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Title: Complete Project Gutenberg John Galsworthy Works

Author: John Galsworthy

Release date: September 27, 2004 [EBook #3254]

Most recently updated: January 8, 2021

Language: English

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In Chancery

Volume 3. Awakening

To Let

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The Dark Flower

The Freelands

Beyond

Villa Rubein and Other Stories

Villa Rubein

A Man of Devon

A Knight

Salvation of a Forsyte

The Silence

Saint's Progress

The Island Pharisees

The Country House

Fraternity

The Patrician

The Burning Spear

Five Short Tales

The First and Last

A Stoic

The Apple Tree

The Juryman

Indian Summer of a Forsyte

Essays and Studies:

Concerning Life

Inn of Tranquility

Magpie over the Hill

Sheep-shearing

Evolution

Riding in the Mist

The Procession

A Christian

Wind in the Rocks

My Distant Relative

The Black Godmother

Quality

The Grand Jury

Gone

Threshing

That Old-time Place

Romance—three Gleams

Memories

Felicity

Concerning Letters

A Novelist's Allegory

Some Platitudes Concerning Drama

Meditation on Finality

Wanted—Schooling

On Our Dislike of Things as They Are

The Windlestraw

About Censorship

Vague Thoughts on Art

Plays:

First Series:

The Silver Box

Joy

Strife

Second Series:

The Eldest Son

The Little Dream

Justice

Third Series:

The Fugitive

The Pigeon

The Mob

Fourth Series:

A Bit O' Love

The Foundations

The Skin Game

Six Short Plays:

The First and The Last

The Little Man

Hall-marked

Defeat

The Sun

Punch and Go

Fifth Series:

A Family Man

Loyalties

Windows

[NOTE: The spelling conforms to the original: "s's" instead of our "z's"; and "c's" where we would have "s's"; and "...our" as in colour and flavour; many interesting double consonants; etc.]

FORSYTE SAGA

Complete

By John Galsworthy

Contents:

Part 1. The Man of Property

Part 2. Indian Summer of a Forsyte

In Chancery

Part 3. Awakening

To Let

THE MAN OF PROPERTY

TO MY WIFE:

I DEDICATE THE FORSYTE SAGA IN ITS ENTIRETY, BELIEVING IT TO BE OF ALL MY WORKS THE LEAST UNWORTHY OF ONE WITHOUT WHOSE ENCOURAGEMENT, SYMPATHY AND CRITICISM I COULD NEVER HAVE BECOME EVEN SUCH A WRITER AS I AM.

PREFACE:

"The Forsyte Saga" was the title originally destined for that part of it which is called "The Man of Property"; and to adopt it for the collected chronicles of the Forsyte family has indulged the Forsytean tenacity that is in all of us. The word Saga might be objected to on the ground that it connotes the heroic and that there is little heroism in these pages. But it is used with a suitable irony; and, after all, this long tale, though it may deal with folk in frock coats, furbelows, and a gilt-edged period, is not devoid of the essential heat of conflict. Discounting for the gigantic stature and blood-thirstiness of old days, as they have come down to us in fairy-tale and legend, the folk of the old Sagas were Forsytes, assuredly, in their possessive instincts, and as little proof against the inroads of beauty and passion as Swithin, Soames, or even Young Jolyon. And if heroic figures, in days that never were, seem to startle out from their surroundings in fashion unbecoming to a Forsyte of the Victorian era, we may be sure that tribal instinct was even then the prime force, and that "family" and the sense of home and property counted as they do to this day, for all the recent efforts to "talk them out."

So many people have written and claimed that their families were the originals of the Forsytes that one has been almost encouraged to believe in the typicality of an imagined species. Manners change and modes evolve, and "Timothy's on the Bayswater Road" becomes a nest of the unbelievable in all except essentials; we shall not look upon its like again, nor perhaps on such a one as James or Old Jolyon. And yet the figures of Insurance Societies and the utterances of Judges reassure us daily that our earthly paradise is still a rich preserve, where the wild raiders, Beauty and Passion, come stealing in, filching security from beneath our noses. As surely as a dog will bark at a brass band, so will the essential Soames in human nature ever rise up uneasily against the dissolution which hovers round the folds of ownership.

"Let the dead Past bury its dead" would be a better saying if the Past ever died. The persistence of the Past is one of those tragi-comic blessings which each new age denies, coming cocksure on to the stage to mouth its claim to a perfect novelty.

But no Age is so new as that! Human Nature, under its changing pretensions and clothes, is and ever will be very much of a Forsyte, and might, after all, be a much worse animal.

Looking back on the Victorian era, whose ripeness, decline, and 'fall-of' is in some sort pictured in "The Forsyte Saga," we see now that we have but jumped out of a frying-pan into a fire. It would be difficult to substantiate a claim that the case of England was better in 1913 than it was in 1886, when the Forsytes assembled at Old Jolyon's to celebrate the engagement of June to Philip Bosinney. And in 1920, when again the clan gathered to bless the marriage of Fleur with Michael Mont, the state of England is as surely too molten and bankrupt as in the eighties it was too congealed and low-percented. If these chronicles had been a really scientific study of transition one would have dwelt probably on such factors as the invention of bicycle, motor-car, and flying-machine; the arrival of a cheap Press; the decline of country life and increase of the towns; the birth of the Cinema. Men are, in fact, quite unable to control their own inventions; they at best develop adaptability to the new conditions those inventions create.

But this long tale is no scientific study of a period; it is rather an intimate incarnation of the disturbance that Beauty effects in the lives of men.

The figure of Irene, never, as the reader may possibly have observed, present, except through the senses of other characters, is a concretion of disturbing Beauty impinging on a possessive world.

One has noticed that readers, as they wade on through the salt waters of the Saga, are inclined more and more to pity Soames, and to think that in doing so they are in revolt against the mood of his creator. Far from it! He, too, pities Soames, the tragedy of whose life is the very simple, uncontrollable tragedy of being unlovable, without quite a thick enough skin to be thoroughly unconscious of the fact. Not even Fleur loves Soames as he feels he ought to be loved. But in pitying Soames, readers incline, perhaps, to animus against Irene: After all, they think, he wasn't a bad fellow, it wasn't his fault; she ought to have forgiven him, and so on!

And, taking sides, they lose perception of the simple truth, which underlies the whole story, that where sex attraction is utterly and definitely lacking in one partner to a union, no amount of pity, or reason, or duty, or what not, can overcome a repulsion implicit in Nature. Whether it ought to, or no, is beside the point; because in fact it never does. And where Irene seems hard and cruel, as in the Bois de Boulogne, or the Goupenor Gallery, she is but wisely realistic—knowing that the least concession is the inch which precedes the impossible, the repulsive ell.

A criticism one might pass on the last phase of the Saga is the complaint that Irene and Jolyon those rebels against property—claim spiritual property in their son Jon. But it would be hypercriticism, as the tale is told. No father and mother could have let the boy marry Fleur without knowledge of the facts; and the facts determine Jon, not the persuasion of his parents. Moreover, Jolyon's persuasion is not on his own account, but on Irene's, and Irene's persuasion becomes a reiterated: "Don't think of me, think of yourself!" That Jon, knowing the facts, can realise his mother's feelings, will hardly with justice be held proof that she is, after all, a Forsyte.

But though the impingement of Beauty and the claims of Freedom on a possessive world are the main prepossessions of the Forsyte Saga, it cannot be absolved from the charge of embalming the upper-middle class. As the old Egyptians placed around their mummies the necessaries of a future existence, so I have endeavoured to lay beside the, figures of Aunts Ann and Juley and Hester, of Timothy and Swithin, of Old Jolyon and James, and of their sons, that which shall guarantee them a little life hereafter, a little balm in the hurried Gilead of a dissolving "Progress."

If the upper-middle class, with other classes, is destined to "move on" into amorphism, here, pickled in these pages, it lies under glass for strollers in the wide and ill-arranged museum of Letters. Here it rests, preserved in its own juice: The Sense of Property. 1922.

THE MAN OF PROPERTY

by JOHN GALSWORTHY

"..... You will answer
The slaves are ours"

—Merchant of Venice.

TO EDWARD GARNETT

PART I

CHAPTER I

'AT HOME' AT OLD JOLYON'S

Those privileged to be present at a family festival of the Forsytes have seen that charming and instructive sight—an upper middle-class family in full plumage. But whosoever of these favoured persons has possessed the gift of psychological analysis (a talent without monetary value and properly ignored by the Forsytes), has witnessed a spectacle, not only delightful in itself, but illustrative of an obscure human problem. In plainer words, he has gleaned from a gathering of this family—no branch of which had a liking for the other, between no three members of whom existed anything worthy of the name of sympathy—evidence of that mysterious concrete tenacity which renders a family so formidable a unit of society, so clear a reproduction of society in miniature. He has been admitted to a vision of the dim roads of social progress, has understood something of patriarchal life, of the swarmings of savage hordes, of the rise and fall of nations. He is like one who, having watched a tree grow from its planting—a paragon of tenacity, insulation, and success, amidst the deaths of a hundred other plants less fibrous, sappy, and persistent—one day will see it flourishing with bland, full foliage, in an almost repugnant prosperity, at the summit of its efflorescence.

On June 15, eighteen eighty-six, about four of the afternoon, the observer who chanced to be present at the house of old Jolyon Forsyte in Stanhope Gate, might have seen the highest efflorescence of the Forsytes.

This was the occasion of an 'at home' to celebrate the engagement of Miss June Forsyte, old Jolyon's granddaughter, to Mr. Philip Bosinney. In the bravery of light gloves, buff waistcoats, feathers and frocks, the family were present, even Aunt Ann, who now but seldom left the corner of her brother Timothy's green drawing-room, where, under the aegis of a plume of dyed pampas grass in a light blue vase, she sat all day reading and knitting, surrounded by the effigies of three generations of Forsytes. Even Aunt Ann was there; her inflexible back, and the dignity of her calm old face personifying the rigid possessiveness of the family idea.

When a Forsyte was engaged, married, or born, the Forsytes were present; when a Forsyte died—but no Forsyte had as yet died; they did not die; death being contrary to their principles, they took precautions against it, the instinctive precautions of highly vitalized persons who resent encroachments on their property.

About the Forsytes mingling that day with the crowd of other guests, there was a more than ordinarily groomed look, an alert, inquisitive assurance, a brilliant respectability, as though they were attired in defiance of something. The habitual sniff on the face of Soames Forsyte had spread through their ranks; they were on their guard.

The subconscious offensiveness of their attitude has constituted old Jolyon's 'home' the psychological moment of the family history, made it the prelude of their drama.

The Forsytes were resentful of something, not individually, but as a family; this resentment expressed itself in an added perfection of raiment, an exuberance of family cordiality, an exaggeration of family

importance, and—the sniff. Danger—so indispensable in bringing out the fundamental quality of any society, group, or individual—was what the Forsytes scented; the premonition of danger put a burnish on their armour. For the first time, as a family, they appeared to have an instinct of being in contact, with some strange and unsafe thing.

Over against the piano a man of bulk and stature was wearing two waistcoats on his wide chest, two waistcoats and a ruby pin, instead of the single satin waistcoat and diamond pin of more usual occasions, and his shaven, square, old face, the colour of pale leather, with pale eyes, had its most dignified look, above his satin stock. This was Swithin Forsyte. Close to the window, where he could get more than his fair share of fresh air, the other twin, James—the fat and the lean of it, old Jolyon called these brothers—like the bulky Swithin, over six feet in height, but very lean, as though destined from his birth to strike a balance and maintain an average, brooded over the scene with his permanent stoop; his grey eyes had an air of fixed absorption in some secret worry, broken at intervals by a rapid, shifting scrutiny of surrounding facts; his cheeks, thinned by two parallel folds, and a long, clean-shaven upper lip, were framed within Dundreary whiskers. In his hands he turned and turned a piece of china. Not far off, listening to a lady in brown, his only son Soames, pale and well-shaved, dark-haired, rather bald, had poked his chin up sideways, carrying his nose with that aforesaid appearance of 'sniff,' as though despising an egg which he knew he could not digest. Behind him his cousin, the tall George, son of the fifth Forsyte, Roger, had a Quilpish look on his fleshy face, pondering one of his sardonic jests. Something inherent to the occasion had affected them all.

Seated in a row close to one another were three ladies—Aunts Ann, Hester (the two Forsyte maids), and Juley (short for Julia), who not in first youth had so far forgotten herself as to marry Septimus Small, a man of poor constitution. She had survived him for many years. With her elder and younger sister she lived now in the house of Timothy, her sixth and youngest brother, on the Bayswater Road. Each of these ladies held fans in their hands, and each with some touch of colour, some emphatic feather or brooch, testified to the solemnity of the opportunity.

In the centre of the room, under the chandelier, as became a host, stood the head of the family, old Jolyon himself. Eighty years of age, with his fine, white hair, his dome-like forehead, his little, dark grey eyes, and an immense white moustache, which drooped and spread below the level of his strong jaw, he had a patriarchal look, and in spite of lean cheeks and hollows at his temples, seemed master of perennial youth. He held himself extremely upright, and his shrewd, steady eyes had lost none of their clear shining. Thus he gave an impression of superiority to the doubts and dislikes of smaller men. Having had his own way for innumerable years, he had earned a prescriptive right to it. It would never have occurred to old Jolyon that it was necessary to wear a look of doubt or of defiance.

Between him and the four other brothers who were present, James, Swithin, Nicholas, and Roger, there was much difference, much similarity. In turn, each of these four brothers was very different from the other, yet they, too, were alike.

Through the varying features and expression of those five faces could be marked a certain steadfastness of chin, underlying surface distinctions, marking a racial stamp, too prehistoric to trace, too remote and permanent to discuss—the very hall-mark and guarantee of the family fortunes.

Among the younger generation, in the tall, bull-like George, in pallid strenuous Archibald, in young Nicholas with his sweet and tentative obstinacy, in the grave and foppishly determined Eustace, there was this same stamp—less meaningful perhaps, but unmistakable—a sign of something ineradicable in the family soul. At one time or another during the afternoon, all these faces, so dissimilar and so alike, had worn an expression of distrust, the object of which was undoubtedly the man whose acquaintance they were thus assembled to make. Philip Bosinney was known to be a young man without fortune, but Forsyte girls had become engaged to such before, and had actually married them. It was not altogether for this reason, therefore, that the minds of the Forsytes misgave them. They could not have explained the origin of a misgiving obscured by the mist of family gossip. A story was undoubtedly told that he had paid his duty call to Aunts Ann, Juley, and Hester, in a soft grey hat—a soft grey hat, not even a new one—a dusty thing with a shapeless crown. "So, extraordinary, my dear—so odd," Aunt Hester, passing through the little, dark hall (she was rather short-sighted), had tried to 'shoo' it off a chair, taking it for a strange, disreputable cat—Tommy had such disgraceful friends! She was disturbed when it did not move.

Like an artist for ever seeking to discover the significant trifle which embodies the whole character of a scene, or place, or person, so those unconscious artists—the Forsytes had fastened by intuition on this hat; it was their significant trifle, the detail in which was embedded the meaning of the whole matter; for each had asked himself: "Come, now, should I have paid that visit in that hat?" and each had answered "No!" and some, with more imagination than others, had added: "It would never have come into my head!"

George, on hearing the story, grinned. The hat had obviously been worn as a practical joke! He himself was a connoisseur of such. "Very haughty!" he said, "the wild Buccaneer."

And this mot, the 'Buccaneer,' was bandied from mouth to mouth, till it became the favourite mode of alluding to Bosinney.

Her aunts reproached June afterwards about the hat.

"We don't think you ought to let him, dear!" they had said.

June had answered in her imperious brisk way, like the little embodiment of will she was: "Oh! what does it matter? Phil never knows what he's got on!"

No one had credited an answer so outrageous. A man not to know what he had on? No, no! What indeed was this young man, who, in becoming engaged to June, old Jolyon's acknowledged heiress, had done so well for himself? He was an architect, not in itself a sufficient reason for wearing such a hat. None of the Forsytes happened to be architects, but one of them knew two architects who would never have worn such a hat upon a call of ceremony in the London season.

Dangerous—ah, dangerous! June, of course, had not seen this, but, though not yet nineteen, she was notorious. Had she not said to Mrs. Soames—who was always so beautifully dressed—that feathers were vulgar? Mrs. Soames had actually given up wearing feathers, so dreadfully downright was dear June!

These misgivings, this disapproval, and perfectly genuine distrust, did not prevent the Forsytes from gathering to old Jolyon's invitation. An 'At Home' at Stanhope Gate was a great rarity; none had been held for twelve years, not indeed, since old Mrs. Jolyon had died.

Never had there been so full an assembly, for, mysteriously united in spite of all their differences, they had taken arms against a common peril. Like cattle when a dog comes into the field, they stood head to head and shoulder to shoulder, prepared to run upon and trample the invader to death. They had come, too, no doubt, to get some notion of what sort of presents they would ultimately be expected to give; for though the question of wedding gifts was usually graduated in this way: 'What are you givin'? Nicholas is givin' spoons!'—so very much depended on the bridegroom. If he were sleek, well-brushed, prosperous-looking, it was more necessary to give him nice things; he would expect them. In the end each gave exactly what was right and proper, by a species of family adjustment arrived at as prices are arrived at on the Stock Exchange—the exact niceties being regulated at Timothy's commodious, red-brick residence in Bayswater, overlooking the Park, where dwelt Aunts Ann, Juley, and Hester.

The uneasiness of the Forsyte family has been justified by the simple mention of the hat. How impossible and wrong would it have been for any family, with the regard for appearances which should ever characterize the great upper middle-class, to feel otherwise than uneasy!

The author of the uneasiness stood talking to June by the further door; his curly hair had a rumpled appearance, as though he found what was going on around him unusual. He had an air, too, of having a joke all to himself. George, speaking aside to his brother, Eustace, said:

"Looks as if he might make a bolt of it—the dashing Buccaneer!"

This 'very singular-looking man,' as Mrs. Small afterwards called him, was of medium height and strong build, with a pale, brown face, a dust-coloured moustache, very prominent cheek-bones, and hollow checks. His forehead sloped back towards the crown of his head, and bulged out in bumps over the eyes, like foreheads seen in the Lion-house at the Zoo. He had sherry-coloured eyes, disconcertingly inattentive at times. Old Jolyon's coachman, after driving June and Bosinney to the theatre, had remarked to the butler:

"I dunno what to make of 'im. Looks to me for all the world like an 'alf-tame leopard." And every now and then a Forsyte would come up, sidle round, and take a look at him.

June stood in front, fending off this idle curiosity—a little bit of a thing, as somebody once said, 'all hair and spirit,' with fearless blue eyes, a firm jaw, and a bright colour, whose face and body seemed too slender for her crown of red-gold hair.

A tall woman, with a beautiful figure, which some member of the family had once compared to a heathen goddess, stood looking at these two with a shadowy smile.

Her hands, gloved in French grey, were crossed one over the other, her grave, charming face held to one side, and the eyes of all men near were fastened on it. Her figure swayed, so balanced that the very

air seemed to set it moving. There was warmth, but little colour, in her cheeks; her large, dark eyes were soft.

But it was at her lips—asking a question, giving an answer, with that shadowy smile—that men looked; they were sensitive lips, sensuous and sweet, and through them seemed to come warmth and perfume like the warmth and perfume of a flower.

The engaged couple thus scrutinized were unconscious of this passive goddess. It was Bosinney who first noticed her, and asked her name.

June took her lover up to the woman with the beautiful figure.

"Irene is my greatest chum," she said: "Please be good friends, you two!"

At the little lady's command they all three smiled; and while they were smiling, Soames Forsyte, silently appearing from behind the woman with the beautiful figure, who was his wife, said:

"Ah! introduce me too!"

He was seldom, indeed, far from Irene's side at public functions, and even when separated by the exigencies of social intercourse, could be seen following her about with his eyes, in which were strange expressions of watchfulness and longing.

At the window his father, James, was still scrutinizing the marks on the piece of china.

"I wonder at Jolyon's allowing this engagement," he said to Aunt Ann. "They tell me there's no chance of their getting married for years. This young Bosinney" (he made the word a dactyl in opposition to general usage of a short o) "has got nothing. When Winifred married Dartie, I made him bring every penny into settlement—lucky thing, too—they'd ha' had nothing by this time!"

Aunt Ann looked up from her velvet chair. Grey curls banded her forehead, curls that, unchanged for decades, had extinguished in the family all sense of time. She made no reply, for she rarely spoke, husbanding her aged voice; but to James, uneasy of conscience, her look was as good as an answer.

"Well," he said, "I couldn't help Irene's having no money. Soames was in such a hurry; he got quite thin dancing attendance on her."

Putting the bowl pettishly down on the piano, he let his eyes wander to the group by the door.

"It's my opinion," he said unexpectedly, "that it's just as well as it is."

Aunt Ann did not ask him to explain this strange utterance. She knew what he was thinking. If Irene had no money she would not be so foolish as to do anything wrong; for they said—they said—she had been asking for a separate room; but, of course, Soames had not....

James interrupted her reverie:

"But where," he asked, "was Timothy? Hadn't he come with them?"

Through Aunt Ann's compressed lips a tender smile forced its way:

"No, he didn't think it wise, with so much of this diphtheria about; and he so liable to take things."

James answered:

"Well, HE takes good care of himself. I can't afford to take the care of myself that he does."

Nor was it easy to say which, of admiration, envy, or contempt, was dominant in that remark.

Timothy, indeed, was seldom seen. The baby of the family, a publisher by profession, he had some years before, when business was at full tide, scented out the stagnation which, indeed, had not yet come, but which ultimately, as all agreed, was bound to set in, and, selling his share in a firm engaged mainly in the production of religious books, had invested the quite conspicuous proceeds in three per cent. consols. By this act he had at once assumed an isolated position, no other Forsyte being content with less than four per cent. for his money; and this isolation had slowly and surely undermined a spirit perhaps better than commonly endowed with caution. He had become almost a myth—a kind of incarnation of security haunting the background of the Forsyte universe. He had never committed the imprudence of marrying, or encumbering himself in any way with children.

James resumed, tapping the piece of china:

"This isn't real old Worcester. I s'pose Jolyon's told you something about the young man. From all I can learn, he's got no business, no income, and no connection worth speaking of; but then, I know nothing—nobody tells me anything."

Aunt Ann shook her head. Over her square-chinned, aquiline old face a trembling passed; the spidery fingers of her hands pressed against each other and interlaced, as though she were subtly recharging her will.

The eldest by some years of all the Forsytes, she held a peculiar position amongst them. Opportunists and egotists one and all—though not, indeed, more so than their neighbours—they quailed before her incorruptible figure, and, when opportunities were too strong, what could they do but avoid her!

Twisting his long, thin legs, James went on:

"Jolyon, he will have his own way. He's got no children"—and stopped, recollecting the continued existence of old Jolyon's son, young Jolyon, June's father, who had made such a mess of it, and done for himself by deserting his wife and child and running away with that foreign governess. "Well," he resumed hastily, "if he likes to do these things, I s'pose he can afford to. Now, what's he going to give her? I s'pose he'll give her a thousand a year; he's got nobody else to leave his money to."

He stretched out his hand to meet that of a dapper, clean-shaven man, with hardly a hair on his head, a long, broken nose, full lips, and cold grey eyes under rectangular brows.

"Well, Nick," he muttered, "how are you?"

Nicholas Forsyte, with his bird-like rapidity and the look of a preternaturally sage schoolboy (he had made a large fortune, quite legitimately, out of the companies of which he was a director), placed within that cold palm the tips of his still colder fingers and hastily withdrew them.

"I'm bad," he said, pouting—"been bad all the week; don't sleep at night. The doctor can't tell why. He's a clever fellow, or I shouldn't have him, but I get nothing out of him but bills."

"Doctors!" said James, coming down sharp on his words: "I've had all the doctors in London for one or another of us. There's no satisfaction to be got out of them; they'll tell you anything. There's Swithin, now. What good have they done him? There he is; he's bigger than ever; he's enormous; they can't get his weight down. Look at him!"

Swithin Forsyte, tall, square, and broad, with a chest like a pouter pigeon's in its plumage of bright waistcoats, came strutting towards them.

"Er—how are you?" he said in his dandified way, aspirating the 'h' strongly (this difficult letter was almost absolutely safe in his keeping)—"how are you?"

Each brother wore an air of aggravation as he looked at the other two, knowing by experience that they would try to eclipse his ailments.

"We were just saying," said James, "that you don't get any thinner."

Swithin protruded his pale round eyes with the effort of hearing.

"Thinner? I'm in good case," he said, leaning a little forward, "not one of your thread-papers like you!"

But, afraid of losing the expansion of his chest, he leaned back again into a state of immobility, for he prized nothing so highly as a distinguished appearance.

Aunt Ann turned her old eyes from one to the other. Indulgent and severe was her look. In turn the three brothers looked at Ann. She was getting shaky. Wonderful woman! Eighty-six if a day; might live another ten years, and had never been strong. Swithin and James, the twins, were only seventy-five, Nicholas a mere baby of seventy or so. All were strong, and the inference was comforting. Of all forms of property their respective healths naturally concerned them most.

"I'm very well in myself," proceeded James, "but my nerves are out of order. The least thing worries me to death. I shall have to go to Bath."

"Bath!" said Nicholas. "I've tried Harrogate. That's no good. What I want is sea air. There's nothing like Yarmouth. Now, when I go there I sleep...."

"My liver's very bad," interrupted Swithin slowly. "Dreadful pain here;" and he placed his hand on his right side.

"Want of exercise," muttered James, his eyes on the china. He quickly added: "I get a pain there, too."

Swithin reddened, a resemblance to a turkey-cock coming upon his old face.

"Exercise!" he said. "I take plenty: I never use the lift at the Club."

"I didn't know," James hurried out. "I know nothing about anybody; nobody tells me anything...."

Swithin fixed him with a stare:

"What do you do for a pain there?"

James brightened.

"I take a compound...."

"How are you, uncle?"

June stood before him, her resolute small face raised from her little height to his great height, and her hand outheld.

The brightness faded from James's visage.

"How are you?" he said, brooding over her. "So you're going to Wales to-morrow to visit your young man's aunts? You'll have a lot of rain there. This isn't real old Worcester." He tapped the bowl. "Now, that set I gave your mother when she married was the genuine thing."

June shook hands one by one with her three great-uncles, and turned to Aunt Ann. A very sweet look had come into the old lady's face, she kissed the girl's cheek with trembling fervour.

"Well, my dear," she said, "and so you're going for a whole month!"

The girl passed on, and Aunt Ann looked after her slim little figure. The old lady's round, steel grey eyes, over which a film like a bird's was beginning to come, followed her wistfully amongst the bustling crowd, for people were beginning to say good-bye; and her finger-tips, pressing and pressing against each other, were busy again with the recharging of her will against that inevitable ultimate departure of her own.

'Yes,' she thought, 'everybody's been most kind; quite a lot of people come to congratulate her. She ought to be very happy.' Amongst the throng of people by the door, the well-dressed throng drawn from the families of lawyers and doctors, from the Stock Exchange, and all the innumerable avocations of the upper-middle class—there were only some twenty percent of Forsytes; but to Aunt Ann they seemed all Forsytes—and certainly there was not much difference—she saw only her own flesh and blood. It was her world, this family, and she knew no other, had never perhaps known any other. All their little secrets, illnesses, engagements, and marriages, how they were getting on, and whether they were making money—all this was her property, her delight, her life; beyond this only a vague, shadowy mist of facts and persons of no real significance. This it was that she would have to lay down when it came to her turn to die; this which gave to her that importance, that secret self-importance, without which none of us can bear to live; and to this she clung wistfully, with a greed that grew each day! If life were slipping away from her, this she would retain to the end.

She thought of June's father, young Jolyon, who had run away with that foreign girl. And what a sad blow to his father and to them all. Such a promising young fellow! A sad blow, though there had been no public scandal, most fortunately, Jo's wife seeking for no divorce! A long time ago! And when June's mother died, six years ago, Jo had married that woman, and they had two children now, so she had heard. Still, he had forfeited his right to be there, had cheated her of the complete fulfilment of her family pride, deprived her of the rightful pleasure of seeing and kissing him of whom she had been so proud, such a promising young fellow! The thought rankled with the bitterness of a long-inflicted injury in her tenacious old heart. A little water stood in her eyes. With a handkerchief of the finest lawn she wiped them stealthily.

"Well, Aunt Ann?" said a voice behind.

Soames Forsyte, flat-shouldered, clean-shaven, flat-cheeked, flat-waisted, yet with something round and secret about his whole appearance, looked downwards and aslant at Aunt Ann, as though trying to see through the side of his own nose.

"And what do you think of the engagement?" he asked.

Aunt Ann's eyes rested on him proudly; of all the nephews since young Jolyon's departure from the

family nest, he was now her favourite, for she recognised in him a sure trustee of the family soul that must so soon slip beyond her keeping.

"Very nice for the young man," she said; "and he's a good-looking young fellow; but I doubt if he's quite the right lover for dear June."

Soames touched the edge of a gold-lacquered lustre.

"She'll tame him," he said, stealthily wetting his finger and rubbing it on the knobby bulbs. "That's genuine old lacquer; you can't get it nowadays. It'd do well in a sale at Jobson's." He spoke with relish, as though he felt that he was cheering up his old aunt. It was seldom he was so confidential. "I wouldn't mind having it myself," he added; "you can always get your price for old lacquer."

"You're so clever with all those things," said Aunt Ann. "And how is dear Irene?"

Soames's smile died.

"Pretty well," he said. "Complains she can't sleep; she sleeps a great deal better than I do," and he looked at his wife, who was talking to Bosinney by the door.

Aunt Ann sighed.

"Perhaps," she said, "it will be just as well for her not to see so much of June. She's such a decided character, dear June!"

Soames flushed; his flushes passed rapidly over his flat cheeks and centered between his eyes, where they remained, the stamp of disturbing thoughts.

"I don't know what she sees in that little flibbertigibbet," he burst out, but noticing that they were no longer alone, he turned and again began examining the lustre.

"They tell me Jolyon's bought another house," said his father's voice close by; "he must have a lot of money—he must have more money than he knows what to do with! Montpellier Square, they say; close to Soames! They never told me, Irene never tells me anything!"

"Capital position, not two minutes from me," said the voice of Swithin, "and from my rooms I can drive to the Club in eight."

The position of their houses was of vital importance to the Forsytes, nor was this remarkable, since the whole spirit of their success was embodied therein.

Their father, of farming stock, had come from Dorsetshire near the beginning of the century.

'Superior Dosset Forsyte, as he was called by his intimates, had been a stonemason by trade, and risen to the position of a master-builder.

Towards the end of his life he moved to London, where, building on until he died, he was buried at Highgate. He left over thirty thousand pounds between his ten children. Old Jolyon alluded to him, if at all, as 'A hard, thick sort of man; not much refinement about him.' The second generation of Forsytes felt indeed that he was not greatly to their credit. The only aristocratic trait they could find in his character was a habit of drinking Madeira.

Aunt Hester, an authority on family history, described him thus: "I don't recollect that he ever did anything; at least, not in my time. He was er—an owner of houses, my dear. His hair about your Uncle Swithin's colour; rather a square build. Tall? No—not very tall" (he had been five feet five, with a mottled face); "a fresh-coloured man. I remember he used to drink Madeira; but ask your Aunt Ann. What was his father? He—er—had to do with the land down in Dorsetshire, by the sea."

James once went down to see for himself what sort of place this was that they had come from. He found two old farms, with a cart track rutted into the pink earth, leading down to a mill by the beach; a little grey church with a buttressed outer wall, and a smaller and greyer chapel. The stream which worked the mill came bubbling down in a dozen rivulets, and pigs were hunting round that estuary. A haze hovered over the prospect. Down this hollow, with their feet deep in the mud and their faces towards the sea, it appeared that the primeval Forsytes had been content to walk Sunday after Sunday for hundreds of years.

Whether or no James had cherished hopes of an inheritance, or of something rather distinguished to be found down there, he came back to town in a poor way, and went about with a pathetic attempt at making the best of a bad job.

"There's very little to be had out of that," he said; "regular country little place, old as the hills...."

Its age was felt to be a comfort. Old Jolyon, in whom a desperate honesty welled up at times, would allude to his ancestors as: "Yeomen—I suppose very small beer." Yet he would repeat the word 'yeomen' as if it afforded him consolation.

They had all done so well for themselves, these Forsytes, that they were all what is called 'of a certain position.' They had shares in all sorts of things, not as yet—with the exception of Timothy—in consols, for they had no dread in life like that of 3 per cent. for their money. They collected pictures, too, and were supporters of such charitable institutions as might be beneficial to their sick domestics. From their father, the builder, they inherited a talent for bricks and mortar. Originally, perhaps, members of some primitive sect, they were now in the natural course of things members of the Church of England, and caused their wives and children to attend with some regularity the more fashionable churches of the Metropolis. To have doubted their Christianity would have caused them both pain and surprise. Some of them paid for pews, thus expressing in the most practical form their sympathy with the teachings of Christ.

Their residences, placed at stated intervals round the park, watched like sentinels, lest the fair heart of this London, where their desires were fixed, should slip from their clutches, and leave them lower in their own estimations.

There was old Jolyon in Stanhope Place; the Jameses in Park Lane; Swithin in the lonely glory of orange and blue chambers in Hyde Park Mansions—he had never married, not he—the Soameses in their nest off Knightsbridge; the Rogers in Prince's Gardens (Roger was that remarkable Forsyte who had conceived and carried out the notion of bringing up his four sons to a new profession. "Collect house property, nothing like it," he would say; "I never did anything else").

The Haymans again—Mrs. Hayman was the one married Forsyte sister—in a house high up on Campden Hill, shaped like a giraffe, and so tall that it gave the observer a crick in the neck; the Nicholases in Ladbrooke Grove, a spacious abode and a great bargain; and last, but not least, Timothy's on the Bayswater Road, where Ann, and Juley, and Hester, lived under his protection.

But all this time James was musing, and now he inquired of his host and brother what he had given for that house in Montpellier Square. He himself had had his eye on a house there for the last two years, but they wanted such a price.

Old Jolyon recounted the details of his purchase.

"Twenty-two years to run?" repeated James; "The very house I was after—you've given too much for it!"

Old Jolyon frowned.

"It's not that I want it," said James hastily; it wouldn't suit my purpose at that price. Soames knows the house, well—he'll tell you it's too dear—his opinion's worth having."

"I don't," said old Jolyon, "care a fig for his opinion."

"Well," murmured James, "you will have your own way—it's a good opinion. Good-bye! We're going to drive down to Hurlingham. They tell me June's going to Wales. You'll be lonely tomorrow. What'll you do with yourself? You'd better come and dine with us!"

Old Jolyon refused. He went down to the front door and saw them into their barouche, and twinkled at them, having already forgotten his spleen—Mrs. James facing the horses, tall and majestic with auburn hair; on her left, Irene—the two husbands, father and son, sitting forward, as though they expected something, opposite their wives. Bobbing and bounding upon the spring cushions, silent, swaying to each motion of their chariot, old Jolyon watched them drive away under the sunlight.

During the drive the silence was broken by Mrs. James.

"Did you ever see such a collection of rumty-too people?"

Soames, glancing at her beneath his eyelids, nodded, and he saw Irene steal at him one of her unfathomable looks. It is likely enough that each branch of the Forsyte family made that remark as they drove away from old Jolyon's 'At Home!'

Amongst the last of the departing guests the fourth and fifth brothers, Nicholas and Roger, walked away together, directing their steps alongside Hyde Park towards the Praed Street Station of the

Underground. Like all other Forsytes of a certain age they kept carriages of their own, and never took cabs if by any means they could avoid it.

The day was bright, the trees of the Park in the full beauty of mid-June foliage; the brothers did not seem to notice phenomena, which contributed, nevertheless, to the jauntiness of promenade and conversation.

"Yes," said Roger, "she's a good-lookin' woman, that wife of Soames's. I'm told they don't get on."

This brother had a high forehead, and the freshest colour of any of the Forsytes; his light grey eyes measured the street frontage of the houses by the way, and now and then he would level his, umbrella and take a 'lunar,' as he expressed it, of the varying heights.

"She'd no money," replied Nicholas.

He himself had married a good deal of money, of which, it being then the golden age before the Married Women's Property Act, he had mercifully been enabled to make a successful use.

"What was her father?"

"Heron was his name, a Professor, so they tell me."

Roger shook his head.

"There's no money in that," he said.

"They say her mother's father was cement."

Roger's face brightened.

"But he went bankrupt," went on Nicholas.

"Ah!" exclaimed Roger, "Soames will have trouble with her; you mark my words, he'll have trouble—she's got a foreign look."

Nicholas licked his lips.

"She's a pretty woman," and he waved aside a crossing-sweeper.

"How did he get hold of her?" asked Roger presently. "She must cost him a pretty penny in dress!"

"Ann tells me," replied Nicholas, "he was half-cracked about her. She refused him five times. James, he's nervous about it, I can see."

"Ah!" said Roger again; "I'm sorry for James; he had trouble with Dartie." His pleasant colour was heightened by exercise, he swung his umbrella to the level of his eye more frequently than ever. Nicholas's face also wore a pleasant look.

"Too pale for me," he said, "but her figures capital!"

Roger made no reply.

"I call her distinguished-looking," he said at last—it was the highest praise in the Forsyte vocabulary. "That young Bosinney will never do any good for himself. They say at Burkitt's he's one of these artistic chaps—got an idea of improving English architecture; there's no money in that! I should like to hear what Timothy would say to it."

They entered the station.

"What class are you going? I go second."

"No second for me," said Nicholas;—"you never know what you may catch."

He took a first-class ticket to Notting Hill Gate; Roger a second to South Kensington. The train coming in a minute later, the two brothers parted and entered their respective compartments. Each felt aggrieved that the other had not modified his habits to secure his society a little longer; but as Roger voiced it in his thoughts:

'Always a stubborn beggar, Nick!'

And as Nicholas expressed it to himself:

'Cantankerous chap Roger—always was!'

There was little sentimentality about the Forsytes. In that great London, which they had conquered and become merged in, what time had they to be sentimental?

CHAPTER II

OLD JOLYON GOES TO THE OPERA

At five o'clock the following day old Jolyon sat alone, a cigar between his lips, and on a table by his side a cup of tea. He was tired, and before he had finished his cigar he fell asleep. A fly settled on his hair, his breathing sounded heavy in the drowsy silence, his upper lip under the white moustache puffed in and out. From between the fingers of his veined and wrinkled hand the cigar, dropping on the empty hearth, burned itself out.

The gloomy little study, with windows of stained glass to exclude the view, was full of dark green velvet and heavily-carved mahogany—a suite of which old Jolyon was wont to say: 'Shouldn't wonder if it made a big price some day!'

It was pleasant to think that in the after life he could get more for things than he had given.

In the rich brown atmosphere peculiar to back rooms in the mansion of a Forsyte, the Rembrandtesque effect of his great head, with its white hair, against the cushion of his high-backed seat, was spoiled by the moustache, which imparted a somewhat military look to his face. An old clock that had been with him since before his marriage forty years ago kept with its ticking a jealous record of the seconds slipping away forever from its old master.

He had never cared for this room, hardly going into it from one year's end to another, except to take cigars from the Japanese cabinet in the corner, and the room now had its revenge.

His temples, curving like thatches over the hollows beneath, his cheek-bones and chin, all were sharpened in his sleep, and there had come upon his face the confession that he was an old man.

He woke. June had gone! James had said he would be lonely. James had always been a poor thing. He recollected with satisfaction that he had bought that house over James's head.

Serve him right for sticking at the price; the only thing the fellow thought of was money. Had he given too much, though? It wanted a lot of doing to—He dared say he would want all his money before he had done with this affair of June's. He ought never to have allowed the engagement. She had met this Bosinney at the house of Baynes, Baynes and Bildeboy, the architects. He believed that Baynes, whom he knew—a bit of an old woman—was the young man's uncle by marriage. After that she'd been always running after him; and when she took a thing into her head there was no stopping her. She was continually taking up with 'lame ducks' of one sort or another. This fellow had no money, but she must needs become engaged to him—a harumscarum, unpractical chap, who would get himself into no end of difficulties.

She had come to him one day in her slap-dash way and told him; and, as if it were any consolation, she had added:

"He's so splendid; he's often lived on cocoa for a week!"

"And he wants you to live on cocoa too?"

"Oh no; he is getting into the swim now."

Old Jolyon had taken his cigar from under his white moustaches, stained by coffee at the edge, and looked at her, that little slip of a thing who had got such a grip of his heart. He knew more about 'swims' than his granddaughter. But she, having clasped her hands on his knees, rubbed her chin against him, making a sound like a purring cat. And, knocking the ash off his cigar, he had exploded in nervous desperation:

"You're all alike: you won't be satisfied till you've got what you want. If you must come to grief, you must; I wash my hands of it."

So, he had washed his hands of it, making the condition that they should not marry until Bosinney had at least four hundred a year.

"I shan't be able to give you very much," he had said, a formula to which June was not unaccustomed. "Perhaps this What's-his-name will provide the cocoa."

He had hardly seen anything of her since it began. A bad business! He had no notion of giving her a lot of money to enable a fellow he knew nothing about to live on in idleness. He had seen that sort of thing before; no good ever came of it. Worst of all, he had no hope of shaking her resolution; she was as obstinate as a mule, always had been from a child. He didn't see where it was to end. They must cut their coat according to their cloth. He would not give way till he saw young Bosinney with an income of his own. That June would have trouble with the fellow was as plain as a pikestaff; he had no more idea of money than a cow. As to this rushing down to Wales to visit the young man's aunts, he fully expected they were old cats.

And, motionless, old Jolyon stared at the wall; but for his open eyes, he might have been asleep.... The idea of supposing that young cub Soames could give him advice! He had always been a cub, with his nose in the air! He would be setting up as a man of property next, with a place in the country! A man of property! H'mph! Like his father, he was always nosing out bargains, a cold-blooded young beggar!

He rose, and, going to the cabinet, began methodically stocking his cigar-case from a bundle fresh in. They were not bad at the price, but you couldn't get a good cigar, nowadays, nothing to hold a candle to those old Superfinos of Hanson and Bridger's. That was a cigar!

The thought, like some stealing perfume, carried him back to those wonderful nights at Richmond when after dinner he sat smoking on the terrace of the Crown and Sceptre with Nicholas Treffry and Traquair and Jack Herring and Anthony Thornworthy. How good his cigars were then! Poor old Nick!—dead, and Jack Herring—dead, and Traquair—dead of that wife of his, and Thornworthy—awfully shaky (no wonder, with his appetite).

Of all the company of those days he himself alone seemed left, except Swithin, of course, and he so outrageously big there was no doing anything with him.

Difficult to believe it was so long ago; he felt young still! Of all his thoughts, as he stood there counting his cigars, this was the most poignant, the most bitter. With his white head and his loneliness he had remained young and green at heart. And those Sunday afternoons on Hampstead Heath, when young Jolyon and he went for a stretch along the Spaniard's Road to Highgate, to Child's Hill, and back over the Heath again to dine at Jack Straw's Castle—how delicious his cigars were then! And such weather! There was no weather now.

When June was a toddler of five, and every other Sunday he took her to the Zoo, away from the society of those two good women, her mother and her grandmother, and at the top of the bear den baited his umbrella with buns for her favourite bears, how sweet his cigars were then!

Cigars! He had not even succeeded in out-living his palate—the famous palate that in the fifties men swore by, and speaking of him, said: "Forsyte's the best palate in London!" The palate that in a sense had made his fortune—the fortune of the celebrated tea men, Forsyte and Treffry, whose tea, like no other man's tea, had a romantic aroma, the charm of a quite singular genuineness. About the house of Forsyte and Treffry in the City had clung an air of enterprise and mystery, of special dealings in special ships, at special ports, with special Orientals.

He had worked at that business! Men did work in those days! these young pups hardly knew the meaning of the word. He had gone into every detail, known everything that went on, sometimes sat up all night over it. And he had always chosen his agents himself, prided himself on it. His eye for men, he used to say, had been the secret of his success, and the exercise of this masterful power of selection had been the only part of it all that he had really liked. Not a career for a man of his ability. Even now, when the business had been turned into a Limited Liability Company, and was declining (he had got out of his shares long ago), he felt a sharp chagrin in thinking of that time. How much better he might have done! He would have succeeded splendidly at the Bar! He had even thought of standing for Parliament. How often had not Nicholas Treffry said to him:

"You could do anything, Jo, if you weren't so d-damned careful of yourself!" Dear old Nick! Such a good fellow, but a racketty chap! The notorious Treffry! He had never taken any care of himself. So he was dead. Old Jolyon counted his cigars with a steady hand, and it came into his mind to wonder if perhaps he had been too careful of himself.

He put the cigar-case in the breast of his coat, buttoned it in, and walked up the long flights to his bedroom, leaning on one foot and the other, and helping himself by the bannister. The house was too

big. After June was married, if she ever did marry this fellow, as he supposed she would, he would let it and go into rooms. What was the use of keeping half a dozen servants eating their heads off?

The butler came to the ring of his bell—a large man with a beard, a soft tread, and a peculiar capacity for silence. Old Jolyon told him to put his dress clothes out; he was going to dine at the Club.

How long had the carriage been back from taking Miss June to the station? Since two? Then let him come round at half-past six!

The Club which old Jolyon entered on the stroke of seven was one of those political institutions of the upper middle class which have seen better days. In spite of being talked about, perhaps in consequence of being talked about, it betrayed a disappointing vitality. People had grown tired of saying that the 'Disunion' was on its last legs. Old Jolyon would say it, too, yet disregarded the fact in a manner truly irritating to well-constituted Clubmen.

"Why do you keep your name on?" Swithin often asked him with profound vexation. "Why don't you join the 'Polyglot'? You can't get a wine like our Heidsieck under twenty shillin' a bottle anywhere in London;" and, dropping his voice, he added: "There's only five hundred dozen left. I drink it every night of my life."

"I'll think of it," old Jolyon would answer; but when he did think of it there was always the question of fifty guineas entrance fee, and it would take him four or five years to get in. He continued to think of it.

He was too old to be a Liberal, had long ceased to believe in the political doctrines of his Club, had even been known to allude to them as 'wretched stuff,' and it afforded him pleasure to continue a member in the teeth of principles so opposed to his own. He had always had a contempt for the place, having joined it many years ago when they refused to have him at the 'Hotch Potch' owing to his being 'in trade.' As if he were not as good as any of them! He naturally despised the Club that did take him. The members were a poor lot, many of them in the City—stockbrokers, solicitors, auctioneers—what not! Like most men of strong character but not too much originality, old Jolyon set small store by the class to which he belonged. Faithfully he followed their customs, social and otherwise, and secretly he thought them 'a common lot.'

Years and philosophy, of which he had his share, had dimmed the recollection of his defeat at the 'Hotch Potch'; and now in his thoughts it was enshrined as the Queen of Clubs. He would have been a member all these years himself, but, owing to the slipshod way his proposer, Jack Herring, had gone to work, they had not known what they were doing in keeping him out. Why! they had taken his son Jo at once, and he believed the boy was still a member; he had received a letter dated from there eight years ago.

He had not been near the 'Disunion' for months, and the house had undergone the piebald decoration which people bestow on old houses and old ships when anxious to sell them.

'Beastly colour, the smoking-room!' he thought. 'The dining-room is good!'

Its gloomy chocolate, picked out with light green, took his fancy.

He ordered dinner, and sat down in the very corner, at the very table perhaps! (things did not progress much at the 'Disunion,' a Club of almost Radical principles) at which he and young Jolyon used to sit twenty-five years ago, when he was taking the latter to Drury Lane, during his holidays.

The boy had loved the theatre, and old Jolyon recalled how he used to sit opposite, concealing his excitement under a careful but transparent nonchalance.

He ordered himself, too, the very dinner the boy had always chosen—soup, whitebait, cutlets, and a tart. Ah! if he were only opposite now!

The two had not met for fourteen years. And not for the first time during those fourteen years old Jolyon wondered whether he had been a little to blame in the matter of his son. An unfortunate love-affair with that precious flirt Danae Thornworthy (now Danae Pellew), Anthony Thornworthy's daughter, had thrown him on the rebound into the arms of June's mother. He ought perhaps to have put a spoke in the wheel of their marriage; they were too young; but after that experience of Jo's susceptibility he had been only too anxious to see him married. And in four years the crash had come! To have approved his son's conduct in that crash was, of course, impossible; reason and training—that combination of potent factors which stood for his principles—told him of this impossibility, and his heart cried out. The grim remorselessness of that business had no pity for hearts. There was June, the atom with flaming hair, who had climbed all over him, twined and twisted herself about him—about his heart that was made to be the plaything and beloved resort of tiny, helpless things. With characteristic

insight he saw he must part with one or with the other; no half-measures could serve in such a situation. In that lay its tragedy. And the tiny, helpless thing prevailed. He would not run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, and so to his son he said good-bye.

That good-bye had lasted until now.

He had proposed to continue a reduced allowance to young Jolyon, but this had been refused, and perhaps that refusal had hurt him more than anything, for with it had gone the last outlet of his penned-in affection; and there had come such tangible and solid proof of rupture as only a transaction in property, a bestowal or refusal of such, could supply.

His dinner tasted flat. His pint of champagne was dry and bitter stuff, not like the *Veuve Clicquots* of old days.

Over his cup of coffee, he bethought him that he would go to the opera. In the *Times*, therefore—he had a distrust of other papers—he read the announcement for the evening. It was '*Fidelio*.'

Mercifully not one of those new-fangled German pantomimes by that fellow Wagner.

Putting on his ancient opera hat, which, with its brim flattened by use, and huge capacity, looked like an emblem of greater days, and, pulling out an old pair of very thin lavender kid gloves smelling strongly of Russia leather, from habitual proximity to the cigar-case in the pocket of his overcoat, he stepped into a hansom.

The cab rattled gaily along the streets, and old Jolyon was struck by their unwonted animation.

'The hotels must be doing a tremendous business,' he thought. A few years ago there had been none of these big hotels. He made a satisfactory reflection on some property he had in the neighbourhood. It must be going up in value by leaps and bounds! What traffic!

But from that he began indulging in one of those strange impersonal speculations, so uncharacteristic of a Forsyte, wherein lay, in part, the secret of his supremacy amongst them. What atoms men were, and what a lot of them! And what would become of them all?

He stumbled as he got out of the cab, gave the man his exact fare, walked up to the ticket office to take his stall, and stood there with his purse in his hand—he always carried his money in a purse, never having approved of that habit of carrying it loosely in the pockets, as so many young men did nowadays. The official leaned out, like an old dog from a kennel.

"Why," he said in a surprised voice, "it's Mr. Jolyon Forsyte! So it is! Haven't seen you, sir, for years. Dear me! Times aren't what they were. Why! you and your brother, and that auctioneer—Mr. Traquair, and Mr. Nicholas Treffry—you used to have six or seven stalls here regular every season. And how are you, sir? We don't get younger!"

The colour in old Jolyon's eyes deepened; he paid his guinea. They had not forgotten him. He marched in, to the sounds of the overture, like an old war-horse to battle.

Folding his opera hat, he sat down, drew out his lavender gloves in the old way, and took up his glasses for a long look round the house. Dropping them at last on his folded hat, he fixed his eyes on the curtain. More poignantly than ever he felt that it was all over and done with him. Where were all the women, the pretty women, the house used to be so full of? Where was that old feeling in the heart as he waited for one of those great singers? Where that sensation of the intoxication of life and of his own power to enjoy it all?

The greatest opera-goer of his day! There was no opera now! That fellow Wagner had ruined everything; no melody left, nor any voices to sing it. Ah! the wonderful singers! Gone! He sat watching the old scenes acted, a numb feeling at his heart.

From the curl of silver over his ear to the pose of his foot in its elastic-sided patent boot, there was nothing clumsy or weak about old Jolyon. He was as upright—very nearly—as in those old times when he came every night; his sight was as good—almost as good. But what a feeling of weariness and disillusion!

He had been in the habit all his life of enjoying things, even imperfect things—and there had been many imperfect things—he had enjoyed them all with moderation, so as to keep himself young. But now he was deserted by his power of enjoyment, by his philosophy, and left with this dreadful feeling that it

was all done with. Not even the Prisoners' Chorus, nor Florian's Song, had the power to dispel the gloom of his loneliness.

If Jo were only with him! The boy must be forty by now. He had wasted fourteen years out of the life of his only son. And Jo was no longer a social pariah. He was married. Old Jolyon had been unable to refrain from marking his appreciation of the action by enclosing his son a cheque for L500. The cheque had been returned in a letter from the 'Hotch Potch,' couched in these words.

'MY DEAREST FATHER,

'Your generous gift was welcome as a sign that you might think worse of me. I return it, but should you think fit to invest it for the benefit of the little chap (we call him Jolly), who bears our Christian and, by courtesy, our surname, I shall be very glad.

'I hope with all my heart that your health is as good as ever.

'Your loving son,

'Jo.'

The letter was like the boy. He had always been an amiable chap. Old Jolyon had sent this reply:

'MY DEAR JO,

'The sum (L500) stands in my books for the benefit of your boy, under the name of Jolyon Forsyte, and will be duly-credited with interest at 5 per cent. I hope that you are doing well. My health remains good at present.

'With love, I am, 'Your affectionate Father,
'JOLYON FORSYTE.'

And every year on the 1st of January he had added a hundred and the interest. The sum was mounting up—next New Year's Day it would be fifteen hundred and odd pounds! And it is difficult to say how much satisfaction he had got out of that yearly transaction. But the correspondence had ended.

In spite of his love for his son, in spite of an instinct, partly constitutional, partly the result, as in thousands of his class, of the continual handling and watching of affairs, prompting him to judge conduct by results rather than by principle, there was at the bottom of his heart a sort of uneasiness. His son ought, under the circumstances, to have gone to the dogs; that law was laid down in all the novels, sermons, and plays he had ever read, heard, or witnessed.

After receiving the cheque back there seemed to him to be something wrong somewhere. Why had his son not gone to the dogs? But, then, who could tell?

He had heard, of course—in fact, he had made it his business to find out—that Jo lived in St. John's Wood, that he had a little house in Wistaria Avenue with a garden, and took his wife about with him into society—a queer sort of society, no doubt—and that they had two children—the little chap they called Jolly (considering the circumstances the name struck him as cynical, and old Jolyon both feared and disliked cynicism), and a girl called Holly, born since the marriage. Who could tell what his son's circumstances really were? He had capitalized the income he had inherited from his mother's father and joined Lloyd's as an underwriter; he painted pictures, too—water-colours. Old Jolyon knew this, for he had surreptitiously bought them from time to time, after chancing to see his son's name signed at the bottom of a representation of the river Thames in a dealer's window. He thought them bad, and did not hang them because of the signature; he kept them locked up in a drawer.

In the great opera-house a terrible yearning came on him to see his son. He remembered the days when he had been wont to slide him, in a brown holland suit, to and fro under the arch of his legs; the times when he ran beside the boy's pony, teaching him to ride; the day he first took him to school. He had been a loving, lovable little chap! After he went to Eton he had acquired, perhaps, a little too much of that desirable manner which old Jolyon knew was only to be obtained at such places and at great expense; but he had always been companionable. Always a companion, even after Cambridge—a little far off, perhaps, owing to the advantages he had received. Old Jolyon's feeling towards our public schools and 'Varsities never wavered, and he retained touchingly his attitude of admiration and mistrust towards a system appropriate to the highest in the land, of which he had not himself been privileged to partake.... Now that June had gone and left, or as good as left him, it would have been a comfort to see his son again. Guilty of this treason to his family, his principles, his class, old Jolyon fixed his eyes on the singer. A poor thing—a wretched poor thing! And the Florian a perfect stick!

It was over. They were easily pleased nowadays!

In the crowded street he snapped up a cab under the very nose of a stout and much younger gentleman, who had already assumed it to be his own. His route lay through Pall Mall, and at the corner, instead of going through the Green Park, the cabman turned to drive up St. James's Street. Old Jolyon put his hand through the trap (he could not bear being taken out of his way); in turning, however, he found himself opposite the 'Hotch Potch,' and the yearning that had been secretly with him the whole evening prevailed. He called to the driver to stop. He would go in and ask if Jo still belonged there.

He went in. The hall looked exactly as it did when he used to dine there with Jack Herring, and they had the best cook in London; and he looked round with the shrewd, straight glance that had caused him all his life to be better served than most men.

"Mr. Jolyon Forsyte still a member here?"

"Yes, sir; in the Club now, sir. What name?"

Old Jolyon was taken aback.

"His father," he said.

And having spoken, he took his stand, back to the fireplace.

Young Jolyon, on the point of leaving the Club, had put on his hat, and was in the act of crossing the hall, as the porter met him. He was no longer young, with hair going grey, and face—a narrower replica of his father's, with the same large drooping moustache—decidedly worn. He turned pale. This meeting was terrible after all those years, for nothing in the world was so terrible as a scene. They met and crossed hands without a word. Then, with a quaver in his voice, the father said:

"How are you, my boy?"

The son answered:

"How are you, Dad?"

Old Jolyon's hand trembled in its thin lavender glove.

"If you're going my way," he said, "I can give you a lift."

And as though in the habit of taking each other home every night they went out and stepped into the cab.

To old Jolyon it seemed that his son had grown. 'More of a man altogether,' was his comment. Over the natural amiability of that son's face had come a rather sardonic mask, as though he had found in the circumstances of his life the necessity for armour. The features were certainly those of a Forsyte, but the expression was more the introspective look of a student or philosopher. He had no doubt been obliged to look into himself a good deal in the course of those fifteen years.

To young Jolyon the first sight of his father was undoubtedly a shock—he looked so worn and old. But in the cab he seemed hardly to have changed, still having the calm look so well remembered, still being upright and keen-eyed.

"You look well, Dad."

"Middling," old Jolyon answered.

He was the prey of an anxiety that he found he must put into words. Having got his son back like this, he felt he must know what was his financial position.

"Jo," he said, "I should like to hear what sort of water you're in. I suppose you're in debt?"

He put it this way that his son might find it easier to confess.

Young Jolyon answered in his ironical voice:

"No! I'm not in debt!"

Old Jolyon saw that he was angry, and touched his hand. He had run a risk. It was worth it, however, and Jo had never been sulky with him. They drove on, without speaking again, to Stanhope Gate. Old Jolyon invited him in, but young Jolyon shook his head.

"June's not here," said his father hastily: "went of to-day on a visit. I suppose you know that she's engaged to be married?"

"Already?" murmured young Jolyon'.

Old Jolyon stepped out, and, in paying the cab fare, for the first time in his life gave the driver a sovereign in mistake for a shilling.

Placing the coin in his mouth, the cabman whipped his horse secretly on the underneath and hurried away.

Old Jolyon turned the key softly in the lock, pushed open the door, and beckoned. His son saw him gravely hanging up his coat, with an expression on his face like that of a boy who intends to steal cherries.

The door of the dining-room was open, the gas turned low; a spirit-urn hissed on a tea-tray, and close to it a cynical looking cat had fallen asleep on the dining-table. Old Jolyon 'shoo'd' her off at once. The incident was a relief to his feelings; he rattled his opera hat behind the animal.

"She's got fleas," he said, following her out of the room. Through the door in the hall leading to the basement he called "Hsst!" several times, as though assisting the cat's departure, till by some strange coincidence the butler appeared below.

"You can go to bed, Parfitt," said old Jolyon. "I will lock up and put out."

When he again entered the dining-room the cat unfortunately preceded him, with her tail in the air, proclaiming that she had seen through this manœuvre for suppressing the butler from the first....

A fatality had dogged old Jolyon's domestic stratagems all his life.

Young Jolyon could not help smiling. He was very well versed in irony, and everything that evening seemed to him ironical. The episode of the cat; the announcement of his own daughter's engagement. So he had no more part or parcel in her than he had in the Puss! And the poetical justice of this appealed to him.

"What is June like now?" he asked.

"She's a little thing," returned old Jolyon; they say she's like me, but that's their folly. She's more like your mother—the same eyes and hair."

"Ah! and she is pretty?"

Old Jolyon was too much of a Forsyte to praise anything freely; especially anything for which he had a genuine admiration.

"Not bad looking—a regular Forsyte chin. It'll be lonely here when she's gone, Jo."

The look on his face again gave young Jolyon the shock he had felt on first seeing his father.

"What will you do with yourself, Dad? I suppose she's wrapped up in him?"

"Do with myself?" repeated old Jolyon with an angry break in his voice. "It'll be miserable work living here alone. I don't know how it's to end. I wish to goodness...." He checked himself, and added: "The question is, what had I better do with this house?"

Young Jolyon looked round the room. It was peculiarly vast and dreary, decorated with the enormous pictures of still life that he remembered as a boy—sleeping dogs with their noses resting on bunches of carrots, together with onions and grapes lying side by side in mild surprise. The house was a white elephant, but he could not conceive of his father living in a smaller place; and all the more did it all seem ironical.

In his great chair with the book-rest sat old Jolyon, the figurehead of his family and class and creed, with his white head and dome-like forehead, the representative of moderation, and order, and love of property. As lonely an old man as there was in London.

There he sat in the gloomy comfort of the room, a puppet in the power of great forces that cared nothing for family or class or creed, but moved, machine-like, with dread processes to inscrutable ends. This was how it struck young Jolyon, who had the impersonal eye.

The poor old Dad! So this was the end, the purpose to which he had lived with such magnificent

moderation! To be lonely, and grow older and older, yearning for a soul to speak to!

In his turn old Jolyon looked back at his son. He wanted to talk about many things that he had been unable to talk about all these years. It had been impossible to seriously confide in June his conviction that property in the Soho quarter would go up in value; his uneasiness about that tremendous silence of Pippin, the superintendent of the New Colliery Company, of which he had so long been chairman; his disgust at the steady fall in American Golgothas, or even to discuss how, by some sort of settlement, he could best avoid the payment of those death duties which would follow his decease. Under the influence, however, of a cup of tea, which he seemed to stir indefinitely, he began to speak at last. A new vista of life was thus opened up, a promised land of talk, where he could find a harbour against the waves of anticipation and regret; where he could soothe his soul with the opium of devising how to round off his property and make eternal the only part of him that was to remain alive.

Young Jolyon was a good listener; it was his great quality. He kept his eyes fixed on his father's face, putting a question now and then.

The clock struck one before old Jolyon had finished, and at the sound of its striking his principles came back. He took out his watch with a look of surprise:

"I must go to bed, Jo," he said.

Young Jolyon rose and held out his hand to help his father up. The old face looked worn and hollow again; the eyes were steadily averted.

"Good-bye, my boy; take care of yourself."

A moment passed, and young Jolyon, turning on his heel, marched out at the door. He could hardly see; his smile quavered. Never in all the fifteen years since he had first found out that life was no simple business, had he found it so singularly complicated.

CHAPTER III DINNER AT SWITHIN'S

In Swithin's orange and light-blue dining-room, facing the Park, the round table was laid for twelve.

A cut-glass chandelier filled with lighted candles hung like a giant stalactite above its centre, radiating over large gilt-framed mirrors, slabs of marble on the tops of side-tables, and heavy gold chairs with crewel worked seats. Everything betokened that love of beauty so deeply implanted in each family which has had its own way to make into Society, out of the more vulgar heart of Nature. Swithin had indeed an impatience of simplicity, a love of ormolu, which had always stamped him amongst his associates as a man of great, if somewhat luxurious taste; and out of the knowledge that no one could possibly enter his rooms without perceiving him to be a man of wealth, he had derived a solid and prolonged happiness such as perhaps no other circumstance in life had afforded him.

Since his retirement from land agency, a profession deplorable in his estimation, especially as to its auctioneering department, he had abandoned himself to naturally aristocratic tastes.

The perfect luxury of his latter days had embedded him like a fly in sugar; and his mind, where very little took place from morning till night, was the junction of two curiously opposite emotions, a lingering and sturdy satisfaction that he had made his own way and his own fortune, and a sense that a man of his distinction should never have been allowed to soil his mind with work.

He stood at the sideboard in a white waistcoat with large gold and onyx buttons, watching his valet screw the necks of three champagne bottles deeper into ice-pails. Between the points of his stand-up collar, which—though it hurt him to move—he would on no account have had altered, the pale flesh of his under chin remained immovable. His eyes roved from bottle to bottle. He was debating, and he argued like this: Jolyon drinks a glass, perhaps two, he's so careful of himself. James, he can't take his wine nowadays. Nicholas—Fanny and he would swill water he shouldn't wonder! Soames didn't count; these young nephews—Soames was thirty-one—couldn't drink! But Bosinney?

Encountering in the name of this stranger something outside the range of his philosophy, Swithin paused. A misgiving arose within him! It was impossible to tell! June was only a girl, in love too! Emily (Mrs. James) liked a good glass of champagne. It was too dry for Juley, poor old soul, she had no palate. As to Hatty Chessman! The thought of this old friend caused a cloud of thought to obscure the perfect

glassiness of his eyes: He shouldn't wonder if she drank half a bottle!

But in thinking of his remaining guest, an expression like that of a cat who is just going to purr stole over his old face: Mrs. Soames! She mightn't take much, but she would appreciate what she drank; it was a pleasure to give her good wine! A pretty woman—and sympathetic to him!

The thought of her was like champagne itself! A pleasure to give a good wine to a young woman who looked so well, who knew how to dress, with charming manners, quite distinguished—a pleasure to entertain her. Between the points of his collar he gave his head the first small, painful oscillation of the evening.

"Adolf!" he said. "Put in another bottle."

He himself might drink a good deal, for, thanks to that prescription of Blight's, he found himself extremely well, and he had been careful to take no lunch. He had not felt so well for weeks. Puffing out his lower lip, he gave his last instructions:

"Adolf, the least touch of the West India when you come to the ham."

Passing into the anteroom, he sat down on the edge of a chair, with his knees apart; and his tall, bulky form was wrapped at once in an expectant, strange, primeval immobility. He was ready to rise at a moment's notice. He had not given a dinner-party for months. This dinner in honour of June's engagement had seemed a bore at first (among Forsytes the custom of solemnizing engagements by feasts was religiously observed), but the labours of sending invitations and ordering the repast over, he felt pleasantly stimulated.

And thus sitting, a watch in his hand, fat, and smooth, and golden, like a flattened globe of butter, he thought of nothing.

A long man, with side whiskers, who had once been in Swithin's service, but was now a greengrocer, entered and proclaimed:

"Mrs. Chessman, Mrs. Septimus Small!"

Two ladies advanced. The one in front, habited entirely in red, had large, settled patches of the same colour in her cheeks, and a hard, dashing eye. She walked at Swithin, holding out a hand cased in a long, primrose-coloured glove:

"Well! Swithin," she said, "I haven't seen you for ages. How are you? Why, my dear boy, how stout you're getting!"

The fixity of Swithin's eye alone betrayed emotion. A dumb and grumbling anger swelled his bosom. It was vulgar to be stout, to talk of being stout; he had a chest, nothing more. Turning to his sister, he grasped her hand, and said in a tone of command:

"Well, Juley."

Mrs. Septimus Small was the tallest of the four sisters; her good, round old face had gone a little sour; an innumerable pout clung all over it, as if it had been encased in an iron wire mask up to that evening, which, being suddenly removed, left little rolls of mutinous flesh all over her countenance. Even her eyes were pouting. It was thus that she recorded her permanent resentment at the loss of Septimus Small.

She had quite a reputation for saying the wrong thing, and, tenacious like all her breed, she would hold to it when she had said it, and add to it another wrong thing, and so on. With the decease of her husband the family tenacity, the family matter-of-factness, had gone sterile within her. A great talker, when allowed, she would converse without the faintest animation for hours together, relating, with epic monotony, the innumerable occasions on which Fortune had misused her; nor did she ever perceive that her hearers sympathized with Fortune, for her heart was kind.

Having sat, poor soul, long by the bedside of Small (a man of poor constitution), she had acquired the habit, and there were countless subsequent occasions when she had sat immense periods of time to amuse sick people, children, and other helpless persons, and she could never divest herself of the feeling that the world was the most ungrateful place anybody could live in. Sunday after Sunday she sat at the feet of that extremely witty preacher, the Rev. Thomas Scoles, who exercised a great influence over her; but she succeeded in convincing everybody that even this was a misfortune. She had passed into a proverb in the family, and when anybody was observed to be peculiarly distressing, he was known as a regular 'Juley.' The habit of her mind would have killed anybody but a Forsyte at forty; but she was seventy-two, and had never looked better. And one felt that there were capacities for

enjoyment about her which might yet come out. She owned three canaries, the cat Tommy, and half a parrot—in common with her sister Hester;—and these poor creatures (kept carefully out of Timothy's way—he was nervous about animals), unlike human beings, recognising that she could not help being blighted, attached themselves to her passionately.

She was sombrely magnificent this evening in black bombazine, with a mauve front cut in a shy triangle, and crowned with a black velvet ribbon round the base of her thin throat; black and mauve for evening wear was esteemed very chaste by nearly every Forsyte.

Pouting at Swithin, she said:

"Ann has been asking for you. You haven't been near us for an age!"

Swithin put his thumbs within the armholes of his waistcoat, and replied:

"Ann's getting very shaky; she ought to have a doctor!"

"Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Forsyte!"

Nicholas Forsyte, cocking his rectangular eyebrows, wore a smile. He had succeeded during the day in bringing to fruition a scheme for the employment of a tribe from Upper India in the gold-mines of Ceylon. A pet plan, carried at last in the teeth of great difficulties—he was justly pleased. It would double the output of his mines, and, as he had often forcibly argued, all experience tended to show that a man must die; and whether he died of a miserable old age in his own country, or prematurely of damp in the bottom of a foreign mine, was surely of little consequence, provided that by a change in his mode of life he benefited the British Empire.

His ability was undoubted. Raising his broken nose towards his listener, he would add:

"For want of a few hundred of these fellows we haven't paid a dividend for years, and look at the price of the shares. I can't get ten shillings for them."

He had been at Yarmouth, too, and had come back feeling that he had added at least ten years to his own life. He grasped Swithin's hand, exclaiming in a jocular voice:

"Well, so here we are again!"

Mrs. Nicholas, an effete woman, smiled a smile of frightened jollity behind his back.

"Mr. and Mrs. James Forsyte! Mr. and Mrs. Soames Forsyte!"

Swithin drew his heels together, his deportment ever admirable.

"Well, James, well Emily! How are you, Soames? How do you do?"

His hand enclosed Irene's, and his eyes swelled. She was a pretty woman—a little too pale, but her figure, her eyes, her teeth! Too good for that chap Soames!

The gods had given Irene dark brown eyes and golden hair, that strange combination, provocative of men's glances, which is said to be the mark of a weak character. And the full, soft pallor of her neck and shoulders, above a gold-coloured frock, gave to her personality an alluring strangeness.

Soames stood behind, his eyes fastened on his wife's neck. The hands of Swithin's watch, which he still held open in his hand, had left eight behind; it was half an hour beyond his dinner-time—he had had no lunch—and a strange primeval impatience surged up within him.

"It's not like Jolyon to be late!" he said to Irene, with uncontrollable vexation. "I suppose it'll be June keeping him!"

"People in love are always late," she answered.

Swithin stared at her; a dusky orange dyed his cheeks.

"They've no business to be. Some fashionable nonsense!"

And behind this outburst the inarticulate violence of primitive generations seemed to mutter and grumble.

"Tell me what you think of my new star, Uncle Swithin," said Irene softly.

Among the lace in the bosom of her dress was shining a five-pointed star, made of eleven diamonds.

Swithin looked at the star. He had a pretty taste in stones; no question could have been more sympathetically devised to distract his attention.

"Who gave you that?" he asked.

"Soames."

There was no change in her face, but Swithin's pale eyes bulged as though he might suddenly have been afflicted with insight.

"I dare say you're dull at home," he said. "Any day you like to come and dine with me, I'll give you as good a bottle of wine as you'll get in London."

"Miss June Forsyte—Mr. Jolyon Forsyte!... Mr. Boswainey!..."

Swithin moved his arm, and said in a rumbling voice:

"Dinner, now—dinner!"

He took in Irene, on the ground that he had not entertained her since she was a bride. June was the portion of Bosinney, who was placed between Irene and his fiancée. On the other side of June was James with Mrs. Nicholas, then old Jolyon with Mrs. James, Nicholas with Hatty Chessman, Soames with Mrs. Small, completing the circle to Swithin again.

Family dinners of the Forsytes observe certain traditions. There are, for instance, no hors d'oeuvre. The reason for this is unknown. Theory among the younger members traces it to the disgraceful price of oysters; it is more probably due to a desire to come to the point, to a good practical sense deciding at once that hors d'oeuvre are but poor things. The Jameses alone, unable to withstand a custom almost universal in Park Lane, are now and then unfaithful.

A silent, almost morose, inattention to each other succeeds to the subsidence into their seats, lasting till well into the first entree, but interspersed with remarks such as, "Tom's bad again; I can't tell what's the matter with him!" "I suppose Ann doesn't come down in the mornings?"—"What's the name of your doctor, Fanny?" "Stubbs?" "He's a quack!"—"Winifred? She's got too many children. Four, isn't it? She's as thin as a lath!"—"What d'you give for this sherry, Swithin? Too dry for me!"

With the second glass of champagne, a kind of hum makes itself heard, which, when divested of casual accessories and resolved into its primal element, is found to be James telling a story, and this goes on for a long time, encroaching sometimes even upon what must universally be recognised as the crowning point of a Forsyte feast—"the saddle of mutton."

No Forsyte has given a dinner without providing a saddle of mutton. There is something in its succulent solidity which makes it suitable to people 'of a certain position.' It is nourishing and tasty; the sort of thing a man remembers eating. It has a past and a future, like a deposit paid into a bank; and it is something that can be argued about.

Each branch of the family tenaciously held to a particular locality—old Jolyon swearing by Dartmoor, James by Welsh, Swithin by Southdown, Nicholas maintaining that people might sneer, but there was nothing like New Zealand! As for Roger, the 'original' of the brothers, he had been obliged to invent a locality of his own, and with an ingenuity worthy of a man who had devised a new profession for his sons, he had discovered a shop where they sold German; on being remonstrated with, he had proved his point by producing a butcher's bill, which showed that he paid more than any of the others. It was on this occasion that old Jolyon, turning to June, had said in one of his bursts of philosophy:

"You may depend upon it, they're a cranky lot, the Forsytes—and you'll find it out, as you grow older!"

Timothy alone held apart, for though he ate saddle of mutton heartily, he was, he said, afraid of it.

To anyone interested psychologically in Forsytes, this great saddle-of-mutton trait is of prime importance; not only does it illustrate their tenacity, both collectively and as individuals, but it marks them as belonging in fibre and instincts to that great class which believes in nourishment and flavour, and yields to no sentimental craving for beauty.

Younger members of the family indeed would have done without a joint altogether, preferring guinea-fowl, or lobster salad—something which appealed to the imagination, and had less nourishment—but these were females; or, if not, had been corrupted by their wives, or by mothers, who having been forced to eat saddle of mutton throughout their married lives, had passed a secret hostility towards it into the fibre of their sons.

The great saddle-of-mutton controversy at an end, a Tewkesbury ham commenced, together with the least touch of West Indian—Swithin was so long over this course that he caused a block in the progress of the dinner. To devote himself to it with better heart, he paused in his conversation.

From his seat by Mrs. Septimus Small Soames was watching. He had a reason of his own connected with a pet building scheme, for observing Bosinney. The architect might do for his purpose; he looked clever, as he sat leaning back in his chair, moodily making little ramparts with bread-crumbs. Soames noted his dress clothes to be well cut, but too small, as though made many years ago.

He saw him turn to Irene and say something and her face sparkle as he often saw it sparkle at other people—never at himself. He tried to catch what they were saying, but Aunt Juley was speaking.

Hadn't that always seemed very extraordinary to Soames? Only last Sunday dear Mr. Scole, had been so witty in his sermon, so sarcastic, "For what," he had said, "shall it profit a man if he gain his own soul, but lose all his property?" That, he had said, was the motto of the middle-class; now, what had he meant by that? Of course, it might be what middle-class people believed—she didn't know; what did Soames think?

He answered abstractedly: "How should I know? Scoles is a humbug, though, isn't he?" For Bosinney was looking round the table, as if pointing out the peculiarities of the guests, and Soames wondered what he was saying. By her smile Irene was evidently agreeing with his remarks. She seemed always to agree with other people.

Her eyes were turned on himself; Soames dropped his glance at once. The smile had died off her lips.

A humbug? But what did Soames mean? If Mr. Scoles was a humbug, a clergyman—then anybody might be—it was frightful!

"Well, and so they are!" said Soames.

During Aunt Juley's momentary and horrified silence he caught some words of Irene's that sounded like: 'Abandon hope, all ye who enter here!'

But Swithin had finished his ham.

"Where do you go for your mushrooms?" he was saying to Irene in a voice like a courtier's; "you ought to go to Smileybob's—he'll give 'em you fresh. These little men, they won't take the trouble!"

Irene turned to answer him, and Soames saw Bosinney watching her and smiling to himself. A curious smile the fellow had. A half-simple arrangement, like a child who smiles when he is pleased. As for George's nickname—"The Buccaneer"—he did not think much of that. And, seeing Bosinney turn to June, Soames smiled too, but sardonically—he did not like June, who was not looking too pleased.

This was not surprising, for she had just held the following conversation with James:

"I stayed on the river on my way home, Uncle James, and saw a beautiful site for a house."

James, a slow and thorough eater, stopped the process of mastication.

"Eh?" he said. "Now, where was that?"

"Close to Pangbourne."

James placed a piece of ham in his mouth, and June waited.

"I suppose you wouldn't know whether the land about there was freehold?" he asked at last. "You wouldn't know anything about the price of land about there?"

"Yes," said June; "I made inquiries." Her little resolute face under its copper crown was suspiciously eager and aglow.

James regarded her with the air of an inquisitor.

"What? You're not thinking of buying land!" he ejaculated, dropping his fork.

June was greatly encouraged by his interest. It had long been her pet plan that her uncles should benefit themselves and Bosinney by building country-houses.

"Of course not," she said. "I thought it would be such a splendid place for—you or—someone to build a country-house!"

James looked at her sideways, and placed a second piece of ham in his mouth....

"Land ought to be very dear about there," he said.

What June had taken for personal interest was only the impersonal excitement of every Forsyte who hears of something eligible in danger of passing into other hands. But she refused to see the disappearance of her chance, and continued to press her point.

"You ought to go into the country, Uncle James. I wish I had a lot of money, I wouldn't live another day in London."

James was stirred to the depths of his long thin figure; he had no idea his niece held such downright views.

"Why don't you go into the country?" repeated June; "it would do you a lot of good."

"Why?" began James in a fluster. "Buying land—what good d'you suppose I can do buying land, building houses?—I couldn't get four per cent. for my money!"

"What does that matter? You'd get fresh air."

"Fresh air!" exclaimed James; "what should I do with fresh air,"

"I should have thought anybody liked to have fresh air," said June scornfully.

James wiped his napkin all over his mouth.

"You don't know the value of money," he said, avoiding her eye.

"No! and I hope I never shall!" and, biting her lip with inexpressible mortification, poor June was silent.

Why were her own relations so rich, and Phil never knew where the money was coming from for tomorrow's tobacco. Why couldn't they do something for him? But they were so selfish. Why couldn't they build country-houses? She had all that naive dogmatism which is so pathetic, and sometimes achieves such great results. Bosinney, to whom she turned in her discomfiture, was talking to Irene, and a chill fell on June's spirit. Her eyes grew steady with anger, like old Jolyon's when his will was crossed.

James, too, was much disturbed. He felt as though someone had threatened his right to invest his money at five per cent. Jolyon had spoiled her. None of his girls would have said such a thing. James had always been exceedingly liberal to his children, and the consciousness of this made him feel it all the more deeply. He trifled moodily with his strawberries, then, deluging them with cream, he ate them quickly; they, at all events, should not escape him.

No wonder he was upset. Engaged for fifty-four years (he had been admitted a solicitor on the earliest day sanctioned by the law) in arranging mortgages, preserving investments at a dead level of high and safe interest, conducting negotiations on the principle of securing the utmost possible out of other people compatible with safety to his clients and himself, in calculations as to the exact pecuniary possibilities of all the relations of life, he had come at last to think purely in terms of money. Money was now his light, his medium for seeing, that without which he was really unable to see, really not cognisant of phenomena; and to have this thing, "I hope I shall never know the value of money!" said to his face, saddened and exasperated him. He knew it to be nonsense, or it would have frightened him. What was the world coming to! Suddenly recollecting the story of young Jolyon, however, he felt a little comforted, for what could you expect with a father like that! This turned his thoughts into a channel still less pleasant. What was all this talk about Soames and Irene?

As in all self-respecting families, an emporium had been established where family secrets were bartered, and family stock priced. It was known on Forsyte 'Change that Irene regretted her marriage. Her regret was disapproved of. She ought to have known her own mind; no dependable woman made these mistakes.

James reflected sourly that they had a nice house (rather small) in an excellent position, no children, and no money troubles. Soames was reserved about his affairs, but he must be getting a very warm man. He had a capital income from the business—for Soames, like his father, was a member of that well-known firm of solicitors, Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte—and had always been very careful. He had done quite unusually well with some mortgages he had taken up, too—a little timely foreclosure—most lucky hits!

There was no reason why Irene should not be happy, yet they said she'd been asking for a separate

room. He knew where that ended. It wasn't as if Soames drank.

James looked at his daughter-in-law. That unseen glance of his was cold and dubious. Appeal and fear were in it, and a sense of personal grievance. Why should he be worried like this? It was very likely all nonsense; women were funny things! They exaggerated so, you didn't know what to believe; and then, nobody told him anything, he had to find out everything for himself. Again he looked furtively at Irene, and across from her to Soames. The latter, listening to Aunt Juley, was looking up, under his brows in the direction of Bosinney.

'He's fond of her, I know,' thought James. 'Look at the way he's always giving her things.'

And the extraordinary unreasonableness of her disaffection struck him with increased force.

It was a pity, too, she was a taking little thing, and he, James, would be really quite fond of her if she'd only let him. She had taken up lately with June; that was doing her no good, that was certainly doing her no good. She was getting to have opinions of her own. He didn't know what she wanted with anything of the sort. She'd a good home, and everything she could wish for. He felt that her friends ought to be chosen for her. To go on like this was dangerous.

June, indeed, with her habit of championing the unfortunate, had dragged from Irene a confession, and, in return, had preached the necessity of facing the evil, by separation, if need be. But in the face of these exhortations, Irene had kept a brooding silence, as though she found terrible the thought of this struggle carried through in cold blood. He would never give her up, she had said to June.

"Who cares?" June cried; "let him do what he likes—you've only to stick to it!" And she had not scrupled to say something of this sort at Timothy's; James, when he heard of it, had felt a natural indignation and horror.

What if Irene were to take it into her head to—he could hardly frame the thought—to leave Soames? But he felt this thought so unbearable that he at once put it away; the shady visions it conjured up, the sound of family tongues buzzing in his ears, the horror of the conspicuous happening so close to him, to one of his own children! Luckily, she had no money—a beggarly fifty pound a year! And he thought of the deceased Heron, who had had nothing to leave her, with contempt. Brooding over his glass, his long legs twisted under the table, he quite omitted to rise when the ladies left the room. He would have to speak to Soames—would have to put him on his guard; they could not go on like this, now that such a contingency had occurred to him. And he noticed with sour disfavour that June had left her wine-glasses full of wine.

'That little, thing's at the bottom of it all,' he mused; 'Irene'd never have thought of it herself.' James was a man of imagination.

The voice of Swithin roused him from his reverie.

"I gave four hundred pounds for it," he was saying. "Of course it's a regular work of art."

"Four hundred! H'm! that's a lot of money!" chimed in Nicholas.

The object alluded to was an elaborate group of statuary in Italian marble, which, placed upon a lofty stand (also of marble), diffused an atmosphere of culture throughout the room. The subsidiary figures, of which there were six, female, nude, and of highly ornate workmanship, were all pointing towards the central figure, also nude, and female, who was pointing at herself; and all this gave the observer a very pleasant sense of her extreme value. Aunt Juley, nearly opposite, had had the greatest difficulty in not looking at it all the evening.

Old Jolyon spoke; it was he who had started the discussion.

"Four hundred fiddlesticks! Don't tell me you gave four hundred for that?"

Between the points of his collar Swithin's chin made the second painful oscillatory movement of the evening.

"Four-hundred-pounds, of English money; not a farthing less. I don't regret it. It's not common English—it's genuine modern Italian!"

Soames raised the corner of his lip in a smile, and looked across at Bosinney. The architect was grinning behind the fumes of his cigarette. Now, indeed, he looked more like a buccaneer.

"There's a lot of work about it," remarked James hastily, who was really moved by the size of the

group. "It'd sell well at Jobson's."

"The poor foreign dey-vil that made it," went on Swithin, "asked me five hundred—I gave him four. It's worth eight. Looked half-starved, poor dey-vil!"

"Ah!" chimed in Nicholas suddenly, "poor, seedy-lookin' chaps, these artists; it's a wonder to me how they live. Now, there's young Flageoletti, that Fanny and the girls are always hav'in' in, to play the fiddle; if he makes a hundred a year it's as much as ever he does!"

James shook his head. "Ah!" he said, "I don't know how they live!"

Old Jolyon had risen, and, cigar in mouth, went to inspect the group at close quarters.

"Wouldn't have given two for it!" he pronounced at last.

Soames saw his father and Nicholas glance at each other anxiously; and, on the other side of Swithin, Bosinney, still shrouded in smoke.

'I wonder what he thinks of it?' thought Soames, who knew well enough that this group was hopelessly vieux jeu; hopelessly of the last generation. There was no longer any sale at Jobson's for such works of art.

Swithin's answer came at last. "You never knew anything about a statue. You've got your pictures, and that's all!"

Old Jolyon walked back to his seat, puffing his cigar. It was not likely that he was going to be drawn into an argument with an obstinate beggar like Swithin, pig-headed as a mule, who had never known a statue from a—straw hat.

"Stucco!" was all he said.

It had long been physically impossible for Swithin to start; his fist came down on the table.

"Stucco! I should like to see anything you've got in your house half as good!"

And behind his speech seemed to sound again that rumbling violence of primitive generations.

It was James who saved the situation.

"Now, what do you say, Mr. Bosinney? You're an architect; you ought to know all about statues and things!"

Every eye was turned upon Bosinney; all waited with a strange, suspicious look for his answer.

And Soames, speaking for the first time, asked:

"Yes, Bosinney, what do you say?"

Bosinney replied coolly:

"The work is a remarkable one."

His words were addressed to Swithin, his eyes smiled slyly at old Jolyon; only Soames remained unsatisfied.

"Remarkable for what?"

"For its naivete"

The answer was followed by an impressive silence; Swithin alone was not sure whether a compliment was intended.

CHAPTER IV

PROJECTION OF THE HOUSE

Soames Forsyte walked out of his green-painted front door three days after the dinner at Swithin's, and looking back from across the Square, confirmed his impression that the house wanted painting.

He had left his wife sitting on the sofa in the drawing-room, her hands crossed in her lap, manifestly waiting for him to go out. This was not unusual. It happened, in fact, every day.

He could not understand what she found wrong with him. It was not as if he drank! Did he run into debt, or gamble, or swear; was he violent; were his friends rackets; did he stay out at night? On the contrary.

The profound, subdued aversion which he felt in his wife was a mystery to him, and a source of the most terrible irritation. That she had made a mistake, and did not love him, had tried to love him and could not love him, was obviously no reason.

He that could imagine so outlandish a cause for his wife's not getting on with him was certainly no Forsyte.

Soames was forced, therefore, to set the blame entirely down to his wife. He had never met a woman so capable of inspiring affection. They could not go anywhere without his seeing how all the men were attracted by her; their looks, manners, voices, betrayed it; her behaviour under this attention had been beyond reproach. That she was one of those women—not too common in the Anglo-Saxon race—born to be loved and to love, who when not loving are not living, had certainly never even occurred to him. Her power of attraction, he regarded as part of her value as his property; but it made him, indeed, suspect that she could give as well as receive; and she gave him nothing! 'Then why did she marry me?' was his continual thought. He had, forgotten his courtship; that year and a half when he had besieged and lain in wait for her, devising schemes for her entertainment, giving her presents, proposing to her periodically, and keeping her other admirers away with his perpetual presence. He had forgotten the day when, adroitly taking advantage of an acute phase of her dislike to her home surroundings, he crowned his labours with success. If he remembered anything, it was the dainty capriciousness with which the gold-haired, dark-eyed girl had treated him. He certainly did not remember the look on her face—strange, passive, appealing—when suddenly one day she had yielded, and said that she would marry him.

It had been one of those real devoted wooings which books and people praise, when the lover is at length rewarded for hammering the iron till it is malleable, and all must be happy ever after as the wedding bells.

Soames walked eastwards, mousing doggedly along on the shady side.

The house wanted doing, up, unless he decided to move into the country, and build.

For the hundredth time that month he turned over this problem. There was no use in rushing into things! He was very comfortably off, with an increasing income getting on for three thousand a year; but his invested capital was not perhaps so large as his father believed—James had a tendency to expect that his children should be better off than they were. 'I can manage eight thousand easily enough,' he thought, 'without calling in either Robertson's or Nicholl's.'

He had stopped to look in at a picture shop, for Soames was an 'amateur' of pictures, and had a little-room in No. 62, Montpellier Square, full of canvases, stacked against the wall, which he had no room to hang. He brought them home with him on his way back from the City, generally after dark, and would enter this room on Sunday afternoons, to spend hours turning the pictures to the light, examining the marks on their backs, and occasionally making notes.

They were nearly all landscapes with figures in the foreground, a sign of some mysterious revolt against London, its tall houses, its interminable streets, where his life and the lives of his breed and class were passed. Every now and then he would take one or two pictures away with him in a cab, and stop at Jobson's on his way into the City.

He rarely showed them to anyone; Irene, whose opinion he secretly respected and perhaps for that reason never solicited, had only been into the room on rare occasions, in discharge of some wifely duty. She was not asked to look at the pictures, and she never did. To Soames this was another grievance. He hated that pride of hers, and secretly dreaded it.

In the plate-glass window of the picture shop his image stood and looked at him.

His sleek hair under the brim of the tall hat had a sheen like the hat itself; his cheeks, pale and flat, the line of his clean-shaven lips, his firm chin with its greyish shaven tinge, and the buttoned strictness of his black cut-away coat, conveyed an appearance of reserve and secrecy, of imperturbable, enforced

composure; but his eyes, cold,—grey, strained—looking, with a line in the brow between them, examined him wistfully, as if they knew of a secret weakness.

He noted the subjects of the pictures, the names of the painters, made a calculation of their values, but without the satisfaction he usually derived from this inward appraisal, and walked on.

No. 62 would do well enough for another year, if he decided to build! The times were good for building, money had not been so dear for years; and the site he had seen at Robin Hill, when he had gone down there in the spring to inspect the Nicholl mortgage—what could be better! Within twelve miles of Hyde Park Corner, the value of the land certain to go up, would always fetch more than he gave for it; so that a house, if built in really good style, was a first-class investment.

The notion of being the one member of his family with a country house weighed but little with him; for to a true Forsyte, sentiment, even the sentiment of social position, was a luxury only to be indulged in after his appetite for more material pleasure had been satisfied.

To get Irene out of London, away from opportunities of going about and seeing people, away from her friends and those who put ideas into her head! That was the thing! She was too thick with June! June disliked him. He returned the sentiment. They were of the same blood.

It would be everything to get Irene out of town. The house would please her she would enjoy messing about with the decoration, she was very artistic!

The house must be in good style, something that would always be certain to command a price, something unique, like that last house of Parkes, which had a tower; but Parkes had himself said that his architect was ruinous. You never knew where you were with those fellows; if they had a name they ran you into no end of expense and were conceited into the bargain.

And a common architect was no good—the memory of Parkes' tower precluded the employment of a common architect:

This was why he had thought of Bosinney. Since the dinner at Swithin's he had made enquiries, the result of which had been meagre, but encouraging: "One of the new school."

"Clever?"

"As clever as you like—a bit—a bit up in the air!"

He had not been able to discover what houses Bosinney had built, nor what his charges were. The impression he gathered was that he would be able to make his own terms. The more he reflected on the idea, the more he liked it. It would be keeping the thing in the family, with Forsytes almost an instinct; and he would be able to get 'favoured-nation,' if not nominal terms—only fair, considering the chance to Bosinney of displaying his talents, for this house must be no common edifice.

Soames reflected complacently on the work it would be sure to bring the young man; for, like every Forsyte, he could be a thorough optimist when there was anything to be had out of it.

Bosinney's office was in Sloane Street, close at hand, so that he would be able to keep his eye continually on the plans.

Again, Irene would not be so likely to object to leave London if her greatest friend's lover were given the job. June's marriage might depend on it. Irene could not decently stand in the way of June's marriage; she would never do that, he knew her too well. And June would be pleased; of this he saw the advantage.

Bosinney looked clever, but he had also—and—it was one of his great attractions—an air as if he did not quite know on which side his bread were buttered; he should be easy to deal with in money matters. Soames made this reflection in no defrauding spirit; it was the natural attitude of his mind—of the mind of any good business man—of all those thousands of good business men through whom he was threading his way up Ludgate Hill.

Thus he fulfilled the inscrutable laws of his great class—of human nature itself—when he reflected, with a sense of comfort, that Bosinney would be easy to deal with in money matters.

While he elbowed his way on, his eyes, which he usually kept fixed on the ground before his feet, were attracted upwards by the dome of St. Paul's. It had a peculiar fascination for him, that old dome, and not once, but twice or three times a week, would he halt in his daily pilgrimage to enter beneath and stop in the side aisles for five or ten minutes, scrutinizing the names and epitaphs on the monuments. The attraction for him of this great church was inexplicable, unless it enabled him to

concentrate his thoughts on the business of the day. If any affair of particular moment, or demanding peculiar acuteness, was weighing on his mind, he invariably went in, to wander with mouse-like attention from epitaph to epitaph. Then retiring in the same noiseless way, he would hold steadily on up Cheapside, a thought more of dogged purpose in his gait, as though he had seen something which he had made up his mind to buy.

He went in this morning, but, instead of stealing from monument to monument, turned his eyes upwards to the columns and spacings of the walls, and remained motionless.

His uplifted face, with the awed and wistful look which faces take on themselves in church, was whitened to a chalky hue in the vast building. His gloved hands were clasped in front over the handle of his umbrella. He lifted them. Some sacred inspiration perhaps had come to him.

'Yes,' he thought, 'I must have room to hang my pictures.'

That evening, on his return from the City, he called at Bosinney's office. He found the architect in his shirt-sleeves, smoking a pipe, and ruling off lines on a plan. Soames refused a drink, and came at once to the point.

"If you've nothing better to do on Sunday, come down with me to Robin Hill, and give me your opinion on a building site."

"Are you going to build?"

"Perhaps," said Soames; "but don't speak of it. I just want your opinion."

"Quite so," said the architect.

Soames peered about the room.

"You're rather high up here," he remarked.

Any information he could gather about the nature and scope of Bosinney's business would be all to the good.

"It does well enough for me so far," answered the architect. "You're accustomed to the swells."

He knocked out his pipe, but replaced it empty between his teeth; it assisted him perhaps to carry on the conversation. Soames noted a hollow in each cheek, made as it were by suction.

"What do you pay for an office like this?" said he.

"Fifty too much," replied Bosinney.

This answer impressed Soames favourably.

"I suppose it is dear," he said. "I'll call for you—on Sunday about eleven."

The following Sunday therefore he called for Bosinney in a hansom, and drove him to the station. On arriving at Robin Hill, they found no cab, and started to walk the mile and a half to the site.

It was the 1st of August—a perfect day, with a burning sun and cloudless sky—and in the straight, narrow road leading up the hill their feet kicked up a yellow dust.

"Gravel soil," remarked Soames, and sideways he glanced at the coat Bosinney wore. Into the side-pockets of this coat were thrust bundles of papers, and under one arm was carried a queer-looking stick. Soames noted these and other peculiarities.

No one but a clever man, or, indeed, a buccaneer, would have taken such liberties with his appearance; and though these eccentricities were revolting to Soames, he derived a certain satisfaction from them, as evidence of qualities by which he must inevitably profit. If the fellow could build houses, what did his clothes matter?

"I told you," he said, "that I want this house to be a surprise, so don't say anything about it. I never talk of my affairs until they're carried through."

Bosinney nodded.

"Let women into your plans," pursued Soames, "and you never know where it'll end."

"Ah!" Said Bosinney, "women are the devil!"

This feeling had long been at the—bottom of Soames's heart; he had never, however, put it into words.

"Oh!" he Muttered, "so you're beginning to...." He stopped, but added, with an uncontrollable burst of spite: "June's got a temper of her own—always had."

"A temper's not a bad thing in an angel."

Soames had never called Irene an angel. He could not so have violated his best instincts, letting other people into the secret of her value, and giving himself away. He made no reply.

They had struck into a half-made road across a warren. A cart-track led at right-angles to a gravel pit, beyond which the chimneys of a cottage rose amongst a clump of trees at the border of a thick wood. Tussocks of feathery grass covered the rough surface of the ground, and out of these the larks soared into the hate of sunshine. On the far horizon, over a countless succession of fields and hedges, rose a line of downs.

Soames led till they had crossed to the far side, and there he stopped. It was the chosen site; but now that he was about to divulge the spot to another he had become uneasy.

"The agent lives in that cottage," he said; "he'll give us some lunch—we'd better have lunch before we go into this matter."

He again took the lead to the cottage, where the agent, a tall man named Oliver, with a heavy face and grizzled beard, welcomed them. During lunch, which Soames hardly touched, he kept looking at Bosinney, and once or twice passed his silk handkerchief stealthily over his forehead. The meal came to an end at last, and Bosinney rose.

"I dare say you've got business to talk over," he said; "I'll just go and nose about a bit." Without waiting for a reply he strolled out.

Soames was solicitor to this estate, and he spent nearly an hour in the agent's company, looking at ground-plans and discussing the Nicholl and other mortgages; it was as it were by an afterthought that he brought up the question of the building site.

"Your people," he said, "ought to come down in their price to me, considering that I shall be the first to build."

Oliver shook his head.

The site you've fixed on, Sir, he said, "is the cheapest we've got. Sites at the top of the slope are dearer by a good bit."

"Mind," said Soames, "I've not decided; it's quite possible I shan't build at all. The ground rent's very high."

"Well, Mr. Forsyte, I shall be sorry if you go off, and I think you'll make a mistake, Sir. There's not a bit of land near London with such a view as this, nor one that's cheaper, all things considered; we've only to advertise, to get a mob of people after it."

They looked at each other. Their faces said very plainly: 'I respect you as a man of business; and you can't expect me to believe a word you say.'

Well, repeated Soames, "I haven't made up my mind; the thing will very likely go off!" With these words, taking up his umbrella, he put his chilly hand into the agent's, withdrew it without the faintest pressure, and went out into the sun.

He walked slowly back towards the site in deep thought. His instinct told him that what the agent had said was true. A cheap site. And the beauty of it was, that he knew the agent did not really think it cheap; so that his own intuitive knowledge was a victory over the agent's.

'Cheap or not, I mean to have it,' he thought.

The larks sprang up in front of his feet, the air was full of butterflies, a sweet fragrance rose from the wild grasses. The sappy scent of the bracken stole forth from the wood, where, hidden in the depths, pigeons were cooing, and from afar on the warm breeze, came the rhythmic chiming of church bells.

Soames walked with his eyes on the ground, his lips opening and closing as though in anticipation of

a delicious morsel. But when he arrived at the site, Bosinney was nowhere to be seen. After waiting some little time, he crossed the warren in the direction of the slope. He would have shouted, but dreaded the sound of his voice.

The warren was as lonely as a prairie, its silence only broken by the rustle of rabbits bolting to their holes, and the song of the larks.

Soames, the pioneer-leader of the great Forsythe army advancing to the civilization of this wilderness, felt his spirit daunted by the loneliness, by the invisible singing, and the hot, sweet air. He had begun to retrace his steps when he at last caught sight of Bosinney.

The architect was sprawling under a large oak tree, whose trunk, with a huge spread of bough and foliage, ragged with age, stood on the verge of the rise.

Soames had to touch him on the shoulder before he looked up.

"Hallo! Forsythe," he said, "I've found the very place for your house! Look here!"

Soames stood and looked, then he said, coldly:

"You may be very clever, but this site will cost me half as much again."

"Hang the cost, man. Look at the view!"

Almost from their feet stretched ripe corn, dipping to a small dark copse beyond. A plain of fields and hedges spread to the distant grey-bluedowns. In a silver streak to the right could be seen the line of the river.

The sky was so blue, and the sun so bright, that an eternal summer seemed to reign over this prospect. Thistledown floated round them, enraptured by the serenity, of the ether. The heat danced over the corn, and, pervading all, was a soft, insensible hum, like the murmur of bright minutes holding revel between earth and heaven.

Soames looked. In spite of himself, something swelled in his breast. To live here in sight of all this, to be able to point it out to his friends, to talk of it, to possess it! His cheeks flushed. The warmth, the radiance, the glow, were sinking into his senses as, four years before, Irene's beauty had sunk into his senses and made him long for her. He stole a glance at Bosinney, whose eyes, the eyes of the coachman's 'half-tame leopard,' seemed running wild over the landscape. The sunlight had caught the promontories of the fellow's face, the bumpy cheekbones, the point of his chin, the vertical ridges above his brow; and Soames watched this rugged, enthusiastic, careless face with an unpleasant feeling.

A long, soft ripple of wind flowed over the corn, and brought a puff of warm air into their faces.

"I could build you a teaser here," said Bosinney, breaking the silence at last.

"I dare say," replied Soames, drily. "You haven't got to pay for it."

"For about eight thousand I could build you a palace."

Soames had become very pale—a struggle was going on within him. He dropped his eyes, and said stubbornly:

"I can't afford it."

And slowly, with his mousing walk, he led the way back to the first site.

They spent some time there going into particulars of the projected house, and then Soames returned to the agent's cottage.

He came out in about half an hour, and, joining Bosinney, started for the station.

"Well," he said, hardly opening his lips, "I've taken that site of yours, after all."

And again he was silent, confusedly debating how it was that this fellow, whom by habit he despised, should have overborne his own decision.

CHAPTER V

A FORSYTE MENAGE

Like the enlightened thousands of his class and generation in this great city of London, who no longer believe in red velvet chairs, and know that groups of modern Italian marble are 'vieux jeu,' Soames Forsyte inhabited a house which did what it could. It owned a copper door knocker of individual design, windows which had been altered to open outwards, hanging flower boxes filled with fuchsias, and at the back (a great feature) a little court tiled with jade-green tiles, and surrounded by pink hydrangeas in peacock-blue tubs. Here, under a parchment-coloured Japanese sunshade covering the whole end, inhabitants or visitors could be screened from the eyes of the curious while they drank tea and examined at their leisure the latest of Soames's little silver boxes.

The inner decoration favoured the First Empire and William Morris. For its size, the house was commodious; there were countless nooks resembling birds' nests, and little things made of silver were deposited like eggs.

In this general perfection two kinds of fastidiousness were at war. There lived here a mistress who would have dwelt daintily on a desert island; a master whose daintiness was, as it were, an investment, cultivated by the owner for his advancement, in accordance with the laws of competition. This competitive daintiness had caused Soames in his Marlborough days to be the first boy into white waistcoats in summer, and corduroy waistcoats in winter, had prevented him from ever appearing in public with his tie climbing up his collar, and induced him to dust his patent leather boots before a great multitude assembled on Speech Day to hear him recite Moliere.

Skin-like immaculateness had grown over Soames, as over many Londoners; impossible to conceive of him with a hair out of place, a tie deviating one-eighth of an inch from the perpendicular, a collar unglossed! He would not have gone without a bath for worlds—it was the fashion to take baths; and how bitter was his scorn of people who omitted them!

But Irene could be imagined, like some nymph, bathing in wayside streams, for the joy of the freshness and of seeing her own fair body.

In this conflict throughout the house the woman had gone to the wall. As in the struggle between Saxon and Celt still going on within the nation, the more impressionable and receptive temperament had had forced on it a conventional superstructure.

Thus the house had acquired a close resemblance to hundreds of other houses with the same high aspirations, having become: 'That very charming little house of the Soames Forsytes, quite individual, my dear—really elegant.'

For Soames Forsyte—read James Peabody, Thomas Atkins, or Emmanuel Spagnoletti, the name in fact of any upper-middle class Englishman in London with any pretensions to taste; and though the decoration be different, the phrase is just.

On the evening of August 8, a week after the expedition to Robin Hill, in the dining-room of this house—'quite individual, my dear—really elegant'—Soames and Irene were seated at dinner. A hot dinner on Sundays was a little distinguishing elegance common to this house and many others. Early in married life Soames had laid down the rule: 'The servants must give us hot dinner on Sundays—they've nothing to do but play the concertina.'

The custom had produced no revolution. For—to Soames a rather deplorable sign—servants were devoted to Irene, who, in defiance of all safe tradition, appeared to recognise their right to a share in the weaknesses of human nature.

The happy pair were seated, not opposite each other, but rectangularly, at the handsome rosewood table; they dined without a cloth—a distinguishing elegance—and so far had not spoken a word.

Soames liked to talk during dinner about business, or what he had been buying, and so long as he talked Irene's silence did not distress him. This evening he had found it impossible to talk. The decision to build had been weighing on his mind all the week, and he had made up his mind to tell her.

His nervousness about this disclosure irritated him profoundly; she had no business to make him feel like that—a wife and a husband being one person. She had not looked at him once since they sat down; and he wondered what on earth she had been thinking about all the time. It was hard, when a man

worked as he did, making money for her—yes, and with an ache in his heart—that she should sit there, looking—looking as if she saw the walls of the room closing in. It was enough to make a man get up and leave the table.

The light from the rose-shaded lamp fell on her neck and arms—Soames liked her to dine in a low dress, it gave him an inexpressible feeling of superiority to the majority of his acquaintance, whose wives were contented with their best high frocks or with tea-gowns, when they dined at home. Under that rosy light her amber-coloured hair and fair skin made strange contrast with her dark brown eyes.

Could a man own anything prettier than this dining-table with its deep tints, the starry, soft-petalled roses, the ruby-coloured glass, and quaint silver furnishing; could a man own anything prettier than the woman who sat at it? Gratitude was no virtue among Forsytes, who, competitive, and full of common-sense, had no occasion for it; and Soames only experienced a sense of exasperation amounting to pain, that he did not own her as it was his right to own her, that he could not, as by stretching out his hand to that rose, pluck her and sniff the very secrets of her heart.

Out of his other property, out of all the things he had collected, his silver, his pictures, his houses, his investments, he got a secret and intimate feeling; out of her he got none.

In this house of his there was writing on every wall. His business-like temperament protested against a mysterious warning that she was not made for him. He had married this woman, conquered her, made her his own, and it seemed to him contrary to the most fundamental of all laws, the law of possession, that he could do no more than own her body—if indeed he could do that, which he was beginning to doubt. If any one had asked him if he wanted to own her soul, the question would have seemed to him both ridiculous and sentimental. But he did so want, and the writing said he never would.

She was ever silent, passive, gracefully averse; as though terrified lest by word, motion, or sign she might lead him to believe that she was fond of him; and he asked himself: Must I always go on like this?

Like most novel readers of his generation (and Soames was a great novel reader), literature coloured his view of life; and he had imbibed the belief that it was only a question of time.

In the end the husband always gained the affection of his wife. Even in those cases—a class of book he was not very fond of—which ended in tragedy, the wife always died with poignant regrets on her lips, or if it were the husband who died—unpleasant thought—threw herself on his body in an agony of remorse.

He often took Irene to the theatre, instinctively choosing the modern Society Plays with the modern Society conjugal problem, so fortunately different from any conjugal problem in real life. He found that they too always ended in the same way, even when there was a lover in the case. While he was watching the play Soames often sympathized with the lover; but before he reached home again, driving with Irene in a hansom, he saw that this would not do, and he was glad the play had ended as it had. There was one class of husband that had just then come into fashion, the strong, rather rough, but extremely sound man, who was peculiarly successful at the end of the play; with this person Soames was really not in sympathy, and had it not been for his own position, would have expressed his disgust with the fellow. But he was so conscious of how vital to himself was the necessity for being a successful, even a 'strong,' husband, that he never spoke of a distaste born perhaps by the perverse processes of Nature out of a secret fund of brutality in himself.

But Irene's silence this evening was exceptional. He had never before seen such an expression on her face. And since it is always the unusual which alarms, Soames was alarmed. He ate his savoury, and hurried the maid as she swept off the crumbs with the silver sweeper. When she had left the room, he filled his glass with wine and said:

"Anybody been here this afternoon?"

"June."

"What did she want?" It was an axiom with the Forsytes that people did not go anywhere unless they wanted something. "Came to talk about her lover, I suppose?"

Irene made no reply.

"It looks to me," continued Soames, "as if she were sweeter on him than he is on her. She's always following him about."

Irene's eyes made him feel uncomfortable.

"You've no business to say such a thing!" she exclaimed.

"Why not? Anybody can see it."

"They cannot. And if they could, it's disgraceful to say so."

Soames's composure gave way.

"You're a pretty wife!" he said. But secretly he wondered at the heat of her reply; it was unlike her. "You're cracked about June! I can tell you one thing: now that she has the Buccaneer in tow, she doesn't care twopence about you, and, you'll find it out. But you won't see so much of her in future; we're going to live in the country."

He had been glad to get his news out under cover of this burst of irritation. He had expected a cry of dismay; the silence with which his pronouncement was received alarmed him.

"You don't seem interested," he was obliged to add.

"I knew it already."

He looked at her sharply.

"Who told you?"

"June."

"How did she know?"

Irene did not answer. Baffled and uncomfortable, he said:

"It's a fine thing for Bosinney, it'll be the making of him. I suppose she's told you all about it?"

"Yes."

There was another pause, and then Soames said:

"I suppose you don't want to, go?"

Irene made no reply.

"Well, I can't tell what you want. You never seem contented here."

"Have my wishes anything to do with it?"

She took the vase of roses and left the room. Soames remained seated. Was it for this that he had signed that contract? Was it for this that he was going to spend some ten thousand pounds? Bosinney's phrase came back to him: "Women are the devil!"

But presently he grew calmer. It might have, been worse. She might have flared up. He had expected something more than this. It was lucky, after all, that June had broken the ice for him. She must have wormed it out of Bosinney; he might have known she would.

He lighted his cigarette. After all, Irene had not made a scene! She would come round—that was the best of her; she was cold, but not sulky. And, puffing the cigarette smoke at a lady-bird on the shining table, he plunged into a reverie about the house. It was no good worrying; he would go and make it up presently. She would be sitting out there in the dark, under the Japanese sunshade, knitting. A beautiful, warm night....

In truth, June had come in that afternoon with shining eyes, and the words: "Soames is a brick! It's splendid for Phil—the very thing for him!"

Irene's face remaining dark and puzzled, she went on:

"Your new house at Robin Hill, of course. What? Don't you know?"

Irene did not know.

"Oh! then, I suppose I oughtn't to have told you!" Looking impatiently at her friend, she cried: "You look as if you didn't care. Don't you see, it's what I've been praying for—the very chance he's been wanting all this time. Now you'll see what he can do;" and thereupon she poured out the whole story.

Since her own engagement she had not seemed much interested in her friend's position; the hours

she spent with Irene were given to confidences of her own; and at times, for all her affectionate pity, it was impossible to keep out of her smile a trace of compassionate contempt for the woman who had made such a mistake in her life—such a vast, ridiculous mistake.

"He's to have all the decorations as well—a free hand. It's perfect—" June broke into laughter, her little figure quivered gleefully; she raised her hand, and struck a blow at a muslin curtain. "Do you, know I even asked Uncle James...." But, with a sudden dislike to mentioning that incident, she stopped; and presently, finding her friend so unresponsive, went away. She looked back from the pavement, and Irene was still standing in the doorway. In response to her farewell wave, Irene put her hand to her brow, and, turning slowly, shut the door....

Soames went to the drawing-room presently, and peered at her through the window.

Out in the shadow of the Japanese sunshade she was sitting very still, the lace on her white shoulders stirring with the soft rise and fall of her bosom.

But about this silent creature sitting there so motionless, in the dark, there seemed a warmth, a hidden fervour of feeling, as if the whole of her being had been stirred, and some change were taking place in its very depths.

He stole back to the dining-room unnoticed.

CHAPTER VI

JAMES AT LARGE

It was not long before Soames's determination to build went the round of the family, and created the flutter that any decision connected with property should make among Forsytes.

It was not his fault, for he had been determined that no one should know. June, in the fulness of her heart, had told Mrs. Small, giving her leave only to tell Aunt Ann—she thought it would cheer her, the poor old sweet! for Aunt Ann had kept her room now for many days.

Mrs. Small told Aunt Ann at once, who, smiling as she lay back on her pillows, said in her distinct, trembling old voice:

"It's very nice for dear June; but I hope they will be careful—it's rather dangerous!"

When she was left alone again, a frown, like a cloud presaging a rainy morrow, crossed her face.

While she was lying there so many days the process of recharging her will went on all the time; it spread to her face, too, and tightening movements were always in action at the corners of her lips.

The maid Smither, who had been in her service since girlhood, and was spoken of as "Smither—a good girl—but so slow!"—the maid Smither performed every morning with extreme punctiliousness the crowning ceremony of that ancient toilet. Taking from the recesses of their pure white band-box those flat, grey curls, the insignia of personal dignity, she placed them securely in her mistress's hands, and turned her back.

And every day Aunts Juley and Hester were required to come and report on Timothy; what news there was of Nicholas; whether dear June had succeeded in getting Jolyon to shorten the engagement, now that Mr. Bosinney was building Soames a house; whether young Roger's wife was really—expecting; how the operation on Archie had succeeded; and what Swithin had done about that empty house in Wigmore Street, where the tenant had lost all his money and treated him so badly; above all, about Soames; was Irene still—still asking for a separate room? And every morning Smither was told: "I shall be coming down this afternoon, Smither, about two o'clock. I shall want your arm, after all these days in bed!"

After telling Aunt Ann, Mrs. Small had spoken of the house in the strictest confidence to Mrs. Nicholas, who in her turn had asked Winifred Dartie for confirmation, supposing, of course, that, being Soames's sister, she would know all about it. Through her it had in due course come round to the ears of James. He had been a good deal agitated.

"Nobody," he said, "told him anything." And, rather than go direct to Soames himself, of whose taciturnity he was afraid, he took his umbrella and went round to Timothy's.

He found Mrs. Septimus and Hester (who had been told—she was so safe, she found it tiring to talk) ready, and indeed eager, to discuss the news. It was very good of dear Soames, they thought, to employ Mr. Bosinney, but rather risky. What had George named him? 'The Buccaneer' How droll! But George was always droll! However, it would be all in the family they supposed they must really look upon Mr. Bosinney as belonging to the family, though it seemed strange.

James here broke in:

"Nobody knows anything about him. I don't see what Soames wants with a young man like that. I shouldn't be surprised if Irene had put her oar in. I shall speak to...."

"Soames," interposed Aunt Juley, "told Mr. Bosinney that he didn't wish it mentioned. He wouldn't like it to be talked about, I'm sure, and if Timothy knew he would be very vexed, I...."

James put his hand behind his ear:

"What?" he said. "I'm getting very deaf. I suppose I don't hear people. Emily's got a bad toe. We shan't be able to start for Wales till the end of the month. There's always something!" And, having got what he wanted, he took his hat and went away.

It was a fine afternoon, and he walked across the Park towards Soames's, where he intended to dine, for Emily's toe kept her in bed, and Rachel and Cicely were on a visit to the country. He took the slanting path from the Bayswater side of the Row to the Knightsbridge Gate, across a pasture of short, burnt grass, dotted with blackened sheep, strewn with seated couples and strange waifs; lying prone on their faces, like corpses on a field over which the wave of battle has rolled.

He walked rapidly, his head bent, looking neither to right nor, left. The appearance of this park, the centre of his own battle-field, where he had all his life been fighting, excited no thought or speculation in his mind. These corpses flung down, there, from out the press and turmoil of the struggle, these pairs of lovers sitting cheek by jowl for an hour of idle Elysium snatched from the monotony of their treadmill, awakened no fancies in his mind; he had outlived that kind of imagination; his nose, like the nose of a sheep, was fastened to the pastures on which he browsed.

One of his tenants had lately shown a disposition to be behind-hand in his rent, and it had become a grave question whether he had not better turn him out at once, and so run the risk of not re-letting before Christmas. Swithin had just been let in very badly, but it had served him right—he had held on too long.

He pondered this as he walked steadily, holding his umbrella carefully by the wood, just below the crook of the handle, so as to keep the ferule off the ground, and not fray the silk in the middle. And, with his thin, high shoulders stooped, his long legs moving with swift mechanical precision, this passage through the Park, where the sun shone with a clear flame on so much idleness—on so many human evidences of the remorseless battle of Property, raging beyond its ring—was like the flight of some land bird across the sea.

He felt a—touch on the arm as he came out at Albert Gate.

It was Soames, who, crossing from the shady side of Piccadilly, where he had been walking home from the office, had suddenly appeared alongside.

"Your mother's in bed," said James; "I was, just coming to you, but I suppose I shall be in the way."

The outward relations between James and his son were marked by a lack of sentiment peculiarly Forsytean, but for all that the two were by no means unattached. Perhaps they regarded one another as an investment; certainly they were solicitous of each other's welfare, glad of each other's company. They had never exchanged two words upon the more intimate problems of life, or revealed in each other's presence the existence of any deep feeling.

Something beyond the power of word-analysis bound them together, something hidden deep in the fibre of nations and families—for blood, they say, is thicker than water—and neither of them was a cold-blooded man. Indeed, in James love of his children was now the prime motive of his existence. To have creatures who were parts of himself, to whom he might transmit the money he saved, was at the root of his saving; and, at seventy-five, what was left that could give him pleasure, but—saving? The kernel of life was in this saving for his children.

Than James Forsyte, notwithstanding all his 'Jonah-isms,' there was no saner man (if the leading

symptom of sanity, as we are told, is self-preservation, though without doubt Timothy went too far) in all this London, of which he owned so much, and loved with such a dumb love, as the centre of his opportunities. He had the marvellous instinctive sanity of the middle class. In him—more than in Jolyon, with his masterful will and his moments of tenderness and philosophy—more than in Swithin, the martyr to crankiness—Nicholas, the sufferer from ability—and Roger, the victim of enterprise—beat the true pulse of compromise; of all the brothers he was least remarkable in mind and person, and for that reason more likely to live for ever.

To James, more than to any of the others, was "the family" significant and dear. There had always been something primitive and cosy in his attitude towards life; he loved the family hearth, he loved gossip, and he loved grumbling. All his decisions were formed of a cream which he skimmed off the family mind; and, through that family, off the minds of thousands of other families of similar fibre. Year after year, week after week, he went to Timothy's, and in his brother's front drawing-room—his legs twisted, his long white whiskers framing his clean-shaven mouth—would sit watching the family pot simmer, the cream rising to the top; and he would go away sheltered, refreshed, comforted, with an indefinable sense of comfort.

Beneath the adamant of his self-preserving instinct there was much real softness in James; a visit to Timothy's was like an hour spent in the lap of a mother; and the deep craving he himself had for the protection of the family wing reacted in turn on his feelings towards his own children; it was a nightmare to him to think of them exposed to the treatment of the world, in money, health, or reputation. When his old friend John Street's son volunteered for special service, he shook his head querulously, and wondered what John Street was about to allow it; and when young Street was assagaied, he took it so much to heart that he made a point of calling everywhere with the special object of saying: He knew how it would be—he'd no patience with them!

When his son-in-law Dartie had that financial crisis, due to speculation in Oil Shares, James made himself ill worrying over it; the knell of all prosperity seemed to have sounded. It took him three months and a visit to Baden-Baden to get better; there was something terrible in the idea that but for his, James's, money, Dartie's name might have appeared in the Bankruptcy List.

Composed of a physiological mixture so sound that if he had an earache he thought he was dying, he regarded the occasional ailments of his wife and children as in the nature of personal grievances, special interventions of Providence for the purpose of destroying his peace of mind; but he did not believe at all in the ailments of people outside his own immediate family, affirming them in every case to be due to neglected liver.

His universal comment was: "What can they expect? I have it myself, if I'm not careful!"

When he went to Soames's that evening he felt that life was hard on him: There was Emily with a bad toe, and Rachel gadding about in the country; he got no sympathy from anybody; and Ann, she was ill—he did not believe she would last through the summer; he had called there three times now without her being able to see him! And this idea of Soames's, building a house, that would have to be looked into. As to the trouble with Irene, he didn't know what was to come of that—anything might come of it!

He entered 62, Montpellier Square with the fullest intentions of being miserable. It was already half-past seven, and Irene, dressed for dinner, was seated in the drawing-room. She was wearing her gold-coloured frock—for, having been displayed at a dinner-party, a soiree, and a dance, it was now to be worn at home—and she had adorned the bosom with a cascade of lace, on which James's eyes riveted themselves at once.

"Where do you get your things?" he said in an aggravated voice. "I never see Rachel and Cicely looking half so well. That rose-point, now—that's not real!"

Irene came close, to prove to him that he was in error.

And, in spite of himself, James felt the influence of her deference, of the faint seductive perfume exhaling from her. No self-respecting Forsyte surrendered at a blow; so he merely said: He didn't know—he expected she was spending a pretty penny on dress.

The gong sounded, and, putting her white arm within his, Irene took him into the dining-room. She seated him in Soames's usual place, round the corner on her left. The light fell softly there, so that he would not be worried by the gradual dying of the day; and she began to talk to him about himself.

Presently, over James came a change, like the mellowing that steals upon a fruit in the sun; a sense of being caressed, and praised, and petted, and all without the bestowal of a single caress or word of praise. He felt that what he was eating was agreeing with him; he could not get that feeling at home; he

did not know when he had enjoyed a glass of champagne so much, and, on inquiring the brand and price, was surprised to find that it was one of which he had a large stock himself, but could never drink; he instantly formed the resolution to let his wine merchant know that he had been swindled.

Looking up from his food, he remarked:

"You've a lot of nice things about the place. Now, what did you give for that sugar-sifter? Shouldn't wonder if it was worth money!"

He was particularly pleased with the appearance of a picture, on the wall opposite, which he himself had given them:

"I'd no idea it was so good!" he said.

They rose to go into the drawing-room, and James followed Irene closely.

"That's what I call a capital little dinner," he murmured, breathing pleasantly down on her shoulder; "nothing heavy—and not too Frenchified. But I can't get it at home. I pay my cook sixty pounds a year, but she can't give me a dinner like that!"

He had as yet made no allusion to the building of the house, nor did he when Soames, pleading the excuse of business, betook himself to the room at the top, where he kept his pictures.

James was left alone with his daughter-in-law. The glow of the wine, and of an excellent liqueur, was still within him. He felt quite warm towards her. She was really a taking little thing; she listened to you, and seemed to understand what you were saying; and, while talking, he kept examining her figure, from her bronze-coloured shoes to the waved gold of her hair. She was leaning back in an Empire chair, her shoulders poised against the top—her body, flexibly straight and unsupported from the hips, swaying when she moved, as though giving to the arms of a lover. Her lips were smiling, her eyes half-closed.

It may have been a recognition of danger in the very charm of her attitude, or a twang of digestion, that caused a sudden dumbness to fall on James. He did not remember ever having been quite alone with Irene before. And, as he looked at her, an odd feeling crept over him, as though he had come across something strange and foreign.

Now what was she thinking about—sitting back like that?

Thus when he spoke it was in a sharper voice, as if he had been awakened from a pleasant dream.

"What d'you do with yourself all day?" he said. "You never come round to Park Lane!"

She seemed to be making very lame excuses, and James did not look at her. He did not want to believe that she was really avoiding them—it would mean too much.

"I expect the fact is, you haven't time," he said; "You're always about with June. I expect you're useful to her with her young man, chaperoning, and one thing and another. They tell me she's never at home now; your Uncle Jolyon he doesn't like it, I fancy, being left so much alone as he is. They tell me she's always hanging about for this young Bosinney; I suppose he comes here every day. Now, what do you think of him? D'you think he knows his own mind? He seems to me a poor thing. I should say the grey mare was the better horse!"

The colour deepened in Irene's face; and James watched her suspiciously.

"Perhaps you don't quite understand Mr. Bosinney," she said.

"Don't understand him!" James hummed out: "Why not?—you can see he's one of these artistic chaps. They say he's clever—they all think they're clever. You know more about him than I do," he added; and again his suspicious glance rested on her.

"He is designing a house for Soames," she said softly, evidently trying to smooth things over.

"That brings me to what I was going to say," continued James; "I don't know what Soames wants with a young man like that; why doesn't he go to a first-rate man?"

"Perhaps Mr. Bosinney is first-rate!"

James rose, and took a turn with bent head.

"That's it," he said, "you young people, you all stick together; you all think you know best!"

Halting his tall, lank figure before her, he raised a finger, and levelled it at her bosom, as though bringing an indictment against her beauty:

"All I can say is, these artistic people, or whatever they call themselves, they're as unreliable as they can be; and my advice to you is, don't you have too much to do with him!"

Irene smiled; and in the curve of her lips was a strange provocation. She seemed to have lost her deference. Her breast rose and fell as though with secret anger; she drew her hands inwards from their rest on the arms of her chair until the tips of her fingers met, and her dark eyes looked unfathomably at James.

The latter gloomily scrutinized the floor.

"I tell you my opinion," he said, "it's a pity you haven't got a child to think about, and occupy you!"

A brooding look came instantly on Irene's face, and even James became conscious of the rigidity that took possession of her whole figure beneath the softness of its silk and lace clothing.

He was frightened by the effect he had produced, and like most men with but little courage, he sought at once to justify himself by bullying.

"You don't seem to care about going about. Why don't you drive down to Hurlingham with us? And go to the theatre now and then. At your time of life you ought to take an interest in things. You're a young woman!"

The brooding look darkened on her face; he grew nervous.

"Well, I know nothing about it," he said; "nobody tells me anything. Soames ought to be able to take care of himself. If he can't take care of himself he mustn't look to me—that's all."

Biting the corner of his forefinger he stole a cold, sharp look at his daughter-in-law.

He encountered her eyes fixed on his own, so dark and deep, that he stopped, and broke into a gentle perspiration.

"Well, I must be going," he said after a short pause, and a minute later rose, with a slight appearance of surprise, as though he had expected to be asked to stop. Giving his hand to Irene, he allowed himself to be conducted to the door, and let out into the street. He would not have a cab, he would walk, Irene was to say good-night to Soames for him, and if she wanted a little gaiety, well, he would drive her down to Richmond any day.

He walked home, and going upstairs, woke Emily out of the first sleep she had had for four and twenty hours, to tell her that it was his impression things were in a bad way at Soames's; on this theme he descanted for half an hour, until at last, saying that he would not sleep a wink, he turned on his side and instantly began to snore.

In Montpellier Square Soames, who had come from the picture room, stood invisible at the top of the stairs, watching Irene sort the letters brought by the last post. She turned back into the drawing-room; but in a minute came out, and stood as if listening. Then she came stealing up the stairs, with a kitten in her arms. He could see her face bent over the little beast, which was purring against her neck. Why couldn't she look at him like that?

Suddenly she saw him, and her face changed.

"Any letters for me?" he said.

"Three."

He stood aside, and without another word she passed on into the bedroom.

CHAPTER VII

Old Jolyon came out of Lord's cricket ground that same afternoon with the intention of going home. He had not reached Hamilton Terrace before he changed his mind, and hailing a cab, gave the driver an address in Wistaria Avenue. He had taken a resolution.

June had hardly been at home at all that week; she had given him nothing of her company for a long time past, not, in fact, since she had become engaged to Bosinney. He never asked her for her company. It was not his habit to ask people for things! She had just that one idea now—Bosinney and his affairs—and she left him stranded in his great house, with a parcel of servants, and not a soul to speak to from morning to night. His Club was closed for cleaning; his Boards in recess; there was nothing, therefore, to take him into the City. June had wanted him to go away; she would not go herself, because Bosinney was in London.

But where was he to go by himself? He could not go abroad alone; the sea upset his liver; he hated hotels. Roger went to a hydropathic—he was not going to begin that at his time of life, those new-fangled places we're all humbug!

With such formulas he clothed to himself the desolation of his spirit; the lines down his face deepening, his eyes day by day looking forth with the melancholy which sat so strangely on a face wont to be strong and serene.

And so that afternoon he took this journey through St. John's Wood, in the golden-light that sprinkled the rounded green bushes of the acacia's before the little houses, in the summer sunshine that seemed holding a revel over the little gardens; and he looked about him with interest; for this was a district which no Forsyte entered without open disapproval and secret curiosity.

His cab stopped in front of a small house of that peculiar buff colour which implies a long immunity from paint. It had an outer gate, and a rustic approach.

He stepped out, his bearing extremely composed; his massive head, with its drooping moustache and wings of white hair, very upright, under an excessively large top hat; his glance firm, a little angry. He had been driven into this!

"Mrs. Jolyon Forsyte at home?"

"Oh, yes sir!—what name shall I say, if you please, sir?"

Old Jolyon could not help twinkling at the little maid as he gave his name. She seemed to him such a funny little toad!

And he followed her through the dark hall, into a small double, drawing-room, where the furniture was covered in chintz, and the little maid placed him in a chair.

"They're all in the garden, sir; if you'll kindly take a seat, I'll tell them."

Old Jolyon sat down in the chintz-covered chair, and looked around him. The whole place seemed to him, as he would have expressed it, pokey; there was a certain—he could not tell exactly what—air of shabbiness, or rather of making two ends meet, about everything. As far as he could see, not a single piece of furniture was worth a five-pound note. The walls, distempered rather a long time ago, were decorated with water-colour sketches; across the ceiling meandered a long crack.

These little houses were all old, second-rate concerns; he should hope the rent was under a hundred a year; it hurt him more than he could have said, to think of a Forsyte—his own son living in such a place.

The little maid came back. Would he please to go down into the garden?

Old Jolyon marched out through the French windows. In descending the steps he noticed that they wanted painting.

Young Jolyon, his wife, his two children, and his dog Balthasar, were all out there under a pear-tree.

This walk towards them was the most courageous act of old Jolyon's life; but no muscle of his face moved, no nervous gesture betrayed him. He kept his deep-set eyes steadily on the enemy.

In those two minutes he demonstrated to perfection all that unconscious soundness, balance, and vitality of fibre that made, of him and so many others of his class the core of the nation. In the unostentatious conduct of their own affairs, to the neglect of everything else, they typified the essential individualism, born in the Briton from the natural isolation of his country's life.

The dog Balthasar sniffed round the edges of his trousers; this friendly and cynical mongrel—

offspring of a liaison between a Russian poodle and a fox-terrier—had a nose for the unusual.

The strange greetings over, old Jolyon seated himself in a wicker chair, and his two grandchildren, one on each side of his knees, looked at him silently, never having seen so old a man.

They were unlike, as though recognising the difference set between them by the circumstances of their births. Jolly, the child of sin, pudgy-faced, with his tow-coloured hair brushed off his forehead, and a dimple in his chin, had an air of stubborn amiability, and the eyes of a Forsyte; little Holly, the child of wedlock, was a dark-skinned, solemn soul, with her mother's, grey and wistful eyes.

The dog Balthasar, having walked round the three small flower-beds, to show his extreme contempt for things at large, had also taken a seat in front of old Jolyon, and, oscillating a tail curled by Nature tightly over his back, was staring up with eyes that did not blink.

Even in the garden, that sense of things being pokey haunted old Jolyon; the wicker chair creaked under his weight; the garden-beds looked 'daverdy'; on the far side, under the smut-stained wall, cats had made a path.

While he and his grandchildren thus regarded each other with the peculiar scrutiny, curious yet trustful, that passes between the very young and the very old, young Jolyon watched his wife.

The colour had deepened in her thin, oval face, with its straight brows, and large, grey eyes. Her hair, brushed in fine, high curves back from her forehead, was going grey, like his own, and this greyness made the sudden vivid colour in her cheeks painfully pathetic.

The look on her face, such as he had never seen there before, such as she had always hidden from him, was full of secret resentments, and longings, and fears. Her eyes, under their twitching brows, stared painfully. And she was silent.

Jolly alone sustained the conversation; he had many possessions, and was anxious that his unknown friend with extremely large moustaches, and hands all covered with blue veins, who sat with legs crossed like his own father (a habit he was himself trying to acquire), should know it; but being a Forsyte, though not yet quite eight years old, he made no mention of the thing at the moment dearest to his heart—a camp of soldiers in a shop-window, which his father had promised to buy. No doubt it seemed to him too precious; a tempting of Providence to mention it yet.

And the sunlight played through the leaves on that little party of the three generations grouped tranquilly under the pear-tree, which had long borne no fruit.

Old Jolyon's furrowed face was reddening patchily, as old men's faces redden in the sun. He took one of Jolly's hands in his own; the boy climbed on to his knee; and little Holly, mesmerized by this sight, crept up to them; the sound of the dog Balthasar's scratching arose rhythmically.

Suddenly young Mrs. Jolyon got up and hurried indoors. A minute later her husband muttered an excuse, and followed. Old Jolyon was left alone with his grandchildren.

And Nature with her quaint irony began working in him one of her strange revolutions, following her cyclic laws into the depths of his heart. And that tenderness for little children, that passion for the beginnings of life which had once made him forsake his son and follow June, now worked in him to forsake June and follow these littler things. Youth, like a flame, burned ever in his breast, and to youth he turned, to the round little limbs, so reckless, that wanted care, to the small round faces so unreasonably solemn or bright, to the treble tongues, and the shrill, chuckling laughter, to the insistent tugging hands, and the feel of small bodies against his legs, to all that was young and young, and once more young. And his eyes grew soft, his voice, and thin-veined hands soft, and soft his heart within him. And to those small creatures he became at once a place of pleasure, a place where they were secure, and could talk and laugh and play; till, like sunshine, there radiated from old Jolyon's wicker chair the perfect gaiety of three hearts.

But with young Jolyon following to his wife's room it was different.

He found her seated on a chair before her dressing-glass, with her hands before her face.

Her shoulders were shaking with sobs. This passion of hers for suffering was mysterious to him. He had been through a hundred of these moods; how he had survived them he never knew, for he could never believe they were moods, and that the last hour of his partnership had not struck.

In the night she would be sure to throw her arms round his neck and say: "Oh! Jo, how I make you suffer!" as she had done a hundred times before.

He reached out his hand, and, unseen, slipped his razor-case into his pocket. 'I cannot stay here,' he thought, 'I must go down!' Without a word he left the room, and went back to the lawn.

Old Jolyon had little Holly on his knee; she had taken possession of his watch; Jolly, very red in the face, was trying to show that he could stand on his head. The dog Balthasar, as close as he might be to the tea-table, had fixed his eyes on the cake.

Young Jolyon felt a malicious desire to cut their enjoyment short.

What business had his father to come and upset his wife like this? It was a shock, after all these years! He ought to have known; he ought to have given them warning; but when did a Forsyte ever imagine that his conduct could upset anybody! And in his thoughts he did old Jolyon wrong.

He spoke sharply to the children, and told them to go in to their tea. Greatly surprised, for they had never heard their father speak sharply before, they went off, hand in hand, little Holly looking back over her shoulder.

Young Jolyon poured out the tea.

"My wife's not the thing today," he said, but he knew well enough that his father had penetrated the cause of that sudden withdrawal, and almost hated the old man for sitting there so calmly.

"You've got a nice little house here," said old Jolyon with a shrewd look; "I suppose you've taken a lease of it!"

Young Jolyon nodded.

"I don't like the neighbourhood," said old Jolyon; "a ramshackle lot."

Young Jolyon replied: "Yes, we're a ramshackle lot."

The silence was now only broken by the sound of the dog Balthasar's scratching.

Old Jolyon said simply: "I suppose I oughtn't to have come here, Jo; but I get so lonely!"

At these words young Jolyon got up and put his hand on his father's shoulder.

In the next house someone was playing over and over again: 'La Donna mobile' on an untuned piano; and the little garden had fallen into shade, the sun now only reached the wall at the end, whereon basked a crouching cat, her yellow eyes turned sleepily down on the dog Balthasar. There was a drowsy hum of very distant traffic; the creepered trellis round the garden shut out everything but sky, and house, and pear-tree, with its top branches still gilded by the sun.

For some time they sat there, talking but little. Then old Jolyon rose to go, and not a word was said about his coming again.

He walked away very sadly. What a poor miserable place; and he thought of the great, empty house in Stanhope Gate, fit residence for a Forsyte, with its huge billiard-room and drawing-room that no one entered from one week's end to another.

That woman, whose face he had rather liked, was too thin-skinned by half; she gave Jo a bad time he knew! And those sweet children! Ah! what a piece of awful folly!

He walked towards the Edgware Road, between rows of little houses, all suggesting to him (erroneously no doubt, but the prejudices of a Forsyte are sacred) shady histories of some sort or kind.

Society, forsooth, the chattering hags and jackanapes—had set themselves up to pass judgment on his flesh and blood! A parcel of old women! He stumped his umbrella on the ground, as though to drive it into the heart of that unfortunate body, which had dared to ostracize his son and his son's son, in whom he could have lived again!

He stumped his umbrella fiercely; yet he himself had followed Society's behaviour for fifteen years—had only today been false to it!

He thought of June, and her dead mother, and the whole story, with all his old bitterness. A wretched business!

He was a long time reaching Stanhope Gate, for, with native perversity, being extremely tired, he walked the whole way.

After washing his hands in the lavatory downstairs, he went to the dining-room to wait for dinner, the only room he used when June was out—it was less lonely so. The evening paper had not yet come; he had finished the Times, there was therefore nothing to do.

The room faced the backwater of traffic, and was very silent. He disliked dogs, but a dog even would have been company. His gaze, travelling round the walls, rested on a picture entitled: 'Group of Dutch fishing boats at sunset'; the chef d'oeuvre of his collection. It gave him no pleasure. He closed his eyes. He was lonely! He oughtn't to complain, he knew, but he couldn't help it: He was a poor thing—had always been a poor thing—no pluck! Such was his thought.

The butler came to lay the table for dinner, and seeing his master apparently asleep, exercised extreme caution in his movements. This bearded man also wore a moustache, which had given rise to grave doubts in the minds of many members—of the family—, especially those who, like Soames, had been to public schools, and were accustomed to niceness in such matters. Could he really be considered a butler? Playful spirits alluded to him as: 'Uncle Jolyon's Nonconformist'; George, the acknowledged wag, had named him: 'Sankey.'

He moved to and fro between the great polished sideboard and the great polished table inimitably sleek and soft.

Old Jolyon watched him, feigning sleep. The fellow was a sneak—he had always thought so—who cared about nothing but rattling through his work, and getting out to his betting or his woman or goodness knew what! A slug! Fat too! And didn't care a pin about his master!

But then against his will, came one of those moments of philosophy which made old Jolyon different from other Forsytes:

After all why should the man care? He wasn't paid to care, and why expect it? In this world people couldn't look for affection unless they paid for it. It might be different in the next—he didn't know—couldn't tell! And again he shut his eyes.

Relentless and stealthy, the butler pursued his labours, taking things from the various compartments of the sideboard. His back seemed always turned to old Jolyon; thus, he robbed his operations of the unseemliness of being carried on in his master's presence; now and then he furtively breathed on the silver, and wiped it with a piece of chamois leather. He appeared to pore over the quantities of wine in the decanters, which he carried carefully and rather high, letting his head droop over them protectingly. When he had finished, he stood for over a minute watching his master, and in his greenish eyes there was a look of contempt:

After all, this master of his was an old buffer, who hadn't much left in him!

Soft as a tom-cat, he crossed the room to press the bell. His orders were 'dinner at seven.' What if his master were asleep; he would soon have him out of that; there was the night to sleep in! He had himself to think of, for he was due at his Club at half-past eight!

In answer to the ring, appeared a page boy with a silver soup tureen. The butler took it from his hands and placed it on the table, then, standing by the open door, as though about to usher company into the room, he said in a solemn voice:

"Dinner is on the table, sir!"

Slowly old Jolyon got up out of his chair, and sat down at the table to eat his dinner.

CHAPTER VIII

PLANS OF THE HOUSE

Forsytes, as is generally admitted, have shells, like that extremely useful little animal which is made into Turkish delight, in other words, they are never seen, or if seen would not be recognised, without habitats, composed of circumstance, property, acquaintances, and wives, which seem to move along with them in their passage through a world composed of thousands of other Forsytes with their habitats. Without a habitat a Forsyte is inconceivable—he would be like a novel without a plot, which is well-known to be an anomaly.

To Forsythe eyes Bosinney appeared to have no habitat, he seemed one of those rare and unfortunate men who go through life surrounded by circumstance, property, acquaintances, and wives that do not belong to them.

His rooms in Sloane Street, on the top floor, outside which, on a plate, was his name, 'Philip Baynes Bosinney, Architect,' were not those of a Forsythe.—He had no sitting-room apart from his office, but a large recess had been screened off to conceal the necessaries of life—a couch, an easy chair, his pipes, spirit case, novels and slippers. The business part of the room had the usual furniture; an open cupboard with pigeon-holes, a round oak table, a folding wash-stand, some hard chairs, a standing desk of large dimensions covered with drawings and designs. June had twice been to tea there under the chaperonage of his aunt.

He was believed to have a bedroom at the back.

As far as the family had been able to ascertain his income, it consisted of two consulting appointments at twenty pounds a year, together with an odd fee once in a way, and—more worthy item—a private annuity under his father's will of one hundred and fifty pounds a year.

What had transpired concerning that father was not so reassuring. It appeared that he had been a Lincolnshire country doctor of Cornish extraction, striking appearance, and Byronic tendencies—a well-known figure, in fact, in his county. Bosinney's uncle by marriage, Baynes, of Baynes and Bildeboy, a Forsythe in instincts if not in name, had but little that was worthy to relate of his brother-in-law.

"An odd fellow!" he would say: 'always spoke of his three eldest boys as 'good creatures, but so dull'; they're all doing capitally in the Indian Civil! Philip was the only one he liked. I've heard him talk in the queerest way; he once said to me: 'My dear fellow, never let your poor wife know what you're thinking of! But I didn't follow his advice; not I! An eccentric man! He would say to Phil: 'Whether you live like a gentleman or not, my boy, be sure you die like one! and he had himself embalmed in a frock coat suit, with a satin cravat and a diamond pin. Oh, quite an original, I can assure you!'"

Of Bosinney himself Baynes would speak warmly, with a certain compassion: "He's got a streak of his father's Byronism. Why, look at the way he threw up his chances when he left my office; going off like that for six months with a knapsack, and all for what?—to study foreign architecture—foreign! What could he expect? And there he is—a clever young fellow—doesn't make his hundred a year! Now this engagement is the best thing that could have happened—keep him steady; he's one of those that go to bed all day and stay up all night, simply because they've no method; but no vice about him—not an ounce of vice. Old Forsythe's a rich man!"

Mr. Baynes made himself extremely pleasant to June, who frequently visited his house in Lowndes Square at this period.

"This house of your cousin's—what a capital man of business—is the very thing for Philip," he would say to her; "you mustn't expect to see too much of him just now, my dear young lady. The good cause—the good cause! The young man must make his way. When I was his age I was at work day and night. My dear wife used to say to me, 'Bobby, don't work too hard, think of your health'; but I never spared myself!"

June had complained that her lover found no time to come to Stanhope Gate.

The first time he came again they had not been together a quarter of an hour before, by one of those coincidences of which she was a mistress, Mrs. Septimus Small arrived. Thereon Bosinney rose and hid himself, according to previous arrangement, in the little study, to wait for her departure.

"My dear," said Aunt Juley, "how thin he is! I've often noticed it with engaged people; but you mustn't let it get worse. There's Barlow's extract of veal; it did your Uncle Swithin a lot of good."

June, her little figure erect before the hearth, her small face quivering grimly, for she regarded her aunt's untimely visit in the light of a personal injury, replied with scorn:

"It's because he's busy; people who can do anything worth doing are never fat!"

Aunt Juley pouted; she herself had always been thin, but the only pleasure she derived from the fact was the opportunity of longing to be stouter.

"I don't think," she said mournfully, "that you ought to let them call him 'The Buccaneer'; people might think it odd, now that he's going to build a house for Soames. I do hope he will be careful; it's so important for him. Soames has such good taste!"

"Taste!" cried June, flaring up at once; "wouldn't give that for his taste, or any of the family's!"

Mrs. Small was taken aback.

"Your Uncle Swithin," she said, "always had beautiful taste! And Soames's little house is lovely; you don't mean to say you don't think so!"

"H'mph!" said June, "that's only because Irene's there!"

Aunt Juley tried to say something pleasant:

"And how will dear Irene like living in the country?"

June gazed at her intently, with a look in her eyes as if her conscience had suddenly leaped up into them; it passed; and an even more intent look took its place, as if she had stared that conscience out of countenance. She replied imperiously:

"Of course she'll like it; why shouldn't she?"

Mrs. Small grew nervous.

"I didn't know," she said; "I thought she mightn't like to leave her friends. Your Uncle James says she doesn't take enough interest in life. We think—I mean Timothy thinks—she ought to go out more. I expect you'll miss her very much!"

June clasped her hands behind her neck.

"I do wish," she cried, "Uncle Timothy wouldn't talk about what doesn't concern him!"

Aunt Juley rose to the full height of her tall figure.

"He never talks about what doesn't concern him," she said.

June was instantly compunctious; she ran to her aunt and kissed her.

"I'm very sorry, auntie; but I wish they'd let Irene alone."

Aunt Juley, unable to think of anything further on the subject that would be suitable, was silent; she prepared for departure, hooking her black silk cape across her chest, and, taking up her green reticule:

"And how is your dear grandfather?" she asked in the hall, "I expect he's very lonely now that all your time is taken up with Mr. Bosinney."

She bent and kissed her niece hungrily, and with little, mincing steps passed away.

The tears sprang up in June's eyes; running into the little study, where Bosinney was sitting at the table drawing birds on the back of an envelope, she sank down by his side and cried:

"Oh, Phil! it's all so horrid!" Her heart was as warm as the colour of her hair.

On the following Sunday morning, while Soames was shaving, a message was brought him to the effect that Mr. Bosinney was below, and would be glad to see him. Opening the door into his wife's room, he said:

"Bosinney's downstairs. Just go and entertain him while I finish shaving. I'll be down in a minute. It's about the plans, I expect."

Irene looked at him, without reply, put the finishing touch to her dress and went downstairs. He could not make her out about this house. She had said nothing against it, and, as far as Bosinney was concerned, seemed friendly enough.

From the window of his dressing-room he could see them talking together in the little court below. He hurried on with his shaving, cutting his chin twice. He heard them laugh, and thought to himself: "Well, they get on all right, anyway!"

As he expected, Bosinney had come round to fetch him to look at the plans.

He took his hat and went over.

The plans were spread on the oak table in the architect's room; and pale, imperturbable, inquiring, Soames bent over them for a long time without speaking.

He said at last in a puzzled voice:

"It's an odd sort of house!"

A rectangular house of two stories was designed in a quadrangle round a covered-in court. This court, encircled by a gallery on the upper floor, was roofed with a glass roof, supported by eight columns running up from the ground.

It was indeed, to Forsyte eyes, an odd house.

"There's a lot of room cut to waste," pursued Soames.

Bosinney began to walk about, and Soames did not like the expression on his face.

"The principle of this house," said the architect, "was that you should have room to breathe—like a gentleman!"

Soames extended his finger and thumb, as if measuring the extent of the distinction he should acquire; and replied:

"Oh! yes; I see."

The peculiar look came into Bosinney's face which marked all his enthusiasms.

"I've tried to plan you a house here with some self-respect of its own. If you don't like it, you'd better say so. It's certainly the last thing to be considered—who wants self-respect in a house, when you can squeeze in an extra lavatory?" He put his finger suddenly down on the left division of the centre oblong: "You can swing a cat here. This is for your pictures, divided from this court by curtains; draw them back and you'll have a space of fifty-one by twenty-three six. This double-faced stove in the centre, here, looks one way towards the court, one way towards the picture room; this end wall is all window; You've a southeast light from that, a north light from the court. The rest of your pictures you can hang round the gallery upstairs, or in the other rooms." "In architecture," he went on—and though looking at Soames he did not seem to see him, which gave Soames an unpleasant feeling—"as in life, you'll get no self-respect without regularity. Fellows tell you that's old fashioned. It appears to be peculiar any way; it never occurs to us to embody the main principle of life in our buildings; we load our houses with decoration, gimcracks, corners, anything to distract the eye. On the contrary the eye should rest; get your effects with a few strong lines. The whole thing is regularity there's no self-respect without it."

Soames, the unconscious ironist, fixed his gaze on Bosinney's tie, which was far from being in the perpendicular; he was unshaven too, and his dress not remarkable for order. Architecture appeared to have exhausted his regularity.

"Won't it look like a barrack?" he inquired.

He did not at once receive a reply.

"I can see what it is," said Bosinney, "you want one of Littlemaster's houses—one of the pretty and commodious sort, where the servants will live in garrets, and the front door be sunk so that you may come up again. By all means try Littlemaster, you'll find him a capital fellow, I've known him all my life!"

Soames was alarmed. He had really been struck by the plans, and the concealment of his satisfaction had been merely instinctive. It was difficult for him to pay a compliment. He despised people who were lavish with their praises.

He found himself now in the embarrassing position of one who must pay a compliment or run the risk of losing a good thing. Bosinney was just the fellow who might tear up the plans and refuse to act for him; a kind of grown-up child!

This grown-up childishness, to which he felt so superior, exercised a peculiar and almost mesmeric effect on Soames, for he had never felt anything like it in himself.

"Well," he stammered at last, "it's—it's, certainly original."

He had such a private distrust and even dislike of the word 'original' that he felt he had not really given himself away by this remark.

Bosinney seemed pleased. It was the sort of thing that would please a fellow like that! And his success encouraged Soames.

"It's—a big place," he said.

"Space, air, light," he heard Bosinney murmur, "you can't live like a gentleman in one of Littlemaster's—he builds for manufacturers."

Soames made a deprecating movement; he had been identified with a gentleman; not for a good deal of money now would he be classed with manufacturers. But his innate distrust of general principles revived. What the deuce was the good of talking about regularity and self-respect? It looked to him as if the house would be cold.

"Irene can't stand the cold!" he said.

"Ah!" said Bosinney sarcastically. "Your wife? She doesn't like the cold? I'll see to that; she shan't be cold. Look here!" he pointed, to four marks at regular intervals on the walls of the court. "I've given you hot-water pipes in aluminium casings; you can get them with very good designs."

Soames looked suspiciously at these marks.

"It's all very well, all this," he said, "but what's it going to cost?"

The architect took a sheet of paper from his pocket:

"The house, of course, should be built entirely of stone, but, as I thought you wouldn't stand that, I've compromised for a facing. It ought to have a copper roof, but I've made it green slate. As it is, including metal work, it'll cost you eight thousand five hundred."

"Eight thousand five hundred?" said Soames. "Why, I gave you an outside limit of eight!"

"Can't be done for a penny less," replied Bosinney coolly.

"You must take it or leave it!"

It was the only way, probably, that such a proposition could have been made to Soames. He was nonplussed. Conscience told him to throw the whole thing up. But the design was good, and he knew it—there was completeness about it, and dignity; the servants' apartments were excellent too. He would gain credit by living in a house like that—with such individual features, yet perfectly well-arranged.

He continued poring over the plans, while Bosinney went into his bedroom to shave and dress.

The two walked back to Montpellier Square in silence, Soames watching him out of the corner of his eye.

The Buccaneer was rather a good-looking fellow—so he thought—when he was properly got up.

Irene was bending over her flowers when the two men came in.

She spoke of sending across the Park to fetch June.

"No, no," said Soames, "we've still got business to talk over!"

At lunch he was almost cordial, and kept pressing Bosinney to eat. He was pleased to see the architect in such high spirits, and left him to spend the afternoon with Irene, while he stole off to his pictures, after his Sunday habit. At tea-time he came down to the drawing-room, and found them talking, as he expressed it, nineteen to the dozen.

Unobserved in the doorway, he congratulated himself that things were taking the right turn. It was lucky she and Bosinney got on; she seemed to be falling into line with the idea of the new house.

Quiet meditation among his pictures had decided him to spring the five hundred if necessary; but he hoped that the afternoon might have softened Bosinney's estimates. It was so purely a matter which Bosinney could remedy if he liked; there must be a dozen ways in which he could cheapen the production of a house without spoiling the effect.

He awaited, therefore, his opportunity till Irene was handing the architect his first cup of tea. A chink of sunshine through the lace of the blinds warmed her cheek, shone in the gold of her hair, and in her soft eyes. Possibly the same gleam deepened Bosinney's colour, gave the rather startled look to his face.

Soames hated sunshine, and he at once got up, to draw the blind. Then he took his own cup of tea from his wife, and said, more coldly than he had intended:

"Can't you see your way to do it for eight thousand after all? There must be a lot of little things you could alter."

Bosinney drank off his tea at a gulp, put down his cup, and answered:

"Not one!"

Soames saw that his suggestion had touched some unintelligible point of personal vanity.

"Well," he agreed, with sulky resignation; "you must have it your own way, I suppose."

A few minutes later Bosinney rose to go, and Soames rose too, to see him off the premises. The architect seemed in absurdly high spirits. After watching him walk away at a swinging pace, Soames returned moodily to the drawing-room, where Irene was putting away the music, and, moved by an uncontrollable spasm of curiosity, he asked:

"Well, what do you think of 'The Buccaneer'?"

He looked at the carpet while waiting for her answer, and he had to wait some time.

"I don't know," she said at last.

"Do you think he's good-looking?"

Irene smiled. And it seemed to Soames that she was mocking him.

"Yes," she answered; "very."

CHAPTER IX

DEATH OF AUNT ANN

There came a morning at the end of September when Aunt Ann was unable to take from Smither's hands the insignia of personal dignity. After one look at the old face, the doctor, hurriedly sent for, announced that Miss Forsyte had passed away in her sleep.

Aunts Juley and Hester were overwhelmed by the shock. They had never imagined such an ending. Indeed, it is doubtful whether they had ever realized that an ending was bound to come. Secretly they felt it unreasonable of Ann to have left them like this without a word, without even a struggle. It was unlike her.

Perhaps what really affected them so profoundly was the thought that a Forsyte should have let go her grasp on life. If one, then why not all!

It was a full hour before they could make up their minds to tell Timothy. If only it could be kept from him! If only it could be broken to him by degrees!

And long they stood outside his door whispering together. And when it was over they whispered together again.

He would feel it more, they were afraid, as time went on. Still, he had taken it better than could have been expected. He would keep his bed, of course!

They separated, crying quietly.

Aunt Juley stayed in her room, prostrated by the blow. Her face, discoloured by tears, was divided into compartments by the little ridges of pouting flesh which had swollen with emotion. It was impossible to conceive of life without Ann, who had lived with her for seventy-three years, broken only by the short interregnum of her married life, which seemed now so unreal. At fixed intervals she went to her drawer, and took from beneath the lavender bags a fresh pocket-handkerchief. Her warm heart could not bear the thought that Ann was lying there so cold.

Aunt Hester, the silent, the patient, that backwater of the family energy, sat in the drawing-room, where the blinds were drawn; and she, too, had wept at first, but quietly, without visible effect. Her guiding principle, the conservation of energy, did not abandon her in sorrow. She sat, slim, motionless,

studying the grate, her hands idle in the lap of her black silk dress. They would want to rouse her into doing something, no doubt. As if there were any good in that! Doing something would not bring back Ann! Why worry her?

Five o'clock brought three of the brothers, Jolyon and James and Swithin; Nicholas was at Yarmouth, and Roger had a bad attack of gout. Mrs. Hayman had been by herself earlier in the day, and, after seeing Ann, had gone away, leaving a message for Timothy—which was kept from him—that she ought to have been told sooner. In fact, there was a feeling amongst them all that they ought to have been told sooner, as though they had missed something; and James said:

"I knew how it'd be; I told you she wouldn't last through the summer."

Aunt Hester made no reply; it was nearly October, but what was the good of arguing; some people were never satisfied.

She sent up to tell her sister that the brothers were there. Mrs. Small came down at once. She had bathed her face, which was still swollen, and though she looked severely at Swithin's trousers, for they were of light blue—he had come straight from the club, where the news had reached him—she wore a more cheerful expression than usual, the instinct for doing the wrong thing being even now too strong for her.

Presently all five went up to look at the body. Under the pure white sheet a quilted counter-pane had been placed, for now, more than ever, Aunt Ann had need of warmth; and, the pillows removed, her spine and head rested flat, with the semblance of their life-long inflexibility; the coil banding the top of her brow was drawn on either side to the level of the ears, and between it and the sheet her face, almost as white, was turned with closed eyes to the faces of her brothers and sisters. In its extraordinary peace the face was stronger than ever, nearly all bone now under the scarce-wrinkled parchment of skin—square jaw and chin, cheekbones, forehead with hollow temples, chiselled nose—the fortress of an unconquerable spirit that had yielded to death, and in its upward sightlessness seemed trying to regain that spirit, to regain the guardianship it had just laid down.

Swithin took but one look at the face, and left the room; the sight, he said afterwards, made him very queer. He went downstairs shaking the whole house, and, seizing his hat, clambered into his brougham, without giving any directions to the coachman. He was driven home, and all the evening sat in his chair without moving.

He could take nothing for dinner but a partridge, with an imperial pint of champagne....

Old Jolyon stood at the bottom of the bed, his hands folded in front of him. He alone of those in the room remembered the death of his mother, and though he looked at Ann, it was of that he was thinking. Ann was an old woman, but death had come to her at last—death came to all! His face did not move, his gaze seemed travelling from very far.

Aunt Hester stood beside him. She did not cry now, tears were exhausted—her nature refused to permit a further escape of force; she twisted her hands, looking not at Ann, but from side to side, seeking some way of escaping the effort of realization.

Of all the brothers and sisters James manifested the most emotion. Tears rolled down the parallel furrows of his thin face; where he should go now to tell his troubles he did not know; Juley was no good, Hester worse than useless! He felt Ann's death more than he had ever thought he should; this would upset him for weeks!

Presently Aunt Hester stole out, and Aunt Juley began moving about, doing 'what was necessary,' so that twice she knocked against something. Old Jolyon, roused from his reverie, that reverie of the long, long past, looked sternly at her, and went away. James alone was left by the bedside; glancing stealthily round, to see that he was not observed, he twisted his long body down, placed a kiss on the dead forehead, then he, too, hastily left the room. Encountering Smither in the hall, he began to ask her about the funeral, and, finding that she knew nothing, complained bitterly that, if they didn't take care, everything would go wrong. She had better send for Mr. Soames—he knew all about that sort of thing; her master was very much upset, he supposed—he would want looking after; as for her mistresses, they were no good—they had no gumption! They would be ill too, he shouldn't wonder. She had better send for the doctor; it was best to take things in time. He didn't think his sister Ann had had the best opinion; if she'd had Blank she would have been alive now. Smither might send to Park Lane any time she wanted advice. Of course, his carriage was at their service for the funeral. He supposed she hadn't such a thing as a glass of claret and a biscuit—he had had no lunch!

The days before the funeral passed quietly. It had long been known, of course, that Aunt Ann had left her little property to Timothy. There was, therefore, no reason for the slightest agitation. Soames, who

was sole executor, took charge of all arrangements, and in due course sent out the following invitation to every male member of the family:

To.....

Your presence is requested at the funeral of Miss Ann Forsyte, in Highgate Cemetery, at noon of Oct. 1st. Carriages will meet at "The Bower," Bayswater Road, at 10.45. No flowers by request.
'R.S.V.P.'

The morning came, cold, with a high, grey, London sky, and at half-past ten the first carriage, that of James, drove up. It contained James and his son-in-law Dartie, a fine man, with a square chest, buttoned very tightly into a frock coat, and a sallow, fattish face adorned with dark, well-curled moustaches, and that incorrigible commencement of whisker which, eluding the strictest attempts at shaving, seems the mark of something deeply ingrained in the personality of the shaver, being especially noticeable in men who speculate.

Soames, in his capacity of executor, received the guests, for Timothy still kept his bed; he would get up after the funeral; and Aunts Juley and Hester would not be coming down till all was over, when it was understood there would be lunch for anyone who cared to come back. The next to arrive was Roger, still limping from the gout, and encircled by three of his sons—young Roger, Eustace, and Thomas. George, the remaining son, arrived almost immediately afterwards in a hansom, and paused in the hall to ask Soames how he found undertaking pay.

They disliked each other.

Then came two Haymans—Giles and Jesse perfectly silent, and very well dressed, with special creases down their evening trousers. Then old Jolyon alone. Next, Nicholas, with a healthy colour in his face, and a carefully veiled sprightliness in every movement of his head and body. One of his sons followed him, meek and subdued. Swithin Forsyte, and Bosinney arrived at the same moment,—and stood—bowing precedence to each other,—but on the door opening they tried to enter together; they renewed their apologies in the hall, and, Swithin, settling his stock, which had become disarranged in the struggle, very slowly mounted the stairs. The other Hayman; two married sons of Nicholas, together with Tweetyman, Spender, and Warry, the husbands of married Forsyte and Hayman daughters. The company was then complete, twenty-one in all, not a male member of the family being absent but Timothy and young Jolyon.

Entering the scarlet and green drawing-room, whose apparel made so vivid a setting for their unaccustomed costumes, each tried nervously to find a seat, desirous of hiding the emphatic blackness of his trousers. There seemed a sort of indecency in that blackness and in the colour of their gloves—a sort of exaggeration of the feelings; and many cast shocked looks of secret envy at 'the Buccaneer,' who had no gloves, and was wearing grey trousers. A subdued hum of conversation rose, no one speaking of the departed, but each asking after the other, as though thereby casting an indirect libation to this event, which they had come to honour.

And presently James said:

"Well, I think we ought to be starting."

They went downstairs, and, two and two, as they had been told off in strict precedence, mounted the carriages.

The hearse started at a foot's pace; the carriages moved slowly after. In the first went old Jolyon with Nicholas; in the second, the twins, Swithin and James; in the third, Roger and young Roger; Soames, young Nicholas, George, and Bosinney followed in the fourth. Each of the other carriages, eight in all, held three or four of the family; behind them came the doctor's brougham; then, at a decent interval, cabs containing family clerks and servants; and at the very end, one containing nobody at all, but bringing the total cortege up to the number of thirteen.

So long as the procession kept to the highway of the Bayswater Road, it retained the foot's-pace, but, turning into less important thorough-fares, it soon broke into a trot, and so proceeded, with intervals of walking in the more fashionable streets, until it arrived. In the first carriage old Jolyon and Nicholas were talking of their wills. In the second the twins, after a single attempt, had lapsed into complete silence; both were rather deaf, and the exertion of making themselves heard was too great. Only once James broke this silence:

"I shall have to be looking about for some ground somewhere. What arrangements have you made, Swithin?"

And Swithin, fixing him with a dreadful stare, answered:

"Don't talk to me about such things!"

In the third carriage a disjointed conversation was carried on in the intervals of looking out to see how far they had got, George remarking, "Well, it was really time that the poor old lady went." He didn't believe in people living beyond seventy, Young Nicholas replied mildly that the rule didn't seem to apply to the Forsytes. George said he himself intended to commit suicide at sixty. Young Nicholas, smiling and stroking a long chin, didn't think his father would like that theory; he had made a lot of money since he was sixty. Well, seventy was the outside limit; it was then time, George said, for them to go and leave their money to their children. Soames, hitherto silent, here joined in; he had not forgotten the remark about the 'undertaking,' and, lifting his eyelids almost imperceptibly, said it was all very well for people who never made money to talk. He himself intended to live as long as he could. This was a hit at George, who was notoriously hard up. Bosinney muttered abstractedly "Hear, hear!" and, George yawning, the conversation dropped.

Upon arriving, the coffin was borne into the chapel, and, two by two, the mourners filed in behind it. This guard of men, all attached to the dead by the bond of kinship, was an impressive and singular sight in the great city of London, with its overwhelming diversity of life, its innumerable vocations, pleasures, duties, its terrible hardness, its terrible call to individualism.

The family had gathered to triumph over all this, to give a show of tenacious unity, to illustrate gloriously that law of property underlying the growth of their tree, by which it had thriven and spread, trunk and branches, the sap flowing through all, the full growth reached at the appointed time. The spirit of the old woman lying in her last sleep had called them to this demonstration. It was her final appeal to that unity which had been their strength—it was her final triumph that she had died while the tree was yet whole.

She was spared the watching of the branches jut out beyond the point of balance. She could not look into the hearts of her followers. The same law that had worked in her, bringing her up from a tall, straight-backed slip of a girl to a woman strong and grown, from a woman grown to a woman old, angular, feeble, almost witchlike, with individuality all sharpened and sharpened, as all rounding from the world's contact fell off from her—that same law would work, was working, in the family she had watched like a mother.

She had seen it young, and growing, she had seen it strong and grown, and before her old eyes had time or strength to see any more, she died. She would have tried, and who knows but she might have kept it young and strong, with her old fingers, her trembling kisses—a little longer; alas! not even Aunt Ann could fight with Nature.

'Pride comes before a fall!' In accordance with this, the greatest of Nature's ironies, the Forsyte family had gathered for a last proud pageant before they fell. Their faces to right and left, in single lines, were turned for the most part impassively toward the ground, guardians of their thoughts; but here and there, one looking upward, with a line between his brows, searched to see some sight on the chapel walls too much for him, to be listening to something that appalled. And the responses, low-muttered, in voices through which rose the same tone, the same unseizable family ring, sounded weird, as though murmured in hurried duplication by a single person.

The service in the chapel over, the mourners filed up again to guard the body to the tomb. The vault stood open, and, round it, men in black were waiting.

From that high and sacred field, where thousands of the upper middle class lay in their last sleep, the eyes of the Forsytes travelled down across the flocks of graves. There—spreading to the distance, lay London, with no sun over it, mourning the loss of its daughter, mourning with this family, so dear, the loss of her who was mother and guardian. A hundred thousand spires and houses, blurred in the great grey web of property, lay there like prostrate worshippers before the grave of this, the oldest Forsyte of them all.

A few words, a sprinkle of earth, the thrusting of the coffin home, and Aunt Ann had passed to her last rest.

Round the vault, trustees of that passing, the five brothers stood, with white heads bowed; they would see that Ann was comfortable where she was going. Her little property must stay behind, but otherwise, all that could be should be done....

Then severally, each stood aside, and putting on his hat, turned back to inspect the new inscription on the marble of the family vault:

Soon perhaps, someone else would be wanting an inscription. It was strange and intolerable, for they had not thought somehow, that Forsytes could die. And one and all they had a longing to get away from this painfulness, this ceremony which had reminded them of things they could not bear to think about—to get away quickly and go about their business and forget.

It was cold, too; the wind, like some slow, disintegrating force, blowing up the hill over the graves, struck them with its chilly breath; they began to split into groups, and as quickly as possible to fill the waiting carriages.

Swithin said he should go back to lunch at Timothy's, and he offered to take anybody with him in his brougham. It was considered a doubtful privilege to drive with Swithin in his brougham, which was not a large one; nobody accepted, and he went off alone. James and Roger followed immediately after; they also would drop in to lunch. The others gradually melted away, Old Jolyon taking three nephews to fill up his carriage; he had a want of those young faces.

Soames, who had to arrange some details in the cemetery office, walked away with Bosinney. He had much to talk over with him, and, having finished his business, they strolled to Hampstead, lunched together at the Spaniard's Inn, and spent a long time in going into practical details connected with the building of the house; they then proceeded to the tram-line, and came as far as the Marble Arch, where Bosinney went off to Stanhope Gate to see June.

Soames felt in excellent spirits when he arrived home, and confided to Irene at dinner that he had had a good talk with Bosinney, who really seemed a sensible fellow; they had had a capital walk too, which had done his liver good—he had been short of exercise for a long time—and altogether a very satisfactory day. If only it hadn't been for poor Aunt Ann, he would have taken her to the theatre; as it was, they must make the best of an evening at home.

"The Buccaneer asked after you more than once," he said suddenly. And moved by some inexplicable desire to assert his proprietorship, he rose from his chair and planted a kiss on his wife's shoulder.

PART II

CHAPTER I

PROGRESS OF THE HOUSE

The winter had been an open one. Things in the trade were slack; and as Soames had reflected before making up his mind, it had been a good time for building. The shell of the house at Robin Hill was thus completed by the end of April.

Now that there was something to be seen for his money, he had been coming down once, twice, even three times a week, and would mouse about among the debris for hours, careful never to soil his clothes, moving silently through the unfinished brickwork of doorways, or circling round the columns in the central court.

And he would stand before them for minutes' together, as though peering into the real quality of their substance.

On April 30 he had an appointment with Bosinney to go over the accounts, and five minutes before the proper time he entered the tent which the architect had pitched for himself close to the old oak tree.

The accounts were already prepared on a folding table, and with a nod Soames sat down to study them. It was some time before he raised his head.

"I can't make them out," he said at last; "they come to nearly seven hundred more than they ought"

After a glance at Bosinney's face he went on quickly:

"If you only make a firm stand against these builder chaps you'll get them down. They stick you with everything if you don't look sharp.... Take ten per cent. off all round. I shan't mind it's coming out a hundred or so over the mark!"

Bosinney shook his head:

"I've taken off every farthing I can!"

Soames pushed back the table with a movement of anger, which sent the account sheets fluttering to the ground.

"Then all I can say is," he flustered out, "you've made a pretty mess of it!"

"I've told you a dozen times," Bosinney answered sharply, "that there'd be extras. I've pointed them out to you over and over again!"

"I know that," growled Soames: "I shouldn't have objected to a ten pound note here and there. How was I to know that by 'extras' you meant seven hundred pounds?"

The qualities of both men had contributed to this not-inconsiderable discrepancy. On the one hand, the architect's devotion to his idea, to the image of a house which he had created and believed in—had made him nervous of being stopped, or forced to the use of makeshifts; on the other, Soames' not less true and wholehearted devotion to the very best article that could be obtained for the money, had rendered him averse to believing that things worth thirteen shillings could not be bought with twelve.

"I wish I'd never undertaken your house," said Bosinney suddenly. "You come down here worrying me out of my life. You want double the value for your money anybody else would, and now that you've got a house that for its size is not to be beaten in the county, you don't want to pay for it. If you're anxious to be off your bargain, I daresay I can find the balance above the estimates myself, but I'm d—d if I do another stroke of work for you!"

Soames regained his composure. Knowing that Bosinney had no capital, he regarded this as a wild suggestion. He saw, too, that he would be kept indefinitely out of this house on which he had set his heart, and just at the crucial point when the architect's personal care made all the difference. In the meantime there was Irene to be thought of! She had been very queer lately. He really believed it was only because she had taken to Bosinney that she tolerated the idea of the house at all. It would not do to make an open breach with her.

"You needn't get into a rage," he said. "If I'm willing to put up with it, I suppose you needn't cry out. All I meant was that when you tell me a thing is going to cost so much, I like to—well, in fact, I—like to know where I am."

"Look here!" said Bosinney, and Soames was both annoyed and surprised by the shrewdness of his glance. "You've got my services dirt cheap. For the kind of work I've put into this house, and the amount of time I've given to it, you'd have had to pay Littlemaster or some other fool four times as much. What you want, in fact, is a first-rate man for a fourth-rate fee, and that's exactly what you've got!"

Soames saw that he really meant what he said, and, angry though he was, the consequences of a row rose before him too vividly. He saw his house unfinished, his wife rebellious, himself a laughingstock.

"Let's go over it," he said sulkily, "and see how the money's gone."

"Very well," assented Bosinney. "But we'll hurry up, if you don't mind. I have to get back in time to take June to the theatre."

Soames cast a stealthy look at him, and said: "Coming to our place, I suppose to meet her?" He was always coming to their place!

There had been rain the night before—a spring rain, and the earth smelt of sap and wild grasses. The warm, soft breeze swung the leaves and the golden buds of the old oak tree, and in the sunshine the blackbirds were whistling their hearts out.

It was such a spring day as breathes into a man an ineffable yearning, a painful sweetness, a longing that makes him stand motionless, looking at the leaves or grass, and fling out his arms to embrace he knows not what. The earth gave forth a fainting warmth, stealing up through the chilly garment in which winter had wrapped her. It was her long caress of invitation, to draw men down to lie within her

arms, to roll their bodies on her, and put their lips to her breast.

On just such a day as this Soames had got from Irene the promise he had asked her for so often. Seated on the fallen trunk of a tree, he had promised for the twentieth time that if their marriage were not a success, she should be as free as if she had never married him!

"Do you swear it?" she had said. A few days back she had reminded him of that oath. He had answered: "Nonsense! I couldn't have sworn any such thing!" By some awkward fatality he remembered it now. What queer things men would swear for the sake of women! He would have sworn it at any time to gain her! He would swear it now, if thereby he could touch her—but nobody could touch her, she was cold-hearted!

And memories crowded on him with the fresh, sweet savour of the spring wind—memories of his courtship.

In the spring of the year 1881 he was visiting his old school-fellow and client, George Liversedge, of Branksome, who, with the view of developing his pine-woods in the neighbourhood of Bournemouth, had placed the formation of the company necessary to the scheme in Soames's hands. Mrs. Liversedge, with a sense of the fitness of things, had given a musical tea in his honour. Later in the course of this function, which Soames, no musician, had regarded as an unmitigated bore, his eye had been caught by the face of a girl dressed in mourning, standing by herself. The lines of her tall, as yet rather thin figure, showed through the wispy, clinging stuff of her black dress, her black-gloved hands were crossed in front of her, her lips slightly parted, and her large, dark eyes wandered from face to face. Her hair, done low on her neck, seemed to gleam above her black collar like coils of shining metal. And as Soames stood looking at her, the sensation that most men have felt at one time or another went stealing through him—a peculiar satisfaction of the senses, a peculiar certainty, which novelists and old ladies call love at first sight. Still stealthily watching her, he at once made his way to his hostess, and stood doggedly waiting for the music to cease.

"Who is that girl with yellow hair and dark eyes?" he asked.

"That—oh! Irene Heron. Her father, Professor Heron, died this year. She lives with her stepmother. She's a nice girl, a pretty girl, but no money!"

"Introduce me, please," said Soames.

It was very little that he found to say, nor did he find her responsive to that little. But he went away with the resolution to see her again. He effected his object by chance, meeting her on the pier with her stepmother, who had the habit of walking there from twelve to one of a forenoon. Soames made this lady's acquaintance with alacrity, nor was it long before he perceived in her the ally he was looking for. His keen scent for the commercial side of family life soon told him that Irene cost her stepmother more than the fifty pounds a year she brought her; it also told him that Mrs. Heron, a woman yet in the prime of life, desired to be married again. The strange ripening beauty of her stepdaughter stood in the way of this desirable consummation. And Soames, in his stealthy tenacity, laid his plans.

He left Bournemouth without having given himself away, but in a month's time came back, and this time he spoke, not to the girl, but to her stepmother. He had made up his mind, he said; he would wait any time. And he had long to wait, watching Irene bloom, the lines of her young figure softening, the stronger blood deepening the gleam of her eyes, and warming her face to a creamy glow; and at each visit he proposed to her, and when that visit was at an end, took her refusal away with him, back to London, sore at heart, but steadfast and silent as the grave. He tried to come at the secret springs of her resistance; only once had he a gleam of light. It was at one of those assembly dances, which afford the only outlet to the passions of the population of seaside watering-places. He was sitting with her in an embrasure, his senses tingling with the contact of the waltz. She had looked at him over her, slowly waving fan; and he had lost his head. Seizing that moving wrist, he pressed his lips to the flesh of her arm. And she had shuddered—to this day he had not forgotten that shudder—nor the look so passionately averse she had given him.

A year after that she had yielded. What had made her yield he could never make out; and from Mrs. Heron, a woman of some diplomatic talent, he learnt nothing. Once after they were married he asked her, "What made you refuse me so often?" She had answered by a strange silence. An enigma to him from the day that he first saw her, she was an enigma to him still....

Bosinney was waiting for him at the door; and on his rugged, good-looking, face was a queer, yearning, yet happy look, as though he too saw a promise of bliss in the spring sky, sniffed a coming happiness in the spring air. Soames looked at him waiting there. What was the matter with the fellow that he looked so happy? What was he waiting for with that smile on his lips and in his eyes? Soames

could not see that for which Bosinney was waiting as he stood there drinking in the flower-scented wind. And once more he felt baffled in the presence of this man whom by habit he despised. He hastened on to the house.

"The only colour for those tiles," he heard Bosinney say,— "is ruby with a grey tint in the stuff, to give a transparent effect. I should like Irene's opinion. I'm ordering the purple leather curtains for the doorway of this court; and if you distemper the drawing-room ivory cream over paper, you'll get an illusive look. You want to aim all through the decorations at what I call charm."

Soames said: "You mean that my wife has charm!"

Bosinney evaded the question.

"You should have a clump of iris plants in the centre of that court."

Soames smiled superciliously.

"I'll look into Beech's some time," he said, "and see what's appropriate!"

They found little else to say to each other, but on the way to the Station Soames asked:

"I suppose you find Irene very artistic."

"Yes." The abrupt answer was as distinct a snub as saying: "If you want to discuss her you can do it with someone else!"

And the slow, sulky anger Soames had felt all the afternoon burned the brighter within him.

Neither spoke again till they were close to the Station, then Soames asked:

"When do you expect to have finished?"

"By the end of June, if you really wish me to decorate as well."

Soames nodded. "But you quite understand," he said, "that the house is costing me a lot beyond what I contemplated. I may as well tell you that I should have thrown it up, only I'm not in the habit of giving up what I've set my mind on."

Bosinney made no reply. And Soames gave him askance a look of dogged dislike—for in spite of his fastidious air and that supercilious, dandified taciturnity, Soames, with his set lips and squared chin, was not unlike a bulldog....

When, at seven o'clock that evening, June arrived at 62, Montpelier Square, the maid Bilson told her that Mr. Bosinney was in the drawing-room; the mistress—she said—was dressing, and would be down in a minute. She would tell her that Miss June was here.

June stopped her at once.

"All right, Bilson," she said, "I'll just go in. You needn't hurry Mrs. Soames."

She took off her cloak, and Bilson, with an understanding look, did not even open the drawing-room door for her, but ran downstairs.

June paused for a moment to look at herself in the little old-fashioned silver mirror above the oaken rug chest—a slim, imperious young figure, with a small resolute face, in a white frock, cut moon-shaped at the base of a neck too slender for her crown of twisted red-gold hair.

She opened the drawing-room door softly, meaning to take him by surprise. The room was filled with a sweet hot scent of flowering azaleas.

She took a long breath of the perfume, and heard Bosinney's voice, not in the room, but quite close, saying.

"Ah! there were such heaps of things I wanted to talk about, and now we shan't have time!"

Irene's voice answered: "Why not at dinner?"

"How can one talk...."

June's first thought was to go away, but instead she crossed to the long window opening on the little court. It was from there that the scent of the azaleas came, and, standing with their backs to her, their faces buried in the golden-pink blossoms, stood her lover and Irene.

Silent but unashamed, with flaming cheeks and angry eyes, the girl watched.

"Come on Sunday by yourself—We can go over the house together."

June saw Irene look up at him through her screen of blossoms. It was not the look of a coquette, but—far worse to the watching girl—of a woman fearful lest that look should say too much.

"I've promised to go for a drive with Uncle...."

"The big one! Make him bring you; it's only ten miles—the very thing for his horses."

"Poor old Uncle Swithin!"

A wave of the azalea scent drifted into June's face; she felt sick and dizzy.

"Do! ah! do!"

"But why?"

"I must see you there—I thought you'd like to help me...."

The answer seemed to the girl to come softly with a tremble from amongst the blossoms: "So I do!"

And she stepped into the open space of the window.

"How stuffy it is here!" she said; "I can't bear this scent!"

Her eyes, so angry and direct, swept both their faces.

"Were you talking about the house? I haven't seen it yet, you know—shall we all go on Sunday?"

From Irene's face the colour had flown.

"I am going for a drive that day with Uncle Swithin," she answered.

"Uncle Swithin! What does he matter? You can throw him over!"

"I am not in the habit of throwing people over!"

There was a sound of footsteps and June saw Soames standing just behind her.

"Well! if you are all ready," said Irene, looking from one to the other with a strange smile, "dinner is too!"

CHAPTER II

JUNE'S TREAT

Dinner began in silence; the women facing one another, and the men.

In silence the soup was finished—excellent, if a little thick; and fish was brought. In silence it was handed.

Bosinney ventured: "It's the first spring day."

Irene echoed softly: "Yes—the first spring day."

"Spring!" said June: "there isn't a breath of air!" No one replied.

The fish was taken away, a fine fresh sole from Dover. And Bilson brought champagne, a bottle swathed around the neck with white....

Soames said: "You'll find it dry."

Cutlets were handed, each pink-frilled about the legs. They were refused by June, and silence fell.

Soames said: "You'd better take a cutlet, June; there's nothing coming."

But June again refused, so they were borne away. And then Irene asked: "Phil, have you heard my blackbird?"

Bosinney answered: "Rather—he's got a hunting-song. As I came round I heard him in the Square."

"He's such a darling!"

"Salad, sir?" Spring chicken was removed.

But Soames was speaking: "The asparagus is very poor. Bosinney, glass of sherry with your sweet? June, you're drinking nothing!"

June said: "You know I never do. Wine's such horrid stuff!"

An apple charlotte came upon a silver dish, and smilingly Irene said: "The azaleas are so wonderful this year!"

To this Bosinney murmured: "Wonderful! The scent's extraordinary!"

June said: "How can you like the scent? Sugar, please, Bilson."

Sugar was handed her, and Soames remarked: "This charlottes good!"

The charlotte was removed. Long silence followed. Irene, beckoning, said: "Take out the azalea, Bilson. Miss June can't bear the scent."

"No; let it stay," said June.

Olives from France, with Russian caviare, were placed on little plates. And Soames remarked: "Why can't we have the Spanish?" But no one answered.

The olives were removed. Lifting her tumbler June demanded: "Give me some water, please." Water was given her. A silver tray was brought, with German plums. There was a lengthy pause. In perfect harmony all were eating them.

Bosinney counted up the stones: "This year—next year—some time."

Irene finished softly: "Never! There was such a glorious sunset. The sky's all ruby still—so beautiful!"

He answered: "Underneath the dark."

Their eyes had met, and June cried scornfully: "A London sunset!"

Egyptian cigarettes were handed in a silver box. Soames, taking one, remarked: "What time's your play begin?"

No one replied, and Turkish coffee followed in enamelled cups.

Irene, smiling quietly, said: "If only...."

"Only what?" said June.

"If only it could always be the spring!"

Brandy was handed; it was pale and old.

Soames said: "Bosinney, better take some brandy."

Bosinney took a glass; they all arose.

"You want a cab?" asked Soames.

June answered: "No! My cloaks please, Bilson." Her cloak was brought.

Irene, from the window, murmured: "Such a lovely night! The stars are coming out!"

Soames added: "Well, I hope you'll both enjoy yourselves."

From the door June answered: "Thanks. Come, Phil."

Bosinney cried: "I'm coming."

Soames smiled a sneering smile, and said: "I wish you luck!"

And at the door Irene watched them go.

Bosinney called: "Good night!"

"Good night!" she answered softly....

June made her lover take her on the top of a 'bus, saying she wanted air, and there sat silent, with her face to the breeze.

The driver turned once or twice, with the intention of venturing a remark, but thought better of it. They were a lively couple! The spring had got into his blood, too; he felt the need for letting steam escape, and clucked his tongue, flourishing his whip, wheeling his horses, and even they, poor things, had smelled the spring, and for a brief half-hour spurned the pavement with happy hoofs.

The whole town was alive; the boughs, curled upward with their decking of young leaves, awaited some gift the breeze could bring. New-lighted lamps were gaining mastery, and the faces of the crowd showed pale under that glare, while on high the great white clouds slid swiftly, softly, over the purple sky.

Men in, evening dress had thrown back overcoats, stepping jauntily up the steps of Clubs; working folk loitered; and women—those women who at that time of night are solitary—solitary and moving eastward in a stream—swung slowly along, with expectation in their gait, dreaming of good wine and a good supper, or—for an unwonted minute, of kisses given for love.

Those countless figures, going their ways under the lamps and the moving-sky, had one and all received some restless blessing from the stir of spring. And one and all, like those clubmen with their opened coats, had shed something of caste, and creed, and custom, and by the cock of their hats, the pace of their walk, their laughter, or their silence, revealed their common kinship under the passionate heavens.

Bosinney and June entered the theatre in silence, and mounted to their seats in the upper boxes. The piece had just begun, and the half-darkened house, with its rows of creatures peering all one way, resembled a great garden of flowers turning their faces to the sun.

June had never before been in the upper boxes. From the age of fifteen she had habitually accompanied her grandfather to the stalls, and not common stalls, but the best seats in the house, towards the centre of the third row, booked by old Jolyon, at Grogan and Boyne's, on his way home from the City, long before the day; carried in his overcoat pocket, together with his cigar-case and his old kid gloves, and handed to June to keep till the appointed night. And in those stalls—an erect old figure with a serene white head, a little figure, strenuous and eager, with a red-gold head—they would sit through every kind of play, and on the way home old Jolyon would say of the principal actor: "Oh, he's a poor stick! You should have seen little Bobson!"

She had looked forward to this evening with keen delight; it was stolen, chaperone-less, undreamed of at Stanhope Gate, where she was supposed to be at Soames'. She had expected reward for her subterfuge, planned for her lover's sake; she had expected it to break up the thick, chilly cloud, and make the relations between them which of late had been so puzzling, so tormenting—sunny and simple again as they had been before the winter. She had come with the intention of saying something definite; and she looked at the stage with a furrow between her brows, seeing nothing, her hands squeezed together in her lap. A swarm of jealous suspicions stung and stung her.

If Bosinney was conscious of her trouble he made no sign.

The curtain dropped. The first act had come to an end.

"It's awfully hot here!" said the girl; "I should like to go out."

She was very white, and she knew—for with her nerves thus sharpened she saw everything—that he was both uneasy and compunctious.

At the back of the theatre an open balcony hung over the street; she took possession of this, and stood leaning there without a word, waiting for him to begin.

At last she could bear it no longer.

"I want to say something to you, Phil," she said.

"Yes?"

The defensive tone of his voice brought the colour flying to her cheek, the words flying to her lips: "You don't give me a chance to be nice to you; you haven't for ages now!"

Bosinney stared down at the street. He made no answer....

June cried passionately: "You know I want to do everything for you—that I want to be everything to you...."

A hum rose from the street, and, piercing it with a sharp 'ping,' the bell sounded for the raising of the curtain. June did not stir. A desperate struggle was going on within her. Should she put everything to the proof? Should she challenge directly that influence, that attraction which was driving him away from her? It was her nature to challenge, and she said: "Phil, take me to see the house on Sunday!"

With a smile quivering and breaking on her lips, and trying, how hard, not to show that she was watching, she searched his face, saw it waver and hesitate, saw a troubled line come between his brows, the blood rush into his face. He answered: "Not Sunday, dear; some other day!"

"Why not Sunday? I shouldn't be in the way on Sunday."

He made an evident effort, and said: "I have an engagement."

"You are going to take...."

His eyes grew angry; he shrugged his shoulders, and answered: "An engagement that will prevent my taking you to see the house!"

June bit her lip till the blood came, and walked back to her seat without another word, but she could not help the tears of rage rolling down her face. The house had been mercifully darkened for a crisis, and no one could see her trouble.

Yet in this world of Forsytes let no man think himself immune from observation.

In the third row behind, Euphemia, Nicholas's youngest daughter, with her married-sister, Mrs. Tweetyman, were watching.

They reported at Timothy's, how they had seen June and her fiance at the theatre.

"In the stalls?" "No, not in the...." "Oh! in the dress circle, of course. That seemed to be quite fashionable nowadays with young people!"

Well—not exactly. In the.... Anyway, that engagement wouldn't last long. They had never seen anyone look so thunder and lightningy as that little June! With tears of enjoyment in their eyes, they related how she had kicked a man's hat as she returned to her seat in the middle of an act, and how the man had looked. Euphemia had a noted, silent laugh, terminating most disappointingly in squeaks; and when Mrs. Small, holding up her hands, said: "My dear! Kicked a ha-at?" she let out such a number of these that she had to be recovered with smelling-salts. As she went away she said to Mrs. Tweetyman:

"Kicked a—ha-at! Oh! I shall die."

For 'that little June' this evening, that was to have been 'her treat,' was the most miserable she had ever spent. God knows she tried to stifle her pride, her suspicion, her jealousy!

She parted from Bosinney at old Jolyon's door without breaking down; the feeling that her lover must be conquered was strong enough to sustain her till his retiring footsteps brought home the true extent of her wretchedness.

The noiseless 'Sankey' let her in. She would have slipped up to her own room, but old Jolyon, who had heard her entrance, was in the dining-room doorway.

"Come in and have your milk," he said. "It's been kept hot for you. You're very late. Where have you been?"

June stood at the fireplace, with a foot on the fender and an arm on the mantelpiece, as her grandfather had done when he came in that night of the opera. She was too near a breakdown to care what she told him.

"We dined at Soames's."

"H'm! the man of property! His wife there and Bosinney?"

"Yes."

Old Jolyon's glance was fixed on her with the penetrating gaze from which it was difficult to hide; but she was not looking at him, and when she turned her face, he dropped his scrutiny at once. He had seen enough, and too much. He bent down to lift the cup of milk for her from the hearth, and, turning away, grumbled: "You oughtn't to stay out so late; it makes you fit for nothing."

He was invisible now behind his paper, which he turned with a vicious crackle; but when June came up to kiss him, he said: "Good-night, my darling," in a tone so tremulous and unexpected, that it was all the girl could do to get out of the room without breaking into the fit of sobbing which lasted her well on into the night.

When the door was closed, old Jolyon dropped his paper, and stared long and anxiously in front of him.

'The beggar!' he thought. 'I always knew she'd have trouble with him!'

Uneasy doubts and suspicions, the more poignant that he felt himself powerless to check or control the march of events, came crowding upon him.

Was the fellow going to jilt her? He longed to go and say to him: "Look here, you sir! Are you going to jilt my grand-daughter?" But how could he? Knowing little or nothing, he was yet certain, with his unerring astuteness, that there was something going on. He suspected Bosinney of being too much at Montpellier Square.

'This fellow,' he thought, 'may not be a scamp; his face is not a bad one, but he's a queer fish. I don't know what to make of him. I shall never know what to make of him! They tell me he works like a nigger, but I see no good coming of it. He's unpractical, he has no method. When he comes here, he sits as glum as a monkey. If I ask him what wine he'll have, he says: "Thanks, any wine." If I offer him a cigar, he smokes it as if it were a twopenny German thing. I never see him looking at June as he ought to look at her; and yet, he's not after her money. If she were to make a sign, he'd be off his bargain tomorrow. But she won't—not she! She'll stick to him! She's as obstinate as fate—She'll never let go!'

Sighing deeply, he turned the paper; in its columns, perchance he might find consolation.

And upstairs in her room June sat at her open window, where the spring wind came, after its revel across the Park, to cool her hot cheeks and burn her heart.

CHAPTER III

DRIVE WITH SWITHIN

Two lines of a certain song in a certain famous old school's songbook run as follows:

'How the buttons on his blue frock shone, tra-la-la! How he carolled and he sang, like a bird!....'

Swithin did not exactly carol and sing like a bird, but he felt almost like endeavouring to hum a tune, as he stepped out of Hyde Park Mansions, and contemplated his horses drawn up before the door.

The afternoon was as balmy as a day in June, and to complete the simile of the old song, he had put on a blue frock-coat, dispensing with an overcoat, after sending Adolf down three times to make sure that there was not the least suspicion of east in the wind; and the frock-coat was buttoned so tightly around his personable form, that, if the buttons did not shine, they might pardonably have done so. Majestic on the pavement he fitted on a pair of dog-skin gloves; with his large bell-shaped top hat, and his great stature and bulk he looked too primeval for a Forsyte. His thick white hair, on which Adolf had bestowed a touch of pomatum, exhaled the fragrance of opoPONAX and cigars—the celebrated Swithin brand, for which he paid one hundred and forty shillings the hundred, and of which old Jolyon had unkindly said, he wouldn't smoke them as a gift; they wanted the stomach of a horse!

"Adolf!"

"Sare!"

"The new plaid rug!"

He would never teach that fellow to look smart; and Mrs. Soames he felt sure, had an eye!

"The phaeton hood down; I am going—to—drive—a—lady!"

A pretty woman would want to show off her frock; and well—he was going to drive a lady! It was like a new beginning to the good old days.

Ages since he had driven a woman! The last time, if he remembered, it had been Juley; the poor old soul had been as nervous as a cat the whole time, and so put him out of patience that, as he dropped her in the Bayswater Road, he had said: "Well I'm d—d if I ever drive you again!" And he never had, not he!

Going up to his horses' heads, he examined their bits; not that he knew anything about bits—he didn't pay his coachman sixty pounds a year to do his work for him, that had never been his principle. Indeed, his reputation as a horsey man rested mainly on the fact that once, on Derby Day, he had been welshed by some thimble-riggers. But someone at the Club, after seeing him drive his greys up to the door—he always drove grey horses, you got more style for the money, some thought—had called him 'Four-in-hand Forsyte.' The name having reached his ears through that fellow Nicholas Treffry, old Jolyon's dead partner, the great driving man notorious for more carriage accidents than any man in the kingdom—Swithin had ever after conceived it right to act up to it. The name had taken his fancy, not because he had ever driven four-in-hand, or was ever likely to, but because of something distinguished in the sound. Four-in-hand Forsyte! Not bad! Born too soon, Swithin had missed his vocation. Coming upon London twenty years later, he could not have failed to have become a stockbroker, but at the time when he was obliged to select, this great profession had not as yet become the chief glory of the upper-middle class. He had literally been forced into land agency.

Once in the driving seat, with the reins handed to him, and blinking over his pale old cheeks in the full sunlight, he took a slow look round—Adolf was already up behind; the cockaded groom at the horses' heads stood ready to let go; everything was prepared for the signal, and Swithin gave it. The equipage dashed forward, and before you could say Jack Robinson, with a rattle and flourish drew up at Soames' door.

Irene came out at once, and stepped in—he afterward described it at Timothy's—"as light as—er—Taglioni, no fuss about it, no wanting this or wanting that;" and above all, Swithin dwelt on this, staring at Mrs. Septimus in a way that disconcerted her a good deal, "no silly nervousness!" To Aunt Hester he portrayed Irene's hat. "Not one of your great flopping things, sprawling about, and catching the dust, that women are so fond of nowadays, but a neat little—" he made a circular motion of his hand, "white veil—capital taste."

"What was it made of?" inquired Aunt Hester, who manifested a languid but permanent excitement at any mention of dress.

"Made of?" returned Swithin; "now how should I know?"

He sank into silence so profound that Aunt Hester began to be afraid he had fallen into a trance. She did not try to rouse him herself, it not being her custom.

'I wish somebody would come,' she thought; 'I don't like the look of him!'

But suddenly Swithin returned to life. "Made of" he wheezed out slowly, "what should it be made of?"

They had not gone four miles before Swithin received the impression that Irene liked driving with him. Her face was so soft behind that white veil, and her dark eyes shone so in the spring light, and whenever he spoke she raised them to him and smiled.

On Saturday morning Soames had found her at her writing-table with a note written to Swithin, putting him off. Why did she want to put him off? he asked. She might put her own people off when she liked, he would not have her putting off his people!

She had looked at him intently, had torn up the note, and said: "Very well!"

And then she began writing another. He took a casual glance presently, and saw that it was addressed to Bosinney.

"What are you writing to him about?" he asked.

Irene, looking at him again with that intent look, said quietly:

"Something he wanted me to do for him!"

"Humph!" said Soames,— "Commissions!"

"You'll have your work cut out if you begin that sort of thing!" He said no more.

Swithin opened his eyes at the mention of Robin Hill; it was a long way for his horses, and he always dined at half-past seven, before the rush at the Club began; the new chef took more trouble with an early dinner—a lazy rascal!

He would like to have a look at the house, however. A house appealed to any Forsyte, and especially to one who had been an auctioneer. After all he said the distance was nothing. When he was a younger man he had had rooms at Richmond for many years, kept his carriage and pair there, and drove them up and down to business every day of his life.

Four-in-hand Forsyte they called him! His T-cart, his horses had been known from Hyde Park Corner to the Star and Garter. The Duke of Z.... wanted to get hold of them, would have given him double the money, but he had kept them; know a good thing when you have it, eh? A look of solemn pride came portentously on his shaven square old face, he rolled his head in his stand-up collar, like a turkey-cock preening himself.

She was really—a charming woman! He enlarged upon her frock afterwards to Aunt Juley, who held up her hands at his way of putting it.

Fitted her like a skin—tight as a drum; that was how he liked 'em, all of a piece, none of your daverdy, scarecrow women! He gazed at Mrs. Septimus Small, who took after James—long and thin.

"There's style about her," he went on, "fit for a king! And she's so quiet with it too!"

"She seems to have made quite a conquest of you, any way," drawled Aunt Hester from her corner.

Swithin heard extremely well when anybody attacked him.

"What's that?" he said. "I know a—pretty—woman when I see one, and all I can say is, I don't see the young man about that's fit for her; but perhaps—you—do, come, perhaps—you-do!"

"Oh?" murmured Aunt Hester, "ask Juley!"

Long before they reached Robin Hill, however, the unaccustomed airing had made him terribly sleepy; he drove with his eyes closed, a life-time of deportment alone keeping his tall and bulky form from falling askew.

Bosinney, who was watching, came out to meet them, and all three entered the house together; Swithin in front making play with a stout gold-mounted Malacca cane, put into his hand by Adolf, for his knees were feeling the effects of their long stay in the same position. He had assumed his fur coat, to guard against the draughts of the unfinished house.

The staircase—he said—was handsome! the baronial style! They would want some statuary about! He came to a standstill between the columns of the doorway into the inner court, and held out his cane inquiringly.

What was this to be—this vestibule, or whatever they called it? But gazing at the skylight, inspiration came to him.

"Ah! the billiard-room!"

When told it was to be a tiled court with plants in the centre, he turned to Irene:

"Waste this on plants? You take my advice and have a billiard table here!"

Irene smiled. She had lifted her veil, banding it like a nun's coif across her forehead, and the smile of her dark eyes below this seemed to Swithin more charming than ever. He nodded. She would take his advice he saw.

He had little to say of the drawing or dining-rooms, which he described as "spacious"; but fell into such raptures as he permitted to a man of his dignity, in the wine-cellar, to which he descended by stone steps, Bosinney going first with a light.

"You'll have room here," he said, "for six or seven hundred dozen—a very pooty little cellar!"

Bosinney having expressed the wish to show them the house from the copse below, Swithin came to a stop.

"There's a fine view from here," he remarked; "you haven't such a thing as a chair?"

A chair was brought him from Bosinney's tent.

"You go down," he said blandly; "you two! I'll sit here and look at the view."

He sat down by the oak tree, in the sun; square and upright, with one hand stretched out, resting on the nob of his cane, the other planted on his knee; his fur coat thrown open, his hat, roofing with its flat top the pale square of his face; his stare, very blank, fixed on the landscape.

He nodded to them as they went off down through the fields. He was, indeed, not sorry to be left thus for a quiet moment of reflection. The air was balmy, not too much heat in the sun; the prospect a fine one, a remarka.... His head fell a little to one side; he jerked it up and thought: Odd! He—ah! They were waving to him from the bottom! He put up his hand, and moved it more than once. They were active—the prospect was remar.... His head fell to the left, he jerked it up at once; it fell to the right. It remained there; he was asleep.

And asleep, a sentinel on the—top of the rise, he appeared to rule over this prospect—remarkable—like some image blocked out by the special artist, of primeval Forsytes in pagan days, to record the domination of mind over matter!

And all the unnumbered generations of his yeoman ancestors, wont of a Sunday to stand akimbo surveying their little plots of land, their grey unmoving eyes hiding their instinct with its hidden roots of violence, their instinct for possession to the exclusion of all the world—all these unnumbered generations seemed to sit there with him on the top of the rise.

But from him, thus slumbering, his jealous Forsyte spirit travelled far, into God-knows-what jungle of fancies; with those two young people, to see what they were doing down there in the copse—in the copse where the spring was running riot with the scent of sap and bursting buds, the song of birds innumerable, a carpet of bluebells and sweet growing things, and the sun caught like gold in the tops of the trees; to see what they were doing, walking along there so close together on the path that was too narrow; walking along there so close that they were always touching; to watch Irene's eyes, like dark thieves, stealing the heart out of the spring. And a great unseen chaperon, his spirit was there, stopping with them to look at the little furry corpse of a mole, not dead an hour, with his mushroom-and-silver coat untouched by the rain or dew; watching over Irene's bent head, and the soft look of her pitying eyes; and over that young man's head, gazing at her so hard, so strangely. Walking on with them, too, across the open space where a wood-cutter had been at work, where the bluebells were trampled down, and a trunk had swayed and staggered down from its gashed stump. Climbing it with them, over, and on to the very edge of the copse, whence there stretched an undiscovered country, from far away in which came the sounds, 'Cuckoo-cuckoo!'

Silent, standing with them there, and uneasy at their silence! Very queer, very strange!

Then back again, as though guilty, through the wood—back to the cutting, still silent, amongst the songs of birds that never ceased, and the wild scent—hum! what was it—like that herb they put in—back to the log across the path....

And then unseen, uneasy, flapping above them, trying to make noises, his Forsyte spirit watched her balanced on the log, her pretty figure swaying, smiling down at that young man gazing up with such strange, shining eyes, slipping now—a—ah! falling, o—oh! sliding—down his breast; her soft, warm body clutched, her head bent back from his lips; his kiss; her recoil; his cry: "You must know—I love you!" Must know—indeed, a pretty...? Love! Hah!

Swithin awoke; virtue had gone out of him. He had a taste in his mouth. Where was he?

Damme! He had been asleep!

He had dreamed something about a new soup, with a taste of mint in it.

Those young people—where had they got to? His left leg had pins and needles.

"Adolf!" The rascal was not there; the rascal was asleep somewhere.

He stood up, tall, square, bulky in his fur, looking anxiously down over the fields, and presently he saw them coming.

Irene was in front; that young fellow—what had they nicknamed him—"The Buccaneer?" looked precious hangdog there behind her; had got a flea in his ear, he shouldn't wonder. Serve him right, taking her down all that way to look at the house! The proper place to look at a house from was the lawn.

They saw him. He extended his arm, and moved it spasmodically to encourage them. But they had stopped. What were they standing there for, talking—talking? They came on again. She had been, giving him a rub, he had not the least doubt of it, and no wonder, over a house like that—a great ugly thing, not the sort of house he was accustomed to.

He looked intently at their faces, with his pale, immovable stare. That young man looked very queer!

"You'll never make anything of this!" he said tartly, pointing at the mansion;—"too newfangled!"

Bosinney gazed at him as though he had not heard; and Swithin afterwards described him to Aunt Hester as "an extravagant sort of fellow very odd way of looking at you—a bumpy beggar!"

What gave rise to this sudden piece of psychology he did not state; possibly Bosinney's, prominent forehead and cheekbones and chin, or something hungry in his face, which quarrelled with Swithin's conception of the calm satiety that should characterize the perfect gentleman.

He brightened up at the mention of tea. He had a contempt for tea—his brother Jolyon had been in tea; made a lot of money by it—but he was so thirsty, and had such a taste in his mouth, that he was prepared to drink anything. He longed to inform Irene of the taste in his mouth—she was so sympathetic—but it would not be a distinguished thing to do; he rolled his tongue round, and faintly smacked it against his palate.

In a far corner of the tent Adolf was bending his cat-like moustaches over a kettle. He left it at once to draw the cork of a pint-bottle of champagne. Swithin smiled, and, nodding at Bosinney, said: "Why, you're quite a Monte Cristo!" This celebrated novel—one of the half-dozen he had read—had produced an extraordinary impression on his mind.

Taking his glass from the table, he held it away from him to scrutinize the colour; thirsty as he was, it was not likely that he was going to drink trash! Then, placing it to his lips, he took a sip.

"A very nice wine," he said at last, passing it before his nose; "not the equal of my Heidsieck!"

It was at this moment that the idea came to him which he afterwards imparted at Timothy's in this nutshell: "I shouldn't wonder a bit if that architect chap were sweet upon Mrs. Soames!"

And from this moment his pale, round eyes never ceased to bulge with the interest of his discovery.

"The fellow," he said to Mrs. Septimus, "follows her about with his eyes like a dog—the bumpy beggar! I don't wonder at it—she's a very charming woman, and, I should say, the pink of discretion!" A vague consciousness of perfume caging about Irene, like that from a flower with half-closed petals and a passionate heart, moved him to the creation of this image. "But I wasn't sure of it," he said, "till I saw him pick up her handkerchief."

Mrs. Small's eyes boiled with excitement.

"And did he give it her back?" she asked.

"Give it back?" said Swithin: "I saw him slobber on it when he thought I wasn't looking!"

Mrs. Small gasped—too interested to speak.

"But she gave him no encouragement," went on Swithin; he stopped, and stared for a minute or two in the way that alarmed Aunt Hester so—he had suddenly recollected that, as they were starting back in the phaeton, she had given Bosinney her hand a second time, and let it stay there too.... He had touched his horses smartly with the whip, anxious to get her all to himself. But she had looked back, and she had not answered his first question; neither had he been able to see her face—she had kept it hanging down.

There is somewhere a picture, which Swithin has not seen, of a man sitting on a rock, and by him, immersed in the still, green water, a sea-nymph lying on her back, with her hand on her naked breast. She has a half-smile on her face—a smile of hopeless surrender and of secret joy.

Seated by Swithin's side, Irene may have been smiling like that.

When, warmed by champagne, he had her all to himself, he unbosomed himself of his wrongs; of his

smothered resentment against the new chef at the club; his worry over the house in Wigmore Street, where the rascally tenant had gone bankrupt through helping his brother-in-law as if charity did not begin at home; of his deafness, too, and that pain he sometimes got in his right side. She listened, her eyes swimming under their lids. He thought she was thinking deeply of his troubles, and pitied himself terribly. Yet in his fur coat, with frogs across the breast, his top hat aslant, driving this beautiful woman, he had never felt more distinguished.

A coster, however, taking his girl for a Sunday airing, seemed to have the same impression about himself. This person had flogged his donkey into a gallop alongside, and sat, upright as a waxwork, in his shallop chariot, his chin settled pompously on a red handkerchief, like Swithin's on his full cravat; while his girl, with the ends of a fly-blown boa floating out behind, aped a woman of fashion. Her swain moved a stick with a ragged bit of string dangling from the end, reproducing with strange fidelity the circular flourish of Swithin's whip, and rolled his head at his lady with a leer that had a weird likeness to Swithin's primeval stare.

Though for a time unconscious of the lowly ruffian's presence, Swithin presently took it into his head that he was being gayed. He laid his whip-lash across the mares flank. The two chariots, however, by some unfortunate fatality continued abreast. Swithin's yellow, puffy face grew red; he raised his whip to lash the costermonger, but was saved from so far forgetting his dignity by a special intervention of Providence. A carriage driving out through a gate forced phaeton and donkey-cart into proximity; the wheels grated, the lighter vehicle skidded, and was overturned.

Swithin did not look round. On no account would he have pulled up to help the ruffian. Serve him right if he had broken his neck!

But he could not if he would. The greys had taken alarm. The phaeton swung from side to side, and people raised frightened faces as they went dashing past. Swithin's great arms, stretched at full length, tugged at the reins. His cheeks were puffed, his lips compressed, his swollen face was of a dull, angry red.

Irene had her hand on the rail, and at every lurch she gripped it tightly. Swithin heard her ask:

"Are we going to have an accident, Uncle Swithin?"

He gasped out between his pants: "It's nothing; a—little fresh!"

"I've never been in an accident."

"Don't you move!" He took a look at her. She was smiling, perfectly calm. "Sit still," he repeated. "Never fear, I'll get you home!"

And in the midst of all his terrible efforts, he was surprised to hear her answer in a voice not like her own:

"I don't care if I never get home!"

The carriage giving a terrific lurch, Swithin's exclamation was jerked back into his throat. The horses, winded by the rise of a hill, now steadied to a trot, and finally stopped of their own accord.

"When"—Swithin described it at Timothy's—"I pulled 'em up, there she was as cool as myself. God bless my soul! she behaved as if she didn't care whether she broke her neck or not! What was it she said: 'I don't care if I never get home?'" Leaning over the handle of his cane, he wheezed out, to Mrs. Small's terror: "And I'm not altogether surprised, with a finickin' feller like young Soames for a husband!"

It did not occur to him to wonder what Bosinney had done after they had left him there alone; whether he had gone wandering about like the dog to which Swithin had compared him; wandering down to that copse where the spring was still in riot, the cuckoo still calling from afar; gone down there with her handkerchief pressed to lips, its fragrance mingling with the scent of mint and thyme. Gone down there with such a wild, exquisite pain in his heart that he could have cried out among the trees. Or what, indeed, the fellow had done. In fact, till he came to Timothy's, Swithin had forgotten all about him.

CHAPTER IV

JAMES GOES TO SEE FOR HIMSELF

Those ignorant of Forsyte 'Change would not, perhaps, foresee all the stir made by Irene's visit to the house.

After Swithin had related at Timothy's the full story of his memorable drive, the same, with the least suspicion of curiosity, the merest touch of malice, and a real desire to do good, was passed on to June.

"And what a dreadful thing to say, my dear!" ended Aunt Juley; "that about not going home. What did she mean?"

It was a strange recital for the girl. She heard it flushing painfully, and, suddenly, with a curt handshake, took her departure.

"Almost rude!" Mrs. Small said to Aunt Hester, when June was gone.

The proper construction was put on her reception of the news. She was upset. Something was therefore very wrong. Odd! She and Irene had been such friends!

It all tallied too well with whispers and hints that had been going about for some time past. Recollections of Euphemia's account of the visit to the theatre—Mr. Bosinney always at Soames's? Oh, indeed! Yes, of course, he would be about the house! Nothing open. Only upon the greatest, the most important provocation was it necessary to say anything open on Forsyte 'Change. This machine was too nicely adjusted; a hint, the merest trifling expression of regret or doubt, sufficed to set the family soul so sympathetic—vibrating. No one desired that harm should come of these vibrations—far from it; they were set in motion with the best intentions, with the feeling, that each member of the family had a stake in the family soul.

And much kindness lay at the bottom of the gossip; it would frequently result in visits of condolence being made, in accordance with the customs of Society, thereby conferring a real benefit upon the sufferers, and affording consolation to the sound, who felt pleasantly that someone at all events was suffering from that from which they themselves were not suffering. In fact, it was simply a desire to keep things well-aired, the desire which animates the Public Press, that brought James, for instance, into communication with Mrs. Septimus, Mrs. Septimus, with the little Nicholases, the little Nicholases with who-knows-whom, and so on. That great class to which they had risen, and now belonged, demanded a certain candour, a still more certain reticence. This combination guaranteed their membership.

Many of the younger Forsytes felt, very naturally, and would openly declare, that they did not want their affairs pried into; but so powerful was the invisible, magnetic current of family gossip, that for the life of them they could not help knowing all about everything. It was felt to be hopeless.

One of them (young Roger) had made an heroic attempt to free the rising generation, by speaking of Timothy as an 'old cat.' The effort had justly recoiled upon himself; the words, coming round in the most delicate way to Aunt Juley's ears, were repeated by her in a shocked voice to Mrs. Roger, whence they returned again to young Roger.

And, after all, it was only the wrong-doers who suffered; as, for instance, George, when he lost all that money playing billiards; or young Roger himself, when he was so dreadfully near to marrying the girl to whom, it was whispered, he was already married by the laws of Nature; or again Irene, who was thought, rather than said, to be in danger.

All this was not only pleasant but salutary. And it made so many hours go lightly at Timothy's in the Bayswater Road; so many hours that must otherwise have been sterile and heavy to those three who lived there; and Timothy's was but one of hundreds of such homes in this City of London—the homes of neutral persons of the secure classes, who are out of the battle themselves, and must find their reason for existing, in the battles of others.

But for the sweetness of family gossip, it must indeed have been lonely there. Rumours and tales, reports, surmises—were they not the children of the house, as dear and precious as the prattling babes the brother and sisters had missed in their own journey? To talk about them was as near as they could get to the possession of all those children and grandchildren, after whom their soft hearts yearned. For though it is doubtful whether Timothy's heart yearned, it is indubitable that at the arrival of each fresh Forsyte child he was quite upset.

Useless for young Roger to say, "Old cat!" for Euphemia to hold up her hands and cry: "Oh! those three!" and break into her silent laugh with the squeak at the end. Useless, and not too kind.

The situation which at this stage might seem, and especially to Forsyte eyes, strange—not to say 'impossible'—was, in view of certain facts, not so strange after all. Some things had been lost sight of. And first, in the security bred of many harmless marriages, it had been forgotten that Love is no hot-house flower, but a wild plant, born of a wet night, born of an hour of sunshine; sprung from wild seed, blown along the road by a wild wind. A wild plant that, when it blooms by chance within the hedge of our gardens, we call a flower; and when it blooms outside we call a weed; but, flower or weed, whose scent and colour are always, wild! And further—the facts and figures of their own lives being against the perception of this truth—it was not generally recognised by Forsytes that, where, this wild plant springs, men and women are but moths around the pale, flame-like blossom.

It was long since young Jolyon's escapade—there was danger of a tradition again arising that people in their position never cross the hedge to pluck that flower; that one could reckon on having love, like measles, once in due season, and getting over it comfortably for all time—as with measles, on a soothing mixture of butter and honey—in the arms of wedlock.

Of all those whom this strange rumour about Bosinney and Mrs. Soames reached, James was the most affected. He had long forgotten how he had hovered, lanky and pale, in side whiskers of chestnut hue, round Emily, in the days of his own courtship. He had long forgotten the small house in the purlieu of Mayfair, where he had spent the early days of his married life, or rather, he had long forgotten the early days, not the small house,—a Forsyte never forgot a house—he had afterwards sold it at a clear profit of four hundred pounds.

He had long forgotten those days, with their hopes and fears and doubts about the prudence of the match (for Emily, though pretty, had nothing, and he himself at that time was making a bare thousand a year), and that strange, irresistible attraction which had drawn him on, till he felt he must die if he could not marry the girl with the fair hair, looped so neatly back, the fair arms emerging from a skin-tight bodice, the fair form decorously shielded by a cage of really stupendous circumference.

James had passed through the fire, but he had passed also through the river of years which washes out the fire; he had experienced the saddest experience of all—forgetfulness of what it was like to be in love.

Forgotten! Forgotten so long, that he had forgotten even that he had forgotten.

And now this rumour had come upon him, this rumour about his son's wife; very vague, a shadow dodging among the palpable, straightforward appearances of things, unreal, unintelligible as a ghost, but carrying with it, like a ghost, inexplicable terror.

He tried to bring it home to his mind, but it was no more use than trying to apply to himself one of those tragedies he read of daily in his evening paper. He simply could not. There could be nothing in it. It was all their nonsense. She didn't get on with Soames as well as she might, but she was a good little thing—a good little thing!

Like the not inconsiderable majority of men, James relished a nice little bit of scandal, and would say, in a matter-of-fact tone, licking his lips, "Yes, yes—she and young Dyson; they tell me they're living at Monte Carlo!"

But the significance of an affair of this sort—of its past, its present, or its future—had never struck him. What it meant, what torture and raptures had gone to its construction, what slow, overmastering fate had lurked within the facts, very naked, sometimes sordid, but generally spicy, presented to his gaze. He was not in the habit of blaming, praising, drawing deductions, or generalizing at all about such things; he simply listened rather greedily, and repeated what he was told, finding considerable benefit from the practice, as from the consumption of a sherry and bitters before a meal.

Now, however, that such a thing—or rather the rumour, the breath of it—had come near him personally, he felt as in a fog, which filled his mouth full of a bad, thick flavour, and made it difficult to draw breath.

A scandal! A possible scandal!

To repeat this word to himself thus was the only way in which he could focus or make it thinkable. He had forgotten the sensations necessary for understanding the progress, fate, or meaning of any such business; he simply could no longer grasp the possibilities of people running any risk for the sake of passion.

Amongst all those persons of his acquaintance, who went into the City day after day and did their business there, whatever it was, and in their leisure moments bought shares, and houses, and ate dinners, and played games, as he was told, it would have seemed to him ridiculous to suppose that

there were any who would run risks for the sake of anything so recondite, so figurative, as passion.

Passion! He seemed, indeed, to have heard of it, and rules such as 'A young man and a young woman ought never to be trusted together' were fixed in his mind as the parallels of latitude are fixed on a map (for all Forsytes, when it comes to 'bed-rock' matters of fact, have quite a fine taste in realism); but as to anything else—well, he could only appreciate it at all through the catch-word 'scandal.'

Ah! but there was no truth in it—could not be. He was not afraid; she was really a good little thing. But there it was when you got a thing like that into your mind. And James was of a nervous temperament—one of those men whom things will not leave alone, who suffer tortures from anticipation and indecision. For fear of letting something slip that he might otherwise secure, he was physically unable to make up his mind until absolutely certain that, by not making it up, he would suffer loss.

In life, however, there were many occasions when the business of making up his mind did not even rest with himself, and this was one of them.

What could he do? Talk it over with Soames? That would only make matters worse. And, after all, there was nothing in it, he felt sure.

It was all that house. He had mistrusted the idea from the first. What did Soames want to go into the country for? And, if he must go spending a lot of money building himself a house, why not have a first-rate man, instead of this young Bosinney, whom nobody knew anything about? He had told them how it would be. And he had heard that the house was costing Soames a pretty penny beyond what he had reckoned on spending.

This fact, more than any other, brought home to James the real danger of the situation. It was always like this with these 'artistic' chaps; a sensible man should have nothing to say to them. He had warned Irene, too. And see what had come of it!

And it suddenly sprang into James's mind that he ought to go and see for himself. In the midst of that fog of uneasiness in which his mind was enveloped the notion that he could go and look at the house afforded him inexplicable satisfaction. It may have been simply the decision to do something—more possibly the fact that he was going to look at a house—that gave him relief. He felt that in staring at an edifice of bricks and mortar, of wood and stone, built by the suspected man himself, he would be looking into the heart of that rumour about Irene.

Without saying a word, therefore, to anyone, he took a hansom to the station and proceeded by train to Robin Hill; thence—there being no 'flies,' in accordance with the custom of the neighbourhood—he found himself obliged to walk.

He started slowly up the hill, his angular knees and high shoulders bent complainingly, his eyes fixed on his feet, yet, neat for all that, in his high hat and his frock-coat, on which was the speckless gloss imparted by perfect superintendence. Emily saw to that; that is, she did not, of course, see to it—people of good position not seeing to each other's buttons, and Emily was of good position—but she saw that the butler saw to it.

He had to ask his way three times; on each occasion he repeated the directions given him, got the man to repeat them, then repeated them a second time, for he was naturally of a talkative disposition, and one could not be too careful in a new neighbourhood.

He kept assuring them that it was a new house he was looking for; it was only, however, when he was shown the roof through the trees that he could feel really satisfied that he had not been directed entirely wrong.

A heavy sky seemed to cover the world with the grey whiteness of a whitewashed ceiling. There was no freshness or fragrance in the air. On such a day even British workmen scarcely cared to do more than they were obliged, and moved about their business without the drone of talk which whiles away the pangs of labour.

Through spaces of the unfinished house, shirt-sleeved figures worked slowly, and sounds arose—spasmodic knockings, the scraping of metal, the sawing of wood, with the rumble of wheelbarrows along boards; now and again the foreman's dog, tethered by a string to an oaken beam, whimpered feebly, with a sound like the singing of a kettle.

The fresh-fitted window-panes, daubed each with a white patch in the centre, stared out at James like the eyes of a blind dog.

And the building chorus went on, strident and mirthless under the grey-white sky. But the thrushes, hunting amongst the fresh-turned earth for worms, were silent quite.

James picked his way among the heaps of gravel—the drive was being laid—till he came opposite the porch. Here he stopped and raised his eyes. There was but little to see from this point of view, and that little he took in at once; but he stayed in this position many minutes, and who shall know of what he thought.

His china-blue eyes under white eyebrows that jutted out in little horns, never stirred; the long upper lip of his wide mouth, between the fine white whiskers, twitched once or twice; it was easy to see from that anxious rapt expression, whence Soames derived the handicapped look which sometimes came upon his face. James might have been saying to himself: 'I don't know—life's a tough job.'

In this position Bosinney surprised him.

James brought his eyes down from whatever bird's-nest they had been looking for in the sky to Bosinney's face, on which was a kind of humorous scorn.

"How do you do, Mr. Forsyte? Come down to see for yourself?"

It was exactly what James, as we know, had come for, and he was made correspondingly uneasy. He held out his hand, however, saying:

"How are you?" without looking at Bosinney.

The latter made way for him with an ironical smile.

James scented something suspicious in this courtesy. "I should like to walk round the outside first," he said, "and see what you've been doing!"

A flagged terrace of rounded stones with a list of two or three inches to port had been laid round the south-east and south-west sides of the house, and ran with a bevelled edge into mould, which was in preparation for being turfed; along this terrace James led the way.

"Now what did this cost?" he asked, when he saw the terrace extending round the corner.

"What should you think?" inquired Bosinney.

"How should I know?" replied James somewhat nonplussed; "two or three hundred, I dare say!"

"The exact sum!"

James gave him a sharp look, but the architect appeared unconscious, and he put the answer down to mishearing.

On arriving at the garden entrance, he stopped to look at the view.

"That ought to come down," he said, pointing to the oak-tree.

"You think so? You think that with the tree there you don't get enough view for your money."

Again James eyed him suspiciously—this young man had a peculiar way of putting things: "Well!" he said, with a perplexed, nervous, emphasis, "I don't see what you want with a tree."

"It shall come down to-morrow," said Bosinney.

James was alarmed. "Oh," he said, "don't go saying I said it was to come down! I know nothing about it!"

"No?"

James went on in a fluster: "Why, what should I know about it? It's nothing to do with me! You do it on your own responsibility."

"You'll allow me to mention your name?"

James grew more and more alarmed: "I don't know what you want mentioning my name for," he muttered; "you'd better leave the tree alone. It's not your tree!"

He took out a silk handkerchief and wiped his brow. They entered the house. Like Swithin, James was impressed by the inner court-yard.

"You must have spent a douce of a lot of money here," he said, after staring at the columns and gallery for some time. "Now, what did it cost to put up those columns?"

"I can't tell you off-hand," thoughtfully answered Bosinney, "but I know it was a deuce of a lot!"

"I should think so," said James. "I should...." He caught the architect's eye, and broke off. And now, whenever he came to anything of which he desired to know the cost, he stifled that curiosity.

Bosinney appeared determined that he should see everything, and had not James been of too 'noticing' a nature, he would certainly have found himself going round the house a second time. He seemed so anxious to be asked questions, too, that James felt he must be on his guard. He began to suffer from his exertions, for, though wiry enough for a man of his long build, he was seventy-five years old.

He grew discouraged; he seemed no nearer to anything, had not obtained from his inspection any of the knowledge he had vaguely hoped for. He had merely increased his dislike and mistrust of this young man, who had tired him out with his politeness, and in whose manner he now certainly detected mockery.

The fellow was sharper than he had thought, and better-looking than he had hoped. He had a—a 'don't care' appearance that James, to whom risk was the most intolerable thing in life, did not appreciate; a peculiar smile, too, coming when least expected; and very queer eyes. He reminded James, as he said afterwards, of a hungry cat. This was as near as he could get, in conversation with Emily, to a description of the peculiar exasperation, velvetiness, and mockery, of which Bosinney's manner had been composed.

At last, having seen all that was to be seen, he came out again at the door where he had gone in; and now, feeling that he was wasting time and strength and money, all for nothing, he took the courage of a Forsyte in both hands, and, looking sharply at Bosinney, said:

"I dare say you see a good deal of my daughter-in-law; now, what does she think of the house? But she hasn't seen it, I suppose?"

This he said, knowing all about Irene's visit not, of course, that there was anything in the visit, except that extraordinary remark she had made about 'not caring to get home'—and the story of how June had taken the news!

He had determined, by this way of putting the question, to give Bosinney a chance, as he said to himself.

The latter was long in answering, but kept his eyes with uncomfortable steadiness on James.

"She has seen the house, but I can't tell you what she thinks of it."

Nervous and baffled, James was constitutionally prevented from letting the matter drop.

"Oh!" he said, "she has seen it? Soames brought her down, I suppose?"

Bosinney smilingly replied: "Oh, no!"

"What, did she come down alone?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then—who brought her?"

"I really don't know whether I ought to tell you who brought her."

To James, who knew that it was Swithin, this answer appeared incomprehensible.

"Why!" he stammered, "you know that...." but he stopped, suddenly perceiving his danger.

"Well," he said, "if you don't want to tell me I suppose you won't! Nobody tells me anything."

Somewhat to his surprise Bosinney asked him a question.

"By the by," he said, "could you tell me if there are likely to be any more of you coming down? I should like to be on the spot!"

"Any more?" said James bewildered, "who should there be more? I don't know of any more. Good-

bye?"

Looking at the ground he held out his hand, crossed the palm of it with Bosinney's, and taking his umbrella just above the silk, walked away along the terrace.

Before he turned the corner he glanced back, and saw Bosinney following him slowly—'slinking along the wall' as he put it to himself, 'like a great cat.' He paid no attention when the young fellow raised his hat.

Outside the drive, and out of sight, he slackened his pace still more. Very slowly, more bent than when he came, lean, hungry, and disheartened, he made his way back to the station.

The Buccaneer, watching him go so sadly home, felt sorry perhaps for his behaviour to the old man.

CHAPTER V

SOAMES AND BOSINNEY CORRESPOND

James said nothing to his son of this visit to the house; but, having occasion to go to Timothy's on morning on a matter connected with a drainage scheme which was being forced by the sanitary authorities on his brother, he mentioned it there.

It was not, he said, a bad house. He could see that a good deal could be made of it. The fellow was clever in his way, though what it was going to cost Soames before it was done with he didn't know.

Euphemia Forsyte, who happened to be in the room—she had come round to borrow the Rev. Mr. Scoles' last novel, 'Passion and Paregoric', which was having such a vogue—chimed in.

"I saw Irene yesterday at the Stores; she and Mr. Bosinney were having a nice little chat in the Groceries."

It was thus, simply, that she recorded a scene which had really made a deep and complicated impression on her. She had been hurrying to the silk department of the Church and Commercial Stores—that Institution than which, with its admirable system, admitting only guaranteed persons on a basis of payment before delivery, no emporium can be more highly recommended to Forsytes—to match a piece of prunella silk for her mother, who was waiting in the carriage outside.

Passing through the Groceries her eye was unpleasantly attracted by the back view of a very beautiful figure. It was so charmingly proportioned, so balanced, and so well clothed, that Euphemia's instinctive propriety was at once alarmed; such figures, she knew, by intuition rather than experience, were rarely connected with virtue—certainly never in her mind, for her own back was somewhat difficult to fit.

Her suspicions were fortunately confirmed. A young man coming from the Drugs had snatched off his hat, and was accosting the lady with the unknown back.

It was then that she saw with whom she had to deal; the lady was undoubtedly Mrs. Soames, the young man Mr. Bosinney. Concealing herself rapidly over the purchase of a box of Tunisian dates, for she was impatient of awkwardly meeting people with parcels in her hands, and at the busy time of the morning, she was quite unintentionally an interested observer of their little interview.

Mrs. Soames, usually somewhat pale, had a delightful colour in her cheeks; and Mr. Bosinney's manner was strange, though attractive (she thought him rather a distinguished-looking man, and George's name for him, 'The Buccaneer'—about which there was something romantic—quite charming). He seemed to be pleading. Indeed, they talked so earnestly—or, rather, he talked so earnestly, for Mrs. Soames did not say much—that they caused, inconsiderately, an eddy in the traffic. One nice old General, going towards Cigars, was obliged to step quite out of the way, and chancing to look up and see Mrs. Soames' face, he actually took off his hat, the old fool! So like a man!

But it was Mrs. Soames' eyes that worried Euphemia. She never once looked at Mr. Bosinney until he moved on, and then she looked after him. And, oh, that look!

On that look Euphemia had spent much anxious thought. It is not too much to say that it had hurt her

with its dark, lingering softness, for all the world as though the woman wanted to drag him back, and unsay something she had been saying.

Ah, well, she had had no time to go deeply into the matter just then, with that prunella silk on her hands; but she was 'very intriguee'—very! She had just nodded to Mrs. Soames, to show her that she had seen; and, as she confided, in talking it over afterwards, to her chum Francie (Roger's daughter), "Didn't she look caught out just?"

James, most averse at the first blush to accepting any news confirmatory of his own poignant suspicions, took her up at once.

"Oh" he said, "they'd be after wall-papers no doubt."

Euphemia smiled. "In the Groceries?" she said softly; and, taking 'Passion and Paregoric' from the table, added: "And so you'll lend me this, dear Auntie? Good-bye!" and went away.

James left almost immediately after; he was late as it was.

When he reached the office of Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte, he found Soames, sitting in his revolving chair, drawing up a defence. The latter greeted his father with a curt good-morning, and, taking an envelope from his pocket, said:

"It may interest you to look through this."

James read as follows:

309D, SLOANE STREET, May 15. 'DEAR FORSYTE,

'The construction of your house being now completed, my duties as architect have come to an end. If I am to go on with the business of decoration, which at your request I undertook, I should like you to clearly understand that I must have a free hand.

'You never come down without suggesting something that goes counter to my scheme. I have here three letters from you, each of which recommends an article I should never dream of putting in. I had your father here yesterday afternoon, who made further valuable suggestions.

'Please make up your mind, therefore, whether you want me to decorate for you, or to retire which on the whole I should prefer to do.

'But understand that, if I decorate, I decorate alone, without interference of any sort.

If I do the thing, I will do it thoroughly, but I must have a free hand.

'Yours truly,
'PHILIP BOSINNEY.'

The exact and immediate cause of this letter cannot, of course, be told, though it is not improbable that Bosinney may have been moved by some sudden revolt against his position towards Soames—that eternal position of Art towards Property—which is so admirably summed up, on the back of the most indispensable of modern appliances, in a sentence comparable to the very finest in Tacitus:

THOS. T. SORROW, Inventor. BERT M. PADLAND, Proprietor.

"What are you going to say to him?" James asked.

Soames did not even turn his head. "I haven't made up my mind," he said, and went on with his defence.

A client of his, having put some buildings on a piece of ground that did not belong to him, had been suddenly and most irritatingly warned to take them off again. After carefully going into the facts, however, Soames had seen his way to advise that his client had what was known as a title by possession, and that, though undoubtedly the ground did not belong to him, he was entitled to keep it, and had better do so; and he was now following up this advice by taking steps to—as the sailors say—'make it so.'

He had a distinct reputation for sound advice; people saying of him: "Go to young Forsyte—a long-headed fellow!" and he prized this reputation highly.

His natural taciturnity was in his favour; nothing could be more calculated to give people, especially people with property (Soames had no other clients), the impression that he was a safe man. And he was

safe. Tradition, habit, education, inherited aptitude, native caution, all joined to form a solid professional honesty, superior to temptation—from the very fact that it was built on an innate avoidance of risk. How could he fall, when his soul abhorred circumstances which render a fall possible—a man cannot fall off the floor!

And those countless Forsytes, who, in the course of innumerable transactions concerned with property of all sorts (from wives to water rights), had occasion for the services of a safe man, found it both reposeful and profitable to confide in Soames. That slight superciliousness of his, combined with an air of mousing amongst precedents, was in his favour too—a man would not be supercilious unless he knew!

He was really at the head of the business, for though James still came nearly every day to, see for himself, he did little now but sit in his chair, twist his legs, slightly confuse things already decided, and presently go away again, and the other partner, Bustard, was a poor thing, who did a great deal of work, but whose opinion was never taken.

So Soames went steadily on with his defence. Yet it would be idle to say that his mind was at ease. He was suffering from a sense of impending trouble, that had haunted him for some time past. He tried to think it physical—a condition of his liver—but knew that it was not.

He looked at his watch. In a quarter of an hour he was due at the General Meeting of the New Colliery Company—one of Uncle Jolyon's concerns; he should see Uncle Jolyon there, and say something to him about Bosinney—he had not made up his mind what, but something—in any case he should not answer this letter until he had seen Uncle Jolyon. He got up and methodically put away the draft of his defence. Going into a dark little cupboard, he turned up the light, washed his hands with a piece of brown Windsor soap, and dried them on a roller towel. Then he brushed his hair, paying strict attention to the parting, turned down the light, took his hat, and saying he would be back at half-past two, stepped into the Poultry.

It was not far to the Offices of the New Colliery Company in Ironmonger Lane, where, and not at the Cannon Street Hotel, in accordance with the more ambitious practice of other companies, the General Meeting was always held. Old Jolyon had from the first set his face against the Press. What business—he said—had the Public with his concerns!

Soames arrived on the stroke of time, and took his seat alongside the Board, who, in a row, each Director behind his own ink-pot, faced their Shareholders.

In the centre of this row old Jolyon, conspicuous in his black, tightly-buttoned frock-coat and his white moustaches, was leaning back with finger tips crossed on a copy of the Directors' report and accounts.

On his right hand, always a little larger than life, sat the Secretary, 'Down-by-the-starn' Hemmings; an all-too-sad sadness beaming in his fine eyes; his iron-grey beard, in mourning like the rest of him, giving the feeling of an all-too-black tie behind it.

The occasion indeed was a melancholy one, only six weeks having elapsed since that telegram had come from Scorrier, the mining expert, on a private mission to the Mines, informing them that Pippin, their Superintendent, had committed suicide in endeavouring, after his extraordinary two years' silence, to write a letter to his Board. That letter was on the table now; it would be read to the Shareholders, who would of course be put into possession of all the facts.

Hemmings had often said to Soames, standing with his coat-tails divided before the fireplace:

"What our Shareholders don't know about our affairs isn't worth knowing. You may take that from me, Mr. Soames."

On one occasion, old Jolyon being present, Soames recollected a little unpleasantness. His uncle had looked up sharply and said: "Don't talk nonsense, Hemmings! You mean that what they do know isn't worth knowing!" Old Jolyon detested humbug.

Hemmings, angry-eyed, and wearing a smile like that of a trained poodle, had replied in an outburst of artificial applause: "Come, now, that's good, sir—that's very good. Your uncle will have his joke!"

The next time he had seen Soames he had taken the opportunity of saying to him: "The chairman's getting very old!—I can't get him to understand things; and he's so wilful—but what can you expect, with a chin like his?"

Soames had nodded.

Everyone knew that Uncle Jolyon's chin was a caution. He was looking worried to-day, in spite of his General Meeting look; he (Soames) should certainly speak to him about Bosinney.

Beyond old Jolyon on the left was little Mr. Booker, and he, too, wore his General Meeting look, as though searching for some particularly tender shareholder. And next him was the deaf director, with a frown; and beyond the deaf director, again, was old Mr. Bleedham, very bland, and having an air of conscious virtue—as well he might, knowing that the brown-paper parcel he always brought to the Board-room was concealed behind his hat (one of that old-fashioned class, of flat-brimmed top-hats which go with very large bow ties, clean-shaven lips, fresh cheeks, and neat little, white whiskers).

Soames always attended the General Meeting; it was considered better that he should do so, in case 'anything should arise!' He glanced round with his close, supercilious air at the walls of the room, where hung plans of the mine and harbour, together with a large photograph of a shaft leading to a working which had proved quite remarkably unprofitable. This photograph—a witness to the eternal irony underlying commercial enterprise till retained its position on the—wall, an effigy of the directors' pet, but dead, lamb.

And now old Jolyon rose, to present the report and accounts.

Veiling under a Jove-like serenity that perpetual antagonism deep-seated in the bosom of a director towards his shareholders, he faced them calmly. Soames faced them too. He knew most of them by sight. There was old Scrubsole, a tar man, who always came, as Hemmings would say, 'to make himself nasty,' a cantankerous-looking old fellow with a red face, a jowl, and an enormous low-crowned hat reposing on his knee. And the Rev. Mr. Boms, who always proposed a vote of thanks to the chairman, in which he invariably expressed the hope that the Board would not forget to elevate their employees, using the word with a double e, as being more vigorous and Anglo-Saxon (he had the strong Imperialistic tendencies of his cloth). It was his salutary custom to buttonhole a director afterwards, and ask him whether he thought the coming year would be good or bad; and, according to the trend of the answer, to buy or sell three shares within the ensuing fortnight.

And there was that military man, Major O'Bally, who could not help speaking, if only to second the re-election of the auditor, and who sometimes caused serious consternation by taking toasts—proposals rather—out of the hands of persons who had been flattered with little slips of paper, entrusting the said proposals to their care.

These made up the lot, together with four or five strong, silent shareholders, with whom Soames could sympathize—men of business, who liked to keep an eye on their affairs for themselves, without being fussy—good, solid men, who came to the City every day and went back in the evening to good, solid wives.

Good, solid wives! There was something in that thought which roused the nameless uneasiness in Soames again.

What should he say to his uncle? What answer should he make to this letter?

. . . . "If any shareholder has any question to put, I shall be glad to answer it." A soft thump. Old Jolyon had let the report and accounts fall, and stood twisting his tortoise-shell glasses between thumb and forefinger.

The ghost of a smile appeared on Soames' face. They had better hurry up with their questions! He well knew his uncle's method (the ideal one) of at once saying: "I propose, then, that the report and accounts be adopted!" Never let them get their wind—shareholders were notoriously wasteful of time!

A tall, white-bearded man, with a gaunt, dissatisfied face, arose:

"I believe I am in order, Mr. Chairman, in raising a question on this figure of L5000 in the accounts. 'To the widow and family'" (he looked sourly round), "'of our late superintendent,' who so—er—ill-advisedly (I say—ill-advisedly) committed suicide, at a time when his services were of the utmost value to this Company. You have stated that the agreement which he has so unfortunately cut short with his own hand was for a period of five years, of which one only had expired—I—"

Old Jolyon made a gesture of impatience.

"I believe I am in order, Mr. Chairman—I ask whether this amount paid, or proposed to be paid, by the Board to the er—deceased—is for services which might have been rendered to the Company—had he not committed suicide?"

"It is in recognition of past services, which we all know—you as well as any of us—to have been of vital value."

"Then, sir, all I have to say is that the services being past, the amount is too much."

The shareholder sat down.

Old Jolyon waited a second and said: "I now propose that the report and—"

The shareholder rose again: "May I ask if the Board realizes that it is not their money which—I don't hesitate to say that if it were their money...."

A second shareholder, with a round, dogged face, whom Soames recognised as the late superintendent's brother-in-law, got up and said warmly: "In my opinion, sir, the sum is not enough!"

The Rev. Mr. Boms now rose to his feet. "If I may venture to express myself," he said, "I should say that the fact of the—er—deceased having committed suicide should weigh very heavily—very heavily with our worthy chairman. I have no doubt it has weighed with him, for—I say this for myself and I think for everyone present (hear, hear)—he enjoys our confidence in a high degree. We all desire, I should hope, to be charitable. But I feel sure" (he looked severely at the late superintendent's brother-in-law) "that he will in some way, by some written expression, or better perhaps by reducing the amount, record our grave disapproval that so promising and valuable a life should have been thus impiously removed from a sphere where both its own interests and—if I may say so—our interests so imperatively demanded its continuance. We should not—nay, we may not—countenance so grave a dereliction of all duty, both human and divine."

The reverend gentleman resumed his seat. The late superintendent's brother-in-law again rose: "What I have said I stick to," he said; "the amount is not enough!"

The first shareholder struck in: "I challenge the legality of the payment. In my opinion this payment is not legal. The Company's solicitor is present; I believe I am in order in asking him the question."

All eyes were now turned upon Soames. Something had arisen!

He stood up, close-lipped and cold; his nerves inwardly fluttered, his attention tweaked away at last from contemplation of that cloud looming on the horizon of his mind.

"The point," he said in a low, thin voice, "is by no means clear. As there is no possibility of future consideration being received, it is doubtful whether the payment is strictly legal. If it is desired, the opinion of the court could be taken."

The superintendent's brother-in-law frowned, and said in a meaning tone: "We have no doubt the opinion of the court could be taken. May I ask the name of the gentleman who has given us that striking piece of information? Mr. Soames Forsyte? Indeed!" He looked from Soames to old Jolyon in a pointed manner.

A flush coloured Soames' pale cheeks, but his superciliousness did not waver. Old Jolyon fixed his eyes on the speaker.

"If," he said, "the late superintendents brother-in-law has nothing more to say, I propose that the report and accounts...."

At this moment, however, there rose one of those five silent, stolid shareholders, who had excited Soames' sympathy. He said:

"I deprecate the proposal altogether. We are expected to give charity to this man's wife and children, who, you tell us, were dependent on him. They may have been; I do not care whether they were or not. I object to the whole thing on principle. It is high time a stand was made against this sentimental humanitarianism. The country is eaten up with it. I object to my money being paid to these people of whom I know nothing, who have done nothing to earn it. I object in toto; it is not business. I now move that the report and accounts be put back, and amended by striking out the grant altogether."

Old Jolyon had remained standing while the strong, silent man was speaking. The speech awoke an echo in all hearts, voicing, as it did, the worship of strong men, the movement against generosity, which had at that time already commenced among the saner members of the community.

The words 'it is not business' had moved even the Board; privately everyone felt that indeed it was not. But they knew also the chairman's domineering temper and tenacity. He, too, at heart must feel that it was not business; but he was committed to his own proposition. Would he go back upon it? It

was thought to be unlikely.

All waited with interest. Old Jolyon held up his hand; dark-rimmed glasses depending between his finger and thumb quivered slightly with a suggestion of menace.

He addressed the strong, silent shareholder.

"Knowing, as you do, the efforts of our late superintendent upon the occasion of the explosion at the mines, do you seriously wish me to put that amendment, sir?"

"I do."

Old Jolyon put the amendment.

"Does anyone second this?" he asked, looking calmly round.

And it was then that Soames, looking at his uncle, felt the power of will that was in that old man. No one stirred. Looking straight into the eyes of the strong, silent shareholder, old Jolyon said:

"I now move, 'That the report and accounts for the year 1886 be received and adopted.' You second that? Those in favour signify the same in the usual way. Contrary—no. Carried. The next business, gentlemen...."

Soames smiled. Certainly Uncle Jolyon had a way with him!

But now his attention relapsed upon Bosinney.

Odd how that fellow haunted his thoughts, even in business hours.

Irene's visit to the house—but there was nothing in that, except that she might have told him; but then, again, she never did tell him anything. She was more silent, more touchy, every day. He wished to God the house were finished, and they were in it, away from London. Town did not suit her; her nerves were not strong enough. That nonsense of the separate room had cropped up again!

The meeting was breaking up now. Underneath the photograph of the lost shaft Hemmings was buttonholed by the Rev. Mr. Boms. Little Mr. Booker, his bristling eyebrows wreathed in angry smiles, was having a parting turn-up with old Scrubsole. The two hated each other like poison. There was some matter of a tar-contract between them, little Mr. Booker having secured it from the Board for a nephew of his, over old Scrubsole's head. Soames had heard that from Hemmings, who liked a gossip, more especially about his directors, except, indeed, old Jolyon, of whom he was afraid.

Soames awaited his opportunity. The last shareholder was vanishing through the door, when he approached his uncle, who was putting on his hat.

"Can I speak to you for a minute, Uncle Jolyon?"

It is uncertain what Soames expected to get out of this interview.

Apart from that somewhat mysterious awe in which Forsytes in general held old Jolyon, due to his philosophic twist, or perhaps—as Hemmings would doubtless have said—to his chin, there was, and always had been, a subtle antagonism between the younger man and the old. It had lurked under their dry manner of greeting, under their non-committal allusions to each other, and arose perhaps from old Jolyon's perception of the quiet tenacity ('obstinacy,' he rather naturally called it) of the young man, of a secret doubt whether he could get his own way with him.

Both these Forsytes, wide asunder as the poles in many respects, possessed in their different ways—to a greater degree than the rest of the family—that essential quality of tenacious and prudent insight into 'affairs,' which is the highwater mark of their great class. Either of them, with a little luck and opportunity, was equal to a lofty career; either of them would have made a good financier, a great contractor, a statesman, though old Jolyon, in certain of his moods when under the influence of a cigar or of Nature—would have been capable of, not perhaps despising, but certainly of questioning, his own high position, while Soames, who never smoked cigars, would not.

Then, too, in old Jolyon's mind there was always the secret ache, that the son of James—of James, whom he had always thought such a poor thing, should be pursuing the paths of success, while his own son...!

And last, not least—for he was no more outside the radiation of family gossip than any other Forsyte—he had now heard the sinister, indefinite, but none the less disturbing rumour about Bosinney, and his pride was wounded to the quick.

Characteristically, his irritation turned not against Irene but against Soames. The idea that his nephew's wife (why couldn't the fellow take better care of her—Oh! quaint injustice! as though Soames could possibly take more care!)—should be drawing to herself June's lover, was intolerably humiliating. And seeing the danger, he did not, like James, hide it away in sheer nervousness, but owned with the dispassion of his broader outlook, that it was not unlikely; there was something very attractive about Irene!

He had a presentiment on the subject of Soames' communication as they left the Board Room together, and went out into the noise and hurry of Cheapside. They walked together a good minute without speaking, Soames with his mousing, mincing step, and old Jolyon upright and using his umbrella languidly as a walking-stick.

They turned presently into comparative quiet, for old Jolyon's way to a second Board led him in the direction of Moorage Street.

Then Soames, without lifting his eyes, began: "I've had this letter from Bosinney. You see what he says; I thought I'd let you know. I've spent a lot more than I intended on this house, and I want the position to be clear."

Old Jolyon ran his eyes unwillingly over the letter: "What he says is clear enough," he said.

"He talks about 'a free hand,'" replied Soames.

Old Jolyon looked at him. The long-suppressed irritation and antagonism towards this young fellow, whose affairs were beginning to intrude upon his own, burst from him.

"Well, if you don't trust him, why do you employ him?"

Soames stole a sideway look: "It's much too late to go into that," he said, "I only want it to be quite understood that if I give him a free hand, he doesn't let me in. I thought if you were to speak to him, it would carry more weight!"

"No," said old Jolyon abruptly; "I'll have nothing to do with it!"

The words of both uncle and nephew gave the impression of unspoken meanings, far more important, behind. And the look they interchanged was like a revelation of this consciousness.

"Well," said Soames; "I thought, for June's sake, I'd tell you, that's all; I thought you'd better know I shan't stand any nonsense!"

"What is that to me?" old Jolyon took him up.

"Oh! I don't know," said Soames, and flurried by that sharp look he was unable to say more. "Don't say I didn't tell you," he added sulkily, recovering his composure.

"Tell me!" said old Jolyon; "I don't know what you mean. You come worrying me about a thing like this. I don't want to hear about your affairs; you must manage them yourself!"

"Very well," said Soames immovably, "I will!"

"Good-morning, then," said old Jolyon, and they parted.

Soames retraced his steps, and going into a celebrated eating-house, asked for a plate of smoked salmon and a glass of Chablis; he seldom ate much in the middle of the day, and generally ate standing, finding the position beneficial to his liver, which was very sound, but to which he desired to put down all his troubles.

When he had finished he went slowly back to his office, with bent head, taking no notice of the swarming thousands on the pavements, who in their turn took no notice of him.

The evening post carried the following reply to Bosinney:

'FORSYTE, BUSTARD AND FORSYTE, 'Commissioners for Oaths, '92001, BRANCH LANE, POULTRY, E.C.,

'May 17, 1887.

'DEAR BOSINNEY,

'I have, received your letter, the terms of which not a little surprise me. I was under the impression that you had, and have had all along, a "free hand"; for I do not recollect that any suggestions I have

been so unfortunate as to make have met with your approval. In giving you, in accordance with your request, this "free hand," I wish you to clearly understand that the total cost of the house as handed over to me completely decorated, inclusive of your fee (as arranged between us), must not exceed twelve thousand pounds—£12,000. This gives you an ample margin, and, as you know, is far more than I originally contemplated.

'I am, 'Yours truly,

'SOAMES FORSYTE.'

On the following day he received a note from Bosinney:

'PHILIP BAYNES BOSINNEY, 'Architect, '309D, SLOANE STREET, S.W., 'May 18.
'DEAR FORSYTE,

'If you think that in such a delicate matter as decoration I can bind myself to the exact pound, I am afraid you are mistaken. I can see that you are tired of the arrangement, and of me, and I had better, therefore, resign.

'Yours faithfully,
'PHILIP BAYNES BOSINNEY.'

Soames pondered long and painfully over his answer, and late at night in the dining-room, when Irene had gone to bed, he composed the following:

'62, MONTPELLIER SQUARE, S.W., 'May 19, 1887. 'DEAR BOSINNEY,

'I think that in both our interests it would be extremely undesirable that matters should be so left at this stage. I did not mean to say that if you should exceed the sum named in my letter to you by ten or twenty or even fifty pounds, there would be any difficulty between us. This being so, I should like you to reconsider your answer. You have a "free hand" in the terms of this correspondence, and I hope you will see your way to completing the decorations, in the matter of which I know it is difficult to be absolutely exact.

'Yours truly,
'SOAMES FORSYTE.'

Bosinney's answer, which came in the course of the next day, was:

'May 20.
'DEAR FORSYTE,

'Very well.
'PH. BOSINNEY.'

CHAPTER VI

OLD JOLYON AT THE ZOO

Old Jolyon disposed of his second Meeting—an ordinary Board—summarily. He was so dictatorial that his fellow directors were left in cabal over the increasing domineeringness of old Forsyte, which they were far from intending to stand much longer, they said.

He went out by Underground to Portland Road Station, whence he took a cab and drove to the Zoo.

He had an assignation there, one of those assignations that had lately been growing more frequent, to which his increasing uneasiness about June and the 'change in her,' as he expressed it, was driving him.

She buried herself away, and was growing thin; if he spoke to her he got no answer, or had his head snapped off, or she looked as if she would burst into tears. She was as changed as she could be, all through this Bosinney. As for telling him about anything, not a bit of it!

And he would sit for long spells brooding, his paper unread before him, a cigar extinct between his

lips. She had been such a companion to him ever since she was three years old! And he loved her so!

Forces regardless of family or class or custom were beating down his guard; impending events over which he had no control threw their shadows on his head. The irritation of one accustomed to have his way was roused against he knew not what.

Chafing at the slowness of his cab, he reached the Zoo door; but, with his sunny instinct for seizing the good of each moment, he forgot his vexation as he walked towards the tryst.

From the stone terrace above the bear-pit his son and his two grandchildren came hastening down when they saw old Jolyon coming, and led him away towards the lion-house. They supported him on either side, holding one to each of his hands,—whilst Jolly, perverse like his father, carried his grandfather's umbrella in such a way as to catch people's legs with the crutch of the handle.

Young Jolyon followed.

It was as good as a play to see his father with the children, but such a play as brings smiles with tears behind. An old man and two small children walking together can be seen at any hour of the day; but the sight of old Jolyon, with Jolly and Holly seemed to young Jolyon a special peep-show of the things that lie at the bottom of our hearts. The complete surrender of that erect old figure to those little figures on either hand was too poignantly tender, and, being a man of an habitual reflex action, young Jolyon swore softly under his breath. The show affected him in a way unbecoming to a Forsyte, who is nothing if not undemonstrative.

Thus they reached the lion-house.

There had been a morning fete at the Botanical Gardens, and a large number of Forsy...—that is, of well-dressed people who kept carriages had brought them on to the Zoo, so as to have more, if possible, for their money, before going back to Rutland Gate or Bryanston Square.

"Let's go on to the Zoo," they had said to each other; "it'll be great fun!" It was a shilling day; and there would not be all those horrid common people.

In front of the long line of cages they were collected in rows, watching the tawny, ravenous beasts behind the bars await their only pleasure of the four-and-twenty hours. The hungrier the beast, the greater the fascination. But whether because the spectators envied his appetite, or, more humanely, because it was so soon to be satisfied, young Jolyon could not tell. Remarks kept falling on his ears: "That's a nasty-looking brute, that tiger!" "Oh, what a love! Look at his little mouth!" "Yes, he's rather nice! Don't go too near, mother."

And frequently, with little pats, one or another would clap their hands to their pockets behind and look round, as though expecting young Jolyon or some disinterested-looking person to relieve them of the contents.

A well-fed man in a white waistcoat said slowly through his teeth: "It's all greed; they can't be hungry. Why, they take no exercise." At these words a tiger snatched a piece of bleeding liver, and the fat man laughed. His wife, in a Paris model frock and gold nose-nippers, reproved him: "How can you laugh, Harry? Such a horrid sight!"

Young Jolyon frowned.

The circumstances of his life, though he had ceased to take a too personal view of them, had left him subject to an intermittent contempt; and the class to which he had belonged—the carriage class—especially excited his sarcasm.

To shut up a lion or tiger in confinement was surely a horrible barbarity. But no cultivated person would admit this.

The idea of its being barbarous to confine wild animals had probably never even occurred to his father for instance; he belonged to the old school, who considered it at once humanizing and educational to confine baboons and panthers, holding the view, no doubt, that in course of time they might induce these creatures not so unreasonably to die of misery and heart-sickness against the bars of their cages, and put the society to the expense of getting others! In his eyes, as in the eyes of all Forsytes, the pleasure of seeing these beautiful creatures in a state of captivity far outweighed the inconvenience of imprisonment to beasts whom God had so improvidently placed in a state of freedom! It was for the animals good, removing them at once from the countless dangers of open air and exercise, and enabling them to exercise their functions in the guaranteed seclusion of a private compartment! Indeed, it was doubtful what wild animals were made for but to be shut up in cages!

But as young Jolyon had in his constitution the elements of impartiality, he reflected that to stigmatize as barbarity that which was merely lack of imagination must be wrong; for none who held these views had been placed in a similar position to the animals they caged, and could not, therefore, be expected to enter into their sensations. It was not until they were leaving the gardens—Jolly and Holly in a state of blissful delirium—that old Jolyon found an opportunity of speaking to his son on the matter next his heart. "I don't know what to make of it," he said; "if she's to go on as she's going on now, I can't tell what's to come. I wanted her to see the doctor, but she won't. She's not a bit like me. She's your mother all over. Obstinate as a mule! If she doesn't want to do a thing, she won't, and there's an end of it!"

Young Jolyon smiled; his eyes had wandered to his father's chin. 'A pair of you,' he thought, but he said nothing.

"And then," went on old Jolyon, "there's this Bosinney. I should like to punch the fellow's head, but I can't, I suppose, though—I don't see why you shouldn't," he added doubtfully.

"What has he done? Far better that it should come to an end, if they don't hit it off!"

Old Jolyon looked at his son. Now they had actually come to discuss a subject connected with the relations between the sexes he felt distrustful. Jo would be sure to hold some loose view or other.

"Well, I don't know what you think," he said; "I dare say your sympathy's with him—shouldn't be surprised; but I think he's behaving precious badly, and if he comes my way I shall tell him so." He dropped the subject.

It was impossible to discuss with his son the true nature and meaning of Bosinney's defection. Had not his son done the very same thing (worse, if possible) fifteen years ago? There seemed no end to the consequences of that piece of folly.

Young Jolyon also was silent; he had quickly penetrated his father's thought, for, dethroned from the high seat of an obvious and uncomplicated view of things, he had become both perceptive and subtle.

The attitude he had adopted towards sexual matters fifteen years before, however, was too different from his father's. There was no bridging the gulf.

He said coolly: "I suppose he's fallen in love with some other woman?"

Old Jolyon gave him a dubious look: "I can't tell," he said; "they say so!"

"Then, it's probably true," remarked young Jolyon unexpectedly; "and I suppose they've told you who she is?"

"Yes," said old Jolyon, "Soames's wife!"

Young Jolyon did not whistle: The circumstances of his own life had rendered him incapable of whistling on such a subject, but he looked at his father, while the ghost of a smile hovered over his face.

If old Jolyon saw, he took no notice.

"She and June were bosom friends!" he muttered.

"Poor little June!" said young Jolyon softly. He thought of his daughter still as a babe of three.

Old Jolyon came to a sudden halt.

"I don't believe a word of it," he said, "it's some old woman's tale. Get me a cab, Jo, I'm tired to death!"

They stood at a corner to see if an empty cab would come along, while carriage after carriage drove past, bearing Forsytes of all descriptions from the Zoo. The harness, the liveries, the gloss on the horses' coats, shone and glittered in the May sunlight, and each equipage, landau, sociable, barouche, Victoria, or brougham, seemed to roll out proudly from its wheels:

'I and my horses and my men you know,' Indeed the whole turn-out have cost a pot. But we were worth it every penny. Look At Master and at Missis now, the dawgs! Ease with security—ah! that's the ticket!

And such, as everyone knows, is fit accompaniment for a perambulating Forsyte.

Amongst these carriages was a barouche coming at a greater pace than the others, drawn by a pair of bright bay horses. It swung on its high springs, and the four people who filled it seemed rocked as in a cradle.

This chariot attracted young Jolyon's attention; and suddenly, on the back seat, he recognised his Uncle James, unmistakable in spite of the increased whiteness of his whiskers; opposite, their backs defended by sunshades, Rachel Forsyte and her elder but married sister, Winifred Dartie, in irreproachable toilettes, had posed their heads haughtily, like two of the birds they had been seeing at the Zoo; while by James' side reclined Dartie, in a brand-new frock-coat buttoned tight and square, with a large expanse of carefully shot linen protruding below each wristband.

An extra, if subdued, sparkle, an added touch of the best gloss or varnish characterized this vehicle, and seemed to distinguish it from all the others, as though by some happy extravagance—like that which marks out the real 'work of art' from the ordinary 'picture'—it were designated as the typical car, the very throne of Forsytedom.

Old Jolyon did not see them pass; he was petting poor Holly who was tired, but those in the carriage had taken in the little group; the ladies' heads tilted suddenly, there was a spasmodic screening movement of parasols; James' face protruded naively, like the head of a long bird, his mouth slowly opening. The shield-like rounds of the parasols grew smaller and smaller, and vanished.

Young Jolyon saw that he had been recognised, even by Winifred, who could not have been more than fifteen when he had forfeited the right to be considered a Forsyte.

There was not much change in them! He remembered the exact look of their turn-out all that time ago: Horses, men, carriage—all different now, no doubt—but of the precise stamp of fifteen years before; the same neat display, the same nicely calculated arrogance ease with security! The swing exact, the pose of the sunshades exact, exact the spirit of the whole thing.

And in the sunlight, defended by the haughty shields of parasols, carriage after carriage went by.

"Uncle James has just passed, with his female folk," said young Jolyon.

His father looked black. "Did your uncle see us? Yes? Hmph! What's he want, coming down into these parts?"

An empty cab drove up at this moment, and old Jolyon stopped it.

"I shall see you again before long, my boy!" he said. "Don't you go paying any attention to what I've been saying about young Bosinney—I don't believe a word of it!"

Kissing the children, who tried to detain him, he stepped in and was borne away.

Young Jolyon, who had taken Holly up in his arms, stood motionless at the corner, looking after the cab.

CHAPTER VII

AFTERNOON AT TIMOTHY'S

If old Jolyon, as he got into his cab, had said: 'I won't believe a word of it!' he would more truthfully have expressed his sentiments.

The notion that James and his womankind had seen him in the company of his son had awakened in him not only the impatience he always felt when crossed, but that secret hostility natural between brothers, the roots of which—little nursery rivalries—sometimes toughen and deepen as life goes on, and, all hidden, support a plant capable of producing in season the bitterest fruits.

Hitherto there had been between these six brothers no more unfriendly feeling than that caused by the secret and natural doubt that the others might be richer than themselves; a feeling increased to the pitch of curiosity by the approach of death—that end of all handicaps—and the great 'closeness' of their man of business, who, with some sagacity, would profess to Nicholas ignorance of James' income, to James ignorance of old Jolyon's, to Jolyon ignorance of Roger's, to Roger ignorance of Swithin's, while

to Swithin he would say most irritatingly that Nicholas must be a rich man. Timothy alone was exempt, being in gilt-edged securities.

But now, between two of them at least, had arisen a very different sense of injury. From the moment when James had the impertinence to pry into his affairs—as he put it—old Jolyon no longer chose to credit this story about Bosinney. His grand-daughter slighted through a member of 'that fellow's' family! He made up his mind that Bosinney was maligned. There must be some other reason for his defection.

June had flown out at him, or something; she was as touchy as she could be!

He would, however, let Timothy have a bit of his mind, and see if he would go on dropping hints! And he would not let the grass grow under his feet either, he would go there at once, and take very good care that he didn't have to go again on the same errand.

He saw James' carriage blocking the pavement in front of 'The Bower.' So they had got there before him—cackling about having seen him, he dared say! And further on, Swithin's greys were turning their noses towards the noses of James' bays, as though in conclave over the family, while their coachmen were in conclave above.

Old Jolyon, depositing his hat on the chair in the narrow hall, where that hat of Bosinney's had so long ago been mistaken for a cat, passed his thin hand grimly over his face with its great drooping white moustaches, as though to remove all traces of expression, and made his way upstairs.

He found the front drawing-room full. It was full enough at the best of times—without visitors—without any one in it—for Timothy and his sisters, following the tradition of their generation, considered that a room was not quite 'nice' unless it was 'properly' furnished. It held, therefore, eleven chairs, a sofa, three tables, two cabinets, innumerable knickknacks, and part of a large grand piano. And now, occupied by Mrs. Small, Aunt Hester, by Swithin, James, Rachel, Winifred, Euphemia, who had come in again to return 'Passion and Paregoric' which she had read at lunch, and her chum Frances, Roger's daughter (the musical Forsyte, the one who composed songs), there was only one chair left unoccupied, except, of course, the two that nobody ever sat on—and the only standing room was occupied by the cat, on whom old Jolyon promptly stepped.

In these days it was by no means unusual for Timothy to have so many visitors. The family had always, one and all, had a real respect for Aunt Ann, and now that she was gone, they were coming far more frequently to The Bower, and staying longer.

Swithin had been the first to arrive, and seated torpid in a red satin chair with a gilt back, he gave every appearance of lasting the others out. And symbolizing Bosinney's name 'the big one,' with his great stature and bulk, his thick white hair, his puffy immovable shaven face, he looked more primeval than ever in the highly upholstered room.

His conversation, as usual of late, had turned at once upon Irene, and he had lost no time in giving Aunts Juley and Hester his opinion with regard to this rumour he heard was going about. No—as he said—she might want a bit of flirtation—a pretty woman must have her fling; but more than that he did not believe. Nothing open; she had too much good sense, too much proper appreciation of what was due to her position, and to the family! No sc..., he was going to say 'scandal' but the very idea was so preposterous that he waved his hand as though to say—'but let that pass!'

Granted that Swithin took a bachelor's view of the situation—still what indeed was not due to that family in which so many had done so well for themselves, had attained a certain position? If he had heard in dark, pessimistic moments the words 'yeomen' and 'very small beer' used in connection with his origin, did he believe them?

No! he cherished, hugging it pathetically to his bosom the secret theory that there was something distinguished somewhere in his ancestry.

"Must be," he once said to young Jolyon, before the latter went to the bad. "Look at us, we've got on! There must be good blood in us somewhere."

He had been fond of young Jolyon: the boy had been in a good set at College, had known that old ruffian Sir Charles Fiste's sons—a pretty rascal one of them had turned out, too; and there was style about him—it was a thousand pities he had run off with that half-foreign governess! If he must go off like that why couldn't he have chosen someone who would have done them credit! And what was he now?—an underwriter at Lloyd's; they said he even painted pictures—pictures! Damme! he might have ended as Sir Jolyon Forsyte, Bart., with a seat in Parliament, and a place in the country!

It was Swithin who, following the impulse which sooner or later urges thereto some member of every great family, went to the Heralds' Office, where they assured him that he was undoubtedly of the same family as the well-known Forsytes with an 'i,' whose arms were 'three dexter buckles on a sable ground gules,' hoping no doubt to get him to take them up.

Swithin, however, did not do this, but having ascertained that the crest was a 'pheasant proper,' and the motto 'For Forsite,' he had the pheasant proper placed upon his carriage and the buttons of his coachman, and both crest and motto on his writing-paper. The arms he hugged to himself, partly because, not having paid for them, he thought it would look ostentatious to put them on his carriage, and he hated ostentation, and partly because he, like any practical man all over the country, had a secret dislike and contempt for things he could not understand he found it hard, as anyone might, to swallow 'three dexter buckles on a sable ground gules.'

He never forgot, however, their having told him that if he paid for them he would be entitled to use them, and it strengthened his conviction that he was a gentleman. Imperceptibly the rest of the family absorbed the 'pheasant proper,' and some, more serious than others, adopted the motto; old Jolyon, however, refused to use the latter, saying that it was humbug meaning nothing, so far as he could see.

Among the older generation it was perhaps known at bottom from what great historical event they derived their crest; and if pressed on the subject, sooner than tell a lie—they did not like telling lies, having an impression that only Frenchmen and Russians told them—they would confess hurriedly that Swithin had got hold of it somehow.

Among the younger generation the matter was wrapped in a discretion proper. They did not want to hurt the feelings of their elders, nor to feel ridiculous themselves; they simply used the crest....

"No," said Swithin, "he had had an opportunity of seeing for himself, and what he should say was, that there was nothing in her manner to that young Buccaneer or Bosinney or whatever his name was, different from her manner to himself; in fact, he should rather say...." But here the entrance of Frances and Euphemia put an unfortunate stop to the conversation, for this was not a subject which could be discussed before young people.

And though Swithin was somewhat upset at being stopped like this on the point of saying something important, he soon recovered his affability. He was rather fond of Frances—Francie, as she was called in the family. She was so smart, and they told him she made a pretty little pot of pin-money by her songs; he called it very clever of her.

He rather prided himself indeed on a liberal attitude towards women, not seeing any reason why they shouldn't paint pictures, or write tunes, or books even, for the matter of that, especially if they could turn a useful penny by it; not at all—kept them out of mischief. It was not as if they were men!

'Little Francie,' as she was usually called with good-natured contempt, was an important personage, if only as a standing illustration of the attitude of Forsytes towards the Arts. She was not really 'little,' but rather tall, with dark hair for a Forsyte, which, together with a grey eye, gave her what was called 'a Celtic appearance.' She wrote songs with titles like 'Breathing Sighs,' or 'Kiss me, Mother, ere I die,' with a refrain like an anthem:

'Kiss me, Mother, ere I die;
Kiss me-kiss me, Mother, ah!
Kiss, ah! kiss me e-ere I—
Kiss me, Mother, ere I d-d-die!'

She wrote the words to them herself, and other poems. In lighter moments she wrote waltzes, one of which, the 'Kensington Coil,' was almost national to Kensington, having a sweet dip in it.

It was very original. Then there were her 'Songs for Little People,' at once educational and witty, especially 'Gran'ma's Porgie,' and that ditty, almost prophetically imbued with the coming Imperial spirit, entitled 'Black Him In His Little Eye.'

Any publisher would take these, and reviews like 'High Living,' and the 'Ladies' Genteel Guide' went into raptures over: 'Another of Miss Francie Forsyte's spirited ditties, sparkling and pathetic. We ourselves were moved to tears and laughter. Miss Forsyte should go far.'

With the true instinct of her breed, Francie had made a point of knowing the right people—people who would write about her, and talk about her, and people in Society, too—keeping a mental register of just where to exert her fascinations, and an eye on that steady scale of rising prices, which in her mind's eye represented the future. In this way she caused herself to be universally respected.

Once, at a time when her emotions were whipped by an attachment—for the tenor of Roger's life, with its whole-hearted collection of house property, had induced in his only daughter a tendency towards passion—she turned to great and sincere work, choosing the sonata form, for the violin. This was the only one of her productions that troubled the Forsytes. They felt at once that it would not sell.

Roger, who liked having a clever daughter well enough, and often alluded to the amount of pocket-money she made for herself, was upset by this violin sonata.

"Rubbish like that!" he called it. Francie had borrowed young Flageoletti from Euphemia, to play it in the drawing-room at Prince's Gardens.

As a matter of fact Roger was right. It was rubbish, but—annoying! the sort of rubbish that wouldn't sell. As every Forsyte knows, rubbish that sells is not rubbish at all—far from it.

And yet, in spite of the sound common sense which fixed the worth of art at what it would fetch, some of the Forsytes—Aunt Hester, for instance, who had always been musical—could not help regretting that Francie's music was not 'classical'; the same with her poems. But then, as Aunt Hester said, they didn't see any poetry nowadays, all the poems were 'little light things.'

There was nobody who could write a poem like 'Paradise Lost,' or 'Childe Harold'; either of which made you feel that you really had read something. Still, it was nice for Francie to have something to occupy her; while other girls were spending money shopping she was making it!

And both Aunt Hester and Aunt Juley were always ready to listen to the latest story of how Francie had got her price increased.

They listened now, together with Swithin, who sat pretending not to, for these young people talked so fast and mumbled so, he never could catch what they said.

"And I can't think," said Mrs. Septimus, "how you do it. I should never have the audacity!"

Francie smiled lightly. "I'd much rather deal with a man than a woman. Women are so sharp!"

"My dear," cried Mrs. Small, "I'm sure we're not."

Euphemia went off into her silent laugh, and, ending with the squeak, said, as though being strangled: "Oh, you'll kill me some day, auntie."

Swithin saw no necessity to laugh; he detested people laughing when he himself perceived no joke. Indeed, he detested Euphemia altogether, to whom he always alluded as 'Nick's daughter, what's she called—the pale one?' He had just missed being her god-father—indeed, would have been, had he not taken a firm stand against her outlandish name. He hated becoming a godfather. Swithin then said to Francie with dignity: "It's a fine day—er—for the time of year." But Euphemia, who knew perfectly well that he had refused to be her godfather, turned to Aunt Hester, and began telling her how she had seen Irene—Mrs. Soames—at the Church and Commercial Stores.

"And Soames was with her?" said Aunt Hester, to whom Mrs. Small had as yet had no opportunity of relating the incident.

"Soames with her? Of course not!"

"But was she all alone in London?"

"Oh, no; there was Mr. Bosinney with her. She was perfectly dressed."

But Swithin, hearing the name Irene, looked severely at Euphemia, who, it is true, never did look well in a dress, whatever she may have done on other occasions, and said:

"Dressed like a lady, I've no doubt. It's a pleasure to see her."

At this moment James and his daughters were announced. Dartie, feeling badly in want of a drink, had pleaded an appointment with his dentist, and, being put down at the Marble Arch, had got into a hansom, and was already seated in the window of his club in Piccadilly.

His wife, he told his cronies, had wanted to take him to pay some calls. It was not in his line—not exactly. Haw!

Hailing the waiter, he sent him out to the hall to see what had won the 4.30 race. He was dog-tired,

he said, and that was a fact; had been drivin' about with his wife to 'shows' all the afternoon. Had put his foot down at last. A fellow must live his own life.

At this moment, glancing out of the bay window—for he loved this seat whence he could see everybody pass—his eye unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, chanced to light on the figure of Soames, who was mousing across the road from the Green Park-side, with the evident intention of coming in, for he, too, belonged to 'The Iseeum.'

Dartie sprang to his feet; grasping his glass, he muttered something about 'that 4.30 race,' and swiftly withdrew to the card-room, where Soames never came. Here, in complete isolation and a dim light, he lived his own life till half past seven, by which hour he knew Soames must certainly have left the club.

It would not do, as he kept repeating to himself whenever he felt the impulse to join the gossips in the bay-window getting too strong for him—it absolutely would not do, with finances as low as his, and the 'old man' (James) rusty ever since that business over the oil shares, which was no fault of his, to risk a row with Winifred.

If Soames were to see him in the club it would be sure to come round to her that he wasn't at the dentist's at all. He never knew a family where things 'came round' so. Uneasily, amongst the green baize card-tables, a frown on his olive coloured face, his check trousers crossed, and patent-leather boots shining through the gloom, he sat biting his forefinger, and wondering where the deuce he was to get the money if Erotic failed to win the Lancashire Cup.

His thoughts turned gloomily to the Forsytes. What a set they were! There was no getting anything out of them—at least, it was a matter of extreme difficulty. They were so d—d particular about money matters; not a sportsman amongst the lot, unless it were George. That fellow Soames, for instance, would have a fit if you tried to borrow a tenner from him, or, if he didn't have a fit, he looked at you with his cursed supercilious smile, as if you were a lost soul because you were in want of money.

And that wife of his (Dartie's mouth watered involuntarily), he had tried to be on good terms with her, as one naturally would with any pretty sister-in-law, but he would be cursed if the (he mentally used a coarse word)—would have anything to say to him—she looked at him, indeed, as if he were dirt—and yet she could go far enough, he wouldn't mind betting. He knew women; they weren't made with soft eyes and figures like that for nothing, as that fellow Soames would jolly soon find out, if there were anything in what he had heard about this Buccaneer Johnny.

Rising from his chair, Dartie took a turn across the room, ending in front of the looking-glass over the marble chimney-piece; and there he stood for a long time contemplating in the glass the reflection of his face. It had that look, peculiar to some men, of having been steeped in linseed oil, with its waxed dark moustaches and the little distinguished commencements of side whiskers; and concernedly he felt the promise of a pimple on the side of his slightly curved and fattish nose.

In the meantime old Jolyon had found the remaining chair in Timothy's commodious drawing-room. His advent had obviously put a stop to the conversation, decided awkwardness having set in. Aunt Juley, with her well-known kindheartedness, hastened to set people at their ease again.

"Yes, Jolyon," she said, "we were just saying that you haven't been here for a long time; but we mustn't be surprised. You're busy, of course? James was just saying what a busy time of year...."

"Was he?" said old Jolyon, looking hard at James. "It wouldn't be half so busy if everybody minded their own business."

James, brooding in a small chair from which his knees ran uphill, shifted his feet uneasily, and put one of them down on the cat, which had unwisely taken refuge from old Jolyon beside him.

"Here, you've got a cat here," he said in an injured voice, withdrawing his foot nervously as he felt it squeezing into the soft, furry body.

"Several," said old Jolyon, looking at one face and another; "I trod on one just now."

A silence followed.

Then Mrs. Small, twisting her fingers and gazing round with 'pathetic calm', asked: "And how is dear June?"

A twinkle of humour shot through the sternness of old Jolyon's eyes. Extraordinary old woman, Juley! No one quite like her for saying the wrong thing!

"Bad!" he said; "London don't agree with her—too many people about, too much clatter and chatter by half." He laid emphasis on the words, and again looked James in the face.

Nobody spoke.

A feeling of its being too dangerous to take a step in any direction, or hazard any remark, had fallen on them all. Something of the sense of the impending, that comes over the spectator of a Greek tragedy, had entered that upholstered room, filled with those white-haired, frock-coated old men, and fashionably attired women, who were all of the same blood, between all of whom existed an unseizable resemblance.

Not that they were conscious of it—the visits of such fateful, bitter spirits are only felt.

Then Swithin rose. He would not sit there, feeling like that—he was not to be put down by anyone! And, manoeuvring round the room with added pomp, he shook hands with each separately.

"You tell Timothy from me," he said, "that he coddles himself too much!" Then, turning to Francie, whom he considered 'smart,' he added: "You come with me for a drive one of these days." But this conjured up the vision of that other eventful drive which had been so much talked about, and he stood quite still for a second, with glassy eyes, as though waiting to catch up with the significance of what he himself had said; then, suddenly recollecting that he didn't care a damn, he turned to old Jolyon: "Well, good-bye, Jolyon! You shouldn't go about without an overcoat; you'll be getting sciatica or something!" And, kicking the cat slightly with the pointed tip of his patent leather boot, he took his huge form away.

When he had gone everyone looked secretly at the others, to see how they had taken the mention of the word 'drive'—the word which had become famous, and acquired an overwhelming importance, as the only official—so to speak—news in connection with the vague and sinister rumour clinging to the family tongue.

Euphemia, yielding to an impulse, said with a short laugh: "I'm glad Uncle Swithin doesn't ask me to go for drives."

Mrs. Small, to reassure her and smooth over any little awkwardness the subject might have, replied: "My dear, he likes to take somebody well dressed, who will do him a little credit. I shall never forget the drive he took me. It was an experience!" And her chubby round old face was spread for a moment with a strange contentment; then broke into pouts, and tears came into her eyes. She was thinking of that long ago driving tour she had once taken with Septimus Small.

James, who had relapsed into his nervous brooding in the little chair, suddenly roused himself: "He's a funny fellow, Swithin," he said, but in a half-hearted way.

Old Jolyon's silence, his stern eyes, held them all in a kind of paralysis. He was disconcerted himself by the effect of his own words—an effect which seemed to deepen the importance of the very rumour he had come to scotch; but he was still angry.

He had not done with them yet—No, no—he would give them another rub or two.

He did not wish to rub his nieces, he had no quarrel with them—a young and presentable female always appealed to old Jolyon's clemency—but that fellow James, and, in a less degree perhaps, those others, deserved all they would get. And he, too, asked for Timothy.

As though feeling that some danger threatened her younger brother, Aunt Juley suddenly offered him tea: "There it is," she said, "all cold and nasty, waiting for you in the back drawing room, but Smither shall make you some fresh."

Old Jolyon rose: "Thank you," he said, looking straight at James, "but I've no time for tea, and—scandal, and the rest of it! It's time I was at home. Good-bye, Julia; good-bye, Hester; good-bye, Winifred."

Without more ceremonious adieux, he marched out.

Once again in his cab, his anger evaporated, for so it ever was with his wrath—when he had rapped out, it was gone. Sadness came over his spirit. He had stopped their mouths, maybe, but at what a cost! At the cost of certain knowledge that the rumour he had been resolved not to believe was true. June was abandoned, and for the wife of that fellow's son! He felt it was true, and hardened himself to treat it as if it were not; but the pain he hid beneath this resolution began slowly, surely, to vent itself in a blind resentment against James and his son.

The six women and one man left behind in the little drawing-room began talking as easily as might be

after such an occurrence, for though each one of them knew for a fact that he or she never talked scandal, each one of them also knew that the other six did; all were therefore angry and at a loss. James only was silent, disturbed, to the bottom of his soul.

Presently Francie said: "Do you know, I think Uncle Jolyon is terribly changed this last year. What do you think, Aunt Hester?"

Aunt Hester made a little movement of recoil: "Oh, ask your Aunt Julia!" she said; "I know nothing about it."

No one else was afraid of assenting, and James muttered gloomily at the floor: "He's not half the man he was."

"I've noticed it a long time," went on Francie; "he's aged tremendously."

Aunt Juley shook her head; her face seemed suddenly to have become one immense pout.

"Poor dear Jolyon," she said, "somebody ought to see to it for him!"

There was again silence; then, as though in terror of being left solitarily behind, all five visitors rose simultaneously, and took their departure.

Mrs. Small, Aunt Hester, and their cat were left once more alone, the sound of a door closing in the distance announced the approach of Timothy.

That evening, when Aunt Hester had just got off to sleep in the back bedroom that used to be Aunt Juley's before Aunt Juley took Aunt Ann's, her door was opened, and Mrs. Small, in a pink night-cap, a candle in her hand, entered: "Hester!" she said. "Hester!"

Aunt Hester faintly rustled the sheet.

"Hester," repeated Aunt Juley, to make quite sure that she had awakened her, "I am quite troubled about poor dear Jolyon. What," Aunt Juley dwelt on the word, "do you think ought to be done?"

Aunt Hester again rustled the sheet, her voice was heard faintly pleading: "Done? How should I know?"

Aunt Juley turned away satisfied, and closing the door with extra gentleness so as not to disturb dear Hester, let it slip through her fingers and fall to with a 'crack.'

Back in her own room, she stood at the window gazing at the moon over the trees in the Park, through a chink in the muslin curtains, close drawn lest anyone should see. And there, with her face all round and pouting in its pink cap, and her eyes wet, she thought of 'dear Jolyon,' so old and so lonely, and how she could be of some use to him; and how he would come to love her, as she had never been loved since—since poor Septimus went away.

CHAPTER VIII

DANCE AT ROGER'S

Roger's house in Prince's Gardens was brilliantly alight. Large numbers of wax candles had been collected and placed in cut-glass chandeliers, and the parquet floor of the long, double drawing-room reflected these constellations. An appearance of real spaciousness had been secured by moving out all the furniture on to the upper landings, and enclosing the room with those strange appendages of civilization known as 'rout' seats. In a remote corner, embowered in palms, was a cottage piano, with a copy of the 'Kensington Coil' open on the music-stand.

Roger had objected to a band. He didn't see in the least what they wanted with a band; he wouldn't go to the expense, and there was an end of it. Francie (her mother, whom Roger had long since reduced to chronic dyspepsia, went to bed on such occasions), had been obliged to content herself with supplementing the piano by a young man who played the cornet, and she so arranged with palms that anyone who did not look into the heart of things might imagine there were several musicians secreted there. She made up her mind to tell them to play loud—there was a lot of music in a cornet, if the man would only put his soul into it.

In the more cultivated American tongue, she was 'through' at last—through that tortuous labyrinth of make-shifts, which must be traversed before fashionable display can be combined with the sound economy of a Forsyte. Thin but brilliant, in her maize-coloured frock with much tulle about the shoulders, she went from place to place, fitting on her gloves, and casting her eye over it all.

To the hired butler (for Roger only kept maids) she spoke about the wine. Did he quite understand that Mr. Forsyte wished a dozen bottles of the champagne from Whiteley's to be put out? But if that were finished (she did not suppose it would be, most of the ladies would drink water, no doubt), but if it were, there was the champagne cup, and he must do the best he could with that.

She hated having to say this sort of thing to a butler, it was so *infra dig.*; but what could you do with father? Roger, indeed, after making himself consistently disagreeable about the dance, would come down presently, with his fresh colour and bumpy forehead, as though he had been its promoter; and he would smile, and probably take the prettiest woman in to supper; and at two o'clock, just as they were getting into the swing, he would go up secretly to the musicians and tell them to play 'God Save the Queen,' and go away.

Francie devoutly hoped he might soon get tired, and slip off to bed.

The three or four devoted girl friends who were staying in the house for this dance had partaken with her, in a small, abandoned room upstairs, of tea and cold chicken-legs, hurriedly served; the men had been sent out to dine at Eustace's Club, it being felt that they must be fed up.

Punctually on the stroke of nine arrived Mrs. Small alone. She made elaborate apologies for the absence of Timothy, omitting all mention of Aunt Hester, who, at the last minute, had said she could not be bothered. Francie received her effusively, and placed her on a rout seat, where she left her, pouting and solitary in lavender-coloured satin—the first time she had worn colour since Aunt Ann's death.

The devoted maiden friends came now from their rooms, each by magic arrangement in a differently coloured frock, but all with the same liberal allowance of tulle on the shoulders and at the bosom—for they were, by some fatality, lean to a girl. They were all taken up to Mrs. Small. None stayed with her more than a few seconds, but clustering together talked and twisted their programmes, looking secretly at the door for the first appearance of a man.

Then arrived in a group a number of Nicholases, always punctual—the fashion up Ladbroke Grove way; and close behind them Eustace and his men, gloomy and smelling rather of smoke.

Three or four of Francie's lovers now appeared, one after the other; she had made each promise to come early. They were all clean-shaven and sprightly, with that peculiar kind of young-man sprightliness which had recently invaded Kensington; they did not seem to mind each other's presence in the least, and wore their ties bunching out at the ends, white waistcoats, and socks with clocks. All had handkerchiefs concealed in their cuffs. They moved buoyantly, each armoured in professional gaiety, as though he had come to do great deeds. Their faces when they danced, far from wearing the traditional solemn look of the dancing Englishman, were irresponsible, charming, suave; they bounded, twirling their partners at great pace, without pedantic attention to the rhythm of the music.

At other dancers they looked with a kind of airy scorn—they, the light brigade, the heroes of a hundred Kensington 'hops'—from whom alone could the right manner and smile and step be hoped.

After this the stream came fast; chaperones silting up along the wall facing the entrance, the volatile element swelling the eddy in the larger room.

Men were scarce, and wallflowers wore their peculiar, pathetic expression, a patient, sourish smile which seemed to say: "Oh, no! don't mistake me, I know you are not coming up to me. I can hardly expect that!" And Francie would plead with one of her lovers, or with some callow youth: "Now, to please me, do let me introduce you to Miss Pink; such a nice girl, really!" and she would bring him up, and say: "Miss Pink—Mr. Gathercole. Can you spare him a dance?" Then Miss Pink, smiling her forced smile, colouring a little, answered: "Oh! I think so!" and screening her empty card, wrote on it the name of Gathercole, spelling it passionately in the district that he proposed, about the second extra.

But when the youth had murmured that it was hot, and passed, she relapsed into her attitude of hopeless expectation, into her patient, sourish smile.

Mothers, slowly fanning their faces, watched their daughters, and in their eyes could be read all the story of those daughters' fortunes. As for themselves, to sit hour after hour, dead tired, silent, or talking spasmodically—what did it matter, so long as the girls were having a good time! But to see them neglected and passed by! Ah! they smiled, but their eyes stabbed like the eyes of an offended swan; they longed to pluck young Gathercole by the slack of his dandified breeches, and drag him to

their daughters—the jackanapes!

And all the cruelties and hardness of life, its pathos and unequal chances, its conceit, self-forgetfulness, and patience, were presented on the battle-field of this Kensington ball-room.

Here and there, too, lovers—not lovers like Francie's, a peculiar breed, but simply lovers—trembling, blushing, silent, sought each other by flying glances, sought to meet and touch in the mazes of the dance, and now and again dancing together, struck some beholder by the light in their eyes.

Not a second before ten o'clock came the Jameses—Emily, Rachel, Winifred (Dartie had been left behind, having on a former occasion drunk too much of Roger's champagne), and Cicely, the youngest, making her debut; behind them, following in a hansom from the paternal mansion where they had dined, Soames and Irene.

All these ladies had shoulder-straps and no tulle—thus showing at once, by a bolder exposure of flesh, that they came from the more fashionable side of the Park.

Soames, sidling back from the contact of the dancers, took up a position against the wall. Guarding himself with his pale smile, he stood watching. Waltz after waltz began and ended, couple after couple brushed by with smiling lips, laughter, and snatches of talk; or with set lips, and eyes searching the throng; or again, with silent, parted lips, and eyes on each other. And the scent of festivity, the odour of flowers, and hair, of essences that women love, rose suffocatingly in the heat of the summer night.

Silent, with something of scorn in his smile, Soames seemed to notice nothing; but now and again his eyes, finding that which they sought, would fix themselves on a point in the shifting throng, and the smile die off his lips.

He danced with no one. Some fellows danced with their wives; his sense of 'form' had never permitted him to dance with Irene since their marriage, and the God of the Forsytes alone can tell whether this was a relief to him or not.

She passed, dancing with other men, her dress, iris-coloured, floating away from her feet. She danced well; he was tired of hearing women say with an acid smile: "How beautifully your wife dances, Mr. Forsyte—it's quite a pleasure to watch her!" Tired of answering them with his sidelong glance: "You think so?"

A young couple close by flirted a fan by turns, making an unpleasant draught. Francie and one of her lovers stood near. They were talking of love.

He heard Roger's voice behind, giving an order about supper to a servant. Everything was very second-class! He wished that he had not come! He had asked Irene whether she wanted him; she had answered with that maddening smile of hers "Oh, no!"

Why had he come? For the last quarter of an hour he had not even seen her. Here was George advancing with his Quilpish face; it was too late to get out of his way.

"Have you seen 'The Buccaneer'?" said this licensed wag; "he's on the warpath—hair cut and everything!"

Soames said he had not, and crossing the room, half-empty in an interval of the dance, he went out on the balcony, and looked down into the street.

A carriage had driven up with late arrivals, and round the door hung some of those patient watchers of the London streets who spring up to the call of light or music; their faces, pale and upturned above their black and rusty figures, had an air of stolid watching that annoyed Soames. Why were they allowed to hang about; why didn't the bobby move them on?

But the policeman took no notice of them; his feet were planted apart on the strip of crimson carpet stretched across the pavement; his face, under the helmet, wore the same stolid, watching look as theirs.

Across the road, through the railings, Soames could see the branches of trees shining, faintly stirring in the breeze, by the gleam of the street lamps; beyond, again, the upper lights of the houses on the other side, so many eyes looking down on the quiet blackness of the garden; and over all, the sky, that wonderful London sky, dusted with the innumerable reflection of countless lamps; a dome woven over between its stars with the refraction of human needs and human fancies—immense mirror of pomp and misery that night after night stretches its kindly mocking over miles of houses and gardens, mansions and squalor, over Forsytes, policemen, and patient watchers in the streets.

Soames turned away, and, hidden in the recess, gazed into the lighted room. It was cooler out there. He saw the new arrivals, June and her grandfather, enter. What had made them so late? They stood by the doorway. They looked fagged. Fancy Uncle Jolyon turning out at this time of night! Why hadn't June come to Irene, as she usually did, and it occurred to him suddenly that he had seen nothing of June for a long time now.

Watching her face with idle malice, he saw it change, grow so pale that he thought she would drop, then flame out crimson. Turning to see at what she was looking, he saw his wife on Bosinney's arm, coming from the conservatory at the end of the room. Her eyes were raised to his, as though answering some question he had asked, and he was gazing at her intently.

Soames looked again at June. Her hand rested on old Jolyon's arm; she seemed to be making a request. He saw a surprised look on his uncle's face; they turned and passed through the door out of his sight.

The music began again—a waltz—and, still as a statue in the recess of the window, his face unmoved, but no smile on his lips, Soames waited. Presently, within a yard of the dark balcony, his wife and Bosinney passed. He caught the perfume of the gardenias that she wore, saw the rise and fall of her bosom, the languor in her eyes, her parted lips, and a look on her face that he did not know. To the slow, swinging measure they danced by, and it seemed to him that they clung to each other; he saw her raise her eyes, soft and dark, to Bosinney's, and drop them again.

Very white, he turned back to the balcony, and leaning on it, gazed down on the Square; the figures were still there looking up at the light with dull persistency, the policeman's face, too, upturned, and staring, but he saw nothing of them. Below, a carriage drew up, two figures got in, and drove away....

That evening June and old Jolyon sat down to dinner at the usual hour. The girl was in her customary high-necked frock, old Jolyon had not dressed.

At breakfast she had spoken of the dance at Uncle Roger's, she wanted to go; she had been stupid enough, she said, not to think of asking anyone to take her. It was too late now.

Old Jolyon lifted his keen eyes. June was used to go to dances with Irene as a matter of course! and deliberately fixing his gaze on her, he asked: "Why don't you get Irene?"

No! June did not want to ask Irene; she would only go if—if her grandfather wouldn't mind just for once for a little time!

At her look, so eager and so worn, old Jolyon had grumblingly consented. He did not know what she wanted, he said, with going to a dance like this, a poor affair, he would wager; and she no more fit for it than a cat! What she wanted was sea air, and after his general meeting of the Globular Gold Concessions he was ready to take her. She didn't want to go away? Ah! she would knock herself up! Stealing a mournful look at her, he went on with his breakfast.

June went out early, and wandered restlessly about in the heat. Her little light figure that lately had moved so languidly about its business, was all on fire. She bought herself some flowers. She wanted—she meant to look her best. He would be there! She knew well enough that he had a card. She would show him that she did not care. But deep down in her heart she resolved that evening to win him back. She came in flushed, and talked brightly all lunch; old Jolyon was there, and he was deceived.

In the afternoon she was overtaken by a desperate fit of sobbing. She strangled the noise against the pillows of her bed, but when at last it ceased she saw in the glass a swollen face with reddened eyes, and violet circles round them. She stayed in the darkened room till dinner time.

All through that silent meal the struggle went on within her.

She looked so shadowy and exhausted that old Jolyon told 'Sankey' to countermand the carriage, he would not have her going out.... She was to go to bed! She made no resistance. She went up to her room, and sat in the dark. At ten o'clock she rang for her maid.

"Bring some hot water, and go down and tell Mr. Forsyte that I feel perfectly rested. Say that if he's too tired I can go to the dance by myself."

The maid looked askance, and June turned on her imperiously. "Go," she said, "bring the hot water at once!"

Her ball-dress still lay on the sofa, and with a sort of fierce care she arrayed herself, took the flowers in her hand, and went down, her small face carried high under its burden of hair. She could hear old Jolyon in his room as she passed.

Bewildered and vexed, he was dressing. It was past ten, they would not get there till eleven; the girl was mad. But he dared not cross her—the expression of her face at dinner haunted him.

With great ebony brushes he smoothed his hair till it shone like silver under the light; then he, too, came out on the gloomy staircase.

June met him below, and, without a word, they went to the carriage.

When, after that drive which seemed to last for ever, she entered Roger's drawing-room, she disguised under a mask of resolution a very torment of nervousness and emotion. The feeling of shame at what might be called 'running after him' was smothered by the dread that he might not be there, that she might not see him after all, and by that dogged resolve—somehow, she did not know how—to win him back.

The sight of the ballroom, with its gleaming floor, gave her a feeling of joy, of triumph, for she loved dancing, and when dancing she floated, so light was she, like a strenuous, eager little spirit. He would surely ask her to dance, and if he danced with her it would all be as it was before. She looked about her eagerly.

The sight of Bosinney coming with Irene from the conservatory, with that strange look of utter absorption on his face, struck her too suddenly. They had not seen—no one should see—her distress, not even her grandfather.

She put her hand on Jolyon's arm, and said very low:

"I must go home, Gran; I feel ill."

He hurried her away, grumbling to himself that he had known how it would be.

To her he said nothing; only when they were once more in the carriage, which by some fortunate chance had lingered near the door, he asked her: "What is it, my darling?"

Feeling her whole slender body shaken by sobs, he was terribly alarmed. She must have Blank tomorrow. He would insist upon it. He could not have her like this.... There, there!

June mastered her sobs, and squeezing his hand feverishly, she lay back in her corner, her face muffled in a shawl.

He could only see her eyes, fixed and staring in the dark, but he did not cease to stroke her hand with his thin fingers.

CHAPTER IX

EVENING AT RICHMOND

Other eyes besides the eyes of June and of Soames had seen 'those two' (as Euphemia had already begun to call them) coming from the conservatory; other eyes had noticed the look on Bosinney's face.

There are moments when Nature reveals the passion hidden beneath the careless calm of her ordinary moods—violent spring flashing white on almond-blossom through the purple clouds; a snowy, moonlit peak, with its single star, soaring up to the passionate blue; or against the flames of sunset, an old yew-tree standing dark guardian of some fiery secret.

There are moments, too, when in a picture-gallery, a work, noted by the casual spectator as '..... Titian—remarkably fine,' breaks through the defences of some Forsyte better lunched perhaps than his fellows, and holds him spellbound in a kind of ecstasy. There are things, he feels—there are things here which—well, which are things. Something unreasoning, unreasonable, is upon him; when he tries to define it with the precision of a practical man, it eludes him, slips away, as the glow of the wine he has drunk is slipping away, leaving him cross, and conscious of his liver. He feels that he has been extravagant, prodigal of something; virtue has gone out of him. He did not desire this glimpse of what lay under the three stars of his catalogue. God forbid that he should know anything about the forces of Nature! God forbid that he should admit for a moment that there are such things! Once admit that, and where was he? One paid a shilling for entrance, and another for the programme.

The look which June had seen, which other Forsytes had seen, was like the sudden flashing of a candle through a hole in some imaginary canvas, behind which it was being moved—the sudden flaming-out of a vague, erratic glow, shadowy and enticing. It brought home to onlookers the consciousness that dangerous forces were at work. For a moment they noticed it with pleasure, with interest, then felt they must not notice it at all.

It supplied, however, the reason of June's coming so late and disappearing again without dancing, without even shaking hands with her lover. She was ill, it was said, and no wonder.

But here they looked at each other guiltily. They had no desire to spread scandal, no desire to be ill-natured. Who would have? And to outsiders no word was breathed, unwritten law keeping them silent.

Then came the news that June had gone to the seaside with old Jolyon.

He had carried her off to Broadstairs, for which place there was just then a feeling, Yarmouth having lost caste, in spite of Nicholas, and no Forsyte going to the sea without intending to have an air for his money such as would render him bilious in a week. That fatally aristocratic tendency of the first Forsyte to drink Madeira had left his descendants undoubtedly accessible.

So June went to the sea. The family awaited developments; there was nothing else to do.

But how far—how far had 'those two' gone? How far were they going to go? Could they really be going at all? Nothing could surely come of it, for neither of them had any money. At the most a flirtation, ending, as all such attachments should, at the proper time.

Soames' sister, Winifred Dartie, who had imbibed with the breezes of Mayfair—she lived in Green Street—more fashionable principles in regard to matrimonial behaviour than were current, for instance, in Ladbroke Grove, laughed at the idea of there being anything in it. The 'little thing'—Irene was taller than herself, and it was real testimony to the solid worth of a Forsyte that she should always thus be a 'little thing'—the little thing was bored. Why shouldn't she amuse herself? Soames was rather tiring; and as to Mr. Bosinney—only that buffoon George would have called him the Buccaneer—she maintained that he was very chic.

This dictum—that Bosinney was chic—caused quite a sensation. It failed to convince. That he was 'good-looking in a way' they were prepared to admit, but that anyone could call a man with his pronounced cheekbones, curious eyes, and soft felt hats chic was only another instance of Winifred's extravagant way of running after something new.

It was that famous summer when extravagance was fashionable, when the very earth was extravagant, chestnut-trees spread with blossom, and flowers drenched in perfume, as they had never been before; when roses blew in every garden; and for the swarming stars the nights had hardly space; when every day and all day long the sun, in full armour, swung his brazen shield above the Park, and people did strange things, lurching and dining in the open air. Unprecedented was the tale of cabs and carriages that streamed across the bridges of the shining river, bearing the upper-middle class in thousands to the green glories of Bushey, Richmond, Kew, and Hampton Court. Almost every family with any pretensions to be of the carriage-class paid one visit that year to the horse-chestnuts at Bushey, or took one drive amongst the Spanish chestnuts of Richmond Park. Bowling smoothly, if dustily, along, in a cloud of their own creation, they would stare fashionably at the antlered heads which the great slow deer raised out of a forest of bracken that promised to autumn lovers such cover as was never seen before. And now and again, as the amorous perfume of chestnut flowers and of fern was drifted too near, one would say to the other: "My dear! What a peculiar scent!"

And the lime-flowers that year were of rare prime, near honey-coloured. At the corners of London squares they gave out, as the sun went down, a perfume sweeter than the honey bees had taken—a perfume that stirred a yearning unnamable in the hearts of Forsytes and their peers, taking the cool after dinner in the precincts of those gardens to which they alone had keys.

And that yearning made them linger amidst the dim shapes of flower-beds in the failing daylight, made them turn, and turn, and turn again, as though lovers were waiting for them—waiting for the last light to die away under the shadow of the branches.

Some vague sympathy evoked by the scent of the limes, some sisterly desire to see for herself, some idea of demonstrating the soundness of her dictum that there was 'nothing in it'; or merely the craving to drive down to Richmond, irresistible that summer, moved the mother of the little Darties (of little Publius, of Imogen, Maud, and Benedict) to write the following note to her sister-in-law:

'DEAR IRENE, 'June 30.

'I hear that Soames is going to Henley tomorrow for the night. I thought it would be great fun if we made up a little party and drove down to, Richmond. Will you ask Mr. Bosinney, and I will get young Flippard.

'Emily (they called their mother Emily—it was so chic) will lend us the carriage. I will call for you and your young man at seven o'clock.

'Your affectionate sister,
'WINIFRED DARTIE.

'Montague believes the dinner at the Crown and Sceptre to be quite eatable.'

Montague was Dartie's second and better known name—his first being Moses; for he was nothing if not a man of the world.

Her plan met with more opposition from Providence than so benevolent a scheme deserved. In the first place young Flippard wrote:

'DEAR Mrs. DARTIE,

'Awfully sorry. Engaged two deep.

'Yours,
'AUGUSTUS FLIPPARD.'

It was late to send into the by-ways and hedges to remedy this misfortune. With the promptitude and conduct of a mother, Winifred fell back on her husband. She had, indeed, the decided but tolerant temperament that goes with a good deal of profile, fair hair, and greenish eyes. She was seldom or never at a loss; or if at a loss, was always able to convert it into a gain.

Dartie, too, was in good feather. Erotic had failed to win the Lancashire Cup. Indeed, that celebrated animal, owned as he was by a pillar of the turf, who had secretly laid many thousands against him, had not even started. The forty-eight hours that followed his scratching were among the darkest in Dartie's life.

Visions of James haunted him day and night. Black thoughts about Soames mingled with the faintest hopes. On the Friday night he got drunk, so greatly was he affected. But on Saturday morning the true Stock Exchange instinct triumphed within him. Owing some hundreds, which by no possibility could he pay, he went into town and put them all on Concertina for the Saltown Borough Handicap.

As he said to Major Scotton, with whom he lunched at the Iseeum: "That little Jew boy, Nathans, had given him the tip. He didn't care a cursh. He wash in—a mucker. If it didn't come up—well then, damme, the old man would have to pay!"

A bottle of Pol Roger to his own cheek had given him a new contempt for James.

It came up. Concertina was squeezed home by her neck—a terrible squeak! But, as Dartie said: There was nothing like pluck!

He was by no means averse to the expedition to Richmond. He would 'stand' it himself! He cherished an admiration for Irene, and wished to be on more playful terms with her.

At half-past five the Park Lane footman came round to say: Mrs. Forsyte was very sorry, but one of the horses was coughing!

Undaunted by this further blow, Winifred at once despatched little Publius (now aged seven) with the nursery governess to Montpellier Square.

They would go down in hansoms and meet at the Crown and Sceptre at 7.45.

Dartie, on being told, was pleased enough. It was better than going down with your back to the horses! He had no objection to driving down with Irene. He supposed they would pick up the others at Montpellier Square, and swop hansoms there?

Informed that the meet was at the Crown and Sceptre, and that he would have to drive with his wife, he turned sulky, and said it was d—d slow!

At seven o'clock they started, Dartie offering to bet the driver half-a-crown he didn't do it in the

three-quarters of an hour.

Twice only did husband and wife exchange remarks on the way.

Dartie said: "It'll put Master Soames's nose out of joint to hear his wife's been drivin' in a hansom with Master Bosinney!"

Winifred replied: "Don't talk such nonsense, Monty!"

"Nonsense!" repeated Dartie. "You don't know women, my fine lady!"

On the other occasion he merely asked: "How am I looking? A bit puffy about the gills? That fizz old George is so fond of is a windy wine!"

He had been lunching with George Forsyte at the Haversnake.

Bosinney and Irene had arrived before them. They were standing in one of the long French windows overlooking the river.

Windows that summer were open all day long, and all night too, and day and night the scents of flowers and trees came in, the hot scent of parching grass, and the cool scent of the heavy dews.

To the eye of the observant Dartie his two guests did not appear to be making much running, standing there close together, without a word. Bosinney was a hungry-looking creature—not much go about him.

He left them to Winifred, however, and busied himself to order the dinner.

A Forsyte will require good, if not delicate feeding, but a Dartie will tax the resources of a Crown and Sceptre. Living as he does, from hand to mouth, nothing is too good for him to eat; and he will eat it. His drink, too, will need to be carefully provided; there is much drink in this country 'not good enough' for a Dartie; he will have the best. Paying for things vicariously, there is no reason why he should stint himself. To stint yourself is the mark of a fool, not of a Dartie.

The best of everything! No sounder principle on which a man can base his life, whose father-in-law has a very considerable income, and a partiality for his grandchildren.

With his not unable eye Dartie had spotted this weakness in James the very first year after little Publius's arrival (an error); he had profited by his perspicacity. Four little Darties were now a sort of perpetual insurance.

The feature of the feast was unquestionably the red mullet. This delectable fish, brought from a considerable distance in a state of almost perfect preservation, was first fried, then boned, then served in ice, with Madeira punch in place of sauce, according to a recipe known to a few men of the world.

Nothing else calls for remark except the payment of the bill by Dartie.

He had made himself extremely agreeable throughout the meal; his bold, admiring stare seldom abandoning Irene's face and figure. As he was obliged to confess to himself, he got no change out of her—she was cool enough, as cool as her shoulders looked under their veil of creamy lace. He expected to have caught her out in some little game with Bosinney; but not a bit of it, she kept up her end remarkably well. As for that architect chap, he was as glum as a bear with a sore head—Winifred could barely get a word out of him; he ate nothing, but he certainly took his liquor, and his face kept getting whiter, and his eyes looked queer.

It was all very amusing.

For Dartie himself was in capital form, and talked freely, with a certain poignancy, being no fool. He told two or three stories verging on the improper, a concession to the company, for his stories were not used to verging. He proposed Irene's health in a mock speech. Nobody drank it, and Winifred said: "Don't be such a clown, Monty!"

At her suggestion they went after dinner to the public terrace overlooking the river.

"I should like to see the common people making love," she said, "it's such fun!"

There were numbers of them walking in the cool, after the day's heat, and the air was alive with the sound of voices, coarse and loud, or soft as though murmuring secrets.

It was not long before Winifred's better sense—she was the only Forsyte present—secured them an

empty bench. They sat down in a row. A heavy tree spread a thick canopy above their heads, and the haze darkened slowly over the river.

Dartie sat at the end, next to him Irene, then Bosinney, then Winifred. There was hardly room for four, and the man of the world could feel Irene's arm crushed against his own; he knew that she could not withdraw it without seeming rude, and this amused him; he devised every now and again a movement that would bring her closer still. He thought: 'That Buccaneer Johnny shan't have it all to himself! It's a pretty tight fit, certainly!'

From far down below on the dark river came drifting the tinkle of a mandoline, and voices singing the old round:

'A boat, a boat, unto the ferry, For we'll go over and be merry; And laugh, and quaff, and drink brown sherry!'

And suddenly the moon appeared, young and tender, floating up on her back from behind a tree; and as though she had breathed, the air was cooler, but down that cooler air came always the warm odour of the limes.

Over his cigar Dartie peered round at Bosinney, who was sitting with his arms crossed, staring straight in front of him, and on his face the look of a man being tortured.

And Dartie shot a glance at the face between, so veiled by the overhanging shadow that it was but like a darker piece of the darkness shaped and breathed on; soft, mysterious, enticing.

A hush had fallen on the noisy terrace, as if all the strollers were thinking secrets too precious to be spoken.

And Dartie thought: 'Women!'

The glow died above the river, the singing ceased; the young moon hid behind a tree, and all was dark. He pressed himself against Irene.

He was not alarmed at the shuddering that ran through the limbs he touched, or at the troubled, scornful look of her eyes. He felt her trying to draw herself away, and smiled.

It must be confessed that the man of the world had drunk quite as much as was good for him.

With thick lips parted under his well-curved moustaches, and his bold eyes aslant upon her, he had the malicious look of a satyr.

Along the pathway of sky between the hedges of the tree tops the stars clustered forth; like mortals beneath, they seemed to shift and swarm and whisper. Then on the terrace the buzz broke out once more, and Dartie thought: 'Ah! he's a poor, hungry-looking devil, that Bosinney!' and again he pressed himself against Irene.

The movement deserved a better success. She rose, and they all followed her.

The man of the world was more than ever determined to see what she was made of. Along the terrace he kept close at her elbow. He had within him much good wine. There was the long drive home, the long drive and the warm dark and the pleasant closeness of the hansom cab—with its insulation from the world devised by some great and good man. That hungry architect chap might drive with his wife—he wished him joy of her! And, conscious that his voice was not too steady, he was careful not to speak; but a smile had become fixed on his thick lips.

They strolled along toward the cabs awaiting them at the farther end. His plan had the merit of all great plans, an almost brutal simplicity he would merely keep at her elbow till she got in, and get in quickly after her.

But when Irene reached the cab she did not get in; she slipped, instead, to the horse's head. Dartie was not at the moment sufficiently master of his legs to follow. She stood stroking the horse's nose, and, to his annoyance, Bosinney was at her side first. She turned and spoke to him rapidly, in a low voice; the words 'That man' reached Dartie. He stood stubbornly by the cab step, waiting for her to come back. He knew a trick worth two of that!

Here, in the lamp-light, his figure (no more than medium height), well squared in its white evening waistcoat, his light overcoat flung over his arm, a pink flower in his button-hole, and on his dark face that look of confident, good-humoured insolence, he was at his best—a thorough man of the world.

Winifred was already in her cab. Dartie reflected that Bosinney would have a poorish time in that cab

if he didn't look sharp! Suddenly he received a push which nearly overturned him in the road. Bosinney's voice hissed in his ear: "I am taking Irene back; do you understand?" He saw a face white with passion, and eyes that glared at him like a wild cat's.

"Eh?" he stammered. "What? Not a bit. You take my wife!"

"Get away!" hissed Bosinney—"or I'll throw you into the road!"

Dartie recoiled; he saw as plainly as possible that the fellow meant it. In the space he made Irene had slipped by, her dress brushed his legs. Bosinney stepped in after her.

"Go on!" he heard the Buccaneer cry. The cabman flicked his horse. It sprang forward.

Dartie stood for a moment dumbfounded; then, dashing at the cab where his wife sat, he scrambled in.

"Drive on!" he shouted to the driver, "and don't you lose sight of that fellow in front!"

Seated by his wife's side, he burst into imprecations. Calming himself at last with a supreme effort, he added: "A pretty mess you've made of it, to let the Buccaneer drive home with her; why on earth couldn't you keep hold of him? He's mad with love; any fool can see that!"

He drowned Winifred's rejoinder with fresh calls to the Almighty; nor was it until they reached Barnes that he ceased a Jeremiad, in the course of which he had abused her, her father, her brother, Irene, Bosinney, the name of Forsyte, his own children, and cursed the day when he had ever married.

Winifred, a woman of strong character, let him have his say, at the end of which he lapsed into sulky silence. His angry eyes never deserted the back of that cab, which, like a lost chance, haunted the darkness in front of him.

Fortunately he could not hear Bosinney's passionate pleading—that pleading which the man of the world's conduct had let loose like a flood; he could not see Irene shivering, as though some garment had been torn from her, nor her eyes, black and mournful, like the eyes of a beaten child. He could not hear Bosinney entreating, entreating, always entreating; could not hear her sudden, soft weeping, nor see that poor, hungry-looking devil, awed and trembling, humbly touching her hand.

In Montpellier Square their cabman, following his instructions to the letter, faithfully drew up behind the cab in front. The Darties saw Bosinney spring out, and Irene follow, and hasten up the steps with bent head. She evidently had her key in her hand, for she disappeared at once. It was impossible to tell whether she had turned to speak to Bosinney.

The latter came walking past their cab; both husband and wife had an admirable view of his face in the light of a street lamp. It was working with violent emotion.

"Good-night, Mr. Bosinney!" called Winifred.

Bosinney started, clawed off his hat, and hurried on. He had obviously forgotten their existence.

"There!" said Dartie, "did you see the beast's face? What did I say? Fine games!" He improved the occasion.

There had so clearly been a crisis in the cab that Winifred was unable to defend her theory.

She said: "I shall say nothing about it. I don't see any use in making a fuss!"

With that view Dartie at once concurred; looking upon James as a private preserve, he disapproved of his being disturbed by the troubles of others.

"Quite right," he said; "let Soames look after himself. He's jolly well able to!"

Thus speaking, the Darties entered their habitat in Green Street, the rent of which was paid by James, and sought a well-earned rest. The hour was midnight, and no Forsytes remained abroad in the streets to spy out Bosinney's wanderings; to see him return and stand against the rails of the Square garden, back from the glow of the street lamp; to see him stand there in the shadow of trees, watching the house where in the dark was hidden she whom he would have given the world to see for a single minute—she who was now to him the breath of the lime-trees, the meaning of the light and the darkness, the very beating of his own heart.

CHAPTER X

DIAGNOSIS OF A FORSYTE

It is in the nature of a Forsyte to be ignorant that he is a Forsyte; but young Jolyon was well aware of being one. He had not known it till after the decisive step which had made him an outcast; since then the knowledge had been with him continually. He felt it throughout his alliance, throughout all his dealings with his second wife, who was emphatically not a Forsyte.

He knew that if he had not possessed in great measure the eye for what he wanted, the tenacity to hold on to it, the sense of the folly of wasting that for which he had given so big a price—in other words, the 'sense of property' he could never have retained her (perhaps never would have desired to retain her) with him through all the financial troubles, slights, and misconstructions of those fifteen years; never have induced her to marry him on the death of his first wife; never have lived it all through, and come up, as it were, thin, but smiling.

He was one of those men who, seated cross-legged like miniature Chinese idols in the cages of their own hearts, are ever smiling at themselves a doubting smile. Not that this smile, so intimate and eternal, interfered with his actions, which, like his chin and his temperament, were quite a peculiar blend of softness and determination.

He was conscious, too, of being a Forsyte in his work, that painting of water-colours to which he devoted so much energy, always with an eye on himself, as though he could not take so unpractical a pursuit quite seriously, and always with a certain queer uneasiness that he did not make more money at it.

It was, then, this consciousness of what it meant to be a Forsyte, that made him receive the following letter from old Jolyon, with a mixture of sympathy and disgust:

'SHELDRAKE HOUSE, 'BROADSTAIRS,

'July 1. 'MY DEAR JO,'

(The Dad's handwriting had altered very little in the thirty odd years that he remembered it.)

'We have been here now a fortnight, and have had good weather on the whole. The air is bracing, but my liver is out of order, and I shall be glad enough to get back to town. I cannot say much for June, her health and spirits are very indifferent, and I don't see what is to come of it. She says nothing, but it is clear that she is harping on this engagement, which is an engagement and no engagement, and—goodness knows what. I have grave doubts whether she ought to be allowed to return to London in the present state of affairs, but she is so self-willed that she might take it into her head to come up at any moment. The fact is someone ought to speak to Bosinney and ascertain what he means. I'm afraid of this myself, for I should certainly rap him over the knuckles, but I thought that you, knowing him at the Club, might put in a word, and get to ascertain what the fellow is about. You will of course in no way commit June. I shall be glad to hear from you in the course of a few days whether you have succeeded in gaining any information. The situation is very distressing to me, I worry about it at night.

With my love to Jolly and Holly.

'I am,

'Your affect. father,

'JOLYON FORSYTE.'

Young Jolyon pondered this letter so long and seriously that his wife noticed his preoccupation, and asked him what was the matter. He replied: "Nothing."

It was a fixed principle with him never to allude to June. She might take alarm, he did not know what she might think; he hastened, therefore, to banish from his manner all traces of absorption, but in this he was about as successful as his father would have been, for he had inherited all old Jolyon's transparency in matters of domestic finesse; and young Mrs. Jolyon, busying herself over the affairs of the house, went about with tightened lips, stealing at him unfathomable looks.

He started for the Club in the afternoon with the letter in his pocket, and without having made up his mind.

To sound a man as to 'his intentions' was peculiarly unpleasant to him; nor did his own anomalous position diminish this unpleasantness. It was so like his family, so like all the people they knew and

mixed with, to enforce what they called their rights over a man, to bring him up to the mark; so like them to carry their business principles into their private relations.

And how that phrase in the letter—'You will, of course, in no way commit June'—gave the whole thing away.

Yet the letter, with the personal grievance, the concern for June, the 'rap over the knuckles,' was all so natural. No wonder his father wanted to know what Bosinney meant, no wonder he was angry.

It was difficult to refuse! But why give the thing to him to do? That was surely quite unbecoming; but so long as a Forsyte got what he was after, he was not too particular about the means, provided appearances were saved.

How should he set about it, or how refuse? Both seemed impossible. So, young Jolyon!

He arrived at the Club at three o'clock, and the first person he saw was Bosinney himself, seated in a corner, staring out of the window.

Young Jolyon sat down not far off, and began nervously to reconsider his position. He looked covertly at Bosinney sitting there unconscious. He did not know him very well, and studied him attentively for perhaps the first time; an unusual looking man, unlike in dress, face, and manner to most of the other members of the Club—young Jolyon himself, however different he had become in mood and temper, had always retained the neat reticence of Forsyte appearance. He alone among Forsytes was ignorant of Bosinney's nickname. The man was unusual, not eccentric, but unusual; he looked worn, too, haggard, hollow in the cheeks beneath those broad, high cheekbones, though without any appearance of ill-health, for he was strongly built, with curly hair that seemed to show all the vitality of a fine constitution.

Something in his face and attitude touched young Jolyon. He knew what suffering was like, and this man looked as if he were suffering.

He got up and touched his arm.

Bosinney started, but exhibited no sign of embarrassment on seeing who it was.

Young Jolyon sat down.

"I haven't seen you for a long time," he said. "How are you getting on with my cousin's house?"

"It'll be finished in about a week."

"I congratulate you!"

"Thanks—I don't know that it's much of a subject for congratulation."

"No?" queried young Jolyon; "I should have thought you'd be glad to get a long job like that off your hands; but I suppose you feel it much as I do when I part with a picture—a sort of child?"

He looked kindly at Bosinney.

"Yes," said the latter more cordially, "it goes out from you and there's an end of it. I didn't know you painted."

"Only water-colours; I can't say I believe in my work."

"Don't believe in it? There—how can you do it? Work's no use unless you believe in it!"

"Good," said young Jolyon; "it's exactly what I've always said. By-the-bye, have you noticed that whenever one says 'Good,' one always adds 'it's exactly what I've always said'! But if you ask me how I do it, I answer, because I'm a Forsyte."

"A Forsyte! I never thought of you as one!"

"A Forsyte," replied young Jolyon, "is not an uncommon animal. There are hundreds among the members of this Club. Hundreds out there in the streets; you meet them wherever you go!"

"And how do you tell them, may I ask?" said Bosinney.

"By their sense of property. A Forsyte takes a practical—one might say a commonsense—view of things, and a practical view of things is based fundamentally on a sense of property. A Forsyte, you will notice, never gives himself away."

"Joking?"

Young Jolyon's eye twinkled.

"Not much. As a Forsyte myself, I have no business to talk. But I'm a kind of thoroughbred mongrel; now, there's no mistaking you: You're as different from me as I am from my Uncle James, who is the perfect specimen of a Forsyte. His sense of property is extreme, while you have practically none. Without me in between, you would seem like a different species. I'm the missing link. We are, of course, all of us the slaves of property, and I admit that it's a question of degree, but what I call a 'Forsyte' is a man who is decidedly more than less a slave of property. He knows a good thing, he knows a safe thing, and his grip on property—it doesn't matter whether it be wives, houses, money, or reputation—is his hall-mark."

"Ah!" murmured Bosinney. "You should patent the word."

"I should like," said young Jolyon, "to lecture on it:

"Properties and quality of a Forsyte: This little animal, disturbed by the ridicule of his own sort, is unaffected in his motions by the laughter of strange creatures (you or I). Hereditarily disposed to myopia, he recognises only the persons of his own species, amongst which he passes an existence of competitive tranquillity."

"You talk of them," said Bosinney, "as if they were half England."

"They are," repeated young Jolyon, "half England, and the better half, too, the safe half, the three per cent. half, the half that counts. It's their wealth and security that makes everything possible; makes your art possible, makes literature, science, even religion, possible. Without Forsytes, who believe in none of these things, and habitats but turn them all to use, where should we be? My dear sir, the Forsytes are the middlemen, the commercials, the pillars of society, the cornerstones of convention; everything that is admirable!"

"I don't know whether I catch your drift," said Bosinney, "but I fancy there are plenty of Forsytes, as you call them, in my profession."

"Certainly," replied young Jolyon. "The great majority of architects, painters, or writers have no principles, like any other Forsytes. Art, literature, religion, survive by virtue of the few cranks who really believe in such things, and the many Forsytes who make a commercial use of them. At a low estimate, three-fourths of our Royal Academicians are Forsytes, seven-eighths of our novelists, a large proportion of the press. Of science I can't speak; they are magnificently represented in religion; in the House of Commons perhaps more numerous than anywhere; the aristocracy speaks for itself. But I'm not laughing. It is dangerous to go against the majority and what a majority!" He fixed his eyes on Bosinney: "It's dangerous to let anything carry you away—a house, a picture, a—woman!"

They looked at each other.—And, as though he had done that which no Forsyte did—given himself away, young Jolyon drew into his shell. Bosinney broke the silence.

"Why do you take your own people as the type?" said he.

"My people," replied young Jolyon, "are not very extreme, and they have their own private peculiarities, like every other family, but they possess in a remarkable degree those two qualities which are the real tests of a Forsyte—the power of never being able to give yourself up to anything soul and body, and the 'sense of property'."

Bosinney smiled: "How about the big one, for instance?"

"Do you mean Swithin?" asked young Jolyon. "Ah! in Swithin there's something primeval still. The town and middle-class life haven't digested him yet. All the old centuries of farm work and brute force have settled in him, and there they've stuck, for all he's so distinguished."

Bosinney seemed to ponder. "Well, you've hit your cousin Soames off to the life," he said suddenly. "He'll never blow his brains out."

Young Jolyon shot at him a penetrating glance.

"No," he said; "he won't. That's why he's to be reckoned with. Look out for their grip! It's easy to laugh, but don't mistake me. It doesn't do to despise a Forsyte; it doesn't do to disregard them!"

"Yet you've done it yourself!"

Young Jolyon acknowledged the hit by losing his smile.

"You forget," he said with a queer pride, "I can hold on, too—I'm a Forsyte myself. We're all in the path of great forces. The man who leaves the shelter of the wall—well—you know what I mean. I don't," he ended very low, as though uttering a threat, "recommend every man to-go-my-way. It depends."

The colour rushed into Bosinney's face, but soon receded, leaving it sallow-brown as before. He gave a short laugh, that left his lips fixed in a queer, fierce smile; his eyes mocked young Jolyon.

"Thanks," he said. "It's deuced kind of you. But you're not the only chaps that can hold on." He rose.

Young Jolyon looked after him as he walked away, and, resting his head on his hand, sighed.

In the drowsy, almost empty room the only sounds were the rustle of newspapers, the scraping of matches being struck. He stayed a long time without moving, living over again those days when he, too, had sat long hours watching the clock, waiting for the minutes to pass—long hours full of the torments of uncertainty, and of a fierce, sweet aching; and the slow, delicious agony of that season came back to him with its old poignancy. The sight of Bosinney, with his haggard face, and his restless eyes always wandering to the clock, had roused in him a pity, with which was mingled strange, irresistible envy.

He knew the signs so well. Whither was he going—to what sort of fate? What kind of woman was it who was drawing him to her by that magnetic force which no consideration of honour, no principle, no interest could withstand; from which the only escape was flight.

Flight! But why should Bosinney fly? A man fled when he was in danger of destroying hearth and home, when there were children, when he felt himself trampling down ideals, breaking something. But here, so he had heard, it was all broken to his hand.

He himself had not fled, nor would he fly if it were all to come over again. Yet he had gone further than Bosinney, had broken up his own unhappy home, not someone else's: And the old saying came back to him: 'A man's fate lies in his own heart.'

In his own heart! The proof of the pudding was in the eating—Bosinney had still to eat his pudding.

His thoughts passed to the woman, the woman whom he did not know, but the outline of whose story he had heard.

An unhappy marriage! No ill-treatment—only that indefinable malaise, that terrible blight which killed all sweetness under Heaven; and so from day to day, from night to night, from week to week, from year to year, till death should end it.

But young Jolyon, the bitterness of whose own feelings time had assuaged, saw Soames' side of the question too. Whence should a man like his cousin, saturated with all the prejudices and beliefs of his class, draw the insight or inspiration necessary to break up this life? It was a question of imagination, of projecting himself into the future beyond the unpleasant gossip, sneers, and tattle that followed on such separations, beyond the passing pangs that the lack of the sight of her would cause, beyond the grave disapproval of the worthy. But few men, and especially few men of Soames' class, had imagination enough for that. A deal of mortals in this world, and not enough imagination to go round! And sweet Heaven, what a difference between theory and practice; many a man, perhaps even Soames, held chivalrous views on such matters, who when the shoe pinched found a distinguishing factor that made of himself an exception.

Then, too, he distrusted his judgment. He had been through the experience himself, had tasted too the dregs the bitterness of an unhappy marriage, and how could he take the wide and dispassionate view of those who had never been within sound of the battle? His evidence was too first-hand—like the evidence on military matters of a soldier who has been through much active service, against that of civilians who have not suffered the disadvantage of seeing things too close. Most people would consider such a marriage as that of Soames and Irene quite fairly successful; he had money, she had beauty; it was a case for compromise. There was no reason why they should not jog along, even if they hated each other. It would not matter if they went their own ways a little so long as the decencies were observed—the sanctity of the marriage tie, of the common home, respected. Half the marriages of the upper classes were conducted on these lines: Do not offend the susceptibilities of Society; do not offend the susceptibilities of the Church. To avoid offending these is worth the sacrifice of any private feelings. The advantages of the stable home are visible, tangible, so many pieces of property; there is no risk in the statu quo. To break up a home is at the best a dangerous experiment, and selfish into the bargain.

This was the case for the defence, and young Jolyon sighed.

'The core of it all,' he thought, 'is property, but there are many people who would not like it put that way. To them it is "the sanctity of the marriage tie"; but the sanctity of the marriage tie is dependent on the sanctity of the family, and the sanctity of the family is dependent on the sanctity of property. And yet I imagine all these people are followers of One who never owned anything. It is curious!

And again young Jolyon sighed.

'Am I going on my way home to ask any poor devils I meet to share my dinner, which will then be too little for myself, or, at all events, for my wife, who is necessary to my health and happiness? It may be that after all Soames does well to exercise his rights and support by his practice the sacred principle of property which benefits us all, with the exception of those who suffer by the process.'

And so he left his chair, threaded his way through the maze of seats, took his hat, and languidly up the hot streets crowded with carriages, reeking with dusty odours, wended his way home.

Before reaching Wistaria Avenue he removed old Jolyon's letter from his pocket, and tearing it carefully into tiny pieces, scattered them in the dust of the road.

He let himself in with his key, and called his wife's name. But she had gone out, taking Jolly and Holly, and the house was empty; alone in the garden the dog Balthasar lay in the shade snapping at flies.

Young Jolyon took his seat there, too, under the pear-tree that bore no fruit.

CHAPTER XI

BOSINNEY ON PAROLE

The day after the evening at Richmond Soames returned from Henley by a morning train. Not constitutionally interested in amphibious sports, his visit had been one of business rather than pleasure, a client of some importance having asked him down.

He went straight to the City, but finding things slack, he left at three o'clock, glad of this chance to get home quietly. Irene did not expect him. Not that he had any desire to spy on her actions, but there was no harm in thus unexpectedly surveying the scene.

After changing to Park clothes he went into the drawing-room. She was sitting idly in the corner of the sofa, her favourite seat; and there were circles under her eyes, as though she had not slept.

He asked: "How is it you're in? Are you expecting somebody?"

"Yes that is, not particularly."

"Who?"

"Mr. Bosinney said he might come."

"Bosinney. He ought to be at work."

To this she made no answer.

"Well," said Soames, "I want you to come out to the Stores with me, and after that we'll go to the Park."

"I don't want to go out; I have a headache."

Soames replied: "If ever I want you to do anything, you've always got a headache. It'll do you good to come and sit under the trees."

She did not answer.

Soames was silent for some minutes; at last he said: "I don't know what your idea of a wife's duty is. I never have known!"

He had not expected her to reply, but she did.

"I have tried to do what you want; it's not my fault that I haven't been able to put my heart into it."

"Whose fault is it, then?" He watched her askance.

"Before we were married you promised to let me go if our marriage was not a success. Is it a success?"

Soames frowned.

"Success," he stammered—"it would be a success if you behaved yourself properly!"

"I have tried," said Irene. "Will you let me go?"

Soames turned away. Secretly alarmed, he took refuge in bluster.

"Let you go? You don't know what you're talking about. Let you go? How can I let you go? We're married, aren't we? Then, what are you talking about? For God's sake, don't let's have any of this sort of nonsense! Get your hat on, and come and sit in the Park."

"Then, you won't let me go?"

He felt her eyes resting on him with a strange, touching look.

"Let you go!" he said; "and what on earth would you do with yourself if I did? You've got no money!"

"I could manage somehow."

He took a swift turn up and down the room; then came and stood before her.

"Understand," he said, "once and for all, I won't have you say this sort of thing. Go and get your hat on!"

She did not move.

"I suppose," said Soames, "you don't want to miss Bosinney if he comes!"

Irene got up slowly and left the room. She came down with her hat on.

They went out.

In the Park, the motley hour of mid-afternoon, when foreigners and other pathetic folk drive, thinking themselves to be in fashion, had passed; the right, the proper, hour had come, was nearly gone, before Soames and Irene seated themselves under the Achilles statue.

It was some time since he had enjoyed her company in the Park. That was one of the past delights of the first two seasons of his married life, when to feel himself the possessor of this gracious creature before all London had been his greatest, though secret, pride. How many afternoons had he not sat beside her, extremely neat, with light grey gloves and faint, supercilious smile, nodding to acquaintances, and now and again removing his hat.

His light grey gloves were still on his hands, and on his lips his smile sardonic, but where the feeling in his heart?

The seats were emptying fast, but still he kept her there, silent and pale, as though to work out a secret punishment. Once or twice he made some comment, and she bent her head, or answered "Yes" with a tired smile.

Along the rails a man was walking so fast that people stared after him when he passed.

"Look at that ass!" said Soames; "he must be mad to walk like that in this heat!"

He turned; Irene had made a rapid movement.

"Hallo!" he said: "it's our friend the Buccaneer!"

And he sat still, with his sneering smile, conscious that Irene was sitting still, and smiling too.

"Will she bow to him?" he thought.

But she made no sign.

Bosinney reached the end of the rails, and came walking back amongst the chairs, quartering his

ground like a pointer. When he saw them he stopped dead, and raised his hat.

The smile never left Soames' face; he also took off his hat.

Bosinney came up, looking exhausted, like a man after hard physical exercise; the sweat stood in drops on his brow, and Soames' smile seemed to say: "You've had a trying time, my friendWhat are you doing in the Park?" he asked. "We thought you despised such frivolity!"

Bosinney did not seem to hear; he made his answer to Irene: "I've been round to your place; I hoped I should find you in."

Somebody tapped Soames on the back, and spoke to him; and in the exchange of those platitudes over his shoulder, he missed her answer, and took a resolution.

"We're just going in," he said to Bosinney; "you'd better come back to dinner with us." Into that invitation he put a strange bravado, a stranger pathos: "You, can't deceive me," his look and voice seemed saying, "but see—I trust you—I'm not afraid of you!"

They started back to Montpellier Square together, Irene between them. In the crowded streets Soames went on in front. He did not listen to their conversation; the strange resolution of trustfulness he had taken seemed to animate even his secret conduct. Like a gambler, he said to himself: 'It's a card I dare not throw away—I must play it for what it's worth. I have not too many chances.'

He dressed slowly, heard her leave her room and go downstairs, and, for full five minutes after, dawdled about in his dressing-room. Then he went down, purposely shutting the door loudly to show that he was coming. He found them standing by the hearth, perhaps talking, perhaps not; he could not say.

He played his part out in the farce, the long evening through—his manner to his guest more friendly than it had ever been before; and when at last Bosinney went, he said: "You must come again soon; Irene likes to have you to talk about the house!" Again his voice had the strange bravado and the stranger pathos; but his hand was cold as ice.

Loyal to his resolution, he turned away from their parting, turned away from his wife as she stood under the hanging lamp to say good-night—away from the sight of her golden head shining so under the light, of her smiling mournful lips; away from the sight of Bosinney's eyes looking at her, so like a dog's looking at its master.

And he went to bed with the certainty that Bosinney was in love with his wife.

The summer night was hot, so hot and still that through every opened window came in but hotter air. For long hours he lay listening to her breathing.

She could sleep, but he must lie awake. And, lying awake, he hardened himself to play the part of the serene and trusting husband.

In the small hours he slipped out of bed, and passing into his dressing-room, leaned by the open window.

He could hardly breathe.

A night four years ago came back to him—the night but one before his marriage; as hot and stifling as this.

He remembered how he had lain in a long cane chair in the window of his sitting-room off Victoria Street. Down below in a side street a man had banged at a door, a woman had cried out; he remembered, as though it were now, the sound of the scuffle, the slam of the door, the dead silence that followed. And then the early water-cart, cleansing the reek of the streets, had approached through the strange-seeming, useless lamp-light; he seemed to hear again its rumble, nearer and nearer, till it passed and slowly died away.

He leaned far out of the dressing-room window over the little court below, and saw the first light spread. The outlines of dark walls and roofs were blurred for a moment, then came out sharper than before.

He remembered how that other night he had watched the lamps paling all the length of Victoria Street; how he had hurried on his clothes and gone down into the street, down past houses and squares, to the street where she was staying, and there had stood and looked at the front of the little house, as still and grey as the face of a dead man.

And suddenly it shot through his mind; like a sick man's fancy: What's he doing?—that fellow who haunts me, who was here this evening, who's in love with my wife—prowling out there, perhaps, looking for her as I know he was looking for her this afternoon; watching my house now, for all I can tell!

He stole across the landing to the front of the house, stealthily drew aside a blind, and raised a window.

The grey light clung about the trees of the square, as though Night, like a great downy moth, had brushed them with her wings. The lamps were still alight, all pale, but not a soul stirred—no living thing in sight.

Yet suddenly, very faint, far off in the deathly stillness, he heard a cry writhing, like the voice of some wandering soul barred out of heaven, and crying for its happiness. There it was again—again! Soames shut the window, shuddering.

Then he thought: 'Ah! it's only the peacocks, across the water.'

CHAPTER XII

JUNE PAYS SOME CALLS

Jolyon stood in the narrow hall at Broadstairs, inhaling that odour of oilcloth and herrings which permeates all respectable seaside lodging-houses. On a chair—a shiny leather chair, displaying its horsehair through a hole in the top left-hand corner—stood a black despatch case. This he was filling with papers, with the Times, and a bottle of Eau-de Cologne. He had meetings that day of the 'Globular Gold Concessions' and the 'New Colliery Company, Limited,' to which he was going up, for he never missed a Board; to 'miss a Board' would be one more piece of evidence that he was growing old, and this his jealous Forsyte spirit could not bear.

His eyes, as he filled that black despatch case, looked as if at any moment they might blaze up with anger. So gleams the eye of a schoolboy, baited by a ring of his companions; but he controls himself, deterred by the fearful odds against him. And old Jolyon controlled himself, keeping down, with his masterful restraint now slowly wearing out, the irritation fostered in him by the conditions of his life.

He had received from his son an unpractical letter, in which by rambling generalities the boy seemed trying to get out of answering a plain question. 'I've seen Bosinney,' he said; 'he is not a criminal. The more I see of people the more I am convinced that they are never good or bad—merely comic, or pathetic. You probably don't agree with me!'

Old Jolyon did not; he considered it cynical to so express oneself; he had not yet reached that point of old age when even Forsytes, bereft of those illusions and principles which they have cherished carefully for practical purposes but never believed in, bereft of all corporeal enjoyment, stricken to the very heart by having nothing left to hope for—break through the barriers of reserve and say things they would never have believed themselves capable of saying.

Perhaps he did not believe in 'goodness' and 'badness' any more than his son; but as he would have said: He didn't know—couldn't tell; there might be something in it; and why, by an unnecessary expression of disbelief, deprive yourself of possible advantage?

Accustomed to spend his holidays among the mountains, though (like a true Forsyte) he had never attempted anything too adventurous or too foolhardy, he had been passionately fond of them. And when the wonderful view (mentioned in Baedeker—'fatiguing but repaying')—was disclosed to him after the effort of the climb, he had doubtless felt the existence of some great, dignified principle crowning the chaotic strivings, the petty precipices, and ironic little dark chasms of life. This was as near to religion, perhaps, as his practical spirit had ever gone.

But it was many years since he had been to the mountains. He had taken June there two seasons running, after his wife died, and had realized bitterly that his walking days were over.

To that old mountain—given confidence in a supreme order of things he had long been a stranger.

He knew himself to be old, yet he felt young; and this troubled him. It troubled and puzzled him, too,

to think that he, who had always been so careful, should be father and grandfather to such as seemed born to disaster. He had nothing to say against Jo—who could say anything against the boy, an amiable chap?—but his position was deplorable, and this business of June's nearly as bad. It seemed like a fatality, and a fatality was one of those things no man of his character could either understand or put up with.

In writing to his son he did not really hope that anything would come of it. Since the ball at Roger's he had seen too clearly how the land lay—he could put two and two together quicker than most men—and, with the example of his own son before his eyes, knew better than any Forsyte of them all that the pale flame sings men's wings whether they will or no.

In the days before June's engagement, when she and Mrs. Soames were always together, he had seen enough of Irene to feel the spell she cast over men. She was not a flirt, not even a coquette—words dear to the heart of his generation, which loved to define things by a good, broad, inadequate word—but she was dangerous. He could not say why. Tell him of a quality innate in some women—a seductive power beyond their own control! He would but answer: 'Humbug!' She was dangerous, and there was an end of it. He wanted to close his eyes to that affair. If it was, it was; he did not want to hear any more about it—he only wanted to save June's position and her peace of mind. He still hoped she might once more become a comfort to himself.

And so he had written. He got little enough out of the answer. As to what young Jolyon had made of the interview, there was practically only the queer sentence: 'I gather that he's in the stream.' The stream! What stream? What was this new-fangled way of talking?

He sighed, and folded the last of the papers under the flap of the bag; he knew well enough what was meant.

June came out of the dining-room, and helped him on with his summer coat. From her costume, and the expression of her little resolute face, he saw at once what was coming.

"I'm going with you," she said.

"Nonsense, my dear; I go straight into the City. I can't have you racketting about!"

"I must see old Mrs. Smeech."

"Oh, your precious 'lame ducks!'" grumbled out old Jolyon. He did not believe her excuse, but ceased his opposition. There was no doing anything with that pertinacity of hers.

At Victoria he put her into the carriage which had been ordered for himself—a characteristic action, for he had no petty selfishnesses.

"Now, don't you go tiring yourself, my darling," he said, and took a cab on into the city.

June went first to a back-street in Paddington, where Mrs. Smeech, her 'lame duck,' lived—an aged person, connected with the charring interest; but after half an hour spent in hearing her habitually lamentable recital, and dragooning her into temporary comfort, she went on to Stanhope Gate. The great house was closed and dark.

She had decided to learn something at all costs. It was better to face the worst, and have it over. And this was her plan: To go first to Phil's aunt, Mrs. Baynes, and, failing information there, to Irene herself. She had no clear notion of what she would gain by these visits.

At three o'clock she was in Lowndes Square. With a woman's instinct when trouble is to be faced, she had put on her best frock, and went to the battle with a glance as courageous as old Jolyon's itself. Her tremors had passed into eagerness.

Mrs. Baynes, Bosinney's aunt (Louisa was her name), was in her kitchen when June was announced, organizing the cook, for she was an excellent housewife, and, as Baynes always said, there was 'a lot in a good dinner.' He did his best work after dinner. It was Baynes who built that remarkably fine row of tall crimson houses in Kensington which compete with so many others for the title of 'the ugliest in London.'

On hearing June's name, she went hurriedly to her bedroom, and, taking two large bracelets from a red morocco case in a locked drawer, put them on her white wrists—for she possessed in a remarkable degree that 'sense of property,' which, as we know, is the touchstone of Forsyteism, and the foundation of good morality.

Her figure, of medium height and broad build, with a tendency to embonpoint, was reflected by the

mirror of her whitewood wardrobe, in a gown made under her own organization, of one of those half-tints, reminiscent of the distempered walls of corridors in large hotels. She raised her hands to her hair, which she wore a la Princesse de Galles, and touched it here and there, settling it more firmly on her head, and her eyes were full of an unconscious realism, as though she were looking in the face one of life's sordid facts, and making the best of it. In youth her cheeks had been of cream and roses, but they were mottled now by middle-age, and again that hard, ugly directness came into her eyes as she dabbed a powder-puff across her forehead. Putting the puff down, she stood quite still before the glass, arranging a smile over her high, important nose, her chin, (never large, and now growing smaller with the increase of her neck), her thin-lipped, down-drooping mouth. Quickly, not to lose the effect, she grasped her skirts strongly in both hands, and went downstairs.

She had been hoping for this visit for some time past. Whispers had reached her that things were not all right between her nephew and his fiancée. Neither of them had been near her for weeks. She had asked Phil to dinner many times; his invariable answer had been 'Too busy.'

Her instinct was alarmed, and the instinct in such matters of this excellent woman was keen. She ought to have been a Forsyte; in young Jolyon's sense of the word, she certainly had that privilege, and merits description as such.

She had married off her three daughters in a way that people said was beyond their deserts, for they had the professional plainness only to be found, as a rule, among the female kind of the more legal callings. Her name was upon the committees of numberless charities connected with the Church-dances, theatricals, or bazaars—and she never lent her name unless sure beforehand that everything had been thoroughly organized.

She believed, as she often said, in putting things on a commercial basis; the proper function of the Church, of charity, indeed, of everything, was to strengthen the fabric of 'Society.' Individual action, therefore, she considered immoral. Organization was the only thing, for by organization alone could you feel sure that you were getting a return for your money. Organization—and again, organization! And there is no doubt that she was what old Jolyon called her—"a 'dab' at that"—he went further, he called her "a humbug."

The enterprises to which she lent her name were organized so admirably that by the time the takings were handed over, they were indeed skim milk divested of all cream of human kindness. But as she often justly remarked, sentiment was to be deprecated. She was, in fact, a little academic.

This great and good woman, so highly thought of in ecclesiastical circles, was one of the principal priestesses in the temple of Forsyteism, keeping alive day and night a sacred flame to the God of Property, whose altar is inscribed with those inspiring words: 'Nothing for nothing, and really remarkably little for sixpence.'

When she entered a room it was felt that something substantial had come in, which was probably the reason of her popularity as a patroness. People liked something substantial when they had paid money for it; and they would look at her—surrounded by her staff in charity ballrooms, with her high nose and her broad, square figure, attired in an uniform covered with sequins—as though she were a general.

The only thing against her was that she had not a double name. She was a power in upper middle-class society, with its hundred sets and circles, all intersecting on the common battlefield of charity functions, and on that battlefield brushing skirts so pleasantly with the skirts of Society with the capital 'S.' She was a power in society with the smaller 's,' that larger, more significant, and more powerful body, where the commercially Christian institutions, maxims, and 'principle,' which Mrs. Baynes embodied, were real life-blood, circulating freely, real business currency, not merely the sterilized imitation that flowed in the veins of smaller Society with the larger 'S.' People who knew her felt her to be sound—a sound woman, who never gave herself away, nor anything else, if she could possibly help it.

She had been on the worst sort of terms with Bosinney's father, who had not infrequently made her the object of an unpardonable ridicule. She alluded to him now that he was gone as her 'poor, dear, irreverend brother.'

She greeted June with the careful effusion of which she was a mistress, a little afraid of her as far as a woman of her eminence in the commercial and Christian world could be afraid—for so slight a girl June had a great dignity, the fearlessness of her eyes gave her that. And Mrs. Baynes, too, shrewdly recognized that behind the uncompromising frankness of June's manner there was much of the Forsyte. If the girl had been merely frank and courageous, Mrs. Baynes would have thought her 'cranky,' and despised her; if she had been merely a Forsyte, like Francie—let us say—she would have patronized her from sheer weight of metal; but June, small though she was—Mrs. Baynes habitually admired quantity

—gave her an uneasy feeling; and she placed her in a chair opposite the light.

There was another reason for her respect which Mrs. Baynes, too good a churchwoman to be worldly, would have been the last to admit—she often heard her husband describe old Jolyon as extremely well off, and was biased towards his granddaughter for the soundest of all reasons. To-day she felt the emotion with which we read a novel describing a hero and an inheritance, nervously anxious lest, by some frightful lapse of the novelist, the young man should be left without it at the end.

Her manner was warm; she had never seen so clearly before how distinguished and desirable a girl this was. She asked after old Jolyon's health. A wonderful man for his age; so upright, and young looking, and how old was he? Eighty-one! She would never have thought it! They were at the sea! Very nice for them; she supposed June heard from Phil every day? Her light grey eyes became more prominent as she asked this question; but the girl met the glance without flinching.

"No," she said, "he never writes!"

Mrs. Baynes's eyes dropped; they had no intention of doing so, but they did. They recovered immediately.

"Of course not. That's Phil all over—he was always like that!"

"Was he?" said June.

The brevity of the answer caused Mrs. Baynes's bright smile a moment's hesitation; she disguised it by a quick movement, and spreading her skirts afresh, said: "Why, my dear—he's quite the most harum-scarum person; one never pays the slightest attention to what he does!"

The conviction came suddenly to June that she was wasting her time; even were she to put a question point-blank, she would never get anything out of this woman.

'Do you see him?' she asked, her face crimsoning.

The perspiration broke out on Mrs. Baynes' forehead beneath the powder.

"Oh, yes! I don't remember when he was here last—indeed, we haven't seen much of him lately. He's so busy with your cousin's house; I'm told it'll be finished directly. We must organize a little dinner to celebrate the event; do come and stay the night with us!"

"Thank you," said June. Again she thought: 'I'm only wasting my time. This woman will tell me nothing.'

She got up to go. A change came over Mrs. Baynes. She rose too; her lips twitched, she fidgeted her hands. Something was evidently very wrong, and she did not dare to ask this girl, who stood there, a slim, straight little figure, with her decided face, her set jaw, and resentful eyes. She was not accustomed to be afraid of asking questions—all organization was based on the asking of questions!

But the issue was so grave that her nerve, normally strong, was fairly shaken; only that morning her husband had said: "Old Mr. Forsyte must be worth well over a hundred thousand pounds!"

And this girl stood there, holding out her hand—holding out her hand!

The chance might be slipping away—she couldn't tell—the chance of keeping her in the family, and yet she dared not speak.

Her eyes followed June to the door.

It closed.

Then with an exclamation Mrs. Baynes ran forward, wobbling her bulky frame from side to side, and opened it again.

Too late! She heard the front door click, and stood still, an expression of real anger and mortification on her face.

June went along the Square with her bird-like quickness. She detested that woman now whom in happier days she had been accustomed to think so kind. Was she always to be put off thus, and forced to undergo this torturing suspense?

She would go to Phil himself, and ask him what he meant. She had the right to know. She hurried on down Sloane Street till she came to Bosinney's number. Passing the swing-door at the bottom, she ran

up the stairs, her heart thumping painfully.

At the top of the third flight she paused for breath, and holding on to the bannisters, stood listening. No sound came from above.

With a very white face she mounted the last flight. She saw the door, with his name on the plate. And the resolution that had brought her so far evaporated.

The full meaning of her conduct came to her. She felt hot all over; the palms of her hands were moist beneath the thin silk covering of her gloves.

She drew back to the stairs, but did not descend. Leaning against the rail she tried to get rid of a feeling of being choked; and she gazed at the door with a sort of dreadful courage. No! she refused to go down. Did it matter what people thought of her? They would never know! No one would help her if she did not help herself! She would go through with it.

Forcing herself, therefore, to leave the support of the wall, she rang the bell. The door did not open, and all her shame and fear suddenly abandoned her; she rang again and again, as though in spite of its emptiness she could drag some response out of that closed room, some recompense for the shame and fear that visit had cost her. It did not open; she left off ringing, and, sitting down at the top of the stairs, buried her face in her hands.

Presently she stole down, out into the air. She felt as though she had passed through a bad illness, and had no desire now but to get home as quickly as she could. The people she met seemed to know where she had been, what she had been doing; and suddenly—over on the opposite side, going towards his rooms from the direction of Montpellier Square—she saw Bosinney himself.

She made a movement to cross into the traffic. Their eyes met, and he raised his hat. An omnibus passed, obscuring her view; then, from the edge of the pavement, through a gap in the traffic, she saw him walking on.

And June stood motionless, looking after him.

CHAPTER XIII

PERFECTION OF THE HOUSE

'One mockturtle, clear; one oxtail; two glasses of port.'

In the upper room at French's, where a Forsyte could still get heavy English food, James and his son were sitting down to lunch.

Of all eating-places James liked best to come here; there was something unpretentious, well-flavoured, and filling about it, and though he had been to a certain extent corrupted by the necessity for being fashionable, and the trend of habits keeping pace with an income that would increase, he still hankered in quiet City moments after the tasty fleshpots of his earlier days. Here you were served by hairy English waiters in aprons; there was sawdust on the floor, and three round gilt looking-glasses hung just above the line of sight. They had only recently done away with the cubicles, too, in which you could have your chop, prime chump, with a floury-potato, without seeing your neighbours, like a gentleman.

He tucked the top corner of his napkin behind the third button of his waistcoat, a practice he had been obliged to abandon years ago in the West End. He felt that he should relish his soup—the entire morning had been given to winding up the estate of an old friend.

After filling his mouth with household bread, stale, he at once began: "How are you going down to Robin Hill? You going to take Irene? You'd better take her. I should think there'll be a lot that'll want seeing to."

Without looking up, Soames answered: "She won't go."

"Won't go? What's the meaning of that? She's going to live in the house, isn't she?"

Soames made no reply.

"I don't know what's coming to women nowadays," mumbled James; "I never used to have any trouble with them. She's had too much liberty. She's spoiled...."

Soames lifted his eyes: "I won't have anything said against her," he said unexpectedly.

The silence was only broken now by the supping of James's soup.

The waiter brought the two glasses of port, but Soames stopped him.

"That's not the way to serve port," he said; "take them away, and bring the bottle."

Rousing himself from his reverie over the soup, James took one of his rapid shifting surveys of surrounding facts.

"Your mother's in bed," he said; "you can have the carriage to take you down. I should think Irene'd like the drive. This young Bosinney'll be there, I suppose, to show you over"

Soames nodded.

"I should like to go and see for myself what sort of a job he's made finishing off," pursued James. "I'll just drive round and pick you both up."

"I am going down by train," replied Soames. "If you like to drive round and see, Irene might go with you, I can't tell."

He signed to the waiter to bring the bill, which James paid.

They parted at St. Paul's, Soames branching off to the station, James taking his omnibus westwards.

He had secured the corner seat next the conductor, where his long legs made it difficult for anyone to get in, and at all who passed him he looked resentfully, as if they had no business to be using up his air.

He intended to take an opportunity this afternoon of speaking to Irene. A word in time saved nine; and now that she was going to live in the country there was a chance for her to turn over a new leaf! He could see that Soames wouldn't stand very much more of her goings on!

It did not occur to him to define what he meant by her 'goings on'; the expression was wide, vague, and suited to a Forsyte. And James had more than his common share of courage after lunch.

On reaching home, he ordered out the barouche, with special instructions that the groom was to go too. He wished to be kind to her, and to give her every chance.

When the door of No.62 was opened he could distinctly hear her singing, and said so at once, to prevent any chance of being denied entrance.

Yes, Mrs. Soames was in, but the maid did not know if she was seeing people.

James, moving with the rapidity that ever astonished the observers of his long figure and absorbed expression, went forthwith into the drawing-room without permitting this to be ascertained. He found Irene seated at the piano with her hands arrested on the keys, evidently listening to the voices in the hall. She greeted him without smiling.

"Your mother-in-law's in bed," he began, hoping at once to enlist her sympathy. "I've got the carriage here. Now, be a good girl, and put on your hat and come with me for a drive. It'll do you good!"

Irene looked at him as though about to refuse, but, seeming to change her mind, went upstairs, and came down again with her hat on.

"Where are you going to take me?" she asked.

"We'll just go down to Robin Hill," said James, spluttering out his words very quick; "the horses want exercise, and I should like to see what they've been doing down there."

Irene hung back, but again changed her mind, and went out to the carriage, James brooding over her closely, to make quite sure.

It was not before he had got her more than half way that he began: "Soames is very fond of you—he won't have anything said against you; why don't you show him more affection?"

Irene flushed, and said in a low voice: "I can't show what I haven't got."

James looked at her sharply; he felt that now he had her in his own carriage, with his own horses and servants, he was really in command of the situation. She could not put him off; nor would she make a scene in public.

"I can't think what you're about," he said. "He's a very good husband!"

Irene's answer was so low as to be almost inaudible among the sounds of traffic. He caught the words: "You are not married to him!"

"What's that got to do with it? He's given you everything you want. He's always ready to take you anywhere, and now he's built you this house in the country. It's not as if you had anything of your own."

"No."

Again James looked at her; he could not make out the expression on her face. She looked almost as if she were going to cry, and yet....

"I'm sure," he muttered hastily, "we've all tried to be kind to you."

Irene's lips quivered; to his dismay James saw a tear steal down her cheek. He felt a choke rise in his own throat.

"We're all fond of you," he said, "if you'd only"—he was going to say, "behave yourself," but changed it to—"if you'd only be more of a wife to him."

Irene did not answer, and James, too, ceased speaking. There was something in her silence which disconcerted him; it was not the silence of obstinacy, rather that of acquiescence in all that he could find to say. And yet he felt as if he had not had the last word. He could not understand this.

He was unable, however, to long keep silence.

"I suppose that young Bosinney," he said, "will be getting married to June now?"

Irene's face changed. "I don't know," she said; "you should ask her."

"Does she write to you?" No.

"How's that?" said James. "I thought you and she were such great friends."

Irene turned on him. "Again," she said, "you should ask her!"

"Well," flustered James, frightened by her look, "it's very odd that I can't get a plain answer to a plain question, but there it is."

He sat ruminating over his rebuff, and burst out at last:

"Well, I've warned you. You won't look ahead. Soames he doesn't say much, but I can see he won't stand a great deal more of this sort of thing. You'll have nobody but yourself to blame, and, what's more, you'll get no sympathy from anybody."

Irene bent her head with a little smiling bow. "I am very much obliged to you."

James did not know what on earth to answer.

The bright hot morning had changed slowly to a grey, oppressive afternoon; a heavy bank of clouds, with the yellow tinge of coming thunder, had risen in the south, and was creeping up.

The branches of the trees dropped motionless across the road without the smallest stir of foliage. A faint odour of glue from the heated horses clung in the thick air; the coachman and groom, rigid and unbending, exchanged stealthy murmurs on the box, without ever turning their heads.

To James' great relief they reached the house at last; the silence and impenetrability of this woman by his side, whom he had always thought so soft and mild, alarmed him.

The carriage put them down at the door, and they entered.

The hall was cool, and so still that it was like passing into a tomb; a shudder ran down James's spine. He quickly lifted the heavy leather curtains between the columns into the inner court.

He could not restrain an exclamation of approval.

The decoration was really in excellent taste. The dull ruby tiles that extended from the foot of the walls to the verge of a circular clump of tall iris plants, surrounding in turn a sunken basin of white marble filled with water, were obviously of the best quality. He admired extremely the purple leather curtains drawn along one entire side, framing a huge white-tiled stove. The central partitions of the skylight had been slid back, and the warm air from outside penetrated into the very heart of the house.

He stood, his hands behind him, his head bent back on his high, narrow shoulders, spying the tracery on the columns and the pattern of the frieze which ran round the ivory-coloured walls under the gallery. Evidently, no pains had been spared. It was quite the house of a gentleman. He went up to the curtains, and, having discovered how they were worked, drew them asunder and disclosed the picture-gallery, ending in a great window taking up the whole end of the room. It had a black oak floor, and its walls, again, were of ivory white. He went on throwing open doors, and peeping in. Everything was in apple-pie order, ready for immediate occupation.

He turned round at last to speak to Irene, and saw her standing over in the garden entrance, with her husband and Bosinney.

Though not remarkable for sensibility, James felt at once that something was wrong. He went up to them, and, vaguely alarmed, ignorant of the nature of the trouble, made an attempt to smooth things over.

"How are you, Mr. Bosinney?" he said, holding out his hand. "You've been spending money pretty freely down here, I should say!"

Soames turned his back, and walked away.

James looked from Bosinney's frowning face to Irene, and, in his agitation, spoke his thoughts aloud: "Well, I can't tell what's the matter. Nobody tells me anything!" And, making off after his son, he heard Bosinney's short laugh, and his "Well, thank God! You look so...." Most unfortunately he lost the rest.

What had happened? He glanced back. Irene was very close to the architect, and her face not like the face he knew of her. He hastened up to his son.

Soames was pacing the picture-gallery.

"What's the matter?" said James. "What's all this?"

Soames looked at him with his supercilious calm unbroken, but James knew well enough that he was violently angry.

"Our friend," he said, "has exceeded his instructions again, that's all. So much the worse for him this time."

He turned round and walked back towards the door. James followed hurriedly, edging himself in front. He saw Irene take her finger from before her lips, heard her say something in her ordinary voice, and began to speak before he reached them.

"There's a storm coming on. We'd better get home. We can't take you, I suppose, Mr. Bosinney? No, I suppose not. Then, good-bye!" He held out his hand. Bosinney did not take it, but, turning with a laugh, said:

"Good-bye, Mr. Forsyte. Don't get caught in the storm!" and walked away.

"Well," began James, "I don't know...."

But the 'sight of Irene's face stopped him. Taking hold of his daughter-in-law by the elbow, he escorted her towards the carriage. He felt certain, quite certain, they had been making some appointment or other....

Nothing in this world is more sure to upset a Forsyte than the discovery that something on which he has stipulated to spend a certain sum has cost more. And this is reasonable, for upon the accuracy of his estimates the whole policy of his life is ordered. If he cannot rely on definite values of property, his compass is amiss; he is adrift upon bitter waters without a helm.

After writing to Bosinney in the terms that have already been chronicled, Soames had dismissed the cost of the house from his mind. He believed that he had made the matter of the final cost so very plain that the possibility of its being again exceeded had really never entered his head. On hearing from Bosinney that his limit of twelve thousand pounds would be exceeded by something like four hundred, he had grown white with anger. His original estimate of the cost of the house completed had been ten

thousand pounds, and he had often blamed himself severely for allowing himself to be led into repeated excesses. Over this last expenditure, however, Bosinney had put himself completely in the wrong. How on earth a fellow could make such an ass of himself Soames could not conceive; but he had done so, and all the rancour and hidden jealousy that had been burning against him for so long was now focussed in rage at this crowning piece of extravagance. The attitude of the confident and friendly husband was gone. To preserve property—his wife—he had assumed it, to preserve property of another kind he lost it now.

"Ah!" he had said to Bosinney when he could speak, "and I suppose you're perfectly contented with yourself. But I may as well tell you that you've altogether mistaken your man!"

What he meant by those words he did not quite know at the time, but after dinner he looked up the correspondence between himself and Bosinney to make quite sure. There could be no two opinions about it—the fellow had made himself liable for that extra four hundred, or, at all events, for three hundred and fifty of it, and he would have to make it good.

He was looking at his wife's face when he came to this conclusion. Seated in her usual seat on the sofa, she was altering the lace on a collar. She had not once spoken to him all the evening.

He went up to the mantelpiece, and contemplating his face in the mirror said: "Your friend the Buccaneer has made a fool of himself; he will have to pay for it!"

She looked at him scornfully, and answered: "I don't know what you are talking about!"

"You soon will. A mere trifle, quite beneath your contempt—four hundred pounds."

"Do you mean that you are going to make him pay that towards this hateful, house?"

"I do."

"And you know he's got nothing?"

"Yes."

"Then you are meaner than I thought you."

Soames turned from the mirror, and unconsciously taking a china cup from the mantelpiece, clasped his hands around it as though praying. He saw her bosom rise and fall, her eyes darkening with anger, and taking no notice of the taunt, he asked quietly:

"Are you carrying on a flirtation with Bosinney?"

"No, I am not!"

Her eyes met his, and he looked away. He neither believed nor disbelieved her, but he knew that he had made a mistake in asking; he never had known, never would know, what she was thinking. The sight of her inscrutable face, the thought of all the hundreds of evenings he had seen her sitting there like that soft and passive, but unreadable, unknown, enraged him beyond measure.

"I believe you are made of stone," he said, clenching his fingers so hard that he broke the fragile cup. The pieces fell into the grate. And Irene smiled.

"You seem to forget," she said, "that cup is not!"

Soames gripped her arm. "A good beating," he said, "is the only thing that would bring you to your senses," but turning on his heel, he left the room.

CHAPTER XIV

SOAMES SITS ON THE STAIRS

Soames went upstairs that night that he had gone too far. He was prepared to offer excuses for his words.

He turned out the gas still burning in the passage outside their room. Pausing, with his hand on the

knob of the door, he tried to shape his apology, for he had no intention of letting her see that he was nervous.

But the door did not open, nor when he pulled it and turned the handle firmly. She must have locked it for some reason, and forgotten.

Entering his dressing-room where the gas was also light and burning low, he went quickly to the other door. That too was locked. Then he noticed that the camp bed which he occasionally used was prepared, and his sleeping-suit laid out upon it. He put his hand up to his forehead, and brought it away wet. It dawned on him that he was barred out.

He went back to the door, and rattling the handle stealthily, called: "Unlock the door, do you hear? Unlock the door!"

There was a faint rustling, but no answer.

"Do you hear? Let me in at once—I insist on being let in!"

He could catch the sound of her breathing close to the door, like the breathing of a creature threatened by danger.

There was something terrifying in this inexorable silence, in the impossibility of getting at her. He went back to the other door, and putting his whole weight against it, tried to burst it open. The door was a new one—he had had them renewed himself, in readiness for their coming in after the honeymoon. In a rage he lifted his foot to kick in the panel; the thought of the servants restrained him, and he felt suddenly that he was beaten.

Flinging himself down in the dressing-room, he took up a book.

But instead of the print he seemed to see his wife—with her yellow hair flowing over her bare shoulders, and her great dark eyes—standing like an animal at bay. And the whole meaning of her act of revolt came to him. She meant it to be for good.

He could not sit still, and went to the door again. He could still hear her, and he called: "Irene! Irene!"

He did not mean to make his voice pathetic.

In ominous answer, the faint sounds ceased. He stood with clenched hands, thinking.

Presently he stole round on tiptoe, and running suddenly at the other door, made a supreme effort to break it open. It creaked, but did not yield. He sat down on the stairs and buried his face in his hands.

For a long time he sat there in the dark, the moon through the skylight above laying a pale smear which lengthened slowly towards him down the stairway. He tried to be philosophical.

Since she had locked her doors she had no further claim as a wife, and he would console himself with other women.

It was but a spectral journey he made among such delights—he had no appetite for these exploits. He had never had much, and he had lost the habit. He felt that he could never recover it. His hunger could only be appeased by his wife, inexorable and frightened, behind these shut doors. No other woman could help him.

This conviction came to him with terrible force out there in the dark.

His philosophy left him; and surly anger took its place. Her conduct was immoral, inexcusable, worthy of any punishment within his power. He desired no one but her, and she refused him!

She must really hate him, then! He had never believed it yet. He did not believe it now. It seemed to him incredible. He felt as though he had lost for ever his power of judgment. If she, so soft and yielding as he had always judged her, could take this decided step—what could not happen?

Then he asked himself again if she were carrying on an intrigue with Bosinney. He did not believe that she was; he could not afford to believe such a reason for her conduct—the thought was not to be faced.

It would be unbearable to contemplate the necessity of making his marital relations public property. Short of the most convincing proofs he must still refuse to believe, for he did not wish to punish himself. And all the time at heart—he did believe.

The moonlight cast a greyish tinge over his figure, hunched against the staircase wall.

Bosinney was in love with her! He hated the fellow, and would not spare him now. He could and would refuse to pay a penny piece over twelve thousand and fifty pounds—the extreme limit fixed in the correspondence; or rather he would pay, he would pay and sue him for damages. He would go to Jobling and Boulter and put the matter in their hands. He would ruin the impecunious beggar! And suddenly—though what connection between the thoughts?—he reflected that Irene had no money either. They were both beggars. This gave him a strange satisfaction.

The silence was broken by a faint creaking through the wall. She was going to bed at last. Ah! Joy and pleasant dreams! If she threw the door open wide he would not go in now!

But his lips, that were twisted in a bitter smile, twitched; he covered his eyes with his hands....

It was late the following afternoon when Soames stood in the dining-room window gazing gloomily into the Square.

The sunlight still showered on the plane-trees, and in the breeze their gay broad leaves shone and swung in rhyme to a barrel organ at the corner. It was playing a waltz, an old waltz that was out of fashion, with a fateful rhythm in the notes; and it went on and on, though nothing indeed but leaves danced to the tune.

The woman did not look too gay, for she was tired; and from the tall houses no one threw her down coppers. She moved the organ on, and three doors off began again.

It was the waltz they had played at Roger's when Irene had danced with Bosinney; and the perfume of the gardenias she had worn came back to Soames, drifted by the malicious music, as it had been drifted to him then, when she passed, her hair glistening, her eyes so soft, drawing Bosinney on and on down an endless ballroom.

The organ woman plied her handle slowly; she had been grinding her tune all day-grinding it in Sloane Street hard by, grinding it perhaps to Bosinney himself.

Soames turned, took a cigarette from the carven box, and walked back to the window. The tune had mesmerized him, and there came into his view Irene, her sunshade furled, hastening homewards down the Square, in a soft, rose-coloured blouse with drooping sleeves, that he did not know. She stopped before the organ, took out her purse, and gave the woman money.

Soames shrank back and stood where he could see into the hall.

She came in with her latch-key, put down her sunshade, and stood looking at herself in the glass. Her cheeks were flushed as if the sun had burned them; her lips were parted in a smile. She stretched her arms out as though to embrace herself, with a laugh that for all the world was like a sob.

Soames stepped forward.

"Very-pretty!" he said.

But as though shot she spun round, and would have passed him up the stairs. He barred the way.

"Why such a hurry?" he said, and his eyes fastened on a curl of hair fallen loose across her ear....

He hardly recognised her. She seemed on fire, so deep and rich the colour of her cheeks, her eyes, her lips, and of the unusual blouse she wore.

She put up her hand and smoothed back the curl. She was breathing fast and deep, as though she had been running, and with every breath perfume seemed to come from her hair, and from her body, like perfume from an opening flower.

"I don't like that blouse," he said slowly, "it's a soft, shapeless thing!"

He lifted his finger towards her breast, but she dashed his hand aside.

"Don't touch me!" she cried.

He caught her wrist; she wrenched it away.

"And where may you have been?" he asked.

"In heaven—out of this house!" With those words she fled upstairs.

Outside—in thanksgiving—at the very door, the organ-grinder was playing the waltz.

And Soames stood motionless. What prevented him from following her?

Was it that, with the eyes of faith, he saw Bosinney looking down from that high window in Sloane Street, straining his eyes for yet another glimpse of Irene's vanished figure, cooling his flushed face, dreaming of the moment when she flung herself on his breast—the scent of her still in the air around, and the sound of her laugh that was like a sob?

PART III

CHAPTER I

Mrs. MACANDER'S EVIDENCE

Many people, no doubt, including the editor of the 'Ultra Vivisectionist,' then in the bloom of its first youth, would say that Soames was less than a man not to have removed the locks from his wife's doors, and, after beating her soundly, resumed wedded happiness.

Brutality is not so deplorably diluted by humaneness as it used to be, yet a sentimental segment of the population may still be relieved to learn that he did none of these things. For active brutality is not popular with Forsytes; they are too circumspect, and, on the whole, too softhearted. And in Soames there was some common pride, not sufficient to make him do a really generous action, but enough to prevent his indulging in an extremely mean one, except, perhaps, in very hot blood. Above all this a true Forsyte refused to feel himself ridiculous. Short of actually beating his wife, he perceived nothing to be done; he therefore accepted the situation without another word.

Throughout the summer and autumn he continued to go to the office, to sort his pictures, and ask his friends to dinner.

He did not leave town; Irene refused to go away. The house at Robin Hill, finished though it was, remained empty and ownerless. Soames had brought a suit against the Buccaneer, in which he claimed from him the sum of three hundred and fifty pounds.

A firm of solicitors, Messrs. Freak and Able, had put in a defence on Bosinney's behalf. Admitting the facts, they raised a point on the correspondence which, divested of legal phraseology, amounted to this: To speak of 'a free hand in the terms of this correspondence' is an Irish bull.

By a chance, fortuitous but not improbable in the close borough of legal circles, a good deal of information came to Soames' ear anent this line of policy, the working partner in his firm, Bustard, happening to sit next at dinner at Walmisley's, the Taxing Master, to young Chankery, of the Common Law Bar.

The necessity for talking what is known as 'shop,' which comes on all lawyers with the removal of the ladies, caused Chankery, a young and promising advocate, to propound an impersonal conundrum to his neighbour, whose name he did not know, for, seated as he permanently was in the background, Bustard had practically no name.

He had, said Chankery, a case coming on with a 'very nice point.' He then explained, preserving every professional discretion, the riddle in Soames' case. Everyone, he said, to whom he had spoken, thought it a nice point. The issue was small unfortunately, 'though d—d serious for his client he believed'—Walmisley's champagne was bad but plentiful. A Judge would make short work of it, he was afraid. He intended to make a big effort—the point was a nice one. What did his neighbour say?

Bustard, a model of secrecy, said nothing. He related the incident to Soames however with some malice, for this quiet man was capable of human feeling, ending with his own opinion that the point was 'a very nice one.'

In accordance with his resolve, our Forsyte had put his interests into the hands of Jobling and Boulter. From the moment of doing so he regretted that he had not acted for himself. On receiving a copy of Bosinney's defence he went over to their offices.

Boulter, who had the matter in hand, Jobling having died some years before, told him that in his opinion it was rather a nice point; he would like counsel's opinion on it.

Soames told him to go to a good man, and they went to Waterbuck, Q.C., marking him ten and one, who kept the papers six weeks and then wrote as follows:

'In my opinion the true interpretation of this correspondence depends very much on the intention of the parties, and will turn upon the evidence given at the trial. I am of opinion that an attempt should be made to secure from the architect an admission that he understood he was not to spend at the outside more than twelve thousand and fifty pounds. With regard to the expression, "a free hand in the terms of this correspondence," to which my attention is directed, the point is a nice one; but I am of opinion that upon the whole the ruling in "Boileau v. The Blasted Cement Co., Ltd.," will apply.'

Upon this opinion they acted, administering interrogatories, but to their annoyance Messrs. Freak and Able answered these in so masterly a fashion that nothing whatever was admitted and that without prejudice.

It was on October 1 that Soames read Waterbuck's opinion, in the dining-room before dinner.

It made him nervous; not so much because of the case of 'Boileau v. The Blasted Cement Co., Ltd.,' as that the point had lately begun to seem to him, too, a nice one; there was about it just that pleasant flavour of subtlety so attractive to the best legal appetites. To have his own impression confirmed by Waterbuck, Q.C., would have disturbed any man.

He sat thinking it over, and staring at the empty grate, for though autumn had come, the weather kept as gloriously fine that jubilee year as if it were still high August. It was not pleasant to be disturbed; he desired too passionately to set his foot on Bosinney's neck.

Though he had not seen the architect since the last afternoon at Robin Hill, he was never free from the sense of his presence—never free from the memory of his worn face with its high cheek bones and enthusiastic eyes. It would not be too much to say that he had never got rid of the feeling of that night when he heard the peacock's cry at dawn—the feeling that Bosinney haunted the house. And every man's shape that he saw in the dark evenings walking past, seemed that of him whom George had so appropriately named the Buccaneer.

Irene still met him, he was certain; where, or how, he neither knew, nor asked; deterred by a vague and secret dread of too much knowledge. It all seemed subterranean nowadays.

Sometimes when he questioned his wife as to where she had been, which he still made a point of doing, as every Forsyte should, she looked very strange. Her self-possession was wonderful, but there were moments when, behind the mask of her face, inscrutable as it had always been to him, lurked an expression he had never been used to see there.

She had taken to lunching out too; when he asked Bilson if her mistress had been in to lunch, as often as not she would answer: "No, sir."

He strongly disapproved of her gadding about by herself, and told her so. But she took no notice. There was something that angered, amazed, yet almost amused him about the calm way in which she disregarded his wishes. It was really as if she were hugging to herself the thought of a triumph over him.

He rose from the perusal of Waterbuck, Q.C.'s opinion, and, going upstairs, entered her room, for she did not lock her doors till bed-time—she had the decency, he found, to save the feelings of the servants. She was brushing her hair, and turned to him with strange fierceness.

"What do you want?" she said. "Please leave my room!"

He answered: "I want to know how long this state of things between us is to last? I have put up with it long enough."

"Will you please leave my room?"

"Will you treat me as your husband?"

"No."

"Then, I shall take steps to make you."

"Do!"

He stared, amazed at the calmness of her answer. Her lips were compressed in a thin line; her hair lay in fluffy masses on her bare shoulders, in all its strange golden contrast to her dark eyes—those eyes alive with the emotions of fear, hate, contempt, and odd, haunting triumph.

"Now, please, will you leave my room?" He turned round, and went sulkily out.

He knew very well that he had no intention of taking steps, and he saw that she knew too—knew that he was afraid to.

It was a habit with him to tell her the doings of his day: how such and such clients had called; how he had arranged a mortgage for Parkes; how that long-standing suit of Fryer v. Forsyte was getting on, which, arising in the preternaturally careful disposition of his property by his great uncle Nicholas, who had tied it up so that no one could get at it at all, seemed likely to remain a source of income for several solicitors till the Day of Judgment.

And how he had called in at Jobson's, and seen a Boucher sold, which he had just missed buying of Talleyrand and Sons in Pall Mall.

He had an admiration for Boucher, Watteau, and all that school. It was a habit with him to tell her all these matters, and he continued to do it even now, talking for long spells at dinner, as though by the volubility of words he could conceal from himself the ache in his heart.

Often, if they were alone, he made an attempt to kiss her when she said good-night. He may have had some vague notion that some night she would let him; or perhaps only the feeling that a husband ought to kiss his wife. Even if she hated him, he at all events ought not to put himself in the wrong by neglecting this ancient rite.

And why did she hate him? Even now he could not altogether believe it. It was strange to be hated!—the emotion was too extreme; yet he hated Bosinney, that Buccaneer, that prowling vagabond, that night-wanderer. For in his thoughts Soames always saw him lying in wait—wandering. Ah, but he must be in very low water! Young Burkitt, the architect, had seen him coming out of a third-rate restaurant, looking terribly down in the mouth!

During all the hours he lay awake, thinking over the situation, which seemed to have no end—unless she should suddenly come to her senses—never once did the thought of separating from his wife seriously enter his head....

And the Forsytes! What part did they play in this stage of Soames' subterranean tragedy?

Truth to say, little or none, for they were at the sea.

From hotels, hydropathics, or lodging-houses, they were bathing daily; laying in a stock of ozone to last them through the winter.

Each section, in the vineyard of its own choosing, grew and culled and pressed and bottled the grapes of a pet sea-air.

The end of September began to witness their several returns.

In rude health and small omnibuses, with considerable colour in their cheeks, they arrived daily from the various termini. The following morning saw them back at their vocations.

On the next Sunday Timothy's was thronged from lunch till dinner.

Amongst other gossip, too numerous and interesting to relate, Mrs. Septimus Small mentioned that Soames and Irene had not been away.

It remained for a comparative outsider to supply the next evidence of interest.

It chanced that one afternoon late in September, Mrs. MacAnder, Winifred Dartie's greatest friend, taking a constitutional, with young Augustus Flippard, on her bicycle in Richmond Park, passed Irene and Bosinney walking from the bracken towards the Sheen Gate.

Perhaps the poor little woman was thirsty, for she had ridden long on a hard, dry road, and, as all London knows, to ride a bicycle and talk to young Flippard will try the toughest constitution; or

perhaps the sight of the cool bracken grove, whence 'those two' were coming down, excited her envy. The cool bracken grove on the top of the hill, with the oak boughs for roof, where the pigeons were raising an endless wedding hymn, and the autumn, humming, whispered to the ears of lovers in the fern, while the deer stole by. The bracken grove of irretrievable delights, of golden minutes in the long marriage of heaven and earth! The bracken grove, sacred to stags, to strange tree-stump fauns leaping around the silver whiteness of a birch-tree nymph at summer dusk.

This lady knew all the Forsytes, and having been at June's 'at home,' was not at a loss to see with whom she had to deal. Her own marriage, poor thing, had not been successful, but having had the good sense and ability to force her husband into pronounced error, she herself had passed through the necessary divorce proceedings without incurring censure.

She was therefore a judge of all that sort of thing, and lived in one of those large buildings, where in small sets of apartments, are gathered incredible quantities of Forsytes, whose chief recreation out of business hours is the discussion of each other's affairs.

Poor little woman, perhaps she was thirsty, certainly she was bored, for Flippard was a wit. To see 'those two' in so unlikely a spot was quite a merciful 'pick-me-up.'

At the MacAnder, like all London, Time pauses.

This small but remarkable woman merits attention; her all-seeing eye and shrewd tongue were inscrutably the means of furthering the ends of Providence.

With an air of being in at the death, she had an almost distressing power of taking care of herself. She had done more, perhaps, in her way than any woman about town to destroy the sense of chivalry which still clogs the wheel of civilization. So smart she was, and spoken of endearingly as 'the little MacAnder!'

Dressing tightly and well, she belonged to a Woman's Club, but was by no means the neurotic and dismal type of member who was always thinking of her rights. She took her rights unconsciously, they came natural to her, and she knew exactly how to make the most of them without exciting anything but admiration amongst that great class to whom she was affiliated, not precisely perhaps by manner, but by birth, breeding, and the true, the secret gauge, a sense of property.

The daughter of a Bedfordshire solicitor, by the daughter of a clergyman, she had never, through all the painful experience of being married to a very mild painter with a cranky love of Nature, who had deserted her for an actress, lost touch with the requirements, beliefs, and inner feeling of Society; and, on attaining her liberty, she placed herself without effort in the very van of Forsyteism.

Always in good spirits, and 'full of information,' she was universally welcomed. She excited neither surprise nor disapprobation when encountered on the Rhine or at Zermatt, either alone, or travelling with a lady and two gentlemen; it was felt that she was perfectly capable of taking care of herself; and the hearts of all Forsytes warmed to that wonderful instinct, which enabled her to enjoy everything without giving anything away. It was generally felt that to such women as Mrs. MacAnder should we look for the perpetuation and increase of our best type of woman. She had never had any children.

If there was one thing more than another that she could not stand it was one of those soft women with what men called 'charm' about them, and for Mrs. Soames she always had an especial dislike.

Obscurely, no doubt, she felt that if charm were once admitted as the criterion, smartness and capability must go to the wall; and she hated—with a hatred the deeper that at times this so-called charm seemed to disturb all calculations—the subtle seductiveness which she could not altogether overlook in Irene.

She said, however, that she could see nothing in the woman—there was no 'go' about her—she would never be able to stand up for herself—anyone could take advantage of her, that was plain—she could not see in fact what men found to admire!

She was not really ill-natured, but, in maintaining her position after the trying circumstances of her married life, she had found it so necessary to be 'full of information,' that the idea of holding her tongue about 'those two' in the Park never occurred to her.

And it so happened that she was dining that very evening at Timothy's, where she went sometimes to 'cheer the old things up,' as she was wont to put it. The same people were always asked to meet her: Winifred Dartie and her husband; Francie, because she belonged to the artistic circles, for Mrs. MacAnder was known to contribute articles on dress to 'The Ladies Kingdom Come'; and for her to flirt with, provided they could be obtained, two of the Hayman boys, who, though they never said anything,

were believed to be fast and thoroughly intimate with all that was latest in smart Society.

At twenty-five minutes past seven she turned out the electric light in her little hall, and wrapped in her opera cloak with the chinchilla collar, came out into the corridor, pausing a moment to make sure she had her latch-key. These little self-contained flats were convenient; to be sure, she had no light and no air, but she could shut it up whenever she liked and go away. There was no bother with servants, and she never felt tied as she used to when poor, dear Fred was always about, in his mooney way. She retained no rancour against poor, dear Fred, he was such a fool; but the thought of that actress drew from her, even now, a little, bitter, derisive smile.

Firmly snapping the door to, she crossed the corridor, with its gloomy, yellow-ochre walls, and its infinite vista of brown, numbered doors. The lift was going down; and wrapped to the ears in the high cloak, with every one of her auburn hairs in its place, she waited motionless for it to stop at her floor. The iron gates clanked open; she entered. There were already three occupants, a man in a great white waistcoat, with a large, smooth face like a baby's, and two old ladies in black, with mittened hands.

Mrs. MacAnder smiled at them; she knew everybody; and all these three, who had been admirably silent before, began to talk at once. This was Mrs. MacAnder's successful secret. She provoked conversation.

Throughout a descent of five stories the conversation continued, the lift boy standing with his back turned, his cynical face protruding through the bars.

At the bottom they separated, the man in the white waistcoat sentimentally to the billiard room, the old ladies to dine and say to each other: "A dear little woman!" "Such a rattle!" and Mrs. MacAnder to her cab.

When Mrs. MacAnder dined at Timothy's, the conversation (although Timothy himself could never be induced to be present) took that wider, man-of-the-world tone current among Forsytes at large, and this, no doubt, was what put her at a premium there.

Mrs. Small and Aunt Hester found it an exhilarating change. "If only," they said, "Timothy would meet her!" It was felt that she would do him good. She could tell you, for instance, the latest story of Sir Charles Fiste's son at Monte Carlo; who was the real heroine of Tynemouth Eddy's fashionable novel that everyone was holding up their hands over, and what they were doing in Paris about wearing bloomers. She was so sensible, too, knowing all about that vexed question, whether to send young Nicholas' eldest into the navy as his mother wished, or make him an accountant as his father thought would be safer. She strongly deprecated the navy. If you were not exceptionally brilliant or exceptionally well connected, they passed you over so disgracefully, and what was it after all to look forward to, even if you became an admiral—a pittance! An accountant had many more chances, but let him be put with a good firm, where there was no risk at starting!

Sometimes she would give them a tip on the Stock Exchange; not that Mrs. Small or Aunt Hester ever took it. They had indeed no money to invest; but it seemed to bring them into such exciting touch with the realities of life. It was an event. They would ask Timothy, they said. But they never did, knowing in advance that it would upset him. Surreptitiously, however, for weeks after they would look in that paper, which they took with respect on account of its really fashionable proclivities, to see whether 'Bright's Rubies' or 'The Woollen Mackintosh Company' were up or down. Sometimes they could not find the name of the company at all; and they would wait until James or Roger or even Swithin came in, and ask them in voices trembling with curiosity how that 'Bolivia Lime and Speltrate' was doing—they could not find it in the paper.

And Roger would answer: "What do you want to know for? Some trash! You'll go burning your fingers—investing your money in lime, and things you know nothing about! Who told you?" and ascertaining what they had been told, he would go away, and, making inquiries in the City, would perhaps invest some of his own money in the concern.

It was about the middle of dinner, just in fact as the saddle of mutton had been brought in by Smither, that Mrs. MacAnder, looking airily round, said: "Oh! and whom do you think I passed to-day in Richmond Park? You'll never guess—Mrs. Soames and—Mr. Bosinney. They must have been down to look at the house!"

Winifred Dartie coughed, and no one said a word. It was the piece of evidence they had all unconsciously been waiting for.

To do Mrs. MacAnder justice, she had been to Switzerland and the Italian lakes with a party of three, and had not heard of Soames' rupture with his architect. She could not tell, therefore, the profound impression her words would make.

Upright and a little flushed, she moved her small, shrewd eyes from face to face, trying to gauge the effect of her words. On either side of her a Hayman boy, his lean, taciturn, hungry face turned towards his plate, ate his mutton steadily.

These two, Giles and Jesse, were so alike and so inseparable that they were known as the Dromios. They never talked, and seemed always completely occupied in doing nothing. It was popularly supposed that they were cramming for an important examination. They walked without hats for long hours in the Gardens attached to their house, books in their hands, a fox-terrier at their heels, never saying a word, and smoking all the time. Every morning, about fifty yards apart, they trotted down Campden Hill on two lean hacks, with legs as long as their own, and every morning about an hour later, still fifty yards apart, they cantered up again. Every evening, wherever they had dined, they might be observed about half-past ten, leaning over the balustrade of the Alhambra promenade.

They were never seen otherwise than together; in this way passing their lives, apparently perfectly content.

Inspired by some dumb stirring within them of the feelings of gentlemen, they turned at this painful moment to Mrs. MacAnder, and said in precisely the same voice: "Have you seen the...?"

Such was her surprise at being thus addressed that she put down her fork; and Smither, who was passing, promptly removed her plate. Mrs. MacAnder, however, with presence of mind, said instantly: "I must have a little more of that nice mutton."

But afterwards in the drawing-room she sat down by Mrs. Small, determined to get to the bottom of the matter. And she began:

"What a charming woman, Mrs. Soames; such a sympathetic temperament! Soames is a really lucky man!"

Her anxiety for information had not made sufficient allowance for that inner Forsyte skin which refuses to share its troubles with outsiders.

Mrs. Septimus Small, drawing herself up with a creak and rustle of her whole person, said, shivering in her dignity:

"My dear, it is a subject we do not talk about!"

CHAPTER II

NIGHT IN THE PARK

Although with her infallible instinct Mrs. Small had said the very thing to make her guest 'more intriguee than ever,' it is difficult to see how else she could truthfully have spoken.

It was not a subject which the Forsytes could talk about even among themselves—to use the word Soames had invented to characterize to himself the situation, it was 'subterranean.'

Yet, within a week of Mrs. MacAnder's encounter in Richmond Park, to all of them—save Timothy, from whom it was carefully kept—to James on his domestic beat from the Poultry to Park Lane, to George the wild one, on his daily adventure from the bow window at the Haversnake to the billiard room at the 'Red Pottle,' was it known that 'those two' had gone to extremes.

George (it was he who invented many of those striking expressions still current in fashionable circles) voiced the sentiment more accurately than any one when he said to his brother Eustace that 'the Buccaneer' was 'going it'; he expected Soames was about 'fed up.'

It was felt that he must be, and yet, what could be done? He ought perhaps to take steps; but to take steps would be deplorable.

Without an open scandal which they could not see their way to recommending, it was difficult to see what steps could be taken. In this impasse, the only thing was to say nothing to Soames, and nothing to each other; in fact, to pass it over.

By displaying towards Irene a dignified coldness, some impression might be made upon her; but she

was seldom now to be seen, and there seemed a slight difficulty in seeking her out on purpose to show her coldness. Sometimes in the privacy of his bedroom James would reveal to Emily the real suffering that his son's misfortune caused him.

"I can't tell," he would say; "it worries me out of my life. There'll be a scandal, and that'll do him no good. I shan't say anything to him. There might be nothing in it. What do you think? She's very artistic, they tell me. What? Oh, you're a 'regular Juley! Well, I don't know; I expect the worst. This is what comes of having no children. I knew how it would be from the first. They never told me they didn't mean to have any children—nobody tells me anything!"

On his knees by the side of the bed, his eyes open and fixed with worry, he would breathe into the counterpane. Clad in his nightshirt, his neck poked forward, his back rounded, he resembled some long white bird.

"Our Father-," he repeated, turning over and over again the thought of this possible scandal.

Like old Jolyon, he, too, at the bottom of his heart set the blame of the tragedy down to family interference. What business had that lot—he began to think of the Stanhope Gate branch, including young Jolyon and his daughter, as 'that lot'—to introduce a person like this Bosinney into the family? (He had heard George's soubriquet, 'The Buccaneer,' but he could make nothing of that—the young man was an architect.)

He began to feel that his brother Jolyon, to whom he had always looked up and on whose opinion he had relied, was not quite what he had expected.

Not having his eldest brother's force of character, he was more sad than angry. His great comfort was to go to Winifred's, and take the little Darties in his carriage over to Kensington Gardens, and there, by the Round Pond, he could often be seen walking with his eyes fixed anxiously on little Publius Dartie's sailing-boat, which he had himself freighted with a penny, as though convinced that it would never again come to shore; while little Publius—who, James delighted to say, was not a bit like his father skipping along under his lee, would try to get him to bet another that it never would, having found that it always did. And James would make the bet; he always paid—sometimes as many as three or four pennies in the afternoon, for the game seemed never to pall on little Publius—and always in paying he said: "Now, that's for your money-box. Why, you're getting quite a rich man!" The thought of his little grandson's growing wealth was a real pleasure to him. But little Publius knew a sweet-shop, and a trick worth two of that.

And they would walk home across the Park, James' figure, with high shoulders and absorbed and worried face, exercising its tall, lean protectorship, pathetically unregarded, over the robust child-figures of Imogen and little Publius.

But those Gardens and that Park were not sacred to James. Forsytes and tramps, children and lovers, rested and wandered day after day, night after night, seeking one and all some freedom from labour, from the reek and turmoil of the streets.

The leaves browned slowly, lingering with the sun and summer-like warmth of the nights.

On Saturday, October 5, the sky that had been blue all day deepened after sunset to the bloom of purple grapes. There was no moon, and a clear dark, like some velvety garment, was wrapped around the trees, whose thinned branches, resembling plumes, stirred not in the still, warm air. All London had poured into the Park, draining the cup of summer to its dregs.

Couple after couple, from every gate, they streamed along the paths and over the burnt grass, and one after another, silently out of the lighted spaces, stole into the shelter of the feathery trees, where, blotted against some trunk, or under the shadow of shrubs, they were lost to all but themselves in the heart of the soft darkness.

To fresh-comers along the paths, these forerunners formed but part of that passionate dusk, whence only a strange murmur, like the confused beating of hearts, came forth. But when that murmur reached each couple in the lamp-light their voices wavered, and ceased; their arms enlaced, their eyes began seeking, searching, probing the blackness. Suddenly, as though drawn by invisible hands, they, too, stepped over the railing, and, silent as shadows, were gone from the light.

The stillness, enclosed in the far, inexorable roar of the town, was alive with the myriad passions, hopes, and loves of multitudes of struggling human atoms; for in spite of the disapproval of that great body of Forsytes, the Municipal Council—to whom Love had long been considered, next to the Sewage Question, the gravest danger to the community—a process was going on that night in the Park, and in a hundred other parks, without which the thousand factories, churches, shops, taxes, and drains, of

which they were custodians, were as arteries without blood, a man without a heart.

The instincts of self-forgetfulness, of passion, and of love, hiding under the trees, away from the trustees of their remorseless enemy, the 'sense of property,' were holding a stealthy revel, and Soames, returning from Bayswater for he had been alone to dine at Timothy's walking home along the water, with his mind upon that coming lawsuit, had the blood driven from his heart by a low laugh and the sound of kisses. He thought of writing to the Times the next morning, to draw the attention of the Editor to the condition of our parks. He did not, however, for he had a horror of seeing his name in print.

But starved as he was, the whispered sounds in the stillness, the half-seen forms in the dark, acted on him like some morbid stimulant. He left the path along the water and stole under the trees, along the deep shadow of little plantations, where the boughs of chestnut trees hung their great leaves low, and there was blacker refuge, shaping his course in circles which had for their object a stealthy inspection of chairs side by side, against tree-trunks, of enlaced lovers, who stirred at his approach.

Now he stood still on the rise overlooking the Serpentine, where, in full lamp-light, black against the silver water, sat a couple who never moved, the woman's face buried on the man's neck—a single form, like a carved emblem of passion, silent and unashamed.

And, stung by the sight, Soames hurried on deeper into the shadow of the trees.

In this search, who knows what he thought and what he sought? Bread for hunger—light in darkness? Who knows what he expected to find—impersonal knowledge of the human heart—the end of his private subterranean tragedy—for, again, who knew, but that each dark couple, unnamed, unnameable, might not be he and she?

But it could not be such knowledge as this that he was seeking—the wife of Soames Forsyte sitting in the Park like a common wench! Such thoughts were inconceivable; and from tree to tree, with his noiseless step, he passed.

Once he was sworn at; once the whisper, "If only it could always be like this!" sent the blood flying again from his heart, and he waited there, patient and dogged, for the two to move. But it was only a poor thin slip of a shop-girl in her draggled blouse who passed him, clinging to her lover's arm.

A hundred other lovers too whispered that hope in the stillness of the trees, a hundred other lovers clung to each other.

But shaking himself with sudden disgust, Soames returned to the path, and left that seeking for he knew not what.

CHAPTER III

MEETING AT THE BOTANICAL

Young Jolyon, whose circumstances were not those of a Forsyte, found at times a difficulty in sparing the money needful for those country jaunts and researches into Nature, without having prosecuted which no watercolour artist ever puts brush to paper.

He was frequently, in fact, obliged to take his colour-box into the Botanical Gardens, and there, on his stool, in the shade of a monkey-puzzler or in the lee of some India-rubber plant, he would spend long hours sketching.

An Art critic who had recently been looking at his work had delivered himself as follows:

"In a way your drawings are very good; tone and colour, in some of them certainly quite a feeling for Nature. But, you see, they're so scattered; you'll never get the public to look at them. Now, if you'd taken a definite subject, such as 'London by Night,' or 'The Crystal Palace in the Spring,' and made a regular series, the public would have known at once what they were looking at. I can't lay too much stress upon that. All the men who are making great names in Art, like Crum Stone or Bleeder, are making them by avoiding the unexpected; by specializing and putting their works all in the same pigeon-hole, so that the public know pat once where to go. And this stands to reason, for if a man's a collector he doesn't want people to smell at the canvas to find out whom his pictures are by; he wants

them to be able to say at once, 'A capital Forsyte!' It is all the more important for you to be careful to choose a subject that they can lay hold of on the spot, since there's no very marked originality in your style."

Young Jolyon, standing by the little piano, where a bowl of dried rose leaves, the only produce of the garden, was deposited on a bit of faded damask, listened with his dim smile.

Turning to his wife, who was looking at the speaker with an angry expression on her thin face, he said:

"You see, dear?"

"I do not," she answered in her staccato voice, that still had a little foreign accent; "your style has originality."

The critic looked at her, smiled' deferentially, and said no more. Like everyone else, he knew their history.

The words bore good fruit with young Jolyon; they were contrary to all that he believed in, to all that he theoretically held good in his Art, but some strange, deep instinct moved him against his will to turn them to profit.

He discovered therefore one morning that an idea had come to him for making a series of watercolour drawings of London. How the idea had arisen he could not tell; and it was not till the following year, when he had completed and sold them at a very fair price, that in one of his impersonal moods, he found himself able to recollect the Art critic, and to discover in his own achievement another proof that he was a Forsyte.

He decided to commence with the Botanical Gardens, where he had already made so many studies, and chose the little artificial pond, sprinkled now with an autumn shower of red and yellow leaves, for though the gardeners longed to sweep them off, they could not reach them with their brooms. The rest of the gardens they swept bare enough, removing every morning Nature's rain of leaves; piling them in heaps, whence from slow fires rose the sweet, acrid smoke that, like the cuckoo's note for spring, the scent of lime trees for the summer, is the true emblem of the fall. The gardeners' tidy souls could not abide the gold and green and russet pattern on the grass. The gravel paths must lie unstained, ordered, methodical, without knowledge of the realities of life, nor of that slow and beautiful decay which flings crowns underfoot to star the earth with fallen glories, whence, as the cycle rolls, will leap again wild spring.

Thus each leaf that fell was marked from the moment when it fluttered a good-bye and dropped, slow turning, from its twig.

But on that little pond the leaves floated in peace, and praised Heaven with their hues, the sunlight haunting over them.

And so young Jolyon found them.

Coming there one morning in the middle of October, he was disconcerted to find a bench about twenty paces from his stand occupied, for he had a proper horror of anyone seeing him at work.

A lady in a velvet jacket was sitting there, with her eyes fixed on the ground. A flowering laurel, however, stood between, and, taking shelter behind this, young Jolyon prepared his easel.

His preparations were leisurely; he caught, as every true artist should, at anything that might delay for a moment the effort of his work, and he found himself looking furtively at this unknown dame.

Like his father before him, he had an eye for a face. This face was charming!

He saw a rounded chin nestling in a cream ruffle, a delicate face with large dark eyes and soft lips. A black 'picture' hat concealed the hair; her figure was lightly poised against the back of the bench, her knees were crossed; the tip of a patent-leather shoe emerged beneath her skirt. There was something, indeed, inexpressibly dainty about the person of this lady, but young Jolyon's attention was chiefly riveted by the look on her face, which reminded him of his wife. It was as though its owner had come into contact with forces too strong for her. It troubled him, arousing vague feelings of attraction and chivalry. Who was she? And what doing there, alone?

Two young gentlemen of that peculiar breed, at once forward and shy, found in the Regent's Park, came by on their way to lawn tennis, and he noted with disapproval their furtive stares of admiration. A loitering gardener halted to do something unnecessary to a clump of pampas grass; he, too, wanted an

excuse for peeping. A gentleman, old, and, by his hat, a professor of horticulture, passed three times to scrutinize her long and stealthily, a queer expression about his lips.

With all these men young Jolyon felt the same vague irritation. She looked at none of them, yet was he certain that every man who passed would look at her like that.

Her face was not the face of a sorceress, who in every look holds out to men the offer of pleasure; it had none of the 'devil's beauty' so highly prized among the first Forsytes of the land; neither was it of that type, no less adorable, associated with the box of chocolate; it was not of the spiritually passionate, or passionately spiritual order, peculiar to house-decoration and modern poetry; nor did it seem to promise to the playwright material for the production of the interesting and neurasthenic figure, who commits suicide in the last act.

In shape and colouring, in its soft persuasive passivity, its sensuous purity, this woman's face reminded him of Titian's 'Heavenly Love,' a reproduction of which hung over the sideboard in his dining-room. And her attraction seemed to be in this soft passivity, in the feeling she gave that to pressure she must yield.

For what or whom was she waiting, in the silence, with the trees dropping here and there a leaf, and the thrushes strutting close on grass, touched with the sparkle of the autumn rime? Then her charming face grew eager, and, glancing round, with almost a lover's jealousy, young Jolyon saw Bosinney striding across the grass.

Curiously he watched the meeting, the look in their eyes, the long clasp of their hands. They sat down close together, linked for all their outward discretion. He heard the rapid murmur of their talk; but what they said he could not catch.

He had rowed in the galley himself! He knew the long hours of waiting and the lean minutes of a half-public meeting; the tortures of suspense that haunt the unhallowed lover.

It required, however, but a glance at their two faces to see that this was none of those affairs of a season that distract men and women about town; none of those sudden appetites that wake up ravening, and are surfeited and asleep again in six weeks. This was the real thing! This was what had happened to himself! Out of this anything might come!

Bosinney was pleading, and she so quiet, so soft, yet immovable in her passivity, sat looking over the grass.

Was he the man to carry her off, that tender, passive being, who would never stir a step for herself? Who had given him all herself, and would die for him, but perhaps would never run away with him!

It seemed to young Jolyon that he could hear her saying: "But, darling, it would ruin you!" For he himself had experienced to the full the gnawing fear at the bottom of each woman's heart that she is a drag on the man she loves.

And he peeped at them no more; but their soft, rapid talk came to his ears, with the stuttering song of some bird who seemed trying to remember the notes of spring: Joy—tragedy? Which—which?

And gradually their talk ceased; long silence followed.

'And where does Soames come in?' young Jolyon thought. 'People think she is concerned about the sin of deceiving her husband! Little they know of women! She's eating, after starvation—taking her revenge! And Heaven help her—for he'll take his.'

He heard the swish of silk, and, spying round the laurel, saw them walking away, their hands stealthily joined....

At the end of July old Jolyon had taken his grand-daughter to the mountains; and on that visit (the last they ever paid) June recovered to a great extent her health and spirits. In the hotels, filled with British Forsytes—for old Jolyon could not bear a 'set of Germans,' as he called all foreigners—she was looked upon with respect—the only grand-daughter of that fine-looking, and evidently wealthy, old Mr. Forsyte. She did not mix freely with people—to mix freely with people was not June's habit—but she formed some friendships, and notably one in the Rhone Valley, with a French girl who was dying of consumption.

Determining at once that her friend should not die, she forgot, in the institution of a campaign against Death, much of her own trouble.

Old Jolyon watched the new intimacy with relief and disapproval; for this additional proof that her life

was to be passed amongst 'lame ducks' worried him. Would she never make a friendship or take an interest in something that would be of real benefit to her?

'Taking up with a parcel of foreigners,' he called it. He often, however, brought home grapes or roses, and presented them to 'Mam'zelle' with an ingratiating twinkle.

Towards the end of September, in spite of June's disapproval, Mademoiselle Vigor breathed her last in the little hotel at St. Luc, to which they had moved her; and June took her defeat so deeply to heart that old Jolyon carried her away to Paris. Here, in contemplation of the 'Venus de Milo' and the 'Madeleine,' she shook off her depression, and when, towards the middle of October, they returned to town, her grandfather believed that he had effected a cure.

No sooner, however, had they established themselves in Stanhope Gate than he perceived to his dismay a return of her old absorbed and brooding manner. She would sit, staring in front of her, her chin on her hand, like a little Norse spirit, grim and intent, while all around in the electric light, then just installed, shone the great, drawing-room brocaded up to the frieze, full of furniture from Baple and Pullbred's. And in the huge gilt mirror were reflected those Dresden china groups of young men in tight knee breeches, at the feet of full-bosomed ladies nursing on their laps pet lambs, which old Jolyon had bought when he was a bachelor and thought so highly of in these days of degenerate taste. He was a man of most open mind, who, more than any Forsyte of them all, had moved with the times, but he could never forget that he had bought these groups at Jobson's, and given a lot of money for them. He often said to June, with a sort of disillusioned contempt:

"You don't care about them! They're not the gimcrack things you and your friends like, but they cost me seventy pounds!" He was not a man who allowed his taste to be warped when he knew for solid reasons that it was sound.

One of the first things that June did on getting home was to go round to Timothy's. She persuaded herself that it was her duty to call there, and cheer him with an account of all her travels; but in reality she went because she knew of no other place where, by some random speech, or roundabout question, she could glean news of Bosinney.

They received her most cordially: And how was her dear grandfather? He had not been to see them since May. Her Uncle Timothy was very poorly, he had had a lot of trouble with the chimney-sweep in his bedroom; the stupid man had let the soot down the chimney! It had quite upset her uncle.

June sat there a long time, dreading, yet passionately hoping, that they would speak of Bosinney.

But paralyzed by unaccountable discretion, Mrs. Septimus Small let fall no word, neither did she question June about him. In desperation the girl asked at last whether Soames and Irene were in town—she had not yet been to see anyone.

It was Aunt Hester who replied: Oh, yes, they were in town, they had not been away at all. There was some little difficulty about the house, she believed. June had heard, no doubt! She had better ask her Aunt Juley!

June turned to Mrs. Small, who sat upright in her chair, her hands clasped, her face covered with innumerable pouts. In answer to the girl's look she maintained a strange silence, and when she spoke it was to ask June whether she had worn night-socks up in those high hotels where it must be so cold of a night.

June answered that she had not, she hated the stuffy things; and rose to leave.

Mrs. Small's infallibly chosen silence was far more ominous to her than anything that could have been said.

Before half an hour was over she had dragged the truth from Mrs. Baynes in Lowndes Square, that Soames was bringing an action against Bosinney over the decoration of the house.

Instead of disturbing her, the news had a strangely calming effect; as though she saw in the prospect of this struggle new hope for herself. She learnt that the case was expected to come on in about a month, and there seemed little or no prospect of Bosinney's success.

"And whatever he'll do I can't think," said Mrs. Baynes; "it's very dreadful for him, you know—he's got no money—he's very hard up. And we can't help him, I'm sure. I'm told the money-lenders won't lend if you have no security, and he has none—none at all."

Her embonpoint had increased of late; she was in the full swing of autumn organization, her writing-table literally strewn with the menus of charity functions. She looked meaningly at June, with her round

eyes of parrot-grey.

The sudden flush that rose on the girl's intent young face—she must have seen spring up before her a great hope—the sudden sweetness of her smile, often came back to Lady Baynes in after years (Baynes was knighted when he built that public Museum of Art which has given so much employment to officials, and so little pleasure to those working classes for whom it was designed).

The memory of that change, vivid and touching, like the breaking open of a flower, or the first sun after long winter, the memory, too, of all that came after, often intruded itself, unaccountably, inopportunately on Lady Baynes, when her mind was set upon the most important things.

This was the very afternoon of the day that young Jolyon witnessed the meeting in the Botanical Gardens, and on this day, too, old Jolyon paid a visit to his solicitors, Forsyte, Bustard, and Forsyte, in the Poultry. Soames was not in, he had gone down to Somerset House; Bustard was buried up to the hilt in papers and that inaccessible apartment, where he was judiciously placed, in order that he might do as much work as possible; but James was in the front office, biting a finger, and lugubriously turning over the pleadings in *Forsyte v. Bosinney*.

This sound lawyer had only a sort of luxurious dread of the 'nice point,' enough to set up a pleasurable feeling of fuss; for his good practical sense told him that if he himself were on the Bench he would not pay much attention to it. But he was afraid that this Bosinney would go bankrupt and Soames would have to find the money after all, and costs into the bargain. And behind this tangible dread there was always that intangible trouble, lurking in the background, intricate, dim, scandalous, like a bad dream, and of which this action was but an outward and visible sign.

He raised his head as old Jolyon came in, and muttered: "How are you, Jolyon? Haven't seen you for an age. You've been to Switzerland, they tell me. This young Bosinney, he's got himself into a mess. I knew how it would be!" He held out the papers, regarding his elder brother with nervous gloom.

Old Jolyon read them in silence, and while he read them James looked at the floor, biting his fingers the while.

Old Jolyon pitched them down at last, and they fell with a thump amongst a mass of affidavits in 're Buncombe, deceased,' one of the many branches of that parent and profitable tree, 'Fryer v. Forsyte.'

"I don't know what Soames is about," he said, "to make a fuss over a few hundred pounds. I thought he was a man of property."

James' long upper lip twitched angrily; he could not bear his son to be attacked in such a spot.

"It's not the money," he began, but meeting his brother's glance, direct, shrewd, judicial, he stopped.

There was a silence.

"I've come in for my Will," said old Jolyon at last, tugging at his moustache.

James' curiosity was roused at once. Perhaps nothing in this life was more stimulating to him than a Will; it was the supreme deal with property, the final inventory of a man's belongings, the last word on what he was worth. He sounded the bell.

"Bring in Mr. Jolyon's Will," he said to an anxious, dark-haired clerk.

"You going to make some alterations?" And through his mind there flashed the thought: 'Now, am I worth as much as he?'

Old Jolyon put the Will in his breast pocket, and James twisted his long legs regretfully.

"You've made some nice purchases lately, they tell me," he said.

"I don't know where you get your information from," answered old Jolyon sharply. "When's this action coming on? Next month? I can't tell what you've got in your minds. You must manage your own affairs; but if you take my advice, you'll settle it out of Court. Good-bye!" With a cold handshake he was gone.

James, his fixed grey-blue eye corkscrewing round some secret anxious image, began again to bite his finger.

Old Jolyon took his Will to the offices of the New Colliery Company, and sat down in the empty Board Room to read it through. He answered 'Down-by-the-starn' Hemmings so tartly when the latter, seeing his Chairman seated there, entered with the new Superintendent's first report, that the Secretary withdrew with regretful dignity; and sending for the transfer clerk, blew him up till the poor youth

knew not where to look.

It was not—by George—as he (Down-by-the-starn) would have him know, for a whippersnapper of a young fellow like him, to come down to that office, and think that he was God Almighty. He (Down-by-the-starn) had been head of that office for more years than a boy like him could count, and if he thought that when he had finished all his work, he could sit there doing nothing, he did not know him, Hemmings (Down-by-the-starn), and so forth.

On the other side of the green baize door old Jolyon sat at the long, mahogany-and-leather board table, his thick, loose-jointed, tortoiseshell eye-glasses perched on the bridge of his nose, his gold pencil moving down the clauses of his Will.

It was a simple affair, for there were none of those vexatious little legacies and donations to charities, which fritter away a man's possessions, and damage the majestic effect of that little paragraph in the morning papers accorded to Forsytes who die with a hundred thousand pounds.

A simple affair. Just a bequest to his son of twenty thousand, and 'as to the residue of my property of whatsoever kind whether realty or personalty, or partaking of the nature of either—upon trust to pay the proceeds rents annual produce dividends or interest thereof and thereon to my said grand-daughter June Forsyte or her assigns during her life to be for her sole use and benefit and without, etc... and from and after her death or decease upon trust to convey assign transfer or make over the said last-mentioned lands hereditaments premises trust moneys stocks funds investments and securities or such as shall then stand for and represent the same unto such person or persons whether one or more for such intents purposes and uses and generally in such manner way and form in all respects as the said June Forsyte notwithstanding coverture shall by her last Will and Testament or any writing or writings in the nature of a Will testament or testamentary disposition to be by her duly made signed and published direct appoint or make over give and dispose of the same And in default etc.... Provided always...' and so on, in seven folios of brief and simple phraseology.

The Will had been drawn by James in his palmy days. He had foreseen almost every contingency.

Old Jolyon sat a long time reading this Will; at last he took half a sheet of paper from the rack, and made a prolonged pencil note; then buttoning up the Will, he caused a cab to be called and drove to the offices of Paramor and Herring, in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Jack Herring was dead, but his nephew was still in the firm, and old Jolyon was closeted with him for half an hour.

He had kept the hansom, and on coming out, gave the driver the address—3, Wistaria Avenue.

He felt a strange, slow satisfaction, as though he had scored a victory over James and the man of property. They should not poke their noses into his affairs any more; he had just cancelled their trusteeships of his Will; he would take the whole of his business out of their hands, and put it into the hands of young Herring, and he would move the business of his Companies too. If that young Soames were such a man of property, he would never miss a thousand a year or so; and under his great white moustache old Jolyon grimly smiled. He felt that what he was doing was in the nature of retributive justice, richly deserved.

Slowly, surely, with the secret inner process that works the destruction of an old tree, the poison of the wounds to his happiness, his will, his pride, had corroded the comely edifice of his philosophy. Life had worn him down on one side, till, like that family of which he was the head, he had lost balance.

To him, borne northwards towards his son's house, the thought of the new disposition of property, which he had just set in motion, appeared vaguely in the light of a stroke of punishment, levelled at that family and that Society, of which James and his son seemed to him the representatives. He had made a restitution to young Jolyon, and restitution to young Jolyon satisfied his secret craving for revenge—revenge against Time, sorrow, and interference, against all that incalculable sum of disapproval that had been bestowed by the world for fifteen years on his only son. It presented itself as the one possible way of asserting once more the domination of his will; of forcing James, and Soames, and the family, and all those hidden masses of Forsytes—a great stream rolling against the single dam of his obstinacy—to recognise once and for all that he would be master. It was sweet to think that at last he was going to make the boy a richer man by far than that son of James, that 'man of property.' And it was sweet to give to Jo, for he loved his son.

Neither young Jolyon nor his wife were in (young Jolyon indeed was not back from the Botanical), but the little maid told him that she expected the master at any moment:

"He's always at 'ome to tea, sir, to play with the children."

Old Jolyon said he would wait; and sat down patiently enough in the faded, shabby drawing room,

where, now that the summer chintzes were removed, the old chairs and sofas revealed all their threadbare deficiencies. He longed to send for the children; to have them there beside him, their supple bodies against his knees; to hear Jolly's: "Hallo, Gran!" and see his rush; and feel Holly's soft little hand stealing up against his cheek. But he would not. There was solemnity in what he had come to do, and until it was over he would not play. He amused himself by thinking how with two strokes of his pen he was going to restore the look of caste so conspicuously absent from everything in that little house; how he could fill these rooms, or others in some larger mansion, with triumphs of art from Baple and Pullbred's; how he could send little Jolly to Harrow and Oxford (he no longer had faith in Eton and Cambridge, for his son had been there); how he could procure little Holly the best musical instruction, the child had a remarkable aptitude.

As these visions crowded before him, causing emotion to swell his heart, he rose, and stood at the window, looking down into the little walled strip of garden, where the pear-tree, bare of leaves before its time, stood with gaunt branches in the slow-gathering mist of the autumn afternoon. The dog Balthasar, his tail curled tightly over a piebald, furry back, was walking at the farther end, sniffing at the plants, and at intervals placing his leg for support against the wall.

And old Jolyon mused.

What pleasure was there left but to give? It was pleasant to give, when you could find one who would be thankful for what you gave—one of your own flesh and blood! There was no such satisfaction to be had out of giving to those who did not belong to you, to those who had no claim on you! Such giving as that was a betrayal of the individualistic convictions and actions of his life, of all his enterprise, his labour, and his moderation, of the great and proud fact that, like tens of thousands of Forsytes before him, tens of thousands in the present, tens of thousands in the future, he had always made his own, and held his own, in the world.

And, while he stood there looking down on the smut-covered foliage of the laurels, the black-stained grass-plot, the progress of the dog Balthasar, all the suffering of the fifteen years during which he had been baulked of legitimate enjoyment mingled its gall with the sweetness of the approaching moment.

Young Jolyon came at last, pleased with his work, and fresh from long hours in the open air. On hearing that his father was in the drawing room, he inquired hurriedly whether Mrs. Forsyte was at home, and being informed that she was not, heaved a sigh of relief. Then putting his painting materials carefully in the little coat-closet out of sight, he went in.

With characteristic decision old Jolyon came at once to the point. "I've been altering my arrangements, Jo," he said. "You can cut your coat a bit longer in the future—I'm settling a thousand a year on you at once. June will have fifty thousand at my death; and you the rest. That dog of yours is spoiling the garden. I shouldn't keep a dog, if I were you!"

The dog Balthasar, seated in the centre of the lawn, was examining his tail.

Young Jolyon looked at the animal, but saw him dimly, for his eyes were misty.

"Yours won't come short of a hundred thousand, my boy," said old Jolyon; "I thought you'd better know. I haven't much longer to live at my age. I shan't allude to it again. How's your wife? And—give her my love."

Young Jolyon put his hand on his father's shoulder, and, as neither spoke, the episode closed.

Having seen his father into a hansom, young Jolyon came back to the drawing-room and stood, where old Jolyon had stood, looking down on the little garden. He tried to realize all that this meant to him, and, Forsyte that he was, vistas of property were opened out in his brain; the years of half rations through which he had passed had not sapped his natural instincts. In extremely practical form, he thought of travel, of his wife's costume, the children's education, a pony for Jolly, a thousand things; but in the midst of all he thought, too, of Bosinney and his mistress, and the broken song of the thrush. Joy—tragedy! Which? Which?

The old past—the poignant, suffering, passionate, wonderful past, that no money could buy, that nothing could restore in all its burning sweetness—had come back before him.

When his wife came in he went straight up to her and took her in his arms; and for a long time he stood without speaking, his eyes closed, pressing her to him, while she looked at him with a wondering, adoring, doubting look in her eyes.

CHAPTER IV

VOYAGE INTO THE INFERNO

The morning after a certain night on which Soames at last asserted his rights and acted like a man, he breakfasted alone.

He breakfasted by gaslight, the fog of late November wrapping the town as in some monstrous blanket till the trees of the Square even were barely visible from the dining-room window.

He ate steadily, but at times a sensation as though he could not swallow attacked him. Had he been right to yield to his overmastering hunger of the night before, and break down the resistance which he had suffered now too long from this woman who was his lawful and solemnly constituted helpmate?

He was strangely haunted by the recollection of her face, from before which, to soothe her, he had tried to pull her hands—of her terrible smothered sobbing, the like of which he had never heard, and still seemed to hear; and he was still haunted by the odd, intolerable feeling of remorse and shame he had felt, as he stood looking at her by the flame of the single candle, before silently slinking away.

And somehow, now that he had acted like this, he was surprised at himself.

Two nights before, at Winifred Dartie's, he had taken Mrs. MacAnder into dinner. She had said to him, looking in his face with her sharp, greenish eyes: "And so your wife is a great friend of that Mr. Bosinney's?"

Not deigning to ask what she meant, he had brooded over her words.

They had roused in him a fierce jealousy, which, with the peculiar perversion of this instinct, had turned to fiercer desire.

Without the incentive of Mrs. MacAnder's words he might never have done what he had done. Without their incentive and the accident of finding his wife's door for once unlocked, which had enabled him to steal upon her asleep.

Slumber had removed his doubts, but the morning brought them again. One thought comforted him: No one would know—it was not the sort of thing that she would speak about.

And, indeed, when the vehicle of his daily business life, which needed so imperatively the grease of clear and practical thought, started rolling once more with the reading of his letters, those nightmare-like doubts began to assume less extravagant importance at the back of his mind. The incident was really not of great moment; women made a fuss about it in books; but in the cool judgment of right-thinking men, of men of the world, of such as he recollected often received praise in the Divorce Court, he had but done his best to sustain the sanctity of marriage, to prevent her from abandoning her duty, possibly, if she were still seeing Bosinney, from....

No, he did not regret it.

Now that the first step towards reconciliation had been taken, the rest would be comparatively—comparatively....

He, rose and walked to the window. His nerve had been shaken. The sound of smothered sobbing was in his ears again. He could not get rid of it.

He put on his fur coat, and went out into the fog; having to go into the City, he took the underground railway from Sloane Square station.

In his corner of the first-class compartment filled with City men the smothered sobbing still haunted him, so he opened the Times with the rich crackle that drowns all lesser sounds, and, barricaded behind it, set himself steadily to con the news.

He read that a Recorder had charged a grand jury on the previous day with a more than usually long list of offences. He read of three murders, five manslaughters, seven arsons, and as many as eleven rapes—a surprisingly high number—in addition to many less conspicuous crimes, to be tried during a coming Sessions; and from one piece of news he went on to another, keeping the paper well before his face.

And still, inseparable from his reading, was the memory of Irene's tear-stained face, and the sounds from her broken heart.

The day was a busy one, including, in addition to the ordinary affairs of his practice, a visit to his brokers, Messrs. Grin and Grinning, to give them instructions to sell his shares in the New Colliery Co., Ltd., whose business he suspected, rather than knew, was stagnating (this enterprise afterwards slowly declined, and was ultimately sold for a song to an American syndicate); and a long conference at Waterbuck, Q.C.'s chambers, attended by Boulter, by Fiske, the junior counsel, and Waterbuck, Q.C., himself.

The case of Forsyte v. Bosinney was expected to be reached on the morrow, before Mr. Justice Bentham.

Mr. Justice Bentham, a man of common-sense rather than too great legal knowledge, was considered to be about the best man they could have to try the action. He was a 'strong' Judge.

Waterbuck, Q.C., in pleasing conjunction with an almost rude neglect of Boulter and Fiske paid to Soames a good deal of attention, by instinct or the sounder evidence of rumour, feeling him to be a man of property.

He held with remarkable consistency to the opinion he had already expressed in writing, that the issue would depend to a great extent on the evidence given at the trial, and in a few well directed remarks he advised Soames not to be too careful in giving that evidence. "A little bluffness, Mr. Forsyte," he said, "a little bluffness," and after he had spoken he laughed firmly, closed his lips tight, and scratched his head just below where he had pushed his wig back, for all the world like the gentleman-farmer for whom he loved to be taken. He was considered perhaps the leading man in breach of promise cases.

Soames used the underground again in going home.

The fog was worse than ever at Sloane Square station. Through the still, thick blur, men groped in and out; women, very few, grasped their reticules to their bosoms and handkerchiefs to their mouths; crowned with the weird excrescence of the driver, haloed by a vague glow of lamp-light that seemed to drown in vapour before it reached the pavement, cabs loomed dim-shaped ever and again, and discharged citizens, bolting like rabbits to their burrows.

And these shadowy figures, wrapped each in his own little shroud of fog, took no notice of each other. In the great warren, each rabbit for himself, especially those clothed in the more expensive fur, who, afraid of carriages on foggy days, are driven underground.

One figure, however, not far from Soames, waited at the station door.

Some buccaneer or lover, of whom each Forsyte thought: 'Poor devil! looks as if he were having a bad time!' Their kind hearts beat a stroke faster for that poor, waiting, anxious lover in the fog; but they hurried by, well knowing that they had neither time nor money to spare for any suffering but their own.

Only a policeman, patrolling slowly and at intervals, took an interest in that waiting figure, the brim of whose slouch hat half hid a face reddened by the cold, all thin, and haggard, over which a hand stole now and again to smooth away anxiety, or renew the resolution that kept him waiting there. But the waiting lover (if lover he were) was used to policemen's scrutiny, or too absorbed in his anxiety, for he never flinched. A hardened case, accustomed to long trysts, to anxiety, and fog, and cold, if only his mistress came at last. Foolish lover! Fogs last until the spring; there is also snow and rain, no comfort anywhere; gnawing fear if you bring her out, gnawing fear if you bid her stay at home!

"Serve him right; he should arrange his affairs better!"

So any respectable Forsyte. Yet, if that sounder citizen could have listened at the waiting lover's heart, out there in the fog and the cold, he would have said again: "Yes, poor devil he's having a bad time!"

Soames got into his cab, and, with the glass down, crept along Sloane Street, and so along the Brompton Road, and home. He reached his house at five.

His wife was not in. She had gone out a quarter of an hour before. Out at such a time of night, into this terrible fog! What was the meaning of that?

He sat by the dining-room fire, with the door open, disturbed to the soul, trying to read the evening paper. A book was no good—in daily papers alone was any narcotic to such worry as his. From the customary events recorded in the journal he drew some comfort. 'Suicide of an actress'—'Grave indisposition of a Statesman' (that chronic sufferer)—'Divorce of an army officer'—'Fire in a colliery'—he read them all. They helped him a little—prescribed by the greatest of all doctors, our natural taste.

It was nearly seven when he heard her come in.

The incident of the night before had long lost its importance under stress of anxiety at her strange sortie into the fog. But now that Irene was home, the memory of her broken-hearted sobbing came back to him, and he felt nervous at the thought of facing her.

She was already on the stairs; her grey fur coat hung to her knees, its high collar almost hid her face, she wore a thick veil.

She neither turned to look at him nor spoke. No ghost or stranger could have passed more silently.

Bilson came to lay dinner, and told him that Mrs. Forsyte was not coming down; she was having the soup in her room.

For once Soames did not 'change'; it was, perhaps, the first time in his life that he had sat down to dinner with soiled cuffs, and, not even noticing them, he brooded long over his wine. He sent Bilson to light a fire in his picture-room, and presently went up there himself.

Turning on the gas, he heaved a deep sigh, as though amongst these treasures, the backs of which confronted him in stacks, around the little room, he had found at length his peace of mind. He went straight up to the greatest treasure of them all, an undoubted Turner, and, carrying it to the easel, turned its face to the light. There had been a movement in Turners, but he had not been able to make up his mind to part with it. He stood for a long time, his pale, clean-shaven face poked forward above his stand-up collar, looking at the picture as though he were adding it up; a wistful expression came into his eyes; he found, perhaps, that it came to too little. He took it down from the easel to put it back against the wall; but, in crossing the room, stopped, for he seemed to hear sobbing.

It was nothing—only the sort of thing that had been bothering him in the morning. And soon after, putting the high guard before the blazing fire, he stole downstairs.

Fresh for the morrow! was his thought. It was long before he went to sleep....

It is now to George Forsyte that the mind must turn for light on the events of that fog-engulfed afternoon.

The wittiest and most sportsmanlike of the Forsytes had passed the day reading a novel in the paternal mansion at Princes' Gardens. Since a recent crisis in his financial affairs he had been kept on parole by Roger, and compelled to reside 'at home.'

Towards five o'clock he went out, and took train at South Kensington Station (for everyone to-day went Underground). His intention was to dine, and pass the evening playing billiards at the Red Pottle—that unique hostel, neither club, hotel, nor good gilt restaurant.

He got out at Charing Cross, choosing it in preference to his more usual St. James's Park, that he might reach Jermyn Street by better lighted ways.

On the platform his eyes—for in combination with a composed and fashionable appearance, George had sharp eyes, and was always on the look-out for fillips to his sardonic humour—his eyes were attracted by a man, who, leaping from a first-class compartment, staggered rather than walked towards the exit.

'So ho, my bird!' said George to himself; 'why, it's "the Buccaneer!"' and he put his big figure on the trail. Nothing afforded him greater amusement than a drunken man.

Bosinney, who wore a slouch hat, stopped in front of him, spun around, and rushed back towards the carriage he had just left. He was too late. A porter caught him by the coat; the train was already moving on.

George's practised glance caught sight of the face of a lady clad in a grey fur coat at the carriage window. It was Mrs. Soames—and George felt that this was interesting!

And now he followed Bosinney more closely than ever—up the stairs, past the ticket collector into the street. In that progress, however, his feelings underwent a change; no longer merely curious and amused, he felt sorry for the poor fellow he was shadowing. 'The Buccaneer' was not drunk, but seemed to be acting under the stress of violent emotion; he was talking to himself, and all that George could catch were the words "Oh, God!" Nor did he appear to know what he was doing, or where going; but stared, hesitated, moved like a man out of his mind; and from being merely a joker in search of amusement, George felt that he must see the poor chap through.

He had 'taken the knock'—'taken the knock!' And he wondered what on earth Mrs. Soames had been saying, what on earth she had been telling him in the railway carriage. She had looked bad enough herself! It made George sorry to think of her travelling on with her trouble all alone.

He followed close behind Bosinney's elbow—tall, burly figure, saying nothing, dodging warily—and shadowed him out into the fog.

There was something here beyond a jest! He kept his head admirably, in spite of some excitement, for in addition to compassion, the instincts of the chase were roused within him.

Bosinney walked right out into the thoroughfare—a vast muffled blackness, where a man could not see six paces before him; where, all around, voices or whistles mocked the sense of direction; and sudden shapes came rolling slow upon them; and now and then a light showed like a dim island in an infinite dark sea.

And fast into this perilous gulf of night walked Bosinney, and fast after him walked George. If the fellow meant to put his 'twopenny' under a 'bus, he would stop it if he could! Across the street and back the hunted creature strode, not groping as other men were groping in that gloom, but driven forward as though the faithful George behind wielded a knout; and this chase after a haunted man began to have for George the strangest fascination.

But it was now that the affair developed in a way which ever afterwards caused it to remain green in his mind. Brought to a stand-still in the fog, he heard words which threw a sudden light on these proceedings. What Mrs. Soames had said to Bosinney in the train was now no longer dark. George understood from those mutterings that Soames had exercised his rights over an estranged and unwilling wife in the greatest—the supreme act of property.

His fancy wandered in the fields of this situation; it impressed him; he guessed something of the anguish, the sexual confusion and horror in Bosinney's heart. And he thought: 'Yes, it's a bit thick! I don't wonder the poor fellow is half-cracked!'

He had run his quarry to earth on a bench under one of the lions in Trafalgar Square, a monster sphynx astray like themselves in that gulf of darkness. Here, rigid and silent, sat Bosinney, and George, in whose patience was a touch of strange brotherliness, took his stand behind. He was not lacking in a certain delicacy—a sense of form—that did not permit him to intrude upon this tragedy, and he waited, quiet as the lion above, his fur collar hitched above his ears concealing the fleshy redness of his cheeks, concealing all but his eyes with their sardonic, compassionate stare. And men kept passing back from business on the way to their clubs—men whose figures shrouded in cocoons of fog came into view like spectres, and like spectres vanished. Then even in his compassion George's Quilpish humour broke forth in a sudden longing to pluck these spectres by the sleeve, and say:

"Hi, you Johnnies! You don't often see a show like this! Here's a poor devil whose mistress has just been telling him a pretty little story of her husband; walk up, walk up! He's taken the knock, you see."

In fancy he saw them gaping round the tortured lover; and grinned as he thought of some respectable, newly-married spectre enabled by the state of his own affections to catch an inkling of what was going on within Bosinney; he fancied he could see his mouth getting wider and wider, and the fog going down and down. For in George was all that contempt of the of the married middle-class—peculiar to the wild and sportsmanlike spirits in its ranks.

But he began to be bored. Waiting was not what he had bargained for.

'After all,' he thought, 'the poor chap will get over it; not the first time such a thing has happened in this little city!' But now his quarry again began muttering words of violent hate and anger. And following a sudden impulse George touched him on the shoulder.

Bosinney spun round.

"Who are you? What do you want?"

George could have stood it well enough in the light of the gas lamps, in the light of that everyday world of which he was so hardy a connoisseur; but in this fog, where all was gloomy and unreal, where nothing had that matter-of-fact value associated by Forsytes with earth, he was a victim to strange qualms, and as he tried to stare back into the eyes of this maniac, he thought:

'If I see a bobby, I'll hand him over; he's not fit to be at large.'

But waiting for no answer, Bosinney strode off into the fog, and George followed, keeping perhaps a little further off, yet more than ever set on tracking him down.

'He can't go on long like this,' he thought. 'It's God's own miracle he's not been run over already.' He brooded no more on policemen, a sportsman's sacred fire alive again within him.

Into a denser gloom than ever Bosinney held on at a furious pace; but his pursuer perceived more method in his madness—he was clearly making his way westwards.

'He's really going for Soames!' thought George. The idea was attractive. It would be a sporting end to such a chase. He had always disliked his cousin.

The shaft of a passing cab brushed against his shoulder and made him leap aside. He did not intend to be killed for the Buccaneer, or anyone. Yet, with hereditary tenacity, he stuck to the trail through vapour that blotted out everything but the shadow of the hunted man and the dim moon of the nearest lamp.

Then suddenly, with the instinct of a town-stroller, George knew himself to be in Piccadilly. Here he could find his way blindfold; and freed from the strain of geographical uncertainty, his mind returned to Bosinney's trouble.

Down the long avenue of his man-about-town experience, bursting, as it were, through a smirch of doubtful amours, there stalked to him a memory of his youth. A memory, poignant still, that brought the scent of hay, the gleam of moonlight, a summer magic, into the reek and blackness of this London fog—the memory of a night when in the darkest shadow of a lawn he had overheard from a woman's lips that he was not her sole possessor. And for a moment George walked no longer in black Piccadilly, but lay again, with hell in his heart, and his face to the sweet-smelling, dewy grass, in the long shadow of poplars that hid the moon.

A longing seized him to throw his arm round the Buccaneer, and say, "Come, old boy. Time cures all. Let's go and drink it off!"

But a voice yelled at him, and he started back. A cab rolled out of blackness, and into blackness disappeared. And suddenly George perceived that he had lost Bosinney. He ran forward and back, felt his heart clutched by a sickening fear, the dark fear which lives in the wings of the fog. Perspiration started out on his brow. He stood quite still, listening with all his might.

"And then," as he confided to Dartie the same evening in the course of a game of billiards at the Red Pottle, "I lost him."

Dartie twirled complacently at his dark moustache. He had just put together a neat break of twenty-three,—failing at a 'Jenny.' "And who was she?" he asked.

George looked slowly at the 'man of the world's' fattish, sallow face, and a little grim smile lurked about the curves of his cheeks and his heavy-lidded eyes.

'No, no, my fine fellow,' he thought, 'I'm not going to tell you.' For though he mixed with Dartie a good deal, he thought him a bit of a cad.

"Oh, some little love-lady or other," he said, and chalked his cue.

"A love-lady!" exclaimed Dartie—he used a more figurative expression. "I made sure it was our friend Soa...."

"Did you?" said George curtly. "Then damme you've made an error."

He missed his shot. He was careful not to allude to the subject again till, towards eleven o'clock, having, in his poetic phraseology, 'looked upon the drink when it was yellow,' he drew aside the blind, and gazed out into the street. The murky blackness of the fog was but faintly broken by the lamps of the 'Red Pottle,' and no shape of mortal man or thing was in sight.

"I can't help thinking of that poor Buccaneer," he said. "He may be wandering out there now in that fog. If he's not a corpse," he added with strange dejection.

"Corpse!" said Dartie, in whom the recollection of his defeat at Richmond flared up. "He's all right. Ten to one if he wasn't tight!"

George turned on him, looking really formidable, with a sort of savage gloom on his big face.

"Dry up!" he said. "Don't I tell you he's 'taken the knock!'"

CHAPTER V

THE TRIAL

In the morning of his case, which was second in the list, Soames was again obliged to start without seeing Irene, and it was just as well, for he had not as yet made up his mind what attitude to adopt towards her.

He had been requested to be in court by half-past ten, to provide against the event of the first action (a breach of promise) collapsing, which however it did not, both sides showing a courage that afforded Waterbuck, Q.C., an opportunity for improving his already great reputation in this class of case. He was opposed by Ram, the other celebrated breach of promise man. It was a battle of giants.

The court delivered judgment just before the luncheon interval. The jury left the box for good, and Soames went out to get something to eat. He met James standing at the little luncheon-bar, like a pelican in the wilderness of the galleries, bent over a sandwich with a glass of sherry before him. The spacious emptiness of the great central hall, over which father and son brooded as they stood together, was marred now and then for a fleeting moment by barristers in wig and gown hurriedly bolting across, by an occasional old lady or rusty-coated man, looking up in a frightened way, and by two persons, bolder than their generation, seated in an embrasure arguing. The sound of their voices arose, together with a scent as of neglected wells, which, mingling with the odour of the galleries, combined to form the savour, like nothing but the emanation of a refined cheese, so indissolubly connected with the administration of British Justice.

It was not long before James addressed his son.

"When's your case coming on? I suppose it'll be on directly. I shouldn't wonder if this Bosinney'd say anything; I should think he'd have to. He'll go bankrupt if it goes against him." He took a large bite at his sandwich and a mouthful of sherry. "Your mother," he said, "wants you and Irene to come and dine to-night."

A chill smile played round Soames' lips; he looked back at his father. Anyone who had seen the look, cold and furtive, thus interchanged, might have been pardoned for not appreciating the real understanding between them. James finished his sherry at a draught.

"How much?" he asked.

On returning to the court Soames took at once his rightful seat on the front bench beside his solicitor. He ascertained where his father was seated with a glance so sidelong as to commit nobody.

James, sitting back with his hands clasped over the handle of his umbrella, was brooding on the end of the bench immediately behind counsel, whence he could get away at once when the case was over. He considered Bosinney's conduct in every way outrageous, but he did not wish to run up against him, feeling that the meeting would be awkward.

Next to the Divorce Court, this court was, perhaps, the favourite emporium of justice, libel, breach of promise, and other commercial actions being frequently decided there. Quite a sprinkling of persons unconnected with the law occupied the back benches, and the hat of a woman or two could be seen in the gallery.

The two rows of seats immediately in front of James were gradually filled by barristers in wigs, who sat down to make pencil notes, chat, and attend to their teeth; but his interest was soon diverted from these lesser lights of justice by the entrance of Waterbuck, Q.C., with the wings of his silk gown rustling, and his red, capable face supported by two short, brown whiskers. The famous Q.C. looked, as James freely admitted, the very picture of a man who could heckle a witness.

For all his experience, it so happened that he had never seen Waterbuck, Q.C., before, and, like many Forsytes in the lower branch of the profession, he had an extreme admiration for a good cross-examiner. The long, lugubrious folds in his cheeks relaxed somewhat after seeing him, especially as he now perceived that Soames alone was represented by silk.

Waterbuck, Q.C., had barely screwed round on his elbow to chat with his Junior before Mr. Justice Bentham himself appeared—a thin, rather hen-like man, with a little stoop, clean-shaven under his snowy wig. Like all the rest of the court, Waterbuck rose, and remained on his feet until the judge was seated. James rose but slightly; he was already comfortable, and had no opinion of Bentham, having sat next but one to him at dinner twice at the Bumley Tomms'. Bumley Tomm was rather a poor thing,

though he had been so successful. James himself had given him his first brief. He was excited, too, for he had just found out that Bosinney was not in court.

'Now, what's he mean by that?' he kept on thinking.

The case having been called on, Waterbuck, Q.C., pushing back his papers, hitched his gown on his shoulder, and, with a semi-circular look around him, like a man who is going to bat, arose and addressed the Court.

The facts, he said, were not in dispute, and all that his Lordship would be asked was to interpret the correspondence which had taken place between his client and the defendant, an architect, with reference to the decoration of a house. He would, however, submit that this correspondence could only mean one very plain thing. After briefly reciting the history of the house at Robin Hill, which he described as a mansion, and the actual facts of expenditure, he went on as follows:

"My client, Mr. Soames Forsyte, is a gentleman, a man of property, who would be the last to dispute any legitimate claim that might be made against him, but he has met with such treatment from his architect in the matter of this house, over which he has, as your lordship has heard, already spent some twelve—some twelve thousand pounds, a sum considerably in advance of the amount he had originally contemplated, that as a matter of principle—and this I cannot too strongly emphasize—as a matter of principle, and in the interests of others, he has felt himself compelled to bring this action. The point put forward in defence by the architect I will suggest to your lordship is not worthy of a moment's serious consideration." He then read the correspondence.

His client, "a man of recognised position," was prepared to go into the box, and to swear that he never did authorize, that it was never in his mind to authorize, the expenditure of any money beyond the extreme limit of twelve thousand and fifty pounds, which he had clearly fixed; and not further to waste the time of the court, he would at once call Mr. Forsyte.

Soames then went into the box. His whole appearance was striking in its composure. His face, just supercilious enough, pale and clean-shaven, with a little line between the eyes, and compressed lips; his dress in unostentatious order, one hand neatly gloved, the other bare. He answered the questions put to him in a somewhat low, but distinct voice. His evidence under cross-examination savoured of taciturnity.

Had he not used the expression, "a free hand"? No.

"Come, come!"

The expression he had used was 'a free hand in the terms of this correspondence.'

"Would you tell the Court that that was English?"

"Yes!"

"What do you say it means?"

"What it says!"

"Are you prepared to deny that it is a contradiction in terms?"

"Yes."

"You are not an Irishman?"

"No."

"Are you a well-educated man?"

"Yes."

"And yet you persist in that statement?"

"Yes."

Throughout this and much more cross-examination, which turned again and again around the 'nice point,' James sat with his hand behind his ear, his eyes fixed upon his son.

He was proud of him! He could not but feel that in similar circumstances he himself would have been tempted to enlarge his replies, but his instinct told him that this taciturnity was the very thing. He sighed with relief, however, when Soames, slowly turning, and without any change of expression,

descended from the box.

When it came to the turn of Bosinney's Counsel to address the Judge, James redoubled his attention, and he searched the Court again and again to see if Bosinney were not somewhere concealed.

Young Chankery began nervously; he was placed by Bosinney's absence in an awkward position. He therefore did his best to turn that absence to account.

He could not but fear—he said—that his client had met with an accident. He had fully expected him there to give evidence; they had sent round that morning both to Mr. Bosinney's office and to his rooms (though he knew they were one and the same, he thought it was as well not to say so), but it was not known where he was, and this he considered to be ominous, knowing how anxious Mr. Bosinney had been to give his evidence. He had not, however, been instructed to apply for an adjournment, and in default of such instruction he conceived it his duty to go on. The plea on which he somewhat confidently relied, and which his client, had he not unfortunately been prevented in some way from attending, would have supported by his evidence, was that such an expression as a 'free hand' could not be limited, fettered, and rendered unmeaning, by any verbiage which might follow it. He would go further and say that the correspondence showed that whatever he might have said in his evidence, Mr. Forsyte had in fact never contemplated repudiating liability on any of the work ordered or executed by his architect. The defendant had certainly never contemplated such a contingency, or, as was demonstrated by his letters, he would never have proceeded with the work—a work of extreme delicacy, carried out with great care and efficiency, to meet and satisfy the fastidious taste of a connoisseur, a rich man, a man of property. He felt strongly on this point, and feeling strongly he used, perhaps, rather strong words when he said that this action was of a most unjustifiable, unexpected, indeed—unprecedented character. If his Lordship had had the opportunity that he himself had made it his duty to take, to go over this very fine house and see the great delicacy and beauty of the decorations executed by his client—an artist in his most honourable profession—he felt convinced that not for one moment would his Lordship tolerate this, he would use no stronger word than daring attempt to evade legitimate responsibility.

Taking the text of Soames' letters, he lightly touched on 'Boileau v. The Blasted Cement Company, Limited.' "It is doubtful," he said, "what that authority has decided; in any case I would submit that it is just as much in my favour as in my friend's." He then argued the 'nice point' closely. With all due deference he submitted that Mr. Forsyte's expression nullified itself. His client not being a rich man, the matter was a serious one for him; he was a very talented architect, whose professional reputation was undoubtedly somewhat at stake. He concluded with a perhaps too personal appeal to the Judge, as a lover of the arts, to show himself the protector of artists, from what was occasionally—he said occasionally—the too iron hand of capital. "What," he said, "will be the position of the artistic professions, if men of property like this Mr. Forsyte refuse, and are allowed to refuse, to carry out the obligations of the commissions which they have given." He would now call his client, in case he should at the last moment have found himself able to be present.

The name Philip Baynes Bosinney was called three times by the Ushers, and the sound of the calling echoed with strange melancholy throughout the Court and Galleries.

The crying of this name, to which no answer was returned, had upon James a curious effect: it was like calling for your lost dog about the streets. And the creepy feeling that it gave him, of a man missing, grated on his sense of comfort and security—on his cosiness. Though he could not have said why, it made him feel uneasy.

He looked now at the clock—a quarter to three! It would be all over in a quarter of an hour. Where could the young fellow be?

It was only when Mr. Justice Bentham delivered judgment that he got over the turn he had received.

Behind the wooden erection, by which he was fenced from more ordinary mortals, the learned Judge leaned forward. The electric light, just turned on above his head, fell on his face, and mellowed it to an orange hue beneath the snowy crown of his wig; the amplitude of his robes grew before the eye; his whole figure, facing the comparative dusk of the Court, radiated like some majestic and sacred body. He cleared his throat, took a sip of water, broke the nib of a quill against the desk, and, folding his bony hands before him, began.

To James he suddenly loomed much larger than he had ever thought Bentham would loom. It was the majesty of the law; and a person endowed with a nature far less matter-of-fact than that of James might have been excused for failing to pierce this halo, and disinter therefrom the somewhat ordinary Forsyte, who walked and talked in every-day life under the name of Sir Walter Bentham.

He delivered judgment in the following words:

"The facts in this case are not in dispute. On May 15 last the defendant wrote to the plaintiff, requesting to be allowed to withdraw from his professional position in regard to the decoration of the plaintiff's house, unless he were given 'a free hand.' The plaintiff, on May 17, wrote back as follows: 'In giving you, in accordance with your request, this free hand, I wish you to clearly understand that the total cost of the house as handed over to me completely decorated, inclusive of your fee (as arranged between us) must not exceed twelve thousand pounds.' To this letter the defendant replied on May 18: 'If you think that in such a delicate matter as decoration I can bind myself to the exact pound, I am afraid you are mistaken.' On May 19 the plaintiff wrote as follows: 'I did not mean to say that if you should exceed the sum named in my letter to you by ten or twenty or even fifty pounds there would be any difficulty between us. You have a free hand in the terms of this correspondence, and I hope you will see your way to completing the decorations.' On May 20 the defendant replied thus shortly: 'Very well.'

"In completing these decorations, the defendant incurred liabilities and expenses which brought the total cost of this house up to the sum of twelve thousand four hundred pounds, all of which expenditure has been defrayed by the plaintiff. This action has been brought by the plaintiff to recover from the defendant the sum of three hundred and fifty pounds expended by him in excess of a sum of twelve thousand and fifty pounds, alleged by the plaintiff to have been fixed by this correspondence as the maximum sum that the defendant had authority to expend.

"The question for me to decide is whether or no the defendant is liable to refund to the plaintiff this sum. In my judgment he is so liable.

"What in effect the plaintiff has said is this 'I give you a free hand to complete these decorations, provided that you keep within a total cost to me of twelve thousand pounds. If you exceed that sum by as much as fifty pounds, I will not hold you responsible; beyond that point you are no agent of mine, and I shall repudiate liability.' It is not quite clear to me whether, had the plaintiff in fact repudiated liability under his agent's contracts, he would, under all the circumstances, have been successful in so doing; but he has not adopted this course. He has accepted liability, and fallen back upon his rights against the defendant under the terms of the latter's engagement.

"In my judgment the plaintiff is entitled to recover this sum from the defendant.

"It has been sought, on behalf of the defendant, to show that no limit of expenditure was fixed or intended to be fixed by this correspondence. If this were so, I can find no reason for the plaintiff's importation into the correspondence of the figures of twelve thousand pounds and subsequently of fifty pounds. The defendant's contention would render these figures meaningless. It is manifest to me that by his letter of May 20 he assented to a very clear proposition, by the terms of which he must be held to be bound.

"For these reasons there will be judgment for the plaintiff for the amount claimed with costs."

James sighed, and stooping, picked up his umbrella which had fallen with a rattle at the words 'importation into this correspondence.'

Untangling his legs, he rapidly left the Court; without waiting for his son, he snapped up a hansom cab (it was a clear, grey afternoon) and drove straight to Timothy's where he found Swithin; and to him, Mrs. Septimus Small, and Aunt Hester, he recounted the whole proceedings, eating two muffins not altogether in the intervals of speech.

"Soames did very well," he ended; "he's got his head screwed on the right way. This won't please Jolyon. It's a bad business for that young Bosinney; he'll go bankrupt, I shouldn't wonder," and then after a long pause, during which he had stared disquietly into the fire, he added:

"He wasn't there—now why?"

There was a sound of footsteps. The figure of a thick-set man, with the ruddy brown face of robust health, was seen in the back drawing-room. The forefinger of his upraised hand was outlined against the black of his frock coat. He spoke in a grudging voice.

"Well, James," he said, "I can't—I can't stop," and turning round, he walked out.

It was Timothy.

James rose from his chair. "There!" he said, "there! I knew there was something wro...." He checked himself, and was silent, staring before him, as though he had seen a portent.

CHAPTER VI

SOAMES BREAKS THE NEWS

In leaving the Court Soames did not go straight home. He felt disinclined for the City, and drawn by need for sympathy in his triumph, he, too, made his way, but slowly and on foot, to Timothy's in the Bayswater Road.

His father had just left; Mrs. Small and Aunt Hester, in possession of the whole story, greeted him warmly. They were sure he was hungry after all that evidence. Smither should toast him some more muffins, his dear father had eaten them all. He must put his legs up on the sofa; and he must have a glass of prune brandy too. It was so strengthening.

Swithin was still present, having lingered later than his wont, for he felt in want of exercise. On hearing this suggestion, he 'pished.' A pretty pass young men were coming to! His own liver was out of order, and he could not bear the thought of anyone else drinking prune brandy.

He went away almost immediately, saying to Soames: "And how's your wife? You tell her from me that if she's dull, and likes to come and dine with me quietly, I'll give her such a bottle of champagne as she doesn't get every day." Staring down from his height on Soames he contracted his thick, puffy, yellow hand as though squeezing within it all this small fry, and throwing out his chest he waddled slowly away.

Mrs. Small and Aunt Hester were left horrified. Swithin was so droll!

They themselves were longing to ask Soames how Irene would take the result, yet knew that they must not; he would perhaps say something of his own accord, to throw some light on this, the present burning question in their lives, the question that from necessity of silence tortured them almost beyond bearing; for even Timothy had now been told, and the effect on his health was little short of alarming. And what, too, would June do? This, also, was a most exciting, if dangerous speculation!

They had never forgotten old Jolyon's visit, since when he had not once been to see them; they had never forgotten the feeling it gave all who were present, that the family was no longer what it had been—that the family was breaking up.

But Soames gave them no help, sitting with his knees crossed, talking of the Barbizon school of painters, whom he had just discovered. These were the coming men, he said; he should not wonder if a lot of money were made over them; he had his eye on two pictures by a man called Corot, charming things; if he could get them at a reasonable price he was going to buy them—they would, he thought, fetch a big price some day.

Interested as they could not but be, neither Mrs. Septimus Small nor Aunt Hester could entirely acquiesce in being thus put off.

It was interesting—most interesting—and then Soames was so clever that they were sure he would do something with those pictures if anybody could; but what was his plan now that he had won his case; was he going to leave London at once, and live in the country, or what was he going to do?

Soames answered that he did not know, he thought they should be moving soon. He rose and kissed his aunts.

No sooner had Aunt Juley received this emblem of departure than a change came over her, as though she were being visited by dreadful courage; every little roll of flesh on her face seemed trying to escape from an invisible, confining mask.

She rose to the full extent of her more than medium height, and said: "It has been on my mind a long time, dear, and if nobody else will tell you, I have made up my mind that...."

Aunt Hester interrupted her: "Mind, Julia, you do it...." she gasped—"on your own responsibility!"

Mrs. Small went on as though she had not heard: "I think you ought to know, dear, that Mrs. MacAnder saw Irene walking in Richmond Park with Mr. Bosinney."

Aunt Hester, who had also risen, sank back in her chair, and turned her face away. Really Juley was too—she should not do such things when she—Aunt Hester, was in the room; and, breathless with anticipation, she waited for what Soames would answer.

He had flushed the peculiar flush which always centred between his eyes; lifting his hand, and, as it were, selecting a finger, he bit a nail delicately; then, drawling it out between set lips, he said: "Mrs. MacAnder is a cat!"

Without waiting for any reply, he left the room.

When he went into Timothy's he had made up his mind what course to pursue on getting home. He would go up to Irene and say:

"Well, I've won my case, and there's an end of it! I don't want to be hard on Bosinney; I'll see if we can't come to some arrangement; he shan't be pressed. And now let's turn over a new leaf! We'll let the house, and get out of these fogs. We'll go down to Robin Hill at once. I—I never meant to be rough with you! Let's shake hands—and—" Perhaps she would let him kiss her, and forget!

When he came out of Timothy's his intentions were no longer so simple. The smouldering jealousy and suspicion of months blazed up within him. He would put an end to that sort of thing once and for all; he would not have her drag his name in the dirt! If she could not or would not love him, as was her duty and his right—she should not play him tricks with anyone else! He would tax her with it; threaten to divorce her! That would make her behave; she would never face that. But—but—what if she did? He was staggered; this had not occurred to him.

What if she did? What if she made him a confession? How would he stand then? He would have to bring a divorce!

A divorce! Thus close, the word was paralyzing, so utterly at variance with all the principles that had hitherto guided his life. Its lack of compromise appalled him; he felt—like the captain of a ship, going to the side of his vessel, and, with his own hands throwing over the most precious of his bales. This jettisoning of his property with his own hand seemed uncanny to Soames. It would injure him in his profession: He would have to get rid of the house at Robin Hill, on which he had spent so much money, so much anticipation—and at a sacrifice. And she! She would no longer belong to him, not even in name! She would pass out of his life, and he—he should never see her again!

He traversed in the cab the length of a street without getting beyond the thought that he should never see her again!

But perhaps there was nothing to confess, even now very likely there was nothing to confess. Was it wise to push things so far? Was it wise to put himself into a position where he might have to eat his words? The result of this case would ruin Bosinney; a ruined man was desperate, but—what could he do? He might go abroad, ruined men always went abroad. What could they do—if indeed it was 'they'—without money? It would be better to wait and see how things turned out. If necessary, he could have her watched. The agony of his jealousy (for all the world like the crisis of an aching tooth) came on again; and he almost cried out. But he must decide, fix on some course of action before he got home. When the cab drew up at the door, he had decided nothing.

He entered, pale, his hands moist with perspiration, dreading to meet her, burning to meet her, ignorant of what he was to say or do.

The maid Bilson was in the hall, and in answer to his question: "Where is your mistress?" told him that Mrs. Forsyte had left the house about noon, taking with her a trunk and bag.

Snatching the sleeve of his fur coat away from her grasp, he confronted her:

"What?" he exclaimed; "what's that you said?" Suddenly recollecting that he must not betray emotion, he added: "What message did she leave?" and noticed with secret terror the startled look of the maid's eyes.

"Mrs. Forsyte left no message, sir."

"No message; very well, thank you, that will do. I shall be dining out."

The maid went downstairs, leaving him still in his fur coat, idly turning over the visiting cards in the porcelain bowl that stood on the carved oak rug chest in the hall.

Mr. and Mrs. Bareham Culcher. Mrs. Septimus Small. Mrs. Baynes. Mr. Solomon Thornworthy. Lady Bellis. Miss Hermione Bellis. Miss Winifred Bellis. Miss Ella Bellis.

Who the devil were all these people? He seemed to have forgotten all familiar things. The words 'no message—a trunk, and a bag,' played a hide-and-seek in his brain. It was incredible that she had left no

message, and, still in his fur coat, he ran upstairs two steps at a time, as a young married man when he comes home will run up to his wife's room.

Everything was dainty, fresh, sweet-smelling; everything in perfect order. On the great bed with its lilac silk quilt, was the bag she had made and embroidered with her own hands to hold her sleeping things; her slippers ready at the foot; the sheets even turned over at the head as though expecting her.

On the table stood the silver-mounted brushes and bottles from her dressing bag, his own present. There must, then, be some mistake. What bag had she taken? He went to the bell to summon Bilson, but remembered in time that he must assume knowledge of where Irene had gone, take it all as a matter of course, and grope out the meaning for himself.

He locked the doors, and tried to think, but felt his brain going round; and suddenly tears forced themselves into his eyes.

Hurriedly pulling off his coat, he looked at himself in the mirror.

He was too pale, a greyish tinge all over his face; he poured out water, and began feverishly washing.

Her silver-mounted brushes smelt faintly of the perfumed lotion she used for her hair; and at this scent the burning sickness of his jealousy seized him again.

Struggling into his fur, he ran downstairs and out into the street.

He had not lost all command of himself, however, and as he went down Sloane Street he framed a story for use, in case he should not find her at Bosinney's. But if he should? His power of decision again failed; he reached the house without knowing what he should do if he did find her there.

It was after office hours, and the street door was closed; the woman who opened it could not say whether Mr. Bosinney were in or no; she had not seen him that day, not for two or three days; she did not attend to him now, nobody attended to him, he....

Soames interrupted her, he would go up and see for himself. He went up with a dogged, white face.

The top floor was unlighted, the door closed, no one answered his ringing, he could hear no sound. He was obliged to descend, shivering under his fur, a chill at his heart. Hailing a cab, he told the man to drive to Park Lane.

On the way he tried to recollect when he had last given her a cheque; she could not have more than three or four pounds, but there were her jewels; and with exquisite torture he remembered how much money she could raise on these; enough to take them abroad; enough for them to live on for months! He tried to calculate; the cab stopped, and he got out with the calculation unmade.

The butler asked whether Mrs. Soames was in the cab, the master had told him they were both expected to dinner.

Soames answered: "No. Mrs. Forsyte has a cold."

The butler was sorry.

Soames thought he was looking at him inquisitively, and remembering that he was not in dress clothes, asked: "Anybody here to dinner, Warmson?"

"Nobody but Mr. and Mrs. Dartie, sir."

Again it seemed to Soames that the butler was looking curiously at him. His composure gave way.

"What are you looking at?" he said. "What's the matter with me, eh?"

The butler blushed, hung up the fur coat, murmured something that sounded like: "Nothing, sir, I'm sure, sir," and stealthily withdrew.

Soames walked upstairs. Passing the drawing-room without a look, he went straight up to his mother's and father's bedroom.

James, standing sideways, the concave lines of his tall, lean figure displayed to advantage in shirt-sleeves and evening waistcoat, his head bent, the end of his white tie peeping askew from underneath one white Dundreary whisker, his eyes peering with intense concentration, his lips pouting, was hooking the top hooks of his wife's bodice. Soames stopped; he felt half-choked, whether because he

had come upstairs too fast, or for some other reason. He—he himself had never—never been asked to....

He heard his father's voice, as though there were a pin in his mouth, saying: "Who's that? Who's there? What d'you want?" His mother's: "Here, Felice, come and hook this; your master'll never get done."

He put his hand up to his throat, and said hoarsely:

"It's I—Soames!"

He noticed gratefully the affectionate surprise in Emily's: "Well, my dear boy?" and James', as he dropped the hook: "What, Soames! What's brought you up? Aren't you well?"

He answered mechanically: "I'm all right," and looked at them, and it seemed impossible to bring out his news.

James, quick to take alarm, began: "You don't look well. I expect you've taken a chill—it's liver, I shouldn't wonder. Your mother'll give you...."

But Emily broke in quietly: "Have you brought Irene?"

Soames shook his head.

"No," he stammered, "she—she's left me!"

Emily deserted the mirror before which she was standing. Her tall, full figure lost its majesty and became very human as she came running over to Soames.

"My dear boy! My dear boy!"

She put her lips to his forehead, and stroked his hand.

James, too, had turned full towards his son; his face looked older.

"Left you?" he said. "What d'you mean—left you? You never told me she was going to leave you."

Soames answered surlily: "How could I tell? What's to be done?"

James began walking up and down; he looked strange and stork-like without a coat. "What's to be done!" he muttered. "How should I know what's to be done? What's the good of asking me? Nobody tells me anything, and then they come and ask me what's to be done; and I should like to know how I'm to tell them! Here's your mother, there she stands; she doesn't say anything. What I should say you've got to do is to follow her.."

Soames smiled; his peculiar, supercilious smile had never before looked pitiable.

"I don't know where she's gone," he said.

"Don't know where she's gone!" said James. "How d'you mean, don't know where she's gone? Where d'you suppose she's gone? She's gone after that young Bosinney, that's where she's gone. I knew how it would be."

Soames, in the long silence that followed, felt his mother pressing his hand. And all that passed seemed to pass as though his own power of thinking or doing had gone to sleep.

His father's face, dusky red, twitching as if he were going to cry, and words breaking out that seemed rent from him by some spasm in his soul.

"There'll be a scandal; I always said so." Then, no one saying anything:
"And there you stand, you and your mother!"

And Emily's voice, calm, rather contemptuous: "Come, now, James! Soames will do all that he can."

And James, staring at the floor, a little brokenly: "Well, I can't help you; I'm getting old. Don't you be in too great a hurry, my boy."

And his mother's voice again: "Soames will do all he can to get her back. We won't talk of it. It'll all come right, I dare say."

And James: "Well, I can't see how it can come right. And if she hasn't gone off with that young Bosinney, my advice to you is not to listen to her, but to follow her and get her back."

Once more Soames felt his mother stroking his hand, in token of her approval, and as though repeating some form of sacred oath, he muttered between his teeth: "I will!"

All three went down to the drawing-room together. There, were gathered the three girls and Dartie; had Irene been present, the family circle would have been complete.

James sank into his armchair, and except for a word of cold greeting to Dartie, whom he both despised and dreaded, as a man likely to be always in want of money, he said nothing till dinner was announced. Soames, too, was silent; Emily alone, a woman of cool courage, maintained a conversation with Winifred on trivial subjects. She was never more composed in her manner and conversation than that evening.

A decision having been come to not to speak of Irene's flight, no view was expressed by any other member of the family as to the right course to be pursued; there can be little doubt, from the general tone adopted in relation to events as they afterwards turned out, that James's advice: "Don't you listen to her, follow-her and get her back!" would, with here and there an exception, have been regarded as sound, not only in Park Lane, but amongst the Nicholases, the Rogers, and at Timothy's. Just as it would surely have been endorsed by that wider body of Forsytes all over London, who were merely excluded from judgment by ignorance of the story.

In spite then of Emily's efforts, the dinner was served by Warmson and the footman almost in silence. Dartie was sulky, and drank all he could get; the girls seldom talked to each other at any time. James asked once where June was, and what she was doing with herself in these days. No one could tell him. He sank back into gloom. Only when Winifred recounted how little Publius had given his bad penny to a beggar, did he brighten up.

"Ah!" he said, "that's a clever little chap. I don't know what'll become of him, if he goes on like this. An intelligent little chap, I call him!" But it was only a flash.

The courses succeeded one another solemnly, under the electric light, which glared down onto the table, but barely reached the principal ornament of the walls, a so-called 'Sea Piece by Turner,' almost entirely composed of cordage and drowning men.

Champagne was handed, and then a bottle of James' prehistoric port, but as by the chill hand of some skeleton.

At ten o'clock Soames left; twice in reply to questions, he had said that Irene was not well; he felt he could no longer trust himself. His mother kissed him with her large soft kiss, and he pressed her hand, a flush of warmth in his cheeks. He walked away in the cold wind, which whistled desolately round the corners of the streets, under a sky of clear steel-blue, alive with stars; he noticed neither their frosty greeting, nor the crackle of the curled-up plane-leaves, nor the night-women hurrying in their shabby furs, nor the pinched faces of vagabonds at street corners. Winter was come! But Soames hastened home, oblivious; his hands trembled as he took the late letters from the gilt wire cage into which they had been thrust through the slit in the door.'

None from Irene!

He went into the dining-room; the fire was bright there, his chair drawn up to it, slippers ready, spirit case, and carven cigarette box on the table; but after staring at it all for a minute or two, he turned out the light and went upstairs. There was a fire too in his dressing-room, but her room was dark and cold. It was into this room that Soames went.

He made a great illumination with candles, and for a long time continued pacing up and down between the bed and the door. He could not get used to the thought that she had really left him, and as though still searching for some message, some reason, some reading of all the mystery of his married life, he began opening every recess and drawer.

There were her dresses; he had always liked, indeed insisted, that she should be well-dressed—she had taken very few; two or three at most, and drawer after drawer; full of linen and silk things, was untouched.

Perhaps after all it was only a freak, and she had gone to the seaside for a few days' change. If only that were so, and she were really coming back, he would never again do as he had done that fatal night before last, never again run that risk—though it was her duty, her duty as a wife; though she did belong to him—he would never again run that risk; she was evidently not quite right in her head!

He stooped over the drawer where she kept her jewels; it was not locked, and came open as he pulled; the jewel box had the key in it. This surprised him until he remembered that it was sure to be

empty. He opened it.

It was far from empty. Divided, in little green velvet compartments, were all the things he had given her, even her watch, and stuck into the recess that contained—the watch was a three-cornered note addressed 'Soames Forsyte,' in Irene's handwriting:

'I think I have taken nothing that you or your people have given me.'
And that was all.

He looked at the clasps and bracelets of diamonds and pearls, at the little flat gold watch with a great diamond set in sapphires, at the chains and rings, each in its nest, and the tears rushed up in his eyes and dropped upon them.

Nothing that she could have done, nothing that she had done, brought home to him like this the inner significance of her act. For the moment, perhaps, he understood nearly all there was to understand—understood that she loathed him, that she had loathed him for years, that for all intents and purposes they were like people living in different worlds, that there was no hope for him, never had been; even, that she had suffered—that she was to be pitied.

In that moment of emotion he betrayed the Forsyte in him—forgot himself, his interests, his property—was capable of almost anything; was lifted into the pure ether of the selfless and unpractical.

Such moments pass quickly.

And as though with the tears he had purged himself of weakness, he got up, locked the box, and slowly, almost trembling, carried it with him into the other room.

CHAPTER VII

JUNE'S VICTORY

June had waited for her chance, scanning the duller columns of the journals, morning and evening with an assiduity which at first puzzled old Jolyon; and when her chance came, she took it with all the promptitude and resolute tenacity of her character.

She will always remember best in her life that morning when at last she saw amongst the reliable Cause List of the Times newspaper, under the heading of Court XIII, Mr. Justice Bentham, the case of Forsyte v. Bosinney.

Like a gambler who stakes his last piece of money, she had prepared to hazard her all upon this throw; it was not her nature to contemplate defeat. How, unless with the instinct of a woman in love, she knew that Bosinney's discomfiture in this action was assured, cannot be told—on this assumption, however, she laid her plans, as upon a certainty.

Half past eleven found her at watch in the gallery of Court XIII., and there she remained till the case of Forsyte v. Bosinney was over. Bosinney's absence did not disquiet her; she had felt instinctively that he would not defend himself. At the end of the judgment she hastened down, and took a cab to his rooms.

She passed the open street-door and the offices on the three lower floors without attracting notice; not till she reached the top did her difficulties begin.

Her ring was not answered; she had now to make up her mind whether she would go down and ask the caretaker in the basement to let her in to await Mr. Bosinney's return, or remain patiently outside the door, trusting that no one would, come up. She decided on the latter course.

A quarter of an hour had passed in freezing vigil on the landing, before it occurred to her that Bosinney had been used to leave the key of his rooms under the door-mat. She looked and found it there. For some minutes she could not decide to make use of it; at last she let herself in and left the door open that anyone who came might see she was there on business.

This was not the same June who had paid the trembling visit five months ago; those months of suffering and restraint had made her less sensitive; she had dwelt on this visit so long, with such

minuteness, that its terrors were discounted beforehand. She was not there to fail this time, for if she failed no one could help her.

Like some mother beast on the watch over her young, her little quick figure never stood still in that room, but wandered from wall to wall, from window to door, fingering now one thing, now another. There was dust everywhere, the room could not have been cleaned for weeks, and June, quick to catch at anything that should buoy up her hope, saw in it a sign that he had been obliged, for economy's sake, to give up his servant.

She looked into the bedroom; the bed was roughly made, as though by the hand of man. Listening intently, she darted in, and peered into his cupboards. A few shirts and collars, a pair of muddy boots—the room was bare even of garments.

She stole back to the sitting-room, and now she noticed the absence of all the little things he had set store by. The clock that had been his mother's, the field-glasses that had hung over the sofa; two really valuable old prints of Harrow, where his father had been at school, and last, not least, the piece of Japanese pottery she herself had given him. All were gone; and in spite of the rage roused within her championing soul at the thought that the world should treat him thus, their disappearance augured happily for the success of her plan.

It was while looking at the spot where the piece of Japanese pottery had stood that she felt a strange certainty of being watched, and, turning, saw Irene in the open doorway.

The two stood gazing at each other for a minute in silence; then June walked forward and held out her hand. Irene did not take it.

When her hand was refused, June put it behind her. Her eyes grew steady with anger; she waited for Irene to speak; and thus waiting, took in, with who-knows-what rage of jealousy, suspicion, and curiosity, every detail of her friend's face and dress and figure.

Irene was clothed in her long grey fur; the travelling cap on her head left a wave of gold hair visible above her forehead. The soft fullness of the coat made her face as small as a child's.

Unlike June's cheeks, her cheeks had no colour in them, but were ivory white and pinched as if with cold. Dark circles lay round her eyes. In one hand she held a bunch of violets.

She looked back at June, no smile on her lips; and with those great dark eyes fastened on her, the girl, for all her startled anger, felt something of the old spell.

She spoke first, after all.

"What have you come for?" But the feeling that she herself was being asked the same question, made her add: "This horrible case. I came to tell him—he has lost it."

Irene did not speak, her eyes never moved from June's face, and the girl cried:

"Don't stand there as if you were made of stone!"

Irene laughed: "I wish to God I were!"

But June turned away: "Stop!" she cried, "don't tell me! I don't want to hear! I don't want to hear what you've come for. I don't want to hear!" And like some uneasy spirit, she began swiftly walking to and fro. Suddenly she broke out:

"I was here first. We can't both stay here together!"

On Irene's face a smile wandered up, and died out like a flicker of firelight. She did not move. And then it was that June perceived under the softness and immobility of this figure something desperate and resolved; something not to be turned away, something dangerous. She tore off her hat, and, putting both hands to her brow, pressed back the bronze mass of her hair.

"You have no right here!" she cried defiantly.

Irene answered: "I have no right anywhere!"

"What do you mean?"

"I have left Soames. You always wanted me to!"

June put her hands over her ears.

"Don't! I don't want to hear anything—I don't want to know anything. It's impossible to fight with you! What makes you stand like that? Why don't you go?"

Irene's lips moved; she seemed to be saying: "Where should I go?"

June turned to the window. She could see the face of a clock down in the street. It was nearly four. At any moment he might come! She looked back across her shoulder, and her face was distorted with anger.

But Irene had not moved; in her gloved hands she ceaselessly turned and twisted the little bunch of violets.

The tears of rage and disappointment rolled down June's cheeks.

"How could you come?" she said. "You have been a false friend to me!"

Again Irene laughed. June saw that she had played a wrong card, and broke down.

"Why have you come?" she sobbed. "You've ruined my life, and now you want to ruin his!"

Irene's mouth quivered; her eyes met June's with a look so mournful that the girl cried out in the midst of her sobbing, "No, no!"

But Irene's head bent till it touched her breast. She turned, and went quickly out, hiding her lips with the little bunch of violets.

June ran to the door. She heard the footsteps going down and down. She called out: "Come back, Irene! Come back!"

The footsteps died away....

Bewildered and torn, the girl stood at the top of the stairs. Why had Irene gone, leaving her mistress of the field? What did it mean? Had she really given him up to her? Or had she...? And she was the prey of a gnawing uncertainty.... Bosinney did not come....

About six o'clock that afternoon old Jolyon returned from Wistaria Avenue, where now almost every day he spent some hours, and asked if his grand-daughter were upstairs. On being told that she had just come in, he sent up to her room to request her to come down and speak to him.

He had made up his mind to tell her that he was reconciled with her father. In future bygones must be bygones. He would no longer live alone, or practically alone, in this great house; he was going to give it up, and take one in the country for his son, where they could all go and live together. If June did not like this, she could have an allowance and live by herself. It wouldn't make much difference to her, for it was a long time since she had shown him any affection.

But when June came down, her face was pinched and piteous; there was a strained, pathetic look in her eyes. She snuggled up in her old attitude on the arm of his chair, and what he said compared but poorly with the clear, authoritative, injured statement he had thought out with much care. His heart felt sore, as the great heart of a mother-bird feels sore when its youngling flies and bruises its wing. His words halted, as though he were apologizing for having at last deviated from the path of virtue, and succumbed, in defiance of sounder principles, to his more natural instincts.

He seemed nervous lest, in thus announcing his intentions, he should be setting his granddaughter a bad example; and now that he came to the point, his way of putting the suggestion that, if she didn't like it, she could live by herself and lump it, was delicate in the extreme.'

"And if, by any chance, my darling," he said, "you found you didn't get on—with them, why, I could make that all right. You could have what you liked. We could find a little flat in London where you could set up, and I could be running to continually. But the children," he added, "are dear little things!"

Then, in the midst of this grave, rather transparent, explanation of changed policy, his eyes twinkled. "This'll astonish Timothy's weak nerves. That precious young thing will have something to say about this, or I'm a Dutchman!"

June had not yet spoken. Perched thus on the arm of his chair, with her head above him, her face was invisible. But presently he felt her warm cheek against his own, and knew that, at all events, there was nothing very alarming in her attitude towards his news. He began to take courage.

"You'll like your father," he said—"an amiable chap. Never was much push about him, but easy to get on with. You'll find him artistic and all that."

And old Jolyon bethought him of the dozen or so water-colour drawings all carefully locked up in his bedroom; for now that his son was going to become a man of property he did not think them quite such poor things as heretofore.

"As to your—your stepmother," he said, using the word with some little difficulty, "I call her a refined woman—a bit of a Mrs. Gummidge, I shouldn't wonder—but very fond of Jo. And the children," he repeated—indeed, this sentence ran like music through all his solemn self-justification—"are sweet little things!"

If June had known, those words but reincarnated that tender love for little children, for the young and weak, which in the past had made him desert his son for her tiny self, and now, as the cycle rolled, was taking him from her.

But he began to get alarmed at her silence, and asked impatiently: "Well, what do you say?"

June slid down to his knee, and she in her turn began her tale. She thought it would all go splendidly; she did not see any difficulty, and she did not care a bit what people thought.

Old Jolyon wriggled. H'm! then people would think! He had thought that after all these years perhaps they wouldn't! Well, he couldn't help it! Nevertheless, he could not approve of his granddaughter's way of putting it—she ought to mind what people thought!

Yet he said nothing. His feelings were too mixed, too inconsistent for expression.

No—went on June he did not care; what business was it of theirs? There was only one thing—and with her cheek pressing against his knee, old Jolyon knew at once that this something was no trifle: As he was going to buy a house in the country, would he not—to please her—buy that splendid house of Soames' at Robin Hill? It was finished, it was perfectly beautiful, and no one would live in it now. They would all be so happy there.

Old Jolyon was on the alert at once. Wasn't the 'man of property' going to live in his new house, then? He never alluded to Soames now but under this title.

"No"—June said—"he was not; she knew that he was not!"

How did she know?

She could not tell him, but she knew. She knew nearly for certain! It was most unlikely; circumstances had changed! Irene's words still rang in her head: "I have left Soames. Where should I go?"

But she kept silence about that.

If her grandfather would only buy it and settle that wretched claim that ought never to have been made on Phil! It would be the very best thing for everybody, and everything—everything might come straight.

And June put her lips to his forehead, and pressed them close.

But old Jolyon freed himself from her caress, his face wore the judicial look which came upon it when he dealt with affairs. He asked: What did she mean? There was something behind all this—had she been seeing Bosinney?

June answered: "No; but I have been to his rooms."

"Been to his rooms? Who took you there?"

June faced him steadily. "I went alone. He has lost that case. I don't care whether it was right or wrong. I want to help him; and I will!"

Old Jolyon asked again: "Have you seen him?" His glance seemed to pierce right through the girl's eyes into her soul.

Again June answered: "No; he was not there. I waited, but he did not come."

Old Jolyon made a movement of relief. She had risen and looked down at him; so slight, and light, and young, but so fixed, and so determined; and disturbed, vexed, as he was, he could not frown away that

fixed look. The feeling of being beaten, of the reins having slipped, of being old and tired, mastered him.

"Ah!" he said at last, "you'll get yourself into a mess one of these days, I can see. You want your own way in everything."

Visited by one of his strange bursts of philosophy, he added: "Like that you were born; and like that you'll stay until you die!"

And he, who in his dealings with men of business, with Boards, with Forsytes of all descriptions, with such as were not Forsytes, had always had his own way, looked at his indomitable grandchild sadly—for he felt in her that quality which above all others he unconsciously admired.

"Do you know what they say is going on?" he said slowly.

June crimsoned.

"Yes—no! I know—and I don't know—I don't care!" and she stamped her foot.

"I believe," said old Jolyon, dropping his eyes, "that you'd have him if he were dead!"

There was a long silence before he spoke again.

"But as to buying this house—you don't know what you're talking about!"

June said that she did. She knew that he could get it if he wanted. He would only have to give what it cost.

"What it cost! You know nothing about it. I won't go to Soames—I'll have nothing more to do with that young man."

"But you needn't; you can go to Uncle James. If you can't buy the house, will you pay his lawsuit claim? I know he is terribly hard up—I've seen it. You can stop it out of my money!"

A twinkle came into old Jolyon's eyes.

"Stop it out of your money! A pretty way. And what will you do, pray, without your money?"

But secretly, the idea of wresting the house from James and his son had begun to take hold of him. He had heard on Forsyte 'Change much comment, much rather doubtful praise of this house. It was 'too artistic,' but a fine place. To take from the 'man of property' that on which he had set his heart, would be a crowning triumph over James, practical proof that he was going to make a man of property of Jo, to put him back in his proper position, and there to keep him secure. Justice once for all on those who had chosen to regard his son as a poor, penniless outcast.

He would see, he would see! It might be out of the question; he was not going to pay a fancy price, but if it could be done, why, perhaps he would do it!

And still more secretly he knew that he could not refuse her.

But he did not commit himself. He would think it over—he said to June.

CHAPTER VIII

BOSINNEY'S DEPARTURE

Old Jolyon was not given to hasty decisions; it is probable that he would have continued to think over the purchase of the house at Robin Hill, had not June's face told him that he would have no peace until he acted.

At breakfast next morning she asked him what time she should order the carriage.

"Carriage!" he said, with some appearance of innocence; "what for? I'm not going out!"

She answered: "If you don't go early, you won't catch Uncle James before he goes into the City."

"James! what about your Uncle James?"

"The house," she replied, in such a voice that he no longer pretended ignorance.

"I've not made up my mind," he said.

"You must! You must! Oh! Gran—think of me!"

Old Jolyon grumbled out: "Think of you—I'm always thinking of you, but you don't think of yourself; you don't think what you're letting yourself in for. Well, order the carriage at ten!"

At a quarter past he was placing his umbrella in the stand at Park Lane—he did not choose to relinquish his hat and coat; telling Warmson that he wanted to see his master, he went, without being announced, into the study, and sat down.

James was still in the dining-room talking to Soames, who had come round again before breakfast. On hearing who his visitor was, he muttered nervously: "Now, what's he want, I wonder?"

He then got up.

"Well," he said to Soames, "don't you go doing anything in a hurry. The first thing is to find out where she is—I should go to Stainer's about it; they're the best men, if they can't find her, nobody can." And suddenly moved to strange softness, he muttered to himself, "Poor little thing, I can't tell what she was thinking about!" and went out blowing his nose.

Old Jolyon did not rise on seeing his brother, but held out his hand, and exchanged with him the clasp of a Forsyte.

James took another chair by the table, and leaned his head on his hand.

"Well," he said, "how are you? We don't see much of you nowadays!"

Old Jolyon paid no attention to the remark.

"How's Emily?" he asked; and waiting for no reply, went on "I've come to see you about this affair of young Bosinney's. I'm told that new house of his is a white elephant."

"I don't know anything about a white elephant," said James, "I know he's lost his case, and I should say he'll go bankrupt."

Old Jolyon was not slow to seize the opportunity this gave him.

"I shouldn't wonder a bit!" he agreed; "and if he goes bankrupt, the 'man of property'—that is, Soames'll be out of pocket. Now, what I was thinking was this: If he's not going to live there...."

Seeing both surprise and suspicion in James' eye, he quickly went on: "I don't want to know anything; I suppose Irene's put her foot down—it's not material to me. But I'm thinking of a house in the country myself, not too far from London, and if it suited me I don't say that I mightn't look at it, at a price."

James listened to this statement with a strange mixture of doubt, suspicion, and relief, merging into a dread of something behind, and tinged with the remains of his old undoubted reliance upon his elder brother's good faith and judgment. There was anxiety, too, as to what old Jolyon could have heard and how he had heard it; and a sort of hopefulness arising from the thought that if June's connection with Bosinney were completely at an end, her grandfather would hardly seem anxious to help the young fellow. Altogether he was puzzled; as he did not like either to show this, or to commit himself in any way, he said:

"They tell me you're altering your Will in favour of your son."

He had not been told this; he had merely added the fact of having seen old Jolyon with his son and grandchildren to the fact that he had taken his Will away from Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte. The shot went home.

"Who told you that?" asked old Jolyon.

"I'm sure I don't know," said James; "I can't remember names—I know somebody told me Soames spent a lot of money on this house; he's not likely to part with it except at a good price."

"Well," said old Jolyon, "if, he thinks I'm going to pay a fancy price, he's mistaken. I've not got the money to throw away that he seems to have. Let him try and sell it at a forced sale, and see what he'll get. It's not every man's house, I hear!"

James, who was secretly also of this opinion, answered: "It's a gentleman's house. Soames is here now if you'd like to see him."

"No," said old Jolyon, "I haven't got as far as that; and I'm not likely to, I can see that very well if I'm met in this manner!"

James was a little cowed; when it came to the actual figures of a commercial transaction he was sure of himself, for then he was dealing with facts, not with men; but preliminary negotiations such as these made him nervous—he never knew quite how far he could go.

"Well," he said, "I know nothing about it. Soames, he tells me nothing; I should think he'd entertain it—it's a question of price."

"Oh!" said old Jolyon, "don't let him make a favour of it!" He placed his hat on his head in dudgeon.

The door was opened and Soames came in.

"There's a policeman out here," he said with his half smile, "for Uncle Jolyon."

Old Jolyon looked at him angrily, and James said: "A policeman? I don't know anything about a policeman. But I suppose you know something about him," he added to old Jolyon with a look of suspicion: "I suppose you'd better see him!"

In the hall an Inspector of Police stood stolidly regarding with heavy-lidded pale-blue eyes the fine old English furniture picked up by James at the famous Mavrojano sale in Portman Square. "You'll find my brother in there," said James.

The Inspector raised his fingers respectfully to his peaked cap, and entered the study.

James saw him go in with a strange sensation.

"Well," he said to Soames, "I suppose we must wait and see what he wants. Your uncle's been here about the house!"

He returned with Soames into the dining-room, but could not rest.

"Now what does he want?" he murmured again.

"Who?" replied Soames: "the Inspector? They sent him round from Stanhope Gate, that's all I know. That 'nonconformist' of Uncle Jolyon's has been pilfering, I shouldn't wonder!"

But in spite of his calmness, he too was ill at ease.

At the end of ten minutes old Jolyon came in. He walked up to the table, and stood there perfectly silent pulling at his long white moustaches. James gazed up at him with opening mouth; he had never seen his brother look like this.

Old Jolyon raised his hand, and said slowly:

"Young Bosinney has been run over in the fog and killed."

Then standing above his brother and his nephew, and looking down at him with his deep eyes:

"There's—some—talk—of—suicide," he said.

James' jaw dropped. "Suicide! What should he do that for?"

Old Jolyon answered sternly: "God knows, if you and your son don't!"

But James did not reply.

For all men of great age, even for all Forsytes, life has had bitter experiences. The passer-by, who sees them wrapped in cloaks of custom, wealth, and comfort, would never suspect that such black shadows had fallen on their roads. To every man of great age—to Sir Walter Bentham himself—the idea of suicide has once at least been present in the ante-room of his soul; on the threshold, waiting to enter, held out from the inmost chamber by some chance reality, some vague fear, some painful hope. To Forsytes that final renunciation of property is hard. Oh! it is hard! Seldom—perhaps never—can they achieve, it; and yet, how near have they not sometimes been!

So even with James! Then in the medley of his thoughts, he broke out: "Why I saw it in the paper

yesterday: 'Run over in the fog!' They didn't know his name!" He turned from one face to the other in his confusion of soul; but instinctively all the time he was rejecting that rumour of suicide. He dared not entertain this thought, so against his interest, against the interest of his son, of every Forsyte. He strove against it; and as his nature ever unconsciously rejected that which it could not with safety accept, so gradually he overcame this fear. It was an accident! It must have been!

Old Jolyon broke in on his reverie.

"Death was instantaneous. He lay all day yesterday at the hospital. There was nothing to tell them who he was. I am going there now; you and your son had better come too."

No one opposing this command he led the way from the room.

The day was still and clear and bright, and driving over to Park Lane from Stanhope Gate, old Jolyon had had the carriage open. Sitting back on the padded cushions, finishing his cigar, he had noticed with pleasure the keen crispness of the air, the bustle of the cabs and people; the strange, almost Parisian, alacrity that the first fine day will bring into London streets after a spell of fog or rain. And he had felt so happy; he had not felt like it for months. His confession to June was off his mind; he had the prospect of his son's, above all, of his grandchildren's company in the future—he had appointed to meet young Jolyon at the Hotch Potch that very morning to—discuss it again; and there was the pleasurable excitement of a coming encounter, a coming victory, over James and the 'man of property' in the matter of the house.

He had the carriage closed now; he had no heart to look on gaiety; nor was it right that Forsytes should be seen driving with an Inspector of Police.

In that carriage the Inspector spoke again of the death:

"It was not so very thick—Just there. The driver says the gentleman must have had time to see what he was about, he seemed to walk right into it. It appears that he was very hard up, we found several pawn tickets at his rooms, his account at the bank is overdrawn, and there's this case in to-day's papers;" his cold blue eyes travelled from one to another of the three Forsytes in the carriage.

Old Jolyon watching from his corner saw his brother's face change, and the brooding, worried, look deepen on it. At the Inspector's words, indeed, all James' doubts and fears revived. Hard-up—pawn-tickets—an overdrawn account! These words that had all his life been a far-off nightmare to him, seemed to make uncannily real that suspicion of suicide which must on no account be entertained. He sought his son's eye; but lynx-eyed, taciturn, immovable, Soames gave no answering look. And to old Jolyon watching, divining the league of mutual defence between them, there came an overmastering desire to have his own son at his side, as though this visit to the dead man's body was a battle in which otherwise he must single-handed meet those two. And the thought of how to keep June's name out of the business kept whirring in his brain. James had his son to support him! Why should he not send for Jo?

Taking out his card-case, he pencilled the following message:

'Come round at once. I've sent the carriage for you.'

On getting out he gave this card to his coachman, telling him to drive—as fast as possible to the Hotch Potch Club, and if Mr. Jolyon Forsyte were there to give him the card and bring him at once. If not there yet, he was to wait till he came.

He followed the others slowly up the steps, leaning on his umbrella, and stood a moment to get his breath. The Inspector said: "This is the mortuary, sir. But take your time."

In the bare, white-walled room, empty of all but a streak of sunshine smeared along the dustless floor, lay a form covered by a sheet. With a huge steady hand the Inspector took the hem and turned it back. A sightless face gazed up at them, and on either side of that sightless defiant face the three Forsytes gazed down; in each one of them the secret emotions, fears, and pity of his own nature rose and fell like the rising, falling waves of life, whose wish those white walls barred out now for ever from Bosinney. And in each one of them the trend of his nature, the odd essential spring, which moved him in fashions minutely, unalterably different from those of every other human being, forced him to a different attitude of thought. Far from the others, yet inscrutably close, each stood thus, alone with death, silent, his eyes lowered.

The Inspector asked softly:

"You identify the gentleman, sir?"

Old Jolyon raised his head and nodded. He looked at his brother opposite, at that long lean figure brooding over the dead man, with face dusky red, and strained grey eyes; and at the figure of Soames white and still by his father's side. And all that he had felt against those two was gone like smoke in the long white presence of Death. Whence comes it, how comes it—Death? Sudden reverse of all that goes before; blind setting forth on a path that leads to where? Dark quenching of the fire! The heavy, brutal crushing—out that all men must go through, keeping their eyes clear and brave unto the end! Small and of no import, insects though they are! And across old Jolyon's face there flitted a gleam, for Soames, murmuring to the Inspector, crept noiselessly away.

Then suddenly James raised his eyes. There was a queer appeal in that suspicious troubled look: "I know I'm no match for you," it seemed to say. And, hunting for handkerchief he wiped his brow; then, bending sorrowful and lank over the dead man, he too turned and hurried out.

Old Jolyon stood, still as death, his eyes fixed on the body. Who shall tell of what he was thinking? Of himself, when his hair was brown like the hair of that young fellow dead before him? Of himself, with his battle just beginning, the long, long battle he had loved; the battle that was over for this young man almost before it had begun? Of his grand-daughter, with her broken hopes? Of that other woman? Of the strangeness, and the pity of it? And the irony, inscrutable, and bitter of that end? Justice! There was no justice for men, for they were ever in the dark!

Or perhaps in his philosophy he thought: Better to be out of, it all!
Better to have done with it, like this poor youth....

Some one touched him on the arm.

A tear started up and wetted his eyelash. "Well," he said, "I'm no good here. I'd better be going. You'll come to me as soon as you can, Jo," and with his head bowed he went away.

It was young Jolyon's turn to take his stand beside the dead man, round whose fallen body he seemed to see all the Forsytes breathless, and prostrated. The stroke had fallen too swiftly.

The forces underlying every tragedy—forces that take no denial, working through cross currents to their ironical end, had met and fused with a thunder-clap, flung out the victim, and flattened to the ground all those that stood around.

Or so at all events young Jolyon seemed to see them, lying around Bosinney's body.

He asked the Inspector to tell him what had happened, and the latter, like a man who does not every day get such a chance, again detailed such facts as were known.

"There's more here, sir, however," he said, "than meets the eye. I don't believe in suicide, nor in pure accident, myself. It's more likely I think that he was suffering under great stress of mind, and took no notice of things about him. Perhaps you can throw some light on these."

He took from his pocket a little packet and laid it on the table. Carefully undoing it, he revealed a lady's handkerchief, pinned through the folds with a pin of discoloured Venetian gold, the stone of which had fallen from the socket. A scent of dried violets rose to young Jolyon's nostrils.

"Found in his breast pocket," said the Inspector; "the name has been cut away!"

Young Jolyon with difficulty answered: "I'm afraid I cannot help you!" But vividly there rose before him the face he had seen light up, so tremulous and glad, at Bosinney's coming! Of her he thought more than of his own daughter, more than of them all—of her with the dark, soft glance, the delicate passive face, waiting for the dead man, waiting even at that moment, perhaps, still and patient in the sunlight.

He walked sorrowfully away from the hospital towards his father's house, reflecting that this death would break up the Forsyte family. The stroke had indeed slipped past their defences into the very wood of their tree. They might flourish to all appearance as before, preserving a brave show before the eyes of London, but the trunk was dead, withered by the same flash that had stricken down Bosinney. And now the saplings would take its place, each one a new custodian of the sense of property.

Good forest of Forsytes! thought young Jolyon—soundest timber of our land!

Concerning the cause of this death—his family would doubtless reject with vigour the suspicion of suicide, which was so compromising! They would take it as an accident, a stroke of fate. In their hearts they would even feel it an intervention of Providence, a retribution—had not Bosinney endangered their two most priceless possessions, the pocket and the hearth? And they would talk of 'that unfortunate accident of young Bosinney's,' but perhaps they would not talk—silence might be better!

As for himself, he regarded the bus-driver's account of the accident as of very little value. For no one so madly in love committed suicide for want of money; nor was Bosinney the sort of fellow to set much store by a financial crisis. And so he too rejected this theory of suicide, the dead man's face rose too clearly before him. Gone in the heyday of his summer—and to believe thus that an accident had cut Bosinney off in the full sweep of his passion was more than ever pitiful to young Jolyon.

Then came a vision of Soames' home as it now was, and must be hereafter. The streak of lightning had flashed its clear uncanny gleam on bare bones with grinning spaces between, the disguising flesh was gone....

In the dining-room at Stanhope Gate old Jolyon was sitting alone when his son came in. He looked very wan in his great armchair. And his eyes travelling round the walls with their pictures of still life, and the masterpiece 'Dutch fishing-boats at Sunset' seemed as though passing their gaze over his life with its hopes, its gains, its achievements.

"Ah! Jo!" he said, "is that you? I've told poor little June. But that's not all of it. Are you going to Soames'? She's brought it on herself, I suppose; but somehow I can't bear to think of her, shut up there—and all alone." And holding up his thin, veined hand, he clenched it.

CHAPTER IX

IRENE'S RETURN

After leaving James and old Jolyon in the mortuary of the hospital, Soames hurried aimlessly along the streets.

The tragic event of Bosinney's death altered the complexion of everything. There was no longer the same feeling that to lose a minute would be fatal, nor would he now risk communicating the fact of his wife's flight to anyone till the inquest was over.

That morning he had risen early, before the postman came, had taken the first-post letters from the box himself, and, though there had been none from Irene, he had made an opportunity of telling Bilson that her mistress was at the sea; he would probably, he said, be going down himself from Saturday to Monday. This had given him time to breathe, time to leave no stone unturned to find her.

But now, cut off from taking steps by Bosinney's death—that strange death, to think of which was like putting a hot iron to his heart, like lifting a great weight from it—he did not know how to pass his day; and he wandered here and there through the streets, looking at every face he met, devoured by a hundred anxieties.

And as he wandered, he thought of him who had finished his wandering, his prowling, and would never haunt his house again.

Already in the afternoon he passed posters announcing the identity of the dead man, and bought the papers to see what they said. He would stop their mouths if he could, and he went into the City, and was closeted with Boulter for a long time.

On his way home, passing the steps of Jobson's about half past four, he met George Forsyte, who held out an evening paper to Soames, saying:

"Here! Have you seen this about the poor Buccaneer?"

Soames answered stonily: "Yes."

George stared at him. He had never liked Soames; he now held him responsible for Bosinney's death. Soames had done for him—done for him by that act of property that had sent the Buccaneer to run amok that fatal afternoon.

'The poor fellow,' he was thinking, 'was so cracked with jealousy, so cracked for his vengeance, that he heard nothing of the omnibus in that infernal fog.'

Soames had done for him! And this judgment was in George's eyes.

"They talk of suicide here," he said at last. "That cat won't jump."

Soames shook his head. "An accident," he muttered.

Clenching his fist on the paper, George crammed it into his pocket. He could not resist a parting shot.

"H'mm! All flourishing at home? Any little Soameses yet?"

With a face as white as the steps of Jobson's, and a lip raised as if snarling, Soames brushed past him and was gone....

On reaching home, and entering the little lighted hall with his latchkey, the first thing that caught his eye was his wife's gold-mounted umbrella lying on the rug chest. Flinging off his fur coat, he hurried to the drawing-room.

The curtains were drawn for the night, a bright fire of cedar-logs burned in the grate, and by its light he saw Irene sitting in her usual corner on the sofa. He shut the door softly, and went towards her. She did not move, and did not seem to see him.

"So you've come back?" he said. "Why are you sitting here in the dark?"

Then he caught sight of her face, so white and motionless that it seemed as though the blood must have stopped flowing in her veins; and her eyes, that looked enormous, like the great, wide, startled brown eyes of an owl.

Huddled in her grey fur against the sofa cushions, she had a strange resemblance to a captive owl, bunched for its soft feathers against the wires of a cage. The supple erectness of her figure was gone, as though she had been broken by cruel exercise; as though there were no longer any reason for being beautiful, and supple, and erect.

"So you've come back," he repeated.

She never looked up, and never spoke, the firelight playing over her motionless figure.

Suddenly she tried to rise, but he prevented her; it was then that he understood.

She had come back like an animal wounded to death, not knowing where to turn, not knowing what she was doing. The sight of her figure, huddled in the fur, was enough.

He knew then for certain that Bosinney had been her lover; knew that she had seen the report of his death—perhaps, like himself, had bought a paper at the draughty corner of a street, and read it.

She had come back then of her own accord, to the cage she had pined to be free of—and taking in all the tremendous significance of this, he longed to cry: "Take your hated body, that I love, out of my house! Take away that pitiful white face, so cruel and soft—before I crush it. Get out of my sight; never let me see you again!"

And, at those unspoken words, he seemed to see her rise and move away, like a woman in a terrible dream, from which she was fighting to awake—rise and go out into the dark and cold, without a thought of him, without so much as the knowledge of his presence.

Then he cried, contradicting what he had not yet spoken, "No; stay there!" And turning away from her, he sat down in his accustomed chair on the other side of the hearth.

They sat in silence.

And Soames thought: 'Why is all this? Why should I suffer so? What have I done? It is not my fault!'

Again he looked at her, huddled like a bird that is shot and dying, whose poor breast you see panting as the air is taken from it, whose poor eyes look at you who have shot it, with a slow, soft, unseeing look, taking farewell of all that is good—of the sun, and the air, and its mate.

So they sat, by the firelight, in the silence, one on each side of the hearth.

And the fume of the burning cedar logs, that he loved so well, seemed to grip Soames by the throat till he could bear it no longer. And going out into the hall he flung the door wide, to gulp down the cold air that came in; then without hat or overcoat went out into the Square.

Along the garden rails a half-starved cat came rubbing her way towards him, and Soames thought: 'Suffering! when will it cease, my suffering?'

At a front door across the way was a man of his acquaintance named Rutter, scraping his boots, with

an air of 'I am master here.' And Soames walked on.

From far in the clear air the bells of the church where he and Irene had been married were pealing in 'practice' for the advent of Christ, the chimes ringing out above the sound of traffic. He felt a craving for strong drink, to lull him to indifference, or rouse him to fury. If only he could burst out of himself, out of this web that for the first time in his life he felt around him. If only he could surrender to the thought: 'Divorce her—turn her out! She has forgotten you. Forget her!'

If only he could surrender to the thought: 'Let her go—she has suffered enough!'

If only he could surrender to the desire: 'Make a slave of her—she is in your power!'

If only even he could surrender to the sudden vision: 'What does it all matter?' Forget himself for a minute, forget that it mattered what he did, forget that whatever he did he must sacrifice something.

If only he could act on an impulse!

He could forget nothing; surrender to no thought, vision, or desire; it was all too serious; too close around him, an unbreakable cage.

On the far side of the Square newspaper boys were calling their evening wares, and the ghoulish cries mingled and jangled with the sound of those church bells.

Soames covered his ears. The thought flashed across him that but for a chance, he himself, and not Bosinney, might be lying dead, and she, instead of crouching there like a shot bird with those dying eyes....

Something soft touched his legs, the cat was rubbing herself against them. And a sob that shook him from head to foot burst from Soames' chest. Then all was still again in the dark, where the houses seemed to stare at him, each with a master and mistress of its own, and a secret story of happiness or sorrow.

And suddenly he saw that his own door was open, and black against the light from the hall a man standing with his back turned. Something slid too in his breast, and he stole up close behind.

He could see his own fur coat flung across the carved oak chair; the Persian rugs; the silver bowls, the rows of porcelain plates arranged along the walls, and this unknown man who was standing there.

And sharply he asked: "What is it you want, sir?"

The visitor turned. It was young Jolyon.

"The door was open," he said. "Might I see your wife for a minute, I have a message for her?"

Soames gave him a strange, sidelong stare.

"My wife can see no one," he muttered doggedly.

Young Jolyon answered gently: "I shouldn't keep her a minute."

Soames brushed by him and barred the way.

"She can see no one," he said again.

Young Jolyon's glance shot past him into the hall, and Soames turned. There in the drawing-room doorway stood Irene, her eyes were wild and eager, her lips were parted, her hands outstretched. In the sight of both men that light vanished from her face; her hands dropped to her sides; she stood like stone.

Soames spun round, and met his visitor's eyes, and at the look he saw in them, a sound like a snarl escaped him. He drew his lips back in the ghost of a smile.

"This is my house," he said; "I manage my own affairs. I've told you once—I tell you again; we are not at home."

And in young Jolyon's face he slammed the door.

THE FORSYTE SAGA

By John Galsworthy

Part 2

Contents:

Indian Summer of a Forsyte
In Chancery

TO ANDRE CHEVRILLON

INDIAN SUMMER OF A FORSYTE

"And Summer's lease hath all
too short a date."
—Shakespeare

I

In the last day of May in the early 'nineties, about six o'clock of the evening, old Jolyon Forsyte sat under the oak tree below the terrace of his house at Robin Hill. He was waiting for the midges to bite him, before abandoning the glory of the afternoon. His thin brown hand, where blue veins stood out, held the end of a cigar in its tapering, long-nailed fingers—a pointed polished nail had survived with him from those earlier Victorian days when to touch nothing, even with the tips of the fingers, had been so distinguished. His domed forehead, great white moustache, lean cheeks, and long lean jaw were covered from the westering sunshine by an old brown Panama hat. His legs were crossed; in all his attitude was serenity and a kind of elegance, as of an old man who every morning put eau de Cologne upon his silk handkerchief. At his feet lay a woolly brown-and-white dog trying to be a Pomeranian—the dog Balthasar between whom and old Jolyon primal aversion had changed into attachment with the years. Close to his chair was a swing, and on the swing was seated one of Holly's dolls—called 'Duffer Alice'—with her body fallen over her legs and her doleful nose buried in a black petticoat. She was never out of disgrace, so it did not matter to her how she sat. Below the oak tree the lawn dipped down a bank, stretched to the fernery, and, beyond that refinement, became fields, dropping to the pond, the coppice, and the prospect—'Fine, remarkable'—at which Swithin Forsyte, from under this very tree, had stared five years ago when he drove down with Irene to look at the house. Old Jolyon had heard of his brother's exploit—that drive which had become quite celebrated on Forsyte 'Change. Swithin! And the fellow had gone and died, last November, at the age of only seventy-nine, renewing the doubt whether Forsytes could live for ever, which had first arisen when Aunt Ann passed away. Died! and left only Jolyon and James, Roger and Nicholas and Timothy, Julia, Hester, Susan! And old Jolyon thought: 'Eighty-five! I don't feel it—except when I get that pain.'

His memory went searching. He had not felt his age since he had bought his nephew Soames' ill-starred house and settled into it here at Robin Hill over three years ago. It was as if he had been getting younger every spring, living in the country with his son and his grandchildren—June, and the little ones of the second marriage, Jolly and Holly; living down here out of the racket of London and the cackle of Forsyte 'Change,' free of his boards, in a delicious atmosphere of no work and all play, with plenty of occupation in the perfecting and mellowing of the house and its twenty acres, and in ministering to the whims of Holly and Jolly. All the knots and crankiness, which had gathered in his heart during that long and tragic business of June, Soames, Irene his wife, and poor young Bosinney, had been smoothed out. Even June had thrown off her melancholy at last—witness this travel in Spain she was taking now with her father and her stepmother. Curiously perfect peace was left by their departure; blissful, yet blank, because his son was not there. Jo was never anything but a comfort and a pleasure to him nowadays—an amiable chap; but women, somehow—even the best—got a little on one's nerves, unless of course one admired them.

Far-off a cuckoo called; a wood-pigeon was cooing from the first elm-tree in the field, and how the daisies and buttercups had sprung up after the last mowing! The wind had got into the sou' west, too—a delicious air, sappy! He pushed his hat back and let the sun fall on his chin and cheek. Somehow, today, he wanted company—wanted a pretty face to look at. People treated the old as if they wanted nothing. And with the un-Forsytean philosophy which ever intruded on his soul, he thought: 'One's never had enough. With a foot in the grave one'll want something, I shouldn't be surprised!' Down here—away from the exigencies of affairs—his grandchildren, and the flowers, trees, birds of his little

domain, to say nothing of sun and moon and stars above them, said, 'Open, sesame,' to him day and night. And sesame had opened—how much, perhaps, he did not know. He had always been responsive to what they had begun to call 'Nature,' genuinely, almost religiously responsive, though he had never lost his habit of calling a sunset a sunset and a view a view, however deeply they might move him. But nowadays Nature actually made him ache, he appreciated it so. Every one of these calm, bright, lengthening days, with Holly's hand in his, and the dog Balthasar in front looking studiously for what he never found, he would stroll, watching the roses open, fruit budding on the walls, sunlight brightening the oak leaves and saplings in the coppice, watching the water-lily leaves unfold and glisten, and the silvery young corn of the one wheat field; listening to the starlings and skylarks, and the Alderney cows chewing the cud, flicking slow their tufted tails; and every one of these fine days he ached a little from sheer love of it all, feeling perhaps, deep down, that he had not very much longer to enjoy it. The thought that some day—perhaps not ten years hence, perhaps not five—all this world would be taken away from him, before he had exhausted his powers of loving it, seemed to him in the nature of an injustice brooding over his horizon. If anything came after this life, it wouldn't be what he wanted; not Robin Hill, and flowers and birds and pretty faces—too few, even now, of those about him! With the years his dislike of humbug had increased; the orthodoxy he had worn in the 'sixties, as he had worn side-whiskers out of sheer exuberance, had long dropped off, leaving him reverent before three things alone—beauty, upright conduct, and the sense of property; and the greatest of these now was beauty. He had always had wide interests, and, indeed could still read *The Times*, but he was liable at any moment to put it down if he heard a blackbird sing. Upright conduct, property—somehow, they were tiring; the blackbirds and the sunsets never tired him, only gave him an uneasy feeling that he could not get enough of them. Staring into the stilly radiance of the early evening and at the little gold and white flowers on the lawn, a thought came to him: This weather was like the music of 'Orfeo,' which he had recently heard at Covent Garden. A beautiful opera, not like Meyerbeer, nor even quite Mozart, but, in its way, perhaps even more lovely; something classical and of the Golden Age about it, chaste and mellow, and the Ravogli 'almost worthy of the old days'—highest praise he could bestow. The yearning of Orpheus for the beauty he was losing, for his love going down to Hades, as in life love and beauty did go—the yearning which sang and throbbled through the golden music, stirred also in the lingering beauty of the world that evening. And with the tip of his cork-soled, elastic-sided boot he involuntarily stirred the ribs of the dog Balthasar, causing the animal to wake and attack his fleas; for though he was supposed to have none, nothing could persuade him of the fact. When he had finished he rubbed the place he had been scratching against his master's calf, and settled down again with his chin over the instep of the disturbing boot. And into old Jolyon's mind came a sudden recollection—a face he had seen at that opera three weeks ago—Irene, the wife of his precious nephew Soames, that man of property! Though he had not met her since the day of the 'At Home' in his old house at Stanhope Gate, which celebrated his granddaughter June's ill-starred engagement to young Bosinney, he had remembered her at once, for he had always admired her—a very pretty creature. After the death of young Bosinney, whose mistress she had so reprehensibly become, he had heard that she had left Soames at once. Goodness only knew what she had been doing since. That sight of her face—a side view—in the row in front, had been literally the only reminder these three years that she was still alive. No one ever spoke of her. And yet Jo had told him something once—something which had upset him completely. The boy had got it from George Forsyte, he believed, who had seen Bosinney in the fog the day he was run over—something which explained the young fellow's distress—an act of Soames towards his wife—a shocking act. Jo had seen her, too, that afternoon, after the news was out, seen her for a moment, and his description had always lingered in old Jolyon's mind—'wild and lost' he had called her. And next day June had gone there—bottled up her feelings and gone there, and the maid had cried and told her how her mistress had slipped out in the night and vanished. A tragic business altogether! One thing was certain—Soames had never been able to lay hands on her again. And he was living at Brighton, and journeying up and down—a fitting fate, the man of property! For when he once took a dislike to anyone—as he had to his nephew—old Jolyon never got over it. He remembered still the sense of relief with which he had heard the news of Irene's disappearance. It had been shocking to think of her a prisoner in that house to which she must have wandered back, when Jo saw her, wandered back for a moment—like a wounded animal to its hole after seeing that news, 'Tragic death of an Architect,' in the street. Her face had struck him very much the other night—more beautiful than he had remembered, but like a mask, with something going on beneath it. A young woman still—twenty-eight perhaps. Ah, well! Very likely she had another lover by now. But at this subversive thought—for married women should never love: once, even, had been too much—his instep rose, and with it the dog Balthasar's head. The sagacious animal stood up and looked into old Jolyon's face. 'Walk?' he seemed to say; and old Jolyon answered: "Come on, old chap!"

Slowly, as was their wont, they crossed among the constellations of buttercups and daisies, and entered the fernery. This feature, where very little grew as yet, had been judiciously dropped below the level of the lawn so that it might come up again on the level of the other lawn and give the impression of irregularity, so important in horticulture. Its rocks and earth were beloved of the dog Balthasar, who sometimes found a mole there. Old Jolyon made a point of passing through it because, though it was

not beautiful, he intended that it should be, some day, and he would think: 'I must get Varr to come down and look at it; he's better than Beech.' For plants, like houses and human complaints, required the best expert consideration. It was inhabited by snails, and if accompanied by his grandchildren, he would point to one and tell them the story of the little boy who said: 'Have plummers got leggers, Mother? 'No, sonny.' 'Then darned if I haven't been and swallowed a snileybob.' And when they skipped and clutched his hand, thinking of the snileybob going down the little boy's 'red lane,' his eyes would twinkle. Emerging from the fernery, he opened the wicket gate, which just there led into the first field, a large and park-like area, out of which, within brick walls, the vegetable garden had been carved. Old Jolyon avoided this, which did not suit his mood, and made down the hill towards the pond. Balthasar, who knew a water-rat or two, gambolled in front, at the gait which marks an oldish dog who takes the same walk every day. Arrived at the edge, old Jolyon stood, noting another water-lily opened since yesterday; he would show it to Holly to-morrow, when 'his little sweet' had got over the upset which had followed on her eating a tomato at lunch—her little arrangements were very delicate. Now that Jolly had gone to school—his first term—Holly was with him nearly all day long, and he missed her badly. He felt that pain too, which often bothered him now, a little dragging at his left side. He looked back up the hill. Really, poor young Bosinney had made an uncommonly good job of the house; he would have done very well for himself if he had lived! And where was he now? Perhaps, still haunting this, the site of his last work, of his tragic love affair. Or was Philip Bosinney's spirit diffused in the general? Who could say? That dog was getting his legs muddy! And he moved towards the coppice. There had been the most delightful lot of bluebells, and he knew where some still lingered like little patches of sky fallen in between the trees, away out of the sun. He passed the cow-houses and the hen-houses there installed, and pursued a path into the thick of the saplings, making for one of the bluebell plots. Balthasar, preceding him once more, uttered a low growl. Old Jolyon stirred him with his foot, but the dog remained motionless, just where there was no room to pass, and the hair rose slowly along the centre of his woolly back. Whether from the growl and the look of the dog's stivered hair, or from the sensation which a man feels in a wood, old Jolyon also felt something move along his spine. And then the path turned, and there was an old mossy log, and on it a woman sitting. Her face was turned away, and he had just time to think: 'She's trespassing—I must have a board put up!' before she turned. Powers above! The face he had seen at the opera—the very woman he had just been thinking of! In that confused moment he saw things blurred, as if a spirit—queer effect—the slant of sunlight perhaps on her violet-grey frock! And then she rose and stood smiling, her head a little to one side. Old Jolyon thought: 'How pretty she is!' She did not speak, neither did he; and he realized why with a certain admiration. She was here no doubt because of some memory, and did not mean to try and get out of it by vulgar explanation.

"Don't let that dog touch your frock," he said; "he's got wet feet. Come here, you!"

But the dog Balthasar went on towards the visitor, who put her hand down and stroked his head. Old Jolyon said quickly:

"I saw you at the opera the other night; you didn't notice me."

"Oh, yes! I did."

He felt a subtle flattery in that, as though she had added: 'Do you think one could miss seeing you?'

"They're all in Spain," he remarked abruptly. "I'm alone; I drove up for the opera. The Ravogli's good. Have you seen the cow-houses?"

In a situation so charged with mystery and something very like emotion he moved instinctively towards that bit of property, and she moved beside him. Her figure swayed faintly, like the best kind of French figures; her dress, too, was a sort of French grey. He noticed two or three silver threads in her amber-coloured hair, strange hair with those dark eyes of hers, and that creamy-pale face. A sudden sidelong look from the velvety brown eyes disturbed him. It seemed to come from deep and far, from another world almost, or at all events from some one not living very much in this. And he said mechanically:

"Where are you living now?"

"I have a little flat in Chelsea."

He did not want to hear what she was doing, did not want to hear anything; but the perverse word came out:

"Alone?"

She nodded. It was a relief to know that. And it came into his mind that, but for a twist of fate, she would have been mistress of this coppice, showing these cow-houses to him, a visitor.

"All Alderneys," he muttered; "they give the best milk. This one's a pretty creature. Woa, Myrtle!"

The fawn-coloured cow, with eyes as soft and brown as Irene's own, was standing absolutely still, not having long been milked. She looked round at them out of the corner of those lustrous, mild, cynical eyes, and from her grey lips a little dribble of saliva threaded its way towards the straw. The scent of hay and vanilla and ammonia rose in the dim light of the cool cow-house; and old Jolyon said:

"You must come up and have some dinner with me. I'll send you home in the carriage."

He perceived a struggle going on within her; natural, no doubt, with her memories. But he wanted her company; a pretty face, a charming figure, beauty! He had been alone all the afternoon. Perhaps his eyes were wistful, for she answered: "Thank you, Uncle Jolyon. I should like to."

He rubbed his hands, and said:

"Capital! Let's go up, then!" And, preceded by the dog Balthasar, they ascended through the field. The sun was almost level in their faces now, and he could see, not only those silver threads, but little lines, just deep enough to stamp her beauty with a coin-like fineness—the special look of life unshared with others. "I'll take her in by the terrace," he thought: "I won't make a common visitor of her."

"What do you do all day?" he said.

"Teach music; I have another interest, too."

"Work!" said old Jolyon, picking up the doll from off the swing, and smoothing its black petticoat. "Nothing like it, is there? I don't do any now. I'm getting on. What interest is that?"

"Trying to help women who've come to grief." Old Jolyon did not quite understand. "To grief?" he repeated; then realised with a shock that she meant exactly what he would have meant himself if he had used that expression. Assisting the Magdalenes of London! What a weird and terrifying interest! And, curiosity overcoming his natural shrinking, he asked:

"Why? What do you do for them?"

"Not much. I've no money to spare. I can only give sympathy and food sometimes."

Involuntarily old Jolyon's hand sought his purse. He said hastily: "How d'you get hold of them?"

"I go to a hospital."

"A hospital! Phew!"

"What hurts me most is that once they nearly all had some sort of beauty."

Old Jolyon straightened the doll. "Beauty!" he ejaculated: "Ha! Yes! A sad business!" and he moved towards the house. Through a French window, under sun-blinds not yet drawn up, he preceded her into the room where he was wont to study *The Times* and the sheets of an agricultural magazine, with huge illustrations of mangold wurzels, and the like, which provided Holly with material for her paint brush.

"Dinner's in half an hour. You'd like to wash your hands! I'll take you to June's room."

He saw her looking round eagerly; what changes since she had last visited this house with her husband, or her lover, or both perhaps—he did not know, could not say! All that was dark, and he wished to leave it so. But what changes! And in the hall he said:

"My boy Jo's a painter, you know. He's got a lot of taste. It isn't mine, of course, but I've let him have his way."

She was standing very still, her eyes roaming through the hall and music room, as it now was—all thrown into one, under the great skylight. Old Jolyon had an odd impression of her. Was she trying to conjure somebody from the shades of that space where the colouring was all pearl-grey and silver? He would have had gold himself; more lively and solid. But Jo had French tastes, and it had come out shadowy like that, with an effect as of the fume of cigarettes the chap was always smoking, broken here and there by a little blaze of blue or crimson colour. It was not his dream! Mentally he had hung this space with those gold-framed masterpieces of still and stiller life which he had bought in days when quantity was precious. And now where were they? Sold for a song! That something which made him, alone among Forsytes, move with the times had warned him against the struggle to retain them. But in his study he still had 'Dutch Fishing Boats at Sunset.'

He began to mount the stairs with her, slowly, for he felt his side.

"These are the bathrooms," he said, "and other arrangements. I've had them tiled. The nurseries are along there. And this is Jo's and his wife's. They all communicate. But you remember, I expect."

Irene nodded. They passed on, up the gallery and entered a large room with a small bed, and several windows.

"This is mine," he said. The walls were covered with the photographs of children and watercolour sketches, and he added doubtfully:

"These are Jo's. The view's first-rate. You can see the Grand Stand at Epsom in clear weather."

The sun was down now, behind the house, and over the 'prospect' a luminous haze had settled, emanation of the long and prosperous day. Few houses showed, but fields and trees faintly glistened, away to a loom of downs.

"The country's changing," he said abruptly, "but there it'll be when we're all gone. Look at those thrushes—the birds are sweet here in the mornings. I'm glad to have washed my hands of London."

Her face was close to the window pane, and he was struck by its mournful look. 'Wish I could make her look happy!' he thought. 'A pretty face, but sad!' And taking up his can of hot water he went out into the gallery.

"This is June's room," he said, opening the next door and putting the can down; "I think you'll find everything." And closing the door behind her he went back to his own room. Brushing his hair with his great ebony brushes, and dabbing his forehead with eau de Cologne, he mused. She had come so strangely—a sort of visitation; mysterious, even romantic, as if his desire for company, for beauty, had been fulfilled by whatever it was which fulfilled that sort of thing. And before the mirror he straightened his still upright figure, passed the brushes over his great white moustache, touched up his eyebrows with eau de Cologne, and rang the bell.

"I forgot to let them know that I have a lady to dinner with me. Let cook do something extra, and tell Beacon to have the landau and pair at half-past ten to drive her back to Town to-night. Is Miss Holly asleep?"

The maid thought not. And old Jolyon, passing down the gallery, stole on tiptoe towards the nursery, and opened the door whose hinges he kept specially oiled that he might slip in and out in the evenings without being heard.

But Holly was asleep, and lay like a miniature Madonna, of that type which the old painters could not tell from Venus, when they had completed her. Her long dark lashes clung to her cheeks; on her face was perfect peace—her little arrangements were evidently all right again. And old Jolyon, in the twilight of the room, stood adoring her! It was so charming, solemn, and loving—that little face. He had more than his share of the blessed capacity of living again in the young. They were to him his future life—all of a future life that his fundamental pagan sanity perhaps admitted. There she was with everything before her, and his blood—some of it—in her tiny veins. There she was, his little companion, to be made as happy as ever he could make her, so that she knew nothing but love. His heart swelled, and he went out, stilling the sound of his patent-leather boots. In the corridor an eccentric notion attacked him: To think that children should come to that which Irene had told him she was helping! Women who were all, once, little things like this one sleeping there! 'I must give her a cheque!' he mused; 'Can't bear to think of them!' They had never borne reflecting on, those poor outcasts; wounding too deeply the core of true refinement hidden under layers of conformity to the sense of property—wounding too grievously the deepest thing in him—a love of beauty which could give him, even now, a flutter of the heart, thinking of his evening in the society of a pretty woman. And he went downstairs, through the swinging doors, to the back regions. There, in the wine-cellar, was a hock worth at least two pounds a bottle, a Steinberg Cabinet, better than any Johannisberg that ever went down throat; a wine of perfect bouquet, sweet as a nectarine—nectar indeed! He got a bottle out, handling it like a baby, and holding it level to the light, to look. Enshrined in its coat of dust, that mellow coloured, slender-necked bottle gave him deep pleasure. Three years to settle down again since the move from Town—ought to be in prime condition! Thirty-five years ago he had bought it—thank God he had kept his palate, and earned the right to drink it. She would appreciate this; not a spice of acidity in a dozen. He wiped the bottle, drew the cork with his own hands, put his nose down, inhaled its perfume, and went back to the music room.

Irene was standing by the piano; she had taken off her hat and a lace scarf she had been wearing, so that her gold-coloured hair was visible, and the pallor of her neck. In her grey frock she made a pretty picture for old Jolyon, against the rosewood of the piano.

He gave her his arm, and solemnly they went. The room, which had been designed to enable twenty-four people to dine in comfort, held now but a little round table. In his present solitude the big dining-table oppressed old Jolyon; he had caused it to be removed till his son came back. Here in the company of two really good copies of Raphael Madonnas he was wont to dine alone. It was the only disconsolate hour of his day, this summer weather. He had never been a large eater, like that great chap Swithin, or Sylvanus Heythorp, or Anthony Thornworthy, those cronies of past times; and to dine alone, overlooked by the Madonnas, was to him but a sorrowful occupation, which he got through quickly, that he might come to the more spiritual enjoyment of his coffee and cigar. But this evening was a different matter! His eyes twinkled at her across the little table and he spoke of Italy and Switzerland, telling her stories of his travels there, and other experiences which he could no longer recount to his son and granddaughter because they knew them. This fresh audience was precious to him; he had never become one of those old men who ramble round and round the fields of reminiscence. Himself quickly fatigued by the insensitive, he instinctively avoided fatiguing others, and his natural flirtatiousness towards beauty guarded him specially in his relations with a woman. He would have liked to draw her out, but though she murmured and smiled and seemed to be enjoying what he told her, he remained conscious of that mysterious remoteness which constituted half her fascination. He could not bear women who threw their shoulders and eyes at you, and chattered away; or hard-mouthed women who laid down the law and knew more than you did. There was only one quality in a woman that appealed to him—charm; and the quieter it was, the more he liked it. And this one had charm, shadowy as afternoon sunlight on those Italian hills and valleys he had loved. The feeling, too, that she was, as it were, apart, cloistered, made her seem nearer to himself, a strangely desirable companion. When a man is very old and quite out of the running, he loves to feel secure from the rivalries of youth, for he would still be first in the heart of beauty. And he drank his hock, and watched her lips, and felt nearly young. But the dog Balthasar lay watching her lips too, and despising in his heart the interruptions of their talk, and the tilting of those greenish glasses full of a golden fluid which was distasteful to him.

The light was just failing when they went back into the music-room. And, cigar in mouth, old Jolyon said:

"Play me some Chopin."

By the cigars they smoke, and the composers they love, ye shall know the texture of men's souls. Old Jolyon could not bear a strong cigar or Wagner's music. He loved Beethoven and Mozart, Handel and Gluck, and Schumann, and, for some occult reason, the operas of Meyerbeer; but of late years he had been seduced by Chopin, just as in painting he had succumbed to Botticelli. In yielding to these tastes he had been conscious of divergence from the standard of the Golden Age. Their poetry was not that of Milton and Byron and Tennyson; of Raphael and Titian; Mozart and Beethoven. It was, as it were, behind a veil; their poetry hit no one in the face, but slipped its fingers under the ribs and turned and twisted, and melted up the heart. And, never certain that this was healthy, he did not care a rap so long as he could see the pictures of the one or hear the music of the other.

Irene sat down at the piano under the electric lamp festooned with pearl-grey, and old Jolyon, in an armchair, whence he could see her, crossed his legs and drew slowly at his cigar. She sat a few moments with her hands on the keys, evidently searching her mind for what to give him. Then she began and within old Jolyon there arose a sorrowful pleasure, not quite like anything else in the world. He fell slowly into a trance, interrupted only by the movements of taking the cigar out of his mouth at long intervals, and replacing it. She was there, and the hock within him, and the scent of tobacco; but there, too, was a world of sunshine lingering into moonlight, and pools with storks upon them, and bluish trees above, glowing with blurs of wine-red roses, and fields of lavender where milk-white cows were grazing, and a woman all shadowy, with dark eyes and a white neck, smiled, holding out her arms; and through air which was like music a star dropped and was caught on a cow's horn. He opened his eyes. Beautiful piece; she played well—the touch of an angel! And he closed them again. He felt miraculously sad and happy, as one does, standing under a lime-tree in full honey flower. Not live one's own life again, but just stand there and bask in the smile of a woman's eyes, and enjoy the bouquet! And he jerked his hand; the dog Balthasar had reached up and licked it.

"Beautiful!" He said: "Go on—more Chopin!"

She began to play again. This time the resemblance between her and 'Chopin' struck him. The swaying he had noticed in her walk was in her playing too, and the Nocturne she had chosen and the soft darkness of her eyes, the light on her hair, as of moonlight from a golden moon. Seductive, yes; but nothing of Delilah in her or in that music. A long blue spiral from his cigar ascended and dispersed. 'So we go out!' he thought. 'No more beauty! Nothing?'

Again Irene stopped.

"Would you like some Gluck? He used to write his music in a sunlit garden, with a bottle of Rhine

wine beside him."

"Ah! yes. Let's have 'Orfeo.'" Round about him now were fields of gold and silver flowers, white forms swaying in the sunlight, bright birds flying to and fro. All was summer. Lingered waves of sweetness and regret flooded his soul. Some cigar ash dropped, and taking out a silk handkerchief to brush it off, he inhaled a mingled scent as of snuff and eau de Cologne. 'Ah!' he thought, 'Indian summer—that's all!' and he said: "You haven't played me 'Che faro.'"

She did not answer; did not move. He was conscious of something—some strange upset. Suddenly he saw her rise and turn away, and a pang of remorse shot through him. What a clumsy chap! Like Orpheus, she of course—she too was looking for her lost one in the hall of memory! And disturbed to the heart, he got up from his chair. She had gone to the great window at the far end. Gingerly he followed. Her hands were folded over her breast; he could just see her cheek, very white. And, quite emotionalized, he said:

"There, there, my love!" The words had escaped him mechanically, for they were those he used to Holly when she had a pain, but their effect was instantaneously distressing. She raised her arms, covered her face with them, and wept.

Old Jolyon stood gazing at her with eyes very deep from age. The passionate shame she seemed feeling at her abandonment, so unlike the control and quietude of her whole presence was as if she had never before broken down in the presence of another being.

"There, there—there, there!" he murmured, and putting his hand out reverently, touched her. She turned, and leaned the arms which covered her face against him. Old Jolyon stood very still, keeping one thin hand on her shoulder. Let her cry her heart out—it would do her good.

And the dog Balthasar, puzzled, sat down on his stern to examine them.

The window was still open, the curtains had not been drawn, the last of daylight from without mingled with faint intrusion from the lamp within; there was a scent of new-mown grass. With the wisdom of a long life old Jolyon did not speak. Even grief sobbed itself out in time; only Time was good for sorrow—Time who saw the passing of each mood, each emotion in turn; Time the layer-to-rest. There came into his mind the words: 'As panteth the hart after cooling streams'—but they were of no use to him. Then, conscious of a scent of violets, he knew she was drying her eyes. He put his chin forward, pressed his moustache against her forehead, and felt her shake with a quivering of her whole body, as of a tree which shakes itself free of raindrops. She put his hand to her lips, as if saying: "All over now! Forgive me!"

The kiss filled him with a strange comfort; he led her back to where she had been so upset. And the dog Balthasar, following, laid the bone of one of the cutlets they had eaten at their feet.

Anxious to obliterate the memory of that emotion, he could think of nothing better than china; and moving with her slowly from cabinet to cabinet, he kept taking up bits of Dresden and Lowestoft and Chelsea, turning them round and round with his thin, veined hands, whose skin, faintly freckled, had such an aged look.

"I bought this at Jobson's," he would say; "cost me thirty pounds. It's very old. That dog leaves his bones all over the place. This old 'ship-bowl' I picked up at the sale when that precious rip, the Marquis, came to grief. But you don't remember. Here's a nice piece of Chelsea. Now, what would you say this was?" And he was comforted, feeling that, with her taste, she was taking a real interest in these things; for, after all, nothing better composes the nerves than a doubtful piece of china.

When the crunch of the carriage wheels was heard at last, he said:

"You must come again; you must come to lunch, then I can show you these by daylight, and my little sweet—she's a dear little thing. This dog seems to have taken a fancy to you."

For Balthasar, feeling that she was about to leave, was rubbing his side against her leg. Going out under the porch with her, he said:

"He'll get you up in an hour and a quarter. Take this for your protegees," and he slipped a cheque for fifty pounds into her hand. He saw her brightened eyes, and heard her murmur: "Oh! Uncle Jolyon!" and a real throb of pleasure went through him. That meant one or two poor creatures helped a little, and it meant that she would come again. He put his hand in at the window and grasped hers once more. The carriage rolled away. He stood looking at the moon and the shadows of the trees, and thought: 'A sweet night! She.....!'

Contents

II

III

IV

IN CHANCERY

PART 1

CHAPTER I

CHAPTER II

CHAPTER III

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER V

CHAPTER VI

CHAPTER VII

CHAPTER VIII

CHAPTER IX

CHAPTER X

CHAPTER XI

CHAPTER XII

CHAPTER XIII

CHAPTER XIV

PART II

CHAPTER I

CHAPTER II

CHAPTER III

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER V

CHAPTER VI

CHAPTER VII

CHAPTER VIII

CHAPTER IX

CHAPTER X

CHAPTER XI

CHAPTER XII

CHAPTER XIII

CHAPTER XIV

PART III

CHAPTER I

CHAPTER II

CHAPTER III

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER V

CHAPTER VI

CHAPTER VII

CHAPTER VIII

CHAPTER IX

CHAPTER X

CHAPTER XI

CHAPTER XII

CHAPTER XIII

CHAPTER XIV

II

Two days of rain, and summer set in bland and sunny. Old Jolyon walked and talked with Holly. At first he felt taller and full of a new vigour; then he felt restless. Almost every afternoon they would enter the coppice, and walk as far as the log. 'Well, she's not there!' he would think, 'of course not!' And he would feel a little shorter, and drag his feet walking up the hill home, with his hand clapped to his left side. Now and then the thought would move in him: 'Did she come—or did I dream it?' and he would stare at space, while the dog Balthasar stared at him. Of course she would not come again! He opened the letters from Spain with less excitement. They were not returning till July; he felt, oddly, that he could bear it. Every day at dinner he screwed up his eyes and looked at where she had sat. She was not there, so he unscrewed his eyes again.

On the seventh afternoon he thought: 'I must go up and get some boots.' He ordered Beacon, and set out. Passing from Putney towards Hyde Park he reflected: 'I might as well go to Chelsea and see her.' And he called out: "Just drive me to where you took that lady the other night." The coachman turned his broad red face, and his juicy lips answered: "The lady in grey, sir?"

"Yes, the lady in grey." What other ladies were there! Stodgy chap!

The carriage stopped before a small three-storied block of flats, standing a little back from the river. With a practised eye old Jolyon saw that they were cheap. 'I should think about sixty pound a year,' he mused; and entering, he looked at the name-board. The name 'Forsyte' was not on it, but against 'First Floor, Flat C' were the words: 'Mrs. Irene Heron.' Ah! She had taken her maiden name again! And somehow this pleased him. He went upstairs slowly, feeling his side a little. He stood a moment, before ringing, to lose the feeling of drag and fluttering there. She would not be in! And then—Boots! The thought was black. What did he want with boots at his age? He could not wear out all those he had.

"Your mistress at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Say Mr. Jolyon Forsyte."

"Yes, sir, will you come this way?"

Old Jolyon followed a very little maid—not more than sixteen one would say—into a very small drawing-room where the sun-blinds were drawn. It held a cottage piano and little else save a vague fragrance and good taste. He stood in the middle, with his top hat in his hand, and thought: 'I expect she's very badly off!' There was a mirror above the fireplace, and he saw himself reflected. An old-looking chap! He heard a rustle, and turned round. She was so close that his moustache almost brushed her forehead, just under her hair.

"I was driving up," he said. "Thought I'd look in on you, and ask you how you got up the other night."

And, seeing her smile, he felt suddenly relieved. She was really glad to see him, perhaps.

"Would you like to put on your hat and come for a drive in the Park?"

But while she was gone to put her hat on, he frowned. The Park! James and Emily! Mrs. Nicholas, or some other member of his precious family would be there very likely, prancing up and down. And they would go and wag their tongues about having seen him with her, afterwards. Better not! He did not wish to revive the echoes of the past on Forsyte 'Change. He removed a white hair from the lapel of his closely-buttoned-up frock coat, and passed his hand over his cheeks, moustache, and square chin. It felt very hollow there under the cheekbones. He had not been eating much lately—he had better get that little whippersnapper who attended Holly to give him a tonic. But she had come back and when they were in the carriage, he said:

"Suppose we go and sit in Kensington Gardens instead?" and added with a twinkle: "No prancing up and down there," as if she had been in the secret of his thoughts.

Leaving the carriage, they entered those select precincts, and strolled towards the water.

"You've gone back to your maiden name, I see," he said: "I'm not sorry."

She slipped her hand under his arm: "Has June forgiven me, Uncle Jolyon?"

He answered gently: "Yes—yes; of course, why not?"

"And have you?"

"I? I forgave you as soon as I saw how the land really lay." And perhaps he had; his instinct had always been to forgive the beautiful.

She drew a deep breath. "I never regretted—I couldn't. Did you ever love very deeply, Uncle Jolyon?"

At that strange question old Jolyon stared before him. Had he? He did not seem to remember that he ever had. But he did not like to say this to the young woman whose hand was touching his arm, whose life was suspended, as it were, by memory of a tragic love. And he thought: 'If I had met you when I was young I—I might have made a fool of myself, perhaps.' And a longing to escape in generalities beset him.

"Love's a queer thing," he said, "fatal thing often. It was the Greeks—wasn't it?—made love into a goddess; they were right, I dare say, but then they lived in the Golden Age."

"Phil adored them."

Phil! The word jarred him, for suddenly—with his power to see all round a thing, he perceived why she was putting up with him like this. She wanted to talk about her lover! Well! If it was any pleasure to her! And he said: "Ah! There was a bit of the sculptor in him, I fancy."

"Yes. He loved balance and symmetry; he loved the whole-hearted way the Greeks gave themselves to art."

Balance! The chap had no balance at all, if he remembered; as for symmetry—clean-built enough he was, no doubt; but those queer eyes of his, and high cheek-bones—Symmetry?

"You're of the Golden Age, too, Uncle Jolyon."

Old Jolyon looked round at her. Was she chaffing him? No, her eyes were soft as velvet. Was she flattering him? But if so, why? There was nothing to be had out of an old chap like him.

"Phil thought so. He used to say: 'But I can never tell him that I admire him.'"

Ah! There it was again. Her dead lover; her desire to talk of him! And he pressed her arm, half resentful of those memories, half grateful, as if he recognised what a link they were between herself

and him.

"He was a very talented young fellow," he murmured. "It's hot; I feel the heat nowadays. Let's sit down."

They took two chairs beneath a chestnut tree whose broad leaves covered them from the peaceful glory of the afternoon. A pleasure to sit there and watch her, and feel that she liked to be with him. And the wish to increase that liking, if he could, made him go on:

"I expect he showed you a side of him I never saw. He'd be at his best with you. His ideas of art were a little new—to me"—he had stiffed the word 'fangled.'

"Yes: but he used to say you had a real sense of beauty." Old Jolyon thought: 'The devil he did!' but answered with a twinkle: "Well, I have, or I shouldn't be sitting here with you." She was fascinating when she smiled with her eyes, like that!

"He thought you had one of those hearts that never grow old. Phil had real insight."

He was not taken in by this flattery spoken out of the past, out of a longing to talk of her dead lover—not a bit; and yet it was precious to hear, because she pleased his eyes and heart which—quite true!—had never grown old. Was that because—unlike her and her dead lover, he had never loved to desperation, had always kept his balance, his sense of symmetry. Well! It had left him power, at eighty-four, to admire beauty. And he thought, 'If I were a painter or a sculptor! But I'm an old chap. Make hay while the sun shines.'

A couple with arms entwined crossed on the grass before them, at the edge of the shadow from their tree. The sunlight fell cruelly on their pale, squashed, unkempt young faces. "We're an ugly lot!" said old Jolyon suddenly. "It amazes me to see how—love triumphs over that."

"Love triumphs over everything!"

"The young think so," he muttered.

"Love has no age, no limit, and no death."

With that glow in her pale face, her breast heaving, her eyes so large and dark and soft, she looked like Venus come to life! But this extravagance brought instant reaction, and, twinkling, he said: "Well, if it had limits, we shouldn't be born; for by George! it's got a lot to put up with."

Then, removing his top hat, he brushed it round with a cuff. The great clumsy thing heated his forehead; in these days he often got a rush of blood to the head—his circulation was not what it had been.

She still sat gazing straight before her, and suddenly she murmured:

"It's strange enough that I'm alive."

Those words of Jo's 'Wild and lost' came back to him.

"Ah!" he said: "my son saw you for a moment—that day."

"Was it your son? I heard a voice in the hall; I thought for a second it was—Phil."

Old Jolyon saw her lips tremble. She put her hand over them, took it away again, and went on calmly: "That night I went to the Embankment; a woman caught me by the dress. She told me about herself. When one knows that others suffer, one's ashamed."

"One of those?"

She nodded, and horror stirred within old Jolyon, the horror of one who has never known a struggle with desperation. Almost against his will he muttered: "Tell me, won't you?"

"I didn't care whether I lived or died. When you're like that, Fate ceases to want to kill you. She took care of me three days—she never left me. I had no money. That's why I do what I can for them, now."

But old Jolyon was thinking: 'No money!' What fate could compare with that? Every other was involved in it.

"I wish you had come to me," he said. "Why didn't you?" But Irene did not answer.

"Because my name was Forsyte, I suppose? Or was it June who kept you away? How are you getting

on now?" His eyes involuntarily swept her body. Perhaps even now she was—! And yet she wasn't thin—not really!

"Oh! with my fifty pounds a year, I make just enough." The answer did not reassure him; he had lost confidence. And that fellow Soames! But his sense of justice stifled condemnation. No, she would certainly have died rather than take another penny from him. Soft as she looked, there must be strength in her somewhere—strength and fidelity. But what business had young Bosinney to have got run over and left her stranded like this!

"Well, you must come to me now," he said, "for anything you want, or I shall be quite cut up." And putting on his hat, he rose. "Let's go and get some tea. I told that lazy chap to put the horses up for an hour, and come for me at your place. We'll take a cab presently; I can't walk as I used to."

He enjoyed that stroll to the Kensington end of the gardens—the sound of her voice, the glancing of her eyes, the subtle beauty of a charming form moving beside him. He enjoyed their tea at Ruffel's in the High Street, and came out thence with a great box of chocolates swung on his little finger. He enjoyed the drive back to Chelsea in a hansom, smoking his cigar. She had promised to come down next Sunday and play to him again, and already in thought he was plucking carnations and early roses for her to carry back to town. It was a pleasure to give her a little pleasure, if it WERE pleasure from an old chap like him! The carriage was already there when they arrived. Just like that fellow, who was always late when he was wanted! Old Jolyon went in for a minute to say good-bye. The little dark hall of the flat was impregnated with a disagreeable odour of patchouli, and on a bench against the wall—its only furniture—he saw a figure sitting. He heard Irene say softly: "Just one minute." In the little drawing-room when the door was shut, he asked gravely: "One of your proteges?"

"Yes. Now thanks to you, I can do something for her."

He stood, staring, and stroking that chin whose strength had frightened so many in its time. The idea of her thus actually in contact with this outcast grieved and frightened him. What could she do for them? Nothing. Only soil and make trouble for herself, perhaps. And he said: "Take care, my dear! The world puts the worst construction on everything."

"I know that."

He was abashed by her quiet smile. "Well then—Sunday," he murmured: "Good-bye."

She put her cheek forward for him to kiss.

"Good-bye," he said again; "take care of yourself." And he went out, not looking towards the figure on the bench. He drove home by way of Hammersmith; that he might stop at a place he knew of and tell them to send her in two dozen of their best Burgundy. She must want picking-up sometimes! Only in Richmond Park did he remember that he had gone up to order himself some boots, and was surprised that he could have had so paltry an idea.

III

The little spirits of the past which throng an old man's days had never pushed their faces up to his so seldom as in the seventy hours elapsing before Sunday came. The spirit of the future, with the charm of the unknown, put up her lips instead. Old Jolyon was not restless now, and paid no visits to the log, because she was coming to lunch. There is wonderful finality about a meal; it removes a world of doubts, for no one misses meals except for reasons beyond control. He played many games with Holly on the lawn, pitching them up to her who was batting so as to be ready to bowl to Jolly in the holidays. For she was not a Forsyte, but Jolly was—and Forsytes always bat, until they have resigned and reached the age of eighty-five. The dog Balthasar, in attendance, lay on the ball as often as he could, and the page-boy fielded, till his face was like the harvest moon. And because the time was getting shorter, each day was longer and more golden than the last. On Friday night he took a liver pill, his side hurt him rather, and though it was not the liver side, there is no remedy like that. Anyone telling him that he had found a new excitement in life and that excitement was not good for him, would have been met by one of those steady and rather defiant looks of his deep-set iron-grey eyes, which seemed to say: 'I know my own business best.' He always had and always would.

On Sunday morning, when Holly had gone with her governess to church, he visited the strawberry beds. There, accompanied by the dog Balthasar, he examined the plants narrowly and succeeded in finding at least two dozen berries which were really ripe. Stooping was not good for him, and he became very dizzy and red in the forehead. Having placed the strawberries in a dish on the dining-table, he washed his hands and bathed his forehead with eau de Cologne. There, before the mirror, it occurred to him that he was thinner. What a 'threadpaper' he had been when he was young! It was nice to be slim—he could not bear a fat chap; and yet perhaps his cheeks were too thin! She was to arrive by train at half-past twelve and walk up, entering from the road past Drage's farm at the far end of the coppice. And, having looked into June's room to see that there was hot water ready, he set forth to meet her, leisurely, for his heart was beating. The air smelled sweet, larks sang, and the Grand Stand at Epsom was visible. A perfect day! On just such a one, no doubt, six years ago, Soames had brought young Bosinney down with him to look at the site before they began to build. It was Bosinney who had pitched on the exact spot for the house—as June had often told him. In these days he was thinking much about that young fellow, as if his spirit were really haunting the field of his last work, on the chance of seeing—her. Bosinney—the one man who had possessed her heart, to whom she had given her whole self with rapture! At his age one could not, of course, imagine such things, but there stirred in him a queer vague aching—as it were the ghost of an impersonal jealousy; and a feeling, too, more generous, of pity for that love so early lost. All over in a few poor months! Well, well! He looked at his watch before entering the coppice—only a quarter past, twenty-five minutes to wait! And then, turning the corner of the path, he saw her exactly where he had seen her the first time, on the log; and realised that she must have come by the earlier train to sit there alone for a couple of hours at least. Two hours of her society missed! What memory could make that log so dear to her? His face showed what he was thinking, for she said at once:

"Forgive me, Uncle Jolyon; it was here that I first knew."

"Yes, yes; there it is for you whenever you like. You're looking a little Londony; you're giving too many lessons."

That she should have to give lessons worried him. Lessons to a parcel of young girls thumping out scales with their thick fingers.

"Where do you go to give them?" he asked.

"They're mostly Jewish families, luckily."

Old Jolyon stared; to all Forsytes Jews seem strange and doubtful.

"They love music, and they're very kind."

"They had better be, by George!" He took her arm—his side always hurt him a little going uphill—and said:

"Did you ever see anything like those buttercups? They came like that in a night."

Her eyes seemed really to fly over the field, like bees after the flowers and the honey. "I wanted you to see them—wouldn't let them turn the cows in yet." Then, remembering that she had come to talk about Bosinney, he pointed to the clock-tower over the stables:

"I expect he wouldn't have let me put that there—had no notion of time, if I remember."

But, pressing his arm to her, she talked of flowers instead, and he knew it was done that he might not feel she came because of her dead lover.

"The best flower I can show you," he said, with a sort of triumph, "is my little sweet. She'll be back from Church directly. There's something about her which reminds me a little of you," and it did not seem to him peculiar that he had put it thus, instead of saying: "There's something about you which reminds me a little of her." Ah! And here she was!

Holly, followed closely by her elderly French governess, whose digestion had been ruined twenty-two years ago in the siege of Strasbourg, came rushing towards them from under the oak tree. She stopped about a dozen yards away, to pat Balthasar and pretend that this was all she had in her mind. Old Jolyon, who knew better, said:

"Well, my darling, here's the lady in grey I promised you."

Holly raised herself and looked up. He watched the two of them with a twinkle, Irene smiling, Holly beginning with grave inquiry, passing into a shy smile too, and then to something deeper. She had a sense of beauty, that child—knew what was what! He enjoyed the sight of the kiss between them.

"Mrs. Heron, Mam'zelle Beauce. Well, Mam'zelle—good sermon?"

For, now that he had not much more time before him, the only part of the service connected with this world absorbed what interest in church remained to him. Mam'zelle Beauce stretched out a spidery hand clad in a black kid glove—she had been in the best families—and the rather sad eyes of her lean yellowish face seemed to ask: "Are you well-brrred?" Whenever Holly or Jolly did anything unpleasing to her—a not uncommon occurrence—she would say to them: "The little Tayleurs never did that—they were such well-brrred little children." Jolly hated the little Tayleurs; Holly wondered dreadfully how it was she fell so short of them. 'A thin rum little soul,' old Jolyon thought her—Mam'zelle Beauce.

Luncheon was a successful meal, the mushrooms which he himself had picked in the mushroom house, his chosen strawberries, and another bottle of the Steinberg cabinet filled him with a certain aromatic spirituality, and a conviction that he would have a touch of eczema to-morrow.

After lunch they sat under the oak tree drinking Turkish coffee. It was no matter of grief to him when Mademoiselle Beauce withdrew to write her Sunday letter to her sister, whose future had been endangered in the past by swallowing a pin—an event held up daily in warning to the children to eat slowly and digest what they had eaten. At the foot of the bank, on a carriage rug, Holly and the dog Balthasar teased and loved each other, and in the shade old Jolyon with his legs crossed and his cigar luxuriously savoured, gazed at Irene sitting in the swing. A light, vaguely swaying, grey figure with a fleck of sunlight here and there upon it, lips just opened, eyes dark and soft under lids a little drooped. She looked content; surely it did her good to come and see him! The selfishness of age had not set its proper grip on him, for he could still feel pleasure in the pleasure of others, realising that what he wanted, though much, was not quite all that mattered.

"It's quiet here," he said; "you mustn't come down if you find it dull. But it's a pleasure to see you. My little sweet is the only face which gives me any pleasure, except yours."

From her smile he knew that she was not beyond liking to be appreciated, and this reassured him. "That's not humbug," he said. "I never told a woman I admired her when I didn't. In fact I don't know when I've told a woman I admired her, except my wife in the old days; and wives are funny." He was silent, but resumed abruptly:

"She used to expect me to say it more often than I felt it, and there we were." Her face looked mysteriously troubled, and, afraid that he had said something painful, he hurried on: "When my little sweet marries, I hope she'll find someone who knows what women feel. I shan't be here to see it, but there's too much topsy-turvydom in marriage; I don't want her to pitch up against that." And, aware that he had made bad worse, he added: "That dog will scratch."

A silence followed. Of what was she thinking, this pretty creature whose life was spoiled; who had done with love, and yet was made for love? Some day when he was gone, perhaps, she would find another mate—not so disorderly as that young fellow who had got himself run over. Ah! but her husband?

"Does Soames never trouble you?" he asked.

She shook her head. Her face had closed up suddenly. For all her softness there was something irreconcilable about her. And a glimpse of light on the inexorable nature of sex antipathies strayed into a brain which, belonging to early Victorian civilisation—so much older than this of his old age—had never thought about such primitive things.

"That's a comfort," he said. "You can see the Grand Stand to-day. Shall we take a turn round?"

Through the flower and fruit garden, against whose high outer walls peach trees and nectarines were trained to the sun, through the stables, the vinery, the mushroom house, the asparagus beds, the rosery, the summer-house, he conducted her—even into the kitchen garden to see the tiny green peas which Holly loved to scoop out of their pods with her finger, and lick up from the palm of her little brown hand. Many delightful things he showed her, while Holly and the dog Balthasar danced ahead, or came to them at intervals for attention. It was one of the happiest afternoons he had ever spent, but it tired him and he was glad to sit down in the music room and let her give him tea. A special little friend of Holly's had come in—a fair child with short hair like a boy's. And the two sported in the distance, under the stairs, on the stairs, and up in the gallery. Old Jolyon begged for Chopin. She played studies, mazurkas, waltzes, till the two children, creeping near, stood at the foot of the piano their dark and golden heads bent forward, listening. Old Jolyon watched.

"Let's see you dance, you two!"

Shyly, with a false start, they began. Bobbing and circling, earnest, not very adroit, they went past

and past his chair to the strains of that waltz. He watched them and the face of her who was playing turned smiling towards those little dancers thinking:

'Sweetest picture I've seen for ages.'

A voice said:

"Hollée! Mais enfin—qu'est-ce que tu fais la—danser, le dimanche! Viens, donc!"

But the children came close to old Jolyon, knowing that he would save them, and gazed into a face which was decidedly 'caught out.'

"Better the day, better the deed, Mam'zelle. It's all my doing. Trot along, chicks, and have your tea."

And, when they were gone, followed by the dog Balthasar, who took every meal, he looked at Irene with a twinkle and said:

"Well, there we are! Aren't they sweet? Have you any little ones among your pupils?"

"Yes, three—two of them darlings."

"Pretty?"

"Lovely!"

Old Jolyon sighed; he had an insatiable appetite for the very young. "My little sweet," he said, "is devoted to music; she'll be a musician some day. You wouldn't give me your opinion of her playing, I suppose?"

"Of course I will."

"You wouldn't like—" but he stifled the words "to give her lessons." The idea that she gave lessons was unpleasant to him; yet it would mean that he would see her regularly. She left the piano and came over to his chair.

"I would like, very much; but there is—June. When are they coming back?"

Old Jolyon frowned. "Not till the middle of next month. What does that matter?"

"You said June had forgiven me; but she could never forget, Uncle Jolyon."

Forget! She must forget, if he wanted her to.

But as if answering, Irene shook her head. "You know she couldn't; one doesn't forget."

Always that wretched past! And he said with a sort of vexed finality:

"Well, we shall see."

He talked to her an hour or more, of the children, and a hundred little things, till the carriage came round to take her home. And when she had gone he went back to his chair, and sat there smoothing his face and chin, dreaming over the day.

That evening after dinner he went to his study and took a sheet of paper. He stayed for some minutes without writing, then rose and stood under the masterpiece 'Dutch Fishing Boats at Sunset.' He was not thinking of that picture, but of his life. He was going to leave her something in his Will; nothing could so have stirred the stilly deeps of thought and memory. He was going to leave her a portion of his wealth, of his aspirations, deeds, qualities, work—all that had made that wealth; going to leave her, too, a part of all he had missed in life, by his sane and steady pursuit of wealth. All! What had he missed? 'Dutch Fishing Boats' responded blankly; he crossed to the French window, and drawing the curtain aside, opened it. A wind had got up, and one of last year's oak leaves which had somehow survived the gardener's brooms, was dragging itself with a tiny clicking rustle along the stone terrace in the twilight. Except for that it was very quiet out there, and he could smell the heliotrope watered not long since. A bat went by. A bird uttered its last 'cheep.' And right above the oak tree the first star shone. Faust in the opera had bartered his soul for some fresh years of youth. Morbid notion! No such bargain was possible, that was real tragedy! No making oneself new again for love or life or anything. Nothing left to do but enjoy beauty from afar off while you could, and leave it something in your Will. But how much? And, as if he could not make that calculation looking out into the mild freedom of the country

night, he turned back and went up to the chimney-piece. There were his pet bronzes—a Cleopatra with the asp at her breast; a Socrates; a greyhound playing with her puppy; a strong man reining in some horses. 'They last!' he thought, and a pang went through his heart. They had a thousand years of life before them!

'How much?' Well! enough at all events to save her getting old before her time, to keep the lines out of her face as long as possible, and grey from soiling that bright hair. He might live another five years. She would be well over thirty by then. 'How much?' She had none of his blood in her! In loyalty to the tenor of his life for forty years and more, ever since he married and founded that mysterious thing, a family, came this warning thought—None of his blood, no right to anything! It was a luxury then, this notion. An extravagance, a petting of an old man's whim, one of those things done in dotage. His real future was vested in those who had his blood, in whom he would live on when he was gone. He turned away from the bronzes and stood looking at the old leather chair in which he had sat and smoked so many hundreds of cigars. And suddenly he seemed to see her sitting there in her grey dress, fragrant, soft, dark-eyed, graceful, looking up at him. Why! She cared nothing for him, really; all she cared for was that lost lover of hers. But she was there, whether she would or no, giving him pleasure with her beauty and grace. One had no right to inflict an old man's company, no right to ask her down to play to him and let him look at her—for no reward! Pleasure must be paid for in this world. 'How much?' After all, there was plenty; his son and his three grandchildren would never miss that little lump. He had made it himself, nearly every penny; he could leave it where he liked, allow himself this little pleasure. He went back to the bureau. 'Well, I'm going to,' he thought, 'let them think what they like. I'm going to!' And he sat down.

'How much?' Ten thousand, twenty thousand—how much? If only with his money he could buy one year, one month of youth. And startled by that thought, he wrote quickly:

'DEAR HERRING,—Draw me a codicil to this effect: "I leave to my niece Irene Forsyte, born Irene Heron, by which name she now goes, fifteen thousand pounds free of legacy duty." 'Yours faithfully, 'JOLYON FORSYTE.'

When he had sealed and stamped the envelope, he went back to the window and drew in a long breath. It was dark, but many stars shone now.

IV

He woke at half-past two, an hour which long experience had taught him brings panic intensity to all awkward thoughts. Experience had also taught him that a further waking at the proper hour of eight showed the folly of such panic. On this particular morning the thought which gathered rapid momentum was that if he became ill, at his age not improbable, he would not see her. From this it was but a step to realisation that he would be cut off, too, when his son and June returned from Spain. How could he justify desire for the company of one who had stolen—early morning does not mince words—June's lover? That lover was dead; but June was a stubborn little thing; warm-hearted, but stubborn as wood, and—quite true—not one who forgot! By the middle of next month they would be back. He had barely five weeks left to enjoy the new interest which had come into what remained of his life. Darkness showed up to him absurdly clear the nature of his feeling. Admiration for beauty—a craving to see that which delighted his eyes.

Preposterous, at his age! And yet—what other reason was there for asking June to undergo such painful reminder, and how prevent his son and his son's wife from thinking him very queer? He would be reduced to sneaking up to London, which tired him; and the least indisposition would cut him off even from that. He lay with eyes open, setting his jaw against the prospect, and calling himself an old fool, while his heart beat loudly, and then seemed to stop beating altogether. He had seen the dawn lighting the window chinks, heard the birds chirp and twitter, and the cocks crow, before he fell asleep again, and awoke tired but sane. Five weeks before he need bother, at his age an eternity! But that early morning panic had left its mark, had slightly fevered the will of one who had always had his own way. He would see her as often as he wished! Why not go up to town and make that codicil at his solicitor's instead of writing about it; she might like to go to the opera! But, by train, for he would not have that fat chap Beacon grinning behind his back. Servants were such fools; and, as likely as not, they had known all the past history of Irene and young Bosinney—servants knew everything, and suspected the rest. He wrote to her that morning:

"MY DEAR IRENE,—I have to be up in town to-morrow. If you would like to have a look in at the opera, come and dine with me quietly"

But where? It was decades since he had dined anywhere in London save at his Club or at a private house. Ah! that new-fangled place close to Covent Garden....

"Let me have a line to-morrow morning to the Piedmont Hotel whether to expect you there at 7 o'clock."

"Yours affectionately,
"JOLYON FORSYTE."

She would understand that he just wanted to give her a little pleasure; for the idea that she should guess he had this itch to see her was instinctively unpleasant to him; it was not seemly that one so old should go out of his way to see beauty, especially in a woman.

The journey next day, short though it was, and the visit to his lawyer's, tired him. It was hot too, and after dressing for dinner he lay down on the sofa in his bedroom to rest a little. He must have had a sort of fainting fit, for he came to himself feeling very queer; and with some difficulty rose and rang the bell. Why! it was past seven! And there he was and she would be waiting. But suddenly the dizziness came on again, and he was obliged to relapse on the sofa. He heard the maid's voice say:

"Did you ring, sir?"

"Yes, come here"; he could not see her clearly, for the cloud in front of his eyes. "I'm not well, I want some sal volatile."

"Yes, sir." Her voice sounded frightened.

Old Jolyon made an effort.

"Don't go. Take this message to my niece—a lady waiting in the hall—a lady in grey. Say Mr. Forsyte is not well—the heat. He is very sorry; if he is not down directly, she is not to wait dinner."

When she was gone, he thought feebly: 'Why did I say a lady in grey—she may be in anything. Sal volatile!' He did not go off again, yet was not conscious of how Irene came to be standing beside him, holding smelling salts to his nose, and pushing a pillow up behind his head. He heard her say anxiously: "Dear Uncle Jolyon, what is it?" was dimly conscious of the soft pressure of her lips on his hand; then drew a long breath of smelling salts, suddenly discovered strength in them, and sneezed.

"Ha!" he said, "it's nothing. How did you get here? Go down and dine—the tickets are on the dressing-table. I shall be all right in a minute."

He felt her cool hand on his forehead, smelled violets, and sat divided between a sort of pleasure and a determination to be all right.

"Why! You are in grey!" he said. "Help me up." Once on his feet he gave himself a shake.

"What business had I to go off like that!" And he moved very slowly to the glass. What a cadaverous chap! Her voice, behind him, murmured:

"You mustn't come down, Uncle; you must rest."

"Fiddlesticks! A glass of champagne'll soon set me to rights. I can't have you missing the opera."

But the journey down the corridor was troublesome. What carpets they had in these newfangled places, so thick that you tripped up in them at every step! In the lift he noticed how concerned she looked, and said with the ghost of a twinkle:

"I'm a pretty host."

When the lift stopped he had to hold firmly to the seat to prevent its slipping under him; but after soup and a glass of champagne he felt much better, and began to enjoy an infirmity which had brought such solicitude into her manner towards him.

"I should have liked you for a daughter," he said suddenly; and watching the smile in her eyes, went on:

"You mustn't get wrapped up in the past at your time of life; plenty of that when you get to my age. That's a nice dress—I like the style."

"I made it myself."

Ah! A woman who could make herself a pretty frock had not lost her interest in life.

"Make hay while the sun shines," he said; "and drink that up. I want to see some colour in your cheeks. We mustn't waste life; it doesn't do. There's a new Marguerite to-night; let's hope she won't be fat. And Mephisto—anything more dreadful than a fat chap playing the Devil I can't imagine."

But they did not go to the opera after all, for in getting up from dinner the dizziness came over him again, and she insisted on his staying quiet and going to bed early. When he parted from her at the door of the hotel, having paid the cabman to drive her to Chelsea, he sat down again for a moment to enjoy the memory of her words: "You are such a darling to me, Uncle Jolyon!" Why! Who wouldn't be! He would have liked to stay up another day and take her to the Zoo, but two days running of him would bore her to death. No, he must wait till next Sunday; she had promised to come then. They would settle those lessons for Holly, if only for a month. It would be something. That little Mam'zelle Beauce wouldn't like it, but she would have to lump it. And crushing his old opera hat against his chest he sought the lift.

He drove to Waterloo next morning, struggling with a desire to say: 'Drive me to Chelsea.' But his sense of proportion was too strong. Besides, he still felt shaky, and did not want to risk another aberration like that of last night, away from home. Holly, too, was expecting him, and what he had in his bag for her. Not that there was any cupboard love in his little sweet—she was a bundle of affection. Then, with the rather bitter cynicism of the old, he wondered for a second whether it was not cupboard love which made Irene put up with him. No, she was not that sort either. She had, if anything, too little notion of how to butter her bread, no sense of property, poor thing! Besides, he had not breathed a word about that codicil, nor should he—sufficient unto the day was the good thereof.

In the victoria which met him at the station Holly was restraining the dog Balthasar, and their caresses made 'jubey' his drive home. All the rest of that fine hot day and most of the next he was content and peaceful, reposing in the shade, while the long lingering sunshine showered gold on the lawns and the flowers. But on Thursday evening at his lonely dinner he began to count the hours; sixty-five till he would go down to meet her again in the little coppice, and walk up through the fields at her side. He had intended to consult the doctor about his fainting fit, but the fellow would be sure to insist on quiet, no excitement and all that; and he did not mean to be tied by the leg, did not want to be told of an infirmity—if there were one, could not afford to hear of it at his time of life, now that this new interest had come. And he carefully avoided making any mention of it in a letter to his son. It would only bring them back with a run! How far this silence was due to consideration for their pleasure, how far to regard for his own, he did not pause to consider.

That night in his study he had just finished his cigar and was dozing off, when he heard the rustle of a gown, and was conscious of a scent of violets. Opening his eyes he saw her, dressed in grey, standing by the fireplace, holding out her arms. The odd thing was that, though those arms seemed to hold nothing, they were curved as if round someone's neck, and her own neck was bent back, her lips open, her eyes closed. She vanished at once, and there were the mantelpiece and his bronzes. But those bronzes and the mantelpiece had not been there when she was, only the fireplace and the wall! Shaken and troubled, he got up. 'I must take medicine,' he thought; 'I can't be well.' His heart beat too fast, he had an asthmatic feeling in the chest; and going to the window, he opened it to get some air. A dog was barking far away, one of the dogs at Gage's farm no doubt, beyond the coppice. A beautiful still night, but dark. 'I dropped off,' he mused, 'that's it! And yet I'll swear my eyes were open!' A sound like a sigh seemed to answer.

"What's that?" he said sharply, "who's there?"

Putting his hand to his side to still the beating of his heart, he stepped out on the terrace. Something soft scurried by in the dark. "Shoo!" It was that great grey cat. 'Young Bosinney was like a great cat!' he thought. 'It was him in there, that she—that she was—He's got her still!' He walked to the edge of the terrace, and looked down into the darkness; he could just see the powdering of the daisies on the unmown lawn. Here to-day and gone to-morrow! And there came the moon, who saw all, young and old, alive and dead, and didn't care a dump! His own turn soon. For a single day of youth he would give what was left! And he turned again towards the house. He could see the windows of the night nursery up there. His little sweet would be asleep. 'Hope that dog won't wake her!' he thought. 'What is it makes us love, and makes us die! I must go to bed.'

And across the terrace stones, growing grey in the moonlight, he passed back within.

How should an old man live his days if not in dreaming of his well-spent past? In that, at all events, there is no agitating warmth, only pale winter sunshine. The shell can withstand the gentle beating of

the dynamos of memory. The present he should distrust; the future shun. From beneath thick shade he should watch the sunlight creeping at his toes. If there be sun of summer, let him not go out into it, mistaking it for the Indian-summer sun! Thus peradventure he shall decline softly, slowly, imperceptibly, until impatient Nature clutches his wind-pipe and he gasps away to death some early morning before the world is aired, and they put on his tombstone: 'In the fulness of years!' yea! If he preserve his principles in perfect order, a Forsyte may live on long after he is dead.

Old Jolyon was conscious of all this, and yet there was in him that which transcended Forsyteism. For it is written that a Forsyte shall not love beauty more than reason; nor his own way more than his own health. And something beat within him in these days that with each throb fretted at the thinning shell. His sagacity knew this, but it knew too that he could not stop that beating, nor would if he could. And yet, if you had told him he was living on his capital, he would have stared you down. No, no; a man did not live on his capital; it was not done! The shibboleths of the past are ever more real than the actualities of the present. And he, to whom living on one's capital had always been anathema, could not have borne to have applied so gross a phrase to his own case. Pleasure is healthful; beauty good to see; to live again in the youth of the young—and what else on earth was he doing!

Methodically, as had been the way of his whole life, he now arranged his time. On Tuesdays he journeyed up to town by train; Irene came and dined with him. And they went to the opera. On Thursdays he drove to town, and, putting that fat chap and his horses up, met her in Kensington Gardens, picking up the carriage after he had left her, and driving home again in time for dinner. He threw out the casual formula that he had business in London on those two days. On Wednesdays and Saturdays she came down to give Holly music lessons. The greater the pleasure he took in her society, the more scrupulously fastidious he became, just a matter-of-fact and friendly uncle. Not even in feeling, really, was he more—for, after all, there was his age. And yet, if she were late he fidgeted himself to death. If she missed coming, which happened twice, his eyes grew sad as an old dog's, and he failed to sleep.

And so a month went by—a month of summer in the fields, and in his heart, with summer's heat and the fatigue thereof. Who could have believed a few weeks back that he would have looked forward to his son's and his grand-daughter's return with something like dread! There was such a delicious freedom, such recovery of that independence a man enjoys before he founds a family, about these weeks of lovely weather, and this new companionship with one who demanded nothing, and remained always a little unknown, retaining the fascination of mystery. It was like a draught of wine to him who has been drinking water for so long that he has almost forgotten the stir wine brings to his blood, the narcotic to his brain. The flowers were coloured brighter, scents and music and the sunlight had a living value—were no longer mere reminders of past enjoyment. There was something now to live for which stirred him continually to anticipation. He lived in that, not in retrospection; the difference is considerable to any so old as he. The pleasures of the table, never of much consequence to one naturally abstemious, had lost all value. He ate little, without knowing what he ate; and every day grew thinner and more worn to look at. He was again a 'threadpaper'; and to this thinned form his massive forehead, with hollows at the temples, gave more dignity than ever. He was very well aware that he ought to see the doctor, but liberty was too sweet. He could not afford to pet his frequent shortness of breath and the pain in his side at the expense of liberty. Return to the vegetable existence he had led among the agricultural journals with the life-size mangold wurzels, before this new attraction came into his life—no! He exceeded his allowance of cigars. Two a day had always been his rule. Now he smoked three and sometimes four—a man will when he is filled with the creative spirit. But very often he thought: 'I must give up smoking, and coffee; I must give up rattling up to town.' But he did not; there was no one in any sort of authority to notice him, and this was a priceless boon.

The servants perhaps wondered, but they were, naturally, dumb. Mam'zelle Beauce was too concerned with her own digestion, and too 'wellbrrred' to make personal allusions. Holly had not as yet an eye for the relative appearance of him who was her plaything and her god. It was left for Irene herself to beg him to eat more, to rest in the hot part of the day, to take a tonic, and so forth. But she did not tell him that she was the cause of his thinness—for one cannot see the havoc oneself is working. A man of eighty-five has no passions, but the Beauty which produces passion works on in the old way, till death closes the eyes which crave the sight of Her.

On the first day of the second week in July he received a letter from his son in Paris to say that they would all be back on Friday. This had always been more sure than Fate; but, with the pathetic improvidence given to the old, that they may endure to the end, he had never quite admitted it. Now he did, and something would have to be done. He had ceased to be able to imagine life without this new interest, but that which is not imagined sometimes exists, as Forsytes are perpetually finding to their cost. He sat in his old leather chair, doubling up the letter, and mumbling with his lips the end of an unlighted cigar. After to-morrow his Tuesday expeditions to town would have to be abandoned. He could still drive up, perhaps, once a week, on the pretext of seeing his man of business. But even that

would be dependent on his health, for now they would begin to fuss about him. The lessons! The lessons must go on! She must swallow down her scruples, and June must put her feelings in her pocket. She had done so once, on the day after the news of Bosinney's death; what she had done then, she could surely do again now. Four years since that injury was inflicted on her—not Christian to keep the memory of old sores alive. June's will was strong, but his was stronger, for his sands were running out. Irene was soft, surely she would do this for him, subdue her natural shrinking, sooner than give him pain! The lessons must continue; for if they did, he was secure. And lighting his cigar at last, he began trying to shape out how to put it to them all, and explain this strange intimacy; how to veil and wrap it away from the naked truth—that he could not bear to be deprived of the sight of beauty. Ah! Holly! Holly was fond of her, Holly liked her lessons. She would save him—his little sweet! And with that happy thought he became serene, and wondered what he had been worrying about so fearfully. He must not worry, it left him always curiously weak, and as if but half present in his own body.

That evening after dinner he had a return of the dizziness, though he did not faint. He would not ring the bell, because he knew it would mean a fuss, and make his going up on the morrow more conspicuous. When one grew old, the whole world was in conspiracy to limit freedom, and for what reason?—just to keep the breath in him a little longer. He did not want it at such cost. Only the dog Balthasar saw his lonely recovery from that weakness; anxiously watched his master go to the sideboard and drink some brandy, instead of giving him a biscuit. When at last old Jolyon felt able to tackle the stairs he went up to bed. And, though still shaky next morning, the thought of the evening sustained and strengthened him. It was always such a pleasure to give her a good dinner—he suspected her of undereating when she was alone; and, at the opera to watch her eyes glow and brighten, the unconscious smiling of her lips. She hadn't much pleasure, and this was the last time he would be able to give her that treat. But when he was packing his bag he caught himself wishing that he had not the fatigue of dressing for dinner before him, and the exertion, too, of telling her about June's return.

The opera that evening was 'Carmen,' and he chose the last entr'acte to break the news, instinctively putting it off till the latest moment.

She took it quietly, queerly; in fact, he did not know how she had taken it before the wayward music lifted up again and silence became necessary. The mask was down over her face, that mask behind which so much went on that he could not see. She wanted time to think it over, no doubt! He would not press her, for she would be coming to give her lesson to-morrow afternoon, and he should see her then when she had got used to the idea. In the cab he talked only of the Carmen; he had seen better in the old days, but this one was not bad at all. When he took her hand to say good-night, she bent quickly forward and kissed his forehead.

"Good-bye, dear Uncle Jolyon, you have been so sweet to me."

"To-morrow then," he said. "Good-night. Sleep well." She echoed softly: "Sleep well" and from the cab window, already moving away, he saw her face screwed round towards him, and her hand put out in a gesture which seemed to linger.

He sought his room slowly. They never gave him the same, and he could not get used to these 'spick-and-spandy' bedrooms with new furniture and grey-green carpets sprinkled all over with pink roses. He was wakeful and that wretched Habanera kept throbbing in his head.

His French had never been equal to its words, but its sense he knew, if it had any sense, a gipsy thing—wild and unaccountable. Well, there was in life something which upset all your care and plans—something which made men and women dance to its pipes. And he lay staring from deep-sunk eyes into the darkness where the unaccountable held sway. You thought you had hold of life, but it slipped away behind you, took you by the scruff of the neck, forced you here and forced you there, and then, likely as not, squeezed life out of you! It took the very stars like that, he shouldn't wonder, rubbed their noses together and flung them apart; it had never done playing its pranks. Five million people in this great blunderbuss of a town, and all of them at the mercy of that Life-Force, like a lot of little dried peas hopping about on a board when you struck your fist on it. Ah, well! Himself would not hop much longer—a good long sleep would do him good!

How hot it was up here!—how noisy! His forehead burned; she had kissed it just where he always worried; just there—as if she had known the very place and wanted to kiss it all away for him. But, instead, her lips left a patch of grievous uneasiness. She had never spoken in quite that voice, had never before made that lingering gesture or looked back at him as she drove away.

He got out of bed and pulled the curtains aside; his room faced down over the river. There was little air, but the sight of that breadth of water flowing by, calm, eternal, soothed him. 'The great thing,' he thought 'is not to make myself a nuisance. I'll think of my little sweet, and go to sleep.' But it was long before the heat and throbbing of the London night died out into the short slumber of the summer

morning. And old Jolyon had but forty winks.

When he reached home next day he went out to the flower garden, and with the help of Holly, who was very delicate with flowers, gathered a great bunch of carnations. They were, he told her, for 'the lady in grey'—a name still bandied between them; and he put them in a bowl in his study where he meant to tackle Irene the moment she came, on the subject of June and future lessons. Their fragrance and colour would help. After lunch he lay down, for he felt very tired, and the carriage would not bring her from the station till four o'clock. But as the hour approached he grew restless, and sought the schoolroom, which overlooked the drive. The sun-blinds were down, and Holly was there with Mademoiselle Beauce, sheltered from the heat of a stifling July day, attending to their silkworms. Old Jolyon had a natural antipathy to these methodical creatures, whose heads and colour reminded him of elephants; who nibbled such quantities of holes in nice green leaves; and smelled, as he thought, horrid. He sat down on a chintz-covered windowseat whence he could see the drive, and get what air there was; and the dog Balthasar who appreciated chintz on hot days, jumped up beside him. Over the cottage piano a violet dust-sheet, faded almost to grey, was spread, and on it the first lavender, whose scent filled the room. In spite of the coolness here, perhaps because of that coolness the beat of life vehemently impressed his ebb-down senses. Each sunbeam which came through the chinks had annoying brilliance; that dog smelled very strong; the lavender perfume was overpowering; those silkworms heaving up their grey-green backs seemed horribly alive; and Holly's dark head bent over them had a wonderfully silky sheen. A marvellous cruelly strong thing was life when you were old and weak; it seemed to mock you with its multitude of forms and its beating vitality. He had never, till those last few weeks, had this curious feeling of being with one half of him eagerly borne along in the stream of life, and with the other half left on the bank, watching that helpless progress. Only when Irene was with him did he lose this double consciousness.

Holly turned her head, pointed with her little brown fist to the piano—for to point with a finger was not 'well-brrred'—and said slyly:

"Look at the 'lady in grey,' Gran; isn't she pretty to-day?"

Old Jolyon's heart gave a flutter, and for a second the room was clouded; then it cleared, and he said with a twinkle:

"Who's been dressing her up?"

"Mam'zelle."

"Hollee! Don't be foolish!"

That prim little Frenchwoman! She hadn't yet got over the music lessons being taken away from her. That wouldn't help. His little sweet was the only friend they had. Well, they were her lessons. And he shouldn't budge shouldn't budge for anything. He stroked the warm wool on Balthasar's head, and heard Holly say: "When mother's home, there won't be any changes, will there? She doesn't like strangers, you know."

The child's words seemed to bring the chilly atmosphere of opposition about old Jolyon, and disclose all the menace to his new-found freedom. Ah! He would have to resign himself to being an old man at the mercy of care and love, or fight to keep this new and prized companionship; and to fight tired him to death. But his thin, worn face hardened into resolution till it appeared all jaw. This was his house, and his affair; he should not budge! He looked at his watch, old and thin like himself; he had owned it fifty years. Past four already! And kissing the top of Holly's head in passing, he went down to the hall. He wanted to get hold of her before she went up to give her lesson. At the first sound of wheels he stepped out into the porch, and saw at once that the victoria was empty.

"The train's in, sir; but the lady 'asn't come."

Old Jolyon gave him a sharp upward look, his eyes seemed to push away that fat chap's curiosity, and defy him to see the bitter disappointment he was feeling.

"Very well," he said, and turned back into the house. He went to his study and sat down, quivering like a leaf. What did this mean? She might have lost her train, but he knew well enough she hadn't. 'Good-bye, dear Uncle Jolyon.' Why 'Good-bye' and not 'Good-night'? And that hand of hers lingering in the air. And her kiss. What did it mean? Vehement alarm and irritation took possession of him. He got up and began to pace the Turkey carpet, between window and wall. She was going to give him up! He felt it for certain—and he defenceless. An old man wanting to look on beauty! It was ridiculous! Age closed his mouth, paralysed his power to fight. He had no right to what was warm and living, no right to anything but memories and sorrow. He could not plead with her; even an old man has his dignity. Defenceless! For an hour, lost to bodily fatigue, he paced up and down, past the bowl of carnations he

had plucked, which mocked him with its scent. Of all things hard to bear, the prostration of will-power is hardest, for one who has always had his way. Nature had got him in its net, and like an unhappy fish he turned and swam at the meshes, here and there, found no hole, no breaking point. They brought him tea at five o'clock, and a letter. For a moment hope beat up in him. He cut the envelope with the butter knife, and read:

"DEAREST UNCLE JOLYON,—I can't bear to write anything that may disappoint you, but I was too cowardly to tell you last night. I feel I can't come down and give Holly any more lessons, now that June is coming back. Some things go too deep to be forgotten. It has been such a joy to see you and Holly. Perhaps I shall still see you sometimes when you come up, though I'm sure it's not good for you; I can see you are tiring yourself too much. I believe you ought to rest quite quietly all this hot weather, and now you have your son and June coming back you will be so happy. Thank you a million times for all your sweetness to me.

"Lovingly your IRENE."

So, there it was! Not good for him to have pleasure and what he chiefly cared about; to try and put off feeling the inevitable end of all things, the approach of death with its stealthy, rustling footsteps. Not good for him! Not even she could see how she was his new lease of interest in life, the incarnation of all the beauty he felt slipping from him.

His tea grew cold, his cigar remained unlit; and up and down he paced, torn between his dignity and his hold on life. Intolerable to be squeezed out slowly, without a say of your own, to live on when your will was in the hands of others bent on weighing you to the ground with care and love. Intolerable! He would see what telling her the truth would do—the truth that he wanted the sight of her more than just a lingering on. He sat down at his old bureau and took a pen. But he could not write. There was something revolting in having to plead like this; plead that she should warm his eyes with her beauty. It was tantamount to confessing dotage. He simply could not. And instead, he wrote:

"I had hoped that the memory of old sores would not be allowed to stand in the way of what is a pleasure and a profit to me and my little grand-daughter. But old men learn to forego their whims; they are obliged to, even the whim to live must be foregone sooner or later; and perhaps the sooner the better. "My love to you, "JOLYON FORSYTE."

'Bitter,' he thought, 'but I can't help it. I'm tired.' He sealed and dropped it into the box for the evening post, and hearing it fall to the bottom, thought: 'There goes all I've looked forward to!'

That evening after dinner which he scarcely touched, after his cigar which he left half-smoked for it made him feel faint, he went very slowly upstairs and stole into the night-nursery. He sat down on the window-seat. A night-light was burning, and he could just see Holly's face, with one hand underneath the cheek. An early cockchafer buzzed in the Japanese paper with which they had filled the grate, and one of the horses in the stable stamped restlessly. To sleep like that child! He pressed apart two rungs of the venetian blind and looked out. The moon was rising, blood-red. He had never seen so red a moon. The woods and fields out there were dropping to sleep too, in the last glimmer of the summer light. And beauty, like a spirit, walked. 'I've had a long life,' he thought, 'the best of nearly everything. I'm an ungrateful chap; I've seen a lot of beauty in my time. Poor young Bosinney said I had a sense of beauty. There's a man in the moon to-night!' A moth went by, another, another. 'Ladies in grey!' He closed his eyes. A feeling that he would never open them again beset him; he let it grow, let himself sink; then, with a shiver, dragged the lids up. There was something wrong with him, no doubt, deeply wrong; he would have to have the doctor after all. It didn't much matter now! Into that coppice the moon-light would have crept; there would be shadows, and those shadows would be the only things awake. No birds, beasts, flowers, insects; just the shadows—moving; 'Ladies in grey!' Over that log they would climb; would whisper together. She and Bosinney! Funny thought! And the frogs and little things would whisper too! How the clock ticked, in here! It was all eerie—out there in the light of that red moon; in here with the little steady night-light and, the ticking clock and the nurse's dressing-gown hanging from the edge of the screen, tall, like a woman's figure. 'Lady in grey!' And a very odd thought beset him: Did she exist? Had she ever come at all? Or was she but the emanation of all the beauty he had loved and must leave so soon? The violet-grey spirit with the dark eyes and the crown of amber hair, who walks the dawn and the moonlight, and at blue-bell time? What was she, who was she, did she exist? He rose and stood a moment clutching the window-sill, to give him a sense of reality again; then began tiptoeing towards the door. He stopped at the foot of the bed; and Holly, as if conscious of his eyes fixed on her, stirred, sighed, and curled up closer in defence. He tiptoed on and passed out into the dark passage; reached his room, undressed at once, and stood before a mirror in his night-shirt. What a scarecrow—with temples fallen in, and thin legs! His eyes resisted his own image, and a look of pride came on his face. All was in league to pull him down, even his reflection in the glass, but he was not down—yet! He got into bed, and lay a long time without sleeping, trying to reach resignation, only too

well aware that fretting and disappointment were very bad for him.

He woke in the morning so unrefreshed and strengthless that he sent for the doctor. After sounding him, the fellow pulled a face as long as your arm, and ordered him to stay in bed and give up smoking. That was no hardship; there was nothing to get up for, and when he felt ill, tobacco always lost its savour. He spent the morning languidly with the sun-blinds down, turning and re-turning *The Times*, not reading much, the dog Balthasar lying beside his bed. With his lunch they brought him a telegram, running thus:

'Your letter received coming down this afternoon will be with you at four-thirty. Irene.'

Coming down! After all! Then she did exist—and he was not deserted. Coming down! A glow ran through his limbs; his cheeks and forehead felt hot. He drank his soup, and pushed the tray-table away, lying very quiet until they had removed lunch and left him alone; but every now and then his eyes twinkled. Coming down! His heart beat fast, and then did not seem to beat at all. At three o'clock he got up and dressed deliberately, noiselessly. Holly and Mam'zelle would be in the schoolroom, and the servants asleep after their dinner, he shouldn't wonder. He opened his door cautiously, and went downstairs. In the hall the dog Balthasar lay solitary, and, followed by him, old Jolyon passed into his study and out into the burning afternoon. He meant to go down and meet her in the coppice, but felt at once he could not manage that in this heat. He sat down instead under the oak tree by the swing, and the dog Balthasar, who also felt the heat, lay down beside him. He sat there smiling. What a revel of bright minutes! What a hum of insects, and cooing of pigeons! It was the quintessence of a summer day. Lovely! And he was happy—happy as a sand-boy, whatever that might be. She was coming; she had not given him up! He had everything in life he wanted—except a little more breath, and less weight—just here! He would see her when she emerged from the fernery, come swaying just a little, a violet-grey figure passing over the daisies and dandelions and 'soldiers' on the lawn—the soldiers with their flowery crowns. He would not move, but she would come up to him and say: 'Dear Uncle Jolyon, I am sorry!' and sit in the swing and let him look at her and tell her that he had not been very well but was all right now; and that dog would lick her hand. That dog knew his master was fond of her; that dog was a good dog.

It was quite shady under the tree; the sun could not get at him, only make the rest of the world bright so that he could see the Grand Stand at Epsom away out there, very far, and the cows cropping the clover in the field and swishing at the flies with their tails. He smelled the scent of limes, and lavender. Ah! that was why there was such a racket of bees. They were excited—busy, as his heart was busy and excited. Drowsy, too, drowsy and drugged on honey and happiness; as his heart was drugged and drowsy. Summer—summer—they seemed saying; great bees and little bees, and the flies too!

The stable clock struck four; in half an hour she would be here. He would have just one tiny nap, because he had had so little sleep of late; and then he would be fresh for her, fresh for youth and beauty, coming towards him across the sunlit lawn—lady in grey! And settling back in his chair he closed his eyes. Some thistle-down came on what little air there was, and pitched on his moustache more white than itself. He did not know; but his breathing stirred it, caught there. A ray of sunlight struck through and lodged on his boot. A bumble-bee alighted and strolled on the crown of his Panama hat. And the delicious surge of slumber reached the brain beneath that hat, and the head swayed forward and rested on his breast. Summer—summer! So went the hum.

The stable clock struck the quarter past. The dog Balthasar stretched and looked up at his master. The thistledown no longer moved. The dog placed his chin over the sunlit foot. It did not stir. The dog withdrew his chin quickly, rose, and leaped on old Jolyon's lap, looked in his face, whined; then, leaping down, sat on his haunches, gazing up. And suddenly he uttered a long, long howl.

But the thistledown was still as death, and the face of his old master.

Summer—summer—summer! The soundless footsteps on the grass! 1917

IN CHANCERY

Two households both alike in dignity, From ancient grudge, break into new mutiny.

—Romeo and Juliet

TO JESSIE AND JOSEPH CONRAD

PART 1

CHAPTER I

AT TIMOTHY'S

The possessive instinct never stands still. Through florescence and feud, frosts and fires, it followed the laws of progression even in the Forsyte family which had believed it fixed for ever. Nor can it be dissociated from environment any more than the quality of potato from the soil.

The historian of the English eighties and nineties will, in his good time, depict the somewhat rapid progression from self-contented and contained provincialism to still more self-contented if less contained imperialism—in other words, the 'possessive' instinct of the nation on the move. And so, as if in conformity, was it with the Forsyte family. They were spreading not merely on the surface, but within.

When, in 1895, Susan Hayman, the married Forsyte sister, followed her husband at the ludicrously low age of seventy-four, and was cremated, it made strangely little stir among the six old Forsytes left. For this apathy there were three causes. First: the almost surreptitious burial of old Jolyon in 1892 down at Robin Hill—first of the Forsytes to desert the family grave at Highgate. That burial, coming a year after Swithin's entirely proper funeral, had occasioned a great deal of talk on Forsyte 'Change, the abode of Timothy Forsyte on the Bayswater Road, London, which still collected and radiated family gossip. Opinions ranged from the lamentation of Aunt Juley to the outspoken assertion of Francie that it was 'a jolly good thing to stop all that stuffy Highgate business.' Uncle Jolyon in his later years—indeed, ever since the strange and lamentable affair between his granddaughter June's lover, young Bosinney, and Irene, his nephew Soames Forsyte's wife—had noticeably rapped the family's knuckles; and that way of his own which he had always taken had begun to seem to them a little wayward. The philosophic vein in him, of course, had always been too liable to crop out of the strata of pure Forsyteism, so they were in a way prepared for his interment in a strange spot. But the whole thing was an odd business, and when the contents of his Will became current coin on Forsyte 'Change, a shiver had gone round the clan. Out of his estate (L145,304 gross, with liabilities L35 7s. 4d.) he had actually left L15,000 to "whomever do you think, my dear? To Irene!" that runaway wife of his nephew Soames; Irene, a woman who had almost disgraced the family, and—still more amazing was to him no blood relation. Not out and out, of course; only a life interest—only the income from it! Still, there it was; and old Jolyon's claim to be the perfect Forsyte was ended once for all. That, then, was the first reason why the burial of Susan Hayman—at Woking—made little stir.

The second reason was altogether more expansive and imperial. Besides the house on Campden Hill, Susan had a place (left her by Hayman when he died) just over the border in Hants, where the Hayman boys had learned to be such good shots and riders, as it was believed, which was of course nice for them, and creditable to everybody; and the fact of owning something really countrified seemed somehow to excuse the dispersion of her remains—though what could have put cremation into her head they could not think! The usual invitations, however, had been issued, and Soames had gone down and young Nicholas, and the Will had been quite satisfactory so far as it went, for she had only had a life interest; and everything had gone quite smoothly to the children in equal shares.

The third reason why Susan's burial made little stir was the most expansive of all. It was summed up daringly by Euphemia, the pale, the thin: "Well, I think people have a right to their own bodies, even when they're dead." Coming from a daughter of Nicholas, a Liberal of the old school and most tyrannical, it was a startling remark—showing in a flash what a lot of water had run under bridges since the death of Aunt Ann in '86, just when the proprietorship of Soames over his wife's body was acquiring the uncertainty which had led to such disaster. Euphemia, of course, spoke like a child, and had no experience; for though well over thirty by now, her name was still Forsyte. But, making all allowances, her remark did undoubtedly show expansion of the principle of liberty, decentralisation and shift in the central point of possession from others to oneself. When Nicholas heard his daughter's remark from Aunt Hester he had rapped out: "Wives and daughters! There's no end to their liberty in these days. I knew that 'Jackson' case would lead to things—lugging in Habeas Corpus like that!" He had, of course, never really forgiven the Married Woman's Property Act, which would so have interfered with him if he had not mercifully married before it was passed. But, in truth, there was no denying the revolt among the younger Forsytes against being owned by others; that, as it were,

Colonial disposition to own oneself, which is the paradoxical forerunner of Imperialism, was making progress all the time. They were all now married, except George, confirmed to the Turf and the Iseum Club; Francie, pursuing her musical career in a studio off the King's Road, Chelsea, and still taking 'lovers' to dances; Euphemia, living at home and complaining of Nicholas; and those two Dromios, Giles and Jesse Hayman. Of the third generation there were not very many—young Jolyon had three, Winifred Dartie four, young Nicholas six already, young Roger had one, Marian Tweetyman one; St. John Hayman two. But the rest of the sixteen married—Soames, Rachel and Cicely of James' family; Eustace and Thomas of Roger's; Ernest, Archibald and Florence of Nicholas'; Augustus and Annabel Spender of the Hayman's—were going down the years unreproduced.

Thus, of the ten old Forsytes twenty-one young Forsytes had been born; but of the twenty-one young Forsytes there were as yet only seventeen descendants; and it already seemed unlikely that there would be more than a further unconsidered trifle or so. A student of statistics must have noticed that the birth rate had varied in accordance with the rate of interest for your money. Grandfather 'Superior Dosset' Forsyte in the early nineteenth century had been getting ten per cent. for his, hence ten children. Those ten, leaving out the four who had not married, and Juley, whose husband Septimus Small had, of course, died almost at once, had averaged from four to five per cent. for theirs, and produced accordingly. The twenty-one whom they produced were now getting barely three per cent. in the Consols to which their father had mostly tied the Settlements they made to avoid death duties, and the six of them who had been reproduced had seventeen children, or just the proper two and five-sixths per stem.

There were other reasons, too, for this mild reproduction. A distrust of their earning powers, natural where a sufficiency is guaranteed, together with the knowledge that their fathers did not die, kept them cautious. If one had children and not much income, the standard of taste and comfort must of necessity go down; what was enough for two was not enough for four, and so on—it would be better to wait and see what Father did. Besides, it was nice to be able to take holidays unhampered. Sooner in fact than own children, they preferred to concentrate on the ownership of themselves, conforming to the growing tendency *fin de siècle*, as it was called. In this way, little risk was run, and one would be able to have a motor-car. Indeed, Eustace already had one, but it had shaken him horribly, and broken one of his eye teeth; so that it would be better to wait till they were a little safer. In the meantime, no more children! Even young Nicholas was drawing in his horns, and had made no addition to his six for quite three years.

The corporate decay, however, of the Forsytes, their dispersion rather, of which all this was symptomatic, had not advanced so far as to prevent a rally when Roger Forsyte died in 1899. It had been a glorious summer, and after holidays abroad and at the sea they were practically all back in London, when Roger with a touch of his old originality had suddenly breathed his last at his own house in Princes Gardens. At Timothy's it was whispered sadly that poor Roger had always been eccentric about his digestion—had he not, for instance, preferred German mutton to all the other brands?

Be that as it may, his funeral at Highgate had been perfect, and coming away from it Soames Forsyte made almost mechanically for his Uncle Timothy's in the Bayswater Road. The 'Old Things'—Aunt Juley and Aunt Hester—would like to hear about it. His father—James—at eighty-eight had not felt up to the fatigue of the funeral; and Timothy himself, of course, had not gone; so that Nicholas had been the only brother present. Still, there had been a fair gathering; and it would cheer Aunts Juley and Hester up to know. The kindly thought was not unmixed with the inevitable longing to get something out of everything you do, which is the chief characteristic of Forsytes, and indeed of the saner elements in every nation. In this practice of taking family matters to Timothy's in the Bayswater Road, Soames was but following in the footsteps of his father, who had been in the habit of going at least once a week to see his sisters at Timothy's, and had only given it up when he lost his nerve at eighty-six, and could not go out without Emily. To go with Emily was of no use, for who could really talk to anyone in the presence of his own wife? Like James in the old days, Soames found time to go there nearly every Sunday, and sit in the little drawing-room into which, with his undoubted taste, he had introduced a good deal of change and china not quite up to his own fastidious mark, and at least two rather doubtful Barbizon pictures, at Christmastides. He himself, who had done extremely well with the Barbizons, had for some years past moved towards the Marises, Israels, and Mauve, and was hoping to do better. In the riverside house which he now inhabited near Mapledurham he had a gallery, beautifully hung and lighted, to which few London dealers were strangers. It served, too, as a Sunday afternoon attraction in those week-end parties which his sisters, Winifred or Rachel, occasionally organised for him. For though he was but a taciturn showman, his quiet collected determinism seldom failed to influence his guests, who knew that his reputation was grounded not on mere aesthetic fancy, but on his power of gauging the future of market values. When he went to Timothy's he almost always had some little tale of triumph over a dealer to unfold, and dearly he loved that coo of pride with which his aunts would greet it. This afternoon, however, he was differently animated, coming from Roger's funeral in his neat

dark clothes—not quite black, for after all an uncle was but an uncle, and his soul abhorred excessive display of feeling. Leaning back in a marqueterie chair and gazing down his uplifted nose at the sky-blue walls plastered with gold frames, he was noticeably silent. Whether because he had been to a funeral or not, the peculiar Forsyte build of his face was seen to the best advantage this afternoon—a face concave and long, with a jaw which divested of flesh would have seemed extravagant: altogether a chinny face though not at all ill-looking. He was feeling more strongly than ever that Timothy's was hopelessly 'rum-ti-too' and the souls of his aunts dimly mid-Victorian. The subject on which alone he wanted to talk—his own undivorced position—was unspeakable. And yet it occupied his mind to the exclusion of all else. It was only since the Spring that this had been so and a new feeling grown up which was egging him on towards what he knew might well be folly in a Forsyte of forty-five. More and more of late he had been conscious that he was 'getting on.' The fortune already considerable when he conceived the house at Robin Hill which had finally wrecked his marriage with Irene, had mounted with surprising vigour in the twelve lonely years during which he had devoted himself to little else. He was worth to-day well over a hundred thousand pounds, and had no one to leave it to—no real object for going on with what was his religion. Even if he were to relax his efforts, money made money, and he felt that he would have a hundred and fifty thousand before he knew where he was. There had always been a strongly domestic, philoprogenitive side to Soames; balked and frustrated, it had hidden itself away, but now had crept out again in this his 'prime of life.' Concreted and focussed of late by the attraction of a girl's undoubted beauty, it had become a veritable prepossession.

And this girl was French, not likely to lose her head, or accept any unlegalised position. Moreover, Soames himself disliked the thought of that. He had tasted of the sordid side of sex during those long years of forced celibacy, secretively, and always with disgust, for he was fastidious, and his sense of law and order innate. He wanted no hole and corner liaison. A marriage at the Embassy in Paris, a few months' travel, and he could bring Annette back quite separated from a past which in truth was not too distinguished, for she only kept the accounts in her mother's Soho Restaurant; he could bring her back as something very new and chic with her French taste and self-possession, to reign at 'The Shelter' near Mapledurham. On Forsyte 'Change and among his riverside friends it would be current that he had met a charming French girl on his travels and married her. There would be the flavour of romance, and a certain cachet about a French wife. No! He was not at all afraid of that. It was only this cursed undivorced condition of his, and—and the question whether Annette would take him, which he dared not put to the touch until he had a clear and even dazzling future to offer her.

In his aunts' drawing-room he heard with but muffled ears those usual questions: How was his dear father? Not going out, of course, now that the weather was turning chilly? Would Soames be sure to tell him that Hester had found boiled holly leaves most comforting for that pain in her side; a poultice every three hours, with red flannel afterwards. And could he relish just a little pot of their very best prune preserve—it was so delicious this year, and had such a wonderful effect. Oh! and about the Darties—had Soames heard that dear Winifred was having a most distressing time with Montague? Timothy thought she really ought to have protection. It was said—but Soames mustn't take this for certain—that he had given some of Winifred's jewellery to a dreadful dancer. It was such a bad example for dear Val just as he was going to college. Soames had not heard? Oh, but he must go and see his sister and look into it at once! And did he think these Boers were really going to resist? Timothy was in quite a stew about it. The price of Consols was so high, and he had such a lot of money in them. Did Soames think they must go down if there was a war? Soames nodded. But it would be over very quickly. It would be so bad for Timothy if it wasn't. And of course Soames' dear father would feel it very much at his age. Luckily poor dear Roger had been spared this dreadful anxiety. And Aunt Juley with a little handkerchief wiped away the large tear trying to climb the permanent pout on her now quite withered left cheek; she was remembering dear Roger, and all his originality, and how he used to stick pins into her when they were little together. Aunt Hester, with her instinct for avoiding the unpleasant, here chimed in: Did Soames think they would make Mr. Chamberlain Prime Minister at once? He would settle it all so quickly. She would like to see that old Kruger sent to St. Helena. She could remember so well the news of Napoleon's death, and what a relief it had been to his grandfather. Of course she and Juley—"We were in pantalettes then, my dear"—had not felt it much at the time.

Soames took a cup of tea from her, drank it quickly, and ate three of those macaroons for which Timothy's was famous. His faint, pale, supercilious smile had deepened just a little. Really, his family remained hopelessly provincial, however much of London they might possess between them. In these go-ahead days their provincialism stared out even more than it used to. Why, old Nicholas was still a Free Trader, and a member of that antediluvian home of Liberalism, the Remove Club—though, to be sure, the members were pretty well all Conservatives now, or he himself could not have joined; and Timothy, they said, still wore a nightcap. Aunt Juley spoke again. Dear Soames was looking so well, hardly a day older than he did when dear Ann died, and they were all there together, dear Jolyon, and dear Swithin, and dear Roger. She paused and caught the tear which had climbed the pout on her right cheek. Did he—did he ever hear anything of Irene nowadays? Aunt Hester visibly interposed her

shoulder. Really, Juley was always saying something! The smile left Soames' face, and he put his cup down. Here was his subject broached for him, and for all his desire to expand, he could not take advantage.

Aunt Juley went on rather hastily:

"They say dear Jolyon first left her that fifteen thousand out and out; then of course he saw it would not be right, and made it for her life only."

Had Soames heard that?

Soames nodded.

"Your cousin Jolyon is a widower now. He is her trustee; you knew that, of course?"

Soames shook his head. He did know, but wished to show no interest. Young Jolyon and he had not met since the day of Bosinney's death.

"He must be quite middle-aged by now," went on Aunt Juley dreamily. "Let me see, he was born when your dear uncle lived in Mount Street; long before they went to Stanhope Gate in December. Just before that dreadful Commune. Over fifty! Fancy that! Such a pretty baby, and we were all so proud of him; the very first of you all." Aunt Juley sighed, and a lock of not quite her own hair came loose and straggled, so that Aunt Hester gave a little shiver. Soames rose, he was experiencing a curious piece of self-discovery. That old wound to his pride and self-esteem was not yet closed. He had come thinking he could talk of it, even wanting to talk of his fettered condition, and—behold! he was shrinking away from this reminder by Aunt Juley, renowned for her Malapropisms.

Oh, Soames was not going already!

Soames smiled a little vindictively, and said:

"Yes. Good-bye. Remember me to Uncle Timothy!" And, leaving a cold kiss on each forehead, whose wrinkles seemed to try and cling to his lips as if longing to be kissed away, he left them looking brightly after him—dear Soames, it had been so good of him to come to-day, when they were not feeling very....!

With compunction tweaking at his chest Soames descended the stairs, where was always that rather pleasant smell of camphor and port wine, and house where draughts are not permitted. The poor old things—he had not meant to be unkind! And in the street he instantly forgot them, repossessed by the image of Annette and the thought of the cursed coil around him. Why had he not pushed the thing through and obtained divorce when that wretched Bosinney was run over, and there was evidence galore for the asking! And he turned towards his sister Winifred Dartie's residence in Green Street, Mayfair.

CHAPTER II

EXIT A MAN OF THE WORLD

That a man of the world so subject to the vicissitudes of fortunes as Montague Dartie should still be living in a house he had inhabited twenty years at least would have been more noticeable if the rent, rates, taxes, and repairs of that house had not been defrayed by his father-in-law. By that simple if wholesale device James Forsyte had secured a certain stability in the lives of his daughter and his grandchildren. After all, there is something invaluable about a safe roof over the head of a sportsman so dashing as Dartie. Until the events of the last few days he had been almost-supernaturally steady all this year. The fact was he had acquired a half share in a filly of George Forsyte's, who had gone irreparably on the turf, to the horror of Roger, now stilled by the grave. Sleeve-links, by Martyr, out of Shirt-on-fire, by Suspender, was a bay filly, three years old, who for a variety of reasons had never shown her true form. With half ownership of this hopeful animal, all the idealism latent somewhere in Dartie, as in every other man, had put up its head, and kept him quietly ardent for months past. When a man has some thing good to live for it is astonishing how sober he becomes; and what Dartie had was really good—a three to one chance for an autumn handicap, publicly assessed at twenty-five to one. The old-fashioned heaven was a poor thing beside it, and his shirt was on the daughter of Shirt-on-fire. But how much more than his shirt depended on this granddaughter of Suspender! At that roving age of forty-five, trying to Forsytes—and, though perhaps less distinguishable from any other age, trying even

to Darties—Montague had fixed his current fancy on a dancer. It was no mean passion, but without money, and a good deal of it, likely to remain a love as airy as her skirts; and Dartie never had any money, subsisting miserably on what he could beg or borrow from Winifred—a woman of character, who kept him because he was the father of her children, and from a lingering admiration for those now-dying Wardour Street good looks which in their youth had fascinated her. She, together with anyone else who would lend him anything, and his losses at cards and on the turf (extraordinary how some men make a good thing out of losses!) were his whole means of subsistence; for James was now too old and nervous to approach, and Soames too formidably adamant. It is not too much to say that Dartie had been living on hope for months. He had never been fond of money for itself, had always despised the Forsytes with their investing habits, though careful to make such use of them as he could. What he liked about money was what it bought—personal sensation.

"No real sportsman cares for money," he would say, borrowing a 'pony' if it was no use trying for a 'monkey.' There was something delicious about Montague Dartie. He was, as George Forsyte said, a 'daisy.'

The morning of the Handicap dawned clear and bright, the last day of September, and Dartie who had travelled to Newmarket the night before, arrayed himself in spotless checks and walked to an eminence to see his half of the filly take her final canter: If she won he would be a cool three thou. in pocket—a poor enough recompense for the sobriety and patience of these weeks of hope, while they had been nursing her for this race. But he had not been able to afford more. Should he 'lay it off' at the eight to one to which she had advanced? This was his single thought while the larks sang above him, and the grassy downs smelled sweet, and the pretty filly passed, tossing her head and glowing like satin.

After all, if he lost it would not be he who paid, and to 'lay it off' would reduce his winnings to some fifteen hundred—hardly enough to purchase a dancer out and out. Even more potent was the itch in the blood of all the Darties for a real flutter. And turning to George he said: "She's a clipper. She'll win hands down; I shall go the whole hog." George, who had laid off every penny, and a few besides, and stood to win, however it came out, grinned down on him from his bulky height, with the words: "So ho, my wild one!" for after a chequered apprenticeship weathered with the money of a deeply complaining Roger, his Forsyte blood was beginning to stand him in good stead in the profession of owner.

There are moments of disillusionment in the lives of men from which the sensitive recorder shrinks. Suffice it to say that the good thing fell down. Sleeve-links finished in the ruck. Dartie's shirt was lost.

Between the passing of these things and the day when Soames turned his face towards Green Street, what had not happened!

When a man with the constitution of Montague Dartie has exercised self-control for months from religious motives, and remains unrewarded, he does not curse God and die, he curses God and lives, to the distress of his family.

Winifred—a plucky woman, if a little too fashionable—who had borne the brunt of him for exactly twenty-one years, had never really believed that he would do what he now did. Like so many wives, she thought she knew the worst, but she had not yet known him in his forty-fifth year, when he, like other men, felt that it was now or never. Paying on the 2nd of October a visit of inspection to her jewel case, she was horrified to observe that her woman's crown and glory was gone—the pearls which Montague had given her in '86, when Benedict was born, and which James had been compelled to pay for in the spring of '87, to save scandal. She consulted her husband at once. He 'pooh-poohed' the matter. They would turn up! Nor till she said sharply: "Very well, then, Monty, I shall go down to Scotland Yard myself," did he consent to take the matter in hand. Alas! that the steady and resolved continuity of design necessary to the accomplishment of sweeping operations should be liable to interruption by drink. That night Dartie returned home without a care in the world or a particle of reticence. Under normal conditions Winifred would merely have locked her door and let him sleep it off, but torturing suspense about her pearls had caused her to wait up for him. Taking a small revolver from his pocket and holding on to the dining table, he told her at once that he did not care a cursh whether she lived s'long as she was quiet; but he himself wash tired o' life. Winifred, holding onto the other side of the dining table, answered:

"Don't be a clown, Monty. Have you been to Scotland Yard?"

Placing the revolver against his chest, Dartie had pulled the trigger several times. It was not loaded. Dropping it with an imprecation, he had muttered: "For shake o' the children," and sank into a chair. Winifred, having picked up the revolver, gave him some soda water. The liquor had a magical effect. Life had illuded him; Winifred had never 'unshtood'm.' If he hadn't the right to take the pearls he had given her himself, who had? That Spanish filly had got'm. If Winifred had any 'jection he w'd cut—her—

throat. What was the matter with that? (Probably the first use of that celebrated phrase—so obscure are the origins of even the most classical language!)

Winifred, who had learned self-containment in a hard school, looked up at him, and said: "Spanish filly! Do you mean that girl we saw dancing in the Pandemonium Ballet? Well, you are a thief and a blackguard." It had been the last straw on a sorely loaded consciousness; reaching up from his chair Dartie seized his wife's arm, and recalling the achievements of his boyhood, twisted it. Winifred endured the agony with tears in her eyes, but no murmur. Watching for a moment of weakness, she wrenched it free; then placing the dining table between them, said between her teeth: "You are the limit, Monty." (Undoubtedly the inception of that phrase —so is English formed under the stress of circumstances.) Leaving Dartie with foam on his dark moustache she went upstairs, and, after locking her door and bathing her arm in hot water, lay awake all night, thinking of her pearls adorning the neck of another, and of the consideration her husband had presumably received therefor.

The man of the world awoke with a sense of being lost to that world, and a dim recollection of having been called a 'limit.' He sat for half an hour in the dawn and the armchair where he had slept—perhaps the unhappiest half-hour he had ever spent, for even to a Dartie there is something tragic about an end. And he knew that he had reached it. Never again would he sleep in his dining-room and wake with the light filtering through those curtains bought by Winifred at Nickens and Jarveys with the money of James. Never again eat a devilled kidney at that rose-wood table, after a roll in the sheets and a hot bath. He took his note case from his dress coat pocket. Four hundred pounds, in fives and tens—the remainder of the proceeds of his half of Sleeve-links, sold last night, cash down, to George Forsyte, who, having won over the race, had not conceived the sudden dislike to the animal which he himself now felt. The ballet was going to Buenos Aires the day after to-morrow, and he was going too. Full value for the pearls had not yet been received; he was only at the soup.

He stole upstairs. Not daring to have a bath, or shave (besides, the water would be cold), he changed his clothes and packed stealthily all he could. It was hard to leave so many shining boots, but one must sacrifice something. Then, carrying a valise in either hand, he stepped out onto the landing. The house was very quiet—that house where he had begotten his four children. It was a curious moment, this, outside the room of his wife, once admired, if not perhaps loved, who had called him 'the limit.' He steeled himself with that phrase, and tiptoed on; but the next door was harder to pass. It was the room his daughters slept in. Maud was at school, but Imogen would be lying there; and moisture came into Dartie's early morning eyes. She was the most like him of the four, with her dark hair, and her luscious brown glance. Just coming out, a pretty thing! He set down the two valises. This almost formal abdication of fatherhood hurt him. The morning light fell on a face which worked with real emotion. Nothing so false as penitence moved him; but genuine paternal feeling, and that melancholy of 'never again.' He moistened his lips; and complete irresolution for a moment paralysed his legs in their check trousers. It was hard—hard to be thus compelled to leave his home! "D—nit!" he muttered, "I never thought it would come to this." Noises above warned him that the maids were beginning to get up. And grasping the two valises, he tiptoed on downstairs. His cheeks were wet, and the knowledge of that was comforting, as though it guaranteed the genuineness of his sacrifice. He lingered a little in the rooms below, to pack all the cigars he had, some papers, a crush hat, a silver cigarette box, a Ruff's Guide. Then, mixing himself a stiff whisky and soda, and lighting a cigarette, he stood hesitating before a photograph of his two girls, in a silver frame. It belonged to Winifred. 'Never mind,' he thought; 'she can get another taken, and I can't!' He slipped it into the valise. Then, putting on his hat and overcoat, he took two others, his best malacca cane, an umbrella, and opened the front door. Closing it softly behind him, he walked out, burdened as he had never been in all his life, and made his way round the corner to wait there for an early cab to come by.

Thus had passed Montague Dartie in the forty-fifth year of his age from the house which he had called his own.

When Winifred came down, and realised that he was not in the house, her first feeling was one of dull anger that he should thus elude the reproaches she had carefully prepared in those long wakeful hours. He had gone off to Newmarket or Brighton, with that woman as likely as not. Disgusting! Forced to a complete reticence before Imogen and the servants, and aware that her father's nerves would never stand the disclosure, she had been unable to refrain from going to Timothy's that afternoon, and pouring out the story of the pearls to Aunts Juley and Hester in utter confidence. It was only on the following morning that she noticed the disappearance of that photograph. What did it mean? Careful examination of her husband's relics prompted the thought that he had gone for good. As that conclusion hardened she stood quite still in the middle of his dressing-room, with all the drawers pulled out, to try and realise what she was feeling. By no means easy! Though he was 'the limit' he was yet her property, and for the life of her she could not but feel the poorer. To be widowed yet not widowed at forty-two; with four children; made conspicuous, an object of commiseration! Gone to the arms of a Spanish Jade! Memories, feelings, which she had thought quite dead, revived within her, painful, sullen,

tenacious. Mechanically she closed drawer after drawer, went to her bed, lay on it, and buried her face in the pillows. She did not cry. What was the use of that? When she got off her bed to go down to lunch she felt as if only one thing could do her good, and that was to have Val home. He—her eldest boy—who was to go to Oxford next month at James' expense, was at Littlehampton taking his final gallops with his trainer for Smalls, as he would have phrased it following his father's diction. She caused a telegram to be sent to him.

"I must see about his clothes," she said to Imogen; "I can't have him going up to Oxford all anyhow. Those boys are so particular."

"Val's got heaps of things," Imogen answered.

"I know; but they want overhauling. I hope he'll come."

"He'll come like a shot, Mother. But he'll probably skew his Exam."

"I can't help that," said Winifred. "I want him."

With an innocent shrewd look at her mother's face, Imogen kept silence. It was father, of course! Val did come 'like a shot' at six o'clock.

Imagine a cross between a pickle and a Forsyte and you have young Publius Valerius Dartie. A youth so named could hardly turn out otherwise. When he was born, Winifred, in the heyday of spirits, and the craving for distinction, had determined that her children should have names such as no others had ever had. (It was a mercy—she felt now—that she had just not named Imogen Thisbe.) But it was to George Forsyte, always a wag, that Val's christening was due. It so happened that Dartie, dining with him a week after the birth of his son and heir, had mentioned this aspiration of Winifred's.

"Call him Cato," said George, "it'll be damned piquant!" He had just won a tenner on a horse of that name.

"Cato!" Dartie had replied—they were a little 'on' as the phrase was even in those days—"it's not a Christian name."

"Halo you!" George called to a waiter in knee breeches. "Bring me the Encyc'pedia Brit. from the Library, letter C."

The waiter brought it.

"Here you are!" said George, pointing with his cigar: "Cato Publius Valerius by Virgil out of Lydia. That's what you want. Publius Valerius is Christian enough."

Dartie, on arriving home, had informed Winifred. She had been charmed. It was so 'chic.' And Publius Valerius became the baby's name, though it afterwards transpired that they had got hold of the inferior Cato. In 1890, however, when little Publius was nearly ten, the word 'chic' went out of fashion, and sobriety came in; Winifred began to have doubts. They were confirmed by little Publius himself who returned from his first term at school complaining that life was a burden to him—they called him Pubby. Winifred—a woman of real decision—promptly changed his school and his name to Val, the Publius being dropped even as an initial.

At nineteen he was a limber, freckled youth with a wide mouth, light eyes, long dark lashes; a rather charming smile, considerable knowledge of what he should not know, and no experience of what he ought to do. Few boys had more narrowly escaped being expelled—the engaging rascal. After kissing his mother and pinching Imogen, he ran upstairs three at a time, and came down four, dressed for dinner. He was awfully sorry, but his 'trainer,' who had come up too, had asked him to dine at the Oxford and Cambridge; it wouldn't do to miss—the old chap would be hurt. Winifred let him go with an unhappy pride. She had wanted him at home, but it was very nice to know that his tutor was so fond of him. He went out with a wink at Imogen, saying: "I say, Mother, could I have two plover's eggs when I come in?—cook's got some. They top up so jolly well. Oh! and look here—have you any money?—I had to borrow a fiver from old Snobby."

Winifred, looking at him with fond shrewdness, answered:

"My dear, you are naughty about money. But you shouldn't pay him to-night, anyway; you're his guest. How nice and slim he looked in his white waistcoat, and his dark thick lashes!"

"Oh, but we may go to the theatre, you see, Mother; and I think I ought to stand the tickets; he's always hard up, you know."

Winifred produced a five-pound note, saying:

"Well, perhaps you'd better pay him, but you mustn't stand the tickets too."

Val pocketed the fiver.

"If I do, I can't," he said. "Good-night, Mum!"

He went out with his head up and his hat cocked joyously, sniffing the air of Piccadilly like a young hound loosed into covert. Jolly good biz! After that mouldy old slow hole down there!

He found his 'tutor,' not indeed at the Oxford and Cambridge, but at the Goat's Club. This 'tutor' was a year older than himself, a good-looking youth, with fine brown eyes, and smooth dark hair, a small mouth, an oval face, languid, immaculate, cool to a degree, one of those young men who without effort establish moral ascendancy over their companions. He had missed being expelled from school a year before Val, had spent that year at Oxford, and Val could almost see a halo round his head. His name was Crum, and no one could get through money quicker. It seemed to be his only aim in life—dazzling to young Val, in whom, however, the Forsyte would stand apart, now and then, wondering where the value for that money was.

They dined quietly, in style and taste; left the Club smoking cigars, with just two bottles inside them, and dropped into stalls at the Liberty. For Val the sound of comic songs, the sight of lovely legs were fogged and interrupted by haunting fears that he would never equal Crum's quiet dandyism. His idealism was roused; and when that is so, one is never quite at ease. Surely he had too wide a mouth, not the best cut of waistcoat, no braid on his trousers, and his lavender gloves had no thin black stitchings down the back. Besides, he laughed too much—Crum never laughed, he only smiled, with his regular dark brows raised a little so that they formed a gable over his just drooped lids. No! he would never be Crum's equal. All the same it was a jolly good show, and Cynthia Dark simply ripping. Between the acts Crum regaled him with particulars of Cynthia's private life, and the awful knowledge became Val's that, if he liked, Crum could go behind. He simply longed to say: "I say, take me!" but dared not, because of his deficiencies; and this made the last act or two almost miserable. On coming out Crum said: "It's half an hour before they close; let's go on to the Pandemonium." They took a hansom to travel the hundred yards, and seats costing seven-and-six apiece because they were going to stand, and walked into the Promenade. It was in these little things, this utter negligence of money that Crum had such engaging polish. The ballet was on its last legs and night, and the traffic of the Promenade was suffering for the moment. Men and women were crowded in three rows against the barrier. The whirl and dazzle on the stage, the half dark, the mingled tobacco fumes and women's scent, all that curious lure to promiscuity which belongs to Promenades, began to free young Val from his idealism. He looked admiringly in a young woman's face, saw she was not young, and quickly looked away. Shades of Cynthia Dark! The young woman's arm touched his unconsciously; there was a scent of musk and mignonette. Val looked round the corner of his lashes. Perhaps she was young, after all. Her foot trod on his; she begged his pardon. He said:

"Not at all; jolly good ballet, isn't it?"

"Oh, I'm tired of it; aren't you?"

Young Val smiled—his wide, rather charming smile. Beyond that he did not go—not yet convinced. The Forsyte in him stood out for greater certainty. And on the stage the ballet whirled its kaleidoscope of snow-white, salmon-pink, and emerald-green and violet and seemed suddenly to freeze into a stilly spangled pyramid. Applause broke out, and it was over! Maroon curtains had cut it off. The semi-circle of men and women round the barrier broke up, the young woman's arm pressed his. A little way off disturbance seemed centring round a man with a pink carnation; Val stole another glance at the young woman, who was looking towards it. Three men, unsteady, emerged, walking arm in arm. The one in the centre wore the pink carnation, a white waistcoat, a dark moustache; he reeled a little as he walked. Crum's voice said slow and level: "Look at that bounder, he's screwed!" Val turned to look. The 'bounder' had disengaged his arm, and was pointing straight at them. Crum's voice, level as ever, said:

"He seems to know you!" The 'bounder' spoke:

"H'llo!" he said. "You f'llows, look! There's my young rascal of a son!"

Val saw. It was his father! He could have sunk into the crimson carpet. It was not the meeting in this place, not even that his father was 'screwed'; it was Crum's word 'bounder,' which, as by heavenly revelation, he perceived at that moment to be true. Yes, his father looked a bounder with his dark good looks, and his pink carnation, and his square, self-assertive walk. And without a word he ducked behind the young woman and slipped out of the Promenade. He heard the word, "Val!" behind him, and ran down deep-carpeted steps past the 'chuckersout,' into the Square.

To be ashamed of his own father is perhaps the bitterest experience a young man can go through. It seemed to Val, hurrying away, that his career had ended before it had begun. How could he go up to Oxford now amongst all those chaps, those splendid friends of Crum's, who would know that his father was a 'bounder'! And suddenly he hated Crum. Who the devil was Crum, to say that? If Crum had been beside him at that moment, he would certainly have been jostled off the pavement. His own father—his own! A choke came up in his throat, and he dashed his hands down deep into his overcoat pockets. Damn Crum! He conceived the wild idea of running back and fending his father, taking him by the arm and walking about with him in front of Crum; but gave it up at once and pursued his way down Piccadilly. A young woman planted herself before him. "Not so angry, darling!" He shied, dodged her, and suddenly became quite cool. If Crum ever said a word, he would jolly well punch his head, and there would be an end of it. He walked a hundred yards or more, contented with that thought, then lost its comfort utterly. It wasn't simple like that! He remembered how, at school, when some parent came down who did not pass the standard, it just clung to the fellow afterwards. It was one of those things nothing could remove. Why had his mother married his father, if he was a 'bounder'? It was bitterly unfair—jolly low-down on a fellow to give him a 'bounder' for father. The worst of it was that now Crum had spoken the word, he realised that he had long known subconsciously that his father was not 'the clean potato.' It was the beastliest thing that had ever happened to him—beastliest thing that had ever happened to any fellow! And, down-hearted as he had never yet been, he came to Green Street, and let himself in with a smuggled latch-key. In the dining-room his plover's eggs were set invitingly, with some cut bread and butter, and a little whisky at the bottom of a decanter—just enough, as Winifred had thought, for him to feel himself a man. It made him sick to look at them, and he went upstairs.

Winifred heard him pass, and thought: 'The dear boy's in. Thank goodness! If he takes after his father I don't know what I shall do! But he won't he's like me. Dear Val!'

CHAPTER III

SOAMES PREPARES TO TAKE STEPS

When Soames entered his sister's little Louis Quinze drawing-room, with its small balcony, always flowered with hanging geraniums in the summer, and now with pots of *Lilium Auratum*, he was struck by the immutability of human affairs. It looked just the same as on his first visit to the newly married Darties twenty-one years ago. He had chosen the furniture himself, and so completely that no subsequent purchase had ever been able to change the room's atmosphere. Yes, he had founded his sister well, and she had wanted it. Indeed, it said a great deal for Winifred that after all this time with Dartie she remained well-founded. From the first Soames had nosed out Dartie's nature from underneath the plausibility, *savoir faire*, and good looks which had dazzled Winifred, her mother, and even James, to the extent of permitting the fellow to marry his daughter without bringing anything but shares of no value into settlement.

Winifred, whom he noticed next to the furniture, was sitting at her Buhl bureau with a letter in her hand. She rose and came towards him. Tall as himself, strong in the cheekbones, well tailored, something in her face disturbed Soames. She crumpled the letter in her hand, but seemed to change her mind and held it out to him. He was her lawyer as well as her brother.

Soames read, on Iseeum Club paper, these words:

'You will not get chance to insult in my own again. I am leaving country to-morrow. It's played out. I'm tired of being insulted by you. You've brought on yourself. No self-respecting man can stand it. I shall not ask you for anything again. Good-bye. I took the photograph of the two girls. Give them my love. I don't care what your family say. It's all their doing. I'm going to live new life. 'M.D.'

This after-dinner note had a splotch on it not yet quite dry. He looked at Winifred—the splotch had clearly come from her; and he checked the words: 'Good riddance!' Then it occurred to him that with this letter she was entering that very state which he himself so earnestly desired to quit—the state of a Forsyte who was not divorced.

Winifred had turned away, and was taking a long sniff from a little gold-topped bottle. A dull commiseration, together with a vague sense of injury, crept about Soames' heart. He had come to her to talk of his own position, and get sympathy, and here was she in the same position, wanting of course to talk of it, and get sympathy from him. It was always like that! Nobody ever seemed to think that he

had troubles and interests of his own. He folded up the letter with the splotch inside, and said:

"What's it all about, now?"

Winifred recited the story of the pearls calmly.

"Do you think he's really gone, Soames? You see the state he was in when he wrote that."

Soames who, when he desired a thing, placated Providence by pretending that he did not think it likely to happen, answered:

"I shouldn't think so. I might find out at his Club."

"If George is there," said Winifred, "he would know."

"George?" said Soames; "I saw him at his father's funeral."

"Then he's sure to be there."

Soames, whose good sense applauded his sister's acumen, said grudgingly:
"Well, I'll go round. Have you said anything in Park Lane?"

"I've told Emily," returned Winifred, who retained that 'chic' way of describing her mother. "Father would have a fit."

Indeed, anything untoward was now sedulously kept from James. With another look round at the furniture, as if to gauge his sister's exact position, Soames went out towards Piccadilly. The evening was drawing in—a touch of chill in the October haze. He walked quickly, with his close and concentrated air. He must get through, for he wished to dine in Soho. On hearing from the hall porter at the Iseeum that Mr. Dartie had not been in to-day, he looked at the trusty fellow and decided only to ask if Mr. George Forsyte was in the Club. He was. Soames, who always looked askance at his cousin George, as one inclined to jest at his expense, followed the pageboy, slightly reassured by the thought that George had just lost his father. He must have come in for about thirty thousand, besides what he had under that settlement of Roger's, which had avoided death duty. He found George in a bow-window, staring out across a half-eaten plate of muffins. His tall, bulky, black-clothed figure loomed almost threatening, though preserving still the supernatural neatness of the racing man. With a faint grin on his fleshy face, he said:

"Hallo, Soames! Have a muffin?"

"No, thanks," murmured Soames; and, nursing his hat, with the desire to say something suitable and sympathetic, added:

"How's your mother?"

"Thanks," said George; "so-so. Haven't seen you for ages. You never go racing. How's the City?"

Soames, scenting the approach of a jest, closed up, and answered:

"I wanted to ask you about Dartie. I hear he's...."

"Flitted, made a bolt to Buenos Aires with the fair Lola. Good for Winifred and the little Darties. He's a treat."

Soames nodded. Naturally inimical as these cousins were, Dartie made them kin.

"Uncle James'll sleep in his bed now," resumed George; "I suppose he's had a lot off you, too."

Soames smiled.

"Ah! You saw him further," said George amicably. "He's a real rouser. Young Val will want a bit of looking after. I was always sorry for Winifred. She's a plucky woman."

Again Soames nodded. "I must be getting back to her," he said; "she just wanted to know for certain. We may have to take steps. I suppose there's no mistake?"

"It's quite O.K.," said George—it was he who invented so many of those quaint sayings which have been assigned to other sources. "He was drunk as a lord last night; but he went off all right this morning. His ship's the Tuscarora;" and, fishing out a card, he read mockingly:

"Mr. Montague Dartie, Poste Restante, Buenos Aires.' I should hurry up with the steps, if I were you. He fairly fed me up last night."

"Yes," said Soames; "but it's not always easy." Then, conscious from George's eyes that he had roused reminiscence of his own affair, he got up, and held out his hand. George rose too.

"Remember me to Winifred.... You'll enter her for the Divorce Stakes straight off if you ask me."

Soames took a sidelong look back at him from the doorway. George had seated himself again and was staring before him; he looked big and lonely in those black clothes. Soames had never known him so subdued. 'I suppose he feels it in a way,' he thought. 'They must have about fifty thousand each, all told. They ought to keep the estate together. If there's a war, house property will go down. Uncle Roger was a good judge, though.' And the face of Annette rose before him in the darkening street; her brown hair and her blue eyes with their dark lashes, her fresh lips and cheeks, dewy and blooming in spite of London, her perfect French figure. 'Take steps!' he thought. Re-entering Winifred's house he encountered Val, and they went in together. An idea had occurred to Soames. His cousin Jolyon was Irene's trustee, the first step would be to go down and see him at Robin Hill. Robin Hill! The odd—the very odd feeling those words brought back! Robin Hill—the house Bosinney had built for him and Irene—the house they had never lived in—the fatal house! And Jolyon lived there now! H'm! And suddenly he thought: 'They say he's got a boy at Oxford! Why not take young Val down and introduce them! It's an excuse! Less bald—very much less bald!' So, as they went upstairs, he said to Val:

"You've got a cousin at Oxford; you've never met him. I should like to take you down with me tomorrow to where he lives and introduce you. You'll find it useful."

Val, receiving the idea with but moderate transports, Soames clinched it.

"I'll call for you after lunch. It's in the country—not far; you'll enjoy it."

On the threshold of the drawing-room he recalled with an effort that the steps he contemplated concerned Winifred at the moment, not himself.

Winifred was still sitting at her Buhl bureau.

"It's quite true," he said; "he's gone to Buenos Aires, started this morning—we'd better have him shadowed when he lands. I'll cable at once. Otherwise we may have a lot of expense. The sooner these things are done the better. I'm always regretting that I didn't..." he stopped, and looked sidelong at the silent Winifred. "By the way," he went on, "can you prove cruelty?"

Winifred said in a dull voice:

"I don't know. What is cruelty?"

"Well, has he struck you, or anything?"

Winifred shook herself, and her jaw grew square.

"He twisted my arm. Or would pointing a pistol count? Or being too drunk to undress himself, or—No—I can't bring in the children."

"No," said Soames; "no! I wonder! Of course, there's legal separation—we can get that. But separation! Um!"

"What does it mean?" asked Winifred desolately.

"That he can't touch you, or you him; you're both of you married and unmarried." And again he grunted. What was it, in fact, but his own accursed position, legalised! No, he would not put her into that!

"It must be divorce," he said decisively; "failing cruelty, there's desertion. There's a way of shortening the two years, now. We get the Court to give us restitution of conjugal rights. Then if he doesn't obey, we can bring a suit for divorce in six months' time. Of course you don't want him back. But they won't know that. Still, there's the risk that he might come. I'd rather try cruelty."

Winifred shook her head. "It's so beastly."

"Well," Soames murmured, "perhaps there isn't much risk so long as he's infatuated and got money. Don't say anything to anybody, and don't pay any of his debts."

Winifred sighed. In spite of all she had been through, the sense of loss was heavy on her. And this

idea of not paying his debts any more brought it home to her as nothing else yet had. Some richness seemed to have gone out of life. Without her husband, without her pearls, without that intimate sense that she made a brave show above the domestic whirlpool, she would now have to face the world. She felt bereaved indeed.

And into the chilly kiss he placed on her forehead, Soames put more than his usual warmth.

"I have to go down to Robin Hill to-morrow," he said, "to see young Jolyon on business. He's got a boy at Oxford. I'd like to take Val with me and introduce him. Come down to 'The Shelter' for the week-end and bring the children. Oh! by the way, no, that won't do; I've got some other people coming." So saying, he left her and turned towards Soho.

CHAPTER IV

SOHO

Of all quarters in the queer adventurous amalgam called London, Soho is perhaps least suited to the Forsyte spirit. 'So-ho, my wild one!' George would have said if he had seen his cousin going there. Untidy, full of Greeks, Ishmaelites, cats, Italians, tomatoes, restaurants, organs, coloured stuffs, queer names, people looking out of upper windows, it dwells remote from the British Body Politic. Yet has it haphazard proprietary instincts of its own, and a certain possessive prosperity which keeps its rents up when those of other quarters go down. For long years Soames' acquaintanceship with Soho had been confined to its Western bastion, Wardour Street. Many bargains had he picked up there. Even during those seven years at Brighton after Bosinney's death and Irene's flight, he had bought treasures there sometimes, though he had no place to put them; for when the conviction that his wife had gone for good at last became firm within him, he had caused a board to be put up in Montpellier Square:

FOR SALE THE LEASE OF THIS DESIRABLE RESIDENCE

Enquire of Messrs. Lesson and Tukes,
Court Street, Belgravia.

It had sold within a week—that desirable residence, in the shadow of whose perfection a man and a woman had eaten their hearts out.

Of a misty January evening, just before the board was taken down, Soames had gone there once more, and stood against the Square railings, looking at its unlighted windows, chewing the cud of possessive memories which had turned so bitter in the mouth. Why had she never loved him? Why? She had been given all she had wanted, and in return had given him, for three long years, all he had wanted—except, indeed, her heart. He had uttered a little involuntary groan, and a passing policeman had glanced suspiciously at him who no longer possessed the right to enter that green door with the carved brass knocker beneath the board 'For Sale!' A choking sensation had attacked his throat, and he had hurried away into the mist. That evening he had gone to Brighton to live...

Approaching Malta Street, Soho, and the Restaurant Bretagne, where Annette would be drooping her pretty shoulders over her accounts, Soames thought with wonder of those seven years at Brighton. How had he managed to go on so long in that town devoid of the scent of sweetpeas, where he had not even space to put his treasures? True, those had been years with no time at all for looking at them—years of almost passionate money-making, during which Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte had become solicitors to more limited Companies than they could properly attend to. Up to the City of a morning in a Pullman car, down from the City of an evening in a Pullman car. Law papers again after dinner, then the sleep of the tired, and up again next morning. Saturday to Monday was spent at his Club in town—curious reversal of customary procedure, based on the deep and careful instinct that while working so hard he needed sea air to and from the station twice a day, and while resting must indulge his domestic affections. The Sunday visit to his family in Park Lane, to Timothy's, and to Green Street; the occasional visits elsewhere had seemed to him as necessary to health as sea air on weekdays. Even since his migration to Mapledurham he had maintained those habits until—he had known Annette.

Whether Annette had produced the revolution in his outlook, or that outlook had produced Annette, he knew no more than we know where a circle begins. It was intricate and deeply involved with the growing consciousness that property without anyone to leave it to is the negation of true Forsyteism. To have an heir, some continuance of self, who would begin where he left off—ensure, in fact, that he

would not leave off—had quite obsessed him for the last year and more. After buying a bit of Wedgwood one evening in April, he had dropped into Malta Street to look at a house of his father's which had been turned into a restaurant—a risky proceeding, and one not quite in accordance with the terms of the lease. He had stared for a little at the outside painted a good cream colour, with two peacock-blue tubs containing little bay-trees in a recessed doorway—and at the words 'Restaurant Bretagne' above them in gold letters, rather favourably impressed. Entering, he had noticed that several people were already seated at little round green tables with little pots of fresh flowers on them and Brittany-ware plates, and had asked of a trim waitress to see the proprietor. They had shown him into a back room, where a girl was sitting at a simple bureau covered with papers, and a small round, table was laid for two. The impression of cleanliness, order, and good taste was confirmed when the girl got up, saying, "You wish to see Maman, Monsieur?" in a broken accent.

"Yes," Soames had answered, "I represent your landlord; in fact, I'm his son."

"Won't you sit down, sir, please? Tell Maman to come to this gentleman."

He was pleased that the girl seemed impressed, because it showed business instinct; and suddenly he noticed that she was remarkably pretty—so remarkably pretty that his eyes found a difficulty in leaving her face. When she moved to put a chair for him, she swayed in a curious subtle way, as if she had been put together by someone with a special secret skill; and her face and neck, which was a little bared, looked as fresh as if they had been sprayed with dew. Probably at this moment Soames decided that the lease had not been violated; though to himself and his father he based the decision on the efficiency of those illicit adaptations in the building, on the signs of prosperity, and the obvious business capacity of Madame Lamotte. He did not, however, neglect to leave certain matters to future consideration, which had necessitated further visits, so that the little back room had become quite accustomed to his spare, not unsolid, but unobtrusive figure, and his pale, chinny face with clipped moustache and dark hair not yet grizzling at the sides.

"Un Monsieur tres distingue," Madame Lamotte found him; and presently, "Tres amical, tres gentil," watching his eyes upon her daughter.

She was one of those generously built, fine-faced, dark-haired Frenchwomen, whose every action and tone of voice inspire perfect confidence in the thoroughness of their domestic tastes, their knowledge of cooking, and the careful increase of their bank balances.

After those visits to the Restaurant Bretagne began, other visits ceased—without, indeed, any definite decision, for Soames, like all Forsytes, and the great majority of their countrymen, was a born empiricist. But it was this change in his mode of life which had gradually made him so definitely conscious that he desired to alter his condition from that of the unmarried man to that of the married man remarried.

Turning into Malta Street on this evening of early October, 1899, he bought a paper to see if there were any after-development of the Dreyfus case—a question which he had always found useful in making closer acquaintanceship with Madame Lamotte and her daughter, who were Catholic and anti-Dreyfusard.

Scanning those columns, Soames found nothing French, but noticed a general fall on the Stock Exchange and an ominous leader about the Transvaal. He entered, thinking: 'War's a certainty. I shall sell my consols.' Not that he had many, personally, the rate of interest was too wretched; but he should advise his Companies—consols would assuredly go down. A look, as he passed the doorways of the restaurant, assured him that business was good as ever, and this, which in April would have pleased him, now gave him a certain uneasiness. If the steps which he had to take ended in his marrying Annette, he would rather see her mother safely back in France, a move to which the prosperity of the Restaurant Bretagne might become an obstacle. He would have to buy them out, of course, for French people only came to England to make money; and it would mean a higher price. And then that peculiar sweet sensation at the back of his throat, and a slight thumping about the heart, which he always experienced at the door of the little room, prevented his thinking how much it would cost.

Going in, he was conscious of an abundant black skirt vanishing through the door into the restaurant, and of Annette with her hands up to her hair. It was the attitude in which of all others he admired her—so beautifully straight and rounded and supple. And he said:

"I just came in to talk to your mother about pulling down that partition. No, don't call her."

"Monsieur will have supper with us? It will be ready in ten minutes." Soames, who still held her hand, was overcome by an impulse which surprised him.

"You look so pretty to-night," he said, "so very pretty. Do you know how pretty you look, Annette?"

Annette withdrew her hand, and blushed. "Monsieur is very good."

"Not a bit good," said Soames, and sat down gloomily.

Annette made a little expressive gesture with her hands; a smile was crinkling her red lips untouched by salve.

And, looking at those lips, Soames said:

"Are you happy over here, or do you want to go back to France?"

"Oh, I like London. Paris, of course. But London is better than Orleans, and the English country is so beautiful. I have been to Richmond last Sunday."

Soames went through a moment of calculating struggle. Mapledurham! Dared he? After all, dared he go so far as that, and show her what there was to look forward to! Still! Down there one could say things. In this room it was impossible.

"I want you and your mother," he said suddenly, "to come for the afternoon next Sunday. My house is on the river, it's not too late in this weather; and I can show you some good pictures. What do you say?"

Annette clasped her hands.

"It will be lovelee. The river is so beautiful"

"That's understood, then. I'll ask Madame."

He need say no more to her this evening, and risk giving himself away. But had he not already said too much? Did one ask restaurant proprietors with pretty daughters down to one's country house without design? Madame Lamotte would see, if Annette didn't. Well! there was not much that Madame did not see. Besides, this was the second time he had stayed to supper with them; he owed them hospitality.

Walking home towards Park Lane—for he was staying at his father's—with the impression of Annette's soft clever hand within his own, his thoughts were pleasant, slightly sensual, rather puzzled. Take steps! What steps? How? Dirty linen washed in public? Pah! With his reputation for sagacity, for far-sightedness and the clever extrication of others, he, who stood for proprietary interests, to become the plaything of that Law of which he was a pillar! There was something revolting in the thought! Winifred's affair was bad enough! To have a double dose of publicity in the family! Would not a liaison be better than that—a liaison, and a son he could adopt? But dark, solid, watchful, Madame Lamotte blocked the avenue of that vision. No! that would not work. It was not as if Annette could have a real passion for him; one could not expect that at his age. If her mother wished, if the worldly advantage were manifestly great—perhaps! If not, refusal would be certain. Besides, he thought: 'I'm not a villain. I don't want to hurt her; and I don't want anything underhand. But I do want her, and I want a son! There's nothing for it but divorce—somehow—anyhow—divorce!' Under the shadow of the plane-trees, in the lamplight, he passed slowly along the railings of the Green Park. Mist clung there among the bluish tree shapes, beyond range of the lamps. How many hundred times he had walked past those trees from his father's house in Park Lane, when he was quite a young man; or from his own house in Montpellier Square in those four years of married life! And, to-night, making up his mind to free himself if he could of that long useless marriage tie, he took a fancy to walk on, in at Hyde Park Corner, out at Knightsbridge Gate, just as he used to when going home to Irene in the old days. What could she be like now?—how had she passed the years since he last saw her, twelve years in all, seven already since Uncle Jolyon left her that money? Was she still beautiful? Would he know her if he saw her? 'I've not changed much,' he thought; 'I expect she has. She made me suffer.' He remembered suddenly one night, the first on which he went out to dinner alone—an old Malburian dinner—the first year of their marriage. With what eagerness he had hurried back; and, entering softly as a cat, had heard her playing. Opening the drawing-room door noiselessly, he had stood watching the expression on her face, different from any he knew, so much more open, so confiding, as though to her music she was giving a heart he had never seen. And he remembered how she stopped and looked round, how her face changed back to that which he did know, and what an icy shiver had gone through him, for all that the next moment he was fondling her shoulders. Yes, she had made him suffer! Divorce! It seemed ridiculous, after all these years of utter separation! But it would have to be. No other way! 'The question,' he thought with sudden realism, 'is—which of us? She or me? She deserted me. She ought to pay for it. There'll be someone, I suppose.' Involuntarily he uttered a little snarling sound, and, turning, made his way back to Park Lane.

CHAPTER V

JAMES SEES VISIONS

The butler himself opened the door, and closing it softly, detained Soames on the inner mat.

"The master's poorly, sir," he murmured. "He wouldn't go to bed till you came in. He's still in the diningroom."

Soames responded in the hushed tone to which the house was now accustomed.

"What's the matter with him, Warmson?"

"Nervous, sir, I think. Might be the funeral; might be Mrs. Dartie's comin' round this afternoon. I think he overheard something. I've took him in a negus. The mistress has just gone up."

Soames hung his hat on a mahogany stag's-horn.

"All right, Warmson, you can go to bed; I'll take him up myself." And he passed into the dining-room.

James was sitting before the fire, in a big armchair, with a camel-hair shawl, very light and warm, over his frock-coated shoulders, on to which his long white whiskers drooped. His white hair, still fairly thick, glistened in the lamplight; a little moisture from his fixed, light-grey eyes stained the cheeks, still quite well coloured, and the long deep furrows running to the corners of the clean-shaven lips, which moved as if mumbling thoughts. His long legs, thin as a crow's, in shepherd's plaid trousers, were bent at less than a right angle, and on one knee a spindly hand moved continually, with fingers wide apart and glistening tapered nails. Beside him, on a low stool, stood a half-finished glass of negus, bedewed with beads of heat. There he had been sitting, with intervals for meals, all day. At eighty-eight he was still organically sound, but suffering terribly from the thought that no one ever told him anything. It is, indeed, doubtful how he had become aware that Roger was being buried that day, for Emily had kept it from him. She was always keeping things from him. Emily was only seventy! James had a grudge against his wife's youth. He felt sometimes that he would never have married her if he had known that she would have so many years before her, when he had so few. It was not natural. She would live fifteen or twenty years after he was gone, and might spend a lot of money; she had always had extravagant tastes. For all he knew she might want to buy one of these motor-cars. Cicely and Rachel and Imogen and all the young people—they all rode those bicycles now and went off Goodness knew where. And now Roger was gone. He didn't know—couldn't tell! The family was breaking up. Soames would know how much his uncle had left. Curiously he thought of Roger as Soames' uncle not as his own brother. Soames! It was more and more the one solid spot in a vanishing world. Soames was careful; he was a warm man; but he had no one to leave his money to. There it was! He didn't know! And there was that fellow Chamberlain! For James' political principles had been fixed between '70 and '85 when 'that rascally Radical' had been the chief thorn in the side of property and he distrusted him to this day in spite of his conversion; he would get the country into a mess and make money go down before he had done with it. A stormy petrel of a chap! Where was Soames? He had gone to the funeral of course which they had tried to keep from him. He knew that perfectly well; he had seen his son's trousers. Roger! Roger in his coffin! He remembered how, when they came up from school together from the West, on the box seat of the old Slowflyer in 1824, Roger had got into the 'boot' and gone to sleep. James uttered a thin cackle. A funny fellow—Roger—an original! He didn't know! Younger than himself, and in his coffin! The family was breaking up. There was Val going to the university; he never came to see him now. He would cost a pretty penny up there. It was an extravagant age. And all the pretty pennies that his four grandchildren would cost him danced before James' eyes. He did not grudge them the money, but he grudged terribly the risk which the spending of that money might bring on them; he grudged the diminution of security. And now that Cicely had married, she might be having children too. He didn't know—couldn't tell! Nobody thought of anything but spending money in these days, and racing about, and having what they called 'a good time.' A motor-car went past the window. Ugly great lumbering thing, making all that racket! But there it was, the country rattling to the dogs! People in such a hurry that they couldn't even care for style—a neat turnout like his barouche and bays was worth all those new-fangled things. And consols at 116! There must be a lot of money in the country. And now there was this old Kruger! They had tried to keep old Kruger from him. But he knew better; there would be a pretty kettle of fish out there! He had known how it would be when that fellow Gladstone—dead now, thank God! made such a mess of it after that dreadful business at Majuba. He shouldn't wonder if the Empire split up and went to pot. And this vision of the Empire going to pot filled a full quarter of an hour with qualms of the most serious character. He had eaten a poor lunch because of them. But it was after lunch that the real disaster to his nerves occurred. He had been dozing when

he became aware of voices—low voices. Ah! they never told him anything! Winifred's and her mother's. "Monty!" That fellow Dartie—always that fellow Dartie! The voices had receded; and James had been left alone, with his ears standing up like a hare's, and fear creeping about his inwards. Why did they leave him alone? Why didn't they come and tell him? And an awful thought, which through long years had haunted him, concreted again swiftly in his brain. Dartie had gone bankrupt—fraudulently bankrupt, and to save Winifred and the children, he—James—would have to pay! Could he—could Soames turn him into a limited company? No, he couldn't! There it was! With every minute before Emily came back the spectre fierced. Why, it might be forgery! With eyes fixed on the doubted Turner in the centre of the wall, James suffered tortures. He saw Dartie in the dock, his grandchildren in the gutter, and himself in bed. He saw the doubted Turner being sold at Jobson's, and all the majestic edifice of property in rags. He saw in fancy Winifred unfashionably dressed, and heard in fancy Emily's voice saying: "Now, don't fuss, James!" She was always saying: "Don't fuss!" She had no nerves; he ought never to have married a woman eighteen years younger than himself. Then Emily's real voice said:

"Have you had a nice nap, James?"

Nap! He was in torment, and she asked him that!

"What's this about Dartie?" he said, and his eyes glared at her.

Emily's self-possession never deserted her.

"What have you been hearing?" she asked blandly.

"What's this about Dartie?" repeated James. "He's gone bankrupt."

"Fiddle!"

James made a great effort, and rose to the full height of his stork-like figure.

"You never tell me anything," he said; "he's gone bankrupt."

The destruction of that fixed idea seemed to Emily all that mattered at the moment.

"He has not," she answered firmly. "He's gone to Buenos Aires."

If she had said "He's gone to Mars" she could not have dealt James a more stunning blow; his imagination, invested entirely in British securities, could as little grasp one place as the other.

"What's he gone there for?" he said. "He's got no money. What did he take?"

Agitated within by Winifred's news, and goaded by the constant reiteration of this jeremiad, Emily said calmly:

"He took Winifred's pearls and a dancer."

"What!" said James, and sat down.

His sudden collapse alarmed her, and smoothing his forehead, she said:

"Now, don't fuss, James!"

A dusky red had spread over James' cheeks and forehead.

"I paid for them," he said tremblingly; "he's a thief! I—I knew how it would be. He'll be the death of me; he" Words failed him and he sat quite still. Emily, who thought she knew him so well, was alarmed, and went towards the sideboard where she kept some sal volatile. She could not see the tenacious Forsyte spirit working in that thin, tremulous shape against the extravagance of the emotion called up by this outrage on Forsyte principles—the Forsyte spirit deep in there, saying: 'You mustn't get into a fantod, it'll never do. You won't digest your lunch. You'll have a fit!' All unseen by her, it was doing better work in James than sal volatile.

"Drink this," she said.

James waved it aside.

"What was Winifred about," he said, "to let him take her pearls?" Emily perceived the crisis past.

"She can have mine," she said comfortably. "I never wear them. She'd better get a divorce."

"There you go!" said James. "Divorce! We've never had a divorce in the family. Where's Soames?"

"He'll be in directly."

"No, he won't," said James, almost fiercely; "he's at the funeral. You think I know nothing."

"Well," said Emily with calm, "you shouldn't get into such fusses when we tell you things." And plumping up his cushions, and putting the sal volatile beside him, she left the room.

But James sat there seeing visions—of Winifred in the Divorce Court, and the family name in the papers; of the earth falling on Roger's coffin; of Val taking after his father; of the pearls he had paid for and would never see again; of money back at four per cent., and the country going to the dogs; and, as the afternoon wore into evening, and tea-time passed, and dinnertime, those visions became more and more mixed and menacing—of being told nothing, till he had nothing left of all his wealth, and they told him nothing of it. Where was Soames? Why didn't he come in?... His hand grasped the glass of negus, he raised it to drink, and saw his son standing there looking at him. A little sigh of relief escaped his lips, and putting the glass down, he said:

"There you are! Dartie's gone to Buenos Aires."

Soames nodded. "That's all right," he said; "good riddance."

A wave of assuagement passed over James' brain. Soames knew. Soames was the only one of them all who had sense. Why couldn't he come and live at home? He had no son of his own. And he said plaintively:

"At my age I get nervous. I wish you were more at home, my boy."

Again Soames nodded; the mask of his countenance betrayed no understanding, but he went closer, and as if by accident touched his father's shoulder.

"They sent their love to you at Timothy's," he said. "It went off all right. I've been to see Winifred. I'm going to take steps." And he thought: 'Yes, and you mustn't hear of them.'

James looked up; his long white whiskers quivered, his thin throat between the points of his collar looked very gristly and naked.

"I've been very poorly all day," he said; "they never tell me anything."

Soames' heart twitched.

"Well, it's all right. There's nothing to worry about. Will you come up now?" and he put his hand under his father's arm.

James obediently and tremulously raised himself, and together they went slowly across the room, which had a rich look in the firelight, and out to the stairs. Very slowly they ascended.

"Good-night, my boy," said James at his bedroom door.

"Good-night, father," answered Soames. His hand stroked down the sleeve beneath the shawl; it seemed to have almost nothing in it, so thin was the arm. And, turning away from the light in the opening doorway, he went up the extra flight to his own bedroom.

'I want a son,' he thought, sitting on the edge of his bed; 'I want a son.'

CHAPTER VI

NO-LONGER-YOUNG JOLYON AT HOME

Trees take little account of time, and the old oak on the upper lawn at Robin Hill looked no day older than when Bosinney sprawled under it and said to Soames: "Forsyte, I've found the very place for your house." Since then Swithin had dreamed, and old Jolyon died, beneath its branches. And now, close to the swing, no-longer-young Jolyon often painted there. Of all spots in the world it was perhaps the most sacred to him, for he had loved his father.

Contemplating its great girth—crinkled and a little mossed, but not yet hollow—he would speculate on the passage of time. That tree had seen, perhaps, all real English history; it dated, he shouldn't wonder, from the days of Elizabeth at least. His own fifty years were as nothing to its wood. When the house behind it, which he now owned, was three hundred years of age instead of twelve, that tree might still be standing there, vast and hollow—for who would commit such sacrilege as to cut it down? A Forsyte might perhaps still be living in that house, to guard it jealously. And Jolyon would wonder what the house would look like coated with such age. Wistaria was already about its walls—the new look had gone. Would it hold its own and keep the dignity Bosinney had bestowed on it, or would the giant London have lapped it round and made it into an asylum in the midst of a jerry-built wilderness? Often, within and without of it, he was persuaded that Bosinney had been moved by the spirit when he built. He had put his heart into that house, indeed! It might even become one of the 'homes of England'—a rare achievement for a house in these degenerate days of building. And the aesthetic spirit, moving hand in hand with his Forsyte sense of possessive continuity, dwelt with pride and pleasure on his ownership thereof. There was the smack of reverence and ancestor-worship (if only for one ancestor) in his desire to hand this house down to his son and his son's son. His father had loved the house, had loved the view, the grounds, that tree; his last years had been happy there, and no one had lived there before him. These last eleven years at Robin Hill had formed in Jolyon's life as a painter, the important period of success. He was now in the very van of water-colour art, hanging on the line everywhere. His drawings fetched high prices. Specialising in that one medium with the tenacity of his breed, he had 'arrived'—rather late, but not too late for a member of the family which made a point of living for ever. His art had really deepened and improved. In conformity with his position he had grown a short fair beard, which was just beginning to grizzle, and hid his Forsyte chin; his brown face had lost the warped expression of his ostracised period—he looked, if anything, younger. The loss of his wife in 1894 had been one of those domestic tragedies which turn out in the end for the good of all. He had, indeed, loved her to the last, for his was an affectionate spirit, but she had become increasingly difficult: jealous of her step-daughter June, jealous even of her own little daughter Holly, and making ceaseless plaint that he could not love her, ill as she was, and 'useless to everyone, and better dead.' He had mourned her sincerely, but his face had looked younger since she died. If she could only have believed that she made him happy, how much happier would the twenty years of their companionship have been!

June had never really got on well with her who had reprehensibly taken her own mother's place; and ever since old Jolyon died she had been established in a sort of studio in London. But she had come back to Robin Hill on her stepmother's death, and gathered the reins there into her small decided hands. Jolly was then at Harrow; Holly still learning from Mademoiselle Beauce. There had been nothing to keep Jolyon at home, and he had removed his grief and his paint-box abroad. There he had wandered, for the most part in Brittany, and at last had fetched up in Paris. He had stayed there several months, and come back with the younger face and the short fair beard. Essentially a man who merely lodged in any house, it had suited him perfectly that June should reign at Robin Hill, so that he was free to go off with his easel where and when he liked. She was inclined, it is true, to regard the house rather as an asylum for her proteges! but his own outcast days had filled Jolyon for ever with sympathy towards an outcast, and June's 'lame ducks' about the place did not annoy him. By all means let her have them down—and feed them up; and though his slightly cynical humour perceived that they ministered to his daughter's love of domination as well as moved her warm heart, he never ceased to admire her for having so many ducks. He fell, indeed, year by year into a more and more detached and brotherly attitude towards his own son and daughters, treating them with a sort of whimsical equality. When he went down to Harrow to see Jolly, he never quite knew which of them was the elder, and would sit eating cherries with him out of one paper bag, with an affectionate and ironical smile twisting up an eyebrow and curling his lips a little. And he was always careful to have money in his pocket, and to be modish in his dress, so that his son need not blush for him. They were perfect friends, but never seemed to have occasion for verbal confidences, both having the competitive self-consciousness of Forsytes. They knew they would stand by each other in scrapes, but there was no need to talk about it. Jolyon had a striking horror—partly original sin, but partly the result of his early immorality—of the moral attitude. The most he could ever have said to his son would have been:

"Look here, old man; don't forget you're a gentleman," and then have wondered whimsically whether that was not a snobbish sentiment. The great cricket match was perhaps the most searching and awkward time they annually went through together, for Jolyon had been at Eton. They would be particularly careful during that match, continually saying: "Hooray! Oh! hard luck, old man!" or "Hooray! Oh! bad luck, Dad!" to each other, when some disaster at which their hearts bounded happened to the opposing school. And Jolyon would wear a grey top hat, instead of his usual soft one, to save his son's feelings, for a black top hat he could not stomach. When Jolly went up to Oxford, Jolyon went up with him, amused, humble, and a little anxious not to discredit his boy amongst all these youths who seemed so much more assured and old than himself. He often thought, 'Glad I'm a painter' for he had long dropped under-writing at Lloyds—'it's so innocuous. You can't look down on a painter—

you can't take him seriously enough.' For Jolly, who had a sort of natural lordliness, had passed at once into a very small set, who secretly amused his father. The boy had fair hair which curled a little, and his grandfather's deepset iron-grey eyes. He was well-built and very upright, and always pleased Jolyon's aesthetic sense, so that he was a tiny bit afraid of him, as artists ever are of those of their own sex whom they admire physically. On that occasion, however, he actually did screw up his courage to give his son advice, and this was it:

"Look here, old man, you're bound to get into debt; mind you come to me at once. Of course, I'll always pay them. But you might remember that one respects oneself more afterwards if one pays one's own way. And don't ever borrow, except from me, will you?"

And Jolly had said:

"All right, Dad, I won't," and he never had.

"And there's just one other thing. I don't know much about morality and that, but there is this: It's always worth while before you do anything to consider whether it's going to hurt another person more than is absolutely necessary."

Jolly had looked thoughtful, and nodded, and presently had squeezed his father's hand. And Jolyon had thought: 'I wonder if I had the right to say that?' He always had a sort of dread of losing the dumb confidence they had in each other; remembering how for long years he had lost his own father's, so that there had been nothing between them but love at a great distance. He under-estimated, no doubt, the change in the spirit of the age since he himself went up to Cambridge in '65; and perhaps he underestimated, too, his boy's power of understanding that he was tolerant to the very bone. It was that tolerance of his, and possibly his scepticism, which ever made his relations towards June so queerly defensive. She was such a decided mortal; knew her own mind so terribly well; wanted things so inexorably until she got them—and then, indeed, often dropped them like a hot potato. Her mother had been like that, whence had come all those tears. Not that his incompatibility with his daughter was anything like what it had been with the first Mrs. Young Jolyon. One could be amused where a daughter was concerned; in a wife's case one could not be amused. To see June set her heart and jaw on a thing until she got it was all right, because it was never anything which interfered fundamentally with Jolyon's liberty—the one thing on which his jaw was also absolutely rigid, a considerable jaw, under that short grizzling beard. Nor was there ever any necessity for real heart-to-heart encounters. One could break away into irony—as indeed he often had to. But the real trouble with June was that she had never appealed to his aesthetic sense, though she might well have, with her red-gold hair and her viking-coloured eyes, and that touch of the Berserker in her spirit. It was very different with Holly, soft and quiet, shy and affectionate, with a playful imp in her somewhere. He watched this younger daughter of his through the duckling stage with extraordinary interest. Would she come out a swan? With her sallow oval face and her grey wistful eyes and those long dark lashes, she might, or she might not. Only this last year had he been able to guess. Yes, she would be a swan—rather a dark one, always a shy one, but an authentic swan. She was eighteen now, and Mademoiselle Beauce was gone—the excellent lady had removed, after eleven years haunted by her continuous reminiscences of the 'well-brrred little Tayleours,' to another family whose bosom would now be agitated by her reminiscences of the 'well-brrred little Forsytes.' She had taught Holly to speak French like herself.

Portraiture was not Jolyon's forte, but he had already drawn his younger daughter three times, and was drawing her a fourth, on the afternoon of October 4th, 1899, when a card was brought to him which caused his eyebrows to go up:

Mr. SOAMES FORSYTE

THE SHELTER, CONNOISSEURS CLUB, MAPLEDURHAM. ST. JAMES'S.

But here the Forsyte Saga must digress again....

To return from a long travel in Spain to a darkened house, to a little daughter bewildered with tears, to the sight of a loved father lying peaceful in his last sleep, had never been, was never likely to be, forgotten by so impressionable and warm-hearted a man as Jolyon. A sense as of mystery, too, clung to that sad day, and about the end of one whose life had been so well-ordered, balanced, and above-board. It seemed incredible that his father could thus have vanished without, as it were, announcing his intention, without last words to his son, and due farewells. And those incoherent allusions of little Holly to 'the lady in grey,' of Mademoiselle Beauce to a Madame Errant (as it sounded) involved all things in a mist, lifted a little when he read his father's will and the codicil thereto. It had been his duty as executor of that will and codicil to inform Irene, wife of his cousin Soames, of her life interest in fifteen thousand pounds. He had called on her to explain that the existing investment in India Stock, earmarked to meet the charge, would produce for her the interesting net sum of L430 odd a year, clear of

income tax. This was but the third time he had seen his cousin Soames' wife—if indeed she was still his wife, of which he was not quite sure. He remembered having seen her sitting in the Botanical Gardens waiting for Bosinney—a passive, fascinating figure, reminding him of Titian's 'Heavenly Love,' and again, when, charged by his father, he had gone to Montpellier Square on the afternoon when Bosinney's death was known. He still recalled vividly her sudden appearance in the drawing-room doorway on that occasion—her beautiful face, passing from wild eagerness of hope to stony despair; remembered the compassion he had felt, Soames' snarling smile, his words, "We are not at home!" and the slam of the front door.

This third time he saw a face and form more beautiful—freed from that warp of wild hope and despair. Looking at her, he thought: 'Yes, you are just what the Dad would have admired!' And the strange story of his father's Indian summer became slowly clear to him. She spoke of old Jolyon with reverence and tears in her eyes. "He was so wonderfully kind to me; I don't know why. He looked so beautiful and peaceful sitting in that chair under the tree; it was I who first came on him sitting there, you know. Such a lovely day. I don't think an end could have been happier. We should all like to go out like that."

'Quite right!' he had thought. 'We should all like to go out in full summer with beauty stepping towards us across a lawn.' And looking round the little, almost empty drawing-room, he had asked her what she was going to do now. "I am going to live again a little, Cousin Jolyon. It's wonderful to have money of one's own. I've never had any. I shall keep this flat, I think; I'm used to it; but I shall be able to go to Italy."

"Exactly!" Jolyon had murmured, looking at her faintly smiling lips; and he had gone away thinking: 'A fascinating woman! What a waste! I'm glad the Dad left her that money.' He had not seen her again, but every quarter he had signed her cheque, forwarding it to her bank, with a note to the Chelsea flat to say that he had done so; and always he had received a note in acknowledgment, generally from the flat, but sometimes from Italy; so that her personality had become embodied in slightly scented grey paper, an upright fine handwriting, and the words, 'Dear Cousin Jolyon.' Man of property that he now was, the slender cheque he signed often gave rise to the thought: 'Well, I suppose she just manages'; sliding into a vague wonder how she was faring otherwise in a world of men not wont to let beauty go unpossessed. At first Holly had spoken of her sometimes, but 'ladies in grey' soon fade from children's memories; and the tightening of June's lips in those first weeks after her grandfather's death whenever her former friend's name was mentioned, had discouraged allusion. Only once, indeed, had June spoken definitely: "I've forgiven her. I'm frightfully glad she's independent now...."

On receiving Soames' card, Jolyon said to the maid—for he could not abide butlers—"Show him into the study, please, and say I'll be there in a minute"; and then he looked at Holly and asked:

"Do you remember 'the lady in grey,' who used to give you music-lessons?"

"Oh yes, why? Has she come?"

Jolyon shook his head, and, changing his holland blouse for a coat, was silent, perceiving suddenly that such history was not for those young ears. His face, in fact, became whimsical perplexity incarnate while he journeyed towards the study.

Standing by the french-window, looking out across the terrace at the oak tree, were two figures, middle-aged and young, and he thought: 'Who's that boy? Surely they never had a child.'

The elder figure turned. The meeting of those two Forsytes of the second generation, so much more sophisticated than the first, in the house built for the one and owned and occupied by the other, was marked by subtle defensiveness beneath distinct attempt at cordiality. 'Has he come about his wife?' Jolyon was thinking; and Soames, 'How shall I begin?' while Val, brought to break the ice, stood negligently scrutinising this 'bearded pard' from under his dark, thick eyelashes.

"This is Val Dartie," said Soames, "my sister's son. He's just going up to Oxford. I thought I'd like him to know your boy."

"Ah! I'm sorry Jolly's away. What college?"

"B.N.C.," replied Val.

"Jolly's at the 'House,' but he'll be delighted to look you up."

"Thanks awfully."

"Holly's in—if you could put up with a female relation, she'd show you round. You'll find her in the

hall if you go through the curtains. I was just painting her."

With another "Thanks, awfully!" Val vanished, leaving the two cousins with the ice unbroken.

"I see you've some drawings at the 'Water Colours,'" said Soames.

Jolyon winced. He had been out of touch with the Forsyte family at large for twenty-six years, but they were connected in his mind with Frith's 'Derby Day' and Landseer prints. He had heard from June that Soames was a connoisseur, which made it worse. He had become aware, too, of a curious sensation of repugnance.

"I haven't seen you for a long time," he said.

"No," answered Soames between close lips, "not since—as a matter of fact, it's about that I've come. You're her trustee, I'm told."

Jolyon nodded.

"Twelve years is a long time," said Soames rapidly: "I—I'm tired of it."

Jolyon found no more appropriate answer than:

"Won't you smoke?"

"No, thanks."

Jolyon himself lit a cigarette.

"I wish to be free," said Soames abruptly.

"I don't see her," murmured Jolyon through the fume of his cigarette.

"But you know where she lives, I suppose?"

Jolyon nodded. He did not mean to give her address without permission. Soames seemed to divine his thought.

"I don't want her address," he said; "I know it."

"What exactly do you want?"

"She deserted me. I want a divorce."

"Rather late in the day, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Soames. And there was a silence.

"I don't know much about these things—at least, I've forgotten," said Jolyon with a wry smile. He himself had had to wait for death to grant him a divorce from the first Mrs. Jolyon. "Do you wish me to see her about it?"

Soames raised his eyes to his cousin's face. "I suppose there's someone," he said.

A shrug moved Jolyon's shoulders.

"I don't know at all. I imagine you may have both lived as if the other were dead. It's usual in these cases."

Soames turned to the window. A few early fallen oak-leaves strewed the terrace already, and were rolling round in the wind. Jolyon saw the figures of Holly and Val Dartie moving across the lawn towards the stables. 'I'm not going to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds,' he thought. 'I must act for her. The Dad would have wished that.' And for a swift moment he seemed to see his father's figure in the old armchair, just beyond Soames, sitting with knees crossed, *The Times* in his hand. It vanished.

"My father was fond of her," he said quietly.

"Why he should have been I don't know," Soames answered without looking round. "She brought trouble to your daughter June; she brought trouble to everyone. I gave her all she wanted. I would have given her even—forgiveness—but she chose to leave me."

In Jolyon compassion was checked by the tone of that close voice. What was there in the fellow that

made it so difficult to be sorry for him?

"I can go and see her, if you like," he said. "I suppose she might be glad of a divorce, but I know nothing."

Soames nodded.

"Yes, please go. As I say, I know her address; but I've no wish to see her." His tongue was busy with his lips, as if they were very dry.

"You'll have some tea?" said Jolyon, stifling the words: 'And see the house.' And he led the way into the hall. When he had rung the bell and ordered tea, he went to his easel to turn his drawing to the wall. He could not bear, somehow, that his work should be seen by Soames, who was standing there in the middle of the great room which had been designed expressly to afford wall space for his own pictures. In his cousin's face, with its unseizable family likeness to himself, and its chinny, narrow, concentrated look, Jolyon saw that which moved him to the thought: 'That chap could never forget anything—nor ever give himself away. He's pathetic!'

CHAPTER VII

THE COLT AND THE FILLY

When young Val left the presence of the last generation he was thinking: 'This is jolly dull! Uncle Soames does take the bun. I wonder what this filly's like?' He anticipated no pleasure from her society; and suddenly he saw her standing there looking at him. Why, she was pretty! What luck!

"I'm afraid you don't know me," he said. "My name's Val Dartie—I'm once removed, second cousin, something like that, you know. My mother's name was Forsyte."

Holly, whose slim brown hand remained in his because she was too shy to withdraw it, said:

"I don't know any of my relations. Are there many?"

"Tons. They're awful—most of them. At least, I don't know—some of them. One's relations always are, aren't they?"

"I expect they think one awful too," said Holly.

"I don't know why they should. No one could think you awful, of course."

Holly looked at him—the wistful candour in those grey eyes gave young Val a sudden feeling that he must protect her.

"I mean there are people and people," he added astutely. "Your dad looks awfully decent, for instance."

"Oh yes!" said Holly fervently; "he is."

A flush mounted in Val's cheeks—that scene in the Pandemonium promenade—the dark man with the pink carnation developing into his own father! "But you know what the Forsytes are," he said almost viciously. "Oh! I forgot; you don't."

"What are they?"

"Oh! fearfully careful; not sportsmen a bit. Look at Uncle Soames!"

"I'd like to," said Holly.

Val resisted a desire to run his arm through hers. "Oh! no," he said, "let's go out. You'll see him quite soon enough. What's your brother like?"

Holly led the way on to the terrace and down to the lawn without answering. How describe Jolly, who, ever since she remembered anything, had been her lord, master, and ideal?

"Does he sit on you?" said Val shrewdly. "I shall be knowing him at

Oxford. Have you got any horses?"

Holly nodded. "Would you like to see the stables?"

"Rather!"

They passed under the oak tree, through a thin shrubbery, into the stable-yard. There under a clock-tower lay a fluffy brown-and-white dog, so old that he did not get up, but faintly waved the tail curled over his back.

"That's Balthasar," said Holly; "he's so old—awfully old, nearly as old as I am. Poor old boy! He's devoted to Dad."

"Balthasar! That's a rum name. He isn't purebred you know."

"No! but he's a darling," and she bent down to stroke the dog. Gentle and supple, with dark covered head and slim browned neck and hands, she seemed to Val strange and sweet, like a thing slipped between him and all previous knowledge.

"When grandfather died," she said, "he wouldn't eat for two days. He saw him die, you know."

"Was that old Uncle Jolyon? Mother always says he was a topper."

"He was," said Holly simply, and opened the stable door.

In a loose-box stood a silver roan of about fifteen hands, with a long black tail and mane. "This is mine—Fairy."

"Ah!" said Val, "she's a jolly palfrey. But you ought to bang her tail. She'd look much smarter." Then catching her wondering look, he thought suddenly: 'I don't know—anything she likes!' And he took a long sniff of the stable air. "Horses are ripping, aren't they? My Dad..." he stopped.

"Yes?" said Holly.

An impulse to unbosom himself almost overcame him—but not quite. "Oh! I don't know he's often gone a mucker over them. I'm jolly keen on them too—riding and hunting. I like racing awfully, as well; I should like to be a gentleman rider." And oblivious of the fact that he had but one more day in town, with two engagements, he plumped out:

"I say, if I hire a gee to-morrow, will you come a ride in Richmond Park?"

Holly clasped her hands.

"Oh yes! I simply love riding. But there's Jolly's horse; why don't you ride him? Here he is. We could go after tea."

Val looked doubtfully at his trousered legs.

He had imagined them immaculate before her eyes in high brown boots and Bedford cords.

"I don't much like riding his horse," he said. "He mightn't like it. Besides, Uncle Soames wants to get back, I expect. Not that I believe in buckling under to him, you know. You haven't got an uncle, have you? This is rather a good beast," he added, scrutinising Jolly's horse, a dark brown, which was showing the whites of its eyes. "You haven't got any hunting here, I suppose?"

"No; I don't know that I want to hunt. It must be awfully exciting, of course; but it's cruel, isn't it? June says so."

"Cruel?" ejaculated Val. "Oh! that's all rot. Who's June?"

"My sister—my half-sister, you know—much older than me." She had put her hands up to both cheeks of Jolly's horse, and was rubbing her nose against its nose with a gentle snuffling noise which seemed to have an hypnotic effect on the animal. Val contemplated her cheek resting against the horse's nose, and her eyes gleaming round at him. 'She's really a duck,' he thought.

They returned to the house less talkative, followed this time by the dog Balthasar, walking more slowly than anything on earth, and clearly expecting them not to exceed his speed limit.

"This is a ripping place," said Val from under the oak tree, where they had paused to allow the dog

Balthasar to come up.

"Yes," said Holly, and sighed. "Of course I want to go everywhere. I wish I were a gipsy."

"Yes, gipsies are jolly," replied Val, with a conviction which had just come to him; "you're rather like one, you know."

Holly's face shone suddenly and deeply, like dark leaves gilded by the sun.

"To go mad-rabbiting everywhere and see everything, and live in the open—oh! wouldn't it be fun?"

"Let's do it!" said Val.

"Oh yes, let's!"

"It'd be grand sport, just you and I."

Then Holly perceived the quaintness and gushed.

"Well, we've got to do it," said Val obstinately, but reddening too.

"I believe in doing things you want to do. What's down there?"

"The kitchen-garden, and the pond and the coppice, and the farm."

"Let's go down!"

Holly glanced back at the house.

"It's tea-time, I expect; there's Dad beckoning."

Val, uttering a growly sound, followed her towards the house.

When they re-entered the hall gallery the sight of two middle-aged Forsytes drinking tea together had its magical effect, and they became quite silent. It was, indeed, an impressive spectacle. The two were seated side by side on an arrangement in marqueterie which looked like three silvery pink chairs made one, with a low tea-table in front of them. They seemed to have taken up that position, as far apart as the seat would permit, so that they need not look at each other too much; and they were eating and drinking rather than talking—Soames with his air of despising the tea-cake as it disappeared, Jolyon of finding himself slightly amusing. To the casual eye neither would have seemed greedy, but both were getting through a good deal of sustenance. The two young ones having been supplied with food, the process went on silent and absorptive, till, with the advent of cigarettes, Jolyon said to Soames:

"And how's Uncle James?"

"Thanks, very shaky."

"We're a wonderful family, aren't we? The other day I was calculating the average age of the ten old Forsytes from my father's family Bible. I make it eighty-four already, and five still living. They ought to beat the record;" and looking whimsically at Soames, he added:

"We aren't the men they were, you know."

Soames smiled. 'Do you really think I shall admit that I'm not their equal'; he seemed to be saying, 'or that I've got to give up anything, especially life?'

"We may live to their age, perhaps," pursued Jolyon, "but self-consciousness is a handicap, you know, and that's the difference between us. We've lost conviction. How and when self-consciousness was born I never can make out. My father had a little, but I don't believe any other of the old Forsytes ever had a scrap. Never to see yourself as others see you, it's a wonderful preservative. The whole history of the last century is in the difference between us. And between us and you," he added, gazing through a ring of smoke at Val and Holly, uncomfortable under his quizzical regard, "there'll be—another difference. I wonder what."

Soames took out his watch.

"We must go," he said, "if we're to catch our train."

"Uncle Soames never misses a train," muttered Val, with his mouth full.

"Why should I?" Soames answered simply.

"Oh! I don't know," grumbled Val, "other people do."

At the front door he gave Holly's slim brown hand a long and surreptitious squeeze.

"Look out for me to-morrow," he whispered; "three o'clock. I'll wait for you in the road; it'll save time. We'll have a ripping ride." He gazed back at her from the lodge gate, and, but for the principles of a man about town, would have waved his hand. He felt in no mood to tolerate his uncle's conversation. But he was not in danger. Soames preserved a perfect muteness, busy with far-away thoughts.

The yellow leaves came down about those two walking the mile and a half which Soames had traversed so often in those long-ago days when he came down to watch with secret pride the building of the house—that house which was to have been the home of him and her from whom he was now going to seek release. He looked back once, up that endless vista of autumn lane between the yellowing hedges. What an age ago! "I don't want to see her," he had said to Jolyon. Was that true? 'I may have to,' he thought; and he shivered, seized by one of those queer shudderings that they say mean footsteps on one's grave. A chilly world! A queer world! And glancing sidelong at his nephew, he thought: 'Wish I were his age! I wonder what she's like now!'

CHAPTER VIII

JOLYON PROSECUTES TRUSTEESHIP

When those two were gone Jolyon did not return to his painting, for daylight was failing, but went to the study, craving unconsciously a revival of that momentary vision of his father sitting in the old leather chair with his knees crossed and his straight eyes gazing up from under the dome of his massive brow. Often in this little room, cosiest in the house, Jolyon would catch a moment of communion with his father. Not, indeed, that he had definitely any faith in the persistence of the human spirit—the feeling was not so logical—it was, rather, an atmospheric impact, like a scent, or one of those strong animistic impressions from forms, or effects of light, to which those with the artist's eye are especially prone. Here only—in this little unchanged room where his father had spent the most of his waking hours—could be retrieved the feeling that he was not quite gone, that the steady counsel of that old spirit and the warmth of his masterful lovability endured.

What would his father be advising now, in this sudden recrudescence of an old tragedy—what would he say to this menace against her to whom he had taken such a fancy in the last weeks of his life? 'I must do my best for her,' thought Jolyon; 'he left her to me in his will. But what is the best?'

And as if seeking to regain the sapience, the balance and shrewd common sense of that old Forsyte, he sat down in the ancient chair and crossed his knees. But he felt a mere shadow sitting there; nor did any inspiration come, while the fingers of the wind tapped on the darkening panes of the french-window.

'Go and see her?' he thought, 'or ask her to come down here? What's her life been? What is it now, I wonder? Beastly to rake up things at this time of day.' Again the figure of his cousin standing with a hand on a front door of a fine olive-green leaped out, vivid, like one of those figures from old-fashioned clocks when the hour strikes; and his words sounded in Jolyon's ears clearer than any chime: "I manage my own affairs. I've told you once, I tell you again: We are not at home." The repugnance he had then felt for Soames—for his flat-cheeked, shaven face full of spiritual bull-doggedness; for his spare, square, sleek figure slightly crouched as it were over the bone he could not digest—came now again, fresh as ever, nay, with an odd increase. 'I dislike him,' he thought, 'I dislike him to the very roots of me. And that's lucky; it'll make it easier for me to back his wife.' Half-artist, and half-Forsyte, Jolyon was constitutionally averse from what he termed 'ructions'; unless angered, he conformed deeply to that classic description of the she-dog, 'Er'd ruther run than fight.' A little smile became settled in his beard. Ironical that Soames should come down here—to this house, built for himself! How he had gazed and gaped at this ruin of his past intention; furtively nosing at the walls and stairway, appraising everything! And intuitively Jolyon thought: 'I believe the fellow even now would like to be living here. He could never leave off longing for what he once owned! Well, I must act, somehow or other; but it's a bore—a great bore.'

Late that evening he wrote to the Chelsea flat, asking if Irene would see him.

The old century which had seen the plant of individualism flower so wonderfully was setting in a sky

orange with coming storms. Rumours of war added to the briskness of a London turbulent at the close of the summer holidays. And the streets to Jolyon, who was not often up in town, had a feverish look, due to these new motorcars and cabs, of which he disapproved aesthetically. He counted these vehicles from his hansom, and made the proportion of them one in twenty. 'They were one in thirty about a year ago,' he thought; 'they've come to stay. Just so much more rattling round of wheels and general stink'—for he was one of those rather rare Liberals who object to anything new when it takes a material form; and he instructed his driver to get down to the river quickly, out of the traffic, desiring to look at the water through the mellowing screen of plane-trees. At the little block of flats which stood back some fifty yards from the Embankment, he told the cabman to wait, and went up to the first floor.

Yes, Mrs. Heron was at home!

The effect of a settled if very modest income was at once apparent to him remembering the threadbare refinement in that tiny flat eight years ago when he announced her good fortune. Everything was now fresh, dainty, and smelled of flowers. The general effect was silvery with touches of black, hydrangea colour, and gold. 'A woman of great taste,' he thought. Time had dealt gently with Jolyon, for he was a Forsyte. But with Irene Time hardly seemed to deal at all, or such was his impression. She appeared to him not a day older, standing there in mole-coloured velvet corduroy, with soft dark eyes and dark gold hair, with outstretched hand and a little smile.

"Won't you sit down?"

He had probably never occupied a chair with a fuller sense of embarrassment.

"You look absolutely unchanged," he said.

"And you look younger, Cousin Jolyon."

Jolyon ran his hands through his hair, whose thickness was still a comfort to him.

"I'm ancient, but I don't feel it. That's one thing about painting, it keeps you young. Titian lived to ninety-nine, and had to have plague to kill him off. Do you know, the first time I ever saw you I thought of a picture by him?"

"When did you see me for the first time?"

"In the Botanical Gardens."

"How did you know me, if you'd never seen me before?"

"By someone who came up to you." He was looking at her hardily, but her face did not change; and she said quietly:

"Yes; many lives ago."

"What is your recipe for youth, Irene?"

"People who don't live are wonderfully preserved."

H'm! a bitter little saying! People who don't live! But an opening, and he took it. "You remember my Cousin Soames?"

He saw her smile faintly at that whimsicality, and at once went on:

"He came to see me the day before yesterday! He wants a divorce. Do you?"

"I?" The word seemed startled out of her. "After twelve years? It's rather late. Won't it be difficult?"

Jolyon looked hard into her face. "Unless...." he said.

"Unless I have a lover now. But I have never had one since."

What did he feel at the simplicity and candour of those words? Relief, surprise, pity! Venus for twelve years without a lover!

"And yet," he said, "I suppose you would give a good deal to be free, too?"

"I don't know. What does it matter, now?"

"But if you were to love again?"

"I should love." In that simple answer she seemed to sum up the whole philosophy of one on whom the world had turned its back.

"Well! Is there anything you would like me to say to him?"

"Only that I'm sorry he's not free. He had his chance once. I don't know why he didn't take it."

"Because he was a Forsyte; we never part with things, you know, unless we want something in their place; and not always then."

Irene smiled. "Don't you, Cousin Jolyon?—I think you do."

"Of course, I'm a bit of a mongrel—not quite a pure Forsyte. I never take the halfpennies off my cheques, I put them on," said Jolyon uneasily.

"Well, what does Soames want in place of me now?"

"I don't know; perhaps children."

She was silent for a little, looking down.

"Yes," she murmured; "it's hard. I would help him to be free if I could."

Jolyon gazed into his hat, his embarrassment was increasing fast; so was his admiration, his wonder, and his pity. She was so lovely, and so lonely; and altogether it was such a coil!

"Well," he said, "I shall have to see Soames. If there's anything I can do for you I'm always at your service. You must think of me as a wretched substitute for my father. At all events I'll let you know what happens when I speak to Soames. He may supply the material himself."

She shook her head.

"You see, he has a lot to lose; and I have nothing. I should like him to be free; but I don't see what I can do."

"Nor I at the moment," said Jolyon, and soon after took his leave. He went down to his hansom. Half-past three! Soames would be at his office still.

"To the Poultry," he called through the trap. In front of the Houses of Parliament and in Whitehall, newsvendors were calling, "Grave situation in the Transvaal!" but the cries hardly roused him, absorbed in recollection of that very beautiful figure, of her soft dark glance, and the words: "I have never had one since." What on earth did such a woman do with her life, back-watered like this? Solitary, unprotected, with every man's hand against her or rather—reaching out to grasp her at the least sign. And year after year she went on like that!

The word 'Poultry' above the passing citizens brought him back to reality.

'Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte,' in black letters on a ground the colour of peasoup, spurred him to a sort of vigour, and he went up the stone stairs muttering: "Fusty musty ownerships! Well, we couldn't do without them!"

"I want Mr. Soames Forsyte," he said to the boy who opened the door.

"What name?"

"Mr. Jolyon Forsyte."

The youth looked at him curiously, never having seen a Forsyte with a beard, and vanished.

The offices of 'Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte' had slowly absorbed the offices of 'Tooting and Bowles,' and occupied the whole of the first floor.

The firm consisted now of nothing but Soames and a number of managing and articulated clerks. The complete retirement of James some six years ago had accelerated business, to which the final touch of speed had been imparted when Bustard dropped off, worn out, as many believed, by the suit of 'Fryer versus Forsyte,' more in Chancery than ever and less likely to benefit its beneficiaries. Soames, with his saner grasp of actualities, had never permitted it to worry him; on the contrary, he had long perceived that Providence had presented him therein with L200 a year net in perpetuity, and—why not?

When Jolyon entered, his cousin was drawing out a list of holdings in Consols, which in view of the rumours of war he was going to advise his companies to put on the market at once, before other

companies did the same. He looked round, sidelong, and said:

"How are you? Just one minute. Sit down, won't you?" And having entered three amounts, and set a ruler to keep his place, he turned towards Jolyon, biting the side of his flat forefinger....

"Yes?" he said.

"I have seen her."

Soames frowned.

"Well?"

"She has remained faithful to memory."

Having said that, Jolyon was ashamed. His cousin had flushed a dusky yellowish red. What had made him tease the poor brute!

"I was to tell you she is sorry you are not free. Twelve years is a long time. You know your law, and what chance it gives you." Soames uttered a curious little grunt, and the two remained a full minute without speaking. 'Like wax!' thought Jolyon, watching that close face, where the flush was fast subsiding. 'He'll never give me a sign of what he's thinking, or going to do. Like wax!' And he transferred his gaze to a plan of that flourishing town, 'By-Street on Sea,' the future existence of which lay exposed on the wall to the possessive instincts of the firm's clients. The whimsical thought flashed through him: 'I wonder if I shall get a bill of costs for this—"To attending Mr. Jolyon Forsyte in the matter of my divorce, to receiving his account of his visit to my wife, and to advising him to go and see her again, sixteen and eightpence.'"

Suddenly Soames said: "I can't go on like this. I tell you, I can't go on like this." His eyes were shifting from side to side, like an animal's when it looks for way of escape. 'He really suffers,' thought Jolyon; 'I've no business to forget that, just because I don't like him.'

"Surely," he said gently, "it lies with yourself. A man can always put these things through if he'll take it on himself."

Soames turned square to him, with a sound which seemed to come from somewhere very deep.

"Why should I suffer more than I've suffered already? Why should I?"

Jolyon could only shrug his shoulders. His reason agreed, his instinct rebelled; he could not have said why.

"Your father," went on Soames, "took an interest in her—why, goodness knows! And I suppose you do too?" he gave Jolyon a sharp look. "It seems to me that one only has to do another person a wrong to get all the sympathy. I don't know in what way I was to blame—I've never known. I always treated her well. I gave her everything she could wish for. I wanted her."

Again Jolyon's reason nodded; again his instinct shook its head. 'What is it?' he thought; 'there must be something wrong in me. Yet if there is, I'd rather be wrong than right.'

"After all," said Soames with a sort of glum fierceness, "she was my wife."

In a flash the thought went through his listener: 'There it is! Ownerships! Well, we all own things. But—human beings! Pah!'

"You have to look at facts," he said drily, "or rather the want of them."

Soames gave him another quick suspicious look.

"The want of them?" he said. "Yes, but I am not so sure."

"I beg your pardon," replied Jolyon; "I've told you what she said. It was explicit."

"My experience has not been one to promote blind confidence in her word. We shall see."

Jolyon got up.

"Good-bye," he said curtly.

"Good-bye," returned Soames; and Jolyon went out trying to understand the look, half-startled, half-

menacing, on his cousin's face. He sought Waterloo Station in a disturbed frame of mind, as though the skin of his moral being had been scraped; and all the way down in the train he thought of Irene in her lonely flat, and of Soames in his lonely office, and of the strange paralysis of life that lay on them both. 'In chancery!' he thought. 'Both their necks in chancery—and her's so pretty!'

CHAPTER IX

VAL HEARS THE NEWS

The keeping of engagements had not as yet been a conspicuous feature in the life of young Val Dartie, so that when he broke two and kept one, it was the latter event which caused him, if anything, the greater surprise, while jogging back to town from Robin Hill after his ride with Holly. She had been even prettier than he had thought her yesterday, on her silver-roan, long-tailed 'palfrey'; and it seemed to him, self-critical in the brumous October gloaming and the outskirts of London, that only his boots had shone throughout their two-hour companionship. He took out his new gold 'hunter'—present from James—and looked not at the time, but at sections of his face in the glittering back of its opened case. He had a temporary spot over one eyebrow, and it displeased him, for it must have displeased her. Crum never had any spots. Together with Crum rose the scene in the promenade of the Pandemonium. To-day he had not had the faintest desire to unbosom himself to Holly about his father. His father lacked poetry, the stirrings of which he was feeling for the first time in his nineteen years. The Liberty, with Cynthia Dark, that almost mythical embodiment of rapture; the Pandemonium, with the woman of uncertain age—both seemed to Val completely 'off,' fresh from communion with this new, shy, dark-haired young cousin of his. She rode 'Jolly well,' too, so that it had been all the more flattering that she had let him lead her where he would in the long gallops of Richmond Park, though she knew them so much better than he did. Looking back on it all, he was mystified by the barrenness of his speech; he felt that he could say 'an awful lot of fetching things' if he had but the chance again, and the thought that he must go back to Littlehampton on the morrow, and to Oxford on the twelfth—'to that beastly exam,' too—without the faintest chance of first seeing her again, caused darkness to settle on his spirit even more quickly than on the evening. He should write to her, however, and she had promised to answer. Perhaps, too, she would come up to Oxford to see her brother. That thought was like the first star, which came out as he rode into Padwick's livery stables in the purlieu of Sloane Square. He got off and stretched himself luxuriously, for he had ridden some twenty-five good miles. The Dartie within him made him chaffer for five minutes with young Padwick concerning the favourite for the Cambridgeshire; then with the words, "Put the gee down to my account," he walked away, a little wide at the knees, and flipping his boots with his knotty little cane. 'I don't feel a bit inclined to go out,' he thought. 'I wonder if mother will stand fizz for my last night!' With 'fizz' and recollection, he could well pass a domestic evening.

When he came down, speckless after his bath, he found his mother scrupulous in a low evening dress, and, to his annoyance, his Uncle Soames. They stopped talking when he came in; then his uncle said:

"He'd better be told."

At those words, which meant something about his father, of course, Val's first thought was of Holly. Was it anything beastly? His mother began speaking.

"Your father," she said in her fashionably appointed voice, while her fingers plucked rather pitifully at sea-green brocade, "your father, my dear boy, has—is not at Newmarket; he's on his way to South America. He—he's left us."

Val looked from her to Soames. Left them! Was he sorry? Was he fond of his father? It seemed to him that he did not know. Then, suddenly—as at a whiff of gardenias and cigars—his heart twitched within him, and he was sorry. One's father belonged to one, could not go off in this fashion—it was not done! Nor had he always been the 'bounder' of the Pandemonium promenade. There were precious memories of tailors' shops and horses, tips at school, and general lavish kindness, when in luck.

"But why?" he said. Then, as a sportsman himself, was sorry he had asked. The mask of his mother's face was all disturbed; and he burst out:

"All right, Mother, don't tell me! Only, what does it mean?"

"A divorce, Val, I'm afraid."

Val uttered a queer little grunt, and looked quickly at his uncle—that uncle whom he had been taught to look on as a guarantee against the consequences of having a father, even against the Dartie blood in his own veins. The flat-checked visage seemed to wince, and this upset him.

"It won't be public, will it?"

So vividly before him had come recollection of his own eyes glued to the unsavoury details of many a divorce suit in the Public Press.

"Can't it be done quietly somehow? It's so disgusting for—for mother, and—and everybody."

"Everything will be done as quietly as it can, you may be sure."

"Yes—but, why is it necessary at all? Mother doesn't want to marry again."

Himself, the girls, their name tarnished in the sight of his schoolfellows and of Crum, of the men at Oxford, of—Holly! Unbearable! What was to be gained by it?

"Do you, Mother?" he said sharply.

Thus brought face to face with so much of her own feeling by the one she loved best in the world, Winifred rose from the Empire chair in which she had been sitting. She saw that her son would be against her unless he was told everything; and, yet, how could she tell him? Thus, still plucking at the green brocade, she stared at Soames. Val, too, stared at Soames. Surely this embodiment of respectability and the sense of property could not wish to bring such a slur on his own sister!

Soames slowly passed a little inlaid paperknife over the smooth surface of a marqueterie table; then, without looking at his nephew, he began:

"You don't understand what your mother has had to put up with these twenty years. This is only the last straw, Val." And glancing up sideways at Winifred, he added:

"Shall I tell him?"

Winifred was silent. If he were not told, he would be against her! Yet, how dreadful to be told such things of his own father! Clenching her lips, she nodded.

Soames spoke in a rapid, even voice:

"He has always been a burden round your mother's neck. She has paid his debts over and over again; he has often been drunk, abused and threatened her; and now he is gone to Buenos Aires with a dancer." And, as if distrusting the efficacy of those words on the boy, he went on quickly:

"He took your mother's pearls to give to her."

Val jerked up his hand, then. At that signal of distress Winifred cried out:

"That'll do, Soames—stop!"

In the boy, the Dartie and the Forsyte were struggling. For debts, drink, dancers, he had a certain sympathy; but the pearls—no! That was too much! And suddenly he found his mother's hand squeezing his.

"You see," he heard Soames say, "we can't have it all begin over again. There's a limit; we must strike while the iron's hot."

Val freed his hand.

"But—you're—never going to bring out that about the pearls! I couldn't stand that—I simply couldn't!"

Winifred cried out:

"No, no, Val—oh no! That's only to show you how impossible your father is!" And his uncle nodded. Somewhat assuaged, Val took out a cigarette. His father had bought him that thin curved case. Oh! it was unbearable—just as he was going up to Oxford!

"Can't mother be protected without?" he said. "I could look after her. It could always be done later if it was really necessary."

A smile played for a moment round Soames' lips, and became bitter.

"You don't know what you're talking of; nothing's so fatal as delay in such matters."

"Why?"

"I tell you, boy, nothing's so fatal. I know from experience."

His voice had the ring of exasperation. Val regarded him round-eyed, never having known his uncle express any sort of feeling. Oh! Yes—he remembered now—there had been an Aunt Irene, and something had happened—something which people kept dark; he had heard his father once use an unmentionable word of her.

"I don't want to speak ill of your father," Soames went on doggedly, "but I know him well enough to be sure that he'll be back on your mother's hands before a year's over. You can imagine what that will mean to her and to all of you after this. The only thing is to cut the knot for good."

In spite of himself, Val was impressed; and, happening to look at his mother's face, he got what was perhaps his first real insight into the fact that his own feelings were not always what mattered most.

"All right, mother," he said; "we'll back you up. Only I'd like to know when it'll be. It's my first term, you know. I don't want to be up there when it comes off."

"Oh! my dear boy," murmured Winifred, "it is a bore for you." So, by habit, she phrased what, from the expression of her face, was the most poignant regret. "When will it be, Soames?"

"Can't tell—not for months. We must get restitution first."

'What the deuce is that?' thought Val. 'What silly brutes lawyers are! Not for months! I know one thing: I'm not going to dine in!' And he said:

"Awfully sorry, mother, I've got to go out to dinner now."

Though it was his last night, Winifred nodded almost gratefully; they both felt that they had gone quite far enough in the expression of feeling.

Val sought the misty freedom of Green Street, reckless and depressed. And not till he reached Piccadilly did he discover that he had only eighteen-pence. One couldn't dine off eighteen-pence, and he was very hungry. He looked longingly at the windows of the Iseeum Club, where he had often eaten of the best with his father! Those pearls! There was no getting over them! But the more he brooded and the further he walked the hungrier he naturally became. Short of trailing home, there were only two places where he could go—his grandfather's in Park Lane, and Timothy's in the Bayswater Road. Which was the less deplorable? At his grandfather's he would probably get a better dinner on the spur of the moment. At Timothy's they gave you a jolly good feed when they expected you, not otherwise. He decided on Park Lane, not unmoved by the thought that to go up to Oxford without affording his grandfather a chance to tip him was hardly fair to either of them. His mother would hear he had been there, of course, and might think it funny; but he couldn't help that. He rang the bell.

"Hullo, Warmson, any dinner for me, d'you think?"

"They're just going in, Master Val. Mr. Forsyte will be very glad to see you. He was saying at lunch that he never saw you nowadays."

Val grinned.

"Well, here I am. Kill the fatted calf, Warmson, let's have fizz."

Warmson smiled faintly—in his opinion Val was a young limb.

"I will ask Mrs. Forsyte, Master Val."

"I say," Val grumbled, taking off his overcoat, "I'm not at school any more, you know."

Warmson, not without a sense of humour, opened the door beyond the stag's-horn coat stand, with the words:

"Mr. Valerus, ma'am."

"Confound him!" thought Val, entering.

A warm embrace, a "Well, Val!" from Emily, and a rather quavery "So there you are at last!" from James, restored his sense of dignity.

"Why didn't you let us know? There's only saddle of mutton. Champagne, Warmson," said Emily. And they went in.

At the great dining-table, shortened to its utmost, under which so many fashionable legs had rested, James sat at one end, Emily at the other, Val half-way between them; and something of the loneliness of his grandparents, now that all their four children were flown, reached the boy's spirit. 'I hope I shall kick the bucket long before I'm as old as grandfather,' he thought. 'Poor old chap, he's as thin as a rail!' And lowering his voice while his grandfather and Warmson were in discussion about sugar in the soup, he said to Emily:

"It's pretty brutal at home, Granny. I suppose you know."

"Yes, dear boy."

"Uncle Soames was there when I left. I say, isn't there anything to be done to prevent a divorce? Why is he so beastly keen on it?"

"Hush, my dear!" murmured Emily; "we're keeping it from your grandfather."

James' voice sounded from the other end.

"What's that? What are you talking about?"

"About Val's college," returned Emily. "Young Pariser was there, James; you remember—he nearly broke the Bank at Monte Carlo afterwards."

James muttered that he did not know—Val must look after himself up there, or he'd get into bad ways. And he looked at his grandson with gloom, out of which affection distrustfully glimmered.

"What I'm afraid of," said Val to his plate, "is of being hard up, you know."

By instinct he knew that the weak spot in that old man was fear of insecurity for his grandchildren.

"Well," said James, and the soup in his spoon dribbled over, "you'll have a good allowance; but you must keep within it."

"Of course," murmured Val; "if it is good. How much will it be, Grandfather?"

"Three hundred and fifty; it's too much. I had next to nothing at your age."

Val sighed. He had hoped for four, and been afraid of three. "I don't know what your young cousin has," said James; "he's up there. His father's a rich man."

"Aren't you?" asked Val hardily.

"I?" replied James, flustered. "I've got so many expenses. Your father...." and he was silent.

"Cousin Jolyon's got an awfully jolly place. I went down there with Uncle Soames—ripping stables."

"Ah!" murmured James profoundly. "That house—I knew how it would be!" And he lapsed into gloomy meditation over his fish-bones. His son's tragedy, and the deep cleavage it had caused in the Forsyte family, had still the power to draw him down into a whirlpool of doubts and misgivings. Val, who hankered to talk of Robin Hill, because Robin Hill meant Holly, turned to Emily and said:

"Was that the house built for Uncle Soames?" And, receiving her nod, went on: "I wish you'd tell me about him, Granny. What became of Aunt Irene? Is she still going? He seems awfully worked-up about something to-night."

Emily laid her finger on her lips, but the word Irene had caught James' ear.

"What's that?" he said, staying a piece of mutton close to his lips. "Who's been seeing her? I knew we hadn't heard the last of that."

"Now, James," said Emily, "eat your dinner. Nobody's been seeing anybody."

James put down his fork.

"There you go," he said. "I might die before you'd tell me of it. Is Soames getting a divorce?"

"Nonsense," said Emily with incomparable aplomb; "Soames is much too sensible."

James had sought his own throat, gathering the long white whiskers together on the skin and bone of it.

"She—she was always...." he said, and with that enigmatic remark the conversation lapsed, for Warmson had returned. But later, when the saddle of mutton had been succeeded by sweet, savoury, and dessert, and Val had received a cheque for twenty pounds and his grandfather's kiss—like no other kiss in the world, from lips pushed out with a sort of fearful suddenness, as if yielding to weakness—he returned to the charge in the hall.

"Tell us about Uncle Soames, Granny. Why is he so keen on mother's getting a divorce?"

"Your Uncle Soames," said Emily, and her voice had in it an exaggerated assurance, "is a lawyer, my dear boy. He's sure to know best."

"Is he?" muttered Val. "But what did become of Aunt Irene? I remember she was jolly good-looking."

"She—er...." said Emily, "behaved very badly. We don't talk about it."

"Well, I don't want everybody at Oxford to know about our affairs," ejaculated Val; "it's a brutal idea. Why couldn't father be prevented without its being made public?"

Emily sighed. She had always lived rather in an atmosphere of divorce, owing to her fashionable proclivities—so many of those whose legs had been under her table having gained a certain notoriety. When, however, it touched her own family, she liked it no better than other people. But she was eminently practical, and a woman of courage, who never pursued a shadow in preference to its substance.

"Your mother," she said, "will be happier if she's quite free, Val. Good-night, my dear boy; and don't wear loud waistcoats up at Oxford, they're not the thing just now. Here's a little present."

With another five pounds in his hand, and a little warmth in his heart, for he was fond of his grandmother, he went out into Park Lane. A wind had cleared the mist, the autumn leaves were rustling, and the stars were shining. With all that money in his pocket an impulse to 'see life' beset him; but he had not gone forty yards in the direction of Piccadilly when Holly's shy face, and her eyes with an imp dancing in their gravity, came up before him, and his hand seemed to be tingling again from the pressure of her warm gloved hand. 'No, dash it!' he thought, 'I'm going home!'

CHAPTER X

SOAMES ENTERTAINS THE FUTURE

It was full late for the river, but the weather was lovely, and summer lingered below the yellowing leaves. Soames took many looks at the day from his riverside garden near Mapledurham that Sunday morning.

With his own hands he put flowers about his little house-boat, and equipped the punt, in which, after lunch, he proposed to take them on the river. Placing those Chinese-looking cushions, he could not tell whether or no he wished to take Annette alone. She was so very pretty—could he trust himself not to say irrevocable words, passing beyond the limits of discretion? Roses on the veranda were still in bloom, and the hedges ever-green, so that there was almost nothing of middle-aged autumn to chill the mood; yet was he nervous, fidgety, strangely distrustful of his powers to steer just the right course. This visit had been planned to produce in Annette and her mother a due sense of his possessions, so that they should be ready to receive with respect any overture he might later be disposed to make. He dressed with great care, making himself neither too young nor too old, very thankful that his hair was still thick and smooth and had no grey in it. Three times he went up to his picture-gallery. If they had any knowledge at all, they must see at once that his collection alone was worth at least thirty thousand pounds. He minutely inspected, too, the pretty bedroom overlooking the river where they would take off their hats. It would be her bedroom if—if the matter went through, and she became his wife. Going up to the dressing-table he passed his hand over the lilac-coloured pincushion, into which were stuck all kinds of pins; a bowl of pot-pourri exhaled a scent that made his head turn just a little. His wife! If only the whole thing could be settled out of hand, and there was not the nightmare of this divorce to be

gone through first; and with gloom puckered on his forehead, he looked out at the river shining beyond the roses and the lawn. Madame Lamotte would never resist this prospect for her child; Annette would never resist her mother. If only he were free! He drove to the station to meet them. What taste Frenchwomen had! Madame Lamotte was in black with touches of lilac colour, Annette in greyish lilac linen, with cream coloured gloves and hat. Rather pale she looked and Londony; and her blue eyes were demure. Waiting for them to come down to lunch, Soames stood in the open french-window of the diningroom moved by that sensuous delight in sunshine and flowers and trees which only came to the full when youth and beauty were there to share it with one. He had ordered the lunch with intense consideration; the wine was a very special Sauterne, the whole appointments of the meal perfect, the coffee served on the veranda super-excellent. Madame Lamotte accepted creme de menthe; Annette refused. Her manners were charming, with just a suspicion of 'the conscious beauty' creeping into them. 'Yes,' thought Soames, 'another year of London and that sort of life, and she'll be spoiled.'

Madame was in sedate French raptures. "Adorable! Le soleil est si bon! How everything is chic, is it not, Annette? Monsieur is a real Monte Cristo." Annette murmured assent, with a look up at Soames which he could not read. He proposed a turn on the river. But to punt two persons when one of them looked so ravishing on those Chinese cushions was merely to suffer from a sense of lost opportunity; so they went but a short way towards Pangbourne, drifting slowly back, with every now and then an autumn leaf dropping on Annette or on her mother's black amplitude. And Soames was not happy, worried by the thought: 'How—when—where—can I say—what?' They did not yet even know that he was married. To tell them he was married might jeopardise his every chance; yet, if he did not definitely make them understand that he wished for Annette's hand, it would be dropping into some other clutch before he was free to claim it.

At tea, which they both took with lemon, Soames spoke of the Transvaal.

"There'll be war," he said.

Madame Lamotte lamented.

"Ces pauvres gens bergers!" Could they not be left to themselves?

Soames smiled—the question seemed to him absurd.

Surely as a woman of business she understood that the British could not abandon their legitimate commercial interests.

"Ah! that!" But Madame Lamotte found that the English were a little hypocrite. They were talking of justice and the Uitlanders, not of business. Monsieur was the first who had spoken to her of that.

"The Boers are only half-civilised," remarked Soames; "they stand in the way of progress. It will never do to let our suzerainty go."

"What does that mean to say? Suzerainty!"

"What a strange word!" Soames became eloquent, roused by these threats to the principle of possession, and stimulated by Annette's eyes fixed on him. He was delighted when presently she said:

"I think Monsieur is right. They should be taught a lesson." She was sensible!

"Of course," he said, "we must act with moderation. I'm no jingo. We must be firm without bullying. Will you come up and see my pictures?" Moving from one to another of these treasures, he soon perceived that they knew nothing. They passed his last Mauve, that remarkable study of a 'Hay-cart going Home,' as if it were a lithograph. He waited almost with awe to see how they would view the jewel of his collection—an Israel's whose price he had watched ascending till he was now almost certain it had reached top value, and would be better on the market again. They did not view it at all. This was a shock; and yet to have in Annette a virgin taste to form would be better than to have the silly, half-baked predilections of the English middle-class to deal with. At the end of the gallery was a Meissonier of which he was rather ashamed —Meissonier was so steadily going down. Madame Lamotte stopped before it.

"Meissonier! Ah! What a jewel!" Soames took advantage of that moment. Very gently touching Annette's arm, he said:

"How do you like my place, Annette?"

She did not shrink, did not respond; she looked at him full, looked down, and murmured:

"Who would not like it? It is so beautiful!"

"Perhaps some day—" Soames said, and stopped.

So pretty she was, so self-possessed—she frightened him. Those cornflower-blue eyes, the turn of that creamy neck, her delicate curves—she was a standing temptation to indiscretion! No! No! One must be sure of one's ground—much surer! 'If I hold off,' he thought, 'it will tantalise her.' And he crossed over to Madame Lamotte, who was still in front of the Meissonier.

"Yes, that's quite a good example of his later work. You must come again, Madame, and see them lighted up. You must both come and spend a night."

Enchanted, would it not be beautiful to see them lighted? By moonlight too, the river must be ravishing!

Annette murmured:

"Thou art sentimental, Maman!"

Sentimental! That black-robed, comely, substantial Frenchwoman of the world! And suddenly he was certain as he could be that there was no sentiment in either of them. All the better. Of what use sentiment? And yet....!

He drove to the station with them, and saw them into the train. To the tightened pressure of his hand it seemed that Annette's fingers responded just a little; her face smiled at him through the dark.

He went back to the carriage, brooding. "Go on home, Jordan," he said to the coachman; "I'll walk." And he strode out into the darkening lanes, caution and the desire of possession playing see-saw within him. 'Bon soir, monsieur!' How softly she had said it. To know what was in her mind! The French—they were like cats—one could tell nothing! But—how pretty! What a perfect young thing to hold in one's arms! What a mother for his heir! And he thought, with a smile, of his family and their surprise at a French wife, and their curiosity, and of the way he would play with it and buffet it confound them!

The poplars sighed in the darkness; an owl hooted. Shadows deepened in the water. 'I will and must be free,' he thought. 'I won't hang about any longer. I'll go and see Irene. If you want things done, do them yourself. I must live again—live and move and have my being.' And in echo to that queer biblical church-bells chimed the call to evening prayer.

CHAPTER XI

AND VISITS THE PAST

On a Tuesday evening after dining at his club Soames set out to do what required more courage and perhaps less delicacy than anything he had yet undertaken in his life—save perhaps his birth, and one other action. He chose the evening, indeed, partly because Irene was more likely to be in, but mainly because he had failed to find sufficient resolution by daylight, had needed wine to give him extra daring.

He left his hansom on the Embankment, and walked up to the Old Church, uncertain of the block of flats where he knew she lived. He found it hiding behind a much larger mansion; and having read the name, 'Mrs. Irene Heron'—Heron, forsooth! Her maiden name: so she used that again, did she?—he stepped back into the road to look up at the windows of the first floor. Light was coming through in the corner flat, and he could hear a piano being played. He had never had a love of music, had secretly borne it a grudge in the old days when so often she had turned to her piano, making of it a refuge place into which she knew he could not enter. Repulse! The long repulse, at first restrained and secret, at last open! Bitter memory came with that sound. It must be she playing, and thus almost assured of seeing her, he stood more undecided than ever. Shivers of anticipation ran through him; his tongue felt dry, his heart beat fast. 'I have no cause to be afraid,' he thought. And then the lawyer stirred within him. Was he doing a foolish thing? Ought he not to have arranged a formal meeting in the presence of her trustee? No! Not before that fellow Jolyon, who sympathised with her! Never! He crossed back into the doorway, and, slowly, to keep down the beating of his heart, mounted the single flight of stairs and rang the bell. When the door was opened to him his sensations were regulated by the scent which came—that perfume—from away back in the past, bringing muffled remembrance: fragrance of a drawing-room he used to enter, of a house he used to own—perfume of dried rose-leaves and honey!

"Say, Mr. Forsyte," he said, "your mistress will see me, I know." He had thought this out; she would think it was Jolyon!

When the maid was gone and he was alone in the tiny hall, where the light was dim from one pearly-shaded sconce, and walls, carpet, everything was silvery, making the walled-in space all ghostly, he could only think ridiculously: 'Shall I go in with my overcoat on, or take it off?' The music ceased; the maid said from the doorway:

"Will you walk in, sir?"

Soames walked in. He noted mechanically that all was still silvery, and that the upright piano was of satinwood. She had risen and stood recoiled against it; her hand, placed on the keys as if groping for support, had struck a sudden discord, held for a moment, and released. The light from the shaded piano-candle fell on her neck, leaving her face rather in shadow. She was in a black evening dress, with a sort of mantilla over her shoulders—he did not remember ever having seen her in black, and the thought passed through him: 'She dresses even when she's alone.'

"You!" he heard her whisper.

Many times Soames had rehearsed this scene in fancy. Rehearsal served him not at all. He simply could not speak. He had never thought that the sight of this woman whom he had once so passionately desired, so completely owned, and whom he had not seen for twelve years, could affect him in this way. He had imagined himself speaking and acting, half as man of business, half as judge. And now it was as if he were in the presence not of a mere woman and erring wife, but of some force, subtle and elusive as atmosphere itself within him and outside. A kind of defensive irony welled up in him.

"Yes, it's a queer visit! I hope you're well."

"Thank you. Will you sit down?"

She had moved away from the piano, and gone over to a window-seat, sinking on to it, with her hands clasped in her lap. Light fell on her there, so that Soames could see her face, eyes, hair, strangely as he remembered them, strangely beautiful.

He sat down on the edge of a satinwood chair, upholstered with silver-coloured stuff, close to where he was standing.

"You have not changed," he said.

"No? What have you come for?"

"To discuss things."

"I have heard what you want from your cousin."

"Well?"

"I am willing. I have always been."

The sound of her voice, reserved and close, the sight of her figure watchfully poised, defensive, was helping him now. A thousand memories of her, ever on the watch against him, stirred, and...

"Perhaps you will be good enough, then, to give me information on which I can act. The law must be complied with."

"I have none to give you that you don't know of."

"Twelve years! Do you suppose I can believe that?"

"I don't suppose you will believe anything I say; but it's the truth."

Soames looked at her hard. He had said that she had not changed; now he perceived that she had. Not in face, except that it was more beautiful; not in form, except that it was a little fuller—no! She had changed spiritually. There was more of her, as it were, something of activity and daring, where there had been sheer passive resistance. 'Ah!' he thought, 'that's her independent income! Confound Uncle Jolyon!'

"I suppose you're comfortably off now?" he said.

"Thank you, yes."

"Why didn't you let me provide for you? I would have, in spite of everything."

A faint smile came on her lips; but she did not answer.

"You are still my wife," said Soames. Why he said that, what he meant by it, he knew neither when he spoke nor after. It was a truism almost preposterous, but its effect was startling. She rose from the window-seat, and stood for a moment perfectly still, looking at him. He could see her bosom heaving. Then she turned to the window and threw it open.

"Why do that?" he said sharply. "You'll catch cold in that dress. I'm not dangerous." And he uttered a little sad laugh.

She echoed it—faintly, bitterly.

"It was—habit."

"Rather odd habit," said Soames as bitterly. "Shut the window!"

She shut it and sat down again. She had developed power, this woman—this—wife of his! He felt it issuing from her as she sat there, in a sort of armour. And almost unconsciously he rose and moved nearer; he wanted to see the expression on her face. Her eyes met his unflinching. Heavens! how clear they were, and what a dark brown against that white skin, and that burnt-amber hair! And how white her shoulders.

Funny sensation this! He ought to hate her.

"You had better tell me," he said; "it's to your advantage to be free as well as to mine. That old matter is too old."

"I have told you."

"Do you mean to tell me there has been nothing—nobody?"

"Nobody. You must go to your own life."

Stung by that retort, Soames moved towards the piano and back to the hearth, to and fro, as he had been wont in the old days in their drawing-room when his feelings were too much for him.

"That won't do," he said. "You deserted me. In common justice it's for you...."

He saw her shrug those white shoulders, heard her murmur:

"Yes. Why didn't you divorce me then? Should I have cared?"

He stopped, and looked at her intently with a sort of curiosity. What on earth did she do with herself, if she really lived quite alone? And why had he not divorced her? The old feeling that she had never understood him, never done him justice, bit him while he stared at her.

"Why couldn't you have made me a good wife?" he said.

"Yes; it was a crime to marry you. I have paid for it. You will find some way perhaps. You needn't mind my name, I have none to lose. Now I think you had better go."

A sense of defeat—of being defrauded of his self-justification, and of something else beyond power of explanation to himself, beset Soames like the breath of a cold fog. Mechanically he reached up, took from the mantel-shelf a little china bowl, reversed it, and said:

"Lowestoft. Where did you get this? I bought its fellow at Jobson's." And, visited by the sudden memory of how, those many years ago, he and she had bought china together, he remained staring at the little bowl, as if it contained all the past. Her voice roused him.

"Take it. I don't want it."

Soames put it back on the shelf.

"Will you shake hands?" he said.

A faint smile curved her lips. She held out her hand. It was cold to his rather feverish touch. 'She's made of ice,' he thought—'she was always made of ice!' But even as that thought darted through him, his senses were assailed by the perfume of her dress and body, as though the warmth within her, which had never been for him, were struggling to show its presence. And he turned on his heel. He walked

out and away, as if someone with a whip were after him, not even looking for a cab, glad of the empty Embankment and the cold river, and the thick-strewn shadows of the plane-tree leaves—confused, flurried, sore at heart, and vaguely disturbed, as though he had made some deep mistake whose consequences he could not foresee. And the fantastic thought suddenly assailed him if instead of, 'I think you had better go,' she had said, 'I think you had better stay!' What should he have felt, what would he have done? That cursed attraction of her was there for him even now, after all these years of estrangement and bitter thoughts. It was there, ready to mount to his head at a sign, a touch. 'I was a fool to go!' he muttered. 'I've advanced nothing. Who could imagine? I never thought!' Memory, flown back to the first years of his marriage, played him torturing tricks. She had not deserved to keep her beauty—the beauty he had owned and known so well. And a kind of bitterness at the tenacity of his own admiration welled up in him. Most men would have hated the sight of her, as she had deserved. She had spoiled his life, wounded his pride to death, defrauded him of a son. And yet the mere sight of her, cold and resisting as ever, had this power to upset him utterly! It was some damned magnetism she had! And no wonder if, as she asserted; she had lived untouched these last twelve years. So Bosinney—cursed be his memory!—had lived on all this time with her! Soames could not tell whether he was glad of that knowledge or no.

Nearing his Club at last he stopped to buy a paper. A headline ran: 'Boers reported to repudiate suzerainty!' Suzerainty! 'Just like her!' he thought: 'she always did. Suzerainty! I still have it by rights. She must be awfully lonely in that wretched little flat!'

CHAPTER XII

ON FORSYTE 'CHANGE

Soames belonged to two clubs, 'The Connoisseurs,' which he put on his cards and seldom visited, and 'The Remove,' which he did not put on his cards and frequented. He had joined this Liberal institution five years ago, having made sure that its members were now nearly all sound Conservatives in heart and pocket, if not in principle. Uncle Nicholas had put him up. The fine reading-room was decorated in the Adam style.

On entering that evening he glanced at the tape for any news about the Transvaal, and noted that Consols were down seven-sixteenths since the morning. He was turning away to seek the reading-room when a voice behind him said:

"Well, Soames, that went off all right."

It was Uncle Nicholas, in a frock-coat and his special cut-away collar, with a black tie passed through a ring. Heavens! How young and dapper he looked at eighty-two!

"I think Roger'd have been pleased," his uncle went on. "The thing was very well done. Blackley's? I'll make a note of them. Buxton's done me no good. These Boers are upsetting me—that fellow Chamberlain's driving the country into war. What do you think?"

"Bound to come," murmured Soames.

Nicholas passed his hand over his thin, clean-shaven cheeks, very rosy after his summer cure; a slight pout had gathered on his lips. This business had revived all his Liberal principles.

"I mistrust that chap; he's a stormy petrel. House-property will go down if there's war. You'll have trouble with Roger's estate. I often told him he ought to get out of some of his houses. He was an opinionated beggar."

'There was a pair of you!' thought Soames. But he never argued with an uncle, in that way preserving their opinion of him as 'a long-headed chap,' and the legal care of their property.

"They tell me at Timothy's," said Nicholas, lowering his voice, "that Dartie has gone off at last. That'll be a relief to your father. He was a rotten egg."

Again Soames nodded. If there was a subject on which the Forsytes really agreed, it was the character of Montague Dartie.

"You take care," said Nicholas, "or he'll turn up again. Winifred had better have the tooth out, I should say. No use preserving what's gone bad."

Soames looked at him sideways. His nerves, exacerbated by the interview he had just come through, disposed him to see a personal allusion in those words.

"I'm advising her," he said shortly.

"Well," said Nicholas, "the brougham's waiting; I must get home. I'm very poorly. Remember me to your father."

And having thus reconsecrated the ties of blood, he passed down the steps at his youthful gait and was wrapped into his fur coat by the junior porter.

'I've never known Uncle Nicholas other than "very poorly,"' mused Soames, 'or seen him look other than everlasting. What a family! Judging by him, I've got thirty-eight years of health before me. Well, I'm not going to waste them.' And going over to a mirror he stood looking at his face. Except for a line or two, and three or four grey hairs in his little dark moustache, had he aged any more than Irene? The prime of life—he and she in the very prime of life! And a fantastic thought shot into his mind. Absurd! Idiotic! But again it came. And genuinely alarmed by the recurrence, as one is by the second fit of shivering which presages a feverish cold, he sat down on the weighing machine. Eleven stone! He had not varied two pounds in twenty years. What age was she? Nearly thirty-seven—not too old to have a child—not at all! Thirty-seven on the ninth of next month. He remembered her birthday well—he had always observed it religiously, even that last birthday so soon before she left him, when he was almost certain she was faithless. Four birthdays in his house. He had looked forward to them, because his gifts had meant a semblance of gratitude, a certain attempt at warmth. Except, indeed, that last birthday—which had tempted him to be too religious! And he shied away in thought. Memory heaps dead leaves on corpse-like deeds, from under which they do but vaguely offend the sense. And then he thought suddenly: 'I could send her a present for her birthday. After all, we're Christians! Couldn't!—couldn't we join up again!' And he uttered a deep sigh sitting there. Annette! Ah! but between him and Annette was the need for that wretched divorce suit! And how?

"A man can always work these things, if he'll take it on himself," Jolyon had said.

But why should he take the scandal on himself with his whole career as a pillar of the law at stake? It was not fair! It was quixotic! Twelve years' separation in which he had taken no steps to free himself put out of court the possibility of using her conduct with Bosinney as a ground for divorcing her. By doing nothing to secure relief he had acquiesced, even if the evidence could now be gathered, which was more than doubtful. Besides, his own pride would never let him use that old incident, he had suffered from it too much. No! Nothing but fresh misconduct on her part—but she had denied it; and—almost—he had believed her. Hung up! Utterly hung up!

He rose from the scooped-out red velvet seat with a feeling of constriction about his vitals. He would never sleep with this going on in him! And, taking coat and hat again, he went out, moving eastward. In Trafalgar Square he became aware of some special commotion travelling towards him out of the mouth of the Strand. It materialised in newspaper men calling out so loudly that no words whatever could be heard. He stopped to listen, and one came by.

"Payper! Special! Ultimatum by Krooger! Declaration of war!" Soames bought the paper. There it was in the stop press....! His first thought was: 'The Boers are committing suicide.' His second: 'Is there anything still I ought to sell?' If so he had missed the chance—there would certainly be a slump in the city to-morrow. He swallowed this thought with a nod of defiance. That ultimatum was insolent—sooner than let it pass he was prepared to lose money. They wanted a lesson, and they would get it; but it would take three months at least to bring them to heel. There weren't the troops out there; always behind time, the Government! Confound those newspaper rats! What was the use of waking everybody up? Breakfast to-morrow was quite soon enough. And he thought with alarm of his father. They would cry it down Park Lane. Hailing a hansom, he got in and told the man to drive there.

James and Emily had just gone up to bed, and after communicating the news to Warmson, Soames prepared to follow. He paused by after-thought to say:

"What do you think of it, Warmson?"

The butler ceased passing a hat brush over the silk hat Soames had taken off, and, inclining his face a little forward, said in a low voice: "Well, sir, they 'aven't a chance, of course; but I'm told they're very good shots. I've got a son in the Inniskillings."

"You, Warmson? Why, I didn't know you were married."

"No, sir. I don't talk of it. I expect he'll be going out."

The slighter shock Soames had felt on discovering that he knew so little of one whom he thought he knew so well was lost in the slight shock of discovering that the war might touch one personally. Born in the year of the Crimean War, he had only come to consciousness by the time the Indian Mutiny was over; since then the many little wars of the British Empire had been entirely professional, quite unconnected with the Forsytes and all they stood for in the body politic. This war would surely be no exception. But his mind ran hastily over his family. Two of the Haymans, he had heard, were in some Yeomanry or other—it had always been a pleasant thought, there was a certain distinction about the Yeomanry; they wore, or used to wear, a blue uniform with silver about it, and rode horses. And Archibald, he remembered, had once on a time joined the Militia, but had given it up because his father, Nicholas, had made such a fuss about his 'wasting his time peacocking about in a uniform.' Recently he had heard somewhere that young Nicholas' eldest, very young Nicholas, had become a Volunteer. 'No,' thought Soames, mounting the stairs slowly, 'there's nothing in that!'

He stood on the landing outside his parents' bed and dressing rooms, debating whether or not to put his nose in and say a reassuring word. Opening the landing window, he listened. The rumble from Piccadilly was all the sound he heard, and with the thought, 'If these motor-cars increase, it'll affect house property,' he was about to pass on up to the room always kept ready for him when he heard, distant as yet, the hoarse rushing call of a newsvendor. There it was, and coming past the house! He knocked on his mother's door and went in.

His father was sitting up in bed, with his ears pricked under the white hair which Emily kept so beautifully cut. He looked pink, and extraordinarily clean, in his setting of white sheet and pillow, out of which the points of his high, thin, nightgowned shoulders emerged in small peaks. His eyes alone, grey and distrustful under their withered lids, were moving from the window to Emily, who in a wrapper was walking up and down, squeezing a rubber ball attached to a scent bottle. The room reeked faintly of the eau-de-Cologne she was spraying.

"All right!" said Soames, "it's not a fire. The Boers have declared war—that's all."

Emily stopped her spraying.

"Oh!" was all she said, and looked at James.

Soames, too, looked at his father. He was taking it differently from their expectation, as if some thought, strange to them, were working in him.

"H'm!" he muttered suddenly, "I shan't live to see the end of this."

"Nonsense, James! It'll be over by Christmas."

"What do you know about it?" James answered her with asperity. "It's a pretty mess at this time of night, too!" He lapsed into silence, and his wife and son, as if hypnotised, waited for him to say: 'I can't tell—I don't know; I knew how it would be!' But he did not. The grey eyes shifted, evidently seeing nothing in the room; then movement occurred under the bedclothes, and the knees were drawn up suddenly to a great height.

"They ought to send out Roberts. It all comes from that fellow Gladstone and his Majuba."

The two listeners noted something beyond the usual in his voice, something of real anxiety. It was as if he had said: 'I shall never see the old country peaceful and safe again. I shall have to die before I know she's won.' And in spite of the feeling that James must not be encouraged to be fussy, they were touched. Soames went up to the bedside and stroked his father's hand which had emerged from under the bedclothes, long and wrinkled with veins.

"Mark my words!" said James, "consols will go to par. For all I know, Val may go and enlist."

"Oh, come, James!" cried Emily, "you talk as if there were danger."

Her comfortable voice seemed to soothe James for once.

"Well," he muttered, "I told you how it would be. I don't know, I'm sure—nobody tells me anything. Are you sleeping here, my boy?"

The crisis was past, he would now compose himself to his normal degree of anxiety; and, assuring his father that he was sleeping in the house, Soames pressed his hand, and went up to his room.

The following afternoon witnessed the greatest crowd Timothy's had known for many a year. On national occasions, such as this, it was, indeed, almost impossible to avoid going there. Not that there was any danger or rather only just enough to make it necessary to assure each other that there was none.

Nicholas was there early. He had seen Soames the night before—Soames had said it was bound to come. This old Kruger was in his dotage—why, he must be seventy-five if he was a day!

(Nicholas was eighty-two.) What had Timothy said? He had had a fit after Majuba. These Boers were a grasping lot! The dark-haired Francie, who had arrived on his heels, with the contradictory touch which became the free spirit of a daughter of Roger, chimed in:

"Kettle and pot, Uncle Nicholas. What price the Uitlanders?" What price, indeed! A new expression, and believed to be due to her brother George.

Aunt Juley thought Francie ought not to say such a thing. Dear Mrs. MacAnder's boy, Charlie MacAnder, was one, and no one could call him grasping. At this Francie uttered one of her mots, scandalising, and so frequently repeated:

"Well, his father's a Scotchman, and his mother's a cat."

Aunt Juley covered her ears, too late, but Aunt Hester smiled; as for Nicholas, he pouted—witticism of which he was not the author was hardly to his taste. Just then Marian Tweetyman arrived, followed almost immediately by young Nicholas. On seeing his son, Nicholas rose.

"Well, I must be going," he said, "Nick here will tell you what'll win the race." And with this hit at his eldest, who, as a pillar of accountancy, and director of an insurance company, was no more addicted to sport than his father had ever been, he departed. Dear Nicholas! What race was that? Or was it only one of his jokes? He was a wonderful man for his age! How many lumps would dear Marian take? And how were Giles and Jesse? Aunt Juley supposed their Yeomanry would be very busy now, guarding the coast, though of course the Boers had no ships. But one never knew what the French might do if they had the chance, especially since that dreadful Fashoda scare, which had upset Timothy so terribly that he had made no investments for months afterwards. It was the ingratitude of the Boers that was so dreadful, after everything had been done for them—Dr. Jameson imprisoned, and he was so nice, Mrs. MacAnder had always said. And Sir Alfred Milner sent out to talk to them—such a clever man! She didn't know what they wanted.

But at this moment occurred one of those sensations—so precious at Timothy's—which great occasions sometimes bring forth:

"Miss June Forsyte."

Aunts Juley and Hester were on their feet at once, trembling from smothered resentment, and old affection bubbling up, and pride at the return of a prodigal June! Well, this was a surprise! Dear June—after all these years! And how well she was looking! Not changed at all! It was almost on their lips to add, 'And how is your dear grandfather?' forgetting in that giddy moment that poor dear Jolyon had been in his grave for seven years now.

Ever the most courageous and downright of all the Forsytes, June, with her decided chin and her spirited eyes and her hair like flame, sat down, slight and short, on a gilt chair with a bead-worked seat, for all the world as if ten years had not elapsed since she had been to see them—ten years of travel and independence and devotion to lame ducks. Those ducks of late had been all definitely painters, etchers, or sculptors, so that her impatience with the Forsytes and their hopelessly inartistic outlook had become intense. Indeed, she had almost ceased to believe that her family existed, and looked round her now with a sort of challenging directness which brought exquisite discomfort to the roomful. She had not expected to meet any of them but 'the poor old things'; and why she had come to see them she hardly knew, except that, while on her way from Oxford Street to a studio in Latimer Road, she had suddenly remembered them with compunction as two long-neglected old lame ducks.

Aunt Juley broke the hush again. "We've just been saying, dear, how dreadful it is about these Boers! And what an impudent thing of that old Kruger!"

"Impudent!" said June. "I think he's quite right. What business have we to meddle with them? If he turned out all those wretched Uitlanders it would serve them right. They're only after money."

The silence of sensation was broken by Francie saying:

"What? Are you a pro-Boer?" (undoubtedly the first use of that expression).

"Well! Why can't we leave them alone?" said June, just as, in the open doorway, the maid said "Mr. Soames Forsyte." Sensation on sensation! Greeting was almost held up by curiosity to see how June and he would take this encounter, for it was shrewdly suspected, if not quite known, that they had not met since that old and lamentable affair of her fiance Bosinney with Soames' wife. They were seen to just touch each other's hands, and look each at the other's left eye only. Aunt Juley came at once to the rescue:

"Dear June is so original. Fancy, Soames, she thinks the Boers are not to blame."

"They only want their independence," said June; "and why shouldn't they have it?"

"Because," answered Soames, with his smile a little on one side, "they happen to have agreed to our suzerainty."

"Suzerainty!" repeated June scornfully; "we shouldn't like anyone's suzerainty over us."

"They got advantages in payment," replied Soames; "a contract is a contract."

"Contracts are not always just," fumed out June, "and when they're not, they ought to be broken. The Boers are much the weaker. We could afford to be generous."

Soames sniffed. "That's mere sentiment," he said.

Aunt Hester, to whom nothing was more awful than any kind of disagreement, here leaned forward and remarked decisively:

"What lovely weather it has been for the time of year?"

But June was not to be diverted.

"I don't know why sentiment should be sneered at. It's the best thing in the world." She looked defiantly round, and Aunt Juley had to intervene again:

"Have you bought any pictures lately, Soames?"

Her incomparable instinct for the wrong subject had not failed her. Soames flushed. To disclose the name of his latest purchases would be like walking into the jaws of disdain. For somehow they all knew of June's predilection for 'genius' not yet on its legs, and her contempt for 'success' unless she had had a finger in securing it.

"One or two," he muttered.

But June's face had changed; the Forsyte within her was seeing its chance. Why should not Soames buy some of the pictures of Eric Cobbly—her last lame duck? And she promptly opened her attack: Did Soames know his work? It was so wonderful. He was the coming man.

Oh, yes, Soames knew his work. It was in his view 'splashy,' and would never get hold of the public.

June blazed up.

"Of course it won't; that's the last thing one would wish for. I thought you were a connoisseur, not a picture-dealer."

"Of course Soames is a connoisseur," Aunt Juley said hastily; "he has wonderful taste—he can always tell beforehand what's going to be successful."

"Oh!" gasped June, and sprang up from the bead-covered chair, "I hate that standard of success. Why can't people buy things because they like them?"

"You mean," said Francie, "because you like them."

And in the slight pause young Nicholas was heard saying gently that Violet (his fourth) was taking lessons in pastel, he didn't know if they were any use.

"Well, good-bye, Auntie," said June; "I must get on," and kissing her aunts, she looked defiantly round the room, said "Good-bye" again, and went. A breeze seemed to pass out with her, as if everyone had sighed.

The third sensation came before anyone had time to speak:

"Mr. James Forsyte."

James came in using a stick slightly and wrapped in a fur coat which gave him a fictitious bulk.

Everyone stood up. James was so old; and he had not been at Timothy's for nearly two years.

"It's hot in here," he said.

Soames divested him of his coat, and as he did so could not help admiring the glossy way his father was turned out. James sat down, all knees, elbows, frock-coat, and long white whiskers.

"What's the meaning of that?" he said.

Though there was no apparent sense in his words, they all knew that he was referring to June. His eyes searched his son's face.

"I thought I'd come and see for myself. What have they answered Kruger?"

Soames took out an evening paper, and read the headline.

"Instant action by our Government—state of war existing!"

"Ah!" said James, and sighed. "I was afraid they'd cut and run like old Gladstone. We shall finish with them this time."

All stared at him. James! Always fussy, nervous, anxious! James with his continual, 'I told you how it would be!' and his pessimism, and his cautious investments. There was something uncanny about such resolution in this the oldest living Forsyte.

"Where's Timothy?" said James. "He ought to pay attention to this."

Aunt Juley said she didn't know; Timothy had not said much at lunch to-day. Aunt Hester rose and threaded her way out of the room, and Francie said rather maliciously:

"The Boers are a hard nut to crack, Uncle James."

"H'm!" muttered James. "Where do you get your information? Nobody tells me."

Young Nicholas remarked in his mild voice that Nick (his eldest) was now going to drill regularly.

"Ah!" muttered James, and stared before him—his thoughts were on Val. "He's got to look after his mother," he said, "he's got no time for drilling and that, with that father of his." This cryptic saying produced silence, until he spoke again.

"What did June want here?" And his eyes rested with suspicion on all of them in turn. "Her father's a rich man now." The conversation turned on Jolyon, and when he had been seen last. It was supposed that he went abroad and saw all sorts of people now that his wife was dead; his water-colours were on the line, and he was a successful man. Francie went so far as to say:

"I should like to see him again; he was rather a dear."

Aunt Juley recalled how he had gone to sleep on the sofa one day, where James was sitting. He had always been very amiable; what did Soames think?

Knowing that Jolyon was Irene's trustee, all felt the delicacy of this question, and looked at Soames with interest. A faint pink had come up in his cheeks.

"He's going grey," he said.

Indeed! Had Soames seen him? Soames nodded, and the pink vanished.

James said suddenly: "Well—I don't know, I can't tell."

It so exactly expressed the sentiment of everybody present that there was something behind everything, that nobody responded. But at this moment Aunt Hester returned.

"Timothy," she said in a low voice, "Timothy has bought a map, and he's put in—he's put in three flags."

Timothy had! A sigh went round the company.

If Timothy had indeed put in three flags already, well!—it showed what the nation could do when it

was roused. The war was as good as over.

CHAPTER XIII

JOLYON FINDS OUT WHERE HE IS

Jolyon stood at the window in Holly's old night nursery, converted into a studio, not because it had a north light, but for its view over the prospect away to the Grand Stand at Epsom. He shifted to the side window which overlooked the stableyard, and whistled down to the dog Balthasar who lay for ever under the clock tower. The old dog looked up and wagged his tail. 'Poor old boy!' thought Jolyon, shifting back to the other window.

He had been restless all this week, since his attempt to prosecute trusteeship, uneasy in his conscience which was ever acute, disturbed in his sense of compassion which was easily excited, and with a queer sensation as if his feeling for beauty had received some definite embodiment. Autumn was getting hold of the old oak-tree, its leaves were browning. Sunshine had been plentiful and hot this summer. As with trees, so with men's lives! 'I ought to live long,' thought Jolyon; 'I'm getting mildewed for want of heat. If I can't work, I shall be off to Paris.' But memory of Paris gave him no pleasure. Besides, how could he go? He must stay and see what Soames was going to do. 'I'm her trustee. I can't leave her unprotected,' he thought. It had been striking him as curious how very clearly he could still see Irene in her little drawing-room which he had only twice entered. Her beauty must have a sort of poignant harmony! No literal portrait would ever do her justice; the essence of her was—ah I what?... The noise of hoofs called him back to the other window. Holly was riding into the yard on her long-tailed 'palfrey.' She looked up and he waved to her. She had been rather silent lately; getting old, he supposed, beginning to want her future, as they all did—youngsters!

Time was certainly the devil! And with the feeling that to waste this swift-travelling commodity was unforgivable folly, he took up his brush. But it was no use; he could not concentrate his eye—besides, the light was going. 'I'll go up to town,' he thought. In the hall a servant met him.

"A lady to see you, sir; Mrs. Heron."

Extraordinary coincidence! Passing into the picture-gallery, as it was still called, he saw Irene standing over by the window.

She came towards him saying:

"I've been trespassing; I came up through the coppice and garden. I always used to come that way to see Uncle Jolyon."

"You couldn't trespass here," replied Jolyon; "history makes that impossible. I was just thinking of you."

Irene smiled. And it was as if something shone through; not mere spirituality—serener, completer, more alluring.

"History!" she answered; "I once told Uncle Jolyon that love was for ever. Well, it isn't. Only aversion lasts."

Jolyon stared at her. Had she got over Bosinney at last?

"Yes!" he said, "aversion's deeper than love or hate because it's a natural product of the nerves, and we don't change them."

"I came to tell you that Soames has been to see me. He said a thing that frightened me. He said: 'You are still my wife!'"

"What!" ejaculated Jolyon. "You ought not to live alone." And he continued to stare at her, afflicted by the thought that where Beauty was, nothing ever ran quite straight, which, no doubt, was why so many people looked on it as immoral.

"What more?"

"He asked me to shake hands."

"Did you?"

"Yes. When he came in I'm sure he didn't want to; he changed while he was there."

"Ah! you certainly ought not to go on living there alone."

"I know no woman I could ask; and I can't take a lover to order, Cousin Jolyon."

"Heaven forbid!" said Jolyon. "What a damnable position! Will you stay to dinner? No? Well, let me see you back to town; I wanted to go up this evening."

"Truly?"

"Truly. I'll be ready in five minutes."

On that walk to the station they talked of pictures and music, contrasting the English and French characters and the difference in their attitude to Art. But to Jolyon the colours in the hedges of the long straight lane, the twittering of chaffinches who kept pace with them, the perfume of weeds being already burned, the turn of her neck, the fascination of those dark eyes bent on him now and then, the lure of her whole figure, made a deeper impression than the remarks they exchanged. Unconsciously he held himself straighter, walked with a more elastic step.

In the train he put her through a sort of catechism as to what she did with her days.

Made her dresses, shopped, visited a hospital, played her piano, translated from the French.

She had regular work from a publisher, it seemed, which supplemented her income a little. She seldom went out in the evening. "I've been living alone so long, you see, that I don't mind it a bit. I believe I'm naturally solitary."

"I don't believe that," said Jolyon. "Do you know many people?"

"Very few."

At Waterloo they took a hansom, and he drove with her to the door of her mansions. Squeezing her hand at parting, he said:

"You know, you could always come to us at Robin Hill; you must let me know everything that happens. Good-bye, Irene."

"Good-bye," she answered softly.

Jolyon climbed back into his cab, wondering why he had not asked her to dine and go to the theatre with him. Solitary, starved, hung-up life that she had! "Hotch Potch Club," he said through the trap-door. As his hansom debouched on to the Embankment, a man in top-hat and overcoat passed, walking quickly, so close to the wall that he seemed to be scraping it.

'By Jove!' thought Jolyon; 'Soames himself! What's he up to now?' And, stopping the cab round the corner, he got out and retraced his steps to where he could see the entrance to the mansions. Soames had halted in front of them, and was looking up at the light in her windows. 'If he goes in,' thought Jolyon, 'what shall I do? What have I the right to do?' What the fellow had said was true. She was still his wife, absolutely without protection from annoyance! 'Well, if he goes in,' he thought, 'I follow.' And he began moving towards the mansions. Again Soames advanced; he was in the very entrance now. But suddenly he stopped, spun round on his heel, and came back towards the river. 'What now?' thought Jolyon. 'In a dozen steps he'll recognise me.' And he turned tail. His cousin's footsteps kept pace with his own. But he reached his cab, and got in before Soames had turned the corner. "Go on!" he said through the trap. Soames' figure ranged up alongside.

"Hansom!" he said. "Engaged? Hallo!"

"Hallo!" answered Jolyon. "You?"

The quick suspicion on his cousin's face, white in the lamplight, decided him.

"I can give you a lift," he said, "if you're going West."

"Thanks," answered Soames, and got in.

"I've been seeing Irene," said Jolyon when the cab had started.

"Indeed!"

"You went to see her yesterday yourself, I understand."

"I did," said Soames; "she's my wife, you know."

The tone, the half-lifted sneering lip, roused sudden anger in Jolyon; but he subdued it.

"You ought to know best," he said, "but if you want a divorce it's not very wise to go seeing her, is it? One can't run with the hare and hunt with the hounds?"

"You're very good to warn me," said Soames, "but I have not made up my mind."

"She has," said Jolyon, looking straight before him; "you can't take things up, you know, as they were twelve years ago."

"That remains to be seen."

"Look here!" said Jolyon, "she's in a damnable position, and I am the only person with any legal say in her affairs."

"Except myself," retorted Soames, "who am also in a damnable position. Hers is what she made for herself; mine what she made for me. I am not at all sure that in her own interests I shan't require her to return to me."

"What!" exclaimed Jolyon; and a shiver went through his whole body.

"I don't know what you may mean by 'what,'" answered Soames coldly; "your say in her affairs is confined to paying out her income; please bear that in mind. In choosing not to disgrace her by a divorce, I retained my rights, and, as I say, I am not at all sure that I shan't require to exercise them."

"My God!" ejaculated Jolyon, and he uttered a short laugh.

"Yes," said Soames, and there was a deadly quality in his voice. "I've not forgotten the nickname your father gave me, 'The man of property'! I'm not called names for nothing."

"This is fantastic," murmured Jolyon. Well, the fellow couldn't force his wife to live with him. Those days were past, anyway! And he looked around at Soames with the thought: 'Is he real, this man?' But Soames looked very real, sitting square yet almost elegant with the clipped moustache on his pale face, and a tooth showing where a lip was lifted in a fixed smile. There was a long silence, while Jolyon thought: 'Instead of helping her, I've made things worse.' Suddenly Soames said:

"It would be the best thing that could happen to her in many ways."

At those words such a turmoil began taking place in Jolyon that he could barely sit still in the cab. It was as if he were boxed up with hundreds of thousands of his countrymen, boxed up with that something in the national character which had always been to him revolting, something which he knew to be extremely natural and yet which seemed to him inexplicable—their intense belief in contracts and vested rights, their complacent sense of virtue in the exaction of those rights. Here beside him in the cab was the very embodiment, the corporeal sum as it were, of the possessive instinct—his own kinsman, too! It was uncanny and intolerable! 'But there's something more in it than that!' he thought with a sick feeling. 'The dog, they say, returns to his vomit! The sight of her has reawakened something. Beauty! The devil's in it!'

"As I say," said Soames, "I have not made up my mind. I shall be obliged if you will kindly leave her quite alone."

Jolyon bit his lips; he who had always hated rows almost welcomed the thought of one now.

"I can give you no such promise," he said shortly.

"Very well," said Soames, "then we know where we are. I'll get down here." And stopping the cab he got out without word or sign of farewell. Jolyon travelled on to his Club.

The first news of the war was being called in the streets, but he paid no attention. What could he do to help her? If only his father were alive! He could have done so much! But why could he not do all that his father could have done? Was he not old enough?—turned fifty and twice married, with grown-up daughters and a son. 'Queer,' he thought. 'If she were plain I shouldn't be thinking twice about it. Beauty is the devil, when you're sensitive to it!' And into the Club reading-room he went with a disturbed heart. In that very room he and Bosinney had talked one summer afternoon; he well

remembered even now the disguised and secret lecture he had given that young man in the interests of June, the diagnosis of the Forsytes he had hazarded; and how he had wondered what sort of woman it was he was warning him against. And now! He was almost in want of a warning himself. 'It's deuced funny!' he thought, 'really deuced funny!'

CHAPTER XIV

SOAMES DISCOVERS WHAT HE WANTS

It is so much easier to say, "Then we know where we are," than to mean anything particular by the words. And in saying them Soames did but vent the jealous rankling of his instincts. He got out of the cab in a state of wary anger—with himself for not having seen Irene, with Jolyon for having seen her; and now with his inability to tell exactly what he wanted.

He had abandoned the cab because he could not bear to remain seated beside his cousin, and walking briskly eastwards he thought: 'I wouldn't trust that fellow Jolyon a yard. Once outcast, always outcast!' The chap had a natural sympathy with—with—laxity (he had shied at the word sin, because it was too melodramatic for use by a Forsyte).

Indecision in desire was to him a new feeling. He was like a child between a promised toy and an old one which had been taken away from him; and he was astonished at himself. Only last Sunday desire had seemed simple—just his freedom and Annette. 'I'll go and dine there,' he thought. To see her might bring back his singleness of intention, calm his exasperation, clear his mind.

The restaurant was fairly full—a good many foreigners and folk whom, from their appearance, he took to be literary or artistic. Scraps of conversation came his way through the clatter of plates and glasses. He distinctly heard the Boers sympathised with, the British Government blamed. 'Don't think much of their clientele,' he thought. He went stolidly through his dinner and special coffee without making his presence known, and when at last he had finished, was careful not to be seen going towards the sanctum of Madame Lamotte. They were, as he entered, having supper—such a much nicer-looking supper than the dinner he had eaten that he felt a kind of grief—and they greeted him with a surprise so seemingly genuine that he thought with sudden suspicion: 'I believe they knew I was here all the time.' He gave Annette a look furtive and searching. So pretty, seemingly so candid; could she be angling for him? He turned to Madame Lamotte and said:

"I've been dining here."

Really! If she had only known! There were dishes she could have recommended; what a pity! Soames was confirmed in his suspicion. 'I must look out what I'm doing!' he thought sharply.

"Another little cup of very special coffee, monsieur; a liqueur, Grand Marnier?" and Madame Lamotte rose to order these delicacies.

Alone with Annette Soames said, "Well, Annette?" with a defensive little smile about his lips.

The girl blushed. This, which last Sunday would have set his nerves tingling, now gave him much the same feeling a man has when a dog that he owns wriggles and looks at him. He had a curious sense of power, as if he could have said to her, 'Come and kiss me,' and she would have come. And yet—it was strange—but there seemed another face and form in the room too; and the itch in his nerves, was it for that—or for this? He jerked his head towards the restaurant and said: "You have some queer customers. Do you like this life?"

Annette looked up at him for a moment, looked down, and played with her fork.

"No," she said, "I do not like it."

'I've got her,' thought Soames, 'if I want her. But do I want her?' She was graceful, she was pretty—very pretty; she was fresh, she had taste of a kind. His eyes travelled round the little room; but the eyes of his mind went another journey—a half-light, and silvery walls, a satinwood piano, a woman standing against it, reined back as it were from him—a woman with white shoulders that he knew, and dark eyes that he had sought to know, and hair like dull dark amber. And as in an artist who strives for the unrealisable and is ever thirsty, so there rose in him at that moment the thirst of the old passion he had never satisfied.

"Well," he said calmly, "you're young. There's everything before you."

Annette shook her head.

"I think sometimes there is nothing before me but hard work. I am not so in love with work as mother."

"Your mother is a wonder," said Soames, faintly mocking; "she will never let failure lodge in her house."

Annette sighed. "It must be wonderful to be rich."

"Oh! You'll be rich some day," answered Soames, still with that faint mockery; "don't be afraid."

Annette shrugged her shoulders. "Monsieur is very kind." And between her pouting lips she put a chocolate.

'Yes, my dear,' thought Soames, 'they're very pretty.'

Madame Lamotte, with coffee and liqueur, put an end to that colloquy. Soames did not stay long.

Outside in the streets of Soho, which always gave him such a feeling of property improperly owned, he mused. If only Irene had given him a son, he wouldn't now be squirming after women! The thought had jumped out of its little dark sentry-box in his inner consciousness. A son—something to look forward to, something to make the rest of life worth while, something to leave himself to, some perpetuity of self. 'If I had a son,' he thought bitterly, 'a proper legal son, I could make shift to go on as I used. One woman's much the same as another, after all.' But as he walked he shook his head. No! One woman was not the same as another. Many a time had he tried to think that in the old days of his thwarted married life; and he had always failed. He was failing now. He was trying to think Annette the same as that other. But she was not, she had not the lure of that old passion. 'And Irene's my wife,' he thought, 'my legal wife. I have done nothing to put her away from me. Why shouldn't she come back to me? It's the right thing, the lawful thing. It makes no scandal, no disturbance. If it's disagreeable to her—but why should it be? I'm not a leper, and she—she's no longer in love!' Why should he be put to the shifts and the sordid disgraces and the lurking defeats of the Divorce Court, when there she was like an empty house only waiting to be retaken into use and possession by him who legally owned her? To one so secretive as Soames the thought of reentry into quiet possession of his own property with nothing given away to the world was intensely alluring. 'No,' he mused, 'I'm glad I went to see that girl. I know now what I want most. If only Irene will come back I'll be as considerate as she wishes; she could live her own life; but perhaps—perhaps she would come round to me.' There was a lump in his throat. And doggedly along by the railings of the Green Park, towards his father's house, he went, trying to tread on his shadow walking before him in the brilliant moonlight.

PART II

CHAPTER I

THE THIRD GENERATION

Jolly Forsyte was strolling down High Street, Oxford, on a November afternoon; Val Dartie was strolling up. Jolly had just changed out of boating flannels and was on his way to the 'Frying-pan,' to which he had recently been elected. Val had just changed out of riding clothes and was on his way to the fire—a bookmaker's in Cornmarket.

"Hallo!" said Jolly.

"Hallo!" replied Val.

The cousins had met but twice, Jolly, the second-year man, having invited the freshman to breakfast;

and last evening they had seen each other again under somewhat exotic circumstances.

Over a tailor's in the Cornmarket resided one of those privileged young beings called minors, whose inheritances are large, whose parents are dead, whose guardians are remote, and whose instincts are vicious. At nineteen he had commenced one of those careers attractive and inexplicable to ordinary mortals for whom a single bankruptcy is good as a feast. Already famous for having the only roulette table then to be found in Oxford, he was anticipating his expectations at a dazzling rate. He out-crummed Crum, though of a sanguine and rather beefy type which lacked the latter's fascinating languor. For Val it had been in the nature of baptism to be taken there to play roulette; in the nature of confirmation to get back into college, after hours, through a window whose bars were deceptive. Once, during that evening of delight, glancing up from the seductive green before him, he had caught sight, through a cloud of smoke, of his cousin standing opposite. 'Rouge gagne, impair, et manque!' He had not seen him again.

"Come in to the Frying-pan and have tea," said Jolly, and they went in.

A stranger, seeing them together, would have noticed an unseizable resemblance between these second cousins of the third generations of Forsytes; the same bone formation in face, though Jolly's eyes were darker grey, his hair lighter and more wavy.

"Tea and buttered buns, waiter, please," said Jolly.

"Have one of my cigarettes?" said Val. "I saw you last night. How did you do?"

"I didn't play."

"I won fifteen quid."

Though desirous of repeating a whimsical comment on gambling he had once heard his father make—'When you're fleeced you're sick, and when you fleece you're sorry'—Jolly contented himself with:

"Rotten game, I think; I was at school with that chap. He's an awful fool."

"Oh! I don't know," said Val, as one might speak in defence of a disparaged god; "he's a pretty good sport."

They exchanged whiffs in silence.

"You met my people, didn't you?" said Jolly. "They're coming up to-morrow."

Val grew a little red.

"Really! I can give you a rare good tip for the Manchester November handicap."

"Thanks, I only take interest in the classic races."

"You can't make any money over them," said Val.

"I hate the ring," said Jolly; "there's such a row and stink. I like the paddock."

"I like to back my judgment," answered Val.

Jolly smiled; his smile was like his father's.

"I haven't got any. I always lose money if I bet."

"You have to buy experience, of course."

"Yes, but it's all messed-up with doing people in the eye."

"Of course, or they'll do you—that's the excitement."

Jolly looked a little scornful.

"What do you do with yourself? Row?"

"No—ride, and drive about. I'm going to play polo next term, if I can get my granddad to stump up."

"That's old Uncle James, isn't it? What's he like?"

"Older than forty hills," said Val, "and always thinking he's going to be ruined."

"I suppose my granddad and he were brothers."

"I don't believe any of that old lot were sportsmen," said Val; "they must have worshipped money."

"Mine didn't!" said Jolly warmly.

Val flipped the ash off his cigarette.

"Money's only fit to spend," he said; "I wish the deuce I had more."

Jolly gave him that direct upward look of judgment which he had inherited from old Jolyon: One didn't talk about money! And again there was silence, while they drank tea and ate the buttered buns.

"Where are your people going to stay?" asked Val, elaborately casual.

"'Rainbow.' What do you think of the war?"

"Rotten, so far. The Boers aren't sports a bit. Why don't they come out into the open?"

"Why should they? They've got everything against them except their way of fighting. I rather admire them."

"They can ride and shoot," admitted Val, "but they're a lousy lot. Do you know Crum?"

"Of Merton? Only by sight. He's in that fast set too, isn't he? Rather La-di-da and Brummagem."

Val said fixedly: "He's a friend of mine."

"Oh! Sorry!" And they sat awkwardly staring past each other, having pitched on their pet points of snobbery. For Jolly was forming himself unconsciously on a set whose motto was:

'We defy you to bore us. Life isn't half long enough, and we're going to talk faster and more crisply, do more and know more, and dwell less on any subject than you can possibly imagine. We are "the best"—made of wire and whipcord.' And Val was unconsciously forming himself on a set whose motto was: 'We defy you to interest or excite us. We have had every sensation, or if we haven't, we pretend we have. We are so exhausted with living that no hours are too small for us. We will lose our shirts with equanimity. We have flown fast and are past everything. All is cigarette smoke. Bismillah!' Competitive spirit, bone-deep in the English, was obliging those two young Forsytes to have ideals; and at the close of a century ideals are mixed. The aristocracy had already in the main adopted the 'jumping-Jesus' principle; though here and there one like Crum—who was an 'honourable'—stood starkly languid for that gambler's Nirvana which had been the summum bonum of the old 'dandies' and of 'the mashers' in the eighties. And round Crum were still gathered a forlorn hope of blue-bloods with a plutocratic following.

But there was between the cousins another far less obvious antipathy—coming from the unseizable family resemblance, which each perhaps resented; or from some half-consciousness of that old feud persisting still between their branches of the clan, formed within them by odd words or half-hints dropped by their elders. And Jolly, tinkling his teaspoon, was musing: 'His tie-pin and his waistcoat and his drawl and his betting—good Lord!'

And Val, finishing his bun, was thinking: 'He's rather a young beast!'

"I suppose you'll be meeting your people?" he said, getting up. "I wish you'd tell them I should like to show them over B.N.C.—not that there's anything much there—if they'd care to come."

"Thanks, I'll ask them."

"Would they lunch? I've got rather a decent scout."

Jolly doubted if they would have time.

"You'll ask them, though?"

"Very good of you," said Jolly, fully meaning that they should not go; but, instinctively polite, he added: "You'd better come and have dinner with us to-morrow."

"Rather. What time?"

"Seven-thirty."

"Dress?"

"No." And they parted, a subtle antagonism alive within them.

Holly and her father arrived by a midday train. It was her first visit to the city of spires and dreams, and she was very silent, looking almost shyly at the brother who was part of this wonderful place. After lunch she wandered, examining his household gods with intense curiosity. Jolly's sitting-room was panelled, and Art represented by a set of Bartolozzi prints which had belonged to old Jolyon, and by college photographs—of young men, live young men, a little heroic, and to be compared with her memories of Val. Jolyon also scrutinised with care that evidence of his boy's character and tastes.

Jolly was anxious that they should see him rowing, so they set forth to the river. Holly, between her brother and her father, felt elated when heads were turned and eyes rested on her. That they might see him to the best advantage they left him at the Barge and crossed the river to the towing-path. Slight in build—for of all the Forsytes only old Swithin and George were beefy—Jolly was rowing 'Two' in a trial eight. He looked very earnest and strenuous. With pride Jolyon thought him the best-looking boy of the lot; Holly, as became a sister, was more struck by one or two of the others, but would not have said so for the world. The river was bright that afternoon, the meadows lush, the trees still beautiful with colour. Distinguished peace clung around the old city; Jolyon promised himself a day's sketching if the weather held. The Eight passed a second time, spurting home along the Barges—Jolly's face was very set, so as not to show that he was blown. They returned across the river and waited for him.

"Oh!" said Jolly in the Christ Church meadows, "I had to ask that chap Val Dartie to dine with us to-night. He wanted to give you lunch and show you B.N.C., so I thought I'd better; then you needn't go. I don't like him much."

Holly's rather sallow face had become suffused with pink.

"Why not?"

"Oh! I don't know. He seems to me rather showy and bad form. What are his people like, Dad? He's only a second cousin, isn't he?"

Jolyon took refuge in a smile.

"Ask Holly," he said; "she saw his uncle."

"I liked Val," Holly answered, staring at the ground before her; "his uncle looked—awfully different." She stole a glance at Jolly from under her lashes.

"Did you ever," said Jolyon with whimsical intention, "hear our family history, my dears? It's quite a fairy tale. The first Jolyon Forsyte—at all events the first we know anything of, and that would be your great-great-grandfather—dwelt in the land of Dorset on the edge of the sea, being by profession an 'agriculturalist,' as your great-aunt put it, and the son of an agriculturist—farmers, in fact; your grandfather used to call them, 'Very small beer.'" He looked at Jolly to see how his lordliness was standing it, and with the other eye noted Holly's malicious pleasure in the slight drop of her brother's face.

"We may suppose him thick and sturdy, standing for England as it was before the Industrial Era began. The second Jolyon Forsyte—your great-grandfather, Jolly; better known as Superior Dosset Forsyte—built houses, so the chronicle runs, begat ten children, and migrated to London town. It is known that he drank sherry. We may suppose him representing the England of Napoleon's wars, and general unrest. The eldest of his six sons was the third Jolyon, your grandfather, my dears—tea merchant and chairman of companies, one of the soundest Englishmen who ever lived—and to me the dearest." Jolyon's voice had lost its irony, and his son and daughter gazed at him solemnly, "He was just and tenacious, tender and young at heart. You remember him, and I remember him. Pass to the others! Your great-uncle James, that's young Val's grandfather, had a son called Soames—whereby hangs a tale of no love lost, and I don't think I'll tell it you. James and the other eight children of 'Superior Dosset,' of whom there are still five alive, may be said to have represented Victorian England, with its principles of trade and individualism at five per cent. and your money back—if you know what that means. At all events they've turned thirty thousand pounds into a cool million between them in the course of their long lives. They never did a wild thing—unless it was your great-uncle Swithin, who I believe was once swindled at thimble-rig, and was called 'Four-in-hand Forsyte' because he drove a pair. Their day is passing, and their type, not altogether for the advantage of the country. They were pedestrian, but they too were sound. I am the fourth Jolyon Forsyte—a poor holder of the name—"

"No, Dad," said Jolly, and Holly squeezed his hand.

"Yes," repeated Jolyon, "a poor specimen, representing, I'm afraid, nothing but the end of the century, unearned income, amateurism, and individual liberty—a different thing from individualism, Jolly. You are the fifth Jolyon Forsyte, old man, and you open the ball of the new century."

As he spoke they turned in through the college gates, and Holly said:
"It's fascinating, Dad."

None of them quite knew what she meant. Jolly was grave.

The Rainbow, distinguished, as only an Oxford hostel can be, for lack of modernity, provided one small oak-panelled private sitting-room, in which Holly sat to receive, white-frocked, shy, and alone, when the only guest arrived. Rather as one would touch a moth, Val took her hand. And wouldn't she wear this 'measly flower'? It would look ripping in her hair. He removed a gardenia from his coat.

"Oh! No, thank you—I couldn't!" But she took it and pinned it at her neck, having suddenly remembered that word 'showy'! Val's buttonhole would give offence; and she so much wanted Jolly to like him. Did she realise that Val was at his best and quietest in her presence, and was that, perhaps, half the secret of his attraction for her?

"I never said anything about our ride, Val."

"Rather not! It's just between us."

By the uneasiness of his hands and the fidgeting of his feet he was giving her a sense of power very delicious; a soft feeling too—the wish to make him happy.

"Do tell me about Oxford. It must be ever so lovely."

Val admitted that it was frightfully decent to do what you liked; the lectures were nothing; and there were some very good chaps. "Only," he added, "of course I wish I was in town, and could come down and see you."

Holly moved one hand shyly on her knee, and her glance dropped.

"You haven't forgotten," he said, suddenly gathering courage, "that we're going mad-rabbiting together?"

Holly smiled.

"Oh! That was only make-believe. One can't do that sort of thing after one's grown up, you know."

"Dash it! cousins can," said Val. "Next Long Vac.—it begins in June, you know, and goes on for ever—we'll watch our chance."

But, though the thrill of conspiracy ran through her veins, Holly shook her head. "It won't come off," she murmured.

"Won't it!" said Val fervently; "who's going to stop it? Not your father or your brother."

At this moment Jolyon and Jolly came in; and romance fled into Val's patent leather and Holly's white satin toes, where it itched and tingled during an evening not conspicuous for open-heartedness.

Sensitive to atmosphere, Jolyon soon felt the latent antagonism between the boys, and was puzzled by Holly; so he became unconsciously ironical, which is fatal to the expansiveness of youth. A letter, handed to him after dinner, reduced him to a silence hardly broken till Jolly and Val rose to go. He went out with them, smoking his cigar, and walked with his son to the gates of Christ Church. Turning back, he took out the letter and read it again beneath a lamp.

"DEAR JOLYON,

"Soames came again to-night—my thirty-seventh birthday. You were right, I mustn't stay here. I'm going to-morrow to the Piedmont Hotel, but I won't go abroad without seeing you. I feel lonely and down-hearted.

"Yours affectionately,
"IRENE."

He folded the letter back into his pocket and walked on, astonished at the violence of his feelings. What had the fellow said or done?

He turned into High Street, down the Turf, and on among a maze of spires and domes and long college fronts and walls, bright or dark-shadowed in the strong moonlight. In this very heart of England's gentility it was difficult to realise that a lonely woman could be importuned or hunted, but what else could her letter mean? Soames must have been pressing her to go back to him again, with public opinion and the Law on his side, too! 'Eighteen-ninety-nine!', he thought, gazing at the broken glass shining on the top of a villa garden wall; 'but when it comes to property we're still a heathen people! I'll go up to-morrow morning. I dare say it'll be best for her to go abroad.' Yet the thought displeased him. Why should Soames hunt her out of England! Besides, he might follow, and out there she would be still more helpless against the attentions of her own husband! 'I must tread warily,' he thought; 'that fellow could make himself very nasty. I didn't like his manner in the cab the other night.' His thoughts turned to his daughter June. Could she help? Once on a time Irene had been her greatest friend, and now she was a 'lame duck,' such as must appeal to June's nature! He determined to wire to his daughter to meet him at Paddington Station. Retracing his steps towards the Rainbow he questioned his own sensations. Would he be upsetting himself over every woman in like case? No! he would not. The candour of this conclusion discomfited him; and, finding that Holly had gone up to bed, he sought his own room. But he could not sleep, and sat for a long time at his window, huddled in an overcoat, watching the moonlight on the roofs.

Next door Holly too was awake, thinking of the lashes above and below Val's eyes, especially below; and of what she could do to make Jolly like him better. The scent of the gardenia was strong in her little bedroom, and pleasant to her.

And Val, leaning out of his first-floor window in B.N.C., was gazing at a moonlit quadrangle without seeing it at all, seeing instead Holly, slim and white-frocked, as she sat beside the fire when he first went in.

But Jolly, in his bedroom narrow as a ghost, lay with a hand beneath his cheek and dreamed he was with Val in one boat, rowing a race against him, while his father was calling from the towpath: 'Two! Get your hands away there, bless you!'

CHAPTER II

SOAMES PUTS IT TO THE TOUCH

Of all those radiant firms which emblazon with their windows the West End of London, Gaves and Cortegal were considered by Soames the most 'attractive' word just coming into fashion. He had never had his Uncle Swithin's taste in precious stones, and the abandonment by Irene when she left his house in 1887 of all the glittering things he had given her had disgusted him with this form of investment. But he still knew a diamond when he saw one, and during the week before her birthday he had taken occasion, on his way into the Poultry or his way out therefrom, to dally a little before the greater jewellers where one got, if not one's money's worth, at least a certain cachet with the goods.

Constant cogitation since his drive with Jolyon had convinced him more and more of the supreme importance of this moment in his life, the supreme need for taking steps and those not wrong. And, alongside the dry and reasoned sense that it was now or never with his self-preservation, now or never if he were to range himself and found a family, went the secret urge of his senses roused by the sight of her who had once been a passionately desired wife, and the conviction that it was a sin against common sense and the decent secrecy of Forsytes to waste the wife he had.

In an opinion on Winifred's case, Dreamer, Q.C.—he would much have preferred Waterbuck, but they had made him a judge (so late in the day as to rouse the usual suspicion of a political job)—had advised that they should go forward and obtain restitution of conjugal rights, a point which to Soames had never been in doubt. When they had obtained a decree to that effect they must wait to see if it was obeyed. If not, it would constitute legal desertion, and they should obtain evidence of misconduct and file their petition for divorce. All of which Soames knew perfectly well. They had marked him ten and one. This simplicity in his sister's case only made him the more desperate about the difficulty in his own. Everything, in fact, was driving him towards the simple solution of Irene's return. If it were still against the grain with her, had he not feelings to subdue, injury to forgive, pain to forget? He at least had never injured her, and this was a world of compromise! He could offer her so much more than she had now. He would be prepared to make a liberal settlement on her which could not be upset. He often scrutinised his image in these days. He had never been a peacock like that fellow Dartie, or fancied

himself a woman's man, but he had a certain belief in his own appearance—not unjustly, for it was well-coupled and preserved, neat, healthy, pale, unblemished by drink or excess of any kind. The Forsyte jaw and the concentration of his face were, in his eyes, virtues. So far as he could tell there was no feature of him which need inspire dislike.

Thoughts and yearnings, with which one lives daily, become natural, even if far-fetched in their inception. If he could only give tangible proof enough of his determination to let bygones be bygones, and to do all in his power to please her, why should she not come back to him?

He entered Gaves and Cortegal's therefore, on the morning of November the 9th, to buy a certain diamond brooch. "Four twenty-five and dirt cheap, sir, at the money. It's a lady's brooch." There was that in his mood which made him accept without demur. And he went on into the Poultry with the flat green morocco case in his breast pocket. Several times that day he opened it to look at the seven soft shining stones in their velvet oval nest.

"If the lady doesn't like it, sir, happy to exchange it any time. But there's no fear of that." If only there were not! He got through a vast amount of work, only soother of the nerves he knew. A cablegram came while he was in the office with details from the agent in Buenos Aires, and the name and address of a stewardess who would be prepared to swear to what was necessary. It was a timely spur to Soames, with his rooted distaste for the washing of dirty linen in public. And when he set forth by Underground to Victoria Station he received a fresh impetus towards the renewal of his married life from the account in his evening paper of a fashionable divorce suit. The homing instinct of all true Forsytes in anxiety and trouble, the corporate tendency which kept them strong and solid, made him choose to dine at Park Lane. He neither could nor would breath a word to his people of his intention—too reticent and proud—but the thought that at least they would be glad if they knew, and wish him luck, was heartening.

James was in lugubrious mood, for the fire which the impudence of Kruger's ultimatum had lit in him had been cold-watered by the poor success of the last month, and the exhortations to effort in *The Times*. He didn't know where it would end. Soames sought to cheer him by the continual use of the word Buller. But James couldn't tell! There was Colley—and he got stuck on that hill, and this Ladysmith was down in a hollow, and altogether it looked to him a 'pretty kettle of fish'; he thought they ought to be sending the sailors—they were the chaps, they did a lot of good in the Crimea. Soames shifted the ground of consolation. Winifred had heard from Val that there had been a 'rag' and a bonfire on Guy Fawkes Day at Oxford, and that he had escaped detection by blacking his face.

"Ah!" James muttered, "he's a clever little chap." But he shook his head shortly afterwards and remarked that he didn't know what would become of him, and looking wistfully at his son, murmured on that Soames had never had a boy. He would have liked a grandson of his own name. And now—well, there it was!

Soames flinched. He had not expected such a challenge to disclose the secret in his heart. And Emily, who saw him wince, said:

"Nonsense, James; don't talk like that!"

But James, not looking anyone in the face, muttered on. There were Roger and Nicholas and Jolyon; they all had grandsons. And Swithin and Timothy had never married. He had done his best; but he would soon be gone now. And, as though he had uttered words of profound consolation, he was silent, eating brains with a fork and a piece of bread, and swallowing the bread.

Soames excused himself directly after dinner. It was not really cold, but he put on his fur coat, which served to fortify him against the fits of nervous shivering to which he had been subject all day. Subconsciously, he knew that he looked better thus than in an ordinary black overcoat. Then, feeling the morocco case flat against his heart, he sallied forth. He was no smoker, but he lit a cigarette, and smoked it gingerly as he walked along. He moved slowly down the Row towards Knightsbridge, timing himself to get to Chelsea at nine-fifteen. What did she do with herself evening after evening in that little hole? How mysterious women were! One lived alongside and knew nothing of them. What could she have seen in that fellow Bosinney to send her mad? For there was madness after all in what she had done—crazy moonstruck madness, in which all sense of values had been lost, and her life and his life ruined! And for a moment he was filled with a sort of exaltation, as though he were a man read of in a story who, possessed by the Christian spirit, would restore to her all the prizes of existence, forgiving and forgetting, and becoming the godfather of her future. Under a tree opposite Knightsbridge Barracks, where the moon-light struck down clear and white, he took out once more the morocco case, and let the beams draw colour from those stones. Yes, they were of the first water! But, at the hard closing snap of the case, another cold shiver ran through his nerves; and he walked on faster, clenching his gloved hands in the pockets of his coat, almost hoping she would not be in. The thought of how

mysterious she was again beset him. Dining alone there night after night—in an evening dress, too, as if she were making believe to be in society! Playing the piano—to herself! Not even a dog or cat, so far as he had seen. And that reminded him suddenly of the mare he kept for station work at Mapledurham. If ever he went to the stable, there she was quite alone, half asleep, and yet, on her home journeys going more freely than on her way out, as if longing to be back and lonely in her stable! 'I would treat her well,' he thought incoherently. 'I would be very careful.' And all that capacity for home life of which a mocking Fate seemed for ever to have deprived him swelled suddenly in Soames, so that he dreamed dreams opposite South Kensington Station. In the King's Road a man came slithering out of a public house playing a concertina. Soames watched him for a moment dance crazily on the pavement to his own drawing jagged sounds, then crossed over to avoid contact with this piece of drunken foolery. A night in the lock-up! What asses people were! But the man had noticed his movement of avoidance, and streams of genial blasphemy followed him across the street. 'I hope they'll run him in,' thought Soames viciously. 'To have ruffians like that about, with women out alone!' A woman's figure in front had induced this thought. Her walk seemed oddly familiar, and when she turned the corner for which he was bound, his heart began to beat. He hastened on to the corner to make certain. Yes! It was Irene; he could not mistake her walk in that little drab street. She threaded two more turnings, and from the last corner he saw her enter her block of flats. To make sure of her now, he ran those few paces, hurried up the stairs, and caught her standing at her door. He heard the latchkey in the lock, and reached her side just as she turned round, startled, in the open doorway.

"Don't be alarmed," he said, breathless. "I happened to see you. Let me come in a minute."

She had put her hand up to her breast, her face was colourless, her eyes widened by alarm. Then seeming to master herself, she inclined her head, and said: "Very well."

Soames closed the door. He, too, had need to recover, and when she had passed into the sitting-room, waited a full minute, taking deep breaths to still the beating of his heart. At this moment, so fraught with the future, to take out that morocco case seemed crude. Yet, not to take it out left him there before her with no preliminary excuse for coming. And in this dilemma he was seized with impatience at all this paraphernalia of excuse and justification. This was a scene—it could be nothing else, and he must face it. He heard her voice, uncomfortably, pathetically soft:

"Why have you come again? Didn't you understand that I would rather you did not?"

He noticed her clothes—a dark brown velvet corduroy, a sable boa, a small round toque of the same. They suited her admirably. She had money to spare for dress, evidently! He said abruptly:

"It's your birthday. I brought you this," and he held out to her the green morocco case.

"Oh! No-no!"

Soames pressed the clasp; the seven stones gleamed out on the pale grey velvet.

"Why not?" he said. "Just as a sign that you don't bear me ill-feeling any longer."

"I couldn't."

Soames took it out of the case.

"Let me just see how it looks."

She shrank back.

He followed, thrusting his hand with the brooch in it against the front of her dress. She shrank again.

Soames dropped his hand.

"Irene," he said, "let bygones be bygones. If I can, surely you might. Let's begin again, as if nothing had been. Won't you?" His voice was wistful, and his eyes, resting on her face, had in them a sort of supplication.

She, who was standing literally with her back against the wall, gave a little gulp, and that was all her answer. Soames went on:

"Can you really want to live all your days half-dead in this little hole? Come back to me, and I'll give you all you want. You shall live your own life; I swear it."

He saw her face quiver ironically.

"Yes," he repeated, "but I mean it this time. I'll only ask one thing. I just want—I just want a son."

Don't look like that! I want one. It's hard." His voice had grown hurried, so that he hardly knew it for his own, and twice he jerked his head back as if struggling for breath. It was the sight of her eyes fixed on him, dark with a sort of fascinated fright, which pulled him together and changed that painful incoherence to anger.

"Is it so very unnatural?" he said between his teeth, "Is it unnatural to want a child from one's own wife? You wrecked our life and put this blight on everything. We go on only half alive, and without any future. Is it so very unflattering to you that in spite of everything I—I still want you for my wife? Speak, for Goodness' sake! do speak."

Irene seemed to try, but did not succeed.

"I don't want to frighten you," said Soames more gently. "Heaven knows. I only want you to see that I can't go on like this. I want you back. I want you."

Irene raised one hand and covered the lower part of her face, but her eyes never moved from his, as though she trusted in them to keep him at bay. And all those years, barren and bitter, since—ah! when?—almost since he had first known her, surged up in one great wave of recollection in Soames; and a spasm that for his life he could not control constricted his face.

"It's not too late," he said; "it's not—if you'll only believe it."

Irene uncovered her lips, and both her hands made a writhing gesture in front of her breast. Soames seized them.

"Don't!" she said under her breath. But he stood holding on to them, trying to stare into her eyes which did not waver. Then she said quietly:

"I am alone here. You won't behave again as you once behaved."

Dropping her hands as though they had been hot irons, he turned away. Was it possible that there could be such relentless unforgiveness! Could that one act of violent possession be still alive within her? Did it bar him thus utterly? And doggedly he said, without looking up:

"I am not going till you've answered me. I am offering what few men would bring themselves to offer, I want a—a reasonable answer."

And almost with surprise he heard her say:

"You can't have a reasonable answer. Reason has nothing to do with it. You can only have the brutal truth: I would rather die."

Soames stared at her.

"Oh!" he said. And there intervened in him a sort of paralysis of speech and movement, the kind of quivering which comes when a man has received a deadly insult, and does not yet know how he is going to take it, or rather what it is going to do with him.

"Oh!" he said again, "as bad as that? Indeed! You would rather die. That's pretty!"

"I am sorry. You wanted me to answer. I can't help the truth, can I?"

At that queer spiritual appeal Soames turned for relief to actuality. He snapped the brooch back into its case and put it in his pocket.

"The truth!" he said; "there's no such thing with women. It's nerves-nerves."

He heard the whisper:

"Yes; nerves don't lie. Haven't you discovered that?" He was silent, obsessed by the thought: 'I will hate this woman. I will hate her.' That was the trouble! If only he could! He shot a glance at her who stood unmoving against the wall with her head up and her hands clasped, for all the world as if she were going to be shot. And he said quickly:

"I don't believe a word of it. You have a lover. If you hadn't, you wouldn't be such a—such a little idiot." He was conscious, before the expression in her eyes, that he had uttered something of a non-sequitur, and dropped back too abruptly into the verbal freedom of his connubial days. He turned away to the door. But he could not go out. Something within him—that most deep and secret Forsyte quality, the impossibility of letting go, the impossibility of seeing the fantastic and forlorn nature of his own

tenacity—prevented him. He turned about again, and there stood, with his back against the door, as hers was against the wall opposite, quite unconscious of anything ridiculous in this separation by the whole width of the room.

"Do you ever think of anybody but yourself?" he said.

Irene's lips quivered; then she answered slowly:

"Do you ever think that I found out my mistake—my hopeless, terrible mistake—the very first week of our marriage; that I went on trying three years—you know I went on trying? Was it for myself?"

Soames gritted his teeth. "God knows what it was. I've never understood you; I shall never understand you. You had everything you wanted; and you can have it again, and more. What's the matter with me? I ask you a plain question: What is it?" Unconscious of the pathos in that enquiry, he went on passionately: "I'm not lame, I'm not loathsome, I'm not a boor, I'm not a fool. What is it? What's the mystery about me?"

Her answer was a long sigh.

He clasped his hands with a gesture that for him was strangely full of expression. "When I came here to-night I was—I hoped—I meant everything that I could to do away with the past, and start fair again. And you meet me with 'nerves,' and silence, and sighs. There's nothing tangible. It's like—it's like a spider's web."

"Yes."

That whisper from across the room maddened Soames afresh.

"Well, I don't choose to be in a spider's web. I'll cut it." He walked straight up to her. "Now!" What he had gone up to her to do he really did not know. But when he was close, the old familiar scent of her clothes suddenly affected him. He put his hands on her shoulders and bent forward to kiss her. He kissed not her lips, but a little hard line where the lips had been drawn in; then his face was pressed away by her hands; he heard her say: "Oh! No!" Shame, compunction, sense of futility flooded his whole being, he turned on his heel and went straight out.

CHAPTER III

VISIT TO IRENE

Jolyon found June waiting on the platform at Paddington. She had received his telegram while at breakfast. Her abode—a studio and two bedrooms in a St. John's Wood garden—had been selected by her for the complete independence which it guaranteed. Unwatched by Mrs. Grundy, unhindered by permanent domestics, she could receive lame ducks at any hour of day or night, and not seldom had a duck without studio of its own made use of June's. She enjoyed her freedom, and possessed herself with a sort of virginal passion; the warmth which she would have lavished on Bosinney, and of which—given her Forsyte tenacity—he must surely have tired, she now expended in championship of the underdogs and budding 'geniuses' of the artistic world. She lived, in fact, to turn ducks into the swans she believed they were. The very fervour of her protection warped her judgments. But she was loyal and liberal; her small eager hand was ever against the oppressions of academic and commercial opinion, and though her income was considerable, her bank balance was often a minus quantity.

She had come to Paddington Station heated in her soul by a visit to Eric Cobbley. A miserable Gallery had refused to let that straight-haired genius have his one-man show after all. Its impudent manager, after visiting his studio, had expressed the opinion that it would only be a 'one-horse show from the selling point of view.' This crowning example of commercial cowardice towards her favourite lame duck—and he so hard up, with a wife and two children, that he had caused her account to be overdrawn—was still making the blood glow in her small, resolute face, and her red-gold hair to shine more than ever. She gave her father a hug, and got into a cab with him, having as many fish to fry with him as he with her. It became at once a question which would fry them first.

Jolyon had reached the words: "My dear, I want you to come with me," when, glancing at her face, he perceived by her blue eyes moving from side to side—like the tail of a preoccupied cat—that she was not attending. "Dad, is it true that I absolutely can't get at any of my money?"

"Only the income, fortunately, my love."

"How perfectly beastly! Can't it be done somehow? There must be a way. I know I could buy a small Gallery for ten thousand pounds."

"A small Gallery," murmured Jolyon, "seems a modest desire. But your grandfather foresaw it."

"I think," cried June vigorously, "that all this care about money is awful, when there's so much genius in the world simply crushed out for want of a little. I shall never marry and have children; why shouldn't I be able to do some good instead of having it all tied up in case of things which will never come off?"

"Our name is Forsyte, my dear," replied Jolyon in the ironical voice to which his impetuous daughter had never quite grown accustomed; "and Forsytes, you know, are people who so settle their property that their grandchildren, in case they should die before their parents, have to make wills leaving the property that will only come to themselves when their parents die. Do you follow that? Nor do I, but it's a fact, anyway; we live by the principle that so long as there is a possibility of keeping wealth in the family it must not go out; if you die unmarried, your money goes to Jolly and Holly and their children if they marry. Isn't it pleasant to know that whatever you do you can none of you be destitute?"

"But can't I borrow the money?"

Jolyon shook his head. "You could rent a Gallery, no doubt, if you could manage it out of your income."

June uttered a contemptuous sound.

"Yes; and have no income left to help anybody with."

"My dear child," murmured Jolyon, "wouldn't it come to the same thing?"

"No," said June shrewdly, "I could buy for ten thousand; that would only be four hundred a year. But I should have to pay a thousand a year rent, and that would only leave me five hundred. If I had the Gallery, Dad, think what I could do. I could make Eric Cobbley's name in no time, and ever so many others."

"Names worth making make themselves in time."

"When they're dead."

"Did you ever know anybody living, my dear, improved by having his name made?"

"Yes, you," said June, pressing his arm.

Jolyon started. 'I?' he thought. 'Oh! Ah! Now she's going to ask me to do something. We take it out, we Forsytes, each in our different ways.'

June came closer to him in the cab.

"Darling," she said, "you buy the Gallery, and I'll pay you four hundred a year for it. Then neither of us will be any the worse off. Besides, it's a splendid investment."

Jolyon wriggled. "Don't you think," he said, "that for an artist to buy a Gallery is a bit dubious? Besides, ten thousand pounds is a lump, and I'm not a commercial character."

June looked at him with admiring appraisal.

"Of course you're not, but you're awfully businesslike. And I'm sure we could make it pay. It'll be a perfect way of scoring off those wretched dealers and people." And again she squeezed her father's arm.

Jolyon's face expressed quizzical despair.

"Where is this desirable Gallery? Splendidly situated, I suppose?"

"Just off Cork Street."

'Ah!' thought Jolyon, 'I knew it was just off somewhere. Now for what I want out of her!'

"Well, I'll think of it, but not just now. You remember Irene? I want you to come with me and see her. Soames is after her again. She might be safer if we could give her asylum somewhere."

The word asylum, which he had used by chance, was of all most calculated to rouse June's interest.

"Irene! I haven't seen her since! Of course! I'd love to help her."

It was Jolyon's turn to squeeze her arm, in warm admiration for this spirited, generous-hearted little creature of his begetting.

"Irene is proud," he said, with a sidelong glance, in sudden doubt of June's discretion; "she's difficult to help. We must tread gently. This is the place. I wired her to expect us. Let's send up our cards."

"I can't bear Soames," said June as she got out; "he sneers at everything that isn't successful"

Irene was in what was called the 'Ladies' drawing-room' of the Piedmont Hotel.

Nothing if not morally courageous, June walked straight up to her former friend, kissed her cheek, and the two settled down on a sofa never sat on since the hotel's foundation. Jolyon could see that Irene was deeply affected by this simple forgiveness.

"So Soames has been worrying you?" he said.

"I had a visit from him last night; he wants me to go back to him."

"You're not going, of course?" cried June.

Irene smiled faintly and shook her head. "But his position is horrible," she murmured.

"It's his own fault; he ought to have divorced you when he could."

Jolyon remembered how fervently in the old days June had hoped that no divorce would smirch her dead and faithless lover's name.

"Let us hear what Irene is going to do," he said.

Irene's lips quivered, but she spoke calmly.

"I'd better give him fresh excuse to get rid of me."

"How horrible!" cried June.

"What else can I do?"

"Out of the question," said Jolyon very quietly, "sans amour."

He thought she was going to cry; but, getting up quickly, she half turned her back on them, and stood regaining control of herself.

June said suddenly:

"Well, I shall go to Soames and tell him he must leave you alone. What does he want at his age?"

"A child. It's not unnatural"

"A child!" cried June scornfully. "Of course! To leave his money to. If he wants one badly enough let him take somebody and have one; then you can divorce him, and he can marry her."

Jolyon perceived suddenly that he had made a mistake to bring June—her violent partizanship was fighting Soames' battle.

"It would be best for Irene to come quietly to us at Robin Hill, and see how things shape."

"Of course," said June; "only...."

Irene looked full at Jolyon—in all his many attempts afterwards to analyze that glance he never could succeed.

"No! I should only bring trouble on you all. I will go abroad."

He knew from her voice that this was final. The irrelevant thought flashed through him: 'Well, I could see her there.' But he said:

"Don't you think you would be more helpless abroad, in case he followed?"

"I don't know. I can but try."

June sprang up and paced the room. "It's all horrible," she said. "Why should people be tortured and kept miserable and helpless year after year by this disgusting sanctimonious law?" But someone had come into the room, and June came to a standstill. Jolyon went up to Irene:

"Do you want money?"

"No."

"And would you like me to let your flat?"

"Yes, Jolyon, please."

"When shall you be going?"

"To-morrow."

"You won't go back there in the meantime, will you?" This he said with an anxiety strange to himself.

"No; I've got all I want here."

"You'll send me your address?"

She put out her hand to him. "I feel you're a rock."

"Built on sand," answered Jolyon, pressing her hand hard; "but it's a pleasure to do anything, at any time, remember that. And if you change your mind....! Come along, June; say good-bye."

June came from the window and flung her arms round Irene.

"Don't think of him," she said under her breath; "enjoy yourself, and bless you!"

With a memory of tears in Irene's eyes, and of a smile on her lips, they went away extremely silent, passing the lady who had interrupted the interview and was turning over the papers on the table.

Opposite the National Gallery June exclaimed:

"Of all undignified beasts and horrible laws!"

But Jolyon did not respond. He had something of his father's balance, and could see things impartially even when his emotions were roused. Irene was right; Soames' position was as bad or worse than her own. As for the law—it catered for a human nature of which it took a naturally low view. And, feeling that if he stayed in his daughter's company he would in one way or another commit an indiscretion, he told her he must catch his train back to Oxford; and hailing a cab, left her to Turner's water-colours, with the promise that he would think over that Gallery.

But he thought over Irene instead. Pity, they said, was akin to love! If so he was certainly in danger of loving her, for he pitied her profoundly. To think of her drifting about Europe so handicapped and lonely! 'I hope to goodness she'll keep her head!' he thought; 'she might easily grow desperate.' In fact, now that she had cut loose from her poor threads of occupation, he couldn't imagine how she would go on—so beautiful a creature, hopeless, and fair game for anyone! In his exasperation was more than a little fear and jealousy. Women did strange things when they were driven into corners. 'I wonder what Soames will do now!' he thought. 'A rotten, idiotic state of things! And I suppose they would say it was her own fault.' Very preoccupied and sore at heart, he got into his train, mislaid his ticket, and on the platform at Oxford took his hat off to a lady whose face he seemed to remember without being able to put a name to her, not even when he saw her having tea at the Rainbow.

CHAPTER IV

WHERE FORSYTES FEAR TO TREAD

Quivering from the defeat of his hopes, with the green morocco case still flat against his heart, Soames revolved thoughts bitter as death. A spider's web! Walking fast, and noting nothing in the moonlight, he brooded over the scene he had been through, over the memory of her figure rigid in his

grasp. And the more he brooded, the more certain he became that she had a lover—her words, 'I would sooner die!' were ridiculous if she had not. Even if she had never loved him, she had made no fuss until Bosinney came on the scene. No; she was in love again, or she would not have made that melodramatic answer to his proposal, which in all the circumstances was reasonable! Very well! That simplified matters.

'I'll take steps to know where I am,' he thought; 'I'll go to Polteed's the first thing tomorrow morning.'

But even in forming that resolution he knew he would have trouble with himself. He had employed Polteed's agency several times in the routine of his profession, even quite lately over Dartie's case, but he had never thought it possible to employ them to watch his own wife.

It was too insulting to himself!

He slept over that project and his wounded pride—or rather, kept vigil. Only while shaving did he suddenly remember that she called herself by her maiden name of Heron. Polteed would not know, at first at all events, whose wife she was, would not look at him obsequiously and leer behind his back. She would just be the wife of one of his clients. And that would be true—for was he not his own solicitor?

He was literally afraid not to put his design into execution at the first possible moment, lest, after all, he might fail himself. And making Warmson bring him an early cup of coffee; he stole out of the house before the hour of breakfast. He walked rapidly to one of those small West End streets where Polteed's and other firms ministered to the virtues of the wealthier classes. Hitherto he had always had Polteed to see him in the Poultry; but he well knew their address, and reached it at the opening hour. In the outer office, a room furnished so cosily that it might have been a money-lender's, he was attended by a lady who might have been a schoolmistress.

"I wish to see Mr. Claud Polteed. He knows me—never mind my name."

To keep everybody from knowing that he, Soames Forsyte, was reduced to having his wife spied on, was the overpowering consideration.

Mr. Claud Polteed—so different from Mr. Lewis Polteed—was one of those men with dark hair, slightly curved noses, and quick brown eyes, who might be taken for Jews but are really Phoenicians; he received Soames in a room hushed by thickness of carpet and curtains. It was, in fact, confidentially furnished, without trace of document anywhere to be seen.

Greeting Soames deferentially, he turned the key in the only door with a certain ostentation.

"If a client sends for me," he was in the habit of saying, "he takes what precaution he likes. If he comes here, we convince him that we have no leakages. I may safely say we lead in security, if in nothing else....Now, sir, what can I do for you?"

Soames' gorge had risen so that he could hardly speak. It was absolutely necessary to hide from this man that he had any but professional interest in the matter; and, mechanically, his face assumed its sideway smile.

"I've come to you early like this because there's not an hour to lose"—if he lost an hour he might fail himself yet! "Have you a really trustworthy woman free?"

Mr. Polteed unlocked a drawer, produced a memorandum, ran his eyes over it, and locked the drawer up again.

"Yes," he said; "the very woman."

Soames had seated himself and crossed his legs—nothing but a faint flush, which might have been his normal complexion, betrayed him.

"Send her off at once, then, to watch a Mrs. Irene Heron of Flat C, Truro Mansions, Chelsea, till further notice."

"Precisely," said Mr. Polteed; "divorce, I presume?" and he blew into a speaking-tube. "Mrs. Blanch in? I shall want to speak to her in ten minutes."

"Deal with any reports yourself," resumed Soames, "and send them to me personally, marked confidential, sealed and registered. My client exacts the utmost secrecy."

Mr. Polteed smiled, as though saying, 'You are teaching your grandmother, my dear sir;' and his eyes slid over Soames' face for one unprofessional instant.

"Make his mind perfectly easy," he said. "Do you smoke?"

"No," said Soames. "Understand me: Nothing may come of this. If a name gets out, or the watching is suspected, it may have very serious consequences."

Mr. Polteed nodded. "I can put it into the cipher category. Under that system a name is never mentioned; we work by numbers."

He unlocked another drawer and took out two slips of paper, wrote on them, and handed one to Soames.

"Keep that, sir; it's your key. I retain this duplicate. The case we'll call 7x. The party watched will be 17; the watcher 19; the Mansions 25; yourself—I should say, your firm—31; my firm 32, myself 2. In case you should have to mention your client in writing I have called him 43; any person we suspect will be 47; a second person 51. Any special hint or instruction while we're about it?"

"No," said Soames; "that is—every consideration compatible."

Again Mr. Polteed nodded. "Expense?"

Soames shrugged. "In reason," he answered curtly, and got up. "Keep it entirely in your own hands."

"Entirely," said Mr. Polteed, appearing suddenly between him and the door. "I shall be seeing you in that other case before long. Good morning, sir." His eyes slid unprofessionally over Soames once more, and he unlocked the door.

"Good morning," said Soames, looking neither to right nor left.

Out in the street he swore deeply, quietly, to himself. A spider's web, and to cut it he must use this spidery, secret, unclean method, so utterly repugnant to one who regarded his private life as his most sacred piece of property. But the die was cast, he could not go back. And he went on into the Poultry, and locked away the green morocco case and the key to that cipher destined to make crystal-clear his domestic bankruptcy.

Odd that one whose life was spent in bringing to the public eye all the private coils of property, the domestic disagreements of others, should dread so utterly the public eye turned on his own; and yet not odd, for who should know so well as he the whole unfeeling process of legal regulation.

He worked hard all day. Winifred was due at four o'clock; he was to take her down to a conference in the Temple with Dreamer Q.C., and waiting for her he re-read the letter he had caused her to write the day of Dartie's departure, requiring him to return.

"DEAR MONTAGUE,

"I have received your letter with the news that you have left me for ever and are on your way to Buenos Aires. It has naturally been a great shock. I am taking this earliest opportunity of writing to tell you that I am prepared to let bygones be bygones if you will return to me at once. I beg you to do so. I am very much upset, and will not say any more now. I am sending this letter registered to the address you left at your Club. Please cable to me.

"Your still affectionate wife,
"WINIFRED DARTIE."

Ugh! What bitter humbug! He remembered leaning over Winifred while she copied what he had pencilled, and how she had said, laying down her pen, "Suppose he comes, Soames!" in such a strange tone of voice, as if she did not know her own mind. "He won't come," he had answered, "till he's spent his money. That's why we must act at once." Annexed to the copy of that letter was the original of Dartie's drunken scrawl from the Iseeum Club. Soames could have wished it had not been so manifestly penned in liquor. Just the sort of thing the Court would pitch on. He seemed to hear the Judge's voice say: "You took this seriously! Seriously enough to write him as you did? Do you think he meant it?" Never mind! The fact was clear that Dartie had sailed and had not returned. Annexed also was his cabled answer: "Impossible return. Dartie." Soames shook his head. If the whole thing were not disposed of within the next few months the fellow would turn up again like a bad penny. It saved a thousand a year at least to get rid of him, besides all the worry to Winifred and his father. 'I must stiffen Dreamer's back,' he thought; 'we must push it on.'

Winifred, who had adopted a kind of half-mourning which became her fair hair and tall figure very well, arrived in James' barouche drawn by James' pair. Soames had not seen it in the City since his

father retired from business five years ago, and its incongruity gave him a shock. 'Times are changing,' he thought; 'one doesn't know what'll go next!' Top hats even were scarcer. He enquired after Val. Val, said Winifred, wrote that he was going to play polo next term. She thought he was in a very good set. She added with fashionably disguised anxiety: "Will there be much publicity about my affair, Soames? Must it be in the papers? It's so bad for him, and the girls."

With his own calamity all raw within him, Soames answered:

"The papers are a pushing lot; it's very difficult to keep things out. They pretend to be guarding the public's morals, and they corrupt them with their beastly reports. But we haven't got to that yet. We're only seeing Dreamer to-day on the restitution question. Of course he understands that it's to lead to a divorce; but you must seem genuinely anxious to get Dartie back—you might practice that attitude to-day."

Winifred sighed.

"Oh! What a clown Monty's been!" she said.

Soames gave her a sharp look. It was clear to him that she could not take her Dartie seriously, and would go back on the whole thing if given half a chance. His own instinct had been firm in this matter from the first. To save a little scandal now would only bring on his sister and her children real disgrace and perhaps ruin later on if Dartie were allowed to hang on to them, going down-hill and spending the money James would leave his daughter. Though it was all tied up, that fellow would milk the settlements somehow, and make his family pay through the nose to keep him out of bankruptcy or even perhaps gaol! They left the shining carriage, with the shining horses and the shining-hatted servants on the Embankment, and walked up to Dreamer Q.C.'s Chambers in Crown Office Row.

"Mr. Bellby is here, sir," said the clerk; "Mr. Dreamer will be ten minutes."

Mr. Bellby, the junior—not as junior as he might have been, for Soames only employed barristers of established reputation; it was, indeed, something of a mystery to him how barristers ever managed to establish that which made him employ them—Mr. Bellby was seated, taking a final glance through his papers. He had come from Court, and was in wig and gown, which suited a nose jutting out like the handle of a tiny pump, his small shrewd blue eyes, and rather protruding lower lip—no better man to supplement and stiffen Dreamer.

The introduction to Winifred accomplished, they leaped the weather and spoke of the war. Soames interrupted suddenly:

"If he doesn't comply we can't bring proceedings for six months. I want to get on with the matter, Bellby."

Mr. Bellby, who had the ghost of an Irish brogue, smiled at Winifred and murmured: "The Law's delays, Mrs. Dartie."

"Six months!" repeated Soames; "it'll drive it up to June! We shan't get the suit on till after the long vacation. We must put the screw on, Bellby"—he would have all his work cut out to keep Winifred up to the scratch.

"Mr. Dreamer will see you now, sir."

They filed in, Mr. Bellby going first, and Soames escorting Winifred after an interval of one minute by his watch.

Dreamer Q.C., in a gown but divested of wig, was standing before the fire, as if this conference were in the nature of a treat; he had the leathery, rather oily complexion which goes with great learning, a considerable nose with glasses perched on it, and little greyish whiskers; he luxuriated in the perpetual cocking of one eye, and the concealment of his lower with his upper lip, which gave a smothered turn to his speech. He had a way, too, of coming suddenly round the corner on the person he was talking to; this, with a disconcerting tone of voice, and a habit of growling before he began to speak—had secured a reputation second in Probate and Divorce to very few. Having listened, eye cocked, to Mr. Bellby's breezy recapitulation of the facts, he growled, and said:

"I know all that;" and coming round the corner at Winifred, smothered the words:

"We want to get him back, don't we, Mrs. Dartie?"

Soames interposed sharply:

"My sister's position, of course, is intolerable."

Dreamer growled. "Exactly. Now, can we rely on the cabled refusal, or must we wait till after Christmas to give him a chance to have written—that's the point, isn't it?"

"The sooner...." Soames began.

"What do you say, Bellby?" said Dreamer, coming round his corner.

Mr. Bellby seemed to sniff the air like a hound.

"We won't be on till the middle of December. We've no need to give um more rope than that."

"No," said Soames, "why should my sister be incommoded by his choosing to go..."

"To Jericho!" said Dreamer, again coming round his corner; "quite so. People oughtn't to go to Jericho, ought they, Mrs. Dartie?" And he raised his gown into a sort of fantail. "I agree. We can go forward. Is there anything more?"

"Nothing at present," said Soames meaningly; "I wanted you to see my sister."

Dreamer growled softly: "Delighted. Good evening!" And let fall the protection of his gown.

They filed out. Winifred went down the stairs. Soames lingered. In spite of himself he was impressed by Dreamer.

"The evidence is all right, I think," he said to Bellby. "Between ourselves, if we don't get the thing through quick, we never may. D'you think he understands that?"

"I'll make um," said Bellby. "Good man though—good man."

Soames nodded and hastened after his sister. He found her in a draught, biting her lips behind her veil, and at once said:

"The evidence of the stewardess will be very complete."

Winifred's face hardened; she drew herself up, and they walked to the carriage. And, all through that silent drive back to Green Street, the souls of both of them revolved a single thought: 'Why, oh! why should I have to expose my misfortune to the public like this? Why have to employ spies to peer into my private troubles? They were not of my making.'

CHAPTER V

JOLLY SITS IN JUDGMENT

The possessive instinct, which, so determinedly balked, was animating two members of the Forsyte family towards riddance of what they could no longer possess, was hardening daily in the British body politic. Nicholas, originally so doubtful concerning a war which must affect property, had been heard to say that these Boers were a pig-headed lot; they were causing a lot of expense, and the sooner they had their lesson the better. He would send out Wolseley! Seeing always a little further than other people—whence the most considerable fortune of all the Forsytes—he had perceived already that Buller was not the man—'a bull of a chap, who just went butting, and if they didn't look out Ladysmith would fall.' This was early in December, so that when Black Week came, he was enabled to say to everybody: 'I told you so.' During that week of gloom such as no Forsyte could remember, very young Nicholas attended so many drills in his corps, 'The Devil's Own,' that young Nicholas consulted the family physician about his son's health and was alarmed to find that he was perfectly sound. The boy had only just eaten his dinners and been called to the bar, at some expense, and it was in a way a nightmare to his father and mother that he should be playing with military efficiency at a time when military efficiency in the civilian population might conceivably be wanted. His grandfather, of course, pooh-poohed the notion, too thoroughly educated in the feeling that no British war could be other than little and professional, and profoundly distrustful of Imperial commitments, by which, moreover, he stood to lose, for he owned De Beers, now going down fast, more than a sufficient sacrifice on the part of his grandson.

At Oxford, however, rather different sentiments prevailed. The inherent effervescence of

conglomerate youth had, during the two months of the term before Black Week, been gradually crystallising out into vivid oppositions. Normal adolescence, ever in England of a conservative tendency though not taking things too seriously, was vehement for a fight to a finish and a good licking for the Boers. Of this larger faction Val Dartie was naturally a member. Radical youth, on the other hand, a small but perhaps more vocal body, was for stopping the war and giving the Boers autonomy. Until Black Week, however, the groups were amorphous, without sharp edges, and argument remained but academic. Jolly was one of those who knew not where he stood. A streak of his grandfather old Jolyon's love of justice prevented, him from seeing one side only. Moreover, in his set of 'the best' there was a 'jumping-Jesus' of extremely advanced opinions and some personal magnetism. Jolly wavered. His father, too, seemed doubtful in his views. And though, as was proper at the age of twenty, he kept a sharp eye on his father, watchful for defects which might still be remedied, still that father had an 'air' which gave a sort of glamour to his creed of ironic tolerance. Artists of course; were notoriously Hamlet-like, and to this extent one must discount for one's father, even if one loved him. But Jolyon's original view, that to 'put your nose in where you aren't wanted' (as the Uitlanders had done) 'and then work the oracle till you get on top is not being quite the clean potato,' had, whether founded in fact or no, a certain attraction for his son, who thought a deal about gentility. On the other hand Jolly could not abide such as his set called 'cranks,' and Val's set called 'smugs,' so that he was still balancing when the clock of Black Week struck. One—two—three, came those ominous repulses at Stormberg, Magersfontein, Colenso. The sturdy English soul reacting after the first cried, 'Ah! but Methuen!' after the second: 'Ah! but Buller!' then, in inspissated gloom, hardened. And Jolly said to himself: 'No, damn it! We've got to lick the beggars now; I don't care whether we're right or wrong.' And, if he had known it, his father was thinking the same thought.

That next Sunday, last of the term, Jolly was bidden to wine with 'one of the best.' After the second toast, 'Buller and damnation to the Boers,' drunk—no heel taps—in the college Burgundy, he noticed that Val Dartie, also a guest, was looking at him with a grin and saying something to his neighbour. He was sure it was disparaging. The last boy in the world to make himself conspicuous or cause public disturbance, Jolly grew rather red and shut his lips. The queer hostility he had always felt towards his second-cousin was strongly and suddenly reinforced. 'All right!' he thought, 'you wait, my friend!' More wine than was good for him, as the custom was, helped him to remember, when they all trooped forth to a secluded spot, to touch Val on the arm.

"What did you say about me in there?"

"Mayn't I say what I like?"

"No."

"Well, I said you were a pro-Boer—and so you are!"

"You're a liar!"

"D'you want a row?"

"Of course, but not here; in the garden."

"All right. Come on."

They went, eyeing each other askance, unsteady, and unflinching; they climbed the garden railings. The spikes on the top slightly ripped Val's sleeve, and occupied his mind. Jolly's mind was occupied by the thought that they were going to fight in the precincts of a college foreign to them both. It was not the thing, but never mind—the young beast!

They passed over the grass into very nearly darkness, and took off their coats.

"You're not screwed, are you?" said Jolly suddenly. "I can't fight you if you're screwed."

"No more than you."

"All right then."

Without shaking hands, they put themselves at once into postures of defence. They had drunk too much for science, and so were especially careful to assume correct attitudes, until Jolly smote Val almost accidentally on the nose. After that it was all a dark and ugly scrimmage in the deep shadow of the old trees, with no one to call 'time,' till, battered and blown, they unclenched and staggered back from each other, as a voice said:

"Your names, young gentlemen?"

At this bland query spoken from under the lamp at the garden gate, like some demand of a god, their nerves gave way, and snatching up their coats, they ran at the railings, shinned up them, and made for the secluded spot whence they had issued to the fight. Here, in dim light, they mopped their faces, and without a word walked, ten paces apart, to the college gate. They went out silently, Val going towards the Broad along the Brewery, Jolly down the lane towards the High. His head, still fumed, was busy with regret that he had not displayed more science, passing in review the counters and knockout blows which he had not delivered. His mind strayed on to an imagined combat, infinitely unlike that which he had just been through, infinitely gallant, with sash and sword, with thrust and parry, as if he were in the pages of his beloved Dumas. He fancied himself La Mole, and Aramis, Bussy, Chicot, and D'Artagnan rolled into one, but he quite failed to envisage Val as Coconnas, Brissac, or Rochefort. The fellow was just a confounded cousin who didn't come up to Cocker. Never mind! He had given him one or two. 'Pro-Boer!' The word still rankled, and thoughts of enlisting jostled his aching head; of riding over the veldt, firing gallantly, while the Boers rolled over like rabbits. And, turning up his smarting eyes, he saw the stars shining between the housetops of the High, and himself lying out on the Karoo (whatever that was) rolled in a blanket, with his rifle ready and his gaze fixed on a glittering heaven.

He had a fearful 'head' next morning, which he doctored, as became one of 'the best,' by soaking it in cold water, brewing strong coffee which he could not drink, and only sipping a little Hock at lunch. The legend that 'some fool' had run into him round a corner accounted for a bruise on his cheek. He would on no account have mentioned the fight, for, on second thoughts, it fell far short of his standards.

The next day he went 'down,' and travelled through to Robin Hill. Nobody was there but June and Holly, for his father had gone to Paris. He spent a restless and unsettled Vacation, quite out of touch with either of his sisters. June, indeed, was occupied with lame ducks, whom, as a rule, Jolly could not stand, especially that Eric Cobbley and his family, 'hopeless outsiders,' who were always littering up the house in the Vacation. And between Holly and himself there was a strange division, as if she were beginning to have opinions of her own, which was so—unnecessary. He punched viciously at a ball, rode furiously but alone in Richmond Park, making a point of jumping the stiff, high hurdles put up to close certain worn avenues of grass—keeping his nerve in, he called it. Jolly was more afraid of being afraid than most boys are. He bought a rifle, too, and put a range up in the home field, shooting across the pond into the kitchen-garden wall, to the peril of gardeners, with the thought that some day, perhaps, he would enlist and save South Africa for his country. In fact, now that they were appealing for Yeomanry recruits the boy was thoroughly upset. Ought he to go? None of 'the best,' so far as he knew—and he was in correspondence with several—were thinking of joining. If they had been making a move he would have gone at once—very competitive, and with a strong sense of form, he could not bear to be left behind in anything—but to do it off his own bat might look like 'swagger'; because of course it wasn't really necessary. Besides, he did not want to go, for the other side of this young Forsyte recoiled from leaping before he looked. It was altogether mixed pickles within him, hot and sickly pickles, and he became quite unlike his serene and rather lordly self.

And then one day he saw that which moved him to uneasy wrath—two riders, in a glade of the Park close to the Ham Gate, of whom she on the left-hand was most assuredly Holly on her silver roan, and he on the right-hand as assuredly that 'squirt' Val Dartie. His first impulse was to urge on his own horse and demand the meaning of this portent, tell the fellow to 'bunk,' and take Holly home. His second—to feel that he would look a fool if they refused. He reined his horse in behind a tree, then perceived that it was equally impossible to spy on them. Nothing for it but to go home and await her coming! Sneaking out with that young bounder! He could not consult with June, because she had gone up that morning in the train of Eric Cobbley and his lot. And his father was still in 'that rotten Paris.' He felt that this was emphatically one of those moments for which he had trained himself, assiduously, at school, where he and a boy called Brent had frequently set fire to newspapers and placed them in the centre of their studies to accustom them to coolness in moments of danger. He did not feel at all cool waiting in the stable-yard, idly stroking the dog Balthasar, who queasy as an old fat monk, and sad in the absence of his master, turned up his face, panting with gratitude for this attention. It was half an hour before Holly came, flushed and ever so much prettier than she had any right to look. He saw her look at him quickly—guiltily of course—then followed her in, and, taking her arm, conducted her into what had been their grandfather's study. The room, not much used now, was still vaguely haunted for them both by a presence with which they associated tenderness, large drooping white moustaches, the scent of cigar smoke, and laughter. Here Jolly, in the prime of his youth, before he went to school at all, had been wont to wrestle with his grandfather, who even at eighty had an irresistible habit of crooking his leg. Here Holly, perched on the arm of the great leather chair, had stroked hair curving silvery over an ear into which she would whisper secrets. Through that window they had all three sallied times without number to cricket on the lawn, and a mysterious game called 'Wopsy-doozle,' not to be understood by outsiders, which made old Jolyon very hot. Here once on a warm night Holly had appeared in her 'nighty,' having had a bad dream, to have the clutch of it released. And here Jolly, having begun the day badly by introducing fizzy magnesia into Mademoiselle Beauce's new-laid egg, and gone on to worse,

had been sent down (in the absence of his father) to the ensuing dialogue:

"Now, my boy, you mustn't go on like this."

"Well, she boxed my ears, Gran, so I only boxed hers, and then she boxed mine again."

"Strike a lady? That'll never do! Have you begged her pardon?"

"Not yet."

"Then you must go and do it at once. Come along."

"But she began it, Gran; and she had two to my one."

"My dear, it was an outrageous thing to do."

"Well, she lost her temper; and I didn't lose mine."

"Come along."

"You come too, then, Gran."

"Well—this time only."

And they had gone hand in hand.

Here—where the Waverley novels and Byron's works and Gibbon's Roman Empire and Humboldt's Cosmos, and the bronzes on the mantelpiece, and that masterpiece of the oily school, 'Dutch Fishing-Boats at Sunset,' were fixed as fate, and for all sign of change old Jolyon might have been sitting there still, with legs crossed, in the arm chair, and domed forehead and deep eyes grave above The Times—here they came, those two grandchildren. And Jolly said:

"I saw you and that fellow in the Park."

The sight of blood rushing into her cheeks gave him some satisfaction; she ought to be ashamed!

"Well?" she said.

Jolly was surprised; he had expected more, or less.

"Do you know," he said weightily, "that he called me a pro-Boer last term? And I had to fight him."

"Who won?"

Jolly wished to answer: 'I should have,' but it seemed beneath him.

"Look here!" he said, "what's the meaning of it? Without telling anybody!"

"Why should I? Dad isn't here; why shouldn't I ride with him?"

"You've got me to ride with. I think he's an awful young rotter."

Holly went pale with anger.

"He isn't. It's your own fault for not liking him."

And slipping past her brother she went out, leaving him staring at the bronze Venus sitting on a tortoise, which had been shielded from him so far by his sister's dark head under her soft felt riding hat. He felt queerly disturbed, shaken to his young foundations. A lifelong domination lay shattered round his feet. He went up to the Venus and mechanically inspected the tortoise.

Why didn't he like Val Dartie? He could not tell. Ignorant of family history, barely aware of that vague feud which had started thirteen years before with Bosinney's defection from June in favour of Soames' wife, knowing really almost nothing about Val he was at sea. He just did dislike him. The question, however, was: What should he do? Val Dartie, it was true, was a second-cousin, but it was not the thing for Holly to go about with him. And yet to 'tell' of what he had chanced on was against his creed. In this dilemma he went and sat in the old leather chair and crossed his legs. It grew dark while he sat there staring out through the long window at the old oak-tree, ample yet bare of leaves, becoming slowly just a shape of deeper dark printed on the dusk.

'Grandfather!' he thought without sequence, and took out his watch. He could not see the hands, but he set the repeater going. 'Five o'clock!' His grandfather's first gold hunter watch, butter-smooth with

age—all the milling worn from it, and dented with the mark of many a fall. The chime was like a little voice from out of that golden age, when they first came from St. John's Wood, London, to this house—came driving with grandfather in his carriage, and almost instantly took to the trees. Trees to climb, and grandfather watering the geranium-beds below! What was to be done? Tell Dad he must come home? Confide in June?—only she was so—so sudden! Do nothing and trust to luck? After all, the Vac. would soon be over. Go up and see Val and warn him off? But how get his address? Holly wouldn't give it him! A maze of paths, a cloud of possibilities! He lit a cigarette. When he had smoked it halfway through his brow relaxed, almost as if some thin old hand had been passed gently over it; and in his ear something seemed to whisper: 'Do nothing; be nice to Holly, be nice to her, my dear!' And Jolly heaved a sigh of contentment, blowing smoke through his nostrils....

But up in her room, divested of her habit, Holly was still frowning. 'He is not—he is not!' were the words which kept forming on her lips.

CHAPTER VI

JOLYON IN TWO MINDS

A little private hotel over a well-known restaurant near the Gare St. Lazare was Jolyon's haunt in Paris. He hated his fellow Forsytes abroad—vapid as fish out of water in their well-trodden runs, the Opera, Rue de Rivoli, and Moulin Rouge. Their air of having come because they wanted to be somewhere else as soon as possible annoyed him. But no other Forsyte came near this haunt, where he had a wood fire in his bedroom and the coffee was excellent. Paris was always to him more attractive in winter. The acrid savour from woodsmoke and chestnut-roasting braziers, the sharpness of the wintry sunshine on bright rays, the open cafes defying keen-aired winter, the self-contained brisk boulevard crowds, all informed him that in winter Paris possessed a soul which, like a migrant bird, in high summer flew away.

He spoke French well, had some friends, knew little places where pleasant dishes could be met with, queer types observed. He felt philosophic in Paris, the edge of irony sharpened; life took on a subtle, purposeless meaning, became a bunch of flavours tasted, a darkness shot with shifting gleams of light.

When in the first week of December he decided to go to Paris, he was far from admitting that Irene's presence was influencing him. He had not been there two days before he owned that the wish to see her had been more than half the reason. In England one did not admit what was natural. He had thought it might be well to speak to her about the letting of her flat and other matters, but in Paris he at once knew better. There was a glamour over the city. On the third day he wrote to her, and received an answer which procured him a pleasurable shiver of the nerves: "MY DEAR JOLYON,

"It will be a happiness for me to see you.
"IRENE."

He took his way to her hotel on a bright day with a feeling such as he had often had going to visit an adored picture. No woman, so far as he remembered, had ever inspired in him this special sensuous and yet impersonal sensation. He was going to sit and feast his eyes, and come away knowing her no better, but ready to go and feast his eyes again to-morrow. Such was his feeling, when in the tarnished and ornate little lounge of a quiet hotel near the river she came to him preceded by a small page-boy who uttered the word, "Madame," and vanished. Her face, her smile, the poise of her figure, were just as he had pictured, and the expression of her face said plainly: 'A friend!'

"Well," he said, "what news, poor exile?"

"None."

"Nothing from Soames?"

"Nothing."

"I have let the flat for you, and like a good steward I bring you some money. How do you like Paris?"

While he put her through this catechism, it seemed to him that he had never seen lips so fine and sensitive, the lower lip curving just a little upwards, the upper touched at one corner by the least conceivable dimple. It was like discovering a woman in what had hitherto been a sort of soft and

breathed-on statue, almost impersonally admired. She owned that to be alone in Paris was a little difficult; and yet, Paris was so full of its own life that it was often, she confessed, as innocuous as a desert. Besides, the English were not liked just now!

"That will hardly be your case," said Jolyon; "you should appeal to the French."

"It has its disadvantages."

Jolyon nodded.

"Well, you must let me take you about while I'm here. We'll start to-morrow. Come and dine at my pet restaurant; and we'll go to the Opera-Comique."

It was the beginning of daily meetings.

Jolyon soon found that for those who desired a static condition of the affections, Paris was at once the first and last place in which to be friendly with a pretty woman. Revelation was alighting like a bird in his heart, singing: 'Elle est ton reve! Elle est ton reve! Sometimes this seemed natural, sometimes ludicrous—a bad case of elderly rapture. Having once been ostracised by Society, he had never since had any real regard for conventional morality; but the idea of a love which she could never return—and how could she at his age?—hardly mounted beyond his subconscious mind. He was full, too, of resentment, at the waste and loneliness of her life. Aware of being some comfort to her, and of the pleasure she clearly took in their many little outings, he was amiably desirous of doing and saying nothing to destroy that pleasure. It was like watching a starved plant draw up water, to see her drink in his companionship. So far as they could tell, no one knew her address except himself; she was unknown in Paris, and he but little known, so that discretion seemed unnecessary in those walks, talks, visits to concerts, picture-galleries, theatres, little dinners, expeditions to Versailles, St. Cloud, even Fontainebleau. And time fled—one of those full months without past to it or future. What in his youth would certainly have been headlong passion, was now perhaps as deep a feeling, but far gentler, tempered to protective companionship by admiration, hopelessness, and a sense of chivalry—arrested in his veins at least so long as she was there, smiling and happy in their friendship, and always to him more beautiful and spiritually responsive: for her philosophy of life seemed to march in admirable step with his own, conditioned by emotion more than by reason, ironically mistrustful, susceptible to beauty, almost passionately humane and tolerant, yet subject to instinctive rigidities of which as a mere man he was less capable. And during all this companionable month he never quite lost that feeling with which he had set out on the first day as if to visit an adored work of art, a well-nigh impersonal desire. The future—inexorable pendant to the present he took care not to face, for fear of breaking up his untroubled manner; but he made plans to renew this time in places still more delightful, where the sun was hot and there were strange things to see and paint. The end came swiftly on the 20th of January with a telegram:

"Have enlisted in Imperial Yeomanry. JOLLY."

Jolyon received it just as he was setting out to meet her at the Louvre. It brought him up with a round turn. While he was lotus-eating here, his boy, whose philosopher and guide he ought to be, had taken this great step towards danger, hardship, perhaps even death. He felt disturbed to the soul, realising suddenly how Irene had twined herself round the roots of his being. Thus threatened with severance, the tie between them—for it had become a kind of tie—no longer had impersonal quality. The tranquil enjoyment of things in common, Jolyon perceived, was gone for ever. He saw his feeling as it was, in the nature of an infatuation. Ridiculous, perhaps, but so real that sooner or later it must disclose itself. And now, as it seemed to him, he could not, must not, make any such disclosure. The news of Jolly stood inexorably in the way. He was proud of this enlistment; proud of his boy for going off to fight for the country; for on Jolyon's pro-Boerism, too, Black Week had left its mark. And so the end was reached before the beginning! Well, luckily he had never made a sign!

When he came into the Gallery she was standing before the 'Virgin of the Rocks,' graceful, absorbed, smiling and unconscious. 'Have I to give up seeing that?' he thought. 'It's unnatural, so long as she's willing that I should see her.' He stood, unnoticed, watching her, storing up the image of her figure, envying the picture on which she was bending that long scrutiny. Twice she turned her head towards the entrance, and he thought: 'That's for me!' At last he went forward.

"Look!" he said.

She read the telegram, and he heard her sigh.

That sigh, too, was for him! His position was really cruel! To be loyal to his son he must just shake her hand and go. To be loyal to the feeling in his heart he must at least tell her what that feeling was.

Could she, would she understand the silence in which he was gazing at that picture?

"I'm afraid I must go home at once," he said at last. "I shall miss all this awfully."

"So shall I; but, of course, you must go."

"Well!" said Jolyon holding out his hand.

Meeting her eyes, a flood of feeling nearly mastered him.

"Such is life!" he said. "Take care of yourself, my dear!"

He had a stumbling sensation in his legs and feet, as if his brain refused to steer him away from her. From the doorway, he saw her lift her hand and touch its fingers with her lips. He raised his hat solemnly, and did not look back again.

CHAPTER VII

DARTIE VERSUS DARTIE

The suit—Dartie versus Dartie—for restitution of those conjugal rights concerning which Winifred was at heart so deeply undecided, followed the laws of subtraction towards day of judgment. This was not reached before the Courts rose for Christmas, but the case was third on the list when they sat again. Winifred spent the Christmas holidays a thought more fashionably than usual, with the matter locked up in her low-cut bosom. James was particularly liberal to her that Christmas, expressing thereby his sympathy, and relief, at the approaching dissolution of her marriage with that 'precious rascal,' which his old heart felt but his old lips could not utter.

The disappearance of Dartie made the fall in Consols a comparatively small matter; and as to the scandal—the real animus he felt against that fellow, and the increasing lead which property was attaining over reputation in a true Forsyte about to leave this world, served to drug a mind from which all allusions to the matter (except his own) were studiously kept. What worried him as a lawyer and a parent was the fear that Dartie might suddenly turn up and obey the Order of the Court when made. That would be a pretty how-de-do! The fear preyed on him in fact so much that, in presenting Winifred with a large Christmas cheque, he said: "It's chiefly for that chap out there; to keep him from coming back." It was, of course, to pitch away good money, but all in the nature of insurance against that bankruptcy which would no longer hang over him if only the divorce went through; and he questioned Winifred rigorously until she could assure him that the money had been sent. Poor woman!—it cost her many a pang to send what must find its way into the vanity-bag of 'that creature!' Soames, hearing of it, shook his head. They were not dealing with a Forsyte, reasonably tenacious of his purpose. It was very risky without knowing how the land lay out there. Still, it would look well with the Court; and he would see that Dreamer brought it out. "I wonder," he said suddenly, "where that ballet goes after the Argentine"; never omitting a chance of reminder; for he knew that Winifred still had a weakness, if not for Dartie, at least for not laundering him in public. Though not good at showing admiration, he admitted that she was behaving extremely well, with all her children at home gaping like young birds for news of their father—Imogen just on the point of coming out, and Val very restive about the whole thing. He felt that Val was the real heart of the matter to Winifred, who certainly loved him beyond her other children. The boy could spoke the wheel of this divorce yet if he set his mind to it. And Soames was very careful to keep the proximity of the preliminary proceedings from his nephew's ears. He did more. He asked him to dine at the Remove, and over Val's cigar introduced the subject which he knew to be nearest to his heart.

"I hear," he said, "that you want to play polo up at Oxford."

Val became less recumbent in his chair.

"Rather!" he said.

"Well," continued Soames, "that's a very expensive business. Your grandfather isn't likely to consent to it unless he can make sure that he's not got any other drain on him." And he paused to see whether the boy understood his meaning.

Val's thick dark lashes concealed his eyes, but a slight grimace appeared on his wide mouth, and he

muttered:

"I suppose you mean my Dad!"

"Yes," said Soames; "I'm afraid it depends on whether he continues to be a drag or not;" and said no more, letting the boy dream it over.

But Val was also dreaming in those days of a silver-roan palfrey and a girl riding it. Though Crum was in town and an introduction to Cynthia Dark to be had for the asking, Val did not ask; indeed, he shunned Crum and lived a life strange even to himself, except in so far as accounts with tailor and livery stable were concerned. To his mother, his sisters, his young brother, he seemed to spend this Vacation in 'seeing fellows,' and his evenings sleepily at home. They could not propose anything in daylight that did not meet with the one response: "Sorry; I've got to see a fellow"; and he was put to extraordinary shifts to get in and out of the house unobserved in riding clothes; until, being made a member of the Goat's Club, he was able to transport them there, where he could change unregarded and slip off on his hack to Richmond Park. He kept his growing sentiment religiously to himself. Not for a world would he breathe to the 'fellows,' whom he was not 'seeing,' anything so ridiculous from the point of view of their creed and his. But he could not help its destroying his other appetites. It was coming between him and the legitimate pleasures of youth at last on its own in a way which must, he knew, make him a milksop in the eyes of Crum. All he cared for was to dress in his last-created riding togs, and steal away to the Robin Hill Gate, where presently the silver roan would come demurely sidling with its slim and dark-haired rider, and in the glades bare of leaves they would go off side by side, not talking very much, riding races sometimes, and sometimes holding hands. More than once of an evening, in a moment of expansion, he had been tempted to tell his mother how this shy sweet cousin had stolen in upon him and wrecked his 'life.' But bitter experience, that all persons above thirty-five were spoil-sports, prevented him. After all, he supposed he would have to go through with College, and she would have to 'come out,' before they could be married; so why complicate things, so long as he could see her? Sisters were teasing and unsympathetic beings, a brother worse, so there was no one to confide in. Ah! And this beastly divorce business! What a misfortune to have a name which other people hadn't! If only he had been called Gordon or Scott or Howard or something fairly common! But Dartie—there wasn't another in the directory! One might as well have been named Morkin for all the covert it afforded! So matters went on, till one day in the middle of January the silver-roan palfrey and its rider were missing at the tryst. Lingered in the cold, he debated whether he should ride on to the house: But Jolly might be there, and the memory of their dark encounter was still fresh within him. One could not be always fighting with her brother! So he returned dismally to town and spent an evening plunged in gloom. At breakfast next day he noticed that his mother had on an unfamiliar dress and was wearing her hat. The dress was black with a glimpse of peacock blue, the hat black and large—she looked exceptionally well. But when after breakfast she said to him, "Come in here, Val," and led the way to the drawing-room, he was at once beset by qualms. Winifred carefully shut the door and passed her handkerchief over her lips; inhaling the violette de Parme with which it had been soaked, Val thought: 'Has she found out about Holly?'

Her voice interrupted

"Are you going to be nice to me, dear boy?"

Val grinned doubtfully.

"Will you come with me this morning...."

"I've got to see...." began Val, but something in her face stopped him.

"I say," he said, "you don't mean...."

"Yes, I have to go to the Court this morning." Already!—that d—d business which he had almost succeeded in forgetting, since nobody ever mentioned it. In self-commiseration he stood picking little bits of skin off his fingers. Then noticing that his mother's lips were all awry, he said impulsively: "All right, mother; I'll come. The brutes!" What brutes he did not know, but the expression exactly summed up their joint feeling, and restored a measure of equanimity.

"I suppose I'd better change into a 'shooter,'" he muttered, escaping to his room. He put on the 'shooter,' a higher collar, a pearl pin, and his neatest grey spats, to a somewhat blasphemous accompaniment. Looking at himself in the glass, he said, "Well, I'm damned if I'm going to show anything!" and went down. He found his grandfather's carriage at the door, and his mother in furs, with the appearance of one going to a Mansion House Assembly. They seated themselves side by side in the closed barouche, and all the way to the Courts of Justice Val made but one allusion to the business in hand. "There'll be nothing about those pearls, will there?"

The little tufted white tails of Winifred's muff began to shiver.

"Oh, no," she said, "it'll be quite harmless to-day. Your grandmother wanted to come too, but I wouldn't let her. I thought you could take care of me. You look so nice, Val. Just pull your coat collar up a little more at the back—that's right."

"If they bully you...." began Val.

"Oh! they won't. I shall be very cool. It's the only way."

"They won't want me to give evidence or anything?"

"No, dear; it's all arranged." And she patted his hand. The determined front she was putting on it stayed the turmoil in Val's chest, and he busied himself in drawing his gloves off and on. He had taken what he now saw was the wrong pair to go with his spats; they should have been grey, but were deerskin of a dark tan; whether to keep them on or not he could not decide. They arrived soon after ten. It was his first visit to the Law Courts, and the building struck him at once.

"By Jove!" he said as they passed into the hall, "this'd make four or five jolly good racket courts."

Soames was awaiting them at the foot of some stairs.

"Here you are!" he said, without shaking hands, as if the event had made them too familiar for such formalities. "It's Happerly Browne, Court I. We shall be on first."

A sensation such as he had known when going in to bat was playing now in the top of Val's chest, but he followed his mother and uncle doggedly, looking at no more than he could help, and thinking that the place smelled 'fuggy.' People seemed to be lurking everywhere, and he plucked Soames by the sleeve.

"I say, Uncle, you're not going to let those beastly papers in, are you?"

Soames gave him the sideway look which had reduced many to silence in its time.

"In here," he said. "You needn't take off your furs, Winifred."

Val entered behind them, nettled and with his head up. In this confounded hole everybody—and there were a good many of them—seemed sitting on everybody else's knee, though really divided from each other by pews; and Val had a feeling that they might all slip down together into the well. This, however, was but a momentary vision—of mahogany, and black gowns, and white blobs of wigs and faces and papers, all rather secret and whispery—before he was sitting next his mother in the front row, with his back to it all, glad of her violette de Parme, and taking off his gloves for the last time. His mother was looking at him; he was suddenly conscious that she had really wanted him there next to her, and that he counted for something in this business.

All right! He would show them! Squaring his shoulders, he crossed his legs and gazed inscrutably at his spats. But just then an 'old Johnny' in a gown and long wig, looking awfully like a funny raddled woman, came through a door into the high pew opposite, and he had to uncross his legs hastily, and stand up with everybody else.

'Dartie versus Dartie!'

It seemed to Val unspeakably disgusting to have one's name called out like this in public! And, suddenly conscious that someone nearly behind him had begun talking about his family, he screwed his face round to see an old be-wigged buffer, who spoke as if he were eating his own words—queer-looking old cuss, the sort of man he had seen once or twice dining at Park Lane and punishing the port; he knew now where they 'dug them up.' All the same he found the old buffer quite fascinating, and would have continued to stare if his mother had not touched his arm. Reduced to gazing before him, he fixed his eyes on the Judge's face instead. Why should that old 'sportsman' with his sarcastic mouth and his quick-moving eyes have the power to meddle with their private affairs—hadn't he affairs of his own, just as many, and probably just as nasty? And there moved in Val, like an illness, all the deep-seated individualism of his breed. The voice behind him droned along: "Differences about money matters—extravagance of the respondent" (What a word! Was that his father?)—"strained situation—frequent absences on the part of Mr. Dartie. My client, very rightly, your Ludship will agree, was anxious to check a course—but lead to ruin—remonstrated—gambling at cards and on the racecourse—" ('That's right!' thought Val, 'pile it on!') "Crisis early in October, when the respondent wrote her this letter from his Club." Val sat up and his ears burned. "I propose to read it with the emendations necessary to the epistle of a gentleman who has been—shall we say dining, me Lud?"

'Old brute!' thought Val, flushing deeper; 'you're not paid to make jokes!'

"You will not get the chance to insult me again in my own house. I am leaving the country to-morrow. It's played out"—an expression, your Ludship, not unknown in the mouths of those who have not met with conspicuous success."

'Sniggering owls!' thought Val, and his flush deepened.

"I am tired of being insulted by you.' My client will tell your Ludship that these so-called insults consisted in her calling him 'the limit',—a very mild expression, I venture to suggest, in all the circumstances."

Val glanced sideways at his mother's impassive face, it had a hunted look in the eyes. 'Poor mother,' he thought, and touched her arm with his own. The voice behind droned on.

"I am going to live a new life. M. D."

"And next day, me Lud, the respondent left by the steamship Tuscarora for Buenos Aires. Since then we have nothing from him but a cabled refusal in answer to the letter which my client wrote the following day in great distress, begging him to return to her. With your Ludship's permission. I shall now put Mrs. Dartie in the box."

When his mother rose, Val had a tremendous impulse to rise too and say: 'Look here! I'm going to see you jolly well treat her decently.' He subdued it, however; heard her saying, 'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,' and looked up. She made a rich figure of it, in her furs and large hat, with a slight flush on her cheek-bones, calm, matter-of-fact; and he felt proud of her thus confronting all these 'confounded lawyers.' The examination began. Knowing that this was only the preliminary to divorce, Val followed with a certain glee the questions framed so as to give the impression that she really wanted his father back. It seemed to him that they were 'foxing Old Bagwigs finely.'

And he received a most unpleasant jar when the Judge said suddenly:

"Now, why did your husband leave you—not because you called him 'the limit,' you know?"

Val saw his uncle lift his eyes to the witness box, without moving his face; heard a shuffle of papers behind him; and instinct told him that the issue was in peril. Had Uncle Soames and the old buffer behind made a mess of it? His mother was speaking with a slight drawl.

"No, my Lord, but it had gone on a long time."

"What had gone on?"

"Our differences about money."

"But you supplied the money. Do you suggest that he left you to better his position?"

'The brute! The old brute, and nothing but the brute!' thought Val suddenly. 'He smells a rat he's trying to get at the pastry!' And his heart stood still. If—if he did, then, of course, he would know that his mother didn't really want his father back. His mother spoke again, a thought more fashionably.

"No, my Lord, but you see I had refused to give him any more money. It took him a long time to believe that, but he did at last—and when he did..."

"I see, you had refused. But you've sent him some since."

"My Lord, I wanted him back."

"And you thought that would bring him?"

"I don't know, my Lord, I acted on my father's advice."

Something in the Judge's face, in the sound of the papers behind him, in the sudden crossing of his uncle's legs, told Val that she had made just the right answer. 'Crafty!' he thought; 'by Jove, what humbug it all is!'

The Judge was speaking:

"Just one more question, Mrs. Dartie. Are you still fond of your husband?"

Val's hands, slack behind him, became fists. What business had that Judge to make things human suddenly? To make his mother speak out of her heart, and say what, perhaps, she didn't know herself,

before all these people! It wasn't decent. His mother answered, rather low: "Yes, my Lord." Val saw the Judge nod. 'Wish I could take a cock-shy at your head!' he thought irreverently, as his mother came back to her seat beside him. Witnesses to his father's departure and continued absence followed—one of their own maids even, which struck Val as particularly beastly; there was more talking, all humbug; and then the Judge pronounced the decree for restitution, and they got up to go. Val walked out behind his mother, chin squared, eyelids drooped, doing his level best to despise everybody. His mother's voice in the corridor roused him from an angry trance.

"You behaved beautifully, dear. It was such a comfort to have you. Your uncle and I are going to lunch."

"All right," said Val; "I shall have time to go and see that fellow." And, parting from them abruptly, he ran down the stairs and out into the air. He bolted into a hansom, and drove to the Goat's Club. His thoughts were on Holly and what he must do before her brother showed her this thing in to-morrow's paper.

When Val had left them Soames and Winifred made their way to the Cheshire Cheese. He had suggested it as a meeting place with Mr. Bellby. At that early hour of noon they would have it to themselves, and Winifred had thought it would be 'amusing' to see this far-famed hostelry. Having ordered a light repast, to the consternation of the waiter, they awaited its arrival together with that of Mr. Bellby, in silent reaction after the hour and a half's suspense on the tenterhooks of publicity. Mr. Bellby entered presently, preceded by his nose, as cheerful as they were glum. Well! they had got the decree of restitution, and what was the matter with that!

"Quite," said Soames in a suitably low voice, "but we shall have to begin again to get evidence. He'll probably try the divorce—it will look fishy if it comes out that we knew of misconduct from the start. His questions showed well enough that he doesn't like this restitution dodge."

"Pho!" said Mr. Bellby cheerily, "he'll forget! Why, man, he'll have tried a hundred cases between now and then. Besides, he's bound by precedent to give ye your divorce, if the evidence is satisfactory. We won't let um know that Mrs. Dartie had knowledge of the facts. Dreamer did it very nicely—he's got a fatherly touch about um!"

Soames nodded.

"And I compliment ye, Mrs. Dartie," went on Mr. Bellby; "ye've a natural gift for giving evidence. Steady as a rock."

Here the waiter arrived with three plates balanced on one arm, and the remark: "I 'urried up the pudden, sir. You'll find plenty o' lark in it to-day."

Mr. Bellby applauded his forethought with a dip of his nose. But Soames and Winifred looked with dismay at their light lunch of gravified brown masses, touching them gingerly with their forks in the hope of distinguishing the bodies of the tasty little song-givers. Having begun, however, they found they were hungrier than they thought, and finished the lot, with a glass of port apiece. Conversation turned on the war. Soames thought Ladysmith would fall, and it might last a year. Bellby thought it would be over by the summer. Both agreed that they wanted more men. There was nothing for it but complete victory, since it was now a question of prestige. Winifred brought things back to more solid ground by saying that she did not want the divorce suit to come on till after the summer holidays had begun at Oxford, then the boys would have forgotten about it before Val had to go up again; the London season too would be over. The lawyers reassured her, an interval of six months was necessary—after that the earlier the better. People were now beginning to come in, and they parted—Soames to the city, Bellby to his chambers, Winifred in a hansom to Park Lane to let her mother know how she had fared. The issue had been so satisfactory on the whole that it was considered advisable to tell James, who never failed to say day after day that he didn't know about Winifred's affair, he couldn't tell. As his sands ran out; the importance of mundane matters became increasingly grave to him, as if he were feeling: 'I must make the most of it, and worry well; I shall soon have nothing to worry about.'

He received the report grudgingly. It was a new-fangled way of going about things, and he didn't know! But he gave Winifred a cheque, saying:

"I expect you'll have a lot of expense. That's a new hat you've got on. Why doesn't Val come and see us?"

Winifred promised to bring him to dinner soon. And, going home, she sought her bedroom where she could be alone. Now that her husband had been ordered back into her custody with a view to putting

him away from her for ever, she would try once more to find out from her sore and lonely heart what she really wanted.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHALLENGE

The morning had been misty, verging on frost, but the sun came out while Val was jogging towards the Roehampton Gate, whence he would canter on to the usual tryst. His spirits were rising rapidly. There had been nothing so very terrible in the morning's proceedings beyond the general disgrace of violated privacy. 'If we were engaged!' he thought, 'what happens wouldn't matter.' He felt, indeed, like human society, which kicks and clamours at the results of matrimony, and hastens to get married. And he galloped over the winter-dried grass of Richmond Park, fearing to be late. But again he was alone at the trysting spot, and this second defection on the part of Holly upset him dreadfully. He could not go back without seeing her to-day! Emerging from the Park, he proceeded towards Robin Hill. He could not make up his mind for whom to ask. Suppose her father were back, or her sister or brother were in! He decided to gamble, and ask for them all first, so that if he were in luck and they were not there, it would be quite natural in the end to ask for Holly; while if any of them were in—an 'excuse for a ride' must be his saving grace.

"Only Miss Holly is in, sir."

"Oh! thanks. Might I take my horse round to the stables? And would you say—her cousin, Mr. Val Dartie."

When he returned she was in the hall, very flushed and shy. She led him to the far end, and they sat down on a wide window-seat.

"I've been awfully anxious," said Val in a low voice. "What's the matter?"

"Jolly knows about our riding."

"Is he in?"

"No; but I expect he will be soon."

"Then!" cried Val, and diving forward, he seized her hand. She tried to withdraw it, failed, gave up the attempt, and looked at him wistfully.

"First of all," he said, "I want to tell you something about my family. My Dad, you know, isn't altogether—I mean, he's left my mother and they're trying to divorce him; so they've ordered him to come back, you see. You'll see that in the paper to-morrow."

Her eyes deepened in colour and fearful interest; her hand squeezed his. But the gambler in Val was roused now, and he hurried on:

"Of course there's nothing very much at present, but there will be, I expect, before it's over; divorce suits are beastly, you know. I wanted to tell you, because—because—you ought to know—if—" and he began to stammer, gazing at her troubled eyes, "if—if you're going to be a darling and love me, Holly. I love you—ever so; and I want to be engaged." He had done it in a manner so inadequate that he could have punched his own head; and dropping on his knees, he tried to get nearer to that soft, troubled face. "You do love me—don't you? If you don't I...." There was a moment of silence and suspense, so awful that he could hear the sound of a mowing-machine far out on the lawn pretending there was grass to cut. Then she swayed forward; her free hand touched his hair, and he gasped: "Oh, Holly!"

Her answer was very soft: "Oh, Val!"

He had dreamed of this moment, but always in an imperative mood, as the masterful young lover, and now he felt humble, touched, trembly. He was afraid to stir off his knees lest he should break the spell; lest, if he did, she should shrink and deny her own surrender—so tremulous was she in his grasp, with her eyelids closed and his lips nearing them. Her eyes opened, seemed to swim a little; he pressed his lips to hers. Suddenly he sprang up; there had been footsteps, a sort of startled grunt. He looked round. No one! But the long curtains which barred off the outer hall were quivering.

"My God! Who was that?"

Holly too was on her feet.

"Jolly, I expect," she whispered.

Val clenched fists and resolution.

"All right!" he said, "I don't care a bit now we're engaged," and striding towards the curtains, he drew them aside. There at the fireplace in the hall stood Jolly, with his back elaborately turned. Val went forward. Jolly faced round on him.

"I beg your pardon for hearing," he said.

With the best intentions in the world, Val could not help admiring him at that moment; his face was clear, his voice quiet, he looked somehow distinguished, as if acting up to principle.

"Well!" Val said abruptly, "it's nothing to you."

"Oh!" said Jolly; "you come this way," and he crossed the hall. Val followed. At the study door he felt a touch on his arm; Holly's voice said:

"I'm coming too."

"No," said Jolly.

"Yes," said Holly.

Jolly opened the door, and they all three went in. Once in the little room, they stood in a sort of triangle on three corners of the worn Turkey carpet; awkwardly upright, not looking at each other, quite incapable of seeing any humour in the situation.

Val broke the silence.

"Holly and I are engaged.",

Jolly stepped back and leaned against the lintel of the window.

"This is our house," he said; "I'm not going to insult you in it. But my father's away. I'm in charge of my sister. You've taken advantage of me.

"I didn't mean to," said Val hotly.

"I think you did," said Jolly. "If you hadn't meant to, you'd have spoken to me, or waited for my father to come back."

"There were reasons," said Val.

"What reasons?"

"About my family—I've just told her. I wanted her to know before things happen."

Jolly suddenly became less distinguished.

"You're kids," he said, "and you know you are.

"I am not a kid," said Val.

"You are—you're not twenty."

"Well, what are you?"

"I am twenty," said Jolly.

"Only just; anyway, I'm as good a man as you."

Jolly's face crimsoned, then clouded. Some struggle was evidently taking place in him; and Val and Holly stared at him, so clearly was that struggle marked; they could even hear him breathing. Then his face cleared up and became oddly resolute.

"We'll see that," he said. "I dare you to do what I'm going to do."

"Dare me?"

Jolly smiled. "Yes," he said, "dare you; and I know very well you won't."

A stab of misgiving shot through Val; this was riding very blind.

"I haven't forgotten that you're a fire-eater," said Jolly slowly, "and I think that's about all you are; or that you called me a pro-Boer."

Val heard a gasp above the sound of his own hard breathing, and saw Holly's face poked a little forward, very pale, with big eyes.

"Yes," went on Jolly with a sort of smile, "we shall soon see. I'm going to join the Imperial Yeomanry, and I dare you to do the same, Mr. Val Dartie."

Val's head jerked on its stem. It was like a blow between the eyes, so utterly unthought of, so extreme and ugly in the midst of his dreaming; and he looked at Holly with eyes grown suddenly, touchingly haggard.

"Sit down!" said Jolly. "Take your time! Think it over well." And he himself sat down on the arm of his grandfather's chair.

Val did not sit down; he stood with hands thrust deep into his breeches' pockets—hands clenched and quivering. The full awfulness of this decision one way or the other knocked at his mind with double knocks as of an angry postman. If he did not take that 'dare' he was disgraced in Holly's eyes, and in the eyes of that young enemy, her brute of a brother. Yet if he took it, ah! then all would vanish—her face, her eyes, her hair, her kisses just begun!

"Take your time," said Jolly again; "I don't want to be unfair."

And they both looked at Holly. She had recoiled against the bookshelves reaching to the ceiling; her dark head leaned against Gibbon's Roman Empire, her eyes in a sort of soft grey agony were fixed on Val. And he, who had not much gift of insight, had suddenly a gleam of vision. She would be proud of her brother—that enemy! She would be ashamed of him! His hands came out of his pockets as if lifted by a spring.

"All right!" he said. "Done!"

Holly's face—oh! it was queer! He saw her flush, start forward. He had done the right thing—her face was shining with wistful admiration. Jolly stood up and made a little bow as who should say: 'You've passed.'

"To-morrow, then," he said, "we'll go together."

Recovering from the impetus which had carried him to that decision, Val looked at him maliciously from under his lashes. 'All right,' he thought, 'one to you. I shall have to join—but I'll get back on you somehow.' And he said with dignity: "I shall be ready."

"We'll meet at the main Recruiting Office, then," said Jolly, "at twelve o'clock." And, opening the window, he went out on to the terrace, conforming to the creed which had made him retire when he surprised them in the hall.

The confusion in the mind of Val thus left alone with her for whom he had paid this sudden price was extreme. The mood of 'showing-off' was still, however, uppermost. One must do the wretched thing with an air.

"We shall get plenty of riding and shooting, anyway," he said; "that's one comfort." And it gave him a sort of grim pleasure to hear the sigh which seemed to come from the bottom of her heart.

"Oh! the war'll soon be over," he said; "perhaps we shan't even have to go out. I don't care, except for you." He would be out of the way of that beastly divorce. It was an ill-wind! He felt her warm hand slip into his. Jolly thought he had stopped their loving each other, did he? He held her tightly round the waist, looking at her softly through his lashes, smiling to cheer her up, promising to come down and see her soon, feeling somehow six inches taller and much more in command of her than he had ever dared feel before. Many times he kissed her before he mounted and rode back to town. So, swiftly, on the least provocation, does the possessive instinct flourish and grow.

CHAPTER IX

DINNER AT JAMES'

Dinner parties were not now given at James' in Park Lane—to every house the moment comes when Master or Mistress is no longer 'up to it'; no more can nine courses be served to twenty mouths above twenty fine white expanses; nor does the household cat any longer wonder why she is suddenly shut up.

So with something like excitement Emily—who at seventy would still have liked a little feast and fashion now and then—ordered dinner for six instead of two, herself wrote a number of foreign words on cards, and arranged the flowers—mimosa from the Riviera, and white Roman hyacinths not from Rome. There would only be, of course, James and herself, Soames, Winifred, Val, and Imogen—but she liked to pretend a little and dally in imagination with the glory of the past. She so dressed herself that James remarked:

"What are you putting on that thing for? You'll catch cold."

But Emily knew that the necks of women are protected by love of shining, unto fourscore years, and she only answered:

"Let me put you on one of those dickies I got you, James; then you'll only have to change your trousers, and put on your velvet coat, and there you'll be. Val likes you to look nice."

"Dicky!" said James. "You're always wasting your money on something."

But he suffered the change to be made till his neck also shone, murmuring vaguely:

"He's an extravagant chap, I'm afraid."

A little brighter in the eye, with rather more colour than usual in his cheeks, he took his seat in the drawing-room to wait for the sound of the front-door bell.

"I've made it a proper dinner party," Emily said comfortably; "I thought it would be good practice for Imogen—she must get used to it now she's coming out."

James uttered an indeterminate sound, thinking of Imogen as she used to climb about his knee or pull Christmas crackers with him.

"She'll be pretty," he muttered, "I shouldn't wonder."

"She is pretty," said Emily; "she ought to make a good match."

"There you go," murmured James; "she'd much better stay at home and look after her mother." A second Dartie carrying off his pretty granddaughter would finish him! He had never quite forgiven Emily for having been as much taken in by Montague Dartie as he himself had been.

"Where's Warmson?" he said suddenly. "I should like a glass of Madeira to-night."

"There's champagne, James."

James shook his head. "No body," he said; "I can't get any good out of it."

Emily reached forward on her side of the fire and rang the bell.

"Your master would like a bottle of Madeira opened, Warmson."

"No, no!" said James, the tips of his ears quivering with vehemence, and his eyes fixed on an object seen by him alone. "Look here, Warmson, you go to the inner cellar, and on the middle shelf of the end bin on the left you'll see seven bottles; take the one in the centre, and don't shake it. It's the last of the Madeira I had from Mr. Jolyon when we came in here—never been moved; it ought to be in prime condition still; but I don't know, I can't tell."

"Very good, sir," responded the withdrawing Warmson.

"I was keeping it for our golden wedding," said James suddenly, "but I shan't live three years at my age."

"Nonsense, James," said Emily, "don't talk like that."

"I ought to have got it up myself," murmured James, "he'll shake it as likely as not." And he sank into silent recollection of long moments among the open gas-jets, the cobwebs and the good smell of wine-soaked corks, which had been appetiser to so many feasts. In the wine from that cellar was written the history of the forty odd years since he had come to the Park Lane house with his young bride, and of the many generations of friends and acquaintances who had passed into the unknown; its depleted bins preserved the record of family festivity—all the marriages, births, deaths of his kith and kin. And when he was gone there it would be, and he didn't know what would become of it. It'd be drunk or spoiled, he shouldn't wonder!

From that deep reverie the entrance of his son dragged him, followed very soon by that of Winifred and her two eldest.

They went down arm-in-arm—James with Imogen, the debutante, because his pretty grandchild cheered him; Soames with Winifred; Emily with Val, whose eyes lighting on the oysters brightened. This was to be a proper full 'blowout' with 'fizz' and port! And he felt in need of it, after what he had done that day, as yet undivulged. After the first glass or two it became pleasant to have this bombshell up his sleeve, this piece of sensational patriotism, or example, rather, of personal daring, to display—for his pleasure in what he had done for his Queen and Country was so far entirely personal. He was now a 'blood,' indissolubly connected with guns and horses; he had a right to swagger—not, of course, that he was going to. He should just announce it quietly, when there was a pause. And, glancing down the menu, he determined on 'Bombe aux fraises' as the proper moment; there would be a certain solemnity while they were eating that. Once or twice before they reached that rosy summit of the dinner he was attacked by remembrance that his grandfather was never told anything! Still, the old boy was drinking Madeira, and looking jolly fit! Besides, he ought to be pleased at this set-off to the disgrace of the divorce. The sight of his uncle opposite, too, was a sharp incentive. He was so far from being a sportsman that it would be worth a lot to see his face. Besides, better to tell his mother in this way than privately, which might upset them both! He was sorry for her, but after all one couldn't be expected to feel much for others when one had to part from Holly.

His grandfather's voice travelled to him thinly. "Val, try a little of the Madeira with your ice. You won't get that up at college."

Val watched the slow liquid filling his glass, the essential oil of the old wine glazing the surface; inhaled its aroma, and thought: 'Now for it!' It was a rich moment. He sipped, and a gentle glow spread in his veins, already heated. With a rapid look round, he said, "I joined the Imperial Yeomanry to-day, Granny," and emptied his glass as though drinking the health of his own act.

"What!" It was his mother's desolate little word.

"Young Jolly Forsythe and I went down there together."

"You didn't sign?" from Uncle Soames.

"Rather! We go into camp on Monday."

"I say!" cried Imogen.

All looked at James. He was leaning forward with his hand behind his ear.

"What's that?" he said. "What's he saying? I can't hear."

Emily reached forward to pat Val's hand.

"It's only that Val has joined the Yeomanry, James; it's very nice for him. He'll look his best in uniform."

"Joined the—rubbish!" came from James, tremulously loud. "You can't see two yards before your nose. He—he'll have to go out there. Why! he'll be fighting before he knows where he is."

Val saw Imogen's eyes admiring him, and his mother still and fashionable with her handkerchief before her lips.

Suddenly his uncle spoke.

"You're under age."

"I thought of that," smiled Val; "I gave my age as twenty-one."

He heard his grandmother's admiring, "Well, Val, that was plucky of you;" was conscious of Warmson deferentially filling his champagne glass; and of his grandfather's voice moaning: "I don't know what'll

become of you if you go on like this."

Imogen was patting his shoulder, his uncle looking at him sidelong; only his mother sat unmoving, till, affected by her stillness, Val said:

"It's all right, you know; we shall soon have them on the run. I only hope I shall come in for something."

He felt elated, sorry, tremendously important all at once. This would show Uncle Soames, and all the Forsytes, how to be sportsmen. He had certainly done something heroic and exceptional in giving his age as twenty-one.

Emily's voice brought him back to earth.

"You mustn't have a second glass, James. Warmson!"

"Won't they be astonished at Timothy's!" burst out Imogen. "I'd give anything to see their faces. Do you have a sword, Val, or only a popgun?"

"What made you?"

His uncle's voice produced a slight chill in the pit of Val's stomach. Made him? How answer that? He was grateful for his grandmother's comfortable:

"Well, I think it's very plucky of Val. I'm sure he'll make a splendid soldier; he's just the figure for it. We shall all be proud of him."

"What had young Jolly Forsyte to do with it? Why did you go together?" pursued Soames, uncannily relentless. "I thought you weren't friendly with him?"

"I'm not," mumbled Val, "but I wasn't going to be beaten by him." He saw his uncle look at him quite differently, as if approving. His grandfather was nodding too, his grandmother tossing her head. They all approved of his not being beaten by that cousin of his. There must be a reason! Val was dimly conscious of some disturbing point outside his range of vision; as it might be, the unlocated centre of a cyclone. And, staring at his uncle's face, he had a quite unaccountable vision of a woman with dark eyes, gold hair, and a white neck, who smelt nice, and had pretty silken clothes which he had liked feeling when he was quite small. By Jove, yes! Aunt Irene! She used to kiss him, and he had bitten her arm once, playfully, because he liked it—so soft. His grandfather was speaking:

"What's his father doing?"

"He's away in Paris," Val said, staring at the very queer expression on his uncle's face, like—like that of a snarling dog.

"Artists!" said James. The word coming from the very bottom of his soul, broke up the dinner.

Opposite his mother in the cab going home, Val tasted the after-fruits of heroism, like medlars over-ripe.

She only said, indeed, that he must go to his tailor's at once and have his uniform properly made, and not just put up with what they gave him. But he could feel that she was very much upset. It was on his lips to console her with the spoken thought that he would be out of the way of that beastly divorce, but the presence of Imogen, and the knowledge that his mother would not be out of the way, restrained him. He felt aggrieved that she did not seem more proud of him. When Imogen had gone to bed, he risked the emotional.

"I'm awfully sorry to have to leave you, Mother."

"Well, I must make the best of it. We must try and get you a commission as soon as we can; then you won't have to rough it so. Do you know any drill, Val?"

"Not a scrap."

"I hope they won't worry you much. I must take you about to get the things to-morrow. Good-night; kiss me."

With that kiss, soft and hot, between his eyes, and those words, 'I hope they won't worry you much,' in his ears, he sat down to a cigarette, before a dying fire. The heat was out of him—the glow of cutting a dash. It was all a damned heart-aching bore. 'I'll be even with that chap Jolly,' he thought, trailing up the stairs, past the room where his mother was biting her pillow to smother a sense of desolation which

was trying to make her sob.

And soon only one of the diners at James' was awake—Soames, in his bedroom above his father's.

So that fellow Jolyon was in Paris—what was he doing there? Hanging round Irene! The last report from Polteed had hinted that there might be something soon. Could it be this? That fellow, with his beard and his cursed amused way of speaking—son of the old man who had given him the nickname 'Man of Property,' and bought the fatal house from him. Soames had ever resented having had to sell the house at Robin Hill; never forgiven his uncle for having bought it, or his cousin for living in it.

Reckless of the cold, he threw his window up and gazed out across the Park. Bleak and dark the January night; little sound of traffic; a frost coming; bare trees; a star or two. 'I'll see Polteed tomorrow,' he thought. 'By God! I'm mad, I think, to want her still. That fellow! If...? Um! No!'

CHAPTER X

DEATH OF THE DOG BALTHASAR

Jolyon, who had crossed from Calais by night, arrived at Robin Hill on Sunday morning. He had sent no word beforehand, so walked up from the station, entering his domain by the coppice gate. Coming to the log seat fashioned out of an old fallen trunk, he sat down, first laying his overcoat on it.

'Lumbago!' he thought; 'that's what love ends in at my time of life!' And suddenly Irene seemed very near, just as she had been that day of rambling at Fontainebleau when they had sat on a log to eat their lunch. Hauntingly near! Odour drawn out of fallen leaves by the pale-filtering sunlight soaked his nostrils. 'I'm glad it isn't spring,' he thought. With the scent of sap, and the song of birds, and the bursting of the blossoms, it would have been unbearable! 'I hope I shall be over it by then, old fool that I am!' and picking up his coat, he walked on into the field. He passed the pond and mounted the hill slowly.

Near the top a hoarse barking greeted him. Up on the lawn above the fernery he could see his old dog Balthasar. The animal, whose dim eyes took his master for a stranger, was warning the world against him. Jolyon gave his special whistle. Even at that distance of a hundred yards and more he could see the dawning recognition in the obese brown-white body. The old dog got off his haunches, and his tail, close-curved over his back, began a feeble, excited fluttering; he came waddling forward, gathered momentum, and disappeared over the edge of the fernery. Jolyon expected to meet him at the wicket gate, but Balthasar was not there, and, rather alarmed, he turned into the fernery. On his fat side, looking up with eyes already glazing, the old dog lay.

"What is it, my poor old man?" cried Jolyon. Balthasar's curled and fluffy tail just moved; his filming eyes seemed saying: "I can't get up, master, but I'm glad to see you."

Jolyon knelt down; his eyes, very dimmed, could hardly see the slowly ceasing heave of the dog's side. He raised the head a little—very heavy.

"What is it, dear man? Where are you hurt?" The tail fluttered once; the eyes lost the look of life. Jolyon passed his hands all over the inert warm bulk. There was nothing—the heart had simply failed in that obese body from the emotion of his master's return. Jolyon could feel the muzzle, where a few whitish bristles grew, cooling already against his lips. He stayed for some minutes kneeling; with his hand beneath the stiffening head. The body was very heavy when he bore it to the top of the field; leaves had drifted there, and he strewed it with a covering of them; there was no wind, and they would keep him from curious eyes until the afternoon. 'I'll bury him myself,' he thought. Eighteen years had gone since he first went into the St. John's Wood house with that tiny puppy in his pocket. Strange that the old dog should die just now! Was it an omen? He turned at the gate to look back at that russet mound, then went slowly towards the house, very choky in the throat.

June was at home; she had come down hotfoot on hearing the news of Jolly's enlistment. His patriotism had conquered her feeling for the Boers. The atmosphere of his house was strange and pocketty when Jolyon came in and told them of the dog Balthasar's death. The news had a unifying effect. A link with the past had snapped—the dog Balthasar! Two of them could remember nothing before his day; to June he represented the last years of her grandfather; to Jolyon that life of domestic stress and aesthetic struggle before he came again into the kingdom of his father's love and wealth!

And he was gone!

In the afternoon he and Jolly took picks and spades and went out to the field. They chose a spot close to the russet mound, so that they need not carry him far, and, carefully cutting off the surface turf, began to dig. They dug in silence for ten minutes, and then rested.

"Well, old man," said Jolyon, "so you thought you ought?"

"Yes," answered Jolly; "I don't want to a bit, of course."

How exactly those words represented Jolyon's own state of mind

"I admire you for it, old boy. I don't believe I should have done it at your age—too much of a Forsyte, I'm afraid. But I suppose the type gets thinner with each generation. Your son, if you have one, may be a pure altruist; who knows?"

"He won't be like me, then, Dad; I'm beastly selfish."

"No, my dear, that you clearly are not." Jolly shook his head, and they dug again.

"Strange life a dog's," said Jolyon suddenly: "The only four-footer with rudiments of altruism and a sense of God!"

Jolly looked at his father.

"Do you believe in God, Dad? I've never known."

At so searching a question from one to whom it was impossible to make a light reply, Jolyon stood for a moment feeling his back tried by the digging.

"What do you mean by God?" he said; "there are two irreconcilable ideas of God. There's the Unknowable Creative Principle—one believes in That. And there's the Sum of altruism in man—naturally one believes in That."

"I see. That leaves out Christ, doesn't it?"

Jolyon stared. Christ, the link between those two ideas! Out of the mouth of babes! Here was orthodoxy scientifically explained at last! The sublime poem of the Christ life was man's attempt to join those two irreconcilable conceptions of God. And since the Sum of human altruism was as much a part of the Unknowable Creative Principle as anything else in Nature and the Universe, a worse link might have been chosen after all! Funny—how one went through life without seeing it in that sort of way!

"What do you think, old man?" he said.

Jolly frowned. "Of course, my first year we talked a good bit about that sort of thing. But in the second year one gives it up; I don't know why—it's awfully interesting."

Jolyon remembered that he also had talked a good deal about it his first year at Cambridge, and given it up in his second.

"I suppose," said Jolly, "it's the second God, you mean, that old Balthasar had a sense of."

"Yes, or he would never have burst his poor old heart because of something outside himself."

"But wasn't that just selfish emotion, really?"

Jolyon shook his head. "No, dogs are not pure Forsytes, they love something outside themselves."

Jolly smiled.

"Well, I think I'm one," he said. "You know, I only enlisted because I dared Val Dartie to."

"But why?"

"We bar each other," said Jolly shortly.

"Ah!" muttered Jolyon. So the feud went on, unto the third generation—this modern feud which had no overt expression?

'Shall I tell the boy about it?' he thought. But to what end—if he had to stop short of his own part?

And Jolly thought: 'It's for Holly to let him know about that chap. If she doesn't, it means she doesn't want him told, and I should be sneaking. Anyway, I've stopped it. I'd better leave well alone!'

So they dug on in silence, till Jolyon said:

"Now, old man, I think it's big enough." And, resting on their spades, they gazed down into the hole where a few leaves had drifted already on a sunset wind.

"I can't bear this part of it," said Jolyon suddenly.

"Let me do it, Dad. He never cared much for me."

Jolyon shook his head.

"We'll lift him very gently, leaves and all. I'd rather not see him again. I'll take his head. Now!"

With extreme care they raised the old dog's body, whose faded tan and white showed here and there under the leaves stirred by the wind. They laid it, heavy, cold, and unresponsive, in the grave, and Jolly spread more leaves over it, while Jolyon, deeply afraid to show emotion before his son, began quickly shovelling the earth on to that still shape. There went the past! If only there were a joyful future to look forward to! It was like stamping down earth on one's own life. They replaced the turf carefully on the smooth little mound, and, grateful that they had spared each other's feelings, returned to the house arm-in-arm.

CHAPTER XI

TIMOTHY STAYS THE ROT

On Forsyte 'Change news of the enlistment spread fast, together with the report that June, not to be outdone, was going to become a Red Cross nurse. These events were so extreme, so subversive of pure Forsyteism, as to have a binding effect upon the family, and Timothy's was thronged next Sunday afternoon by members trying to find out what they thought about it all, and exchange with each other a sense of family credit. Giles and Jesse Hayman would no longer defend the coast but go to South Africa quite soon; Jolly and Val would be following in April; as to June—well, you never knew what she would really do.

The retirement from Spion Kop and the absence of any good news from the seat of war imparted an air of reality to all this, clinched in startling fashion by Timothy. The youngest of the old Forsytes—scarcely eighty, in fact popularly supposed to resemble their father, 'Superior Dosset,' even in his best-known characteristic of drinking Sherry—had been invisible for so many years that he was almost mythical. A long generation had elapsed since the risks of a publisher's business had worked on his nerves at the age of forty, so that he had got out with a mere thirty-five thousand pounds in the world, and started to make his living by careful investment. Putting by every year, at compound interest, he had doubled his capital in forty years without having once known what it was like to shake in his shoes over money matters. He was now putting aside some two thousand a year, and, with the care he was taking of himself, expected, so Aunt Hester said, to double his capital again before he died. What he would do with it then, with his sisters dead and himself dead, was often mockingly queried by free spirits such as Francie, Euphemia, or young Nicholas' second, Christopher, whose spirit was so free that he had actually said he was going on the stage. All admitted, however, that this was best known to Timothy himself, and possibly to Soames, who never divulged a secret.

Those few Forsytes who had seen him reported a man of thick and robust appearance, not very tall, with a brown-red complexion, grey hair, and little of the refinement of feature with which most of the Forsytes had been endowed by 'Superior Dosset's' wife, a woman of some beauty and a gentle temperament. It was known that he had taken surprising interest in the war, sticking flags into a map ever since it began, and there was uneasiness as to what would happen if the English were driven into the sea, when it would be almost impossible for him to put the flags in the right places. As to his knowledge of family movements or his views about them, little was known, save that Aunt Hester was always declaring that he was very upset. It was, then, in the nature of a portent when Forsytes, arriving on the Sunday after the evacuation of Spion Kop, became conscious, one after the other, of a presence seated in the only really comfortable armchair, back to the light, concealing the lower part of his face with a large hand, and were greeted by the awed voice of Aunt Hester:

"Your Uncle Timothy, my dear."

Timothy's greeting to them all was somewhat identical; and rather, as it were, passed over by him than expressed:

"How de do? How de do? 'Xcuse me gettin' up!"

Francie was present, and Eustace had come in his car; Winifred had brought Imogen, breaking the ice of the restitution proceedings with the warmth of family appreciation at Val's enlistment; and Marian Tweetyman with the last news of Giles and Jesse. These with Aunt Juley and Hester, young Nicholas, Euphemia, and—of all people!—George, who had come with Eustace in the car, constituted an assembly worthy of the family's palmiest days. There was not one chair vacant in the whole of the little drawing-room, and anxiety was felt lest someone else should arrive.

The constraint caused by Timothy's presence having worn off a little, conversation took a military turn. George asked Aunt Juley when she was going out with the Red Cross, almost reducing her to a state of gaiety; whereon he turned to Nicholas and said:

"Young Nick's a warrior bold, isn't he? When's he going to don the wild khaki?"

Young Nicholas, smiling with a sort of sweet deprecation, intimated that of course his mother was very anxious.

"The Dromios are off, I hear," said George, turning to Marian Tweetyman; "we shall all be there soon. En avant, the Forsytes! Roll, bowl, or pitch! Who's for a cooler?"

Aunt Juley gurgled, George was so droll! Should Hester get Timothy's map? Then he could show them all where they were.

At a sound from Timothy, interpreted as assent, Aunt Hester left the room.

George pursued his image of the Forsyte advance, addressing Timothy as Field Marshal; and Imogen, whom he had noted at once for 'a pretty filly,'—as Vivandiere; and holding his top hat between his knees, he began to beat it with imaginary drumsticks. The reception accorded to his fantasy was mixed. All laughed—George was licensed; but all felt that the family was being 'rotted'; and this seemed to them unnatural, now that it was going to give five of its members to the service of the Queen. George might go too far; and there was relief when he got up, offered his arm to Aunt Juley, marched up to Timothy, saluted him, kissed his aunt with mock passion, said, "Oh! what a treat, dear papa! Come on, Eustace!" and walked out, followed by the grave and fastidious Eustace, who had never smiled.

Aunt Juley's bewildered, "Fancy not waiting for the map! You mustn't mind him, Timothy. He's so droll!" broke the hush, and Timothy removed the hand from his mouth.

"I don't know what things are comin' to," he was heard to say. "What's all this about goin' out there? That's not the way to beat those Boers."

Francie alone had the hardihood to observe: "What is, then, Uncle Timothy?"

"All this new-fangled volunteerin' and expense—lettin' money out of the country."

Just then Aunt Hester brought in the map, handling it like a baby with eruptions. With the assistance of Euphemia it was laid on the piano, a small Colwood grand, last played on, it was believed, the summer before Aunt Ann died, thirteen years ago. Timothy rose. He walked over to the piano, and stood looking at his map while they all gathered round.

"There you are," he said; "that's the position up to date; and very poor it is. H'm!"

"Yes," said Francie, greatly daring, "but how are you going to alter it, Uncle Timothy, without more men?"

"Men!" said Timothy; "you don't want men—wastin' the country's money. You want a Napoleon, he'd settle it in a month."

"But if you haven't got him, Uncle Timothy?"

"That's their business," replied Timothy. "What have we kept the Army up for—to eat their heads off in time of peace! They ought to be ashamed of themselves, comin' on the country to help them like this! Let every man stick to his business, and we shall get on."

And looking round him, he added almost angrily:

"Volunteerin', indeed! Throwin' good money after bad! We must save! Conserve energy that's the only way." And with a prolonged sound, not quite a sniff and not quite a snort, he trod on Euphemia's toe, and went out, leaving a sensation and a faint scent of barley-sugar behind him.

The effect of something said with conviction by one who has evidently made a sacrifice to say it is ever considerable. And the eight Forsytes left behind, all women except young Nicholas, were silent for a moment round the map. Then Francie said:

"Really, I think he's right, you know. After all, what is the Army for? They ought to have known. It's only encouraging them."

"My dear!" cried Aunt Juley, "but they've been so progressive. Think of their giving up their scarlet. They were always so proud of it. And now they all look like convicts. Hester and I were saying only yesterday we were sure they must feel it very much. Fancy what the Iron Duke would have said!"

"The new colour's very smart," said Winifred; "Val looks quite nice in his."

Aunt Juley sighed.

"I do so wonder what Jolyon's boy is like. To think we've never seen him! His father must be so proud of him."

"His father's in Paris," said Winifred.

Aunt Hester's shoulder was seen to mount suddenly, as if to ward off her sister's next remark, for Juley's crumpled cheeks had gushed.

"We had dear little Mrs. MacAnder here yesterday, just back from Paris. And whom d'you think she saw there in the street? You'll never guess."

"We shan't try, Auntie," said Euphemia.

"Irene! Imagine! After all this time; walking with a fair beard...."

"Auntie! you'll kill me! A fair beard...."

"I was going to say," said Aunt Juley severely, "a fair-bearded gentleman. And not a day older; she was always so pretty," she added, with a sort of lingering apology.

"Oh! tell us about her, Auntie," cried Imogen; "I can just remember her. She's the skeleton in the family cupboard, isn't she? And they're such fun."

Aunt Hester sat down. Really, Juley had done it now!

"She wasn't much of a skeleton as I remember her," murmured Euphemia, "extremely well-covered."

"My dear!" said Aunt Juley, "what a peculiar way of putting it—not very nice."

"No, but what was she like?" persisted Imogen.

"I'll tell you, my child," said Francie; "a kind of modern Venus, very well-dressed."

Euphemia said sharply: "Venus was never dressed, and she had blue eyes of melting sapphire."

At this juncture Nicholas took his leave.

"Mrs. Nick is awfully strict," said Francie with a laugh.

"She has six children," said Aunt Juley; "it's very proper she should be careful."

"Was Uncle Soames awfully fond of her?" pursued the inexorable Imogen, moving her dark luscious eyes from face to face.

Aunt Hester made a gesture of despair, just as Aunt Juley answered:

"Yes, your Uncle Soames was very much attached to her."

"I suppose she ran off with someone?"

"No, certainly not; that is—not precisely."

"What did she do, then, Auntie?"

"Come along, Imogen," said Winifred, "we must be getting back."

But Aunt Juley interjected resolutely: "She—she didn't behave at all well."

"Oh, bother!" cried Imogen; "that's as far as I ever get."

"Well, my dear," said Francie, "she had a love affair which ended with the young man's death; and then she left your uncle. I always rather liked her."

"She used to give me chocolates," murmured Imogen, "and smell nice."

"Of course!" remarked Euphemia.

"Not of course at all!" replied Francie, who used a particularly expensive essence of gillyflower herself.

"I can't think what we are about," said Aunt Juley, raising her hands, "talking of such things!"

"Was she divorced?" asked Imogen from the door.

"Certainly not," cried Aunt Juley; "that is—certainly not."

A sound was heard over by the far door. Timothy had re-entered the back drawing-room. "I've come for my map," he said. "Who's been divorced?"

"No one, Uncle," replied Francie with perfect truth.

Timothy took his map off the piano.

"Don't let's have anything of that sort in the family," he said. "All this enlistin's bad enough. The country's breakin' up; I don't know what we're comin' to." He shook a thick finger at the room: "Too many women nowadays, and they don't know what they want."

So saying, he grasped the map firmly with both hands, and went out as if afraid of being answered.

The seven women whom he had addressed broke into a subdued murmur, out of which emerged Francie's, "Really, the Forsytes!" and Aunt Juley's: "He must have his feet in mustard and hot water to-night, Hester; will you tell Jane? The blood has gone to his head again, I'm afraid...."

That evening, when she and Hester were sitting alone after dinner, she dropped a stitch in her crochet, and looked up:

"Hester, I can't think where I've heard that dear Soames wants Irene to come back to him again. Who was it told us that George had made a funny drawing of him with the words, 'He won't be happy till he gets it'?"

"Eustace," answered Aunt Hester from behind *The Times*; "he had it in his pocket, but he wouldn't show it us."

Aunt Juley was silent, ruminating. The clock ticked, *The Times* crackled, the fire sent forth its rustling purr. Aunt Juley dropped another stitch.

"Hester," she said, "I have had such a dreadful thought."

"Then don't tell me," said Aunt Hester quickly.

"Oh! but I must. You can't think how dreadful!" Her voice sank to a whisper:

"Jolyon—Jolyon, they say, has a—has a fair beard, now."

CHAPTER XII

Two days after the dinner at James', Mr. Polteed provided Soames with food for thought.

"A gentleman," he said, consulting the key concealed in his left hand, "47 as we say, has been paying marked attention to 17 during the last month in Paris. But at present there seems to have been nothing very conclusive. The meetings have all been in public places, without concealment—restaurants, the Opera, the Comique, the Louvre, Luxembourg Gardens, lounge of the hotel, and so forth. She has not yet been traced to his rooms, nor vice versa. They went to Fontainebleau—but nothing of value. In short, the situation is promising, but requires patience." And, looking up suddenly, he added:

"One rather curious point—47 has the same name as—er—31!"

'The fellow knows I'm her husband,' thought Soames.

"Christian name—an odd one—Jolyon," continued Mr. Polteed. "We know his address in Paris and his residence here. We don't wish, of course, to be running a wrong hare."

"Go on with it, but be careful," said Soames doggedly.

Instinctive certainty that this detective fellow had fathomed his secret made him all the more reticent.

"Excuse me," said Mr. Polteed, "I'll just see if there's anything fresh in."

He returned with some letters. Relocking the door, he glanced at the envelopes.

"Yes, here's a personal one from 19 to myself."

"Well?" said Soames.

"Um!" said Mr. Polteed, "she says: '47 left for England to-day. Address on his baggage: Robin Hill. Parted from 17 in Louvre Gallery at 3.30; nothing very striking. Thought it best to stay and continue observation of 17. You will deal with 47 in England if you think desirable, no doubt.'" And Mr. Polteed lifted an unprofessional glance on Soames, as though he might be storing material for a book on human nature after he had gone out of business. "Very intelligent woman, 19, and a wonderful make-up. Not cheap, but earns her money well. There's no suspicion of being shadowed so far. But after a time, as you know, sensitive people are liable to get the feeling of it, without anything definite to go on. I should rather advise letting-up on 17, and keeping an eye on 47. We can't get at correspondence without great risk. I hardly advise that at this stage. But you can tell your client that it's looking up very well." And again his narrowed eyes gleamed at his taciturn customer.

"No," said Soames suddenly, "I prefer that you should keep the watch going discreetly in Paris, and not concern yourself with this end."

"Very well," replied Mr. Polteed, "we can do it."

"What—what is the manner between them?"

"I'll read you what she says," said Mr. Polteed, unlocking a bureau drawer and taking out a file of papers; "she sums it up somewhere confidentially. Yes, here it is! '17 very attractive—conclude 47, longer in the tooth' (slang for age, you know)—'distinctly gone—waiting his time—17 perhaps holding off for terms, impossible to say without knowing more. But inclined to think on the whole—doesn't know her mind—likely to act on impulse some day. Both have style.'"

"What does that mean?" said Soames between close lips.

"Well," murmured Mr. Polteed with a smile, showing many white teeth, "an expression we use. In other words, it's not likely to be a weekend business—they'll come together seriously or not at all."

"H'm!" muttered Soames, "that's all, is it?"

"Yes," said Mr. Polteed, "but quite promising."

'Spider!' thought Soames. "Good-day!"

He walked into the Green Park that he might cross to Victoria Station and take the Underground into the City. For so late in January it was warm; sunlight, through the haze, sparkled on the frosty grass—an illumined cobweb of a day.

Little spiders—and great spiders! And the greatest spinner of all, his own tenacity, for ever wrapping its cocoon of threads round any clear way out. What was that fellow hanging round Irene for? Was it

really as Polteed suggested? Or was Jolyon but taking compassion on her loneliness, as he would call it—sentimental radical chap that he had always been? If it were, indeed, as Polteed hinted! Soames stood still. It could not be! The fellow was seven years older than himself, no better looking! No richer! What attraction had he?

'Besides, he's come back,' he thought; 'that doesn't look—I'll go and see him!' and, taking out a card, he wrote:

"If you can spare half an hour some afternoon this week, I shall be at the Connoisseurs any day between 5.30 and 6, or I could come to the Hotch Potch if you prefer it. I want to see you.—S. F."

He walked up St. James's Street and confided it to the porter at the Hotch Potch.

"Give Mr. Jolyon Forsyte this as soon as he comes in," he said, and took one of the new motor cabs into the City....

Jolyon received that card the same afternoon, and turned his face towards the Connoisseurs. What did Soames want now? Had he got wind of Paris? And stepping across St. James's Street, he determined to make no secret of his visit. 'But it won't do,' he thought, 'to let him know she's there, unless he knows already.' In this complicated state of mind he was conducted to where Soames was drinking tea in a small bay-window.

"No tea, thanks," said Jolyon, "but I'll go on smoking if I may."

The curtains were not yet drawn, though the lamps outside were lighted; the two cousins sat waiting on each other.

"You've been in Paris, I hear," said Soames at last.

"Yes; just back."

"Young Val told me; he and your boy are going off, then?" Jolyon nodded.

"You didn't happen to see Irene, I suppose. It appears she's abroad somewhere."

Jolyon wreathed himself in smoke before he answered: "Yes, I saw her."

"How was she?"

"Very well."

There was another silence; then Soames roused himself in his chair.

"When I saw you last," he said, "I was in two minds. We talked, and you expressed your opinion. I don't wish to reopen that discussion. I only wanted to say this: My position with her is extremely difficult. I don't want you to go using your influence against me. What happened is a very long time ago. I'm going to ask her to let bygones be bygones."

"You have asked her, you know," murmured Jolyon.

"The idea was new to her then; it came as a shock. But the more she thinks of it, the more she must see that it's the only way out for both of us."

"That's not my impression of her state of mind," said Jolyon with particular calm. "And, forgive my saying, you misconceive the matter if you think reason comes into it at all."

He saw his cousin's pale face grow paler—he had used, without knowing it, Irene's own words.

"Thanks," muttered Soames, "but I see things perhaps more plainly than you think. I only want to be sure that you won't try to influence her against me."

"I don't know what makes you think I have any influence," said Jolyon; "but if I have I'm bound to use it in the direction of what I think is her happiness. I am what they call a 'feminist,' I believe."

"Feminist!" repeated Soames, as if seeking to gain time. "Does that mean that you're against me?"

"Bluntly," said Jolyon, "I'm against any woman living with any man whom she definitely dislikes. It appears to me rotten."

"And I suppose each time you see her you put your opinions into her mind."

"I am not likely to be seeing her."

"Not going back to Paris?"

"Not so far as I know," said Jolyon, conscious of the intent watchfulness in Soames' face.

"Well, that's all I had to say. Anyone who comes between man and wife, you know, incurs heavy responsibility."

Jolyon rose and made him a slight bow.

"Good-bye," he said, and, without offering to shake hands, moved away, leaving Soames staring after him. 'We Forsytes,' thought Jolyon, hailing a cab, 'are very civilised. With simpler folk that might have come to a row. If it weren't for my boy going to the war....' The war! A gust of his old doubt swept over him. A precious war! Domination of peoples or of women! Attempts to master and possess those who did not want you! The negation of gentle decency! Possession, vested rights; and anyone 'agin' 'em—outcast! 'Thank Heaven!' he thought, 'I always felt "agin" 'em, anyway!' Yes! Even before his first disastrous marriage he could remember fuming over the bludgeoning of Ireland, or the matrimonial suits of women trying to be free of men they loathed. Parsons would have it that freedom of soul and body were quite different things! Pernicious doctrine! Body and soul could not thus be separated. Free will was the strength of any tie, and not its weakness. 'I ought to have told Soames,' he thought, 'that I think him comic. Ah! but he's tragic, too!' Was there anything, indeed, more tragic in the world than a man enslaved by his own possessive instinct, who couldn't see the sky for it, or even enter fully into what another person felt! 'I must write and warn her,' he thought; 'he's going to have another try.' And all the way home to Robin Hill he rebelled at the strength of that duty to his son which prevented him from posting back to Paris....

But Soames sat long in his chair, the prey of a no less gnawing ache—a jealous ache, as if it had been revealed to him that this fellow held precedence of himself, and had spun fresh threads of resistance to his way out. 'Does that mean that you're against me?' he had got nothing out of that disingenuous question. Feminist! Phrasey fellow! 'I mustn't rush things,' he thought. 'I have some breathing space; he's not going back to Paris, unless he was lying. I'll let the spring come!' Though how the spring could serve him, save by adding to his ache, he could not tell. And gazing down into the street, where figures were passing from pool to pool of the light from the high lamps, he thought: 'Nothing seems any good—nothing seems worth while. I'm loney—that's the trouble.'

He closed his eyes; and at once he seemed to see Irene, in a dark street below a church—passing, turning her neck so that he caught the gleam of her eyes and her white forehead under a little dark hat, which had gold spangles on it and a veil hanging down behind. He opened his eyes—so vividly he had seen her! A woman was passing below, but not she! Oh no, there was nothing there!

CHAPTER XIII

'HERE WE ARE AGAIN!'

Imogen's frocks for her first season exercised the judgment of her mother and the purse of her grandfather all through the month of March. With Forsyte tenacity Winifred quested for perfection. It took her mind off the slowly approaching rite which would give her a freedom but doubtfully desired; took her mind, too, off her boy and his fast approaching departure for a war from which the news remained disquieting. Like bees busy on summer flowers, or bright gadflies hovering and darting over spiky autumn blossoms, she and her 'little daughter,' tall nearly as herself and with a bust measurement not far inferior, hovered in the shops of Regent Street, the establishments of Hanover Square and of Bond Street, lost in consideration and the feel of fabrics. Dozens of young women of striking deportment and peculiar gait paraded before Winifred and Imogen, draped in 'creations.' The models—'Very new, modom; quite the latest thing—' which those two reluctantly turned down, would have filled a museum; the models which they were obliged to have nearly emptied James' bank. It was no good doing things by halves, Winifred felt, in view of the need for making this first and sole untarnished season a conspicuous success. Their patience in trying the patience of those impersonal creatures who swam about before them could alone have been displayed by such as were moved by faith. It was for Winifred a long prostration before her dear goddess Fashion, fervent as a Catholic might make before the Virgin; for Imogen an experience by no means too unpleasant—she often looked so nice, and flattery was implicit everywhere: in a word it was 'amusing.'

On the afternoon of the 20th of March, having, as it were, gutted Skywards, they had sought refreshment over the way at Caramel and Baker's, and, stored with chocolate frothed at the top with cream, turned homewards through Berkeley Square of an evening touched with spring. Opening the door—freshly painted a light olive-green; nothing neglected that year to give Imogen a good send-off—Winifred passed towards the silver basket to see if anyone had called, and suddenly her nostrils twitched. What was that scent?

Imogen had taken up a novel sent from the library, and stood absorbed. Rather sharply, because of the queer feeling in her breast, Winifred said:

"Take that up, dear, and have a rest before dinner."

Imogen, still reading, passed up the stairs. Winifred heard the door of her room slammed to, and drew a long savouring breath. Was it spring tickling her senses—whipping up nostalgia for her 'clown,' against all wisdom and outraged virtue? A male scent! A faint reek of cigars and lavender-water not smelt since that early autumn night six months ago, when she had called him 'the limit.' Whence came it, or was it ghost of scent—sheer emanation from memory? She looked round her. Nothing—not a thing, no tiniest disturbance of her hall, nor of the diningroom. A little day-dream of a scent—illusory, saddening, silly! In the silver basket were new cards, two with 'Mr. and Mrs. Polegate Thom,' and one with 'Mr. Polegate Thom' thereon; she sniffed them, but they smelled severe. 'I must be tired,' she thought, 'I'll go and lie down.' Upstairs the drawing-room was darkened, waiting for some hand to give it evening light; and she passed on up to her bedroom. This, too, was half-curtained and dim, for it was six o'clock. Winifred threw off her coat—that scent again!—then stood, as if shot, transfixed against the bed-rail. Something dark had risen from the sofa in the far corner. A word of horror—in her family—escaped her: "God!"

"It's I—Monty," said a voice.

Clutching the bed-rail, Winifred reached up and turned the switch of the light hanging above her dressing-table. He appeared just on the rim of the light's circumference, emblazoned from the absence of his watch-chain down to boots neat and sooty brown, but—yes!—split at the toecap. His chest and face were shadowy. Surely he was thin—or was it a trick of the light? He advanced, lighted now from toe-cap to the top of his dark head—surely a little grizzled! His complexion had darkened, sallow; his black moustache had lost boldness, become sardonic; there were lines which she did not know about his face. There was no pin in his tie. His suit—ah!—she knew that—but how unpressed, unglorious! She stared again at the toe-cap of his boot. Something big and relentless had been 'at him,' had turned and twisted, raked and scraped him. And she stayed, not speaking, motionless, staring at that crack across the toe.

"Well!" he said, "I got the order. I'm back."

Winifred's bosom began to heave. The nostalgia for her husband which had rushed up with that scent was struggling with a deeper jealousy than any she had felt yet. There he was—a dark, and as if harried, shadow of his sleek and brazen self! What force had done this to him—squeezed him like an orange to its dry rind! That woman!

"I'm back," he said again. "I've had a beastly time. By God! I came steerage. I've got nothing but what I stand up in, and that bag."

"And who has the rest?" cried Winifred, suddenly alive. "How dared you come? You knew it was just for divorce that you got that order to come back. Don't touch me!"

They held each to the rail of the big bed where they had spent so many years of nights together. Many times, yes—many times she had wanted him back. But now that he had come she was filled with this cold and deadly resentment. He put his hand up to his moustache; but did not frizz and twist it in the old familiar way, he just pulled it downwards.

"Gad!" he said: "If you knew the time I've had!"

"I'm glad I don't!"

"Are the kids all right?"

Winifred nodded. "How did you get in?"

"With my key."

"Then the maids don't know. You can't stay here, Monty."

He uttered a little sardonic laugh.

"Where then?"

"Anywhere."

"Well, look at me! That—that damned...."

"If you mention her," cried Winifred, "I go straight out to Park Lane and I don't come back."

Suddenly he did a simple thing, but so uncharacteristic that it moved her. He shut his eyes. It was as if he had said: 'All right! I'm dead to the world!'

"You can have a room for the night," she said; "your things are still here. Only Imogen is at home."

He leaned back against the bed-rail. "Well, it's in your hands," and his own made a writhing movement. "I've been through it. You needn't hit too hard—it isn't worth while. I've been frightened; I've been frightened, Freddie."

That old pet name, disused for years and years, sent a shiver through Winifred.

'What am I to do with him?' she thought. 'What in God's name am I to do with him?'

"Got a cigarette?"

She gave him one from a little box she kept up there for when she couldn't sleep at night, and lighted it. With that action the matter-of-fact side of her nature came to life again.

"Go and have a hot bath. I'll put some clothes out for you in the dressing-room. We can talk later."

He nodded, and fixed his eyes on her—they looked half-dead, or was it that the folds in the lids had become heavier?

'He's not the same,' she thought. He would never be quite the same again! But what would he be?

"All right!" he said, and went towards the door. He even moved differently, like a man who has lost illusion and doubts whether it is worth while to move at all.

When he was gone, and she heard the water in the bath running, she put out a complete set of garments on the bed in his dressing-room, then went downstairs and fetched up the biscuit box and whisky. Putting on her coat again, and listening a moment at the bathroom door, she went down and out. In the street she hesitated. Past seven o'clock! Would Soames be at his Club or at Park Lane? She turned towards the latter. Back!

Soames had always feared it—she had sometimes hoped it.... Back! So like him—clown that he was—with this: 'Here we are again!' to make fools of them all—of the Law, of Soames, of herself!

Yet to have done with the Law, not to have that murky cloud hanging over her and the children! What a relief! Ah! but how to accept his return? That 'woman' had ravaged him, taken from him passion such as he had never bestowed on herself, such as she had not thought him capable of. There was the sting! That selfish, blatant 'clown' of hers, whom she herself had never really stirred, had been swept and ungarnished by another woman! Insulting! Too insulting! Not right, not decent to take him back! And yet she had asked for him; the Law perhaps would make her now! He was as much her husband as ever—she had put herself out of court! And all he wanted, no doubt, was money—to keep him in cigars and lavender-water! That scent! 'After all, I'm not old,' she thought, 'not old yet!' But that woman who had reduced him to those words: 'I've been through it. I've been frightened—frightened, Freddie!' She neared her father's house, driven this way and that, while all the time the Forsyte undertow was drawing her to deep conclusion that after all he was her property, to be held against a robbing world. And so she came to James'.

"Mr. Soames? In his room? I'll go up; don't say I'm here."

Her brother was dressing. She found him before a mirror, tying a black bow with an air of despising its ends.

"Hullo!" he said, contemplating her in the glass; "what's wrong?"

"Monty!" said Winifred stonily.

Soames spun round. "What!"

"Back!"

"Hoist," muttered Soames, "with our own petard. Why the deuce didn't you let me try cruelty? I always knew it was too much risk this way."

"Oh! Don't talk about that! What shall I do?"

Soames answered, with a deep, deep sound.

"Well?" said Winifred impatiently.

"What has he to say for himself?"

"Nothing. One of his boots is split across the toe."

Soames stared at her.

"Ah!" he said, "of course! On his beam ends. So—it begins again! This'll about finish father."

"Can't we keep it from him?"

"Impossible. He has an uncanny flair for anything that's worrying."

And he brooded, with fingers hooked into his blue silk braces. "There ought to be some way in law," he muttered, "to make him safe."

"No," cried Winifred, "I won't be made a fool of again; I'd sooner put up with him."

The two stared at each other. Their hearts were full of feeling, but they could give it no expression—Forsytes that they were.

"Where did you leave him?"

"In the bath," and Winifred gave a little bitter laugh. "The only thing he's brought back is lavender-water."

"Steady!" said Soames, "you're thoroughly upset. I'll go back with you."

"What's the use?"

"We ought to make terms with him."

"Terms! It'll always be the same. When he recovers—cards and betting, drink and!" She was silent, remembering the look on her husband's face. The burnt child—the burnt child. Perhaps...!

"Recovers?" replied Soames: "Is he ill?"

"No; burnt out; that's all."

Soames took his waistcoat from a chair and put it on, he took his coat and got into it, he scented his handkerchief with eau-de-Cologne, threaded his watch-chain, and said: "We haven't any luck."

And in the midst of her own trouble Winifred was sorry for him, as if in that little saying he had revealed deep trouble of his own.

"I'd like to see mother," she said.

"She'll be with father in their room. Come down quietly to the study. I'll get her."

Winifred stole down to the little dark study, chiefly remarkable for a Canaletto too doubtful to be placed elsewhere, and a fine collection of Law Reports unopened for many years. Here she stood, with her back to maroon-coloured curtains close-drawn, staring at the empty grate, till her mother came in followed by Soames.

"Oh! my poor dear!" said Emily: "How miserable you look in here! This is too bad of him, really!"

As a family they had so guarded themselves from the expression of all unfashionable emotion that it was impossible to go up and give her daughter a good hug. But there was comfort in her cushioned

voice, and her still dimpled shoulders under some rare black lace. Summoning pride and the desire not to distress her mother, Winifred said in her most off-hand voice:

"It's all right, Mother; no good fussing."

"I don't see," said Emily, looking at Soames, "why Winifred shouldn't tell him that she'll prosecute him if he doesn't keep off the premises. He took her pearls; and if he's not brought them back, that's quite enough."

Winifred smiled. They would all plunge about with suggestions of this and that, but she knew already what she would be doing, and that was—nothing. The feeling that, after all, she had won a sort of victory, retained her property, was every moment gaining ground in her. No! if she wanted to punish him, she could do it at home without the world knowing.

"Well," said Emily, "come into the dining-room comfortably—you must stay and have dinner with us. Leave it to me to tell your father." And, as Winifred moved towards the door, she turned out the light. Not till then did they see the disaster in the corridor.

There, attracted by light from a room never lighted, James was standing with his duncoloured camel-hair shawl folded about him, so that his arms were not free and his silvered head looked cut off from his fashionably trousered legs as if by an expanse of desert. He stood, inimitably stork-like, with an expression as if he saw before him a frog too large to swallow.

"What's all this?" he said. "Tell your father? You never tell me anything."

The moment found Emily without reply. It was Winifred who went up to him, and, laying one hand on each of his swathed, helpless arms, said:

"Monty's not gone bankrupt, Father. He's only come back."

They all three expected something serious to happen, and were glad she had kept that grip of his arms, but they did not know the depth of root in that shadowy old Forsyte. Something wry occurred about his shaven mouth and chin, something scratchy between those long silvery whiskers. Then he said with a sort of dignity: "He'll be the death of me. I knew how it would be."

"You mustn't worry, Father," said Winifred calmly. "I mean to make him behave."

"Ah!" said James. "Here, take this thing off, I'm hot." They unwound the shawl. He turned, and walked firmly to the dining-room.

"I don't want any soup," he said to Warmson, and sat down in his chair. They all sat down too, Winifred still in her hat, while Warmson laid the fourth place. When he left the room, James said: "What's he brought back?"

"Nothing, Father."

James concentrated his eyes on his own image in a tablespoon. "Divorce!" he muttered; "rubbish! What was I about? I ought to have paid him an allowance to stay out of England. Soames you go and propose it to him."

It seemed so right and simple a suggestion that even Winifred was surprised when she said: "No, I'll keep him now he's back; he must just behave—that's all."

They all looked at her. It had always been known that Winifred had pluck.

"Out there!" said James elliptically, "who knows what cut-throats! You look for his revolver! Don't go to bed without. You ought to have Warmson to sleep in the house. I'll see him myself tomorrow."

They were touched by this declaration, and Emily said comfortably: "That's right, James, we won't have any nonsense."

"Ah!" muttered James darkly, "I can't tell."

The advent of Warmson with fish diverted conversation.

When, directly after dinner, Winifred went over to kiss her father good-night, he looked up with eyes so full of question and distress that she put all the comfort she could into her voice.

"It's all right, Daddy, dear; don't worry. I shan't need anyone—he's quite bland. I shall only be upset if you worry. Good-night, bless you!"

James repeated the words, "Bless you!" as if he did not quite know what they meant, and his eyes followed her to the door.

She reached home before nine, and went straight upstairs.

Dartie was lying on the bed in his dressing-room, fully redressed in a blue serge suit and pumps; his arms were crossed behind his head, and an extinct cigarette drooped from his mouth.

Winifred remembered ridiculously the flowers in her window-boxes after a blazing summer day; the way they lay, or rather stood—parched, yet rested by the sun's retreat. It was as if a little dew had come already on her burnt-up husband.

He said apathetically: "I suppose you've been to Park Lane. How's the old man?"

Winifred could not help the bitter answer: "Not dead."

He winced, actually he winced.

"Understand, Monty," she said, "I will not have him worried. If you aren't going to behave yourself, you may go back, you may go anywhere. Have you had dinner?"

No.

"Would you like some?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Imogen offered me some. I didn't want any."

Imogen! In the plenitude of emotion Winifred had forgotten her.

"So you've seen her? What did she say?"

"She gave me a kiss."

With mortification Winifred saw his dark sardonic face relaxed. 'Yes!' she thought, 'he cares for her, not for me a bit.'

Dartie's eyes were moving from side to side.

"Does she know about me?" he said.

It flashed through Winifred that here was the weapon she needed. He minded their knowing!

"No. Val knows. The others don't; they only know you went away."

She heard him sigh with relief.

"But they shall know," she said firmly, "if you give me cause."

"All right!" he muttered, "hit me! I'm down!"

Winifred went up to the bed. "Look here, Monty! I don't want to hit you. I don't want to hurt you. I shan't allude to anything. I'm not going to worry. What's the use?" She was silent a moment. "I can't stand any more, though, and I won't! You'd better know. You've made me suffer. But I used to be fond of you. For the sake of that...." She met the heavy-lidded gaze of his brown eyes with the downward stare of her green-grey eyes; touched his hand suddenly, turned her back, and went into her room.

She sat there a long time before her glass, fingering her rings, thinking of this subdued dark man, almost a stranger to her, on the bed in the other room; resolutely not 'worrying,' but gnawed by jealousy of what he had been through, and now and again just visited by pity.

CHAPTER XIV

Soames doggedly let the spring come—no easy task for one conscious that time was flying, his birds in the bush no nearer the hand, no issue from the web anywhere visible. Mr. Polteed reported nothing, except that his watch went on—costing a lot of money. Val and his cousin were gone to the war, whence came news more favourable; Dartie was behaving himself so far; James had retained his health; business prospered almost terribly—there was nothing to worry Soames except that he was 'held up,' could make no step in any direction.

He did not exactly avoid Soho, for he could not afford to let them think that he had 'piped off,' as James would have put it—he might want to 'pipe on' again at any minute. But he had to be so restrained and cautious that he would often pass the door of the Restaurant Bretagne without going in, and wander out of the purlieus of that region which always gave him the feeling of having been possessively irregular.

He wandered thus one May night into Regent Street and the most amazing crowd he had ever seen; a shrieking, whistling, dancing, jostling, grotesque and formidably jovial crowd, with false noses and mouth-organs, penny whistles and long feathers, every appanage of idiocy, as it seemed to him. Mafeking! Of course, it had been relieved! Good! But was that an excuse? Who were these people, what were they, where had they come from into the West End? His face was tickled, his ears whistled into. Girls cried: 'Keep your hair on, stucco!' A youth so knocked off his top-hat that he recovered it with difficulty. Crackers were exploding beneath his nose, between his feet. He was bewildered, exasperated, offended. This stream of people came from every quarter, as if impulse had unlocked flood-gates, let flow waters of whose existence he had heard, perhaps, but believed in never. This, then, was the populace, the innumerable living negation of gentility and Forsyteism. This was—egad!—Democracy! It stank, yelled, was hideous! In the East End, or even Soho, perhaps—but here in Regent Street, in Piccadilly! What were the police about! In 1900, Soames, with his Forsyte thousands, had never seen the cauldron with the lid off; and now looking into it, could hardly believe his scorching eyes. The whole thing was unspeakable! These people had no restraint, they seemed to think him funny; such swarms of them, rude, coarse, laughing—and what laughter!

Nothing sacred to them! He shouldn't be surprised if they began to break windows. In Pall Mall, past those august dwellings, to enter which people paid sixty pounds, this shrieking, whistling, dancing dervish of a crowd was swarming. From the Club windows his own kind were looking out on them with regulated amusement. They didn't realise! Why, this was serious—might come to anything! The crowd was cheerful, but some day they would come in different mood! He remembered there had been a mob in the late eighties, when he was at Brighton; they had smashed things and made speeches. But more than dread, he felt a deep surprise. They were hysterical—it wasn't English! And all about the relief of a little town as big as—Watford, six thousand miles away. Restraint, reserve! Those qualities to him more dear almost than life, those indispensable attributes of property and culture, where were they? It wasn't English! No, it wasn't English! So Soames brooded, threading his way on. It was as if he had suddenly caught sight of someone cutting the covenant 'for quiet possession' out of his legal documents; or of a monster lurking and stalking out in the future, casting its shadow before. Their want of stolidity, their want of reverence! It was like discovering that nine-tenths of the people of England were foreigners. And if that were so—then, anything might happen!

At Hyde Park Corner he ran into George Forsyte, very sunburnt from racing, holding a false nose in his hand.

"Hallo, Soames!" he said, "have a nose!"

Soames responded with a pale smile.

"Got this from one of these sportsmen," went on George, who had evidently been dining; "had to lay him out—for trying to bash my hat. I say, one of these days we shall have to fight these chaps, they're getting so damned cheeky—all radicals and socialists. They want our goods. You tell Uncle James that, it'll make him sleep."

'In vino veritas,' thought Soames, but he only nodded, and passed on up Hamilton Place. There was but a trickle of roysterers in Park Lane, not very noisy. And looking up at the houses he thought: 'After all, we're the backbone of the country. They won't upset us easily. Possession's nine points of the law.'

But, as he closed the door of his father's house behind him, all that queer outlandish nightmare in the streets passed out of his mind almost as completely as if, having dreamed it, he had awakened in the warm clean morning comfort of his spring-mattressed bed.

Walking into the centre of the great empty drawing-room, he stood still.

A wife! Somebody to talk things over with. One had a right! Damn it!

One had a right!

PART III

CHAPTER I

SOAMES IN PARIS

Soames had travelled little. Aged nineteen he had made the 'petty tour' with his father, mother, and Winifred—Brussels, the Rhine, Switzerland, and home by way of Paris. Aged twenty-seven, just when he began to take interest in pictures, he had spent five hot weeks in Italy, looking into the Renaissance—not so much in it as he had been led to expect—and a fortnight in Paris on his way back, looking into himself, as became a Forsyte surrounded by people so strongly self-centred and 'foreign' as the French. His knowledge of their language being derived from his public school, he did not understand them when they spoke. Silence he had found better for all parties; one did not make a fool of oneself. He had disliked the look of the men's clothes, the closed-in cabs, the theatres which looked like bee-hives, the Galleries which smelled of beeswax. He was too cautious and too shy to explore that side of Paris supposed by Forsytes to constitute its attraction under the rose; and as for a collector's bargain—not one to be had! As Nicholas might have put it—they were a grasping lot. He had come back uneasy, saying Paris was overrated.

When, therefore, in June of 1900 he went to Paris, it was but his third attempt on the centre of civilisation. This time, however, the mountain was going to Mahomet; for he felt by now more deeply civilised than Paris, and perhaps he really was. Moreover, he had a definite objective. This was no mere genuflexion to a shrine of taste and immorality, but the prosecution of his own legitimate affairs. He went, indeed, because things were getting past a joke. The watch went on and on, and—nothing—nothing! Jolyon had never returned to Paris, and no one else was 'suspect!' Busy with new and very confidential matters, Soames was realising more than ever how essential reputation is to a solicitor. But at night and in his leisure moments he was ravaged by the thought that time was always flying and money flowing in, and his own future as much 'in irons' as ever. Since Mafeking night he had become aware that a 'young fool of a doctor' was hanging round Annette. Twice he had come across him—a cheerful young fool, not more than thirty.

Nothing annoyed Soames so much as cheerfulness—an indecent, extravagant sort of quality, which had no relation to facts. The mixture of his desires and hopes was, in a word, becoming torture; and lately the thought had come to him that perhaps Irene knew she was being shadowed: It was this which finally decided him to go and see for himself; to go and once more try to break down her repugnance, her refusal to make her own and his path comparatively smooth once more. If he failed again—well, he would see what she did with herself, anyway!

He went to an hotel in the Rue Caumartin, highly recommended to Forsytes, where practically nobody spoke French. He had formed no plan. He did not want to startle her; yet must contrive that she had no chance to evade him by flight. And next morning he set out in bright weather.

Paris had an air of gaiety, a sparkle over its star-shape which almost annoyed Soames. He stepped gravely, his nose lifted a little sideways in real curiosity. He desired now to understand things French. Was not Annette French? There was much to be got out of his visit, if he could only get it. In this laudable mood and the Place de la Concorde he was nearly run down three times. He came on the 'Cours la Reine,' where Irene's hotel was situated, almost too suddenly, for he had not yet fixed on his procedure. Crossing over to the river side, he noted the building, white and cheerful-looking, with green sunblinds, seen through a screen of plane-tree leaves. And, conscious that it would be far better to meet her casually in some open place than to risk a call, he sat down on a bench whence he could watch the entrance. It was not quite eleven o'clock, and improbable that she had yet gone out. Some pigeons were strutting and preening their feathers in the pools of sunlight between the shadows of the plane-trees. A workman in a blue blouse passed, and threw them crumbs from the paper which contained his dinner. A 'bonne' coiffed with ribbon shepherded two little girls with pig-tails and frilled drawers. A cab meandered by, whose cocher wore a blue coat and a black-glazed hat. To Soames a kind

of affectation seemed to cling about it all, a sort of picturesqueness which was out of date. A theatrical people, the French! He lit one of his rare cigarettes, with a sense of injury that Fate should be casting his life into outlandish waters. He shouldn't wonder if Irene quite enjoyed this foreign life; she had never been properly English—even to look at! And he began considering which of those windows could be hers under the green sunblinds. How could he word what he had come to say so that it might pierce the defence of her proud obstinacy? He threw the fag-end of his cigarette at a pigeon, with the thought: 'I can't stay here for ever twiddling my thumbs. Better give it up and call on her in the late afternoon.' But he still sat on, heard twelve strike, and then half-past. 'I'll wait till one,' he thought, 'while I'm about it.' But just then he started up, and shrinkingly sat down again. A woman had come out in a cream-coloured frock, and was moving away under a fawn-coloured parasol. Irene herself! He waited till she was too far away to recognise him, then set out after her. She was strolling as though she had no particular objective; moving, if he remembered rightly, toward the Bois de Boulogne. For half an hour at least he kept his distance on the far side of the way till she had passed into the Bois itself. Was she going to meet someone after all? Some confounded Frenchman—one of those 'Bel Ami' chaps, perhaps, who had nothing to do but hang about women—for he had read that book with difficulty and a sort of disgusted fascination. He followed doggedly along a shady alley, losing sight of her now and then when the path curved. And it came back to him how, long ago, one night in Hyde Park he had slid and sneaked from tree to tree, from seat to seat, hunting blindly, ridiculously, in burning jealousy for her and young Bosinney. The path bent sharply, and, hurrying, he came on her sitting in front of a small fountain—a little green-bronze Niobe veiled in hair to her slender hips, gazing at the pool she had wept: He came on her so suddenly that he was past before he could turn and take off his hat. She did not start up. She had always had great self-command—it was one of the things he most admired in her, one of his greatest grievances against her, because he had never been able to tell what she was thinking. Had she realised that he was following? Her self-possession made him angry; and, disdaining to explain his presence, he pointed to the mournful little Niobe, and said:

"That's rather a good thing."

He could see, then, that she was struggling to preserve her composure.

"I didn't want to startle you; is this one of your haunts?"

"Yes."

"A little lonely." As he spoke, a lady, strolling by, paused to look at the fountain and passed on.

Irene's eyes followed her.

"No," she said, prodding the ground with her parasol, "never lonely. One has always one's shadow."

Soames understood; and, looking at her hard, he exclaimed:

"Well, it's your own fault. You can be free of it at any moment. Irene, come back to me, and be free."

Irene laughed.

"Don't!" cried Soames, stamping his foot; "it's inhuman. Listen! Is there any condition I can make which will bring you back to me? If I promise you a separate house—and just a visit now and then?"

Irene rose, something wild suddenly in her face and figure.

"None! None! None! You may hunt me to the grave. I will not come."

Outraged and on edge, Soames recoiled.

"Don't make a scene!" he said sharply. And they both stood motionless, staring at the little Niobe, whose greenish flesh the sunlight was burnishing.

"That's your last word, then," muttered Soames, clenching his hands; "you condemn us both."

Irene bent her head. "I can't come back. Good-bye!"

A feeling of monstrous injustice flared up in Soames.

"Stop!" he said, "and listen to me a moment. You gave me a sacred vow—you came to me without a penny. You had all I could give you. You broke that vow without cause, you made me a by-word; you refused me a child; you've left me in prison; you—you still move me so that I want you—I want you. Well, what do you think of yourself?"

Irene turned, her face was deadly pale, her eyes burning dark.

"God made me as I am," she said; "wicked if you like—but not so wicked that I'll give myself again to a man I hate."

The sunlight gleamed on her hair as she moved away, and seemed to lay a caress all down her clinging cream-coloured frock.

Soames could neither speak nor move. That word 'hate'—so extreme, so primitive—made all the Forsyte in him tremble. With a deep imprecation he strode away from where she had vanished, and ran almost into the arms of the lady sauntering back—the fool, the shadowing fool!

He was soon dripping with perspiration, in the depths of the Bois.

'Well,' he thought, 'I need have no consideration for her now; she has not a grain of it for me. I'll show her this very day that she's my wife still.'

But on the way home to his hotel, he was forced to the conclusion that he did not know what he meant. One could not make scenes in public, and short of scenes in public what was there he could do? He almost cursed his own thin-skinnedness. She might deserve no consideration; but he—alas! deserved some at his own hands. And sitting lunchless in the hall of his hotel, with tourists passing every moment, Baedeker in hand, he was visited by black dejection. In irons! His whole life, with every natural instinct and every decent yearning gagged and fettered, and all because Fate had driven him seventeen years ago to set his heart upon this woman—so utterly, that even now he had no real heart to set on any other! Cursed was the day he had met her, and his eyes for seeing in her anything but the cruel Venus she was! And yet, still seeing her with the sunlight on the clinging China crepe of her gown, he uttered a little groan, so that a tourist who was passing, thought: 'Man in pain! Let's see! what did I have for lunch?'

Later, in front of a cafe near the Opera, over a glass of cold tea with lemon and a straw in it, he took the malicious resolution to go and dine at her hotel. If she were there, he would speak to her; if she were not, he would leave a note. He dressed carefully, and wrote as follows:

"Your idyll with that fellow Jolyon Forsyte is known to me at all events. If you pursue it, understand that I will leave no stone unturned to make things unbearable for him. 'S. F.'"

He sealed this note but did not address it, refusing to write the maiden name which she had impudently resumed, or to put the word Forsyte on the envelope lest she should tear it up unread. Then he went out, and made his way through the glowing streets, abandoned to evening pleasure-seekers. Entering her hotel, he took his seat in a far corner of the dining-room whence he could see all entrances and exits. She was not there. He ate little, quickly, watchfully. She did not come. He lingered in the lounge over his coffee, drank two liqueurs of brandy. But still she did not come. He went over to the keyboard and examined the names. Number twelve, on the first floor! And he determined to take the note up himself. He mounted red-carpeted stairs, past a little salon; eight-ten-twelve! Should he knock, push the note under, or...? He looked furtively round and turned the handle. The door opened, but into a little space leading to another door; he knocked on that—no answer. The door was locked. It fitted very closely to the floor; the note would not go under. He thrust it back into his pocket, and stood a moment listening. He felt somehow certain that she was not there. And suddenly he came away, passing the little salon down the stairs. He stopped at the bureau and said:

"Will you kindly see that Mrs. Heron has this note?"

"Madame Heron left to-day, Monsieur—suddenly, about three o'clock. There was illness in her family."

Soames compressed his lips. "Oh!" he said; "do you know her address?"

"Non, Monsieur. England, I think."

Soames put the note back into his pocket and went out. He hailed an open horse-cab which was passing.

"Drive me anywhere!"

The man, who, obviously, did not understand, smiled, and waved his whip. And Soames was borne along in that little yellow-wheeled Victoria all over star-shaped Paris, with here and there a pause, and the question, "C'est par ici, Monsieur?" "No, go on," till the man gave it up in despair, and the yellow-wheeled chariot continued to roll between the tall, flat-fronted shuttered houses and plane-tree avenues—a little Flying Dutchman of a cab.

'Like my life,' thought Soames, 'without object, on and on!'

CHAPTER II

IN THE WEB

Soames returned to England the following day, and on the third morning received a visit from Mr. Polteed, who wore a flower and carried a brown billycock hat. Soames motioned him to a seat.

"The news from the war is not so bad, is it?" said Mr. Polteed. "I hope I see you well, sir."

"Thanks! quite."

Mr. Polteed leaned forward, smiled, opened his hand, looked into it, and said softly:

"I think we've done your business for you at last."

"What?" ejaculated Soames.

"Nineteen reports quite suddenly what I think we shall be justified in calling conclusive evidence," and Mr. Polteed paused.

"Well?"

"On the 10th instant, after witnessing an interview between 17 and a party, earlier in the day, 19 can swear to having seen him coming out of her bedroom in the hotel about ten o'clock in the evening. With a little care in the giving of the evidence that will be enough, especially as 17 has left Paris—no doubt with the party in question. In fact, they both slipped off, and we haven't got on to them again, yet; but we shall—we shall. She's worked hard under very difficult circumstances, and I'm glad she's brought it off at last." Mr. Polteed took out a cigarette, tapped its end against the table, looked at Soames, and put it back. The expression on his client's face was not encouraging.

"Who is this new person?" said Soames abruptly.

"That we don't know. She'll swear to the fact, and she's got his appearance pat."

Mr. Polteed took out a letter, and began reading:

"Middle-aged, medium height, blue dittoes in afternoon, evening dress at night, pale, dark hair, small dark moustache, flat cheeks, good chin, grey eyes, small feet, guilty look...."

Soames rose and went to the window. He stood there in sardonic fury. Congenital idiot—spidery congenital idiot! Seven months at fifteen pounds a week—to be tracked down as his own wife's lover! Guilty look! He threw the window open.

"It's hot," he said, and came back to his seat.

Crossing his knees, he bent a supercilious glance on Mr. Polteed.

"I doubt if that's quite good enough," he said, drawling the words, "with no name or address. I think you may let that lady have a rest, and take up our friend 47 at this end." Whether Polteed had spotted him he could not tell; but he had a mental vision of him in the midst of his cronies dissolved in inextinguishable laughter. 'Guilty look!' Damnation!

Mr. Polteed said in a tone of urgency, almost of pathos: "I assure you we have put it through sometimes on less than that. It's Paris, you know. Attractive woman living alone. Why not risk it, sir? We might screw it up a peg."

Soames had sudden insight. The fellow's professional zeal was stirred: 'Greatest triumph of my career; got a man his divorce through a visit to his own wife's bedroom! Something to talk of there, when I retire!' And for one wild moment he thought: 'Why not?' After all, hundreds of men of medium height had small feet and a guilty look!

"I'm not authorised to take any risk!" he said shortly.

Mr. Polteed looked up.

"Pity," he said, "quite a pity! That other affair seemed very costive."

Soames rose.

"Never mind that. Please watch 47, and take care not to find a mare's nest. Good-morning!"

Mr. Polteed's eye glinted at the words 'mare's nest!'

"Very good. You shall be kept informed."

And Soames was alone again. The spidery, dirty, ridiculous business! Laying his arms on the table, he leaned his forehead on them. Full ten minutes he rested thus, till a managing clerk roused him with the draft prospectus of a new issue of shares, very desirable, in Manifold and Topping's. That afternoon he left work early and made his way to the Restaurant Bretagne. Only Madame Lamotte was in. Would Monsieur have tea with her?

Soames bowed.

When they were seated at right angles to each other in the little room, he said abruptly:

"I want a talk with you, Madame."

The quick lift of her clear brown eyes told him that she had long expected such words.

"I have to ask you something first: That young doctor—what's his name? Is there anything between him and Annette?"

Her whole personality had become, as it were, like jet—clear-cut, black, hard, shining.

"Annette is young," she said; "so is monsieur le docteur. Between young people things move quickly; but Annette is a good daughter. Ah! what a jewel of a nature!"

The least little smile twisted Soames' lips.

"Nothing definite, then?"

"But definite—no, indeed! The young man is verree nice, but—what would you? There is no money at present."

She raised her willow-patterned tea-cup; Soames did the same. Their eyes met.

"I am a married man," he said, "living apart from my wife for many years. I am seeking to divorce her."

Madame Lamotte put down her cup. Indeed! What tragic things there were! The entire absence of sentiment in her inspired a queer species of contempt in Soames.

"I am a rich man," he added, fully conscious that the remark was not in good taste. "It is useless to say more at present, but I think you understand."

Madame's eyes, so open that the whites showed above them, looked at him very straight.

"Ah! ca—mais nous avons le temps!" was all she said. "Another little cup?" Soames refused, and, taking his leave, walked westward.

He had got that off his mind; she would not let Annette commit herself with that cheerful young ass until....! But what chance of his ever being able to say: 'I'm free.' What chance? The future had lost all semblance of reality. He felt like a fly, entangled in cobweb filaments, watching the desirable freedom of the air with pitiful eyes.

He was short of exercise, and wandered on to Kensington Gardens, and down Queen's Gate towards Chelsea. Perhaps she had gone back to her flat. That at all events he could find out. For since that last and most ignominious repulse his wounded self-respect had taken refuge again in the feeling that she must have a lover. He arrived before the little Mansions at the dinner-hour. No need to enquire! A grey-haired lady was watering the flower-boxes in her window. It was evidently let. And he walked slowly past again, along the river—an evening of clear, quiet beauty, all harmony and comfort, except within his heart.

CHAPTER III

On the afternoon that Soames crossed to France a cablegram was received by Jolyon at Robin Hill:

"Your son down with enteric no immediate danger will cable again."

It reached a household already agitated by the imminent departure of June, whose berth was booked for the following day. She was, indeed, in the act of confiding Eric Cobbley and his family to her father's care when the message arrived.

The resolution to become a Red Cross nurse, taken under stimulus of Jolly's enlistment, had been loyally fulfilled with the irritation and regret which all Forsytes feel at what curtails their individual liberties. Enthusiastic at first about the 'wonderfulness' of the work, she had begun after a month to feel that she could train herself so much better than others could train her. And if Holly had not insisted on following her example, and being trained too, she must inevitably have 'cried off.' The departure of Jolly and Val with their troop in April had further stiffened her failing resolve. But now, on the point of departure, the thought of leaving Eric Cobbley, with a wife and two children, adrift in the cold waters of an unappreciative world weighed on her so that she was still in danger of backing out. The reading of that cablegram, with its disquieting reality, clinched the matter. She saw herself already nursing Jolly—for of course they would let her nurse her own brother! Jolyon—ever wide and doubtful—had no such hope. Poor June!

Could any Forsyte of her generation grasp how rude and brutal life was? Ever since he knew of his boy's arrival at Cape Town the thought of him had been a kind of recurrent sickness in Jolyon. He could not get reconciled to the feeling that Jolly was in danger all the time. The cablegram, grave though it was, was almost a relief. He was now safe from bullets, anyway. And yet—this enteric was a virulent disease! The Times was full of deaths therefrom. Why could he not be lying out there in that up-country hospital, and his boy safe at home? The un-Forsyean self-sacrifice of his three children, indeed, had quite bewildered Jolyon. He would eagerly change places with Jolly, because he loved his boy; but no such personal motive was influencing them. He could only think that it marked the decline of the Forsyte type.

Late that afternoon Holly came out to him under the old oak-tree. She had grown up very much during these last months of hospital training away from home. And, seeing her approach, he thought: 'She has more sense than June, child though she is; more wisdom. Thank God she isn't going out.' She had seated herself in the swing, very silent and still. 'She feels this,' thought Jolyon, 'as much as I' and, seeing her eyes fixed on him, he said: "Don't take it to heart too much, my child. If he weren't ill, he might be in much greater danger."

Holly got out of the swing.

"I want to tell you something, Dad. It was through me that Jolly enlisted and went out."

"How's that?"

"When you were away in Paris, Val Dartie and I fell in love. We used to ride in Richmond Park; we got engaged. Jolly found it out, and thought he ought to stop it; so he dared Val to enlist. It was all my fault, Dad; and I want to go out too. Because if anything happens to either of them I should feel awful. Besides, I'm just as much trained as June."

Jolyon gazed at her in a stupefaction that was tinged with irony. So this was the answer to the riddle he had been asking himself; and his three children were Forsytes after all. Surely Holly might have told him all this before! But he smothered the sarcastic sayings on his lips. Tenderness to the young was perhaps the most sacred article of his belief. He had got, no doubt, what he deserved. Engaged! So this was why he had so lost touch with her! And to young Val Dartie—nephew of Soames—in the other camp! It was all terribly distasteful. He closed his easel, and set his drawing against the tree.

"Have you told June?"

"Yes; she says she'll get me into her cabin somehow. It's a single cabin; but one of us could sleep on the floor. If you consent, she'll go up now and get permission."

'Consent?' thought Jolyon. 'Rather late in the day to ask for that!' But again he checked himself.

"You're too young, my dear; they won't let you."

"June knows some people that she helped to go to Cape Town. If they won't let me nurse yet, I could stay with them and go on training there. Let me go, Dad!"

Jolyon smiled because he could have cried.

"I never stop anyone from doing anything," he said.

Holly flung her arms round his neck.

"Oh! Dad, you are the best in the world."

'That means the worst,' thought Jolyon. If he had ever doubted his creed of tolerance he did so then.

"I'm not friendly with Val's family," he said, "and I don't know Val, but Jolly didn't like him."

Holly looked at the distance and said:

"I love him."

"That settles it," said Jolyon dryly, then catching the expression on her face, he kissed her, with the thought: 'Is anything more pathetic than the faith of the young?' Unless he actually forbade her going it was obvious that he must make the best of it, so he went up to town with June. Whether due to her persistence, or the fact that the official they saw was an old school friend of Jolyon's, they obtained permission for Holly to share the single cabin. He took them to Surbiton station the following evening, and they duly slid away from him, provided with money, invalid foods, and those letters of credit without which Forsytes do not travel.

He drove back to Robin Hill under a brilliant sky to his late dinner, served with an added care by servants trying to show him that they sympathised, eaten with an added scrupulousness to show them that he appreciated their sympathy. But it was a real relief to get to his cigar on the terrace of flagstones—cunningly chosen by young Bosinney for shape and colour—with night closing in around him, so beautiful a night, hardly whispering in the trees, and smelling so sweet that it made him ache. The grass was drenched with dew, and he kept to those flagstones, up and down, till presently it began to seem to him that he was one of three, not wheeling, but turning right about at each end, so that his father was always nearest to the house, and his son always nearest to the terrace edge. Each had an arm lightly within his arm; he dared not lift his hand to his cigar lest he should disturb them, and it burned away, dripping ash on him, till it dropped from his lips, at last, which were getting hot. They left him then, and his arms felt chilly. Three Jolyons in one Jolyon they had walked.

He stood still, counting the sounds—a carriage passing on the highroad, a distant train, the dog at Gage's farm, the whispering trees, the groom playing on his penny whistle. A multitude of stars up there—bright and silent, so far off! No moon as yet! Just enough light to show him the dark flags and swords of the iris flowers along the terrace edge—his favourite flower that had the night's own colour on its curving crumpled petals. He turned round to the house. Big, unlighted, not a soul beside himself to live in all that part of it. Stark loneliness! He could not go on living here alone. And yet, so long as there was beauty, why should a man feel lonely? The answer—as to some idiot's riddle—was: Because he did. The greater the beauty, the greater the loneliness, for at the back of beauty was harmony, and at the back of harmony was —union. Beauty could not comfort if the soul were out of it. The night, maddeningly lovely, with bloom of grapes on it in starshine, and the breath of grass and honey coming from it, he could not enjoy, while she who was to him the life of beauty, its embodiment and essence, was cut off from him, utterly cut off now, he felt, by honourable decency.

He made a poor fist of sleeping, striving too hard after that resignation which Forsytes find difficult to reach, bred to their own way and left so comfortably off by their fathers. But after dawn he dozed off, and soon was dreaming a strange dream.

He was on a stage with immensely high rich curtains—high as the very stars—stretching in a semi-circle from footlights to footlights. He himself was very small, a little black restless figure roaming up and down; and the odd thing was that he was not altogether himself, but Soames as well, so that he was not only experiencing but watching. This figure of himself and Soames was trying to find a way out through the curtains, which, heavy and dark, kept him in. Several times he had crossed in front of them before he saw with delight a sudden narrow rift—a tall chink of beauty the colour of iris flowers, like a glimpse of Paradise, remote, ineffable. Stepping quickly forward to pass into it, he found the curtains closing before him. Bitterly disappointed he—or was it Soames?—moved on, and there was the chink again through the parted curtains, which again closed too soon. This went on and on and he never got through till he woke with the word "Irene" on his lips. The dream disturbed him badly, especially that identification of himself with Soames.

Next morning, finding it impossible to work, he spent hours riding Jolly's horse in search of fatigue. And on the second day he made up his mind to move to London and see if he could not get permission

to follow his daughters to South Africa. He had just begun to pack the following morning when he received this letter:

"GREEN HOTEL,
"June 13.
"RICHMOND.
"MY DEAR JOLYON,

"You will be surprised to see how near I am to you. Paris became impossible—and I have come here to be within reach of your advice. I would so love to see you again. Since you left Paris I don't think I have met anyone I could really talk to. Is all well with you and with your boy? No one knows, I think, that I am here at present.

"Always your friend,
"IRENE."

Irene within three miles of him!—and again in flight! He stood with a very queer smile on his lips. This was more than he had bargained for!

About noon he set out on foot across Richmond Park, and as he went along, he thought: 'Richmond Park! By Jove, it suits us Forsytes!' Not that Forsytes lived there—nobody lived there save royalty, rangers, and the deer—but in Richmond Park Nature was allowed to go so far and no further, putting up a brave show of being natural, seeming to say: 'Look at my instincts—they are almost passions, very nearly out of hand, but not quite, of course; the very hub of possession is to possess oneself.' Yes! Richmond Park possessed itself, even on that bright day of June, with arrowy cuckoos shifting the tree-points of their calls, and the wood doves announcing high summer.

The Green Hotel, which Jolyon entered at one o'clock, stood nearly opposite that more famous hostelry, the Crown and Sceptre; it was modest, highly respectable, never out of cold beef, gooseberry tart, and a dowager or two, so that a carriage and pair was almost always standing before the door.

In a room draped in chintz so slippery as to forbid all emotion, Irene was sitting on a piano stool covered with crewel work, playing 'Hansel and Gretel' out of an old score. Above her on a wall, not yet Morris-papered, was a print of the Queen on a pony, amongst deer-hounds, Scotch caps, and slain stags; beside her in a pot on the window-sill was a white and rosy fuchsia. The Victorianism of the room almost talked; and in her clinging frock Irene seemed to Jolyon like Venus emerging from the shell of the past century.

"If the proprietor had eyes," he said, "he would show you the door; you have broken through his decorations." Thus lightly he smothered up an emotional moment. Having eaten cold beef, pickled walnut, gooseberry tart, and drunk stone-bottle ginger-beer, they walked into the Park, and light talk was succeeded by the silence Jolyon had dreaded.

"You haven't told me about Paris," he said at last.

"No. I've been shadowed for a long time; one gets used to that. But then Soames came. By the little Niobe—the same story; would I go back to him?"

"Incredible!"

She had spoken without raising her eyes, but she looked up now. Those dark eyes clinging to his said as no words could have: 'I have come to an end; if you want me, here I am.'

For sheer emotional intensity had he ever—old as he was—passed through such a moment?

The words: 'Irene, I adore you!' almost escaped him. Then, with a clearness of which he would not have believed mental vision capable, he saw Jolly lying with a white face turned to a white wall.

"My boy is very ill out there," he said quietly.

Irene slipped her arm through his.

"Let's walk on; I understand."

No miserable explanation to attempt! She had understood! And they walked on among the bracken, knee-high already, between the rabbit-holes and the oak-trees, talking of Jolly. He left her two hours later at the Richmond Hill Gate, and turned towards home.

'She knows of my feeling for her, then,' he thought. Of course! One could not keep knowledge of that from such a woman!

CHAPTER IV

OVER THE RIVER

Jolly was tired to death of dreams. They had left him now too wan and weak to dream again; left him to lie torpid, faintly remembering far-off things; just able to turn his eyes and gaze through the window near his cot at the trickle of river running by in the sands, at the straggling milk-bush of the Karoo beyond. He knew what the Karoo was now, even if he had not seen a Boer roll over like a rabbit, or heard the whine of flying bullets. This pestilence had sneaked on him before he had smelled powder. A thirsty day and a rash drink, or perhaps a tainted fruit—who knew? Not he, who had not even strength left to grudge the evil thing its victory—just enough to know that there were many lying here with him, that he was sore with frenzied dreaming; just enough to watch that thread of river and be able to remember faintly those far-away things....

The sun was nearly down. It would be cooler soon. He would have liked to know the time—to feel his old watch, so butter-smooth, to hear the repeater strike. It would have been friendly, home-like. He had not even strength to remember that the old watch was last wound the day he began to lie here. The pulse of his brain beat so feebly that faces which came and went, nurse's, doctor's, orderly's, were indistinguishable, just one indifferent face; and the words spoken about him meant all the same thing, and that almost nothing. Those things he used to do, though far and faint, were more distinct—walking past the foot of the old steps at Harrow 'bill'—'Here, sir! Here, sir!'—wrapping boots in the Westminster Gazette, greenish paper, shining boots—grandfather coming from somewhere dark—a smell of earth—the mushroom house! Robin Hill! Burying poor old Balthasar in the leaves! Dad! Home....

Consciousness came again with noticing that the river had no water in it—someone was speaking too. Want anything? No. What could one want? Too weak to want—only to hear his watch strike....

Holly! She wouldn't bowl properly. Oh! Pitch them up! Not sneaks!... 'Back her, Two and Bow!' He was Two!... Consciousness came once more with a sense of the violet dusk outside, and a rising blood-red crescent moon. His eyes rested on it fascinated; in the long minutes of brain-nothingness it went moving up and up....

"He's going, doctor!" Not pack boots again? Never? 'Mind your form, Two!' Don't cry! Go quietly—over the river—sleep!... Dark? If somebody would—strike—his—watch!...

CHAPTER V

SOAMES ACTS

A sealed letter in the handwriting of Mr. Polteed remained unopened in Soames' pocket throughout two hours of sustained attention to the affairs of the 'New Colliery Company,' which, declining almost from the moment of old Jolyon's retirement from the Chairmanship, had lately run down so fast that there was now nothing for it but a 'winding-up.' He took the letter out to lunch at his City Club, sacred to him for the meals he had eaten there with his father in the early seventies, when James used to like him to come and see for himself the nature of his future life.

Here in a remote corner before a plate of roast mutton and mashed potato, he read:

"DEAR SIR,

"In accordance with your suggestion we have duly taken the matter up at the other end with gratifying results. Observation of 47 has enabled us to locate 17 at the Green Hotel, Richmond. The two have been observed to meet daily during the past week in Richmond Park. Nothing absolutely crucial has so far been notified. But in conjunction with what we had from Paris at the beginning of the year, I am confident we could now satisfy the Court. We shall, of course, continue to watch the matter until we hear from you.

"Very faithfully yours,
"CLAUD POLTEED."

Soames read it through twice and beckoned to the waiter:

"Take this away; it's cold."

"Shall I bring you some more, sir?"

"No. Get me some coffee in the other room."

And, paying for what he had not eaten, he went out, passing two acquaintances without sign of recognition.

'Satisfy the Court!' he thought, sitting at a little round marble table with the coffee before him. That fellow Jolyon! He poured out his coffee, sweetened and drank it. He would disgrace him in the eyes of his own children! And rising, with that resolution hot within him, he found for the first time the inconvenience of being his own solicitor. He could not treat this scandalous matter in his own office. He must commit the soul of his private dignity to a stranger, some other professional dealer in family dishonour. Who was there he could go to? Linkman and Laver in Budge Row, perhaps—reliable, not too conspicuous, only nodding acquaintances. But before he saw them he must see Polteed again. But at this thought Soames had a moment of sheer weakness. To part with his secret? How find the words? How subject himself to contempt and secret laughter? Yet, after all, the fellow knew already—oh yes, he knew! And, feeling that he must finish with it now, he took a cab into the West End.

In this hot weather the window of Mr. Polteed's room was positively open, and the only precaution was a wire gauze, preventing the intrusion of flies. Two or three had tried to come in, and been caught, so that they seemed to be clinging there with the intention of being devoured presently. Mr. Polteed, following the direction of his client's eye, rose apologetically and closed the window.

'Posing ass!' thought Soames. Like all who fundamentally believe in themselves he was rising to the occasion, and, with his little sideway smile, he said: "I've had your letter. I'm going to act. I suppose you know who the lady you've been watching really is?" Mr. Polteed's expression at that moment was a masterpiece. It so clearly said: 'Well, what do you think? But mere professional knowledge, I assure you—pray forgive it!' He made a little half airy movement with his hand, as who should say: 'Such things—such things will happen to us all!'

"Very well, then," said Soames, moistening his lips: "there's no need to say more. I'm instructing Linkman and Laver of Budge Row to act for me. I don't want to hear your evidence, but kindly make your report to them at five o'clock, and continue to observe the utmost secrecy."

Mr. Polteed half closed his eyes, as if to comply at once. "My dear sir," he said.

"Are you convinced," asked Soames with sudden energy, "that there is enough?"

The faintest movement occurred to Mr. Polteed's shoulders.

"You can risk it," he murmured; "with what we have, and human nature, you can risk it."

Soames rose. "You will ask for Mr. Linkman. Thanks; don't get up." He could not bear Mr. Polteed to slide as usual between him and the door. In the sunlight of Piccadilly he wiped his forehead. This had been the worst of it—he could stand the strangers better. And he went back into the City to do what still lay before him.

That evening in Park Lane, watching his father dine, he was overwhelmed by his old longing for a son—a son, to watch him eat as he went down the years, to be taken on his knee as James on a time had been wont to take him; a son of his own begetting, who could understand him because he was the same flesh and blood—understand, and comfort him, and become more rich and cultured than himself because he would start even better off. To get old—like that thin, grey wiry-frail figure sitting there—and be quite alone with possessions heaping up around him; to take no interest in anything because it had no future and must pass away from him to hands and mouths and eyes for whom he cared no jot! No! He would force it through now, and be free to marry, and have a son to care for him before he grew to be like the old old man his father, wistfully watching now his sweetbread, now his son.

In that mood he went up to bed. But, lying warm between those fine linen sheets of Emily's providing, he was visited by memories and torture. Visions of Irene, almost the solid feeling of her body, beset him. Why had he ever been fool enough to see her again, and let this flood back on him so that it was pain to think of her with that fellow—that stealing fellow.

CHAPTER VI

A SUMMER DAY

His boy was seldom absent from Jolyon's mind in the days which followed the first walk with Irene in Richmond Park. No further news had come; enquiries at the War Office elicited nothing; nor could he expect to hear from June and Holly for three weeks at least. In these days he felt how insufficient were his memories of Jolly, and what an amateur of a father he had been. There was not a single memory in which anger played a part; not one reconciliation, because there had never been a rupture; nor one heart-to-heart confidence, not even when Jolly's mother died. Nothing but half-ironical affection. He had been too afraid of committing himself in any direction, for fear of losing his liberty, or interfering with that of his boy.

Only in Irene's presence had he relief, highly complicated by the ever-growing perception of how divided he was between her and his son. With Jolly was bound up all that sense of continuity and social creed of which he had drunk deeply in his youth and again during his boy's public school and varsity life—all that sense of not going back on what father and son expected of each other. With Irene was bound up all his delight in beauty and in Nature. And he seemed to know less and less which was the stronger within him. From such sentimental paralysis he was rudely awakened, however, one afternoon, just as he was starting off to Richmond, by a young man with a bicycle and a face oddly familiar, who came forward faintly smiling.

"Mr. Jolyon Forsyte? Thank you!" Placing an envelope in Jolyon's hand he wheeled off the path and rode away. Bewildered, Jolyon opened it.

"Admiralty Probate and Divorce, Forsyte v. Forsyte and Forsyte!"

A sensation of shame and disgust was followed by the instant reaction 'Why, here's the very thing you want, and you don't like it!' But she must have had one too; and he must go to her at once. He turned things over as he went along. It was an ironical business. For, whatever the Scriptures said about the heart, it took more than mere longings to satisfy the law. They could perfectly well defend this suit, or at least in good faith try to. But the idea of doing so revolted Jolyon. If not her lover in deed he was in desire, and he knew that she was ready to come to him. Her face had told him so. Not that he exaggerated her feeling for him. She had had her grand passion, and he could not expect another from her at his age. But she had trust in him, affection for him, and must feel that he would be a refuge. Surely she would not ask him to defend the suit, knowing that he adored her! Thank Heaven she had not that maddening British conscientiousness which refused happiness for the sake of refusing! She must rejoice at this chance of being free after seventeen years of death in life! As to publicity, the fat was in the fire! To defend the suit would not take away the slur. Jolyon had all the proper feeling of a Forsyte whose privacy is threatened: If he was to be hung by the Law, by all means let it be for a sheep! Moreover the notion of standing in a witness box and swearing to the truth that no gesture, not even a word of love had passed between them seemed to him more degrading than to take the tacit stigma of being an adulterer—more truly degrading, considering the feeling in his heart, and just as bad and painful for his children. The thought of explaining away, if he could, before a judge and twelve average Englishmen, their meetings in Paris, and the walks in Richmond Park, horrified him. The brutality and hypocritical censoriousness of the whole process; the probability that they would not be believed—the mere vision of her, whom he looked on as the embodiment of Nature and of Beauty, standing there before all those suspicious, gloating eyes was hideous to him. No, no! To defend a suit only made a London holiday, and sold the newspapers. A thousand times better accept what Soames and the gods had sent!

'Besides,' he thought honestly, 'who knows whether, even for my boy's sake, I could have stood this state of things much longer? Anyway, her neck will be out of chancery at last!' Thus absorbed, he was hardly conscious of the heavy heat. The sky had become overcast, purplish with little streaks of white. A heavy heat-drop plashed a little star pattern in the dust of the road as he entered the Park. 'Phew!' he thought, 'thunder! I hope she's not come to meet me; there's a ducking up there!' But at that very minute he saw Irene coming towards the Gate. 'We must scuttle back to Robin Hill,' he thought.

The storm had passed over the Poultry at four o'clock, bringing welcome distraction to the clerks in every office. Soames was drinking a cup of tea when a note was brought in to him:

"DEAR SIR,

"In accordance with your instructions, we beg to inform you that we personally served the respondent and co-respondent in this suit to-day, at Richmond, and Robin Hill, respectively. "Faithfully yours, "LINKMAN AND LAVER."

For some minutes Soames stared at that note. Ever since he had given those instructions he had been tempted to annul them. It was so scandalous, such a general disgrace! The evidence, too, what he had heard of it, had never seemed to him conclusive; somehow, he believed less and less that those two had gone all lengths. But this, of course, would drive them to it; and he suffered from the thought. That fellow to have her love, where he had failed! Was it too late? Now that they had been brought up sharp by service of this petition, had he not a lever with which he could force them apart? 'But if I don't act at once,' he thought, 'it will be too late, now they've had this thing. I'll go and see him; I'll go down!'

And, sick with nervous anxiety, he sent out for one of the 'new-fangled' motor-cabs. It might take a long time to run that fellow to ground, and Goodness knew what decision they might come to after such a shock! 'If I were a theatrical ass,' he thought, 'I suppose I should be taking a horse-whip or a pistol or something!' He took instead a bundle of papers in the case of 'Magentie versus Wake,' intending to read them on the way down. He did not even open them, but sat quite still, jolted and jarred, unconscious of the draught down the back of his neck, or the smell of petrol. He must be guided by the fellow's attitude; the great thing was to keep his head!

London had already begun to disgorge its workers as he neared Putney Bridge; the ant-heap was on the move outwards. What a lot of ants, all with a living to get, holding on by their eyelids in the great scramble! Perhaps for the first time in his life Soames thought: 'I could let go if I liked! Nothing could touch me; I could snap my fingers, live as I wished—enjoy myself!' No! One could not live as he had and just drop it all—settle down in Capua, to spend the money and reputation he had made. A man's life was what he possessed and sought to possess. Only fools thought otherwise—fools, and socialists, and libertines!

The cab was passing villas now, going a great pace. 'Fifteen miles an hour, I should think!' he mused; 'this'll take people out of town to live!' and he thought of its bearing on the portions of London owned by his father—he himself had never taken to that form of investment, the gambler in him having all the outlet needed in his pictures. And the cab sped on, down the hill past Wimbledon Common. This interview! Surely a man of fifty-two with grown-up children, and hung on the line, would not be reckless. 'He won't want to disgrace the family,' he thought; 'he was as fond of his father as I am of mine, and they were brothers. That woman brings destruction—what is it in her? I've never known.' The cab branched off, along the side of a wood, and he heard a late cuckoo calling, almost the first he had heard that year. He was now almost opposite the site he had originally chosen for his house, and which had been so unceremoniously rejected by Bosinney in favour of his own choice. He began passing his handkerchief over his face and hands, taking deep breaths to give him steadiness. 'Keep one's head,' he thought, 'keep one's head!'

The cab turned in at the drive which might have been his own, and the sound of music met him. He had forgotten the fellow's daughters.

"I may be out again directly," he said to the driver, "or I may be kept some time"; and he rang the bell.

Following the maid through the curtains into the inner hall, he felt relieved that the impact of this meeting would be broken by June or Holly, whichever was playing in there, so that with complete surprise he saw Irene at the piano, and Jolyon sitting in an armchair listening. They both stood up. Blood surged into Soames' brain, and all his resolution to be guided by this or that left him utterly. The look of his farmer forbears—dogged Forsytes down by the sea, from 'Superior Dosset' back—grinned out of his face.

"Very pretty!" he said.

He heard the fellow murmur:

"This is hardly the place—we'll go to the study, if you don't mind." And they both passed him through the curtain opening. In the little room to which he followed them, Irene stood by the open window, and the 'fellow' close to her by a big chair. Soames pulled the door to behind him with a slam; the sound carried him back all those years to the day when he had shut out Jolyon—shut him out for meddling with his affairs.

"Well," he said, "what have you to say for yourselves?"

The fellow had the effrontery to smile.

"What we have received to-day has taken away your right to ask. I should imagine you will be glad to have your neck out of chancery."

"Oh!" said Soames; "you think so! I came to tell you that I'll divorce her with every circumstance of disgrace to you both, unless you swear to keep clear of each other from now on."

He was astonished at his fluency, because his mind was stammering and his hands twitching. Neither of them answered; but their faces seemed to him as if contemptuous.

"Well," he said; "you—Irene?"

Her lips moved, but Jolyon laid his hand on her arm.

"Let her alone!" said Soames furiously. "Irene, will you swear it?"

"No."

"Oh! and you?"

"Still less."

"So then you're guilty, are you?"

"Yes, guilty." It was Irene speaking in that serene voice, with that unreachd air which had maddened him so often; and, carried beyond himself, he cried:

"You are a devil"

"Go out! Leave this house, or I'll do you an injury."

That fellow to talk of injuries! Did he know how near his throat was to being scragged?

"A trustee," he said, "embezzling trust property! A thief, stealing his cousin's wife."

"Call me what you like. You have chosen your part, we have chosen ours. Go out!"

If he had brought a weapon Soames might have used it at that moment.

"I'll make you pay!" he said.

"I shall be very happy."

At that deadly turning of the meaning of his speech by the son of him who had nicknamed him 'the man of property,' Soames stood glaring. It was ridiculous!

There they were, kept from violence by some secret force. No blow possible, no words to meet the case. But he could not, did not know how to turn and go away. His eyes fastened on Irene's face—the last time he would ever see that fatal face—the last time, no doubt!

"You," he said suddenly, "I hope you'll treat him as you treated me—that's all."

He saw her wince, and with a sensation not quite triumph, not quite relief, he wrenched open the door, passed out through the hall, and got into his cab. He lolled against the cushion with his eyes shut. Never in his life had he been so near to murderous violence, never so thrown away the restraint which was his second nature. He had a stripped and naked feeling, as if all virtue had gone out of him—life meaningless, mind-striking work. Sunlight streamed in on him, but he felt cold. The scene he had passed through had gone from him already, what was before him would not materialise, he could catch on to nothing; and he felt frightened, as if he had been hanging over the edge of a precipice, as if with another turn of the screw sanity would have failed him. 'I'm not fit for it,' he thought; 'I mustn't—I'm not fit for it.' The cab sped on, and in mechanical procession trees, houses, people passed, but had no significance. 'I feel very queer,' he thought; 'I'll take a Turkish bath.—I've been very near to something. It won't do.' The cab whirred its way back over the bridge, up the Fulham Road, along the Park.

"To the Hammam," said Soames.

Curious that on so warm a summer day, heat should be so comforting! Crossing into the hot room he met George Forsyte coming out, red and glistening.

"Hallo!" said George; "what are you training for? You've not got much superfluous."

Buffoon! Soames passed him with his sideway smile. Lying back, rubbing his skin uneasily for the first signs of perspiration, he thought: 'Let them laugh! I won't feel anything! I can't stand violence! It's not good for me!'

CHAPTER VII

A SUMMER NIGHT

Soames left dead silence in the little study. "Thank you for that good lie," said Jolyon suddenly. "Come out—the air in here is not what it was!"

In front of a long high southerly wall on which were trained peach-trees the two walked up and down in silence. Old Jolyon had planted some cupressus-trees, at intervals, between this grassy terrace and the dipping meadow full of buttercups and ox-eyed daisies; for twelve years they had flourished, till their dark spiral shapes had quite a look of Italy. Birds fluttered softly in the wet shrubbery; the swallows swooped past, with a steel-blue sheen on their swift little bodies; the grass felt springy beneath the feet, its green refreshed; butterflies chased each other. After that painful scene the quiet of Nature was wonderfully poignant. Under the sun-soaked wall ran a narrow strip of garden-bed full of mignonette and pansies, and from the bees came a low hum in which all other sounds were set—the mooing of a cow deprived of her calf, the calling of a cuckoo from an elm-tree at the bottom of the meadow. Who would have thought that behind them, within ten miles, London began—that London of the Forsytes, with its wealth, its misery; its dirt and noise; its jumbled stone isles of beauty, its grey sea of hideous brick and stucco? That London which had seen Irene's early tragedy, and Jolyon's own hard days; that web; that princely workhouse of the possessive instinct!

And while they walked Jolyon pondered those words: 'I hope you'll treat him as you treated me.' That would depend on himself. Could he trust himself? Did Nature permit a Forsyte not to make a slave of what he adored? Could beauty be confided to him? Or should she not be just a visitor, coming when she would, possessed for moments which passed, to return only at her own choosing? 'We are a breed of spoilers!' thought Jolyon, 'close and greedy; the bloom of life is not safe with us. Let her come to me as she will, when she will, not at all if she will not. Let me be just her stand-by, her perching-place; never-never her cage!'

She was the chink of beauty in his dream. Was he to pass through the curtains now and reach her? Was the rich stuff of many possessions, the close encircling fabric of the possessive instinct walling in that little black figure of himself, and Soames—was it to be rent so that he could pass through into his vision, find there something not of the senses only? 'Let me,' he thought, 'ah! let me only know how not to grasp and destroy!'

But at dinner there were plans to be made. To-night she would go back to the hotel, but tomorrow he would take her up to London. He must instruct his solicitor—Jack Herring. Not a finger must be raised to hinder the process of the Law. Damages exemplary, judicial strictures, costs, what they liked—let it go through at the first moment, so that her neck might be out of chancery at last! To-morrow he would see Herring—they would go and see him together. And then—abroad, leaving no doubt, no difficulty about evidence, making the lie she had told into the truth. He looked round at her; and it seemed to his adoring eyes that more than a woman was sitting there. The spirit of universal beauty, deep, mysterious, which the old painters, Titian, Giorgione, Botticelli, had known how to capture and transfer to the faces of their women—this flying beauty seemed to him imprinted on her brow, her hair, her lips, and in her eyes.

'And this is to be mine!' he thought. 'It frightens me!'

After dinner they went out on to the terrace to have coffee. They sat there long, the evening was so lovely, watching the summer night come very slowly on. It was still warm and the air smelled of lime blossom—early this summer. Two bats were fighting with the faint mysterious little noise they make. He had placed the chairs in front of the study window, and moths flew past to visit the discreet light in there. There was no wind, and not a whisper in the old oak-tree twenty yards away! The moon rose from behind the copse, nearly full; and the two lights struggled, till moonlight conquered, changing the colour and quality of all the garden, stealing along the flagstones, reaching their feet, climbing up, changing their faces.

"Well," said Jolyon at last, "you'll be tired, dear; we'd better start. The maid will show you Holly's room," and he rang the study bell. The maid who came handed him a telegram. Watching her take Irene away, he thought: 'This must have come an hour or more ago, and she didn't bring it out to us! That shows! Well, we'll be hung for a sheep soon!' And, opening the telegram, he read:

"JOLYON FORSYTE, Robin Hill.—Your son passed painlessly away on June 20th. Deep sympathy"—some name unknown to him.

He dropped it, spun round, stood motionless. The moon shone in on him; a moth flew in his face. The first day of all that he had not thought almost ceaselessly of Jolly. He went blindly towards the window, struck against the old armchair—his father's—and sank down on to the arm of it. He sat there huddled forward, staring into the night. Gone out like a candle flame; far from home, from love, all by himself, in the dark! His boy! From a little chap always so good to him—so friendly! Twenty years old, and cut down like grass—to have no life at all! 'I didn't really know him,' he thought, 'and he didn't know me; but we loved each other. It's only love that matters.'

To die out there—lonely—wanting them—wanting home! This seemed to his Forsyte heart more painful, more pitiful than death itself. No shelter, no protection, no love at the last! And all the deeply rooted clanship in him, the family feeling and essential clinging to his own flesh and blood which had been so strong in old Jolyon was so strong in all the Forsytes—felt outraged, cut, and torn by his boy's lonely passing. Better far if he had died in battle, without time to long for them to come to him, to call out for them, perhaps, in his delirium!

The moon had passed behind the oak-tree now, endowing it with uncanny life, so that it seemed watching him—the oak-tree his boy had been so fond of climbing, out of which he had once fallen and hurt himself, and hadn't cried!

The door creaked. He saw Irene come in, pick up the telegram and read it. He heard the faint rustle of her dress. She sank on her knees close to him, and he forced himself to smile at her. She stretched up her arms and drew his head down on her shoulder. The perfume and warmth of her encircled him; her presence gained slowly his whole being.

CHAPTER VIII

JAMES IN WAITING

Sweated to serenity, Soames dined at the Remove and turned his face toward Park Lane. His father had been unwell lately. This would have to be kept from him! Never till that moment had he realised how much the dread of bringing James' grey hairs down with sorrow to the grave had counted with him; how intimately it was bound up with his own shrinking from scandal. His affection for his father, always deep, had increased of late years with the knowledge that James looked on him as the real prop of his decline. It seemed pitiful that one who had been so careful all his life and done so much for the family name—so that it was almost a byword for solid, wealthy respectability—should at his last gasp have to see it in all the newspapers. This was like lending a hand to Death, that final enemy of Forsytes. 'I must tell mother,' he thought, 'and when it comes on, we must keep the papers from him somehow. He sees hardly anyone.' Letting himself in with his latchkey, he was beginning to ascend he stairs when he became conscious of commotion on the second-floor landing. His mother's voice was saying:

"Now, James, you'll catch cold. Why can't you wait quietly?"

His father's answering

"Wait? I'm always waiting. Why doesn't he come in?"

"You can speak to him to-morrow morning, instead of making a guy of yourself on the landing."

"He'll go up to bed, I shouldn't wonder. I shan't sleep."

"Now come back to bed, James."

"Um! I might die before to-morrow morning for all you can tell."

"You shan't have to wait till to-morrow morning; I'll go down and bring him up. Don't fuss!"

"There you go—always so cock-a-hoop. He mayn't come in at all."

"Well, if he doesn't come in you won't catch him by standing out here in your dressing-gown."

Soames rounded the last bend and came in sight of his father's tall figure wrapped in a brown silk quilted gown, stooping over the balustrade above. Light fell on his silvery hair and whiskers, investing his head with, a sort of halo.

"Here he is!" he heard him say in a voice which sounded injured, and his mother's comfortable answer from the bedroom door:

"That's all right. Come in, and I'll brush your hair." James extended a thin, crooked finger, oddly like the beckoning of a skeleton, and passed through the doorway of his bedroom.

'What is it?' thought Soames. 'What has he got hold of now?'

His father was sitting before the dressing-table sideways to the mirror, while Emily slowly passed two silver-backed brushes through and through his hair. She would do this several times a day, for it had on him something of the effect produced on a cat by scratching between its ears.

"There you are!" he said. "I've been waiting."

Soames stroked his shoulder, and, taking up a silver button-hook, examined the mark on it.

"Well," he said, "you're looking better."

James shook his head.

"I want to say something. Your mother hasn't heard." He announced Emily's ignorance of what he hadn't told her, as if it were a grievance.

"Your father's been in a great state all the evening. I'm sure I don't know what about."

The faint 'whisk-whisk' of the brushes continued the soothing of her voice.

"No! you know nothing," said James. "Soames can tell me." And, fixing his grey eyes, in which there was a look of strain, uncomfortable to watch, on his son, he muttered:

"I'm getting on, Soames. At my age I can't tell. I might die any time. There'll be a lot of money. There's Rachel and Cicely got no children; and Val's out there—that chap his father will get hold of all he can. And somebody'll pick up Imogen, I shouldn't wonder."

Soames listened vaguely—he had heard all this before. Whish-whish! went the brushes.

"If that's all!" said Emily.

"All!" cried James; "it's nothing. I'm coming to that." And again his eyes strained pitifully at Soames.

"It's you, my boy," he said suddenly; "you ought to get a divorce."

That word, from those of all lips, was almost too much for Soames' composure. His eyes reconcentrated themselves quickly on the buttonhook, and as if in apology James hurried on:

"I don't know what's become of her—they say she's abroad. Your Uncle Swithin used to admire her—he was a funny fellow." (So he always alluded to his dead twin—'The Stout and the Lean of it,' they had been called.) "She wouldn't be alone, I should say." And with that summing-up of the effect of beauty on human nature, he was silent, watching his son with eyes doubting as a bird's. Soames, too, was silent. Whish-whish went the brushes.

"Come, James! Soames knows best. It's his 'business.'"

"Ah!" said James, and the word came from deep down; "but there's all my money, and there's his—who's it to go to? And when he dies the name goes out."

Soames replaced the button-hook on the lace and pink silk of the dressing-table coverlet.

"The name?" said Emily, "there are all the other Forsytes."

"As if that helped me," muttered James. "I shall be in my grave, and there'll be nobody, unless he marries again."

"You're quite right," said Soames quietly; "I'm getting a divorce."

James' eyes almost started from his head.

"What?" he cried. "There! nobody tells me anything."

"Well," said Emily, "who would have imagined you wanted it? My dear boy, that is a surprise, after all these years."

"It'll be a scandal," muttered James, as if to himself; "but I can't help that. Don't brush so hard. When'll it come on?"

"Before the Long Vacation; it's not defended."

James' lips moved in secret calculation. "I shan't live to see my grandson," he muttered.

Emily ceased brushing. "Of course you will, James. Soames will be as quick as he can."

There was a long silence, till James reached out his arm.

"Here! let's have the eau-de-Cologne," and, putting it to his nose, he moved his forehead in the direction of his son. Soames bent over and kissed that brow just where the hair began. A relaxing quiver passed over James' face, as though the wheels of anxiety within were running down.

"I'll get to bed," he said; "I shan't want to see the papers when that comes. They're a morbid lot; I can't pay attention to them, I'm too old."

Queerly affected, Soames went to the door; he heard his father say:

"Here, I'm tired. I'll say a prayer in bed."

And his mother answering

"That's right, James; it'll be ever so much more comfy."

CHAPTER IX

OUT OF THE WEB

On Forsyte 'Change the announcement of Jolly's death, among a batch of troopers, caused mixed sensation. Strange to read that Jolyon Forsyte (fifth of the name in direct descent) had died of disease in the service of his country, and not be able to feel it personally. It revived the old grudge against his father for having estranged himself. For such was still the prestige of old Jolyon that the other Forsytes could never quite feel, as might have been expected, that it was they who had cut off his descendants for irregularity. The news increased, of course, the interest and anxiety about Val; but then Val's name was Dartie, and even if he were killed in battle or got the Victoria Cross, it would not be at all the same as if his name were Forsyte. Not even casualty or glory to the Haymans would be really satisfactory. Family pride felt defrauded.

How the rumour arose, then, that 'something very dreadful, my dear,' was pending, no one, least of all Soames, could tell, secret as he kept everything. Possibly some eye had seen 'Forsyte v. Forsyte and Forsyte,' in the cause list; and had added it to 'Irene in Paris with a fair beard.' Possibly some wall at Park Lane had ears. The fact remained that it was known—whispered among the old, discussed among the young—that family pride must soon receive a blow.

Soames, paying one, of his Sunday visits to Timothy's—paying it with the feeling that after the suit came on he would be paying no more—felt knowledge in the air as he came in. Nobody, of course, dared speak of it before him, but each of the four other Forsytes present held their breath, aware that nothing could prevent Aunt Juley from making them all uncomfortable. She looked so piteously at Soames, she checked herself on the point of speech so often, that Aunt Hester excused herself and said she must go and bathe Timothy's eye—he had a sty coming. Soames, impassive, slightly supercilious, did not stay long. He went out with a curse stifled behind his pale, just smiling lips.

Fortunately for the peace of his mind, cruelly tortured by the coming scandal, he was kept busy day

and night with plans for his retirement—for he had come to that grim conclusion. To go on seeing all those people who had known him as a 'long-headed chap,' an astute adviser—after that—no! The fastidiousness and pride which was so strangely, so inextricably blended in him with possessive obtuseness, revolted against the thought. He would retire, live privately, go on buying pictures, make a great name as a collector—after all, his heart was more in that than it had ever been in Law. In pursuance of this now fixed resolve, he had to get ready to amalgamate his business with another firm without letting people know, for that would excite curiosity and make humiliation cast its shadow before. He had pitched on the firm of Cuthcott, Holliday and Kingson, two of whom were dead. The full name after the amalgamation would therefore be Cuthcott, Holliday, Kingson, Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte. But after debate as to which of the dead still had any influence with the living, it was decided to reduce the title to Cuthcott, Kingson and Forsyte, of whom Kingson would be the active and Soames the sleeping partner. For leaving his name, prestige, and clients behind him, Soames would receive considerable value.

One night, as befitted a man who had arrived at so important a stage of his career, he made a calculation of what he was worth, and after writing off liberally for depreciation by the war, found his value to be some hundred and thirty thousand pounds. At his father's death, which could not, alas, be delayed much longer, he must come into at least another fifty thousand, and his yearly expenditure at present just reached two. Standing among his pictures, he saw before him a future full of bargains earned by the trained faculty of knowing better than other people. Selling what was about to decline, keeping what was still going up, and exercising judicious insight into future taste, he would make a unique collection, which at his death would pass to the nation under the title 'Forsyte Bequest.'

If the divorce went through, he had determined on his line with Madame Lamotte. She had, he knew, but one real ambition—to live on her 'renter' in Paris near her grandchildren. He would buy the goodwill of the Restaurant Bretagne at a fancy price. Madame would live like a Queen-Mother in Paris on the interest, invested as she would know how. (Incidentally Soames meant to put a capable manager in her place, and make the restaurant pay good interest on his money. There were great possibilities in Soho.) On Annette he would promise to settle fifteen thousand pounds (whether designedly or not), precisely the sum old Jolyon had settled on 'that woman.'

A letter from Jolyon's solicitor to his own had disclosed the fact that 'those two' were in Italy. And an opportunity had been duly given for noting that they had first stayed at an hotel in London. The matter was clear as daylight, and would be disposed of in half an hour or so; but during that half-hour he, Soames, would go down to hell; and after that half-hour all bearers of the Forsyte name would feel the bloom was off the rose. He had no illusions like Shakespeare that roses by any other name would smell as sweet. The name was a possession, a concrete, unstained piece of property, the value of which would be reduced some twenty per cent. at least. Unless it were Roger, who had once refused to stand for Parliament, and—oh, irony!—Jolyon, hung on the line, there had never been a distinguished Forsyte. But that very lack of distinction was the name's greatest asset. It was a private name, intensely individual, and his own property; it had never been exploited for good or evil by intrusive report. He and each member of his family owned it wholly, sanely, secretly, without any more interference from the public than had been necessitated by their births, their marriages, their deaths. And during these weeks of waiting and preparing to drop the Law, he conceived for that Law a bitter distaste, so deeply did he resent its coming violation of his name, forced on him by the need he felt to perpetuate that name in a lawful manner. The monstrous injustice of the whole thing excited in him a perpetual suppressed fury. He had asked no better than to live in spotless domesticity, and now he must go into the witness box, after all these futile, barren years, and proclaim his failure to keep his wife—incur the pity, the amusement, the contempt of his kind. It was all upside down. She and that fellow ought to be the sufferers, and they—were in Italy! In these weeks the Law he had served so faithfully, looked on so reverently as the guardian of all property, seemed to him quite pitiful. What could be more insane than to tell a man that he owned his wife, and punish him when someone unlawfully took her away from him? Did the Law not know that a man's name was to him the apple of his eye, that it was far harder to be regarded as cuckold than as seducer? He actually envied Jolyon the reputation of succeeding where he, Soames, had failed. The question of damages worried him, too. He wanted to make that fellow suffer, but he remembered his cousin's words, "I shall be very happy," with the uneasy feeling that to claim damages would make not Jolyon but himself suffer; he felt uncannily that Jolyon would rather like to pay them—the chap was so loose. Besides, to claim damages was not the thing to do. The claim, indeed, had been made almost mechanically; and as the hour drew near Soames saw in it just another dodge of this insensitive and topsy-turvy Law to make him ridiculous; so that people might sneer and say: "Oh, yes, he got quite a good price for her!" And he gave instructions that his Counsel should state that the money would be given to a Home for Fallen Women. He was a long time hitting off exactly the right charity; but, having pitched on it, he used to wake up in the night and think: 'It won't do, too lurid; it'll draw attention. Something quieter—better taste.' He did not care for dogs, or he would have named them; and it was in desperation at last—for his knowledge of charities was limited—that he decided on

the blind. That could not be inappropriate, and it would make the Jury assess the damages high.

A good many suits were dropping out of the list, which happened to be exceptionally thin that summer, so that his case would be reached before August. As the day grew nearer, Winifred was his only comfort. She showed the fellow-feeling of one who had been through the mill, and was the 'femme-sole' in whom he confided, well knowing that she would not let Dartie into her confidence. That ruffian would be only too rejoiced! At the end of July, on the afternoon before the case, he went in to see her. They had not yet been able to leave town, because Dartie had already spent their summer holiday, and Winifred dared not go to her father for more money while he was waiting not to be told anything about this affair of Soames.

Soames found her with a letter in her hand.

"That from Val," he asked gloomily. "What does he say?"

"He says he's married," said Winifred.

"Whom to, for Goodness' sake?"

Winifred looked up at him.

"To Holly Forsyte, Jolyon's daughter."

"What?"

"He got leave and did it. I didn't even know he knew her. Awkward, isn't it?"

Soames uttered a short laugh at that characteristic minimisation.

"Awkward! Well, I don't suppose they'll hear about this till they come back. They'd better stay out there. That fellow will give her money."

"But I want Val back," said Winifred almost piteously; "I miss him, he helps me to get on."

"I know," murmured Soames. "How's Dartie behaving now?"

"It might be worse; but it's always money. Would you like me to come down to the Court to-morrow, Soames?"

Soames stretched out his hand for hers. The gesture so betrayed the loneliness in him that she pressed it between her two.

"Never mind, old boy. You'll feel ever so much better when it's all over."

"I don't know what I've done," said Soames huskily; "I never have. It's all upside down. I was fond of her; I've always been."

Winifred saw a drop of blood ooze out of his lip, and the sight stirred her profoundly.

"Of course," she said, "it's been too bad of her all along! But what shall I do about this marriage of Val's, Soames? I don't know how to write to him, with this coming on. You've seen that child. Is she pretty?"

"Yes, she's pretty," said Soames. "Dark—lady-like enough."

'That doesn't sound so bad,' thought Winifred. 'Jolyon had style.'

"It is a coil," she said. "What will father say?"

"Mustn't be told," said Soames. "The war'll soon be over now, you'd better let Val take to farming out there."

It was tantamount to saying that his nephew was lost.

"I haven't told Monty," Winifred murmured desolately.

The case was reached before noon next day, and was over in little more than half an hour. Soames—pale, spruce, sad-eyed in the witness-box—had suffered so much beforehand that he took it all like one dead. The moment the decree nisi was pronounced he left the Courts of Justice.

Four hours until he became public property! 'Solicitor's divorce suit!' A surly, dogged anger replaced that dead feeling within him. 'Damn them all!' he thought; 'I won't run away. I'll act as if nothing had

happened.' And in the sweltering heat of Fleet Street and Ludgate Hill he walked all the way to his City Club, lunched, and went back to his office. He worked there stolidly throughout the afternoon.

On his way out he saw that his clerks knew, and answered their involuntary glances with a look so sardonic that they were immediately withdrawn. In front of St. Paul's, he stopped to buy the most gentlemanly of the evening papers. Yes! there he was! 'Well-known solicitor's divorce. Cousin correspondent. Damages given to the blind'—so, they had got that in! At every other face, he thought: 'I wonder if you know!' And suddenly he felt queer, as if something were racing round in his head.

What was this? He was letting it get hold of him! He mustn't! He would be ill. He mustn't think! He would get down to the river and row about, and fish. 'I'm not going to be laid up,' he thought.

It flashed across him that he had something of importance to do before he went out of town. Madame Lamotte! He must explain the Law. Another six months before he was really free! Only he did not want to see Annette! And he passed his hand over the top of his head—it was very hot.

He branched off through Covent Garden. On this sultry day of late July the garbage-tainted air of the old market offended him, and Soho seemed more than ever the disenchanting home of rascallionism. Alone, the Restaurant Bretagne, neat, daintily painted, with its blue tubs and the dwarf trees therein, retained an aloof and Frenchified self-respect. It was the slack hour, and pale trim waitresses were preparing the little tables for dinner. Soames went through into the private part. To his discomfiture Annette answered his knock. She, too, looked pale and dragged down by the heat.

"You are quite a stranger," she said languidly.

Soames smiled.

"I haven't wished to be; I've been busy."

"Where's your mother, Annette? I've got some news for her."

"Mother is not in."

It seemed to Soames that she looked at him in a queer way. What did she know? How much had her mother told her? The worry of trying to make that out gave him an alarming feeling in the head. He gripped the edge of the table, and dizzily saw Annette come forward, her eyes clear with surprise. He shut his own and said:

"It's all right. I've had a touch of the sun, I think." The sun! What he had was a touch of 'darkness! Annette's voice, French and composed, said:

"Sit down, it will pass, then." Her hand pressed his shoulder, and Soames sank into a chair. When the dark feeling dispersed, and he opened his eyes, she was looking down at him. What an inscrutable and odd expression for a girl of twenty!

"Do you feel better?"

"It's nothing," said Soames. Instinct told him that to be feeble before her was not helping him—age was enough handicap without that. Will-power was his fortune with Annette, he had lost ground these latter months from indecision—he could not afford to lose any more. He got up, and said:

"I'll write to your mother. I'm going down to my river house for a long holiday. I want you both to come there presently and stay. It's just at its best. You will, won't you?"

"It will be verree nice." A pretty little roll of that 'r' but no enthusiasm. And rather sadly he added:

"You're feeling the heat; too, aren't you, Annette? It'll do you good to be on the river. Good-night." Annette swayed forward. There was a sort of compunction in the movement.

"Are you fit to go? Shall I give you some coffee?"

"No," said Soames firmly. "Give me your hand."

She held out her hand, and Soames raised it to his lips. When he looked up, her face wore again that strange expression. 'I can't tell,' he thought, as he went out; 'but I mustn't think—I mustn't worry:

But worry he did, walking toward Pall Mall. English, not of her religion, middle-aged, scarred as it were by domestic tragedy, what had he to give her? Only wealth, social position, leisure, admiration! It was much, but was it enough for a beautiful girl of twenty? He felt so ignorant about Annette. He had, too, a curious fear of the French nature of her mother and herself. They knew so well what they

wanted. They were almost Forsytes. They would never grasp a shadow and miss a substance.

The tremendous effort it was to write a simple note to Madame Lamotte when he reached his Club warned him still further that he was at the end of his tether.

"MY DEAR MADAME (he said),

"You will see by the enclosed newspaper cutting that I obtained my decree of divorce to-day. By the English Law I shall not, however, be free to marry again till the decree is confirmed six months hence. In the meanwhile I have the honor to ask to be considered a formal suitor for the hand of your daughter. I shall write again in a few days and beg you both to come and stay at my river house. "I am, dear Madame, "Sincerely yours, "SOAMES FORSYTE."

Having sealed and posted this letter, he went into the dining-room. Three mouthfuls of soup convinced him that he could not eat; and, causing a cab to be summoned, he drove to Paddington Station and took the first train to Reading. He reached his house just as the sun went down, and wandered out on to the lawn. The air was drenched with the scent of pinks and picotees in his flower-borders. A stealing coolness came off the river.

Rest-peace! Let a poor fellow rest! Let not worry and shame and anger chase like evil night-birds in his head! Like those doves perched half-sleeping on their dovecot, like the furry creatures in the woods on the far side, and the simple folk in their cottages, like the trees and the river itself, whitening fast in twilight, like the darkening cornflower-blue sky where stars were coming up—let him cease from himself, and rest!

CHAPTER X

PASSING OF AN AGE

The marriage of Soames with Annette took place in Paris on the last day of January, 1901, with such privacy that not even Emily was told until it was accomplished.

The day after the wedding he brought her to one of those quiet hotels in London where greater expense can be incurred for less result than anywhere else under heaven. Her beauty in the best Parisian frocks was giving him more satisfaction than if he had collected a perfect bit of china, or a jewel of a picture; he looked forward to the moment when he would exhibit her in Park Lane, in Green Street, and at Timothy's.

If some one had asked him in those days, "In confidence—are you in love with this girl?" he would have replied: "In love? What is love? If you mean do I feel to her as I did towards Irene in those old days when I first met her and she would not have me; when I sighed and starved after her and couldn't rest a minute until she yielded—no! If you mean do I admire her youth and prettiness, do my senses ache a little when I see her moving about—yes! Do I think she will keep me straight, make me a creditable wife and a good mother for my children?—again, yes!"

"What more do I need? and what more do three-quarters of the women who are married get from the men who marry them?" And if the enquirer had pursued his query, "And do you think it was fair to have tempted this girl to give herself to you for life unless you have really touched her heart?" he would have answered: "The French see these things differently from us. They look at marriage from the point of view of establishments and children; and, from my own experience, I am not at all sure that theirs is not the sensible view. I shall not expect this time more than I can get, or she can give. Years hence I shouldn't be surprised if I have trouble with her; but I shall be getting old, I shall have children by then. I shall shut my eyes. I have had my great passion; hers is perhaps to come—I don't suppose it will be for me. I offer her a great deal, and I don't expect much in return, except children, or at least a son. But one thing I am sure of—she has very good sense!"

And if, insatiate, the enquirer had gone on, "You do not look, then, for spiritual union in this marriage?" Soames would have lifted his sideway smile, and rejoined: "That's as it may be. If I get satisfaction for my senses, perpetuation of myself; good taste and good humour in the house; it is all I can expect at my age. I am not likely to be going out of my way towards any far-fetched sentimentalism." Whereon, the enquirer must in good taste have ceased enquiry.

The Queen was dead, and the air of the greatest city upon earth grey with unshed tears. Fur-coated and top-hatted, with Annette beside him in dark furs, Soames crossed Park Lane on the morning of the funeral procession, to the rails in Hyde Park. Little moved though he ever was by public matters, this event, supremely symbolical, this summing-up of a long rich period, impressed his fancy. In '37, when she came to the throne, 'Superior Dosset' was still building houses to make London hideous; and James, a stripling of twenty-six, just laying the foundations of his practice in the Law. Coaches still ran; men wore stocks, shaved their upper lips, ate oysters out of barrels; 'tigers' swung behind cabriolets; women said, 'La!' and owned no property; there were manners in the land, and pigsties for the poor; unhappy devils were hanged for little crimes, and Dickens had but just begun to write. Well-nigh two generations had slipped by—of steamboats, railways, telegraphs, bicycles, electric light, telephones, and now these motorcars—of such accumulated wealth, that eight per cent. had become three, and Forsytes were numbered by the thousand! Morals had changed, manners had changed, men had become monkeys twice-removed, God had become Mammon—Mammon so respectable as to deceive himself: Sixty-four years that favoured property, and had made the upper middle class; buttressed, chiselled, polished it, till it was almost indistinguishable in manners, morals, speech, appearance, habit, and soul from the nobility. An epoch which had gilded individual liberty so that if a man had money, he was free in law and fact, and if he had not money he was free in law and not in fact. An era which had canonised hypocrisy, so that to seem to be respectable was to be. A great Age, whose transmuting influence nothing had escaped save the nature of man and the nature of the Universe.

And to witness the passing of this Age, London—its pet and fancy—was pouring forth her citizens through every gate into Hyde Park, hub of Victorianism, happy hunting-ground of Forsytes. Under the grey heavens, whose drizzle just kept off, the dark concourse gathered to see the show. The 'good old' Queen, full of years and virtue, had emerged from her seclusion for the last time to make a London holiday. From Houndsditch, Acton, Ealing, Hampstead, Islington, and Bethnal Green; from Hackney, Hornsey, Leytonstone, Battersea, and Fulham; and from those green pastures where Forsytes flourish—Mayfair and Kensington, St. James' and Belgravia, Bayswater and Chelsea and the Regent's Park, the people swarmed down on to the roads where death would presently pass with dusky pomp and pageantry. Never again would a Queen reign so long, or people have a chance to see so much history buried for their money. A pity the war dragged on, and that the Wreath of Victory could not be laid upon her coffin! All else would be there to follow and commemorate—soldiers, sailors, foreign princes, half-masted bunting, tolling bells, and above all the surging, great, dark-coated crowd, with perhaps a simple sadness here and there deep in hearts beneath black clothes put on by regulation. After all, more than a Queen was going to her rest, a woman who had braved sorrow, lived well and wisely according to her lights.

Out in the crowd against the railings, with his arm hooked in Annette's, Soames waited. Yes! the Age was passing! What with this Trade Unionism, and Labour fellows in the House of Commons, with continental fiction, and something in the general feel of everything, not to be expressed in words, things were very different; he recalled the crowd on Mafeking night, and George Forsyte saying: "They're all socialists, they want our goods." Like James, Soames didn't know, he couldn't tell—with Edward on the throne! Things would never be as safe again as under good old Vicky! Convulsively he pressed his young wife's arm. There, at any rate, was something substantially his own, domestically certain again at last; something which made property worth while—a real thing once more. Pressed close against her and trying to ward others off, Soames was content. The crowd swayed round them, ate sandwiches and dropped crumbs; boys who had climbed the plane-trees chattered above like monkeys, threw twigs and orange-peel. It was past time; they should be coming soon! And, suddenly, a little behind them to the left, he saw a tallish man with a soft hat and short grizzling beard, and a tallish woman in a little round fur cap and veil. Jolyon and Irene talking, smiling at each other, close together like Annette and himself! They had not seen him; and stealthily, with a very queer feeling in his heart, Soames watched those two. They looked happy! What had they come here for—inherently illicit creatures, rebels from the Victorian ideal? What business had they in this crowd? Each of them twice exiled by morality—making a boast, as it were, of love and laxity! He watched them fascinated; admitting grudgingly even with his arm thrust through Annette's that—that she—Irene—No! he would not admit it; and he turned his eyes away. He would not see them, and let the old bitterness, the old longing rise up within him! And then Annette turned to him and said: "Those two people, Soames; they know you, I am sure. Who are they?"

Soames nosed sideways.

"What people?"

"There, you see them; just turning away. They know you."

"No," Soames answered; "a mistake, my dear."

"A lovely face! And how she walk! Elle est tres distinguee!"

Soames looked then. Into his life, out of his life she had walked like that swaying and erect, remote, unseizable; ever eluding the contact of his soul! He turned abruptly from that receding vision of the past.

"You'd better attend," he said, "they're coming now!"

But while he stood, grasping her arm, seemingly intent on the head of the procession, he was quivering with the sense of always missing something, with instinctive regret that he had not got them both.

Slow came the music and the march, till, in silence, the long line wound in through the Park gate. He heard Annette whisper, "How sad it is and beautiful!" felt the clutch of her hand as she stood up on tiptoe; and the crowd's emotion gripped him. There it was—the bier of the Queen, coffin of the Age slow passing! And as it went by there came a murmuring groan from all the long line of those who watched, a sound such as Soames had never heard, so unconscious, primitive, deep and wild, that neither he nor any knew whether they had joined in uttering it. Strange sound, indeed! Tribute of an Age to its own death.... Ah! Ah!.... The hold on life had slipped. That which had seemed eternal was gone! The Queen—God bless her!

It moved on with the bier, that travelling groan, as a fire moves on over grass in a thin line; it kept step, and marched alongside down the dense crowds mile after mile. It was a human sound, and yet inhuman, pushed out by animal subconsciousness, by intimate knowledge of universal death and change. None of us—none of us can hold on for ever!

It left silence for a little—a very little time, till tongues began, eager to retrieve interest in the show. Soames lingered just long enough to gratify Annette, then took her out of the Park to lunch at his father's in Park Lane....

James had spent the morning gazing out of his bedroom window. The last show he would see, last of so many! So she was gone! Well, she was getting an old woman. Swithin and he had seen her crowned—slim slip of a girl, not so old as Imogen! She had got very stout of late. Jolyon and he had seen her married to that German chap, her husband—he had turned out all right before he died, and left her with that son of his. And he remembered the many evenings he and his brothers and their cronies had wagged their heads over their wine and walnuts and that fellow in his salad days. And now he had come to the throne. They said he had steadied down—he didn't know—couldn't tell! He'd make the money fly still, he shouldn't wonder. What a lot of people out there! It didn't seem so very long since he and Swithin stood in the crowd outside Westminster Abbey when she was crowned, and Swithin had taken him to Cremorne afterwards—racketty chap, Swithin; no, it didn't seem much longer ago than Jubilee Year, when he had joined with Roger in renting a balcony in Piccadilly.

Jolyon, Swithin, Roger all gone, and he would be ninety in August! And there was Soames married again to a French girl. The French were a queer lot, but they made good mothers, he had heard. Things changed! They said this German Emperor was here for the funeral, his telegram to old Kruger had been in shocking taste. He should not be surprised if that chap made trouble some day. Change! H'm! Well, they must look after themselves when he was gone: he didn't know where he'd be! And now Emily had asked Dartie to lunch, with Winifred and Imogen, to meet Soames' wife—she was always doing something. And there was Irene living with that fellow Jolyon, they said. He'd marry her now, he supposed.

'My brother Jolyon,' he thought, 'what would he have said to it all?' And somehow the utter impossibility of knowing what his elder brother, once so looked up to, would have said, so worried James that he got up from his chair by the window, and began slowly, feebly to pace the room.

'She was a pretty thing, too,' he thought; 'I was fond of her. Perhaps Soames didn't suit her—I don't know—I can't tell. We never had any trouble with our wives.' Women had changed everything had changed! And now the Queen was dead—well, there it was! A movement in the crowd brought him to a standstill at the window, his nose touching the pane and whitening from the chill of it. They had got her as far as Hyde Park Corner—they were passing now! Why didn't Emily come up here where she could see, instead of fussing about lunch. He missed her at that moment—missed her! Through the bare branches of the plane-trees he could just see the procession, could see the hats coming off the people's heads—a lot of them would catch colds, he shouldn't wonder! A voice behind him said:

"You've got a capital view here, James!"

"There you are!" muttered James; "why didn't you come before? You might have missed it!"

And he was silent, staring with all his might.

"What's the noise?" he asked suddenly.

"There's no noise," returned Emily; "what are you thinking of?—they wouldn't cheer."

"I can hear it."

"Nonsense, James!"

No sound came through those double panes; what James heard was the groaning in his own heart at sight of his Age passing.

"Don't you ever tell me where I'm buried," he said suddenly. "I shan't want to know." And he turned from the window. There she went, the old Queen; she'd had a lot of anxiety—she'd be glad to be out of it, he should think!

Emily took up the hair-brushes.

"There'll be just time to brush your head," she said, "before they come. You must look your best, James."

"Ah!" muttered James; "they say she's pretty."

The meeting with his new daughter-in-law took place in the dining-room. James was seated by the fire when she was brought in. He placed, his hands on the arms of the chair and slowly raised himself. Stooping and immaculate in his frock-coat, thin as a line in Euclid, he received Annette's hand in his; and the anxious eyes of his furrowed face, which had lost its colour now, doubted above her. A little warmth came into them and into his cheeks, refracted from her bloom.

"How are you?" he said. "You've been to see the Queen, I suppose? Did you have a good crossing?"

In this way he greeted her from whom he hoped for a grandson of his name.

Gazing at him, so old, thin, white, and spotless, Annette murmured something in French which James did not understand.

"Yes, yes," he said, "you want your lunch, I expect. Soames, ring the bell; we won't wait for that chap Dartie." But just then they arrived. Dartie had refused to go out of his way to see 'the old girl.' With an early cocktail beside him, he had taken a 'squint' from the smoking-room of the Iseeum, so that Winifred and Imogen had been obliged to come back from the Park to fetch him thence. His brown eyes rested on Annette with a stare of almost startled satisfaction. The second beauty that fellow Soames had picked up! What women could see in him! Well, she would play him the same trick as the other, no doubt; but in the meantime he was a lucky devil! And he brushed up his moustache, having in nine months of Green Street domesticity regained almost all his flesh and his assurance. Despite the comfortable efforts of Emily, Winifred's composure, Imogen's enquiring friendliness, Dartie's showing-off, and James' solicitude about her food, it was not, Soames felt, a successful lunch for his bride. He took her away very soon.

"That Monsieur Dartie," said Annette in the cab, "je n'aime pas ce type-la!"

"No, by George!" said Soames.

"Your sister is verree amiable, and the girl is pretty. Your father is verree old. I think your mother has trouble with him; I should not like to be her."

Soames nodded at the shrewdness, the clear hard judgment in his young wife; but it disquieted him a little. The thought may have just flashed through him, too: 'When I'm eighty she'll be fifty-five, having trouble with me!'

"There's just one other house of my relations I must take you to," he said; "you'll find it funny, but we must get it over; and then we'll dine and go to the theatre."

In this way he prepared her for Timothy's. But Timothy's was different. They were delighted to see dear Soames after this long long time; and so this was Annette!

"You are so pretty, my dear; almost too young and pretty for dear Soames, aren't you? But he's very attentive and careful—such a good hush...." Aunt Juley checked herself, and placed her lips just under each of Annette's eyes—she afterwards described them to Francie, who dropped in, as: "Cornflower-blue, so pretty, I quite wanted to kiss them. I must say dear Soames is a perfect connoisseur. In her

French way, and not so very French either, I think she's as pretty—though not so distinguished, not so alluring—as Irene. Because she was alluring, wasn't she? with that white skin and those dark eyes, and that hair, couleur de—what was it? I always forget."

"Feuille morte," Francie prompted.

"Of course, dead leaves—so strange. I remember when I was a girl, before we came to London, we had a foxhound puppy—to 'walk' it was called then; it had a tan top to its head and a white chest, and beautiful dark brown eyes, and it was a lady."

"Yes, auntie," said Francie, "but I don't see the connection."

"Oh!" replied Aunt Juley, rather flustered, "it was so alluring, and her eyes and hair, you know...." She was silent, as if surprised in some indelicacy. "Feuille morte," she added suddenly; "Hester—do remember that!"....

Considerable debate took place between the two sisters whether Timothy should or should not be summoned to see Annette.

"Oh, don't bother!" said Soames.

"But it's no trouble, only of course Annette's being French might upset him a little. He was so scared about Fashoda. I think perhaps we had better not run the risk, Hester. It's nice to have her all to ourselves, isn't it? And how are you, Soames? Have you quite got over your...."

Hester interposed hurriedly:

"What do you think of London, Annette?"

Soames, disquieted, awaited the reply. It came, sensible, composed: "Oh! I know London. I have visited before."

He had never ventured to speak to her on the subject of the restaurant. The French had different notions about gentility, and to shrink from connection with it might seem to her ridiculous; he had waited to be married before mentioning it; and now he wished he hadn't.

"And what part do you know best?" said Aunt Juley.

"Soho," said Annette simply.

Soames snapped his jaw.

"Soho?" repeated Aunt Juley; "Soho?"

'That'll go round the family,' thought Soames.

"It's very French, and interesting," he said.

"Yes," murmured Aunt Juley, "your Uncle Roger had some houses there once; he was always having to turn the tenants out, I remember."

Soames changed the subject to Mapledurham.

"Of course," said Aunt Juley, "you will be going down there soon to settle in. We are all so looking forward to the time when Annette has a dear little...."

"Juley!" cried Aunt Hester desperately, "ring tea!"

Soames dared not wait for tea, and took Annette away.

"I shouldn't mention Soho if I were you," he said in the cab. "It's rather a shady part of London; and you're altogether above that restaurant business now; I mean," he added, "I want you to know nice people, and the English are fearful snobs."

Annette's clear eyes opened; a little smile came on her lips.

"Yes?" she said.

'H'm!' thought Soames, 'that's meant for me!' and he looked at her hard. 'She's got good business instincts,' he thought. 'I must make her grasp it once for all!'

"Look here, Annette! it's very simple, only it wants understanding. Our professional and leisured

classes still think themselves a cut above our business classes, except of course the very rich. It may be stupid, but there it is, you see. It isn't advisable in England to let people know that you ran a restaurant or kept a shop or were in any kind of trade. It may have been extremely creditable, but it puts a sort of label on you; you don't have such a good time, or meet such nice people—that's all."

"I see," said Annette; "it is the same in France."

"Oh!" murmured Soames, at once relieved and taken aback. "Of course, class is everything, really."

"Yes," said Annette; "comme vous etes sage."

'That's all right,' thought Soames, watching her lips, 'only she's pretty cynical.' His knowledge of French was not yet such as to make him grieve that she had not said 'tu.' He slipped his arm round her, and murmured with an effort:

"Et vous etes ma belle femme."

Annette went off into a little fit of laughter.

"Oh, non!" she said. "Oh, non! ne parlez pas Francais, Soames. What is that old lady, your aunt, looking forward to?"

Soames bit his lip. "God knows!" he said; "she's always saying something;" but he knew better than God.

CHAPTER XI

SUSPENDED ANIMATION

The war dragged on. Nicholas had been heard to say that it would cost three hundred millions if it cost a penny before they'd done with it! The income-tax was seriously threatened. Still, there would be South Africa for their money, once for all. And though the possessive instinct felt badly shaken at three o'clock in the morning, it recovered by breakfast-time with the recollection that one gets nothing in this world without paying for it. So, on the whole, people went about their business much as if there were no war, no concentration camps, no slippery de Wet, no feeling on the Continent, no anything unpleasant. Indeed, the attitude of the nation was typified by Timothy's map, whose animation was suspended—for Timothy no longer moved the flags, and they could not move themselves, not even backwards and forwards as they should have done.

Suspended animation went further; it invaded Forsyte 'Change, and produced a general uncertainty as to what was going to happen next. The announcement in the marriage column of The Times, 'Jolyon Forsyte to Irene, only daughter of the late Professor Heron,' had occasioned doubt whether Irene had been justly described. And yet, on the whole, relief was felt that she had not been entered as 'Irene, late the wife,' or 'the divorced wife,' 'of Soames Forsyte.' Altogether, there had been a kind of sublimity from the first about the way the family had taken that 'affair.' As James had phrased it, 'There it was!' No use to fuss! Nothing to be had out of admitting that it had been a 'nasty jar'—in the phraseology of the day.

But what would happen now that both Soames and Jolyon were married again? That was very intriguing. George was known to have laid Eustace six to four on a little Jolyon before a little Soames. George was so droll! It was rumoured, too, that he and Dartie had a bet as to whether James would attain the age of ninety, though which of them had backed James no one knew.

Early in May, Winifred came round to say that Val had been wounded in the leg by a spent bullet, and was to be discharged. His wife was nursing him. He would have a little limp—nothing to speak of. He wanted his grandfather to buy him a farm out there where he could breed horses. Her father was giving Holly eight hundred a year, so they could be quite comfortable, because his grandfather would give Val five, he had said; but as to the farm, he didn't know—couldn't tell: he didn't want Val to go throwing away his money.

"But you know," said Winifred, "he must do something."

Aunt Hester thought that perhaps his dear grandfather was wise, because if he didn't buy a farm it

couldn't turn out badly.

"But Val loves horses," said Winifred. "It'd be such an occupation for him."

Aunt Juley thought that horses were very uncertain, had not Montague found them so?

"Val's different," said Winifred; "he takes after me."

Aunt Juley was sure that dear Val was very clever. "I always remember," she added, "how he gave his bad penny to a beggar. His dear grandfather was so pleased. He thought it showed such presence of mind. I remember his saying that he ought to go into the Navy."

Aunt Hester chimed in: Did not Winifred think that it was much better for the young people to be secure and not run any risk at their age?

"Well," said Winifred, "if they were in London, perhaps; in London it's amusing to do nothing. But out there, of course, he'll simply get bored to death."

Aunt Hester thought that it would be nice for him to work, if he were quite sure not to lose by it. It was not as if they had no money. Timothy, of course, had done so well by retiring. Aunt Juley wanted to know what Montague had said.

Winifred did not tell her, for Montague had merely remarked: "Wait till the old man dies."

At this moment Francie was announced. Her eyes were brimming with a smile.

"Well," she said, "what do you think of it?"

"Of what, dear?"

"In *The Times* this morning."

"We haven't seen it, we always read it after dinner; Timothy has it till then."

Francie rolled her eyes.

"Do you think you ought to tell us?" said Aunt Juley. "What was it?"

"Irene's had a son at Robin Hill."

Aunt Juley drew in her breath. "But," she said, "they were only married in March!"

"Yes, Auntie; isn't it interesting?"

"Well," said Winifred, "I'm glad. I was sorry for Jolyon losing his boy. It might have been Val."

Aunt Juley seemed to go into a sort of dream. "I wonder," she murmured, "what dear Soames will think? He has so wanted to have a son himself. A little bird has always told me that."

"Well," said Winifred, "he's going to—bar accidents."

Gladness trickled out of Aunt Juley's eyes.

"How delightful!" she said. "When?"

"November."

Such a lucky month! But she did wish it could be sooner. It was a long time for James to wait, at his age!

To wait! They dreaded it for James, but they were used to it themselves. Indeed, it was their great distraction. To wait! For *The Times* to read; for one or other of their nieces or nephews to come in and cheer them up; for news of Nicholas' health; for that decision of Christopher's about going on the stage; for information concerning the mine of Mrs. MacAnder's nephew; for the doctor to come about Hester's inclination to wake up early in the morning; for books from the library which were always out; for Timothy to have a cold; for a nice quiet warm day, not too hot, when they could take a turn in Kensington Gardens. To wait, one on each side of the hearth in the drawing-room, for the clock between them to strike; their thin, veined, knuckled hands plying knitting-needles and crochet-hooks, their hair ordered to stop—like Canute's waves—from any further advance in colour. To wait in their black silks or satins for the Court to say that Hester might wear her dark green, and Juley her darker

maroon. To wait, slowly turning over and over, in their old minds the little joys and sorrows, events and expectancies, of their little family world, as cows chew patient cud in a familiar field. And this new event was so well worth waiting for. Soames had always been their pet, with his tendency to give them pictures, and his almost weekly visits which they missed so much, and his need for their sympathy evoked by the wreck of his first marriage. This new event—the birth of an heir to Soames—was so important for him, and for his dear father, too, that James might not have to die without some certainty about things. James did so dislike uncertainty; and with Montague, of course, he could not feel really satisfied to leave no grand-children but the young Darties. After all, one's own name did count! And as James' ninetieth birthday neared they wondered what precautions he was taking. He would be the first of the Forsytes to reach that age, and set, as it were, a new standard in holding on to life. That was so important, they felt, at their ages eighty-seven and eighty-five; though they did not want to think of themselves when they had Timothy, who was not yet eighty-two, to think of. There was, of course, a better world. 'In my Father's house are many mansions' was one of Aunt Juley's favourite sayings—it always comforted her, with its suggestion of house property, which had made the fortune of dear Roger. The Bible was, indeed, a great resource, and on very fine Sundays there was church in the morning; and sometimes Juley would steal into Timothy's study when she was sure he was out, and just put an open New Testament casually among the books on his little table—he was a great reader, of course, having been a publisher. But she had noticed that Timothy was always cross at dinner afterwards. And Smither had told her more than once that she had picked books off the floor in doing the room. Still, with all that, they did feel that heaven could not be quite so cosy as the rooms in which they and Timothy had been waiting so long. Aunt Hester, especially, could not bear the thought of the exertion. Any change, or rather the thought of a change—for there never was any—always upset her very much. Aunt Juley, who had more spirit, sometimes thought it would be quite exciting; she had so enjoyed that visit to Brighton the year dear Susan died. But then Brighton one knew was nice, and it was so difficult to tell what heaven would be like, so on the whole she was more than content to wait.

On the morning of James' birthday, August the 5th, they felt extraordinary animation, and little notes passed between them by the hand of Smither while they were having breakfast in their beds. Smither must go round and take their love and little presents and find out how Mr. James was, and whether he had passed a good night with all the excitement. And on the way back would Smither call in at Green Street—it was a little out of her way, but she could take the bus up Bond Street afterwards; it would be a nice little change for her—and ask dear Mrs. Dartie to be sure and look in before she went out of town.

All this Smither did—an undeniable servant trained many years ago under Aunt Ann to a perfection not now procurable. Mr. James, so Mrs. James said, had passed an excellent night, he sent his love; Mrs. James had said he was very funny and had complained that he didn't know what all the fuss was about. Oh! and Mrs. Dartie sent her love, and she would come to tea.

Aunts Juley and Hester, rather hurt that their presents had not received special mention—they forgot every year that James could not bear to receive presents, 'throwing away their money on him,' as he always called it—were 'delighted'; it showed that James was in good spirits, and that was so important for him. And they began to wait for Winifred. She came at four, bringing Imogen, and Maud, just back from school, and 'getting such a pretty girl, too,' so that it was extremely difficult to ask for news about Annette. Aunt Juley, however, summoned courage to enquire whether Winifred had heard anything, and if Soames was anxious.

"Uncle Soames is always anxious, Auntie," interrupted Imogen; "he can't be happy now he's got it."

The words struck familiarly on Aunt Juley's ears. Ah! yes; that funny drawing of George's, which had not been shown them! But what did Imogen mean? That her uncle always wanted more than he could have? It was not at all nice to think like that.

Imogen's voice rose clear and clipped:

"Imagine! Annette's only two years older than me; it must be awful for her, married to Uncle Soames."

Aunt Juley lifted her hands in horror.

"My dear," she said, "you don't know what you're talking about. Your Uncle Soames is a match for anybody. He's a very clever man, and good-looking and wealthy, and most considerate and careful, and not at all old, considering everything."

Imogen, turning her luscious glance from one to the other of the 'old dears,' only smiled.

"I hope," said Aunt Juley quite severely, "that you will marry as good a man."

"I shan't marry a good man, Auntie," murmured Imogen; "they're dull."

"If you go on like this," replied Aunt Juley, still very much upset, "you won't marry anybody. We'd better not pursue the subject;" and turning to Winifred, she said: "How is Montague?"

That evening, while they were waiting for dinner, she murmured:

"I've told Smither to get up half a bottle of the sweet champagne, Hester. I think we ought to drink dear James' health, and—and the health of Soames' wife; only, let's keep that quite secret. I'll just say like this, 'And you know, Hester!' and then we'll drink. It might upset Timothy."

"It's more likely to upset us," said Aunt Nester. "But we must, I suppose; for such an occasion."

"Yes," said Aunt Juley rapturously, "it is an occasion! Only fancy if he has a dear little boy, to carry the family on! I do feel it so important, now that Irene has had a son. Winifred says George is calling Jolyon 'The Three-Decker,' because of his three families, you know! George is droll. And fancy! Irene is living after all in the house Soames had built for them both. It does seem hard on dear Soames; and he's always been so regular."

That night in bed, excited and a little flushed still by her glass of wine and the secrecy of the second toast, she lay with her prayer-book opened flat, and her eyes fixed on a ceiling yellowed by the light from her reading-lamp. Young things! It was so nice for them all! And she would be so happy if she could see dear Soames happy. But, of course, he must be now, in spite of what Imogen had said. He would have all that he wanted: property, and wife, and children! And he would live to a green old age, like his dear father, and forget all about Irene and that dreadful case. If only she herself could be here to buy his children their first rocking-horse! Smither should choose it for her at the stores, nice and dappled. Ah! how Roger used to rock her until she fell off! Oh dear! that was a long time ago! It was! 'In my Father's house are many mansions—' A little scratling noise caught her ear—'but no mice!' she thought mechanically. The noise increased. There! it was a mouse! How naughty of Smither to say there wasn't! It would be eating through the wainscot before they knew where they were, and they would have to have the builders in. They were such destructive things! And she lay, with her eyes just moving, following in her mind that little scratling sound, and waiting for sleep to release her from it.

CHAPTER XII

BIRTH OF A FORSYTE

Soames walked out of the garden door, crossed the lawn, stood on the path above the river, turned round and walked back to the garden door, without having realised that he had moved. The sound of wheels crunching the drive convinced him that time had passed, and the doctor gone. What, exactly, had he said?

"This is the position, Mr. Forsyte. I can make pretty certain of her life if I operate, but the baby will be born dead. If I don't operate, the baby will most probably be born alive, but it's a great risk for the mother—a great risk. In either case I don't think she can ever have another child. In her state she obviously can't decide for herself, and we can't wait for her mother. It's for you to make the decision, while I'm getting what's necessary. I shall be back within the hour."

The decision! What a decision! No time to get a specialist down! No time for anything!

The sound of wheels died away, but Soames still stood intent; then, suddenly covering his ears, he walked back to the river. To come before its time like this, with no chance to foresee anything, not even to get her mother here! It was for her mother to make that decision, and she couldn't arrive from Paris till to-night! If only he could have understood the doctor's jargon, the medical niceties, so as to be sure he was weighing the chances properly; but they were Greek to him—like a legal problem to a layman. And yet he must decide! He brought his hand away from his brow wet, though the air was chilly. These sounds which came from her room! To go back there would only make it more difficult. He must be calm, clear. On the one hand life, nearly certain, of his young wife, death quite certain, of his child; and—no more children afterwards! On the other, death perhaps of his wife, nearly certain life for the child; and—no more children afterwards! Which to choose?... It had rained this last fortnight—the river was very full, and in the water, collected round the little house-boat moored by his landing-stage, were many leaves from the woods above, brought off by a frost. Leaves fell, lives drifted down—Death! To

decide about death! And no one to give him a hand. Life lost was lost for good. Let nothing go that you could keep; for, if it went, you couldn't get it back. It left you bare, like those trees when they lost their leaves; barer and barer until you, too, withered and came down. And, by a queer somersault of thought, he seemed to see not Annette lying up there behind that window-pane on which the sun was shining, but Irene lying in their bedroom in Montpellier Square, as it might conceivably have been her fate to lie, sixteen years ago. Would he have hesitated then? Not a moment! Operate, operate! Make certain of her life! No decision—a mere instinctive cry for help, in spite of his knowledge, even then, that she did not love him! But this! Ah! there was nothing overmastering in his feeling for Annette! Many times these last months, especially since she had been growing frightened, he had wondered. She had a will of her own, was selfish in her French way. And yet—so pretty! What would she wish—to take the risk. 'I know she wants the child,' he thought. 'If it's born dead, and no more chance afterwards—it'll upset her terribly. No more chance! All for nothing! Married life with her for years and years without a child. Nothing to steady her! She's too young. Nothing to look forward to, for her—for me! For me!' He struck his hands against his chest! Why couldn't he think without bringing himself in—get out of himself and see what he ought to do? The thought hurt him, then lost edge, as if it had come in contact with a breastplate. Out of oneself! Impossible! Out into soundless, scentless, touchless, sightless space! The very idea was ghastly, futile! And touching there the bedrock of reality, the bottom of his Forsyte spirit, Soames rested for a moment. When one ceased, all ceased; it might go on, but there'd be nothing in it!

He looked at his watch. In half an hour the doctor would be back. He must decide! If against the operation and she died, how face her mother and the doctor afterwards? How face his own conscience? It was his child that she was having. If for the operation—then he condemned them both to childlessness. And for what else had he married her but to have a lawful heir? And his father—at death's door, waiting for the news! 'It's cruel!' he thought; 'I ought never to have such a thing to settle! It's cruel!' He turned towards the house. Some deep, simple way of deciding! He took out a coin, and put it back. If he spun it, he knew he would not abide by what came up! He went into the dining-room, furthest away from that room whence the sounds issued. The doctor had said there was a chance. In here that chance seemed greater; the river did not flow, nor the leaves fall. A fire was burning. Soames unlocked the tantalus. He hardly ever touched spirits, but now—he poured himself out some whisky and drank it neat, craving a faster flow of blood. 'That fellow Jolyon,' he thought; 'he had children already. He has the woman I really loved; and now a son by her! And I—I'm asked to destroy my only child! Annette can't die; it's not possible. She's strong!'

He was still standing sullenly at the sideboard when he heard the doctor's carriage, and went out to him. He had to wait for him to come downstairs.

"Well, doctor?"

"The situation's the same. Have you decided?"

"Yes," said Soames; "don't operate!"

"Not? You understand—the risk's great?"

In Soames' set face nothing moved but the lips.

"You said there was a chance?"

"A chance, yes; not much of one."

"You say the baby must be born dead if you do?"

"Yes."

"Do you still think that in any case she can't have another?"

"One can't be absolutely sure, but it's most unlikely."

"She's strong," said Soames; "we'll take the risk."

The doctor looked at him very gravely. "It's on your shoulders," he said; "with my own wife, I couldn't."

Soames' chin jerked up as if someone had hit him.

"Am I of any use up there?" he asked.

"No; keep away."

"I shall be in my picture-gallery, then; you know where."

The doctor nodded, and went upstairs.

Soames continued to stand, listening. 'By this time to-morrow,' he thought, 'I may have her death on my hands.' No! it was unfair —monstrous, to put it that way! Sullenness dropped on him again, and he went up to the gallery. He stood at the window. The wind was in the north; it was cold, clear; very blue sky, heavy ragged white clouds chasing across; the river blue, too, through the screen of goldening trees; the woods all rich with colour, glowing, burnished—an early autumn. If it were his own life, would he be taking that risk? 'But she'd take the risk of losing me,' he thought, 'sooner than lose her child! She doesn't really love me!' What could one expect—a girl and French? The one thing really vital to them both, vital to their marriage and their futures, was a child! 'I've been through a lot for this,' he thought, 'I'll hold on—hold on. There's a chance of keeping both—a chance!' One kept till things were taken—one naturally kept! He began walking round the gallery. He had made one purchase lately which he knew was a fortune in itself, and he halted before it—a girl with dull gold hair which looked like filaments of metal gazing at a little golden monster she was holding in her hand. Even at this tortured moment he could just feel the extraordinary nature of the bargain he had made—admire the quality of the table, the floor, the chair, the girl's figure, the absorbed expression on her face, the dull gold filaments of her hair, the bright gold of the little monster. Collecting pictures; growing richer, richer! What use, if...! He turned his back abruptly on the picture, and went to the window. Some of his doves had flown up from their perches round the dovecot, and were stretching their wings in the wind. In the clear sharp sunlight their whiteness almost flashed. They flew far, making a flung-up hieroglyphic against the sky. Annette fed the doves; it was pretty to see her. They took it out of her hand; they knew she was matter-of-fact. A choking sensation came into his throat. She would not—could not die! She was too—too sensible; and she was strong, really strong, like her mother, in spite of her fair prettiness.

It was already growing dark when at last he opened the door, and stood listening. Not a sound! A milky twilight crept about the stairway and the landings below. He had turned back when a sound caught his ear. Peering down, he saw a black shape moving, and his heart stood still. What was it? Death? The shape of Death coming from her door? No! only a maid without cap or apron. She came to the foot of his flight of stairs and said breathlessly:

"The doctor wants to see you, sir."

He ran down. She stood flat against the wall to let him pass, and said:

"Oh, Sir! it's over."

"Over?" said Soames, with a sort of menace; "what d'you mean?"

"It's born, sir."

He dashed up the four steps in front of him, and came suddenly on the doctor in the dim passage. The man was wiping his brow.

"Well?" he said; "quick!"

"Both living; it's all right, I think."

Soames stood quite still, covering his eyes.

"I congratulate you," he heard the doctor say; "it was touch and go."

Soames let fall the hand which was covering his face.

"Thanks," he said; "thanks very much. What is it?"

"Daughter—luckily; a son would have killed her—the head."

A daughter!

"The utmost care of both," he heard the doctor say, "and we shall do. When does the mother come?"

"To-night, between nine and ten, I hope."

"I'll stay till then. Do you want to see them?"

"Not now," said Soames; "before you go. I'll have dinner sent up to you." And he went downstairs.

Relief unspeakable, and yet—a daughter! It seemed to him unfair. To have taken that risk—to have been through this agony—and what agony!—for a daughter! He stood before the blazing fire of wood logs in the hall, touching it with his toe and trying to readjust himself. 'My father!' he thought. A bitter disappointment, no disguising it! One never got all one wanted in this life! And there was no other—at least, if there was, it was no use!

While he was standing there, a telegram was brought him.

"Come up at once, your father sinking fast.—MOTHER."

He read it with a choking sensation. One would have thought he couldn't feel anything after these last hours, but he felt this. Half-past seven, a train from Reading at nine, and madame's train, if she had caught it, came in at eight-forty—he would meet that, and go on. He ordered the carriage, ate some dinner mechanically, and went upstairs. The doctor came out to him.

"They're sleeping."

"I won't go in," said Soames with relief. "My father's dying; I have to—go up. Is it all right?"

The doctor's face expressed a kind of doubting admiration. 'If they were all as unemotional' he might have been saying.

"Yes, I think you may go with an easy mind. You'll be down soon?"

"To-morrow," said Soames. "Here's the address."

The doctor seemed to hover on the verge of sympathy.

"Good-night!" said Soames abruptly, and turned away. He put on his fur coat. Death! It was a chilly business. He smoked a cigarette in the carriage—one of his rare cigarettes. The night was windy and flew on black wings; the carriage lights had to search out the way. His father! That old, old man! A comfortless night—to die!

The London train came in just as he reached the station, and Madame Lamotte, substantial, dark-clothed, very yellow in the lamplight, came towards the exit with a dressing-bag.

"This all you have?" asked Soames.

"But yes; I had not the time. How is my little one?"

"Doing well—both. A girl!"

"A girl! What joy! I had a frightful crossing!"

Her black bulk, solid, unreduced by the frightful crossing, climbed into the brougham.

"And you, mon cher?"

"My father's dying," said Soames between his teeth. "I'm going up. Give my love to Annette."

"Tiens!" murmured Madame Lamotte; "quel malheur!"

Soames took his hat off, and moved towards his train. 'The French!' he thought.

CHAPTER XIII

JAMES IS TOLD

A simple cold, caught in the room with double windows, where the air and the people who saw him were filtered, as it were, the room he had not left since the middle of September—and James was in deep waters. A little cold, passing his little strength and flying quickly to his lungs. "He mustn't catch cold," the doctor had declared, and he had gone and caught it. When he first felt it in his throat he had said to his nurse—for he had one now—"There, I knew how it would be, airing the room like that!" For a whole day he was highly nervous about himself and went in advance of all precautions and remedies; drawing every breath with extreme care and having his temperature taken every hour. Emily was not

alarmed.

But next morning when she went in the nurse whispered: "He won't have his temperature taken."

Emily crossed to the side of the bed where he was lying, and said softly, "How do you feel, James?" holding the thermometer to his lips. James looked up at her.

"What's the good of that?" he murmured huskily; "I don't want to know."

Then she was alarmed. He breathed with difficulty, he looked terribly frail, white, with faint red discolorations. She had 'had trouble' with him, Goodness knew; but he was James, had been James for nearly fifty years; she couldn't remember or imagine life without James—James, behind all his fussiness, his pessimism, his crusty shell, deeply affectionate, really kind and generous to them all!

All that day and the next he hardly uttered a word, but there was in his eyes a noticing of everything done for him, a look on his face which told her he was fighting; and she did not lose hope. His very stillness, the way he conserved every little scrap of energy, showed the tenacity with which he was fighting. It touched her deeply; and though her face was composed and comfortable in the sick-room, tears ran down her cheeks when she was out of it.

About tea-time on the third day—she had just changed her dress, keeping her appearance so as not to alarm him, because he noticed everything—she saw a difference. 'It's no use; I'm tired,' was written plainly across that white face, and when she went up to him, he muttered: "Send for Soames."

"Yes, James," she said comfortably; "all right—at once." And she kissed his forehead. A tear dropped there, and as she wiped it off she saw that his eyes looked grateful. Much upset, and without hope now, she sent Soames the telegram.

When he entered out of the black windy night, the big house was still as a grave. Warmson's broad face looked almost narrow; he took the fur coat with a sort of added care, saying:

"Will you have a glass of wine, sir?"

Soames shook his head, and his eyebrows made enquiry.

Warmson's lips twitched. "He's asking for you, sir;" and suddenly he blew his nose. "It's a long time, sir," he said, "that I've been with Mr. Forsyte—a long time."

Soames left him folding the coat, and began to mount the stairs. This house, where he had been born and sheltered, had never seemed to him so warm, and rich, and cosy, as during this last pilgrimage to his father's room. It was not his taste; but in its own substantial, lincrusta way it was the acme of comfort and security. And the night was so dark and windy; the grave so cold and lonely!

He paused outside the door. No sound came from within. He turned the handle softly and was in the room before he was perceived. The light was shaded. His mother and Winifred were sitting on the far side of the bed; the nurse was moving away from the near side where was an empty chair. 'For me!' thought Soames. As he moved from the door his mother and sister rose, but he signed with his hand and they sat down again. He went up to the chair and stood looking at his father. James' breathing was as if strangled; his eyes were closed. And in Soames, looking on his father so worn and white and wasted, listening to his strangled breathing, there rose a passionate vehemence of anger against Nature, cruel, inexorable Nature, kneeling on the chest of that wisp of a body, slowly pressing out the breath, pressing out the life of the being who was dearest to him in the world. His father, of all men, had lived a careful life, moderate, abstemious, and this was his reward—to have life slowly, painfully squeezed out of him! And, without knowing that he spoke, he said: "It's cruel!"

He saw his mother cover her eyes and Winifred bow her face towards the bed. Women! They put up with things so much better than men. He took a step nearer to his father. For three days James had not been shaved, and his lips and chin were covered with hair, hardly more snowy than his forehead. It softened his face, gave it a queer look already not of this world. His eyes opened. Soames went quite close and bent over. The lips moved.

"Here I am, Father:"

"Um—what—what news? They never tell...." the voice died, and a flood of emotion made Soames' face work so that he could not speak. Tell him?—yes. But what? He made a great effort, got his lips together, and said:

"Good news, dear, good—Annette, a son."

"Ah!" It was the queerest sound, ugly, relieved, pitiful, triumphant—like the noise a baby makes getting what it wants. The eyes closed, and that strangled sound of breathing began again. Soames recoiled to the chair and stonily sat down. The lie he had told, based, as it were, on some deep, temperamental instinct that after death James would not know the truth, had taken away all power of feeling for the moment. His arm brushed against something. It was his father's naked foot. In the struggle to breathe he had pushed it out from under the clothes. Soames took it in his hand, a cold foot, light and thin, white, very cold. What use to put it back, to wrap up that which must be colder soon! He warmed it mechanically with his hand, listening to his father's laboured breathing; while the power of feeling rose again within him. A little sob, quickly smothered, came from Winifred, but his mother sat unmoving with her eyes fixed on James. Soames signed to the nurse.

"Where's the doctor?" he whispered.

"He's been sent for."

"Can't you do anything to ease his breathing?"

"Only an injection; and he can't stand it. The doctor said, while he was fighting...."

"He's not fighting," whispered Soames, "he's being slowly smothered. It's awful."

James stirred uneasily, as if he knew what they were saying. Soames rose and bent over him. James feebly moved his two hands, and Soames took them.

"He wants to be pulled up," whispered the nurse.

Soames pulled. He thought he pulled gently, but a look almost of anger passed over James' face. The nurse plumped the pillows. Soames laid the hands down, and bending over kissed his father's forehead. As he was raising himself again, James' eyes bent on him a look which seemed to come from the very depths of what was left within. 'I'm done, my boy,' it seemed to say, 'take care of them, take care of yourself; take care—I leave it all to you.'

"Yes, Yes," Soames whispered, "yes, yes."

Behind him the nurse did he knew, not what, for his father made a tiny movement of repulsion as if resenting that interference; and almost at once his breathing eased away, became quiet; he lay very still. The strained expression on his face passed, a curious white tranquillity took its place. His eyelids quivered, rested; the whole face rested; at ease. Only by the faint puffing of his lips could they tell that he was breathing. Soames sank back on his chair, and fell to cherishing the foot again. He heard the nurse quietly crying over there by the fire; curious that she, a stranger, should be the only one of them who cried! He heard the quiet lick and flutter of the fire flames. One more old Forsyte going to his long rest—wonderful, they were!—wonderful how he had held on! His mother and Winifred were leaning forward, hanging on the sight of James' lips. But Soames bent sideways over the feet, warming them both; they gave him comfort, colder and colder though they grew. Suddenly he started up; a sound, a dreadful sound such as he had never heard, was coming from his father's lips, as if an outraged heart had broken with a long moan. What a strong heart, to have uttered that farewell! It ceased. Soames looked into the face. No motion; no breath! Dead! He kissed the brow, turned round and went out of the room. He ran upstairs to the bedroom, his old bedroom, still kept for him; flung himself face down on the bed, and broke into sobs which he stilled with the pillow....

A little later he went downstairs and passed into the room. James lay alone, wonderfully calm, free from shadow and anxiety, with the gravity on his ravaged face which underlies great age, the worn fine gravity of old coins.

Soames looked steadily at that face, at the fire, at all the room with windows thrown open to the London night.

"Good-bye!" he whispered, and went out.

CHAPTER XIV

He had much to see to, that night and all next day. A telegram at breakfast reassured him about Annette, and he only caught the last train back to Reading, with Emily's kiss on his forehead and in his ears her words:

"I don't know what I should have done without you, my dear boy."

He reached his house at midnight. The weather had changed, was mild again, as though, having finished its work and sent a Forsyte to his last account, it could relax. A second telegram, received at dinner-time, had confirmed the good news of Annette, and, instead of going in, Soames passed down through the garden in the moonlight to his houseboat. He could sleep there quite well. Bitterly tired, he lay down on the sofa in his fur coat and fell asleep. He woke soon after dawn and went on deck. He stood against the rail, looking west where the river swept round in a wide curve under the woods. In Soames, appreciation of natural beauty was curiously like that of his farmer ancestors, a sense of grievance if it wasn't there, sharpened, no doubt, and civilised, by his researches among landscape painting. But dawn has power to fertilise the most matter-of-fact vision, and he was stirred. It was another world from the river he knew, under that remote cool light; a world into which man had not entered, an unreal world, like some strange shore sighted by discovery. Its colour was not the colour of convention, was hardly colour at all; its shapes were brooding yet distinct; its silence stunning; it had no scent. Why it should move him he could not tell, unless it were that he felt so alone in it, bare of all relationship and all possessions. Into such a world his father might be voyaging, for all resemblance it had to the world he had left. And Soames took refuge from it in wondering what painter could have done it justice. The white-grey water was like—like the belly of a fish! Was it possible that this world on which he looked was all private property, except the water—and even that was tapped! No tree, no shrub, not a blade of grass, not a bird or beast, not even a fish that was not owned. And once on a time all this was jungle and marsh and water, and weird creatures roamed and sported without human cognizance to give them names; rotting luxuriance had rioted where those tall, carefully planted woods came down to the water, and marsh-misted reeds on that far side had covered all the pasture. Well! they had got it under, kennelled it all up, labelled it, and stowed it in lawyers' offices. And a good thing too! But once in a way, as now, the ghost of the past came out to haunt and brood and whisper to any human who chanced to be awake: 'Out of my unowned loneliness you all came, into it some day you will all return.'

And Soames, who felt the chill and the eeriness of that world-new to him and so very old: the world, unowned, visiting the scene of its past—went down and made himself tea on a spirit-lamp. When he had drunk it, he took out writing materials and wrote two paragraphs:

"On the 20th instant at his residence in Park Lane, James Forsyte, in his ninety-first year. Funeral at noon on the 24th at Highgate. No flowers by request."

"On the 20th instant at The Shelter; Mapledurham, Annette, wife of Soames Forsyte, of a daughter." And underneath on the blottingpaper he traced the word "son."

It was eight o'clock in an ordinary autumn world when he went across to the house. Bushes across the river stood round and bright-coloured out of a milky haze; the wood-smoke went up blue and straight; and his doves cooed, preening their feathers in the sunlight.

He stole up to his dressing-room, bathed, shaved, put on fresh linen and dark clothes.

Madame Lamotte was beginning her breakfast when he went down.

She looked at his clothes, said, "Don't tell me!" and pressed his hand. "Annette is prettee well. But the doctor say she can never have no more children. You knew that?" Soames nodded. "It's a pity. Mais la petite est adorable. Du cafe?"

Soames got away from her as soon as he could. She offended him—solid, matter-of-fact, quick, clear—French. He could not bear her vowels, her 'r's'; he resented the way she had looked at him, as if it were his fault that Annette could never bear him a son! His fault! He even resented her cheap adoration of the daughter he had not yet seen.

Curious how he jibbed away from sight of his wife and child!

One would have thought he must have rushed up at the first moment. On the contrary, he had a sort of physical shrinking from it—fastidious possessor that he was. He was afraid of what Annette was thinking of him, author of her agonies, afraid of the look of the baby, afraid of showing his disappointment with the present and—the future.

He spent an hour walking up and down the drawing-room before he could screw his courage up to mount the stairs and knock on the door of their room.

Madame Lamotte opened it.

"Ah! At last you come! Elle vous attend!" She passed him, and Soames went in with his noiseless step, his jaw firmly set, his eyes furtive.

Annette was very pale and very pretty lying there. The baby was hidden away somewhere; he could not see it. He went up to the bed, and with sudden emotion bent and kissed her forehead.

"Here you are then, Soames," she said. "I am not so bad now. But I suffered terribly, terribly. I am glad I cannot have any more. Oh! how I suffered!"

Soames stood silent, stroking her hand; words of endearment, of sympathy, absolutely would not come; the thought passed through him: 'An English girl wouldn't have said that!' At this moment he knew with certainty that he would never be near to her in spirit and in truth, nor she to him. He had collected her—that was all! And Jolyon's words came rushing into his mind: "I should imagine you will be glad to have your neck out of chancery." Well, he had got it out! Had he got it in again?

"We must feed you up," he said, "you'll soon be strong."

"Don't you want to see baby, Soames? She is asleep."

"Of course," said Soames, "very much."

He passed round the foot of the bed to the other side and stood staring. For the first moment what he saw was much what he had expected to see—a baby. But as he stared and the baby breathed and made little sleeping movements with its tiny features, it seemed to assume an individual shape, grew to be like a picture, a thing he would know again; not repulsive, strangely bud-like and touching. It had dark hair. He touched it with his finger, he wanted to see its eyes. They opened, they were dark—whether blue or brown he could not tell. The eyes winked, stared, they had a sort of sleepy depth in them. And suddenly his heart felt queer, warm, as if elated.

"Ma petite fleur!" Annette said softly.

"Fleur," repeated Soames: "Fleur! we'll call her that."

The sense of triumph and renewed possession swelled within him.

By God! this—this thing was his! By God! this—this thing was his!

THE FORSYTE SAGA

Part 3

AWAKENING and TO LET

By John Galsworthy

AWAKENING

TO LET

TO CHARLES SCRIBNER

AWAKENING

Through the massive skylight illuminating the hall at Robin Hill, the July sunlight at five o'clock fell just where the broad stairway turned; and in that radiant streak little Jon Forsyte stood, blue-linen-suited. His hair was shining, and his eyes, from beneath a frown, for he was considering how to go downstairs, this last of innumerable times, before the car brought his father and mother home. Four at a time, and five at the bottom? Stale! Down the banisters? But in which fashion? On his face, feet foremost? Very stale. On his stomach, sideways? Paltry! On his back, with his arms stretched down on both sides? Forbidden! Or on his face, head foremost, in a manner unknown as yet to any but himself? Such was the cause of the frown on the illuminated face of little Jon....

In that Summer of 1909 the simple souls who even then desired to simplify the English tongue, had, of course, no cognizance of little Jon, or they would have claimed him for a disciple. But one can be too simple in this life, for his real name was Jolyon, and his living father and dead half-brother had usurped of old the other shortenings, Jo and Jolly. As a fact little Jon had done his best to conform to convention and spell himself first Jhon, then John; not till his father had explained the sheer necessity, had he spelled his name Jon.

Up till now that father had possessed what was left of his heart by the groom, Bob, who played the concertina, and his nurse "Da," who wore the violet dress on Sundays, and enjoyed the name of Spraggins in that private life lived at odd moments even by domestic servants. His mother had only appeared to him, as it were in dreams, smelling delicious, smoothing his forehead just before he fell asleep, and sometimes docking his hair, of a golden brown colour. When he cut his head open against the nursery fender she was there to be bled over; and when he had nightmare she would sit on his bed and cuddle his head against her neck. She was precious but remote, because "Da" was so near, and there is hardly room for more than one woman at a time in a man's heart. With his father, too, of course, he had special bonds of union; for little Jon also meant to be a painter when he grew up—with the one small difference, that his father painted pictures, and little Jon intended to paint ceilings and walls, standing on a board between two step-ladders, in a dirty-white apron, and a lovely smell of whitewash. His father also took him riding in Richmond Park, on his pony, Mouse, so-called because it was so-coloured.

Little Jon had been born with a silver spoon in a mouth which was rather curly and large. He had never heard his father or his mother speak in an angry voice, either to each other, himself, or anybody else; the groom, Bob, Cook, Jane, Bella and the other servants, even "Da," who alone restrained him in his courses, had special voices when they talked to him. He was therefore of opinion that the world was a place of perfect and perpetual gentility and freedom.

A child of 1901, he had come to consciousness when his country, just over that bad attack of scarlet fever, the Boer War, was preparing for the Liberal revival of 1906. Coercion was unpopular, parents had exalted notions of giving their offspring a good time. They spoiled their rods, spared their children, and anticipated the results with enthusiasm. In choosing, moreover, for his father an amiable man of fifty-two, who had already lost an only son, and for his mother a woman of thirty-eight, whose first and only child he was, little Jon had done well and wisely. What had saved him from becoming a cross between a lap dog and a little prig, had been his father's adoration of his mother, for even little Jon could see that she was not merely just his mother, and that he played second fiddle to her in his father's heart: What he played in his mother's heart he knew not yet. As for "Auntie" June, his half-sister (but so old that she had grown out of the relationship) she loved him, of course, but was too sudden. His devoted "Da," too, had a Spartan touch. His bath was cold and his knees were bare; he was not encouraged to be sorry for himself. As to the vexed question of his education, little Jon shared the theory of those who considered that children should not be forced. He rather liked the Mademoiselle who came for two hours every morning to teach him her language, together with history, geography and sums; nor were the piano lessons which his mother gave him disagreeable, for she had a way of luring him from tune to tune, never making him practise one which did not give him pleasure, so that he remained eager to convert ten thumbs into eight fingers. Under his father he learned to draw pleasure-pigs and other animals. He was not a highly educated little boy. Yet, on the whole, the silver spoon stayed in his mouth without spoiling it, though "Da" sometimes said that other children would do him a "world of good."

It was a disillusionment, then, when at the age of nearly seven she held him down on his back, because he wanted to do something of which she did not approve. This first interference with the free individualism of a Forsyte drove him almost frantic. There was something appalling in the utter helplessness of that position, and the uncertainty as to whether it would ever come to an end. Suppose she never let him get up any more! He suffered torture at the top of his voice for fifty seconds. Worse

than anything was his perception that "Da" had taken all that time to realise the agony of fear he was enduring. Thus, dreadfully, was revealed to him the lack of imagination in the human being.

When he was let up he remained convinced that "Da" had done a dreadful thing. Though he did not wish to bear witness against her, he had been compelled, by fear of repetition, to seek his mother and say: "Mum, don't let 'Da' hold me down on my back again."

His mother, her hands held up over her head, and in them two plaits of hair—"couleur de feuille morte," as little Jon had not yet learned to call it—had looked at him with eyes like little bits of his brown velvet tunic, and answered:

"No, darling, I won't."

She, being in the nature of a goddess, little Jon was satisfied; especially when, from under the dining-table at breakfast, where he happened to be waiting for a mushroom, he had overheard her say to his father:

"Then, will you tell 'Da,' dear, or shall I? She's so devoted to him"; and his father's answer:

"Well, she mustn't show it that way. I know exactly what it feels like to be held down on one's back. No Forsyte can stand it for a minute."

Conscious that they did not know him to be under the table, little Jon was visited by the quite new feeling of embarrassment, and stayed where he was, ravaged by desire for the mushroom.

Such had been his first dip into the dark abysses of existence. Nothing much had been revealed to him after that, till one day, having gone down to the cow-house for his drink of milk fresh from the cow, after Garratt had finished milking, he had seen Clover's calf, dead. Inconsolable, and followed by an upset Garratt, he had sought "Da"; but suddenly aware that she was not the person he wanted, had rushed away to find his father, and had run into the arms of his mother.

"Clover's calf's dead! Oh! Oh! It looked so soft!"

His mother's clasp, and her:

"Yes, darling, there, there!" had stayed his sobbing. But if Clover's calf could die, anything could—not only bees, flies, beetles and chickens—and look soft like that! This was appalling—and soon forgotten!

The next thing had been to sit on a bumble bee, a poignant experience, which his mother had understood much better than "Da"; and nothing of vital importance had happened after that till the year turned; when, following a day of utter wretchedness, he had enjoyed a disease composed of little spots, bed, honey in a spoon, and many Tangerine oranges. It was then that the world had flowered. To "Auntie" June he owed that flowering, for no sooner was he a little lame duck than she came rushing down from London, bringing with her the books which had nurtured her own Berserker spirit, born in the noted year of 1869. Aged, and of many colours, they were stored with the most formidable happenings. Of these she read to little Jon, till he was allowed to read to himself; whereupon she whisked back to London and left them with him in a heap. Those books cooked his fancy, till he thought and dreamed of nothing but midshipmen and dhows, pirates, rafts, sandal-wood traders, iron horses, sharks, battles, Tartars, Red Indians, balloons, North Poles and other extravagant delights. The moment he was suffered to get up, he rigged his bed fore and aft, and set out from it in a narrow bath across green seas of carpet, to a rock, which he climbed by means of its mahogany drawer knobs, to sweep the horizon with his drinking tumbler screwed to his eye, in search of rescuing sails. He made a daily raft out of the towel stand, the tea tray, and his pillows. He saved the juice from his French plums, bottled it in an empty medicine bottle, and provisioned the raft with the rum that it became; also with pemmican made out of little saved-up bits of chicken sat on and dried at the fire; and with lime juice against scurvy, extracted from the peel of his oranges and a little economised juice. He made a North Pole one morning from the whole of his bedclothes except the bolster, and reached it in a birch-bark canoe (in private life the fender), after a terrible encounter with a polar bear fashioned from the bolster and four skittles dressed up in "Da's" nightgown. After that, his father, seeking to steady his imagination, brought him Ivanboe, Bevis, a book about King Arthur, and Tom Brown's Schooldays. He read the first, and for three days built, defended and stormed Front de Boeuf's castle, taking every part in the piece except those of Rebecca and Rowena; with piercing cries of: "En avant, de Bracy!" and similar utterances. After reading the book about King Arthur he became almost exclusively Sir Lamorac de Galis, because, though there was very little about him, he preferred his name to that of any other knight; and he rode his old rocking-horse to death, armed with a long bamboo. Bevis he found tame; besides, it required woods and animals, of which he had none in his nursery, except his two cats, Fitz and Puck Forsyte, who permitted no liberties. For Tom Brown he was as yet too young. There was relief in the house when, after the fourth week, he was permitted to go down and out.

The month being March the trees were exceptionally like the masts of ships, and for little Jon that was a wonderful Spring, extremely hard on his knees, suits, and the patience of "Da," who had the washing and reparation of his clothes. Every morning the moment his breakfast was over, he could be viewed by his mother and father, whose windows looked out that way, coming from the study, crossing the terrace, climbing the old oak tree, his face resolute and his hair bright. He began the day thus because there was not time to go far afield before his lessons. The old tree's variety never staled; it had mainmast, foremast, top-gallant mast, and he could always come down by the halyards—or ropes of the swing. After his lessons, completed by eleven, he would go to the kitchen for a thin piece of cheese, a biscuit and two French plums—provision enough for a jolly-boat at least—and eat it in some imaginative way; then, armed to the teeth with gun, pistols, and sword, he would begin the serious climbing of the morning, encountering by the way innumerable slavers, Indians, pirates, leopards, and bears. He was seldom seen at that hour of the day without a cutlass in his teeth (like Dick Needham) amid the rapid explosion of copper caps. And many were the gardeners he brought down with yellow peas shot out of his little gun. He lived a life of the most violent action.

"Jon," said his father to his mother, under the oak tree, "is terrible. I'm afraid he's going to turn out a sailor, or something hopeless. Do you see any sign of his appreciating beauty?"

"Not the faintest."

"Well, thank heaven he's no turn for wheels or engines! I can bear anything but that. But I wish he'd take more interest in Nature."

"He's imaginative, Jolyon."

"Yes, in a sanguinary way. Does he love anyone just now?"

"No; only everyone. There never was anyone born more loving or more lovable than Jon."

"Being your boy, Irene."

At this moment little Jon, lying along a branch high above them, brought them down with two peas; but that fragment of talk lodged, thick, in his small gizzard. Loving, lovable, imaginative, sanguinary!

The leaves also were thick by now, and it was time for his birthday, which, occurring every year on the twelfth of May, was always memorable for his chosen dinner of sweetbread, mushrooms, macaroons, and ginger beer.

Between that eighth birthday, however, and the afternoon when he stood in the July radiance at the turning of the stairway, several important things had happened.

"Da," worn out by washing his knees, or moved by that mysterious instinct which forces even nurses to desert their nurslings, left the very day after his birthday in floods of tears "to be married"—of all things—"to a man." Little Jon, from whom it had been kept, was inconsolable for an afternoon. It ought not to have been kept from him! Two large boxes of soldiers and some artillery, together with The Young Buglers, which had been among his birthday presents, cooperated with his grief in a sort of conversion, and instead of seeking adventures in person and risking his own life, he began to play imaginative games, in which he risked the lives of countless tin soldiers, marbles, stones and beans. Of these forms of "chair a canon" he made collections, and, using them alternately, fought the Peninsular, the Seven Years, the Thirty Years, and other wars, about which he had been reading of late in a big History of Europe which had been his grandfather's. He altered them to suit his genius, and fought them all over the floor in his day nursery, so that nobody could come in, for fearing of disturbing Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden, or treading on an army of Austrians. Because of the sound of the word he was passionately addicted to the Austrians, and finding there were so few battles in which they were successful he had to invent them in his games. His favourite generals were Prince Eugene, the Archduke Charles and Wallenstein. Tilly and Mack ("music-hall turns" he heard his father call them one day, whatever that might mean) one really could not love very much, Austrian though they were. For euphonic reasons, too, he doted on Turenne.

This phase, which caused his parents anxiety, because it kept him indoors when he ought to have been out, lasted through May and half of June, till his father killed it by bringing home to him Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. When he read those books something happened in him, and he went out of doors again in passionate quest of a river. There being none on the premises at Robin Hill, he had to make one out of the pond, which fortunately had water lilies, dragonflies, gnats, bullrushes, and three small willow trees. On this pond, after his father and Garratt had ascertained by sounding that it had a reliable bottom and was nowhere more than two feet deep, he was allowed a little collapsible canoe, in which he spent hours and hours paddling, and lying down out of sight of Indian Joe and other enemies. On the shore of the pond, too, he built himself a wigwam about four feet square, of old biscuit tins,

roofed in by boughs. In this he would make little fires, and cook the birds he had not shot with his gun, hunting in the coppice and fields, or the fish he did not catch in the pond because there were none. This occupied the rest of June and that July, when his father and mother were away in Ireland. He led a lonely life of "make believe" during those five weeks of summer weather, with gun, wigwam, water and canoe; and, however hard his active little brain tried to keep the sense of beauty away, she did creep in on him for a second now and then, perching on the wing of a dragon-fly, glistening on the water lilies, or brushing his eyes with her blue as he lay on his back in ambush.

"Auntie" June, who had been left in charge, had a "grown-up" in the house, with a cough and a large piece of putty which he was making into a face; so she hardly ever came down to see him in the pond. Once, however, she brought with her two other "grown-ups." Little Jon, who happened to have painted his naked self bright blue and yellow in stripes out of his father's water-colour box, and put some duck's feathers in his hair, saw them coming, and—ambushed himself among the willows. As he had foreseen, they came at once to his wigwam and knelt down to look inside, so that with a blood-curdling yell he was able to take the scalps of "Auntie" June and the woman "grown-up" in an almost complete manner before they kissed him. The names of the two grown-ups were "Auntie" Holly and "Uncle" Val, who had a brown face and a little limp, and laughed at him terribly. He took a fancy to "Auntie" Holly, who seemed to be a sister too; but they both went away the same afternoon and he did not see them again. Three days before his father and mother were to come home "Auntie" June also went off in a great hurry, taking the "grown-up" who coughed and his piece of putty; and Mademoiselle said: "Poor man, he was verree ill. I forbid you to go into his room, Jon." Little Jon, who rarely did things merely because he was told not to, refrained from going, though he was bored and lonely. In truth the day of the pond was past, and he was filled to the brim of his soul with restlessness and the want of something—not a tree, not a gun—something soft. Those last two days had seemed months in spite of Cast Up by the Sea, wherein he was reading about Mother Lee and her terrible wrecking bonfire. He had gone up and down the stairs perhaps a hundred times in those two days, and often from the day nursery, where he slept now, had stolen into his mother's room, looked at everything, without touching, and on into the dressing-room; and standing on one leg beside the bath, like Slingsby, had whispered:

"Ho, ho, ho! Dog my cats!" mysteriously, to bring luck. Then, stealing back, he had opened his mother's wardrobe, and taken a long sniff which seemed to bring him nearer to—he didn't know what.

He had done this just before he stood in the streak of sunlight, debating in which of the several ways he should slide down the banisters. They all seemed silly, and in a sudden languor he began descending the steps one by one. During that descent he could remember his father quite distinctly—the short grey beard, the deep eyes twinkling, the furrow between them, the funny smile, the thin figure which always seemed so tall to little Jon; but his mother he couldn't see. All that represented her was something swaying with two dark eyes looking back at him; and the scent of her wardrobe.

Bella was in the hall, drawing aside the big curtains, and opening the front door. Little Jon said, wheedling,

"Bella!"

"Yes, Master Jon."

"Do let's have tea under the oak tree when they come; I know they'd like it best."

"You mean you'd like it best."

Little Jon considered.

"No, they would, to please me."

Bella smiled. "Very well, I'll take it out if you'll stay quiet here and not get into mischief before they come."

Little Jon sat down on the bottom step, and nodded. Bella came close, and looked him over.

"Get up!" she said.

Little Jon got up. She scrutinized him behind; he was not green, and his knees seemed clean.

"All right!" she said. "My! Aren't you brown? Give me a kiss!"

And little Jon received a peck on his hair.

"What jam?" he asked. "I'm so tired of waiting."

"Gooseberry and strawberry."

Num! They were his favourites!

When she was gone he sat still for quite a minute. It was quiet in the big hall open to its East end so that he could see one of his trees, a brig sailing very slowly across the upper lawn. In the outer hall shadows were slanting from the pillars. Little Jon got up, jumped one of them, and walked round the clump of iris plants which filled the pool of grey-white marble in the centre. The flowers were pretty, but only smelled a very little. He stood in the open doorway and looked out. Suppose!—suppose they didn't come! He had waited so long that he felt he could not bear that, and his attention slid at once from such finality to the dust motes in the bluish sunlight coming in: Thrusting his hand up, he tried to catch some. Bella ought to have dusted that piece of air! But perhaps they weren't dust—only what sunlight was made of, and he looked to see whether the sunlight out of doors was the same. It was not. He had said he would stay quiet in the hall, but he simply couldn't any more; and crossing the gravel of the drive he lay down on the grass beyond. Pulling six daisies he named them carefully, Sir Lamorac, Sir Tristram, Sir Lancelot, Sir Palimedes, Sir Bors, Sir Gawain, and fought them in couples till only Sir Lamorac, whom he had selected for a specially stout stalk, had his head on, and even he, after three encounters, looked worn and waggly. A beetle was moving slowly in the grass, which almost wanted cutting. Every blade was a small tree, round whose trunk the beetle had to glide. Little Jon stretched out Sir Lamorac, feet foremost, and stirred the creature up. It scuttled painfully. Little Jon laughed, lost interest, and sighed. His heart felt empty. He turned over and lay on his back. There was a scent of honey from the lime trees in flower, and in the sky the blue was beautiful, with a few white clouds which looked and perhaps tasted like lemon ice. He could hear Bob playing: "Way down upon de Suwannee ribber" on his concertina, and it made him nice and sad. He turned over again and put his ear to the ground—Indians could hear things coming ever so far—but he could hear nothing—only the concertina! And almost instantly he did hear a grinding sound, a faint toot. Yes! it was a car—coming—coming! Up he jumped. Should he wait in the porch, or rush upstairs, and as they came in, shout: "Look!" and slide slowly down the banisters, head foremost? Should he? The car turned in at the drive. It was too late! And he only waited, jumping up and down in his excitement. The car came quickly, whirred, and stopped. His father got out, exactly like life. He bent down and little Jon bobbed up—they bumped. His father said,

"Bless us! Well, old man, you are brown!" Just as he would; and the sense of expectation—of something wanted—bubbled unextinguished in little Jon. Then, with a long, shy look he saw his mother, in a blue dress, with a blue motor scarf over her cap and hair, smiling. He jumped as high as ever he could, twined his legs behind her back, and hugged. He heard her gasp, and felt her hugging back. His eyes, very dark blue just then, looked into hers, very dark brown, till her lips closed on his eyebrow, and, squeezing with all his might, he heard her creak and laugh, and say:

"You are strong, Jon!"

He slid down at that, and rushed into the hall, dragging her by the hand.

While he was eating his jam beneath the oak tree, he noticed things about his mother that he had never seemed to see before, her cheeks for instance were creamy, there were silver threads in her dark goldy hair, her throat had no knob in it like Bella's, and she went in and out softly. He noticed, too, some little lines running away from the corners of her eyes, and a nice darkness under them. She was ever so beautiful, more beautiful than "Da" or Mademoiselle, or "Auntie" June or even "Auntie" Holly, to whom he had taken a fancy; even more beautiful than Bella, who had pink cheeks and came out too suddenly in places. This new beautifulness of his mother had a kind of particular importance, and he ate less than he had expected to.

When tea was over his father wanted him to walk round the gardens. He had a long conversation with his father about things in general, avoiding his private life—Sir Lamorac, the Austrians, and the emptiness he had felt these last three days, now so suddenly filled up. His father told him of a place called Glensofantrim, where he and his mother had been; and of the little people who came out of the ground there when it was very quiet. Little Jon came to a halt, with his heels apart.

"Do you really believe they do, Daddy?" "No, Jon, but I thought you might."

"Why?"

"You're younger than I; and they're fairies." Little Jon squared the dimple in his chin.

"I don't believe in fairies. I never see any." "Ha!" said his father.

"Does Mum?"

His father smiled his funny smile.

"No; she only sees Pan."

"What's Pan?"

"The Goaty God who skips about in wild and beautiful places."

"Was he in Glensofantrim?"

"Mum said so."

Little Jon took his heels up, and led on.

"Did you see him?"

"No; I only saw Venus Anadyomene."

Little Jon reflected; Venus was in his book about the Greeks and Trojans. Then Anna was her Christian and Dyomene her surname?

But it appeared, on inquiry, that it was one word, which meant rising from the foam.

"Did she rise from the foam in Glensofantrim?"

"Yes; every day."

"What is she like, Daddy?"

"Like Mum."

"Oh! Then she must be..." but he stopped at that, rushed at a wall, scrambled up, and promptly scrambled down again. The discovery that his mother was beautiful was one which he felt must absolutely be kept to himself. His father's cigar, however, took so long to smoke, that at last he was compelled to say:

"I want to see what Mum's brought home. Do you mind, Daddy?"

He pitched the motive low, to absolve him from unmanliness, and was a little disconcerted when his father looked at him right through, heaved an important sigh, and answered:

"All right, old man, you go and love her."

He went, with a pretence of slowness, and then rushed, to make up. He entered her bedroom from his own, the door being open. She was still kneeling before a trunk, and he stood close to her, quite still.

She knelt up straight, and said:

"Well, Jon?"

"I thought I'd just come and see."

Having given and received another hug, he mounted the window-seat, and tucking his legs up under him watched her unpack. He derived a pleasure from the operation such as he had not yet known, partly because she was taking out things which looked suspicious, and partly because he liked to look at her. She moved differently from anybody else, especially from Bella; she was certainly the refinedest-looking person he had ever seen. She finished the trunk at last, and knelt down in front of him.

"Have you missed us, Jon?"

Little Jon nodded, and having thus admitted his feelings, continued to nod.

"But you had 'Auntie' June?"

"Oh! she had a man with a cough."

His mother's face changed, and looked almost angry. He added hastily:

"He was a poor man, Mum; he coughed awfully; I—I liked him."

His mother put her hands behind his waist.

"You like everybody, Jon?"

Little Jon considered.

"Up to a point," he said: "Auntie June took me to church one Sunday."

"To church? Oh!"

"She wanted to see how it would affect me." "And did it?"

"Yes. I came over all funny, so she took me home again very quick. I wasn't sick after all. I went to bed and had hot brandy and water, and read *The Boys of Beechwood*. It was scrumptious."

His mother bit her lip.

"When was that?"

"Oh! about—a long time ago—I wanted her to take me again, but she wouldn't. You and Daddy never go to church, do you?"

"No, we don't."

"Why don't you?"

His mother smiled.

"Well, dear, we both of us went when we were little. Perhaps we went when we were too little."

"I see," said little Jon, "it's dangerous."

"You shall judge for yourself about all those things as you grow up."

Little Jon replied in a calculating manner:

"I don't want to grow up, much. I don't want to go to school." A sudden overwhelming desire to say something more, to say what he really felt, turned him red. "I—I want to stay with you, and be your lover, Mum."

Then with an instinct to improve the situation, he added quickly "I don't want to go to bed to-night, either. I'm simply tired of going to bed, every night."

"Have you had any more nightmares?"

"Only about one. May I leave the door open into your room to-night, Mum?"

"Yes, just a little." Little Jon heaved a sigh of satisfaction.

"What did you see in Glensofantrim?"

"Nothing but beauty, darling."

"What exactly is beauty?"

"What exactly is—Oh! Jon, that's a poser."

"Can I see it, for instance?" His mother got up, and sat beside him. "You do, every day. The sky is beautiful, the stars, and moonlit nights, and then the birds, the flowers, the trees—they're all beautiful. Look out of the window—there's beauty for you, Jon."

"Oh! yes, that's the view. Is that all?"

"All? no. The sea is wonderfully beautiful, and the waves, with their foam flying back."

"Did you rise from it every day, Mum?"

His mother smiled. "Well, we bathed."

Little Jon suddenly reached out and caught her neck in his hands.

"I know," he said mysteriously, "you're it, really, and all the rest is make-believe."

She sighed, laughed, said: "Oh! Jon!"

Little Jon said critically:

"Do you think Bella beautiful, for instance? I hardly do."

"Bella is young; that's something."

"But you look younger, Mum. If you bump against Bella she hurts."

"I don't believe 'Da' was beautiful, when I come to think of it; and Mademoiselle's almost ugly."

"Mademoiselle has a very nice face." "Oh! yes; nice. I love your little rays, Mum."

"Rays?"

Little Jon put his finger to the outer corner of her eye.

"Oh! Those? But they're a sign of age."

"They come when you smile."

"But they usen't to."

"Oh! well, I like them. Do you love me, Mum?"

"I do—I do love you, darling."

"Ever so?"

"Ever so!"

"More than I thought you did?"

"Much—much more."

"Well, so do I; so that makes it even."

Conscious that he had never in his life so given himself away, he felt a sudden reaction to the manliness of Sir Lamorac, Dick Needham, Huck Finn, and other heroes.

"Shall I show you a thing or two?" he said; and slipping out of her arms, he stood on his head. Then, fired by her obvious admiration, he mounted the bed, and threw himself head foremost from his feet on to his back, without touching anything with his hands. He did this several times.

That evening, having inspected what they had brought, he stayed up to dinner, sitting between them at the little round table they used when they were alone. He was extremely excited. His mother wore a French-grey dress, with creamy lace made out of little scriggly roses, round her neck, which was browner than the lace. He kept looking at her, till at last his father's funny smile made him suddenly attentive to his slice of pineapple. It was later than he had ever stayed up, when he went to bed. His mother went up with him, and he undressed very slowly so as to keep her there. When at last he had nothing on but his pyjamas, he said:

"Promise you won't go while I say my prayers!"

"I promise."

Kneeling down and plunging his face into the bed, little Jon hurried up, under his breath, opening one eye now and then, to see her standing perfectly still with a smile on her face. "Our Father"—so went his last prayer, "which art in heaven, hallowed be thy Mum, thy Kingdom Mum—on Earth as it is in heaven, give us this day our daily Mum and forgive us our trespasses on earth as it is in heaven and trespass against us, for thine is the evil the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amum! Look out!" He sprang, and for a long minute remained in her arms. Once in bed, he continued to hold her hand.

"You won't shut the door any more than that, will you? Are you going to be long, Mum?"

"I must go down and play to Daddy."

"Oh! well, I shall hear you."

"I hope not; you must go to sleep."

"I can sleep any night."

"Well, this is just a night like any other."

"Oh! no—it's extra special."

"On extra special nights one always sleeps soundest."

"But if I go to sleep, Mum, I shan't hear you come up."

"Well, when I do, I'll come in and give you a kiss, then if you're awake you'll know, and if you're not you'll still know you've had one."

Little Jon sighed, "All right!" he said: "I suppose I must put up with that. Mum?"

"Yes?"

"What was her name that Daddy believes in? Venus Anna Diomedes?"

"Oh! my angel! Anadyomene."

"Yes! but I like my name for you much better."

"What is yours, Jon?"

Little Jon answered shyly:

"Guinevere! it's out of the Round Table—I've only just thought of it, only of course her hair was down."

His mother's eyes, looking past him, seemed to float.

"You won't forget to come, Mum?"

"Not if you'll go to sleep."

"That's a bargain, then." And little Jon screwed up his eyes.

He felt her lips on his forehead, heard her footsteps; opened his eyes to see her gliding through the doorway, and, sighing, screwed them up again.

Then Time began.

For some ten minutes of it he tried loyally to sleep, counting a great number of thistles in a row, "Da's" old recipe for bringing slumber. He seemed to have been hours counting. It must, he thought, be nearly time for her to come up now. He threw the bedclothes back. "I'm hot!" he said, and his voice sounded funny in the darkness, like someone else's. Why didn't she come? He sat up. He must look! He got out of bed, went to the window and pulled the curtain a slice aside. It wasn't dark, but he couldn't tell whether because of daylight or the moon, which was very big. It had a funny, wicked face, as if laughing at him, and he did not want to look at it. Then, remembering that his mother had said moonlit nights were beautiful, he continued to stare out in a general way. The trees threw thick shadows, the lawn looked like spilt milk, and a long, long way he could see; oh! very far; right over the world, and it all looked different and swimmy. There was a lovely smell, too, in his open window.

'I wish I had a dove like Noah!' he thought.

"The moony moon was round and bright, It shone and shone and made it light."

After that rhyme, which came into his head all at once, he became conscious of music, very soft-lovely! Mum playing! He bethought himself of a macaroon he had, laid up in his chest of drawers, and, getting it, came back to the window. He leaned out, now munching, now holding his jaws to hear the music better. "Da" used to say that angels played on harps in heaven; but it wasn't half so lovely as Mum playing in the moony night, with him eating a macaroon. A cockchafer buzzed by, a moth flew in his face, the music stopped, and little Jon drew his head in. She must be coming! He didn't want to be found awake. He got back into bed and pulled the clothes nearly over his head; but he had left a streak of moonlight coming in. It fell across the floor, near the foot of the bed, and he watched it moving ever so slowly towards him, as if it were alive. The music began again, but he could only just hear it now; sleepy music, pretty—sleepy—music—sleepy—slee.....

And time slipped by, the music rose, fell, ceased; the moonbeam crept towards his face. Little Jon turned in his sleep till he lay on his back, with one brown fist still grasping the bedclothes. The corners of his eyes twitched—he had begun to dream. He dreamed he was drinking milk out of a pan that was the moon, opposite a great black cat which watched him with a funny smile like his father's. He heard it whisper: "Don't drink too much!" It was the cat's milk, of course, and he put out his hand amicably to

stroke the creature; but it was no longer there; the pan had become a bed, in which he was lying, and when he tried to get out he couldn't find the edge; he couldn't find it—he—he—couldn't get out! It was dreadful!

He whimpered in his sleep. The bed had begun to go round too; it was outside him and inside him; going round and round, and getting fiery, and Mother Lee out of Cast up by the Sea was stirring it! Oh! so horrible she looked! Faster and faster!—till he and the bed and Mother Lee and the moon and the cat were all one wheel going round and round and up and up—awful—awful—awful!

He shrieked.

A voice saying: "Darling, darling!" got through the wheel, and he awoke, standing on his bed, with his eyes wide open.

There was his mother, with her hair like Guinevere's, and, clutching her, he buried his face in it.

"Oh! oh!"

"It's all right, treasure. You're awake now. There! There! It's nothing!"

But little Jon continued to say: "Oh! oh!"

Her voice went on, velvety in his ear:

"It was the moonlight, sweetheart, coming on your face."

Little Jon burbled into her nightgown

"You said it was beautiful. Oh!"

"Not to sleep in, Jon. Who let it in? Did you draw the curtains?"

"I wanted to see the time; I—I looked out, I—I heard you playing, Mum; I—I ate my macaroon." But he was growing slowly comforted; and the instinct to excuse his fear revived within him.

"Mother Lee went round in me and got all fiery," he mumbled.

"Well, Jon, what can you expect if you eat macaroons after you've gone to bed?"

"Only one, Mum; it made the music ever so more beautiful. I was waiting for you—I nearly thought it was to-morrow."

"My ducky, it's only just eleven now."

Little Jon was silent, rubbing his nose on her neck.

"Mum, is Daddy in your room?"

"Not to-night."

"Can I come?"

"If you wish, my precious."

Half himself again, little Jon drew back.

"You look different, Mum; ever so younger."

"It's my hair, darling."

Little Jon laid hold of it, thick, dark gold, with a few silver threads.

"I like it," he said: "I like you best of all like this."

Taking her hand, he had begun dragging her towards the door. He shut it as they passed, with a sigh of relief.

"Which side of the bed do you like, Mum?"

"The left side."

"All right."

Wasting no time, giving her no chance to change her mind, little Jon got into the bed, which seemed much softer than his own. He heaved another sigh, screwed his head into the pillow and lay examining the battle of chariots and swords and spears which always went on outside blankets, where the little hairs stood up against the light.

"It wasn't anything, really, was it?" he said.

From before her glass his mother answered:

"Nothing but the moon and your imagination heated up. You mustn't get so excited, Jon."

But, still not quite in possession of his nerves, little Jon answered boastfully:

"I wasn't afraid, really, of course!" And again he lay watching the spears and chariots. It all seemed very long.

"Oh! Mum, do hurry up!"

"Darling, I have to plait my hair."

"Oh! not to-night. You'll only have to unplait it again to-morrow. I'm sleepy now; if you don't come, I shan't be sleepy soon."

His mother stood up white and flowey before the winged mirror: he could see three of her, with her neck turned and her hair bright under the light, and her dark eyes smiling. It was unnecessary, and he said:

"Do come, Mum; I'm waiting."

"Very well, my love, I'll come."

Little Jon closed his eyes. Everything was turning out most satisfactory, only she must hurry up! He felt the bed shake, she was getting in. And, still with his eyes closed, he said sleepily: "It's nice, isn't it?"

He heard her voice say something, felt her lips touching his nose, and, snuggling up beside her who lay awake and loved him with her thoughts, he fell into the dreamless sleep, which rounded off his past.

TO LET

"From out the fatal loins of those two foes
A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life."

—Romeo and Juliet.

TO CHARLES SCRIBNER

PART I

ENCOUNTER

Soames Forsyte emerged from the Knightsbridge Hotel, where he was staying, in the afternoon of the 12th of May, 1920, with the intention of visiting a collection of pictures in a Gallery off Cork Street, and looking into the Future. He walked. Since the War he never took a cab if he could help it. Their drivers

were, in his view, an uncivil lot, though now that the War was over and supply beginning to exceed demand again, getting more civil in accordance with the custom of human nature. Still, he had not forgiven them, deeply identifying them with gloomy memories, and now, dimly, like all members, of their class, with revolution. The considerable anxiety he had passed through during the War, and the more considerable anxiety he had since undergone in the Peace, had produced psychological consequences in a tenacious nature. He had, mentally, so frequently experienced ruin, that he had ceased to believe in its material probability. Paying away four thousand a year in income and super tax, one could not very well be worse off! A fortune of a quarter of a million, encumbered only by a wife and one daughter, and very diversely invested, afforded substantial guarantee even against that "wildcat notion" a levy on capital. And as to confiscation of war profits, he was entirely in favour of it, for he had none, and "serve the beggars right!" The price of pictures, moreover, had, if anything, gone up, and he had done better with his collection since the War began than ever before. Air-raids, also, had acted beneficially on a spirit congenitally cautious, and hardened a character already dogged. To be in danger of being entirely dispersed inclined one to be less apprehensive of the more partial dispersions involved in levies and taxation, while the habit of condemning the impudence of the Germans had led naturally to condemning that of Labour, if not openly at least in the sanctuary of his soul.

He walked. There was, moreover, time to spare, for Fleur was to meet him at the Gallery at four o'clock, and it was as yet but half-past two. It was good for him to walk—his liver was a little constricted, and his nerves rather on edge. His wife was always out when she was in Town, and his daughter would flibberty-gibbet all over the place like most young women since the War. Still, he must be thankful that she had been too young to do anything in that War itself. Not, of course, that he had not supported the War from its inception, with all his soul, but between that and supporting it with the bodies of his wife and daughter, there had been a gap fixed by something old-fashioned within him which abhorred emotional extravagance. He had, for instance, strongly objected to Annette, so attractive, and in 1914 only thirty-four, going to her native France, her "chere patrie" as, under the stimulus of war, she had begun to call it, to nurse her "braves poilus," forsooth! Ruining her health and her looks! As if she were really a nurse! He had put a stopper on it. Let her do needlework for them at home, or knit! She had not gone, therefore, and had never been quite the same woman since. A bad tendency of hers to mock at him, not openly, but in continual little ways, had grown. As for Fleur, the War had resolved the vexed problem whether or not she should go to school. She was better away from her mother in her war mood, from the chance of air-raids, and the impetus to do extravagant things; so he had placed her in a seminary as far West as had seemed to him compatible with excellence, and had missed her horribly. Fleur! He had never regretted the somewhat outlandish name by which at her birth he had decided so suddenly to call her—marked concession though it had been to the French. Fleur! A pretty name—a pretty child! But restless—too restless; and wilful! Knowing her power too over her father! Soames often reflected on the mistake it was to dote on his daughter. To get old and dote! Sixty-five! He was getting on; but he didn't feel it, for, fortunately perhaps, considering Annette's youth and good looks, his second marriage had turned out a cool affair. He had known but one real passion in his life—for that first wife of his—Irene. Yes, and that fellow, his cousin Jolyon, who had gone off with her, was looking very shaky, they said. No wonder, at seventy-two, after twenty years of a third marriage!

Soames paused a moment in his march to lean over the railings of the Row. A suitable spot for reminiscence, half-way between that house in Park Lane which had seen his birth and his parents' deaths, and the little house in Montpellier Square where thirty-five years ago he had enjoyed his first edition of matrimony. Now, after twenty years of his second edition, that old tragedy seemed to him like a previous existence—which had ended when Fleur was born in place of the son he had hoped for. For many years he had ceased regretting, even vaguely, the son who had not been born; Fleur filled the bill in his heart. After all, she bore his name; and he was not looking forward at all to the time when she would change it. Indeed, if he ever thought of such a calamity, it was seasoned by the vague feeling that he could make her rich enough to purchase perhaps and extinguish the name of the fellow who married her—why not, since, as it seemed, women were equal to men nowadays? And Soames, secretly convinced that they were not, passed his curved hand over his face vigorously, till it reached the comfort of his chin. Thanks to abstemious habits, he had not grown fat and gabby; his nose was pale and thin, his grey moustache close-clipped, his eyesight unimpaired. A slight stoop closed and corrected the expansion given to his face by the heightening of his forehead in the recession of his grey hair. Little change had Time wrought in the "warmest" of the young Forsytes, as the last of the old Forsytes—Timothy—now in his hundred and first year, would have phrased it.

The shade from the plane-trees fell on his neat Homburg hat; he had given up top hats—it was no use attracting attention to wealth in days like these. Plane-trees! His thoughts travelled sharply to Madrid—the Easter before the War, when, having to make up his mind about that Goya picture, he had taken a voyage of discovery to study the painter on his spot. The fellow had impressed him—great range, real genius! Highly as the chap ranked, he would rank even higher before they had finished with him. The

second Goya craze would be greater even than the first; oh, yes! And he had bought. On that visit he had—as never before—commissioned a copy of a fresco painting called "La Vendimia," wherein was the figure of a girl with an arm akimbo, who had reminded him of his daughter. He had it now in the Gallery at Mapledurham, and rather poor it was—you couldn't copy Goya. He would still look at it, however, if his daughter were not there, for the sake of something irresistibly reminiscent in the light, erect balance of the figure, the width between the arching eyebrows, the eager dreaming of the dark eyes. Curious that Fleur should have dark eyes, when his own were grey—no pure Forsyte had brown eyes—and her mother's blue! But of course her grandmother Lamotte's eyes were dark as treacle!

He began to walk on again toward Hyde Park Corner. No greater change in all England than in the Row! Born almost within hail of it, he could remember it from 1860 on. Brought there as a child between the crinolines to stare at tight-trousered dandies in whiskers, riding with a cavalry seat; to watch the doffing of curly-brimmed and white top hats; the leisurely air of it all, and the little bow-legged man in a long red waistcoat who used to come among the fashion with dogs on several strings, and try to sell one to his mother: King Charles spaniels, Italian greyhounds, affectionate to her crinoline—you never saw them now. You saw no quality of any sort, indeed, just working people sitting in dull rows with nothing to stare at but a few young bouncing females in pot hats, riding astride, or desultory Colonials charging up and down on dismal-looking hacks; with, here and there, little girls on ponies, or old gentlemen jogging their livers, or an orderly trying a great galumphing cavalry horse; no thoroughbreds, no grooms, no bowing, no scraping, no gossip—nothing; only the trees the same—the trees in—different to the generations and declensions of mankind. A democratic England—dishevelled, hurried, noisy, and seemingly without an apex. And that something fastidious in the soul of Soames turned over within him. Gone forever, the close borough of rank and polish! Wealth there was—oh, yes! wealth—he himself was a richer man than his father had ever been; but manners, flavour, quality, all gone, engulfed in one vast, ugly, shoulder-rubbing, petrol-smelling Cheerio. Little half-beaten pockets of gentility and caste lurking here and there, dispersed and chetif, as Annette would say; but nothing ever again firm and coherent to look up to. And into this new hurly-burly of bad manners and loose morals his daughter—flower of his life—was flung! And when those Labour chaps got power—if they ever did—the worst was yet to come.

He passed out under the archway, at last no longer—thank goodness! —disfigured by the gungrey of its search-light. 'They'd better put a search-light on to where they're all going,' he thought, 'and light up their precious democracy!' And he directed his steps along the Club fronts of Piccadilly. George Forsyte, of course, would be sitting in the bay window of the Iseeum. The chap was so big now that he was there nearly all his time, like some immovable, sardonic, humorous eye noting the decline of men and things. And Soames hurried, ever constitutionally uneasy beneath his cousin's glance. George, who, as he had heard, had written a letter signed "Patriot" in the middle of the War, complaining of the Government's hysteria in docking the oats of race-horses. Yes, there he was, tall, ponderous, neat, clean-shaven, with his smooth hair, hardly thinned, smelling, no doubt, of the best hair-wash, and a pink paper in his hand. Well, he didn't change! And for perhaps the first time in his life Soames felt a kind of sympathy tapping in his waistcoat for that sardonic kinsman. With his weight, his perfectly parted hair, and bull-like gaze, he was a guarantee that the old order would take some shifting yet. He saw George move the pink paper as if inviting him to ascend—the chap must want to ask something about his property. It was still under Soames' control; for in the adoption of a sleeping partnership at that painful period twenty years back when he had divorced Irene, Soames had found himself almost insensibly retaining control of all purely Forsyte affairs.

Hesitating for just a moment, he nodded and went in. Since the death of his brother-in-law Montague Dartie, in Paris, which no one had quite known what to make of, except that it was certainly not suicide—the Iseeum Club had seemed more respectable to Soames. George, too, he knew, had sown the last of his wild oats, and was committed definitely to the joys of the table, eating only of the very best so as to keep his weight down, and owning, as he said, "just one or two old screws to give me an interest in life." He joined his cousin, therefore, in the bay window without the embarrassing sense of indiscretion he had been used to feel up there. George put out a well-kept hand.

"Haven't seen you since the War," he said. "How's your wife?"

"Thanks," said Soames coldly, "well enough."

Some hidden jest curved, for a moment, George's fleshy face, and gloated from his eye.

"That Belgian chap, Profond," he said, "is a member here now. He's a rum customer."

"Quite!" muttered Soames. "What did you want to see me about?"

"Old Timothy; he might go off the hooks at any moment. I suppose he's made his Will."

"Yes."

"Well, you or somebody ought to give him a look up—last of the old lot; he's a hundred, you know. They say he's like a rummy. Where are you goin' to put him? He ought to have a pyramid by rights."

Soames shook his head. "Highgate, the family vault."

"Well, I suppose the old girls would miss him, if he was anywhere else. They say he still takes an interest in food. He might last on, you know. Don't we get anything for the old Forsytes? Ten of them—average age eighty-eight—I worked it out. That ought to be equal to triplets."

"Is that all?" said Soames, "I must be getting on."

'You unsociable devil,' George's eyes seemed to answer. "Yes, that's all: Look him up in his mausoleum—the old chap might want to prophesy." The grin died on the rich curves of his face, and he added: "Haven't you attorneys invented a way yet of dodging this damned income tax? It hits the fixed inherited income like the very deuce. I used to have two thousand five hundred a year; now I've got a beggarly fifteen hundred, and the price of living doubled."

"Ah!" murmured Soames, "the turf's in danger."

Over George's face moved a gleam of sardonic self-defence.

"Well," he said, "they brought me up to do nothing, and here I am in the sear and yellow, getting poorer every day. These Labour chaps mean to have the lot before they've done. What are you going to do for a living when it comes? I shall work a six-hour day teaching politicians how to see a joke. Take my tip, Soames; go into Parliament, make sure of your four hundred—and employ me."

And, as Soames retired, he resumed his seat in the bay window.

Soames moved along Piccadilly deep in reflections excited by his cousin's words. He himself had always been a worker and a saver, George always a drone and a spender; and yet, if confiscation once began, it was he—the worker and the saver—who would be looted! That was the negation of all virtue, the overturning of all Forsyte principles. Could civilization be built on any other? He did not think so. Well, they wouldn't confiscate his pictures, for they wouldn't know their worth. But what would they be worth, if these maniacs once began to milk capital? A drug on the market. 'I don't care about myself,' he thought; 'I could live on five hundred a year, and never know the difference, at my age.' But Fleur! This fortune, so widely invested, these treasures so carefully chosen and amassed, were all for—her. And if it should turn out that he couldn't give or leave them to her—well, life had no meaning, and what was the use of going in to look at this crazy, futuristic stuff with the view of seeing whether it had any future?

Arriving at the Gallery off Cork Street, however, he paid his shilling, picked up a catalogue, and entered. Some ten persons were prowling round. Soames took steps and came on what looked to him like a lamp-post bent by collision with a motor omnibus. It was advanced some three paces from the wall, and was described in his catalogue as "Jupiter." He examined it with curiosity, having recently turned some of his attention to sculpture. 'If that's Jupiter,' he thought, 'I wonder what Juno's like.' And suddenly he saw her, opposite. She appeared to him like nothing so much as a pump with two handles, lightly clad in snow. He was still gazing at her, when two of the prowlers halted on his left. "Epatant!" he heard one say.

"Jargon!" growled Soames to himself.

The other's boyish voice replied

"Missed it, old bean; he's pulling your leg. When Jove and Juno created he them, he was saying: 'I'll see how much these fools will swallow.' And they've lapped up the lot."

"You young duffer! Vospovitch is an innovator. Don't you see that he's brought satire into sculpture? The future of plastic art, of music, painting, and even architecture, has set in satiric. It was bound to. People are tired—the bottom's tumbled out of sentiment."

"Well, I'm quite equal to taking a little interest in beauty. I was through the War. You've dropped your handkerchief, sir."

Soames saw a handkerchief held out in front of him. He took it with some natural suspicion, and approached it to his nose. It had the right scent—of distant Eau de Cologne—and his initials in a corner. Slightly reassured, he raised his eyes to the young man's face. It had rather fawn-like ears, a laughing

mouth, with half a toothbrush growing out of it on each side, and small lively eyes, above a normally dressed appearance.

"Thank you," he said; and moved by a sort of irritation, added: "Glad to hear you like beauty; that's rare, nowadays."

"I dote on it," said the young man; "but you and I are the last of the old guard, sir."

Soames smiled.

"If you really care for pictures," he said, "here's my card. I can show you some quite good ones any Sunday, if you're down the river and care to look in."

"Awfully nice of you, sir. I'll drop in like a bird. My name's Mont-Michael." And he took off his hat.

Soames, already regretting his impulse, raised his own slightly in response, with a downward look at the young man's companion, who had a purple tie, dreadful little sluglike whiskers, and a scornful look—as if he were a poet!

It was the first indiscretion he had committed for so long that he went and sat down in an alcove. What had possessed him to give his card to a rackety young fellow, who went about with a thing like that? And Fleur, always at the back of his thoughts, started out like a filigree figure from a clock when the hour strikes. On the screen opposite the alcove was a large canvas with a great many square tomato-coloured blobs on it, and nothing else, so far as Soames could see from where he sat. He looked at his catalogue: "No. 32 'The Future Town'—Paul Post." 'I suppose that's satiric too,' he thought. 'What a thing!' But his second impulse was more cautious. It did not do to condemn hurriedly. There had been those stripey, streaky creations of Monet's, which had turned out such trumps; and then the stippled school; and Gauguin. Why, even since the Post-Impressionists there had been one or two painters not to be sneezed at. During the thirty-eight years of his connoisseur's life, indeed, he had marked so many "movements," seen the tides of taste and technique so ebb and flow, that there was really no telling anything except that there was money to be made out of every change of fashion. This too might quite well be a case where one must subdue primordial instinct, or lose the market. He got up and stood before the picture, trying hard to see it with the eyes of other people. Above the tomato blobs was what he took to be a sunset, till some one passing said: "He's got the airplanes wonderfully, don't you think!" Below the tomato blobs was a band of white with vertical black stripes, to which he could assign no meaning whatever, till some one else came by, murmuring: "What expression he gets with his foreground!" Expression? Of what? Soames went back to his seat. The thing was "rich," as his father would have said, and he wouldn't give a damn for it. Expression! Ah! they were all Expressionists now, he had heard, on the Continent. So it was coming here too, was it? He remembered the first wave of influenza in 1887—or '8—hatched in China, so they said. He wondered where this—this Expressionism had been hatched. The thing was a regular disease!

He had become conscious of a woman and a youth standing between him and the "Future Town." Their backs were turned; but very suddenly Soames put his catalogue before his face, and drawing his hat forward, gazed through the slit between. No mistaking that back, elegant as ever though the hair above had gone grey. Irene! His divorced wife—Irene! And this, no doubt, was—her son—by that fellow Jolyon Forsyte—their boy, six months older than his own girl! And mumbling over in his mind the bitter days of his divorce, he rose to get out of sight, but quickly sat down again. She had turned her head to speak to her boy; her profile was still so youthful that it made her grey hair seem powdery, as if fancy-dressed; and her lips were smiling as Soames, first possessor of them, had never seen them smile. Grudgingly he admitted her still beautiful and in figure almost as young as ever. And how that boy smiled back at her! Emotion squeezed Soames' heart. The sight infringed his sense of justice. He grudged her that boy's smile—it went beyond what Fleur gave him, and it was undeserved. Their son might have been his son; Fleur might have been her daughter, if she had kept straight! He lowered his catalogue. If she saw him, all the better! A reminder of her conduct in the presence of her son, who probably knew nothing of it, would be a salutary touch from the finger of that Nemesis which surely must soon or late visit her! Then, half-conscious that such a thought was extravagant for a Forsyte of his age, Soames took out his watch. Past four! Fleur was late. She had gone to his niece Imogen Cardigan's, and there they would keep her smoking cigarettes and gossiping, and that. He heard the boy laugh, and say eagerly: "I say, Mum, is this by one of Auntie June's lame ducks?"

"Paul Post—I believe it is, darling."

The word produced a little shock in Soames; he had never heard her use it. And then she saw him. His eyes must have had in them something of George Forsyte's sardonic look; for her gloved hand crisped the folds of her frock, her eyebrows rose, her face went stony. She moved on.

"It is a caution," said the boy, catching her arm again.

Soames stared after them. That boy was good-looking, with a Forsyte chin, and eyes deep-grey, deep in; but with something sunny, like a glass of old sherry spilled over him; his smile perhaps, his hair. Better than they deserved—those two! They passed from his view into the next room, and Soames continued to regard the Future Town, but saw it not. A little smile snarled up his lips. He was despising the vehemence of his own feelings after all these years. Ghosts! And yet as one grew old—was there anything but what was ghost-like left? Yes, there was Fleur! He fixed his eyes on the entrance. She was due; but she would keep him waiting, of course! And suddenly he became aware of a sort of human breeze—a short, slight form clad in a sea-green djibbah with a metal belt and a fillet binding unruly red-gold hair all streaked with grey. She was talking to the Gallery attendants, and something familiar riveted his gaze—in her eyes, her chin, her hair, her spirit—something which suggested a thin Skye terrier just before its dinner. Surely June Forsyte! His cousin June—and coming straight to his recess! She sat down beside him, deep in thought, took out a tablet, and made a pencil note. Soames sat unmoving. A confounded thing, cousinship! "Disgusting!" he heard her murmur; then, as if resenting the presence of an overhearing stranger, she looked at him. The worst had happened.

"Soames!"

Soames turned his head a very little.

"How are you?" he said. "Haven't seen you for twenty years."

"No. Whatever made you come here?"

"My sins," said Soames. "What stuff!"

"Stuff? Oh, yes—of course; it hasn't arrived yet.

"It never will," said Soames; "it must be making a dead loss."

"Of course it is."

"How d'you know?"

"It's my Gallery."

Soames sniffed from sheer surprise.

"Yours? What on earth makes you run a show like this?"

"I don't treat Art as if it were grocery."

Soames pointed to the Future Town. "Look at that! Who's going to live in a town like that, or with it on his walls?"

June contemplated the picture for a moment.

"It's a vision," she said.

"The deuce!"

There was silence, then June rose. 'Crazylooking creature!' he thought.

"Well," he said, "you'll find your young stepbrother here with a woman I used to know. If you take my advice, you'll close this exhibition."

June looked back at him. "Oh! You Forsyte!" she said, and moved on. About her light, fly-away figure, passing so suddenly away, was a look of dangerous decisions. Forsyte! Of course, he was a Forsyte! And so was she! But from the time when, as a mere girl, she brought Bosinney into his life to wreck it, he had never hit it off with June and never would! And here she was, unmarried to this day, owning a Gallery!... And suddenly it came to Soames how little he knew now of his own family. The old aunts at Timothy's had been dead so many years; there was no clearing-house for news. What had they all done in the War? Young Roger's boy had been wounded, St. John Hayman's second son killed; young Nicholas' eldest had got an O. B. E., or whatever they gave them. They had all joined up somehow, he believed. That boy of Jolyon's and Irene's, he supposed, had been too young; his own generation, of course, too old, though Giles Hayman had driven a car for the Red Cross—and Jesse Hayman been a special constable—those "Dromios" had always been of a sporting type! As for himself, he had given a motor ambulance, read the papers till he was sick of them, passed through much anxiety, bought no clothes, lost seven pounds in weight; he didn't know what more he could have done at his age. Indeed,

thinking it over, it struck him that he and his family had taken this war very differently to that affair with the Boers, which had been supposed to tax all the resources of the Empire. In that old war, of course, his nephew Val Dartie had been wounded, that fellow Jolyon's first son had died of enteric, "the Dromios" had gone out on horses, and June had been a nurse; but all that had seemed in the nature of a portent, while in this war everybody had done "their bit," so far as he could make out, as a matter of course. It seemed to show the growth of something or other—or perhaps the decline of something else. Had the Forsytes become less individual, or more Imperial, or less provincial? Or was it simply that one hated Germans?... Why didn't Fleur come, so that he could get away? He saw those three return together from the other room and pass back along the far side of the screen. The boy was standing before the Juno now. And, suddenly, on the other side of her, Soames saw—his daughter, with eyebrows raised, as well they might be. He could see her eyes glint sideways at the boy, and the boy look back at her. Then Irene slipped her hand through his arm, and drew him on. Soames saw him glancing round, and Fleur looking after them as the three went out.

A voice said cheerfully: "Bit thick, isn't it, sir?"

The young man who had handed him his handkerchief was again passing. Soames nodded.

"I don't know what we're coming to."

"Oh! That's all right, sir," answered the young man cheerfully; "they don't either."

Fleur's voice said: "Hallo, Father! Here you are!" precisely as if he had been keeping her waiting.

The young man, snatching off his hat, passed on.

"Well," said Soames, looking her up and down, "you're a punctual sort of young woman!"

This treasured possession of his life was of medium height and colour, with short, dark chestnut hair; her wide-apart brown eyes were set in whites so clear that they glinted when they moved, and yet in repose were almost dreamy under very white, black-lashed lids, held over them in a sort of suspense. She had a charming profile, and nothing of her father in her face save a decided chin. Aware that his expression was softening as he looked at her, Soames frowned to preserve the unemotionalism proper to a Forsyte. He knew she was only too inclined to take advantage of his weakness.

Slipping her hand under his arm, she said:

"Who was that?"

"He picked up my handkerchief. We talked about the pictures."

"You're not going to buy that, Father?"

"No," said Soames grimly; "nor that Juno you've been looking at."

Fleur dragged at his arm. "Oh! Let's go! It's a ghastly show."

In the doorway they passed the young man called Mont and his partner. But Soames had hung out a board marked "Trespassers will be prosecuted," and he barely acknowledged the young fellow's salute.

"Well," he said in the street, "whom did you meet at Imogen's?"

"Aunt Winifred, and that Monsieur Profond."

"Oh!" muttered Soames; "that chap! What does your aunt see in him?"

"I don't know. He looks pretty deep—mother says she likes him."

Soames grunted.

"Cousin Val and his wife were there, too."

"What!" said Soames. "I thought they were back in South Africa."

"Oh, no! They've sold their farm. Cousin Val is going to train race-horses on the Sussex Downs. They've got a jolly old manor-house; they asked me down there."

Soames coughed: the news was distasteful to him. "What's his wife like now?"

"Very quiet, but nice, I think."

Soames coughed again. "He's a rackety chap, your Cousin Val."

"Oh! no, Father; they're awfully devoted. I promised to go—Saturday to Wednesday next."

"Training race-horses!" said Soames. It was extravagant, but not the reason for his distaste. Why the deuce couldn't his nephew have stayed out in South Africa? His own divorce had been bad enough, without his nephew's marriage to the daughter of the co-respondent; a half-sister too of June, and of that boy whom Fleur had just been looking at from under the pump-handle. If he didn't look out, she would come to know all about that old disgrace! Unpleasant things! They were round him this afternoon like a swarm of bees!

"I don't like it!" he said.

"I want to see the race-horses," murmured Fleur; "and they've promised I shall ride. Cousin Val can't walk much, you know; but he can ride perfectly. He's going to show me their gallops."

"Racing!" said Soames. "It's a pity the War didn't knock that on the head. He's taking after his father, I'm afraid."

"I don't know anything about his father."

"No," said Soames, grimly. "He took an interest in horses and broke his neck in Paris, walking down-stairs. Good riddance for your aunt." He frowned, recollecting the inquiry into those stairs which he had attended in Paris six years ago, because Montague Dartie could not attend it himself—perfectly normal stairs in a house where they played baccarat. Either his winnings or the way he had celebrated them had gone to his brother-in-law's head. The French procedure had been very loose; he had had a lot of trouble with it.

A sound from Fleur distracted his attention. "Look! The people who were in the Gallery with us."

"What people?" muttered Soames, who knew perfectly well.

"I think that woman's beautiful."

"Come into this pastry-cook's," said Soames abruptly, and tightening his grip on her arm he turned into a confectioner's. It was—for him—a surprising thing to do, and he said rather anxiously: "What will you have?"

"Oh! I don't want anything. I had a cocktail and a tremendous lunch."

"We must have something now we're here," muttered Soames, keeping hold of her arm.

"Two teas," he said; "and two of those nougat things."

But no sooner was his body seated than his soul sprang up. Those three—those three were coming in! He heard Irene say something to her boy, and his answer:

"Oh! no, Mum; this place is all right. My stunt." And the three sat down.

At that moment, most awkward of his existence, crowded with ghosts and shadows from his past, in presence of the only two women he had ever loved—his divorced wife and his daughter by her successor—Soames was not so much afraid of them as of his cousin June. She might make a scene—she might introduce those two children—she was capable of anything. He bit too hastily at the nougat, and it stuck to his plate. Working at it with his finger, he glanced at Fleur. She was masticating dreamily, but her eyes were on the boy. The Forsyte in him said: "Think, feel, and you're done for!" And he wiggled his finger desperately. Plate! Did Jolyon wear a plate? Did that woman wear a plate? Time had been when he had seen her wearing nothing! That was something, anyway, which had never been stolen from him. And she knew it, though she might sit there calm and self-possessed, as if she had never been his wife. An acid humour stirred in his Forsyte blood; a subtle pain divided by hair's breadth from pleasure. If only June did not suddenly bring her hornets about his ears! The boy was talking.

"Of course, Auntie June"—so he called his half-sister "Auntie," did he?—well, she must be fifty, if she was a day!—"it's jolly good of you to encourage them. Only—hang it all!" Soames stole a glance. Irene's startled eyes were bent watchfully on her boy. She—she had these devotions—for Bosinney—for that boy's father—for this boy! He touched Fleur's arm, and said:

"Well, have you had enough?"

"One more, Father, please."

She would be sick! He went to the counter to pay. When he turned round again he saw Fleur standing near the door, holding a handkerchief which the boy had evidently just handed to her.

"F. F.," he heard her say. "Fleur Forsyte—it's mine all right. Thank you ever so."

Good God! She had caught the trick from what he'd told her in the Gallery—monkey!

"Forsyte? Why—that's my name too. Perhaps we're cousins."

"Really! We must be. There aren't any others. I live at Mapledurham; where do you?"

"Robin Hill."

Question and answer had been so rapid that all was over before he could lift a finger. He saw Irene's face alive with startled feeling, gave the slightest shake of his head, and slipped his arm through Fleur's.

"Come along!" he said.

She did not move.

"Didn't you hear, Father? Isn't it queer—our name's the same. Are we cousins?"

"What's that?" he said. "Forsyte? Distant, perhaps."

"My name's Jolyon, sir. Jon, for short."

"Oh! Ah!" said Soames. "Yes. Distant. How are you? Very good of you. Good-bye!"

He moved on.

"Thanks awfully," Fleur was saying. "Au revoir!"

"Au revoir!" he heard the boy reply.

II

FINE FLEUR FORSYTE

Emerging from the "pastry-cook's," Soames' first impulse was to vent his nerves by saying to his daughter: 'Dropping your hand-kerchief!' to which her reply might well be: 'I picked that up from you!' His second impulse therefore was to let sleeping dogs lie. But she would surely question him. He gave her a sidelong look, and found she was giving him the same. She said softly:

"Why don't you like those cousins, Father?" Soames lifted the corner of his lip.

"What made you think that?"

"Cela se voit."

'That sees itself!' What a way of putting it! After twenty years of a French wife Soames had still little sympathy with her language; a theatrical affair and connected in his mind with all the refinements of domestic irony.

"How?" he asked.

"You must know them; and you didn't make a sign. I saw them looking at you."

"I've never seen the boy in my life," replied Soames with perfect truth.

"No; but you've seen the others, dear."

Soames gave her another look. What had she picked up? Had her Aunt Winifred, or Imogen, or Val Dartie and his wife, been talking? Every breath of the old scandal had been carefully kept from her at

home, and Winifred warned many times that he wouldn't have a whisper of it reach her for the world. So far as she ought to know, he had never been married before. But her dark eyes, whose southern glint and clearness often almost frightened him, met his with perfect innocence.

"Well," he said, "your grandfather and his brother had a quarrel. The two families don't know each other."

"How romantic!"

'Now, what does she mean by that?' he thought. The word was to him extravagant and dangerous—it was as if she had said: "How jolly!"

"And they'll continue not to know each other," he added, but instantly regretted the challenge in those words. Fleur was smiling. In this age, when young people prided themselves on going their own ways and paying no attention to any sort of decent prejudice, he had said the very thing to excite her wilfulness. Then, recollecting the expression on Irene's face, he breathed again.

"What sort of a quarrel?" he heard Fleur say.

"About a house. It's ancient history for you. Your grandfather died the day you were born. He was ninety."

"Ninety? Are there many Forsytes besides those in the Red Book?"

"I don't know," said Soames. "They're all dispersed now. The old ones are dead, except Timothy."

Fleur clasped her hands.

"Timothy? Isn't that delicious?"

"Not at all," said Soames. It offended him that she should think "Timothy" delicious—a kind of insult to his breed. This new generation mocked at anything solid and tenacious. "You go and see the old boy. He might want to prophesy." Ah! If Timothy could see the disquiet England of his great-nephews and great-nieces, he would certainly give tongue. And involuntarily he glanced up at the Iseeum; yes—George was still in the window, with the same pink paper in his hand.

"Where is Robin Hill, Father?"

Robin Hill! Robin Hill, round which all that tragedy had centred! What did she want to know for?

"In Surrey," he muttered; "not far from Richmond. Why?"

"Is the house there?"

"What house?"

"That they quarrelled about."

"Yes. But what's all that to do with you? We're going home to-morrow—you'd better be thinking about your frocks."

"Bless you! They're all thought about. A family feud? It's like the Bible, or Mark Twain—awfully exciting. What did you do in the feud, Father?"

"Never you mind."

"Oh! But if I'm to keep it up?"

"Who said you were to keep it up?"

"You, darling."

"I? I said it had nothing to do with you."

"Just what I think, you know; so that's all right."

She was too sharp for him; fine, as Annette sometimes called her. Nothing for it but to distract her attention.

"There's a bit of rosaline point in here," he said, stopping before a shop, "that I thought you might like."

When he had paid for it and they had resumed their progress, Fleur said:

"Don't you think that boy's mother is the most beautiful woman of her age you've ever seen?"

Soames shivered. Uncanny, the way she stuck to it!

"I don't know that I noticed her."

"Dear, I saw the corner of your eye."

"You see everything—and a great deal more, it seems to me!"

"What's her husband like? He must be your first cousin, if your fathers were brothers."

"Dead, for all I know," said Soames, with sudden vehemence. "I haven't seen him for twenty years."

"What was he?"

"A painter."

"That's quite jolly."

The words: "If you want to please me you'll put those people out of your head," sprang to Soames' lips, but he choked them back—he must not let her see his feelings.

"He once insulted me," he said.

Her quick eyes rested on his face.

"I see! You didn't avenge it, and it rankles. Poor Father! You let me have a go!"

It was really like lying in the dark with a mosquito hovering above his face. Such pertinacity in Fleur was new to him, and, as they reached the hotel, he said grimly:

"I did my best. And that's enough about these people. I'm going up till dinner."

"I shall sit here."

With a parting look at her extended in a chair—a look half-resentful, half-adoring—Soames moved into the lift and was transported to their suite on the fourth floor. He stood by the window of the sitting-room which gave view over Hyde Park, and drummed a finger on its pane. His feelings were confused, tetchy, troubled. The throb of that old wound, scarred over by Time and new interests, was mingled with displeasure and anxiety, and a slight pain in his chest where that nougat stuff had disagreed. Had Annette come in? Not that she was any good to him in such a difficulty. Whenever she had questioned him about his first marriage, he had always shut her up; she knew nothing of it, save that it had been the great passion of his life, and his marriage with herself but domestic makeshift. She had always kept the grudge of that up her sleeve, as it were, and used it commercially. He listened. A sound—the vague murmur of a woman's movements—was coming through the door. She was in. He tapped.

"Who?"

"I," said Soames.

She had been changing her frock, and was still imperfectly clothed; a striking figure before her glass. There was a certain magnificence about her arms, shoulders, hair, which had darkened since he first knew her, about the turn of her neck, the silkiness of her garments, her dark-lashed, greyblue eyes—she was certainly as handsome at forty as she had ever been. A fine possession, an excellent housekeeper, a sensible and affectionate enough mother. If only she weren't always so frankly cynical about the relations between them! Soames, who had no more real affection for her than she had for him, suffered from a kind of English grievance in that she had never dropped even the thinnest veil of sentiment over their partnership. Like most of his countrymen and women, he held the view that marriage should be based on mutual love, but that when from a marriage love had disappeared, or, been found never to have really existed—so that it was manifestly not based on love—you must not admit it. There it was, and the love was not—but there you were, and must continue to be! Thus you had it both ways, and were not tarred with cynicism, realism, and immorality like the French. Moreover, it was necessary in the interests of property. He knew that she knew that they both knew there was no love between them, but he still expected her not to admit in words or conduct such a thing, and he could never understand what she meant when she talked of the hypocrisy of the English. He said:

"Whom have you got at 'The Shelter' next week?"

Annette went on touching her lips delicately with salve—he always wished she wouldn't do that.

"Your sister Winifred, and the Car-r-digans"—she took up a tiny stick of black—"and Prosper Profond."

"That Belgian chap? Why him?"

Annette turned her neck lazily, touched one eyelash, and said:

"He amuses Winifred."

"I want some one to amuse Fleur; she's restive."

"R-restive?" repeated Annette. "Is it the first time you see that, my friend? She was born r-restive, as you call it."

Would she never get that affected roll out of her r's?

He touched the dress she had taken off, and asked:

"What have you been doing?"

Annette looked at him, reflected in her glass. Her just-brightened lips smiled, rather full, rather ironical.

"Enjoying myself," she said.

"Oh!" answered Soames glumly. "Ribbandry, I suppose."

It was his word for all that incomprehensible running in and out of shops that women went in for. "Has Fleur got her summer dresses?"

"You don't ask if I have mine."

"You don't care whether I do or not."

"Quite right. Well, she has; and I have mine—terribly expensive."

"H'm!" said Soames. "What does that chap Profond do in England?"

Annette raised the eyebrows she had just finished.

"He yachts."

"Ah!" said Soames; "he's a sleepy chap."

"Sometimes," answered Annette, and her face had a sort of quiet enjoyment. "But sometimes very amusing."

"He's got a touch of the tar-brush about him."

Annette stretched herself.

"Tar-brush?" she said. "What is that? His mother was Armenienne."

"That's it, then," muttered Soames. "Does he know anything about pictures?"

"He knows about everything—a man of the world."

"Well, get some one for Fleur. I want to distract her. She's going off on Saturday to Val Dartie and his wife; I don't like it."

"Why not?"

Since the reason could not be explained without going into family history, Soames merely answered:

"Racketing about. There's too much of it."

"I like that little Mrs. Val; she is very quiet and clever."

"I know nothing of her except—This thing's new." And Soames took up a creation from the bed.

Annette received it from him.

"Would you hook me?" she said.

Soames hooked. Glancing once over her shoulder into the glass, he saw the expression on her face, faintly amused, faintly contemptuous, as much as to say: "Thanks! You will never learn!" No, thank God, he wasn't a Frenchman! He finished with a jerk, and the words: "It's too low here." And he went to the door, with the wish to get away from her and go down to Fleur again.

Annette stayed a powder-puff, and said with startling suddenness

"Que to es grossier!"

He knew the expression—he had reason to. The first time she had used it he had thought it meant "What a grocer you are!" and had not known whether to be relieved or not when better informed. He resented the word—he was not coarse! If he was coarse, what was that chap in the room beyond his, who made those horrible noises in the morning when he cleared his throat, or those people in the Lounge who thought it well-bred to say nothing but what the whole world could hear at the top of their voices—quacking inanity! Coarse, because he had said her dress was low! Well, so it was! He went out without reply.

Coming into the Lounge from the far end, he at once saw Fleur where he had left her. She sat with crossed knees, slowly balancing a foot in silk stocking and grey shoe, sure sign that she was dreaming. Her eyes showed it too—they went off like that sometimes. And then, in a moment, she would come to life, and be as quick and restless as a monkey. And she knew so much, so self-assured, and not yet nineteen. What was that odious word? Flapper! Dreadful young creatures—squealing and squawking and showing their legs! The worst of them bad dreams, the best of them powdered angels! Fleur was not a flapper, not one of those slangy, ill-bred young females. And yet she was frighteningly self-willed, and full of life, and determined to enjoy it. Enjoy! The word brought no puritan terror to Soames; but it brought the terror suited to his temperament. He had always been afraid to enjoy to-day for fear he might not enjoy tomorrow so much. And it was terrifying to feel that his daughter was divested of that safeguard. The very way she sat in that chair showed it—lost in her dream. He had never been lost in a dream himself—there was nothing to be had out of it; and where she got it from he did not know! Certainly not from Annette! And yet Annette, as a young girl, when he was hanging about her, had once had a flowery look. Well, she had lost it now!

Fleur rose from her chair—swiftly, restlessly; and flung herself down at a writing-table. Seizing ink and writing paper, she began to write as if she had not time to breathe before she got her letter written. And suddenly she saw him. The air of desperate absorption vanished, she smiled, waved a kiss, made a pretty face as if she were a little puzzled and a little bored.

Ah! She was "fine"—"fine!"

III

AT ROBIN HILL

Jolyon Forsyte had spent his boy's nineteenth birthday at Robin Hill, quietly going into his affairs. He did everything quietly now, because his heart was in a poor way, and, like all his family, he disliked the idea of dying. He had never realised how much till one day, two years ago, he had gone to his doctor about certain symptoms, and been told:

"At any moment, on any overstrain."

He had taken it with a smile—the natural Forsyte reaction against an unpleasant truth. But with an increase of symptoms in the train on the way home, he had realised to the full the sentence hanging over him. To leave Irene, his boy, his home, his work—though he did little enough work now! To leave them for unknown darkness, for the unimaginable state, for such nothingness that he would not even be conscious of wind stirring leaves above his grave, nor of the scent of earth and grass. Of such nothingness that, however hard he might try to conceive it, he never could, and must still hover on the hope that he might see again those he loved! To realise this was to endure very poignant spiritual anguish. Before he reached home that day he had determined to keep it from Irene. He would have to

be more careful than man had ever been, for the least thing would give it away and make her as wretched as himself, almost. His doctor had passed him sound in other respects, and seventy was nothing of an age—he would last a long time yet, if he could.

Such a conclusion, followed out for nearly two years, develops to the full the subtler side of character. Naturally not abrupt, except when nervously excited, Jolyon had become control incarnate. The sad patience of old people who cannot exert themselves was masked by a smile which his lips preserved even in private. He devised continually all manner of cover to conceal his enforced lack of exertion.

Mocking himself for so doing, he counterfeited conversion to the Simple Life; gave up wine and cigars, drank a special kind of coffee with no coffee in it. In short, he made himself as safe as a Forsyte in his condition could, under the rose of his mild irony. Secure from discovery, since his wife and son had gone up to Town, he had spent the fine May day quietly arranging his papers, that he might die tomorrow without inconveniencing any one, giving in fact a final polish to his terrestrial state. Having docketed and enclosed it in his father's old Chinese cabinet, he put the key into an envelope, wrote the words outside: "Key of the Chinese cabinet, wherein will be found the exact state of me, J. F.," and put it in his breast-pocket, where it would be always about him, in case of accident. Then, ringing for tea, he went out to have it under the old oak-tree.

All are under sentence of death; Jolyon, whose sentence was but a little more precise and pressing, had become so used to it that he thought habitually, like other people, of other things. He thought of his son now.

Jon was nineteen that day, and Jon had come of late to a decision. Educated neither at Eton like his father, nor at Harrow, like his dead half-brother, but at one of those establishments which, designed to avoid the evil and contain the good of the Public School system, may or may not contain the evil and avoid the good, Jon had left in April perfectly ignorant of what he wanted to become. The War, which had promised to go on for ever, had ended just as he was about to join the Army, six months before his time. It had taken him ever since to get used to the idea that he could now choose for himself. He had held with his father several discussions, from which, under a cheery show of being ready for anything—except, of course, the Church, Army, Law, Stage, Stock Exchange, Medicine, Business, and Engineering—Jolyon had gathered rather clearly that Jon wanted to go in for nothing. He himself had felt exactly like that at the same age. With him that pleasant vacuity had soon been ended by an early marriage, and its unhappy consequences. Forced to become an underwriter at Lloyd's, he had regained prosperity before his artistic talent had outcropped. But having—as the simple say—"learned" his boy to draw pigs and other animals, he knew that Jon would never be a painter, and inclined to the conclusion that his aversion from everything else meant that he was going to be a writer. Holding, however, the view that experience was necessary even for that profession, there seemed to Jolyon nothing in the meantime, for Jon, but University, travel, and perhaps the eating of dinners for the Bar. After that one would see, or more probably one would not. In face of these proffered allurements, however, Jon had remained undecided.

Such discussions with his son had confirmed in Jolyon a doubt whether the world had really changed. People said that it was a new age. With the profundity of one not too long for any age, Jolyon perceived that under slightly different surfaces the era was precisely what it had been. Mankind was still divided into two species: The few who had "speculation" in their souls, and the many who had none, with a belt of hybrids like himself in the middle. Jon appeared to have speculation; it seemed to his father a bad lookout.

With something deeper, therefore, than his usual smile, he had heard the boy say, a fortnight ago: "I should like to try farming, Dad; if it won't cost you too much. It seems to be about the only sort of life that doesn't hurt anybody; except art, and of course that's out of the question for me."

Jolyon subdued his smile, and answered:

"All right; you shall skip back to where we were under the first Jolyon in 1760. It'll prove the cycle theory, and incidentally, no doubt, you may grow a better turnip than he did."

A little dashed, Jon had answered:

"But don't you think it's a good scheme, Dad?"

"'Twill serve, my dear; and if you should really take to it, you'll do more good than most men, which is little enough."

To himself, however, he had said: 'But he won't take to it. I give him four years. Still, it's healthy, and harmless.'

After turning the matter over and consulting with Irene, he wrote to his daughter, Mrs. Val Dartie, asking if they knew of a farmer near them on the Downs who would take Jon as an apprentice. Holly's answer had been enthusiastic. There was an excellent man quite close; she and Val would love Jon to live with them.

The boy was due to go to-morrow.

Sipping weak tea with lemon in it, Jolyon gazed through the leaves of the old oak-tree at that view which had appeared to him desirable for thirty-two years. The tree beneath which he sat seemed not a day older! So young, the little leaves of brownish gold; so old, the whitey-grey-green of its thick rough trunk. A tree of memories, which would live on hundreds of years yet, unless some barbarian cut it down—would see old England out at the pace things were going! He remembered a night three years before, when, looking from his window, with his arm close round Irene, he had watched a German aeroplane hovering, it seemed, right over the old tree. Next day they had found a bomb hole in a field on Gage's farm. That was before he knew that he was under sentence of death. He could almost have wished the bomb had finished him. It would have saved a lot of hanging about, many hours of cold fear in the pit of his stomach. He had counted on living to the normal Forsyte age of eighty-five or more, when Irene would be seventy. As it was, she would miss him. Still there was Jon, more important in her life than himself; Jon, who adored his mother.

Under that tree, where old Jolyon—waiting for Irene to come to him across the lawn—had breathed his last, Jolyon wondered, whimsically, whether, having put everything in such perfect order, he had not better close his own eyes and drift away. There was something undignified in a parasitically clinging on to the effortless close of a life wherein he regretted two things only—the long division between his father and himself when he was young, and the lateness of his union with Irene.

From where he sat he could see a cluster of apple-trees in blossom. Nothing in Nature moved him so much as fruit-trees in blossom; and his heart ached suddenly because he might never see them flower again. Spring! Decidedly no man ought to have to die while his heart was still young enough to love beauty! Blackbirds sang recklessly in the shrubbery, swallows were flying high, the leaves above him glistened; and over the fields was every imaginable tint of early foliage, burnished by the level sunlight, away to where the distant "smoke-bush" blue was trailed along the horizon. Irene's flowers in their narrow beds had startling individuality that evening, little deep assertions of gay life. Only Chinese and Japanese painters, and perhaps Leonardo, had known how to get that startling little ego into each painted flower, and bird, and beast—the ego, yet the sense of species, the universality of life as well. They were the fellows! 'I've made nothing that will live!' thought Jolyon; 'I've been an amateur—a mere lover, not a creator. Still, I shall leave Jon behind me when I go.' What luck that the boy had not been caught by that ghastly war! He might so easily have been killed, like poor Jolly twenty years ago out in the Transvaal. Jon would do something some day—if the Age didn't spoil him—an imaginative chap! His whim to take up farming was but a bit of sentiment, and about as likely to last. And just then he saw them coming up the field: Irene and the boy; walking from the station, with their arms linked. And getting up, he strolled down through the new rose garden to meet them....

Irene came into his room that night and sat down by the window. She sat there without speaking till he said:

"What is it, my love?"

"We had an encounter to-day."

"With whom?"

"Soames."

Soames! He had kept that name out of his thoughts these last two years; conscious that it was bad for him. And, now, his heart moved in a disconcerting manner, as if it had side-slipped within his chest.

Irene went on quietly:

"He and his daughter were in the Gallery, and afterward at the confectioner's where we had tea."

Jolyon went over and put his hand on her shoulder.

"How did he look?"

"Grey; but otherwise much the same."

"And the daughter?"

"Pretty. At least, Jon thought so."

Jolyon's heart side-slipped again. His wife's face had a strained and puzzled look.

"You didn't-?" he began.

"No; but Jon knows their name. The girl dropped her handkerchief and he picked it up."

Jolyon sat down on his bed. An evil chance!

"June was with you. Did she put her foot into it?"

"No; but it was all very queer and strained, and Jon could see it was."

Jolyon drew a long breath, and said:

"I've often wondered whether we've been right to keep it from him. He'll find out some day."

"The later the better, Jolyon; the young have such cheap, hard judgment. When you were nineteen what would you have thought of your mother if she had done what I have?"

Yes! There it was! Jon worshipped his mother; and knew nothing of the tragedies, the inexorable necessities of life, nothing of the prisoned grief in an unhappy marriage, nothing of jealousy or passion—knew nothing at all, as yet!

"What have you told him?" he said at last.

"That they were relations, but we didn't know them; that you had never cared much for your family, or they for you. I expect he will be asking you."

Jolyon smiled. "This promises to take the place of air-raids," he said.
"After all, one misses them."

Irene looked up at him.

"We've known it would come some day."

He answered her with sudden energy:

"I could never stand seeing Jon blame you. He shan't do that, even in thought. He has imagination; and he'll understand if it's put to him properly. I think I had better tell him before he gets to know otherwise."

"Not yet, Jolyon."

That was like her—she had no foresight, and never went to meet trouble. Still—who knew?—she might be right. It was ill going against a mother's instinct. It might be well to let the boy go on, if possible, till experience had given him some touchstone by which he could judge the values of that old tragedy; till love, jealousy, longing, had deepened his charity. All the same, one must take precautions—every precaution possible! And, long after Irene had left him, he lay awake turning over those precautions. He must write to Holly, telling her that Jon knew nothing as yet of family history. Holly was discreet, she would make sure of her husband, she would see to it! Jon could take the letter with him when he went to-morrow.

And so the day on which he had put the polish on his material estate died out with the chiming of the stable clock; and another began for Jolyon in the shadow of a spiritual disorder which could not be so rounded off and polished....

But Jon, whose room had once been his day nursery, lay awake too, the prey of a sensation disputed by those who have never known it, "love at first sight!" He had felt it beginning in him with the glint of those dark eyes gazing into his athwart the Juno—a conviction that this was his 'dream'; so that what followed had seemed to him at once natural and miraculous. Fleur! Her name alone was almost enough for one who was terribly susceptible to the charm of words. In a homoeopathic Age, when boys and girls were co-educated, and mixed up in early life till sex was almost abolished, Jon was singularly old-fashioned. His modern school took boys only, and his holidays had been spent at Robin Hill with boy friends, or his parents alone. He had never, therefore, been inoculated against the germs of love by small doses of the poison. And now in the dark his temperature was mounting fast. He lay awake, featuring Fleur—as they called it—recalling her words, especially that "Au revoir!" so soft and sprightly.

He was still so wide awake at dawn that he got up, slipped on tennis shoes, trousers, and a sweater, and in silence crept downstairs and out through the study window. It was just light; there was a smell of grass. 'Fleur!' he thought; 'Fleur!' It was mysteriously white out of doors, with nothing awake except the birds just beginning to chirp. 'I'll go down into the coppice,' he thought. He ran down through the fields, reached the pond just as the sun rose, and passed into the coppice. Bluebells carpeted the ground there; among the larch-trees there was mystery—the air, as it were, composed of that romantic quality. Jon sniffed its freshness, and stared at the bluebells in the sharpening light. Fleur! It rhymed with her! And she lived at Mapleduram—a jolly name, too, on the river somewhere. He could find it in the atlas presently. He would write to her. But would she answer? Oh! She must. She had said "Au revoir!" Not good-bye! What luck that she had dropped her handkerchief! He would never have known her but for that. And the more he thought of that handkerchief, the more amazing his luck seemed. Fleur! It certainly rhymed with her! Rhythm thronged his head; words jostled to be joined together; he was on the verge of a poem.

Jon remained in this condition for more than half an hour, then returned to the house, and getting a ladder, climbed in at his bedroom window out of sheer exhilaration. Then, remembering that the study window was open, he went down and shut it, first removing the ladder, so as to obliterate all traces of his feeling. The thing was too deep to be revealed to mortal soul—even to his mother.

IV

THE MAUSOLEUM

There are houses whose souls have passed into the limbo of Time, leaving their bodies in the limbo of London. Such was not quite the condition of "Timothy's" on the Bayswater Road, for Timothy's soul still had one foot in Timothy Forsyte's body, and Smither kept the atmosphere unchanging, of camphor and port wine and house whose windows are only opened to air it twice a day.

To Forsyte imagination that house was now a sort of Chinese pill-box, a series of layers in the last of which was Timothy. One did not reach him, or so it was reported by members of the family who, out of old-time habit or absentmindedness, would drive up once in a blue moon and ask after their surviving uncle. Such were Francie, now quite emancipated from God (she frankly avowed atheism), Euphemia, emancipated from old Nicholas, and Winifred Dartie from her "man of the world." But, after all, everybody was emancipated now, or said they were—perhaps not quite the same thing!

When Soames, therefore, took it on his way to Paddington station on the morning after that encounter, it was hardly with the expectation of seeing Timothy in the flesh. His heart made a faint demonstration within him while he stood in full south sunlight on the newly whitened doorstep of that little house where four Forsytes had once lived, and now but one dwelt on like a winter fly; the house into which Soames had come and out of which he had gone times without number, divested of, or burdened with, fardels of family gossip; the house of the "old people" of another century, another age.

The sight of Smither—still corseted up to the armpits because the new fashion which came in as they were going out about 1903 had never been considered "nice" by Aunts Juley and Hester—brought a pale friendliness to Soames' lips; Smither, still faithfully arranged to old pattern in every detail, an invaluable servant—none such left—smiling back at him, with the words: "Why! it's Mr. Soames, after all this time! And how are you, sir? Mr. Timothy will be so pleased to know you've been."

"How is he?"

"Oh! he keeps fairly bobbish for his age, sir; but of course he's a wonderful man. As I said to Mrs. Dartie when she was here last: It would please Miss Forsyte and Mrs. Juley and Miss Hester to see how he relishes a baked apple still. But he's quite deaf. And a mercy, I always think. For what we should have done with him in the air-raids, I don't know."

"Ah!" said Soames. "What did you do with him?"

"We just left him in his bed, and had the bell run down into the cellar, so that Cook and I could hear him if he rang. It would never have done to let him know there was a war on. As I said to Cook, 'If Mr. Timothy rings, they may do what they like—I'm going up. My dear mistresses would have a fit if they could see him ringing and nobody going to him.' But he slept through them all beautiful. And the one in the daytime he was having his bath. It was a mercy, because he might have noticed the people in the

street all looking up—he often looks out of the window."

"Quite!" murmured Soames. Smither was getting garrulous! "I just want to look round and see if there's anything to be done."

"Yes, sir. I don't think there's anything except a smell of mice in the dining-room that we don't know how to get rid of. It's funny they should be there, and not a crumb, since Mr. Timothy took to not coming down, just before the War. But they're nasty little things; you never know where they'll take you next."

"Does he leave his bed?"—

"Oh! yes, sir; he takes nice exercise between his bed and the window in the morning, not to risk a change of air. And he's quite comfortable in himself; has his Will out every day regular. It's a great consolation to him—that."

"Well, Smither, I want to see him, if I can; in case he has anything to say to me."

Smither coloured up above her corsets.

"It will be an occasion!" she said. "Shall I take you round the house, sir, while I send Cook to break it to him?"

"No, you go to him," said Soames. "I can go round the house by myself."

One could not confess to sentiment before another, and Soames felt that he was going to be sentimental nosing round those rooms so saturated with the past. When Smither, creaking with excitement, had left him, Soames entered the dining-room and sniffed. In his opinion it wasn't mice, but incipient wood-rot, and he examined the panelling. Whether it was worth a coat of paint, at Timothy's age, he was not sure. The room had always been the most modern in the house; and only a faint smile curled Soames' lips and nostrils. Walls of a rich green surmounted the oak dado; a heavy metal chandelier hung by a chain from a ceiling divided by imitation beams. The pictures had been bought by Timothy, a bargain, one day at Jobson's sixty years ago—three Snyder "still lifes," two faintly coloured drawings of a boy and a girl, rather charming, which bore the initials "J. R."—Timothy had always believed they might turn out to be Joshua Reynolds, but Soames, who admired them, had discovered that they were only John Robinson; and a doubtful Morland of a white pony being shod. Deep-red plush curtains, ten high-backed dark mahogany chairs with deep-red plush seats, a Turkey carpet, and a mahogany dining-table as large as the room was small, such was an apartment which Soames could remember unchanged in soul or body since he was four years old. He looked especially at the two drawings, and thought: 'I shall buy those at the sale.'

From the dining-room he passed into Timothy's study. He did not remember ever having been in that room. It was lined from floor to ceiling with volumes, and he looked at them with curiosity. One wall seemed devoted to educational books, which Timothy's firm had published two generations back—sometimes as many as twenty copies of one book. Soames read their titles and shuddered. The middle wall had precisely the same books as used to be in the library at his own father's in Park Lane, from which he deduced the fancy that James and his youngest brother had gone out together one day and bought a brace of small libraries. The third wall he approached with more excitement. Here, surely, Timothy's own taste would be found. It was. The books were dummies. The fourth wall was all heavily curtained window. And turned toward it was a large chair with a mahogany reading-stand attached, on which a yellowish and folded copy of *The Times*, dated July 6, 1914, the day Timothy first failed to come down, as if in preparation for the War, seemed waiting for him still. In a corner stood a large globe of that world never visited by Timothy, deeply convinced of the unreality of everything but England, and permanently upset by the sea, on which he had been very sick one Sunday afternoon in 1836, out of a pleasure boat off the pier at Brighton, with Juley and Hester, Swithin and Hatty Chessman; all due to Swithin, who was always taking things into his head, and who, thank goodness, had been sick too. Soames knew all about it, having heard the tale fifty times at least from one or other of them. He went up to the globe, and gave it a spin; it emitted a faint creak and moved about an inch, bringing into his purview a daddy-long-legs which had died on it in latitude 44.

'Mausoleum!' he thought. 'George was right!' And he went out and up the stairs. On the half-landing he stopped before the case of stuffed humming-birds which had delighted his childhood. They looked not a day older, suspended on wires above pampas-grass. If the case were opened the birds would not begin to hum, but the whole thing would crumble, he suspected. It wouldn't be worth putting that into the sale! And suddenly he was caught by a memory of Aunt Ann—dear old Aunt Ann—holding him by the hand in front of that case and saying: "Look, Soamey! Aren't they bright and pretty, dear little humming-birds!" Soames remembered his own answer: "They don't hum, Auntie." He must have been

six, in a black velveteen suit with a light-blue collar—he remembered that suit well! Aunt Ann with her ringlets, and her spidery kind hands, and her grave old aquiline smile—a fine old lady, Aunt Ann! He moved on up to the drawing-room door. There on each side of it were the groups of miniatures. Those he would certainly buy in! The miniatures of his four aunts, one of his Uncle Swithin adolescent, and one of his Uncle Nicholas as a boy. They had all been painted by a young lady friend of the family at a time, 1830, about, when miniatures were considered very genteel, and lasting too, painted as they were on ivory. Many a time had he heard the tale of that young lady: "Very talented, my dear; she had quite a weakness for Swithin, and very soon after she went into a consumption and died: so like Keats—we often spoke of it."

Well, there they were! Ann, Juley, Hester, Susan—quite a small child; Swithin, with sky-blue eyes, pink cheeks, yellow curls, white waistcoat—large as life; and Nicholas, like Cupid with an eye on heaven. Now he came to think of it, Uncle Nick had always been rather like that—a wonderful man to the last. Yes, she must have had talent, and miniatures always had a certain back-watered cachet of their own, little subject to the currents of competition on aesthetic Change. Soames opened the drawing-room door. The room was dusted, the furniture uncovered, the curtains drawn back, precisely as if his aunts still dwelt there patiently waiting. And a thought came to him: When Timothy died—why not? Would it not be almost a duty to preserve this house—like Carlyle's—and put up a tablet, and show it? "Specimen of mid-Victorian abode—entrance, one shilling, with catalogue." After all, it was the completest thing, and perhaps the dearest in the London of to-day. Perfect in its special taste and culture, if, that is, he took down and carried over to his own collection the four Barbizon pictures he had given them. The still sky-blue walls, tile green curtains patterned with red flowers and ferns; the crewel-worked fire-screen before the cast-iron grate; the mahogany cupboard with glass windows, full of little knickknacks; the beaded footstools; Keats, Shelley, Southey, Cowper, Coleridge, Byron's Corsair (but nothing else), and the Victorian poets in a bookshelf row; the marqueterie cabinet lined with dim red plush, full of family relics: Hester's first fan; the buckles of their mother's father's shoes; three bottled scorpions; and one very yellow elephant's tusk, sent home from India by Great-uncle Edgar Forsyte, who had been in jute; a yellow bit of paper propped up, with spidery writing on it, recording God knew what! And the pictures crowding on the walls—all water-colours save those four Barbizons looking like tile foreigners they were, and doubtful customers at that—pictures bright and illustrative, "Telling the Bees," "Hey for the Ferry!" and two in the style of Frith, all thimblery and crinolines, given them by Swithin. Oh! many, many pictures at which Soames had gazed a thousand times in supercilious fascination; a marvellous collection of bright, smooth gilt frames.

And the boudoir—grand piano, beautifully dusted, hermetically sealed as ever; and Aunt Juley's album of pressed seaweed on it. And the gilt-legged chairs, stronger than they looked. And on one side of the fireplace the sofa of crimson silk, where Aunt Ann, and after her Aunt Juley, had been wont to sit, facing the light and bolt upright. And on the other side of the fire the one really easy chair, back to the light, for Aunt Hester. Soames screwed up his eyes; he seemed to see them sitting there. Ah! and the atmosphere—even now, of too many stuffs and washed lace curtains, lavender in bags, and dried bees' wings. 'No,' he thought, 'there's nothing like it left; it ought to be preserved.' And, by George, they might laugh at it, but for a standard of gentle life never departed from, for fastidiousness of skin and eye and nose and feeling, it beat to-day hollow—to-day with its Tubes and cars, its perpetual smoking, its cross-legged, bare-necked girls visible up to the knees and down to the waist if you took the trouble (agreeable to the satyr within each Forsyte but hardly his idea of a lady), with their feet, too, screwed round the legs of their chairs while they ate, and their "So longs," and their "Old Beans," and their laughter—girls who gave him the shudders whenever he thought of Fleur in contact with them; and the hard-eyed, capable, older women who managed life and gave him the shudders too. No! his old aunts, if they never opened their minds, their eyes, or very much their windows, at least had manners, and a standard, and reverence for past and future.

With rather a choky feeling he closed the door and went tiptoeing upstairs. He looked in at a place on the way: H'm! in perfect order of the eighties, with a sort of yellow oilskin paper on the walls. At the top of the stairs he hesitated between four doors. Which of them was Timothy's? And he listened. A sound, as of a child slowly dragging a hobby-horse about, came to his ears. That must be Timothy! He tapped, and a door was opened by Smither, very red in the face.

Mr. Timothy was taking his walk, and she had not been able to get him to attend. If Mr. Soames would come into the back-room, he could see him through the door.

Soames went into the back-room and stood watching.

The last of the old Forsytes was on his feet, moving with the most impressive slowness, and an air of perfect concentration on his own affairs, backward and forward between the foot of his bed and the window, a distance of some twelve feet. The lower part of his square face, no longer clean-shaven, was covered with snowy beard clipped as short as it could be, and his chin looked as broad as his brow

where the hair was also quite white, while nose and cheeks and brow were a good yellow. One hand held a stout stick, and the other grasped the skirt of his Jaeger dressing-gown, from under which could be seen his bed-socked ankles and feet thrust into Jaeger slippers. The expression on his face was that of a crossed child, intent on something that he has not got. Each time he turned he stumped the stick, and then dragged it, as if to show that he could do without it:

"He still looks strong," said Soames under his breath.

"Oh! yes, sir. You should see him take his bath—it's wonderful; he does enjoy it so."

Those quite loud words gave Soames an insight. Timothy had resumed his babyhood.

"Does he take any interest in things generally?" he said, also loud.

"Oh I yes, sir; his food and his Will. It's quite a sight to see him turn it over and over, not to read it, of course; and every now and then he asks the price of Consols, and I write it on a slate for him—very large. Of course, I always write the same, what they were when he last took notice, in 1914. We got the doctor to forbid him to read the paper when the War broke out. Oh! he did take on about that at first. But he soon came round, because he knew it tired him; and he's a wonder to conserve energy as he used to call it when my dear mistresses were alive, bless their hearts! How he did go on at them about that; they were always so active, if you remember, Mr. Soames."

"What would happen if I were to go in?" asked Soames: "Would he remember me? I made his Will, you know, after Miss Hester died in 1907."

"Oh! that, sir," replied Smither doubtfully, "I couldn't take on me to say. I think he might; he really is a wonderful man for his age."

Soames moved into the doorway, and waiting for Timothy to turn, said in a loud voice: "Uncle Timothy!"

Timothy trailed back half-way, and halted.

"Eh?" he said.

"Soames," cried Soames at the top of his voice, holding out his hand, "Soames Forsyte!"

"No!" said Timothy, and stumping his stick loudly on the floor, he continued his walk.

"It doesn't seem to work," said Soames.

"No, sir," replied Smither, rather crestfallen; "you see, he hasn't finished his walk. It always was one thing at a time with him. I expect he'll ask me this afternoon if you came about the gas, and a pretty job I shall have to make him understand."

"Do you think he ought to have a man about him?"

Smither held up her hands. "A man! Oh! no. Cook and me can manage perfectly. A strange man about would send him crazy in no time. And my mistresses wouldn't like the idea of a man in the house. Besides, we're so—proud of him."

"I suppose the doctor comes?"

"Every morning. He makes special terms for such a quantity, and Mr. Timothy's so used, he doesn't take a bit of notice, except to put out his tongue."

"Well," said Soames, turning away, "it's rather sad and painful to me."

"Oh! sir," returned Smither anxiously, "you mustn't think that. Now that he can't worry about things, he quite enjoys his life, really he does. As I say to Cook, Mr. Timothy is more of a man than he ever was. You see, when he's not walkin', or takin' his bath, he's eatin', and when he's not eatin', he's sleepin'; and there it is. There isn't an ache or a care about him anywhere."

"Well," said Soames, "there's something in that. I'll go down. By the way, let me see his Will."

"I should have to take my time about that, sir; he keeps it under his pillow, and he'd see me, while he's active."

"I only want to know if it's the one I made," said Soames; "you take a look at its date some time, and let me know."

"Yes, sir; but I'm sure it's the same, because me and Cook witnessed, you remember, and there's our names on it still, and we've only done it once."

"Quite," said Soames. He did remember. Smither and Jane had been proper witnesses, having been left nothing in the Will that they might have no interest in Timothy's death. It had been—he fully admitted—an almost improper precaution, but Timothy had wished it, and, after all, Aunt Hester had provided for them amply.

"Very well," he said; "good-bye, Smither. Look after him, and if he should say anything at any time, put it down, and let me know."

"Oh I yes, Mr. Soames; I'll be sure to do that. It's been such a pleasant change to see you. Cook will be quite excited when I tell her."

Soames shook her hand and went down-stairs. He stood for fully two minutes by the hat-stand whereon he had hung his hat so many times. 'So it all passes,' he was thinking; 'passes and begins again. Poor old chap!' And he listened, if perchance the sound of Timothy trailing his hobby-horse might come down the well of the stairs; or some ghost of an old face show over the bannisters, and an old voice say: 'Why, it's dear Soames, and we were only saying that we hadn't seen him for a week!'

Nothing—nothing! Just the scent of camphor, and dust-motes in a sunbeam through the fanlight over the door. The little old house! A mausoleum! And, turning on his heel, he went out, and caught his train.

V

THE NATIVE HEATH

"His foot's upon his native heath,
His name's—Val Dartie."

With some such feeling did Val Dartie, in the fortieth year of his age, set out that same Thursday morning very early from the old manor-house he had taken on the north side of the Sussex Downs. His destination was Newmarket, and he had not been there since the autumn of 1899, when he stole over from Oxford for the Cambridgeshire. He paused at the door to give his wife a kiss, and put a flask of port into his pocket.

"Don't overtire your leg, Val, and don't bet too much."

With the pressure of her chest against his own, and her eyes looking into his, Val felt both leg and pocket safe. He should be moderate; Holly was always right—she had a natural aptitude. It did not seem so remarkable to him, perhaps, as it might to others, that—half Dartie as he was—he should have been perfectly faithful to his young first cousin during the twenty years since he married her romantically out in the Boer War; and faithful without any feeling of sacrifice or boredom—she was so quick, so slyly always a little in front of his mood. Being first cousins they had decided, rather needlessly, to have no children; and, though a little sallower, she had kept her looks, her slimness, and the colour of her dark hair. Val particularly admired the life of her own she carried on, besides carrying on his, and riding better every year. She kept up her music, she read an awful lot—novels, poetry, all sorts of stuff. Out on their farm in Cape colony she had looked after all the "nigger" babies and women in a miraculous manner. She was, in fact, clever; yet made no fuss about it, and had no "side." Though not remarkable for humility, Val had come to have the feeling that she was his superior, and he did not grudge it—a great tribute. It might be noted that he never looked at Holly without her knowing of it, but that she looked at him sometimes unawares.

He had kissed her in the porch because he should not be doing so on the platform, though she was going to the station with him, to drive the car back. Tanned and wrinkled by Colonial weather and the wiles inseparable from horses, and handicapped by the leg which, weakened in the Boer War, had probably saved his life in the War just past, Val was still much as he had been in the days of his courtship; his smile as wide and charming, his eyelashes, if anything, thicker and darker, his eyes screwed up under them, as bright a grey, his freckles rather deeper, his hair a little grizzled at the sides. He gave the impression of one who has lived actively with horses in a sunny climate.

Twisting the car sharp round at the gate, he said:

"When is young Jon coming?"

"To-day."

"Is there anything you want for him? I could bring it down on Saturday."

"No; but you might come by the same train as Fleur—one-forty."

Val gave the Ford full rein; he still drove like a man in a new country on bad roads, who refuses to compromise, and expects heaven at every hole.

"That's a young woman who knows her way about," he said. "I say, has it struck you?"

"Yes," said Holly.

"Uncle Soames and your Dad—bit awkward, isn't it?"

"She won't know, and he won't know, and nothing must be said, of course. It's only for five days, Val."

"Stable secret! Righto!" If Holly thought it safe, it was. Glancing slyly round at him, she said: "Did you notice how beautifully she asked herself?"

"No!"

"Well, she did. What do you think of her, Val?"

"Pretty and clever; but she might run out at any corner if she got her monkey up, I should say."

"I'm wondering," Holly murmured, "whether she is the modern young woman. One feels at sea coming home into all this."

"You? You get the hang of things so quick."

Holly slid her hand into his coat-pocket.

"You keep one in the know," said Val encouraged. "What do you think of that Belgian fellow, Profond?"

"I think he's rather 'a good devil.'"

Val grinned.

"He seems to me a queer fish for a friend of our family. In fact, our family is in pretty queer waters, with Uncle Soames marrying a Frenchwoman, and your Dad marrying Soames's first. Our grandfathers would have had fits!"

"So would anybody's, my dear."

"This car," Val said suddenly, "wants rousing; she doesn't get her hind legs under her uphill. I shall have to give her her head on the slope if I'm to catch that train."

There was that about horses which had prevented him from ever really sympathising with a car, and the running of the Ford under his guidance compared with its running under that of Holly was always noticeable. He caught the train.

"Take care going home; she'll throw you down if she can. Good-bye, darling."

"Good-bye," called Holly, and kissed her hand.

In the train, after quarter of an hour's indecision between thoughts of Holly, his morning paper, the look of the bright day, and his dim memory of Newmarket, Val plunged into the recesses of a small square book, all names, pedigrees, tap-roots, and notes about the make and shape of horses. The Forsyte in him was bent on the acquisition of a certain strain of blood, and he was subduing resolutely as yet the Dartie hankering for a Nutter. On getting back to England, after the profitable sale of his South African farm and stud, and observing that the sun seldom shone, Val had said to himself: "I've absolutely got to have an interest in life, or this country will give me the blues. Hunting's not enough, I'll breed and I'll train." With just that extra pinch of shrewdness and decision imparted by long residence in a new country, Val had seen the weak point of modern breeding. They were all hypnotised

by fashion and high price. He should buy for looks, and let names go hang! And here he was already, hypnotised by the prestige of a certain strain of blood! Half-consciously, he thought: 'There's something in this damned climate which makes one go round in a ring. All the same, I must have a strain of Mayfly blood.'

In this mood he reached the Mecca of his hopes. It was one of those quiet meetings favourable to such as wish to look into horses, rather than into the mouths of bookmakers; and Val clung to the paddock. His twenty years of Colonial life, divesting him of the dandyism in which he had been bred, had left him the essential neatness of the horseman, and given him a queer and rather blighting eye over what he called "the silly haw-haw" of some Englishmen, the "flapping cockatoory" of some Englishwomen—Holly had none of that and Holly was his model. Observant, quick, resourceful, Val went straight to the heart of a transaction, a horse, a drink; and he was on his way to the heart of a Mayfly filly, when a slow voice said at his elbow:

"Mr. Val Dartie? How's Mrs. Val Dartie? She's well, I hope." And he saw beside him the Belgian he had met at his sister Imogen's.

"Prosper Profond—I met you at lunch," said the voice.

"How are you?" murmured Val.

"I'm very well," replied Monsieur Profond, smiling with a certain inimitable slowness. "A good devil," Holly had called him. Well! He looked a little like a devil, with his dark, clipped, pointed beard; a sleepy one though, and good-humoured, with fine eyes, unexpectedly intelligent.

"Here's a gentleman wants to know you—cousin of yours—Mr. George Forsyde."

Val saw a large form, and a face clean-shaven, bull-like, a little lowering, with sardonic humour bubbling behind a full grey eye; he remembered it dimly from old days when he would dine with his father at the Iseum Club.

"I used to go racing with your father," George was saying: "How's the stud? Like to buy one of my screws?"

Val grinned, to hide the sudden feeling that the bottom had fallen out of breeding. They believed in nothing over here, not even in horses. George Forsyte, Prosper Profond! The devil himself was not more disillusioned than those two.

"Didn't know you were a racing man," he said to Monsieur Profond.

"I'm not. I don't care for it. I'm a yachtin' man. I don't care for yachtin' either, but I like to see my friends. I've got some lunch, Mr. Val Dartie, just a small lunch, if you'd like to 'ave some; not much—just a small one—in my car."

"Thanks," said Val; "very good of you. I'll come along in about quarter of an hour."

"Over there. Mr. Forsyde's comin'," and Monsieur Profond "pounded" with a yellow-gloved finger; "small car, with a small lunch"; he moved on, groomed, sleepy, and remote, George Forsyte following, neat, huge, and with his jesting air.

Val remained gazing at the Mayfly filly. George Forsyte, of course, was an old chap, but this Profond might be about his own age; Val felt extremely young, as if the Mayfly filly were a toy at which those two had laughed. The animal had lost reality.

"That 'small' mare"—he seemed to hear the voice of Monsieur Profond—"what do you see in her?—we must all die!"

And George Forsyte, crony of his father, racing still! The Mayfly strain—was it any better than any other? He might just as well have a flutter with his money instead.

"No, by gum!" he muttered suddenly, "if it's no good breeding horses, it's no good doing anything. What did I come for? I'll buy her."

He stood back and watched the ebb of the paddock visitors toward the stand. Natty old chips, shrewd portly fellows, Jews, trainers looking as if they had never been guilty of seeing a horse in their lives; tall, flapping, languid women, or brisk, loud-voiced women; young men with an air as if trying to take it seriously—two or three of them with only one arm.

'Life over here's a game!' thought Val. 'Muffin bell rings, horses run, money changes hands; ring

again, run again, money changes back.'

But, alarmed at his own philosophy, he went to the paddock gate to watch the Mayfly filly canter down. She moved well; and he made his way over to the "small" car. The "small" lunch was the sort a man dreams of but seldom gets; and when it was concluded Monsieur Profond walked back with him to the paddock.

"Your wife's a nice woman," was his surprising remark.

"Nicest woman I know," returned Val dryly.

"Yes," said Monsieur Profond; "she has a nice face. I admire nice women."

Val looked at him suspiciously, but something kindly and direct in the heavy diabolism of his companion disarmed him for the moment.

"Any time you like to come on my yacht, I'll give her a small cruise."

"Thanks," said Val, in arms again, "she hates the sea."

"So do I," said Monsieur Profond.

"Then why do you yacht?"

The Belgian's eyes smiled. "Oh! I don't know. I've done everything; it's the last thing I'm doin'."

"It must be d-d expensive. I should want more reason than that."

Monsieur Prosper Profond raised his eyebrows, and puffed out a heavy lower lip.

"I'm an easy-goin' man," he said.

"Were you in the War?" asked Val.

"Ye-es. I've done that too. I was gassed; it was a small bit unpleasant." He smiled with a deep and sleepy air of prosperity, as if he had caught it from his name.

Whether his saying "small" when he ought to have said "little" was genuine mistake or affectation Val could not decide; the fellow was evidently capable of anything.

Among the ring of buyers round the Mayfly filly who had won her race, Monsieur Profond said:

"You goin' to bid?"

Val nodded. With this sleepy Satan at his elbow, he felt in need of faith. Though placed above the ultimate blows of Providence by the forethought of a grand-father who had tied him up a thousand a year to which was added the thousand a year tied up for Holly by her grand-father, Val was not flush of capital that he could touch, having spent most of what he had realised from his South African farm on his establishment in Sussex. And very soon he was thinking: 'Dash it! she's going beyond me!' His limit-six hundred-was exceeded; he dropped out of the bidding. The Mayfly filly passed under the hammer at seven hundred and fifty guineas. He was turning away vexed when the slow voice of Monsieur Profond said in his ear:

"Well, I've bought that small filly, but I don't want her; you take her and give her to your wife."

Val looked at the fellow with renewed suspicion, but the good humour in his eyes was such that he really could not take offence.

"I made a small lot of money in the War," began Monsieur Profond in answer to that look. "I 'ad armament shares. I like to give it away. I'm always makin' money. I want very small lot myself. I like my friends to 'ave it."

"I'll buy her of you at the price you gave," said Val with sudden resolution.

"No," said Monsieur Profond. "You take her. I don' want her."

"Hang it! one doesn't—"

"Why not?" smiled Monsieur Profond. "I'm a friend of your family."

"Seven hundred and fifty guineas is not a box of cigars," said Val impatiently.

"All right; you keep her for me till I want her, and do what you like with her."

"So long as she's yours," said Val. "I don't mind that."

"That's all right," murmured Monsieur Profond, and moved away.

Val watched; he might be "a good devil," but then again he might not. He saw him rejoin George Forsyte, and thereafter saw him no more.

He spent those nights after racing at his mother's house in Green Street.

Winifred Dartie at sixty-two was marvellously preserved, considering the three-and-thirty years during which she had put up with Montague Dartie, till almost happily released by a French staircase. It was to her a vehement satisfaction to have her favourite son back from South Africa after all this time, to feel him so little changed, and to have taken a fancy to his wife. Winifred, who in the late seventies, before her marriage, had been in the vanguard of freedom, pleasure, and fashion, confessed her youth outclassed by the donzellas of the day. They seemed, for instance, to regard marriage as an incident, and Winifred sometimes regretted that she had not done the same; a second, third, fourth incident might have secured her a partner of less dazzling inebriety; though, after all, he had left her Val, Imogen, Maud, Benedict (almost a colonel and unharmed by the War)—none of whom had been divorced as yet. The steadiness of her children often amazed one who remembered their father; but, as she was fond of believing, they were really all Forsytes, favouring herself, with the exception, perhaps, of Imogen. Her brother's "little girl" Fleur frankly puzzled Winifred. The child was as restless as any of these modern young women—"She's a small flame in a draught," Prosper Profond had said one day after dinner—but she did not flop, or talk at the top of her voice. The steady Forsyteism in Winifred's own character instinctively resented the feeling in the air, the modern girl's habits and her motto: "All's much of a muchness! Spend, to-morrow we shall be poor!" She found it a saving grace in Fleur that, having set her heart on a thing, she had no change of heart until she got it—though—what happened after, Fleur was, of course, too young to have made evident. The child was a "very pretty little thing," too, and quite a credit to take about, with her mother's French taste and gift for wearing clothes; everybody turned to look at Fleur—great consideration to Winifred, a lover of the style and distinction which had so cruelly deceived her in the case of Montague Dartie.

In discussing her with Val, at breakfast on Saturday morning, Winifred dwelt on the family skeleton.

"That little affair of your father-in-law and your Aunt Irene, Val—it's old as the hills, of course, Fleur need know nothing about it—making a fuss. Your Uncle Soames is very particular about that. So you'll be careful."

"Yes! But it's dashed awkward—Holly's young half-brother is coming to live with us while he learns farming. He's there already."

"Oh!" said Winifred. "That is a gaff! What is he like?"

"Only saw him once—at Robin Hill, when we were home in 1909; he was naked and painted blue and yellow in stripes—a jolly little chap."

Winifred thought that "rather nice," and added comfortably: "Well, Holly's sensible; she'll know how to deal with it. I shan't tell your uncle. It'll only bother him. It's a great comfort to have you back, my dear boy, now that I'm getting on."

"Getting on! Why! you're as young as ever. That chap Profond, Mother, is he all right?"

"Prosper Profond! Oh! the most amusing man I know."

Val grunted, and recounted the story of the Mayfly filly.

"That's so like him," murmured Winifred. "He does all sorts of things."

"Well," said Val shrewdly, "our family haven't been too lucky with that kind of cattle; they're too light-hearted for us."

It was true, and Winifred's blue study lasted a full minute before she answered:

"Oh! well! He's a foreigner, Val; one must make allowances."

"All right, I'll use his filly and make it up to him, somehow."

And soon after he gave her his blessing, received a kiss, and left her for his bookmaker's, the Iseum Club, and Victoria station.

VI

JON

Mrs. Val Dartie, after twenty years of South Africa, had fallen deeply in love, fortunately with something of her own, for the object of her passion was the prospect in front of her windows, the cool clear light on the green Downs. It was England again, at last! England more beautiful than she had dreamed. Chance had, in fact, guided the Val Darties to a spot where the South Downs had real charm when the sun shone. Holly had enough of her father's eye to apprehend the rare quality of their outlines and chalky radiance; to go up there by the ravine-like lane and wander along toward Chanctonbury or Amberley, was still a delight which she hardly attempted to share with Val, whose admiration of Nature was confused by a Forsyte's instinct for getting something out of it, such as the condition of the turf for his horses' exercise.

Driving the Ford home with a certain humouring, smoothness, she promised herself that the first use she would make of Jon would be to take him up there, and show him "the view" under this May-day sky.

She was looking forward to her young half-brother with a motherliness not exhausted by Val. A three-day visit to Robin Hill, soon after their arrival home, had yielded no sight of him—he was still at school; so that her recollection, like Val's, was of a little sunny-haired boy, striped blue and yellow, down by the pond.

Those three days at Robin Hill had been exciting, sad, embarrassing. Memories of her dead brother, memories of Val's courtship; the ageing of her father, not seen for twenty years, something funereal in his ironic gentleness which did not escape one who had much subtle instinct; above all, the presence of her stepmother, whom she could still vaguely remember as the "lady in grey" of days when she was little and grandfather alive and Mademoiselle Beauce so cross because that intruder gave her music lessons—all these confused and tantalised a spirit which had longed to find Robin Hill untroubled. But Holly was adept at keeping things to herself, and all had seemed to go quite well.

Her father had kissed her when she left him, with lips which she was sure had trembled.

"Well, my dear," he said, "the War hasn't changed Robin Hill, has it? If only you could have brought Jolly back with you! I say, can you stand this spiritualistic racket? When the oak-tree dies, it dies, I'm afraid."

From the warmth of her embrace he probably divined that he had let the cat out of the bag, for he rode off at once on irony.

"Spiritualism—queer word, when the more they manifest the more they prove that they've got hold of matter."

"How?" said Holly.

"Why! Look at their photographs of auric presences. You must have something material for light and shade to fall on before you can take a photograph. No, it'll end in our calling all matter spirit, or all spirit matter—I don't know which."

"But don't you believe in survival, Dad?"

Jolyon had looked at her, and the sad whimsicality of his face impressed her deeply.

"Well, my dear, I should like to get something out of death. I've been looking into it a bit. But for the life of me I can't find anything that telepathy, sub-consciousness, and emanation from the storehouse of this world can't account for just as well. Wish I could! Wishes father thought but they don't breed evidence." Holly had pressed her lips again to his forehead with the feeling that it confirmed his theory that all matter was becoming spirit—his brow felt, somehow, so insubstantial.

But the most poignant memory of that little visit had been watching, unobserved, her stepmother reading to herself a letter from Jon. It was—she decided—the prettiest sight she had ever seen. Irene, lost as it were in the letter of her boy, stood at a window where the light fell on her face and her fine grey hair; her lips were moving, smiling, her dark eyes laughing, dancing, and the hand which did not hold the letter was pressed against her breast. Holly withdrew as from a vision of perfect love, convinced that Jon must be nice.

When she saw him coming out of the station with a kit-bag in either hand, she was confirmed in her predisposition. He was a little like Jolly, that long-lost idol of her childhood, but eager-looking and less

formal, with deeper eyes and brighter-coloured hair, for he wore no hat; altogether a very interesting "little" brother!

His tentative politeness charmed one who was accustomed to assurance in the youthful manner; he was disturbed because she was to drive him home, instead of his driving her. Shouldn't he have a shot? They hadn't a car at Robin Hill since the War, of course, and he had only driven once, and landed up a bank, so she oughtn't to mind his trying. His laugh, soft and infectious, was very attractive, though that word, she had heard, was now quite old-fashioned. When they reached the house he pulled out a crumpled letter which she read while he was washing—a quite short letter, which must have cost her father many a pang to write. "MY DEAR,

"You and Val will not forget, I trust, that Jon knows nothing of family history. His mother and I think he is too young at present. The boy is very dear, and the apple of her eye. Verbum sapientibus. your loving father, "J. F."

That was all; but it renewed in Holly an uneasy regret that Fleur was coming.

After tea she fulfilled that promise to herself and took Jon up the hill. They had a long talk, sitting above an old chalk-pit grown over with brambles and goosepenny. Milkwort and liverwort starred the green slope, the larks sang, and thrushes in the brake, and now and then a gull fighting inland would wheel very white against the paling sky, where the vague moon was coming up. Delicious fragrance came to them, as if little invisible creatures were running and treading scent out of the blades of grass.

Jon, who had fallen silent, said rather suddenly:

"I say, this is wonderful! There's no fat on it at all. Gull's flight and sheep-bells"

"Gull's flight and sheep-bells! You're a poet, my dear!"

Jon sighed.

"Oh, Golly! No go!"

"Try! I used to at your age."

"Did you? Mother says 'try' too; but I'm so rotten. Have you any of yours for me to see?"

"My dear," Holly murmured, "I've been married nineteen years. I only wrote verses when I wanted to be."

"Oh!" said Jon, and turned over on his face: the one cheek she could see was a charming colour. Was Jon "touched in the wind," then, as Val would have called it? Already? But, if so, all the better, he would take no notice of young Fleur. Besides, on Monday he would begin his farming. And she smiled. Was it Burns who followed the plough, or only Piers Plowman? Nearly every young man and most young women seemed to be poets now, judging from the number of their books she had read out in South Africa, importing them from Hatchus and Bumphards; and quite good—oh! quite; much better than she had been herself! But then poetry had only really come in since her day—with motor-cars. Another long talk after dinner over a wood fire in the low hall, and there seemed little left to know about Jon except anything of real importance. Holly parted from him at his bedroom door, having seen twice over that he had everything, with the conviction that she would love him, and Val would like him. He was eager, but did not gush; he was a splendid listener, sympathetic, reticent about himself. He evidently loved their father, and adored his mother. He liked riding, rowing, and fencing better than games. He saved moths from candles, and couldn't bear spiders, but put them out of doors in screws of paper sooner than kill them. In a word, he was amiable. She went to sleep, thinking that he would suffer horribly if anybody hurt him; but who would hurt him?

Jon, on the other hand, sat awake at his window with a bit of paper and a pencil, writing his first "real poem" by the light of a candle because there was not enough moon to see by, only enough to make the night seem fluttery and as if engraved on silver. Just the night for Fleur to walk, and turn her eyes, and lead on-over the hills and far away. And Jon, deeply furrowed in his ingenuous brow, made marks on the paper and rubbed them out and wrote them in again, and did all that was necessary for the completion of a work of art; and he had a feeling such as the winds of Spring must have, trying their first songs among the coming blossom. Jon was one of those boys (not many) in whom a home-trained love of beauty had survived school life. He had had to keep it to himself, of course, so that not even the drawing-master knew of it; but it was there, fastidious and clear within him. And his poem seemed to him as lame and stilted as the night was winged. But he kept it, all the same. It was a "beast," but better than nothing as an expression of the inexpressible. And he thought with a sort of discomfiture: 'I shan't be able to show it to Mother.' He slept terribly well, when he did sleep, overwhelmed by novelty.

VII

FLEUR

To avoid the awkwardness of questions which could not be answered, all that had been told Jon was:

"There's a girl coming down with Val for the week-end."

For the same reason, all that had been told Fleur was: "We've got a youngster staying with us."

The two yearlings, as Val called them in his thoughts, met therefore in a manner which for unpreparedness left nothing to be desired. They were thus introduced by Holly:

"This is Jon, my little brother; Fleur's a cousin of ours, Jon."

Jon, who was coming in through a French window out of strong sunlight, was so confounded by the providential nature of this miracle, that he had time to hear Fleur say calmly: "Oh, how do you do?" as if he had never seen her, and to understand dimly from the quickest imaginable little movement of her head that he never had seen her. He bowed therefore over her hand in an intoxicated manner, and became more silent than the grave. He knew better than to speak. Once in his early life, surprised reading by a nightlight, he had said fatuously "I was just turning over the leaves, Mum," and his mother had replied: "Jon, never tell stories, because of your face nobody will ever believe them."

The saying had permanently undermined the confidence necessary to the success of spoken untruth. He listened therefore to Fleur's swift and rapt allusions to the jolliness of everything, plied her with scones and jam, and got away as soon as might be. They say that in delirium tremens you see a fixed object, preferably dark, which suddenly changes shape and position. Jon saw the fixed object; it had dark eyes and passably dark hair, and changed its position, but never its shape. The knowledge that between him and that object there was already a secret understanding (however impossible to understand) thrilled him so that he waited feverishly, and began to copy out his poem—which of course he would never dare to—show her—till the sound of horses' hoofs roused him, and, leaning from his window, he saw her riding forth with Val. It was clear that she wasted no time, but the sight filled him with grief. He wasted his. If he had not bolted, in his fearful ecstasy, he might have been asked to go too. And from his window he sat and watched them disappear, appear again in the chine of the road, vanish, and emerge once more for a minute clear on the outline of the Down. 'Silly brute!' he thought; 'I always miss my chances.'

Why couldn't he be self-confident and ready? And, leaning his chin on his hands, he imagined the ride he might have had with her. A week-end was but a week-end, and he had missed three hours of it. Did he know any one except himself who would have been such a flat? He did not.

He dressed for dinner early, and was first down. He would miss no more. But he missed Fleur, who came down last. He sat opposite her at dinner, and it was terrible—impossible to say anything for fear of saying the wrong thing, impossible to keep his eyes fixed on her in the only natural way; in sum, impossible to treat normally one with whom in fancy he had already been over the hills and far away; conscious, too, all the time, that he must seem to her, to all of them, a dumb gawk. Yes, it was terrible! And she was talking so well—swooping with swift wing this way and that. Wonderful how she had learned an art which he found so disgustingly difficult. She must think him hopeless indeed!

His sister's eyes, fixed on him with a certain astonishment, obliged him at last to look at Fleur; but instantly her eyes, very wide and eager, seeming to say, "Oh! for goodness' sake!" obliged him to look at Val, where a grin obliged him to look at his cutlet—that, at least, had no eyes, and no grin, and he ate it hastily.

"Jon is going to be a farmer," he heard Holly say; "a farmer and a poet."

He glanced up reproachfully, caught the comic lift of her eyebrow just like their father's, laughed, and felt better.

Val recounted the incident of Monsieur Prosper Profond; nothing could have been more favourable, for, in relating it, he regarded Holly, who in turn regarded him, while Fleur seemed to be regarding with a slight frown some thought of her own, and Jon was really free to look at her at last. She had on a white frock, very simple and well made; her arms were bare, and her hair had a white rose in it. In just that swift moment of free vision, after such intense discomfort, Jon saw her sublimated, as one sees in the dark a slender white fruit-tree; caught her like a verse of poetry flashed before the eyes of the mind, or a tune which floats out in the distance and dies. He wondered giddily how old she was—she

seemed so much more self-possessed and experienced than himself. Why mustn't he say they had met? He remembered suddenly his mother's face; puzzled, hurt-looking, when she answered: "Yes, they're relations, but we don't know them." Impossible that his mother, who loved beauty, should not admire Fleur if she did know her.

Alone with Val after dinner, he sipped port deferentially and answered the advances of this new-found brother-in-law. As to riding (always the first consideration with Val) he could have the young chestnut, saddle and unsaddle it himself, and generally look after it when he brought it in. Jon said he was accustomed to all that at home, and saw that he had gone up one in his host's estimation.

"Fleur," said Val, "can't ride much yet, but she's keen. Of course, her father doesn't know a horse from a cart-wheel. Does your Dad ride?"

"He used to; but now he's—you know, he's—" He stopped, so hating the word "old." His father was old, and yet not old; no—never!

"Quite," muttered Val. "I used to know your brother up at Oxford, ages ago, the one who died in the Boer War. We had a fight in New College Gardens. That was a queer business," he added, musing; "a good deal came out of it."

Jon's eyes opened wide; all was pushing him toward historical research, when his sister's voice said gently from the doorway:

"Come along, you two," and he rose, his heart pushing him toward something far more modern.

Fleur having declared that it was "simply too wonderful to stay indoors," they all went out. Moonlight was frosting the dew, and an old sundial threw a long shadow. Two box hedges at right angles, dark and square, barred off the orchard. Fleur turned through that angled opening.

"Come on!" she called. Jon glanced at the others, and followed. She was running among the trees like a ghost. All was lovely and foamlike above her, and there was a scent of old trunks, and of nettles. She vanished. He thought he had lost her, then almost ran into her standing quite still.

"Isn't it jolly?" she cried, and Jon answered:

"Rather!"

She reached up, twisted off a blossom and, twirling it in her fingers, said:

"I suppose I can call you Jon?"

"I should think so just."

"All right! But you know there's a feud between our families?"

Jon stammered: "Feud? Why?"

"It's ever so romantic and silly. That's why I pretended we hadn't met. Shall we get up early tomorrow morning and go for a walk before breakfast and have it out? I hate being slow about things, don't you?"

Jon murmured a rapturous assent.

"Six o'clock, then. I think your mother's beautiful"

Jon said fervently: "Yes, she is."

"I love all kinds of beauty," went on Fleur, "when it's exciting. I don't like Greek things a bit."

"What! Not Euripides?"

"Euripides? Oh! no, I can't bear Greek plays; they're so long. I think beauty's always swift. I like to look at one picture, for instance, and then run off. I can't bear a lot of things together. Look!" She held up her blossom in the moonlight. "That's better than all the orchard, I think."

And, suddenly, with her other hand she caught Jon's.

"Of all things in the world, don't you think caution's the most awful? Smell the moonlight!"

She thrust the blossom against his face; Jon agreed giddily that of all things in the world caution was

the worst, and bending over, kissed the hand which held his.

"That's nice and old-fashioned," said Fleur calmly. "You're frightfully silent, Jon. Still I like silence when it's swift." She let go his hand. "Did you think I dropped my handkerchief on purpose?"

"No!" cried Jon, intensely shocked.

"Well, I did, of course. Let's get back, or they'll think we're doing this on purpose too." And again she ran like a ghost among the trees. Jon followed, with love in his heart, Spring in his heart, and over all the moonlit white unearthly blossom. They came out where they had gone in, Fleur walking demurely.

"It's quite wonderful in there," she said dreamily to Holly.

Jon preserved silence, hoping against hope that she might be thinking it swift.

She bade him a casual and demure good-night, which made him think he had been dreaming....

In her bedroom Fleur had flung off her gown, and, wrapped in a shapeless garment, with the white flower still in her hair, she looked like a mouse, sitting cross-legged on her bed, writing by candlelight. "DEAREST CHERRY,

"I believe I'm in love. I've got it in the neck, only the feeling is really lower down. He's a second cousin—such a child, about six months older and ten years younger than I am. Boys always fall in love with their seniors, and girls with their juniors or with old men of forty. Don't laugh, but his eyes are the truest things I ever saw; and he's quite divinely silent! We had a most romantic first meeting in London under the Vospovitch Juno. And now he's sleeping in the next room and the moonlight's on the blossom; and to-morrow morning, before anybody's awake, we're going to walk off into Down fairyland. There's a feud between our families, which makes it really exciting. Yes! and I may have to use subterfuge and come on you for invitations—if so, you'll know why! My father doesn't want us to know each other, but I can't help that. Life's too short. He's got the most beautiful mother, with lovely silvery hair and a young face with dark eyes. I'm staying with his sister—who married my cousin; it's all mixed up, but I mean to pump her to-morrow. We've often talked about love being a spoil-sport; well, that's all tosh, it's the beginning of sport, and the sooner you feel it, my dear, the better for you.

"Jon (not simplified spelling, but short for Jolyon, which is a name in my family, they say) is the sort that lights up and goes out; about five feet ten, still growing, and I believe he's going to be a poet. If you laugh at me I've done with you forever. I perceive all sorts of difficulties, but you know when I really want a thing I get it. One of the chief effects of love is that you see the air sort of inhabited, like seeing a face in the moon; and you feel—you feel dancey and soft at the same time, with a funny sensation—like a continual first sniff of orange—blossom—Just above your stays. This is my first, and I feel as if it were going to be my last, which is absurd, of course, by all the laws of Nature and morality. If you mock me I will smite you, and if you tell anybody I will never forgive you. So much so, that I almost don't think I'll send this letter. Anyway, I'll sleep over it. So good-night, my Cherry—oh! "Your, "FLEUR." VIII IDYLL ON GRASS

When those two young Forsytes emerged from the chine lane, and set their faces east toward the sun, there was not a cloud in heaven, and the Downs were dewy. They had come at a good bat up the slope and were a little out of breath; if they had anything to say they did not say it, but marched in the early awkwardness of unbreakfasted morning under the songs of the larks. The stealing out had been fun, but with the freedom of the tops the sense of conspiracy ceased, and gave place to dumbness.

"We've made one blooming error," said Fleur, when they had gone half a mile. "I'm hungry."

Jon produced a stick of chocolate. They shared it and their tongues were loosened. They discussed the nature of their homes and previous existences, which had a kind of fascinating unreality up on that lonely height. There remained but one thing solid in Jon's past—his mother; but one thing solid in Fleur's—her father; and of these figures, as though seen in the distance with disapproving faces, they spoke little.

The Down dipped and rose again toward Chanctonbury Ring; a sparkle of far sea came into view, a sparrow-hawk hovered in the sun's eye so that the blood-nourished brown of his wings gleamed nearly red. Jon had a passion for birds, and an aptitude for sitting very still to watch them; keen-sighted, and with a memory for what interested him, on birds he was almost worth listening to. But in Chanctonbury Ring there were none—its great beech temple was empty of life, and almost chilly at this early hour; they came out willingly again into the sun on the far side. It was Fleur's turn now. She spoke of dogs, and the way people treated them. It was wicked to keep them on chains! She would like to flog people who did that. Jon was astonished to find her so humanitarian. She knew a dog, it seemed, which some farmer near her home kept chained up at the end of his chicken run, in all weathers, till it had almost

lost its voice from barking!

"And the misery is," she said vehemently, "that if the poor thing didn't bark at every one who passes it wouldn't be kept there. I do think men are cunning brutes. I've let it go twice, on the sly; it's nearly bitten me both times, and then it goes simply mad with joy; but it always runs back home at last, and they chain it up again. If I had my way, I'd chain that man up." Jon saw her teeth and her eyes gleam. "I'd brand him on his forehead with the word 'Brute'; that would teach him!"

Jon agreed that it would be a good remedy.

"It's their sense of property," he said, "which makes people chain things. The last generation thought of nothing but property; and that's why there was the War."

"Oh!" said Fleur, "I never thought of that. Your people and mine quarrelled about property. And anyway we've all got it—at least, I suppose your people have."

"Oh! yes, luckily; I don't suppose I shall be any good at making money."

"If you were, I don't believe I should like you."

Jon slipped his hand tremulously under her arm. Fleur looked straight before her and chanted:

"Jon, Jon, the farmer's son, Stole a pig, and away he run!"

Jon's arm crept round her waist.

"This is rather sudden," said Fleur calmly; "do you often do it?"

Jon dropped his arm. But when she laughed his arm stole back again; and Fleur began to sing:

"O who will oer the downs so free, O who will with me ride? O who will up and follow me—"

"Sing, Jon!"

Jon sang. The larks joined in, sheep-bells, and an early morning church far away over in Steyning. They went on from tune to tune, till Fleur said:

"My God! I am hungry now!"

"Oh! I am sorry!"

She looked round into his face.

"Jon, you're rather a darling."

And she pressed his hand against her waist. Jon almost reeled from happiness. A yellow-and-white dog coursing a hare startled them apart. They watched the two vanish down the slope, till Fleur said with a sigh: "He'll never catch it, thank goodness! What's the time? Mine's stopped. I never wound it."

Jon looked at his watch. "By Jove!" he said, "mine's stopped; too."

They walked on again, but only hand in hand.

"If the grass is dry," said Fleur, "let's sit down for half a minute."

Jon took off his coat, and they shared it.

"Smell! Actually wild thyme!"

With his arm round her waist again, they sat some minutes in silence.

"We are goats!" cried Fleur, jumping up; "we shall be most fearfully late, and look so silly, and put them on their guard. Look here, Jon We only came out to get an appetite for breakfast, and lost our way. See?"

"Yes," said Jon.

"It's serious; there'll be a stopper put on us. Are you a good liar?"

"I believe not very; but I can try."

Fleur frowned.

"You know," she said, "I realize that they don't mean us to be friends."

"Why not?"

"I told you why."

"But that's silly."

"Yes; but you don't know my father!"

"I suppose he's fearfully fond of you."

"You see, I'm an only child. And so are you—of your mother. Isn't it a bore? There's so much expected of one. By the time they've done expecting, one's as good as dead."

"Yes," muttered Jon, "life's beastly short. One wants to live forever, and know everything."

"And love everybody?"

"No," cried Jon; "I only want to love once—you."

"Indeed! You're coming on! Oh! Look! There's the chalk-pit; we can't be very far now. Let's run."

Jon followed, wondering fearfully if he had offended her.

The chalk-pit was full of sunshine and the murmur of bees. Fleur flung back her hair.

"Well," she said, "in case of accidents, you may give me one kiss, Jon," and she pushed her cheek forward. With ecstasy he kissed that hot soft cheek.

"Now, remember! We lost our way; and leave it to me as much as you can. I'm going to be rather beastly to you; it's safer; try and be beastly to me!"

Jon shook his head. "That's impossible."

"Just to please me; till five o'clock, at all events."

"Anybody will be able to see through it," said Jon gloomily.

"Well, do your best. Look! There they are! Wave your hat! Oh! you haven't got one. Well, I'll cooe! Get a little away from me, and look sulky."

Five minutes later, entering the house and doing his utmost to look sulky, Jon heard her clear voice in the dining-room:

"Oh! I'm simply ravenous! He's going to be a farmer—and he loses his way! The boy's an idiot!"

IX

GOYA

Lunch was over and Soames mounted to the picture-gallery in his house near Mapleduram. He had what Annette called "a grief." Fleur was not yet home. She had been expected on Wednesday; had wired that it would be Friday; and again on Friday that it would be Sunday afternoon; and here were her aunt, and her cousins the Cardigans, and this fellow Profond, and everything flat as a pancake for the want of her. He stood before his Gauguin—sorest point of his collection. He had bought the ugly great thing with two early Matisses before the War, because there was such a fuss about those Post-Impressionist chaps. He was wondering whether Profond would take them off his hands—the fellow seemed not to know what to do with his money—when he heard his sister's voice say: "I think that's a horrid thing, Soames," and saw that Winifred had followed him up.

"Oh! you do?" he said dryly; "I gave five hundred for it."

"Fancy! Women aren't made like that even if they are black."

Soames uttered a glum laugh. "You didn't come up to tell me that."

"No. Do you know that Jolyon's boy is staying with Val and his wife?"

Soames spun round.

"What?"

"Yes," drawled Winifred; "he's gone to live with them there while he learns farming."

Soames had turned away, but her voice pursued him as he walked up and down. "I warned Val that neither of them was to be spoken to about old matters."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

Winifred shrugged her substantial shoulders.

"Fleur does what she likes. You've always spoiled her. Besides, my dear boy, what's the harm?"

"The harm!" muttered Soames. "Why, she—" he checked himself. The Juno, the handkerchief, Fleur's eyes, her questions, and now this delay in her return—the symptoms seemed to him so sinister that, faithful to his nature, he could not part with them.

"I think you take too much care," said Winifred. "If I were you, I should tell her of that old matter. It's no good thinking that girls in these days are as they used to be. Where they pick up their knowledge I can't tell, but they seem to know everything."

Over Soames' face, closely composed, passed a sort of spasm, and Winifred added hastily:

"If you don't like to speak of it, I could for you."

Soames shook his head. Unless there was absolute necessity the thought that his adored daughter should learn of that old scandal hurt his pride too much.

"No," he said, "not yet. Never if I can help it."

"Nonsense, my dear. Think what people are!"

"Twenty years is a long time," muttered Soames. "Outside our family, who's likely to remember?"

Winifred was silenced. She inclined more and more to that peace and quietness of which Montague Dartie had deprived her in her youth. And, since pictures always depressed her, she soon went down again.

Soames passed into the corner where, side by side, hung his real Goya and the copy of the fresco "La Vendimia." His acquisition of the real Goya rather beautifully illustrated the cobweb of vested interests and passions which mesh the bright-winged fly of human life. The real Goya's noble owner's ancestor had come into possession of it during some Spanish war—it was in a word loot. The noble owner had remained in ignorance of its value until in the nineties an enterprising critic discovered that a Spanish painter named Goya was a genius. It was only a fair Goya, but almost unique in England, and the noble owner became a marked man. Having many possessions and that aristocratic culture which, independent of mere sensuous enjoyment, is founded on the sounder principle that one must know everything and be fearfully interested in life, he had fully intended to keep an article which contributed to his reputation while he was alive, and to leave it to the nation after he was dead. Fortunately for Soames, the House of Lords was violently attacked in 1909, and the noble owner became alarmed and angry. 'If,' he said to himself, 'they think they can have it both ways they are very much mistaken. So long as they leave me in quiet enjoyment the nation can have some of my pictures at my death. But if the nation is going to bait me, and rob me like this, I'm damned if I won't sell the lot. They can't have my private property and my public spirit—both.' He brooded in this fashion for several months till one morning, after reading the speech of a certain statesman, he telegraphed to his agent to come down and bring Bodkin. On going over the collection Bodkin, than whose opinion on market values none was more sought, pronounced that with a free hand to sell to America, Germany, and other places where there was an interest in art, a lot more money could be made than by selling in England. The noble owner's public spirit—he said—was well known but the pictures were unique. The noble owner put this opinion in his pipe and smoked it for a year. At the end of that time he read another speech by the same statesman, and telegraphed to his agents: "Give Bodkin a free hand." It was at this juncture that Bodkin conceived the idea which salvaged the Goya and two other unique pictures for the native country of the noble owner. With one hand Bodkin proffered the pictures to the foreign market, with the other he

formed a list of private British collectors. Having obtained what he considered the highest possible bids from across the seas, he submitted pictures and bids to the private British collectors, and invited them, of their public spirit, to outbid. In three instances (including the Goya) out of twenty-one he was successful. And why? One of the private collectors made buttons—he had made so many that he desired that his wife should be called Lady "Buttons." He therefore bought a unique picture at great cost, and gave it to the nation. It was "part," his friends said, "of his general game." The second of the private collectors was an Americophobe, and bought an unique picture to "spite the damned Yanks." The third of the private collectors was Soames, who—more sober than either of the, others—bought after a visit to Madrid, because he was certain that Goya was still on the up grade. Goya was not booming at the moment, but he would come again; and, looking at that portrait, Hogarthian, Manetesque in its directness, but with its own queer sharp beauty of paint, he was perfectly satisfied still that he had made no error, heavy though the price had been—heaviest he had ever paid. And next to it was hanging the copy of "La Vendimia." There she was—the little wretch-looking back at him in her dreamy mood, the mood he loved best because he felt so much safer when she looked like that.

He was still gazing when the scent of a cigar impinged on his nostrils, and a voice said:

"Well, Mr. Forsyde, what you goin' to do with this small lot?"

That Belgian chap, whose mother-as if Flemish blood were not enough—had been Armenian! Subduing a natural irritation, he said:

"Are you a judge of pictures?"

"Well, I've got a few myself."

"Any Post-Impressionists?"

"Ye-es, I rather like them."

"What do you think of this?" said Soames, pointing to the Gauguin.

Monsieur Profond protruded his lower lip and short pointed beard.

"Rather fine, I think," he said; "do you want to sell it?"

Soames checked his instinctive "Not particularly"—he would not chaffer with this alien.

"Yes," he said.

"What do you want for it?"

"What I gave."

"All right," said Monsieur Profond. "I'll be glad to take that small picture. Post-Impressionists—they're awful dead, but they're amusin'. I don' care for pictures much, but I've got some, just a small lot."

"What do you care for?"

Monsieur Profond shrugged his shoulders.

"Life's awful like a lot of monkeys scramblin' for empty nuts."

"You're young," said Soames. If the fellow must make a generalization, he needn't suggest that the forms of property lacked solidity!

"I don' worry," replied Monsieur Profond smiling; "we're born, and we die. Half the world's starvin'. I feed a small lot of babies out in my mother's country; but what's the use? Might as well throw my money in the river."

Soames looked at him, and turned back toward his Goya. He didn't know what the fellow wanted.

"What shall I make my cheque for?" pursued Monsieur Profond.

"Five hundred," said Soames shortly; "but I don't want you to take it if you don't care for it more than that."

"That's all right," said Monsieur Profond; "I'll be 'appy to 'ave that picture."

He wrote a cheque with a fountain-pen heavily chased with gold. Soames watched the process uneasily. How on earth had the fellow known that he wanted to sell that picture? Monsieur Profond

held out the cheque.

"The English are awful funny about pictures," he said. "So are the French, so are my people. They're all awful funny."

"I don't understand you," said Soames stiffly.

"It's like hats," said Monsieur Profond enigmatically, "small or large, turnin' up or down—just the fashion. Awful funny." And, smiling, he drifted out of the gallery again, blue and solid like the smoke of his excellent cigar.

Soames had taken the cheque, feeling as if the intrinsic value of ownership had been called in question. 'He's a cosmopolitan,' he thought, watching Profond emerge from under the verandah with Annette, and saunter down the lawn toward the river. What his wife saw in the fellow he didn't know, unless it was that he could speak her language; and there passed in Soames what Monsieur Profond would have called a "small doubt" whether Annette was not too handsome to be walking with any one so "cosmopolitan." Even at that distance he could see the blue fumes from Profond's cigar wreath out in the quiet sunlight; and his grey buckskin shoes, and his grey hat—the fellow was a dandy! And he could see the quick turn of his wife's head, so very straight on her desirable neck and shoulders. That turn of her neck always seemed to him a little too showy, and in the "Queen of all I survey" manner—not quite distinguished. He watched them walk along the path at the bottom of the garden. A young man in flannels joined them down there—a Sunday caller no doubt, from up the river. He went back to his Goya. He was still staring at that replica of Fleur, and worrying over Winifred's news, when his wife's voice said:

"Mr. Michael Mont, Soames. You invited him to see your pictures."

There was the cheerful young man of the Gallery off Cork Street!

"Turned up, you see, sir; I live only four miles from Pangbourne. Jolly day, isn't it?"

Confronted with the results of his expansiveness, Soames scrutinized his visitor. The young man's mouth was excessively large and curly—he seemed always grinning. Why didn't he grow the rest of those idiotic little moustaches, which made him look like a music-hall buffoon? What on earth were young men about, deliberately lowering their class with these tooth-brushes, or little slug whiskers? Ugh! Affected young idiots! In other respects he was presentable, and his flannels very clean.

"Happy to see you!" he said.

The young man, who had been turning his head from side to side, became transfixed. "I say!" he said, "'some' picture!"

Soames saw, with mixed sensations, that he had addressed the remark to the Goya copy.

"Yes," he said dryly, "that's not a Goya. It's a copy. I had it painted because it reminded me of my daughter."

"By Jove! I thought I knew the face, sir. Is she here?"

The frankness of his interest almost disarmed Soames.

"She'll be in after tea," he said. "Shall we go round the pictures?"

And Soames began that round which never tired him. He had not anticipated much intelligence from one who had mistaken a copy for an original, but as they passed from section to section, period to period, he was startled by the young man's frank and relevant remarks. Natively shrewd himself, and even sensuous beneath his mask, Soames had not spent thirty-eight years over his one hobby without knowing something more about pictures than their market values. He was, as it were, the missing link between the artist and the commercial public. Art for art's sake and all that, of course, was cant. But aesthetics and good taste were necessary. The appreciation of enough persons of good taste was what gave a work of art its permanent market value, or in other words made it "a work of art." There was no real cleavage. And he was sufficiently accustomed to sheep-like and unseeing visitors, to be intrigued by one who did not hesitate to say of Mauve: "Good old haystacks!" or of James Maris: "Didn't he just paint and paper 'em! Mathew was the real swell, sir; you could dig into his surfaces!" It was after the young man had whistled before a Whistler, with the words, "D'you think he ever really saw a naked woman, sir?" that Soames remarked:

"What are you, Mr. Mont, if I may ask?"

"I, sir? I was going to be a painter, but the War knocked that. Then in the trenches, you know, I used to dream of the Stock Exchange, snug and warm and just noisy enough. But the Peace knocked that, shares seem off, don't they? I've only been demobbed about a year. What do you recommend, sir?"

"Have you got money?"

"Well," answered the young man, "I've got a father; I kept him alive during the War, so he's bound to keep me alive now. Though, of course, there's the question whether he ought to be allowed to hang on to his property. What do you think about that, sir?"

Soames, pale and defensive, smiled.

"The old man has fits when I tell him he may have to work yet. He's got land, you know; it's a fatal disease."

"This is my real Goya," said Soames dryly.

"By George! He was a swell. I saw a Goya in Munich once that bowled me middle stump. A most evil-looking old woman in the most gorgeous lace. He made no compromise with the public taste. That old boy was 'some' explosive; he must have smashed up a lot of convention in his day. Couldn't he just paint! He makes Velasquez stiff, don't you think?"

"I have no Velasquez," said Soames.

The young man stared. "No," he said; "only nations or profiteers can afford him, I suppose. I say, why shouldn't all the bankrupt nations sell their Velasquez and Titians and other swells to the profiteers by force, and then pass a law that any one who holds a picture by an Old Master—see schedule—must hang it in a public gallery? There seems something in that."

"Shall we go down to tea?" said Soames.

The young man's ears seemed to droop on his skull. 'He's not dense,' thought Soames, following him off the premises.

Goya, with his satiric and surpassing precision, his original "line," and the daring of his light and shade, could have reproduced to admiration the group assembled round Annette's tea-tray in the inglenook below. He alone, perhaps, of painters would have done justice to the sunlight filtering through a screen of creeper, to the lovely pallor of brass, the old cut glasses, the thin slices of lemon in pale amber tea; justice to Annette in her black lacey dress; there was something of the fair Spaniard in her beauty, though it lacked the spirituality of that rare type; to Winifred's grey-haired, corseted solidity; to Soames, of a certain grey and flat-cheeked distinction; to the vivacious Michael Mont, pointed in ear and eye; to Imogen, dark, luscious of glance, growing a little stout; to Prosper Profond, with his expression as who should say, "Well, Mr. Goya, what's the use of paintin' this small party?" finally, to Jack Cardigan, with his shining stare and tanned sanguinity betraying the moving principle: "I'm English, and I live to be fit."

Curious, by the way, that Imogen, who as a girl had declared solemnly one day at Timothy's that she would never marry a good man—they were so dull—should have married Jack Cardigan, in whom health had so destroyed all traces of original sin, that she might have retired to rest with ten thousand other Englishmen without knowing the difference from the one she had chosen to repose beside. "Oh!" she would say of him, in her "amusing" way, "Jack keeps himself so fearfully fit; he's never had a day's illness in his life. He went right through the War without a finger-ache. You really can't imagine how fit he is!" Indeed, he was so "fit" that he couldn't see when she was flirting, which was such a comfort in a way. All the same she was quite fond of him, so far as one could be of a sports-machine, and of the two little Cardigans made after his pattern. Her eyes just then were comparing him maliciously with Prosper Profond. There was no "small" sport or game which Monsieur Profond had not played at too, it seemed, from skittles to tarpon-fishing, and worn out every one. Imogen would sometimes wish that they had worn out Jack, who continued to play at them and talk of them with the simple zeal of a school-girl learning hockey; at the age of Great-uncle Timothy she well knew that Jack would be playing carpet golf in her bedroom, and "wiping somebody's eye."

He was telling them now how he had "pipped the pro—a charmin' fellow, playin' a very good game," at the last hole this morning; and how he had pulled down to Caversham since lunch, and trying to incite Prosper Profond to play him a set of tennis after tea—do him good—"keep him fit.

"But what's the use of keepin' fit?" said Monsieur Profond.

"Yes, sir," murmured Michael Mont, "what do you keep fit for?"

"Jack," cried Imogen, enchanted, "what do you keep fit for?"

Jack Cardigan stared with all his health. The questions were like the buzz of a mosquito, and he put up his hand to wipe them away. During the War, of course, he had kept fit to kill Germans; now that it was over he either did not know, or shrank in delicacy from explanation of his moving principle.

"But he's right," said Monsieur Profond unexpectedly, "there's nothin' left but keepin' fit."

The saying, too deep for Sunday afternoon, would have passed unanswered, but for the mercurial nature of young Mont.

"Good!" he cried. "That's the great discovery of the War. We all thought we were progressing—now we know we're only changing."

"For the worse," said Monsieur Profond genially.

"How you are cheerful, Prosper!" murmured Annette.

"You come and play tennis!" said Jack Cardigan; "you've got the hump. We'll soon take that down. D'you play, Mr. Mont?"

"I hit the ball about, sir."

At this juncture Soames rose, ruffled in that deep instinct of preparation for the future which guided his existence.

"When Fleur comes—" he heard Jack Cardigan say.

Ah! and why didn't she come? He passed through drawing-room, hall, and porch out on to the drive, and stood there listening for the car. All was still and Sundayfied; the lilacs in full flower scented the air. There were white clouds, like the feathers of ducks gilded by the sunlight. Memory of the day when Fleur was born, and he had waited in such agony with her life and her mother's balanced in his hands, came to him sharply. He had saved her then, to be the flower of his life. And now! was she going to give him trouble—pain—give him trouble? He did not like the look of things! A blackbird broke in on his reverie with an evening song—a great big fellow up in that acacia-tree. Soames had taken quite an interest in his birds of late years; he and Fleur would walk round and watch them; her eyes were sharp as needles, and she knew every nest. He saw her dog, a retriever, lying on the drive in a patch of sunlight, and called to him. "Hallo, old fellow—waiting for her too!" The dog came slowly with a grudging tail, and Soames mechanically laid a pat on his head. The dog, the bird, the lilac, all were part of Fleur for him; no more, no less. "Too fond of her!" he thought, 'too fond!' He was like a man uninsured, with his ships at sea. Uninsured again—as in that other time, so long ago, when he would wander dumb and jealous in the wilderness of London, longing for that woman—his first wife—the mother of this infernal boy. Ah! There was the car at last! It drew up, it had luggage, but no Fleur.

"Miss Fleur is walking up, sir, by the towing-path."

Walking all those miles? Soames stared. The man's face had the beginning of a smile on it. What was he grinning at? And very quickly he turned, saying, "All right, Sims!" and went into the house. He mounted to the picture-gallery once more. He had from there a view of the river bank, and stood with his eyes fixed on it, oblivious of the fact that it would be an hour at least before her figure showed there. Walking up! And that fellow's grin! The boy—! He turned abruptly from the window. He couldn't spy on her. If she wanted to keep things from him—she must; he could not spy on her. His heart felt empty, and bitterness mounted from it into his very mouth. The staccato shouts of Jack Cardigan pursuing the ball, the laugh of young Mont rose in the stillness and came in. He hoped they were making that chap Profond run. And the girl in "La Vendimia" stood with her arm akimbo and her dreamy eyes looking past him. 'I've done all I could for you,' he thought, 'since you were no higher than my knee. You aren't going to—to—hurt me, are you?'

But the Goya copy answered not, brilliant in colour just beginning to tone down. 'There's no real life in it,' thought Soames. 'Why doesn't she come?'

X

Among those four Forsytes of the third, and, as one might say, fourth generation, at Wansdon under the Downs, a week-end prolonged unto the ninth day had stretched the crossing threads of tenacity almost to snapping-point. Never had Fleur been so "fine," Holly so watchful, Val so stable-secretive, Jon so silent and disturbed. What he learned of farming in that week might have been balanced on the point of a penknife and puffed off. He, whose nature was essentially averse from intrigue, and whose adoration of Fleur disposed him to think that any need for concealing it was "skittles," chafed and fretted, yet obeyed, taking what relief he could in the few moments when they were alone. On Thursday, while they were standing in the bay window of the drawing-room, dressed for dinner, she said to him:

"Jon, I'm going home on Sunday by the 3.40 from Paddington; if you were to go home on Saturday you could come up on Sunday and take me down, and just get back here by the last train, after. You were going home anyway, weren't you?"

Jon nodded.

"Anything to be with you," he said; "only why need I pretend—"

Fleur slipped her little finger into his palm:

"You have no instinct, Jon; you must leave things to me. It's serious about our people. We've simply got to be secret at present, if we want to be together." The door was opened, and she added loudly: "You are a duffer, Jon."

Something turned over within Jon; he could not bear this subterfuge about a feeling so natural, so overwhelming, and so sweet.

On Friday night about eleven he had packed his bag, and was leaning out of his window, half miserable, and half lost in a dream of Paddington station, when he heard a tiny sound, as of a finger-nail tapping on his door. He rushed to it and listened. Again the sound. It was a nail. He opened. Oh! What a lovely thing came in!

"I wanted to show you my fancy dress," it said, and struck an attitude at the foot of his bed.

Jon drew a long breath and leaned against the door. The apparition wore white muslin on its head, a fichu round its bare neck over a wine-coloured dress, full out below its slender waist.

It held one arm akimbo, and the other raised, right-angled, holding a fan which touched its head.

"This ought to be a basket of grapes," it whispered, "but I haven't got it here. It's my Goya dress. And this is the attitude in the picture. Do you like it?"

"It's a dream."

The apparition pirouetted. "Touch it, and see."

Jon knelt down and took the skirt reverently.

"Grape colour," came the whisper, "all grapes—La Vendimia—the vintage."

Jon's fingers scarcely touched each side of the waist; he looked up, with adoring eyes.

"Oh! Jon," it whispered; bent, kissed his forehead, pirouetted again, and, gliding out, was gone.

Jon stayed on his knees, and his head fell forward against the bed. How long he stayed like that he did not know. The little noises—of the tapping nail, the feet, the skirts rustling—as in a dream—went on about him; and before his closed eyes the figure stood and smiled and whispered, a faint perfume of narcissus lingering in the air. And his forehead where it had been kissed had a little cool place between the brows, like the imprint of a flower. Love filled his soul, that love of boy for girl which knows so little, hopes so much, would not brush the down off for the world, and must become in time a fragrant memory—a searing passion—a humdrum mateship—or, once in many times, vintage full and sweet with sunset colour on the grapes.

Enough has been said about Jon Forsyte here and in another place to show what long marches lay between him and his great-great-grandfather, the first Jolyon, in Dorset down by the sea. Jon was sensitive as a girl, more sensitive than nine out of ten girls of the day; imaginative as one of his half-sister June's "lame duck" painters; affectionate as a son of his father and his mother naturally would be. And yet, in his inner tissue, there was something of the old founder of his family, a secret tenacity of

soul, a dread of showing his feelings, a determination not to know when he was beaten. Sensitive, imaginative, affectionate boys get a bad time at school, but Jon had instinctively kept his nature dark, and been but normally unhappy there. Only with his mother had he, up till then, been absolutely frank and natural; and when he went home to Robin Hill that Saturday his heart was heavy because Fleur had said that he must not be frank and natural with her from whom he had never yet kept anything, must not even tell her that they had met again, unless he found that she knew already. So intolerable did this seem to him that he was very near to telegraphing an excuse and staying up in London. And the first thing his mother said to him was:

"So you've had our little friend of the confectioner's there, Jon. What is she like on second thoughts?"

With relief, and a high colour, Jon answered:

"Oh! awfully jolly, Mum."

Her arm pressed his.

Jon had never loved her so much as in that minute which seemed to falsify Fleur's fears and to release his soul. He turned to look at her, but something in her smiling face—something which only he perhaps would have caught—stopped the words bubbling up in him. Could fear go with a smile? If so, there was fear in her face. And out of Jon tumbled quite other words, about farming, Holly, and the Downs. Talking fast, he waited for her to come back to Fleur. But she did not. Nor did his father mention her, though of course he, too, must know. What deprivation, and killing of reality was in his silence about Fleur—when he was so full of her; when his mother was so full of Jon, and his father so full of his mother! And so the trio spent the evening of that Saturday.

After dinner his mother played; she seemed to play all the things he liked best, and he sat with one knee clasped, and his hair standing up where his fingers had run through it. He gazed at his mother while she played, but he saw Fleur—Fleur in the moonlit orchard, Fleur in the sunlit gravel-pit, Fleur in that fancy dress, swaying, whispering, stooping, kissing his forehead. Once, while he listened, he forgot himself and glanced at his father in that other easy chair. What was Dad looking like that for? The expression on his face was so sad and puzzling. It filled him with a sort of remorse, so that he got up and went and sat on the arm of his father's chair. From there he could not see his face; and again he saw Fleur—in his mother's hands, slim and white on the keys, in the profile of her face and her powdery hair; and down the long room in the open window where the May night walked outside.

When he went up to bed his mother came into his room. She stood at the window, and said:

"Those cypresses your grandfather planted down there have done wonderfully. I always think they look beautiful under a dropping moon. I wish you had known your grandfather, Jon."

"Were you married to father when he was alive?" asked Jon suddenly.

"No, dear; he died in '92—very old—eighty-five, I think."

"Is Father like him?"

"A little, but more subtle, and not quite so solid."

"I know, from grandfather's portrait; who painted that?"

"One of June's 'lame ducks.' But it's quite good."

Jon slipped his hand through his mother's arm. "Tell me about the family quarrel, Mum."

He felt her arm quivering. "No, dear; that's for your Father some day, if he thinks fit."

"Then it was serious," said Jon, with a catch in his breath.

"Yes." And there was a silence, during which neither knew whether the arm or the hand within it were quivering most.

"Some people," said Irene softly, "think the moon on her back is evil; to me she's always lovely. Look at those cypress shadows! Jon, Father says we may go to Italy, you and I, for two months. Would you like?"

Jon took his hand from under her arm; his sensation was so sharp and so confused. Italy with his mother! A fortnight ago it would have been perfection; now it filled him with dismay; he felt that the sudden suggestion had to do with Fleur. He stammered out:

"Oh! yes; only—I don't know. Ought I—now I've just begun? I'd like to think it over."

Her voice answered, cool and gentle:

"Yes, dear; think it over. But better now than when you've begun farming seriously. Italy with you! It would be nice!"

Jon put his arm round her waist, still slim and firm as a girl's.

"Do you think you ought to leave Father?" he said feebly, feeling very mean.

"Father suggested it; he thinks you ought to see Italy at least before you settle down to anything."

The sense of meanness died in Jon; he knew, yes—he knew—that his father and his mother were not speaking frankly, no more than he himself. They wanted to keep him from Fleur. His heart hardened. And, as if she felt that process going on, his mother said:

"Good-night, darling. Have a good sleep and think it over. But it would be lovely!"

She pressed him to her so quickly that he did not see her face. Jon stood feeling exactly as he used to when he was a naughty little boy; sore because he was not loving, and because he was justified in his own eyes.

But Irene, after she had stood a moment in her own room, passed through the dressing-room between it and her husband's.

"Well?"

"He will think it over, Jolyon."

Watching her lips that wore a little drawn smile, Jolyon said quietly:

"You had better let me tell him, and have done with it. After all, Jon has the instincts of a gentleman. He has only to understand—"

"Only! He can't understand; that's impossible."

"I believe I could have at his age."

Irene caught his hand. "You were always more of a realist than Jon; and never so innocent."

"That's true," said Jolyon. "It's queer, isn't it? You and I would tell our stories to the world without a particle of shame; but our own boy stumps us."

"We've never cared whether the world approves or not."

"Jon would not disapprove of us!"

"Oh! Jolyon, yes. He's in love, I feel he's in love. And he'd say: 'My mother once married without love! How could she have!' It'll seem to him a crime! And so it was!"

Jolyon took her hand, and said with a wry smile:

"Ah! why on earth are we born young? Now, if only we were born old and grew younger year by year, we should understand how things happen, and drop all our cursed intolerance. But you know if the boy is really in love, he won't forget, even if he goes to Italy. We're a tenacious breed; and he'll know by instinct why he's being sent. Nothing will really cure him but the shock of being told."

"Let me try, anyway."

Jolyon stood a moment without speaking. Between this devil and this deep sea—the pain of a dreaded disclosure and the grief of losing his wife for two months—he secretly hoped for the devil; yet if she wished for the deep sea he must put up with it. After all, it would be training for that departure from which there would be no return. And, taking her in his arms, he kissed her eyes, and said:

"As you will, my love."

XI

DUET

That "small" emotion, love, grows amazingly when threatened with extinction. Jon reached Paddington station half an hour before his time and a full week after, as it seemed to him. He stood at the appointed bookstall, amid a crowd of Sunday travellers, in a Harris tweed suit exhaling, as it were, the emotion of his thumping heart. He read the names of the novels on the book-stall, and bought one at last, to avoid being regarded with suspicion by the book-stall clerk. It was called "The Heart of the Trail!" which must mean something, though it did not seem to. He also bought "The Lady's Mirror" and "The Landsman." Every minute was an hour long, and full of horrid imaginings. After nineteen had passed, he saw her with a bag and a porter wheeling her luggage. She came swiftly; she came cool. She greeted him as if he were a brother.

"First class," she said to the porter, "corner seats; opposite."

Jon admired her frightful self-possession.

"Can't we get a carriage to ourselves," he whispered.

"No good; it's a stopping train. After Maidenhead perhaps. Look natural, Jon."

Jon screwed his features into a scowl. They got in—with two other beasts!—oh! heaven! He tipped the porter unnaturally, in his confusion. The brute deserved nothing for putting them in there, and looking as if he knew all about it into the bargain.

Fleur hid herself behind "The Lady's Mirror." Jon imitated her behind "The Landsman." The train started. Fleur let "The Lady's Mirror" fall and leaned forward.

"Well?" she said.

"It's seemed about fifteen days."

She nodded, and Jon's face lighted up at once.

"Look natural," murmured Fleur, and went off into a bubble of laughter. It hurt him. How could he look natural with Italy hanging over him? He had meant to break it to her gently, but now he blurted it out.

"They want me to go to Italy with Mother for two months."

Fleur drooped her eyelids; turned a little pale, and bit her lips. "Oh!" she said. It was all, but it was much.

That "Oh!" was like the quick drawback of the wrist in fencing ready for riposte. It came.

"You must go!"

"Go?" said Jon in a strangled voice.

"Of course."

"But—two months—it's ghastly."

"No," said Fleur, "six weeks. You'll have forgotten me by then. We'll meet in the National Gallery the day after you get back."

Jon laughed.

"But suppose you've forgotten me," he muttered into the noise of the train.

Fleur shook her head.

"Some other beast—" murmured Jon.

Her foot touched his.

"No other beast," she said, lifting "The Lady's Mirror."

The train stopped; two passengers got out, and one got in.

'I shall die,' thought Jon, 'if we're not alone at all.'

The train went on; and again Fleur leaned forward.

"I never let go," she said; "do you?"

Jon shook his head vehemently.

"Never!" he said. "Will you write to me?"

"No; but you can—to my Club."

She had a Club; she was wonderful!

"Did you pump Holly?" he muttered.

"Yes, but I got nothing. I didn't dare pump hard."

"What can it be?" cried Jon.

"I shall find out all right."

A long silence followed till Fleur said: "This is Maidenhead; stand by, Jon!"

The train stopped. The remaining passenger got out. Fleur drew down her blind.

"Quick!" she cried. "Hang out! Look as much of a beast as you can."

Jon blew his nose, and scowled; never in all his life had he scowled like that! An old lady recoiled, a young one tried the handle. It turned, but the door would not open. The train moved, the young lady darted to another carriage.

"What luck!" cried Jon. "It Jammed."

"Yes," said Fleur; "I was holding it."

The train moved out, and Jon fell on his knees.

"Look out for the corridor," she whispered; "and—quick!"

Her lips met his. And though their kiss only lasted perhaps ten seconds, Jon's soul left his body and went so far beyond, that, when he was again sitting opposite that demure figure, he was pale as death. He heard her sigh, and the sound seemed to him the most precious he had ever heard—an exquisite declaration that he meant something to her.

"Six weeks isn't really long," she said; "and you can easily make it six if you keep your head out there, and never seem to think of me."

Jon gasped.

"This is just what's really wanted, Jon, to convince them, don't you see? If we're just as bad when you come back they'll stop being ridiculous about it. Only, I'm sorry it's not Spain; there's a girl in a Goya picture at Madrid who's like me, Father says. Only she isn't—we've got a copy of her."

It was to Jon like a ray of sunshine piercing through a fog. "I'll make it Spain," he said, "Mother won't mind; she's never been there. And my Father thinks a lot of Goya."

"Oh! yes, he's a painter—isn't he?"

"Only water-colour," said Jon, with honesty.

"When we come to Reading, Jon, get out first and go down to Caversham lock and wait for me. I'll send the car home and we'll walk by the towing-path."

Jon seized her hand in gratitude, and they sat silent, with the world well lost, and one eye on the corridor. But the train seemed to run twice as fast now, and its sound was almost lost in that of Jon's sighing.

"We're getting near," said Fleur; "the towing-path's awfully exposed. One more! Oh! Jon, don't forget me."

Jon answered with his kiss. And very soon, a flushed, distracted-looking youth could have been seen—as they say—leaping from the train and hurrying along the platform, searching his pockets for his ticket.

When at last she rejoined him on the towing-path a little beyond Caversham lock he had made an effort, and regained some measure of equanimity. If they had to part, he would not make a scene! A breeze by the bright river threw the white side of the willow leaves up into the sunlight, and followed those two with its faint rustle.

"I told our chauffeur that I was train-giddy," said Fleur. "Did you look pretty natural as you went out?"

"I don't know. What is natural?"

"It's natural to you to look seriously happy. When I first saw you I thought you weren't a bit like other people."

"Exactly what I thought when I saw you. I knew at once I should never love anybody else."

Fleur laughed.

"We're absurdly young. And love's young dream is out of date, Jon. Besides, it's awfully wasteful. Think of all the fun you might have. You haven't begun, even; it's a shame, really. And there's me. I wonder!"

Confusion came on Jon's spirit. How could she say such things just as they were going to part?

"If you feel like that," he said, "I can't go. I shall tell Mother that I ought to try and work. There's always the condition of the world!"

"The condition of the world!"

Jon thrust his hands deep into his pockets.

"But there is," he said; "think of the people starving!"

Fleur shook her head. "No, no, I never, never will make myself miserable for nothing."

"Nothing! But there's an awful state of things, and of course one ought to help."

"Oh! yes, I know all that. But you can't help people, Jon; they're hopeless. When you pull them out they only get into another hole. Look at them, still fighting and plotting and struggling, though they're dying in heaps all the time. Idiots!"

"Aren't you sorry for them?"

"Oh! sorry—yes, but I'm not going to make myself unhappy about it; that's no good."

And they were silent, disturbed by this first glimpse of each other's natures.

"I think people are brutes and idiots," said Fleur stubbornly.

"I think they're poor wretches," said Jon. It was as if they had quarrelled—and at this supreme and awful moment, with parting visible out there in that last gap of the willows!

"Well, go and help your poor wretches, and don't think of me."

Jon stood still. Sweat broke out on his forehead, and his limbs trembled. Fleur too had stopped, and was frowning at the river.

"I must believe in things," said Jon with a sort of agony; "we're all meant to enjoy life."

Fleur laughed. "Yes; and that's what you won't do, if you don't take care. But perhaps your idea of enjoyment is to make yourself wretched. There are lots of people like that, of course."

She was pale, her eyes had darkened, her lips had thinned. Was it Fleur thus staring at the water? Jon had an unreal feeling as if he were passing through the scene in a book where the lover has to choose between love and duty. But just then she looked round at him. Never was anything so intoxicating as that vivacious look. It acted on him exactly as the tug of a chain acts on a dog—brought him up to her with his tail wagging and his tongue out.

"Don't let's be silly," she said, "time's too short. Look, Jon, you can just see where I've got to cross the river. There, round the bend, where the woods begin."

Jon saw a gable, a chimney or two, a patch of wall through the trees—and felt his heart sink.

"I mustn't dawdle any more. It's no good going beyond the next hedge, it gets all open. Let's get on to it and say good-bye."

They went side by side, hand in hand, silently toward the hedge, where the may-flower, both pink and white, was in full bloom.

"My Club's the 'Talisman,' Stratton Street, Piccadilly. Letters there will be quite safe, and I'm almost always up once a week."

Jon nodded. His face had become extremely set, his eyes stared straight before him.

"To-day's the twenty-third of May," said Fleur; "on the ninth of July I shall be in front of the 'Bacchus and Ariadne' at three o'clock; will you?"

"I will."

"If you feel as bad as I it's all right. Let those people pass!"

A man and woman airing their children went by strung out in Sunday fashion.

The last of them passed the wicket gate.

"Domesticity!" said Fleur, and blotted herself against the hawthorn hedge. The blossom sprayed out above her head, and one pink cluster brushed her cheek. Jon put up his hand jealously to keep it off.

"Good-bye, Jon." For a second they stood with hands hard clasped. Then their lips met for the third time, and when they parted Fleur broke away and fled through the wicket gate. Jon stood where she had left him, with his forehead against that pink cluster. Gone! For an eternity—for seven weeks all but two days! And here he was, wasting the last sight of her! He rushed to the gate. She was walking swiftly on the heels of the straggling children. She turned her head, he saw her hand make a little flitting gesture; then she sped on, and the trailing family blotted her out from his view.

The words of a comic song—

"Paddington groan-worst ever known
He gave a sepulchral Paddington groan—"

came into his head, and he sped incontinently back to Reading station. All the way up to London and down to Wansdon he sat with "The Heart of the Trail" open on his knee, knitting in his head a poem so full of feeling that it would not rhyme.

XII

CAPRICE

Fleur sped on. She had need of rapid motion; she was late, and wanted all her wits about her when she got in. She passed the islands, the station, and hotel, and was about to take the ferry, when she saw a skiff with a young man standing up in it, and holding to the bushes.

"Miss Forsyte," he said; "let me put you across. I've come on purpose."

She looked at him in blank amazement.

"It's all right, I've been having tea with your people. I thought I'd save you the last bit. It's on my way, I'm just off back to Pangbourne. My name's Mont. I saw you at the picture-gallery—you remember—when your father invited me to see his pictures."

"Oh!" said Fleur; "yes—the handkerchief."

To this young man she owed Jon; and, taking his hand, she stepped down into the skiff. Still

emotional, and a little out of breath, she sat silent; not so the young man. She had never heard any one say so much in so short a time. He told her his age, twenty-four; his weight, ten stone eleven; his place of residence, not far away; described his sensations under fire, and what it felt like to be gassed; criticized the Juno, mentioned his own conception of that goddess; commented on the Goya copy, said Fleur was not too awfully like it; sketched in rapidly the condition of England; spoke of Monsieur Profond—or whatever his name was—as "an awful sport"; thought her father had some "ripping" pictures and some rather "dug-up"; hoped he might row down again and take her on the river because he was quite trustworthy; inquired her opinion of Tchekov, gave her his own; wished they could go to the Russian ballet together some time—considered the name Fleur Forsyte simply topping; cursed his people for giving him the name of Michael on the top of Mont; outlined his father, and said that if she wanted a good book she should read "Job"; his father was rather like Job while Job still had land.

"But Job didn't have land," Fleur murmured; "he only had flocks and herds and moved on."

"Ah!" answered Michael Mont, "I wish my gov'nor would move on. Not that I want his land. Land's an awful bore in these days, don't you think?"

"We never have it in my family," said Fleur. "We have everything else. I believe one of my great-uncles once had a sentimental farm in Dorset, because we came from there originally, but it cost him more than it made him happy."

"Did he sell it?"

"No; he kept it."

"Why?"

"Because nobody would buy it."

"Good for the old boy!"

"No, it wasn't good for him. Father says it soured him. His name was Swithin."

"What a corking name!"

"Do you know that we're getting farther off, not nearer? This river flows."

"Splendid!" cried Mont, dipping his sculls vaguely; "it's good to meet a girl who's got wit."

"But better to meet a young man who's got it in the plural."

Young Mont raised a hand to tear his hair.

"Look out!" cried Fleur. "Your scull!"

"All right! It's thick enough to bear a scratch."

"Do you mind sculling?" said Fleur severely. "I want to get in."

"Ah!" said Mont; "but when you get in, you see, I shan't see you any more to-day. Fini, as the French girl said when she jumped on her bed after saying her prayers. Don't you bless the day that gave you a French mother, and a name like yours?"

"I like my name, but Father gave it me. Mother wanted me called Marguerite."

"Which is absurd. Do you mind calling me M. M. and letting me call you F. F.? It's in the spirit of the age."

"I don't mind anything, so long as I get in."

Mont caught a little crab, and answered: "That was a nasty one!"

"Please row."

"I am." And he did for several strokes, looking at her with rueful eagerness. "Of course, you know," he ejaculated, pausing, "that I came to see you, not your father's pictures."

Fleur rose.

"If you don't row, I shall get out and swim."

"Really and truly? Then I could come in after you."

"Mr. Mont, I'm late and tired; please put me on shore at once."

When she stepped out on to the garden landing-stage he rose, and grasping his hair with both hands, looked at her.

Fleur smiled.

"Don't!" cried the irrepressible Mont. "I know you're going to say: 'Out, damned hair!'"

Fleur whisked round, threw him a wave of her hand. "Good-bye, Mr. M.M.!" she called, and was gone among the rose-trees. She looked at her wrist-watch and the windows of the house. It struck her as curiously uninhabited. Past six! The pigeons were just gathering to roost, and sunlight slanted on the dovecot, on their snowy feathers, and beyond in a shower on the top boughs of the woods. The click of billiard-balls came from the ingle-nook—Jack Cardigan, no doubt; a faint rustling, too, from an eucalyptus-tree, startling Southerner in this old English garden. She reached the verandah and was passing in, but stopped at the sound of voices from the drawing-room to her left. Mother! Monsieur Profond! From behind the verandah screen which fenced the ingle-nook she heard these words:

"I don't, Annette."

Did Father know that he called her mother "Annette"? Always on the side of her Father—as children are ever on one side or the other in houses where relations are a little strained—she stood, uncertain. Her mother was speaking in her low, pleasing, slightly metallic voice—one word she caught: "Demain." And Profond's answer: "All right." Fleur frowned. A little sound came out into the stillness. Then Profond's voice: "I'm takin' a small stroll."

Fleur darted through the window into the morning-room. There he came from the drawing-room, crossing the verandah, down the lawn; and the click of billiard-balls which, in listening for other sounds, she had ceased to hear, began again. She shook herself, passed into the hall, and opened the drawing-room door. Her mother was sitting on the sofa between the windows, her knees crossed, her head resting on a cushion, her lips half parted, her eyes half closed. She looked extraordinarily handsome.

"Ah! Here you are, Fleur! Your father is beginning to fuss."

"Where is he?"

"In the picture-gallery. Go up!"

"What are you going to do to-morrow, Mother?"

"To-morrow? I go up to London with your aunt."

"I thought you might be. Will you get me a quite plain parasol?" "What colour?"

"Green. They're all going back, I suppose."

"Yes, all; you will console your father. Kiss me, then."

Fleur crossed the room, stooped, received a kiss on her forehead, and went out past the impress of a form on the sofa-cushions in the other corner. She ran up-stairs.

Fleur was by no means the old-fashioned daughter who demands the regulation of her parents' lives in accordance with the standard imposed upon herself. She claimed to regulate her own life, not those of others; besides, an unerring instinct for what was likely to advantage her own case was already at work. In a disturbed domestic atmosphere the heart she had set on Jon would have a better chance. None the less was she offended, as a flower by a crisping wind. If that man had really been kissing her mother it was—serious, and her father ought to know. "Demain!" "All right!" And her mother going up to Town! She turned into her bedroom and hung out of the window to cool her face, which had suddenly grown very hot. Jon must be at the station by now! What did her father know about Jon? Probably everything—pretty nearly!

She changed her dress, so as to look as if she had been in some time, and ran up to the gallery.

Soames was standing stubbornly still before his Alfred Stevens—the picture he loved best. He did not

turn at the sound of the door, but she knew he had heard, and she knew he was hurt. She came up softly behind him, put her arms round his neck, and poked her face over his shoulder till her cheek lay against his. It was an advance which had never yet failed, but it failed her now, and she augured the worst. "Well," he said stonily, "so you've come!"

"Is that all," murmured Fleur, "from a bad parent?" And she rubbed her cheek against his.

Soames shook his head so far as that was possible.

"Why do you keep me on tenterhooks like this, putting me off and off?"

"Darling, it was very harmless."

"Harmless! Much you know what's harmless and what isn't."

Fleur dropped her arms.

"Well, then, dear, suppose you tell me; and be quite frank about it."

And she went over to the window-seat.

Her father had turned from his picture, and was staring at his feet. He looked very grey. 'He has nice small feet,' she thought, catching his eye, at once averted from her.

"You're my only comfort," said Soames suddenly, "and you go on like this."

Fleur's heart began to beat.

"Like what, dear?"

Again Soames gave her a look which, but for the affection in it, might have been called furtive.

"You know what I told you," he said. "I don't choose to have anything to do with that branch of our family."

"Yes, ducky, but I don't know why I shouldn't."

Soames turned on his heel.

"I'm not going into the reasons," he said; "you ought to trust me, Fleur!"

The way he spoke those words affected Fleur, but she thought of Jon, and was silent, tapping her foot against the wainscot. Unconsciously she had assumed a modern attitude, with one leg twisted in and out of the other, with her chin on one bent wrist, her other arm across her chest, and its hand hugging her elbow; there was not a line of her that was not involuted, and yet—in spite of all—she retained a certain grace.

"You knew my wishes," Soames went on, "and yet you stayed on there four days. And I suppose that boy came with you to-day."

Fleur kept her eyes on him.

"I don't ask you anything," said Soames; "I make no inquisition where you're concerned."

Fleur suddenly stood up, leaning out at the window with her chin on her hands. The sun had sunk behind trees, the pigeons were perched, quite still, on the edge of the dove-cot; the click of the billiard-balls mounted, and a faint radiance shone out below where Jack Cardigan had turned the light up.

"Will it make you any happier," she said suddenly, "if I promise you not to see him for say—the next six weeks?" She was not prepared for a sort of tremble in the blankness of his voice.

"Six weeks? Six years—sixty years more like. Don't delude yourself, Fleur; don't delude yourself!"

Fleur turned in alarm.

"Father, what is it?"

Soames came close enough to see her face.

"Don't tell me," he said, "that you're foolish enough to have any feeling beyond caprice. That would be

too much!" And he laughed.

Fleur, who had never heard him laugh like that, thought: 'Then it is deep! Oh! what is it?' And putting her hand through his arm she said lightly:

"No, of course; caprice. Only, I like my caprices and I don't like yours, dear."

"Mine!" said Soames bitterly, and turned away.

The light outside had chilled, and threw a chalky whiteness on the river. The trees had lost all gaiety of colour. She felt a sudden hunger for Jon's face, for his hands, and the feel of his lips again on hers. And pressing her arms tight across her breast she forced out a little light laugh.

"O la! la! What a small fuss! as Profond would say. Father, I don't like that man."

She saw him stop, and take something out of his breast pocket.

"You don't?" he said. "Why?"

"Nothing," murmured Fleur; "just caprice!"

"No," said Soames; "not caprice!" And he tore what was in his hands across. "You're right. I don't like him either!"

"Look!" said Fleur softly. "There he goes! I hate his shoes; they don't make any noise."

Down in the failing light Prosper Profond moved, his hands in his side pockets, whistling softly in his beard; he stopped, and glanced up at the sky, as if saying: "I don't think much of that small moon."

Fleur drew back. "Isn't he a great cat?" she whispered; and the sharp click of the billiard-balls rose, as if Jack Cardigan had capped the cat, the moon, caprice, and tragedy with: "In off the red!"

Monsieur Profond had resumed his stroll, to a teasing little tune in his beard. What was it? Oh! yes, from "Rigoletto": "Donna a mobile." Just what he would think! She squeezed her father's arm.

"Prowling!" she muttered, as he turned the corner of the house. It was past that disillusioned moment which divides the day and night—still and lingering and warm, with hawthorn scent and lilac scent clinging on the riverside air. A blackbird suddenly burst out. Jon would be in London by now; in the Park perhaps, crossing the Serpentine, thinking of her! A little sound beside her made her turn her eyes; her father was again tearing the paper in his hands. Fleur saw it was a cheque.

"I shan't sell him my Gauguin," he said. "I don't know what your aunt and Imogen see in him."

"Or Mother."

"Your mother!" said Soames.

'Poor Father!' she thought. 'He never looks happy—not really happy. I don't want to make him worse, but of course I shall have to, when Jon comes back. Oh! well, sufficient unto the night!'

"I'm going to dress," she said.

In her room she had a fancy to put on her "freak" dress. It was of gold tissue with little trousers of the same, tightly drawn in at the ankles, a page's cape slung from the shoulders, little gold shoes, and a gold-winged Mercury helmet; and all over her were tiny gold bells, especially on the helmet; so that if she shook her head she pealed. When she was dressed she felt quite sick because Jon could not see her; it even seemed a pity that the sprightly young man Michael Mont would not have a view. But the gong had sounded, and she went down.

She made a sensation in the drawing-room. Winifred thought it "Most amusing." Imogen was enraptured. Jack Cardigan called it "stunning," "ripping," "topping," and "corking."

Monsieur Profond, smiling with his eyes, said: "That's a nice small dress!" Her mother, very handsome in black, sat looking at her, and said nothing. It remained for her father to apply the test of common sense. "What did you put on that thing for? You're not going to dance."

Fleur spun round, and the bells pealed.

"Caprice!"

Soames stared at her, and, turning away, gave his arm to Winifred. Jack Cardigan took her mother.

Prosper Profond took Imogen. Fleur went in by herself, with her bells jingling....

The "small" moon had soon dropped down, and May night had fallen soft and warm, enwrapping with its grape-bloom colour and its scents the billion caprices, intrigues, passions, longings, and regrets of men and women. Happy was Jack Cardigan who snored into Imogen's white shoulder, fit as a flea; or Timothy in his "mausoleum," too old for anything but baby's slumber. For so many lay awake, or dreamed, teased by the criss-cross of the world.

The dew fell and the flowers closed; cattle grazed on in the river meadows, feeling with their tongues for the grass they could not see; and the sheep on the Downs lay quiet as stones. Pheasants in the tall trees of the Pangbourne woods, larks on their grassy nests above the gravel-pit at Wansdon, swallows in the eaves at Robin Hill, and the sparrows of Mayfair, all made a dreamless night of it, soothed by the lack of wind. The Mayfly filly, hardly accustomed to her new quarters, scraped at her straw a little; and the few night-flitting things—bats, moths, owls—were vigorous in the warm darkness; but the peace of night lay in the brain of all day-time Nature, colourless and still. Men and women, alone, riding the hobby-horses of anxiety or love, burned their wavering tapers of dream and thought into the lonely hours.

Fleur, leaning out of her window, heard the hall clock's muffled chime of twelve, the tiny splash of a fish, the sudden shaking of an aspen's leaves in the puffs of breeze that rose along the river, the distant rumble of a night train, and time and again the sounds which none can put a name to in the darkness, soft obscure expressions of uncatalogued emotions from man and beast, bird and machine, or, maybe, from departed Forsytes, Darties, Cardigans, taking night strolls back into a world which had once suited their embodied spirits. But Fleur heeded not these sounds; her spirit, far from disembodied, fled with swift wing from railway-carriage to flowery hedge, straining after Jon, tenacious of his forbidden image, and the sound of his voice, which was taboo. And she crinkled her nose, retrieving from the perfume of the riverside night that moment when his hand slipped between the mayflowers and her cheek. Long she leaned out in her freak dress, keen to burn her wings at life's candle; while the moths brushed her cheeks on their pilgrimage to the lamp on her dressing-table, ignorant that in a Forsyte's house there is no open flame. But at last even she felt sleepy, and, forgetting her bells, drew quickly in.

Through the open window of his room, alongside Annette's, Soames, wakeful too, heard their thin faint tinkle, as it might be shaken from stars, or the dewdrops falling from a flower, if one could hear such sounds.

'Caprice!' he thought. 'I can't tell. She's wilful. What shall I do? Fleur!'

And long into the "small" night he brooded.

PART II I MOTHER AND SON

To say that Jon Forsyte accompanied his mother to Spain unwillingly would scarcely have been adequate. He went as a well-natured dog goes for a walk with its mistress, leaving a choice mutton-bone on the lawn. He went looking back at it. Forsytes deprived of their mutton-bones are wont to sulk. But Jon had little sulkiness in his composition. He adored his mother, and it was his first travel. Spain had become Italy by his simply saying: "I'd rather go to Spain, Mum; you've been to Italy so many times; I'd like it new to both of us."

The fellow was subtle besides being naive. He never forgot that he was going to shorten the proposed two months into six weeks, and must therefore show no sign of wishing to do so. For one with so enticing a mutton-bone and so fixed an idea, he made a good enough travelling companion, indifferent to where or when he arrived, superior to food, and thoroughly appreciative of a country strange to the most travelled Englishman. Fleur's wisdom in refusing to write to him was profound, for he reached each new place entirely without hope or fever, and could concentrate immediate attention on the donkeys and tumbling bells, the priests, patios, beggars, children, crowing cocks, sombreros, cactus-hedges, old high white villages, goats, olive-trees, greening plains, singing birds in tiny cages, watersellers, sunsets, melons, mules, great churches, pictures, and swimming grey-brown mountains of a fascinating land.

It was already hot, and they enjoyed an absence of their compatriots. Jon, who, so far as he knew, had no blood in him which was not English, was often innately unhappy in the presence of his own

countrymen. He felt they had no nonsense about them, and took a more practical view of things than himself. He confided to his mother that he must be an unsociable beast—it was jolly to be away from everybody who could talk about the things people did talk about. To which Irene had replied simply:

"Yes, Jon, I know."

In this isolation he had unparalleled opportunities of appreciating what few sons can apprehend, the whole-heartedness of a mother's love. Knowledge of something kept from her made him, no doubt, unduly sensitive; and a Southern people stimulated his admiration for her type of beauty, which he had been accustomed to hear called Spanish, but which he now perceived to be no such thing. Her beauty was neither English, French, Spanish, nor Italian—it was special! He appreciated, too, as never before, his mother's subtlety of instinct. He could not tell, for instance, whether she had noticed his absorption in that Goya picture, "La Vendimia," or whether she knew that he had slipped back there after lunch and again next morning, to stand before it full half an hour, a second and third time. It was not Fleur, of course, but like enough to give him heartache—so dear to lovers—remembering her standing at the foot of his bed with her hand held above her head. To keep a postcard reproduction of this picture in his pocket and slip it out to look at became for Jon one of those bad habits which soon or late disclose themselves to eyes sharpened by love, fear, or jealousy. And his mother's were sharpened by all three. In Granada he was fairly caught, sitting on a sun-warmed stone bench in a little battlemented garden on the Alhambra hill, whence he ought to have been looking at the view. His mother, he had thought, was examining the potted stocks between the polled acacias, when her voice said:

"Is that your favourite Goya, Jon?"

He checked, too late, a movement such as he might have made at school to conceal some surreptitious document, and answered: "Yes."

"It certainly is most charming; but I think I prefer the 'Quitaso!' Your father would go crazy about Goya; I don't believe he saw them when he was in Spain in '92."

In '92—nine years before he had been born! What had been the previous existences of his father and his mother? If they had a right to share in his future, surely he had a right to share in their pasts. He looked up at her. But something in her face—a look of life hard-lived, the mysterious impress of emotions, experience, and suffering—seemed, with its incalculable depth, its purchased sanctity, to make curiosity impertinent. His mother must have had a wonderfully interesting life; she was so beautiful, and so—so—but he could not frame what he felt about her. He got up, and stood gazing down at the town, at the plain all green with crops, and the ring of mountains glamorous in sinking sunlight. Her life was like the past of this old Moorish city, full, deep, remote—his own life as yet such a baby of a thing, hopelessly ignorant and innocent! They said that in those mountains to the West, which rose sheer from the blue-green plain, as if out of a sea, Phoenicians had dwelt—a dark, strange, secret race, above the land! His mother's life was as unknown to him, as secret, as that Phoenician past was to the town down there, whose cocks crowed and whose children played and clamoured so gaily, day in, day out. He felt aggrieved that she should know all about him and he nothing about her except that she loved him and his father, and was beautiful. His callow ignorance—he had not even had the advantage of the War, like nearly everybody else!—made him small in his own eyes.

That night, from the balcony of his bedroom, he gazed down on the roof of the town—as if inlaid with honeycomb of jet, ivory, and gold; and, long after, he lay awake, listening to the cry of the sentry as the hours struck, and forming in his head these lines:

"Voice in the night crying, down in the old sleeping
Spanish city darkened under her white stars!

"What says the voice-its clear-lingering anguish?
Just the watchman, telling his dateless tale of safety?
Just a road-man, flinging to the moon his song?

"No! 'Tis one deprived, whose lover's heart is weeping,
Just his cry: 'How long?'"

The word "deprived" seemed to him cold and unsatisfactory, but "bereaved" was too final, and no other word of two syllables short-long came to him, which would enable him to keep "whose lover's heart is weeping." It was past two by the time he had finished it, and past three before he went to sleep, having said it over to himself at least twenty-four times. Next day he wrote it out and enclosed it in one of those letters to Fleur which he always finished before he went down, so as to have his mind free and companionable.

About noon that same day, on the tiled terrace of their hotel, he felt a sudden dull pain in the back of

his head, a queer sensation in the eyes, and sickness. The sun had touched him too affectionately. The next three days were passed in semi-darkness, and a dulled, aching indifference to all except the feel of ice on his forehead and his mother's smile. She never moved from his room, never relaxed her noiseless vigilance, which seemed to Jon angelic. But there were moments when he was extremely sorry for himself, and wished terribly that Fleur could see him. Several times he took a poignant imaginary leave of her and of the earth, tears oozing out of his eyes. He even prepared the message he would send to her by his mother—who would regret to her dying day that she had ever sought to separate them—his poor mother! He was not slow, however, in perceiving that he had now his excuse for going home.

Toward half-past six each evening came a "gasgacha" of bells—a cascade of tumbling chimes, mounting from the city below and falling back chime on chime. After listening to them on the fourth day he said suddenly:

"I'd like to be back in England, Mum, the sun's too hot."

"Very well, darling. As soon as you're fit to travel" And at once he felt better, and—meaner.

They had been out five weeks when they turned toward home. Jon's head was restored to its pristine clarity, but he was confined to a hat lined by his mother with many layers of orange and green silk and he still walked from choice in the shade. As the long struggle of discretion between them drew to its close, he wondered more and more whether she could see his eagerness to get back to that which she had brought him away from. Condemned by Spanish Providence to spend a day in Madrid between their trains, it was but natural to go again to the Prado. Jon was elaborately casual this time before his Goya girl. Now that he was going back to her, he could afford a lesser scrutiny. It was his mother who lingered before the picture, saying:

"The face and the figure of the girl are exquisite."

Jon heard her uneasily. Did she understand? But he felt once more that he was no match for her in self-control and subtlety. She could, in some supersensitive way, of which he had not the secret, feel the pulse of his thoughts; she knew by instinct what he hoped and feared and wished. It made him terribly uncomfortable and guilty, having, beyond most boys, a conscience. He wished she would be frank with him, he almost hoped for an open struggle. But none came, and steadily, silently, they travelled north. Thus did he first learn how much better than men women play a waiting game. In Paris they had again to pause for a day. Jon was grieved because it lasted two, owing to certain matters in connection with a dressmaker; as if his mother, who looked beautiful in anything, had any need of dresses! The happiest moment of his travel was that when he stepped on to the Folkestone boat.

Standing by the bulwark rail, with her arm in his, she said

"I'm afraid you haven't enjoyed it much, Jon. But you've been very sweet to me."

Jon squeezed her arm.

"Oh I yes, I've enjoyed it awfully—except for my head lately."

And now that the end had come, he really had, feeling a sort of glamour over the past weeks—a kind of painful pleasure, such as he had tried to screw into those lines about the voice in the night crying; a feeling such as he had known as a small boy listening avidly to Chopin, yet wanting to cry. And he wondered why it was that he couldn't say to her quite simply what she had said to him:

"You were very sweet to me." Odd—one never could be nice and natural like that! He substituted the words: "I expect we shall be sick."

They were, and reached London somewhat attenuated, having been away six weeks and two days, without a single allusion to the subject which had hardly ever ceased to occupy their minds.

II

FATHERS AND DAUGHTERS

Deprived of his wife and son by the Spanish adventure, Jolyon found the solitude at Robin Hill intolerable. A philosopher when he has all that he wants is different from a philosopher when he has

not. Accustomed, however, to the idea, if not to the reality of resignation, he would perhaps have faced it out but for his daughter June. He was a "lame duck" now, and on her conscience. Having achieved—momentarily—the rescue of an etcher in low circumstances, which she happened to have in hand, she appeared at Robin Hill a fortnight after Irene and Jon had gone. June was living now in a tiny house with a big studio at Chiswick. A Forsythe of the best period, so far as the lack of responsibility was concerned, she had overcome the difficulty of a reduced income in a manner satisfactory to herself and her father. The rent of the Gallery off Cork Street which he had bought for her and her increased income tax happening to balance, it had been quite simple—she no longer paid him the rent. The Gallery might be expected now at any time, after eighteen years of barren usufruct, to pay its way, so that she was sure her father would not feel it. Through this device she still had twelve hundred a year, and by reducing what she ate, and, in place of two Belgians in a poor way, employing one Austrian in a poorer, practically the same surplus for the relief of genius. After three days at Robin Hill she carried her father back with her to Town. In those three days she had stumbled on the secret he had kept for two years, and had instantly decided to cure him. She knew, in fact, the very man. He had done wonders with Paul Post—that painter a little in advance of Futurism; and she was impatient with her father because his eyebrows would go up, and because he had heard of neither. Of course, if he hadn't "faith" he would never get well! It was absurd not to have faith in the man who had healed Paul Post so that he had only just relapsed, from having overworked, or overlived, himself again. The great thing about this healer was that he relied on Nature. He had made a special study of the symptoms of Nature—when his patient failed in any natural symptom he supplied the poison which caused it—and there you were! She was extremely hopeful. Her father had clearly not been living a natural life at Robin Hill, and she intended to provide the symptoms. He was—she felt—out of touch with the times, which was not natural; his heart wanted stimulating. In the little Chiswick house she and the Austrian—a grateful soul, so devoted to June for rescuing her that she was in danger of decease from overwork—stimulated Jolyon in all sorts of ways, preparing him for his cure. But they could not keep his eyebrows down; as, for example, when the Austrian woke him at eight o'clock just as he was going to sleep, or June took The Times away from him, because it was unnatural to read "that stuff" when he ought to be taking an interest in "life." He never failed, indeed, to be astonished at her resource, especially in the evenings. For his benefit, as she declared, though he suspected that she also got something out of it, she assembled the Age so far as it was satellite to genius; and with some solemnity it would move up and down the studio before him in the Fox-trot, and that more mental form of dancing—the One-step—which so pulled against the music, that Jolyon's eyebrows would be almost lost in his hair from wonder at the strain it must impose on the dancer's will-power. Aware that, hung on the line in the Water Colour Society, he was a back number to those with any pretension to be called artists, he would sit in the darkest corner he could find, and wonder about rhythm, on which so long ago he had been raised. And when June brought some girl or young man up to him, he would rise humbly to their level so far as that was possible, and think: 'Dear me! This is very dull for them!' Having his father's perennial sympathy with Youth, he used to get very tired from entering into their points of view. But it was all stimulating, and he never failed in admiration of his daughter's indomitable spirit. Even genius itself attended these gatherings now and then, with its nose on one side; and June always introduced it to her father. This, she felt, was exceptionally good for him, for genius was a natural symptom he had never had—fond as she was of him.

Certain as a man can be that she was his own daughter, he often wondered whence she got herself—her red-gold hair, now greyed into a special colour; her direct, spirited face, so different from his own rather folded and subtilised countenance, her little lithe figure, when he and most of the Forsytes were tall. And he would dwell on the origin of species, and debate whether she might be Danish or Celtic. Celtic, he thought, from her pugnacity, and her taste in fillets and djibbahs. It was not too much to say that he preferred her to the Age with which she was surrounded, youthful though, for the greater part, it was. She took, however, too much interest in his teeth, for he still had some of those natural symptoms. Her dentist at once found "Staphylococcus aureus present in pure culture" (which might cause boils, of course), and wanted to take out all the teeth he had and supply him with two complete sets of unnatural symptoms. Jolyon's native tenacity was roused, and in the studio that evening he developed his objections. He had never had any boils, and his own teeth would last his time. Of course—June admitted—they would last his time if he didn't have them out! But if he had more teeth he would have a better heart and his time would be longer. His recalcitrance—she said—was a symptom of his whole attitude; he was taking it lying down. He ought to be fighting. When was he going to see the man who had cured Paul Post? Jolyon was very sorry, but the fact was he was not going to see him. June chafed. Pondridge—she said—the healer, was such a fine man, and he had such difficulty in making two ends meet, and getting his theories recognised. It was just such indifference and prejudice as her father manifested which was keeping him back. It would be so splendid for both of them!

"I perceive," said Jolyon, "that you are trying to kill two birds with one stone."

"To cure, you mean!" cried June.

"My dear, it's the same thing."

June protested. It was unfair to say that without a trial.

Jolyon thought he might not have the chance, of saying it after.

"Dad!" cried June, "you're hopeless."

"That," said Jolyon, "is a fact, but I wish to remain hopeless as long as possible. I shall let sleeping dogs lie, my child. They are quiet at present."

"That's not giving science a chance," cried June. "You've no idea how devoted Pondridge is. He puts his science before everything."

"Just," replied Jolyon, puffing the mild cigarette to which he was reduced, "as Mr. Paul Post puts his art, eh? Art for Art's sake —Science for the sake of Science. I know those enthusiastic egomaniac gentry. They vivisect you without blinking. I'm enough of a Forsyte to give them the go-by, June."

"Dad," said June, "if you only knew how old-fashioned that sounds! Nobody can afford to be half-hearted nowadays."

"I'm afraid," murmured Jolyon, with his smile, "that's the only natural symptom with which Mr. Pondridge need not supply me. We are born to be extreme or to be moderate, my dear; though, if you'll forgive my saying so, half the people nowadays who believe they're extreme are really very moderate. I'm getting on as well as I can expect, and I must leave it at that."

June was silent, having experienced in her time the inexorable character of her father's amiable obstinacy so far as his own freedom of action was concerned.

How he came to let her know why Irene had taken Jon to Spain puzzled Jolyon, for he had little confidence in her discretion. After she had brooded on the news, it brought a rather sharp discussion, during which he perceived to the full the fundamental opposition between her active temperament and his wife's passivity. He even gathered that a little soreness still remained from that generation-old struggle between them over the body of Philip Bosinney, in which the passive had so signally triumphed over the active principle.

According to June, it was foolish and even cowardly to hide the past from Jon. Sheer opportunism, she called it.

"Which," Jolyon put in mildly, "is the working principle of real life, my dear."

"Oh!" cried June, "you don't really defend her for not telling Jon, Dad. If it were left to you, you would."

"I might, but simply because I know he must find out, which will be worse than if we told him."

"Then why don't you tell him? It's just sleeping dogs again."

"My dear," said Jolyon, "I wouldn't for the world go against Irene's instinct. He's her boy."

"Yours too," cried June.

"What is a man's instinct compared with a mother's?"

"Well, I think it's very weak of you."

"I dare say," said Jolyon, "I dare say."

And that was all she got from him; but the matter rankled in her brain. She could not bear sleeping dogs. And there stirred in her a tortuous impulse to push the matter toward decision. Jon ought to be told, so that either his feeling might be nipped in the bud, or, flowering in spite of the past, come to fruition. And she determined to see Fleur, and judge for herself. When June determined on anything, delicacy became a somewhat minor consideration. After all, she was Soames' cousin, and they were both interested in pictures. She would go and tell him that he ought to buy a Paul Post, or perhaps a piece of sculpture by Boris Strumolowski, and of course she would say nothing to her father. She went on the following Sunday, looking so determined that she had some difficulty in getting a cab at Reading station. The river country was lovely in those days of her own month, and June ached at its loveliness. She who had passed through this life without knowing what union was had a love of natural beauty which was almost madness. And when she came to that choice spot where Soames had pitched his tent, she dismissed her cab, because, business over, she wanted to revel in the bright water and the woods.

She appeared at his front door, therefore, as a mere pedestrian, and sent in her card. It was in June's character to know that when her nerves were fluttering she was doing something worth while. If one's nerves did not flutter, she was taking the line of least resistance, and knew that nobleness was not obliging her. She was conducted to a drawing-room, which, though not in her style, showed every mark of fastidious elegance. Thinking, 'Too much taste—too many knick-knacks,' she saw in an old lacquer-framed mirror the figure of a girl coming in from the verandah. Clothed in white, and holding some white roses in her hand, she had, reflected in that silvery-grey pool of glass, a vision-like appearance, as if a pretty ghost had come out of the green garden.

"How do you do?" said June, turning round. "I'm a cousin of your father's."

"Oh, yes; I saw you in that confectioner's."

"With my young stepbrother. Is your father in?"

"He will be directly. He's only gone for a little walk."

June slightly narrowed her blue eyes, and lifted her decided chin.

"Your name's Fleur, isn't it? I've heard of you from Holly. What do you think of Jon?"

The girl lifted the roses in her hand, looked at them, and answered calmly:

"He's quite a nice boy."

"Not a bit like Holly or me, is he?"

"Not a bit."

'She's cool,' thought June.

And suddenly the girl said: "I wish you'd tell me why our families don't get on?"

Confronted with the question she had advised her father to answer, June was silent; whether because this girl was trying to get something out of her, or simply because what one would do theoretically is not always what one will do when it comes to the point.

"You know," said the girl, "the surest way to make people find out the worst is to keep them ignorant. My father's told me it was a quarrel about property. But I don't believe it; we've both got heaps. They wouldn't have been so bourgeois as all that."

June flushed. The word applied to her grandfather and father offended her.

"My grandfather," she said, "was very generous, and my father is, too; neither of them was in the least bourgeois."

"Well, what was it then?" repeated the girl: Conscious that this young Forsyte meant having what she wanted, June at once determined to prevent her, and to get something for herself instead.

"Why do you want to know?"

The girl smelled at her roses. "I only want to know because they won't tell me."

"Well, it was about property, but there's more than one kind."

"That makes it worse. Now I really must know."

June's small and resolute face quivered. She was wearing a round cap, and her hair had fluffed out under it. She looked quite young at that moment, rejuvenated by encounter.

"You know," she said, "I saw you drop your handkerchief. Is there anything between you and Jon? Because, if so, you'd better drop that too."

The girl grew paler, but she smiled.

"If there were, that isn't the way to make me."

At the gallantry of that reply, June held out her hand.

"I like you; but I don't like your father; I never have. We may as well be frank."

"Did you come down to tell him that?"

June laughed. "No; I came down to see you."

"How delightful of you."

This girl could fence.

"I'm two and a half times your age," said June, "but I quite sympathize. It's horrid not to have one's own way."

The girl smiled again. "I really think you might tell me."

How the child stuck to her point

"It's not my secret. But I'll see what I can do, because I think both you and Jon ought to be told. And now I'll say good-bye."

"Won't you wait and see Father?"

June shook her head. "How can I get over to the other side?"

"I'll row you across."

"Look!" said June impulsively, "next time you're in London, come and see me. This is where I live. I generally have young people in the evening. But I shouldn't tell your father that you're coming."

The girl nodded.

Watching her scull the skiff across, June thought: 'She's awfully pretty and well made. I never thought Soames would have a daughter as pretty as this. She and Jon would make a lovely couple.

The instinct to couple, starved within herself, was always at work in June. She stood watching Fleur row back; the girl took her hand off a scull to wave farewell, and June walked languidly on between the meadows and the river, with an ache in her heart. Youth to youth, like the dragon-flies chasing each other, and love like the sun warming them through and through. Her youth! So long ago—when Phil and she—And since? Nothing—no one had been quite what she had wanted. And so she had missed it all. But what a coil was round those two young things, if they really were in love, as Holly would have it—as her father, and Irene, and Soames himself seemed to dread. What a coil, and what a barrier! And the itch for the future, the contempt, as it were, for what was overpast, which forms the active principle, moved in the heart of one who ever believed that what one wanted was more important than what other people did not want. From the bank, awhile, in the warm summer stillness, she watched the water-lily plants and willow leaves, the fishes rising; sniffed the scent of grass and meadow-sweet, wondering how she could force everybody to be happy. Jon and Fleur! Two little lame ducks—charming callow yellow little ducks! A great pity! Surely something could be done! One must not take such situations lying down. She walked on, and reached a station, hot and cross.

That evening, faithful to the impulse toward direct action, which made many people avoid her, she said to her father:

"Dad, I've been down to see young Fleur. I think she's very attractive. It's no good hiding our heads under our wings, is it?"

The startled Jolyon set down his barley-water, and began crumbling his bread.

"It's what you appear to be doing," he said. "Do you realise whose daughter she is?"

"Can't the dead past bury its dead?"

Jolyon rose.

"Certain things can never be buried."

"I disagree," said June. "It's that which stands in the way of all happiness and progress. You don't understand the Age, Dad. It's got no use for outgrown things. Why do you think it matters so terribly that Jon should know about his mother? Who pays any attention to that sort of thing now? The marriage laws are just as they were when Soames and Irene couldn't get a divorce, and you had to come in. We've moved, and they haven't. So nobody cares. Marriage without a decent chance of relief is only a sort of slave-owning; people oughtn't to own each other. Everybody sees that now. If Irene broke such laws, what does it matter?"

"It's not for me to disagree there," said Jolyon; "but that's all quite beside the mark. This is a matter

of human feeling."

"Of course it is," cried June, "the human feeling of those two young things."

"My dear," said Jolyon with gentle exasperation; "you're talking nonsense."

"I'm not. If they prove to be really fond of each other, why should they be made unhappy because of the past?"

"You haven't lived that past. I have—through the feelings of my wife; through my own nerves and my imagination, as only one who is devoted can."

June, too, rose, and began to wander restlessly.

"If," she said suddenly, "she were the daughter of Philip Bosinney, I could understand you better. Irene loved him, she never loved Soames."

Jolyon uttered a deep sound—the sort of noise an Italian peasant woman utters to her mule. His heart had begun beating furiously, but he paid no attention to it, quite carried away by his feelings.

"That shows how little you understand. Neither I nor Jon, if I know him, would mind a love-past. It's the brutality of a union without love. This girl is the daughter of the man who once owned Jon's mother as a negro-slave was owned. You can't lay that ghost; don't try to, June! It's asking us to see Jon joined to the flesh and blood of the man who possessed Jon's mother against her will. It's no good mincing words; I want it clear once for all. And now I mustn't talk any more, or I shall have to sit up with this all night." And, putting his hand over his heart, Jolyon turned his back on his daughter and stood looking at the river Thames.

June, who by nature never saw a hornet's nest until she had put her head into it, was seriously alarmed. She came and slipped her arm through his. Not convinced that he was right, and she herself wrong, because that was not natural to her, she was yet profoundly impressed by the obvious fact that the subject was very bad for him. She rubbed her cheek against his shoulder, and said nothing.

After taking her elderly cousin across, Fleur did not land at once, but pulled in among the reeds, into the sunshine. The peaceful beauty of the afternoon seduced for a little one not much given to the vague and poetic. In the field beyond the bank where her skiff lay up, a machine drawn by a grey horse was turning an early field of hay. She watched the grass cascading over and behind the light wheels with fascination—it looked so cool and fresh. The click and swish blended with the rustle of the willows and the poplars, and the cooing of a wood-pigeon, in a true river song. Alongside, in the deep green water, weeds, like yellow snakes, were writhing and nosing with the current; pied cattle on the farther side stood in the shade lazily swishing their tails. It was an afternoon to dream. And she took out Jon's letters—not flowery effusions, but haunted in their recital of things seen and done by a longing very agreeable to her, and all ending "Your devoted J." Fleur was not sentimental, her desires were ever concrete and concentrated, but what poetry there was in the daughter of Soames and Annette had certainly in those weeks of waiting gathered round her memories of Jon. They all belonged to grass and blossom, flowers and running water. She enjoyed him in the scents absorbed by her crinkling nose. The stars could persuade her that she was standing beside him in the centre of the map of Spain; and of an early morning the dewy cobwebs, the hazy sparkle and promise of the day down in the garden, were Jon personified to her.

Two white swans came majestically by, while she was reading his letters, followed by their brood of six young swans in a line, with just so much water between each tail and head, a flotilla of grey destroyers. Fleur thrust her letters back, got out her sculls, and pulled up to the landing-stage. Crossing the lawn, she wondered whether she should tell her father of June's visit. If he learned of it from the butler, he might think it odd if she did not. It gave her, too, another chance to startle out of him the reason of the feud. She went, therefore, up the road to meet him.

Soames had gone to look at a patch of ground on which the Local Authorities were proposing to erect a Sanatorium for people with weak lungs. Faithful to his native individualism, he took no part in local affairs, content to pay the rates which were always going up. He could not, however, remain indifferent to this new and dangerous scheme. The site was not half a mile from his own house. He was quite of opinion that the country should stamp out tuberculosis; but this was not the place. It should be done farther away. He took, indeed, an attitude common to all true Forsytes, that disability of any sort in other people was not his affair, and the State should do its business without prejudicing in any way the natural advantages which he had acquired or inherited. Francie, the most free-spirited Forsyte of his generation (except perhaps that fellow Jolyon) had once asked him in her malicious way: "Did you ever see the name Forsyte in a subscription list, Soames?" That was as it might be, but a Sanatorium would depreciate the neighbourhood, and he should certainly sign the petition which was being got up against

it. Returning with this decision fresh within him, he saw Fleur coming.

She was showing him more affection of late, and the quiet time down here with her in this summer weather had been making him feel quite young; Annette was always running up to Town for one thing or another, so that he had Fleur to himself almost as much as he could wish. To be sure, young Mont had formed a habit of appearing on his motor-cycle almost every other day. Thank goodness, the young fellow had shaved off his half-toothbrushes, and no longer looked like a mountebank! With a girl friend of Fleur's who was staying in the house, and a neighbouring youth or so, they made two couples after dinner, in the hall, to the music of the electric pianola, which performed Fox-trots unassisted, with a surprised shine on its expressive surface. Annette, even, now and then passed gracefully up and down in the arms of one or other of the young men. And Soames, coming to the drawing-room door, would lift his nose a little sideways, and watch them, waiting to catch a smile from Fleur; then move back to his chair by the drawing-room hearth, to peruse *The Times* or some other collector's price list. To his ever-anxious eyes Fleur showed no signs of remembering that caprice of hers.

When she reached him on the dusty road, he slipped his hand within her arm.

"Who, do you think, has been to see you, Dad? She couldn't wait! Guess!"

"I never guess," said Soames uneasily. "Who?"

"Your cousin, June Forsyte."

Quite unconsciously Soames gripped her arm. "What did she want?"

"I don't know. But it was rather breaking through the feud, wasn't it?"

"Feud? What feud?"

"The one that exists in your imagination, dear."

Soames dropped her arm. Was she mocking, or trying to draw him on?

"I suppose she wanted me to buy a picture," he said at last.

"I don't think so. Perhaps it was just family affection."

"She's only a first cousin once removed," muttered Soames.

"And the daughter of your enemy."

"What d'you mean by that?"

"I beg your pardon, dear; I thought he was."

"Enemy!" repeated Soames. "It's ancient history. I don't know where you get your notions."

"From June Forsyte."

It had come to her as an inspiration that if he thought she knew, or were on the edge of knowledge, he would tell her.

Soames was startled, but she had underrated his caution and tenacity.

"If you know," he said coldly, "why do you plague me?"

Fleur saw that she had overreached herself.

"I don't want to plague you, darling. As you say, why want to know more? Why want to know anything of that 'small' mystery—*Je m'en fiche*, as *Profond* says?"

"That chap!" said Soames profoundly.

That chap, indeed, played a considerable, if invisible, part this summer—for he had not turned up again. Ever since the Sunday when Fleur had drawn attention to him prowling on the lawn, Soames had thought of him a good deal, and always in connection with Annette, for no reason, except that she was looking handsomer than for some time past. His possessive instinct, subtle, less formal, more elastic since the War, kept all misgiving underground. As one looks on some American river, quiet and pleasant, knowing that an alligator perhaps is lying in the mud with his snout just raised and indistinguishable from a snag of wood—so Soames looked on the river of his own existence,

subconscious of Monsieur Profond, refusing to see more than the suspicion of his snout. He had at this epoch in his life practically all he wanted, and was as nearly happy as his nature would permit. His senses were at rest; his affections found all the vent they needed in his daughter; his collection was well known, his money well invested; his health excellent, save for a touch of liver now and again; he had not yet begun to worry seriously about what would happen after death, inclining to think that nothing would happen. He resembled one of his own gilt-edged securities, and to knock the gilt off by seeing anything he could avoid seeing would be, he felt instinctively, perverse and retrogressive. Those two crumpled rose-leaves, Fleur's caprice and Monsieur Profond's snout, would level away if he lay on them industriously.

That evening Chance, which visits the lives of even the best-invested Forsytes, put a clue into Fleur's hands. Her father came down to dinner without a handkerchief, and had occasion to blow his nose.

"I'll get you one, dear," she had said, and ran upstairs. In the sachet where she sought for it—an old sachet of very faded silk—there were two compartments: one held handkerchiefs; the other was buttoned, and contained something flat and hard. By some childish impulse Fleur unbuttoned it. There was a frame and in it a photograph of herself as a little girl. She gazed at it, fascinated, as one is by one's own presentment. It slipped under her fidgeting thumb, and she saw that another photograph was behind. She pressed her own down further, and perceived a face, which she seemed to know, of a young woman, very good-looking, in a very old style of evening dress. Slipping her own photograph up over it again, she took out a handkerchief and went down. Only on the stairs did she identify that face. Surely—surely Jon's mother! The conviction came as a shock. And she stood still in a flurry of thought. Why, of course! Jon's father had married the woman her father had wanted to marry, had cheated him out of her, perhaps. Then, afraid of showing by her manner that she had lighted on his secret, she refused to think further, and, shaking out the silk handkerchief, entered the dining-room.

"I chose the softest, Father."

"H'm!" said Soames; "I only use those after a cold. Never mind!"

That evening passed for Fleur in putting two and two together; recalling the look on her father's face in the confectioner's shop—a look strange and coldly intimate, a queer look. He must have loved that woman very much to have kept her photograph all this time, in spite of having lost her. Unsparing and matter-of-fact, her mind darted to his relations with her own mother. Had he ever really loved her? She thought not. Jon was the son of the woman he had really loved. Surely, then, he ought not to mind his daughter loving him; it only wanted getting used to. And a sigh of sheer relief was caught in the folds of her nightgown slipping over her head.

III

MEETINGS

Youth only recognises Age by fits and starts. Jon, for one, had never really seen his father's age till he came back from Spain. The face of the fourth Jolyon, worn by waiting, gave him quite a shock—it looked so wan and old. His father's mask had been forced awry by the emotion of the meeting, so that the boy suddenly realised how much he must have felt their absence. He summoned to his aid the thought: 'Well, I didn't want to go!' It was out of date for Youth to defer to Age. But Jon was by no means typically modern. His father had always been "so jolly" to him, and to feel that one meant to begin again at once the conduct which his father had suffered six weeks' loneliness to cure was not agreeable.

At the question, "Well, old man, how did the great Goya strike you?" his conscience pricked him badly. The great Goya only existed because he had created a face which resembled Fleur's.

On the night of their return, he went to bed full of compunction; but awoke full of anticipation. It was only the fifth of July, and no meeting was fixed with Fleur until the ninth. He was to have three days at home before going back to farm. Somehow he must contrive to see her!

In the lives of men an inexorable rhythm, caused by the need for trousers, not even the fondest parents can deny. On the second day, therefore, Jon went to Town, and having satisfied his conscience by ordering what was indispensable in Conduit Street, turned his face toward Piccadilly. Stratton Street, where her Club was, adjoined Devonshire House. It would be the merest chance that she should

be at her Club. But he dawdled down Bond Street with a beating heart, noticing the superiority of all other young men to himself. They wore their clothes with such an air; they had assurance; they were old. He was suddenly overwhelmed by the conviction that Fleur must have forgotten him. Absorbed in his own feeling for her all these weeks, he had mislaid that possibility. The corners of his mouth drooped, his hands felt clammy. Fleur with the pick of youth at the beck of her smile—Fleur incomparable! It was an evil moment. Jon, however, had a great idea that one must be able to face anything. And he braced himself with that dour refection in front of a bric-a-brac shop. At this high-water mark of what was once the London season, there was nothing to mark it out from any other except a grey top hat or two, and the sun. Jon moved on, and turning the corner into Piccadilly, ran into Val Dartie moving toward the Iseeum Club, to which he had just been elected.

"Hallo! young man! Where are you off to?"

Jon gushed. "I've just been to my tailor's."

Val looked him up and down. "That's good! I'm going in here to order some cigarettes; then come and have some lunch."

Jon thanked him. He might get news of her from Val!

The condition of England, that nightmare of its Press and Public men, was seen in different perspective within the tobacconist's which they now entered.

"Yes, sir; precisely the cigarette I used to supply your father with. Bless me! Mr. Montague Dartie was a customer here from—let me see—the year Melton won the Derby. One of my very best customers he was." A faint smile illumined the tobacconist's face. "Many's the tip he's given me, to be sure! I suppose he took a couple of hundred of these every week, year in, year out, and never changed his cigarette. Very affable gentleman, brought me a lot of custom. I was sorry he met with that accident. One misses an old customer like him."

Val smiled. His father's decease had closed an account which had been running longer, probably, than any other; and in a ring of smoke puffed out from that time-honoured cigarette he seemed to see again his father's face, dark, good-looking, moustachioed, a little puffy, in the only halo it had earned. His father had his fame here, anyway—a man who smoked two hundred cigarettes a week, who could give tips, and run accounts for ever! To his tobacconist a hero! Even that was some distinction to inherit!

"I pay cash," he said; "how much?"

"To his son, sir, and cash—ten and six. I shall never forget Mr. Montague Dartie. I've known him stand talkin' to me half an hour. We don't get many like him now, with everybody in such a hurry. The War was bad for manners, sir—it was bad for manners. You were in it, I see."

"No," said Val, tapping his knee, "I got this in the war before. Saved my life, I expect. Do you want any cigarettes, Jon?"

Rather ashamed, Jon murmured, "I don't smoke, you know," and saw the tobacconist's lips twisted, as if uncertain whether to say "Good God!" or "Now's your chance, sir!"

"That's right," said Val; "keep off it while you can. You'll want it when you take a knock. This is really the same tobacco, then?"

"Identical, sir; a little dearer, that's all. Wonderful staying power—the British Empire, I always say."

"Send me down a hundred a week to this address, and invoice it monthly. Come on, Jon."

Jon entered the Iseeum with curiosity. Except to lunch now and then at the Hotch-Potch with his father, he had never been in a London Club. The Iseeum, comfortable and unpretentious, did not move, could not, so long as George Forsyte sat on its Committee, where his culinary acumen was almost the controlling force. The Club had made a stand against the newly rich, and it had taken all George Forsyte's prestige, and praise of him as a "good sportsman," to bring in Prosper Profond.

The two were lunching together when the half-brothers-in-law entered the dining-room, and attracted by George's forefinger, sat down at their table, Val with his shrewd eyes and charming smile, Jon with solemn lips and an attractive shyness in his glance. There was an air of privilege around that corner table, as though past masters were eating there. Jon was fascinated by the hypnotic atmosphere. The waiter, lean in the chaps, pervaded with such free-masonical deference. He seemed to hang on George Forsyte's lips, to watch the gloat in his eye with a kind of sympathy, to follow the movements of the

heavy club-marked silver fondly. His liveried arm and confidential voice alarmed Jon, they came so secretly over his shoulder.

Except for George's "Your grandfather tipped me once; he was a deuced good judge of a cigar!" neither he nor the other past master took any notice of him, and he was grateful for this. The talk was all about the breeding, points, and prices of horses, and he listened to it vaguely at first, wondering how it was possible to retain so much knowledge in a head. He could not take his eyes off the dark past master—what he said was so deliberate and discouraging—such heavy, queer, smiled-out words. Jon was thinking of butterflies, when he heard him say:

"I want to see Mr. Soames Forsyde take an interest in 'orses."

"Old Soames! He's too dry a file!"

With all his might Jon tried not to grow red, while the dark past master went on.

"His daughter's an attractive small girl. Mr. Soames Forsyde is a bit old-fashioned. I want to see him have a pleasure some day." George Forsyde grinned.

"Don't you worry; he's not so miserable as he looks. He'll never show he's enjoying anything—they might try and take it from him. Old Soames! Once bit, twice shy!"

"Well, Jon," said Val, hastily, "if you've finished, we'll go and have coffee."

"Who were those?" Jon asked, on the stairs. "I didn't quite—"

"Old George Forsyde is a first cousin of your father's and of my Uncle Soames. He's always been here. The other chap, Profond, is a queer fish. I think he's hanging round Soames' wife, if you ask me!"

Jon looked at him, startled. "But that's awful," he said: "I mean—for Fleur."

"Don't suppose Fleur cares very much; she's very up-to-date."

"Her mother!"

"You're very green, Jon."

Jon grew red. "Mothers," he stammered angrily, "are different."

"You're right," said Val suddenly; "but things aren't what they were when I was your age. There's a 'To-morrow we die' feeling. That's what old George meant about my Uncle Soames. He doesn't mean to die to-morrow."

Jon said, quickly: "What's the matter between him and my father?"

"Stable secret, Jon. Take my advice, and bottle up. You'll do no good by knowing. Have a liqueur?"

Jon shook his head.

"I hate the way people keep things from one," he muttered, "and then sneer at one for being green."

"Well, you can ask Holly. If she won't tell you, you'll believe it's for your own good, I suppose."

Jon got up. "I must go now; thanks awfully for the lunch."

Val smiled up at him half-sorry, and yet amused. The boy looked so upset.

"All right! See you on Friday."

"I don't know," murmured Jon.

And he did not. This conspiracy of silence made him desperate. It was humiliating to be treated like a child! He retraced his moody steps to Stratton Street. But he would go to her Club now, and find out the worst! To his enquiry the reply was that Miss Forsyde was not in the Club. She might be in perhaps later. She was often in on Monday—they could not say. Jon said he would call again, and, crossing into the Green Park, flung himself down under a tree. The sun was bright, and a breeze fluttered the leaves of the young lime-tree beneath which he lay; but his heart ached. Such darkness seemed gathered round his happiness. He heard Big Ben chime "Three" above the traffic. The sound moved something in him, and, taking out a piece of paper, he began to scribble on it with a pencil. He had jotted a stanza, and was searching the grass for another verse, when something hard touched his shoulder—a green

parasol. There above him stood Fleur!

"They told me you'd been, and were coming back. So I thought you might be out here; and you are—it's rather wonderful!"

"Oh, Fleur! I thought you'd have forgotten me."

"When I told you that I shouldn't!"

Jon seized her arm.

"It's too much luck! Let's get away from this side." He almost dragged her on through that too thoughtfully regulated Park, to find some cover where they could sit and hold each other's hands.

"Hasn't anybody cut in?" he said, gazing round at her lashes, in suspense above her cheeks.

"There is a young idiot, but he doesn't count."

Jon felt a twitch of compassion for the-young idiot.

"You know I've had sunstroke; I didn't tell you."

"Really! Was it interesting?"

"No. Mother was an angel. Has anything happened to you?"

"Nothing. Except that I think I've found out what's wrong between our families, Jon."

His heart began beating very fast.

"I believe my father wanted to marry your mother, and your father got her instead."

"Oh!"

"I came on a photo of her; it was in a frame behind a photo of me. Of course, if he was very fond of her, that would have made him pretty mad, wouldn't it?"

Jon thought for a minute. "Not if she loved my father best."

"But suppose they were engaged?"

"If we were engaged, and you found you loved somebody better, I might go cracked, but I shouldn't grudge it you."

"I should. You mustn't ever do that with me, Jon.

"My God! Not much!"

"I don't believe that he's ever really cared for my mother."

Jon was silent. Val's words—the two past masters in the Club!

"You see, we don't know," went on Fleur; "it may have been a great shock. She may have behaved badly to him. People do."

"My mother wouldn't."

Fleur shrugged her shoulders. "I don't think we know much about our fathers and mothers. We just see them in the light of the way they treat us; but they've treated other people, you know, before we were born-plenty, I expect. You see, they're both old. Look at your father, with three separate families!"

"Isn't there any place," cried Jon, "in all this beastly London where we can be alone?"

"Only a taxi."

"Let's get one, then."

When they were installed, Fleur asked suddenly: "Are you going back to Robin Hill? I should like to see where you live, Jon. I'm staying with my aunt for the night, but I could get back in time for dinner. I wouldn't come to the house, of course."

Jon gazed at her enraptured.

"Splendid! I can show it you from the copse, we shan't meet anybody. There's a train at four."

The god of property and his Forsytes great and small, leisured, official, commercial, or professional, like the working classes, still worked their seven hours a day, so that those two of the fourth generation travelled down to Robin Hill in an empty first-class carriage, dusty and sun-warmed, of that too early train. They travelled in blissful silence, holding each other's hands.

At the station they saw no one except porters, and a villager or two unknown to Jon, and walked out up the lane, which smelled of dust and honeysuckle.

For Jon—sure of her now, and without separation before him—it was a miraculous dawdle, more wonderful than those on the Downs, or along the river Thames. It was love-in-a-mist—one of those illumined pages of Life, where every word and smile, and every light touch they gave each other were as little gold and red and blue butterflies and flowers and birds scrolled in among the text—a happy communing, without afterthought, which lasted thirty-seven minutes. They reached the coppice at the milking hour. Jon would not take her as far as the farmyard; only to where she could see the field leading up to the gardens, and the house beyond. They turned in among the larches, and suddenly, at the winding of the path, came on Irene, sitting on an old log seat.

There are various kinds of shocks: to the vertebrae; to the nerves; to moral sensibility; and, more potent and permanent, to personal dignity. This last was the shock Jon received, coming thus on his mother. He became suddenly conscious that he was doing an indelicate thing. To have brought Fleur down openly—yes! But to sneak her in like this! Consumed with shame, he put on a front as brazen as his nature would permit.

Fleur was smiling, a little defiantly; his mother's startled face was changing quickly to the impersonal and gracious. It was she who uttered the first words:

"I'm very glad to see you. It was nice of Jon to think of bringing you down to us."

"We weren't coming to the house," Jon blurted out. "I just wanted Fleur to see where I lived."

His mother said quietly:

"Won't you come up and have tea?"

Feeling that he had but aggravated his breach of breeding, he heard Fleur answer:

"Thanks very much; I have to get back to dinner. I met Jon by accident, and we thought it would be rather jolly just to see his home."

How self-possessed she was!

"Of course; but you must have tea. We'll send you down to the station. My husband will enjoy seeing you."

The expression of his mother's eyes, resting on him for a moment, cast Jon down level with the ground—a true worm. Then she led on, and Fleur followed her. He felt like a child, trailing after those two, who were talking so easily about Spain and Wansdon, and the house up there beyond the trees and the grassy slope. He watched the fencing of their eyes, taking each other in—the two beings he loved most in the world.

He could see his father sitting under the oaktree; and suffered in advance all the loss of caste he must go through in the eyes of that tranquil figure, with his knees crossed, thin, old, and elegant; already he could feel the faint irony which would come into his voice and smile.

"This is Fleur Forsyte, Jolyon; Jon brought her down to see the house. Let's have tea at once—she has to catch a train. Jon, tell them, dear, and telephone to the Dragon for a car."

To leave her alone with them was strange, and yet, as no doubt his mother had foreseen, the least of evils at the moment; so he ran up into the house. Now he would not see Fleur alone again—not for a minute, and they had arranged no further meeting! When he returned under cover of the maids and teapots, there was not a trace of awkwardness beneath the tree; it was all within himself, but not the less for that. They were talking of the Gallery off Cork Street.

"We back numbers," his father was saying, "are awfully anxious to find out why we can't appreciate the new stuff; you and Jon must tell us."

"It's supposed to be satiric, isn't it?" said Fleur.

He saw his father's smile.

"Satiric? Oh! I think it's more than that. What do you say, Jon?"

"I don't know at all," stammered Jon. His father's face had a sudden grimness.

"The young are tired of us, our gods and our ideals. Off with their heads, they say—smash their idols! And let's get back to-nothing! And, by Jove, they've done it! Jon's a poet. He'll be going in, too, and stamping on what's left of us. Property, beauty, sentiment—all smoke. We mustn't own anything nowadays, not even our feelings. They stand in the way of—Nothing."

Jon listened, bewildered, almost outraged by his father's words, behind which he felt a meaning that he could not reach. He didn't want to stamp on anything!

"Nothing's the god of to-day," continued Jolyon; "we're back where the Russians were sixty years ago, when they started Nihilism."

"No, Dad," cried Jon suddenly, "we only want to live, and we don't know how, because of the Past—that's all!"

"By George!" said Jolyon, "that's profound, Jon. Is it your own? The Past! Old ownerships, old passions, and their aftermath. Let's have cigarettes."

Conscious that his mother had lifted her hand to her lips, quickly, as if to hush something, Jon handed the cigarettes. He lighted his father's and Fleur's, then one for himself. Had he taken the knock that Val had spoken of? The smoke was blue when he had not puffed, grey when he had; he liked the sensation in his nose, and the sense of equality it gave him. He was glad no one said: "So you've begun!" He felt less young.

Fleur looked at her watch, and rose. His mother went with her into the house. Jon stayed with his father, puffing at the cigarette.

"See her into the car, old man," said Jolyon; "and when she's gone, ask your mother to come back to me."

Jon went. He waited in the hall. He saw her into the car. There was no chance for any word; hardly for a pressure of the hand. He waited all that evening for something to be said to him. Nothing was said. Nothing might have happened. He went up to bed, and in the mirror on his dressing-table met himself. He did not speak, nor did the image; but both looked as if they thought the more.

IV

IN GREEN STREET

Uncertain whether the impression that Prosper Profond was dangerous should be traced to his attempt to give Val the Mayfly filly; to a remark of Fleur's: "He's like the hosts of Midian—he prowls and prowls around"; to his preposterous inquiry of Jack Cardigan: "What's the use of keepin' fit?" or, more simply, to the fact that he was a foreigner, or alien as it was now called. Certain, that Annette was looking particularly handsome, and that Soames—had sold him a Gauguin and then torn up the cheque, so that Monsieur Profond himself had said: "I didn't get that small picture I bought from Mr. Forsyde."

However suspiciously regarded, he still frequented Winifred's evergreen little house in Green Street, with a good-natured obtuseness which no one mistook for naivete, a word hardly applicable to Monsieur Prosper Profond. Winifred still found him "amusing," and would write him little notes saying: "Come and have a 'jolly' with us"—it was breath of life to her to keep up with the phrases of the day.

The mystery, with which all felt him to be surrounded, was due to his having done, seen, heard, and known everything, and found nothing in it—which was unnatural. The English type of disillusionment was familiar enough to Winifred, who had always moved in fashionable circles. It gave a certain cachet or distinction, so that one got something out of it. But to see nothing in anything, not as a pose, but because there was nothing in anything, was not English; and that which was not English one could not help secretly feeling dangerous, if not precisely bad form. It was like having the mood which the War

had left, seated—dark, heavy, smiling, indifferent—in your Empire chair; it was like listening to that mood talking through thick pink lips above a little diabolic beard. It was, as Jack Cardigan expressed it—for the English character at large—"a bit too thick"—for if nothing was really worth getting excited about, there were always games, and one could make it so! Even Winifred, ever a Forsyte at heart, felt that there was nothing to be had out of such a mood of disillusionment, so that it really ought not to be there. Monsieur Profond, in fact, made the mood too plain in a country which decently veiled such realities.

When Fleur, after her hurried return from Robin Hill, came down to dinner that evening, the mood was standing at the window of Winifred's little drawing-room, looking out into Green Street, with an air of seeing nothing in it. And Fleur gazed promptly into the fireplace with an air of seeing a fire which was not there.

Monsieur Profond came from the window. He was in full fig, with a white waistcoat and a white flower in his buttonhole.

"Well, Miss Forsyde," he said, "I'm awful pleased to see you. Mr. Forsyde well? I was sayin' to-day I want to see him have some pleasure. He worries."

"You think so?" said Fleur shortly.

"Worries," repeated Monsieur Profond, burring the r's.

Fleur spun round. "Shall I tell you," she said, "what would give him pleasure?" But the words, "To hear that you had cleared out," died at the expression on his face. All his fine white teeth were showing.

"I was hearin' at the Club to-day about his old trouble." Fleur opened her eyes. "What do you mean?"

Monsieur Profond moved his sleek head as if to minimize his statement.

"Before you were born," he said; "that small business."

Though conscious that he had cleverly diverted her from his own share in her father's worry, Fleur was unable to withstand a rush of nervous curiosity. "Tell me what you heard."

"Why!" murmured Monsieur Profond, "you know all that."

"I expect I do. But I should like to know that you haven't heard it all wrong."

"His first wife," murmured Monsieur Profond.

Choking back the words, "He was never married before," she said: "Well, what about her?"

"Mr. George Forsyde was tellin' me about your father's first wife marryin' his cousin Jolyon afterward. It was a small bit unpleasant, I should think. I saw their boy—nice boy!"

Fleur looked up. Monsieur Profond was swimming, heavily diabolical, before her. That—the reason! With the most heroic effort of her life so far, she managed to arrest that swimming figure. She could not tell whether he had noticed. And just then Winifred came in.

"Oh! here you both are already; Imogen and I have had the most amusing afternoon at the Babies' bazaar."

"What babies?" said Fleur mechanically.

"The 'Save the Babies.' I got such a bargain, my dear. A piece of old Armenian work—from before the Flood. I want your opinion on it, Prosper."

"Auntie," whispered Fleur suddenly.

At the tone in the girl's voice Winifred closed in on her.'

"What's the matter? Aren't you well?"

Monsieur Profond had withdrawn into the window, where he was practically out of hearing.

"Auntie, he-he told me that father has been married before. Is it true that he divorced her, and she married Jon Forsyde's father?"

Never in all the life of the mother of four little Darties had Winifred felt more seriously embarrassed. Her niece's face was so pale, her eyes so dark, her voice so whispery and strained.

"Your father didn't wish you to hear," she said, with all the aplomb she could muster. "These things will happen. I've often told him he ought to let you know."

"Oh!" said Fleur, and that was all, but it made Winifred pat her shoulder—a firm little shoulder, nice and white! She never could help an appraising eye and touch in the matter of her niece, who would have to be married, of course—though not to that boy Jon.

"We've forgotten all about it years and years ago," she said comfortably. "Come and have dinner!"

"No, Auntie. I don't feel very well. May I go upstairs?"

"My dear!" murmured Winifred, concerned, "you're not taking this to heart? Why, you haven't properly come out yet! That boy's a child!"

"What boy? I've only got a headache. But I can't stand that man to-night."

"Well, well," said Winifred, "go and lie down. I'll send you some bromide, and I shall talk to Prosper Profond. What business had he to gossip? Though I must say I think it's much better you should know."

Fleur smiled. "Yes," she said, and slipped from the room.

She went up with her head whirling, a dry sensation in her throat, a guttered frightened feeling in her breast. Never in her life as yet had she suffered from even momentary fear that she would not get what she had set her heart on. The sensations of the afternoon had been full and poignant, and this gruesome discovery coming on the top of them had really made her head ache. No wonder her father had hidden that photograph, so secretly behind her own-ashamed of having kept it! But could he hate Jon's mother and yet keep her photograph? She pressed her hands over her forehead, trying to see things clearly. Had they told Jon—had her visit to Robin Hill forced them to tell him? Everything now turned on that! She knew, they all knew, except—perhaps—Jon!

She walked up and down, biting her lip and thinking desperately hard. Jon loved his mother. If they had told him, what would he do? She could not tell. But if they had not told him, should she not—could she not get him for herself—get married to him, before he knew? She searched her memories of Robin Hill. His mother's face so passive—with its dark eyes and as if powdered hair, its reserve, its smile—baffled her; and his father's—kindly, sunken, ironic. Instinctively she felt they would shrink from telling Jon, even now, shrink from hurting him—for of course it would hurt him awfully to know!

Her aunt must be made not to tell her father that she knew. So long as neither she herself nor Jon were supposed to know, there was still a chance—freedom to cover one's tracks, and get what her heart was set on. But she was almost overwhelmed by her isolation. Every one's hand was against her—every one's! It was as Jon had said—he and she just wanted to live and the past was in their way, a past they hadn't shared in, and didn't understand! Oh! What a shame! And suddenly she thought of June. Would she help them? For somehow June had left on her the impression that she would be sympathetic with their love, impatient of obstacle. Then, instinctively, she thought: 'I won't give anything away, though, even to her. I daren't. I mean to have Jon; against them all.'

Soup was brought up to her, and one of Winifred's pet headache cachets. She swallowed both. Then Winifred herself appeared. Fleur opened her campaign with the words:

"You know, Auntie, I do wish people wouldn't think I'm in love with that boy. Why, I've hardly seen him!"

Winifred, though experienced, was not "fine." She accepted the remark with considerable relief. Of course, it was not pleasant for the girl to hear of the family scandal, and she set herself to minimise the matter, a task for which she was eminently qualified, "raised" fashionably under a comfortable mother and a father whose nerves might not be shaken, and for many years the wife of Montague Dartie. Her description was a masterpiece of understatement. Fleur's father's first wife had been very foolish. There had been a young man who had got run over, and she had left Fleur's father. Then, years after, when it might all have come—right again, she had taken up with their cousin Jolyon; and, of course, her father had been obliged to have a divorce. Nobody remembered anything of it now, except just the family. And, perhaps, it had all turned out for the best; her father had Fleur; and Jolyon and Irene had been quite happy, they said, and their boy was a nice boy. "Val having Holly, too, is a sort of plaster, don't you know?" With these soothing words, Winifred patted her niece's shoulder; thought: 'She's a nice, plump little thing!' and went back to Prosper Profond, who, in spite of his indiscretion, was very

"amusing" this evening.

For some minutes after her aunt had gone Fleur remained under influence of bromide material and spiritual. But then reality came back. Her aunt had left out all that mattered—all the feeling, the hate, the love, the unforgivingness of passionate hearts. She, who knew so little of life, and had touched only the fringe of love, was yet aware by instinct that words have as little relation to fact and feeling as coin to the bread it buys. 'Poor Father!' she thought. 'Poor me! Poor Jon! But I don't care, I mean to have him!' From the window of her darkened room she saw "that man" issue from the door below and "prowl" away. If he and her mother—how would that affect her chance? Surely it must make her father cling to her more closely, so that he would consent in the end to anything she wanted, or become reconciled the sooner to what she did without his knowledge.

She took some earth from the flower-box in the window, and with all her might flung it after that disappearing figure. It fell short, but the action did her good.

And a little puff of air came up from Green Street, smelling of petrol, not sweet.

V

PURELY FORSYTE AFFAIRS

Soames, coming up to the City, with the intention of calling in at Green Street at the end of his day and taking Fleur back home with him, suffered from rumination. Sleeping partner that he was, he seldom visited the City now, but he still had a room of his own at Cuthcott, Kingson and Forsyte's, and one special clerk and a half assigned to the management of purely Forsyte affairs. They were somewhat in flux just now—an auspicious moment for the disposal of house property. And Soames was unloading the estates of his father and Uncle Roger, and to some extent of his Uncle Nicholas. His shrewd and matter-of-course probity in all money concerns had made him something of an autocrat in connection with these trusts. If Soames thought this or thought that, one had better save oneself the bother of thinking too. He guaranteed, as it were, irresponsibility to numerous Forsytes of the third and fourth generations. His fellow trustees, such as his cousins Roger or Nicholas, his cousins-in-law Tweetyman and Spender, or his sister Cicely's husband, all trusted him; he signed first, and where he signed first they signed after, and nobody was a penny the worse. Just now they were all a good many pennies the better, and Soames was beginning to see the close of certain trusts, except for distribution of the income from securities as gilt-edged as was compatible with the period.

Passing the more feverish parts of the City toward the most perfect backwater in London, he ruminated. Money was extraordinarily tight; and morality extraordinarily loose! The War had done it. Banks were not lending; people breaking contracts all over the place. There was a feeling in the air and a look on faces that he did not like. The country seemed in for a spell of gambling and bankruptcies. There was satisfaction in the thought that neither he nor his trusts had an investment which could be affected by anything less maniacal than national repudiation or a levy on capital. If Soames had faith, it was in what he called "English common sense"—or the power to have things, if not one way then another. He might—like his father James before him—say he didn't know what things were coming to, but he never in his heart believed they were. If it rested with him, they wouldn't—and, after all, he was only an Englishman like any other, so quietly tenacious of what he had that he knew he would never really part with it without something more or less equivalent in exchange. His mind was essentially equilibristic in material matters, and his way of putting the national situation difficult to refute in a world composed of human beings. Take his own case, for example! He was well off. Did that do anybody harm? He did not eat ten meals a day; he ate no more than, perhaps not so much as, a poor man. He spent no money on vice; breathed no more air, used no more water to speak of than the mechanic or the porter. He certainly had pretty things about him, but they had given employment in the making, and somebody must use them. He bought pictures, but Art must be encouraged. He was, in fact, an accidental channel through which money flowed, employing labour. What was there objectionable in that? In his charge money was in quicker and more useful flux than it would be in charge of the State and a lot of slow-fly money-sucking officials. And as to what he saved each year—it was just as much in flux as what he didn't save, going into Water Board or Council Stocks, or something sound and useful. The State paid him no salary for being trustee of his own or other people's money he did all that for nothing. Therein lay the whole case against nationalisation—owners of private property were unpaid, and yet had every incentive to quicken up the flux. Under nationalisation—just the opposite! In a country smarting from officialism he felt that he had a strong case.

It particularly annoyed him, entering that backwater of perfect peace, to think that a lot of unscrupulous Trusts and Combinations had been cornering the market in goods of all kinds, and keeping prices at an artificial height. Such abusers of the individualistic system were the ruffians who caused all the trouble, and it was some satisfaction to see them getting into a stew at last lest the whole thing might come down with a run—and land them in the soup.

The offices of Cuthcott, Kingson and Forsyte occupied the ground and first floors of a house on the right-hand side; and, ascending to his room, Soames thought: 'Time we had a coat of paint.'

His old clerk Gradman was seated, where he always was, at a huge bureau with countless pigeonholes. Half-the-clerk stood beside him, with a broker's note recording investment of the proceeds from sale of the Bryanston Square house, in Roger Forsyte's estate. Soames took it, and said:

"Vancouver City Stock. H'm. It's down today!"

With a sort of grating ingratiating old Gradman answered him:

"Ye-es; but everything's down, Mr. Soames." And half-the-clerk withdrew.

Soames skewered the document on to a number of other papers and hung up his hat.

"I want to look at my Will and Marriage Settlement, Gradman."

Old Gradman, moving to the limit of his swivel chair, drew out two drafts from the bottom lefthand drawer. Recovering his body, he raised his grizzle-haired face, very red from stooping.

"Copies, Sir."

Soames took them. It struck him suddenly how like Gradman was to the stout brindled yard dog they had been wont to keep on his chain at The Shelter, till one day Fleur had come and insisted it should be let loose, so that it had at once bitten the cook and been destroyed. If you let Gradman off his chain, would he bite the cook?

Checking this frivolous fancy, Soames unfolded his Marriage Settlement. He had not looked at it for over eighteen years, not since he remade his Will when his father died and Fleur was born. He wanted to see whether the words "during coverture" were in. Yes, they were—odd expression, when you thought of it, and derived perhaps from horse-breeding! Interest on fifteen thousand pounds (which he paid her without deducting income tax) so long as she remained his wife, and afterward during widowhood "dum casta"—old-fashioned and rather pointed words, put in to insure the conduct of Fleur's mother. His Will made it up to an annuity of a thousand under the same conditions. All right! He returned the copies to Gradman, who took them without looking up, swung the chair, restored the papers to their drawer, and went on casting up.

"Gradman! I don't like the condition of the country; there are a lot of people about without any common sense. I want to find a way by which I can safeguard Miss Fleur against anything which might arise."

Gradman wrote the figure "2" on his blotting-paper.

"Ye-es," he said; "there's a nahsty spirit."

"The ordinary restraint against anticipation doesn't meet the case."

"Nao," said Gradman.

"Suppose those Labour fellows come in, or worse! It's these people with fixed ideas who are the danger. Look at Ireland!"

"Ah!" said Gradman.

"Suppose I were to make a settlement on her at once with myself as beneficiary for life, they couldn't take anything but the interest from me, unless of course they alter the law."

Gradman moved his head and smiled.

"Ah!" he said, "they wouldn't do tha-at!"

"I don't know," muttered Soames; "I don't trust them."

"It'll take two years, sir, to be valid against death duties."

Soames sniffed. Two years! He was only sixty-five!

"That's not the point. Draw a form of settlement that passes all my property to Miss Fleur's children in equal shares, with antecedent life-interests first to myself and then to her without power of anticipation, and add a clause that in the event of anything happening to divert her life-interest, that interest passes to the trustees, to apply for her benefit, in their absolute discretion."

Gradman grated: "Rather extreme at your age, sir; you lose control."

"That's my business," said Soames sharply.

Gradman wrote on a piece of paper: "Life-interest—anticipation—divert interest—absolute discretion...." and said:

"What trustees? There's young Mr. Kingson; he's a nice steady young fellow."

"Yes, he might do for one. I must have three. There isn't a Forsyte now who appeals to me."

"Not young Mr. Nicholas? He's at the Bar. We've given 'im briefs."

"He'll never set the Thames on fire," said Soames.

A smile oozed out on Gradman's face, greasy from countless mutton-chops, the smile of a man who sits all day.

"You can't expect it, at his age, Mr. Soames."

"Why? What is he? Forty?"

"Ye-es, quite a young fellow."

"Well, put him in; but I want somebody who'll take a personal interest. There's no one that I can see."

"What about Mr. Valerius, now he's come home?"

"Val Dartie? With that father?"

"We-ell," murmured Gradman, "he's been dead seven years—the Statute runs against him."

"No," said Soames. "I don't like the connection." He rose. Gradman said suddenly:

"If they were makin' a levy on capital, they could come on the trustees, sir. So there you'd be just the same. I'd think it over, if I were you."

"That's true," said Soames. "I will. What have you done about that dilapidation notice in Vere Street?"

"I 'aven't served it yet. The party's very old. She won't want to go out at her age."

"I don't know. This spirit of unrest touches every one."

"Still, I'm lookin' at things broadly, sir. She's eighty-one."

"Better serve it," said Soames, "and see what she says. Oh! and Mr. Timothy? Is everything in order in case of—"

"I've got the inventory of his estate all ready; had the furniture and pictures valued so that we know what reserves to put on. I shall be sorry when he goes, though. Dear me! It is a time since I first saw Mr. Timothy!"

"We can't live for ever," said Soames, taking down his hat.

"Nao," said Gradman; "but it'll be a pity—the last of the old family! Shall I take up the matter of that nuisance in Old Compton Street? Those organs—they're nahsty things."

"Do. I must call for Miss Fleur and catch the four o'clock. Good-day, Gradman."

"Good-day, Mr. Soames. I hope Miss Fleur—"

"Well enough, but gads about too much."

"Ye-es," grated Gradman; "she's young."

Soames went out, musing: "Old Gradman! If he were younger I'd put him in the trust. There's nobody I can depend on to take a real interest."

Leaving the bilious and mathematical exactitude, the preposterous peace of that backwater, he thought suddenly: 'During coverture! Why can't they exclude fellows like Profond, instead of a lot of hard-working Germans?' and was surprised at the depth of uneasiness which could provoke so unpatriotic a thought. But there it was! One never got a moment of real peace. There was always something at the back of everything! And he made his way toward Green Street.

Two hours later by his watch, Thomas Gradman, stirring in his swivel chair, closed the last drawer of his bureau, and putting into his waistcoat pocket a bunch of keys so fat that they gave him a protuberance on the liver side, brushed his old top hat round with his sleeve, took his umbrella, and descended. Thick, short, and buttoned closely into his old frock coat, he walked toward Covent Garden market. He never missed that daily promenade to the Tube for Highgate, and seldom some critical transaction on the way in connection with vegetables and fruit. Generations might be born, and hats might change, wars be fought, and Forsytes fade away, but Thomas Gradman, faithful and grey, would take his daily walk and buy his daily vegetable. Times were not what they were, and his son had lost a leg, and they never gave him those nice little plaited baskets to carry the stuff in now, and these Tubes were convenient things—still he mustn't complain; his health was good considering his time of life, and after fifty-four years in the Law he was getting a round eight hundred a year and a little worried of late, because it was mostly collector's commission on the rents, and with all this conversion of Forsyte property going on, it looked like drying up, and the price of living still so high; but it was no good worrying—"The good God made us all"—as he was in the habit of saying; still, house property in London—he didn't know what Mr. Roger or Mr. James would say if they could see it being sold like this—seemed to show a lack of faith; but Mr. Soames—he worried. Life and lives in being and twenty-one years after—beyond that you couldn't go; still, he kept his health wonderfully—and Miss Fleur was a pretty little thing—she was; she'd marry; but lots of people had no children nowadays—he had had his first child at twenty-two; and Mr. Jolyon, married while he was at Cambridge, had his child the same year—gracious Peter! That was back in '69, a long time before old Mr. Jolyon—fine judge of property—had taken his Will away from Mr. James—dear, yes! Those were the days when they were buyin' property right and left, and none of this khaki and fallin' over one another to get out of things; and cucumbers at twopence; and a melon—the old melons, that made your mouth water! Fifty years since he went into Mr. James' office, and Mr. James had said to him: "Now, Gradman, you're only a shaver—you pay attention, and you'll make your five hundred a year before you've done." And he had, and feared God, and served the Forsytes, and kept a vegetable diet at night. And, buying a copy of John Bull—not that he approved of it, an extravagant affair—he entered the Tube elevator with his mere brown-paper parcel, and was borne down into the bowels of the earth.

VI

SOAMES' PRIVATE LIFE

On his way to Green Street it occurred to Soames that he ought to go into Dumetrius' in Suffolk Street about the possibility of the Bolderby Old Crome. Almost worth while to have fought the war to have the Bolderby Old Crome, as it were, in flux! Old Bolderby had died, his son and grandson had been killed—a cousin was coming into the estate, who meant to sell it, some said because of the condition of England, others said because he had asthma.

If Dumetrius once got hold of it the price would become prohibitive; it was necessary for Soames to find out whether Dumetrius had got it, before he tried to get it himself. He therefore confined himself to discussing with Dumetrius whether Monticellis would come again now that it was the fashion for a picture to be anything except a picture; and the future of Johns, with a side-slip into Buxton Knights. It was only when leaving that he added: "So they're not selling the Bolderby Old Crome, after all?" In sheer pride of racial superiority, as he had calculated would be the case, Dumetrius replied:

"Oh! I shall get it, Mr. Forsyte, sir!"

The flutter of his eyelid fortified Soames in a resolution to write direct to the new Bolderby, suggesting that the only dignified way of dealing with an Old Crome was to avoid dealers. He therefore said, "Well, good-day!" and went, leaving Dumetrius the wiser.

At Green Street he found that Fleur was out and would be all the evening; she was staying one more night in London. He cabbed on dejectedly, and caught his train.

He reached his house about six o'clock. The air was heavy, midges biting, thunder about. Taking his letters he went up to his dressing-room to cleanse himself of London.

An uninteresting post. A receipt, a bill for purchases on behalf of Fleur. A circular about an exhibition of etchings. A letter beginning:

"SIR, "I feel it my duty..."

That would be an appeal or something unpleasant. He looked at once for the signature. There was none! Incredulously he turned the page over and examined each corner. Not being a public man, Soames had never yet had an anonymous letter, and his first impulse was to tear it up, as a dangerous thing; his second to read it, as a thing still more dangerous.

"SIR, "I feel it my duty to inform you that having no interest in the matter your lady is carrying on with a foreigner—"

Reaching that word Soames stopped mechanically and examined the postmark. So far as he could pierce the impenetrable disguise in which the Post Office had wrapped it, there was something with a "sea" at the end and a "t" in it. Chelsea? No! Battersea? Perhaps! He read on.

"These foreigners are all the same. Sack the lot. This one meets your lady twice a week. I know it of my own knowledge—and to see an Englishman put on goes against the grain. You watch it and see if what I say isn't true. I shouldn't meddle if it wasn't a dirty foreigner that's in it. Yours obedient."

The sensation with which Soames dropped the letter was similar to that he would have had entering his bedroom and finding it full of black-beetles. The meanness of anonymity gave a shuddering obscenity to the moment. And the worst of it was that this shadow had been at the back of his mind ever since the Sunday evening when Fleur had pointed down at Prosper Profond strolling on the lawn, and said: "Prowling cat!" Had he not in connection therewith, this very day, perused his Will and Marriage Settlement? And now this anonymous ruffian, with nothing to gain, apparently, save the venting of his spite against foreigners, had wrenched it out of the obscurity in which he had hoped and wished it would remain. To have such knowledge forced on him, at his time of life, about Fleur's mother! He picked the letter up from the carpet, tore it across, and then, when it hung together by just the fold at the back, stopped tearing, and reread it. He was taking at that moment one of the decisive resolutions of his life. He would not be forced into another scandal. No! However he decided to deal with this matter—and it required the most far-sighted and careful consideration he would do nothing that might injure Fleur. That resolution taken, his mind answered the helm again, and he made his ablutions. His hands trembled as he dried them. Scandal he would not have, but something must be done to stop this sort of thing! He went into his wife's room and stood looking around him. The idea of searching for anything which would incriminate, and entitle him to hold a menace over her, did not even come to him. There would be nothing—she was much too practical. The idea of having her watched had been dismissed before it came—too well he remembered his previous experience of that. No! He had nothing but this torn-up letter from some anonymous ruffian, whose impudent intrusion into his private life he so violently resented. It was repugnant to him to make use of it, but he might have to. What a mercy Fleur was not at home to-night! A tap on the door broke up his painful cogitations.

"Mr. Michael Mont, sir, is in the drawing-room. Will you see him?"

"No," said Soames; "yes. I'll come down."

Anything that would take his mind off for a few minutes!

Michael Mont in flannels stood on the verandah smoking a cigarette. He threw it away as Soames came up, and ran his hand through his hair.

Soames' feeling toward this young man was singular. He was no doubt a rackets, irresponsible young fellow according to old standards, yet somehow likeable, with his extraordinarily cheerful way of blurting out his opinions.

"Come in," he said; "have you had tea?"

Mont came in.

"I thought Fleur would have been back, sir; but I'm glad she isn't. The fact is, I—I'm fearfully gone on

her; so fearfully gone that I thought you'd better know. It's old-fashioned, of course, coming to fathers first, but I thought you'd forgive that. I went to my own Dad, and he says if I settle down he'll see me through. He rather cottons to the idea, in fact. I told him about your Goya."

"Oh!" said Soames, inexpressibly dry. "He rather cottons?"

"Yes, sir; do you?"

Soames smiled faintly.

"You see," resumed Mont, twiddling his straw hat, while his hair, ears, eyebrows, all seemed to stand up from excitement, "when you've been through the War you can't help being in a hurry."

"To get married; and unmarried afterward," said Soames slowly.

"Not from Fleur, sir. Imagine, if you were me!"

Soames cleared his throat. That way of putting it was forcible enough.

"Fleur's too young," he said.

"Oh! no, sir. We're awfully old nowadays. My Dad seems to me a perfect babe; his thinking apparatus hasn't turned a hair. But he's a Baronight, of course; that keeps him back."

"Baronight," repeated Soames; "what may that be?"

"Bart, sir. I shall be a Bart some day. But I shall live it down, you know."

"Go away and live this down," said Soames.

Young Mont said imploringly: "Oh! no, sir. I simply must hang around, or I shouldn't have a dog's chance. You'll let Fleur do what she likes, I suppose, anyway. Madame passes me."

"Indeed!" said Soames frigidly.

"You don't really bar me, do you?" and the young man looked so doleful that Soames smiled.

"You may think you're very old," he said; "but you strike me as extremely young. To rattle ahead of everything is not a proof of maturity."

"All right, sir; I give you our age. But to show you I mean business—I've got a job."

"Glad to hear it."

"Joined a publisher; my governor is putting up the stakes."

Soames put his hand over his mouth—he had so very nearly said: "God help the publisher!" His grey eyes scrutinised the agitated young man.

"I don't dislike you, Mr. Mont, but Fleur is everything to me: Everything—do you understand?"

"Yes, sir, I know; but so she is to me."

"That's as may be. I'm glad you've told me, however. And now I think there's nothing more to be said."

"I know it rests with her, sir."

"It will rest with her a long time, I hope."

"You aren't cheering," said Mont suddenly.

"No," said Soames, "my experience of life has not made me anxious to couple people in a hurry. Good-night, Mr. Mont. I shan't tell Fleur what you've said."

"Oh!" murmured Mont blankly; "I really could knock my brains out for want of her. She knows that perfectly well."

"I dare say." And Soames held out his hand. A distracted squeeze, a heavy sigh, and soon after sounds from the young man's motor-cycle called up visions of flying dust and broken bones.

'The younger generation!' he thought heavily, and went out on to the lawn. The gardeners had been

mowing, and there was still the smell of fresh-cut grass—the thundery air kept all scents close to earth. The sky was of a purplish hue—the poplars black. Two or three boats passed on the river, scuttling, as it were, for shelter before the storm. 'Three days' fine weather,' thought Soames, 'and then a storm!' Where was Annette? With that chap, for all he knew—she was a young woman! Impressed with the queer charity of that thought, he entered the summerhouse and sat down. The fact was—and he admitted it—Fleur was so much to him that his wife was very little—very little; French—had never been much more than a mistress, and he was getting indifferent to that side of things! It was odd how, with all this ingrained care for moderation and secure investment, Soames ever put his emotional eggs into one basket. First Irene—now Fleur. He was dimly conscious of it, sitting there, conscious of its odd dangerousness. It had brought him to wreck and scandal once, but now—now it should save him! He cared so much for Fleur that he would have no further scandal. If only he could get at that anonymous letter-writer, he would teach him not to meddle and stir up mud at the bottom of water which he wished should remain stagnant!... A distant flash, a low rumble, and large drops of rain spattered on the thatch above him. He remained indifferent, tracing a pattern with his finger on the dusty surface of a little rustic table. Fleur's future! 'I want fair sailing for her,' he thought. 'Nothing else matters at my time of life.' A lonely business—life! What you had you never could keep to yourself! As you warned one off, you let another in. One could make sure of nothing! He reached up and pulled a red rambler rose from a cluster which blocked the window. Flowers grew and dropped—Nature was a queer thing! The thunder rumbled and crashed, travelling east along a river, the paling flashes flicked his eyes; the poplar tops showed sharp and dense against the sky, a heavy shower rustled and rattled and veiled in the little house wherein he sat, indifferent, thinking.

When the storm was over, he left his retreat and went down the wet path to the river bank.

Two swans had come, sheltering in among the reeds. He knew the birds well, and stood watching the dignity in the curve of those white necks and formidable snake-like heads. 'Not dignified—what I have to do!' he thought. And yet it must be tackled, lest worse befell. Annette must be back by now from wherever she had gone, for it was nearly dinner-time, and as the moment for seeing her approached, the difficulty of knowing what to say and how to say it had increased. A new and scaring thought occurred to him. Suppose she wanted her liberty to marry this fellow! Well, if she did, she couldn't have it. He had not married her for that. The image of Prosper Profond dawdled before him reassuringly. Not a marrying man! No, no! Anger replaced that momentary scare. 'He had better not come my way,' he thought. The mongrel represented—! But what did Prosper Profond represent? Nothing that mattered surely. And yet something real enough in the world—unmorality let off its chain, disillusionment on the prow! That expression Annette had caught from him: "Je m'en fiche!" A fatalistic chap! A continental—a cosmopolitan—a product of the age! If there were condemnation more complete, Soames felt that he did not know it.

The swans had turned their heads, and were looking past him into some distance of their own. One of them uttered a little hiss, wagged its tail, turned as if answering to a rudder, and swam away. The other followed. Their white bodies, their stately necks, passed out of his sight, and he went toward the house.

Annette was in the drawing-room, dressed for dinner, and he thought as he went up-stairs 'Handsome is as handsome does.' Handsome! Except for remarks about the curtains in the drawing-room, and the storm, there was practically no conversation during a meal distinguished by exactitude of quantity and perfection of quality. Soames drank nothing. He followed her into the drawing-room afterward, and found her smoking a cigarette on the sofa between the two French windows. She was leaning back, almost upright, in a low black frock, with her knees crossed and her blue eyes half-closed; grey-blue smoke issued from her red, rather full lips, a fillet bound her chestnut hair, she wore the thinnest silk stockings, and shoes with very high heels showing off her instep. A fine piece in any room! Soames, who held that torn letter in a hand thrust deep into the side-pocket of his dinner-jacket, said:

"I'm going to shut the window; the damp's lifting in."

He did so, and stood looking at a David Cox adorning the cream-panelled wall close by.

What was she thinking of? He had never understood a woman in his life—except Fleur—and Fleur not always! His heart beat fast. But if he meant to do it, now was the moment. Turning from the David Cox, he took out the torn letter.

"I've had this."

Her eyes widened, stared at him, and hardened.

Soames handed her the letter.

"It's torn, but you can read it." And he turned back to the David Cox—a sea-piece, of good tone—but

without movement enough. 'I wonder what that chap's doing at this moment?' he thought. 'I'll astonish him yet.' Out of the corner of his eye he saw Annette holding the letter rigidly; her eyes moved from side to side under her darkened lashes and frowning darkened eyes. She dropped the letter, gave a little shiver, smiled, and said:

"Dirrty!"

"I quite agree," said Soames; "degrading. Is it true?"

A tooth fastened on her red lower lip. "And what if it were?"

She was brazen!

"Is that all you have to say?"

"No."

"Well, speak out!"

"What is the good of talking?"

Soames said icily: "So you admit it?"

"I admit nothing. You are a fool to ask. A man like you should not ask. It is dangerous."

Soames made a tour of the room, to subdue his rising anger.

"Do you remember," he said, halting in front of her, "what you were when I married you? Working at accounts in a restaurant."

"Do you remember that I was not half your age?"

Soames broke off the hard encounter of their eyes, and went back to the David Cox.

"I am not going to bandy words. I require you to give up this —friendship. I think of the matter entirely as it affects Fleur."

"Ah!—Fleur!"

"Yes," said Soames stubbornly; "Fleur. She is your child as well as mine."

"It is kind to admit that!"

"Are you going to do what I say?"

"I refuse to tell you."

"Then I must make you."

Annette smiled.

"No, Soames," she said. "You are helpless. Do not say things that you will regret."

Anger swelled the veins on his forehead. He opened his mouth to vent that emotion, and could not. Annette went on:

"There shall be no more such letters, I promise you. That is enough."

Soames writhed. He had a sense of being treated like a child by this woman who had deserved he did not know what.

"When two people have married, and lived like us, Soames, they had better be quiet about each other. There are things one does not drag up into the light for people to laugh at. You will be quiet, then; not for my sake for your own. You are getting old; I am not, yet. You have made me ver-ry practical"

Soames, who had passed through all the sensations of being choked, repeated dully:

"I require you to give up this friendship."

"And if I do not?"

"Then—then I will cut you out of my Will."

Somehow it did not seem to meet the case. Annette laughed.

"You will live a long time, Soames."

"You—you are a bad woman," said Soames suddenly.

Annette shrugged her shoulders.

"I do not think so. Living with you has killed things in me, it is true; but I am not a bad woman. I am sensible—that is all. And so will you be when you have thought it over."

"I shall see this man," said Soames sullenly, "and warn him off."

"Mon cher, you are funny. You do not want me, you have as much of me as you want; and you wish the rest of me to be dead. I admit nothing, but I am not going to be dead, Soames, at my age; so you had better be quiet, I tell you. I myself will make no scandal; none. Now, I am not saying any more, whatever you do."

She reached out, took a French novel off a little table, and opened it. Soames watched her, silenced by the tumult of his feelings. The thought of that man was almost making him want her, and this was a revelation of their relationship, startling to one little given to introspective philosophy. Without saying another word he went out and up to the picture-gallery. This came of marrying a Frenchwoman! And yet, without her there would have been no Fleur! She had served her purpose.

'She's right,' he thought; 'I can do nothing. I don't even know that there's anything in it.' The instinct of self-preservation warned him to batten down his hatches, to smother the fire with want of air. Unless one believed there was something in a thing, there wasn't.

That night he went into her room. She received him in the most matter-of-fact way, as if there had been no scene between them. And he returned to his own room with a curious sense of peace. If one didn't choose to see, one needn't. And he did not choose—in future he did not choose. There was nothing to be gained by it—nothing! Opening the drawer he took from the sachet a handkerchief, and the framed photograph of Fleur. When he had looked at it a little he slipped it down, and there was that other one—that old one of Irene. An owl hooted while he stood in his window gazing at it. The owl hooted, the red climbing roses seemed to deepen in colour, there came a scent of lime-blossom. God! That had been a different thing! Passion—Memory! Dust!

VII

JUNE TAKES A HAND

One who was a sculptor, a Slav, a sometime resident in New York, an egoist, and impecunious, was to be found of an evening in June Forsyte's studio on the bank of the Thames at Chiswick. On the evening of July 6, Boris Strumolowski—several of whose works were on show there because they were as yet too advanced to be on show anywhere else—had begun well, with that aloof and rather Christ-like silence which admirably suited his youthful, round, broad cheek-boned countenance framed in bright hair banged like a girl's. June had known him three weeks, and he still seemed to her the principal embodiment of genius, and hope of the future; a sort of Star of the East which had strayed into an unappreciative West. Until that evening he had conversationally confined himself to recording his impressions of the United States, whose dust he had just shaken from off his feet—a country, in his opinion, so barbarous in every way that he had sold practically nothing there, and become an object of suspicion to the police; a country, as he said, without a race of its own, without liberty, equality, or fraternity, without principles, traditions, taste, without—in a word—a soul. He had left it for his own good, and come to the only other country where he could live well. June had dwelt unhappily on him in her lonely moments, standing before his creations—frightening, but powerful and symbolic once they had been explained! That he, haloed by bright hair like an early Italian painting, and absorbed in his genius to the exclusion of all else—the only sign of course by which real genius could be told—should still be a "lame duck" agitated her warm heart almost to the exclusion of Paul Post. And she had begun to take steps to clear her Gallery, in order to fill it with Strumolowski masterpieces. She had at once encountered trouble. Paul Post had kicked; Vospovitch had stung. With all the emphasis of a genius

which she did not as yet deny them, they had demanded another six weeks at least of her Gallery. The American stream, still flowing in, would soon be flowing out. The American stream was their right, their only hope, their salvation—since nobody in this "beastly" country cared for Art. June had yielded to the demonstration. After all Boris would not mind their having the full benefit of an American stream, which he himself so violently despised.

This evening she had put that to Boris with nobody else present, except Hannah Hobdey, the mediaeval black-and-whitist, and Jimmy Portugal, editor of the Neo-Artist. She had put it to him with that sudden confidence which continual contact with the neo-artistic world had never been able to dry up in her warm and generous nature. He had not broken his Christ-like silence, however, for more than two minutes before she began to move her blue eyes from side to side, as a cat moves its tail. This—he said—was characteristic of England, the most selfish country in the world; the country which sucked the blood of other countries; destroyed the brains and hearts of Irishmen, Hindus, Egyptians, Boers, and Burmese, all the best races in the world; bullying, hypocritical England! This was what he had expected, coming to, such a country, where the climate was all fog, and the people all tradesmen perfectly blind to Art, and sunk in profiteering and the grossest materialism. Conscious that Hannah Hobdey was murmuring, "Hear, hear!" and Jimmy Portugal sniggering, June grew crimson, and suddenly rapped out:

"Then why did you ever come? We didn't ask you."

The remark was so singularly at variance with all she had led him to expect from her, that Strumolowski stretched out his hand and took a cigarette.

"England never wants an idealist," he said.

But in June something primitively English was thoroughly upset; old Jolyon's sense of justice had risen, as it were, from bed. "You come and sponge on us," she said, "and then abuse us. If you think that's playing the game, I don't."

She now discovered that which others had discovered before her—the thickness of hide beneath which the sensibility of genius is sometimes veiled. Strumolowski's young and ingenuous face became the incarnation of a sneer.

"Sponge, one does not sponge, one takes what is owing—a tenth part of what is owing. You will repent to say that, Miss Forsyte."

"Oh, no," said June, "I shan't."

"Ah! We know very well, we artists—you take us to get what you can out of us. I want nothing from you"—and he blew out a cloud of June's smoke.

Decision rose in an icy puff from the turmoil of insulted shame within her. "Very well, then, you can take your things away."

And, almost in the same moment, she thought: 'Poor boy! He's only got a garret, and probably not a taxi fare. In front of these people, too; it's positively disgusting!'

Young Strumolowski shook his head violently; his hair, thick, smooth, close as a golden plate, did not fall off.

"I can live on nothing," he said shrilly; "I have often had to for the sake of my Art. It is you bourgeois who force us to spend money."

The words hit June like a pebble, in the ribs. After all she had done for Art, all her identification with its troubles and lame ducks. She was struggling for adequate words when the door was opened, and her Austrian murmured:

"A young lady, gnadiges Fraulein."

"Where?"

"In the little meal-room."

With a glance at Boris Strumolowski, at Hannah Hobdey, at Jimmy Portugal, June said nothing, and went out, devoid of equanimity. Entering the "little meal-room," she perceived the young lady to be Fleur—looking very pretty, if pale. At this disenchanted moment a little lame duck of her own breed was welcome to June, so homoeopathic by instinct.

The girl must have come, of course, because of Jon; or, if not, at least to get something out of her.

And June felt just then that to assist somebody was the only bearable thing.

"So you've remembered to come," she said.

"Yes. What a jolly little duck of a house! But please don't let me bother you, if you've got people."

"Not at all," said June. "I want to let them stew in their own juice for a bit. Have you come about Jon?"

"You said you thought we ought to be told. Well, I've found out."

"Oh!" said June blankly. "Not nice, is it?"

They were standing one on each side of the little bare table at which June took her meals. A vase on it was full of Iceland poppies; the girl raised her hand and touched them with a gloved finger. To her new-fangled dress, frilly about the hips and tight below the knees, June took a sudden liking—a charming colour, flax-blue.

'She makes a picture,' thought June. Her little room, with its whitewashed walls, its floor and hearth of old pink brick, its black paint, and latticed window athwart which the last of the sunlight was shining, had never looked so charming, set off by this young figure, with the creamy, slightly frowning face. She remembered with sudden vividness how nice she herself had looked in those old days when her heart was set on Philip Bosinney, that dead lover, who had broken from her to destroy for ever Irene's allegiance to this girl's father. Did Fleur know of that, too?

"Well," she said, "what are you going to do?"

It was some seconds before Fleur answered.

"I don't want Jon to suffer. I must see him once more to put an end to it."

"You're going to put an end to it!"

"What else is there to do?"

The girl seemed to June, suddenly, intolerably spiritless.

"I suppose you're right," she muttered. "I know my father thinks so; but—I should never have done it myself. I can't take things lying down."

How poised and watchful that girl looked; how unemotional her voice sounded!

"People will assume that I'm in love."

"Well, aren't you?"

Fleur shrugged her shoulders. 'I might have known it,' thought June; 'she's Soames' daughter—fish! And yet—he!'

"What do you want me to do then?" she said with a sort of disgust.

"Could I see Jon here to-morrow on his way down to Holly's? He'd come if you sent him a line to-night. And perhaps afterward you'd let them know quietly at Robin Hill that it's all over, and that they needn't tell Jon about his mother."

"All right!" said June abruptly. "I'll write now, and you can post it. Half-past two tomorrow. I shan't be in, myself."

She sat down at the tiny bureau which filled one corner. When she looked round with the finished note Fleur was still touching the poppies with her gloved finger.

June licked a stamp. "Well, here it is. If you're not in love, of course, there's no more to be said. Jon's lucky."

Fleur took the note. "Thanks awfully!"

'Cold-blooded little baggage!' thought June. Jon, son of her father, to love, and not to be loved by the daughter of—Soames! It was humiliating!

"Is that all?"

Fleur nodded; her frills shook and trembled as she swayed toward the door.

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!... Little piece of fashion!" muttered June, closing the door. "That family!" And she marched back toward her studio. Boris Strumolowski had regained his Christ-like silence and Jimmy Portugal was damning everybody, except the group in whose behalf he ran the Neo-Artist. Among the condemned were Eric Cobbley, and several other "lame-duck" geni who at one time or another had held first place in the repertoire of June's aid and adoration. She experienced a sense of futility and disgust, and went to the window to let the river-wind blow those squeaky words away.

But when at length Jimmy Portugal had finished, and gone with Hannah Hobdey, she sat down and mothered young Strumolowski for half an hour, promising him a month, at least, of the American stream; so that he went away with his halo in perfect order. 'In spite of all,' June thought, 'Boris is wonderful'

VIII

THE BIT BETWEEN THE TEETH

To know that your hand is against every one's is—for some natures—to experience a sense of moral release. Fleur felt no remorse when she left June's house. Reading condemnatory resentment in her little kinswoman's blue eyes—she was glad that she had fooled her, despising June because that elderly idealist had not seen what she was after.

End it, forsooth! She would soon show them all that she was only just beginning. And she smiled to herself on the top of the bus which carried her back to Mayfair. But the smile died, squeezed out by spasms of anticipation and anxiety. Would she be able to manage Jon? She had taken the bit between her teeth, but could she make him take it too? She knew the truth and the real danger of delay—he knew neither; therein lay all the difference in the world.

'Suppose I tell him,' she thought; 'wouldn't it really be safer?' This hideous luck had no right to spoil their love; he must see that! They could not let it! People always accepted an accomplished fact in time! From that piece of philosophy—profound enough at her age—she passed to another consideration less philosophic. If she persuaded Jon to a quick and secret marriage, and he found out afterward that she had known the truth. What then? Jon hated subterfuge. Again, then, would it not be better to tell him? But the memory of his mother's face kept intruding on that impulse. Fleur was afraid. His mother had power over him; more power perhaps than she herself. Who could tell? It was too great a risk. Deep-sunk in these instinctive calculations she was carried on past Green Street as far as the Ritz Hotel. She got down there, and walked back on the Green Park side. The storm had washed every tree; they still dripped. Heavy drops fell on to her frills, and to avoid them she crossed over under the eyes of the Iseum Club. Chancing to look up she saw Monsieur Profond with a tall stout man in the bay window. Turning into Green Street she heard her name called, and saw "that prowler" coming up. He took off his hat—a glossy "bowler" such as she particularly detested.

"Good evenin'! Miss Forsyde. Isn't there a small thing I can do for you?"

"Yes, pass by on the other side."

"I say! Why do you dislike me?"

"Do I?"

"It looks like it."

"Well, then, because you make me feel life isn't worth living."

Monsieur Profond smiled.

"Look here, Miss Forsyde, don't worry. It'll be all right. Nothing lasts."

"Things do last," cried Fleur; "with me anyhow—especially likes and dislikes."

"Well, that makes me a bit un'appy."

"I should have thought nothing could ever make you happy or unhappy."

"I don't like to annoy other people. I'm goin' on my yacht."

Fleur looked at him, startled.

"Where?"

"Small voyage to the South Seas or somewhere," said Monsieur Profond.

Fleur suffered relief and a sense of insult. Clearly he meant to convey that he was breaking with her mother. How dared he have anything to break, and yet how dared he break it?

"Good-night, Miss Forsyde! Remember me to Mrs. Dartie. I'm not so bad really. Good-night!" Fleur left him standing there with his hat raised. Stealing a look round, she saw him stroll—immaculate and heavy—back toward his Club.

'He can't even love with conviction,' she thought. 'What will Mother do?'

Her dreams that night were endless and uneasy; she rose heavy and unrested, and went at once to the study of Whitaker's Almanac. A Forsyte is instinctively aware that facts are the real crux of any situation. She might conquer Jon's prejudice, but without exact machinery to complete their desperate resolve, nothing would happen. From the invaluable tome she learned that they must each be twenty-one; or some one's consent would be necessary, which of course was unobtainable; then she became lost in directions concerning licenses, certificates, notices, districts, coming finally to the word "perjury." But that was nonsense! Who would really mind their giving wrong ages in order to be married for love! She ate hardly any breakfast, and went back to Whitaker. The more she studied the less sure she became; till, idly turning the pages, she came to Scotland. People could be married there without any of this nonsense. She had only to go and stay there twenty-one days, then Jon could come, and in front of two people they could declare themselves married. And what was more—they would be! It was far the best way; and at once she ran over her schoolfellows. There was Mary Lambe who lived in Edinburgh and was "quite a sport!"

She had a brother too. She could stay with Mary Lambe, who with her brother would serve for witnesses. She well knew that some girls would think all this unnecessary, and that all she and Jon need do was to go away together for a weekend and then say to their people: "We are married by Nature, we must now be married by Law." But Fleur was Forsyte enough to feel such a proceeding dubious, and to dread her father's face when he heard of it. Besides, she did not believe that Jon would do it; he had an opinion of her such as she could not bear to diminish. No! Mary Lambe was preferable, and it was just the time of year to go to Scotland. More at ease now she packed, avoided her aunt, and took a bus to Chiswick. She was too early, and went on to Kew Gardens. She found no peace among its flower-beds, labelled trees, and broad green spaces, and having lunched off anchovy-paste sandwiches and coffee, returned to Chiswick and rang June's bell. The Austrian admitted her to the "little meal-room." Now that she knew what she and Jon were up against, her longing for him had increased tenfold, as if he were a toy with sharp edges or dangerous paint such as they had tried to take from her as a child. If she could not have her way, and get Jon for good and all, she felt like dying of privation. By hook or crook she must and would get him! A round dim mirror of very old glass hung over the pink brick hearth. She stood looking at herself reflected in it, pale, and rather dark under the eyes; little shudders kept passing through her nerves. Then she heard the bell ring, and, stealing to the window, saw him standing on the doorstep smoothing his hair and lips, as if he too were trying to subdue the fluttering of his nerves.

She was sitting on one of the two rush-seated chairs, with her back to the door, when he came in, and she said at once—

"Sit down, Jon, I want to talk seriously."

Jon sat on the table by her side, and without looking at him she went on:

"If you don't want to lose me, we must get married."

Jon gasped.

"Why? Is there anything new?"

"No, but I felt it at Robin Hill, and among my people."

"But—" stammered Jon, "at Robin Hill—it was all smooth—and they've said nothing to me."

"But they mean to stop us. Your mother's face was enough. And my father's."

"Have you seen him since?"

Fleur nodded. What mattered a few supplementary lies?

"But," said Jon eagerly, "I can't see how they can feel like that after all these years."

Fleur looked up at him.

"Perhaps you don't love me enough." "Not love you enough! Why—!"

"Then make sure of me."

"Without telling them?"

"Not till after."

Jon was silent. How much older he looked than on that day, barely two months ago, when she first saw him—quite two years older!

"It would hurt Mother awfully," he said.

Fleur drew her hand away.

"You've got to choose."

Jon slid off the table on to his knees.

"But why not tell them? They can't really stop us, Fleur!"

"They can! I tell you, they can."

"How?"

"We're utterly dependent—by putting money pressure, and all sorts of other pressure. I'm not patient, Jon."

"But it's deceiving them."

Fleur got up.

"You can't really love me, or you wouldn't hesitate. 'He either fears his fate too much!'"

Lifting his hands to her waist, Jon forced her to sit down again. She hurried on:

"I've planned it all out. We've only to go to Scotland. When we're married they'll soon come round. People always come round to facts. Don't you see, Jon?"

"But to hurt them so awfully!"

So he would rather hurt her than those people of his! "All right, then; let me go!"

Jon got up and put his back against the door.

"I expect you're right," he said slowly; "but I want to think it over."

She could see that he was seething with feelings he wanted to express; but she did not mean to help him. She hated herself at this moment and almost hated him. Why had she to do all the work to secure their love? It wasn't fair. And then she saw his eyes, adoring and distressed.

"Don't look like that! I only don't want to lose you, Jon."

"You can't lose me so long as you want me."

"Oh, yes, I can."

Jon put his hands on her shoulders.

"Fleur, do you know anything you haven't told me?"

It was the point-blank question she had dreaded. She looked straight at him, and answered: "No." She had burnt her boats; but what did it matter, if she got him? He would forgive her. And throwing her arms round his neck, she kissed him on the lips. She was winning! She felt it in the beating of his heart against her, in the closing of his eyes. "I want to make sure! I want to make sure!" she whispered.

"Promise!"

Jon did not answer. His face had the stillness of extreme trouble. At last he said:

"It's like hitting them. I must think a little, Fleur. I really must."

Fleur slipped out of his arms.

"Oh! Very well!" And suddenly she burst into tears of disappointment, shame, and overstrain. Followed five minutes of acute misery. Jon's remorse and tenderness knew no bounds; but he did not promise. Despite her will to cry, "Very well, then, if you don't love me enough-goodbye!" she dared not. From birth accustomed to her own way, this check from one so young, so tender, so devoted, baffled and surprised her. She wanted to push him away from her, to try what anger and coldness would do, and again she dared not. The knowledge that she was scheming to rush him blindfold into the irrevocable weakened everything—weakened the sincerity of pique, and the sincerity of passion; even her kisses had not the lure she wished for them. That stormy little meeting ended inconclusively.

"Will you some tea, gnadiges Fraulein?"

Pushing Jon from her, she cried out:

"No-no, thank you! I'm just going."

And before he could prevent her she was gone.

She went stealthily, mopping her gushed, stained cheeks, frightened, angry, very miserable. She had stirred Jon up so fearfully, yet nothing definite was promised or arranged! But the more uncertain and hazardous the future, the more "the will to have" worked its tentacles into the flesh of her heart—like some burrowing tick!

No one was at Green Street. Winifred had gone with Imogen to see a play which some said was allegorical, and others "very exciting, don't you know." It was because of what others said that Winifred and Imogen had gone. Fleur went on to Paddington. Through the carriage the air from the brick-kilns of West Drayton and the late hayfields fanned her still gushed cheeks. Flowers had seemed to be had for the picking; now they were all thorned and prickled. But the golden flower within the crown of spikes seemed to her tenacious spirit all the fairer and more desirable.

IX

THE FAT IN THE FIRE

On reaching home Fleur found an atmosphere so peculiar that it penetrated even the perplexed aura of her own private life. Her mother was inaccessibly entrenched in a brown study; her father contemplating fate in the vinery. Neither of them had a word to throw to a dog. 'Is it because of me?' thought Fleur. 'Or because of Profond?' To her mother she said:

"What's the matter with Father?"

Her mother answered with a shrug of her shoulders.

To her father:

"What's the matter with Mother?"

Her father answered:

"Matter? What should be the matter?" and gave her a sharp look.

"By the way," murmured Fleur, "Monsieur Profond is going a 'small' voyage on his yacht, to the South Seas."

Soames examined a branch on which no grapes were growing.

"This vine's a failure," he said. "I've had young Mont here. He asked me something about you."

"Oh! How do you like him, Father?"

"He—he's a product—like all these young people."

"What were you at his age, dear?"

Soames smiled grimly.

"We went to work, and didn't play about—flying and motoring, and making love."

"Didn't you ever make love?"

She avoided looking at him while she said that, but she saw him well enough. His pale face had reddened, his eyebrows, where darkness was still mingled with the grey, had come close together.

"I had no time or inclination to philander."

"Perhaps you had a grand passion."

Soames looked at her intently.

"Yes—if you want to know—and much good it did me." He moved away, along by the hot-water pipes. Fleur tiptoed silently after him.

"Tell me about it, Father!"

Soames became very still.

"What should you want to know about such things, at your age?"

"Is she alive?"

He nodded.

"And married?" Yes."

"It's Jon Forsyte's mother, isn't it? And she was your wife first."

It was said in a flash of intuition. Surely his opposition came from his anxiety that she should not know of that old wound to his pride. But she was startled. To see some one so old and calm wince as if struck, to hear so sharp a note of pain in his voice!

"Who told you that? If your aunt! I can't bear the affair talked of."

"But, darling," said Fleur, softly, "it's so long ago."

"Long ago or not, I...."

Fleur stood stroking his arm.

"I've tried to forget," he said suddenly; "I don't wish to be reminded." And then, as if venting some long and secret irritation, he added: "In these days people don't understand. Grand passion, indeed! No one knows what it is."

"I do," said Fleur, almost in a whisper.

Soames, who had turned his back on her, spun round.

"What are you talking of—a child like you!"

"Perhaps I've inherited it, Father."

"What?"

"For her son, you see."

He was pale as a sheet, and she knew that she was as bad. They stood staring at each other in the steamy heat, redolent of the mushy scent of earth, of potted geranium, and of vines coming along fast.

"This is crazy," said Soames at last, between dry lips.

Scarcely moving her own, she murmured:

"Don't be angry, Father. I can't help it."

But she could see he wasn't angry; only scared, deeply scared.

"I thought that foolishness," he stammered, "was all forgotten."

"Oh, no! It's ten times what it was."

Soames kicked at the hot-water pipe. The hapless movement touched her, who had no fear of her father—none.

"Dearest!" she said. "What must be, must, you know."

"Must!" repeated Soames. "You don't know what you're talking of. Has that boy been told?"

The blood rushed into her cheeks.

"Not yet."

He had turned from her again, and, with one shoulder a little raised, stood staring fixedly at a joint in the pipes.

"It's most distasteful to me," he said suddenly; "nothing could be more so. Son of that fellow! It's—it's—perverse!"

She had noted, almost unconsciously, that he did not say "son of that woman," and again her intuition began working.

Did the ghost of that grand passion linger in some corner of his heart?

She slipped her hand under his arm.

"Jon's father is quite ill and old; I saw him."

"You—?"

"Yes, I went there with Jon; I saw them both."

"Well, and what did they say to you?"

"Nothing. They were very polite."

"They would be." He resumed his contemplation of the pipe-joint, and then said suddenly:

"I must think this over—I'll speak to you again to-night."

She knew this was final for the moment, and stole away, leaving him still looking at the pipe-joint. She wandered into the fruit-garden, among the raspberry and currant bushes, without impetus to pick and eat. Two months ago—she was light-hearted! Even two days ago—light-hearted, before Prosper Profond told her. Now she felt tangled in a web-of passions, vested rights, oppressions and revolts, the ties of love and hate. At this dark moment of discouragement there seemed, even to her hold-fast nature, no way out. How deal with it—how sway and bend things to her will, and get her heart's desire? And, suddenly, round the corner of the high box hedge, she came plump on her mother, walking swiftly, with an open letter in her hand. Her bosom was heaving, her eyes dilated, her cheeks flushed. Instantly Fleur thought: 'The yacht! Poor Mother!'

Annette gave her a wide startled look, and said:

"J'ai la migraine."

"I'm awfully sorry, Mother."

"Oh, yes! you and your father—sorry!"

"But, Mother—I am. I know what it feels like."

Annette's startled eyes grew wide, till the whites showed above them.

"Poor innocent!" she said.

Her mother—so self-possessed, and commonsensical—to look and speak like this! It was all frightening! Her father, her mother, herself! And only two months back they had seemed to have

everything they wanted in this world.

Annette crumpled the letter in her hand. Fleur knew that she must ignore the sight.

"Can't I do anything for your head, Mother?"

Annette shook that head and walked on, swaying her hips.

'It's cruel,' thought Fleur, 'and I was glad! That man! What do men come prowling for, disturbing everything! I suppose he's tired of her. What business has he to be tired of my mother? What business!' And at that thought, so natural and so peculiar, she uttered a little choked laugh.

She ought, of course, to be delighted, but what was there to be delighted at? Her father didn't really care! Her mother did, perhaps? She entered the orchard, and sat down under a cherry-tree. A breeze sighed in the higher boughs; the sky seen through their green was very blue and very white in cloud—those heavy white clouds almost always present in river landscape. Bees, sheltering out of the wind, hummed softly, and over the lush grass fell the thick shade from those fruit-trees planted by her father five-and-twenty, years ago. Birds were almost silent, the cuckoos had ceased to sing, but wood-pigeons were cooing. The breath and drone and cooing of high summer were not for long a sedative to her excited nerves. Crouched over her knees she began to scheme. Her father must be made to back her up. Why should he mind so long as she was happy? She had not lived for nearly nineteen years without knowing that her future was all he really cared about. She had, then, only to convince him that her future could not be happy without Jon. He thought it a mad fancy. How foolish the old were, thinking they could tell what the young felt! Had not he confessed that he—when young—had loved with a grand passion? He ought to understand! 'He piles up his money for me,' she thought; 'but what's the use, if I'm not going to be happy?' Money, and all it bought, did not bring happiness. Love only brought that. The ox-eyed daisies in this orchard, which gave it such a moony look sometimes, grew wild and happy, and had their hour. 'They oughtn't to have called me Fleur,' she mused, 'if they didn't mean me to have my hour, and be happy while it lasts.' Nothing real stood in the way, like poverty, or disease—sentiment only, a ghost from the unhappy past! Jon was right. They wouldn't let you live, these old people! They made mistakes, committed crimes, and wanted their children to go on paying! The breeze died away; midges began to bite. She got up, plucked a piece of honeysuckle, and went in.

It was hot that night. Both she and her mother had put on thin, pale low frocks. The dinner flowers were pale. Fleur was struck with the pale look of everything; her father's face, her mother's shoulders; the pale panelled walls, the pale grey velvety carpet, the lamp-shade, even the soup was pale. There was not one spot of colour in the room, not even wine in the pale glasses, for no one drank it. What was not pale was black—her father's clothes, the butler's clothes, her retriever stretched out exhausted in the window, the curtains black with a cream pattern. A moth came in, and that was pale. And silent was that half-mourning dinner in the heat.

Her father called her back as she was following her mother out.

She sat down beside him at the table, and, unpinning the pale honeysuckle, put it to her nose.

"I've been thinking," he said.

"Yes, dear?"

"It's extremely painful for me to talk, but there's no help for it. I don't know if you understand how much you are to me I've never spoken of it, I didn't think it necessary; but—but you're everything. Your mother—" he paused, staring at his finger-bowl of Venetian glass.

"Yes?"

"I've only you to look to. I've never had—never wanted anything else, since you were born."

"I know," Fleur murmured.

Soames moistened his lips.

"You may think this a matter I can smooth over and arrange for you. You're mistaken. I'm helpless."

Fleur did not speak.

"Quite apart from my own feelings," went on Soames with more resolution, "those two are not amenable to anything I can say. They—they hate me, as people always hate those whom they have injured." "But he—Jon—"

"He's their flesh and blood, her only child. Probably he means to her what you mean to me. It's a deadlock."

"No," cried Fleur, "no, Father!"

Soames leaned back, the image of pale patience, as if resolved on the betrayal of no emotion.

"Listen!" he said. "You're putting the feelings of two months—two months—against the feelings of thirty-five years! What chance do you think you have? Two months—your very first love affair, a matter of half a dozen meetings, a few walks and talks, a few kisses—against, against what you can't imagine, what no one could who hasn't been through it. Come, be reasonable, Fleur! It's midsummer madness!"

Fleur tore the honeysuckle into little, slow bits.

"The madness is in letting the past spoil it all.

"What do we care about the past? It's our lives, not yours."

Soames raised his hand to his forehead, where suddenly she saw moisture shining.

"Whose child are you?" he said. "Whose child is he? The present is linked with the past, the future with both. There's no getting away from that."

She had never heard philosophy pass those lips before. Impressed even in her agitation, she leaned her elbows on the table, her chin on her hands.

"But, Father, consider it practically. We want each other. There's ever so much money, and nothing whatever in the way but sentiment. Let's bury the past, Father."

His answer was a sigh.

"Besides," said Fleur gently, "you can't prevent us."

"I don't suppose," said Soames, "that if left to myself I should try to prevent you; I must put up with things, I know, to keep your affection. But it's not I who control this matter. That's what I want you to realise before it's too late. If you go on thinking you can get your way and encourage this feeling, the blow will be much heavier when you find you can't."

"Oh!" cried Fleur, "help me, Father; you can help me, you know."

Soames made a startled movement of negation. "I?" he said bitterly. "Help? I am the impediment—the just cause and impediment—isn't that the jargon? You have my blood in your veins."

He rose.

"Well, the fat's in the fire. If you persist in your wilfulness you'll have yourself to blame. Come! Don't be foolish, my child—my only child!"

Fleur laid her forehead against his shoulder.

All was in such turmoil within her. But no good to show it! No good at all! She broke away from him, and went out into the twilight, distraught, but unconvinced. All was indeterminate and vague within her, like the shapes and shadows in the garden, except—her will to have. A poplar pierced up into the dark-blue sky and touched a white star there. The dew wetted her shoes, and chilled her bare shoulders. She went down to the river bank, and stood gazing at a moonstreak on the darkening water. Suddenly she smelled tobacco smoke, and a white figure emerged as if created by the moon. It was young Mont in flannels, standing in his boat. She heard the tiny hiss of his cigarette extinguished in the water.

"Fleur," came his voice, "don't be hard on a poor devil! I've been waiting hours."

"For what?"

"Come in my boat!"

"Not I."

"Why not?"

"I'm not a water-nymph."

"Haven't you any romance in you? Don't be modern, Fleur!"

He appeared on the path within a yard of her.

"Go away!"

"Fleur, I love you. Fleur!"

Fleur uttered a short laugh.

"Come again," she said, "when I haven't got my wish."

"What is your wish?"

"Ask another."

"Fleur," said Mont, and his voice sounded strange, "don't mock me! Even vivisected dogs are worth decent treatment before they're cut up for good."

Fleur shook her head; but her lips were trembling.

"Well, you shouldn't make me jump. Give me a cigarette."

Mont gave her one, lighted it, and another for himself.

"I don't want to talk rot," he said, "but please imagine all the rot that all the lovers that ever were have talked, and all my special rot thrown in."

"Thank you, I have imagined it. Good-night!" They stood for a moment facing each other in the shadow of an acacia-tree with very moonlit blossoms, and the smoke from their cigarettes mingled in the air between them.

"Also ran: 'Michael Mont'?" he said. Fleur turned abruptly toward the house. On the lawn she stopped to look back. Michael Mont was whirling his arms above him; she could see them dashing at his head; then waving at the moonlit blossoms of the acacia. His voice just reached her. "Jolly-jolly!" Fleur shook herself. She couldn't help him, she had too much trouble of her own! On the verandah she stopped very suddenly again. Her mother was sitting in the drawing-room at her writing bureau, quite alone. There was nothing remarkable in the expression of her face except its utter immobility. But she looked desolate! Fleur went upstairs. At the door of her room she paused. She could hear her father walking up and down, up and down the picture-gallery.

'Yes,' she thought, jolly! Oh, Jon!

X

DECISION

When Fleur left him Jon stared at the Austrian. She was a thin woman with a dark face and the concerned expression of one who has watched every little good that life once had slip from her, one by one. "No tea?" she said.

Susceptible to the disappointment in her voice, Jon murmured:

"No, really; thanks."

"A lil cup—it ready. A lil cup and cigarette."

Fleur was gone! Hours of remorse and indecision lay before him! And with a heavy sense of disproportion he smiled, and said:

"Well—thank you!"

She brought in a little pot of tea with two little cups, and a silver box of cigarettes on a little tray.

"Sugar? Miss Forsyte has much sugar—she buy my sugar, my friend's sugar also. Miss Forsyte is a veree kind lady. I am happy to serve her. You her brother?"

"Yes," said Jon, beginning to puff the second cigarette of his life.

"Very young brother," said the Austrian, with a little anxious smile, which reminded him of the wag of a dog's tail.

"May I give you some?" he said. "And won't you sit down, please?"

The Austrian shook her head.

"Your father a very nice old man—the most nice old man I ever see. Miss Forsyte tell me all about him. Is he better?"

Her words fell on Jon like a reproach. "Oh Yes, I think he's all right."

"I like to see him again," said the Austrian, putting a hand on her heart; "he have verree kind heart."

"Yes," said Jon. And again her words seemed to him a reproach.

"He never give no trouble to no one, and smile so gentle."

"Yes, doesn't he?"

"He look at Miss Forsyte so funny sometimes. I tell him all my story; he so sympatisch. Your mother—she nice and well?"

"Yes, very."

"He have her photograph on his dressing-table. Verree beautiful"

Jon gulped down his tea. This woman, with her concerned face and her reminding words, was like the first and second murderers.

"Thank you," he said; "I must go now. May—may I leave this with you?"

He put a ten-shilling note on the tray with a doubting hand and gained the door. He heard the Austrian gasp, and hurried out. He had just time to catch his train, and all the way to Victoria looked at every face that passed, as lovers will, hoping against hope. On reaching Worthing he put his luggage into the local train, and set out across the Downs for Wansdon, trying to walk off his aching irresolution. So long as he went full bat, he could enjoy the beauty of those green slopes, stopping now and again to sprawl on the grass, admire the perfection of a wild rose or listen to a lark's song. But the war of motives within him was but postponed—the longing for Fleur, and the hatred of deception. He came to the old chalk-pit above Wansdon with his mind no more made up than when he started. To see both sides of a question vigorously was at once Jon's strength and weakness. He tramped in, just as the first dinner-bell rang. His things had already been brought up. He had a hurried bath and came down to find Holly alone—Val had gone to Town and would not be back till the last train.

Since Val's advice to him to ask his sister what was the matter between the two families, so much had happened—Fleur's disclosure in the Green Park, her visit to Robin Hill, to-day's meeting—that there seemed nothing to ask. He talked of Spain, his sunstroke, Val's horses, their father's health. Holly startled him by saying that she thought their father not at all well. She had been twice to Robin Hill for the week-end. He had seemed fearfully languid, sometimes even in pain, but had always refused to talk about himself.

"He's awfully dear and unselfish—don't you think, Jon?"

Feeling far from dear and unselfish himself, Jon answered: "Rather!"

"I think, he's been a simply perfect father, so long as I can remember."

"Yes," answered Jon, very subdued.

"He's never interfered, and he's always seemed to understand. I shall never forget his letting me go to South Africa in the Boer War when I was in love with Val."

"That was before he married Mother, wasn't it?" said Jon suddenly.

"Yes. Why?"

"Oh! nothing. Only, wasn't she engaged to Fleur's father first?"

Holly put down the spoon she was using, and raised her eyes. Her stare was circumspect. What did

the boy know? Enough to make it better to tell him? She could not decide. He looked strained and worried, altogether older, but that might be the sunstroke.

"There was something," she said. "Of course we were out there, and got no news of anything." She could not take the risk.

It was not her secret. Besides, she was in the dark about his feelings now. Before Spain she had made sure he was in love; but boys were boys; that was seven weeks ago, and all Spain between.

She saw that he knew she was putting him off, and added:

"Have you heard anything of Fleur?"

"Yes."

His face told her, then, more than the most elaborate explanations. So he had not forgotten!

She said very quietly: "Fleur is awfully attractive, Jon, but you know—Val and I don't really like her very much."

"Why?"

"We think she's got rather a 'having' nature."

"Having'? I don't know what you mean. She—she—" he pushed his dessert plate away, got up, and went to the window.

Holly, too, got up, and put her arm round his waist.

"Don't be angry, Jon dear. We can't all see people in the same light, can we? You know, I believe each of us only has about one or two people who can see the best that's in us, and bring it out. For you I think it's your mother. I once saw her looking at a letter of yours; it was wonderful to see her face. I think she's the most beautiful woman I ever saw—Age doesn't seem to touch her."

Jon's face softened; then again became tense. Everybody—everybody was against him and Fleur! It all strengthened the appeal of her words: "Make sure of me—marry me, Jon!"

Here, where he had passed that wonderful week with her—the tug of her enchantment, the ache in his heart increased with every minute that she was not there to make the room, the garden, the very air magical. Would he ever be able to live down here, not seeing her? And he closed up utterly, going early to bed. It would not make him healthy, wealthy, and wise, but it closeted him with memory of Fleur in her fancy frock. He heard Val's arrival—the Ford discharging cargo, then the stillness of the summer night stole back—with only the bleating of very distant sheep, and a night-Jar's harsh purring. He leaned far out. Cold moon—warm air—the Downs like silver! Small wings, a stream bubbling, the rambler roses! God—how empty all of it without her! In the Bible it was written: Thou shalt leave father and mother and cleave to—Fleur!

Let him have pluck, and go and tell them! They couldn't stop him marrying her—they wouldn't want to stop him when they knew how he felt. Yes! He would go! Bold and open—Fleur was wrong!

The night-jar ceased, the sheep were silent; the only sound in the darkness was the bubbling of the stream. And Jon in his bed slept, freed from the worst of life's evils—indecision.

XI

TIMOTHY PROPHECIES

On the day of the cancelled meeting at the National Gallery began the second anniversary of the resurrection of England's pride and glory—or, more shortly, the top hat. "Lord's"—that festival which the War had driven from the field—raised its light and dark blue flags for the second time, displaying almost every feature of a glorious past. Here, in the luncheon interval, were all species of female and one species of male hat, protecting the multiple types of face associated with "the classes." The observing Forsyte might discern in the free or unconsidered seats a certain number of the squash-hatted, but they hardly ventured on the grass; the old school—or schools—could still rejoice that the

proletariat was not yet paying the necessary half-crown. Here was still a close borough, the only one left on a large scale—for the papers were about to estimate the attendance at ten thousand. And the ten thousand, all animated by one hope, were asking each other one question: "Where are you lunching?" Something wonderfully uplifting and reassuring in that query and the sight of so many people like themselves voicing it! What reserve power in the British realm—enough pigeons, lobsters, lamb, salmon mayonnaise, strawberries, and bottles of champagne to feed the lot! No miracle in prospect—no case of seven loaves and a few fishes—faith rested on surer foundations. Six thousand top hats, four thousand parasols would be doffed and furled, ten thousand mouths all speaking the same English would be filled. There was life in the old dog yet! Tradition! And again Tradition! How strong and how elastic! Wars might rage, taxation prey, Trades Unions take toll, and Europe perish of starvation; but the ten thousand would be fed; and, within their ring fence, stroll upon green turf, wear their top hats, and meet—theirself. The heart was sound, the pulse still regular. E-ton! E-ton! Har-r-o-o-o-w!

Among the many Forsytes, present on a hunting-ground theirs, by personal prescriptive right, or proxy, was Soames with his wife and daughter. He had not been at either school, he took no interest in cricket, but he wanted Fleur to show her frock, and he wanted to wear his top hat parade it again in peace and plenty among his peers. He walked sedately with Fleur between him and Annette. No women equalled them, so far as he could see. They could walk, and hold themselves up; there was substance in their good looks; the modern woman had no build, no chest, no anything! He remembered suddenly with what intoxication of pride he had walked round with Irene in the first years of his first marriage. And how they used to lunch on the drag which his mother would make his father have, because it was so "chic"—all drags and carriages in those days, not these lumbering great Stands! And how consistently Montague Dartie had drunk too much. He supposed that people drank too much still, but there was not the scope for it there used to be. He remembered George Forsyte—whose brothers Roger and Eustace had been at Harrow and Eton—towering up on the top of the drag waving a light-blue flag with one hand and a dark-blue flag with the other, and shouting "Etroow-Harrton!" Just when everybody was silent, like the buffoon he had always been; and Eustace got up to the nines below, too dandified to wear any colour or take any notice. H'm! Old days, and Irene in grey silk shot with palest green. He looked, sideways, at Fleur's face. Rather colourless—no light, no eagerness! That love affair was preying on her—a bad business! He looked beyond, at his wife's face, rather more touched up than usual, a little disdainful—not that she had any business to disdain, so far as he could see. She was taking Profond's defection with curious quietude; or was his "small" voyage just a blind? If so, he should refuse to see it! Having promenaded round the pitch and in front of the pavilion, they sought Winifred's table in the Bedouin Club tent. This Club—a new "cock and hen"—had been founded in the interests of travel, and of a gentleman with an old Scottish name, whose father had somewhat strangely been called Levi. Winifred had joined, not because she had travelled, but because instinct told her that a Club with such a name and such a founder was bound to go far; if one didn't join at once one might never have the chance. Its tent, with a text from the Koran on an orange ground, and a small green camel embroidered over the entrance, was the most striking on the ground. Outside it they found Jack Cardigan in a dark blue tie (he had once played for Harrow), batting with a Malacca cane to show how that fellow ought to have hit that ball. He piloted them in. Assembled in Winifred's corner were Imogen, Benedict with his young wife, Val Dartie without Holly, Maud and her husband, and, after Soames and his two were seated, one empty place.

"I'm expecting Prosper," said Winifred, "but he's so busy with his yacht."

Soames stole a glance. No movement in his wife's face! Whether that fellow were coming or not, she evidently knew all about it. It did not escape him that Fleur, too, looked at her mother. If Annette didn't respect his feelings, she might think of Fleur's! The conversation, very desultory, was syncopated by Jack Cardigan talking about "mid-off." He cited all the "great mid-offs" from the beginning of time, as if they had been a definite racial entity in the composition of the British people. Soames had finished his lobster, and was beginning on pigeon-pie, when he heard the words, "I'm a small bit late, Mrs. Dartie," and saw that there was no longer any empty place. That fellow was sitting between Annette and Imogen. Soames ate steadily on, with an occasional word to Maud and Winifred. Conversation buzzed around him. He heard the voice of Profond say:

"I think you're mistaken, Mrs. Forsyde; I'll—I'll bet Miss Forsyde agrees with me."

"In what?" came Fleur's clear voice across the table.

"I was sayin', young gurls are much the same as they always were—there's very small difference."

"Do you know so much about them?"

That sharp reply caught the ears of all, and Soames moved uneasily on his thin green chair.

"Well, I don't know, I think they want their own small way, and I think they always did."

"Indeed!"

"Oh, but—Prosper," Winifred interjected comfortably, "the girls in the streets—the girls who've been in munitions, the little flappers in the shops; their manners now really quite hit you in the eye."

At the word "hit" Jack Cardigan stopped his disquisition; and in the silence Monsieur Profond said:

"It was inside before, now it's outside; that's all."

"But their morals!" cried Imogen.

"Just as moral as they ever were, Mrs. Cardigan, but they've got more opportunity."

The saying, so cryptically cynical, received a little laugh from Imogen, a slight opening of Jack Cardigan's mouth, and a creak from Soames' chair.

Winifred said: "That's too bad, Prosper."

"What do you say, Mrs. Forsyde; don't you think human nature's always the same?"

Soames subdued a sudden longing to get up and kick the fellow. He heard his wife reply:

"Human nature is not the same in England as anywhere else." That was her confounded mockery!

"Well, I don't know much about this small country"—'No, thank God!' thought Soames—"but I should say the pot was boilin' under the lid everywhere. We all want pleasure, and we always did."

Damn the fellow! His cynicism was—was outrageous!

When lunch was over they broke up into couples for the digestive promenade. Too proud to notice, Soames knew perfectly that Annette and that fellow had gone prowling round together. Fleur was with Val; she had chosen him, no doubt, because he knew that boy. He himself had Winifred for partner. They walked in the bright, circling stream, a little flushed and sated, for some minutes, till Winifred sighed:

"I wish we were back forty years, old boy!"

Before the eyes of her spirit an interminable procession of her own "Lord's" frocks was passing, paid for with the money of her father, to save a recurrent crisis. "It's been very amusing, after all. Sometimes I even wish Monty was back. What do you think of people nowadays, Soames?"

"Precious little style. The thing began to go to pieces with bicycles and motor-cars; the War has finished it."

"I wonder what's coming?" said Winifred in a voice dreamy from pigeon-pie. "I'm not at all sure we shan't go back to crinolines and pegtops. Look at that dress!"

Soames shook his head.

"There's money, but no faith in things. We don't lay by for the future. These youngsters—it's all a short life and a merry one with them."

"There's a hat!" said Winifred. "I don't know—when you come to think of the people killed and all that in the War, it's rather wonderful, I think. There's no other country—Prosper says the rest are all bankrupt, except America; and of course her men always took their style in dress from us."

"Is that chap," said Soames, "really going to the South Seas?"

"Oh! one never knows where Prosper's going!"

"He's a sign of the times," muttered Soames, "if you like."

Winifred's hand gripped his arm.

"Don't turn your head," she said in a low voice, "but look to your right in the front row of the Stand."

Soames looked as best he could under that limitation. A man in a grey top hat, grey-bearded, with thin brown, folded cheeks, and a certain elegance of posture, sat there with a woman in a lawn-coloured frock, whose dark eyes were fixed on himself. Soames looked quickly at his feet. How funnily feet moved, one after the other like that! Winifred's voice said in his ear:

"Jolyon looks very ill; but he always had style. She doesn't change —except her hair."

"Why did you tell Fleur about that business?"

"I didn't; she picked it up. I always knew she would."

"Well, it's a mess. She's set her heart upon their boy."

"The little wretch," murmured Winifred. "She tried to take me in about that. What shall you do, Soames?"

"Be guided by events."

They moved on, silent, in the almost solid crowd.

"Really," said Winifred suddenly; "it almost seems like Fate. Only that's so old-fashioned. Look! there are George and Eustace!"

George Forsyte's lofty bulk had halted before them.

"Hallo, Soames!" he said. "Just met Profond and your wife. You'll catch 'em if you put on pace. Did you ever go to see old Timothy?"

Soames nodded, and the streams forced them apart.

"I always liked old George," said Winifred. "He's so droll."

"I never did," said Soames. "Where's your seat? I shall go to mine. Fleur may be back there."

Having seen Winifred to her seat, he regained his own, conscious of small, white, distant figures running, the click of the bat, the cheers and counter-cheers. No Fleur, and no Annette! You could expect nothing of women nowadays! They had the vote. They were "emancipated," and much good it was doing them! So Winifred would go back, would she, and put up with Dartie all over again? To have the past once more—to be sitting here as he had sat in '83 and '84, before he was certain that his marriage with Irene had gone all wrong, before her antagonism had become so glaring that with the best will in the world he could not overlook it. The sight of her with that fellow had brought all memory back. Even now he could not understand why she had been so impracticable. She could love other men; she had it in her! To himself, the one person she ought to have loved, she had chosen to refuse her heart. It seemed to him, fantastically, as he looked back, that all this modern relaxation of marriage—though its forms and laws were the same as when he married her—that all this modern looseness had come out of her revolt; it seemed to him, fantastically, that she had started it, till all decent ownership of anything had gone, or was on the point of going. All came from her! And now—a pretty state of things! Homes! How could you have them without mutual ownership? Not that he had ever had a real home! But had that been his fault? He had done his best. And his rewards were—those two sitting in that Stand, and this affair of Fleur's!

And overcome by loneliness he thought: 'Shan't wait any longer! They must find their own way back to the hotel—if they mean to come!' Hailing a cab outside the ground, he said:

"Drive me to the Bayswater Road." His old aunts had never failed him. To them he had meant an ever-welcome visitor. Though they were gone, there, still, was Timothy!

Smither was standing in the open doorway.

"Mr. Soames! I was just taking the air. Cook will be so pleased."

"How is Mr. Timothy?"

"Not himself at all these last few days, sir; he's been talking a great deal. Only this morning he was saying: 'My brother James, he's getting old.' His mind wanders, Mr. Soames, and then he will talk of them. He troubles about their investments. The other day he said: 'There's my brother Jolyon won't look at Consols'—he seemed quite down about it. Come in, Mr. Soames, come in! It's such a pleasant change!"

"Well," said Soames, "just for a few minutes."

"No," murmured Smither in the hall, where the air had the singular freshness of the outside day, "we haven't been very satisfied with him, not all this week. He's always been one to leave a titbit to the end; but ever since Monday he's been eating it first. If you notice a dog, Mr. Soames, at its dinner, it eats the meat first. We've always thought it such a good sign of Mr. Timothy at his age to leave it to the last, but now he seems to have lost all his self-control; and, of course, it makes him leave the rest. The doctor

doesn't make anything of it, but"—Smither shook her head—"he seems to think he's got to eat it first, in case he shouldn't get to it. That and his talking makes us anxious."

"Has he said anything important?"

"I shouldn't like to say that, Mr. Soames; but he's turned against his Will. He gets quite pettish—and after having had it out every morning for years, it does seem funny. He said the other day: 'They want my money.' It gave me such a turn, because, as I said to him, nobody wants his money, I'm sure. And it does seem a pity he should be thinking about money at his time of life. I took my courage in my 'ands. 'You know, Mr. Timothy,' I said, 'my dear mistress'—that's Miss Forsyte, Mr. Soames, Miss Ann that trained me—'she never thought about money,' I said, 'it was all character with her.' He looked at me, I can't tell you how funny, and he said quite dry: 'Nobody wants my character.' Think of his saying a thing like that! But sometimes he'll say something as sharp and sensible as anything."

Soames, who had been staring at an old print by the hat-rack, thinking, "That's got value!" murmured: "I'll go up and see him, Smither."

"Cook's with him," answered Smither above her corsets; "she will be pleased to see you."

He mounted slowly, with the thought: 'Shan't care to live to be that age.'

On the second floor, he paused, and tapped. The door was opened, and he saw the round homely face of a woman about sixty.

"Mr. Soames!" she said: "Why! Mr. Soames!"

Soames nodded. "All right, Cook!" and entered.

Timothy was propped up in bed, with his hands joined before his chest, and his eyes fixed on the ceiling, where a fly was standing upside down. Soames stood at the foot of the bed, facing him.

"Uncle Timothy," he said, raising his voice. "Uncle Timothy!"

Timothy's eyes left the fly, and levelled themselves on his visitor. Soames could see his pale tongue passing over his darkish lips.

"Uncle Timothy," he said again, "is there anything I can do for you? Is there anything you'd like to say?"

"Ha!" said Timothy.

"I've come to look you up and see that everything's all right."

Timothy nodded. He seemed trying to get used to the apparition before him.

"Have you got everything you want?"

"No," said Timothy.

"Can I get you anything?"

"No," said Timothy.

"I'm Soames, you know; your nephew, Soames Forsyte. Your brother James' son."

Timothy nodded.

"I shall be delighted to do anything I can for you."

Timothy beckoned. Soames went close to him:

"You—" said Timothy in a voice which seemed to have outlived tone, "you tell them all from me—you tell them all—" and his finger tapped on Soames' arm, "to hold on—hold on—Consols are goin' up," and he nodded thrice.

"All right!" said Soames; "I will."

"Yes," said Timothy, and, fixing his eyes again on the ceiling, he added: "That fly!"

Strangely moved, Soames looked at the Cook's pleasant fattish face, all little puckers from staring at fires.

"That'll do him a world of good, sir," she said.

A mutter came from Timothy, but he was clearly speaking to himself, and Soames went out with the cook.

"I wish I could make you a pink cream, Mr. Soames, like in old days; you did so relish them. Good-bye, sir; it has been a pleasure."

"Take care of him, Cook, he is old."

And, shaking her crumpled hand, he went down-stairs. Smither was still taking the air in the doorway.

"What do you think of him, Mr. Soames?"

"H'm!" Soames murmured: "He's lost touch."

"Yes," said Smither, "I was afraid you'd think that coming fresh out of the world to see him like."

"Smither," said Soames, "we're all indebted to you."

"Oh, no, Mr. Soames, don't say that! It's a pleasure—he's such a wonderful man."

"Well, good-bye!" said Soames, and got into his taxi.

'Going up!' he thought; 'going up!'

Reaching the hotel at Knightsbridge he went to their sitting-room, and rang for tea. Neither of them were in. And again that sense of loneliness came over him. These hotels. What monstrous great places they were now! He could remember when there was nothing bigger than Long's or Brown's, Morley's or the Tavistock, and the heads that were shaken over the Langham and the Grand. Hotels and Clubs—Clubs and Hotels; no end to them now! And Soames, who had just been watching at Lord's a miracle of tradition and continuity, fell into reverie over the changes in that London where he had been born five-and-sixty years before. Whether Consols were going up or not, London had become a terrific property. No such property in the world, unless it were New York! There was a lot of hysteria in the papers nowadays; but any one who, like himself, could remember London sixty years ago, and see it now, realised the fecundity and elasticity of wealth. They had only to keep their heads, and go at it steadily. Why! he remembered cobblestones, and stinking straw on the floor of your cab. And old Timothy—what could he not have told them, if he had kept his memory! Things were unsettled, people in a funk or in a hurry, but here were London and the Thames, and out there the British Empire, and the ends of the earth. "Consols are goin' up!" He should n't be a bit surprised. It was the breed that counted. And all that was bull-dogged in Soames stared for a moment out of his grey eyes, till diverted by the print of a Victorian picture on the walls. The hotel had bought three dozen of that little lot! The old hunting or "Rake's Progress" prints in the old inns were worth looking at—but this sentimental stuff—well, Victorianism had gone! "Tell them to hold on!" old Timothy had said. But to what were they to hold on in this modern welter of the "democratic principle"? Why, even privacy was threatened! And at the thought that privacy might perish, Soames pushed back his teacup and went to the window. Fancy owning no more of Nature than the crowd out there owned of the flowers and trees and waters of Hyde Park! No, no! Private possession underlay everything worth having. The world had slipped its sanity a bit, as dogs now and again at full moon slipped theirs and went off for a night's rabbiting; but the world, like the dog, knew where its bread was buttered and its bed warm, and would come back sure enough to the only home worth having—to private ownership. The world was in its second childhood for the moment, like old Timothy—eating its titbit first!

He heard a sound behind him, and saw that his wife and daughter had come in.

"So you're back!" he said.

Fleur did not answer; she stood for a moment looking at him and her mother, then passed into her bedroom. Annette poured herself out a cup of tea.

"I am going to Paris, to my mother, Soames." "Oh! To your mother?"

"Yes."

"For how long?"

"I do not know."

"And when are you going?"

"On Monday."

Was she really going to her mother? Odd, how indifferent he felt! Odd, how clearly she had perceived the indifference he would feel so long as there was no scandal. And suddenly between her and himself he saw distinctly the face he had seen that afternoon—Irene's.

"Will you want money?"

"Thank you; I have enough."

"Very well. Let us know when you are coming back."

Annette put down the cake she was fingering, and, looking up through darkened lashes, said:

"Shall I give Maman any message?"

"My regards."

Annette stretched herself, her hands on her waist, and said in French:

"What luck that you have never loved me, Soames!" Then rising, she too left the room. Soames was glad she had spoken it in French—it seemed to require no dealing with. Again that other face—pale, dark-eyed, beautiful still! And there stirred far down within him the ghost of warmth, as from sparks lingering beneath a mound of flaky ash. And Fleur infatuated with her boy! Queer chance! Yet, was there such a thing as chance? A man went down a street, a brick fell on his head. Ah! that was chance, no doubt. But this! "Inherited," his girl had said. She—she was "holding on"!

PART III I OLD JOLYON WALKS

Twofold impulse had made Jolyon say to his wife at breakfast "Let's go up to Lord's!"

"Wanted"—something to abate the anxiety in which those two had lived during the sixty hours since Jon had brought Fleur down. "Wanted"—too, that which might assuage the pangs of memory in one who knew he might lose them any day!

Fifty-eight years ago Jolyon had become an Eton boy, for old Jolyon's whim had been that he should be canonised at the greatest possible expense. Year after year he had gone to Lord's from Stanhope Gate with a father whose youth in the eighteen-twenties had been passed without polish in the game of cricket. Old Jolyon would speak quite openly of swipes, full tosses, half and three-quarter balls; and young Jolyon with the guileless snobbery of youth had trembled lest his sire should be overheard. Only in this supreme matter of cricket he had been nervous, for his father—in Crimean whiskers then—had ever impressed him as the beau ideal. Though never canonised himself, Old Jolyon's natural fastidiousness and balance had saved him from the errors of the vulgar. How delicious, after howling in a top hat and a sweltering heat, to go home with his father in a hansom cab, bathe, dress, and forth to the "Disunion" Club, to dine off white bait, cutlets, and a tart, and go—two "swells," old and young, in lavender kid gloves—to the opera or play. And on Sunday, when the match was over, and his top hat duly broken, down with his father in a special hansom to the "Crown and Sceptre," and the terrace above the river—the golden sixties when the world was simple, dandies glamorous, Democracy not born, and the books of Whyte Melville coming thick and fast.

A generation later, with his own boy, Jolly, Harrow-buttonholed with corn-flowers—by old Jolyon's whim his grandson had been canonised at a trifle less expense—again Jolyon had experienced the heat and counter-passions of the day, and come back to the cool and the strawberry beds of Robin Hill, and billiards after dinner, his boy making the most heart-breaking flukes and trying to seem languid and grown-up. Those two days each year he and his son had been alone together in the world, one on each side—and Democracy just born!

And so, he had unearthed a grey top hat, borrowed a tiny bit of light-blue ribbon from Irene, and gingerly, keeping cool, by car and train and taxi, had reached Lord's Ground. There, beside her in a lawn-coloured frock with narrow black edges, he had watched the game, and felt the old thrill stir within him.

When Soames passed, the day was spoiled. Irene's face was distorted by compression of the lips. No

good to go on sitting here with Soames or perhaps his daughter recurring in front of them, like decimals. And he said:

"Well, dear, if you've had enough—let's go!"

That evening Jolyon felt exhausted. Not wanting her to see him thus, he waited till she had begun to play, and stole off to the little study. He opened the long window for air, and the door, that he might still hear her music drifting in; and, settled in his father's old armchair, closed his eyes, with his head against the worn brown leather. Like that passage of the Cesar Franck Sonata—so had been his life with her, a divine third movement. And now this business of Jon's—this bad business! Drifted to the edge of consciousness, he hardly knew if it were in sleep that he smelled the scent of a cigar, and seemed to see his father in the blackness before his closed eyes. That shape formed, went, and formed again; as if in the very chair where he himself was sitting, he saw his father, black-coated, with knees crossed, glasses balanced between thumb and finger; saw the big white moustaches, and the deep eyes looking up below a dome of forehead and seeming to search his own, seeming to speak. "Are you facing it, Jo? It's for you to decide. She's only a woman!" Ah! how well he knew his father in that phrase; how all the Victorian Age came up with it! And his answer "No, I've funk'd it—funk'd hurting her and Jon and myself. I've got a heart; I've funk'd it." But the old eyes, so much older, so much younger than his own, kept at it; "It's your wife, your son; your past. Tackle it, my boy!" Was it a message from walking spirit; or but the instinct of his sire living on within him? And again came that scent of cigar smoke—from the old saturated leather. Well! he would tackle it, write to Jon, and put the whole thing down in black and white! And suddenly he breathed with difficulty, with a sense of suffocation, as if his heart were swollen. He got up and went out into the air. The stars were very bright. He passed along the terrace round the corner of the house, till, through the window of the music-room, he could see Irene at the piano, with lamp-light falling on her powdery hair; withdrawn into herself she seemed, her dark eyes staring straight before her, her hands idle. Jolyon saw her raise those hands and clasp them over her breast. 'It's Jon, with her,' he thought; 'all Jon! I'm dying out of her—it's natural!'

And, careful not to be seen, he stole back.

Next day, after a bad night, he sat down to his task. He wrote with difficulty and many erasures. "MY DEAREST BOY,

"You are old enough to understand how very difficult it is for elders to give themselves away to their young. Especially when—like your mother and myself, though I shall never think of her as anything but young—their hearts are altogether set on him to whom they must confess. I cannot say we are conscious of having sinned exactly—people in real life very seldom are, I believe—but most persons would say we had, and at all events our conduct, righteous or not, has found us out. The truth is, my dear, we both have pasts, which it is now my task to make known to you, because they so grievously and deeply affect your future. Many, very many years ago, as far back indeed as 1883, when she was only twenty, your mother had the great and lasting misfortune to make an unhappy marriage—no, not with me, Jon. Without money of her own, and with only a stepmother—closely related to Jezebel—she was very unhappy in her home life. It was Fleur's father that she married, my cousin Soames Forsyte. He had pursued her very tenaciously and to do him justice was deeply in love with her. Within a week she knew the fearful mistake she had made. It was not his fault; it was her error of judgment—her misfortune."

So far Jolyon had kept some semblance of irony, but now his subject carried him away.

"Jon, I want to explain to you if I can—and it's very hard—how it is that an unhappy marriage such as this can so easily come about. You will of course say: 'If she didn't really love him how could she ever have married him?' You would be right if it were not for one or two rather terrible considerations. From this initial mistake of hers all the subsequent trouble, sorrow, and tragedy have come, and so I must make it clear to you if I can. You see, Jon, in those days and even to this day—indeed, I don't see, for all the talk of enlightenment, how it can well be otherwise—most girls are married ignorant of the sexual side of life. Even if they know what it means they have not experienced it. That's the crux. It is this actual lack of experience, whatever verbal knowledge they have, which makes all the difference and all the trouble. In a vast number of marriages—and your mother's was one—girls are not and cannot be certain whether they love the man they marry or not; they do not know until after that act of union which makes the reality of marriage. Now, in many, perhaps in most doubtful cases, this act cements and strengthens the attachment, but in other cases, and your mother's was one, it is a revelation of mistake, a destruction of such attraction as there was. There is nothing more tragic in a woman's life than such a revelation, growing daily, nightly clearer. Coarse-grained and unthinking people are apt to laugh at such a mistake, and say, 'What a fuss about nothing!' Narrow and self-righteous people, only capable of judging the lives of others by their own, are apt to condemn those who make this tragic error, to condemn them for life to the dungeons they have made for themselves. You know the

expression: 'She has made her bed, she must lie on it!' It is a hard-mouthed saying, quite unworthy of a gentleman or lady in the best sense of those words; and I can use no stronger condemnation. I have not been what is called a moral man, but I wish to use no words to you, my dear, which will make you think lightly of ties or contracts into which you enter. Heaven forbid! But with the experience of a life behind me I do say that those who condemn the victims of these tragic mistakes, condemn them and hold out no hands to help them, are inhuman, or rather they would be if they had the understanding to know what they are doing. But they haven't! Let them go! They are as much anathema to me as I, no doubt, am to them. I have had to say all this, because I am going to put you into a position to judge your mother, and you are very young, without experience of what life is. To go on with the story. After three years of effort to subdue her shrinking—I was going to say her loathing and it's not too strong a word, for shrinking soon becomes loathing under such circumstances—three years of what to a sensitive, beauty-loving nature like your mother's, Jon, was torment, she met a young man who fell in love with her. He was the architect of this very house that we live in now, he was building it for her and Fleur's father to live in, a new prison to hold her, in place of the one she inhabited with him in London. Perhaps that fact played some part in what came of it. But in any case she, too, fell in love with him. I know it's not necessary to explain to you that one does not precisely choose with whom one will fall in love. It comes. Very well! It came. I can imagine—though she never said much to me about it—the struggle that then took place in her, because, Jon, she was brought up strictly and was not light in her ideas—not at all. However, this was an overwhelming feeling, and it came to pass that they loved in deed as well as in thought. Then came a fearful tragedy. I must tell you of it because if I don't you will never understand the real situation that you have now to face. The man whom she had married—Soames Forsyte, the father of Fleur one night, at the height of her passion for this young man, forcibly reasserted his rights over her. The next day she met her lover and told him of it. Whether he committed suicide or whether he was accidentally run over in his distraction, we never knew; but so it was. Think of your mother as she was that evening when she heard of his death. I happened to see her. Your grandfather sent me to help her if I could. I only just saw her, before the door was shut against me by her husband. But I have never forgotten her face, I can see it now. I was not in love with her then, not for twelve years after, but I have never forgotten. My dear boy—it is not easy to write like this. But you see, I must. Your mother is wrapped up in you, utterly, devotedly. I don't wish to write harshly of Soames Forsyte. I don't think harshly of him. I have long been sorry for him; perhaps I was sorry even then. As the world judges she was in error, he within his rights. He loved her—in his way. She was his property. That is the view he holds of life—of human feelings and hearts—property. It's not his fault—so was he born. To me it is a view that has always been abhorrent—so was I born! Knowing you as I do, I feel it cannot be otherwise than abhorrent to you. Let me go on with the story. Your mother fled from his house that night; for twelve years she lived quietly alone without companionship of any sort, until in 1899 her husband—you see, he was still her husband, for he did not attempt to divorce her, and she of course had no right to divorce him—became conscious, it seems, of the want of children, and commenced a long attempt to induce her to go back to him and give him a child. I was her trustee then, under your Grandfather's Will, and I watched this going on. While watching, I became attached to her, devotedly attached. His pressure increased, till one day she came to me here and practically put herself under my protection. Her husband, who was kept informed of all her movements, attempted to force us apart by bringing a divorce suit, or possibly he really meant it, I don't know; but anyway our names were publicly joined. That decided us, and we became united in fact. She was divorced, married me, and you were born. We have lived in perfect happiness, at least I have, and I believe your mother also. Soames, soon after the divorce, married Fleur's mother, and she was born. That is the story, Jon. I have told it you, because by the affection which we see you have formed for this man's daughter you are blindly moving toward what must utterly destroy your mother's happiness, if not your own. I don't wish to speak of myself, because at my age there's no use supposing I shall cumber the ground much longer, besides, what I should suffer would be mainly on her account, and on yours. But what I want you to realise is that feelings of horror and aversion such as those can never be buried or forgotten. They are alive in her to-day. Only yesterday at Lord's we happened to see Soames Forsyte. Her face, if you had seen it, would have convinced you. The idea that you should marry his daughter is a nightmare to her, Jon. I have nothing to say against Fleur save that she is his daughter. But your children, if you married her, would be the grandchildren of Soames, as much as of your mother, of a man who once owned your mother as a man might own a slave. Think what that would mean. By such a marriage you enter the camp which held your mother prisoner and wherein she ate her heart out. You are just on the threshold of life, you have only known this girl two months, and however deeply you think you love her, I appeal to you to break it off at once. Don't give your mother this rankling pain and humiliation during the rest of her life. Young though she will always seem to me, she is fifty-seven. Except for us two she has no one in the world. She will soon have only you. Pluck up your spirit, Jon, and break away. Don't put this cloud and barrier between you. Don't break her heart! Bless you, my dear boy, and again forgive me for all the pain this letter must bring you—we tried to spare it you, but Spain—it seems—was no good.

"Ever your devoted father
"JOLYON FORSYTE."

Having finished his confession, Jolyon sat with a thin cheek on his hand, re-reading. There were things in it which hurt him so much, when he thought of Jon reading them, that he nearly tore the letter up. To speak of such things at all to a boy—his own boy—to speak of them in relation to his own wife and the boy's own mother, seemed dreadful to the reticence of his Forsyte soul. And yet without speaking of them how make Jon understand the reality, the deep cleavage, the ineffaceable scar? Without them, how justify this stifling of the boy's love? He might just as well not write at all!

He folded the confession, and put it in his pocket. It was—thank Heaven!—Saturday; he had till Sunday evening to think it over; for even if posted now it could not reach Jon till Monday. He felt a curious relief at this delay, and at the fact that, whether sent or not, it was written.

In the rose garden, which had taken the place of the old fernery, he could see Irene snipping and pruning, with a little basket on her arm. She was never idle, it seemed to him, and he envied her now that he himself was idle nearly all his time. He went down to her. She held up a stained glove and smiled. A piece of lace tied under her chin concealed her hair, and her oval face with its still dark brows looked very young.

"The green-fly are awful this year, and yet it's cold. You look tired, Jolyon."

Jolyon took the confession from his pocket. "I've been writing this. I think you ought to see it?"

"To Jon?" Her whole face had changed, in that instant, becoming almost haggard.

"Yes; the murder's out."

He gave it to her, and walked away among the roses. Presently, seeing that she had finished reading and was standing quite still with the sheets of the letter against her skirt, he came back to her.

"Well?"

"It's wonderfully put. I don't see how it could be put better. Thank you, dear."

"Is there anything you would like left out?"

She shook her head.

"No; he must know all, if he's to understand."

"That's what I thought, but—I hate it!"

He had the feeling that he hated it more than she—to him sex was so much easier to mention between man and woman than between man and man; and she had always been more natural and frank, not deeply secretive like his Forsyte self.

"I wonder if he will understand, even now, Jolyon? He's so young; and he shrinks from the physical."

"He gets that shrinking from my father, he was as fastidious as a girl in all such matters. Would it be better to rewrite the whole thing, and just say you hated Soames?"

Irene shook her head.

"Hate's only a word. It conveys nothing. No, better as it is."

"Very well. It shall go to-morrow."

She raised her face to his, and in sight of the big house's many creepered windows, he kissed her.

II

CONFESSION

Late that same afternoon, Jolyon had a nap in the old armchair. Face down on his knee was La Rotisserie de la Refine Pedauque, and just before he fell asleep he had been thinking: 'As a people shall we ever really like the French? Will they ever really like us!' He himself had always liked the French,

feeling at home with their wit, their taste, their cooking. Irene and he had paid many visits to France before the War, when Jon had been at his private school. His romance with her had begun in Paris—his last and most enduring romance. But the French—no Englishman could like them who could not see them in some sort with the detached aesthetic eye! And with that melancholy conclusion he had nodded off.

When he woke he saw Jon standing between him and the window. The boy had evidently come in from the garden and was waiting for him to wake. Jolyon smiled, still half asleep. How nice the chap looked—sensitive, affectionate, straight! Then his heart gave a nasty jump; and a quaking sensation overcame him. Jon! That confession! He controlled himself with an effort. "Why, Jon, where did you spring from?"

Jon bent over and kissed his forehead.

Only then he noticed the look on the boy's face.

"I came home to tell you something, Dad."

With all his might Jolyon tried to get the better of the jumping, gurgling sensations within his chest.

"Well, sit down, old man. Have you seen your mother?"

"No." The boy's flushed look gave place to pallor; he sat down on the arm of the old chair, as, in old days, Jolyon himself used to sit beside his own father, installed in its recesses. Right up to the time of the rupture in their relations he had been wont to perch there—had he now reached such a moment with his own son? All his life he had hated scenes like poison, avoided rows, gone on his own way quietly and let others go on theirs. But now—it seemed—at the very end of things, he had a scene before him more painful than any he had avoided. He drew a visor down over his emotion, and waited for his son to speak.

"Father," said Jon slowly, "Fleur and I are engaged."

'Exactly!' thought Jolyon, breathing with difficulty.

"I know that you and Mother don't like the idea. Fleur says that Mother was engaged to her father before you married her. Of course I don't know what happened, but it must be ages ago. I'm devoted to her, Dad, and she says she is to me."

Jolyon uttered a queer sound, half laugh, half groan.

"You are nineteen, Jon, and I am seventy-two. How are we to understand each other in a matter like this, eh?"

"You love Mother, Dad; you must know what we feel. It isn't fair to us to let old things spoil our happiness, is it?"

Brought face to face with his confession, Jolyon resolved to do without it if by any means he could. He laid his hand on the boy's arm.

"Look, Jon! I might put you off with talk about your both being too young and not knowing your own minds, and all that, but you wouldn't listen, besides, it doesn't meet the case—Youth, unfortunately, cures itself. You talk lightly about 'old things like that,' knowing nothing—as you say truly—of what happened. Now, have I ever given you reason to doubt my love for you, or my word?"

At a less anxious moment he might have been amused by the conflict his words aroused—the boy's eager clasp, to reassure him on these points, the dread on his face of what that reassurance would bring forth; but he could only feel grateful for the squeeze.

"Very well, you can believe what I tell you. If you don't give up this love affair, you will make Mother wretched to the end of her days. Believe me, my dear, the past, whatever it was, can't be buried—it can't indeed."

Jon got off the arm of the chair.

'The girl'—thought Jolyon—'there she goes—starting up before him—life itself—eager, pretty, loving!'

"I can't, Father; how can I—just because you say that? Of course, I can't!"

"Jon, if you knew the story you would give this up without hesitation; you would have to! Can't you believe me?"

"How can you tell what I should think? Father, I love her better than anything in the world."

Jolyon's face twitched, and he said with painful slowness:

"Better than your mother, Jon?"

From the boy's face, and his clenched fists Jolyon realised the stress and struggle he was going through.

"I don't know," he burst out, "I don't know! But to give Fleur up for nothing—for something I don't understand, for something that I don't believe can really matter half so much, will make me—make me"

"Make you feel us unjust, put a barrier—yes. But that's better than going on with this."

"I can't. Fleur loves me, and I love her. You want me to trust you; why don't you trust me, Father? We wouldn't want to know anything—we wouldn't let it make any difference. It'll only make us both love you and Mother all the more."

Jolyon put his hand into his breast pocket, but brought it out again empty, and sat, clucking his tongue against his teeth.

"Think what your mother's been to you, Jon! She has nothing but you; I shan't last much longer."

"Why not? It isn't fair to—Why not?"

"Well," said Jolyon, rather coldly, "because the doctors tell me I shan't; that's all."

"Oh, Dad!" cried Jon, and burst into tears.

This downbreak of his son, whom he had not seen cry since he was ten, moved Jolyon terribly. He recognised to the full how fearfully soft the boy's heart was, how much he would suffer in this business, and in life generally. And he reached out his hand helplessly—not wishing, indeed not daring to get up.

"Dear man," he said, "don't—or you'll make me!"

Jon smothered down his paroxysm, and stood with face averted, very still.

'What now?' thought Jolyon. 'What can I say to move him?'

"By the way, don't speak of that to Mother," he said; "she has enough to frighten her with this affair of yours. I know how you feel. But, Jon, you know her and me well enough to be sure we wouldn't wish to spoil your happiness lightly. Why, my dear boy, we don't care for anything but your happiness—at least, with me it's just yours and Mother's and with her just yours. It's all the future for you both that's at stake."

Jon turned. His face was deadly pale; his eyes, deep in his head, seemed to burn.

"What is it? What is it? Don't keep me like this!"

Jolyon, who knew that he was beaten, thrust his hand again into his breast pocket, and sat for a full minute, breathing with difficulty, his eyes closed. The thought passed through his mind: 'I've had a good long innings—some pretty bitter moments—this is the worst!' Then he brought his hand out with the letter, and said with a sort of fatigue: "Well, Jon, if you hadn't come to-day, I was going to send you this. I wanted to spare you—I wanted to spare your mother and myself, but I see it's no good. Read it, and I think I'll go into the garden." He reached forward to get up.

Jon, who had taken the letter, said quickly, "No, I'll go"; and was gone.

Jolyon sank back in his chair. A blue-bottle chose that moment to come buzzing round him with a sort of fury; the sound was homely, better than nothing.... Where had the boy gone to read his letter? The wretched letter—the wretched story! A cruel business—cruel to her—to Soames—to those two children—to himself!... His heart thumped and pained him. Life—its loves—its work—its beauty—its aching, and—its end! A good time; a fine time in spite of all; until—you regretted that you had ever been born. Life—it wore you down, yet did not make you want to die—that was the cunning evil! Mistake to have a heart! Again the blue-bottle came buzzing—bringing in all the heat and hum and scent of summer—yes, even the scent—as of ripe fruits, dried grasses, sappy shrubs, and the vanilla breath of cows. And out there somewhere in the fragrance Jon would be reading that letter, turning and twisting its pages in his trouble, his bewilderment and trouble—breaking his heart about it! The thought made Jolyon acutely miserable. Jon was such a tender-hearted chap, affectionate to his bones, and conscientious, too—it was so unfair, so damned unfair! He remembered Irene saying to him once: "Never was any one born more

loving and lovable than Jon." Poor little Jon! His world gone up the spout, all of a summer afternoon! Youth took things so hard! And stirred, tormented by that vision of Youth taking things hard, Jolyon got out of his chair, and went to the window. The boy was nowhere visible. And he passed out. If one could take any help to him now—one must!

He traversed the shrubbery, glanced into the walled garden—no Jon! Nor where the peaches and the apricots were beginning to swell and colour. He passed the Cupressus trees, dark and spiral, into the meadow. Where had the boy got to? Had he rushed down to the coppice—his old hunting-ground? Jolyon crossed the rows of hay. They would cock it on Monday and be carrying the day after, if rain held off. Often they had crossed this field together—hand in hand, when Jon was a little chap. Dash it! The golden age was over by the time one was ten! He came to the pond, where flies and gnats were dancing over a bright reedy surface; and on into the coppice. It was cool there, fragrant of larches. Still no Jon! He called. No answer! On the log seat he sat down, nervous, anxious, forgetting his own physical sensations. He had been wrong to let the boy get away with that letter; he ought to have kept him under his eye from the start! Greatly troubled, he got up to retrace his steps. At the farm-buildings he called again, and looked into the dark cow-house. There in the cool, and the scent of vanilla and ammonia, away from flies, the three Alderneys were chewing the quiet cud; just milked, waiting for evening, to be turned out again into the lower field. One turned a lazy head, a lustrous eye; Jolyon could see the slobber on its grey lower lip. He saw everything with passionate clearness, in the agitation of his nerves—all that in his time he had adored and tried to paint—wonder of light and shade and colour. No wonder the legend put Christ into a manger—what more devotional than the eyes and moon-white horns of a chewing cow in the warm dusk! He called again. No answer! And he hurried away out of the coppice, past the pond, up the hill. Oddly ironical—now he came to think of it—if Jon had taken the gruel of his discovery down in the coppice where his mother and Bosinney in those old days had made the plunge of acknowledging their love. Where he himself, on the log seat the Sunday morning he came back from Paris, had realised to the full that Irene had become the world to him. That would have been the place for Irony to tear the veil from before the eyes of Irene's boy! But he was not here! Where had he got to? One must find the poor chap!

A gleam of sun had come, sharpening to his hurrying senses all the beauty of the afternoon, of the tall trees and lengthening shadows, of the blue, and the white clouds, the scent of the hay, and the cooing of the pigeons; and the flower shapes standing tall. He came to the rosery, and the beauty of the roses in that sudden sunlight seemed to him unearthly. "Rose, you Spaniard!" Wonderful three words! There she had stood by that bush of dark red roses; had stood to read and decide that Jon must know it all! He knew all now! Had she chosen wrong? He bent and sniffed a rose, its petals brushed his nose and trembling lips; nothing so soft as a rose-leaf's velvet, except her neck—Irene! On across the lawn he went, up the slope, to the oak-tree. Its top alone was glistening, for the sudden sun was away over the house; the lower shade was thick, blessedly cool—he was greatly overheated. He paused a minute with his hand on the rope of the swing—Jolly, Holly—Jon! The old swing! And suddenly, he felt horribly—deadly ill. 'I've over done it!' he thought: 'by Jove! I've overdone it—after all!' He staggered up toward the terrace, dragged himself up the steps, and fell against the wall of the house. He leaned there gasping, his face buried in the honey-suckle that he and she had taken such trouble with that it might sweeten the air which drifted in. Its fragrance mingled with awful pain. 'My love!' he thought; 'the boy!' And with a great effort he tottered in through the long window, and sank into old Jolyon's chair. The book was there, a pencil in it; he caught it up, scribbled a word on the open page.... His hand dropped.... So it was like this—was it?...

There was a great wrench; and darkness....

III

IRENE

When Jon rushed away with the letter in his hand, he ran along the terrace and round the corner of the house, in fear and confusion. Leaning against the creepered wall he tore open the letter. It was long—very long! This added to his fear, and he began reading. When he came to the words: "It was Fleur's father that she married," everything seemed to spin before him. He was close to a window, and entering by it, he passed, through music-room and hall, up to his bedroom. Dipping his face in cold water, he sat on his bed, and went on reading, dropping each finished page on the bed beside him. His father's writing was easy to read—he knew it so well, though he had never had a letter from him one

quarter so long. He read with a dull feeling—imagination only half at work. He best grasped, on that first reading, the pain his father must have had in writing such a letter. He let the last sheet fall, and in a sort of mental, moral helplessness began to read the first again. It all seemed to him disgusting—dead and disgusting. Then, suddenly, a hot wave of horrified emotion tingled through him. He buried his face in his hands. His mother! Fleur's father! He took up the letter again, and read on mechanically. And again came the feeling that it was all dead and disgusting; his own love so different! This letter said his mother—and her father! An awful letter!

Property! Could there be men who looked on women as their property? Faces seen in street and countryside came thronging up before him—red, stock-fish faces; hard, dull faces; prim, dry faces; violent faces; hundreds, thousands of them! How could he know what men who had such faces thought and did? He held his head in his hands and groaned. His mother! He caught up the letter and read on again: "horror and aversion-alive in her to-day.... your children.... grandchildren.... of a man who once owned your mother as a man might own a slave...." He got up from his bed. This cruel shadowy past, lurking there to murder his love and Fleur's, was true, or his father could never have written it. 'Why didn't they tell me the first thing,' he thought, 'the day I first saw Fleur? They knew I'd seen her. They were afraid, and—now—I've—got it!' Overcome by misery too acute for thought or reason, he crept into a dusky corner of the room and sat down on the floor. He sat there, like some unhappy little animal. There was comfort in dusk, and the floor—as if he were back in those days when he played his battles sprawling all over it. He sat there huddled, his hair ruffled, his hands clasped round his knees, for how long he did not know. He was wrenched from his blank wretchedness by the sound of the door opening from his mother's room. The blinds were down over the windows of his room, shut up in his absence, and from where he sat he could only hear a rustle, her footsteps crossing, till beyond the bed he saw her standing before his dressing-table. She had something in her hand. He hardly breathed, hoping she would not see him, and go away. He saw her touch things on the table as if they had some virtue in them, then face the window-grey from head to foot like a ghost. The least turn of her head, and she must see him! Her lips moved: "Oh! Jon!" She was speaking to herself; the tone of her voice troubled Jon's heart. He saw in her hand a little photograph. She held it toward the light, looking at it—very small. He knew it—one of himself as a tiny boy, which she always kept in her bag. His heart beat fast. And, suddenly as if she had heard it, she turned her eyes and saw him. At the gasp she gave, and the movement of her hands pressing the photograph against her breast, he said:

"Yes, it's me."

She moved over to the bed, and sat down on it, quite close to him, her hands still clasping her breast, her feet among the sheets of the letter which had slipped to the floor. She saw them, and her hands grasped the edge of the bed. She sat very upright, her dark eyes fixed on him. At last she spoke.

"Well, Jon, you know, I see."

"Yes."

"You've seen Father?"

"Yes."

There was a long silence, till she said:

"Oh! my darling!"

"It's all right." The emotions in him were so, violent and so mixed that he dared not move—resentment, despair, and yet a strange yearning for the comfort of her hand on his forehead.

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know."

There was another long silence, then she got up. She stood a moment, very still, made a little movement with her hand, and said: "My darling boy, my most darling boy, don't think of me—think of yourself," and, passing round the foot of the bed, went back into her room.

Jon turned—curled into a sort of ball, as might a hedgehog—into the corner made by the two walls.

He must have been twenty minutes there before a cry roused him. It came from the terrace below. He got up, scared. Again came the cry: "Jon!" His mother was calling! He ran out and down the stairs, through the empty dining-room into the study. She was kneeling before the old armchair, and his father was lying back quite white, his head on his breast, one of his hands resting on an open book, with a pencil clutched in it—more strangely still than anything he had ever seen. She looked round wildly, and

said:

"Oh! Jon—he's dead—he's dead!"

Jon flung himself down, and reaching over the arm of the chair, where he had lately been sitting, put his lips to the forehead. Icy cold! How could—how could Dad be dead, when only an hour ago—! His mother's arms were round the knees; pressing her breast against them. "Why—why wasn't I with him?" he heard her whisper. Then he saw the tottering word "Irene" pencilled on the open page, and broke down himself. It was his first sight of human death, and its unutterable stillness blotted from him all other emotion; all else, then, was but preliminary to this! All love and life, and joy, anxiety, and sorrow, all movement, light and beauty, but a beginning to this terrible white stillness. It made a dreadful mark on him; all seemed suddenly little, futile, short. He mastered himself at last, got up, and raised her.

"Mother! don't cry—Mother!"

Some hours later, when all was done that had to be, and his mother was lying down, he saw his father alone, on the bed, covered with a white sheet. He stood for a long time gazing at that face which had never looked angry—always whimsical, and kind. "To be kind and keep your end up—there's nothing else in it," he had once heard his father say. How wonderfully Dad had acted up to that philosophy! He understood now that his father had known for a long time past that this would come suddenly—known, and not said a word. He gazed with an awed and passionate reverence. The loneliness of it—just to spare his mother and himself! His own trouble seemed small while he was looking at that face. The word scribbled on the page! The farewell word! Now his mother had no one but himself! He went up close to the dead face—not changed at all, and yet completely changed. He had heard his father say once that he did not believe in consciousness surviving death, or that if it did it might be just survival till the natural age limit of the body had been reached—the natural term of its inherent vitality; so that if the body were broken by accident, excess, violent disease, consciousness might still persist till, in the course of Nature uninterfered with, it would naturally have faded out. It had struck him because he had never heard any one else suggest it. When the heart failed like this—surely it was not quite natural! Perhaps his father's consciousness was in the room with him. Above the bed hung a picture of his father's father. Perhaps his consciousness, too, was still alive; and his brother's—his half-brother, who had died in the Transvaal. Were they all gathered round this bed? Jon kissed the forehead, and stole back to his own room. The door between it and his mother's was ajar; she had evidently been in—everything was ready for him, even some biscuits and hot milk, and the letter no longer on the floor. He ate and drank, watching the last light fade. He did not try to see into the future—just stared at the dark branches of the oak-tree, level with his window, and felt as if life had stopped. Once in the night, turning in his heavy sleep, he was conscious of something white and still, beside his bed, and started up.

His mother's voice said:

"It's only I, Jon dear!" Her hand pressed his forehead gently back; her white figure disappeared.

Alone! He fell heavily asleep again, and dreamed he saw his mother's name crawling on his bed.

IV

SOAMES COGITATES

The announcement in *The Times* of his cousin Jolyon's death affected Soames quite simply. So that chap was gone! There had never been a time in their two lives when love had not been lost between them. That quick-blooded sentiment hatred had run its course long since in Soames' heart, and he had refused to allow any recrudescence, but he considered this early decease a piece of poetic justice. For twenty years the fellow had enjoyed the reversion of his wife and house, and—he was dead! The obituary notice, which appeared a little later, paid Jolyon—he thought—too much attention. It spoke of that "diligent and agreeable painter whose work we have come to look on as typical of the best late-Victorian water-colour art." Soames, who had almost mechanically preferred Mole, Morpin, and Caswell Baye, and had always sniffed quite audibly when he came to one of his cousin's on the line, turned *The Times* with a crackle.

He had to go up to Town that morning on Forsyte affairs, and was fully conscious of Gradman's glance sidelong over his spectacles. The old clerk had about him an aura of regretful congratulation. He

smelled, as it were, of old days. One could almost hear him thinking: "Mr. Jolyon, ye-es—just my age, and gone—dear, dear! I dare say she feels it. She was a mice-lookin' woman. Flesh is flesh! They've given 'im a notice in the papers. Fancy!" His atmosphere in fact caused Soames to handle certain leases and conversions with exceptional swiftness.

"About that settlement on Miss Fleur, Mr. Soames?"

"I've thought better of that," answered Soames shortly.

"Ah! I'm glad of that. I thought you were a little hasty. The times do change."

How this death would affect Fleur had begun to trouble Soames. He was not certain that she knew of it—she seldom looked at the paper, never at the births, marriages, and deaths.

He pressed matters on, and made his way to Green Street for lunch. Winifred was almost doleful. Jack Cardigan had broken a splashboard, so far as one could make out, and would not be "fit" for some time. She could not get used to the idea.

"Did Profond ever get off?" he said suddenly.

"He got off," replied Winifred, "but where—I don't know."

Yes, there it was—impossible to tell anything! Not that he wanted to know. Letters from Annette were coming from Dieppe, where she and her mother were staying.

"You saw that fellow's death, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Winifred. "I'm sorry for—for his children. He was very amiable." Soames uttered a rather queer sound. A suspicion of the old deep truth—that men were judged in this world rather by what they were than by what they did—crept and knocked resentfully at the back doors of his mind.

"I know there was a superstition to that effect," he muttered.

"One must do him justice now he's dead."

"I should like to have done him justice before," said Soames; "but I never had the chance. Have you got a 'Baronetage' here?"

"Yes; in that bottom row."

Soames took out a fat red book, and ran over the leaves.

"Mont-Sir Lawrence, 9th Bt., cr. 1620, e. s. of Geoffrey, 8th Bt., and Lavinia, daur. of Sir Charles Muskham, Bt., of Muskham Hall, Shrops: marr. 1890 Emily, daur. of Conway Charwell, Esq., of Condaford Grange, co. Oxon; 1 son, heir Michael Conway, b. 1895, 2 daurs. Residence: Lippinghall Manor, Folwell, Bucks. Clubs: Snooks': Coffee House: Aeroplane. See Bidlicott."

"H'm!" he said. "Did you ever know a publisher?"

"Uncle Timothy."

"Alive, I mean."

"Monty knew one at his Club. He brought him here to dinner once. Monty was always thinking of writing a book, you know, about how to make money on the turf. He tried to interest that man."

"Well?"

"He put him on to a horse—for the Two Thousand. We didn't see him again. He was rather smart, if I remember."

"Did it win?"

"No; it ran last, I think. You know Monty really was quite clever in his way."

"Was he?" said Soames. "Can you see any connection between a sucking baronet and publishing?"

"People do all sorts of things nowadays," replied Winifred. "The great stunt seems not to be idle—so different from our time. To do nothing was the thing then. But I suppose it'll come again."

"This young Mont that I'm speaking of is very sweet on Fleur. If it would put an end to that other affair I might encourage it."

"Has he got style?" asked Winifred.

"He's no beauty; pleasant enough, with some scattered brains. There's a good deal of land, I believe. He seems genuinely attached. But I don't know."

"No," murmured Winifred; "it's—very difficult. I always found it best to do nothing. It is such a bore about Jack; now we shan't get away till after Bank Holiday. Well, the people are always amusing, I shall go into the Park and watch them."

"If I were you," said Soames, "I should have a country cottage, and be out of the way of holidays and strikes when you want."

"The country bores me," answered Winifred, "and I found the railway strike quite exciting."

Winifred had always been noted for sang-froid.

Soames took his leave. All the way down to Reading he debated whether he should tell Fleur of that boy's father's death. It did not alter the situation except that he would be independent now, and only have his mother's opposition to encounter. He would come into a lot of money, no doubt, and perhaps the house—the house built for Irene and himself—the house whose architect had wrought his domestic ruin. His daughter—mistress of that house! That would be poetic justice! Soames uttered a little mirthless laugh. He had designed that house to re-establish his failing union, meant it for the seat of his descendants, if he could have induced Irene to give him one! Her son and Fleur! Their children would be, in some sort, offspring of the union between himself and her!

The theatricality in that thought was repulsive to his sober sense. And yet—it would be the easiest and wealthiest way out of the impasse, now that Jolyon was gone. The juncture of two Forsyte fortunes had a kind of conservative charm. And she—Irene—would be linked to him once more. Nonsense! Absurd! He put the notion from his head.

On arriving home he heard the click of billiard-balls, and through the window saw young Mont sprawling over the table. Fleur, with her cue akimbo, was watching with a smile. How pretty she looked! No wonder that young fellow was out of his mind about her. A title—land! There was little enough in land, these days; perhaps less in a title. The old Forsytes had always had a kind of contempt for titles, rather remote and artificial things—not worth the money they cost, and having to do with the Court. They had all had that feeling in differing measure—Soames remembered. Swithin, indeed, in his most expansive days had once attended a Levee. He had come away saying he shouldn't go again—"all that small fry." It was suspected that he had looked too big in knee-breeches. Soames remembered how his own mother had wished to be presented because of the fashionable nature of the performance, and how his father had put his foot down with unwonted decision. What did she want with that peacocking—wasting time and money; there was nothing in it!

The instinct which had made and kept the English Commons the chief power in the State, a feeling that their own world was good enough and a little better than any other because it was their world, had kept the old Forsytes singularly free of "flummery," as Nicholas had been wont to call it when he had the gout. Soames' generation, more self-conscious and ironical, had been saved by a sense of Swithin in knee-breeches. While the third and the fourth generation, as it seemed to him, laughed at everything.

However, there was no harm in the young fellow's being heir to a title and estate—a thing one couldn't help. He entered quietly, as Mont missed his shot. He noted the young man's eyes, fixed on Fleur bending over in her turn; and the adoration in them almost touched him.

She paused with the cue poised on the bridge of her slim hand, and shook her crop of short dark chestnut hair.

"I shall never do it."

"Nothing venture."

"All right." The cue struck, the ball rolled. "There!"

"Bad luck! Never mind!"

Then they saw him, and Soames said:

"I'll mark for you."

He sat down on the raised seat beneath the marker, trim and tired, furtively studying those two young faces. When the game was over Mont came up to him.

"I've started in, sir. Rum game, business, isn't it? I suppose you saw a lot of human nature as a solicitor."

"I did."

"Shall I tell you what I've noticed: People are quite on the wrong tack in offering less than they can afford to give; they ought to offer more, and work backward."

Soames raised his eyebrows.

"Suppose the more is accepted?"

"That doesn't matter a little bit," said Mont; "it's much more paying to abate a price than to increase it. For instance, say we offer an author good terms—he naturally takes them. Then we go into it, find we can't publish at a decent profit and tell him so. He's got confidence in us because we've been generous to him, and he comes down like a lamb, and bears us no malice. But if we offer him poor terms at the start, he doesn't take them, so we have to advance them to get him, and he thinks us damned screws into the bargain."

"Try buying pictures on that system," said Soames; "an offer accepted is a contract—haven't you learned that?"

Young Mont turned his head to where Fleur was standing in the window.

"No," he said, "I wish I had. Then there's another thing. Always let a man off a bargain if he wants to be let off."

"As advertisement?" said Soames dryly.

"Of course it is; but I meant on principle."

"Does your firm work on those lines?"

"Not yet," said Mont, "but it'll come."

"And they will go."

"No, really, sir. I'm making any number of observations, and they all confirm my theory. Human nature is consistently underrated in business, people do themselves out of an awful lot of pleasure and profit by that. Of course, you must be perfectly genuine and open, but that's easy if you feel it. The more human and generous you are the better chance you've got in business."

Soames rose.

"Are you a partner?"

"Not for six months, yet."

"The rest of the firm had better make haste and retire."

Mont laughed.

"You'll see," he said. "There's going to be a big change. The possessive principle has got its shutters up."

"What?" said Soames.

"The house is to let! Good-bye, sir; I'm off now."

Soames watched his daughter give her hand, saw her wince at the squeeze it received, and distinctly heard the young man's sigh as he passed out. Then she came from the window, trailing her finger along the mahogany edge of the billiard-table. Watching her, Soames knew that she was going to ask him something. Her finger felt round the last pocket, and she looked up.

"Have you done anything to stop Jon writing to me, Father?"

Soames shook his head.

"You haven't seen, then?" he said. "His father died just a week ago to-day."

"Oh!"

In her startled, frowning face he saw the instant struggle to apprehend what this would mean.

"Poor Jon! Why didn't you tell me, Father?"

"I never know!" said Soames slowly; "you don't confide in me."

"I would, if you'd help me, dear."

"Perhaps I shall."

Fleur clasped her hands. "Oh! darling—when one wants a thing fearfully, one doesn't think of other people. Don't be angry with me."

Soames put out his hand, as if pushing away an aspersion.

"I'm cogitating," he said. What on earth had made him use a word like that! "Has young Mont been bothering you again?"

Fleur smiled. "Oh! Michael! He's always bothering; but he's such a good sort—I don't mind him."

"Well," said Soames, "I'm tired; I shall go and have a nap before dinner."

He went up to his picture-gallery, lay down on the couch there, and closed his eyes. A terrible responsibility this girl of his—whose mother was—ah! what was she? A terrible responsibility! Help her—how could he help her? He could not alter the fact that he was her father. Or that Irene—! What was it young Mont had said—some nonsense about the possessive instinct—shutters up—To let? Silly!

The sultry air, charged with a scent of meadow-sweet, of river and roses, closed on his senses, drowsing them.

V

THE FIXED IDEA

"The fixed idea," which has outrun more constables than any other form of human disorder, has never more speed and stamina than when it takes the avid guise of love. To hedges and ditches, and doors, to humans without ideas fixed or otherwise, to perambulators and the contents sucking their fixed ideas, even to the other sufferers from this fast malady—the fixed idea of love pays no attention. It runs with eyes turned inward to its own light, oblivious of all other stars. Those with the fixed ideas that human happiness depends on their art, on vivisection dogs, on hating foreigners, on paying supertax, on remaining Ministers, on making wheels go round, on preventing their neighbours from being divorced, on conscientious objection, Greek roots, Church dogma, paradox and superiority to everybody else, with other forms of ego-mania—all are unstable compared with him or her whose fixed idea is the possession of some her or him. And though Fleur, those chilly summer days, pursued the scattered life of a little Forsyte whose frocks are paid for, and whose business is pleasure, she was—as Winifred would have said in the latest fashion of speech—"honest to God" indifferent to it all. She wished and wished for the moon, which sailed in cold skies above the river or the Green Park when she went to Town. She even kept Jon's letters, covered with pink silk, on her heart, than which in days when corsets were so low, sentiment so despised, and chests so out of fashion, there could, perhaps, have been no greater proof of the fixity of her idea.

After hearing of his father's death, she wrote to Jon, and received his answer three days later on her return from a river picnic. It was his first letter since their meeting at June's. She opened it with misgiving, and read it with dismay.

"Since I saw you I've heard everything about the past. I won't tell it you—I think you knew when we met at June's. She says you did. If you did, Fleur, you ought to have told me. I expect you only heard your father's side of it. I have heard my mother's. It's dreadful. Now that she's so sad I can't do anything to hurt her more. Of course, I long for you all day, but I don't believe now that we shall ever come together—there's something too strong pulling us apart."

So! Her deception had found her out. But Jon—she felt—had forgiven that. It was what he said of his mother which caused the guttering in her heart and the weak sensation in her legs.

Her first impulse was to reply—her second, not to reply. These impulses were constantly renewed in the days which followed, while desperation grew within her. She was not her father's child for nothing. The tenacity which had at once made and undone Soames was her backbone, too, frilled and embroidered by French grace and quickness. Instinctively she conjugated the verb "to have" always with the pronoun "I." She concealed, however, all signs of her growing desperation, and pursued such river pleasures as the winds and rain of a disagreeable July permitted, as if she had no care in the world; nor did any "sucking baronet" ever neglect the business of a publisher more consistently than her attendant spirit, Michael Mont.

To Soames she was a puzzle. He was almost deceived by this careless gaiety. Almost—because he did not fail to mark her eyes often fixed on nothing, and the film of light shining from her bedroom window late at night. What was she thinking and brooding over into small hours when she ought to have been asleep? But he dared not ask what was in her mind; and, since that one little talk in the billiard-room, she said nothing to him.

In this taciturn condition of affairs it chanced that Winifred invited them to lunch and to go afterward to "a most amusing little play, 'The Beggar's Opera'" and would they bring a man to make four? Soames, whose attitude toward theatres was to go to nothing, accepted, because Fleur's attitude was to go to everything. They motored up, taking Michael Mont, who, being in his seventh heaven, was found by Winifred "very amusing." "The Beggar's Opera" puzzled Soames. The people were very unpleasant, the whole thing very cynical. Winifred was "intrigued"—by the dresses. The music, too, did not displease her. At the Opera, the night before, she had arrived too early for the Russian Ballet, and found the stage occupied by singers, for a whole hour pale or apoplectic from terror lest by some dreadful inadvertence they might drop into a tune. Michael Mont was enraptured with the whole thing. And all three wondered what Fleur was thinking of it. But Fleur was not thinking of it. Her fixed idea stood on the stage and sang with Polly Peachum, mimed with Filch, danced with Jenny Diver, postured with Lucy Lockit, kissed, trolled, and cuddled with Macheath. Her lips might smile, her hands applaud, but the comic old masterpiece made no more impression on her than if it had been pathetic, like a modern "Revue." When they embarked in the car to return, she ached because Jon was not sitting next her instead of Michael Mont. When, at some jolt, the young man's arm touched hers as if by accident, she only thought: 'If that were Jon's arm!' When his cheerful voice, tempered by her proximity, murmured above the sound of the car's progress, she smiled and answered, thinking: 'If that were Jon's voice!' and when once he said, "Fleur, you look a perfect angel in that dress!" she answered, "Oh, do you like it?" thinking, 'If only Jon could see it!'

During this drive she took a resolution. She would go to Robin Hill and see him—alone; she would take the car, without word beforehand to him or to her father. It was nine days since his letter, and she could wait no longer. On Monday she would go! The decision made her well disposed toward young Mont. With something to look forward to she could afford to tolerate and respond. He might stay to dinner; propose to her as usual; dance with her, press her hand, sigh—do what he liked. He was only a nuisance when he interfered with her fixed idea. She was even sorry for him so far as it was possible to be sorry for anybody but herself just now. At dinner he seemed to talk more wildly than usual about what he called "the death of the close borough"—she paid little attention, but her father seemed paying a good deal, with the smile on his face which meant opposition, if not anger.

"The younger generation doesn't think as you do, sir; does it, Fleur?"

Fleur shrugged her shoulders—the younger generation was just Jon, and she did not know what he was thinking.

"Young people will think as I do when they're my age, Mr. Mont. Human nature doesn't change."

"I admit that, sir; but the forms of thought change with the times. The pursuit of self-interest is a form of thought that's going out."

"Indeed! To mind one's own business is not a form of thought, Mr. Mont, it's an instinct."

Yes, when Jon was the business!

"But what is one's business, sir? That's the point. Everybody's business is going to be one's business. Isn't it, Fleur?"

Fleur only smiled.

"If not," added young Mont, "there'll be blood."

"People have talked like that from time immemorial"

"But you'll admit, sir, that the sense of property is dying out?"

"I should say increasing among those who have none."

"Well, look at me! I'm heir to an entailed estate. I don't want the thing; I'd cut the entail to-morrow."

"You're not married, and you don't know what you're talking about."

Fleur saw the young man's eyes turn rather piteously upon her.

"Do you really mean that marriage—?" he began.

"Society is built on marriage," came from between her father's close lips; "marriage and its consequences. Do you want to do away with it?"

Young Mont made a distracted gesture. Silence brooded over the dinner table, covered with spoons bearing the Forsyte crest—a pheasant proper—under the electric light in an alabaster globe. And outside, the river evening darkened, charged with heavy moisture and sweet scents.

'Monday,' thought Fleur; 'Monday!'

VI

DESPERATE

The weeks which followed the death of his father were sad and empty to the only Jolyon Forsyte left. The necessary forms and ceremonies—the reading of the Will, valuation of the estate, distribution of the legacies—were enacted over the head, as it were, of one not yet of age. Jolyon was cremated. By his special wish no one attended that ceremony, or wore black for him. The succession of his property, controlled to some extent by old Jolyon's Will, left his widow in possession of Robin Hill, with two thousand five hundred pounds a year for life. Apart from this the two Wills worked together in some complicated way to insure that each of Jolyon's three children should have an equal share in their grandfather's and father's property in the future as in the present, save only that Jon, by virtue of his sex, would have control of his capital when he was twenty-one, while June and Holly would only have the spirit of theirs, in order that their children might have the body after them. If they had no children, it would all come to Jon if he outlived them; and since June was fifty, and Holly nearly forty, it was considered in Lincoln's Inn Fields that but for the cruelty of income tax, young Jon would be as warm a man as his grandfather when he died. All this was nothing to Jon, and little enough to his mother. It was June who did everything needful for one who had left his affairs in perfect order. When she had gone, and those two were alone again in the great house, alone with death drawing them together, and love driving them apart, Jon passed very painful days secretly disgusted and disappointed with himself. His mother would look at him with such a patient sadness which yet had in it an instinctive pride, as if she were reserving her defence. If she smiled he was angry that his answering smile should be so grudging and unnatural. He did not judge or condemn her; that was all too remote—indeed, the idea of doing so had never come to him. No! he was grudging and unnatural because he couldn't have what he wanted be cause of her. There was one alleviation—much to do in connection with his father's career, which could not be safely entrusted to June, though she had offered to undertake it. Both Jon and his mother had felt that if she took his portfolios, unexhibited drawings and unfinished matter, away with her, the work would encounter such icy blasts from Paul Post and other frequenters of her studio, that it would soon be frozen out even of her warm heart. On its old-fashioned plane and of its kind the work was good, and they could not bear the thought of its subjection to ridicule. A one-man exhibition of his work was the least testimony they could pay to one they had loved; and on preparation for this they spent many hours together. Jon came to have a curiously increased respect for his father. The quiet tenacity with which he had converted a mediocre talent into something really individual was disclosed by these researches. There was a great mass of work with a rare continuity of growth in depth and reach of vision. Nothing certainly went very deep, or reached very high—but such as the work was, it was thorough, conscientious, and complete. And, remembering his father's utter absence of "side" or self-assertion, the chaffing humility with which he had always spoken of his own efforts, ever calling himself "an amateur," Jon could not help feeling that he had never really known his father. To take himself seriously, yet never bore others by letting them know that he did so, seemed to have been his ruling principle. There was something in this which appealed to the boy, and made him heartily endorse his mother's comment: "He had true refinement; he couldn't help thinking of others, whatever he did. And

when he took a resolution which went counter, he did it with the minimum of defiance—not like the Age, is it? Twice in his life he had to go against everything; and yet it never made him bitter." Jon saw tears running down her face, which she at once turned away from him. She was so quiet about her loss that sometimes he had thought she didn't feel it much. Now, as he looked at her, he felt how far he fell short of the reserve power and dignity in both his father and his mother. And, stealing up to her, he put his arm round her waist. She kissed him swiftly, but with a sort of passion, and went out of the room.

The studio, where they had been sorting and labelling, had once been Holly's schoolroom, devoted to her silkworms, dried lavender, music, and other forms of instruction. Now, at the end of July, despite its northern and eastern aspects, a warm and slumberous air came in between the long-faded lilac linen curtains. To redeem a little the departed glory, as of a field that is golden and gone, clinging to a room which its master has left, Irene had placed on the paint-stained table a bowl of red roses. This, and Jolyon's favourite cat, who still clung to the deserted habitat, were the pleasant spots in that dishevelled, sad workroom. Jon, at the north window, sniffing air mysteriously scented with warm strawberries, heard a car drive up. The lawyers again about some nonsense! Why did that scent so make one ache? And where did it come from—there were no strawberry beds on this side of the house. Instinctively he took a crumpled sheet of paper from his pocket, and wrote down some broken words. A warmth began spreading in his chest; he rubbed the palms of his hands together. Presently he had jotted this:

"If I could make a little song
A little song to soothe my heart!
I'd make it all of little things
The plash of water, rub of wings,
The puffing-off of dandies crown,
The hiss of raindrop spilling down,
The purr of cat, the trill of bird,
And ev'ry whispering I've heard
From willy wind in leaves and grass,
And all the distant drones that pass.
A song as tender and as light
As flower, or butterfly in flight;
And when I saw it opening,
I'd let it fly and sing!"

He was still muttering it over to himself at the window, when he heard his name called, and, turning round, saw Fleur. At that amazing apparition, he made at first no movement and no sound, while her clear vivid glance ravished his heart. Then he went forward to the table, saying, "How nice of you to come!" and saw her flinch as if he had thrown something at her.

"I asked for you," she said, "and they showed me up here. But I can go away again."

Jon clutched the paint-stained table. Her face and figure in its frilly frock photographed itself with such startling vividness upon his eyes, that if she had sunk through the floor he must still have seen her.

"I know I told you a lie, Jon. But I told it out of love."

"Yes, oh! yes! That's nothing!"

"I didn't answer your letter. What was the use—there wasn't anything to answer. I wanted to see you instead." She held out both her hands, and Jon grasped them across the table. He tried to say something, but all his attention was given to trying not to hurt her hands. His own felt so hard and hers so soft. She said almost defiantly:

"That old story—was it so very dreadful?"

"Yes." In his voice, too, there was a note of defiance.

She dragged her hands away. "I didn't think in these days boys were tied to their mothers' apron-strings."

Jon's chin went up as if he had been struck.

"Oh! I didn't mean it, Jon. What a horrible thing to say!" Swiftly she came close to him. "Jon, dear; I didn't mean it."

"All right."

She had put her two hands on his shoulder, and her forehead down on them; the brim of her hat touched his neck, and he felt it quivering. But, in a sort of paralysis, he made no response. She let go of his shoulder and drew away.

"Well, I'll go, if you don't want me. But I never thought you'd have given me up."

"I haven't," cried Jon, coming suddenly to life. "I can't. I'll try again."

Her eyes gleamed, she swayed toward him. "Jon—I love you! Don't give me up! If you do, I don't know

what—I feel so desperate. What does it matter—all that past-compared with this?"

She clung to him. He kissed her eyes, her cheeks, her lips. But while he kissed her he saw, the sheets of that letter fallen down on the floor of his bedroom—his father's white dead face—his mother kneeling before it. Fleur's whispered, "Make her! Promise! Oh! Jon, try!" seemed childish in his ear. He felt curiously old.

"I promise!" he muttered. "Only, you don't understand."

"She wants to spoil our lives, just because—"

"Yes, of what?"

Again that challenge in his voice, and she did not answer. Her arms tightened round him, and he returned her kisses; but even while he yielded, the poison worked in him, the poison of the letter. Fleur did not know, she did not understand—she misjudged his mother; she came from the enemy's camp! So lovely, and he loved her so—yet, even in her embrace, he could not help the memory of Holly's words: "I think she has a 'having' nature," and his mother's "My darling boy, don't think of me—think of yourself!"

When she was gone like a passionate dream, leaving her image on his eyes, her kisses on his lips, such an ache in his heart, Jon leaned in the window, listening to the car bearing her away. Still the scent as of warm strawberries, still the little summer sounds that should make his song; still all the promise of youth and happiness in sighing, floating, fluttering July—and his heart torn; yearning strong in him; hope high in him yet with its eyes cast down, as if ashamed. The miserable task before him! If Fleur was desperate, so was he—watching the poplars swaying, the white clouds passing, the sunlight on the grass.

He waited till evening, till after their almost silent dinner, till his mother had played to him and still he waited, feeling that she knew what he was waiting to say. She kissed him and went up-stairs, and still he lingered, watching the moonlight and the moths, and that unreality of colouring which steals along and stains a summer night. And he would have given anything to be back again in the past—barely three months back; or away forward, years, in the future. The present with this dark cruelty of a decision, one way or the other, seemed impossible. He realised now so much more keenly what his mother felt than he had at first; as if the story in that letter had been a poisonous germ producing a kind of fever of partisanship, so that he really felt there were two camps, his mother's and his—Fleur's and her father's. It might be a dead thing, that old tragic ownership and enmity, but dead things were poisonous till time had cleaned them away. Even his love felt tainted, less illusioned, more of the earth, and with a treacherous lurking doubt lest Fleur, like her father, might want to own; not articulate, just a stealing haunt, horribly unworthy, which crept in and about the ardour of his memories, touched with its tarnishing breath the vividness and grace of that charmed face and figure—a doubt, not real enough to convince him of its presence, just real enough to deflower a perfect faith. And perfect faith, to Jon, not yet twenty, was essential. He still had Youth's eagerness to give with both hands, to take with neither—to give lovingly to one who had his own impulsive generosity. Surely she had! He got up from the window-seat and roamed in the big grey ghostly room, whose walls were hung with silvered canvas. This house his father said in that death-bed letter—had been built for his mother to live in—with Fleur's father! He put out his hand in the half-dark, as if to grasp the shadowy hand of the dead. He clenched, trying to feel the thin vanished fingers of his father; to squeeze them, and reassure him that he—he was on his father's side. Tears, prisoned within him, made his eyes feel dry and hot. He went back to the window. It was warmer, not so eerie, more comforting outside, where the moon hung golden, three days off full; the freedom of the night was comforting. If only Fleur and he had met on some desert island without a past—and Nature for their house! Jon had still his high regard for desert islands, where breadfruit grew, and the water was blue above the coral. The night was deep, was free—there was enticement in it; a lure, a promise, a refuge from entanglement, and love! Milksop tied to his mother's...! His cheeks burned. He shut the window, drew curtains over it, switched off the lighted sconce, and went up-stairs.

The door of his room was open, the light turned up; his mother, still in her evening gown, was standing at the window. She turned and said:

"Sit down, Jon; let's talk." She sat down on the window-seat, Jon on his bed. She had her profile turned to him, and the beauty and grace of her figure, the delicate line of the brow, the nose, the neck, the strange and as it were remote refinement of her, moved him. His mother never belonged to her surroundings. She came into them from somewhere—as it were! What was she going to say to him, who had in his heart such things to say to her?

"I know Fleur came to-day. I'm not surprised." It was as though she had added: "She is her father's

daughter!" And Jon's heart hardened. Irene went on quietly:

"I have Father's letter. I picked it up that night and kept it. Would you like it back, dear?"

Jon shook his head.

"I had read it, of course, before he gave it to you. It didn't quite do justice to my criminality."

"Mother!" burst from Jon's lips.

"He put it very sweetly, but I know that in marrying Fleur's father without love I did a dreadful thing. An unhappy marriage, Jon, can play such havoc with other lives besides one's own. You are fearfully young, my darling, and fearfully loving. Do you think you can possibly be happy with this girl?"

Staring at her dark eyes, darker now from pain, Jon answered

"Yes; oh! yes—if you could be."

Irene smiled.

"Admiration of beauty and longing for possession are not love. If yours were another case like mine, Jon—where the deepest things are stifled; the flesh joined, and the spirit at war!"

"Why should it, Mother? You think she must be like her father, but she's not. I've seen him."

Again the smile came on Irene's lips, and in Jon something wavered; there was such irony and experience in that smile.

"You are a giver, Jon; she is a taker."

That unworthy doubt, that haunting uncertainty again! He said with vehemence:

"She isn't—she isn't. It's only because I can't bear to make you unhappy, Mother, now that Father—" He thrust his fists against his forehead.

Irene got up.

"I told you that night, dear, not to mind me. I meant it. Think of yourself and your own happiness! I can stand what's left—I've brought it on myself."

Again the word "Mother!" burst from Jon's lips.

She came over to him and put her hands over his.

"Do you feel your head, darling?"

Jon shook it. What he felt was in his chest—a sort of tearing asunder of the tissue there, by the two loves.

"I shall always love you the same, Jon, whatever you do. You won't lose anything." She smoothed his hair gently, and walked away.

He heard the door shut; and, rolling over on the bed, lay, stifling his breath, with an awful held-up feeling within him.

VII

EMBASSY

Enquiring for her at tea time Soames learned that Fleur had been out in the car since two. Three hours! Where had she gone? Up to London without a word to him? He had never become quite reconciled with cars. He had embraced them in principle—like the born empiricist, or Forsyte, that he was—adopting each symptom of progress as it came along with: "Well, we couldn't do without them now." But in fact he found them tearing, great, smelly things. Obligated by Annette to have one—a Rollhard with pearl-grey cushions, electric light, little mirrors, trays for the ashes of cigarettes, flower vases—all smelling of petrol and stephanotis—he regarded it much as he used to regard his brother-in-

law, Montague Dartie. The thing typified all that was fast, insecure, and subcutaneously oily in modern life. As modern life became faster, looser, younger, Soames was becoming older, slower, tighter, more and more in thought and language like his father James before him. He was almost aware of it himself. Pace and progress pleased him less and less; there was an ostentation, too, about a car which he considered provocative in the prevailing mood of Labour. On one occasion that fellow Sims had driven over the only vested interest of a working man. Soames had not forgotten the behaviour of its master, when not many people would have stopped to put up with it. He had been sorry for the dog, and quite prepared to take its part against the car, if that ruffian hadn't been so outrageous. With four hours fast becoming five, and still no Fleur, all the old car-wise feelings he had experienced in person and by proxy balled within him, and sinking sensations troubled the pit of his stomach. At seven he telephoned to Winifred by trunk call. No! Fleur had not been to Green Street. Then where was she? Visions of his beloved daughter rolled up in her pretty frills, all blood and dust-stained, in some hideous catastrophe, began to haunt him. He went to her room and spied among her things. She had taken nothing—no dressing-case, no Jewellery. And this, a relief in one sense, increased his fears of an accident. Terrible to be helpless when his loved one was missing, especially when he couldn't bear fuss or publicity of any kind! What should he do if she were not back by nightfall?

At a quarter to eight he heard the car. A great weight lifted from off his heart; he hurried down. She was getting out—pale and tired-looking, but nothing wrong. He met her in the hall.

"You've frightened me. Where have you been?"

"To Robin Hill. I'm sorry, dear. I had to go; I'll tell you afterward."
And, with a flying kiss, she ran up-stairs.

Soames waited in the drawing-room. To Robin Hill! What did that portend?

It was not a subject they could discuss at dinner—consecrated to the susceptibilities of the butler. The agony of nerves Soames had been through, the relief he felt at her safety, softened his power to condemn what she had done, or resist what she was going to do; he waited in a relaxed stupor for her revelation. Life was a queer business. There he was at sixty-five and no more in command of things than if he had not spent forty years in building up security—always something one couldn't get on terms with! In the pocket of his dinner-jacket was a letter from Annette. She was coming back in a fortnight. He knew nothing of what she had been doing out there. And he was glad that he did not. Her absence had been a relief. Out of sight was out of mind! And now she was coming back. Another worry! And the Bolderby Old Crome was gone—Dumetrius had got it—all because that anonymous letter had put it out of his thoughts. He furtively remarked the strained look on his daughter's face, as if she too were gazing at a picture that she couldn't buy. He almost wished the War back. Worries didn't seem, then, quite so worrying. From the caress in her voice, the look on her face, he became certain that she wanted something from him, uncertain whether it would be wise of him to give it her. He pushed his savoury away uneaten, and even joined her in a cigarette.

After dinner she set the electric piano-player going. And he augured the worst when she sat down on a cushion footstool at his knee, and put her hand on his.

"Darling, be nice to me. I had to see Jon—he wrote to me. He's going to try what he can do with his mother. But I've been thinking. It's really in your hands, Father. If you'd persuade her that it doesn't mean renewing the past in any way! That I shall stay yours, and Jon will stay hers; that you need never see him or her, and she need never see you or me! Only you could persuade her, dear, because only you could promise. One can't promise for other people. Surely it wouldn't be too awkward for you to see her just this once now that Jon's father is dead?"

"Too awkward?" Soames repeated. "The whole thing's preposterous."

"You know," said Fleur, without looking up, "you wouldn't mind seeing her, really."

Soames was silent. Her words had expressed a truth too deep for him to admit. She slipped her fingers between his own—hot, slim, eager, they clung there. This child of his would corkscrew her way into a brick wall!

"What am I to do if you won't, Father?" she said very softly.

"I'll do anything for your happiness," said Soames; "but this isn't for your happiness."

"Oh! it is; it is!"

"It'll only stir things up," he said grimly.

"But they are stirred up. The thing is to quiet them. To make her feel that this is just our lives, and has nothing to do with yours or hers. You can do it, Father, I know you can."

"You know a great deal, then," was Soames' glum answer.

"If you will, Jon and I will wait a year—two years if you like."

"It seems to me," murmured Soames, "that you care nothing about what I feel."

Fleur pressed his hand against her cheek.

"I do, darling. But you wouldn't like me to be awfully miserable."

How she wheedled to get her ends! And trying with all his might to think she really cared for him—he was not sure—not sure. All she cared for was this boy! Why should he help her to get this boy, who was killing her affection for himself? Why should he? By the laws of the Forsytes it was foolish! There was nothing to be had out of it—nothing! To give her to that boy! To pass her into the enemy's camp, under the influence of the woman who had injured him so deeply! Slowly—inevitably—he would lose this flower of his life! And suddenly he was conscious that his hand was wet. His heart gave a little painful jump. He couldn't bear her to cry. He put his other hand quickly over hers, and a tear dropped on that, too. He couldn't go on like this! "Well, well," he said, "I'll think it over, and do what I can. Come, come!" If she must have it for her happiness—she must; he couldn't refuse to help her. And lest she should begin to thank him he got out of his chair and went up to the piano-player—making that noise! It ran down, as he reached it, with a faint buzz. That musical box of his nursery days: "The Harmonious Blacksmith," "Glorious Port"—the thing had always made him miserable when his mother set it going on Sunday afternoons. Here it was again—the same thing, only larger, more expensive, and now it played "The Wild, Wild Women," and "The Policeman's Holiday," and he was no longer in black velvet with a sky blue collar. 'Profond's right,' he thought, 'there's nothing in it! We're all progressing to the grave!' And with that surprising mental comment he walked out.

He did not see Fleur again that night. But, at breakfast, her eyes followed him about with an appeal he could not escape—not that he intended to try. No! He had made up his mind to the nerve-racking business. He would go to Robin Hill—to that house of memories. Pleasant memory—the last! Of going down to keep that boy's father and Irene apart by threatening divorce. He had often thought, since, that it had clinched their union. And, now, he was going to clinch the union of that boy with his girl. 'I don't know what I've done,' he thought, 'to have such things thrust on me!' He went up by train and down by train, and from the station walked by the long rising lane, still very much as he remembered it over thirty years ago. Funny—so near London! Some one evidently was holding on to the land there. This speculation soothed him, moving between the high hedges slowly, so as not to get overheated, though the day was chill enough. After all was said and done there was something real about land, it didn't shift. Land, and good pictures! The values might fluctuate a bit, but on the whole they were always going up—worth holding on to, in a world where there was such a lot of unreality, cheap building, changing fashions, such a "Here to-day and gone to-morrow" spirit. The French were right, perhaps, with their peasant proprietorship, though he had no opinion of the French. One's bit of land! Something solid in it! He had heard peasant proprietors described as a pig-headed lot; had heard young Mont call his father a pigheaded Morning Poster—disrespectful young devil. Well, there were worse things than being pig-headed or reading the Morning Post. There was Profond and his tribe, and all these Labour chaps, and loud-mouthed politicians and 'wild, wild women'! A lot of worse things! And suddenly Soames became conscious of feeling weak, and hot, and shaky. Sheer nerves at the meeting before him! As Aunt Juley might have said—quoting "Superior Dosset"—his nerves were "in a proper fautigue." He could see the house now among its trees, the house he had watched being built, intending it for himself and this woman, who, by such strange fate, had lived in it with another after all! He began to think of Dumetrius, Local Loans, and other forms of investment. He could not afford to meet her with his nerves all shaking; he who represented the Day of Judgment for her on earth as it was in heaven; he, legal ownership, personified, meeting lawless beauty, incarnate. His dignity demanded impassivity during this embassy designed to link their offspring, who, if she had behaved herself, would have been brother and sister. That wretched tune, "The Wild, Wild Women," kept running in his head, perversely, for tunes did not run there as a rule. Passing the poplars in front of the house, he thought: 'How they've grown; I had them planted!' A maid answered his ring.

"Will you say—Mr. Forsyte, on a very special matter."

If she realised who he was, quite probably she would not see him. 'By George!' he thought, hardening as the tug came. 'It's a topsy-turvy affair!'

The maid came back. "Would the gentleman state his business, please?"

"Say it concerns Mr. Jon," said Soames.

And once more he was alone in that hall with the pool of grey-white marble designed by her first lover. Ah! she had been a bad lot—had loved two men, and not himself! He must remember that when he came face to face with her once more. And suddenly he saw her in the opening chink between the long heavy purple curtains, swaying, as if in hesitation; the old perfect poise and line, the old startled dark-eyed gravity, the old calm defensive voice: "Will you come in, please?"

He passed through that opening. As in the picture-gallery and the confectioner's shop, she seemed to him still beautiful. And this was the first time—the very first—since he married her seven-and-thirty years ago, that he was speaking to her without the legal right to call her his. She was not wearing black—one of that fellow's radical notions, he supposed.

"I apologise for coming," he said glumly; "but this business must be settled one way or the other."

"Won't you sit down?"

"No, thank you."

Anger at his false position, impatience of ceremony between them, mastered him, and words came tumbling out:

"It's an infernal mischance; I've done my best to discourage it. I consider my daughter crazy, but I've got into the habit of indulging her; that's why I'm here. I suppose you're fond of your son."

"Devotedly."

"Well?"

"It rests with him."

He had a sense of being met and baffled. Always—always she had baffled him, even in those old first married days.

"It's a mad notion," he said.

"It is."

"If you had only—! Well—they might have been—" he did not finish that sentence "brother and sister and all this saved," but he saw her shudder as if he had, and stung by the sight he crossed over to the window. Out there the trees had not grown—they couldn't, they were old!

"So far as I'm concerned," he said, "you may make your mind easy. I desire to see neither you nor your son if this marriage comes about. Young people in these days are—are unaccountable. But I can't bear to see my daughter unhappy. What am I to say to her when I go back?"

"Please say to her as I said to you, that it rests with Jon."

"You don't oppose it?"

"With all my heart; not with my lips."

Soames stood, biting his finger.

"I remember an evening—" he said suddenly; and was silent. What was there—what was there in this woman that would not fit into the four corners of his hate or condemnation? "Where is he—your son?"

"Up in his father's studio, I think."

"Perhaps you'd have him down."

He watched her ring the bell, he watched the maid come in.

"Please tell Mr. Jon that I want him."

"If it rests with him," said Soames hurriedly, when the maid was gone, "I suppose I may take it for granted that this unnatural marriage will take place; in that case there'll be formalities. Whom do I deal with—Herring's?"

Irene nodded.

"You don't propose to live with them?"

Irene shook her head.

"What happens to this house?"

"It will be as Jon wishes."

"This house," said Soames suddenly: "I had hopes when I began it. If they live in it—their children! They say there's such a thing as Nemesis. Do you believe in it?"

"Yes."

"Oh! You do!"

He had come back from the window, and was standing close to her, who, in the curve of her grand piano, was, as it were, embayed.

"I'm not likely to see you again," he said slowly. "Will you shake hands"—his lip quivered, the words came out jerkily—"and let the past die." He held out his hand. Her pale face grew paler, her eyes so dark, rested immovably on his, her hands remained clasped in front of her. He heard a sound and turned. That boy was standing in the opening of the curtains. Very queer he looked, hardly recognisable as the young fellow he had seen in the Gallery off Cork Street—very queer; much older, no youth in the face at all—haggard, rigid, his hair ruffled, his eyes deep in his head. Soames made an effort, and said with a lift of his lip, not quite a smile nor quite a sneer:

"Well, young man! I'm here for my daughter; it rests with you, it seems—this matter. Your mother leaves it in your hands."

The boy continued staring at his mother's face, and made no answer.

"For my daughter's sake I've brought myself to come," said Soames. "What am I to say to her when I go back?"

Still looking at his mother, the boy said, quietly:

"Tell Fleur that it's no good, please; I must do as my father wished before he died."

"Jon!"

"It's all right, Mother."

In a kind of stupefaction Soames looked from one to the other; then, taking up hat and umbrella which he had put down on a chair, he walked toward the curtains. The boy stood aside for him to go by. He passed through and heard the grate of the rings as the curtains were drawn behind him. The sound liberated something in his chest.

'So that's that!' he thought, and passed out of the front door.

VIII

THE DARK TUNE

As Soames walked away from the house at Robin Hill the sun broke through the grey of that chill afternoon, in smoky radiance. So absorbed in landscape painting that he seldom looked seriously for effects of Nature out of doors—he was struck by that moody effulgence—it mourned with a triumph suited to his own feeling. Victory in defeat. His embassy had come to naught. But he was rid of those people, had regained his daughter at the expense of—her happiness. What would Fleur say to him? Would she believe he had done his best? And under that sunlight faring on the elms, hazels, hollies of the lane and those unexploited fields, Soames felt dread. She would be terribly upset! He must appeal to her pride. That boy had given her up, declared part and lot with the woman who so long ago had given her father up! Soames clenched his hands. Given him up, and why? What had been wrong with him? And once more he felt the malaise of one who contemplates himself as seen by another—like a dog who chances on his reflection in a mirror and is intrigued and anxious at the unseizable thing.

Not in a hurry to get home, he dined in town at the Connoisseurs. While eating a pear it suddenly

occurred to him that, if he had not gone down to Robin Hill, the boy might not have so decided. He remembered the expression on his face while his mother was refusing the hand he had held out. A strange, an awkward thought! Had Fleur cooked her own goose by trying to make too sure?

He reached home at half-past nine. While the car was passing in at one drive gate he heard the grinding sputter of a motor-cycle passing out by the other. Young Mont, no doubt, so Fleur had not been lonely. But he went in with a sinking heart. In the cream-panelled drawing-room she was sitting with her elbows on her knees, and her chin on her clasped hands, in front of a white camellia plant which filled the fireplace. That glance at her before she saw him renewed his dread. What was she seeing among those white camellias?

"Well, Father!"

Soames shook his head. His tongue failed him. This was murderous work! He saw her eyes dilate, her lips quivering.

"What? What? Quick, Father!"

"My dear," said Soames, "I—I did my best, but—" And again he shook his head.

Fleur ran to him, and put a hand on each of his shoulders.

"She?"

"No," muttered Soames; "he. I was to tell you that it was no use; he must do what his father wished before he died." He caught her by the waist. "Come, child, don't let them hurt you. They're not worth your little finger."

Fleur tore herself from his grasp.

"You didn't you—couldn't have tried. You—you betrayed me, Father!"

Bitterly wounded, Soames gazed at her passionate figure writhing there in front of him.

"You didn't try—you didn't—I was a fool! I won't believe he could—he ever could! Only yesterday he—! Oh! why did I ask you?"

"Yes," said Soames, quietly, "why did you? I swallowed my feelings; I did my best for you, against my judgment—and this is my reward. Good-night!"

With every nerve in his body twitching he went toward the door.

Fleur darted after him.

"He gives me up? You mean that? Father!"

Soames turned and forced himself to answer:

"Yes."

"Oh!" cried Fleur. "What did you—what could you have done in those old days?"

The breathless sense of really monstrous injustice cut the power of speech in Soames' throat. What had he done! What had they done to him!

And with quite unconscious dignity he put his hand on his breast, and looked at her.

"It's a shame!" cried Fleur passionately.

Soames went out. He mounted, slow and icy, to his picture gallery, and paced among his treasures. Outrageous! Oh! Outrageous! She was spoiled! Ah! and who had spoiled her? He stood still before the Goya copy. Accustomed to her own way in everything. Flower of his life! And now that she couldn't have it! He turned to the window for some air. Daylight was dying, the moon rising, gold behind the poplars! What sound was that? Why! That piano thing! A dark tune, with a thrum and a throb! She had set it going—what comfort could she get from that? His eyes caught movement down there beyond the lawn, under the trellis of rambler roses and young acacia-trees, where the moonlight fell. There she was, roaming up and down. His heart gave a little sickening jump. What would she do under this blow? How could he tell? What did he know of her—he had only loved her all his life—looked on her as the apple of his eye! He knew nothing—had no notion. There she was—and that dark tune—and the river gleaming in the moonlight!

'I must go out,' he thought.

He hastened down to the drawing-room, lighted just as he had left it, with the piano thrumming out that waltz, or fox-trot, or whatever they called it in these days, and passed through on to the verandah.

Where could he watch, without her seeing him? And he stole down through the fruit garden to the boat-house. He was between her and the river now, and his heart felt lighter. She was his daughter, and Annette's—she wouldn't do anything foolish; but there it was—he didn't know! From the boat house window he could see the last acacia and the spin of her skirt when she turned in her restless march. That tune had run down at last—thank goodness! He crossed the floor and looked through the farther window at the water slow-flowing past the lilies. It made little bubbles against them, bright where a moon-streak fell. He remembered suddenly that early morning when he had slept on the house-boat after his father died, and she had just been born—nearly nineteen years ago! Even now he recalled the unaccustomed world when he woke up, the strange feeling it had given him. That day the second passion of his life began—for this girl of his, roaming under the acacias. What a comfort she had been to him! And all the soreness and sense of outrage left him. If he could make her happy again, he didn't care! An owl flew, queeking, queeking; a bat flitted by; the moonlight brightened and broadened on the water. How long was she going to roam about like this! He went back to the window, and suddenly saw her coming down to the bank. She stood quite close, on the landing-stage. And Soames watched, clenching his hands. Should he speak to her? His excitement was intense. The stillness of her figure, its youth, its absorption in despair, in longing, in—itself. He would always remember it, moonlit like that; and the faint sweet reek of the river and the shivering of the willow leaves. She had everything in the world that he could give her, except the one thing that she could not have because of him! The perversity of things hurt him at that moment, as might a fish-bone in his throat.

Then, with an infinite relief, he saw her turn back toward the house. What could he give her to make amends? Pearls, travel, horses, other young men—anything she wanted—that he might lose the memory of her young figure lonely by the water! There! She had set that tune going again! Why—it was a mania! Dark, thrumming, faint, travelling from the house. It was as though she had said: "If I can't have something to keep me going, I shall die of this!" Soames dimly understood. Well, if it helped her, let her keep it thrumming on all night! And, mousing back through the fruit garden, he regained the verandah. Though he meant to go in and speak to her now, he still hesitated, not knowing what to say, trying hard to recall how it felt to be thwarted in love. He ought to know, ought to remember—and he could not! Gone—all real recollection; except that it had hurt him horribly. In this blankness he stood passing his handkerchief over hands and lips, which were very dry. By craning his head he could just see Fleur, standing with her back to that piano still grinding out its tune, her arms tight crossed on her breast, a lighted cigarette between her lips, whose smoke half veiled her face. The expression on it was strange to Soames, the eyes shone and stared, and every feature was alive with a sort of wretched scorn and anger. Once or twice he had seen Annette look like that—the face was too vivid, too naked, not his daughter's at that moment. And he dared not go in, realising the futility of any attempt at consolation. He sat down in the shadow of the ingle-nook.

Monstrous trick, that Fate had played him! Nemesis! That old unhappy marriage! And in God's name—why? How was he to know, when he wanted Irene so violently, and she consented to be his, that she would never love him? The tune died and was renewed, and died again, and still Soames sat in the shadow, waiting for he knew not what. The fag of Fleur's cigarette, flung through the window, fell on the grass; he watched it glowing, burning itself out. The moon had freed herself above the poplars, and poured her unreality on the garden. Comfortless light, mysterious, withdrawn—like the beauty of that woman who had never loved him—dappling the nemesias and the stocks with a vesture not of earth. Flowers! And his flower so unhappy! Ah! Why could one not put happiness into Local Loans, gild its edges, insure it against going down?

Light had ceased to flow out now from the drawing-room window. All was silent and dark in there. Had she gone up? He rose, and, tiptoeing, peered in. It seemed so! He entered. The verandah kept the moonlight out; and at first he could see nothing but the outlines of furniture blacker than the darkness. He groped toward the farther window to shut it. His foot struck a chair, and he heard a gasp. There she was, curled and crushed into the corner of the sofa! His hand hovered. Did she want his consolation? He stood, gazing at that ball of crushed frills and hair and graceful youth, trying to burrow its way out of sorrow. How leave her there? At last he touched her hair, and said:

"Come, darling, better go to bed. I'll make it up to you, somehow." How fatuous! But what could he have said?

IX

UNDER THE OAK-TREE

When their visitor had disappeared Jon and his mother stood without speaking, till he said suddenly:

"I ought to have seen him out."

But Soames was already walking down the drive, and Jon went upstairs to his father's studio, not trusting himself to go back.

The expression on his mother's face confronting the man she had once been married to, had sealed a resolution growing within him ever since she left him the night before. It had put the finishing touch of reality. To marry Fleur would be to hit his mother in the face; to betray his dead father! It was no good! Jon had the least resentful of natures. He bore his parents no grudge in this hour of his distress. For one so young there was a rather strange power in him of seeing things in some sort of proportion. It was worse for Fleur, worse for his mother even, than it was for him. Harder than to give up was to be given up, or to be the cause of some one you loved giving up for you. He must not, would not behave grudgingly! While he stood watching the tardy sunlight, he had again that sudden vision of the world which had come to him the night before. Sea on sea, country on country, millions on millions of people, all with their own lives, energies, joys, griefs, and suffering—all with things they had to give up, and separate struggles for existence. Even though he might be willing to give up all else for the one thing he couldn't have, he would be a fool to think his feelings mattered much in so vast a world, and to behave like a cry-baby or a cad. He pictured the people who had nothing—the millions who had given up life in the War, the millions whom the War had left with life and little else; the hungry children he had read of, the shattered men; people in prison, every kind of unfortunate. And—they did not help him much. If one had to miss a meal, what comfort in the knowledge that many others had to miss it too? There was more distraction in the thought of getting away out into this vast world of which he knew nothing yet. He could not go on staying here, walled in and sheltered, with everything so slick and comfortable, and nothing to do but brood and think what might have been. He could not go back to Wansdon, and the memories of Fleur. If he saw her again he could not trust himself; and if he stayed here or went back there, he would surely see her. While they were within reach of each other that must happen. To go far away and quickly was the only thing to do. But, however much he loved his mother, he did not want to go away with her. Then feeling that was brutal, he made up his mind desperately to propose that they should go to Italy. For two hours in that melancholy room he tried to master himself, then dressed solemnly for dinner.

His mother had done the same. They ate little, at some length, and talked of his father's catalogue. The show was arranged for October, and beyond clerical detail there was nothing more to do.

After dinner she put on a cloak and they went out; walked a little, talked a little, till they were standing silent at last beneath the oak-tree. Ruled by the thought: 'If I show anything, I show all,' Jon put his arm through hers and said quite casually:

"Mother, let's go to Italy."

Irene pressed his arm, and said as casually:

"It would be very nice; but I've been thinking you ought to see and do more than you would if I were with you."

"But then you'd be alone."

"I was once alone for more than twelve years. Besides, I should like to be here for the opening of Father's show."

Jon's grip tightened round her arm; he was not deceived.

"You couldn't stay here all by yourself; it's too big."

"Not here, perhaps. In London, and I might go to Paris, after the show opens. You ought to have a year at least, Jon, and see the world."

"Yes, I'd like to see the world and rough it. But I don't want to leave you all alone."

"My dear, I owe you that at least. If it's for your good, it'll be for mine. Why not start tomorrow? You've got your passport."

"Yes; if I'm going it had better be at once. Only—Mother—if—if I wanted to stay out somewhere—America or anywhere, would you mind coming presently?"

"Wherever and whenever you send for me. But don't send until you really want me."

Jon drew a deep breath.

"I feel England's choky."

They stood a few minutes longer under the oak-tree—looking out to where the grand stand at Epsom was veiled in evening. The branches kept the moonlight from them, so that it only fell everywhere else—over the fields and far away, and on the windows of the creepered house behind, which soon would be to let.

X

FLEUR'S WEDDING

The October paragraphs describing the wedding of Fleur Forsyte to Michael Mont hardly conveyed the symbolic significance of this event. In the union of the great-granddaughter of "Superior Dosset" with the heir of a ninth baronet was the outward and visible sign of that merger of class in class which buttresses the political stability of a realm. The time had come when the Forsytes might resign their natural resentment against a "flummery" not theirs by birth, and accept it as the still more natural due of their possessive instincts. Besides, they had to mount to make room for all those so much more newly rich. In that quiet but tasteful ceremony in Hanover Square, and afterward among the furniture in Green Street, it had been impossible for those not in the know to distinguish the Forsyte troop from the Mont contingent—so far away was "Superior Dosset" now. Was there, in the crease of his trousers, the expression of his moustache, his accent, or the shine on his top-hat, a pin to choose between Soames and the ninth baronet himself? Was not Fleur as self-possessed, quick, glancing, pretty, and hard as the likeliest Muskham, Mont, or Charwell filly present? If anything, the Forsytes had it in dress and looks and manners. They had become "upper class" and now their name would be formally recorded in the Stud Book, their money joined to land. Whether this was a little late in the day, and those rewards of the possessive instinct, lands and money, destined for the melting-pot—was still a question so moot that it was not mooted. After all, Timothy had said Consols were goin' up. Timothy, the last, the missing link; Timothy, in extremis on the Bayswater Road—so Francie had reported. It was whispered, too, that this young Mont was a sort of socialist—strangely wise of him, and in the nature of insurance, considering the days they lived in. There was no uneasiness on that score. The landed classes produced that sort of amiable foolishness at times, turned to safe uses and confined to theory. As George remarked to his sister Francie: "They'll soon be having puppies—that'll give him pause."

The church with white flowers and something blue in the middle of the East window looked extremely chaste, as though endeavouring to counteract the somewhat lurid phraseology of a Service calculated to keep the thoughts of all on puppies. Forsytes, Haymans, Tweetymans, sat in the left aisle; Monts, Charwells; Muskhams in the right; while a sprinkling of Fleur's fellow-sufferers at school, and of Mont's fellow-sufferers in, the War, gaped indiscriminately from either side, and three maiden ladies, who had dropped in on their way from Skyward's brought up the rear, together with two Mont retainers and Fleur's old nurse. In the unsettled state of the country as full a house as could be expected.

Mrs. Val Dartie, who sat with her husband in the third row, squeezed his hand more than once during the performance. To her, who knew the plot of this tragi-comedy, its most dramatic moment was well-nigh painful. 'I wonder if Jon knows by instinct,' she thought—Jon, out in British Columbia. She had received a letter from him only that morning which had made her smile and say:

"Jon's in British Columbia, Val, because he wants to be in California. He thinks it's too nice there."

"Oh!" said Val, "so he's beginning to see a joke again."

"He's bought some land and sent for his mother."

"What on earth will she do out there?"

"All she cares about is Jon. Do you still think it a happy release?"

Val's shrewd eyes narrowed to grey pin-points between their dark lashes.

"Fleur wouldn't have suited him a bit. She's not bred right."

"Poor little Fleur!" sighed Holly. Ah! it was strange—this marriage. The young man, Mont, had caught her on the rebound, of course, in the reckless mood of one whose ship has just gone down. Such a plunge could not but be—as Val put it—an outside chance. There was little to be told from the back view of her young cousin's veil, and Holly's eyes reviewed the general aspect of this Christian wedding. She, who had made a love-match which had been successful, had a horror of unhappy marriages. This might not be one in the end—but it was clearly a toss-up; and to consecrate a toss-up in this fashion with manufactured unction before a crowd of fashionable free-thinkers—for who thought otherwise than freely, or not at all, when they were "dolled" up—seemed to her as near a sin as one could find in an age which had abolished them. Her eyes wandered from the prelate in his robes (a Charwell-the Forsytes had not as yet produced a prelate) to Val, beside her, thinking—she was certain—of the Mayfly filly at fifteen to one for the Cambridgeshire. They passed on and caught the profile of the ninth baronet, in counterfeiturement of the kneeling process. She could just see the neat ruck above his knees where he had pulled his trousers up, and thought: 'Val's forgotten to pull up his!' Her eyes passed to the pew in front of her, where Winifred's substantial form was gowned with passion, and on again to Soames and Annette kneeling side by side. A little smile came on her lips—Prosper Profond, back from the South Seas of the Channel, would be kneeling too, about six rows behind. Yes! This was a funny "small" business, however it turned out; still it was in a proper church and would be in the proper papers to-morrow morning.

They had begun a hymn; she could hear the ninth baronet across the aisle, singing of the hosts of Midian. Her little finger touched Val's thumb—they were holding the same hymn-book—and a tiny thrill passed through her, preserved—from twenty years ago. He stooped and whispered:

"I say, d'you remember the rat?" The rat at their wedding in Cape Colony, which had cleaned its whiskers behind the table at the Registrar's! And between her little and third fingers she squeezed his thumb hard.

The hymn was over, the prelate had begun to deliver his discourse. He told them of the dangerous times they lived in, and the awful conduct of the House of Lords in connection with divorce. They were all soldiers—he said—in the trenches under the poisonous gas of the Prince of Darkness, and must be manful. The purpose of marriage was children, not mere sinful happiness.

An imp danced in Holly's eyes—Val's eyelashes were meeting. Whatever happened; he must not snore. Her finger and thumb closed on his thigh till he stirred uneasily.

The discourse was over, the danger past. They were signing in the vestry; and general relaxation had set in.

A voice behind her said:

"Will she stay the course?"

"Who's that?" she whispered.

"Old George Forsyte!"

Holly demurely scrutinized one of whom she had often heard. Fresh from South Africa, and ignorant of her kith and kin, she never saw one without an almost childish curiosity. He was very big, and very dapper; his eyes gave her a funny feeling of having no particular clothes.

"They're off!" she heard him say.

They came, stepping from the chancel. Holly looked first in young Mont's face. His lips and ears were twitching, his eyes, shifting from his feet to the hand within his arm, stared suddenly before them as if to face a firing party. He gave Holly the feeling that he was spiritually intoxicated. But Fleur! Ah! That was different. The girl was perfectly composed, prettier than ever, in her white robes and veil over her banged dark chestnut hair; her eyelids hovered demure over her dark hazel eyes. Outwardly, she seemed all there. But inwardly, where was she? As those two passed, Fleur raised her eyelids—the restless glint of those clear whites remained on Holly's vision as might the flutter of caged bird's wings.

In Green Street Winifred stood to receive, just a little less composed than usual. Soames' request for the use of her house had come on her at a deeply psychological moment. Under the influence of a remark of Prosper Profond, she had begun to exchange her Empire for Expressionistic furniture. There

were the most amusing arrangements, with violet, green, and orange blobs and scriggles, to be had at Mealand's. Another month and the change would have been complete. Just now, the very "intriguing" recruits she had enlisted, did not march too well with the old guard. It was as if her regiment were half in khaki, half in scarlet and bearskins. But her strong and comfortable character made the best of it in a drawing-room which typified, perhaps, more perfectly than she imagined, the semi-bolshevized imperialism of her country. After all, this was a day of merger, and you couldn't have too much of it! Her eyes travelled indulgently among her guests. Soames had gripped the back of a buhl chair; young Mont was behind that "awfully amusing" screen, which no one as yet had been able to explain to her. The ninth baronet had shied violently at a round scarlet table, inlaid under glass with blue Australian butterflies' wings, and was clinging to her Louis-Quinze cabinet; Francie Forsyte had seized the new mantel-board, finely carved with little purple grotesques on an ebony ground; George, over by the old spinet, was holding a little sky-blue book as if about to enter bets; Prosper Profond was twiddling the knob of the open door, black with peacock-blue panels; and Annette's hands, close by, were grasping her own waist; two Muskhams clung to the balcony among the plants, as if feeling ill; Lady Mont, thin and brave-looking, had taken up her long-handled glasses and was gazing at the central light shade, of ivory and orange dashed with deep magenta, as if the heavens had opened. Everybody, in fact, seemed holding on to something. Only Fleur, still in her bridal dress, was detached from all support, flinging her words and glances to left and right.

The room was full of the bubble and the squeak of conversation. Nobody could hear anything that anybody said; which seemed of little consequence, since no one waited for anything so slow as an answer. Modern conversation seemed to Winifred so different from the days of her prime, when a drawl was all the vogue. Still it was "amusing," which, of course, was all that mattered. Even the Forsytes were talking with extreme rapidity—Fleur and Christopher, and Imogen, and young Nicholas's youngest, Patrick. Soames, of course, was silent; but George, by the spinet, kept up a running commentary, and Francie, by her mantel-shelf. Winifred drew nearer to the ninth baronet. He seemed to promise a certain repose; his nose was fine and drooped a little, his grey moustaches too; and she said, drawling through her smile:

"It's rather nice, isn't it?"

His reply shot out of his smile like a snapped bread pellet

"D'you remember, in Frazer, the tribe that buries the bride up to the waist?"

He spoke as fast as anybody! He had dark lively little eyes, too, all crinkled round like a Catholic priest's. Winifred felt suddenly he might say things she would regret.

"They're always so amusing—weddings," she murmured, and moved on to Soames. He was curiously still, and Winifred saw at once what was dictating his immobility. To his right was George Forsyte, to his left Annette and Prosper Profond. He could not move without either seeing those two together, or the reflection of them in George Forsyte's japing eyes. He was quite right not to be taking notice.

"They say Timothy's sinking;" he said glumly.

"Where will you put him, Soames?"

"Highgate." He counted on his fingers. "It'll make twelve of them there, including wives. How do you think Fleur looks?"

"Remarkably well."

Soames nodded. He had never seen her look prettier, yet he could not rid himself of the impression that this business was unnatural—remembering still that crushed figure burrowing into the corner of the sofa. From that night to this day he had received from her no confidences. He knew from his chauffeur that she had made one more attempt on Robin Hill and drawn blank—an empty house, no one at home. He knew that she had received a letter, but not what was in it, except that it had made her hide herself and cry. He had remarked that she looked at him sometimes when she thought he wasn't noticing, as if she were wondering still what he had done—forsooth—to make those people hate him so. Well, there it was! Annette had come back, and things had worn on through the summer—very miserable, till suddenly Fleur had said she was going to marry young Mont. She had shown him a little more affection when she told him that. And he had yielded—what was the good of opposing it? God knew that he had never wished to thwart her in anything! And the young man seemed quite delirious about her. No doubt she was in a reckless mood, and she was young, absurdly young. But if he opposed her, he didn't know what she would do; for all he could tell she might want to take up a profession, become a doctor or solicitor, some nonsense. She had no aptitude for painting, writing, music, in his view the legitimate occupations of unmarried women, if they must do something in these days. On the

whole, she was safer married, for he could see too well how feverish and restless she was at home. Annette, too, had been in favour of it—Annette, from behind the veil of his refusal to know what she was about, if she was about anything. Annette had said: "Let her marry this young man. He is a nice boy—not so highy-flighty as he seems." Where she got her expressions, he didn't know—but her opinion soothed his doubts. His wife, whatever her conduct, had clear eyes and an almost depressing amount of common sense. He had settled fifty thousand on Fleur, taking care that there was no cross settlement in case it didn't turn out well. Could it turn out well? She had not got over that other boy—he knew. They were to go to Spain for the honeymoon. He would be even lonelier when she was gone. But later, perhaps, she would forget, and turn to him again! Winifred's voice broke on his reverie.

"Why! Of all wonders-June!"

There, in a djibbah—what things she wore!—with her hair straying from under a fillet, Soames saw his cousin, and Fleur going forward to greet her. The two passed from their view out on to the stairway.

"Really," said Winifred, "she does the most impossible things! Fancy her coming!"

"What made you ask her?" muttered Soames.

"Because I thought she wouldn't accept, of course."

Winifred had forgotten that behind conduct lies the main trend of character; or, in other words, omitted to remember that Fleur was now a "lame duck."

On receiving her invitation, June had first thought, 'I wouldn't go near them for the world!' and then, one morning, had awakened from a dream of Fleur waving to her from a boat with a wild unhappy gesture. And she had changed her mind.

When Fleur came forward and said to her, "Do come up while I'm changing my dress," she had followed up the stairs. The girl led the way into Imogen's old bedroom, set ready for her toilet.

June sat down on the bed, thin and upright, like a little spirit in the sear and yellow. Fleur locked the door.

The girl stood before her divested of her wedding dress. What a pretty thing she was!

"I suppose you think me a fool," she said, with quivering lips, "when it was to have been Jon. But what does it matter? Michael wants me, and I don't care. It'll get me away from home." Diving her hand into the frills on her breast, she brought out a letter. "Jon wrote me this."

June read: "Lake Okanagan, British Columbia. I'm not coming back to England. Bless you always. Jon."

"She's made safe, you see," said Fleur.

June handed back the letter.

"That's not fair to Irene," she said, "she always told Jon he could do as he wished."

Fleur smiled bitterly. "Tell me, didn't she spoil your life too?" June looked up. "Nobody can spoil a life, my dear. That's nonsense. Things happen, but we bob up."

With a sort of terror she saw the girl sink on her knees and bury her face in the djibbah. A strangled sob mounted to June's ears.

"It's all right—all right," she murmured, "Don't! There, there!"

But the point of the girl's chin was pressed ever closer into her thigh, and the sound was dreadful of her sobbing.

Well, well! It had to come. She would feel better afterward! June stroked the short hair of that shapely head; and all the scattered mother-sense in her focussed itself and passed through the tips of her fingers into the girl's brain.

"Don't sit down under it, my dear," she said at last. "We can't control life, but we can fight it. Make the best of things. I've had to. I held on, like you; and I cried, as you're crying now. And look at me!"

Fleur raised her head; a sob merged suddenly into a little choked laugh. In truth it was a thin and rather wild and wasted spirit she was looking at, but it had brave eyes.

"All right!" she said. "I'm sorry. I shall forget him, I suppose, if I fly fast and far enough."

And, scrambling to her feet, she went over to the wash-stand.

June watched her removing with cold water the traces of emotion. Save for a little becoming pinkness there was nothing left when she stood before the mirror. June got off the bed and took a pin-cushion in her hand. To put two pins into the wrong places was all the vent she found for sympathy.

"Give me a kiss," she said when Fleur was ready, and dug her chin into the girl's warm cheek.

"I want a whiff," said Fleur; "don't wait."

June left her, sitting on the bed with a cigarette between her lips and her eyes half closed, and went down-stairs. In the doorway of the drawing-room stood Soames as if unquiet at his daughter's tardiness. June tossed her head and passed down on to the half-landing. Her cousin Francie was standing there.

"Look!" said June, pointing with her chin at Soames. "That man's fatal!"

"How do you mean," said Francie, "fatal?"

June did not answer her. "I shan't wait to see them off," she said.
"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said Francie, and her eyes, of a Celtic grey, goggled. That old feud! Really, it was quite romantic!

Soames, moving to the well of the staircase, saw June go, and drew a breath of satisfaction. Why didn't Fleur come? They would miss their train. That train would bear her away from him, yet he could not help fidgeting at the thought that they would lose it. And then she did come, running down in her tan-coloured frock and black velvet cap, and passed him into the drawing-room. He saw her kiss her mother, her aunt, Val's wife, Imogen, and then come forth, quick and pretty as ever. How would she treat him at this last moment of her girlhood? He couldn't hope for much!

Her lips pressed the middle of his cheek.

"Daddy!" she said, and was past and gone! Daddy! She hadn't called him that for years. He drew a long breath and followed slowly down. There was all the folly with that confetti stuff and the rest of it to go through with yet. But he would like just to catch her smile, if she leaned out, though they would hit her in the eye with the shoe, if they didn't take care. Young Mont's voice said fervently in his ear:

"Good-bye, sir; and thank you! I'm so fearfully bucked."

"Good-bye," he said; "don't miss your train."

He stood on the bottom step but three, whence he could see above the heads—the silly hats and heads. They were in the car now; and there was that stuff, showering, and there went the shoe. A flood of something welled up in Soames, and—he didn't know—he couldn't see!

XI

THE LAST OF THE OLD FORSYTES

When they came to prepare that terrific symbol Timothy Forsyte—the one pure individualist left, the only man who hadn't heard of the Great War—they found him wonderful—not even death had undermined his soundness.

To Smither and Cook that preparation came like final evidence of what they had never believed possible—the end of the old Forsyte family on earth. Poor Mr. Timothy must now take a harp and sing in the company of Miss Forsyte, Mrs. Julia, Miss Hester; with Mr. Jolyon, Mr. Swithin, Mr. James, Mr. Roger, and Mr. Nicholas of the party. Whether Mrs. Hayman would be there was more doubtful, seeing that she had been cremated. Secretly Cook thought that Mr. Timothy would be upset—he had always been so set against barrel organs. How many times had she not said: "Drat the thing! There it is again! Smither, you'd better run up and see what you can do." And in her heart she would so have enjoyed the tunes, if she hadn't known that Mr. Timothy would ring the bell in a minute and say: "Here, take him a halfpenny and tell him to move on." Often they had been obliged to add threepence of their own before

the man would go—Timothy had ever underrated the value of emotion. Luckily he had taken the organs for blue-bottles in his last years, which had been a comfort, and they had been able to enjoy the tunes. But a harp! Cook wondered. It was a change! And Mr. Timothy had never liked change. But she did not speak of this to Smither, who did so take a line of her own in regard to heaven that it quite put one about sometimes.

She cried while Timothy was being prepared, and they all had sherry afterward out of the yearly Christmas bottle, which would not be needed now. Ah! dear! She had been there five-and-forty years and Smither three-and-forty! And now they would be going to a tiny house in Tooting, to live on their savings and what Miss Hester had so kindly left them—for to take fresh service after the glorious past—No! But they would like just to see Mr. Soames again, and Mrs. Dartie, and Miss Francie, and Miss Euphemia. And even if they had to take their own cab, they felt they must go to the funeral. For six years Mr. Timothy had been their baby, getting younger and younger every day, till at last he had been too young to live.

They spent the regulation hours of waiting in polishing and dusting, in catching the one mouse left, and asphyxiating the last beetle so as to leave it nice, discussing with each other what they would buy at the sale. Miss Ann's workbox; Miss Juley's (that is Mrs. Julia's) seaweed album; the fire-screen Miss Hester had crewelled; and Mr. Timothy's hair—little golden curls, glued into a black frame. Oh! they must have those—only the price of things had gone up so!

It fell to Soames to issue invitations for the funeral. He had them drawn up by Gradman in his office—only blood relations, and no flowers. Six carriages were ordered. The Will would be read afterward at the house.

He arrived at eleven o'clock to see that all was ready. At a quarter past old Gradman came in black gloves and crape on his hat. He and Soames stood in the drawing-room waiting. At half-past eleven the carriages drew up in a long row. But no one else appeared. Gradman said:

"It surprises me, Mr. Soames. I posted them myself."

"I don't know," said Soames; "he'd lost touch with the family." Soames had often noticed in old days how much more neighbourly his family were to the dead than to the living. But, now, the way they had flocked to Fleur's wedding and abstained from Timothy's funeral, seemed to show some vital change. There might, of course, be another reason; for Soames felt that if he had not known the contents of Timothy's Will, he might have stayed away himself through delicacy. Timothy had left a lot of money, with nobody in particular to leave it to. They mightn't like to seem to expect something.

At twelve o'clock the procession left the door; Timothy alone in the first carriage under glass. Then Soames alone; then Gradman alone; then Cook and Smither together. They started at a walk, but were soon trotting under a bright sky. At the entrance to Highgate Cemetery they were delayed by service in the Chapel. Soames would have liked to stay outside in the sunshine. He didn't believe a word of it; on the other hand, it was a form of insurance which could not safely be neglected, in case there might be something in it after all.

They walked up two and two—he and Gradman, Cook and Smither—to the family vault. It was not very distinguished for the funeral of the last old Forsyte.

He took Gradman into his carriage on the way back to the Bayswater Road with a certain glow in his heart. He had a surprise in pickle for the old chap who had served the Forsytes four-and-fifty years—a treat that was entirely his doing. How well he remembered saying to Timothy the day—after Aunt Hester's funeral: "Well; Uncle Timothy, there's Gradman. He's taken a lot of trouble for the family. What do you say to leaving him five thousand?" and his surprise, seeing the difficulty there had been in getting Timothy to leave anything, when Timothy had nodded. And now the old chap would be as pleased as Punch, for Mrs. Gradman, he knew, had a weak heart, and their son had lost a leg in the War. It was extraordinarily gratifying to Soames to have left him five thousand pounds of Timothy's money. They sat down together in the little drawing-room, whose walls—like a vision of heaven—were sky-blue and gold with every picture-frame unnaturally bright, and every speck of dust removed from every piece of furniture, to read that little masterpiece—the Will of Timothy. With his back to the light in Aunt Hester's chair, Soames faced Gradman with his face to the light, on Aunt Ann's sofa; and, crossing his legs, began:

"This is the last Will and Testament of me Timothy Forsyte of The Bower Bayswater Road, London I appoint my nephew Soames Forsyte of The Shelter Mapleduram and Thomas Gradman of 159 Folly Road Highgate (hereinafter called my Trustees) to be the trustees and executors of this my Will To the said Soames Forsyte I leave the sum of one thousand pounds free of legacy duty and to the said Thomas Gradman I leave the sum of five thousand pounds free of legacy duty."

Soames paused. Old Gradman was leaning forward, convulsively gripping a stout black knee with each of his thick hands; his mouth had fallen open so that the gold fillings of three teeth gleamed; his eyes were blinking, two tears rolled slowly out of them. Soames read hastily on.

"All the rest of my property of whatsoever description I bequeath to my Trustees upon Trust to convert and hold the same upon the following trusts namely To pay thereout all my debts funeral expenses and outgoings of any kind in connection with my Will and to hold the residue thereof in trust for that male lineal descendant of my father Jolyon Forsyte by his marriage with Ann Pierce who after the decease of all lineal descendants whether male or female of my said father by his said marriage in being at the time of my death shall last attain the age of twenty-one years absolutely it being my desire that my property shall be nursed to the extreme limit permitted by the laws of England for the benefit of such male lineal descendant as aforesaid."

Soames read the investment and attestation clauses, and, ceasing, looked at Gradman. The old fellow was wiping his brow with a large handkerchief, whose brilliant colour supplied a sudden festive tinge to the proceedings.

"My word, Mr. Soames!" he said, and it was clear that the lawyer in him had utterly wiped out the man: "My word! Why, there are two babies now, and some quite young children—if one of them lives to be eighty—it's not a great age—and add twenty-one—that's a hundred years; and Mr. Timothy worth a hundred and fifty thousand pound net if he's worth a penny. Compound interest at five per cent. doubles you in fourteen years. In fourteen years three hundred thousand—six hundred thousand in twenty-eight—twelve hundred thousand in forty-two—twenty-four hundred thousand in fifty-six—four million eight hundred thousand in seventy—nine million six hundred thousand in eighty-four—Why, in a hundred years it'll be twenty million! And we shan't live to use it! It is a Will!"

Soames said dryly: "Anything may happen. The State might take the lot; they're capable of anything in these days."

"And carry five," said Gradman to himself. "I forgot—Mr. Timothy's in Consols; we shan't get more than two per cent. with this income tax. To be on the safe side, say eight millions. Still, that's a pretty penny."

Soames rose and handed him the Will. "You're going into the City. Take care of that, and do what's necessary. Advertise; but there are no debts. When's the sale?"

"Tuesday week," said Gradman. "Life or lives in bein' and twenty-one years afterward—it's a long way off. But I'm glad he's left it in the family...."

The sale—not at Jobson's, in view of the Victorian nature of the effects—was far more freely attended than the funeral, though not by Cook and Smither, for Soames had taken it on himself to give them their heart's desires. Winifred was present, Euphemia, and Francie, and Eustace had come in his car. The miniatures, Barbizons, and J. R. drawings had been bought in by Soames; and relics of no marketable value were set aside in an off-room for members of the family who cared to have mementoes. These were the only restrictions upon bidding characterised by an almost tragic languor. Not one piece of furniture, no picture or porcelain figure appealed to modern taste. The humming birds had fallen like autumn leaves when taken from where they had not hummed for sixty years. It was painful to Soames to see the chairs his aunts had sat on, the little grand piano they had practically never played, the books whose outsides they had gazed at, the china they had dusted, the curtains they had drawn, the hearth-rug which had warmed their feet; above all, the beds they had lain and died in—sold to little dealers, and the housewives of Fulham. And yet—what could one do? Buy them and stick them in a lumber-room? No; they had to go the way of all flesh and furniture, and be worn out. But when they put up Aunt Ann's sofa and were going to knock it down for thirty shillings, he cried out, suddenly: "Five pounds!" The sensation was considerable, and the sofa his.

When that little sale was over in the fusty saleroom, and those Victorian ashes scattered, he went out into the misty October sunshine feeling as if cosiness had died out of the world, and the board "To Let" was up, indeed. Revolutions on the horizon; Fleur in Spain; no comfort in Annette; no Timothy's on the Bayswater Road. In the irritable desolation of his soul he went into the Goupenor Gallery. That chap Jolyon's watercolours were on view there. He went in to look down his nose at them—it might give him some faint satisfaction. The news had trickled through from June to Val's wife, from her to Val, from Val to his mother, from her to Soames, that the house—the fatal house at Robin Hill—was for sale, and Irene going to join her boy out in British Columbia, or some such place. For one wild moment the thought had come to Soames: "Why shouldn't I buy it back? I meant it for my!" No sooner come than gone. Too lugubrious a triumph; with too many humiliating memories for himself and Fleur. She would never live there after what had happened. No, the place must go its way to some peer or profiteer. It had been a bone of contention from the first, the shell of the feud; and with the woman gone, it was an

empty shell. "For Sale or To Let." With his mind's eye he could see that board raised high above the ivied wall which he had built.

He passed through the first of the two rooms in the Gallery. There was certainly a body of work! And now that the fellow was dead it did not seem so trivial. The drawings were pleasing enough, with quite a sense of atmosphere, and something individual in the brush work. 'His father and my father; he and I; his child and mine!' thought Soames. So it had gone on! And all about that woman! Softened by the events of the past week, affected by the melancholy beauty of the autumn day, Soames came nearer than he had ever been to realisation of that truth—passing the understanding of a Forsyte pure—that the body of Beauty has a spiritual essence, uncapturable save by a devotion which thinks not of self. After all, he was near that truth in his devotion to his daughter; perhaps that made him understand a little how he had missed the prize. And there, among the drawings of his kinsman, who had attained to that which he had found beyond his reach, he thought of him and her with a tolerance which surprised him. But he did not buy a drawing.

Just as he passed the seat of custom on his return to the outer air he met with a contingency which had not been entirely absent from his mind when he went into the Gallery—Irene, herself, coming in. So she had not gone yet, and was still paying farewell visits to that fellow's remains! He subdued the little involuntary leap of his subconsciousness, the mechanical reaction of his senses to the charm of this once-owned woman, and passed her with averted eyes. But when he had gone by he could not for the life of him help looking back. This, then, was finality—the heat and stress of his life, the madness and the longing thereof, the only defeat he had known, would be over when she faded from his view this time; even such memories had their own queer aching value.

She, too, was looking back. Suddenly she lifted her gloved hand, her lips smiled faintly, her dark eyes seemed to speak. It was the turn of Soames to make no answer to that smile and that little farewell wave; he went out into the fashionable street quivering from head to foot. He knew what she had meant to say: "Now that I am going for ever out of the reach of you and yours—forgive me; I wish you well." That was the meaning; last sign of that terrible reality—passing morality, duty, common sense—her aversion from him who had owned her body, but had never touched her spirit or her heart. It hurt; yes—more than if she had kept her mask unmoved, her hand unlifted.

Three days later, in that fast-yellowing October, Soames took a taxi-cab to Highgate Cemetery and mounted through its white forest to the Forsyte vault. Close to the cedar, above catacombs and columbaria, tall, ugly, and individual, it looked like an apex of the competitive system. He could remember a discussion wherein Swithin had advocated the addition to its face of the pheasant proper. The proposal had been rejected in favour of a wreath in stone, above the stark words: "The family vault of Jolyon Forsyte: 1850." It was in good order. All trace of the recent interment had been removed, and its sober grey gloomed reposefully in the sunshine. The whole family lay there now, except old Jolyon's wife, who had gone back under a contract to her own family vault in Suffolk; old Jolyon himself lying at Robin Hill; and Susan Hayman, cremated so that none knew where she might be. Soames gazed at it with satisfaction—massive, needing little attention; and this was important, for he was well aware that no one would attend to it when he himself was gone, and he would have to be looking out for lodgings soon. He might have twenty years before him, but one never knew. Twenty years without an aunt or uncle, with a wife of whom one had better not know anything, with a daughter gone from home. His mood inclined to melancholy and retrospection.

This cemetery was full, they said—of people with extraordinary names, buried in extraordinary taste. Still, they had a fine view up here, right over London. Annette had once given him a story to read by that Frenchman, Maupassant, most lugubrious concern, where all the skeletons emerged from their graves one night, and all the pious inscriptions on the stones were altered to descriptions of their sins. Not a true story at all. He didn't know about the French, but there was not much real harm in English people except their teeth and their taste, which was certainly deplorable. "The family vault of Jolyon Forsyte: 1850." A lot of people had been buried here since then—a lot of English life crumbled to mould and dust! The boom of an airplane passing under the gold-tinted clouds caused him to lift his eyes. The deuce of a lot of expansion had gone on. But it all came back to a cemetery—to a name and a date on a tomb. And he thought with a curious pride that he and his family had done little or nothing to help this feverish expansion. Good solid middlemen, they had gone to work with dignity to manage and possess. "Superior Dosset," indeed, had built in a dreadful, and Jolyon painted in a doubtful, period, but so far as he remembered not another of them all had soiled his hands by creating anything—unless you counted Val Dartie and his horse-breeding. Collectors, solicitors, barristers, merchants, publishers, accountants, directors, land agents, even soldiers—there they had been! The country had expanded, as it were, in spite of them. They had checked, controlled, defended, and taken advantage of the process and when you considered how "Superior Dosset" had begun life with next to nothing, and his lineal descendants already owned what old Gradman estimated at between a million and a million and a half, it was not so bad! And yet he sometimes felt as if the family bolt was shot, their possessive instinct dying out. They

seemed unable to make money—this fourth generation; they were going into art, literature, farming, or the army; or just living on what was left them—they had no push and no tenacity. They would die out if they didn't take care.

Soames turned from the vault and faced toward the breeze. The air up here would be delicious if only he could rid his nerves of the feeling that mortality was in it. He gazed restlessly at the crosses and the urns, the angels, the "immortelles," the flowers, gaudy or withering; and suddenly he noticed a spot which seemed so different from anything else up there that he was obliged to walk the few necessary yards and look at it. A sober corner, with a massive queer-shaped cross of grey rough-hewn granite, guarded by four dark yew-trees. The spot was free from the pressure of the other graves, having a little box-hedged garden on the far side, and in front a goldening birch-tree. This oasis in the desert of conventional graves appealed to the aesthetic sense of Soames, and he sat down there in the sunshine. Through those trembling gold birch leaves he gazed out at London, and yielded to the waves of memory. He thought of Irene in Montpellier Square, when her hair was rusty-golden and her white shoulders his—Irene, the prize of his love-passion, resistant to his ownership. He saw Bosinney's body lying in that white mortuary, and Irene sitting on the sofa looking at space with the eyes of a dying bird. Again he thought of her by the little green Niobe in the Bois de Boulogne, once more rejecting him. His fancy took him on beside his drifting river on the November day when Fleur was to be born, took him to the dead leaves floating on the green-tinged water and the snake-headed weed for ever swaying and nosing, sinuous, blind, tethered. And on again to the window opened to the cold starry night above Hyde Park, with his father lying dead. His fancy darted to that picture of "the future town," to that boy's and Fleur's first meeting; to the bluish trail of Prosper Profond's cigar, and Fleur in the window pointing down to where the fellow prowled. To the sight of Irene and that dead fellow sitting side by side in the stand at Lord's. To her and that boy at Robin Hill. To the sofa, where Fleur lay crushed up in the corner; to her lips pressed into his cheek, and her farewell "Daddy." And suddenly he saw again Irene's grey-gloved hand waving its last gesture of release.

He sat there a long time dreaming his career, faithful to the scut of his possessive instinct, warming himself even with its failures.

"To Let"—the Forsyte age and way of life, when a man owned his soul, his investments, and his woman, without check or question. And now the State had, or would have, his investments, his woman had herself, and God knew who had his soul. "To Let"—that sane and simple creed!

The waters of change were foaming in, carrying the promise of new forms only when their destructive flood should have passed its full. He sat there, subconscious of them, but with his thoughts resolutely set on the past—as a man might ride into a wild night with his face to the tail of his galloping horse. Athwart the Victorian dykes the waters were rolling on property, manners, and morals, on melody and the old forms of art—waters bringing to his mouth a salt taste as of blood, lapping to the foot of this Highgate Hill where Victorianism lay buried. And sitting there, high up on its most individual spot, Soames—like a figure of Investment—refused their restless sounds. Instinctively he would not fight them—there was in him too much primeval wisdom, of Man the possessive animal. They would quiet down when they had fulfilled their tidal fever of dispossessing and destroying; when the creations and the properties of others were sufficiently broken and defected—they would lapse and ebb, and fresh forms would rise based on an instinct older than the fever of change—the instinct of Home.

"Je m'en fiche," said Prosper Profond. Soames did not say "Je m'en fiche"—it was French, and the fellow was a thorn in his side—but deep down he knew that change was only the interval of death between two forms of life, destruction necessary to make room for fresher property. What though the board was up, and cosiness to let?—some one would come along and take it again some day.

And only one thing really troubled him, sitting there—the melancholy craving in his heart—because the sun was like enchantment on his face and on the clouds and on the golden birch leaves, and the wind's rustle was so gentle, and the yewtree green so dark, and the sickle of a moon pale in the sky.

He might wish and wish and never get it—the beauty and the loving in the world!

THE END

THE DARK FLOWER

by John Galsworthy

"Take the flower from my breast, I pray thee,
Take the flower too from out my tresses;
And then go hence, for see, the night is fair,
The stars rejoice to watch thee on thy way."
—From "The Bard of the Dimbovitza."

THE DARK FLOWER

Part I

Spring

I

He walked along Holywell that afternoon of early June with his short gown drooping down his arms, and no cap on his thick dark hair. A youth of middle height, and built as if he had come of two very different strains, one sturdy, the other wiry and light. His face, too, was a curious blend, for, though it was strongly formed, its expression was rather soft and moody. His eyes—dark grey, with a good deal of light in them, and very black lashes—had a way of looking beyond what they saw, so that he did not seem always to be quite present; but his smile was exceedingly swift, uncovering teeth as white as a negro's, and giving his face a peculiar eagerness. People stared at him a little as he passed—since in eighteen hundred and eighty he was before his time in not wearing a cap. Women especially were interested; they perceived that he took no notice of them, seeming rather to be looking into distance, and making combinations in his soul.

Did he know of what he was thinking—did he ever know quite definitely at that time of his life, when things, especially those beyond the immediate horizon, were so curious and interesting?—the things he was going to see and do when he had got through Oxford, where everybody was 'awfully decent' to him and 'all right' of course, but not so very interesting.

He was on his way to his tutor's to read an essay on Oliver Cromwell; and under the old wall, which had once hedged in the town, he took out of his pocket a beast. It was a small tortoise, and, with an extreme absorption, he watched it move its little inquiring head, feeling it all the time with his short, broad fingers, as though to discover exactly how it was made. It was mighty hard in the back! No wonder poor old Aeschylus felt a bit sick when it fell on his head! The ancients used it to stand the world on—a pagoda world, perhaps, of men and beasts and trees, like that carving on his guardian's Chinese cabinet. The Chinese made jolly beasts and trees, as if they believed in everything having a soul, and not only being just fit for people to eat or drive or make houses of. If only the Art School would let him model things 'on his own,' instead of copying and copying—it was just as if they imagined it would be dangerous to let you think out anything for yourself!

He held the tortoise to his waistcoat, and let it crawl, till, noticing that it was gnawing the corner of his essay, he put it back into his pocket. What would his tutor do if he were to know it was there?—cock his head a little to one side, and say: "Ah! there are things, Lennan, not dreamed of in my philosophy!" Yes, there were a good many not dreamed of by 'old Stormer,' who seemed so awfully afraid of anything that wasn't usual; who seemed always laughing at you, for fear that you should laugh at him. There were lots of people in Oxford like that. It was stupid. You couldn't do anything decent if you were afraid of being laughed at! Mrs. Stormer wasn't like that; she did things because—they came into her head. But then, of course, she was Austrian, not English, and ever so much younger than old Stormer.

And having reached the door of his tutor's house, he rang the bell. . . .

II

When Anna Stormer came into the study she found her husband standing at the window with his head a little on one side—a tall, long-legged figure in clothes of a pleasant tweed, and wearing a low turn-over collar (not common in those days) and a blue silk tie, which she had knitted, strung through a ring. He

was humming and gently tapping the window-pane with his well-kept finger-nails. Though celebrated for the amount of work he got through, she never caught him doing any in this house of theirs, chosen because it was more than half a mile away from the College which held the 'dear young clowns,' as he called them, of whom he was tutor.

He did not turn—it was not, of course, his habit to notice what was not absolutely necessary—but she felt that he was aware of her. She came to the window seat and sat down. He looked round at that, and said: "Ah!"

It was a murmur almost of admiration, not usual from him, since, with the exception of certain portions of the classics, it was hardly his custom to admire. But she knew that she was looking her best sitting there, her really beautiful figure poised, the sun shining on her brown hair, and brightening her deep-set, ice-green eyes under their black lashes. It was sometimes a great comfort to her that she remained so good-looking. It would have been an added vexation indeed to have felt that she ruffled her husband's fastidiousness. Even so, her cheekbones were too high for his taste, symbols of that something in her character which did not go with his—the dash of desperation, of vividness, that lack of a certain English smoothness, which always annoyed him.

"Harold!"—she would never quite flatten her r's—"I want to go to the mountains this year."

The mountains! She had not seen them since that season at San Martino di Castrozza twelve years ago, which had ended in her marrying him.

"Nostalgia!"

"I don't know what that means—I am homesick. Can we go?"

"If you like—why not? But no leading up the Cimone della Pala for ME!"

She knew what he meant by that. No romance. How splendidly he had led that day! She had almost worshipped him. What blindness! What distortion! Was it really the same man standing there with those bright, doubting eyes, with grey already in his hair? Yes, romance was over! And she sat silent, looking out into the street—that little old street into which she looked day and night. A figure passed out there, came to the door, and rang.

She said softly: "Here is Mark Lennan!"

She felt her husband's eyes rest on her just for a moment, knew that he had turned, heard him murmur: "Ah, the angel clown!" And, quite still, she waited for the door to open. There was the boy, with his blessed dark head, and his shy, gentle gravity, and his essay in his hand.

"Well, Lennan, and how's old Noll? Hypocrite of genius, eh? Draw up; let's get him over!"

Motionless, from her seat at the window, she watched those two figures at the table—the boy reading in his queer, velvety bass voice; her husband leaning back with the tips of his fingers pressed together, his head a little on one side, and that faint, satiric smile which never reached his eyes. Yes, he was dozing, falling asleep; and the boy, not seeing, was going on. Then he came to the end and glanced up. What eyes he had! Other boys would have laughed; but he looked almost sorry. She heard him murmur: "I'm awfully sorry, sir."

"Ah, Lennan, you caught me! Fact is, term's fagged me out. We're going to the mountains. Ever been to the mountains? What—never! You should come with us, eh? What do you say, Anna? Don't you think this young man ought to come with us?"

She got up, and stood staring at them both. Had she heard aright?

Then she answered—very gravely:

"Yes; I think he ought."

"Good; we'll get HIM to lead up the Cimone della Pala!"

III

When the boy had said good-bye, and she had watched him out into the street, Anna stood for a moment in the streak of sunlight that came in through the open door, her hands pressed to cheeks which were flaming. Then she shut the door and leaned her forehead against the window-pane, seeing nothing. Her heart beat very fast; she was going over and over again the scene just passed through. This meant so much more than it had seemed to mean. . . .

Though she always had Heimweh, and especially at the end of the summer term, this year it had been a different feeling altogether that made her say to her husband: "I want to go to the mountains!"

For twelve years she had longed for the mountains every summer, but had not pleaded for them; this year she had pleaded, but she did not long for them. It was because she had suddenly realized the strange fact that she did not want to leave England, and the reason for it, that she had come and begged to go. Yet why, when it was just to get away from thought of this boy, had she said: "Yes, I think he ought to come!" Ah! but life for her was always a strange pull between the conscientious and the desperate; a queer, vivid, aching business! How long was it now since that day when he first came to lunch, silent and shy, and suddenly smiling as if he were all lighted up within—the day when she had said to her husband afterwards: "Ah, he's an angel!" Not yet a year—the beginning of last October term, in fact. He was different from all the other boys; not that he was a prodigy with untidy hair, ill-fitting clothes, and a clever tongue; but because of something—something—Ah! well—different; because he was—he; because she longed to take his head between her hands and kiss it. She remembered so well the day that longing first came to her. She was giving him tea, it was quite early in the Easter term; he was stroking her cat, who always went to him, and telling her that he meant to be a sculptor, but that his guardian objected, so that, of course, he could not start till he was of age. The lamp on the table had a rose-coloured shade; he had been rowing—a very cold day—and his face was glowing; generally it was rather pale. And suddenly he smiled, and said: "It's rotten waiting for things, isn't it?" It was then she had almost stretched out her hands to draw his forehead to her lips. She had thought then that she wanted to kiss him, because it would have been so nice to be his mother—she might just have been his mother, if she had married at sixteen. But she had long known now that she wanted to kiss, not his forehead, but his lips. He was there in her life—a fire in a cold and unaired house; it had even become hard to understand that she could have gone on all these years without him. She had missed him so those six weeks of the Easter vacation, she had revelled so in his three queer little letters, half-shy, half-confidential; kissed them, and worn them in her dress! And in return had written him long, perfectly correct epistles in her still rather quaint English. She had never let him guess her feelings; the idea that he might shocked her inexpressibly. When the summer term began, life seemed to be all made up of thoughts of him. If, ten years ago, her baby had lived, if its cruel death—after her agony—had not killed for good her wish to have another; if for years now she had not been living with the knowledge that she had no warmth to expect, and that love was all over for her; if life in the most beautiful of all old cities had been able to grip her—there would have been forces to check this feeling. But there was nothing in the world to divert the current. And she was so brimful of life, so conscious of vitality running to sheer waste. Sometimes it had been terrific, that feeling within her, of wanting to live—to find outlet for her energy. So many hundreds of lonely walks she had taken during all these years, trying to lose herself in Nature—hurrying alone, running in the woods, over the fields, where people did not come, trying to get rid of that sense of waste, trying once more to feel as she had felt when a girl, with the whole world before her. It was not for nothing that her figure was superb, her hair so bright a brown, her eyes so full of light. She had tried many distractions. Work in the back streets, music, acting, hunting; given them up one after the other; taken to them passionately again. They had served in the past. But this year they had not served. . . . One Sunday, coming from confession unconfessed, she had faced herself. It was wicked. She would have to kill this feeling—must fly from this boy who moved her so! If she did not act quickly, she would be swept away. And then the thought had come: Why not? Life was to be lived—not torpidly dozed through in this queer cultured place, where age was in the blood! Life was for love—to be enjoyed! And she would be thirty-six next month! It seemed to her already an enormous age. Thirty-six! Soon she would be old, actually old—and never have known passion! The worship, which had made a hero of the distinguished-looking Englishman, twelve years older than herself, who could lead up the Cimone della Pala, had not been passion. It might, perhaps, have become passion if he had so willed. But he was all form, ice, books. Had he a heart at all, had he blood in his veins? Was there any joy of life in this too beautiful city and these people who lived in it—this place where even enthusiasms seemed to be formal and have no wings, where everything was settled and sophisticated as the very chapels and cloisters? And yet, to have this feeling for a boy—for one almost young enough to be her son! It was so—shameless! That thought haunted her, made her flush in the dark, lying awake at night. And desperately she would pray—for she was devout—pray to be made pure, to be given the holy feelings of a mother, to be filled simply with the sweet sense that she could do everything, suffer anything for him, for his good. After these long prayers she would feel calmed, drowsy, as though she had taken a drug. For hours, perhaps, she would stay like that. And then it would all come over her again. She never thought of his loving her; that would be—unnatural. Why should he love her? She was very humble about it. Ever since that Sunday, when she avoided the confessional, she had brooded over how to make an end—how to get away from a longing that was too strong for her. And she had hit on this plan—to beg for the mountains, to go back to where her husband had come into her life, and try if this feeling would not die. If it did not, she would ask to be left out there with her own people, away from this danger. And now the fool—the blind fool—the superior fool—with his satiric smile, his everlasting patronage, had driven her to overturn her own plan. Well, let him take the consequences; she had done her best! She would

have this one fling of joy, even if it meant that she must stay out there, and never see the boy again!

Standing in her dusky hall, where a faint scent of woodrot crept out into the air, whenever windows and doors were closed, she was all tremulous with secret happiness. To be with him among her mountains, to show him all those wonderful, glittering or tawny crags, to go with him to the top of them and see the kingdoms of the world spread out below; to wander with him in the pine woods, on the Alps in all the scent of the trees and the flowers, where the sun was hot! The first of July; and it was only the tenth of June! Would she ever live so long? They would not go to San Martino this time, rather to Cortina—some new place that had no memories!

She moved from the window, and busied herself with a bowl of flowers. She had heard that humming sound which often heralded her husband's approach, as though warning the world to recover its good form before he reached it. In her happiness she felt kind and friendly to him. If he had not meant to give her joy, he had nevertheless given it! He came downstairs two at a time, with that air of not being a pedagogue, which she knew so well; and, taking his hat off the stand, half turned round to her.

"Pleasant youth, young Lennan; hope he won't bore us out there!"

His voice seemed to have an accent of compunction, to ask pardon for having issued that impulsive invitation. And there came to her an overwhelming wish to laugh. To hide it, to find excuse for it, she ran up to him, and, pulling his coat lapels till his face was within reach, she kissed the tip of his nose. And then she laughed. And he stood looking at her, with his head just a little on one side, and his eyebrows just a little raised.

IV

When young Mark heard a soft tapping at his door, though out of bed, he was getting on but dreamily—it was so jolly to watch the mountains lying out in this early light like huge beasts. That one they were going up, with his head just raised above his paws, looked very far away out there! Opening the door an inch, he whispered:

"Is it late?"

"Five o'clock; aren't you ready?"

It was awfully rude of him to keep her waiting! And he was soon down in the empty dining-room, where a sleepy maid was already bringing in their coffee. Anna was there alone. She had on a flax-blue shirt, open at the neck, a short green skirt, and a grey-green velvety hat, small, with one black-cock's feather. Why could not people always wear such nice things, and be as splendid-looking! And he said:

"You do look jolly, Mrs. Stormer!"

She did not answer for so long that he wondered if it had been rude to say that. But she DID look so strong, and swift, and happy-looking.

Down the hill, through a wood of larch-trees, to the river, and across the bridge, to mount at once by a path through hay-fields. How could old Stormer stay in bed on such a morning! The peasant girls in their blue linen skirts were already gathering into bundles what the men had scythed. One, raking at the edge of a field, paused and shyly nodded to them. She had the face of a Madonna, very calm and grave and sweet, with delicate arched brows—a face it was pure pleasure to see. The boy looked back at her. Everything to him, who had never been out of England before, seemed strange and glamorous. The chalets, with their long wide burnt-brown wooden balconies and low-hanging eaves jutting far beyond the walls; these bright dresses of the peasant women; the friendly little cream-coloured cows, with blunt, smoke-grey muzzles. Even the feel in the air was new, that delicious crisp burning warmth that lay so lightly as it were on the surface of frozen stillness; and the special sweetness of all places at the foot of mountains—scent of pine-gum, burning larch-wood, and all the meadow flowers and grasses. But newest of all was the feeling within him—a sort of pride, a sense of importance, a queer exhilaration at being alone with her, chosen companion of one so beautiful.

They passed all the other pilgrims bound the same way—stout square Germans with their coats slung through straps, who trailed behind them heavy alpenstocks, carried greenish bags, and marched stolidly at a pace that never varied, growling, as Anna and the boy went by: "Aber eilen ist nichts!"

But those two could not go fast enough to keep pace with their spirits. This was no real climb—just a training walk to the top of the Nuvolau; and they were up before noon, and soon again descending, very hungry. When they entered the little dining-room of the Cinque Torre Hutte, they found it occupied by a party of English people, eating omelettes, who looked at Anna with faint signs of recognition, but did

not cease talking in voices that all had a certain half-languid precision, a slight but brisk pinching of sounds, as if determined not to tolerate a drawl, and yet to have one. Most of them had field-glasses slung round them, and cameras were dotted here and there about the room. Their faces were not really much alike, but they all had a peculiar drooping smile, and a particular lift of the eyebrows, that made them seem reproductions of a single type. Their teeth, too, for the most part were a little prominent, as though the drooping of their mouths had forced them forward. They were eating as people eat who distrust the lower senses, preferring not to be compelled to taste or smell.

"From our hotel," whispered Anna; and, ordering red wine and schnitzels, she and the boy sat down. The lady who seemed in command of the English party inquired now how Mr. Stormer was—he was not laid up, she hoped. No? Only lazy? Indeed! He was a great climber, she believed. It seemed to the boy that this lady somehow did not quite approve of them. The talk was all maintained between her, a gentleman with a crumpled collar and puggaree, and a short thick-set grey-bearded man in a dark Norfolk jacket. If any of the younger members of the party spoke, the remark was received with an arch lifting of the brows, and drooping of the lids, as who should say: "Ah! Very promising!"

"Nothing in my life has given me greater pain than to observe the aptitude of human nature for becoming crystallized." It was the lady in command who spoke, and all the young people swayed their faces up and down, as if assenting. How like they were, the boy thought, to guinea-fowl, with their small heads and sloping shoulders and speckly grey coats!

"Ah! my dear lady"—it was the gentleman with the crumpled collar—"you novelists are always girding at the precious quality of conformity. The sadness of our times lies in this questioning spirit. Never was there more revolt, especially among the young. To find the individual judging for himself is a grave symptom of national degeneration. But this is not a subject—"

"Surely, the subject is of the most poignant interest to all young people." Again all the young ones raised their faces and moved them slightly from side to side.

"My dear lady, we are too prone to let the interest that things arouse blind our judgment in regard to the advisability of discussing them. We let these speculations creep and creep until they twine themselves round our faith and paralyze it."

One of the young men interjected suddenly: "Madre"—and was silent.

"I shall not, I think"—it was the lady speaking—"be accused of licence when I say that I have always felt that speculation is only dangerous when indulged in by the crude intelligence. If culture has nothing to give us, then let us have no culture; but if culture be, as I think it, indispensable, then we must accept the dangers that culture brings."

Again the young people moved their faces, and again the younger of the two young men said: "Madre—"

"Dangers? Have cultured people dangers?"

Who had spoken thus? Every eyebrow was going up, every mouth was drooping, and there was silence. The boy stared at his companion. In what a strange voice she had made that little interjection! There seemed a sort of flame, too, lighted in her eyes. Then the little grey-bearded man said, and his rather whispering voice sounded hard and acid:

"We are all human, my dear madam."

The boy felt his heart go thump at Anna's laugh. It was just as if she had said: "Ah! but not you—surely!" And he got up to follow her towards the door.

The English party had begun already talking—of the weather.

The two walked some way from the 'hut' in silence, before Anna said:

"You didn't like me when I laughed?"

"You hurt their feelings, I think."

"I wanted to—the English Grundys! Ah! don't be cross with me! They WERE English Grundys, weren't they—every one?"

She looked into his face so hard, that he felt the blood rush to his cheeks, and a dizzy sensation of being drawn forward.

"They have no blood, those people! Their voices, their supercilious eyes that look you up and down!

Oh! I've had so much of them! That woman with her Liberalism, just as bad as any. I hate them all!"

He would have liked to hate them, too, since she did; but they had only seemed to him amusing.

"They aren't human. They don't FEEL! Some day you'll know them. They won't amuse you then!"

She went on, in a quiet, almost dreamy voice:

"Why do they come here? It's still young and warm and good out here. Why don't they keep to their Culture, where no one knows what it is to ache and feel hunger, and hearts don't beat. Feel!"

Disturbed beyond measure, the boy could not tell whether it was in her heart or in his hand that the blood was pulsing so. Was he glad or sorry when she let his hand go?

"Ah, well! They can't spoil this day. Let's rest."

At the edge of the larch-wood where they sat, were growing numbers of little mountain pinks, with fringed edges and the sweetest scent imaginable; and she got up presently to gather them. But he stayed where he was, and odd sensations stirred in him. The blue of the sky, the feathery green of the larch-trees, the mountains, were no longer to him what they had been early that morning.

She came back with her hands full of the little pinks, spread her fingers and let them drop. They showered all over his face and neck. Never was so wonderful a scent; never such a strange feeling as they gave him. They clung to his hair, his forehead, his eyes, one even got caught on the curve of his lips; and he stared up at her through their fringed petals. There must have been something wild in his eyes then, something of the feeling that was stinging his heart, for her smile died; she walked away, and stood with her face turned from him. Confused, and unhappy, he gathered the strewn flowers; and not till he had collected every one did he get up and shyly take them to her, where she still stood, gazing into the depths of the larch-wood.

V

What did he know of women, that should make him understand? At his public school he had seen none to speak to; at Oxford, only this one. At home in the holidays, not any, save his sister Cicely. The two hobbies of their guardian, fishing, and the antiquities of his native county, rendered him averse to society; so that his little Devonshire manor-house, with its black oak panels and its wild stone-walled park along the river-side was, from year's end to year's end, innocent of all petticoats, save those of Cicely and old Miss Tring, the governess. Then, too, the boy was shy. No, there was nothing in his past, of not yet quite nineteen years, to go by. He was not of those youths who are always thinking of conquests. The very idea of conquest seemed to him vulgar, mean, horrid. There must be many signs indeed before it would come into his head that a woman was in love with him, especially the one to whom he looked up, and thought so beautiful. For before all beauty he was humble, inclined to think himself a clod. It was the part of life which was always unconsciously sacred, and to be approached trembling. The more he admired, the more tremulous and diffident he became. And so, after his one wild moment, when she plucked those sweet-scented blossoms and dropped them over him, he felt abashed; and walking home beside her he was quieter than ever, awkward to the depths of his soul.

If there were confusion in his heart which had been innocent of trouble, what must there have been in hers, that for so long had secretly desired the dawning of that confusion? And she, too, was very silent.

Passing a church with open door in the outskirts of the village, she said:

"Don't wait for me—I want to go in here a little."

In the empty twilight within, one figure, a countrywoman in her black shawl, was kneeling—marvellously still. He would have liked to stay. That kneeling figure, the smile of the sunlight filtering through into the half darkness! He lingered long enough to see Anna, too, go down on her knees in the stillness. Was she praying? Again he had the turbulent feeling with which he had watched her pluck those flowers. She looked so splendid kneeling there! It was caddish to feel like that, when she was praying, and he turned quickly away into the road. But that sharp, sweet stinging sensation did not leave him. He shut his eyes to get rid of her image—and instantly she became ten times more visible, his feeling ten times stronger. He mounted to the hotel; there on the terrace was his tutor. And oddly enough, the sight of him at that moment was no more embarrassing than if it had been the hotel concierge. Stormer did not somehow seem to count; did not seem to want you to count him. Besides, he was so old—nearly fifty!

The man who was so old was posed in a characteristic attitude—hands in the pockets of his Norfolk

jacket, one shoulder slightly raised, head just a little on one side, as if preparing to quiz something. He spoke as Lennan came up, smiling—but not with his eyes.

"Well, young man, and what have you done with my wife?"

"Left her in a church, sir."

"Ah! She will do that! Has she run you off your legs? No? Then let's walk and talk a little."

To be thus pacing up and down and talking with her husband seemed quite natural, did not even interfere with those new sensations, did not in the least increase his shame for having them. He only wondered a little how she could have married him—but so little! Quite far and academic was his wonder—like his wonder in old days how his sister could care to play with dolls. If he had any other feeling, it was just a longing to get away and go down the hill again to the church. It seemed cold and lonely after all that long day with her—as if he had left himself up there, walking along hour after hour, or lying out in the sun beside her. What was old Stormer talking about? The difference between the Greek and Roman views of honour. Always in the past—seemed to think the present was bad form. And he said:

"We met some English Grundys, sir, on the mountain."

"Ah, yes! Any particular brand?"

"Some advanced, and some not; but all the same, I think, really."

"I see. Grundys, I think you said?"

"Yes, sir, from this hotel. It was Mrs. Stormer's name for them. They were so very superior."

"Quite."

There was something unusual in the tone of that little word. And the boy stared—for the first time there seemed a real man standing there. Then the blood rushed up into his cheeks, for there she was! Would she come up to them? How splendid she was looking, burnt by the sun, and walking as if just starting! But she passed into the hotel without turning her head their way. Had he offended, hurt her? He made an excuse, and got away to his room.

In the window from which that same morning he had watched the mountains lying out like lions in the dim light, he stood again, and gazed at the sun dropping over the high horizon. What had happened to him? He felt so different, so utterly different. It was another world. And the most strange feeling came on him, as of the flowers falling again all over his face and neck and hands, the tickling of their soft-fringed edges, the stinging sweetness of their scent. And he seemed to hear her voice saying: "Feel!" and to feel her heart once more beating under his hand.

VI

Alone with that black-shawled figure in the silent church, Anna did not pray. Resting there on her knees, she experienced only the sore sensation of revolt. Why had Fate flung this feeling into her heart, lighted up her life suddenly, if God refused her its enjoyment? Some of the mountain pinks remained clinging to her belt, and the scent of them, crushed against her, warred with the faint odour of age and incense. While they were there, with their enticement and their memories, prayer would never come. But did she want to pray? Did she desire the mood of that poor soul in her black shawl, who had not moved by one hair's breadth since she had been watching her, who seemed resting her humble self so utterly, letting life lift from her, feeling the relief of nothingness? Ah, yes! what would it be to have a life so toilsome, so little exciting from day to day and hour to hour, that just to kneel there in wistful stupor was the greatest pleasure one could know? It was beautiful to see her, but it was sad. And there came over Anna a longing to go up to her neighbour and say: "Tell me your troubles; we are both women." She had lost a son, perhaps, some love—or perhaps not really love, only some illusion. Ah! Love. . . . Why should any spirit yearn, why should any body, full of strength and joy, wither slowly away for want of love? Was there not enough in this great world for her, Anna, to have a little? She would not harm him, for she would know when he had had enough of her; she would surely have the pride and grace then to let him go. For, of course, he would get tired of her. At her age she could never hope to hold a boy more than a few years—months, perhaps. But would she ever hold him at all? Youth was so hard—it had no heart! And then the memory of his eyes came back—gazing up, troubled, almost wild—when she had dropped on him those flowers. That memory filled her with a sort of delirium. One look from her then, one touch, and he would have clasped her to him. She was sure of it, yet scarcely dared to believe what meant so much. And suddenly the torment that she must go through, whatever

happened, seemed to her too brutal and undeserved! She rose. Just one gleam of sunlight was still slanting through the doorway; it failed by a yard or so to reach the kneeling countrywoman, and Anna watched. Would it steal on and touch her, or would the sun pass down behind the mountains, and it fade away? Unconscious of that issue, the black-shawled figure knelt, never moving. And the beam crept on. "If it touches her, then he will love me, if only for an hour; if it fades out too soon—" And the beam crept on. That shadowy path of light, with its dancing dust-motes, was it indeed charged with Fate—indeed the augury of Love or Darkness? And, slowly moving, it mounted, the sun sinking; it rose above that bent head, hovered in a golden mist, passed—and suddenly was gone.

Unsteadily, seeing nothing plain, Anna walked out of the church. Why she passed her husband and the boy on the terrace without a look she could not quite have said—perhaps because the tortured does not salute her torturers. When she reached her room she felt deadly tired, and lying down on her bed, almost at once fell asleep.

She was wakened by a sound, and, recognizing the delicate 'rat-tat' of her husband's knock, did not answer, indifferent whether he came in or no. He entered noiselessly. If she did not let him know she was awake, he would not wake her. She lay still and watched him sit down astride of a chair, cross his arms on its back, rest his chin on them, and fix his eyes on her. Through her veil of eyelashes she had unconsciously contrived that his face should be the one object plainly seen—the more intensely visualized, because of this queer isolation. She did not feel at all ashamed of this mutual fixed scrutiny, in which she had such advantage. He had never shown her what was in him, never revealed what lay behind those bright satiric eyes. Now, perhaps, she would see! And she lay, regarding him with the intense excited absorption with which one looks at a tiny wildflower through a magnifying-lens, and watches its insignificance expanded to the size and importance of a hothouse bloom. In her mind was this thought: He is looking at me with his real self, since he has no reason for armour against me now. At first his eyes seemed masked with their customary brightness, his whole face with its usual decorous formality; then gradually he became so changed that she hardly knew him. That decorousness, that brightness, melted off what lay behind, as frosty dew melts off grass. And her very soul contracted within her, as if she had become identified with what he was seeing—a something to be passed over, a very nothing. Yes, his was the face of one looking at what was unintelligible, and therefore negligible; at that which had no soul; at something of a different and inferior species and of no great interest to a man. His face was like a soundless avowal of some conclusion, so fixed and intimate that it must surely emanate from the very core of him—be instinctive, unchangeable. This was the real he! A man despising women! Her first thought was: And he's married—what a fate! Her second: If he feels that, perhaps thousands of men do! Am I and all women really what they think us? The conviction in his stare—its through-and-through conviction—had infected her; and she gave in to it for the moment, crushed. Then her spirit revolted with such turbulence, and the blood so throbbled in her, that she could hardly lie still. How dare he think her like that—a nothing, a bundle of soulless inexplicable whims and moods and sensuality? A thousand times, No! It was HE who was the soulless one, the dry, the godless one; who, in his sickening superiority, could thus deny her, and with her all women! That stare was as if he saw her—a doll tricked out in garments labelled soul, spirit, rights, responsibilities, dignity, freedom—all so many words. It was vile, it was horrible, that he should see her thus! And a really terrific struggle began in her between the desire to get up and cry this out, and the knowledge that it would be stupid, undignified, even mad, to show her comprehension of what he would never admit or even understand that he had revealed to her. And then a sort of cynicism came to her rescue. What a funny thing was married life—to have lived all these years with him, and never known what was at the bottom of his heart! She had the feeling now that, if she went up to him and said: "I am in love with that boy!" it would only make him droop the corners of his mouth and say in his most satiric voice: "Really! That is very interesting!"—would not change in one iota his real thoughts of her; only confirm him in the conviction that she was negligible, inexplicable, an inferior strange form of animal, of no real interest to him.

And then, just when she felt that she could not hold herself in any longer, he got up, passed on tiptoe to the door, opened it noiselessly, and went out.

The moment he had gone, she jumped up. So, then, she was linked to one for whom she, for whom women, did not, as it were, exist! It seemed to her that she had stumbled on knowledge of almost sacred importance, on the key of everything that had been puzzling and hopeless in their married life. If he really, secretly, whole-heartedly despised her, the only feeling she need have for one so dry, so narrow, so basically stupid, was just contempt. But she knew well enough that contempt would not shake what she had seen in his face; he was impregably walled within his clever, dull conviction of superiority. He was for ever intrenched, and she would always be only the assailant. Though—what did it matter, now?

Usually swift, almost careless, she was a long time that evening over her toilette. Her neck was very sunburnt, and she lingered, doubtful whether to hide it with powder, or accept her gipsy colouring. She

did accept it, for she saw that it gave her eyes, so like glacier ice, under their black lashes, and her hair, with its surprising glints of flame colour, a peculiar value.

When the dinner-bell rang she passed her husband's door without, as usual, knocking, and went down alone.

In the hall she noticed some of the English party of the mountain hut. They did not greet her, conceiving an immediate interest in the barometer; but she could feel them staring at her very hard. She sat down to wait, and at once became conscious of the boy coming over from the other side of the room, rather like a person walking in his sleep. He said not a word. But how he looked! And her heart began to beat. Was this the moment she had longed for? If it, indeed, had come, dared she take it? Then she saw her husband descending the stairs, saw him greet the English party, heard the intoning of their drawl. She looked up at the boy, and said quickly: "Was it a happy day?" It gave her such delight to keep that look on his face, that look as if he had forgotten everything except just the sight of her. His eyes seemed to have in them something holy at that moment, something of the wonder-yearning of Nature and of innocence. It was dreadful to know that in a moment that look must be gone; perhaps never to come back on his face—that look so precious! Her husband was approaching now! Let him see, if he would! Let him see that someone could adore—that she was not to everyone a kind of lower animal. Yes, he must have seen the boy's face; and yet his expression never changed. He noticed nothing! Or was it that he disdained to notice?

VII

Then followed for young Lennan a strange time, when he never knew from minute to minute whether he was happy—always trying to be with her, restless if he could not be, sore if she talked with and smiled at others; yet, when he was with her, restless too, unsatisfied, suffering from his own timidity.

One wet morning, when she was playing the hotel piano, and he listening, thinking to have her to himself, there came a young German violinist—pale, and with a brown, thin-waisted coat, longish hair, and little whiskers—rather a beast, in fact. Soon, of course, this young beast was asking her to accompany him—as if anyone wanted to hear him play his disgusting violin! Every word and smile that she gave him hurt so, seeing how much more interesting than himself this foreigner was! And his heart grew heavier and heavier, and he thought: If she likes him I ought not to mind—only, I DO mind! How can I help minding? It was hateful to see her smiling, and the young beast bending down to her. And they were talking German, so that he could not tell what they were saying, which made it more unbearable. He had not known there could be such torture.

And then he began to want to hurt her, too. But that was mean—besides, how could he hurt her? She did not care for him. He was nothing to her—only a boy. If she really thought him only a boy, who felt so old—it would be horrible. It flashed across him that she might be playing that young violinist against him! No, she never would do that! But the young beast looked just the sort that might take advantage of her smiles. If only he WOULD do something that was not respectful, how splendid it would be to ask him to come for a walk in the woods, and, having told him why, give him a thrashing. Afterwards, he would not tell her, he would not try to gain credit by it. He would keep away till she wanted him back. But suddenly the thought of what he would feel if she really meant to take this young man as her friend in place of him became so actual, so poignant, so horribly painful, that he got up abruptly and went towards the door. Would she not say a word to him before he got out of the room, would she not try and keep him? If she did not, surely it would be all over; it would mean that anybody was more to her than he. That little journey to the door, indeed, seemed like a march to execution. Would she not call after him? He looked back. She was smiling. But HE could not smile; she had hurt him too much! Turning his head away, he went out, and dashed into the rain bareheaded. The feeling of it on his face gave him a sort of dismal satisfaction. Soon he would be wet through. Perhaps he would get ill. Out here, far away from his people, she would have to offer to nurse him; and perhaps—perhaps in his illness he would seem to her again more interesting than that young beast, and then—Ah! if only he could be ill!

He mounted rapidly through the dripping leaves towards the foot of the low mountain that rose behind the hotel. A trail went up there to the top, and he struck into it, going at a great pace. His sense of injury began dying away; he no longer wanted to be ill. The rain had stopped, the sun came out; he went on, up and up. He would get to the top quicker than anyone ever had! It was something he could do better than that young beast. The pine-trees gave way to stunted larches, and these to pine scrub and bare scree, up which he scrambled, clutching at the tough bushes, terribly out of breath, his heart pumping, the sweat streaming into his eyes. He had no feeling now but wonder whether he would get to the top before he dropped, exhausted. He thought he would die of the beating of his heart; but it was better to die than to stop and be beaten by a few yards. He stumbled up at last on to the little plateau at the top. For full ten minutes he lay there on his face without moving, then rolled over. His heart had

given up that terrific thumping; he breathed luxuriously, stretched out his arms along the steaming grass—felt happy. It was wonderful up here, with the sun burning hot in a sky clear-blue already. How tiny everything looked below—hotel, trees, village, chalets—little toy things! He had never before felt the sheer joy of being high up. The rain-clouds, torn and driven in huge white shapes along the mountains to the South, were like an army of giants with chariots and white horses hurrying away. He thought suddenly: "Suppose I had died when my heart pumped so! Would it have mattered the least bit? Everything would be going on just the same, the sun shining, the blue up there the same; and those toy things down in the valley." That jealousy of his an hour ago, why—it was nothing—he himself nothing! What did it matter if she were nice to that fellow in the brown coat? What did anything matter when the whole thing was so big—and he such a tiny scrap of it?

On the edge of the plateau, to mark the highest point, someone had erected a rude cross, which jutted out stark against the blue sky. It looked cruel somehow, sagged all crooked, and out of place up here; a piece of bad manners, as if people with only one idea had dragged it in, without caring whether or no it suited what was around it. One might just as well introduce one of these rocks into that jolly dark church where he had left her the other day, as put a cross up here.

A sound of bells, and of sniffing and scuffling, roused him; a large grey goat had come up and was smelling at his hair—the leader of a flock, that were soon all round him, solemnly curious, with their queer yellow oblong-pupilled eyes, and their quaint little beards and tails. Awfully decent beasts—and friendly! What jolly things to model! He lay still (having learnt from the fisherman, his guardian, that necessary habit in the presence of all beasts), while the leader sampled the flavour of his neck. The passage of that long rough tongue athwart his skin gave him an agreeable sensation, awakened a strange deep sense of comradeship. He restrained his desire to stroke the creature's nose. It appeared that they now all wished to taste his neck; but some were timid, and the touch of their tongues simply a tickle, so that he was compelled to laugh, and at that peculiar sound they withdrew and gazed at him. There seemed to be no one with them; then, at a little distance, quite motionless in the shade of a rock, he spied the goatherd, a boy about his own age. How lonely he must be up here all day! Perhaps he talked to his goats. He looked as if he might. One would get to have queer thoughts up here, get to know the rocks, and clouds, and beasts, and what they all meant. The goatherd uttered a peculiar whistle, and something, Lennan could not tell exactly what, happened among the goats—a sort of "Here, Sir!" seemed to come from them. And then the goatherd moved out from the shade and went over to the edge of the plateau, and two of the goats that were feeding there thrust their noses into his hand, and rubbed themselves against his legs. The three looked beautiful standing there together on the edge against the sky. . . .

That night, after dinner, the dining-room was cleared for dancing, so that the guests might feel freedom and gaiety in the air. And, indeed, presently, a couple began sawing up and down over the polished boards, in the apologetic manner peculiar to hotel guests. Then three pairs of Italians suddenly launched themselves into space—twirling and twirling, and glaring into each other's eyes; and some Americans, stimulated by their precept, began airily backing and filling. Two of the 'English Grundys' with carefully amused faces next moved out. To Lennan it seemed that they all danced very well, better than he could. Did he dare ask HER? Then he saw the young violinist go up, saw her rise and take his arm and vanish into the dancing-room; and leaning his forehead against a window-pane, with a sick, beaten feeling, he stayed, looking out into the moonlight, seeing nothing. He heard his name spoken; his tutor was standing beside him.

"You and I, Lennan, must console each other. Dancing's for the young, eh?"

Fortunately it was the boy's instinct and his training not to show his feelings; to be pleasant, though suffering.

"Yes, sir. Jolly moonlight, isn't it, out there?"

"Ah! very jolly; yes. When I was your age I twirled the light fantastic with the best. But gradually, Lennan, one came to see it could not be done without a partner—there was the rub! Tell me—do you regard women as responsible beings? I should like to have your opinion on that."

It was, of course, ironical—yet there was something in those words—something!

"I think it's you, sir, who ought to give me yours."

"My dear Lennan—my experience is a mere nothing!"

That was meant for unkindness to her! He would not answer. If only Stormer would go away! The music had stopped. They would be sitting out somewhere, talking! He made an effort, and said:

"I was up the hill at the back this morning, where the cross is. There were some jolly goats."

And suddenly he saw her coming. She was alone—flushed, smiling; it struck him that her frock was the same colour as the moonlight.

"Harold, will you dance?"

He would say 'Yes,' and she would be gone again! But his tutor only made her a little bow, and said with that smile of his:

"Lennan and I have agreed that dancing is for the young."

"Sometimes the old must sacrifice themselves. Mark, will you dance?"

Behind him he heard his tutor murmur:

"Ah! Lennan—you betray me!"

That little silent journey with her to the dancing-room was the happiest moment perhaps that he had ever known. And he need not have been so much afraid about his dancing. Truly, it was not polished, but it could not spoil hers, so light, firm, buoyant! It was wonderful to dance with her. Only when the music stopped and they sat down did he know how his head was going round. He felt strange, very strange indeed. He heard her say:

"What is it, dear boy? You look so white!"

Without quite knowing what he did, he bent his face towards the hand that she had laid on his sleeve, then knew no more, having fainted.

VIII

Growing boy—over-exertion in the morning! That was all! He was himself very quickly, and walked up to bed without assistance. Rotten of him! Never was anyone more ashamed of his little weakness than this boy. Now that he was really a trifle indisposed, he simply could not bear the idea of being nursed at all or tended. Almost rudely he had got away. Only when he was in bed did he remember the look on her face as he left her. How wistful and unhappy, seeming to implore him to forgive her! As if there were anything to forgive! As if she had not made him perfectly happy when she danced with him! He longed to say to her: "If I might be close to you like that one minute every day, then I don't mind all the rest!" Perhaps he would dare say that to-morrow. Lying there he still felt a little funny. He had forgotten to close the ribs of the blinds, and moonlight was filtering in; but he was too idle, too drowsy to get up now and do it. They had given him brandy, rather a lot—that perhaps was the reason he felt so queer; not ill, but mazy, as if dreaming, as if he had lost the desire ever to move again. Just to lie there, and watch the powdery moonlight, and hear faraway music throbbing down below, and still feel the touch of her, as in the dance she swayed against him, and all the time to have the scent about him of flowers! His thoughts were dreams, his dreams thoughts—all precious unreality. And then it seemed to him that the moonlight was gathered into a single slip of pallor—there was a thrumming, a throbbing, and that shape of moonlight moved towards him. It came so close that he felt its warmth against his brow; it sighed, hovered, drew back soundless, and was gone. He must have fallen then into dreamless sleep. . . .

What time was it when he was awakened by that delicate 'rat-tat' to see his tutor standing in the door-way with a cup of tea?

Was young Lennan all right? Yes, he was perfectly all right—would be down directly! It was most frightfully good of Mr. Stormer to come! He really didn't want anything.

Yes, yes; but the maimed and the halt must be attended to!

His face seemed to the boy very kind just then—only to laugh at him a very little—just enough. And it was awfully decent of him to have come, and to stand there while he drank the tea. He was really all right, but for a little headache. Many times while he was dressing he stood still, trying to remember. That white slip of moonlight? Was it moonlight? Was it part of a dream; or was it, could it have been she, in her moonlight-coloured frock? Why had he not stayed awake? He would not dare to ask her, and now would never know whether the vague memory of warmth on his brow had been a kiss.

He breakfasted alone in the room where they had danced. There were two letters for him. One from his guardian enclosing money, and complaining of the shyness of the trout; the other from his sister. The man she was engaged to—he was a budding diplomat, attached to the Embassy at Rome—was afraid that his leave was going to be curtailed. They would have to be married at once. They might even have to get a special licence. It was lucky Mark was coming back so soon. They simply **MUST** have him

for best man. The only bridesmaid now would be Sylvia. . . . Sylvia Doone? Why, she was only a kid! And the memory of a little girl in a very short holland frock, with flaxen hair, pretty blue eyes, and a face so fair that you could almost see through it, came up before him. But that, of course, was six years ago; she would not still be in a frock that showed her knees, or wear beads, or be afraid of bulls that were never there. It was stupid being best man—they might have got some decent chap! And then he forgot all—for there was SHE, out on the terrace. In his rush to join her he passed several of the 'English Grundys,' who stared at him askance. Indeed, his conduct of the night before might well have upset them. An Oxford man, fainting in an hotel! Something wrong there! . . .

And then, when he reached her, he did find courage.

"Was it really moonlight?"

"All moonlight."

"But it was warm!"

And, when she did not answer that, he had within him just the same light, intoxicated feeling as after he had won a race at school.

But now came a dreadful blow. His tutor's old guide had suddenly turned up, after a climb with a party of Germans. The war-horse had been aroused in Stormer. He wished to start that afternoon for a certain hut, and go up a certain peak at dawn next day. But Lennan was not to go. Why not? Because of last night's faint; and because, forsooth, he was not some stupid thing they called 'an expert.' As if—! Where she could go he could! This was to treat him like a child. Of course he could go up this rotten mountain. It was because she did not care enough to take him! She did not think him man enough! Did she think that he could not climb what—her husband—could? And if it were dangerous SHE ought not to be going, leaving him behind—that was simply cruel! But she only smiled, and he flung away from her, not having seen that all this grief of his only made her happy.

And that afternoon they went off without him. What deep, dark thoughts he had then! What passionate hatred of his own youth! What schemes he wove, by which she might come back, and find him gone-up some mountain far more dangerous and fatiguing! If people did not think him fit to climb with, he would climb by himself. That, anyway, everyone admitted, was dangerous. And it would be her fault. She would be sorry then. He would get up, and be off before dawn; he put his things out ready, and filled his flask. The moonlight that evening was more wonderful than ever, the mountains like great ghosts of themselves. And she was up there at the hut, among them! It was very long before he went to sleep, brooding over his injuries—intending not to sleep at all, so as to be ready to be off at three o'clock. At NINE o'clock he woke. His wrath was gone; he only felt restless and ashamed. If, instead of flying out, he had made the best of it, he could have gone with them as far as the hut, could have stayed the night there. And now he cursed himself for being such a fool and idiot. Some little of that idiocy he could, perhaps, retrieve. If he started for the hut at once, he might still be in time to meet them coming down, and accompany them home. He swallowed his coffee, and set off. He knew the way at first, then in woods lost it, recovered the right track again at last, but did not reach the hut till nearly two o'clock. Yes, the party had made the ascent that morning—they had been seen, been heard jodelling on the top. Gewiss! Gewiss! But they would not come down the same way. Oh, no! They would be going home down to the West and over the other pass. They would be back in house before the young Herr himself.

He heard this, oddly, almost with relief. Was it the long walk alone, or being up there so high? Or simply that he was very hungry? Or just these nice friendly folk in the hut, and their young daughter with her fresh face, queer little black cloth sailor hat with long ribbons, velvet bodice, and perfect simple manners; or the sight of the little silvery-dun cows, thrusting their broad black noses against her hand? What was it that had taken away from him all his restless feeling, made him happy and content? . . . He did not know that the newest thing always fascinates the puppy in its gambols! . . . He sat a long while after lunch, trying to draw the little cows, watching the sun on the cheek of that pretty maiden, trying to talk to her in German. And when at last he said: "Adieu!" and she murmured "Kuss die Hand. Adieu!" there was quite a little pang in his heart. . . . Wonderful and queer is the heart of a man! . . . For all that, as he neared home he hastened, till he was actually running. Why had he stayed so long up there? She would be back—she would expect to see him; and that young beast of a violinist would be with her, perhaps, instead! He reached the hotel just in time to rush up and dress, and rush down to dinner. Ah! They were tired, no doubt—were resting in their rooms. He sat through dinner as best he could; got away before dessert, and flew upstairs. For a minute he stood there doubtful; on which door should he knock? Then timidly he tapped on hers. No answer! He knocked loud on his tutor's door. No answer! They were not back, then. Not back? What could that mean? Or could it be that they were both asleep? Once more he knocked on her door; then desperately turned the handle, and took a flying glance. Empty, tidy, untouched! Not back! He turned and ran downstairs again. All the guests were streaming out from dinner, and he became entangled with a group of 'English Grundys' discussing a

climbing accident which had occurred in Switzerland. He listened, feeling suddenly quite sick. One of them, the short grey-bearded Grundy with the rather whispering voice, said to him: "All alone again to-night? The Stormers not back?" Lennan did his best to answer, but something had closed his throat; he could only shake his head.

"They had a guide, I think?" said the 'English Grundy.'

This time Lennan managed to get out: "Yes, sir."

"Stormer, I fancy, is quite an expert!" and turning to the lady whom the young 'Grundys' addressed as 'Madre' he added:

"To me the great charm of mountain-climbing was always the freedom from people—the remoteness."

The mother of the young 'Grundys,' looking at Lennan with her half-closed eyes, answered:

"That, to me, would be the disadvantage; I always like to be mixing with my own kind."

The grey-bearded 'Grundy' murmured in a muffled voice:

"Dangerous thing, that, to say—in an hotel!"

And they went on talking, but of what Lennan no longer knew, lost in this sudden feeling of sick fear. In the presence of these 'English Grundys,' so superior to all vulgar sensations, he could not give vent to his alarm; already they viewed him as unsound for having fainted. Then he grasped that there had begun all round him a sort of luxurious speculation on what might have happened to the Stormers. The descent was very nasty; there was a particularly bad traverse. The 'Grundy,' whose collar was not now crumpled, said he did not believe in women climbing. It was one of the signs of the times that he most deplored. The mother of the young 'Grundys' countered him at once: In practice she agreed that they were out of place, but theoretically she could not see why they should not climb. An American standing near threw all into confusion by saying he guessed that it might be liable to develop their understandings. Lennan made for the front door. The moon had just come up over in the South, and exactly under it he could see their mountain. What visions he had then! He saw her lying dead, saw himself climbing down in the moonlight and raising her still-living, but half-frozen, form from some perilous ledge. Even that was almost better than this actuality of not knowing where she was, or what had happened. People passed out into the moonlight, looking curiously at his set face staring so fixedly. One or two asked him if he were anxious, and he answered: "Oh no, thanks!" Soon there would have to be a search party. How soon? He would, he must be, of it! They should not stop him this time. And suddenly he thought: Ah, it is all because I stayed up there this afternoon talking to that girl, all because I forgot HER!

And then he heard a stir behind him. There they were, coming down the passage from a side door—she in front with her alpenstock and rucksack—smiling. Instinctively he recoiled behind some plants. They passed. Her sunburned face, with its high cheek-bones and its deep-set eyes, looked so happy; smiling, tired, triumphant. Somehow he could not bear it, and when they were gone by he stole out into the wood and threw himself down in shadow, burying his face, and choking back a horrible dry sobbing that would keep rising in his throat.

IX

Next day he was happy; for all the afternoon he lay out in the shade of that same wood at her feet, gazing up through larch-boughs. It was so wonderful, with nobody but Nature near. Nature so alive, and busy, and so big!

Coming down from the hut the day before, he had seen a peak that looked exactly like the figure of a woman with a garment over her head, the biggest statue in the world; from further down it had become the figure of a bearded man, with his arm bent over his eyes. Had she seen it? Had she noticed how all the mountains in moonlight or very early morning took the shape of beasts? What he wanted most in life was to be able to make images of beasts and creatures of all sorts, that were like—that had—that gave out the spirit of—Nature; so that by just looking at them one could have all those jolly feelings one had when one was watching trees, and beasts, and rocks, and even some sorts of men—but not 'English Grundys.'

So he was quite determined to study Art?

Oh yes, of course!

He would want to leave—Oxford, then!

No, oh no! Only some day he would have to.

She answered: "Some never get away!"

And he said quickly: "Of course, I shall never want to leave Oxford while you are there."

He heard her draw her breath in sharply.

"Oh yes, you will! Now help me up!" And she led the way back to the hotel.

He stayed out on the terrace when she had gone in, restless and unhappy the moment he was away from her. A voice close by said:

"Well, friend Lennan—brown study, or blue devils, which?"

There, in one of those high wicker chairs that insulate their occupants from the world, he saw his tutor leaning back, head a little to one side, and tips of fingers pressed together. He looked like an idol sitting there inert, and yet—yesterday he had gone up that mountain!

"Cheer up! You will break your neck yet! When I was your age, I remember feeling it deeply that I was not allowed to risk the lives of others."

Lennan stammered out:

"I didn't think of that; but I thought where Mrs. Stormer could go, I could."

"Ah! For all our admiration we cannot quite admit—can we, when it comes to the point?"

The boy's loyalty broke into flame:

"It's not that. I think Mrs. Stormer as good as any man—only—only—"

"Not quite so good as you, eh?"

"A hundred times better, sir."

Stormer smiled. Ironic beast!

"Lennan," he said, "distrust hyperbole."

"Of course, I know I'm no good at climbing," the boy broke out again; "but—but—I thought where she was allowed to risk her life, I ought to be!"

"Good! I like that." It was said so entirely without irony for once, that the boy was disconcerted.

"You are young, Brother Lennan," his tutor went on. "Now, at what age do you consider men develop discretion? Because, there is just one thing always worth remembering—women have none of that better part of valour."

"I think women are the best things in the world," the boy blurted out.

"May you long have that opinion!" His tutor had risen, and was ironically surveying his knees. "A bit stiff!" he said. "Let me know when you change your views!"

"I never shall, sir."

"Ah, ah! Never is a long word, Lennan. I am going to have some tea;" and gingerly he walked away, quizzing, as it were, with a smile, his own stiffness.

Lennan remained where he was, with burning cheeks. His tutor's words again had seemed directed against her. How could a man say such things about women! If they were true, he did not want to know; if they were not true, it was wicked to say them. It must be awful never to have generous feelings; always to have to be satirical. Dreadful to be like the 'English Grundys'; only different, of course, because, after all, old Stormer was much more interesting and intelligent—ever so much more; only, just as 'superior.' "Some never get away!" Had she meant—from that superiority? Just down below were a family of peasants scything and gathering in the grass. One could imagine her doing that, and looking beautiful, with a coloured handkerchief over her head; one could imagine her doing anything simple—one could not imagine old Stormer doing anything but what he did do. And suddenly the boy felt miserable, oppressed by these dim glimmerings of lives misplaced. And he resolved that he would not be like Stormer when he was old! No, he would rather be a regular beast than be like that! . . .

When he went to his room to change for dinner he saw in a glass of water a large clove carnation. Who had put it there? Who could have put it there—but she? It had the same scent as the mountain pinks she had dropped over him, but deeper, richer—a scent moving, dark, and sweet. He put his lips to it before he pinned it into his coat.

There was dancing again that night—more couples this time, and a violin beside the piano; and she had on a black frock. He had never seen her in black. Her face and neck were powdered over their sunburn. The first sight of that powder gave him a faint shock. He had not somehow thought that ladies ever put on powder. But if SHE did—then it must be right! And his eyes never left her. He saw the young German violinist hovering round her, even dancing with her twice; watched her dancing with others, but all without jealousy, without troubling; all in a sort of dream. What was it? Had he been bewitched into that queer state, bewitched by the gift of that flower in his coat? What was it, when he danced with her, that kept him happy in her silence and his own? There was no expectation in him of anything that she would say, or do—no expectation, no desire. Even when he wandered out with her on to the terrace, even when they went down the bank and sat on a bench above the fields where the peasants had been scything, he had still no feeling but that quiet, dreamy adoration. The night was black and dreamy too, for the moon was still well down behind the mountains. The little band was playing the next waltz; but he sat, not moving, not thinking, as if all power of action and thought had been stolen out of him. And the scent of the flower in his coat rose, for there was no wind. Suddenly his heart stopped beating. She had leaned against him, he felt her shoulder press his arm, her hair touch his cheek. He closed his eyes then, and turned his face to her. He felt her lips press his mouth with a swift, burning kiss. He sighed, stretched out his arms. There was nothing there but air. The rustle of her dress against the grass was all! The flower—it, too, was gone.

X

Not one minute all that night did Anna sleep. Was it remorse that kept her awake, or the intoxication of memory? If she felt that her kiss had been a crime, it was not against her husband or herself, but against the boy—the murder of illusion, of something sacred. But she could not help feeling a delirious happiness too, and the thought of trying to annul what she had done did not even occur to her.

He was ready, then, to give her a little love! Ever so little, compared to hers, but still a little! There could be no other meaning to that movement of his face with the closed eyes, as if he would nestle it down on her breast.

Was she ashamed of her little manoeuvres of these last few days—ashamed of having smiled at the young violinist, of that late return from the mountain climb, of the flower she had given him, of all the conscious siege she had laid since the evening her husband came in and sat watching her, without knowing that she saw him? No; not really ashamed! Her remorse rose only from the kiss. It hurt to think of that, because it was death, the final extinction of the mother-feeling in her; the awakening of—who knew what—in the boy! For if she was mysterious to him, what was he not to her, with his eagerness, and his dreaminess, his youthful warmth, his innocence! What if it had killed in him trust, brushed off the dew, tumbled a star down? Could she forgive herself for that? Could she bear it if she were to make him like so many other boys, like that young violinist; just a cynical youth, looking on women as what they called 'fair game'? But COULD she make him into such—would he ever grow like that? Oh! surely not; or she would not have loved him from the moment she first set eyes on him and spoke of him as 'an angel.'

After that kiss—that crime, if it were one—in the dark she had not known what he had done, where gone—perhaps wandering, perhaps straight up to his room. Why had she refrained, left him there, vanished out of his arms? This she herself hardly understood. Not shame; not fear; reverence perhaps—for what? For love—for the illusion, the mystery, all that made love beautiful; for youth, and the poetry of it; just for the sake of the black still night itself, and the scent of that flower—dark flower of passion that had won him to her, and that she had stolen back, and now wore all night long close to her neck, and in the morning placed withered within her dress. She had been starved so long, and so long waited for that moment—it was little wonder if she did not clearly know why she had done just this, and not that!

And now how should she meet him, how first look into his eyes? Would they have changed? Would they no longer have the straight look she so loved? It would be for her to lead, to make the future. And she kept saying to herself: I am not going to be afraid. It is done. I will take what life offers! Of her husband she did not think at all.

But the first moment she saw the boy, she knew that something from outside, and untoward, had happened since that kiss. He came up to her, indeed, but he said nothing, stood trembling all over and handed her a telegram that contained these words: "Come back at once Wedding immediate Expect you

day after to-morrow. Cicely." The words grew indistinct even as she read them, and the boy's face all blurred. Then, making an effort, she said quietly:

"Of course, you must go. You cannot miss your only sister's wedding."

Without protest he looked at her; and she could hardly bear that look—it seemed to know so little, and ask so much. She said: "It is nothing—only a few days. You will come back, or we will come to you."

His face brightened at once.

"Will you really come to us soon, at once—if they ask you? Then I don't mind—I—I—" And then he stopped, choking.

She said again:

"Ask us. We will come."

He seized her hand; pressed and pressed it in both his own, then stroked it gently, and said:

"Oh! I'm hurting it!"

She laughed, not wishing to cry.

In a few minutes he would have to start to catch the only train that would get him home in time.

She went and helped him to pack. Her heart felt like lead, but, not able to bear that look on his face again, she kept cheerfully talking of their return, asking about his home, how to get to it, speaking of Oxford and next term. When his things were ready she put her arms round his neck, and for a moment pressed him to her. Then she escaped. Looking back from his door, she saw him standing exactly as when she had withdrawn her arms. Her cheeks were wet; she dried them as she went downstairs. When she felt herself safe, she went out on the terrace. Her husband was there, and she said to him:

"Will you come with me into the town? I want to buy some things."

He raised his eyebrows, smiled dimly, and followed her. They walked slowly down the hill into the long street of the little town. All the time she talked of she knew not what, and all the time she thought: His carriage will pass—his carriage will pass!

Several carriages went jingling by. At last he came. Sitting there, and staring straight before him, he did not see them. She heard her husband say:

"Hullo! Where is our young friend Lennan off to, with his luggage —looking like a lion cub in trouble?"

She answered in a voice that she tried to make clear and steady:

"There must be something wrong; or else it is his sister's wedding."

She felt that her husband was gazing at her, and wondered what her face was like; but at that moment the word "Madre!" sounded close in her ear and they were surrounded by a small drove of 'English Grundys.'

XI

That twenty mile drive was perhaps the worst part of the journey for the boy. It is always hard to sit still and suffer.

When Anna left him the night before, he had wandered about in the dark, not knowing quite where he went. Then the moon came up, and he found himself sitting under the eave of a barn close to a chalet where all was dark and quiet; and down below him the moon-whitened valley village—its roofs and spires and little glamorous unreal lights.

In his evening suit, his dark ruffled hair uncovered, he would have made a quaint spectacle for the owners of that chalet, if they had chanced to see him seated on the hay-strewn boards against their barn, staring before him with such wistful rapture. But they were folk to whom sleep was precious. . . .

And now it was all snatched away from him, relegated to some immensely far-off future. Would it indeed be possible to get his guardian to ask them down to Hayle? And would they really come? His tutor would surely never care to visit a place right away in the country—far from books and everything! He frowned, thinking of his tutor, but it was with perplexity—no other feeling. And yet, if he could not

have them down there, how could he wait the two whole months till next term began! So went his thoughts, round and round, while the horses jogged, dragging him further and further from her.

It was better in the train; the distraction of all the strange crowd of foreigners, the interest of new faces and new country; and then sleep—a long night of it, snoozed up in his corner, thoroughly fagged out. And next day more new country, more new faces; and slowly, his mood changing from ache and bewilderment to a sense of something promised, delightful to look forward to. Then Calais at last, and a night-crossing in a wet little steamer, a summer gale blowing spray in his face, waves leaping white in a black sea, and the wild sound of the wind. On again to London, the early drive across the town, still sleepy in August haze; an English breakfast—porridge, chops, marmalade. And, at last, the train for home. At all events he could write to her, and tearing a page out of his little sketch-book, he began:

"I am writing in the train, so please forgive this joggly writing—"

Then he did not know how to go on, for all that he wanted to say was such as he had never even dreamed of writing—things about his feelings which would look horrible in words; besides, he must not put anything that might not be read, by anyone, so what was there to say?

"It has been such a long journey," he wrote at last, "away from the Tyrol;" (he did not dare even to put "from you,") "I thought it would never end. But at last it has—very nearly. I have thought a great deal about the Tyrol. It was a lovely time—the loveliest time I have ever had. And now it's over, I try to console myself by thinking of the future, but not the immediate future—THAT is not very enjoyable. I wonder how the mountains are looking to-day. Please give my love to them, especially the lion ones that come and lie out in the moonlight—you will not recognize them from this"—then followed a sketch. "And this is the church we went to, with someone kneeling. And this is meant for the 'English Grundys,' looking at someone who is coming in very late with an alpenstock—only, I am better at the 'English Grundys' than at the person with the alpenstock. I wish I were the 'English Grundys' now, still in the Tyrol. I hope I shall get a letter from you soon; and that it will say you are getting ready to come back. My guardian will be awfully keen for you to come and stay with us. He is not half bad when you know him, and there will be his sister, Mrs. Doone, and her daughter left there after the wedding. It will be simply disgusting if you and Mr. Stormer don't come. I wish I could write all I feel about my lovely time in the Tyrol, but you must please imagine it."

And just as he had not known how to address her, so he could not tell how to subscribe himself, and only put "Mark Lennan."

He posted the letter at Exeter, where he had some time to wait; and his mind moved still more from past to future. Now that he was nearing home he began to think of his sister. In two days she would be gone to Italy; he would not see her again for a long time, and a whole crowd of memories began to stretch out hands to him. How she and he used to walk together in the walled garden, and on the sunk croquet ground; she telling him stories, her arm round his neck, because she was two years older, and taller than he in those days. Their first talk each holidays, when he came back to her; the first tea—with unlimited jam—in the old mullion-windowed, flower-chintzed schoolroom, just himself and her and old Tingle (Miss Tring, the ancient governess, whose chaperonage would now be gone), and sometimes that kid Sylvia, when she chanced to be staying there with her mother. Cicely had always understood him when he explained to her how inferior school was, because nobody took any interest in beasts or birds except to kill them; or in drawing, or making things, or anything decent. They would go off together, rambling along the river, or up the park, where everything looked so jolly and wild—the ragged oak-trees, and huge boulders, of whose presence old Godden, the coachman, had said: "I can't think but what these ha' been washed here by the Flood, Mast' Mark!" These and a thousand other memories beset his conscience now. And as the train drew closer to their station, he eagerly made ready to jump out and greet her. There was the honeysuckle full out along the paling of the platform over the waiting-room; wonderful, this year—and there was she, standing alone on the platform. No, it was not Cicely! He got out with a blank sensation, as if those memories had played him false. It was a girl, indeed, but she only looked about sixteen, and wore a sunbonnet that hid her hair and half her face. She had on a blue frock, and some honeysuckle in her waist-belt. She seemed to be smiling at him, and expecting him to smile at her; and so he did smile. She came up to him then, and said:

"I'm Sylvia."

He answered: "Oh! thanks awfully—it was awfully good of you to come and meet me."

"Cicely's so busy. It's only the T-cart. Have you got much luggage?"

She took up his hold-all, and he took it from her; she took his bag, and he took it from her; then they went out to the T-cart. A small groom stood there, holding a silver-roan cob with a black mane and black swish tail.

She said: "D'you mind if I drive, because I'm learning."

And he answered: "Oh, no! rather not."

She got up; he noticed that her eyes looked quite excited. Then his portmanteau came out and was deposited with the other things behind; and he got up beside her.

She said: "Let go, Billy."

The roan rushed past the little groom, whose top boots seemed to twinkle as he jumped up behind. They whizzed round the corner from the station yard, and observing that her mouth was just a little open as though this had disconcerted her, he said:

"He pulls a bit."

"Yes—but isn't he perfectly sweet?"

"He IS rather decent."

Ah! when SHE came, he would drive her; they would go off alone in the T-cart, and he would show her all the country round.

He was re-awakened by the words:

"Oh! I know he's going to shy!" At once there was a swerve. The roan was cantering.

They had passed a pig.

"Doesn't he look lovely now? Ought I to have whipped him when he shied?"

"Rather not."

"Why?"

"Because horses are horses, and pigs are pigs; it's natural for horses to shy at them."

"Oh!"

He looked up at her then, sidelong. The curve of her cheek and chin looked very soft, and rather jolly.

"I didn't know you, you know!" he said. "You've grown up so awfully."

"I knew you at once. Your voice is still furry."

There was another silence, till she said:

"He does pull, rather—doesn't he, going home?"

"Shall I drive?"

"Yes, please."

He stood up and took the reins, and she slipped past under them in front of him; her hair smelt exactly like hay, as she was softly bumped against him.

She kept regarding him steadily with very blue eyes, now that she was relieved of driving.

"Cicely was afraid you weren't coming," she said suddenly. "What sort of people are those old Stormers?"

He felt himself grow very red, choked something down, and answered:

"It's only he that's old. She's not more than about thirty-five."

"That IS old."

He restrained the words: "Of course it's old to a kid like you!" And, instead, he looked at her. Was she exactly a kid? She seemed quite tall (for a girl) and not very thin, and there was something frank and soft about her face, and as if she wanted you to be nice to her.

"Is she very pretty?"

This time he did not go red, such was the disturbance that question made in him. If he said: "Yes," it

was like letting the world know his adoration; but to say anything less would be horrible, disloyal. So he did say: "Yes," listening hard to the tone of his own voice.

"I thought she was. Do you like her very much?" Again he struggled with that thing in his throat, and again said: "Yes."

He wanted to hate this girl, yet somehow could not—she looked so soft and confiding. She was staring before her now, her lips still just parted, so evidently THAT had not been because of Bolero's pulling; they were pretty all the same, and so was her short, straight little nose, and her chin, and she was awfully fair. His thoughts flew back to that other face—so splendid, so full of life. Suddenly he found himself unable to picture it—for the first time since he had started on his journey it would not come before him.

"Oh! Look!"

Her hand was pulling at his arm. There in the field over the hedge a buzzard hawk was dropping like a stone.

"Oh, Mark! Oh! Oh! It's got it!"

She was covering her face with both her hands, and the hawk, with a young rabbit in its claws, was sailing up again. It looked so beautiful that he did not somehow feel sorry for the rabbit; but he wanted to stroke and comfort her, and said:

"It's all right, Sylvia; it really is. The rabbit's dead already, you know. And it's quite natural."

She took her hands away from a face that looked just as if she were going to cry.

"Poor little rabbit! It was such a little one!"

XII

On the afternoon of the day following he sat in the smoking-room with a prayer book in his hand, and a frown on his forehead, reading the Marriage Service. The book had been effectively designed for not spoiling the figure when carried in a pocket. But this did not matter, for even if he could have read the words, he would not have known what they meant, seeing that he was thinking how he could make a certain petition to a certain person sitting just behind at a large bureau with a sliding top, examining artificial flies.

He fixed at last upon this form:

"Gordy!" (Why Gordy no one quite knew now—whether because his name was George, or by way of corruption from Guardian.) "When Cis is gone it'll be rather awful, won't it?"

"Not a bit."

Mr. Heatherley was a man of perhaps sixty-four, if indeed guardians have ages, and like a doctor rather than a squire; his face square and puffy, his eyes always half-closed, and his curly mouth using bluntly a voice of that refined coarseness peculiar to people of old family.

"But it will, you know!"

"Well, supposin' it is?"

"I only wondered if you'd mind asking Mr. and Mrs. Stormer to come here for a little—they were awfully kind to me out there."

"Strange man and woman! My dear fellow!"

"Mr. Stormer likes fishing."

"Does he? And what does she like?"

Very grateful that his back was turned, the boy said:

"I don't know—anything—she's awfully nice."

"Ah! Pretty?"

He answered faintly:

"I don't know what YOU call pretty, Gordy."

He felt, rather than saw, his guardian scrutinizing him with those half-closed eyes under their gouty lids.

"All right; do as you like. Have 'em here and have done with it, by all means."

Did his heart jump? Not quite; but it felt warm and happy, and he said:

"Thanks awfully, Gordy. It's most frightfully decent of you," and turned again to the Marriage Service. He could make out some of it. In places it seemed to him fine, and in other places queer. About obeying, for instance. If you loved anybody, it seemed rotten to expect them to obey you. If you loved them and they loved you, there couldn't ever be any question of obeying, because you would both do the things always of your own accord. And if they didn't love you, or you them, then—oh! then it would be simply too disgusting for anything, to go on living with a person you didn't love or who didn't love you. But of course SHE didn't love his tutor. Had she once? Those bright doubting eyes, that studiously satiric mouth came very clearly up before him. You could not love them; and yet—he was really very decent. A feeling as of pity, almost of affection, rose in him for his remote tutor. It was queer to feel so, since the last time they had talked together out there, on the terrace, he had not felt at all like that.

The noise of the bureau top sliding down aroused him; Mr. Heatherley was closing in the remains of the artificial flies. That meant he would be going out to fish. And the moment he heard the door shut, Mark sprang up, slid back the bureau top, and began to write his letter. It was hard work.

"DEAR MRS. STORMER,

"My guardian wishes me to beg you and Mr. Stormer to pay us a visit as soon as you come back from the Tyrol. Please tell Mr. Stormer that only the very best fishermen—like him—can catch our trout; the rest catch our trees. This is me catching our trees (here followed a sketch). My sister is going to be married to-morrow, and it will be disgusting afterwards unless you come. So do come, please. And with my very best greetings,

"I am,

"Your humble servant,

"M. LENNAN."

When he had stamped this production and dropped it in the letter-box, he had the oddest feeling, as if he had been let out of school; a desire to rush about, to frolic. What should he do? Cis, of course, would be busy—they were all busy about the wedding. He would go and saddle Bolero, and jump him in the park; or should he go down along the river and watch the jays? Both seemed lonely occupations. And he stood in the window—dejected. At the age of five, walking with his nurse, he had been overheard remarking: "Nurse, I want to eat a biscuit—ALL THE WAY I want to eat a biscuit!" and it was still rather so with him perhaps—all the way he wanted to eat a biscuit. He bethought him then of his modelling, and went out to the little empty greenhouse where he kept his masterpieces. They seemed to him now quite horrible—and two of them, the sheep and the turkey, he marked out for summary destruction. The idea occurred to him that he might try and model that hawk escaping with the little rabbit; but when he tried, no nice feeling came, and flinging the things down he went out. He ran along the unweeded path to the tennis ground—lawn tennis was then just coming in. The grass looked very rough. But then, everything about that little manor house was left rather wild and anyhow; why, nobody quite knew, and nobody seemed to mind. He stood there scrutinizing the condition of the ground. A sound of humming came to his ears. He got up on the wall. There was Sylvia sitting in the field, making a wreath of honeysuckle. He stood very quiet and listened. She looked pretty—lost in her tune. Then he slid down off the wall, and said gently:

"Hallo!"

She looked round at him, her eyes very wide open.

"Your voice is jolly, Sylvia!"

"Oh, no!"

"It is. Come and climb a tree!"

"Where?"

"In the park, of course."

They were some time selecting the tree, many being too easy for him, and many too hard for her; but one was found at last, an oak of great age, and frequented by rooks. Then, insisting that she must be roped to him, he departed to the house for some blind-cord. The climb began at four o'clock—named by him the ascent of the Cimone della Pala. He led the momentous expedition, taking a hitch of the blind-cord round a branch before he permitted her to move. Two or three times he was obliged to make the cord fast and return to help her, for she was not an 'expert'; her arms seemed soft, and she was inclined to straddle instead of trusting to one foot. But at last they were settled, streaked indeed with moss, on the top branch but two. They rested there, silent, listening to the rooks soothing an outraged dignity. Save for this slowly subsiding demonstration it was marvellously peaceful and remote up there, half-way to a blue sky thinly veiled from them by the crinkled brown-green leaves. The peculiar dry mossy smell of an oak-tree was disturbed into the air by the least motion of their feet or hands against the bark. They could hardly see the ground, and all around, other gnarled trees barred off any view.

He said:

"If we stay up here till it's dark we might see owls."

"Oh, no! Owls are horrible!"

"What! They're LOVELY—especially the white ones."

"I can't stand their eyes, and they squeak so when they're hunting."

"Oh! but that's so jolly, and their eyes are beautiful."

"They're always catching mice and little chickens; all sorts of little things."

"But they don't mean to; they only want them to eat. Don't you think things are jolliest at night?"

She slipped her arm in his.

"No; I don't like the dark."

"Why not? It's splendid—when things get mysterious." He dwelt lovingly on that word.

"I don't like mysterious things. They frighten you."

"Oh, Sylvia!"

"No, I like early morning—especially in spring, when it's beginning to get leafy."

"Well, of course."

She was leaning against him, for safety, just a little; and stretching out his arm, he took good hold of the branch to make a back for her. There was a silence. Then he said:

"If you could only have one tree, which would you have?"

"Not oaks. Limes—no—birches. Which would you?"

He pondered. There were so many trees that were perfect. Birches and limes, of course; but beeches and cypresses, and yews, and cedars, and holm-oaks—almost, and plane-trees; then he said suddenly:

"Pines; I mean the big ones with reddish stems and branches pretty high up."

"Why?"

Again he pondered. It was very important to explain exactly why; his feelings about everything were concerned in this. And while he mused she gazed at him, as if surprised to see anyone think so deeply. At last he said:

"Because they're independent and dignified and never quite cold, and their branches seem to brood, but chiefly because the ones I mean are generally out of the common where you find them. You know—just one or two, strong and dark, standing out against the sky."

"They're TOO dark."

It occurred to him suddenly that he had forgotten larches. They, of course, could be heavenly, when you lay under them and looked up at the sky, as he had that afternoon out there. Then he heard her say:

"If I could only have one flower, I should have lilies of the valley, the small ones that grow wild and smell so jolly."

He had a swift vision of another flower, dark—very different, and was silent.

"What would you have, Mark?" Her voice sounded a little hurt. "You ARE thinking of one, aren't you?"

He said honestly:

"Yes, I am."

"Which?"

"It's dark, too; you wouldn't care for it a bit."

"How d'you know?"

"A clove carnation."

"But I do like it—only—not very much."

He nodded solemnly.

"I knew you wouldn't."

Then a silence fell between them. She had ceased to lean against him, and he missed the cosy friendliness of it. Now that their voices and the cawings of the rooks had ceased, there was nothing heard but the dry rustle of the leaves, and the plaintive cry of a buzzard hawk hunting over the little tor across the river. There were nearly always two up there, quartering the sky. To the boy it was lovely, that silence—like Nature talking to you—Nature always talked in silences. The beasts, the birds, the insects, only really showed themselves when you were still; you had to be awfully quiet, too, for flowers and plants, otherwise you couldn't see the real jolly separate life there was in them. Even the boulders down there, that old Godden thought had been washed up by the Flood, never showed you what queer shapes they had, and let you feel close to them, unless you were thinking of nothing else. Sylvia, after all, was better in that way than he had expected. She could keep quiet (he had thought girls hopeless); she was gentle, and it was rather jolly to watch her. Through the leaves there came the faint far tinkle of the tea-bell.

She said: "We must get down."

It was much too jolly to go in, really. But if she wanted her tea —girls always wanted tea! And, twisting the cord carefully round the branch, he began to superintend her descent. About to follow, he heard her cry:

"Oh, Mark! I'm stuck—I'm stuck! I can't reach it with my foot! I'm swinging!" And he saw that she WAS swinging by her hands and the cord.

"Let go; drop on to the branch below—the cord'll hold you straight till you grab the trunk."

Her voice mounted piteously:

"I can't—I really can't—I should slip!"

He tied the cord, and slithered hastily to the branch below her; then, bracing himself against the trunk, he clutched her round the waist and knees; but the taut cord held her up, and she would not come to anchor. He could not hold her and untie the cord, which was fast round her waist. If he let her go with one hand, and got out his knife, he would never be able to cut and hold her at the same time. For a moment he thought he had better climb up again and slack off the cord, but he could see by her face that she was getting frightened; he could feel it by the quivering of her body.

"If I heave you up," he said, "can you get hold again above?" And, without waiting for an answer, he heaved. She caught hold frantically.

"Hold on just for a second."

She did not answer, but he saw that her face had gone very white. He snatched out his knife and cut the cord. She clung just for that moment, then came loose into his arms, and he hauled her to him against the trunk. Safe there, she buried her face on his shoulder. He began to murmur to her and smooth her softly, with quite a feeling of its being his business to smooth her like this, to protect her. He knew she was crying, but she let no sound escape, and he was very careful not to show that he

knew, for fear she should feel ashamed. He wondered if he ought to kiss her. At last he did, on the top of her head, very gently. Then she put up her face and said she was a beast. And he kissed her again on an eyebrow.

After that she seemed all right, and very gingerly they descended to the ground, where shadows were beginning to lengthen over the fern and the sun to slant into their eyes.

XIII

The night after the wedding the boy stood at the window of his pleasant attic bedroom, with one wall sloping, and a faint smell of mice. He was tired and excited, and his brain, full of pictures. This was his first wedding, and he was haunted by a vision of his sister's little white form, and her face with its starry eyes. She was gone—his no more! How fearful the Wedding March had sounded on that organ—that awful old wheezer; and the sermon! One didn't want to hear that sort of thing when one felt inclined to cry. Even Gordy had looked rather boiled when he was giving her away. With perfect distinctness he could still see the group before the altar rails, just as if he had not been a part of it himself. Cis in her white, Sylvia in fluffy grey; his impassive brother-in-law's tall figure; Gordy looking queer in a black coat, with a very yellow face, and eyes still half-closed. The rotten part of it all had been that you wanted to be just FEELING, and you had to be thinking of the ring, and your gloves, and whether the lowest button of your white waistcoat was properly undone. Girls could do both, it seemed—Cis seemed to be seeing something wonderful all the time, and Sylvia had looked quite holy. He himself had been too conscious of the rector's voice, and the sort of professional manner with which he did it all, as if he were making up a prescription, with directions how to take it. And yet it was all rather beautiful in a kind of fashion, every face turned one way, and a tremendous hush—except for poor old Godden's blowing of his nose with his enormous red handkerchief; and the soft darkness up in the roof, and down in the pews; and the sunlight brightening the South windows. All the same, it would have been much jollier just taking hands by themselves somewhere, and saying out before God what they really felt—because, after all, God was everything, everywhere, not only in stuffy churches. That was how HE would like to be married, out of doors on a starry night like this, when everything felt wonderful all round you. Surely God wasn't half as small as people seemed always making Him—a sort of superior man a little bigger than themselves! Even the very most beautiful and wonderful and awful things one could imagine or make, could only be just nothing to a God who had a temple like the night out there. But then you couldn't be married alone, and no girl would ever like to be married without rings and flowers and dresses, and words that made it all feel small and cosy! Cis might have, perhaps, only she wouldn't, because of not hurting other people's feelings; but Sylvia—never—she would be afraid. Only, of course, she was young! And the thread of his thoughts broke—and scattered like beads from a string.

Leaning out, and resting his chin on his hands, he drew the night air into his lungs. Honeysuckle, or was it the scent of lilies still? The stars all out, and lots of owls to-night—four at least. What would night be like without owls and stars? But that was it—you never could think what things would be like if they weren't just what and where they were. You never knew what was coming, either; and yet, when it came, it seemed as if nothing else ever could have come. That was queer—you could do anything you liked until you'd done it, but when you HAD done it, then you knew, of course, that you must always have had to . . . What was that light, below and to the left? Whose room? Old Tingle's—no, the little spare room—Sylvia's! She must be awake, then! He leaned far out, and whispered in the voice she had said was still furry:

"Sylvia!"

The light flickered, he could just see her head appear, with hair all loose, and her face turning up to him. He could only half see, half imagine it, mysterious, blurry; and he whispered:

"Isn't this jolly?"

The whisper travelled back:

"Awfully."

"Aren't you sleepy?"

"No; are you?"

"Not a bit. D'you hear the owls?"

"Rather."

"Doesn't it smell good?"

"Perfect. Can you see me?"

"Only just, not too much. Can you?"

"I can't see your nose. Shall I get the candle?"

"No—that'd spoil it. What are you sitting on?"

"The window sill."

"It doesn't twist your neck, does it?"

"No—o—only a little bit."

"Are you hungry?"

"Yes."

"Wait half a shake. I'll let down some chocolate in my big bath towel; it'll swing along to you—reach out."

A dim white arm reached out.

"Catch! I say, you won't get cold?"

"Rather not."

"It's too jolly to sleep, isn't it?"

"Mark!"

"Yes."

"Which star is yours? Mine is the white one over the top branch of the big sycamore, from here."

"Mine is that twinkling red one over the summer house. Sylvia!"

"Yes."

"Catch!"

"Oh! I couldn't—what was it?"

"Nothing."

"No, but what WAS it?"

"Only my star. It's caught in your hair."

"Oh!"

"Listen!"

Silence, then, until her awed whisper:

"What?"

And his floating down, dying away:

"CAVE!"

What had stirred—some window opened? Cautiously he spied along the face of the dim house. There was no light anywhere, nor any shifting blur of white at her window below. All was dark, remote—still sweet with the scent of something jolly. And then he saw what that something was. All over the wall below his window white jessamine was in flower—stars, not only in the sky. Perhaps the sky was really a field of white flowers; and God walked there, and plucked the stars. . . .

The next morning there was a letter on his plate when he came down to breakfast. He couldn't open it with Sylvia on one side of him, and old Tingle on the other. Then with a sort of anger he did open it. He need not have been afraid. It was written so that anyone might have read; it told of a climb, of bad weather, said they were coming home. Was he relieved, disturbed, pleased at their coming back, or only uneasily ashamed? She had not got his second letter yet. He could feel old Tingle looking round at

him with those queer sharp twinkling eyes of hers, and Sylvia regarding him quite frankly. And conscious that he was growing red, he said to himself: 'I won't!' And did not. In three days they would be at Oxford. Would they come on here at once? Old Tingle was speaking. He heard Sylvia answer: "No, I don't like 'bopsies.' They're so hard!" It was their old name for high cheekbones. Sylvia certainly had none, her cheeks went softly up to her eyes.

"Do you, Mark?"

He said slowly:

"On some people."

"People who have them are strong-willed, aren't they?"

Was SHE—Anna—strong-willed? It came to him that he did not know at all what she was.

When breakfast was over and he had got away to his old greenhouse, he had a strange, unhappy time. He was a beast, he had not been thinking of her half enough! He took the letter out, and frowned at it horribly. Why could he not feel more? What was the matter with him? Why was he such a brute—not to be thinking of her day and night? For long he stood, disconsolate, in the little dark greenhouse among the images of his beasts, the letter in his hand.

He stole out presently, and got down to the river unobserved. Comforting—that crisp, gentle sound of water; ever so comforting to sit on a stone, very still, and wait for things to happen round you. You lost yourself that way, just became branches, and stones, and water, and birds, and sky. You did not feel such a beast. Gordy would never understand why he did not care for fishing—one thing trying to catch another—instead of watching and understanding what things were. You never got to the end of looking into water, or grass or fern; always something queer and new. It was like that, too, with yourself, if you sat down and looked properly—most awfully interesting to see things working in your mind.

A soft rain had begun to fall, hissing gently on the leaves, but he had still a boy's love of getting wet, and stayed where he was, on the stone. Some people saw fairies in woods and down in water, or said they did; that did not seem to him much fun. What was really interesting was noticing that each thing was different from every other thing, and what made it so; you must see that before you could draw or model decently. It was fascinating to see your creatures coming out with shapes of their very own; they did that without your understanding how. But this vacation he was no good—couldn't draw or model a bit!

A jay had settled about forty yards away, and remained in full view, attending to his many-coloured feathers. Of all things, birds were the most fascinating! He watched it a long time, and when it flew on, followed it over the high wall up into the park. He heard the lunch-bell ring in the far distance, but did not go in. So long as he was out there in the soft rain with the birds and trees and other creatures, he was free from that unhappy feeling of the morning. He did not go back till nearly seven, properly wet through, and very hungry.

All through dinner he noticed that Sylvia seemed to be watching him, as if wanting to ask him something. She looked very soft in her white frock, open at the neck; and her hair almost the colour of special moonlight, so goldy-pale; and he wanted her to understand that it wasn't a bit because of her that he had been out alone all day. After dinner, when they were getting the table ready to play 'red nines,' he did murmur:

"Did you sleep last night—after?"

She nodded fervently to that.

It was raining really hard now, swishing and dripping out in the darkness, and he whispered:

"Our stars would be drowned to-night."

"Do you really think we have stars?"

"We might. But mine's safe, of course; your hair IS jolly, Sylvia."

She gazed at him, very sweet and surprised.

XIV

Anna did not receive the boy's letter in the Tyrol. It followed her to Oxford. She was just going out when it came, and she took it up with the mingled beatitude and almost sickening tremor that a lover

feels touching the loved one's letter. She would not open it in the street, but carried it all the way to the garden of a certain College, and sat down to read it under the cedar-tree. That little letter, so short, boyish, and dry, transported her halfway to heaven. She was to see him again at once, not to wait weeks, with the fear that he would quite forget her! Her husband had said at breakfast that Oxford without 'the dear young clowns' assuredly was charming, but Oxford 'full of tourists and other strange bodies' as certainly was not. Where should they go? Thank heaven, the letter could be shown him! For all that, a little stab of pain went through her that there was not one word which made it unsuitable to show. Still, she was happy. Never had her favourite College garden seemed so beautiful, with each tree and flower so cared for, and the very wind excluded; never had the birds seemed so tame and friendly. The sun shone softly, even the clouds were luminous and joyful. She sat a long time, musing, and went back forgetting all she had come out to do. Having both courage and decision, she did not leave the letter to burn a hole in her corsets, but gave it to her husband at lunch, looking him in the face, and saying carelessly:

"Providence, you see, answers your question."

He read it, raised his eyebrows, smiled, and, without looking up, murmured:

"You wish to prosecute this romantic episode?"

Did he mean anything—or was it simply his way of putting things?

"I naturally want to be anywhere but here."

"Perhaps you would like to go alone?"

He said that, of course, knowing she could not say: Yes. And she answered simply: "No."

"Then let us both go—on Monday. I will catch the young man's trout; thou shalt catch—h'm!—he shall catch—What is it he catches—trees? Good! That's settled."

And, three days later, without another word exchanged on the subject, they started.

Was she grateful to him? No. Afraid of him? No. Scornful of him? Not quite. But she was afraid of HERSELF, horribly. How would she ever be able to keep herself in hand, how disguise from these people that she loved their boy? It was her desperate mood that she feared. But since she so much wanted all the best for him that life could give, surely she would have the strength to do nothing that might harm him. Yet she was afraid.

He was there at the station to meet them, in riding things and a nice rough Norfolk jacket that she did not recognize, though she thought she knew his clothes by heart; and as the train came slowly to a standstill the memory of her last moment with him, up in his room amid the luggage that she had helped to pack, very nearly overcame her. It seemed so hard to have to meet him coldly, formally, to have to wait—who knew how long—for a minute with him alone! And he was so polite, so beautifully considerate, with all the manners of a host; hoping she wasn't tired, hoping Mr. Stormer had brought his fishing-rod, though they had lots, of course, they could lend him; hoping the weather would be fine; hoping that they wouldn't mind having to drive three miles, and busying himself about their luggage. All this when she just wanted to take him in her arms and push his hair back from his forehead, and look at him!

He did not drive with them—he had thought they would be too crowded—but followed, keeping quite close in the dust to point out the scenery, mounted on a 'palfrey,' as her husband called the roan with the black swish tail.

This countryside, so rich and yet a little wild, the independent-looking cottages, the old dark cosy manor-house, all was very new to one used to Oxford, and to London, and to little else of England. And all was delightful. Even Mark's guardian seemed to her delightful. For Gordy, when absolutely forced to face an unknown woman, could bring to the encounter a certain bluff ingratiating. His sister, too, Mrs. Doone, with her faded gentleness, seemed soothing.

When Anna was alone in her room, reached by an unexpected little stairway, she stood looking at its carved four-poster bed and the wide lattice window with chintz curtains, and the flowers in a blue bowl. Yes, all was delightful. And yet! What was it? What had she missed? Ah, she was a fool to fret! It was only his anxiety that they should be comfortable, his fear that he might betray himself. Out there those last few days—his eyes! And now! She brooded earnestly over what dress she should put on. She, who tanned so quickly, had almost lost her sunburn in the week of travelling and Oxford. To-day her eyes looked tired, and she was pale. She was not going to disdain anything that might help. She had reached thirty-six last month, and he would be nineteen to-morrow! She decided on black. In black she knew

that her neck looked whiter, and the colour of her eyes and hair stranger. She put on no jewellery, did not even pin a rose at her breast, took white gloves. Since her husband did not come to her room, she went up the little stairway to his. She surprised him ready dressed, standing by the fireplace, smiling faintly. What was he thinking of, standing there with that smile? Was there blood in him at all?

He inclined his head slightly and said:

"Good! Chaste as the night! Black suits you. Shall we find our way down to these savage halls?"

And they went down.

Everyone was already there, waiting. A single neighbouring squire and magistrate, by name Trusham, had been bidden, to make numbers equal.

Dinner was announced; they went in. At the round table in a dining-room, all black oak, with many candles, and terrible portraits of departed ancestors, Anna sat between the magistrate and Gordy. Mark was opposite, between a quaint-looking old lady and a young girl who had not been introduced, a girl in white, with very fair hair and very white skin, blue eyes, and lips a little parted; a daughter evidently of the faded Mrs. Doone. A girl like a silvery moth, like a forget-me-not! Anna found it hard to take her eyes away from this girl's face; not that she admired her exactly; pretty she was—yes; but weak, with those parted lips and soft chin, and almost wistful look, as if her deep-blue half-eager eyes were in spite of her. But she was young—so young! That was why not to watch her seemed impossible. "Sylvia Doone?" Indeed! Yes. A soft name, a pretty name—and very like her! Every time her eyes could travel away from her duty to Squire Trusham, and to Gordy (on both of whom she was clearly making an impression), she gazed at this girl, sitting there by the boy, and whenever those two young things smiled and spoke together she felt her heart contract and hurt her. Was THIS why that something had gone out of his eyes? Ah, she was foolish! If every girl or woman the boy knew was to cause such a feeling in her, what would life be like? And her will hardened against her fears. She was looking brilliant herself; and she saw that the girl in her turn could not help gazing at her eagerly, wistfully, a little bewildered—hatefully young. And the boy? Slowly, surely, as a magnet draws, Anna could feel that she was drawing him, could see him stealing chances to look at her. Once she surprised him full. What troubled eyes! It was not the old adoring face; yet she knew from its expression that she could make him want her—make him jealous—easily fire him with her kisses, if she would.

And the dinner wore to an end. Then came the moment when the girl and she must meet under the eyes of the mother, and that sharp, quaint-looking old governess. It would be a hard moment, that! And it came—a hard moment and a long one, for Gordy sat full span over his wine. But Anna had not served her time beneath the gaze of upper Oxford for nothing; she managed to be charming, full of interest and questions in her still rather foreign accent. Miss Doone—soon she became Sylvia—must show her all the treasures and antiquities. Was it too dark to go out just to look at the old house by night? Oh, no. Not a bit. There were goloshes in the hall. And they went, the girl leading, and talking of Anna knew not what, so absorbed was she in thinking how for a moment, just a moment, she could contrive to be with the boy alone.

It was not remarkable, this old house, but it was his home—might some day perhaps be his. And houses at night were strangely alive with their window eyes.

"That is my room," the girl said, "where the jessamine is—you can just see it. Mark's is above—look, under where the eave hangs out, away to the left. The other night—"

"Yes; the other night?"

"Oh, I don't—! Listen. That's an owl. We have heaps of owls. Mark likes them. I don't, much."

Always Mark!

"He's awfully keen, you see, about all beasts and birds—he models them. Shall I show you his workshop?—it's an old greenhouse. Here, you can see in."

There through the glass Anna indeed could just see the boy's quaint creations huddling in the dark on a bare floor, a grotesque company of small monsters. She murmured:

"Yes, I see them, but I won't really look unless he brings me himself."

"Oh, he's sure to. They interest him more than anything in the world."

For all her cautious resolutions Anna could not for the life of her help saying:

"What, more than you?"

The girl gave her a wistful stare before she answered:

"Oh! I don't count much."

Anna laughed, and took her arm. How soft and young it felt! A pang went through her heart, half jealous, half remorseful.

"Do you know," she said, "that you are very sweet?"

The girl did not answer.

"Are you his cousin?"

"No. Gordy is only Mark's uncle by marriage; my mother is Gordy's sister—so I'm nothing."

Nothing!

"I see—just what you English call 'a connection.'"

They were silent, seeming to examine the night; then the girl said:

"I wanted to see you awfully. You're not like what I thought."

"Oh! And what DID you think?"

"I thought you would have dark eyes, and Venetian red hair, and not be quite so tall. Of course, I haven't any imagination."

They were at the door again when the girl said that, and the hall light was falling on her; her slip of a white figure showed clear. Young—how young she looked! Everything she said—so young!

And Anna murmured: "And you are—more than I thought, too."

Just then the men came out from the dining-room; her husband with the look on his face that denoted he had been well listened to; Squire Trusham laughing as a man does who has no sense of humour; Gordy having a curly, slightly asphyxiated air; and the boy his pale, brooding look, as though he had lost touch with his surroundings. He wavered towards her, seemed to lose himself, went and sat down by the old governess. Was it because he did not dare to come up to her, or only because he saw the old lady sitting alone? It might well be that.

And the evening, so different from what she had dreamed of, closed in. Squire Trusham was gone in his high dog-cart, with his famous mare whose exploits had entertained her all through dinner. Her candle had been given her; she had said good-night to all but Mark. What should she do when she had his hand in hers? She would be alone with him in that grasp, whose strength no one could see. And she did not know whether to clasp it passionately, or to let it go coolly back to its owner; whether to claim him or to wait. But she was unable to help pressing it feverishly. At once in his face she saw again that troubled look; and her heart smote her. She let it go, and that she might not see him say good-night to the girl, turned and mounted to her room.

Fully dressed, she flung herself on the bed, and there lay, her handkerchief across her mouth, gnawing at its edges.

XV

Mark's nineteenth birthday rose in grey mist, slowly dropped its veil to the grass, and shone clear and glistening. He woke early. From his window he could see nothing in the steep park but the soft blue-grey, balloon-shaped oaks suspended one above the other among the round-topped boulders. It was in early morning that he always got his strongest feeling of wanting to model things; then and after dark, when, for want of light, it was no use. This morning he had the craving badly, and the sense of not knowing how weighed down his spirit. His drawings, his models—they were all so bad, so fumbly. If only this had been his twenty-first birthday, and he had his money, and could do what he liked. He would not stay in England. He would be off to Athens, or Rome, or even to Paris, and work till he COULD do something. And in his holidays he would study animals and birds in wild countries where there were plenty of them, and you could watch them in their haunts. It was stupid having to stay in a place like Oxford; but at the thought of what Oxford meant, his roaming fancy, like a bird hypnotized by a hawk, fluttered, stayed suspended, and dived back to earth. And that feeling of wanting to make things suddenly left him. It was as though he had woken up, his real self; then—lost that self again. Very quietly he made his way downstairs. The garden door was not shuttered, not even locked—it must have been forgotten overnight. Last night! He had never thought he would feel like this when she came

—so bewildered, and confused; drawn towards her, but by something held back. And he felt impatient, angry with himself, almost with her. Why could he not be just simply happy, as this morning was happy? He got his field-glasses and searched the meadow that led down to the river. Yes, there were several rabbits out. With the white marguerites and the dew cobwebs, it was all moon-flowery and white; and the rabbits being there made it perfect. He wanted one badly to model from, and for a moment was tempted to get his rook rifle—but what was the good of a dead rabbit—besides, they looked so happy! He put the glasses down and went towards his greenhouse to get a drawing block, thinking to sit on the wall and make a sort of Midsummer Night's Dream sketch of flowers and rabbits. Someone was there, bending down and doing something to his creatures. Who had the cheek? Why, it was Sylvia—in her dressing-gown! He grew hot, then cold, with anger. He could not bear anyone in that holy place! It was hateful to have his things even looked at; and she—she seemed to be fingering them. He pulled the door open with a jerk, and said: "What are you doing?" He was indeed so stirred by righteous wrath that he hardly noticed the gasp she gave, and the collapse of her figure against the wall. She ran past him, and vanished without a word. He went up to his creatures and saw that she had placed on the head of each one of them a little sprig of jessamine flower. Why! It was idiotic! He could see nothing at first but the ludicrousness of flowers on the heads of his beasts! Then the desperation of this attempt to imagine something graceful, something that would give him pleasure touched him; for he saw now that this was a birthday decoration. From that it was only a second before he was horrified with himself. Poor little Sylvia! What a brute he was! She had plucked all that jessamine, hung out of her window and risked falling to get hold of it; and she had woken up early and come down in her dressing-gown just to do something that she thought he would like! Horrible—what he had done! Now, when it was too late, he saw, only too clearly, her startled white face and quivering lips, and the way she had shrunk against the wall. How pretty she had looked in her dressing-gown with her hair all about her, frightened like that! He would do anything now to make up to her for having been such a perfect beast! The feeling, always a little with him, that he must look after her—dating, no doubt, from days when he had protected her from the bulls that were not there; and the feeling of her being so sweet and decent to him always; and some other feeling too—all these suddenly reached poignant climax. He simply must make it up to her! He ran back into the house and stole upstairs. Outside her room he listened with all his might, but could hear nothing; then tapped softly with one nail, and, putting his mouth to the keyhole, whispered: "Sylvia!" Again and again he whispered her name. He even tried the handle, meaning to open the door an inch, but it was bolted. Once he thought he heard a noise like sobbing, and this made him still more wretched. At last he gave it up; she would not come, would not be consoled. He deserved it, he knew, but it was very hard. And dreadfully dispirited he went up to his room, took a bit of paper, and tried to write:

"DEAREST SYLVIA,

"It was most awfully sweet of you to put your stars on my beasts. It was just about the most sweet thing you could have done. I am an awful brute, but, of course, if I had only known what you were doing, I should have loved it. Do forgive me; I deserve it, I know—only it IS my birthday.

"Your sorrowful
"MARK."

He took this down, slipped it under her door, tapped so that she might notice it, and stole away. It relieved his mind a little, and he went downstairs again.

Back in the greenhouse, sitting on a stool, he ruefully contemplated those chapletted beasts. They consisted of a crow, a sheep, a turkey, two doves, a pony, and sundry fragments. She had fastened the jessamine sprigs to the tops of their heads by a tiny daub of wet clay, and had evidently been surprised trying to put a sprig into the mouth of one of the doves, for it hung by a little thread of clay from the beak. He detached it and put it in his buttonhole. Poor little Sylvia! she took things awfully to heart. He would be as nice as ever he could to her all day. And, balancing on his stool, he stared fixedly at the wall against which she had fallen back; the line of her soft chin and throat seemed now to be his only memory. It was very queer how he could see nothing but that, the way the throat moved, swallowed—so white, so soft. And HE had made it go like that! It seemed an unconscionable time till breakfast.

As the hour approached he haunted the hall, hoping she might be first down. At last he heard footsteps, and waited, hidden behind the door of the empty dining-room, lest at sight of him she should turn back. He had rehearsed what he was going to do—bend down and kiss her hand and say: "Dulcinea del Toboso is the most beautiful lady in the world, and I the most unfortunate knight upon the earth," from his favourite passage out of his favourite book, 'Don Quixote.' She would surely forgive him then, and his heart would no longer hurt him. Certainly she could never go on making him so miserable if she knew his feelings! She was too soft and gentle for that. Alas! it was not Sylvia who came; but Anna, fresh from sleep, with her ice-green eyes and bright hair; and in sudden strange antipathy to her, that strong, vivid figure, he stood dumb. And this first lonely moment, which he had so

many times in fancy spent locked in her arms, passed without even a kiss; for quickly one by one the others came. But of Sylvia only news through Mrs. Doone that she had a headache, and was staying in bed. Her present was on the sideboard, a book called 'Sartor Resartus.' "Mark—from Sylvia, August 1st, 1880," together with Gordy's cheque, Mrs. Doone's pearl pin, old Tingle's 'Stones of Venice,' and one other little parcel wrapped in tissue-paper—four ties of varying shades of green, red, and blue, hand-knitted in silk—a present of how many hours made short by the thought that he would wear the produce of that clicking. He did not fail in outer gratitude, but did he realize what had been knitted into those ties? Not then.

Birthdays, like Christmas days, were made for disenchantment. Always the false gaiety of gaiety arranged—always that pistol to the head: 'Confound you! enjoy yourself!' How could he enjoy himself with the thought of Sylvia in her room, made ill by his brutality! The vision of her throat working, swallowing her grief, haunted him like a little white, soft spectre all through the long drive out on to the moor, and the picnic in the heather, and the long drive home—haunted him so that when Anna touched or looked at him he had no spirit to answer, no spirit even to try and be with her alone, but almost a dread of it instead.

And when at last they were at home again, and she whispered:

"What is it? What have I done?" he could only mutter:

"Nothing! Oh, nothing! It's only that I've been a brute!"

At that enigmatic answer she might well search his face.

"Is it my husband?"

He could answer that, at all events.

"Oh, no!"

"What is it, then? Tell me."

They were standing in the inner porch, pretending to examine the ancestral chart—dotted and starred with dolphins and little full-rigged galleons sailing into harbours—which always hung just there.

"Tell me, Mark; I don't like to suffer!"

What could he say, since he did not know himself? He stammered, tried to speak, could not get anything out.

"Is it that girl?"

Startled, he looked away, and said:

"Of course not."

She shivered, and went into the house. But he stayed, staring at the chart with a dreadful stirred-up feeling—of shame and irritation, pity, impatience, fear, all mixed. What had he done, said, lost? It was that horrid feeling of when one has not been kind and not quite true, yet might have been kinder if one had been still less true. Ah! but it was all so mixed up. It felt all bleak, too, and wintry in him, as if he had suddenly lost everybody's love. Then he was conscious of his tutor.

"Ah! friend Lennan—looking deeply into the past from the less romantic present? Nice things, those old charts. The dolphins are extremely jolly."

It was difficult to remember not to be ill-mannered then. Why did Stormer jeer like that? He just managed to answer:

"Yes, sir; I wish we had some now."

"There are so many moons we wish for, Lennan, and they none of them come tumbling down."

The voice was almost earnest, and the boy's resentment fled. He felt sorry, but why he did not know.

"In the meantime," he heard his tutor say, "let us dress for dinner."

When he came down to the drawing-room, Anna in her moonlight-coloured frock was sitting on the sofa talking to—Sylvia. He kept away from them; they could neither of them want him. But it did seem odd to him, who knew not too much concerning women, that she could be talking so gaily, when only half an hour ago she had said: "Is it that girl?"

He sat next her at dinner. Again it was puzzling that she should be laughing so serenely at Gordy's stories. Did the whispering in the porch, then, mean nothing? And Sylvia would not look at him; he felt sure that she turned her eyes away simply because she knew he was going to look in her direction. And this roused in him a sore feeling—everything that night seemed to rouse that feeling—of injustice; he was cast out, and he could not tell why. He had not meant to hurt either of them! Why should they both want to hurt him so? And presently there came to him a feeling that he did not care: Let them treat him as they liked! There were other things besides love! If they did not want him—he did not want them! And he hugged this reckless, unhappy, don't-care feeling to him with all the abandonment of youth.

But even birthdays come to an end. And moods and feelings that seem so desperately real die in the unreality of sleep.

XVI

If to the boy that birthday was all bewildered disillusionment, to Anna it was verily slow torture; SHE found no relief in thinking that there were things in life other than love. But next morning brought readjustment, a sense of yesterday's extravagance, a renewal of hope. Impossible surely that in one short fortnight she had lost what she had made so sure of! She had only to be resolute. Only to grasp firmly what was hers. After all these empty years was she not to have her hour? To sit still meekly and see it snatched from her by a slip of a soft girl? A thousand times, no! And she watched her chance. She saw him about noon sally forth towards the river, with his rod. She had to wait a little, for Gordy and his bailiff were down there by the tennis lawn, but they soon moved on. She ran out then to the park gate. Once through that she felt safe; her husband, she knew, was working in his room; the girl somewhere invisible; the old governess still at her housekeeping; Mrs. Doone writing letters. She felt full of hope and courage. This old wild tangle of a park, that she had not yet seen, was beautiful—a true trysting-place for fauns and nymphs, with its mossy trees and boulders and the high bracken. She kept along under the wall in the direction of the river, but came to no gate, and began to be afraid that she was going wrong. She could hear the river on the other side, and looked for some place where she could climb and see exactly where she was. An old ash-tree tempted her. Scrambling up into its fork, she could just see over. There was the little river within twenty yards, its clear dark water running between thick foliage. On its bank lay a huge stone balanced on another stone still more huge. And with his back to this stone stood the boy, his rod leaning beside him. And there, on the ground, her arms resting on her knees, her chin on her hands, that girl sat looking up. How eager his eyes now—how different from the brooding eyes of yesterday!

"So, you see, that was all. You might forgive me, Sylvia!"

And to Anna it seemed verily as if those two young faces formed suddenly but one—the face of youth.

If she had stayed there looking for all time, she could not have had graven on her heart a vision more indelible. Vision of Spring, of all that was gone from her for ever! She shrank back out of the fork of the old ash-tree, and, like a stricken beast, went hurrying, stumbling away, amongst the stones and bracken. She ran thus perhaps a quarter of a mile, then threw up her arms, fell down amongst the fern, and lay there on her face. At first her heart hurt her so that she felt nothing but that physical pain. If she could have died! But she knew it was nothing but breathlessness. It left her, and that which took its place she tried to drive away by pressing her breast against the ground, by clutching the stalks of the bracken—an ache, an emptiness too dreadful! Youth to youth! He was gone from her—and she was alone again! She did not cry. What good in crying? But gusts of shame kept sweeping through her; shame and rage. So this was all she was worth! The sun struck hot on her back in that lair of tangled fern, where she had fallen; she felt faint and sick. She had not known till now quite what this passion for the boy had meant to her; how much of her very belief in herself was bound up with it; how much clinging to her own youth. What bitterness! One soft slip of a white girl—one YOUNG thing—and she had become as nothing! But was that true? Could she not even now wrench him back to her with the passion that this child knew nothing of! Surely! Oh, surely! Let him but once taste the rapture she could give him! And at that thought she ceased clutching at the bracken stalks, lying as still as the very stones around her. Could she not? Might she not, even now? And all feeling, except just a sort of quivering, deserted her—as if she had fallen into a trance. Why spare this girl? Why falter? She was first! He had been hers out there. And she still had the power to draw him. At dinner the first evening she had dragged his gaze to her, away from that girl—away from youth, as a magnet draws steel. She could still bind him with chains that for a little while at all events he would not want to break! Bind him? Hateful word! Take him, hankering after what she could not give him—youth, white innocence, Spring? It would be infamous, infamous! She sprang up from the fern, and ran along the hillside, not looking where she went, stumbling among the tangled growth, in and out of the boulders, till she once more sank breathless on to a stone. It was bare of trees just here, and she could see, across the river valley, the high larch-crowned tor on the far side. The sky was clear—the sun bright. A hawk was

wheeling over that hill; far up, very near the blue! Infamous! She could not do that! Could not drug him, drag him to her by his senses, by all that was least high in him, when she wished for him all the finest things that life could give, as if she had been his mother. She could not. It would be wicked! In that moment of intense spiritual agony, those two down there in the sun, by the grey stone and the dark water, seemed guarded from her, protected. The girl's white flower-face trembling up, the boy's gaze leaping down! Strange that a heart which felt that, could hate at the same moment that flower-face, and burn to kill with kisses that eagerness in the boy's eyes. The storm in her slowly passed. And she prayed just to feel nothing. It was natural that she should lose her hour! Natural that her thirst should go unslaked, and her passion never bloom; natural that youth should go to youth, this boy to his own kind, by the law of—love. The breeze blowing down the valley fanned her cheeks, and brought her a faint sensation of relief. Nobility! Was it just a word? Or did those that gave up happiness feel noble?

She wandered for a long time in the park. Not till late afternoon did she again pass out by the gate, through which she had entered, full of hope. She met no one before she reached her room; and there, to be safe, took refuge in her bed. She dreaded only lest the feeling of utter weariness should leave her. She wanted no vigour of mind or body till she was away from here. She meant neither to eat nor drink; only to sleep, if she could. To-morrow, if there were any early train, she could be gone before she need see anyone; her husband must arrange. As to what he would think, and she could say—time enough to decide that. And what did it matter? The one vital thing now was not to see the boy, for she could not again go through hours of struggle like those. She rang the bell, and sent the startled maid with a message to her husband. And while she waited for him to come, her pride began revolting. She must not let him see. That would be horrible. And slipping out of bed she got a handkerchief and the eau-de-Cologne flask, and bandaged her forehead. He came almost instantly, entering in his quick, noiseless way, and stood looking at her. He did not ask what was the matter, but simply waited. And never before had she realized so completely how he began, as it were, where she left off; began on a plane from which instinct and feeling were as carefully ruled out as though they had been blasphemous. She summoned all her courage, and said: "I went into the park; the sun must have been too hot. I should like to go home to-morrow, if you don't mind. I can't bear not feeling well in other people's houses."

She was conscious of a smile flickering over his face; then it grew grave.

"Ah!" he said; "yes. The sun, a touch of that will last some days. Will you be fit to travel, though?"

She had a sudden conviction that he knew all about it, but that—since to know all about it was to feel himself ridiculous—he had the power of making himself believe that he knew nothing. Was this fine of him, or was it hateful?

She closed her eyes and said:

"My head is bad, but I SHALL be able. Only I don't want a fuss made. Could we go by a train before they are down?"

She heard him say:

"Yes. That will have its advantages."

There was not the faintest sound now, but of course he was still there. In that dumb, motionless presence was all her future. Yes, that would be her future—a thing without feeling, and without motion. A fearful curiosity came on her to look at it. She opened her gaze. He was still standing just as he had been, his eyes fixed on her. But one hand, on the edge of his coat pocket—out of the picture, as it were—was nervously closing and unclosing. And suddenly she felt pity. Not for her future—which must be like that; but for him. How dreadful to have grown so that all emotion was exiled—how dreadful! And she said gently:

"I am sorry, Harold."

As if he had heard something strange and startling, his eyes dilated in a curious way, he buried that nervous hand in his pocket, turned, and went out.

XVII

When young Mark came on Sylvia by the logan-stone, it was less surprising to him than if he had not known she was there—having watched her go. She was sitting, all humped together, brooding over the water, her sunbonnet thrown back; and that hair, in which his star had caught, shining faint-gold under the sun. He came on her softly through the grass, and, when he was a little way off, thought it best to halt. If he startled her she might run away, and he would not have the heart to follow. How still she was, lost in her brooding! He wished he could see her face. He spoke at last, gently:

"Sylvia! . . . Would you mind?"

And, seeing that she did not move, he went up to her. Surely she could not still be angry with him!

"Thanks most awfully for that book you gave me—it looks splendid!"

She made no answer. And leaning his rod against the stone, he sighed. That silence of hers seemed to him unjust; what was it she wanted him to say or do? Life was not worth living, if it was to be all bottled up like this.

"I never meant to hurt you. I hate hurting people. It's only that my beasts are so bad—I can't bear people to see them—especially you—I want to please you—I do really. So, you see, that was all. You MIGHT forgive me, Sylvia!"

Something over the wall, a rustling, a scattering in the fern—deer, no doubt! And again he said eagerly, softly:

"You might be nice to me, Sylvia; you really might."

Very quickly, turning her head away, she said:

"It isn't that any more. It's—it's something else."

"What else?"

"Nothing—only, that I don't count—now—"

He knelt down beside her. What did she mean? But he knew well enough.

"Of course, you count! Most awfully! Oh, don't be unhappy! I hate people being unhappy. Don't be unhappy, Sylvia!" And he began gently to stroke her arm. It was all strange and troubled within him; one thing only plain—he must not admit anything! As if reading that thought, her blue eyes seemed suddenly to search right into him. Then she pulled some blades of grass, and began plaiting them.

"SHE counts."

Ah! He was not going to say: She doesn't! It would be caddish to say that. Even if she didn't count—Did she still?—it would be mean and low. And in his eyes just then there was the look that had made his tutor compare him to a lion cub in trouble.

Sylvia was touching his arm.

"Mark!"

"Yes."

"Don't!"

He got up and took his rod. What was the use? He could not stay there with her, since he could not—must not speak.

"Are you going?"

"Yes."

"Are you angry? PLEASE don't be angry with me."

He felt a choke in his throat, bent down to her hand, and kissed it; then shouldered his rod, and marched away. Looking back once, he saw her still sitting there, gazing after him, forlorn, by that great stone. It seemed to him, then, there was nowhere he could go; nowhere except among the birds and beasts and trees, who did not mind even if you were all mixed up and horrible inside. He lay down in the grass on the bank. He could see the tiny trout moving round and round the stones; swallows came all about him, flying very low; a hornet, too, bore him company for a little. But he could take interest in nothing; it was as if his spirit were in prison. It would have been nice, indeed, to be that water, never staying, passing, passing; or wind, touching everything, never caught. To be able to do nothing without hurting someone—that was what was so ghastly. If only one were like a flower, that just sprang up and lived its life all to itself, and died. But whatever he did, or said now, would be like telling lies, or else being cruel. The only thing was to keep away from people. And yet how keep away from his own guests?

He went back to the house for lunch, but both those guests were out, no one seemed quite to know

where. Restless, unhappy, puzzled, he wandered round and about all the afternoon. Just before dinner he was told of Mrs. Stormer's not being well, and that they would be leaving to-morrow. Going—after three days! That plunged him deeper into his strange and sorrowful confusion. He was reduced now to a complete brooding silence. He knew he was attracting attention, but could not help it. Several times during dinner he caught Gordy's eyes fixed on him, from under those puffy half-closed lids, with asphyxiated speculation. But he simply COULD not talk—everything that came into his mind to say seemed false. Ah! it was a sad evening—with its glimmering vision into another's sore heart, its confused gnawing sense of things broken, faith betrayed; and yet always the perplexed wonder—"How could I have helped it?" And always Sylvia's wistful face that he tried not to look at.

He stole out, leaving Gordy and his tutor still over their wine, and roamed about the garden a long time, listening sadly to the owls. It was a blessing to get upstairs, though of course he would not sleep.

But he did sleep, all through a night of many dreams, in the last of which he was lying on a mountain side, Anna looking down into his eyes, and bending her face to his. He woke just as her lips touched him. Still under the spell of that troubling dream, he became conscious of the sound of wheels and horses' hoofs on the gravel, and sprang out of bed. There was the waggonette moving from the door, old Godden driving, luggage piled up beside him, and the Stormers sitting opposite each other in the carriage. Going away like that—having never even said good-bye! For a moment he felt as people must when they have unwittingly killed someone—utterly stunned and miserable. Then he dashed into his clothes. He would not let her go thus! He would—he must—see her again! What had he done that she should go like this? He rushed downstairs. The hall was empty; nineteen minutes to eight! The train left at eight o'clock. Had he time to saddle Bolero? He rushed round to the stables; but the cob was out, being shod. He would—he must get there in time. It would show her anyway that he was not quite a cad. He walked till the drive curved, then began running hard. A quarter of a mile, and already he felt better, not so miserable and guilty; it was something to feel you had a tough job in hand, all your work cut out—something to have to think of economizing strength, picking out the best going, keeping out of the sun, saving your wind uphill, flying down any slope. It was cool still, and the dew had laid the dust; there was no traffic and scarcely anyone to look back and gape as he ran by. What he would do, if he got there in time—how explain this mad three-mile run—he did not think. He passed a farm that he knew was just half-way. He had left his watch. Indeed, he had put on only his trousers, shirt, and Norfolk jacket; no tie, no hat, not even socks under his tennis shoes, and he was as hot as fire, with his hair flying back—a strange young creature indeed for anyone to meet. But he had lost now all feeling, save the will to get there. A flock of sheep came out of a field into the lane. He pushed through them somehow, but they lost him several seconds. More than a mile still; and he was blown, and his legs beginning to give! Downhill indeed they went of their own accord, but there was the long run-in, quite level; and he could hear the train, now slowly puffing its way along the valley. Then, in spite of exhaustion, his spirit rose. He would not go in looking like a scarecrow, utterly done, and make a scene. He must pull himself together at the end, and stroll in—as if he had come for fun. But how—seeing that at any moment he felt he might fall flat in the dust, and stay there for ever! And, as he ran, he made little desperate efforts to mop his face, and brush his clothes. There were the gates, at last—two hundred yards away. The train, he could hear no longer. It must be standing in the station. And a sob came from his overdriven lungs. He heard the guard's whistle as he reached the gates. Instead of making for the booking-office, he ran along the paling, where an entrance to the goods'-shed was open, and dashing through he fell back against the honeysuckle. The engine was just abreast of him; he snatched at his sleeve and passed it over his face, to wipe the sweat away. Everything was blurred. He must see—surely he had not come in time just not to see! He pushed his hands over his forehead and hair, and spied up dizzily at the slowly passing train. She was there, at a window! Standing, looking out! He dared not step forward, for fear of falling, but he put out his hand—She saw him. Yes, she saw him! Wasn't she going to make a sign? Not one? And suddenly he saw her tear at her dress, pluck something out, and throw it. It fell close to his feet. He did not pick it up—he wanted to see her face till she was gone. It looked wonderful—very proud, and pale. She put her hand up to her lips. Then everything went blurred again and when he could see once more, the train had vanished. But at his feet was what she had thrown. He picked it up! All dry and dark, it was the flower she had given him in the Tyrol, and stolen back from his buttonhole.

Creeping out, past the goods'-shed, he made his way to a field, and lay down with his face pressed to that withered thing which still had its scent. . . .

The asphyxiated speculation in his guardian's eyes had not been without significance. Mark did not go back to Oxford. He went instead to Rome—to live in his sister's house, and attend a school of sculpture. That was the beginning of a time when nothing counted except his work.

To Anna he wrote twice, but received no answer. From his tutor he had one little note:

"MY DEAR LENNAN,

"So! You abandon us for Art? Ah! well—it was your moon, if I remember—one of them. A worthy moon—a little dusty in these days—a little in her decline—but to you no doubt a virgin goddess, whose hem, etc.

"We shall retain the friendliest memories of you in spite of your defection.

"Once your tutor and still your friend,
"HAROLD STORMER."

After that vacation it was long—very long before he saw Sylvia again.

PART II

SUMMER

I

Gleam of a thousand lights; clack and mutter of innumerable voices, laughter, footsteps; hiss and rumble of passing trains taking gamblers back to Nice or Mentone; fevered wailing from the violins of four fiddlers with dark-white skins outside the cafe; and above, around, beyond, the dark sky, and the dark mountains, and the dark sea, like some great dark flower to whose heart is clinging a jewelled beetle. So was Monte Carlo on that May night of 1887.

But Mark Lennan, at one of the little marble-topped tables, was in too great maze and exaltation of spirit and of senses to be conscious of its glare and babel, even of its beauty. He sat so very still that his neighbours, with the instinctive aversion of the human creature to what is too remote from its own mood, after one good stare, turned their eyes away, as from something ludicrous, almost offensive.

He was lost, indeed, in memory of the minutes just gone by. For it had come at last, after all these weeks of ferment, after all this strange time of perturbation.

Very stealthily it had been creeping on him, ever since that chance introduction nearly a year ago, soon after he settled down in London, following those six years of Rome and Paris. First the merest friendliness, because she was so nice about his work; then respectful admiration, because she was so beautiful; then pity, because she was so unhappy in her marriage. If she had been happy, he would have fled. The knowledge that she had been unhappy long before he knew her had kept his conscience still. And at last one afternoon she said: "Ah! if you come out there too!" Marvelously subtle, the way that one little outslipped saying had worked in him, as though it had a life of its own—like a strange bird that had flown into the garden of his heart, and established itself with its new song and flutterings, its new flight, its wistful and ever clearer call. That and one moment, a few days later in her London drawing-room, when he had told her that he WAS coming, and she did not, could not, he felt, look at him. Queer, that nothing momentous said, done—or even left undone—had altered all the future!

And so she had gone with her uncle and aunt, under whose wing one might be sure she would meet with no wayward or exotic happenings. And he had received from her this little letter:

"HOTEL COEUR D'OR, "MONTE CARLO. "MY DEAR MARK,

"We've arrived. It is so good to be in the sun. The flowers are wonderful. I am keeping Gorbio and Roquebrune till you come.

"Your friend,
"OLIVE CRAMIER."

That letter was the single clear memory he had of the time between her going and his following. He received it one afternoon, sitting on an old low garden wall with the spring sun shining on him through apple-trees in blossom, and a feeling as if all the desire of the world lay before him, and he had but to stretch out his arms to take it.

Then confused unrest, all things vague; till at the end of his journey he stepped out of the train at Beaulieu with a furiously beating heart. But why? Surely he had not expected her to come out from

Monte Carlo to meet him!

A week had gone by since then in one long effort to be with her and appear to others as though he did not greatly wish to be; two concerts, two walks with her alone, when all that he had said seemed as nothing said, and all her sayings but ghosts of what he wished to hear; a week of confusion, day and night, until, a few minutes ago, her handkerchief had fallen from her glove on to the dusty road, and he had picked it up and put it to his lips. Nothing could take away the look she had given him then. Nothing could ever again separate her from him utterly. She had confessed in it to the same sweet, fearful trouble that he himself was feeling. She had not spoken, but he had seen her lips part, her breast rise and fall. And HE had not spoken. What was the use of words?

He felt in the pocket of his coat. There, against his fingers, was that wisp of lawn and lace, soft, yet somehow alive; and stealthily he took it out. The whole of her, with her fragrance, seemed pressed to his face in the touch of that lawn border, roughened by little white stars. More secretly than ever he put it back; and for the first time looked round. These people! They belonged to a world that he had left. They gave him the same feeling that her uncle and aunt had given him just now, when they said good-night, following her into their hotel. That good Colonel, that good Mrs. Ercott! The very concretion of the world he had been brought up in, of the English point of view; symbolic figures of health, reason, and the straight path, on which at that moment, seemingly, he had turned his back. The Colonel's profile, ruddy through its tan, with grey moustache guiltless of any wax, his cheery, high-pitched: "Good-night, young Lennan!" His wife's curly smile, her flat, cosy, confidential voice—how strange and remote they had suddenly become! And all these people here, chattering, drinking—how queer and far away! Or was it just that he was queer and remote to them?

And getting up from his table, he passed the fiddlers with the dark-white skins, out into the Place.

II

He went up the side streets to the back of her hotel, and stood by the railings of the garden—one of those hotel gardens which exist but to figure in advertisements, with its few arid palms, its paths staring white between them, and a fringe of dusty lilacs and mimosas.

And there came to him the oddest feeling—that he had been there before, peering through blossoms at those staring paths and shuttered windows. A scent of wood-smoke was abroad, and some dry plant rustled ever so faintly in what little wind was stirring. What was there of memory in this night, this garden? Some dark sweet thing, invisible, to feel whose presence was at once ecstasy, and the irritation of a thirst that will not be quenched.

And he walked on. Houses, houses! At last he was away from them, alone on the high road, beyond the limits of Monaco. And walking thus through the night he had thoughts that he imagined no one had ever had before him. The knowledge that she loved him had made everything seem very sacred and responsible. Whatever he did, he must not harm her. Women were so helpless!

For in spite of six years of art in Rome and Paris, he still had a fastidious reverence for women. If she had loved her husband she would have been safe enough from him; but to be bound to a companionship that she gave unwillingly—this had seemed to him atrocious, even before he loved her. How could any husband ask that? Have so little pride—so little pity? The unpardonable thing! What was there to respect in such a marriage? Only, he must not do her harm! But now that her eyes had said, I love you!—What then? It was simply miraculous to know THAT, under the stars of this warm Southern night, burning its incense of trees and flowers!

Climbing up above the road, he lay down. If only she were there beside him! The fragrance of the earth not yet chilled, crept to his face; and for just a moment it seemed to him that she did come. If he could keep her there for ever in that embrace that was no embrace—in that ghostly rapture, on this wild fragrant bed that no lovers before had ever pressed, save the creeping things, and the flowers; save sunlight and moonlight with their shadows; and the wind kissing the earth! . . .

Then she was gone; his hands touched nothing but the crumbled pine dust, and the flowers of the wild thyme fallen into sleep.

He stood on the edge of the little cliff, above the road between the dark mountains and the sea black with depth. Too late for any passer-by; as far from what men thought and said and did as the very night itself with its whispering warmth. And he conjured up her face, making certain of it—the eyes, clear and brown, and wide apart; the close, sweet mouth; the dark hair; the whole flying loveliness.

Then he leaped down into the road, and ran—one could not walk, feeling this miracle, that no one had ever felt before, the miracle of love.

III

In their most reputable hotel 'Le Coeur d'Or,' long since remodelled and renamed, Mrs. Ercott lay in her brass-bound bed looking by starlight at the Colonel in his brass-bound bed. Her ears were carefully freed from the pressure of her pillow, for she thought she heard a mosquito. Companion for thirty years to one whose life had been feverishly punctuated by the attentions of those little beasts, she had no love for them. It was the one subject on which perhaps her imagination was stronger than her common sense. For in fact there was not, and could not be, a mosquito, since the first thing the Colonel did, on arriving at any place farther South than Parallel 46 of latitude, was to open the windows very wide, and nail with many tiny tacks a piece of mosquito netting across that refreshing space, while she held him firmly by the coat-tails. The fact that other people did not so secure their windows did not at all trouble the Colonel, a true Englishman, who loved to act in his own way, and to think in the ways of other people. After that they would wait till night came, then burn a peculiar little lamp with a peculiar little smell, and, in the full glare of the gaslight, stand about on chairs, with slippers, and their eyes fixed on true or imaginary beasts. Then would fall little slaps, making little messes, and little joyous or doleful cries would arise: "I've got that one!" "Oh, John, I missed him!" And in the middle of the room, the Colonel, in pyjamas, and spectacles (only worn in very solemn moments, low down on his nose), would revolve slowly, turning his eyes, with that look in them of out-facing death which he had so long acquired, on every inch of wall and ceiling, till at last he would say: "Well, Dolly, that's the lot!" At which she would say: "Give me a kiss, dear!" and he would kiss her, and get into his bed.

There was, then, no mosquito, save that general ghost of him which lingered in the mind of one devoted to her husband. Spying out his profile, for he was lying on his back, she refrained from saying: "John, are you awake?" A whiffling sound was coming from a nose, to which—originally straight—attention to military duties had given a slight crook, half an inch below the level of grizzled eyebrows raised a little, as though surprised at the sounds beneath. She could hardly see him, but she thought: "How good he looks!" And, in fact, he did. It was the face of a man incapable of evil, having in its sleep the candour of one at heart a child—that simple candour of those who have never known how to seek adventures of the mind, and have always sought adventures of the body. Then somehow she did say:

"John! Are you asleep?"

The Colonel, instantly alive, as at some old-time attack, answered:

"Yes."

"That poor young man!"

"Which?"

"Mark Lennan. Haven't you seen?"

"What?"

"My dear, it was under your nose. But you never do see these things!"

The Colonel slowly turned his head. His wife was an imaginative woman! She had always been so. Dimly he perceived that something romantic was about to come from her. But with that almost professional gentleness of a man who has cut the heads and arms off people in his time, he answered:

"What things?"

"He picked up her handkerchief."

"Whose?"

"Olive's. He put it in his pocket. I distinctly saw him."

There was silence; then Mrs. Ercott's voice rose again, impersonal, far away.

"What always astonishes me about young people is the way they think they're not seen—poor dears!"

Still there was silence.

"John! Are you thinking?"

For a considerable sound of breathing, not mere whiffling now, was coming from the Colonel—to his wife a sure sign.

And indeed he WAS thinking. Dolly was an imaginative woman, but something told him that in this

case she might not be riding past the hounds.

Mrs. Ercott raised herself. He looked more good than ever; a little perplexed frown had climbed up with his eyebrows and got caught in the wrinkles across his forehead.

"I'm very fond of Olive," he said.

Mrs. Ercott fell back on her pillows. In her heart there was just that little soreness natural to a woman over fifty, whose husband has a niece.

"No doubt," she murmured.

Something vague moved deep down in the Colonel; he stretched out his hand. In that strip of gloom between the beds it encountered another hand, which squeezed it rather hard.

He said: "Look here, old girl!" and there was silence.

Mrs. Ercott in her turn was thinking. Her thoughts were flat and rapid like her voice, but had that sort of sentiment which accompanies the mental exercise of women with good hearts. Poor young man! And poor Olive! But was a woman ever to be pitied, when she was so pretty as that! Besides, when all was said and done, she had a fine-looking man for husband; in Parliament, with a career, and fond of her—decidedly. And their little house in London, so close to Westminster, was a distinct dear; and nothing could be more charming than their cottage by the river. Was Olive, then, to be pitied? And yet—she was not happy. It was no good pretending that she was happy. All very well to say that such things were within one's control, but if you read novels at all, you knew they weren't. There was such a thing as incompatibility. Oh yes! And there was the matter of difference in their ages! Olive was twenty-six, Robert Cramier forty-two. And now this young Mark Lennan was in love with her. What if she were in love with him! John would realize then, perhaps, that the young flew to the young. For men—even the best, like John, were funny! She would never dream of feeling for any of her nephews as John clearly felt for Olive.

The Colonel's voice broke in on her thoughts.

"Nice young fellow—Lennan! Great pity! Better sheer off—if he's getting—"

And, rather suddenly, she answered:

"Suppose he can't!"

"Can't?"

"Did you never hear of a 'grande passion'?"

The Colonel rose on his elbow. This was another of those occasions that showed him how, during the later years of his service in Madras and Upper Burmah, when Dolly's health had not been equal to the heat, she had picked up in London a queer way of looking at things—as if they were not—not so right or wrong as—as he felt them to be. And he repeated those two French words in his own way, adding:

"Isn't that just what I'm saying? The sooner he stands clear, the better."

But Mrs. Ercott, too, sat up.

"Be human," she said.

The Colonel experienced the same sensation as when one suddenly knows that one is not digesting food. Because young Lennan was in danger of getting into a dishonourable fix, he was told to be human! Really, Dolly was—! The white blur of her new boudoir cap suddenly impinged on his consciousness. Surely she was not getting—un-English! At her time of life!

"I'm thinking of Olive," he said; "I don't want her worried with that sort of thing."

"Perhaps Olive can manage for herself. In these days it doesn't do to interfere with love."

"Love!" muttered the Colonel. "What? Phew!"

If one's own wife called this—this sort of—thing, love—then, why had he been faithful to her—in very hot climates—all these years? A sense of waste, and of injustice, tried to rear its head against all the side of him that attached certain meanings to certain words, and acted up to them. And this revolt gave him a feeling, strange and so unpleasant. Love! It was not a word to use thus loosely! Love led to marriage; this could not lead to marriage, except through—the Divorce Court. And suddenly the

Colonel had a vision of his dead brother Lindsay, Olive's father, standing there in the dark, with his grave, clear-cut, ivory-pale face, under the black hair supposed to be derived from a French ancestress who had escaped from the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Upright fellow always, Lindsay—even before he was made bishop! Queer somehow that Olive should be his daughter. Not that she was not upright; not at all! But she was soft! Lindsay was not! Imagine him seeing that young fellow putting her handkerchief in his pocket. But had young Lennan really done such a thing? Dolly was imaginative! He had mistaken it probably for his own; if he had chanced to blow his nose, he would have realized. For, coupled with the almost child-like candour of his mind, the Colonel had real administrative vigour, a true sense of practical values; an ounce of illustration was always worth to him a pound of theory! Dolly was given to riding off on theories. Thank God! she never acted on 'em!

He said gently:

"My dear! Young Lennan may be an artist and all that, but he's a gentleman! I know old Heatherley, his guardian. Why I introduced him to Olive myself!"

"What has that to do with it? He's in love with her."

One of the countless legion that hold a creed taken at face value, into whose roots and reasons they have never dreamed of going, the Colonel was staggered. Like some native on an island surrounded by troubled seas, which he has stared at with a certain contemptuous awe all his life, but never entered, he was disconcerted by thus being asked to leave the shore. And by his own wife!

Indeed, Mrs. Ercott had not intended to go so far; but there was in her, as in all women whose minds are more active than their husbands', a something worrying her always to go a little farther than she meant. With real compunction she heard the Colonel say:

"I must get up and drink some water."

She was out of bed in a moment. "Not without boiling!"

She had seriously troubled him, then! Now he would not sleep—the blood went to his head so quickly. He would just lie awake, trying not to disturb her. She could not bear him not to disturb her. It seemed so selfish of her! She ought to have known that the whole subject was too dangerous to discuss at night.

She became conscious that he was standing just behind her; his figure in its thin covering looked very lean, his face strangely worn.

"I'm sorry you put that idea into my head!" he said. "I'm fond of Olive."

Again Mrs. Ercott felt that jealous twinge, soon lost this time in the motherliness of a childless woman for her husband. He must not be troubled! He should not be troubled. And she said:

"The water's boiling! Now sip a good glass slowly, and get into bed, or I'll take your temperature!"

Obediently the Colonel took from her the glass, and as he sipped, she put her hand up and stroked his head.

IV

In the room below them the subject of their discussion was lying very wide awake. She knew that she had betrayed herself, made plain to Mark Lennan what she had never until now admitted to herself. But the love-look, which for the life of her she could not keep back, had been followed by a feeling of having 'lost caste.' For, hitherto, the world of women had been strictly divided by her into those who did and those who did not do such things; and to be no longer quite sure to which half she belonged was frightening. But what was the good of thinking, of being frightened?—it could not lead to anything. Yesterday she had not known this would come; and now she could not guess at to-morrow! To-night was enough! To-night with its swimming loveliness! Just to feel! To love, and to be loved!

A new sensation for her—as different from those excited by the courtships of her girlhood, or by her marriage, as light from darkness. For she had never been in love, not even with her husband. She knew it now. The sun was shining in a world where she had thought there was none. Nothing could come of it. But the sun was shining; and in that sunshine she must warm herself a little.

Quite simply she began to plan what he and she would do. There were six days left. They had not yet

been to Gorbio, nor to Castellar—none of those long walks or rides they had designed to do for the beauty of them. Would he come early to-morrow? What could they do together? No one should know what these six days would be to her—not even he. To be with him, watch his face, hear his voice, and now and then just touch him! She could trust herself to show no one. And then, it would be—over! Though, of course, she would see him again in London.

And, lying there in the dark, she thought of their first meeting, one Sunday morning, in Hyde Park. The Colonel religiously observed Church Parade, and would even come all the way down to Westminster, from his flat near Knightsbridge, in order to fetch his niece up to it. She remembered how, during their stroll, he had stopped suddenly in front of an old gentleman with a puffy yellow face and eyes half open.

"Ah! Mr. Heatherley—you up from Devonshire? How's your nephew—the—er—sculptor?"

And the old gentleman, glaring a little, as it seemed to her, from under his eyelids and his grey top hat, had answered: "Colonel Ercott, I think? Here's the fellow himself—Mark!" And a young man had taken off his hat. She had only noticed at first that his dark hair grew—not long—but very thick; and that his eyes were very deep-set. Then she saw him smile; it made his face all eager, yet left it shy; and she decided that he was nice. Soon after, she had gone with the Ercotts to see his 'things'; for it was, of course, and especially in those days, quite an event to know a sculptor—rather like having a zebra in your park. The Colonel had been delighted and a little relieved to find that the 'things' were nearly all of beasts and birds. "Very interestin'" to one full of curious lore about such, having in his time killed many of them, and finding himself at the end of it with a curious aversion to killing any more—which he never put into words.

Acquaintanceship had ripened fast after that first visit to his studio, and now it was her turn to be relieved that Mark Lennan devoted himself almost entirely to beasts and birds instead of to the human form, so-called divine. Ah! yes—she would have suffered; now that she loved him, she saw that. At all events she could watch his work and help it with sympathy. That could not be wrong. . . .

She fell asleep at last, and dreamed that she was in a boat alone on the river near her country cottage, drifting along among spiky flowers like asphodels, with birds singing and flying round her. She could move neither face nor limbs, but that helpless feeling was not unpleasant, till she became conscious that she was drawing nearer and nearer to what was neither water nor land, light nor darkness, but simply some unutterable feeling. And then she saw, gazing at her out of the rushes on the banks, a great bull head. It moved as she moved—it was on both sides of her, yet all the time only one head. She tried to raise her hands and cover her eyes, but could not—and woke with a sob. . . . It was light.

Nearly six o'clock already! Her dream made her disinclined to trust again to sleep. Sleep was a robber now—of each minute of these few days! She got up, and looked out. The morning was fine, the air warm already, sweet with dew, and heliotrope nailed to the wall outside her window. She had but to open her shutters and walk into the sun. She dressed, took her sunshade, stealthily slipped the shutters back, and stole forth. Shunning the hotel garden, where the eccentricity of her early wandering might betray the condition of her spirit, she passed through into the road toward the Casino. Without perhaps knowing it, she was making for where she had sat with him yesterday afternoon, listening to the band. Hatless, but defended by her sunshade, she excited the admiration of the few connoisseurs as yet abroad, strolling in blue blouses to their labours; and this simple admiration gave her pleasure. For once she was really conscious of the grace in her own limbs, actually felt the gentle vividness of her own face, with its nearly black hair and eyes, and creamy skin—strange sensation, and very comforting!

In the Casino gardens she walked more slowly, savouring the aromatic trees, and stopping to bend and look at almost every flower; then, on the seat, where she had sat with him yesterday, she rested. A few paces away were the steps that led to the railway-station, trodden upwards eagerly by so many, day after day, night after night, and lightly or sorrowfully descended. Above her, two pines, a pepper-tree, and a palm mingled their shade—so fantastic the jumbling of trees and souls in this strange place! She furled her sunshade and leaned back. Her gaze, free and friendly, passed from bough to bough. Against the bright sky, unbesieged as yet by heat or dust, they had a spiritual look, lying sharp and flat along the air. She plucked a cluster of pinkish berries from the pepper-tree, crushing and rubbing them between her hands to get their fragrance. All these beautiful and sweet things seemed to be a part of her joy at being loved, part of this sudden summer in her heart. The sky, the flowers, that jewel of green-blue sea, the bright acacias, were nothing in the world but love.

And those few who passed, and saw her sitting there under the pepper-tree, wondered no doubt at the stillness of this dame bien mise, who had risen so early.

In the small hours, which so many wish were smaller, the Colonel had awakened, with the affair of the handkerchief swelling visibly. His niece's husband was not a man that he had much liking for—a taciturn fellow, with possibly a bit of the brute in him, a man who rather rode people down; but, since Dolly and he were in charge of Olive, the notion that young Lennan was falling in love with her under their very noses was alarming to one naturally punctilious. It was not until he fell asleep again, and woke in full morning light, that the remedy occurred to him. She must be taken out of herself! Dolly and he had been slack; too interested in this queer place, this queer lot of people! They had neglected her, left her to. . . Boys and girls!—One ought always to remember. But it was not too late. She was old Lindsay's daughter; would not forget herself. Poor old Lindsay—fine fellow; bit too much, perhaps, of the—Huguenot in him! Queer, those throw-backs! Had noticed in horses, time and again—white hairs about the tail, carriage of the head—skip generations and then pop out. And Olive had something of his look—the same ivory skin, same colour of eyes and hair! Only she was not severe, like her father, not exactly! And once more there shot through the Colonel a vague dread, as of a trusteeship neglected. It disappeared, however, in his bath.

He was out before eight o'clock, a thin upright figure in hard straw hat and grey flannel clothes, walking with the indescribable loose poise of the soldier Englishman, with that air, different from the French, German, what not, because of shoulders ever asserting, through their drill, the right to put on mufti; with that perfectly quiet and modest air of knowing that, whatever might be said, there was only one way of wearing clothes and moving legs. And, as he walked, he smoothed his drooping grey moustache, considering how best to take his niece out of herself. He passed along by the Terrace, and stood for a moment looking down at the sea beyond the pigeon-shooting ground. Then he moved on round under the Casino into the gardens at the back. A beautiful spot! Wonderful care they had taken with the plants! It made him think a little of Tushawore, where his old friend the Rajah—precious old rascal!—had gardens to his palace rather like these. He paced again to the front. It was nice and quiet in the early mornings, with the sea down there, and nobody trying to get the better of anybody else. There were fellows never happy unless they were doing someone in the eye. He had known men who would ride at the devil himself, make it a point of honour to swindle a friend out of a few pounds! Odd place this 'Monte'—sort of a Garden of Eden gone wrong. And all the real, but quite inarticulate love of Nature, which had supported the Colonel through deserts and jungles, on transports at sea, and in mountain camps, awoke in the sweetness of these gardens. His dear mother! He had never forgotten the words with which she had shown him the sunset through the coppice down at old Withes Norton, when he was nine years old: "That is beauty, Jack! Do you feel it, darling?" He had not felt it at the time—not he; a thick-headed, scampering youngster. Even when he first went to India he had had no eye for a sunset. The rising generation were different. That young couple, for instance, under the pepper-tree, sitting there without a word, just looking at the trees. How long, he wondered, had they been sitting like that? And suddenly something in the Colonel leaped; his steel-coloured eyes took on their look of out-facing death. Choking down a cough, he faced about, back to where he had stood above the pigeon-shooting ground. . . . Olive and that young fellow! An assignation! At this time in the morning! The earth reeled. His brother's child—his favourite niece! The woman whom he most admired—the woman for whom his heart was softest. Leaning over the stone parapet, no longer seeing either the smooth green of the pigeon-shooting ground, or the smooth blue of the sea beyond, he was moved, distressed, bewildered beyond words. Before breakfast! That was the devil of it! Confession, as it were, of everything. Moreover, he had seen their hands touching on the seat. The blood rushed up to his face; he had seen, spied out, what was not intended for his eyes. Nice position—that! Dolly, too, last night, had seen. But that was different. Women might see things—it was expected of them. But for a man—a—a gentleman! The fullness of his embarrassment gradually disclosed itself. His hands were tied. Could he even consult Dolly? He had a feeling of isolation, of utter solitude. Nobody—not anybody in the world—could understand his secret and intense discomfort. To take up a position—the position he was bound to take up, as Olive's nearest relative and protector, and—what was it—chaperon, by the aid of knowledge come at in such a way, however unintentionally! Never in all his days in the regiment—and many delicate matters affecting honour had come his way—had he had a thing like this to deal with. Poor child! But he had no business to think of her like that. No, indeed! She had not behaved—as—And there he paused, curiously unable to condemn her. Suppose they got up and came that way!

He took his hands off the stone parapet, and made for his hotel. His palms were white from the force of his grip. He said to himself as he went along: "I must consider the whole question calmly; I must think it out." This gave him relief. With young Lennan, at all events, he could be angry. But even there he found, to his dismay, no finality of judgment. And this absence of finality, so unwonted, distressed him horribly. There was something in the way the young man had been sitting there beside her—so quiet, so almost timid—that had touched him. This was bad, by Jove—very bad! The two of them, they made, somehow, a nice couple! Confound it! This would not do! The chaplain of the little English church, passing at this moment, called out, "Fine morning, Colonel Ercott." The Colonel saluted, and

did not answer. The greeting at the moment seemed to him paltry. No morning could be fine that contained such a discovery. He entered the hotel, passed into the dining-room, and sat down. Nobody was there. They all had their breakfast upstairs, even Dolly. Olive alone was in the habit of supporting him while he ate an English breakfast. And suddenly he perceived that he was face to face already with this dreadful situation. To have breakfast without, as usual, waiting for her, seemed too pointed. She might be coming in at any minute now. To wait for her, and have it, without showing anything—how could he do that?

He was conscious of a faint rustling behind him. There she was, and nothing decided. In this moment of hopeless confusion the Colonel acted by pure instinct, rose, patted her cheek, and placed a chair.

"Well, my dear," he said; "hungry?"

She was looking very dainty, very soft. That creamy dress showed off her dark hair and eyes, which seemed somehow to be—flying off somewhere; yes—it was queer, but that was the only way to put it. He got no reassurance, no comfort, from the sight of her. And slowly he stripped the skin from the banana with which he always commenced breakfast. One might just as well be asked to shoot a tame dove or tear a pretty flower to pieces as he expected to take her to task, even if he could, in honour. And he sought refuge in the words:

"Been out?" Then could have bitten his tongue off. Suppose she answered: "No."

But she did not so answer. The colour came into her cheeks, indeed, but she nodded: "It's so lovely!"

How pretty she looked saying that! He had put himself out of court now—could never tell her what he had seen, after setting, as it were, that trap for her; and presently he asked:

"Got any plans to-day?"

She answered, without flinching in the least:

"Mark Lennan and I were going to take mules from Mentone up to Gorbio."

He was amazed at her steadiness—never, to his knowledge, having encountered a woman armoured at every point to preserve a love that flies against the world. How tell what was under her smile! And in confusion of feeling that amounted almost to pain he heard her say:

"Will you and Aunt Dolly come?"

Between sense of trusteeship and hatred of spoiling sport; between knowledge of the danger she was in and half-pitying admiration at the sight of her; between real disapproval of an illicit and underhand business (what else was it, after all?) and some dim perception that here was something he did not begin to be able to fathom—something that perhaps no one but those two themselves could deal with—between these various extremes he was lost indeed. And he stammered out:

"I must ask your aunt; she's—she's not very good on a mule."

Then, in an impulse of sheer affection, he said with startling suddenness: "My dear, I've often meant to ask, are you happy at home?"

"At home?"

There was something sinister about the way she repeated that, as if the word "home" were strange to her.

She drank her coffee and got up; and the Colonel felt afraid of her, standing there—afraid of what she was going to tell him. He grew very red. But, worse than all, she said absolutely nothing; only shrugged her shoulders with a little smile that went to his heart.

VI

On the wild thyme, under the olives below the rock village of Gorbio, with their mules cropping at a little distance, those two sat after their lunch, listening to the cuckoos. Since their uncanny chance meeting that morning in the gardens, when they sat with their hands just touching, amazed and elated by their own good fortune, there was not much need to say what they felt, to break with words this rapture of belonging to each other—so shyly, so wildly, so, as it were, without reality. They were like epicures with old wine in their glasses, not yet tired of its fragrance and the spell of anticipation.

And so their talk was not of love, but, in that pathetic way of star-crossed lovers, of the things they

loved; leaving out—each other.

It was the telling of her dream that brought the words from him at last; but she drew away, and answered:

"It can't—it mustn't be!"

Then he just clung to her hand; and presently, seeing that her eyes were wet, took courage enough to kiss her cheek.

Trembling and fugitive indeed that first passage of their love. Not much of the conquering male in him, nor in her of the ordinary enchantress.

And then they went, outwardly sober enough, riding their mules down the stony slopes back to Mentone.

But in the grey, dusty railway-carriage when she had left him, he was like a man drugged, staring at where she had sat opposite.

Two hours later, at dinner in her hotel, between her and Mrs. Ercott, with the Colonel opposite, he knew for the first time what he was faced with. To watch every thought that passed within him, lest it should by the slightest sign betray him; to regulate and veil every look and every word he spoke to her; never for a second to forget that these other persons were actual and dangerous, not merely the insignificant and grotesque shadows that they seemed. It would be perhaps for ever a part of his love for her to seem not to love her. He did not dare dream of fulfilment. He was to be her friend, and try to bring her happiness—burn and long for her, and not think about reward. This was his first real overwhelming passion—so different to the loves of spring—and he brought to it all that naivete, that touching quality of young Englishmen, whose secret instinct it is to back away from the full nature of love, even from admitting that it has that nature. They two were to love, and—not to love! For the first time he understood a little of what that meant. A few stolen adoring minutes now and then, and, for the rest, the presence of a world that must be deceived. Already he had almost a hatred of that orderly, brown-faced Colonel, with his eyes that looked so steady and saw nothing; of that flat, kindly lady, who talked so pleasantly throughout dinner, saying things that he had to answer without knowing what they signified. He realized, with a sense of shock, that he was deprived of all interests in life but one; not even his work had any meaning apart from HER. It lit no fire within him to hear Mrs. Ercott praise certain execrable pictures in the Royal Academy, which she had religiously visited the day before leaving home. And as the interminable meal wore on, he began even to feel grief and wonder that Olive could be so smiling, so gay, and calm; so, as it seemed to him, indifferent to this intolerable impossibility of exchanging even one look of love. Did she really love him—could she love him, and show not one little sign of it? And suddenly he felt her foot touch his own. It was the faintest sidelong, supplicating pressure, withdrawn at once, but it said: 'I know what you are suffering; I, too, but I love you.' Characteristically, he felt that it cost her dear to make use of that little primitive device of common loves; the touch awoke within him only chivalry. He would burn for ever sooner than cause her the pain of thinking that he was not happy.

After dinner, they sat out on a balcony. The stars glowed above the palms; a frog was croaking. He managed to draw his chair so that he could look at her unseen. How deep, and softly dark her eyes, when for a second they rested on his! A moth settled on her knee—a cunning little creature, with its hooded, horned owl's face, and tiny black slits of eyes! Would it have come so confidingly to anyone but her? The Colonel knew its name—he had collected it. Very common, he said. The interest in it passed; but Lennan stayed, bent forward, gazing at that silk-covered knee.

The voice of Mrs. Ercott, sharper than its wont, said: "What day does Robert say he wants you back, my dear?"

He managed to remain gazing at the moth, even to take it gently from her knee, while he listened to her calm answer.

"Tuesday, I believe."

Then he got up, and let the moth fly into the darkness; his hands and lips were trembling, and he was afraid of their being seen. He had never known, had not dreamed, of such a violent, sick feeling. That this man could thus hale her home at will! It was grotesque, fantastic, awful, but—it was true! Next Tuesday she would journey back away from him to be again at the mercy of her Fate! The pain of this thought made him grip the railing, and grit his teeth, to keep himself from crying out. And another thought came to him: I shall have to go about with this feeling, day and night, and keep it secret.

They were saying good-night; and he had to smirk and smile, and pretend—to her above all—that he

was happy, and he could see that she knew it was pretence.

Then he was alone, with the feeling that he had failed her at the first shot; torn, too, between horror of what he suddenly saw before him, and longing to be back in her presence at any cost. . . . And all this on the day of that first kiss which had seemed to him to make her so utterly his own.

He sat down on a bench facing the Casino. Neither the lights, nor the people passing in and out, not even the gipsy bandsmen's music, distracted his thoughts for a second. Could it be less than twenty-four hours since he had picked up her handkerchief, not thirty yards away? In that twenty-four hours he seemed to have known every emotion that man could feel. And in all the world there was now not one soul to whom he could speak his real thoughts—not even to her, because from her, beyond all, he must keep at any cost all knowledge of his unhappiness. So this was illicit love—as it was called! Loneliness, and torture! Not jealousy—for her heart was his; but amazement, outrage, fear. Endless lonely suffering! And nobody, if they knew, would care, or pity him one jot!

Was there really, then, as the ancients thought, a Daemon that liked to play with men, as men liked to stir an earwig and turn it over and put a foot on it in the end?

He got up and made his way towards the railway-station. There was the bench where she had been sitting when he came on her that very morning. The stars in their courses had seemed to fight for them then; but whether for joy he no longer knew. And there on the seat were still the pepper berries she had crushed and strewn. He broke off another bunch and bruised them. That scent was the ghost of sacred minutes when her hand lay against his own. The stars in their courses—for joy or sorrow!

VII

There was no peace now for Colonel and Mrs. Ercott. They felt themselves conspirators, and of conspiracy they had never had the habit. Yet how could they openly deal with anxieties which had arisen solely from what they had chanced secretly to see? What was not intended for one's eyes and ears did not exist; no canon of conduct could be quite so sacred. As well defend the opening of another person's letters as admit the possibility of making use of adventitious knowledge. So far tradition, and indeed character, made them feel at one, and conspire freely. But they diverged on a deeper plane. Mrs. Ercott had SAID, indeed, that here was something which could not be controlled; the Colonel had FELT it—a very different thing! Less tolerant in theory, he was touched at heart; Mrs. Ercott, in theory almost approving—she read that dangerous authoress, George Eliot—at heart felt cold towards her husband's niece. For these reasons they could not in fact conspire without, in the end, saying suddenly: "Well, it's no good talking about it!" and almost at once beginning to talk about it again.

In proposing to her that mule, the Colonel had not had time, or, rather, not quite conviction enough as to his line of action, to explain so immediately the new need for her to sit upon it. It was only when, to his somewhat strange relief, she had refused the expedition, and Olive had started without them, that he told her of the meeting in the Gardens, of which he had been witness. She then said at once that if she had known she would, of course, have put up with anything in order to go; not because she approved of interfering, but because they must think of Robert! And the Colonel had said: "D—n the fellow!" And there the matter had rested for the moment, for both of them were, wondering a little which fellow it was that he had damned. That indeed was the trouble. If the Colonel had not cared so much about his niece, and had liked, instead of rather disliking Cramier; if Mrs. Ercott had not found Mark Lennan a 'nice boy,' and had not secretly felt her husband's niece rather dangerous to her peace of mind; if, in few words, those three had been puppets made of wood and worked by law, it would have been so much simpler for all concerned. It was the discovery that there was a personal equation in such matters, instead of just a simple rule of three, which disorganized the Colonel and made him almost angry; which depressed Mrs. Ercott and made her almost silent. . . . These two good souls had stumbled on a problem which has divided the world from birth. Shall cases be decided on their individual merits, or according to formal codes?

Beneath an appearance and a vocabulary more orthodox than ever, the Colonel's allegiance to Authority and the laws of Form was really shaken; he simply could not get out of his head the sight of those two young people sitting side by side, nor the tone of Olive's voice, when she had repeated his regrettable words about happiness at home.

If only the thing had not been so human! If only she had been someone else's niece, it would clearly have been her duty to remain unhappy. As it was, the more he thought, the less he knew what to think. A man who had never had any balance to speak of at his bank, and from the nomadic condition of his life had no exaggerated feeling for a settled social status—deeming Society in fact rather a bore—he did not unduly exaggerate the worldly dangers of this affair; neither did he honestly believe that she would burn in everlasting torment if she did not succeed in remaining true to 'that great black chap,' as

he secretly called Cramier. His feeling was simply that it was an awful pity; a sort of unhappy conviction that it was not like the women of his family to fall upon such ways; that his dead brother would turn in his grave; in two words that it was 'not done.' Yet he was by no means of those who, giving latitude to women in general, fall with whips on those of their own family who take it. On the contrary, believing that 'Woman in general' should be stainless to the world's eye, he was inclined to make allowance for any individual woman that he knew and loved. A suspicion he had always entertained, that Cramier was not by breeding 'quite the clean potato' may insensibly have influenced him just a little. He had heard indeed that he was not even entitled to the name of Cramier, but had been adopted by a childless man, who had brought him up and left him a lot of money. There was something in this that went against the grain of the childless Colonel. He had never adopted, nor been adopted by anyone himself. There was a certain lack about a man who had been adopted, of reasonable guarantee—he was like a non-vintage wine, or a horse without a pedigree; you could not quite rely on what he might do, having no tradition in his blood. His appearance, too, and manner somehow lent colour to this distrust. A touch of the tar-brush somewhere, and a stubborn, silent, pushing fellow. Why on earth had Olive ever married him! But then women were such kittle cattle, poor things! and old Lindsay, with his vestments and his views on obedience, must have been a Tartar as a father, poor old chap! Besides, Cramier, no doubt, was what most women would call good-looking; more taking to the eye than such a quiet fellow as young Lennan, whose features were rather anyhow, though pleasant enough, and with a nice smile—the sort of young man one could not help liking, and who certainly would never hurt a fly! And suddenly there came the thought: Why should he not go to young Lennan and put it to him straight? That he was in love with Olive? Not quite—but the way to do it would come to him. He brooded long over this idea, and spoke of it to Mrs. Ercott, while shaving, the next morning. Her answer: "My dear John, bosh!" removed his last doubt.

Without saying where he was going, he strolled out the moment after breakfast—and took a train to Beaulieu. At the young man's hotel he sent in his card, and was told that this Monsieur had already gone out for the day. His mood of marching straight up to the guns thus checked, he was left pensive and distraught. Not having seen Beaulieu (they spoke of it then as a coming place), he made his way up an incline. That whole hillside was covered with rose-trees. Thousands of these flowers were starring the lower air, and the strewn petals of blown and fallen roses covered the light soil. The Colonel put his nose to blossoms here and there, but they had little scent, as if they knew that the season was already over. A few blue-bloused peasants were still busy among them. And suddenly he came on young Lennan himself, sitting on a stone and dabbing away with his fingers at a lump of putty stuff. The Colonel hesitated. Apart from obvious reasons for discomfiture, he had that feeling towards Art common to so many of his caste. It was not work, of course, but it was very clever—a mystery to him how anyone could do it! On seeing him, Lennan had risen, dropping his handkerchief over what he was modelling—but not before the Colonel had received a dim impression of something familiar. The young man was very red—the Colonel, too, was conscious suddenly of the heat. He held out his hand.

"Nice quiet place this," he stammered; "never seen it before. I called at your hotel."

Now that he had his chance, he was completely at a loss. The sight of the face emerging from that lump of 'putty stuff' had quite unnerved him. The notion of this young man working at it up here all by himself, just because he was away an hour or two from the original, touched him. How on earth to say what he had come to say? It was altogether different from what he had thought. And it suddenly flashed through him—Dolly was right! She's always right—hang it!

"You're busy," he said; "I mustn't interrupt you."

"Not at all, sir. It was awfully good of you to look me up."

The Colonel stared. There was something about young Lennan that he had not noticed before; a 'Don't take liberties with me!' look that made things difficult. But still he lingered, staring wistfully at the young man, who stood waiting with such politeness. Then a safe question shot into his mind:

"Ah! And when do you go back to England? We're off on Tuesday."

While he spoke, a puff of wind lifted the handkerchief from the modelled face. Would the young fellow put it back? He did not. And the Colonel thought:

"It would have been bad form. He knew I wouldn't take advantage. Yes! He's a gentleman!"

Lifting his hand to the salute, he said: "Well, I must be getting back. See you at dinner perhaps?" And turning on his heel he marched away.

The remembrance of that face in the 'putty stuff' up there by the side of the road accompanied him

home. It was bad—it was serious! And the sense that he counted for nothing in all of it grew and grew in him. He told no one of where he had been. . . .

When the Colonel turned with ceremony and left him, Lennan sat down again on the flat stone, took up his 'putty stuff,' and presently effaced that image. He sat still a long time, to all appearance watching the little blue butterflies playing round the red and tawny roses. Then his fingers began to work, feverishly shaping a head; not of a man, not of a beast, but a sort of horned, heavy mingling of the two. There was something frenetic in the movement of those rather short, blunt-ended fingers, as though they were strangling the thing they were creating.

VIII

In those days, such as had served their country travelled, as befitted Spartans, in ordinary first-class carriages, and woke in the morning at La Roche or some strange-sounding place, for paler coffee and the pale brioche. So it was with Colonel and Mrs. Ercott and their niece, accompanied by books they did not read, viands they did not eat, and one somnolent Irishman returning from the East. In the disposition of legs there was the usual difficulty, no one quite liking to put them up, and all ultimately doing so, save Olive. More than once during that night the Colonel, lying on the seat opposite, awoke and saw her sitting, withdrawn into her corner, with eyes still open. Staring at that little head which he admired so much, upright and unmoving, in its dark straw toque against the cushion, he would become suddenly alert. Kicking the Irishman slightly in the effort, he would slip his legs down, bend across to her in the darkness, and, conscious of a faint fragrance as of violets, whisper huskily: "Anything I can do for you, my dear?" When she had smiled and shaken her head, he would retreat, and after holding his breath to see if Dolly were asleep, would restore his feet, slightly kicking the Irishman. After one such expedition, for full ten minutes he remained awake, wondering at her tireless immobility. For indeed she was spending this night entranced, with the feeling that Lennan was beside her, holding her hand in his. She seemed actually to feel the touch of his finger against the tiny patch of her bare palm where the glove opened. It was wonderful, this uncanny communion in the dark rushing night—she would not have slept for worlds! Never before had she felt so close to him, not even when he had kissed her that once under the olives; nor even when at the concert yesterday his arm pressed hers; and his voice whispered words she heard so thirstily. And that golden fortnight passed and passed through her on an endless band of reminiscence. Its memories were like flowers, such scent and warmth and colour in them; and of all, none perhaps quite so poignant as the memory of the moment, at the door of their carriage, when he said, so low that she just heard: "Good-bye, my darling!"

He had never before called her that. Not even his touch on her cheek under the olives equalled the simple treasure of that word. And above the roar and clatter of the train, and the snoring of the Irishman, it kept sounding in her ears, hour after dark hour. It was perhaps not wonderful, that through all that night she never once looked the future in the face—made no plans, took no stock of her position; just yielded to memory, and to the half-dreamed sensation of his presence close beside her. Whatever might come afterwards, she was his this night. Such was the trance that gave to her the strange, soft, tireless immobility which so moved her Uncle whenever he woke up.

In Paris they drove from station to station in a vehicle unfit for three—'to stretch their legs'—as the Colonel said. Since he saw in his niece no signs of flagging, no regret, his spirits were rising, and he confided to Mrs. Ercott in the buffet at the Gare du Nord, when Olive had gone to wash, that he did not think there was much in it, after all, looking at the way she'd travelled.

But Mrs. Ercott answered:

"Haven't you ever noticed that Olive never shows what she does not want to? She has not got those eyes for nothing."

"What eyes?"

"Eyes that see everything, and seem to see nothing."

Conscious that something was hurting her, the Colonel tried to take her hand.

But Mrs. Ercott rose quickly, and went where he could not follow.

Thus suddenly deserted, the Colonel brooded, drumming on the little table. What now! Dolly was unjust! Poor Dolly! He was as fond of her as ever! Of course! How could he help Olive's being young—and pretty; how could he help looking after her, and wanting to save her from this mess! Thus he sat wondering, dismayed by the unreasonableness of women. It did not enter his head that Mrs. Ercott had been almost as sleepless as his niece, watching through closed eyes every one of those little expeditions of his, and saying to herself: "Ah! He doesn't care how I travel!"

She returned serene enough, concealing her 'grief,' and soon they were once more whirling towards England.

But the future had begun to lay its hand on Olive; the spell of the past was already losing power; the sense that it had all been a dream grew stronger every minute. In a few hours she would re-enter the little house close under the shadow of that old Wren church, which reminded her somehow of childhood, and her austere father with his chiselled face. The meeting with her husband! How go through that! And to-night! But she did not care to contemplate to-night. And all those to-morrows wherein there was nothing she had to do of which it was reasonable to complain, yet nothing she could do without feeling that all the friendliness and zest and colour was out of life, and she a prisoner. Into those to-morrows she felt she would slip back, out of her dream; lost, with hardly perhaps an effort. To get away to the house on the river, where her husband came only at weekends, had hitherto been a refuge; only she would not see Mark there—unless—! Then, with the thought that she would, must still see him sometimes, all again grew faintly glamorous. If only she did see him, what would the rest matter? Never again as it had before!

The Colonel was reaching down her handbag; his cheery: "Looks as if it would be rough!" aroused her. Glad to be alone, and tired enough now, she sought the ladies' cabin, and slept through the crossing, till the voice of the old stewardess awakened her: "You've had a nice sleep. We're alongside, miss." Ah! if she were but THAT now! She had been dreaming that she was sitting in a flowery field, and Lennan had drawn her up by the hands, with the words: "We're here, my darling!"

On deck, the Colonel, laden with bags, was looking back for her, and trying to keep a space between him and his wife. He signalled with his chin. Threading her way towards him, she happened to look up. By the rails of the pier above she saw her husband. He was leaning there, looking intently down; his tall broad figure made the people on each side of him seem insignificant. The clean-shaved, square-cut face, with those almost epileptic, forceful eyes, had a stillness and intensity beside which the neighbouring faces seemed to disappear. She saw him very clearly, even noting the touch of silver in his dark hair, on each side under his straw hat; noting that he seemed too massive for his neat blue suit. His face relaxed; he made a little movement of one hand. Suddenly it shot through her: Suppose Mark had travelled with them, as he had wished to do? For ever and ever now, that dark massive creature, smiling down at her, was her enemy; from whom she must guard and keep herself if she could; keep, at all events, each one of her real thoughts and hopes! She could have writhed, and cried out; instead, she tightened her grip on the handle of her bag, and smiled. Though so skilled in knowledge of his moods, she felt, in his greeting, his fierce grip of her shoulders, the smouldering of some feeling the nature of which she could not quite fathom. His voice had a grim sincerity: "Glad you're back—thought you were never coming!" Resigned to his charge, a feeling of sheer physical faintness so beset her that she could hardly reach the compartment he had reserved. It seemed to her that, for all her foreboding, she had not till this moment had the smallest inkling of what was now before her; and at his muttered: "Must we have the old fossils in?" she looked back to assure herself that her Uncle and Aunt were following. To avoid having to talk, she feigned to have travelled badly, leaning back with closed eyes, in her corner. If only she could open them and see, not this square-jawed face with its intent gaze of possession, but that other with its eager eyes humbly adoring her. The interminable journey ended all too soon. She clung quite desperately to the Colonel's hand on the platform at Charing Cross. When his kind face vanished she would be lost indeed! Then, in the closed cab, she heard her husband's: "Aren't you going to kiss me?" and submitted to his embrace.

She tried so hard to think: What does it matter? It's not I, not my soul, my spirit—only my miserable lips!

She heard him say: "You don't seem too glad to see me!" And then: "I hear you had young Lennan out there. What was HE doing?"

She felt the turmoil of sudden fear, wondered whether she was showing it, lost it in unnatural alertness—all in the second before she answered: "Oh! just a holiday."

Some seconds passed, and then he said:

"You didn't mention him in your letters."

She answered coolly: "Didn't I? We saw a good deal of him."

She knew that he was looking at her—an inquisitive, half-menacing regard. Why—oh, why!—could she not then and there cry out: "And I love him—do you hear?—I love him!" So awful did it seem to be denying her love with these half lies! But it was all so much more grim and hopeless than even she had thought. How inconceivable, now, that she had ever given herself up to this man for life! If only she could get away from him to her room, and scheme and think! For his eyes never left her, travelling over

her with their pathetic greed, their menacing inquiry, till he said: "Well, it's not done you any harm. You look very fit." But his touch was too much even for her self-command, and she recoiled as if he had struck her.

"What's the matter? Did I hurt you?"

It seemed to her that he was jeering—then realized as vividly that he was not. And the full danger to her, perhaps to Mark himself, of shrinking from this man, striking her with all its pitiable force, she made a painful effort, slipped her hand under his arm, and said: "I'm very tired. You startled me."

But he put her hand away, and turning his face, stared out of the window. And so they reached their home.

When he had left her alone, she remained where she was standing, by her wardrobe, without sound or movement, thinking: What am I going to do? How am I going to live?

IX

When Mark Lennan, travelling through from Beaulieu, reached his rooms in Chelsea, he went at once to the little pile of his letters, twice hunted through them, then stood very still, with a stunned, sick feeling. Why had she not sent him that promised note? And now he realized—though not yet to the full—what it meant to be in love with a married woman. He must wait in this suspense for eighteen hours at least, till he could call, and find out what had happened to prevent her, till he could hear from her lips that she still loved him. The chilliest of legal lovers had access to his love, but he must possess a soul that was on fire, in this deadly patience, for fear of doing something that might jeopardize her. Telegraph? He dared not. Write? She would get it by the first post; but what could he say that was not dangerous, if Cramier chanced to see? Call? Still more impossible till three o'clock, at very earliest, tomorrow. His gaze wandered round the studio. Were these household gods, and all these works of his, indeed the same he had left twenty days ago? They seemed to exist now only in so far as she might come to see them—come and sit in such a chair, and drink out of such a cup, and let him put this cushion for her back, and that footstool for her feet. And so vividly could he see her lying back in that chair looking across at him, that he could hardly believe she had never yet sat there. It was odd how—without any resolution taken, without admission that their love could not remain platonic, without any change in their relations, save one humble kiss and a few whispered words—everything was changed. A month or so ago, if he had wanted, he would have gone at once calmly to her house. It would have seemed harmless, and quite natural. Now it was impossible to do openly the least thing that strict convention did not find desirable. Sooner or later they would find him stepping over convention, and take him for what he was not—a real lover! A real lover! He knelt down before the empty chair and stretched out his arms. No substance—no warmth—no fragrance—nothing! Longing that passed through air, as the wind through grass.

He went to the little round window, which overlooked the river. The last evening of May; gloaming above the water, dusk resting in the trees, and the air warm! Better to be out, and moving in the night, out in the ebb and flow of things, among others whose hearts were beating, than stay in this place that without her was so cold and meaningless.

Lamps—the passion-fruit of towns—were turning from pallor to full orange, and the stars were coming out. Half-past nine! At ten o'clock, and not before, he would walk past her house. To have this something to look forward to, however furtive and barren, helped. But on a Saturday night there would be no sitting at the House. Cramier would be at home; or they would both be out; or perhaps have gone down to their river cottage. Cramier! What cruel demon had presided over that marring of her life! Why had he never met her till after she had bound herself to this man! From a negative contempt for one who was either not sensitive enough to recognize that his marriage was a failure, or not chivalrous enough to make that failure bear as little hardly as possible on his wife, he had come already to jealous hatred as of a monster. To be face to face with Cramier in a mortal conflict could alone have satisfied his feeling. . . . Yet he was a young man by nature gentle!

His heart beat desperately as he approached that street—one of those little old streets, so beautiful, that belonged to a vanished London. It was very narrow, there was no shelter; and he thought confusedly of what he could say, if met in this remote backwater that led nowhere. He would tell some lie, no doubt. Lies would now be his daily business. Lies and hatred, those violent things of life, would come to seem quite natural, in the violence of his love.

He stood a moment, hesitating, by the rails of the old church. Black, white-veined, with shadowy summits, in that half darkness, it was like some gigantic vision. Mystery itself seemed modelled there. He turned and walked quickly down the street close to the houses on the further side. The windows of her house were lighted! So, she was not away! Dim light in the dining-room, lights in the room above—

her bedroom, doubtless. Was there no way to bring her to the window, no way his spirit could climb up there and beckon hers out to him? Perhaps she was not there, perhaps it was but a servant taking up hot water. He was at the end of the street by now, but to leave without once more passing was impossible. And this time he went slowly, his head down, feigning abstraction, grudging every inch of pavement, and all the time furtively searching that window with the light behind the curtains. Nothing! Once more he was close to the railings of the church, and once more could not bring himself to go away. In the little, close, deserted street, not a soul was moving, not even a cat or dog; nothing alive but many discreet, lighted windows. Like veiled faces, showing no emotion, they seemed to watch his indecision. And he thought: "Ah, well! I dare say there are lots like me. Lots as near, and yet as far away! Lots who have to suffer!" But what would he not have given for the throwing open of those curtains. Then, suddenly scared by an approaching figure, he turned and walked away. X

At three o'clock next day he called.

In the middle of her white drawing-room, whose latticed window ran the whole length of one wall, stood a little table on which was a silver jar full of early larkspurs, evidently from her garden by the river. And Lennan waited, his eyes fixed on those blossoms so like to little blue butterflies and strange-hued crickets, tethered to the pale green stems. In this room she passed her days, guarded from him. Once a week, at most, he would be able to come there—once a week for an hour or two of the hundred and sixty-eight hours that he longed to be with her.

And suddenly he was conscious of her. She had come in without sound, and was standing by the piano, so pale, in her cream-white dress, that her eyes looked jet black. He hardly knew that face, like a flower closed against cold.

What had he done? What had happened in these five days to make her like this to him? He took her hands and tried to kiss them; but she said quickly:

"He's in!"

At that he stood silent, looking into that face, frozen to a dreadful composure, on the breaking up of which his very life seemed to depend. At last he said:

"What is it? Am I nothing to you, after all?"

But as soon as he had spoken he saw that he need not have asked, and flung his arms round her. She clung to him with desperation; then freed herself, and said:

"No, no; let's sit down quietly!"

He obeyed, half-divining, half-refusing to admit all that lay behind that strange coldness, and this desperate embrace; all the self-pity, and self-loathing, shame, rage, and longing of a married woman for the first time face to face with her lover in her husband's house.

She seemed now to be trying to make him forget her strange behaviour; to be what she had been during that fortnight in the sunshine. But, suddenly, just moving her lips, she said:

"Quick! When can we see each other? I will come to you to tea —to-morrow," and, following her eyes, he saw the door opening, and Cramier coming in. Unsmiling, very big in the low room, he crossed over to them, and offered his hand to Lennan; then drawing a low chair forward between their two chairs, sat down.

"So you're back," he said. "Have a good time?"

"Thanks, yes; very."

"Luck for Olive you were there; those places are dull holes."

"It was luck for me."

"No doubt." And with those words he turned to his wife. His elbows rested along the arms of his chair, so that his clenched palms were upwards; it was as if he knew that he was holding those two, gripped one in each hand.

"I wonder," he said slowly, "that fellows like you, with nothing in the world to tie them, ever sit down in a place like London. I should have thought Rome or Paris were your happy hunting-grounds." In his voice, in those eyes of his, a little bloodshot, with their look of power, in his whole attitude, there was a sort of muffled menace, and contempt, as though he were thinking: "Step into my path, and I will crush you!"

And Lennan thought:

"How long must I sit here?" Then, past that figure planted solidly between them, he caught a look from her, swift, sure, marvellously timed—again and again—as if she were being urged by the very presence of this danger. One of those glances would surely—surely be seen by Cramier. Is there need for fear that a swallow should dash itself against the wall over which it skims? But he got up, unable to bear it longer.

"Going?" That one suave word had an inimitable insolence.

He could hardly see his hand touching Cramier's heavy fist. Then he realized that she was standing so that their faces when they must say good-bye could not be seen. Her eyes were smiling, yet imploring; her lips shaped the word: "To-morrow!" And squeezing her hand desperately, he got away.

He had never dreamed that to see her in the presence of the man who owned her would be so terrible. For a moment he thought that he must give her up, give up a love that would drive him mad.

He climbed on to an omnibus travelling West. Another twenty-four hours of starvation had begun. It did not matter at all what he did with them. They were simply so much aching that had to be got through somehow—so much aching; and what relief at the end? An hour or two with her, desperately holding himself in.

Like most artists, and few Englishmen, he lived on feelings rather than on facts; so, found no refuge in decisive resolutions. But he made many—the resolution to give her up; to be true to the ideal of service for no reward; to beseech her to leave Cramier and come to him—and he made each many times.

At Hyde Park Corner he got down, and went into the Park, thinking that to walk would help him.

A great number of people were sitting there, taking mysterious anodyne, doing the right thing; to avoid them, he kept along the rails, and ran almost into the arms of Colonel and Mrs. Ercott, who were coming from the direction of Knightsbridge, slightly flushed, having lunched and talked of 'Monte' at the house of a certain General.

They greeted him with the surprise of those who had said to each other many times: "That young man will come rushing back!" It was very nice—they said—to run across him. When did he arrive? They had thought he was going on to Italy—he was looking rather tired. They did not ask if he had seen her—being too kind, and perhaps afraid that he would say 'Yes,' which would be embarrassing; or that he would say 'No,' which would be still more embarrassing when they found that he ought to have said 'Yes.' Would he not come and sit with them a little—they were going presently to see how Olive was? Lennan perceived that they were warning him. And, forcing himself to look at them very straight, he said: "I have just been there."

Mrs. Ercott phrased her impressions that same evening: "He looks quite hunted, poor young man! I'm afraid there's going to be fearful trouble there. Did you notice how quickly he ran away from us? He's thin, too; if it wasn't for his tan, he'd look really ill. The boy's eyes are so pathetic; and he used to have such a nice smile in them."

The Colonel, who was fastening her hooks, paused in an operation that required concentration.

"It's a thousand pities," he muttered, "that he hasn't any work to do. That puddling about with clay or whatever he does is no good at all." And slowly fastening one hook, he unhooked several others.

Mrs. Ercott went on:

"And I saw Olive, when she thought I wasn't looking; it was just as if she'd taken off a mask. But Robert Cramier will never put up with it. He's in love with her still; I watched him. It's tragic, John."

The Colonel let his hands fall from the hooks.

"If I thought that," he said, "I'd do something."

"If you could, it would not be tragic."

The Colonel stared. There was always SOMETHING to be done.

"You read too many novels," he said, but without spirit.

Mrs. Ercott smiled, and made no answer to an aspersion she had heard before.

When Lennan reached his rooms again after that encounter with the Ercotts, he found in his letterbox a visiting card: "Mrs. Doone" "Miss Sylvia Doone," and on it pencilled the words: "Do come and see us before we go down to Hayle—Sylvia." He stared blankly at the round handwriting he knew so well.

Sylvia! Nothing perhaps could have made so plain to him how in this tornado of his passion the world was drowned. Sylvia! He had almost forgotten her existence; and yet, only last year, after he definitely settled down in London, he had once more seen a good deal of her; and even had soft thoughts of her again—with her pale-gold hair, her true look, her sweetness. Then they had gone for the winter to Algiers for her mother's health.

When they came back, he had already avoided seeing her, though that was before Olive went to Monte Carlo, before he had even admitted his own feeling. And since—he had not once thought of her. Not once! The world had indeed vanished. "Do come and see us—Sylvia." The very notion was an irritation. No rest from aching and impatience to be had that way.

And then the idea came to him: Why not kill these hours of waiting for to-morrow's meeting by going on the river passing by her cottage? There was still one train that he could catch.

He reached the village after dark, and spent the night at the inn; got up early next morning, took a boat, and pulled down-stream. The bluffs of the opposite bank were wooded with high trees. The sun shone softly on their leaves, and the bright stream was ruffled by a breeze that bent all the reeds and slowly swayed the water-flowers. One thin white line of wind streaked the blue sky. He shipped his sculls and drifted, listening to the wood-pigeons, watching the swallows chasing. If only she were here! To spend one long day thus, drifting with the stream! To have but one such rest from longing! Her cottage, he knew, lay on the same side as the village, and just beyond an island. She had told him of a hedge of yew-trees, and a white dovecote almost at the water's edge. He came to the island, and let his boat slide into the backwater. It was all overgrown with willow-trees and alders, dark even in this early morning radiance, and marvellously still. There was no room to row; he took the boathook and tried to punt, but the green water was too deep and entangled with great roots, so that he had to make his way by clawing with the hook at branches. Birds seemed to shun this gloom, but a single magpie crossed the one little clear patch of sky, and flew low behind the willows. The air here had a sweetish, earthy odour of too rank foliage; all brightness seemed entombed. He was glad to pass out again under a huge poplar-tree into the fluttering gold and silver of the morning. And almost at once he saw the yew-hedge at the border of some bright green turf, and a pigeon-house, high on its pole, painted cream-white. About it a number of ring-doves and snow-white pigeons were perched or flying; and beyond the lawn he could see the dark veranda of a low house, covered by wistaria just going out of flower. A drift of scent from late lilacs, and new-mown grass, was borne out to him, together with the sound of a mowing-machine, and the humming of many bees. It was beautiful here, and seemed, for all its restfulness, to have something of that flying quality he so loved about her face, about the sweep of her hair, the quick, soft turn of her eyes—or was that but the darkness of the yew-trees, the whiteness of the dovecote, and the doves themselves, flying?

He lay there a long time quietly beneath the bank, careful not to attract the attention of the old gardener, who was methodically pushing his machine across and across the lawn. How he wanted her with him then! Wonderful that there could be in life such beauty and wild softness as made the heart ache with the delight of it, and in that same life grey rules and rigid barriers—coffins of happiness! That doors should be closed on love and joy! There was not so much of it in the world! She, who was the very spirit of this flying, nymph-like summer, was untimely wintered-up in bleak sorrow. There was a hateful unwisdom in that thought; it seemed so grim and violent, so corpse-like, gruesome, narrow and extravagant! What possible end could it serve that she should be unhappy! Even if he had not loved her, he would have hated her fate just as much—all such stories of imprisoned lives had roused his anger even as a boy.

Soft white clouds—those bright angels of the river, never very long away—had begun now to spread their wings over the woods; and the wind had dropped so that the slumbrous warmth and murmuring of summer gathered full over the water. The old gardener had finished his job of mowing, and came with a little basket of grain to feed the doves. Lennan watched them going to him, the ring-doves, very dainty, and capricious, keeping to themselves. In place of that old fellow, he was really seeing HER, feeding from her hands those birds of Cypris. What a group he could have made of her with them perching and flying round her! If she were his, what could he not achieve—to make her immortal—like the old Greeks and Italians, who, in their work, had rescued their mistresses from Time! . . .

He was back in his rooms in London two hours before he dared begin expecting her. Living alone there but for a caretaker who came every morning for an hour or two, made dust, and departed, he had

no need for caution. And when he had procured flowers, and the fruits and cakes which they certainly would not eat—when he had arranged the tea-table, and made the grand tour at least twenty times, he placed himself with a book at the little round window, to watch for her approach. There, very still, he sat, not reading a word, continually moistening his dry lips and sighing, to relieve the tension of his heart. At last he saw her coming. She was walking close to the railings of the houses, looking neither to right nor left. She had on a lawn frock, and a hat of the palest coffee-coloured straw, with a narrow black velvet ribbon. She crossed the side street, stopped for a second, gave a swift look round, then came resolutely on. What was it made him love her so? What was the secret of her fascination? Certainly, no conscious enticements. Never did anyone try less to fascinate. He could not recall one single little thing that she had done to draw him to her. Was it, perhaps, her very passivity, her native pride that never offered or asked anything, a sort of soft stoicism in her fibre; that and some mysterious charm, as close and intimate as scent was to a flower?

He waited to open till he heard her footstep just outside. She came in without a word, not even looking at him. And he, too, said not a word till he had closed the door, and made sure of her. Then they turned to each other. Her breast was heaving a little, under her thin frock, but she was calmer than he, with that wonderful composure of pretty women in all the passages of love, as who should say: This is my native air!

They stood and looked at each other, as if they could never have enough, till he said at last:

"I thought I should die before this moment came. There isn't a minute that I don't long for you so terribly that I can hardly live."

"And do you think that I don't long for you?"

"Then come to me!"

She looked at him mournfully and shook her head.

Well, he had known that she would not. He had not earned her. What right had he to ask her to fly against the world, to brave everything, to have such faith in him—as yet? He had no heart to press his words, beginning then to understand the paralyzing truth that there was no longer any resolving this or that; with love like his he had ceased to be a separate being with a separate will. He was entwined with her, could act only if her will and his were one. He would never be able to say to her: 'You must!' He loved her too much. And she knew it. So there was nothing for it but to forget the ache, and make the hour happy. But how about that other truth—that in love there is no pause, no resting? . . . With any watering, however scant, the flower will grow till its time comes to be plucked. . . . This oasis in the desert—these few minutes with her alone, were swept through and through with a feverish wind. To be closer! How not try to be that? How not long for her lips when he had but her hand to kiss? And how not be poisoned with the thought that in a few minutes she would leave him and go back to the presence of that other, who, even though she loathed him, could see and touch her when he would? She was leaning back in the very chair where in fancy he had seen her, and he only dared sit at her feet and look up. And this, which a week ago would have been rapture, was now almost torture, so far did it fall short of his longing. It was torture, too, to keep his voice in tune with the sober sweetness of her voice. And bitterly he thought: How can she sit there, and not want me, as I want her? Then at a touch of her fingers on his hair, he lost control, and kissed her lips. Her surrender lasted only for a second.

"No, no—you must not!"

That mournful surprise sobered him at once.

He got up, stood away from her, begged to be forgiven.

And, when she was gone, he sat in the chair where she had sat. That clasp of her, the kiss he had begged her to forget—to forget!—nothing could take that from him. He had done wrong; had startled her, had fallen short of chivalry! And yet—a smile of utter happiness would cling about his lips. His fastidiousness, his imagination almost made him think that this was all he wanted. If he could close his eyes, now, and pass out, before he lost that moment of half-fulfilment!

And, the smile still on his lips, he lay back watching the flies wheeling and chasing round the hanging-lamp. Sixteen of them there were, wheeling and chasing—never still!

XII

When, walking from Lennan's studio, Olive reentered her dark little hall, she approached its alcove and glanced first at the hat-stand. They were all there—the silk hat, the bowler, the straw! So he was in!

And within each hat, in turn, she seemed to see her husband's head—with the face turned away from her—so distinctly as to note the leathery look of the skin of his cheek and neck. And she thought: "I pray that he will die! It is wicked, but I pray that he will die!" Then, quietly, that he might not hear, she mounted to her bedroom. The door into his dressing-room was open, and she went to shut it. He was standing there at the window.

"Ah! You're in! Been anywhere?"

"To the National Gallery."

It was the first direct lie she had ever told him, and she was surprised to feel neither shame nor fear, but rather a sense of pleasure at defeating him. He was the enemy, all the more the enemy because she was still fighting against herself, and, so strangely, in his behalf.

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Rather boring, wasn't it? I should have thought you'd have got young Lennan to take you there."

"Why?"

By instinct she had seized on the boldest answer; and there was nothing to be told from her face. If he were her superior in strength, he was her inferior in quickness.

He lowered his eyes, and said:

"His line, isn't it?"

With a shrug she turned away and shut the door. She sat down on the edge of her bed, very still. In that little passage of wits she had won, she could win in many such; but the full hideousness of things had come to her. Lies! lies! That was to be her life! That; or to say farewell to all she now cared for, to cause despair not only in herself, but in her lover, and—for what? In order that her body might remain at the disposal of that man in the next room—her spirit having flown from him for ever. Such were the alternatives, unless those words: "Then come to me," were to be more than words. Were they? Could they be? They would mean such happiness if—if his love for her were more than a summer love? And hers for him? Was it—were they—more than summer loves? How know? And, without knowing, how give such pain to everyone? How break a vow she had thought herself quite above breaking? How make such a desperate departure from all the traditions and beliefs in which she had been brought up! But in the very nature of passion is that which resents the intrusion of hard and fast decisions. . . . And suddenly she thought: If our love cannot stay what it is, and if I cannot yet go to him for always, is there not still another way?

She got up and began to dress for dinner. Standing before her glass she was surprised to see that her face showed no signs of the fears and doubts that were now her comrades. Was it because, whatever happened, she loved and was beloved! She wondered how she had looked when he kissed her so passionately; had she shown her joy before she checked him?

In her garden by the river were certain flowers that, for all her care, would grow rank and of the wrong colour—wanting a different soil. Was she, then, like those flowers of hers? Ah! Let her but have her true soil, and she would grow straight and true enough!

Then in the doorway she saw her husband. She had never, till to-day, quite hated him; but now she did, with a real blind horrible feeling. What did he want of her standing there with those eyes fixed on her—those forceful eyes, touched with blood, that seemed at once to threaten, covet, and beseech! She drew her wrapper close round her shoulders. At that he came up and said:

"Look at me, Olive!"

Against instinct and will she obeyed, and he went on:

"Be careful! I say, be careful!"

Then he took her by the shoulders, and raised her up to him. And, quite unnerved, she stood without resisting.

"I want you," he said; "I mean to keep you."

Then, suddenly letting her go, he covered his eyes with his hands. That frightened her most—it was

so unlike him. Not till now had she understood between what terrifying forces she was balancing. She did not speak, but her face grew white. From behind those hands he uttered a sound, not quite like a human noise, turned sharply, and went out. She dropped back into the chair before her mirror, overcome by the most singular feeling she had ever known; as if she had lost everything, even her love for Lennan, and her longing for his love. What was it all worth, what was anything worth in a world like this? All was loathsome, herself loathsome! All was a void! Hateful, hateful, hateful! It was like having no heart at all! And that same evening, when her husband had gone down to the House, she wrote to Lennan:

"Our love must never turn to earthiness as it might have this afternoon. Everything is black and hopeless. HE suspects. For you to come here is impossible, and too dreadful for us both. And I have no right to ask you to be furtive, I can't bear to think of you like that, and I can't bear it myself. I don't know what to do or say. Don't try to see me yet. I must have time, I must think." XIII

Colonel Ercott was not a racing man, but he had in common with others of his countrymen a religious feeling in the matter of the Derby. His remembrances of it went back to early youth, for he had been born and brought up almost within sound of the coaching-road to Epsom. Every Derby and Oaks day he had gone out on his pony to watch the passing of the tall hats and feathers of the great, and the pot-hats and feathers of the lowly; and afterwards, in the fields at home, had ridden races with old Lindsay, finishing between a cow that judged and a clump of bulrushes representing the Grand Stand.

But for one reason or another he had never seen the great race, and the notion that it was his duty to see it had now come to him. He proposed this to Mrs. Ercott with some diffidence. She read so many books—he did not quite know whether she would approve. Finding that she did, he added casually:

"And we might take Olive."

Mrs. Ercott answered dryly:

"You know the House of Commons has a holiday?"

The Colonel murmured:

"Oh! I don't want that chap!"

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Ercott, "you would like Mark Lennan."

The Colonel looked at her most dubiously. Dolly could talk of it as a tragedy, and a—a grand passion, and yet make a suggestion like that! Then his wrinkles began slowly to come alive, and he gave her waist a squeeze.

Mrs. Ercott did not resist that treatment.

"Take Olive alone," she said. "I don't really care to go."

When the Colonel went to fetch his niece he found her ready, and very half-heartedly he asked for Cramier. It appeared she had not told him.

Relieved, yet somewhat disconcerted, he murmured:

"He won't mind not going, I suppose?"

"If he went, I should not."

At this quiet answer the Colonel was beset again by all his fears. He put his white 'topper' down, and took her hand.

"My dear," he said, "I don't want to intrude upon your feelings; but—but is there anything I can do? It's dreadful to see things going unhappily with you!" He felt his hand being lifted, her face pressed against it; and, suffering acutely, with his other hand, cased in a bright new glove, he smoothed her arm. "We'll have a jolly good day, sweetheart," he said, "and forget all about it."

She gave the hand a kiss and turned away. And the Colonel vowed to himself that she should not be unhappy—lovely creature that she was, so delicate, and straight, and fine in her pearly frock. And he pulled himself together, brushing his white 'topper' vigorously with his sleeve, forgetting that this kind of hat has no nap.

And so he was tenderness itself on the journey down, satisfying all her wants before she had them, telling her stories of Indian life, and consulting her carefully as to which horse they should back. There was the Duke's, of course, but there was another animal that appealed to him greatly. His friend Tabor

had given him the tip—Tabor, who had the best Arabs in all India—and at a nice price. A man who practically never gambled, the Colonel liked to feel that his fancy would bring him in something really substantial—if it won; the idea that it could lose not really troubling him. However, they would see it in the paddock, and judge for themselves. The paddock was the place, away from all the dust and racket—Olive would enjoy the paddock! Once on the course, they neglected the first race; it was more important, the Colonel thought, that they should lunch. He wanted to see more colour in her cheeks, wanted to see her laugh. He had an invitation to his old regiment's drag, where the champagne was sure to be good. And he was so proud of her—would not have missed those young fellows' admiration of her for the world; though to take a lady amongst them was, in fact, against the rules. It was not, then, till the second race was due to start that they made their way into the paddock. Here the Derby horses were being led solemnly, attended each by a little posse of persons, looking up their legs and down their ribs to see whether they were worthy of support, together with a few who liked to see a whole horse at a time. Presently they found the animal which had been recommended to the Colonel. It was a chestnut, with a starred forehead, parading in a far corner. The Colonel, who really loved a horse, was deep in admiration. He liked its head and he liked its hocks; above all, he liked its eye. A fine creature, all sense and fire—perhaps just a little straight in the shoulder for coming down the hill! And in the midst of his examination he found himself staring at his niece. What breeding the child showed, with her delicate arched brows, little ears, and fine, close nostrils; and the way she moved—so sure and springy. She was too pretty to suffer! A shame! If she hadn't been so pretty that young fellow wouldn't have fallen in love with her. If she weren't so pretty—that husband of hers wouldn't—! And the Colonel dropped his gaze, startled by the discovery he had stumbled on. If she hadn't been so pretty! Was that the meaning of it all? The cynicism of his own reflection struck him between wind and water. And yet something in himself seemed to confirm it somehow. What then? Was he to let them tear her in two between them, destroying her, because she was so pretty? And somehow this discovery of his—that passion springs from worship of beauty and warmth, of form and colour—disturbed him horribly, for he had no habit of philosophy. The thought seemed to him strangely crude, even immoral. That she should be thus between two ravening desires—a bird between two hawks, a fruit between two mouths! It was a way of looking at things that had never before occurred to him. The idea of a husband clutching at his wife, the idea of that young man who looked so gentle, swooping down on her; and the idea that if she faded, lost her looks, went off, their greed, indeed, any man's, would die away—all these horrible ideas hurt him the more for the remarkable suddenness with which they had come to him. A tragic business! Dolly had said so. Queer and quick—were women! But his resolution that the day was to be jolly soon recurred to him, and he hastily resumed inspection of his fancy. Perhaps they ought to have a ten-pound note on it, and they had better get back to the Stand! And as they went the Colonel saw, standing beneath a tree at a little distance, a young man that he could have sworn was Lennan. Not likely for an artist chap to be down here! But it WAS undoubtedly young Lennan, brushed-up, in a top-hat. Fortunately, however, his face was not turned in their direction. He said nothing to Olive, not wishing—especially after those unpleasant thoughts—to take responsibility, and he kept her moving towards the gate, congratulating himself that his eyes had been so sharp. In the crush there he was separated from her a little, but she was soon beside him again; and more than ever he congratulated himself that nothing had occurred to upset her and spoil the day. Her cheeks were warm enough now, her dark eyes glowing. She was excited no doubt by thoughts of the race, and of the 'tenner' he was going to put on for her.

He recounted the matter afterwards to Mrs. Ercott. "That chestnut Tabor put me on to finished nowhere—couldn't get down the hill—knew it wouldn't the moment I set eyes on it. But the child enjoyed herself. Wish you'd been there, my dear!" Of his deeper thoughts and of that glimpse of young Lennan he did not speak, for on the way home an ugly suspicion had attacked him. Had the young fellow, after all, seen and managed to get close to her in the crush at the paddock gateway?

XIV

That letter of hers fanned the flame in Lennan as nothing had yet fanned it. Earthiness! Was it earthiness to love as he did? If so, then not for all the world would he be otherwise than earthy. In the shock of reading it, he crossed his Rubicon, and burned his boats behind him. No more did the pale ghost, chivalrous devotion, haunt him. He knew now that he could not stop short. Since she asked him, he must not, of course, try to see her just yet. But when he did, then he would fight for his life; the thought that she might be meaning to slip away from him was too utterly unbearable. But she could not be meaning that! She would never be so cruel! Ah! she would—she must come to him in the end! The world, life itself, would be well lost for love of her!

Thus resolved, he was even able to work again; and all that Tuesday he modelled at a big version of the fantastic, bull-like figure he had conceived after the Colonel left him up on the hillside at Beaulieu. He worked at it with a sort of evil joy. Into this creature he would put the spirit of possession that held her from him. And while his fingers forced the clay, he felt as if he had Cramier's neck within his grip.

Yet, now that he had resolved to take her if he could, he had not quite the same hatred. After all, this man loved her too, could not help it that she loathed him; could not help it that he had the disposition of her, body and soul!

June had come in with skies of a blue that not even London glare and dust could pale. In every square and park and patch of green the air simmered with life and with the music of birds swaying on little boughs. Piano organs in the streets were no longer wistful for the South; lovers already sat in the shade of trees.

To remain indoors, when he was not working, was sheer torture; for he could not read, and had lost all interest in the little excitements, amusements, occupations that go to make up the normal life of man. Every outer thing seemed to have dropped off, shrivelled, leaving him just a condition of the spirit, a state of mind.

Lying awake he would think of things in the past, and they would mean nothing—all dissolved and dispersed by the heat of this feeling in him. Indeed, his sense of isolation was so strong that he could not even believe that he had lived through the facts which his memory apprehended. He had become one burning mood—that, and nothing more.

To be out, especially amongst trees, was the only solace.

And he sat for a long time that evening under a large lime-tree on a knoll above the Serpentine. There was very little breeze, just enough to keep alive a kind of whispering. What if men and women, when they had lived their gusty lives, became trees! What if someone who had burned and ached were now spreading over him this leafy peace—this blue-black shadow against the stars? Or were the stars, perhaps, the souls of men and women escaped for ever from love and longing? He broke off a branch of the lime and drew it across his face. It was not yet in flower, but it smelled lemony and fresh even here in London. If only for a moment he could desert his own heart, and rest with the trees and stars!

No further letter came from her next morning, and he soon lost his power to work. It was Derby Day. He determined to go down. Perhaps she would be there. Even if she were not, he might find some little distraction in the crowd and the horses. He had seen her in the paddock long before the Colonel's sharp eyes detected him; and, following in the crush, managed to touch her hand in the crowded gateway, and whisper: "To-morrow, the National Gallery, at four o'clock—by the Bacchus and Ariadne. For God's sake!" Her gloved hand pressed his hard; and she was gone. He stayed in the paddock, too happy almost to breathe. . . .

Next day, while waiting before that picture, he looked at it with wonder. For there seemed his own passion transfigured in the darkening star-crowned sky, and the eyes of the leaping god. In spirit, was he not always rushing to her like that? Minutes passed, and she did not come. What should he do if she failed him? Surely die of disappointment and despair. . . . He had little enough experience as yet of the toughness of the human heart; how life bruises and crushes, yet leaves it beating. . . . Then, from an unlikely quarter, he saw her coming.

They walked in silence down to the quiet rooms where the Turner watercolours hung. No one, save two Frenchmen and an old official, watched them passing slowly before those little pictures, till they came to the end wall, and, unseen, unheard by any but her, he could begin!

The arguments he had so carefully rehearsed were all forgotten; nothing left but an incoherent pleading. Life without her was not life; and they had only one life for love—one summer. It was all dark where she was not—the very sun itself was dark. Better to die than to live such false, broken lives, apart from each other. Better to die at once than to live wanting each other, longing and longing, and watching each other's sorrow. And all for the sake of what? It maddened, killed him, to think of that man touching her when he knew she did but hate him. It shamed all manhood; it could not be good to help such things to be. A vow when the spirit of it was gone was only superstition; it was wicked to waste one's life for the sake of that. Society—she knew, she must know—only cared for the forms, the outsides of things. And what did it matter what Society thought? It had no soul, no feeling, nothing. And if it were said they ought to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others, to make things happier in the world, she must know that was only true when love was light and selfish; but not when people loved as they did, with all their hearts and souls, so that they would die for each other any minute, so that without each other there was no meaning in anything. It would not help a single soul, for them to murder their love and all the happiness of their lives; to go on in a sort of living death. Even if it were wrong, he would rather do that wrong, and take the consequences! But it was not, it COULD not be wrong, when they felt like that!

And all the time that he was pouring forth those supplications, his eyes searched and searched her face. But there only came from her: "I don't know—I can't tell—if only I knew!" And then he was silent,

stricken to the heart; till, at a look or a touch from her, he would break out again: "You do love me—you do; then what does anything else matter?"

And so it went on and on that summer afternoon, in the deserted room meant for such other things, where the two Frenchmen were too sympathetic, and the old official too drowsy, to come. Then it all narrowed to one fierce, insistent question:

"What is it—WHAT is it you're afraid of?"

But to that, too, he got only the one mournful answer, paralyzing in its fateful monotony.

"I don't know—I can't tell!"

It was awful to go on thus beating against this uncanny, dark, shadowy resistance; these unreal doubts and dreads, that by their very dumbness were becoming real to him, too. If only she could tell him what she feared! It could not be poverty—that was not like her—besides, he had enough for both. It could not be loss of a social position, which was but irksome to her! Surely it was not fear that he would cease to love her! What was it? In God's name—what?

To-morrow—she had told him—she was to go down, alone, to the river-house; would she not come now, this very minute, to him instead? And they would start off—that night, back to the South where their love had flowered. But again it was: "I can't! I don't know—I must have time!" And yet her eyes had that brooding love-light. How COULD she hold back and waver? But, utterly exhausted, he did not plead again; did not even resist when she said: "You must go, now; and leave me to get back! I will write. Perhaps—soon—I shall know." He begged for, and took one kiss; then, passing the old official, went quickly up and out.

XV

He reached his rooms overcome by a lassitude that was not, however, quite despair. He had made his effort, failed—but there was still within him the unconquerable hope of the passionate lover. . . . As well try to extinguish in full June the beating of the heart of summer; deny to the flowers their deepening hues, or to winged life its slumbrous buzzing, as stifle in such a lover his conviction of fulfilment. . . .

He lay down on a couch, and there stayed a long time quite still, his forehead pressed against the wall. His will was already beginning to recover for a fresh attempt. It was merciful that she was going away from Cramier, going to where he had in fancy watched her feed her doves. No laws, no fears, not even her commands could stop his fancy from conjuring her up by day and night. He had but to close his eyes, and she was there.

A ring at the bell, repeated several times, roused him at last to go to the door. His caller was Robert Cramier. And at sight of him, all Lennan's lethargy gave place to a steely feeling. What had brought him here? Had he been spying on his wife? The old longing for physical combat came over him. Cramier was perhaps fifteen years his senior, but taller, heavier, thicker. Chances, then, were pretty equal!

"Won't you come in?" he said.

"Thanks."

The voice had in it the same mockery as on Sunday; and it shot through him that Cramier had thought to find his wife here. If so, he did not betray it by any crude look round. He came in with his deliberate step, light and well-poised for so big a man.

"So this," he said, "is where you produce your masterpieces! Anything great since you came back?"

Lennan lifted the cloths from the half-modelled figure of his bull-man. He felt malicious pleasure in doing that. Would Cramier recognize himself in this creature with the horn-like ears, and great bossed forehead? If this man who had her happiness beneath his heel had come here to mock, he should at all events get what he had come to give. And he waited.

"I see. You are giving the poor brute horns!"

If Cramier had seen, he had dared to add a touch of cynical humour, which the sculptor himself had never thought of. And this even evoked in the young man a kind of admiring compunction.

"Those are not horns," he said gently; "only ears."

Cramier lifted a hand and touched the edge of his own ear.

"Not quite like that, are they—human ears? But I suppose you would call this symbolic. What, if I may ask, does it represent?"

All the softness in Lennan vanished.

"If you can't gather that from looking, it must be a failure."

"Not at all. If I am right, you want something for it to tread on, don't you, to get your full effect?"

Lennan touched the base of the clay.

"The broken curve here"—then, with sudden disgust at this fencing, was silent. What had the man come for? He must want something. And, as if answering, Cramier said:

"To pass to another subject—you see a good deal of my wife. I just wanted to tell you that I don't very much care that you should. It is as well to be quite frank, I think."

Lennan bowed.

"Is that not," he said, "perhaps rather a matter for HER decision?"

That heavy figure—those threatening eyes! The whole thing was like a dream come true!

"I do not feel it so. I am not one of those who let things drift. Please understand me. You come between us at your peril."

Lennan kept silence for a moment, then he said quietly:

"Can one come between two people who have ceased to have anything in common?"

The veins in Cramier's forehead were swollen, his face and neck had grown crimson. And Lennan thought with strange elation: Now he's going to hit me! He could hardly keep his hands from shooting out and seizing in advance that great strong neck. If he could strangle, and have done with him!

But, quite suddenly, Cramier turned on his heel. "I have warned you," he said, and went.

Lennan took a long breath. So! That was over, and he knew where he was. If Cramier had struck out, he would surely have seized his neck and held on till life was gone. Nothing should have shaken him off. In fancy he could see himself swaying, writhing, reeling, battered about by those heavy fists, but always with his hands on the thick neck, squeezing out its life. He could feel, absolutely feel, the last reel and stagger of that great bulk crashing down, dragging him with it, till it lay upturned, still. He covered his eyes with his hands. . . . Thank God! The fellow had not hit out!

He went to the door, opened it, and stood leaning against the door-post. All was still and drowsy out there in that quiet backwater of a street. Not a soul in sight! How still, for London! Only the birds. In a neighbouring studio someone was playing Chopin. Queer! He had almost forgotten there was such a thing as Chopin. A mazurka! Spinning like some top thing, round and round—weird little tune! . . . Well, and what now? Only one thing certain. Sooner give up life than give her up! Far sooner! Love her, achieve her—or give up everything, and drown to that tune going on and on, that little dancing dirge of summer!

XVI

At her cottage Olive stood often by the river.

What lay beneath all that bright water—what strange, deep, swaying, life so far below the ruffling of wind, and the shadows of the willow trees? Was love down there, too? Love between sentient things, where it was almost dark; or had all passion climbed up to rustle with the reeds, and float with the water-flowers in the sunlight? Was there colour? Or had colour been drowned? No scent and no music; but movement there would be, for all the dim groping things bending one way to the current—movement, no less than in the aspen-leaves, never quite still, and the winged droves of the clouds. And if it were dark down there, it was dark, too, above the water; and hearts ached, and eyes just as much searched for that which did not come.

To watch it always flowing by to the sea; never looking back, never swaying this way or that; drifting along, quiet as Fate—dark, or glamorous with the gold and moonlight of these beautiful days and nights, when every flower in her garden, in the fields, and along the river banks, was full of sweet life; when dog-roses starred the lanes, and in the wood the bracken was nearly a foot high.

She was not alone there, though she would much rather have been; two days after she left London her Uncle and Aunt had joined her. It was from Cramier they had received their invitation. He himself had not yet been down.

Every night, having parted from Mrs. Ercott and gone up the wide shallow stairs to her room, she would sit down at the window to write to Lennan, one candle beside her—one pale flame for comrade, as it might be his spirit. Every evening she poured out to him her thoughts, and ended always: "Have patience!" She was still waiting for courage to pass that dark hedge of impalpable doubts and fears and scruples, of a dread that she could not make articulate even to herself. Having finished, she would lean out into the night. The Colonel, his black figure cloaked against the dew, would be pacing up and down the lawn, with his good-night cigar, whose fiery spark she could just discern; and, beyond, her ghostly dove-house; and, beyond, the river—flowing. Then she would clasp herself close—afraid to stretch out her arms, lest she should be seen.

Each morning she rose early, dressed, and slipped away to the village to post her letter. From the woods across the river wild pigeons would be calling—as though Love itself pleaded with her afresh each day. She was back well before breakfast, to go up to her room and come down again as if for the first time. The Colonel, meeting her on the stairs, or in the hall, would say: "Ah, my dear! just beaten you! Slept well?" And, while her lips touched his cheek, slanted at the proper angle for uncles, he never dreamed that she had been three miles already through the dew.

Now that she was in the throes of an indecision, whose ending, one way or the other, must be so tremendous, now that she was in the very swirl, she let no sign at all escape her; the Colonel and even his wife were deceived into thinking that after all no great harm had been done. It was grateful to them to think so, because of that stewardship at Monte Carlo, of which they could not render too good account. The warm sleepy days, with a little croquet and a little paddling on the river, and much sitting out of doors, when the Colonel would read aloud from Tennyson, were very pleasant. To him—if not to Mrs. Ercott—it was especially jolly to be out of Town 'this confounded crowded time of year.' And so the days of early June went by, each finer than the last.

And then Cramier came down, without warning on a Friday evening. It was hot in London . . . the session dull. . . . The Jubilee turning everything upside down. . . . They were lucky to be out of Town!

A silent dinner—that!

Mrs. Ercott noticed that he drank wine like water, and for minutes at a time fixed his eyes, that looked heavy as if he had not been sleeping, not on his wife's face but on her neck. If Olive really disliked and feared him—as John would have it—she disguised her feelings very well! For so pale a woman she was looking brilliant that night. The sun had caught her cheeks, perhaps. That black low-cut frock suited her, with old Milanese-point lace matching her skin so well, and one carnation, of darkest red, at her breast. Her eyes were really sometimes like black velvet. It suited pale women to have those eyes, that looked so black at night! She was talking, too, and laughing more than usual. One would have said: A wife delighted to welcome her husband! And yet there was something—something in the air, in the feel of things—the lowering fixity of that man's eyes, or—thunder coming, after all this heat! Surely the night was unnaturally still and dark, hardly a breath of air, and so many moths out there, passing the beam of light, like little pale spirits crossing a river! Mrs. Ercott smiled, pleased at that image. Moths! Men were like moths; there were women from whom they could not keep away. Yes, there was something about Olive that drew men to her. Not meretricious—to do her justice, not that at all; but something soft, and-fatal; like one of these candle-flames to the poor moths. John's eyes were never quite as she knew them when he was looking at Olive; and Robert Cramier's—what a queer, drugged look they had! As for that other poor young fellow—she had never forgotten his face when they came on him in the Park!

And when after dinner they sat on the veranda, they were all more silent still, just watching, it seemed, the smoke of their cigarettes, rising quite straight, as though wind had been withdrawn from the world. The Colonel twice endeavoured to speak about the moon: It ought to be up by now! It was going to be full.

And then Cramier said: "Put on that scarf thing, Olive, and come round the garden with me."

Mrs. Ercott admitted to herself now that what John said was true. Just one gleam of eyes, turned quickly this way and that, as a bird looks for escape; and then Olive had got up and quietly gone with him down the path, till their silent figures were lost to sight.

Disturbed to the heart, Mrs. Ercott rose and went over to her husband's chair. He was frowning, and staring at his evening shoe balanced on a single toe. He looked up at her and put out his hand. Mrs. Ercott gave it a squeeze; she wanted comfort.

The Colonel spoke:

"It's heavy to-night, Dolly. I don't like the feel of it."

XVII

They had passed without a single word spoken, down through the laurels and guelder roses to the river bank; then he had turned to the right, and gone along it under the dove-house, to the yew-trees. There he had stopped, in the pitch darkness of that foliage. It seemed to her dreadfully still; if only there had been the faintest breeze, the faintest lisp of reeds on the water, one bird to make a sound; but nothing, nothing save his breathing, deep, irregular, with a quiver in it. What had he brought her here for? To show her how utterly she was his? Was he never going to speak, never going to say whatever it was he had in mind to say? If only he would not touch her!

Then he moved, and a stone dislodged fell with a splash into the water. She could not help a little gasp. How black the river looked! But slowly, beyond the dim shape of the giant poplar, a shiver of light stole outwards across the blackness from the far bank—the moon, whose rim she could now see rising, of a thick gold like a coin, above the woods. Her heart went out to that warm light. At all events there was one friendly inhabitant of this darkness.

Suddenly she felt his hands on her waist. She did not move, her heart beat too furiously; but a sort of prayer fluttered up from it against her lips. In the grip of those heavy hands was such quivering force!

His voice sounded very husky and strange: "Olive, this can't go on. I suffer. My God! I suffer!"

A pang went through her, a sort of surprise. Suffer! She might wish him dead, but she did not want him to suffer—God knew! And yet, gripped by those hands, she could not say: I am sorry!

He made a sound that was almost a groan, and dropped on his knees. Feeling herself held fast, she tried to push his forehead back from her waist. It was fiery hot; and she heard him mutter: "Have mercy! Love me a little!" But the clutch of his hands, never still on the thin silk of her dress, turned her faint. She tried to writhe away, but could not; stood still again, and at last found her voice.

"Mercy? Can I MAKE myself love? No one ever could since the world began. Please, please get up. Let me go!"

But he was pulling her down to him so that she was forced on to her knees on the grass, with her face close to his. A low moaning was coming from him. It was horrible—so horrible! And he went on pleading, the words all confused, not looking in her face. It seemed to her that it would never end, that she would never get free of that grip, away from that stammering, whispering voice. She stayed by instinct utterly still, closing her eyes. Then she felt his gaze for the first time that evening on her face, and realized that he had not dared to look until her eyes were closed, for fear of reading what was in them. She said very gently:

"Please let me go. I think I'm going to faint."

He relaxed the grip of his arms; she sank down and stayed unmoving on the grass. After such utter stillness that she hardly knew whether he were there or not, she felt his hot hand on her bare shoulder. Was it all to begin again? She shrank down lower still, and a little moan escaped her. He let her go suddenly, and, when at last she looked up, was gone.

She got to her feet trembling, and moved quickly from under the yew-trees. She tried to think—tried to understand exactly what this portended for her, for him, for her lover. But she could not. There was around her thoughts the same breathless darkness that brooded over this night. Ah! but to the night had been given that pale-gold moon-ray, to herself nothing, no faintest gleam; as well try to pierce below the dark surface of that water!

She passed her hands over her face, and hair, and dress. How long had it lasted? How long had they been out here? And she began slowly moving back towards the house. Thank God! She had not yielded to fear or pity, not uttered falsities, not pretended she could love him, and betrayed her heart. That would have been the one unbearable thing to have been left remembering! She stood long looking down, as if trying to see the future in her dim flower-beds; then, bracing herself, hurried to the house. No one was on the veranda, no one in the drawing-room. She looked at the clock. Nearly eleven. Ringing for the servant to shut the windows, she stole up to her room. Had her husband gone away as he had come? Or would she presently again be face to face with that dread, the nerve of which never stopped aching now, dread of the night when he was near? She determined not to go to bed, and drawing a long chair to the window, wrapped herself in a gown, and lay back.

The flower from her dress, miraculously uncrushed in those dark minutes on the grass, she set in water beside her at the window—Mark's favourite flower, he had once told her; it was a comfort, with its scent, and hue, and memory of him.

Strange that in her life, with all the faces seen, and people known, she had not loved one till she had met Lennan! She had even been sure that love would never come to her; had not wanted it—very much; had thought to go on well enough, and pass out at the end, never having known, or much cared to know, full summer. Love had taken its revenge on her now for all slighted love offered her in the past; for the one hated love that had to-night been on its knees to her. They said it must always come once to every man and woman—this witchery, this dark sweet feeling, springing up, who knew how or why? She had not believed, but now she knew. And whatever might be coming, she would not have this different. Since all things changed, she must change and get old and be no longer pretty for him to look at, but this in her heart could not change. She felt sure of that. It was as if something said: This is for ever, beyond life, beyond death, this is for ever! He will be dust, and you dust, but your love will live! Somewhere—in the woods, among the flowers, or down in the dark water, it will haunt! For it only you have lived! . . . Then she noticed that a slender silvery-winged thing, unlike any moth she had ever seen, had settled on her gown, close to her neck. It seemed to be sleeping, so delicate and drowsy, having come in from the breathless dark, thinking, perhaps, that her whiteness was a light. What dim memory did it rouse; something of HIM, something HE had done—in darkness, on a night like this. Ah, yes! that evening after Gorbio, the little owl-moth on her knee! He had touched her when he took that cosy wan velvet-eyed thing off her!

She leaned out for air. What a night!—whose stars were hiding in the sheer heavy warmth; whose small, round, golden moon had no transparency! A night like a black pansy with a little gold heart. And silent! For, of the trees, that whispered so much at night, not even the aspens had voice. The unstirring air had a dream-solidity against her cheeks. But in all the stillness, what sentiency, what passion—as in her heart! Could she not draw HIM to her from those woods, from that dark gleaming river, draw him from the flowers and trees and the passion-mood of the sky—draw him up to her waiting here, so that she was no more this craving creature, but one with him and the night! And she let her head droop down on her hands.

All night long she stayed there at the window. Sometimes dozing in the chair; once waking with a start, fancying that her husband was bending over her. Had he been—and stolen away? And the dawn came; dew-grey, filmy and wistful, woven round each black tree, and round the white dove-cot, and falling scarf-like along the river. And the chirrupings of birds stirred among leaves as yet invisible.

She slept then.

XVIII

When she awoke once more, in daylight, smiling, Cramier was standing beside her chair. His face, all dark and bitter, had the sodden look of a man very tired.

"So!" he said: "Sleeping this way doesn't spoil your dreams. Don't let me disturb them. I am just going back to Town."

Like a frightened bird, she stayed, not stirring, gazing at his back as he leaned in the window, till, turning round on her again, he said:

"But remember this: What I can't have, no one else shall! Do you understand? No one else!" And he bent down close, repeating: "Do you understand—you bad wife!"

Four years' submission to a touch she shrank from; one long effort not to shrink! Bad wife! Not if he killed her would she answer now!

"Do you hear?" he said once more: "Make up your mind to that. I mean it."

He had gripped the arms of her chair, till she could feel it quiver beneath her. Would he drive his fist into her face that she managed to keep still smiling? But there only passed into his eyes an expression which she could not read.

"Well," he said, "you know!" and walked heavily towards the door.

The moment he had gone she sprang up: Yes, she was a bad wife! A wife who had reached the end of her tether. A wife who hated instead of loving. A wife in prison! Bad wife! Martyrdom, then, for the sake of a faith in her that was lost already, could be but folly. If she seemed bad and false to him, there was no longer reason to pretend to be otherwise. No longer would she, in the words of the old song:

—'sit and sigh—pulling bracken, pulling bracken.' No more would she starve for want of love, and watch the nights throb and ache, as last night had throbbled and ached, with the passion that she might not satisfy.

And while she was dressing she wondered why she did not look tired. To get out quickly! To send her lover word at once to hasten to her while it was safe—that she might tell him she was coming to him out of prison! She would telegraph for him to come that evening with a boat, opposite the tall poplar. She and her Aunt and Uncle were to go to dinner at the Rectory, but she would plead headache at the last minute. When the Ercotts had gone she would slip out, and he and she would row over to the wood, and be together for two hours of happiness. And they must make a clear plan, too—for to-morrow they would begin their life together. But it would not be safe to send that message from the village; she must go down and over the bridge to the post-office on the other side, where they did not know her. It was too late now before breakfast. Better after, when she could slip away, knowing for certain that her husband had gone. It would still not be too late for her telegram—Lennan never left his rooms till the midday post which brought her letters.

She finished dressing, and knowing that she must show no trace of her excitement, sat quite still for several minutes, forcing herself into languor. Then she went down. Her husband had breakfasted and gone. At everything she did, and every word she spoke, she was now smiling with a sort of wonder, as if she were watching a self, that she had abandoned like an old garment, perform for her amusement. It even gave her no feeling of remorse to think she was going to do what would be so painful to the good Colonel. He was dear to her—but it did not matter. She was past all that. Nothing mattered—nothing in the world! It amused her to believe that her Uncle and Aunt misread her last night's walk in the dark garden, misread her languor and serenity. And at the first moment possible she flew out, and slipped away under cover of the yew-trees towards the river. Passing the spot where her husband had dragged her down to him on her knees in the grass, she felt a sort of surprise that she could ever have been so terrified. What was he? The past—nothing! And she flew on. She noted carefully the river bank opposite the tall poplar. It would be quite easy to get down from there into a boat. But they would not stay in that dark backwater. They would go over to the far side into those woods from which last night the moon had risen, those woods from which the pigeons mocked her every morning, those woods so full of summer. Coming back, no one would see her landing; for it would be pitch dark in the backwater. And, while she hurried, she looked back across her shoulder, marking where the water, entering, ceased to be bright. A dragon-fly brushed her cheek; she saw it vanish where the sunlight failed. How suddenly its happy flight was quenched in that dark shade, as a candle flame blown out. The tree growth there was too thick—the queer stumps and snags had uncanny shapes, as of monstrous creatures, whose eyes seemed to peer out at you. She shivered. She had seen those monsters with their peering eyes somewhere. Ah! In her dream at Monte Carlo of that bull-face staring from the banks, while she drifted by, unable to cry out. No! The backwater was not a happy place—they would not stay there a single minute. And more swiftly than ever she flew on along the path. Soon she had crossed the bridge, sent off her message, and returned. But there were ten hours to get through before eight o'clock, and she did not hurry now. She wanted this day of summer to herself alone, a day of dreaming till he came; this day for which all her life till now had been shaping her—the day of love. Fate was very wonderful! If she had ever loved before; if she had known joy in her marriage—she could never have been feeling what she was feeling now, what she well knew she would never feel again. She crossed a new-mown hayfield, and finding a bank, threw herself down on her back among its uncut grasses. Far away at the other end men were scything. It was all very beautiful—the soft clouds floating, the clover-stalks pushing themselves against her palms, and stems of the tall couch grass cool to her cheeks; little blue butterflies; a lark, invisible; the scent of the ripe hay; and the gold-fairy arrows of the sun on her face and limbs. To grow and reach the hour of summer; all must do that! That was the meaning of Life! She had no more doubts and fears. She had no more dread, no bitterness, and no remorse for what she was going to do. She was doing it because she must. . . . As well might grass stay its ripening because it shall be cut down! She had, instead, a sense of something blessed and uplifting. Whatever Power had made her heart, had placed within it this love. Whatever it was, whoever it was, could not be angry with her!

A wild bee settled on her arm, and she held it up between her and the sun, so that she might enjoy its dusky glamour. It would not sting her—not to-day! The little blue butterflies, too, kept alighting on her, who lay there so still. And the love-songs of the wood-pigeons never ceased, nor the faint swish of scything.

At last she rose to make her way home. A telegram had come saying simply: "Yes." She read it with an unmoved face, having resorted again to her mask of languor. Toward tea-time she confessed to headache, and said she would lie down. Up there in her room she spent those three hours writing—writing as best she could all she had passed through in thought and feeling, before making her decision. It seemed to her that she owed it to herself to tell her lover how she had come to what she

had never thought to come to. She put what she had written in an envelope and sealed it. She would give it to him, that he might read and understand, when she had shown him with all of her how she loved him. It would pass the time for him, until to-morrow—until they set out on their new life together. For to-night they would make their plans, and to-morrow start.

At half-past seven she sent word that her headache was too bad to allow her to go out. This brought a visit from Mrs. Ercott: The Colonel and she were so distressed; but perhaps Olive was wise not to exert herself! And presently the Colonel himself spoke, lugubriously through the door: Not well enough to come? No fun without her! But she mustn't on any account strain herself! No, no!

Her heart smote her at that. He was always so good to her.

At last, watching from the corridor, she saw them sally forth down the drive—the Colonel a little in advance, carrying his wife's evening shoes. How nice he looked—with his brown face, and his grey moustache; so upright, and concerned with what he had in hand!

There was no languor in her now. She had dressed in white, and now she took a blue silk cloak with a hood, and caught up the flower that had so miraculously survived last night's wearing and pinned it at her breast. Then making sure no servant was about, she slipped downstairs and out. It was just eight, and the sun still glistened on the dove-cot. She kept away from that lest the birds should come fluttering about her, and betray her by cooing. When she had nearly reached the tow-path, she stopped affrighted. Surely something had moved, something heavy, with a sound of broken branches. Was it the memory of last night come on her again; or, indeed, someone there? She walked back a few steps. Foolish alarm! In the meadow beyond a cow was brushing against the hedge. And, stealing along the grass, out on to the tow-path, she went swiftly towards the poplar.

XIX

A hundred times in these days of her absence Lennan had been on the point of going down, against her orders, just to pass the house, just to feel himself within reach, to catch a glimpse of her, perhaps, from afar. If his body haunted London, his spirit had passed down on to that river where he had drifted once already, reconnoitring. A hundred times—by day in fancy, and by night in dreams—pulling himself along by the boughs, he stole down that dim backwater, till the dark yews and the white dove-cot came into view.

For he thought now only of fulfilment. She was wasting cruelly away! Why should he leave her where she was? Leave her to profane herself and all womanhood in the arms of a man she hated?

And on that day of mid-June, when he received her telegram, it was as if he had been handed the key of Paradise.

Would she—could she mean to come away with him that very night? He would prepare for that at all events. He had so often in mind faced this crisis in his affairs, that now it only meant translating into action what had been carefully thought out. He packed, supplied himself liberally with money, and wrote a long letter to his guardian. It would hurt the old man—Gordy was over seventy now—but that could not be helped. He would not post it till he knew for certain.

After telling how it had all come about, he went on thus: "I know that to many people, and perhaps to you, Gordy, it will seem very wrong, but it does not to me, and that is the simple truth. Everybody has his own views on such things, I suppose; and as I would not—on my honour, Gordy—ever have held or wished to hold, or ever will hold in marriage or out of marriage, any woman who does not love me, so I do not think it is acting as I would resent others acting towards me, to take away from such unhappiness this lady for whom I would die at any minute. I do not mean to say that pity has anything to do with it—I thought so at first, but I know now that it is all swallowed up in the most mighty feeling I have ever had or ever shall have. I am not a bit afraid of conscience. If God is Universal Truth, He cannot look hardly upon us for being true to ourselves. And as to people, we shall just hold up our heads; I think that they generally take you at your own valuation. But, anyway, Society does not much matter. We shan't want those who don't want us—you may be sure. I hope he will divorce her quickly—there is nobody much to be hurt by that except you and Cis; but if he doesn't—it can't be helped. I don't think she has anything; but with my six hundred, and what I can make, even if we have to live abroad, we shall be all right for money. You have been awfully good to me always, Gordy, and I am very grieved to hurt you, and still more sorry if you think I am being ungrateful; but when one feels as I do—body and soul and spirit—there isn't any question; there wouldn't be if death itself stood in the way. If you receive this, we shall be gone together; I will write to you from wherever we pitch our tent, and, of course, I shall write to Cicely. But will you please tell Mrs. Doone and Sylvia, and give them my love if they still care to have it. Good-bye, dear Gordy. I believe you would have done the same, if you had

been I. Always your affectionate—MARK."

In all those preparations he forgot nothing, employing every minute of the few hours in a sort of methodic exaltation. The last thing before setting out he took the damp cloths off his 'bull-man.' Into the face of the monster there had come of late a hungry, yearning look. The artist in him had done his work that unconscious justice; against his will had set down the truth. And, wondering whether he would ever work at it again, he redamped the cloths and wrapped it carefully.

He did not go to her village, but to one five or six miles down the river—it was safer, and the row would steady him. Hiring a skiff, he pulled up stream. He travelled very slowly to kill time, keeping under the far bank. And as he pulled, his very heart seemed parched with nervousness. Was it real that he was going to her, or only some fantastic trick of Fate, a dream from which he would wake to find himself alone again? He passed the dove-cot at last, and kept on till he could round into the backwater and steal up under cover to the poplar. He arrived a few minutes before eight o'clock, turned the boat round, and waited close beneath the bank, holding to a branch, and standing so that he could see the path. If a man could die from longing and anxiety, surely Lennan must have died then!

All wind had failed, and the day was fallen into a wonderful still evening. Gnats were dancing in the sparse strips of sunlight that slanted across the dark water, now that the sun was low. From the fields, bereft of workers, came the scent of hay and the heavy scent of meadow-sweet; the musky odour of the backwater was confused with them into one brooding perfume. No one passed. And sounds were few and far to that wistful listener, for birds did not sing just there. How still and warm was the air, yet seemed to vibrate against his cheeks as though about to break into flame. That fancy came to him vividly while he stood waiting—a vision of heat simmering in little pale red flames. On the thick reeds some large, slow, dusky flies were still feeding, and now and then a moorhen a few yards away splashed a little, or uttered a sharp, shrill note. When she came—if she did come!—they would not stay here, in this dark earthy backwater; he would take her over to the other side, away to the woods! But the minutes passed, and his heart sank. Then it leaped up. Someone was coming—in white, with bare head, and something blue or black flung across her arm. It was she! No one else walked like that! She came very quickly. And he noticed that her hair looked like little wings on either side of her brow, as if her face were a white bird with dark wings, flying to love! Now she was close, so close that he could see her lips parted, and her eyes love-lighted—like nothing in the world but darkness wild with dew and starlight. He reached up and lifted her down into the boat, and the scent of some flower pressed against his face seemed to pierce into him and reach his very heart, awakening the memory of something past, forgotten. Then, seizing the branches, snapping them in his haste, he dragged the skiff along through the sluggish water, the gnats dancing in his face. She seemed to know where he was taking her, and neither of them spoke a single word, while he pulled out into the open, and over to the far bank.

There was but one field between them and the wood—a field of young wheat, with a hedge of thorn and alder. And close to that hedge they set out, their hands clasped. They had nothing to say yet—like children saving up. She had put on her cloak to hide her dress, and its silk swished against the silvery blades of the wheat. What had moved her to put on this blue cloak? Blue of the sky, and flowers, of birds' wings, and the black-burning blue of the night! The hue of all holy things! And how still it was in the late gleam of the sun! Not one little sound of beast or bird or tree; not one bee humming! And not much colour—only the starry white hemlocks and globe-campion flowers, and the low-flying glamour of the last warm light on the wheat.

XX

. . . Now over wood and river the evening drew in fast. And first the swallows, that had looked as if they would never stay their hunting, ceased; and the light, that had seemed fastened above the world, for all its last brightenings, slowly fell wingless and dusky.

The moon would not rise till ten! And all things waited. The creatures of night were slow to come forth after that long bright summer's day, watching for the shades of the trees to sink deeper and deeper into the now chalk-white water; watching for the chalk-white face of the sky to be masked with velvet. The very black-plumed trees themselves seemed to wait in suspense for the grape-bloom of night. All things stared, wan in that hour of passing day—all things had eyes wistful and unblessed. In those moments glamour was so dead that it was as if meaning had abandoned the earth. But not for long. Winged with darkness, it stole back; not the soul of meaning that had gone, but a witch-like and brooding spirit harbouring in the black trees, in the high dark spears of the rushes, and on the grim-snouted snags that lurked along the river bank. Then the owls came out, and night-flying things. And in the wood there began a cruel bird-tragedy—some dark pursuit in the twilight above the bracken; the piercing shrieks of a creature into whom talons have again and again gone home; and mingled with

them, hoarse raging cries of triumph. Many minutes they lasted, those noises of the night, sound-emblems of all the cruelty in the heart of Nature; till at last death appeased that savagery. And any soul abroad, that pitied fugitives, might once more listen, and not weep. . . .

Then a nightingale began to give forth its long liquid gurgling; and a corn-crake churred in the young wheat. Again the night brooded, in the silent tops of the trees, in the more silent depths of the water. It sent out at long intervals a sigh or murmur, a tiny scuttling splash, an owl's hunting cry. And its breath was still hot and charged with heavy odour, for no dew was falling. . . .

XXI

It was past ten when they came out from the wood. She had wanted to wait for the moon to rise; not a gold coin of a moon as last night, but ivory pale, and with a gleaming radiance level over the fern, and covering the lower boughs, as it were, with a drift of white blossom.

Through the wicket gate they passed once more beside the moon-coloured wheat, which seemed of a different world from that world in which they had walked but an hour and a half ago.

And in Lennan's heart was a feeling such as a man's heart can only know once in all his life—such humble gratitude, and praise, and adoration of her who had given him her all. There should be nothing for her now but joy—like the joy of this last hour. She should never know less happiness! And kneeling down before her at the water's edge he kissed her dress, and hands, and feet, which to-morrow would be his forever.

Then they got into the boat.

The smile of the moonlight glided over each ripple, and reed, and closing water-lily; over her face, where the hood had fallen back from her loosened hair; over one hand trailing the water, and the other touching the flower at her breast; and, just above her breath, she said:

"Row, my dear love; it's late!"

Dipping his sculls, he shot the skiff into the darkness of the backwater. . . .

What happened then he never knew, never clearly—in all those after years. A vision of her white form risen to its feet, bending forward like a creature caught, that cannot tell which way to spring; a crashing shock, his head striking something hard! Nothingness! And then—an awful, awful struggle with roots and weeds and slime, a desperate agony of groping in that pitchy blackness, among tree-stumps, in dead water that seemed to have no bottom—he and that other, who had leaped at them in the dark with his boat, like a murdering beast; a nightmare search more horrible than words could tell, till in a patch of moonlight on the bank they laid her, who for all their efforts never stirred. . . . There she lay all white, and they two crouched at her head and feet—like dark creatures of the woods and waters over that which with their hunting they had slain.

How long they stayed there, not once looking at each other, not once speaking, not once ceasing to touch with their hands that dead thing—he never knew. How long in the summer night, with its moonlight and its shadows quivering round them, and the night wind talking in the reeds!

And then the most enduring of all sentient things had moved in him again; so that he once more felt. . . . Never again to see those eyes that had loved him with their light! Never again to kiss her lips! Frozen—like moonlight to the earth, with the flower still clinging at her breast. Thrown out on the bank like a plucked water-lily! Dead? No, no! Not dead! Alive in the night—alive to him—somewhere! Not on this dim bank, in this hideous backwater, with that dark dumb creature who had destroyed her! Out there on the river—in the wood of their happiness—somewhere alive! . . . And, staggering up past Cramier, who never moved, he got into his boat, and like one demented pulled out into the stream.

But once there in the tide, he fell huddled forward, motionless above his oars. . . .

And the moonlight flooded his dark skiff drifting down. And the moonlight effaced the ripples on the water that had stolen away her spirit. Her spirit mingled now with the white beauty and the shadows, for ever part of the stillness and the passion of a summer night; hovering, floating, listening to the rustle of the reeds, and the whispering of the woods; one with the endless dream—that spirit passing out, as all might wish to pass, in the hour of happiness.

PART III

AUTUMN

I

When on that November night Lennan stole to the open door of his dressing-room, and stood watching his wife asleep, Fate still waited for an answer.

A low fire was burning—one of those fires that throw faint shadows everywhere, and once and again glow so that some object shines for a moment, some shape is clearly seen. The curtains were not quite drawn, and a plane-tree branch with leaves still hanging, which had kept them company all the fifteen years they had lived there, was moving darkly in the wind, now touching the glass with a frail tap, as though asking of him, who had been roaming in that wind so many hours, to let it in. Unfailing comrades—London plane-trees!

He had not dared hope that Sylvia would be asleep. It was merciful that she was, whichever way the issue went—that issue so cruel. Her face was turned towards the fire, and one hand rested beneath her cheek. So she often slept. Even when life seemed all at sea, its landmarks lost, one still did what was customary. Poor tender-hearted thing—she had not slept since he told her, forty-eight hours, that seemed such years, ago! With her flaxen hair, and her touching candour, even in sleep, she looked like a girl lying there, not so greatly changed from what she had been that summer of Cicely's marriage down at Hayle. Her face had not grown old in all those twenty-eight years. There had been till now no special reason why it should. Thought, strong feeling, suffering, those were what changed faces; Sylvia had never thought very deeply, never suffered much, till now. And was it for him, who had been careful of her—very careful on the whole, despite man's selfishness, despite her never having understood the depths of him—was it for him of all people to hurt her so, to stamp her face with sorrow, perhaps destroy her utterly?

He crept a little farther in and sat down in the arm-chair beyond the fire. What memories a fire gathered into it, with its flaky ashes, its little leaf-like flames, and that quiet glow and flicker! What tale of passions! How like to a fire was a man's heart! The first young fitful leapings, the sudden, fierce, mastering heat, the long, steady sober burning, and then—that last flaming-up, that clutch back at its own vanished youth, the final eager flight of flame, before the ashes wintered it to nothing! Visions and memories he saw down in the fire, as only can be seen when a man's heart, by the agony of long struggle, has been stripped of skin, and quivers at every touch. Love! A strange haphazard thing was love—so spun between ecstasy and torture! A thing insidious, irresponsible, desperate. A flying sweetness, more poignant than anything on earth, more dark in origin and destiny. A thing without reason or coherence. A man's love-life—what say had he in the ebb and flow of it? No more than in the flights of autumn birds, swooping down, alighting here and there, passing on. The loves one left behind—even in a life by no means vagabond in love, as men's lives went! The love that thought the Tyrol skies would fall if he were not first with a certain lady. The love whose star had caught in the hair of Sylvia, now lying there asleep. A so-called love—that half-glamorous, yet sordid little meal of pleasure, which youth, however sensitive, must eat, it seems, some time or other with some young light of love—a glimpse of life that beforehand had seemed much and had meant little, save to leave him disillusioned with himself and sorry for his partner. And then the love that he could not, even after twenty years, bear to remember; that all-devouring summer passion, which in one night had gained all and lost all terribly, leaving on his soul a scar that could never be quite healed, leaving his spirit always a little lonely, haunted by the sense of what might have been. Of his share in that night of tragedy—that 'terrible accident on the river'—no one had ever dreamed. And then the long despair which had seemed the last death of love had slowly passed, and yet another love had been born—or rather born again, pale, sober, but quite real; the fresh springing-up of a feeling long forgotten, of that protective devotion of his boyhood. He still remembered the expression on Sylvia's face when he passed her by chance in Oxford Street, soon after he came back from his four years of exile in the East and Rome—that look, eager, yet reproachful, then stoically ironic, as if saying: 'Oh, no! after forgetting me four years and more—you can't remember me now!' And when he spoke, the still more touching pleasure in her face. Then uncertain months, with a feeling of what the end would be; and then their marriage. Happy enough—gentle, not very vivid, nor spiritually very intimate—his work always secretly as remote from her as when she had thought to please him by putting jessamine stars on the heads of his beasts. A quiet successful union, not meaning, he had thought, so very much to him nor so very much to her—until forty-eight hours ago he told her; and she had shrunk, and wilted, and gone all to pieces. And what was it he had told her?

A long story—that!

Sitting there by the fire, with nothing yet decided, he could see it all from the start, with its devilish, delicate intricacy, its subtle slow enchantment spinning itself out of him, out of his own state of mind and body, rather than out of the spell cast over him, as though a sort of fatal force, long dormant, were working up again to burst into dark flower. . . .

II

Yes, it had begun within him over a year ago, with a queer unhappy restlessness, a feeling that life was slipping, ebbing away within reach of him, and his arms never stretched out to arrest it. It had begun with a sort of long craving, stilled only when he was working hard—a craving for he knew not what, an ache which was worst whenever the wind was soft.

They said that about forty-five was a perilous age for a man—especially for an artist. All the autumn of last year he had felt this vague misery rather badly. It had left him alone most of December and January, while he was working so hard at his group of lions; but the moment that was finished it had gripped him hard again. In those last days of January he well remembered wandering about in the parks day after day, trying to get away from it. Mild weather, with a scent in the wind! With what avidity he had watched children playing, the premature buds on the bushes, anything, everything young—with what an ache, too, he had been conscious of innumerable lives being lived round him, and loves loved, and he outside, unable to know, to grasp, to gather them; and all the time the sands of his hourglass running out! A most absurd and unreasonable feeling for a man with everything he wanted, with work that he loved, quite enough money, and a wife so good as Sylvia—a feeling that no Englishman of forty-six, in excellent health, ought for a moment to have been troubled with. A feeling such as, indeed, no Englishman ever admitted having—so that there was not even, as yet, a Society for its suppression. For what was this disquiet feeling, but the sense that he had had his day, would never again know the stir and fearful joy of falling in love, but only just hanker after what was past and gone! Could anything be more reprehensible in a married man?

It was—yes—the last day of January, when, returning from one of those restless rambles in Hyde Park, he met Dromore. Queer to recognize a man hardly seen since school-days. Yet unmistakably, Johnny Dromore, sauntering along the rails of Piccadilly on the Green Park side, with that slightly rolling gait of his thin, horseman's legs, his dandified hat a little to one side, those strange, chaffing, goggling eyes, that look, as if making a perpetual bet. Yes—the very same teasing, now moody, now reckless, always astute Johnny Dromore, with a good heart beneath an outside that seemed ashamed of it. Truly to have shared a room at school—to have been at College together, were links mysteriously indestructible.

"Mark Lennan! By gum! haven't seen you for ages. Not since you turned out a full-blown—what d'you call it? Awfully glad to meet you, old chap!" Here was the past indeed, long vanished in feeling and thought and all; and Lennan's head buzzed, trying to find some common interest with this hunting, racing man-about-town.

Johnny Dromore come to life again—he whom the Machine had stamped with astute simplicity by the time he was twenty-two, and for ever after left untouched in thought and feeling—Johnny Dromore, who would never pass beyond the philosophy that all was queer and freakish which had not to do with horses, women, wine, cigars, jokes, good-heartedness, and that perpetual bet; Johnny Dromore, who, somewhere in him, had a pocket of depth, a streak of hunger, that was not just Johnny Dromore.

How queer was the sound of that jerky talk!

"You ever see old Fookes now? Been racin' at all? You live in Town? Remember good old Blenker?" And then silence, and then another spurt: "Ever go down to 'Bambury's'? Ever go racin'? . . . Come on up to my 'digs.' You've got nothin' to do." No persuading Johnny Dromore that a 'what d'you call it' could have anything to do. "Come on, old chap. I've got the hump. It's this damned east wind."

Well he remembered it, when they shared a room at 'Bambury's'—that hump of Johnny Dromore's, after some reckless spree or bout of teasing.

And down that narrow bye-street of Piccadilly he had gone, and up into those 'digs' on the first floor, with their little dark hall, their Van Beers' drawing and Vanity Fair cartoons, and prints of racehorses, and of the old Nightgown Steeplechase; with the big chairs, and all the paraphernalia of Race Guides and race-glasses, fox-masks and stags'-horns, and hunting-whips. And yet, something that from the first moment struck him as not quite in keeping, foreign to the picture—a little jumble of books, a vase of flowers, a grey kitten.

"Sit down, old chap. What'll you drink?"

Sunk into the recesses of a marvellous chair, with huge arms of tawny leather, he listened and spoke drowsily. 'Bambury's,' Oxford, Gordy's clubs—dear old Gordy, gone now!—things long passed by; they seemed all round him once again. And yet, always that vague sense, threading this resurrection, threading the smoke of their cigars, and Johnny Dromore's clipped talk—of something that did not quite belong. Might it be, perhaps, that sepia drawing—above the 'Tantalus' on the oak sideboard at the far end—of a woman's face gazing out into the room? Mysteriously unlike everything else, except the flowers, and this kitten that was pushing its furry little head against his hand. Odd how a single thing sometimes took possession of a room, however remote in spirit! It seemed to reach like a shadow over Dromore's outstretched limbs, and weathered, long-nosed face, behind his huge cigar; over the queer, solemn, chaffing eyes, with something brooding in the depths of them.

"Ever get the hump? Bally awful, isn't it? It's getting old. We're bally old, you know, Lenny!" Ah! No one had called him 'Lenny' for twenty years. And it was true; they were unmentionably old.

"When a fellow begins to feel old, you know, it's time he went broke—or something; doesn't bear sittin' down and lookin' at. Come out to 'Monte' with me!"

'Monte!' That old wound, never quite healed, started throbbing at the word, so that he could hardly speak his: "No, I don't care for 'Monte.'"

And, at once, he saw Dromore's eyes probing, questioning:

"You married?"

"Yes."

"Never thought of you as married!"

So Dromore did think of him. Queer! He never thought of Johnny Dromore.

"Winter's bally awful, when you're not huntin'. You've changed a lot; should hardly have known you. Last time I saw you, you'd just come back from Rome or somewhere. What's it like bein' a—a sculptor? Saw something of yours once. Ever do things of horses?"

Yes; he had done a 'relief' of ponies only last year.

"You do women, too, I s'pose?"

"Not often."

The eyes goggled slightly. Quaint, that unholy interest! Just like boys, the Johnny Dromores—would never grow up, no matter how life treated them. If Dromore spoke out his soul, as he used to speak it out at 'Bambury's,' he would say: 'You get a pull there; you have a bally good time, I expect.' That was the way it took them; just a converse manifestation of the very same feeling towards Art that the pious Philistines had, with their deploring eyebrows and their 'peril to the soul.' Babes all! Not a glimmering of what Art meant—of its effort, and its yearnings!

"You make money at it?"

"Oh, yes."

Again that appreciative goggle, as who should say: 'Ho! there's more in this than I thought!'

A long silence, then, in the dusk with the violet glimmer from outside the windows, the fire flickering in front of them, the grey kitten purring against his neck, the smoke of their cigars going up, and such a strange, dozing sense of rest, as he had not known for many days. And then—something, someone at the door, over by the sideboard! And Dromore speaking in a queer voice:

"Come in, Nell! D'you know my daughter?"

A hand took Lennan's, a hand that seemed to waver between the aplomb of a woman of the world, and a child's impulsive warmth. And a voice, young, clipped, clear, said:

"How d'you do? She's rather sweet, isn't she—my kitten?"

Then Dromore turned the light up. A figure fairly tall, in a grey riding-habit, stupendously well cut; a face not quite so round as a child's nor so shaped as a woman's, blushing slightly, very calm; crinkly light-brown hair tied back with a black ribbon under a neat hat; and eyes like those eyes of Gainsborough's 'Perdita'—slow, grey, mesmeric, with long lashes curling up, eyes that draw things to them, still innocent.

And just on the point of saying: "I thought you'd stepped out of that picture"—he saw Dromore's face, and mumbled instead:

"So it's YOUR kitten?"

"Yes; she goes to everybody. Do you like Persians? She's all fur really. Feel!"

Entering with his fingers the recesses of the kitten, he said:

"Cats without fur are queer."

"Have you seen one without fur?"

"Oh, yes! In my profession we have to go below fur—I'm a sculptor."

"That must be awfully interesting."

What a woman of the world! But what a child, too! And now he could see that the face in the sepia drawing was older altogether—lips not so full, look not so innocent, cheeks not so round, and something sad and desperate about it—a face that life had rudely touched. But the same eyes it had—and what charm, for all its disillusionment, its air of a history! Then he noticed, fastened to the frame, on a thin rod, a dust-coloured curtain, drawn to one side. The self-possessed young voice was saying:

"Would you mind if I showed you my drawings? It would be awfully good of you. You could tell me about them." And with dismay he saw her open a portfolio. While he scrutinized those schoolgirl drawings, he could feel her looking at him, as animals do when they are making up their minds whether or no to like you; then she came and stood so close that her arm pressed his. He redoubled his efforts to find something good about the drawings. But in truth there was nothing good. And if, in other matters, he could lie well enough to save people's feelings, where Art was concerned he never could; so he merely said:

"You haven't been taught, you see."

"Will you teach me?"

But before he could answer, she was already effacing that naive question in her most grown-up manner.

"Of course I oughtn't to ask. It would bore you awfully."

After that he vaguely remembered Dromore's asking if he ever rode in the Row; and those eyes of hers following him about; and her hand giving his another childish squeeze. Then he was on his way again down the dimly-lighted stairs, past an interminable array of Vanity Fair cartoons, out into the east wind.

III

Crossing the Green Park on his way home, was he more, or less, restless? Difficult to say. A little flattered, certainly, a little warmed; yet irritated, as always when he came into contact with people to whom the world of Art was such an amusing unreality. The notion of trying to show that child how to draw—that feather-pate, with her riding and her kitten; and her 'Perdita' eyes! Quaint, how she had at once made friends with him! He was a little different, perhaps, from what she was accustomed to. And how daintily she spoke! A strange, attractive, almost lovely child! Certainly not more than seventeen—and—Johnny Dromore's daughter!

The wind was bitter, the lamps bright among the naked trees. Beautiful always—London at night, even in January, even in an east wind, with a beauty he never tired of. Its great, dark, chiselled shapes, its gleaming lights, like droves of flying stars come to earth; and all warmed by the beat and stir of innumerable lives—those lives that he ached so to know and to be part of.

He told Sylvia of his encounter. Dromore! The name struck her. She had an old Irish song, 'The Castle of Dromore,' with a queer, haunting refrain.

It froze hard all the week, and he began a life-size group of their two sheep-dogs. Then a thaw set in with that first south-west wind, which brings each February a feeling of Spring such as is never again recaptured, and men's senses, like sleepy bees in the sun, go roving. It awakened in him more violently than ever the thirst to be living, knowing, loving—the craving for something new. Not this, of course, took him back to Dromore's rooms; oh, no! just friendliness, since he had not even told his old roommate where he lived, or said that his wife would be glad to make his acquaintance, if he cared to come

round. For Johnny Dromore had assuredly not seemed too happy, under all his hard-bitten air. Yes! it was but friendly to go again.

Dromore was seated in his long arm-chair, a cigar between his lips, a pencil in his hand, a Ruff's Guide on his knee; beside him was a large green book. There was a festive air about him, very different from his spasmodic gloom of the other day; and he murmured without rising:

"Halo, old man!—glad to see you. Take a pew. Look here! Agapemone—which d'you think I ought to put her to—San Diavolo or Ponte Canet?—not more than four crosses of St. Paul. Goin' to get a real good one from her this time!"

He, who had never heard these sainted names, answered:

"Oh! Ponte Canet, without doubt. But if you're working I'll come in another time."

"Lord! no! Have a smoke. I'll just finish lookin' out their blood—and take a pull."

And so Lennan sat down to watch those researches, wreathed in cigar smoke and punctuated by muttered expletives. They were as sacred and absorbing, no doubt, as his own efforts to create in clay; for before Dromore's inner vision was the perfect racehorse—he, too, was creating. Here was no mere dodge for making money, but a process hallowed by the peculiar sensation felt when one rubbed the palms of the hands together, the sensation that accompanied all creative achievement. Once only Dromore paused to turn his head and say:

"Bally hard, gettin' a taproot right!"

Real Art! How well an artist knew that desperate search after the point of balance, the central rivet that must be found before a form would come to life. . . . And he noted that to-day there was no kitten, no flowers, no sense at all of an extraneous presence—even the picture was curtained. Had the girl been just a dream—a fancy conjured up by his craving after youth?

Then he saw that Dromore had dropped the large green book, and was standing before the fire.

"Nell took to you the other day. But you always were a lady's man. Remember the girl at Coaster's?"

Coaster's tea-shop, where he would go every afternoon that he had money, just for the pleasure of looking shyly at a face. Something beautiful to look at—nothing more! Johnny Dromore would no better understand that now than when they were at 'Bambury's.' Not the smallest good even trying to explain! He looked up at the goggling eyes; he heard the bantering voice:

"I say—you ARE goin' grey. We're bally old, Lenny! A fellow gets old when he marries."

And he answered:

"By the way, I never knew that YOU had been."

From Dromore's face the chaffing look went, like a candle-flame blown out; and a coppery flush spread over it. For some seconds he did not speak, then, jerking his head towards the picture, he muttered gruffly:

"Never had the chance of marrying, there; Nell's 'outside.'"

A sort of anger leaped in Lennan; why should Dromore speak that word as if he were ashamed of his own daughter? Just like his sort—none so hidebound as men-about-town! Flotsam on the tide of other men's opinions; poor devils adrift, without the one true anchorage of their own real feelings! And doubtful whether Dromore would be pleased, or think him gushing, or even distrustful of his morality, he said:

"As for that, it would only make any decent man or woman nicer to her. When is she going to let me teach her drawing?"

Dromore crossed the room, drew back the curtain of the picture, and in a muffled voice, said:

"My God, Lenny! Life's unfair. Nell's coming killed her mother. I'd rather it had been me—bar chaff! Women have no luck."

Lennan got up from his comfortable chair. For, startled out of the past, the memory of that summer night, when yet another woman had no luck, was flooding his heart with its black, inextinguishable

grief. He said quietly:

"The past IS past, old man."

Dromore drew the curtain again across the picture, and came back to the fire. And for a full minute he stared into it.

"What am I to do with Nell? She's growing up."

"What have you done with her so far?"

"She's been at school. In the summer she goes to Ireland—I've got a bit of an old place there. She'll be eighteen in July. I shall have to introduce her to women, and all that. It's the devil! How? Who?"

Lennan could only murmur: "My wife, for one."

He took his leave soon after. Johnny Dromore! Bizarre guardian for that child! Queer life she must have of it, in that bachelor's den, surrounded by Ruff's Guides! What would become of her? Caught up by some young spark about town; married to him, no doubt—her father would see to the thoroughness of that, his standard of respectability was evidently high! And after—go the way, maybe, of her mother—that poor thing in the picture with the alluring, desperate face. Well! It was no business of his!

IV

No business of his! The merest sense of comradeship, then, took him once more to Dromore's after that disclosure, to prove that the word 'outside' had no significance save in his friend's own fancy; to assure him again that Sylvia would be very glad to welcome the child at any time she liked to come.

When he had told her of that little matter of Nell's birth, she had been silent a long minute, looking in his face, and then had said: "Poor child! I wonder if SHE knows! People are so unkind, even nowadays!" He could not himself think of anyone who would pay attention to such a thing, except to be kinder to the girl; but in such matters Sylvia was the better judge, in closer touch with general thought. She met people that he did not—and of a more normal species.

It was rather late when he got to Dromore's diggings on that third visit.

"Mr. Dromore, sir," the man said—he had one of those strictly confidential faces bestowed by an all-wise Providence on servants in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly—"Mr. Dromore, sir, is not in. But he will be almost sure to be in to dress. Miss Nell is in, sir."

And there she was, sitting at the table, pasting photographs into an album—lonely young creature in that abode of male middle-age! Lennan stood, unheard, gazing at the back of her head, with its thick crinkly-brown hair tied back on her dark-red frock. And, to the confidential man's soft:

"Mr. Lennan, miss," he added a softer: "May I come in?"

She put her hand into his with intense composure.

"Oh, yes, do! if you don't mind the mess I'm making;" and, with a little squeeze of the tips of his fingers, added: "Would it bore you to see my photographs?"

And down they sat together before the photographs—snapshots of people with guns or fishing-rods, little groups of schoolgirls, kittens, Dromore and herself on horseback, and several of a young man with a broad, daring, rather good-looking face. "That's Oliver—Oliver Dromore—Dad's first cousin once removed. Rather nice, isn't he? Do you like his expression?"

Lennan did not know. Not her second cousin; her father's first cousin once removed! And again there leaped in him that unreasoning flame of indignant pity.

"And how about drawing? You haven't come to be taught yet."

She went almost as red as her frock.

"I thought you were only being polite. I oughtn't to have asked. Of course, I want to awfully—only I know it'll bore you."

"It won't at all."

She looked up at that. What peculiar languorous eyes they were!

"Shall I come to-morrow, then?"

"Any day you like, between half-past twelve and one."

"Where?"

He took out a card.

"Mark Lennan—yes—I like your name. I liked it the other day. It's awfully nice!"

What was in a name that she should like him because of it? His fame as a sculptor—such as it was—could have nothing to do with that, for she would certainly not know of it. Ah! but there was a lot in a name—for children. In his childhood what fascination there had been in the words macaroon, and Spaniard, and Carinola, and Aldebaran, and Mr. McCrae. For quite a week the whole world had been Mr. McCrae—a most ordinary friend of Gordy's.

By whatever fascination moved, she talked freely enough now—of her school; of riding and motoring—she seemed to love going very fast; about Newmarket—which was 'perfect'; and theatres—plays of the type that Johnny Dromore might be expected to approve; these together with 'Hamlet' and 'King Lear' were all she had seen. Never was a girl so untouched by thought, or Art—yet not stupid, having, seemingly, a certain natural good taste; only, nothing, evidently, had come her way. How could it—'Johnny Dromore duce, et auspice Johnny Dromore!' She had been taken, indeed, to the National Gallery while at school. And Lennan had a vision of eight or ten young maidens trailing round at the skirts of one old maiden, admiring Landseer's dogs, giggling faintly at Botticelli's angels, gaping, rustling, chattering like young birds in a shrubbery.

But with all her surroundings, this child of Johnny Dromoredom was as yet more innocent than cultured girls of the same age. If those grey, mesmeric eyes of hers followed him about, they did so frankly, unconsciously. There was no minx in her, so far.

An hour went by, and Dromore did not come. And the loneliness of this young creature in her incongruous abode began telling on Lennan's equanimity.

What did she do in the evenings?

"Sometimes I go to the theatre with Dad, generally I stay at home."

"And then?"

"Oh! I just read, or talk French."

"What? To yourself?"

"Yes, or to Oliver sometimes, when he comes in."

So Oliver came in!

"How long have you known Oliver?"

"Oh! ever since I was a child."

He wanted to say: And how long is that? But managed to refrain, and got up to go instead. She caught his sleeve and said:

"You're not to go!" Saying that she looked as a dog will, going to bite in fun, her upper lip shortened above her small white teeth set fast on her lower lip, and her chin thrust a little forward. A glimpse of a wilful spirit! But as soon as he had smiled, and murmured:

"Ah! but I must, you see!" she at once regained her manners, only saying rather mournfully: "You don't call me by my name. Don't you like it?"

"Nell?"

"Yes. It's really Eleanor, of course. DON'T you like it?"

If he had detested the name, he could only have answered: "Very much."

"I'm awfully glad! Good-bye."

When he got out into the street, he felt terribly like a man who, instead of having had his sleeve touched, has had his heart plucked at. And that warm, bewildered feeling lasted him all the way home.

Changing for dinner, he looked at himself with unwonted attention. Yes, his dark hair was still thick, but going distinctly grey; there were very many lines about his eyes, too, and those eyes, still eager when they smiled, were particularly deepset, as if life had forced them back. His cheekbones were almost 'bopsies' now, and his cheeks very thin and dark, and his jaw looked too set and bony below the almost black moustache. Altogether a face that life had worn a good deal, with nothing for a child to take a fancy to and make friends with, that he could see.

Sylvia came in while he was thus taking stock of himself, bringing a freshly-opened flask of eau-de-Cologne. She was always bringing him something—never was anyone so sweet in those ways. In that grey, low-cut frock, her white, still prettiness and pale-gold hair, so little touched by Time, only just fell short of real beauty for lack of a spice of depth and of incisiveness, just as her spirit lacked he knew not what of poignancy. He would not for the world have let her know that he ever felt that lack. If a man could not hide little rifts in the lute from one so good and humble and affectionate, he was not fit to live.

She sang 'The Castle of Dromore' again that night with its queer haunting lilt. And when she had gone up, and he was smoking over the fire, the girl in her dark-red frock seemed to come, and sit opposite with her eyes fixed on his, just as she had been sitting while they talked. Dark red had suited her! Suited the look on her face when she said:

"You're not to go!" Odd, indeed, if she had not some devil in her, with that parentage!

V

Next day they had summoned him from the studio to see a peculiar phenomenon—Johnny Dromore, very well groomed, talking to Sylvia with unnatural suavity, and carefully masking the goggle in his eyes! Mrs. Lennan ride? Ah! Too busy, of course. Helped Mark with his—er—No! Really! Read a lot, no doubt? Never had any time for readin' himself—awful bore not having time to read! And Sylvia listening and smiling, very still and soft.

What had Dromore come for? To spy out the land, discover why Lennan and his wife thought nothing of the word 'outside'—whether, in fact, their household was respectable. . . . A man must always look twice at 'what-d'you-call-ems,' even if they have shared his room at school! . . . To his credit, of course, to be so careful of his daughter, at the expense of time owed to the creation of the perfect racehorse! On the whole he seemed to be coming to the conclusion that they might be useful to Nell in the uncomfortable time at hand when she would have to go about; seemed even to be falling under the spell of Sylvia's transparent goodness—abandoning his habitual vigilance against being scored off in life's perpetual bet; parting with his armour of chaff. Almost a relief, indeed, once out of Sylvia's presence, to see that familiar, unholy curiosity creeping back into his eyes, as though they were hoping against parental hope to find something—er—amusing somewhere about that mysterious Mecca of good times—a 'what-d'you-call-it's' studio. Delicious to watch the conflict between relief and disappointment. Alas! no model—not even a statue without clothes; nothing but portrait heads, casts of animals, and such-like sobrieties—absolutely nothing that could bring a blush to the cheek of the young person, or a glow to the eyes of a Johnny Dromore.

With what curious silence he walked round and round the group of sheep-dogs, inquiring into them with that long crinkled nose of his! With what curious suddenness, he said: "Damned good! You wouldn't do me one of Nell on horseback?" With what dubious watchfulness he listened to the answer:

"I might, perhaps, do a statuette of her; if I did, you should have a cast."

Did he think that in some way he was being outmanoeuvred? For he remained some seconds in a sort of trance before muttering, as though clinching a bet:

"Done! And if you want to ride with her to get the hang of it, I can always mount you."

When he had gone, Lennan remained staring at his unfinished sheep-dogs in the gathering dusk. Again that sense of irritation at contact with something strange, hostile, uncomprehending! Why let these Dromores into his life like this? He shut the studio, and went back to the drawing-room. Sylvia was sitting on the fender, gazing at the fire, and she edged along so as to rest against his knees. The light from a candle on her writing-table was shining on her hair, her cheek, and chin, that years had so little altered. A pretty picture she made, with just that candle flame, swaying there, burning slowly, surely down the pale wax—candle flame, of all lifeless things most living, most like a spirit, so bland and vague, one would hardly have known it was fire at all. A drift of wind blew it this way and that: he got up to shut the window, and as he came back; Sylvia said:

"I like Mr. Dromore. I think he's nicer than he looks."

"He's asked me to make a statuette of his daughter on horseback."

"And will you?"

"I don't know."

"If she's really so pretty, you'd better."

"Pretty's hardly the word—but she's not ordinary."

She turned round, and looked up at him, and instinctively he felt that something difficult to answer was coming next.

"Mark."

"Yes."

"I wanted to ask you: Are you really happy nowadays?"

"Of course. Why not?"

What else to be said? To speak of those feelings of the last few months—those feelings so ridiculous to anyone who had them not—would only disturb her horribly.

And having received her answer, Sylvia turned back to the fire, resting silently against his knees. . . .

Three days later the sheep-dogs suddenly abandoned the pose into which he had lured them with such difficulty, and made for the studio door. There in the street was Nell Dromore, mounted on a narrow little black horse with a white star, a white hoof, and devilish little goat's ears, pricked, and very close together at the tips.

"Dad said I had better ride round and show you Magpie. He's not very good at standing still. Are those your dogs? What darlings!"

She had slipped her knee already from the pommel, and slid down; the sheep-dogs were instantly on their hind-feet, propping themselves against her waist. Lennan held the black horse—a bizarre little beast, all fire and whipcord, with a skin like satin, liquid eyes, very straight hocks, and a thin bang-tail reaching down to them. The little creature had none of those commonplace good looks so discouraging to artists.

He had forgotten its rider, till she looked up from the dogs, and said:

"Do you like him? It IS nice of you to be going to do us."

When she had ridden away, looking back until she turned the corner, he tried to lure the two dogs once more to their pose. But they would sit no more, going continually to the door, listening and sniffing; and everything felt disturbed and out of gear.

That same afternoon at Sylvia's suggestion he went with her to call on the Dromores.

While they were being ushered in he heard a man's voice rather high-pitched speaking in some language not his own; then the girl:

"No, no, Oliver. 'Dans l'amour il y a toujours un qui aime, et l'autre qui se laisse aimer.'"

She was sitting in her father's chair, and on the window-sill they saw a young man lolling, who rose and stood stock-still, with an almost insolent expression on his broad, good-looking face. Lennan scrutinized him with interest—about twenty-four he might be, rather dandified, clean-shaved, with crisp dark hair and wide-set hazel eyes, and, as in his photograph, a curious look of daring. His voice, when he vouchsafed a greeting, was rather high and not unpleasant, with a touch of lazy drawl.

They stayed but a few minutes, and going down those dimly lighted stairs again, Sylvia remarked:

"How prettily she said good-bye—as if she were putting up her face to be kissed! I think she's lovely. So does that young man. They go well together."

Rather abruptly Lennan answered:

"Ah! I suppose they do."

She came to them often after that, sometimes alone, twice with Johnny Dromore, sometimes with young Oliver, who, under Sylvia's spell, soon lost his stand-off air. And the statuette was begun. Then came Spring in earnest, and that real business of life—the racing of horses 'on the flat,' when Johnny Dromore's genius was no longer hampered by the illegitimate risks of 'jumpin'.' He came to dine with them the day before the first Newmarket meeting. He had a soft spot for Sylvia, always saying to Lennan as he went away: "Charmin' woman—your wife!" She, too, had a soft spot for him, having fathomed the utter helplessness of this worldling's wisdom, and thinking him pathetic.

After he was gone that evening, she said:

"Ought we to have Nell to stay with us while you're finishing her? She must be very lonely now her father's so much away."

It was like Sylvia to think of that; but would it be pleasure or vexation to have in the house this child with her quaint grown-upness, her confiding ways, and those 'Perdita' eyes? In truth he did not know.

She came to them with touching alacrity—very like a dog, who, left at home when the family goes for a holiday, takes at once to those who make much of it.

And she was no trouble, too well accustomed to amuse herself; and always quaint to watch, with her continual changes from child to woman of the world. A new sensation, this—of a young creature in the house. Both he and Sylvia had wanted children, without luck. Twice illness had stood in the way. Was it, perhaps, just that little lack in her—that lack of poignancy, which had prevented her from becoming a mother? An only child herself, she had no nieces or nephews; Cicely's boys had always been at school, and now were out in the world. Yes, a new sensation, and one in which Lennan's restless feelings seemed to merge and vanish.

Outside the hours when Nell sat to him, he purposely saw but little of her, leaving her to nestle under Sylvia's wing; and this she did, as if she never wanted to come out. Thus he preserved his amusement at her quaint warmths, and quainter calmness, his aesthetic pleasure in watching her, whose strange, half-hypnotized, half-hypnotic gaze, had a sort of dreamy and pathetic lovingness, as if she were brimful of affections that had no outlet.

Every morning after 'sitting' she would stay an hour bent over her own drawing, which made practically no progress; and he would often catch her following his movements with those great eyes of hers, while the sheep-dogs would lie perfectly still at her feet, blinking horribly—such was her attraction. His birds also, a jackdaw and an owl, who had the run of the studio, tolerated her as they tolerated no other female, save the housekeeper. The jackdaw would perch on her and peck her dress; but the owl merely engaged her in combats of mesmeric gazing, which never ended in victory for either.

Now that she was with them, Oliver Dromore began to haunt the house, coming at all hours, on very transparent excuses. She behaved to him with extreme capriciousness, sometimes hardly speaking, sometimes treating him like a brother; and in spite of all his nonchalance, the poor youth would just sit glowering, or gazing out his adoration, according to her mood.

One of these July evenings Lennan remembered beyond all others. He had come, after a hard day's work, out from his studio into the courtyard garden to smoke a cigarette and feel the sun on his cheek before it sank behind the wall. A piano-organ far away was grinding out a waltz; and on an hydrangea tub, under the drawing-room window, he sat down to listen. Nothing was visible from there, save just the square patch of a quite blue sky, and one soft plume of smoke from his own kitchen chimney; nothing audible save that tune, and the never-ending street murmur. Twice birds flew across—starlings. It was very peaceful, and his thoughts went floating like the smoke of his cigarette, to meet who-knew-what other thoughts—for thoughts, no doubt, had little swift lives of their own; desired, found their mates, and, lightly blending, sent forth offspring. Why not? All things were possible in this wonder-house of a world. Even that waltz tune, floating away, would find some melody to wed, and twine with, and produce a fresh chord that might float in turn to catch the hum of a gnat or fly, and breed again. Queer—how everything sought to entwine with something else! On one of the pinkish blooms of the hydrangea he noted a bee—of all things, in this hidden-away garden of tiles and gravel and plants in tubs! The little furry, lonely thing was drowsily clinging there, as if it had forgotten what it had come for—seduced, maybe, like himself, from labour by these last rays of the sun. Its wings, close-furled, were glistening; its eyes seemed closed. And the piano-organ played on, a tune of yearning, waiting, yearning. . . .

Then, through the window above his head, he heard Oliver Dromore—a voice one could always tell, pitched high, with its slight drawl—pleading, very softly at first, then insistent, imperious; and suddenly Nell's answering voice:

"I won't, Oliver! I won't! I won't!"

He rose to go out of earshot. Then a door slammed, and he saw her at the window above him, her waist on a level with his head; flushed, with her grey eyes ominously bright, her full lips parted. And he said:

"What is it, Nell?"

She leaned down and caught his hand; her touch was fiery hot.

"He kissed me! I won't let him—I won't kiss him!"

Through his head went a medley of sayings to soothe children that are hurt; but he felt unsteady, unlike himself. And suddenly she knelt, and put her hot forehead against his lips.

It was as if she had really been a little child, wanting the place kissed to make it well.

VII

After that strange outburst, Lennan considered long whether he should speak to Oliver. But what could he say, from what standpoint say it, and—with that feeling? Or should he speak to Dromore? Not very easy to speak on such a subject to one off whose turf all spiritual matters were so permanently warned. Nor somehow could he bring himself to tell Sylvia; it would be like violating a confidence to speak of the child's outburst and that quivering moment, when she had kneeled and put her hot forehead to his lips for comfort. Such a disclosure was for Nell herself to make, if she so wished.

And then young Oliver solved the difficulty by coming to the studio himself next day. He entered with 'Dromore' composure, very well groomed, in a silk hat, a cut-away black coat and charming lemon-coloured gloves; what, indeed, the youth did, besides belonging to the Yeomanry and hunting all the winter, seemed known only to himself. He made no excuse for interrupting Lennan, and for some time sat silently smoking his cigarette, and pulling the ears of the dogs. And Lennan worked on, waiting. There was always something attractive to him in this young man's broad, good-looking face, with its crisp dark hair, and half-insolent good humour, now so clouded.

At last Oliver got up, and went over to the unfinished 'Girl on the Magpie Horse.' Turning to it so that his face could not be seen, he said:

"You and Mrs. Lennan have been awfully kind to me; I behaved rather like a cad yesterday. I thought I'd better tell you. I want to marry Nell, you know."

Lennan was glad that the young man's face was so religiously averted. He let his hands come to anchor on what he was working at before he answered: "She's only a child, Oliver;" and then, watching his fingers making an inept movement with the clay, was astonished at himself.

"She'll be eighteen this month," he heard Oliver say. "If she once gets out—amongst people—I don't know what I shall do. Old Johnny's no good to look after her."

The young man's face was very red; he was forgetting to hide it now. Then it went white, and he said through clenched teeth: "She sends me mad! I don't know how not to—If I don't get her, I shall shoot myself. I shall, you know—I'm that sort. It's her eyes. They draw you right out of yourself—and leave you—" And from his gloved hand the smoked-out cigarette-end fell to the floor. "They say her mother was like that. Poor old Johnny! D'you think I've got a chance, Mr. Lennan? I don't mean now, this minute; I know she's too young."

Lennan forced himself to answer.

"I dare say, my dear fellow, I dare say. Have you talked with my wife?"

Oliver shook his head.

"She's so good—I don't think she'd quite understand my sort of feeling."

A queer little smile came up on Lennan's lips.

"Ah, well!" he said, "you must give the child time. Perhaps when she comes back from Ireland, after the summer."

The young man answered moodily:

"Yes. I've got the run of that, you know. And I shan't be able to keep away." He took up his hat. "I suppose I oughtn't to have come and bored you about this, but Nell thinks such a lot of you; and, you being different to most people—I thought you wouldn't mind." He turned again at the door. "It wasn't gas what I said just now—about not getting her. Fellows say that sort of thing, but I mean it."

He put on that shining hat and went.

And Lennan stood, staring at the statuette. So! Passion broke down even the defences of Dromoredom. Passion! Strange hearts it chose to bloom in!

'Being different to most people—I thought you wouldn't mind!' How had this youth known that Sylvia would not understand passion so out of hand as this? And what had made it clear that he (Lennan) would? Was there, then, something in his face? There must be! Even Johnny Dromore—most reticent of creatures—had confided to him that one hour of his astute existence, when the wind had swept him out to sea!

Yes! And that statuette would never be any good, try as he might. Oliver was right—it was her eyes! How they had smoked—in their childish anger—if eyes could be said to smoke, and how they had drawn and pleaded when she put her face to his in her still more childish entreaty! If they were like this now, what would they be when the woman in her woke? Just as well not to think of her too much! Just as well to work, and take heed that he would soon be forty-seven! Just as well that next week she would be gone to Ireland!

And the last evening before she went they took her to see "Carmen" at the Opera. He remembered that she wore a nearly high white frock, and a dark carnation in the ribbon tying her crinkly hair, that still hung loose. How wonderfully entranced she sat, drunk on that opera that he had seen a score of times; now touching his arm, now Sylvia's, whispering questions: "Who's that?" "What's coming now?" The Carmen roused her to adoration, but Don Jose was 'too fat in his funny little coat,' till, in the maddened jealousy of the last act, he rose superior. Then, quite lost in excitement, she clutched Lennan's arm; and her gasp, when Carmen at last fell dead, made all their neighbours jump. Her emotion was far more moving than that on the stage; he wanted badly to stroke, and comfort her and say: "There, there, my dear, it's only make-believe!" And, when it was over, and the excellent murdered lady and her poor fat little lover appeared before the curtain, finally forgetting that she was a woman of the world, she started forward in her seat and clapped, and clapped. Fortunate that Johnny Dromore was not there to see! But all things coming to an end, they had to get up and go. And, as they made their way out to the hall, Lennan felt a hot little finger crooked into his own, as if she simply must have something to squeeze. He really did not know what to do with it. She seemed to feel this half-heartedness, soon letting it go. All the way home in the cab she was silent. With that same abstraction she ate her sandwiches and drank her lemonade; took Sylvia's kiss, and, quite a woman of the world once more, begged that they would not get up to see her off—for she was to go at seven in the morning, to catch the Irish mail. Then, holding out her hand to Lennan, she very gravely said:

"Thanks most awfully for taking me to-night. Good-bye!"

He stayed full half an hour at the window, smoking. No street lamp shone just there, and the night was velvety black above the plane-trees. At last, with a sigh, he shut up, and went tiptoe-ing upstairs in darkness. Suddenly in the corridor the white wall seemed to move at him. A warmth, a fragrance, a sound like a tiny sigh, and something soft was squeezed into his hand. Then the wall moved back, and he stood listening—no sound, no anything! But in his dressing-room he looked at the soft thing in his hand. It was the carnation from her hair. What had possessed the child to give him that? Carmen! Ah! Carmen! And gazing at the flower, he held it away from him with a sort of terror; but its scent arose. And suddenly he thrust it, all fresh as it was, into a candle-flame, and held it, burning, writhing, till it blackened to velvet. Then his heart smote him for so cruel a deed. It was still beautiful, but its scent was gone. And turning to the window he flung it far out into the darkness.

VIII

Now that she was gone, it was curious how little they spoke of her, considering how long she had been with them. And they had from her but one letter written to Sylvia, very soon after she left, ending: "Dad sends his best respects, please; and with my love to you and Mr. Lennan, and all the beasts.—NELL.

"Oliver is coming here next week. We are going to some races."

It was difficult, of course, to speak of her, with that episode of the flower, too bizarre to be told—the sort of thing Sylvia would see out of all proportion—as, indeed, any woman might. Yet—what had it really been, but the uncontrolled impulse of an emotional child longing to express feelings kindled by

the excitement of that opera? What but a child's feathery warmth, one of those flying peeps at the mystery of passion that young things take? He could not give away that pretty foolishness. And because he would not give it away, he was more than usually affectionate to Sylvia.

They had made no holiday plans, and he eagerly fell in with her suggestion that they should go down to Hayle. There, if anywhere, this curious restlessness would leave him. They had not been down to the old place for many years; indeed, since Gordy's death it was generally let.

They left London late in August. The day was closing in when they arrived. Honeysuckle had long been improved away from that station paling, against which he had stood twenty-nine years ago, watching the train carrying Anna Stormer away. In the hired fly Sylvia pressed close to him, and held his hand beneath the ancient dust-rug. Both felt the same excitement at seeing again this old home. Not a single soul of the past days would be there now—only the house and the trees, the owls and the stars; the river, park, and logan stone! It was dark when they arrived; just their bedroom and two sitting-rooms had been made ready, with fires burning, though it was still high summer. The same old execrable Heatherleys looked down from the black oak panellings. The same scent of apples and old mice clung here and there about the dark corridors with their unexpected stairways. It was all curiously unchanged, as old houses are when they are let furnished.

Once in the night he woke. Through the wide-open, uncurtained windows the night was simply alive with stars, such swarms of them swinging and trembling up there; and, far away, rose the melancholy, velvet-soft hooting of an owl.

Sylvia's voice, close to him, said:

"Mark, that night when your star caught in my hair? Do you remember?"

Yes, he remembered. And in his drowsy mind just roused from dreams, there turned and turned the queer nonsensical refrain: "I never—never—will desert Mr. Micawber. . . ."

A pleasant month that—of reading, and walking with the dogs the country round, of lying out long hours amongst the boulders or along the river banks, watching beasts and birds.

The little old green-house temple of his early masterpieces was still extant, used now to protect watering pots. But no vestige of impulse towards work came to him down there. He was marking time; not restless, not bored, just waiting—but for what, he had no notion. And Sylvia, at any rate, was happy, blooming in these old haunts, losing her fairness in the sun; even taking again to a sunbonnet, which made her look extraordinarily young. The trout that poor old Gordy had so harried were left undisturbed. No gun was fired; rabbits, pigeons, even the few partridges enjoyed those first days of autumn unmolested. The bracken and leaves turned very early, so that the park in the hazy September sunlight had an almost golden hue. A gentle mellowness reigned over all that holiday. And from Ireland came no further news, save one picture postcard with the words: "This is our house.—NELL."

In the last week of September they went back to London. And at once there began in him again that restless, unreasonable aching—that sense of being drawn away out of himself; so that he once more took to walking the Park for hours, over grass already strewn with leaves, always looking—craving—and for what?

At Dromore's the confidential man did not know when his master would be back; he had gone to Scotland with Miss Nell after the St. Leger. Was Lennan disappointed? Not so—relieved, rather. But his ache was there all the time, feeding on its secrecy and loneliness, unmentionable feeling that it was. Why had he not realized long ago that youth was over, passion done with, autumn upon him? How never grasped the fact that 'Time steals away'? And, as before, the only refuge was in work. The sheep—dogs and 'The Girl on the Magpie Horse' were finished. He began a fantastic 'relief'—a nymph peering from behind a rock, and a wild-eyed man creeping, through reeds, towards her. If he could put into the nymph's face something of this lure of Youth and Life and Love that was dragging at him, into the man's face the state of his own heart, it might lay that feeling to rest. Anything to get it out of himself! And he worked furiously, laboriously, all October, making no great progress. . . . What could he expect when Life was all the time knocking with that muffled tapping at his door?

It was on the Tuesday, after the close of the last Newmarket meeting, and just getting dusk, when Life opened the door and walked in. She wore a dark-red dress, a new one, and surely her face—her figure—were very different from what he had remembered! They had quickened and become poignant. She was no longer a child—that was at once plain. Cheeks, mouth, neck, waist—all seemed fined, shaped; the crinkly, light-brown hair was coiled up now under a velvet cap; only the great grey eyes seemed quite the same. And at sight of her his heart gave a sort of dive and flight, as if all its vague and wistful sensations had found their goal.

Then, in sudden agitation, he realized that his last moment with this girl—now a child no longer—had been a secret moment of warmth and of emotion; a moment which to her might have meant, in her might have bred, feelings that he had no inkling of. He tried to ignore that fighting and diving of his heart, held out his hand, and murmured:

"Ah, Nell! Back at last! You've grown." Then, with a sensation of every limb gone weak, he felt her arms round his neck, and herself pressed against him. There was time for the thought to flash through him: This is terrible! He gave her a little convulsive squeeze—could a man do less?—then just managed to push her gently away, trying with all his might to think: She's a child! It's nothing more than after Carmen! She doesn't know what I am feeling! But he was conscious of a mad desire to clutch her to him. The touch of her had demolished all his vagueness, made things only too plain, set him on fire.

He said uncertainly:

"Come to the fire, my child, and tell me all about it."

If he did not keep to the notion that she was just a child, his head would go. Perdita—"the lost one"! A good name for her, indeed, as she stood there, her eyes shining in the firelight—more mesmeric than ever they had been! And, to get away from the lure of those eyes, he bent down and raked the grate, saying:

"Have you seen Sylvia?" But he knew that she had not, even before she gave that impatient shrug. Then he pulled himself together, and said:

"What has happened to you, child?"

"I'm not a child."

"No, we've both grown older. I was forty-seven the other day."

She caught his hand—Heavens! how supple she was!—and murmured:

"You're not old a bit; you're quite young." At his wits' end, with his heart thumping, but still keeping his eyes away from her, he said:

"Where is Oliver?"

She dropped his hand at that.

"Oliver? I hate him!"

Afraid to trust himself near her, he had begun walking up and down. And she stood, following him with her gaze—the firelight playing on her red frock. What extraordinary stillness! What power she had developed in these few months! Had he let her see that he felt that power? And had all this come of one little moment in a dark corridor, of one flower pressed into his hand? Why had he not spoken to her roughly then—told her she was a romantic little fool? God knew what thoughts she had been feeding on! But who could have supposed—who dreamed—? And again he fixed his mind resolutely on that thought: She's a child—only a child!

"Come!" he said: "tell me all about your time in Ireland?"

"Oh! it was just dull—it's all been dull away from you."

It came out without hesitancy or shame, and he could only murmur:

"Ah! you've missed your drawing!"

"Yes. Can I come to-morrow?"

That was the moment to have said: No! You are a foolish child, and I an elderly idiot! But he had neither courage nor clearness of mind enough; nor—the desire. And, without answering, he went towards the door to turn up the light.

"Oh, no! please don't! It's so nice like this!"

The shadowy room, the bluish dusk painted on all the windows, the fitful shining of the fire, the pallor and darkness of the dim casts and bronzes, and that one glowing figure there before the hearth! And her voice, a little piteous, went on:

"Aren't you glad I'm back? I can't see you properly out there."

He went back into the glow, and she gave a little sigh of satisfaction. Then her calm young voice said, ever so distinctly:

"Oliver wants me to marry him, and I won't, of course."

He dared not say: Why not? He dared not say anything. It was too dangerous. And then followed those amazing words: "You know why, don't you? Of course you do."

It was ridiculous, almost shameful to understand their meaning. And he stood, staring in front of him, without a word; humility, dismay, pride, and a sort of mad exultation, all mixed and seething within him in the queerest pudding of emotion. But all he said was:

"Come, my child; we're neither of us quite ourselves to-night. Let's go to the drawing-room."

IX

Back in the darkness and solitude of the studio, when she was gone, he sat down before the fire, his senses in a whirl. Why was he not just an ordinary animal of a man that could enjoy what the gods had sent? It was as if on a November day someone had pulled aside the sober curtains of the sky and there in a chink had been April standing—thick white blossom, a purple cloud, a rainbow, grass vivid green, light flaring from one knew not where, and such a tingling passion of life on it all as made the heart stand still! This, then, was the marvellous, enchanting, maddening end of all that year of restlessness and wanting! This bit of Spring suddenly given to him in the midst of Autumn. Her lips, her eyes, her hair; her touching confidence; above all—quite unbelievable—her love. Not really love perhaps, just childish fancy. But on the wings of fancy this child would fly far, too far—all wistfulness and warmth beneath that light veneer of absurd composure.

To live again—to plunge back into youth and beauty—to feel Spring once more—to lose the sense of all being over, save just the sober jogtrot of domestic bliss; to know, actually to know, ecstasy again, in the love of a girl; to rediscover all that youth yearns for, and feels, and hopes, and dreads, and loves. It was a prospect to turn the head even of a decent man. . . .

By just closing his eyes he could see her standing there with the firelight glow on her red frock; could feel again that marvellous thrill when she pressed herself against him in the half-innocent, seducing moment when she first came in; could feel again her eyes drawing—drawing him! She was a witch, a grey-eyed, brown-haired witch—even unto her love of red. She had the witch's power of lighting fever in the veins. And he simply wondered at himself, that he had not, as she stood there in the firelight, knelt, and put his arms round her and pressed his face against her waist. Why had he not? But he did not want to think; the moment thought began he knew he must be torn this way and that, tossed here and there between reason and desire, pity and passion. Every sense struggled to keep him wrapped in the warmth and intoxication of this discovery that he, in the full of Autumn, had awakened love in Spring. It was amazing that she could have this feeling; yet there was no mistake. Her manner to Sylvia just now had been almost dangerously changed; there had been a queer cold impatience in her look, frightening from one who but three months ago had been so affectionate. And, going away, she had whispered, with that old trembling-up at him, as if offering to be kissed: "I may come, mayn't I? And don't be angry with me, please; I can't help it." A monstrous thing at his age to let a young girl love him—compromise her future! A monstrous thing by all the canons of virtue and gentility! And yet—what future?—with that nature—those eyes—that origin—with that father, and that home? But he would not—simply must not think!

Nevertheless, he showed the signs of thought, and badly; for after dinner Sylvia, putting her hand on his forehead, said:

"You're working too hard, Mark. You don't go out enough."

He held those fingers fast. Sylvia! No, indeed he must not think! But he took advantage of her words, and said that he would go out and get some air.

He walked at a great pace—to keep thought away—till he reached the river close to Westminster, and, moved by sudden impulse, seeking perhaps an antidote, turned down into that little street under the big Wren church, where he had never been since the summer night when he lost what was then more to him than life. There SHE had lived; there was the house—those windows which he had stolen past and gazed at with such distress and longing. Who lived there now? Once more he seemed to see that face out of the past, the dark hair, and dark soft eyes, and sweet gravity; and it did not reproach him. For this new feeling was not a love like that had been. Only once could a man feel the love that passed all things, the love before which the world was but a spark in a draught of wind; the love that, whatever dishonour, grief, and unrest it might come through, alone had in it the heart of peace and joy

and honour. Fate had torn that love from him, nipped it off as a sharp wind nips off a perfect flower. This new feeling was but a fever, a passionate fancy, a grasping once more at Youth and Warmth. Ah, well! but it was real enough! And, in one of those moments when a man stands outside himself, seems to be lifted away and see his own life twirling, Lennan had a vision of a shadow driven here and there; a straw going round and round; a midge in the grip of a mad wind. Where was the home of this mighty secret feeling that sprang so suddenly out of the dark, and caught you by the throat? Why did it come now and not then, for this one and not that other? What did man know of it, save that it made him spin and hover—like a moth intoxicated by a light, or a bee by some dark sweet flower; save that it made of him a distraught, humble, eager puppet of its fancy? Had it not once already driven him even to the edge of death; and must it now come on him again with its sweet madness, its drugging scent? What was it? Why was it? Why these passionate obsessions that could not decently be satisfied? Had civilization so outstripped man that his nature was cramped into shoes too small—like the feet of a Chinese woman? What was it? Why was it?

And faster than ever he walked away.

Pall Mall brought him back to that counterfeit presentment of the real—reality. There, in St. James's Street, was Johnny Dromore's Club; and, again moved by impulse, he pushed open its swing door. No need to ask; for there was Dromore in the hall, on his way from dinner to the card-room. The glossy tan of hard exercise and good living lay on his cheeks as thick as clouted cream. His eyes had the peculiar shine of superabundant vigour; a certain sub-festive air in face and voice and movements suggested that he was going to make a night of it. And the sardonic thought flashed through Lennan: Shall I tell him?

"Hallo, old chap! Awfully glad to see you! What you doin' with yourself? Workin' hard? How's your wife? You been away? Been doin' anything great?" And then the question that would have given him his chance, if he had liked to be so cruel:

"Seen Nell?"

"Yes, she came round this afternoon."

"What d'you think of her? Comin' on nicely, isn't she?"

That old query, half furtive and half proud, as much as to say: 'I know she's not in the stud-book, but, d—n it, I sired her!' And then the old sudden gloom, which lasted but a second, and gave way again to chaff.

Lennan stayed very few minutes. Never had he felt farther from his old school-chum.

No. Whatever happened, Johnny Dromore must be left out. It was a position he had earned with his goggling eyes, and his astute philosophy; from it he should not be disturbed.

He passed along the railings of the Green Park. On the cold air of this last October night a thin haze hung, and the acrid fragrance from little bonfires of fallen leaves. What was there about that scent of burned-leaf smoke that had always moved him so? Symbol of parting!—that most mournful thing in all the world. For what would even death be, but for parting? Sweet, long sleep, or new adventure. But, if a man loved others—to leave them, or be left! Ah! and it was not death only that brought partings!

He came to the opening of the street where Dromore lived. She would be there, sitting by the fire in the big chair, playing with her kitten, thinking, dreaming, and—alone! He passed on at such a pace that people stared; till, turning the last corner for home, he ran almost into the arms of Oliver Dromore.

The young man was walking with unaccustomed indecision, his fur coat open, his opera-hat pushed up on his crisp hair. Dark under the eyes, he had not the proper gloss of a Dromore at this season of the year.

"Mr. Lennan! I've just been round to you."

And Lennan answered dazedly:

"Will you come in, or shall I walk your way a bit?"

"I'd rather—out here, if you don't mind."

So in silence they went back into the Square. And Oliver said:

"Let's get over by the rails."

They crossed to the railings of the Square's dark garden, where nobody was passing. And with every

step Lennan's humiliation grew. There was something false and undignified in walking with this young man who had once treated him as a father confessor to his love for Nell. And suddenly he perceived that they had made a complete circuit of the Square garden without speaking a single word.

"Yes?" he said.

Oliver turned his face away.

"You remember what I told you in the summer. Well, it's worse now. I've been going a mucker lately in all sorts of ways to try and get rid of it. But it's all no good. She's got me!"

And Lennan thought: You're not alone in that! But he kept silence. His chief dread was of saying something that he would remember afterwards as the words of Judas.

Then Oliver suddenly burst out:

"Why can't she care? I suppose I'm nothing much, but she's known me all her life, and she used to like me. There's something—I can't make out. Could you do anything for me with her?"

Lennan pointed across the street.

"In every other one of those houses, Oliver," he said, "there's probably some creature who can't make out why another creature doesn't care. Passion comes when it will, goes when it will; and we poor devils have no say in it."

"What do you advise me, then?"

Lennan had an almost overwhelming impulse to turn on his heel and leave the young man standing there. But he forced himself to look at his face, which even then had its attraction—perhaps more so than ever, so pallid and desperate it was. And he said slowly, staring mentally at every word:

"I'm not up to giving you advice. The only thing I might say is: One does not press oneself where one isn't wanted; all the same—who knows? So long as she feels you're there, waiting, she might turn to you at any moment. The more chivalrous you are, Oliver, the more patiently you wait, the better chance you have."

Oliver took those words of little comfort without flinching. "I see," he said. "Thanks! But, my God! it's hard. I never could wait." And with that epigram on himself, holding out his hand, he turned away.

Lennan went slowly home, trying to gauge exactly how anyone who knew all would judge him. It was a little difficult in this affair to keep a shred of dignity.

Sylvia had not gone up, and he saw her looking at him anxiously. The one strange comfort in all this was that his feeling for her, at any rate, had not changed. It seemed even to have deepened—to be more real to him.

How could he help staying awake that night? How could he help thinking, then? And long time he lay, staring at the dark.

As if thinking were any good for fever in the veins!

X

Passion never plays the game. It, at all events, is free from self-consciousness, and pride; from dignity, nerves, scruples, cant, moralities; from hypocrisies, and wisdom, and fears for pocket, and position in this world and the next. Well did the old painters limn it as an arrow or a wind! If it had not been as swift and darting, Earth must long ago have drifted through space untenanted—to let. . . .

After that fevered night Lennan went to his studio at the usual hour and naturally did not do a stroke of work. He was even obliged to send away his model. The fellow had been his hairdresser, but, getting ill, and falling on dark days, one morning had come to the studio, to ask with manifest shame if his head were any good. After having tested his capacity for standing still, and giving him some introductions, Lennan had noted him down: "Five feet nine, good hair, lean face, something tortured and pathetic. Give him a turn if possible." The turn had come, and the poor man was posing in a painful attitude, talking, whenever permitted, of the way things had treated him, and the delights of cutting hair. This morning he took his departure with the simple pleasure of one fully paid for services not rendered.

And so, walking up and down, up and down, the sculptor waited for Nell's knock. What would happen now? Thinking had made nothing clear. Here was offered what every warm-blooded man whose Spring

is past desires—youth and beauty, and in that youth a renewal of his own; what all men save hypocrites and Englishmen would even admit that they desired. And it was offered to one who had neither religious nor moral scruples, as they are commonly understood. In theory he could accept. In practice he did not as yet know what he could do. One thing only he had discovered during the night's reflections: That those who scouted belief in the principle of Liberty made no greater mistake than to suppose that Liberty was dangerous because it made a man a libertine. To those with any decency, the creed of Freedom was—of all—the most enchaining. Easy enough to break chains imposed by others, fling his cap over the windmill, and cry for the moment at least: I am unfettered, free! Hard, indeed, to say the same to his own unfettered Self! Yes, his own Self was in the judgment-seat; by his own verdict and decision he must abide. And though he ached for the sight of her, and his will seemed paralyzed—many times already he had thought: It won't do! God help me!

Then twelve o'clock had come, and she had not. Would 'The Girl on the Magpie Horse' be all he would see of her to-day—that unsatisfying work, so cold, and devoid of witchery? Better have tried to paint her—with a red flower in her hair, a pout on her lips, and her eyes fey, or languorous. Goya could have painted her!

And then, just as he had given her up, she came.

After taking one look at his face, she slipped in ever so quietly, like a very good child. . . . Marvellous the instinct and finesse of the young when they are women! . . . Not a vestige in her of yesterday's seductive power; not a sign that there had been a yesterday at all—just confiding, like a daughter. Sitting there, telling him about Ireland, showing him the little batch of drawings she had done while she was away. Had she brought them because she knew they would make him feel sorry for her? What could have been less dangerous, more appealing to the protective and paternal side of him than she was that morning; as if she only wanted what her father and her home could not give her—only wanted to be a sort of daughter to him!

She went away demurely, as she had come, refusing to stay to lunch, manifestly avoiding Sylvia. Only then he realized that she must have taken alarm from the look of strain on his face, been afraid that he would send her away; only then perceived that, with her appeal to his protection, she had been binding him closer, making it harder for him to break away and hurt her. And the fevered aching began again—worse than ever—the moment he lost sight of her. And more than ever he felt in the grip of something beyond his power to fight against; something that, however he swerved, and backed, and broke away, would close in on him, find means to bind him again hand and foot.

In the afternoon Dromore's confidential man brought him a note. The fellow, with his cast-down eyes, and his well-parted hair, seemed to Lennan to be saying: "Yes, sir—it is quite natural that you should take the note out of eyeshot, sir—BUT I KNOW; fortunately, there is no necessity for alarm—I am strictly confidential."

And this was what the note contained:

"You promised to ride with me once—you DID promise, and you never have. Do please ride with me to-morrow; then you will get what you want for the statuette instead of being so cross with it. You can have Dad's horse—he has gone to Newmarket again, and I'm so lonely. Please—to-morrow, at half-past two—starting from here.—NELL."

To hesitate in view of those confidential eyes was not possible; it must be 'Yes' or 'No'; and if 'No,' it would only mean that she would come in the morning instead. So he said:

"Just say 'All right!'"

"Very good, sir." Then from the door: "Mr. Dromore will be away till Saturday, sir."

Now, why had the fellow said that? Curious how this desperate secret feeling of his own made him see sinister meaning in this servant, in Oliver's visit of last night—in everything. It was vile—this suspiciousness! He could feel, almost see, himself deteriorating already, with this furtive feeling in his soul. It would soon be written on his face! But what was the use of troubling? What would come, would—one way or the other.

And suddenly he remembered with a shock that it was the first of November—Sylvia's birthday! He had never before forgotten it. In the disturbance of that discovery he was very near to going and pouring out to her the whole story of his feelings. A charming birthday present, that would make! Taking his hat, instead, he dashed round to the nearest flower shop. A Frenchwoman kept it.

What had she?

What did Monsieur desire? "Des oeillets rouges? J'en ai de bien beaux ce soir."

No—not those. White flowers!

"Une belle azalee?"

Yes, that would do—to be sent at once—at once!

Next door was a jeweller's. He had never really known if Sylvia cared for jewels, since one day he happened to remark that they were vulgar. And feeling that he had fallen low indeed, to be trying to atone with some miserable gewgaw for never having thought of her all day, because he had been thinking of another, he went in and bought the only ornament whose ingredients did not make his gorge rise, two small pear-shaped black pearls, one at each end of a fine platinum chain. Coming out with it, he noticed over the street, in a clear sky fast deepening to indigo, the thinnest slip of a new moon, like a bright swallow, with wings bent back, flying towards the ground. That meant—fine weather! If it could only be fine weather in his heart! And in order that the azalea might arrive first, he walked up and down the Square which he and Oliver had patrolled the night before.

When he went in, Sylvia was just placing the white azalea in the window of the drawing-room; and stealing up behind her he clasped the little necklet round her throat. She turned round and clung to him. He could feel that she was greatly moved. And remorse stirred and stirred in him that he was betraying her with his kiss.

But, even while he kissed her, he was hardening his heart.

XI

Next day, still following the lead of her words about fresh air and his tired look, he told her that he was going to ride, and did not say with whom. After applauding his resolution, she was silent for a little—then asked:

"Why don't you ride with Nell?"

He had already so lost his dignity, that he hardly felt disgraced in answering:

"It might bore her!"

"Oh, no; it wouldn't bore her."

Had she meant anything by that? And feeling as if he were fencing with his own soul, he said:

"Very well, I will."

He had perceived suddenly that he did not know his wife, having always till now believed that it was she who did not quite know him.

If she had not been out at lunch-time, he would have lunched out himself—afraid of his own face. For feverishness in sick persons mounts steadily with the approach of a certain hour. And surely his face, to anyone who could have seen him being conveyed to Piccadilly, would have suggested a fevered invalid rather than a healthy, middle-aged sculptor in a cab.

The horses were before the door—the little magpie horse, and a thoroughbred bay mare, weeded from Dromore's racing stable. Nell, too, was standing ready, her cheeks very pink, and her eyes very bright. She did not wait for him to mount her, but took the aid of the confidential man. What was it that made her look so perfect on that little horse—shape of limb, or something soft and fiery in her spirit that the little creature knew of?

They started in silence, but as soon as the sound of hoofs died on the tan of Rotten Row, she turned to him.

"It was lovely of you to come! I thought you'd be afraid—you ARE afraid of me."

And Lennan thought: You're right!

"But please don't look like yesterday. To-day's too heavenly. Oh! I love beautiful days, and I love riding, and—" She broke off and looked at him. 'Why can't you just be nice to me'—she seemed to be saying—'and love me as you ought!' That was her power—the conviction that he did, and ought to love her; that she ought to and did love him. How simple!

But riding, too, is a simple passion; and simple passions distract each other. It was a treat to be on that bay mare. Who so to be trusted to ride the best as Johnny Dromore?

At the far end of the Row she cried out: "Let's go on to Richmond now," and trotted off into the road, as if she knew she could do with him what she wished. And, following meekly, he asked himself: Why? What was there in her to make up to him for all that he was losing—his power of work, his dignity, his self-respect? What was there? Just those eyes, and lips, and hair?

And as if she knew what he was thinking, she looked round and smiled.

So they jogged on over the Bridge and across Barnes Common into Richmond Park.

But the moment they touched turf, with one look back at him, she was off. Had she all the time meant to give him this breakneck chase—or had the loveliness of that Autumn day gone to her head—blue sky and coppery flames of bracken in the sun, and the beech leaves and the oak leaves; pure Highland colouring come South for once.

When in the first burst he had tested the mare's wind, this chase of her, indeed, was sheer delight. Through glades, over fallen tree-trunks, in bracken up to the hocks, out across the open, past a herd of amazed and solemn deer, over rotten ground all rabbit-burrows, till just as he thought he was up to her, she slipped away by a quick turn round trees. Mischief incarnate, but something deeper than mischief, too! He came up with her at last, and leaned over to seize her rein. With a cut of her whip that missed his hand by a bare inch, and a wrench, she made him shoot past, wheeled in her tracks, and was off again like an arrow, back amongst the trees—lying right forward under the boughs, along the neck of her little horse. Then out from amongst the trees she shot downhill. Right down she went, full tilt, and after her went Lennan, lying back, and expecting the bay mare to come down at every stride. This was her idea of fun! She switched round at the bottom and went galloping along the foot of the hill; and he thought: Now I've got her! She could not break back up that hill, and there was no other cover for fully half a mile.

Then he saw, not thirty yards in front, an old sandpit; and Great God! she was going straight at it! And shouting frantically, he reined his mare outwards. But she only raised her whip, cut the magpie horse over the flank, and rode right on. He saw that little demon gather its feet and spring—down, down, saw him pitch, struggle, sink—and she, flung forward, roll over and lie on her back. He felt nothing at the moment, only had that fixed vision of a yellow patch of sand, the blue sky, a rook flying, and her face upturned. But when he came on her she was on her feet, holding the bridle of her dazed horse. No sooner did he touch her, than she sank down. Her eyes were closed, but he could feel that she had not fainted; and he just held her, and kept pressing his lips to her eyes and forehead. Suddenly she let her head fall back, and her lips met his. Then opening her eyes, she said: "I'm not hurt, only—funny. Has Magpie cut his knees?"

Not quite knowing what he did, he got up to look. The little horse was cropping at some grass, unharmed—the sand and fern had saved his knees. And the languid voice behind him said: "It's all right—you can leave the horses. They'll come when I call."

Now that he knew she was unhurt, he felt angry. Why had she behaved in this mad way—given him this fearful shock? But in that same languid voice she went on: "Don't be cross with me. I thought at first I'd pull up, but then I thought: 'If I jump he can't help being nice'—so I did—Don't leave off loving me because I'm not hurt, please."

Terribly moved, he sat down beside her, took her hands in his, and said:

"Nell! Nell! it's all wrong—it's madness!"

"Why? Don't think about it! I don't want you to think—only to love me."

"My child, you don't know what love is!"

For answer she only flung her arms round his neck; then, since he held back from kissing her, let them fall again, and jumped up.

"Very well. But I love you. You can think of THAT—you can't prevent me!" And without waiting for help, she mounted the magpie horse from the sand-heap where they had fallen.

Very sober that ride home! The horses, as if ashamed of their mad chase, were edging close to each other, so that now and then his arm would touch her shoulder. He asked her once what she had felt while she was jumping.

"Only to be sure my foot was free. It was rather horrid coming down, thinking of Magpie's knees;" and touching the little horse's goat-like ears, she added softly: "Poor dear! He'll be stiff to-morrow."

She was again only the confiding, rather drowsy, child. Or was it that the fierceness of those past moments had killed his power of feeling? An almost dreamy hour—with the sun going down, the lamps being lighted one by one—and a sort of sweet oblivion over everything!

At the door, where the groom was waiting, Lennan would have said good-bye, but she whispered: "Oh, no, please! I AM tired now—you might help me up a little."

And so, half carrying her, he mounted past the Vanity Fair cartoons, and through the corridor with the red paper and the Van Beers' drawings, into the room where he had first seen her.

Once settled back in Dromore's great chair, with the purring kitten curled up on her neck, she murmured:

"Isn't it nice? You can make tea; and we'll have hot buttered toast."

And so Lennan stayed, while the confidential man brought tea and toast; and, never once looking at them, seemed to know all that had passed, all that might be to come.

Then they were alone again, and, gazing down at her stretched out in that great chair, Lennan thought:

"Thank God that I'm tired too—body and soul!"

But suddenly she looked up at him, and pointing to the picture that to-day had no curtain drawn, said:

"Do you think I'm like her? I made Oliver tell me about—myself this summer. That's why you needn't bother. It doesn't matter what happens to me, you see. And I don't care—because you can love me, without feeling bad about it. And you will, won't you?"

Then, with her eyes still on his face, she went on quickly:

"Only we won't talk about that now, will we? It's too cosy. I AM nice and tired. Do smoke!"

But Lennan's fingers trembled so that he could hardly light that cigarette. And, watching them, she said: "Please give me one. Dad doesn't like my smoking."

The virtue of Johnny Dromore! Yes! It would always be by proxy! And he muttered:

"How do you think he would like to know about this afternoon, Nell?"

"I don't care." Then peering up through the kitten's fur she murmured: "Oliver wants me to go to a dance on Saturday—it's for a charity. Shall I?"

"Of course; why not?"

"Will YOU come?"
"I?"

"Oh, do! You must! It's my very first, you know. I've got an extra ticket."

And against his will, his judgment—everything, Lennan answered: "Yes."

She clapped her hands, and the kitten crawled down to her knees.

When he got up to go, she did not move, but just looked up at him; and how he got away he did not know.

Stopping his cab a little short of home, he ran, for he felt cold and stiff, and letting himself in with his latch-key, went straight to the drawing-room. The door was ajar, and Sylvia standing at the window. He heard her sigh; and his heart smote him. Very still, and slender, and lonely she looked out there, with the light shining on her fair hair so that it seemed almost white. Then she turned and saw him. He noticed her throat working with the effort she made not to show him anything, and he said:

"Surely you haven't been anxious! Nell had a bit of a fall—jumping into a sandpit. She's quite mad sometimes. I stayed to tea with her—just to make sure she wasn't really hurt." But as he spoke he loathed himself; his voice sounded so false.

She only answered: "It's all right, dear," but he saw that she kept her eyes—those blue, too true eyes—averted, even when she kissed him.

And so began another evening and night and morning of fever, subterfuge, wariness, aching. A round of half-ecstatic torment, out of which he seemed no more able to break than a man can break through the walls of a cell. . . .

Though it live but a day in the sun, though it drown in tenebrous night, the dark flower of passion will have its hour. . . .

XII

To deceive undoubtedly requires a course of training. And, unversed in this art, Lennan was fast finding it intolerable to scheme and watch himself, and mislead one who had looked up to him ever since they were children. Yet, all the time, he had a feeling that, since he alone knew all the circumstances of his case, he alone was entitled to blame or to excuse himself. The glib judgments that moralists would pass upon his conduct could be nothing but the imbecilities of smug and pharisaic fools—of those not under this drugging spell—of such as had not blood enough, perhaps, ever to fall beneath it!

The day after the ride Nell had not come, and he had no word from her. Was she, then, hurt, after all? She had lain back very inertly in that chair! And Sylvia never asked if he knew how the girl was after her fall, nor offered to send round to inquire. Did she not wish to speak of her, or had she simply—not believed? When there was so much he could not talk of it seemed hard that just what happened to be true should be distrusted. She had not yet, indeed, by a single word suggested that she felt he was deceiving her, but at heart he knew that she was not deceived. . . . Those feelers of a woman who loves—can anything check their delicate apprehension? . . .

Towards evening, the longing to see the girl—a sensation as if she were calling him to come to her—became almost insupportable; yet, whatever excuse he gave, he felt that Sylvia would know where he was going. He sat on one side of the fire, she on the other, and they both read books; the only strange thing about their reading was, that neither of them ever turned a leaf. It was 'Don Quixote' he read, the page which had these words: "Let Altisidora weep or sing, still I am Dulcinea's and hers alone, dead or alive, dutiful and unchanged, in spite of all the necromantic powers in the world." And so the evening passed. When she went up to bed, he was very near to stealing out, driving up to the Dromores' door, and inquiring of the confidential man; but the thought of the confounded fellow's eyes was too much for him, and he held out. He took up Sylvia's book, De Maupassant's 'Fort comme la mort'—open at the page where the poor woman finds that her lover has passed away from her to her own daughter. And as he read, the tears rolled down his cheek. Sylvia! Sylvia! Were not his old favourite words from that old favourite book still true? "Dulcinea del Toboso is the most beautiful woman in the world, and I the most unfortunate knight upon the earth. It were unjust that such perfection should suffer through my weakness. No, pierce my body with your lance, knight, and let my life expire with my honour. . . ." Why could he not wrench this feeling from his heart, banish this girl from his eyes? Why could he not be wholly true to her who was and always had been wholly true to him? Horrible—this will-less, nerveless feeling, this paralysis, as if he were a puppet moved by a cruel hand. And, as once before, it seemed to him that the girl was sitting there in Sylvia's chair in her dark red frock, with her eyes fixed on him. Uncannily vivid—that impression! . . . A man could not go on long with his head in Chancery like this, without becoming crazed!

It was growing dusk on Saturday afternoon when he gave up that intolerable waiting and opened the studio door to go to Nell. It was now just two days since he had seen or heard of her. She had spoken of a dance for that very night—of his going to it. She MUST be ill!

But he had not taken six steps when he saw her coming. She had on a grey furry scarf, hiding her mouth, making her look much older. The moment the door was shut she threw it off, went to the hearth, drew up a little stool, and, holding her hands out to the fire, said:

"Have you thought about me? Have you thought enough now?"

And he answered: "Yes, I've thought, but I'm no nearer."

"Why? Nobody need ever know you love me. And if they did, I wouldn't care."

Simple! How simple! Glorious, egoistic youth!

He could not speak of Sylvia to this child—speak of his married life, hitherto so dignified, so almost sacred. It was impossible. Then he heard her say:

"It can't be wrong to love YOU! I don't care if it is wrong," and saw her lips quivering, and her eyes suddenly piteous and scared, as if for the first time she doubted of the issue. Here was fresh torment! To watch an unhappy child. And what was the use of even trying to make clear to her—on the very threshold of life—the hopeless maze that he was wandering in! What chance of making her understand the marsh of mud and tangled weeds he must drag through to reach her. "Nobody need know." So simple! What of his heart and his wife's heart? And, pointing to his new work—the first man bewitched by the first nymph—he said:

"Look at this, Nell! That nymph is you; and this man is me." She got up, and came to look. And while she was gazing he greedily drank her in. What a strange mixture of innocence and sorcery! What a wonderful young creature to bring to full knowledge of love within his arms! And he said: "You had better understand what you are to me—all that I shall never know again; there it is in that nymph's face. Oh, no! not YOUR face. And there am I struggling through slime to reach you—not MY face, of course."

She said: "Poor face!" then covered her own. Was she going to cry, and torture him still more? But, instead, she only murmured: "But you HAVE reached me!" swayed towards him, and put her lips to his.

He gave way then. From that too stormy kiss of his she drew back for a second, then, as if afraid of her own recoil, snuggled close again. But the instinctive shrinking of innocence had been enough for Lennan—he dropped his arms and said:

"You must go, child."

Without a word she picked up her fur, put it on, and stood waiting for him to speak. Then, as he did not, she held out something white. It was the card for the dance.

"You said you were coming?"

And he nodded. Her eyes and lips smiled at him; she opened the door, and, still with that slow, happy smile, went out. . . .

Yes, he would be coming; wherever she was, whenever she wanted him! . . .

His blood on fire, heedless of everything but to rush after happiness, Lennan spent those hours before the dance. He had told Sylvia that he would be dining at his Club—a set of rooms owned by a small coterie of artists in Chelsea. He had taken this precaution, feeling that he could not sit through dinner opposite her and then go out to that dance—and Nell! He had spoken of a guest at the Club, to account for evening dress—another lie, but what did it matter? He was lying all the time, if not in words, in action—must lie, indeed, to save her suffering!

He stopped at the Frenchwoman's flower shop.

"Que desirez-vous, monsieur? Des oeillets rouges—j'en ai de bien beaux, ce soir."

Des oeillets rouges? Yes, those to-night! To this address. No green with them; no card!

How strange the feeling—with the die once cast for love—of rushing, of watching his own self being left behind!

In the Brompton Road, outside a little restaurant, a thin musician was playing on a violin. Ah! and he knew this place; he would go in there, not to the Club—and the fiddler should have all he had to spare, for playing those tunes of love. He turned in. He had not been there since the day before that night on the river, twenty years ago. Never since; and yet it was not changed. The same tarnished gilt, and smell of cooking; the same macaroni in the same tomato sauce; the same Chianti flasks; the same staring, light-blue walls wreathed with pink flowers. Only the waiter different—hollow-cheeked, patient, dark of eye. He, too, should be well tipped! And that poor, over-hatted lady, eating her frugal meal—to her, at all events, a look of kindness. For all desperate creatures he must feel, this desperate night! And suddenly he thought of Oliver. Another desperate one! What should he say to Oliver at this dance—he, aged forty-seven, coming there without his wife! Some imbecility, such as: 'Watching the human form divine in motion,' 'Catching sidelights on Nell for the statuette'—some cant; it did not matter! The wine was drawn, and he must drink!

It was still early when he left the restaurant—a dry night, very calm, not cold. When had he danced last? With Olive Cramier, before he knew he loved her. Well, THAT memory could not be broken, for he would not dance to-night! Just watch, sit with the girl a few minutes, feel her hand cling to his, see her eyes turned back to him; and—come away! And then—the future! For the wine was drawn! The leaf of a plane-tree, fluttering down, caught on his sleeve. Autumn would soon be gone, and after Autumn—only

Winter! She would have done with him long before he came to Winter. Nature would see to it that Youth called for her, and carried her away. Nature in her courses! But just to cheat Nature for a little while! To cheat Nature—what greater happiness!

Here was the place with red-striped awning, carriages driving away, loiterers watching. He turned in with a beating heart. Was he before her? How would she come to this first dance? With Oliver alone? Or had some chaperon been found? To have come because she—this child so lovely, born 'outside'—might have need of chaperonage, would have been some comfort to dignity, so wistful, so lost as his. But, alas! he knew he was only there because he could not keep away!

Already they were dancing in the hall upstairs; but not she, yet; and he stood leaning against the wall where she must pass. Lonely and out of place he felt; as if everyone must know why he was there. People stared, and he heard a girl ask: "Who's that against the wall with the hair and dark moustache?"—and her partner murmuring his answer, and her voice again: "Yes, he looks as if he were seeing sand and lions." For whom, then, did they take him? Thank heaven! They were all the usual sort. There would be no one that he knew. Suppose Johnny Dromore himself came with Nell! He was to be back on Saturday! What could he say, then? How meet those doubting, knowing eyes, goggling with the fixed philosophy that a man has but one use for woman? God! and it would be true! For a moment he was on the point of getting his coat and hat, and sneaking away. That would mean not seeing her till Monday; and he stood his ground. But after to-night there must be no more such risks—their meetings must be wisely planned, must sink underground. And then he saw her at the foot of the stairs in a dress of a shell-pink colour, with one of his flowers in her light-brown hair and the others tied to the handle of a tiny fan. How self-possessed she looked, as if this were indeed her native element—her neck and arms bare, her cheeks a deep soft pink, her eyes quickly turning here and there. She began mounting the stairs, and saw him. Was ever anything so lovely as she looked just then? Behind her he marked Oliver, and a tall girl with red hair, and another young man. He moved deliberately to the top of the stairs on the wall side, so that from behind they should not see her face when she greeted him. She put the little fan with the flowers to her lips; and, holding out her hand, said, quick and low:

"The fourth, it's a polka; we'll sit out, won't we?"

Then swaying a little, so that her hair and the flower in it almost touched his face, she passed, and there in her stead stood Oliver.

Lennan had expected one of his old insolent looks, but the young man's face was eager and quite friendly.

"It was awfully good of you to come, Mr. Lennan. Is Mrs. Lennan—"

And Lennan murmured:

"She wasn't able; she's not quite—" and could have sunk into the shining floor. Youth with its touching confidence, its eager trust! This was the way he was fulfilling his duty towards Youth!

When they had passed into the ballroom he went back to his position against the wall. They were dancing Number Three; his time of waiting, then, was drawing to a close. From where he stood he could not see the dancers—no use to watch her go round in someone else's arms.

Not a true waltz—some French or Spanish pavement song played in waltz time; bizarre, pathetic, whirling after its own happiness. That chase for happiness! Well, life, with all its prizes and its possibilities, had nothing that quite satisfied—save just the fleeting moments of passion! Nothing else quite poignant enough to be called pure joy! Or so it seemed to him.

The waltz was over. He could see her now, on a rout seat against the wall with the other young man, turning her eyes constantly as if to make sure that he was still standing there. What subtle fuel was always being added to the fire by that flattery of her inexplicable adoration—of those eyes that dragged him to her, yet humbly followed him, too! Five times while she sat there he saw the red-haired girl or Oliver bring men up; saw youths cast longing glances; saw girls watching her with cold appraisal, or with a touching, frank delight. From the moment that she came in, there had been, in her father's phrase, 'only one in it.' And she could pass all this by, and still want him. Incredible!

At the first notes of the polka he went to her. It was she who found their place of refuge—a little alcove behind two palm-plants. But sitting there, he realized, as never before, that there was no spiritual communion between him and this child. She could tell him her troubles or her joys; he could soothe or sympathize; but never would the gap between their natures and their ages be crossed. His happiness was only in the sight and touch of her. But that, God knew, was happiness enough—a feverish, craving joy, like an overtired man's thirst, growing with the drink on which it tries to slake itself. Sitting there, in the scent of those flowers and of some sweet essence in her hair, with her

fingers touching his, and her eyes seeking his, he tried loyally not to think of himself, to grasp her sensations at this her first dance, and just help her to enjoyment. But he could not—paralyzed, made drunk by that insensate longing to take her in his arms and crush her to him as he had those few hours back. He could see her expanding like a flower, in all this light, and motion, and intoxicating admiration round her. What business had he in her life, with his dark hunger after secret hours; he—a coin worn thin already—a destroyer of the freshness and the glamour of her youth and beauty!

Then, holding up the flowers, she said:

"Did you give me these because of the one I gave you?"

"Yes."

"What did you do with that?"

"Burned it."

"Oh! but why?"

"Because you are a witch—and witches must be burned with all their flowers."

"Are you going to burn me?"

He put his hand on her cool arm.

"Feel! The flames are lighted."

"You may! I don't care!"

She took his hand and laid her cheek against it; yet, to the music, which had begun again, the tip of her shoe was already beating time. And he said:

"You ought to be dancing, child."

"Oh, no! Only it's a pity you don't want to."

"Yes! Do you understand that it must all be secret—underground?"

She covered his lips with the fan, and said: "You're not to think; you're not to think—never! When can I come?"

"I must find the best way. Not to-morrow. Nobody must know, Nell—for your sake—for hers—nobody!"

She nodded, and repeated with a soft, mysterious wisdom: "Nobody." And then, aloud: "Here's Oliver! It was awfully good of you to come. Good-night!"

And as, on Oliver's arm, she left their little refuge, she looked back.

He lingered—to watch her through this one dance. How they made all the other couples sink into insignificance, with that something in them both that was better than mere good looks—that something not outre or eccentric, but poignant, wayward. They went well together, those two Dromores—his dark head and her fair head; his clear, brown, daring eyes, and her grey, languorous, mesmeric eyes. Ah! Master Oliver was happy now, with her so close to him! It was not jealousy that Lennan felt. Not quite—one did not feel jealous of the young; something very deep—pride, sense of proportion, who knew what—prevented that. She, too, looked happy, as if her soul were dancing, vibrating with the music and the scent of the flowers. He waited for her to come round once more, to get for a last time that flying glance turned back; then found his coat and hat and went.

XIII

Outside, he walked a few steps, then stood looking back at the windows of the hall through some trees, the shadows of whose trunks, in the light of a street lamp, were spilled out along the ground like the splines of a fan. A church clock struck eleven. For hours yet she would be there, going round and round in the arms of Youth! Try as he might he could never recapture for himself the look that Oliver's face had worn—the look that was the symbol of so much more than he himself could give her. Why had she come into his life—to her undoing, and his own? And the bizarre thought came to him: If she were dead should I really care? Should I not be almost glad? If she were dead her witchery would be dead, and I could stand up straight again and look people in the face! What was this power that played with men,

darted into them, twisted their hearts to rags; this power that had looked through her eyes when she put her fan, with his flowers, to her lips?

The thrumming of the music ceased; he walked away.

It must have been nearly twelve when he reached home. Now, once more, would begin the gruesome process of deception—flinching of soul, and brazening of visage. It would be better when the whole thievish business was irretrievably begun and ordered in its secret courses!

There was no light in the drawing-room, save just the glow of the fire. If only Sylvia might have gone to bed! Then he saw her, sitting motionless out there by the uncurtained window.

He went over to her, and began his hateful formula:

"I'm afraid you've been lonely. I had to stay rather late. A dull evening." And, since she did not move or answer, but just sat there very still and white, he forced himself to go close, bend down to her, touch her cheek; even to kneel beside her. She looked round then; her face was quiet enough, but her eyes were strangely eager. With a pitiful little smile she broke out:

"Oh, Mark! What is it—what is it? Anything is better than this!"

Perhaps it was the smile, perhaps her voice or eyes—but something gave way in Lennan. Secrecy, precaution went by the board. Bowing his head against her breast, he poured it all out, while they clung, clutched together in the half dark like two frightened children. Only when he had finished did he realize that if she had pushed him away, refused to let him touch her, it would have been far less piteous, far easier to bear, than her wan face and her hands clutching him, and her words: "I never thought—you and I—oh! Mark—you and I—" The trust in their life together, in himself, that those words revealed! Yet, not greater than he had had—still had! She could not understand—he had known that she could never understand; it was why he had fought so for secrecy, all through. She was taking it as if she had lost everything; and in his mind she had lost nothing. This passion, this craving for Youth and Life, this madness—call it what one would—was something quite apart, not touching his love and need of her. If she would only believe that! Over and over he repeated it; over and over again perceived that she could not take it in. The only thing she saw was that his love had gone from her to another—though that was not true! Suddenly she broke out of his arms, pushing him from her, and cried: "That girl—hateful, horrible, false!" Never had he seen her look like this, with flaming spots in her white cheeks, soft lips and chin distorted, blue eyes flaming, breast heaving, as if each breath were drawn from lungs that received no air. And then, as quickly, the fire went out of her; she sank down on the sofa; covering her face with her arms, rocking to and fro. She did not cry, but a little moan came from her now and then. And each one of those sounds was to Lennan like the cry of something he was murdering. At last he went and sat down on the sofa by her and said:

"Sylvia! Sylvia! Don't! oh! don't!" And she was silent, ceasing to rock herself; letting him smooth and stroke her. But her face she kept hidden, and only once she spoke, so low that he could hardly hear: "I can't—I won't keep you from her." And with the awful feeling that no words could reach or soothe the wound in that tender heart, he could only go on stroking and kissing her hands.

It was atrocious—horrible—this that he had done! God knew that he had not sought it—the thing had come on him. Surely even in her misery she could see that! Deep down beneath his grief and self-hatred, he knew, what neither she nor anyone else could know—that he could not have prevented this feeling, which went back to days before he ever saw the girl—that no man could have stopped that feeling in himself. This craving and roving was as much part of him as his eyes and hands, as overwhelming and natural a longing as his hunger for work, or his need of the peace that Sylvia gave, and alone could give him. That was the tragedy—it was all sunk and rooted in the very nature of a man. Since the girl had come into their lives he was no more unfaithful to his wife in thought than he had been before. If only she could look into him, see him exactly as he was, as, without part or lot in the process, he had been made—then she would understand, and even might not suffer; but she could not, and he could never make it plain. And solemnly, desperately, with a weary feeling of the futility of words, he went on trying: Could she not see? It was all a thing outside him—a craving, a chase after beauty and life, after his own youth! At that word she looked at him:

"And do you think I don't want my youth back?"

He stopped.

For a woman to feel that her beauty—the brightness of her hair and eyes, the grace and suppleness of her limbs—were slipping from her and from the man she loved! Was there anything more bitter?—or any more sacred duty than not to add to that bitterness, not to push her with suffering into old age, but to help keep the star of her faith in her charm intact!

Man and woman—they both wanted youth again; she, that she might give it all to him; he, because it would help him towards something—new! Just that world of difference!

He got up, and said:

"Come, dear, let's try and sleep."

He had not once said that he could give it up. The words would not pass his lips, though he knew she must be conscious that he had not said them, must be longing to hear them. All he had been able to say was:

"So long as you want me, you shall never lose me" . . . and, "I will never keep anything from you again."

Up in their room she lay hour after hour in his arms, quite unresentful, but without life in her, and with eyes that, when his lips touched them, were always wet.

What a maze was a man's heart, wherein he must lose himself every minute! What involved and intricate turnings and turnings on itself; what fugitive replacement of emotion by emotion! What strife between pities and passions; what longing for peace! . . .

And in his feverish exhaustion, which was almost sleep, Lennan hardly knew whether it was the thrum of music or Sylvia's moaning that he heard; her body or Nell's within his arms. . . .

But life had to be lived, a face preserved against the world, engagements kept. And the nightmare went on for both of them, under the calm surface of an ordinary Sunday. They were like people walking at the edge of a high cliff, not knowing from step to step whether they would fall; or like swimmers struggling for issue out of a dark whirlpool.

In the afternoon they went together to a concert; it was just something to do—something that saved them for an hour or two from the possibility of speaking on the one subject left to them. The ship had gone down, and they were clutching at anything that for a moment would help to keep them above water.

In the evening some people came to supper; a writer and two painters, with their wives. A grim evening—never more so than when the conversation turned on that perennial theme—the freedom, spiritual, mental, physical, requisite for those who practise Art. All the stale arguments were brought forth, and had to be joined in with unmoved faces. And for all their talk of freedom, Lennan could see the volte-face his friends would be making, if they only knew. It was not 'the thing' to seduce young girls—as if, forsooth, there were freedom in doing only what people thought 'the thing'! Their cant about the free artist spirit experiencing everything, would wither the moment it came up against a canon of 'good form,' so that in truth it was no freer than the bourgeois spirit, with its conventions; or the priest spirit, with its cry of 'Sin!' No, no! To resist—if resistance were possible to this dragging power—maxims of 'good form,' dogmas of religion and morality, were no help—nothing was any help, but some feeling stronger than passion itself. Sylvia's face, forced to smile!—that, indeed was a reason why they should condemn him! None of their doctrines about freedom could explain that away—the harm, the death that came to a man's soul when he made a loving, faithful creature suffer.

But they were gone at last—with their "Thanks so much!" and their "Delightful evening!"

And those two were face to face for another night.

He knew that it must begin all over again—inevitable, after the stab of that wretched argument plunged into their hearts and turned and turned all the evening.

"I won't, I mustn't keep you starved, and spoil your work. Don't think of me, Mark! I can bear it!"

And then a breakdown worse than the night before. What genius, what sheer genius Nature had for torturing her creatures! If anyone had told him, even so little as a week ago, that he could have caused such suffering to Sylvia—Sylvia, whom as a child with wide blue eyes and a blue bow on her flaxen head he had guarded across fields full of imaginary bulls; Sylvia, in whose hair his star had caught; Sylvia, who day and night for fifteen years had been his devoted wife; whom he loved and still admired—he would have given him the lie direct. It would have seemed incredible, monstrous, silly. Had all married men and women such things to go through—was this but a very usual crossing of the desert? Or was it, once for all, shipwreck? death—unholy, violent death—in a storm of sand?

Another night of misery, and no answer to that question yet.

He had told her that he would not see Nell again without first letting her know. So, when morning came, he simply wrote the words: "Don't come today!"—showed them to Sylvia, and sent them by a servant to Dromore's.

Hard to describe the bitterness with which he entered his studio that morning. In all this chaos, what of his work? Could he ever have peace of mind for it again? Those people last night had talked of 'inspiration of passion, of experience.' In pleading with her he had used the words himself. She—poor soul!—had but repeated them, trying to endure them, to believe them true. And were they true? Again no answer, or certainly none that he could give. To have had the waters broken up; to be plunged into emotion; to feel desperately, instead of stagnating—some day he might be grateful—who knew? Some day there might be fair country again beyond this desert, where he could work even better than before. But just now, as well expect creative work from a condemned man. It seemed to him that he was equally destroyed whether he gave Nell up, and with her, once for all, that roving, seeking instinct, which ought, forsooth, to have been satisfied, and was not; or whether he took Nell, knowing that in doing so he was torturing a woman dear to him! That was as far as he could see to-day. What he would come to see in time God only knew! But: 'Freedom of the Spirit!' That was a phrase of bitter irony indeed! And, there, with his work all round him, like a man tied hand and foot, he was swept by such a feeling of exasperated rage as he had never known. Women! These women! Only let him be free of both, of all women, and the passions and pities they aroused, so that his brain and his hands might live and work again! They should not strangle, they should not destroy him!

Unfortunately, even in his rage, he knew that flight from them both could never help him. One way or the other the thing would have to be fought through. If it had been a straight fight even; a clear issue between passion and pity! But both he loved, and both he pitied. There was nothing straight and clear about it anywhere; it was all too deeply rooted in full human nature. And the appalling sense of rushing ceaselessly from barrier to barrier began really to affect his brain.

True, he had now and then a lucid interval of a few minutes, when the ingenious nature of his own torments struck him as supremely interesting and queer; but this was not precisely a relief, for it only meant, as in prolonged toothache, that his power of feeling had for a moment ceased. A very pretty little hell indeed!

All day he had the premonition, amounting to certainty, that Nell would take alarm at those three words he had sent her, and come in spite of them. And yet, what else could he have written? Nothing save what must have alarmed her more, or plunged him deeper. He had the feeling that she could follow his moods, that her eyes could see him everywhere, as a cat's eyes can see in darkness. That feeling had been with him, more or less, ever since the last evening of October, the evening she came back from her summer—grown-up. How long ago? Only six days—was it possible? Ah, yes! She knew when her spell was weakening, when the current wanted, as it were, renewing. And about six o'clock—dusk already—without the least surprise, with only a sort of empty quivering, he heard her knock. And just behind the closed door, as near as he could get to her, he stood, holding his breath. He had given his word to Sylvia—of his own accord had given it. Through the thin wood of the old door he could hear the faint shuffle of her feet on the pavement, moved a few inches this way and that, as though supplicating the inexorable silence. He seemed to see her head, bent a little forward listening. Three times she knocked, and each time Lennan writhed. It was so cruel! With that seeing-sense of hers she must know he was there; his very silence would be telling her—for his silence had its voice, its pitiful breathless sound. Then, quite distinctly, he heard her sigh, and her footsteps move away; and covering his face with his hands he rushed to and fro in the studio, like a madman.

No sound of her any more! Gone! It was unbearable; and, seizing his hat, he ran out. Which way? At random he ran towards the Square. There she was, over by the railings; languidly, irresolutely moving towards home.

XIV

But now that she was within reach, he wavered; he had given his word—was he going to break it? Then she turned, and saw him; and he could not go back. In the biting easterly wind her face looked small, and pinched, and cold, but her eyes only the larger, the more full of witchery, as if beseeching him not to be angry, not to send her away.

"I had to come; I got frightened. Why did you write such a tiny little note?"

He tried to make his voice sound quiet and ordinary.

"You must be brave, Nell. I have had to tell her."

She clutched at his arm; then drew herself up, and said in her clear, clipped voice:

"Oh! I suppose she hates me, then!"

"She is terribly unhappy."

They walked a minute, that might have been an hour, without a word; not round the Square, as he had walked with Oliver, but away from the house. At last she said in a half-choked voice: "I only want a little bit of you."

And he answered dully: "In love, there are no little bits—no standing still."

Then, suddenly, he felt her hand in his, the fingers lacing, twining restlessly amongst his own; and again the half-choked voice said:

"But you WILL let me see you sometimes! You must!"

Hardest of all to stand against was this pathetic, clinging, frightened child. And, not knowing very clearly what he said, he murmured:

"Yes—yes; it'll be all right. Be brave—you must be brave, Nell. It'll all come right."

But she only answered:

"No, no! I'm not brave. I shall do something."

Her face looked just as when she had ridden at that gravel pit. Loving, wild, undisciplined, without resource of any kind—what might she not do? Why could he not stir without bringing disaster upon one or other? And between these two, suffering so because of him, he felt as if he had lost his own existence. In quest of happiness, he had come to that!

Suddenly she said:

"Oliver asked me again at the dance on Saturday. He said you had told him to be patient. Did you?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I was sorry for him."

She let his hand go.

"Perhaps you would like me to marry him."

Very clearly he saw those two going round and round over the shining floor.

"It would be better, Nell."

She made a little sound—of anger or dismay.

"You don't REALLY want me, then?"

That was his chance. But with her arm touching his, her face so pale and desperate, and those maddening eyes turned to him, he could not tell that lie, and answered:

"Yes—I want you, God knows!"

At that a sigh of content escaped her, as if she were saying to herself: 'If he wants me he will not let me go.' Strange little tribute to her faith in love and her own youth!

They had come somehow to Pall Mall by now. And scared to find himself so deep in the hunting-ground of the Dromores, Lennan turned hastily towards St. James's Park, that they might cross it in the dark, round to Piccadilly. To be thus slinking out of the world's sight with the daughter of his old roommate—of all men in the world the last perhaps that he should do this to! A nice treacherous business! But the thing men called honour—what was it, when her eyes were looking at him and her shoulder touching his?

Since he had spoken those words, "Yes, I want you," she had been silent—fearful perhaps to let other words destroy their comfort. But near the gate by Hyde Park Corner she put her hand again into his, and again her voice, so clear, said:

"I don't want to hurt anybody, but you WILL let me come sometimes—you will let me see you—you won't leave me all alone, thinking that I'll never see you again?"

And once more, without knowing what he answered, Lennan murmured:

"No, no! It'll be all right, dear—it'll all come right. It must—and shall."

Again her fingers twined amongst his, like a child's. She seemed to have a wonderful knowledge of the exact thing to say and do to keep him helpless. And she went on:

"I didn't try to love you—it isn't wrong to love—it wouldn't hurt her. I only want a little of your love."

A little—always a little! But he was solely bent on comforting her now. To think of her going home, and sitting lonely, frightened, and unhappy, all the evening, was dreadful. And holding her fingers tight, he kept on murmuring words of would-be comfort.

Then he saw that they were out in Piccadilly. How far dared he go with her along the railings before he said good-bye? A man was coming towards them, just where he had met Dromore that first fatal afternoon nine months ago; a man with a slight lurch in his walk and a tall, shining hat a little on one side. But thank Heaven!—it was not Dromore—only one somewhat like him, who in passing stared sphinx-like at Nell. And Lennan said:

"You must go home now, child; we mustn't be seen together."

For a moment he thought she was going to break down, refuse to leave him. Then she threw up her head, and for a second stood like that, quite motionless, looking in his face. Suddenly stripping off her glove, she thrust her warm, clinging hand into his. Her lips smiled faintly, tears stood in her eyes; then she drew her hand away and plunged into the traffic. He saw her turn the corner of her street and disappear. And with the warmth of that passionate little hand still stinging his palm, he almost ran towards Hyde Park.

Taking no heed of direction, he launched himself into its dark space, deserted in this cold, homeless wind, that had little sound and no scent, travelling its remorseless road under the grey-black sky.

The dark firmament and keen cold air suited one who had little need of aids to emotion—one who had, indeed, but the single wish to get rid, if he only could, of the terrible sensation in his head, that bruised, battered, imprisoned feeling of a man who paces his cell—never, never to get out at either end. Without thought or intention he drove his legs along; not running, because he knew that he would have to stop the sooner. Alas! what more comic spectacle for the eyes of a good citizen than this married man of middle age, striding for hours over those dry, dark, empty pastures—hunted by passion and by pity, so that he knew not even whether he had dined! But no good citizen was abroad of an autumn night in a bitter easterly wind. The trees were the sole witnesses of this grim exercise—the trees, resigning to the cold blast their crinkled leaves that fluttered past him, just a little lighter than the darkness. Here and there his feet rustled in the drifts, waiting their turn to serve the little bonfires, whose scent still clung in the air. A desperate walk, in this heart of London—round and round, up and down, hour after hour, keeping always in the dark; not a star in the sky, not a human being spoken to or even clearly seen, not a bird or beast; just the gleam of the lights far away, and the hoarse muttering of the traffic! A walk as lonely as the voyage of the human soul is lonely from birth to death with nothing to guide it but the flickering glow from its own frail spirit lighted it knows not where. . . .

And, so tired that he could hardly move his legs, but free at last of that awful feeling in his head—free for the first time for days and days—Lennan came out of the Park at the gate where he had gone in, and walked towards his home, certain that tonight, one way or the other, it would be decided. . . .

XV

This then—this long trouble of body and of spirit—was what he remembered, sitting in the armchair beyond his bedroom fire, watching the glow, and Sylvia sleeping there exhausted, while the dark plane-tree leaves tap-tapped at the window in the autumn wind; watching, with the uncanny certainty that, he would not pass the limits of this night without having made at last a decision that would not alter. For even conflict wears itself out; even indecision has this measure set to its miserable powers of torture, that any issue in the end is better than the hell of indecision itself. Once or twice in those last days even death had seemed to him quite tolerable; but now that his head was clear and he had come to grips, death passed out of his mind like the shadow that it was. Nothing so simple, extravagant, and vain could serve him. Other issues had reality; death—none. To leave Sylvia, and take this young love away; there was reality in that, but it had always faded as soon as it shaped itself; and now once more it

faded. To put such a public and terrible affront on a tender wife whom he loved, do her to death, as it were, before the world's eyes—and then, ever remorseful, grow old while the girl was still young? He could not. If Sylvia had not loved him, yes; or, even if he had not loved her; or if, again, though loving him she had stood upon her rights—in any of those events he might have done it. But to leave her whom he did love, and who had said to him so generously: "I will not hamper you—go to her"—would be a black atrocity. Every memory, from their boy-and-girl loving to the desperate clinging of her arms these last two nights—memory with its innumerable tentacles, the invincible strength of its countless threads, bound him to her too fast. What then? Must it come, after all, to giving up the girl? And sitting there, by that warm fire, he shivered. How desolate, sacrilegious, wasteful to throw love away; to turn from the most precious of all gifts; to drop and break that vase! There was not too much love in the world, nor too much warmth and beauty—not, anyway, for those whose sands were running out, whose blood would soon be cold.

Could Sylvia not let him keep both her love and the girl's? Could she not bear that? She had said she could; but her face, her eyes, her voice gave her the lie, so that every time he heard her his heart turned sick with pity. This, then, was the real issue. Could he accept from her such a sacrifice, exact a daily misery, see her droop and fade beneath it? Could he bear his own happiness at such a cost? Would it be happiness at all? He got up from the chair and crept towards her. She looked very fragile sleeping there! The darkness below her closed eyelids showed cruelly on that too fair skin; and in her flax-coloured hair he saw what he had never noticed—a few strands of white. Her softly opened lips, almost colourless, quivered with her uneven breathing; and now and again a little feverish shiver passed up as from her heart. All soft and fragile! Not much life, not much strength; youth and beauty slipping! To know that he who should be her champion against age and time would day by day be placing one more mark upon her face, one more sorrow in her heart! That he should do this—they both going down the years together!

As he stood there holding his breath, bending to look at her, that slurring swish of the plane-tree branch, flung against and against the window by the autumn wind, seemed filling the whole world. Then her lips moved in one of those little, soft hurrying whispers that unhappy dreamers utter, the words all blurred with their wistful rushing.

And he thought: I, who believe in bravery and kindness; I, who hate cruelty—if I do this cruel thing, what shall I have to live for; how shall I work; how bear myself? If I do it, I am lost—an outcast from my own faith—a renegade from all that I believe in.

And, kneeling there close to that face so sad and lonely, that heart so beaten even in its sleep, he knew that he could not do it—knew it with sudden certainty, and a curious sense of peace. Over!—the long struggle—over at last! Youth with youth, summer to summer, falling leaf with falling leaf! And behind him the fire flickered, and the plane-tree leaves tap-tapped.

He rose, and crept away stealthily downstairs into the drawing-room, and through the window at the far end out into the courtyard, where he had sat that day by the hydrangea, listening to the piano-organ. Very dark and cold and eerie it was there, and he hurried across to his studio. There, too, it was cold, and dark, and eerie, with its ghostly plaster presences, stale scent of cigarettes, and just one glowing ember of the fire he had left when he rushed out after Nell—those seven hours ago.

He went first to the bureau, turned up its lamp, and taking out some sheets of paper, marked on them directions for his various works; for the statuette of Nell, he noted that it should be taken with his compliments to Mr. Dromore. He wrote a letter to his banker directing money to be sent to Rome, and to his solicitor telling him to let the house. He wrote quickly. If Sylvia woke, and found him still away, what might she not think? He took a last sheet. Did it matter what he wrote, what deliberate lie, if it helped Nell over the first shock?

"DEAR NELL,

"I write this hastily in the early hours, to say that we are called out to Italy to my only sister, who is very ill. We leave by the first morning boat, and may be away some time. I will write again. Don't fret, and God bless you. "M. L."

He could not see very well as he wrote. Poor, loving, desperate child! Well, she had youth and strength, and would soon have—Oliver! And he took yet another sheet.

"DEAR OLIVER,

"My wife and I are obliged to go post-haste to Italy. I watched you both at the dance the other night. Be very gentle with Nell; and—good luck to you! But don't say again that I told you to be patient; it is hardly the way to make her love you. "M. LENNAN."

That, then, was all—yes, all! He turned out the little lamp, and groped towards the hearth. But one thing left. To say good-bye! To her, and Youth, and Passion!—to the only salve for the aching that Spring and Beauty bring—the aching for the wild, the passionate, the new, that never quite dies in a man's heart. Ah! well, sooner or later, all men had to say good-bye to that. All men—all men!

He crouched down before the hearth. There was no warmth in that fast-blackening ember, but it still glowed like a dark-red flower. And while it lived he crouched there, as though it were that to which he was saying good-bye. And on the door he heard the girl's ghostly knocking. And beside him—a ghost among the ghostly presences—she stood. Slowly the glow blackened, till the last spark had faded out.

Then by the glimmer of the night he found his way back, softly as he had come, to his bedroom.

Sylvia was still sleeping; and, to watch for her to wake, he sat down again by the fire, in silence only stirred by the frail tap-tapping of those autumn leaves, and the little catch in her breathing now and then. It was less troubled than when he had bent over her before, as though in her sleep she knew. He must not miss the moment of her waking, must be beside her before she came to full consciousness, to say: "There, there! It's all over; we are going away at once—at once." To be ready to offer that quick solace, before she had time to plunge back into her sorrow, was an island in this black sea of night, a single little refuge point for his bereaved and naked being. Something to do—something fixed, real, certain. And yet another long hour before her waking, he sat forward in the chair, with that wistful eagerness, his eyes fixed on her face, staring through it at some vision, some faint, glimmering light—far out there beyond—as a traveller watches a star. . . . star

THE END.

THE FREELANDS

By John Galsworthy

"Liberty's a glorious feast."—Burns.

PROLOGUE

One early April afternoon, in a Worcestershire field, the only field in that immediate landscape which was not down in grass, a man moved slowly athwart the furrows, sowing—a big man of heavy build, swinging his hairy brown arm with the grace of strength. He wore no coat or hat; a waistcoat, open over a blue-checked cotton shirt, flapped against belted corduroys that were somewhat the color of his square, pale-brown face and dusty hair. His eyes were sad, with the swimming yet fixed stare of epileptics; his mouth heavy-lipped, so that, but for the yearning eyes, the face would have been almost brutal. He looked as if he suffered from silence. The elm-trees bordering the field, though only just in leaf, showed dark against a white sky. A light wind blew, carrying already a scent from the earth and growth pushing up, for the year was early. The green Malvern hills rose in the west; and not far away, shrouded by trees, a long country house of weathered brick faced to the south. Save for the man sowing, and some rooks crossing from elm to elm, no life was visible in all the green land. And it was quiet—with a strange, a brooding tranquillity. The fields and hills seemed to mock the scars of road and ditch and furrow scraped on them, to mock at barriers of hedge and wall—between the green land and white sky was a conspiracy to disregard those small activities. So lonely was it, so plunged in a ground-

bass of silence; so much too big and permanent for any figure of man.

Across and across the brown loam the laborer doggedly finished out his task; scattered the few last seeds into a corner, and stood still. Thrushes and blackbirds were just beginning that even-song whose blitheness, as nothing else on earth, seems to promise youth forever to the land. He picked up his coat, slung it on, and, heaving a straw bag over his shoulder, walked out on to the grass-bordered road between the elms.

"Tryst! Bob Tryst!"

At the gate of a creepered cottage amongst fruit-trees, high above the road, a youth with black hair and pale-brown face stood beside a girl with frizzy brown hair and cheeks like poppies.

"Have you had that notice?"

The laborer answered slowly:

"Yes, Mr. Derek. If she don't go, I've got to."

"What a d—d shame!"

The laborer moved his head, as though he would have spoken, but no words came.

"Don't do anything, Bob. We'll see about that."

"Evenin', Mr. Derek. Evenin', Miss Sheila," and the laborer moved on.

The two at the wicket gate also turned away. A black-haired woman dressed in blue came to the wicket gate in their place. There seemed no purpose in her standing there; it was perhaps an evening custom, some ceremony such as Moslems observe at the muezzin-call. And any one who saw her would have wondered what on earth she might be seeing, gazing out with her dark glowing eyes above the white, grass-bordered roads stretching empty this way and that between the elm-trees and green fields; while the blackbirds and thrushes shouted out their hearts, calling all to witness how hopeful and young was life in this English countryside. . . .

CHAPTER I

Mayday afternoon in Oxford Street, and Felix Freeland, a little late, on his way from Hampstead to his brother John's house in Porchester Gardens. Felix Freeland, author, wearing the very first gray top hat of the season. A compromise, that—like many other things in his life and works—between individuality and the accepted view of things, aestheticism and fashion, the critical sense and authority. After the meeting at John's, to discuss the doings of the family of his brother Morton Freeland—better known as Tod—he would perhaps look in on the caricatures at the English Gallery, and visit one duchess in Mayfair, concerning the George Richard Memorial. And so, not the soft felt hat which really suited authorship, nor the black top hat which obliterated personality to the point of pain, but this gray thing with narrowish black band, very suitable, in truth, to a face of a pale buff color, to a moustache of a deep buff color streaked with a few gray hairs, to a black braided coat cut away from a buff-colored waistcoat, to his neat boots—not patent leather—faintly buffed with May-day dust. Even his eyes, Freeland gray, were a little buffed over by sedentary habit, and the number of things that he was conscious of. For instance, that the people passing him were distressingly plain, both men and women; plain with the particular plainness of those quite unaware of it. It struck him forcibly, while he went along, how very queer it was that with so many plain people in the country, the population managed to keep up even as well as it did. To his wonderfully keen sense of defect, it seemed little short of marvellous. A shambling, shoddy crew, this crowd of shoppers and labor demonstrators! A conglomeration of hopelessly mediocre visages! What was to be done about it? Ah! what indeed!—since they were evidently not aware of their own dismal mediocrity. Hardly a beautiful or a vivid face, hardly a wicked one, never anything transfigured, passionate, terrible, or grand. Nothing Greek, early Italian, Elizabethan, not even beefy, beery, broad old Georgian. Something clutched-in, and squashed-out about it all—on that collective face something of the look of a man almost comfortably and warmly wrapped round by a snake at the very beginning of its squeeze. It gave Felix Freeland a sort of faint excitement and pleasure to notice this. For it was his business to notice things, and embalm them afterward in ink. And he believed that not many people noticed it, so that it contributed in his mind to his own

distinction, which was precious to him. Precious, and encouraged to be so by the press, which—as he well knew—must print his name several thousand times a year. And yet, as a man of culture and of principle, how he despised that kind of fame, and theoretically believed that a man's real distinction lay in his oblivion of the world's opinion, particularly as expressed by that flighty creature, the Fourth Estate. But here again, as in the matter of the gray top hat, he had instinctively compromised, taking in press cuttings which described himself and his works, while he never failed to describe those descriptions—good, bad, and indifferent—as 'that stuff,' and their writers as 'those fellows.'

Not that it was new to him to feel that the country was in a bad way. On the contrary, it was his established belief, and one for which he was prepared to furnish due and proper reasons. In the first place he traced it to the horrible hold Industrialism had in the last hundred years laid on the nation, draining the peasantry from 'the Land'; and in the second place to the influence of a narrow and insidious Officialism, sapping the independence of the People.

This was why, in going to a conclave with his brother John, high in Government employ, and his brother Stanley, a captain of industry, possessor of the Morton Plough Works, he was conscious of a certain superiority in that he, at all events, had no hand in this paralysis which was creeping on the country.

And getting more buff-colored every minute, he threaded his way on, till, past the Marble Arch, he secured the elbow-room of Hyde Park. Here groups of young men, with chivalrous idealism, were jeering at and chivying the broken remnants of a suffrage meeting. Felix debated whether he should oppose his body to their bodies, his tongue to theirs, or whether he should avert his consciousness and hurry on; but, that instinct which moved him to wear the gray top hat prevailing, he did neither, and stood instead, looking at them in silent anger, which quickly provoked endearments—such as: "Take it off," or "Keep it on," or "What cheer, Topsy!" but nothing more acute. And he meditated: Culture! Could culture ever make headway among the blind partisanships, the hand-to-mouth mentality, the cheap excitements of this town life? The faces of these youths, the tone of their voices, the very look of their bowler hats, said: No! You could not culturalize the impermeable texture of their vulgarity. And they were the coming manhood of the nation—this inexpressibly distasteful lot of youths! The country had indeed got too far away from 'the Land.' And this essential towny commonness was not confined to the classes from which these youths were drawn. He had even remarked it among his own son's school and college friends—an impatience of discipline, an insensibility to everything but excitement and having a good time, a permanent mental indigestion due to a permanent diet of tit-bits. What aspiration they possessed seemed devoted to securing for themselves the plums of official or industrial life. His boy Alan, even, was infected, in spite of home influences and the atmosphere of art in which he had been so sedulously soaked. He wished to enter his Uncle Stanley's plough works, seeing in it a 'soft thing.'

But the last of the woman-baiters had passed by now, and, conscious that he was really behind time, Felix hurried on. . . .

In his study—a pleasant room, if rather tidy—John Freeland was standing before the fire smoking a pipe and looking thoughtfully at nothing. He was, in fact, thinking, with that continuity characteristic of a man who at fifty has won for himself a place of permanent importance in the Home Office. Starting life in the Royal Engineers, he still preserved something of a military look about his figure, and grave visage with steady eyes and drooping moustache (both a shade grayer than those of Felix), and a forehead bald from justness and knowing where to lay his hand on papers. His face was thinner, his head narrower, than his brother's, and he had acquired a way of making those he looked at doubt themselves and feel the sudden instability of all their facts. He was—as has been said—thinking. His brother Stanley had wired to him that morning: "Am motoring up to-day on business; can you get Felix to come at six o'clock and talk over the position at Tod's?" What position at Tod's? He had indeed heard something vague—of those youngsters of Tod's, and some fuss they were making about the laborers down there. He had not liked it. Too much of a piece with the general unrest, and these new democratic ideas that were playing old Harry with the country! For in his opinion the country was in a bad way, partly owing to Industrialism, with its rotting effect upon physique; partly to this modern analytic Intellectualism, with its destructive and anarchic influence on morals. It was difficult to overestimate the mischief of those two factors; and in the approaching conference with his brothers, one of whom was the head of an industrial undertaking, and the other a writer, whose books, extremely modern, he never read, he was perhaps vaguely conscious of his own cleaner hands. Hearing a car come to a halt outside, he went to the window and looked out. Yes, it was Stanley! . .

Stanley Freeland, who had motored up from Becket—his country place, close to his plough works in Worcestershire—stood a moment on the pavement, stretching his long legs and giving directions to his chauffeur. He had been stopped twice on the road for not exceeding the limit as he believed, and was still a little ruffled. Was it not his invariable principle to be moderate in speed as in all other things? And his feeling at the moment was stronger even than usual, that the country was in a bad way, eaten

up by officialism, with its absurd limitations of speed and the liberty of the subject, and the advanced ideas of these new writers and intellectuals, always talking about the rights and sufferings of the poor. There was no progress along either of those roads. He had it in his heart, as he stood there on the pavement, to say something pretty definite to John about interference with the liberty of the subject, and he wouldn't mind giving old Felix a rap about his precious destructive doctrines, and continual girding at the upper classes, vested interests, and all the rest of it. If he had something to put in their place that would be another matter. Capital and those who controlled it were the backbone of the country—what there was left of the country, apart from these d—d officials and aesthetic fellows! And with a contraction of his straight eyebrows above his straight gray eyes, straight blunt nose, blunter moustaches, and blunt chin, he kept a tight rein on his blunt tongue, not choosing to give way even to his own anger.

Then, perceiving Felix coming—'in a white topper, by Jove!'—he crossed the pavement to the door; and, tall, square, personable, rang the bell.

CHAPTER II

"Well, what's the matter at Tod's?"

And Felix moved a little forward in his chair, his eyes fixed with interest on Stanley, who was about to speak.

"It's that wife of his, of course. It was all very well so long as she confined herself to writing, and talk, and that Land Society, or whatever it was she founded, the one that snuffed out the other day; but now she's getting herself and those two youngsters mixed up in our local broils, and really I think Tod's got to be spoken to."

"It's impossible for a husband to interfere with his wife's principles."
So Felix.

"Principles!" The word came from John.

"Certainly! Kirsteen's a woman of great character; revolutionary by temperament. Why should you expect her to act as you would act yourselves?"

When Felix had said that, there was a silence.

Then Stanley muttered: "Poor old Tod!"

Felix sighed, lost for a moment in his last vision of his youngest brother. It was four years ago now, a summer evening—Tod standing between his youngsters Derek and Sheila, in a doorway of his white, black-timbered, creepered cottage, his sunburnt face and blue eyes the serenest things one could see in a day's march!

"Why 'poor'?" he said. "Tod's much happier than we are. You've only to look at him."

"Ah!" said Stanley suddenly. "D'you remember him at Father's funeral?—without his hat, and his head in the clouds. Fine-lookin' chap, old Tod—pity he's such a child of Nature."

Felix said quietly:

"If you'd offered him a partnership, Stanley—it would have been the making of him."

"Tod in the plough works? My hat!"

Felix smiled. At sight of that smile, Stanley grew red, and John refilled his pipe. It is always the devil to have a brother more sarcastic than oneself!

"How old are those two?" John said abruptly.

"Sheila's twenty, Derek nineteen."

"I thought the boy was at an agricultural college?"

"Finished."

"What's he like?"

"A black-haired, fiery fellow, not a bit like Tod."

John muttered: "That's her Celtic blood. Her father, old Colonel Moray, was just that sort; by George, he was a regular black Highlander. What's the trouble exactly?"

It was Stanley who answered: "That sort of agitation business is all very well until it begins to affect your neighbors; then it's time it stopped. You know the Mallorings who own all the land round Tod's. Well, they've fallen foul of the Mallorings over what they call injustice to some laborers. Questions of morality involved. I don't know all the details. A man's got notice to quit over his deceased wife's sister; and some girl or other in another cottage has kicked over—just ordinary country incidents. What I want is that Tod should be made to see that his family mustn't quarrel with his nearest neighbors in this way. We know the Mallorings well, they're only seven miles from us at Becket. It doesn't do; sooner or later it plays the devil all round. And the air's full of agitation about the laborers and 'the Land,' and all the rest of it—only wants a spark to make real trouble."

And having finished this oration, Stanley thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and jingled the money that was there.

John said abruptly:

"Felix, you'd better go down."

Felix was sitting back, his eyes for once withdrawn from his brothers' faces.

"Odd," he said, "really odd, that with a perfectly unique person like Tod for a brother, we only see him once in a blue moon."

"It's because he IS so d—d unique."

Felix got up and gravely extended his hand to Stanley.

"By Jove," he said, "you've spoken truth." And to John he added: "Well, I WILL go, and let you know the upshot."

When he had departed, the two elder brothers remained for some moments silent, then Stanley said:

"Old Felix is a bit tryin'! With the fuss they make of him in the papers, his head's swelled!"

John did not answer. One could not in so many words resent one's own brother being made a fuss of, and if it had been for something real, such as discovering the source of the Black River, conquering Bechuanaland, curing Blue-mange, or being made a Bishop, he would have been the first and most loyal in his appreciation; but for the sort of thing Felix made up—Fiction, and critical, acid, destructive sort of stuff, pretending to show John Freeland things that he hadn't seen before—as if Felix could!—not at all the jolly old romance which one could read well enough and enjoy till it sent you to sleep after a good day's work. No! that Felix should be made a fuss of for such work as that really almost hurt him. It was not quite decent, violating deep down one's sense of form, one's sense of health, one's traditions. Though he would not have admitted it, he secretly felt, too, that this fuss was dangerous to his own point of view, which was, of course, to him the only real one. And he merely said:

"Will you stay to dinner, Stan?"

CHAPTER III

If John had those sensations about Felix, so—when he was away from John—had Felix about himself. He had never quite grown out of the feeling that to make himself conspicuous in any way was bad form. In common with his three brothers he had been through the mills of gentility—those unique grinding machines of education only found in his native land. Tod, to be sure, had been publicly sacked at the end of his third term, for climbing on to the headmaster's roof and filling up two of his chimneys with football pants, from which he had omitted to remove his name. Felix still remembered the august scene—the horrid thrill of it, the ominous sound of that: "Freeland minimus!" the ominous sight of poor little Tod emerging from his obscurity near the roof of the Speech Room, and descending all those steps. How very small and rosy he had looked, his bright hair standing on end, and his little blue eyes staring

up very hard from under a troubled frown. And the august hand holding up those sooty pants, and the august voice: "These appear to be yours, Freeland minimus. Were you so good as to put them down my chimneys?" And the little piping, "Yes, sir."

"May I ask why, Freeland minimus?"

"I don't know, sir."

"You must have had some reason, Freeland minimus?"

"It was the end of term, sir."

"Ah! You must not come back here, Freeland minimus. You are too dangerous, to yourself, and others. Go to your place."

And poor little Tod ascending again all those steps, cheeks more terribly rosy than ever, eyes bluer, from under a still more troubled frown; little mouth hard set; and breathing so that you could hear him six forms off. True, the new Head had been goaded by other outrages, the authors of which had not omitted to remove their names; but the want of humor, the amazing want of humor! As if it had not been a sign of first-rate stuff in Tod! And to this day Felix remembered with delight the little bubbling hiss that he himself had started, squelched at once, but rippling out again along the rows like tiny scattered lines of fire when a conflagration is suppressed. Expulsion had been the salvation of Tod! Or—his damnation? Which? God would know, but Felix was not certain. Having himself been fifteen years acquiring 'Mill' philosophy, and another fifteen years getting rid of it, he had now begun to think that after all there might be something in it. A philosophy that took everything, including itself, at face value, and questioned nothing, was sedative to nerves too highly strung by the continual examination of the insides of oneself and others, with a view to their alteration. Tod, of course, having been sent to Germany after his expulsion, as one naturally would be, and then put to farming, had never properly acquired 'Mill' manner, and never sloughed it off; and yet he was as sedative a man as you could meet.

Emerging from the Tube station at Hampstead, he moved toward home under a sky stranger than one might see in a whole year of evenings. Between the pine-trees on the ridge it was opaque and colored like pinkish stone, and all around violent purple with flames of the young green, and white spring blossom lit against it. Spring had been dull and unimaginative so far, but this evening it was all fire and gathered torrents; Felix wondered at the waiting passion of that sky.

He reached home just as those torrents began to fall.

The old house, beyond the Spaniard's Road, save for mice and a faint underlying savor of wood-rot in two rooms, well satisfied the aesthetic sense. Felix often stood in his hall, study, bedroom, and other apartments, admiring the rich and simple glow of them—admiring the rarity and look of studied negligence about the stuffs, the flowers, the books, the furniture, the china; and then quite suddenly the feeling would sweep over him: "By George, do I really own all this, when my ideal is 'bread and water, and on feast days a little bit of cheese'?" True, he was not to blame for the niceness of his things—Flora did it; but still—there they were, a little hard to swallow for an epicurean. It might, of course, have been worse, for if Flora had a passion for collecting, it was a very chaste one, and though what she collected cost no little money, it always looked as if it had been inherited, and—as everybody knows—what has been inherited must be put up with, whether it be a coronet or a cruet-stand.

To collect old things, and write poetry! It was a career; one would not have one's wife otherwise. She might, for instance, have been like Stanley's wife, Clara, whose career was wealth and station; or John's wife, Anne, whose career had been cut short; or even Tod's wife, Kirsteen, whose career was revolution. No—a wife who had two, and only two children, and treated them with affectionate surprise, who was never out of temper, never in a hurry, knew the points of a book or play, could cut your hair at a pinch; whose hand was dry, figure still good, verse tolerable, and—above all—who wished for no better fate than Fate had given her—was a wife not to be sneezed at. And Felix never had. He had depicted so many sneezing wives and husbands in his books, and knew the value of a happy marriage better perhaps than any one in England. He had laid marriage low a dozen times, wrecked it on all sorts of rocks, and had the greater veneration for his own, which had begun early, manifested every symptom of ending late, and in the meantime walked down the years holding hands fast, and by no means forgetting to touch lips.

Hanging up the gray top hat, he went in search of her. He found her in his dressing-room, surrounded by a number of little bottles, which she was examining vaguely, and putting one by one into an 'inherited' waste-paper basket. Having watched her for a little while with a certain pleasure, he said:

"Yes, my dear?"

Noticing his presence, and continuing to put bottles into the basket, she answered:

"I thought I must—they're what dear Mother's given us."

There they lay—little bottles filled with white and brown fluids, white and blue and brown powders; green and brown and yellow ointments; black lozenges; buff plasters; blue and pink and purple pills. All beautifully labelled and corked.

And he said in a rather faltering voice:

"Bless her! How she does give her things away! Haven't we used ANY?"

"Not one. And they have to be cleared away before they're stale, for fear we might take one by mistake."

"Poor Mother!"

"My dear, she's found something newer than them all by now."

Felix sighed.

"The nomadic spirit. I have it, too!"

And a sudden vision came to him of his mother's carved ivory face, kept free of wrinkles by sheer will-power, its firm chin, slightly aquiline nose, and measured brows; its eyes that saw everything so quickly, so fastidiously, its compressed mouth that smiled sweetly, with a resolute but pathetic acceptance. Of the piece of fine lace, sometimes black, sometimes white, over her gray hair. Of her hands, so thin now, always moving a little, as if all the composure and care not to offend any eye by allowing Time to ravage her face, were avenging themselves in that constant movement. Of her figure, that was short but did not seem so, still quick-moving, still alert, and always dressed in black or gray. A vision of that exact, fastidious, wandering spirit called Frances Fleeming Freeland—that spirit strangely compounded of domination and humility, of acceptance and cynicism; precise and actual to the point of desert dryness; generous to a point that caused her family to despair; and always, beyond all things, brave.

Flora dropped the last little bottle, and sitting on the edge of the bath let her eyebrows rise. How pleasant was that impersonal humor which made her superior to other wives!

"You—nomadic? How?"

"Mother travels unceasingly from place to place, person to person, thing to thing. I travel unceasingly from motive to motive, mind to mind; my native air is also desert air—hence the sterility of my work."

Flora rose, but her eyebrows descended.

"Your work," she said, "is not sterile."

"That, my dear," said Felix, "is prejudice." And perceiving that she was going to kiss him, he waited without annoyance. For a woman of forty-two, with two children and three books of poems—and not knowing which had taken least out of her—with hazel-gray eyes, wavy eyebrows darker than they should have been, a glint of red in her hair; wavy figure and lips; quaint, half-humorous indolence, quaint, half-humorous warmth—was she not as satisfactory a woman as a man could possibly have married!

"I have got to go down and see Tod," he said. "I like that wife of his; but she has no sense of humor. How much better principles are in theory than in practice!"

Flora repeated softly, as if to herself:

"I'm glad I have none." She was at the window leaning out, and Felix took his place beside her. The air was full of scent from wet leaves, alive with the song of birds thanking the sky. Suddenly he felt her arm round his ribs; either it or they—which, he could not at the moment tell—seemed extraordinarily soft. . . .

Between Felix and his young daughter, Nedda, there existed the only kind of love, except a mother's, which has much permanence—love based on mutual admiration. Though why Nedda, with her starry innocence, should admire him, Felix could never understand, not realizing that she read his books, and even analyzed them for herself in the diary which she kept religiously, writing it when she ought to have been asleep. He had therefore no knowledge of the way his written thoughts stimulated the ceaseless questioning that was always going on within her; the thirst to know why this was and that

was not. Why, for instance, her heart ached so some days and felt light and eager other days? Why, when people wrote and talked of God, they seemed to know what He was, and she never did? Why people had to suffer; and the world be black to so many millions? Why one could not love more than one man at a time? Why—a thousand things? Felix's books supplied no answers to these questions, but they were comforting; for her real need as yet was not for answers, but ever for more questions, as a young bird's need is for opening its beak without quite knowing what is coming out or going in. When she and her father walked, or sat, or went to concerts together, their talk was neither particularly intimate nor particularly voluble; they made to each other no great confidences. Yet each was certain that the other was not bored—a great thing; and they squeezed each other's little fingers a good deal—very warming. Now with his son Alan, Felix had a continual sensation of having to keep up to a mark and never succeeding—a feeling, as in his favorite nightmare, of trying to pass an examination for which he had neglected to prepare; of having to preserve, in fact, form proper to the father of Alan Freeland. With Nedda he had a sense of refreshment; the delight one has on a spring day, watching a clear stream, a bank of flowers, birds flying. And Nedda with her father—what feeling had she? To be with him was like a long stroking with a touch of tickle in it; to read his books, a long tickle with a nice touch of stroking now and then when one was not expecting it.

That night after dinner, when Alan had gone out and Flora into a dream, she snuggled up alongside her father, got hold of his little finger, and whispered:

"Come into the garden, Dad; I'll put on goloshes. It's an awfully nice moon."

The moon indeed was palest gold behind the pines, so that its radiance was a mere shower of pollen, just a brushing of white moth-down over the reeds of their little dark pond, and the black blur of the flowering currant bushes. And the young lime-trees, not yet in full leaf, quivered ecstatically in that moon-witchery, still letting fall raindrops of the past spring torrent, with soft hissing sounds. A real sense in the garden, of God holding his breath in the presence of his own youth swelling, growing, trembling toward perfection! Somewhere a bird—a thrush, they thought—mixed in its little mind as to night and day, was queerly chirruping. And Felix and his daughter went along the dark wet paths, holding each other's arms, not talking much. For, in him, very responsive to the moods of Nature, there was a flattered feeling, with that young arm in his, of Spring having chosen to confide in him this whispering, rustling hour. And in Nedda was so much of that night's unutterable youth—no wonder she was silent! Then, somehow—neither responsible—they stood motionless. How quiet it was, but for a distant dog or two, and the stilly shivering-down of the water drops, and the far vibration of the million-voiced city! How quiet and soft and fresh! Then Nedda spoke:

"Dad, I do so want to know everything."

Not rousing even a smile, with its sublime immodesty, that aspiration seemed to Felix infinitely touching. What less could youth want in the very heart of Spring? And, watching her face put up to the night, her parted lips, and the moon-gleam fingering her white throat, he answered:

"It'll all come soon enough, my pretty!"

To think that she must come to an end like the rest, having found out almost nothing, having discovered just herself, and the particle of God that was within her! But he could not, of course, say this.

"I want to FEEL. Can't I begin?"

How many millions of young creatures all the world over were sending up that white prayer to climb and twine toward the stars, and—fall to earth again! And nothing to be answered, but:

"Time enough, Nedda!"

"But, Dad, there are such heaps of things, such heaps of people, and reasons, and—and life; and I know nothing. Dreams are the only times, it seems to me, that one finds out anything."

"As for that, my child, I am exactly in your case. What's to be done for us?"

She slid her hand through his arm again.

"Don't laugh at me!"

"Heaven forbid! I meant it. You're finding out much quicker than I. It's all folk-music to you still; to me Strauss and the rest of the tired stuff. The variations my mind spins—wouldn't I just swap them for the tunes your mind is making?"

"I don't seem making tunes at all. I don't seem to have anything to make them of. Take me down to

see 'the Tods,' Dad!"

Why not? And yet—! Just as in this spring night Felix felt so much, so very much, lying out there behind the still and moony dark, such marvellous holding of breath and waiting sentiency, so behind this innocent petition, he could not help the feeling of a lurking fatefulness. That was absurd. And he said: "If you wish it, by all means. You'll like your Uncle Tod; as to the others, I can't say, but your aunt is an experience, and experiences are what you want, it seems."

Fervently, without speech, Nedda squeezed his arm.

CHAPTER IV

Stanley Freeland's country house, Becket, was almost a show place. It stood in its park and pastures two miles from the little town of Transham and the Morton Plough Works; close to the ancestral home of the Moretons, his mother's family—that home burned down by Roundheads in the Civil War. The site—certain vagaries in the ground—Mrs. Stanley had caused to be walled round, and consecrated so to speak with a stone medallion on which were engraved the aged Moreton arms—arrows and crescent moons in proper juxtaposition. Peacocks, too—that bird 'parlant,' from the old Moreton crest—were encouraged to dwell there and utter their cries, as of passionate souls lost in too comfortable surroundings.

By one of those freaks of which Nature is so prodigal, Stanley—owner of this native Moreton soil—least of all four Freeland brothers, had the Moreton cast of mind and body. That was why he made so much more money than the other three put together, and had been able, with the aid of Clara's undoubted genius for rank and station, to restore a strain of Moreton blood to its rightful position among the county families of Worcestershire. Bluff and without sentiment, he himself set little store by that, smiling up his sleeve—for he was both kindly and prudent—at his wife who had been a Tomson. It was not in Stanley to appreciate the peculiar flavor of the Moretons, that something which in spite of their naivete and narrowness, had really been rather fine. To him, such Moretons as were left were 'dry enough sticks, clean out of it.' They were of a breed that was already gone, the simplest of all country gentlemen, dating back to the Conquest, without one solitary conspicuous ancestor, save the one who had been physician to a king and perished without issue—marrying from generation to generation exactly their own equals; living simple, pious, parochial lives; never in trade, never making money, having a tradition and a practice of gentility more punctilious than the so-called aristocracy; constitutionally paternal and maternal to their dependents, constitutionally so convinced that those dependents and all indeed who were not 'gentry,' were of different clay, that they were entirely simple and entirely without arrogance, carrying with them even now a sort of Early atmosphere of archery and home-made cordials, lavender and love of clergy, together with frequent use of the word 'nice,' a peculiar regularity of feature, and a complexion that was rather parchmety. High Church people and Tories, naturally, to a man and woman, by sheer inbred absence of ideas, and sheer inbred conviction that nothing else was nice; but withal very considerate of others, really plucky in bearing their own ills; not greedy, and not wasteful.

Of Becket, as it now was, they would not have approved at all. By what chance Edmund Moreton (Stanley's mother's grandfather), in the middle of the eighteenth century, had suddenly diverged from family feeling and ideals, and taken that 'not quite nice' resolution to make ploughs and money, would never now be known. The fact remained, together with the plough works. A man apparently of curious energy and character, considering his origin, he had dropped the E from his name, and—though he continued the family tradition so far as to marry a Fleeming of Worcestershire, to be paternal to his workmen, to be known as Squire, and to bring his children up in the older Moreton 'niceness'—he had yet managed to make his ploughs quite celebrated, to found a little town, and die still handsome and clean-shaved at the age of sixty-six. Of his four sons, only two could be found sufficiently without the E to go on making ploughs. Stanley's grandfather, Stuart Morton, indeed, had tried hard, but in the end had reverted to the congenital instinct for being just a Moreton. An extremely amiable man, he took to wandering with his family, and died in France, leaving one daughter—Frances, Stanley's mother—and three sons, one of whom, absorbed in horses, wandered to Australia and was killed by falling from them; one of whom, a soldier, wandered to India, and the embraces of a snake; and one of whom wandered into the embraces of the Holy Roman Church.

The Morton Plough Works were dry and dwindling when Stanley's father, seeking an opening for his son, put him and money into them. From that moment they had never looked back, and now brought

Stanley, the sole proprietor, an income of full fifteen thousand pounds a year. He wanted it. For Clara, his wife, had that energy of aspiration which before now has raised women to positions of importance in the counties which are not their own, and caused, incidentally, many acres to go out of cultivation. Not one plough was used on the whole of Becket, not even a Morton plough—these indeed were unsuitable to English soil and were all sent abroad. It was the corner-stone of his success that Stanley had completely seen through the talked-of revival of English agriculture, and sedulously cultivated the foreign market. This was why the Becket dining-room could contain without straining itself large quantities of local magnates and celebrities from London, all deploring the condition of 'the Land,' and discussing without end the regrettable position of the agricultural laborer. Except for literary men and painters, present in small quantities to leaven the lump, Becket was, in fact, a rallying point for the advanced spirits of Land Reform—one of those places where they were sure of being well done at week-ends, and of congenial and even stimulating talk about the undoubted need for doing something, and the designs which were being entertained upon 'the Land' by either party. This very heart of English country that the old Moretons in their paternal way had so religiously farmed, making out of its lush grass and waving corn a simple and by no means selfish or ungenerous subsistence, was now entirely lawns, park, coverts, and private golf course, together with enough grass to support the kine which yielded that continual stream of milk necessary to Clara's entertainments and children, all female, save little Francis, and still of tender years. Of gardeners, keepers, cow-men, chauffeurs, footmen, stablemen—full twenty were supported on those fifteen hundred acres that formed the little Becket demesne. Of agricultural laborers proper—that vexed individual so much in the air, so reluctant to stay on 'the Land,' and so difficult to house when he was there, there were fortunately none, so that it was possible for Stanley, whose wife meant him to 'put up' for the Division, and his guests, who were frequently in Parliament, to hold entirely unbiassed and impersonal views upon the whole question so long as they were at Becket.

It was beautiful there, too, with the bright open fields hedged with great elms, and that ever-rich serenity of its grass and trees. The white house, timbered with dark beams in true Worcestershire fashion, and added-to from time to time, had preserved, thanks to a fine architect, an old-fashioned air of spacious presidency above its gardens and lawns. On the long artificial lake, with innumerable rushy nooks and water-lilies and coverture of leaves floating flat and bright in the sun, the half-tame wild duck and shy water-hens had remote little worlds, and flew and splashed when all Becket was abed, quite as if the human spirit, with its monkey-tricks and its little divine flame, had not yet been born.

Under the shade of a copper-beech, just where the drive cut through into its circle before the house, an old lady was sitting that afternoon on a campstool. She was dressed in gray alpaca, light and cool, and had on her iron-gray hair a piece of black lace. A number of *Hearth and Home* and a little pair of scissors, suspended by an inexpensive chain from her waist, rested on her knee, for she had been meaning to cut out for dear Felix a certain recipe for keeping the head cool; but, as a fact, she sat without doing so, very still, save that, now and then, she compressed her pale fine lips, and continually moved her pale fine hands. She was evidently waiting for something that promised excitement, even pleasure, for a little rose-leaf flush had quavered up into a face that was colored like parchment; and her gray eyes under regular and still-dark brows, very far apart, between which there was no semblance of a wrinkle, seemed noting little definite things about her, almost unwillingly, as an Arab's or a Red Indian's eyes will continue to note things in the present, however their minds may be set on the future. So sat Frances Fleeming Freeland (nee Morton) waiting for the arrival of her son Felix and her grandchildren Alan and Nedda.

She marked presently an old man limping slowly on a stick toward where the drive debouched, and thought at once: "He oughtn't to be coming this way. I expect he doesn't know the way round to the back. Poor man, he's very lame. He looks respectable, too." She got up and went toward him, remarking that his face with nice gray moustaches was wonderfully regular, almost like a gentleman's, and that he touched his dusty hat with quite old-fashioned courtesy. And smiling—her smile was sweet but critical—she said: "You'll find the best way is to go back to that little path, and past the greenhouses. Have you hurt your leg?"

"My leg's been like that, m'm, fifteen year come Michaelmas."

"How did it happen?"

"Ploughin'. The bone was injured; an' now they say the muscle's dried up in a manner of speakin'."

"What do you do for it? The very best thing is this."

From the recesses of a deep pocket, placed where no one else wore such a thing, she brought out a little pot.

"You must let me give it you. Put it on when you go to bed, and rub it well in; you'll find it act

splendidly."

The old man took the little pot with dubious reverence.

"Yes, m'm," he said; "thank you, m'm."

"What is your name?"

"Gaunt."

"And where do you live?"

"Over to Joyfields, m'm."

"Joyfields—another of my sons lives there—Mr. Morton Freeland. But it's seven miles."

"I got a lift half-way."

"And have you business at the house?" The old man was silent; the downcast, rather cynical look of his lined face deepened. And Frances Freeland thought: 'He's overtired. They must give him some tea and an egg. What can he want, coming all this way? He's evidently not a beggar.'

The old man who was not a beggar spoke suddenly:

"I know the Mr. Freeland at Joyfields. He's a good gentleman, too."

"Yes, he is. I wonder I don't know you."

"I'm not much about, owin' to my leg. It's my grand-daughter in service here, I come to see."

"Oh, yes! What is her name?"

"Gaunt her name is."

"I shouldn't know her by her surname."

"Alice."

"Ah! in the kitchen; a nice, pretty girl. I hope you're not in trouble."

Again the old man was silent, and again spoke suddenly:

"That's as you look at it, m'm," he said. "I've got a matter of a few words to have with her about the family. Her father he couldn't come, so I come instead."

"And how are you going to get back?"

"I'll have to walk, I expect, without I can pick up with a cart."

Frances Freeland compressed her lips. "With that leg you should have come by train."

The old man smiled.

"I hadn't the fare like," he said. "I only gets five shillin's a week, from the council, and two o' that I pays over to my son."

Frances Freeland thrust her hand once more into that deep pocket, and as she did so she noticed that the old man's left boot was flapping open, and that there were two buttons off his coat. Her mind was swiftly calculating: "It is more than seven weeks to quarter day. Of course I can't afford it, but I must just give him a sovereign."

She withdrew her hand from the recesses of her pocket and looked at the old man's nose. It was finely chiselled, and the same yellow as his face. "It looks nice, and quite sober," she thought. In her hand was her purse and a boot-lace. She took out a sovereign.

"Now, if I give you this," she said, "you must promise me not to spend any of it in the public-house. And this is for your boot. And you must go back by train. And get those buttons sewn on your coat. And tell cook, from me, please, to give you some tea and an egg." And noticing that he took the sovereign and the boot-lace very respectfully, and seemed altogether very respectable, and not at all coarse or beery-looking, she said:

"Good-by; don't forget to rub what I gave you into your leg every night and every morning," and went

back to her camp-stool. Sitting down on it with the scissors in her hand, she still did not cut out that recipe, but remained as before, taking in small, definite things, and feeling with an inner trembling that dear Felix and Alan and Nedda would soon be here; and the little flush rose again in her cheeks, and again her lips and hands moved, expressing and compressing what was in her heart. And close behind her, a peacock, straying from the foundations of the old Moreton house, uttered a cry, and moved slowly, spreading its tail under the low-hanging boughs of the copper-beeches, as though it knew those dark burnished leaves were the proper setting for its 'parlant' magnificence.

CHAPTER V

The day after the little conference at John's, Felix had indeed received the following note:

"DEAR FELIX:

"When you go down to see old Tod, why not put up with us at Becket? Any time will suit, and the car can take you over to Joyfields when you like. Give the pen a rest. Clara joins in hoping you'll come, and Mother is still here. No use, I suppose, to ask Flora.

"Yours ever,
"STANLEY."

During the twenty years of his brother's sojourn there Felix had been down to Becket perhaps once a year, and latterly alone; for Flora, having accompanied him the first few times, had taken a firm stand.

"My dear," she said, "I feel all body there."

Felix had rejoined:

"No bad thing, once in a way."

But Flora had remained firm. Life was too short! She did not get on well with Clara. Neither did Felix feel too happy in his sister-in-law's presence; but the gray top-hat instinct had kept him going there, for one ought to keep in touch with one's brothers.

He replied to Stanley:
"DEAR STANLEY:

"Delighted; if I may bring my two youngsters. We'll arrive to-morrow at four-fifty.

"Yours affectionately,
"FELIX."

Travelling with Nedda was always jolly; one could watch her eyes noting, inquiring, and when occasion served, have one's little finger hooked in and squeezed. Travelling with Alan was convenient, the young man having a way with railways which Felix himself had long despaired of acquiring. Neither of the children had ever been at Becket, and though Alan was seldom curious, and Nedda too curious about everything to be specially so about this, yet Felix experienced in their company the sensations of a new adventure.

Arrived at Transham, that little town upon a hill which the Morton Plough Works had created, they were soon in Stanley's car, whirling into the sleepy peace of a Worcestershire afternoon. Would this young bird nestling up against him echo Flora's verdict: 'I feel all body there!' or would she take to its fatted luxury as a duck to water? And he said: "By the way, your aunt's 'Bigwigs' set in on a Saturday. Are you for staying and seeing the lions feed, or do we cut back?"

From Alan he got the answer he expected:

"If there's golf or something, I suppose we can make out all right."
From Nedda: "What sort of Bigwigs are they, Dad?"

"A sort you've never seen, my dear."

"Then I should like to stay. Only, about dresses?"

"What war paint have you?"

"Only two white evenings. And Mums gave me her Mechlin."

"'Twill serve."

To Felix, Nedda in white 'evenings' was starry and all that man could desire.

"Only, Dad, do tell me about them, beforehand."

"My dear, I will. And God be with you. This is where Becket begins."

The car had swerved into a long drive between trees not yet full-grown, but decorously trying to look more than their twenty years. To the right, about a group of older elms, rooks were in commotion, for Stanley's three keepers' wives had just baked their annual rook pies, and the birds were not yet happy again. Those elms had stood there when the old Moretons walked past them through corn-fields to church of a Sunday. Away on the left above the lake, the little walled mound had come in view. Something in Felix always stirred at sight of it, and, squeezing Nedda's arm, he said:

"See that silly wall? Behind there Granny's ancients lived. Gone now—new house—new lake—new trees—new everything."

But he saw from his little daughter's calm eyes that the sentiment in him was not in her.

"I like the lake," she said. "There's Granny—oh, and a peacock!"

His mother's embrace, with its frail energy, and the pressure of her soft, dry lips, filled Felix always with remorse. Why could he not give the simple and direct expression to his feeling that she gave to hers? He watched those lips transferred to Nedda, heard her say: "Oh, my darling, how lovely to see you! Do you know this for midge-bites?" A hand, diving deep into a pocket, returned with a little silver-coated stick having a bluish end. Felix saw it rise and hover about Nedda's forehead, and descend with two little swift dabs. "It takes them away at once."

"Oh, but Granny, they're not midge-bites; they're only from my hat!"

"It doesn't matter, darling; it takes away anything like that."

And he thought: 'Mother is really wonderful!'

At the house the car had already disgorged their luggage. Only one man, but he absolutely the butler, awaited them, and they entered, at once conscious of Clara's special pot-pourri. Its fragrance steamed from blue china, in every nook and crevice, a sort of baptism into luxury. Clara herself, in the outer morning-room, smelled a little of it. Quick and dark of eye, capable, comely, perfectly buttoned, one of those women who know exactly how not to be superior to the general taste of the period. In addition to that great quality she was endowed with a fine nose, an instinct for co-ordination not to be excelled, and a genuine love of making people comfortable; so that it was no wonder that she had risen in the ranks of hostesses, till her house was celebrated for its ease, even among those who at their week-ends liked to feel 'all body.' In regard to that characteristic of Becket, not even Felix in his ironies had ever stood up to Clara; the matter was too delicate. Frances Freeland, indeed—not because she had any philosophic preconceptions on the matter, but because it was 'not nice, dear, to be wasteful' even if it were only of rose-leaves, or to 'have too much decoration,' such as Japanese prints in places where they hum—sometimes told her daughter-in-law frankly what was wrong, without, however, making the faintest impression upon Clara, for she was not sensitive, and, as she said to Stanley, it was 'only Mother.'

When they had drunk that special Chinese tea, all the rage, but which no one really liked, in the inner morning, or afternoon room—for the drawing-rooms were too large to be comfortable except at week-ends—they went to see the children, a special blend of Stanley and Clara, save the little Francis, who did not seem to be entirely body. Then Clara took them to their rooms. She lingered kindly in Nedda's, feeling that the girl could not yet feel quite at home, and looking in the soap-dish lest she might not have the right verbena, and about the dressing-table to see that she had pins and scent, and plenty of 'pot-pourri,' and thinking: 'The child is pretty—a nice girl, not like her mother.' Explaining carefully how, because of the approaching week-end, she had been obliged to put her in 'a very simple room' where she would be compelled to cross the corridor to her bath, she asked her if she had a quilted dressing-gown, and finding that she had not, left her saying she would send one—and could she do her frocks up, or should Sirrett come?

Abandoned, the girl stood in the middle of the room, so far more 'simple' than she had ever slept in, with its warm fragrance of rose-leaves and verbena, its Aubusson carpet, white silk-quilted bed, sofa,

cushioned window-seat, dainty curtains, and little nickel box of biscuits on little spindly table. There she stood and sniffed, stretched herself, and thought: 'It's jolly—only, it smells too much!' and she went up to the pictures, one by one. They seemed to go splendidly with the room, and suddenly she felt homesick. Ridiculous, of course! Yet, if she had known where her father's room was, she would have run out to it; but her memory was too tangled up with stairs and corridors—to find her way down to the hall again was all she could have done.

A maid came in now with a blue silk gown very thick and soft. Could she do anything for Miss Freeland? No, thanks, she could not; only, did she know where Mr. Freeland's room was?

"Which Mr. Freeland, miss, the young or the old?"

"Oh, the old!" Having said which, Nedda felt unhappy; her Dad was not old! "No, miss; but I'll find out. It'll be in the walnut wing!" But with a little flutter at the thought of thus setting people to run about wings, Nedda murmured: "Oh! thanks, no; it doesn't matter."

She settled down now on the cushion of the window-seat, to look out and take it all in, right away to that line of hills gone blue in the haze of the warm evening. That would be Malvern; and there, farther to the south, the 'Tods' lived. 'Joyfields!' A pretty name! And it was lovely country all round; green and peaceful, with its white, timbered houses and cottages. People must be very happy, living here—happy and quiet like the stars and the birds; not like the crowds in London thronging streets and shops and Hampstead Heath; not like the people in all those disgruntled suburbs that led out for miles where London ought to have stopped but had not; not like the thousands and thousands of those poor creatures in Bethnal Green, where her slum work lay. The natives here must surely be happy. Only, were there any natives? She had not seen any. Away to the right below her window were the first trees of the fruit garden; for many of them Spring was over, but the apple-trees had just come into blossom, and the low sun shining through a gap in some far elms was slanting on their creamy pink, christening them—Nedda thought—with drops of light; and lovely the blackbirds' singing sounded in the perfect hush! How wonderful to be a bird, going where you would, and from high up in the air seeing everything; flying down a sunbeam, drinking a raindrop, sitting on the very top of a tall tree, running in grass so high that you were hidden, laying little perfect blue-green eggs, or pure-gray speckly ones; never changing your dress, yet always beautiful. Surely the spirit of the world was in the birds and the clouds, roaming, floating, and in the flowers and trees that never smelled anything but sweet, never looked anything but lovely, and were never restless. Why was one restless, wanting things that did not come—wanting to feel and know, wanting to love, and be loved? And at that thought which had come to her so unexpectedly—a thought never before shaped so definitely—Nedda planted her arms on the window-sill, with sleeves fallen down, and let her hands meet cup-shaped beneath her chin. Love! To have somebody with whom she could share everything—some one to whom and for whom she could give up—some one she could protect and comfort—some one who would bring her peace. Peace, rest—from what? Ah! that she could not make clear, even to herself. Love! What would love be like? Her father loved her, and she loved him. She loved her mother; and Alan on the whole was jolly to her—it was not that. What was it—where was it—when would it come and wake her, and kiss her to sleep, all in one? Come and fill her as with the warmth and color, the freshness, light, and shadow of this beautiful May evening, flood her as with the singing of those birds, and the warm light sunning the apple blossoms. And she sighed. Then—as with all young things whose attention after all is but as the hovering of a butterfly—her speculation was attracted to a thin, high-shouldered figure limping on a stick, away from the house, down one of the paths among the apple-trees. He wavered, not knowing, it seemed, his way. And Nedda thought: 'Poor old man, how lame he is!' She saw him stoop, screened, as he evidently thought, from sight, and take something very small from his pocket. He gazed, rubbed it, put it back; what it was she could not see. Then pressing his hand down, he smoothed and stretched his leg. His eyes seemed closed. So a stone man might have stood! Till very slowly he limped on, passing out of sight. And turning from the window, Nedda began hurrying into her evening things.

When she was ready she took a long time to decide whether to wear her mother's lace or keep it for the Bigwigs. But it was so nice and creamy that she simply could not take it off, and stood turning and turning before the glass. To stand before a glass was silly and old-fashioned; but Nedda could never help it, wanting so badly to be nicer to look at than she was, because of that something that some day was coming!

She was, in fact, pretty, but not merely pretty—there was in her face something alive and sweet, something clear and swift. She had still that way of a child raising its eyes very quickly and looking straight at you with an eager innocence that hides everything by its very wonder; and when those eyes looked down they seemed closed—their dark lashes were so long. Her eyebrows were wide apart, arching with a slight angle, and slanting a little down toward her nose. Her forehead under its burnt-brown hair was candid; her firm little chin just dimpled. Altogether, a face difficult to take one's eyes off. But Nedda was far from vain, and her face seemed to her too short and broad, her eyes too dark

and indeterminate, neither gray nor brown. The straightness of her nose was certainly comforting, but it, too, was short. Being creamy in the throat and browning easily, she would have liked to be marble-white, with blue dreamy eyes and fair hair, or else like a Madonna. And was she tall enough? Only five foot five. And her arms were too thin. The only things that gave her perfect satisfaction were her legs, which, of course, she could not at the moment see; they really WERE rather jolly! Then, in a panic, fearing to be late, she turned and ran out, fluttering into the maze of stairs and corridors.

CHAPTER VI

Clara, Mrs. Stanley Freeland, was not a narrow woman either in mind or body; and years ago, soon indeed after she married Stanley, she had declared her intention of taking up her sister-in-law, Kirsteen, in spite of what she had heard were the woman's extraordinary notions. Those were the days of carriages, pairs, coachmen, grooms, and, with her usual promptitude, ordering out the lot, she had set forth. It is safe to say she had never forgotten that experience.

Imagine an old, white, timbered cottage with a thatched roof, and no single line about it quite straight. A cottage crazy with age, buried up to the thatch in sweetbrier, creepers, honeysuckle, and perched high above crossroads. A cottage almost unapproachable for beehives and their bees—an insect for which Clara had an aversion. Imagine on the rough, pebbled approach to the door of this cottage (and Clara had on thin shoes) a peculiar cradle with a dark-eyed baby that was staring placidly at two bees sleeping on a coverlet made of a rough linen such as Clara had never before seen. Imagine an absolutely naked little girl of three, sitting in a tub of sunlight in the very doorway. Clara had turned swiftly and closed the wicket gate between the pebbled pathway and the mossed steps that led down to where her coachman and her footman were sitting very still, as was the habit of those people. She had perceived at once that she was making no common call. Then, with real courage she had advanced, and, looking down at the little girl with a fearful smile, had tickled the door with the handle of her green parasol. A woman younger than herself, a girl, indeed, appeared in a low doorway. She had often told Stanley since that she would never forget her first sight (she had not yet had another) of Tod's wife. A brown face and black hair, fiery gray eyes, eyes all light, under black lashes, and "such a strange smile"; bare, brown, shapely arms and neck in a shirt of the same rough, creamy linen, and, from under a bright blue skirt, bare, brown, shapely ankles and feet! A voice so soft and deadly that, as Clara said: "What with her eyes, it really gave me the shivers. And, my dear," she had pursued, "white-washed walls, bare brick floors, not a picture, not a curtain, not even a fire-iron. Clean—oh, horribly! They must be the most awful cranks. The only thing I must say that was nice was the smell. Sweetbrier, and honey, coffee, and baked apples—really delicious. I must try what I can do with it. But that woman—girl, I suppose she is—stumped me. I'm sure she'd have cut my head off if I'd attempted to open my mouth on ordinary topics. The children were rather ducks; but imagine leaving them about like that amongst the bees. 'Kirsteen!' She looked it. Never again! And Tod I didn't see at all; I suppose he was mooning about amongst his creatures."

It was the memory of this visit, now seventeen years ago, that had made her smile so indulgently when Stanley came back from the conference. She had said at once that they must have Felix to stay, and for her part she would be only too glad to do anything she could for those poor children of Tod's, even to asking them to Becket, and trying to civilize them a little. . . . "But as for that woman, there'll be nothing to be done with her, I can assure you. And I expect Tod is completely under her thumb."

To Felix, who took her in to dinner, she spoke feelingly and in a low voice. She liked Felix, in spite of his wife, and respected him—he had a name. Lady Malloring—she told him—the Mallorings owned, of course, everything round Joyfields—had been telling her that of late Tod's wife had really become quite rabid over the land question. 'The Tods' were hand in glove with all the cottagers. She, Clara, had nothing to say against any one who sympathized with the condition of the agricultural laborer; quite the contrary. Becket was almost, as Felix knew—though perhaps it wasn't for her to say so—the centre of that movement; but there were ways of doing things, and one did so deprecate women like this Kirsteen—what an impossibly Celtic name!—putting her finger into any pie that really was of national importance. Nothing could come of anything done that sort of way. If Felix had any influence with Tod it would be a mercy to use it in getting those poor young creatures away from home, to mix a little with people who took a sane view of things. She would like very much to get them over to Becket, but with their notions it was doubtful whether they had evening clothes! She had, of course, never forgotten that naked mite in the tub of sunlight, nor the poor baby with its bees and its rough linen. Felix replied deferentially—he was invariably polite, and only just ironic enough, in the houses of others—that he had

the very greatest respect for Tod, and that there could be nothing very wrong with the woman to whom Tod was so devoted. As for the children, his own young people would get at them and learn all about what was going on in a way that no fogey like himself could. In regard to the land question, there were, of course, many sides to that, and he, for one, would not be at all sorry to observe yet another. After all, the Tods were in real contact with the laborers, and that was the great thing. It would be very interesting.

Yes, Clara quite saw all that, but—and here she sank her voice so that there was hardly any left—as Felix was going over there, she really must put him au courant with the heart of this matter. Lady Malloring had told her the whole story. It appeared there were two cases: A family called Gaunt, an old man, and his son, who had two daughters—one of them, Alice, quite a nice girl, was kitchen-maid here at Becket, but the other sister—Wilmet—well! she was one of those girls that, as Felix must know, were always to be found in every village. She was leading the young men astray, and Lady Malloring had put her foot down, telling her bailiff to tell the farmer for whom Gaunt worked that he and his family must go, unless they sent the girl away somewhere. That was one case. And the other was of a laborer called Tryst, who wanted to marry his deceased wife's sister. Of course, whether Mildred Malloring was not rather too churchy and puritanical—now that a deceased wife's sister was legal—Clara did not want to say; but she was undoubtedly within her rights if she thought it for the good of the village. This man, Tryst, was a good workman, and his farmer had objected to losing him, but Lady Malloring had, of course, not given way, and if he persisted he would get put out. All the cottages about there were Sir Gerald Malloring's, so that in both cases it would mean leaving the neighborhood. In regard to village morality, as Felix knew, the line must be drawn somewhere.

Felix interrupted quietly:

"I draw it at Lady Malloring."

"Well, I won't argue that with you. But it really is a scandal that Tod's wife should incite her young people to stir up the villagers. Goodness knows where that mayn't lead! Tod's cottage and land, you see, are freehold, the only freehold thereabouts; and his being a brother of Stanley's makes it particularly awkward for the Mallorings."

"Quite so!" murmured Felix.

"Yes, but my dear Felix, when it comes to infecting those simple people with inflated ideas of their rights, it's serious, especially in the country. I'm told there's really quite a violent feeling. I hear from Alice Gaunt that the young Tods have been going about saying that dogs are better off than people treated in this fashion, which, of course, is all nonsense, and making far too much of a small matter. Don't you think so?"

But Felix only smiled his peculiar, sweetish smile, and answered:

"I'm glad to have come down just now."

Clara, who did not know that when Felix smiled like that he was angry, agreed.

"Yes," she said; "you're an observer. You will see the thing in right perspective."

"I shall endeavor to. What does Tod say?"

"Oh! Tod never seems to say anything. At least, I never hear of it."

Felix murmured:

"Tod is a well in the desert."

To which deep saying Clara made no reply, not indeed understanding in the least what it might signify.

That evening, when Alan, having had his fill of billiards, had left the smoking-room and gone to bed, Felix remarked to Stanley:

"I say, what sort of people are these Mallorings?"

Stanley, who was settling himself for the twenty minutes of whiskey, potash, and a Review, with which he commonly composed his mind before retiring, answered negligently:

"The Mallorings? Oh! about the best type of landowner we've got."

"What exactly do you mean by that?"

Stanley took his time to answer, for below his bluff good-nature he had the tenacious, if somewhat slow, precision of an English man of business, mingled with a certain mistrust of 'old Felix.'

"Well," he said at last, "they build good cottages, yellow brick, d—d ugly, I must say; look after the character of their tenants; give 'em rebate of rent if there's a bad harvest; encourage stock-breedin', and machinery—they've got some of my ploughs, but the people don't like 'em, and, as a matter of fact, they're right—they're not made for these small fields; set an example goin' to church; patronize the Rifle Range; buy up the pubs when they can, and run 'em themselves; send out jelly, and let people over their place on bank holidays. Dash it all, I don't know what they don't do. Why?"

"Are they liked?"

"Liked? No, I should hardly think they were liked; respected, and all that. Malloring's a steady fellow, keen man on housing, and a gentleman; she's a bit too much perhaps on the pious side. They've got one of the finest Georgian houses in the country. Altogether they're what you call 'model.'"

"But not human."

Stanley slightly lowered the Review and looked across it at his brother. It was evident to him that 'old Felix' was in one of his free-thinking moods.

"They're domestic," he said, "and fond of their children, and pleasant neighbors. I don't deny that they've got a tremendous sense of duty, but we want that in these days."

"Duty to what?"

Stanley raised his level eyebrows. It was a stumper. Without great care he felt that he would be getting over the border into the uncharted land of speculation and philosophy, wandering on paths that led him nowhere.

"If you lived in the country, old man," he said, "you wouldn't ask that sort of question."

"You don't imagine," said Felix, "that you or the Mallorings live in the country? Why, you landlords are every bit as much town dwellers as I am—thought, habit, dress, faith, souls, all town stuff. There IS no 'country' in England now for us of the 'upper classes.' It's gone. I repeat: Duty to what?"

And, rising, he went over to the window, looking out at the moonlit lawn, overcome by a sudden aversion from more talk. Of what use were words from a mind tuned in one key to a mind tuned in another? And yet, so ingrained was his habit of discussion, that he promptly went on:

"The Mallorings, I've not the slightest doubt, believe it their duty to look after the morals of those who live on their property. There are three things to be said about that: One—you can't make people moral by adopting the attitude of the schoolmaster. Two—it implies that they consider themselves more moral than their neighbors. Three—it's a theory so convenient to their security that they would be exceptionally good people if they did not adopt it; but, from your account, they are not so much exceptionally as just typically good people. What you call their sense of duty, Stanley, is really their sense of self-preservation coupled with their sense of superiority."

"H'm!" said Stanley; "I don't know that I quite follow you."

"I always hate an odor of sanctity. I'd prefer them to say frankly: 'This is my property, and you'll jolly well do what I tell you, on it.'"

"But, my dear chap, after all, they really ARE superior."

"That," said Felix, "I emphatically question. Put your Mallorings to earn their living on fifteen to eighteen shillings a week, and where would they be? The Mallorings have certain virtues, no doubt, natural to their fortunate environment, but of the primitive virtues of patience, hardihood, perpetual, almost unconscious self-sacrifice, and cheerfulness in the face of a hard fate, they are no more the equals of the people they pretend to be superior to than I am your equal as a man of business."

"Hang it!" was Stanley's answer, "what a d—d old heretic you are!"

Felix frowned. "Am I? Be honest! Take the life of a Malloring and take it at its best; see how it stands comparison in the ordinary virtues with those of an averagely good specimen of a farm-laborer. Your Malloring is called with a cup of tea, at, say, seven o'clock, out of a nice, clean, warm bed; he gets into a bath that has been got ready for him; into clothes and boots that have been brushed for him; and goes down to a room where there's a fire burning already if it's a cold day, writes a few letters, perhaps,

before eating a breakfast of exactly what he likes, nicely prepared for him, and reading the newspaper that best comforts his soul; when he has eaten and read, he lights his cigar or his pipe and attends to his digestion in the most sanitary and comfortable fashion; then in his study he sits down to steady direction of other people, either by interview or by writing letters, or what not. In this way, between directing people and eating what he likes, he passes the whole day, except that for two or three hours, sometimes indeed seven or eight hours, he attends to his physique by riding, motoring, playing a game, or indulging in a sport that he has chosen for himself. And, at the end of all that, he probably has another bath that has been made ready for him, puts on clean clothes that have been put out for him, goes down to a good dinner that has been cooked for him, smokes, reads, learns, and inwardly digests, or else plays cards, billiards, and acts host till he is sleepy, and so to bed, in a clean, warm bed, in a clean, fresh room. Is that exaggerated?"

"No; but when you talk of his directing other people, you forget that he is doing what they couldn't."

"He may be doing what they couldn't; but ordinary directive ability is not born in a man; it's acquired by habit and training. Suppose fortune had reversed them at birth, the Gaunt or Tryst would by now have it and the Malloring would not. The accident that they were not reversed at birth has given the Malloring a thousandfold advantage."

"It's no joke directing things," muttered Stanley.

"No work is any joke; but I just put it to you: Simply as work, without taking in the question of reward, would you dream for a minute of swapping your work with the work of one of your workmen? No. Well, neither would a Malloring with one of his Gaunts. So that, my boy, for work which is intrinsically more interesting and pleasurable, the Malloring gets a hundred to a thousand times more money."

"All this is rank socialism, my dear fellow."

"No; rank truth. Now, to take the life of a Gaunt. He gets up summer and winter much earlier out of a bed that he cannot afford time or money to keep too clean or warm, in a small room that probably has not a large enough window; into clothes stiff with work and boots stiff with clay; makes something hot for himself, very likely brings some of it to his wife and children; goes out, attending to his digestion crudely and without comfort; works with his hands and feet from half past six or seven in the morning till past five at night, except that twice he stops for an hour or so and eats simple things that he would not altogether have chosen to eat if he could have had his will. He goes home to a tea that has been got ready for him, and has a clean-up without assistance, smokes a pipe of shag, reads a newspaper perhaps two days old, and goes out again to work for his own good, in his vegetable patch, or to sit on a wooden bench in an atmosphere of beer and 'baccy.' And so, dead tired, but not from directing other people, he drowns himself to early lying again in his doubtful bed. Is that exaggerated?"

"I suppose not, but he—"

"Has his compensations: Clean conscience—freedom from worry—fresh air, all the rest of it! I know. Clean conscience granted, but so has your Malloring, it would seem. Freedom from worry—yes, except when a pair of boots is wanted, or one of the children is ill; then he has to make up for lost time with a vengeance. Fresh air—and wet clothes, with a good chance of premature rheumatism. Candidly, which of those two lives demands more of the virtues on which human life is founded—courage and patience, hardihood and self-sacrifice? And which of two men who have lived those two lives well has most right to the word 'superior'?"

Stanley dropped the Review and for fully a minute paced the room without reply. Then he said:

"Felix, you're talking flat revolution."

Felix, who, faintly smiling, had watched him up and down, up and down the Turkey carpet, answered:

"Not so. I am by no means a revolutionary person, because with all the good-will in the world I have been unable to see how upheavals from the bottom, or violence of any sort, is going to equalize these lives or do any good. But I detest humbug, and I believe that so long as you and your Mallorings go on blindly dosing yourselves with humbug about duty and superiority, so long will you see things as they are not. And until you see things as they are, purged of all that sickening cant, you will none of you really move to make the conditions of life more and ever more just. For, mark you, Stanley, I, who do not believe in revolution from the bottom, the more believe that it is up to us in honour to revolutionize things from the top!"

"H'm!" said Stanley; "that's all very well; but the more you give the more they want, till there's no end

to it."

Felix stared round that room, where indeed one was all body.

"By George," he said, "I've yet to see a beginning. But, anyway, if you give in a grudging spirit, or the spirit of a schoolmaster, what can you expect? If you offer out of real good-will, so it is taken." And suddenly conscious that he had uttered a constructive phrase, Felix cast down his eyes, and added:

"I am going to my clean, warm bed. Good night, old man!"

When his brother had taken up his candlestick and gone, Stanley, uttering a dubious sound, sat down on the lounge, drank deep out of his tumbler, and once more took up his Review.

CHAPTER VII

The next day Stanley's car, fraught with Felix and a note from Clara, moved swiftly along the grass-bordered roads toward Joyfields. Lying back on the cushioned seat, the warm air flying at his face, Felix contemplated with delight his favorite countryside. Certainly this garden of England was very lovely, its greenness, trees, and large, pied, lazy cattle; its very emptiness of human beings even was pleasing.

Nearing Joyfields he noted the Mallorings' park and their long Georgian house, carefully fronting south. There, too, was the pond of what village there was, with the usual ducks on it; and three well-remembered cottages in a row, neat and trim, of the old, thatched sort, but evidently restored. Out of the door of one of them two young people had just emerged, going in the same direction as the car. Felix passed them and turned to look. Yes, it was they! He stopped the car. They were walking, with eyes straight before them, frowning. And Felix thought: 'Nothing of Tod in either of them; regular Celts!'

The girl's vivid, open face, crisp, brown, untidy hair, cheeks brimful of color, thick lips, eyes that looked up and out as a Skye terrier's eyes look out of its shagginess—indeed, her whole figure struck Felix as almost frighteningly vital; and she walked as if she despised the ground she covered. The boy was even more arresting. What a strange, pale-dark face, with its black, uncovered hair, its straight black brows; what a proud, swan's-eyed, thin-lipped, straight-nosed young devil, marching like a very Highlander; though still rather run-up, from sheer youthfulness! They had come abreast of the car by now, and, leaning out, he said:

"You don't remember me, I'm afraid!" The boy shook his head. Wonderful eyes he had! But the girl put out her hand.

"Of course, Derek; it's Uncle Felix."

They both smiled now, the girl friendly, the boy rather drawn back into himself. And feeling strangely small and ill at ease, Felix murmured:

"I'm going to see your father. Can I give you a lift home?"

The answer came as he expected:

"No, thanks." Then, as if to tone it down, the girl added:

"We've got something to do first. You'll find him in the orchard."

She had a ringing voice, full of warmth. Lifting his hat, Felix passed on. They WERE a couple! Strange, attractive, almost frightening. Kirsteen had brought his brother a formidable little brood.

Arriving at the cottage, he went up its mossy stones and through the wicket gate. There was little change, indeed, since the days of Clara's visit, save that the beehives had been moved farther out. Nor did any one answer his knock; and mindful of the girl's words, "You'll find him in the orchard," he made his way out among the trees. The grass was long and starred with petals. Felix wandered over it among bees busy with the apple-blossom. At the very end he came on his brother, cutting down a pear-tree. Tod was in shirt-sleeves, his brown arms bare almost to the shoulders. How tremendous the fellow was! What resounding and terrific blows he was dealing! Down came the tree, and Tod drew his arm across his brow. This great, burnt, curly-headed fellow was more splendid to look upon than even Felix had remembered, and so well built that not a movement of his limbs was heavy. His cheek-bones were very

broad and high; his brows thick and rather darker than his bright hair, so that his deep-set, very blue eyes seemed to look out of a thicket; his level white teeth gleamed from under his tawny moustache, and his brown, unshaven cheeks and jaw seemed covered with gold powder. Catching sight of Felix, he came forward.

"Fancy," he said, "old Gladstone spending his leisure cutting down trees—of all melancholy jobs!"

Felix did not quite know what to answer, so he put his arm within his brother's. Tod drew him toward the tree.

"Sit down!" he said. Then, looking sorrowfully at the pear-tree, he murmured:

"Seventy years—and down in seven minutes. Now we shall burn it. Well, it had to go. This is the third year it's had no blossom."

His speech was slow, like that of a man accustomed to think aloud. Felix admired him askance. "I might live next door," he thought, "for all the notice he's taken of my turning up!"

"I came over in Stanley's car," he said. "Met your two coming along—fine couple they are!"

"Ah!" said Tod. And there was something in the way he said it that was more than a mere declaration of pride or of affection. Then he looked at Felix.

"What have you come for, old man?"

Felix smiled. Quaint way to put it!

"For a talk."

"Ah!" said Tod, and he whistled.

A largish, well-made dog with a sleek black coat, white underneath, and a black tail white-tipped, came running up, and stood before Tod, with its head rather to one side and its yellow-brown eyes saying: 'I simply must get at what you're thinking, you know.'

"Go and tell your mistress to come—Mistress!"

The dog moved his tail, lowered it, and went off.

"A gypsy gave him to me," said Tod; "best dog that ever lived."

"Every one thinks that of his own dog, old man."

"Yes," said Tod; "but this IS."

"He looks intelligent."

"He's got a soul," said Tod. "The gypsy said he didn't steal him, but he did."

"Do you always know when people aren't speaking the truth, then?"

"Yes."

At such a monstrous remark from any other man, Felix would have smiled; but seeing it was Tod, he only asked: "How?"

"People who aren't speaking the truth look you in the face and never move their eyes."

"Some people do that when they are speaking the truth."

"Yes; but when they aren't, you can see them struggling to keep their eyes straight. A dog avoids your eye when he's something to conceal; a man stares at you. Listen!"

Felix listened and heard nothing.

"A wren"; and, screwing up his lips, Tod emitted a sound: "Look!"

Felix saw on the branch of an apple-tree a tiny brown bird with a little beak sticking out and a little tail sticking up. And he thought: 'Tod's hopeless!'

"That fellow," said Tod softly, "has got his nest there just behind us." Again he emitted the sound. Felix saw the little bird move its head with a sort of infinite curiosity, and hop twice on the branch.

"I can't get the hen to do that," Tod murmured.

Felix put his hand on his brother's arm—what an arm!

"Yes," he said; "but look here, old man—I really want to talk to you."

Tod shook his head. "Wait for her," he said.

Felix waited. Tod was getting awfully eccentric, living this queer, out-of-the-way life with a cranky woman year after year; never reading anything, never seeing any one but tramps and animals and villagers. And yet, sitting there beside his eccentric brother on that fallen tree, he had an extraordinary sense of rest. It was, perhaps, but the beauty and sweetness of the day with its dappling sunlight brightening the apple-blossoms, the wind-flowers, the wood-sorrel, and in the blue sky above the fields those clouds so unimaginably white. All the tiny noises of the orchard, too, struck on his ear with a peculiar meaning, a strange fulness, as if he had never heard such sounds before. Tod, who was looking at the sky, said suddenly:

"Are you hungry?"

And Felix remembered that they never had any proper meals, but, when hungry, went to the kitchen, where a wood-fire was always burning, and either heated up coffee, and porridge that was already made, with boiled eggs and baked potatoes and apples, or devoured bread, cheese, jam, honey, cream, tomatoes, butter, nuts, and fruit, that were always set out there on a wooden table, under a muslin awning; he remembered, too, that they washed up their own bowls and spoons and plates, and, having finished, went outside and drew themselves a draught of water. Queer life, and deuced uncomfortable—almost Chinese in its reversal of everything that every one else was doing.

"No," he said, "I'm not."

"I am. Here she is."

Felix felt his heart beating—Clara was not alone in being frightened of this woman. She was coming through the orchard with the dog; a remarkable-looking woman—oh, certainly remarkable! She greeted him without surprise and, sitting down close to Tod, said: "I'm glad to see you."

Why did this family somehow make him feel inferior? The way she sat there and looked at him so calmly! Still more the way she narrowed her eyes and wrinkled her lips, as if rather malicious thoughts were rising in her soul! Her hair, as is the way of fine, soft, almost indigo-colored hair, was already showing threads of silver; her whole face and figure thinner than he had remembered. But a striking woman still—with wonderful eyes! Her dress—Felix had scanned many a crank in his day—was not so alarming as it had once seemed to Clara; its coarse-woven, deep-blue linen and needle-worked yoke were pleasing to him, and he could hardly take his gaze from the kingfisher-blue band or fillet that she wore round that silver-threaded black hair.

He began by giving her Clara's note, the wording of which he had himself dictated:

"DEAR KIRSTEEN:

"Though we have not seen each other for so long, I am sure you will forgive my writing. It would give us so much pleasure if you and the two children would come over for a night or two while Felix and his young folk are staying with us. It is no use, I fear, to ask Tod; but of course if he would come, too, both Stanley and myself would be delighted.

"Yours cordially,

"CLARA FREELAND."

She read it, handed it to Tod, who also read it and handed it to Felix. Nobody said anything. It was so altogether simple and friendly a note that Felix felt pleased with it, thinking: 'I expressed that well!'

Then Tod said: "Go ahead, old man! You've got something to say about the youngsters, haven't you?"

How on earth did he know that? But then Tod HAD a sort of queer prescience.

"Well," he brought out with an effort, "don't you think it's a pity to embroil your young people in village troubles? We've been hearing from Stanley—"

Kirsteen interrupted in her calm, staccato voice with just the faintest lisp:

"Stanley would not understand."

She had put her arm through Tod's, but never removed her eyes from her brother-in-law's face.

"Possibly," said Felix, "but you must remember that Stanley, John, and myself represent ordinary—what shall we say—level-headed opinion."

"With which we have nothing in common, I'm afraid."

Felix glanced from her to Tod. The fellow had his head on one side and seemed listening to something in the distance. And Felix felt a certain irritation.

"It's all very well," he said, "but I think you really have got to look at your children's future from a larger point of view. You don't surely want them to fly out against things before they've had a chance to see life for themselves."

She answered:

"The children know more of life than most young people. They've seen it close to, they've seen its realities. They know what the tyranny of the countryside means."

"Yes, yes," said Felix, "but youth is youth."

"They are not too young to know and feel the truth."

Felix was impressed. How those narrowing eyes shone! What conviction in that faintly lisping voice!

'I am a fool for my pains,' he thought, and only said:

"Well, what about this invitation, anyway?"

"Yes; it will be just the thing for them at the moment."

The words had to Felix a somewhat sinister import. He knew well enough that she did not mean by them what others would have meant. But he said: "When shall we expect them? Tuesday, I suppose, would be best for Clara, after her weekend. Is there no chance of you and Tod?"

She quaintly wrinkled her lips into not quite a smile, and answered:

"Tod shall say. Do you hear, Tod?"

"In the meadow. It was there yesterday—first time this year."

Felix slipped his arm through his brother's.

"Quite so, old man."

"What?" said Tod. "Ah! let's go in. I'm awfully hungry." . . .

Sometimes out of a calm sky a few drops fall, the twigs rustle, and far away is heard the muttering of thunder; the traveller thinks: 'A storm somewhere about.' Then all once more is so quiet and peaceful that he forgets he ever had that thought, and goes on his way careless.

So with Felix returning to Becket in Stanley's car. That woman's face, those two young heathens—the unconscious Tod!

There was mischief in the air above that little household. But once more the smooth gliding of the cushioned car, the soft peace of the meadows so permanently at grass, the churches, mansions, cottages embowered among their elms, the slow-flapping flight of the rooks and crows lulled Felix to quietude, and the faint far muttering of that thunder died away.

Nedda was in the drive when he returned, gazing at a nymph set up there by Clara. It was a good thing, procured from Berlin, well known for sculpture, and beginning to green over already, as though it had been there a long time—a pretty creature with shoulders drooping, eyes modestly cast down, and a sparrow perching on her head.

"Well, Dad?"

"They're coming."

"When?"

"On Tuesday—the youngsters, only."

"You might tell me a little about them."

But Felix only smiled. His powers of description faltered before that task; and, proud of those powers, he did not choose to subject them to failure.

CHAPTER VIII

Not till three o'clock that Saturday did the Bigwigs begin to come. Lord and Lady Britto first from Erne by car; then Sir Gerald and Lady Malloring, also by car from Joyfields; an early afternoon train brought three members of the Lower House, who liked a round of golf—Colonel Martlett, Mr. Slesor, and Sir John Fanfar—with their wives; also Miss Bawtrey, an American who went everywhere; and Moorsome, the landscape-painter, a short, very heavy man who went nowhere, and that in almost perfect silence, which he afterward avenged. By a train almost sure to bring no one else came Literature in Public Affairs, alone, Henry Wiltram, whom some believed to have been the very first to have ideas about the land. He was followed in the last possible train by Cuthcott, the advanced editor, in his habitual hurry, and Lady Maude Ughtred in her beauty. Clara was pleased, and said to Stanley, while dressing, that almost every shade of opinion about the land was represented this week-end. She was not, she said, afraid of anything, if she could keep Henry Wiltram and Cuthcott apart. The House of Commons men would, of course, be all right. Stanley assented: "They'll be 'fed up' with talk. But how about Britto—he can sometimes be very nasty, and Cuthcott's been pretty rough on him, in his rag."

Clara had remembered that, and she was putting Lady Maude on one side of Cuthcott, and Moorsome on the other, so that he would be quite safe at dinner, and afterward—Stanley must look out!

"What have you done with Nedda?" Stanley asked.

"Given her to Colonel Martlett, with Sir John Fanfar on the other side; they both like something fresh." She hoped, however, to foster a discussion, so that they might really get further this week-end; the opportunity was too good to throw away.

"H'm!" Stanley murmured. "Felix said some very queer things the other night. He, too, might make ructions."

Oh, no!—Clara persisted—Felix had too much good taste. She thought that something might be coming out of this occasion, something as it were national, that would bear fruit. And watching Stanley buttoning his braces, she grew enthusiastic. For, think how splendidly everything was represented! Britto, with his view that the thing had gone too far, and all the little efforts we might make now were no good, with Canada and those great spaces to outbid anything we could do; though she could not admit that he was right, there was a lot in what he said; he had great gifts—and some day might—who knew? Then there was Sir John—Clara pursued—who was almost the father of the new Tory policy: Assist the farmers to buy their own land. And Colonel Martlett, representing the older Tory policy of: What the devil would happen to the landowners if they did? Secretly (Clara felt sure) he would never go into a lobby to support that. He had said to her: 'Look at my brother James's property; if we bring this policy in, and the farmers take advantage, his house might stand there any day without an acre round it.' Quite true—it might. The same might even happen to Becket.

Stanley grunted.

Exactly!—Clara went on: And that was the beauty of having got the Mallorings; theirs was such a steady point of view, and she was not sure that they weren't right, and the whole thing really a question of model proprietorship.

"H'm!" Stanley muttered. "Felix will have his knife into that."

Clara did not think that mattered. The thing was to get everybody's opinion. Even Mr. Moorsome's would be valuable—if he weren't so terrifically silent, for he must think a lot, sitting all day, as he did, painting the land.

"He's a heavy ass," said Stanley.

Yes; but Clara did not wish to be narrow. That was why it was so splendid to have got Mr. Slesor. If anybody knew the Radical mind he did, and he could give full force to what one always felt was at the bottom of it—that the Radicals' real supporters were the urban classes; so that their policy must not go

too far with 'the Land,' for fear of seeming to neglect the towns. For, after all, in the end it was out of the pockets of the towns that 'the Land' would have to be financed, and nobody really could expect the towns to get anything out of it. Stanley paused in the adjustment of his tie; his wife was a shrewd woman.

"You've hit it there," he said. "Wiltram will give it him hot on that, though."

Of course, Clara assented. And it was magnificent that they had got Henry Wiltram, with his idealism and his really heavy corn tax; not caring what happened to the stunted products of the towns—and they truly were stunted, for all that the Radicals and the half-penny press said—till at all costs we could grow our own food. There was a lot in that.

"Yes," Stanley muttered, "and if he gets on to it, shan't I have a jolly time of it in the smoking-room? I know what Cuthcott's like with his shirt out."

Clara's eyes brightened; she was very curious herself to see Mr. Cuthcott with his—that is, to hear him expound the doctrine he was always writing up, namely, that 'the Land' was gone and, short of revolution, there was nothing for it but garden cities. She had heard he was so cutting and ferocious that he really did seem as if he hated his opponents. She hoped he would get a chance—perhaps Felix could encourage him.

"What about the women?" Stanley asked suddenly. "Will they stand a political powwow? One must think of them a bit."

Clara had. She was taking a farewell look at herself in the far-away mirror through the door into her bedroom. It was a mistake—she added—to suppose that women were not interested in 'the Land.' Lady Britto was most intelligent, and Mildred Malloring knew every cottage on her estate.

"Pokes her nose into 'em often enough," Stanley muttered.

Lady Fanfar again, and Mrs. Slesor, and even Hilda Martlett, were interested in their husbands, and Miss Bawtrey, of course, interested in everything. As for Maude Ughtred, all talk would be the same to her; she was always week-ending. Stanley need not worry—it would be all right; some real work would get done, some real advance be made. So saying, she turned her fine shoulders twice, once this way and once that, and went out. She had never told even Stanley her ambition that at Becket, under her aegis, should be laid the foundation-stone of the real scheme, whatever it might be, that should regenerate 'the Land.' Stanley would only have laughed; even though it would be bound to make him Lord Freeland when it came to be known some day. . . .

To the eyes and ears of Nedda that evening at dinner, all was new indeed, and all wonderful. It was not that she was unaccustomed to society or to conversation, for to their house at Hampstead many people came, uttering many words, but both the people and the words were so very different. After the first blush, the first reconnaissance of the two Bigwigs between whom she sat, her eyes WOULD stray and her ears would only half listen to them. Indeed, half her ears, she soon found out, were quite enough to deal with Colonel Martlett and Sir John Fanfar. Across the azaleas she let her glance come now and again to anchor on her father's face, and exchanged with him a most enjoyable blink. She tried once or twice to get through to Alan, but he was always eating; he looked very like a young Uncle Stanley this evening.

What was she feeling? Short, quick stabs of self-consciousness as to how she was looking; a sort of stunned excitement due to sheer noise and the number of things offered to her to eat and drink; keen pleasure in the consciousness that Colonel Martlett and Sir John Fanfar and other men, especially that nice one with the straggly moustache who looked as if he were going to bite, glanced at her when they saw she wasn't looking. If only she had been quite certain that it was not because they thought her too young to be there! She felt a sort of continual exhilaration, that this was the great world—the world where important things were said and done, together with an intense listening expectancy, and a sense most unexpected and almost frightening, that nothing important was being said or would be done. But this she knew to be impudent. On Sunday evenings at home people talked about a future existence, about Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Chinese pictures, post-impressionism, and would suddenly grow hot and furious about peace, and Strauss, justice, marriage, and De Maupassant, and whether people were losing their souls through materialism, and sometimes one of them would get up and walk about the room. But to-night the only words she could catch were the names of two politicians whom nobody seemed to approve of, except that nice one who was going to bite. Once very timidly she asked Colonel Martlett whether he liked Strauss, and was puzzled by his answer: "Rather; those 'Tales of Hoffmann' are rippin', don't you think? You go to the opera much?" She could not, of course, know that the thought which instantly rose within her was doing the governing classes a grave injustice—almost all of whom save Colonel Martlett knew that the 'Tales of Hoffmann' were by one Offenbach. But beyond all

things she felt she would never, never learn to talk as they were all talking—so quickly, so continuously, so without caring whether everybody or only the person they were talking to heard what they said. She had always felt that what you said was only meant for the person you said it to, but here in the great world she must evidently not say anything that was not meant for everybody, and she felt terribly that she could not think of anything of that sort to say. And suddenly she began to want to be alone. That, however, was surely wicked and wasteful, when she ought to be learning such a tremendous lot; and yet, what was there to learn? And listening just sufficiently to Colonel Martlett, who was telling her how great a man he thought a certain general, she looked almost despairingly at the one who was going to bite. He was quite silent at that moment, gazing at his plate, which was strangely empty. And Nedda thought: 'He has jolly wrinkles about his eyes, only they might be heart disease; and I like the color of his face, so nice and yellow, only that might be liver. But I DO like him—I wish I'd been sitting next to him; he looks real.' From that thought, of the reality of a man whose name she did not know, she passed suddenly into the feeling that nothing else of this about her was real at all, neither the talk nor the faces, not even the things she was eating. It was all a queer, buzzing dream. Nor did that sensation of unreality cease when her aunt began collecting her gloves, and they trooped forth to the drawing-room. There, seated between Mrs. Slesor and Lady Britto, with Lady Malloring opposite, and Miss Bawtrey leaning over the piano toward them, she pinched herself to get rid of the feeling that, when all these were out of sight of each other, they would become silent and have on their lips a little, bitter smile. Would it be like that up in their bedrooms, or would it only be on her (Nedda's) own lips that this little smile would come? It was a question she could not answer; nor could she very well ask it of any of these ladies. She looked them over as they sat there talking and felt very lonely. And suddenly her eyes fell on her grandmother. Frances Freeland was seated halfway down the long room in a sandalwood chair, somewhat insulated by a surrounding sea of polished floor. She sat with a smile on her lips, quite still, save for the continual movement of her white hands on her black lap. To her gray hair some lace of Chantilly was pinned with a little diamond brooch, and hung behind her delicate but rather long ears. And from her shoulders was depended a silvery garment, of stuff that looked like the mail shirt of a fairy, reaching the ground on either side. A tacit agreement had evidently been come to, that she was incapable of discussing 'the Land' or those other subjects such as the French murder, the Russian opera, the Chinese pictures, and the doings of one, L—, whose fate was just then in the air, so that she sat alone.

And Nedda thought: 'How much more of a lady she looks than anybody here! There's something deep in her to rest on that isn't in the Bigwigs; perhaps it's because she's of a different generation.' And, getting up, she went over and sat down beside her on a little chair.

Frances Freeland rose at once and said:

"Now, my darling, you can't be comfortable in that tiny chair. You must take mine."

"Oh, no, Granny; please!"

"Oh, yes; but you must! It's so comfortable, and I've simply been longing to sit in the chair you're in. Now, darling, to please me!"

Seeing that a prolonged struggle would follow if she did not get up, Nedda rose and changed chairs.

"Do you like these week-ends, Granny?"

Frances Freeland seemed to draw her smile more resolutely across her face. With her perfect articulation, in which there was, however, no trace of bigwiggery, she answered:

"I think they're most interesting, darling. It's so nice to see new people. Of course you don't get to know them, but it's very amusing to watch, especially the head-dresses!" And sinking her voice: "Just look at that one with the feather going straight up; did you ever see such a guy?" and she cackled with a very gentle archness. Gazing at that almost priceless feather, trying to reach God, Nedda felt suddenly how completely she was in her grandmother's little camp; how entirely she disliked bigwiggery.

Frances Freeland's voice brought her round.

"Do you know, darling, I've found the most splendid thing for eyebrows? You just put a little on every night and it keeps them in perfect order. I must give you my little pot."

"I don't like grease, Granny."

"Oh! but this isn't grease, darling. It's a special thing; and you only put on just the tiniest touch."

Diving suddenly into the recesses of something, she produced an exiguous round silver box. Prizing it open, she looked over her shoulder at the Bigwigs, then placed her little finger on the contents of the little box, and said very softly:

"You just take the merest touch, and you put it on like that, and it keeps them together beautifully. Let me! Nobody'll see!"

Quite well understanding that this was all part of her grandmother's passion for putting the best face upon things, and having no belief in her eyebrows, Nedda bent forward; but in a sudden flutter of fear lest the Bigwigs might observe the operation, she drew back, murmuring: "Oh, Granny, darling! Not just now!"

At that moment the men came in, and, under cover of the necessary confusion, she slipped away into the window.

It was pitch-black outside, with the moon not yet up. The bloomy, peaceful dark out there! Wistaria and early roses, clustering in, had but the ghost of color on their blossoms. Nedda took a rose in her fingers, feeling with delight its soft fragility, its coolness against her hot palm. Here in her hand was a living thing, here was a little soul! And out there in the darkness were millions upon millions of other little souls, of little flame-like or coiled-up shapes alive and true.

A voice behind her said:

"Nothing nicer than darkness, is there?"

She knew at once it was the one who was going to bite; the voice was proper for him, having a nice, smothery sound. And looking round gratefully, she said:

"Do you like dinner-parties?"

It was jolly to watch his eyes twinkle and his thin cheeks puff out. He shook his head and muttered through that straggly moustache:

"You're a niece, aren't you? I know your father. He's a big man."

Hearing those words spoken of her father, Nedda flushed.

"Yes, he is," she said fervently.

Her new acquaintance went on:

"He's got the gift of truth—can laugh at himself as well as others; that's what makes him precious. These humming-birds here to-night couldn't raise a smile at their own tomfoolery to save their silly souls."

He spoke still in that voice of smothery wrath, and Nedda thought: 'He IS nice!'

"They've been talking about 'the Land'"—he raised his hands and ran them through his palish hair—"the Land! Heavenly Father! 'The Land!' Why! Look at that fellow!"

Nedda looked and saw a man, like Richard Coeur de Lion in the history books, with a straw-colored moustache just going gray.

"Sir Gerald Malloring—hope he's not a friend of yours! Divine right of landowners to lead 'the Land' by the nose! And our friend Britto!"

Nedda, following his eyes, saw a robust, quick-eyed man with a suave insolence in his dark, clean-shaved face.

"Because at heart he's just a supercilious ruffian, too cold-blooded to feel, he'll demonstrate that it's no use to feel—waste of valuable time—ha! valuable!—to act in any direction. And that's a man they believe things of. And poor Henry Wiltram, with his pathetic: 'Grow our own food—maximum use of the land as food-producer, and let the rest take care of itself!' As if we weren't all long past that feeble individualism; as if in these days of world markets the land didn't stand or fall in this country as a breeding-ground of health and stamina and nothing else. Well, well!"

"Aren't they really in earnest, then?" asked Nedda timidly.

"Miss Freeland, this land question is a perfect tragedy. Bar one or two, they all want to make the omelette without breaking eggs; well, by the time they begin to think of breaking them, mark me—

there'll be no eggs to break. We shall be all park and suburb. The real men on the land, what few are left, are dumb and helpless; and these fellows here for one reason or another don't mean business—they'll talk and tinker and top-dress—that's all. Does your father take any interest in this? He could write something very nice."

"He takes interest in everything," said Nedda. "Please go on, Mr. —Mr.—" She was terribly afraid he would suddenly remember that she was too young and stop his nice, angry talk.

"Cuthcott. I'm an editor, but I was brought up on a farm, and know something about it. You see, we English are grumblers, snobs to the backbone, want to be something better than we are; and education nowadays is all in the direction of despising what is quiet and humdrum. We never were a stay-at-home lot, like the French. That's at the back of this business—they may treat it as they like, Radicals or Tories, but if they can't get a fundamental change of opinion into the national mind as to what is a sane and profitable life; if they can't work a revolution in the spirit of our education, they'll do no good. There'll be lots of talk and tinkering, tariffs and tommy-rot, and, underneath, the land-bred men dying, dying all the time. No, madam, industrialism and vested interests have got us! Bar the most strenuous national heroism, there's nothing for it now but the garden city!"

"Then if we WERE all heroic, 'the Land' could still be saved?"

Mr. Cuthcott smiled.

"Of course we might have a European war or something that would shake everything up. But, short of that, when was a country ever consciously and homogeneously heroic—except China with its opium? When did it ever deliberately change the spirit of its education, the trend of its ideas; when did it ever, of its own free will, lay its vested interests on the altar; when did it ever say with a convinced and resolute heart: 'I will be healthy and simple before anything. I will not let the love of sanity and natural conditions die out of me!' When, Miss Freeland, when?"

And, looking so hard at Nedda that he almost winked, he added:

"You have the advantage of me by thirty years. You'll see what I shall not—the last of the English peasant. Did you ever read 'Erewhon,' where the people broke up their machines? It will take almost that sort of national heroism to save what's left of him, even."

For answer, Nedda wrinkled her brows horribly. Before her there had come a vision of the old, lame man, whose name she had found out was Gaunt, standing on the path under the apple-trees, looking at that little something he had taken from his pocket. Why she thought of him thus suddenly she had no idea, and she said quickly:

"It's awfully interesting. I do so want to hear about 'the Land.' I only know a little about sweated workers, because I see something of them."

"It's all of a piece," said Mr. Cuthcott; "not politics at all, but religion—touches the point of national self-knowledge and faith, the point of knowing what we want to become and of resolving to become it. Your father will tell you that we have no more idea of that at present than a cat of its own chemical composition. As for these good people here to-night—I don't want to be disrespectful, but if they think they're within a hundred miles of the land question, I'm a—I'm a Jingo—more I can't say."

And, as if to cool his head, he leaned out of the window.

"Nothing is nicer than darkness, as I said just now, because you can only see the way you MUST go instead of a hundred and fifty ways you MIGHT. In darkness your soul is something like your own; in daylight, lamplight, moonlight, never."

Nedda's spirit gave a jump; he seemed almost at last to be going to talk about the things she wanted, above all, to find out. Her cheeks went hot, she clenched her hands and said resolutely:

"Mr. Cuthcott, do you believe in God?"

Mr. Cuthcott made a queer, deep little noise; it was not a laugh, however, and it seemed as if he knew she could not bear him to look at her just then.

"H'm!" he said. "Every one does that—according to their natures. Some call God IT, some HIM, some HER, nowadays—that's all. You might as well ask—do I believe that I'm alive?"

"Yes," said Nedda, "but which do YOU call God?"

As she asked that, he gave a wriggle, and it flashed through her: 'He must think me an awful enfant

terrible!' His face peered round at her, queer and pale and puffy, with nice, straight eyes; and she added hastily:

"It isn't a fair question, is it? Only you talked about darkness, and the only way—so I thought—"

"Quite a fair question. My answer is, of course: 'All three'; but the point is rather: Does one wish to make even an attempt to define God to oneself? Frankly, I don't! I'm content to feel that there is in one some kind of instinct toward perfection that one will still feel, I hope, when the lights are going out; some kind of honour forbidding one to let go and give up. That's all I've got; I really don't know that I want more."

Nedda clasped her hands.

"I like that," she said; "only—what is perfection, Mr. Cuthcott?"

Again he emitted that deep little sound.

"Ah!" he repeated, "what is perfection? Awkward, that—isn't it?"

"Is it"—Nedda rushed the words out—"is it always to be sacrificing yourself, or is it—is it always to be—to be expressing yourself?"

"To some—one; to some—the other; to some—half one, half the other."

"But which is it to me?"

"Ah! that you've got to find out for yourself. There's a sort of metronome inside us—wonderful, self-adjusting little machine; most delicate bit of mechanism in the world—people call it conscience—that records the proper beat of our tempos. I guess that's all we have to go by."

Nedda said breathlessly:

"Yes; and it's frightfully hard, isn't it?"

"Exactly," Mr. Cuthcott answered. "That's why people devised religions and other ways of having the thing done second-hand. We all object to trouble and responsibility if we can possibly avoid it. Where do you live?"

"In Hampstead."

"Your father must be a stand-by, isn't he?"

"Oh, yes; Dad's splendid; only, you see, I AM a good deal younger than he. There was just one thing I was going to ask you. Are these very Bigwigs?"

Mr. Cuthcott turned to the room and let his screwed-up glance wander. He looked just then particularly as if he were going to bite.

"If you take 'em at their own valuation: Yes. If at the country's: So-so. If at mine: Ha! I know what you'd like to ask: Should I be a Bigwig in THEIR estimation? Not I! As you knock about, Miss Freeland, you'll find out one thing—all bigwiggery is founded on: Scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours. Seriously, these are only tenpenny ones; but the mischief is, that in the matter of 'the Land,' the men who really are in earnest are precious scarce. Nothing short of a rising such as there was in 1832 would make the land question real, even for the moment. Not that I want to see one—God forbid! Those poor doomed devils were treated worse than dogs, and would be again."

Before Nedda could pour out questions about the rising in 1832, Stanley's voice said:

"Cuthcott, I want to introduce you!"

Her new friend screwed his eyes up tighter and, muttering something, put out his hand to her.

"Thank you for our talk. I hope we shall meet again. Any time you want to know anything—I'll be only too glad. Good night!"

She felt the squeeze of his hand, warm and dry, but rather soft, as of a man who uses a pen too much; saw him following her uncle across the room, with his shoulders a little hunched, as if preparing to inflict, and ward off, blows. And with the thought: 'He must be jolly when he gives them one!' she turned once more to the darkness, than which he had said there was nothing nicer. It smelled of new-mown grass, was full of little shiverings of leaves, and all colored like the bloom of a black grape. And her heart felt soothed.

CHAPTER IX

". . . When I first saw Derek I thought I should never feel anything but shy and hopeless. In four days, only in four days, the whole world is different. . . . And yet, if it hadn't been for that thunder-storm, I shouldn't have got over being shy in time. He has never loved anybody—nor have I. It can't often be like that—it makes it solemn. There's a picture somewhere—not a good one, I know—of a young Highlander being taken away by soldiers from his sweetheart. Derek is fiery and wild and shy and proud and dark—like the man in that picture. That last day along the hills—along and along—with the wind in our faces, I could have walked forever; and then Joyfields at the end! Their mother's wonderful; I'm afraid of her. But Uncle Tod is a perfect dear. I never saw any one before who noticed so many things that I didn't, and nothing that I did. I am sure he has in him what Mr. Cuthcott said we were all losing—the love of simple, natural conditions. And then, THE moment, when I stood with Derek at the end of the orchard, to say good-by. The field below covered with those moony-white flowers, and the cows all dark and sleepy; the holy feeling down there was wonderful, and in the branches over our heads, too, and the velvety, starry sky, and the dewiness against one's face, and the great, broad silence—it was all worshipping something, and I was worshipping—worshipping happiness. I WAS happy, and I think HE was. Perhaps I shall never be so happy again. When he kissed me I didn't think the whole world had so much happiness in it. I know now that I'm not cold a bit; I used to think I was. I believe I could go with him anywhere, and do anything he wanted. What would Dad think? Only the other day I was saying I wanted to know everything. One only knows through love. It's love that makes the world all beautiful—makes it like those pictures that seem to be wrapped in gold, makes it like a dream—no, not like a dream—like a wonderful tune. I suppose that's glamour—a goldeny, misty, lovely feeling, as if my soul were wandering about with his—not in my body at all. I want it to go on and on wandering—oh! I don't want it back in my body, all hard and inquisitive and aching! I shall never know anything so lovely as loving him and being loved. I don't want anything more—nothing! Stay with me, please—Happiness! Don't go away and leave me! . . . They frighten me, though; he frightens me—their idealism; wanting to do great things, and fight for justice. If only I'd been brought up more like that—but everything's been so different. It's their mother, I think, even more than themselves. I seem to have grown up just looking on at life as at a show; watching it, thinking about it, trying to understand—not living it at all. I must get over that; I will. I believe I can tell the very moment I began to love him. It was in the schoolroom the second evening. Sheila and I were sitting there just before dinner, and he came, in a rage, looking splendid. 'That footman put out everything just as if I were a baby—asked me for suspenders to fasten on my socks; hung the things on a chair in order, as if I couldn't find out for myself what to put on first; turned the tongues of my shoes out!—curled them over!' Then Derek looked at me and said: 'Do they do that for you?—And poor old Gaunt, who's sixty-six and lame, has three shillings a week to buy him everything. Just think of that! If we had the pluck of flies—' And he clenched his fists. But Sheila got up, looked hard at me, and said: 'That'll do, Derek.' Then he put his hand on my arm and said: 'It's only Cousin Nedda!' I began to love him then; and I believe he saw it, because I couldn't take my eyes away. But it was when Sheila sang 'The Red Sarafan,' after dinner, that I knew for certain. 'The Red Sarafan'—it's a wonderful song, all space and yearning, and yet such calm—it's the song of the soul; and he was looking at me while she sang. How can he love me? I am nothing—no good for anything! Alan calls him a 'run-up kid, all legs and wings.' Sometimes I hate Alan; he's conventional and stodgy—the funny thing is that he admires Sheila. She'll wake him up; she'll stick pins into him. No, I don't want Alan hurt—I want every one in the world to be happy, happy—as I am. . . . The next day was the thunder-storm. I never saw lightning so near—and didn't care a bit. If he were struck I knew I should be; that made it all right. When you love, you don't care, if only the something must happen to you both. When it was over, and we came out from behind the stack and walked home through the fields, all the beasts looked at us as if we were new and had never been seen before; and the air was ever so sweet, and that long, red line of cloud low down in the purple, and the elm-trees so heavy and almost black. He put his arm round me, and I let him. . . . It seems an age to wait till they come to stay with us next week. If only Mother likes them, and I can go and stay at Joyfields. Will she like them? It's all so different to what it would be if they were ordinary. But if he were ordinary I shouldn't love him; it's because there's nobody like him. That isn't a loverish fancy—you only have to look at him against Alan or Uncle Stanley or even Dad. Everything he does is so different; the way he walks, and the way he stands drawn back into himself, like a stag, and looks out as if he were burning and smouldering inside; even the way he smiles. Dad asked me what I thought of him! That was only the second day. I thought he was too proud, then. And Dad said: 'He ought to be in a Highland regiment; pity—great pity!' He is a fighter, of course. I don't like fighting, but if I'm not ready to, he'll stop loving me, perhaps. I've got to learn. O Darkness out there, help me! And Stars, help me! O God, make me brave, and I will believe in you forever! If you are the spirit that grows in things in spite of everything, until they're like the flowers, so perfect that we laugh and sing at their beauty, grow in me, too; make me beautiful and brave; then I shall be fit for him, alive or dead; and that's all I want. Every evening I shall stand in spirit with him at the end of that orchard in the darkness, under the trees above the white flowers and the

sleepy cows, and perhaps I shall feel him kiss me again. . . . I'm glad I saw that old man Gaunt; it makes what they feel more real to me. He showed me that poor laborer Tryst, too, the one who mustn't marry his wife's sister, or have her staying in the house without marrying her. Why should people interfere with others like that? It does make your blood boil! Derek and Sheila have been brought up to be in sympathy with the poor and oppressed. If they had lived in London they would have been even more furious, I expect. And it's no use my saying to myself 'I don't know the laborer, I don't know his hardships,' because he is really just the country half of what I do know and see, here in London, when I don't hide my eyes. One talk showed me how desperately they feel; at night, in Sheila's room, when we had gone up, just we four. Alan began it; they didn't want to, I could see; but he was criticising what some of those Bigwigs had said—the 'Varsity makes boys awfully conceited. It was such a lovely night; we were all in the big, long window. A little bat kept flying past; and behind the copper-beech the moon was shining on the lake. Derek sat in the windowsill, and when he moved he touched me. To be touched by him gives me a warm shiver all through. I could hear him gritting his teeth at what Alan said—frightfully sententious, just like a newspaper: 'We can't go into land reform from feeling, we must go into it from reason.' Then Derek broke out: 'Walk through this country as we've walked; see the pigsties the people live in; see the water they drink; see the tiny patches of ground they have; see the way their roofs let in the rain; see their pecky children; see their patience and their hopelessness; see them working day in and day out, and coming on the parish at the end! See all that, and then talk about reason! Reason! It's the coward's excuse, and the rich man's excuse, for doing nothing. It's the excuse of the man who takes jolly good care not to see for fear that he may come to feel! Reason never does anything, it's too reasonable. The thing is to act; then perhaps reason will be jolted into doing something.' But Sheila touched his arm, and he stopped very suddenly. She doesn't trust us. I shall always be being pushed away from him by her. He's just twenty, and I shall be eighteen in a week; couldn't we marry now at once? Then, whatever happened, I couldn't be cut off from him. If I could tell Dad, and ask him to help me! But I can't—it seems desecration to talk about it, even to Dad. All the way up in the train to-day, coming back home, I was struggling not to show anything; though it's hateful to keep things from Dad. Love alters everything; it melts up the whole world and makes it afresh. Love is the sun of our spirits, and it's the wind. Ah, and the rain, too! But I won't think of that! . . . I wonder if he's told Aunt Kirsteen! . . ."

CHAPTER X

While Nedda sat, long past midnight, writing her heart out in her little, white, lilac-curtained room of the old house above the Spaniard's Road, Derek, of whom she wrote, was walking along the Malvern hills, hurrying upward in the darkness. The stars were his companions; though he was no poet, having rather the fervid temper of the born swordsman, that expresses itself in physical ecstasies. He had come straight out from a stormy midnight talk with Sheila. What was he doing—had been the burden of her cry—falling in love just at this moment when they wanted all their wits and all their time and strength for this struggle with the Mallorings? It was foolish, it was weak; and with a sweet, soft sort of girl who could be no use. Hotly he had answered: What business was it of hers? As if one fell in love when one wished! She didn't know—her blood didn't run fast enough! Sheila had retorted, "I've more blood in my big toe than Nedda in all her body! A lot of use you'll be, with your heart mooning up in London!" And crouched together on the end of her bed, gazing fixedly up at him through her hair, she had chanted mockingly: "Here we go gathering wool and stars—wool and stars—wool and stars!"

He had not deigned to answer, but had gone out, furious with her, striding over the dark fields, scrambling his way through the hedges toward the high loom of the hills. Up on the short grass in the cooler air, with nothing between him and those swarming stars, he lost his rage. It never lasted long—hers was more enduring. With the innate lordliness of a brother he already put it down to jealousy. Sheila was hurt that he should want any one but her; as if his love for Nedda would make any difference to their resolution to get justice for Tryst and the Gaunts, and show those landed tyrants once for all that they could not ride roughshod.

Nedda! with her dark eyes, so quick and clear, so loving when they looked at him! Nedda, soft and innocent, the touch of whose lips had turned his heart to something strange within him, and wakened such feelings of chivalry! Nedda! To see whom for half a minute he felt he would walk a hundred miles.

This boy's education had been administered solely by his mother till he was fourteen, and she had brought him up on mathematics, French, and heroism. His extensive reading of history had been focussed on the personality of heroes, chiefly knights errant, and revolutionaries. He had carried the

worship of them to the Agricultural College, where he had spent four years; and a rather rough time there had not succeeded in knocking romance out of him. He had found that you could not have such beliefs comfortably without fighting for them, and though he ended his career with the reputation of a rebel and a champion of the weak, he had had to earn it. To this day he still fed himself on stories of rebellions and fine deeds. The figures of Spartacus, Montrose, Hofer, Garibaldi, Hampden, and John Nicholson, were more real to him than the people among whom he lived, though he had learned never to mention—especially not to the matter-of-fact Sheila—his encompassing cloud of heroes; but, when he was alone, he pranced a bit with them, and promised himself that he too would reach the stars. So you may sometimes see a little, grave boy walking through a field, unwatched as he believes, suddenly fling his feet and his head every which way. An active nature, romantic, without being dreamy and book-loving, is not too prone to the attacks of love; such a one is likely to survive unscathed to a maturer age. But Nedda had seduced him, partly by the appeal of her touchingly manifest love and admiration, and chiefly by her eyes, through which he seemed to see such a loyal, and loving little soul looking. She had that indefinable something which lovers know that they can never throw away. And he had at once made of her, secretly, the crown of his active romanticism—the lady waiting for the spoils of his lance. Queer is the heart of a boy—strange its blending of reality and idealism!

Climbing at a great pace, he reached Malvern Beacon just as it came dawn, and stood there on the top, watching. He had not much aesthetic sense; but he had enough to be impressed by the slow paling of the stars over space that seemed infinite, so little were its dreamy confines visible in the May morning haze, where the quivering crimson flags and spears of sunrise were forging up in a march upon the sky. That vision of the English land at dawn, wide and mysterious, hardly tallied with Mr. Cuthcott's view of a future dedicate to Park and Garden City. While Derek stood there gazing, the first lark soared up and began its ecstatic praise. Save for that song, silence possessed all the driven dark, right out to the Severn and the sea, and the fastnesses of the Welsh hills, and the Wrekin, away in the north, a black point in the gray. For a moment dark and light hovered and clung together. Would victory wing back into night or on into day? Then, as a town is taken, all was over in one overmastering rush, and light proclaimed. Derek tightened his belt and took a bee-line down over the slippery grass. He meant to reach the cottage of the laborer Tryst before that early bird was away to the fields. He meditated as he went. Bob Tryst was all right! If they only had a dozen or two like him! A dozen or two whom they could trust, and who would trust each other and stand firm to form the nucleus of a strike, which could be timed for hay harvest. What slaves these laborers still were! If only they could be relied on, if only they would stand together! Slavery! It WAS slavery; so long as they could be turned out of their homes at will in this fashion. His rebellion against the conditions of their lives, above all against the manifold petty tyrannies that he knew they underwent, came from use of his eyes and ears in daily contact with a class among whom he had been more or less brought up. In sympathy with, and yet not of them, he had the queer privilege of feeling their slights as if they were his own, together with feelings of protection, and even of contempt that they should let themselves be slighted. He was near enough to understand how they must feel; not near enough to understand why, feeling as they did, they did not act as he would have acted. In truth, he knew them no better than he should.

He found Tryst washing at his pump. In the early morning light the big laborer's square, stubborn face, with its strange, dog-like eyes, had a sodden, hungry, lost look. Cutting short ablutions that certainly were never protracted, he welcomed Derek, and motioned him to pass into the kitchen. The young man went in, and perched himself on the window-sill beside a pot of Bridal Wreath. The cottage was one of the Mallorings', and recently repaired. A little fire was burning, and a teapot of stewed tea sat there beside it. Four cups and spoons and some sugar were put out on a deal table, for Tryst was, in fact, brewing the morning draught of himself and children, who still lay abed up-stairs. The sight made Derek shiver and his eyes darken. He knew the full significance of what he saw.

"Did you ask him again, Bob?"

"Yes, I asked 'im."

"What did he say?"

"Said as orders was plain. 'So long as you lives there,' he says, 'along of yourself alone, you can't have her come back.'"

"Did you say the children wanted looking after badly? Did you make it clear? Did you say Mrs. Tryst wished it, before she—"

"I said that."

"What did he say then?"

"'Sorry for you, m'lad, but them's m'lady's orders, an' I can't go contrary. I don't wish to go into

things,' he says; 'you know better'n I how far 'tis gone when she was 'ere before; but seein' as m'lady don't never give in to deceased wife's sister marryin', if she come back 'tis certain to be the other thing. So, as that won't do neither, you go elsewhere,' he says."

Having spoken thus at length, Tryst lifted the teapot and poured out the dark tea into the three cups.

"Will 'ee have some, sir?"

Derek shook his head.

Taking the cups, Tryst departed up the narrow stairway. And Derek remained motionless, staring at the Bridal Wreath, till the big man came down again and, retiring into a far corner, sat sipping at his own cup.

"Bob," said the boy suddenly, "do you LIKE being a dog; put to what company your master wishes?"

Tryst set his cup down, stood up, and crossed his thick arms—the swift movement from that stolid creature had in it something sinister; but he did not speak.

"Do you like it, Bob?"

"I'll not say what I feels, Mr. Derek; that's for me. What I does'll be for others, p'raps."

And he lifted his strange, lowering eyes to Derek's. For a full minute the two stared, then Derek said:

"Look out, then; be ready!" and, getting off the sill, he went out.

On the bright, slimy surface of the pond three ducks were quietly revelling in that hour before man and his damned soul, the dog, rose to put the fear of God into them. In the sunlight, against the green duckweed, their whiteness was truly marvellous; difficult to believe that they were not white all through. Passing the three cottages, in the last of which the Gaunts lived, he came next to his own home, but did not turn in, and made on toward the church. It was a very little one, very old, and had for him a curious fascination, never confessed to man or beast. To his mother, and Sheila, more intolerant, as became women, that little, lichened, gray stone building was the very emblem of hypocrisy, of a creed preached, not practised; to his father it was nothing, for it was not alive, and any tramp, dog, bird, or fruit-tree meant far more. But in Derek it roused a peculiar feeling, such as a man might have gazing at the shores of a native country, out of which he had been thrown for no fault of his own—a yearning deeply muffled up in pride and resentment. Not infrequently he would come and sit brooding on the grassy hillock just above the churchyard. Church-going, with its pageantry, its tradition, dogma, and demand for blind devotion, would have suited him very well, if only blind devotion to his mother had not stood across that threshold; he could not bring himself to bow to that which viewed his rebellious mother as lost. And yet the deep fibres of heredity from her papistic Highland ancestors, and from old pious Moretons, drew him constantly to this spot at times when no one would be about. It was his enemy, this little church, the fold of all the instincts and all the qualities against which he had been brought up to rebel; the very home of patronage and property and superiority; the school where his friends the laborers were taught their place! And yet it had that queer, ironical attraction for him. In some such sort had his pet hero Montrose rebelled, and then been drawn despite himself once more to the side of that against which he had taken arms.

While he leaned against the rail, gazing at that ancient edifice, he saw a girl walk into the churchyard at the far end, sit down on a gravestone, and begin digging a little hole in the grass with the toe of her boot. She did not seem to see him, and at his ease he studied her face, one of those broad, bright English country faces with deep-set rogue eyes and red, thick, soft lips, smiling on little provocation. In spite of her disgrace, in spite of the fact that she was sitting on her mother's grave, she did not look depressed. And Derek thought: 'Wilmet Gaunt is the jolliest of them all! She isn't a bit a bad girl, as they say; it's only that she must have fun. If they drive her out of here, she'll still want fun wherever she is; she'll go to a town and end up like those girls I saw in Bristol.' And the memory of those night girls, with their rouged faces and cringing boldness, came back to him with horror.

He went across the grass toward her.

She looked round as he came, and her face livened.

"Well, Wilmet?"

"You're an early bird, Mr. Derek."

"Haven't been to bed."

"Oh!"

"Been up Malvern Beacon to see the sun rise."

"You're tired, I expect!"

"No."

"Must be fine up there. You'd see a long ways from there; near to London I should think. Do you know London, Mr. Derek?"

"No."

"They say 'tis a funny place, too." Her rogue eyes gleamed from under a heavy frown. "It'd not be all 'Do this' an' 'Do that'; an' 'You bad girl' an' 'You little hussy!' in London. They say there's room for more'n one sort of girl there."

"All towns are beastly places, Wilmet."

Again her rogue's eyes gleamed. "I don' know so much about that, Mr. Derek. I'm going where I won't be chivied about and pointed at, like what I am here."

"Your dad's stuck to you; you ought to stick to him."

"Ah, Dad! He's losin' his place for me, but that don't stop his tongue at home. 'Tis no use to nag me—nag me. Suppose one of m'lady's daughters had a bit of fun—they say there's lots as do—I've heard tales—there'd be none comin' to chase her out of her home. 'No, my girl, you can't live here no more, endangerin' the young men. You go away. Best for you's where they'll teach you to be'ave. Go on! Out with you! I don't care where you go; but you just go!' 'Tis as if girls were all pats o' butter—same square, same pattern on it, same weight, an' all."

Derek had come closer; he put his hand down and gripped her arm. Her eloquence dried up before the intentness of his face, and she just stared up at him.

"Now, look here, Wilmet; you promise me not to scoot without letting us know. We'll get you a place to go to. Promise."

A little sheepishly the rogue-girl answered:

"I promise; only, I'm goin'."

Suddenly she dimpled and broke into her broad smile.

"Mr. Derek, d'you know what they say—they say you're in love. You was seen in th' orchard. Ah! 'tis all right for you and her! But if any one kiss and hug ME, I got to go!"

Derek drew back among the graves, as if he had been struck with a whip.

She looked up at him with coaxing sweetness.

"Don't you mind me, Mr. Derek, and don't you stay here neither. If they saw you here with me, they'd say: 'Aw—look! Endangerin' another young man—poor young man!' Good mornin', Mr. Derek!"

The rogue eyes followed him gravely, then once more began examining the grass, and the toe of her boot again began kicking a little hole. But Derek did not look back.

CHAPTER XI

It is in the nature of men and angels to pursue with death such birds as are uncommon, such animals as are rare; and Society had no use for one like Tod, so uncut to its pattern as to be practically unconscious of its existence. Not that he had deliberately turned his back on anything; he had merely begun as a very young man to keep bees. The better to do that he had gone on to the cultivation of flowers and fruit, together with just enough farming as kept his household in vegetables, milk, butter, and eggs. Living thus amongst insects, birds, cows, and the peace of trees, he had become queer. His was not a very reflective mind, it distilled but slowly certain large conclusions, and followed intently the

minute happenings of his little world. To him a bee, a bird, a flower, a tree was well-nigh as interesting as a man; yet men, women, and especially children took to him, as one takes to a Newfoundland dog, because, though capable of anger, he seemed incapable of contempt, and to be endowed with a sort of permanent wonder at things. Then, too, he was good to look at, which counts for more than a little in the scales of our affections; indeed, the slight air of absence in his blue eyes was not chilling, as is that which portends a wandering of its owner on his own business. People recognized that it meant some bee or other in that bonnet, or elsewhere, some sound or scent or sight of life, suddenly perceived—always of life! He had often been observed gazing with peculiar gravity at a dead flower, bee, bird, or beetle, and, if spoken to at such a moment, would say, "Gone!" touching a wing or petal with his finger. To conceive of what happened after death did not apparently come within the few large conclusions of his reflective powers. That quaint grief of his in the presence of the death of things that were not human had, more than anything, fostered a habit among the gentry and clergy of the neighborhood of drawing up the mouth when they spoke of him, and slightly raising the shoulders. For the cottagers, to be sure, his eccentricity consisted rather in his being a 'gentleman,' yet neither eating flesh, drinking wine, nor telling them how they ought to behave themselves, together with the way he would sit down on anything and listen to what they had to tell him, without giving them the impression that he was proud of himself for doing so. In fact, it was the extraordinary impression he made of listening and answering without wanting anything either for himself or for them, that they could not understand. How on earth it came about that he did not give them advice about their politics, religion, morals, or monetary states, was to them a never-ending mystery; and though they were too well bred to shrug their shoulders, there did lurk in their dim minds the suspicion that 'the good gentleman,' as they called him, was 'a tiddy-bit off.' He had, of course, done many practical little things toward helping them and their beasts, but always, as it seemed, by accident, so that they could never make up their minds afterward whether he remembered having done them, which, in fact, he probably did not; and this seemed to them perhaps the most damning fact of all about his being—well, about his being—not quite all there. Another worrying habit he had, too, that of apparently not distinguishing between them and any tramps or strangers who might happen along and come across him. This was, in their eyes, undoubtedly a fault; for the village was, after all, their village, and he, as it were, their property. To crown all, there was a story, full ten years old now, which had lost nothing in the telling, of his treatment of a cattle-drover. To the village it had an eerie look, that windmill-like rage let loose upon a man who, after all, had only been twisting a bullock's tail and running a spiked stick into its softer parts, as any drover might. People said—the postman and a wagoner had seen the business, raconteurs born, so that the tale had perhaps lost nothing—that he had positively roared as he came leaping down into the lane upon the man, a stout and thick-set fellow, taken him up like a baby, popped him into a furzebush, and held him there. People said that his own bare arms had been pricked to the very shoulder from pressing the drover down into that uncompromising shrub, and the man's howls had pierced the very heavens. The postman, to this day, would tell how the mere recollection of seeing it still made him sore all over. Of the words assigned to Tod on this occasion, the mildest and probably most true were: "By the Lord God, if you treat a beast like that again, I'll cut your liver out, you hell-hearted sweep!"

The incident, which had produced a somewhat marked effect in regard to the treatment of animals all round that neighborhood, had never been forgotten, nor in a sense forgiven. In conjunction with the extraordinary peace and mildness of his general behavior, it had endowed Tod with mystery; and people, especially simple folk, cannot bring themselves to feel quite at home with mystery. Children only—to whom everything is so mysterious that nothing can be—treated him as he treated them, giving him their hands with confidence. But children, even his own, as they grew up, began to have a little of the village feeling toward Tod; his world was not theirs, and what exactly his world was they could not grasp. Possibly it was the sense that they partook of his interest and affection too much on a level with any other kind of living thing that might happen to be about, which discomfited their understanding. They held him, however, in a certain reverence.

That early morning he had already done a good two hours' work in connection with broad beans, of which he grew, perhaps, the best in the whole county, and had knocked off for a moment, to examine a spider's web. This marvellous creation, which the dew had visited and clustered over, as stars over the firmament, was hung on the gate of the vegetable garden, and the spider, a large and active one, was regarding Tod with the misgiving natural to its species. Intensely still Tod stood, absorbed in contemplation of that bright and dusty miracle. Then, taking up his hoe again, he went back to the weeds that threatened his broad beans. Now and again he stopped to listen, or to look at the sky, as is the way of husbandmen, thinking of nothing, enjoying the peace of his muscles.

"Please, sir, father's got into a fit again."

Two little girls were standing in the lane below. The elder, who had spoken in that small, anxious voice, had a pale little face with pointed chin; her hair, the color of over-ripe corn, hung fluffy on her

thin shoulders, her flower-like eyes, with something motherly in them already, were the same hue as her pale-blue, almost clean, overall. She had her smaller, chubbier sister by the hand, and, having delivered her message, stood still, gazing up at Tod, as one might at God. Tod dropped his hoe.

"Biddy come with me; Susie go and tell Mrs. Freeland, or Miss Sheila."

He took the frail little hand of the elder Tryst and ran. They ran at the child's pace, the one so very massive, the other such a whiff of flesh and blood.

"Did you come at once, Biddy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where was he taken?"

"In the kitchen—just as I was cookin' breakfast."

"Ah! Is it a bad one?"

"Yes, sir, awful bad—he's all foamy."

"What did you do for it?"

"Susie and me turned him over, and Billy's seein' he don't get his tongue down his throat—like what you told us, and we ran to you. Susie was frightened, he hollered so."

Past the three cottages, whence a woman at a window stared in amaze to see that queer couple running, past the pond where the ducks, whiter than ever in the brightening sunlight, dived and circled carelessly, into the Tryst kitchen. There on the brick floor lay the distressful man, already struggling back out of epilepsy, while his little frightened son sat manfully beside him.

"Towels, and hot water, Biddy!"

With extraordinary calm rapidity the small creature brought what might have been two towels, a basin, and the kettle; and in silence she and Tod steeped his forehead.

"Eyes look better, Biddy?"

"He don't look so funny now, sir."

Picking up that form, almost as big as his own, Tod carried it up impossibly narrow stairs and laid it on a dishevelled bed.

"Phew! Open the window, Biddy."

The small creature opened what there was of window.

"Now, go down and heat two bricks and wrap them in something, and bring them up."

Tryst's boots and socks removed, Tod rubbed the large, warped feet. While doing this he whistled, and the little boy crept up-stairs and squatted in the doorway, to watch and listen. The morning air overcame with its sweetness the natural odor of that small room, and a bird or two went flirting past. The small creature came back with the bricks, wrapped in petticoats of her own, and, placing them against the soles of her father's feet, she stood gazing at Tod, for all the world like a little mother dog with puppies.

"You can't go to school to-day, Biddy."

"Is Susie and Billy to go?"

"Yes; there's nothing to be frightened of now. He'll be nearly all right by evening. But some one shall stay with you."

At this moment Tryst lifted his hand, and the small creature went and stood beside him, listening to the whispering that emerged from his thick lips.

"Father says I'm to thank you, please."

"Yes. Have you had your breakfasts?"

The small creature and her smaller brother shook their heads.

"Go down and get them."

Whispering and twisting back, they went, and by the side of the bed Tod sat down. In Tryst's eyes was that same look of dog-like devotion he had bent on Derek earlier that morning. Tod stared out of the window and gave the man's big hand a squeeze. Of what did he think, watching a lime-tree outside, and the sunlight through its foliage painting bright the room's newly whitewashed wall, already gray-spotted with damp again; watching the shadows of the leaves playing in that sunlight? Almost cruel, that lovely shadow game of outside life so full and joyful, so careless of man and suffering; too gay almost, too alive! Of what did he think, watching the chase and dart of shadow on shadow, as of gray butterflies fluttering swift to the sack of flowers, while beside him on the bed the big laborer lay? . . .

When Kirsteen and Sheila came to relieve him of that vigil he went down-stairs. There in the kitchen Bidy was washing up, and Susie and Billy putting on their boots for school. They stopped to gaze at Tod feeling in his pockets, for they knew that things sometimes happened after that. To-day there came out two carrots, some lumps of sugar, some cord, a bill, a pruning knife, a bit of wax, a bit of chalk, three flints, a pouch of tobacco, two pipes, a match-box with a single match in it, a six-pence, a necktie, a stick of chocolate, a tomato, a handkerchief, a dead bee, an old razor, a bit of gauze, some tow, a stick of caustic, a reel of cotton, a needle, no thimble, two dock leaves, and some sheets of yellowish paper. He separated from the rest the sixpence, the dead bee, and what was edible. And in delighted silence the three little Trysts gazed, till Bidy with the tip of one wet finger touched the bee.

"Not good to eat, Bidy."

At those words, one after the other, cautiously, the three little Trysts smiled. Finding that Tod smiled too, they broadened, and Billy burst into chuckles. Then, clustering in the doorway, grasping the edibles and the sixpence, and consulting with each other, they looked long after his big figure passing down the road.

CHAPTER XII

Still later, that same morning, Derek and Sheila moved slowly up the Mallorings' well-swept drive. Their lips were set, as though they had spoken the last word before battle, and an old cock pheasant, running into the bushes close by, rose with a whir and skimmed out toward his covert, scared, perhaps, by something uncompromising in the footsteps of those two.

Only when actually under the shelter of the porch, which some folk thought enhanced the old Greek-temple effect of the Mallorings' house, Derek broke through that taciturnity:

"What if they won't?"

"Wait and see; and don't lose your head, Derek." The man who stood there when the door opened was tall, grave, wore his hair in powder, and waited without speech.

"Will you ask Sir Gerald and Lady Malloring if Miss Freeland and Mr. Derek Freeland could see them, please; and will you say the matter is urgent?"

The man bowed, left them, and soon came back.

"My lady will see you, miss; Sir Gerald is not in. This way."

Past the statuary, flowers, and antlers of the hall, they traversed a long, cool corridor, and through a white door entered a white room, not very large, and very pretty. Two children got up as they came in and flapped out past them like young partridges, and Lady Malloring rose from her writing-table and came forward, holding out her hand. The two young Freelands took it gravely. For all their hostility they could not withstand the feeling that she would think them terrible young prigs if they simply bowed. And they looked steadily at one with whom they had never before been at quite such close quarters. Lady Malloring, who had originally been the Honorable Mildred Killory, a daughter of Viscount Silport, was tall, slender, and not very striking, with very fair hair going rather gray; her expression in repose was pleasant, a little anxious; only by her eyes was the suspicion awakened that she was a woman of some character. They had that peculiar look of belonging to two worlds, so often to be met with in English eyes, a look of self-denying aspiration, tinctured with the suggestion that denial might not be confined to self.

In a quite friendly voice she said:

"Can I do anything for you?" And while she waited for an answer her glance travelled from face to face of the two young people, with a certain curiosity. After a silence of several seconds, Sheila answered:

"Not for us, thank you; for others, you can."

Lady Malloring's eyebrows rose a little, as if there seemed to her something rather unjust in those words—"for others."

"Yes?" she said.

Sheila, whose hands were clenched, and whose face had been fiery red, grew suddenly almost white.

"Lady Malloring, will you please let the Gaunts stay in their cottage and Tryst's wife's sister come to live with the children and him?"

Lady Malloring raised one hand; the motion, quite involuntary, ended at the tiny cross on her breast. She said quietly:

"I'm afraid you don't understand."

"Yes," said Sheila, still very pale, "we understand quite well. We understand that you are acting in what you believe to be the interests of morality. All the same, won't you? Do!"

"I'm very sorry, but I can't."

"May we ask why?"

Lady Malloring started, and transferred her glance to Derek.

"I don't know," she said with a smile, "that I am obliged to account for my actions to you two young people. Besides, you must know why, quite well."

Sheila put out her hand.

"Wilmet Gaunt will go to the bad if you turn them out."

"I am afraid I think she has gone to the bad already, and I do not mean her to take others there with her. I am sorry for poor Tryst, and I wish he could find some nice woman to marry; but what he proposes is impossible."

The blood had flared up again in Sheila's cheeks; she was as red as the comb of a turkey-cock.

"Why shouldn't he marry his wife's sister? It's legal, now, and you've no right to stop it."

Lady Malloring bit her lips; she looked straight and hard at Sheila.

"I do not stop it; I have no means of stopping it. Only, he cannot do it and live in one of our cottages. I don't think we need discuss this further."

"I beg your pardon—"

The words had come from Derek. Lady Malloring paused in her walk toward the bell. With his peculiar thin-lipped smile the boy went on:

"We imagined you would say no; we really came because we thought it fair to warn you that there may be trouble."

Lady Malloring smiled.

"This is a private matter between us and our tenants, and we should be so glad if you could manage not to interfere."

Derek bowed, and put his hand within his sister's arm. But Sheila did not move; she was trembling with anger.

"Who are you," she suddenly burst out, "to dispose of the poor, body and soul? Who are you, to dictate their private lives? If they pay their rent, that should be enough for you."

Lady Malloring moved swiftly again toward the bell. She paused with her hand on it, and said:

"I am sorry for you two; you have been miserably brought up!"

There was a silence; then Derek said quietly:

"Thank you; we shall remember that insult to our people. Don't ring, please; we're going."

In a silence if anything more profound than that of their approach, the two young people retired down the drive. They had not yet learned—most difficult of lessons—how to believe that people could in their bones differ from them. It had always seemed to them that if only they had a chance of putting directly what they thought, the other side must at heart agree, and only go on saying they didn't out of mere self-interest. They came away, therefore, from this encounter with the enemy a little dazed by the discovery that Lady Malloring in her bones believed that she was right. It confused them, and heated the fires of their anger.

They had shaken off all private dust before Sheila spoke.

"They're all like that—can't see or feel—simply certain they're superior! It makes—it makes me hate them! It's terrible, ghastly." And while she stammered out those little stabs of speech, tears of rage rolled down her cheeks.

Derek put his arm round her waist.

"All right! No good groaning; let's think seriously what to do."

There was comfort to the girl in that curiously sudden reversal of their usual attitudes.

"Whatever's done," he went on, "has got to be startling. It's no good pottering and protesting, any more." And between his teeth he muttered: "'Men of England, wherefore plough?' . . ."

In the room where the encounter had taken place Mildred Malloring was taking her time to recover. From very childhood she had felt that the essence of her own goodness, the essence of her duty in life, was the doing of 'good' to others; from very childhood she had never doubted that she was in a position to do this, and that those to whom she did good, although they might kick against it as inconvenient, must admit that it WAS their 'good.' The thought: 'They don't admit that I am superior!' had never even occurred to her, so completely was she unselfconscious, in her convinced superiority. It was hard, indeed, to be flung against such outspoken rudeness. It shook her more than she gave sign of, for she was not by any means an insensitive woman—shook her almost to the point of feeling that there was something in the remonstrance of those dreadful young people. Yet, how could there be, when no one knew better than she that the laborers on the Malloring estate were better off than those on nine out of ten estates; better paid and better housed, and—better looked after in their morals. Was she to give up that?—when she knew that she WAS better able to tell what was good for them than they were themselves. After all, without stripping herself naked of every thought, experience, and action since her birth, how could she admit that she was not better able? And slowly, in the white room with the moss-green carpet, she recovered, till there was only just a touch of soreness left, at the injustice implicit in their words. Those two had been 'miserably brought up,' had never had a chance of finding their proper place, of understanding that they were just two callow young things, for whom Life had some fearful knocks in store. She could even feel now that she had meant that saying: 'I am sorry for you two!' She WAS sorry for them, sorry for their want of manners and their point of view, neither of which they could help, of course, with a mother like that. For all her gentleness and sensibility, there was much practical directness about Mildred Malloring; for her, a page turned was a page turned, an idea absorbed was never disgorged; she was of religious temperament, ever trimming her course down the exact channel marked out with buoys by the Port Authorities, and really incapable of imagining spiritual wants in others that could not be satisfied by what satisfied herself. And this pathetic strength she had in common with many of her fellow creatures in every class. Sitting down at the writing-table from which she had been disturbed, she leaned her thin, rather long, gentle, but stubborn face on her hand, thinking. These Gaunts were a source of irritation in the parish, a kind of open sore. It would be better if they could be got rid of before quarter day, up to which she had weakly said they might remain. Far better for them to go at once, if it could be arranged. As for the poor fellow Tryst, thinking that by plunging into sin he could improve his lot and his poor children's, it was really criminal of those Freelands to encourage him. She had refrained hitherto from seriously worrying Gerald on such points of village policy—his hands were so full; but he must now take his part. And she rang the bell.

"Tell Sir Gerald I'd like to see him, please, as soon as he gets back."

"Sir Gerald has just come in, my lady."

"Now, then!"

Gerald Malloring—an excellent fellow, as could be seen from his face of strictly Norman architecture, with blue stained-glass windows rather deep set in—had only one defect: he was not a poet. Not that this would have seemed to him anything but an advantage, had he been aware of it. His was one of those high-principled natures who hold that breadth is synonymous with weakness. It may be said without exaggeration that the few meetings of his life with those who had a touch of the poet in them had been exquisitely uncomfortable. Silent, almost taciturn by nature, he was a great reader of poetry, and seldom went to sleep without having digested a page or two of Wordsworth, Milton, Tennyson, or Scott. Byron, save such poems as 'Don Juan' or 'The Waltz,' he could but did not read, for fear of setting a bad example. Burns, Shelley, and Keats he did not care for. Browning pained him, except by such things as: 'How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix' and the 'Cavalier Tunes'; while of 'Omar Khayyam' and 'The Hound of Heaven' he definitely disapproved. For Shakespeare he had no real liking, though he concealed this, from humility in the face of accepted opinion. His was a firm mind, sure of itself, but not self-assertive. His points were so good, and he had so many of them, that it was only when he met any one touched with poetry that his limitations became apparent; it was rare, however, and getting more so every year, for him to have this unpleasant experience.

When summoned by his wife, he came in with a wrinkle between his straight brows; he had just finished a morning's work on a drainage scheme, like the really good fellow that he was. She greeted him with a little special smile. Nothing could be friendlier than the relations between these two. Affection and trust, undeviating undemonstrativeness, identity of feeling as to religion, children, property; and, in regard to views on the question of sex, a really strange unanimity, considering that they were man and woman.

"It's about these Gaunts, Gerald. I feel they must go at once. They're only creating bad feeling by staying till quarter day. I have had the young Freelands here."

"Those young pups!"

"Can't it be managed?"

Malloring did not answer hastily. He had that best point of the good Englishman, a dislike to being moved out of a course of conduct by anything save the appeal of his own conscience.

"I don't know," he said, "why we should alter what we thought was just. Must give him time to look round and get a job elsewhere."

"I think the general state of feeling demands it. It's not fair to the villagers to let the Freelands have such a handle for agitating. Labor's badly wanted everywhere; he can't have any difficulty in getting a place, if he likes."

"No. Only, I rather admire the fellow for sticking by his girl, though he is such a 'land-lawyer.' I think it's a bit harsh to move him suddenly."

"So did I, till I saw from those young furies what harm it's doing. They really do infect the cottagers. You know how discontent spreads. And Tryst—they're egging him on, too."

Malloring very thoughtfully filled a pipe. He was not an alarmist; if anything, he erred on the side of not being alarmed until it was all over and there was no longer anything to be alarmed at! His imagination would then sometimes take fire, and he would say that such and such, or so and so, was dangerous.

"I'd rather go and have a talk with Freeland," he said. "He's queer, but he's not at all a bad chap."

Lady Malloring rose, and took one of his real-leather buttons in her hand.

"My dear Gerald, Mr. Freeland doesn't exist."

"Don't know about that; a man can always come to life, if he likes, in his own family."

Lady Malloring was silent. It was true. For all their unanimity of thought and feeling, for all the latitude she had in domestic and village affairs, Gerald had a habit of filling his pipe with her decisions. Quite honestly, she had no objection to their becoming smoke through HIS lips, though she might wriggle just a little. To her credit, she did entirely carry out in her life her professed belief that husbands should be the forefronts of their wives. For all that, there burst from her lips the words:

"That Freeland woman! When I think of the mischief she's always done here, by her example and her irreligion—I can't forgive her. I don't believe you'll make any impression on Mr. Freeland; he's entirely under her thumb."

Smoking slowly, and looking just over the top of his wife's head, Malloring answered:

"I'll have a try; and don't you worry!"

Lady Malloring turned away. Her soreness still wanted salve.

"Those two young people," she murmured, "said some very unpleasant things to me. The boy, I believe, might have some good in him, but the girl is simply terrible."

"H'm! I think just the reverse, you know."

"They'll come to awful grief if they're not brought up sharp. They ought to be sent to the colonies to learn reality."

Malloring nodded.

"Come out, Mildred, and see how they're getting on with the new vinery." And they went out together through the French window.

The vinery was of their own designing, and of extraordinary interest. In contemplation of its lofty glass and aluminium-cased pipes the feeling of soreness left her. It was very pleasant, standing with Gerald, looking at what they had planned together; there was a soothing sense of reality about that visit, after the morning's happening, with its disappointment, its reminder of immorality and discontent, and of folk ungrateful for what was done for their good. And, squeezing her husband's arm, she murmured:

"It's really exactly what we thought it would be, Gerald!"

CHAPTER XIII

About five o'clock of that same afternoon, Gerald Malloring went to see Tod. An open-air man himself, who often deplored the long hours he was compelled to spend in the special atmosphere of the House of Commons, he rather envied Tod his existence in this cottage, crazed from age, and clothed with wistaria, rambler roses, sweetbrier, honeysuckle, and Virginia creeper. Freeland had, in his opinion, quite a jolly life of it—the poor fellow not being able, of course, to help having a cranky wife and children like that. He pondered, as he went along, over a talk at Becket, when Stanley, still under the influence of Felix's outburst, had uttered some rather queer sayings. For instance, he had supposed that they (meaning, apparently, himself and Malloring) WERE rather unable to put themselves in the position of these Trysts and Gaunts. He seemed to speak of them as one might speak generically of Hodge, which had struck Malloring as singular, it not being his habit to see anything in common between an individual case, especially on his own estate, and the ethics of a general proposition. The place for general propositions was undoubtedly the House of Commons, where they could be supported one way or the other, out of blue books. He had little use for them in private life, where innumerable things such as human nature and all that came into play. He had stared rather hard at his host when Stanley had followed up that first remark with: "I'm bound to say, I shouldn't care to have to get up at half past five, and go out without a bath!" What that had to do with the land problem or the regulation of village morality Malloring had been unable to perceive. It all depended on what one was accustomed to; and in any case threw no light on the question, as to whether or not he was to tolerate on his estate conduct of which his wife and himself distinctly disapproved. At the back of national life there was always this problem of individual conduct, especially sexual conduct—without regularity in which, the family, as the unit of national life, was gravely threatened, to put it on the lowest ground. And he did not see how to bring it home to the villagers that they had got to be regular, without making examples now and then.

He had hoped very much to get through his call without coming across Freeland's wife and children, and was greatly relieved to find Tod, seated on a window-sill in front of his cottage, smoking, and gazing apparently at nothing. In taking the other corner of the window-sill, the thought passed through his mind that Freeland was really a very fine-looking fellow. Tod was, indeed, about Malloring's own height of six feet one, with the same fairness and straight build of figure and feature. But Tod's head was round and massive, his hair crisp and uncut; Malloring's head long and narrow, his hair smooth and close-cropped. Tod's eyes, blue and deep-set, seemed fixed on the horizon, Malloring's, blue and

deep-set, on the nearest thing they could light on. Tod smiled, as it were, without knowing; Malloring seemed to know what he was smiling at almost too well. It was comforting, however, that Freeland was as shy and silent as himself, for this produced a feeling that there could not be any real difference between their points of view. Perceiving at last that if he did not speak they would continue sitting there dumb till it was time for him to go, Malloring said:

"Look here, Freeland; about my wife and yours and Tryst and the Gaunts, and all the rest of it! It's a pity, isn't it? This is a small place, you know. What's your own feeling?"

Tod answered:

"A man has only one life."

Malloring was a little puzzled.

"In this world. I don't follow."

"Live and let live."

A part of Malloring undoubtedly responded to that curt saying, a part of him as strongly rebelled against it; and which impulse he was going to follow was not at first patent.

"You see, YOU keep apart," he said at last. "You couldn't say that so easily if you had, like us, to take up the position in which we find ourselves."

"Why take it up?"

Malloring frowned. "How would things go on?"

"All right," said Tod.

Malloring got up from the sill. This was 'laissez-faire' with a vengeance! Such philosophy had always seemed to him to savor dangerously of anarchism. And yet twenty years' experience as a neighbor had shown him that Tod was in himself perhaps the most harmless person in Worcestershire, and held in a curious esteem by most of the people about. He was puzzled, and sat down again.

"I've never had a chance to talk things over with you," he said. "There are a good few people, Freeland, who can't behave themselves; we're not bees, you know!"

He stopped, having an uncomfortable suspicion that his hearer was not listening.

"First I've heard this year," said Tod.

For all the rudeness of that interruption, Malloring felt a stir of interest. He himself liked birds. Unfortunately, he could hear nothing but the general chorus of their songs.

"Thought they'd gone," murmured Tod.

Malloring again got up. "Look here, Freeland," he said, "I wish you'd give your mind to this. You really ought not to let your wife and children make trouble in the village."

Confound the fellow! He was smiling; there was a sort of twinkle in his smile, too, that Malloring found infectious!

"No, seriously," he said, "you don't know what harm you mayn't do."

"Have you ever watched a dog looking at a fire?" asked Tod.

"Yes, often; why?"

"He knows better than to touch it."

"You mean you're helpless? But you oughtn't to be."

The fellow was smiling again!

"Then you don't mean to do anything?"

Tod shook his head.

Malloring flushed. "Now, look here, Freeland," he said, "forgive my saying so, but this strikes me as a bit cynical. D'you think I enjoy trying to keep things straight?"

Tod looked up.

"Birds," he said, "animals, insects, vegetable life—they all eat each other more or less, but they don't fuss about it."

Malloring turned abruptly and went down the path. Fuss! He never fussed. Fuss! The word was an insult, addressed to him! If there was one thing he detested more than another, whether in public or private life, it was 'fussing.' Did he not belong to the League for Suppression of Interference with the Liberty of the Subject? Was he not a member of the party notoriously opposed to fussy legislation? Had any one ever used the word in connection with conduct of his, before? If so, he had never heard them. Was it fussy to try and help the Church to improve the standard of morals in the village? Was it fussy to make a simple decision and stick to it? The injustice of the word really hurt him. And the more it hurt him, the slower and more dignified and upright became his march toward his drive gate.

'Wild geese' in the morning sky had been forerunners; very heavy clouds were sweeping up from the west, and rain beginning to fall. He passed an old man leaning on the gate of a cottage garden and said: "Good evening!"

The old man touched his hat but did not speak.

"How's your leg, Gaunt?"

"'Tis much the same, Sir Gerald."

"Rain coming makes it shoot, I expect."

"It do."

Malloring stood still. The impulse was on him to see if, after all, the Gaunts' affair could not be disposed of without turning the old fellow and his son out.

"Look here!" he said; "about this unfortunate business. Why don't you and your son make up your minds without more ado to let your granddaughter go out to service? You've been here all your lives; I don't want to see you go."

The least touch of color invaded the old man's carved and grayish face.

"Askin' your pardon," he said, "my son sticks by his girl, and I sticks by my son!"

"Oh! very well; you know your own business, Gaunt. I spoke for your good."

A faint smile curled the corners of old Gaunt's mouth downward beneath his gray moustaches.

"Thank you kindly," he said.

Malloring raised a finger to his cap and passed on. Though he felt a longing to stride his feelings off, he did not increase his pace, knowing that the old man's eyes were following him. But how pig-headed they were, seeing nothing but their own point of view! Well, he could not alter his decision. They would go at the June quarter—not a day before, nor after.

Passing Tryst's cottage, he noticed a 'fly' drawn up outside, and its driver talking to a woman in hat and coat at the cottage doorway. She avoided his eye.

'The wife's sister again!' he thought. 'So that fellow's going to be an ass, too? Hopeless, stubborn lot!' And his mind passed on to his scheme for draining the bottom fields at Cantley Bromage. This village trouble was too small to occupy for long the mind of one who had so many duties. . . .

Old Gaunt remained at the gate watching till the tall figure passed out of sight, then limped slowly down the path and entered his son's cottage. Tom Gaunt, not long in from work, was sitting in his shirtsleeves, reading the paper—a short, thick-set man with small eyes, round, ruddy cheeks, and humorous lips indifferently concealed by a ragged moustache. Even in repose there was about him something talkative and disputatious. He was clearly the kind of man whose eyes and wit would sparkle above a pewter pot. A good workman, he averaged out an income of perhaps eighteen shillings a week, counting the two shillings' worth of vegetables that he grew. His erring daughter washed for two old ladies in a bungalow, so that with old Gaunt's five shillings from the parish, the total resources of this family of five, including two small boys at school, was seven and twenty shillings a week. Quite a sum! His comparative wealth no doubt contributed to the reputation of Tom Gaunt, well known as local wag and disturber of political meetings. His method with these gatherings, whether Liberal or Tory, had a certain masterly simplicity. By interjecting questions that could not be understood, and commenting on the answers received, he insured perpetual laughter, with the most salutary effects on the over-

consideration of any political question, together with a tendency to make his neighbors say: "Ah! Tom Gaunt, he's a proper caution, he is!" An encomium dear to his ears. What he seriously thought about anything in this world, no one knew; but some suspected him of voting Liberal, because he disturbed their meetings most. His loyalty to his daughter was not credited to affection. It was like Tom Gaunt to stick his toes in and kick—the Quality, for choice. To look at him and old Gaunt, one would not have thought they could be son and father, a relationship indeed ever dubious. As for his wife, she had been dead twelve years. Some said he had joked her out of life, others that she had gone into consumption. He was a reader—perhaps the only one in all the village, and could whistle like a blackbird. To work hard, but without too great method, to drink hard, but with perfect method, and to talk nineteen to the dozen anywhere except at home—was his mode of life. In a word, he was a 'character.'

Old Gaunt sat down in a wooden rocking-chair, and spoke.

"Sir Gerald 'e've a-just passed."

"Sir Gerald 'e can goo to hell. They'll know un there, by 'is little ears."

"'E've a-spoke about us stoppin'; so as Mettie goes out to sarvice."

"'E've a-spoke about what 'e don't know 'bout, then. Let un do what they like, they can't put Tom Gaunt about; he can get work anywhere—Tom Gaunt can, an' don't you forget that, old man."

The old man, placing his thin brown hands on his knees, was silent. And thoughts passed through and through him. 'If so be as Tom goes, there'll be no one as'll take me in for less than three bob a week. Two bob a week, that's what I'll 'ave to feed me—Two bob a week—two bob a week! But if so be's I go with Tom, I'll 'ave to reg'lar sit down under he for me bread and butter.' And he contemplated his son.

"Where are you goin', then?" he said.

Tom Gaunt rustled the greenish paper he was reading, and his little, hard gray eyes fixed his father.

"Who said I was going?"

Old Gaunt, smoothing and smoothing the lined, thin cheeks of the parchments, thin-nosed face that Frances Freeland had thought to be almost like a gentleman's, answered: "I thart you said you was goin'."

"You think too much, then—that's what 'tis. You think too much, old man."

With a slight deepening of the sardonic patience in his face, old Gaunt rose, took a bowl and spoon down from a shelf, and very slowly proceeded to make himself his evening meal. It consisted of crusts of bread soaked in hot water and tempered with salt, pepper, onion, and a touch of butter. And while he waited, crouched over the kettle, his son smoked his grayish clay and read his greenish journal; an old clock ticked and a little cat purred without provocation on the ledge of the tight-closed window. Then the door opened and the rogue-girl appeared. She shook her shoulders as though to dismiss the wetting she had got, took off her turn-down, speckly, straw hat, put on an apron, and rolled up her sleeves. Her arms were full and firm and red; the whole of her was full and firm. From her rosy cheeks to her stout ankles she was superabundant with vitality, the strangest contrast to her shadowy, thin old grandfather. About the preparation of her father's tea she moved with a sort of brooding stolidity, out of which would suddenly gleam a twinkle of rogue-sweetness, as when she stopped to stroke the little cat or to tickle the back of her grandfather's lean neck in passing. Having set the tea, she stood by the table and said slowly: "Tea's ready, father. I'm goin' to London."

Tom Gaunt put down his pipe and journal, took his seat at the table, filled his mouth with sausage, and said: "You're goin' where I tell you."

"I'm goin' to London."

Tom Gaunt stayed the morsel in one cheek and fixed her with his little, wild boar's eye.

"Ye're goin' to catch the stick," he said. "Look here, my girl, Tom Gaunt's been put about enough along of you already. Don't you make no mistake."

"I'm goin' to London," repeated the rogue-girl stolidly. "You can get Alice to come over."

"Oh! Can I? Ye're not goin' till I tell you. Don't you think it!"

"I'm goin'. I saw Mr. Derek this mornin'. They'll get me a place there."

Tom Gaunt remained with his fork as it were transfixed. The effort of devising contradiction to the chief supporters of his own rebellion was for the moment too much for him. He resumed mastication.

"You'll go where I want you to go; and don't you think you can tell me where that is."

In the silence that ensued the only sound was that of old Gaunt supping at his crusty-broth. Then the rogue-girl went to the window and, taking the little cat on her breast, sat looking out into the rain. Having finished his broth, old Gaunt got up, and, behind his son's back, he looked at his granddaughter and thought:

'Goin' to London! 'Twud be best for us all. WE shudn' need to be movin', then. Goin' to London!' But he felt desolate.

CHAPTER XIV

When Spring and first love meet in a girl's heart, then the birds sing.

The songs that blackbirds and dusty-coated thrushes flung through Nedda's window when she awoke in Hampstead those May mornings seemed to have been sung by herself all night. Whether the sun were flashing on the leaves, or rain-drops sieving through on a sou'west wind, the same warmth glowed up in her the moment her eyes opened. Whether the lawn below were a field of bright dew, or dry and darkish in a shiver of east wind, her eyes never grew dim all day; and her blood felt as light as ostrich feathers.

Stormed by an attack of his cacoethes scribendi, after those few blank days at Becket, Felix saw nothing amiss with his young daughter. The great observer was not observant of things that other people observed. Neither he nor Flora, occupied with matters of more spiritual importance, could tell, offhand, for example, on which hand a wedding-ring was worn. They had talked enough of Becket and the Tods to produce the impression on Flora's mind that one day or another two young people would arrive in her house on a visit; but she had begun a poem called 'Dionysus at the Well,' and Felix himself had plunged into a satiric allegory entitled 'The Last of the Laborers.' Nedda, therefore, walked alone; but at her side went always an invisible companion. In that long, imaginary walking-out she gave her thoughts and the whole of her heart, and to be doing this never surprised her, who, before, had not given them whole to anything. A bee knows the first summer day and clings intoxicated to its flowers; so did Nedda know and cling. She wrote him two letters and he wrote her one. It was not poetry; indeed, it was almost all concerned with Wilmet Gaunt, asking Nedda to find a place in London where the girl could go; but it ended with the words:

"Your lover,
"DEREK."

This letter troubled Nedda. She would have taken it at once to Felix or to Flora if it had not been for the first words, "Dearest Nedda," and those last three. Except her mother, she instinctively distrusted women in such a matter as that of Wilmet Gaunt, feeling they would want to know more than she could tell them, and not be too tolerant of what they heard. Casting about, at a loss, she thought suddenly of Mr. Cuthcott.

At dinner that day she fished round carefully. Felix spoke of him almost warmly. What Cuthcott could have been doing at Becket, of all places, he could not imagine—the last sort of man one expected to see there; a good fellow, rather desperate, perhaps, as men of his age were apt to get if they had too many women, or no woman, about them.

Which, said Nedda, had Mr. Cuthcott?

Oh! None. How had he struck Nedda? And Felix looked at his little daughter with a certain humble curiosity. He always felt that the young instinctively knew so much more than he did.

"I liked him awfully. He was like a dog."

"Ah!" said Felix, "he IS like a dog—very honest; he grins and runs about the city, and might be inclined to bay the moon."

'I don't mind that,' Nedda thought, 'so long as he's not "superior."'

"He's very human," Felix added.

And having found out that he lived in Gray's Inn, Nedda thought: 'I will; I'll ask him.'

To put her project into execution, she wrote this note:
"DEAR MR. CUTHCOTT:

"You were so kind as to tell me you wouldn't mind if I bothered you about things. I've got a very bothery thing to know what to do about, and I would be so glad of your advice. It so happens that I can't ask my father and mother. I hope you won't think me very horrible, wasting your time. And please say no, if you'd rather.

"Yours sincerely,
"NEDDA FREELAND."

The answer came:
"DEAR MISS FREELAND:

"Delighted. But if very bothery, better save time and ink, and have a snack of lunch with me to-morrow at the Elgin restaurant, close to the British Museum. Quiet and respectable. No flowers by request. One o'clock.

"Very truly yours,
"GILES CUTHCOTT."

Putting on 'no flowers' and with a fast-beating heart, Nedda, went on her first lonely adventure. To say truth she did not know in the least how ever she was going to ask this almost strange man about a girl of doubtful character. But she kept saying to herself: 'I don't care—he has nice eyes.' And her spirit would rise as she got nearer, because, after all, she was going to find things out, and to find things out was jolly. The new warmth and singing in her heart had not destroyed, but rather heightened, her sense of the extraordinary interest of all things that be. And very mysterious to her that morning was the kaleidoscope of Oxford Street and its innumerable girls, and women, each going about her business, with a life of her own that was not Nedda's. For men she had little use just now, they had acquired a certain insignificance, not having gray-black eyes that smoked and flared, nor Harris tweed suits that smelled delicious. Only once on her journey from Oxford Circus she felt the sense of curiosity rise in her, in relation to a man, and this was when she asked a policeman at Tottenham Court Road, and he put his head down fully a foot to listen to her. So huge, so broad, so red in the face, so stolid, it seemed wonderful to her that he paid her any attention! If he were a human being, could she really be one, too? But that, after all, was no more odd than everything. Why, for instance, the spring flowers in that woman's basket had been born; why that high white cloud floated over; why and what was Nedda Freeland?

At the entrance of the little restaurant she saw Mr. Cuthcott waiting. In a brown suit, with his pale but freckled face, and his gnawed-at, sandy moustache, and his eyes that looked out and beyond, he was certainly no beauty. But Nedda thought: 'He's even nicer than I remembered, and I'm sure he knows a lot.'

At first, to be sitting opposite to him, in front of little plates containing red substances and small fishes, was so exciting that she simply listened to his rapid, rather stammering voice mentioning that the English had no idea of life or cookery, that God had so made this country by mistake that everything, even the sun, knew it. What, however, would she drink? Chardonnnet? It wasn't bad here.

She assented, not liking to confess that she did not know what Chardonnnet might be, and hoping it was some kind of sherbet. She had never yet drunk wine, and after a glass felt suddenly extremely strong.

"Well," said Mr. Cuthcott, and his eyes twinkled, "what's your botheration? I suppose you want to strike out for yourself. MY daughters did that without consulting me."

"Oh! Have you got daughters?"

"Yes—funny ones; older than you."

"That's why you understand, then"

Mr. Cuthcott smiled. "They WERE a liberal education!"

And Nedda thought: 'Poor Dad, I wonder if I am!'

"Yes," Mr. Cuthcott murmured, "who would think a gosling would ever become a goose?"

"Ah!" said Nedda eagerly, "isn't it wonderful how things grow?"

She felt his eyes suddenly catch hold of hers.

"You're in love!" he said.

It seemed to her a great piece of luck that he had found that out. It made everything easy at once, and her words came out pell-mell.

"Yes, and I haven't told my people yet. I don't seem able. He's given me something to do, and I haven't much experience."

A funny little wriggle passed over Mr. Cuthcott's face. "Yes, yes; go on! Tell us about it."

She took a sip from her glass, and the feeling that he had been going to laugh passed away.

"It's about the daughter of a laborer, down there in Worcestershire, where he lives, not very far from Becket. He's my cousin, Derek, the son of my other uncle at Joyfields. He and his sister feel most awfully strongly about the laborers."

"Ah!" said Mr. Cuthcott, "the laborers! Queer how they're in the air, all of a sudden."

"This girl hasn't been very good, and she has to go from the village, or else her family have. He wants me to find a place for her in London."

"I see; and she hasn't been very good?"

"Not very." She knew that her cheeks were flushing, but her eyes felt steady, and seeing that his eyes never moved, she did not mind. She went on:

"It's Sir Gerald Malloring's estate. Lady Malloring—won't—"

She heard a snap. Mr. Cuthcott's mouth had closed.

"Oh!" he said, "say no more!"

'He CAN bite nicely!' she thought.

Mr. Cuthcott, who had begun lightly thumping the little table with his open hand, broke out suddenly:

"That petty bullying in the country! I know it! My God! Those prudes, those prisms! They're the ruination of half the girls on the—" He looked at Nedda and stopped short. "If she can do any kind of work, I'll find her a place. In fact, she'd better come, for a start, under my old housekeeper. Let your cousin know; she can turn up any day. Name? Wilmet Gaunt? Right you are!" He wrote it on his cuff.

Nedda rose to her feet, having an inclination to seize his hand, or stroke his head, or something. She subsided again with a fervid sigh, and sat exchanging with him a happy smile. At last she said:

"Mr. Cuthcott, is there any chance of things like that changing?"

"Changing?" He certainly had grown paler, and was again lightly thumping the table. "Changing? By gum! It's got to change! This d—d pluto-aristocratic ideal! The weed's so grown up that it's choking us. Yes, Miss Freeland, whether from inside or out I don't know yet, but there's a blazing row coming. Things are going to be made new before long."

Under his thumps the little plates had begun to rattle and leap. And Nedda thought: 'I DO like him.'

But she said anxiously:

"You believe there's something to be done, then? Derek is simply full of it; I want to feel like that, too, and I mean to."

His face grew twinkly; he put out his hand. And wondering a little whether he meant her to, Nedda timidly stretched forth her own and grasped it.

"I like you," he said. "Love your cousin and don't worry."

Nedda's eyes slipped into the distance.

"But I'm afraid for him. If you saw him, you'd know."

"One's always afraid for the fellows that are worth anything. There was another young Freeland at your uncle's the other night—"

"My brother Alan!"

"Oh! your brother? Well, I wasn't afraid for him, and it seemed a pity. Have some of this; it's about the only thing they do well here."

"Oh, thank you, no. I've had a lovely lunch. Mother and I generally have about nothing." And clasping her hands she added:

"This is a secret, isn't it, Mr. Cuthcott?"

"Dead."

He laughed and his face melted into a mass of wrinkles. Nedda laughed also and drank up the rest of her wine. She felt blissful.

"Yes," said Mr. Cuthcott, "there's nothing like loving. How long have you been at it?"

"Only five days, but it's everything."

Mr. Cuthcott sighed. "That's right. When you can't love, the only thing is to hate."

"Oh!" said Nedda.

Mr. Cuthcott again began banging on the little table. "Look at them, look at them!" His eyes wandered angrily about the room, wherein sat some few who had passed through the mills of gentility. "What do they know of life? Where are their souls and sympathies? They haven't any. I'd like to see their blood flow, the silly brutes."

Nedda looked at them with alarm and curiosity. They seemed to her somewhat like everybody she knew. She said timidly: "Do you think OUR blood ought to flow, too?"

Mr. Cuthcott relapsed into twinkles. "Rather! Mine first!"

'He IS human!' thought Nedda. And she got up: "I'm afraid I ought to go now. It's been awfully nice. Thank you so very much. Good-by!"

He shook her firm little hand with his frail thin one, and stood smiling till the restaurant door cut him off from her view.

The streets seemed so gorgeously full of life now that Nedda's head swam. She looked at it all with such absorption that she could not tell one thing from another. It seemed rather long to the Tottenham Court Road, though she noted carefully the names of all the streets she passed, and was sure she had not missed it. She came at last to one called POULTRY. 'Poultry!' she thought; 'I should have remembered that—Poultry?' And she laughed. It was so sweet and feathery a laugh that the driver of an old four-wheeler stopped his horse. He was old and anxious-looking, with a gray beard and deep folds in his red cheeks.

"Poultry!" she said. "Please, am I right for the Tottenham Court Road?"

The old man answered: "Glory, no, miss; you're goin' East!"

'East!' thought Nedda; 'I'd better take him.' And she got in. She sat in the four-wheeler, smiling. And how far this was due to Chardonnay she did not consider. She was to love and not worry. It was wonderful! In this mood she was put down, still smiling, at the Tottenham Court Road Tube, and getting out her purse she prepared to pay the cabman. The fare would be a shilling, but she felt like giving him two. He looked so anxious and worn, in spite of his red face. He took them, looked at her, and said: "Thank you, miss; I wanted that."

"Oh!" murmured Nedda, "then please take this, too. It's all I happen to have, except my Tube fare."

The old man took it, and water actually ran along his nose.

"God bless yer!" he said. And taking up his whip, he drove off quickly.

Rather choky, but still glowing, Nedda descended to her train. It was not till she was walking to the Spaniard's Road that a cloud seemed to come over her sky, and she reached home dejected.

In the garden of the Freelands' old house was a nook shut away by berberis and rhododendrons, where some bees were supposed to make honey, but, knowing its destination, and belonging to a union, made no more than they were obliged. In this retreat, which contained a rustic bench, Nedda was accustomed to sit and read; she went there now. And her eyes began filling with tears. Why must the poor old fellow who had driven her look so anxious and call on God to bless her for giving him that little present? Why must people grow old and helpless, like that Grandfather Gaunt she had seen at Becket? Why was there all the tyranny that made Derek and Sheila so wild? And all the grinding poverty that she herself could see when she went with her mother to their Girls' Club, in Bethnal Green? What was the use of being young and strong if nothing happened, nothing was really changed, so that one got old and died seeing still the same things as before? What was the use even of loving, if love itself had to yield to death? The trees! How they grew from tiny seeds to great and beautiful things, and then slowly, slowly dried and decayed away to dust. What was the good of it all? What comfort was there in a God so great and universal that he did not care to keep her and Derek alive and loving forever, and was not interested enough to see that the poor old cab-driver should not be haunted day and night with fear of the workhouse for himself and an old wife, perhaps? Nedda's tears fell fast, and how far THIS was Chardonnay no one could tell.

Felix, seeking inspiration from the sky in regard to 'The Last of the Laborers,' heard a noise like sobbing, and, searching, found his little daughter sitting there and crying as if her heart would break. The sight was so unusual and so utterly disturbing that he stood rooted, quite unable to bring her help. Should he sneak away? Should he go for Flora? What should he do? Like many men whose work keeps them centred within themselves, he instinctively avoided everything likely to pain or trouble him; for this reason, when anything did penetrate those mechanical defences he became almost strangely tender. Loath, for example, to believe that any one was ill, if once convinced of it, he made so good a nurse that Flora, at any rate, was in the habit of getting well with suspicious alacrity. Thoroughly moved now, he sat down on the bench beside Nedda, and said:

"My darling!"

She leaned her forehead against his arm and sobbed the more.

Felix waited, patting her far shoulder gently.

He had often dealt with such situations in his books, and now that one had come true was completely at a loss. He could not even begin to remember what was usually said or done, and he only made little soothing noises.

To Nedda this tenderness brought a sudden sharp sense of guilt and yearning. She began:

"It's not because of that I'm crying, Dad, but I want you to know that Derek and I are in love."

The words: 'You! What! In those few days!' rose, and got as far as Felix's teeth; he swallowed them and went on patting her shoulder. Nedda in love! He felt blank and ashy. That special feeling of owning her more than any one else, which was so warming and delightful, so really precious—it would be gone! What right had she to take it from him, thus, without warning! Then he remembered how odious he had always said the elderly were, to spoke the wheels of youth, and managed to murmur:

"Good luck to you, my pretty!"

He said it, conscious that a father ought to be saying:

'You're much too young, and he's your cousin!' But what a father ought to say appeared to him just then both sensible and ridiculous. Nedda rubbed her cheek against his hand.

"It won't make any difference, Dad, I promise you!"

And Felix thought: 'Not to you, only to me!' But he said:

"Not a scrap, my love! What WERE you crying about?"

"About the world; it seems so heartless."

And she told him about the water that had run along the nose of the old four-wheeler man.

But while he seemed to listen, Felix thought: 'I wish to God I were made of leather; then I shouldn't feel as if I'd lost the warmth inside me. I mustn't let her see. Fathers ARE queer—I always suspected that. There goes my work for a good week!' Then he answered:

"No, my dear, the world is not heartless; it's only arranged according to certain necessary contraries: No pain, no pleasure; no dark, no light, and the rest of it. If you think, it couldn't be arranged differently."

As he spoke a blackbird came running with a chuckle from underneath the berberis, looked at them with alarm, and ran back. Nedda raised her face.

"Dad, I mean to do something with my life!"

Felix answered:

"Yes. That's right."

But long after Nedda had fallen into dreams that night, he lay awake, with his left foot enclosed between Floras', trying to regain that sense of warmth which he knew he must never confess to having lost.

CHAPTER XV

Flora took the news rather with the air of a mother-dog that says to her puppy: "Oh, very well, young thing! Go and stick your teeth in it and find out for yourself!" Sooner or later this always happened, and generally sooner nowadays. Besides, she could not help feeling that she would get more of Felix, to her a matter of greater importance than she gave sign of. But inwardly the news had given her a shock almost as sharp as that felt by him. Was she really the mother of one old enough to love? Was the child that used to cuddle up to her in the window-seat to be read to, gone from her; that used to rush in every morning at all inconvenient moments of her toilet; that used to be found sitting in the dark on the stairs, like a little sleepy owl, because, for-sooth, it was so 'cosey'?

Not having seen Derek, she did not as yet share her husband's anxiety on that score, though his description was dubious:

"Upstanding young cockerel, swinging his sporran and marching to pipes—a fine spurn about him! Born to trouble, if I know anything, trying to sweep the sky with his little broom!"

"Is he a prig?"

"No-o. There's simplicity about his scorn, and he seems to have been brought up on facts, not on literature, like most of these young monkeys. The cousinship I don't think matters; Kirsteen brings in too strong an out-strain. He's HER son, not Tod's. But perhaps," he added, sighing, "it won't last."

Flora shook her head. "It will last!" she said; "Nedda's deep."

And if Nedda held, so would Fate; no one would throw Nedda over! They naturally both felt that. 'Dionysus at the Well,' no less than 'The Last of the Laborers,' had a light week of it.

Though in a sense relieved at having parted with her secret, Nedda yet felt that she had committed desecration. Suppose Derek should mind her people knowing!

On the day that he and Sheila were to come, feeling she could not trust herself to seem even reasonably calm, she started out, meaning to go to the South Kensington Museum and wander the time away there; but once out-of-doors the sky seemed what she wanted, and, turning down the hill on the north side, she sat down under a gorse bush. Here tramps, coming in to London, passed the night under the stars; here was a vision, however dim, of nature. And nature alone could a little soothe her ecstatic nerves.

How would he greet her? Would he be exactly as he was when they stood at the edge of Tod's orchard, above the dreamy, darkening fields, joining hands and lips, moved as they had never been moved before?

May blossom was beginning to come out along the hedge of the private grounds that bordered that bit of Cockney Common, and from it, warmed by the sun, the scent stole up to her. Familiar, like so many children of the cultured classes, with the pagan and fairy-tales of nature, she forgot them all the moment she was really by herself with earth and sky. In their breadth, their soft and stirring continuity, they rejected bookish fancy, and woke in her rapture and yearning, a sort of long delight, a never-

appeased hunger. Crouching, hands round knees, she turned her face to get the warmth of the sun, and see the white clouds go slowly by, and catch all the songs that the birds sang. And every now and then she drew a deep breath. It was true what Dad had said: There was no real heartlessness in nature. It was warm, beating, breathing. And if things ate each other, what did it matter? They had lived and died quickly, helping to make others live. The sacred swing and circle of it went on forever, full and harmonious under the lighted sky, under the friendly stars. It was wonderful to be alive! And all done by love. Love! More, more, more love! And then death, if it must come! For, after all, to Nedda death was so far away, so unimaginably dim and distant, that it did not really count.

While she sat, letting her fingers, that were growing slowly black, scrabble the grass and fern, a feeling came on her of a Presence, a creature with wings above and around, that seemed to have on its face a long, mysterious smile of which she, Nedda, was herself a tiny twinkle. She would bring Derek here. They two would sit together and let the clouds go over them, and she would learn all that he really thought, and tell him all her longings and fears; they would be silent, too, loving each other too much to talk. She made elaborate plans of what they were to do and see, beginning with the East End and the National Gallery, and ending with sunrise from Parliament Hill; but she somehow knew that nothing would happen as she had designed. If only the first moment were not different from what she hoped!

She sat there so long that she rose quite stiff, and so hungry that she could not help going home and stealing into the kitchen. It was three o'clock, and the old cook, as usual, asleep in an armchair, with her apron thrown up between her face and the fire. What would Cookie say if she knew? In that oven she had been allowed to bake in fancy perfect little doll loaves, while Cookie baked them in reality. Here she had watched the mysterious making of pink cream, had burned countless 'goes' of toffy, and cocoanut ice; and tasted all kinds of loveliness. Dear old Cookie! Stealing about on tiptoe, seeking what she might devour, she found four small jam tarts and ate them, while the cook snored softly. Then, by the table, that looked so like a great loaf-platter, she stood contemplating cook. Old darling, with her fat, pale, crumple face! Hung to the dresser, opposite, was a little mahogany looking-glass tilted forward. Nedda could see herself almost down to her toes. 'I mean to be prettier than I am!' she thought, putting her hands on her waist. 'I wonder if I can pull them in a bit!' Sliding her fingers under her blouse, she began to pull at certain strings. They would not budge. They were loose, yes, really too comfortable. She would have to get the next size smaller! And dropping her chin, she rubbed it on the lace edging of her chest, where it felt warm and smelled piny. Had Cookie ever been in love? Her gray hairs were coming, poor old duck! The windows, where a protection of wire gauze kept out the flies, were opened wide, and the sun shone in and dimmed the fire. The kitchen clock ticked like a conscience; a faint perfume of frying-pan and mint scented the air. And, for the first time since this new sensation of love had come to her, Nedda felt as if a favorite book, read through and done with, were dropping from her hands. The lovely times in that kitchen, in every nook of that old house and garden, would never come again! Gone! She felt suddenly cast down to sadness. They HAD been lovely times! To be deserting in spirit all that had been so good to her—it seemed like a crime! She slid down off the table and, passing behind the cook, put her arms round those substantial sides. Without meaning to, out of sheer emotion, she pressed them somewhat hard, and, as from a concertina emerges a jerked and drawn-out chord, so from the cook came a long, quaking sound; her apron fell, her body heaved, and her drowsy, flat, soft voice, greasy from pondering over dishes, murmured:

"Ah, Miss Nedda! it's you, my dear! Bless your pretty 'heart."

But down Nedda's cheeks, behind her, rolled two tears.

"Cookie, oh, Cookie!" And she ran out. . . .

And the first moment? It was like nothing she had dreamed of. Strange, stiff! One darting look, and then eyes down; one convulsive squeeze, then such a formal shake of hot, dry hands, and off he had gone with Felix to his room, and she with Sheila to hers, bewildered, biting down consternation, trying desperately to behave 'like a little lady,' as her old nurse would have put it—before Sheila, especially, whose hostility she knew by instinct she had earned. All that evening, furtive watching, formal talk, and underneath a ferment of doubt and fear and longing. All a mistake! An awful mistake! Did he love her? Heaven! If he did not, she could never face any one again. He could not love her! His eyes were like those of a swan when its neck is drawn up and back in anger. Terrible—having to show nothing, having to smile at Sheila, at Dad, and Mother! And when at last she got to her room, she stood at the window and at first simply leaned her forehead against the glass and shivered. What had she done? Had she dreamed it all—dreamed that they had stood together under those boughs in the darkness, and through their lips exchanged their hearts? She must have dreamed it! Dreamed that most wonderful, false dream! And the walk home in the thunder-storm, and his arm round her, and her letters, and his letter—dreamed it all! And now she was awake! From her lips came a little moan, and she sank down huddled, and stayed there ever so long, numb and chilly. Undress—go to bed? Not for the world. By the

time the morning came she had got to forget that she had dreamed. For very shame she had got to forget that; no one should see. Her cheeks and ears and lips were burning, but her body felt icy cold. Then—what time she did not know at all—she felt she must go out and sit on the stairs. They had always been her comforters, those wide, shallow, cosey stairs. Out and down the passage, past all their rooms—his the last—to the dark stairs, eerie at night, where the scent of age oozed out of the old house. All doors below, above, were closed; it was like looking down into a well, to sit with her head leaning against the banisters. And silent, so silent—just those faint creakings that come from nowhere, as it might be the breathing of the house. She put her arms round a cold banister and hugged it hard. It hurt her, and she embraced it the harder. The first tears of self-pity came welling up, and without warning a great sob burst out of her. Alarmed at the sound, she smothered her mouth with her arm. No good; they came breaking out! A door opened; all the blood rushed to her heart and away from it, and with a little dreadful gurgle she was silent. Some one was listening. How long that terrible listening lasted she had no idea; then footsteps, and she was conscious that it was standing in the dark behind her. A foot touched her back. She gave a little gasp. Derek's voice whispered hoarsely:

"What? Who are you?"

And, below her breath, she answered: "Nedda."

His arms wrenched her away from the banister, his voice in her ear said:

"Nedda, darling, Nedda!"

But despair had sunk too deep; she could only quiver and shake and try to drive sobbing out of her breath. Then, most queer, not his words, nor the feel of his arms, comforted her—any one could pity!—but the smell and the roughness of his Norfolk jacket. So he, too, had not been in bed; he, too, had been unhappy! And, burying her face in his sleeve, she murmured:

"Oh, Derek! Why?"

"I didn't want them all to see. I can't bear to give it away. Nedda, come down lower and let's love each other!"

Softly, stumbling, clinging together, they went down to the last turn of the wide stairs. How many times had she not sat there, in white frocks, her hair hanging down as now, twisting the tassels of little programmes covered with hieroglyphics only intelligible to herself, talking spasmodically to spasmodic boys with budding 'tails,' while Chinese lanterns let fall their rose and orange light on them and all the other little couples as exquisitely devoid of ease. Ah! it was worth those hours of torture to sit there together now, comforting each other with hands and lips and whisperings. It was more, as much more than that moment in the orchard, as sun shining after a Spring storm is more than sun in placid mid-July. To hear him say: "Nedda, I love you!" to feel it in his hand clasped on her heart was much more, now that she knew how difficult it was for him to say or show it, except in the dark with her alone. Many a long day they might have gone through together that would not have shown her so much of his real heart as that hour of whispering and kisses.

He had known she was unhappy, and yet he couldn't! It had only made him more dumb! It was awful to be like that! But now that she knew, she was glad to think that it was buried so deep in him and kept for her alone. And if he did it again she would just know that it was only shyness and pride. And he was not a brute and a beast, as he insisted. But suppose she had chanced not to come out! Would she ever have lived through the night? And she shivered.

"Are you cold, darling? Put on my coat."

It was put on her in spite of all effort to prevent him. Never was anything so warm, so delicious, wrapping her in something more than Harris tweed. And the hall clock struck—Two!

She could just see his face in the glimmer that filtered from the skylight at the top. And she felt that he was learning her, learning all that she had to give him, learning the trust that was shining through her eyes. There was just enough light for them to realize the old house watching from below and from above—a glint on the dark floor there, on the dark wall here; a blackness that seemed to be inhabited by some spirit, so that their hands clutched and twitched, when the tiny, tiny noises of Time, playing in wood and stone, clicked out.

That stare of the old house, with all its knowledge of lives past, of youth and kisses spent and gone, of hopes spun and faiths abashed, the old house cynical, stirred in them desire to clutch each other close and feel the thrill of peering out together into mystery that must hold for them so much of love and joy and trouble! And suddenly she put her fingers to his face, passed them softly, clingingly, over his hair, forehead, eyes, traced the sharp cheek-bones down to his jaw, round by the hard chin up to his lips,

over the straight bone of his nose, lingering, back, to his eyes again.

"Now, if I go blind, I shall know you. Give me one kiss, Derek. You MUST be tired."

Buried in the old dark house that kiss lasted long; then, tiptoeing—she in front—pausing at every creak, holding breath, they stole up to their rooms. And the clock struck—Three!

CHAPTER XVI

Felix (nothing if not modern) had succumbed already to the feeling that youth ruled the roost. Whatever his misgivings, his and Flora's sense of loss, Nedda must be given a free hand! Derek gave no outward show of his condition, and but for his little daughter's happy serenity Felix would have thought as she had thought that first night. He had a feeling that his nephew rather despised one so soaked in mildness and reputation as Felix Freeland; and he got on better with Sheila, not because she was milder, but because she was devoid of that scornful tang which clung about her brother. No! Sheila was not mild. Rich-colored, downright of speech, with her mane of short hair, she was a no less startling companion. The smile of Felix had never been more whimsically employed than during that ten-day visit. The evening John Freeland came to dinner was the highwater mark of his alarmed amusement. Mr. Cuthcott, also bidden, at Nedda's instigation, seemed to take a mischievous delight in drawing out those two young people in face of their official uncle. The pleasure of the dinner to Felix—and it was not too great—was in watching Nedda's face. She hardly spoke, but how she listened! Nor did Derek say much, but what he did say had a queer, sarcastic twinge about it.

"An unpleasant young man," was John's comment afterward. "How the deuce did he ever come to be Tod's son? Sheila, of course, is one of these hot-headed young women that make themselves a nuisance nowadays, but she's intelligible. By the way, that fellow Cuthcott's a queer chap!"

One subject of conversation at dinner had been the morality of revolutionary violence. And the saying that had really upset John had been Derek's: "Conflagration first—morality afterward!" He had looked at his nephew from under brows which a constant need for rejecting petitions to the Home Office had drawn permanently down and in toward the nose, and made no answer.

To Felix these words had a more sinister significance. With his juster appreciation both of the fiery and the official points of view, his far greater insight into his nephew than ever John would have, he saw that they were more than a mere arrow of controversy. And he made up his mind that night that he would tackle his nephew and try to find out exactly what was smouldering within that crisp, black pate.

Following him into the garden next morning, he said to himself: 'No irony—that's fatal. Man to man—or boy to boy—whichever it is!' But, on the garden path, alongside that young spread-eagle, whose dark, glowering, self-contained face he secretly admired, he merely began:

"How do you like your Uncle John?"

"He doesn't like me, Uncle Felix."

Somewhat baffled, Felix proceeded:

"I say, Derek, fortunately or unfortunately, I've some claim now to a little knowledge of you. You've got to open out a bit to me. What are you going to do with yourself in life? You can't support Nedda on revolution."

Having drawn this bow at a venture, he paused, doubtful of his wisdom. A glance at Derek's face confirmed his doubt. It was closer than ever, more defiant.

"There's a lot of money in revolution, Uncle Felix—other people's."

Dash the young brute! There was something in him! He swerved off to a fresh line.

"How do you like London?"

"I don't like it. But, Uncle Felix, don't you wish YOU were seeing it for the first time? What books you'd write!"

Felix felt that unconscious thrust go 'home.' Revolt against staleness and clipped wings, against the

terrible security of his too solid reputation, smote him.

"What strikes you most about it, then?" he asked.

"That it ought to be jolly well blown up. Everybody seems to know that, too—they look it, anyway, and yet they go on as if it oughtn't."

"Why ought it to be blown up?"

"Well, what's the good of anything while London and all these other big towns are sitting on the country's chest? England must have been a fine place once, though!"

"Some of us think it a fine place still."

"Of course it is, in a way. But anything new and keen gets sat on. England's like an old tom-cat by the fire: too jolly comfortable for anything!"

At this support to his own theory that the country was going to the dogs, owing to such as John and Stanley, Felix thought: 'Out of the mouths of babes!' But he merely said: "You're a cheerful young man!"

"It's got cramp," Derek muttered; "can't even give women votes. Fancy my mother without a vote! And going to wait till every laborer is off the land before it attends to them. It's like the port you gave us last night, Uncle Felix, wonderful crust!"

"And what is to be your contribution to its renovation?"

Derek's face instantly resumed its peculiar defiant smile, and Felix thought: 'Young beggar! He's as close as wax.' After their little talk, however, he had more understanding of his nephew. His defiant self-sufficiency seemed more genuine. . . .

In spite of his sensations when dining with Felix, John Freeland (little if not punctilious) decided that it was incumbent on him to have the 'young Tods' to dinner, especially since Frances Freeland had come to stay with him the day after the arrival of those two young people at Hampstead. She had reached Porchester Gardens faintly flushed from the prospect of seeing darling John, with one large cane trunk, and a hand-bag of a pattern which the man in the shop had told her was the best thing out. It had a clasp which had worked beautifully in the shop, but which, for some reason, on the journey had caused her both pain and anxiety. Convinced, however, that she could cure it and open the bag the moment she could get to that splendid new pair of pincers in her trunk, which a man had only yesterday told her were the latest, she still felt that she had a soft thing, and dear John must have one like it if she could get him one at the Stores to-morrow.

John, who had come away early from the Home Office, met her in that dark hall, to which he had paid no attention since his young wife died, fifteen years ago. Embracing him, with a smile of love almost timorous from intensity, Frances Freeland looked him up and down, and, catching what light there was gleaming on his temples, determined that she had in her bag, as soon as she could get it open, the very thing for dear John's hair. He had such a nice moustache, and it was a pity he was getting bald. Brought to her room, she sat down rather suddenly, feeling, as a fact, very much like fainting—a condition of affairs to which she had never in the past and intended never in the future to come, making such a fuss! Owing to that nice new patent clasp, she had not been able to get at her smelling-salts, nor the little flask of brandy and the one hard-boiled egg without which she never travelled; and for want of a cup of tea her soul was nearly dying within her. Dear John would never think she had not had anything since breakfast (she travelled always by a slow train, disliking motion), and she would not for the world let him know—so near dinner-time, giving a lot of trouble! She therefore stayed quite quiet, smiling a little, for fear he might suspect her. Seeing John, however, put her bag down in the wrong place, she felt stronger.

"No, darling—not there—in the window."

And while he was changing the position of the bag, her heart swelled with joy because his back was so straight, and with the thought: 'What a pity the dear boy has never married again! It does so keep a man from getting moony!' With all that writing and thinking he had to do, such important work, too, it would have been so good for him, especially at night. She would not have expressed it thus in words—that would not have been quite nice—but in thought Frances Freeland was a realist.

When he was gone, and she could do as she liked, she sat stiller than ever, knowing by long experience that to indulge oneself in private only made it more difficult not to indulge oneself in public. It really was provoking that this nice new clasp should go wrong just this once, and that the first time it

was used! And she took from her pocket a tiny prayer-book, and, holding it to the light, read the eighteenth psalm—it was a particularly good one, that never failed her when she felt low—she used no glasses, and up to the present had avoided any line between the brows, knowing it was her duty to remain as nice as she could to look at, so as not to spoil the pleasure of people round about her. Then saying to herself firmly, "I do not, I WILL not want any tea—but I shall be glad of dinner!" she rose and opened her cane trunk. Though she knew exactly where they were, she was some time finding the pincers, because there were so many interesting things above them, each raising a different train of thought. A pair of field-glasses, the very latest—the man had said—for darling Derek; they would be so useful to keep his mind from thinking about things that it was no good thinking about. And for dear Flora (how wonderful that she could write poetry—poetry!) a really splendid, and perfectly new, little pill. She herself had already taken two, and they had suited her to perfection. For darling Felix a new kind of eau de cologne, made in Worcester, because that was the only scent he would use. For her pet Nedda, a piece of 'point de Venise' that she really could not be selfish enough to keep any longer, especially as she was particularly fond of it. For Alan, a new kind of tin-opener that the dear boy would like enormously; he was so nice and practical. For Sheila, such a nice new novel by Mr. and Mrs. Whirlingham—a bright, wholesome tale, with such a good description of quite a new country in it—the dear child was so clever, it would be a change for her. Then, actually resting on the pincers, she came on her pass-book, recently made up, containing little or no balance, just enough to get darling John that bag like hers with the new clasp, which would be so handy for his papers when he went travelling. And having reached the pincers, she took them in her hand, and sat down again to be quite quiet a moment, with her still-dark eyelashes resting on her ivory cheeks and her lips pressed to a colorless line; for her head swam from stooping over. In repose, with three flies circling above her fine gray hair, she might have served a sculptor for a study of the stoic spirit. Then, going to the bag, her compressed lips twitching, her gray eyes piercing into its clasp with a kind of distrustful optimism, she lifted the pincers and tweaked it hard.

If the atmosphere of that dinner, to which all six from Hampstead came, was less disturbed than John anticipated, it was due to his sense of hospitality, and to every one's feeling that controversy would puzzle and distress Granny. That there were things about which people differed, Frances Freeland well knew, but that they should so differ as to make them forget to smile and have good manners would not have seemed right to her at all. And of this, in her presence, they were all conscious; so that when they had reached the asparagus there was hardly anything left that could by any possibility be talked about. And this—for fear of seeming awkward—they at once proceeded to discuss, Flora remarking that London was very full. John agreed.

Frances Freeland, smiling, said:

"It's so nice for Derek and Sheila to be seeing it like this for the first time."

Sheila said:

"Why? Isn't it always as full as this?"

John answered:

"In August practically empty. They say a hundred thousand people, at least, go away."

"Double!" remarked Felix.

"The figures are variously given. My estimate—"

"One in sixty. That shows you!"

At this interruption of Derek's John frowned slightly. "What does it show you?" he said.

Derek glanced at his grandmother.

"Oh, nothing!"

"Of course it shows you," exclaimed Sheila, "what a heartless great place it is. All 'the world' goes out of town, and 'London's empty!' But if you weren't told so you'd never know the difference."

Derek muttered: "I think it shows more than that."

Under the table Flora was touching John's foot warningly; Nedda attempting to touch Derek's; Felix endeavoring to catch John's eye; Alan trying to catch Sheila's; John biting his lip and looking carefully at nothing. Only Frances Freeland was smiling and gazing lovingly at dear Derek, thinking he would be so handsome when he had grown a nice black moustache. And she said:

"Yes, dear. What were you going to say?"

Derek looked up.

"Do you really want it, Granny?"

Nedda murmured across the table: "No, Derek."

Frances Freeland raised her brows quizzically. She almost looked arch.

"But of course I do, darling. I want to hear immensely. It's so interesting."

"Derek was going to say, Mother"—every one at once looked at Felix, who had thus broken in—"that all we West-End people—John and I and Flora and Stanley, and even you—all we people born in purple and fine linen, are so accustomed to think we're all that matters, that when we're out of London there's nobody in it. He meant to say that this is appalling enough, but that what is still more appalling is the fact that we really ARE all that matters, and that if people try to disturb us, we can, and jolly well will, take care they don't disturb us long. Is that what you meant, Derek?"

Derek turned a rather startled look on Felix.

"What he meant to say," went on Felix, "was, that age and habit, vested interests, culture and security sit so heavy on this country's chest, that aspiration may wriggle and squirm but will never get from under. That, for all we pretend to admire enthusiasm and youth, and the rest of it, we push it out of us just a little faster than it grows up. Is that what you meant, Derek?"

"You'll try to, but you won't succeed!"

"I'm afraid we shall, and with a smile, too, so that you won't see us doing it."

"I call that devilish."

"I call it natural. Look at a man who's growing old; notice how very gracefully and gradually he does it. Take my hair—your aunt says she can't tell the difference from month to month. And there it is, or rather isn't—little by little."

Frances Freeland, who during Felix's long speech had almost closed her eyes, opened them, and looked piercingly at the top of his head.

"Darling," she said, "I've got the very thing for it. You must take some with you when you go tonight. John is going to try it."

Checked in the flow of his philosophy, Felix blinked like an owl surprised.

"Mother," he said, "YOU only have the gift of keeping young."

"Oh! my dear, I'm getting dreadfully old. I have the greatest difficulty in keeping awake sometimes when people are talking. But I mean to fight against it. It's so dreadfully rude, and ugly, too; I catch myself sometimes with my mouth open."

Flora said quietly: "Granny, I have the very best thing for that—quite new!"

A sweet but rather rueful smile passed over Frances Freeland's face.

"Now," she said, "you're chaffing me," and her eyes looked loving.

It is doubtful if John understood the drift of Felix's exordium, it is doubtful if he had quite listened—he having so much to not listen to at the Home Office that the practice was growing on him. A vested interest to John was a vested interest, culture was culture, and security was certainly security—none of them were symbols of age. Further, the social question—at least so far as it had to do with outbreaks of youth and enthusiasm—was too familiar to him to have any general significance whatever. What with women, labor people, and the rest of it, he had no time for philosophy—a dubious process at the best. A man who had to get through so many daily hours of real work did not dissipate his energy in speculation. But, though he had not listened to Felix's remarks, they had ruffled him. There is no philosophy quite so irritating as that of a brother! True, no doubt, that the country was in a bad way, but as to vested interests and security, that was all nonsense! The guilty causes were free thought and industrialism.

Having seen them all off to Hampstead, he gave his mother her good-night kiss. He was proud of her, a wonderful woman, who always put a good face on everything! Even her funny way of always having some new thing or other to do you good—even that was all part of her wanting to make the best of

things. She never lost her 'form'!

John worshipped that kind of stoicism which would die with its head up rather than live with its tail down. Perhaps the moment of which he was most proud in all his life was that, when, at the finish of his school mile, he overheard a vulgar bandsman say: "I like that young—'s running; he breathes through his—nose." At that moment, if he had stooped to breathe through his mouth, he must have won; as it was he had lost in great distress and perfect form.

When, then, he had kissed Frances Freeland, and watched her ascend the stairs, breathless because she WOULD breathe through her nose to the very last step, he turned into his study, lighted his pipe, and sat down to a couple of hours of a report upon the forces of constabulary available in the various counties, in the event of any further agricultural rioting, such as had recently taken place on a mild scale in one or two districts where there was still Danish blood. He worked at the numbers steadily, with just that engineer's touch of mechanical invention which had caused him to be so greatly valued in a department where the evolution of twelve policemen out of ten was constantly desired. His mastery of figures was highly prized, for, while it had not any of that flamboyance which has come from America and the game of poker, it possessed a kind of English optimism, only dangerous when, as rarely happened, it was put to the test. He worked two full pipes long, and looked at the clock. Twelve! No good knocking off just yet! He had no liking for bed this many a long year, having, from loyalty to memory and a drier sense of what became one in the Home Department, preserved his form against temptations of the flesh. Yet, somehow, to-night he felt no spring, no inspiration, in his handling of county constabulary. A kind of English stolidity about them baffled him—ten of them remained ten. And leaning that forehead, whose height so troubled Frances Freeland, on his neat hand, he fell to brooding. Those young people with everything before them! Did he envy them? Or was he glad of his own age? Fifty! Fifty already; a fogey! An official fogey! For all the world like an umbrella, that every day some one put into a stand and left there till it was time to take it out again. Neatly rolled, too, with an elastic and button! And this fancy, which had never come to him before, surprised him. One day he, too, would wear out, slit all up his seams, and they would leave him at home, or give him away to the butler.

He went to the window. A scent of—of May, or something! And nothing in sight save houses just like his own! He looked up at the strip of sky privileged to hang just there. He had got a bit rusty with his stars. There, however, certainly was Venus. And he thought of how he had stood by the ship's rail on that honeymoon trip of his twenty years ago, giving his young wife her first lesson in counting the stars. And something very deep down, very mossed and crusted over in John's heart, beat and stirred, and hurt him. Nedda—he had caught her looking at that young fellow just as Anne had once looked at him, John Freeland, now an official fogey, an umbrella in a stand. There was a policeman! How ridiculous the fellow looked, putting one foot before the other, flirting his lantern and trying the area gates! This confounded scent of hawthorn—could it be hawthorn?—got here into the heart of London! The look in that girl's eyes! What was he about, to let them make him feel as though he could give his soul for a face looking up into his own, for a breast touching his, and the scent of a woman's hair. Hang it! He would smoke a cigarette and go to bed! He turned out the light and began to mount the stairs; they creaked abominably—the felt must be wearing out. A woman about the place would have kept them quiet. Reaching the landing of the second floor, he paused a moment from habit, to look down into the dark hall. A voice, thin, sweet, almost young, said:

"Is that you, darling?" John's heart stood still. What—was that? Then he perceived that the door of the room that had been his wife's was open, and remembered that his mother was in there.

"What! Aren't you asleep, Mother?"

Frances Freeland's voice answered cheerfully: "Oh, no, dear; I'm never asleep before two. Come in."

John entered. Propped very high on her pillows, in perfect regularity, his mother lay. Her carved face was surmounted by a piece of fine lace, her thin, white fingers on the turnover of the sheet moved in continual interlocking, her lips smiled.

"There's something you must have," she said. "I left my door open on purpose. Give me that little bottle, darling."

John took from a small table by the bed a still smaller bottle. Frances Freeland opened it, and out came three tiny white globules.

"Now," she said, "pop them in! You've no idea how they'll send you to sleep! They're the most splendid things; perfectly harmless. Just let them rest on the tongue and swallow!"

John let them rest—they were sweetish—and swallowed.

"How is it, then," he said, "that you never go to sleep before two?"

Frances Freeland corked the little bottle, as if enclosing within it that awkward question.

"They don't happen to act with me, darling; but that's nothing. It's the very thing for any one who has to sit up so late," and her eyes searched his face. Yes—they seemed to say—I know you pretend to have work; but if you only had a dear little wife!

"I shall leave you this bottle when I go. Kiss me."

John bent down, and received one of those kisses of hers that had such sudden vitality in the middle of them, as if her lips were trying to get inside his cheek. From the door he looked back. She was smiling, composed again to her stoic wakefulness.

"Shall I shut the door, Mother?"

"Please, darling."

With a little lump in his throat John closed the door.

CHAPTER XVII

The London which Derek had said should be blown up was at its maximum of life those May days. Even on this outer rampart of Hampstead, people, engines, horses, all had a touch of the spring fever; indeed, especially on this rampart of Hampstead was there increase of the effort to believe that nature was not dead and embalmed in books. The poets, painters, talkers who lived up there were at each other all the time in their great game of make-believe. How could it be otherwise, when there was veritably blossom on the trees and the chimneys were ceasing to smoke? How otherwise, when the sun actually shone on the ponds? But the four young people (for Alan joined in—hypnotized by Sheila) did not stay in Hampstead. Chiefly on top of tram and 'bus they roamed the wilderness. Bethnal Green and Leytonstone, Kensington and Lambeth, St. James's and Soho, Whitechapel, Shoreditch, West Ham, and Piccadilly, they traversed the whole ant-heap at its most ebullient moment. They knew their Whitman and their Dostoevsky sufficiently to be aware that they ought to love and delight in everything—in the gentleman walking down Piccadilly with a flower in his buttonhole, and in the lady sewing that buttonhole in Bethnal Green; in the orator bawling himself hoarse close to the Marble Arch, the coster loading his barrow in Covent Garden; and in Uncle John Freeland rejecting petitions in Whitehall. All these things, of course, together with the long lines of little gray houses in Camden Town, long lines of carts with bobtail horses rattling over Blackfriars' Bridge, long smells drifting behind taxicabs—all these things were as delightful and as stimulating to the soul as the clouds that trailed the heavens, the fronds of the lilac, and Leonardo's Cartoon in the Diploma Gallery. All were equal manifestations of that energy in flower known as 'Life.' They knew that everything they saw and felt and smelled OUGHT equally to make them long to catch creatures to their hearts and cry: Hosanna! And Nedda and Alan, bred in Hampstead, even knew that to admit that these things did not all move them in the same way would be regarded as a sign of anaemia. Nevertheless—most queerly—these four young people confessed to each other all sorts of sensations besides that 'Hosanna' one. They even confessed to rage and pity and disgust one moment, and to joy and dreams the next, and they differed greatly as to what excited which. It was truly odd! The only thing on which they did seem to agree was that they were having 'a thundering good time.' A sort of sense of "Blow everything!" was in their wings, and this was due not to the fact that they were thinking of and loving and admiring the little gray streets and the gentleman in Piccadilly—as, no doubt, in accordance with modern culture, they should have been—but to the fact that they were loving and admiring themselves, and that entirely without the trouble of thinking about it at all. The practice, too, of dividing into couples was distinctly precious to them, for, though they never failed to start out together, they never failed to come home two by two. In this way did they put to confusion Whitman and Dostoevsky, and all the other thinkers in Hampstead. In the daytime they all, save Alan, felt that London ought to be blown up; but at night it undermined their philosophies so that they sat silent on the tops of their respective 'buses, with arms twined in each other's. For then a something seemed to have floated up from that mass of houses and machines, of men and trees, and to be hovering above them, violet-colored, caught between the stars and the lights, a spirit of such overpowering beauty that it drenched even Alan in a kind of awe. After all, the huge creature that sat with such a giant's weight on the country's chest, the monster that had spoiled so many fields and robbed so many lives of peace and health, could fly at night upon blue and gold and

purple wings, murmur a passionate lullaby, and fall into deep sleep!

One such night they went to the gallery at the opera, to supper at an oyster-shop, under Alan's pilotage, and then set out to walk back to Hampstead, timing themselves to catch the dawn. They had not gone twenty steps up Southampton Row before Alan and Sheila were forty steps in front. A fellow-feeling had made Derek and Nedda stand to watch an old man who walked, tortuous, extremely happy, bidding them all come. And when they moved on, it was very slowly, just keeping sight of the others across the lumbered dimness of Covent Garden, where tarpaulin-covered carts and barrows seemed to slumber under the blink of lamps and watchmen's lanterns. Across Long Acre they came into a street where there was not a soul save the two others, a long way ahead. Walking with his arm tightly laced with hers, touching her all down one side, Derek felt that it would be glorious to be attacked by night-birds in this dark, lonely street, to have a splendid fight and drive them off, showing himself to Nedda for a man, and her protector. But nothing save one black cat came near, and that ran for its life. He bent round and looked under the blue veil-thing that wrapped Nedda's head. Her face seemed mysteriously lovely, and her eyes, lifted so quickly, mysteriously true. She said:

"Derek, I feel like a hill with the sun on it!"

"I feel like that yellow cloud with the wind in it."

"I feel like an apple-tree coming into blossom."

"I feel like a giant."

"I feel like a song."

"I feel I could sing you."

"On a river, floating along."

"A wide one, with great plains on each side, and beasts coming down to drink, and either the sun or a yellow moon shining, and some one singing, too, far off."

"The Red Sarafan."

"Let's run!"

From that yellow cloud sailing in moonlight a spurt of rain had driven into their faces, and they ran as fast as their blood was flowing, and the raindrops coming down, jumping half the width of the little dark streets, clutching each other's arms. And peering round into her face, so sweet and breathless, into her eyes, so dark and dancing, he felt he could run all night if he had her there to run beside him through the dark. Into another street they dashed, and again another, till she stopped, panting.

"Where are we now?"

Neither knew. A policeman put them right for Portland Place. Half past one! And it would be dawn soon after three! They walked soberly again now into the outer circle of Regent's Park; talked soberly, too, discussing sublunary matters, and every now and then, their arms, round each other, gave little convulsive squeezes. The rain had stopped and the moon shone clear; by its light the trees and flowers were clothed in colors whose blood had spilled away; the town's murmur was dying, the house lights dead already. They came out of the park into a road where the latest taxis were rattling past; a face, a bare neck, silk hat, or shirt-front gleamed in the window-squares, and now and then a laugh came floating through. They stopped to watch them from under the low-hanging branches of an acacia-tree, and Derek, gazing at her face, still wet with rain, so young and round and soft, thought: 'And she loves me!' Suddenly she clutched him round the neck, and their lips met.

They talked not at all for a long time after that kiss, walking slowly up the long, empty road, while the whitish clouds sailed across the dark river of the sky and the moon slowly sank. This was the most delicious part of all that long walk home, for the kiss had made them feel as though they had no bodies, but were just two spirits walking side by side. This is its curious effect sometimes in first love between the very young. . . .

Having sent Flora to bed, Felix was sitting up among his books. There was no need to do this, for the young folk had latch-keys, but, having begun the vigil, he went on with it, a volume about Eastern philosophies on his knee, a bowl of narcissus blooms, giving forth unexpected whiffs of odor, beside him. And he sank into a long reverie.

Could it be said—as was said in this Eastern book—that man's life was really but a dream; could that be said with any more truth than it had once been said, that he rose again in his body, to perpetual life?

Could anything be said with truth, save that we knew nothing? And was that not really what had always been said by man—that we knew nothing, but were just blown over and about the world like sighs of wind, in obedience to some immortal, unknowable coherence! But had that want of knowledge ever retarded what was known as the upward growth of man? Had it ever stopped man from working, fighting, loving, dying like a hero if need were? Had faith ever been anything but embroidery to an instinctive heroism, so strong that it needed no such trappings? Had faith ever been anything but anodyne, or gratification of the aesthetic sense? Or had it really body and substance of its own? Was it something absolute and solid, that he—Felix Freeland—had missed? Or again, was it, perhaps, but the natural concomitant of youth, a naive effervescence with which thought and brooding had to part? And, turning the page of his book, he noticed that he could no longer see to read, the lamp had grown too dim, and showed but a decorative glow in the bright moonlight flooding through the study window. He got up and put another log on the fire, for these last nights of May were chilly.

Nearly three! Where were these young people? Had he been asleep, and they come in? Sure enough, in the hall Alan's hat and Sheila's cloak—the dark-red one he had admired when she went forth—were lying on a chair. But of the other two—nothing! He crept upstairs. Their doors were open. They certainly took their time—these young lovers. And the same sore feeling which had attacked Felix when Nedda first told him of her love came on him badly in that small of the night when his vitality was lowest. All the hours she had spent clambering about him, or quietly resting on his knee with her head tucked in just where his arm and shoulder met, listening while he read or told her stories, and now and again turning those clear eyes of hers wide open to his face, to see if he meant it; the wilful little tugs of her hand when they two went exploring the customs of birds, or bees, or flowers; all her 'Daddy, I love you!' and her rushes to the front door, and long hugs when he came back from a travel; all those later crookings of her little finger in his, and the times he had sat when she did not know it, watching her, and thinking: 'That little creature, with all that's before her, is my very own daughter to take care of, and share joy and sorrow with. . . .' Each one of all these seemed to come now and tweak at him, as the songs of blackbirds tweak the heart of one who lies, unable to get out into the Spring. His lamp had burned itself quite out; the moon was fallen below the clump of pines, and away to the north-east something stirred in the stain and texture of the sky. Felix opened the window. What peace out there! The chill, scentless peace of night, waiting for dawn's renewal of warmth and youth. Through that bay window facing north he could see on one side the town, still wan with the light of its lamps, on the other the country, whose dark bloom was graying fast. Suddenly a tiny bird twittered, and Felix saw his two truants coming slowly from the gate across the grass, his arm round her shoulders, hers round his waist. With their backs turned to him, they passed the corner of the house, across where the garden sloped away. There they stood above the wide country, their bodies outlined against a sky fast growing light, evidently waiting for the sun to rise. Silent they stood, while the birds, one by one, twittered out their first calls. And suddenly Felix saw the boy fling his hand up into the air. The Sun! Far away on the gray horizon was a flare of red!

CHAPTER XVIII

The anxieties of the Lady Mallorings of this life concerning the moral welfare of their humbler neighbors are inclined to march in front of events. The behavior in Tryst's cottage was more correct than it would have been in nine out of ten middle or upper class demesnes under similar conditions. Between the big laborer and 'that woman,' who, since the epileptic fit, had again come into residence, there had passed nothing whatever that might not have been witnessed by Bidy and her two nurslings. For love is an emotion singularly dumb and undemonstrative in those who live the life of the fields; passion a feeling severely beneath the thumb of a propriety born of the age-long absence of excitements, opportunities, and the aesthetic sense; and those two waited, almost as a matter of course, for the marriage which was forbidden them in this parish. The most they did was to sit and look at one another.

On the day of which Felix had seen the dawn at Hampstead, Sir Gerald's agent tapped on the door of Tryst's cottage, and was answered by Bidy, just in from school for the midday meal.

"Your father home, my dear?"

"No, sir; Auntie's in."

"Ask your auntie to come and speak to me."

The mother-child vanished up the narrow stairs, and the agent sighed. A strong-built, leathery-skinned man in a brown suit and leggings, with a bristly little moustache and yellow whites to his eyes, he did not, as he had said to his wife that morning, 'like the job a little bit.' And while he stood there waiting, Susie and Billy emerged from the kitchen and came to stare at him. The agent returned that stare till a voice behind him said: "Yes, sir?"

'That woman' was certainly no great shakes to look at: a fresh, decent, faithful sort of body! And he said gruffly: "Mornin', miss. Sorry to say my orders are to make a clearance here. I suppose Tryst didn't think we should act on it, but I'm afraid I've got to put his things out, you know. Now, where are you all going; that's the point?"

"I shall go home, I suppose; but Tryst and the children—we don't know."

The agent tapped his leggings with a riding-cane. "So you've been expecting it!" he said with relief. "That's right." And, staring down at the mother-child, he added: "Well, what d'you say, my dear; you look full of sense, you do!"

Biddy answered: "I'll go and tell Mr. Freeland, sir."

"Ah! You're a bright maid. He'll know where to put you for the time bein'. Have you had your dinner?"

"No, sir; it's just ready."

"Better have it—better have it first. No hurry. What've you got in the pot that smells so good?"

"Bubble and squeak, sir."

"Bubble and squeak! Ah!" And with those words the agent withdrew to where, in a farm wagon drawn up by the side of the road, three men were solemnly pulling at their pipes. He moved away from them a little, for, as he expressed it to his wife afterward: "Look bad, you know, look bad—anybody seeing me! Those three little children—that's where it is! If our friends at the Hall had to do these jobs for themselves, there wouldn't be any to do!"

Presently, from his discreet distance, he saw the mother-child going down the road toward Tod's, in her blue 'pinny' and corn-colored hair. Nice little thing! Pretty little thing, too! Pity, great pity! And he went back to the cottage. On his way a thought struck him so that he well-nigh shivered. Suppose the little thing brought back that Mrs. Freeland, the lady who always went about in blue, without a hat! Phew! Mr. Freeland—he was another sort; a bit off, certainly—harmless, quite harmless! But that lady! And he entered the cottage. The woman was washing up; seemed a sensible body. When the two kids cleared off to school he could go to work and get it over; the sooner the better, before people came hanging round. A job of this kind sometimes made nasty blood! His yellowish eyes took in the nature of the task before him. Funny jam-up they did get about them, to be sure! Every blessed little thing they'd ever bought, and more, too! Have to take precious good care nothing got smashed, or the law would be on the other leg! And he said to the woman:

"Now, miss, can I begin?"

"I can't stop you, sir."

'No,' he thought, 'you can't stop me, and I blamed well wish you could!' But he said: "Got an old wagon out here. Thought I'd save him damage by weather or anything; we'll put everything in that, and run it up into the empty barn at Marrow and leave it. And there they'll be for him when he wants 'em."

The woman answered: "You're very kind, I'm sure."

Perceiving that she meant no irony, the agent produced a sound from somewhere deep and went out to summon his men.

With the best intentions, however, it is not possible, even in villages so scattered that they cannot be said to exist, to do anything without every one's knowing; and the work of 'putting out' the household goods of the Tryst family, and placing them within the wagon, was not an hour in progress before the road in front of the cottage contained its knot of watchers. Old Gaunt first, alone—for the rogue-girl had gone to Mr. Cuthcott's and Tom Gaunt was at work. The old man had seen evictions in his time, and looked on silently, with a faint, sardonic grin. Four children, so small that not even school had any use for them as yet, soon gathered round his legs, followed by mothers coming to retrieve them, and there was no longer silence. Then came two laborers, on their way to a job, a stone-breaker, and two more women. It was through this little throng that the mother-child and Kirsteen passed into the fast-being-gutted cottage.

The agent was standing by Tryst's bed, keeping up a stream of comment to two of his men, who were taking that aged bed to pieces. It was his habit to feel less when he talked more; but no one could have fallen into a more perfect taciturnity than he when he saw Kirsteen coming up those narrow stairs. In so small a space as this room, where his head nearly touched the ceiling, was it fair to be confronted by that lady—he put it to his wife that same evening—"Was it fair?" He had seen a mother wild duck look like that when you took away its young—snaky fierce about the neck, and its dark eye! He had seen a mare, going to bite, look not half so vicious! "There she stood, and—let me have it?—not a bit! Too much the lady for that, you know!—Just looked at me, and said very quiet: 'Ah! Mr. Simmons, and are you really doing this?' and put her hand on that little girl of his. 'Orders are orders, ma'am!' What could I say? 'Ah!' she said, 'yes, orders are orders, but they needn't be obeyed.' 'As to that, ma'am,' I said—mind you, she's a lady; you can't help feeling that 'I'm a working man, the same as Tryst here; got to earn my living.' 'So have slave-drivers, Mr. Simmons.' 'Every profession,' I said, 'has got its dirty jobs, ma'am. And that's a fact.' 'And will have,' she said, 'so long as professional men consent to do the dirty work of their employers.' 'And where should I be, I should like to know,' I said, 'if I went on that lay? I've got to take the rough with the smooth.' 'Well,' she said, 'Mr. Freeland and I will take Tryst and the little ones in at present.' Good-hearted people, do a lot for the laborers, in their way. All the same, she's a bit of a vixen. Picture of a woman, too, standin' there; shows blood, mind you! Once said, all over—no nagging. She took the little girl off with her. And pretty small I felt, knowing I'd got to finish that job, and the folk outside gettin' nastier all the time—not sayin' much, of course, but lookin' a lot!" The agent paused in his recital and gazed fixedly at a bluebottle crawling up the windowpane. Stretching out his thumb and finger, he nipped it suddenly and threw it in the grate. "Blest if that fellow himself didn't turn up just as I was finishing. I was sorry for the man, you know. There was his home turned out-o'-doors. Big man, too! 'You blanky-blank!' he says; 'if I'd been here you shouldn't ha' done this!' Thought he was goin' to hit me. 'Come, Tryst!' I said, 'it's not my doing, you know!' 'Ah!' he said, 'I know that; and it'll be blanky well the worse for THEM!' Rough tongue; no class of man at all, he is! 'Yes,' he said, 'let 'em look out; I'll be even with 'em yet!' 'None o' that!' I told him; 'you know which side the law's buttered. I'm making it easy for you, too, keeping your things in the wagon, ready to shift any time!' He gave me a look—he's got very queer eyes, swimmin', sad sort of eyes, like a man in liquor—and he said: 'I've been here twenty years,' he said. 'My wife died here.' And all of a sudden he went as dumb as a fish. Never let his eyes off us, though, while we finished up the last of it; made me feel funny, seein' him glowering like that all the time. He'll savage something over this, you mark my words!" Again the agent paused, and remained as though transfixed, holding that face of his, whose yellow had run into the whites of the eyes, as still as wood. "He's got some feeling for the place, I suppose," he said suddenly; "or maybe they've put it into him about his rights; there's plenty of 'em like that. Well, anyhow, nobody likes his private affairs turned inside out for every one to gape at. I wouldn't myself." And with that deeply felt remark the agent put out his leathery-yellow thumb and finger and nipped a second bluebottle. . . .

While the agent was thus recounting to his wife the day's doings, the evicted Tryst sat on the end of his bed in a ground-floor room of Tod's cottage. He had taken off his heavy boots, and his feet, in their thick, soiled socks, were thrust into a pair of Tod's carpet slippers. He sat without moving, precisely as if some one had struck him a blow in the centre of the forehead, and over and over again he turned the heavy thought: 'They've turned me out o' there—I done nothing, and they turned me out o' there! Blast them—they turned me out o' there!' . . .

In the orchard Tod sat with a grave and puzzled face, surrounded by the three little Trysts. And at the wicket gate Kirsteen, awaiting the arrival of Derek and Sheila—summoned home by telegram—stood in the evening glow, her blue-clad figure still as that of any worshipper at the muezzin-call.

CHAPTER XIX

"A fire, causing the destruction of several ricks and an empty cowshed, occurred in the early morning of Thursday on the home farm of Sir Gerald Malloring's estate in Worcestershire. Grave suspicions of arson are entertained, but up to the present no arrest has been made. The authorities are in doubt whether the occurrence has any relation with recent similar outbreaks in the eastern counties."

So Stanley read at breakfast, in his favorite paper; and the little leader thereon:

"The outbreak of fire on Sir Gerald Malloring's Worcestershire property may or may not have any significance as a symptom of agrarian unrest. We shall watch the upshot with some anxiety. Certain it is that unless the authorities are prepared to deal sharply with arson, or other cases of deliberate

damage to the property of landlords, we may bid good-by to any hope of ameliorating the lot of the laborer"

—and so on.

If Stanley had risen and paced the room there would have been a good deal to be said for him; for, though he did not know as much as Felix of the nature and sentiments of Tod's children, he knew enough to make any but an Englishman uneasy. The fact that he went on eating ham, and said to Clara, "Half a cup!" was proof positive of that mysterious quality called phlegm which had long enabled his country to enjoy the peace of a weedy duck-pond.

Stanley, a man of some intelligence—witness his grasp of the secret of successful plough-making (none for the home market!)—had often considered this important proposition of phlegm. People said England was becoming degenerate and hysterical, growing soft, and nervous, and towny, and all the rest of it. In his view there was a good deal of bosh about that! "Look," he would say, "at the weight that chauffeurs put on! Look at the House of Commons, and the size of the upper classes!" If there were growing up little shrill types of working men and Socialists, and new women, and half-penny papers, and a rather larger crop of professors and long-haired chaps—all the better for the rest of the country! The flesh all these skimpy ones had lost, solid people had put on. The country might be suffering a bit from officialism, and the tendency of modern thought, but the breed was not changing. John Bull was there all right under his moustache. Take it off and clap on little side-whiskers, and you had as many Bulls as you liked, any day. There would be no social upheaval so long as the climate was what it was! And with this simple formula, and a kind of very deep-down throaty chuckle, he would pass to a subject of more immediate importance. There was something, indeed, rather masterly in his grasp of the fact that rain might be trusted to put out any fire—give it time. And he kept a special vessel in a special corner which recorded for him faithfully the number of inches that fell; and now and again he wrote to his paper to say that there were more inches in his vessel than there had been "for thirty years." His conviction that the country was in a bad way was nothing but a skin affection, causing him local irritation rather than affecting the deeper organs of his substantial body.

He did not readily confide in Clara concerning his own family, having in a marked degree the truly domestic quality of thinking it superior to his wife's. She had been a Tomson, not one of THE Tomsons, and it was quite a question whether he or she were trying to forget that fact the faster. But he did say to her as he was getting into the car:

"It's just possible I might go round by Tod's on my way home. I want a run."

She answered: "Be careful what you say to that woman. I don't want her here by any chance. The young ones were quite bad enough."

And when he had put in his day at the works he did turn the nose of his car toward Tod's. Travelling along grass-bordered roads, the beauty of this England struck his not too sensitive spirit and made him almost gasp. It was that moment of the year when the countryside seems to faint from its own loveliness, from the intoxication of its scents and sounds. Creamy-white may, splashed here and there with crimson, flooded the hedges in breaking waves of flower-foam; the fields were all buttercup glory; every tree had its cuckoo, calling; every bush its blackbird or thrush in full even-song. Swallows were flying rather low, and the sky, whose moods they watch, had the slumberous, surcharged beauty of a long, fine day, with showers not far away. Some orchards were still in blossom, and the great wild bees, hunting over flowers and grasses warm to their touch, kept the air deeply murmurous. Movement, light, color, song, scent, the warm air, and the fluttering leaves were confused, till one had almost become the other.

And Stanley thought, for he was not rhapsodic 'Wonderful pretty country! The way everything's looked after—you never see it abroad!'

But the car, a creature with little patience for natural beauty, had brought him to the crossroads and stood, panting slightly, under the cliff-bank whereon grew Tod's cottage, so loaded now with lilac, wistaria, and roses that from the road nothing but a peak or two of the thatched roof could be seen.

Stanley was distinctly nervous. It was not a weakness his face and figure were very capable of showing, but he felt that dryness of mouth and quivering of chest which precede adventures of the soul. Advancing up the steps and pebbled path, which Clara had trodden once, just nineteen years ago, and he himself but three times as yet in all, he cleared his throat and said to himself: 'Easy, old man! What is it, after all? She won't bite!' And in the very doorway he came upon her.

What there was about this woman to produce in a man of common sense such peculiar sensations, he no more knew after seeing her than before. Felix, on returning from his visit, had said, "She's like a

Song of the Hebrides sung in the middle of a programme of English ballads." The remark, as any literary man's might, had conveyed nothing to Stanley, and that in a far-fetched way. Still, when she said: "Will you come in?" he felt heavier and thicker than he had ever remembered feeling; as a glass of stout might feel coming across a glass of claret. It was, perhaps, the gaze of her eyes, whose color he could not determine, under eyebrows that waved in the middle and twitched faintly, or a dress that was blue, with the queerest effect of another color at the back of it, or perhaps the feeling of a torrent flowing there under a coat of ice, that might give way in little holes, so that your leg went in but not the whole of you. Something, anyway, made him feel both small and heavy—that awkward combination for a man accustomed to associate himself with cheerful but solid dignity. In seating himself by request at a table, in what seemed to be a sort of kitchen, he experienced a singular sensation in the legs, and heard her say, as it might be to the air:

"Biddy, dear, take Susie and Billy out."

And thereupon a little girl with a sad and motherly face came crawling out from underneath the table, and dropped him a little courtesy. Then another still smaller girl came out, and a very small boy, staring with all his eyes.

All these things were against Stanley, and he felt that if he did not make it quite clear that he was there he would soon not know where he was.

"I came," he said, "to talk about this business up at Malloring's." And, encouraged by having begun, he added: "Whose kids were those?"

A level voice with a faint lisp answered him:

"They belong to a man called Tryst; he was turned out of his cottage on Wednesday because his dead wife's sister was staying with him, so we've taken them in. Did you notice the look on the face of the eldest?"

Stanley nodded. In truth, he had noticed something, though what he could not have said.

"At nine years old she has to do the housework and be a mother to the other two, besides going to school. This is all because Lady Malloring has conscientious scruples about marriage with a deceased wife's sister."

'Certainly'—thought Stanley—'that does sound a bit thick!' And he asked:

"Is the woman here, too?"

"No, she's gone home for the present."

He felt relief.

"I suppose Malloring's point is," he said, "whether or not you're to do what you like with your own property. For instance, if you had let this cottage to some one you thought was harming the neighborhood, wouldn't you terminate his tenancy?"

She answered, still in that level voice:

"Her action is cowardly, narrow, and tyrannical, and no amount of sophistry will make me think differently."

Stanley felt precisely as if one of his feet had gone through the ice into water so cold that it seemed burning hot! Sophistry! In a plain man like himself! He had always connected the word with Felix. He looked at her, realizing suddenly that the association of his brother's family with the outrage on Malloring's estate was probably even nearer than he had feared.

"Look here, Kirsteen!" he said, uttering the unlikely name with resolution, for, after all, she was his sister-in-law: "Did this fellow set fire to Malloring's ricks?"

He was aware of a queer flash, a quiver, a something all over her face, which passed at once back to its intent gravity.

"We have no reason to suppose so. But tyranny produces revenge, as you know."

Stanley shrugged his shoulders. "It's not my business to go into the rights and wrongs of what's been done. But, as a man of the world and a relative, I do ask you to look after your youngsters and see they don't get into a mess. They're an inflammable young couple—young blood, you know!"

Having made this speech, Stanley looked down, with a feeling that it would give her more chance.

"You are very kind," he heard her saying in that quiet, faintly lisping voice; "but there are certain principles involved."

And, suddenly, his curious fear of this woman took shape. Principles! He had unconsciously been waiting for that word, than which none was more like a red rag to him.

"What principles can possibly be involved in going against the law?"

"And where the law is unjust?"

Stanley was startled, but he said: "Remember that your principles, as you call them, may hurt other people besides yourself; Tod and your children most of all. How is the law unjust, may I ask?"

She had been sitting at the table opposite, but she got up now and went to the hearth. For a woman of forty-two—as he supposed she would be—she was extraordinarily lithe, and her eyes, fixed on him from under those twitching, wavy brows, had a curious glow in their darkness. The few silver threads in the mass of her over-fine black hair seemed to give it extra vitality. The whole of her had a sort of intensity that made him profoundly uncomfortable. And he thought suddenly: 'Poor old Tod! Fancy having to go to bed with that woman!'

Without raising her voice, she began answering his question.

"These poor people have no means of setting law in motion, no means of choosing where and how they will live, no means of doing anything except just what they are told; the Mallorings have the means to set the law in motion, to choose where and how to live, and to dictate to others. That is why the law is unjust. With every independent pound a year, this equal law of yours—varies!"

"Phew!" said Stanley. "That's a proposition!"

"I give you a simple case. If I had chosen not to marry Tod but to live with him in free love, we could have done it without inconvenience. We have some independent income; we could have afforded to disregard what people thought or did. We could have bought (as we did buy) our piece of land and our cottage, out of which we could not have been turned. Since we don't care for society, it would have made absolutely no difference to our present position. But Tryst, who does not even want to defy the law—what happens to him? What happens to hundreds of laborers all over the country who venture to differ in politics, religion, or morals from those who own them?"

'By George!' thought Stanley, 'it's true, in a way; I never looked at it quite like that.' But the feeling that he had come to persuade her to be reasonable, and the deeply rooted Englishry of him, conspired to make him say:

"That's all very well; but, you see, it's only a necessary incident of property-holding. You can't interfere with plain rights."

"You mean—an evil inherent in property-holding?"

"If you like; I don't split words. The lesser of two evils. What's your remedy? You don't want to abolish property; you've confessed that property gives YOU your independence!"

Again that curious quiver and flash!

"Yes; but if people haven't decency enough to see for themselves how the law favors their independence, they must be shown that it doesn't pay to do to others as they would hate to be done by."

"And you wouldn't try reasoning?"

"They are not amenable to reason."

Stanley took up his hat.

"Well, I think some of us are. I see your point; but, you know, violence never did any good; it isn't—isn't English."

She did not answer. And, nonplussed thereby, he added lamely: "I should have liked to have seen Tod and your youngsters. Remember me to them. Clara sent her regards"; and, looking round the room in a rather lost way, he held out his hand.

He had an impression of something warm and dry put into it, with even a little pressure.

Back in the car, he said to his chauffeur, "Go home the other way, Batter, past the church."

The vision of that kitchen, with its brick floor, its black oak beams, bright copper pans, the flowers on the window-sill, the great, open hearth, and the figure of that woman in her blue dress standing before it, with her foot poised on a log, clung to his mind's eye with curious fidelity. And those three kids, popping out like that—proof that the whole thing was not a rather bad dream! 'Queer business!' he thought; 'bad business! That woman's uncommonly all there, though. Lot in what she said, too. Where the deuce should we all be if there were many like her!' And suddenly he noticed, in a field to the right, a number of men coming along the hedge toward the road—evidently laborers. What were they doing? He stopped the car. There were fifteen or twenty of them, and back in the field he could see a girl's red blouse, where a little group of four still lingered. 'By George!' he thought, 'those must be the young Tods going it!' And, curious to see what it might mean, Stanley fixed his attention on the gate through which the men were bound to come. First emerged a fellow in corduroys tied below the knee, with long brown moustaches decorating a face that, for all its haggardness, had a jovial look. Next came a sturdy little red-faced, bow-legged man in shirt-sleeves rolled up, walking alongside a big, dark fellow with a cap pushed up on his head, who had evidently just made a joke. Then came two old men, one of whom was limping, and three striplings. Another big man came along next, in a little clearance, as it were, between main groups. He walked heavily, and looked up lowering at the car. The fellow's eyes were queer, and threatening, and sad—giving Stanley a feeling of discomfort. Then came a short, square man with an impudent, loquacious face and a bit of swagger in his walk. He, too, looked up at Stanley and made some remark which caused two thin-faced fellows with him to grin sheepishly. A spare old man, limping heavily, with a yellow face and drooping gray moustaches, walked next, alongside a warped, bent fellow, with yellowish hair all over his face, whose expression struck Stanley as half-idiotic. Then two more striplings of seventeen or so, whittling at bits of sticks; an active, clean-shorn chap with drawn-in cheeks; and, last of all, a small man by himself, without a cap on a round head covered with thin, light hair, moving at a 'dot-here, dot-there' walk, as though he had beasts to drive.

Stanley noted that all—save the big man with the threatening, sad eyes, the old, yellow-faced man with a limp, and the little man who came out last, lost in his imaginary beasts—looked at the car furtively as they went their ways. And Stanley thought: 'English peasant! Poor devil! Who is he? What is he? Who'd miss him if he did die out? What's the use of all this fuss about him? He's done for! Glad I've nothing to do with him at Becket, anyway! "Back to the land!" "Independent peasantry!" Not much! Shan't say that to Clara, though; knock the bottom out of her week-ends!' And to his chauffeur he muttered:

"Get on, Batter!"

So, through the peace of that country, all laid down in grass, through the dignity and loveliness of trees and meadows, this May evening, with the birds singing under a sky surcharged with warmth and color, he sped home to dinner.

CHAPTER XX

But next morning, turning on his back as it came dawn, Stanley thought, with the curious intensity which in those small hours so soon becomes fear: 'By Jove! I don't trust that woman a yard! I shall wire for Felix!' And the longer he lay on his back, the more the conviction bored a hole in him. There was a kind of fever in the air nowadays, that women seemed to catch, as children caught the measles. What did it all mean? England used to be a place to live in. One would have thought an old country like this would have got through its infantile diseases! Hysteria! No one gave in to that. Still, one must look out! Arson was about the limit! And Stanley had a vision, suddenly, of his plough-works in flames. Why not? The ploughs were not for the English market. Who knew whether these laboring fellows mightn't take that as a grievance, if trouble began to spread? This somewhat far-fetched notion, having started to burrow, threw up a really horrid mole-hill on Stanley. And it was only the habit, in the human mind, of saying suddenly to fears: Stop! I'm tired of you! that sent him to sleep about half past four.

He did not, however, neglect to wire to Felix:

"If at all possible, come down again at once; awkward business at Joyfields."

Nor, on the charitable pretext of employing two old fellows past ordinary work, did he omit to treble his night-watchman. . .

On Wednesday, the day of which he had seen the dawn rise, Felix had already been startled, on returning from his constitutional, to discover his niece and nephew in the act of departure. All the explanation vouchsafed had been: "Awfully sorry, Uncle Felix; Mother's wired for us." Save for the general uneasiness which attended on all actions of that woman, Felix would have felt relieved at their going. They had disturbed his life, slipped between him and Nedda! So much so that he did not even expect her to come and tell him why they had gone, nor feel inclined to ask her. So little breaks the fine coherence of really tender ties! The deeper the quality of affection, the more it 'starts and puffs,' and from sheer sensitive feeling, each for the other, spares attempt to get back into touch!

His paper—though he did not apply to it the word 'favorite,' having that proper literary feeling toward all newspapers, that they took him in rather than he them—gave him on Friday morning precisely the same news, of the rick-burning, as it gave to Stanley at breakfast and to John on his way to the Home Office. To John, less in the know, it merely brought a knitting of the brow and a vague attempt to recollect the numbers of the Worcestershire constabulary. To Felix it brought a feeling of sickness. Men whose work in life demands that they shall daily whip their nerves, run, as a rule, a little in advance of everything. And goodness knows what he did not see at that moment. He said no word to Nedda, but debated with himself and Flora what, if anything, was to be done. Flora, whose sense of humor seldom deserted her, held the more comfortable theory that there was nothing to be done as yet. Soon enough to cry when milk was spilled! He did not agree, but, unable to suggest a better course, followed her advice. On Saturday, however, receiving Stanley's wire, he had much difficulty in not saying to her, "I told you so!" The question that agitated him now was whether or not to take Nedda with him. Flora said: "Yes. The child will be the best restraining influence, if there is really trouble brewing!" Some feeling fought against this in Felix, but, suspecting it to be mere jealousy, he decided to take her. And, to the girl's rather puzzled delight, they arrived at Becket that day in time for dinner. It was not too reassuring to find John there, too. Stanley had also wired to him. The matter must indeed be serious!

The usual week-end was in progress. Clara had made one of her greatest efforts. A Bulgarian had providentially written a book in which he showed, beyond doubt, that persons fed on brown bread, potatoes, and margarine, gave the most satisfactory results of all. It was a discovery of the first value as a topic for her dinner-table—seeming to solve the whole vexed problem of the laborers almost at one stroke. If they could only be got to feed themselves on this perfect programme, what a saving of the situation! On those three edibles, the Bulgarian said—and he had been well translated—a family of five could be maintained at full efficiency for a shilling per day. Why! that would leave nearly eight shillings a week, in many cases more, for rent, firing, insurance, the man's tobacco, and the children's boots. There would be no more of that terrible pinching by the mothers, to feed the husband and children properly, of which one heard so much; no more lamentable deterioration in our stock! Brown bread, potatoes, margarine—quite a great deal could be provided for seven shillings! And what was more delicious than a well-baked potato with margarine of good quality? The carbohydrates—or was it hybocardrates—ah, yes! the kybohadrates—would be present in really sufficient quantity! Little else was talked of all through dinner at her end of the table. Above the flowers which Frances Freeland always insisted on arranging—and very charmingly—when she was there—over bare shoulders and white shirt-fronts, those words bombed and rebombed. Brown bread, potatoes, margarine, carbohydrates, calorific! They mingled with the creaming sizzle of champagne, with the soft murmur of well-bred deglutition. White bosoms heaved and eyebrows rose at them. And now and again some Bigwig versed in science murmured the word 'Fats.' An agricultural population fed to the point of efficiency without disturbance of the existing state of things! Eureka! If only into the bargain they could be induced to bake their own brown bread and cook their potatoes well! Faces flushed, eyes brightened, and teeth shone. It was the best, the most stimulating, dinner ever swallowed in that room. Nor was it until each male guest had eaten, drunk, and talked himself into torpor suitable to the company of his wife, that the three brothers could sit in the smoking-room together, undisturbed.

When Stanley had described his interview with 'that woman,' his glimpse of the red blouse, and the laborers' meeting, there was a silence before John said:

"It might be as well if Tod would send his two youngsters abroad for a bit."

Felix shook his head.

"I don't think he would, and I don't think they'd go. But we might try to get those two to see that anything the poor devils of laborers do is bound to recoil on themselves, fourfold. I suppose," he added, with sudden malice, "a laborers' rising would have no chance?"

Neither John nor Stanley winced.

"Rising? Why should they rise?"

"They did in '32."

"In '32!" repeated John. "Agriculture had its importance then. Now it has none. Besides, they've no cohesion, no power, like the miners or railway men. Rising? No chance, no earthly! Weight of metal's dead against it."

Felix smiled.

"Money and guns! Guns and money! Confess with me, brethren, that we're glad of metal."

John stared and Stanley drank off his whiskey and potash. Felix really was a bit 'too thick' sometimes. Then Stanley said:

"Wonder what Tod thinks of it all. Will you go over, Felix, and advise that our young friends be more considerate to these poor beggars?"

Felix nodded. And with 'Good night, old man' all round, and no shaking of the hands, the three brothers dispersed.

But behind Felix, as he opened his bedroom door, a voice whispered:

"Dad!" And there, in the doorway of the adjoining room, was Nedda in her dressing-gown.

"Do come in for a minute. I've been waiting up. You ARE late."

Felix followed her into her room. The pleasure he would once have had in this midnight conspiracy was superseded now, and he stood blinking at her gravely. In that blue gown, with her dark hair falling on its lace collar and her face so round and childish, she seemed more than ever to have defrauded him. Hooking her arm in his, she drew him to the window; and Felix thought: 'She just wants to talk to me about Derek. Dog in the manger that I am! Here goes to be decent!' So he said:

"Well, my dear?"

Nedda pressed his hand with a little coaxing squeeze.

"Daddy, darling, I do love you!"

And, though Felix knew that she had grasped what he was feeling, a sort of warmth spread in him. She had begun counting his fingers with one of her own, sitting close beside him. The warmth in Felix deepened, but he thought: 'She must want a good deal out of me!' Then she began:

"Why did we come down again? I know there's something wrong! It's hard not to know, when you're anxious." And she sighed. That little sigh affected Felix.

"I'd always rather know the truth, Dad. Aunt Clara said something about a fire at the Mallorings'."

Felix stole a look at her. Yes! There was a lot in this child of his! Depth, warmth, and strength to hold to things. No use to treat her as a child! And he answered:

"My dear, there's really nothing beyond what you know—our young man and Sheila are hotheads, and things over there are working up a bit. We must try and smooth them down."

"Dad, ought I to back him whatever he does?"

What a question! The more so that one cannot answer superficially the questions of those whom one loves.

"Ah!" he said at last. "I don't know yet. Some things it's not your duty to do; that's certain. It can't be right to do things simply because he does them—THAT'S not real—however fond one is."

"No; I feel that. Only, it's so hard to know what I do really think—there's always such a lot trying to make one feel that only what's nice and cosy is right!"

And Felix thought: 'I've been brought up to believe that only Russian girls care for truth. It seems I was wrong. The saints forbid I should be a stumbling-block to my own daughter searching for it! And yet—where's it all leading? Is this the same child that told me only the other night she wanted to know everything? She's a woman now! So much for love!' And he said:

"Let's go forward quietly, without expecting too much of ourselves."

"Yes, Dad; only I distrust myself so."

"No one ever got near the truth who didn't."

"Can we go over to Joyfields to-morrow? I don't think I could bear a whole day of Bigwigs and eating, with this hanging—"

"Poor Bigwigs! All right! We'll go. And now, bed; and think of nothing!"

Her whisper tickled his ear:

"You are a darling to me, Dad!"

He went out comforted.

And for some time after she had forgotten everything he leaned out of his window, smoking cigarettes, and trying to see the body and soul of night. How quiet she was—night, with her mystery, bereft of moon, in whose darkness seemed to vibrate still the song of the cuckoos that had been calling so all day! And whisperings of leaves communed with Felix.

CHAPTER XXI

What Tod thought of all this was, perhaps, as much of an enigma to Tod as to his three brothers, and never more so than on that Sunday morning when two police constables appeared at his door with a warrant for the arrest of Tryst. After regarding them fixedly for full thirty seconds, he said, "Wait!" and left them in the doorway.

Kirsteen was washing breakfast things which had a leadless glaze, and Tryst's three children, extremely tidy, stood motionless at the edge of the little scullery, watching.

When she had joined him in the kitchen Tod shut the door.

"Two policemen," he said, "want Tryst. Are they to have him?"

In the life together of these two there had, from the very start, been a queer understanding as to who should decide what. It had become by now so much a matter of instinct that combative consultations, which bulk so large in married lives, had no place in theirs. A frowning tremor passed over her face.

"I suppose they must. Derek is out. Leave it to me, Tod, and take the tinies into the orchard."

Tod took the three little Trysts to the very spot where Derek and Nedda had gazed over the darkening fields in exchanging that first kiss, and, sitting on the stump of the apple-tree he had cut down, he presented each of them with an apple. While they ate, he stared. And his dog stared at him. How far there worked in Tod the feelings of an ordinary man watching three small children whose only parent the law was just taking into its charge it would be rash to say, but his eyes were extremely blue and there was a frown between them.

"Well, Biddy?" he said at last.

Biddy did not reply; the habit of being a mother had imposed on her, together with the gravity of her little, pale, oval face, a peculiar talent for silence. But the round-cheeked Susie said:

"Billy can eat cores."

After this statement, silence was broken only by munching, till Tod remarked:

"What makes things?"

The children, having the instinct that he had not asked them, but himself, came closer. He had in his hand a little beetle.

"This beetle lives in rotten wood; nice chap, isn't he?"

"We kill beetles; we're afraid of them." So Susie.

They were now round Tod so close that Billy was standing on one of his large feet, Susie leaning her elbows on one of his broad knees, and Biddy's slender little body pressed against his huge arm.

"No," said Tod; "beetles are nice chaps."

"The birds eats them," remarked Billy.

"This beetle," said Tod, "eats wood. It eats through trees and the trees get rotten."

Biddy spoke:

"Then they don't give no more apples." Tod put the beetle down and Billy got off his foot to tread on it. When he had done his best the beetle emerged and vanished in the grass. Tod, who had offered no remonstrance, stretched out his hand and replaced Billy on his foot.

"What about my treading on you, Billy?" he said.

"Why?"

"I'm big and you're little."

On Billy's square face came a puzzled defiance. If he had not been early taught his station he would evidently have found some poignant retort. An intoxicated humblebee broke the silence by buzzing into Biddy's fluffed-out, corn-gold hair. Tod took it off with his hand.

"Lovely chap, isn't he?"

The children, who had recoiled, drew close again, while the drunken bee crawled feebly in the cage of Tod's large hand.

"Bees sting," said Biddy; "I fell on a bee and it stang me!"

"You stang it first," said Tod. "This chap wouldn't sting—not for worlds. Stroke it!"

Biddy put out her little, pale finger but stayed it a couple of inches from the bee.

"Go on," said Tod.

Opening her mouth a little, Biddy went on and touched the bee.

"It's soft," she said. "Why don't it buzz?"

"I want to stroke it, too," said Susie. And Billy stamped a little on Tod's foot.

"No," said Tod; "only Biddy."

There was perfect silence till the dog, rising, approached its nose, black with a splash of pinky whiteness on the end of the bridge, as if to love the bee.

"No," said Tod. The dog looked at him, and his yellow-brown eyes were dark with anxiety.

"It'll sting the dog's nose," said Biddy, and Susie and Billy came yet closer.

It was at this moment, when the heads of the dog, the bee, Tod, Biddy, Susie, and Billy might have been contained within a noose three feet in diameter, that Felix dismounted from Stanley's car and, coming from the cottage, caught sight of that little idyll under the dappled sunlight, green, and blossom. It was something from the core of life, out of the heartbeat of things—like a rare picture or song, the revelation of the childlike wonder and delight, to which all other things are but the supernumerary casings—a little pool of simplicity into which fever and yearning sank and were for a moment drowned. And quite possibly he would have gone away without disturbing them if the dog had not growled and wagged his tail.

But when the children had been sent down into the field he experienced the usual difficulty in commencing a talk with Tod. How far was his big brother within reach of mere unphilosophic statements; how far was he going to attend to facts?

"We came back yesterday," he began; "Nedda and I. You know all about Derek and Nedda, I suppose?"

Tod nodded.

"What do you think of it?"

"He's a good chap."

"Yes," murmured Felix, "but a firebrand. This business at Malloring's—what's it going to lead to, Tod? We must look out, old man. Couldn't you send Derek and Sheila abroad for a bit?"

"Wouldn't go."

"But, after all, they're dependent on you."

"Don't say that to them; I should never see them again."

Felix, who felt the instinctive wisdom of that remark, answered helplessly:

"What's to be done, then?"

"Sit tight." And Tod's hand came down on Felix's shoulder.

"But suppose they get into real trouble? Stanley and John don't like it; and there's Mother." And Felix added, with sudden heat, "Besides, I can't stand Nedda being made anxious like this."

Tod removed his hand. Felix would have given a good deal to have been able to see into the brain behind the frowning stare of those blue eyes.

"Can't help by worrying. What must be, will. Look at the birds!"

The remark from any other man would have irritated Felix profoundly; coming from Tod, it seemed the unconscious expression of a really felt philosophy. And, after all, was he not right? What was this life they all lived but a ceaseless worrying over what was to come? Was not all man's unhappiness caused by nervous anticipations of the future? Was not that the disease, and the misfortune, of the age; perhaps of all the countless ages man had lived through?

With an effort he recalled his thoughts from that far flight. What if Tod had rediscovered the secret of the happiness that belonged to birds and lilies of the field—such overpowering interest in the moment that the future did not exist? Why not? Were not the only minutes when he himself was really happy those when he lost himself in work, or love? And why were they so few? For want of pressure to the square moment. Yes! All unhappiness was fear and lack of vitality to live the present fully. That was why love and fighting were such poignant ecstasies—they lived their present to the full. And so it would be almost comic to say to those young people: Go away; do nothing in this matter in which your interest and your feelings are concerned! Don't have a present, because you've got to have a future! And he said:

"I'd give a good deal for your power of losing yourself in the moment, old boy!"

"That's all right," said Tod. He was examining the bark of a tree, which had nothing the matter with it, so far as Felix could see; while his dog, who had followed them, carefully examined Tod. Both were obviously lost in the moment. And with a feeling of defeat Felix led the way back to the cottage.

In the brick-floored kitchen Derek was striding up and down; while around him, in an equilateral triangle, stood the three women, Sheila at the window, Kirsteen by the open hearth, Nedda against the wall opposite. Derek exclaimed at once:

"Why did you let them, Father? Why didn't you refuse to give him up?"

Felix looked at his brother. In the doorway, where his curly head nearly touched the wood, Tod's face was puzzled, rueful. He did not answer.

"Any one could have said he wasn't here. We could have smuggled him away. Now the brutes have got him! I don't know that, though—" And he made suddenly for the door.

Tod did not budge. "No," he said.

Derek turned; his mother was at the other door; at the window, the two girls.

The comedy of this scene, if there be comedy in the face of grief, was for the moment lost on Felix.

'It's come,' he thought. 'What now?'

Derek had flung himself down at the table and was burying his head in his hands. Sheila went up to

him.

"Don't be a fool, Derek."

However right and natural that remark, it seemed inadequate.

And Felix looked at Nedda. The blue motor scarf she had worn had slipped off her dark head; her face was white; her eyes, fixed immovably on Derek, seemed waiting for him to recognize that she was there. The boy broke out again:

"It was treachery! We took him in; and now we've given him up. They wouldn't have touched US if we'd got him away. Not they!"

Felix literally heard the breathing of Tod on one side of him and of Kirsteen on the other. He crossed over and stood opposite his nephew.

"Look here, Derek," he said; "your mother was quite right. You might have put this off for a day or two; but it was bound to come. You don't know the reach of the law. Come, my dear fellow! It's no good making a fuss, that's childish—the thing is to see that the man gets every chance."

Derek looked up. Probably he had not yet realized that his uncle was in the room; and Felix was astonished at his really haggard face; as if the incident had bitten and twisted some vital in his body.

"He trusted us."

Felix saw Kirsteen quiver and flinch, and understood why they had none of them felt quite able to turn their backs on that display of passion. Something deep and unreasoning was on the boy's side; something that would not fit with common sense and the habits of civilized society; something from an Arab's tent or a Highland glen. Then Tod came up behind and put his hands on his son's shoulders.

"Come!" he said; "milk's spilt."

"All right!" said Derek gruffly, and he went to the door.

Felix made Nedda a sign and she slipped out after him.

CHAPTER XXII

Nedda, her blue head-gear trailing, followed along at the boy's side while he passed through the orchard and two fields; and when he threw himself down under an ash-tree she, too, subsided, waiting for him to notice her.

"I am here," she said at last.

At that ironic little speech Derek sat up.

"It'll kill him," he said.

"But—to burn things, Derek! To light horrible cruel flames, and burn things, even if they aren't alive!"

Derek said through his teeth:

"It's I who did it! If I'd never talked to him he'd have been like the others. They were taking him in a cart, like a calf."

Nedda got possession of his hand and held it tight.

That was a bitter and frightening hour under the faintly rustling ash-tree, while the wind sprinkled over her flakes of the may blossom, just past its prime. Love seemed now so little a thing, seemed to have lost warmth and power, seemed like a suppliant outside a door. Why did trouble come like this the moment one felt deeply?

The church bell was tolling; they could see the little congregation pass across the churchyard into that weekly dream they knew too well. And presently the drone emerged, mingling with the voices outside, of sighing trees and trickling water, of the rub of wings, birds' songs, and the callings of beasts

everywhere beneath the sky.

In spite of suffering because love was not the first emotion in his heart, the girl could only feel he was right not to be loving her; that she ought to be glad of what was eating up all else within him. It was ungenerous, unworthy, to want to be loved at such a moment. Yet she could not help it! This was her first experience of the eternal tug between self and the loved one pulled in the hearts of lovers. Would she ever come to feel happy when he was just doing what he thought was right? And she drew a little away from him; then perceived that unwittingly she had done the right thing, for he at once tried to take her hand again. And this was her first lesson, too, in the nature of man. If she did not give her hand, he wanted it! But she was not one of those who calculate in love; so she gave him her hand at once. That went to his heart; and he put his arm round her, till he could feel the emotion under those stays that would not be drawn any closer. In this nest beneath the ash-tree they sat till they heard the organ wheeze and the furious sound of the last hymn, and saw the brisk coming-forth with its air of, 'Thank God! And now, to eat!' till at last there was no stir again about the little church—no stir at all save that of nature's ceaseless thanksgiving. . . .

Tod, his brown face still rueful, had followed those two out into the air, and Sheila had gone quickly after him. Thus left alone with his sister-in-law, Felix said gravely:

"If you don't want the boy to get into real trouble, do all you can to show him that the last way in the world to help these poor fellows is to let them fall foul of the law. It's madness to light flames you can't put out. What happened this morning? Did the man resist?"

Her face still showed how bitter had been her mortification, and he was astonished that she kept her voice so level and emotionless.

"No. He went with them quite quietly. The back door was open; he could have walked out. I did not advise him to. I'm glad no one saw his face except myself. You see," she added, "he's devoted to Derek, and Derek knows it; that's why he feels it so, and will feel it more and more. The boy has a great sense of honour, Felix."

Under that tranquillity Felix caught the pain and yearning in her voice. Yes! This woman really felt and saw. She was not one of those who make disturbance with their brains and powers of criticism; rebellion leaped out from the heat in her heart. But he said:

"Is it right to fan this flame? Do you think any good end is being served?" Waiting for her answer, he found himself gazing at the ghost of dark down on her upper lip, wondering that he had never noticed it before.

Very low, as if to herself, she said:

"I would kill myself to-day if I didn't believe that tyranny and injustice must end."

"In our time?"

"Perhaps not."

"Are you content to go on working for an Utopia that you will never see?"

"While our laborers are treated and housed more like dogs than human beings, while the best life under the sun—because life on the soil might be the best life—is despised and starved, and made the plaything of people's tongues, neither I nor mine are going to rest."

The admiration she inspired in Felix at that moment was mingled with a kind of pity. He said impressively:

"Do you know the forces you are up against? Have you looked into the unfathomable heart of this trouble? Understood the tug of the towns, the call of money to money; grasped the destructive restlessness of modern life; the abysmal selfishness of people when you threaten their interests; the age-long apathy of those you want to help? Have you grasped all these?"

"And more!"

Felix held out his hand. "Then," he said, "you are truly brave!"

She shook her head.

"It got bitten into me very young. I was brought up in the Highlands among the crofters in their worst days. In some ways the people here are not so badly off, but they're still slaves."

"Except that they can go to Canada if they want, and save old England."

She flushed. "I hate irony."

Felix looked at her with ever-increasing interest; she certainly was of the kind that could be relied on to make trouble.

"Ah!" he murmured. "Don't forget that when we can no longer smile we can only swell and burst. It IS some consolation to reflect that by the time we've determined to do something really effectual for the ploughmen of England there'll be no ploughmen left!"

"I cannot smile at that."

And, studying her face, Felix thought, 'You're right there! You'll get no help from humor.' . . .

Early that afternoon, with Nedda between them, Felix and his nephew were speeding toward Transham.

The little town—a hamlet when Edmund Moreton dropped the E from his name and put up the works which Stanley had so much enlarged—had monopolized by now the hill on which it stood. Living entirely on its ploughs, it yet had but little of the true look of a British factory town, having been for the most part built since ideas came into fashion. With its red roofs and chimneys, it was only moderately ugly, and here and there an old white, timbered house still testified to the fact that it had once been country. On this fine Sunday afternoon the population were in the streets, and presented all that long narrow-headedness, that twist and distortion of feature, that perfect absence of beauty in face, figure, and dress, which is the glory of the Briton who has been for three generations in a town. 'And my great-grandfather'—thought Felix—'did all this! God rest his soul!'

At a rather new church on the very top they halted, and went in to inspect the Morton memorials. There they were, in dedicated corners. 'Edmund and his wife Catherine'—'Charles Edmund and his wife Florence'—'Maurice Edmund and his wife Dorothy.' Clara had set her foot down against 'Stanley and his wife Clara' being in the fourth; her soul was above ploughs, and she, of course, intended to be buried at Becket, as Clara, dowager Lady Freeland, for her efforts in regard to the land. Felix, who had a tendency to note how things affected other people, watched Derek's inspection of these memorials and marked that they excited in him no tendency to ribaldry. The boy, indeed, could hardly be expected to see in them what Felix saw—an epitome of the great, perhaps fatal, change that had befallen his native country; a record of the beginning of that far-back fever, whose course ran ever faster, which had emptied country into town and slowly, surely, changed the whole spirit of life. When Edmund Moreton, about 1780, took the infection disseminated by the development of machinery, and left the farming of his acres to make money, that thing was done which they were all now talking about trying to undo, with their cries of: "Back to the land! Back to peace and sanity in the shade of the elms! Back to the simple and patriarchal state of feeling which old documents disclose. Back to a time before these little squashed heads and bodies and features jugged every which way; before there were long squashed streets of gray houses; long squashed chimneys emitting smoke-blight; long squashed rows of graves; and long squashed columns of the daily papers. Back to well-fed countrymen who could not read, with Common rights, and a kindly feeling for old 'Moretons,' who had a kindly feeling for them!" Back to all that? A dream! Sirs! A dream! There was nothing for it now, but —progress! Progress! On with the dance! Let engines rip, and the little, squash-headed fellows with them! Commerce, literature, religion, science, politics, all taking a hand; what a glorious chance had money, ugliness, and ill will! Such were the reflections of Felix before the brass tablet:

"IN LOVING MEMORY OF EDMUND MORTON AND HIS DEVOTED WIFE CATHERINE.

AT REST IN THE LORD. A.D., 1816."

From the church they went about their proper business, to interview a Mr. Pogram, of the firm of Pogram & Collet, solicitors, in whose hands the interests of many citizens of Transham and the country round were almost securely deposited. He occupied, curiously enough, the house where Edmund Morton himself had lived, conducting his works on the one hand and the squirearchy of the parish on the other. Incorporated now into the line of a long, loose street, it still stood rather apart from its neighbors, behind some large shrubs and trees of the holmoak variety.

Mr. Pogram, who was finishing his Sunday after-lunch cigar, was a short, clean-shaved man with strong cheeks and those rather lustful gray-blue eyes which accompany a sturdy figure. He rose when they were introduced, and, uncrossing his fat little thighs, asked what he could do for them.

Felix propounded the story of the arrest, so far as might be, in words of one syllable, avoiding the

sentimental aspect of the question, and finding it hard to be on the side of disorder, as any modern writer might. There was something, however, about Mr. Pogram that reassured him. The small fellow looked a fighter—looked as if he would sympathize with Tryst's want of a woman about him. The tusked but soft-hearted little brute kept nodding his round, sparsely covered head while he listened, exuding a smell of lavender-water, cigars, and gutta-percha. When Felix ceased he said, rather dryly:

"Sir Gerald Malloring? Yes. Sir Gerald's country agents, I rather think, are Messrs. Porter of Worcester. Quite so."

And a conviction that Mr. Pogram thought they should have been Messrs. Pogram & Collet of Transham confirmed in Felix the feeling that they had come to the right man.

"I gather," Mr. Pogram said, and he looked at Nedda with a glance from which he obviously tried to remove all earthly desires, "that you, sir, and your nephew wish to go and see the man. Mrs. Pogram will be delighted to show Miss Freeland our garden. Your great-grandfather, sir, on the mother's side, lived in this house. Delighted to meet you; often heard of your books; Mrs. Pogram has read one—let me see—"The Bannister,' was it?"

"The Balustrade," Felix answered gently.

Mr. Pogram rang the bell. "Quite so," he said. "Assizes are just over so that he can't come up for trial till August or September; pity—great pity! Bail in cases of arson—for a laborer, very doubtful! Ask your mistress to come, please."

There entered a faded rose of a woman on whom Mr. Pogram in his time had evidently made a great impression. A vista of two or three little Pograms behind her was hastily removed by the maid. And they all went into the garden.

"Through here," said Mr. Pogram, coming to a side door in the garden wall, "we can make a short cut to the police station. As we go along I shall ask you one or two blunt questions." And he thrust out his under lip:

"For instance, what's your interest in this matter?"

Before Felix could answer, Derek had broken in:

"My uncle has come out of kindness. It's my affair, sir. The man has been tyrannously treated."

Mr. Pogram cocked his eye. "Yes, yes; no doubt, no doubt! He's not confessed, I understand?"

"No; but—"

Mr. Pogram laid a finger on his lips.

"Never say die; that's what we're here for. So," he went on, "you're a rebel; Socialist, perhaps. Dear me! Well, we're all of us something, nowadays—I'm a humanitarian myself. Often say to Mrs. Pogram—humanity's the thing in this age—and so it is! Well, now, what line shall we take?" And he rubbed his hands. "Shall we have a try at once to upset what evidence they've got? We should want a strong alibi. Our friends here will commit if they can—nobody likes arson. I understand he was sleeping in your cottage. His room, now? Was it on the ground floor?"

"Yes; but—"

Mr. Pogram frowned, as who should say: Ah! Be careful! "He had better reserve his defence and give us time to turn round," he said rather shortly.

They had arrived at the police station and after a little parley were ushered into the presence of Tryst.

The big laborer was sitting on the stool in his cell, leaning back against the wall, his hands loose and open at his sides. His gaze passed at once from Felix and Mr. Pogram, who were in advance, to Derek; and the dumb soul seemed suddenly to look through, as one may see all there is of spirit in a dog reach out to its master. This was the first time Felix had seen him who had caused already so much anxiety, and that broad, almost brutal face, with the yearning fidelity in its tragic eyes, made a powerful impression on him. It was the sort of face one did not forget and might be glad of not remembering in dreams. What had put this yearning spirit into so gross a frame, destroying its solid coherence? Why could not Tryst have been left by nature just a beer-loving serf, devoid of grief for his dead wife, devoid of longing for the nearest he could get to her again, devoid of susceptibility to this young man's influence? And the thought of all that was before the mute creature, sitting there in heavy, hopeless

patience, stung Felix's heart so that he could hardly bear to look him in the face.

Derek had taken the man's thick, brown hand; Felix could see with what effort the boy was biting back his feelings.

"This is Mr. Pogram, Bob. A solicitor who'll do all he can for you."

Felix looked at Mr. Pogram. The little man was standing with arms akimbo; his face the queerest mixture of shrewdness and compassion, and he was giving off an almost needlessly strong scent of gutta-percha.

"Yes, my man," he said, "you and I are going to have a talk when these gentlemen have done with you," and, turning on his heel, he began to touch up the points of his little pink nails with a penknife, in front of the constable who stood outside the cell door, with his professional air of giving a man a chance.

Invaded by a feeling, apt to come to him in Zoos, that he was watching a creature who had no chance to escape being watched, Felix also turned; but, though his eyes saw not, his ears could not help hearing.

"Forgive me, Bob! It's I who got you into this!"

"No, sir; naught to forgive. I'll soon be back, and then they'll see!"

By the reddening of Mr. Pogram's ears Felix formed the opinion that the little man, also, could hear.

"Tell her not to fret, Mr. Derek. I'd like a shirt, in case I've got to stop. The children needn' know where I be; though I an't ashamed."

"It may be a longer job than you think, Bob."

In the silence that followed Felix could not help turning. The laborer's eyes were moving quickly round his cell, as if for the first time he realized that he was shut up; suddenly he brought those big hands of his together and clasped them between his knees, and again his gaze ran round the cell. Felix heard the clearing of a throat close by, and, more than ever conscious of the scent of gutta-percha, grasped its connection with compassion in the heart of Mr. Pogram. He caught Derek's muttered, "Don't ever think we're forgetting you, Bob," and something that sounded like, "And don't ever say you did it." Then, passing Felix and the little lawyer, the boy went out. His head was held high, but tears were running down his cheeks. Felix followed.

A bank of clouds, gray-white, was rising just above the red-tiled roofs, but the sun still shone brightly. And the thought of the big laborer sitting there knocked and knocked at Felix's heart mournfully, miserably. He had a warmer feeling for his young nephew than he had ever had. Mr. Pogram rejoined them soon, and they walked on together,

"Well?" said Felix.

Mr. Pogram answered in a somewhat grumpy voice:

"Not guilty, and reserve defence. You have influence, young man! Dumb as a waiter. Poor devil!" And not another word did he say till they had re-entered his garden.

Here the ladies, surrounded by many little Pograms, were having tea. And seated next the little lawyer, whose eyes were fixed on Nedda, Felix was able to appreciate that in happier mood he exhaled almost exclusively the scent of lavender-water and cigars.

CHAPTER XXIII

On their way back to Becket, after the visit to Tryst, Felix and Nedda dropped Derek half-way on the road to Joyfields. They found that the Becket household already knew of the arrest. Woven into a dirge on the subject of 'the Land,' the last town doings, and adventures on golf courses, it formed the genial topic of the dinner-table; for the Bulgarian with his carbohydrates was already a wonder of the past. The Bigwigs of this week-end were quite a different lot from those of three weeks ago, and comparatively homogeneous, having only three different plans for settling the land question, none of

which, fortunately, involved any more real disturbance of the existing state of things than the potato, brown-bread plan, for all were based on the belief held by the respectable press, and constructive portions of the community, that omelette can be made without breaking eggs. On one thing alone, the whole house party was agreed—the importance of the question. Indeed, a sincere conviction on this point was like the card one produces before one is admitted to certain functions. No one came to Becket without it; or, if he did, he begged, borrowed, or stole it the moment he smelled Clara's special pot-pourri in the hall; and, though he sometimes threw it out of the railway-carriage window in returning to town, there was nothing remarkable about that. The conversational debauch of the first night's dinner—and, alas! there were only two even at Becket during a week-end—had undoubtedly revealed the feeling, which had set in of late, that there was nothing really wrong with the condition of the agricultural laborer, the only trouble being that the unreasonable fellow did not stay on the land. It was believed that Henry Wiltram, in conjunction with Colonel Martlett, was on the point of promoting a policy for imposing penalties on those who attempted to leave it without good reason, such reason to be left to the discretion of impartial district boards, composed each of one laborer, one farmer, and one landowner, decision going by favor of majority. And though opinion was rather freely expressed that, since the voting would always be two to one against, this might trench on the liberty of the subject, many thought that the interests of the country were so much above this consideration that something of the sort would be found, after all, to be the best arrangement. The cruder early notions of resettling the land by fostering peasant proprietorship, with habitable houses and security of tenure, were already under a cloud, since it was more than suspected that they would interfere unduly with the game laws and other soundly vested interests. Mere penalization of those who (or whose fathers before them) had at great pains planted so much covert, enclosed so much common, and laid so much country down in grass was hardly a policy for statesmen. A section of the guests, and that perhaps strongest because most silent, distinctly favored this new departure of Henry Wiltram's. Coupled with his swinging corn tax, it was indubitably a stout platform.

A second section of the guests spoke openly in favor of Lord Settleham's policy of good-will. The whole thing, they thought, must be voluntary, and they did not see any reason why, if it were left to the kindness and good intentions of the landowner, there should be any land question at all. Boards would be formed in every county on which such model landowners as Sir Gerald Malloring, or Lord Settleham himself, would sit, to apply the principles of goodwill. Against this policy the only criticism was levelled by Felix. He could have agreed, he said, if he had not noticed that Lord Settleham, and nearly all landowners, were thoroughly satisfied with their existing good-will and averse to any changes in their education that might foster an increase of it. If—he asked—landowners were so full of good-will, and so satisfied that they could not be improved in that matter, why had they not already done what was now proposed, and settled the land question? He himself believed that the land question, like any other, was only capable of settlement through improvement in the spirit of all concerned, but he found it a little difficult to credit Lord Settleham and the rest of the landowners with sincerity in the matter so long as they were unconscious of any need for their own improvement. According to him, they wanted it both ways, and, so far as he could see, they meant to have it!

His use of the word sincere, in connection with Lord Settleham, was at once pounced on. He could not know Lord Settleham—one of the most sincere of men. Felix freely admitted that he did not, and hastened to explain that he did not question the—er—parliamentary sincerity of Lord Settleham and his followers. He only ventured to doubt whether they realized the hold that human nature had on them. His experience, he said, of the houses where they had been bred, and the seminaries where they had been trained, had convinced him that there was still a conspiracy on foot to blind Lord Settleham and those others concerning all this; and, since they were themselves part of the conspiracy, there was very little danger of their unmasking it. At this juncture Felix was felt to have exceeded the limit of fair criticism, and only that toleration toward literary men of a certain reputation, in country houses, as persons brought there to say clever and irresponsible things, prevented people from taking him seriously.

The third section of the guests, unquestionably more static than the others, confined themselves to pointing out that, though the land question was undoubtedly serious, nothing whatever would result from placing any further impositions upon landowners. For, after all, what was land? Simply capital invested in a certain way, and very poorly at that. And what was capital? Simply a means of causing wages to be paid. And whether they were paid to men who looked after birds and dogs, loaded your guns, beat your coverts, or drove you to the shoot, or paid to men who ploughed and fertilized the land, what did it matter? To dictate to a man to whom he was to pay wages was, in the last degree, un-English. Everybody knew the fate which had come, or was coming, upon capital. It was being driven out of the country by leaps and bounds—though, to be sure, it still perversely persisted in yielding every year a larger revenue by way of income tax. And it would be dastardly to take advantage of land just because it was the only sort of capital which could not fly the country in times of need. Stanley himself, though—as became a host—he spoke little and argued not at all, was distinctly of this faction; and Clara

sometimes felt uneasy lest her efforts to focus at Becket all interest in the land question should not quite succeed in outweighing the passivity of her husband's attitude. But, knowing that it is bad policy to raise the whip too soon, she trusted to her genius to bring him 'with one run at the finish,' as they say, and was content to wait.

There was universal sympathy with the Mallorings. If a model landlord like Malloring had trouble with his people, who—who should be immune? Arson! It was the last word! Felix, who secretly shared Nedda's horror of the insensate cruelty of flames, listened, nevertheless, to the jubilation that they had caught the fellow, with profound disturbance. For the memory of the big laborer seated against the wall, his eyes haunting round his cell, quarrelled fiercely with his natural abhorrence of any kind of violence, and his equally natural dislike of what brought anxiety into his own life—and the life, almost as precious, of his little daughter. Scarcely a word of the evening's conversation but gave him in high degree the feeling: How glib all this is, how far from reality! How fattened up with shell after shell of comfort and security! What do these people know, what do they realize, of the pressure and beat of raw life that lies behind—what do even I, who have seen this prisoner, know? For us it's as simple as killing a rat that eats our corn, or a flea that sucks our blood. Arson! Destructive brute—lock him up! And something in Felix said: For order, for security, this may be necessary. But something also said: Our smug attitude is odious!

He watched his little daughter closely, and several times marked the color rush up in her face, and once could have sworn he saw tears in her eyes. If the temper of this talk were trying to him, hardened at a hundred dinner-tables, what must it be to a young and ardent creature! And he was relieved to find, on getting to the drawing-room, that she had slipped behind the piano and was chatting quietly with her Uncle John. .

As to whether this or that man liked her, Nedda perhaps was not more ignorant than other women; and she had noted a certain warmth and twinkle in Uncle John's eyes the other evening, a certain rather jolly tendency to look at her when he should have been looking at the person to whom he was talking; so that she felt toward him a trustful kindness not altogether unmingled with a sense that he was in that Office which controls the destinies of those who 'get into trouble.' The motives even of statesmen, they say, are mixed; how much more so, then, of girls in love! Tucked away behind a Steinway, which instinct told her was not for use, she looked up under her lashes at her uncle's still military figure and said softly:

"It was awfully good of you to come, too, Uncle John."

And John, gazing down at that round, dark head, and those slim, pretty, white shoulders, answered:

"Not at all—very glad to get a breath of fresh air."

And he stealthily tightened his white waistcoat—a rite neglected of late; the garment seemed to him at the moment unnecessarily loose.

"You have so much experience, Uncle. Do you think violent rebellion is ever justifiable?"

"I do not."

Nedda sighed. "I'm glad you think that," she murmured, "because I don't think it is, either. I do so want you to like Derek, Uncle John, because—it's a secret from nearly every one—he and I are engaged."

John jerked his head up a little, as though he had received a slight blow. The news was not palatable. He kept his form, however, and answered:

"Oh! Really! Ah!"

Nedda said still more softly: "Please don't judge him by the other night; he wasn't very nice then, I know."

John cleared his throat.

Instinct warned her that he agreed, and she said rather sadly:

"You see, we're both awfully young. It must be splendid to have experience."

Over John's face, with its double line between the brows, its double line in the thin cheeks, its single firm line of mouth beneath a gray moustache, there passed a little grimace.

"As to being young," he said, "that'll change for the—er—better only too fast."

What was it in this girl that reminded him of that one with whom he had lived but two years, and mourned fifteen? Was it her youth? Was it that quick way of lifting her eyes, and looking at him with such clear directness? Or the way her hair grew? Or what?

"Do you like the people here, Uncle John?"

The question caught John, as it were, between wind and water. Indeed, all her queries seemed to be trying to incite him to those wide efforts of mind which bring into use the philosophic nerve; and it was long since he had generalized afresh about either things or people, having fallen for many years past into the habit of reaching his opinions down out of some pigeonhole or other. To generalize was a youthful practice that one took off as one takes certain garments off babies when they come to years of discretion. But since he seemed to be in for it, he answered rather shortly: "Not at all."

Nedda sighed again.

"Nor do I. They make me ashamed of myself."

John, whose dislike of the Bigwigs was that of the dogged worker of this life for the dogged talkers, wrinkled his brows:

"How's that?"

"They make me feel as if I were part of something heavy sitting on something else, and all the time talking about how to make things lighter for the thing it's sitting on."

A vague recollection of somebody—some writer, a dangerous one—having said something of this sort flitted through John.

"Do YOU think England is done for, Uncle—I mean about 'the Land'?"

In spite of his conviction that 'the country was in a bad way,' John was deeply, intimately shocked by that simple little question. Done for! Never! Whatever might be happening underneath, there must be no confession of that. No! the country would keep its form. The country would breathe through its nose, even if it did lose the race. It must never know, or let others know, even if it were beaten. And he said:

"What on earth put that into your head?"

"Only that it seems funny, if we're getting richer and richer, and yet all the time farther and farther away from the life that every one agrees is the best for health and happiness. Father put it into my head, making me look at the little, towney people in Transham this afternoon. I know I mean to begin at once to learn about farm work."

"You?" This pretty young thing with the dark head and the pale, slim shoulders! Farm work! Women were certainly getting queer. In his department he had almost daily evidence of that!

"I should have thought art was more in your line!"

Nedda looked up at him; and he was touched by that look, so straight and young.

"It's this. I don't believe Derek will be able to stay in England. When you feel very strongly about things it must be awfully difficult to."

In bewilderment John answered:

"Why! I should have said this was the country of all others for movements, and social work, and—and—cranks—" he paused.

"Yes; but those are all for curing the skin, and I suppose we're really dying of heart disease, aren't we? Derek feels that, anyway, and, you see, he's not a bit wise, not even patient—so I expect he'll have to go. I mean to be ready, anyway."

And Nedda got up. "Only, if he does something rash, don't let them hurt him, Uncle John, if you can help it."

John felt her soft fingers squeezing his almost desperately, as if her emotions had for the moment got out of hand. And he was moved, though he knew that the squeeze expressed feeling for his nephew, not for himself. When she slid away out of the big room all friendliness seemed to go out with her, and very soon after he himself slipped away to the smoking-room. There he was alone, and, lighting a cigar, because he still had on his long-tailed coat which did not go with that pipe he would so much have preferred, he stepped out of the French window into the warm, dark night. He walked slowly in his

evening pumps up a thin path between columbines and peonies, late tulips, forget-me-nots, and pansies peering up in the dark with queer, monkey faces. He had a love for flowers, rather starved for a long time past, and, strangely, liked to see them, not in the set and orderly masses that should seemingly have gone with his character, but in wilder beds, where one never knew what flower was coming next. Once or twice he stopped and bent down, ascertaining which kind it was, living its little life down there, then passed on in that mood of stammering thought which besets men of middle age who walk at night—a mood caught between memory of aspirations spun and over, and vision of aspirations that refuse to take shape. Why should they, any more—what was the use? And turning down another path he came on something rather taller than himself, that glowed in the darkness as though a great moon, or some white round body, had floated to within a few feet of the earth. Approaching, he saw it for what it was—a little magnolia-tree in the full of its white blossoms. Those clustering flower-stars, printed before him on the dark coat of the night, produced in John more feeling than should have been caused by a mere magnolia-tree; and he smoked somewhat furiously. Beauty, seeking whom it should upset, seemed, like a girl, to stretch out arms and say: "I am here!" And with a pang at heart, and a long ash on his cigar, between lips that quivered oddly, John turned on his heel and retraced his footsteps to the smoking-room. It was still deserted. Taking up a Review, he opened it at an article on 'the Land,' and, fixing his eyes on the first page, did not read it, but thought: 'That child! What folly! Engaged! H'm! To that young—! Why, they're babes! And what is it about her that reminds me—reminds me—What is it? Lucky devil, Felix—to have her for daughter! Engaged! The little thing's got her troubles before her. Wish I had! By George, yes—wish I had!' And with careful fingers he brushed off the ash that had fallen on his lapel. . .

The little thing who had her troubles before her, sitting in her bedroom window, had watched his white front and the glowing point of his cigar passing down there in the dark, and, though she did not know that they belonged to him, had thought: 'There's some one nice, anyway, who likes being out instead of in that stuffy drawing-room, playing bridge, and talking, talking.' Then she felt ashamed of her uncharitableness. After all, it was wrong to think of them like that. They did it for rest after all their hard work; and she—she did not work at all! If only Aunt Kirsteen would let her stay at Joyfields, and teach her all that Sheila knew! And lighting her candles, she opened her diary to write.

"Life," she wrote, "is like looking at the night. One never knows what's coming, only suspects, as in the darkness you suspect which trees are what, and try to see whether you are coming to the edge of anything. . . A moth has just flown into my candle before I could stop it! Has it gone quite out of the world? If so, why should it be different for us? The same great Something makes all life and death, all light and dark, all love and hate—then why one fate for one living thing, and the opposite for another? But suppose there IS nothing after death—would it make me say: 'I'd rather not live'? It would only make me delight more in life of every kind. Only human beings brood and are discontented, and trouble about future life. While Derek and I were sitting in that field this morning, a bumblebee flew to the bank and tucked its head into the grass and went to sleep, just tired out with flying and working at its flowers; it simply snoozed its head down and went off. We ought to live every minute to the utmost, and when we're tired out, tuck in our heads and sleep. . . . If only Derek is not brooding over that poor man! Poor man—all alone in the dark, with months of misery before him! Poor soul! Oh! I am sorry for all the unhappiness of people! I can't bear to think of it. I simply can't." And dropping her pen, Nedda went again to her window and leaned out. So sweet the air smelled that it made her ache with delight to breathe it in. Each leaf that lived out there, each flower, each blade of grass, were sworn to conspiracy of perfume. And she thought: 'They MUST all love each other; it all goes together so beautifully!' Then, mingled with the incense of the night, she caught the savor of woodsmoke. It seemed to make the whole scent even more delicious, but she thought, bewildered: 'Smoke! Cruel fire—burning the wood that once grew leaves like those. Oh! it IS so mixed!' It was a thought others have had before her.

CHAPTER XXIV

To see for himself how it fared with the big laborer at the hands of Preliminary Justice, Felix went into Transham with Stanley the following morning. John having departed early for town, the brothers had not further exchanged sentiments on the subject of what Stanley called 'the kick-up at Joyfields.' And just as night will sometimes disperse the brooding moods of nature, so it had brought to all three the feeling: 'Haven't we made too much of this? Haven't we been a little extravagant, and aren't we rather bored with the whole subject?' Arson was arson; a man in prison more or less was a man in prison more or less! This was especially Stanley's view, and he took the opportunity to say to Felix: "Look here, old

man, the thing is, of course, to see it in proportion."

It was with this intention, therefore, that Felix entered the building where the justice of that neighborhood was customarily dispensed. It was a species of small hall, somewhat resembling a chapel, with distempered walls, a platform, and benches for the public, rather well filled that morning—testimony to the stir the little affair had made. Felix, familiar with the appearance of London police courts, noted the efforts that had been made to create resemblance to those models of administration. The justices of the peace, hastily convoked and four in number, sat on the platform, with a semicircular backing of high gray screens and a green baize barrier in front of them, so that their legs and feet were quite invisible. In this way had been preserved the really essential feature of all human justice—at whose feet it is well known one must not look! Their faces, on the contrary, were entirely exposed to view, and presented that pleasing variety of type and unanimity of expression peculiar to men keeping an open mind. Below them, with his face toward the public, was placed a gray-bearded man at a table also covered with green baize, that emblem of authority. And to the side, at right angles, raised into the air, sat a little terrier of a man, with gingery, wired hair, obviously the more articulate soul of these proceedings. As Felix sat down to worship, he noticed Mr. Pogram at the green baize table, and received from the little man a nod and the faintest whiff of lavender and gutta-percha. The next moment he caught sight of Derek and Sheila, screwed sideways against one of the distempered walls, looking, with their frowning faces, for all the world like two young devils just turned out of hell. They did not greet him, and Felix set to work to study the visages of Justice. They impressed him, on the whole, more favorably than he had expected. The one to his extreme left, with a gray-whiskered face, was like a large and sleepy cat of mature age, who moved not, except to write a word now and then on the paper before him, or to hand back a document. Next to him, a man of middle age with bald forehead and dark, intelligent eyes seemed conscious now and again of the body of the court, and Felix thought: 'You have not been a magistrate long.' The chairman, who sat next, with the moustache of a heavy dragoon and gray hair parted in the middle, seemed, on the other hand, oblivious of the public, never once looking at them, and speaking so that they could not hear him, and Felix thought: 'You have been a magistrate too long.' Between him and the terrier man, the last of the four wrote diligently, below a clean, red face with clipped white moustache and little peaked beard. And Felix thought: 'Retired naval!' Then he saw that they were bringing in Tryst. The big laborer advanced between two constables, his broad, unshaven face held high, and his lowering eyes, through which his strange and tragical soul seemed looking, turned this way and that. Felix, who, no more than any one else, could keep his gaze off the trapped creature, felt again all the sensations of the previous afternoon.

"Guilty? or, Not guilty?" As if repeating something learned by heart, Tryst answered: "Not guilty, sir." And his big hands, at his sides, kept clenching and unclenching. The witnesses, four in number, began now to give their testimony. A sergeant of police recounted how he had been first summoned to the scene of burning, and afterward arrested Tryst; Sir Gerald's agent described the eviction and threats uttered by the evicted man; two persons, a stone-breaker and a tramp, narrated that they had seen him going in the direction of the rick and barn at five o'clock, and coming away therefrom at five-fifteen. Punctuated by the barking of the terrier clerk, all this took time, during which there passed through Felix many thoughts. Here was a man who had done a wicked, because an antisocial, act; the sort of act no sane person could defend; an act so barbarous, stupid, and unnatural that the very beasts of the field would turn noses away from it! How was it, then, that he himself could not feel incensed? Was it that in habitually delving into the motives of men's actions he had lost the power of dissociating what a man did from what he was; had come to see him, with his thoughts, deeds, and omissions, as a coherent growth? And he looked at Tryst. The big laborer was staring with all his soul at Derek. And, suddenly, he saw his nephew stand up—tilt his dark head back against the wall—and open his mouth to speak. In sheer alarm Felix touched Mr. Pogram on the arm. The little square man had already turned; he looked at that moment extremely like a frog.

"Gentlemen, I wish to say—"

"Who are you? Sit down!" It was the chairman, speaking for the first time in a voice that could be heard.

"I wish to say that he is not responsible. I—"

"Silence! Silence, sir! Sit down!"

Felix saw his nephew waver, and Sheila pulling at his sleeve; then, to his infinite relief, the boy sat down. His sallow face was red; his thin lips compressed to a white line. And slowly under the eyes of the whole court he grew deadly pale.

Distracted by fear that the boy might make another scene, Felix followed the proceedings vaguely. They were over soon enough: Tryst committed, defence reserved, bail refused—all as Mr. Pogram had predicted.

Derek and Sheila had vanished, and in the street outside, idle at this hour of a working-day, were only the cars of the four magistrates; two or three little knots of those who had been in court, talking of the case; and in the very centre of the street, an old, dark-whiskered man, lame, and leaning on a stick.

"Very nearly being awkward," said the voice of Mr. Pogram in his ear. "I say, do you think—no hand himself, surely no real hand himself?"

Felix shook his head violently. If the thought had once or twice occurred to him, he repudiated it with all his force when shaped by another's mouth—and such a mouth, so wide and rubbery!

"No, no! Strange boy! Extravagant sense of honour—too sensitive, that's all!"

"Quite so," murmured Mr. Pogram soothingly. "These young people! We live in a queer age, Mr. Freeland. All sorts of ideas about, nowadays. Young men like that—better in the army—safe in the army. No ideas there!"

"What happens now?" said Felix.

"Wait!" said Mr. Pogram. "Nothing else for it—wait. Three months—twiddle his thumbs. Bad system! Rotten!"

"And suppose in the end he's proved innocent?"

Mr. Pogram shook his little round head, whose ears were very red.

"Ah!" he said: "Often say to my wife: 'Wish I weren't a humanitarian!' Heart of india-rubber—excellent thing—the greatest blessing. Well, good-morning! Anything you want to say at any time, let me know!" And exhaling an overpowering whiff of gutta-percha, he grasped Felix's hand and passed into a house on the door of which was printed in brazen letters: "Edward Pogram, James Collet. Solicitors. Agents."

On leaving the little humanitarian, Felix drifted back toward the court. The cars were gone, the groups dispersed; alone, leaning on his stick, the old, dark-whiskered man stood like a jackdaw with a broken wing. Yearning, at that moment, for human intercourse, Felix went up to him.

"Fine day," he said.

"Yes, sir, 'tis fine enough." And they stood silent, side by side. The gulf fixed by class and habit between soul and human soul yawned before Felix as it had never before. Stirred and troubled, he longed to open his heart to this old, ragged, dark-eyed, whiskered creature with the game leg, who looked as if he had passed through all the thorns and thickets of hard and primitive existence; he longed that the old fellow should lay bare to him his heart. And for the life of him he could not think of any mortal words which might bridge the unreal gulf between them. At last he said:

"You a native here?"

"No, sir. From over Malvern way. Livin' here with my darter, owin' to my leg. Her 'usband works in this here factory."

"And I'm from London," Felix said.

"Thart you were. Fine place, London, they say!"

Felix shook his head. "Not so fine as this Worcestershire of yours."

The old man turned his quick, dark gaze. "Aye!" he said, "people'll be a bit nervy-like in towns, nowadays. The country be a good place for a healthy man, too; I don't want no better place than the country—never could abide bein' shut in."

"There aren't so very many like you, judging by the towns."

The old man smiled—that smile was the reverse of a bitter tonic coated with sweet stuff to make it palatable.

"'Tis the want of a life takes 'em," he said. "There's not a many like me. There's not so many as can't do without the smell of the earth. With these 'ere newspapers—'tesn't taught nowadays. The boys and gells they goes to school, and 'tes all in favor of the towns there. I can't work no more; I'm 's good as gone meself; but I feel sometimes I'll 'ave to go back. I don't like the streets, an' I guess 'tes worse in London."

"Ah! Perhaps," Felix said, "there are more of us like you than you think."

Again the old man turned his dark, quick glance.

"Well, an' I widden say no to that, neither. I've seen 'em terrible homesick. 'T'es certain sure there's lots would never go, ef 'twasn't so mortal hard on the land. 'Tisn't a bare livin', after that. An' they're put upon, right and left they're put upon. 'T'es only a man here and there that 'as something in 'im too strong. I widden never 'ave stayed in the country ef 'twasn't that I couldn't stand the town life. 'T'es like some breeds o' cattle—you take an' put 'em out o' their own country, an' you 'ave to take an' put 'em back again. Only some breeds, though. Others they don' mind where they go. Well, I've seen the country pass in my time, as you might say; where you used to see three men you only see one now."

"Are they ever going back onto the land?"

"They tawk about it. I read my newspaper reg'lar. In some places I see they're makin' unions. That an' t' no good."

"Why?"

The old man smiled again.

"Why! Think of it! The land's different to anythin' else—that's why! Different work, different hours, four men's work to-day and one's to-morrow. Work land wi' unions, same as they've got in this 'ere factory, wi' their eight hours an' their do this an' don' do that? No! You've got no weather in factories, an' such-like. On the land 't'es a matter o' weather. On the land a man must be ready for anythin' at any time; you can't work it no other way. 'T'es along o' God's comin' into it; an' no use pullin' this way an' that. Union says to me: You mustn't work after hours. Hoh! I've 'ad to set up all night wi' ship an' cattle hundreds o' times, an' no extra for it. 'T'es not that way they'll do any good to keep people on the land. Oh, no!"

"How, then?"

"Well, you'll want new laws, o' course, to prevent farmers an' landowners takin' their advantage; you want laws to build new cottages; but mainly 't'es a case of hands together; can't be no other—the land's so ticklish. If 'tesn't hands together, 't'es nothing. I 'ad a master once that was never content so long's we wasn't content. That farm was better worked than any in the parish."

"Yes, but the difficulty is to get masters that can see the other side; a man doesn't care much to look at home."

The old man's dark eyes twinkled.

"No; an' when 'e does, 't'es generally to say: 'Lord, an't I right, an' an't they wrong, just?' That's powerful customary!"

"It is," said Felix; "God bless us all!"

"Ah! You may well say that, sir; an' we want it, too. A bit more wages wouldn't come amiss, neither. An' a bit more freedom; 't'es a man's liberty 'e prizes as well as money."

"Did you hear about this arson case?"

The old man cast a glance this way and that before he answered in a lower voice:

"They say 'e was put out of his cottage. I've seen men put out for votin' Liberal; I've seen 'em put out for free-thinkin'; all sorts o' things I seen em put out for. 'T'es that makes the bad blood. A man wants to call 'is soul 'is own, when all's said an' done. An' 'e can't, not in th' old country, unless 'e's got the dibs."

"And yet you never thought of emigrating?"

"Thart of it—ah! thart of it hundreds o' times; but some'ow cudden never bring mysel' to the scratch o' not seein' th' Beacon any more. I can just see it from 'ere, you know. But there's not so many like me, an' gettin' fewer every day."

"Yes," murmured Felix, "that I believe."

"'T'es a 'and-made piece o' goods—the land! You has to be fond of it, same as of your missis and yer chillen. These poor pitiful fellows that's workin' in this factory, makin' these here Colonial ploughs—union's all right for them—'t'es all mechanical; but a man on the land, 'e's got to put the land first, whether 't'es his own or some one else's, or he'll never do no good; might as well go for a postman, any

day. I'm keepin' of you, though, with my tattle!"

In truth, Felix had looked at the old man, for the accursed question had begun to worry him: Ought he or not to give the lame old fellow something? Would it hurt his feelings? Why could he not say simply: 'Friend, I'm better off than you; help me not to feel so unfairly favored'? Perhaps he might risk it. And, diving into his trousers pockets, he watched the old man's eyes. If they followed his hand, he would risk it. But they did not. Withdrawing his hand, he said:

"Have a cigar?"

The old fellow's dark face twinkled.

"I don' know," he said, "as I ever smoked one; but I can have a darned old try!"

"Take the lot," said Felix, and shuffled into the other's pocket the contents of his cigar-case. "If you get through one, you'll want the rest. They're pretty good."

"Ah!" said the old man. "Shuldn' wonder, neither."

"Good-by. I hope your leg will soon be better."

"Thank 'ee, sir. Good-by, thank 'ee!"

Looking back from the turning, Felix saw him still standing there in the middle of the empty street.

Having undertaken to meet his mother, who was returning this afternoon to Becket, he had still two hours to put away, and passing Mr. Pogram's house, he turned into a path across a clover-field and sat down on a stile. He had many thoughts, sitting at the foot of this little town—which his great-grandfather had brought about. And chiefly he thought of the old man he had been talking to, sent there, as it seemed to him, by Providence, to afford a prototype for his 'The Last of the Laborers.' Wonderful that the old fellow should talk of loving 'the Land,' whereon he must have toiled for sixty years or so, at a number of shillings per week, that would certainly not buy the cigars he had shovelled into that ragged pocket. Wonderful! And yet, a marvellous sweet thing, when all was said—this land! Changing its sheen and texture, the feel of its air, its very scent, from day to day. This land with myriad offspring of flowers and flying folk; the majestic and untiring march of seasons: Spring and its wistful ecstasy of saplings, and its yearning, wild, wind-loosened heart; gleam and song, blossom and cloud, and the swift white rain; each upturned leaf so little and so glad to flutter; each wood and field so full of peeping things! Summer! Ah! Summer, when on the solemn old trees the long days shone and lingered, and the glory of the meadows and the murmur of life and the scent of flowers bewildered tranquillity, till surcharge of warmth and beauty brooded into dark passion, and broke! And Autumn, in mellow haze down on the fields and woods; smears of gold already on the beeches, smears of crimson on the rowans, the apple-trees still burdened, and a flax-blue sky well-nigh merging with the misty air; the cattle browsing in the lingering golden stillness; not a breath to fan the blue smoke of the weed-fires—and in the fields no one moving—who would disturb such mellow peace? And Winter! The long spaces, the long dark; and yet—and yet, what delicate loveliness of twig tracery; what blur of rose and brown and purple caught in the bare boughs and in the early sunset sky! What sharp dark flights of birds in the gray-white firmament! Who cared what season held in its arms this land that had bred them all!

Not wonderful that into the veins of those who nursed it, tending, watching its perpetual fertility, should be distilled a love so deep and subtle that they could not bear to leave it, to abandon its hills, and greenness, and bird-songs, and all the impress of their forefathers throughout the ages.

Like so many of his fellows—cultured moderns, alien to the larger forms of patriotism, that rich liquor brewed of maps and figures, commercial profit, and high-cockalorum, which served so perfectly to swell smaller heads—Felix had a love of his native land resembling love for a woman, a kind of sensuous chivalry, a passion based on her charm, on her tranquillity, on the power she had to draw him into her embrace, to make him feel that he had come from her, from her alone, and into her alone was going back. And this green parcel of his native land, from which the half of his blood came, and that the dearest half, had a potency over his spirit that he might well be ashamed of in days when the true Briton was a town-bred creature with a foot of fancy in all four corners of the globe. There was ever to him a special flavor about the elm-girt fields, the flowery coppices, of this country of the old Moretons, a special fascination in its full, white-clouded skies, its grass-edged roads, its pied and creamy cattle, and the blue-green loom of the Malvern hills. If God walked anywhere for him, it was surely here. Sentiment! Without sentiment, without that love, each for his own corner, 'the Land' was lost indeed! Not if all Becket blew trumpets till kingdom came, would 'the Land' be reformed, if they lost sight of that! To fortify men in love for their motherland, to see that insecurity, grinding poverty, interference, petty tyranny, could no longer undermine that love—this was to be, surely must be, done! Monotony? Was that cry true? What work now performed by humble men was less monotonous than work on the

land? What work was even a tenth part so varied? Never quite the same from day to day: Now weeding, now hay, now roots, now hedging; now corn, with sowing, reaping, threshing, stacking, thatching; the care of beasts, and their companionship; sheep-dipping, shearing, wood-gathering, apple-picking, cider-making; fashioning and tarring gates; whitewashing walls; carting; trenching—never, never two days quite the same! Monotony! The poor devils in factories, in shops, in mines; poor devils driving 'busses, punching tickets, cleaning roads; baking; cooking; sewing; typing! Stokers; machine-tenders; bricklayers; dockers; clerks! Ah! that great company from towns might well cry out: Monotony! True, they got their holidays; true, they had more social life—a point that might well be raised at Becket: Holidays and social life for men on the soil! But—and suddenly Felix thought of the long, long holiday that was before the laborer Tryst. 'Twiddle his thumbs'—in the words of the little humanitarian—twiddle his thumbs in a space twelve feet by seven! No sky to see, no grass to smell, no beast to bear him company; no anything—for, what resources in himself had this poor creature? No anything, but to sit with tragic eyes fixed on the wall before him for eighty days and eighty nights, before they tried him. And then—not till then—would his punishment for that moment's blind revenge for grievous wrong begin! What on this earth of God's was more disproportioned, and wickedly extravagant, more crassly stupid, than the arrangements of his most perfect creature, man? What a devil was man, who could yet rise to such sublime heights of love and heroism! What a ferocious brute, the most ferocious and cold-blooded brute that lived! Of all creatures most to be stampeded by fear into a callous torturer! 'Fear'—thought Felix—'fear! Not momentary panic, such as makes our brother animals do foolish things; conscious, calculating fear, paralyzing the reason of our minds and the generosity of our hearts. A detestable thing Tryst has done, a hateful act; but his punishment will be twentyfold as hateful!'

And, unable to sit and think of it, Felix rose and walked on through the fields. . . .

CHAPTER XXV

He was duly at Transham station in time for the London train, and, after a minute consecrated to looking in the wrong direction, he saw his mother already on the platform with her bag, an air-cushion, and a beautifully neat roll.

'Travelling third!' he thought. 'Why will she do these things?'

Slightly flushed, she kissed Felix with an air of abstraction.

"How good of you to meet me, darling!"

Felix pointed in silence to the crowded carriage from which she had emerged. Frances Freeland looked a little rueful. "It would have been delightful," she said. "There was a dear baby there and, of course, I couldn't have the window down, so it WAS rather hot."

Felix, who could just see the dear baby, said dryly:

"So that's how you go about, is it? Have you had any lunch?"

Frances Freeland put her hand under his arm. "Now, don't fuss, darling! Here's sixpence for the porter. There's only one trunk—it's got a violet label. Do you know them? They're so useful. You see them at once. I must get you some."

"Let me take those things. You won't want this cushion. I'll let the air out."

"I'm afraid you won't be able, dear. It's quite the best screw I've ever come across—a splendid thing; I can't get it undone."

"Ah!" said Felix. "And now we may as well go out to the car!"

He was conscious of a slight stoppage in his mother's footsteps and rather a convulsive squeeze of her hand on his arm. Looking at her face, he discovered it occupied with a process whose secret he could not penetrate, a kind of disarray of her features, rapidly and severely checked, and capped with a resolute smile. They had already reached the station exit, where Stanley's car was snorting. Frances Freeland looked at it, then, mounting rather hastily, sat, compressing her lips.

When they were off, Felix said:

"Would you like to stop at the church and have a look at the brasses to your grandfather and the rest of them?"

His mother, who had slipped her hand under his arm again, answered:

"No, dear; I've seen them. The church is not at all beautiful. I like the old church at Becket so much better; it is such a pity your great-grandfather was not buried there."

She had never quite got over the lack of 'niceness' about those ploughs.

Going, as was the habit of Stanley's car, at considerable speed, Felix was not at first certain whether the peculiar little squeezes his arm was getting were due to the bounds of the creature under them or to some cause more closely connected with his mother, and it was not till they shaved a cart at the turning of the Becket drive that it suddenly dawned on him that she was in terror. He discovered it in looking round just as she drew her smile over a spasm of her face and throat. And, leaning out of the car, he said:

"Drive very slowly, Batter; I want to look at the trees."

A little sigh rewarded him. Since SHE had said nothing, He said nothing, and Clara's words in the hall seemed to him singularly tactless:

"Oh! I meant to have reminded you, Felix, to send the car back and take a fly. I thought you knew that Mother's terrified of motors." And at his mother's answer:

"Oh! no; I quite enjoyed it, dear," he thought: 'Bless her heart! She IS a stoic!'

Whether or no to tell her of the 'kick-up at Joyfields' exercised his mind. The question was intricate, for she had not yet been informed that Nedda and Derek were engaged, and Felix did not feel at liberty to forestall the young people. That was their business. On the other hand, she would certainly glean from Clara a garbled understanding of the recent events at Joyfields, if she were not first told of them by himself. And he decided to tell her, with the natural trepidation of one who, living among principles and theories, never quite knew what those, for whom each fact is unrelated to anything else under the moon, were going to think. Frances Freeland, he knew well, kept facts and theories especially unrelated, or, rather, modified her facts to suit her theories, instead of, like Felix, her theories to suit her facts. For example, her instinctive admiration for Church and State, her instinctive theory that they rested on gentility and people who were nice, was never for a moment shaken when she saw a half-starved baby of the slums. Her heart would impel her to pity and feed the poor little baby if she could, but to correlate the creature with millions of other such babies, and those millions with the Church and State, would not occur to her. And if Felix made an attempt to correlate them for her she would look at him and think: 'Dear boy! How good he is! I do wish he wouldn't let that line come in his forehead; it does so spoil it!' And she would say: "Yes, darling, I know, it's very sad; only I'm NOT clever." And, if a Liberal government chanced to be in power, would add: "Of course, I do think this Government is dreadful. I MUST show you a sermon of the dear Bishop of Walham. I cut it out of the 'Daily Mystery.' He puts things so well—he always has such nice ideas."

And Felix, getting up, would walk a little and sit down again too suddenly. Then, as if entreating him to look over her want of 'cleverness,' she would put out a hand that, for all its whiteness, had never been idle and smooth his forehead. It had sometimes touched him horribly to see with what despair she made attempts to follow him in his correlating efforts, and with what relief she heard him cease enough to let her say: "Yes, dear; only, I must show you this new kind of expanding cork. It's simply splendid. It bottles up everything!" And after staring at her just a moment he would acquit her of irony. Very often after these occasions he had thought, and sometimes said: "Mother, you're the best Conservative I ever met." She would glance at him then, with a special loving doubtfulness, at a loss as to whether or no he had designed to compliment her.

When he had given her half an hour to rest he made his way to the blue corridor, where a certain room was always kept for her, who never occupied it long enough at a time to get tired of it. She was lying on a sofa in a loose gray cashmere gown. The windows were open, and the light breeze just moved in the folds of the chintz curtains and stirred perfume from a bowl of pinks—her favorite flowers. There was no bed in this bedroom, which in all respects differed from any other in Clara's house, as though the spirit of another age and temper had marched in and dispossessed the owner. Felix had a sensation that one was by no means all body here. On the contrary. There was not a trace of the body anywhere; as if some one had decided that the body was not quite nice. No bed, no washstand, no chest of drawers, no wardrobe, no mirror, not even a jar of Clara's special pot-pourri. And Felix said:

"This can't be your bedroom, Mother?"

Frances Freeland answered, with a touch of deprecating quizzicality:

"Oh yes, darling. I must show you my arrangements." And she rose. "This," she said, "you see, goes under there, and that under here; and that again goes under this. Then they all go under that, and then I pull this. It's lovely."

"But why?" said Felix.

"Oh! but don't you see? It's so nice; nobody can tell. And it doesn't give any trouble."

"And when you go to bed?"

"Oh! I just pop my clothes into this and open that. And there I am. It's simply splendid."

"I see," said Felix. "Do you think I might sit down, or shall I go through?"

Frances Freeland loved him with her eyes, and said:

"Naughty boy!"

And Felix sat down on what appeared to be a window-seat.

"Well," he said, with slight uneasiness, for she was hovering, "I think you're wonderful."

Frances Freeland put away an impeachment that she evidently felt to be too soft.

"Oh! but it's all so simple, darling." And Felix saw that she had something in her hand, and mind.

"This is my little electric brush. It'll do wonders with your hair. While you sit there, I'll just try it."

A clicking and a whirring had begun to occur close to his ear, and something darted like a gadfly at his scalp.

"I came to tell you something serious, Mother."

"Yes, darling; it'll be simply lovely to hear it; and you mustn't mind this, because it really is a first-rate thing—quite new."

Now, how is it, thought Felix, that any one who loves the new as she does, when it's made of matter, will not even look at it when it's made of mind? And, while the little machine buzzed about his head, he proceeded to detail to her the facts of the state of things that existed at Joyfields.

When he had finished, she said:

"Now, darling, bend down a little."

Felix bent down. And the little machine began severely tweaking the hairs on the nape of his neck. He sat up again rather suddenly.

Frances Freeland was contemplating the little machine.

"How very provoking! It's never done that before!"

"Quite so!" Felix murmured. "But about Joyfields?"

"Oh, my dear, it IS such a pity they don't get on with those Mallorings! I do think it sad they weren't brought up to go to church."

Felix stared, not knowing whether to be glad or sorry that his recital had not roused within her the faintest suspicion of disaster. How he envied her that single-minded power of not seeing further than was absolutely needful! And suddenly he thought: 'She really is wonderful! With her love of church, how it must hurt her that we none of us go, not even John! And yet she never says a word. There really is width about her; a power of accepting the inevitable. Never was woman more determined to make the best of a bad job. It's a great quality!' And he heard her say:

"Now, darling, if I give you this, you must promise me to use it every morning. You'll find you'll soon have a splendid crop of little young hairs."

"I know," he said gloomily; "but they won't come to anything. Age has got my head, Mother, just as it's got 'the Land's.'"

"Oh, nonsense! You must go on with it, that's all!"

Felix turned so that he could look at her. She was moving round the room now, meticulously adjusting the framed photographs of her family that were the only decoration of the walls. How formal, chiselled, and delicate her face, yet how almost fanatically decisive! How frail and light her figure, yet how indomitably active! And the memory assailed him of how, four years ago, she had defeated double pneumonia without having a doctor, simply by lying on her back. 'She leaves trouble,' he thought, 'until it's under her nose, then simply tells it that it isn't there. There's something very English about that.'

She was chasing a bluebottle now with a little fan made of wire, and, coming close to Felix, said:

"Have you seen these, darling? You've only to hit the fly and it kills him at once."

"But do you ever hit the fly?"

"Oh, yes!" And she waved the fan at the bluebottle, which avoided it without seeming difficulty.

"I can't bear hurting them, but I DON'T like flies. There!"

The bluebottle flew out of the window behind Felix and in at the one that was not behind him. He rose.

"You ought to rest before tea, Mother."

He felt her searching him with her eyes, as if trying desperately to find something she might bestow upon or do for him.

"Would you like this wire—"

With a feeling that he was defrauding love, he turned and fled. She would never rest while he was there! And yet there was that in her face which made him feel a brute to go.

Passing out of the house, sunk in its Monday hush, no vestige of a Bigwig left, Felix came to that new-walled mound where the old house of the Moretons had been burned 'by soldiers from Tewkesbury and Gloucester,' as said the old chronicles dear to the heart of Clara. And on the wall he sat him down. Above, in the uncut grass, he could see the burning blue of a peacock's breast, where the heraldic bird stood digesting grain in the repose of perfect breeding, and below him gardeners were busy with the gooseberries. 'Gardeners and the gooseberries of the great!' he thought. 'Such is the future of our Land.' And he watched them. How methodically they went to work! How patient and well-done-for they looked! After all, was it not the ideal future? Gardeners, gooseberries, and the great! Each of the three content in that station of life into which—! What more could a country want? Gardeners, gooseberries, and the great! The phrase had a certain hypnotic value. Why trouble? Why fuss? Gardeners, gooseberries, and the great! A perfect land! A land dedicate to the week-end! Gardeners, goose—! And suddenly he saw that he was not alone. Half hidden by the angle of the wall, on a stone of the foundations, carefully preserved and nearly embedded in the nettles which Clara had allowed to grow because they added age to the appearance, was sitting a Bigwig. One of the Settleham faction, he had impressed Felix alike by his reticence, the steady sincerity of his gray eyes, a countenance that, beneath a simple and delicate urbanity, had still in it something of the best type of schoolboy. 'How comes he to have stayed?' he mused. 'I thought they always fed and scattered!' And having received an answer to his salutation, he moved across and said:

"I imagined you'd gone."

"I've been having a look round. It's very jolly here. My affections are in the North, but I suppose this is pretty well the heart of England."

"Near 'the big song,'" Felix answered. "There'll never be anything more English than Shakespeare, when all's said and done." And he took a steady, sidelong squint at his companion. 'This is another of the types I've been looking for,' he reflected. The peculiar 'don't-quite-touch-me' accent of the aristocrat—and of those who would be—had almost left this particular one, as though he secretly aspired to rise superior and only employed it in the nervousness of his first greetings. 'Yes,' thought Felix, 'he's just about the very best we can do among those who sit upon 'the Land.' I would wager there's not a better landlord nor a better fellow in all his class, than this one. He's chalks away superior to Malloring, if I know anything of faces—would never have turned poor Tryst out. If this exception were the rule! And yet—! Does he, can he, go quite far enough to meet the case? If not—what hope of regeneration from above? Would he give up his shooting? Could he give up feeling he's a leader? Would he give up his town house and collecting whatever it is he collects? Could he let himself sink down and merge till he was just unseen leaven of good-fellowship and good-will, working in the common bread?'

And squinting at that sincere, clean, charming, almost fine face, he answered himself unwillingly: 'He could not!' And suddenly he knew that he was face to face with the tremendous question which soon or late confronts all thinkers. Sitting beside him—was the highest product of the present system! With its charm, humanity, courage, chivalry up to a point, its culture, and its cleanliness, this decidedly rare flower at the end of a tall stalk, with dark and tortuous roots and rank foliage, was in a sense the sole justification of power wielded from above. And was it good enough? Was it quite good enough? Like so many other thinkers, Felix hesitated to reply. If only merit and the goods of this world could be finally divorced! If the reward of virtue were just men's love and an unconscious self-respect! If only 'to have nothing' were the highest honour! And yet, to do away with this beside him and put in its place—What? No kiss-me-quick change had a chance of producing anything better. To scrap the long growth of man and start afresh was but to say: 'Since in the past the best that man has done has not been good enough, I have a perfect faith in him for the future!' No! That was a creed for archangels and other extremists. Safer to work on what we had! And he began:

"Next door to this estate I'm told there's ten thousand acres almost entirely grass and covert, owned by Lord Baltimore, who lives in Norfolk, London, Cannes, and anywhere else that the whim takes him. He comes down here twice a year to shoot. The case is extremely common. Surely it spells paralysis. If land is to be owned at all in such great lumps, owners ought at least to live on the lumps, and to pass very high examinations as practical farmers. They ought to be the life and soul, the radiating sun, of their little universes; or else they ought to be cleared out. How expect keen farming to start from such an example? It really looks to me as if the game laws would have to go." And he redoubled his scrutiny of the Bigwig's face. A little furrow in its brow had deepened visibly, but nodding, he said:

"The absentee landlord is a curse, of course. I'm afraid I'm a bit of a one myself. And I'm bound to say—though I'm keen on shooting—if the game laws were abolished, it might do a lot."

"YOU wouldn't move in that direction, I suppose?"

The Bigwig smiled—charming, rather whimsical, that smile.

"Honestly, I'm not up to it. The spirit, you know, but the flesh—! My line is housing and wages, of course."

'There it is,' thought Felix. 'Up to a point, they'll move—not up to THE point. It's all fiddling. One won't give up his shooting; another won't give up his power; a third won't give up her week-ends; a fourth won't give up his freedom. Our interest in the thing is all lackadaisical, a kind of bun-fight of pet notions. There's no real steam.' And abruptly changing the subject, he talked of pictures to the pleasant Bigwig in the sleepy afternoon. Of how this man could paint, and that man couldn't. And in the uncut grass the peacock slowly moved, displaying his breast of burning blue; and below, the gardeners worked among the gooseberries.

CHAPTER XXVI

Nedda, borrowing the bicycle of Clara's maid, Sirrett, had been over to Joyfields, and only learned on her return of her grandmother's arrival. In her bath before dinner there came to her one of those strategic thoughts that even such as are no longer quite children will sometimes conceive. She hurried desperately into her clothes, and, ready full twenty minutes before the gong was due to sound, made her way to her grandmother's room. Frances Freeland had just pulled THIS, and, to her astonishment, THAT had not gone in properly. She was looking at it somewhat severely, when she heard Nedda's knock. Drawing a screen temporarily over the imperfection, she said: "Come in!"

The dear child looked charming in her white evening dress with one red flower in her hair; and while she kissed her, she noted that the neck of her dress was just a little too open to be quite nice, and at once thought: 'I've got the very thing for that.'

Going to a drawer that no one could have suspected of being there, she took from it a little diamond star. Getting delicate but firm hold of the Mechlin at the top of the frock, she popped it in, so that the neck was covered at least an inch higher, and said:

"Now, ducky, you're to keep that as a little present. You've no idea how perfectly it suits you just like this." And having satisfied for the moment her sense of niceness and that continual itch to part with everything she had, she surveyed her granddaughter, lighted up by that red flower, and said:

"How sweet you look!"

Nedda, looking down past cheeks colored by pleasure at the new little star on a neck rather browned by her day in the sun, murmured:

"Oh, Granny! it's much too lovely! You mustn't give it to me!"

These were moments that Frances Freeland loved best in life; and, with the untruthfulness in which she only indulged when she gave things away, or otherwise benefited her neighbors with or without their will, she added: "It's quite wasted; I never wear it myself." And, seeing Nedda's smile, for the girl recollected perfectly having admired it during dinner at Uncle John's, and at Becket itself, she said decisively, "So that's that!" and settled her down on the sofa. But just as she was thinking, 'I have the very thing for the dear child's sunburn,' Nedda said: "Granny, dear, I've been meaning to tell you—Derek and I are engaged."

For the moment Frances Freeland could do nothing but tremulously interlace her fingers.

"Oh, but, darling," she said very gravely, "have you thought?"

"I think of nothing else, Granny."

"But has he thought?"

Nedda nodded.

Frances Freeland sat staring straight before her. Nedda and Derek, Derek and Nedda! The news was almost unintelligible; those two were still for her barely more than little creatures to be tucked up at night. Engaged! Marriage! Between those who were both as near to her, almost, as her own children had been! The effort was for the moment quite too much for her, and a sort of pain disturbed her heart. Then the crowning principle of her existence came a little to her aid. No use in making a fuss; must put the best face on it, whether it were going to come to anything or not! And she said:

"Well, darling, I don't know, I'm sure. I dare say it's very lovely for you. But do you think you've seen enough of him?"

Nedda gave her a swift look, then dropped her lashes, so that her eyes seemed closed. Snuggling up, she said:

"No, Granny, I do wish I could see more; if only I could go and stay with them a little!"

And as she planted that dart of suggestion, the gong sounded.

In Frances Freeland, lying awake till two, as was her habit, the suggestion grew. To this growth not only her custom of putting the best face on things, but her incurable desire to make others happy, and an instinctive sympathy with love-affairs, all contributed; moreover, Felix had said something about Derek's having been concerned in something rash. If darling Nedda were there it would occupy his mind and help to make him careful. Never dilatory in forming resolutions, she decided to take the girl over with her on the morrow. Kirsteen had a dear little spare room, and Nedda should take her bag. It would be a nice surprise for them all. Accordingly, next morning, not wanting to give any trouble, she sent Thomas down to the Red Lion, where they had a comfortable fly, with a very steady, respectable driver, and ordered it to come at half past two. Then, without saying anything to Clara, she told Nedda to be ready to pop in her bag, trusting to her powers of explaining everything to everybody without letting anybody know anything. Little difficulties of this sort never bunkered her; she was essentially a woman of action. And on the drive to Joyfields she stilled the girl's quavering with:

"It's all right, darling; it'll be very nice for them."

She was perhaps the only person in the world who was not just a little bit afraid of Kirsteen. Indeed, she was constitutionally unable to be afraid of anything, except motor-cars, and, of course, earwigs, and even them one must put up with. Her critical sense told her that this woman in blue was just like anybody else, besides her father had been the colonel of a Highland regiment, which was quite nice, and one must put the best face on her.

In this way, pointing out the beauty of each feature of the scenery, and not permitting herself or Nedda to think about the bag, they drove until they came to Joyfields.

Kirsteen alone was in, and, having sent Nedda into the orchard to look for her uncle, Frances Freeland came at once to the point. It was so important, she thought, that darling Nedda should see more of dear Derek. They were very young, and if she could stay for a few weeks, they would both know

their minds so much better. She had made her bring her bag, because she knew dear Kirsteen would agree with her; and it would be so nice for them all. Felix had told her about that poor man who had done this dreadful thing, and she thought that if Nedda were here it would be a distraction. She was a very good child, and quite useful in the house. And while she was speaking she watched Kirsteen, and thought: 'She is very handsome, and altogether ladylike; only it is such a pity she wears that blue thing in her hair—it makes her so conspicuous.' And rather unexpectedly she said:

"Do you know, dear, I believe I know the very thing to keep your hair from getting loose. It's such lovely hair. And this is quite a new thing, and doesn't show at all; invented by a very nice hairdresser in Worcester. It's simplicity itself. Do let me show you!" Quickly going over, she removed the kingfisher-blue fillet, and making certain passes with her fingers through the hair, murmured:

"It's so beautifully fine; it seems such a pity not to show it all, dear. Now look at yourself!" And from the recesses of her pocket she produced a little mirror. "I'm sure Tod will simply love it like that. It'll be such a nice change for him."

Kirsteen, with just a faint wrinkling of her lips and eyebrows, waited till she had finished. Then she said:

"Yes, Mother, dear, I'm sure he will," and replaced the fillet. A patient, half-sad, half-quizzical smile visited Frances Freeland's lips, as who should say: 'Yes, I know you think that I'm a fuss-box, but it really is a pity that you wear it so, darling!'

At sight of that smile, Kirsteen got up and kissed her gravely on the forehead.

When Nedda came back from a fruitless search for Tod, her bag was already in the little spare bedroom and Frances Freeland gone. The girl had never yet been alone with her aunt, for whom she had a fervent admiration not unmixed with awe. She idealized her, of course, thinking of her as one might think of a picture or statue, a symbolic figure, standing for liberty and justice and the redress of wrong. Her never-varying garb of blue assisted the girl's fancy, for blue was always the color of ideals and aspiration—was not blue sky the nearest one could get to heaven—were not blue violets the flowers of spring? Then, too, Kirsteen was a woman with whom it would be quite impossible to gossip or small-talk; with her one could but simply and directly say what one felt, and only that over things which really mattered. And this seemed to Nedda so splendid that it sufficed in itself to prevent the girl from saying anything whatever. She longed to, all the same, feeling that to be closer to her aunt meant to be closer to Derek. Yet, with all, she knew that her own nature was very different; this, perhaps, egged her on, and made her aunt seem all the more exciting. She waited breathless till Kirsteen said:

"Yes, you and Derek must know each other better. The worst kind of prison in the world is a mistaken marriage."

Nedda nodded fervently. "It must be. But I think one knows, Aunt Kirsteen!"

She felt as if she were being searched right down to the soul before the answer came:

"Perhaps. I knew myself. I have seen others who did—a few. I think you might."

Nedda flushed from sheer joy. "I could never go on if I didn't love. I feel I couldn't, even if I'd started."

With another long look through narrowing eyes, Kirsteen answered:

"Yes. You would want truth. But after marriage truth is an unhappy thing, Nedda, if you have made a mistake."

"It must be dreadful. Awful."

"So don't make a mistake, my dear—and don't let him."

Nedda answered solemnly:

"I won't—oh, I won't!"

Kirsteen had turned away to the window, and Nedda heard her say quietly to herself:

"Liberty's a glorious feast!"

Trembling all over with the desire to express what was in her, Nedda stammered:

"I would never keep anything that wanted to be free—never, never! I would never try to make any

one do what they didn't want to!"

She saw her aunt smile, and wondered whether she had said anything exceptionally foolish. But it was not foolish—surely not—to say what one really felt.

"Some day, Nedda, all the world will say that with you. Until then we'll fight those who won't say it. Have you got everything in your room you want? Let's come and see."

To pass from Becket to Joyfields was really a singular experience. At Becket you were certainly supposed to do exactly what you liked, but the tyranny of meals, baths, scents, and other accompaniments of the 'all-body' regime soon annihilated every impulse to do anything but just obey it. At Joyfields, bodily existence was a kind of perpetual skirmish, a sort of grudging accompaniment to a state of soul. You might be alone in the house at any meal-time. You might or might not have water in your jug. And as to baths, you had to go out to a little white-washed shed at the back, with a brick floor, where you pumped on yourself, prepared to shout out, "Halloo! I'm here!" in case any one else came wanting to do the same. The conditions were in fact almost perfect for seeing more of one another. Nobody asked where you were going, with whom going, or how going. You might be away by day or night without exciting curiosity or comment. And yet you were conscious of a certain something always there, holding the house together; some principle of life, or perhaps—just a woman in blue. There, too, was that strangest of all phenomena in an English home—no game ever played, outdoors or in.

The next fortnight, while the grass was ripening, was a wonderful time for Nedda, given up to her single passion—of seeing more of him who so completely occupied her heart. She was at peace now with Sheila, whose virility forbade that she should dispute pride of place with this soft and truthful guest, so evidently immersed in rapture. Besides, Nedda had that quality of getting on well with her own sex, found in those women who, though tenacious, are not possessive; who, though humble, are secretly very self-respecting; who, though they do not say much about it, put all their eggs in one basket; above all, who disengage, no matter what their age, a candid but subtle charm.

But that fortnight was even more wonderful for Derek, caught between two passions—both so fervid. For though the passion of his revolt against the Mallorings did not pull against his passion for Nedda, they both tugged at him. And this had one curious psychological effect. It made his love for Nedda more actual, less of an idealization. Now that she was close to him, under the same roof, he felt the full allurements of her innocent warmth; he would have been cold-blooded indeed if he had not taken fire, and, his pride always checking the expression of his feelings, they glowed ever hotter underneath.

Yet, over those sunshiny days there hung a shadow, as of something kept back, not shared between them; a kind of waiting menace. Nedda learned of Kirsteen and Sheila all the useful things she could; the evenings she passed with Derek, those long evenings of late May and early June, this year so warm and golden. They walked generally in the direction of the hills. A favorite spot was a wood of larches whose green shoots had not yet quite ceased to smell of lemons. Tall, slender things those trees, whose stems and dried lower branch-growth were gray, almost sooty, up to the feathery green of the tops, that swayed and creaked faintly in a wind, with a souging of their branches like the sound of the sea. From the shelter of those Highland trees, rather strange in such a countryside, they two could peer forth at the last sunlight gold-powdering the fringed branches, at the sunset flush dyeing the sky above the Beacon; watch light slowly folding gray wings above the hay-fields and the elms; mark the squirrels scurry along, and the pigeons' evening flight. A stream ran there at the edge, and beech-trees grew beside it. In the tawny-dappled sand bed of that clear water, and the gray-green dappled trunks of those beeches with their great, sinuous, long-muscled roots, was that something which man can never tame or garden out of the land: the strength of unconquerable fertility—the remote deep life in Nature's heart. Men and women had their spans of existence; those trees seemed as if there forever! From generation to generation lovers might come and, looking on this strength and beauty, feel in their veins the sap of the world. Here the laborer and his master, hearing the wind in the branches and the water murmuring down, might for a brief minute grasp the land's unchangeable wild majesty. And on the far side of that little stream was a field of moon-colored flowers that had for Nedda a strange fascination. Once the boy jumped across and brought her back a handkerchief full. They were of two kinds: close to the water's edge the marsh orchis, and farther back, a small marguerite. Out of this they made a crown of the alternate flowers, and a girdle for her waist. That was an evening of rare beauty, and warm enough already for an early chafer to go blooming in the dusk. An evening when they wandered with their arms round each other a long time, silent, stopping to listen to an owl; stopping to point out each star coming so shyly up in the gray-violet of the sky. And that was the evening when they had a strange little quarrel, sudden as a white squall on a blue sea, or the tiff of two birds shooting up in a swift spiral of attack and then—all over. Would he come to-morrow to see her milking? He could not. Why? He could not; he would be out. Ah! he never told her where he went; he never let her come with him among the laborers like Sheila.

"I can't; I'm pledged not."

"Then you don't trust me!"

"Of course I trust you; but a promise is a promise. You oughtn't to ask me, Nedda."

"No; but I would never have promised to keep anything from you."

"You don't understand."

"Oh! yes, I do. Love doesn't mean the same to you that it does to me."

"How do you know what it means to me?"

"I couldn't have a secret from you."

"Then you don't count honour."

"Honour only binds oneself!"

"What d'you mean by that?"

"I include you—you don't include me in yourself, that's all."

"I think you're very unjust. I was obliged to promise; it doesn't only concern myself."

Then silent, motionless, a yard apart, they looked fiercely at each other, their hearts stiff and sore, and in their brains no glimmer of perception of anything but tragedy. What more tragic than to have come out of an elysium of warm arms round each other, to this sudden hostility! And the owl went on hooting, and the larches smelled sweet! And all around was the same soft dusk wherein the flowers in her hair and round her waist gleamed white! But for Nedda the world had suddenly collapsed. Tears rushed into her eyes; she shook her head and turned away, hiding them passionately. . . . A full minute passed, each straining to make no sound and catch the faintest sound from the other, till in her breathing there was a little clutch. His fingers came stealing round, touched her cheeks, and were wetted. His arms suddenly squeezed all breath out of her; his lips fastened on hers. She answered those lips with her own desperately, bending her head back, shutting her wet eyes. And the owl hooted, and the white flowers fell into the dusk off her hair and waist.

After that, they walked once more enlaced, avoiding with what perfect care any allusion to the sudden tragedy, giving themselves up to the bewildering ecstasy that had started throbbing in their blood with that kiss, longing only not to spoil it. And through the sheltering larch wood their figures moved from edge to edge, like two little souls in paradise, unwilling to come forth.

After that evening love had a poignancy it had not quite had before; at once deeper, sweeter, tinged for both of them with the rich darkness of passion, and with discovery that love does not mean a perfect merger of one within another. For both felt themselves in the right over that little quarrel. The boy that he could not, must not, resign what was not his to resign; feeling dimly, without being quite able to shape the thought even to himself, that a man has a life of action into which a woman cannot always enter, with which she cannot always be identified. The girl feeling that she did not want any life into which he did not enter, so that it was hard that he should want to exclude her from anything. For all that, she did not try again to move him to let her into the secret of his plans of revolt and revenge, and disdained completely to find them out from Sheila or her aunt.

And the grass went on ripening. Many and various as the breeds of men, or the trees of a forest, were the stalks that made up that greenish jungle with the waving, fawn-colored surface; of rye-grass and brome-grass, of timothy, plantain, and yarrow; of bent-grass and quake-grass, foxtail, and the green-hearted trefoil; of dandelion, dock, musk-thistle, and sweet-scented vernal.

On the 10th of June Tod began cutting his three fields; the whole family, with Nedda and the three Tryst children, working like slaves. Old Gaunt, who looked to the harvests to clothe him for the year, came to do his share of raking, and any other who could find some evening hours to spare. The whole was cut and carried in three days of glorious weather.

The lovers were too tired the last evening of hay harvest to go rambling, and sat in the orchard watching the moon slide up through the coppice behind the church. They sat on Tod's log, deliciously weary, in the scent of the new-mown hay, while moths flitted gray among the blue darkness of the leaves, and the whitened trunks of the apple-trees gleamed ghostly. It was very warm; a night of whispering air, opening all hearts. And Derek said:

"You'll know to-morrow, Nedda."

A flutter of fear overtook her. What would she know?

CHAPTER XXVII

On the 13th of June Sir Gerald Malloring, returning home to dinner from the House of Commons, found on his hall table, enclosed in a letter from his agent, the following paper:

"We, the undersigned laborers on Sir Gerald Malloring's estate, beg respectfully to inform him that we consider it unjust that any laborer should be evicted from his cottage for any reason connected with private life, or social or political convictions. And we respectfully demand that, before a laborer receives notice to quit for any such reason, the case shall be submitted to all his fellow laborers on the estate; and that in the future he shall only receive such notice if a majority of his fellow laborers record their votes in favor of the notice being given. In the event of this demand being refused, we regretfully decline to take any hand in getting in the hay on Sir Gerald Malloring's estate."

Then followed ninety-three signatures, or signs of the cross with names printed after them.

The agent's letter which enclosed this document mentioned that the hay was already ripe for cutting; that everything had been done to induce the men to withdraw the demand, without success, and that the farmers were very much upset. The thing had been sprung on them, the agent having no notion that anything of the sort was on foot. It had been very secretly, very cleverly, managed; and, in the agent's opinion, was due to Mr. Freeland's family. He awaited Sir Gerald's instructions. Working double tides, with luck and good weather, the farmers and their families might perhaps save half of the hay.

Malloring read this letter twice, and the enclosure three times, and crammed them deep down into his pocket.

It was pre-eminently one of those moments which bring out the qualities of Norman blood. And the first thing he did was to look at the barometer. It was going slowly down. After a month of first-class weather it would not do that without some sinister intention. An old glass, he believed in it implicitly. He tapped, and it sank further. He stood there frowning. Should he consult his wife? General friendliness said: Yes! A Norman instinct of chivalry, and perhaps the deeper Norman instinct, that, when it came to the point, women were too violent, said, No! He went upstairs three at a time, and came down two. And all through dinner he sat thinking it over, and talking as if nothing had happened; so that he hardly spoke. Three-quarters of the hay at stake, if it rained soon! A big loss to the farmers, a further reduction in rents already far too low. Should he grin and bear it, and by doing nothing show these fellows that he could afford to despise their cowardly device? For it WAS cowardly to let his grass get ripe and play it this low trick! But if he left things unfought this time, they would try it on again with the corn—not that there was much of that on the estate of a man who only believed in corn as a policy.

Should he make the farmers sack the lot and get in other labor? But where? Agricultural laborers were made, not born. And it took a deuce of a lot of making, at that! Should he suspend wages till they withdrew their demand? That might do—but he would still lose the hay. The hay! After all, anybody, pretty well, could make hay; it was the least skilled of all farm work, so long as the farmers were there to drive the machines and direct. Why not act vigorously? And his jaws set so suddenly on a piece of salmon that he bit his tongue. The action served to harden a growing purpose. So do small events influence great! Suspend those fellows' wages, get down strike-breakers, save the hay! And if there were a row—well, let there be a row! The constabulary would have to act. It was characteristic of his really Norman spirit that the notion of agreeing to the demand, or even considering whether it were just, never once came into his mind. He was one of those, comprising nowadays nearly all his class, together with their press, who habitually referred to his country as a democratic power, a champion of democracy—but did not at present suspect the meaning of the word; nor, to say truth, was it likely they ever would. Nothing, however, made him more miserable than indecision. And so, now that he was on the point of deciding, and the decision promised vigorous consequences, he felt almost elated. Closing his jaws once more too firmly, this time on lamb, he bit his tongue again. It was impossible to confess what he had done, for two of his children were there, expected to eat with that well-bred detachment which precludes such happenings; and he rose from dinner with his mind made up. Instead of going back to the House of Commons, he went straight to a strike-breaking agency. No grass should grow under the feet of his decision! Thence he sought the one post-office still open, despatched a long

telegram to his agent, another to the chief constable of Worcestershire; and, feeling he had done all he could for the moment, returned to the 'House,' where they were debating the rural housing question. He sat there, paying only moderate attention to a subject on which he was acknowledged an authority. To-morrow, in all probability, the papers would have got hold of the affair! How he loathed people poking their noses into his concerns! And suddenly he was assailed, very deep down, by a feeling with which in his firmness he had not reckoned—a sort of remorse that he was going to let a lot of loafing blackguards down onto his land, to toss about his grass, and swill their beastly beer above it. And all the real love he had for his fields and coverts, all the fastidiousness of an English gentleman, and, to do him justice, the qualms of a conscience telling him that he owed better things than this to those born on his estate, assaulted him in force. He sat back in his seat, driving his long legs hard against the pew in front. His thick, wavy, still brown hair was beautifully parted above the square brow that frowned over deep-set eyes and a perfectly straight nose. Now and again he bit into a side of his straw-colored moustache, or raised a hand and twisted the other side. Without doubt one of the handsomest and perhaps the most Norman-looking man in the whole 'House.' There was a feeling among those round him that he was thinking deeply. And so he was. But he had decided, and he was not a man who went back on his decisions.

Morning brought even worse sensations. Those ruffians that he had ordered down—the farmers would never consent to put them up! They would have to camp. Camp on his land! It was then that for two seconds the thought flashed through him: Ought I to have considered whether I could agree to that demand? Gone in another flash. If there was one thing a man could not tolerate, it was dictation! Out of the question! But perhaps he had been a little hasty about strike-breakers. Was there not still time to save the situation from that, if he caught the first train? The personal touch was everything. If he put it to the men on the spot, with these strike-breakers up his sleeve, surely they must listen! After all, they were his own people. And suddenly he was overcome with amazement that they should have taken such a step. What had got into them? Spiritless enough, as a rule, in all conscience; the sort of fellows who hadn't steam even to join the miniature rifle-range that he had given them! And visions of them, as he was accustomed to pass them in the lanes, slouching along with their straw bags, their hoes, and their shamefaced greetings, passed before him. Yes! It was all that fellow Freeland's family! The men had been put up to it—put up to it! The very wording of their demand showed that! Very bitterly he thought of the unneighborly conduct of that woman and her cubs. It was impossible to keep it from his wife! And so he told her. Rather to his surprise, she had no scruples about the strike-breakers. Of course, the hay must be saved! And the laborers be taught a lesson! All the unpleasantness he and she had gone through over Tryst and that Gaunt girl must not go for nothing! It must never be said or thought that the Freeland woman and her children had scored over them! If the lesson were once driven home, they would have no further trouble.

He admired her firmness, though with a certain impatience. Women never quite looked ahead; never quite realized all the consequences of anything. And he thought: 'By George! I'd no idea she was so hard! But, then, she always felt more strongly about Tryst and that Gaunt girl than I did.'

In the hall the glass was still going down. He caught the 9.15, wiring to his agent to meet him at the station, and to the impresario of the strike-breakers to hold up their departure until he telegraphed. The three-mile drive up from the station, fully half of which was through his own land, put him in possession of all the agent had to tell: Nasty spirit abroad—men dumb as fishes—the farmers, puzzled and angry, had begun cutting as best they could. Not a man had budged. He had seen young Mr. and Miss Freeland going about. The thing had been worked very cleverly. He had suspected nothing—utterly unlike the laborers as he knew them. They had no real grievance, either! Yes, they were going on with all their other work—milking, horses, and that; it was only the hay they wouldn't touch. Their demand was certainly a very funny one—very funny—had never heard of anything like it. Amounted almost to security of tenure. The Tryst affair no doubt had done it! Malloring cut him short:

"Till they've withdrawn this demand, Simmons, I can't discuss that or anything."

The agent coughed behind his hand.

Naturally! Only perhaps there might be a way of wording it that would satisfy them. Never do to really let them have such decisions in their hands, of course!

They were just passing Tod's. The cottage wore its usual air of embowered peace. And for the life of him Malloring could not restrain a gesture of annoyance.

On reaching home he sent gardeners and grooms in all directions with word that he would be glad to meet the men at four o'clock at the home farm. Much thought, and interviews with several of the farmers, who all but one—a shaky fellow at best—were for giving the laborers a sharp lesson, occupied the interval. Though he had refused to admit the notion that the men could be chicaned, as his agent had implied, he certainly did wonder a little whether a certain measure of security might not in some

way be guaranteed, which would still leave him and the farmers a free hand. But the more he meditated on the whole episode, the more he perceived how intimately it interfered with the fundamental policy of all good landowners—of knowing what was good for their people better than those people knew themselves.

As four o'clock approached, he walked down to the home farm. The sky was lightly overcast, and a rather chill, draughty, rustling wind had risen. Resolved to handle the men with the personal touch, he had discouraged his agent and the farmers from coming to the conference, and passed the gate with the braced-up feeling of one who goes to an encounter. In that very spick-and-span farmyard ducks were swimming leisurely on the greenish pond, white pigeons strutting and preening on the eaves of the barn, and his keen eye noted that some tiles were out of order up there. Four o'clock! Ah, here was a fellow coming! And instinctively he crisped his hands that were buried in his pockets, and ran over to himself his opening words. Then, with a sensation of disgust, he saw that the advancing laborer was that incorrigible 'land lawyer' Gaunt. The short, square man with the ruffled head and the little bright-gray eyes saluted, uttered an "Afternoon, Sir Gerald!" in his teasing voice, and stood still. His face wore the jeering twinkle that had disconcerted so many political meetings. Two lean fellows, rather alike, with lined faces and bitten, drooped moustaches, were the next to come through the yard gate. They halted behind Gaunt, touching their forelocks, shuffling a little, and looking sidelong at each other. And Malloring waited. Five past four! Ten past! Then he said:

"D'you mind telling the others that I'm here?"

Gaunt answered:

"If so be as you was waitin' for the meetin', I fancy as 'ow you've got it, Sir Gerald!"

A wave of anger surged up in Malloring, dyeing his face brick-red. So! He had come all that way with the best intentions—to be treated like this; to meet this 'land lawyer,' who, he could see, was only here to sharpen his tongue, and those two scarecrow-looking chaps, who had come to testify, no doubt, to his discomfiture. And he said sharply:

"So that's the best you can do to meet me, is it?"

Gaunt answered imperturbably:

"I think it is, Sir Gerald."

"Then you've mistaken your man."

"I don't think so, Sir Gerald."

Without another look Malloring passed the three by, and walked back to the house. In the hall was the agent, whose face clearly showed that he had foreseen this defeat. Malloring did not wait for him to speak.

"Make arrangements. The strike-breakers will be down by noon to-morrow. I shall go through with it now, Simmons, if I have to clear the whole lot out. You'd better go in and see that they're ready to send police if there's any nonsense. I'll be down again in a day or two." And, without waiting for reply, he passed into his study. There, while the car was being got ready, he stood in the window, very sore; thinking of what he had meant to do; thinking of his good intentions; thinking of what was coming to the country, when a man could not even get his laborers to come and hear what he had to say. And a sense of injustice, of anger, of bewilderment, harrowed his very soul.

CHAPTER XXVIII

For the first two days of this new 'kick-up,' that 'fellow Freeland's' family undoubtedly tasted the sweets of successful mutiny. The fellow himself alone shook his head. He, like Nedda, had known nothing, and there was to him something unnatural and rather awful in this conduct toward dumb crops.

From the moment he heard of it he hardly spoke, and a perpetual little frown creased a brow usually so serene. In the early morning of the day after Malloring went back to town, he crossed the road to a field where the farmer, aided by his family and one of Malloring's gardeners, was already carrying the hay; and, taking up a pitchfork, without a word to anybody, he joined in the work. The action was

deeper revelation of his feeling than any expostulation, and the young people watched it rather aghast.

"It's nothing," Derek said at last; "Father never has understood, and never will, that you can't get things without fighting. He cares more for trees and bees and birds than he does for human beings."

"That doesn't explain why he goes over to the enemy, when it's only a lot of grass."

Kirsteen answered:

"He hasn't gone over to the enemy, Sheila. You don't understand your father; to neglect the land is sacrilege to him. It feeds us—he would say—we live on it; we've no business to forget that but for the land we should all be dead."

"That's beautiful," said Nedda quickly; "and true."

Sheila answered angrily:

"It may be true in France with their bread and wine. People don't live off the land here; they hardly eat anything they grow themselves. How can we feel like that when we're all brought up on mongrel food? Besides, it's simply sentimental, when there are real wrongs to fight about."

"Your father is not sentimental, Sheila. It's too deep with him for that, and too unconscious. He simply feels so unhappy about the waste of that hay that he can't keep his hands off it."

Derek broke in: "Mother's right. And it doesn't matter, except that we've got to see that the men don't follow his example. They've a funny feeling about him."

Kirsteen shook her head.

"You needn't be afraid. He's always been too strange to them!"

"Well, I'm going to stiffen their backs. Coming Sheila?" And they went.

Left, as she seemed always to be in these days of open mutiny, Nedda said sadly:

"What is coming, Aunt Kirsteen?"

Her aunt was standing in the porch, looking straight before her; a trail of clematis had drooped over her fine black hair down on to the blue of her linen dress. She answered, without turning:

"Have you ever seen, on jubilee nights, bonfire to bonfire, from hill to hill, to the end of the land? This is the first lighted."

Nedda felt something clutch her heart. What was that figure in blue? Priestess? Prophetess? And for a moment the girl felt herself swept into the vision those dark glowing eyes were seeing; some violent, exalted, inexorable, flaming vision. Then something within her revolted, as though one had tried to hypnotize her into seeing what was not true; as though she had been forced for the moment to look, not at what was really there, but at what those eyes saw projected from the soul behind them. And she said quietly:

"I don't believe, Aunt Kirsteen. I don't really believe. I think it must go out."

Kirsteen turned.

"You are like your father," she said—"a doubter."

Nedda shook her head.

"I can't persuade myself to see what isn't there. I never can, Aunt Kirsteen."

Without reply, save a quiver of her brows, Kirsteen went back into the house. And Nedda stayed on the pebbled path before the cottage, unhappy, searching her own soul. Did she fail to see because she was afraid to see, because she was too dull to see; or because, as she had said, there was really nothing there—no flames to leap from hill to hill, no lift, no tearing in the sky that hung over the land? And she thought: 'London—all those big towns, their smoke, the things they make, the things we want them to make, that we shall always want them to make. Aren't they there? For every laborer who's a slave Dad says there are five town workers who are just as much slaves! And all those Bigwigs with their great houses, and their talk, and their interest in keeping things where they are! Aren't they there? I don't—I can't believe anything much can happen, or be changed. Oh! I shall never see visions, and dream dreams!' And from her heart she sighed.

In the meantime Derek and Sheila were going their round on bicycles, to stiffen the backs of the laborers. They had hunted lately, always in a couple, desiring no complications, having decided that it was less likely to provoke definite assault and opposition from the farmers. To their mother was assigned all correspondence; to themselves the verbal exhortations, the personal touch. It was past noon, and they were already returning, when they came on the char-a-bancs containing the head of the strike-breaking column. The two vehicles were drawn up opposite the gate leading to Marrow Farm, and the agent was detaching the four men destined to that locality, with their camping-gear. By the open gate the farmer stood eying his new material askance. Dejected enough creatures they looked—poor devils picked up at ten pound the dozen, who, by the mingled apathy and sheepish amusement on their faces, might never have seen a pitchfork, or smelled a field of clover, in their lives.

The two young Freelands rode slowly past; the boy's face scornfully drawn back into itself; the girl's flaming scarlet.

"Don't take notice," Derek said; "we'll soon stop that."

And they had gone another mile before he added:

"We've got to make our round again; that's all."

The words of Mr. Pogram, 'You have influence, young man,' were just. There was about Derek the sort of quality that belongs to the good regimental officer; men followed and asked themselves why the devil they had, afterward. And if it be said that no worse leader than a fiery young fool can be desired for any movement, it may also be said that without youth and fire and folly there is usually no movement at all.

Late in the afternoon they returned home, dead beat. That evening the farmers and their wives milked the cows, tended the horses, did everything that must be done, not without curses. And next morning the men, with Gaunt and a big, dark fellow, called Tulley, for spokesmen, again proffered their demand. The agent took counsel with Malloring by wire. His answer, "Concede nothing," was communicated to the men in the afternoon, and received by Gaunt with the remark: "I thart we should be hearin' that. Please to thank Sir Gerald. The men concedes their gratitood." . . .

That night it began to rain. Nedda, waking, could hear the heavy drops pattering on the sweetbrier and clematis thatching her open window. The scent of rain-cooled leaves came in drifts, and it seemed a shame to sleep. She got up; put on her dressing-gown, and went to thrust her nose into that bath of dripping sweetness. Dark as the clouds had made the night, there was still the faint light of a moon somewhere behind. The leaves of the fruit-trees joined in the long, gentle hissing, and now and again rustled and sighed sharply; a cock somewhere, as by accident, let off a single crow. There were no stars. All was dark and soft as velvet. And Nedda thought: 'The world is dressed in living creatures! Trees, flowers, grass, insects, ourselves—woven together—the world is dressed in life! I understand Uncle Tod's feeling! If only it would rain till they have to send these strike-breakers back because there's no hay worth fighting about!' Suddenly her heart beat fast. The wicket gate had clicked. There was something darker than the darkness coming along the path! Scared, but with all protective instinct roused, she leaned out, straining to see. A faint grating sound from underneath came up to her. A window being opened! And she flew to her door. She neither barred it, however, nor cried out, for in that second it had flashed across her: 'Suppose it's he! Gone out to do something desperate, as Tryst did!' If it were, he would come up-stairs and pass her door, going to his room. She opened it an inch, holding her breath. At first, nothing! Was it fancy? Or was some one noiselessly rifling the room down-stairs? But surely no one would steal of Uncle Tod, who, everybody knew, had nothing valuable. Then came a sound as of bootless feet pressing the stairs stealthily! And the thought darted through her, 'If it isn't he, what shall I do?' And then—'What shall I do—if it IS!'

Desperately she opened the door, clasping her hands on the place whence her heart had slipped down to her bare feet. But she knew it was he before she heard him whisper: "Nedda!" and, clutching him by the sleeve, she drew him in and closed the door. He was wet through, dripping; so wet that the mere brushing against him made her skin feel moist through its thin coverings.

"Where have you been? What have you been doing? Oh, Derek!"

There was just light enough to see his face, his teeth, the whites of his eyes.

"Cutting their tent-ropes in the rain. Hooroosh!"

It was such a relief that she just let out a little gasping "Oh!" and leaned her forehead against his coat. Then she felt his wet arms round her, his wet body pressed to hers, and in a second he was dancing with her a sort of silent, ecstatic war dance. Suddenly he stopped, went down on his knees, pressing his face to her waist, and whispering: "What a brute, what a brute! Making her wet! Poor little

Nedda!"

Nedda bent over him; her hair covered his wet head, her hands trembled on his shoulders. Her heart felt as if it would melt right out of her; she longed so to warm and dry him with herself. And, in turn, his wet arms clutched her close, his wet hands could not keep still on her. Then he drew back, and whispering: "Oh, Nedda! Nedda!" fled out like a dark ghost. Oblivious that she was damp from head to foot, Nedda stood swaying, her eyes closed and her lips just open; then, putting out her arms, she drew them suddenly in and clasped herself. . . .

When she came down to breakfast the next morning, he had gone out already, and Uncle Tod, too; her aunt was writing at the bureau. Sheila greeted her gruffly, and almost at once went out. Nedda swallowed coffee, ate her egg, and bread and honey, with a heavy heart. A newspaper lay open on the table; she read it idly till these words caught her eye:

"The revolt which has paralyzed the hay harvest on Sir Gerald Malloring's Worcestershire estate and led to the introduction of strike-breakers, shows no sign of abatement. A very wanton spirit of mischief seems to be abroad in this neighborhood. No reason can be ascertained for the arson committed a short time back, nor for this further outbreak of discontent. The economic condition of the laborers on this estate is admittedly rather above than below the average."

And at once she thought: "Mischief!" What a shame! Were people, then, to know nothing of the real cause of the revolt—nothing of the Tryst eviction, the threatened eviction of the Gaunts? Were they not to know that it was on principle, and to protest against that sort of petty tyranny to the laborers all over the country, that this rebellion had been started? For liberty! only simple liberty not to be treated as though they had no minds or souls of their own—weren't the public to know that? If they were allowed to think that it was all wanton mischief—that Derek was just a mischief-maker—it would be dreadful! Some one must write and make this known? Her father? But Dad might think it too personal—his own relations! Mr. Cuthcott! Into whose household Wilmet Gaunt had gone. Ah! Mr. Cuthcott who had told her that he was always at her service! Why not? And the thought that she might really do something at last to help made her tingle all over. If she borrowed Sheila's bicycle she could catch the nine-o'clock train to London, see him herself, make him do something, perhaps even bring him back with her! She examined her purse. Yes, she had money. She would say nothing, here, because, of course, he might refuse! At the back of her mind was the idea that, if a real newspaper took the part of the laborers, Derek's position would no longer be so dangerous; he would be, as it were, legally recognized, and that, in itself, would make him more careful and responsible. Whence she got this belief in the legalizing power of the press it is difficult to say, unless that, reading newspapers but seldom, she still took them at their own valuation, and thought that when they said: "We shall do this," or "We must do that," they really were speaking for the country, and that forty-five millions of people were deliberately going to do something, whereas, in truth, as was known to those older than Nedda, they were speaking, and not too conclusively at that, for single anonymous gentlemen in a hurry who were not going to do anything. She knew that the press had power, great power—for she was always hearing that—and it had not occurred to her as yet to examine the composition of that power so as to discover that, while the press certainly had a certain monopoly of expression, and that same 'spirit of body' which makes police constables swear by one another, it yet contained within its ring fence the sane and advisable futility of a perfectly balanced contradiction; so that its only functions, practically speaking, were the dissemination of news, seven-tenths of which would have been happier in obscurity; and—'irritation of the Dutch!' Not, of course, that the press realized this; nor was it probable that any one would tell it, for it had power—great power.

She caught her train—glowing outwardly from the speed of her ride, and inwardly from the heat of adventure and the thought that at last she was being of some use.

The only other occupants of her third-class compartment were a friendly looking man, who might have been a sailor or other wanderer on leave, and his thin, dried-up, black-clothed cottage woman of an old mother. They sat opposite each other. The son looked at his mother with beaming eyes, and she remarked: "An' I says to him, says I, I says, 'What?' I says; so 'e says to me, he says, 'Yes,' he says; 'that's what I say,' he says." And Nedda thought: 'What an old dear! And the son looks nice too; I do like simple people.'

They got out at the first stop and she journeyed on alone. Taking a taxicab from Paddington, she drove toward Gray's Inn. But now that she was getting close she felt very nervous. How expect a busy man like Mr. Cuthcott to spare time to come down all that way? It would be something, though, if she could get him even to understand what was really happening, and why; so that he could contradict that man in the other paper. It must be wonderful to be writing, daily, what thousands and thousands of people read! Yes! It must be a very sacred-feeling life! To be able to say things in that particularly authoritative way which must take such a lot of people in—that is, make such a lot of people think in

the same way! It must give a man a terrible sense of responsibility, make him feel that he simply must be noble, even if he naturally wasn't. Yes! it must be a wonderful profession, and only fit for the highest! In addition to Mr. Cuthcott, she knew as yet but three young journalists, and those all weekly.

At her timid ring the door was opened by a broad-cheeked girl, enticingly compact in apron and black frock, whose bright color, thick lips, and rogue eyes came of anything but London. It flashed across Nedda that this must be the girl for whose sake she had faced Mr. Cuthcott at the luncheon-table! And she said: "Are you Wilmet Gaunt?"

The girl smiled till her eyes almost disappeared, and answered: "Yes, miss."

"I'm Nedda Freeland, Miss Sheila's cousin. I've just come from Joyfields. How are you getting on?"

"Fine, thank you, miss. Plenty of life here."

Nedda thought: 'That's what Derek said of her. Bursting with life! And so she is.' And she gazed doubtfully at the girl, whose prim black dress and apron seemed scarcely able to contain her.

"Is Mr. Cuthcott in?"

"No, miss; he'll be down at the paper. Two hundred and five Floodgate Street."

'Oh!' thought Nedda with dismay; 'I shall never venture there!' And glancing once more at the girl, whose rogue slits of eyes, deep sunk between cheek-bones and brow, seemed to be quizzing her and saying: 'You and Mr. Derek—oh! I know!' she went sadly away. And first she thought she would go home to Hampstead, then that she would go back to the station, then: 'After all, why shouldn't I go and try? They can't eat me. I will!'

She reached her destination at the luncheon-hour, so that the offices of the great evening journal were somewhat deserted. Producing her card, she was passed from hand to hand till she rested in a small bleak apartment where a young woman was typing fast. She longed to ask her how she liked it, but did not dare. The whole atmosphere seemed to her charged with a strenuous solemnity, as though everything said, 'We have power—great power.' And she waited, sitting by the window which faced the street. On the buildings opposite she could read the name of another great evening journal. Why, it was the one which had contained the paragraph she had read at breakfast! She had bought a copy of it at the station. Its temperament, she knew, was precisely opposed to that of Mr. Cuthcott's paper. Over in that building, no doubt there would be the same strenuously loaded atmosphere, so that if they opened the windows on both sides little puffs of power would meet in mid-air, above the heads of the passers-by, as might the broadsides of old three-deckers, above the green, green sea.

And for the first time an inkling of the great comic equipoise in Floodgate Street and human affairs stole on Nedda's consciousness. They puffed and puffed, and only made smoke in the middle! That must be why Dad always called them: 'Those fellows!' She had scarcely, however, finished beginning to think these thoughts when a handbell sounded sharply in some adjoining room, and the young woman nearly fell into her typewriter. Readjusting her balance, she rose, and, going to the door, passed out in haste. Through the open doorway Nedda could see a large and pleasant room, whose walls seemed covered with prints of men standing in attitudes such that she was almost sure they were statesmen; and, at a table in the centre, the back of Mr. Cuthcott in a twiddly chair, surrounded by sheets of paper reposing on the floor, shining like autumn leaves on a pool of water. She heard his voice, smothery, hurried, but still pleasant, say: "Take these, Miss Mayne, take these! Begin on them, begin! Confound it! What's the time?" And the young woman's voice: "Half past one, Mr. Cuthcott!" And a noise from Mr. Cuthcott's throat that sounded like an adjuration to the Deity not to pass over something. Then the young woman dipped and began gathering those leaves of paper, and over her comely back Nedda had a clear view of Mr. Cuthcott hunching one brown shoulder as though warding something off, and of one of his thin hands ploughing up and throwing back his brown hair on one side, and heard the sound of his furiously scratching pen. And her heart pattered; it was so clear that he was 'giving them one' and had no time for her. And involuntarily she looked at the windows beyond him to see if there were any puffs of power issuing therefrom. But they were closed. She saw the young woman rise and come back toward her, putting the sheets of paper in order; and, as the door was closing, from the twiddly chair a noise that seemed to couple God with the condemnation of silly souls. When the young woman was once more at the typewriter she rose and said: "Have you given him my card yet?"

The young woman looked at her surprised, as if she had broken some rule of etiquette, and answered: "No."

"Then don't, please. I can see that he's too busy. I won't wait."

The young woman abstractedly placed a sheet of paper in her typewriter.

"Very well," she said. "Good morning!"

And before Nedda reached the door she heard the click-click of the machine, reducing Mr. Cuthcott to legibility.

'I was stupid to come,' she thought. 'He must be terribly overworked. Poor man! He does say lovely things!' And, crestfallen, she went along the passages, and once more out into Floodgate Street. She walked along it frowning, till a man who was selling newspapers said as she passed: "Mind ye don't smile, lydy!"

Seeing that he was selling Mr. Cuthcott's paper, she felt for a coin to buy one, and, while searching, scrutinized the newsvender's figure, almost entirely hidden by the words:

GREAT HOUSING SCHEME

HOPE FOR THE MILLION!

on a buff-colored board; while above it, his face, that had not quite blood enough to be scorbutic, was wrapped in the expression of those philosophers to whom a hope would be fatal. He was, in fact, just what he looked—a street stoic. And a dim perception of the great social truth: "The smell of half a loaf is not better than no bread!" flickered in Nedda's brain as she passed on. Was that what Derek was doing with the laborers—giving them half the smell of a liberty that was not there? And a sudden craving for her father came over her. He—he only, was any good, because he, only, loved her enough to feel how distracted and unhappy she was feeling, how afraid of what was coming. So, making for a Tube station, she took train to Hampstead. . . .

It was past two, and Felix, on the point of his constitutional. He had left Becket the day after Nedda's rather startling removal to Joyfields, and since then had done his level best to put the whole Tryst affair, with all its somewhat sinister relevance to her life and his own, out of his mind as something beyond control. He had but imperfectly succeeded.

Flora, herself not too present-minded, had in these days occasion to speak to him about the absent-minded way in which he fulfilled even the most domestic duties, and Alan was always saying to him, "Buck up, Dad!" With Nedda's absorption into the little Joyfields whirlpool, the sun shone but dimly for Felix. And a somewhat febrile attention to 'The Last of the Laborers' had not brought it up to his expectations. He fluttered under his buff waistcoat when he saw her coming in at the gate. She must want something of him! For to this pitch of resignation, as to his little daughter's love for him, had he come! And if she wanted something of him, things would be going wrong again down there! Nor did the warmth of her embrace, and her: "Oh! Dad, it IS nice to see you!" remove that instinctive conviction; though delicacy, born of love, forbade him to ask her what she wanted. Talking of the sky and other matters, thinking how pretty she was looking, he waited for the new, inevitable proof that youth was first, and a mere father only second fiddle now. A note from Stanley had already informed him of the strike. The news had been something of a relief. Strikes, at all events, were respectable and legitimate means of protest, and to hear that one was in progress had not forced him out of his laborious attempt to believe the whole affair only a mole-hill. He had not, however, heard of the strike-breakers, nor had he seen any newspaper mention of the matter; and when she had shown him the paragraph; recounted her visit to Mr. Cuthcott, and how she had wanted to take him back with her to see for himself—he waited a moment, then said almost timidly: "Should I be of any use, my dear?" She flushed and squeezed his hand in silence; and he knew he would.

When he had packed a handbag and left a note for Flora, he rejoined her in the hall.

It was past seven when they reached their destination, and, taking the station 'fly,' drove slowly up to Joyfields, under a showery sky.

CHAPTER XXIX

When Felix and Nedda reached Tod's cottage, the three little Trysts, whose activity could never be quite called play, were all the living creatures about the house.

"Where is Mrs. Freeland, Biddy?"

"We don't know; a man came, and she went."

"And Miss Sheila?"

"She went out in the mornin'. And Mr. Freeland's gone."

Susie added: "The dog's gone, too."

"Then help me to get some tea."

"Yes."

With the assistance of the mother-child, and the hindrance of Susie and Billy, Nedda made and laid tea, with an anxious heart. The absence of her aunt, who so seldom went outside the cottage, fields, and orchard, disturbed her; and, while Felix refreshed himself, she fluttered several times on varying pretexts to the wicket gate.

At her third visit, from the direction of the church, she saw figures coming on the road—dark figures carrying something, followed by others walking alongside. What sun there had been had quite given in to heavy clouds; the light was dull, the elm-trees dark; and not till they were within two hundred yards could Nedda make out that these were figures of policemen. Then, alongside that which they were carrying, she saw her aunt's blue dress. WHAT were they carrying like that? She dashed down the steps, and stopped. No! If it were HE they would bring him in! She rushed back again, distracted. She could see now a form stretched on a hurdle. It WAS he!

"Dad! Quick!"

Felix came, startled at that cry, to find his little daughter on the path wringing her hands and flying back to the wicket gate. They were close now. She saw them begin to mount the steps, those behind raising their arms so that the hurdle should be level. Derek lay on his back, with head and forehead swathed in wet blue linen, torn from his mother's skirt; and the rest of his face very white. He lay quite still, his clothes covered with mud. Terrified, Nedda plucked at Kirsteen's sleeve.

"What is it?"

"Concussion!" The stillness of that blue-clothed figure, so calm beside her, gave her strength to say quietly:

"Put him in my room, Aunt Kirsteen; there's more air there!" And she flew up-stairs, flinging wide her door, making the bed ready, snatching her night things from the pillow; pouring out cold water, sprinkling the air with eau de cologne. Then she stood still. Perhaps, they would not bring him there? Yes, they were coming up. They brought him in, and laid him on the bed. She heard one say: "Doctor'll be here directly, ma'am. Let him lie quiet." Then she and his mother were alone beside him.

"Undo his boots," said Kirsteen.

Nedda's fingers trembled, and she hated them for fumbling so, while she drew off those muddy boots. Then her aunt said softly: "Hold him up, dear, while I get his things off."

And, with a strange rapture that she was allowed to hold him thus, she supported him against her breast till he was freed and lying back inert. Then, and only then, she whispered:

"How long before he—?"

Kirsteen shook her head; and, slipping her arm round the girl, murmured:
"Courage, Nedda!"

The girl felt fear and love rush up desperately to overwhelm her. She choked them back, and said quite quietly: "I will. I promise. Only let me help nurse him!"

Kirsteen nodded. And they sat down to wait.

That quarter of an hour was the longest of her life. To see him thus, living, yet not living, with the spirit driven from him by a cruel blow, perhaps never to come back! Curious, how things still got themselves noticed when all her faculties were centred in gazing at his face. She knew that it was raining again; heard the swish and drip, and smelled the cool wet perfume through the scent of the eau de cologne that she had spilled. She noted her aunt's arm, as it hovered, wetting the bandage; the veins and rounded whiteness from under the loose blue sleeve slipped up to the elbow. One of his feet lay

close to her at the bed's edge; she stole her hand beneath the sheet. That foot felt very cold, and she grasped it tight. If only she could pass life into him through her hot hand. She heard the ticking of her little travelling-clock, and was conscious of flies wheeling close up beneath the white ceiling, of how one by one they darted at each other, making swift zigzags in the air. And something in her she had not yet known came welling up, softening her eyes, her face, even the very pose of her young body—the hidden passion of a motherliness, that yearned so to 'kiss the place,' to make him well, to nurse and tend, restore and comfort him. And with all her might she watched the movements of those rounded arms under the blue sleeves—how firm and exact they were, how soft and quiet and swift, bathing the dark head! Then from beneath the bandage she caught sight suddenly of his eyes. And her heart turned sick. Oh, they were not quite closed! As if he hadn't life enough to close them! She bit into her lip to stop a cry. It was so terrible to see them without light. Why did not that doctor come? Over and over and over again within her the prayer turned: Let him live! Oh, let him live!

The blackbirds out in the orchard were tuning up for evening. It seemed almost dreadful they should be able to sing like that. All the world was going on just the same! If he died, the world would have no more light for her than there was now in his poor eyes—and yet it would go on the same! How was that possible? It was not possible, because she would die too! She saw her aunt turn her head like a startled animal; some one was coming up the stairs! It was the doctor, wiping his wet face—a young man in gaiters. How young—dreadfully young! No; there was a little gray at the sides of his hair! What would he say? And Nedda sat with hands tight clenched in her lap, motionless as a young crouching sphinx. An interminable testing, and questioning, and answer! Never smoked—never drank—never been ill! The blow—ah, here! Just here! Concussion—yes! Then long staring into the eyes, the eyelids lifted between thumb and finger. And at last (how could he talk so loud! Yet it was a comfort too—he would not talk like that if Derek were going to die!)—Hair cut shorter—ice—watch him like a lynx! This and that, if he came to. Nothing else to be done. And then those blessed words:

"But don't worry too much. I think it'll be all right." She could not help a little sigh escaping her clenched teeth.

The doctor was looking at her. His eyes were nice.

"Sister?"

"Cousin."

"Ah! Well, I'll get back now, and send you out some ice, at once."

More talk outside the door. Nedda, alone with her lover, crouched forward on her knees, and put her lips to his. They were not so cold as his foot, and the first real hope and comfort came to her. Watch him like a lynx—wouldn't she? But how had it all happened? And where was Sheila? and Uncle Tod?

Her aunt had come back and was stroking her shoulder. There had been fighting in the barn at Marrow Farm. They had arrested Sheila. Derek had jumped down to rescue her and struck his head against a grindstone. Her uncle had gone with Sheila. They would watch, turn and turn about. Nedda must go now and eat something, and get ready to take the watch from eight to midnight.

Following her resolve to make no fuss, the girl went out. The police had gone. The mother-child was putting her little folk to bed; and in the kitchen Felix was arranging the wherewithal to eat. He made her sit down and kept handing things; watching like a cat to see that she put them in her mouth, in the way from which only Flora had suffered hitherto; he seemed so anxious and unhappy, and so awfully sweet, that Nedda forced herself to swallow what she thought would never go down a dry and choky throat. He kept coming up and touching her shoulder or forehead. Once he said:

"It's all right, you know, my pet; concussion often takes two days."

Two days with his eyes like that! The consolation was not so vivid as Felix might have wished; but she quite understood that he was doing his best to give it. She suddenly remembered that he had no room to sleep in. He must use Derek's. No! That, it appeared, was to be for her when she came off duty. Felix was going to have an all-night sitting in the kitchen. He had been looking forward to an all-night sitting for many years, and now he had got his chance. It was a magnificent opportunity—"without your mother, my dear, to insist on my sleeping." And staring at his smile, Nedda thought: 'He's like Granny—he comes out under difficulties. If only I did!'

The ice arrived by motor-cycle just before her watch began. It was some comfort to have that definite thing to see to. How timorous and humble are thoughts in a sick-room, above all when the sick are stretched behind the muffle of unconsciousness, withdrawn from the watcher by half-death! And yet, for him or her who loves, there is at least the sense of being alone with the loved one, of doing all that can be done; and in some strange way of twining hearts with the exiled spirit. To Nedda, sitting at his

feet, and hardly ever turning eyes away from his still face, it sometimes seemed that the flown spirit was there beside her. And she saw into his soul in those hours of watching, as one looking into a stream sees the leopard-like dapple of its sand and dark-strewn floor, just reached by sunlight. She saw all his pride, courage, and impatience, his reserve, and strange unwilling tenderness, as she had never seen them. And a queer dreadful feeling moved her that in some previous existence she had looked at that face dead on a field of battle, frowning up at the stars. That was absurd—there were no previous existences! Or was it prevision of what would come some day?

When, at half past nine, the light began to fail, she lighted two candles in tall, thin, iron candlesticks beside her. They burned without flicker, those spires of yellow flame, slowly conquering the dying twilight, till in their soft radiance the room was full of warm dusky shadows, the night outside ever a deeper black. Two or three times his mother came, looked at him, asked her if she should stay, and, receiving a little silent shake of the head, went away again. At eleven o'clock, when once more she changed the ice-cap, his eyes had still no lustre, and for a moment her courage failed her utterly. It seemed to her that he could never win back, that death possessed the room already, possessed those candle-flames, the ticking of the clock, the dark, dripping night, possessed her heart. Could he be gone before she had been his! Gone! Where? She sank down on her knees, covering her eyes. What good to watch, if he were never coming back! A long time—it seemed hours—passed thus, with the feeling growing deeper in her that no good would come while she was watching. And behind the barrier of her hands she tried desperately to rally courage. If things were—they were! One must look them in the face! She took her hands away. His eyes! Was it light in them? Was it? They were seeing—surely they saw. And his lips made the tiniest movement. In that turmoil of exultation she never knew how she managed to continue kneeling there, with her hands on his. But all her soul shone down to him out of her eyes, and drew and drew at his spirit struggling back from the depths of him. For many minutes that struggle lasted; then he smiled. It was the feeblest smile that ever was on lips, but it made the tears pour down Nedda's cheeks and trickle off on to his hands. Then, with a stoicism that she could not believe in, so hopelessly unreal it seemed, so utterly the negation of the tumult within her, she settled back again at his feet to watch and not excite him. And still his lips smiled that faint smile, and his opened eyes grew dark and darker with meaning.

So at midnight Kirsteen found them.

CHAPTER XXX

In the early hours of his all-night sitting Felix had first only memories, and then Kirsteen for companion.

"I worry most about Tod," she said. "He had that look in his face when he went off from Marrow Farm. He might do something terrible if they ill-treat Sheila. If only she has sense enough to see and not provoke them."

"Surely she will," Felix murmured.

"Yes, if she realizes. But she won't, I'm afraid. Even I have only known him look like that three times. Tod is so gentle—passion stores itself in him; and when it comes, it's awful. If he sees cruelty, he goes almost mad. Once he would have killed a man if I hadn't got between them. He doesn't know what he's doing at such moments. I wish—I wish he were back. It's hard one can't pierce through, and see him."

Gazing at her eyes so dark and intent, Felix thought: 'If YOU can't pierce through—none can.'

He learned the story of the disaster.

Early that morning Derek had assembled twenty of the strongest laborers, and taken them a round of the farms to force the strike-breakers to desist. There had been several fights, in all of which the strike-breakers had been beaten. Derek himself had fought three times. In the afternoon the police had come, and the laborers had rushed with Derek and Sheila, who had joined them, into a barn at Marrow Farm, barred it, and thrown mangolds at the police, when they tried to force an entrance. One by one the laborers had slipped away by a rope out of a ventilation-hole high up at the back, and they had just got Sheila down when the police appeared on that side, too. Derek, who had stayed to the last, covering their escape with mangolds, had jumped down twenty feet when he saw them taking Sheila, and, pitching forward, hit his head against a grindstone. Then, just as they were marching Sheila and two of the laborers away, Tod had arrived and had fallen in alongside the policemen—he and the dog. It was

then she had seen that look on his face.

Felix, who had never beheld his big brother in Berserk mood, could offer no consolation; nor had he the heart to adorn the tale, and inflict on this poor woman his reflection: 'This, you see, is what comes of the ferment you have fostered. This is the reward of violence!' He longed, rather, to comfort her; she seemed so lonely and, in spite of all her stoicism, so distraught and sad. His heart went out, too, to Tod. How would he himself have felt, walking by the side of policemen whose arms were twisted in Nedda's! But so mixed are the minds of men that at this very moment there was born within him the germ of a real revolt against the entry of his little daughter into this family of hotheads. It was more now than mere soreness and jealousy; it was fear of a danger hitherto but sniffed at, but now only too sharply savored.

When she left him to go up-stairs, Felix stayed consulting the dark night. As ever, in hours of ebb vitality, the shapes of fear and doubt grew clearer and more positive; they loomed huge out there among the apple-trees, where the drip-drip of the rain made music. But his thoughts were still nebulous, not amounting to resolve. It was no moment for resolves—with the boy lying up there between the tides of chance; and goodness knew what happening to Tod and Sheila. The air grew sharper; he withdrew to the hearth, where a wood fire still burned, gray ash, red glow, scent oozing from it. And while he crouched there, blowing it with bellows, he heard soft footsteps, and saw Nedda standing behind him transformed.

But in the midst of all his glad sympathy Felix could not help thinking: 'Better for you, perhaps, if he had never returned from darkness!'

She came and crouched down by him.

"Let me sit with you, Dad. It smells so good."

"Very well; but you must sleep."

"I don't believe I'll ever want to sleep again."

And at the glow in her Felix glowed too. What is so infectious as delight? They sat a long time talking, as they had not talked since the first fatal visit to Becket. Of how love, and mountains, works of art, and doing things for others were the only sources of happiness; except scents, and lying on one's back looking through tree-tops at the sky; and tea, and sunlight, flowers, and hard exercise; oh, and the sea! Of how, when things went hard, one prayed—but what did one pray to? Was it not to something in oneself? It was of no use to pray to the great mysterious Force that made one thing a cabbage, and the other a king; for That could obviously not be weak-minded enough to attend. And gradually little pauses began to creep into their talk; then a big pause, and Nedda, who would never want to sleep again, was fast asleep.

Felix watched those long, dark lashes resting on her cheeks; the slow, soft rise of her breast; the touching look of trust and goodness in that young face abandoned to oblivion after these hours of stress; watched the little tired shadows under the eyes, the tremors of the just-parted lips. And, getting up, stealthy as a cat, he found a light rug, and ever more stealthily laid it over her. She stirred at that, smiled up at him, and instantly went off again. And he thought: 'Poor little sweetheart, she WAS tired!' And a passionate desire to guard her from trials and troubles came on him.

At four o'clock Kirsteen slipped in again, and whispered: "She made me promise to come for her. How pretty she looks, sleeping!"

"Yes," Felix answered; "pretty and good!"

Nedda raised her head, stared up at her aunt, and a delighted smile spread over her face. "Is it time again? How lovely!" Then, before either could speak or stop her, she was gone.

"She is more in love," Kirsteen murmured, "than I ever saw a girl of her age."

"She is more in love," Felix answered, "than is good to see."

"She is not truer than Derek is."

"That may be, but she will suffer from him."

"Women who love must always suffer."

Her cheeks were sunken, shadowy; she looked very tired. When she had gone to get some sleep, Felix restored the fire and put on a kettle, meaning to make himself some coffee. Morning had broken, clear

and sparkling after the long rain, and full of scent and song. What glory equalled this early morning radiance, the dewy wonder of everything! What hour of the day was such a web of youth and beauty as this, when all the stars from all the skies had fallen into the grass! A cold nose was thrust into his hand, and he saw beside him Tod's dog. The animal was wet, and lightly moved his white-tipped tail; while his dark-yellow eyes inquired of Felix what he was going to give a dog to eat. Then Felix saw his brother coming in. Tod's face was wild and absent as a man with all his thoughts turned on something painful in the distance. His ruffled hair had lost its brightness; his eyes looked as if driven back into his head; he was splashed with mud, and wet from head to foot. He walked up to the hearth without a word.

"Well, old man?" said Felix anxiously.

Tod looked at him, but did not answer.

"Come," said Felix; "tell us!"

"Locked up," said Tod in a voice unlike his own. "I didn't knock them down."

"Heavens! I should hope not."

"I ought to have."

Felix put his hand within his brother's arm.

"They twisted her arms; one of them pushed her from behind. I can't understand it. How was it I didn't? I can't understand."

"I can," said Felix. "They were the Law. If they had been mere men you'd have done it, fast enough."

"I can't understand," Tod repeated. "I've been walking ever since."

Felix stroked his shoulder.

"Go up-stairs, old man. Kirsteen's anxious."

Tod sat down and took his boots off.

"I can't understand," he said once more. Then, without another word, or even a look at Felix, he went out and up the stairs.

And Felix thought: 'Poor Kirsteen! Ah, well—they're all about as queer, one as the other! How to get Nedda out of it?'

And, with that question gnawing at him, he went out into the orchard. The grass was drenching wet, so he descended to the road. Two wood-pigeons were crooning to each other, truest of all sounds of summer; there was no wind, and the flies had begun humming. In the air, cleared of dust, the scent of hay was everywhere. What about those poor devils of laborers, now? They would get the sack for this! and he was suddenly beset with a feeling of disgust. This world where men, and women too, held what they had, took what they could; this world of seeing only one thing at a time; this world of force, and cunning, of struggle, and primitive appetites; of such good things, too, such patience, endurance, heroism—and yet at heart so unutterably savage!

He was very tired; but it was too wet to sit down, so he walked on. Now and again he passed a laborer going to work; but very few in all those miles, and they quite silent. 'Did they ever really whistle?' Felix thought. 'Were they ever jolly ploughmen? Or was that always a fiction? Surely, if they can't give tongue this morning, they never can!' He crossed a stile and took a slanting path through a little wood. The scent of leaves and sap, the dapple of sunlight—all the bright early glow and beauty struck him with such force that he could have cried out in the sharpness of sensation. At that hour when man was still abed and the land lived its own life, how full and sweet and wild that life seemed, how in love with itself! Truly all the trouble in the world came from the manifold disharmonies of the self-conscious animal called Man!

Then, coming out on the road again, he saw that he must be within a mile or two of Becket; and finding himself suddenly very hungry, determined to go there and get some breakfast.

CHAPTER XXXI

Duly shaved with one of Stanley's razors, bathed, and breakfasted, Felix was on the point of getting into the car to return to Joyfields when he received a message from his mother: Would he please go up and see her before he went?

He found her looking anxious and endeavoring to conceal it.

Having kissed him, she drew him to her sofa and said: "Now, darling, come and sit down here, and tell me all about this DREADFUL business." And taking up an odorator she blew over him a little cloud of scent. "It's quite a new perfume; isn't it delicious?"

Felix, who dreaded scent, concealed his feelings, sat down, and told her. And while he told her he was conscious of how pathetically her fastidiousness was quivering under those gruesome details—fighting with policemen, fighting with common men, prison—FOR A LADY; conscious too of her still more pathetic effort to put a good face on it. When he had finished she remained so perfectly still, with lips so hard compressed, that he said:

"It's no good worrying, Mother."

Frances Freeland rose, pulled something hard, and a cupboard appeared. She opened it, and took out a travelling-bag.

"I must go back with you at once," she said.

"I don't think it's in the least necessary, and you'll only knock yourself up."

"Oh, nonsense, darling! I must."

Knowing that further dissuasion would harden her determination, Felix said: "I'm going in the car."

"That doesn't matter. I shall be ready in ten minutes. Oh! and do you know this? It's splendid for taking lines out under the eyes!" She was holding out a little round box with the lid off. "Just wet your finger with it, and dab it gently on."

Touched by this evidence of her deep desire that he should put as good a face on it as herself, Felix dabbed himself under the eyes.

"That's right. Now, wait for me, dear; I shan't be a minute. I've only to get my things. They'll all go splendidly in this little bag."

In a quarter of an hour they had started. During that journey Frances Freeland betrayed no sign of tremor. She was going into action, and, therefore, had no patience with her nerves.

"Are you proposing to stay, Mother?" Felix hazarded; "because I don't think there's a room for you."

"Oh! that's nothing, darling. I sleep beautifully in a chair. It suits me better than lying down." Felix cast up his eyes, and made no answer.

On arriving, they found that the doctor had been there, expressed his satisfaction, and enjoined perfect quiet. Tod was on the point of starting back to Transham, where Sheila and the two laborers would be brought up before the magistrates. Felix and Kirsteen took hurried counsel. Now that Mother, whose nursing was beyond reproach, had come, it would be better if they went with Tod. All three started forthwith in the car.

Left alone, Frances Freeland took her bag—a noticeably old one, without any patent clasp whatever, so that she could open it—went noiselessly upstairs, tapped on Derek's door, and went in. A faint but cheerful voice remarked: "Halloo, Granny!"

Frances Freeland went up to the bed, smiled down on him ineffably, laid a finger on his lips, and said, in the stillest voice: "You mustn't talk, darling!" Then she sat down in the window with her bag beside her. Half a tear had run down her nose, and she had no intention that it should be seen. She therefore opened her bag, and, having taken out a little bottle, beckoned Nedda.

"Now, darling," she whispered, "you must just take one of these. It's nothing new; they're what my mother used to give me at your age. And for one hour you must go out and get some fresh air, and then you can come back."

"Must I, Granny?"

"Yes; you must keep up your strength. Kiss me."

Nedda kissed a cheek that seemed extraordinarily smooth and soft, received a kiss in the middle of her own, and, having stayed a second by the bed, looking down with all her might, went out.

Frances Freeland, in the window, wasted no thoughts, but began to run over in her mind the exact operations necessary to defeat this illness of darling Derek's. Her fingers continually locked and interlocked themselves with fresh determinations; her eyes, fixed on imaginary foods, methods of washing, and ways of keeping him quiet, had an almost fanatical intensity. Like a good general she marshalled her means of attack and fixed them in perfect order. Now and then she gazed into her bag, making quite sure that she had everything, and nothing that was new-fangled or liable to go wrong. For into action she never brought any of those patent novelties that delighted her soul in times of peace. For example, when she herself had pneumonia and no doctor, for two months, it was well known that she had lain on her back, free from every kind of remedy, employing only courage, nature, and beef tea, or some such simple sustenance.

Having now made her mental dispositions, she got up without sound and slipped off a petticoat that she suspected of having rustled a little when she came in; folding and popping it where it could not be suspected any more, she removed her shoes and put on very old velvet slippers. She walked in these toward the bed, listening to find out whether she could hear herself, without success. Then, standing where she could see when his eyes opened, she began to take stock. That pillow wasn't very comfortable! A little table was wanted on both sides, instead of on one. There was no odorator, and she did not see one of those arrangements! All these things would have to be remedied.

Absorbed in this reconnoitring, she failed to observe that darling Derek was looking at her through eyelashes that were always so nice and black. He said suddenly, in that faint and cheerful voice:

"All right, Granny; I'm going to get up to-morrow."

Frances Freeland, whose principle it was that people should always be encouraged to believe themselves better than they were, answered. "Yes, darling, of course; you'll be up in no time. It'll be delightful to see you in a chair to-morrow. But you mustn't talk."

Derek sighed, closed his eyes, and went off into a faint.

It was in moments such as these that Frances Freeland was herself. Her face flushed a little and grew terribly determined. Conscious that she was absolutely alone in the house, she ran to her bag, took out her sal volatile, applied it vigorously to his nose, and poured a little between his lips. She did other things to him, and not until she had brought him round, and the best of it was already made, did she even say to herself: 'It's no use fussing; I must make the best of it.'

Then, having discovered that he felt quite comfortable—as he said—she sat down in a chair to fan him and tremble vigorously. She would not have allowed that movement of her limbs if it had in any way interfered with the fanning. But since, on the contrary, it seemed to be of assistance, she certainly felt it a relief; for, whatever age her spirit might be, her body was seventy-three.

And while she fanned she thought of Derek as a little, black-haired, blazing-gray-eyed slip of a sallow boy, all little thin legs and arms moving funnily like a foal's. He had been such a dear, gentlemanlike little chap. It was dreadful he should be forgetting himself so, and getting into such trouble. And her thoughts passed back beyond him to her own four little sons, among whom she had been so careful not to have a favorite, but to love them all equally. And she thought of how their holland suits wore out, especially in the elastic, and got green behind, almost before they were put on; and of how she used to cut their hairs, spending at least three-quarters of an hour on each, because she had never been quick at it, while they sat so good—except Stanley, and darling Tod, who WOULD move just as she had got into the comb particularly nice bits of his hair, always so crisp and difficult! And of how she had cut off Felix's long golden curls when he was four, and would have cried over it, if crying hadn't always been silly! And of how beautifully they had all had their measles together, so that she had been up with them day and night for about a fortnight. And of how it was a terrible risk with Derek and darling Nedda, not at all a wise match, she was afraid. And yet, if they really were attached, of course one must put the best face on it! And how lovely it would be to see another little baby some day; and what a charming little mother Nedda would make—if only the dear child would do her hair just a little differently! And she perceived that Derek was asleep—and one of her own legs, from the knee down. She would certainly have had pins and needles if she did not get up; but, since she would not wake him for the world, she must do something else to cure it. And she hit upon this plan. She had only to say, 'Nonsense, you haven't anything of the sort!' and it was sure to go away. She said this to her leg, but, being a realist, she only made it feel like a pin-cushion. She knew, however, that she had only to persevere, because it would never do to give in. She persevered, and her leg felt as if red-hot needles were being stuck in it. Then, for the life of her, she could not help saying a little psalm. The sensation went away and left her leg quite dead. She would have no strength in it at all when she got up. But that

would be easily cured, when she could get to her bag, with three globules of nux vomica—and darling Derek must not be waked up for anything! She waited thus till Nedda came back, and then said, "Sssh!"

He woke at once, so that providentially she was able to get up, and, having stood with her weight on one leg for five minutes, so as to be quite sure she did not fall, she crossed back to the window, took her nux vomica, and sat down with her tablets to note down the little affairs she would require, while Nedda took her place beside the bed, to fan him. Having made her list, she went to Nedda and whispered that she was going down to see about one or two little things, and while she whispered she arranged the dear child's hair. If only she would keep it just like that, it would be so much more becoming! And she went down-stairs.

Accustomed to the resources of Stanley's establishment, or at least to those of John's and Felix's, and of the hotels she stayed at, she felt for a moment just a little nonplussed at discovering at her disposal nothing but three dear little children playing with a dog, and one bicycle. For a few seconds she looked at the latter hard. If only it had been a tricycle! Then, feeling certain that she could not make it into one, she knew that she must make the best of it, especially as, in any case, she could not have used it, for it would never do to leave darling Nedda alone in the house. She decided therefore to look in every room to see if she could find the things she wanted. The dog, who had been attracted by her, left the children and came too, and the children, attracted by the dog, followed; so they all five went into a room on the ground floor. It was partitioned into two by a screen; in one portion was a rough camp bedstead, and in the other two dear little child's beds, that must once have been Derek's and Sheila's, and one still smaller, made out of a large packing-case. The eldest of the little children said:

"That's where Billy sleeps, Susie sleeps here, and I sleeps there; and our father slepted in here before he went to prison." Frances Freeland experienced a shock. To prison! The idea of letting these little things know such a thing as that! The best face had so clearly not been put on it that she decided to put it herself.

"Oh, not to prison, dear! Only into a house in the town for a little while."

It seemed to her quite dreadful that they should know the truth—it was simply necessary to put it out of their heads. That dear little girl looked so old already, such a little mother! And, as they stood about her, she gazed piercingly at their heads. They were quite clean.

The second dear little thing said:

"We like bein' here; we hope Father won't be comin' back from prison for a long time, so as we can go on stayin' here. Mr. Freeland gives us apples."

The failure of her attempt to put a nicer idea into their heads disconcerted Frances Freeland for a moment only. She said:

"Who told you he was in prison?"

Biddy answered slowly: "Nobody didn't tell us; we picked it up."

"Oh, but you should never pick things up! That's not at all nice. You don't know what harm they may do you."

Billy replied: "We picked up a dead cat yesterday. It didn't scratch a bit, it didn't."

And Biddy added: "Please, what is prison like?"

Pity seized on Frances Freeland for these little derelicts, whose heads and pinafores and faces were so clean. She pursed her lips very tight and said:

"Hold out your hands, all of you."

Three small hands were held out, and three small pairs of gray-blue eyes looked up at her. From the recesses of her pocket she drew forth her purse, took from it three shillings, and placed one in the very centre of each palm. The three small hands closed; two small grave bodies dipped in little courtesies; the third remained stock-still, but a grin spread gradually on its face from ear to ear.

"What do you say?" said Frances Freeland.

"Thank you."

"Thank you—what?"

"Thank you, ma'am."

"That's right. Now run away and play a nice game in the orchard."

The three turned immediately and went. A sound of whispering rose busily outside. Frances Freeland, glancing through the window, saw them unlatching the wicket gate. Sudden alarm seized her. She put out her head and called. Biddy came back.

"You mustn't spend them all at once."

Biddy shook her head.

"No. Once we had a shillin', and we were sick. We're goin' to spend three pennies out of one shillin' every day, till they're gone."

"And aren't you going to put any by for a rainy day?"

"No."

Frances Freeland did not know what to answer. Dear little things!

The dear little things vanished.

In Tod's and Kirsteen's room she found a little table and a pillow, and something that might do, and having devised a contrivance by which this went into that and that into this and nothing whatever showed, she conveyed the whole very quietly up near dear Derek's room, and told darling Nedda to go down-stairs and look for something that she knew she would not find, for she could not think at the moment of any better excuse. When the child had gone, she popped this here, and popped that there. And there she was! And she felt better. It was no use whatever to make a fuss about that aspect of nursing which was not quite nice. One just put the best face upon it, quietly did what was necessary, and pretended that it was not there. Kirsteen had not seen to things quite as she should have. But then dear Kirsteen was so clever.

Her attitude, indeed, to that blue bird, who had alighted now twenty-one years ago in the Freeland nest, had always, after the first few shocks, been duly stoical. For, however her fastidiousness might jibe at neglect of the forms of things, she was the last woman not to appreciate really sterling qualities. Though it was a pity dear Kirsteen did expose her neck and arms so that they had got quite brown, a pity that she never went to church and had brought up the dear children not to go, and to have ideas that were not quite right about 'the Land,' still she was emphatically a lady, and devoted to dear Tod, and very good. And her features were so regular, and she had such a good color, and was so slim and straight in the back, that she was always a pleasure to look at. And if she was not quite so practical as she might have been, that was not everything; and she would never get stout, as there was every danger of Clara doing. So that from the first she had always put a good face on her. Derek's voice interrupted her thoughts:

"I'm awfully thirsty, Granny."

"Yes, darling. Don't move your head; and just let me pop in some of this delicious lemonade with a spoon."

Nedda, returning, found her supporting his head with one hand, while with the other she kept popping in the spoon, her soul smiling at him lovingly through her lips and eyes.

CHAPTER XXXII

Felix went back to London the afternoon of Frances Freeland's installation, taking Sheila with him. She had been 'bound over to keep the peace'—a task which she would obviously be the better able to accomplish at a distance. And, though to take charge of her would be rather like holding a burning match till there was no match left, he felt bound to volunteer.

He left Nedda with many misgivings; but had not the heart to wrench her away.

The recovery of a young man who means to get up to-morrow is not so rapid when his head, rather than his body, is the seat of trouble. Derek's temperament was against him. He got up several times in spirit, to find that his body had remained in bed. And this did not accelerate his progress. It had been impossible to dispossess Frances Freeland from command of the sick-room; and, since she was

admittedly from experience and power of paying no attention to her own wants, the fittest person for the position, there she remained, taking turn and turn about with Nedda, and growing a little whiter, a little thinner, more resolute in face, and more loving in her eyes, from day to day. That tragedy of the old—the being laid aside from life before the spirit is ready to resign, the feeling that no one wants you, that all those you have borne and brought up have long passed out on to roads where you cannot follow, that even the thought-life of the world streams by so fast that you lie up in a backwater, feebly, blindly groping for the full of the water, and always pushed gently, hopelessly back; that sense that you are still young and warm, and yet so furbelowed with old thoughts and fashions that none can see how young and warm you are, none see how you long to rub hearts with the active, how you yearn for something real to do that can help life on, and how no one will give it you! All this—this tragedy—was for the time defeated. She was, in triumph, doing something real for those she loved and longed to do things for. She had Sheila's room.

For a week at least Derek asked no questions, made no allusion to the mutiny, not even to the cause of his own disablement. It had been impossible to tell whether the concussion had driven coherent recollection from his mind, or whether he was refraining from an instinct of self-preservation, barring such thoughts as too exciting. Nedda dreaded every day lest he should begin. She knew that the questions would fall on her, since no answer could possibly be expected from Granny except: "It's all right, darling, everything's going on perfectly—only you mustn't talk!"

It began the last day of June, the very first day that he got up.

"They didn't save the hay, did they?"

Was he fit to hear the truth? Would he forgive her if she did not tell it? If she lied about this, could she go on lying to his other questions? When he discovered, later, would not the effect undo the good of lies now? She decided to lie; but, when she opened her lips, simply could not, with his eyes on her; and said faintly: "Yes, they did."

His face contracted. She slipped down at once and knelt beside his chair. He said between his teeth:

"Go on; tell me. Did it all collapse?"

She could only stroke his hands and bow her head.

"I see. What's happened to them?"

Without looking up, she murmured:

"Some have been dismissed; the others are working again all right."

"All right!"

She looked up then so pitifully that he did not ask her anything more. But the news put him back a week. And she was in despair. The day he got up again he began afresh:

"When are the assizes?"

"The 7th of August."

"Has anybody been to see Bob Tryst?"

"Yes; Aunt Kirsteen has been twice."

Having been thus answered, he was quiet for a long time. She had slipped again out of her chair to kneel beside him; it seemed the only place from which she could find courage for her answers. He put his hand, that had lost its brown, on her hair. At that she plucked up spirit to ask:

"Would you like me to go and see him?"

He nodded.

"Then, I will—to-morrow."

"Don't ever tell me what isn't true, Nedda! People do; that's why I didn't ask before."

She answered fervently:

"I won't! Oh, I won't!"

She dreaded this visit to the prison. Even to think of those places gave her nightmare. Sheila's

description of her night in a cell had made her shiver with horror. But there was a spirit in Nedda that went through with things; and she started early the next day, refusing Kirsteen's proffered company.

The look of that battlemented building, whose walls were pierced with emblems of the Christian faith, turned her heartsick, and she stood for several minutes outside the dark-green door before she could summon courage to ring the bell.

A stout man in blue, with a fringe of gray hair under his peaked cap, and some keys dangling from a belt, opened, and said:

"Yes, miss?"

Being called 'miss' gave her a little spirit, and she produced the card she had been warming in her hand.

"I have come to see a man called Robert Tryst, waiting for trial at the assizes."

The stout man looked at the card back and front, as is the way of those in doubt, closed the door behind her, and said:

"Just a minute, miss."

The shutting of the door behind her sent a little shiver down Nedda's spine; but the temperature of her soul was rising, and she looked round. Beyond the heavy arch, beneath which she stood, was a courtyard where she could see two men, also in blue, with peaked caps. Then, to her left, she became conscious of a shaven-headed noiseless being in drab-gray clothes, on hands and knees, scrubbing the end of a corridor. Her tremor at the stealthy ugliness of this crouching figure yielded at once to a spasm of pity. The man gave her a look, furtive, yet so charged with intense penetrating curiosity that it seemed to let her suddenly into innumerable secrets. She felt as if the whole life of people shut away in silence and solitude were disclosed to her in the swift, unutterably alive look of this noiseless kneeling creature, riving out of her something to feed his soul and body on. That look seemed to lick its lips. It made her angry, made her miserable, with a feeling of pity she could hardly bear. Tears, too startled to flow, darkened her eyes. Poor man! How he must hate her, who was free, and all fresh from the open world and the sun, and people to love and talk to! The 'poor man' scrubbed on steadily, his ears standing out from his shaven head; then, dragging his knee-mat skew-ways, he took the chance to look at her again. Perhaps because his dress and cap and stubble of hair and even the color of his face were so drab-gray, those little dark eyes seemed to her the most terribly living things she had ever seen. She felt that they had taken her in from top to toe, clothed and unclothed, taken in the resentment she had felt and the pity she was feeling; they seemed at once to appeal, to attack, and to possess her ravenously, as though all the starved instincts in a whole prisoned world had rushed up and for a second stood outside their bars. Then came the clank of keys, the eyes left her as swiftly as they had seized her, and he became again just that stealthy, noiseless creature scrubbing a stone floor. And, shivering, Nedda thought:

'I can't bear myself here—me with everything in the world I want—and these with nothing!'

But the stout janitor was standing by her again, together with another man in blue, who said:

"Now, miss; this way, please!"

And down that corridor they went. Though she did not turn, she knew well that those eyes were following, still riving something from her; and she heaved a sigh of real relief when she was round a corner. Through barred windows that had no glass she could see another court, where men in the same drab-gray clothes printed with arrows were walking one behind the other, making a sort of moving human hieroglyphic in the centre of the concrete floor. Two warders with swords stood just outside its edge. Some of those walking had their heads up, their chests expanded, some slouched along with heads almost resting on their chests; but most had their eyes fixed on the back of the neck of the man in front; and there was no sound save the tramp of feet.

Nedda put her hand to her throat. The warder beside her said in a chatty voice:

"That's where the 'ards takes their exercise, miss. You want to see a man called Tryst, waitin' trial, I think. We've had a woman here to see him, and a lady in blue, once or twice."

"My aunt."

"Ah! just so. Laborer, I think—case of arson. Funny thing; never yet found a farm-laborer that took to prison well."

Nedda shivered. The words sounded ominous. Then a little flame lit itself within her.

"Does anybody ever 'take to' prison?"

The warder uttered a sound between a grunt and chuckle.

"There's some has a better time here than they have out, any day. No doubt about it—they're well fed here."

Her aunt's words came suddenly into Nedda's mind: 'Liberty's a glorious feast!' But she did not speak them.

"Yes," the warder proceeded, "some o' them we get look as if they didn't have a square meal outside from one year's end to the other. If you'll just wait a minute, miss, I'll fetch the man down to you."

In a bare room with distempered walls, and bars to a window out of which she could see nothing but a high brick wall, Nedda waited. So rapid is the adjustment of the human mind, so quick the blunting of human sensation, that she had already not quite the passion of pitiful feeling which had stormed her standing under that archway. A kind of numbness gripped her nerves. There were wooden forms in this room, and a blackboard, on which two rows of figures had been set one beneath the other, but not yet added up.

The silence at first was almost deathly. Then it was broken by a sound as of a heavy door banged, and the shuffling tramp of marching men—louder, louder, softer—a word of command—still softer, and it died away. Dead silence again! Nedda pressed her hands to her breast. Twice she added up those figures on the blackboard; each time the number was the same. Ah, there was a fly—two flies! How nice they looked, moving, moving, chasing each other in the air. Did flies get into the cells? Perhaps not even a fly came there—nothing more living than walls and wood! Nothing living except what was inside oneself! How dreadful! Not even a clock ticking, not even a bird's song! Silent, unliving, worse than in this room! Something pressed against her leg. She started violently and looked down. A little cat! Oh, what a blessed thing! A little sandy, ugly cat! It must have crept in through the door. She was not locked in, then, anyway! Thus far had nerves carried her already! Scrattling the little cat's furry pate, she pulled herself together. She would not tremble and be nervous. It was disloyal to Derek and to her purpose, which was to bring comfort to poor Tryst. Then the door was pushed open, and the warder said:

"A quarter of an hour, miss. I'll be just outside."

She saw a big man with unshaven cheeks come in, and stretched out her hand.

"I am Mr. Derek's cousin, going to be married to him. He's been ill, but he's getting well again now. We knew you'd like to hear." And she thought: 'Oh! What a tragic face! I can't bear to look at his eyes!'

He took her hand, said, "Thank you, miss," and stood as still as ever.

"Please come and sit down, and we can talk."

Tryst moved to a form and took his seat thereon, with his hands between his knees, as if playing with an imaginary cap. He was dressed in an ordinary suit of laborer's best clothes, and his stiff, dust-colored hair was not cut particularly short. The cheeks of his square-cut face had fallen in, the eyes had sunk back, and the prominence thus given to his cheek and jawbones and thick mouth gave his face a savage look—only his dog-like, terribly yearning eyes made Nedda feel so sorry that she simply could not feel afraid.

"The children are such dears, Mr. Tryst. Billy seems to grow every day. They're no trouble at all, and quite happy. Biddy's wonderful with them."

"She's a good maid." The thick lips shaped the words as though they had almost lost power of speech.

"Do they let you see the newspapers we send? Have you got everything you want?"

For a minute he did not seem to be going to answer; then, moving his head from side to side, he said:

"Nothin' I want, but just get out of here."

Nedda murmured helplessly:

"It's only a month now to the assizes. Does Mr. Pogram come to see you?"

"Yes, he comes. He can't do nothin'!"

"Oh, don't despair! Even if they don't acquit you, it'll soon be over. Don't despair!" And she stole her hand out and timidly touched his arm. She felt her heart turning over and over, he looked so sad.

He said in that stumbling, thick voice:

"Thank you kindly. I must get out. I won't stand long of it—not much longer. I'm not used to it—always been accustomed to the air, an' bein' about, that's where 'tis. But don't you tell him, miss. You say I'm goin' along all right. Don't you tell him what I said. 'Tis no use him frettin' over me. 'Twon' do me no good."

And Nedda murmured:

"No, no; I won't tell him."

Then suddenly came the words she had dreaded:

"D'you think they'll let me go, miss?"

"Oh, yes, I think so—I hope so!" But she could not meet his eyes, and hearing him grit his boot on the floor knew he had not believed her.

He said slowly:

"I never meant to do it when I went out that mornin'. It came on me sudden, lookin' at the straw."

Nedda gave a little gasp. Could that man outside hear?

Tryst went on: "If they don't let me go, I won' stand it. 'Tis too much for a man. I can't sleep, I can't eat, nor nothin'. I won' stand it. It don' take long to die, if you put your mind to it."

Feeling quite sick with pity, Nedda got up and stood beside him; and, moved by an uncontrollable impulse, she lifted one of his great hands and clasped it in both her own. "Oh, try and be brave and look forward! You're going to be ever so happy some day."

He gave her a strange long stare.

"Yes, I'll be happy some day. Don' you never fret about me."

And Nedda saw that the warder was standing in the doorway.

"Sorry, miss, time's up."

Without a word Tryst rose and went out.

Nedda was alone again with the little sandy cat. Standing under the high-barred window she wiped her cheeks, that were all wet. Why, why must people suffer so? Suffer so slowly, so horribly? What were men made of that they could go on day after day, year after year, watching others suffer?

When the warder came back to take her out, she did not trust herself to speak, or even to look at him. She walked with hands tight clenched, and eyes fixed on the ground. Outside the prison door she drew a long, long breath. And suddenly her eyes caught the inscription on the corner of a lane leading down alongside the prison wall—"Love's Walk"!

CHAPTER XXXIII

Peremptorily ordered by the doctor to the sea, but with instructions to avoid for the present all excitement, sunlight, and color, Derek and his grandmother repaired to a spot well known to be gray, and Nedda went home to Hampstead. This was the last week in July. A fortnight spent in the perfect vacuity of an English watering-place restored the boy wonderfully. No one could be better trusted than Frances Freeland to preserve him from looking on the dark side of anything, more specially when that thing was already not quite nice. Their conversation was therefore free from allusion to the laborers, the strike, or Bob Tryst. And Derek thought the more. The approaching trial was hardly ever out of his mind. Bathing, he would think of it; sitting on the gray jetty looking over the gray sea, he would think of it. Up the gray cobbled streets and away on the headlands, he would think of it. And, so as not to have

to think of it, he would try to walk himself to a standstill. Unfortunately the head will continue working when the legs are at rest. And when he sat opposite to her at meal-times, Frances Freeland would gaze piercingly at his forehead and muse: "The dear boy looks much better, but he's getting a little line between his brows—it IS such a pity!" It worried her, too, that the face he was putting on their little holiday together was not quite as full as she could have wished—though the last thing in the world she could tolerate were really fat cheeks, those signs of all that her stoicism abhorred, those truly unforgivable marks of the loss of 'form.' He struck her as dreadfully silent, too, and she would rack her brains for subjects that would interest him, often saying to herself: 'If only I were clever!' It was natural he should think of dear Nedda, but surely it was not that which gave him the little line. He must be brooding about those other things. He ought not to be melancholy like this and let anything prevent the sea from doing him good. The habit—hard-learned by the old, and especially the old of her particular sex—of not wishing for the moon, or at all events of not letting others know that you are wishing for it, had long enabled Frances Freeland to talk cheerfully on the most indifferent subjects whether or no her heart were aching. One's heart often did ache, of course, but it simply didn't do to let it interfere, making things uncomfortable for others. And once she said to him: "You know, darling, I think it would be so nice for you to take a little interest in politics. They're very absorbing when you once get into them. I find my paper most enthralling. And it really has very good principles."

"If politics did anything for those who most need things done, Granny—but I can't see that they do."

She thought a little, then, making firm her lips, said:

"I don't think that's quite just, darling, there are a great many politicians who are very much looked up to—all the bishops, for instance, and others whom nobody could suspect of self-seeking."

"I didn't mean that politicians were self-seeking, Granny; I meant that they're comfortable people, and the things that interest them are those that interest comfortable people. What have they done for the laborers, for instance?"

"Oh, but, darling! they're going to do a great deal. In my paper they're continually saying that."

"Do you believe it?"

"I'm sure they wouldn't say so if they weren't. There's quite a new plan, and it sounds most sensible. And so I don't think, darling, that if I were you I should make myself unhappy about all that kind of thing. They must know best. They're all so much older than you. And you're getting quite a little line between your eyes."

Derek smiled.

"All right, Granny; I shall have a big one soon."

Frances Freeland smiled, too, but shook her head.

"Yes; and that's why I really think you ought to take interest in politics."

"I'd rather take interest in you, Granny. You're very jolly to look at."

Frances Freeland raised her brows.

"I? My dear, I'm a perfect fright nowadays."

Thus pushing away what her stoicism and perpetual aspiration to an impossibly good face would not suffer her to admit, she added:

"Where would you like to drive this afternoon?"

For they took drives in a small victoria, Frances Freeland holding her sunshade to protect him from the sun whenever it made the mistake of being out.

On August the fourth he insisted that he was well and must go back home. And, though to bring her attendance on him to an end was a grief, she humbly admitted that he must be wanting younger company, and, after one wistful attempt, made no further bones. The following day they travelled.

On getting home he found that the police had been to see little Bidy Tryst, who was to be called as a witness. Tod would take her over on the morning of the trial. Derek did not wait for this, but on the day before the assizes repacked his bag and went off to the Royal Charles Hostel at Worcester. He slept not at all that night, and next morning was early at the court, for Tryst's case would be the first. Anxiously he sat watching all the queer and formal happenings that mark the initiation of the higher justice—the

assemblage of the gentlemen in wigs; the sifting, shifting, settling of clerks, and ushers, solicitors, and the public; the busy indifference, the cheerful professionalism of it all. He saw little Mr. Pogram come in, more square and rubbery than ever, and engage in conclave with one of the bewigged. The smiles, shrugs, even the sharp expressions on that barrister's face; the way he stood, twisting round, one hand wrapped in his gown, one foot on the bench behind; it was all as if he had done it hundreds of times before and cared not the snap of one of his thin, yellow fingers. Then there was a sudden hush; the judge came in, bowed, and took his seat. And that, too, seemed so professional. Haunted by the thought of him to whom this was almost life and death, the boy was incapable of seeing how natural it was that they should not all feel as he did.

The case was called and Tryst brought in. Derek had once more to undergo the torture of those tragic eyes fixed on him. Round that heavy figure, that mournful, half-brutal, and half-yearning face, the pleadings, the questions, the answers buzzed, bringing out facts with damning clearness, yet leaving the real story of that early morning as hidden as if the court and all were but gibbering figures of air. The real story of Tryst, heavy and distraught, rising and turning out from habit into the early haze on the fields, where his daily work had lain, of Tryst brooding, with the slow, the wrathful incoherence that centuries of silence in those lonely fields had passed into the blood of his forebears and himself. Brooding, in the dangerous disproportion that enforced continence brings to certain natures, loading the brain with violence till the storm bursts and there leap out the lurid, dark insanities of crime. Brooding, while in the air flies chased each other, insects crawled together in the grass, and the first principle of nature worked everywhere its sane fulfilment. They might talk and take evidence as they would, be shrewd and sharp with all the petty sharpness of the Law; but the secret springs would still lie undisclosed, too natural and true to bear the light of day. The probings and eloquence of justice would never paint the picture of that moment of maniacal relief, when, with jaw hanging loose, eyes bulging in exultation of revenge, he had struck those matches with his hairy hands and let them flare in the straw, till the little red flames ran and licked, rustled and licked, and there was nothing to do but watch them lick and burn. Nor of that sudden wildness of dumb fear that rushed into the heart of the crouching creature, changing the madness of his face to palsy. Nor of the recoil from the burning stack; those moments empty with terror. Nor of how terror, through habit of inarticulate, emotionless existence, gave place again to brute stolidity. And so, heavily back across the dewy fields, under the larks' songs, the cooings of pigeons, the hum of wings, and all the unconscious rhythm of ageless Nature. No! The probings of Justice could never reach the whole truth. And even Justice quailed at its own probings when the mother-child was passed up from Tod's side into the witness-box and the big laborer was seen to look at her and she at him. She seemed to have grown taller; her pensive little face and beautifully fluffed-out corn-brown hair had an eerie beauty, perched up there in the arid witness-box, as of some small figure from the brush of Botticelli.

"Your name, my dear?"

"Biddy Tryst."

"How old?"

"Ten next month, please."

"Do you remember going to live at Mr. Freeland's cottage?"

"Yes, sir."

"And do you remember the first night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you sleep, Biddy?"

"Please, sir, we slept in a big room with a screen. Billy and Susie and me; and father behind the screen."

"And where was the room?"

"Down-stairs, sir."

"Now, Biddy, what time did you wake up the first morning?"

"When Father got up."

"Was that early or late?"

"Very early."

"Would you know the time?"

"No, sir."

"But it was very early; how did you know that?"

"It was a long time before we had any breakfast."

"And what time did you have breakfast?"

"Half past six by the kitchen clock."

"Was it light when you woke up?"

"Yes, sir."

"When Father got up, did he dress or did he go to bed again?"

"He hadn't never undressed, sir."

"Then did he stay with you or did he go out?"

"Out, sir."

"And how long was it before he came back?"

"When I was puttin' on Billy's boots."

"What had you done in between?"

"Helped Susie and dressed Billy."

"And how long does that take you generally?"

"Half an hour, sir."

"I see. What did Father look like when he came in, Biddy?"

The mother-child paused. For the first time it seemed to dawn on her that there was something dangerous in these questions. She twisted her small hands before her and gazed at her father.

The judge said gently:

"Well, my child?"

"Like he does now, sir."

"Thank you, Biddy."

That was all; the mother-child was suffered to step down and take her place again by Tod. And in the silence rose the short and rubbery report of little Mr. Pogram blowing his nose. No evidence given that morning was so conclusive, actual, terrible as that unconscious: "Like he does now, sir." That was why even Justice quailed a little at its own probings.

From this moment the boy knew that Tryst's fate was sealed. What did all those words matter, those professional patterings one way and the other; the professional jeers: 'My friend has told you this' and 'My friend will tell you that.' The professional steering of the impartial judge, seated there above them all; the cold, calculated rhapsodies about the heinousness of arson; the cold and calculated attack on the characters of the stone-breaker witness and the tramp witness; the cold and calculated patter of the appeal not to condemn a father on the evidence of his little child; the cold and calculated outburst on the right of every man to be assumed innocent except on overwhelming evidence such as did not here exist. The cold and calculated balancing of pro and con; and those minutes of cold calculation veiled from the eyes of the court. Even the verdict: 'Guilty'; even the judgment: 'Three years' penal servitude.' All nothing, all superfluity to the boy supporting the tragic gaze of Tryst's eyes and making up his mind to a desperate resort.

"Three years' penal servitude!" The big laborer paid no more attention to those words than to any others spoken during that hour's settlement of his fate. True, he received them standing, as is the custom, fronting the image of Justice, from whose lips they came. But by no single gesture did he let any one see the dumb depths of his soul. If life had taught him nothing else, it had taught him never to express himself. Mute as any bullock led into the slaughtering-house, with something of a bullock's

dulled and helpless fear in his eyes, he passed down and away between his jailers. And at once the professional noises rose, and the professional rhapsodists, hunching their gowns, swept that little lot of papers into their pink tape, and, turning to their neighbors, smiled, and talked, and jerked their eyebrows.

CHAPTER XXXIV

The nest on the Spaniard's Road had not been able to contain Sheila long. There are certain natures, such as that of Felix, to whom the claims and exercise of authority are abhorrent, who refuse to exercise it themselves and rage when they see it exercised over others, but who somehow never come into actual conflict with it. There are other natures, such as Sheila's, who do not mind in the least exercising authority themselves, but who oppose it vigorously when they feel it coming near themselves or some others. Of such is the kingdom of militancy. Her experience with the police had sunk deep into her soul. They had not, as a fact, treated her at all badly, which did not prevent her feeling as if they had outraged in her the dignity of woman. She arrived, therefore, in Hampstead seeing red even where red was not. And since, undoubtedly, much real red was to be seen, there was little other color in the world or in her cheeks those days. Long disagreements with Alan, to whom she was still a magnet but whose Stanley-like nature stood firm against the blandishments of her revolting tongue, drove her more and more toward a decision the seeds of which had, perhaps, been planted during her former stay among the breezy airs of Hampstead.

Felix, coming one day into his wife's study—for the house knew not the word drawing-room—found Flora, with eyebrows lifted up and smiling lips, listening to Sheila proclaiming the doctrine that it was impossible not to live 'on one's own.' Nothing else—Felix learned—was compatible with dignity, or even with peace of mind. She had, therefore, taken a back room high up in a back street, in which she was going to live perfectly well on ten shillings a week; and, having thirty-two pounds saved up, she would be all right for a year, after which she would be able to earn her living. The principle she purposed to keep before her eyes was that of committing herself to nothing which would seriously interfere with her work in life. Somehow, it was impossible to look at this girl, with her glowing cheeks and her glowing eyes, and her hair frizzy from ardor, and to distrust her utterances. Yes! She would arrive, if not where she wanted, at all events somewhere; which, after all, was the great thing. And in fact she did arrive the very next day in the back room high up in the back street, and neither Tod's cottage nor the house on the Spaniard's Road saw more than flying gleams of her, thenceforth.

Another by-product, this, of that little starting episode, the notice given to Tryst! Strange how in life one little incident, one little piece of living stress, can attract and gather round it the feelings, thoughts, actions of people whose lives run far and wide away therefrom. But episodes are thus potent only when charged with a significance that comes from the clash of the deepest instincts.

During the six weeks which had elapsed between his return home from Joyfields and the assizes, Felix had much leisure to reflect that if Lady Malloring had not caused Tryst to be warned that he could not marry his deceased wife's sister and continue to stay on the estate—the lives of Felix himself, his daughter, mother, brother, brother's wife, their son and daughter, and in less degree of his other brothers, would have been free of a preoccupation little short of ludicrous in proportion to the face value of the cause. But he had leisure, too, to reflect that in reality the issue involved in that tiny episode concerned human existence to its depths—for, what was it but the simple, all-important question of human freedom? The simple, all-important issue of how far men and women should try to rule the lives of others instead of trying only to rule their own, and how far those others should allow their lives to be so ruled? This it was which gave that episode its power of attracting and affecting the thoughts, feelings, actions of so many people otherwise remote. And though Felix was paternal enough to say to himself nearly all the time, 'I can't let Nedda get further into this mess!' he was philosopher enough to tell himself, in the unfatherly balance of his hours, that the mess was caused by the fight best of all worth fighting—of democracy against autocracy, of a man's right to do as he likes with his life if he harms not others; of 'the Land' against the fetterers of 'the Land.' And he was artist enough to see how from that little starting episode the whole business had sprung—given, of course, the entrance of the wilful force called love. But a father, especially when he has been thoroughly alarmed, gives the artist and philosopher in him short shrift.

Nedda came home soon after Sheila went, and to the eyes of Felix she came back too old and thoughtful altogether. How different a girl from the Nedda who had so wanted 'to know everything' that first night of May! What was she brooding over, what planning, in that dark, round, pretty head? At

what resolve were those clear eyes so swiftly raised to look? What was going on within, when her breast heaved so, without seeming cause, and the color rushed up in her cheeks at a word, as though she had been so far away that the effort of recall was alone enough to set all her veins throbbing. And yet Felix could devise no means of attack on her infatuation. For a man cannot cultivate the habit of never interfering and then suddenly throw it over; least of all when the person to be interfered with is his pet and only daughter.

Flora, not of course in the swim of those happenings at Joyfields, could not be got to take the matter very seriously. In fact—beyond what concerned Felix himself and poetry—the matter that she did take seriously had yet to be discovered. Hers was one of those semi-detached natures particularly found in Hampstead. When exhorted to help tackle the question, she could only suggest that Felix should take them all abroad when he had finished 'The Last of the Laborers.' A tour, for instance, in Norway and Sweden, where none of them had ever been, and perhaps down through Finland into Russia.

Feeling like one who squirts on a burning haystack with a garden syringe, Felix propounded this scheme to his little daughter. She received it with a start, a silence, a sort of quivering all over, as of an animal who scents danger. She wanted to know when, and being told—'not before the middle of August', relapsed into her preoccupation as if nothing had been said. Felix noted on the hall table one afternoon a letter in her handwriting, addressed to a Worcester newspaper, and remarked thereafter that she began to receive this journal daily, obviously with a view to reports of the coming assizes. Once he tried to break through into her confidence. It was August Bank Holiday, and they had gone out on to the heath together to see the people wonderfully assembled. Coming back across the burnt-up grass, strewn with paper bags, banana peel, and the cores of apples, he hooked his hand into her arm.

"What is to be done with a child that goes about all day thinking and thinking and not telling anybody what she is thinking?"

She smiled round at him and answered:

"I know, Dad. She IS a pig, isn't she?"

This comparison with an animal of proverbial stubbornness was not encouraging. Then his hand was squeezed to her side and he heard her murmur:

"I wonder if all daughters are such beasts!"

He understood well that she had meant: 'There is only one thing I want—one thing I mean to have—one thing in the world for me now!'

And he said soberly:

"We can't expect anything else."

"Oh, Daddy!" she answered, but nothing more.

Only four days later she came to his study with a letter, and a face so flushed and troubled that he dropped his pen and got up in alarm.

"Read this, Dad! It's impossible! It's not true! It's terrible! Oh! What am I to do?"

The letter ran thus, in a straight, boyish handwriting:

"ROYAL CHARLES HOSTEL,

"WORCESTER, Aug. 7th.

"MY NEDDA,

"I have just seen Bob tried. They have given him three years' penal. It was awful to sit there and watch him. He can never stand it. It was awful to watch him looking at ME. It's no good. I'm going to give myself up. I must do it. I've got everything ready; they'll have to believe me and squash his sentence. You see, but for me it would never have been done. It's a matter of honour. I can't let him suffer any more. This isn't impulse. I've been meaning to do it for some time, if they found him guilty. So in a way, it's an immense relief. I'd like to have seen you first, but it would only distress you, and I might not have been able to go through with it after. Nedda, darling, if you still love me when I get out, we'll go to New Zealand, away from this country where they bully poor creatures like Bob. Be brave! I'll write to-morrow, if they let me.

"Your

"Derek."

The first sensation in Felix on reading this effusion was poignant recollection of the little lawyer's look after Derek had made the scene at Tryst's committal and of his words: 'Nothing in it, is there?' His second thought: 'Is this the cutting of the knot that I've been looking for?' His third, which swept all else away: 'My poor little darling! What business has that boy to hurt her again like this!'

He heard her say:

"Tryst told me himself he did it, Dad! He told me when I went to see him in the prison. Honour doesn't demand what isn't true! Oh, Dad, help me!"

Felix was slow in getting free from the cross currents of reflection. "He wrote this last night," he said dismally. "He may have done it already. We must go and see John."

Nedda clasped her hands. "Ah! Yes!"

And Felix had not the heart to add what he was thinking: 'Not that I see what good he can do!' But, though sober reason told him this, it was astonishingly comforting to be going to some one who could be relied on to see the facts of the situation without any of that 'flimflam' with which imagination is accustomed to surround them. "And we'll send Derek a wire for what it's worth."

They went at once to the post-office, Felix composing this message on the way: 'Utterly mistaken chivalry you have no right await our arrival Felix Freeland.' He handed it to her to read, and passed it under the brass railing to the clerk, not without the feeling of shame due from one who uses the word chivalry in a post-office.

On the way to the Tube station he held her arm tightly, but whether to impart courage or receive it he could not have said, so strung-up in spirit did he feel her. With few words exchanged they reached Whitehall. Marking their card 'Urgent,' they were received within ten minutes.

John was standing in a high, white room, smelling a little of papers and tobacco, and garnished solely by five green chairs, a table, and a bureau with an immense number of pigeonholes, whereat he had obviously been seated. Quick to observe what concerned his little daughter, Felix noted how her greeting trembled up at her uncle and how a sort of warmth thawed for the moment the regularity of his brother's face. When they had taken two of the five green chairs and John was back at his bureau, Felix handed over the letter. John read it and looked at Nedda. Then taking a pipe out of his pocket, which he had evidently filled before they came in, he lighted it and re-read the letter. Then, looking very straight at Nedda, he said:

"Nothing in it? Honour bright, my dear!"

"No, Uncle John, nothing. Only that he fancies his talk about injustice put it into Tryst's head."

John nodded; the girl's face was evidence enough for him.

"Any proof?"

"Tryst himself told me in the prison that he did it. He said it came on him suddenly, when he saw the straw."

A pause followed before John said:

"Good! You and I and your father will go down and see the police."

Nedda lifted her hands and said breathlessly:

"But, Uncle! Dad! Have I the right? He says—honour. Won't it be betraying him?"

Felix could not answer, but with relief he heard John say:

"It's not honorable to cheat the law."

"No; but he trusted me or he wouldn't have written."

John answered slowly:

"I think your duty's plain, my dear. The question for the police will be whether or not to take notice of this false confession. For us to keep the knowledge that it's false from them, under the circumstances, is clearly not right. Besides being, to my mind, foolish."

For Felix to watch this mortal conflict going on in the soul of his daughter—that soul which used to seem, perhaps even now seemed, part of himself; to know that she so desperately wanted help for her decision, and to be unable to give it, unable even to trust himself to be honest—this was hard for Felix. There she sat, staring before her; and only her tight-clasped hands, the little movements of her lips and throat, showed the struggle going on in her.

"I couldn't, without seeing him; I MUST see him first, Uncle!"

John got up and went over to the window; he, too, had been affected by her face.

"You realize," he said, "that you risk everything by that. If he's given himself up, and they've believed him, he's not the sort to let it fall through. You cut off your chance if he won't let you tell. Better for your father and me to see him first, anyway." And Felix heard a mutter that sounded like: 'Confound him!'

Nedda rose. "Can we go at once, then, Uncle?"

With a solemnity that touched Felix, John put a hand on each side of her face, raised it, and kissed her on the forehead.

"All right!" he said. "Let's be off!"

A silent trio sought Paddington in a taxi-cab, digesting this desperate climax of an affair that sprang from origins so small.

In Felix, contemplating his daughter's face, there was profound compassion, but also that family dismay, that perturbation of self-esteem, which public scandal forces on kinsmen, even the most philosophic. He felt exasperation against Derek, against Kirsteen, almost even against Tod, for having acquiesced passively in the revolutionary bringing-up which had brought on such a disaster. War against injustice; sympathy with suffering; chivalry! Yes! But not quite to the point whence they recoiled on his daughter, his family, himself! The situation was impossible! He was fast resolving that, whether or no they saved Derek from this quixotry, the boy should not have Nedda. And already his eyes found difficulty in meeting hers.

They secured a compartment to themselves and, having settled down in corners, began mechanically unfolding evening journals. For after all, whatever happens, one must read the papers! Without that, life would indeed be insupportable! Felix had bought Mr. Cuthcott's, but, though he turned and turned the sheets, they seemed to have no sense till these words caught his eyes: "Convict's tragic death! Yesterday afternoon at Worcester, while being conveyed from the assize court back to prison, a man named Tryst, sentenced to three years' penal servitude for arson, suddenly attacked the warders in charge of him and escaped. He ran down the street, hotly pursued, and, darting out into the traffic, threw himself under a motor-car going at some speed. The car struck him on the head, and the unfortunate man was killed on the spot. No reason whatever can be assigned for this desperate act. He is known, however, to have suffered from epilepsy, and it is thought an attack may have been coming on him at the time."

When Felix had read these words he remained absolutely still, holding that buff-colored paper before his face, trying to decide what he must do now. What was the significance—exactly the significance of this? Now that Tryst was dead, Derek's quixotic action had no meaning. But had he already 'confessed'? It seemed from this account that the suicide was directly after the trial; even before the boy's letter to Nedda had been written. He must surely have heard of it since and given up his mad idea! He leaned over, touched John on the knee, and handed him the paper. John read the paragraph, handed it back; and the two brothers stared fixedly at each other. Then Felix made the faintest movement of his head toward his daughter, and John nodded. Crossing to Nedda, Felix hooked his arm in hers and said:

"Just look at this, my child."

Nedda read, started to her feet, sank back, and cried out:

"Poor, poor man! Oh, Dad! Poor man!"

Felix felt ashamed. Though Tryst's death meant so much relief to her, she felt first this rush of compassion; he himself, to whom it meant so much less relief, had felt only that relief.

"He said he couldn't stand it; he told me that. But I never thought—Oh! Poor man!" And, burying her face against his arm, she gave way.

Petrified, and conscious that John at the far end of the carriage was breathing rather hard, Felix could only stroke her arm till at last she whispered:

"There's nobody now for Derek to save. Oh, if you'd seen that poor man in prison, Dad!"

And the only words of comfort Felix could find were:

"My child, there are thousands and thousands of poor prisoners and captives!"

In a truce to agitation they spent the rest of that three hours' journey, while the train rattled and rumbled through the quiet, happy-looking land.

CHAPTER XXXV

It was tea-time when they reached Worcester, and at once went up to the Royal Charles Hostel. A pretty young woman in the office there informed them that the young gentleman had paid his bill and gone out about ten o'clock; but had left his luggage. She had not seen him come in. His room was up that little staircase at the end of the passage. There was another entrance that he might have come in at. The 'Boots' would take them.

Past the hall stuffed with furniture and decorated with the stags' heads and battle-prints common to English county-town hotels, they followed the 'Boots' up five red-carpeted steps, down a dingy green corridor, to a door at the very end. There was no answer to their knock. The dark little room, with striped walls, and more battle-prints, looked out on a side street and smelled dusty. On a shiny leather sofa an old valise, strapped-up ready for departure, was reposing with Felix's telegram, unopened, deposited thereon. Writing on his card, "Have come down with Nedda. F. F.," and laying it on the telegram, in case Derek should come in by the side entrance, Felix and Nedda rejoined John in the hall.

To wait in anxiety is perhaps the hardest thing in life; tea, tobacco, and hot baths perhaps the only anodynes. These, except the baths, they took. Without knowing what had happened, neither John nor Felix liked to make inquiry at the police station, nor did they care to try and glean knowledge from the hotel people by questions that might lead to gossip. They could but kick their heels till it became reasonably certain that Derek was not coming back. The enforced waiting increased Felix's exasperation. Everything Derek did seemed designed to cause Nedda pain. To watch her sitting there, trying resolutely to mask her anxiety, became intolerable. At last he got up and said to John:

"I think we'd better go round there," and, John nodding, he added: "Wait here, my child. One of us'll come back at once and tell you anything we hear."

She gave them a grateful look and the two brothers went out. They had not gone twenty yards when they met Derek striding along, pale, wild, unhappy-looking. When Felix touched him on the arm, he started and stared blankly at his uncle.

"We've seen about Tryst," Felix said: "You've not done anything?"

Derek shook his head.

"Good! John, tell Nedda that, and stay with her a bit. I want to talk to Derek. We'll go in the other way." He put his hand under the boy's arm and turned him down into the side street. When they reached the gloomy little bedroom Felix pointed to the telegram.

"From me. I suppose the news of his death stopped you?"

"Yes." Derek opened the telegram, dropped it, and sat down beside his valise on the shiny sofa. He looked positively haggard.

Taking his stand against the chest of drawers, Felix said quietly:

"I'm going to have it out with you, Derek. Do you understand what all this means to Nedda? Do you realize how utterly unhappy you're making her? I don't suppose you're happy yourself—"

The boy's whole figure writhed.

"Happy! When you've killed some one you don't think much of happiness—your own or any one's!"

Startled in his turn, Felix said sharply:

"Don't talk like that. It's monomania."

Derek laughed. "Bob Tryst's dead—through me! I can't get out of that."

Gazing at the boy's tortured face, Felix grasped the gruesome fact that this idea amounted to obsession.

"Derek," he said, "you've dwelt on this till you see it out of all proportion. If we took to ourselves the remote consequences of all our words we should none of us survive a week. You're overdone. You'll see it differently to-morrow."

Derek got up to pace the room.

"I swear I would have saved him. I tried to do it when they committed him at Transham." He looked wildly at Felix. "Didn't I? You were there; you heard!"

"Yes, yes; I heard."

"They wouldn't let me then. I thought they mightn't find him guilty here—so I let it go on. And now he's dead. You don't know how I feel!"

His throat was working, and Felix said with real compassion:

"My dear boy! Your sense of honour is too extravagant altogether. A grown man like poor Tryst knew perfectly what he was doing."

"No. He was like a dog—he did what he thought was expected of him. I never meant him to burn those ricks."

"Exactly! No one can blame you for a few wild words. He might have been the boy and you the man by the way you take it! Come!"

Derek sat down again on the shiny sofa and buried his head in his hands.

"I can't get away from him. He's been with me all day. I see him all the time."

That the boy was really haunted was only too apparent. How to attack this mania? If one could make him feel something else! And Felix said:

"Look here, Derek! Before you've any right to Nedda you've got to find ballast. That's a matter of honour, if you like."

Derek flung up his head as if to escape a blow. Seeing that he had riveted him, Felix pressed on, with some sternness:

"A man can't serve two passions. You must give up this championing the weak and lighting flames you can't control. See what it leads to! You've got to grow and become a man. Until then I don't trust my daughter to you."

The boy's lips quivered; a flush darkened his face, ebbed, and left him paler than ever.

Felix felt as if he had hit that face. Still, anything was better than to leave him under this gruesome obsession! Then, to his consternation, Derek stood up and said:

"If I go and see his body at the prison, perhaps he'll leave me alone a little!"

Catching at that, as he would have caught at anything, Felix said:

"Good! Yes! Go and see the poor fellow; we'll come, too."

And he went out to find Nedda.

By the time they reached the street Derek had already started, and they could see him going along in front. Felix racked his brains to decide whether he ought to prepare her for the state the boy was in. Twice he screwed himself up to take the plunge, but her face—puzzled, as though wondering at her lover's neglect of her—stopped him. Better say nothing!

Just as they reached the prison she put her hand on his arm:

"Look, Dad!"

And Felix read on the corner of the prison lane those words: 'Love's

Walk'!

Derek was waiting at the door. After some difficulty they were admitted and taken down the corridor where the prisoner on his knees had stared up at Nedda, past the courtyard where those others had been pacing out their living hieroglyphic, up steps to the hospital. Here, in a white-washed room on a narrow bed, the body of the big laborer lay, wrapped in a sheet.

"We bury him Friday, poor chap! Fine big man, too!" And at the warder's words a shudder passed through Felix. The frozen tranquillity of that body!

As the carved beauty of great buildings, so is the graven beauty of death, the unimaginable wonder of the abandoned thing lying so quiet, marvelling at its resemblance to what once lived! How strange this thing, still stamped by all that it had felt, wanted, loved, and hated, by all its dumb, hard, commonplace existence! This thing with the calm, pathetic look of one who asks of his own fled spirit: Why have you abandoned me?

Death! What more wonderful than a dead body—that still perfect work of life, for which life has no longer use! What more mysterious than this sight of what still is, yet is not!

Below the linen swathing the injured temples, those eyes were closed through which such yearning had looked forth. From that face, where the hair had grown faster than if it had been alive, death's majesty had planed away the aspect of brutality, removed the yearning, covering all with wistful acquiescence. Was his departed soul coherent? Where was it? Did it hover in this room, visible still to the boy? Did it stand there beside what was left of Tryst the laborer, that humblest of all creatures who dared to make revolt—serf, descendant of serfs, who, since the beginning, had hewn wood, drawn water, and done the will of others? Or was it winged, and calling in space to the souls of the oppressed?

This body would go back to the earth that it had tended, the wild grass would grow over it, the seasons spend wind and rain forever above it. But that which had held this together—the inarticulate, lowly spirit, hardly asking itself why things should be, faithful as a dog to those who were kind to it, obeying the dumb instinct of a violence that in his betters would be called 'high spirit,' where—Felix wondered—where was it?

And what were they thinking—Nedda and that haunted boy—so motionless? Nothing showed on their faces, nothing but a sort of living concentration, as if they were trying desperately to pierce through and see whatever it was that held this thing before them in such awful stillness. Their first glimpse of death; their first perception of that terrible remoteness of the dead! No wonder they seemed to be conjured out of the power of thought and feeling!

Nedda was first to turn away. Walking back by her side, Felix was surprised by her composure. The reality of death had not been to her half so harrowing as the news of it. She said softly:

"I'm glad to have seen him like that; now I shall think of him—at peace; not as he was that other time."

Derek rejoined them, and they went in silence back to the hotel. But at the door she said:

"Come with me to the cathedral, Derek; I can't go in yet!"

To Felix's dismay the boy nodded, and they turned to go. Should he stop them? Should he go with them? What should a father do? And, with a heavy sigh, he did nothing but retire into the hotel.

CHAPTER XXXVI

It was calm, with a dark-blue sky, and a golden moon, and the lighted street full of people out for airing. The great cathedral, cutting the heavens with its massive towers, was shut. No means of getting in; and while they stood there looking up the thought came into Nedda's mind: Where would they bury poor Tryst who had killed himself? Would they refuse to bury that unhappy one in a churchyard? Surely, the more unhappy and desperate he was, the kinder they ought to be to him!

They turned away down into a little lane where an old, white, timbered cottage presided ghostly at the corner. Some church magnate had his garden back there; and it was quiet, along the waving line of a high wall, behind which grew sycamores spreading close-bunched branches, whose shadows, in the

light of the corner lamps, lay thick along the ground this glamorous August night. A chafer buzzed by, a small black cat played with its tail on some steps in a recess. Nobody passed.

The girl's heart was beating fast. Derek's face was so strange and strained. And he had not yet said one word to her. All sorts of fears and fancies beset her till she was trembling all over.

"What is it?" she said at last. "You haven't—you haven't stopped loving me, Derek?"

"No one could stop loving you."

"What is it, then? Are you thinking of poor Tryst?"

With a catch in his throat and a sort of choked laugh he answered:

"Yes."

"But it's all over. He's at peace."

"Peace!" Then, in a queer, dead voice, he added: "I'm sorry, Nedda. It's beastly for you. But I can't help it."

What couldn't he help? Why did he keep her suffering like this—not telling her? What was this something that seemed so terribly between them? She walked on silently at his side, conscious of the rustling of the sycamores, of the moonlit angle of the church magnate's house, of the silence in the lane, and the gliding of their own shadows along the wall. What was this in his face, his thoughts, that she could not reach! And she cried out:

"Tell me! Oh, tell me, Derek! I can go through anything with you!"

"I can't get rid of him, that's all. I thought he'd go when I'd seen him there. But it's no good!"

Terror got hold of her then. She peered at his face—very white and haggard. There seemed no blood in it. They were going downhill now, along the blank wall of a factory; there was the river in front, with the moonlight on it and boats drawn up along the bank. From a chimney a scroll of black smoke was flung out across the sky, and a lighted bridge glowed above the water. They turned away from that, passing below the dark pile of the cathedral. Here couples still lingered on benches along the river-bank, happy in the warm night, under the August moon! And on and on they walked in that strange, miserable silence, past all those benches and couples, out on the river-path by the fields, where the scent of hay-stacks, and the freshness from the early stubbles and the grasses webbed with dew, overpowered the faint reek of the river mud. And still on and on in the moonlight that haunted through the willows. At their footsteps the water-rats scuttled down into the water with tiny splashes; a dog barked somewhere a long way off; a train whistled; a frog croaked. From the stubbles and second crops of sun-baked clover puffs of warm air kept stealing up into the chillier air beneath the willows. Such moonlit nights never seem to sleep. And there was a kind of triumph in the night's smile, as though it knew that it ruled the river and the fields, ruled with its gleams the silent trees that had given up all rustling. Suddenly Derek said:

"He's walking with us! Look! Over there!"

And for a second there did seem to Nedda a dim, gray shape moving square and dogged, parallel with them at the stubble edges. Gasping out:

"Oh, no; don't frighten me! I can't bear it tonight!" She hid her face against his shoulder like a child. He put his arm round her and she pressed her face deep into his coat. This ghost of Bob Tryst holding him away from her! This enemy! This uncanny presence! She pressed closer, closer, and put her face up to his. It was wonderfully lonely, silent, whispering, with the moongleams slipping through the willow boughs into the shadow where they stood. And from his arms warmth stole through her! Closer and closer she pressed, not quite knowing what she did, not quite knowing anything but that she wanted him never to let her go; wanted his lips on hers, so that she might feel his spirit pass, away from what was haunting it, into hers, never to escape. But his lips did not come to hers. They stayed drawn back, trembling, hungry-looking, just above her lips. And she whispered:

"Kiss me!"

She felt him shudder in her arms, saw his eyes darken, his lips quiver and quiver, as if he wanted them to, but they would not. What was it? Oh, what was it? Wasn't he going to kiss her—not to kiss her? And while in that unnatural pause they stood, their heads bent back among the moongleams and those willow shadows, there passed through Nedda such strange trouble as she had never known. Not kiss her! Not kiss her! Why didn't he? When in her blood and in the night all round, in the feel of his arms,

the sight of his hungry lips, was something unknown, wonderful, terrifying, sweet! And she wailed out:

"I want you—I don't care—I want you!" She felt him sway, reel, and clutch her as if he were going to fall, and all other feeling vanished in the instinct of the nurse she had already been to him. He was ill again! Yes, he was ill! And she said:

"Derek—don't! It's all right. Let's walk on quietly!"

She got his arm tightly in hers and drew him along toward home. By the jerking of that arm, the taut look on his face, she could feel that he did not know from step to step whether he could stay upright. But she herself was steady and calm enough, bent on keeping emotion away, and somehow getting him back along the river-path, abandoned now to the moon and the bright, still spaces of the night and the slow-moving, whitened water. Why had she not felt from the first that he was overwrought and only fit for bed?

Thus, very slowly, they made their way up by the factory again into the lane by the church magnate's garden, under the branches of the sycamores, past the same white-faced old house at the corner, to the high street where some few people were still abroad.

At the front door of the hotel stood Felix, looking at his watch, disconsolate as an old hen. To her great relief he went in quickly when he saw them coming. She could not bear the thought of talk and explanation. The one thing was to get Derek to bed. All the time he had gone along with that taut face; and now, when he sat down on the shiny sofa in the little bedroom, he shivered so violently that his teeth chattered. She rang for a hot bottle and brandy and hot water. When he had drunk he certainly shivered less, professed himself all right, and would not let her stay. She dared not ask, but it did seem as if the physical collapse had driven away, for the time at all events, that ghostly visitor, and, touching his forehead with her lips—very motherly—so that he looked up and smiled at her—she said in a matter-of-fact voice:

"I'll come back after a bit and tuck you up," and went out.

Felix was waiting in the hall, at a little table on which stood a bowl of bread and milk. He took the cover off it for her without a word. And while she supped he kept glancing at her, trying to make up his mind to words. But her face was sealed. And all he said was:

"Your uncle's gone to Becket for the night. I've got you a room next mine, and a tooth-brush, and some sort of comb. I hope you'll be able to manage, my child."

Nedda left him at the door of his room and went into her own. After waiting there ten minutes she stole out again. It was all quiet, and she went resolutely back down the stairs. She did not care who saw her or what they thought. Probably they took her for Derek's sister; but even if they didn't she would not have cared. It was past eleven, the light nearly out, and the hall in the condition of such places that await a morning's renovation. His corridor, too, was quite dark. She opened the door without sound and listened, till his voice said softly:

"All right, little angel; I'm not asleep."

And by a glimmer of moonlight, through curtains designed to keep out nothing, she stole up to the bed. She could just see his face, and eyes looking up at her with a sort of adoration. She put her hand on his forehead and whispered: "Are you comfy?"

He murmured back: "Yes, quite comfy."

Kneeling down, she laid her face beside his on the pillow. She could not help doing that; it made everything seem holy, cuddly, warm. His lips touched her nose. Her eyes, for just that instant, looked up into his, that were very dark and soft; then she got up.

"Would you like me to stay till you're asleep?"

"Yes; forever. But I shouldn't exactly sleep. Would you?"

In the darkness Nedda vehemently shook her head. Sleep! No! She would not sleep!

"Good night, then!"

"Good night, little dark angel!"

"Good night!" With that last whisper she slipped back to the door and noiselessly away.

CHAPTER XXXVII

It was long before she closed her eyes, spending the hours in fancy where still less she would have slept. But when she did drop off she dreamed that he and she were alone upon a star, where all the trees were white, the water, grass, birds, everything, white, and they were walking arm in arm, among white flowers. And just as she had stooped to pick one—it was no flower, but—Tryst's white-banded face! She woke with a little cry.

She was dressed by eight and went at once to Derek's room. There was no answer to her knock, and in a flutter of fear she opened the door. He had gone—packed, and gone. She ran back to the hall. There was a note for her in the office, and she took it out of sight to read. It said:

"He came back this morning. I'm going home by the first train. He seems to want me to do something. "DEREK."

Came back! That thing—that gray thing that she, too, had seemed to see for a moment in the fields beside the river! And he was suffering again as he had suffered yesterday! It was awful. She waited miserably till her father came down. To find that he, too, knew of this trouble was some relief. He made no objection when she begged that they should follow on to Joyfields. Directly after breakfast they set out. Once on her way to Derek again, she did not feel so frightened. But in the train she sat very still, gazing at her lap, and only once glanced up from under those long lashes.

"Can you understand it, Dad?"

Felix, not much happier than she, answered:

"The man had something queer about him. Besides Derek's been ill, don't forget that. But it's too bad for you, Nedda. I don't like it; I don't like it."

"I can't be parted from him, Dad. That's impossible."

Felix was silenced by the vigor of those words.

"His mother can help, perhaps," he said.

Ah! If his mother would help—send him away from the laborers, and all this!

Up from the station they took the field paths, which cut off quite a mile. The grass and woods were shining brightly, peacefully in the sun; it seemed incredible that there should be heartburnings about a land so smiling, that wrongs and miseries should haunt those who lived and worked in these bright fields. Surely in this earthly paradise the dwellers were enviable, well-nourished souls, sleek and happy as the pied cattle that lifted their inquisitive muzzles! Nedda tried to stroke the nose of one—grayish, blunt, moist. But the creature backed away from her hand, snuffling, and its cynical, soft eyes with chestnut lashes seemed warning the girl that she belonged to the breed that might be trusted to annoy.

In the last fields before the Joyfields crossroads they came up with a little, square, tow-headed man, without coat or cap, who had just driven some cattle in and was returning with his dog, at a 'dot-here dot-there' walk, as though still driving them. He gave them a look rather like that of the bullock Nedda had tried to stroke. She knew he must be one of the Malloring men, and longed to ask him questions; but he, too, looked shy and distrustful, as if he suspected that they wanted something out of him. She summoned up courage, however, to say: "Did you see about poor Bob Tryst?"

"I 'eard tell. 'E didn' like prison. They say prison takes the 'eart out of you. 'E didn' think o' that." And the smile that twisted the little man's lips seemed to Nedda strange and cruel, as if he actually found pleasure in the fate of his fellow. All she could find to answer was:

"Is that a good dog?"

The little man looked down at the dog trotting alongside with drooped tail, and shook his head:

"'E's no good wi' beasts—won't touch 'em!" Then, looking up sidelong, he added surprisingly:

"Mast' Freeland 'e got a crack on the head, though!" Again there was that satisfied resentment in his voice and the little smile twisting his lips. Nedda felt more lost than ever.

They parted at the crossroads and saw him looking back at them as they went up the steps to the wicket gate. Amongst a patch of early sunflowers, Tod, in shirt and trousers, was surrounded by his dog and the three small Trysts, all apparently engaged in studying the biggest of the sunflowers, where a

peacock-butterfly and a bee were feeding, one on a gold petal, the other on the black heart. Nedda went quickly up to them and asked:

"Has Derek come, Uncle Tod?"

Tod raised his eyes. He did not seem in the least surprised to see her, as if his sky were in the habit of dropping his relatives at ten in the morning.

"Gone out again," he said.

Nedda made a sign toward the children.

"Have you heard, Uncle Tod?"

Tod nodded and his blue eyes, staring above the children's heads, darkened.

"Is Granny still here?"

Again Tod nodded.

Leaving Felix in the garden, Nedda stole upstairs and tapped on Frances Freeland's door.

She, whose stoicism permitted her the one luxury of never coming down to breakfast, had just made it for herself over a little spirit-lamp. She greeted Nedda with lifted eyebrows.

"Oh, my darling! Where HAVE you come from? You must have my nice cocoa! Isn't this the most perfect lamp you ever saw? Did you ever see such a flame? Watch!"

She touched the spirit-lamp and what there was of flame died out.

"Now, isn't that provoking? It's really a splendid thing, quite a new kind. I mean to get you one. Now, drink your cocoa; it's beautifully hot."

"I've had breakfast, Granny."

Frances Freeland gazed at her doubtfully, then, as a last resource, began to sip the cocoa, of which, in truth, she was badly in want.

"Granny, will you help me?"

"Of course, darling. What is it?"

"I do so want Derek to forget all about this terrible business."

Frances Freeland, who had unscrewed the top of a little canister, answered:

"Yes, dear, I quite agree. I'm sure it's best for him. Open your mouth and let me pop in one of these delicious little plasmon biscuits. They're perfect after travelling. Only," she added wistfully, "I'm afraid he won't pay any attention to me."

"No, but you could speak to Aunt Kirsteen; it's for her to stop him."

One of her most pathetic smiles came over Frances Freeland's face.

"Yes, I could speak to her. But, you see, I don't count for anything. One doesn't when one gets old."

"Oh, Granny, you do! You count for a lot; every one admires you so. You always seem to have something that—that other people haven't got. And you're not a bit old in spirit."

Frances Freeland was fingering her rings; she slipped one off.

"Well," she said, "it's no good thinking about that, is it? I've wanted to give you this for ages, darling; it IS so uncomfortable on my finger. Now, just let me see if I can pop it on!"

Nedda recoiled.

"Oh, Granny!" she said. "You ARE—!" and vanished.

There was still no one in the kitchen, and she sat down to wait for her aunt to finish her up-stairs duties.

Kirsteen came down at last, in her inevitable blue dress, betraying her surprise at this sudden appearance of her niece only by a little quivering of her brows. And, trembling with nervousness, Nedda took her plunge, pouring out the whole story—of Derek's letter; their journey down; her father's talk with him; the visit to Tryst's body; their walk by the river; and of how haunted and miserable he was. Showing the little note he had left that morning, she clasped her hands and said:

"Oh, Aunt Kirsteen, make him happy again! Stop that awful haunting and keep him from all this!"

Kirsteen had listened, with one foot on the hearth in her favorite attitude. When the girl had finished she said quietly:

"I'm not a witch, Nedda!"

"But if it wasn't for you he would never have started. And now that poor Tryst's dead he would leave it alone. I'm sure only you can make him lose that haunted feeling."

Kirsteen shook her head.

"Listen, Nedda!" she said slowly, as though weighing each word. "I should like you to understand. There's a superstition in this country that people are free. Ever since I was a girl your age I've known that they are not; no one is free here who can't pay for freedom. It's one thing to see, another to feel this with your whole being. When, like me, you have an open wound, which something is always inflaming, you can't wonder, can you, that fever escapes into the air. Derek may have caught the infection of my fever—that's all! But I shall never lose that fever, Nedda—never!"

"But, Aunt Kirsteen, this haunting is dreadful. I can't bear to see it."

"My dear, Derek is very highly strung, and he's been ill. It's in my family to see things. That'll go away."

Nedda said passionately:

"I don't believe he'll ever lose it while he goes on here, tearing his heart out. And they're trying to get me away from him. I know they are!"

Kirsteen turned; her eyes seemed to blaze.

"They? Ah! Yes! You'll have to fight if you want to marry a rebel, Nedda!"

Nedda put her hands to her forehead, bewildered. "You see, Nedda, rebellion never ceases. It's not only against this or that injustice, it's against all force and wealth that takes advantage of its force and wealth. That rebellion goes on forever. Think well before you join in."

Nedda turned away. Of what use to tell her to think when 'I won't—I can't be parted from him!' kept every other thought paralyzed. And she pressed her forehead against the cross-bar of the window, trying to find better words to make her appeal again. Out there above the orchard the sky was blue, and everything light and gay, as the very butterflies that wavered past. A motor-car seemed to have stopped in the road close by; its whirring and whizzing was clearly audible, mingled with the cooings of pigeons and a robin's song. And suddenly she heard her aunt say:

"You have your chance, Nedda! Here they are!"

Nedda turned. There in the doorway were her Uncles John and Stanley coming in, followed by her father and Uncle Tod.

What did this mean? What had they come for? And, disturbed to the heart, she gazed from one to the other. They had that curious look of people not quite knowing what their reception will be like, yet with something resolute, almost portentous, in their mien. She saw John go up to her aunt and hold out his hand.

"I dare say Felix and Nedda have told you about yesterday," he said.
"Stanley and I thought it best to come over." Kirsteen answered:

"Tod, will you tell Mother who's here?"

Then none of them seemed to know quite what to say, or where to look, till Frances Freeland, her face all pleased and anxious, came in. When she had kissed them they all sat down. And Nedda, at the window, squeezed her hands tight together in her lap.

"We've come about Derek," John said.

"Yes," broke in Stanley. "For goodness' sake, Kirsteen, don't let's have any more of this! Just think what would have happened yesterday if that poor fellow hadn't providentially gone off the hooks!"

"Providentially!"

"Well, it was. You see to what lengths Derek was prepared to go. Hang it all! We shouldn't have been exactly proud of a felon in the family."

Frances Freeland, who had been lacing and unlacing her fingers, suddenly fixed her eyes on Kirsteen.

"I don't understand very well, darling, but I am sure that whatever dear John says will be wise and right. You must remember that he is the eldest and has a great deal of experience."

Kirsteen bent her head. If there was irony in the gesture, it was not perceived by Frances Freeland.

"It can't be right for dear Derek, or any gentleman, to go against the law of the land or be mixed up with wrong-doing in any way. I haven't said anything, but I HAVE felt it very much. Because—it's all been not quite nice, has it?"

Nedda saw her father wince. Then Stanley broke in again:

"Now that the whole thing's done with, do, for Heaven's sake, let's have a little peace!"

At that moment her aunt's face seemed wonderful to Nedda; so quiet, yet so burningly alive.

"Peace! There is no peace in this world. There is death, but no peace!" And, moving nearer to Tod, she rested her hand on his shoulder, looking, as it seemed to Nedda, at something far away, till John said:

"That's hardly the point, is it? We should be awfully glad to know that there'll be no more trouble. All this has been very worrying. And now the cause seems to be—removed."

There was always a touch of finality in John's voice. Nedda saw that all had turned to Kirsteen for her answer.

"If those up and down the land who profess belief in liberty will cease to filch from the helpless the very crust of it, the cause will be removed."

"Which is to say—never!"

At those words from Felix, Frances Freeland, gazing first at him and then at Kirsteen, said in a pained voice:

"I don't think you ought to talk like that, Kirsteen, dear. Nobody who's at all nice means to be unkind. We're all forgetful sometimes. I know I often forget to be sympathetic. It vexes me dreadfully!"

"Mother, don't defend tyranny!"

"I'm sure it's often from the best motives, dear."

"So is rebellion."

"Well, I don't understand about that, darling. But I do think, with dear John, it's a great pity. It will be a dreadful drawback to Derek if he has to look back on something that he regrets when he's older. It's always best to smile and try to look on the bright side of things and not be grumbly-grumbly!"

After that little speech of Frances Freeland's there was a silence that Nedda thought would last forever, till her aunt, pressing close to Tod's shoulder, spoke.

"You want me to stop Derek. I tell you all what I've just told Nedda. I don't attempt to control Derek; I never have. For myself, when I see a thing I hate I can't help fighting against it. I shall never be able to help that. I understand how you must dislike all this; I know it must be painful to you, Mother. But while there is tyranny in this land, to laborers, women, animals, anything weak and helpless, so long will there be rebellion against it, and things will happen that will disturb you."

Again Nedda saw her father wince. But Frances Freeland, bending forward, fixed her eyes piercingly on Kirsteen's neck, as if she were noticing something there more important than that about tyranny!

Then John said very gravely:

"You seem to think that we approve of such things being done to the helpless!"

"I know that you disapprove."

"With the masterly inactivity," Felix said suddenly, in a voice more bitter than Nedda had ever heard from him, "of authority, money, culture, and philosophy. With the disapproval that lifts no finger—winking at tyrannies lest worse befall us. Yes, WE—brethren—we—and so we shall go on doing. Quite right, Kirsteen!"

"No. The world is changing, Felix, changing!"

But Nedda had started up. There at the door was Derek.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Derek, who had slept the sleep of the dead, having had none for two nights, woke thinking of Nedda hovering above him in the dark; of her face laid down beside him on the pillow. And then, suddenly, up started that thing, and stood there, haunting him! Why did it come? What did it want of him? After writing the little note to Nedda, he hurried to the station and found a train about to start. To see and talk with the laborers; to do something, anything to prove that this tragic companion had no real existence! He went first to the Gaunts' cottage. The door, there, was opened by the rogue-girl, comely and robust as ever, in a linen frock, with her sleeves rolled up, and smiling broadly at his astonishment.

"Don't be afraid, Mr. Derek; I'm only here for the week-end, just to tididy up a bit. 'Tis all right in London. I wouldn't come back here, I wouldn't—not if you was to give me—" and she pouted her red lips.

"Where's your father, Wilmet?"

"Over in Willey's Copse cuttin' stakes. I hear you've been ill, Mr. Derek. You do look pale. Were you very bad?" And her eyes opened as though the very thought of illness was difficult for her to grasp. "I saw your young lady up in London. She's very pretty. Wish you happiness, Mr. Derek. Grandfather, here's Mr. Derek!"

The face of old Gaunt, carved, cynical, yellow, appeared above her shoulder. There he stood, silent, giving Derek no greeting. And with a sudden miserable feeling the boy said:

"I'll go and find him. Good-by, Wilmet!"

"Good-by, Mr. Derek. 'Tis quiet enough here now; there's changes."

Her rogue face twinkled again, and, turning her chin, she rubbed it on her plump shoulder, as might a heifer, while from behind her Grandfather Gaunt's face looked out with a faint, sardonic grin.

Derek, hurrying on to Willey's Copse, caught sight, along a far hedge, of the big dark laborer, Tulley, who had been his chief lieutenant in the fighting; but, whether the man heard his hail or no, he continued along the hedgeside without response and vanished over a stile. The field dipped sharply to a stream, and at the crossing Derek came suddenly on the little 'dot-here dot-there' cowherd, who, at Derek's greeting, gave him an abrupt "Good day!" and went on with his occupation of mending a hurdle. Again that miserable feeling beset the boy, and he hastened on. A sound of chopping guided him. Near the edge of the coppice Tom Gaunt was lopping at some bushes. At sight of Derek he stopped and stood waiting, his loquacious face expressionless, his little, hard eye cocked.

"Good morning, Tom. It's ages since I saw you."

"Ah, 'tis a proper long time! You 'ad a knock."

Derek winced; it was said as if he had been disabled in an affair in which Gaunt had neither part nor parcel. Then, with a great effort, the boy brought out his question:

"You've heard about poor Bob?"

"Yaas; 'tis the end of HIM."

Some meaning behind those words, the unsmiling twist of that hard-bitten face, the absence of the 'sir' that even Tom Gaunt generally gave him, all seemed part of an attack. And, feeling as if his heart were being squeezed, Derek looked straight into his face.

"What's the matter, Tom?"

"Matter! I don't know as there's anything the matter, ezactly!"

"What have I done? Tell me!"

Tom Gaunt smiled; his little, gray eyes met Derek's full.

"'Tisn't for a gentleman to be held responsible."

"Come!" Derek cried passionately. "What is it? D'you think I deserted you, or what? Speak out, man!"

Abating nothing of his stare and drawl, Gaunt answered:

"Deserted? Oh, dear no! Us can't afford to do no more dyin' for you—that's all!"

"For me! Dying! My God! D'you think I wouldn't have—? Oh! Confound you!"

"Aye! Confounded us you 'ave! Hope you're satisfied!"

Pale as death and quivering all over, Derek answered:

"So you think I've just been frying fish of my own?"

Tom Gaunt, emitted a little laugh.

"I think you've fried no fish at all. That's what I think. And no one else does, neither, if you want to know—except poor Bob. You've fried his fish, sure enough!"

Stung to the heart, the boy stood motionless. A pigeon was cooing; the sappy scent from the lopped bushes filled all the sun-warmed air.

"I see!" he said. "Thanks, Tom; I'm glad to know."

Without moving a muscle, Tom Gaunt answered:

"Don't mention it!" and resumed his lopping.

Derek turned and walked out of the little wood. But when he had put a field between him and the sound of Gaunt's bill-hook, he lay down and buried his face in the grass, chewing at its green blades, scarce dry of dew, and with its juicy sweetness tasting the full of bitterness. And the gray shade stalked out again, and stood there in the warmth of the August day, with its scent and murmur of full summer, while the pigeons cooed and dandelion fluff drifted by. . . .

When, two hours later, he entered the kitchen at home, of the company assembled Frances Freeland alone retained equanimity enough to put up her face to be kissed.

"I'm so thankful you've come back in time to see your uncles, darling. Your Uncle John thinks, and we all agree, that to encourage those poor laborers to do things which are not nice is—is—you know what I mean, darling!"

Derek gave a bitter little laugh.

"Criminal, Granny! Yes, and puppyish! I've learned all that."

The sound of his voice was utterly unlike his own, and Kirsteen, starting forward, put her arm round him.

"It's all right, Mother. They've chucked me."

At that moment, when all, save his mother, wanted so to express their satisfaction, Frances Freeland alone succeeded.

"I'm so glad, darling!"

Then John rose and, holding out his hand to his nephew, said:

"That's the end of the trouble, then, Derek?"

"Yes. And I beg your pardon, Uncle John; and all—Uncle Stanley, Uncle Felix; you, Dad; Granny."

They had all risen now. The boy's face gave them—even John, even Stanley—a choke in the throat. Frances Freeland suddenly took their arms and went to the door; her other two sons followed. And quietly they all went out.

Derek, who had stayed perfectly still, staring past Nedda into a corner of the room, said:

"Ask him what he wants, Mother."

Nedda smothered down a cry. But Kirsteen, tightening her clasp of him and looking steadily into that corner, answered:

"Nothing, my boy. He's quite friendly. He only wants to be with you for a little."

"But I can't do anything for him."

"He knows that."

"I wish he wouldn't, Mother. I can't be more sorry than I have been."

Kirsteen's face quivered.

"My dear, it will go quite soon. Love Nedda! See! She wants you!"

Derek answered in the same quiet voice:

"Yes, Nedda is the comfort. Mother, I want to go away—away out of England—right away."

Nedda rushed and flung her arms round him.

"I, too, Derek; I, too!"

That evening Felix came out to the old 'fly,' waiting to take him from Joyfields to Becket. What a sky! All over its pale blue a far-up wind had drifted long, rosy clouds, and through one of them the half-moon peered, of a cheese-green hue; and, framed and barred by the elm-trees, like some roseate, stained-glass window, the sunset blazed. In a corner of the orchard a little bonfire had been lighted, and round it he could see the three small Trysts dropping armfuls of leaves and pointing at the flames leaping out of the smoulder. There, too, was Tod's big figure, motionless, and his dog sitting on its haunches, with head poked forward, staring at those red tongues of flame. Kirsteen had come with him to the wicket gate. He held her hand long in his own and pressed it hard. And while that blue figure, turned to the sunset, was still visible, he screwed himself back to look.

They had been in painful conclave, as it seemed to Felix, all day, coming to the decision that those two young things should have their wish, marry, and go out to New Zealand. The ranch of Cousin Alick Morton (son of that brother of Frances Freeland, who, absorbed in horses, had wandered to Australia and died in falling from them) had extended a welcome to Derek. Those two would have a voyage of happiness—see together the red sunsets in the Mediterranean, Pompeii, and the dark ants of men swarming in endless band up and down with their coal-sacks at Port Said; smell the cinnamon gardens of Colombo; sit up on deck at night and watch the stars. . . . Who could grudge it them? Out there youth and energy would run unchecked. For here youth had been beaten!

On and on the old 'fly' rumbled between the shadowy fields. 'The world is changing, Felix—changing!' Was that defeat of youth, then, nothing? Under the crust of authority and wealth, culture and philosophy—was the world really changing; was liberty truly astir, under that sky in the west all blood; and man rising at long last from his knees before the God of force? The silent, empty fields darkened, the air gathered dewy thickness, and the old 'fly' rumbled and rolled as slow as fate. Cottage lamps were already lighted for the evening meal. No laborer abroad at this hour! And Felix thought of Tryst, the tragic fellow—the moving, lonely figure; emanation of these solitary fields, shade of the departing land! One might well see him as that boy saw him, silent, dogged, in a gray light such as this now clinging above the hedgerows and the grass!

The old 'fly' turned into the Becket drive. It had grown dark now, save for the half-moon; the last chafer was booming by, and a bat flitting, a little, blind, eager bat, through the quiet trees. He got out to walk the last few hundred yards. A lovely night, silent below her stars—cool and dark, spread above field after field, wood on wood, for hundreds of miles on every side. Night covering his native land. The same silence had reigned out there, the same perfume stolen up, the same star-shine fallen, for millions

of years in the past, and would for millions of years to come. Close to where the half-moon floated, a slow, narrow, white cloud was passing—curiously shaped. At one end of it Felix could see distinctly the form of a gleaming skull, with dark sky showing through its eyeholes, cheeks, and mouth. A queer phenomenon; fascinating, rather ghastly! It grew sharper in outline, more distinct. One of those sudden shudders, that seize men from the crown of the head to the very heels, passed down his back. He shut his eyes. And, instead, there came up before him Kirsteen's blue-clothed figure turned to the sunset glow. Ah! Better to see that than this skull above the land! Better to believe her words: 'The world is changing, Felix—changing!' world is changing, Felix—changing!

THE END

BEYOND

by JOHN GALSWORTHY

"Che faro senza—!"

To THOMAS HARDY

BEYOND

Part I

I

At the door of St. George's registry office, Charles Clare Winton strolled forward in the wake of the taxi-cab that was bearing his daughter away with "the fiddler fellow" she had married. His sense of decorum forbade his walking with Nurse Betty—the only other witness of the wedding. A stout woman in a highly emotional condition would have been an incongruous companion to his slim, upright figure, moving with just that unexaggerated swing and balance becoming to a lancer of the old school, even if he has been on the retired list for sixteen years.

Poor Betty! He thought of her with irritated sympathy—she need not have given way to tears on the door-step. She might well feel lost now Gyp was gone, but not so lost as himself! His pale-gloved hand—the one real hand he had, for his right hand had been amputated at the wrist—twisted vexedly at the small, grizzling moustache lifting itself from the corners of his firm lips. On this grey February day he wore no overcoat; faithful to the absolute, almost shamefaced quietness of that wedding, he had not even donned black coat and silk hat, but wore a blue suit and a hard black felt. The instinct of a soldier and hunting man to exhibit no sign whatever of emotion did not desert him this dark day of his life; but his grey-hazel eyes kept contracting, staring fiercely, contracting again; and, at moments, as if overpowered by some deep feeling, they darkened and seemed to draw back in his head. His face was narrow and weathered and thin-cheeked, with a clean-cut jaw, small ears, hair darker than the moustache, but touched at the side wings with grey—the face of a man of action, self-reliant, resourceful. And his bearing was that of one who has always been a bit of a dandy, and paid attention to "form," yet been conscious sometimes that there were things beyond. A man, who, preserving all the precision of a type, yet had in him a streak of something that was not typical. Such often have tragedy

in their pasts.

Making his way towards the park, he turned into Mount Street. There was the house still, though the street had been very different then—the house he had passed, up and down, up and down in the fog, like a ghost, that November afternoon, like a cast-out dog, in such awful, unutterable agony of mind, twenty-three years ago, when Gyp was born. And then to be told at the door—he, with no right to enter, he, loving as he believed man never loved woman—to be told at the door that SHE was dead—dead in bearing what he and she alone knew was their child! Up and down in the fog, hour after hour, knowing her time was upon her; and at last to be told that! Of all fates that befall man, surely the most awful is to love too much.

Queer that his route should take him past the very house to-day, after this new bereavement! Accursed luck—that gout which had sent him to Wiesbaden, last September! Accursed luck that Gyp had ever set eyes on this fellow Fiorsen, with his fatal fiddle! Certainly not since Gyp had come to live with him, fifteen years ago, had he felt so forlorn and fit for nothing. To-morrow he would get back to Mildenhall and see what hard riding would do. Without Gyp—to be without Gyp! A fiddler! A chap who had never been on a horse in his life! And with his crutch-handled cane he switched viciously at the air, as though carving a man in two.

His club, near Hyde Park Corner, had never seemed to him so desolate. From sheer force of habit he went into the card-room. The afternoon had so darkened that electric light already burned, and there were the usual dozen of players seated among the shaded gleams falling decorously on dark-wood tables, on the backs of chairs, on cards and tumblers, the little gilded coffee-cups, the polished nails of fingers holding cigars. A crony challenged him to piquet. He sat down listless. That three-legged whist—bridge—had always offended his fastidiousness—a mangled short cut of a game! Poker had something blatant in it. Piquet, though out of fashion, remained for him the only game worth playing—the only game which still had style. He held good cards and rose the winner of five pounds that he would willingly have paid to escape the boredom of the bout. Where would they be by now? Past Newbury; Gyp sitting opposite that Swedish fellow with his greenish wildcat's eyes. Something furtive, and so foreign, about him! A mess—if he were any judge of horse or man! Thank God he had tied Gyp's money up—every farthing! And an emotion that was almost jealousy swept him at the thought of the fellow's arms round his soft-haired, dark-eyed daughter—that pretty, willowy creature, so like in face and limb to her whom he had loved so desperately.

Eyes followed him when he left the card-room, for he was one who inspired in other men a kind of admiration—none could say exactly why. Many quite as noted for general good sportsmanship attracted no such attention. Was it "style," or was it the streak of something not quite typical—the brand left on him by the past?

Abandoning the club, he walked slowly along the railings of Piccadilly towards home, that house in Bury Street, St. James's, which had been his London abode since he was quite young—one of the few in the street that had been left untouched by the general passion for puffing down and building up, which had spoiled half London in his opinion.

A man, more silent than anything on earth, with the soft, quick, dark eyes of a woodcock and a long, greenish, knitted waistcoat, black cutaway, and tight trousers strapped over his boots, opened the door.

"I shan't go out again, Markey. Mrs. Markey must give me some dinner. Anything'll do."

Markey signalled that he had heard, and those brown eyes under eyebrows meeting and forming one long, dark line, took his master in from head to heel. He had already nodded last night, when his wife had said the gov'nor would take it hard. Retiring to the back premises, he jerked his head toward the street and made a motion upward with his hand, by which Mrs. Markey, an astute woman, understood that she had to go out and shop because the gov'nor was dining in. When she had gone, Markey sat down opposite Betty, Gyp's old nurse. The stout woman was still crying in a quiet way. It gave him the fair hump, for he felt inclined to howl like a dog himself. After watching her broad, rosy, tearful face in silence for some minutes, he shook his head, and, with a gulp and a tremor of her comfortable body, Betty desisted. One paid attention to Markey.

Winton went first into his daughter's bedroom, and gazed at its emptied silken order, its deserted silver mirror, twisting viciously at his little moustache. Then, in his sanctum, he sat down before the fire, without turning up the light. Anyone looking in, would have thought he was asleep; but the drowsy influence of that deep chair and cosy fire had drawn him back into the long-ago. What unhappy chance had made him pass HER house to-day!

Some say there is no such thing as an affinity, no case—of a man, at least—made bankrupt of passion

by a single love. In theory, it may be so; in fact, there are such men—neck-or-nothing men, quiet and self-contained, the last to expect that nature will play them such a trick, the last to desire such surrender of themselves, the last to know when their fate is on them. Who could have seemed to himself, and, indeed, to others, less likely than Charles Clare Winton to fall over head and ears in love when he stepped into the Belvoir Hunt ballroom at Grantham that December evening, twenty-four years ago? A keen soldier, a dandy, a first-rate man to hounds, already almost a proverb in his regiment for coolness and for a sort of courteous disregard of women as among the minor things of life—he had stood there by the door, in no hurry to dance, taking a survey with an air that just did not give an impression of "side" because it was not at all put on. And—behold!—SHE had walked past him, and his world was changed for ever. Was it an illusion of light that made her whole spirit seem to shine through a half-startled glance? Or a little trick of gait, a swaying, seductive balance of body; was it the way her hair waved back, or a subtle scent, as of a flower? What was it? The wife of a squire of those parts, with a house in London. Her name? It doesn't matter—she has been long enough dead. There was no excuse—not an ill-treated woman; an ordinary, humdrum marriage, of three years standing; no children. An amiable good fellow of a husband, fifteen years older than herself, inclined already to be an invalid. No excuse! Yet, in one month from that night, Winton and she were lovers, not only in thought but in deed. A thing so utterly beyond "good form" and his sense of what was honourable and becoming in an officer and gentleman that it was simply never a question of weighing pro and con, the cons had it so completely. And yet from that first evening, he was hers, she his. For each of them the one thought was how to be with the other. If so—why did they not at least go off together? Not for want of his beseeching. And no doubt, if she had survived Gyp's birth, they would have gone. But to face the prospect of ruining two men, as it looked to her, had till then been too much for that soft-hearted creature. Death stilled her struggle before it was decided. There are women in whom utter devotion can still go hand in hand with a doubting soul. Such are generally the most fascinating; for the power of hard and prompt decision robs women of mystery, of the subtle atmosphere of change and chance. Though she had but one part in four of foreign blood, she was not at all English. But Winton was English to his back-bone, English in his sense of form, and in that curious streak of whole-hearted desperation that will break form to smithereens in one department and leave it untouched in every other of its owner's life. To have called Winton a "crank" would never have occurred to any one—his hair was always perfectly parted; his boots glowed; he was hard and reticent, accepting and observing every canon of well-bred existence. Yet, in that, his one infatuation, he was as lost to the world and its opinion as the longest-haired lentil-eater of us all. Though at any moment during that one year of their love he would have risked his life and sacrificed his career for a whole day in her company, he never, by word or look, compromised her. He had carried his punctilious observance of her "honour" to a point more bitter than death, consenting, even, to her covering up the tracks of their child's coming. Paying that gambler's debt was by far the bravest deed of his life, and even now its memory festered.

To this very room he had come back after hearing she was dead; this very room which he had refurnished to her taste, so that even now, with its satinwood chairs, little dainty Jacobean bureau, shaded old brass candelabra, divan, it still had an air exotic to bachelordom. There, on the table, had been a letter recalling him to his regiment, ordered on active service. If he had realized what he would go through before he had the chance of trying to lose his life out there, he would undoubtedly have taken that life, sitting in this very chair before the fire—the chair sacred to her and memory. He had not the luck he wished for in that little war—men who don't care whether they live or die seldom have. He secured nothing but distinction. When it was over, he went on, with a few more lines in his face, a few more wrinkles in his heart, soldiering, shooting tigers, pig-sticking, playing polo, riding to hounds harder than ever; giving nothing away to the world; winning steadily the curious, uneasy admiration that men feel for those who combine reckless daring with an ice-cool manner. Since he was less of a talker even than most of his kind, and had never in his life talked of women, he did not gain the reputation of a woman-hater, though he so manifestly avoided them. After six years' service in India and Egypt, he lost his right hand in a charge against dervishes, and had, perforce, to retire, with the rank of major, aged thirty-four. For a long time he had hated the very thought of the child—his child, in giving birth to whom the woman he loved had died. Then came a curious change of feeling; and for three years before his return to England, he had been in the habit of sending home odds and ends picked up in the bazaars, to serve as toys. In return, he had received, twice annually at least, a letter from the man who thought himself Gyp's father. These letters he read and answered. The squire was likable, and had been fond of HER; and though never once had it seemed possible to Winton to have acted otherwise than he did, he had all the time preserved a just and formal sense of the wrong he had done this man. He did not experience remorse, but he had always an irksome feeling as of a debt unpaid, mitigated by knowledge that no one had ever suspected, and discounted by memory of the awful torture he had endured to make sure against suspicion.

When, plus distinction and minus his hand, he was at last back in England, the squire had come to see him. The poor man was failing fast from Bright's disease. Winton entered again that house in Mount Street with an emotion, to stifle which required more courage than any cavalry charge. But one whose

heart, as he would have put it, is "in the right place" does not indulge the quaverings of his nerves, and he faced those rooms where he had last seen her, faced that lonely little dinner with her husband, without sign of feeling. He did not see little Ghita, or Gyp, as she had nicknamed herself, for she was already in her bed; and it was a whole month before he brought himself to go there at an hour when he could see the child if he would. The fact is, he was afraid. What would the sight of this little creature stir in him? When Betty, the nurse, brought her in to see the soldier gentleman with "the leather hand," who had sent her those funny toys, she stood calmly staring with her large, deep-brown eyes. Being seven, her little brown-velvet frock barely reached the knees of her thin, brown-stockinged legs planted one just in front of the other, as might be the legs of a small brown bird; the oval of her gravely wondering face was warm cream colour without red in it, except that of the lips, which were neither full nor thin, and had a little tuck, the tiniest possible dimple at one corner. Her hair of warm dark brown had been specially brushed and tied with a narrow red ribbon back from her forehead, which was broad and rather low, and this added to her gravity. Her eyebrows were thin and dark and perfectly arched; her little nose was perfectly straight, her little chin in perfect balance between round and point. She stood and stared till Winton smiled. Then the gravity of her face broke, her lips parted, her eyes seemed to fly a little. And Winton's heart turned over within him—she was the very child of her that he had lost! And he said, in a voice that seemed to him to tremble:

"Well, Gyp?"

"Thank you for my toys; I like them."

He held out his hand, and she gravely put her small hand into it. A sense of solace, as if some one had slipped a finger in and smoothed his heart, came over Winton. Gently, so as not to startle her, he raised her hand a little, bent, and kissed it. It may have been from his instant recognition that here was one as sensitive as child could be, or the way many soldiers acquire from dealing with their men—those simple, shrewd children—or some deeper instinctive sense of ownership between them; whatever it was, from that moment, Gyp conceived for him a rushing admiration, one of those headlong affections children will sometimes take for the most unlikely persons.

He used to go there at an hour when he knew the squire would be asleep, between two and five. After he had been with Gyp, walking in the park, riding with her in the Row, or on wet days sitting in her lonely nursery telling stories, while stout Betty looked on half hypnotized, a rather queer and doubting look on her comfortable face—after such hours, he found it difficult to go to the squire's study and sit opposite him, smoking. Those interviews reminded him too much of past days, when he had kept such desperate check on himself—too much of the old inward chafing against the other man's legal ownership—too much of the debt owing. But Winton was triple-proofed against betrayal of feeling. The squire welcomed him eagerly, saw nothing, felt nothing, was grateful for his goodness to the child. Well, well! He had died in the following spring. And Winton found that he had been made Gyp's guardian and trustee. Since his wife's death, the squire had muddled his affairs, his estate was heavily mortgaged; but Winton accepted the position with an almost savage satisfaction, and, from that moment, schemed deeply to get Gyp all to himself. The Mount Street house was sold; the Lincolnshire place let. She and Nurse Betty were installed at his own hunting-box, Mildenhams. In this effort to get her away from all the squire's relations, he did not scruple to employ to the utmost the power he undoubtedly had of making people feel him unapproachable. He was never impolite to any of them; he simply froze them out. Having plenty of money himself, his motives could not be called in question. In one year he had isolated her from all except stout Betty. He had no qualms, for Gyp was no more happy away from him than he from her. He had but one bad half-hour. It came when he had at last decided that she should be called by his name, if not legally at least by custom, round Mildenhams. It was to Markey he had given the order that Gyp was to be little Miss Winton for the future. When he came in from hunting that day, Betty was waiting in his study. She stood in the centre of the emptiest part of that rather dingy room, as far as possible away from any good or chattel. How long she had been standing there, heaven only knew; but her round, rosy face was confused between awe and resolution, and she had made a sad mess of her white apron. Her blue eyes met Winton's with a sort of desperation.

"About what Markey told me, sir. My old master wouldn't have liked it, sir."

Touched on the raw by this reminder that before the world he had been nothing to the loved one, that before the world the squire, who had been nothing to her, had been everything, Winton said icily:

"Indeed! You will be good enough to comply with my wish, all the same."

The stout woman's face grew very red. She burst out, breathless:

"Yes, sir; but I've seen what I've seen. I never said anything, but I've got eyes. If Miss Gyp's to take your name, sir, then tongues'll wag, and my dear, dead mistress—"

But at the look on his face she stopped, with her mouth open.

"You will be kind enough to keep your thoughts to yourself. If any word or deed of yours gives the slightest excuse for talk—you go. Understand me, you go, and you never see Gyp again! In the meantime you will do what I ask. Gyp is my adopted daughter."

She had always been a little afraid of him, but she had never seen that look in his eyes or heard him speak in that voice. And she bent her full moon of a face and went, with her apron crumpled as apron had never been, and tears in her eyes. And Winton, at the window, watching the darkness gather, the leaves flying by on a sou'-westerly wind, drank to the dregs a cup of bitter triumph. He had never had the right to that dead, forever-loved mother of his child. He meant to have the child. If tongues must wag, let them! This was a defeat of all his previous precaution, a deep victory of natural instinct. And his eyes narrowed and stared into the darkness.

II

In spite of his victory over all human rivals in the heart of Gyp, Winton had a rival whose strength he fully realized perhaps for the first time now that she was gone, and he, before the fire, was brooding over her departure and the past. Not likely that one of his decisive type, whose life had so long been bound up with swords and horses, would grasp what music might mean to a little girl. Such ones, he knew, required to be taught scales, and "In a Cottage near a Wood" with other melodies. He took care not to go within sound of them, so that he had no conception of the avidity with which Gyp had mopped up all, and more than all, her governess could teach her. He was blind to the rapture with which she listened to any stray music that came its way to Mildenhams—to carols in the Christmas dark, to certain hymns, and one special "Nunc Dimittis" in the village church, attended with a hopeless regularity; to the horn of the hunter far out in the quivering, dripping coverts; even to Markey's whistling, which was full and strangely sweet.

He could share her love of dogs and horses, take an anxious interest in her way of catching bumblebees in the hollow of her hand and putting them to her small, delicate ears to hear them buzz, sympathize with her continual ravages among the flowerbeds, in the old-fashioned garden, full of lilacs and laburnums in spring, pinks, roses, cornflowers in summer, dahlias and sunflowers in autumn, and always a little neglected and overgrown, a little squeezed in, and elbowed by the more important surrounding paddocks. He could sympathize with her attempts to draw his attention to the song of birds; but it was simply not in him to understand how she loved and craved for music. She was a cloudy little creature, up and down in mood—rather like a brown lady spaniel that she had, now gay as a butterfly, now brooding as night. Any touch of harshness she took to heart fearfully. She was the strangest compound of pride and self-disparagement; the qualities seemed mixed in her so deeply that neither she nor any one knew of which her cloudy fits were the result. Being so sensitive, she "fancied" things terribly. Things that others did to her, and thought nothing of, often seemed to her conclusive evidence that she was not loved by anybody, which was dreadfully unjust, because she wanted to love everyone—nearly. Then suddenly she would feel: "If they don't love me, I don't care. I don't want anything of anybody!" Presently, all would blow away just like a cloud, and she would love and be gay, until something fresh, perhaps not at all meant to hurt her, would again hurt her horribly. In reality, the whole household loved and admired her. But she was one of those delicate-treading beings, born with a skin too few, who—and especially in childhood—suffer from themselves in a world born with a skin too many.

To Winton's extreme delight, she took to riding as a duck to water, and knew no fear on horseback. She had the best governess he could get her, the daughter of an admiral, and, therefore, in distressed circumstances; and later on, a tutor for her music, who came twice a week all the way from London—a sardonic man who cherished for her even more secret admiration than she for him. In fact, every male thing fell in love with her at least a little. Unlike most girls, she never had an epoch of awkward plainness, but grew like a flower, evenly, steadily. Winton often gazed at her with a sort of intoxication; the turn of her head, the way those perfectly shaped, wonderfully clear brown eyes would "fly," the set of her straight, round neck, the very shaping of her limbs were all such poignant reminders of what he had so loved. And yet, for all that likeness to her mother, there was a difference, both in form and character. Gyp had, as it were, an extra touch of "breeding," more chiselling in body, more fastidiousness in soul, a little more poise, a little more sheer grace; in mood, more variance, in mind, more clarity and, mixed with her sweetness, a distinct spice of scepticism which her mother had lacked.

In modern times there are no longer "toasts," or she would have been one with both the hunts. Though delicate in build, she was not frail, and when her blood was up would "go" all day, and come in so bone-tired that she would drop on to the tiger skin before the fire, rather than face the stairs. Life at Mildenhams was lonely, save for Winton's hunting cronies, and they but few, for his spiritual dandyism did not gladly suffer the average country gentleman and his frigid courtesy frightened women.

Besides, as Betty had foreseen, tongues did wag—those tongues of the countryside, avid of anything that might spice the tedium of dull lives and brains. And, though no breath of gossip came to Winton's ears, no women visited at Mildenhams. Save for the friendly casual acquaintanceships of churchyard, hunting-field, and local race-meetings, Gyp grew up knowing hardly any of her own sex. This dearth developed her reserve, kept her backward in sex-perception, gave her a faint, unconscious contempt for men—creatures always at the beck and call of her smile, and so easily disquieted by a little frown—gave her also a secret yearning for companions of her own gender. Any girl or woman that she did chance to meet always took a fancy to her, because she was so nice to them, which made the transitory nature of these friendships tantalizing. She was incapable of jealousies or backbiting. Let men beware of such—there is coiled in their fibre a secret fascination!

Gyp's moral and spiritual growth was not the sort of subject that Winton could pay much attention to. It was pre-eminently a matter one did not talk about. Outward forms, such as going to church, should be preserved; manners should be taught her by his own example as much as possible; beyond this, nature must look after things. His view had much real wisdom. She was a quick and voracious reader, bad at remembering what she read; and though she had soon devoured all the books in Winton's meagre library, including Byron, Whyte-Melville, and Humboldt's "Cosmos," they had not left too much on her mind. The attempts of her little governess to impart religion were somewhat arid of result, and the interest of the vicar, Gyp, with her instinctive spice of scepticism soon put into the same category as the interest of all the other males she knew. She felt that he enjoyed calling her "my dear" and patting her shoulder, and that this enjoyment was enough reward for his exertions.

Tucked away in that little old dark manor house, whose stables alone were up to date—three hours from London, and some thirty miles from The Wash, it must be confessed that her upbringing lacked modernity. About twice a year, Winton took her up to town to stay with his unmarried sister Rosamund in Curzon Street. Those weeks, if they did nothing else, increased her natural taste for charming clothes, fortified her teeth, and fostered her passion for music and the theatre. But the two main nourishments of the modern girl—discussion and games—she lacked utterly. Moreover, those years of her life from fifteen to nineteen were before the social resurrection of 1906, and the world still crawled like a winter fly on a window-pane. Winton was a Tory, Aunt Rosamund a Tory, everybody round her a Tory. The only spiritual development she underwent all those years of her girlhood was through her headlong love for her father. After all, was there any other way in which she could really have developed? Only love makes fruitful the soul. The sense of form that both had in such high degree prevented much demonstration; but to be with him, do things for him, to admire, and credit him with perfection; and, since she could not exactly wear the same clothes or speak in the same clipped, quiet, decisive voice, to dislike the clothes and voices of other men—all this was precious to her beyond everything. If she inherited from him that fastidious sense of form, she also inherited his capacity for putting all her eggs in one basket. And since her company alone gave him real happiness, the current of love flowed over her heart all the time. Though she never realized it, abundant love FOR somebody was as necessary to her as water running up the stems of flowers, abundant love FROM somebody as needful as sunshine on their petals. And Winton's somewhat frequent little runs to town, to Newmarket, or where not, were always marked in her by a fall of the barometer, which recovered as his return grew near.

One part of her education, at all events, was not neglected—cultivation of an habitual sympathy with her poorer neighbours. Without concerning himself in the least with problems of sociology, Winton had by nature an open hand and heart for cottagers, and abominated interference with their lives. And so it came about that Gyp, who, by nature also never set foot anywhere without invitation, was always hearing the words: "Step in, Miss Gyp"; "Step in, and sit down, lovey," and a good many words besides from even the boldest and baddest characters. There is nothing like a soft and pretty face and sympathetic listening for seducing the hearts of "the people."

So passed the eleven years till she was nineteen and Winton forty-six. Then, under the wing of her little governess, she went to the hunt-ball. She had revolted against appearing a "fluffy miss," wanting to be considered at once full-fledged; so that her dress, perfect in fit, was not white but palest maize-colour, as if she had already been to dances. She had all Winton's dandyism, and just so much more as was appropriate to her sex. With her dark hair, wonderfully fluffed and coiled, waving across her forehead, her neck bare for the first time, her eyes really "flying," and a demeanour perfectly cool—as though she knew that light and movement, covetous looks, soft speeches, and admiration were her birthright—she was more beautiful than even Winton had thought her. At her breast she wore some

sprigs of yellow jasmine procured by him from town—a flower of whose scent she was very fond, and that he had never seen worn in ballrooms. That swaying, delicate creature, warmed by excitement, reminded him, in every movement and by every glance of her eyes, of her whom he had first met at just such a ball as this. And by the carriage of his head, the twist of his little moustache, he conveyed to the world the pride he was feeling.

That evening held many sensations for Gyp—some delightful, one confused, one unpleasant. She revelled in her success. Admiration was very dear to her. She passionately enjoyed dancing, loved feeling that she was dancing well and giving pleasure. But, twice over, she sent away her partners, smitten with compassion for her little governess sitting there against the wall—all alone, with no one to take notice of her, because she was elderly, and roundabout, poor darling! And, to that loyal person's horror, she insisted on sitting beside her all through two dances. Nor would she go in to supper with anyone but Winton. Returning to the ballroom on his arm, she overheard an elderly woman say: "Oh, don't you know? Of course he really IS her father!" and an elderly man answer: "Ah, that accounts for it—quite so!" With those eyes at the back of the head which the very sensitive possess, she could see their inquisitive, cold, slightly malicious glances, and knew they were speaking of her. And just then her partner came for her.

"Really IS her father!" The words meant TOO much to be grasped this evening of full sensations. They left a little bruise somewhere, but softened and anointed, just a sense of confusion at the back of her mind. And very soon came that other sensation, so disillusioning, that all else was crowded out. It was after a dance—a splendid dance with a good-looking man quite twice her age. They were sitting behind some palms, he murmuring in his mellow, flown voice admiration for her dress, when suddenly he bent his flushed face and kissed her bare arm above the elbow. If he had hit her he could not have astonished or hurt her more. It seemed to her innocence that he would never have done such a thing if she had not said something dreadful to encourage him. Without a word she got up, gazed at him a moment with eyes dark from pain, shivered, and slipped away. She went straight to Winton. From her face, all closed up, tightened lips, and the familiar little droop at their corners, he knew something dire had happened, and his eyes boded ill for the person who had hurt her; but she would say nothing except that she was tired and wanted to go home. And so, with the little faithful governess, who, having been silent perforce nearly all the evening, was now full of conversation, they drove out into the frosty night. Winton sat beside the chauffeur, smoking viciously, his fur collar turned up over his ears, his eyes stabbing the darkness, under his round, low-drawn fur cap. Who had dared upset his darling? And, within the car, the little governess chattered softly, and Gyp, shrouded in lace, in her dark corner sat silent, seeing nothing but the vision of that insult. Sad end to a lovely night!

She lay awake long hours in the darkness, while a sort of coherence was forming in her mind. Those words: "Really IS her father!" and that man's kissing of her bare arm were a sort of revelation of sex-mystery, hardening the consciousness that there was something at the back of her life. A child so sensitive had not, of course, quite failed to feel the spiritual draughts around her; but instinctively she had recoiled from more definite perceptions. The time before Winton came was all so faint—Betty, toys, short glimpses of a kind, invalidish man called "Papa." As in that word there was no depth compared with the word "Dad" bestowed on Winton, so there had been no depth in her feelings towards the squire. When a girl has no memory of her mother, how dark are many things! None, except Betty, had ever talked of her mother. There was nothing sacred in Gyp's associations, no faiths to be broken by any knowledge that might come to her; isolated from other girls, she had little realisation even of the conventions. Still, she suffered horribly, lying there in the dark—from bewilderment, from thorns dragged over her skin, rather than from a stab in the heart. The knowledge of something about her conspicuous, doubtful, provocative of insult, as she thought, grievously hurt her delicacy. Those few wakeful hours made a heavy mark. She fell asleep at last, still all in confusion, and woke up with a passionate desire to KNOW. All that morning she sat at her piano, playing, refusing to go out, frigid to Betty and the little governess, till the former was reduced to tears and the latter to Wordsworth. After tea she went to Winton's study, that dingy little room where he never studied anything, with leather chairs and books which—except "Mr. Jorrocks," Byron, those on the care of horses, and the novels of Whyte-Melville—were never read; with prints of superequine celebrities, his sword, and photographs of Gyp and of brother officers on the walls. Two bright spots there were indeed—the fire, and the little bowl that Gyp always kept filled with flowers.

When she came gliding in like that, a slender, rounded figure, her creamy, dark-eyed, oval face all cloudy, she seemed to Winton to have grown up of a sudden. He had known all day that something was coming, and had been cudgelling his brains finely. From the fervour of his love for her, he felt an anxiety that was almost fear. What could have happened last night—that first night of her entrance into society—meddlesome, gossiping society! She slid down to the floor against his knee. He could not see her face, could not even touch her; for she had settled down on his right side. He mastered his tremors and said:

"Well, Gyp—tired?"

"No."

"A little bit?"

"No."

"Was it up to what you thought, last night?"

"Yes."

The logs hissed and crackled; the long flames ruffled in the chimney-draught; the wind roared outside—then, so suddenly that it took his breath away:

"Dad, are you really and truly my father?"

When that which one has always known might happen at last does happen, how little one is prepared! In the few seconds before an answer that could in no way be evaded, Winton had time for a tumult of reflection. A less resolute character would have been caught by utter mental blankness, then flung itself in panic on "Yes" or "No." But Winton was incapable of losing his head; he would not answer without having faced the consequences of his reply. To be her father was the most warming thing in his life; but if he avowed it, how far would he injure her love for him? What did a girl know? How make her understand? What would her feeling be about her dead mother? How would that dead loved one feel? What would she have wished?

It was a cruel moment. And the girl, pressed against his knee, with face hidden, gave him no help. Impossible to keep it from her, now that her instinct was roused! Silence, too, would answer for him. And clenching his hand on the arm of his chair, he said:

"Yes, Gyp; your mother and I loved each other." He felt a quiver go through her, would have given much to see her face. What, even now, did she understand? Well, it must be gone through with, and he said:

"What made you ask?"

She shook her head and murmured:

"I'm glad."

Grief, shock, even surprise would have roused all his loyalty to the dead, all the old stubborn bitterness, and he would have frozen up against her. But this acquiescent murmur made him long to smooth it down.

"Nobody has ever known. She died when you were born. It was a fearful grief to me. If you've heard anything, it's just gossip, because you go by my name. Your mother was never talked about. But it's best you should know, now you're grown up. People don't often love as she and I loved. You needn't be ashamed."

She had not moved, and her face was still turned from him. She said quietly:

"I'm not ashamed. Am I very like her?"

"Yes; more than I could ever have hoped."

Very low she said:

"Then you don't love me for myself?"

Winton was but dimly conscious of how that question revealed her nature, its power of piercing instinctively to the heart of things, its sensitive pride, and demand for utter and exclusive love. To things that go too deep, one opposes the bulwark of obtuseness. And, smiling, he simply said:

"What do you think?"

Then, to his dismay, he perceived that she was crying—struggling against it so that her shoulder shook against his knee. He had hardly ever known her cry, not in all the disasters of unstable youth, and she had received her full meed of knocks and tumbles. He could only stroke that shoulder, and say:

"Don't cry, Gyp; don't cry!"

She ceased as suddenly as she had begun, got up, and, before he too could rise, was gone.

That evening, at dinner, she was just as usual. He could not detect the slightest difference in her voice or manner, or in her good-night kiss. And so a moment that he had dreaded for years was over, leaving only the faint shame which follows a breach of reticence on the spirits of those who worship it. While the old secret had been quite undisclosed, it had not troubled him. Disclosed, it hurt him. But Gyp, in those twenty-four hours, had left childhood behind for good; her feeling toward men had hardened. If she did not hurt them a little, they would hurt her! The sex-instinct had come to life. To Winton she gave as much love as ever, even more, perhaps; but the dew was off.

III

The next two years were much less solitary, passed in more or less constant gaiety. His confession spurred Winton on to the fortification of his daughter's position. He would stand no nonsense, would not have her looked on askance. There is nothing like "style" for carrying the defences of society—only, it must be the genuine thing. Whether at Mildenhall, or in London under the wing of his sister, there was no difficulty. Gyp was too pretty, Winton too cool, his quietness too formidable. She had every advantage. Society only troubles itself to make front against the visibly weak.

The happiest time of a girl's life is that when all appreciate and covet her, and she herself is free as air—a queen of hearts, for none of which she hankers; or, if not the happiest, at all events it is the gayest time. What did Gyp care whether hearts ached for her—she knew not love as yet, perhaps would never know the pains of unrequited love. Intoxicated with life, she led her many admirers a pretty dance, treating them with a sort of bravura. She did not want them to be unhappy, but she simply could not take them seriously. Never was any girl so heart-free. She was a queer mixture in those days, would give up any pleasure for Winton, and most for Betty or her aunt—her little governess was gone—but of nobody else did she seem to take account, accepting all that was laid at her feet as the due of her looks, her dainty frocks, her music, her good riding and dancing, her talent for amateur theatricals and mimicry. Winton, whom at least she never failed, watched that glorious fluttering with quiet pride and satisfaction. He was getting to those years when a man of action dislikes interruption of the grooves into which his activity has fallen. He pursued his hunting, racing, card-playing, and his very stealthy alms and services to lame ducks of his old regiment, their families, and other unfortunates—happy in knowing that Gyp was always as glad to be with him as he to be with her. Hereditary gout, too, had begun to bother him.

The day that she came of age they were up in town, and he summoned her to the room, in which he now sat by the fire recalling all these things, to receive an account of his stewardship. He had nursed her greatly embarrassed inheritance very carefully till it amounted to some twenty thousand pounds. He had never told her of it—the subject was dangerous, and, since his own means were ample, she had not wanted for anything. When he had explained exactly what she owned, shown her how it was invested, and told her that she must now open her own banking account, she stood gazing at the sheets of paper, whose items she had been supposed to understand, and her face gathered the look which meant that she was troubled. Without lifting her eyes she asked:

"Does it all come from—him?"

He had not expected that, and flushed under his tan.

"No; eight thousand of it was your mother's."

Gyp looked at him, and said:

"Then I won't take the rest—please, Dad."

Winton felt a sort of crabbed pleasure. What should be done with that money if she did not take it, he did not in the least know. But not to take it was like her, made her more than ever his daughter—a kind of final victory. He turned away to the window from which he had so often watched for her mother. There was the corner she used to turn! In one minute, surely she would be standing there, colour glowing in her cheeks, her eyes soft behind her veil, her breast heaving a little with her haste, waiting for his embrace. There she would stand, drawing up her veil. He turned round. Difficult to believe it was not she! And he said:

"Very well, my love. But you will take the equivalent from me instead. The other can be put by; some one will benefit some day!"

At those unaccustomed words, "My love," from his undemonstrative lips, the colour mounted in her cheeks and her eyes shone. She threw her arms round his neck.

She had her fill of music in those days, taking piano lessons from a Monsieur Harmost, a grey-haired native of Liege, with mahogany cheeks and the touch of an angel, who kept her hard at it and called her his "little friend." There was scarcely a concert of merit that she did not attend or a musician of mark whose playing she did not know, and, though fastidiousness saved her from squirming in adoration round the feet of those prodigious performers, she perched them all on pedestals, men and women alike, and now and then met them at her aunt's house in Curzon Street.

Aunt Rosamund, also musical, so far as breeding would allow, stood for a good deal to Gyp, who had built up about her a romantic story of love wrecked by pride from a few words she had once let drop. She was a tall and handsome woman, a year older than Winton, with a long, aristocratic face, deep-blue, rather shining eyes, a gentlemanly manner, warm heart, and one of those indescribable, not unmelodious drawls that one connects with an unshakable sense of privilege. She, in turn, was very fond of Gyp; and what passed within her mind, by no means devoid of shrewdness, as to their real relationship, remained ever discreetly hidden. She was, so far again as breeding would allow, something of a humanitarian and rebel, loving horses and dogs, and hating cats, except when they had four legs. The girl had just that softness which fascinates women who perhaps might have been happier if they had been born men. Not that Rosamund Winton was of an aggressive type—she merely had the resolute "catch hold of your tail, old fellow" spirit so often found in Englishwomen of the upper classes. A cheery soul, given to long coats and waistcoats, stocks, and a crutch-handled stick, she—like her brother—had "style," but more sense of humour—valuable in musical circles! At her house, the girl was practically compelled to see fun as well as merit in all those prodigies, haloed with hair and filled to overflowing with music and themselves. And, since Gyp's natural sense of the ludicrous was extreme, she and her aunt could rarely talk about anything without going into fits of laughter.

Winton had his first really bad attack of gout when Gyp was twenty-two, and, terrified lest he might not be able to sit a horse in time for the opening meets, he went off with her and Markey to Wiesbaden. They had rooms in the Wilhelmstrasse, overlooking the gardens, where leaves were already turning, that gorgeous September. The cure was long and obstinate, and Winton badly bored. Gyp fared much better. Attended by the silent Markey, she rode daily on the Neroberg, chafing at regulations which reduced her to specified tracks in that majestic wood where the beeches glowed. Once or even twice a day she went to the concerts in the Kurhaus, either with her father or alone.

The first time she heard Fiorsen play she was alone. Unlike most violinists, he was tall and thin, with great pliancy of body and swift sway of movement. His face was pale, and went strangely with hair and moustache of a sort of dirt-gold colour, and his thin cheeks with very broad high cheek-bones had little narrow scraps of whisker. Those little whiskers seemed to Gyp awful—indeed, he seemed rather awful altogether—but his playing stirred and swept her in the most uncanny way. He had evidently remarkable technique; and the emotion, the intense wayward feeling of his playing was chiselled by that technique, as if a flame were being frozen in its swaying. When he stopped, she did not join in the tornado of applause, but sat motionless, looking up at him. Quite unconstrained by all those people, he passed the back of his hand across his hot brow, shoving up a wave or two of that queer-coloured hair; then, with a rather disagreeable smile, he made a short supple bow or two. And she thought, "What strange eyes he has—like a great cat's!" Surely they were green; fierce, yet shy, almost furtive—mesmeric! Certainly the strangest man she had ever seen, and the most frightening. He seemed looking straight at her; and, dropping her gaze, she clapped. When she looked again, his face had lost that smile for a kind of wistfulness. He made another of those little supple bows straight at her—it seemed to Gyp—and jerked his violin up to his shoulder. "He's going to play to me," she thought absurdly. He played without accompaniment a little tune that seemed to twitch the heart. When he finished, this time she did not look up, but was conscious that he gave one impatient bow and walked off.

That evening at dinner she said to Winton:

"I heard a violinist to-day, Dad, the most wonderful playing—Gustav Fiorsen. Is that Swedish, do you think—or what?"

Winton answered:

"Very likely. What sort of a bounder was he to look at? I used to know a Swede in the Turkish army—nice fellow, too."

"Tall and thin and white-faced, with bumpy cheek-bones, and hollows under them, and queer green

eyes. Oh, and little goldy side-whiskers."

"By Jove! It sounds the limit."

Gyp murmured, with a smile:

"Yes; I think perhaps he is."

She saw him next day in the gardens. They were sitting close to the Schiller statue, Winton reading *The Times*, to whose advent he looked forward more than he admitted, for he was loath by confessions of boredom to disturb Gyp's manifest enjoyment of her stay. While perusing the customary comforting animadversions on the conduct of those "rascally Radicals" who had just come into power, and the account of a Newmarket meeting, he kept stealing sidelong glances at his daughter.

Certainly she had never looked prettier, daintier, shown more breeding than she did out here among these Germans with their thick pasterns, and all the cosmopolitan hairy-heeled crowd in this God-forsaken place! The girl, unconscious of his stealthy regalement, was letting her clear eyes rest, in turn, on each figure that passed, on the movements of birds and dogs, watching the sunlight glisten on the grass, burnish the copper beeches, the lime-trees, and those tall poplars down there by the water. The doctor at Mildenham, once consulted on a bout of headache, had called her eyes "perfect organs," and certainly no eyes could take things in more swiftly or completely. She was attractive to dogs, and every now and then one would stop, in two minds whether or no to put his nose into this foreign girl's hand. From a flirtation of eyes with a great Dane, she looked up and saw Fiorsen passing, in company with a shorter, square man, having very fashionable trousers and a corseted waist. The violinist's tall, thin, loping figure was tightly buttoned into a brownish-grey frock-coat suit; he wore a rather broad-brimmed, grey, velvety hat; in his buttonhole was a white flower; his cloth-topped boots were of patent leather; his tie was bunched out at the ends over a soft white-linen shirt—altogether quite a dandy! His most strange eyes suddenly swept down on hers, and he made a movement as if to put his hand to his hat.

'Why, he remembers me,' thought Gyp. That thin-waisted figure with head set just a little forward between rather high shoulders, and its long stride, curiously suggested a leopard or some lithe creature. He touched his short companion's arm, muttered something, turned round, and came back. She could see him staring her way, and knew he was coming simply to look at her. She knew, too, that her father was watching. And she felt that those greenish eyes would waver before his stare—that stare of the Englishman of a certain class, which never condescends to be inquisitive. They passed; Gyp saw Fiorsen turn to his companion, slightly tossing back his head in their direction, and heard the companion laugh. A little flame shot up in her.

Winton said:

"Rum-looking Johnnies one sees here!"

"That was the violinist I told you of—Fiorsen."

"Oh! Ah!" But he had evidently forgotten.

The thought that Fiorsen should have picked her out of all that audience for remembrance subtly flattered her vanity. She lost her ruffled feeling. Though her father thought his dress awful, it was really rather becoming. He would not have looked as well in proper English clothes. Once, at least, during the next two days, she noticed the short, square young man who had been walking with him, and was conscious that he followed her with his eyes.

And then a certain Baroness von Maisen, a cosmopolitan friend of Aunt Rosamund's, German by marriage, half-Dutch, half-French by birth, asked her if she had heard the Swedish violinist, Fiorsen. He would be, she said, the best violinist of the day, if—and she shook her head. Finding that expressive shake unquestioned, the baroness pursued her thoughts:

"Ah, these musicians! He wants saving from himself. If he does not halt soon, he will be lost. Pity! A great talent!"

Gyp looked at her steadily and asked:

"Does he drink, then?"

"Pas mal! But there are things besides drink, ma chere."

Instinct and so much life with Winton made the girl regard it as beneath her to be shocked. She did not seek knowledge of life, but refused to shy away from it or be discomfited; and the baroness, to

whom innocence was piquant, went on:

"Des femmes—toujours des femmes! C'est grand dommage. It will spoil his spirit. His sole chance is to find one woman, but I pity her; sapristi, quelle vie pour elle!"

Gyp said calmly:

"Would a man like that ever love?"

The baroness goggled her eyes.

"I have known such a man become a slave. I have known him running after a woman like a lamb while she was deceiving him here and there. On ne peut jamais dire. Ma belle, il y a des choses que vous ne savez pas encore." She took Gyp's hand. "And yet, one thing is certain. With those eyes and those lips and that figure, YOU have a time before you!"

Gyp withdrew her hand, smiled, and shook her head; she did not believe in love.

"Ah, but you will turn some heads! No fear! as you English say. There is fatality in those pretty brown eyes!"

A girl may be pardoned who takes as a compliment the saying that her eyes are fatal. The words warmed Gyp, uncontrollably light-hearted in these days, just as she was warmed when people turned to stare at her. The soft air, the mellowness of this gay place, much music, a sense of being a *rara avis* among people who, by their heavier type, enhanced her own, had produced in her a kind of intoxication, making her what the baroness called "un peu folle." She was always breaking into laughter, having that precious feeling of twisting the world round her thumb, which does not come too often in the life of one who is sensitive. Everything to her just then was either "funny" or "lovely." And the baroness, conscious of the girl's chic, genuinely attracted by one so pretty, took care that she saw all the people, perhaps more than all, that were desirable.

To women and artists, between whom there is ever a certain kinship, curiosity is a vivid emotion. Besides, the more a man has conquered, the more precious field he is for a woman's conquest. To attract a man who has attracted many, what is it but a proof that one's charm is superior to that of all those others? The words of the baroness deepened in Gyp the impression that Fiorsen was "impossible," but secretly fortified the faint excitement she felt that he should have remembered her out of all that audience. Later on, they bore more fruit than that. But first came that queer incident of the flowers.

Coming in from a ride, a week after she had sat with Winton under the Schiller statue, Gyp found on her dressing-table a bunch of Gloire de Dijon and La France roses. Plunging her nose into them, she thought: "How lovely! Who sent me these?" There was no card. All that the German maid could say was that a boy had brought them from a flower shop "fur Fraulein Vinton"; it was surmised that they came from the baroness. In her bodice at dinner, and to the concert after, Gyp wore one La France and one Gloire de Dijon—a daring mixture of pink and orange against her oyster-coloured frock, which delighted her, who had a passion for experiments in colour. They had bought no programme, all music being the same to Winton, and Gyp not needing any. When she saw Fiorsen come forward, her cheeks began to colour from sheer anticipation.

He played first a minuet by Mozart; then the Cesar Franck sonata; and when he came back to make his bow, he was holding in his hand a Gloire de Dijon and a La France rose. Involuntarily, Gyp raised her hand to her own roses. His eyes met hers; he bowed just a little lower. Then, quite naturally, put the roses to his lips as he was walking off the platform. Gyp dropped her hand, as if it had been stung. Then, with the swift thought: "Oh, that's schoolgirlish!" she contrived a little smile. But her cheeks were flushing. Should she take out those roses and let them fall? Her father might see, might notice Fiorsen's—put two and two together! He would consider she had been insulted. Had she? She could not bring herself to think so. It was too pretty a compliment, as if he wished to tell her that he was playing to her alone. The baroness's words flashed through her mind: "He wants saving from himself. Pity! A great talent!" It WAS a great talent. There must be something worth saving in one who could play like that! They left after his last solo. Gyp put the two roses carefully back among the others.

Three days later, she went to an afternoon "at home" at the Baroness von Maisen's. She saw him at once, over by the piano, with his short, square companion, listening to a voluble lady, and looking very bored and restless. All that overcast afternoon, still and with queer lights in the sky, as if rain were coming, Gyp had been feeling out of mood, a little homesick. Now she felt excited. She saw the short companion detach himself and go up to the baroness; a minute later, he was brought up to her and introduced—Count Rosek. Gyp did not like his face; there were dark rings under the eyes, and he was too perfectly self-possessed, with a kind of cold sweetness; but he was very agreeable and polite, and

spoke English well. He was—it seemed—a Pole, who lived in London, and seemed to know all that was to be known about music. Miss Winton—he believed—had heard his friend Fiorsen play; but not in London? No? That was odd; he had been there some months last season. Faintly annoyed at her ignorance, Gyp answered:

"Yes; but I was in the country nearly all last summer."

"He had a great success. I shall take him back; it is best for his future. What do you think of his playing?"

In spite of herself, for she did not like expanding to this sphinxlike little man, Gyp murmured:

"Oh, simply wonderful, of course!"

He nodded, and then rather suddenly said, with a peculiar little smile:

"May I introduce him? Gustav—Miss Winton!"

Gyp turned. There he was, just behind her, bowing; and his eyes had a look of humble adoration which he made no attempt whatever to conceal. Gyp saw another smile slide over the Pole's lips; and she was alone in the bay window with Fiorsen. The moment might well have fluttered a girl's nerves after his recognition of her by the Schiller statue, after that episode of the flowers, and what she had heard of him. But life had not yet touched either her nerves or spirit; she only felt amused and a little excited. Close to, he had not so much that look of an animal behind bars, and he certainly was in his way a dandy, beautifully washed—always an important thing—and having some pleasant essence on his handkerchief or hair, of which Gyp would have disapproved if he had been English. He wore a diamond ring also, which did not somehow seem bad form on that particular little finger. His height, his broad cheek-bones, thick but not long hair, the hungry vitality of his face, figure, movements, annulled those evidences of femininity. He was male enough, rather too male. Speaking with a queer, crisp accent, he said:

"Miss Winton, you are my audience here. I play to you—only to you."

Gyp laughed.

"You laugh at me; but you need not. I play for you because I admire you. I admire you terribly. If I sent you those flowers, it was not to be rude. It was my gratitude for the pleasure of your face." His voice actually trembled. And, looking down, Gyp answered:

"Thank you. It was very kind of you. I want to thank you for your playing. It is beautiful—really beautiful!"

He made her another little bow.

"When I go back to London, will you come and hear me?"

"I should think any one would go to hear you, if they had the chance."

He gave a short laugh.

"Bah! Here, I do it for money; I hate this place. It bores me—bores me! Was that your father sitting with you under the statue?"

Gyp nodded, suddenly grave. She had not forgotten the slighting turn of his head.

He passed his hand over his face, as if to wipe off its expression.

"He is very English. But you—of no country—you belong to all!"

Gyp made him an ironical little bow.

"No; I should not know your country—you are neither of the North nor of the South. You are just Woman, made to be adored. I came here hoping to meet you; I am extremely happy. Miss Winton, I am your very devoted servant."

He was speaking very fast, very low, with an agitated earnestness that surely could not be put on. But suddenly muttering: "These people!" he made her another of his little bows and abruptly slipped away. The baroness was bringing up another man. The chief thought left by that meeting was: "Is that how he begins to everyone?" She could not quite believe it. The stammering earnestness of his voice, those humbly adoring looks! Then she remembered the smile on the lips of the little Pole, and thought: "But

he must know I'm not silly enough just to be taken in by vulgar flattery!"

Too sensitive to confide in anyone, she had no chance to ventilate the curious sensations of attraction and repulsion that began fermenting in her, feelings defying analysis, mingling and quarrelling deep down in her heart. It was certainly not love, not even the beginning of that; but it was the kind of dangerous interest children feel in things mysterious, out of reach, yet within reach, if only they dared! And the tug of music was there, and the tug of those words of the baroness about salvation—the thought of achieving the impossible, reserved only for the woman of supreme charm, for the true victress. But all these thoughts and feelings were as yet in embryo. She might never see him again! And she certainly did not know whether she even wanted to.

IV

Gyp was in the habit of walking with Winton to the Kochbrunnen, where, with other patient-folk, he was required to drink slowly for twenty minutes every morning. While he was imbibing she would sit in a remote corner of the garden, and read a novel in the Reclam edition, as a daily German lesson.

She was sitting there, the morning after the "at-home" at the Baroness von Maisen's, reading Turgenev's "Torrents of Spring," when she saw Count Rosek sauntering down the path with a glass of the waters in his hand. Instant memory of the smile with which he had introduced Fiorsen made her take cover beneath her sunshade. She could see his patent-leathered feet, and well-turned, peg-top-trousered legs go by with the gait of a man whose waist is corseted. The certainty that he wore those prerogatives of womanhood increased her dislike. How dare men be so effeminate? Yet someone had told her that he was a good rider, a good fencer, and very strong. She drew a breath of relief when he was past, and, for fear he might turn and come back, closed her little book and slipped away. But her figure and her springing step were more unmistakable than she knew.

Next morning, on the same bench, she was reading breathlessly the scene between Gemma and Sanin at the window, when she heard Fiorsen's voice, behind her, say:

"Miss Winton!"

He, too, held a glass of the waters in one hand, and his hat in the other.

"I have just made your father's acquaintance. May I sit down a minute?"

Gyp drew to one side on the bench, and he sat down.

"What are you reading?"

"A story called 'Torrents of Spring.'"

"Ah, the finest ever written! Where are you?"

"Gemma and Sanin in the thunderstorm."

"Wait! You have Madame Polozov to come! What a creation! How old are you, Miss Winton?"

"Twenty-two."

"You would be too young to appreciate that story if you were not YOU. But you know much—by instinct. What is your Christian name—forgive me!"

"Ghita."

"Ghita? Not soft enough."

"I am always called Gyp."

"Gyp—ah, Gyp! Yes; Gyp!"

He repeated her name so impersonally that she could not be angry.

"I told your father I have had the pleasure of meeting you. He was very polite."

Gyp said coldly:

"My father is always polite."

"Like the ice in which they put champagne."

Gyp smiled; she could not help it.

And suddenly he said:

"I suppose they have told you that I am a mauvais sujet." Gyp inclined her head. He looked at her steadily, and said: "It is true. But I could be better—much."

She wanted to look at him, but could not. A queer sort of exultation had seized on her. This man had power; yet she had power over him. If she wished she could make him her slave, her dog, chain him to her. She had but to hold out her hand, and he would go on his knees to kiss it. She had but to say, "Come," and he would come from wherever he might be. She had but to say, "Be good," and he would be good. It was her first experience of power; and it was intoxicating. But—but! Gyp could never be self-confident for long; over her most victorious moments brooded the shadow of distrust. As if he read her thought, Fiorsen said:

"Tell me to do something—anything; I will do it, Miss Winton."

"Then—go back to London at once. You are wasting yourself here, you know. You said so!"

He looked at her, bewildered and upset, and muttered:

"You have asked me the one thing I can't do, Miss—Miss Gyp!"

"Please—not that; it's like a servant!"

"I AM your servant!"

"Is that why you won't do what I ask you?"

"You are cruel."

Gyp laughed.

He got up and said, with sudden fierceness:

"I am not going away from you; do not think it." Bending with the utmost swiftness, he took her hand, put his lips to it, and turned on his heel.

Gyp, uneasy and astonished, stared at her hand, still tingling from the pressure of his bristly moustache. Then she laughed again—it was just "foreign" to have your hand kissed—and went back to her book, without taking in the words.

Was ever courtship more strange than that which followed? It is said that the cat fascinates the bird it desires to eat; here the bird fascinated the cat, but the bird too was fascinated. Gyp never lost the sense of having the whip-hand, always felt like one giving alms, or extending favour, yet had a feeling of being unable to get away, which seemed to come from the very strength of the spell she laid on him. The magnetism with which she held him reacted on herself. Thoroughly sceptical at first, she could not remain so. He was too utterly morose and unhappy if she did not smile on him, too alive and excited and grateful if she did. The change in his eyes from their ordinary restless, fierce, and furtive expression to humble adoration or wistful hunger when they looked at her could never have been simulated. And she had no lack of chance to see that metamorphosis. Wherever she went, there he was. If to a concert, he would be a few paces from the door, waiting for her entrance. If to a confectioner's for tea, as likely as not he would come in. Every afternoon he walked where she must pass, riding to the Neroberg.

Except in the gardens of the Kochbrunnen, when he would come up humbly and ask to sit with her five minutes, he never forced his company, or tried in any way to compromise her. Experience, no doubt, served him there; but he must have had an instinct that it was dangerous with one so sensitive. There were other moths, too, round that bright candle, and they served to keep his attentions from being too conspicuous. Did she comprehend what was going on, understand how her defences were being sapped, grasp the danger to retreat that lay in permitting him to hover round her? Not really. It all served to swell the triumphant intoxication of days when she was ever more and more in love with living, more and more conscious that the world appreciated and admired her, that she had power to do what others couldn't.

Was not Fiorsen, with his great talent, and his dubious reputation, proof of that? And he excited her. Whatever else one might be in his moody, vivid company, one would not be dull. One morning, he told her something of his life. His father had been a small Swedish landowner, a very strong man and a very hard drinker; his mother, the daughter of a painter. She had taught him the violin, but died while he was still a boy. When he was seventeen he had quarrelled with his father, and had to play his violin for a living in the streets of Stockholm. A well-known violinist, hearing him one day, took him in hand. Then his father had drunk himself to death, and he had inherited the little estate. He had sold it at once—"for follies," as he put it crudely. "Yes, Miss Winton; I have committed many follies, but they are nothing to those I shall commit the day I do not see you any more!" And, with that disturbing remark, he got up and left her. She had smiled at his words, but within herself she felt excitement, scepticism, compassion, and something she did not understand at all. In those days, she understood herself very little.

But how far did Winton understand, how far see what was going on? He was a stoic; but that did not prevent jealousy from taking alarm, and causing him twinges more acute than those he still felt in his left foot. He was afraid of showing disquiet by any dramatic change, or he would have carried her off a fortnight at least before his cure was over. He knew too well the signs of passion. That long, loping, wolfish fiddling fellow with the broad cheekbones and little side-whiskers (Good God!) and greenish eyes whose looks at Gyp he secretly marked down, roused his complete distrust. Perhaps his inbred English contempt for foreigners and artists kept him from direct action. He COULD not take it quite seriously. Gyp, his fastidious perfect Gyp, succumbing, even a little to a fellow like that! Never! His jealous affection, too, could not admit that she would neglect to consult him in any doubt or difficulty. He forgot the sensitive secrecy of girls, forgot that his love for her had ever shunned words, her love for him never indulged in confidences. Nor did he see more than a little of what there was to see, and that little was doctored by Fiorsen for his eyes, shrewd though they were. Nor was there in all so very much, except one episode the day before they left, and of that he knew nothing.

That last afternoon was very still, a little mournful. It had rained the night before, and the soaked tree-trunks, the soaked fallen leaves gave off a faint liquorice-like perfume. In Gyp there was a feeling, as if her spirit had been suddenly emptied of excitement and delight. Was it the day, or the thought of leaving this place where she had so enjoyed herself? After lunch, when Winton was settling his accounts, she wandered out through the long park stretching up the valley. The sky was brooding-grey, the trees were still and melancholy. It was all a little melancholy, and she went on and on, across the stream, round into a muddy lane that led up through the outskirts of a village, on to the higher ground whence she could return by the main road. Why must things come to an end? For the first time in her life, she thought of Mildenhall and hunting without enthusiasm. She would rather stay in London. There she would not be cut off from music, from dancing, from people, and all the exhilaration of being appreciated. On the air came the shrilly, hollow droning of a thresher, and the sound seemed exactly to express her feelings. A pigeon flew over, white against the leaden sky; some birch-trees that had gone golden shivered and let fall a shower of drops. It was lonely here! And, suddenly, two little boys bolted out of the hedge, nearly upsetting her, and scurried down the road. Something had startled them. Gyp, putting up her face to see, felt on it soft pin-points of rain. Her frock would be spoiled, and it was one she was fond of—dove-coloured, velvety, not meant for weather. She turned for refuge to the birch-trees. It would be over directly, perhaps. Muffled in distance, the whining drone of that thresher still came travelling, deepening her discomfort. Then in the hedge, whence the boys had bolted down, a man reared himself above the lane, and came striding along toward her. He jumped down the bank, among the birch-trees. And she saw it was Fiorsen—panting, dishevelled, pale with heat. He must have followed her, and climbed straight up the hillside from the path she had come along in the bottom, before crossing the stream. His artistic dandyism had been harshly treated by that scramble. She might have laughed; but, instead, she felt excited, a little scared by the look on his hot, pale face. He said, breathlessly:

"I have caught you. So you are going to-morrow, and never told me! You thought you would slip away—not a word for me! Are you always so cruel? Well, I will not spare you, either!"

Crouching suddenly, he took hold of her broad ribbon sash, and buried his face in it. Gyp stood trembling—the action had not stirred her sense of the ridiculous. He circled her knees with his arms.

"Oh, Gyp, I love you—I love you—don't send me away—let me be with you!
I am your dog—your slave. Oh, Gyp, I love you!"

His voice moved and terrified her. Men had said "I love you" several times during those last two years, but never with that lost-soul ring of passion, never with that look in the eyes at once fiercely hungry and so supplicating, never with that restless, eager, timid touch of hands. She could only murmur:

"Please get up!"

But he went on:

"Love me a little, only a little—love me! Oh, Gyp!"

The thought flashed through Gyp: "To how many has he knelt, I wonder?" His face had a kind of beauty in its abandonment—the beauty that comes from yearning—and she lost her frightened feeling. He went on, with his stammering murmur: "I am a prodigal, I know; but if you love me, I will no longer be. I will do great things for you. Oh, Gyp, if you will some day marry me! Not now. When I have proved. Oh, Gyp, you are so sweet—so wonderful!"

His arms crept up till he had buried his face against her waist. Without quite knowing what she did, Gyp touched his hair, and said again:

"No; please get up."

He got up then, and standing near, with his hands hard clenched at his sides, whispered:

"Have mercy! Speak to me!"

She could not. All was strange and mazed and quivering in her, her spirit straining away, drawn to him, fantastically confused. She could only look into his face with her troubled, dark eyes. And suddenly she was seized and crushed to him. She shrank away, pushing him back with all her strength. He hung his head, abashed, suffering, with eyes shut, lips trembling; and her heart felt again that quiver of compassion. She murmured:

"I don't know. I will tell you later—later—in England."

He bowed, folding his arms, as if to make her feel safe from him. And when, regardless of the rain, she began to move on, he walked beside her, a yard or so away, humbly, as though he had never poured out those words or hurt her lips with the violence of his kiss.

Back in her room, taking off her wet dress, Gyp tried to remember what he had said and what she had answered. She had not promised anything. But she had given him her address, both in London and the country. Unless she resolutely thought of other things, she still felt the restless touch of his hands, the grip of his arms, and saw his eyes as they were when he was kissing her; and once more she felt frightened and excited.

He was playing at the concert that evening—her last concert. And surely he had never played like that—with a despairing beauty, a sort of frenzied rapture. Listening, there came to her a feeling—a feeling of fatality—that, whether she would or no, she could not free herself from him.

V

Once back in England, Gyp lost that feeling, or very nearly. Her scepticism told her that Fiorsen would soon see someone else who seemed all he had said she was! How ridiculous to suppose that he would stop his follies for her, that she had any real power over him! But, deep down, she did not quite believe this. It would have wounded her belief in herself too much—a belief so subtle and intimate that she was not conscious of it; belief in that something about her which had inspired the baroness to use the word "fatality."

Winton, who breathed again, hurried her off to Mildenhamp. He had bought her a new horse. They were in time for the last of the cubbing. And, for a week at least, the passion for riding and the sight of hounds carried all before it. Then, just as the real business of the season was beginning, she began to feel dull and restless. Mildenhamp was dark; the autumn winds made dreary noises. Her little brown spaniel, very old, who seemed only to have held on to life just for her return, died. She accused herself terribly for having left it so long when it was failing. Thinking of all the days Lass had been watching for her to come home—as Betty, with that love of woeful recital so dear to simple hearts, took good care to make plain—she felt as if she had been cruel. For events such as these, Gyp was both too tender-hearted and too hard on herself. She was quite ill for several days. The moment she was better, Winton, in dismay, whisked her back to Aunt Rosamund, in town. He would lose her company, but if it did her good, took her out of herself, he would be content. Running up for the week-end, three days

later, he was relieved to find her decidedly perked-up, and left her again with the easier heart.

It was on the day after he went back to Mildenhams that she received a letter from Fiorsen, forwarded from Bury Street. He was—it said—just returning to London; he had not forgotten any look she had ever given him, or any word she had spoken. He should not rest till he could see her again. "For a long time," the letter ended, "before I first saw you, I was like the dead—lost. All was bitter apples to me. Now I am a ship that comes from the whirlpools to a warm blue sea; now I see again the evening star. I kiss your hands, and am your faithful slave—Gustav Fiorsen." These words, which from any other man would have excited her derision, renewed in Gyp that fluttered feeling, the pleasurable, frightened sense that she could not get away from his pursuit.

She wrote in answer to the address he gave her in London, to say that she was staying for a few days in Curzon Street with her aunt, who would be glad to see him if he cared to come in any afternoon between five and six, and signed herself "Ghita Winton." She was long over that little note. Its curt formality gave her satisfaction. Was she really mistress of herself—and him; able to dispose as she wished? Yes; and surely the note showed it.

It was never easy to tell Gyp's feelings from her face; even Winton was often baffled. Her preparation of Aunt Rosamund for the reception of Fiorsen was a masterpiece of casualness. When he duly came, he, too, seemed doubly alive to the need for caution, only gazing at Gyp when he could not be seen doing so. But, going out, he whispered: "Not like this—not like this; I must see you alone—I must!" She smiled and shook her head. But bubbles had come back to the wine in her cup.

That evening she said quietly to Aunt Rosamund:

"Dad doesn't like Mr. Fiorsen—can't appreciate his playing, of course."

And this most discreet remark caused Aunt Rosamund, avid—in a well-bred way—of music, to omit mention of the intruder when writing to her brother. The next two weeks he came almost every day, always bringing his violin, Gyp playing his accompaniments, and though his hungry stare sometimes made her feel hot, she would have missed it.

But when Winton next came up to Bury Street, she was in a quandary. To confess that Fiorsen was here, having omitted to speak of him in her letters? Not to confess, and leave him to find it out from Aunt Rosamund? Which was worse? Seized with panic, she did neither, but told her father she was dying for a gallop. Hailing that as the best of signs, he took her forthwith back to Mildenhams. And curious were her feelings—light-hearted, compunctious, as of one who escapes yet knows she will soon be seeking to return. The meet was rather far next day, but she insisted on riding to it, since old Pettance, the superannuated jockey, charitably employed as extra stable help at Mildenhams, was to bring on her second horse. There was a good scenting-wind, with rain in the offing, and outside the covert they had a corner to themselves—Winton knowing a trick worth two of the field's at-large. They had slipped there, luckily unseen, for the knowing were given to following the one-handed horseman in faded pink, who, on his bang-tailed black mare, had a knack of getting so well away. One of the whips, a little dark fellow with smouldery eyes and sucked-in weathered cheeks, dashed out of covert, rode past, saluting, and dashed in again. A jay came out with a screech, dived, and doubled back; a hare made off across the fallow—the light-brown lopping creature was barely visible against the brownish soil. Pigeons, very high up, flew over and away to the next wood. The shrilling voices of the whips rose from the covert-depths, and just a whimper now and then from the hounds, swiftly wheeling their noses among the fern and briers.

Gyp, cringing her fingers on the reins, drew-in deep breaths. It smelled so sweet and soft and fresh under that sky, pied of blue, and of white and light-grey swift-moving clouds—not half the wind down here that there was up there, just enough to be carrying off the beech and oak leaves, loosened by frost two days before. If only a fox would break this side, and they could have the first fields to themselves! It was so lovely to be alone with hounds! One of these came trotting out, a pretty young creature, busy and unconcerned, raising its tan-and-white head, its mild reproachful deep-brown eyes, at Winton's, "Loo-in Trix!" What a darling! A burst of music from the covert, and the darling vanished among the briers.

Gyp's new brown horse pricked its ears. A young man in a grey cutaway, buff cords, and jack-boots, on a low chestnut mare, came slipping round the covert. Oh—did that mean they were all coming? Impatiently she glanced at this intruder, who raised his hat a little and smiled. That smile, faintly impudent, was so infectious, that Gyp was melted to a slight response. Then she frowned. He had spoiled their lovely loneliness. Who was he? He looked unpardonably serene and happy sitting there. She did not remember his face at all, yet there was something familiar about it. He had taken his hat off—a broad face, very well cut, and clean-shaved, with dark curly hair, extraordinary clear eyes, a bold, cool, merry look. Where had she seen somebody like him?

A tiny sound from Winton made her turn her head. The fox—stealing out beyond those further bushes! Breathless, she fixed her eyes on her father's face. It was hard as steel, watching. Not a sound, not a quiver, as if horse and man had turned to metal. Was he never going to give the view-halloo? Then his lips writhed, and out it came. Gyp cast a swift smile of gratitude at the young man for having had taste and sense to leave that to her father, and again he smiled at her. There were the first hounds streaming out—one on the other—music and feather! Why didn't Dad go? They would all be round this way in a minute!

Then the black mare slid past her, and, with a bound, her horse followed. The young man on the chestnut was away on the left. Only the hunts-man and one whip—beside their three selves! Glorious! The brown horse went too fast at that first fence and Winton called back: "Steady, Gyp! Steady him!" But she couldn't; and it didn't matter. Grass, three fields of grass! Oh, what a lovely fox—going so straight! And each time the brown horse rose, she thought: "Perfect! I CAN ride! Oh, I am happy!" And she hoped her father and the young man were looking. There was no feeling in the world like this, with a leader like Dad, hounds moving free, good going, and the field distanced. Better than dancing; better—yes, better than listening to music. If one could spend one's life galloping, sailing over fences; if it would never stop! The new horse was a darling, though he DID pull.

She crossed the next fence level with the young man, whose low chestnut mare moved with a stealthy action. His hat was crammed down now, and his face very determined, but his lips still had something of that smile. Gyp thought: "He's got a good seat—very strong, only he looks like 'thrusting.' Nobody rides like Dad—so beautifully quiet!" Indeed, Winton's seat on a horse was perfection, all done with such a minimum expenditure. The hounds swung round in a curve. Now she was with them, really with them! What a pace—cracking! No fox could stand this long!

And suddenly she caught sight of him, barely a field ahead, scurrying desperately, brush down; and the thought flashed through her: 'Oh! don't let's catch you. Go on, fox; go on! Get away!' Were they really all after that little hunted red thing—a hundred great creatures, horses and men and women and dogs, and only that one little fox! But then came another fence, and quickly another, and she lost feelings of shame and pity in the exultation of flying over them. A minute later the fox went to earth within a few hundred yards of the leading hound, and she was glad. She had been in at deaths before—horrid! But it had been a lovely gallop. And, breathless, smiling rapturously, she wondered whether she could mop her face before the field came up, without that young man noticing.

She could see him talking to her father, and taking out a wisp of a handkerchief that smelled of cyclamen, she had a good scrub round. When she rode up, the young man raised his hat, and looking full at her said: "You did go!" His voice, rather high-pitched, had in it a spice of pleasant laziness. Gyp made him an ironical little bow, and murmured: "My new horse, you mean." He broke again into that irrepressible smile, but, all the same, she knew that he admired her. And she kept thinking: 'Where HAVE I seen someone like him?'

They had two more runs, but nothing like that first gallop. Nor did she again see the young man, whose name—it seemed—was Summerhay, son of a certain Lady Summerhay at Widrington, ten miles from Mildenhams.

All that long, silent jog home with Winton in fading daylight, she felt very happy—saturated with air and elation. The trees and fields, the hay-stacks, gates, and ponds beside the lanes grew dim; lights came up in the cottage windows; the air smelled sweet of wood smoke. And, for the first time all day, she thought of Fiorsen, thought of him almost longingly. If he could be there in the cosy old drawing-room, to play to her while she lay back—drowsing, dreaming by the fire in the scent of burning cedar logs—the Mozart minuet, or that little heart-catching tune of Poise, played the first time she heard him, or a dozen other of the things he played unaccompanied! That would be the most lovely ending to this lovely day. Just the glow and warmth wanting, to make all perfect—the glow and warmth of music and adoration!

And touching the mare with her heel, she sighed. To indulge fancies about music and Fiorsen was safe here, far away from him; she even thought she would not mind if he were to behave again as he had under the birch-trees in the rain at Wiesbaden. It was so good to be adored. Her old mare, ridden now six years, began the series of contented snuffles that signified she smelt home. Here was the last turn, and the loom of the short beech-tree avenue to the house—the old manor-house, comfortable, roomy, rather dark, with wide shallow stairs. Ah, she was tired; and it was drizzling now. She would be nicely stiff to-morrow. In the light coming from the open door she saw Markey standing; and while fishing from her pocket the usual lumps of sugar, heard him say: "Mr. Fiorsen, sir—gentleman from Wiesbaden—to see you."

Her heart thumped. What did this mean? Why had he come? How had he dared? How could he have been so treacherous to her? Ah, but he was ignorant, of course, that she had not told her father. A

veritable judgment on her! She ran straight in and up the stairs. The voice of Betty, "Your bath's ready, Miss Gyp," roused her. And crying, "Oh, Betty darling, bring me up my tea!" she ran into the bathroom. She was safe there; and in the delicious heat of the bath faced the situation better.

There could be only one meaning. He had come to ask for her. And, suddenly, she took comfort. Better so; there would be no more secrecy from Dad! And he would stand between her and Fiorsen if— if she decided not to marry him. The thought staggered her. Had she, without knowing it, got so far as this? Yes, and further. It was all no good; Fiorsen would never accept refusal, even if she gave it! But, did she want to refuse?

She loved hot baths, but had never stayed in one so long. Life was so easy there, and so difficult outside. Betty's knock forced her to get out at last, and let her in with tea and the message. Would Miss Gyp please to go down when she was ready?

VI

Winton was staggered. With a glance at Gyp's vanishing figure, he said curtly to Markey, "Where have you put this gentleman?" But the use of the word "this" was the only trace he showed of his emotions. In that little journey across the hall he entertained many extravagant thoughts. Arrived at the study, he inclined his head courteously enough, waiting for Fiorsen to speak. The "fiddler," still in his fur-lined coat, was twisting a squash hat in his hands. In his own peculiar style he was impressive. But why couldn't he look you in the face; or, if he did, why did he seem about to eat you?

"You knew I was returned to London, Major Winton?"

Then Gyp had been seeing the fellow without letting him know! The thought was chill and bitter to Winton. He must not give her away, however, and he simply bowed. He felt that his visitor was afraid of his frigid courtesy; and he did not mean to help him over that fear. He could not, of course, realize that this ascendancy would not prevent Fiorsen from laughing at him behind his back and acting as if he did not exist. No real contest, in fact, was possible between men moving on such different planes, neither having the slightest respect for the other's standards or beliefs.

Fiorsen, who had begun to pace the room, stopped, and said with agitation:

"Major Winton, your daughter is the most beautiful thing on earth. I love her desperately. I am a man with a future, though you may not think it. I have what future I like in my art if only I can marry her. I have a little money, too—not much; but in my violin there is all the fortune she can want."

Winton's face expressed nothing but cold contempt. That this fellow should take him for one who would consider money in connection with his daughter simply affronted him.

Fiorsen went on:

"You do not like me—that is clear. I saw it the first moment. You are an English gentleman"—he pronounced the words with a sort of irony—"I am nothing to you. Yet, in MY world, I am something. I am not an adventurer. Will you permit me to beg your daughter to be my wife?" He raised his hands that still held the hat; involuntarily they had assumed the attitude of prayer.

For a second, Winton realized that he was suffering. That weakness went in a flash, and he said frigidly:

"I am obliged to you, sir, for coming to me first. You are in my house, and I don't want to be discourteous, but I should be glad if you would be good enough to withdraw and take it that I shall certainly oppose your wish as best I can."

The almost childish disappointment and trouble in Fiorsen's face changed quickly to an expression fierce, furtive, mocking; and then shifted to despair.

"Major Winton, you have loved; you must have loved her mother. I suffer!"

Winton, who had turned abruptly to the fire, faced round again.

"I don't control my daughter's affections, sir; she will do as she wishes. I merely say it will be against my hopes and judgment if she marries you. I imagine you've not altogether waited for my leave. I was

not blind to the way you hung about her at Wiesbaden, Mr. Fiorsen."

Fiorsen answered with a twisted, miserable smile:

"Poor wretches do what they can. May I see her? Let me just see her."

Was it any good to refuse? She had been seeing the fellow already without his knowledge, keeping from him—HIM—all her feelings, whatever they were. And he said:

"I'll send for her. In the meantime, perhaps you'll have some refreshment?"

Fiorsen shook his head, and there followed half an hour of acute discomfort. Winton, in his mud-stained clothes before the fire, supported it better than his visitor. That child of nature, after endeavouring to emulate his host's quietude, renounced all such efforts with an expressive gesture, fidgeted here, fidgeted there, tramped the room, went to the window, drew aside the curtains and stared out into the dark; came back as if resolved again to confront Winton; then, baffled by that figure so motionless before the fire, flung himself down in an armchair, and turned his face to the wall. Winton was not cruel by nature, but he enjoyed the writhings of this fellow who was endangering Gyp's happiness. Endangering? Surely not possible that she would accept him! Yet, if not, why had she not told him? And he, too, suffered.

Then she came. He had expected her to be pale and nervous; but Gyp never admitted being naughty till she had been forgiven. Her smiling face had in it a kind of warning closeness. She went up to Fiorsen, and holding out her hand, said calmly:

"How nice of you to come!"

Winton had the bitter feeling that he—he—was the outsider. Well, he would speak plainly; there had been too much underhand doing.

"Mr. Fiorsen has done us the honour to wish to marry you. I've told him that you decide such things for yourself. If you accept him, it will be against my wish, naturally."

While he was speaking, the glow in her cheeks deepened; she looked neither at him nor at Fiorsen. Winton noted the rise and fall of the lace on her breast. She was smiling, and gave the tiniest shrug of her shoulders. And, suddenly smitten to the heart, he walked stiffly to the door. It was evident that she had no use for his guidance. If her love for him was not worth to her more than this fellow! But there his resentment stopped. He knew that he could not afford wounded feelings; could not get on without her. Married to the greatest rascal on earth, he would still be standing by her, wanting her companionship and love. She represented too much in the present and—the past. With sore heart, indeed, he went down to dinner.

Fiorsen was gone when he came down again. What the fellow had said, or she had answered, he would not for the world have asked. Gulfs between the proud are not lightly bridged. And when she came up to say good-night, both their faces were as though coated with wax.

In the days that followed, she gave no sign, uttered no word in any way suggesting that she meant to go against his wishes. Fiorsen might not have existed, for any mention made of him. But Winton knew well that she was moping, and cherishing some feeling against himself. And this he could not bear. So, one evening, after dinner, he said quietly:

"Tell me frankly, Gyp; do you care for that chap?"

She answered as quietly:

"In a way—yes."

"Is that enough?"

"I don't know, Dad."

Her lips had quivered; and Winton's heart softened, as it always did when he saw her moved. He put his hand out, covered one of hers, and said:

"I shall never stand in the way of your happiness, Gyp. But it must BE happiness. Can it possibly be that? I don't think so. You know what they said of him out there?"

"Yes."

He had not thought she knew. And his heart sank.

"That's pretty bad, you know. And is he of our world at all?"

Gyp looked up.

"Do you think I belong to 'our world,' Dad?"

Winton turned away. She followed, slipping her hand under his arm.

"I didn't mean to hurt. But it's true, isn't it? I don't belong among society people. They wouldn't have me, you know—if they knew about what you told me. Ever since that I've felt I don't belong to them. I'm nearer him. Music means more to me than anything!"

Winton gave her hand a convulsive grip. A sense of coming defeat and bereavement was on him.

"If your happiness went wrong, Gyp, I should be most awfully cut up."

"But why shouldn't I be happy, Dad?"

"If you were, I could put up with anyone. But, I tell you, I can't believe you would be. I beg you, my dear—for God's sake, make sure. I'll put a bullet into the man who treats you badly."

Gyp laughed, then kissed him. But they were silent. At bedtime he said:

"We'll go up to town to-morrow."

Whether from a feeling of the inevitable, or from the forlorn hope that seeing more of the fellow might be the only chance of curing her—he put no more obstacles in the way.

And the queer courtship began again. By Christmas she had consented, still under the impression that she was the mistress, not the slave—the cat, not the bird. Once or twice, when Fiorsen let passion out of hand and his overbold caresses affronted her, she recoiled almost with dread from what she was going toward. But, in general, she lived elated, intoxicated by music and his adoration, withal remorseful that she was making her father sad. She was but little at Mildenhams, and he, in his unhappiness, was there nearly all the time, riding extra hard, and leaving Gyp with his sister. Aunt Rosamund, though under the spell of Fiorsen's music, had agreed with her brother that Fiorsen was "impossible." But nothing she said made any effect on Gyp. It was new and startling to discover in this soft, sensitive girl such a vein of stubbornness. Opposition seemed to harden her resolution. And the good lady's natural optimism began to persuade her that Gyp would make a silk purse out of that sow's ear yet. After all, the man was a celebrity in his way!

It was settled for February. A house with a garden was taken in St. John's Wood. The last month went, as all such last months go, in those intoxicating pastimes, the buying of furniture and clothes. If it were not for that, who knows how many engagement knots would slip!

And to-day they had been married. To the last, Winton had hardly believed it would come to that. He had shaken the hand of her husband and kept pain and disappointment out of his face, knowing well that he deceived no one. Thank heaven, there had been no church, no wedding-cake, invitations, congratulations, fal-lals of any kind—he could never have stood them. Not even Rosamund—who had influenza—to put up with!

Lying back in the recesses of that old chair, he stared into the fire.

They would be just about at Torquay by now—just about. Music! Who would have thought noises made out of string and wood could have stolen her away from him? Yes, they would be at Torquay by now, at their hotel. And the first prayer Winton had uttered for years escaped his lips:

"Let her be happy! Let her be happy!"

Then, hearing Markey open the door, he closed his eyes and feigned sleep.

Part II

When a girl first sits opposite the man she has married, of what does she think? Not of the issues and emotions that lie in wait. They are too overwhelming; she would avoid them while she can. Gyp thought of her frock, a mushroom-coloured velvet cord. Not many girls of her class are married without "fal-lals," as Winton had called them. Not many girls sit in the corner of their reserved first-class compartments without the excitement of having been supreme centre of the world for some flattering hours to buoy them up on that train journey, with no memories of friends' behaviour, speech, appearance, to chat of with her husband, so as to keep thought away. For Gyp, her dress, first worn that day, Betty's breakdown, the faces, blank as hats, of the registrar and clerk, were about all she had to distract her. She stole a look at her husband, clothed in blue serge, just opposite. Her husband! Mrs. Gustav Fjorsen! No! People might call her that; to herself, she was Ghita Winton. Ghita Fjorsen would never seem right. And, not confessing that she was afraid to meet his eyes, but afraid all the same, she looked out of the window. A dull, bleak, dismal day; no warmth, no sun, no music in it—the Thames as grey as lead, the willows on its banks forlorn.

Suddenly she felt his hand on hers. She had not seen his face like that before—yes; once or twice when he was playing—a spirit shining though. She felt suddenly secure. If it stayed like that, then!—His hand rested on her knee; his face changed just a little; the spirit seemed to waver, to be fading; his lips grew fuller. He crossed over and sat beside her. Instantly she began to talk about their house, where they were going to put certain things—presents and all that. He, too, talked of the house; but every now and then he glanced at the corridor, and muttered. It was pleasant to feel that the thought of her possessed him through and through, but she was tremulously glad of that corridor. Life is mercifully made up of little things! And Gyp was always able to live in the moment. In the hours they had spent together, up to now, he had been like a starved man snatching hasty meals; now that he had her to himself for good, he was another creature altogether—like a boy out of school, and kept her laughing nearly all the time.

Presently he got down his practise violin, and putting on the mute, played, looking at her over his shoulder with a droll smile. She felt happy, much warmer at heart, now. And when his face was turned away, she looked at him. He was so much better looking now than when he had those little whiskers. One day she had touched one of them and said: "Ah! if only these wings could fly!" Next morning they had flown. His face was not one to be easily got used to; she was not used to it yet, any more than she was used to his touch. When it grew dark, and he wanted to draw down the blinds, she caught him by the sleeve, and said:

"No, no; they'll know we're honeymooners!"

"Well, my Gyp, and are we not?"

But he obeyed; only, as the hours went on, his eyes seemed never to let her alone.

At Torquay, the sky was clear and starry; the wind brought whiffs of sea-scent into their cab; lights winked far out on a headland; and in the little harbour, all bluish dark, many little boats floated like tame birds. He had put his arm round her, and she could feel his hand resting on her heart. She was grateful that he kept so still. When the cab stopped and they entered the hall of the hotel, she whispered:

"Don't let's let them see!"

Still, mercifully, little things! Inspecting the three rooms, getting the luggage divided between dressing-room and bedroom, unpacking, wondering which dress to put on for dinner, stopping to look out over the dark rocks and the sea, where the moon was coming up, wondering if she dared lock the door while she was dressing, deciding that it would be silly; dressing so quickly, fluttering when she found him suddenly there close behind her, beginning to do up her hooks. Those fingers were too skilful! It was the first time she had thought of his past with a sort of hurt pride and fastidiousness. When he had finished, he twisted her round, held her away, looked at her from head to foot, and said below his breath:

"Mine!"

Her heart beat fast then; but suddenly he laughed, slipped his arm about her, and danced her twice round the room. He let her go demurely down the stairs in front of him, saying:

"They shan't see—my Gyp. Oh, they shan't see! We are old married people, tired of each other—very!"

At dinner it amused him at first—her too, a little—to keep up this farce of indifference. But every now and then he turned and stared at some inoffensive visitor who was taking interest in them, with such

fierce and genuine contempt that Gyp took alarm; whereon he laughed. When she had drunk a little wine and he had drunk a good deal, the farce of indifference came to its end. He talked at a great rate now, slyly nicknaming the waiters and mimicking the people around—happy thrusts that made her smile but shiver a little, lest they should be heard or seen. Their heads were close together across the little table. They went out into the lounge. Coffee came, and he wanted her to smoke with him. She had never smoked in a public room. But it seemed stiff and "missish" to refuse—she must do now as his world did. And it was another little thing; she wanted little things, all the time wanted them. She drew back a window-curtain, and they stood there side by side. The sea was deep blue beneath bright stars, and the moon shone through a ragged pine-tree on a little headland. Though she stood five feet six in her shoes, she was only up to his mouth. He sighed and said: "Beautiful night, my Gyp!" And suddenly it struck her that she knew nothing of what was in him, and yet he was her husband! "Husband"—funny word, not pretty! She felt as a child opening the door of a dark room, and, clutching his arm, said:

"Look! There's a sailing-boat. What's it doing out there at night?"
Another little thing! Any little thing!

Presently he said:

"Come up-stairs! I'll play to you."

Up in their sitting-room was a piano, but—not possible; to-morrow they would have to get another. To-morrow! The fire was hot, and he took off his coat to play. In one of his shirt-sleeves there was a rent. She thought, with a sort of triumph: 'I shall mend that!' It was something definite, actual—a little thing. There were lilies in the room that gave a strong, sweet scent. He brought them up to her to sniff, and, while she was sniffing, stooped suddenly and kissed her neck. She shut her eyes with a shiver. He took the flowers away at once, and when she opened her eyes again, his violin was at his shoulder. For a whole hour he played, and Gyp, in her cream-coloured frock, lay back, listening. She was tired, not sleepy. It would have been nice to have been sleepy. Her mouth had its little sad tuck or dimple at the corner; her eyes were deep and dark—a cloudy child. His gaze never left her face; he played and played, and his own fitful face grew clouded. At last he put away the violin, and said:

"Go to bed, Gyp; you're tired."

Obediently she got up and went into the bedroom. With a sick feeling in her heart, and as near the fire as she could get, she undressed with desperate haste, and got to bed. An age—it seemed—she lay there shivering in her flimsy lawn against the cold sheets, her eyes not quite closed, watching the flicker of the firelight. She did not think—could not—just lay stiller than the dead. The door creaked. She shut her eyes. Had she a heart at all? It did not seem to beat. She lay thus, with eyes shut, till she could bear it no longer. By the firelight she saw him crouching at the foot of the bed; could just see his face—like a face—a face—where seen? Ah yes!—a picture—of a wild man crouching at the feet of Iphigenia—so humble, so hungry—so lost in gazing. She gave a little smothered sob and held out her hand.

II

Gyp was too proud to give by halves. And in those early days she gave Fiorsen everything except—her heart. She earnestly desired to give that too; but hearts only give themselves. Perhaps if the wild man in him, maddened by beauty in its power, had not so ousted the spirit man, her heart might have gone with her lips and the rest of her. He knew he was not getting her heart, and it made him, in the wildness of his nature and the perversity of a man, go just the wrong way to work, trying to conquer her by the senses, not the soul.

Yet she was not unhappy—it cannot be said she was unhappy, except for a sort of lost feeling sometimes, as if she were trying to grasp something that kept slipping, slipping away. She was glad to give him pleasure. She felt no repulsion—this was man's nature. Only there was always that feeling that she was not close. When he was playing, with the spirit-look on his face, she would feel: 'Now, now, surely I shall get close to him!' But the look would go; how to keep it there she did not know, and when it went, her feeling went too.

Their little suite of rooms was at the very end of the hotel, so that he might play as much as he wished. While he practised in the mornings she would go into the garden, which sloped in rock-terraces down to the sea. Wrapped in fur, she would sit there with a book. She soon knew each evergreen, or

flower that was coming out—aubretia, and laurustinus, a little white flower whose name was uncertain, and one star-periwinkle. The air was often soft; the birds sang already and were busy with their weddings, and twice, at least, spring came in her heart—that wonderful feeling when first the whole being scents new life preparing in the earth and the wind—the feeling that only comes when spring is not yet, and one aches and rejoices all at once. Seagulls often came over her, craning down their greedy bills and uttering cries like a kitten's mewling.

Out here she had feelings, that she did not get with him, of being at one with everything. She did not realize how tremendously she had grown up in these few days, how the ground bass had already come into the light music of her life. Living with Fiorsen was opening her eyes to much beside mere knowledge of "man's nature"; with her perhaps fatal receptivity, she was already soaking up the atmosphere of his philosophy. He was always in revolt against accepting things because he was expected to; but, like most executant artists, he was no reasoner, just a mere instinctive kicker against the pricks. He would lose himself in delight with a sunset, a scent, a tune, a new caress, in a rush of pity for a beggar or a blind man, a rush of aversion from a man with large feet or a long nose, of hatred for a woman with a flat chest or an expression of sanctimony. He would swing along when he was walking, or dawdle, dawdle; he would sing and laugh, and make her laugh too till she ached, and half an hour later would sit staring into some pit of darkness in a sort of powerful brooding of his whole being. Insensibly she shared in this deep drinking of sensation, but always gracefully, fastidiously, never losing sense of other people's feelings.

In his love-raptures, he just avoided setting her nerves on edge, because he never failed to make her feel his enjoyment of her beauty; that perpetual consciousness, too, of not belonging to the proper and respectable, which she had tried to explain to her father, made her set her teeth against feeling shocked. But in other ways he did shock her. She could not get used to his utter oblivion of people's feelings, to the ferocious contempt with which he would look at those who got on his nerves, and make half-audible comments, just as he had commented on her own father when he and Count Rosek passed them, by the Schiller statue. She would visibly shrink at those remarks, though they were sometimes so excruciatingly funny that she had to laugh, and feel dreadful immediately after. She saw that he resented her shrinking; it seemed to excite him to run amuck the more. But she could not help it. Once she got up and walked away. He followed her, sat on the floor beside her knees, and thrust his head, like a great cat, under her hand.

"Forgive me, my Gyp; but they are such brutes. Who could help it? Now tell me—who could, except my Gyp?" And she had to forgive him. But, one evening, when he had been really outrageous during dinner, she answered:

"No; I can't. It's you that are the brute. You WERE a brute to them!"

He leaped up with a face of furious gloom and went out of the room. It was the first time he had given way to anger with her. Gyp sat by the fire, very disturbed; chiefly because she was not really upset at having hurt him. Surely she ought to be feeling miserable at that!

But when, at ten o'clock, he had not come back, she began to flutter in earnest. She had said a dreadful thing! And yet, in her heart, she did not take back her judgment. He really HAD been a brute. She would have liked to soothe herself by playing, but it was too late to disturb people, and going to the window, she looked out over the sea, feeling beaten and confused. This was the first time she had given free rein to her feeling against what Winton would have called his "boulderism." If he had been English, she would never have been attracted by one who could trample so on other people's feelings. What, then, had attracted her? His strangeness, wildness, the mesmeric pull of his passion for her, his music! Nothing could spoil that in him. The sweep, the surge, and sigh in his playing was like the sea out there, dark, and surf-edged, beating on the rocks; or the sea deep-coloured in daylight, with white gulls over it; or the sea with those sinuous paths made by the wandering currents, the subtle, smiling, silent sea, holding in suspense its unfathomable restlessness, waiting to surge and spring again. That was what she wanted from him—not his embraces, not even his adoration, his wit, or his queer, lithe comeliness touched with felinity; no, only that in his soul which escaped through his fingers into the air and dragged at her soul. If, when he came in, she were to run to him, throw her arms round his neck, make herself feel close, lose herself in him! Why not? It was her duty; why not her delight, too? But she shivered. Some instinct too deep for analysis, something in the very heart of her nerves made her recoil, as if she were afraid, literally scared of letting herself go, of loving—the subtlest instinct of self-preservation against something fatal; against being led on beyond—yes, it was like that curious, instinctive sinking which some feel at the mere sight of a precipice, a dread of going near, lest they should be drawn on and over by irresistible attraction.

She passed into their bedroom and began slowly to undress. To go to bed without knowing where he was, what doing, thinking, seemed already a little odd; and she sat brushing her hair slowly with the

silver-backed brushes, staring at her own pale face, whose eyes looked so very large and dark. At last there came to her the feeling: "I can't help it! I don't care!" And, getting into bed, she turned out the light. It seemed queer and lonely; there was no fire. And then, without more ado, she slept.

She had a dream of being between Fiorsen and her father in a railway-carriage out at sea, with the water rising higher and higher, swishing and sighing. Awakened always, like a dog, to perfect presence of mind, she knew that he was playing in the sitting-room, playing—at what time of night? She lay listening to a quivering, gibbering tune that she did not know. Should she be first to make it up, or should she wait for him? Twice she half slipped out of bed, but both times, as if fate meant her not to move, he chose that moment to swell out the sound, and each time she thought: 'No, I can't. It's just the same now; he doesn't care how many people he wakes up. He does just what he likes, and cares nothing for anyone.' And covering her ears with her hands, she continued to lie motionless.

When she withdrew her hands at last, he had stopped. Then she heard him coming, and feigned sleep. But he did not spare even sleep. She submitted to his kisses without a word, her heart hardening within her—surely he smelled of brandy! Next morning he seemed to have forgotten it all. But Gyp had not. She wanted badly to know what he had felt, where he had gone, but was too proud to ask.

She wrote twice to her father in the first week, but afterwards, except for a postcard now and then, she never could. Why tell him what she was doing, in company of one whom he could not bear to think of? Had he been right? To confess that would hurt her pride too much. But she began to long for London. The thought of her little house was a green spot to dwell on. When they were settled in, and could do what they liked without anxiety about people's feelings, it would be all right perhaps. When he could start again really working, and she helping him, all would be different. Her new house, and so much to do; her new garden, and fruit-trees coming into blossom! She would have dogs and cats, would ride when Dad was in town. Aunt Rosamund would come, friends, evenings of music, dances still, perhaps—he danced beautifully, and loved it, as she did. And his concerts—the elation of being identified with his success! But, above all, the excitement of making her home as dainty as she could, with daring experiments in form and colour. And yet, at heart she knew that to be already looking forward, banning the present, was a bad sign.

One thing, at all events, she enjoyed—sailing. They had blue days when even the March sun was warm, and there was just breeze enough. He got on excellently well with the old salt whose boat they used, for he was at his best with simple folk, whose lingo he could understand about as much as they could understand his.

In those hours, Gyp had some real sensations of romance. The sea was so blue, the rocks and wooded spurs of that Southern coast so dreamy in the bright land-haze. Oblivious of "the old salt," he would put his arm round her; out there, she could swallow down her sense of form, and be grateful for feeling nearer to him in spirit. She made loyal efforts to understand him in these weeks that were bringing a certain disillusionment. The elemental part of marriage was not the trouble; if she did not herself feel passion, she did not resent his. When, after one of those embraces, his mouth curled with a little bitter smile, as if to say, "Yes, much you care for me," she would feel compunctious and yet aggrieved. But the trouble lay deeper—the sense of an insuperable barrier; and always that deep, instinctive recoil from letting herself go. She could not let herself be known, and she could not know him. Why did his eyes often fix her with a stare that did not seem to see her? What made him, in the midst of serious playing, break into some furious or desolate little tune, or drop his violin? What gave him those long hours of dejection, following the maddest gaiety? Above all, what dreams had he in those rare moments when music transformed his strange pale face? Or was it a mere physical illusion—had he any dreams? "The heart of another is a dark forest"—to all but the one who loves.

One morning, he held up a letter.

"Ah, ha! Paul Rosek went to see our house. 'A pretty dove's nest!' he calls it."

The memory of the Pole's sphinxlike, sweetish face, and eyes that seemed to know so many secrets, always affected Gyp unpleasantly. She said quietly:

"Why do you like him, Gustav?"

"Like him? Oh, he is useful. A good judge of music, and—many things."

"I think he is hateful."

Fiorsen laughed.

"Hateful? Why hateful, my Gyp? He is a good friend. And he admires you—oh, he admires you very much! He has success with women. He always says, 'J'ai une technique merveilleuse pour seduire une

femme"

Gyp laughed.

"Ugh! He's like a toad, I think."

"Ah, I shall tell him that! He will be flattered."

"If you do; if you give me away—I—"

He jumped up and caught her in his arms; his face was so comically compunctious that she calmed down at once. She thought over her words afterwards and regretted them. All the same, Rosek was a sneak and a cold sensualist, she was sure. And the thought that he had been spying at their little house tarnished her anticipations of homecoming.

They went to Town three days later. While the taxi was skirting Lord's Cricket-ground, Gyp slipped her hand into Fiorsen's. She was brimful of excitement. The trees were budding in the gardens that they passed; the almond-blossom coming—yes, really coming! They were in the road now. Five, seven, nine—thirteen! Two more! There it was, nineteen, in white figures on the leaf-green railings, under the small green lilac buds; yes, and their almond-blossom was out, too! She could just catch a glimpse over those tall railings of the low white house with its green outside shutters. She jumped out almost into the arms of Betty, who stood smiling all over her broad, flushed face, while, from under each arm peered forth the head of a black devil, with pricked ears and eyes as bright as diamonds.

"Betty! What darlings!"

"Major Winton's present, my dear—ma'am!"

Giving the stout shoulders a hug, Gyp seized the black devils, and ran up the path under the trellis, while the Scotch-terrier pups, squeezed against her breast, made confused small noises and licked her nose and ears. Through the square hall she ran into the drawing-room, which opened out on to the lawn; and there, in the French window, stood spying back at the spick-and-span room, where everything was, of course, placed just wrong. The colouring, white, ebony, and satinwood, looked nicer even than she had hoped. Out in the garden—her own garden—the pear-trees were thickening, but not in blossom yet; a few daffodils were in bloom along the walls, and a magnolia had one bud opened. And all the time she kept squeezing the puppies to her, enjoying their young, warm, fluffy savour, and letting them kiss her. She ran out of the drawing-room, up the stairs. Her bedroom, the dressing-room, the spare room, the bathroom—she dashed into them all. Oh, it was nice to be in your own place, to be—Suddenly she felt herself lifted off the ground from behind, and in that undignified position, her eyes flying, she turned her face till he could reach her lips.

III

To wake, and hear the birds at early practise, and feel that winter is over—is there any pleasanter moment?

That first morning in her new house, Gyp woke with the sparrow, or whatever the bird which utters the first cheeps and twitters, soon eclipsed by so much that is more important in bird-song. It seemed as if all the feathered creatures in London must be assembled in her garden; and the old verse came into her head:

"All dear Nature's children sweet
Lie at bride and bridegroom's feet,
Blessing their sense.
Not a creature of the air,
Bird melodious or bird fair,
Be absent hence!"

She turned and looked at her husband. He lay with his head snoozled down into the pillow, so that she could only see his thick, rumpled hair. And a shiver went through her, exactly as if a strange man were lying there. Did he really belong to her, and she to him—for good? And was this their house—together? It all seemed somehow different, more serious and troubling, in this strange bed, of this strange room, that was to be so permanent. Careful not to wake him, she slipped out and stood

between the curtains and the window. Light was all in confusion yet; away low down behind the trees, the rose of dawn still clung. One might almost have been in the country, but for the faint, rumorous noises of the town beginning to wake, and that film of ground-mist which veils the feet of London mornings. She thought: "I am mistress in this house, have to direct it all—see to everything! And my pups! Oh, what do they eat?"

That was the first of many hours of anxiety, for she was very conscientious. Her fastidiousness desired perfection, but her sensitiveness refused to demand it of others—especially servants. Why should she harry them?

Fiorsen had not the faintest notion of regularity. She found that he could not even begin to appreciate her struggles in housekeeping. And she was much too proud to ask his help, or perhaps too wise, since he was obviously unfit to give it. To live like the birds of the air was his motto. Gyp would have liked nothing better; but, for that, one must not have a house with three servants, several meals, two puppy-dogs, and no great experience of how to deal with any of them.

She spoke of her difficulties to no one and suffered the more. With Betty—who, bone-conservative, admitted Fiorsen as hardly as she had once admitted Winton—she had to be very careful. But her great trouble was with her father. Though she longed to see him, she literally dreaded their meeting. He first came—as he had been wont to come when she was a tiny girl—at the hour when he thought the fellow to whom she now belonged would most likely be out. Her heart beat, when she saw him under the trellis. She opened the door herself, and hung about him so that his shrewd eyes should not see her face. And she began at once to talk of the puppies, whom she had named Don and Doff. They were perfect darlings; nothing was safe from them; her slippers were completely done for; they had already got into her china-cabinet and gone to sleep there! He must come and see all over.

Hooking her arm into his, and talking all the time, she took him up-stairs and down, and out into the garden, to the studio, or music-room, at the end, which had an entrance to itself on to a back lane. This room had been the great attraction. Fiorsen could practice there in peace. Winton went along with her very quietly, making a shrewd comment now and then. At the far end of the garden, looking over the wall, down into that narrow passage which lay between it and the back of another garden he squeezed her arm suddenly and said:

"Well, Gyp, what sort of a time?"

The question had come at last.

"Oh, rather lovely—in some ways." But she did not look at him, nor he at her. "See, Dad! The cats have made quite a path there!"

Winton bit his lips and turned from the wall. The thought of that fellow was bitter within him. She meant to tell him nothing, meant to keep up that lighthearted look—which didn't deceive him a bit!

"Look at my crocuses! It's really spring today!"

It was. Even a bee or two had come. The tiny leaves had a transparent look, too thin as yet to keep the sunlight from passing through them. The purple, delicate-veined crocuses, with little flames of orange blowing from their centres, seemed to hold the light as in cups. A wind, without harshness, swung the boughs; a dry leaf or two still rustled round here and there. And on the grass, and in the blue sky, and on the almond-blossom was the first spring brilliance. Gyp clasped her hands behind her head.

"Lovely—to feel the spring!"

And Winton thought: 'She's changed!' She had softened, quickened—more depth of colour in her, more gravity, more sway in her body, more sweetness in her smile. But—was she happy?

A voice said:

"Ah, what a pleasure!"

The fellow had slunk up like the great cat he was. And it seemed to Winton that Gyp had winced.

"Dad thinks we ought to have dark curtains in the music-room, Gustav."

Fiorsen made a bow.

"Yes, yes—like a London club."

Winton, watching, was sure of supplication in her face. And, forcing a smile, he said:

"You seem very snug here. Glad to see you again. Gyp looks splendid."

Another of those bows he so detested! Mountebank! Never, never would he be able to stand the fellow! But he must not, would not, show it. And, as soon as he decently could, he went, taking his lonely way back through this region, of which his knowledge was almost limited to Lord's Cricket-ground, with a sense of doubt and desolation, an irritation more than ever mixed with the resolve to be always at hand if the child wanted him.

He had not been gone ten minutes before Aunt Rosamund appeared, with a crutch-handled stick and a gentlemanly limp, for she, too, indulged her ancestors in gout. A desire for exclusive possession of their friends is natural to some people, and the good lady had not known how fond she was of her niece till the girl had slipped off into this marriage. She wanted her back, to go about with and make much of, as before. And her well-bred drawl did not quite disguise this feeling.

Gyp could detect Fiorsen subtly mimicking that drawl; and her ears began to burn. The puppies afforded a diversion—their points, noses, boldness, and food, held the danger in abeyance for some minutes. Then the mimicry began again. When Aunt Rosamund had taken a somewhat sudden leave, Gyp stood at the window of her drawing-room with the mask off her face. Fiorsen came up, put his arm round her from behind, and said with a fierce sigh:

"Are they coming often—these excellent people?"

Gyp drew back from him against the wall.

"If you love me, why do you try to hurt the people who love me too?"

"Because I am jealous. I am jealous even of those puppies."

"And shall you try to hurt them?"

"If I see them too much near you, perhaps I shall."

"Do you think I can be happy if you hurt things because they love me?"

He sat down and drew her on to his knee. She did not resist, but made not the faintest return to his caresses. The first time—the very first friend to come into her own new home! It was too much!

Fiorsen said hoarsely:

"You do not love me. If you loved me, I should feel it through your lips. I should see it in your eyes. Oh, love me, Gyp! You shall!"

But to say to Love: "Stand and deliver!" was not the way to touch Gyp. It seemed to her mere ill-bred stupidity. She froze against him in soul, all the more that she yielded her body. When a woman refuses nothing to one whom she does not really love, shadows are already falling on the bride-house. And Fiorsen knew it; but his self-control about equalled that of the two puppies.

Yet, on the whole, these first weeks in her new home were happy, too busy to allow much room for doubting or regret. Several important concerts were fixed for May. She looked forward to these with intense eagerness, and pushed everything that interfered with preparation into the background. As though to make up for that instinctive recoil from giving her heart, of which she was always subconscious, she gave him all her activities, without calculation or reserve. She was ready to play for him all day and every day, just as from the first she had held herself at the disposal of his passion. To fail him in these ways would have tarnished her opinion of herself. But she had some free hours in the morning, for he had the habit of lying in bed till eleven, and was never ready for practise before twelve. In those early hours she got through her orders and her shopping—that pursuit which to so many women is the only real "sport"—a chase of the ideal; a pitting of one's taste and knowledge against that of the world at large; a secret passion, even in the beautiful, for making oneself and one's house more beautiful. Gyp never went shopping without that faint thrill running up and down her nerves. She hated to be touched by strange fingers, but not even that stopped her pleasure in turning and turning before long mirrors, while the saleswoman or man, with admiration at first crocodilic and then genuine, ran the tips of fingers over those curves, smoothing and pinning, and uttering the word, "moddam."

On other mornings, she would ride with Winton, who would come for her, leaving her again at her door after their outings. One day, after a ride in Richmond Park, where the horse-chestnuts were just coming into flower, they had late breakfast on the veranda of a hotel before starting for home. Some fruit-trees were still in blossom just below them, and the sunlight showering down from a blue sky

brightened to silver the windings of the river, and to gold the budding leaves of the oak-trees. Winton, smoking his after-breakfast cigar, stared down across the tops of those trees toward the river and the wooded fields beyond. Stealing a glance at him, Gyp said very softly:

"Did you ever ride with my mother, Dad?"

"Only once—the very ride we've been to-day. She was on a black mare; I had a chestnut—" Yes, in that grove on the little hill, which they had ridden through that morning, he had dismounted and stood beside her.

Gyp stretched her hand across the table and laid it on his.

"Tell me about her, dear. Was she beautiful?"

"Yes."

"Dark? Tall?"

"Very like you, Gyp. A little—a little"—he did not know how to describe that difference—"a little more foreign-looking perhaps. One of her grandmothers was Italian, you know."

"How did you come to love her? Suddenly?"

"As suddenly as"—he drew his hand away and laid it on the veranda rail—"as that sun came on my hand."

Gyp said quietly, as if to herself:

"Yes; I don't think I understand that—yet."

Winton drew breath through his teeth with a subdued hiss.

"Did she love you at first sight, too?"

He blew out a long puff of smoke.

"One easily believes what one wants to—but I think she did. She used to say so."

"And how long?"

"Only a year."

Gyp said very softly:

"Poor darling Dad." And suddenly she added: "I can't bear to think I killed her—I can't bear it!"

Winton got up in the discomfort of these sudden confidences; a blackbird, startled by the movement, ceased his song. Gyp said in a hard voice:

"No; I don't want to have any children."

"Without that, I shouldn't have had you, Gyp."

"No; but I don't want to have them. And I don't—I don't want to love like that. I should be afraid."

Winton looked at her for a long time without speaking, his brows drawn down, frowning, puzzled, as though over his own past.

"Love," he said, "it catches you, and you're gone. When it comes, you welcome it, whether it's to kill you or not. Shall we start back, my child?"

When she got home, it was not quite noon. She hurried over her bath and dressing, and ran out to the music-room. Its walls had been hung with Willesden scrim gilded over; the curtains were silver-grey; there was a divan covered with silver-and-gold stuff, and a beaten brass fireplace. It was a study in silver, and gold, save for two touches of fantasy—a screen round the piano-head, covered with brilliantly painted peacocks' tails, and a blue Persian vase, in which were flowers of various hues of red.

Fiorsen was standing at the window in a fume of cigarette smoke. He did not turn round. Gyp put her hand within his arm, and said:

"So sorry, dear. But it's only just half-past twelve."

His face was as if the whole world had injured him.

"Pity you came back! Very nice, riding, I'm sure!"

Could she not go riding with her own father? What insensate jealousy and egomania! She turned away, without a word, and sat down at the piano. She was not good at standing injustice—not good at all! The scent of brandy, too, was mixed with the fumes of his cigarette. Drink in the morning was so ugly—really horrid! She sat at the piano, waiting. He would be like this till he had played away the fumes of his ill mood, and then he would come and paw her shoulders and put his lips to her neck. Yes; but it was not the way to behave, not the way to make her love him. And she said suddenly:

"Gustav; what exactly have I done that you dislike?"

"You have had a father."

Gyp sat quite still for a few seconds, and then began to laugh. He looked so like a sulky child, standing there. He turned swiftly on her and put his hand over her mouth. She looked up over that hand which smelled of tobacco. Her heart was doing the grand ecart within her, this way in compunction, that way in resentment. His eyes fell before hers; he dropped his hand.

"Well, shall we begin?" she said.

He answered roughly: "No," and went out into the garden.

Gyp was left dismayed, disgusted. Was it possible that she could have taken part in such a horrid little scene? She remained sitting at the piano, playing over and over a single passage, without heeding what it was.

IV

So far, they had seen nothing of Rosek at the little house. She wondered if Fiorsen had passed on to him her remark, though if he had, he would surely say he hadn't; she had learned that her husband spoke the truth when convenient, not when it caused him pain. About music, or any art, however, he could be implicitly relied on; and his frankness was appalling when his nerves were ruffled.

But at the first concert she saw Rosek's unwelcome figure on the other side of the gangway, two rows back. He was talking to a young girl, whose face, short and beautifully formed, had the opaque transparency of alabaster. With her round blue eyes fixed on him, and her lips just parted, she had a slightly vacant look. Her laugh, too, was just a little vacant. And yet her features were so beautiful, her hair so smooth and fair, her colouring so pale and fine, her neck so white and round, the poise of her body so perfect that Gyp found it difficult to take her glance away. She had refused her aunt's companionship. It might irritate Fiorsen and affect his playing to see her with "that stiff English creature." She wanted, too, to feel again the sensations of Wiesbaden. There would be a kind of sacred pleasure in knowing that she had helped to perfect sounds which touched the hearts and senses of so many listeners. She had looked forward to this concert so long. And she sat scarcely breathing, abstracted from consciousness of those about her, soft and still, radiating warmth and eagerness.

Fiorsen looked his worst, as ever, when first coming before an audience—cold, furtive, defensive, defiant, half turned away, with those long fingers tightening the screws, touching the strings. It seemed queer to think that only six hours ago she had stolen out of bed from beside him. Wiesbaden! No; this was not like Wiesbaden! And when he played she had not the same emotions. She had heard him now too often, knew too exactly how he produced those sounds; knew that their fire and sweetness and nobility sprang from fingers, ear, brain—not from his soul. Nor was it possible any longer to drift off on those currents of sound into new worlds, to hear bells at dawn, and the dews of evening as they fell, to feel the divinity of wind and sunlight. The romance and ecstasy that at Wiesbaden had soaked her spirit came no more. She was watching for the weak spots, the passages with which he had struggled and she had struggled; she was distracted by memories of petulance, black moods, and sudden caresses. And then she caught his eye. The look was like, yet how unlike, those looks at Wiesbaden. It had the old love-hunger, but had lost the adoration, its spiritual essence. And she thought: 'Is it my fault, or is it only because he has me now to do what he likes with?' It was all another disillusionment, perhaps the greatest yet. But she kindled and flushed at the applause, and lost herself in pleasure at his success. At the interval, she slipped out at once, for her first visit to the artist's room, the mysterious enchantment

of a peep behind the scenes. He was coming down from his last recall; and at sight of her his look of bored contempt vanished; lifting her hand, he kissed it. Gyp felt happier than she had since her marriage. Her eyes shone, and she whispered:

"Beautiful!"

He whispered back:

"So! Do you love me, Gyp?"

She nodded. And at that moment she did, or thought so.

Then people began to come; amongst them her old music-master, Monsieur Harmost, grey and mahogany as ever, who, after a "Merveilleux," "Tres fort" or two to Fiorsen, turned his back on him to talk to his old pupil.

So she had married Fiorsen—dear, dear! That was extraordinary, but extraordinary! And what was it like, to be always with him—a little funny—not so? And how was her music? It would be spoiled now. Ah, what a pity! No? She must come to him, then; yes, come again. All the time he patted her arm, as if playing the piano, and his fingers, that had the touch of an angel, felt the firmness of her flesh, as though debating whether she were letting it deteriorate. He seemed really to have missed "his little friend," to be glad at seeing her again; and Gyp, who never could withstand appreciation, smiled at him. More people came. She saw Rosek talking to her husband, and the young alabaster girl standing silent, her lips still a little parted, gazing up at Fiorsen. A perfect figure, though rather short; a dovelike face, whose exquisitely shaped, just-opened lips seemed to be demanding sugar-plums. She could not be more than nineteen. Who was she?

A voice said almost in her ear:

"How do you do, Mrs. Fiorsen? I am fortunate to see you again at last."

She was obliged to turn. If Gustav had given her away, one would never know it from this velvet-masked creature, with his suave watchfulness and ready composure, who talked away so smoothly. What was it that she so disliked in him? Gyp had acute instincts, the natural intelligence deep in certain natures not over intellectual, but whose "feelers" are too delicate to be deceived. And, for something to say, she asked:

"Who is the girl you were talking to, Count Rosek? Her face is so lovely."

He smiled, exactly the smile she had so disliked at Wiesbaden; following his glance, she saw her husband talking to the girl, whose lips at that moment seemed more than ever to ask for sugar-plums.

"A young dancer, Daphne Wing—she will make a name. A dove flying! So you admire her, Madame Gyp?"

Gyp said, smiling:

"She's very pretty—I can imagine her dancing beautifully."

"Will you come one day and see her? She has still to make her debut."

Gyp answered:

"Thank you. I don't know. I love dancing, of course."

"Good! I will arrange it."

And Gyp thought: "No, no! I don't want to have anything to do with you! Why do I not speak the truth? Why didn't I say I hate dancing?"

Just then a bell sounded; people began hurrying away. The girl came up to Rosek.

"Miss Daphne Wing—Mrs. Fiorsen."

Gyp put out her hand with a smile—this girl was certainly a picture. Miss Daphne Wing smiled, too, and said, with the intonation of those who have been carefully corrected of an accent:

"Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, how beautifully your husband plays—doesn't he?"

It was not merely the careful speech but something lacking when the perfect mouth moved—spirit, sensibility, who could say? And Gyp felt sorry, as at blight on a perfect flower. With a friendly nod, she

turned away to Fiorsen, who was waiting to go up on to the platform. Was it at her or at the girl he had been looking? She smiled at him and slid away. In the corridor, Rosek, in attendance, said:

"Why not this evening? Come with Gustav to my rooms. She shall dance to us, and we will all have supper. She admires you, Madame Gyp. She will love to dance for you."

Gyp longed for the simple brutality to say: "I don't want to come. I don't like you!" But all she could manage was:

"Thank you. I—I will ask Gustav."

Once in her seat again, she rubbed the cheek that his breath had touched. A girl was singing now—one of those faces that Gyp always admired, reddish-gold hair, blue eyes—the very antithesis of herself—and the song was "The Bens of Jura," that strange outpouring from a heart broken by love:

"And my heart reft of its own sun—"

Tears rose in her eyes, and the shiver of some very deep response passed through her. What was it Dad had said: "Love catches you, and you're gone!"

She, who was the result of love like that, did not want to love!

The girl finished singing. There was little applause. Yet she had sung beautifully; and what more wonderful song in the world? Was it too tragic, too painful, too strange—not "pretty" enough? Gyp felt sorry for her. Her head ached now. She would so have liked to slip away when it was all over. But she had not the needful rudeness. She would have to go through with this evening at Rosek's and be gay. And why not? Why this shadow over everything? But it was no new sensation, that of having entered by her own free will on a life which, for all effort, would not give her a feeling of anchorage or home. Of her own accord she had stepped into the cage!

On the way to Rosek's rooms, she disguised from Fiorsen her headache and depression. He was in one of his boy-out-of-school moods, elated by applause, mimicking her old master, the idolatries of his worshippers, Rosek, the girl dancer's upturned expectant lips. And he slipped his arm round Gyp in the cab, crushing her against him and sniffing at her cheek as if she had been a flower.

Rosek had the first floor of an old-time mansion in Russell Square. The smell of incense or some kindred perfume was at once about one; and, on the walls of the dark hall, electric light burned, in jars of alabaster picked up in the East. The whole place was in fact a sanctum of the collector's spirit. Its owner had a passion for black—the walls, divans, picture-frames, even some of the tilings were black, with glimmerings of gold, ivory, and moonlight. On a round black table there stood a golden bowl filled with moonlight-coloured velvety "palm" and "honesty"; from a black wall gleamed out the ivory mask of a faun's face; from a dark niche the little silver figure of a dancing girl. It was beautiful, but deathly. And Gyp, though excited always by anything new, keenly alive to every sort of beauty, felt a longing for air and sunlight. It was a relief to get close to one of the black-curtained windows, and see the westering sun shower warmth and light on the trees of the Square gardens. She was introduced to a Mr. and Mrs. Gallant, a dark-faced, cynical-looking man with clever, malicious eyes, and one of those large cornucopias of women with avid blue stares. The little dancer was not there. She had "gone to put on nothing," Rosek informed them.

He took Gyp the round of his treasures, scarabs, Rops drawings, death-masks, Chinese pictures, and queer old flutes, with an air of displaying them for the first time to one who could truly appreciate. And she kept thinking of that saying, "Une technique merveilleuse." Her instinct apprehended the refined bone-viciousness of this place, where nothing, save perhaps taste, would be sacred. It was her first glimpse into that gilt-edged bohemia, whence the generosities, the elans, the struggles of the true bohemia are as rigidly excluded as from the spheres where bishops moved. But she talked and smiled; and no one could have told that her nerves were crisping as if at contact with a corpse. While showing her those alabaster jars, her host had laid his hand softly on her wrist, and in taking it away, he let his fingers, with a touch softer than a kitten's paw, ripple over the skin, then put them to his lips. Ah, there it was—the—the TECHNIQUE! A desperate desire to laugh seized her. And he saw it—oh, yes, he saw it! He gave her one look, passed that same hand over his smooth face, and—behold!—it showed as before, unmortified, unconscious. A deadly little man!

When they returned to the salon, as it was called, Miss Daphne Wing in a black kimono, whence her face and arms emerged more like alabaster than ever, was sitting on a divan beside Fiorsen. She rose at once and came across to Gyp.

"Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen"—why did everything she said begin with "Oh"—"isn't this room lovely? It's perfect for dancing. I only brought cream, and flame-colour; they go so beautifully with black."

She threw back her kimono for Gyp to inspect her dress—a girdled cream-coloured shift, which made her ivory arms and neck seem more than ever dazzling; and her mouth opened, as if for a sugar-plum of praise. Then, lowering her voice, she murmured:

"Do you know, I'm rather afraid of Count Rosek."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know; he's so critical, and smooth, and he comes up so quietly. I do think your husband plays wonderfully. Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, you are beautiful, aren't you?" Gyp laughed. "What would you like me to dance first? A waltz of Chopin's?"

"Yes; I love Chopin."

"Then I shall. I shall dance exactly what you like, because I do admire you, and I'm sure you're awfully sweet. Oh, yes; you are; I can see that! And I think your husband's awfully in love with you. I should be, if I were a man. You know, I've been studying five years, and I haven't come out yet. But now Count Rosek's going to back me, I expect it'll be very soon. Will you come to my first night? Mother says I've got to be awfully careful. She only let me come this evening because you were going to be here. Would you like me to begin?"

She slid across to Rosek, and Gyp heard her say:

"Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen wants me to begin; a Chopin waltz, please. The one that goes like this."

Rosek went to the piano, the little dancer to the centre of the room. Gyp sat down beside Fiorsen.

Rosek began playing, his eyes fixed on the girl, and his mouth loosened from compression in a sweetish smile. Miss Daphne Wing was standing with her finger-tips joined at her breast—a perfect statue of ebony and palest wax. Suddenly she flung away the black kimono. A thrill swept Gyp from head to foot. She COULD dance—that common little girl! Every movement of her round, sinuous body, of her bare limbs, had the ecstasy of natural genius, controlled by the quivering balance of a really fine training. "A dove flying!" So she was. Her face had lost its vacancy, or rather its vacancy had become divine, having that look—not lost but gone before—which dance demands. Yes, she was a gem, even if she had a common soul. Tears came up in Gyp's eyes. It was so lovely—like a dove, when it flings itself up in the wind, breasting on up, up—wings bent back, poised. Abandonment, freedom—chastened, shaped, controlled!

When, after the dance, the girl came and sat down beside her, she squeezed her hot little hand, but the caress was for her art, not for this moist little person with the lips avid of sugar-plums.

"Oh, did you like it? I'm so glad. Shall I go and put on my flame-colour, now?"

The moment she was gone, comment broke out freely. The dark and cynical Gallant thought the girl's dancing like a certain Napierkowska whom he had seen in Moscow, without her fire—the touch of passion would have to be supplied. She wanted love! Love! And suddenly Gyp was back in the concert-hall, listening to that other girl singing the song of a broken heart.

"Thy kiss, dear love

—Like watercress gathered fresh from cool streams."

Love! in this abode—of fauns' heads, deep cushions, silver dancing girls! Love! She had a sudden sense of deep abasement. What was she, herself, but just a feast for a man's senses? Her home, what but a place like this? Miss Daphne Wing was back again. Gyp looked at her husband's face while she was dancing. His lips! How was it that she could see that disturbance in him, and not care? If she had really loved him, to see his lips like that would have hurt her, but she might have understood perhaps, and forgiven. Now she neither quite understood nor quite forgave.

And that night, when he kissed her, she murmured:

"Would you rather it were that girl—not me?"

"That girl! I could swallow her at a draft. But you, my Gyp—I want to drink for ever!"

Was that true? IF she had loved him—how good to hear!

V

After this, Gyp was daily more and more in contact with high bohemia, that curious composite section of society which embraces the neck of music, poetry, and the drama. She was a success, but secretly she felt that she did not belong to it, nor, in truth, did Fiorsen, who was much too genuine a bohemian, and artist, and mocked at the Gallants and even the Roseks of this life, as he mocked at Winton, Aunt Rosamund, and their world. Life with him had certainly one effect on Gyp; it made her feel less and less a part of that old orthodox, well-bred world which she had known before she married him; but to which she had confessed to Winton she had never felt that she belonged, since she knew the secret of her birth. She was, in truth, much too impressionable, too avid of beauty, and perhaps too naturally critical to accept the dictates of their fact-and-form-governed routine; only, of her own accord, she would never have had initiative enough to step out of its circle. Loosened from those roots, unable to attach herself to this new soil, and not spiritually leagued with her husband, she was more and more lonely. Her only truly happy hours were those spent with Winton or at her piano or with her puppies. She was always wondering at what she had done, longing to find the deep, the sufficient reason for having done it. But the more she sought and longed, the deeper grew her bewilderment, her feeling of being in a cage. Of late, too, another and more definite uneasiness had come to her.

She spent much time in her garden, where the blossoms had all dropped, lilac was over, acacias coming into bloom, and blackbirds silent.

Winton, who, by careful experiment, had found that from half-past three to six there was little or no chance of stumbling across his son-in-law, came in nearly every day for tea and a quiet cigar on the lawn. He was sitting there with Gyp one afternoon, when Betty, who usurped the functions of parlour-maid whenever the whim moved her, brought out a card on which were printed the words, "Miss Daphne Wing."

"Bring her out, please, Betty dear, and some fresh tea, and buttered toast—plenty of buttered toast; yes, and the chocolates, and any other sweets there are, Betty darling."

Betty, with that expression which always came over her when she was called "darling," withdrew across the grass, and Gyp said to her father:

"It's the little dancer I told you of, Dad. Now you'll see something perfect. Only, she'll be dressed. It's a pity."

She was. The occasion had evidently exercised her spirit. In warm ivory, shrouded by leaf-green chiffon, with a girdle of tiny artificial leaves, and a lightly covered head encircled by other green leaves, she was somewhat like a nymph peering from a bower. If rather too arresting, it was charming, and, after all, no frock could quite disguise the beauty of her figure. She was evidently nervous.

"Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, I thought you wouldn't mind my coming. I did so want to see you again. Count Rosek said he thought I might. It's all fixed for my coming-out. Oh, how do you do?" And with lips and eyes opening at Winton, she sat down in the chair he placed for her. Gyp, watching his expression, felt inclined to laugh. Dad, and Daphne Wing! And the poor girl so evidently anxious to make a good impression! Presently she asked:

"Have you been dancing at Count Rosek's again lately?"

"Oh, yes, haven't you—didn't you—I—" And she stopped.

The thought flashed through Gyp, 'So Gustav's been seeing her, and hasn't told me!' But she said at once:

"Ah, yes, of course; I forgot. When is the night of your coming-out?"

"Next Friday week. Fancy! The Octagon. Isn't it splendid? They've given me such a good engagement. I do so want you and Mr. Fiorsen to come, though!"

Gyp, smiling, murmured:

"Of course we will. My father loves dancing, too; don't you, Dad?"

Winton took his cigar from his mouth.

"When it's good," he said, urbanely.

"Oh, mine IS good; isn't it, Mrs. Fiorsen? I mean, I HAVE worked—ever since I was thirteen, you know. I simply love it. I think YOU would dance beautifully, Mrs. Fiorsen. You've got such a perfect figure. I simply love to see you walk."

Gyp flushed, and said:

"Do have one of these, Miss Wing—they've got whole raspberries inside."

The little dancer put one in her mouth.

"Oh, but please don't call me Miss Wing! I wish you'd call me Daphne. Mr. Fior—everybody does."

Conscious of her father's face, Gyp murmured:

"It's a lovely name. Won't you have another? These are apricot."

"They're perfect. You know, my first dress is going to be all orange-blossom; Mr. Fiorsen suggested that. But I expect he told you. Perhaps you suggested it really; did you?" Gyp shook her head. "Count Rosek says the world is waiting for me—" She paused with a sugar-plum halfway to her lips, and added doubtfully: "Do you think that's true?"

Gyp answered with a soft: "I hope so."

"He says I'm something new. It would be nice to think that. He has great taste; so has Mr. Fiorsen, hasn't he?"

Conscious of the compression in the lips behind the smoke of her father's cigar, and with a sudden longing to get up and walk away, Gyp nodded.

The little dancer placed the sweet in her mouth, and said complacently:

"Of course he has; because he married you."

Then, seeming to grow conscious of Winton's eyes fixed so intently on her, she became confused, swallowed hastily, and said:

"Oh, isn't it lovely here—like the country! I'm afraid I must go; it's my practice-time. It's so important for me not to miss any now, isn't it?" And she rose.

Winton got up, too. Gyp saw the girl's eyes, lighting on his rigid hand, grow round and rounder; and from her, walking past the side of the house, the careful voice floated back:

"Oh, I do hope—" But what, could not be heard.

Sinking back in her chair, Gyp sat motionless. Bees were murmurous among her flowers, pigeons murmurous among the trees; the sunlight warmed her knees, and her stretched-out feet through the openwork of her stockings. The maid's laughter, the delicious growling of the puppies at play in the kitchen came drifting down the garden, with the distant cry of a milkman up the road. All was very peaceful. But in her heart were such curious, baffled emotions, such strange, tangled feelings. This moment of enlightenment regarding the measure of her husband's frankness came close on the heels of the moment fate had chosen for another revelation, for clinching within her a fear felt for weeks past. She had said to Winton that she did not want to have a child. In those conscious that their birth has caused death or even too great suffering, there is sometimes this hostile instinct. She had not even the consolation that Fiorsen wanted children; she knew that he did not. And now she was sure one was coming. But it was more than that. She had not reached, and knew she could not reach, that point of spirit-union which alone makes marriage sacred, and the sacrifices demanded by motherhood a joy. She was fairly caught in the web of her foolish and presumptuous mistake! So few months of marriage—and so sure that it was a failure, so hopeless for the future! In the light of this new certainty, it was terrifying. A hard, natural fact is needed to bring a yearning and bewildered spirit to knowledge of the truth. Disillusionment is not welcome to a woman's heart; the less welcome when it is disillusionment with self as much as with another. Her great dedication—her scheme of life! She had been going to—what?—save Fiorsen from himself! It was laughable. She had only lost herself. Already she felt in prison, and by a child would be all the more bound. To some women, the knowledge that a thing must be brings assuagement of the nerves. Gyp was the opposite of those. To force her was the way to stiver up every contrary emotion. She might will herself to acquiesce, but—one cannot change one's nature.

And so, while the pigeons cooed and the sunlight warmed her feet, she spent the bitterest moments of her life—so far. Pride came to her help. She had made a miserable mess of it, but no one must know

—certainly not her father, who had warned her so desperately! She had made her bed, and she would have to lie on it.

When Winton came back, he found her smiling, and said:

"I don't see the fascination, Gyp."

"Don't you think her face really rather perfect?"

"Common."

"Yes; but that drops off when she's dancing."

Winton looked at her from under half-closed eyelids.

"With her clothes? What does Fiorsen think of her?"

Gyp smiled.

"Does he think of her? I don't know."

She could feel the watchful tightening of his face. And suddenly he said:

"Daphne Wing! By George!"

The words were a masterpiece of resentment and distrust. His daughter in peril from—such as that!

After he was gone Gyp sat on till the sun had quite vanished and the dew was stealing through her thin frock. She would think of anything, anybody except herself! To make others happy was the way to be happy—or so they said. She would try—must try. Betty—so stout, and with that rheumatism in her leg—did she ever think of herself? Or Aunt Rosamund, with her perpetual rescuings of lost dogs, lame horses, and penniless musicians? And Dad, for all his man-of-the-world ways, was he not always doing little things for the men of his old regiment, always thinking of her, too, and what he could do to give her pleasure? To love everybody, and bring them happiness! Was it not possible? Only, people were hard to love, different from birds and beasts and flowers, to love which seemed natural and easy.

She went up to her room and began to dress for dinner. Which of her frocks did he like best? The pale, low-cut amber, or that white, soft one, with the coffee-dipped lace? She decided on the latter. Scrutinizing her supple, slender image in the glass, a shudder went through her. That would all go; she would be like those women taking careful exercise in the streets, who made her wonder at their hardihood in showing themselves. It wasn't fair that one must become unsightly, offensive to the eye, in order to bring life into the world. Some women seemed proud to be like that. How was that possible? She would never dare to show herself in the days coming.

She finished dressing and went downstairs. It was nearly eight, and Fiorsen had not come in. When the gong was struck, she turned from the window with a sigh, and went in to dinner. That sigh had been relief. She ate her dinner with the two pups beside her, sent them off, and sat down at her piano. She played Chopin—studies, waltzes, mazurkas, preludes, a polonaise or two. And Betty, who had a weakness for that composer, sat on a chair by the door which partitioned off the back premises, having opened it a little. She wished she could go and take a peep at her "pretty" in her white frock, with the candle-flames on each side, and those lovely lilies in the vase close by, smelling beautiful. And one of the maids coming too near, she shooed her angrily away.

It grew late. The tray had been brought up; the maids had gone to bed. Gyp had long stopped playing, had turned out, ready to go up, and, by the French window, stood gazing out into the dark. How warm it was—warm enough to draw forth the scent of the jessamine along the garden wall! Not a star. There always seemed so few stars in London. A sound made her swing round. Something tall was over there in the darkness, by the open door. She heard a sigh, and called out, frightened:

"Is that you, Gustav?"

He spoke some words that she could not understand. Shutting the window quickly, she went toward him. Light from the hall lit up one side of his face and figure. He was pale; his eyes shone strangely; his sleeve was all white. He said thickly:

"Little ghost!" and then some words that must be Swedish. It was the first time Gyp had ever come to close quarters with drunkenness. And her thought was simply: 'How awful if anybody were to see—how awful!' She made a rush to get into the hall and lock the door leading to the back regions, but he caught her frock, ripping the lace from her neck, and his entangled fingers clutched her shoulder. She stopped dead, fearing to make a noise or pull him over, and his other hand clutched her other shoulder,

so that he stood steadying himself by her. Why was she not shocked, smitten to the ground with grief and shame and rage? She only felt: "What am I to do? How get him upstairs without anyone knowing?" And she looked up into his face—it seemed to her so pathetic with its shining eyes and its staring whiteness that she could have burst into tears. She said gently:

"Gustav, it's all right. Lean on me; we'll go up."

His hands, that seemed to have no power or purpose, touched her cheeks, mechanically caressing. More than disgust, she felt that awful pity. Putting her arm round his waist, she moved with him toward the stairs. If only no one heard; if only she could get him quietly up! And she murmured:

"Don't talk; you're not well. Lean on me hard."

He seemed to make a big effort; his lips puffed out, and with an expression of pride that would have been comic if not so tragic, he muttered something.

Holding him close with all her strength, as she might have held one desperately loved, she began to mount. It was easier than she had thought. Only across the landing now, into the bedroom, and then the danger would be over. Done! He was lying across the bed, and the door shut. Then, for a moment, she gave way to a fit of shivering so violent that she could hear her teeth chattering yet could not stop them. She caught sight of herself in the big mirror. Her pretty lace was all torn; her shoulders were red where his hands had gripped her, holding himself up. She threw off her dress, put on a wrapper, and went up to him. He was lying in a sort of stupor, and with difficulty she got him to sit up and lean against the bed-rail. Taking off his tie and collar, she racked her brains for what to give him. *Sal volatile!* Surely that must be right. It brought him to himself, so that he even tried to kiss her. At last he was in bed, and she stood looking at him. His eyes were closed; he would not see if she gave way now. But she would not cry—she would not. One sob came—but that was all. Well, there was nothing to be done now but get into bed too. She undressed, and turned out the light. He was in a stertorous sleep. And lying there, with eyes wide open, staring into the dark, a smile came on her lips—a very strange smile! She was thinking of all those preposterous young wives she had read of, who, blushing, trembling, murmur into the ears of their young husbands that they "have something—something to tell them!"

VI

Looking at Fiorsen, next morning, still sunk in heavy sleep, her first thought was: 'He looks exactly the same.' And, suddenly, it seemed queer to her that she had not been, and still was not, disgusted. It was all too deep for disgust, and somehow, too natural. She took this new revelation of his unbridled ways without resentment. Besides, she had long known of this taste of his—one cannot drink brandy and not betray it.

She stole noiselessly from bed, noiselessly gathered up his boots and clothes all tumbled on to a chair, and took them forth to the dressing-room. There she held the garments up to the early light and brushed them, then, noiseless, stole back to bed, with needle and thread and her lace. No one must know; not even he must know. For the moment she had forgotten that other thing so terrifically important. It came back to her, very sudden, very sickening. So long as she could keep it secret, no one should know that either—he least of all.

The morning passed as usual; but when she came to the music-room at noon, she found that he had gone out. She was just sitting down to lunch when Betty, with the broad smile which prevailed on her moon-face when someone had tickled the right side of her, announced:

"Count Rosek."

Gyp got up, startled.

"Say that Mr. Fiorsen is not in, Betty. But—but ask if he will come and have some lunch, and get a bottle of hock up, please."

In the few seconds before her visitor appeared, Gyp experienced the sort of excitement one has entering a field where a bull is grazing.

But not even his severest critics could accuse Rosek of want of tact. He had hoped to see Gustav, but

it was charming of her to give him lunch—a great delight!

He seemed to have put off, as if for her benefit, his corsets, and some, at all events, of his offending looks—seemed simpler, more genuine. His face was slightly browned, as if, for once, he had been taking his due of air and sun. He talked without cynical submeanings, was most appreciative of her "charming little house," and even showed some warmth in his sayings about art and music. Gyp had never disliked him less. But her instincts were on the watch. After lunch, they went out across the garden to see the music-room, and he sat down at the piano. He had the deep, caressing touch that lies in fingers of steel worked by a real passion for tone. Gyp sat on the divan and listened. She was out of his sight there; and she looked at him, wondering. He was playing Schumann's Child Music. How could one who produced such fresh idyllic sounds have sinister intentions? And presently she said:

"Count Rosek!"

"Madame?"

"Will you please tell me why you sent Daphne Wing here yesterday?"

"I send her?"

"Yes."

But instantly she regretted having asked that question. He had swung round on the music-stool and was looking full at her. His face had changed.

"Since you ask me, I thought you should know that Gustav is seeing a good deal of her."

He had given the exact answer she had divined.

"Do you think I mind that?"

A flicker passed over his face. He got up and said quietly:

"I am glad that you do not."

"Why glad?"

She, too, had risen. Though he was little taller than herself, she was conscious suddenly of how thick and steely he was beneath his dapper garments, and of a kind of snaky will-power in his face. Her heart beat faster.

He came toward her and said:

"I am glad you understand that it is over with Gustav—finished—" He stopped dead, seeing at once that he had gone wrong, and not knowing quite where. Gyp had simply smiled. A flush coloured his cheeks, and he said:

"He is a volcano soon extinguished. You see, I know him. Better you should know him, too. Why do you smile?"

"Why is it better I should know?"

He went very pale, and said between his teeth:

"That you may not waste your time; there is love waiting for you."

But Gyp still smiled.

"Was it from love of me that you made him drunk last night?"

His lips quivered.

"Gyp!" Gyp turned. But with the merest change of front, he had put himself between her and the door. "You never loved him. That is my excuse. You have given him too much already—more than he is worth. Ah! God! I am tortured by you; I am possessed."

He had gone white through and through like a flame, save for his smouldering eyes. She was afraid, and because she was afraid, she stood her ground. Should she make a dash for the door that opened into the little lane and escape that way? Then suddenly he seemed to regain control; but she could feel that he was trying to break through her defences by the sheer intensity of his gaze—by a kind of mesmerism, knowing that he had frightened her.

Under the strain of this duel of eyes, she felt herself beginning to sway, to get dizzy. Whether or no he really moved his feet, he seemed coming closer inch by inch. She had a horrible feeling—as if his arms were already round her.

With an effort, she wrenched her gaze from his, and suddenly his crisp hair caught her eyes. Surely—surely it was curled with tongs! A kind of spasm of amusement was set free in her heart, and, almost inaudibly, the words escaped her lips: "Une technique merveilleuse!" His eyes wavered; he uttered a little gasp; his lips fell apart. Gyp walked across the room and put her hand on the bell. She had lost her fear. Without a word, he turned, and went out into the garden. She watched him cross the lawn. Gone! She had beaten him by the one thing not even violent passions can withstand—ridicule, almost unconscious ridicule. Then she gave way and pulled the bell with nervous violence. The sight of the maid, in her trim black dress and spotless white apron, coming from the house completed her restoration. Was it possible that she had really been frightened, nearly failing in that encounter, nearly dominated by that man—in her own house, with her own maids down there at hand? And she said quietly:

"I want the puppies, please."

"Yes, ma'am."

Over the garden, the day brooded in the first-gathered warmth of summer. Mid-June of a fine year. The air was drowsy with hum and scent.

And Gyp, sitting in the shade, while the puppies rolled and snapped, searched her little world for comfort and some sense of safety, and could not find it; as if there were all round her a hot heavy fog in which things lurked, and where she kept erect only by pride and the will not to cry out that she was struggling and afraid.

Fiorsen, leaving his house that morning, had walked till he saw a taxi-cab. Leaning back therein, with hat thrown off, he caused himself to be driven rapidly, at random. This was one of his habits when his mind was not at ease—an expensive idiosyncrasy, ill-afforded by a pocket that had holes. The swift motion and titillation by the perpetual close shaving of other vehicles were sedative to him. He needed sedatives this morning. To wake in his own bed without the least remembering how he had got there was no more new to him than to many another man of twenty-eight, but it was new since his marriage. If he had remembered even less he would have been more at ease. But he could just recollect standing in the dark drawing-room, seeing and touching a ghostly Gyp quite close to him. And, somehow, he was afraid. And when he was afraid—like most people—he was at his worst.

If she had been like all the other women in whose company he had eaten passion-fruit, he would not have felt this carking humiliation. If she had been like them, at the pace he had been going since he obtained possession of her, he would already have "finished," as Rosek had said. And he knew well enough that he had not "finished." He might get drunk, might be loose-ended in every way, but Gyp was hooked into his senses, and, for all that he could not get near her, into his spirit. Her very passivity was her strength, the secret of her magnetism. In her, he felt some of that mysterious sentiency of nature, which, even in yielding to man's fevers, lies apart with a faint smile—the uncapturable smile of the woods and fields by day or night, that makes one ache with longing. He felt in her some of the unfathomable, soft, vibrating indifference of the flowers and trees and streams, of the rocks, of birdsongs, and the eternal hum, under sunshine or star-shine. Her dark, half-smiling eyes enticed him, inspired an unquenchable thirst. And his was one of those natures which, encountering spiritual difficulty, at once jib off, seek anodynes, try to bandage wounded egoism with excess—a spoiled child, with the desperations and the inherent pathos, the something repulsive and the something lovable that belong to all such. Having wished for this moon, and got her, he now did not know what to do with her, kept taking great bites at her, with a feeling all the time of getting further and further away. At moments, he desired revenge for his failure to get near her spiritually, and was ready to commit follies of all kinds. He was only kept in control at all by his work. For he did work hard; though, even there, something was lacking. He had all the qualities of making good, except the moral backbone holding them together, which alone could give him his rightful—as he thought—pre-eminence. It often surprised and vexed him to find that some contemporary held higher rank than himself.

Threading the streets in his cab, he mused:

"Did I do anything that really shocked her last night? Why didn't I wait for her this morning and find out the worst?" And his lips twisted awry—for to find out the worst was not his forte. Meditation, seeking as usual a scapegoat, lighted on Rosek. Like most egoists addicted to women, he had not many friends. Rosek was the most constant. But even for him, Fiorsen had at once the contempt and fear that a man naturally uncontrolled and yet of greater scope has for one of less talent but stronger will-power. He had for him, too, the feeling of a wayward child for its nurse, mixed with the need that an artist,

especially an executant artist, feels for a connoisseur and patron with well-lined pockets.

'Curse Paul!' he thought. 'He must know—he does know—that brandy of his goes down like water. Trust him, he saw I was getting silly! He had some game on. Where did I go after? How did I get home?' And again: 'Did I hurt Gyp?' If the servants had seen—that would be the worst; that would upset her fearfully! And he laughed. Then he had a fresh access of fear. He didn't know her, never knew what she was thinking or feeling, never knew anything about her. And he thought angrily: 'That's not fair! I don't hide myself from her. I am as free as nature; I let her see everything. What did I do? That maid looked very queerly at me this morning!' And suddenly he said to the driver: "Bury Street, St. James's." He could find out, at all events, whether Gyp had been to her father's. The thought of Winton ever afflicted him; and he changed his mind several times before the cab reached that little street, but so swiftly that he had not time to alter his instructions to the driver. A light sweat broke out on his forehead while he was waiting for the door to be opened.

"Mrs. Fiorsen here?"

"No, sir."

"Not been here this morning?"

"No, sir."

He shrugged away the thought that he ought to give some explanation of his question, and got into the cab again, telling the man to drive to Curzon Street. If she had not been to "that Aunt Rosamund" either it would be all right. She had not. There was no one else she would go to. And, with a sigh of relief, he began to feel hungry, having had no breakfast. He would go to Rosek's, borrow the money to pay his cab, and lunch there. But Rosek was not in. He would have to go home to get the cab paid. The driver seemed to eye him queerly now, as though conceiving doubts about the fare.

Going in under the trellis, Fiorsen passed a man coming out, who held in his hand a long envelope and eyed him askance.

Gyp, who was sitting at her bureau, seemed to be adding up the counterfoils in her cheque-book. She did not turn round, and Fiorsen paused. How was she going to receive him?

"Is there any lunch?" he said.

She reached out and rang the bell. He felt sorry for himself. He had been quite ready to take her in his arms and say: "Forgive me, little Gyp; I'm sorry!"

Betty answered the bell.

"Please bring up some lunch for Mr. Fiorsen."

He heard the stout woman sniff as she went out. She was a part of his ostracism. And, with sudden rage, he said:

"What do you want for a husband—a bourgeois who would die if he missed his lunch?"

Gyp turned round to him and held out her cheque-book.

"I don't in the least mind about meals; but I do about this." He read on the counterfoil:

"Messrs. Travers & Sanborn, Tailors, Account rendered: L54 35s. 7d."

"Are there many of these, Gustav?"

Fiorsen had turned the peculiar white that marked deep injury to his self-esteem. He said violently:

"Well, what of that? A bill! Did you pay it? You have no business to pay my bills."

"The man said if it wasn't paid this time, he'd sue you." Her lips quivered. "I think owing money is horrible. It's undignified. Are there many others? Please tell me!"

"I shall not tell you. What is it to you?"

"It is a lot to me. I have to keep this house and pay the maids and everything, and I want to know how I stand. I am not going to make debts. That's hateful."

Her face had a hardness that he did not know. He perceived dimly that she was different from the Gyp of this hour yesterday—the last time when, in possession of his senses, he had seen or spoken to her. The novelty of her revolt stirred him in strange ways, wounded his self-conceit, inspired a curious

fear, and yet excited his senses. He came up to her, said softly:

"Money! Curse money! Kiss me!" With a certain amazement at the sheer distaste in her face, he heard her say:

"It's childish to curse money. I will spend all the income I have; but I will not spend more, and I will not ask Dad."

He flung himself down in a chair.

"Ho! Ho! Virtue!"

"No—pride."

He said gloomily:

"So you don't believe in me. You don't believe I can earn as much as I want—more than you have—any time? You never have believed in me."

"I think you earn now as much as you are ever likely to earn."

"That is what you think! I don't want money—your money! I can live on nothing, any time. I have done it—often."

"Hssh!"

He looked round and saw the maid in the doorway.

"Please, sir, the driver says can he have his fare, or do you want him again? Twelve shillings."

Fiorsen stared at her a moment in the way that—as the maid often said—made you feel like a silly.

"No. Pay him."

The girl glanced at Gyp, answered: "Yes, sir," and went out.

Fiorsen laughed; he laughed, holding his sides. It was droll coming on the top of his assertion, too droll! And, looking up at her, he said:

"That was good, wasn't it, Gyp?"

But her face had not abated its gravity; and, knowing that she was even more easily tickled by the incongruous than himself, he felt again that catch of fear. Something was different. Yes; something was really different.

"Did I hurt you last night?"

She shrugged her shoulders and went to the window. He looked at her darkly, jumped up, and swung out past her into the garden. And, almost at once, the sound of his violin, furiously played in the music-room, came across the lawn.

Gyp listened with a bitter smile. Money, too! But what did it matter? She could not get out of what she had done. She could never get out. Tonight he would kiss her; and she would pretend it was all right. And so it would go on and on! Well, it was her own fault. Taking twelve shillings from her purse, she put them aside on the bureau to give the maid. And suddenly she thought: 'Perhaps he'll get tired of me. If only he would get tired!' That was a long way the furthest she had yet gone.

VII

They who have known the doldrums—how the sails of the listless ship droop, and the hope of escape dies day by day—may understand something of the life Gyp began living now. On a ship, even doldrums come to an end. But a young woman of twenty-three, who has made a mistake in her marriage, and has only herself to blame, looks forward to no end, unless she be the new woman, which Gyp was not. Having settled that she would not admit failure, and clenched her teeth on the knowledge that she was going to have a child, she went on keeping things sealed up even from Winton. To Fiorsen, she

managed to behave as usual, making material life easy and pleasant for him—playing for him, feeding him well, indulging his amorousness. It did not matter; she loved no one else. To count herself a martyr would be silly! Her malaise, successfully concealed, was deeper—of the spirit; the subtle utter discouragement of one who has done for herself, clipped her own wings.

As for Rosek, she treated him as if that little scene had never taken place. The idea of appealing to her husband in a difficulty was gone for ever since the night he came home drunk. And she did not dare to tell her father. He would—what would he not do? But she was always on her guard, knowing that Rosek would not forgive her for that dart of ridicule. His insinuations about Daphne Wing she put out of mind, as she never could have if she had loved Fiorsen. She set up for herself the idol of pride, and became its faithful worshipper. Only Winton, and perhaps Betty, could tell she was not happy. Fiorsen's debts and irresponsibility about money did not worry her much, for she paid everything in the house—rent, wages, food, and her own dress—and had so far made ends meet; and what he did outside the house she could not help.

So the summer wore on till concerts were over, and it was supposed to be impossible to stay in London. But she dreaded going away. She wanted to be left quiet in her little house. It was this which made her tell Fiorsen her secret one night, after the theatre. He had begun to talk of a holiday, sitting on the edge of the settee, with a glass in his hand and a cigarette between his lips. His cheeks, white and hollow from too much London, went a curious dull red; he got up and stared at her. Gyp made an involuntary movement with her hands.

"You needn't look at me. It's true."

He put down glass and cigarette and began to tramp the room. And Gyp stood with a little smile, not even watching him. Suddenly he clasped his forehead and broke out:

"But I don't want it; I won't have it—spoiling my Gyp." Then quickly going up to her with a scared face: "I don't want it; I'm afraid of it. Don't have it."

In Gyp's heart came the same feeling as when he had stood there drunk, against the wall—compassion, rather than contempt of his childishness. And taking his hand she said:

"All right, Gustav. It shan't bother you. When I begin to get ugly, I'll go away with Betty till it's over."

He went down on his knees.

"Oh, no! Oh, no! Oh, no! My beautiful Gyp!"

And Gyp sat like a sphinx, for fear that she too might let slip those words: "Oh, no!"

The windows were open, and moths had come in. One had settled on the hydrangea plant that filled the hearth. Gyp looked at the soft, white, downy thing, whose head was like a tiny owl's against the bluish petals; looked at the purple-grey tiles down there, and the stuff of her own frock, in the shaded gleam of the lamps. And all her love of beauty rebelled, called up by his: "Oh, no!" She would be unsightly soon, and suffer pain, and perhaps die of it, as her own mother had died. She set her teeth, listening to that grown-up child revolting against what he had brought on her, and touched his hand, protectingly.

It interested, even amused her this night and next day to watch his treatment of the disconcerting piece of knowledge. For when at last he realized that he had to acquiesce in nature, he began, as she had known he would, to jib away from all reminder of it. She was careful not to suggest that he should go away without her, knowing his perversity. But when he proposed that she should come to Ostend with him and Rosek, she answered, after seeming deliberation, that she thought she had better not—she would rather stay at home quite quietly; but he must certainly go and get a good holiday.

When he was really gone, peace fell on Gyp—peace such as one feels, having no longer the tight, banded sensations of a fever. To be without that strange, disorderly presence in the house! When she woke in the sultry silence of the next morning, she utterly failed to persuade herself that she was missing him, missing the sound of his breathing, the sight of his rumpled hair on the pillow, the outline of his long form under the sheet. Her heart was devoid of any emptiness or ache; she only felt how pleasant and cool and tranquil it was to lie there alone. She stayed quite late in bed. It was delicious, with window and door wide open and the puppies running in and out, to lie and doze off, or listen to the pigeons' cooing, and the distant sounds of traffic, and feel in command once more of herself, body and soul. Now that she had told Fiorsen, she had no longer any desire to keep her condition secret. Feeling that it would hurt her father to learn of it from anyone but herself, she telephoned to tell him she was alone, and asked if she might come to Bury Street and dine with him.

Winton had not gone away, because, between Goodwood and Doncaster there was no racing that he cared for; one could not ride at this time of year, so might just as well be in London. In fact, August was perhaps the pleasantest of all months in town; the club was empty, and he could sit there without some old bore buttonholing him. Little Boncarte, the fencing-master, was always free for a bout—Winton had long learned to make his left hand what his right hand used to be; the Turkish baths in Jermyn Street were nearly void of their fat clients; he could saunter over to Covent Garden, buy a melon, and carry it home without meeting any but the most inferior duchesses in Piccadilly; on warm nights he could stroll the streets or the parks, smoking his cigar, his hat pushed back to cool his forehead, thinking vague thoughts, recalling vague memories. He received the news that his daughter was alone and free from that fellow with something like delight. Where should he dine her? Mrs. Markey was on her holiday. Why not Blafard's? Quiet—small rooms—not too respectable—quite fairly cool—good things to eat. Yes; Blafard's!

When she drove up, he was ready in the doorway, his thin brown face with its keen, half-veiled eyes the picture of composure, but feeling at heart like a schoolboy off for an exeat. How pretty she was looking—though pale from London—her dark eyes, her smile! And stepping quickly to the cab, he said:

"No; I'm getting in—dining at Blafard's, Gyp—a night out!"

It gave him a thrill to walk into that little restaurant behind her; and passing through its low red rooms to mark the diners turn and stare with envy—taking him, perhaps, for a different sort of relation. He settled her into a far corner by a window, where she could see the people and be seen. He wanted her to be seen; while he himself turned to the world only the short back wings of his glossy greyish hair. He had no notion of being disturbed in his enjoyment by the sight of Hivites and Amorites, or whatever they might be, lapping champagne and shining in the heat. For, secretly, he was living not only in this evening but in a certain evening of the past, when, in this very corner, he had dined with her mother. HIS face then had borne the brunt; hers had been turned away from inquisition. But he did not speak of this to Gyp.

She drank two full glasses of wine before she told him her news. He took it with the expression she knew so well—tightening his lips and staring a little upward. Then he said quietly:

"When?"

"November, Dad."

A shudder, not to be repressed, went through Winton. The very month! And stretching his hand across the table, he took hers and pressed it tightly.

"It'll be all right, child; I'm glad."

Clinging to his hand, Gyp murmured:

"I'm not; but I won't be frightened—I promise."

Each was trying to deceive the other; and neither was deceived. But both were good at putting a calm face on things. Besides, this was "a night out"—for her, the first since her marriage—of freedom, of feeling somewhat as she used to feel with all before her in a ballroom of a world; for him, the unfettered resumption of a dear companionship and a stealthy revel in the past. After his, "So he's gone to Ostend?" and his thought: 'He would!' they never alluded to Fiorsen, but talked of horses, of Mildenhams—it seemed to Gyp years since she had been there—of her childish escapades. And, looking at him quizzically, she asked:

"What were you like as a boy, Dad? Aunt Rosamund says that you used to get into white rages when nobody could go near you. She says you were always climbing trees, or shooting with a catapult, or stalking things, and that you never told anybody what you didn't want to tell them. And weren't you desperately in love with your nursery-governess?"

Winton smiled. How long since he had thought of that first affection. Miss Huntley! Helena Huntley—with crinkly brown hair, and blue eyes, and fascinating frocks! He remembered with what grief and sense of bitter injury he heard in his first school-holidays that she was gone. And he said:

"Yes, yes. By Jove, what a time ago! And my father's going off to India. He never came back; killed in that first Afghan business. When I was fond, I WAS fond. But I didn't feel things like you—not half so sensitive. No; not a bit like you, Gyp."

And watching her unconscious eyes following the movements of the waiters, never staring, but taking in all that was going on, he thought: 'Prettiest creature in the world!'

"Well," he said: "What would you like to do now—drop into a theatre or music-hall, or what?"

Gyp shook her head. It was so hot. Could they just drive, and then perhaps sit in the park? That would be lovely. It had gone dark, and the air was not quite so exhausted—a little freshness of scent from the trees in the squares and parks mingled with the fumes of dung and petrol. Winton gave the same order he had given that long past evening: "Knightsbridge Gate." It had been a hansom then, and the night air had blown in their faces, instead of as now in these infernal taxis, down the back of one's neck. They left the cab and crossed the Row; passed the end of the Long Water, up among the trees. There, on two chairs covered by Winton's coat, they sat side by side. No dew was falling yet; the heavy leaves hung unstirring; the air was warm, sweet-smelling. Blotted against trees or on the grass were other couples darker than the darkness, very silent. All was quiet save for the never-ceasing hum of traffic. From Winton's lips, the cigar smoke wreathed and curled. He was dreaming. The cigar between his teeth trembled; a long ash fell. Mechanically he raised his hand to brush it off—his right hand! A voice said softly in his ear:

"Isn't it delicious, and warm, and gloomy black?"

Winton shivered, as one shivers recalled from dreams; and, carefully brushing off the ash with his left hand, he answered:

"Yes; very jolly. My cigar's out, though, and I haven't a match."

Gyp's hand slipped through his arm.

"All these people in love, and so dark and whispery—it makes a sort of strangeness in the air. Don't you feel it?"

Winton murmured:

"No moon to-night!"

Again they were silent. A puff of wind ruffled the leaves; the night, for a moment, seemed full of whispering; then the sound of a giggle jarred out and a girl's voice:

"Oh! Chuck it, 'Arry."

Gyp rose.

"I feel the dew now, Dad. Can we walk on?"

They went along paths, so as not to wet her feet in her thin shoes. And they talked. The spell was over; the night again but a common London night; the park a space of parching grass and gravel; the people just clerks and shop-girls walking out.

VIII

Fiorsen's letters were the source of one long smile to Gyp. He missed her horribly; if only she were there!—and so forth—blended in the queerest way with the impression that he was enjoying himself uncommonly. There were requests for money, and careful omission of any real account of what he was doing. Out of a balance running rather low, she sent him remittances; this was her holiday, too, and she could afford to pay for it. She even sought out a shop where she could sell jewelry, and, with a certain malicious joy, forwarded him the proceeds. It would give him and herself another week.

One night she went with Winton to the Octagon, where Daphne Wing was still performing. Remembering the girl's squeaks of rapture at her garden, she wrote next day, asking her to lunch and spend a lazy afternoon under the trees.

The little dancer came with avidity. She was pale, and droopy from the heat, but happily dressed in Liberty silk, with a plain turn-down straw hat. They lunched off sweetbreads, ices, and fruit, and then, with coffee, cigarettes, and plenty of sugar-plums, settled down in the deepest shade of the garden, Gyp in a low wicker chair, Daphne Wing on cushions and the grass. Once past the exclamatory stage, she seemed a great talker, laying bare her little soul with perfect liberality. And Gyp—excellent listener—enjoyed it, as one enjoys all confidential revelations of existences very different from one's own, especially when regarded as a superior being.

"Of course I don't mean to stay at home any longer than I can help; only it's no good going out into life"—this phrase she often used—"till you know where you are. In my profession, one has to be so careful. Of course, people think it's worse than it is; father gets fits sometimes. But you know, Mrs. Fiorsen, home's awful. We have mutton—you know what mutton is—it's really awful in your bedroom in hot weather. And there's nowhere to practise. What I should like would be a studio. It would be lovely, somewhere down by the river, or up here near you. That WOULD be lovely. You know, I'm putting by. As soon as ever I have two hundred pounds, I shall skip. What I think would be perfectly lovely would be to inspire painters and musicians. I don't want to be just a common 'turn'—ballet business year after year, and that; I want to be something rather special. But mother's so silly about me; she thinks I oughtn't to take any risks at all. I shall never get on that way. It IS so nice to talk to you, Mrs. Fiorsen, because you're young enough to know what I feel; and I'm sure you'd never be shocked at anything. You see, about men: Ought one to marry, or ought one to take a lover? They say you can't be a perfect artist till you've felt passion. But, then, if you marry, that means mutton over again, and perhaps babies, and perhaps the wrong man after all. Ugh! But then, on the other hand, I don't want to be raffish. I hate raffish people—I simply hate them. What do you think? It's awfully difficult, isn't it?"

Gyp, perfectly grave, answered:

"That sort of thing settles itself. I shouldn't bother beforehand."

Miss Daphne Wing buried her perfect chin deeper in her hands, and said meditatively:

"Yes; I rather thought that, too; of course I could do either now. But, you see, I really don't care for men who are not distinguished. I'm sure I shall only fall in love with a really distinguished man. That's what you did— isn't it?—so you MUST understand. I think Mr. Fiorsen is wonderfully distinguished."

Sunlight, piercing the shade, suddenly fell warm on Gyp's neck where her blouse ceased, and fortunately stilled the medley of emotion and laughter a little lower down. She continued to look gravely at Daphne Wing, who resumed:

"Of course, Mother would have fits if I asked her such a question, and I don't know what Father would do. Only it is important, isn't it? One may go all wrong from the start; and I do really want to get on. I simply adore my work. I don't mean to let love stand in its way; I want to make it help, you know. Count Rosek says my dancing lacks passion. I wish you'd tell me if you think it does. I should believe YOU."

Gyp shook her head.

"I'm not a judge."

Daphne Wing looked up reproachfully.

"Oh, I'm sure you are! If I were a man, I should be passionately in love with you. I've got a new dance where I'm supposed to be a nymph pursued by a faun; it's so difficult to feel like a nymph when you know it's only the ballet-master. Do you think I ought to put passion into that? You see, I'm supposed to be flying all the time; but it would be much more subtle, wouldn't it, if I could give the impression that I wanted to be caught. Don't you think so?"

Gyp said suddenly:

"Yes, I think it WOULD do you good to be in love."

Miss Daphne's mouth fell a little open; her eyes grew round. She said:

"You frightened me when you said that. You looked so different—so—intense."

A flame indeed had leaped up in Gyp. This fluffy, flabby talk of love set her instincts in revolt. She did not want to love; she had failed to fall in love. But, whatever love was like, it did not bear talking about. How was it that this little suburban girl, when she once got on her toes, could twirl one's emotions as she did?

"D'you know what I should simply revel in?" Daphne Wing went on: "To dance to you here in the garden some night. It must be wonderful to dance out of doors; and the grass is nice and hard now. Only, I suppose it would shock the servants. Do they look out this way?" Gyp shook her head. "I could dance over there in front of the drawing-room window. Only it would have to be moonlight. I could come any Sunday. I've got a dance where I'm supposed to be a lotus flower—that would do splendidly. And there's my real moonlight dance that goes to Chopin. I could bring my dresses, and change in the music-room, couldn't I?" She wriggled up, and sat cross-legged, gazing at Gyp, and clasping her hands. "Oh, may I?"

Her excitement infected Gyp. A desire to give pleasure, the queerness of the notion, and her real love of seeing this girl dance, made her say:

"Yes; next Sunday."

Daphne Wing got up, made a rush, and kissed her. Her mouth was soft, and she smelled of orange blossom; but Gyp recoiled a little—she hated promiscuous kisses. Somewhat abashed, Miss Daphne hung her head, and said:

"You did look so lovely; I couldn't help it, really."

And Gyp gave her hand the squeeze of compunction.

They went indoors, to try over the music of the two dances; and soon after Daphne Wing departed, full of sugar-plums and hope.

She arrived punctually at eight o'clock next Sunday, carrying an exiguous green linen bag, which contained her dresses. She was subdued, and, now that it had come to the point, evidently a little scared. Lobster salad, hock, and peaches restored her courage. She ate heartily. It did not apparently matter to her whether she danced full or empty; but she would not smoke.

"It's bad for the—" She checked herself.

When they had finished supper, Gyp shut the dogs into the back premises; she had visions of their rending Miss Wing's draperies, or calves. Then they went into the drawing-room, not lighting up, that they might tell when the moonlight was strong enough outside. Though it was the last night of August, the heat was as great as ever—a deep, unstimulating warmth; the climbing moon shot as yet but a thin shaft here and there through the heavy foliage. They talked in low voices, unconsciously playing up to the nature of the escapade. As the moon drew up, they stole out across the garden to the music-room. Gyp lighted the candles.

"Can you manage?"

Miss Daphne had already shed half her garments.

"Oh, I'm so excited, Mrs. Fiorsen! I do hope I shall dance well."

Gyp stole back to the house; it being Sunday evening, the servants had been easily disposed of. She sat down at the piano, turning her eyes toward the garden. A blurred white shape flitted suddenly across the darkness at the far end and became motionless, as it might be a white-flowering bush under the trees. Miss Daphne had come out, and was waiting for the moon. Gyp began to play. She pitched on a little Sicilian pastorale that the herdsmen play on their pipes coming down from the hills, softly, from very far, rising, rising, swelling to full cadence, and failing, failing away again to nothing. The moon rose over the trees; its light flooded the face of the house, down on to the grass, and spread slowly back toward where the girl stood waiting. It caught the border of sunflowers along the garden wall with a stroke of magical, unearthly colour—gold that was not gold.

Gyp began to play the dance. The pale blurr in the darkness stirred. The moonlight fell on the girl now, standing with arms spread, holding out her drapery—a white, winged statue. Then, like a gigantic moth she fluttered forth, blanched and noiseless flew over the grass, spun and hovered. The moonlight etched out the shape of her head, painted her hair with pallid gold. In the silence, with that unearthly gleam of colour along the sunflowers and on the girl's head, it was as if a spirit had dropped into the garden and was fluttering to and fro, unable to get out.

A voice behind Gyp said: "My God! What's this? An angel?"

Fiorsen was standing half-way in the darkened room staring out into the garden, where the girl had halted, transfixed before the window, her eyes as round as saucers, her mouth open, her limbs rigid with interest and affright. Suddenly she turned and, gathering her garment, fled, her limbs gleaming in the moonlight.

And Gyp sat looking up at the apparition of her husband. She could just see his eyes straining after that flying nymph. Miss Daphne's faun! Why, even his ears were pointed! Had she never noticed before, how like a faun he was? Yes—on her wedding-night! And she said quietly:

"Daphne Wing was rehearsing her new dance. So you're back! Why didn't you let me know? Are you all right—you look splendid!"

Fiorsen bent down and clutched her by the shoulders.

"My Gyp! Kiss me!"

But even while his lips were pressed on hers, she felt rather than saw his eyes straying to the garden, and thought, "He would like to be kissing that girl!"

The moment he had gone to get his things from the cab, she slipped out to the music-room.

Miss Daphne was dressed, and stuffing her garments into the green linen bag. She looked up, and said piteously:

"Oh! Does he mind? It's awful, isn't it?"

Gyp strangled her desire to laugh.

"It's for you to mind."

"Oh, I don't, if you don't! How did you like the dance?"

"Lovely! When you're ready—come along!"

"Oh, I think I'd rather go home, please! It must seem so funny!"

"Would you like to go by this back way into the lane? You turn to the right, into the road."

"Oh, yes; please. It would have been better if he could have seen the dance properly, wouldn't it? What will he think?"

Gyp smiled, and opened the door into the lane. When she returned, Fiorsen was at the window, gazing out. Was it for her or for that flying nymph?

IX

September and October passed. There were more concerts, not very well attended. Fiorsen's novelty had worn off, nor had his playing sweetness and sentiment enough for the big Public. There was also a financial crisis. It did not seem to Gyp to matter. Everything seemed remote and unreal in the shadow of her coming time. Unlike most mothers to be, she made no garments, no preparations of any kind. Why make what might never be needed? She played for Fiorsen a great deal, for herself not at all, read many books—poetry, novels, biographies—taking them in at the moment, and forgetting them at once, as one does with books read just to distract the mind. Winton and Aunt Rosamund, by tacit agreement, came on alternate afternoons. And Winton, almost as much under that shadow as Gyp herself, would take the evening train after leaving her, and spend the next day racing or cub-hunting, returning the morning of the day after to pay his next visit. He had no dread just then like that of an unoccupied day face to face with anxiety.

Betty, who had been present at Gyp's birth, was in a queer state. The obvious desirability of such events to one of motherly type defrauded by fate of children was terribly impinged on by that old memory, and a solicitude for her "pretty" far exceeding what she would have had for a daughter of her own. What a peony regards as a natural happening to a peony, she watches with awe when it happens to the lily. That other single lady of a certain age, Aunt Rosamund, the very antithesis to Betty—a long, thin nose and a mere button, a sense of divine rights and no sense of rights at all, a drawl and a comforting wheeze, length and circumference, decision and the curtsy to providence, humour and none, dyspepsia, and the digestion of an ostrich, with other oppositions—Aunt Rosamund was also uneasy, as only one could be who disapproved heartily of uneasiness, and habitually joked and drawled it into retirement.

But of all those round Gyp, Fiorsen gave the most interesting display. He had not even an elementary notion of disguising his state of mind. And his state of mind was weirdly, wistfully primitive. He wanted Gyp as she had been. The thought that she might never become herself again terrified him so at times that he was forced to drink brandy, and come home only a little less far gone than that first time. Gyp had often to help him go to bed. On two or three occasions, he suffered so that he was out all night. To account for this, she devised the formula of a room at Count Rosek's, where he slept when music kept him late, so as not to disturb her. Whether the servants believed her or not, she never knew. Nor did she ever ask him where he went—too proud, and not feeling that she had the right.

Deeply conscious of the unaesthetic nature of her condition, she was convinced that she could no longer be attractive to one so easily upset in his nerves, so intolerant of ugliness. As to deeper feelings about her—had he any? He certainly never gave anything up, or sacrificed himself in any way. If she had loved, she felt she would want to give up everything to the loved one; but then—she would never love! And yet he seemed frightened about her. It was puzzling! But perhaps she would not be puzzled much longer about that or anything; for she often had the feeling that she would die. How could she be going to live, grudging her fate? What would give her strength to go through with it? And, at times, she felt as if she would be glad to die. Life had defrauded her, or she had defrauded herself of life. Was it really only a year since that glorious day's hunting when Dad and she, and the young man with the clear eyes and the irrepressible smile, had slipped away with the hounds ahead of all the field—the fatal day Fiorsen descended from the clouds and asked for her? An overwhelming longing for Mildenhams came on her, to get away there with her father and Betty.

She went at the beginning of November.

Over her departure, Fiorsen behaved like a tired child that will not go to bed. He could not bear to be away from her, and so forth; but when she had gone, he spent a furious bohemian evening. At about five, he woke with "an awful cold feeling in my heart," as he wrote to Gyp next day—"an awful feeling, my Gyp; I walked up and down for hours" (in reality, half an hour at most). "How shall I bear to be away from you at this time? I feel lost." Next day, he found himself in Paris with Rosek. "I could not stand," he wrote, "the sight of the streets, of the garden, of our room. When I come back I shall stay with Rosek. Nearer to the day I will come; I must come to you." But Gyp, when she read the letter, said to Winton: "Dad, when it comes, don't send for him. I don't want him here."

With those letters of his, she buried the last remnants of her feeling that somewhere in him there must be something as fine and beautiful as the sounds he made with his violin. And yet she felt those letters genuine in a way, pathetic, and with real feeling of a sort.

From the moment she reached Mildenhams, she began to lose that hopelessness about herself; and, for the first time, had the sensation of wanting to live in the new life within her. She first felt it, going into her old nursery, where everything was the same as it had been when she first saw it, a child of eight; there was her old red doll's house, the whole side of which opened to display the various floors; the worn Venetian blinds, the rattle of whose fall had sounded in her ears so many hundred times; the high fender, near which she had lain so often on the floor, her chin on her hands, reading Grimm, or "Alice in Wonderland," or histories of England. Here, too, perhaps this new child would live amongst the old familiars. And the whim seized her to face her hour in her old nursery, not in the room where she had slept as a girl. She would not like the daintiness of that room deflowered. Let it stay the room of her girlhood. But in the nursery—there was safety, comfort! And when she had been at Mildenhams a week, she made Betty change her over.

No one in that house was half so calm to look at in those days as Gyp. Betty was not guiltless of sitting on the stairs and crying at odd moments. Mrs. Markey had never made such bad soups. Markey so far forgot himself as frequently to talk. Winton lamed a horse trying an impossible jump that he might get home the quicker, and, once back, was like an unquiet spirit. If Gyp were in the room, he would make the pretence of wanting to warm his feet or hand, just to stroke her shoulder as he went back to his chair. His voice, so measured and dry, had a ring in it, that too plainly disclosed the anxiety of his heart. Gyp, always sensitive to atmosphere, felt cradled in all the love about her. Wonderful that they should all care so much! What had she done for anyone, that people should be so sweet—he especially, whom she had so grievously distressed by her wretched marriage? She would sit staring into the fire with her wide, dark eyes, unblinking as an owl's at night—wondering what she could do to make up to her father, whom already once she had nearly killed by coming into life. And she began to practise the bearing of the coming pain, trying to project herself into this unknown suffering, so that it should not surprise from her cries and contortions.

She had one dream, over and over again, of sinking and sinking into a feather bed, growing hotter and more deeply walled in by that which had no stay in it, yet through which her body could not fall and reach anything more solid. Once, after this dream, she got up and spent the rest of the night wrapped in a blanket and the eider-down, on the old sofa, where, as a child, they had made her lie flat on her back from twelve to one every day. Betty was aghast at finding her there asleep in the morning. Gyp's face was so like the child-face she had seen lying there in the old days, that she bundled out of the room and cried bitterly into the cup of tea. It did her good. Going back with the tea, she scolded her "pretty" for sleeping out there, with the fire out, too!

But Gyp only said:

"Betty, darling, the tea's awfully cold! Please get me some more!"

From the day of the nurse's arrival, Winton gave up hunting. He could not bring himself to be out of doors for more than half an hour at a time. Distrust of doctors did not prevent him having ten minutes every morning with the old practitioner who had treated Gyp for mumps, measles, and the other blessings of childhood. The old fellow—his name was Rivershaw—was a most peculiar survival. He smelled of mackintosh, had round purplish cheeks, a rim of hair which people said he dyed, and bulging grey eyes slightly bloodshot. He was short in body and wind, drank port wine, was suspected of taking snuff, read *The Times*, spoke always in a husky voice, and used a very small brougham with a very old black horse. But he had a certain low cunning, which had defeated many ailments, and his reputation for assisting people into the world stood extremely high. Every morning punctually at twelve, the crunch of his little brougham's wheels would be heard. Winton would get up, and, taking a deep breath, cross the hall to the dining-room, extract from a sideboard a decanter of port, a biscuit-canister, and one glass. He would then stand with his eyes fixed on the door, till, in due time, the doctor would appear, and he could say:

"Well, doctor? How is she?"

"Nicely; quite nicely."

"Nothing to make one anxious?"

The doctor, puffing out his cheeks, with eyes straying to the decanter, would murmur:

"Cardiac condition, capital—a little—um—not to matter. Taking its course. These things!"

And Winton, with another deep breath, would say:

"Glass of port, doctor?"

An expression of surprise would pass over the doctor's face.

"Cold day—ah, perhaps—" And he would blow his nose on his purple-and-red bandanna.

Watching him drink his port, Winton would mark:

"We can get you at any time, can't we?"

And the doctor, sucking his lips, would answer:

"Never fear, my dear sir! Little Miss Gyp—old friend of mine. At her service day and night. Never fear!"

A sensation of comfort would pass through Winton, which would last quite twenty minutes after the crunching of the wheels and the mingled perfumes of him had died away.

In these days, his greatest friend was an old watch that had been his father's before him; a gold repeater from Switzerland, with a chipped dial-plate, and a case worn wondrous thin and smooth—a favourite of Gyp's childhood. He would take it out about every quarter of an hour, look at its face without discovering the time, finger it, all smooth and warm from contact with his body, and put it back. Then he would listen. There was nothing whatever to listen to, but he could not help it. Apart from this, his chief distraction was to take a foil and make passes at a leather cushion, set up on the top of a low bookshelf. In these occupations, varied by constant visits to the room next the nursery, where—to save her the stairs—Gyp was now established, and by excursions to the conservatory to see if he could not find some new flower to take her, he passed all his time, save when he was eating, sleeping, or smoking cigars, which he had constantly to be relighting.

By Gyp's request, they kept from him knowledge of when her pains began. After that first bout was over and she was lying half asleep in the old nursery, he happened to go up. The nurse—a bonny creature—one of those free, independent, economic agents that now abound—met him in the sitting-room. Accustomed to the "fuss and botheration of men" at such times, she was prepared to deliver him a little lecture. But, in approaching, she became affected by the look on his face, and, realizing somehow that she was in the presence of one whose self-control was proof, she simply whispered:

"It's beginning; but don't be anxious—she's not suffering just now. We shall send for the doctor soon. She's very plucky"; and with an unaccustomed sensation of respect and pity she repeated: "Don't be anxious, sir."

"If she wants to see me at any time, I shall be in my study. Save her all you can, nurse."

The nurse was left with a feeling of surprise at having used the word "Sir"; she had not done such a thing since—since—! And, pensive, she returned to the nursery, where Gyp said at once:

"Was that my father? I didn't want him to know."

The nurse answered mechanically:

"That's all right, my dear."

"How long do you think before—before it'll begin again, nurse? I'd like to see him."

The nurse stroked her hair.

"Soon enough when it's all over and comfy. Men are always fidgety."

Gyp looked at her, and said quietly:

"Yes. You see, my mother died when I was born."

The nurse, watching those lips, still pale with pain, felt a queer pang. She smoothed the bed-clothes and said:

"That's nothing—it often happens—that is, I mean,—you know it has no connection whatever."

And seeing Gyp smile, she thought: 'Well, I am a fool.'

"If by any chance I don't get through, I want to be cremated; I want to go back as quick as I can. I can't bear the thought of the other thing. Will you remember, nurse? I can't tell my father that just now; it might upset him. But promise me."

And the nurse thought: 'That can't be done without a will or something, but I'd better promise. It's a morbid fancy, and yet she's not a morbid subject, either.' And she said:

"Very well, my dear; only, you're not going to do anything of the sort. That's flat."

Gyp smiled again, and there was silence, till she said:

"I'm awfully ashamed, wanting all this attention, and making people miserable. I've read that Japanese women quietly go out somewhere by themselves and sit on a gate."

The nurse, still busy with the bedclothes, murmured abstractedly:

"Yes, that's a very good way. But don't you fancy you're half the trouble most of them are. You're very good, and you're going to get on splendidly." And she thought: 'Odd! She's never once spoken of her husband. I don't like it for this sort—too perfect, too sensitive; her face touches you so!'

Gyp murmured again:

"I'd like to see my father, please; and rather quick."

The nurse, after one swift look, went out.

Gyp, who had clinched her hands under the bedclothes, fixed her eyes on the window. November! Acorns and the leaves—the nice, damp, earthy smell! Acorns all over the grass. She used to drive the old retriever in harness on the lawn covered with acorns and the dead leaves, and the wind still blowing them off the trees—in her brown velvet—that was a ducky dress! Who was it had called her once "a wise little owl," in that dress? And, suddenly, her heart sank. The pain was coming again. Winton's voice from the door said:

"Well, my pet?"

"It was only to see how you are. I'm all right. What sort of a day is it? You'll go riding, won't you? Give my love to the horses. Good-bye, Dad; just for now."

Her forehead was wet to his lips.

Outside, in the passage, her smile, like something actual on the air, preceded him—the smile that had just lasted out. But when he was back in the study, he suffered—suffered! Why could he not have that pain to bear instead?

The crunch of the brougham brought his ceaseless march over the carpet to an end. He went out into the hall and looked into the doctor's face—he had forgotten that this old fellow knew nothing of his special reason for deadly fear. Then he turned back into his study. The wild south wind brought wet drift-leaves whirling against the panes. It was here that he had stood looking out into the dark, when Fiorsen came down to ask for Gyp a year ago. Why had he not bundled the fellow out neck and crop, and taken her away?—India, Japan—anywhere would have done! She had not loved that fiddler, never really loved him. Monstrous—monstrous! The full bitterness of having missed right action swept over Winton, and he positively groaned aloud. He moved from the window and went over to the bookcase; there in one row were the few books he ever read, and he took one out. "Life of General Lee." He put it back and took another, a novel of Whyte Melville's: "Good for Nothing." Sad book—sad ending! The book dropped from his hand and fell with a flump on the floor. In a sort of icy discovery, he had seen his life as it would be if for a second time he had to bear such loss. She must not—could not die! If she did—then, for him—! In old times they buried a man with his horse and his dog, as if at the end of a good run. There was always that! The extremity of this thought brought relief. He sat down, and, for a long time, stayed staring into the fire in a sort of coma. Then his feverish fears began again. Why the devil didn't they come and tell him something, anything—rather than this silence, this deadly solitude and waiting? What was that? The front door shutting. Wheels? Had that hell-hound of an old doctor sneaked off? He started up. There at the door was Markey, holding in his hand some cards. Winton scanned them.

"Lady Summerhay; Mr. Bryan Summerhay. I said, 'Not at home,' sir."

Winton nodded.

"Well?"

"Nothing at present. You have had no lunch, sir."

"What time is it?"

"Four o'clock."

"Bring in my fur coat and the port, and make the fire up. I want any news there is."

Markey nodded.

Odd to sit in a fur coat before a fire, and the day not cold! They said you lived on after death. He had never been able to feel that SHE was living on. SHE lived in Gyp. And now if Gyp—! Death—your own—no great matter! But—for her! The wind was dropping with the darkness. He got up and drew the curtains.

It was seven o'clock when the doctor came down into the hall, and stood rubbing his freshly washed hands before opening the study door. Winton was still sitting before the fire, motionless, shrunk into his fur coat. He raised himself a little and looked round dully.

The doctor's face puckered, his eyelids drooped half-way across his bulging eyes; it was his way of smiling. "Nicely," he said; "nicely—a girl. No complications."

Winton's whole body seemed to swell, his lips opened, he raised his hand. Then, the habit of a lifetime catching him by the throat, he stayed motionless. At last he got up and said:

"Glass of port, doctor?"

The doctor spying at him above the glass thought: 'This is "the fifty-two." Give me "the sixty-eight"—more body.'

After a time, Winton went upstairs. Waiting in the outer room he had a return of his cold dread. "Perfectly successful—the patient died from exhaustion!" The tiny squawking noise that fell on his ears entirely failed to reassure him. He cared nothing for that new being. Suddenly he found Betty just behind him, her bosom heaving horribly.

"What is it, woman? Don't!"

She had leaned against his shoulder, appearing to have lost all sense of right and wrong, and, out of her sobbing, gurgled:

"She looks so lovely—oh dear, she looks so lovely!"

Pushing her abruptly from him, Winton peered in through the just-opened door. Gyp was lying extremely still, and very white; her eyes, very large, very dark, were fastened on her baby. Her face

wore a kind of wonder. She did not see Winton, who stood stone-quiet, watching, while the nurse moved about her business behind a screen. This was the first time in his life that he had seen a mother with her just-born baby. That look on her face—gone right away somewhere, right away—amazed him. She had never seemed to like children, had said she did not want a child. She turned her head and saw him. He went in. She made a faint motion toward the baby, and her eyes smiled. Winton looked at that swaddled speckled mite; then, bending down, he kissed her hand and tiptoed away.

At dinner he drank champagne, and benevolence towards all the world spread in his being. Watching the smoke of his cigar wreath about him, he thought: 'Must send that chap a wire.' After all, he was a fellow being—might be suffering, as he himself had suffered only two hours ago. To keep him in ignorance—it wouldn't do! And he wrote out the form—

"All well, a daughter.—WINTON,"

and sent it out with the order that a groom should take it in that night.

Gyp was sleeping when he stole up at ten o'clock.

He, too, turned in, and slept like a child.

XI

Returning the next afternoon from the first ride for several days, Winton passed the station fly rolling away from the drive-gate with the light-hearted disillusionment peculiar to quite empty vehicles.

The sight of a fur coat and broad-brimmed hat in the hall warned him of what had happened.

"Mr. Fiorsen, sir; gone up to Mrs. Fiorsen."

Natural, but a d—d bore! And bad, perhaps, for Gyp. He asked:

"Did he bring things?"

"A bag, sir."

"Get a room ready, then."

To dine tete-a-tete with that fellow!

Gyp had passed the strangest morning in her life, so far. Her baby fascinated her, also the tug of its lips, giving her the queerest sensation, almost sensual; a sort of meltedness, an infinite warmth, a desire to grip the little creature right into her—which, of course, one must not do. And yet, neither her sense of humour nor her sense of beauty were deceived. It was a queer little affair with a tuft of black hair, in grace greatly inferior to a kitten. Its tiny, pink, crisped fingers with their infinitesimal nails, its microscopic curly toes, and solemn black eyes—when they showed, its inimitable stillness when it slept, its incredible vigour when it fed, were all, as it were, miraculous. Withal, she had a feeling of gratitude to one that had not killed nor even hurt her so very desperately—gratitude because she had succeeded, performed her part of mother perfectly—the nurse had said so—she, so distrustful of herself! Instinctively she knew, too, that this was HER baby, not his, going "to take after her," as they called it. How it succeeded in giving that impression she could not tell, unless it were the passivity, and dark eyes of the little creature. Then from one till three they had slept together with perfect soundness and unanimity. She awoke to find the nurse standing by the bed, looking as if she wanted to tell her something.

"Someone to see you, my dear."

And Gyp thought: 'He! I can't think quickly; I ought to think quickly—I want to, but I can't.' Her face expressed this, for the nurse said at once:

"I don't think you're quite up to it yet."

Gyp answered:

"Yes. Only, not for five minutes, please."

Her spirit had been very far away, she wanted time to get it back before she saw him—time to know in some sort what she felt now; what this mite lying beside her had done for her and him. The thought that it was his, too—this tiny, helpless being—seemed unreal. No, it was not his! He had not wanted it, and now that she had been through the torture it was hers, not his—never his. The memory of the night when she first yielded to the certainty that the child was coming, and he had come home drunk, swooped on her, and made her shrink and shudder and put her arm round her baby. It had not made any difference. Only—Back came the old accusing thought, from which these last days she had been free: 'But I married him—I chose to marry him. I can't get out of that!' And she felt as if she must cry out to the nurse: "Keep him away; I don't want to see him. Oh, please, I'm tired." She bit the words back. And presently, with a very faint smile, said:

"Now, I'm ready."

She noticed first what clothes he had on—his newest suit, dark grey, with little lighter lines—she had chosen it herself; that his tie was in a bow, not a sailor's knot, and his hair brighter than usual—as always just after being cut; and surely the hair was growing down again in front of his ears. Then, gratefully, almost with emotion, she realized that his lips were quivering, his whole face quivering. He came in on tiptoe, stood looking at her a minute, then crossed very swiftly to the bed, very swiftly knelt down, and, taking her hand, turned it over and put his face to it. The bristles of his moustache tickled her palm; his nose flattened itself against her fingers, and his lips kept murmuring words into the hand, with the moist warm touch of his lips. Gyp knew he was burying there all his remorse, perhaps the excesses he had committed while she had been away from him, burying the fears he had felt, and the emotion at seeing her so white and still. She felt that in a minute he would raise a quite different face. And it flashed through her: "If I loved him I wouldn't mind what he did—ever! Why don't I love him? There's something loveable. Why don't I?"

He did raise his face; his eyes lighted on the baby, and he grinned.

"Look at this!" he said. "Is it possible? Oh, my Gyp, what a funny one! Oh, oh, oh!" He went off into an ecstasy of smothered laughter; then his face grew grave, and slowly puckered into a sort of comic disgust. Gyp too had seen the humours of her baby, of its queer little reddish pudge of a face, of its twenty-seven black hairs, and the dribble at its almost invisible mouth; but she had also seen it as a miracle; she had felt it, and there surged up from her all the old revolt and more against his lack of consideration. It was not a funny one—her baby! It was not ugly! Or, if it were, she was not fit to be told of it. Her arm tightened round the warm bundled thing against her. Fiorsen put his finger out and touched its cheek.

"It IS real—so it is. Mademoiselle Fiorsen. Tk, tk!"

The baby stirred. And Gyp thought: 'If I loved I wouldn't even mind his laughing at my baby. It would be different.'

"Don't wake her!" she whispered. She felt his eyes on her, knew that his interest in the baby had ceased as suddenly as it came, that he was thinking, "How long before I have you in my arms again?" He touched her hair. And, suddenly, she had a fainting, sinking sensation that she had never yet known. When she opened her eyes again, the economic agent was holding something beneath her nose and making sounds that seemed to be the words: "Well, I am a d—d fool!" repeatedly expressed. Fiorsen was gone.

Seeing Gyp's eyes once more open, the nurse withdrew the ammonia, replaced the baby, and saying: "Now go to sleep!" withdrew behind the screen. Like all robust personalities, she visited on others her vexations with herself. But Gyp did not go to sleep; she gazed now at her sleeping baby, now at the pattern of the wall-paper, trying mechanically to find the bird caught at intervals amongst its brown-and-green foliage—one bird in each alternate square of the pattern, so that there was always a bird in the centre of four other birds. And the bird was of green and yellow with a red beak.

On being turned out of the nursery with the assurance that it was "all right—only a little faint," Fiorsen went down-stairs disconsolate. The atmosphere of this dark house where he was a stranger, an unwelcome stranger, was insupportable. He wanted nothing in it but Gyp, and Gyp had fainted at his touch. No wonder he felt miserable. He opened a door. What room was this? A piano! The drawing-room. Ugh! No fire—what misery! He recoiled to the doorway and stood listening. Not a sound. Grey light in the cheerless room; almost dark already in the hall behind him. What a life these English lived—worse than the winter in his old country home in Sweden, where, at all events, they kept good fires. And, suddenly, all his being revolted. Stay here and face that father—and that image of a servant! Stay here for a night of this! Gyp was not his Gyp, lying there with that baby beside her, in this hostile house. Smothering his footsteps, he made for the outer hall. There were his coat and hat. He put them on. His bag? He could not see it. No matter! They could send it after him. He would write to her—say

that her fainting had upset him—that he could not risk making her faint again—could not stay in the house so near her, yet so far. She would understand. And there came over him a sudden wave of longing. Gyp! He wanted her. To be with her! To look at her and kiss her, and feel her his own again! And, opening the door, he passed out on to the drive and strode away, miserable and sick at heart. All the way to the station through the darkening lanes, and in the railway carriage going up, he felt that aching wretchedness. Only in the lighted street, driving back to Rosek's, did he shake it off a little. At dinner and after, drinking that special brandy he nearly lost it; but it came back when he went to bed, till sleep relieved him with its darkness and dreams.

XII

Gyp's recovery proceeded at first with a sure rapidity which delighted Winton. As the economic agent pointed out, she was beautifully made, and that had a lot to do with it!

Before Christmas Day, she was already out, and on Christmas morning the old doctor, by way of present, pronounced her fit and ready to go home when she liked. That afternoon, she was not so well, and next day back again upstairs. Nothing seemed definitely wrong, only a sort of desperate lassitude; as if the knowledge that to go back was within her power, only needing her decision, had been too much for her. And since no one knew her inward feelings, all were puzzled except Winton. The nursing of her child was promptly stopped.

It was not till the middle of January that she said to him.

"I must go home, Dad."

The word "home" hurt him, and he only answered:

"Very well, Gyp; when?"

"The house is quite ready. I think I had better go to-morrow. He's still at Rosek's. I won't let him know. Two or three days there by myself first would be better for settling baby in."

"Very well; I'll take you up."

He made no effort to ascertain her feelings toward Fiorsen. He knew too well.

They travelled next day, reaching London at half-past two. Betty had gone up in the early morning to prepare the way. The dogs had been with Aunt Rosamund all this time. Gyp missed their greeting; but the installation of Betty and the baby in the spare room that was now to be the nursery, absorbed all her first energies. Light was just beginning to fail when, still in her fur, she took a key of the music-room and crossed the garden, to see how all had fared during her ten weeks' absence. What a wintry garden! How different from that languorous, warm, moonlit night when Daphne Wing had come dancing out of the shadow of the dark trees. How bare and sharp the boughs against the grey, darkening sky—and not a song of any bird, not a flower! She glanced back at the house. Cold and white it looked, but there were lights in her room and in the nursery, and someone just drawing the curtains. Now that the leaves were off, one could see the other houses of the road, each different in shape and colour, as is the habit of London houses. It was cold, frosty; Gyp hurried down the path. Four little icicles had formed beneath the window of the music-room. They caught her eye, and, passing round to the side, she broke one off. There must be a fire in there, for she could see the flicker through the curtains not quite drawn. Thoughtful Ellen had been airing it! But, suddenly, she stood still. There was more than a fire in there! Through the chink in the drawn curtains she had seen two figures seated on the divan. Something seemed to spin round in her head. She turned to rush away. Then a kind of superhuman coolness came to her, and she deliberately looked in. He and Daphne Wing! His arm was round her neck. The girl's face riveted her eyes. It was turned a little back and up, gazing at him, the lips parted, the eyes hypnotized, adoring; and her arm round him seemed to shiver—with cold, with ecstasy?

Again that something went spinning through Gyp's head. She raised her hand. For a second it hovered close to the glass. Then, with a sick feeling, she dropped it and turned away.

Never! Never would she show him or that girl that they could hurt her! Never! They were safe from any scene she would make—safe in their nest! And blindly, across the frosty grass, through the

unlighted drawing-room, she went upstairs to her room, locked the door, and sat down before the fire. Pride raged within her. She stuffed her handkerchief between her teeth and lips; she did it unconsciously. Her eyes felt scorched from the fire-flames, but she did not trouble to hold her hand before them.

Suddenly she thought: 'Suppose I HAD loved him?' and laughed. The handkerchief dropped to her lap, and she looked at it with wonder—it was blood-stained. She drew back in the chair, away from the scorching of the fire, and sat quite still, a smile on her lips. That girl's eyes, like a little adoring dog's—that girl, who had fawned on her so! She had got her "distinguished man"! She sprang up and looked at herself in the glass; shuddered, turned her back on herself, and sat down again. In her own house! Why not here—in this room? Why not before her eyes? Not yet a year married! It was almost funny—almost funny! And she had her first calm thought: 'I am free.'

But it did not seem to mean anything, had no value to a spirit so bitterly stricken in its pride. She moved her chair closer to the fire again. Why had she not tapped on the window? To have seen that girl's face ashy with fright! To have seen him—caught—caught in the room she had made beautiful for him, the room where she had played for him so many hours, the room that was part of the house that she paid for! How long had they used it for their meetings—sneaking in by that door from the back lane? Perhaps even before she went away—to bear his child! And there began in her a struggle between mother instinct and her sense of outrage—a spiritual tug-of-war so deep that it was dumb, unconscious—to decide whether her baby would be all hers, or would have slipped away from her heart, and be a thing almost abhorrent.

She huddled nearer the fire, feeling cold and physically sick. And suddenly the thought came to her: 'If I don't let the servants know I'm here, they might go out and see what I saw!' Had she shut the drawing-room window when she returned so blindly? Perhaps already—! In a fever, she rang the bell, and unlocked the door. The maid came up.

"Please shut the drawing-room, window, Ellen; and tell Betty I'm afraid I got a little chill travelling. I'm going to bed. Ask her if she can manage with baby." And she looked straight into the girl's face. It wore an expression of concern, even of commiseration, but not that fluttered look which must have been there if she had known.

"Yes, m'm; I'll get you a hot-water bottle, m'm. Would you like a hot bath and a cup of hot tea at once?"

Gyp nodded. Anything—anything! And when the maid was gone, she thought mechanically: 'A cup of hot tea! How quaint! What should it be but hot?'

The maid came back with the tea; she was an affectionate girl, full of that admiring love servants and dogs always felt for Gyp, imbued, too, with the instinctive partisanship which stores itself one way or the other in the hearts of those who live in houses where the atmosphere lacks unity. To her mind, the mistress was much too good for him—a foreigner—and such 'abits! Manners—he hadn't any! And no good would come of it. Not if you took her opinion!

"And I've turned the water in, m'm. Will you have a little mustard in it?"

Again Gyp nodded. And the girl, going downstairs for the mustard, told cook there was "that about the mistress that makes you quite pathetic." The cook, who was fingering her concertina, for which she had a passion, answered:

"She 'ides up her feelin's, same as they all does. Thank 'eaven she haven't got that drawl, though, that 'er old aunt 'as—always makes me feel to want to say, 'Buck up, old dear, you ain't 'alf so precious as all that!'"

And when the maid Ellen had taken the mustard and gone, she drew out her concertina to its full length and, with cautionary softness, began to practise "Home, Sweet Home!"

To Gyp, lying in her hot bath, those muffled strains just mounted, not quite as a tune, rather as some far-away humming of large flies. The heat of the water, the pungent smell of the mustard, and that droning hum slowly soothed and drowsed away the vehemence of feeling. She looked at her body, silver-white in the yellowish water, with a dreamy sensation. Some day she, too, would love! Strange feeling she had never had before! Strange, indeed, that it should come at such a moment, breaking through the old instinctive shrinking. Yes; some day love would come to her. There floated before her brain the adoring look on Daphne Wing's face, the shiver that had passed along her arm, and pitifulness crept into her heart—a half-bitter, half-admiring pitifulness. Why should she grudge—she who did not love? The sounds, like the humming of large flies, grew deeper, more vibrating. It was the cook, in her passion swelling out her music on the phrase,

"Be it ne-e-ver so humble,
There's no-o place like home!"

XIII

That night, Gyp slept peacefully, as though nothing had happened, as though there were no future at all before her. She woke into misery. Her pride would never let her show the world what she had discovered, would force her to keep an unmoved face and live an unmoved life. But the struggle between mother-instinct and revolt was still going on within her. She was really afraid to see her baby, and she sent word to Betty that she thought it would be safer if she kept quite quiet till the afternoon.

She got up at noon and stole downstairs. She had not realized how violent was her struggle over HIS child till she was passing the door of the room where it was lying. If she had not been ordered to give up nursing, that struggle would never have come. Her heart ached, but a demon pressed her on and past the door. Downstairs she just potted round, dusting her china, putting in order the books which, after house-cleaning, the maid had arranged almost too carefully, so that the first volumes of Dickens and Thackeray followed each other on the top shelf, and the second volumes followed each other on the bottom shelf. And all the time she thought dully: 'Why am I doing this? What do I care how the place looks? It is not my home. It can never be my home!'

For lunch she drank some beef tea, keeping up the fiction of her indisposition. After that, she sat down at her bureau to write. Something must be decided! There she sat, her forehead on her hand, and nothing came—not one word—not even the way to address him; just the date, and that was all. At a ring of the bell she started up. She could not see anybody! But the maid only brought a note from Aunt Rosamund, and the dogs, who fell frantically on their mistress and instantly began to fight for her possession. She went on her knees to separate them, and enjoin peace and good-will, and their little avid tongues furiously licked her cheeks. Under the eager touch of those wet tongues the band round her brain and heart gave way; she was overwhelmed with longing for her baby. Nearly a day since she had seen her—was it possible? Nearly a day without sight of those solemn eyes and crinkled toes and fingers! And followed by the dogs, she went upstairs.

The house was invisible from the music-room; and, spurred on by thought that, until Fiorsen knew she was back, those two might be there in each other's arms any moment of the day or night, Gyp wrote that evening:

"DEAR GUSTAV,—We are back.—GYP."

What else in the world could she say? He would not get it till he woke about eleven. With the instinct to take all the respite she could, and knowing no more than before how she would receive his return, she went out in the forenoon and wandered about all day shopping and trying not to think. Returning at tea-time, she went straight up to her baby, and there heard from Betty that he had come, and gone out with his violin to the music-room.

Bent over the child, Gyp needed all her self-control—but her self-control was becoming great. Soon, the girl would come fluttering down that dark, narrow lane; perhaps at this very minute her fingers were tapping at the door, and he was opening it to murmur, "No; she's back!" Ah, then the girl would shrink! The rapid whispering—some other meeting-place! Lips to lips, and that look on the girl's face; till she hurried away from the shut door, in the darkness, disappointed! And he, on that silver-and-gold divan, gnawing his moustache, his eyes—catlike—staring at the fire! And then, perhaps, from his violin would come one of those swaying bursts of sound, with tears in them, and the wind in them, that had of old bewitched her! She said:

"Open the window just a little, Betty dear—it's hot."

There it was, rising, falling! Music! Why did it so move one even when, as now, it was the voice of insult! And suddenly she thought: "He will expect me to go out there again and play for him. But I will not, never!"

She put her baby down, went into her bedroom, and changed hastily into a teagown for the evening, ready to go downstairs. A little shepherdess in china on the mantel-shelf attracted her attention, and she took it in her hand. She had bought it three and more years ago, when she first came to London, at the beginning of that time of girl-gaiety when all life seemed a long cotillion, and she its leader. Its cool

daintiness made it seem the symbol of another world, a world without depths or shadows, a world that did not feel—a happy world!

She had not long to wait before he tapped on the drawing-room window. She got up from the tea-table to let him in. Why do faces gazing in through glass from darkness always look hungry—searching, appealing for what you have and they have not? And while she was undoing the latch she thought: 'What am I going to say? I feel nothing!' The ardour of his gaze, voice, hands seemed to her so false as to be almost comic; even more comically false his look of disappointment when she said:

"Please take care; I'm still brittle!" Then she sat down again and asked:

"Will you have some tea?"

"Tea! I have you back, and you ask me if I will have tea Gyp! Do you know what I have felt like all this time? No; you don't know. You know nothing of me—do you?"

A smile of sheer irony formed on her lips—without her knowing it was there. She said:

"Have you had a good time at Count Rosek's?" And, without her will, against her will, the words slipped out: "I'm afraid you've missed the music-room!"

His stare wavered; he began to walk up and down.

"Missed! Missed everything! I have been very miserable, Gyp. You've no idea how miserable. Yes, miserable, miserable, miserable!" With each repetition of that word, his voice grew gayer. And kneeling down in front of her, he stretched his long arms round her till they met behind her waist: "Ah, my Gyp! I shall be a different being, now."

And Gyp went on smiling. Between that, and stabbing these false raptures to the heart, there seemed to be nothing she could do. The moment his hands relaxed, she got up and said:

"You know there's a baby in the house?"

He laughed.

"Ah, the baby! I'd forgotten. Let's go up and see it."

Gyp answered:

"You go."

She could feel him thinking: 'Perhaps it will make her nice to me!' He turned suddenly and went.

She stood with her eyes shut, seeing the divan in the music-room and the girl's arm shivering. Then, going to the piano, she began with all her might to play a Chopin polonaise.

That evening they dined out, and went to "The Tales of Hoffmann." By such devices it was possible to put off a little longer what she was going to do. During the drive home in the dark cab, she shrank away into her corner, pretending that his arm would hurt her dress; her exasperated nerves were already overstrung. Twice she was on the very point of crying out: "I am not Daphne Wing!" But each time pride strangled the words in her throat. And yet they would have to come. What other reason could she find to keep him from her room?

But when in her mirror she saw him standing behind her—he had crept into the bedroom like a cat—fierceness came into her. She could see the blood rush up in her own white face, and, turning round she said:

"No, Gustav, go out to the music-room if you want a companion."

He recoiled against the foot of the bed and stared at her haggardly, and Gyp, turning back to her mirror, went on quietly taking the pins out of her hair. For fully a minute she could see him leaning there, moving his head and hands as though in pain. Then, to her surprise, he went. And a vague feeling of compunction mingled with her sense of deliverance. She lay awake a long time, watching the fire-glow brighten and darken on the ceiling, tunes from "The Tales of Hoffmann" running in her head; thoughts and fancies crisscrossing in her excited brain. Falling asleep at last, she dreamed she was feeding doves out of her hand, and one of them was Daphne Wing. She woke with a start. The fire still burned, and by its light she saw him crouching at the foot of the bed, just as he had on their wedding-night—the same hungry yearning in his face, and an arm outstretched. Before she could speak, he began:

"Oh, Gyp, you don't understand! All that is nothing—it is only you I want—always. I am a fool who cannot control himself. Think! It's a long time since you went away from me."

Gyp said, in a hard voice:

"I didn't want to have a child."

He said quickly:

"No; but now you have it you are glad. Don't be unmerciful, my Gyp! It is like you to be merciful. That girl—it is all over—I swear—I promise."

His hand touched her foot through the soft eiderdown. Gyp thought: 'Why does he come and whine to me like this? He has no dignity—none!' And she said:

"How can you promise? You have made the girl love you. I saw her face."

He drew his hand back.

"You saw her?"

"Yes."

He was silent, staring at her. Presently he began again:

"She is a little fool. I do not care for the whole of her as much as I care for your one finger. What does it matter what one does in that way if one does not care? The soul, not the body, is faithful. A man satisfies appetite—it is nothing."

Gyp said:

"Perhaps not; but it is something when it makes others miserable."

"Has it made you miserable, my Gyp?"

His voice had a ring of hope. She answered, startled:

"I? No—her."

"Her? Ho! It is an experience for her—it is life. It will do her no harm."

"No; nothing will do anybody harm if it gives you pleasure."

At that bitter retort, he kept silence a long time, now and then heaving a long sigh. His words kept sounding in her heart: "The soul, not the body, is faithful." Was he, after all, more faithful to her than she had ever been, could ever be—who did not love, had never loved him? What right had she to talk, who had married him out of vanity, out of—what?

And suddenly he said:

"Gyp! Forgive!"

She uttered a sigh, and turned away her face.

He bent down against the eider-down. She could hear him drawing long, sobbing breaths, and, in the midst of her lassitude and hopelessness, a sort of pity stirred her. What did it matter? She said, in a choked voice:

"Very well, I forgive."

XIV

The human creature has wonderful power of putting up with things. Gyp never really believed that Daphne Wing was of the past. Her sceptical instinct told her that what Fiorsen might honestly mean to do was very different from what he would do under stress of opportunity carefully put within his reach.

Since her return, Rosek had begun to come again, very careful not to repeat his mistake, but not deceiving her at all. Though his self-control was as great as Fiorsen's was small, she felt he had not given up his pursuit of her, and would take very good care that Daphne Wing was afforded every chance of being with her husband. But pride never let her allude to the girl. Besides, what good to speak of her? They would both lie—Rosek, because he obviously saw the mistaken line of his first attack; Fiorsen, because his temperament did not permit him to suffer by speaking the truth.

Having set herself to endure, she found she must live in the moment, never think of the future, never think much of anything. Fortunately, nothing so conduces to vacuity as a baby. She gave herself up to it with desperation. It was a good baby, silent, somewhat understanding. In watching its face, and feeling it warm against her, Gyp succeeded daily in getting away into the hypnotic state of mothers, and cows that chew the cud. But the baby slept a great deal, and much of its time was claimed by Betty. Those hours, and they were many, Gyp found difficult. She had lost interest in dress and household elegance, keeping just enough to satisfy her fastidiousness; money, too, was scarce, under the drain of Fiorsen's irregular requirements. If she read, she began almost at once to brood. She was cut off from the music-room, had not crossed its threshold since her discovery. Aunt Rosamund's efforts to take her into society were fruitless—all the effervescence was out of that, and, though her father came, he never stayed long for fear of meeting Fiorsen. In this condition of affairs, she turned more and more to her own music, and one morning, after she had come across some compositions of her girlhood, she made a resolution. That afternoon she dressed herself with pleasure, for the first time for months, and sallied forth into the February frost.

Monsieur Edouard Harmost inhabited the ground floor of a house in the Marylebone Road. He received his pupils in a large back room overlooking a little sooty garden. A Walloon by extraction, and of great vitality, he grew old with difficulty, having a soft corner in his heart for women, and a passion for novelty, even for new music, that was unappeasable. Any fresh discovery would bring a tear rolling down his mahogany cheeks into his clipped grey beard, the while he played, singing wheezily to elucidate the wondrous novelty; or moved his head up and down, as if pumping.

When Gyp was shown into this well-remembered room he was seated, his yellow fingers buried in his stiff grey hair, grieving over a pupil who had just gone out. He did not immediately rise, but stared hard at Gyp.

"Ah," he said, at last, "my little old friend! She has come back! Now that is good!" And, patting her hand he looked into her face, which had a warmth and brilliance rare to her in these days. Then, making for the mantelpiece, he took therefrom a bunch of Parma violets, evidently brought by his last pupil, and thrust them under her nose. "Take them, take them—they were meant for me. Now—how much have you forgotten? Come!" And, seizing her by the elbow, he almost forced her to the piano. "Take off your furs. Sit down!"

And while Gyp was taking off her coat, he fixed on her his prominent brown eyes that rolled easily in their slightly blood-shot whites, under squared eyelids and cliffs of brow. She had on what Fiorsen called her "humming-bird" blouse—dark blue, shot with peacock and old rose, and looked very warm and soft under her fur cap. Monsieur Harmost's stare seemed to drink her in; yet that stare was not unpleasant, having in it only the rather sad yearning of old men who love beauty and know that their time for seeing it is getting short.

"Play me the 'Carnival,'" he said. "We shall soon see!"

Gyp played. Twice he nodded; once he tapped his fingers on his teeth, and showed her the whites of his eyes—which meant: "That will have to be very different!" And once he grunted. When she had finished, he sat down beside her, took her hand in his, and, examining the fingers, began:

"Yes, yes, soon again! Spoiling yourself, playing for that fiddler!
Trop sympathique! The back-bone, the back-bone—we shall improve that.
Now, four hours a day for six weeks—and we shall have something again."

Gyp said softly:

"I have a baby, Monsieur Harmost."

Monsieur Harmost bounded.

"What! That is a tragedy!" Gyp shook her head. "You like it? A baby!
Does it not squall?"

"Very little."

"Mon Dieu! Well, well, you are still as beautiful as ever. That is something. Now, what can you do with this baby? Could you get rid of it a little? This is serious. This is a talent in danger. A fiddler, and a baby! C'est beaucoup! C'est trop!"

Gyp smiled. And Monsieur Harmost, whose exterior covered much sensibility, stroked her hand.

"You have grown up, my little friend," he said gravely. "Never mind; nothing is wasted. But a baby!" And he chirruped his lips. "Well; courage! We shall do things yet!"

Gyp turned her head away to hide the quiver of her lips. The scent of latakia tobacco that had soaked into things, and of old books and music, a dark smell, like Monsieur Harmost's complexion; the old brown curtains, the sooty little back garden beyond, with its cat-runs, and its one stunted sumach tree; the dark-brown stare of Monsieur Harmost's rolling eyes brought back that time of happiness, when she used to come week after week, full of gaiety and importance, and chatter away, basking in his brusque admiration and in music, all with the glamorous feeling that she was making him happy, and herself happy, and going to play very finely some day.

The voice of Monsieur Harmost, softly gruff, as if he knew what she was feeling, increased her emotion; her breast heaved under the humming-bird blouse, water came into her eyes, and more than ever her lips quivered. He was saying:

"Come, come! The only thing we cannot cure is age. You were right to come, my child. Music is your proper air. If things are not all what they ought to be, you shall soon forget. In music—in music, we can get away. After all, my little friend, they cannot take our dreams from us—not even a wife, not even a husband can do that. Come, we shall have good times yet!"

And Gyp, with a violent effort, threw off that sudden weakness. From those who serve art devotedly there radiates a kind of glamour. She left Monsieur Harmost that afternoon, infected by his passion for music. Poetic justice—on which all homeopathy is founded—was at work to try and cure her life by a dose of what had spoiled it. To music, she now gave all the hours she could spare. She went to him twice a week, determining to get on, but uneasy at the expense, for monetary conditions were ever more embarrassed. At home, she practised steadily and worked hard at composition. She finished several songs and studies during the spring and summer, and left still more unfinished. Monsieur Harmost was tolerant of these efforts, seeming to know that harsh criticism or disapproval would cut her impulse down, as frost cuts the life of flowers. Besides, there was always something fresh and individual in her things. He asked her one day:

"What does your husband think of these?"

Gyp was silent a moment.

"I don't show them to him."

She never had; she instinctively kept back the knowledge that she composed, dreading his ruthlessness when anything grated on his nerves, and knowing that a breath of mockery would wither her belief in herself, frail enough plant already. The only person, besides her master, to whom she confided her efforts was—strangely enough—Rosek. But he had surprised her one day copying out some music, and said at once: "I knew. I was certain you composed. Ah, do play it to me! I am sure you have talent." The warmth with which he praised that little "caprice" was surely genuine; and she felt so grateful that she even played him others, and then a song for him to sing. From that day, he no longer seemed to her odious; she even began to have for him a certain friendliness, to be a little sorry, watching him, pale, trim, and sphinx-like, in her drawing-room or garden, getting no nearer to the fulfilment of his desire. He had never again made love to her, but she knew that at the least sign he would. His face and his invincible patience made him pathetic to her. Women such as Gyp cannot actively dislike those who admire them greatly. She consulted him about Fiorsen's debts. There were hundreds of pounds owing, it seemed, and, in addition, much to Rosek himself. The thought of these debts weighed unbearably on her. Why did he, HOW did he get into debt like this? What became of the money he earned? His fees, this summer, were good enough. There was such a feeling of degradation about debt. It was, somehow, so underbred to owe money to all sorts of people. Was it on that girl, on other women, that he spent it all? Or was it simply that his nature had holes in every pocket?

Watching Fiorsen closely, that spring and early summer, she was conscious of a change, a sort of loosening, something in him had given way—as when, in winding a watch, the key turns on and on, the ratchet being broken. Yet he was certainly working hard—perhaps harder than ever. She would hear him, across the garden, going over and over a passage, as if he never would be satisfied. But his playing seemed to her to have lost its fire and sweep; to be stale, and as if disillusioned. It was all as though he had said to himself: "What's the use?" In his face, too, there was a change. She knew—she

was certain that he was drinking secretly. Was it his failure with her? Was it the girl? Was it simply heredity from a hard-drinking ancestry?

Gyp never faced these questions. To face them would mean useless discussion, useless admission that she could not love him, useless asseveration from him about the girl, which she would not believe, useless denials of all sorts. Hopeless!

He was very irritable, and seemed especially to resent her music lessons, alluding to them with a sort of sneering impatience. She felt that he despised them as amateurish, and secretly resented it. He was often impatient, too, of the time she gave to the baby. His own conduct with the little creature was like all the rest of him. He would go to the nursery, much to Betty's alarm, and take up the baby; be charming with it for about ten minutes, then suddenly dump it back into its cradle, stare at it gloomily or utter a laugh, and go out. Sometimes, he would come up when Gyp was there, and after watching her a little in silence, almost drag her away.

Suffering always from the guilty consciousness of having no love for him, and ever more and more from her sense that, instead of saving him she was, as it were, pushing him down-hill—ironical nemesis for vanity!—Gyp was ever more and more compliant to his whims, trying to make up. But this compliance, when all the time she felt further and further away, was straining her to breaking-point. Hers was a nature that goes on passively enduring till something snaps; after that—no more.

Those months of spring and summer were like a long spell of drought, when moisture gathers far away, coming nearer, nearer, till, at last, the deluge bursts and sweeps the garden.

XV

The tenth of July that year was as the first day of summer. There had been much fine weather, but always easterly or northerly; now, after a broken, rainy fortnight, the sun had come in full summer warmth with a gentle breeze, drifting here and there scent of the opening lime blossom. In the garden, under the trees at the far end, Betty sewed at a garment, and the baby in her perambulator had her seventh morning sleep. Gyp stood before a bed of pansies and sweet peas. How monkeyish the pansies' faces! The sweet peas, too, were like tiny bright birds fastened to green perches swaying with the wind. And their little green tridents, growing out from the queer, flat stems, resembled the antennae of insects. Each of these bright frail, growing things had life and individuality like herself!

The sound of footsteps on the gravel made her turn. Rosek was coming from the drawing-room window. Rather startled, Gyp looked at him over her shoulder. What had brought him at eleven o'clock in the morning? He came up to her, bowed, and said:

"I came to see Gustav. He's not up yet, it seems. I thought I would speak to you first. Can we talk?"

Hesitating just a second, Gyp drew off her gardening-gloves:

"Of course! Here? Or in the drawing-room?"

Rosek answered:

"In the drawing-room, please."

A faint tremor passed through her, but she led the way, and seated herself where she could see Betty and the baby. Rosek stood looking down at her; his stillness, the sweetish gravity of his well-cut lips, his spotless dandyism stirred in Gyp a kind of unwilling admiration.

"What is it?" she said.

"Bad business, I'm afraid. Something must be done at once. I have been trying to arrange things, but they will not wait. They are even threatening to sell up this house."

With a sense of outrage, Gyp cried:

"Nearly everything here is mine."

Rosek shook his head.

"The lease is in his name—you are his wife. They can do it, I assure you." A sort of shadow passed over his face, and he added: "I cannot help him any more—just now."

Gyp shook her head quickly.

"No—of course! You ought not to have helped him at all. I can't bear—" He bowed, and she stopped, ashamed. "How much does he owe altogether?"

"About thirteen hundred pounds. It isn't much, of course. But there is something else—"

"Worse?"

Rosek nodded.

"I am afraid to tell you; you will think again perhaps that I am trying to make capital out of it. I can read your thoughts, you see. I cannot afford that you should think that, this time."

Gyp made a little movement as though putting away his words.

"No; tell me, please."

Rosek shrugged his shoulders.

"There is a man called Wagge, an undertaker—the father of someone you know—"

"Daphne Wing?"

"Yes. A child is coming. They have made her tell. It means the cancelling of her engagements, of course—and other things."

Gyp uttered a little laugh; then she said slowly:

"Can you tell me, please, what this Mr.—Wagge can do?"

Again Rosek shrugged his shoulders.

"He is rabid—a rabid man of his class is dangerous. A lot of money will be wanted, I should think—some blood, perhaps."

He moved swiftly to her, and said very low:

"Gyp, it is a year since I told you of this. You did not believe me then. I told you, too, that I loved you. I love you more, now, a hundred times! Don't move! I am going up to Gustav."

He turned, and Gyp thought he was really going; but he stopped and came back past the line of the window. The expression of his face was quite changed, so hungry that, for a moment, she felt sorry for him. And that must have shown in her face, for he suddenly caught at her, and tried to kiss her lips; she wrenched back, and he could only reach her throat, but that he kissed furiously. Letting her go as suddenly, he bent his head and went out without a look.

Gyp stood wiping his kisses off her throat with the back of her hand, dumbly, mechanically thinking: "What have I done to be treated like this? What HAVE I done?" No answer came. And such rage against men flared up that she just stood there, twisting her garden-gloves in her hands, and biting the lips he would have kissed. Then, going to her bureau, she took up her address book and looked for the name: Wing, 88, Frankland Street, Fulham. Unhooking her little bag from off the back of the chair, she put her cheque-book into it. Then, taking care to make no sound, she passed into the hall, caught up her sunshade, and went out, closing the door without noise.

She walked quickly toward Baker Street. Her gardening-hat was right enough, but she had come out without gloves, and must go into the first shop and buy a pair. In the choosing of them, she forgot her emotions for a minute. Out in the street again, they came back as bitterly as ever. And the day was so beautiful—the sun bright, the sky blue, the clouds dazzling white; from the top of her 'bus she could see all its brilliance. There rose up before her the memory of the man who had kissed her arm at the first ball. And now—this! But, mixed with her rage, a sort of unwilling compassion and fellow feeling kept rising for that girl, that silly, sugar-plum girl, brought to such a pass by—her husband. These feelings sustained her through that voyage to Fulham. She got down at the nearest corner, walked up a widish street of narrow grey houses till she came to number eighty-eight. On that newly scrubbed step, waiting for the door to open, she very nearly turned and fled. What exactly had she come to do?

The door was opened by a servant in an untidy frock. Mutton! The smell of mutton—there it was, just

as the girl had said!

"Is Miss—Miss Daphne Wing at home?"

In that peculiar "I've given it up" voice of domestics in small households, the servant answered:

"Yes; Miss Daisey's in. D'you want to see 'er? What nyme?"

Gyp produced her card. The maid looked at it, at Gyp, and at two brown-painted doors, as much as to say, "Where will you have it?" Then, opening the first of them, she said:

"Tyke a seat, please; I'll fetch her."

Gyp went in. In the middle of what was clearly the dining-room, she tried to subdue the tremor of her limbs and a sense of nausea. The table against which her hand rested was covered with red baize, no doubt to keep the stains of mutton from penetrating to the wood. On the mahogany sideboard reposed a cruet-stand and a green dish of very red apples. A bamboo-framed talc screen painted with white and yellow marguerites stood before a fireplace filled with pampas-grass dyed red. The chairs were of red morocco, the curtains a brownish-red, the walls green, and on them hung a set of Landseer prints. The peculiar sensation which red and green in juxtaposition produce on the sensitive was added to Gyp's distress. And, suddenly, her eyes lighted on a little deep-blue china bowl. It stood on a black stand on the mantel-piece, with nothing in it. To Gyp, in this room of red and green, with the smell of mutton creeping in, that bowl was like the crystallized whiff of another world. Daphne Wing—not Daisy Wagge—had surely put it there! And, somehow, it touched her—emblem of stifled beauty, emblem of all that the girl had tried to pour out to her that August afternoon in her garden nearly a year ago. Thin Eastern china, good and really beautiful! A wonder they allowed it to pollute this room!

A sigh made her turn round. With her back against the door and a white, scared face, the girl was standing. Gyp thought: 'She has suffered horribly.' And, going impulsively up to her, she held out her hand.

Daphne Wing sighed out: "Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen!" and, bending over that hand, kissed it. Gyp saw that her new glove was wet. Then the girl relapsed, her feet a little forward, her head a little forward, her back against the door. Gyp, who knew why she stood thus, was swept again by those two emotions—rage against men, and fellow feeling for one about to go through what she herself had just endured.

"It's all right," she said, gently; "only, what's to be done?"

Daphne Wing put her hands up over her white face and sobbed. She sobbed so quietly but so terribly deeply that Gyp herself had the utmost difficulty not to cry. It was the sobbing of real despair by a creature bereft of hope and strength, above all, of love—the sort of weeping which is drawn from desolate, suffering souls only by the touch of fellow feeling. And, instead of making Gyp glad or satisfying her sense of justice, it filled her with more rage against her husband—that he had taken this girl's infatuation for his pleasure and then thrown her away. She seemed to see him discarding that clinging, dove-fair girl, for cloying his senses and getting on his nerves, discarding her with caustic words, to abide alone the consequences of her infatuation. She put her hand timidly on that shaking shoulder, and stroked it. For a moment the sobbing stopped, and the girl said brokenly:

"Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, I do love him so!" At those naive words, a painful wish to laugh seized on Gyp, making her shiver from head to foot. Daphne Wing saw it, and went on: "I know—I know—it's awful; but I do—and now he—he—" Her quiet but really dreadful sobbing broke out again. And again Gyp began stroking and stroking her shoulder. "And I have been so awful to you! Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, do forgive me, please!"

All Gyp could find to answer, was:

"Yes, yes; that's nothing! Don't cry—don't cry!"

Very slowly the sobbing died away, till it was just a long shivering, but still the girl held her hands over her face and her face down. Gyp felt paralyzed. The unhappy girl, the red and green room, the smell of mutton—creeping!

At last, a little of that white face showed; the lips, no longer craving for sugar-plums, murmured:

"It's you he—he—really loves all the time. And you don't love him—that's what's so funny—and—and—I can't understand it. Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, if I could see him—just see him! He told me never to come again; and I haven't dared. I haven't seen him for three weeks—not since I told him about IT. What shall I do? What shall I do?"

His being her own husband seemed as nothing to Gyp at that moment. She felt such pity and yet such violent revolt that any girl should want to crawl back to a man who had spurned her. Unconsciously, she had drawn herself up and pressed her lips together. The girl, who followed every movement, said piteously:

"I don't seem to have any pride. I don't mind what he does to me, or what he says, if only I can see him."

Gyp's revolt yielded to her pity. She said:

"How long before?"

"Three months."

Three months—and in this state of misery!

"I think I shall do something desperate. Now that I can't dance, and THEY know, it's too awful! If I could see him, I wouldn't mind anything. But I know—I know he'll never want me again. Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, I wish I was dead! I do!"

A heavy sigh escaped Gyp, and, bending suddenly, she kissed the girl's forehead. Still that scent of orange blossom about her skin or hair, as when she asked whether she ought to love or not; as when she came, moth-like, from the tree-shade into the moonlight, spun, and fluttered, with her shadow spinning and fluttering before her. Gyp turned away, feeling that she must relieve the strain and pointing to the bowl, said:

"YOU put that there, I'm sure. It's beautiful."

The girl answered, with piteous eagerness:

"Oh, would you like it? Do take it. Count Rosek gave it me." She started away from the door. "Oh, that's papa. He'll be coming in!"

Gyp heard a man clear his throat, and the rattle of an umbrella falling into a stand; the sight of the girl wilting and shrinking against the sideboard steadied her. Then the door opened, and Mr. Wagge entered. Short and thick, in black frock coat and trousers, and a greyish beard, he stared from one to the other. He looked what he was, an Englishman and a chapelgoer, nourished on sherry and mutton, who could and did make his own way in the world. His features, coloured, as from a deep liverishness, were thick, like his body, and not ill-natured, except for a sort of anger in his small, rather piggy grey eyes. He said in a voice permanently gruff, but impregnated with a species of professional ingratiating:

"Ye-es? Whom 'ave I—?"

"Mrs. Fiorsen."

"Ow!" The sound of his breathing could be heard distinctly; he twisted a chair round and said:

"Take a seat, won't you?"

Gyp shook her head.

In Mr. Wagge's face a kind of deference seemed to struggle with some more primitive emotion. Taking out a large, black-edged handkerchief, he blew his nose, passed it freely over his visage, and turning to his daughter, muttered:

"Go upstairs."

The girl turned quickly, and the last glimpse of her white face whipped up Gyp's rage against men. When the door was shut, Mr. Wagge cleared his throat; the grating sound carried with it the suggestion of enormously thick linings.

He said more gruffly than ever:

"May I ask what 'as given us the honour?"

"I came to see your daughter."

His little piggy eyes travelled from her face to her feet, to the walls of the room, to his own watch-chain, to his hands that had begun to rub themselves together, back to her breast, higher than which they dared not mount. Their infinite embarrassment struck Gyp. She could almost hear him thinking:

'Now, how can I discuss it with this attractive young female, wife of the scoundrel who's ruined my daughter? Delicate—that's what it is!' Then the words burst hoarsely from him.

"This is an unpleasant business, ma'am. I don't know what to say. Reelly I don't. It's awkward; it's very awkward."

Gyp said quietly:

"Your daughter is desperately unhappy; and that can't be good for her just now."

Mr. Wagge's thick figure seemed to writhe. "Pardon me, ma'am," he spluttered, "but I must call your husband a scoundrel. I'm sorry to be impolite, but I must do it. If I had 'im 'ere, I don't know that I should be able to control myself—I don't indeed." Gyp made a movement of her gloved hands, which he seemed to interpret as sympathy, for he went on in a stream of husky utterance: "It's a delicate thing before a lady, and she the injured party; but one has feelings. From the first I said this dancin' was in the face of Providence; but women have no more sense than an egg. Her mother she would have it; and now she's got it! Career, indeed! Pretty career! Daughter of mine! I tell you, ma'am, I'm angry; there's no other word for it—I'm angry. If that scoundrel comes within reach of me, I shall mark 'im—I'm not a young man, but I shall mark 'im. An' what to say to you, I'm sure I don't know. That my daughter should be 'ave like that! Well, it's made a difference to me. An' now I suppose her name'll be dragged in the mud. I tell you frankly I 'oped you wouldn't hear of it, because after all the girl's got her punishment. And this divorce-court—it's not nice—it's a horrible thing for respectable people. And, mind you, I won't see my girl married to that scoundrel, not if you do divorce 'im. No; she'll have her disgrace for nothing."

Gyp, who had listened with her head a little bent, raised it suddenly, and said:

"There'll be no public disgrace, Mr. Wagge, unless you make it yourself. If you send Daphne—Daisy—quietly away somewhere till her trouble's over, no one need know anything."

Mr. Wagge, whose mouth had opened slightly, and whose breathing could certainly have been heard in the street, took a step forward and said:

"Do I understand you to say that you're not goin' to take proceedings, ma'am?"

Gyp shuddered, and shook her head.

Mr. Wagge stood silent, slightly moving his face up and down.

"Well," he said, at length, "it's more than she deserves; but I don't disguise it's a relief to me. And I must say, in a young lady like you, and—and handsome, it shows a Christian spirit." Again Gyp shivered, and shook her head. "It does. You'll allow me to say so, as a man old enough to be your father—and a regular attendant."

He held out his hand. Gyp put her gloved hand into it.

"I'm very, very sorry. Please be nice to her."

Mr. Wagge recoiled a little, and for some seconds stood ruefully rubbing his hands together and looking from side to side.

"I'm a domestic man," he said suddenly. "A domestic man in a serious line of life; and I never thought to have anything like this in my family—never! It's been—well, I can't tell you what it's been!"

Gyp took up her sunshade. She felt that she must get away; at any moment he might say something she could not bear—and the smell of mutton rising fast!

"I am sorry," she said again; "good-bye"; and moved past him to the door. She heard him breathing hard as he followed her to open it, and thought: 'If only—oh! please let him be silent till I get outside!' Mr. Wagge passed her and put his hand on the latch of the front door. His little piggy eyes scanned her almost timidly.

"Well," he said, "I'm very glad to have the privilege of your acquaintance; and, if I may say so, you 'ave—you 'ave my 'earty sympathy. Good-day."

The door once shut behind her, Gyp took a long breath and walked swiftly away. Her cheeks were burning; and, with a craving for protection, she put up her sunshade. But the girl's white face came up again before her, and the sound of her words:

"Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, I wish I was dead! I DO!"

Gyp walked on beneath her sunshade, making unconsciously for the peace of trees. Her mind was a whirl of impressions—Daphne Wing's figure against the door, Mr. Wagge's puggy grey-bearded countenance, the red pampas-grass, the blue bowl, Rosek's face swooping at her, her last glimpse of her baby asleep under the trees!

She reached Kensington Gardens, turned into that walk renowned for the beauty of its flowers and the plainness of the people who frequent it, and sat down on a bench. It was near the luncheon-hour; nursemaids, dogs, perambulators, old gentlemen—all were hurrying a little toward their food. They glanced with critical surprise at this pretty young woman, leisured and lonely at such an hour, trying to find out what was wrong with her, as one naturally does with beauty—bow legs or something, for sure, to balance a face like that! But Gyp noticed none of them, except now and again a dog which sniffed her knees in passing. For months she had resolutely cultivated insensibility, resolutely refused to face reality; the barrier was forced now, and the flood had swept her away. "Proceedings!" Mr. Wagge had said. To those who shrink from letting their secret affairs be known even by their nearest friends, the notion of a public exhibition of troubles simply never comes, and it had certainly never come to Gyp. With a bitter smile she thought: 'I'm better off than she is, after all! Suppose I loved him, too? No, I never—never—want to love. Women who love suffer too much.'

She sat on that bench a long time before it came into her mind that she was due at Monsieur Harmost's for a music lesson at three o'clock. It was well past two already; and she set out across the grass. The summer day was full of murmurings of bees and flies, cooings of blissful pigeons, the soft swish and stir of leaves, and the scent of lime blossom under a sky so blue, with few white clouds slow, and calm, and full. Why be unhappy? And one of those spotty spaniel dogs, that have broad heads, with frizzy topknots, and are always rascals, smelt at her frock and moved round and round her, hoping that she would throw her sunshade on the water for him to fetch, this being in his view the only reason why anything was carried in the hand.

She found Monsieur Harmost fidgeting up and down the room, whose opened windows could not rid it of the smell of latakia.

"Ah," he said, "I thought you were not coming! You look pale; are you not well? Is it the heat? Or"—he looked hard into her face—"has someone hurt you, my little friend?" Gyp shook her head. "Ah, yes," he went on irritably; "you tell me nothing; you tell nobody nothing! You close up your pretty face like a flower at night. At your age, my child, one should make confidences; a secret grief is to music as the east wind to the stomach. Put off your mask for once." He came close to her. "Tell me your troubles. It is a long time since I have been meaning to ask. Come! We are only once young; I want to see you happy."

But Gyp stood looking down. Would it be relief to pour her soul out? Would it? His brown eyes questioned her like an old dog's. She did not want to hurt one so kind. And yet—impossible!

Monsieur Harmost suddenly sat down at the piano. Resting his hands on the keys, he looked round at her, and said:

"I am in love with you, you know. Old men can be very much in love, but they know it is no good—that makes them endurable. Still, we like to feel of use to youth and beauty; it gives us a little warmth. Come; tell me your grief!" He waited a moment, then said irritably: "Well, well, we go to music then!"

It was his habit to sit by her at the piano corner, but to-day he stood as if prepared to be exceptionally severe. And Gyp played, whether from overexcited nerves or from not having had any lunch, better than she had ever played. The Chopin polonaise in A flat, that song of revolution, which had always seemed so unattainable, went as if her fingers were being worked for her. When she had finished, Monsieur Harmost, bending forward, lifted one of her hands and put his lips to it. She felt the scrub of his little bristly beard, and raised her face with a deep sigh of satisfaction. A voice behind them said mockingly:

"Bravo!"

There, by the door, stood Fiorsen.

"Congratulations, madame! I have long wanted to see you under the inspiration of your—master!"

Gyp's heart began to beat desperately. Monsieur Harmost had not moved. A faint grin slowly settled in his beard, but his eyes were startled.

Fiorsen kissed the back of his own hand.

"To this old Pantaloon you come to give your heart. Ho—what a lover!"

Gyp saw the old man quiver; she sprang up and cried:

"You brute!"

Fiorsen ran forward, stretching out his arms toward Monsieur Harmost, as if to take him by the throat.

The old man drew himself up. "Monsieur," he said, "you are certainly drunk."

Gyp slipped between, right up to those outstretched hands till she could feel their knuckles against her. Had he gone mad? Would he strangle her? But her eyes never moved from his, and his began to waver; his hands dropped, and, with a kind of moan, he made for the door.

Monsieur Harmost's voice behind her said:

"Before you go, monsieur, give me some explanation of this imbecility!"

Fiorsen spun round, shook his fist, and went out muttering. They heard the front door slam. Gyp turned abruptly to the window, and there, in her agitation, she noticed little outside things as one does in moments of bewildered anger. Even into that back yard, summer had crept. The leaves of the sumach-tree were glistening; in a three-cornered little patch of sunlight, a black cat with a blue ribbon round its neck was basking. The voice of one hawking strawberries drifted melancholy from a side street. She was conscious that Monsieur Harmost was standing very still, with a hand pressed to his mouth, and she felt a perfect passion of compunction and anger. That kind and harmless old man—to be so insulted! This was indeed the culmination of all Gustav's outrages! She would never forgive him this! For he had insulted her as well, beyond what pride or meekness could put up with. She turned, and, running up to the old man, put both her hands into his.

"I'm so awfully sorry. Good-bye, dear, dear Monsieur Harmost; I shall come on Friday!" And, before he could stop her, she was gone.

She dived into the traffic; but, just as she reached the pavement on the other side, felt her dress plucked and saw Fiorsen just behind her. She shook herself free and walked swiftly on. Was he going to make a scene in the street? Again he caught her arm. She stopped dead, faced round on him, and said, in an icy voice:

"Please don't make scenes in the street, and don't follow me like this. If you want to talk to me, you can—at home."

Then, very calmly, she turned and walked on. But he was still following her, some paces off. She did not quicken her steps, and to the first taxicab driver that passed she made a sign, and saying:

"Bury Street—quick!" got in. She saw Fiorsen rush forward, too late to stop her. He threw up his hand and stood still, his face deadly white under his broad-brimmed hat. She was far too angry and upset to care.

From the moment she turned to the window at Monsieur Harmost's, she had determined to go to her father's. She would not go back to Fiorsen; and the one thought that filled her mind was how to get Betty and her baby. Nearly four! Dad was almost sure to be at his club. And leaning out, she said: "No; Hyde Park Corner, please."

The hall porter, who knew her, after calling to a page-boy: "Major Winton—sharp, now!" came specially out of his box to offer her a seat and *The Times*.

Gyp sat with it on her knee, vaguely taking in her surroundings—a thin old gentleman anxiously weighing himself in a corner, a white-calved footman crossing with a tea-tray; a number of hats on pegs; the green-baize board with its white rows of tapelike paper, and three members standing before it. One of them, a tall, stout, good-humoured-looking man in pince-nez and a white waistcoat, becoming conscious, removed his straw hat and took up a position whence, without staring, he could gaze at her; and Gyp knew, without ever seeming to glance at him, that he found her to his liking. She saw her father's unhurried figure passing that little group, all of whom were conscious now, and eager to get away out of this sanctum of masculinity, she met him at the top of the low steps, and said:

"I want to talk to you, Dad."

He gave her a quick look, selected his hat, and followed to the door. In the cab, he put his hand on

hers and said:

"Now, my dear?"

But all she could get out was:

"I want to come back to you. I can't go on there. It's—it's—I've come to an end."

His hand pressed hers tightly, as if he were trying to save her the need for saying more. Gyp went on:

"I must get baby; I'm terrified that he'll try to keep her, to get me back."

"Is he at home?"

"I don't know. I haven't told him that I'm going to leave him."

Winton looked at his watch and asked:

"Does the baby ever go out as late as this?"

"Yes; after tea. It's cooler."

"I'll take this cab on, then. You stay and get the room ready for her. Don't worry, and don't go out till I return."

And Gyp thought: 'How wonderful of him not to have asked a single question.'

The cab stopped at the Bury Street door. She took his hand, put it to her cheek, and got out. He said quietly:

"Do you want the dogs?"

"Yes—oh, yes! He doesn't care for them."

"All right. There'll be time to get you in some things for the night after I come back. I shan't run any risks to-day. Make Mrs. Markey give you tea."

Gyp watched the cab gather way again, saw him wave his hand; then, with a deep sigh, half anxiety, half relief, she rang the bell.

XVII

When the cab debouched again into St. James' Street, Winton gave the order: "Quick as you can!" One could think better going fast! A little red had come into his brown cheeks; his eyes under their half-drawn lids had a keener light; his lips were tightly closed; he looked as he did when a fox was breaking cover. Gyp could do no wrong, or, if she could, he would stand by her in it as a matter of course. But he was going to take no risks—make no frontal attack. Time for that later, if necessary. He had better nerves than most people, and that kind of steely determination and resource which makes many Englishmen of his class formidable in small operations. He kept his cab at the door, rang, and asked for Gyp, with a kind of pleasure in his ruse.

"She's not in yet, sir. Mr. Fiorsen's in."

"Ah! And baby?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll come in and see her. In the garden?"

"Yes, sir."

"Dogs there, too?"

"Yes, sir. And will you have tea, please, sir?"

"No, thanks." How to effect this withdrawal without causing gossip, and yet avoid suspicion of

collusion with Gyp? And he added: "Unless Mrs. Fiorsen comes in."

Passing out into the garden, he became aware that Fiorsen was at the dining-room window watching him, and decided to make no sign that he knew this. The baby was under the trees at the far end, and the dogs came rushing thence with a fury which lasted till they came within scent of him. Winton went leisurely up to the perambulator, and, saluting Betty, looked down at his grandchild. She lay under an awning of muslin, for fear of flies, and was awake. Her solemn, large brown eyes, already like Gyp's, regarded him with gravity. Clucking to her once or twice, as is the custom, he moved so as to face the house. In this position, he had Betty with her back to it. And he said quietly:

"I'm here with a message from your mistress, Betty. Keep your head; don't look round, but listen to me. She's at Bury Street and going to stay there; she wants you and baby and the dogs." The stout woman's eyes grew round and her mouth opened. Winton put his hand on the perambulator. "Steady, now! Go out as usual with this thing. It's about your time; and wait for me at the turning to Regent's Park. I'll come on in my cab and pick you all up. Don't get flurried; don't take anything; do exactly as you usually would. Understand?"

It is not in the nature of stout women with babies in their charge to receive such an order without question. Her colour, and the heaving of that billowy bosom made Winton add quickly:

"Now, Betty, pull yourself together; Gyp wants you. I'll tell you all about it in the cab."

The poor woman, still heaving vaguely, could only stammer:

"Yes, sir. Poor little thing! What about its night-things? And Miss Gyp's?"

Conscious of that figure still at the window, Winton made some passes with his fingers at the baby, and said:

"Never mind them. As soon as you see me at the drawing-room window, get ready and go. Eyes front, Betty; don't look round; I'll cover your retreat! Don't fail Gyp now. Pull yourself together."

With a sigh that could have been heard in Kensington, Betty murmured: "Very well, sir; oh dear!" and began to adjust the strings of her bonnet. With nods, as if he had been the recipient of some sage remarks about the baby, Winton saluted, and began his march again towards the house. He carefully kept his eyes to this side and to that, as if examining the flowers, but noted all the same that Fiorsen had receded from the window. Rapid thought told him that the fellow would come back there to see if he were gone, and he placed himself before a rose-bush, where, at that reappearance, he could make a sign of recognition. Sure enough, he came; and Winton quietly raising his hand to the salute passed on through the drawing-room window. He went quickly into the hall, listened a second, and opened the dining-room door. Fiorsen was pacing up and down, pale and restless. He came to a standstill and stared haggardly at Winton, who said:

"How are you? Gyp not in?"

"No."

Something in the sound of that "No" touched Winton with a vague—a very vague—compunction. To be left by Gyp! Then his heart hardened again. The fellow was a rotter—he was sure of it, had always been sure.

"Baby looks well," he said.

Fiorsen turned and began to pace up and down again.

"Where is Gyp? I want her to come in. I want her."

Winton took out his watch.

"It's not late." And suddenly he felt a great aversion for the part he was playing. To get the baby; to make Gyp safe—yes! But, somehow, not this pretence that he knew nothing about it. He turned on his heel and walked out. It imperilled everything; but he couldn't help it. He could not stay and go on prevaricating like this. Had that woman got clear? He went back into the drawing-room. There they were—just passing the side of the house. Five minutes, and they would be down at the turning. He stood at the window, waiting. If only that fellow did not come in! Through the partition wall he could hear him still tramping up and down the dining-room. What a long time a minute was! Three had gone when he heard the dining-room door opened, and Fiorsen crossing the hall to the front door. What was he after, standing there as if listening? And suddenly he heard him sigh. It was just such a sound as

many times, in the long-past days, had escaped himself, waiting, listening for footsteps, in parched and sickening anxiety. Did this fellow then really love—almost as he had loved? And in revolt at spying on him like this, he advanced and said:

"Well, I won't wait any longer."

Fiorsen started; he had evidently supposed himself alone. And Winton thought: 'By Jove! he does look bad!'

"Good-bye!" he said; but the words: "Give my love to Gyp," perished on their way up to his lips.

"Good-bye!" Fiorsen echoed. And Winton went out under the trellis, conscious of that forlorn figure still standing at the half-opened door. Betty was nowhere in sight; she must have reached the turning. His mission had succeeded, but he felt no elation. Round the corner, he picked up his convoy, and, with the perambulator hoisted on to the taxi, journeyed on at speed. He had said he would explain in the cab, but the only remark he made was:

"You'll all go down to Mildenhamp to-morrow."

And Betty, who had feared him ever since their encounter so many years ago, eyed his profile, without daring to ask questions. Before he reached home, Winton stopped at a post-office, and sent this telegram:

"Gyp and the baby are with me letter follows.—WINTON."

It salved a conscience on which that fellow's figure in the doorway weighed; besides, it was necessary, lest Fiorsen should go to the police. The rest must wait till he had talked with Gyp.

There was much to do, and it was late before they dined, and not till Markey had withdrawn could they begin their talk.

Close to the open windows where Markey had placed two hydrangea plants—just bought on his own responsibility, in token of silent satisfaction—Gyp began. She kept nothing back, recounting the whole miserable fiasco of her marriage. When she came to Daphne Wing and her discovery in the music-room, she could see the glowing end of her father's cigar move convulsively. That insult to his adored one seemed to Winton so inconceivable that, for a moment, he stopped her recital by getting up to pace the room. In her own house—her own house! And—after that, she had gone on with him! He came back to his chair and did not interrupt again, but his stillness almost frightened her.

Coming to the incidents of the day itself, she hesitated. Must she tell him, too, of Rosek—was it wise, or necessary? The all-or-nothing candour that was part of her nature prevailed, and she went straight on, and, save for the feverish jerking of his evening shoe, Winton made no sign. When she had finished, he got up and slowly extinguished the end of his cigar against the window-sill; then looking at her lying back in her chair as if exhausted, he said: "By God!" and turned his face away to the window.

At that hour before the theatres rose, a lull brooded in the London streets; in this quiet narrow one, the town's hum was only broken by the clack of a half-drunken woman bickering at her man as they lurched along for home, and the strains of a street musician's fiddle, trying to make up for a blank day. The sound vaguely irritated Winton, reminding him of those two damnable foreigners by whom she had been so treated. To have them at the point of a sword or pistol—to teach them a lesson! He heard her say:

"Dad, I should like to pay his debts. Then things would be as they were when I married him."

He emitted an exasperated sound. He did not believe in heaping coals of fire.

"I want to make sure, too, that the girl is all right till she's over her trouble. Perhaps I could use some of that—that other money, if mine is all tied up?"

It was sheer anger, not disapproval of her impulse, that made him hesitate; money and revenge would never be associated in his mind. Gyp went on:

"I want to feel as if I'd never let him marry me. Perhaps his debts are all part of that—who knows? Please!"

Winton looked at her. How like—when she said that "Please!" How like—her figure sunk back in the old chair, and the face lifted in shadow! A sort of exultation came to him. He had got her back—had got her back!

XVIII

Fiorsen's bedroom was—as the maid would remark—"a proper pigsty"—until he was out of it and it could be renovated each day. He had a talent for disorder, so that the room looked as if three men instead of one had gone to bed in it. Clothes and shoes, brushes, water, tumblers, breakfast-tray, newspapers, French novels, and cigarette-ends—none were ever where they should have been; and the stale fumes from the many cigarettes he smoked before getting up incommoded anyone whose duty it was to take him tea and shaving-water. When, on that first real summer day, the maid had brought Rosek up to him, he had been lying a long time on his back, dreamily watching the smoke from his cigarette and four flies waltzing in the sunlight that filtered through the green sun-blinds. This hour, before he rose, was his creative moment, when he could best see the form of music and feel inspiration for its rendering. Of late, he had been stale and wretched, all that side of him dull; but this morning he felt again the delicious stir of fancy, that vibrating, half-dreamy state when emotion seems so easily to find shape and the mind pierces through to new expression. Hearing the maid's knock, and her murmured: "Count Rosek to see you, sir," he thought: 'What the devil does he want?' A larger nature, drifting without control, in contact with a smaller one, who knows his own mind exactly, will instinctively be irritable, though he may fail to grasp what his friend is after.

And pushing the cigarette-box toward Rosek, he turned away his head. It would be money he had come about, or—that girl! That girl—he wished she was dead! Soft, clinging creature! A baby! God! What a fool he had been—ah, what a fool! Such absurdity! Unheard of! First Gyp—then her! He had tried to shake the girl off. As well try to shake off a burr! How she clung! He had been patient—oh, yes—patient and kind, but how go on when one was tired—tired of her—and wanting only Gyp, only his own wife? That was a funny thing! And now, when, for an hour or two, he had shaken free of worry, had been feeling happy—yes, happy—this fellow must come, and stand there with his face of a sphinx! And he said pettishly:

"Well, Paul! sit down. What troubles have you brought?"

Rosek lit a cigarette but did not sit down. He struck even Fiorsen by his unsmiling pallor.

"You had better look out for Mr. Wagge, Gustav; he came to me yesterday. He has no music in his soul."

Fiorsen sat up.

"Satan take Mr. Wagge! What can he do?"

"I am not a lawyer, but I imagine he can be unpleasant—the girl is young."

Fiorsen glared at him, and said:

"Why did you throw me that cursed girl?"

Rosek answered, a little too steadily:

"I did not, my friend."

"What! You did. What was your game? You never do anything without a game. You know you did. Come; what was your game?"

"You like pleasure, I believe."

Fiorsen said violently:

"Look here: I have done with your friendship—you are no friend to me. I have never really known you, and I should not wish to. It is finished. Leave me in peace."

Rosek smiled.

"My dear, that is all very well, but friendships are not finished like that. Moreover, you owe me a thousand pounds."

"Well, I will pay it." Rosek's eyebrows mounted. "I will. Gyp will lend it to me."

"Oh! Is Gyp so fond of you as that? I thought she only loved her music-lessons."

Crouching forward with his knees drawn up, Fiorsen hissed out:

"Don't talk of Gyp! Get out of this! I will pay you your thousand pounds."

Rosek, still smiling, answered:

"Gustav, don't be a fool! With a violin to your shoulder, you are a man. Without—you are a child. Lie quiet, my friend, and think of Mr. Wagge. But you had better come and talk it over with me. Good-bye for the moment. Calm yourself." And, flipping the ash off his cigarette on to the tray by Fiorsen's elbow, he nodded and went.

Fiorsen, who had leaped out of bed, put his hand to his head. The cursed fellow! Cursed be every one of them—the father and the girl, Rosek and all the other sharks! He went out on to the landing. The house was quite still below. Rosek had gone—good riddance! He called, "Gyp!" No answer. He went into her room. Its superlative daintiness struck his fancy. A scent of cyclamen! He looked out into the garden. There was the baby at the end, and that fat woman. No Gyp! Never in when she was wanted. Wagge! He shivered; and, going back into his bedroom, took a brandy-bottle from a locked cupboard and drank some. It steadied him; he locked up the cupboard again, and dressed.

Going out to the music-room, he stopped under the trees to make passes with his fingers at the baby. Sometimes he felt that it was an adorable little creature, with its big, dark eyes so like Gyp's. Sometimes it excited his disgust—a discoloured brat. This morning, while looking at it, he thought suddenly of the other that was coming—and grimaced. Catching Betty's stare of horrified amazement at the face he was making at her darling, he burst into a laugh and turned away into the music-room.

While he was keying up his violin, Gyp's conduct in never having come there for so long struck him as bitterly unjust. The girl—who cared about the wretched girl? As if she made any real difference! It was all so much deeper than that. Gyp had never loved him, never given him what he wanted, never quenched his thirst of her! That was the heart of it. No other woman he had ever had to do with had been like that—kept his thirst unquenched. No; he had always tired of them before they tired of him. She gave him nothing really—nothing! Had she no heart or did she give it elsewhere? What was that Paul had said about her music-lessons? And suddenly it struck him that he knew nothing, absolutely nothing, of where she went or what she did. She never told him anything. Music-lessons? Every day, nearly, she went out, was away for hours. The thought that she might go to the arms of another man made him put down his violin with a feeling of actual sickness. Why not? That deep and fearful whipping of the sexual instinct which makes the ache of jealousy so truly terrible was at its full in such a nature as Fiorsen's. He drew a long breath and shuddered. The remembrance of her fastidious pride, her candour, above all her passivity cut in across his fear. No, not Gyp!

He went to a little table whereon stood a tantalus, tumblers, and a syphon, and pouring out some brandy, drank. It steadied him. And he began to practise. He took a passage from Brahms' violin concerto and began to play it over and over. Suddenly, he found he was repeating the same flaws each time; he was not attending. The fingering of that thing was ghastly! Music-lessons! Why did she take them? Waste of time and money—she would never be anything but an amateur! Ugh! Unconsciously, he had stopped playing. Had she gone there to-day? It was past lunch-time. Perhaps she had come in.

He put down his violin and went back to the house. No sign of her! The maid came to ask if he would lunch. No! Was the mistress to be in? She had not said. He went into the dining-room, ate a biscuit, and drank a brandy and soda. It steadied him. Lighting a cigarette, he came back to the drawing-room and sat down at Gyp's bureau. How tidy! On the little calendar, a pencil-cross was set against to-day—Wednesday, another against Friday. What for? Music-lessons! He reached to a pigeon-hole, and took out her address-book. "H—Harmost, 305A, Marylebone Road," and against it the words in pencil, "3 P.M."

Three o'clock. So that was her hour! His eyes rested idly on a little old coloured print of a Bacchante, with flowing green scarf, shaking a tambourine at a naked Cupid, who with a baby bow and arrow in his hands, was gazing up at her. He turned it over; on the back was written in a pointed, scriggly hand, "To my little friend.—E. H." Fiorsen drew smoke deep down into his lungs, expelled it slowly, and went to the piano. He opened it and began to play, staring vacantly before him, the cigarette burned nearly to his lips. He went on, scarcely knowing what he played. At last he stopped, and sat dejected. A great artist? Often, nowadays, he did not care if he never touched a violin again. Tired of standing up before a sea of dull faces, seeing the blockheads knock their silly hands one against the other! Sick of the sameness of it all! Besides—besides, were his powers beginning to fail? What was happening to him of late?

He got up, went into the dining-room, and drank some brandy. Gyp could not bear his drinking. Well, she shouldn't be out so much—taking music-lessons. Music-lessons! Nearly three o'clock. If he went for once and saw what she really did—Went, and offered her his escort home! An attention. It might please her. Better, anyway, than waiting here until she chose to come in with her face all closed up. He drank

a little more brandy—ever so little—took his hat and went. Not far to walk, but the sun was hot, and he reached the house feeling rather dizzy. A maid-servant opened the door to him.

"I am Mr. Fiorsen. Mrs. Fiorsen here?"

"Yes, sir; will you wait?"

Why did she look at him like that? Ugly girl! How hateful ugly people were! When she was gone, he reopened the door of the waiting-room, and listened.

Chopin! The polonaise in A flat. Good! Could that be Gyp? Very good! He moved out, down the passage, drawn on by her playing, and softly turned the handle. The music stopped. He went in.

When Winton had left him, an hour and a half later that afternoon, Fiorsen continued to stand at the front door, swaying his body to and fro. The brandy-nurtured burst of jealousy which had made him insult his wife and old Monsieur Harmost had died suddenly when Gyp turned on him in the street and spoke in that icy voice; since then he had felt fear, increasing every minute. Would she forgive? To one who always acted on the impulse of the moment, so that he rarely knew afterward exactly what he had done, or whom hurt, Gyp's self-control had ever been mysterious and a little frightening. Where had she gone? Why did she not come in? Anxiety is like a ball that rolls down-hill, gathering momentum. Suppose she did not come back! But she must—there was the baby—their baby!

For the first time, the thought of it gave him unalloyed satisfaction. He left the door, and, after drinking a glass to steady him, flung himself down on the sofa in the drawing-room. And while he lay there, the brandy warm within him, he thought: 'I will turn over a new leaf; give up drink, give up everything, send the baby into the country, take Gyp to Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Rome—anywhere out of this England, anywhere, away from that father of hers and all these stiff, dull folk! She will like that—she loves travelling!' Yes, they would be happy! Delicious nights—delicious days—air that did not weigh you down and make you feel that you must drink—real inspiration—real music! The acrid wood-smoke scent of Paris streets, the glistening cleanness of the Thiergarten, a serenading song in a Florence back street, fireflies in the summer dusk at Sorrento—he had intoxicating memories of them all! Slowly the warmth of the brandy died away, and, despite the heat, he felt chill and shuddery. He shut his eyes, thinking to sleep till she came in. But very soon he opened them, because—a thing usual with him of late—he saw such ugly things—faces, vivid, changing as he looked, growing ugly and uglier, becoming all holes—holes—horrible holes—Corruption—matted, twisted, dark human-tree-roots of faces! Horrible! He opened his eyes, for when he did that, they always went. It was very silent. No sound from above. No sound of the dogs. He would go up and see the baby.

While he was crossing the hall, there came a ring. He opened the door himself. A telegram! He tore the envelope.

"Gyp and the baby are with me letter follows.—WINTON."

He gave a short laugh, shut the door in the boy's face, and ran upstairs; why—heaven knew! There was nobody there now! Nobody! Did it mean that she had really left him—was not coming back? He stopped by the side of Gyp's bed, and flinging himself forward, lay across it, burying his face. And he sobbed, as men will, unmanned by drink. Had he lost her? Never to see her eyes closing and press his lips against them! Never to soak his senses in her loveliness! He leaped up, with the tears still wet on his face. Lost her? Absurd! That calm, prim, devilish Englishman, her father—he was to blame—he had worked it all—stealing the baby!

He went down-stairs and drank some brandy. It steadied him a little. What should he do? "Letter follows." Drink, and wait? Go to Bury Street? No. Drink! Enjoy himself!

He laughed, and, catching up his hat, went out, walking furiously at first, then slower and slower, for his head began to whirl, and, taking a cab, was driven to a restaurant in Soho. He had eaten nothing but a biscuit since his breakfast, always a small matter, and ordered soup and a flask of their best Chianti—solids he could not face. More than two hours he sat, white and silent, perspiration on his forehead, now and then grinning and flourishing his fingers, to the amusement and sometimes the alarm of those sitting near. But for being known there, he would have been regarded with suspicion. About half-past nine, there being no more wine, he got up, put a piece of gold on the table, and went out without waiting for his change.

In the streets, the lamps were lighted, but daylight was not quite gone. He walked unsteadily, toward Piccadilly. A girl of the town passed and looked up at him. Staring hard, he hooked his arm in hers without a word; it steadied him, and they walked on thus together. Suddenly he said:

"Well, girl, are you happy?" The girl stopped and tried to disengage her arm; a rather frightened look had come into her dark-eyed powdered face. Fiorsen laughed, and held it firm. "When the unhappy meet, they walk together. Come on! You are just a little like my wife. Will you have a drink?"

The girl shook her head, and, with a sudden movement, slipped her arm out of this madman's and dived away like a swallow through the pavement traffic. Fiorsen stood still and laughed with his head thrown back. The second time to-day. SHE had slipped from his grasp. Passers looked at him, amazed. The ugly devils! And with a grimace, he turned out of Piccadilly, past St. James's Church, making for Bury Street. They wouldn't let him in, of course—not they! But he would look at the windows; they had flower-boxes—flower-boxes! And, suddenly, he groaned aloud—he had thought of Gyp's figure busy among the flowers at home. Missing the right turning, he came in at the bottom of the street. A fiddler in the gutter was scraping away on an old violin. Fiorsen stopped to listen. Poor devil! "Pagliacci!" Going up to the man—dark, lame, very shabby, he took out some silver, and put his other hand on the man's shoulder.

"Brother," he said, "lend me your fiddle. Here's money for you. Come; lend it to me. I am a great violinist."

"Vraiment, monsieur!"

"Ah! Vraiment! Voyons! Donnez—un instant—vous verrez."

The fiddler, doubting but hypnotized, handed him the fiddle; his dark face changed when he saw this stranger fling it up to his shoulder and the ways of his fingers with bow and strings. Fiorsen had begun to walk up the street, his eyes searching for the flower-boxes. He saw them, stopped, and began playing "Che faro?" He played it wonderfully on that poor fiddle; and the fiddler, who had followed at his elbow, stood watching him, uneasy, envious, but a little entranced. Sapristi! This tall, pale monsieur with the strange face and the eyes that looked drunk and the hollow chest, played like an angel! Ah, but it was not so easy as all that to make money in the streets of this sacred town! You might play like forty angels and not a copper! He had begun another tune—like little pluckings at your heart—tres joli—tout a fait ecoeurant! Ah, there it was—a monsieur as usual closing the window, drawing the curtains! Always same thing! The violin and the bow were thrust back into his hands; and the tall strange monsieur was off as if devils were after him—not badly drunk, that one! And not a sou thrown down! With an uneasy feeling that he had been involved in something that he did not understand, the lame, dark fiddler limped his way round the nearest corner, and for two streets at least did not stop. Then, counting the silver Fiorsen had put into his hand and carefully examining his fiddle, he used the word, "Bigre!" and started for home.

XIX

Gyp hardly slept at all. Three times she got up, and, stealing to the door, looked in at her sleeping baby, whose face in its new bed she could just see by the night-light's glow. The afternoon had shaken her nerves. Nor was Betty's method of breathing while asleep conducive to the slumber of anything but babies. It was so hot, too, and the sound of the violin still in her ears. By that little air of Poise, she had known for certain it was Fiorsen; and her father's abrupt drawing of the curtains had clinched that certainty. If she had gone to the window and seen him, she would not have been half so deeply disturbed as she was by that echo of an old emotion. The link which yesterday she thought broken for good was reforged in some mysterious way. The sobbing of that old fiddle had been his way of saying, "Forgive me; forgive!" To leave him would have been so much easier if she had really hated him; but she did not. However difficult it may be to live with an artist, to hate him is quite as difficult. An artist is so flexible—only the rigid can be hated. She hated the things he did, and him when he was doing them; but afterward again could hate him no more than she could love him, and that was—not at all. Resolution and a sense of the practical began to come back with daylight. When things were hopeless, it was far better to recognize it and harden one's heart.

Winton, whose night had been almost as sleepless—to play like a beggar in the street, under his windows, had seemed to him the limit!—announced at breakfast that he must see his lawyer, make arrangements for the payment of Fiorsen's debts, and find out what could be done to secure Gyp against persecution. Some deed was probably necessary; he was vague on all such matters. In the meantime, neither Gyp nor the baby must go out. Gyp spent the morning writing and rewriting to Monsieur Harmost, trying to express her chagrin, but not saying that she had left Fiorsen.

Her father came back from Westminster quiet and angry. He had with difficulty been made to understand that the baby was Fiorsen's property, so that, if the fellow claimed it, legally they would be unable to resist. The point opened the old wound, forced him to remember that his own daughter had once belonged to another—father. He had told the lawyer in a measured voice that he would see the fellow damned first, and had directed a deed of separation to be prepared, which should provide for the complete payment of Fiorsen's existing debts on condition that he left Gyp and the baby in peace. After telling Gyp this, he took an opportunity of going to the extempore nursery and standing by the baby's cradle. Until then, the little creature had only been of interest as part of Gyp; now it had for him an existence of its own—this tiny, dark-eyed creature, lying there, watching him so gravely, clutching his finger. Suddenly the baby smiled—not a beautiful smile, but it made on Winton an indelible impression.

Wishing first to settle this matter of the deed, he put off going down to Mildenhams; but "not trusting those two scoundrels a yard"—for he never failed to bracket Rosek and Fiorsen—he insisted that the baby should not go out without two attendants, and that Gyp should not go out alone. He carried precaution to the point of accompanying her to Monsieur Harmost's on the Friday afternoon, and expressed a wish to go in and shake hands with the old fellow. It was a queer meeting. Those two had as great difficulty in finding anything to say as though they were denizens of different planets. And indeed, there ARE two planets on this earth! When, after a minute or so of the friendliest embarrassment, he had retired to wait for her, Gyp sat down to her lesson.

Monsieur Harmost said quietly:

"Your letter was very kind, my little friend—and your father is very kind. But, after all, it was a compliment your husband paid me." His smile smote Gyp; it seemed to sum up so many resignations. "So you stay again with your father!" And, looking at her very hard with his melancholy brown eyes, "When will you find your fate, I wonder?"

"Never!"

Monsieur Harmost's eyebrows rose.

"Ah," he said, "you think! No, that is impossible!" He walked twice very quickly up and down the room; then spinning round on his heel, said sharply: "Well, we must not waste your father's time. To work."

Winton's simple comment in the cab on the way home was:

"Nice old chap!"

At Bury Street, they found Gyp's agitated parlour-maid. Going to do the music-room that morning, she had "found the master sitting on the sofa, holding his head, and groaning awful. He's not been at home, ma'am, since you—you went on your visit, so I didn't know what to do. I ran for cook and we got him up to bed, and not knowing where you'd be, ma'am, I telephoned to Count Rosek, and he came—I hope I didn't do wrong—and he sent me down to see you. The doctor says his brain's on the touch and go, and he keeps askin' for you, ma'am. So I didn't know what to do."

Gyp, pale to the lips, said:

"Wait here a minute, Ellen," and went into the dining-room. Winton followed. She turned to him at once, and said:

"Oh, Dad, what am I to do? His brain! It would be too awful to feel I'd brought that about."

Winton grunted. Gyp went on:

"I must go and see. If it's really that, I couldn't bear it. I'm afraid I must go, Dad."

Winton nodded.

"Well, I'll come too," he said. "The girl can go back in the cab and say we're on the way."

Taking a parting look at her baby, Gyp thought bitterly: 'My fate? THIS is my fate, and no getting out of it!' On the journey, she and Winton were quite silent—but she held his hand tight. While the cook was taking up to Rosek the news of their arrival, Gyp stood looking out at her garden. Two days and six hours only since she had stood there above her pansies; since, at this very spot, Rosek had kissed her throat! Slipping her hand through Winton's arm, she said:

"Dad, please don't make anything of that kiss. He couldn't help himself,

I suppose. What does it matter, too?"

A moment later Rosek entered. Before she could speak, Winton was saying:

"Thank you for letting us know, sir. But now that my daughter is here, there will be no further need for your kind services. Good-day!"

At the cruel curtness of those words, Gyp gave the tiniest start forward. She had seen them go through Rosek's armour as a sword through brown paper. He recovered himself with a sickly smile, bowed, and went out. Winton followed—precisely as if he did not trust him with the hats in the hall. When the outer door was shut, he said:

"I don't think he'll trouble you again."

Gyp's gratitude was qualified by a queer compassion. After all, his offence had only been that of loving her.

Fiorsen had been taken to her room, which was larger and cooler than his own; and the maid was standing by the side of the bed with a scared face. Gyp signed to her to go. He opened his eyes presently:

"Gyp! Oh! Gyp! Is it you? The devilish, awful things I see—don't go away again! Oh, Gyp!" With a sob he raised himself and rested his forehead against her. And Gyp felt—as on the first night he came home drunk—a merging of all other emotions in the desire to protect and heal.

"It's all right, all right," she murmured. "I'm going to stay. Don't worry about anything. Keep quite quiet, and you'll soon be well."

In a quarter of an hour, he was asleep. His wasted look went to her heart, and that expression of terror which had been coming and going until he fell asleep! Anything to do with the brain was so horrible! Only too clear that she must stay—that his recovery depended on her. She was still sitting there, motionless, when the doctor came, and, seeing him asleep, beckoned her out. He looked a kindly man, with two waistcoats, the top one unbuttoned; and while he talked, he winked at Gyp involuntarily, and, with each wink, Gyp felt that he ripped the veil off one more domestic secret. Sleep was the ticket—the very ticket for him! Had something on his mind—yes! And—er—a little given to—brandy? Ah! all that must stop! Stomach as well as nerves affected. Seeing things—nasty things—sure sign. Perhaps not a very careful life before marriage. And married—how long? His kindly appreciative eyes swept Gyp from top to toe. Year and a half! Quite so! Hard worker at his violin, too? No doubt! Musicians always a little inclined to be immoderate—too much sense of beauty—burn the candle at both ends! She must see to that. She had been away, had she not—staying with her father? Yes. But—no one like a wife for nursing. As to treatment? Well! One would shove in a dash of what he would prescribe, night and morning. Perfect quiet. No stimulant. A little cup of strong coffee without milk, if he seemed low. Keep him in bed at present. No worry; no excitement. Young man still. Plenty of vitality. As to herself, no undue anxiety. To-morrow they would see whether a night nurse would be necessary. Above all, no violin for a month, no alcohol—in every way the strictest moderation! And with a last and friendliest wink, leaning heavily on that word "moderation," he took out a stylographic pen, scratched on a leaf of his note-book, shook Gyp's hand, smiled whimsically, buttoned his upper waistcoat, and departed.

Gyp went back to her seat by the bed. Irony! She whose only desire was to be let go free, was mainly responsible for his breakdown! But for her, there would be nothing on his mind, for he would not be married! Brooding morbidly, she asked herself—his drinking, debts, even the girl—had she caused them, too? And when she tried to free him and herself—this was the result! Was there something fatal about her that must destroy the men she had to do with? She had made her father unhappy, Monsieur Harmost—Rosek, and her husband! Even before she married, how many had tried for her love, and gone away unhappy! And, getting up, she went to a mirror and looked at herself long and sadly.

XX

Three days after her abortive attempt to break away, Gyp, with much heart-searching, wrote to Daphne Wing, telling her of Fiorsen's illness, and mentioning a cottage near Mildenham, where—if she liked to go—she would be quite comfortable and safe from all curiosity, and finally begging to be allowed to make good the losses from any broken dance-contracts.

Next morning, she found Mr. Wagge with a tall, crape-banded hat in his black-gloved hands, standing in the very centre of her drawing-room. He was staring into the garden, as if he had been vouchsafed a vision of that warm night when the moonlight shed its ghostly glamour on the sunflowers, and his daughter had danced out there. She had a perfect view of his thick red neck in its turndown collar, crossed by a black bow over a shiny white shirt. And, holding out her hand, she said:

"How do you do, Mr. Wagge? It was kind of you to come."

Mr. Wagge turned. His pug face wore a downcast expression.

"I hope I see you well, ma'am. Pretty place you 'ave 'ere. I'm fond of flowers myself. They've always been my 'obby."

"They're a great comfort in London, aren't they?"

"Ye-es; I should think you might grow the dahlia here." And having thus obeyed the obscure instincts of savoir faire, satisfied some obscurer desire to flatter, he went on: "My girl showed me your letter. I didn't like to write; in such a delicate matter I'd rather be vivey vocey. Very kind, in your position; I'm sure I appreciate it. I always try to do the Christian thing myself. Flesh passes; you never know when you may have to take your turn. I said to my girl I'd come and see you."

"I'm very glad. I hoped perhaps you would."

Mr. Wagge cleared his throat, and went on, in a hoarser voice:

"I don't want to say anything harsh about a certain party in your presence, especially as I read he's indisposed, but really I hardly know how to bear the situation. I can't bring myself to think of money in relation to that matter; all the same, it's a serious loss to my daughter, very serious loss. I've got my family pride to think of. My daughter's name, well—it's my own; and, though I say it, I'm respected—a regular attendant—I think I told you. Sometimes, I assure you, I feel I can't control myself, and it's only that—and you, if I may say so, that keeps me in check."

During this speech, his black-gloved hands were clenching and unclenching, and he shifted his broad, shining boots. Gyp gazed at them, not daring to look up at his eyes thus turning and turning from Christianity to shekels, from his honour to the world, from his anger to herself. And she said:

"Please let me do what I ask, Mr. Wagge. I should be so unhappy if I mightn't do that little something."

Mr. Wagge blew his nose.

"It's a delicate matter," he said. "I don't know where my duty lays. I don't, reelly."

Gyp looked up then.

"The great thing is to save Daisy suffering, isn't it?"

Mr. Wagge's face wore for a moment an expression of affront, as if from the thought: 'Sufferin'! You must leave that to her father!' Then it wavered; the curious, furtive warmth of the attracted male came for a moment into his little eyes; he averted them, and coughed. Gyp said softly:

"To please me."

Mr. Wagge's readjusted glance stopped in confusion at her waist. He answered, in a voice that he strove to make bland:

"If you put it in that way, I don't reelly know 'ow to refuse; but it must be quite between you and me—I can't withdraw my attitude."

Gyp murmured:

"No, of course. Thank you so much; and you'll let me know about everything later. I mustn't take up your time now." And she held out her hand.

Mr. Wagge took it in a lingering manner.

"Well, I HAVE an appointment," he said; "a gentleman at Campden Hill. He starts at twelve. I'm never late. GOOD-morning."

When she had watched his square, black figure pass through the outer gate, busily rebuttoning those shining black gloves, she went upstairs and washed her face and hands.

For several days, Fiorsen wavered; but his collapse had come just in time, and with every hour the danger lessened. At the end of a fortnight of a perfectly white life, there remained nothing to do in the words of the doctor but "to avoid all recurrence of the predisposing causes, and shove in sea air!" Gyp had locked up all brandy—and violins; she could control him so long as he was tamed by his own weakness. But she passed some very bitter hours before she sent for her baby, Betty, and the dogs, and definitely took up life in her little house again. His debts had been paid, including the thousand pounds to Rosek, and the losses of Daphne Wing. The girl had gone down to that cottage where no one had ever heard of her, to pass her time in lonely grief and terror, with the aid of a black dress and a gold band on her third finger.

August and the first half of September were spent near Bude. Fiorsen's passion for the sea, a passion Gyp could share, kept him singularly moderate and free from restiveness. He had been thoroughly frightened, and such terror is not easily forgotten. They stayed in a farmhouse, where he was at his best with the simple folk, and his best could be charming. He was always trying to get his "mermaid," as he took to calling Gyp, away from the baby, getting her away to himself, along the grassy cliffs and among the rocks and yellow sands of that free coast. His delight was to find every day some new nook where they could bathe, and dry themselves by sitting in the sun. And very like a mermaid she was, on a seaweedy rock, with her feet close together in a little pool, her fingers combing her drowned hair, and the sun silvering her wet body. If she had loved him, it would have been perfect. But though, close to nature like this—there are men to whom towns are poison—he was so much more easy to bear, even to like, her heart never opened to him, never fluttered at his voice, or beat more quickly under his kisses. One cannot regulate these things. The warmth in her eyes when they looked at her baby, and the coolness when they looked at him, was such that not even a man, and he an egoist, could help seeing; and secretly he began to hate that tiny rival, and she began to notice that he did.

As soon as the weather broke, he grew restless, craving his violin, and they went back to town, in robust health—all three. During those weeks, Gyp had never been free of the feeling that it was just a lull, of forces held up in suspense, and the moment they were back in their house, this feeling gathered density and darkness, as rain gathers in the sky after a fine spell. She had often thought of Daphne Wing, and had written twice, getting in return one naive and pathetic answer:

'DEAR MRS. FIORENSEN,

'Oh, it is kind of you to write, because I know what you must be feeling about me; and it was so kind of you to let me come here. I try not to think about things, but of course I can't help it; and I don't seem to care what happens now. Mother is coming down here later on. Sometimes I lie awake all night, listening to the wind. Don't you think the wind is the most melancholy thing in the world? I wonder if I shall die? I hope I shall. Oh, I do, really! Good-bye, dear Mrs. Fiorsen. I shall never forgive myself about you.

'Your grateful,
'DAPHNE WING.'

The girl had never once been mentioned between her and Fiorsen since the night when he sat by her bed, begging forgiveness; she did not know whether he ever gave the little dancer and her trouble a thought, or even knew what had become of her. But now that the time was getting near, Gyp felt more and more every day as if she must go down and see her. She wrote to her father, who, after a dose of Harrogate with Aunt Rosamund, was back at Mildenhamp. Winton answered that the nurse was there, and that there seemed to be a woman, presumably the mother, staying with her, but that he had not of course made direct inquiry. Could not Gyp come down? He was alone, and cubbing had begun. It was like him to veil his longings under such dry statements. But the thought of giving him pleasure, and of a gallop with hounds fortified intensely her feeling that she ought to go. Now that baby was so well, and Fiorsen still not drinking, she might surely snatch this little holiday and satisfy her conscience about the girl. Since the return from Cornwall, she had played for him in the music-room just as of old, and she chose the finish of a morning practice to say:

"Gustav, I want to go to Mildenhamp this afternoon for a week. Father's lonely."

He was putting away his violin, but she saw his neck grow red.

"To him? No. He will steal you as he stole the baby. Let him have the baby if he likes. Not you. No."

Gyp, who was standing by the piano, kept silence at this unexpected outburst, but revolt blazed up in her. She never asked him anything; he should not refuse this. He came up behind and put his arms round her.

"My Gyp, I want you here—I am lonely, too. Don't go away."

She tried to force his arms apart, but could not, and her anger grew. She said coldly:

"There's another reason why I must go."

"No, no! No good reason—to take you from me."

"There is! The girl who is just going to have your child is staying near Mildenhams, and I want to see how she is."

He let go of her then, and recoiling against the divan, sat down. And Gyp thought: 'I'm sorry. I didn't mean to—but it serves him right.'

He muttered, in a dull voice:

"Oh, I hoped she was dead."

"Yes! For all you care, she might be. I'm going, but you needn't be afraid that I shan't come back. I shall be back to-day week; I promise."

He looked at her fixedly.

"Yes. You don't break your promises; you will not break it." But, suddenly, he said again: "Gyp, don't go!"

"I must."

He got up and caught her in his arms.

"Say you love me, then!"

But she could not. It was one thing to put up with embraces, quite another to pretend that. When at last he was gone, she sat smoothing her hair, staring before her with hard eyes, thinking: "Here—where I saw him with that girl! What animals men are!"

Late that afternoon, she reached Mildenhams. Winton met her at the station. And on the drive up, they passed the cottage where Daphne Wing was staying. It stood in front of a small coppice, a creepered, plain-fronted, little brick house, with a garden still full of sunflowers, tenanted by the old jockey, Pettance, his widowed daughter, and her three small children. "That talkative old scoundrel," as Winton always called him, was still employed in the Mildenhams stables, and his daughter was laundress to the establishment. Gyp had secured for Daphne Wing the same free, independent, economic agent who had watched over her own event; the same old doctor, too, was to be the presiding deity. There were no signs of life about the cottage, and she would not stop, too eager to be at home again, to see the old rooms, and smell the old savour of the house, to get to her old mare, and feel its nose nuzzling her for sugar. It was so good to be back once more, feeling strong and well and able to ride. The smile of the inscrutable Markey at the front door was a joy to her, even the darkness of the hall, where a gleam of last sunlight fell across the skin of Winton's first tiger, on which she had so often sunk down dead tired after hunting. Ah, it was nice to be at home!

In her mare's box, old Pettance was putting a last touch to cleanliness. His shaven, skin-tight, wicked old face, smiled deeply. He said in honeyed tones:

"Good evenin', miss; beautiful evenin', ma'am!" And his little burning brown eyes, just touched by age, regarded her lovingly.

"Well, Pettance, how are you? And how's Annie, and how are the children? And how's this old darling?"

"Wonderful, miss; artful as a kitten. Carry you like a bird to-morrow, if you're goin' out."

"How are her legs?"

And while Gyp passed her hand down those iron legs, the old mare examined her down the back of her neck.

"They 'aven't filled not once since she come in—she was out all July and August; but I've kept 'er well at it since, in 'opes you might be comin'."

"They feel splendid." And, still bending down, Gyp asked: "And how is your lodger—the young lady I sent you?"

"Well, ma'am, she's very young, and these very young ladies they get a bit excited, you know, at such times; I should say she've never been—" With obvious difficulty he checked the words, "to an 'orse before!" "Well, you must expect it. And her mother, she's a dreadful funny one, miss. She does needle me! Oh, she puts my back up properly! No class, of course—that's where it is. But this 'ere nurse—well, you know, miss, she won't 'ave no nonsense; so there we are. And, of course, you're bound to 'ave 'ighsteria, a bit—losin' her 'usband as young as that."

Gyp could feel his wicked old smile even before she raised herself. But what did it matter if he did guess? She knew he would keep a stable secret.

"Oh, we've 'ad some pretty flirts—up and cryin', dear me! I sleeps in the next room—oh, yes, at night-time—when you're a widder at that age, you can't expect nothin' else. I remember when I was ridin' in Ireland for Captain O'Neill, there was a young woman—"

Gyp thought: 'I mustn't let him get off—or I shall be late for dinner,' and she said:

"Oh, Pettance, who bought the young brown horse?"

"Mr. Bryn Summer'ay, ma'am, over at Widrington, for an 'unter, and 'ack in town, miss."

"Summerhay? Ah!" With a touch of the whip to her memory, Gyp recalled the young man with the clear eyes and teasing smile, on the chestnut mare, the bold young man who reminded her of somebody, and she added:

"That'll be a good home for him, I should think."

"Oh, yes, miss; good 'ome—nice gentleman, too. He come over here to see it, and asked after you. I told 'im you was a married lady now, miss. 'Ah,' he said; 'she rode beautiful!' And he remembered the 'orse well. The major, he wasn't 'ere just then, so I let him try the young un; he popped 'im over a fence or two, and when he come back he says, 'Well, I'm goin' to have 'im.' Speaks very pleasant, an' don't waste no time—'orse was away before the end of the week. Carry 'im well; 'e's a strong rider, too, and a good plucked one, but bad 'ands, I should say."

"Yes, Pettance; I must go in now. Will you tell Annie I shall be round to-morrow, to see her?"

"Very good, miss. 'Ounds meets at Filly Cross, seven-thirty. You'll be goin' out?"

"Rather. Good-night."

Flying back across the yard, Gyp thought: "'She rode beautiful!' How jolly! I'm glad he's got my horse."

XXI

Still glowing from her morning in the saddle, Gyp started out next day at noon on her visit to the "old scoundrel's" cottage. It was one of those lingering mellow mornings of late September, when the air, just warmed through, lifts off the stubbles, and the hedgerows are not yet dried of dew. The short cut led across two fields, a narrow strip of village common, where linen was drying on gorse bushes coming into bloom, and one field beyond; she met no one. Crossing the road, she passed into the cottage-garden, where sunflowers and Michaelmas daisies in great profusion were tangled along the low red-brick garden-walls, under some poplar trees yellow-flecked already. A single empty chair, with a book turned face downward, stood outside an open window. Smoke wreathing from one chimney was the only sign of life. But, standing undecided before the half-open door, Gyp was conscious, as it were, of too much stillness, of something unnatural about the silence. She was just raising her hand to knock when she heard the sound of smothered sobbing. Peeping through the window, she could just see a woman dressed in green, evidently Mrs. Wagge, seated at a table, crying into her handkerchief. At that very moment, too, a low moaning came from the room above. Gyp recoiled; then, making up her mind, she went in and knocked at the room where the woman in green was sitting. After fully half a minute, it was opened, and Mrs. Wagge stood there. The nose and eyes and cheeks of that thinnish, acid face were red, and in her green dress, and with her greenish hair (for it was going grey and she put on it a yellow lotion smelling of cantharides), she seemed to Gyp just like one of those green apples that turn reddish so unnaturally in the sun. She had rubbed over her face, which shone in streaks, and her handkerchief was still crumpled in her hand. It was horrible to come, so fresh and glowing, into the

presence of this poor woman, evidently in bitter sorrow. And a desperate desire came over Gyp to fly. It seemed dreadful for anyone connected with him who had caused this trouble to be coming here at all. But she said as softly as she could:

"Mrs. Wagge? Please forgive me—but is there any news? I am—It was I who got Daphne down here."

The woman before her was evidently being torn this way and that, but at last she answered, with a sniff:

"It—it—was born this morning—dead." Gyp gasped. To have gone through it all for that! Every bit of mother-feeling in her rebelled and sorrowed; but her reason said: Better so! Much better! And she murmured:

"How is she?"

Mrs. Wagge answered, with profound dejection:

"Bad—very bad. I don't know I'm sure what to say—my feelings are all anyhow, and that's the truth. It's so dreadfully upsetting altogether."

"Is my nurse with her?"

"Yes; she's there. She's a very headstrong woman, but capable, I don't deny. Daisy's very weak. Oh, it IS upsetting! And now I suppose there'll have to be a burial. There really seems no end to it. And all because of—of that man." And Mrs. Wagge turned away again to cry into her handkerchief.

Feeling she could never say or do the right thing to the poor lady, Gyp stole out. At the bottom of the stairs, she hesitated whether to go up or no. At last, she mounted softly. It must be in the front room that the bereaved girl was lying—the girl who, but a year ago, had debated with such naive self-importance whether or not it was her duty to take a lover. Gyp summoned courage to tap gently. The economic agent opened the door an inch, but, seeing who it was, slipped her robust and handsome person through into the corridor.

"You, my dear!" she said in a whisper. "That's nice!"

"How is she?"

"Fairly well—considering. You know about it?"

"Yes; can I see her?"

"I hardly think so. I can't make her out. She's got no spirit, not an ounce. She doesn't want to get well, I believe. It's the man, I expect." And, looking at Gyp with her fine blue eyes, she asked: "Is that it? Is he tired of her?"

Gyp met her gaze better than she had believed possible.

"Yes, nurse."

The economic agent swept her up and down. "It's a pleasure to look at you. You've got quite a colour, for you. After all, I believe it MIGHT do her good to see you. Come in!"

Gyp passed in behind her, and stood gazing, not daring to step forward. What a white face, with eyes closed, with fair hair still damp on the forehead, with one white hand lying on the sheet above her heart! What a frail madonna of the sugar-plums! On the whole of that bed the only colour seemed the gold hoop round the wedding-finger.

The economic agent said very quietly:

"Look, my dear; I've brought you a nice visitor."

Daphne Wing's eyes and lips opened and closed again. And the awful thought went through Gyp: 'Poor thing! She thought it was going to be him, and it's only me!' Then the white lips said:

"Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, it's you—it is kind of you!" And the eyes opened again, but very little, and differently.

The economic agent slipped away. Gyp sat down by the bed and timidly touched the hand.

Daphne Wing looked at her, and two tears slowly ran down her cheeks.

"It's over," she said just audibly, "and there's nothing now—it was dead, you know. I don't want to live. Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, why can't they let me die, too?"

Gyp bent over and kissed the hand, unable to bear the sight of those two slowly rolling tears. Daphne Wing went on:

"You ARE good to me. I wish my poor little baby hadn't—"

Gyp, knowing her own tears were wetting that hand, raised herself and managed to get out the words:

"Bear up! Think of your work!"

"Dancing! Ho!" She gave the least laugh ever heard. "It seems so long ago."

"Yes; but now it'll all come back to you again, better than ever."

Daphne Wing answered by a feeble sigh.

There was silence. Gyp thought: 'She's falling asleep.'

With eyes and mouth closed like that, and all alabaster white, the face was perfect, purged of its little commonnesses. Strange freak that this white flower of a face could ever have been produced by Mr. and Mrs. Wagge!

Daphne Wing opened her eyes and said:

"Oh! Mrs. Fiorsen, I feel so weak. And I feel much more lonely now. There's nothing anywhere."

Gyp got up; she felt herself being carried into the mood of the girl's heart, and was afraid it would be seen. Daphne Wing went on:

"Do you know, when nurse said she'd brought a visitor, I thought it was him; but I'm glad now. If he had looked at me like he did—I couldn't have borne it."

Gyp bent down and put her lips to the damp forehead. Faint, very faint, there was still the scent of orange-blossom.

When she was once more in the garden, she hurried away; but instead of crossing the fields again, turned past the side of the cottage into the coppice behind. And, sitting down on a log, her hands pressed to her cheeks and her elbows to her breast, she stared at the sunlit bracken and the flies chasing each other over it. Love! Was it always something hateful and tragic that spoiled lives? Criss-cross! One darting on another, taking her almost before she knew she was seized, then darting away and leaving her wanting to be seized again. Or darting on her, who, when seized, was fatal to the darter, yet had never wanted to be seized. Or darting one on the other for a moment, then both breaking away too soon. Did never two dart at each other, seize, and cling, and ever after be one? Love! It had spoiled her father's life, and Daphne Wing's; never came when it was wanted; always came when it was not. Malevolent wanderer, alighting here, there; tiring of the spirit before it tired of the body; or of the body before it tired of the spirit. Better to have nothing to do with it—far better! If one never loved, one would never feel lonely—like that poor girl. And yet! No—there was no "and yet." Who that was free would wish to become a slave? A slave—like Daphne Wing! A slave—like her own husband to his want of a wife who did not love him. A slave like her father had been—still was, to a memory. And watching the sunlight on the bracken, Gyp thought: 'Love! Keep far from me. I don't want you. I shall never want you!'

Every morning that week she made her way to the cottage, and every morning had to pass through the hands of Mrs. Wagge. The good lady had got over the upsetting fact that Gyp was the wife of that villain, and had taken a fancy to her, confiding to the economic agent, who confided it to Gyp, that she was "very distangey—and such pretty eyes, quite Italian." She was one of those numberless persons whose passion for distinction was just a little too much for their passionate propriety. It was that worship of distinction which had caused her to have her young daughter's talent for dancing fostered. Who knew to what it might lead in these days? At great length she explained to Gyp the infinite care with which she had always "brought Daisy up like a lady—and now this is the result." And she would look piercingly at Gyp's hair or ears, at her hands or her instep, to see how it was done. The burial worried her dreadfully. "I'm using the name of Daisy Wing; she was christened 'Daisy' and the Wing's professional, so that takes them both in, and it's quite the truth. But I don't think anyone would connect it, would they? About the father's name, do you think I might say the late Mr. Joseph Wing, this once? You see, it never was alive, and I must put something if they're not to guess the truth, and that I

couldn't bear; Mr. Wagge would be so distressed. It's in his own line, you see. Oh, it is upsetting!"

Gyp murmured desperately:

"Oh! yes, anything."

Though the girl was so deathly white and spiritless, it soon became clear that she was going to pull through. With each day, a little more colour and a little more commonness came back to her. And Gyp felt instinctively that she would, in the end, return to Fulham purged of her infatuation, a little harder, perhaps a little deeper.

Late one afternoon toward the end of her week at Mildenhams, Gyp wandered again into the coppice, and sat down on that same log. An hour before sunset, the light shone level on the yellowing leaves all round her; a startled rabbit pelted out of the bracken and pelted back again, and, from the far edge of the little wood, a jay cackled harshly, shifting its perch from tree to tree. Gyp thought of her baby, and of that which would have been its half-brother; and now that she was so near having to go back to Fiorsen, she knew that she had not been wise to come here. To have been in contact with the girl, to have touched, as it were, that trouble, had made the thought of life with him less tolerable even than it was before. Only the longing to see her baby made return seem possible. Ah, well—she would get used to it all again! But the anticipation of his eyes fixed on her, then sliding away from the meeting with her eyes, of all—of all that would begin again, suddenly made her shiver. She was very near to loathing at that moment. He, the father of her baby! The thought seemed ridiculous and strange. That little creature seemed to bind him to her no more than if it were the offspring of some chance encounter, some pursuit of nymph by faun. No! It was hers alone. And a sudden feverish longing to get back to it overpowered all other thought. This longing grew in her so all night that at breakfast she told her father. Swallowing down whatever his feeling may have been, he said:

"Very well, my child; I'll come up with you."

Putting her into the cab in London, he asked:

"Have you still got your key of Bury Street? Good! Remember, Gyp—any time day or night—there it is for you."

She had wired to Fiorsen from Mildenhams that she was coming, and she reached home soon after three. He was not in, and what was evidently her telegram lay unopened in the hall. Tremulous with expectation, she ran up to the nursery. The pathetic sound of some small creature that cannot tell what is hurting it, or why, met her ears. She went in, disturbed, yet with the half-triumphant thought: 'Perhaps that's for me!'

Betty, very flushed, was rocking the cradle, and examining the baby's face with a perplexed frown. Seeing Gyp, she put her hand to her side, and gasped:

"Oh, be joyful! Oh, my dear! I AM glad. I can't do anything with baby since the morning. Whenever she wakes up, she cries like that. And till to-day she's been a little model. Hasn't she! There, there!"

Gyp took up the baby, whose black eyes fixed themselves on her mother in a momentary contentment; but, at the first movement, she began again her fretful plaint. Betty went on:

"She's been like that ever since this morning. Mr. Fiorsen's been in more than once, ma'am, and the fact is, baby don't like it. He stares at her so. But this morning I thought—well—I thought: 'You're her father. It's time she was getting used to you.' So I let them be a minute; and when I came back—I was only just across to the bathroom—he was comin' out lookin' quite fierce and white, and baby—oh, screamin'! And except for sleepin', she's hardly stopped cryin' since."

Pressing the baby to her breast, Gyp sat very still, and queer thoughts went through her mind.

"How has he been, Betty?" she said.

Betty plaited her apron; her moon-face was troubled.

"Well," she said, "I think he's been drinkin'. Oh, I'm sure he has—I've smelt it about him. The third day it began. And night before last he came in dreadfully late—I could hear him staggerin' about, abusing the stairs as he was comin' up. Oh dear—it IS a pity!"

The baby, who had been still enough since she lay in her mother's lap, suddenly raised her little voice again. Gyp said:

"Betty, I believe something hurts her arm. She cries the moment she's touched there. Is there a pin or

anything? Just see. Take her things off. Oh—look!"

Both the tiny arms above the elbow were circled with dark marks, as if they had been squeezed by ruthless fingers. The two women looked at each other in horror; and under her breath Gyp said: "He!"

She had flushed crimson; her eyes filled but dried again almost at once. And, looking at her face, now gone very pale, and those lips tightened to a line, Betty stopped in her outburst of ejaculation. When they had wrapped the baby's arm in remedies and cotton-wool, Gyp went into her bedroom, and, throwing herself down on her bed, burst into a passion of weeping, smothering it deep in her pillow.

It was the crying of sheer rage. The brute! Not to have control enough to stop short of digging his claws into that precious mite! Just because the poor little thing cried at that cat's stare of his! The brute! The devil! And he would come to her and whine about it, and say: "My Gyp, I never meant—how should I know I was hurting? Her crying was so—Why should she cry at me? I was upset! I wasn't thinking!" She could hear him pleading and sighing to her to forgive him. But she would not—not this time! He had hurt a helpless thing once too often. Her fit of crying ceased, and she lay listening to the tick of the clock, and marshalling in her mind a hundred little evidences of his malevolence toward her baby—his own baby. How was it possible? Was he really going mad? And a fit of such chilly shuddering seized her that she crept under the eider down to regain warmth. In her rage, she retained enough sense of proportion to understand that he had done this, just as he had insulted Monsieur Harmost and her father—and others—in an ungovernable access of nerve-irritation; just as, perhaps, one day he would kill someone. But to understand this did not lessen her feeling. Her baby! Such a tiny thing! She hated him at last; and she lay thinking out the coldest, the cruellest, the most cutting things to say. She had been too long-suffering.

But he did not come in that evening; and, too upset to eat or do anything, she went up to bed at ten o'clock. When she had undressed, she stole across to the nursery; she had a longing to have the baby with her—a feeling that to leave her was not safe. She carried her off, still sleeping, and, locking her doors, got into bed. Having warmed a nest with her body for the little creature, she laid it there; and then for a long time lay awake, expecting every minute to hear him return. She fell asleep at last, and woke with a start. There were vague noises down below or on the stairs. It must be he! She had left the light on in her room, and she leaned over to look at the baby's face. It was still sleeping, drawing its tiny breaths peacefully, little dog-shivers passing every now and then over its face. Gyp, shaking back her dark plaits of hair, sat up by its side, straining her ears.

Yes; he WAS coming up, and, by the sounds, he was not sober. She heard a loud creak, and then a thud, as if he had clutched at the banisters and fallen; she heard muttering, too, and the noise of boots dropped. Swiftly the thought went through her: 'If he were quite drunk, he would not have taken them off at all;—nor if he were quite sober. Does he know I'm back?' Then came another creak, as if he were raising himself by support of the banisters, and then—or was it fancy?—she could hear him creeping and breathing behind the door. Then—no fancy this time—he fumbled at the door and turned the handle. In spite of his state, he must know that she was back, had noticed her travelling-coat or seen the telegram. The handle was tried again, then, after a pause, the handle of the door between his room and hers was fiercely shaken. She could hear his voice, too, as she knew it when he was flown with drink, thick, a little drawling.

"Gyp—let me in—Gyp!"

The blood burned up in her cheeks, and she thought: 'No, my friend; you're not coming in!'

After that, sounds were more confused, as if he were now at one door, now at the other; then creakings, as if on the stairs again, and after that, no sound at all.

For fully half an hour, Gyp continued to sit up, straining her ears. Where was he? What doing? On her over-excited nerves, all sorts of possibilities came crowding. He must have gone downstairs again. In that half-drunken state, where would his baffled frenzies lead him? And, suddenly, she thought that she smelled burning. It went, and came again; she got up, crept to the door, noiselessly turned the key, and, pulling it open a few inches, sniffed.

All was dark on the landing. There was no smell of burning out there. Suddenly, a hand clutched her ankle. All the blood rushed from her heart; she stifled a scream, and tried to pull the door to. But his arm and her leg were caught between, and she saw the black mass of his figure lying full-length on its face. Like a vice, his hand held her; he drew himself up on to his knees, on to his feet, and forced his way through. Panting, but in utter silence, Gyp struggled to drive him out. His drunken strength seemed to come and go in gusts, but hers was continuous, greater than she had ever thought she had, and she panted:

"Go! go out of my room—you—you—wretch!"

Then her heart stood still with horror, for he had slued round to the bed and was stretching his hands out above the baby. She heard him mutter:

"Ah-h-h!—YOU—in my place—YOU!"

Gyp flung herself on him from behind, dragging his arms down, and, clasping her hands together, held him fast. He twisted round in her arms and sat down on the bed. In that moment of his collapse, Gyp snatched up her baby and fled out, down the dark stairs, hearing him stumbling, groping in pursuit. She fled into the dining-room and locked the door. She heard him run against it and fall down. Snuggling her baby, who was crying now, inside her nightgown, next to her skin for warmth, she stood rocking and hushing it, trying to listen. There was no more sound. By the hearth, whence a little heat still came forth from the ashes, she cowered down. With cushions and the thick white felt from the dining-table, she made the baby snug, and wrapping her shivering self in the table-cloth, sat staring wide-eyed before her—and always listening. There were sounds at first, then none. A long, long time she stayed like that, before she stole to the door. She did not mean to make a second mistake. She could hear the sound of heavy breathing. And she listened to it, till she was quite certain that it was really the breathing of sleep. Then stealthily she opened, and looked. He was over there, lying against the bottom chair, in a heavy, drunken slumber. She knew that sleep so well; he would not wake from it.

It gave her a sort of evil pleasure that they would find him like that in the morning when she was gone. She went back to her baby and, with infinite precaution, lifted it, still sleeping, cushion and all, and stole past him up the stairs that, under her bare feet, made no sound. Once more in her locked room, she went to the window and looked out. It was just before dawn; her garden was grey and ghostly, and she thought: 'The last time I shall see you. Good-bye!'

Then, with the utmost speed, she did her hair and dressed. She was very cold and shivery, and put on her fur coat and cap. She hunted out two jerseys for the baby, and a certain old camel's-hair shawl. She took a few little things she was fondest of and slipped them into her wrist-bag with her purse, put on her hat and a pair of gloves. She did everything very swiftly, wondering, all the time, at her own power of knowing what to take. When she was quite ready, she scribbled a note to Betty to follow with the dogs to Bury Street, and pushed it under the nursery door. Then, wrapping the baby in the jerseys and shawl, she went downstairs. The dawn had broken, and, from the long narrow window above the door with spikes of iron across it, grey light was striking into the hall. Gyp passed Fiorsen's sleeping figure safely, and, for one moment, stopped for breath. He was lying with his back against the wall, his head in the hollow of an arm raised against a stair, and his face turned a little upward. That face which, hundreds of times, had been so close to her own, and something about this crumpled body, about his tumbled hair, those cheek-bones, and the hollows beneath the pale lips just parted under the dirt-gold of his moustache—something of lost divinity in all that inert figure—clutched for a second at Gyp's heart. Only for a second. It was over, this time! No more—never again! And, turning very stealthily, she slipped her shoes on, undid the chain, opened the front door, took up her burden, closed the door softly behind her, and walked away.

Part III

I

Gyp was going up to town. She sat in the corner of a first-class carriage, alone. Her father had gone up by an earlier train, for the annual June dinner of his old regiment, and she had stayed to consult the doctor concerning "little Gyp," aged nearly nineteen months, to whom teeth were making life a burden.

Her eyes wandered from window to window, obeying the faint excitement within her. All the winter and spring, she had been at Mildenhall, very quiet, riding much, and pursuing her music as best she could, seeing hardly anyone except her father; and this departure for a spell of London brought her the feeling that comes on an April day, when the sky is blue, with snow-white clouds, when in the fields the lambs are leaping, and the grass is warm for the first time, so that one would like to roll in it. At Widrington, a porter entered, carrying a kit-bag, an overcoat, and some golf-clubs; and round the door a little group, such as may be seen at any English wayside station, clustered, filling the air with their

clean, slightly drawling voices. Gyp noted a tall woman whose blonde hair was going grey, a young girl with a fox-terrier on a lead, a young man with a Scotch terrier under his arm and his back to the carriage. The girl was kissing the Scotch terrier's head.

"Good-bye, old Ossy! Was he nice! Tumbo, keep DOWN! YOU'RE not going!"

"Good-bye, dear boy! Don't work too hard!"

The young man's answer was not audible, but it was followed by irrepressible gurgles and a smothered:

"Oh, Bryan, you ARE—Good-bye, dear Ossy!" "Good-bye!" "Good-bye!" The young man who had got in, made another unintelligible joke in a rather high-pitched voice, which was somehow familiar, and again the gurgles broke forth. Then the train moved. Gyp caught a side view of him, waving his hat from the carriage window. It was her acquaintance of the hunting-field—the "Mr. Bryn Summer'ay," as old Pettance called him, who had bought her horse last year. Seeing him pull down his overcoat, to bank up the old Scotch terrier against the jolting of the journey, she thought: 'I like men who think first of their dogs.' His round head, with curly hair, broad brow, and those clean-cut lips, gave her again the wonder: 'Where HAVE I seen someone like him?' He raised the window, and turned round.

"How would you like—Oh, how d'you do! We met out hunting. You don't remember me, I expect."

"Yes; perfectly. And you bought my horse last summer. How is he?"

"In great form. I forgot to ask what you called him; I've named him Hotspur—he'll never be steady at his fences. I remember how he pulled with you that day."

They were silent, smiling, as people will in remembrance of a good run.

Then, looking at the dog, Gyp said softly:

"HE looks rather a darling. How old?"

"Twelve. Beastly when dogs get old!"

There was another little silence while he contemplated her steadily with his clear eyes.

"I came over to call once—with my mother; November the year before last. Somebody was ill."

"Yes—I."

"Badly?"

Gyp shook her head.

"I heard you were married—" The little drawl in his voice had increased, as though covering the abruptness of that remark. Gyp looked up.

"Yes; but my little daughter and I live with my father again." What "came over" her—as they say—to be so frank, she could not have told.

He said simply:

"Ah! I've often thought it queer I've never seen you since. What a run that was!"

"Perfect! Was that your mother on the platform?"

"Yes—and my sister Edith. Extraordinary dead-alive place, Widrington; I expect Mildenham isn't much better?"

"It's very quiet, but I like it."

"By the way, I don't know your name now?"

"Fiorsen."

"Oh, yes! The violinist. Life's a bit of a gamble, isn't it?"

Gyp did not answer that odd remark, did not quite know what to make of this audacious young man, whose hazel eyes and lazy smile were queerly lovable, but whose face in repose had such a broad gravity. He took from his pocket a little red book.

"Do you know these? I always take them travelling. Finest things ever written, aren't they?"

The book—Shakespeare's Sonnets—was open at that which begins:

"Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove—"

Gyp read on as far as the lines:

"Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come.
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks
But bears it out even to the edge of doom—"

and looked out of the window. The train was passing through a country of fields and dykes, where the sun, far down in the west, shone almost level over wide, whitish-green space, and the spotted cattle browsed or stood by the ditches, lazily flicking their tufted tails. A shaft of sunlight flowed into the carriage, filled with dust motes; and, handing the little book back through that streak of radiance, she said softly:

"Yes; that's wonderful. Do you read much poetry?"

"More law, I'm afraid. But it is about the finest thing in the world, isn't it?"

"No; I think music."

"Are you a musician?"

"Only a little."

"You look as if you might be."

"What? A little?"

"No; I should think you had it badly."

"Thank you. And you haven't it at all?"

"I like opera."

"The hybrid form—and the lowest!"

"That's why it suits me. Don't you like it, though?"

"Yes; that's why I'm going up to London."

"Really? Are you a subscriber?"

"This season."

"So am I. Jolly—I shall see you."

Gyp smiled. It was so long since she had talked to a man of her own age, so long since she had seen a face that roused her curiosity and admiration, so long since she had been admired. The sun-shaft, shifted by a westward trend of the train, bathed her from the knees up; and its warmth increased her light-hearted sense of being in luck—above her fate, instead of under it.

Astounding how much can be talked of in two or three hours of a railway journey! And what a friendly after-warmth clings round those hours! Does the difficulty of making oneself heard provoke confidential utterance? Or is it the isolation or the continual vibration that carries friendship faster and further than will a spasmodic acquaintanceship of weeks? But in that long talk he was far the more voluble. There was, too, much of which she could not speak. Besides, she liked to listen. His slightly drawling voice fascinated her—his audacious, often witty way of putting things, and the irrepressible bubble of laughter that would keep breaking from him. He disclosed his past, such as it was, freely—public-school and college life, efforts at the bar, ambitions, tastes, even his scrapes. And in this spontaneous unfolding there was perpetual flattery; Gyp felt through it all, as pretty women will, a sort of subtle admiration. Presently he asked her if she played piquet.

"Yes; I play with my father nearly every evening."

"Shall we have a game, then?"

She knew he only wanted to play because he could sit nearer, joined by the evening paper over their knees, hand her the cards after dealing, touch her hand by accident, look in her face. And this was not unpleasant; for she, in turn, liked looking at his face, which had what is called "charm"—that something light and unepiscopal, entirely lacking to so many solid, handsome, admirable faces.

But even railway journeys come to an end; and when he gripped her hand to say good-bye, she gave him an involuntary little squeeze. Standing at her cab window, with his hat raised, the old dog under his arm, and a look of frank, rather wistful, admiration on his face, he said:

"I shall see you at the opera, then, and in the Row perhaps; and I may come along to Bury Street, some time, mayn't I?"

Nodding to those friendly words, Gyp drove off through the sultry London evening. Her father was not back from the dinner, and she went straight to her room. After so long in the country, it seemed very close in Bury Street; she put on a wrapper and sat down to brush the train-smoke out of her hair.

For months after leaving Fiorsen, she had felt nothing but relief. Only of late had she begun to see her new position, as it was—that of a woman married yet not married, whose awakened senses have never been gratified, whose spirit is still waiting for unfoldment in love, who, however disillusioned, is—even if in secret from herself—more and more surely seeking a real mate, with every hour that ripens her heart and beauty. To-night—gazing at her face, reflected, intent and mournful, in the mirror—she saw that position more clearly, in all its aridity, than she had ever seen it. What was the use of being pretty? No longer use to anyone! Not yet twenty-six, and in a nunnery! With a shiver, but not of cold, she drew her wrapper close. This time last year she had at least been in the main current of life, not a mere derelict. And yet—better far be like this than go back to him whom memory painted always standing over her sleeping baby, with his arms stretched out and his fingers crooked like claws.

After that early-morning escape, Fiorsen had lurked after her for weeks, in town, at Mildenhall, followed them even to Scotland, where Winton had carried her off. But she had not weakened in her resolution a second time, and suddenly he had given up pursuit, and gone abroad. Since then—nothing had come from him, save a few wild or maudlin letters, written evidently during drinking-bouts. Even they had ceased, and for four months she had heard no word. He had "got over" her, it seemed, wherever he was—Russia, Sweden—who knew—who cared?

She let the brush rest on her knee, thinking again of that walk with her baby through empty, silent streets, in the early misty morning last October, of waiting dead-tired outside here, on the pavement, ringing till they let her in. Often, since, she had wondered how fear could have worked her up to that weird departure. She only knew that it had not been unnatural at the time. Her father and Aunt Rosamund had wanted her to try for a divorce, and no doubt they had been right. But her instincts had refused, still refused to let everyone know her secrets and sufferings—still refused the hollow pretence involved, that she had loved him when she never had. No, it had been her fault for marrying him without love—

"Love is not love

Which alters when it alteration finds!"

What irony—giving her that to read—if her fellow traveller had only known!

She got up from before the mirror, and stood looking round her room, the room she had always slept in as a girl. So he had remembered her all this time! It had not seemed like meeting a stranger. They were not strangers now, anyway. And, suddenly, on the wall before her, she saw his face; or, if not, what was so like that she gave a little gasp. Of course! How stupid of her not to have known at once! There, in a brown frame, hung a photograph of the celebrated Botticelli or Masaccio "Head of a Young Man" in the National Gallery. She had fallen in love with it years ago, and on the wall of her room it had been ever since. That broad face, the clear eyes, the bold, clean-cut mouth, the audacity—only, the live face was English, not Italian, had more humour, more "breeding," less poetry—something "old Georgian" about it. How he would laugh if she told him he was like that peasant acolyte with fluffed-out hair, and a little ruching round his neck! And, smiling, Gyp plaited her own hair and got into bed.

But she could not sleep; she heard her father come in and go up to his room, heard the clocks strike midnight, and one, and two, and always the dull roar of Piccadilly. She had nothing over her but a sheet, and still it was too hot. There was a scent in the room, as of honeysuckle. Where could it come from? She got up at last, and went to the window. There, on the window-sill, behind the curtains, was a bowl of jessamine. Her father must have brought it up for her—just like him to think of that!

And, burying her nose in those white blossoms, she was visited by a memory of her first ball—that

evening of such delight and disillusionment. Perhaps Bryan Summerhay had been there—all that time ago! If he had been introduced to her then, if she had happened to dance with him instead of with that man who had kissed her arm, might she not have felt different toward all men? And if he had admired her—and had not everyone, that night—might she not have liked, perhaps more than liked, him in return? Or would she have looked on him as on all her swains before she met Fiorsen, so many moths fluttering round a candle, foolish to singe themselves, not to be taken seriously? Perhaps she had been bound to have her lesson, to be humbled and brought low!

Taking a sprig of jessamine and holding it to her nose, she went up to that picture. In the dim light, she could just see the outline of the face and the eyes gazing at her. The scent of the blossom penetrated her nerves; in her heart, something faintly stirred, as a leaf turns over, as a wing flutters. And, blossom and all, she clasped her hands over her breast, where again her heart quivered with that faint, shy tremor.

It was late, no—early, when she fell asleep and had a strange dream. She was riding her old mare through a field of flowers. She had on a black dress, and round her head a crown of bright, pointed crystals; she sat without saddle, her knee curled up, perched so lightly that she hardly felt the mare's back, and the reins she held were long twisted stems of honeysuckle. Singing as she rode, her eyes flying here and there, over the field, up to the sky, she felt happier, lighter than thistledown. While they raced along, the old mare kept turning her head and biting at the honeysuckle flowers; and suddenly that chestnut face became the face of Summerhay, looking back at her with his smile. She awoke. Sunlight, through the curtains where she had opened them to find the flowers, was shining on her.

II

Very late that same night, Summerhay came out of the little Chelsea house, which he inhabited, and walked toward the river. In certain moods men turn insensibly toward any space where nature rules a little—downs, woods, waters—where the sky is free to the eye and one feels the broad comradeship of primitive forces. A man is alone when he loves, alone when he dies; nobody cares for one so absorbed, and he cares for nobody, no—not he! Summerhay stood by the river-wall and looked up at the stars through the plane-tree branches. Every now and then he drew a long breath of the warm, unstimulating air, and smiled, without knowing that he smiled. And he thought of little, of nothing; but a sweetish sensation beset his heart, a kind of quivering lightness his limbs. He sat down on a bench and shut his eyes. He saw a face—only a face. The lights went out one by one in the houses opposite; no cabs passed now, and scarce a passenger was afoot, but Summerhay sat like a man in a trance, the smile coming and going on his lips; and behind him the air that ever stirs above the river faintly moved with the tide flowing up.

It was nearly three, just coming dawn, when he went in, and, instead of going to bed, sat down to a case in which he was junior on the morrow, and worked right on till it was time to ride before his bath and breakfast. He had one of those constitutions, not uncommon among barristers—fostered perhaps by ozone in the Courts of Law—that can do this sort of thing and take no harm. Indeed, he worked best in such long spurts of vigorous concentration. With real capacity and a liking for his work, this young man was certainly on his way to make a name; though, in the intervals of energy, no one gave a more complete impression of imperturbable drifting on the tides of the moment. Altogether, he was rather a paradox. He chose to live in that little Chelsea house which had a scrap of garden rather than in the Temple or St. James's, because he often preferred solitude; and yet he was an excellent companion, with many friends, who felt for him the affectionate distrust inspired by those who are prone to fits and starts of work and play, conviviality and loneliness. To women, he was almost universally attractive. But if he had scorched his wings a little once or twice, he had kept heart-free on the whole. He was, it must be confessed, a bit of a gambler, the sort of gambler who gets in deep, and then, by a plucky, lucky plunge, gets out again, until some day perhaps—he stays there. His father, a diplomatist, had been dead fifteen years; his mother was well known in the semi-intellectual circles of society. He had no brothers, two sisters, and an income of his own. Such was Bryan Summerhay at the age of twenty-six, his wisdom-teeth to cut, his depths unplumbed.

When he started that morning for the Temple, he had still a feeling of extraordinary lightness in his limbs, and he still saw that face—its perfect regularity, its warm pallor, and dark smiling eyes rather wide apart, its fine, small, close-set ears, and the sweep of the black-brown hair across the low brow. Or was it something much less definite he saw—an emanation or expression, a trick, a turn, an indwelling grace, a something that appealed, that turned, and touched him? Whatever it was, it would

not let him be, and he did not desire that it should. For this was in his character; if he saw a horse that he liked, he put his money on whatever it ran; if charmed by an opera, he went over and over again; if by a poem, he almost learned it by heart. And while he walked along the river—his usual route—he had queer and unaccustomed sensations, now melting, now pugnacious. And he felt happy.

He was rather late, and went at once into court. In wig and gown, that something "old Georgian" about him was very visible. A beauty-spot or two, a full-skirted velvet coat, a sword and snuff-box, with that grey wig or its equivalent, and there would have been a perfect eighteenth-century specimen of the less bucolic stamp—the same strong, light build, breadth of face, brown pallor, clean and unpinched cut of lips, the same slight insolence and devil-may-care, the same clear glance, and bubble of vitality. It was almost a pity to have been born so late.

Except that once or twice he drew a face on blotting-paper and smeared it over, he remained normally attentive to his "lud" and the matters in hand all day, conducted without error the examination of two witnesses and with terror the cross-examination of one; lunched at the Courts in perfect amity with the sucking barrister on the other side of the case, for they had neither, as yet, reached that maturity which enables an advocate to call his enemy his "friend," and treat him with considerable asperity. Though among his acquaintances Summerhay always provoked badinage, in which he was scarcely ever defeated, yet in chambers and court, on circuit, at his club, in society or the hunting-field, he had an unfavourable effect on the grosser sort of stories. There are men—by no means strikingly moral—who exercise this blighting influence. They are generally what the French call "spirituel," and often have rather desperate love-affairs which they keep very closely to themselves.

When at last in chambers, he had washed off that special reek of clothes, and parchment, far-away herrings, and distemper, which clings about the law, dipping his whole curly head in water, and towelling vigorously, he set forth alone along the Embankment, his hat tilted up, smoking a cigar. It was nearly seven. Just this time yesterday he had got into the train, just this time yesterday turned and seen the face which had refused to leave him since. Fever recurs at certain hours, just so did the desire to see her mount within him, becoming an obsession, because it was impossible to gratify it. One could not call at seven o'clock! The idea of his club, where at this time of day he usually went, seemed flat and stale, until he remembered that he might pass up Bury Street to get to it. But, near Charing Cross, a hand smote him on the shoulder, and the voice of one of his intimates said:

"Halo, Bryan!"

Odd, that he had never noticed before how vacuous this fellow was—with his talk of politics, and racing, of this ass and that ass—subjects hitherto of primary importance! And, stopping suddenly, he drawled out:

"Look here, old chap, you go on; see you at the club—presently."

"Why? What's up?"

With his lazy smile, Summerhay answered:

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio," and turned on his heel.

When his friend had disappeared, he resumed his journey toward Bury Street. He passed his boot shop, where, for some time, he had been meaning to order two pairs, and went by thinking: 'I wonder where SHE goes for things.' Her figure came to him so vividly—sitting back in that corner, or standing by the cab, her hand in his. The blood rushed up in his cheeks. She had been scented like flowers, and—and a rainy wind! He stood still before a plate-glass window, in confusion, and suddenly muttered aloud: "Damn it! I believe I am!" An old gentleman, passing, turned so suddenly, to see what he was, that he ricked his neck.

But Summerhay still stood, not taking in at all the reflected image of his frowning, rueful face, and of the cigar extinct between his lips. Then he shook his head vigorously and walked on. He walked faster, his mind blank, as it is sometimes for a short space after a piece of self-revelation that has come too soon for adjustment or even quite for understanding. And when he began to think, it was irritably and at random. He had come to Bury Street, and, while he passed up it, felt a queer, weak sensation down the back of his legs. No flower-boxes this year broke the plain front of Winton's house, and nothing whatever but its number and the quickened beating of his heart marked it out for Summerhay from any other dwelling. The moment he turned into Jermyn Street, that beating of the heart subsided, and he felt suddenly morose. He entered his club at the top of St. James' Street and passed at once into the least used room. This was the library; and going to the French section, he took down "The Three Musketeers" and seated himself in a window, with his back to anyone who might come in. He had taken this—his favourite romance, feeling in want of warmth and companionship; but he did not read. From

where he sat he could throw a stone to where she was sitting perhaps; except for walls he could almost reach her with his voice, could certainly see her. This was imbecile! A woman he had only met twice. Imbecile! He opened the book—

"Oh, no; it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken.
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown altho' its height be taken."

"Point of five! Three queens—three knaves! Do you know that thing of Dowson's: 'I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion'? Better than any Verlaine, except 'Les sanglots longs.' What have you got?"

"Only quart to the queen. Do you like the name 'Cynara'?"

"Yes; don't you?"

"Cynara! Cynara! Ye-es—an autumn, rose-petal, whirling, dead-leaf sound."

"Good! Pipped. Shut up, Ossy—don't snore!"

"Ah, poor old dog! Let him. Shuffle for me, please. Oh! there goes another card!" Her knee was touching his—! . . .

The book had dropped—Summerhay started.

Dash it! Hopeless! And, turning round in that huge armchair, he snoozed down into its depths. In a few minutes, he was asleep. He slept without a dream.

It was two hours later when the same friend, seeking distraction, came on him, and stood grinning down at that curly head and face which just then had the sleepy abandonment of a small boy's. Maliciously he gave the chair a little kick.

Summerhay stirred, and thought: 'What! Where am I?'

In front of the grinning face, above him, floated another, filmy, charming. He shook himself, and sat up. "Oh, damn you!"

"Sorry, old chap!"

"What time is it?"

"Ten o'clock."

Summerhay uttered an unintelligible sound, and, turning over on the other arm, pretended to snooze down again. But he slept no more. Instead, he saw her face, heard her voice, and felt again the touch of her warm, gloved hand.

III

At the opera, that Friday evening, they were playing "Cavalleria" and "Pagliacci"—works of which Gyp tolerated the first and loved the second, while Winton found them, with "Faust" and "Carmen," about the only operas he could not sleep through.

Women's eyes, which must not stare, cover more space than the eyes of men, which must not stare, but do; women's eyes have less method, too, seeing all things at once, instead of one thing at a time. Gyp had seen Summerhay long before he saw her; seen him come in and fold his opera hat against his white waistcoat, looking round, as if for—someone. Her eyes criticized him in this new garb—his broad head, and its crisp, dark, shining hair, his air of sturdy, lazy, lovable audacity. He looked well in evening clothes. When he sat down, she could still see just a little of his profile; and, vaguely watching the stout Santuzza and the stouter Turiddu, she wondered whether, by fixing her eyes on him, she could make him turn and see her. Just then he did see her, and his face lighted up. She smiled back. Why not? She had not so many friends nowadays. But it was rather startling to find, after that exchange of looks, that she at once began to want another. Would he like her dress? Was her hair nice? She

wished she had not had it washed that morning. But when the interval came, she did not look round, until his voice said:

"How d'you do, Major Winton? Oh, how d'you do?"

Winton had been told of the meeting in the train. He was pining for a cigarette, but had not liked to desert his daughter. After a few remarks, he got up and said:

"Take my pew a minute, Summerhay, I'm going to have a smoke."

He went out, thinking, not for the first time by a thousand: 'Poor child, she never sees a soul! Twenty-five, pretty as paint, and clean out of the running. What the devil am I to do about her?'

Summerhay sat down. Gyp had a queer feeling, then, as if the house and people vanished, and they two were back again in the railway-carriage—alone together. Ten minutes to make the most of! To smile and talk, and enjoy the look in his eyes, the sound of his voice and laugh. To laugh, too, and be warm and nice to him. Why not? They were friends. And, presently, she said, smiling:

"Oh, by the way, there's a picture in the National Gallery, I want you to look at."

"Yes? Which? Will you take me?"

"If you like."

"To-morrow's Saturday; may I meet you there? What time? Three?"

Gyp nodded. She knew she was flushing, and, at that moment, with the warmth in her cheeks and the smile in her eyes, she had the sensation, so rare and pleasant, of feeling beautiful. Then he was gone! Her father was slipping back into his stall; and, afraid of her own face, she touched his arm, and murmured:

"Dad, do look at that head-dress in the next row but one; did you ever see anything so delicious!"

And while Winton was star-gazing, the orchestra struck up the overture to "Pagliacci." Watching that heart-breaking little plot unfold, Gyp had something more than the old thrill, as if for the first time she understood it with other than her aesthetic sense. Poor Nedda! and poor Canio! Poor Silvio! Her breast heaved, and her eyes filled with tears. Within those doubled figures of the tragi-comedy she seemed to see, to feel that passionate love—too swift, too strong, too violent, sweet and fearful within them.

"Thou hast my heart, and I am thine for ever
—To-night and for ever I am thine!
What is there left to me? What have I but a heart that is broken?"

And the clear, heart-aching music mocking it all, down to those last words:

La commedia e finita!

While she was putting on her cloak, her eyes caught Summerhay's. She tried to smile—could not, gave a shake of her head, slowly forced her gaze away from his, and turned to follow Winton.

At the National Gallery, next day, she was not late by coquetry, but because she had changed her dress at the last minute, and because she was afraid of letting him think her eager. She saw him at once standing under the colonnade, looking by no means imperturbable, and marked the change in his face when he caught sight of her, with a little thrill. She led him straight up into the first Italian room to contemplate his counterfeit. A top hat and modern collar did not improve the likeness, but it was there still.

"Well! Do you like it?"

"Yes. What are you smiling at?"

"I've had a photograph of that, ever since I was fifteen; so you see I've known you a long time."

He stared.

"Great Scott! Am I like that? All right; I shall try and find YOU now."

But Gyp shook her head.

"No. Come and look at my very favourite picture 'The Death of Procris.' What is it makes one love it so? Procris is out of drawing, and not beautiful; the faun's queer and ugly. What is it—can you tell?"

Summerhay looked not at the picture, but at her! In aesthetic sense, he was not her equal. She said softly:

"The wonder in the faun's face, Procris's closed eyes; the dog, and the swans, and the pity for what might have been!"

Summerhay repeated:

"Ah, for what might have been! Did you enjoy 'Pagliacci'?"

Gyp shivered.

"I think I felt it too much."

"I thought you did. I watched you."

"Destruction by—love—seems such a terrible thing! Now show me your favourites. I believe I can tell you what they are, though."

"Well?"

"The 'Admiral,' for one."

"Yes. What others?"

"The two Bellini's."

"By Jove, you ARE uncanny!"

Gyp laughed.

"You want decision, clarity, colour, and fine texture. Is that right? Here's another of MY favourites."

On a screen was a tiny "Crucifixion" by da Messina—the thinnest of high crosses, the thinnest of simple, humble, suffering Christs, lonely, and actual in the clear, darkened landscape.

"I think that touches one more than the big, idealized sort. One feels it WAS like that. Oh! And look—the Francesca's! Aren't they lovely?"

He repeated:

"Yes; lovely!" But his eyes said: "And so are you."

They spent two hours among those endless pictures, talking a little of art and of much besides, almost as alone as in the railway carriage. But, when she had refused to let him walk back with her, Summerhay stood stock-still beneath the colonnade. The sun streamed in under; the pigeons preened their feathers; people passed behind him and down there in the square, black and tiny against the lions and the great column. He took in nothing of all that. What was it in her? She was like no one he had ever known—not one! Different from girls and women in society as—Simile failed. Still more different from anything in the half-world he had met! Not the new sort—college, suffrage! Like no one! And he knew so little of her! Not even whether she had ever really been in love. Her husband—where was he; what was he to her? "The rare, the mute, the inexpressive She!" When she smiled; when her eyes—but her eyes were so quick, would drop before he could see right into them! How beautiful she had looked, gazing at that picture—her favourite, so softly, her lips just smiling! If he could kiss them, would he not go nearly mad? With a deep sigh, he moved down the wide, grey steps into the sunlight. And London, throbbing, overflowing with the season's life, seemed to him empty. To-morrow—yes, to-morrow he could call!

IV

After that Sunday call, Gyp sat in the window at Bury Street close to a bowl of heliotrope on the window-sill. She was thinking over a passage of their conversation.

"Mrs. Fiorsen, tell me about yourself."

"Why? What do you want to know?"

"Your marriage?"

"I made a fearful mistake—against my father's wish. I haven't seen my husband for months; I shall never see him again if I can help it. Is that enough?"

"And you love him?"

"No."

"It must be like having your head in chancery. Can't you get it out?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Divorce-court! Ugh! I couldn't!"

"Yes, I know—it's hellish!"

Was he, who gripped her hand so hard and said that, really the same nonchalant young man who had leaned out of the carriage window, gurgling with laughter? And what had made the difference? She buried her face in the heliotrope, whose perfume seemed the memory of his visit; then, going to the piano, began to play. She played Debussy, McDowell, Ravel; the chords of modern music suited her feelings just then. And she was still playing when her father came in. During these last nine months of his daughter's society, he had regained a distinct measure of youthfulness, an extra twist in his little moustache, an extra touch of dandyism in his clothes, and the gloss of his short hair. Gyp stopped playing at once, and shut the piano.

"Mr. Summerhay's been here, Dad. He was sorry to miss you."

There was an appreciable pause before Winton answered:

"My dear, I doubt it."

And there passed through Gyp the thought that she could never again be friends with a man without giving that pause. Then, conscious that her father was gazing at her, she turned and said:

"Well, was it nice in the Park?"

"Thirty years ago they were all nobs and snobs; now God himself doesn't know what they are!"

"But weren't the flowers nice?"

"Ah—and the trees, and the birds—but, by Jove, the humans do their best to dress the balance!"

"What a misanthrope you're getting!"

"I'd like to run a stud for two-leggers; they want proper breeding. What sort of a fellow is young Summerhay? Not a bad face."

She answered impassively:

"Yes; it's so alive."

In spite of his self-control, she could always read her father's thoughts quicker than he could read hers, and knew that he was struggling between the wish that she should have a good time and the desire to convey some kind of warning. He said, with a sigh:

"What does a young man's fancy turn to in summer, Gyp?"

Women who have subtle instincts and some experience are able to impose their own restraint on those who, at the lifting of a hand, would become their lovers. From that afternoon on, Gyp knew that a word from her would change everything; but she was far from speaking it. And yet, except at weekends, when she went back to her baby at Mildenhams, she saw Summerhay most days—in the Row, at the opera, or at Bury Street. She had a habit of going to St. James's Park in the late afternoon and sitting there by the water. Was it by chance that he passed one day on his way home from chambers, and that, after this, they sat there together constantly? Why make her father uneasy—when there was nothing to be uneasy about—by letting him come too often to Bury Street? It was so pleasant, too, out there, talking calmly of many things, while in front of them the small ragged children fished and put the

fishes into clear glass bottles, to eat, or watch on rainy days, as is the custom of man with the minor works of God.

So, in nature, when the seasons are about to change, the days pass, tranquil, waiting for the wind that brings in the new. And was it not natural to sit under the trees, by the flowers and the water, the pigeons and the ducks, that wonderful July? For all was peaceful in Gyp's mind, except, now and then, when a sort of remorse possessed her, a sort of terror, and a sort of troubling sweetness.

V

Summerhay did not wear his heart on his sleeve, and when, on the closing-day of term, he left his chambers to walk to that last meeting, his face was much as usual under his grey top hat. But, in truth, he had come to a pretty pass. He had his own code of what was befitting to a gentleman. It was perhaps a trifle "old Georgian," but it included doing nothing to distress a woman. All these weeks he had kept himself in hand; but to do so had cost him more than he liked to reflect on. The only witness of his struggles was his old Scotch terrier, whose dreams he had disturbed night after night, tramping up and down the long back-to-front sitting-room of his little house. She knew—must know—what he was feeling. If she wanted his love, she had but to raise her finger; and she had not raised it. When he touched her, when her dress disengaged its perfume or his eyes traced the slow, soft movement of her breathing, his head would go round, and to keep calm and friendly had been torture.

While he could see her almost every day, this control had been just possible; but now that he was about to lose her—for weeks—his heart felt sick within him. He had been hard put to it before the world. A man passionately in love craves solitude, in which to alternate between fierce exercise and that trance-like stillness when a lover simply aches or is busy conjuring her face up out of darkness or the sunlight. He had managed to do his work, had been grateful for having it to do; but to his friends he had not given attention enough to prevent them saying: "What's up with old Bryan?" Always rather elusive in his movements, he was now too elusive altogether for those who had been accustomed to lunch, dine, dance, and sport with him. And yet he shunned his own company—going wherever strange faces, life, anything distracted him a little, without demanding real attention. It must be confessed that he had come unwillingly to discovery of the depth of his passion, aware that it meant giving up too much. But there are women who inspire feeling so direct and simple that reason does not come into play; and he had never asked himself whether Gyp was worth loving, whether she had this or that quality, such or such virtue. He wanted her exactly as she was; and did not weigh her in any sort of balance. It is possible for men to love passionately, yet know that their passion is but desire, possible for men to love for sheer spiritual worth, feeling that the loved one lacks this or that charm.

Summerhay's love had no such divided consciousness. About her past, too, he dismissed speculation. He remembered having heard in the hunting-field that she was Winton's natural daughter; even then it had made him long to punch the head of that covert-side scandal-monger. The more there might be against the desirability of loving her, the more he would love her; even her wretched marriage only affected him in so far as it affected her happiness. It did not matter—nothing mattered except to see her and be with her as much as she would let him. And now she was going to the sea for a month, and he himself—curse it!—was due in Perthshire to shoot grouse. A month!

He walked slowly along the river. Dared he speak? At times, her face was like a child's when it expects some harsh or frightening word. One could not hurt her—impossible! But, at times, he had almost thought she would like him to speak. Once or twice he had caught a slow soft glance—gone the moment he had sight of it.

He was before his time, and, leaning on the river parapet, watched the tide run down. The sun shone on the water, brightening its yellowish swirl, and little black eddies—the same water that had flowed along under the willows past Eynsham, past Oxford, under the church at Clifton, past Moulsham, past Sonning. And he thought: 'My God! To have her to myself one day on the river—one whole long day!' Why had he been so pusillanimous all this time? He passed his hand over his face. Broad faces do not easily grow thin, but his felt thin to him, and this gave him a kind of morbid satisfaction. If she knew how he was longing, how he suffered! He turned away, toward Whitehall. Two men he knew stopped to bandy a jest. One of them was just married. They, too, were off to Scotland for the twelfth. Pah! How stale and flat seemed that which till then had been the acme of the whole year to him! Ah, but if he had been going to Scotland WITH HER! He drew his breath in with a sigh that nearly removed the Home Office.

Oblivious of the gorgeous sentries at the Horse Guards, oblivious of all beauty, he passed irresolute along the water, making for their usual seat; already, in fancy, he was sitting there, prodding at the gravel, a nervous twittering in his heart, and that eternal question: Dare I speak? asking itself within him. And suddenly he saw that she was before him, sitting there already. His heart gave a jump. No more craning—he WOULD speak!

She was wearing a maize-coloured muslin to which the sunlight gave a sort of transparency, and sat, leaning back, her knees crossed, one hand resting on the knob of her furled sunshade, her face half hidden by her shady hat. Summerhay clenched his teeth, and went straight up to her.

"Gyp! No, I won't call you anything else. This can't go on! You know it can't. You know I worship you! If you can't love me, I've got to break away. All day, all night, I think and dream of nothing but you. Gyp, do you want me to go?"

Suppose she said: "Yes, go!" She made a little movement, as if in protest, and without looking at him, answered very low:

"Of course I don't want you to go. How could I?"

Summerhay gasped.

"Then you DO love me?"

She turned her face away.

"Wait, please. Wait a little longer. When we come back I'll tell you: I promise!"

"So long?"

"A month. Is that long? Please! It's not easy for me." She smiled faintly, lifted her eyes to him just for a second. "Please not any more now."

That evening at his club, through the bluish smoke of cigarette after cigarette, he saw her face as she had lifted it for that one second; and now he was in heaven, now in hell.

VI

The verandahed bungalow on the South Coast, built and inhabited by an artist friend of Aunt Rosamund's, had a garden of which the chief feature was one pine-tree which had strayed in advance of the wood behind. The little house stood in solitude, just above a low bank of cliff whence the beach sank in sandy ridges. The verandah and thick pine wood gave ample shade, and the beach all the sun and sea air needful to tan little Gyp, a fat, tumbling soul, as her mother had been at the same age, incurably fond and fearless of dogs or any kind of beast, and speaking words already that required a glossary.

At night, Gyp, looking from her bedroom through the flat branches of the pine, would get a feeling of being the only creature in the world. The crinkled, silvery sea, that lonely pine-tree, the cold moon, the sky dark corn-flower blue, the hiss and sucking rustle of the surf over the beach pebbles, even the salt, chill air, seemed lonely. By day, too—in the hazy heat when the clouds merged, scarce drifting, into the blue, and the coarse sea-grass tufts hardly quivered, and sea-birds passed close above the water with chuckle and cry—it all often seemed part of a dream. She bathed, and grew as tanned as her little daughter, a regular Gypsy, in her broad hat and linen frocks; and yet she hardly seemed to be living down here at all, for she was never free of the memory of that last meeting with Summerhay. Why had he spoken and put an end to their quiet friendship, and left her to such heart-searchings all by herself? But she did not want his words unsaid. Only, how to know whether to recoil and fly, or to pass beyond the dread of letting herself go, of plunging deep into the unknown depths of love—of that passion, whose nature for the first time she had tremulously felt, watching "Pagliacci"—and had ever since been feeling and trembling at! Must it really be neck or nothing? Did she care enough to break through all barriers, fling herself into midstream? When they could see each other every day, it was so easy to live for the next meeting—not think of what was coming after. But now, with all else cut away, there was only the future to think about—hers and his. But need she trouble about his? Would he not just love her as long as he liked?

Then she thought of her father—still faithful to a memory—and felt ashamed. Some men loved on—yes—even beyond death! But, sometimes, she would think: 'Am I a candle-flame again? Is he just going to burn himself? What real good can I be to him—I, without freedom, and with my baby, who will grow up?' Yet all these thoughts were, in a way, unreal. The struggle was in herself, so deep that she could hardly understand it; as might be an effort to subdue the instinctive dread of a precipice. And she would feel a kind of resentment against all the happy life round her these summer days—the sea-birds, the sunlight, and the waves; the white sails far out; the calm sun-steeped pine-trees; her baby, tumbling and smiling and softly twittering; and Betty and the other servants—all this life that seemed so simple and untortured.

To the one post each day she looked forward terribly. And yet his letters, which began like hers: "My dear friend," might have been read by anyone—almost. She spent a long time over her answers. She was not sleeping well; and, lying awake, she could see his face very distinct before her closed eyes—its teasing, lazy smile, its sudden intent gravity. Once she had a dream of him, rushing past her down into the sea. She called, but, without turning his head, he swam out further, further, till she lost sight of him, and woke up suddenly with a pain in her heart. "If you can't love me, I've got to break away!" His face, his flung-back head reminded her too sharply of those words. Now that he was away from her, would he not feel that it was best to break, and forget her? Up there, he would meet girls untouched by life—not like herself. He had everything before him; could he possibly go on wanting one who had nothing before her? Some blue-eyed girl with auburn hair—that type so superior to her own—would sweep, perhaps had already swept him, away from her! What then? No worse than it used to be? Ah, so much worse that she dared not think of it!

Then, for five days, no letter came. And, with each blank morning, the ache in her grew—a sharp, definite ache of longing and jealousy, utterly unlike the mere feeling of outraged pride when she had surprised Fjorsen and Daphne Wing in the music-room—a hundred years ago, it seemed. When on the fifth day the postman left nothing but a bill for little Gyp's shoes, and a note from Aunt Rosamund at Harrogate, where she had gone with Winton for the annual cure, Gyp's heart sank to the depths. Was this the end? And, with a blind, numb feeling, she wandered out into the wood, where the fall of the pine-needles, season after season, had made of the ground one soft, dark, dust-coloured bed, on which the sunlight traced the pattern of the pine boughs, and ants rummaged about their great heaped dwellings.

Gyp went along till she could see no outer world for the grey-brown tree-stems streaked with gum-resin; and, throwing herself down on her face, dug her elbows deep into the pine dust. Tears, so rare with her, forced their way up, and trickled slowly to the hands whereon her chin rested. No good—crying! Crying only made her ill; crying was no relief. She turned over on her back and lay motionless, the sunbeams warm on her cheeks. Silent here, even at noon! The sough of the calm sea could not reach so far; the flies were few; no bird sang. The tall bare pine stems rose up all round like columns in a temple roofed with the dark boughs and sky. Cloud-fleeces drifted slowly over the blue. There should be peace—but in her heart there was none!

A dusky shape came padding through the trees a little way off, another—two donkeys loose from somewhere, who stood licking each other's necks and noses. Those two humble beasts, so friendly, made her feel ashamed. Why should she be sorry for herself, she who had everything in life she wanted—except love—the love she had thought she would never want? Ah, but she wanted it now, wanted it at last with all her being!

With a shudder, she sprang up; the ants had got to her, and she had to pick them off her neck and dress. She wandered back towards the beach. If he had truly found someone to fill his thoughts, and drive her out, all the better for him; she would never, by word or sign, show him that she missed, and wanted him—never! She would sooner die!

She came out into the sunshine. The tide was low; and the wet foreshore gleamed with opal tints; there were wandering tracks on the sea, as of great serpents winding their way beneath the surface; and away to the west the archwayed, tawny rock that cut off the line of coast was like a dream-shape. All was dreamy. And, suddenly her heart began beating to suffocation and the colour flooded up in her cheeks. On the edge of the low cliff bank, by the side of the path, Summerhay was sitting!

He got up and came toward her. Putting her hands up to her glowing face, she said:

"Yes; it's me. Did you ever see such a gipsified object? I thought you were still in Scotland. How's dear Ossy?" Then her self-possession failed, and she looked down.

"It's no good, Gyp. I must know."

It seemed to Gyp that her heart had given up beating; she said quietly: "Let's sit down a minute"; and

moved under the cliff bank where they could not be seen from the house. There, drawing the coarse grass blades through her fingers, she said, with a shiver:

"I didn't try to make you, did I? I never tried."

"No; never."

"It's wrong."

"Who cares? No one could care who loves as I do. Oh, Gyp, can't you love me? I know I'm nothing much." How quaint and boyish! "But it's eleven weeks to-day since we met in the train. I don't think I've had one minute's let-up since."

"Have you tried?"

"Why should I, when I love you?"

Gyp sighed; relief, delight, pain—she did not know.

"Then what is to be done? Look over there—that bit of blue in the grass is my baby daughter. There's her—and my father—and—"

"And what?"

"I'm afraid—afraid of love, Bryan!"

At that first use of his name, Summerhay turned pale and seized her hand.

"Afraid—how—afraid?"

Gyp said very low:

"I might love too much. Don't say any more now. No; don't! Let's go in and have lunch." And she got up.

He stayed till tea-time, and not a word more of love did he speak. But when he was gone, she sat under the pine-tree with little Gyp on her lap. Love! If her mother had checked love, she herself would never have been born. The midges were biting before she went in. After watching Betty give little Gyp her bath, she crossed the passage to her bedroom and leaned out of the window. Could it have been to-day she had lain on the ground with tears of despair running down on to her hands? Away to the left of the pine-tree, the moon had floated up, soft, barely visible in the paling sky. A new world, an enchanted garden! And between her and it—what was there?

That evening she sat with a book on her lap, not reading; and in her went on the strange revolution which comes in the souls of all women who are not half-men when first they love—the sinking of 'I' into 'Thou,' the passionate, spiritual subjection, the intense, unconscious giving-up of will, in preparation for completer union.

She slept without dreaming, awoke heavy and oppressed. Too languid to bathe, she sat listless on the beach with little Gyp all the morning. Had she energy or spirit to meet him in the afternoon by the rock archway, as she had promised? For the first time since she was a small and naughty child, she avoided the eyes of Betty. One could not be afraid of that stout, devoted soul, but one could feel that she knew too much. When the time came, after early tea, she started out; for if she did not go, he would come, and she did not want the servants to see him two days running.

This last day of August was warm and still, and had a kind of beneficence—the corn all gathered in, the apples mellowing, robins singing already, a few slumberous, soft clouds, a pale blue sky, a smiling sea. She went inland, across the stream, and took a footpath back to the shore. No pines grew on that side, where the soil was richer—of a ruddy brown. The second crops of clover were already high; in them humblebees were hard at work; and, above, the white-throated swallows dipped and soared. Gyp gathered a bunch of chicory flowers. She was close above the shore before she saw him standing in the rock archway, looking for her across the beach. After the hum of the bees and flies, it was very quiet here—only the faintest hiss of tiny waves. He had not yet heard her coming, and the thought flashed through her: 'If I take another step, it is for ever! She stood there scarcely breathing, the chicory flowers held before her lips. Then she heard him sigh, and, moving quickly forward, said:

"Here I am."

He turned round, seized her hand, and, without a word, they passed through the archway. They walked on the hard sand, side by side, till he said:

"Let's go up into the fields."

They scrambled up the low cliff and went along the grassy top to a gate into a stubble field. He held it open for her, but, as she passed, caught her in his arms and kissed her lips as if he would never stop. To her, who had been kissed a thousand times, it was the first kiss. Deadly pale, she fell back from him against the gate; then, her lips still quivering, her eyes very dark, she looked at him distraught with passion, drunk on that kiss. And, suddenly turning round to the gate, she laid her arms on the top bar and buried her face on them. A sob came up in her throat that seemed to tear her to bits, and she cried as if her heart would break. His timid despairing touches, his voice close to her ear:

"Gyp, Gyp! My darling! My love! Oh, don't, Gyp!" were not of the least avail; she could not stop. That kiss had broken down something in her soul, swept away her life up to that moment, done something terrible and wonderful. At last, she struggled out:

"I'm sorry—so sorry! Don't—don't look at me! Go away a little, and I'll—I'll be all right."

He obeyed without a word, and, passing through the gate, sat down on the edge of the cliff with his back to her, looking out over the sea.

Gripping the wood of the old grey gate till it hurt her hands, Gyp gazed at the chicory flowers and poppies that had grown up again in the stubble field, at the butterflies chasing in the sunlight over the hedge toward the crinkly foam edging the quiet sea till they were but fluttering white specks in the blue.

But when she had rubbed her cheeks and smoothed her face, she was no nearer to feeling that she could trust herself. What had happened in her was too violent, too sweet, too terrifying. And going up to him she said:

"Let me go home now by myself. Please, let me go, dear. To-morrow!"

Summerhay looked up.

"Whatever you wish, Gyp—always!"

He pressed her hand against his cheek, then let it go, and, folding his arms tight, resumed his meaningless stare at the sea. Gyp turned away. She crossed back to the other side of the stream, but did not go in for a long time, sitting in the pine wood till the evening gathered and the stars crept out in a sky of that mauve-blue which the psychic say is the soul-garment colour of the good.

Late that night, when she had finished brushing her hair, she opened her window and stepped out on to the verandah. How warm! How still! Not a sound from the sleeping house—not a breath of wind! Her face, framed in her hair, her hands, and all her body, felt as if on fire. The moon behind the pine-tree branches was filling every cranny of her brain with wakefulness. The soft shiver of the wellnigh surfless sea on a rising tide, rose, fell, rose, fell. The sand cliff shone like a bank of snow. And all was inhabited, as a moonlit night is wont to be, by a magical Presence. A big moth went past her face, so close that she felt the flutter of its wings. A little night beast somewhere was scuttling in bushes or the sand. Suddenly, across the wan grass the shadow of the pine-trunk moved. It moved—ever so little—moved! And, petrified—Gyp stared. There, joined to the trunk, Summerhay was standing, his face just visible against the stem, the moonlight on one cheek, a hand shading his eyes. He moved that hand, held it out in supplication. For long—how long—Gyp did not stir, looking straight at that beseeching figure. Then, with a feeling she had never known, she saw him coming. He came up to the verandah and stood looking up at her. She could see all the workings of his face—passion, reverence, above all amazement; and she heard his awed whisper:

"Is it you, Gyp? Really you? You look so young—so young!"

VII

From the moment of surrender, Gyp passed straight into a state the more enchanted because she had never believed in it, had never thought that she could love as she now loved. Days and nights went by in a sort of dream, and when Summerhay was not with her, she was simply waiting with a smile on her lips for the next hour of meeting. Just as she had never felt it possible to admit the world into the

secrets of her married life, so, now she did not consider the world at all. Only the thought of her father weighed on her conscience. He was back in town. And she felt that she must tell him. When Summerhay heard this he only said: "All right, Gyp, whatever you think best."

And two days before her month at the bungalow was up, she went, leaving Betty and little Gyp to follow on the last day. Winton, pale and somewhat languid, as men are when they have been cured, found her when he came in from the club. She had put on evening dress, and above the pallor of her shoulders, her sunwarmed face and throat had almost the colour of a nectarine. He had never seen her look like that, never seen her eyes so full of light. And he uttered a quiet grunt of satisfaction. It was as if a flower, which he had last seen in close and elegant shape, had bloomed in full perfection. She did not meet his gaze quite steadily and all that evening kept putting her confession off and off. It was not easy—far from easy. At last, when he was smoking his "go-to-bed" cigarette, she took a cushion and sank down on it beside his chair, leaning against his knee, where her face was hidden from him, as on that day after her first ball, when she had listened to HIS confession. And she began:

"Dad, do you remember my saying once that I didn't understand what you and my mother felt for each other?" Winton did not speak; misgiving had taken possession of him. Gyp went on: "I know now how one would rather die than give someone up."

Winton drew his breath in sharply:

"Who? Summerhay?"

"Yes; I used to think I should never be in love, but you knew better."

Better!

In disconsolate silence, he thought rapidly: 'What's to be done? What can I do? Get her a divorce?'

Perhaps because of the ring in her voice, or the sheer seriousness of the position, he did not feel resentment as when he lost her to Fiorsen. Love! A passion such as had overtaken her mother and himself! And this young man? A decent fellow, a good rider—comprehensible! Ah, if the course had only been clear! He put his hand on her shoulder and said:

"Well, Gyp, we must go for the divorce, then, after all."

She shook her head.

"It's too late. Let HIM divorce me, if he only will!"

Winton needed all his self-control at that moment. Too late? Already! Sudden recollection that he had not the right to say a word alone kept him silent. Gyp went on:

"I love him, with every bit of me. I don't care what comes—whether it's open or secret. I don't care what anybody thinks."

She had turned round now, and if Winton had doubt of her feeling, he lost it. This was a Gyp he had never seen! A glowing, soft, quick-breathing creature, with just that lithe watchful look of the mother cat or lioness whose whelps are threatened. There flashed through him a recollection of how, as a child, with face very tense, she would ride at fences that were too big. At last he said:

"I'm sorry you didn't tell me sooner."

"I couldn't. I didn't know. Oh, Dad, I'm always hurting you! Forgive me!"

She was pressing his hand to her cheek that felt burning hot. And he thought: "Forgive! Of course I forgive. That's not the point; the point is—"

And a vision of his loved one talked about, besmirched, bandied from mouth to mouth, or else—for her what there had been for him, a hole-and-corner life, an underground existence of stealthy meetings kept dark, above all from her own little daughter. Ah, not that! And yet—was not even that better than the other, which revolted to the soul his fastidious pride in her, roused in advance his fury against tongues that would wag, and eyes that would wink or be uplifted in righteousness? Summerhay's world was more or less his world; scandal, which—like all parasitic growths—flourishes in enclosed spaces, would have every chance. And, at once, his brain began to search, steely and quick, for some way out; and the expression as when a fox broke covert, came on his face.

"Nobody knows, Gyp?"

"No; nobody."

That was something! With an irritation that rose from his very soul, he muttered:

"I can't stand it that you should suffer, and that fellow Fiorsen go scot-free. Can you give up seeing Summerhay while we get you a divorce? We might do it, if no one knows. I think you owe it to me, Gyp."

Gyp got up and stood by the window a long time without answering. Winton watched her face. At last she said:

"I couldn't. We might stop seeing each other; it isn't that. It's what I should feel. I shouldn't respect myself after; I should feel so mean. Oh, Dad, don't you see? He really loved me in his way. And to pretend! To make out a case for myself, tell about Daphne Wing, about his drinking, and baby; pretend that I wanted him to love me, when I got to hate it and didn't care really whether he was faithful or not—and knowing all the while that I've been everything to someone else! I couldn't. I'd much rather let him know, and ask him to divorce me."

Winton replied:

"And suppose he won't?"

"Then my mind would be clear, anyway; and we would take what we could."

"And little Gyp?"

Staring before her as if trying to see into the future, she said slowly:

"Some day, she'll understand, as I do. Or perhaps it will be all over before she knows. Does happiness ever last?"

And, going up to him, she bent over, kissed his forehead, and went out. The warmth from her lips, and the scent of her remained with Winton like a sensation wafted from the past.

Was there then nothing to be done—nothing? Men of his stamp do not, as a general thing, see very deep even into those who are nearest to them; but to-night he saw his daughter's nature more fully perhaps than ever before. No use to importune her to act against her instincts—not a bit of use! And yet—how to sit and watch it all—watch his own passion with its ecstasy and its heart-burnings re-enacted with her—perhaps for many years? And the old vulgar saying passed through his mind: "What's bred in the bone will come out in the meat." Now she had given, she would give with both hands—beyond measure—beyond!—as he himself, as her mother had given! Ah, well, she was better off than his own loved one had been. One must not go ahead of trouble, or cry over spilled milk!

VIII

Gyp had a wakeful night. The question she herself had raised, of telling Fiorsen, kept her thoughts in turmoil. Was he likely to divorce her if she did? His contempt for what he called 'these bourgeois morals,' his instability, the very unpleasantness, and offence to his vanity—all this would prevent him. No; he would not divorce her, she was sure, unless by any chance he wanted legal freedom, and that was quite unlikely. What then would be gained? Ease for her conscience? But had she any right to ease her conscience if it brought harm to her lover? And was it not ridiculous to think of conscience in regard to one who, within a year of marriage, had taken to himself a mistress, and not even spared the home paid for and supported by his wife? No; if she told Fiorsen, it would only be to salve her pride, wounded by doing what she did not avow. Besides, where was he? At the other end of the world for all she knew.

She came down to breakfast, dark under the eyes and no whit advanced toward decision. Neither of them mentioned their last night's talk, and Gyp went back to her room to busy herself with dress, after those weeks away. It was past noon when, at a muffled knock, she found Markey outside her door.

"Mr. Fiorsen, m'm."

Gyp beckoned him in, and closed the door.

"In the hall, m'm—slipped in when I answered the bell; short of shoving, I couldn't keep him out."

Gyp stood full half a minute before she said:

"Is my father in?"

"No, m'm; the major's gone to the fencin'-club."

"What did you say?"

"Said I would see. So far as I was aware, nobody was in. Shall I have a try to shift him, m'm?"

With a faint smile Gyp shook her head.

"Say no one can see him."

Markey's woodcock eyes, under their thin, dark, twisting brows, fastened on her dolefully; he opened the door to go. Fiorsen was standing there, and, with a quick movement, came in. She saw Markey raise his arms as if to catch him round the waist, and said quietly:

"Markey—wait outside, please."

When the door was shut, she retreated against her dressing-table and stood gazing at her husband, while her heart throbbed as if it would leap through its coverings.

He had grown a short beard, his cheeks seemed a little fatter, and his eyes surely more green; otherwise, he looked much as she remembered him. And the first thought that passed through her was: 'Why did I ever pity him? He'll never fret or drink himself to death—he's got enough vitality for twenty men.'

His face, which had worn a fixed, nervous smile, grew suddenly grave as her own, and his eyes roved round the room in the old half-fierce, half-furtive way.

"Well, Gyp," he said, and his voice shook a little: "At last! Won't you kiss me?"

The question seemed to Gyp idiotic; and suddenly she felt quite cool.

"If you want to speak to my father, you must come later; he's out."

Fiorsen gave one of his fierce shrugs.

"Is it likely? Look, Gyp! I returned from Russia yesterday. I was a great success, made a lot of money out there. Come back to me! I will be good—I swear it! Now I have seen you again, I can't be without you. Ah, Gyp, come back to me! And see how good I will be. I will take you abroad, you and the bambina. We will go to Rome—anywhere you like—live how you like. Only come back to me!"

Gyp answered stonily:

"You are talking nonsense."

"Gyp, I swear to you I have not seen a woman—not one fit to put beside you. Oh, Gyp, be good to me once more. This time I will not fail. Try me! Try me, my Gyp!"

Only at this moment of his pleading, whose tragic tones seemed to her both false and childish, did Gyp realize the strength of the new feeling in her heart. And the more that feeling throbbed within her, the harder her face and her voice grew. She said:

"If that is all you came to say—please go. I will never come back to you. Once for all, understand, PLEASE."

The silence in which he received her words, and his expression, impressed her far more than his appeal; with one of his stealthy movements he came quite close, and, putting his face forward till it almost touched her, said:

"You are my wife. I want you back. I must have you back. If you do not come, I will kill either you or myself."

And suddenly she felt his arms knotted behind her back, crushing her to him. She stilled a scream; then, very swiftly, took a resolve, and, rigid in his arms, said:

"Let go; you hurt me. Sit down quietly. I will tell you something."

The tone of her voice made him loosen his grasp and crane back to see her face. Gyp detached his arms from her completely, sat down on an old oak chest, and motioned him to the window-seat. Her heart thumped pitifully; cold waves of almost physical sickness passed through and through her. She had smelt brandy in his breath when he was close to her. It was like being in the cage of a wild beast; it was like being with a madman! The remembrance of him with his fingers stretched out like claws above her baby was so vivid at that moment that she could scarcely see him as he was, sitting there quietly, waiting for what she was going to say. And fixing her eyes on him, she said softly:

"You say you love me, Gustav. I tried to love you, too, but I never could—never from the first. I tried very hard. Surely you care what a woman feels, even if she happens to be your wife."

She could see his face quiver; and she went on:

"When I found I couldn't love you, I felt I had no right over you. I didn't stand on my rights. Did I?"

Again his face quivered, and again she hurried on:

"But you wouldn't expect me to go all through my life without ever feeling love—you who've felt it so many times?" Then, clasping her hands tight, with a sort of wonder at herself, she murmured: "I AM in love. I've given myself."

He made a queer, whining sound, covering his face. And the beggar's tag: "'Ave a feelin' 'eart, gentleman—'ave a feelin' 'eart!" passed idiotically through Gyp's mind. Would he get up and strangle her? Should she dash to the door—escape? For a long, miserable moment, she watched him swaying on the window-seat, with his face covered. Then, without looking at her, he crammed a clenched hand up against his mouth, and rushed out.

Through the open door, Gyp had a glimpse of Markey's motionless figure, coming to life as Fiorsen passed. She drew a long breath, locked the door, and lay down on her bed. Her heart beat dreadfully. For a moment, something had checked his jealous rage. But if on this shock he began to drink, what might not happen? He had said something wild. And she shuddered. But what right had he to feel jealousy and rage against her? What right? She got up and went to the glass, trembling, mechanically tidying her hair. Miraculous that she had come through unscathed!

Her thoughts flew to Summerhay. They were to meet at three o'clock by the seat in St. James's Park. But all was different, now; difficult and dangerous! She must wait, take counsel with her father. And yet if she did not keep that tryst, how anxious he would be—thinking that all sorts of things had happened to her; thinking perhaps—oh, foolish!—that she had forgotten, or even repented of her love. What would she herself think, if he were to fail her at their first tryst after those days of bliss? Certainly that he had changed his mind, seen she was not worth it, seen that a woman who could give herself so soon, so easily, was one to whom he could not sacrifice his life.

In this cruel uncertainty, she spent the next two hours, till it was nearly three. If she did not go out, he would come on to Bury Street, and that would be still more dangerous. She put on her hat and walked swiftly towards St. James's Palace. Once sure that she was not being followed, her courage rose, and she passed rapidly down toward the water. She was ten minutes late, and seeing him there, walking up and down, turning his head every few seconds so as not to lose sight of the bench, she felt almost lightheaded from joy. When they had greeted with that pathetic casualness of lovers which deceives so few, they walked on together past Buckingham Palace, up into the Green Park, beneath the trees. During this progress, she told him about her father; but only when they were seated in that comparative refuge, and his hand was holding hers under cover of the sunshade that lay across her knee, did she speak of Fiorsen.

He tightened his grasp of her hand; then, suddenly dropping it, said:

"Did he touch you, Gyp?"

Gyp heard that question with a shock. Touch her! Yes! But what did it matter?

He made a little shuddering sound; and, wondering, mournful, she looked at him. His hands and teeth were clenched. She said softly:

"Bryan! Don't! I wouldn't let him kiss me."

He seemed to have to force his eyes to look at her.

"It's all right," he said, and, staring before him, bit his nails.

Gyp sat motionless, cut to the heart. She was soiled, and spoiled for him! Of course! And yet a sense of injustice burned in her. Her heart had never been touched; it was his utterly. But that was not enough for a man—he wanted an untouched body, too. That she could not give; he should have thought of that sooner, instead of only now. And, miserably, she, too, stared before her, and her face hardened.

A little boy came and stood still in front of them, regarding her with round, unmoving eyes. She was conscious of a slice of bread and jam in his hand, and that his mouth and cheeks were smeared with red. A woman called out: "Jacky! Come on, now!" and he was hauled away, still looking back, and holding out his bread and jam as though offering her a bite. She felt Summerhay's arm slipping round her.

"It's over, darling. Never again—I promise you!"

Ah, he might promise—might even keep that promise. But he would suffer, always suffer, thinking of that other. And she said:

"You can only have me as I am, Bryan. I can't make myself new for you; I wish I could—oh, I wish I could!"

"I ought to have cut my tongue out first! Don't think of it! Come home to me and have tea—there's no one there. Ah, do, Gyp—come!"

He took her hands and pulled her up. And all else left Gyp but the joy of being close to him, going to happiness.

IX

Fiorsen, passing Markey like a blind man, made his way out into the street, but had not gone a hundred yards before he was hurrying back. He had left his hat. The servant, still standing there, handed him that wide-brimmed object and closed the door in his face. Once more he moved away, going towards Piccadilly. If it had not been for the expression on Gyp's face, what might he not have done? And, mixed with sickening jealousy, he felt a sort of relief, as if he had been saved from something horrible. So she had never loved him! Never at all? Impossible! Impossible that a woman on whom he had lavished such passion should never have felt passion for him—never any! Innumerable images of her passed before him—surrendering, always surrendering. It could not all have been pretence! He was not a common man—she herself had said so; he had charm—or, other women thought so! She had lied; she must have lied, to excuse herself!

He went into a cafe and asked for a fine champagne. They brought him a carafe, with the measures marked. He sat there a long time. When he rose, he had drunk nine, and he felt better, with a kind of ferocity that was pleasant in his veins and a kind of nobility that was pleasant in his soul. Let her love, and be happy with her lover! But let him get his fingers on that fellow's throat! Let her be happy, if she could keep her lover from him! And suddenly, he stopped in his tracks, for there on a sandwich-board just in front of him were the words: "Daphne Wing. Pantheon. Daphne Wing. Plastic Danseuse. Poetry of Motion. To-day at three o'clock. Pantheon. Daphne Wing."

Ah, SHE had loved him—little Daphne! It was past three. Going in, he took his place in the stalls, close to the stage, and stared before him, with a sort of bitter amusement. This was irony indeed! Ah—and here she came! A Pierrette—in short, diaphanous muslin, her face whitened to match it; a Pierrette who stood slowly spinning on her toes, with arms raised and hands joined in an arch above her glistening hair.

Idiotic pose! Idiotic! But there was the old expression on her face, limpid, dovelike. And that something of the divine about her dancing smote Fiorsen through all the sheer imbecility of her posturings. Across and across she flitted, pirouetting, caught up at intervals by a Pierrot in black tights with a face as whitened as her own, held upside down, or right end up with one knee bent sideways, and the toe of a foot pressed against the ankle of the other, and arms arched above her. Then, with Pierrot's hands grasping her waist, she would stand upon one toe and slowly twiddle, lifting her other leg toward the roof, while the trembling of her form manifested cunningly to all how hard it was; then, off the toe, she capered out to the wings, and capered back, wearing on her face that divine, lost, dovelike look, while her perfect legs gleamed white up to the very thigh-joint. Yes; on the stage she was adorable! And raising his hands high, Fiorsen clapped and called out: "Brava!" He marked the sudden

roundness of her eyes, a tiny start—no more. She had seen him. 'Ah! Some don't forget me!' he thought.

And now she came on for her second dance, assisted this time only by her own image reflected in a little weedy pool about the middle of the stage. From the programme Fiorsen read, "Ophelia's last dance," and again he grinned. In a clinging sea-green gown, cut here and there to show her inevitable legs, with marguerites and corn-flowers in her unbound hair, she circled her own reflection, languid, pale, desolate; then slowly gaining the abandon needful to a full display, danced with frenzy till, in a gleam of limelight, she sank into the apparent water and floated among paper water-lilies on her back. Lovely she looked there, with her eyes still open, her lips parted, her hair trailing behind. And again Fiorsen raised his hands high to clap, and again called out: 'Brava!' But the curtain fell, and Ophelia did not reappear. Was it the sight of him, or was she preserving the illusion that she was drowned? That "arty" touch would be just like her.

Averting his eyes from two comedians in calico, beating each other about the body, he rose with an audible "Pish!" and made his way out. He stopped in the street to scribble on his card, "Will you see me?—G. F." and took it round to the stage-door. The answer came back:

"Miss Wing will see you in a minute, sir."

And leaning against the distempered wall of the draughty corridor, a queer smile on his face, Fiorsen wondered why the devil he was there, and what the devil she would say.

When he was admitted, she was standing with her hat on, while her "dresser" buttoned her patent-leather shoes. Holding out her hand above the woman's back, she said:

"Oh, Mr. Fiorsen, how do you do?"

Fiorsen took the little moist hand; and his eyes passed over her, avoiding a direct meeting with her eyes. He received an impression of something harder, more self-possessed, than he remembered. Her face was the same, yet not the same; only her perfect, supple little body was as it had been. The dresser rose, murmured: "Good-afternoon, miss," and went.

Daphne Wing smiled faintly.

"I haven't seen you for a long time, have I?"

"No; I've been abroad. You dance as beautifully as ever."

"Oh, yes; it hasn't hurt my dancing."

With an effort, he looked her in the face. Was this really the same girl who had clung to him, cloyed him with her kisses, her tears, her appeals for love—just a little love? Ah, but she was more desirable, much more desirable than he had remembered! And he said:

"Give me a kiss, little Daphne!"

Daphne Wing did not stir; her white teeth rested on her lower lip; she said:

"Oh, no, thank you! How is Mrs. Fiorsen?"

Fiorsen turned abruptly.

"There is none."

"Oh, has she divorced you?"

"No. Stop talking of her; stop talking, I say!"

Daphne Wing, still motionless in the centre of her little crowded dressing-room said, in a matter-of-fact voice:

"You are polite, aren't you? It's funny; I can't tell whether I'm glad to see you. I had a bad time, you know; and Mrs. Fiorsen was an angel. Why do you come to see me now?"

Exactly! Why had he come? The thought flashed through him: 'She'll help me to forget.' And he said:

"I was a great brute to you, Daphne. I came to make up, if I can."

"Oh, no; you can't make up—thank you!" A shudder ran through her, and she began drawing on her gloves. "You taught me a lot, you know. I ought to be quite grateful. Oh, you've grown a little beard! D'you think that improves you? It makes you look rather like Mephistopheles, I think."

Fiorsen stared fixedly at that perfectly shaped face, where a faint, underdone pink mingled with the fairness of the skin. Was she mocking him? Impossible! She looked too matter of fact.

"Where do you live now?" he said.

"I'm on my own, in a studio. You can come and see it, if you like."

"With pleasure."

"Only, you'd better understand. I've had enough of love."

Fiorsen grinned.

"Even for another?" he said.

Daphne Wing answered calmly:

"I wish you would treat me like a lady."

Fiorsen bit his lip, and bowed.

"May I have the pleasure of giving you some tea?"

"Yes, thank you; I'm very hungry. I don't eat lunch on matinee-days; I find it better not. Do you like my Ophelia dance?"

"It's artificial."

"Yes, it IS artificial—it's done with mirrors and wire netting, you know. But do I give you the illusion of being mad?" Fiorsen nodded. "I'm so glad. Shall we go? I do want my tea."

She turned round, scrutinized herself in the glass, touched her hat with both hands, revealing, for a second, all the poised beauty of her figure, took a little bag from the back of a chair, and said:

"I think, if you don't mind going on, it's less conspicuous. I'll meet you at Ruffel's—they have lovely things there. Au revoir."

In a state of bewilderment, irritation, and queer meekness, Fiorsen passed down Coventry Street, and entering the empty Ruffel's, took a table near the window. There he sat staring before him, for the sudden vision of Gyp sitting on that oaken chest, at the foot of her bed, had blotted the girl clean out. The attendant coming to take his order, gazed at his pale, furious face, and said mechanically:

"What can I get you, please?"

Looking up, Fiorsen saw Daphne Wing outside, gazing at the cakes in the window. She came in.

"Oh, here you are! I should like iced coffee and walnut cake, and some of those marzipan sweets—oh, and some whipped cream with my cake. Do you mind?" And, sitting down, she fixed her eyes on his face and asked:

"Where have you been abroad?"

"Stockholm, Budapest, Moscow, other places."

"How perfect! Do you think I should make a success in Budapest or Moscow?"

"You might; you are English enough."

"Oh! Do you think I'm very English?"

"Utterly. Your kind of—" But even he was not quite capable of finishing that sentence—"your kind of vulgarity could not be produced anywhere else." Daphne Wing finished it for him:

"My kind of beauty?"

Fiorsen grinned and nodded.

"Oh, I think that's the nicest thing you ever said to me! Only, of course, I should like to think I'm more of the Greek type—pagan, you know."

She fell silent, casting her eyes down. Her profile at that moment, against the light, was very pure

and soft in line. And he said:

"I suppose you hate me, little Daphne? You ought to hate me."

Daphne Wing looked up; her round, blue-grey eyes passed over him much as they had been passing over the marzipan.

"No; I don't hate you—now. Of course, if I had any love left for you, I should. Oh, isn't that Irish? But one can think anybody a rotter without hating them, can't one?"

Fiorsen bit his lips.

"So you think me a 'rotter'?"

Daphne Wing's eyes grew rounder.

"But aren't you? You couldn't be anything else—could you?—with the sort of things you did."

"And yet you don't mind having tea with me?"

Daphne Wing, who had begun to eat and drink, said with her mouth full:

"You see, I'm independent now, and I know life. That makes you harmless."

Fiorsen stretched out his hand and seized hers just where her little warm pulse was beating very steadily. She looked at it, changed her fork over, and went on eating with the other hand. Fiorsen drew his hand away as if he had been stung.

"Ah, you HAVE changed—that is certain!"

"Yes; you wouldn't expect anything else, would you? You see, one doesn't go through that for nothing. I think I was a dreadful little fool—" She stopped, with her spoon on its way to her mouth—"and yet—"

"I love you still, little Daphne."

She slowly turned her head toward him, and a faint sigh escaped her.

"Once I would have given a lot to hear that."

And turning her head away again, she picked a large walnut out of her cake and put it in her mouth.

"Are you coming to see my studio? I've got it rather nice and new. I'm making twenty-five a week; my next engagement, I'm going to get thirty. I should like Mrs. Fiorsen to know—Oh, I forgot; you don't like me to speak of her! Why not? I wish you'd tell me!" Gazing, as the attendant had, at his furious face, she went on: "I don't know how it is, but I'm not a bit afraid of you now. I used to be. Oh, how is Count Rosek? Is he as pale as ever? Aren't you going to have anything more? You've had hardly anything. D'you know what I should like—a chocolate éclair and a raspberry ice-cream soda with a slice of tangerine in it."

When she had slowly sucked up that beverage, prodding the slice of tangerine with her straws, they went out and took a cab. On that journey to her studio, Fiorsen tried to possess himself of her hand, but, folding her arms across her chest, she said quietly:

"It's very bad manners to take advantage of cabs." And, withdrawing sullenly into his corner, he watched her askance. Was she playing with him? Or had she really ceased to care the snap of a finger? It seemed incredible. The cab, which had been threading the maze of the Soho streets, stopped. Daphne Wing alighted, proceeded down a narrow passage to a green door on the right, and, opening it with a latch-key, paused to say:

"I like it's being in a little sordid street—it takes away all amateurishness. It wasn't a studio, of course; it was the back part of a paper-maker's. Any space conquered for art is something, isn't it?" She led the way up a few green-carpeted stairs, into a large room with a skylight, whose walls were covered in Japanese silk the colour of yellow azaleas. Here she stood for a minute without speaking, as though lost in the beauty of her home: then, pointing to the walls, she said:

"It took me ages, I did it all myself. And look at my little Japanese trees; aren't they dickies?" Six little dark abortions of trees were arranged scrupulously on a lofty window-sill, whence the skylight sloped. She added suddenly: "I think Count Rosek would like this room. There's something bizarre about it, isn't there? I wanted to surround myself with that, you know—to get the bizarre note into my work. It's so important nowadays. But through there I've got a bedroom and a bathroom and a little kitchen with

everything to hand, all quite domestic; and hot water always on. My people are SO funny about this room. They come sometimes, and stand about. But they can't get used to the neighbourhood; of course it IS sordid, but I think an artist ought to be superior to that."

Suddenly touched, Fiorsen answered gently:

"Yes, little Daphne."

She looked at him, and another tiny sigh escaped her.

"Why did you treat me like you did?" she said. "It's such a pity, because now I can't feel anything at all." And turning, she suddenly passed the back of her hand across her eyes. Really moved by that, Fiorsen went towards her, but she had turned round again, and putting out her hand to keep him off, stood shaking her head, with half a tear glistening on her eyelashes.

"Please sit down on the divan," she said. "Will you smoke? These are Russians." And she took a white box of pink-coloured cigarettes from a little golden birchwood table. "I have everything Russian and Japanese so far as I can; I think they help more than anything with atmosphere. I've got a balalaika; you can't play on it, can you? What a pity! If only I had a violin! I SHOULD have liked to hear you play again." She clasped her hands: "Do you remember when I danced to you before the fire?"

Fiorsen remembered only too well. The pink cigarette trembled in his fingers, and he said rather hoarsely:

"Dance to me now, Daphne!"

She shook her head.

"I don't trust you a yard. Nobody would—would they?"

Fiorsen started up.

"Then why did you ask me here? What are you playing at, you little—" At sight of her round, unmoving eyes, he stopped. She said calmly:

"I thought you'd like to see that I'd mastered my fate—that's all. But, of course, if you don't, you needn't stop."

Fiorsen sank back on the divan. A conviction that everything she said was literal had begun slowly to sink into him. And taking a long pull at that pink cigarette he puffed the smoke out with a laugh.

"What are you laughing at?"

"I was thinking, little Daphne, that you are as great an egoist as I."

"I want to be. It's the only thing, isn't it?"

Fiorsen laughed again.

"You needn't worry. You always were."

She had seated herself on an Indian stool covered with a bit of Turkish embroidery, and, joining her hands on her lap, answered gravely:

"No; I think I wasn't, while I loved you. But it didn't pay, did it?"

Fiorsen stared at her.

"It has made a woman of you, Daphne. Your face is different. Your mouth is prettier for my kisses—or the want of them. All over, you are prettier." Pink came up in Daphne Wing's cheeks. And, encouraged by that flush, he went on warmly: "If you loved me now, I should not tire of you. Oh, you can believe me! I—"

She shook her head.

"We won't talk about love, will we? Did you have a big triumph in Moscow and St. Petersburg? It must be wonderful to have really great triumphs!"

Fiorsen answered gloomily:

"Triumphs? I made a lot of money."

Daphne Wing purred:

"Oh, I expect you're very happy."

Did she mean to be ironic?

"I'm miserable."

He got up and went towards her. She looked up in his face.

"I'm sorry if you're miserable. I know what it feels like."

"You can help me not to be. Little Daphne, you can help me to forget."

He had stopped, and put his hands on her shoulders. Without moving Daphne Wing answered:

"I suppose it's Mrs. Fiorsen you want to forget, isn't it?"

"As if she were dead. Ah, let it all be as it was, Daphne! You have grown up; you are a woman, an artist, and you—"

Daphne Wing had turned her head toward the stairs.

"That was the bell," she said. "Suppose it's my people? It's just their time! Oh, isn't that awkward?"

Fiorsen dropped his grasp of her and recoiled against the wall. There with his head touching one of the little Japanese trees, he stood biting his fingers. She was already moving toward the door.

"My mother's got a key, and it's no good putting you anywhere, because she always has a good look round. But perhaps it isn't them. Besides, I'm not afraid now; it makes a wonderful difference being on one's own."

She disappeared. Fiorsen could hear a woman's acid voice, a man's, rather hoarse and greasy, the sound of a smacking kiss. And, with a vicious shrug, he stood at bay. Trapped! The little devil! The little dovelike devil! He saw a lady in a silk dress, green shot with beetroot colour, a short, thick gentleman with a round, greyish beard, in a grey suit, having a small dahlia in his buttonhole, and, behind them, Daphne Wing, flushed, and very round-eyed. He took a step, intending to escape without more ado. The gentleman said:

"Introduce us, Daisy. I didn't quite catch—Mr. Dawson? How do you do, sir? One of my daughter's impresarios, I think. 'Appy to meet you, I'm sure."

Fiorsen took a long breath, and bowed. Mr. Wagge's small piggy eyes had fixed themselves on the little trees.

"She's got a nice little place here for her work—quiet and unconventional. I hope you think well of her talent, sir? You might go further and fare worse, I believe."

Again Fiorsen bowed.

"You may be proud of her," he said; "she is the rising star."

Mr. Wagge cleared his throat.

"Ow," he said; "ye'es! From a little thing, we thought she had stuff in her. I've come to take a great interest in her work. It's not in my line, but I think she's a sticker; I like to see perseverance. Where you've got that, you've got half the battle of success. So many of these young people seem to think life's all play. You must see a lot of that in your profession, sir."

"Robert!"

A shiver ran down Fiorsen's spine.

"Ye-es?"

"The name was not DAWson!"

There followed a long moment. On the one side was that vinegary woman poking her head forward like an angry hen, on the other, Daphne Wing, her eyes rounder and rounder, her cheeks redder and redder, her lips opening, her hands clasped to her perfect breast, and, in the centre, that broad, grey-bearded figure, with reddening face and angry eyes and hoarsening voice:

"You scoundrel! You infernal scoundrel!" It lurched forward, raising a pudgy fist. Fiorsen sprang down the stairs and wrenched open the door. He walked away in a whirl of mortification. Should he go back and take that pug-faced vulgarian by the throat? As for that minx! But his feelings about HER were too complicated for expression. And then—so dark and random are the ways of the mind—his thoughts darted back to Gyp, sitting on the oaken chest, making her confession; and the whips and stings of it scored him worse than ever.

X

That same evening, standing at the corner of Bury Street, Summerhay watched Gyp going swiftly to her father's house. He could not bring himself to move while there was still a chance to catch a glimpse of her face, a sign from her hand. Gone! He walked away with his head down. The more blissful the hours just spent, the greater the desolation when they are over. Of such is the nature of love, as he was now discerning. The longing to have her always with him was growing fast. Since her husband knew—why wait? There would be no rest for either of them in an existence of meetings and partings like this, with the menace of that fellow. She must come away with him at once—abroad—until things had declared themselves; and then he must find a place where they could live and she feel safe and happy. He must show he was in dead earnest, set his affairs in order. And he thought: 'No good doing things by halves. Mother must know. The sooner the better. Get it over—at once!' And, with a grimace of discomfort, he set out for his aunt's house in Cadogan Gardens, where his mother always stayed when she was in town.

Lady Summerhay was in the boudoir, waiting for dinner and reading a book on dreams. A red-shaded lamp cast a mellow tinge over the grey frock, over one reddish cheek and one white shoulder. She was a striking person, tall and well built, her very blonde hair only just turning grey, for she had married young and been a widow fifteen years—one of those women whose naturally free spirits have been netted by association with people of public position. Bubbles were still rising from her submerged soul, but it was obvious that it would not again set eyes on the horizon. With views neither narrow nor illiberal, as views in society go, she judged everything now as people of public position must—discussion, of course, but no alteration in one's way of living. Speculation and ideas did not affect social usage. The countless movements in which she and her friends were interested for the emancipation and benefit of others were, in fact, only channels for letting off her superfluous goodwill, conduit-pipes, for the directing spirit bred in her. She thought and acted in terms of the public good, regulated by what people of position said at luncheon and dinner. And it was surely not her fault that such people must lunch and dine. When her son had bent and kissed her, she held up the book to him and said:

"Well, Bryan, I think this man's book disgraceful; he simply runs his sex-idea to death. Really, we aren't all quite so obsessed as that. I do think he ought to be put in his own lunatic asylum."

Summerhay, looking down at her gloomily, answered:

"I've got bad news for you, Mother."

Lady Summerhay closed the book and searched his face with apprehension. She knew that expression. She knew that poise of his head, as if butting at something. He looked like that when he came to her in gambling scrapes. Was this another? Bryan had always been a pickle. His next words took her breath away.

"The people at Mildenhall, Major Winton and his daughter—you know. Well, I'm in love with her—I'm—I'm her lover."

Lady Summerhay uttered a gasp.

"But—but—Bryan—"

"That fellow she married drinks. He's impossible. She had to leave him a year ago, with her baby—other reasons, too. Look here, Mother: This is hateful, but you'd got to know. I can't talk of her. There's no chance of a divorce." His voice grew higher. "Don't try to persuade me out of it. It's no good."

Lady Summerhay, from whose comely face a frock, as it were, had slipped, clasped her hands together on the book.

Such a swift descent of "life" on one to whom it had for so long been a series of "cases" was cruel, and her son felt this without quite realizing why. In the grip of his new emotions, he still retained enough balance to appreciate what an abominably desolate piece of news this must be to her, what a disturbance and disappointment. And, taking her hand, he put it to his lips.

"Cheer up, Mother! It's all right. She's happy, and so am I."

Lady Summerhay could only press her hand against his kiss, and murmur:

"Yes; that's not everything, Bryan. Is there—is there going to be a scandal?"

"I don't know. I hope not; but, anyway, HE knows about it."

"Society doesn't forgive."

Summerhay shrugged his shoulders.

"Awfully sorry for YOU, Mother."

"Oh, Bryan!"

This repetition of her plaint jarred his nerves.

"Don't run ahead of things. You needn't tell Edith or Flo. You needn't tell anybody. We don't know what'll happen yet."

But in Lady Summerhay all was too sore and blank. This woman she had never seen, whose origin was doubtful, whose marriage must have soiled her, who was some kind of a siren, no doubt. It really was too hard! She believed in her son, had dreamed of public position for him, or, rather, felt he would attain it as a matter of course. And she said feebly:

"This Major Winton is a man of breeding, isn't he?"

"Rather!" And, stopping before her, as if he read her thoughts, he added: "You think she's not good enough for me? She's good enough for anyone on earth. And she's the proudest woman I've ever met. If you're bothering as to what to do about her—don't! She won't want anything of anybody—I can tell you that. She won't accept any crumbs."

"That's lucky!" hovered on Lady Summerhay's lips; but, gazing at her son, she became aware that she stood on the brink of a downfall in his heart. Then the bitterness of her disappointment rising up again, she said coldly:

"Are you going to live together openly?"

"Yes; if she will."

"You don't know yet?"

"I shall—soon."

Lady Summerhay got up, and the book on dreams slipped off her lap with a thump. She went to the fireplace, and stood there looking at her son. He had altered. His merry look was gone; his face was strange to her. She remembered it like that, once in the park at Widrington, when he lost his temper with a pony and came galloping past her, sitting back, his curly hair stivered up like a little demon's. And she said sadly:

"You can hardly expect me to like it for you, Bryan, even if she is what you say. And isn't there some story about—"

"My dear mother, the more there is against her, the more I shall love her—that's obvious."

Lady Summerhay sighed again.

"What is this man going to do? I heard him play once."

"I don't know. Nothing, I dare say. Morally and legally, he's out of court. I only wish to God he WOULD bring a case, and I could marry her; but Gyp says he won't."

Lady Summerhay murmured:

"Gyp? Is that her name?" And a sudden wish, almost a longing, not a friendly one, to see this woman

seized her. "Will you bring her to see me? I'm alone here till Wednesday."

"I'll ask her, but I don't think she'll come." He turned his head away.
"Mother, she's wonderful!"

An unhappy smile twisted Lady Summerhay's lips. No doubt! Aphrodite herself had visited her boy. Aphrodite! And—afterward? She asked desolately:

"Does Major Winton know?"

"Yes."

"What does he say to it?"

"Say? What can anyone say? From your point of view, or his, it's rotten, of course. But in her position, anything's rotten."

At that encouraging word, the flood-gates gave way in Lady Summerhay, and she poured forth a stream of words.

"Oh, my dear, can't you pull up? I've seen so many of these affairs go wrong. It really is not for nothing that law and conventions are what they are—believe me! Really, Bryan, experience does show that the pressure's too great. It's only once in a way—very exceptional people, very exceptional circumstances. You mayn't think now it'll hamper you, but you'll find it will—most fearfully. It's not as if you were a writer or an artist, who can take his work where he likes and live in a desert if he wants. You've got to do yours in London, your whole career is bound up with society. Do think, before you go butting up against it! It's all very well to say it's no affair of anyone's, but you'll find it is, Bryan. And then, can you—can you possibly make her happy in the long-run?"

She stopped at the expression on his face. It was as if he were saying: "I have left your world. Talk to your fellows; all this is nothing to me."

"Look here, Mother: you don't seem to understand. I'm devoted—devoted so that there's nothing else for me."

"How long will that last, Bryan? You mean bewitched."

Summerhay said, with passion:

"I don't. I mean what I said. Good-night!" And he went to the door.

"Won't you stay to dinner, dear?"

But he was gone, and the full of vexation, anxiety, and wretchedness came on Lady Summerhay. It was too hard! She went down to her lonely dinner, desolate and sore. And to the book on dreams, opened beside her plate, she turned eyes that took in nothing.

Summerhay went straight home. The lamps were brightening in the early-autumn dusk, and a draughty, ruffling wind flicked a yellow leaf here and there from off the plane trees. It was just the moment when evening blue comes into the colouring of the town—that hour of fusion when day's hard and staring shapes are softening, growing dark, mysterious, and all that broods behind the lives of men and trees and houses comes down on the wings of illusion to repossess the world—the hour when any poetry in a man wells up. But Summerhay still heard his mother's, "Oh, Bryan!" and, for the first time, knew the feeling that his hand was against everyone's. There was a difference already, or so it seemed to him, in the expression of each passer-by. Nothing any more would be a matter of course; and he was of a class to whom everything has always been a matter of course. Perhaps he did not realize this clearly yet; but he had begun to take what the nurses call "notice," as do those only who are forced on to the defensive against society.

Putting his latch-key into the lock, he recalled the sensation with which, that afternoon, he had opened to Gyp for the first time—half furtive, half defiant. It would be all defiance now. This was the end of the old order! And, lighting a fire in his sitting-room, he began pulling out drawers, sorting and destroying. He worked for hours, burning, making lists, packing papers and photographs. Finishing at last, he drank a stiff whisky and soda, and sat down to smoke. Now that the room was quiet, Gyp seemed to fill it again with her presence. Closing his eyes, he could see her there by the hearth, just as she stood before they left, turning her face up to him, murmuring: "You won't stop loving me, now you're so sure I love you?" Stop loving her! The more she loved him, the more he would love her. And he said aloud: "By God! I won't!" At that remark, so vehement for the time of night, the old Scotch terrier, Ossian, came from his corner and shoved his long black nose into his master's hand.

"Come along up, Ossy! Good dog, Oss!" And, comforted by the warmth of that black body beside him in the chair, Summerhay fell asleep in front of the fire smouldering with blackened fragments of his past.

XI

Though Gyp had never seemed to look round she had been quite conscious of Summerhay still standing where they had parted, watching her into the house in Bury Street. The strength of her own feeling surprised her, as a bather in the sea is surprised, finding her feet will not touch bottom, that she is carried away helpless—only, these were the waters of ecstasy.

For the second night running, she hardly slept, hearing the clocks of St. James's strike, and Big Ben boom, hour after hour. At breakfast, she told her father of Fiorsen's reappearance. He received the news with a frown and a shrewd glance.

"Well, Gyp?"

"I told him."

His feelings, at that moment, were perhaps as mixed as they had ever been—curiosity, parental disapproval, to which he knew he was not entitled, admiration of her pluck in letting that fellow know, fears for the consequences of this confession, and, more than all, his profound disturbance at knowing her at last launched into the deep waters of love. It was the least of these feelings that found expression.

"How did he take it?"

"Rushed away. The only thing I feel sure of is that he won't divorce me."

"No, by George; I don't suppose even he would have that impudence!" And Winton was silent, trying to penetrate the future. "Well," he said suddenly, "it's on the knees of the gods then. But be careful, Gyp."

About noon, Betty returned from the sea, with a solemn, dark-eyed, cooing little Gyp, brown as a roasted coffee-berry. When she had been given all that she could wisely eat after the journey, Gyp carried her off to her own room, undressed her for sheer delight of kissing her from head to foot, and admiring her plump brown legs, then cuddled her up in a shawl and lay down with her on the bed. A few sleepy coos and strokings, and little Gyp had left for the land of Nod, while her mother lay gazing at her black lashes with a kind of passion. She was not a child-lover by nature; but this child of her own, with her dark softness, plump delicacy, giving disposition, her cooing voice, and constant adjurations to "dear mum," was adorable. There was something about her insidiously seductive. She had developed so quickly, with the graceful roundness of a little animal, the perfection of a flower. The Italian blood of her great-great-grandmother was evidently prepotent in her as yet; and, though she was not yet two years old, her hair, which had lost its baby darkness, was already curving round her neck and waving on her forehead. One of her tiny brown hands had escaped the shawl and grasped its edge with determined softness. And while Gyp gazed at the pinkish nails and their absurdly wee half-moons, at the sleeping tranquillity stirred by breathing no more than a rose-leaf on a windless day, her lips grew fuller, trembled, reached toward the dark lashes, till she had to rein her neck back with a jerk to stop such self-indulgence. Soothed, hypnotized, almost in a dream, she lay there beside her baby.

That evening, at dinner, Winton said calmly:

"Well, I've been to see Fiorsen, and warned him off. Found him at that fellow Rosek's." Gyp received the news with a vague sensation of alarm. "And I met that girl, the dancer, coming out of the house as I was going in—made it plain I'd seen her, so I don't think he'll trouble you."

An irresistible impulse made her ask:

"How was she looking, Dad?"

Winton smiled grimly. How to convey his impression of the figure he had seen coming down the steps—of those eyes growing rounder and rounder at sight of him, of that mouth opening in an: "Oh!"

"Much the same. Rather flabbergasted at seeing me, I think. A white hat—very smart. Attractive in her way, but common, of course. Those two were playing the piano and fiddle when I went up. They tried not to let me in, but I wasn't to be put off. Queer place, that!"

Gyp smiled. She could see it all so well. The black walls, the silver statuettes, Rops drawings, scent of dead rose-leaves and pastilles and cigarettes—and those two by the piano—and her father so cool and dry!

"One can't stand on ceremony with fellows like that. I hadn't forgotten that Polish chap's behaviour to you, my dear."

Through Gyp passed a quiver of dread, a vague return of the feelings once inspired by Rosek.

"I'm almost sorry you went, Dad. Did you say anything very—"

"Did I? Let's see! No; I think I was quite polite." He added, with a grim, little smile: "I won't swear I didn't call one of them a ruffian. I know they said something about my presuming on being a cripple."

"Oh, darling!"

"Yes; it was that Polish chap—and so he is!"

Gyp murmured:

"I'd almost rather it had been—the other." Rosek's pale, suave face, with the eyes behind which there were such hidden things, and the lips sweetish and restrained and sensual—he would never forgive! But Winton only smiled again, patting her arm. He was pleased with an encounter which had relieved his feelings.

Gyp spent all that evening writing her first real love-letter. But when, next afternoon at six, in fulfilment of its wording, she came to Summerhay's little house, her heart sank; for the blinds were down and it had a deserted look. If he had been there, he would have been at the window, waiting. Had he, then, not got her letter, not been home since yesterday? And that chill fear which besets lovers' hearts at failure of a tryst smote her for the first time. In the three-cornered garden stood a decayed statue of a naked boy with a broken bow—a sparrow was perching on his greenish shoulder; sooty, heart-shaped lilac leaves hung round his head, and at his legs the old Scotch terrier was sniffing. Gyp called: "Ossian! Ossy!" and the old dog came, wagging his tail feebly.

"Master! Where is your master, dear?"

Ossian poked his long nose into her calf, and that gave her a little comfort. She passed, perforce, away from the deserted house and returned home; but all manner of frightened thoughts beset her. Where had he gone? Why had he gone? Why had he not let her know? Doubts—those hasty attendants on passion—came thronging, and scepticism ran riot. What did she know of his life, of his interests, of him, except that he said he loved her? Where had he gone? To Widrington, to some smart house-party, or even back to Scotland? The jealous feelings that had so besieged her at the bungalow when his letters ceased came again now with redoubled force. There must be some woman who, before their love began, had claim on him, or some girl that he admired. He never told her of any such—of course, he would not! She was amazed and hurt by her capacity for jealousy. She had always thought she would be too proud to feel jealousy—a sensation so dark and wretched and undignified, but—alas!—so horribly real and clinging.

She had said she was not dining at home; so Winton had gone to his club, and she was obliged to partake of a little trumped-up lonely meal. She went up to her room after it, but there came on her such restlessness that presently she put on her things and slipped out. She went past St. James's Church into Piccadilly, to the further, crowded side, and began to walk toward the park. This was foolish; but to do a foolish thing was some relief, and she went along with a faint smile, mocking her own recklessness. Several women of the town—ships of night with sails set—came rounding out of side streets or down the main stream, with their skilled, rapid-seeming slowness. And at the discomfited, half-hostile stares on their rouged and powdered faces, Gyp felt a wicked glee. She was disturbing, hurting them—and she wanted to hurt.

Presently, a man, in evening dress, with overcoat thrown open, gazed pointblank into her face, and, raising his hat, ranged up beside her. She walked straight on, still with that half-smile, knowing him puzzled and fearfully attracted. Then an insensate wish to stab him to the heart made her turn her head and look at him. At the expression on her face, he wilted away from her, and again she felt that wicked glee at having hurt him.

She crossed out into the traffic, to the park side, and turned back toward St. James's; and now she was possessed by profound, black sadness. If only her lover were beside her that beautiful evening, among the lights and shadows of the trees, in the warm air! Why was he not among these passers-by? She who could bring any casual man to her side by a smile could not conjure up the only one she wanted from this great desert of a town! She hurried along, to get in and hide her longing. But at the corner of St. James's Street, she stopped. That was his club, nearly opposite. Perhaps he was there, playing cards or billiards, a few yards away, and yet as in another world. Presently he would come out, go to some music-hall, or stroll home thinking of her—perhaps not even thinking of her! Another woman passed, giving her a furtive glance. But Gyp felt no glee now. And, crossing over, close under the windows of the club, she hurried home. When she reached her room, she broke into a storm of tears. How could she have liked hurting those poor women, hurting that man—who was only paying her a man's compliment, after all? And with these tears, her jealous, wild feelings passed, leaving only her longing.

Next morning brought a letter. Summerhay wrote from an inn on the river, asking her to come down by the eleven o'clock train, and he would meet her at the station. He wanted to show her a house that he had seen; and they could have the afternoon on the river! Gyp received this letter, which began: "My darling!" with an ecstasy that she could not quite conceal. And Winton, who had watched her face, said presently:

"I think I shall go to Newmarket, Gyp. Home to-morrow evening."

In the train on the way down, she sat with closed eyes, in a sort of trance. If her lover had been there holding her in his arms, he could not have seemed nearer.

She saw him as the train ran in; but they met without a hand-clasp, without a word, simply looking at each other and breaking into smiles.

A little victoria "dug up"—as Summerhay said—"horse, driver and all," carried them slowly upward. Under cover of the light rugs their hands were clasped, and they never ceased to look into each other's faces, except for those formal glances of propriety which deceive no one.

The day was beautiful, as only early September days can be—when the sun is hot, yet not too hot, and its light falls in a silken radiance on trees just losing the opulent monotony of summer, on silvery-gold reaped fields, silvery-green uplands, golden mustard; when shots ring out in the distance, and, as one gazes, a leaf falls, without reason, as it would seem. Presently they branched off the main road by a lane past a clump of beeches and drew up at the gate of a lonely house, built of very old red brick, and covered by Virginia creeper just turning—a house with an ingle-nook and low, broad chimneys. Before it was a walled, neglected lawn, with poplars and one large walnut-tree. The sunlight seemed to have collected in that garden, and there was a tremendous hum of bees. Above the trees, the downs could be seen where racehorses, they said, were trained. Summerhay had the keys of the house, and they went in. To Gyp, it was like a child's "pretending"—to imagine they were going to live there together, to sort out the rooms and consecrate each. She would not spoil this perfect day by argument or admission of the need for a decision. And when he asked:

"Well, darling, what do you think of it?" she only answered:

"Oh, lovely, in a way; but let's go back to the river and make the most of it."

They took boat at 'The Bowl of Cream,' the river inn where Summerhay was staying. To him, who had been a rowing man at Oxford, the river was known from Lechlade to Richmond; but Gyp had never in her life been on it, and its placid magic, unlike that of any other river in the world, almost overwhelmed her. On this glistening, windless day, to drift along past the bright, flat water-lily leaves over the greenish depths, to listen to the pigeons, watch the dragon-flies flitting past, and the fish leaping lazily, not even steering, letting her hand dabble in the water, then cooling her sun-warmed cheek with it, and all the time gazing at Summerhay, who, dipping his sculls gently, gazed at her—all this was like a voyage down some river of dreams, the very fulfilment of felicity. There is a degree of happiness known to the human heart which seems to belong to some enchanted world—a bright maze into which, for a moment now and then, we escape and wander. To-day, he was more than ever like her Botticelli "Young Man," with his neck bare, and his face so clear-eyed and broad and brown. Had she really had a life with another man? And only a year ago? It seemed inconceivable!

But when, in the last backwater, he tied the boat up and came to sit with her once more, it was already getting late, and the vague melancholy of the now shadowy river was stealing into her. And, with a sort of sinking in her heart, she heard him begin:

"Gyp, we **MUST** go away together. We can never stand it going on apart, snatching hours here and

there."

Pressing his hand to her cheeks, she murmured:

"Why not, darling? Hasn't this been perfect? What could we ever have more perfect? It's been paradise itself!"

"Yes; but to be thrown out every day! To be whole days and nights without you! Gyp, you must—you must! What is there against it? Don't you love me enough?"

She looked at him, and then away into the shadows.

"Too much, I think. It's tempting Providence to change. Let's go on as we are, Bryan. No; don't look like that—don't be angry!"

"Why are you afraid? Are you sorry for our love?"

"No; but let it be like this. Don't let's risk anything."

"Risk? Is it people—society—you're afraid of? I thought YOU wouldn't care."

Gyp smiled.

"Society? No; I'm not afraid of that."

"What, then? Of me?"

"I don't know. Men soon get tired. I'm a doubter, Bryan, I can't help it."

"As if anyone could get tired of you! Are you afraid of yourself?"

Again Gyp smiled.

"Not of loving too little, I told you."

"How can one love too much?"

She drew his head down to her. But when that kiss was over, she only said again:

"No, Bryan; let's go on as we are. I'll make up to you when I'm with you. If you were to tire of me, I couldn't bear it."

For a long time more he pleaded—now with anger, now with kisses, now with reasonings; but, to all, she opposed that same tender, half-mournful "No," and, at last, he gave it up, and, in dogged silence, rowed her to the village, whence she was to take train back. It was dusk when they left the boat, and dew was falling. Just before they reached the station, she caught his hand and pressed it to her breast.

"Darling, don't be angry with me! Perhaps I will—some day."

And, in the train, she tried to think herself once more in the boat, among the shadows and the whispering reeds and all the quiet wonder of the river.

XII

On reaching home she let herself in stealthily, and, though she had not had dinner, went up at once to her room. She was just taking off her blouse when Betty entered, her round face splotched with red, and tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Betty! What is it?"

"Oh, my dear, where HAVE you been? Such a dreadful piece of news! They've stolen her! That wicked man—your husband—he took her right out of her pram—and went off with her in a great car—he and that other one! I've been half out of my mind!" Gyp stared aghast. "I hollered to a policeman. 'He's stolen her—her father! Catch them!' I said. 'However shall I face my mistress?'" She stopped for breath, then burst out again. "'He's a bad one,' I said. 'A foreigner! They're both foreigners!' 'Her father?' he said. 'Well, why shouldn't he? He's only givin' her a joy ride. He'll bring her back, never you fear.' And I

ran home—I didn't know where you were. Oh dear! The major away and all—what was I to do? I'd just turned round to shut the gate of the square gardens, and I never saw him till he'd put his great long arm over the pram and snatched her out." And, sitting on the bed, she gave way utterly.

Gyp stood still. Nemesis for her happiness? That vengeful wretch, Rosek! This was his doing. And she said:

"Oh, Betty, she must be crying!"

A fresh outburst of moans was the only answer. Gyp remembered suddenly what the lawyer had said over a year ago—it had struck her with terror at the time. In law, Fiorsen owned and could claim her child. She could have got her back, then, by bringing a horrible case against him, but now, perhaps, she had no chance. Was it her return to Fiorsen that they aimed at—or the giving up of her lover? She went over to her mirror, saying:

"We'll go at once, Betty, and get her back somehow. Wash your face."

While she made ready, she fought down those two horrible fears—of losing her child, of losing her lover; the less she feared, the better she could act, the more subtly, the swifter. She remembered that she had somewhere a little stiletto, given her a long time ago. She hunted it out, slipped off its red-leather sheath, and, stabbing the point into a tiny cork, slipped it beneath her blouse. If they could steal her baby, they were capable of anything. She wrote a note to her father, telling him what had happened, and saying where she had gone. Then, in a taxi, they set forth. Cold water and the calmness of her mistress had removed from Betty the main traces of emotion; but she clasped Gyp's hand hard and gave vent to heavy sighs.

Gyp would not think. If she thought of her little one crying, she knew she would cry, too. But her hatred for those who had dealt this cowardly blow grew within her. She took a resolution and said quietly:

"Mr. Summerhay, Betty. That's why they've stolen our darling. I suppose you know he and I care for each other. They've stolen her so as to make me do anything they like."

A profound sigh answered her.

Behind that moon-face with the troubled eyes, what conflict was in progress—between unquestioning morality and unquestioning belief in Gyp, between fears for her and wishes for her happiness, between the loyal retainer's habit of accepting and the old nurse's feeling of being in charge? She said faintly:

"Oh dear! He's a nice gentleman, too!" And suddenly, wheezing it out with unexpected force: "To say truth, I never did hold you was rightly married to that foreigner in that horrible registry place—no music, no flowers, no blessin' asked, nor nothing. I cried me eyes out at the time."

Gyp said quietly:

"No; Betty, I never was. I only thought I was in love." A convulsive squeeze and creaking, whiffling sounds heralded a fresh outburst. "Don't cry; we're just there. Think of our darling!"

The cab stopped. Feeling for her little weapon, she got out, and with her hand slipped firmly under Betty's arm, led the way upstairs. Chilly shudders ran down her spine—memories of Daphne Wing and Rosek, of that large woman—what was her name?—of many other faces, of unholy hours spent up there, in a queer state, never quite present, never comfortable in soul; memories of late returnings down these wide stairs out to their cab, of Fiorsen beside her in the darkness, his dim, broad-cheekboned face moody in the corner or pressed close to hers. Once they had walked a long way homeward in the dawn, Rosek with them, Fiorsen playing on his muted violin, to the scandal of the policemen and the cats. Dim, unreal memories! Grasping Betty's arm more firmly, she rang the bell. When the man servant, whom she remembered well, opened the door, her lips were so dry that they could hardly form the words:

"Is Mr. Fiorsen in, Ford?"

"No, ma'am; Mr. Fiorsen and Count Rosek went into the country this afternoon. I haven't their address at present." She must have turned white, for she could hear the man saying: "Anything I can get you, ma'am?"

"When did they start, please?"

"One o'clock, ma'am—by car. Count Rosek was driving himself. I should say they won't be away long—they just had their bags with them." Gyp put out her hand helplessly; she heard the servant say in a

concerned voice: "I could let you know the moment they return, ma'am, if you'd kindly leave me your address."

Giving her card, and murmuring:

"Thank you, Ford; thank you very much," she grasped Betty's arm again and leaned heavily on her going down the stairs.

It was real, black fear now. To lose helpless things—children—dogs—and know for certain that one cannot get to them, no matter what they may be suffering! To be pinned down to ignorance and have in her ears the crying of her child—this horror, Gyp suffered now. And nothing to be done! Nothing but to go to bed and wait—hardest of all tasks! Mercifully—thanks to her long day in the open—she fell at last into a dreamless sleep, and when she was called, there was a letter from Fiorsen on the tray with her tea.

"Gyp:

"I am not a baby-stealer like your father. The law gives me the right to my own child. But swear to give up your lover, and the baby shall come back to you at once. If you do not give him up, I will take her away out of England. Send me an answer to this post-office, and do not let your father try any tricks upon me.

"GUSTAV FIORSEN."

Beneath was written the address of a West End post-office.

When Gyp had finished reading, she went through some moments of such mental anguish as she had never known, but—just as when Betty first told her of the stealing—her wits and wariness came quickly back. Had he been drinking when he wrote that letter? She could almost fancy that she smelled brandy, but it was so easy to fancy what one wanted to. She read it through again—this time, she felt almost sure that it had been dictated to him. If he had composed the wording himself, he would never have resisted a gibe at the law, or a gibe at himself for thus safeguarding her virtue. It was Rosek's doing. Her anger flamed up anew. Since they used such mean, cruel ways, why need she herself be scrupulous? She sprang out of bed and wrote:

"How COULD you do such a brutal thing? At all events, let the darling have her nurse. It's not like you to let a little child suffer. Betty will be ready to come the minute you send for her. As for myself, you must give me time to decide. I will let you know within two days.

"GYP."

When she had sent this off, and a telegram to her father at Newmarket, she read Fiorsen's letter once more, and was more than ever certain that it was Rosek's wording. And, suddenly, she thought of Daphne Wing, whom her father had seen coming out of Rosek's house. Through her there might be a way of getting news. She seemed to see again the girl lying so white and void of hope when robbed by death of her own just-born babe. Yes; surely it was worth trying.

An hour later, her cab stopped before the Wagges' door in Frankland Street. But just as she was about to ring the bell, a voice from behind her said:

"Allow me; I have a key. What may I—Oh, it's you!" She turned. Mr. Wagge, in professional habiliments, was standing there. "Come in; come in," he said. "I was wondering whether perhaps we shouldn't be seeing you after what's transpired."

Hanging his tall black hat, craped nearly to the crown, on a knob of the mahogany stand, he said huskily:

"I DID think we'd seen the last of that," and opened the dining-room door. "Come in, ma'am. We can put our heads together better in here."

In that too well remembered room, the table was laid with a stained white cloth, a cruets-stand, and bottle of Worcestershire sauce. The little blue bowl was gone, so that nothing now marred the harmony of red and green. Gyp said quickly:

"Doesn't Daph—Daisy live at home, then, now?"

The expression on Mr. Wagge's face was singular; suspicion, relief, and a sort of craftiness were blended with that furtive admiration which Gyp seemed always to excite in him.

"Do I understand that you—er—"

"I came to ask if Daisy would do something for me."

Mr. Wagge blew his nose.

"You didn't know—" he began again.

"Yes; I dare say she sees my husband, if that's what you mean; and I don't mind—he's nothing to me now."

Mr. Wagge's face became further complicated by the sensations of a husband.

"Well," he said, "it's not to be wondered at, perhaps, in the circumstances. I'm sure I always thought —"

Gyp interrupted swiftly.

"Please, Mr. Wagge—please! Will you give me Daisy's address?"

Mr. Wagge remained a moment in deep thought; then he said, in a gruff, jerky voice:

"Seventy-three Comrade Street, So'o. Up to seeing him there on Tuesday, I must say I cherished every hope. Now I'm sorry I didn't strike him—he was too quick for me—" He had raised one of his gloved hands and was sawing it up and down. The sight of that black object cleaving the air nearly made Gyp scream, her nerves were so on edge. "It's her blasted independence—I beg pardon—but who wouldn't?" he ended suddenly.

Gyp passed him.

"Who wouldn't?" she heard his voice behind her. "I did think she'd have run straight this time—" And while she was fumbling at the outer door, his red, pudgy face, with its round grey beard, protruded almost over her shoulder. "If you're going to see her, I hope you'll—"

Gyp was gone. In her cab she shivered. Once she had lunched with her father at a restaurant in the Strand. It had been full of Mr. Wagges. But, suddenly, she thought: 'It's hard on him, poor man!'

XIII

Seventy-three Comrade Street, Soho, was difficult to find; but, with the aid of a milk-boy, Gyp discovered the alley at last, and the right door. There her pride took sudden alarm, and but for the milk-boy's eyes fixed on her while he let out his professional howl, she might have fled. A plump white hand and wrist emerging took the can, and Daphne Wing's voice said:

"Oh, where's the cream?"

"Ain't got none."

"Oh! I told you always—two pennyworth at twelve o'clock."

"Two penn'orth." The boy's eyes goggled.

"Didn't you want to speak to her, miss?" He beat the closing door. "Lidy wants to speak to you! Good-mornin', miss."

The figure of Daphne Wing in a blue kimono was revealed. Her eyes peered round at Gyp.

"Oh!" she said.

"May I come in?"

"Oh, yes! Oh, do! I've been practising. Oh, I am glad to see you!"

In the middle of the studio, a little table was laid for two. Daphne Wing went up to it, holding in one hand the milk-can and in the other a short knife, with which she had evidently been opening oysters. Placing the knife on the table, she turned round to Gyp. Her face was deep pink, and so was her neck,

which ran V-shaped down into the folds of her kimono. Her eyes, round as saucers, met Gyp's, fell, met them again. She said:

"Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, I am glad! I really am. I wanted you so much to see my room—do you like it? How DID you know where I was?" She looked down and added: "I think I'd better tell you. Mr. Fiorsen came here, and, since then, I've seen him at Count Rosek's—and—and—"

"Yes; but don't trouble to tell me, please."

Daphne Wing hurried on.

"Of course, I'm quite mistress of myself now." Then, all at once, the uneasy woman-of-the-world mask dropped from her face and she seized Gyp's hand. "Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, I shall never be like you!"

With a little shiver, Gyp said:

"I hope not." Her pride rushed up in her. How could she ask this girl anything? She choked back that feeling, and said stonily: "Do you remember my baby? No, of course; you never saw her. HE and Count Rosek have just taken her away from me."

Daphne Wing convulsively squeezed the hand of which she had possessed herself.

"Oh, what a wicked thing! When?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"Oh, I AM glad I haven't seen him since! Oh, I DO think that was wicked! Aren't you dreadfully distressed?" The least of smiles played on Gyp's mouth. Daphne Wing burst forth: "D'you know—I think—I think your self-control is something awful. It frightens me. If my baby had lived and been stolen like that, I should have been half dead by now."

Gyp answered stonily as ever:

"Yes; I want her back, and I wondered—"

Daphne Wing clasped her hands.

"Oh, I expect I can make him—" She stopped, confused, then added hastily: "Are you sure you don't mind?"

"I shouldn't mind if he had fifty loves. Perhaps he has."

Daphne Wing uttered a little gasp; then her teeth came down rather viciously on her lower lip.

"I mean him to do what I want now, not what he wants me. That's the only way when you love. Oh, don't smile like that, please; you do make me feel so—uncertain."

"When are you going to see him next?"

Daphne Wing grew very pink.

"I don't know. He might be coming in to lunch. You see, it's not as if he were a stranger, is it?" Casting up her eyes a little, she added: "He won't even let me speak your name; it makes him mad. That's why I'm sure he still loves you; only, his love is so funny." And, seizing Gyp's hand: "I shall never forget how good you were to me. I do hope you—you love somebody else." Gyp pressed those damp, clinging fingers, and Daphne Wing hurried on: "I'm sure your baby's a darling. How you must be suffering! You look quite pale. But it isn't any good suffering. I learned that."

Her eyes lighted on the table, and a faint ruefulness came into them, as if she were going to ask Gyp to eat the oysters.

Gyp bent forward and put her lips to the girl's forehead.

"Good-bye. My baby would thank you if she knew."

And she turned to go. She heard a sob. Daphne Wing was crying; then, before Gyp could speak, she struck herself on the throat, and said, in a strangled voice:

"Tha—that's idiotic! I—I haven't cried since—since, you know. I—I'm perfect mistress of myself; only, I—only—I suppose you reminded me—I NEVER cry!"

Those words and the sound of a hiccough accompanied Gyp down the alley to her cab.

When she got back to Bury Street, she found Betty sitting in the hall with her bonnet on. She had not been sent for, nor had any reply come from Newmarket. Gyp could not eat, could settle to nothing. She went up to her bedroom to get away from the servants' eyes, and went on mechanically with a frock of little Gyp's she had begun on the fatal morning Fiorsen had come back. Every other minute she stopped to listen to sounds that never meant anything, went a hundred times to the window to look at nothing. Betty, too, had come upstairs, and was in the nursery opposite; Gyp could hear her moving about restlessly among her household gods. Presently, those sounds ceased, and, peering into the room, she saw the stout woman still in her bonnet, sitting on a trunk, with her back turned, uttering heavy sighs. Gyp stole back into her own room with a sick, trembling sensation. If—if her baby really could not be recovered except by that sacrifice! If that cruel letter were the last word, and she forced to decide between them! Which would she give up? Which follow—her lover or her child?

She went to the window for air—the pain about her heart was dreadful. And, leaning there against the shutter, she felt quite dizzy from the violence of a struggle that refused coherent thought or feeling, and was just a dumb pull of instincts, both so terribly strong—how terribly strong she had not till then perceived.

Her eyes fell on the picture that reminded her of Bryan; it seemed now to have no resemblance—none. He was much too real, and loved, and wanted. Less than twenty-four hours ago, she had turned a deaf ear to his pleading that she should go to him for ever. How funny! Would she not rush to him now—go when and where he liked? Ah, if only she were back in his arms! Never could she give him up—never! But then in her ears sounded the cooing words, "Dear mum!" Her baby—that tiny thing—how could she give her up, and never again hold close and kiss that round, perfect little body, that grave little dark-eyed face?

The roar of London came in through the open window. So much life, so many people—and not a soul could help! She left the window and went to the cottage-piano she had there, out of Winton's way. But she only sat with arms folded, looking at the keys. The song that girl had sung at Fiorsen's concert—song of the broken heart—came back to her.

No, no; she couldn't—couldn't! It was to her lover she would cling. And tears ran down her cheeks.

A cab had stopped below, but not till Betty came rushing in did she look up.

XIV

When, trembling all over, she entered the dining-room, Fiorsen was standing by the sideboard, holding the child.

He came straight up and put her into Gyp's arms.

"Take her," he said, "and do what you will. Be happy."

Hugging her baby, close to the door as she could get, Gyp answered nothing. Her heart was in such a tumult that she could not have spoken a word to save her life; relieved, as one dying of thirst by unexpected water; grateful, bewildered, abashed, yet instinctively aware of something evanescent and unreal in his altruism. Daphne Wing! What bargain did this represent?

Fiorsen must have felt the chill of this instinctive vision, for he cried out:

"Yes! You never believed in me; you never thought me capable of god! Why didn't you?"

Gyp bent her face over her baby to hide the quivering of her lips.

"I am sorry—very, very sorry."

Fiorsen came closer and looked into her face.

"By God, I am afraid I shall never forget you—never!"

Tears had come into his eyes, and Gyp watched them, moved, troubled, but still deeply mistrusting.

He brushed his hand across his face; and the thought flashed through her: 'He means me to see them! Ah, what a cynical wretch I am!'

Fiorsen saw that thought pass, and muttering suddenly:

"Good-bye, Gyp! I am not all bad. I AM NOT!" He tore the door open and was gone.

That passionate "I am not!" saved Gyp from a breakdown. No; even at his highest pitch of abnegation, he could not forget himself.

Relief, if overwhelming, is slowly realized; but when, at last, what she had escaped and what lay before her were staring full in each other's face, it seemed to her that she must cry out, and tell the whole world of her intoxicating happiness. And the moment little Gyp was in Betty's arms, she sat down and wrote to Summerhay:

"DARLING,

"I've had a fearful time. My baby was stolen by him while I was with you. He wrote me a letter saying that he would give her back to me if I gave you up. But I found I couldn't give you up, not even for my baby. And then, a few minutes ago, he brought her—none the worse. Tomorrow we shall all go down to Mildenhamp; but very soon, if you still want me, I'll come with you wherever you like. My father and Betty will take care of my treasure till we come back; and then, perhaps, the old red house we saw—after all. Only—now is the time for you to draw back. Look into the future—look far! Don't let any foolish pity—or honour—weigh with you; be utterly sure, I do beseech you. I can just bear it now if I know it's for your good. But afterward it'll be too late. It would be the worst misery of all if I made you unhappy. Oh, make sure—make sure! I shall understand. I mean this with every bit of me. And now, good-night, and perhaps—good-bye.

"Your
"GYP."

She read it over and shivered. Did she really mean that she could bear it if he drew back—if he did look far, far into the future, and decided that she was not worth the candle? Ah, but better now—than later.

She closed and sealed the letter, and sat down to wait for her father. And she thought: 'Why does one have a heart? Why is there in one something so much too soft?'

Ten days later, at Mildenhamp station, holding her father's hand, Gyp could scarcely see him for the mist before her eyes. How good he had been to her all those last days, since she told him that she was going to take the plunge! Not a word of remonstrance or complaint.

"Good-bye, my love! Take care of yourself; wire from London, and again from Paris." And, smiling up at her, he added: "He has luck; I had none."

The mist became tears, rolled down, fell on his glove.

"Not too long out there, Gyp!"

She pressed her wet cheek passionately to his. The train moved, but, so long as she could see, she watched him standing on the platform, waving his grey hat, then, in her corner, sat down, blinded with tears behind her veil. She had not cried when she left him the day of her fatal marriage; she cried now that she was leaving him to go to her incredible happiness.

Strange! But her heart had grown since then.

PART IV

Little Gyp, aged nearly four and a half that first of May, stood at the edge of the tulip border, bowing to two hen turkeys who were poking their heads elegantly here and there among the flowers. She was absurdly like her mother, the same oval-shaped face, dark arched brows, large and clear brown eyes; but she had the modern child's open-air look; her hair, that curled over at the ends, was not allowed to be long, and her polished brown legs were bare to the knees.

"Turkeys! You aren't good, are you? Come ON!" And, stretching out her hands with the palms held up, she backed away from the tulip-bed. The turkeys, trailing delicately their long-toed feet and uttering soft, liquid interrogations, moved after her in hopes of what she was not holding in her little brown hands. The sun, down in the west, for it was past tea-time, slanted from over the roof of the red house, and painted up that small procession—the deep blue frock of little Gyp, the glint of gold in the chestnut of her hair; the daisy-starred grass; the dark birds with translucent red dewlaps, and checkered tails and the tulip background, puce and red and yellow. When she had lured them to the open gate, little Gyp raised herself, and said:

"Aren't you duffies, dears? Shoo!" And on the tails of the turkeys she shut the gate. Then she went to where, under the walnut-tree—the one large tree of that walled garden—a very old Scotch terrier was lying, and sitting down beside him, began stroking his white muzzle, saying:

"Ossy, Ossy, do you love me?"

Presently, seeing her mother in the porch, she jumped up, and crying out: "Ossy—Ossy! Walk!" rushed to Gyp and embraced her legs, while the old Scotch terrier slowly followed.

Thus held prisoner, Gyp watched the dog's approach. Nearly three years had changed her a little. Her face was softer, and rather more grave, her form a little fuller, her hair, if anything, darker, and done differently—instead of waving in wings and being coiled up behind, it was smoothly gathered round in a soft and lustrous helmet, by which fashion the shape of her head was better revealed.

"Darling, go and ask Pettance to put a fresh piece of sulphur in Ossy's water-bowl, and to cut up his meat finer. You can give Hotspur and Brownie two lumps of sugar each; and then we'll go out." Going down on her knees in the porch, she parted the old dog's hair, and examined his eczema, thinking: "I must rub some more of that stuff in to-night. Oh, ducky, you're not smelling your best! Yes; only—not my face!"

A telegraph-boy was coming from the gate. Gyp opened the missive with the faint tremor she always felt when Summerhay was not with her.

"Detained; shall be down by last train; need not come up to-morrow.—BRYAN."

When the boy was gone, she stooped down and stroked the old dog's head.

"Master home all day to-morrow, Ossy—master home!"

A voice from the path said, "Beautiful evenin', ma'am."

The "old scoundrel," Pettance, stiffer in the ankle-joints, with more lines in his gargoyle's face, fewer stumps in his gargoyle's mouth, more film over his dark, burning little eyes, was standing before her, and, behind him, little Gyp, one foot rather before the other, as Gyp had been wont to stand, waited gravely.

"Oh, Pettance, Mr. Summerhay will be at home all to-morrow, and we'll go a long ride: and when you exercise, will you call at the inn, in case I don't go that way, and tell Major Winton I expect him to dinner to-night?"

"Yes, ma'am; and I've seen the pony for little Miss Gyp this morning, ma'am. It's a mouse pony, five year old, sound, good temper, pretty little paces. I says to the man: 'Don't you come it over me,' I says; 'I was born on an 'orse. Talk of twenty pounds, for that pony! Ten, and lucky to get it!' 'Well,' he says, 'Pettance, it's no good to talk round an' round with you. Fifteen!' he says. 'I'll throw you one in,' I says, 'Eleven! Take it or leave it.' 'Ah!' he says, 'Pettance, YOU know 'ow to buy an 'orse. All right,' he says; 'twelve!' She's worth all of fifteen, ma'am, and the major's passed her. So if you likes to have 'er, there she is!"

Gyp looked at her little daughter, who had given one excited hop, but now stood still, her eyes flying up at her mother and her lips parted; and she thought: "The darling! She never begs for anything!"

"Very well, Pettance; buy her."

The "old scoundrel" touched his forelock:

"Yes, ma'am—very good, ma'am. Beautiful evenin', ma'am." And, withdrawing at his gait of one whose feet are at permanent right angles to the legs, he mused: 'And that'll be two in my pocket.'

Ten minutes later Gyp, little Gyp, and Ossian emerged from the garden gate for their evening walk. They went, not as usual, up to the downs, but toward the river, making for what they called "the wild." This was an outlying plot of neglected ground belonging to their farm, two sedgy meadows, hedged by banks on which grew oaks and ashes. An old stone lincay, covered to its broken thatch by a huge ivy bush, stood at the angle where the meadows met. The spot had a strange life to itself in that smooth, kempt countryside of cornfields, grass, and beech-clumps; it was favoured by beasts and birds, and little Gyp had recently seen two baby hares there. From an oak-tree, where the crinkled leaves were not yet large enough to hide him, a cuckoo was calling and they stopped to look at the grey bird till he flew off. The singing and serenity, the green and golden oaks and ashes, the flowers—marsh-orchis, ladies' smocks, and cuckoo-buds, starring the rushy grass—all brought to Gyp that feeling of the uncapturable spirit which lies behind the forms of nature, the shadowy, hovering smile of life that is ever vanishing and ever springing again out of death. While they stood there close to the old lincay a bird came flying round them in wide circles, uttering shrill cries. It had a long beak and long, pointed wings, and seemed distressed by their presence. Little Gyp squeezed her mother's hand.

"Poor bird! Isn't it a poor bird, mum?"

"Yes, dear, it's a curlew—I wonder what's the matter with it. Perhaps its mate is hurt."

"What is its mate?"

"The bird it lives with."

"It's afraid of us. It's not like other birds. Is it a real bird, mum?
Or one out of the sky?"

"I think it's real. Shall we go on and see if we can find out what's the matter?"

"Yes."

They went on into the sedgy grass and the curlew continued to circle, vanishing and reappearing from behind the trees, always uttering those shrill cries. Little Gyp said:

"Mum, could we speak to it? Because we're not going to hurt nothing, are we?"

"Of course not, darling! But I'm afraid the poor bird's too wild. Try, if you like. Call to it: 'Courlie! Courlie!'"

Little Gyp's piping joined the curlew's cries and other bird-songs in the bright shadowy quiet of the evening till Gyp said:

"Oh, look; it's dipping close to the ground, over there in that corner—it's got a nest! We won't go near, will we?"

Little Gyp echoed in a hushed voice:

"It's got a nest."

They stole back out of the gate close to the lincay, the curlew still fighting and crying behind them.

"Aren't we glad the mate isn't hurt, mum?"

Gyp answered with a shiver:

"Yes, darling, fearfully glad. Now then, shall we go down and ask Grandy to come up to dinner?"

Little Gyp hopped. And they went toward the river.

At "The Bowl of Cream," Winton had for two years had rooms, which he occupied as often as his pursuits permitted. He had refused to make his home with Gyp, desiring to be on hand only when she wanted him; and a simple life of it he led in those simple quarters, riding with her when Summerhay was in town, visiting the cottagers, smoking cigars, laying plans for the defence of his daughter's position, and devoting himself to the whims of little Gyp. This moment, when his grandchild was to begin to ride, was in a manner sacred to one for whom life had scant meaning apart from horses. Looking at them, hand in hand, Gyp thought: 'Dad loves her as much as he loves me now—more, I

think.'

Lonely dinner at the inn was an infliction which he studiously concealed from Gyp, so he accepted their invitation without alacrity, and they walked on up the hill, with little Gyp in the middle, supported by a hand on each side.

The Red House contained nothing that had been in Gyp's married home except the piano. It had white walls, furniture of old oak, and for pictures reproductions of her favourites. "The Death of Procris" hung in the dining-room. Winton never failed to scrutinize it when he came in to a meal—that "deuced rum affair" appeared to have a fascination for him. He approved of the dining-room altogether; its narrow oak "last supper" table made gay by a strip of blue linen, old brick hearth, casement windows hung with flowered curtains—all had a pleasing austerity, uncannily redeemed to softness. He got on well enough with Summerhay, but he enjoyed himself much more when he was there alone with his daughter. And this evening he was especially glad to have her to himself, for she had seemed of late rather grave and absent-minded. When dinner was over and they were undisturbed, he said:

"It must be pretty dull for you, my dear, sometimes. I wish you saw more people."

"Oh no, Dad."

Watching her smile, he thought: "That's not sour grapes"—What is the trouble, then?"

"I suppose you've not heard anything of that fellow Fiorsen lately?"

"Not a word. But he's playing again in London this season, I see."

"Is he? Ah, that'll cheer them." And he thought: 'It's not that, then. But there's something—I'll swear!'

"I hear that Bryan's going ahead. I met a man in town last week who spoke of him as about the most promising junior at the bar."

"Yes; he's doing awfully well." And a sound like a faint sigh caught his ears. "Would you say he's changed much since you knew him, Dad?"

"I don't know—perhaps a little less jokey."

"Yes; he's lost his laugh."

It was very evenly and softly said, yet it affected Winton.

"Can't expect him to keep that," he answered, "turning people inside out, day after day—and most of them rotten. By George, what a life!"

But when he had left her, strolling back in the bright moonlight, he reverted to his suspicions and wished he had said more directly: "Look here, Gyp, are you worrying about Bryan—or have people been making themselves unpleasant?"

He had, in these last three years, become unconsciously inimical to his own class and their imitators, and more than ever friendly to the poor—visiting the labourers, small farmers, and small tradesmen, doing them little turns when he could, giving their children sixpences, and so forth. The fact that they could not afford to put on airs of virtue escaped him; he perceived only that they were respectful and friendly to Gyp and this warmed his heart toward them in proportion as he grew exasperated with the two or three landed families, and that parvenu lot in the riverside villas.

When he first came down, the chief landowner—a man he had known for years—had invited him to lunch. He had accepted with the deliberate intention of finding out where he was, and had taken the first natural opportunity of mentioning his daughter. She was, he said, devoted to her flowers; the Red House had quite a good garden. His friend's wife, slightly lifting her brows, had answered with a nervous smile: "Oh! yes; of course—yes." A silence had, not unnaturally, fallen. Since then, Winton had saluted his friend and his friend's wife with such frigid politeness as froze the very marrow in their bones. He had not gone there fishing for Gyp to be called on, but to show these people that his daughter could not be slighted with impunity. Foolish of him, for, man of the world to his fingertips, he knew perfectly well that a woman living with a man to whom she was not married could not be recognized by people with any pretensions to orthodoxy; Gyp was beyond even the debatable ground on which stood those who have been divorced and are married again. But even a man of the world is not proof against the warping of devotion, and Winton was ready to charge any windmill at any moment on her behalf.

Outside the inn door, exhaling the last puffs of his good-night cigarette, he thought: 'What wouldn't I give for the old days, and a chance to wing some of these moral upstarts!'

II

The last train was not due till eleven-thirty, and having seen that the evening tray had sandwiches, Gyp went to Summerhay's study, the room at right angles to the body of the house, over which was their bedroom. Here, if she had nothing to do, she always came when he was away, feeling nearer to him. She would have been horrified if she had known of her father's sentiments on her behalf. Her instant denial of the wish to see more people had been quite genuine. The conditions of her life, in that respect, often seemed to her ideal. It was such a joy to be free of people one did not care two straws about, and of all empty social functions. Everything she had now was real—love, and nature, riding, music, animals, and poor people. What else was worth having? She would not have changed for anything. It often seemed to her that books and plays about the unhappiness of women in her position were all false. If one loved, what could one want better? Such women, if unhappy, could have no pride; or else could not really love! She had recently been reading "Anna Karenina," and had often said to herself: "There's something not true about it—as if Tolstoy wanted to make us believe that Anna was secretly feeling remorse. If one loves, one doesn't feel remorse. Even if my baby had been taken away, I shouldn't have felt remorse. One gives oneself to love—or one does not."

She even derived a positive joy from the feeling that her love imposed a sort of isolation; she liked to be apart—for him. Besides, by her very birth she was outside the fold of society, her love beyond the love of those within it—just as her father's love had been. And her pride was greater than theirs, too. How could women mope and moan because they were cast out, and try to scratch their way back where they were not welcome? How could any woman do that? Sometimes, she wondered whether, if Fiorsen died, she would marry her lover. What difference would it make? She could not love him more. It would only make him feel, perhaps, too sure of her, make it all a matter of course. For herself, she would rather go on as she was. But for him, she was not certain, of late had been less and less certain. He was not bound now, could leave her when he tired! And yet—did he perhaps feel himself more bound than if they were married—unfairly bound? It was this thought—barely more than the shadow of a thought—which had given her, of late, the extra gravity noticed by her father.

In that unlighted room with the moonbeams drifting in, she sat down at Summerhay's bureau, where he often worked too late at his cases, depriving her of himself. She sat there resting her elbows on the bare wood, crossing her finger-tips, gazing out into the moonlight, her mind drifting on a stream of memories that seemed to have beginning only from the year when he came into her life. A smile crept out on her face, and now and then she uttered a little sigh of contentment.

So many memories, nearly all happy! Surely, the most adroit work of the jeweller who put the human soul together was his provision of its power to forget the dark and remember sunshine. The year and a half of her life with Fiorsen, the empty months that followed it were gone, dispersed like mist by the radiance of the last three years in whose sky had hung just one cloud, no bigger than a hand, of doubt whether Summerhay really loved her as much as she loved him, whether from her company he got as much as the all she got from his. She would not have been her distrustful self if she could have settled down in complacent security; and her mind was ever at stretch on that point, comparing past days and nights with the days and nights of the present. Her prevision that, when she loved, it would be desperately, had been fulfilled. He had become her life. When this befalls one whose besetting strength and weakness alike is pride—no wonder that she doubts.

For their Odyssey they had gone to Spain—that brown un-European land of "lyrio" flowers, and cries of "Agua!" in the streets, where the men seem cleft to the waist when they are astride of horses, under their wide black hats, and the black-clothed women with wonderful eyes still look as if they missed their Eastern veils. It had been a month of gaiety and glamour, last days of September and early days of October, a revel of enchanted wanderings in the streets of Seville, of embraces and laughter, of strange scents and stranger sounds, of orange light and velvety shadows, and all the warmth and deep gravity of Spain. The Alcazar, the cigarette-girls, the Gipsy dancers of Triana, the old brown ruins to which they rode, the streets, and the square with its grave talkers sitting on benches in the sun, the water-sellers and the melons; the mules, and the dark ragged man out of a dream, picking up the ends of cigarettes, the wine of Malaga, burnt fire and honey! Seville had bewitched them—they got no further. They had come back across the brown uplands of Castile to Madrid and Goya and Velasquez, till it was time for Paris, before the law-term began. There, in a queer little French hotel—all bedrooms, and a lift,

coffee and carved beds, wood fires, and a chambermaid who seemed all France, and down below a restaurant, to which such as knew about eating came, with waiters who looked like monks, both fat and lean—they had spent a week. Three special memories of that week started up in the moonlight before Gyp's eyes: The long drive in the Bois among the falling leaves of trees flashing with colour in the crisp air under a brilliant sky. A moment in the Louvre before the Leonardo "Bacchus," when—his "restored" pink skin forgotten—all the world seemed to drop away while she listened, with the listening figure before her, to some mysterious music of growing flowers and secret life. And that last most disconcerting memory, of the night before they returned. They were having supper after the theatre in their restaurant, when, in a mirror she saw three people come in and take seats at a table a little way behind—Fiorsen, Rosek, and Daphne Wing! How she managed to show no sign she never knew! While they were ordering, she was safe, for Rosek was a gourmet, and the girl would certainly be hungry; but after that, she knew that nothing could save her being seen—Rosek would mark down every woman in the room! Should she pretend to feel faint and slip out into the hotel? Or let Bryan know? Or sit there laughing and talking, eating and drinking, as if nothing were behind her?

Her own face in the mirror had a flush, and her eyes were bright. When they saw her, they would see that she was happy, safe in her love. Her foot sought Summerhay's beneath the table. How splendid and brown and fit he looked, compared with those two pale, towney creatures! And he was gazing at her as though just discovering her beauty. How could she ever—that man with his little beard and his white face and those eyes—how could she ever! Ugh! And then, in the mirror, she saw Rosek's dark-circled eyes fasten on her and betray their recognition by a sudden gleam, saw his lips compressed, and a faint red come up in his cheeks. What would he do? The girl's back was turned—her perfect back—and she was eating. And Fiorsen was staring straight before him in that moody way she knew so well. All depended on that deadly little man, who had once kissed her throat. A sick feeling seized on Gyp. If her lover knew that within five yards of him were those two men! But she still smiled and talked, and touched his foot. Rosek had seen that she was conscious—was getting from it a kind of satisfaction. She saw him lean over and whisper to the girl, and Daphne Wing turning to look, and her mouth opening for a smothered "Oh!" Gyp saw her give an uneasy glance at Fiorsen, and then begin again to eat. Surely she would want to get away before he saw. Yes; very soon she rose. What little airs of the world she had now—quite mistress of the situation! The wrap must be placed exactly on her shoulders; and how she walked, giving just one startled look back from the door. Gone! The ordeal over! And Gyp said:

"Let's go up, darling."

She felt as if they had both escaped a deadly peril—not from anything those two could do to him or her, but from the cruel ache and jealousy of the past, which the sight of that man would have brought him.

Women, for their age, are surely older than men—married women, at all events, than men who have not had that experience. And all through those first weeks of their life together, there was a kind of wise watchfulness in Gyp. He was only a boy in knowledge of life as she saw it, and though his character was so much more decided, active, and insistent than her own, she felt it lay with her to shape the course and avoid the shallows and sunken rocks. The house they had seen together near the river, under the Berkshire downs, was still empty; and while it was being got ready, they lived at a London hotel. She had insisted that he should tell no one of their life together. If that must come, she wanted to be firmly settled in, with little Gyp and Betty and the horses, so that it should all be for him as much like respectable married life as possible. But, one day, in the first week after their return, while in her room, just back from a long day's shopping, a card was brought up to her: "Lady Summerhay." Her first impulse was to be "not at home"; her second, "I'd better face it. Bryan would wish me to see her!" When the page-boy was gone, she turned to the mirror and looked at herself doubtfully. She seemed to know exactly what that tall woman whom she had seen on the platform would think of her—too soft, not capable, not right for him!—not even if she were legally his wife. And touching her hair, laying a dab of scent on her eyebrows, she turned and went downstairs fluttering, but outwardly calm enough.

In the little low-roofed inner lounge of that old hotel, whose rooms were all "entirely renovated," Gyp saw her visitor standing at a table, rapidly turning the pages of an illustrated magazine, as people will when their minds are set upon a coming operation. And she thought: 'I believe she's more frightened than I am!'

Lady Summerhay held out a gloved hand.

"How do you do?" she said. "I hope you'll forgive my coming."

Gyp took the hand.

"Thank you. It was very good of you. I'm sorry Bryan isn't in yet.

Will you have some tea?"

"I've had tea; but do let's sit down. How do you find the hotel?"

"Very nice."

On a velvet lounge that had survived the renovation, they sat side by side, screwed round toward each other.

"Bryan's told me what a pleasant time you had abroad. He's looking very well, I think. I'm devoted to him, you know."

Gyp answered softly:

"Yes, you must be." And her heart felt suddenly as hard as flint.

Lady Summerhay gave her a quick look.

"I—I hope you won't mind my being frank—I've been so worried. It's an unhappy position, isn't it?" Gyp did not answer, and she hurried on. "If there's anything I can do to help, I should be so glad—it must be horrid for you."

Gyp said very quietly:

"Oh! no. I'm perfectly happy—couldn't be happier." And she thought: 'I suppose she doesn't believe that.'

Lady Summerhay was looking at her fixedly.

"One doesn't realize these things at first—neither of you will, till you see how dreadfully Society can cold-shoulder."

Gyp made an effort to control a smile.

"One can only be cold-shouldered if one puts oneself in the way of it. I should never wish to see or speak to anyone who couldn't take me just for what I am. And I don't really see what difference it will make to Bryan; most men of his age have someone, somewhere." She felt malicious pleasure watching her visitor jib and frown at the cynicism of that soft speech; a kind of hatred had come on her of this society woman, who—disguise it as she would—was at heart her enemy, who regarded her, must regard her, as an enslaver, as a despoiler of her son's worldly chances, a Delilah dragging him down. She said still more quietly: "He need tell no one of my existence; and you can be quite sure that if ever he feels he's had enough of me, he'll never be troubled by the sight of me again."

And she got up. Lady Summerhay also rose.

"I hope you don't think—I really am only too anxious to—"

"I think it's better to be quite frank. You will never like me, or forgive me for ensnaring Bryan. And so it had better be, please, as it would be if I were just his common mistress. That will be perfectly all right for both of us. It was very good of you to come, though. Thank you—and good-bye."

Lady Summerhay literally faltered with speech and hand.

With a malicious smile, Gyp watched her retirement among the little tables and elaborately modern chairs till her tall figure had disappeared behind a column. Then she sat down again on the lounge, pressing her hands to her burning ears. She had never till then known the strength of the pride-demon within her; at the moment, it was almost stronger than her love. She was still sitting there, when the page-boy brought her another card—her father's. She sprang up saying:

"Yes, here, please."

Winton came in all brisk and elated at sight of her after this long absence; and, throwing her arms round his neck, she hugged him tight. He was doubly precious to her after the encounter she had just gone through. When he had given her news of Mildenhams and little Gyp, he looked at her steadily, and said:

"The coast'll be clear for you both down there, and at Bury Street, whenever you like to come, Gyp. I shall regard this as your real marriage. I shall have the servants in and make that plain."

A row like family prayers—and Dad standing up very straight, saying in his dry way: "You will be so good in future as to remember—" "I shall be obliged if you will," and so on; Betty's round face pouting

at being brought in with all the others; Markey's soft, inscrutable; Mrs. Markey's demure and goggling; the maids' rabbit-faces; old Pettance's carved grin the film lifting from his little burning eyes: "Ha! Mr. Bryn Summer'ay; he bought her orse, and so she's gone to 'im!" And she said:

"Darling, I don't know! It's awfully sweet of you. We'll see later."

Winton patted her hand. "We must stand up to 'em, you know, Gyp. You mustn't get your tail down."

Gyp laughed.

"No, Dad; never!"

That same night, across the strip of blackness between their beds, she said:

"Bryan, promise me something!"

"It depends. I know you too well."

"No; it's quite reasonable, and possible. Promise!"

"All right; if it is."

"I want you to let me take the lease of the Red House—let it be mine, the whole thing—let me pay for everything there."

"Reasonable! What's the point?"

"Only that I shall have a proper home of my own. I can't explain, but your mother's coming to-day made me feel I must."

"My child, how could I possibly live on YOU there? It's absurd!"

"You can pay for everything else; London—travelling—clothes, if you like. We can make it square up. It's not a question of money, of course. I only want to feel that if, at any moment, you don't need me any more, you can simply stop coming."

"I think that's brutal, Gyp."

"No, no; so many women lose men's love because they seem to claim things of them. I don't want to lose yours that way—that's all."

"That's silly, darling!"

"It's not. Men—and women, too—always tug at chains. And when there is no chain—"

"Well then; let me take the house, and you can go away when you're tired of me." His voice sounded smothered, resentful; she could hear him turning and turning, as if angry with his pillows. And she murmured:

"No; I can't explain. But I really mean it."

"We're just beginning life together, and you talk as if you want to split it up. It hurts, Gyp, and that's all about it."

She said gently:

"Don't be angry, dear."

"Well! Why don't you trust me more?"

"I do. Only I must make as sure as I can."

The sound came again of his turning and turning.

"I can't!"

Gyp said slowly:

"Oh! Very well!"

A dead silence followed, both lying quiet in the darkness, trying to get the better of each other by sheer listening. An hour perhaps passed before he sighed, and, feeling his lips on hers, she knew that she had won.

III

There, in the study, the moonlight had reached her face; an owl was hooting not far away, and still more memories came—the happiest of all, perhaps—of first days in this old house together.

Summerhay damaged himself out hunting that first winter. The memory of nursing him was strangely pleasant, now that it was two years old. For convalescence they had gone to the Pyrenees—Argeles in March, all almond-blossom and snows against the blue—a wonderful fortnight. In London on the way back they had their first awkward encounter. Coming out of a theatre one evening, Gyp heard a woman's voice, close behind, say: "Why, it's Bryan! What ages!" And his answer defensively drawled out:

"Halo! How are you, Diana?"

"Oh, awfully fit. Where are you, nowadays? Why don't you come and see us?"

Again the drawl:

"Down in the country. I will, some time. Good-bye."

A tall woman or girl—red-haired, with one of those wonderful white skins that go therewith; and brown—yes, brown eyes; Gyp could see those eyes sweeping her up and down with a sort of burning-live curiosity. Bryan's hand was thrust under her arm at once.

"Come on, let's walk and get a cab."

As soon as they were clear of the crowd, she pressed his hand to her breast, and said:

"Did you mind?"

"Mind? Of course not. It's for you to mind."

"Who was it?"

"A second cousin. Diana Leyton."

"Do you know her very well?"

"Oh yes—used to."

"And do you like her very much?"

"Rather!"

He looked round into her face, with laughter bubbling up behind his gravity. Ah, but could one tease on such a subject as their love? And to this day the figure of that tall girl with the burning-white skin, the burning-brown eyes, the burning-red hair was not quite a pleasant memory to Gyp. After that night, they gave up all attempt to hide their union, going to whatever they wished, whether they were likely to meet people or not. Gyp found that nothing was so easily ignored as Society when the heart was set on other things. Besides, they were seldom in London, and in the country did not wish to know anyone, in any case. But she never lost the feeling that what was ideal for her might not be ideal for him. He ought to go into the world, ought to meet people. It would not do for him to be cut off from social pleasures and duties, and then some day feel that he owed his starvation to her. To go up to London, too, every day was tiring, and she persuaded him to take a set of residential chambers in the Temple, and sleep there three nights a week. In spite of all his entreaties, she herself never went to those chambers, staying always at Bury Street when she came up. A kind of superstition prevented her; she would not risk making him feel that she was hanging round his neck. Besides, she wanted to keep herself desirable—so little a matter of course that he would hanker after her when he was away. And she never asked him where he went or whom he saw. But, sometimes, she wondered whether he could still be quite faithful to her in thought, love her as he used to; and joy would go down behind a heavy bank of clouds, till, at his return, the sun came out again. Love such as hers—passionate, adoring, protective, longing to sacrifice itself, to give all that it had to him, yet secretly demanding all his love in return—for how could a proud woman love one who did not love her?—such love as this is always longing for a

union more complete than it is likely to get in a world where all things move and change. But against the grip of this love she never dreamed of fighting now. From the moment when she knew she must cling to him rather than to her baby, she had made no reservations; all her eggs were in one basket, as her father's had been before her—all!

The moonlight was shining full on the old bureau and a vase of tulips standing there, giving those flowers colour that was not colour, and an unnamed look, as if they came from a world which no human enters. It glinted on a bronze bust of old Voltaire, which she had bought him for a Christmas present, so that the great writer seemed to be smiling from the hollows of his eyes. Gyp turned the bust a little, to catch the light on its far cheek; a letter was disclosed between it and the oak. She drew it out thinking: 'Bless him! He uses everything for paper-weights'; and, in the strange light, its first words caught her eyes:

"DEAR BRYAN,

"But I say—you ARE wasting yourself—"

She laid it down, methodically pushing it back under the bust. Perhaps he had put it there on purpose! She got up and went to the window, to check the temptation to read the rest of that letter and see from whom it was. No! She did not admit that she was tempted. One did not read letters. Then the full import of those few words struck into her: "Dear Bryan. But I say—you ARE wasting yourself." A letter in a chain of correspondence, then! A woman's hand; but not his mother's, nor his sisters'—she knew their writings. Who had dared to say he was wasting himself? A letter in a chain of letters! An intimate correspondent, whose name she did not know, because—he had not told her! Wasting himself—on what?—on his life with her down here? And was he? Had she herself not said that very night that he had lost his laugh? She began searching her memory. Yes, last Christmas vacation—that clear, cold, wonderful fortnight in Florence, he had been full of fun. It was May now. Was there no memory since—of his old infectious gaiety? She could not think of any. "But I say—you ARE wasting yourself." A sudden hatred flared up in her against the unknown woman who had said that thing—and fever, running through her veins, made her ears burn. She longed to snatch forth and tear to pieces the letter, with its guardianship of which that bust seemed mocking her; and she turned away with the thought: 'I'll go and meet him; I can't wait here.'

Throwing on a cloak she walked out into the moonlit garden, and went slowly down the whitened road toward the station. A magical, dewless night! The moonbeams had stolen in to the beech clump, frosting the boles and boughs, casting a fine ghostly grey over the shadow-patterned beech-mast. Gyp took the short cut through it. Not a leaf moved in there, no living thing stirred; so might an earth be where only trees inhabited! She thought: 'I'll bring him back through here.' And she waited at the far corner of the clump, where he must pass, some little distance from the station. She never gave people unnecessary food for gossip—any slighting of her irritated him, she was careful to spare him that. The train came in; a car went whizzing by, a cyclist, then the first foot-passenger, at a great pace, breaking into a run. She saw that it was he, and, calling out his name, ran back into the shadow of the trees. He stopped dead in his tracks, then came rushing after her. That pursuit did not last long, and, in his arms, Gyp said:

"If you aren't too hungry, darling, let's stay here a little—it's so wonderful!"

They sat down on a great root, and leaning against him, looking up at the dark branches, she said:

"Have you had a hard day?"

"Yes; got hung up by a late consultation; and old Leyton asked me to come and dine."

Gyp felt a sensation as when feet happen on ground that gives a little.

"The Leytons—that's Eaton Square, isn't it? A big dinner?"

"No. Only the old people, and Bertie and Diana."

"Diana? That's the girl we met coming out of the theatre, isn't it?"

"When? Oh—ah—what a memory, Gyp!"

"Yes; it's good for things that interest me."

"Why? Did she interest you?"

Gyp turned and looked into his face.

"Yes. Is she clever?"

"H'm! I suppose you might call her so."

"And in love with you?"

"Great Scott! Why?"

"Is it very unlikely? I am."

He began kissing her lips and hair. And, closing her eyes, Gyp thought: 'If only that's not because he doesn't want to answer!' Then, for some minutes, they were silent as the moonlit beech clump.

"Answer me truly, Bryan. Do you never—never—feel as if you were wasting yourself on me?"

She was certain of a quiver in his grasp; but his face was open and serene, his voice as usual when he was teasing.

"Well, hardly ever! Aren't you funny, dear?"

"Promise me faithfully to let me know when you've had enough of me. Promise!"

"All right! But don't look for fulfilment in this life."

"I'm not so sure."

"I am."

Gyp put up her lips, and tried to drown for ever in a kiss the memory of those words: "But I say—you ARE wasting yourself."

IV

Summerhay, coming down next morning, went straight to his bureau; his mind was not at ease. "Wasting yourself!" What had he done with that letter of Diana's? He remembered Gyp's coming in just as he finished reading it. Searching the pigeonholes and drawers, moving everything that lay about, he twitched the bust—and the letter lay disclosed. He took it up with a sigh of relief:

"DEAR BRYAN,

"But I say—you ARE wasting yourself. Why, my dear, of course! 'Il faut se faire valoir!' You have only one foot to put forward; the other is planted in I don't know what mysterious hole. One foot in the grave—at thirty! Really, Bryan! Pull it out. There's such a lot waiting for you. It's no good your being hoity-toity, and telling me to mind my business. I'm speaking for everyone who knows you. We all feel the blight on the rose. Besides, you always were my favourite cousin, ever since I was five and you a horrid little bully of ten; and I simply hate to think of you going slowly down instead of quickly up. Oh! I know 'D—n the world!' But—are you? I should have thought it was 'd—ning' you! Enough! When are you coming to see us? I've read that book. The man seems to think love is nothing but passion, and passion always fatal. I wonder! Perhaps you know.

"Don't be angry with me for being such a grandmother.

"Au revoir.

"Your very good cousin,

"DIANA LEYTON."

He crammed the letter into his pocket, and sat there, appalled. It must have lain two days under that bust! Had Gyp seen it? He looked at the bronze face; and the philosopher looked back from the hollows of his eyes, as if to say: "What do you know of the human heart, my boy—your own, your mistress's, that girl's, or anyone's? A pretty dance the heart will lead you yet! Put it in a packet, tie it round with string, seal it up, drop it in a drawer, lock the drawer! And to-morrow it will be out and skipping on its

wrappings. Ho! Ho!" And Summerhay thought: 'You old goat. You never had one!' In the room above, Gyp would still be standing as he had left her, putting the last touch to her hair—a man would be a scoundrel who, even in thought, could—"Hallo!" the eyes of the bust seemed to say. "Pity! That's queer, isn't it? Why not pity that red-haired girl, with the skin so white that it burns you, and the eyes so brown that they burn you—don't they?" Old Satan! Gyp had his heart; no one in the world would ever take it from her!

And in the chair where she had sat last night conjuring up memories, he too now conjured. How he had loved her, did love her! She would always be what she was and had been to him. And the sage's mouth seemed to twist before him with the words: "Quite so, my dear! But the heart's very funny—very—capacious!" A tiny sound made him turn.

Little Gyp was standing in the doorway.

"Hallo!" he said.

"Hallo, Baryn!" She came flying to him, and he caught her up so that she stood on his knees with the sunlight shining on her fluffed out hair.

"Well, Gipsy! Who's getting a tall girl?"

"I'm goin' to ride."

"Ho, ho!"

"Baryn, let's do Humpty-Dumpty!"

"All right; come on!" He rose and carried her upstairs.

Gyp was still doing one of those hundred things which occupy women for a quarter of an hour after they are "quite ready," and at little Gyp's shout of, "Humpty!" she suspended her needle to watch the sacred rite.

Summerhay had seated himself on the foot-rail of the bed, rounding his arms, sinking his neck, blowing out his cheeks to simulate an egg; then, with an unexpectedness that even little Gyp could always see through, he rolled backward on to the bed.

And she, simulating "all the king's horses," tried in vain to put him up again. This immemorial game, watched by Gyp a hundred times, had to-day a special preciousness. If he could be so ridiculously young, what became of her doubts? Looking at his face pulled this way and that, lazily imperturbable under the pommelings of those small fingers, she thought: 'And that girl dared to say he was WASTING HIMSELF!' For in the night conviction had come to her that those words were written by the tall girl with the white skin, the girl of the theatre—the Diana of his last night's dinner. Humpty-Dumpty was up on the bed-rail again for the finale; all the king's horses were clasped to him, making the egg more round, and over they both went with shrieks and gurgles. What a boy he was! She would not—no, she would not brood and spoil her day with him.

But that afternoon, at the end of a long gallop on the downs, she turned her head away and said suddenly:

"Is she a huntress?"

"Who?"

"Your cousin—Diana."

In his laziest voice, he answered:

"I suppose you mean—does she hunt me?"

She knew that tone, that expression on his face, knew he was angry; but could not stop herself.

"I did."

"So you're going to become jealous, Gyp?"

It was one of those cold, naked sayings that should never be spoken between lovers—one of those sayings at which the heart of the one who speaks sinks with a kind of dismay, and the heart of the one who hears quivers. She cantered on. And he, perforce, after her. When she reined in again, he glanced into her face and was afraid. It was all closed up against him. And he said softly:

"I didn't mean that, Gyp."

But she only shook her head. He HAD meant it—had wanted to hurt her! It didn't matter—she wouldn't give him the chance again. And she said:

"Look at that long white cloud, and the apple-green in the sky—rain to-morrow. One ought to enjoy any fine day as if it were the last."

Uneasy, ashamed, yet still a little angry, Summerhay rode on beside her.

That night, she cried in her sleep; and, when he awakened her, clung to him and sobbed out:

"Oh! such a dreadful dream! I thought you'd left off loving me!"

For a long time he held and soothed her. Never, never! He would never leave off loving her!

But a cloud no broader than your hand can spread and cover the whole day.

V

The summer passed, and always there was that little patch of silence in her heart, and in his. The tall, bright days grew taller, slowly passed their zenith, slowly shortened. On Saturdays and Sundays, sometimes with Winton and little Gyp, but more often alone, they went on the river. For Gyp, it had never lost the magic of their first afternoon upon it—never lost its glamour as of an enchanted world. All the week she looked forward to these hours of isolation with him, as if the surrounding water secured her not only against a world that would take him from her, if it could, but against that side of his nature, which, so long ago she had named "old Georgian." She had once adventured to the law courts by herself, to see him in his wig and gown. Under that stiff grey crescent on his broad forehead, he seemed so hard and clever—so of a world to which she never could belong, so of a piece with the brilliant bullying of the whole proceeding. She had come away feeling that she only possessed and knew one side of him. On the river, she had that side utterly—her lovable, lazy, impudently loving boy, lying with his head in her lap, plunging in for a swim, splashing round her; or with his sleeves rolled up, his neck bare, and a smile on his face, plying his slow sculls down-stream, singing, "Away, my rolling river," or puffing home like a demon in want of his dinner. It was such a blessing to lose for a few hours each week this growing consciousness that she could never have the whole of him. But all the time the patch of silence grew, for doubt in the heart of one lover reacts on the heart of the other.

When the long vacation came, she made an heroic resolve. He must go to Scotland, must have a month away from her, a good long rest. And while Betty was at the sea with little Gyp, she would take her father to his cure. She held so inflexibly to this resolve, that, after many protests, he said with a shrug:

"Very well, I will then—if you're so keen to get rid of me."

"Keen to get rid!" When she could not bear to be away from him! But she forced her feeling back, and said, smiling:

"At last! There's a good boy!" Anything! If only it would bring him back to her exactly as he had been. She asked no questions as to where, or to whom, he would go.

Tunbridge Wells, that charming purgatory where the retired prepare their souls for a more permanent retirement, was dreaming on its hills in long rows of adequate villas. Its commons and woods had remained unscorched, so that the retired had not to any extent deserted it, that August, for the sea. They still shopped in the Pantiles, strolled the uplands, or flourished their golf-clubs in the grassy parks; they still drank tea in each other's houses and frequented the many churches. One could see their faces, as it were, goldened by their coming glory, like the chins of children by reflection from buttercups. From every kind of life they had retired, and, waiting now for a more perfect day, were doing their utmost to postpone it. They lived very long.

Gyp and her father had rooms in a hotel where he could bathe and drink the waters without having to climb three hills. This was the first cure she had attended since the long-past time at Wiesbaden. Was it possible that was only six years ago? She felt so utterly, so strangely different! Then life had been sparkling sips of every drink, and of none too much; now it was one long still draft, to quench a thirst

that would not be quenched.

During these weeks she held herself absolutely at her father's disposal, but she lived for the post, and if, by any chance, she did not get her daily letter, her heart sank to the depths. She wrote every day, sometimes twice, then tore up that second letter, remembering for what reason she had set herself to undergo this separation. During the first week, his letters had a certain equanimity; in the second week they became ardent; in the third, they were fitful—now beginning to look forward, now moody and dejected; and they were shorter. During this third week Aunt Rosamund joined them. The good lady had become a staunch supporter of Gyp's new existence, which, in her view, served Fiorsen right. Why should the poor child's life be loveless? She had a definitely low opinion of men, and a lower of the state of the marriage-laws; in her view, any woman who struck a blow in that direction was something of a heroine. And she was oblivious of the fact that Gyp was quite guiltless of the desire to strike a blow against the marriage-laws, or anything else. Aunt Rosamund's aristocratic and rebellious blood boiled with hatred of what she called the "stuffy people" who still held that women were men's property. It had made her specially careful never to put herself in that position.

She had brought Gyp a piece of news.

"I was walking down Bond Street past that tea-and-tart shop, my dear—you know, where they have those special coffee-creams, and who should come out of it but Miss Daphne Wing and our friend Fiorsen; and pretty hangdog he looked. He came up to me, with his little lady watching him like a lynx. Really, my dear, I was rather sorry for him; he'd got that hungry look of his; she'd been doing all the eating, I'm sure. He asked me how you were. I told him, 'Very well.'

"When you see her,' he said, 'tell her I haven't forgotten her, and never shall. But she was quite right; this is the sort of lady that I'm fit for.' And the way he looked at that girl made me feel quite uncomfortable. Then he gave me one of his little bows; and off they went, she as pleased as Punch. I really was sorry for him."

Gyp said quietly:

"Ah! you needn't have been, Auntie; he'll always be able to be sorry for himself."

A little shocked at her niece's cynicism, Aunt Rosamund was silent. The poor lady had not lived with Fiorsen!

That same afternoon, Gyp was sitting in a shelter on the common, a book on her knee—thinking her one long thought: 'To-day is Thursday—Monday week! Eleven days—still!'—when three figures came slowly toward her, a man, a woman, and what should have been a dog. English love of beauty and the rights of man had forced its nose back, deprived it of half its ears, and all but three inches or so of tail. It had asthma—and waddled in disillusionment. A voice said:

"This'll do, Maria. We can take the sun 'ere."

But for that voice, with the permanent cold hoarseness caught beside innumerable graves, Gyp might not have recognized Mr. Wagge, for he had taken off his beard, leaving nothing but side-whiskers, and Mrs. Wagge had filled out wonderfully. They were some time settling down beside her.

"You sit here, Maria; you won't get the sun in your eyes."

"No, Robert; I'll sit here. You sit there."

"No, YOU sit there."

"No, I will. Come, Duckie!"

But the dog, standing stockily on the pathway was gazing at Gyp, while what was left of its broad nose moved from side to side. Mr. Wagge followed the direction of its glance.

"Oh!" he said, "oh, this is a surprise!" And fumbling at his straw hat, he passed his other hand over his sleeve and held it out to Gyp. It felt almost dry, and fatter than it had been. While she was shaking it, the dog moved forward and sat down on her feet. Mrs. Wagge also extended her hand, clad in a shiny glove.

"This is a—a—pleasure," she murmured. "Who WOULD have thought of meeting you! Oh, don't let Duckie sit against your pretty frock! Come, Duckie!"

But Duckie did not move, resting his back against Gyp's shin-bones. Mr. Wagge, whose tongue had been passing over a mouth which she saw to its full advantage for the first time, said abruptly:

"You 'aven't come to live here, 'ave you?"

"Oh no! I'm only with my father for the baths."

"Ah, I thought not, never havin' seen you. We've been retired here ourselves a matter of twelve months. A pretty spot."

"Yes; lovely, isn't it?"

"We wanted nature. The air suits us, though a bit—er—too irony, as you might say. But it's a long-lived place. We were quite a time lookin' round."

Mrs. Wagge added in her thin voice:

"Yes—we'd thought of Wimbledon, you see, but Mr. Wagge liked this better; he can get his walk, here; and it's more—select, perhaps. We have several friends. The church is very nice."

Mr. Wagge's face assumed an uncertain expression. He said bluffly:

"I was always a chapel man; but—I don't know how it is—there's something in a place like this that makes church seem more—more suitable; my wife always had a leaning that way. I never conceal my actions."

Gyp murmured:

"It's a question of atmosphere, isn't it?"

Mr. Wagge shook his head.

"No; I don't hold with incense—we're not 'Igh Church. But how are YOU, ma'am? We often speak of you. You're looking well."

His face had become a dusky orange, and Mrs. Wagge's the colour of a doubtful beetroot. The dog on Gyp's feet stirred, snuffled, turned round, and fell heavily against her legs again. She said quietly:

"I was hearing of Daisy only to-day. She's quite a star now, isn't she?"

Mrs. Wagge sighed. Mr. Wagge looked away and answered:

"It's a sore subject. There she is, making her forty and fifty pound a week, and run after in all the papers. She's a success—no doubt about it. And she works. Saving a matter of fifteen 'undred a year, I shouldn't be surprised. Why, at my best, the years the influenza was so bad, I never cleared a thousand net. No, she's a success."

Mrs. Wagge added:

"Have you seen her last photograph—the one where she's standing between two hydrangea-tubs? It was her own idea."

Mr. Wagge mumbled suddenly:

"I'm always glad to see her when she takes a run down in a car. But I've come here for quiet after the life I've led, and I don't want to think about it, especially before you, ma'am. I don't—that's a fact."

A silence followed, during which Mr. and Mrs. Wagge looked at their feet, and Gyp looked at the dog.

"Ah!—here you are!" It was Winton, who had come up from behind the shelter, and stood, with eyebrows slightly raised. Gyp could not help a smile. Her father's weathered, narrow face, half-veiled eyes, thin nose, little crisp, grey moustache that did not hide his firm lips, his lean, erect figure, the very way he stood, his thin, dry, clipped voice were the absolute antithesis of Mr. Wagge's thickset, stoutly planted form, thick-skinned, thick-featured face, thick, rather hoarse yet oily voice. It was as if Providence had arranged a demonstration of the extremes of social type. And she said:

"Mr. and Mrs. Wagge—my father."

Winton raised his hat. Gyp remained seated, the dog Duckie being still on her feet.

"'Appy to meet you, sir. I hope you have benefit from the waters. They're supposed to be most powerful, I believe."

"Thank you—not more deadly than most. Are you drinking them?"

Mr. Wagge smiled.

"Nao!" he said, "we live here."

"Indeed! Do you find anything to do?"

"Well, as a fact, I've come here for rest. But I take a Turkish bath once a fortnight—find it refreshing; keeps the pores of the skin acting."

Mrs. Wagge added gently:

"It seems to suit my husband wonderfully."

Winton murmured:

"Yes. Is this your dog? Bit of a philosopher, isn't he?"

Mrs. Wagge answered:

"Oh, he's a naughty dog, aren't you, Duckie?"

The dog Duckie, feeling himself the cynosure of every eye, rose and stood panting into Gyp's face. She took the occasion to get up.

"We must go, I'm afraid. Good-bye. It's been very nice to meet you again. When you see Daisy, will you please give her my love?"

Mrs. Wagge unexpectedly took a handkerchief from her reticule. Mr. Wagge cleared his throat heavily. Gyp was conscious of the dog Duckie waddling after them, and of Mrs. Wagge calling, "Duckie, Duckie!" from behind her handkerchief.

Winton said softly:

"So those two got that pretty filly! Well, she didn't show much quality, when you come to think of it. She's still with our friend, according to your aunt."

Gyp nodded.

"Yes; and I do hope she's happy."

"HE isn't, apparently. Serves him right."

Gyp shook her head.

"Oh no, Dad!"

"Well, one oughtn't to wish any man worse than he's likely to get. But when I see people daring to look down their noses at you—by Jove! I get—"

"Darling, what does that matter?"

Winton answered testily:

"It matters very much to me—the impudence of it!" His mouth relaxed in a grim little smile: "Ah, well—there's not much to choose between us so far as condemning our neighbours goes. 'Charity Stakes—also ran, Charles Clare Winton, the Church, and Mrs. Grundy.'"

They opened out to each other more in those few days at Tunbridge Wells than they had for years. Whether the process of bathing softened his crust, or the air that Mr. Wagge found "a bit—er—too irony, as you might say," had upon Winton the opposite effect, he certainly relaxed that first duty of man, the concealment of his spirit, and disclosed his activities as he never had before—how such and such a person had been set on his feet, so and so sent out to Canada, this man's wife helped over her confinement, that man's daughter started again after a slip. And Gyp's child-worship of him bloomed anew.

On the last afternoon of their stay, she strolled out with him through one of the long woods that stretched away behind their hotel. Excited by the coming end of her self-inflicted penance, moved by the beauty among those sunlit trees, she found it difficult to talk. But Winton, about to lose her, was quite loquacious. Starting from the sinister change in the racing-world—so plutocratic now, with the American seat, the increase of bookmaking owners, and other tragic occurrences—he launched forth into a jeremiad on the condition of things in general. Parliament, he thought, especially now that

members were paid, had lost its self-respect; the towns had eaten up the country; hunting was threatened; the power and vulgarity of the press were appalling; women had lost their heads; and everybody seemed afraid of having any "breeding." By the time little Gyp was Gyp's age, they would all be under the thumb of Watch Committees, live in Garden Cities, and have to account for every half-crown they spent, and every half-hour of their time; the horse, too, would be an extinct animal, brought out once a year at the lord-mayor's show. He hoped—the deuce—he might not be alive to see it. And suddenly he added: "What do you think happens after death, Gyp?"

They were sitting on one of those benches that crop up suddenly in the heart of nature. All around them briars and bracken were just on the turn; and the hum of flies, the vague stir of leaves and life formed but a single sound. Gyp, gazing into the wood, answered:

"Nothing, Dad. I think we just go back."

"Ah—My idea, too!"

Neither of them had ever known what the other thought about it before!

Gyp murmured:

"La vie est vaine
—Un peu d'amour,
Un peu de haine,
Et puis bonjour!"

Not quite a grunt or quite a laugh emerged from the depths of Winton, and, looking up at the sky, he said:

"And what they call 'God,' after all, what is it? Just the very best you can get out of yourself—nothing more, so far as I can see. Dash it, you can't imagine anything more than you can imagine. One would like to die in the open, though, like Whyte-Melville. But there's one thing that's always puzzled me, Gyp. All one's life one's tried to have a single heart. Death comes, and out you go! Then why did one love, if there's to be no meeting after?"

"Yes; except for that, who would care? But does the wanting to meet make it any more likely, Dad? The world couldn't go on without love; perhaps loving somebody or something with all your heart is all in itself."

Winton stared; the remark was a little deep.

"Ye-es," he said at last. "I often think the religious johnnies are saving their money to put on a horse that'll never run after all. I remember those Yogi chaps in India. There they sat, and this jolly world might rot round them for all they cared—they thought they were going to be all right themselves, in Kingdom Come. But suppose it doesn't come?"

Gyp murmured with a little smile:

"Perhaps they were trying to love everything at once."

"Rum way of showing it. And, hang it, there are such a lot of things one can't love! Look at that!" He pointed upwards. Against the grey bole of a beech-tree hung a board, on which were the freshly painted words:

PRIVATE

TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED

"That board is stuck up all over this life and the next. Well, WE won't give them the chance to warn us off, Gyp."

Slipping her hand through his arm, she pressed close up to him.

"No, Dad; you and I will go off with the wind and the sun, and the trees and the waters, like Procris in my picture."

VI

The curious and complicated nature of man in matters of the heart is not sufficiently conceded by women, professors, clergymen, judges, and other critics of his conduct. And naturally so, since they all have vested interests in his simplicity. Even journalists are in the conspiracy to make him out less wayward than he is, and dip their pens in epithets, if his heart diverges inch or ell.

Bryan Summerhay was neither more curious nor more complicated than those of his own sex who would condemn him for getting into the midnight express from Edinburgh with two distinct emotions in his heart—a regretful aching for the girl, his cousin, whom he was leaving behind, and a rapturous anticipation of the woman whom he was going to rejoin. How was it possible that he could feel both at once? "Against all the rules," women and other moralists would say. Well, the fact is, a man's heart knows no rules. And he found it perfectly easy, lying in his bunk, to dwell on memories of Diana handing him tea, or glancing up at him, while he turned the leaves of her songs, with that enticing mockery in her eyes and about her lips; and yet the next moment to be swept from head to heel by the longing to feel Gyp's arms around him, to hear her voice, look in her eyes, and press his lips on hers. If, instead of being on his way to rejoin a mistress, he had been going home to a wife, he would not have felt a particle more of spiritual satisfaction, perhaps not so much. He was returning to the feelings and companionship that he knew were the most deeply satisfying spiritually and bodily he would ever have. And yet he could ache a little for that red-haired girl, and this without any difficulty. How disconcerting! But, then, truth is.

From that queer seesawing of his feelings, he fell asleep, dreamed of all things under the sun as men only can in a train, was awakened by the hollow silence in some station, slept again for hours, it seemed, and woke still at the same station, fell into a sound sleep at last that ended at Willesden in broad daylight. Dressing hurriedly, he found he had but one emotion now, one longing—to get to Gyp. Sitting back in his cab, hands deep-thrust into the pockets of his ulster, he smiled, enjoying even the smell of the misty London morning. Where would she be—in the hall of the hotel waiting, or upstairs still?

Not in the hall! And asking for her room, he made his way to its door.

She was standing in the far corner motionless, deadly pale, quivering from head to foot; and when he flung his arms round her, she gave a long sigh, closing her eyes. With his lips on hers, he could feel her almost fainting; and he too had no consciousness of anything but that long kiss.

Next day, they went abroad to a little place not far from Fecamp, in that Normandy countryside where all things are large—the people, the beasts, the unhedged fields, the courtyards of the farms guarded so squarely by tall trees, the skies, the sea, even the blackberries large. And Gyp was happy. But twice there came letters, in that too-well-remembered handwriting, which bore a Scottish postmark. A phantom increases in darkness, solidifies when seen in mist. Jealousy is rooted not in reason, but in the nature that feels it—in her nature that loved desperately, felt proudly. And jealousy flourishes on scepticism. Even if pride would have let her ask, what good? She would not have believed the answers. Of course he would say—if only out of pity—that he never let his thoughts rest on another woman. But, after all, it was only a phantom. There were many hours in those three weeks when she felt he really loved her, and so—was happy.

They went back to the Red House at the end of the first week in October. Little Gyp, home from the sea, was now an almost accomplished horsewoman. Under the tutelage of old Pettance, she had been riding steadily round and round those rough fields by the lincay which they called "the wild," her firm brown legs astride of the mouse-coloured pony, her little brown face, with excited, dark eyes, very erect, her auburn crop of short curls flopping up and down on her little straight back. She wanted to be able to "go out riding" with Grandy and Mum and Baryn. And the first days were spent by them all more or less in fulfilling her new desires. Then term began, and Gyp sat down again to the long sharing of Summerhay with his other life.

VII

One afternoon at the beginning of November, the old Scotch terrier, Ossian, lay on the path in the pale sunshine. He had lain there all the morning since his master went up by the early train. Nearly sixteen

years old, he was deaf now and disillusioned, and every time that Summerhay left him, his eyes seemed to say: "You will leave me once too often!" The blandishments of the other nice people about the house were becoming to him daily less and less a substitute for that which he felt he had not much time left to enjoy; nor could he any longer bear a stranger within the gate. From her window, Gyp saw him get up and stand with his back ridged, growling at the postman, and, fearing for the man's calves, she hastened out.

Among the letters was one in that dreaded hand writing marked "Immediate," and forwarded from his chambers. She took it up, and put it to her nose. A scent—of what? Too faint to say. Her thumb nails sought the edge of the flap on either side. She laid the letter down. Any other letter, but not that—she wanted to open it too much. Readdressing it, she took it out to put with the other letters. And instantly the thought went through her: 'What a pity! If I read it, and there was nothing!' All her restless, jealous misgivings of months past would then be set at rest! She stood, uncertain, with the letter in her hand. Ah—but if there WERE something! She would lose at one stroke her faith in him, and her faith in herself—not only his love but her own self-respect. She dropped the letter on the table. Could she not take it up to him herself? By the three o'clock slow train, she could get to him soon after five. She looked at her watch. She would just have time to walk down. And she ran upstairs. Little Gyp was sitting on the top stair—her favourite seat—looking at a picture-book.

"I'm going up to London, darling. Tell Betty I may be back to-night, or perhaps I may not. Give me a good kiss."

Little Gyp gave the good kiss, and said:

"Let me see you put your hat on, Mum."

While Gyp was putting on hat and furs, she thought: "I shan't take a bag; I can always make shift at Bury Street if—" She did not finish the thought, but the blood came up in her cheeks. "Take care of Ossy, darling!" She ran down, caught up the letter, and hastened away to the station. In the train, her cheeks still burned. Might not this first visit to his chambers be like her old first visit to the little house in Chelsea? She took the letter out. How she hated that large, scrawly writing for all the thoughts and fears it had given her these past months! If that girl knew how much anxiety and suffering she had caused, would she stop writing, stop seeing him? And Gyp tried to conjure up her face, that face seen only for a minute, and the sound of that clipped, clear voice but once heard—the face and voice of one accustomed to have her own way. No! It would only make her go on all the more. Fair game, against a woman with no claim—but that of love. Thank heaven she had not taken him away from any woman—unless—that girl perhaps thought she had! Ah! Why, in all these years, had she never got to know his secrets, so that she might fight against what threatened her? But would she have fought? To fight for love was degrading, horrible! And yet—if one did not? She got up and stood at the window of her empty carriage. There was the river—and there—yes, the very backwater where he had begged her to come to him for good. It looked so different, bare and shorn, under the light grey sky; the willows were all polled, the reeds cut down. And a line from one of his favourite sonnets came into her mind:

"Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang."

Ah, well! Time enough to face things when they came. She would only think of seeing him! And she put the letter back to burn what hole it liked in the pocket of her fur coat.

The train was late; it was past five, already growing dark, when she reached Paddington and took a cab to the Temple. Strange to be going there for the first time—not even to know exactly where Harcourt Buildings were. At Temple Lane, she stopped the cab and walked down that narrow, ill-lighted, busy channel into the heart of the Great Law.

"Up those stone steps, miss; along the railin', second doorway." Gyp came to the second doorway and in the doubtful light scrutinized the names. "Summerhay—second floor." She began to climb the stairs. Her heart beat fast. What would he say? How greet her? Was it not absurd, dangerous, to have come? He would be having a consultation perhaps. There would be a clerk or someone to be heard, and what name could she give? On the first floor she paused, took out a blank card, and pencilled on it:

"Can I see you a minute?—G."

Then, taking a long breath to quiet her heart, she went on up. There was the name, and there the door. She rang—no one came; listened—could hear no sound. All looked so massive and bleak and dim—the iron railings, stone stairs, bare walls, oak door. She rang again. What should she do? Leave the letter? Not see him after all—her little romance all come to naught—just a chilly visit to Bury Street, where perhaps there would be no one but Mrs. Markey, for her father, she knew, was at Mildenhall, hunting, and would not be up till Sunday! And she thought: 'I'll leave the letter, go back to the Strand,

have some tea, and try again.'

She took out the letter, with a sort of prayer pushed it through the slit of the door, heard it fall into its wire cage; then slowly descended the stairs to the outer passage into Temple Lane. It was thronged with men and boys, at the end of the day's work. But when she had nearly reached the Strand, a woman's figure caught her eye. She was walking with a man on the far side; their faces were turned toward each other. Gyp heard their voices, and, faint, dizzy, stood looking back after them. They passed under a lamp; the light glinted on the woman's hair, on a trick of Summerhay's, the lift of one shoulder, when he was denying something; she heard his voice, high-pitched. She watched them cross, mount the stone steps she had just come down, pass along the railed stone passage, enter the doorway, disappear. And such horror seized on her that she could hardly walk away.

"Oh no! Oh no! Oh no!" So it went in her mind—a kind of moaning, like that of a cold, rainy wind through dripping trees. What did it mean? Oh, what did it mean? In this miserable tumult, the only thought that did not come to her was that of going back to his chambers. She hurried away. It was a wonder she was not run over, for she had no notion what she was doing, where going, and crossed the streets without the least attention to traffic. She came to Trafalgar Square, and stood leaning against its parapet in front of the National Gallery. Here she had her first coherent thought: So that was why his chambers had been empty! No clerk—no one! That they might be alone. Alone, where she had dreamed of being alone with him! And only that morning he had kissed her and said, "Good-bye, treasure!" A dreadful little laugh got caught in her throat, confused with a sob. Why—why had she a heart? Down there, against the plinth of one of the lions, a young man leaned, with his arms round a girl, pressing her to him. Gyp turned away from the sight and resumed her miserable wandering. She went up Bury Street. No light; not any sign of life! It did not matter; she could not have gone in, could not stay still, must walk! She put up her veil to get more air, feeling choked.

The trees of the Green Park, under which she was passing now, had still a few leaves, and they gleamed in the lamplight copper-coloured as that girl's hair. All sorts of torturing visions came to her. Those empty chambers! She had seen one little minute of their intimacy. A hundred kisses might have passed between them—a thousand words of love! And he would lie to her. Already he had acted a lie! She had not deserved that. And this sense of the injustice done her was the first relief she felt—this definite emotion of a mind clouded by sheer misery. She had not deserved that he should conceal things from her. She had not had one thought or look for any man but him since that night down by the sea, when he came to her across the garden in the moonlight—not one thought—and never would! Poor relief enough! She was in Hyde Park now, wandering along a pathway which cut diagonally across the grass. And with more resolution, more purpose, she began searching her memory for signs, proofs of WHEN he had changed to her. She could not find them. He had not changed in his ways to her; not at all. Could one act love, then? Act passion, or—horrible thought!—when he kissed her nowadays, was he thinking of that girl?

She heard the rustling of leaves behind. A youth was following her along the path, some ravening youth, whose ungoverned breathing had a kind of pathos in it. Heaven! What irony! She was too miserable to care, hardly even knew when, in the main path again, she was free from his pursuit. Love! Why had it such possession of her, that a little thing—yes, a little thing—only the sight of him with another, should make her suffer so? She came out on the other side of the park. What should she do? Crawl home, creep into her hole, and lie there stricken! At Paddington she found a train just starting and got in. There were other people in the carriage, business men from the city, lawyers, from that—place where she had been. And she was glad of their company, glad of the crackle of evening papers and stolid faces giving her looks of stolid interest from behind them, glad to have to keep her mask on, afraid of the violence of her emotion. But one by one they got out, to their cars or their constitucionals, and she was left alone to gaze at darkness and the deserted river just visible in the light of a moon smothered behind the sou'westerly sky. And for one wild moment she thought: 'Shall I open the door and step out—one step—peace!'

She hurried away from the station. It was raining, and she drew up her veil to feel its freshness on her hot face. There was just light enough for her to see the pathway through the beech clump. The wind in there was sighing, sougning, driving the dark boughs, tearing off the leaves, little black wet shapes that came whirling at her face. The wild melancholy in that swaying wood was too much for Gyp; she ran, thrusting her feet through the deep rustling drifts of leaves not yet quite drenched. They clung all wet round her thin stockings, and the rainy wind beat her forehead. At the edge, she paused for breath, leaning against the bole of a beech, peering back, where the wild whirling wind was moaning and tearing off the leaves. Then, bending her head to the rain, she went on in the open, trying to prepare herself to show nothing when she reached home.

She got in and upstairs to her room, without being seen. If she had possessed any sedative drug she would have taken it. Anything to secure oblivion from this aching misery! Huddling before the freshly

lighted fire, she listened to the wind driving through the poplars; and once more there came back to her the words of that song sung by the Scottish girl at Fiorsen's concert:

"And my heart reft of its own sun,
Deep lies in death-torpor cold and grey."

Presently she crept into bed, and at last fell asleep.

She woke next morning with the joyful thought: 'It's Saturday; he'll be down soon after lunch!' And then she remembered. Ah, no! It was too much! At the pang of that remembrance, it was as if a devil entered into her—a devil of stubborn pride, which grew blacker with every hour of that morning. After lunch, that she might not be in when he came, she ordered her mare, and rode up on the downs alone. The rain had ceased, but the wind still blew strong from the sou'west, and the sky was torn and driven in swathes of white and grey to north, south, east, and west, and puffs of what looked like smoke scurried across the cloud banks and the glacier-blue rifts between. The mare had not been out the day before, and on the springy turf stretched herself in that thoroughbred gallop which bears a rider up, as it were, on air, till nothing but the thud of hoofs, the grass flying by, the beating of the wind in her face betrayed to Gyp that she was moving. For full two miles they went without a pull, only stopped at last by the finish of the level. From there, one could see far—away over to Wittenham Clumps across the Valley, and to the high woods above the river in the east—away, in the south and west, under that strange, torn sky, to a whole autumn land, of whitish grass, bare fields, woods of grey and gold and brown, fast being pillaged. But all that sweep of wind, and sky, freshness of rain, and distant colour could not drive out of Gyp's heart the hopeless aching and the devil begotten of it.

VIII

There are men who, however well-off—either in money or love—must gamble. Their affections may be deeply rooted, but they cannot repulse fate when it tantalizes them with a risk.

Summerhay, who loved Gyp, was not tired of her either physically or mentally, and even felt sure he would never tire, had yet dallied for months with this risk which yesterday had come to a head. And now, taking his seat in the train to return to her, he felt unquiet; and since he resented disquietude, he tried defiantly to think of other things, but he was very unsuccessful. Looking back, it was difficult for him to tell when the snapping of his defences had begun. A preference shown by one accustomed to exact preference is so insidious. The girl, his cousin, was herself a gambler. He did not respect her as he respected Gyp; she did not touch him as Gyp touched him, was not—no, not half—so deeply attractive; but she had—confound her! the power of turning his head at moments, a queer burning, skin-deep fascination, and, above all, that most dangerous quality in a woman—the lure of an imperious vitality. In love with life, she made him feel that he was letting things slip by. And since to drink deep of life was his nature, too—what chance had he of escape? Far-off cousinhood is a dangerous relationship. Its familiarity is not great enough to breed contempt, but sufficient to remove those outer defences to intimacy, the conquest of which, in other circumstances, demands the conscious effort which warns people whither they are going.

Summerhay had not realized the extent of the danger, but he had known that it existed, especially since Scotland. It would be interesting—as the historians say—to speculate on what he would have done, if he could have foretold what would happen. But he had certainly not foretold the crisis of yesterday evening. He had received a telegram from her at lunch-time, suggesting the fulfilment of a jesting promise, made in Scotland, that she should have tea with him and see his chambers—a small and harmless matter. Only, why had he dismissed his clerk so early? That is the worst of gamblers—they will put a polish on the risks they run. He had not reckoned, perhaps, that she would look so pretty, lying back in his big Oxford chair, with furs thrown open so that her white throat showed, her hair gleaming, a smile coming and going on her lips; her white hand, with polished nails, holding that cigarette; her brown eyes, so unlike Gyp's, fixed on him; her slim foot with high instep thrust forward in transparent stocking. Not reckoned that, when he bent to take her cup, she would put out her hands, draw his head down, press her lips to his, and say: "Now you know!" His head had gone round, still went round, thinking of it! That was all. A little matter—except that, in an hour, he would be meeting the eyes of one he loved much more. And yet—the poison was in his blood; a kiss so cut short—by what—what counter impulse?—leaving him gazing at her without a sound, inhaling that scent of hers—something like a pine wood's scent, only sweeter, while she gathered up her gloves, fastened her furs, as if it had been he, not she, who had snatched that kiss. But her hand had pressed his arm against her

as they went down the stairs. And getting into her cab at the Temple Station, she had looked back at him with a little half-mocking smile of challenge and comradeship and promise. The link would be hard to break—even if he wanted to. And yet nothing would come of it! Heavens, no! He had never thought! Marriage! Impossible! Anything else—even more impossible! When he got back to his chambers, he had found in the box the letter, which her telegram had repeated, readdressed by Gyp from the Red House. And a faint uneasiness at its having gone down there passed through him. He spent a restless evening at the club, playing cards and losing; sat up late in his chambers over a case; had a hard morning's work, and only now that he was nearing Gyp, realized how utterly he had lost the straightforward simplicity of things.

When he reached the house and found that she had gone out riding alone, his uneasiness increased. Why had she not waited as usual for him to ride with her? And he paced up and down the garden, where the wind was melancholy in the boughs of the walnut-tree that had lost all its leaves. Little Gyp was out for her walk, and only poor old Ossy kept him company. Had she not expected him by the usual train? He would go and try to find out. He changed and went to the stables. Old Pettance was sitting on a corn-bin, examining an aged Ruff's Guide, which contained records of his long-past glory, scored under by a pencil: "June Stakes: Agility. E. Pettance 3rd." "Tidport Selling H'Cap: Dorothea, E. Pettance, o." "Salisbury Cup: Also ran Plum Pudding, E. Pettance," with other triumphs. He got up, saying:

"Good-afternoon, sir; windy afternoon, sir. The mistress 'as been gone out over two hours, sir. She wouldn't take me with 'er."

"Hurry up, then, and saddle Hotspur."

"Yes, sir; very good, sir."

Over two hours! He went up on to the downs, by the way they generally came home, and for an hour he rode, keeping a sharp lookout for any sign of her. No use; and he turned home, hot and uneasy. On the hall table were her riding-whip and gloves. His heart cleared, and he ran upstairs. She was doing her hair and turned her head sharply as he entered. Hurrying across the room he had the absurd feeling that she was standing at bay. She drew back, bent her face away from him, and said:

"No! Don't pretend! Anything's better than pretence!"

He had never seen her look or speak like that—her face so hard, her eyes so stabbing! And he recoiled dumbfounded.

"What's the matter, Gyp?"

"Nothing. Only—don't pretend!" And, turning to the glass, she went on twisting and coiling up her hair.

She looked lovely, flushed from her ride in the wind, and he had a longing to seize her in his arms. But her face stopped him. With fear and a sort of anger, he said:

"You might explain, I think."

An evil little smile crossed her face.

"YOU can do that. I am in the dark."

"I don't in the least understand what you mean."

"Don't you?" There was something deadly in her utter disregard of him, while her fingers moved swiftly about her dark, shining hair—something so appallingly sudden in this hostility that Summerhay felt a peculiar sensation in his head, as if he must knock it against something. He sat down on the side of the bed. Was it that letter? But how? It had not been opened. He said:

"What on earth has happened, Gyp, since I went up yesterday? Speak out, and don't keep me like this!"

She turned and looked at him.

"Don't pretend that you're upset because you can't kiss me! Don't be false, Bryan! You know it's been pretence for months."

Summerhay's voice grew high.

"I think you've gone mad. I don't know what you mean."

"Oh, yes, you do. Did you get a letter yesterday marked 'Immediate'?"

Ah! So it WAS that! To meet the definite, he hardened, and said stubbornly:

"Yes; from Diana Leyton. Do you object?"

"No; only, how do you think it got back to you from here so quickly?"

He said dully:

"I don't know. By post, I suppose."

"No; I put it in your letter-box myself—at half-past five."

Summerhay's mind was trained to quickness, and the full significance of those words came home to him at once. He stared at her fixedly.

"I suppose you saw us, then."

"Yes."

He got up, made a helpless movement, and said:

"Oh, Gyp, don't! Don't be so hard! I swear by—"

Gyp gave a little laugh, turned her back, and went on coiling at her hair. And again that horrid feeling that he must knock his head against something rose in Summerhay. He said helplessly:

"I only gave her tea. Why not? She's my cousin. It's nothing! Why should you think the worst of me? She asked to see my chambers. Why not? I couldn't refuse."

"Your EMPTY chambers? Don't, Bryan—it's pitiful! I can't bear to hear you."

At that lash of the whip, Summerhay turned and said:

"It pleases you to think the worst, then?"

Gyp stopped the movement of her fingers and looked round at him.

"I've always told you you were perfectly free. Do you think I haven't felt it going on for months? There comes a moment when pride revolts—that's all. Don't lie to me, PLEASE!"

"I am not in the habit of lying." But still he did not go. That awful feeling of encirclement, of a net round him, through which he could not break—a net which he dimly perceived even in his resentment to have been spun by himself, by that cursed intimacy, kept from her all to no purpose—beset him more closely every minute. Could he not make her see the truth, that it was only her he REALLY loved? And he said:

"Gyp, I swear to you there's nothing but one kiss, and that was not—"

A shudder went through her from head to foot; she cried out:

"Oh, please go away!"

He went up to her, put his hands on her shoulders, and said:

"It's only you I really love. I swear it! Why don't you believe me? You must believe me. You can't be so wicked as not to. It's foolish—foolish! Think of our life—think of our love—think of all—" Her face was frozen; he loosened his grasp of her, and muttered: "Oh, your pride is awful!"

"Yes, it's all I've got. Lucky for you I have it. You can go to her when you like."

"Go to her! It's absurd—I couldn't—if you wish, I'll never see her again."

She turned away to the glass.

"Oh, don't! What IS the use?"

Nothing is harder for one whom life has always spoiled than to find his best and deepest feelings disbelieved in. At that moment, Summerhay meant absolutely what he said. The girl was nothing to him! If she was pursuing him, how could he help it? And he could not make Gyp believe it! How awful! How truly terrible! How unjust and unreasonable of her! And why? What had he done that she should

be so unbelieving—should think him such a shallow scoundrel? Could he help the girl's kissing him? Help her being fond of him? Help having a man's nature? Unreasonable, unjust, ungenerous! And giving her a furious look, he went out.

He went down to his study, flung himself on the sofa and turned his face to the wall. Devilish! But he had not been there five minutes before his anger seemed childish and evaporated into the chill of deadly and insistent fear. He was perceiving himself up against much more than a mere incident, up against her nature—its pride and scepticism—yes—and the very depth and singleness of her love. While she wanted nothing but him, he wanted and took so much else. He perceived this but dimly, as part of that feeling that he could not break through, of the irritable longing to put his head down and butt his way out, no matter what the obstacles. What was coming? How long was this state of things to last? He got up and began to pace the room, his hands clasped behind him, his head thrown back; and every now and then he shook that head, trying to free it from this feeling of being held in chancery. And then Diana! He had said he would not see her again. But was that possible? After that kiss—after that last look back at him! How? What could he say—do? How break so suddenly? Then, at memory of Gyp's face, he shivered. Ah, how wretched it all was! There must be some way out—some way! Surely some way out! For when first, in the wood of life, fatality halts, turns her dim dark form among the trees, shows her pale cheek and those black eyes of hers, shows with awful swiftness her strange reality—men would be fools indeed who admitted that they saw her!

IX

Gyp stayed in her room doing little things—as a woman will when she is particularly wretched—sewing pale ribbons into her garments, polishing her rings. And the devil that had entered into her when she woke that morning, having had his fling, slunk away, leaving the old bewildered misery. She had stabbed her lover with words and looks, felt pleasure in stabbing, and now was bitterly sad. What use—what satisfaction? How by vengeful prickings cure the deep wound, disperse the canker in her life? How heal herself by hurting him whom she loved so? If he came up again now and made but a sign, she would throw herself into his arms. But hours passed, and he did not come, and she did not go down—too truly miserable. It grew dark, but she did not draw the curtains; the sight of the windy moonlit garden and the leaves driving across brought a melancholy distraction. Little Gyp came in and prattled. There was a tree blown down, and she had climbed on it; they had picked up two baskets of acorns, and the pigs had been so greedy; and she had been blown away, so that Betty had had to run after her. And Baryn was walking in the study; he was so busy he had only given her one kiss.

When she was gone, Gyp opened the window and let the wind full into her face. If only it would blow out of her heart this sickening sense that all was over, no matter how he might pretend to love her out of pity! In a nature like hers, so doubting and self-distrustful, confidence, once shaken to the roots, could never be restored. A proud nature that went all lengths in love could never be content with a half-love. She had been born too doubting, proud, and jealous, yet made to love too utterly. She—who had been afraid of love, and when it came had fought till it swept her away; who, since then, had lived for love and nothing else, who gave all, and wanted all—knew for certain and for ever that she could not have all.

It was "nothing" he had said! Nothing! That for months he had been thinking at least a little of another woman besides herself. She believed what he had told her, that there had been no more than a kiss—but was it nothing that they had reached that kiss? This girl—this cousin—who held all the cards, had everything on her side—the world, family influence, security of life; yes, and more, so terribly much more—a man's longing for the young and unawakened. This girl he could marry! It was this thought which haunted her. A mere momentary outbreak of man's natural wildness she could forgive and forget—oh, yes! It was the feeling that it was a girl, his own cousin, besieging him, dragging him away, that was so dreadful. Ah, how horrible it was—how horrible! How, in decent pride, keep him from her, fetter him?

She heard him come up to his dressing-room, and while he was still there, stole out and down. Life must go on, the servants be hoodwinked, and so forth. She went to the piano and played, turning the dagger in her heart, or hoping forlornly that music might work some miracle. He came in presently and stood by the fire, silent.

Dinner, with the talk needful to blinding the household—for what is more revolting than giving away the sufferings of the heart?—was almost unendurable and directly it was over, they went, he to his

study, she back to the piano. There she sat, ready to strike the notes if anyone came in; and tears fell on the hands that rested in her lap. With all her soul she longed to go and clasp him in her arms and cry: "I don't care—I don't care! Do what you like—go to her—if only you'll love me a little!" And yet to love—a LITTLE! Was it possible? Not to her!

In sheer misery she went upstairs and to bed. She heard him come up and go into his dressing-room—and, at last, in the firelight saw him kneeling by her.

"Gyp!"

She raised herself and threw her arms round him. Such an embrace a drowning woman might have given. Pride and all were abandoned in an effort to feel him close once more, to recover the irrecoverable past. For a long time she listened to his pleading, explanations, justifications, his protestations of undying love—strange to her and painful, yet so boyish and pathetic. She soothed him, clasping his head to her breast, gazing out at the flickering fire. In that hour, she rose to a height above herself. What happened to her own heart did not matter so long as he was happy, and had all that he wanted with her and away from her—if need be, always away from her.

But, when he had gone to sleep, a terrible time began; for in the small hours, when things are at their worst, she could not keep back her weeping, though she smothered it into the pillow. It woke him, and all began again; the burden of her cry: "It's gone!" the burden of his: "It's NOT—can't you see it isn't?" Till, at last, that awful feeling that he must knock his head against the wall made him leap up and tramp up and down like a beast in a cage—the cage of the impossible. For, as in all human tragedies, both were right according to their natures. She gave him all herself, wanted all in return, and could not have it. He wanted her, the rest besides, and no complaining, and could not have it. He did not admit impossibility; she did.

At last came another of those pitying lulls till he went to sleep in her arms. Long she lay awake, staring at the darkness, admitting despair, trying to find how to bear it, not succeeding. Impossible to cut his other life away from him—impossible that, while he lived it, this girl should not be tugging him away from her. Impossible to watch and question him. Impossible to live dumb and blind, accepting the crumbs left over, showing nothing. Would it have been better if they had been married? But then it might have been the same—reversed; perhaps worse! The roots were so much deeper than that. He was not single-hearted and she was. In spite of all that he said, she knew he didn't really want to give up that girl. How could he? Even if the girl would let him go! And slowly there formed within her a gruesome little plan to test him. Then, ever so gently withdrawing her arms, she turned over and slept, exhausted.

Next morning, remorselessly carrying out that plan, she forced herself to smile and talk as if nothing had happened, watching the relief in his face, his obvious delight at the change, with a fearful aching in her heart. She waited till he was ready to go down, and then, still smiling, said:

"Forget all about yesterday, darling. Promise me you won't let it make any difference. You must keep up your friendship; you mustn't lose anything. I shan't mind; I shall be quite happy." He knelt down and leaned his forehead against her waist. And, stroking his hair, she repeated: "I shall only be happy if you take everything that comes your way. I shan't mind a bit." And she watched his face that had lost its trouble.

"Do you really mean that?"

"Yes; really!"

"Then you do see that it's nothing, never has been anything—compared with you—never!"

He had accepted her crucifixion. A black wave surged into her heart.

"It would be so difficult and awkward for you to give up that intimacy. It would hurt your cousin so."

She saw the relief deepen in his face and suddenly laughed. He got up from his knees and stared at her.

"Oh, Gyp, for God's sake don't begin again!"

But she went on laughing; then, with a sob, turned away and buried her face in her hands. To all his prayers and kisses she answered nothing, and breaking away from him, she rushed toward the door. A wild thought possessed her. Why go on? If she were dead, it would be all right for him, quiet—peaceful, quiet—for them all! But he had thrown himself in the way.

"Gyp, for heaven's sake! I'll give her up—of course I'll give her up. Do—do—be reasonable! I don't care a finger-snap for her compared with you!"

And presently there came another of those lulls that both were beginning to know were mere pauses of exhaustion. They were priceless all the same, for the heart cannot go on feeling at that rate.

It was Sunday morning, the church-bells ringing, no wind, a lull in the sou'westerly gale—one of those calms that fall in the night and last, as a rule, twelve or fifteen hours, and the garden all strewn with leaves of every hue, from green spotted with yellow to deep copper.

Summerhay was afraid; he kept with her all the morning, making all sorts of little things to do in her company. But he gradually lost his fear, she seemed so calm now, and his was a nature that bore trouble badly, ever impatient to shake it off. And then, after lunch, the spirit-storm beat up again, with a swiftness that showed once more how deceptive were those lulls, how fearfully deep and lasting the wound. He had simply asked her whether he should try to match something for her when he went up, to-morrow. She was silent a moment, then answered:

"Oh, no, thanks; you'll have other things to do; people to see!"

The tone of her voice, the expression on her face showed him, with a fresh force of revelation, what paralysis had fallen on his life. If he could not reconvince her of his love, he would be in perpetual fear—that he might come back and find her gone, fear that she might even do something terrible to herself. He looked at her with a sort of horror, and, without a word, went out of the room. The feeling that he must hit his head against something was on him once more, and once more he sought to get rid of it by tramping up and down. Great God! Such a little thing, such fearful consequences! All her balance, her sanity almost, destroyed. Was what he had done so very dreadful? He could not help Diana loving him!

In the night, Gyp had said: "You are cruel. Do you think there is any man in the world that I wouldn't hate the sight of if I knew that to see him gave you a moment's pain?" It was true—he felt it was true. But one couldn't hate a girl simply because she loved you; at least he couldn't—not even to save Gyp pain. That was not reasonable, not possible. But did that difference between a man and a woman necessarily mean that Gyp loved him so much more than he loved her? Could she not see things in proportion? See that a man might want, did want, other friendships, even passing moments of passion, and yet could love her just the same? She thought him cruel, called him cruel—what for? Because he had kissed a girl who had kissed him; because he liked talking to her, and—yes, might even lose his head with her. But cruel! He was not! Gyp would always be first with him. He must MAKE her see—but how? Give up everything? Give up—Diana? (Truth is so funny—it will out even in a man's thoughts!) Well, and he could! His feeling was not deep—that was God's truth! But it would be difficult, awkward, brutal to give her up completely! It could be done, though, sooner than that Gyp should think him cruel to her. It could be—should be done!

Only, would it be any use? Would she believe? Would she not always now be suspecting him when he was away from her, whatever he did? Must he then sit down here in inactivity? And a gust of anger with her swept him. Why should she treat him as if he were utterly unreliable? Or—was he? He stood still. When Diana had put her arms round his neck, he could no more have resisted answering her kiss than he could now fly through the window and over those poplar trees. But he was not a blackguard, not cruel, not a liar! How could he have helped it all? The only way would have been never to have answered the girl's first letter, nearly a year ago. How could he foresee? And, since then, all so gradual, and nothing, really, or almost nothing. Again the surge of anger swelled his heart. She must have read the letter which had been under that cursed bust of old Voltaire all those months ago. The poison had been working ever since! And in sudden fury at that miserable mischance, he drove his fist into the bronze face. The bust fell over, and Summerhay looked stupidly at his bruised hand. A silly thing to do! But it had quenched his anger. He only saw Gyp's face now—so pitifully unhappy. Poor darling! What could he do? If only she would believe! And again he had the sickening conviction that whatever he did would be of no avail. He could never get back, was only at the beginning, of a trouble that had no end. And, like a rat in a cage, his mind tried to rush out of this entanglement now at one end, now at the other. Ah, well! Why bruise your head against walls? If it was hopeless—let it go! And, shrugging his shoulders, he went out to the stables, and told old Pettance to saddle Hotspur. While he stood there waiting, he thought: 'Shall I ask her to come?' But he could not stand another bout of misery—must have rest! And mounting, he rode up towards the downs.

Hotspur, the sixteen-hand brown horse, with not a speck of white, that Gyp had ridden hunting the day she first saw Summerhay, was nine years old now. His master's two faults as a horseman—a habit of thrusting, and not too light hands—had encouraged his rather hard mouth, and something had happened in the stables to-day to put him into a queer temper; or perhaps he felt—as horses will—the disturbance raging within his rider. At any rate, he gave an exhibition of his worst qualities, and Summerhay derived perverse pleasure from that waywardness. He rode a good hour up there; then,

hot, with aching arms—for the brute was pulling like the devil!—he made his way back toward home and entered what little Gyp called "the wild," those two rough sedgy fields with the linhay in the corner where they joined. There was a gap in the hedge-growth of the bank between them, and at this he put Hotspur at speed. The horse went over like a bird; and for the first time since Diana's kiss Summerhay felt a moment's joy. He turned him round and sent him at it again, and again Hotspur cleared it beautifully. But the animal's blood was up now. Summerhay could hardly hold him. Muttering: "Oh, you BRUTE, don't pull!" he jagged the horse's mouth. There darted into his mind Gyp's word: "Cruel!" And, viciously, in one of those queer nerve-crises that beset us all, he struck the pulling horse.

They were cantering toward the corner where the fields joined, and suddenly he was aware that he could no more hold the beast than if a steam-engine had been under him. Straight at the linhay Hotspur dashed, and Summerhay thought: "My God! He'll kill himself!" Straight at the old stone linhay, covered by the great ivy bush. Right at it—into it! Summerhay ducked his head. Not low enough—the ivy concealed a beam! A sickening crash! Torn backward out of the saddle, he fell on his back in a pool of leaves and mud. And the horse, slithering round the linhay walls, checked in his own length, unhurt, snorting, frightened, came out, turning his wild eyes on his master, who never stirred, then trotted back into the field, throwing up his head.

X

When, at her words, Summerhay went out of the room, Gyp's heart sank. All the morning she had tried so hard to keep back her despairing jealousy, and now at the first reminder had broken down again. It was beyond her strength! To live day after day knowing that he, up in London, was either seeing that girl or painfully abstaining from seeing her! And then, when he returned, to be to him just what she had been, to show nothing—would it ever be possible? Hardest to bear was what seemed to her the falsity of his words, maintaining that he still really loved her. If he did, how could he hesitate one second? Would not the very thought of the girl be abhorrent to him? He would have shown that, not merely said it among other wild things. Words were no use when they contradicted action. She, who loved with every bit of her, could not grasp that a man can really love and want one woman and yet, at the same time, be attracted by another.

That sudden fearful impulse of the morning to make away with herself and end it for them both recurred so vaguely that it hardly counted in her struggles; the conflict centred now round the question whether life would be less utterly miserable if she withdrew from him and went back to Mildenhamp. Life without him? That was impossible! Life with him? Just as impossible, it seemed! There comes a point of mental anguish when the alternatives between which one swings, equally hopeless, become each so monstrous that the mind does not really work at all, but rushes helplessly from one to the other, no longer trying to decide, waiting on fate. So in Gyp that Sunday afternoon, doing little things all the time—mending a hole in one of his gloves, brushing and applying ointment to old Ossy, sorting bills and letters.

At five o'clock, knowing little Gyp must soon be back from her walk, and feeling unable to take part in gaiety, she went up and put on her hat. She turned from contemplation of her face with disgust. Since it was no longer the only face for him, what was the use of beauty? She slipped out by the side gate and went down toward the river. The lull was over; the south-west wind had begun sighing through the trees again, and gorgeous clouds were piled up from the horizon into the pale blue. She stood by the river watching its grey stream, edged by a scum of torn-off twigs and floating leaves, watched the wind shivering through the spoiled plume-branches of the willows. And, standing there, she had a sudden longing for her father; he alone could help her—just a little—by his quietness, and his love, by his mere presence.

She turned away and went up the lane again, avoiding the inn and the riverside houses, walking slowly, her head down. And a thought came, her first hopeful thought. Could they not travel—go round the world? Would he give up his work for that—that chance to break the spell? Dared she propose it? But would even that be anything more than a putting-off? If she was not enough for him now, would she not be still less, if his work were cut away? Still, it was a gleam, a gleam in the blackness. She came in at the far end of the fields they called "the wild." A rose-leaf hue tinged the white cloud-banks, which towered away to the east beyond the river; and peeping over that mountain-top was the moon, fleecy and unsubstantial in the flax-blue sky. It was one of nature's moments of wild colour. The oak-trees above the hedgerows had not lost their leaves, and in the darting, rain-washed light from the setting sun, had a sheen of old gold with heart of ivy-green; the hail-stripped beeches flamed with copper; the

russet tufts of the ash-trees glowed. And past Gyp, a single leaf blown off, went soaring, turning over and over, going up on the rising wind, up—up, higher—higher into the sky, till it was lost—away.

The rain had drenched the long grass, and she turned back. At the gate beside the linhay, a horse was standing. It whinnied. Hotspur, saddled, bridled, with no rider! Why? Where—then? Hastily she undid the latch, ran through, and saw Summerhay lying in the mud—on his back, with eyes wide-open, his forehead and hair all blood. Some leaves had dropped on him. God! O God! His eyes had no sight, his lips no breath; his heart did not beat; the leaves had dropped even on his face—in the blood on his poor head. Gyp raised him—stiffened, cold as ice! She gave one cry, and fell, embracing his dead, stiffened body with all her strength, kissing his lips, his eyes, his broken forehead; clasping, warming him, trying to pass life into him; till, at last, she, too, lay still, her lips on his cold lips, her body on his cold body in the mud and the fallen leaves, while the wind crept and rustled in the ivy, and went over with the scent of rain. Close by, the horse, uneasy, put his head down and sniffed at her, then, backing away, neighed, and broke into a wild gallop round the field. . . .

Old Pettance, waiting for Summerhay's return to stable-up for the night, heard that distant neigh and went to the garden gate, screwing up his little eyes against the sunset. He could see a loose horse galloping down there in "the wild," where no horse should be, and thinking: "There now; that artful devil's broke away from the guv'nor! Now I'll 'ave to ketch 'im!" he went back, got some oats, and set forth at the best gait of his stiff-jointed feet. The old horseman characteristically did not think of accidents. The guv'nor had got off, no doubt, to unhitch that heavy gate—the one you had to lift. That 'orse—he was a masterpiece of mischief! His difference with the animal still rankled in a mind that did not easily forgive.

Half an hour later, he entered the lighted kitchen shaking and gasping, tears rolling down his furrowed cheeks into the corners of his gargoyles' mouth, and panted out:

"O, my Gord! Fetch the farmer—fetch an 'urdle! O my Gord! Betty, you and cook—I can't get 'er off him. She don't speak. I felt her—all cold. Come on, you sluts—quick! O my Gord! The poor guv'nor! That 'orse must 'a' galloped into the linhay and killed him. I've see'd the marks on the devil's shoulder where he rubbed it scrapin' round the wall. Come on—come on! Fetch an 'urdle or she'll die there on him in the mud. Put the child to bed and get the doctor, and send a wire to London, to the major, to come sharp. Oh, blarst you all—keep your 'eads! What's the good o' howlin' and blubberin'!"

In the whispering corner of those fields, light from a lantern and the moon fell on the old stone linhay, on the ivy and the broken gate, on the mud, the golden leaves, and the two quiet bodies clasped together. Gyp's consciousness had flown; there seemed no difference between them. And presently, over the rushy grass, a procession moved back in the wind and the moonlight—two hurdles, two men carrying one, two women and a man the other, and, behind, old Pettance and the horse.

XI

When Gyp recovered a consciousness, whose flight had been mercifully renewed with morphia, she was in her bed, and her first drowsy movement was toward her mate. With eyes still closed, she turned, as she was wont, and put out her hand to touch him before she dozed off again. There was no warmth, no substance; through her mind, still away in the mists of morphia, the thoughts passed vague and lonely: 'Ah, yes, in London!' And she turned on her back. London! Something—something up there! She opened her eyes. So the fire had kept in all night! Someone was in a chair there, or—was she dreaming! And suddenly, without knowing why, she began breathing hurriedly in little half-sobbing gasps. The figure moved, turned her face in the firelight. Betty! Gyp closed her eyes. An icy sweat had broken out all over her. A dream! In a whisper, she said:

"Betty!"

The muffled answer came.

"Yes, my darlin'."

"What is it?"

No answer; then a half-choked, "Don't 'ee think—don't 'ee think! Your Daddy'll be here directly, my sweetie!"

Gyp's eyes, wide open, passed from the firelight and that rocking figure to the little chink of light that was hardly light as yet, coming in at one corner of the curtain. She was remembering. Her tongue stole out and passed over her lips; beneath the bedclothes she folded both her hands tight across her heart. Then she was not dead with him—not dead! Not gone back with him into the ground—not—And suddenly there flickered in her a flame of maniacal hatred. They were keeping her alive! A writhing smile forced its way up on to her parched lips.

"Betty, I'm so thirsty—so thirsty. Get me a cup of tea."

The stout form heaved itself from the chair and came toward the bed.

"Yes, my lovey, at once. It'll do you good. That's a brave girl."

"Yes."

The moment the door clicked to, Gyp sprang up. Her veins throbbed; her whole soul was alive with cunning. She ran to the wardrobe, seized her long fur coat, slipped her bare feet into her slippers, wound a piece of lace round her head, and opened the door. All dark and quiet! Holding her breath, stifling the sound of her feet, she glided down the stairs, slipped back the chain of the front door, opened it, and fled. Like a shadow she passed across the grass, out of the garden gate, down the road under the black dripping trees. The beginning of light was mixing its grey hue into the darkness; she could just see her feet among the puddles on the road. She heard the grinding and whirring of a motor-car on its top gear approaching up the hill, and cowered away against the hedge. Its light came searching along, picking out with a mysterious momentary brightness the bushes and tree-trunks, making the wet road gleam. Gyp saw the chauffeur turn his head back at her, then the car's body passed up into darkness, and its tail-light was all that was left to see. Perhaps that car was going to the Red House with her father, the doctor, somebody, helping to keep her alive! The maniacal hate flared up in her again; she flew on. The light grew; a man with a dog came out of a gate she had passed, and called "Hallo!" She did not turn her head. She had lost her slippers, and ran with bare feet, unconscious of stones, or the torn-off branches strewn the road, making for the lane that ran right down to the river, a little to the left of the inn, the lane of yesterday, where the bank was free.

She turned into the lane; dimly, a hundred or more yards away, she could see the willows, the width of lighter grey that was the river. The river—"Away, my rolling river!"—the river—and the happiest hours of all her life! If he were anywhere, she would find him there, where he had sung, and lain with his head on her breast, and swum and splashed about her; where she had dreamed, and seen beauty, and loved him so! She reached the bank. Cold and grey and silent, swifter than yesterday, the stream was flowing by, its dim far shore brightening slowly in the first break of dawn. And Gyp stood motionless, drawing her breath in gasps after her long run; her knees trembled; gave way. She sat down on the wet grass, clasping her arms round her drawn-up legs, rocking herself to and fro, and her loosened hair fell over her face. The blood beat in her ears; her heart felt suffocated; all her body seemed on fire, yet numb. She sat, moving her head up and down—as the head of one moves that is gasping her last—waiting for breath—breath and strength to let go life, to slip down into the grey water. And that queer apartness from self, which is the property of fever, came on her, so that she seemed to see herself sitting there, waiting, and thought: 'I shall see myself dead, floating among the reeds. I shall see the birds wondering above me!' And, suddenly, she broke into a storm of dry sobbing, and all things vanished from her, save just the rocking of her body, the gasping of her breath, and the sound of it in her ears. Her boy—her boy—and his poor hair! "Away, my rolling river!" Swaying over, she lay face down, clasping at the wet grass and the earth.

The sun rose, laid a pale bright streak along the water, and hid himself again. A robin twittered in the willows; a leaf fell on her bare ankle.

Winton, who had been hunting on Saturday, had returned to town on Sunday by the evening tram, and gone straight to his club for some supper. There falling asleep over his cigar, he had to be awakened when they desired to close the club for the night. It was past two when he reached Bury Street and found a telegram.

"Something dreadful happened to Mr. Summerhay. Come quick.—BETTY."

Never had he so cursed the loss of his hand as during the time that followed, when Markey had to dress, help his master, pack bags, and fetch a taxi equipped for so long a journey. At half-past three they started. The whole way down, Winton, wrapped in his fur coat, sat a little forward on his seat, ready to put his head through the window and direct the driver. It was a wild night, and he would not let Markey, whose chest was not strong, go outside to act as guide. Twice that silent one, impelled by feelings too strong even for his respectful taciturnity, had spoken.

"That'll be bad for Miss Gyp, sir."

"Bad, yes—terrible."

And later:

"D'you think it means he's dead, sir?"

Winton answered sombrely:

"God knows, Markey! We must hope for the best."

Dead! Could Fate be cruel enough to deal one so soft and loving such a blow? And he kept saying to himself: "Courage. Be ready for the worst. Be ready."

But the figures of Betty and a maid at the open garden gate, in the breaking darkness, standing there wringing their hands, were too much for his stoicism. Leaping out, he cried:

"What is it, woman? Quick!"

"Oh, sir! My dear's gone. I left her a moment to get her a cup of tea. And she's run out in the cold!"

Winton stood for two seconds as if turned to stone. Then, taking Betty by the shoulder, he asked quietly:

"What happened to HIM?"

Betty could not answer, but the maid said:

"The horse killed him at that linhay, sir, down in 'the wild.' And the mistress was unconscious till quarter of an hour ago."

"Which way did she go?"

"Out here, sir; the door and the gate was open—can't tell which way."

Through Winton flashed one dreadful thought: The river!

"Turn the cab round! Stay in, Markey! Betty and you, girl, go down to 'the wild,' and search there at once. Yes? What is it?"

The driver was leaning out.

"As we came up the hill, sir, I see a lady or something in a long dark coat with white on her head, against the hedge."

"Right! Drive down again sharp, and use your eyes."

At such moments, thought is impossible, and a feverish use of every sense takes its place. But of thought there was no need, for the gardens of villas and the inn blocked the river at all but one spot. Winton stopped the car where the narrow lane branched down to the bank, and jumping out, ran. By instinct he ran silently on the grass edge, and Markey, imitating, ran behind. When he came in sight of a black shape lying on the bank, he suffered a moment of intense agony, for he thought it was just a dark garment thrown away. Then he saw it move, and, holding up his hand for Markey to stand still, walked on alone, tiptoeing in the grass, his heart swelling with a sort of rapture. Stealthily moving round between that prostrate figure and the water, he knelt down and said, as best he could, for the husk in his throat:

"My darling!"

Gyp raised her head and stared at him. Her white face, with eyes unnaturally dark and large, and hair falling all over it, was strange to him—the face of grief itself, stripped of the wrappings of form. And he knew not what to do, how to help or comfort, how to save. He could see so clearly in her eyes the look of a wild animal at the moment of its capture, and instinct made him say:

"I lost her just as cruelly, Gyp."

He saw the words reach her brain, and that wild look waver. Stretching out his arm, he drew her close to him till her cheek was against his, her shaking body against him, and kept murmuring:

"For my sake, Gyp; for my sake!"

When, with Markey's aid, he had got her to the cab, they took her, not back to the house, but to the inn. She was in high fever, and soon delirious. By noon, Aunt Rosamund and Mrs. Markey, summoned by telegram, had arrived; and the whole inn was taken lest there should be any noise to disturb her.

At five o'clock, Winton was summoned downstairs to the little so-called reading-room. A tall woman was standing at the window, shading her eyes with the back of a gloved hand. Though they had lived so long within ten miles of each other he only knew Lady Summerhay by sight, and he waited for the poor woman to speak first. She said in a low voice:

"There is nothing to say; only, I thought I must see you. How is she?"

"Delirious."

They stood in silence a full minute, before she whispered:

"My poor boy! Did you see him—his forehead?" Her lips quivered. "I will take him back home." And tears rolled, one after the other, slowly down her flushed face under her veil. Poor woman! Poor woman! She had turned to the window, passing her handkerchief up under the veil, staring out at the little strip of darkening lawn, and Winton, too, stared out into that mournful daylight. At last, he said:

"I will send you all his things, except—except anything that might help my poor girl."

She turned quickly.

"And so it's ended like this! Major Winton, is there anything behind—were they really happy?"

Winton looked straight at her and answered:

"Ah, too happy!"

Without a quiver, he met those tear-darkened, dilated eyes straining at his; with a heavy sigh, she once more turned away, and, brushing her handkerchief across her face, drew down her veil.

It was not true—he knew from the mutterings of Gyp's fever—but no one, not even Summerhay's mother, should hear a whisper if he could help it. At the door, he murmured:

"I don't know whether my girl will get through, or what she will do after. When Fate hits, she hits too hard. And you! Good-bye."

Lady Summerhay pressed his outstretched hand.

"Good-bye," she said, in a strangled voice. "I wish you—good-bye." Then, turning abruptly, she hastened away.

Winton went back to his guardianship upstairs.

In the days that followed, when Gyp, robbed of memory, hung between life and death, Winton hardly left her room, that low room with creepered windows whence the river could be seen, gliding down under the pale November sunshine or black beneath the stars. He would watch it, fascinated, as one sometimes watches the relentless sea. He had snatched her as by a miracle from that snaky river.

He had refused to have a nurse. Aunt Rosamund and Mrs. Markey were skilled in sickness, and he could not bear that a strange person should listen to those delirious mutterings. His own part of the nursing was just to sit there and keep her secrets from the others—if he could. And he grudged every minute away from his post. He would stay for hours, with eyes fixed on her face. No one could supply so well as he just that coherent thread of the familiar, by which the fevered, without knowing it, perhaps find their way a little in the dark mazes where they wander. And he would think of her as she used to be—well and happy—adopting unconsciously the methods of those mental and other scientists whom he looked upon as quacks.

He was astonished by the number of inquiries, even people whom he had considered enemies left cards or sent their servants, forcing him to the conclusion that people of position are obliged to reserve their human kindness for those as good as dead. But the small folk touched him daily by their genuine concern for her whose grace and softness had won their hearts. One morning he received a letter forwarded from Bury Street.

"DEAR MAJOR WINTON,

"I have read a paragraph in the paper about poor Mr. Summerhay's death. And, oh, I feel so sorry for her! She was so good to me; I do feel it most dreadfully. If you think she would like to know how we all feel for her, you would tell her, wouldn't you? I do think it's cruel.

"Very faithfully yours,

"DAPHNE WING."

So they knew Summerhay's name—he had not somehow expected that. He did not answer, not knowing what to say.

During those days of fever, the hardest thing to bear was the sound of her rapid whisperings and mutterings—incoherent phrases that said so little and told so much. Sometimes he would cover his ears, to avoid hearing of that long stress of mind at which he had now and then glimpsed. Of the actual tragedy, her wandering spirit did not seem conscious; her lips were always telling the depth of her love, always repeating the dread of losing his; except when they would give a whispering laugh, uncanny and enchanting, as at some gleam of perfect happiness. Those little laughs were worst of all to hear; they never failed to bring tears into his eyes. But he drew a certain gruesome comfort from the conclusion slowly forced on him, that Summerhay's tragic death had cut short a situation which might have had an even more tragic issue. One night in the big chair at the side of her bed, he woke from a doze to see her eyes fixed on him. They were different; they saw, were her own eyes again. Her lips moved.

"Dad."

"Yes, my pet."

"I remember everything."

At that dreadful little saying, Winton leaned forward and put his lips to her hand, that lay outside the clothes.

"Where is he buried?"

"At Widrington."

"Yes."

It was rather a sigh than a word and, raising his head, Winton saw her eyes closed again. Now that the fever had gone, the white transparency of her cheeks and forehead against the dark lashes and hair was too startling. Was it a living face, or was its beauty that of death?

He bent over. She was breathing—asleep.

XII

The return to Mildenhams was made by easy stages nearly two months after Summerhay's death, on New Year's day—Mildenhams, dark, smelling the same, full of ghosts of the days before love began. For little Gyp, more than five years old now, and beginning to understand life, this was the pleasantest home yet. In watching her becoming the spirit of the place, as she herself had been when a child, Gyp found rest at times, a little rest. She had not picked up much strength, was shadowy as yet, and if her face was taken unawares, it was the saddest face one could see. Her chief preoccupation was not being taken unawares. Alas! To Winton, her smile was even sadder. He was at his wits' end about her that winter and spring. She obviously made the utmost effort to keep up, and there was nothing to do but watch and wait. No use to force the pace. Time alone could heal—perhaps. Meanwhile, he turned to little Gyp, so that they became more or less inseparable.

Spring came and passed. Physically, Gyp grew strong again, but since their return to Mildenhams, she had never once gone outside the garden, never once spoken of The Red House, never once of Summerhay. Winton had hoped that warmth and sunlight would bring some life to her spirit, but it did not seem to. Not that she cherished her grief, appeared, rather, to do all in her power to forget and mask it. She only had what used to be called a broken heart. Nothing to be done. Little Gyp, who had been told that "Barn" had gone away for ever, and that she must "never speak of him for fear of making Mum sad," would sometimes stand and watch her mother with puzzled gravity. She once

remarked uncannily to Winton:

"Mum doesn't live with us, Grandy; she lives away somewhere, I think. Is it with Baryn?"

Winton stared, and answered:

"Perhaps it is, sweetheart; but don't say that to anybody but me. Don't ever talk of Baryn to anyone else."

"Yes, I know; but where is he, Grandy?"

What could Winton answer? Some imbecility with the words "very far" in it; for he had not courage to broach the question of death, that mystery so hopelessly beyond the grasp of children, and of himself—and others.

He rode a great deal with the child, who, like her mother before her, was never so happy as in the saddle; but to Gyp he did not dare suggest it. She never spoke of horses, never went to the stables, passed all the days doing little things about the house, gardening, and sitting at her piano, sometimes playing a little, sometimes merely looking at the keys, her hands clasped in her lap. This was early in the fateful summer, before any as yet felt the world-tremors, or saw the Veil of the Temple rending and the darkness beginning to gather. Winton had no vision of the coil above the dark eyes of his loved one, nor of himself in a strange brown garb, calling out old familiar words over barrack-squares. He often thought: 'If only she had something to take her out of herself!'

In June he took his courage in both hands and proposed a visit to London. To his surprise, she acquiesced without hesitation. They went up in Whit-week. While they were passing Widrington, he forced himself to an unnatural spurt of talk; and it was not till fully quarter of an hour later that, glancing stealthily round his paper, he saw her sitting motionless, her face turned to the fields and tears rolling down it. And he dared not speak, dared not try to comfort her. She made no sound, the muscles of her face no movement; only, those tears kept rolling down. And, behind his paper, Winton's eyes narrowed and retreated; his face hardened till the skin seemed tight drawn over the bones, and every inch of him quivered.

The usual route from the station to Bury Street was "up," and the cab went by narrow by-streets, town lanes where the misery of the world is on show, where ill-looking men, draggled and over-driven women, and the jaunty ghosts of little children in gutters and on doorsteps proclaim, by every feature of their clay-coloured faces and every movement of their unfed bodies, the post-datement of the millennium; where the lean and smutted houses have a look of dissolution indefinitely put off, and there is no more trace of beauty than in a sewer. Gyp, leaning forward, looked out, as one does after a long sea voyage; Winton felt her hand slip into his and squeeze it hard.

That evening after dinner—in the room he had furnished for her mother, where the satinwood chairs, the little Jacobean bureau, the old brass candelabra were still much as they had been just on thirty years ago—she said:

"Dad, I've been thinking. Would you mind if I could make a sort of home at Mildenhamp where poor children could come to stay and get good air and food? There are such thousands of them."

Strangely moved by this, the first wish he had heard her express since the tragedy, Winton took her hand, and, looking at it as if for answer to his question, said:

"My dear, are, you strong enough?"

"Quite. There's nothing wrong with me now except here." She drew his hand to her and pressed it against her heart. "What's given, one can't get back. I can't help it; I would if I could. It's been so dreadful for you. I'm so sorry." Winton made an unintelligible sound, and she went on: "If I had them to see after, I shouldn't be able to think so much; the more I had to do the better. Good for our gipsy-bird, too, to have them there. I should like to begin it at once."

Winton nodded. Anything that she felt could do her good—anything!

"Yes, yes," he said; "I quite see—you could use the two old cottages to start with, and we can easily run up anything you want."

"Only let me do it all, won't you?"

At that touch of her old self, Winton smiled. She should do everything, pay for everything, bring a whole street of children down, if it would give her any comfort!

"Rosamund'll help you find 'em," he muttered. "She's first-rate at all that sort of thing." Then, looking at her fixedly, he added: "Courage, my soul; it'll all come back some day."

Gyp forced herself to smile. Watching her, he understood only too well the child's saying: "Mum lives away somewhere, I think."

Suddenly, she said, very low:

"And yet I wouldn't have been without it."

She was sitting, her hands clasped in her lap, two red spots high in her cheeks, her eyes shining strangely, the faint smile still on her lips. And Winton, staring with narrowed eyes, thought: 'Love! Beyond measure—beyond death—it nearly kills. But one wouldn't have been without it. Why?'

Three days later, leaving Gyp with his sister, he went back to Mildenhams to start the necessary alterations in the cottages. He had told no one he was coming, and walked up from the station on a perfect June day, bright and hot. When he turned through the drive gate, into the beech-tree avenue, the leaf-shadows were thick on the ground, with golden gleams of the invincible sunlight thrusting their way through. The grey boles, the vivid green leaves, those glistening sun-shafts through the shade entranced him, coming from the dusty road. Down in the very middle of the avenue, a small, white figure was standing, as if looking out for him. He heard a shrill shout.

"Oh, Grandy, you've come back—you've come back! What FUN!"

Winton took her curls in his hand, and, looking into her face, said:

"Well, my gipsy-bird, will you give me one of these?"

Little Gyp looked at him with flying eyes, and, hugging his legs, answered furiously:

"Yes; because I love you. PULL!" "Yes; because I love you. PULL!"

THE END.

VILLA RUBEIN

Contents:

Villa Rubein
A Man of Devon
A Knight
Salvation of a Forsyte
The Silence

VILLA RUBEIN

PREFACE

Writing not long ago to my oldest literary friend, I expressed in a moment of heedless sentiment the wish that we might have again one of our talks of long-past days, over the purposes and methods of our art. And my friend, wiser than I, as he has always been, replied with this doubting phrase "Could we recapture the zest of that old time?"

I would not like to believe that our faith in the value of imaginative art has diminished, that we think

it less worth while to struggle for glimpses of truth and for the words which may pass them on to other eyes; or that we can no longer discern the star we tried to follow; but I do fear, with him, that half a lifetime of endeavour has dulled the exuberance which kept one up till morning discussing the ways and means of aesthetic achievement. We have discovered, perhaps with a certain finality, that by no talk can a writer add a cubit to his stature, or change the temperament which moulds and colours the vision of life he sets before the few who will pause to look at it. And so—the rest is silence, and what of work we may still do will be done in that dogged muteness which is the lot of advancing years.

Other times, other men and modes, but not other truth. Truth, though essentially relative, like Einstein's theory, will never lose its ever-new and unique quality-perfect proportion; for Truth, to the human consciousness at least, is but that vitally just relation of part to whole which is the very condition of life itself. And the task before the imaginative writer, whether at the end of the last century or all these aeons later, is the presentation of a vision which to eye and ear and mind has the implicit proportions of Truth.

I confess to have always looked for a certain flavour in the writings of others, and craved it for my own, believing that all true vision is so coloured by the temperament of the seer, as to have not only the just proportions but the essential novelty of a living thing for, after all, no two living things are alike. A work of fiction should carry the hall mark of its author as surely as a Goya, a Daumier, a Velasquez, and a Mathew Maris, should be the unmistakable creations of those masters. This is not to speak of tricks and manners which lend themselves to that facile elf, the caricaturist, but of a certain individual way of seeing and feeling. A young poet once said of another and more popular poet: "Oh! yes, but he cuts no ice." And, when one came to think of it, he did not; a certain flabbiness of spirit, a lack of temperament, an absence, perhaps, of the ironic, or passionate, view, insubstantiated his work; it had no edge—just a felicity which passed for distinction with the crowd.

Let me not be understood to imply that a novel should be a sort of sandwich, in which the author's mood or philosophy is the slice of ham. One's demand is for a far more subtle impregnation of flavour; just that, for instance, which makes De Maupassant a more poignant and fascinating writer than his master Flaubert, Dickens and Thackeray more living and permanent than George Eliot or Trollope. It once fell to my lot to be the preliminary critic of a book on painting, designed to prove that the artist's sole function was the impersonal elucidation of the truths of nature. I was regretfully compelled to observe that there were no such things as the truths of Nature, for the purposes of art, apart from the individual vision of the artist. Seer and thing seen, inextricably involved one with the other, form the texture of any masterpiece; and I, at least, demand therefrom a distinct impression of temperament. I never saw, in the flesh, either De Maupassant or Tchekov—those masters of such different methods entirely devoid of didacticism—but their work leaves on me a strangely potent sense of personality. Such subtle intermingling of seer with thing seen is the outcome only of long and intricate brooding, a process not too favoured by modern life, yet without which we achieve little but a fluent chaos of clever insignificant impressions, a kind of glorified journalism, holding much the same relation to the deeply-impregnated work of Turgenev, Hardy, and Conrad, as a film bears to a play.

Speaking for myself, with the immodesty required of one who hazards an introduction to his own work, I was writing fiction for five years before I could master even its primary technique, much less achieve that union of seer with thing seen, which perhaps begins to show itself a little in this volume—binding up the scanty harvests of 1899, 1900, and 1901—especially in the tales: "A Knight," and "Salvation of a Forsyte." Men, women, trees, and works of fiction—very tiny are the seeds from which they spring. I used really to see the "Knight"—in 1896, was it?—sitting in the "Place" in front of the Casino at Monte Carlo; and because his dried-up elegance, his burnt straw hat, quiet courtesy of attitude, and big dog, used to fascinate and intrigue me, I began to imagine his life so as to answer my own questions and to satisfy, I suppose, the mood I was in. I never spoke to him, I never saw him again. His real story, no doubt, was as different from that which I wove around his figure as night from day.

As for Swithin, wild horses will not drag from me confession of where and when I first saw the prototype which became enlarged to his bulky stature. I owe Swithin much, for he first released the satirist in me, and is, moreover, the only one of my characters whom I killed before I gave him life, for it is in "The Man of Property" that Swithin Forsyte more memorably lives.

Ranging beyond this volume, I cannot recollect writing the first words of "The Island Pharisees"—but it would be about August, 1901. Like all the stories in "Villa Rubein," and, indeed, most of my tales, the book originated in the curiosity, philosophic reflections, and unphilosophic emotions roused in me by some single figure in real life. In this case it was Ferrand, whose real name, of course, was not Ferrand, and who died in some "sacred institution" many years ago of a consumption brought on by the conditions of his wandering life. If not "a beloved," he was a true vagabond, and I first met him in the Champs Elysees, just as in "The Pigeon" he describes his meeting with Wellwyn. Though drawn very much from life, he did not in the end turn out very like the Ferrand of real life—the, figures of fiction

soon diverge from their prototypes.

The first draft of "The Island Pharisees" was buried in a drawer; when retrieved the other day, after nineteen years, it disclosed a picaresque string of anecdotes told by Ferrand in the first person. These two-thirds of a book were laid to rest by Edward Garnett's dictum that its author was not sufficiently within Ferrand's skin; and, struggling heavily with laziness and pride, he started afresh in the skin of Shelton. Three times he wrote that novel, and then it was long in finding the eye of Sydney Pawling, who accepted it for Heinemann's in 1904. That was a period of ferment and transition with me, a kind of long awakening to the home truths of social existence and national character. The liquor bubbled too furiously for clear bottling. And the book, after all, became but an introduction to all those following novels which depict—somewhat satirically—the various sections of English "Society" with a more or less capital "S."

Looking back on the long-stretched-out body of one's work, it is interesting to mark the endless duel fought within a man between the emotional and critical sides of his nature, first one, then the other, getting the upper hand, and too seldom fusing till the result has the mellowness of full achievement. One can even tell the nature of one's readers, by their preference for the work which reveals more of this side than of that. My early work was certainly more emotional than critical. But from 1901 came nine years when the critical was, in the main, holding sway. From 1910 to 1918 the emotional again struggled for the upper hand; and from that time on there seems to have been something of a "dead beat." So the conflict goes, by what mysterious tides promoted, I know not.

An author must ever wish to discover a hapless member of the Public who, never yet having read a word of his writing, would submit to the ordeal of reading him right through from beginning to end. Probably the effect could only be judged through an autopsy, but in the remote case of survival, it would interest one so profoundly to see the differences, if any, produced in that reader's character or outlook over life. This, however, is a consummation which will remain devoutly to be wished, for there is a limit to human complaisance. One will never know the exact measure of one's infecting power; or whether, indeed, one is not just a long soporific.

A writer they say, should not favouritise among his creations; but then a writer should not do so many things that he does. This writer, certainly, confesses to having favourites, and of his novels so far he likes best: The Forsyte Series; "The Country House"; "Fraternity"; "The Dark Flower"; and "Five Tales"; believing these to be the works which most fully achieve fusion of seer with thing seen, most subtly disclose the individuality of their author, and best reveal such of truth as has been vouchsafed to him.
JOHN GALSWORTHY.

TO

MY SISTER BLANCHE LILIAN SAUTER

VILLA RUBEIN

I

Walking along the river wall at Botzen, Edmund Dawney said to Alois Harz:
"Would you care to know the family at that pink house, Villa Rubein?"

Harz answered with a smile:

"Perhaps."

"Come with me then this afternoon."

They had stopped before an old house with a blind, deserted look, that stood by itself on the wall; Harz pushed the door open.

"Come in, you don't want breakfast yet. I'm going to paint the river to-day."

He ran up the bare broad stairs, and Dawney followed leisurely, his thumbs hooked in the armholes of his waistcoat, and his head thrown back.

In the attic which filled the whole top story, Harz had pulled a canvas to the window. He was a young man of middle height, square shouldered, active, with an angular face, high cheek-bones, and a strong, sharp chin. His eyes were piercing and steel-blue, his eyebrows very flexible, nose long and thin with a high bridge; and his dark, unparted hair fitted him like a cap. His clothes looked as if he never gave them a second thought.

This room, which served for studio, bedroom, and sitting-room, was bare and dusty. Below the window the river in spring flood rushed down the valley, a stream, of molten bronze. Harz dodged before the canvas like a fencer finding his distance; Dawney took his seat on a packingcase.

"The snows have gone with a rush this year," he drawled. "The Talfer comes down brown, the Eisack comes down blue; they flow into the Etsch and make it green; a parable of the Spring for you, my painter."

Harz mixed his colours.

"I've no time for parables," he said, "no time for anything. If I could be guaranteed to live to ninety-nine, like Titian—he had a chance. Look at that poor fellow who was killed the other day! All that struggle, and then—just at the turn!"

He spoke English with a foreign accent; his voice was rather harsh, but his smile very kindly.

Dawney lit a cigarette.

"You painters," he said, "are better off than most of us. You can strike out your own line. Now if I choose to treat a case out of the ordinary way and the patient dies, I'm ruined."

"My dear Doctor—if I don't paint what the public likes, I starve; all the same I'm going to paint in my own way; in the end I shall come out on top."

"It pays to work in the groove, my friend, until you've made your name; after that—do what you like, they'll lick your boots all the same."

"Ah, you don't love your work."

Dawney answered slowly: "Never so happy as when my hands are full. But I want to make money, to get known, to have a good time, good cigars, good wine. I hate discomfort. No, my boy, I must work it on the usual lines; I don't like it, but I must lump it. One starts in life with some notion of the ideal—it's gone by the board with me. I've got to shove along until I've made my name, and then, my little man—then—"

"Then you'll be soft!"

"You pay dearly for that first period!"

"Take my chance of that; there's no other way."

"Make one!"

"Humph!"

Harz poised his brush, as though it were a spear:

"A man must do the best in him. If he has to suffer—let him!"

Dawney stretched his large soft body; a calculating look had come into his eyes.

"You're a tough little man!" he said.

"I've had to be tough."

Dawney rose; tobacco smoke was wreathed round his unruffled hair.

"Touching Villa Rubein," he said, "shall I call for you? It's a mixed household, English mostly—very decent people."

"No, thank you. I shall be painting all day. Haven't time to know the sort of people who expect one to change one's clothes."

"As you like; ta-to!" And, puffing out his chest, Dawney vanished through a blanket looped across the doorway.

Harz set a pot of coffee on a spirit-lamp, and cut himself some bread. Through the window the freshness of the morning came; the scent of sap and blossom and young leaves; the scent of earth, and the mountains freed from winter; the new flights and songs of birds; all the odorous, enchanted, restless Spring.

There suddenly appeared through the doorway a white rough-haired terrier dog, black-marked about the face, with shaggy tan eyebrows. He sniffed at Harz, showed the whites round his eyes, and uttered a sharp bark. A young voice called:

"Scruff! Thou naughty dog!" Light footsteps were heard on the stairs; from the distance a thin, high voice called:

"Greta! You mustn't go up there!"

A little girl of twelve, with long fair hair under a wide-brimmed hat, slipped in.

Her blue eyes opened wide, her face flushed up. That face was not regular; its cheek-bones were rather prominent, the nose was flattish; there was about it an air, innocent, reflecting, quizzical, shy.

"Oh!" she said.

Harz smiled: "Good-morning! This your dog?"

She did not answer, but looked at him with soft bewilderment; then running to the dog seized him by the collar.

"Scr-ruff! Thou naughty dog—the baddest dog!" The ends of her hair fell about him; she looked up at Harz, who said:

"Not at all! Let me give him some bread."

"Oh no! You must not—I will beat him—and tell him he is bad; then he shall not do such things again. Now he is sulky; he looks so always when he is sulky. Is this your home?"

"For the present; I am a visitor."

"But I think you are of this country, because you speak like it."

"Certainly, I am a Tyroler."

"I have to talk English this morning, but I do not like it very much —because, also I am half Austrian, and I like it best; but my sister, Christian, is all English. Here is Miss Naylor; she shall be very angry with me."

And pointing to the entrance with a rosy-tipped forefinger, she again looked ruefully at Harz.

There came into the room with a walk like the hopping of a bird an elderly, small lady, in a grey serge dress, with narrow bands of claret-coloured velveteen; a large gold cross dangled from a steel chain on her chest; she nervously twisted her hands, clad in black kid gloves, rather white about the seams.

Her hair was prematurely grey; her quick eyes brown; her mouth twisted at one corner; she held her face, kind-looking, but long and narrow, rather to one side, and wore on it a look of apology. Her quick sentences sounded as if she kept them on strings, and wanted to draw them back as soon as she had let them forth.

"Greta, how can, you do such things? I don't know what your father would say! I am sure I don't know how to—so extraordinary—"

"Please!" said Harz.

"You must come at once—so very sorry—so awkward!" They were standing in a ring: Harz with his eyebrows working up and down; the little lady fidgeting her parasol; Greta, flushed and pouting, her

eyes all dewy, twisting an end of fair hair round her finger.

"Oh, look!" The coffee had boiled over. Little brown streams trickled spluttering from the pan; the dog, with ears laid back and tail tucked in, went scurrying round the room. A feeling of fellowship fell on them at once.

"Along the wall is our favourite walk, and Scruff—so awkward, so unfortunate—we did not think any one lived here—the shutters are cracked, the paint is peeling off so dreadfully. Have you been long in Botzen? Two months? Fancy! You are not English? You are Tyrolese? But you speak English so well—there for seven years? Really? So fortunate!—It is Greta's day for English."

Miss Naylor's eyes darted bewildered glances at the roof where the crossing of the beams made such deep shadows; at the litter of brushes, tools, knives, and colours on a table made out of packing-cases; at the big window, innocent of glass, and flush with the floor, whence dangled a bit of rusty chain—relic of the time when the place had been a store-loft; her eyes were hastily averted from an unfinished figure of the nude.

Greta, with feet crossed, sat on a coloured blanket, dabbling her finger in a little pool of coffee, and gazing up at Harz. And he thought: 'I should like to paint her like that. "A forget-me-not."' "

He took out his chalks to make a sketch of her.

"Shall you show me?" cried out Greta, scrambling to her feet.

"'Will,' Greta—'will'; how often must I tell you? I think we should be going—it is very late—your father—so very kind of you, but I think we should be going. Scruff!" Miss Naylor gave the floor two taps. The terrier backed into a plaster cast which came down on his tail, and sent him flying through the doorway. Greta followed swiftly, crying:

"Ach! poor Scrufee!"

Miss Naylor crossed the room; bowing, she murmured an apology, and also disappeared.

Harz was left alone, his guests were gone; the little girl with the fair hair and the eyes like forget-me-nots, the little lady with kindly gestures and bird-like walk, the terrier. He looked round him; the room seemed very empty. Gnawing his moustache, he muttered at the fallen cast.

Then taking up his brush, stood before his picture, smiling and frowning. Soon he had forgotten it all in his work.

II

It was early morning four days later, and Harz was loitering homewards. The shadows of the clouds passing across the vines were vanishing over the jumbled roofs and green-topped spires of the town. A strong sweet wind was blowing from the mountains, there was a stir in the branches of the trees, and flakes of the late blossom were drifting down. Amongst the soft green pods of a kind of poplar chafers buzzed, and numbers of their little brown bodies were strewn on the path.

He passed a bench where a girl sat sketching. A puff of wind whirled her drawing to the ground; Harz ran to pick it up. She took it from him with a bow; but, as he turned away, she tore the sketch across.

"Ah!" he said; "why did you do that?"

This girl, who stood with a bit of the torn sketch in either hand, was slight and straight; and her face earnest and serene. She gazed at Harz with large, clear, greenish eyes; her lips and chin were defiant, her forehead tranquil.

"I don't like it."

"Will you let me look at it? I am a painter."

"It isn't worth looking at, but—if you wish—"

He put the two halves of the sketch together.

"You see!" she said at last; "I told you."

Harz did not answer, still looking at the sketch. The girl frowned.

Harz asked her suddenly:

"Why do you paint?"

She coloured, and said:

"Show me what is wrong."

"I cannot show you what is wrong, there is nothing wrong—but why do you paint?"

"I don't understand."

Harz shrugged his shoulders.

"You've no business to do that," said the girl in a hurt voice; "I want to know."

"Your heart is not in it," said Harz.

She looked at him, startled; her eyes had grown thoughtful.

"I suppose that is it. There are so many other things—"

"There should be nothing else," said Harz.

She broke in: "I don't want always to be thinking of myself. Suppose—"

"Ah! When you begin supposing!"

The girl confronted him; she had torn the sketch again.

"You mean that if it does not matter enough, one had better not do it at all. I don't know if you are right—I think you are."

There was the sound of a nervous cough, and Harz saw behind him his three visitors—Miss Naylor offering him her hand; Greta, flushed, with a bunch of wild flowers, staring intently in his face; and the terrier, sniffing at his trousers.

Miss Naylor broke an awkward silence.

"We wondered if you would still be here, Christian. I am sorry to interrupt you—I was not aware that you knew Mr. Herr—"

"Harz is my name—we were just talking"

"About my sketch. Oh, Greta, you do tickle! Will you come and have breakfast with us to-day, Herr Harz? It's our turn, you know."

Harz, glancing at his dusty clothes, excused himself.

But Greta in a pleading voice said: "Oh! do come! Scruff likes you. It is so dull when there is nobody for breakfast but ourselves."

Miss Naylor's mouth began to twist. Harz hurriedly broke in:

"Thank you. I will come with pleasure; you don't mind my being dirty?"

"Oh no! we do not mind; then we shall none of us wash, and afterwards I shall show you my rabbits."

Miss Naylor, moving from foot to foot, like a bird on its perch, exclaimed:

"I hope you won't regret it, not a very good meal—the girls are so impulsive—such informal invitation; we shall be very glad."

But Greta pulled softly at her sister's sleeve, and Christian, gathering her things, led the way.

Harz followed in amazement; nothing of this kind had come into his life before. He kept shyly glancing at the girls; and, noting the speculative innocence in Greta's eyes, he smiled. They soon came to two great poplar-trees, which stood, like sentinels, one on either side of an unweeded gravel walk leading through lilac bushes to a house painted dull pink, with green-shuttered windows, and a roof of

greenish slate. Over the door in faded crimson letters were written the words, "Villa Rubein."

"That is to the stables," said Greta, pointing down a path, where some pigeons were sunning themselves on a wall. "Uncle Nic keeps his horses there: Countess and Cuckoo—his horses begin with C, because of Chris—they are quite beautiful. He says he could drive them to Kingdom-Come and they would not turn their hair. Bow, and say 'Good-morning' to our house!"

Harz bowed.

"Father said all strangers should, and I think it brings good luck." From the doorstep she looked round at Harz, then ran into the house.

A broad, thick-set man, with stiff, brushed-up hair, a short, brown, bushy beard parted at the chin, a fresh complexion, and blue glasses across a thick nose, came out, and called in a bluff voice:

"Ha! my good dears, kiss me quick—prrt! How goes it then this morning? A good walk, hein?" The sound of many loud rapid kisses followed.

"Ha, Fraulein, good!" He became aware of Harz's figure standing in the doorway: "Und der Herr?"

Miss Naylor hurriedly explained.

"Good! An artist! Kommen Sie herein, I am delight. You will breakfast? I too—yes, yes, my dears—I too breakfast with you this morning. I have the hunter's appetite."

Harz, looking at him keenly, perceived him to be of middle height and age, stout, dressed in a loose holland jacket, a very white, starched shirt, and blue silk sash; that he looked particularly clean, had an air of belonging to Society, and exhaled a really fine aroma of excellent cigars and the best hairdresser's essences.

The room they entered was long and rather bare; there was a huge map on the wall, and below it a pair of globes on crooked supports, resembling two inflated frogs erect on their hind legs. In one corner was a cottage piano, close to a writing-table heaped with books and papers; this nook, sacred to Christian, was foreign to the rest of the room, which was arranged with supernatural neatness. A table was laid for breakfast, and the sun-warmed air came in through French windows.

The meal went merrily; Herr Paul von Morawitz was never in such spirits as at table. Words streamed from him. Conversing with Harz, he talked of Art as who should say: "One does not claim to be a connoisseur—pas si bete—still, one has a little knowledge, que diable!" He recommended him a man in the town who sold cigars that were "not so very bad." He consumed porridge, ate an omelette; and bending across to Greta gave her a sounding kiss, muttering: "Kiss me quick!"—an expression he had picked up in a London music-hall, long ago, and considered chic. He asked his daughters' plans, and held out porridge to the terrier, who refused it with a sniff.

"Well," he said suddenly, looking at Miss Naylor, "here is a gentleman who has not even heard our names!"

The little lady began her introductions in a breathless voice.

"Good!" Herr Paul said, puffing out his lips: "Now we know each other!" and, brushing up the ends of his moustaches, he carried off Harz into another room, decorated with pipe-racks, prints of dancing-girls, spittoons, easy-chairs well-seasoned by cigar smoke, French novels, and newspapers.

The household at Villa Rubein was indeed of a mixed and curious nature. Cut on both floors by corridors, the Villa was divided into four divisions; each of which had its separate inhabitants, an arrangement which had come about in the following way:

When old Nicholas Treffry died, his estate, on the boundary of Cornwall, had been sold and divided up among his three surviving children—Nicholas, who was much the eldest, a partner in the well-known firm of Forsyte and Treffry, teamen, of the Strand; Constance, married to a man called Decie; and Margaret, at her father's death engaged to the curate of the parish, John Devorell, who shortly afterwards became its rector. By his marriage with Margaret Treffry the rector had one child called Christian. Soon after this he came into some property, and died, leaving it unfettered to his widow. Three years went by, and when the child was six years old, Mrs. Devorell, still young and pretty, came to live in London with her brother Nicholas. It was there that she met Paul von Morawitz—the last of an old Czech family, who had lived for many hundred years on their estates near Budweiss. Paul had been left an orphan at the age of ten, and without a solitary ancestral acre. Instead of acres, he inherited the faith that nothing was too good for a von Morawitz. In later years his savoir faire enabled him to laugh at faith, but it stayed quietly with him all the same. The absence of acres was of no great consequence,

for through his mother, the daughter of a banker in Vienna, he came into a well-nursed fortune. It befitted a von Morawitz that he should go into the Cavalry, but, unshaped for soldiering, he soon left the Service; some said he had a difference with his Colonel over the quality of food provided during some manoeuvres; others that he had retired because his chargers did not fit his legs, which were, indeed, rather round.

He had an admirable appetite for pleasure; a man-about-town's life suited him. He went his genial, unreflecting, costly way in Vienna, Paris, London. He loved exclusively those towns, and boasted that he was as much at home in one as in another. He combined exuberant vitality with fastidiousness of palate, and devoted both to the acquisition of a special taste in women, weeds, and wines; above all he was blessed with a remarkable digestion. He was thirty when he met Mrs. Devorell; and she married him because he was so very different from anybody she had ever seen. People more dissimilar were never mated. To Paul—accustomed to stage doors—freshness, serene tranquillity, and obvious purity were the baits; he had run through more than half his fortune, too, and the fact that she had money was possibly not overlooked. Be that as it may, he was fond of her; his heart was soft, he developed a domestic side.

Greta was born to them after a year of marriage. The instinct of the "freeman" was, however, not dead in Paul; he became a gambler. He lost the remainder of his fortune without being greatly disturbed. When he began to lose his wife's fortune too things naturally became more difficult. Not too much remained when Nicholas Treffry stepped in, and caused his sister to settle what was left on her daughters, after providing a life-interest for herself and Paul. Losing his supplies, the good man had given up his cards. But the instinct of the "freeman" was still living in his breast; he took to drink. He was never grossly drunk, and rarely very sober. His wife sorrowed over this new passion; her health, already much enfeebled, soon broke down. The doctors sent her to the Tyrol. She seemed to benefit by this, and settled down at Botzen. The following year, when Greta was just ten, she died. It was a shock to Paul. He gave up excessive drinking; became a constant smoker, and lent full rein to his natural domesticity. He was fond of both the girls, but did not at all understand them; Greta, his own daughter, was his favourite. Villa Rubein remained their home; it was cheap and roomy. Money, since Paul became housekeeper to himself, was scarce.

About this time Mrs. Decie, his wife's sister, whose husband had died in the East, returned to England; Paul invited her to come and live with them. She had her own rooms, her own servant; the arrangement suited Paul—it was economically sound, and there was some one always there to take care of the girls. In truth he began to feel the instinct of the "freeman" rising again within him; it was pleasant to run over to Vienna now and then; to play piquet at a Club in Gries, of which he was the shining light; in a word, to go "on the tiles" a little. One could not always mourn—even if a woman were an angel; moreover, his digestion was as good as ever.

The fourth quarter of this Villa was occupied by Nicholas Treffry, whose annual sojourn out of England perpetually surprised himself. Between him and his young niece, Christian, there existed, however, a rare sympathy; one of those affections between the young and old, which, mysteriously born like everything in life, seems the only end and aim to both, till another feeling comes into the younger heart.

Since a long and dangerous illness, he had been ordered to avoid the English winter, and at the commencement of each spring he would appear at Botzen, driving his own horses by easy stages from the Italian Riviera, where he spent the coldest months. He always stayed till June before going back to his London Club, and during all that time he let no day pass without growling at foreigners, their habits, food, drink, and raiment, with a kind of big dog's growling that did nobody any harm. The illness had broken him very much; he was seventy, but looked more. He had a servant, a Luganese, named Dominique, devoted to him. Nicholas Treffry had found him overworked in an hotel, and had engaged him with the caution: "Look—here, Dominique! I swear!" To which Dominique, dark of feature, saturnine and ironical, had only replied: "Tres biens, M'sieur!"

III

Harz and his host sat in leather chairs; Herr Paul's square back was wedged into a cushion, his round legs crossed. Both were smoking, and they eyed each other furtively, as men of different stamp do when first thrown together. The young artist found his host extremely new and disconcerting; in his presence he felt both shy and awkward. Herr Paul, on the other hand, very much at ease, was thinking

indolently:

'Good-looking young fellow—comes of the people, I expect, not at all the manner of the world; wonder what he talks about.'

Presently noticing that Harz was looking at a photograph, he said: "Ah! yes! that was a woman! They are not to be found in these days. She could dance, the little Coralie! Did you ever see such arms? Confess that she is beautiful, hein?"

"She has individuality," said Harz. "A fine type!"

Herr Paul blew out a cloud of smoke.

"Yes," he murmured, "she was fine all over!" He had dropped his eyeglasses, and his full brown eyes, with little crow's-feet at the corners, wandered from his visitor to his cigar.

'He'd be like a Satyr if he wasn't too clean,' thought Harz. 'Put vine leaves in his hair, paint him asleep, with his hands crossed, so!'

"When I am told a person has individuality," Herr Paul was saying in a rich and husky voice, "I generally expect boots that bulge, an umbrella of improper colour; I expect a creature of 'bad form' as they say in England; who will shave some days and some days will not shave; who sometimes smells of India-rubber, and sometimes does not smell, which is discouraging!"

"You do not approve of individuality?" said Harz shortly.

"Not if it means doing, and thinking, as those who know better do not do, or think."

"And who are those who know better?"

"Ah! my dear, you are asking me a riddle? Well, then—Society, men of birth, men of recognised position, men above eccentricity, in a word, of reputation."

Harz looked at him fixedly. "Men who haven't the courage of their own ideas, not even the courage to smell of India-rubber; men who have no desires, and so can spend all their time making themselves flat!"

Herr Paul drew out a red silk handkerchief and wiped his beard. "I assure you, my dear," he said, "it is easier to be flat; it is more respectable to be flat. Himmel! why not, then, be flat?"

"Like any common fellow?"

"Certes; like any common fellow—like me, par exemple!" Herr Paul waved his hand. When he exercised unusual tact, he always made use of a French expression.

Harz flushed. Herr Paul followed up his victory. "Come, come!" he said. "Pass me my men of repute! que diable! we are not anarchists."

"Are you sure?" said Harz.

Herr Paul twisted his moustache. "I beg your pardon," he said slowly. But at this moment the door was opened; a rumbling voice remarked: "Morning, Paul. Who's your visitor?" Harz saw a tall, bulky figure in the doorway.

"Come in," called out Herr Paul. "Let me present to you a new acquaintance, an artist: Herr Harz—Mr. Nicholas Treffry. Psumm bumm! All this introducing is dry work." And going to the sideboard he poured out three glasses of a light, foaming beer.

Mr. Treffry waved it from him: "Not for me," he said: "Wish I could! They won't let me look at it." And walking over, to the window with a heavy tread, which trembled like his voice, he sat down. There was something in his gait like the movements of an elephant's hind legs. He was very tall (it was said, with the customary exaggeration of family tradition, that there never had been a male Treffry under six feet in height), but now he stooped, and had grown stout. There was something at once vast and unobtrusive about his personality.

He wore a loose brown velvet jacket, and waistcoat, cut to show a soft frilled shirt and narrow black ribbon tie; a thin gold chain was looped round his neck and fastened to his fob. His heavy cheeks had folds in them like those in a bloodhound's face. He wore big, drooping, yellow-grey moustaches, which he had a habit of sucking, and a goatee beard. He had long loose ears that might almost have been said

to gap. On his head there was a soft black hat, large in the brim and low in the crown. His grey eyes, heavy-lidded, twinkled under their bushy brows with a queer, kind cynicism. As a young man he had sown many a wild oat; but he had also worked and made money in business; he had, in fact, burned the candle at both ends; but he had never been unready to do his fellows a good turn. He had a passion for driving, and his reckless method of pursuing this art had caused him to be nicknamed: "The notorious Treffry."

Once, when he was driving tandem down a hill with a loose rein, the friend beside him had said: "For all the good you're doing with those reins, Treffry, you might as well throw them on the horses' necks."

"Just so," Treffry had answered. At the bottom of the hill they had gone over a wall into a potato patch. Treffry had broken several ribs; his friend had gone unharmed.

He was a great sufferer now, but, constitutionally averse to being pitied, he had a disconcerting way of humming, and this, together with the shake in his voice, and his frequent use of peculiar phrases, made the understanding of his speech depend at times on intuition rather than intelligence.

The clock began to strike eleven. Harz muttered an excuse, shook hands with his host, and bowing to his new acquaintance, went away. He caught a glimpse of Greta's face against the window, and waved his hand to her. In the road he came on Dawney, who was turning in between the poplars, with thumbs as usual hooked in the armholes of his waistcoat.

"Hallo!" the latter said.

"Doctor!" Harz answered slyly; "the Fates outwitted me, it seems."

"Serve you right," said Dawney, "for your confounded egoism! Wait here till I come out, I shan't be many minutes."

But Harz went on his way. A cart drawn by cream-coloured oxen was passing slowly towards the bridge. In front of the brushwood piled on it two peasant girls were sitting with their feet on a mat of grass—the picture of contentment.

"I'm wasting my time!" he thought. "I've done next to nothing in two months. Better get back to London! That girl will never make a painter!" She would never make a painter, but there was something in her that he could not dismiss so rapidly. She was not exactly beautiful, but she was sympathetic. The brow was pleasing, with dark-brown hair softly turned back, and eyes so straight and shining. The two sisters were very different! The little one was innocent, yet mysterious; the elder seemed as clear as crystal!

He had entered the town, where the arcaded streets exuded their peculiar pungent smell of cows and leather, wood-smoke, wine-casks, and drains. The sound of rapid wheels over the stones made him turn his head. A carriage drawn by red-roan horses was passing at a great pace. People stared at it, standing still, and looking alarmed. It swung from side to side and vanished round a corner. Harz saw Mr. Nicholas Treffry in a long, whitish dust-coat; his Italian servant, perched behind, was holding to the seat-rail, with a nervous grin on his dark face.

'Certainly,' Harz thought, 'there's no getting away from these people this morning—they are everywhere.'

In his studio he began to sort his sketches, wash his brushes, and drag out things he had accumulated during his two months' stay. He even began to fold his blanket door. But suddenly he stopped. Those two girls! Why not try? What a picture! The two heads, the sky, and leaves! Begin tomorrow! Against that window—no, better at the Villa! Call the picture—Spring...!

IV

The wind, stirring among trees and bushes, flung the young leaves skywards. The trembling of their silver linings was like the joyful flutter of a heart at good news. It was one of those Spring mornings when everything seems full of a sweet restlessness—soft clouds chasing fast across the sky; soft scents floating forth and dying; the notes of birds, now shrill and sweet, now hushed in silences; all nature striving for something, nothing at peace.

Villa Rubein withstood the influence of the day, and wore its usual look of rest and isolation. Harz sent in his card, and asked to see "der Herr." The servant, a grey-eyed, clever-looking Swiss with no hair on his face, came back saying:

"Der Herr, mein Herr, is in the Garden gone." Harz followed him.

Herr Paul, a small white flannel cap on his head, gloves on his hands, and glasses on his nose, was watering a rosebush, and humming the serenade from Faust.

This aspect of the house was very different from the other. The sun fell on it, and over a veranda creepers clung and scrambled in long scrolls. There was a lawn, with freshly mown grass; flower-beds were laid out, and at the end of an avenue of young acacias stood an arbour covered with wisteria.

In the east, mountain peaks—fingers of snow—glittered above the mist. A grave simplicity lay on that scene, on the roofs and spires, the valleys and the dreamy hillsides, with their yellow scars and purple bloom, and white cascades, like tails of grey horses swishing in the wind.

Herr Paul held out his hand: "What can we do for you?" he said.

"I have to beg a favour," replied Harz. "I wish to paint your daughters. I will bring the canvas here—they shall have no trouble. I would paint them in the garden when they have nothing else to do."

Herr Paul looked at him dubiously—ever since the previous day he had been thinking: 'Queer bird, that painter—thinks himself the devil of a swell! Looks a determined fellow too!' Now—staring in the painter's face—it seemed to him, on the whole, best if some one else refused this permission.

"With all the pleasure, my dear sir," he said. "Come, let us ask these two young ladies!" and putting down his hose, he led the way towards the arbour, thinking: 'You'll be disappointed, my young conqueror, or I'm mistaken.'

Miss Naylor and the girls were sitting in the shade, reading La Fontaine's fables. Greta, with one eye on her governess, was stealthily cutting a pig out of orange peel.

"Ah! my dear dears!" began Herr Paul, who in the presence of Miss Naylor always paraded his English. "Here is our friend, who has a very flattering request to make; he would paint you, yes—both together, *alfresco*, in the air, in the sunshine, with the birds, the little birds!"

Greta, gazing at Harz, gushed deep pink, and furtively showed him her pig.

Christian said: "Paint us? Oh no!"

She saw Harz looking at her, and added, slowly: "If you really wish it, I suppose we could!" then dropped her eyes.

"Ah!" said Herr Paul raising his brows till his glasses fell from his nose: "And what says Gretchen? Does she want to be handed up to posterities a little peacock along with the other little birds?"

Greta, who had continued staring at the painter, said: "Of—course —I—want—to—be."

"Prrrt!" said Herr Paul, looking at Miss Naylor. The little lady indeed opened her mouth wide, but all that came forth was a tiny squeak, as sometimes happens when one is anxious to say something, and has not arranged beforehand what it shall be.

The affair seemed ended; Harz heaved a sigh of satisfaction. But Herr Paul had still a card to play.

"There is your Aunt," he said; "there are things to be considered—one must certainly inquire—so, we shall see." Kissing Greta loudly on both cheeks, he went towards the house.

"What makes you want to paint us?" Christian asked, as soon as he was gone.

"I think it very wrong," Miss Naylor blurted out.

"Why?" said Harz, frowning.

"Greta is so young—there are lessons—it is such a waste of time!"

His eyebrows twitched: "Ah! You think so!"

"I don't see why it is a waste of time," said Christian quietly; "there are lots of hours when we sit here

and do nothing."

"And it is very dull," put in Greta, with a pout.

"You are rude, Greta," said Miss Naylor in a little rage, pursing her lips, and taking up her knitting.

"I think it seems always rude to speak the truth," said Greta. Miss Naylor looked at her in that concentrated manner with which she was in the habit of expressing displeasure.

But at this moment a servant came, and said that Mrs. Decie would be glad to see Herr Harz. The painter made them a stiff bow, and followed the servant to the house. Miss Naylor and the two girls watched his progress with apprehensive eyes; it was clear that he had been offended.

Crossing the veranda, and passing through an open window hung with silk curtains, Hart entered a cool dark room. This was Mrs. Decie's sanctum, where she conducted correspondence, received her visitors, read the latest literature, and sometimes, when she had bad headaches, lay for hours on the sofa, with a fan, and her eyes closed. There was a scent of sandalwood, a suggestion of the East, a kind of mystery, in here, as if things like chairs and tables were not really what they seemed, but something much less commonplace.

The visitor looked twice, to be quite sure of anything; there were many plants, bead curtains, and a deal of silverwork and china.

Mrs. Decie came forward in the slightly rustling silk which—whether in or out of fashion—always accompanied her. A tall woman, over fifty, she moved as if she had been tied together at the knees. Her face was long, with broad brows, from which her sandy-grey hair was severely waved back; she had pale eyes, and a perpetual, pale, enigmatic smile. Her complexion had been ruined by long residence in India, and might unkindly have been called fawn-coloured. She came close to Harz, keeping her eyes on his, with her head bent slightly forward.

"We are so pleased to know you," she said, speaking in a voice which had lost all ring. "It is charming to find some one in these parts who can help us to remember that there is such a thing as Art. We had Mr. C—here last autumn, such a charming fellow. He was so interested in the native customs and dresses. You are a subject painter, too, I think? Won't you sit down?"

She went on for some time, introducing painters' names, asking questions, skating round the edge of what was personal. And the young man stood before her with a curious little smile fixed on his lips. 'She wants to know whether I'm worth powder and shot,' he thought.

"You wish to paint my nieces?" Mrs. Decie said at last, leaning back on her settee.

"I wish to have that honour," Harz answered with a bow.

"And what sort of picture did you think of?"

"That," said Harz, "is in the future. I couldn't tell you." And he thought: 'Will she ask me if I get my tints in Paris, like the woman Tramper told me of?'

The perpetual pale smile on Mrs. Decie's face seemed to invite his confidence, yet to warn him that his words would be sucked in somewhere behind those broad fine brows, and carefully sorted. Mrs. Decie, indeed, was thinking: 'Interesting young man, regular Bohemian—no harm in that at his age; something Napoleonic in his face; probably has no dress clothes. Yes, should like to see more of him!' She had a fine eye for points of celebrity; his name was unfamiliar, would probably have been scouted by that famous artist Mr. C—, but she felt her instinct urging her on to know him. She was, to do her justice, one of those "lion" finders who seek the animal for pleasure, not for the glory it brings them; she had the courage of her instincts—lion-entities were indispensable to her, but she trusted to divination to secure them; nobody could foist a "lion" on her.

"It will be very nice. You will stay and have some lunch? The arrangements here are rather odd. Such a mixed household—but there is always lunch at two o'clock for any one who likes, and we all dine at seven. You would have your sittings in the afternoons, perhaps? I should so like to see your sketches. You are using the old house on the wall for studio; that is so original of you!"

Harz would not stay to lunch, but asked if he might begin work that afternoon; he left a little suffocated by the sandalwood and sympathy of this sphinx-like woman.

Walking home along the river wall, with the singing of the larks and thrushes, the rush of waters, the humming of the chafers in his ears, he felt that he would make something fine of this subject. Before his eyes the faces of the two girls continually started up, framed by the sky, with young leaves

guttering against their cheeks.

V

Three days had passed since Harz began his picture, when early in the morning, Greta came from Villa Rubein along the river dyke and sat down on a bench from which the old house on the wall was visible. She had not been there long before Harz came out.

"I did not knock," said Greta, "because you would not have heard, and it is so early, so I have been waiting for you a quarter of an hour."

Selecting a rosebud, from some flowers in her hand, she handed it to him. "That is my first rosebud this year," she said; "it is for you because you are painting me. To-day I am thirteen, Herr Harz; there is not to be a sitting, because it is my birthday; but, instead, we are all going to Meran to see the play of Andreas Hofer. You are to come too, please; I am here to tell you, and the others shall be here directly."

Harz bowed: "And who are the others?"

"Christian, and Dr. Edmund, Miss Naylor, and Cousin Teresa. Her husband is ill, so she is sad, but to-day she is going to forget that. It is not good to be always sad, is it, Herr Harz?"

He laughed: "You could not be."

Greta answered gravely: "Oh yes, I could. I too am often sad. You are making fun. You are not to make fun to-day, because it is my birthday. Do you think growing up is nice, Herr Harz?"

"No, Fraulein Greta, it is better to have all the time before you."

They walked on side by side.

"I think," said Greta, "you are very much afraid of losing time. Chris says that time is nothing."

"Time is everything," responded Harz.

"She says that time is nothing, and thought is everything," Greta murmured, rubbing a rose against her cheek, "but I think you cannot have a thought unless you have the time to think it in. There are the others! Look!"

A cluster of sunshades on the bridge glowed for a moment and was lost in shadow.

"Come," said Harz, "let's join them!"

At Meran, under Schloss Tirol, people were streaming across the meadows into the open theatre. Here were tall fellows in mountain dress, with leather breeches, bare knees, and hats with eagles' feathers; here were fruit-sellers, burghers and their wives, mountebanks, actors, and every kind of visitor. The audience, packed into an enclosure of high boards, sweltered under the burning sun. Cousin Teresa, tall and thin, with hard, red cheeks, shaded her pleasant eyes with her hand.

The play began. It depicted the rising in the Tyrol of 1809: the village life, dances and yodelling; murmurings and exhortations, the warning beat of drums; then the gathering, with flintlocks, pitchforks, knives; the battle and victory; the homecoming, and festival. Then the second gathering, the roar of cannon; betrayal, capture, death. The impassive figure of the patriot Andreas Hofer always in front, black-bearded, leathern-girdled, under the blue sky, against a screen of mountains.

Harz and Christian sat behind the others. He seemed so intent on the play that she did not speak, but watched his face, rigid with a kind of cold excitement; he seemed to be transported by the life passing before them. Something of his feeling seized on her; when the play was over she too was trembling. In pushing their way out they became separated from the others.

"There's a short cut to the station here," said Christian; "let's go this way."

The path rose a little; a narrow stream crept alongside the meadow, and the hedge was spangled with wild roses. Christian kept glancing shyly at the painter. Since their meeting on the river wall her thoughts had never been at rest. This stranger, with his keen face, insistent eyes, and ceaseless energy,

had roused a strange feeling in her; his words had put shape to something in her not yet expressed. She stood aside at a stile to make way for some peasant boys, dusty and rough-haired, who sang and whistled as they went by.

"I was like those boys once," said Harz.

Christian turned to him quickly. "Ah! that was why you felt the play, so much."

"It's my country up there. I was born amongst the mountains. I looked after the cows, and slept in hay-cocks, and cut the trees in winter. They used to call me a 'black sheep,' a 'loafer' in my village."

"Why?"

"Ah! why? I worked as hard as any of them. But I wanted to get away. Do you think I could have stayed there all my life?"

Christian's eyes grew eager.

"If people don't understand what it is you want to do, they always call you a loafer!" muttered Harz.

"But you did what you meant to do in spite of them," Christian said.

For herself it was so hard to finish or decide. When in the old days she told Greta stories, the latter, whose instinct was always for the definite, would say: "And what came at the end, Chris? Do finish it this morning!" but Christian never could. Her thoughts were deep, vague, dreamy, invaded by both sides of every question. Whatever she did, her needlework, her verse-making, her painting, all had its charm; but it was not always what it was intended for at the beginning. Nicholas Treffry had once said of her: "When Chris starts out to make a hat, it may turn out an altar-cloth, but you may bet it won't be a hat." It was her instinct to look for what things meant; and this took more than all her time. She knew herself better than most girls of nineteen, but it was her reason that had informed her, not her feelings. In her sheltered life, her heart had never been ruffled except by rare fits of passion—"tantrums" old Nicholas Treffry dubbed them—at what seemed to her mean or unjust.

"If I were a man," she said, "and going to be great, I should have wanted to begin at the very bottom as you did."

"Yes," said Harz quickly, "one should be able to feel everything."

She did not notice how simply he assumed that he was going to be great. He went on, a smile twisting his mouth unpleasantly beneath its dark moustache—"Not many people think like you! It's a crime not to have been born a gentleman."

"That's a sneer," said Christian; "I didn't think you would have sneered!"

"It is true. What is the use of pretending that it isn't?"

"It may be true, but it is finer not to say it!"

"By Heavens!" said Harz, striking one hand into the other, "if more truth were spoken there would not be so many shams."

Christian looked down at him from her seat on the stile.

"You are right all the same, Fraulein Christian," he added suddenly; "that's a very little business. Work is what matters, and trying to see the beauty in the world."

Christian's face changed. She understood, well enough, this craving after beauty. Slipping down from the stile, she drew a slow deep breath.

"Yes!" she said. Neither spoke for some time, then Harz said shyly:

"If you and Fraulein Greta would ever like to come and see my studio, I should be so happy. I would try and clean it up for you!"

"I should like to come. I could learn something. I want to learn."

They were both silent till the path joined the road.

"We must be in front of the others; it's nice to be in front—let's dawdle. I forgot—you never dawdle, Herr Harz."

"After a big fit of work, I can dawdle against any one; then I get another fit of work—it's like appetite."

"I'm always dawdling," answered Christian.

By the roadside a peasant woman screwed up her sun-dried face, saying in a low voice: "Please, gracious lady, help me to lift this basket!"

Christian stooped, but before she could raise it, Harz hoisted it up on his back.

"All right," he nodded; "this good lady doesn't mind."

The woman, looking very much ashamed, walked along by Christian; she kept rubbing her brown hands together, and saying; "Gracious lady, I would not have wished. It is heavy, but I would not have wished."

"I'm sure he'd rather carry it," said Christian.

They had not gone far along the road, however, before the others passed them in a carriage, and at the strange sight Miss Naylor could be seen pursing her lips; Cousin Teresa nodding pleasantly; a smile on Dawney's face; and beside him Greta, very demure. Harz began to laugh.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Christian.

"You English are so funny. You mustn't do this here, you mustn't do that there, it's like sitting in a field of nettles. If I were to walk with you without my coat, that little lady would fall off her seat." His laugh infected Christian; they reached the station feeling that they knew each other better.

The sun had dipped behind the mountains when the little train steamed down the valley. All were subdued, and Greta, with a nodding head, slept fitfully. Christian, in her corner, was looking out of the window, and Harz kept studying her profile.

He tried to see her eyes. He had remarked indeed that, whatever their expression, the brows, arched and rather wide apart, gave them a peculiar look of understanding. He thought of his picture. There was nothing in her face to seize on, it was too sympathetic, too much like light. Yet her chin was firm, almost obstinate.

The train stopped with a jerk; she looked round at him. It was as though she had said: "You are my friend."

At Villa Rubein, Herr Paul had killed the fatted calf for Greta's Fest. When the whole party were assembled, he alone remained standing; and waving his arm above the cloth, cried: "My dears! Your happiness! There are good things here—Come!" And with a sly look, the air of a conjurer producing rabbits, he whipped the cover off the soup tureen:

"Soup-turtle, fat, green fat!" He smacked his lips.

No servants were allowed, because, as Greta said to Harz:

"It is that we are to be glad this evening."

Geniality radiated from Herr Paul's countenance, mellow as a bowl of wine. He toasted everybody, exhorting them to pleasure.

Harz passed a cracker secretly behind Greta's head, and Miss Naylor, moved by a mysterious impulse, pulled it with a sort of gleeful horror; it exploded, and Greta sprang off her chair. Scruff, seeing this, appeared suddenly on the sideboard with his forelegs in a plate of soup; without moving them, he turned his head, and appeared to accuse the company of his false position. It was the signal for shrieks of laughter. Scruff made no attempt to free his forelegs; but sniffed the soup, and finding that nothing happened, began to lap it.

"Take him out! Oh! take him out!" wailed Greta, "he shall be ill!"

"Allons! Mon cher!" cried Herr Paul, "c'est magnifique, mais, vous savez, ce nest guere la guerre!" Scruff, with a wild spring, leaped past him to the ground.

"Ah!" cried Miss Naylor, "the carpet!" Fresh moans of mirth shook the table; for having tasted the wine of laughter, all wanted as much more as they could get. When Scruff and his traces were effaced, Herr Paul took a ladle in his hand.

"I have a toast," he said, waving it for silence; "a toast we will drink all together from our hearts; the toast of my little daughter, who to-day has thirteen years become; and there is also in our hearts," he continued, putting down the ladle and suddenly becoming grave, "the thought of one who is not today with us to see this joyful occasion; to her, too, in this our happiness we turn our hearts and glasses because it is her joy that we should yet be joyful. I drink to my little daughter; may God her shadow bless!"

All stood up, clinking their glasses, and drank: then, in the hush that followed, Greta, according to custom, began to sing a German carol; at the end of the fourth line she stopped, abashed.

Heir Paul blew his nose loudly, and, taking up a cap that had fallen from a cracker, put it on.

Every one followed his example, Miss Naylor attaining the distinction of a pair of donkey's ears, which she wore, after another glass of wine, with an air of sacrificing to the public good.

At the end of supper came the moment for the offering of gifts. Herr Paul had tied a handkerchief over Greta's eyes, and one by one they brought her presents. Greta, under forfeit of a kiss, was bound to tell the giver by the feel of the gift. Her swift, supple little hands explored noiselessly; and in every case she guessed right.

Dawney's present, a kitten, made a scene by clawing at her hair.

"That is Dr. Edmund's," she cried at once. Christian saw that Harz had disappeared, but suddenly he came back breathless, and took his place at the end of the rank of givers.

Advancing on tiptoe, he put his present into Greta's hands. It was a small bronze copy of a Donatello statue.

"Oh, Herr Harz!" cried Greta; "I saw it in the studio that day. It stood on the table, and it is lovely."

Mrs. Decie, thrusting her pale eyes close to it, murmured: "Charming!"

Mr. Treffry took it in his forgers.

"Rum little toad! Cost a pot of money, I expect!" He eyed Harz doubtfully.

They went into the next room now, and Herr Paul, taking Greta's bandage, transferred it to his own eyes.

"Take care—take care, all!" he cried; "I am a devil of a catcher," and, feeling the air cautiously, he moved forward like a bear about to hug. He caught no one. Christian and Greta whisked under his arms and left him grasping at the air. Mrs. Decie slipped past with astonishing agility. Mr. Treffry, smoking his cigar, and barricaded in a corner, jeered: "Bravo, Paul! The active beggar! Can't he run! Go it, Greta!"

At last Herr Paul caught Cousin Teresa, who, fattened against the wall, lost her head, and stood uttering tiny shrieks.

Suddenly Mrs. Decie started playing The Blue Danube. Herr Paul dropped the handkerchief, twisted his moustache up fiercely, glared round the room, and seizing Greta by the waist, began dancing furiously, bobbing up and down like a cork in lumpy water. Cousin Teresa followed suit with Miss Naylor, both very solemn, and dancing quite different steps. Harz, went up to Christian.

"I can't dance," he said, "that is, I have only danced once, but—if you would try with me!"

She put her hand on his arm, and they began. She danced, light as a feather, eyes shining, feet flying, her body bent a little forward. It was not a great success at first, but as soon as the time had got into Harz's feet, they went swinging on when all the rest had stopped. Sometimes one couple or another slipped through the window to dance on the veranda, and came whirling in again. The lamplight glowed on the girls' white dresses; on Herr Paul's perspiring face. He constituted in himself a perfect orgy, and when the music stopped flung himself, full length, on the sofa gasping out:

"My God! But, my God!"

Suddenly Christian felt Harz cling to her arm.

Glowing and panting she looked at him.

"Giddy!" he murmured: "I dance so badly; but I'll soon learn."

Greta clapped her hands: "Every evening we will dance, every evening we will dance."

Harz looked at Christian; the colour had deepened in her face.

"I'll show you how they dance in my village, feet upon the ceiling!" And running to Dawney, he said:

"Hold me here! Lift me—so! Now, on—two," he tried to swing his feet above his head, but, with an "Ouch!" from Dawney, they collapsed, and sat abruptly on the floor. This untimely event brought the evening to an end. Dawney left, escorting Cousin Teresa, and Harz strode home humming *The Blue Danube*, still feeling Christian's waist against his arm.

In their room the two girls sat long at the window to cool themselves before undressing.

"Ah!" sighed Greta, "this is the happiest birthday I have had."

Christian too thought: 'I have never been so happy in my life as I have been to-day. I should like every day to be like this!' And she leant out into the night, to let the air cool her cheeks.

"Chris!" said Greta some days after this, "Miss Naylor danced last evening; I think she shall have a headache to-day. There is my French and my history this morning."

"Well, I can take them."

"That is nice; then we can talk. I am sorry about the headache. I shall give her some of my Eau de Cologne."

Miss Naylor's headaches after dancing were things on which to calculate. The girls carried their books into the arbour; it was a showery day, and they had to run for shelter through the raindrops and sunlight.

"The French first, Chris!" Greta liked her French, in which she was not far inferior to Christian; the lesson therefore proceeded in an admirable fashion. After one hour exactly by her watch (Mr. Treffry's birthday present loved and admired at least once every hour) Greta rose.

"Chris, I have not fed my rabbits."

"Be quick! there's not much time for history."

Greta vanished. Christian watched the bright water dripping from the roof; her lips were parted in a smile. She was thinking of something Harz had said the night before. A discussion having been started as to whether average opinion did, or did not, safeguard Society, Harz, after sitting silent, had burst out: "I think one man in earnest is better than twenty half-hearted men who follow tamely; in the end he does Society most good."

Dawney had answered: "If you had your way there would be no Society."

"I hate Society because it lives upon the weak."

"Bah!" Herr Paul chimed in; "the weak goes to the wall; that is as certain as that you and I are here."

"Let them fall against the wall," cried Harz; "don't push them there...."

Greta reappeared, walking pensively in the rain.

"Bino," she said, sighing, "has eaten too much. I remember now, I did feed them before. Must we do the history, Chris?"

"Of course!"

Greta opened her book, and put a finger in the page. "Herr Harz is very kind to me," she said. "Yesterday he brought a bird which had come into his studio with a hurt wing; he brought it very gently in his handkerchief—he is very kind, the bird was not even frightened of him. You did not know about that, Chris?"

Chris flushed a little, and said in a hurt voice

"I don't see what it has to—do with me."

"No," assented Greta.

Christian's colour deepened. "Go on with your history, Greta."

"Only," pursued Greta, "that he always tells you all about things, Chris."

"He doesn't! How can you say that!"

"I think he does, and it is because you do not make him angry. It is very easy to make him angry; you have only to think differently, and he shall be angry at once."

"You are a little cat!" said Christian; "it isn't true, at all. He hates shams, and can't bear meanness; and it is mean to cover up dislikes and pretend that you agree with people."

"Papa says that he thinks too much about himself."

"Father!" began Christian hotly; biting her lips she stopped, and turned her wrathful eyes on Greta.

"You do not always show your dislikes, Chris."

"I? What has that to do with it? Because one is a coward that doesn't make it any better, does it?"

"I think that he has a great many dislikes," murmured Greta.

"I wish you would attend to your own faults, and not pry into other people's," and pushing the book aside, Christian gazed in front of her.

Some minutes passed, then Greta leaning over, rubbed a cheek against her shoulder.

"I am very sorry, Chris—I only wanted to be talking. Shall I read some history?"

"Yes," said Christian coldly.

"Are you angry with me, Chris?"

There was no answer. The lingering raindrops pattered down on the roof. Greta pulled at her sister's sleeve.

"Look, Chris!" she said. "There is Herr Harz!"

Christian looked up, dropped her eyes again, and said: "Will you go on with the history, Greta?"

Greta sighed.

"Yes, I will—but, oh! Chris, there is the luncheon gong!" and she meekly closed the book.

During the following weeks there was a "sitting" nearly every afternoon. Miss Naylor usually attended them; the little lady was, to a certain extent, carried past objection. She had begun to take an interest in the picture, and to watch the process out of the corner of her eye; in the depths of her dear mind, however, she never quite got used to the vanity and waste of time; her lips would move and her knitting-needles click in suppressed remonstrances.

What Harz did fast he did best; if he had leisure he "saw too much," loving his work so passionately that he could never tell exactly when to stop. He hated to lay things aside, always thinking: "I can get it better." Greta was finished, but with Christian, try as he would, he was not satisfied; from day to day her face seemed to him to change, as if her soul were growing.

There were things too in her eyes that he could neither read nor reproduce.

Dawney would often stroll out to them after his daily visit, and lying on the grass, his arms crossed behind his head, and a big cigar between his lips, would gently banter everybody. Tea came at five o'clock, and then Mrs. Decie appeared armed with a magazine or novel, for she was proud of her literary knowledge. The sitting was suspended; Harz, with a cigarette, would move between the table and the picture, drinking his tea, putting a touch in here and there; he never sat down till it was all over for the day. During these "rests" there was talk, usually ending in discussion. Mrs. Decie was happiest in conversations of a literary order, making frequent use of such expressions as: "After all, it produces an illusion—does anything else matter?" "Rather a poseur, is he not?" "A question, that, of temperament," or "A matter of the definition of words"; and other charming generalities, which sound well, and seem to go far, and are pleasingly irrefutable. Sometimes the discussion turned on Art—on points of colour or technique; whether realism was quite justified; and should we be pre-Raphaelites? When these discussions started, Christian's eyes would grow bigger and clearer, with a sort of shining reasonableness; as though they were trying to see into the depths. And Harz would stare at them. But the look in those eyes eluded him, as if they had no more meaning than Mrs. Decie's, which, with their

pale, watchful smile, always seemed saying: "Come, let us take a little intellectual exercise."

Greta, pulling Scruff's ears, would gaze up at the speakers; when the talk was over, she always shook herself. But if no one came to the "sittings," there would sometimes be very earnest, quick talk, sometimes long silences.

One day Christian said: "What is your religion?"

Harz finished the touch he was putting on the canvas, before he answered: "Roman Catholic, I suppose; I was baptised in that Church."

"I didn't mean that. Do you believe in a future life?"

"Christian," murmured Greta, who was plaiting blades of grass, "shall always want to know what people think about a future life; that is so funny!"

"How can I tell?" said Harz; "I've never really thought of it—never had the time."

"How can you help thinking?" Christian said: "I have to—it seems to me so awful that we might come to an end."

She closed her book, and it slipped off her lap. She went on: "There must be a future life, we're so incomplete. What's the good of your work, for instance? What's the use of developing if you have to stop?"

"I don't know," answered Harz. "I don't much care. All I know is, I've got to work."

"But why?"

"For happiness—the real happiness is fighting—the rest is nothing. If you have finished a thing, does it ever satisfy you? You look forward to the next thing at once; to wait is wretched!"

Christian clasped her hands behind her neck; sunlight flickered through the leaves on to the bosom of her dress.

"Ah! Stay like that!" cried Harz.

She let her eyes rest on his face, swinging her foot a little.

"You work because you must; but that's not enough. Why do you feel you must? I want to know what's behind. When I was travelling with Aunt Constance the winter before last we often talked—I've heard her discuss it with her friends. She says we move in circles till we reach Nirvana. But last winter I found I couldn't talk to her; it seemed as if she never really meant anything. Then I started reading—Kant and Hegel—"

"Ah!" put in Harz, "if they would teach me to draw better, or to see a new colour in a flower, or an expression in a face, I would read them all."

Christian leaned forward: "It must be right to get as near truth as possible; every step gained is something. You believe in truth; truth is the same as beauty—that was what you said—you try to paint the truth, you always see the beauty. But how can we know truth, unless we know what is at the root of it?"

"I—think," murmured Greta, sotto voce, "you see one way—and he sees another—because—you are not one person."

"Of course!" said Christian impatiently, "but why—"

A sound of humming interrupted her.

Nicholas Treffry was coming from the house, holding the Times in one hand, and a huge meerschaum pipe in the other.

"Aha!" he said to Harz: "how goes the picture?" and he lowered himself into a chair.

"Better to-day, Uncle?" said Christian softly.

Mr. Treffry growled. "Confounded humbugs, doctors!" he said. "Your father used to swear by them; why, his doctor killed him—made him drink such a lot of stuff!"

"Why then do you have a doctor, Uncle Nic?" asked Greta.

Mr. Treffry looked at her; his eyes twinkled. "I don't know, my dear. If they get half a chance, they won't let go of you!"

There had been a gentle breeze all day, but now it had died away; not a leaf quivered, not a blade of grass was stirring; from the house were heard faint sounds as of some one playing on a pipe. A blackbird came hopping down the path.

"When you were a boy, did you go after birds' nests, Uncle Nic?" Greta whispered.

"I believe you, Greta." The blackbird hopped into the shrubbery.

"You frightened him, Uncle Nic! Papa says that at Schloss Konig, where he lived when he was young, he would always be after jackdaws' nests."

"Gammon, Greta. Your father never took a jackdaw's nest, his legs are much too round!"

"Are you fond of birds, Uncle Nic?"

"Ask me another, Greta! Well, I s'pose so."

"Then why did you go bird-nesting? I think it is cruel"

Mr. Treffry coughed behind his paper: "There you have me, Greta," he remarked.

Harz began to gather his brushes: "Thank you," he said, "that's all I can do to-day."

"Can I look?" Mr. Treffry inquired.

"Certainly!"

Uncle Nic got up slowly, and stood in front of the picture. "When it's for sale," he said at last, "I'll buy it."

Harz bowed; but for some reason he felt annoyed, as if he had been asked to part with something personal.

"I thank you," he said. A gong sounded.

"You'll stay and have a snack with us?" said Mr. Treffry; "the doctor's stopping." Gathering up his paper, he moved off to the house with his hand on Greta's shoulder, the terrier running in front. Harz and Christian were left alone. He was scraping his palette, and she was sitting with her elbows resting on her knees; between them, a gleam of sunlight dyed the path golden. It was evening already; the bushes and the flowers, after the day's heat, were breathing out perfume; the birds had started their evensong.

"Are you tired of sitting for your portrait, Fraulein Christian?"

Christian shook her head.

"I shall get something into it that everybody does not see—something behind the surface, that will last."

Christian said slowly: "That's like a challenge. You were right when you said fighting is happiness—for yourself, but not for me. I'm a coward. I hate to hurt people, I like them to like me. If you had to do anything that would make them hate you, you would do it all the same, if it helped your work; that's fine—it's what I can't do. It's—it's everything. Do you like Uncle Nic?"

The young painter looked towards the house, where under the veranda old Nicholas Treffry was still in sight; a smile came on his lips.

"If I were the finest painter in the world, he wouldn't think anything of me for it, I'm afraid; but if I could show him handfuls of big cheques for bad pictures I had painted, he would respect me."

She smiled, and said: "I love him."

"Then I shall like him," Harz answered simply.

She put her hand out, and her fingers met his. "We shall be late," she said, glowing, and catching up her book: "I'm always late!"

VII

There was one other guest at dinner, a well-groomed person with pale, fattish face, dark eyes, and hair thin on the temples, whose clothes had a military cut. He looked like a man fond of ease, who had gone out of his groove, and collided with life. Herr Paul introduced him as Count Mario Sarelli.

Two hanging lamps with crimson shades threw a rosy light over the table, where, in the centre stood a silver basket, full of irises. Through the open windows the garden was all clusters of black foliage in the dying light. Moths fluttered round the lamps; Greta, following them with her eyes, gave quite audible sighs of pleasure when they escaped. Both girls wore white, and Harz, who sat opposite Christian, kept looking at her, and wondering why he had not painted her in that dress.

Mrs. Decie understood the art of dining—the dinner, ordered by Herr Paul, was admirable; the servants silent as their, shadows; there was always a hum of conversation.

Sarelli, who sat on her right hand, seemed to partake of little except olives, which he dipped into a glass of sherry. He turned his black, solemn eyes silently from face to face, now and then asking the meaning of an English word. After a discussion on modern Rome, it was debated whether or no a criminal could be told by the expression of his face.

"Crime," said Mrs. Decie, passing her hand across her brow—"crime is but the hallmark of strong individuality."

Miss Naylor, gushing rather pink, stammered: "A great crime must show itself—a murder. Why, of course!"

"If that were so," said Dawney, "we should only have to look about us—no more detectives."

Miss Naylor rejoined with slight severity: "I cannot conceive that such a thing can pass the human face by, leaving no impression!"

Harz said abruptly: "There are worse things than murder."

"Ah! par exemple!" said Sarelli.

There was a slight stir all round the table.

"Verry good," cried out Herr Paul, "a vot' sante, cher."

Miss Naylor shivered, as if some one had put a penny down her back; and Mrs. Decie, leaning towards Harz, smiled like one who has made a pet dog do a trick. Christian alone was motionless, looking thoughtfully at Harz.

"I saw a man tried for murder once," he said, "a murder for revenge; I watched the judge, and I thought all the time: 'I'd rather be that murderer than you; I've never seen a meaner face; you crawl through life; you're not a criminal, simply because you haven't the courage.'"

In the dubious silence following the painter's speech, Mr. Treffry could distinctly be heard humming. Then Sarelli said: "What do you say to anarchists, who are not men, but savage beasts, whom I would tear to pieces!"

"As to that," Harz answered defiantly, "it maybe wise to hang them, but then there are so many other men that it would be wise to hang."

"How can we tell what they went through; what their lives were?" murmured Christian.

Miss Naylor, who had been rolling a pellet of bread, concealed it hastily. "They are—always given a chance to—repent—I believe," she said.

"For what they are about to receive," drawled Dawney.

Mrs. Decie signalled with her fan: "We are trying to express the inexpressible—shall we go into the garden?"

All rose; Harz stood by the window, and in passing, Christian looked at him.

He sat down again with a sudden sense of loss. There was no white figure opposite now. Raising his

eyes he met Sarelli's. The Italian was regarding him with a curious stare.

Herr Paul began retailing a piece of scandal he had heard that afternoon.

"Shocking affair!" he said; "I could never have believed it of her! B—is quite beside himself. Yesterday there was a row, it seems!"

"There has been one every day for months," muttered Dawney.

"But to leave without a word, and go no one knows where! B—is 'viveur' no doubt, mais, mon Dieu, que voulezvous? She was always a poor, pale thing. Why! when my—" he flourished his cigar; "I was not always—what I should have been—one lives in a world of flesh and blood—we are not all angels—que diable! But this is a very vulgar business. She goes off; leaves everything—without a word; and B—is very fond of her. These things are not done!" the starched bosom of his shirt seemed swollen by indignation.

Mr. Treffry, with a heavy hand on the table, eyed him sideways. Dawney said slowly:

"B—is a beast; I'm sorry for the poor woman; but what can she do alone?"

"There is, no doubt, a man," put in Sarelli.

Herr Paul muttered: "Who knows?"

"What is B—going to do?" said Dawney.

"Ah!" said Herr Paul. "He is fond of her. He is a chap of resolution, he will get her back. He told me: 'Well, you know, I shall follow her wherever she goes till she comes back.' He will do it, he is a determined chap; he will follow her wherever she goes."

Mr. Treffry drank his wine off at a gulp, and sucked his moustache in sharply.

"She was a fool to marry him," said Dawney; "they haven't a point in common; she hates him like poison, and she's the better of the two. But it doesn't pay a woman to run off like that. B—had better hurry up, though. What do you think, sir?" he said to Mr. Treffry.

"Eh?" said Mr. Treffry; "how should I know? Ask Paul there, he's one of your moral men, or Count Sarelli."

The latter said impassively: "If I cared for her I should very likely kill her—if not—" he shrugged his shoulders.

Harz, who was watching, was reminded of his other words at dinner, "wild beasts whom I would tear to pieces." He looked with interest at this quiet man who said these extremely ferocious things, and thought: 'I should like to paint that fellow.'

Herr Paul twirled his wine-glass in his fingers. "There are family ties," he said, "there is society, there is decency; a wife should be with her husband. B—will do quite right. He must go after her; she will not perhaps come back at first; he will follow her; she will begin to think, 'I am helpless—I am ridiculous!' A woman is soon beaten. They will return. She is once more with her husband—Society will forgive, it will be all right."

"By Jove, Paul," growled Mr. Treffry, "wonderful power of argument!"

"A wife is a wife," pursued Herr Paul; "a man has a right to her society."

"What do you say to that, sir?" asked Dawney.

Mr. Treffry tugged at his beard: "Make a woman live with you, if she don't want to? I call it low."

"But, my dear," exclaimed Herr Paul, "how should you know? You have not been married."

"No, thank the Lord!" Mr. Treffry replied.

"But looking at the question broadly, sir," said Dawney; "if a husband always lets his wife do as she likes, how would the thing work out? What becomes of the marriage tie?"

"The marriage tie," growled Mr. Treffry, "is the biggest thing there is! But, by Jove, Doctor, I'm a Dutchman if hunting women ever helped the marriage tie!"

"I am not thinking of myself," Herr Paul cried out, "I think of the community. There are rights."

"A decent community never yet asked a man to tread on his self-respect. If I get my fingers skinned over my marriage, which I undertake at my own risk, what's the community to do with it? D'you think I'm going to whine to it to put the plaster on? As to rights, it'd be a deuced sight better for us all if there wasn't such a fuss about 'em. Leave that to women! I don't give a tinker's damn for men who talk about their rights in such matters."

Sarelli rose. "But your honour," he said, "there is your honour!"

Mr. Treffry stared at him.

"Honour! If huntin' women's your idea of honour, well—it isn't mine."

"Then you'd forgive her, sir, whatever happened," Dawney said.

"Forgiveness is another thing. I leave that to your sanctimonious beggars. But, hunt a woman! Hang it, sir, I'm not a cad!" and bringing his hand down with a rattle, he added: "This is a subject that don't bear talking of."

Sarelli fell back in his seat, twirling his moustaches fiercely. Harz, who had risen, looked at Christian's empty place.

'If I were married!' he thought suddenly.

Herr Paul, with a somewhat vinous glare, still muttered, "But your duty to the family!"

Harz slipped through the window. The moon was like a wonderful white lantern in the purple sky; there was but a smoulder of stars. Beneath the softness of the air was the iciness of the snow; it made him want to run and leap. A sleepy beetle dropped on its back; he turned it over and watched it scurry across the grass.

Someone was playing Schumann's *Kinderscenen*. Harz stood still to listen. The notes came twining, weaving round his thoughts; the whole night seemed full of girlish voices, of hopes and fancies, soaring away to mountain heights—invisible, yet present. Between the stems of the acacia-trees he could see the flicker of white dresses, where Christian and Greta were walking arm in arm. He went towards them; the blood flushed up in his face, he felt almost surfeited by some sweet emotion. Then, in sudden horror, he stood still. He was in love! With nothing done with everything before him! He was going to bow down to a face! The flicker of the dresses was no longer visible. He would not be fettered, he would stamp it out! He turned away; but with each step, something seemed to jab at his heart.

Round the corner of the house, in the shadow of the wall, Dominique, the Luganese, in embroidered slippers, was smoking a long cherry-wood pipe, leaning against a tree—Mephistopheles in evening clothes. Harz went up to him.

"Lend me a pencil, Dominique."

"Bien, M'sieu."

Resting a card against the tree Harz wrote to Mrs. Decie: "Forgive me, I am obliged to go away. In a few days I shall hope to return, and finish the picture of your nieces."

He sent Dominique for his hat. During the man's absence he was on the point of tearing up the card and going back into the house.

When the Luganese returned he thrust the card into his hand, and walked out between the tall poplars, waiting, like ragged ghosts, silver with moonlight.

VIII

Harz walked away along the road. A dog was howling. The sound seemed too appropriate. He put his fingers to his ears, but the lugubrious noise passed those barriers, and made its way into his heart. Was there nothing that would put an end to this emotion? It was no better in the old house on the wall; he spent the night tramping up and down.

Just before daybreak he slipped out with a knapsack, taking the road towards Meran.

He had not quite passed through Gries when he overtook a man walking in the middle of the road and leaving a trail of cigar smoke behind him.

"Ah! my friend," the smoker said, "you walk early; are you going my way?"

It was Count Sarelli. The raw light had imparted a grey tinge to his pale face, the growth of his beard showed black already beneath the skin; his thumbs were hooked in the pockets of a closely buttoned coat, he gesticulated with his fingers.

"You are making a journey?" he said, nodding at the knapsack. "You are early—I am late; our friend has admirable kummel—I have drunk too much. You have not been to bed, I think? If there is no sleep in one's bed it is no good going to look for it. You find that? It is better to drink kummel...! Pardon! You are doing the right thing: get away! Get away as fast as possible! Don't wait, and let it catch you!"

Harz stared at him amazed.

"Pardon!" Sarelli said again, raising his hat, "that girl—the white girl—I saw. You do well to get away!" he swayed a little as he walked. "That old fellow—what is his name—Trrreffr-ry! What ideas of honour!" He mumbled: "Honour is an abstraction! If a man is not true to an abstraction, he is a low type; but wait a minute!"

He put his hand to his side as though in pain.

The hedges were brightening with a faint pinky glow; there was no sound on the long, deserted road, but that of their footsteps; suddenly a bird commenced to chirp, another answered—the world seemed full of these little voices.

Sarelli stopped.

"That white girl," he said, speaking with rapidity. "Yes! You do well! get away! Don't let it catch you! I waited, it caught me—what happened? Everything horrible—and now—kummel!" Laughing a thick laugh, he gave a twirl to his moustache, and swaggered on.

"I was a fine fellow—nothing too big for Mario Sarelli; the regiment looked to me. Then she came—with her eyes and her white dress, always white, like this one; the little mole on her chin, her hands for ever moving—their touch as warm as sunbeams. Then, no longer Sarelli this, and that! The little house close to the ramparts! Two arms, two eyes, and nothing here," he tapped his breast, "but flames that made ashes quickly—in her, like this ash—" he flicked the white flake off his cigar. "It's droll! You agree, hein? Some day I shall go back and kill her. In the meantime—kummel!"

He stopped at a house close to the road, and stood still, his teeth bared in a grin.

"But I bore you," he said. His cigar, flung down, sputtered forth its sparks on the road in front of Harz. "I live here—good-morning! You are a man for work—your honour is your Art! I know, and you are young! The man who loves flesh better than his honour is a low type—I am a low type. I! Mario Sarelli, a low type! I love flesh better than my honour!"

He remained swaying at the gate with the grin fixed on his face; then staggered up the steps, and banged the door. But before Harz had walked on, he again appeared, beckoning, in the doorway. Obeying an impulse, Harz went in.

"We will make a night of it," said Sarelli; "wine, brandy, kummel? I am virtuous—kummel it must be for me!"

He sat down at a piano, and began to touch the keys. Harz poured out some wine. Sarelli nodded.

"You begin with that? Allegro—piu—presto!"

"Wine—brandy—kummel!" he quickened the time of the tune: "it is not too long a passage, and this"—he took his hands off the keys—"comes after."

Harz smiled.

"Some men do not kill themselves," he said.

Sarelli, who was bending and swaying to the music of a tarantella, broke off, and letting his eyes rest on the painter, began playing Schumann's Kinderscenen. Harz leaped to his feet.

"Stop that!" he cried.

"It pricks you?" said Sarelli suavely; "what do you think of this?" he played again, crouching over the piano, and making the notes sound like the crying of a wounded animal.

"For me!" he said, swinging round, and rising.

"Your health! And so you don't believe in suicide, but in murder? The custom is the other way; but you don't believe in customs? Customs are only for Society?" He drank a glass of kummel. "You do not love Society?"

Harz looked at him intently; he did not want to quarrel.

"I am not too fond of other people's thoughts," he said at last; "I prefer to think my own.

"And is Society never right? That poor Society!"

"Society! What is Society—a few men in good coats? What has it done for me?"

Sarelli bit the end off a cigar.

"Ah!" he said; "now we are coming to it. It is good to be an artist, a fine bantam of an artist; where other men have their dis-ci-pline, he has his, what shall we say—his mound of roses?"

The painter started to his feet.

"Yes," said Sarelli, with a hiccough, "you are a fine fellow!"

"And you are drunk!" cried Harz.

"A little drunk—not much, not enough to matter!"

Harz broke into laughter. It was crazy to stay there listening to this mad fellow. What had brought him in? He moved towards the door.

"Ah!" said Sarelli, "but it is no good going to bed—let us talk. I have a lot to say—it is pleasant to talk to anarchists at times."

Full daylight was already coming through the chinks of the shutters.

"You are all anarchists, you painters, you writing fellows. You live by playing ball with facts. Images—nothing solid—hein? You're all for new things too, to tickle your nerves. No discipline! True anarchists, every one of you!"

Harz poured out another glass of wine and drank it off. The man's feverish excitement was catching.

"Only fools," he replied, "take things for granted. As for discipline, what do you aristocrats, or bourgeois know of discipline? Have you ever been hungry? Have you ever had your soul down on its back?"

"Soul on its back? That is good!"

"A man's no use," cried Harz, "if he's always thinking of what others think; he must stand on his own legs."

"He must not then consider other people?"

"Not from cowardice anyway."

Sarelli drank.

"What would you do," he said, striking his chest, "if you had a devil-here? Would you go to bed?"

A sort of pity seized on Harz. He wanted to say something that would be consoling but could find no words; and suddenly he felt disgusted. What link was there between him and this man; between his love and this man's love?

"Harz!" muttered Sarelli; "Harz means 'tar,' hein? Your family is not an old one?"

Harz glared, and said: "My father is a peasant."

Sarelli lifted the kummel bottle and emptied it into his glass, with a steady hand.

"You're honest—and we both have devils. I forgot; I brought you in to see a picture!"

He threw wide the shutters; the windows were already open, and a rush of air came in.

"Ah!" he said, sniffing, "smells of the earth, nicht wahr, Herr Artist? You should know—it belongs to your father.... Come, here's my picture; a Correggio! What do you think of it?"

"It is a copy."

"You think?"

"I know."

"Then you have given me the lie, Signor," and drawing out his handkerchief Sarelli flicked it in the painter's face.

Harz turned white.

"Duelling is a good custom!" said Sarelli. "I shall have the honour to teach you just this one, unless you are afraid. Here are pistols—this room is twenty feet across at least, twenty feet is no bad distance."

And pulling out a drawer he took two pistols from a case, and put them on the table.

"The light is good—but perhaps you are afraid."

"Give me one!" shouted the infuriated painter; "and go to the devil for a fool!"

"One moment!" Sarelli murmured: "I will load them, they are more useful loaded."

Harz leaned out of the window; his head was in a whirl. 'What on earth is happening?' he thought. 'He's mad—or I am! Confound him! I'm not going to be killed!' He turned and went towards the table. Sarelli's head was sunk on his arms, he was asleep. Harz methodically took up the pistols, and put them back into the drawer. A sound made him turn his head; there stood a tall, strong young woman in a loose gown caught together on her chest. Her grey eyes glanced from the painter to the bottles, from the bottles to the pistol-case. A simple reasoning, which struck Harz as comic.

"It is often like this," she said in the country patois; "der Herr must not be frightened."

Lifting the motionless Sarelli as if he were a baby, she laid him on a couch.

"Ah!" she said, sitting down and resting her elbow on the table; "he will not wake!"

Harz bowed to her; her patient figure, in spite of its youth and strength, seemed to him pathetic. Taking up his knapsack, he went out.

The smoke of cottages rose straight; wisps of mist were wandering about the valley, and the songs of birds dropping like blessings. All over the grass the spiders had spun a sea of threads that bent and quivered to the pressure of the air, like fairy tight-ropes.

All that day he tramped.

Blacksmiths, tall stout men with knotted muscles, sleepy eyes, and great fair beards, came out of their forges to stretch and wipe their brows, and stare at him.

Teams of white oxen, waiting to be harnessed, lashed their tails against their flanks, moving their heads slowly from side to side in the heat. Old women at chalet doors blinked and knitted.

The white houses, with gaping caves of storage under the roofs, the red church spire, the clinking of hammers in the forges, the slow stamping of oxen—all spoke of sleepy toil, without ideas or ambition. Harz knew it all too well; like the earth's odour, it belonged to him, as Sarelli had said.

Towards sunset coming to a cove of larches, he sat down to rest. It was very still, but for the tinkle of cowbells, and, from somewhere in the distance, the sound of dropping logs.

Two barefooted little boys came from the wood, marching earnestly along, and looking at Harz as if he were a monster. Once past him, they began to run.

'At their age,' he thought, 'I should have done the same.' A hundred memories rushed into his mind.

He looked down at the village straggling below—white houses with russet tiles and crowns of smoke, vineyards where the young leaves were beginning to unfold, the red-capped spire, a thread of bubbling stream, an old stone cross. He had been fourteen years struggling up from all this; and now just as he

had breathing space, and the time to give himself wholly to his work—this weakness was upon him! Better, a thousand times, to give her up!

In a house or two lights began to wink; the scent of wood smoke reached him, the distant chimes of bells, the burring of a stream.

IX

Next day his one thought was to get back to work. He arrived at the studio in the afternoon, and, laying in provisions, barricaded the lower door. For three days he did not go out; on the fourth day he went to Villa Rubein....

Schloss Runkelstein—grey, blind, strengthless—still keeps the valley. The windows which once, like eyes, watched men and horses creeping through the snow, braved the splutter of guns and the gleam of torches, are now holes for the birds to nest in. Tangled creepers have spread to the very summits of the walls. In the keep, instead of grim men in armour, there is a wooden board recording the history of the castle and instructing visitors on the subject of refreshments. Only at night, when the cold moon blanches everything, the castle stands like the grim ghost of its old self, high above the river.

After a long morning's sitting the girls had started forth with Harz and Dawney to spend the afternoon at the ruin; Miss Naylor, kept at home by headache, watched them depart with words of caution against sunstroke, stinging nettles, and strange dogs.

Since the painter's return Christian and he had hardly spoken to each other. Below the battlement on which they sat, in a railed gallery with little tables, Dawney and Greta were playing dominoes, two soldiers drinking beer, and at the top of a flight of stairs the Custodian's wife sewing at a garment. Christian said suddenly: "I thought we were friends."

"Well, Fraulein Christian, aren't we?"

"You went away without a word; friends don't do that."

Harz bit his lips.

"I don't think you care," she went on with a sort of desperate haste, "whether you hurt people or not. You have been here all this time without even going to see your father and mother."

"Do you think they would want to see me?"

Christian looked up.

"It's all been so soft for you," he said bitterly; "you don't understand."

He turned his head away, and then burst out: "I'm proud to come straight from the soil—I wouldn't have it otherwise; but they are of 'the people,' everything is narrow with them—they only understand what they can see and touch."

"I'm sorry I spoke like that," said Christian softly; "you've never told me about yourself."

There was something just a little cruel in the way the painter looked at her, then seeming to feel compunction, he said quickly: "I always hated—the peasant life—I wanted to get away into the world; I had a feeling in here—I wanted—I don't know what I wanted! I did run away at last to a house-painter at Meran. The priest wrote me a letter from my father—they threw me off; that's all."

Christian's eyes were very bright, her lips moved, like the lips of a child listening to a story.

"Go on," she said.

"I stayed at Meran two years, till I'd learnt all I could there, then a brother of my mother's helped me to get to Vienna; I was lucky enough to find work with a man who used to decorate churches. We went about the country together. Once when he was ill I painted the roof of a church entirely by myself; I lay on my back on the scaffold boards all day for a week—I was proud of that roof." He paused.

"When did you begin painting pictures?"

"A friend asked me why I didn't try for the Academie. That started me going to the night schools; I worked every minute—I had to get my living as well, of course, so I worked at night.

"Then when the examination came, I thought I could do nothing—it was just as if I had never had a brush or pencil in my hand. But the second day a professor in passing me said, 'Good! Quite good!' That gave me courage. I was sure I had failed though; but I was second out of sixty."

Christian nodded.

"To work in the schools after that I had to give up my business, of course. There was only one teacher who ever taught me anything; the others all seemed fools. This man would come and rub out what you'd done with his sleeve. I used to cry with rage—but I told him I could only learn from him, and he was so astonished that he got me into his class."

"But how did you live without money?" asked Christian.

His face burned with a dark flush. "I don't know how I lived; you must have been through these things to know, you would never understand."

"But I want to understand, please."

"What do you want me to tell you? How I went twice a week to eat free dinners! How I took charity! How I was hungry! There was a rich cousin of my mother's—I used to go to him. I didn't like it. But if you're starving in the winter"

Christian put out her hand.

"I used to borrow apronsful of coals from other students who were as poor—but I never went to the rich students."

The flush had died out of his face.

"That sort of thing makes you hate the world! You work till you stagger; you're cold and hungry; you see rich people in their carriages, wrapped in furs, and all the time you want to do something great. You pray for a chance, any chance; nothing comes to the poor! It makes you hate the world."

Christian's eyes filled with tears. He went on:

"But I wasn't the only one in that condition; we used to meet. Garin, a Russian with a brown beard and patches of cheek showing through, and yellow teeth, who always looked hungry. Paunitz, who came from sympathy! He had fat cheeks and little eyes, and a big gold chain—the swine! And little Misek. It was in his room we met, with the paper peeling off the walls, and two doors with cracks in them, so that there was always a draught. We used to sit on his bed, and pull the dirty blankets over us for warmth; and smoke—tobacco was the last thing we ever went without. Over the bed was a Virgin and Child—Misek was a very devout Catholic; but one day when he had had no dinner and a dealer had kept his picture without paying him, he took the image and threw it on the floor before our eyes; it broke, and he trampled on the bits. Lendorf was another, a heavy fellow who was always puffing out his white cheeks and smiting himself, and saying: 'Cursed society!' And Schonborn, an aristocrat who had quarrelled with his family. He was the poorest of us all; but only he and I would ever have dared to do anything—they all knew that!"

Christian listened with awe. "Do you mean?" she said, "do you mean, that you—?"

"You see! you're afraid of me at once. It's impossible even for you to understand. It only makes you afraid. A hungry man living on charity, sick with rage and shame, is a wolf even to you!"

Christian looked straight into his eyes.

"That's not true. If I can't understand, I can feel. Would you be the same now if it were to come again?"

"Yes, it drives me mad even now to think of people fatted with prosperity, sneering and holding up their hands at poor devils who have suffered ten times more than the most those soft animals could bear. I'm older; I've lived—I know things can't be put right by violence—nothing will put things right, but that doesn't stop my feeling."

"Did you do anything? You must tell me all now."

"We talked—we were always talking."

"No, tell me everything!"

Unconsciously she claimed, and he seemed unconsciously to admit her right to this knowledge.

"There's not much to tell. One day we began talking in low voices —Garin began it; he had been in some affair in Russia. We took an oath; after that we never raised our voices. We had a plan. It was all new to me, and I hated the whole thing—but I was always hungry, or sick from taking charity, and I would have done anything. They knew that; they used to look at me and Schonborn; we knew that no one else had any courage. He and I were great friends, but we never talked of that; we tried to keep our minds away from the thought of it. If we had a good day and were not so hungry, it seemed unnatural; but when the day had not been good—then it seemed natural enough. I wasn't afraid, but I used to wake up in the night; I hated the oath we had taken, I hated every one of those fellows; the thing was not what I was made for, it wasn't my work, it wasn't my nature, it was forced on me—I hated it, but sometimes I was like a madman."

"Yes, yes," she murmured.

"All this time I was working at the Academie, and learning all I could.... One evening that we met, Paunitz was not there. Misek was telling us how the thing had been arranged. Schonborn and I looked at each other—it was warm—perhaps we were not hungry—it was springtime, too, and in the Spring it's different. There is something."

Christian nodded.

"While we were talking there came a knock at the door. Lendorf put his eye to the keyhole, and made a sign. The police were there. Nobody said anything, but Misek crawled under the bed; we all followed; and the knocking grew louder and louder. In the wall at the back of the bed was a little door into an empty cellar. We crept through. There was a trap-door behind some cases, where they used to roll barrels in. We crawled through that into the back street. We went different ways."

He paused, and Christian gasped.

"I thought I would get my money, but there was a policeman before my door. They had us finely. It was Paunitz; if I met him even now I should wring his neck. I swore I wouldn't be caught, but I had no idea where to go. Then I thought of a little Italian barber who used to shave me when I had money for a shave; I knew he would help. He belonged to some Italian Society; he often talked to me, under his breath, of course. I went to him. He was shaving himself before going to a ball. I told him what had happened; it was funny to see him put his back against the door. He was very frightened, understanding this sort of thing better than I did—for I was only twenty then. He shaved my head and moustache and put me on a fair wig. Then he brought me macaroni, and some meat, to eat. He gave me a big fair moustache, and a cap, and hid the moustache in the lining. He brought me a cloak of his own, and four gulden. All the time he was extremely frightened, and kept listening, and saying: 'Eat!'

"When I had done, he just said: 'Go away, I refuse to know anything more of you.'

"I thanked him and went out. I walked about all that night; for I couldn't think of anything to do or anywhere to go. In the morning I slept on a seat in one of the squares. Then I thought I would go to the Gallerien; and I spent the whole day looking at the pictures. When the Galleries were shut I was very tired, so I went into a cafe, and had some beer. When I came out I sat on the same seat in the Square. I meant to wait till dark and then walk out of the city and take the train at some little station, but while I was sitting there I went to sleep. A policeman woke me. He had my wig in his hand.

"Why do you wear a wig?' he said.

"I answered: 'Because I am bald.'

"No,' he said, 'you're not bald, you've been shaved. I can feel the hair coming.'

"He put his finger on my head. I felt reckless and laughed.

"Ah!' he said, 'you'll come with me and explain all this; your nose and eyes are looked for.'

"I went with him quietly to the police-station...."

Harz seemed carried away by his story. His quick dark face worked, his steel-grey eyes stared as though he were again passing through all these long-past emotions.

The hot sun struck down; Christian drew herself together, sitting with her hands clasped round her knees.

"I didn't care by then what came of it. I didn't even think what I was going to say. He led me down a passage to a room with bars across the windows and long seats, and maps on the walls. We sat and waited. He kept his eye on me all the time; and I saw no hope. Presently the Inspector came. 'Bring him in here,' he said; I remember feeling I could kill him for ordering me about! We went into the next room. It had a large clock, a writing-table, and a window, without bars, looking on a courtyard. Long policemen's coats and caps were hanging from some pegs. The Inspector told me to take off my cap. I took it off, wig and all. He asked me who I was, but I refused to answer. Just then there was a loud sound of voices in the room we had come from. The Inspector told the policeman to look after me, and went to see what it was. I could hear him talking. He called out: 'Come here, Becker!' I stood very quiet, and Becker went towards the door. I heard the Inspector say: 'Go and find Schwartz, I will see after this fellow.' The policeman went, and the Inspector stood with his back to me in the half-open door, and began again to talk to the man in the other room. Once or twice he looked round at me, but I stood quiet all the time. They began to disagree, and their voices got angry. The Inspector moved a little into the other room. 'Now!' I thought, and slipped off my cloak. I hooked off a policeman's coat and cap, and put them on. My heart beat till I felt sick. I went on tiptoe to the window. There was no one outside, but at the entrance a man was holding some horses. I opened the window a little and held my breath. I heard the Inspector say: 'I will report you for impertinence!' and slipped through the window. The coat came down nearly to my heels, and the cap over my eyes. I walked up to the man with the horses, and said: 'Good-evening.' One of the horses had begun to kick, and he only grunted at me. I got into a passing tram; it was five minutes to the West Bahnhof; I got out there. There was a train starting; they were shouting 'Einsteigen!' I ran. The collector tried to stop me. I shouted: 'Business—important!' He let me by. I jumped into a carriage. The train started."

He paused, and Christian heaved a sigh.

Harz went on, twisting a twig of ivy in his hands: "There was another man in the carriage reading a paper. Presently I said to him, 'Where do we stop first?' 'St. Polten.' Then I knew it was the Munich express—St. Polten, Amstetten, Linz, and Salzburg—four stops before the frontier. The man put down his paper and looked at me; he had a big fair moustache and rather shabby clothes. His looking at me disturbed me, for I thought every minute he would say: 'You're no policeman!' And suddenly it came into my mind that if they looked for me in this train, it would be as a policeman!—they would know, of course, at the station that a policeman had run past at the last minute. I wanted to get rid of the coat and cap, but the man was there, and I didn't like to move out of the carriage for other people to notice. So I sat on. We came to St. Polten at last. The man in my carriage took his bag, got out, and left his paper on the seat. We started again; I breathed at last, and as soon as I could took the cap and coat and threw them out into the darkness. I thought: 'I shall get across the frontier now.' I took my own cap out and found the moustache Luigi gave me; rubbed my clothes as clean as possible; stuck on the moustache, and with some little ends of chalk in my pocket made my eyebrows light; then drew some lines in my face to make it older, and pulled my cap well down above my wig. I did it pretty well—I was quite like the man who had got out. I sat in his corner, took up his newspaper, and waited for Amstetten. It seemed a tremendous time before we got there. From behind my paper I could see five or six policemen on the platform, one quite close. He opened the door, looked at me, and walked through the carriage into the corridor. I took some tobacco and rolled up a cigarette, but it shook, Harz lifted the ivy twig, like this. In a minute the conductor and two more policemen came. 'He was here,' said the conductor, 'with this gentleman.' One of them looked at me, and asked: 'Have you seen a policeman travelling on this train?' 'Yes,' I said. 'Where?' 'He got out at St. Polten.' The policeman asked the conductor: 'Did you see him get out there?' The conductor shook his head. I said: 'He got out as the train was moving.' 'Ah!' said the policeman, 'what was he like?' 'Rather short, and no moustache. Why?' 'Did you notice anything unusual?' 'No,' I said, 'only that he wore coloured trousers. What's the matter?' One policeman said to the other: 'That's our man! Send a telegram to St. Polten; he has more than an hour's start.' He asked me where I was going. I told him: 'Linz.' 'Ah!' he said, 'you'll have to give evidence; your name and address please?' 'Josef Reinhardt, 17 Donau Strasse.' He wrote it down. The conductor said: 'We are late, can we start?' They shut the door. I heard them say to the conductor: 'Search again at Linz, and report to the Inspector there.' They hurried on to the platform, and we started. At first I thought I would get out as soon as the train had left the station. Then, that I should be too far from the frontier; better to go on to Linz and take my chance there. I sat still and tried not to think.

"After a long time, we began to run more slowly. I put my head out and could see in the distance a ring of lights hanging in the blackness. I loosened the carriage door and waited for the train to run slower still; I didn't mean to go into Linz like a rat into a trap. At last I could wait no longer; I opened the door, jumped and fell into some bushes. I was not much hurt, but bruised, and the breath knocked

out of me. As soon as I could, I crawled out. It was very dark. I felt heavy and sore, and for some time went stumbling in and out amongst trees. Presently I came to a clear space; on one side I could see the town's shape drawn in lighted lamps, and on the other a dark mass, which I think was forest; in the distance too was a thin chain of lights. I thought: 'They must be the lights of a bridge.' Just then the moon came out, and I could see the river shining below. It was cold and damp, and I walked quickly. At last I came out on a road, past houses and barking dogs, down to the river bank; there I sat against a shed and went to sleep. I woke very stiff. It was darker than before; the moon was gone. I could just see the river. I stumbled on, to get through the town before dawn. It was all black shapes—houses and sheds, and the smell of the river, the smell of rotting hay, apples, tar, mud, fish; and here and there on a wharf a lantern. I stumbled over casks and ropes and boxes; I saw I should never get clear—the dawn had begun already on the other side. Some men came from a house behind me. I bent, and crept behind some barrels. They passed along the wharf; they seemed to drop into the river. I heard one of them say: 'Passau before night.' I stood up and saw they had walked on board a steamer which was lying head up-stream, with some barges in tow. There was a plank laid to the steamer, and a lantern at the other end. I could hear the fellows moving below deck, getting up steam. I ran across the plank and crept to the end of the steamer. I meant to go with them to Passau! The rope which towed the barges was nearly taut; and I knew if I could get on to the barges I should be safe. I climbed down on this rope and crawled along. I was desperate, I knew they'd soon be coming up, and it was getting light. I thought I should fall into the water several times, but I got to the barge at last. It was laden with straw. There was nobody on board. I was hungry and thirsty—I looked for something to eat; there was nothing but the ashes of a fire and a man's coat. I crept into the straw. Soon a boat brought men, one for each barge, and there were sounds of steam. As soon as we began moving through the water, I fell asleep. When I woke we were creeping through a heavy mist. I made a little hole in the straw and saw the bargeman. He was sitting by a fire at the barge's edge, so that the sparks and smoke blew away over the water. He ate and drank with both hands, and funny enough he looked in the mist, like a big bird flapping its wings; there was a good smell of coffee, and I sneezed. How the fellow started! But presently he took a pitchfork and prodded the straw. Then I stood up. I couldn't help laughing, he was so surprised—a huge, dark man, with a great black beard. I pointed to the fire and said 'Give me some, brother!' He pulled me out of the straw; I was so stiff, I couldn't move. I sat by the fire, and ate black bread and turnips, and drank coffee; while he stood by, watching me and muttering. I couldn't understand him well—he spoke a dialect from Hungary. He asked me: How I got there—who I was—where I was from? I looked up in his face, and he looked down at me, sucking his pipe. He was a big man, he lived alone on the river, and I was tired of telling lies, so I told him the whole thing. When I had done he just grunted. I can see him now standing over me, with the mist hanging in his beard, and his great naked arms. He drew me some water, and I washed and showed him my wig and moustache, and threw them overboard. All that day we lay out on the barge in the mist, with our feet to the fire, smoking; now and then he would spit into the ashes and mutter into his beard. I shall never forget that day. The steamer was like a monster with fiery nostrils, and the other barges were dumb creatures with eyes, where the fires were; we couldn't see the bank, but now and then a bluff and high trees, or a castle, showed in the mist. If I had only had paint and canvas that day!" He sighed.

"It was early Spring, and the river was in flood; they were going to Regensburg to unload there, take fresh cargo, and back to Linz. As soon as the mist began to clear, the bargeman hid me in the straw. At Passau was the frontier; they lay there for the night, but nothing happened, and I slept in the straw. The next day I lay out on the barge deck; there was no mist, but I was free—the sun shone gold on the straw and the green sacking; the water seemed to dance, and I laughed—I laughed all the time, and the barge man laughed with me. A fine fellow he was! At Regensburg I helped them to unload; for more than a week we worked; they nicknamed me baldhead, and when it was all over I gave the money I earned for the unloading to the big bargeman. We kissed each other at parting. I had still three of the gulden that Luigi gave me, and I went to a house-painter and got work with him. For six months I stayed there to save money; then I wrote to my mother's cousin in Vienna, and told him I was going to London. He gave me an introduction to some friends there. I went to Hamburg, and from there to London in a cargo steamer, and I've never been back till now."

XI

After a minute's silence Christian said in a startled voice: "They could arrest you then!"

Harz laughed.

"If they knew; but it's seven years ago."

"Why did you come here, when it's so dangerous?"

"I had been working too hard, I wanted to see my country—after seven years, and when it's forbidden! But I'm ready to go back now." He looked down at her, frowning.

"Had you a hard time in London, too?"

"Harder, at first—I couldn't speak the language. In my profession it's hard work to get recognised, it's hard work to make a living. There are too many whose interest it is to keep you down—I shan't forget them."

"But every one is not like that?"

"No; there are fine fellows, too. I shan't forget them either. I can sell my pictures now; I'm no longer weak, and I promise you I shan't forget. If in the future I have power, and I shall have power—I shan't forget."

A shower of fine gravel came rattling on the wall. Dawney was standing below them with an amused expression on his upturned face.

"Are you going to stay there all night?" he asked. "Greta and I have bored each other."

"We're coming," called Christian hastily.

On the way back neither spoke a word, but when they reached the Villa, Harz took her hand, and said: "Fraulein Christian, I can't do any more with your picture. I shan't touch it again after this."

She made no answer, but they looked at each other, and both seemed to ask, to entreat, something more; then her eyes fell. He dropped her hand, and saying, "Good-night," ran after Dawney.

In the corridor, Dominique, carrying a dish of fruit, met the sisters; he informed them that Miss Naylor had retired to bed; that Herr Paul would not be home to dinner; his master was dining in his room; dinner would be served for Mrs. Decie and the two young ladies in a quarter of an hour: "And the fish is good to-night; little trouts! try them, Signorina!" He moved on quickly, softly, like a cat, the tails of his dress-coat flapping, and the heels of his white socks gleaming.

Christian ran upstairs. She flew about her room, feeling that if she once stood still it would all crystallise in hard painful thought, which motion alone kept away. She washed, changed her dress and shoes, and ran down to her uncle's room. Mr. Treffry had just finished dinner, pushed the little table back, and was sitting in his chair, with his glasses on his nose, reading the Times. Christian touched his forehead with her lips.

"Glad to see you, Chris. Your stepfather's out to dinner, and I can't stand your aunt when she's in one of her talking moods—bit of a humbug, Chris, between ourselves; eh, isn't she?" His eyes twinkled.

Christian smiled. There was a curious happy restlessness in her that would not let her keep still.

"Picture finished?" Mr. Treffry asked suddenly, taking up the paper with a crackle. "Don't go and fall in love with the painter, Chris."

Christian was still enough now.

'Why not?' she thought. 'What should you know about him? Isn't he good enough for me?' A gong sounded.

"There's your dinner," Mr. Treffry remarked.

With sudden contrition she bent and kissed him.

But when she had left the room Mr. Treffry put down the Times and stared at the door, humming to himself, and thoughtfully fingering his chin.

Christian could not eat; she sat, indifferent to the hoverings of Dominique, tormented by uneasy fear and longings. She answered Mrs. Decie at random. Greta kept stealing looks at her from under her lashes.

"Decided characters are charming, don't you think so, Christian?" Mrs. Decie said, thrusting her chin a little forward, and modelling the words. "That is why I like Mr. Harz so much; such an immense advantage for a man to know his mind. You have only to look at that young man to see that he knows

what he wants, and means to have it."

Christian pushed her plate away. Greta, flushing, said abruptly: "Doctor Edmund is not a decided character, I think. This afternoon he said: 'Shall I have some beer—yes, I shall—no, I shall not'; then he ordered the beer, so, when it came, he gave it to the soldiers."

Mrs. Decie turned her enigmatic smile from one girl to the other.

When dinner was over they went into her room. Greta stole at once to the piano, where her long hair fell almost to the keys; silently she sat there fingering the notes, smiling to herself, and looking at her aunt, who was reading Pater's essays. Christian too had taken up a book, but soon put it down—of several pages she had not understood a word. She went into the garden and wandered about the lawn, clasping her hands behind her head. The air was heavy; very distant thunder trembled among the mountains, flashes of summer lightning played over the trees; and two great moths were hovering about a rosebush. Christian watched their soft uncertain rushes. Going to the little summer-house she flung herself down on a seat, and pressed her hands to her heart.

There was a strange and sudden aching there. Was he going from her? If so, what would be left? How little and how narrow seemed the outlook of her life—with the world waiting for her, the world of beauty, effort, self-sacrifice, fidelity! It was as though a flash of that summer lightning had fled by, singeing her, taking from her all powers of flight, burning off her wings, as off one of those pale hovering moths. Tears started up, and trickled down her face. 'Blind!' she thought; 'how could I have been so blind?'

Some one came down the path.

"Who's there?" she cried.

Harz stood in the doorway.

"Why did you come out?" he said. "Ah! why did you come out?" He caught her hand; Christian tried to draw it from him, and to turn her eyes away, but she could not. He flung himself down on his knees, and cried: "I love you!"

In a rapture of soft terror Christian bent her forehead down to his hand.

"What are you doing?" she heard him say. "Is it possible that you love me?" and she felt his kisses on her hair.

"My sweet! it will be so hard for you; you are so little, so little, and so weak." Claspng his hand closer to her face, she murmured: "I don't care."

There was a long, soft silence, that seemed to last for ever. Suddenly she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"Whatever comes!" she whispered, and gathering her dress, escaped from him into the darkness.

XII

Christian woke next morning with a smile. In her attitudes, her voice, her eyes, there was a happy and sweet seriousness, as if she were hugging some holy thought. After breakfast she took a book and sat in the open window, whence she could see the poplar-trees guarding the entrance. There was a breeze; the roses close by kept nodding to her; the cathedral bells were in full chime; bees hummed above the lavender; and in the sky soft clouds were floating like huge, white birds.

The sounds of Miss Naylor's staccato dictation travelled across the room, and Greta's sighs as she took it down, one eye on her paper, one eye on Scruff, who lay with a black ear flapped across his paw, and his tan eyebrows quivering. He was in disgrace, for Dominique, coming on him unawares, had seen him "say his prayers" before a pudding, and take the pudding for reward.

Christian put her book down gently, and slipped through the window. Harz was coming in from the road. "I am all yours!" she whispered. His fingers closed on hers, and he went into the house.

She slipped back, took up her book, and waited. It seemed long before he came out, but when he did he waved her back, and hurried on; she had a glimpse of his face, white to the lips. Feeling faint and sick, she flew to her stepfather's room.

Herr Paul was standing in a corner with the utterly disturbed appearance of an easy-going man, visited by the unexpected. His fine shirt-front was crumpled as if his breast had heaved too suddenly under strong emotion; his smoked eyeglasses dangled down his back; his fingers were embedded in his beard. He was fixing his eye on a spot in the floor as though he expected it to explode and blow them to fragments. In another corner Mrs. Decie, with half-closed eyes, was running her finger-tips across her brow.

"What have you said to him?" cried Christian.

Herr Paul regarded her with glassy eyes.

"Mein Gott!" he said. "Your aunt and I!"

"What have you said to him?" repeated Christian.

"The impudence! An anarchist! A beggar!"

"Paul!" murmured Mrs. Decie.

"The outlaw! The fellow!" Herr Paul began to stride about the room.

Quivering from head to foot, Christian cried: "How dared you?" and ran from the room, pushing aside Miss Naylor and Greta, who stood blanched and frightened in the doorway.

Herr Paul stopped in his tramp, and, still with his eyes fixed on the floor, growled:

"A fine thing-hein? What's coming? Will you please tell me? An anarchist—a beggar!"

"Paul!" murmured Mrs. Decie.

"Paul! Paul! And you!" he pointed to Miss Naylor—"Two women with eyes!—hein!"

"There is nothing to be gained by violence," Mrs. Decie murmured, passing her handkerchief across her lips. Miss Naylor, whose thin brown cheeks had flushed, advanced towards him.

"I hope you do not—" she said; "I am sure there was nothing that I could have prevented—I should be glad if that were understood." And, turning with some dignity, the little lady went away, closing the door behind her.

"You hear!" Herr Paul said, violently sarcastic: "nothing she could have prevented! Enfin! Will you please tell me what I am to do?"

"Men of the world"—whose philosophy is a creature of circumstance and accepted things—find any deviation from the path of their convictions dangerous, shocking, and an intolerable bore. Herr Paul had spent his life laughing at convictions; the matter had but to touch him personally, and the tap of laughter was turned off. That any one to whom he was the lawful guardian should marry other than a well-groomed man, properly endowed with goods, properly selected, was beyond expression horrid. From his point of view he had great excuse for horror; and he was naturally unable to judge whether he had excuse for horror from other points of view. His amazement had in it a spice of the pathetic; he was like a child in the presence of a thing that he absolutely could not understand. The interview had left him with a sense of insecurity which he felt to be particularly unfair.

The door was again opened, and Greta flew in, her cheeks flushed, her hair floating behind her, and tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Papa!" she cried, "you have been cruel to Chris. The door is locked; I can hear her crying—why have you been cruel?" Without waiting to be answered, she flew out again.

Herr Paul seized his hair with both his hands: "Good! Very good! My own child, please! What next then?"

Mrs. Decie rose from her chair languidly. "My head is very bad," she said, shading her eyes and speaking in low tones: "It is no use making a fuss—nothing can come of this—he has not a penny. Christian will have nothing till you die, which will not be for a long time yet, if you can but avoid an apoplectic fit!"

At these last words Herr Paul gave a start of real disgust. "Hum!" he muttered; it was as if the world were bent on being brutal to him. Mrs. Decie continued:

"If I know anything of this young man, he will not come here again, after the words you have spoken. As for Christian—you had better talk to Nicholas. I am going to lie down."

Herr Paul nervously fingered the shirt-collar round his stout, short neck.

"Nicholas! Certainly—a good idea. Quelle diable d'affaire!"

'French!' thought Mrs. Decie; 'we shall soon have peace. Poor Christian! I'm sorry! After all, these things are a matter of time and opportunity.' This consoled her a good deal.

But for Christian the hours were a long nightmare of grief and shame, fear and anger. Would he forgive? Would he be true to her? Or would he go away without a word? Since yesterday it was as if she had stepped into another world, and lost it again. In place of that new feeling, intoxicating as wine, what was coming? What bitter; dreadful ending?

A rude entrance this into the life of facts, and primitive emotions!

She let Greta into her room after a time, for the child had begun sobbing; but she would not talk, and sat hour after hour at the window with the air fanning her face, and the pain in her eyes turned to the sky and trees. After one or two attempts at consolation, Greta sank on the floor, and remained there, humbly gazing at her sister in a silence only broken when Christian cleared her throat of tears, and by the song of birds in the garden. In the afternoon she slipped away and did not come back again.

After his interview with Mr. Treffry, Herr Paul took a bath, perfumed himself with precision, and caused it to be clearly understood that, under circumstances such as these, a man's house was not suited for a pig to live in. He shortly afterwards went out to the Kurbaus, and had not returned by dinner-time.

Christian came down for dinner. There were crimson spots in her cheeks, dark circles round her eyes; she behaved, however, as though nothing had happened. Miss Naylor, affected by the kindness of her heart and the shock her system had sustained, rolled a number of bread pills, looking at each as it came, with an air of surprise, and concealing it with difficulty. Mr. Treffry was coughing, and when he talked his voice seemed to rumble even more than usual. Greta was dumb, trying to catch Christian's eye; Mrs. Decie alone seemed at ease. After dinner Mr. Treffry went off to his room, leaning heavily on Christian's shoulder. As he sank into his chair, he said to her:

"Pull yourself together, my dear!" Christian did not answer him.

Outside his room Greta caught her by the sleeve.

"Look!" she whispered, thrusting a piece of paper into Christian's hand.
"It is to me from Dr. Edmund, but you must read it."

Christian opened the note, which ran as follows:

"MY PHILOSOPHER AND FRIEND,—I received your note, and went to our friend's studio; he was not in, but half an hour ago I stumbled on him in the Platz. He is not quite himself; has had a touch of the sun—nothing serious: I took him to my hotel, where he is in bed. If he will stay there he will be all right in a day or two. In any case he shall not elude my clutches for the present.

"My warm respects to Mistress Christian.—Yours in friendship and philosophy, "EDMUND DAWNEY."

Christian read and re-read this note, then turned to Greta.

"What did you say to Dr. Dawney?"

Greta took back the piece of paper, and replied: "I said:

"DEAR DR. EDMUND,—We are anxious about Herr Harz. We think he is perhaps not very well to-day. We (I and Christian) should like to know. You can tell us. Please shall you? GRETA."

"That is what I said."

Christian dropped her eyes. "What made you write?"

Greta gazed at her mournfully: "I thought—O Chris! come into the garden. I am so hot, and it is so dull without you!"

Christian bent her head forward and rubbed her cheek against Greta's, then without another word ran upstairs and locked herself into her room. The child stood listening; hearing the key turn in the lock, she sank down on the bottom step and took Scruff in her arms.

Half an hour later Miss Naylor, carrying a candle, found her there fast asleep, with her head resting on the terrier's back, and tear stains on her cheeks....

Mrs. Decie presently came out, also carrying a candle, and went to her brother's room. She stood before his chair, with folded hands.

"Nicholas, what is to be done?"

Mr. Treffry was pouring whisky into a glass.

"Damn it, Con!" he answered; "how should I know?"

"There's something in Christian that makes interference dangerous. I know very well that I've no influence with her at all."

"You're right there, Con," Mr. Treffry replied.

Mrs. Decie's pale eyes, fastened on his face, forced him to look up.

"I wish you would leave off drinking whisky and attend to me. Paul is an element—"

"Paul," Mr. Treffry growled, "is an ass!"

"Paul," pursued Mrs. Decie, "is an element of danger in the situation; any ill-timed opposition of his might drive her to I don't know what. Christian is gentle, she is 'sympathetic' as they say; but thwart her, and she is as obstinate as...."

"You or I! Leave her alone!"

"I understand her character, but I confess that I am at a loss what to do."

"Do nothing!" He drank again.

Mrs. Decie took up the candle.

"Men!" she said with a mysterious intonation; shrugging her shoulders, she walked out.

Mr. Treffry put down his glass.

'Understand?' he thought; 'no, you don't, and I don't. Who understands a young girl? Vapourings, dreams, moonshine I.... What does she see in this painter fellow? I wonder!' He breathed heavily. 'By heavens! I wouldn't have had this happen for a hundred thousand pounds!'

XIII

For many hours after Dawney had taken him to his hotel, Harz was prostrate with stunning pains in the head and neck. He had been all day without food, exposed to burning sun, suffering violent emotion. Movement of any sort caused him such agony that he could only lie in stupor, counting the spots dancing before, his eyes. Dawney did everything for him, and Harz resented in a listless way the intent scrutiny of the doctor's calm, black eyes.

Towards the end of the second day he was able to get up; Dawney found him sitting on the bed in shirt and trousers.

"My son," he said, "you had better tell me what the trouble is—it will do your stubborn carcass good."

"I must go back to work," said Harz.

"Work!" said Dawney deliberately: "you couldn't, if you tried."

"I must."

"My dear fellow, you couldn't tell one colour from another."

"I must be doing something; I can't sit here and think."

Dawney hooked his thumbs into his waistcoat: "You won't see the sun for three days yet, if I can help it."

Harz got up.

"I'm going to my studio to-morrow," he said. "I promise not to go out. I must be where I can see my work. If I can't paint, I can draw; I can feel my brushes, move my things about. I shall go mad if I do nothing."

Dawney took his arm, and walked him up and down.

"I'll let you go," he said, "but give me a chance! It's as much to me to put you straight as it is to you to paint a decent picture. Now go to bed; I'll have a carriage for you to-morrow morning."

Harz sat down on the bed again, and for a long time stayed without moving, his eyes fixed on the floor. The sight of him, so desperate and miserable, hurt the young doctor.

"Can you get to bed by yourself?" he asked at last.

Harz nodded.

"Then, good-night, old chap!" and Dawney left the room.

He took his hat and turned towards the Villa. Between the poplars he stopped to think. The farther trees were fret-worked black against the lingering gold of the sunset; a huge moth, attracted by the tip of his cigar, came fluttering in his face. The music of a concertina rose and fell, like the sighing of some disillusioned spirit. Dawney stood for several minutes staring at the house.

He was shown to Mrs. Decie's room. She was holding a magazine before her eyes, and received him with as much relief as philosophy permitted.

"You are the very person I wanted to see," she said.

He noticed that the magazine she held was uncut.

"You are a young man," pursued Mrs. Decie, "but as my doctor I have a right to your discretion."

Dawney smiled; the features of his broad, clean-shaven face looked ridiculously small on such occasions, but his eyes retained their air of calculation.

"That is so," he answered.

"It is about this unfortunate affair. I understand that Mr. Harz is with you. I want you to use your influence to dissuade him from attempting to see my niece."

"Influence!" said Dawney; "you know Harz!"

Mrs. Decie's voice hardened.

"Everybody," she said, "has his weak points. This young man is open to approach from at least two quarters—his pride is one, his work another. I am seldom wrong in gauging character; these are his vital spots, and they are of the essence of this matter. I'm sorry for him, of course—but at his age, and living a man's life, these things—" Her smile was extra pale. "I wish you could give me something for my head. It's foolish to worry. Nerves of course! But I can't help it! You know my opinion, Dr. Dawney. That young man will go far if he remains unfettered; he will make a name. You will be doing him a great service if you could show him the affair as it really is—a drag on him, and quite unworthy of his pride! Do help me! You are just the man to do it!"

Dawney threw up his head as if to shake off this impeachment; the curve of his chin thus displayed was imposing in its fulness; altogether he was imposing, having an air of capability.

She struck him, indeed, as really scared; it was as if her mask of smile had become awry, and failed to cover her emotion; and he was puzzled, thinking, 'I wouldn't have believed she had it in her....' "It's not an easy business," he said; "I'll think it over."

"Thank you!" murmured Mrs. Decie. "You are most kind."

Passing the schoolroom, he looked in through the open door. Christian was sitting there. The sight of her face shocked him, it was so white, so resolutely dumb. A book lay on her knees; she was not reading, but staring before her. He thought suddenly: 'Poor thing! If I don't say something to her, I shall be a brute!'

"Miss Devorell," he said: "You can reckon on him."

Christian tried to speak, but her lips trembled so that nothing came forth.

"Good-night," said Dawney, and walked out....

Three days later Harz was sitting in the window of his studio. It was the first day he had found it possible to work, and now, tired out, he stared through the dusk at the slowly lengthening shadows of the rafters. A solitary mosquito hummed, and two house sparrows, who had built beneath the roof, chirruped sleepily. Swallows darted by the window, dipping their blue wings towards the quiet water; a hush had stolen over everything. He fell asleep.

He woke, with a dim impression of some near presence. In the pale glimmer from innumerable stars, the room was full of shadowy shapes. He lit his lantern. The flame darted forth, bickered, then slowly lit up the great room.

"Who's there?"

A rustling seemed to answer. He peered about, went to the doorway, and drew the curtain. A woman's cloaked figure shrank against the wall. Her face was buried in her hands; her arms, from which the cloak fell back, were alone visible.

"Christian?"

She ran past him, and when he had put the lantern down, was standing at the window. She turned quickly to him. "Take me away from here! Let me come with you!"

"Do you mean it?"

"You said you wouldn't give me up!"

"You know what you are doing?"

She made a motion of assent.

"But you don't grasp what this means. Things to bear that you know nothing of—hunger perhaps! Think, even hunger! And your people won't forgive—you'll lose everything."

She shook her head.

"I must choose—it's one thing or the other. I can't give you up! I should be afraid!"

"But, dear; how can you come with me? We can't be married here."

"I am giving my life to you."

"You are too good for me," said Harz. "The life you're going into—may be dark, like that!" he pointed to the window.

A sound of footsteps broke the hush. They could see a figure on the path below. It stopped, seemed to consider, vanished. They heard the sounds of groping hands, of a creaking door, of uncertain feet on the stairs.

Harz seized her hand.

"Quick!" he whispered; "behind this canvas!"

Christian was trembling violently. She drew her hood across her face. The heavy breathing and ejaculations of the visitor were now plainly audible.

"He's there! Quick! Hide!"

She shook her head.

With a thrill at his heart, Harz kissed her, then walked towards the entrance. The curtain was pulled aside.

It was Herr Paul, holding a cigar in one hand, his hat in the other, and breathing hard.

"Pardon!" he said huskily, "your stairs are steep, and dark! mais en, fin! nous voila! I have ventured to come for a talk." His glance fell on the cloaked figure in the shadow.

"Pardon! A thousand pardons! I had no idea! I beg you to forgive this indiscretion! I may take it you resign pretensions then? You have a lady here—I have nothing more to say; I only beg a million pardons for intruding. A thousand times forgive me! Good-night!"

He bowed and turned to go. Christian stepped forward, and let the hood fall from her head.

"It's I!"

Herr Paul pirouetted.

"Good God!" he stammered, dropping cigar and hat. "Good God!"

The lantern flared suddenly, revealing his crimson, shaking cheeks.

"You came here, at night! You, the daughter of my wife!" His eyes wandered with a dull glare round the room.

"Take care!" cried Harz: "If you say a word against her—"

The two men stared at each other's eyes. And without warning, the lantern flickered and went out. Christian drew the cloak round her again. Herr Paul's voice broke the silence; he had recovered his self-possession.

"Ah! ah!" he said: "Darkness! Tant mieux! The right thing for what we have to say. Since we do not esteem each other, it is well not to see too much."

"Just so," said Harz.

Christian had come close to them. Her pale face and great shining eyes could just be seen through the gloom.

Herr Paul waved his arm; the gesture was impressive, annihilating.

"This is a matter, I believe, between two men," he said, addressing Harz. "Let us come to the point. I will do you the credit to suppose that you have a marriage in view. You know, perhaps, that Miss Devorell has no money till I die?"

"Yes."

"And I am passably young! You have money, then?"

"No."

"In that case, you would propose to live on air?"

"No, to work; it has been done before."

"It is calculated to increase hunger! You are prepared to take Miss Devorell, a young lady accustomed to luxury, into places like—this!" he peered about him, "into places that smell of paint, into the milieu of 'the people,' into the society of Bohemians—who knows? of anarchists, perhaps?"

Harz clenched his hands: "I will answer no more questions."

"In that event, we reach the ultimatum," said Herr Paul. "Listen, Herr Outlaw! If you have not left the country by noon to-morrow, you shall be introduced to the police!"

Christian uttered a cry. For a minute in the gloom the only sound heard was the short, hard breathing of the two men.

Suddenly Harz cried: "You coward, I defy you!"

"Coward!" Herr Paul repeated. "That is indeed the last word. Look to yourself, my friend!"

Stooping and fumbling on the floor, he picked up his hat. Christian had already vanished; the sound of her hurrying footsteps was distinctly audible at the top of the dark stairs. Herr Paul stood still a minute.

"Look to yourself, my dear friend!" he said in a thick voice, groping for the wall. Planting his hat askew on his head, he began slowly to descend the stairs.

XV

Nicholas Treffry sat reading the paper in his room by the light of a lamp with a green shade; on his sound foot the terrier Scruff was asleep and snoring lightly—the dog habitually came down when Greta was in bed, and remained till Mr. Treffry, always the latest member of the household, retired to rest.

Through the long window a little river of light shone out on the veranda tiles, and, flowing past, cut the garden in two.

There was the sound of hurried footsteps, a rustling of draperies; Christian, running through the window, stood before him.

Mr. Treffry dropped his paper, such a fury of passion and alarm shone in the girl's eyes.

"Chris! What is it?"

"Hateful!"

"Chris!"

"Oh! Uncle! He's insulted, threatened! And I love his little finger more than all the world!"

Her passionate voice trembled, her eyes were shining.

Mr. Treffry's profound discomfort found vent in the gruff words: "Sit down!"

"I'll never speak to Father again! Oh! Uncle! I love him!"

Quiet in the extremity of his disturbance, Mr. Treffry leaned forward in his chair, rested his big hands on its arms, and stared at her.

Chris! Here was a woman he did not know! His lips moved under the heavy droop of his moustache. The girl's face had suddenly grown white. She sank down on her knees, and laid her cheek against his hand. He felt it wet; and a lump rose in his throat. Drawing his hand away, he stared at it, and wiped it with his sleeve.

"Don't cry!" he said.

She seized it again and clung to it; that clutch seemed to fill him with sudden rage.

"What's the matter? How the devil can I do anything if you don't tell me?"

She looked up at him. The distress of the last days, the passion and fear of the last hour, the tide of that new life of the spirit and the flesh, stirring within her, flowed out in a stream of words.

When she had finished, there was so dead a silence that the fluttering of a moth round the lamp could be heard plainly.

Mr. Treffry raised himself, crossed the room, and touched the bell. "Tell the groom," he said to Dominique, "to put the horses to, and have 'em round at once; bring my old boots; we drive all night...."

His bent figure looked huge, body and legs outlined by light, head and shoulders towering into shadow. "He shall have a run for his money!" he said. His eyes stared down sombrely at his niece. "It's more than he deserves!—it's more than you deserve, Chris. Sit down there and write to him; tell him to put himself entirely in my hands." He turned his back on her, and went into his bedroom.

Christian rose, and sat down at the writing-table. A whisper startled her. It came from Dominique, who was holding out a pair of boots.

"M'mselle Chris, what is this?—to run about all night?" But Christian did not answer.

"M'mselle Chris, are you ill?" Then seeing her face, he slipped away again.

She finished her letter and went out to the carriage. Mr. Treffry was seated under the hood.

"Shan't want you," he called out to the groom, "Get up, Dominique."

Christian thrust her letter into his hand. "Give him that," she said, clinging to his arm with sudden terror. "Oh! Uncle! do take care!"

"Chris, if I do this for you—" They looked wistfully at one another. Then, shaking his head, Mr. Treffry gathered up the reins.

"Don't fret, my dear, don't fret! Whoa, mare!"

The carriage with a jerk plunged forward into darkness, curved with a crunch of wheels, and vanished, swinging between the black treepillars at the entrance....

Christian stood, straining to catch the failing sound of the hoofs.

Down the passage came a flutter of white garments; soft limbs were twined about her, some ends of hair fell on her face.

"What is it, Chris? Where have you been? Where is Uncle Nic going? Tell me!"

Christian tore herself away. "I don't know," she cried, "I know nothing!"

Greta stroked her face. "Poor Chris!" she murmured. Her bare feet gleamed, her hair shone gold against her nightdress. "Come to bed, poor Chris!"

Christian laughed. "You little white moth! Feel how hot I am! You'll burn your wings!"

Harz had lain down, fully dressed. He was no longer angry, but felt that he would rather die than yield. Presently he heard footsteps coming up the stairs.

"M'sieu!"

It was the voice of Dominique, whose face, illumined by a match, wore an expression of ironical disgust.

"My master," he said, "makes you his compliments; he says there is no time to waste. You are to please come and drive with him!"

"Your master is very kind. Tell him I'm in bed."

"Ah, M'sieu," said Dominique, grimacing, "I must not go back with such an answer. If you would not come, I was to give you this."

Harz broke the seal and read Christian's letter.

"I will come," he said.

A clock was striking as they went out through the gate. From within the dark cave of the phaeton hood Mr. Treffry said gruffly: "Come along, sir!"

Harz flung his knapsack in, and followed.

His companion's figure swayed, the whiplash slid softly along the flank of the off horse, and, as the carriage rattled forward, Mr. Treffry called out, as if by afterthought: "Hallo, Dominique!" Dominique's voice, shaken and ironical, answered from behind: "M'v'la, M'sieu!"

In the long street of silent houses, men sitting in the lighted cafes turned with glasses at their lips to stare after the carriage. The narrow river of the sky spread suddenly to a vast, limpid ocean tremulous with stars. They had turned into the road for Italy.

Mr. Treffry took a pull at his horses. "Whoa, mare! Dogged does it!" and the near horse, throwing up her head, whinnied; a fleck of foam drifted into Harz's face.

The painter had come on impulse; because Christian had told him to, not of his own free will. He was angry with himself, wounded in self-esteem, for having allowed any one to render him this service. The smooth swift movement through velvet blackness splashed on either hand with the flying lamp-light; the strong sweet air blowing in his face-air that had kissed the tops of mountains and stolen their spirit; the snort and snuffle of the horses, and crisp rattling of their hoofs—all this soon roused in him another

feeling. He looked at Mr. Treffry's profile, with its tufted chin; at the grey road adventuring in darkness; at the purple mass of mountains piled above it. All seemed utterly unreal.

As if suddenly aware that he had a neighbour, Mr. Treffry turned his head. "We shall do better than this presently," he said, "bit of a slope coming. Haven't had 'em out for three days. Whoa-mare! Steady!"

"Why are you taking this trouble for me?" asked Harz.

"I'm an old chap, Mr. Harz, and an old chap may do a stupid thing once in a while!"

"You are very good," said Harz, "but I want no favours."

Mr. Treffry stared at him.

"Just so," he said drily, "but you see there's my niece to be thought of. Look here! We're not at the frontier yet, Mr. Harz, by forty miles; it's long odds we don't get there—so, don't spoil sport!" He pointed to the left.

Harz caught the glint of steel. They were already crossing the railway. The sigh of the telegraph wires fluttered above them.

"Hear 'em," said Mr. Treffry, "but if we get away up the mountains, we'll do yet!" They had begun to rise, the speed slackened. Mr. Treffry rummaged out a flask.

"Not bad stuff, Mr. Harz—try it. You won't? Mother's milk! Fine night, eh?" Below them the valley was lit by webs of milky mist like the glimmer of dew on grass.

These two men sitting side by side—unlike in face, age, stature, thought, and life—began to feel drawn towards each other, as if, in the rolling of the wheels, the snorting of the horses, the huge dark space, the huge uncertainty, they had found something they could enjoy in common. The steam from the horses' flanks and nostrils enveloped them with an odour as of glue.

"You smoke, Mr. Harz?"

Harz took the proffered weed, and lighted it from the glowing tip of Mr. Treffry's cigar, by light of which his head and hat looked like some giant mushroom. Suddenly the wheels jolted on a rubble of loose stones; the carriage was swung sideways. The scared horses, straining asunder, leaped forward, and sped downwards, in the darkness.

Past rocks, trees, dwellings, past a lighted house that gleamed and vanished. With a clink and clatter, a flirt of dust and pebbles, and the side lamps throwing out a frisky orange blink, the carriage dashed down, sinking and rising like a boat crossing billows. The world seemed to rock and sway; to dance up, and be flung flat again. Only the stars stood still.

Mr. Treffry, putting on the brake, muttered apologetically: "A little out o'hand!"

Suddenly with a headlong dive, the carriage swayed as if it would fly in pieces, slithered along, and with a jerk steadied itself. Harz lifted his voice in a shout of pure excitement. Mr. Treffry let out a short shaky howl, and from behind there rose a wail. But the hill was over and the startled horses were cantering with a free, smooth motion. Mr. Treffry and Harz looked at each other.

XVII

Mr. Treffry said with a sort of laugh: "Near go, eh? You drive? No? That's a pity! Broken most of my bones at the game—nothing like it!" Each felt a kind of admiration for the other that he had not felt before. Presently Mr. Treffry began: "Look here, Mr. Harz, my niece is a slip of a thing, with all a young girl's notions! What have you got to give her, eh? Yourself? That's surely not enough; mind this—six months after marriage we all turn out much the same—a selfish lot! Not to mention this anarchist affair!"

"You're not of her blood, nor of her way of life, nor anything—it's taking chances—and—" his hand came down on the young man's knee, "I'm fond of her, you see."

"If you were in my place," said Harz, "would you give her up?"

Mr. Treffry groaned. "Lord knows!"

"Men have made themselves before now. For those who don't believe in failure, there's no such thing. Suppose she does suffer a little? Will it do her any harm? Fair weather love is no good."

Mr. Treffry sighed.

"Brave words, sir! You'll pardon me if I'm too old to understand 'em when they're used about my niece."

He pulled the horses up, and peered into the darkness. "We're going through this bit quietly; if they lose track of us here so much the better. Dominique! put out the lamps. Soho, my beauties!" The horses paced forward at a walk the muffled beat of their hoofs in the dust hardly broke the hush. Mr. Treffry pointed to the left: "It'll be another thirty-five miles to the frontier."

They passed the whitewashed houses, and village church with its sentinel cypress-trees. A frog was croaking in a runlet; there was a faint spicy scent of lemons. But nothing stirred.

It was wood now on either side, the high pines, breathing their fragrance out into the darkness, and, like ghosts amongst them, the silver stems of birch-trees.

Mr. Treffry said gruffly: "You won't give her up? Her happiness means a lot to me."

"To you!" said Harz: "to him! And I am nothing! Do you think I don't care for her happiness? Is it a crime for me to love her?"

"Almost, Mr. Harz—considering...."

"Considering that I've no money! Always money!"

To this sneer Mr. Treffry made no answer, clucking to his horses.

"My niece was born and bred a lady," he said at last. "I ask you plainly What position have you got to give her?"

"If she marries me," said Harz, "she comes into my world. You think that I'm a common...."

Mr. Treffry shook his head: "Answer my question, young man."

But the painter did not answer it, and silence fell.

A light breeze had sprung up; the whispering in the trees, the rolling of the wheels in this night progress, the pine-drugged air, sent Harz to sleep. When he woke it was to the same tune, varied by Mr. Treffry's uneasy snoring; the reins were hanging loose, and, peering out, he saw Dominique shuffling along at the horses' heads. He joined him, and, one on each side, they plodded up and up. A haze had begun to bathe the trees, the stars burnt dim, the air was colder. Mr. Treffry woke coughing. It was like some long nightmare, this interminable experience of muffled sounds and shapes, of perpetual motion, conceived, and carried out in darkness. But suddenly the day broke. Heralded by the snuffle of the horses, light began glimmering over a chaos of lines and shadows, pale as mother-o'-pearl. The stars faded, and in a smouldering zigzag the dawn fled along the mountain tops, flinging out little isles of cloud. From a lake, curled in a hollow like a patch of smoke, came the cry of a water-bird. A cuckoo started a soft mocking; and close to the carriage a lark flew up. Beasts and men alike stood still, drinking in the air-sweet with snows and dew, and vibrating faintly with the running of the water and the rustling of the leaves.

The night had played sad tricks with Mr. Nicholas Treffry; his hat was grey with dust; his cheeks brownish-purple, there were heavy pouches beneath his eyes, which stared painfully.

"We'll call a halt," he said, "and give the gees their grub, poor things. Can you find some water, Mr. Harz? There's a rubber bucket in behind."

"Can't get about myself this morning; make that lazy fellow of mine stir his stumps."

Harz saw that he had drawn off one of his boots, and stretched the foot out on a cushion.

"You're not fit to go farther," he said; "you're ill."

"Ill!" replied Mr. Treffry; "not a bit of it!"

Harz looked at him, then catching up the bucket, made off in search of water. When he came back the horses were feeding from an india-rubber trough slung to the pole; they stretched their heads towards the bucket, pushing aside each other's noses.

The flame in the east had died, but the tops of the larches were bathed in a gentle radiance; and the peaks ahead were like amber. Everywhere were threads of water, threads of snow, and little threads of dewy green, glistening like gossamer.

Mr. Treffry called out: "Give me your arm, Mr. Harz; I'd like to shake the reefs out of me. When one comes to stand over at the knees, it's no such easy matter, eh?" He groaned as he put his foot down, and gripped the young man's shoulder as in a vise. Presently he lowered himself on to a stone.

"All over now!" as Chris would say when she was little; nasty temper she had too—kick and scream on the floor! Never lasted long though.... 'Kiss her! take her up! show her the pictures!' Amazing fond of pictures Chris was!" He looked dubiously at Harz; then took a long pull at his flask. "What would the doctor say? Whisky at four in the morning! Well! Thank the Lord Doctors aren't always with us." Sitting on the stone, with one hand pressed against his side, and the other tilting up the flask, he was grey from head to foot.

Harz had dropped on to another stone. He, too, was worn out by the excitement and fatigue, coming so soon after his illness. His head was whirling, and the next thing he remembered was a tree walking at him, turning round, yellow from the roots up; everything seemed yellow, even his own feet. Somebody opposite to him was jumping up and down, a grey bear—with a hat—Mr. Treffry! He cried: "Ha-alloo!" And the figure seemed to fall and disappear....

When Harz came to himself a hand was pouring liquor into his mouth, and a wet cloth was muffled round his brows; a noise of humming and hoofs seemed familiar. Mr. Treffry loomed up alongside, smoking a cigar; he was muttering: "A low trick, Paul—bit of my mind!" Then, as if a curtain had been snatched aside, the vision before Harz cleared again. The carriage was winding between uneven, black-eaved houses, past doorways from which goats and cows were coming out, with bells on their necks. Black-eyed boys, and here and there a drowsy man with a long, cherry-stemmed pipe between his teeth, stood aside to stare.

Mr. Treffry seemed to have taken a new lease of strength; like an angry old dog, he stared from side to side. "My bone!" he seemed to say: "let's see who's going to touch it!"

The last house vanished, glowing in the early sunshine, and the carriage with its trail of dust became entombed once more in the gloom of tall trees, along a road that cleft a wilderness of mossgrown rocks, and dewy stems, through which the sun had not yet driven paths.

Dominique came round to them, bearing appearance of one who has seen better days, and a pot of coffee brewed on a spirit lamp. Breakfast—he said—was served!

The ears of the horses were twitching with fatigue. Mr. Treffry said sadly: "If I can see this through, you can. Get on, my beauties!"

As soon as the sun struck through the trees, Mr. Treffry's strength ebbed again. He seemed to suffer greatly; but did not complain. They had reached the pass at last, and the unchecked sunlight was streaming down with a blinding glare.

"Jump up!" Mr. Treffry cried out. "We'll make a finish of it!" and he gave the reins a jerk. The horses flung up their heads, and the bleak pass with its circling crown of jagged peaks soon slipped away.

Between the houses on the very top, they passed at a slow trot; and soon began slanting down the other side. Mr. Treffry brought them to a halt where a mule track joined the road.

"That's all I can do for you; you'd better leave me here," he said. "Keep this track down to the river—go south—you'll be in Italy in a couple of hours. Get rail at Feltre. Money? Yes? Well!" He held out his hand; Harz gripped it.

"Give her up, eh?"

Harz shook his head.

"No? Then it's 'pull devil, pull baker,' between us. Good-bye, and good luck to you!" And mustering his strength for a last attempt at dignity, Mr. Treffry gathered up the reins.

Harz watched his figure huddled again beneath the hood. The carriage moved slowly away.

XVIII

At Villa Rubein people went about, avoiding each other as if detected in conspiracy. Miss Naylor, who for an inscrutable reason had put on her best frock, a purple, relieved at the chest with bird's-eye blue, conveyed an impression of trying to count a chicken which ran about too fast. When Greta asked what she had lost she was heard to mutter: "Mr.—Needlecase."

Christian, with big circles round her eyes, sat silent at her little table. She had had no sleep. Herr Paul coming into the room about noon gave her a furtive look and went out again; after this he went to his bedroom, took off all his clothes, flung them passionately one by one into a footbath, and got into bed.

"I might be a criminal!" he muttered to himself, while the buttons of his garments rattled on the bath.

"Am I her father? Have I authority? Do I know the world? Bssss! I might be a frog!"

Mrs. Decie, having caused herself to be announced, found him smoking a cigar, and counting the flies on the ceiling.

"If you have really done this, Paul," she said in a restrained voice, "you have done a very unkind thing, and what is worse, you have made us all ridiculous. But perhaps you have not done it?"

"I have done it," cried Herr Paul, staring dreadfully: "I have done it, I tell you, I have done it—"

"Very well, you have done it—and why, pray? What conceivable good was there in it? I suppose you know that Nicholas has driven him to the frontier? Nicholas is probably more dead than alive by this time; you know his state of health."

Herr Paul's fingers ploughed up his beard.

"Nicholas is mad—and the girl is mad! Leave me alone! I will not be made angry; do you understand? I will not be worried—I am not fit for it." His prominent brown eyes stared round the room, as if looking for a way of escape.

"If I may prophesy, you will be worried a good deal," said Mrs. Decie coldly, "before you have finished with this affair."

The anxious, uncertain glance which Herr Paul gave her at these words roused an unwilling feeling of compunction in her.

"You are not made for the outraged father of the family," she said. "You had better give up the attitude, Paul; it does not suit you."

Herr Paul groaned.

"I suppose it is not your fault," she added.

Just then the door was opened, and Fritz, with an air of saying the right thing, announced:

"A gentleman of the police to see you, sir."

Herr Paul bounded.

"Keep him out!" he cried.

Mrs. Decie, covering her lips, disappeared with a rustling of silk; in her place stood a stiff man in blue....

Thus the morning dragged itself away without any one being able to settle to anything, except Herr Paul, who was settled in bed. As was fitting in a house that had lost its soul, meals were neglected, even by the dog.

About three o'clock a telegram came for Christian, containing these words: "All right; self returns tomorrow. Treffry." After reading it she put on her hat and went out, followed closely by Greta, who, when she thought that she would not be sent away, ran up from behind and pulled her by the sleeve.

"Let me come, Chris—I shall not talk."

The two girls walked on together. When they had gone some distance

Christian said:

"I'm going to get his pictures, and take charge of them!"

"Oh!" said Greta timidly.

"If you are afraid," said Christian, "you had better go back home."

"I am not afraid, Chris," said Greta meekly.

Neither girl spoke again till they had taken the path along the wall. Over the tops of the vines the heat was dancing.

"The sun-fairies are on the vines!" murmured Greta to herself.

At the old house they stopped, and Christian, breathing quickly, pushed the door; it was immovable.

"Look!" said Greta, "they have screwed it!" She pointed out three screws with a rosy-tipped forefinger.

Christian stamped her foot.

"We mustn't stand here," she said; "let's sit on that bench and think."

"Yes," murmured Greta, "let us think." Dangling an end of hair, she regarded Christian with her wide blue eyes.

"I can't make any plan," Christian cried at last, "while you stare at me like that."

"I was thinking," said Greta humbly, "if they have screwed it up, perhaps we shall screw it down again; there is the big screw-driver of Fritz."

"It would take a long time; people are always passing."

"People do not pass in the evening," murmured Greta, "because the gate at our end is always shut."

Christian rose.

"We will come this evening, just before the gate is shut."

"But, Chris, how shall we get back again?"

"I don't know; I mean to have the pictures."

"It is not a high gate," murmured Greta.

After dinner the girls went to their room, Greta bearing with her the big screw-driver of Fritz. At dusk they slipped downstairs and out.

They arrived at the old house, and stood, listening, in the shadow of the doorway. The only sounds were those of distant barking dogs, and of the bugles at the barracks.

"Quick!" whispered Christian; and Greta, with all the strength of her small hands, began to turn the screws. It was some time before they yielded; the third was very obstinate, till Christian took the screw-driver and passionately gave the screw a starting twist.

"It is like a pig—that one," said Greta, rubbing her wrists mournfully.

The opened door revealed the gloom of the dank rooms and twisting staircase, then fell to behind them with a clatter.

Greta gave a little scream, and caught her sister's dress.

"It is dark," she gasped; "O Chris! it is dark!"

Christian groped for the bottom stair, and Greta felt her arm shaking.

"Suppose there is a man to keep guard! O Chris! suppose there are bats!"

"You are a baby!" Christian answered in a trembling voice. "You had better go home!"

Greta choked a little in the dark.

"I am—not—going home, but I'm afraid of bats. O Chris! aren't you afraid?"

"Yes," said Christian, "but I'm going to have the pictures."

Her cheeks were burning; she was trembling all over. Having found the bottom step she began to mount with Greta clinging to her skirts.

The haze above inspired a little courage in the child, who, of all things, hated darkness. The blanket across the doorway of the loft had been taken down, there was nothing to veil the empty room.

"Nobody here, you see," said Christian.

"No-o," whispered Greta, running to the window, and clinging to the wall, like one of the bats she dreaded.

"But they have been here!" cried Christian angrily. "They have broken this." She pointed to the fragments of a plaster cast that had been thrown down.

Out of the corner she began to pull the canvases set in rough, wooden frames, dragging them with all her strength.

"Help me!" she cried; "it will be dark directly."

They collected a heap of sketches and three large pictures, piling them before the window, and peering at them in the failing light.

Greta said ruefully:

"O Chris! they are heavy ones; we shall never carry them, and the gate is shut now!"

Christian took a pointed knife from the table.

"I shall cut them out of the frames," she said. "Listen! What's that?"

It was the sound of whistling, which stopped beneath the window. The girls, clasping each other's hands, dropped on their knees.

"Hallo!" cried a voice.

Greta crept to the window, and, placing her face level with the floor, peered over.

"It is only Dr. Edmund; he doesn't know, then," she whispered; "I shall call him; he is going away!" cried Christian catching her sister's —"Don't!" cried Christian catching her sister's dress.

"He would help us," Greta said reproachfully, "and it would not be so dark if he were here."

Christian's cheeks were burning.

"I don't choose," she said, and began handling the pictures, feeling their edges with her knife.

"Chris! Suppose anybody came?"

"The door is screwed," Christian answered absently.

"O Chris! We screwed it unscrewed; anybody who wishes shall come!"

Christian, leaning her chin in her hands, gazed at her thoughtfully.

"It will take a long time to cut these pictures out carefully; or, perhaps I can get them out without cutting. You must screw me up and go home. In the morning you must come early, when the gate is open, unscrew me again, and help carry the pictures."

Greta did not answer at once. At last she shook her head violently.

"I am afraid," she gasped.

"We can't both stay here all night," said Christian; "if any one comes to our room there will be nobody to answer. We can't lift these pictures over the gate. One of us must go back; you can climb over the gate—there is nothing to be afraid of"

Greta pressed her hands together.

"Do you want the pictures badly, Chris?"

Christian nodded.

"Very badly?"

"Yes—yes—yes!"

Greta remained sitting where she was, shivering violently, as a little animal shivers when it scents danger. At last she rose.

"I am going," she said in a despairing voice. At the doorway she turned.

"If Miss Naylor shall ask me where you are, Chris, I shall be telling her a story."

Christian started.

"I forgot that—O Greta, I am sorry! I will go instead."

Greta took another step—a quick one.

"I shall die if I stay here alone," she said; "I can tell her that you are in bed; you must go to bed here, Chris, so it shall be true after all."

Christian threw her arms about her.

"I am so sorry, darling; I wish I could go instead. But if you have to tell a lie, I would tell a straight one."

"Would you?" said Greta doubtfully.

"Yes."

"I think," said Greta to herself, beginning to descend the stairs, "I think I will tell it in my way." She shuddered and went on groping in the darkness.

Christian listened for the sound of the screws. It came slowly, threatening her with danger and solitude.

Sinking on her knees she began to work at freeing the canvas of a picture. Her heart throbbed distressfully; at the stir of wind-breath or any distant note of clamour she stopped, and held her breathing. No sounds came near. She toiled on, trying only to think that she was at the very spot where last night his arms had been round her. How long ago it seemed! She was full of vague terror, overmastered by the darkness, dreadfully alone. The new glow of resolution seemed suddenly to have died down in her heart, and left her cold.

She would never be fit to be his wife, if at the first test her courage failed! She set her teeth; and suddenly she felt a kind of exultation, as if she too were entering into life, were knowing something within herself that she had never known before. Her fingers hurt, and the pain even gave pleasure; her cheeks were burning; her breath came fast. They could not stop her now! This feverish task in darkness was her baptism into life. She finished; and rolling the pictures very carefully, tied them with cord. She had done something for him! Nobody could take that from her! She had a part of him! This night had made him hers! They might do their worst! She lay down on his mattress and soon fell asleep....

She was awakened by Scruff's tongue against her face. Greta was standing by her side.

"Wake up, Chris! The gate is open!"

In the cold early light the child seemed to glow with warmth and colour; her eyes were dancing.

"I am not afraid now; Scruff and I sat up all night, to catch the morning—I—think it was fun; and O Chris!" she ended with a rueful gleam in her eyes, "I told it."

Christian hugged her.

"Come—quick! There is nobody about. Are those the pictures?"

Each supporting an end, the girls carried the bundle downstairs, and set out with their corpse-like burden along the wall-path between the river and the vines.

XIX

Hidden by the shade of rose-bushes Greta lay stretched at length, cheek on arm, sleeping the sleep of the unrighteous. Through the flowers the sun flicked her parted lips with kisses, and spilled the withered petals on her. In a denser islet of shade, Scruff lay snapping at a fly. His head lolled drowsily in the middle of a snap, and snapped in the middle of a loll.

At three o'clock Miss Naylor too came out, carrying a basket and pair of scissors. Lifting her skirts to avoid the lakes of water left by the garden hose, she stopped in front of a rose-bush, and began to snip off the shrivelled flowers. The little lady's silvered head and thin, brown face sustained the shower of sunlight unprotected, and had a gentle dignity in their freedom.

Presently, as the scissors flittered in and out of the leaves, she, began talking to herself.

"If girls were more like what they used to be, this would not have happened. Perhaps we don't understand; it's very easy to forget." Burying her nose and lips in a rose, she sniffed. "Poor dear girl! It's such a pity his father is—a—"

"A farmer," said a sleepy voice behind the rosebush.

Miss Naylor leaped. "Greta! How you startled me! A farmer—that is —an—an agriculturalist!"

"A farmer with vineyards—he told us, and he is not ashamed. Why is it a pity, Miss Naylor?"

Miss Naylor's lips looked very thin.

"For many reasons, of which you know nothing."

"That is what you always say," pursued the sleepy voice; "and that is why, when I am to be married, there shall also be a pity."

"Greta!" Miss Naylor cried, "it is not proper for a girl of your age to talk like that."

"Why?" said Greta. "Because it is the truth?"

Miss Naylor made no reply to this, but vexedly cut off a sound rose, which she hastily picked up and regarded with contrition. Greta spoke again:

"Chris said: 'I have got the pictures, I shall tell her'; but I shall tell you instead, because it was I that told the story."

Miss Naylor stared, wrinkling her nose, and holding the scissors wide apart....

"Last night," said Greta slowly, "I and Chris went to his studio and took his pictures, and so, because the gate was shut, I came back to tell it; and when you asked me where Chris was, I told it; because she was in the studio all night, and I and Scruff sat up all night, and in the morning we brought the pictures, and hid them under our beds, and that is why—we—are—so—sleepy."

Over the rose-bush Miss Naylor peered down at her; and though she was obliged to stand on tiptoe this did not altogether destroy her dignity.

"I am surprised at you, Greta; I am surprised at Christian, more surprised at Christian. The world seems upside down."

Greta, a sunbeam entangled in her hair, regarded her with inscrutable, innocent eyes.

"When you were a girl, I think you would be sure to be in love," she murmured drowsily.

Miss Naylor, flushing deeply, snipped off a particularly healthy bud.

"And so, because you are not married, I think—"

The scissors hissed.

Greta nestled down again. "I think it is wicked to cut off all the good buds," she said, and shut her eyes.

Miss Naylor continued to peer across the rosebush; but her thin face, close to the glistening leaves, had become oddly soft, pink, and girlish. At a deeper breath from Greta, the little lady put down her

basket, and began to pace the lawn, followed dubiously by Scruff. It was thus that Christian came on them.

Miss Naylor slipped her arm into the girl's and though she made no sound, her lips kept opening and shutting, like the beak of a bird contemplating a worm.

Christian spoke first:

"Miss Naylor, I want to tell you please—"

"Oh, my dear! I know; Greta has been in the confessional before you." She gave the girl's arm a squeeze. "Isn't it a lovely day? Did you ever see 'Five Fingers' look so beautiful?" And she pointed to the great peaks of the Funffingerspitze glittering in the sun like giant crystals.

"I like them better with clouds about them."

"Well," agreed Miss Naylor nervously, "they certainly are nicer with clouds about them. They look almost hot and greasy, don't they.... My dear!" she went on, giving Christian's arm a dozen little squeezes, "we all of us—that is, we all of us—"

Christian turned her eyes away.

"My dear," Miss Naylor tried again, "I am far—that is, I mean, to all of us at some time or another—and then you see—well—it is hard!"

Christian kissed the gloved hand resting on her arm. Miss Naylor bobbed her head; a tear trickled off her nose.

"Do let us wind your skein of woof!" she said with resounding gaiety.

Some half-hour later Mrs. Decie called Christian to her room.

"My dear!" she said; "come here a minute; I have a message for you."

Christian went with an odd, set look about her mouth.

Her aunt was sitting, back to the light, tapping a bowl of goldfish with the tip of a polished fingernail; the room was very cool. She held a letter out. "Your uncle is not coming back tonight."

Christian took the letter. It was curtly worded, in a thin, toppling hand:

"DEAR CON—Can't get back to-night. Sending Dominique for things. Tell Christian to come over with him for night if possible.—Yr. aff. brother,
NICALS. TREFFRY."

"Dominique has a carriage here," said Mrs. Decie. "You will have nice time to catch the train. Give my love to your uncle. You must take Barbi with you, I insist on that." She rose from her chair and held Christian's hand: "My dear! You look very tired—very! Almost ill. I don't like to see you look like that. Come!" She thrust her pale lips forward, and kissed the girl's paler cheek.

Then as Christian left the room she sank back in her chair, with creases in her forehead, and began languidly to cut a magazine. 'Poor Christian!' she thought, 'how hardly she does take it! I am sorry for her; but perhaps it's just as well, as things are turning out. Psychologically it is interesting!'

Christian found her things packed, and the two servants waiting. In a few minutes they were driving to the station. She made Dominique take the seat opposite.

"Well?" she asked him.

Dominique's eyebrows twitched, he smiled deprecatingly.

"M'mselle, Mr. Treffry told me to hold my tongue."

"But you can tell me, Dominique; Barbi can't understand."

"To you, then, M'mselle," said Dominique, as one who accepts his fate; "to you, then, who will doubtless forget all that I shall tell you—my master is not well; he has terrible pain here; he has a cough; he is not well at all; not well at all."

A feeling of dismay seized on the girl.

"We were a caravan for all that night," Dominique resumed. "In the morning by noon we ceased to be a caravan; Signor Harz took a mule path; he will be in Italy—certainly in Italy. As for us, we stayed at San Martino, and my master went to bed. It was time; I had much trouble with his clothes, his legs were swollen. In the afternoon came a signor of police, on horseback, red and hot; I persuaded him that we were at Paneveggio, but as we were not, he came back angry—Mon Die! as angry as a cat. It was not good to meet him—when he was with my master I was outside. There was much noise. I do not know what passed, but at last the signor came out through the door, and went away in a hurry." Dominique's features were fixed in a sardonic grin; he rubbed the palm of one hand with the finger of the other. "Mr. Treffry made me give him whisky afterwards, and he had no money to pay the bill—that I know because I paid it. Well, M'mselle, to-day he would be dressed and very slowly we came as far as Auer; there he could do no more, so went to bed. He is not well at all."

Christian was overwhelmed by forebodings; the rest of the journey was made in silence, except when Barbi, a country girl, filled with the delirium of railway travel, sighed: "Ach! gnadige Fraulein!" looking at Christian with pleasant eyes.

At once, on arriving at the little hostel, Christian went to see her uncle. His room was darkened, and smelt of beeswax.

"Ah! Chris," he said, "glad to see you."

In a blue flannel gown, with a rug over his feet, he was lying on a couch lengthened artificially by chairs; the arm he reached out issued many inches from its sleeve, and showed the corded veins of the wrist. Christian, settling his pillows, looked anxiously into his eyes.

"I'm not quite the thing, Chris," said Mr. Treffry. "Somehow, not quite the thing. I'll come back with you to-morrow."

"Let me send for Dr. Dawney, Uncle?"

"No—no! Plenty of him when I get home. Very good young fellow, as doctors go, but I can't stand his puddin's—slops and puddin's, and all that trumperry medicine on the top. Send me Dominique, my dear—I'll put myself to rights a bit!" He fingered his unshaven cheek, and clutched the gown together on his chest. "Got this from the landlord. When you come back we'll have a little talk!"

He was asleep when she came into the room an hour later. Watching his uneasy breathing, she wondered what it was that he was going to say.

He looked ill! And suddenly she realised that her thoughts were not of him.... When she was little he would take her on his back; he had built cocked hats for her and paper boats; had taught her to ride; slid her between his knees; given her things without number; and taken his payment in kisses. And now he was ill, and she was not thinking of him! He had been all that was most dear to her, yet before her eyes would only come the vision of another.

Mr. Treffry woke suddenly. "Not been asleep, have I? The beds here are infernal hard."

"Uncle Nic, won't you give me news of him?"

Mr. Treffry looked at her, and Christian could not bear that look.

"He's safe into Italy; they aren't very keen after him, it's so long ago; I squared 'em pretty easily. Now, look here, Chris!"

Christian came close; he took her hand.

"I'd like to see you pull yourself together. 'Tisn't so much the position; 'tisn't so much the money; because after all there's always mine—" Christian shook her head. "But," he went on with shaky emphasis, "there's the difference of blood, and that's a serious thing; and there's this anarch—this political affair; and there's the sort of life, an' that's a serious thing; but—what I'm coming to is this, Chris—there's the man!"

Christian drew away her hand. Mr. Treffry went on:

"Ah! yes. I'm an old chap and fond of you, but I must speak out what I think. He's got pluck, he's strong, he's in earnest; but he's got a damned hot temper, he's an egotist, and—he's not the man for you. If you marry him, as sure as I lie here, you'll be sorry for it. You're not your father's child for nothing; nice fellow as ever lived, but soft as butter. If you take this chap, it'll be like mixing earth and ironstone, and they don't blend!" He dropped his head back on the pillows, and stretching out his hand, repeated wistfully: "Take my word for it, my dear, he's not the man for you."

Christian, staring at the wall beyond, said quietly: "I can't take any one's word for that."

"Ah!" muttered Mr. Treffry, "you're obstinate enough, but obstinacy isn't strength."

"You'll give up everything to him, you'll lick his shoes; and you'll never play anything but second fiddle in his life. He'll always be first with himself, he and his work, or whatever he calls painting pictures; and some day you'll find that out. You won't like it, and I don't like it for you, Chris, and that's flat."

He wiped his brow where the perspiration stood in beads.

Christian said: "You don't understand; you don't believe in him; you don't see! If I do come after his work—if I do give him everything, and he can't give all back—I don't care! He'll give what he can; I don't want any more. If you're afraid of the life for me, uncle, if you think it'll be too hard—"

Mr. Treffry bowed his head. "I do, Chris."

"Well, then, I hate to be wrapped in cotton wool; I want to breathe. If I come to grief, it's my own affair; nobody need mind."

Mr. Treffry's fingers sought his beard. "Ah! yes. Just so!"

Christian sank on her knees.

"Oh! Uncle! I'm a selfish beast!"

Mr. Treffry laid his hand against her cheek. "I think I could do with a nap," he said.

Swallowing a lump in her throat, she stole out of the room.

By a stroke of Fate Mr. Treffry's return to Villa Rubein befell at the psychological moment when Herr Paul, in a suit of rather too bright blue, was starting for Vienna.

As soon as he saw the carriage appear between the poplars he became as pensive as a boy caught in the act of stealing cherries. Pitching his hatbox to Fritz, he recovered himself, however, in time to whistle while Mr. Treffry was being assisted into the house. Having forgotten his anger, he was only anxious now to smooth out its after effects; in the glances he cast at Christian and his brother-in-law there was a kind of shamed entreaty which seemed to say: "For goodness' sake, don't worry me about that business again! Nothing's come of it, you see!"

He came forward: "Ah! Mon cher! So you return; I put off my departure, then. Vienna must wait for me—that poor Vienna!"

But noticing the extreme feebleness of Mr. Treffry's advance, he exclaimed with genuine concern:

"What is it? You're ill? My God!" After disappearing for five minutes, he came back with a whitish liquid in a glass.

"There!" he said, "good for the gout—for a cough—for everything!"

Mr. Treffry sniffed, drained the glass, and sucked his moustache.

"Ah!" he said. "No doubt! But it's uncommonly like gin, Paul." Then turning to Christian, he said: "Shake hands, you two!"

Christian looked from one to the other, and at last held out her hand to Herr Paul, who brushed it with his moustache, gazing after her as she left the room with a queer expression.

"My dear!" he began, "you support her in this execrable matter? You forget my position, you make me ridiculous. I have been obliged to go to bed in my own house, absolutely to go to bed, because I was in danger of becoming funny."

"Look here, Paul!" Mr. Treffry said gruffly, "if any one's to bully Chris, it's I."

"In that case," returned Herr Paul sarcastically, "I will go to Vienna."

"You may go to the devil!" said Mr. Treffry; "and I'll tell you what—in my opinion it was low to set the police on that young chap; a low, dirty trick."

Herr Paul divided his beard carefully in two, took his seat on the very edge of an arm-chair, and

placing his hands on his parted knees, said:

"I have regretted it since—mais, que diable! He called me a coward—it is very hot weather!—there were drinks at the Kurhaus—I am her guardian—the affair is a very beastly one—there were more drinks—I was a little enfin!" He shrugged his shoulders. "Adieu, my dear; I shall be some time in Vienna; I need rest!" He rose and went to the door; then he turned, and waved his cigar. "Adieu! Be good; get well! I will buy you some cigars up there." And going out, he shut the door on any possibility of answer.

Mr. Treffry lay back amongst his cushions. The clock ticked; pigeons cooed on the veranda; a door opened in the distance, and for a moment a treble voice was heard. Mr. Treffry's head drooped forward; across his face, gloomy and rugged, fell a thin line of sunlight.

The clock suddenly stopped ticking, and outside, in mysterious accord, the pigeons rose with a great fluttering of wings, and flew off. Mr. Treffry made a startled, heavy movement. He tried to get on to his feet and reach the bell, but could not, and sat on the side of the couch with drops of sweat rolling off his forehead, and his hands clawing his chest. There was no sound at all throughout the house. He looked about him, and tried to call, but again could not. He tried once more to reach the bell, and, failing, sat still, with a thought that made him cold.

"I'm done for," he muttered. "By George! I believe I'm done for this time!" A voice behind him said:

"Can we have a look at you, sir?"

"Ah! Doctor, bear a hand, there's a good fellow."

Dawney propped him against the cushions, and loosened his shirt. Receiving no answer to his questions, he stepped alarmed towards the bell. Mr. Treffry stopped him with a sign.

"Let's hear what you make of me," he said.

When Dawney had examined him, he asked:

"Well?"

"Well," answered Dawney slowly, "there's trouble, of course."

Mr. Treffry broke out with a husky whisper: "Out with it, Doctor; don't humbug me."

Dawney bent down, and took his wrist.

"I don't know how you've got into this state, sir," he said with the brusqueness of emotion. "You're in a bad way. It's the old trouble; and you know what that means as well as I. All I can tell you is, I'm going to have a big fight with it. It shan't be my fault, there's my hand on that."

Mr. Treffry lay with his eyes fixed on the ceiling; at last he said:

"I want to live."

"Yes—yes."

"I feel better now; don't make a fuss about it. It'll be very awkward if I die just now. Patch me up, for the sake of my niece."

Dawney nodded. "One minute, there are a few things I want," and he went out.

A moment later Greta stole in on tiptoe. She bent over till her hair touched Mr. Treffry's face.

"Uncle Nic!" she whispered. He opened his eyes.

"Hallo, Greta!"

"I have come to bring you my love, Uncle Nic, and to say good-bye. Papa says that I and Scruff and Miss Naylor are going to Vienna with him; we have had to pack in half an hour; in five minutes we are going to Vienna, and it is my first visit there, Uncle Nic."

"To Vienna!" Mr. Treffry repeated slowly. "Don't have a guide, Greta; they're humbugs."

"No, Uncle Nic," said Greta solemnly.

"Draw the curtains, old girl, let's have a look at you. Why, you're as smart as ninepence!"

"Yes," said Greta with a sigh, touching the buttons of her cape, "because I am going to Vienna; but I am sorry to leave you, Uncle Nic."

"Are you, Greta?"

"But you will have Chris, and you are fonder of Chris than of me, Uncle Nic."

"I've known her longer."

"Perhaps when you've known me as long as Chris, you shall be as fond of me."

"When I've known you as long—may be."

"While I am gone, Uncle Nic, you are to get well, you are not very well, you know."

"What put that into your head?"

"If you were well you would be smoking a cigar—it is just three o'clock. This kiss is for myself, this is for Scruff, and this is for Miss Naylor."

She stood upright again; a tremulous, joyful gravity was in her eyes and on her lips.

"Good-bye, my dear; take care of yourselves; and don't you have a guide, they're humbugs."

"No, Uncle Nic. There is the carriage! To Vienna, Uncle Nic!" The dead gold of her hair gleamed in the doorway. Mr. Treffry raised himself upon his elbow.

"Give us one more, for luck!"

Greta ran back.

"I love you very much!" she said, and kissing him, backed slowly, then, turning, flew out like a bird.

Mr. Treffry fixed his eyes on the shut door.

XXI

After many days of hot, still weather, the wind had come, and whirled the dust along the parched roads. The leaves were all astir, like tiny wings. Round Villa Rubein the pigeons cooed uneasily, all the other birds were silent. Late in the afternoon Christian came out on the veranda, reading a letter:

"DEAR CHRIS,—We are here now six days, and it is a very large place with many churches. In the first place then we have been to a great many, but the nicest of them is not St. Stephan's Kirche, it is another, but I do not remember the name. Papa is out nearly all the night; he says he is resting here, so he is not able to come to the churches with us, but I do not think he rests very much. The day before yesterday we, that is, Papa, I, and Miss Naylor, went to an exhibition of pictures. It was quite beautiful and interesting (Miss Naylor says it is not right to say 'quite' beautiful, but I do not know what other word could mean 'quite' except the word 'quite,' because it is not exceedingly and not extremely). And O Chris! there was one picture painted by him; it was about a ship without masts—Miss Naylor says it is a barge, but I do not know what a barge is—on fire, and, floating down a river in a fog. I think it is extremely beautiful. Miss Naylor says it is very impressionistick—what is that? and Papa said 'Puh!' but he did not know it was painted by Herr Harz, so I did not tell him.

"There has also been staying at our hotel that Count Sarelli who came one evening to dinner at our house, but he is gone away now. He sat all day in the winter garden reading, and at night he went out with Papa. Miss Naylor says he is unhappy, but I think he does not take enough exercise; and O Chris! one day he said to me, 'That is your sister, Mademoiselle, that young lady in the white dress? Does she always wear white dresses?' and I said to him: 'It is not always a white dress; in the picture, it is green, because the picture is called "Spring.'" But I did not tell him the colours of all your dresses because he looked so tired. Then he said to me: 'She is very charming.' So I tell you this, Chris, because I think you shall like to know. Scruff' has a sore toe; it is because he has eaten too much meat.

"It is not nice without you, Chris, and Miss Naylor says I am improving my mind here, but I do not think it shall improve very much, because at night I like it always best, when the shops are lighted and the carriages are driving past; then I am wanting to dance. The first night Papa said he would take me to the theatre, but yesterday he said it was not good for me; perhaps to-morrow he shall think it good for me again.

"Yesterday we have been in the Prater, and saw many people, and some that Papa knew; and then came the most interesting part of all, sitting under the trees in the rain for two hours because we could not get a carriage (very exciting).

"There is one young lady here, only she is not any longer very young, who knew Papa when he was a boy. I like her very much; she shall soon know me quite to the bottom and is very kind.

"The ill husband of Cousin Teresa who went with us to Meran and lost her umbrella and Dr. Edmund was so sorry about it, has been very much worse, so she is not here but in Baden. I wrote to her but have no news, so I do not know whether he is still living or not, at any rate he can't get well again so soon (and I don't think he ever shall). I think as the weather is very warm you and Uncle Nic are sitting much out of doors. I am sending presents to you all in a wooden box and screwed very firm, so you shall have to use again the big screw-driver of Fritz. For Aunt Constance, photographs; for Uncle Nic, a green bird on a stand with a hole in the back of the bird to put his ashes in; it is a good green and not expensive please tell him, because he does not like expensive presents (Miss Naylor says the bird has an inquiring eye—it is a parrot); for you, a little brooch of turquoise because I like them best; for Dr. Edmund a machine to weigh medicines in because he said he could not get a good one in Botzen; this is a very good one, the shopman told me so, and is the most expensive of all the presents—so that is all my money, except two gulden. If Papa shall give me some more, I shall buy for Miss Naylor a parasol, because it is useful and the handle of hers is 'wobbly' (that is one of Dr. Edmund's words and I like it).

"Good-bye for this time. Greta sends you her kiss.

"P. S.—Miss Naylor has read all this letter (except about the parasol) and there are several things she did not want me to put, so I have copied it without the things, but at the last I have kept that copy myself, so that is why this is smudgy and several words are not spelt well, but all the things are here."

Christian read, smiling, but to finish it was like dropping a talisman, and her face clouded. A sudden draught blew her hair about, and from within, Mr. Treffry's cough mingled with the sighing of the wind; the sky was fast blackening. She went indoors, took a pen and began to write:

"MY FRIEND,—Why haven't you written to me? It is so, long to wait. Uncle says you are in Italy—it is dreadful not to know for certain. I feel you would have written if you could; and I can't help thinking of all the things that may have happened. I am unhappy. Uncle Nic is ill; he will not confess it, that is his way; but he is very ill. Though perhaps you will never see this, I must write down all my thoughts. Sometimes I feel that I am brutal to be always thinking about you, scheming how to be with you again, when he is lying there so ill. How good he has always been to me; it is terrible that love should pull one apart so. Surely love should be beautiful, and peaceful, instead of filling me with bitter, wicked thoughts. I love you—and I love him; I feel as if I were torn in two. Why should it be so? Why should the beginning of one life mean the ending of another, one love the destruction of another? I don't understand. The same spirit makes me love you and him, the same sympathy, the same trust—yet it sometimes seems as if I were a criminal in loving you. You know what he thinks—he is too honest not to have shown you. He has talked to me; he likes you in a way, but you are a foreigner—he says—your life is not my life. 'He is not the man for you!' Those were his words. And now he doesn't talk to me, but when I am in the room he looks at me—that's worse—a thousand times; when he talks it rouses me to fight—when it's his eyes only, I'm a coward at once; I feel I would do anything, anything, only not to hurt him. Why can't he see? Is it because he's old and we are young? He may consent, but he will never, never see; it will always hurt him.

"I want to tell you everything; I have had worse thoughts than these —sometimes I have thought that I should never have the courage to face the struggle which you have to face. Then I feel quite broken; it is like something giving way in me. Then I think of you, and it is over; but it has been there, and I am ashamed—I told you I was a coward. It's like the feeling one would have going out into a storm on a dark night, away from a warm fire—only of the spirit not the body—which makes it worse. I had to tell you this; you mustn't think of it again, I mean to fight it away and forget that it has ever been there. But Uncle Nic—what am I to do? I hate myself because I am young, and he is old and weak—sometimes I seem even to hate him. I have all sorts of thoughts, and always at the end of them, like a dark hole at the end of a passage, the thought that I ought to give you up. Ought I? Tell me. I want to know, I want to do what is right; I still want to do that, though sometimes I think I am all made of evil.

"Do you remember once when we were talking, you said: 'Nature always has an answer for every

question; you cannot get an answer from laws, conventions, theories, words, only from Nature.' What do you say to me now; do you tell me it is Nature to come to you in spite of everything, and so, that it must be right? I think you would; but can it be Nature to do something which will hurt terribly one whom I love and who loves me? If it is—Nature is cruel. Is that one of the 'lessons of life'? Is that what Aunt Constance means when she says: 'If life were not a paradox, we could not get on at all'? I am beginning to see that everything has its dark side; I never believed that before.

"Uncle Nic dreads the life for me; he doesn't understand (how should he?—he has always had money) how life can be tolerable without money—it is horrible that the accident of money should make such difference in our lives. I am sometimes afraid myself, and I can't outface that fear in him; he sees the shadow of his fear in me—his eyes seem to see everything that is in me now; the eyes of old people are the saddest things in the world. I am writing like a wretched coward, but you will never see this letter I suppose, and so it doesn't matter; but if you do, and I pray that you may—well, if I am only worth taking at my best, I am not worth taking at all. I want you to know the worst of me—you, and no one else.

"With Uncle Nic it is not as with my stepfather; his opposition only makes me angry, mad, ready to do anything, but with Uncle Nic I feel so bruised—so sore. He said: 'It is not so much the money, because there is always mine.' I could never do a thing he cannot bear, and take his money, and you would never let me. One knows very little of anything in the world till trouble comes. You know how it is with flowers and trees; in the early spring they look so quiet and self-contained; then all in a moment they change—I think it must be like that with the heart. I used to think I knew a great deal, understood why and how things came about; I thought self-possession and reason so easy; now I know nothing. And nothing in the world matters but to see you and hide away from that look in Uncle Nic's eyes. Three months ago I did not know you, now I write like this. Whatever I look at, I try to see as you would see; I feel, now you are away even more than when you were with me, what your thoughts would be, how you would feel about this or that. Some things you have said seem always in my mind like lights—"

A slanting drift of rain was striking the veranda tiles with a cold, ceaseless hissing. Christian shut the window, and went into her uncle's room.

He was lying with closed eyes, growling at Dominique, who moved about noiselessly, putting the room ready for the night. When he had finished, and with a compassionate bow had left the room, Mr. Treffry opened his eyes, and said:

"This is beastly stuff of the doctor's, Chris, it puts my monkey up; I can't help swearing after I've taken it; it's as beastly as a vulgar woman's laugh, and I don't know anything beastlier than that!"

"I have a letter from Greta, Uncle Nic; shall I read it?"

He nodded, and Christian read the letter, leaving out the mention of Harz, and for some undefined reason the part about Sarelli.

"Ay!" said Mr. Treffry with a feeble laugh, "Greta and her money! Send her some more, Chris. Wish I were a youngster again; that's a beast of a proverb about a dog and his day. I'd like to go fishing again in the West Country! A fine time we had when we were youngsters. You don't get such times these days. 'Twasn't often the fishing-smacks went out without us. We'd watch their lights from our bedroom window; when they were swung aboard we were out and down to the quay before you could say 'knife.' They always waited for us; but your Uncle Dan was the favourite, he was the chap for luck. When I get on my legs, we might go down there, you and I? For a bit, just to see? What d'you say, old girl?"

Their eyes met.

"I'd like to look at the smack lights going to sea on a dark night; pity you're such a duffer in a boat—we might go out with them. Do you a power of good! You're not looking the thing, my dear."

His voice died wistfully, and his glance, sweeping her face, rested on her hands, which held and twisted Greta's letter. After a minute or two of silence he boomed out again with sudden energy:

"Your aunt'll want to come and sit with me, after dinner; don't let her, Chris, I can't stand it. Tell her I'm asleep—the doctor'll be here directly; ask him to make up some humbug for you—it's his business."

He was seized by a violent fit of pain which seemed to stab his breath away, and when it was over signed that he would be left alone. Christian went back to her letter in the other room, and had written these words, when the gong summoned her to dinner:

"I'm like a leaf in the wind, I put out my hand to one thing, and it's seized and twisted and flung aside. I want you—I want you; if I could see you I think I should know what to do—"

XXII

The rain drove with increasing fury. The night was very black. Nicholas Treffry slept heavily. By the side of his bed the night-lamp cast on to the opposite wall a bright disc festooned by the hanging shadow of the ceiling. Christian was leaning over him. For the moment he filled all her heart, lying there, so helpless. Fearful of waking him she slipped into the sitting-room. Outside the window stood a man with his face pressed to the pane. Her heart thumped; she went up and unlatched the window. It was Harz, with the rain dripping off him. He let fall his hat and cape.

"You!" she said, touching his sleeve. "You! You!"

He was sodden with wet, his face drawn and tired; a dark growth of beard covered his cheeks and chin.

"Where is your uncle?" he said; "I want to see him."

She put her hand up to his lips, but he caught it and covered it with kisses.

"He's asleep—ill—speak gently!"

"I came to him first," he muttered.

Christian lit the lamp; and he looked at her hungrily without a word.

"It's not possible to go on like this; I came to tell your uncle so. He is a man. As for the other, I want to have nothing to do with him! I came back on foot across the mountains. It's not possible to go on like this, Christian."

She handed him her letter. He held it to the light, clearing his brow of raindrops. When he had read to the last word he gave it her back, and whispered: "Come!"

Her lips moved, but she did not speak.

"While this goes on I can't work; I can do nothing. I can't—I won't bargain with my work; if it's to be that, we had better end it. What are we waiting for? Sooner or later we must come to this. I'm sorry that he's ill, God knows! But that changes nothing. To wait is tying me hand and foot—it's making me afraid! Fear kills! It will kill you! It kills work, and I must work, I can't waste time—I won't! I will sooner give you up." He put his hands on her shoulders. "I love you! I want you! Look in my eyes and see if you dare hold back!"

Christian stood with the grip of his strong hands on her shoulders, without a movement or sign. Her face was very white. And suddenly he began to kiss that pale, still face, to kiss its eyes and lips, to kiss it from its chin up to its hair; and it stayed pale, as a white flower, beneath those kisses—as a white flower, whose stalk the fingers bend back a little.

There was a sound of knocking on the wall; Mr. Treffry called feebly. Christian broke away from Harz.

"To-morrow!" he whispered, and picking up his hat and cloak, went out again into the rain.

XXIII

It was not till morning that Christian fell into a troubled sleep. She dreamed that a voice was calling her, and she was filled with a helpless, dumb dream terror.

When she woke the light was streaming in; it was Sunday, and the cathedral bells were chiming. Her first thought was of Harz. One step, one moment of courage! Why had she not told her uncle? If he had only asked! But why—why should she tell him? When it was over and she was gone, he would see that all was for the best.

Her eyes fell on Greta's empty bed. She sprang up, and bending over, kissed the pillow. 'She will mind at first; but she's so young! Nobody will really miss me, except Uncle Nic!' She stood along while

in the window without moving. When she was dressed she called out to her maid:

"Bring me some milk, Barbi; I'm going to church."

"Ach! gnadiges Fraulein, will you no breakfast have?"

"No thank you, Barbi."

"Liebes Fraulein, what a beautiful morning after the rain it has become! How cool! It is for you good—for the colour in your cheeks; now they will bloom again!" and Barbi stroked her own well-coloured cheeks.

Dominique, sunning himself outside with a cloth across his arm, bowed as she passed, and smiled affectionately:

"He is better this morning, M'mselle. We march—we are getting on. Good news will put the heart into you."

Christian thought: 'How sweet every one is to-day!'

Even the Villa seemed to greet her, with the sun aslant on it; and the trees, trembling and weeping golden tears. At the cathedral she was early for the service, but here and there were figures on their knees; the faint, sickly odour of long-burnt incense clung in the air; a priest moved silently at the far end. She knelt, and when at last she rose the service had begun. With the sound of the intoning a sense of peace came to her—the peace of resolution. For good or bad she felt that she had faced her fate.

She went out with a look of quiet serenity and walked home along the dyke. Close to Harz's studio she sat down. Now—it was her own; all that had belonged to him, that had ever had a part in him.

An old beggar, who had been watching her, came gently from behind. "Gracious lady!" he said, peering at her eyes, "this is the lucky day for you. I have lost my luck."

Christian opened her purse, there was only one coin in it, a gold piece; the beggar's eyes sparkled.

She thought suddenly: 'It's no longer mine; I must begin to be careful,' but she felt ashamed when she looked at the old man.

"I am sorry," she said; "yesterday I would have given you this, but—but now it's already given."

He seemed so old and poor—what could she give him? She unhooked a little silver brooch at her throat. "You will get something for that," she said; "it's better than nothing. I am very sorry you are so old and poor."

The beggar crossed himself. "Gracious lady," he muttered, "may you never want!"

Christian hurried on; the rustling of leaves soon carried the words away. She did not feel inclined to go in, and crossing the bridge began to climb the hill. There was a gentle breeze, drifting the clouds across the sun; lizards darted out over the walls, looked at her, and whisked away.

The sunshine, dappling through the tops of trees, gashed down on a torrent. The earth smelt sweet, the vineyards round the white farms glistened; everything seemed to leap and dance with sap and life; it was a moment of Spring in midsummer. Christian walked on, wondering at her own happiness.

'Am I heartless?' she thought. 'I am going to leave him—I am going into life; I shall have to fight now, there'll be no looking back.'

The path broke away and wound down to the level of the torrent; on the other side it rose again, and was lost among trees. The woods were dank; she hastened home.

In her room she began to pack, sorting and tearing up old letters. 'Only one thing matters,' she thought; 'singleness of heart; to see your way, and keep to it with all your might.'

She looked up and saw Barbi standing before her with towels in her hands, and a scared face.

"Are you going a journey, gnadiges Fraulein?"

"I am going away to be married, Barbi," said Christian at last; "don't speak of it to any one, please."

Barbi leant a little forward with the towels clasped to the blue cotton bosom of her dress.

"No, no! I will not speak. But, dear Fraulein, that is a big matter; have you well thought?"

"Thought, Barbi? Have I not!"

"But, dear Fraulein, will you be rich?"

"No! I shall be as poor as you."

"Ach! dear God! that is terrible. Katrina, my sister, she is married; she tells me all her life; she tells me it is very hard, and but for the money in her stocking it would be harder. Dear Fraulein, think again! And is he good? Sometimes they are not good."

"He is good," said Christian, rising; "it is all settled!" and she kissed Barbi on the cheek.

"You are crying, liebes Fraulein! Think yet again, perhaps it is not quite all settled; it is not possible that a maiden should not a way out leave?"

Christian smiled. "I don't do things that way, Barbi."

Barbi hung the towels on the horse, and crossed herself.

Mr. Treffry's gaze was fixed on a tortoise-shell butterfly fluttering round the ceiling. The insect seemed to fascinate him, as things which move quickly always fascinate the helpless. Christian came softly in.

"Couldn't stay in bed, Chris," he called out with an air of guilt. "The heat was something awful. The doctor piped off in a huff, just because o' this." He motioned towards a jug of claret-cup and a pipe on the table by his elbow. "I was only looking at 'em."

Christian, sitting down beside him, took up a fan.

"If I could get out of this heat—" he said, and closed his eyes.

'I must tell him,' she thought; 'I can't slink away.'

"Pour me out some of that stuff, Chris."

She reached for the jug. Yes! She must tell him! Her heart sank.

Mr. Treffry took a lengthy draught. "Broken my promise; don't matter—won't hurt any one but me." He took up the pipe and pressed tobacco into it. "I've been lying here with this pain going right through me, and never a smoke! D'you tell me anything the parsons say can do me half the good of this pipe?" He leaned back, steeped in a luxury of satisfaction. He went on, pursuing a private train of thought: "Things have changed a lot since my young days. When I was a youngster, a young fellow had to look out for peck and perch—he put the future in his pocket. He did well or not, according as he had stuff in him. Now he's not content with that, it seems—trades on his own opinion of himself; thinks he is what he says he's going to be."

"You are unjust," said Christian.

Mr. Treffry grunted. "Ah, well! I like to know where I am. If I lend money to a man, I like to know whether he's going to pay it back; I may not care whether he does or not, but I like to know. The same with other things. I don't care what a man has—though, mind you, Chris, it's not a bad rule that measures men by the balance at their banks; but when it comes to marriage, there's a very simple rule, What's not enough for one is not enough for two. You can't talk black white, or bread into your mouth. I don't care to speak about myself, as you know, Chris, but I tell you this—when I came to London I wanted to marry—I hadn't any money, and I had to want. When I had the money—but that's neither here nor there!" He frowned, fingering his pipe.

"I didn't ask her, Chris; I didn't think it the square thing; it seems that's out of fashion!"

Christian's cheeks were burning.

"I think a lot while I lie here," Mr. Treffry went on; "nothing much else to do. What I ask myself is this: What do you know about what's best for you? What do you know of life? Take it or leave it, life's not all you think; it's give and get all the way, a fair start is everything."

Christian thought: 'Will he never see?'

Mr. Treffry went on:

"I get better every day, but I can't last for ever. It's not pleasant to lie here and know that when I'm

gone there'll be no one to keep a hand on the check string!"

"Don't talk like that, dear!" Christian murmured.

"It's no use blinking facts, Chris. I've lived a long time in the world; I've seen things pretty well as they are; and now there's not much left for me to think about but you."

"But, Uncle, if you loved him, as I do, you couldn't tell me to be afraid! It's cowardly and mean to be afraid. You must have forgotten!"

Mr. Treffry closed his eyes.

"Yes," he said; "I'm old."

The fan had dropped into Christian's lap; it rested on her white frock like a large crimson leaf; her eyes were fixed on it.

Mr. Treffry looked at her. "Have you heard from him?" he asked with sudden intuition.

"Last night, in that room, when you thought I was talking to Dominique—"

The pipe fell from his hand.

"What!" he stammered: "Back?"

Christian, without looking up, said:

"Yes, he's back; he wants me—I must go to him, Uncle."

There was a long silence.

"You must go to him?" he repeated.

She longed to fling herself down at his knees, but he was so still, that to move seemed impossible; she remained silent, with folded hands.

Mr. Treffry spoke:

"You'll let me know—before—you—go. Goodnight!"

Christian stole out into the passage. A bead curtain rustled in the draught; voices reached her.

"My honour is involved, or I would give the case up."

"He is very trying, poor Nicholas! He always had that peculiar quality of opposition; it has brought him to grief a hundred times. There is opposition in our blood; my family all have it. My eldest brother died of it; with my poor sister, who was as gentle as a lamb, it took the form of doing the right thing in the wrong place. It is a matter of temperament, you see. You must have patience."

"Patience," repeated Dawney's voice, "is one thing; patience where there is responsibility is another. I've not had a wink of sleep these last two nights."

There was a faint, shrill swish of silk.

"Is he so very ill?"

Christian held her breath. The answer came at last.

"Has he made his will? With this trouble in the side again, I tell you plainly, Mrs. Decie, there's little or no chance."

Christian put her hands up to her ears, and ran out into the air. What was she about to do, then—to leave him dying!

On the following day Harz was summoned to the Villa. Mr. Treffry had just risen, and was garbed in a dressing-suit, old and worn, which had a certain air of magnificence. His seamed cheeks were newly shaved.

"I hope I see you well," he said majestically.

Thinking of the drive and their last parting, Harz felt sorry and ashamed. Suddenly Christian came into the room; she stood for a moment looking at him; then sat down.

"Chris!" said Mr. Treffry reproachfully. She shook her head, and did not move; mournful and intent, her eyes seemed full of secret knowledge.

Mr. Treffry spoke:

"I've no right to blame you, Mr. Harz, and Chris tells me you came to see me first, which is what I would have expected of you; but you shouldn't have come back."

"I came back, sir, because I found I was obliged. I must speak out."

"I ask nothing better," Mr. Treffry replied.

Harz looked again at Christian; but she made no sign, sitting with her chin resting on her hands.

"I have come for her," he said; "I can make my living—enough for both of us. But I can't wait."

"Why?"

Harz made no answer.

Mr. Treffry boomed out again: "Why? Isn't she worth waiting for? Isn't she worth serving for?"

"I can't expect you to understand me," the painter said. "My art is my life to me. Do you suppose that if it wasn't I should ever have left my village; or gone through all that I've gone through, to get as far even as I am? You tell me to wait. If my thoughts and my will aren't free, how can I work? I shan't be worth my salt. You tell me to go back to England—knowing she is here, amongst you who hate me, a thousand miles away. I shall know that there's a death fight going on in her and outside her against me—you think that I can go on working under these conditions. Others may be able, I am not. That's the plain truth. If I loved her less—"

There was a silence, then Mr. Treffry said:

"It isn't fair to come here and ask what you're asking. You don't know what's in the future for you, you don't know that you can keep a wife. It isn't pleasant, either, to think you can't hold up your head in your own country."

Harz turned white.

"Ah! you bring that up again!" he broke out. "Seven years ago I was a boy and starving; if you had been in my place you would have done what I did. My country is as much to me as your country is to you. I've been an exile seven years, I suppose I shall always be I've had punishment enough; but if you think I am a rascal, I'll go and give myself up." He turned on his heel.

"Stop! I beg your pardon! I never meant to hurt you. It isn't easy for me to eat my words," Mr. Treffry said wistfully, "let that count for something." He held out his hand.

Harz came quickly back and took it. Christian's gaze was never for a moment withdrawn; she seemed trying to store up the sight of him within her. The light darting through the half-closed shutters gave her eyes a strange, bright intensity, and shone in the folds of her white dress like the sheen of birds' wings.

Mr. Treffry glanced uneasily about him. "God knows I don't want anything but her happiness," he said. "What is it to me if you'd murdered your mother? It's her I'm thinking of."

"How can you tell what is happiness to her? You have your own ideas of happiness—not hers, not mine. You can't dare to stop us, sir!"

"Dare?" said Mr. Treffry. "Her father gave her over to me when she was a mite of a little thing; I've known her all her life. I've—I've loved her—and you come here with your 'dare!' His hand dragged at his beard, and shook as though palsied.

A look of terror came into Christian's face.

"All right, Chris! I don't ask for quarter, and I don't give it!"

Harz made a gesture of despair.

"I've acted squarely by you, sir," Mr. Treffry went on, "I ask the same of you. I ask you to wait, and come like an honest man, when you can say, 'I see my way—here's this and that for her.' What makes this art you talk of different from any other call in life? It doesn't alter facts, or give you what other men have no right to expect. It doesn't put grit into you, or keep your hands clean, or prove that two and

two make five."

Harz answered bitterly:

"You know as much of art as I know of money. If we live a thousand years we shall never understand each other. I am doing what I feel is best for both of us."

Mr. Treffry took hold of the painter's sleeve.

"I make you an offer," he said. "Your word not to see or write to her for a year! Then, position or not, money or no money, if she'll have you, I'll make it right for you."

"I could not take your money."

A kind of despair seemed suddenly to seize on Mr. Nicholas Treffry. He rose, and stood towering over them.

"All my life—" he said; but something seemed to click deep down in his throat, and he sank back in his seat.

"Go!" whispered Christian, "go!" But Mr. Treffry found his voice again: "It's for the child to say. Well, Chris!"

Christian did not speak.

It was Harz who broke the silence. He pointed to Mr. Treffry.

"You know I can't tell you to come with—that, there. Why did you send for me?" And, turning, he went out.

Christian sank on her knees, burying her face in her hands. Mr. Treffry pressed his handkerchief with a stealthy movement to his mouth. It was dyed crimson with the price of his victory.

XXVI

A telegram had summoned Herr Paul from Vienna. He had started forthwith, leaving several unpaid accounts to a more joyful opportunity, amongst them a chemist's bill, for a wonderful quack medicine of which he brought six bottles.

He came from Mr. Treffry's room with tears rolling down his cheeks, saying:

"Poor Nicholas! Poor Nicholas! Il n'a pas de chance!"

It was difficult to find any one to listen; the women were scared and silent, waiting for the orders that were now and then whispered through the door. Herr Paul could not bear this silence, and talked to his servant for half an hour, till Fritz also vanished to fetch something from the town. Then in despair Herr Paul went to his room.

It was hard not to be allowed to help—it was hard to wait! When the heart was suffering, it was frightful! He turned and, looking furtively about him, lighted a cigar. Yes, it came to every one—at some time or other; and what was it, that death they talked of? Was it any worse than life? That frightful jumble people made for themselves! Poor Nicholas! After all, it was he that had the luck!

His eyes filled with tears, and drawing a penknife from his pocket, he began to stab it into the stuffing of his chair. Scruff, who sat watching the chink of light under the door, turned his head, blinked at him, and began feebly tapping with a claw.

It was intolerable, this uncertainty—to be near, and yet so far, was not endurable!

Herr Paul stepped across the room. The dog, following, threw his black-marked muzzle upwards with a gruff noise, and went back to the door. His master was holding in his hand a bottle of champagne.

Poor Nicholas! He had chosen it. Herr Paul drained a glass.

Poor Nicholas! The prince of fellows, and of what use was one? They kept him away from Nicholas!

Herr Paul's eyes fell on the terrier. "Ach! my dear," he said, "you and I, we alone are kept away!"

He drained a second glass.

What was it? This life! Froth-like that! He tossed off a third glass. Forget! If one could not help, it was better to forget!

He put on his hat. Yes. There was no room for him there! He was not wanted!

He finished the bottle, and went out into the passage. Scruff ran and lay down at Mr. Treffry's door. Herr Paul looked at him. "Ach!" he said, tapping his chest, "ungrateful hound!" And opening the front door he went out on tiptoe....

Late that afternoon Greta stole hatless through the lilac bushes; she looked tired after her night journey, and sat idly on a chair in the speckled shadow of a lime-tree.

'It is not like home,' she thought; 'I am unhappy. Even the birds are silent, but perhaps that is because it is so hot. I have never been sad like this—for it is not fancy that I am sad this time, as it is sometimes. It is in my heart like the sound the wind makes through a wood, it feels quite empty in my heart. If it is always like this to be unhappy, then I am sorry for all the unhappy things in the world; I am sorrier than I ever was before.'

A shadow fell on the grass, she raised her eyes, and saw Dawney.

"Dr. Edmund!" she whispered.

Dawney turned to her; a heavy furrow showed between his brows. His eyes, always rather close together, stared painfully.

"Dr. Edmund," Greta whispered, "is it true?"

He took her hand, and spread his own palm over it.

"Perhaps," he said; "perhaps not. We must hope."

Greta looked up, awed.

"They say he is dying."

"We have sent for the best man in Vienna."

Greta shook her head.

"But you are clever, Dr. Edmund; and you are afraid."

"He is brave," said Dawney; "we must all be brave, you know. You too!"

"Brave?" repeated Greta; "what is it to be brave? If it is not to cry and make a fuss—that I can do. But if it is not to be sad in here," she touched her breast, "that I cannot do, and it shall not be any good for me to try."

"To be brave is to hope; don't give up hope, dear."

"No," said Greta, tracing the pattern of the sunlight on her skirt. "But I think that when we hope, we are not brave, because we are expecting something for ourselves. Chris says that hope is prayer, and if it is prayer, then all the time we are hoping, we are asking for something, and it is not brave to ask for things."

A smile curved Dawney's mouth.

"Go on, Philosopher!" he said. "Be brave in your own way, it will be just as good as anybody else's."

"What are you going to do to be brave, Dr. Edmund?"

"I? Fight! If only we had five years off his life!"

Greta watched him as he walked away.

"I shall never be brave," she mourned; "I shall always be wanting to be happy." And, kneeling down, she began to disentangle a fly, imprisoned in a cobweb. A plant of hemlock had sprung up in the long grass by her feet. Greta thought, dismayed: 'There are weeds!'

It seemed but another sign of the death of joy.

'But it's very beautiful,' she thought, 'the blossoms are like stars. I am not going to pull it up. I will leave it; perhaps it will spread all through the garden; and if it does I do not care, for now things are not like they used to be and I do not, think they ever shall be again.'

XXVII

The days went by; those long, hot days, when the heat haze swims up about ten of the forenoon, and, as the sun sinks level with the mountains, melts into golden ether which sets the world quivering with sparkles.

At the lighting of the stars those sparkles die, vanishing one by one off the hillsides; evening comes flying down the valleys, and life rests under her cool wings. The night falls; and the hundred little voices of the night arise.

It was near grape-gathering, and in the heat the fight for Nicholas Treffry's life went on, day in, day out, with gleams of hope and moments of despair. Doctors came, but after the first he refused to see them.

"No," he said to Dawney—"throwing away money. If I pull through it won't be because of them."

For days together he would allow no one but Dawney, Dominique, and the paid nurse in the room.

"I can stand it better," he said to Christian, "when I don't see any of you; keep away, old girl, and let me get on with it!"

To have been able to help would have eased the tension of her nerves, and the aching of her heart. At his own request they had moved his bed into a corner so that he might face the wall. There he would lie for hours together, not speaking a word, except to ask for drink.

Sometimes Christian crept in unnoticed, and sat watching, with her arms tightly folded across her breast. At night, after Greta was asleep, she would toss from side to side, muttering feverish prayers. She spent hours at her little table in the schoolroom, writing letters to Harz that were never sent. Once she wrote these words: "I am the most wicked of all creatures—I have even wished that he may die!" A few minutes afterwards Miss Naylor found her with her head buried on her arms. Christian sprang up; tears were streaming down her cheeks. "Don't touch me!" she cried, and rushed away. Later, she stole into her uncle's room, and sank down on the floor beside the bed. She sat there silently, unnoticed all the evening. When night came she could hardly be persuaded to leave the room.

One day Mr. Treffry expressed a wish to see Herr Paul; it was a long while before the latter could summon courage to go in.

"There's a few dozen of the Gordon sherry at my Chambers, in London, Paul," Mr. Treffry said; "I'd be glad to think you had 'em. And my man, Dominique, I've made him all right in my will, but keep your eye on him; he's a good sort for a foreigner, and no chicken, but sooner or later, the women'll get hold of him. That's all I had to say. Send Chris to me."

Herr Paul stood by the bedside speechless. Suddenly he blurted out.

"Ah! my dear! Courage! We are all mortal. You will get well!" All the morning he walked about quite inconsolable. "It was frightful to see him, you know, frightful! An iron man could not have borne it."

When Christian came to him, Mr. Treffry raised himself and looked at her a long while.

His wistful face was like an accusation. But that very afternoon the news came from the sickroom that he was better, having had no pain for several hours.

Every one went about with smiles lurking in their eyes, and ready to break forth at a word. In the kitchen Barbi burst out crying, and, forgetting to toss the pan, spoiled a Kaiser-Schmarn she was making. Dominique was observed draining a glass of Chianti, and solemnly casting forth the last drops in libation. An order was given for tea to be taken out under the acacias, where it was always cool; it was felt that something in the nature of high festival was being held. Even Herr Paul was present; but Christian did not come. Nobody spoke of illness; to mention it might break the spell.

Miss Naylor, who had gone into the house, came back, saying:

"There is a strange man standing over there by the corner of the house."

"Really!" asked Mrs. Decie; "what does he want?"

Miss Naylor reddened. "I did not ask him. I—don't—know—whether he is quite respectable. His coat is buttoned very close, and he—doesn't seem—to have a—collar."

"Go and see what he wants, dear child," Mrs. Decie said to Greta.

"I don't know—I really do not know—" began Miss Naylor; "he has very—high—boots," but Greta was already on her way, with hands clasped behind her, and demure eyes taking in the stranger's figure.

"Please?" she said, when she was close to him.

The stranger took his cap off with a jerk.

"This house has no bells," he said in a nasal voice; "it has a tendency to discourage one."

"Yes," said Greta gravely, "there is a bell, but it does not ring now, because my uncle is so ill."

"I am very sorry to hear that. I don't know the people here, but I am very sorry to hear that."

"I would be glad to speak a few words to your sister, if it is your sister that I want."

And the stranger's face grew very red.

"Is it," said Greta, "that you are a friend of Herr Harz? If you are a friend of his, you will please come and have some tea, and while you are having tea I will look for Chris."

Perspiration bedewed the stranger's forehead.

"Tea? Excuse me! I don't drink tea."

"There is also coffee," Greta said.

The stranger's progress towards the arbour was so slow that Greta arrived considerably before him.

"It is a friend of Herr Harz," she whispered; "he will drink coffee. I am going to find Chris."

"Greta!" gasped Miss Naylor.

Mrs. Decie put up her hand.

"Ah!" she said, "if it is so, we must be very nice to him for Christian's sake."

Miss Naylor's face grew soft.

"Ah, yes!" she said; "of course."

"Bah!" muttered Herr Paul, "that recommences."

"Paul!" murmured Mrs. Decie, "you lack the elements of wisdom."

Herr Paul glared at the approaching stranger.

Mrs. Decie had risen, and smilingly held out her hand.

"We are so glad to know you; you are an artist too, perhaps? I take a great interest in art, and especially in that school which Mr. Harz represents."

The stranger smiled.

"He is the genuine article, ma'am," he said. "He represents no school, he is one of that kind whose corpses make schools."

"Ah!" murmured Mrs. Decie, "you are an American. That is so nice. Do sit down! My niece will soon be here."

Greta came running back.

"Will you come, please?" she said. "Chris is ready."

Gulping down his coffee, the stranger included them all in a single bow, and followed her.

"Ach!" said Herr Paul, "garcon tres chic, celui-la!"

Christian was standing by her little table. The stranger began.

"I am sending Mr. Harz's things to England; there are some pictures here. He would be glad to have them."

A flood of crimson swept over her face.

"I am sending them to London," the stranger repeated; "perhaps you could give them to me to-day."

"They are ready; my sister will show you."

Her eyes seemed to dart into his soul, and try to drag something from it. The words rushed from her lips:

"Is there any message for me?"

The stranger regarded her curiously.

"No," he stammered, "no! I guess not. He is well.... I wish...." He stopped; her white face seemed to flash scorn, despair, and entreaty on him all at once. And turning, she left him standing there.

XXVII

When Christian went that evening to her uncle's room he was sitting up in bed, and at once began to talk. "Chris," he said, "I can't stand this dying by inches. I'm going to try what a journey'll do for me. I want to get back to the old country. The doctor's promised. There's a shot in the locker yet! I believe in that young chap; he's stuck to me like a man.... It'll be your birthday, on Tuesday, old girl, and you'll be twenty. Seventeen years since your father died. You've been a lot to me.... A parson came here today. That's a bad sign. Thought it his duty! Very civil of him! I wouldn't see him, though. If there's anything in what they tell you, I'm not going to sneak in at this time o' day. There's one thing that's rather badly on my mind. I took advantage of Mr. Harz with this damned pitifulness of mine. You've a right to look at me as I've seen you sometimes when you thought I was asleep. If I hadn't been ill he'd never have left you. I don't blame you, Chris—not I! You love me? I know that, my dear. But one's alone when it comes to the run-in. Don't cry! Our minds aren't Sunday-school books; you're finding it out, that's all!" He sighed and turned away.

The noise of sun-blinds being raised vibrated through the house. A feeling of terror seized on the girl; he lay so still, and yet the drawing of each breath was a fight. If she could only suffer in his place! She went close, and bent over him.

"It's air we want, both you and I!" he muttered. Christian beckoned to the nurse, and stole out through the window.

A regiment was passing in the road; she stood half-hidden amongst the lilac bushes watching. The poplar leaves drooped lifeless and almost black above her head, the dust raised by the soldiers' feet hung in the air; it seemed as if in all the world no freshness and no life were stirring. The tramp of feet died away. Suddenly within arm's length of her a man appeared, his stick shouldered like a sword. He raised his hat.

"Good-evening! You do not remember me? Sarelli. Pardon! You looked like a ghost standing there. How badly those fellows marched! We hang, you see, on the skirts of our profession and criticise; it is all we are fit for." His black eyes, restless and malevolent like a swan's, seemed to stab her face. "A fine evening! Too hot. The storm is wanted; you feel that? It is weary waiting for the storm; but after the storm, my dear young lady, comes peace." He smiled, gently, this time, and baring his head again, was lost to view in the shadow of the trees.

His figure had seemed to Christian like the sudden vision of a threatening, hidden force. She thrust out her hands, as though to keep it off.

No use; it was within her, nothing could keep it away! She went to Mrs. Decie's room, where her aunt

and Miss Naylor were conversing in low tones. To hear their voices brought back the touch of this world of everyday which had no part or lot in the terrifying powers within her.

Dawney slept at the Villa now. In the dead of night he was awakened by a light flashed in his eyes. Christian was standing there, her face pale and wild with terror, her hair falling in dark masses on her shoulders.

"Save him! Save him!" she cried. "Quick! The bleeding!"

He saw her muffle her face in her white sleeves, and seizing the candle, leaped out of bed and rushed away.

The internal haemorrhage had come again, and Nicholas Treffry wavered between life and death. When it had ceased, he sank into a sort of stupor. About six o'clock he came back to consciousness; watching his eyes, they could see a mental struggle taking place within him. At last he singled Christian out from the others by a sign.

"I'm beat, Chris," he whispered. "Let him know, I want to see him."

His voice grew a little stronger. "I thought that I could see it through—but here's the end." He lifted his hand ever so little, and let it fall again. When told a little later that a telegram had been sent to Harz his eyes expressed satisfaction.

Herr Paul came down in ignorance of the night's events. He stopped in front of the barometer and tapped it, remarking to Miss Naylor: "The glass has gone downstairs; we shall have cool weather—it will still go well with him!"

When, with her brown face twisted by pity and concern, she told him that it was a question of hours, Herr Paul turned first purple, then pale, and sitting down, trembled violently. "I cannot believe it," he exclaimed almost angrily. "Yesterday he was so well! I cannot believe it! Poor Nicholas! Yesterday he spoke to me!" Taking Miss Naylor's hand, he clutched it in his own. "Ah!" he cried, letting it go suddenly, and striking at his forehead, "it is too terrible; only yesterday he spoke to me of sherry. Is there nobody, then, who can do good?"

"There is only God," replied Miss Naylor softly.

"God?" said Herr Paul in a scared voice.

"We—can—all—pray to Him," Miss Naylor murmured; little spots of colour came into her cheeks. "I am going to do it now."

Herr Paul raised her hand and kissed it.

"Are you?" he said; "good! I too." He passed through his study door, closed it carefully behind him, then for some unknown reason set his back against it. Ugh! Death! It came to all! Some day it would come to him. It might come tomorrow! One must pray!

The day dragged to its end. In the sky clouds had mustered, and, crowding close on one another, clung round the sun, soft, thick, greywhite, like the feathers on a pigeon's breast. Towards evening faint tremblings were felt at intervals, as from the shock of immensely distant earthquakes.

Nobody went to bed that night, but in the morning the report was the same: "Unconscious—a question of hours." Once only did he recover consciousness, and then asked for Harz. A telegram had come from him, he was on the way. Towards seven of the evening the long-expected storm broke in a sky like ink. Into the valleys and over the crests of mountains it seemed as though an unseen hand were spilling goblets of pale wine, darting a sword-blade zigzag over trees, roofs, spires, peaks, into the very firmament, which answered every thrust with great bursts of groaning. Just beyond the veranda Greta saw a glowworm shining, as it might be a tiny bead of the fallen lightning. Soon the rain covered everything. Sometimes a jet of light brought the hilltops, towering, dark, and hard, over the house, to disappear again behind the raindrops and shaken leaves. Each breath drawn by the storm was like the clash of a thousand cymbals; and in his room Mr. Treffry lay unconscious of its fury.

Greta had crept in unobserved; and sat curled in a corner, with Scruff in her arms, rocking slightly to and fro. When Christian passed, she caught her skirt, and whispered: "It is your birthday, Chris!"

Mr. Treffry stirred.

"What's that? Thunder?—it's cooler. Where am I? Chris!"

Dawney signed for her to take his place.

"Chris!" Mr. Treffry said. "It's near now." She bent across him, and her tears fell on his forehead.

"Forgive!" she whispered; "love me!"

He raised his finger, and touched her cheek.

For an hour or more he did not speak, though once or twice he moaned, and faintly tightened his pressure on her fingers. The storm had died away, but very far off the thunder was still muttering.

His eyes opened once more, rested on her, and passed beyond, into that abyss dividing youth from age, conviction from conviction, life from death.

At the foot of the bed Dawney stood covering his face; behind him Dominique knelt with hands held upwards; the sound of Greta's breathing, soft in sleep, rose and fell in the stillness.

XXIX

One afternoon in March, more than three years after Mr. Treffry's death, Christian was sitting at the window of a studio in St. John's Wood. The sky was covered with soft, high clouds, through which shone little gleams of blue. Now and then a bright shower fell, sprinkling the trees, where every twig was curling upwards as if waiting for the gift of its new leaves. And it seemed to her that the boughs thickened and budded under her very eyes; a great concourse of sparrows had gathered on those boughs, and kept raising a shrill chatter. Over at the far side of the room Harz was working at a picture.

On Christian's face was the quiet smile of one who knows that she has only to turn her eyes to see what she wishes to see; of one whose possessions are safe under her hand. She looked at Harz with that possessive smile. But as into the brain of one turning in his bed grim fancies will suddenly leap up out of warm nothingness, so there leaped into her mind the memory of that long ago dawn, when he had found her kneeling by Mr. Treffry's body. She seemed to see again the dead face, so gravely quiet, and furrowless. She seemed to see her lover and herself setting forth silently along the river wall where they had first met; sitting down, still silent, beneath the poplar-tree where the little bodies of the chafers had lain strewn in the Spring. To see the trees changing from black to grey, from grey to green, and in the dark sky long white lines of cloud, lighting to the south like birds; and, very far away, rosy peaks watching the awakening of the earth. And now once again, after all that time, she felt her spirit shrink away from his; as it had shrunk in that hour, when she had seemed hateful to herself. She remembered the words she had spoken: "I have no heart left. You've torn it in two between you. Love is all self—I wanted him to die." She remembered too the raindrops on the vines like a million tiny lamps, and the throstle that began singing. Then, as dreams die out into warm nothingness, recollection vanished, and the smile came back to her lips.

She took out a letter.

"...O Chris! We are really coming; I seem to be always telling it to myself, and I have told Scruff many times, but he does not care, because he is getting old. Miss Naylor says we shall arrive for breakfast, and that we shall be hungry, but perhaps she will not be very hungry, if it is rough. Papa said to me: 'Je serai inconsolable, mais inconsolable!' But I think he will not be, because he is going to Vienna. When we are come, there will be nobody at Villa Rubein; Aunt Constance has gone a fortnight ago to Florence. There is a young man at her hotel; she says he will be one of the greatest playwrights in England, and she sent me a play of his to read; it was only a little about love, I did not like it very much.... O Chris! I think I shall cry when I see you. As I am quite grown up, Miss Naylor is not to come back with me; sometimes she is sad, but she will be glad to see you, Chris. She seems always sadder when it is Spring. Today I walked along the wall; the little green balls of wool are growing on the poplars already, and I saw one chafer; it will not be long before the cherry blossom comes; and I felt so funny, sad and happy together, and once I thought that I had wings and could fly away up the valley to Meran—but I had none, so I sat on the bench where we sat the day we took the pictures, and I thought and thought; there was nothing came to me in my thoughts, but all was sweet and a little noisy, and rather sad; it was like the buzzing of the chafer, in my head; and now I feel so tired and all my blood is running up and down me. I do not mind, because I know it is the Spring.

"Dominique came to see us the other day; he is very well, and is half the proprietor of the Adler

Hotel, at Meran; he is not at all different, and he asked about you and about Alois—do you know, Chris, to myself I call him Herr Harz, but when I have seen him this time I shall call him Alois in my heart also.

"I have a letter from Dr. Edmund; he is in London, so perhaps you have seen him, only he has a great many patients and some that he has 'hopes of killing soon!' especially one old lady, because she is always wanting him to do things for her, and he is never saying 'No,' so he does not like her. He says that he is getting old. When I have finished this letter I am going to write and tell him that perhaps he shall see me soon, and then I think he will be very sad. Now that the Spring is come there are more flowers to take to Uncle Nic's grave, and every day, when I am gone, Barbi is to take them so that he shall not miss you, Chris, because all the flowers I put there are for you.

"I am buying some toys without paint on for my niece."

"O Chris! this will be the first baby that I have known."

"I am only to stay three weeks with you, but I think when I am once there I shall be staying longer. I send a kiss for my niece, and to Herr Harz, my love—that is the last time I shall call him Herr Harz; and to you, Chris, all the joy that is in my heart.—Your loving "GRETA."

Christian rose, and, turning very softly, stood, leaning her elbows on the back of a high seat, looking at her husband.

In her eyes there was a slow, clear, faintly smiling, yet yearning look, as though this strenuous figure bent on its task were seen for a moment as something apart, and not all the world to her.

"Tired?" asked Harz, putting his lips to her hand.

"No, it's only—what Greta says about the Spring; it makes one want more than one has got."

Slipping her hand away, she went back to the window. Harz stood, looking after her; then, taking up his palette, again began painting.

In the world, outside, the high soft clouds flew by; the trees seemed thickening and budding.

And Christian thought:

'Can we never have quite enough?'

December 1890.

TO

MY FATHER A MAN OF DEVON I

"MOOR, 20th July.

.....It is quiet here, sleepy, rather—a farm is never quiet; the sea, too, is only a quarter of a mile away, and when it's windy, the sound of it travels up the combe; for distraction, you must go four miles to Brixham or five to Kingswear, and you won't find much then. The farm lies in a sheltered spot, scooped, so to speak, high up the combe side—behind is a rise of fields, and beyond, a sweep of down. You have the feeling of being able to see quite far, which is misleading, as you soon find out if you walk. It is true Devon country—hills, hollows, hedge-banks, lanes dipping down into the earth or going up like the sides of houses, coppices, cornfields, and little streams wherever there's a place for one; but the downs along the cliff, all gorse and ferns, are wild. The combe ends in a sandy cove with black rock on one side, pinkish cliffs away to the headland on the other, and a coastguard station. Just now, with the harvest coming on, everything looks its richest, the apples ripening, the trees almost too green. It's very hot, still weather; the country and the sea seem to sleep in the sun. In front of the farm are half-a-dozen pines that look as if they had stepped out of another land, but all round the back is orchard as lush, and gnarled, and orthodox as any one could wish. The house, a long, white building with three levels of roof, and splashes of brown all over it, looks as if it might be growing down into the earth. It was freshly thatched two years ago—and that's all the newness there is about it; they say the front

door, oak, with iron knobs, is three hundred years old at least. You can touch the ceilings with your hand. The windows certainly might be larger—a heavenly old place, though, with a flavour of apples, smoke, sweetbriar, bacon, honeysuckle, and age, all over it.

The owner is a man called John Ford, about seventy, and seventeen stone in weight—very big, on long legs, with a grey, stubbly beard, grey, watery eyes, short neck and purplish complexion; he is asthmatic, and has a very courteous, autocratic manner. His clothes are made of Harris tweed—except on Sundays, when he puts on black—a seal ring, and a thick gold cable chain. There's nothing mean or small about John Ford; I suspect him of a warm heart, but he doesn't let you know much about him. He's a north-country man by birth, and has been out in New Zealand all his life. This little Devonshire farm is all he has now. He had a large "station" in the North Island, and was much looked up to, kept open house, did everything, as one would guess, in a narrow-minded, large-handed way. He came to grief suddenly; I don't quite know how. I believe his only son lost money on the turf, and then, unable to face his father, shot himself; if you had seen John Ford, you could imagine that. His wife died, too, that year. He paid up to the last penny, and came home, to live on this farm. He told me the other night that he had only one relation in the world, his granddaughter, who lives here with him. Pasiance Voisey—old spelling for Patience, but they pronounce, it Pash-yence—is sitting out here with me at this moment on a sort of rustic loggia that opens into the orchard. Her sleeves are rolled up, and she's stripping currants, ready for black currant tea. Now and then she rests her elbows on the table, eats a berry, pouts her lips, and, begins again. She has a round, little face; a long, slender body; cheeks like poppies; a bushy mass of black-brown hair, and dark-brown, almost black, eyes; her nose is snub; her lips quick, red, rather full; all her motions quick and soft. She loves bright colours. She's rather like a little cat; sometimes she seems all sympathy, then in a moment as hard as tortoise-shell. She's all impulse; yet she doesn't like to show her feelings; I sometimes wonder whether she has any. She plays the violin.

It's queer to see these two together, queer and rather sad. The old man has a fierce tenderness for her that strikes into the very roots of him. I see him torn between it, and his cold north-country horror of his feelings; his life with her is an unconscious torture to him. She's a restless, chafing thing, demure enough one moment, then flashing out into mocking speeches or hard little laughs. Yet she's fond of him in her fashion; I saw her kiss him once when he was asleep. She obeys him generally—in a way as if she couldn't breathe while she was doing it. She's had a queer sort of education—history, geography, elementary mathematics, and nothing else; never been to school; had a few lessons on the violin, but has taught herself most of what she knows. She is well up in the lore of birds, flowers, and insects; has three cats, who follow her about; and is full of pranks. The other day she called out to me, "I've something for you. Hold out your hand and shut your eyes!" It was a large, black slug! She's the child of the old fellow's only daughter, who was sent home for schooling at Torquay, and made a runaway match with one Richard Voisey, a yeoman farmer, whom she met in the hunting-field. John Ford was furious—his ancestors, it appears, used to lead ruffians on the Cumberland side of the Border—he looked on "Squire" Rick Voisey as a cut below him. He was called "Squire," as far as I can make out, because he used to play cards every evening with a parson in the neighbourhood who went by the name of "Devil" Hawkins. Not that the Voisey stock is to be despised. They have had this farm since it was granted to one Richard Voisey by copy dated 8th September, 13 Henry VIII. Mrs. Hopgood, the wife of the bailiff—a dear, quaint, serene old soul with cheeks like a rosy, withered apple, and an unbounded love of Pasiance—showed me the very document.

"I kape it," she said. "Mr. Ford be tu proud—but other folks be proud tu. 'Tis a pra-aper old fam'ly: all the women is Margery, Pasiance, or Mary; all the men's Richards an' Johns an' Rogers; old as they apple-trees."

Rick Voisey was a racketsy, hunting fellow, and "dipped" the old farm up to its thatched roof. John Ford took his revenge by buying up the mortgages, foreclosing, and commanding his daughter and Voisey to go on living here rent free; this they dutifully did until they were both killed in a dog-cart accident, eight years ago. Old Ford's financial smash came a year later, and since then he's lived here with Pasiance. I fancy it's the cross in her blood that makes her so restless, and irresponsible: if she had been all a native she'd have been happy enough here, or all a stranger like John Ford himself, but the two strains struggling for mastery seem to give her no rest. You'll think this a far-fetched theory, but I believe it to be the true one. She'll stand with lips pressed together, her arms folded tight across her narrow chest, staring as if she could see beyond the things round her; then something catches her attention, her eyes will grow laughing, soft, or scornful all in a minute! She's eighteen, perfectly fearless in a boat, but you can't get her to mount a horse—a sore subject with her grandfather, who spends most of his day on a lean, half-bred pony, that carries him like a feather, for all his weight.

They put me up here as a favour to Dan Treffry; there's an arrangement of L. s. d. with Mrs. Hopgood in the background. They aren't at all well off; this is the largest farm about, but it doesn't bring them in much. To look at John Ford, it seems incredible he should be short of money—he's too large.

We have family prayers at eight, then, breakfast—after that freedom for writing or anything else till supper and evening prayers. At midday one forages for oneself. On Sundays, two miles to church twice, or you get into John Ford's black books.... Dan Treffry himself is staying at Kingswear. He says he's made his pile; it suits him down here—like a sleep after years of being too wide-awake; he had a rough time in New Zealand, until that mine made his fortune. You'd hardly remember him; he reminds me of his uncle, old Nicholas Treffry; the same slow way of speaking, with a hesitation, and a trick of repeating your name with everything he says; left-handed too, and the same slow twinkle in his eyes. He has a dark, short beard, and red-brown cheeks; is a little bald on the temples, and a bit grey, but hard as iron. He rides over nearly every day, attended by a black spaniel with a wonderful nose and a horror of petticoats. He has told me lots of good stories of John Ford in the early squatter's times; his feats with horses live to this day; and he was through the Maori wars; as Dan says, "a man after Uncle Nic's own heart."

They are very good friends, and respect each other; Dan has a great admiration for the old man, but the attraction is Pasiance. He talks very little when she's in the room, but looks at her in a sidelong, wistful sort of way. Pasiance's conduct to him would be cruel in any one else, but in her, one takes it with a pinch of salt. Dan goes off, but turns up again as quiet and dogged as you please.

Last night, for instance, we were sitting in the loggia after supper. Pasiance was fingering the strings of her violin, and suddenly Dan (a bold thing for him) asked her to play.

"What!" she said, "before men? No, thank you!"

"Why not?"

"Because I hate them."

Down came John Ford's hand on the wicker table: "You forget yourself! Go to bed!"

She gave Dan a look, and went; we could hear her playing in her bedroom; it sounded like a dance of spirits; and just when one thought she had finished, out it would break again like a burst of laughter. Presently, John Ford begged our pardons ceremoniously, and stumped off indoors. The violin ceased; we heard his voice growling at her; down he came again. Just as he was settled in his chair there was a soft swish, and something dark came falling through the apple boughs. The violin! You should have seen his face! Dan would have picked the violin up, but the old man stopped him. Later, from my bedroom window, I saw John Ford come out and stand looking at the violin. He raised his foot as if to stamp on it. At last he picked it up, wiped it carefully, and took it in....

My room is next to hers. I kept hearing her laugh, a noise too as if she were dragging things about the room. Then I fell asleep, but woke with a start, and went to the window for a breath of fresh air. Such a black, breathless night! Nothing to be seen but the twisted, blacker branches; not the faintest stir of leaves, no sound but muffled grunting from the cowhouse, and now and then a faint sigh. I had the queerest feeling of unrest and fear, the last thing to expect on such a night. There is something here that's disturbing; a sort of suppressed struggle. I've never in my life seen anything so irresponsible as this girl, or so uncompromising as the old man; I keep thinking of the way he wiped that violin. It's just as if a spark would set everything in a blaze. There's a menace of tragedy—or—perhaps it's only the heat, and too much of Mother Hopgood's crame....

II

"Tuesday.

.....I've made a new acquaintance. I was lying in the orchard, and presently, not seeing me, he came along—a man of middle height, with a singularly good balance, and no lumber—rather old blue clothes, a flannel shirt, a dull red necktie, brown shoes, a cap with a leather peak pushed up on the forehead. Face long and narrow, bronzed with a kind of pale burnt-in brownness; a good forehead. A brown moustache, beard rather pointed, blackening about the cheeks; his chin not visible, but from the beard's growth must be big; mouth I should judge sensuous. Nose straight and blunt; eyes grey, with an upward look, not exactly frank, because defiant; two parallel furrows down each cheek, one from the inner corner of the eye, one from the nostril; age perhaps thirty-five. About the face, attitude, movements, something immensely vital, adaptable, daring, and unprincipled.

He stood in front of the loggia, biting his fingers, a kind of nineteenth-century buccaneer, and I wondered what he was doing in this galley. They say you can tell a man of Kent or a Somersetshire man; certainly you can tell a Yorkshire man, and this fellow could only have been a man of Devon, one of the two main types found in this county. He whistled; and out came Pasiance in a geranium-coloured dress, looking like some tall poppy—you know the slight droop of a poppy's head, and the way the wind sways its stem.... She is a human poppy, her fuzzy dark hair is like a poppy's lustreless black heart, she has a poppy's tantalising attraction and repulsion, something fatal, or rather fateful. She came walking up to my new friend, then caught sight of me, and stopped dead.

"That," she said to me, "is Zachary Pearse. This," she said to him, "is our lodger." She said it with a wonderful soft malice. She wanted to scratch me, and she scratched. Half an hour later I was in the yard, when up came this fellow Pearse.

"Glad to know you," he said, looking thoughtfully at the pigs.

"You're a writer, aren't you?"

"A sort of one," I said.

"If by any chance," he said suddenly, "you're looking for a job, I could put something in your way. Walk down to the beach with me, and I'll tell you; my boat's at anchor, smartest little craft in these parts."

It was very hot, and I had no desire whatever to go down to the beach—I went, all the same. We had not gone far when John Ford and Dan Treffry came into the lane. Our friend seemed a little disconcerted, but soon recovered himself. We met in the middle of the lane, where there was hardly room to pass. John Ford, who looked very haughty, put on his pince-nez and stared at Pearse.

"Good-day!" said Pearse; "fine weather! I've been up to ask Pasiance to come for a sail. Wednesday we thought, weather permitting; this gentleman's coming. Perhaps you'll come too, Mr. Treffry. You've never seen my place. I'll give you lunch, and show you my father. He's worth a couple of hours' sail any day." It was said in such an odd way that one couldn't resent his impudence. John Ford was seized with a fit of wheezing, and seemed on the eve of an explosion; he glanced at me, and checked himself.

"You're very good," he said icily; "my granddaughter has other things to do. You, gentlemen, will please yourselves"; and, with a very slight bow, he went stumping on to the house. Dan looked at me, and I looked at him.

"You'll come?" said Pearse, rather wistfully. Dan stammered: "Thank you, Mr. Pearse; I'm a better man on a horse than in a boat, but—thank you." Cornered in this way, he's a shy, soft-hearted being. Pearse smiled his thanks. "Wednesday, then, at ten o'clock; you shan't regret it."

"Pertinacious beggar!" I heard Dan mutter in his beard; and found myself marching down the lane again by Pearse's side. I asked him what he was good enough to mean by saying I was coming, without having asked me. He answered, unabashed:

"You see, I'm not friends with the old man; but I knew he'd not be impolite to you, so I took the liberty."

He has certainly a knack of turning one's anger to curiosity. We were down in the combe now; the tide was running out, and the sand all little, wet, shining ridges. About a quarter of a mile out lay a cutter, with her tan sail half down, swinging to the swell. The sunlight was making the pink cliffs glow in the most wonderful way; and shifting in bright patches over the sea like moving shoals of goldfish. Pearse perched himself on his dinghy, and looked out under his hand. He seemed lost in admiration.

"If we could only net some of those spangles," he said, "an' make gold of 'em! No more work then."

"It's a big job I've got on," he said presently; "I'll tell you about it on Wednesday. I want a journalist."

"But I don't write for the papers," I said; "I do other sort of work. My game is archaeology."

"It doesn't matter," he said, "the more imagination the better. It'd be a thundering good thing for you."

His assurance was amazing, but it was past supper-time, and hunger getting the better of my curiosity, I bade him good-night. When I looked back, he was still there, on the edge of his boat, gazing at the sea. A queer sort of bird altogether, but attractive somehow.

Nobody mentioned him that evening; but once old Ford, after staring a long time at Pasiance, muttered a propos of nothing, "Undutiful children!" She was softer than usual; listening quietly to our talk, and smiling when spoken to. At bedtime she went up to her grand-father, without waiting for the usual command, "Come and kiss me, child."

Dan did not stay to supper, and he has not been here since. This morning I asked Mother Hopgood who Zachary Pearse was. She's a true Devonian; if there's anything she hates, it is to be committed to a definite statement. She ambled round her answer, and at last told me that he was "son of old Cap'en Jan Pearse to Black Mill. 'Tis an old family to Dartymouth an' Plymouth," she went on in a communicative outburst. "They du say Francis Drake tuke five o' they Pearses with 'en to fight the Spaniards. At least that's what I've heard Mr. Zachary zay; but Ha-apgood can tell yu." Poor Hopgood, the amount of information she saddles him with in the course of the day! Having given me thus to understand that she had run dry, she at once went on:

"Cap'en Jan Pearse made a dale of ventures. He's old now—they du say nigh an 'undred. Ha-apgood can tell yu."

"But the son, Mrs. Hopgood?"

Her eyes twinkled with sudden shrewdness: She hugged herself placidly.

"An' what would yu take for dinner to-day? There's duck; or yu might like 'toad in the hole,' with an apple tart; or then, there's—Well! we'll see what we can du like." And off she went, without waiting for my answer.

To-morrow is Wednesday. I shan't be sorry to get another look at this fellow Pearse....

III

"Friday, 29th July.

.....Why do you ask me so many questions, and egg me on to write about these people instead of minding my business? If you really want to hear, I'll tell you of Wednesday's doings.

It was a splendid morning; and Dan turned up, to my surprise—though I might have known that when he says a thing, he does it. John Ford came out to shake hands with him, then, remembering why he had come, breathed loudly, said nothing, and went in again. Nothing was to be seen of Pasiance, and we went down to the beach together.

"I don't like this fellow Pearse, George," Dan said to me on the way; "I was fool enough to say I'd go, and so I must, but what's he after? Not the man to do things without a reason, mind you."

I remarked that we should soon know.

"I'm not so sure—queer beggar; I never look at him without thinking of a pirate."

The cutter lay in the cove as if she had never moved. There too was Zachary Pearse seated on the edge of his dinghy.

"A five-knot breeze," he said, "I'll run you down in a couple of hours." He made no inquiry about Pasiance, but put us into his cockleshell and pulled for the cutter. A lantern-jawed fellow, named Prawle, with a spiky, prominent beard, long, clean-shaven upper lip, and tanned complexion—a regular hard-weather bird—received us.

The cutter was beautifully clean; built for a Brixham trawler, she still had her number—DH 113—uneffaced. We dived into a sort of cabin, airy, but dark, fitted with two bunks and a small table, on which stood some bottles of stout; there were lockers, too, and pegs for clothes. Prawle, who showed us round, seemed very proud of a steam contrivance for hoisting sails. It was some minutes before we came on deck again; and there, in the dinghy, being pulled towards the cutter, sat Pasiance.

"If I'd known this," stammered Dan, getting red, "I wouldn't have come." She had outwitted us, and there was nothing to be done.

It was a very pleasant sail. The breeze was light from the south-east, the sun warm, the air soft.

Presently Pasiance began singing:

"Columbus is dead and laid in his grave, Oh! heigh-ho! and laid in his grave; Over his head the apple-trees wave Oh! heigh-ho! the apple-trees wave....

"The apples are ripe and ready to fall, Oh! heigh-ho! and ready to fall; There came an old woman and gathered them all, Oh! heigh-ho! and gathered them all....

"The apples are gathered, and laid on the shelf, Oh! heigh-ho! and laid on the shelf; If you want any more, you must sing for yourself, Oh! heigh-ho! and sing for yourself."

Her small, high voice came to us in trills and spurts, as the wind let it, like the singing of a skylark lost in the sky. Pearse went up to her and whispered something. I caught a glimpse of her face like a startled wild creature's; shrinking, tossing her hair, laughing, all in the same breath. She wouldn't sing again, but crouched in the bows with her chin on her hands, and the sun falling on one cheek, round, velvety, red as a peach....

We passed Dartmouth, and half an hour later put into a little wooded bay. On a low reddish cliff was a house hedged round by pine-trees. A bit of broken jetty ran out from the bottom of the cliff. We hooked on to this, and landed. An ancient, fish-like man came slouching down and took charge of the cutter. Pearse led us towards the house, Pasiance following mortally shy all of a sudden.

The house had a dark, overhanging thatch of the rush reeds that grow in the marshes hereabouts; I remember nothing else remarkable. It was neither old, nor new; neither beautiful, nor exactly ugly; neither clean, nor entirely squalid; it perched there with all its windows over the sea, turning its back contemptuously on the land.

Seated in a kind of porch, beside an immense telescope, was a very old man in a panama hat, with a rattan cane. His pure-white beard and moustache, and almost black eyebrows, gave a very singular, piercing look to his little, restless, dark-grey eyes; all over his mahogany cheeks and neck was a network of fine wrinkles. He sat quite upright, in the full sun, hardly blinking.

"Dad!" said Zachary, "this is Pasiance Voisey." The old man turned his eyes on her and muttered, "How do you do, ma'am?" then took no further notice. And Pasiance, who seemed to resent this, soon slipped away and went wandering about amongst the pines. An old woman brought some plates and bottles and laid them casually on a table; and we sat round the figure of old Captain Pearse without a word, as if we were all under a spell.

Before lunch there was a little scene between Zachary Pearse and Dan, as to which of them should summon Pasiance. It ended in both going, and coming back without her. She did not want any lunch, would stay where she was amongst the pines.

For lunch we had chops, wood-pigeons, mushrooms, and mulberry preserve, and drank wonderful Madeira out of common wine-glasses. I asked the old man where he got it; he gave me a queer look, and answered with a little bow:

"Stood me in tu shillin' the bottle, an' the country got nothing out of it, sir. In the early Thirties; tu shillin' the bottle; there's no such wine nowadays and," he added, looking at Zachary, "no such men."

Zachary smiled and said: "You did nothing so big, dad, as what I'm after, now!"

The old man's eyes had a sort of disdain in them.

"You're going far, then, in the Pied Witch, Zack?"

"I am," said Zachary.

"And where might yu be goin' in that old trampin' smut factory?"

"Morocco."

"Heu!" said the old man, "there's nothing there; I know that coast, as I know the back o' my hand." He stretched out a hand covered with veins and hair.

Zachary began suddenly to pour out a flood of words:

"Below Mogador—a fellow there—friend of mine—two years ago now. Concessions—trade-gunpowder—cruisers—feuds—money& mdash;chiefs—Gatling guns—Sultan—rifles—rebellion—gold." He detailed a reckless, sordid, bold scheme, which, on the pivot of a trading venture, was intended to spin a whole wheel of political convulsions.

"They'll never let you get there," said old Pearse.

"Won't they?" returned Zachary. "Oh yes, they will, an' when I leave, there'll be another dynasty, and I'll be a rich man."

"Yu'll never leave," answered the old man.

Zachary took out a sheet of paper covered with figures. He had worked the whole thing out. So much—equipment, so much—trade, so much—concessions, so much—emergencies. "My last mag!" he ended, "a thousand short; the ship's ready, and if I'm not there within a month my chance is as good as gone."

This was the pith of his confidences—an appeal for money, and we all looked as men will when that crops up.

"Mad!" muttered the old man, looking at the sea.

"No," said Zachary. That one word was more eloquent than all the rest of his words put together. This fellow is no visionary. His scheme may be daring, and unprincipled, but—he knows very well what he's about.

"Well!" said old Pearse, "you shall have five 'undred of my money, if it's only to learn what yu're made of. Wheel me in!" Zachary wheeled him into the house, but soon came back.

"The old man's cheque for five hundred pounds!" he said, holding it up. "Mr. Treffry, give me another, and you shall have a third of the profits."

I expected Dan to give a point-blank refusal. But he only asked:

"Would that clear you for starting?"

"With that," said Zachary, "I can get to sea in a fortnight."

"Good!" Dan said slowly. "Give me a written promise! To sea in fourteen days and my fair share on the five hundred pounds—no more—no less."

Again I thought Pearse would have jumped at this, but he leaned his chin on his hand, and looked at Dan, and Dan looked at him. While they were staring at each other like this, Pasiance came up with a kitten.

"See!" she said, "isn't it a darling?" The kitten crawled and clawed its way up behind her neck. I saw both men's eyes as they looked at Pasiance, and suddenly understood what they were at. The kitten rubbed itself against Pasiance's cheek, overbalanced, and fell, clawing, down her dress. She caught it up and walked away. Some one, I don't know which of us, sighed, and Pearse cried "Done!"

The bargain had been driven.

"Good-bye, Mr. Pearse," said Dan; "I guess that's all I'm wanted for. I'll find my pony waiting in the village. George, you'll see Pasiance home?"

We heard the hoofs of his pony galloping down the road; Pearse suddenly excused himself, and disappeared.

This venture of his may sound romantic and absurd, but it's matter-of-fact enough. He's after L. s. d.! Shades of Drake, Raleigh, Hawkins, Oxenham! The worm of suspicion gnaws at the rose of romance. What if those fellows, too, were only after L. s. d....?

I strolled into the pine-wood. The earth there was covered like a bee's body with black and gold stripes; there was the blue sea below, and white, sleepy clouds, and bumble-bees booming above the heather; it was all softness, a summer's day in Devon. Suddenly I came on Pearse standing at the edge of the cliff with Pasiance sitting in a little hollow below, looking up at him. I heard him say:

"Pasiance—Pasiance!" The sound of his voice, and the sight of her soft, wondering face made me furious. What business has she with love, at her age? What business have they with each other?

He told me presently that she had started off for home, and drove me to the ferry, behind an old grey pony. On the way he came back to his offer of the other day.

"Come with me," he said. "It doesn't do to neglect the Press; you can see the possibilities. It's one of the few countries left. If I once get this business started you don't know where it's going to stop. You'd

have free passage everywhere, and whatever you like in reason."

I answered as rudely as I could—but by no means as rudely as I wanted—that his scheme was mad. As a matter of fact, it's much too sane for me; for, whatever the body of a scheme, its soul is the fibre of the schemer.

"Think of it," he urged, as if he could see into me. "You can make what you like of it. Press paragraphs, of course. But that's mechanical; why, even I could do it, if I had time. As for the rest, you'll be as free—as free as a man."

There, in five words of one syllable, is the kernel of this fellow Pearse—"As free as a man!" No rule, no law, not even the mysterious shackles that bind men to their own self-respects! "As free as a man!" No ideals; no principles; no fixed star for his worship; no coil he can't slide out of! But the fellow has the tenacity of one of the old Devon mastiffs, too. He wouldn't take "No" for an answer.

"Think of it," he said; "any day will do—I've got a fortnight.... Look! there she is!" I thought that he meant *Pasiance*; but it was an old steamer, sluggish and black in the blazing sun of mid-stream, with a yellow-and-white funnel, and no sign of life on her decks.

"That's her—the *Pied Witch*! Do her twelve knots; you wouldn't think it! Well! good-evening! You'd better come. A word to me at any time. I'm going aboard now."

As I was being ferried across I saw him lolling in the stern-sheets of a little boat, the sun crowning his straw hat with glory.

I came on *Pasiance*, about a mile up the road, sitting in the hedge. We walked on together between the banks—Devonshire banks, as high as houses, thick with ivy and ferns, bramble and hazel boughs, and honeysuckle.

"Do you believe in a God?" she said suddenly.

"Grandfather's God is simply awful. When I'm playing the fiddle, I can feel God; but grandfather's is such a stuffy God—you know what I mean: the sea, the wind, the trees, colours too—they make one feel. But I don't believe that life was meant to 'be good' in. Isn't there anything better than being good? When I'm 'good,' I simply feel wicked." She reached up, caught a flower from the hedge, and slowly tore its petals.

"What would you do," she muttered, "if you wanted a thing, but were afraid of it? But I suppose you're never afraid!" she added, mocking me. I admitted that I was sometimes afraid, and often afraid of being afraid.

"That's nice! I'm not afraid of illness, nor of grandfather, nor of his God; but—I want to be free. If you want a thing badly, you're afraid about it."

I thought of Zachary Pearse's words, "free as a man."

"Why are you looking at me like that?" she said.

I stammered: "What do you mean by freedom?"

"Do you know what I shall do to-night?" she answered. "Get out of my window by the apple-tree, and go to the woods, and play!"

We were going down a steep lane, along the side of a wood, where there's always a smell of sappy leaves, and the breath of the cows that come close to the hedge to get the shade.

There was a cottage in the bottom, and a small boy sat outside playing with a heap of dust.

"Hallo, Johnny!" said *Pasiance*. "Hold your leg out and show this man your bad place!" The small boy undid a bandage round his bare and dirty little leg, and proudly revealed a sore.

"Isn't it nasty?" cried *Pasiance* ruefully, tying up the bandage again; "poor little feller! Johnny, see what I've brought you!" She produced from her pocket a stick of chocolate, the semblance of a soldier made of sealing-wax and worsted, and a crooked sixpence.

It was a new glimpse of her. All the way home she was telling me the story of little Johnny's family; when she came to his mother's death, she burst out: "A beastly shame, wasn't it, and they're so poor; it might just as well have been somebody else. I like poor people, but I hate rich ones—stuck-up beasts."

Mrs. Hopgood was looking over the gate, with her cap on one side, and one of *Pasiance's* cats

rubbing itself against her skirts. At the sight of us she hugged herself.

"Where's grandfather?" asked Pasiance. The old lady shook her head.

"Is it a row?" Mrs. Hopgood wriggled, and wriggled, and out came:

"Did you get yure tay, my pretty? No? Well, that's a pity; yu'll be falin' low-like."

Pasiance tossed her head, snatched up the cat, and ran indoors. I remained staring at Mrs. Hopgood.

"Dear-dear," she clucked, "poor lamb. So to spake it's—" and she blurted out suddenly, "chuckin' full of wra-ath, he is. Well, there!"

My courage failed that evening. I spent it at the coastguard station, where they gave me bread and cheese and some awful cider. I passed the kitchen as I came back. A fire was still burning there, and two figures, misty in the darkness, flitted about with stealthy laughter like spirits afraid of being detected in a carnal-meal. They were Pasiance and Mrs. Hopgood; and so charming was the smell of eggs and bacon, and they had such an air of tender enjoyment of this dark revel, that I stifled many pangs, as I crept hungry up to bed.

In the middle of the night I woke and heard what I thought was screaming; then it sounded like wind in trees, then like the distant shaking of a tambourine, with the high singing of a human voice. Suddenly it stopped—two long notes came wailing out like sobs—then utter stillness; and though I listened for an hour or more there was no other sound

IV

"4th August.

.....For three days after I wrote last, nothing at all happened here. I spent the mornings on the cliff reading, and watching the sun-sparks raining on the sea. It's grand up there with the gorse all round, the gulls basking on the rocks, the partridges calling in the corn, and now and then a young hawk overhead. The afternoons I spent out in the orchard. The usual routine goes on at the farm all the time—cow-milking, bread-baking, John Ford riding in and out, Pasiance in her garden stripping lavender, talking to the farm hands; and the smell of clover, and cows and hay; the sound of hens and pigs and pigeons, the soft drawl of voices, the dull thud of the farm carts; and day by day the apples getting redder. Then, last Monday, Pasiance was away from sunrise till sunset—nobody saw her go—nobody knew where she had gone. It was a wonderful, strange day, a sky of silver-grey and blue, with a drift of wind-clouds, all the trees sighing a little, the sea heaving in a long, low swell, the animals restless, the birds silent, except the gulls with their old man's laughter and kitten's mewing.

A something wild was in the air; it seemed to sweep across the downs and combe, into the very house, like a passionate tune that comes drifting to your ears when you're sleepy. But who would have thought the absence of that girl for a few hours could have wrought such havoc! We were like uneasy spirits; Mrs. Hopgood's apple cheeks seemed positively to wither before one's eyes. I came across a dairymaid and farm hand discussing it stolidly with very downcast faces. Even Hopgood, a hard-bitten fellow with immense shoulders, forgot his imperturbability so far as to harness his horse, and depart on what he assured me was "just a wild-guse chaace." It was long before John Ford gave signs of noticing that anything was wrong, but late in the afternoon I found him sitting with his hands on his knees, staring straight before him. He rose heavily when he saw me, and stalked out. In the evening, as I was starting for the coastguard station to ask for help to search the cliff, Pasiance appeared, walking as if she could hardly drag one leg after the other. Her cheeks were crimson; she was biting her lips to keep tears of sheer fatigue out of her eyes. She passed me in the doorway without a word. The anxiety he had gone through seemed to forbid the old man from speaking. He just came forward, took her face in his hands, gave it a great kiss, and walked away. Pasiance dropped on the floor in the dark passage, and buried her face on her arms. "Leave me alone!" was all she would say. After a bit she dragged herself upstairs. Presently Mrs. Hopgood came to me.

"Not a word out of her—an' not a bite will she ate, an' I had a pie all ready—scrumptious. The good Lord knows the truth—she asked for brandy; have you any brandy, sir? Ha-apgood'e don't drink it, an' Mister Ford 'e don't allaow for anything but caowslip wine."

I had whisky.

The good soul seized the flask, and went off hugging it. She returned it to me half empty.

"Lapped it like a kitten laps milk. I misdaoubt it's straong, poor lamb, it lusened 'er tongue praaperly. 'I've a-done it,' she says to me, 'Mums-I've a-done it,' an' she laughed like a mad thing; and then, sir, she cried, an' kissed me, an' pushed me thru the door. Gude Lard! What is 't she's a-done...?"

It rained all the next day and the day after. About five o'clock yesterday the rain ceased; I started off to Kingswear on Hopgood's nag to see Dan Treffry. Every tree, bramble, and fern in the lanes was dripping water; and every bird singing from the bottom of his heart. I thought of Pasiance all the time. Her absence that day was still a mystery; one never ceased asking oneself what she had done. There are people who never grow up—they have no right to do things. Actions have consequences—and children have no business with consequences.

Dan was out. I had supper at the hotel, and rode slowly home. In the twilight stretches of the road, where I could touch either bank of the lane with my whip, I thought of nothing but Pasiance and her grandfather; there was something in the half light suited to wonder and uncertainty. It had fallen dark before I rode into the straw-yard. Two young bullocks snuffled at me, a sleepy hen got up and ran off with a tremendous shrieking. I stabled the horse, and walked round to the back. It was pitch black under the apple-trees, and the windows were all darkened. I stood there a little, everything smelled so delicious after the rain; suddenly I had the uncomfortable feeling that I was being watched. Have you ever felt like that on a dark night? I called out at last: "Is any one there?" Not a sound! I walked to the gate-nothing! The trees still dripped with tiny, soft, hissing sounds, but that was all. I slipped round to the front, went in, barricaded the door, and groped up to bed. But I couldn't sleep. I lay awake a long while; dozed at last, and woke with a jump. A stealthy murmur of smothered voices was going on quite close somewhere. It stopped. A minute passed; suddenly came the soft thud as of something falling. I sprang out of bed and rushed to the window. Nothing—but in the distance something that sounded like footsteps. An owl hooted; then clear as crystal, but quite low, I heard Pasiance singing in her room:

"The apples are ripe and ready to fall. Oh! heigh-ho! and ready to fall."

I ran to her door and knocked.

"What is it?" she cried.

"Is anything the matter?"

"Matter?"

"Is anything the matter?"

"Ha-ha-ha-ha! Good-night!" then quite low, I heard her catch her breath, hard, sharply. No other answer, no other sound.

I went to bed and lay awake for hours....

This evening Dan came; during supper he handed Pasiance a roll of music; he had got it in Torquay. The shopman, he said, had told him that it was a "corker."

It was Bach's "Chaconne." You should have seen her eyes shine, her fingers actually tremble while she turned over the pages. Seems odd to think of her worshipping at the shrine of Bach as odd as to think of a wild colt running of its free will into the shafts; but that's just it with her you can never tell. "Heavenly!" she kept saying.

John Ford put down his knife and fork.

"Heathenish stuff!" he muttered, and suddenly thundered out, "Pasiance!"

She looked up with a start, threw the music from her, and resumed her place.

During evening prayers, which follow every night immediately on food, her face was a study of mutiny. She went to bed early. It was rather late when we broke up—for once old Ford had been talking of his squatter's life. As we came out, Dan held up his hand. A dog was barking. "It's Lass," he said. "She'll wake Pasiance."

The spaniel yelped furiously. Dan ran out to stop her. He was soon back.

"Somebody's been in the orchard, and gone off down to the cove." He ran on down the path. I, too, ran, horribly uneasy. In front, through the darkness, came the spaniel's bark; the lights of the

coastguard station faintly showed. I was first on the beach; the dog came to me at once, her tail almost in her mouth from apology. There was the sound of oars working in rowlocks; nothing visible but the feathery edges of the waves. Dan said behind, "No use! He's gone." His voice sounded hoarse, like that of a man choking with passion.

"George," he stammered, "it's that blackguard. I wish I'd put a bullet in him." Suddenly a light burned up in the darkness on the sea, seemed to swing gently, and vanished. Without another word we went back up the hill. John Ford stood at the gate motionless, indifferent—nothing had dawned on him as yet. I whispered to Dan, "Let it alone!"

"No," he said, "I'm going to show you." He struck a match, and slowly hunted the footsteps in the wet grass of the orchard. "Look—here!"

He stopped under Pasiance's window and swayed the match over the ground. Clear as daylight were the marks of some one who had jumped or fallen. Dan held the match over his head.

"And look there!" he said. The bough of an apple-tree below the window was broken. He blew the match out.

I could see the whites of his eyes, like an angry animal's.

"Drop it, Dan!" I said.

He turned on his heel suddenly, and stammered out, "You're right."

But he had turned into John Ford's arms.

The old man stood there like some great force, darker than the darkness, staring up at the window, as though stupefied. We had not a word to say. He seemed unconscious of our presence. He turned round, and left us standing there.

"Follow him!" said Dan. "Follow him—by God! it's not safe."

We followed. Bending, and treading heavily, he went upstairs. He struck a blow on Pasiance's door. "Let me in!" he said. I drew Dan into my bedroom. The key was slowly turned, her door was flung open, and there she stood in her dressing-gown, a candle in her hand, her face crimson, and oh! so young, with its short, crisp hair and round cheeks. The old man—like a giant in front of her—raised his hands, and laid them on her shoulders.

"What's this? You—you've had a man in your room?"

Her eyes did not drop.

"Yes," she said. Dan gave a groan.

"Who?"

"Zachary Pearse," she answered in a voice like a bell.

He gave her one awful shake, dropped his hands, then raised them as though to strike her. She looked him in the eyes; his hands dropped, and he too groaned. As far as I could see, her face never moved.

"I'm married to him," she said, "d' you hear? Married to him. Go out of my room!" She dropped the candle on the floor at his feet, and slammed the door in his face. The old man stood for a minute as though stunned, then groped his way downstairs.

"Dan," I said, "is it true?"

"Ah!" he answered, "it's true; didn't you hear her?"

I was glad I couldn't see his face.

"That ends it," he said at last; "there's the old man to think of."

"What will he do?"

"Go to the fellow this very night." He seemed to have no doubt. Trust one man of action to know another.

I muttered something about being an outsider—wondered if there was anything I could do to help.

"Well," he said slowly, "I don't know that I'm anything but an outsider now; but I'll go along with him, if he'll have me."

He went downstairs. A few minutes later they rode out from the straw-yard. I watched them past the line of hayricks, into the blacker shadows of the pines, then the tramp of hoofs began to fail in the darkness, and at last died away.

I've been sitting here in my bedroom writing to you ever since, till my candle's almost gone. I keep thinking what the end of it is to be; and reproaching myself for doing nothing. And yet, what could I have done? I'm sorry for her—sorrrier than I can say. The night is so quiet—I haven't heard a sound; is she asleep, awake, crying, triumphant?

It's four o'clock; I've been asleep.

They're back. Dan is lying on my bed. I'll try and tell you his story as near as I can, in his own words.

"We rode," he said, "round the upper way, keeping out of the lanes, and got to Kingswear by half-past eleven. The horse-ferry had stopped running, and we had a job to find any one to put us over. We hired the fellow to wait for us, and took a carriage at the 'Castle.' Before we got to Black Mill it was nearly one, pitch-dark. With the breeze from the southeast, I made out he should have been in an hour or more. The old man had never spoken to me once: and before we got there I had begun to hope we shouldn't find the fellow after all. We made the driver pull up in the road, and walked round and round, trying to find the door. Then some one cried, 'Who are you?'

"John Ford.'

"What do you want?' It was old Pearse.

"To see Zachary Pearse.'

"The long window out of the porch where we sat the other day was open, and in we went. There was a door at the end of the room, and a light coming through. John Ford went towards it; I stayed out in the dark.

"Who's that with you?'

"Mr. Treffry.'

"Let him come in!' I went in. The old fellow was in bed, quite still on his pillows, a candle by his side; to look at him you'd think nothing of him but his eyes were alive. It was queer being there with those two old men!"

Dan paused, seemed to listen, then went on doggedly.

"Sit down, gentleman,' said old Pearse. 'What may you want to see my son for?' John Ford begged his pardon, he had something to say, he said, that wouldn't wait.

"They were very polite to one another," muttered Dan

"Will you leave your message with me?' said Pearse.

"What I have to say to your son is private.'

"I'm his father.'

"I'm my girl's grandfather; and her only stand-by.'

"Ah!' muttered old Pearse, 'Rick Voisey's daughter?'

"I mean to see your son.'

Old Pearse smiled. Queer smile he's got, sort of sneering sweet.

"You can never tell where Zack may be,' he said. 'You think I want to shield him. You're wrong; Zack can take care of himself.'

"Your son's here!' said John Ford. 'I know.' Old Pearse gave us a very queer look.

"You come into my house like thieves in the night,' he said, 'and give me the lie, do you?'

"Your son came to my child's room like a thief in the night; it's for that I want to see him,' and then," said Dan, "there was a long silence. At last Pearse said:

"I don't understand; has he played the blackguard?"

"John Ford answered, 'He's married her, or, before God, I'd kill him.'

"Old Pearse seemed to think this over, never moving on his pillows. 'You don't know Zack,' he said; 'I'm sorry for you, and I'm sorry for Rick Voisey's daughter; but you don't know Zack.'

"'Sorry!' groaned out John Ford; 'he's stolen my child, and I'll punish him.'

"'Punish!' cried old Pearse, 'we don't take punishment, not in my family.'

"'Captain Jan Pearse, as sure as I stand here, you and your breed will get your punishment of God.' Old Pearse smiled.

"'Mr. John Ford, that's as may be; but sure as I lie here we won't take it of you. You can't punish unless you make to feel, and that you can't du.'"

And that is truth!

Dan went on again:

"'You won't tell me where your son is!' but old Pearse never blinked.

"'I won't,' he said, 'and now you may get out. I lie here an old man alone, with no use to my legs, night on night, an' the house open; any rapsCALLION could get in; d' ye think I'm afraid of you?'

"We were beat; and walked out without a word. But that old man; I've thought of him a lot—ninety-two, and lying there. Whatever he's been, and they tell you rum things of him, whatever his son may be, he's a man. It's not what he said, nor that there was anything to be afraid of just then, but somehow it's the idea of the old chap lying there. I don't ever wish to see a better plucked one...."

We sat silent after that; out of doors the light began to stir among the leaves. There were all kinds of rustling sounds, as if the world were turning over in bed.

Suddenly Dan said:

"He's cheated me. I paid him to clear out and leave her alone. D' you think she's asleep?" He's made no appeal for sympathy, he'd take pity for an insult; but he feels it badly.

"I'm tired as a cat," he said at last, and went to sleep on my bed.

It's broad daylight now; I too am tired as a cat....

V

"Saturday, 6th August.

.....I take up my tale where I left off yesterday.... Dan and I started as soon as we could get Mrs. Hopgood to give us coffee. The old lady was more tentative, more undecided, more pouncing, than I had ever seen her. She was manifestly uneasy: Ha-aggood—who "don't slape" don't he, if snores are any criterion—had called out in the night, "Hark to th' 'arses' 'oofs!" Had we heard them? And where might we be going then? 'Twas very earrly to start, an' no breakfast. Haapgood had said it was goin' to shaowerr. Miss Pasiance was not to 'er violin yet, an' Mister Ford 'e kept 'is room. Was it?—would there be—? "Well, an' therr's an 'arvest bug; 'tis some earrly for they!" Wonderful how she pounces on all such creatures, when I can't even see them. She pressed it absently between finger and thumb, and began manoeuvring round another way. Long before she had reached her point, we had gulped down our coffee, and departed. But as we rode out she came at a run, holding her skirts high with either hand, raised her old eyes bright and anxious in their setting of fine wrinkles, and said:

"'Tidden sorrow for her?"

A shrug of the shoulders was all the answer she got. We rode by the lanes; through sloping

farmyards, all mud and pigs, and dirty straw, and farmers with clean-shaven upper lips and whiskers under the chin; past fields of corn, where larks were singing. Up or down, we didn't draw rein till we came to Dan's hotel.

There was the river gleaming before us under a rainbow mist that hallowed every shape. There seemed affinity between the earth and the sky. I've never seen that particular soft unity out of Devon. And every ship, however black or modern, on those pale waters, had the look of a dream ship. The tall green woods, the red earth, the white houses, were all melted into one opal haze. It was raining, but the sun was shining behind. Gulls swooped by us—ghosts of the old greedy wanderers of the sea.

We had told our two boatmen to pull us out to the Pied Witch! They started with great resolution, then rested on their oars.

"The Pied Witch, zurr?" asked one politely; "an' which may her be?"

That's the West countryman all over! Never say you "nay," never lose an opportunity, never own he doesn't know, or can't do anything—independence, amiability, and an eye to the main chance. We mentioned Pearse's name.

"Capt'n Zach'ry Pearse!" They exchanged a look half-amused, half-admiring.

"The Zunflaower, yu mane. That's her. Zunflaower, ahoy!" As we mounted the steamer's black side I heard one say:

"Pied Witch! A pra-aper name that—a dandy name for her!" They laughed as they made fast.

The mate of the Sunflower, or Pied Witch, or whatever she was called, met us—a tall young fellow in his shirtsleeves, tanned to the roots of his hair, with sinewy, tattooed arms, and grey eyes, charred round the rims from staring at weather.

"The skipper is on board," he said. "We're rather busy, as you see. Get on with that, you sea-cooks," he bawled at two fellows who were doing nothing. All over the ship, men were hauling, splicing, and stowing cargo.

"To-day's Friday: we're off on Wednesday with any luck. Will you come this way?" He led us down the companion to a dark hole which he called the saloon. "Names? What! are you Mr. Treffry? Then we're partners!" A schoolboy's glee came on his face.

"Look here!" he said; "I can show you something," and he unlocked the door of a cabin. There appeared to be nothing in it but a huge piece of tarpaulin, which depended, bulging, from the topmost bunk. He pulled it up. The lower bunk had been removed, and in its place was the ugly body of a dismantled Gatling gun.

"Got six of them," he whispered, with unholy mystery, through which his native frankness gaped out. "Worth their weight in gold out there just now, the skipper says. Got a heap of rifles, too, and lots of ammunition. He's given me a share. This is better than the P. and O., and playing deck cricket with the passengers. I'd made up my mind already to chuck that, and go in for plantin' sugar, when I ran across the skipper. Wonderful chap, the skipper! I'll go and tell him. He's been out all night; only came aboard at four bells; having a nap now, but he won't mind that for you."

Off he went. I wondered what there was in Zachary Pearse to attract a youngster of this sort; one of the customary twelve children of some country parson, no doubt-burning to shoot a few niggers, and for ever frank and youthful.

He came back with his hands full of bottles.

"What'll you drink? The skipper'll be here in a jiffy. Excuse my goin' on deck. We're so busy."

And in five minutes Zachary Pearse did come. He made no attempt to shake hands, for which I respected him. His face looked worn, and more defiant than usual.

"Well, gentlemen?" he said.

"We've come to ask what you're going to do?" said Dan.

"I don't know," answered Pearse, "that that's any of your business."

Dan's little eyes were like the eyes of an angry pig.

"You've got five hundred pounds of mine," he said; "why do you think I gave it you?"

Zachary bit his fingers.

"That's no concern of mine," he said. "I sail on Wednesday. Your money's safe."

"Do you know what I think of you?" said Dan.

"No, and you'd better not tell me!" Then, with one of his peculiar changes, he smiled: "As you like, though."

Dan's face grew very dark. "Give me a plain answer," he said: "What are you going to do about her?"

Zachary looked up at him from under his brows.

"Nothing."

"Are you cur enough to deny that you've married her?"

Zachary looked at him coolly. "Not at all," he said.

"What in God's name did you do it for?"

"You've no monopoly in the post of husband, Mr. Treffry."

"To put a child in that position! Haven't you the heart of a man? What d' ye come sneaking in at night for? By Gad! Don't you know you've done a beastly thing?"

Zachary's face darkened, he clenched his fists. Then he seemed to shut his anger into himself.

"You wanted me to leave her to you," he sneered. "I gave her my promise that I'd take her out there, and we'd have gone off on Wednesday quietly enough, if you hadn't come and nosed the whole thing out with your infernal dog. The fat's in the fire! There's no reason why I should take her now. I'll come back to her a rich man, or not at all."

"And in the meantime?" I slipped in.

He turned to me, in an ingratiating way.

"I would have taken her to save the fuss—I really would—it's not my fault the thing's come out. I'm on a risky job. To have her with me might ruin the whole thing; it would affect my nerve. It isn't safe for her."

"And what's her position to be," I said, "while you're away? Do you think she'd have married you if she'd known you were going to leave her like this? You ought to give up this business."

"You stole her. Her life's in your hands; she's only a child!"

A quiver passed over his face; it showed that he was suffering.

"Give it up!" I urged.

"My last farthing's in it," he sighed; "the chance of a lifetime."

He looked at me doubtfully, appealingly, as if for the first time in his life he had been given a glimpse of that dilemma of consequences which his nature never recognises. I thought he was going to give in. Suddenly, to my horror, Dan growled, "Play the man!"

Pearse turned his head. "I don't want your advice anyway," he said; "I'll not be dictated to."

"To your last day," said Dan, "you shall answer to me for the way you treat her."

Zachary smiled.

"Do you see that fly?" he said. "Wel—I care for you as little as this," and he flicked the fly off his white trousers. "Good-morning...!"

The noble mariners who manned our boat pulled lustily for the shore, but we had hardly shoved off when a storm of rain burst over the ship, and she seemed to vanish, leaving a picture on my eyes of the mate waving his cap above the rail, with his tanned young face bent down at us, smiling, keen, and friendly.

..... We reached the shore drenched, angry with ourselves, and with each other; I started sulkily for

home.

As I rode past an orchard, an apple, loosened by the rainstorm, came down with a thud.

"The apples were ripe and ready to fall, Oh! heigh-ho! and ready to fall."

I made up my mind to pack, and go away. But there's a strangeness, a sort of haunting fascination in it all. To you, who don't know the people, it may only seem a piece of rather sordid folly. But it isn't the good, the obvious, the useful that puts a spell on us in life. It's the bizarre, the dimly seen, the mysterious for good or evil.

The sun was out again when I rode up to the farm; its yellow thatch shone through the trees as if sheltering a store of gladness and good news. John Ford himself opened the door to me.

He began with an apology, which made me feel more than ever an intruder; then he said:

"I have not spoken to my granddaughter—I waited to see Dan Treffry."

He was stern and sad-eyed, like a man with a great weight of grief on his shoulders. He looked as if he had not slept; his dress was out of order, he had not taken his clothes off, I think. He isn't a man whom you can pity. I felt I had taken a liberty in knowing of the matter at all. When I told him where we had been, he said:

"It was good of you to take this trouble. That you should have had to! But since such things have come to pass—" He made a gesture full of horror. He gave one the impression of a man whose pride was struggling against a mortal hurt. Presently he asked:

"You saw him, you say? He admitted this marriage? Did he give an explanation?"

I tried to make Pearse's point of view clear. Before this old man, with his inflexible will and sense of duty, I felt as if I held a brief for Zachary, and must try to do him justice.

"Let me understand," he said at last. "He stole her, you say, to make sure; and deserts her within a fortnight."

"He says he meant to take her—"

"Do you believe that?"

Before I could answer, I saw Pasiance standing at the window. How long she had been there I don't know.

"Is it true that he is going to leave me behind?" she cried out.

I could only nod.

"Did you hear him your own self?"

"Yes."

She stamped her foot.

"But he promised! He promised!"

John Ford went towards her.

"Don't touch me, grandfather! I hate every one! Let him do what he likes, I don't care."

John Ford's face turned quite grey.

"Pasiance," he said, "did you want to leave me so much?"

She looked straight at us, and said sharply:

"What's the good of telling stories. I can't help its hurting you."

"What did you think you would find away from here?"

She laughed.

"Find? I don't know—nothing; I wouldn't be stifled anyway. Now I suppose you'll shut me up because I'm a weak girl, not strong like men!"

"Silence!" said John Ford; "I will make him take you."

"You shan't!" she cried; "I won't let you. He's free to do as he likes. He's free—I tell you all, everybody—free!"

She ran through the window, and vanished.

John Ford made a movement as if the bottom had dropped out of his world. I left him there.

I went to the kitchen, where Hopgood was sitting at the table, eating bread and cheese. He got up on seeing me, and very kindly brought me some cold bacon and a pint of ale.

"I thart I shude be seeing yu, zurr," he said between his bites; "Therr's no thart to 'atin' 'bout the 'ouse to-day. The old wumman's puzzivantin' over Miss Pasiance. Young girls are skeery critters"—he brushed his sleeve over his broad, hard jaws, and filled a pipe "specially when it's in the blood of 'em. Squire Rick Voisey werr a dandy; an' Mistress Voisey—well, she werr a nice lady tu, but"—rolling the stem of his pipe from corner to corner of his mouth—"she werr a pra-aper vixen."

Hopgood's a good fellow, and I believe as soft as he looks hard, but he's not quite the sort with whom one chooses to talk over a matter like this. I went upstairs, and began to pack, but after a bit dropped it for a book, and somehow or other fell asleep.

I woke, and looked at my watch; it was five o'clock. I had been asleep four hours. A single sunbeam was slanting across from one of my windows to the other, and there was the cool sound of milk dropping into pails; then, all at once, a stir as of alarm, and heavy footsteps.

I opened my door. Hopgood and a coast-guardsman were carrying Pasiance slowly up the stairs. She lay in their arms without moving, her face whiter than her dress, a scratch across the forehead, and two or three drops there of dried blood. Her hands were clasped, and she slowly crooked and stiffened out her fingers. When they turned with her at the stair top, she opened her lips, and gasped, "All right, don't put me down. I can bear it." They passed, and, with a half-smile in her eyes, she said something to me that I couldn't catch; the door was shut, and the excited whispering began again below. I waited for the men to come out, and caught hold of Hopgood. He wiped the sweat off his forehead.

"Poor young thing!" he said. "She fell—down the cliffs—'tis her back—coastguard saw her 'twerr they fetched her in. The Lord 'elp her mebbe she's not broken up much! An' Mister Ford don't know! I'm gwine for the doctor."

There was an hour or more to wait before he came; a young fellow; almost a boy. He looked very grave, when he came out of her room.

"The old woman there fond of her? nurse her well...? Fond as a dog!—good! Don't know—can't tell for certain! Afraid it's the spine, must have another opinion! What a plucky girl! Tell Mr. Ford to have the best man he can get in Torquay—there's C—. I'll be round the first thing in the morning. Keep her dead quiet. I've left a sleeping draught; she'll have fever tonight."

John Ford came in at last. Poor old man! What it must have cost him not to go to her for fear of the excitement! How many times in the next few hours didn't I hear him come to the bottom of the stairs; his heavy wheezing, and sighing; and the forlorn tread of his feet going back! About eleven, just as I was going to bed, Mrs. Hopgood came to my door.

"Will yu come, sir," she said; "she's asking for yu. Naowt I can zay but what she will see yu; zeems crazy, don't it?" A tear trickled down the old lady's cheek. "Du 'ee come; 'twill du 'err 'arm mebbe, but I dunno—she'll fret else."

I slipped into the room. Lying back on her pillows, she was breathing quickly with half-closed eyes. There was nothing to show that she had wanted me, or even knew that I was there. The wick of the candle, set by the bedside, had been snuffed too short, and gave but a faint light; both window and door stood open, still there was no draught, and the feeble little flame burned quite still, casting a faint yellow stain on the ceiling like the reflection from a buttercup held beneath a chin. These ceilings are far too low! Across the wide, squat window the apple branches fell in black stripes which never stirred. It was too dark to see things clearly. At the foot of the bed was a chest, and there Mrs. Hopgood had sat down, moving her lips as if in speech. Mingled with the half-musty smell of age; there were other scents, of mignonette, apples, and some sweet-smelling soap. The floor had no carpet, and there was not one single dark object except the violin, hanging from a nail over the bed. A little, round clock ticked solemnly.

"Why won't you give me that stuff, Mums?" Pasiance said in a faint, sharp voice. "I want to sleep."

"Have you much pain?" I asked.

"Of course I have; it's everywhere."

She turned her face towards me.

"You thought I did it on purpose, but you're wrong. If I had, I'd have done it better than this. I wouldn't have this brutal pain." She put her fingers over her eyes. "It's horrible to complain! Only it's so bad! But I won't again—promise."

She took the sleeping draught gratefully, making a face, like a child after a powder.

"How long do you think it'll be before I can play again? Oh! I forgot—there are other things to think about." She held out her hand to me. "Look at my ring. Married—isn't it funny? Ha, ha! Nobody will ever understand—that's funny too! Poor Gran! You see, there wasn't any reason—only me. That's the only reason I'm telling you now; Mums is there—but she doesn't count; why don't you count, Mums?"

The fever was fighting against the draught; she had tossed the clothes back from her throat, and now and then raised one thin arm a little, as if it eased her; her eyes had grown large, and innocent like a child's; the candle, too, had flared, and was burning clearly.

"Nobody is to tell him—nobody at all; promise...! If I hadn't slipped, it would have been different. What would have happened then? You can't tell; and I can't—that's funny! Do you think I loved him? Nobody marries without love, do they? Not quite without love, I mean. But you see I wanted to be free, he said he'd take me; and now he's left me after all! I won't be left, I can't! When I came to the cliff—that bit where the ivy grows right down—there was just the sea there, underneath; so I thought I would throw myself over and it would be all quiet; and I climbed on a ledge, it looked easier from there, but it was so high, I wanted to get back; and then my foot slipped; and now it's all pain. You can't think much, when you're in pain."

From her eyes I saw that she was dropping off.

"Nobody can take you away from-yourself. He's not to be told—not even—I don't—want you—to go away, because—" But her eyes closed, and she dropped off to sleep.

They don't seem to know this morning whether she is better or worse....

VI

"Tuesday, 9th August.

It seems more like three weeks than three days since I wrote. The time passes slowly in a sickhouse...! The doctors were here this morning, they give her forty hours. Not a word of complaint has passed her lips since she knew. To see her you would hardly think her ill; her cheeks have not had time to waste or lose their colour. There is not much pain, but a slow, creeping numbness.... It was John Ford's wish that she should be told. She just turned her head to the wall and sighed; then to poor old Mrs. Hopgood, who was crying her heart out: "Don't cry, Mums, I don't care."

When they had gone, she asked for her violin. She made them hold it for her, and drew the bow across the strings; but the notes that came out were so trembling and uncertain that she dropped the bow and broke into a passion of sobbing. Since then, no complaint or moan of any kind....

But to go back. On Sunday, the day after I wrote, as I was coming from a walk, I met a little boy making mournful sounds on a tin whistle.

"Coom ahn!" he said, "the Miss wahnts t' zee yu."

I went to her room. In the morning she had seemed better, but now looked utterly exhausted. She had a letter in her hand.

"It's this," she said. "I don't seem to understand it. He wants me to do something—but I can't think, and my eyes feel funny. Read it to me, please."

The letter was from Zachary. I read it to her in a low voice, for Mrs. Hopgood was in the room, her eyes always fixed on Pasiance above her knitting. When I'd finished, she made me read it again, and yet again. At first she seemed pleased, almost excited, then came a weary, scornful look, and before I'd finished the third time she was asleep. It was a remarkable letter, that seemed to bring the man right before one's eyes. I slipped it under her fingers on the bed-clothes, and went out. Fancy took me to the cliff where she had fallen. I found the point of rock where the cascade of ivy flows down the cliff; the ledge on which she had climbed was a little to my right—a mad place. It showed plainly what wild emotions must have been driving her! Behind was a half-cut cornfield with a fringe of poppies, and swarms of harvest insects creeping and flying; in the uncut corn a landrail kept up a continual charring. The sky was blue to the very horizon, and the sea wonderful, under that black wild cliff stained here and there with red. Over the dips and hollows of the fields great white clouds hung low down above the land. There are no brassy, east-coast skies here; but always sleepy, soft-shaped clouds, full of subtle stir and change. Passages of Zachary's Pearse's letter kept rising to my lips. After all he's the man that his native place, and life, and blood have made him. It is useless to expect idealists where the air is soft and things good to look on (the idealist grows where he must create beauty or comfort for himself); useless to expect a man of law and order, in one whose fathers have stared at the sea day and night for a thousand years—the sea, full of its promises of unknown things, never quite the same, a slave to its own impulses. Man is an imitative animal....

"Life's hard enough," he wrote, "without tying yourself down. Don't think too hardly of me! Shall I make you happier by taking you into danger? If I succeed you'll be a rich woman; but I shall fail if you're with me. To look at you makes me soft. At sea a man dreams of all the good things on land, he'll dream of the heather, and honey—you're like that; and he'll dream of the apple-trees, and the grass of the orchards—you're like that; sometimes he only lies on his back and wishes—and you're like that, most of all like that...."

When I was reading those words I remember a strange, soft, half-scornful look came over Pasiance's face; and once she said, "But that's all nonsense, isn't it...?"

Then followed a long passage about what he would gain if he succeeded, about all that he was risking, the impossibility of failure, if he kept his wits about him. "It's only a matter of two months or so," he went on; "stay where you are, dear, or go to my Dad. He'll be glad to have you. There's my mother's room. There's no one to say 'No' to your fiddle there; you can play it by the sea; and on dark nights you'll have the stars dancing to you over the water as thick as bees. I've looked at them often, thinking of you...."

Pasiance had whispered to me, "Don't read that bit," and afterwards I left it out.... Then the sensuous side of him shows up: "When I've brought this off, there's the whole world before us. There are places I can take you to. There's one I know, not too warm and not too cold, where you can sit all day in the shade and watch the creepers, and the cocoa-palms, still as still; nothing to do or care about; all the fruits you can think of; no noise but the parrots and the streams, and a splash when a nigger dives into a water-hole. Pasiance, we'll go there! With an eighty-ton craft there's no sea we couldn't know. The world's a fine place for those who go out to take it; there's lots of unknown stuff' in it yet. I'll fill your lap, my pretty, so full of treasures that you shan't know yourself. A man wasn't meant to sit at home...."

Throughout this letter—for all its real passion—one could feel how the man was holding to his purpose—the rather sordid purpose of this venture. He's unconscious of it; for he is in love with her; but he must be furthering his own ends. He is vital—horribly vital! I wonder less now that she should have yielded.

What visions hasn't he dangled before her. There was physical attraction, too—I haven't forgotten the look I saw on her face at Black Mill. But when all's said and done, she married him, because she's Pasiance Voisey, who does things and wants "to get back." And she lies there dying; not he nor any other man will ever take her away. It's pitiful to think of him tingling with passion, writing that letter to this doomed girl in that dark hole of a saloon. "I've wanted money," he wrote, "ever since I was a little chap sitting in the fields among the cows.... I want it for you now, and I mean to have it. I've studied the thing two years; I know what I know...."

"The moment this is in the post I leave for London. There are a hundred things to look after still; I can't trust myself within reach of you again till the anchor's weighed. When I re-christened her the Pied Witch, I thought of you—you witch to me...."

There followed a solemn entreaty to her to be on the path leading to the cove at seven o'clock on Wednesday evening (that is, to-morrow) when he would come ashore and bid her good-bye. It was signed, "Your loving husband, Zachary Pearse...."

I lay at the edge of that cornfield a long time; it was very peaceful. The church bells had begun to

ring. The long shadows came stealing out from the sheaves; woodpigeons rose one by one, and flapped off to roost; the western sky was streaked with red, and all the downs and combe bathed in the last sunlight. Perfect harvest weather; but oppressively still, the stillness of suspense....

Life at the farm goes on as usual. We have morning and evening prayers. John Ford reads them fiercely, as though he were on the eve of a revolt against his God. Morning and evening he visits her, comes out wheezing heavily, and goes to his own room; I believe, to pray. Since this morning I haven't dared meet him. He is a strong old man—but this will break him up....

VII

"KINGSWEAR, Saturday, 13th August.

It's over—I leave here to-morrow, and go abroad.

A quiet afternoon—not a breath up in the churchyard! I was there quite half an hour before they came. Some red cows had strayed into the adjoining orchard, and were rubbing their heads against the railing. While I stood there an old woman came and drove them away; afterwards, she stooped and picked up the apples that had fallen before their time.

"The apples are ripe and ready to fall, Oh! heigh-ho! and ready to fall; There came an old woman and gathered them all, Oh! heigh-ho! and gathered them all."

.....They brought Pasiance very simply—no hideous funeral trappings, thank God—the farm hands carried her, and there was no one there but John Ford, the Hopgoods, myself, and that young doctor. They read the service over her grave. I can hear John Ford's "Amen!" now. When it was over he walked away bareheaded in the sun, without a word. I went up there again this evening, and wandered amongst the tombstones. "Richard Voisey," "John, the son of Richard and Constance Voisey," "Margery Voisey," so many generations of them in that corner; then "Richard Voisey and Agnes his wife," and next to it that new mound on which a sparrow was strutting and the shadows of the apple-trees already hovering.

I will tell you the little left to tell....

On Wednesday afternoon she asked for me again.

"It's only till seven," she whispered. "He's certain to come then. But if I—were to die first—then tell him—I'm sorry for him. They keep saying: 'Don't talk—don't talk!' Isn't it stupid? As if I should have any other chance! There'll be no more talking after to-night! Make everybody come, please—I want to see them all. When you're dying you're freer than any other time—nobody wants you to do things, nobody cares what you say.... He promised me I should do what I liked if I married him—I never believed that really—but now I can do what I like; and say all the things I want to." She lay back silent; she could not after all speak the inmost thoughts that are in each of us, so sacred that they melt away at the approach of words.

I shall remember her like that—with the gleam of a smile in her half-closed eyes, her red lips parted—such a quaint look of mockery, pleasure, regret, on her little round, upturned face; the room white, and fresh with flowers, the breeze guttering the apple-leaves against the window. In the night they had unhooked the violin and taken it away; she had not missed it.... When Dan came, I gave up my place to him. He took her hand gently in his great paw, without speaking.

"How small my hand looks there," she said, "too small." Dan put it softly back on the bedclothes and wiped his forehead. Pasiance cried in a sharp whisper: "Is it so hot in here? I didn't know." Dan bent down, put his lips to her fingers and left the room.

The afternoon was long, the longest I've ever spent. Sometimes she seemed to sleep, sometimes whispered to herself about her mother, her grandfather, the garden, or her cats—all sorts of inconsequent, trivial, even ludicrous memories seemed to throng her mind—never once, I think, did she speak of Zachary, but, now and then, she asked the time.... Each hour she grew visibly weaker. John Ford sat by her without moving, his heavy breathing was often the only sound; sometimes she rubbed her fingers on his hand, without speaking. It was a summary of their lives together. Once he prayed aloud for her in a hoarse voice; then her pitiful, impatient eyes signed to me.

"Quick," she whispered, "I want him; it's all so—cold."

I went out and ran down the path towards the cove.

Leaning on a gate stood Zachary, an hour before his time; dressed in the same old blue clothes and leather-peaked cap as on the day when I saw him first. He knew nothing of what had happened. But at a quarter of the truth, I'm sure he divined the whole, though he would not admit it to himself. He kept saying, "It can't be. She'll be well in a few days—a sprain! D' you think the sea-voyage.... Is she strong enough to be moved now at once?"

It was painful to see his face, so twisted by the struggle between his instinct and his vitality. The sweat poured down his forehead. He turned round as we walked up the path, and pointed out to sea. There was his steamer. "I could get her on board in no time. Impossible! What is it, then? Spine? Good God! The doctors.... Sometimes they'll do wonders!" It was pitiful to see his efforts to blind himself to the reality.

"It can't be, she's too young. We're walking very slow." I told him she was dying.

For a second I thought he was going to run away. Then he jerked up his head, and rushed on towards the house. At the foot of the staircase he gripped me by the shoulder.

"It's not true!" he said; "she'll get better now I'm here. I'll stay. Let everything go. I'll stay."

"Now's the time," I said, "to show you loved her. Pull yourself together, man!" He shook all over.

"Yes!" was all he answered. We went into her room. It seemed impossible she was going to die; the colour was bright in her cheeks, her lips trembling and pouted as if she had just been kissed, her eyes gleaming, her hair so dark and crisp, her face so young....

Half an hour later I stole to the open door of her room. She was still and white as the sheets of her bed. John Ford stood at the foot; and, bowed to the level of the pillows, his head on his clenched fists, sat Zachary. It was utterly quiet. The guttering of the leaves had ceased. When things have come to a crisis, how little one feels—no fear, no pity, no sorrow, rather the sense, as when a play is over, of anxiety to get away!

Suddenly Zachary rose, brushed past me without seeing, and ran downstairs.

Some hours later I went out on the path leading to the cove. It was pitch-black; the riding light of the Pied Witch was still there, looking no bigger than a firefly. Then from in front I heard sobbing—a man's sobs; no sound is quite so dreadful. Zachary Pearse got up out of the bank not ten paces off.

I had no heart to go after him, and sat down in the hedge. There was something subtly akin to her in the fresh darkness of the young night; the soft bank, the scent of honeysuckle, the touch of the ferns and brambles. Death comes to all of us, and when it's over it's over; but this blind business—of those left behind!

A little later the ship whistled twice; her starboard light gleamed faintly—and that was all....

VIII

"TORQUAY, 30th October.

....Do you remember the letters I wrote you from Moor Farm nearly three years ago? To-day I rode over there. I stopped at Brixham on the way for lunch, and walked down to the quay. There had been a shower—but the sun was out again, shining on the sea, the brown-red sails, and the rampart of slate roofs.

A trawler was lying there, which had evidently been in a collision. The spiky-bearded, thin-lipped fellow in torn blue jersey and sea-boots who was superintending the repairs, said to me a little proudly:

"Bane in collision, zurr; like to zee over her?" Then suddenly screwing up his little blue eyes, he added:

"Why, I remembers yu. Steered yu along o' the young lady in this yer very craft."

It was Prawle, Zachary Pearse's henchman.

"Yes," he went on, "that's the cutter."

"And Captain Pearse?"

He leant his back against the quay, and spat. "He was a pra-aper man; I never zane none like 'en."

"Did you do any good out there?"

Prawle gave me a sharp glance.

"Gude? No, t'was arrm we done, vrom ztart to finish—had trouble all the time. What a man cude du, the skipper did. When yu caan't du right, zome calls it 'Providence'! 'Tis all my eye an' Betty Martin! What I zay es, 'tis these times, there's such a dale o' folk, a dale of puzzivantin' fellers; the world's to small."

With these words there flashed across me a vision of Drake crushed into our modern life by the shrinkage of the world; Drake caught in the meshes of red tape, electric wires, and all the lofty appliances of our civilization. Does a type survive its age; live on into times that have no room for it? The blood is there—and sometimes there's a throw-back.... All fancy! Eh?

"So," I said, "you failed?"

Prawle wriggled.

"I wudden' goo for to zay that, zurr—'tis an ugly word. Da-am!" he added, staring at his boots, "'twas thru me tu. We were along among the haythen, and I mus' nades goo for to break me leg. The capt'n he wudden' lave me. 'One Devon man,' he says to me, 'don' lave another.' We werr six days where we shuld ha' been tu; when we got back to the ship a cruiser had got her for gun-runnin'."

"And what has become of Captain Pearse?"

Prawle answered, "Zurr, I belave 'e went to China, 'tis onsartin."

"He's not dead?"

Prawle looked at me with a kind of uneasy anger.

"Yu cudden' kell 'en! 'Tis true, mun 'll die zome day. But therr's not a one that'll show better zport than Capt'n Zach'ry Pearse."

I believe that; he will be hard to kill. The vision of him comes up, with his perfect balance, defiant eyes, and sweetish smile; the way the hair of his beard crisped a little, and got blacker on the cheeks; the sort of desperate feeling he gave, that one would never get the better of him, that he would never get the better of himself.

I took leave of Prawle and half a crown. Before I was off the quay I heard him saying to a lady, "Bane in collision, marm! Like to zee over her?"

After lunch I rode on to Moor. The old place looked much the same; but the apple-trees were stripped of fruit, and their leaves beginning to go yellow and fall. One of Pasiance's cats passed me in the orchard hunting a bird, still with a ribbon round its neck. John Ford showed me all his latest improvements, but never by word or sign alluded to the past. He inquired after Dan, back in New Zealand now, without much interest; his stubby beard and hair have whitened; he has grown very stout, and I noticed that his legs are not well under control; he often stops to lean on his stick. He was very ill last winter; and sometimes, they say, will go straight off to sleep in the middle of a sentence.

I managed to get a few minutes with the Hopgoods. We talked of Pasiance sitting in the kitchen under a row of plates, with that clinging smell of wood-smoke, bacon, and age bringing up memories, as nothing but scents can. The dear old lady's hair, drawn so nicely down her forehead on each side from the centre of her cap, has a few thin silver lines; and her face is a thought more wrinkled. The tears still come into her eyes when she talks of her "lamb."

Of Zachary I heard nothing, but she told me of old Pearse's death.

"Therr they found 'en, zo to spake, dead—in th' sun; but Ha-apgood can tell yu," and Hopgood, ever rolling his pipe, muttered something, and smiled his wooden smile.

He came to see me off from the straw-yard. "'Tis like death to the varrm, zurr," he said, putting all the play of his vast shoulders into the buckling of my girths. "Mister Ford—well! And not one of th' old stock to take it when 'e's garn.... Ah! it werr cruel; my old woman's never been hersel' since. Tell 'ee what 'tis—don't du t' think to much."

I went out of my way to pass the churchyard. There were flowers, quite fresh, chrysanthemums, and asters; above them the white stone, already stained:

"PASIANCE

"WIFE OF ZACHARY PEARSE

"The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away."

The red cows were there too; the sky full of great white clouds, some birds whistling a little mournfully, and in the air the scent of fallen leaves....

May, 1900.

A KNIGHT

TO MY MOTHER

A KNIGHT

I

At Monte Carlo, in the spring of the year 189-, I used to notice an old fellow in a grey suit and sunburnt straw hat with a black ribbon. Every morning at eleven o'clock, he would come down to the Place, followed by a brindled German boarhound, walk once or twice round it, and seat himself on a bench facing the casino. There he would remain in the sun, with his straw hat tilted forward, his thin legs apart, his brown hands crossed between them, and the dog's nose resting on his knee. After an hour or more he would get up, and, stooping a little from the waist, walk slowly round the Place and return up hill. Just before three, he would come down again in the same clothes and go into the casino, leaving the dog outside.

One afternoon, moved by curiosity, I followed him. He passed through the hall without looking at the gambling-rooms, and went into the concert. It became my habit after that to watch for him. When he sat in the Place I could see him from the window of my room. The chief puzzle to me was the matter of his nationality.

His lean, short face had a skin so burnt that it looked like leather; his jaw was long and prominent, his chin pointed, and he had hollows in his cheeks. There were wrinkles across his forehead; his eyes were brown; and little white moustaches were brushed up from the corners of his lips. The back of his head bulged out above the lines of his lean neck and high, sharp shoulders; his grey hair was cropped quite close. In the Marseilles buffet, on the journey out, I had met an Englishman, almost his counterpart in features—but somehow very different! This old fellow had nothing of the other's alert, autocratic self-sufficiency. He was quiet and undemonstrative, without looking, as it were, insulated against shocks and foreign substances. He was certainly no Frenchman. His eyes, indeed, were brown, but hazel-brown, and gentle—not the red-brown sensual eye of the Frenchman. An American? But was ever an American so passive? A German? His moustache was certainly brushed up, but in a modest, almost pathetic way, not in the least Teutonic. Nothing seemed to fit him. I gave him up, and named him "the Cosmopolitan."

Leaving at the end of April, I forgot him altogether. In the same month, however, of the following year I was again at Monte Carlo, and going one day to the concert found myself seated next this same old fellow. The orchestra was playing Meyerbeer's "Prophete," and my neighbour was asleep, snoring softly. He was dressed in the same grey suit, with the same straw hat (or one exactly like it) on his knees, and his hands crossed above it. Sleep had not disfigured him—his little white moustache was still brushed up, his lips closed; a very good and gentle expression hovered on his face. A curved mark showed on his right temple, the scar of a cut on the side of his neck, and his left hand was covered by an old glove, the little finger of which was empty. He woke up when the march was over and brisked up his moustache.

The next thing on the programme was a little thing by Poise from Le joli Gilles, played by Mons. Corsanego on the violin. Happening to glance at my old neighbour, I saw a tear caught in the hollow of his cheek, and another just leaving the corner of his eye; there was a faint smile on his lips. Then came an interval; and while orchestra and audience were resting, I asked him if he were fond of music. He looked up without distrust, bowed, and answered in a thin, gentle voice: "Certainly. I know nothing about it, play no instrument, could never sing a note; but fond of it! Who would not be?" His English was correct enough, but with an emphasis not quite American nor quite foreign. I ventured to remark that he did not care for Meyerbeer. He smiled.

"Ah!" he said, "I was asleep? Too bad of me. He is a little noisy—I know so little about music. There is Bach, for instance. Would you believe it, he gives me no pleasure? A great misfortune to be no musician!" He shook his head.

I murmured, "Bach is too elevating for you perhaps."

"To me," he answered, "any music I like is elevating. People say some music has a bad effect on them. I never found any music that gave me a bad thought—no—no—quite the opposite; only sometimes, as you see, I go to sleep. But what a lovely instrument the violin!" A faint flush came on his parched cheeks. "The human soul that has left the body. A curious thing, distant bugles at night have given me the same feeling." The orchestra was now coming back, and, folding his hands, my neighbour turned his eyes towards them. When the concert was over we came out together. Waiting at the entrance was his dog.

"You have a beautiful dog!"

"Ah! yes. Freda. mia cara, da su mano!" The dog squatted on her haunches, and lifted her paw in the vague, bored way of big dogs when requested to perform civilities. She was a lovely creature—the purest brindle, without a speck of white, and free from the unbalanced look of most dogs of her breed.

"Basta! basta!" He turned to me apologetically. "We have agreed to speak Italian; in that way I keep up the language; astonishing the number of things that dog will understand!" I was about to take my leave, when he asked if I would walk a little way with him—"If you are free, that is." We went up the street with Freda on the far side of her master.

"Do you never 'play' here?" I asked him.

"Play? No. It must be very interesting; most exciting, but as a matter of fact, I can't afford it. If one has very little, one is too nervous."

He had stopped in front of a small hairdresser's shop. "I live here," he said, raising his hat again. "Au revoir!—unless I can offer you a glass of tea. It's all ready. Come! I've brought you out of your way; give me the pleasure!"

I have never met a man so free from all self-consciousness, and yet so delicate and diffident the combination is a rare one. We went up a steep staircase to a room on the second floor. My companion threw the shutters open, setting all the flies buzzing. The top of a plane-tree was on a level with the window, and all its little brown balls were dancing, quite close, in the wind. As he had promised, an urn was hissing on a table; there was also a small brown teapot, some sugar, slices of lemon, and glasses. A bed, washstand, cupboard, tin trunk, two chairs, and a small rug were all the furniture. Above the bed a sword in a leather sheath was suspended from two nails. The photograph of a girl stood on the closed stove. My host went to the cupboard and produced a bottle, a glass, and a second spoon. When the cork was drawn, the scent of rum escaped into the air. He sniffed at it and dropped a teaspoonful into both glasses.

"This is a trick I learned from the Russians after Plevna; they had my little finger, so I deserved something in exchange." He looked round; his eyes, his whole face, seemed to twinkle. "I assure you it was worth it—makes all the difference. Try!" He poured off the tea.

"Had you a sympathy with the Turks?"

"The weaker side—" He paused abruptly, then added: "But it was not that." Over his face innumerable crow's-feet had suddenly appeared, his eyes twitched; he went on hurriedly, "I had to find something to do just then—it was necessary." He stared into his glass; and it was some time before I ventured to ask if he had seen much fighting.

"Yes," he replied gravely, "nearly twenty years altogether; I was one of Garibaldi's Mille in '60."

"Surely you are not Italian?"

He leaned forward with his hands on his knees. "I was in Genoa at that time learning banking; Garibaldi was a wonderful man! One could not help it." He spoke quite simply. "You might say it was like seeing a little man stand up to a ring of great hulking fellows; I went, just as you would have gone, if you'd been there. I was not long with them—our war began; I had to go back home." He said this as if there had been but one war since the world began. "In '60," he mused, "till '65. Just think of it! The poor country. Why, in my State, South Carolina—I was through it all—nobody could be spared there—we were one to three."

"I suppose you have a love of fighting?"

"H'm!" he said, as if considering the idea for the first time. "Sometimes I fought for a living, and sometimes—because I was obliged; one must try to be a gentleman. But won't you have some more?"

I refused more tea and took my leave, carrying away with me a picture of the old fellow looking down from the top of the steep staircase, one hand pressed to his back, the other twisting up those little white moustaches, and murmuring, "Take care, my dear sir, there's a step there at the corner."

"To be a gentleman!" I repeated in the street, causing an old French lady to drop her parasol, so that for about two minutes we stood bowing and smiling to each other, then separated full of the best feeling.

II

A week later I found myself again seated next him at a concert. In the meantime I had seen him now and then, but only in passing. He seemed depressed. The corners of his lips were tightened, his tanned cheeks had a greyish tinge, his eyes were restless; and, between two numbers of the programme, he murmured, tapping his fingers on his hat, "Do you ever have bad days? Yes? Not pleasant, are they?"

Then something occurred from which all that I have to tell you followed. There came into the concert-hall the heroine of one of those romances, crimes, follies, or irregularities, call it what you will, which had just attracted the "world's" stare. She passed us with her partner, and sat down in a chair a few rows to our right. She kept turning her head round, and at every turn I caught the gleam of her uneasy eyes. Some one behind us said: "The brazen baggage!"

My companion turned full round, and glared at whoever it was who had spoken. The change in him was quite remarkable. His lips were drawn back from his teeth; he frowned; the scar on his temple had reddened.

"Ah!" he said to me. "The hue and cry! Contemptible! How I hate it! But you wouldn't understand—!" he broke off, and slowly regained his usual air of self-obliteration; he even seemed ashamed, and began trying to brush his moustaches higher than ever, as if aware that his heat had robbed them of neatness.

"I'm not myself, when I speak of such matters," he said suddenly; and began reading his programme, holding it upside down. A minute later, however, he said in a peculiar voice: "There are people to be found who object to vivisectioning animals; but the vivisection of a woman, who minds that? Will you tell me it's right, that because of some tragedy like this—believe me, it is always a tragedy—we should hunt down a woman? That her fellow-women should make an outcast of her? That we, who are men, should make a prey of her? If I thought that...." Again he broke off, staring very hard in front of him. "It is we who make them what they are; and even if that is not so—why! if I thought there was a woman in the world I could not take my hat off to—I—I—couldn't sleep at night." He got up from his seat, put on his old straw hat with trembling fingers, and, without a glance back, went out, stumbling over the chair-

legs.

I sat there, horribly disturbed; the words, "One must try to be a gentleman!" haunting me. When I came out, he was standing by the entrance with one hand on his hip and the other on his dog. In that attitude of waiting he was such a patient figure; the sun glared down and showed the threadbare nature of his clothes and the thinness of his brown hands, with their long forgers and nails yellow from tobacco. Seeing me he came up the steps again, and raised his hat.

"I am glad to have caught you; please forget all that." I asked if he would do me the honour of dining at my hotel.

"Dine?" he repeated with the sort of smile a child gives if you offer him a box of soldiers; "with the greatest pleasure. I seldom dine out, but I think I can muster up a coat. Yes—yes—and at what time shall I come? At half-past seven, and your hotel is—? Good! I shall be there. Freda, mia cara, you will be alone this evening. You do not smoke caporal, I fear. I find it fairly good; though it has too much bite." He walked off with Freda, puffing at his thin roll of caporal.

Once or twice he stopped, as if bewildered or beset by some sudden doubt or memory; and every time he stopped, Freda licked his hand. They disappeared round the corner of the street, and I went to my hotel to see about dinner. On the way I met Jules le Ferrier, and asked him to come too.

"My faith, yes!" he said, with the rosy pessimism characteristic of the French editor. "Man must dine!"

At half-past six we assembled. My "Cosmopolitan" was in an old frock-coat braided round the edges, buttoned high and tight, defining more than ever the sharp lines of his shoulders and the slight kink of his back; he had brought with him, too, a dark-peaked cap of military shape, which he had evidently selected as more fitting to the coat than a straw hat. He smelled slightly of some herb.

We sat down to dinner, and did not rise for two hours. He was a charming guest, praised everything he ate—not with commonplaces, but in words that made you feel it had given him real pleasure. At first, whenever Jules made one of his caustic remarks, he looked quite pained, but suddenly seemed to make up his mind that it was bark, not bite; and then at each of them he would turn to me and say, "Aha! that's good—isn't it?" With every glass of wine he became more gentle and more genial, sitting very upright, and tightly buttoned-in; while the little white wings of his moustache seemed about to leave him for a better world.

In spite of the most leading questions, however, we could not get him to talk about himself, for even Jules, most cynical of men, had recognised that he was a hero of romance. He would answer gently and precisely, and then sit twisting his moustaches, perfectly unconscious that we wanted more. Presently, as the wine went a little to his head, his thin, high voice grew thinner, his cheeks became flushed, his eyes brighter; at the end of dinner he said: "I hope I have not been noisy."

We assured him that he had not been noisy enough. "You're laughing at me," he answered. "Surely I've been talking all the time!"

"Mon Dieu!" said Jules, "we have been looking for some fables of your wars; but nothing—nothing, not enough to feed a frog!"

The old fellow looked troubled.

"To be sure!" he mused. "Let me think! there is that about Colhoun at Gettysburg; and there's the story of Garibaldi and the Miller." He plunged into a tale, not at all about himself, which would have been extremely dull, but for the conviction in his eyes, and the way he stopped and commented. "So you see," he ended, "that's the sort of man Garibaldi was! I could tell you another tale of him." Catching an introspective look in Jules's eye, however, I proposed taking our cigars over to the cafe opposite.

"Delightful!" the old fellow said: "We shall have a band and the fresh air, and clear consciences for our cigars. I cannot like this smoking in a room where there are ladies dining."

He walked out in front of us, smoking with an air of great enjoyment. Jules, glowing above his candid shirt and waistcoat, whispered to me, "Mon cher Georges, how he is good!" then sighed, and added darkly: "The poor man!"

We sat down at a little table. Close by, the branches of a plane-tree rustled faintly; their leaves hung lifeless, speckled like the breasts of birds, or black against the sky; then, caught by the breeze, fluttered suddenly.

The old fellow sat, with head thrown back, a smile on his face, coming now and then out of his enchanted dreams to drink coffee, answer our questions, or hum the tune that the band was playing. The ash of his cigar grew very long. One of those bizarre figures in Oriental garb, who, night after night, offer their doubtful wares at a great price, appeared in the white glare of a lamp, looked with a furtive smile at his face, and glided back, discomfited by its unconsciousness. It was a night for dreams! A faint, half-eastern scent in the air, of black tobacco and spice; few people as yet at the little tables, the waiters leisurely, the band soft! What was he dreaming of, that old fellow, whose cigar-ash grew so long? Of youth, of his battles, of those things that must be done by those who try to be gentlemen; perhaps only of his dinner; anyway of something gilded in vague fashion as the light was gilding the branches of the plane-tree.

Jules pulled my sleeve: "He sleeps." He had smilingly dropped off; the cigar-ash—that feathery tower of his dreams—had broken and fallen on his sleeve. He awoke, and fell to dusting it.

The little tables round us began to fill. One of the bandsmen played a czardas on the czymbal. Two young Frenchmen, talking loudly, sat down at the adjoining table. They were discussing the lady who had been at the concert that afternoon.

"It's a bet," said one of them, "but there's the present man. I take three weeks, that's enough 'elle est declassée; ce n'est que le premier pas—"

My old friend's cigar fell on the table. "Monsieur," he stammered, "you speak of a lady so, in a public place?"

The young man stared at him. "Who is this person?" he said to his companion.

My guest took up Jules's glove that lay on the table; before either of us could raise a finger, he had swung it in the speaker's face. "Enough!" he said, and, dropping the glove, walked away.

We all jumped to our feet. I left Jules and hurried after him. His face was grim, his eyes those of a creature who has been struck on a raw place. He made a movement of his fingers which said plainly. "Leave me, if you please!"

I went back to the café. The two young men had disappeared, so had Jules, but everything else was going on just as before; the bandsman still twanging out his czardas; the waiters serving drinks; the orientals trying to sell their carpets. I paid the bill, sought out the manager, and apologised. He shrugged his shoulders, smiled and said: "An eccentric, your friend, nicht wahr?" Could he tell me where M. Le Ferrier was? He could not. I left to look for Jules; could not find him, and returned to my hotel disgusted. I was sorry for my old guest, but vexed with him too; what business had he to carry his Quixotism to such an unpleasant length? I tried to read. Eleven o'clock struck; the casino disgorged a stream of people; the Place seemed fuller of life than ever; then slowly it grew empty and quite dark. The whim seized me to go out. It was a still night, very warm, very black. On one of the seats a man and woman sat embraced, on another a girl was sobbing, on a third—strange sight—a priest dozed. I became aware of some one at my side; it was my old guest.

"If you are not too tired," he said, "can you give me ten minutes?"

"Certainly; will you come in?"

"No, no; let us go down to the Terrace. I shan't keep you long."

He did not speak again till we reached a seat above the pigeon-shooting grounds; there, in a darkness denser for the string of lights still burning in the town, we sat down.

"I owe you an apology," he said; "first in the afternoon, then again this evening—your guest—your friend's glove! I have behaved as no gentleman should." He was leaning forward with his hands on the handle of a stick. His voice sounded broken and disturbed.

"Oh!" I muttered. "It's nothing!"

"You are very good," he sighed; "but I feel that I must explain. I consider I owe this to you, but I must tell you I should not have the courage if it were not for another reason. You see I have no friend." He looked at me with an uncertain smile. I bowed, and a minute or two later he began....

"You will excuse me if I go back rather far. It was in '74, when I had been ill with Cuban fever. To keep me alive they had put me on board a ship at Santiago, and at the end of the voyage I found myself in London. I had very little money; I knew nobody. I tell you, sir, there are times when it's hard for a fighting man to get anything to do. People would say to me: 'Afraid we've nothing for a man like you in our business.' I tried people of all sorts; but it was true—I had been fighting here and there since '60, I wasn't fit for anything—" He shook his head. "In the South, before the war, they had a saying, I remember, about a dog and a soldier having the same value. But all this has nothing to do with what I have to tell you." He sighed again and went on, moistening his lips: "I was walking along the Strand one day, very disheartened, when I heard my name called. It's a queer thing, that, in a strange street. By the way," he put in with dry ceremony, "you don't know my name, I think: it is Brune—Roger Brune. At first I did not recognise the person who called me. He had just got off an omnibus—a square-shouldered man with heavy moustaches, and round spectacles. But when he shook my hand I knew him at once. He was a man called Dalton, who was taken prisoner at Gettysburg; one of you Englishmen who came to fight with us—a major in the regiment where I was captain. We were comrades during two campaigns. If I had been his brother he couldn't have seemed more pleased to see me. He took me into a bar for the sake of old times. The drink went to my head, and by the time we reached Trafalgar Square I was quite unable to walk. He made me sit down on a bench. I was in fact—drunk. It's disgraceful to be drunk, but there was some excuse. Now I tell you, sir" (all through his story he was always making use of that expression, it seemed to infuse fresh spirit into him, to help his memory in obscure places, to give him the mastery of his emotions; it was like the piece of paper a nervous man holds in his hand to help him through a speech), "there never was a man with a finer soul than my friend Dalton. He was not clever, though he had read much; and sometimes perhaps he was too fond of talking. But he was a gentleman; he listened to me as if I had been a child; he was not ashamed of me—and it takes a gentleman not to be ashamed of a drunken man in the streets of London; God knows what things I said to him while we were sitting there! He took me to his home and put me to bed himself; for I was down again with fever." He stopped, turned slightly from me, and put his hand up to his brow. "Well, then it was, sir, that I first saw her. I am not a poet and I cannot tell you what she seemed to me. I was delirious, but I always knew when she was there. I had dreams of sunshine and cornfields, of dancing waves at sea, young trees—never the same dreams, never anything for long together; and when I had my senses I was afraid to say so for fear she would go away. She'd be in the corner of the room, with her hair hanging about her neck, a bright gold colour; she never worked and never read, but sat and talked to herself in a whisper, or looked at me for a long time together out of her blue eyes, a little frown between them, and her upper lip closed firm on her lower lip, where she had an uneven tooth. When her father came, she'd jump up and hang on to his neck until he groaned, then run away, but presently come stealing back on tiptoe. I used to listen for her footsteps on the stairs, then the knock, the door flung back or opened quietly—you never could tell which; and her voice, with a little lisp, 'Are you better today, Mr. Brune? What funny things you say when you're delirious! Father says you've been in heaps of battles!'"

He got up, paced restlessly to and fro, and sat down again. "I remember every word as if it were yesterday, all the things she said, and did; I've had a long time to think them over, you see. Well, I must tell you, the first morning that I was able to get up, I missed her. Dalton came in her place, and I asked him where she was. 'My dear fellow,' he answered, 'I've sent Eilie away to her old nurse's inn down on the river; she's better there at this time of year.' We looked at each other, and I saw that he had sent her away because he didn't trust me. I was hurt by this. Illness spoils one. He was right, he was quite right, for all he knew about me was that I could fight and had got drunk; but I am very quick-tempered. I made up my mind at once to leave him. But I was too weak—he had to put me to bed again. The very next morning he came and proposed that I should go into partnership with him. He kept a fencing-school and pistol-gallery. It seemed like the finger of God; and perhaps it was—who knows?" He fell into a reverie, and taking out his caporal, rolled himself a cigarette; having lighted it, he went on suddenly: "There, in the room above the school, we used to sit in the evenings, one on each side of the grate. The room was on the second floor, I remember, with two windows, and a view of nothing but the houses opposite. The furniture was covered up with chintz. The things on the bookshelf were never disturbed, they were Eilie's—half-broken cases with butterflies, a dead frog in a bottle, a horse-shoe covered with tinfoil, some shells too, and a cardboard box with three speckled eggs in it, and these words written on the lid: 'Missel-thrush from Lucy's tree—second family, only one blown.'" He smoked fiercely, with puffs that were like sharp sighs.

"Dalton was wrapped up in her. He was never tired of talking to me about her, and I was never tired of hearing. We had a number of pupils; but in the evening when we sat there, smoking—our talk would sooner or later—come round to her. Her bedroom opened out of that sitting—room; he took me in once and showed me a narrow little room the width of a passage, fresh and white, with a photograph of her mother above the bed, and an empty basket for a dog or cat." He broke off with a vexed air, and resumed sternly, as if trying to bind himself to the narration of his more important facts: "She was then fifteen—her mother had been dead twelve years—a beautiful, face, her mother's; it had been her death

that sent Dalton to fight with us. Well, sir, one day in August, very hot weather, he proposed a run into the country, and who should meet us on the platform when we arrived but Eilie, in a blue sun-bonnet and frock-flax blue, her favourite colour. I was angry with Dalton for not telling me that we should see her; my clothes were not quite—my hair wanted cutting. It was black then, sir," he added, tracing a pattern in the darkness with his stick. "She had a little donkey-cart; she drove, and, while we walked one on each side, she kept looking at me from under her sunbonnet. I must tell you that she never laughed—her eyes danced, her cheeks would go pink, and her hair shake about on her neck, but she never laughed. Her old nurse, Lucy, a very broad, good woman, had married the proprietor of the inn in the village there. I have never seen anything like that inn: sweethriar up to the roof! And the scent—I am very susceptible to scents!" His head drooped, and the cigarette fell from his hand. A train passing beneath sent up a shower of sparks. He started, and went on: "We had our lunch in the parlour—I remember that room very well, for I spent the happiest days of my life afterwards in that inn.... We went into a meadow after lunch, and my friend Dalton fell asleep. A wonderful thing happened then. Eilie whispered to me, 'Let's have a jolly time.' She took me for the most glorious walk. The river was close by. A lovely stream, your river Thames, so calm and broad; it is like the spirit of your people. I was bewitched; I forgot my friend, I thought of nothing but how to keep her to myself. It was such a day! There are days that are the devil's, but that was truly one of God's. She took me to a little pond under an elm-tree, and we dragged it, we two, an hour, for a kind of tiny red worm to feed some creature that she had. We found them in the mud, and while she was bending over, the curls got in her eyes. If you could have seen her then, I think, sir, you would have said she was like the first sight of spring.... We had tea afterwards, all together, in the long grass under some fruit-trees. If I had the knack of words, there are things that I could say." He bent, as though in deference to those unspoken memories. "Twilight came on while we were sitting there. A wonderful thing is twilight in the country! It became time for us to go. There was an avenue of trees close by—like a church with a window at the end, where golden light came through. I walked up and down it with her. 'Will you come again?' she whispered, and suddenly she lifted up her face to be kissed. I kissed her as if she were a little child. And when we said good-bye, her eyes were looking at me across her father's shoulder, with surprise and sorrow in them. 'Why do you go away?' they seemed to say.... But I must tell you," he went on hurriedly, "of a thing that happened before we had gone a hundred yards. We were smoking our pipes, and I, thinking of her—when out she sprang from the hedge and stood in front of us. Dalton cried out, 'What are you here for again, you mad girl?' She rushed up to him and hugged him; but when she looked at me, her face was quite different—careless, defiant, as one might say—it hurt me. I couldn't understand it, and what one doesn't understand frightens one."

IV

"Time went on. There was no swordsman, or pistol-shot like me in London, they said. We had as many pupils as we liked—it was the only part of my life when I have been able to save money. I had no chance to spend it. We gave lessons all day, and in the evening were too tired to go out. That year I had the misfortune to lose my dear mother. I became a rich man—yes, sir, at that time I must have had not less than six hundred a year.

"It was a long time before I saw Eilie again. She went abroad to Dresden with her father's sister to learn French and German. It was in the autumn of 1875 when she came back to us. She was seventeen then—a beautiful young creature." He paused, as if to gather his forces for description, and went on.

"Tall, as a young tree, with eyes like the sky. I would not say she was perfect, but her imperfections were beautiful to me. What is it makes you love—ah! sir, that is very hidden and mysterious. She had never lost the trick of closing her lips tightly when she remembered her uneven tooth. You may say that was vanity, but in a young girl—and which of us is not vain, eh? 'Old men and maidens, young men and children!'

"As I said, she came back to London to her little room, and in the evenings was always ready with our tea. You mustn't suppose she was housewifely; there is something in me that never admired housewifeliness—a fine quality, no doubt, still—" He sighed.

"No," he resumed, "Eilie was not like that, for she was never quite the same two days together. I told you her eyes were like the sky—that was true of all of her. In one thing, however, at that time, she always seemed the same—in love for her father. For me! I don't know what I should have expected; but my presence seemed to have the effect of making her dumb; I would catch her looking at me with a frown, and then, as if to make up to her own nature—and a more loving nature never came into this

world, that I shall maintain to my dying day—she would go to her father and kiss him. When I talked with him she pretended not to notice, but I could see her face grow cold and stubborn. I am not quick; and it was a long time before I understood that she was jealous, she wanted him all to herself. I've often wondered how she could be his daughter, for he was the very soul of justice and a slow man too—and she was as quick as a bird. For a long time after I saw her dislike of me, I refused to believe it—if one does not want to believe a thing there are always reasons why it should not seem true, at least so it is with me, and I suppose with all selfish men.

"I spent evening after evening there, when, if I had not thought only of myself, I should have kept away. But one day I could no longer be blind.

"It was a Sunday in February. I always had an invitation on Sundays to dine with them in the middle of the day. There was no one in the sitting-room; but the door of Eilie's bedroom was open. I heard her voice: 'That man, always that man!' It was enough for me, I went down again without coming in, and walked about all day.

"For three weeks I kept away. To the school of course I came as usual, but not upstairs. I don't know what I told Dalton—it did not signify what you told him, he always had a theory of his own, and was persuaded of its truth—a very single-minded man, sir.

"But now I come to the most wonderful days of my life. It was an early spring that year. I had fallen away already from my resolution, and used to slink up—seldom, it's true—and spend the evening with them as before. One afternoon I came up to the sitting-room; the light was failing—it was warm, and the windows were open. In the air was that feeling which comes to you once a year, in the spring, no matter where you may be, in a crowded street, or alone in a forest; only once—a feeling like—but I cannot describe it.

"Eilie was sitting there. If you don't know, sir, I can't tell you what it means to be near the woman one loves. She was leaning on the windowsill, staring down into the street. It was as though she might be looking out for some one. I stood, hardly breathing. She turned her head, and saw me. Her eyes were strange. They seemed to ask me a question. But I couldn't have spoken for the world. I can't tell you what I felt—I dared not speak, or think, or hope. I have been in nineteen battles—several times in positions of some danger, when the lifting of a finger perhaps meant death; but I have never felt what I was feeling at that moment. I knew something was coming; and I was paralysed with terror lest it should not come!" He drew a long breath.

"The servant came in with a light and broke the spell. All that night I lay awake and thought of how she had looked at me, with the colour coming slowly up in her cheeks—"It was three days before I plucked up courage to go again; and then I felt her eyes on me at once—she was making a 'cat's cradle' with a bit of string, but I could see them stealing up from her hands to my face. And she went wandering about the room, fingering at everything. When her father called out: 'What's the matter with you, Elie?' she stared at him like a child caught doing wrong. I looked straight at her then, she tried to look at me, but she couldn't; and a minute later she went out of the room. God knows what sort of nonsense I talked—I was too happy.

"Then began our love. I can't tell you of that time. Often and often Dalton said to me: 'What's come to the child? Nothing I can do pleases her.' All the love she had given him was now for me; but he was too simple and straight to see what was going on. How many times haven't I felt criminal towards him! But when you're happy, with the tide in your favour, you become a coward at once...."

V

"Well, sir," he went on, "we were married on her eighteenth birthday. It was a long time before Dalton became aware of our love. But one day he said to me with a very grave look:

"Eilie has told me, Brune; I forbid it. She's too young, and you're—too old!' I was then forty-five, my hair as black and thick as a rook's feathers, and I was strong and active. I answered him: 'We shall be married within a month!' We parted in anger. It was a May night, and I walked out far into the country. There's no remedy for anger, or, indeed, for anything, so fine as walking. Once I stopped—it was on a common, without a house or light, and the stars shining like jewels. I was hot from walking, I could feel the blood boiling in my veins—I said to myself 'Old, are you?' And I laughed like a fool. It was the thought of losing her—I wished to believe myself angry, but really I was afraid; fear and anger in me

are very much the same. A friend of mine, a bit of a poet, sir, once called them 'the two black wings of self.' And so they are, so they are...! The next morning I went to Dalton again, and somehow I made him yield. I'm not a philosopher, but it has often seemed to me that no benefit can come to us in this life without an equal loss somewhere, but does that stop us? No, sir, not often....

"We were married on the 30th of June 1876, in the parish church. The only people present were Dalton, Lucy, and Lucy's husband—a big, red-faced fellow, with blue eyes and a golden beard parted in two. It had been arranged that we should spend the honeymoon down at their inn on the river. My wife, Dalton and I, went to a restaurant for lunch. She was dressed in grey, the colour of a pigeon's feathers." He paused, leaning forward over the crutch handle of his stick; trying to conjure up, no doubt, that long-ago image of his young bride in her dress "the colour of a pigeon's feathers," with her blue eyes and yellow hair, the little frown between her brows, the firmly shut red lips, opening to speak the words, "For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health."

"At that time, sir," he went on suddenly, "I was a bit of a dandy. I wore, I remember, a blue frock-coat, with white trousers, and a grey top hat. Even now I should always prefer to be well dressed...."

"We had an excellent lunch, and drank Veuve Clicquot, a wine that you cannot get in these days! Dalton came with us to the railway station. I can't bear partings; and yet, they must come."

"That evening we walked out in the cool under the aspen-trees. What should I remember in all my life if not that night—the young bullocks snuffing in the gateways—the campion flowers all lighted up along the hedges—the moon with a halo-bats, too, in and out among the stems, and the shadows of the cottages as black and soft as that sea down there. For a long time we stood on the river-bank beneath a lime-tree. The scent of the lime flowers! A man can only endure about half his joy; about half his sorrow. Lucy and her husband," he went on, presently, "his name was Frank Tor—a man like an old Viking, who ate nothing but milk, bread, and fruit—were very good to us! It was like Paradise in that inn—though the commissariat, I am bound to say, was limited. The sweetthriar grew round our bedroom windows; when the breeze blew the leaves across the opening—it was like a bath of perfume. Eilie grew as brown as a gipsy while we were there. I don't think any man could have loved her more than I did. But there were times when my heart stood still; it didn't seem as if she understood how much I loved her. One day, I remember, she coaxed me to take her camping. We drifted down-stream all the afternoon, and in the evening pulled into the reeds under the willow-boughs and lit a fire for her to cook by—though, as a matter of fact, our provisions were cooked already—but you know how it is; all the romance was in having a real fire. 'We won't pretend,' she kept saying. While we were eating our supper a hare came to our clearing—a big fellow—how surprised he looked! 'The tall hare,' Eilie called him. After that we sat by the ashes and watched the shadows, till at last she roamed away from me. The time went very slowly; I got up to look for her. It was past sundown. I called and called. It was a long time before I found her—and she was like a wild thing, hot and flushed, her pretty frock torn, her hands and face scratched, her hair down, like some beautiful creature of the woods. If one loves, a little thing will scare one. I didn't think she had noticed my fright; but when we got back to the boat she threw her arms round my neck, and said, 'I won't ever leave you again!'

"Once in the night I woke—a water-hen was crying, and in the moonlight a kingfisher flew across. The wonder on the river—the wonder of the moon and trees, the soft bright mist, the stillness! It was like another world, peaceful, enchanted, far holier than ours. It seemed like a vision of the thoughts that come to one—how seldom! and go if one tries to grasp them. Magic—poetry-sacred!" He was silent a minute, then went on in a wistful voice: "I looked at her, sleeping like a child, with her hair loose, and her lips apart, and I thought: 'God do so to me, if ever I bring her pain!' How was I to understand her? the mystery and innocence of her soul! The river has had all my light and all my darkness, the happiest days, and the hours when I've despaired; and I like to think of it, for, you know, in time bitter memories fade, only the good remain.... Yet the good have their own pain, a different kind of aching, for we shall never get them back. Sir," he said, turning to me with a faint smile, "it's no use crying over spilt milk.... In the neighbourhood of Lucy's inn, the Rose and Maybush—Can you imagine a prettier name? I have been all over the world, and nowhere found names so pretty as in the English country. There, too, every blade of grass; and flower, has a kind of pride about it; knows it will be cared for; and all the roads, trees, and cottages, seem to be certain that they will live for ever.... But I was going to tell you: Half a mile from the inn was a quiet old house which we used to call the 'Convent'—though I believe it was a farm. We spent many afternoons there, trespassing in the orchard—Eilie was fond of trespassing; if there were a long way round across somebody else's property, she would always take it. We spent our last afternoon in that orchard, lying in the long grass. I was reading Childe Harold for the first time—a wonderful, a memorable poem! I was at that passage—the bull-fight—you remember:

"Thrice sounds the clarion; lo! the signal falls,
The din expands, and expectation mute'

—"when suddenly Eilie said: 'Suppose I were to leave off loving you?' It was as if some one had struck me in the face. I jumped up, and tried to take her in my arms, but she slipped away; then she turned, and began laughing softly. I laughed too. I don't know why...."

VI

"We went back to London the next day; we lived quite close to the school, and about five days a week Dalton came to dine with us. He would have come every day, if he had not been the sort of man who refuses to consult his own pleasure. We had more pupils than ever. In my leisure I taught my wife to fence. I have never seen any one so lithe and quick; or so beautiful as she looked in her fencing dress, with embroidered shoes.

"I was completely happy. When a man has obtained his desire he becomes careless and self-satisfied; I was watchful, however, for I knew that I was naturally a selfish man. I studied to arrange my time and save my money, to give her as much pleasure as I could. What she loved best in the world just then was riding. I bought a horse for her, and in the evenings of the spring and summer we rode together; but when it was too dark to go out late, she would ride alone, great distances, sometimes spend the whole day in the saddle, and come back so tired she could hardly walk upstairs—I can't say that I liked that. It made me nervous, she was so headlong—but I didn't think it right to interfere with her. I had a good deal of anxiety about money, for though I worked hard and made more than ever, there never seemed enough. I was anxious to save—I hoped, of course—but we had no child, and this was a trouble to me. She grew more beautiful than ever, and I think was happy. Has it ever struck you that each one of us lives on the edge of a volcano? There is, I imagine, no one who has not some affection or interest so strong that he counts the rest for nothing, beside it. No doubt a man may live his life through without discovering that. But some of us—! I am not complaining; what is—is." He pulled the cap lower over his eyes, and clutched his hands firmly on the top of his stick. He was like a man who rushes his horse at some hopeless fence, unwilling to give himself time, for fear of craning at the last moment. "In the spring of '78, a new pupil came to me, a young man of twenty-one who was destined for the army. I took a fancy to him, and did my best to turn him into a good swordsman; but there was a kind of perverse recklessness in him; for a few minutes one would make a great impression, then he would grow utterly careless. 'Francis,' I would say, 'if I were you I should be ashamed.' 'Mr. Brune,' he would answer, 'why should I be ashamed? I didn't make myself.' God knows, I wish to do him justice, he had a heart—one day he drove up in a cab, and brought in his poor dog, who had been run over, and was dying: For half an hour he shut himself up with its body, we could hear him sobbing like a child; he came out with his eyes all red, and cried: 'I know where to find the brute who drove over him,' and off he rushed. He had beautiful Italian eyes; a slight figure, not very tall; dark hair, a little dark moustache; and his lips were always a trifle parted—it was that, and his walk, and the way he drooped his eyelids, which gave him a peculiar, soft, proud look. I used to tell him that he'd never make a soldier! 'Oh!' he'd answer, 'that'll be all right when the time comes! He believed in a kind of luck that was to do everything for him, when the time came. One day he came in as I was giving Eilie her lesson. This was the first time they saw each other. After that he came more often, and sometimes stayed to dinner with us. I won't deny, sir, that I was glad to welcome him; I thought it good for Eilie. Can there be anything more odious," he burst out, "than such a self-complacent blindness? There are people who say, 'Poor man, he had such faith!' Faith, sir! Conceit! I was a fool—in this world one pays for folly...."

"The summer came; and one Saturday in early June, Eilie, I, and Francis—I won't tell you his other name—went riding. The night had been wet; there was no dust, and presently the sun came out—a glorious day! We rode a long way. About seven o'clock we started back—slowly, for it was still hot, and there was all the cool of night before us. It was nine o'clock when we came to Richmond Park. A grand place, Richmond Park; and in that half-light wonderful, the deer moving so softly, you might have thought they were spirits. We were silent too—great trees have that effect on me...."

"Who can say when changes come? Like a shift of the wind, the old passes, the new is on you. I am telling you now of a change like that. Without a sign of warning, Eilie put her horse into a gallop. 'What are you doing?' I shouted. She looked back with a smile, then he dashed past me too. A hornet might have stung them both: they galloped over fallen trees, under low hanging branches, up hill and down. I had to watch that madness! My horse was not so fast. I rode like a demon; but fell far behind. I am not a man who takes things quietly. When I came up with them at last, I could not speak for rage. They were riding side by side, the reins on the horses' necks, looking in each other's faces. 'You should take care,' I said. 'Care!' she cried; 'life is not all taking care!' My anger left me. I dropped behind, as

grooms ride behind their mistresses... Jealousy! No torture is so ceaseless or so black.... In those minutes a hundred things came up in me—a hundred memories, true, untrue, what do I know? My soul was poisoned. I tried to reason with myself. It was absurd to think such things! It was unmanly.... Even if it were true, one should try to be a gentleman! But I found myself laughing; yes, sir, laughing at that word." He spoke faster, as if pouring his heart out not to a live listener, but to the night. "I could not sleep that night. To lie near her with those thoughts in my brain was impossible! I made an excuse, and sat up with some papers. The hardest thing in life is to see a thing coming and be able to do nothing to prevent it. What could I do? Have you noticed how people may become utter strangers without a word? It only needs a thought.... The very next day she said: 'I want to go to Lucy's.' 'Alone?' 'Yes.' I had made up my mind by then that she must do just as she wished. Perhaps I acted wrongly; I do not know what one ought to do in such a case; but before she went I said to her: 'Eilie, what is it?' 'I don't know,' she answered; and I kissed her—that was all.... A month passed; I wrote to her nearly every day, and I had short letters from her, telling me very little of herself. Dalton was a torture to me, for I could not tell him; he had a conviction that she was going to become a mother. 'Ah, Brune!' he said, 'my poor wife was just like that.' Life, sir, is a somewhat ironical affair...! He—I find it hard to speak his name—came to the school two or three times a week. I used to think I saw a change, a purpose growing up through his recklessness; there seemed a violence in him as if he chafed against my blade. I had a kind of joy in feeling I had the mastery, and could toss the iron out of his hand any minute like a straw. I was ashamed, and yet I gloried in it. Jealousy is a low thing, sir—a low, base thing! When he asked me where my wife was, I told him; I was too proud to hide it. Soon after that he came no more to the school.

"One morning, when I could bear it no longer, I wrote, and said I was coming down. I would not force myself on her, but I asked her to meet me in the orchard of the old house we called the Convent. I asked her to be there at four o'clock. It has always been my belief that a man must neither beg anything of a woman, nor force anything from her. Women are generous—they will give you what they can. I sealed my letter, and posted it myself. All the way down I kept on saying to myself, 'She must come—surely she will come!'"

VII

"I was in high spirits, but the next moment trembled like a man with ague. I reached the orchard before my time. She was not there. You know what it is like to wait? I stood still and listened; I went to the point whence I could see farthest; I said to myself, 'A watched pot never boils; if I don't look for her she will come.' I walked up and down with my eyes on the ground. The sickness of it! A hundred times I took out my watch.... Perhaps it was fast, perhaps hers was slow—I can't tell you a thousandth part of my hopes and fears. There was a spring of water, in one corner. I sat beside it, and thought of the last time I had been there—and something seemed to burst in me. It was five o'clock before I lost all hope; there comes a time when you're glad that hope is dead, it means rest. 'That's over,' you say, 'now I can act.' But what was I to do? I lay down with my face to the ground; when one's in trouble, it's the only thing that helps—something to press against and cling to that can't give way. I lay there for two hours, knowing all the time that I should play the coward. At seven o'clock I left the orchard and went towards the inn; I had broken my word, but I felt happy.... I should see her—and, sir, nothing—nothing seemed to matter beside that. Tor was in the garden snipping at his roses. He came up, and I could see that he couldn't look me in the face. 'Where's my wife?' I said. He answered, 'Let's get Lucy.' I ran indoors. Lucy met me with two letters; the first—my own—unopened; and the second, this:

"I have left you. You were good to me, but now—it is no use.
EILIE."

"She told me that a boy had brought a letter for my wife the day before, from a young gentleman in a boat. When Lucy delivered it she asked, 'Who is he, Miss Eilie? What will Mr. Brune say?' My wife looked at her angrily, but gave her no answer—and all that day she never spoke. In the evening she was gone, leaving this note on the bed.... Lucy cried as if her heart would break. I took her by the shoulders and put her from the room; I couldn't bear the noise. I sat down and tried to think. While I was sitting there Tor came in with a letter. It was written on the notepaper of an inn twelve miles up the river: these were the words.

"Eilie is mine. I am ready to meet you where you like."

He went on with a painful evenness of speech. "When I read those words, I had only one thought—to

reach them; I ran down to the river, and chose out the lightest boat. Just as I was starting, Tor came running. 'You dropped this letter, sir,' he said. 'Two pair of arms are better than one.' He came into the boat. I took the sculls and I pulled out into the stream. I pulled like a madman; and that great man, with his bare arms crossed, was like a huge, tawny bull sitting there opposite me. Presently he took my place, and I took the rudder lines. I could see his chest, covered with hair, heaving up and down, it gave me a sort of comfort—it meant that we were getting nearer. Then it grew dark, there was no moon, I could barely see the bank; there's something in the dark which drives one into oneself. People tell you there comes a moment when your nature is decided—'saved' or 'lost' as they call it—for good or evil. That is not true, your self is always with you, and cannot be altered; but, sir, I believe that in a time of agony one finds out what are the things one can do, and what are those one cannot. You get to know yourself, that's all. And so it was with me. Every thought and memory and passion was so clear and strong! I wanted to kill him. I wanted to kill myself. But her—no! We are taught that we possess our wives, body and soul, we are brought up in that faith, we are commanded to believe it—but when I was face to face with it, those words had no meaning; that belief, those commands, they were without meaning to me, they were—vile. Oh yes, I wanted to find comfort in them, I wanted to hold on to them—but I couldn't. You may force a body; how can you force a soul? No, no—cowardly! But I wanted to—I wanted to kill him and force her to come back to me! And then, suddenly, I felt as if I were pressing right on the most secret nerve of my heart. I seemed to see her face, white and quivering, as if I'd stamped my heel on it. They say this world is ruled by force; it may be true—I know I have a weak spot in me.... I couldn't bear it. At last I jumped to my feet and shouted out, 'Turn the boat round!' Tor looked up at me as if I had gone mad. And I had gone mad. I seized the boat-hook and threatened him; I called him fearful names. 'Sir,' he said, 'I don't take such names from any one!' 'You'll take them from me,' I shouted; 'turn the boat round, you idiot, you hound, you fish!...' I have a terrible temper, a perfect curse to me. He seemed amazed, even frightened; he sat down again suddenly and pulled the boat round. I fell on the seat, and hid my face. I believe the moon came up; there must have been a mist too, for I was cold as death. In this life, sir, we cannot hide our faces—but by degrees the pain of wounds grows less. Some will have it that such blows are mortal; it is not so. Time is merciful.

"In the early morning I went back to London. I had fever on me—and was delirious. I dare say I should have killed myself if I had not been so used to weapons—they and I were too old friends, I suppose—I can't explain. It was a long while before I was up and about. Dalton nursed me through it; his great heavy moustache had grown quite white. We never mentioned her; what was the good? There were things to settle of course, the lawyer—this was unspeakably distasteful to me. I told him it was to be as she wished, but the fellow would come to me, with his—there, I don't want to be unkind. I wished him to say it was my fault, but he said—I remember his smile now—he said, that was impossible, would be seen through, talked of collusion—I don't understand these things, and what's more, I can't bear them, they are—dirty.

"Two years later, when I had come back to London, after the Russo-Turkish war, I received a letter from her. I have it here." He took an old, yellow sheet of paper out of a leathern pocketbook, spread it in his fingers, and sat staring at it. For some minutes he did not speak.

"In the autumn of that same year she died in childbirth. He had deserted her. Fortunately for him, he was killed on the Indian frontier, that very year. If she had lived she would have been thirty-two next June; not a great age.... I know I am what they call a crank; doctors will tell you that you can't be cured of a bad illness, and be the same man again. If you are bent, to force yourself straight must leave you weak in another place. I must and will think well of women—everything done, and everything said against them is a stone on her dead body. Could you sit, and listen to it?" As though driven by his own question, he rose, and paced up and down. He came back to the seat at last.

"That, sir, is the reason of my behaviour this afternoon, and again this evening. You have been so kind, I wanted!—wanted to tell you. She had a little daughter—Lucy has her now. My friend Dalton is dead; there would have been no difficulty about money, but, I am sorry to say, that he was swindled—disgracefully. It fell to me to administer his affairs—he never knew it, but he died penniless; he had trusted some wretched fellows—had an idea they would make his fortune. As I very soon found, they had ruined him. It was impossible to let Lucy—such a dear woman—bear that burden. I have tried to make provision; but, you see," he took hold of my sleeve, "I, too, have not been fortunate; in fact, it's difficult to save a great deal out of L 190 a year; but the capital is perfectly safe—and I get L 47, 10s. a quarter, paid on the nail. I have often been tempted to reinvest at a greater rate of interest, but I've never dared. Anyway, there are no debts—I've been obliged to make a rule not to buy what I couldn't pay for on the spot.... Now I am really plaguing you—but I wanted to tell you—in case anything should happen to me." He seemed to take a sudden scare, stiffened, twisted his moustache, and muttering, "Your great kindness! Shall never forget!" turned hurriedly away.

He vanished; his footsteps, and the tap of his stick grew fainter and fainter. They died out. He was gone. Suddenly I got up and hastened after him. I soon stopped—what was there to say?

VIII

The following day I was obliged to go to Nice, and did not return till midnight. The porter told me that Jules le Ferrier had been to see me. The next morning, while I was still in bed, the door was opened, and Jules appeared. His face was very pale; and the moment he stood still drops of perspiration began coursing down his cheeks.

"Georges!" he said, "he is dead. There, there! How stupid you look! My man is packing. I have half an hour before the train; my evidence shall come from Italy. I have done my part, the rest is for you. Why did you have that dinner? The Don Quixote! The idiot! The poor man! Don't move! Have you a cigar? Listen! When you followed him, I followed the other two. My infernal curiosity! Can you conceive a greater folly? How fast they walked, those two! feeling their cheeks, as if he had struck them both, you know; it was funny. They soon saw me, for their eyes were all round about their heads; they had the mark of a glove on their cheeks." The colour began to come back, into Jules's face; he gesticulated with his cigar and became more and more dramatic. "They waited for me. 'Tiens!' said one, 'this gentleman was with him. My friend's name is M. Le Baron de—. The man who struck him was an odd-looking person; kindly inform me whether it is possible for my friend to meet him?' Eh!" commented Jules, "he was offensive! Was it for me to give our dignity away? 'Perfectly, monsieur!' I answered. 'In that case,' he said, 'please give me his name and address.... I could not remember his name, and as for the address, I never knew it...! I reflected. 'That,' I said, 'I am unable to do, for special reasons.' 'Aha!' he said, 'reasons that will prevent our fighting him, I suppose?' 'On the contrary,' I said. 'I will convey your request to him; I may mention that I have heard he is the best swordsman and pistol-shot in Europe. Good-night!' I wished to give them something to dream of, you understand.... Patience, my dear! Patience! I was, coming to you, but I thought I would let them sleep on it—there was plenty of time! But yesterday morning I came into the Place, and there he was on the bench, with a big dog. I declare to you he blushed like a young girl. 'Sir,' he said, 'I was hoping to meet you; last evening I made a great disturbance. I took an unpardonable liberty'—and he put in my hand an envelope. My friend, what do you suppose it contained—a pair of gloves! Senor Don Punctilioso, hein? He was the devil, this friend of yours; he fascinated me with his gentle eyes and his white moustachettes, his humility, his flames—poor man...! I told him I had been asked to take him a challenge. 'If anything comes of it,' I said, 'make use of me!' 'Is that so?' he said. 'I am most grateful for your kind offer. Let me see—it is so long since I fought a duel. The sooner it's over the better. Could you arrange to-morrow morning? Weapons? Yes; let them choose.' You see, my friend, there was no hanging back here; nous voila en train."

Jules took out his watch. "I have sixteen minutes. It is lucky for you that you were away yesterday, or you would be in my shoes now. I fixed the place, right hand of the road to Roquebrune, just by the railway cutting, and the time—five-thirty of the morning. It was arranged that I should call for him. Disgusting hour; I have not been up so early since I fought Jacques Tirbaut in '85. At five o'clock I found him ready and drinking tea with rum in it—singular man! he made me have some too, brrr! He was shaved, and dressed in that old frock-coat. His great dog jumped into the carriage, but he bade her get out, took her paws on his shoulders, and whispered in her ear some Italian words; a charm, hein! and back she went, the tail between the legs. We drove slowly, so as not to shake his arm. He was more gay than I. All the way he talked to me of you: how kind you were! how good you had been to him! 'You do not speak of yourself!' I said. 'Have you no friends, nothing to say? Sometimes an accident will happen!' 'Oh!' he answered, 'there is no danger; but if by any chance—well, there is a letter in my pocket.' 'And if you should kill him?' I said. 'But I shall not,' he answered slyly: 'do you think I am going to fire at him? No, no; he is too young.' 'But,' I said, 'I—I am not going to stand that!' 'Yes,' he replied, 'I owe him a shot; but there is no danger—not the least danger.' We had arrived; already they were there. Ah bah! You know the preliminaries, the politeness—this duelling, you know, it is absurd, after all. We placed them at twenty paces. It is not a bad place. There are pine-trees round, and rocks; at that hour it was cool and grey as a church. I handed him the pistol. How can I describe him to you, standing there, smoothing the barrel with his fingers! 'What a beautiful thing a good pistol!' he said. 'Only a fool or a madman throws away his life,' I said. 'Certainly,' he replied, 'certainly; but there is no danger,' and he regarded me, raising his moustachette.

"There they stood then, back to back, with the mouths of their pistols to the sky. 'Un!' I cried, 'deux! tirez!' They turned, I saw the smoke of his shot go straight up like a prayer; his pistol dropped. I ran to him. He looked surprised, put out his hand, and fell into my arms. He was dead. Those fools came running up. 'What is it?' cried one. I made him a bow. 'As you see,' I said; 'you have made a pretty shot. My friend fired in the air. Messieurs, you had better breakfast in Italy.' We carried him to the carriage, and covered him with a rug; the others drove for the frontier. I brought him to his room. Here is his letter." Jules stopped; tears were running down his face. "He is dead; I have closed his eyes. Look here, you know, we are all of us cads—it is the rule; but this—this, perhaps, was the exception." And without another word he rushed away....

Outside the old fellow's lodging a dismounted cocher was standing disconsolate in the sun. "How was I to know they were going to fight a duel?" he burst out on seeing me. "He had white hair—I call you to witness he had white hair. This is bad for me: they will ravish my licence. Aha! you will see—this is bad for me!" I gave him the slip and found my way upstairs. The old fellow was alone, lying on the bed, his feet covered with a rug as if he might feel cold; his eyes were closed, but in this sleep of death, he still had that air of faint surprise. At full length, watching the bed intently, Freda lay, as she lay nightly when he was really asleep. The shutters were half open; the room still smelt slightly of rum. I stood for a long time looking at the face: the little white fans of moustache brushed upwards even in death, the hollows in his cheeks, the quiet of his figure; he was like some old knight.... The dog broke the spell. She sat up, and resting her paws on the bed, licked his face. I went downstairs—I couldn't bear to hear her howl. This was his letter to me, written in a pointed handwriting:

"MY DEAR SIR,—Should you read this, I shall be gone. I am ashamed to trouble you—a man should surely manage so as not to give trouble; and yet I believe you will not consider me importunate. If, then, you will pick up the pieces of an old fellow, I ask you to have my sword, the letter enclosed in this, and the photograph that stands on the stove buried with me. My will and the acknowledgments of my property are between the leaves of the Byron in my tin chest; they should go to Lucy Tor—address thereon. Perhaps you will do me the honour to retain for yourself any of my books that may give you pleasure. In the Pilgrim's Progress you will find some excellent recipes for Turkish coffee, Italian and Spanish dishes, and washing wounds. The landlady's daughter speaks Italian, and she would, I know, like to have Freda; the poor dog will miss me. I have read of old Indian warriors taking their horses and dogs with them to the happy hunting-grounds. Freda would come—noble animals are dogs! She eats once a day—a good large meal—and requires much salt. If you have animals of your own, sir, don't forget—all animals require salt. I have no debts, thank God! The money in my pockets would bury me decently—not that there is any danger. And I am ashamed to weary you with details—the least a man can do is not to make a fuss—and yet he must be found ready.—Sir, with profound gratitude, your servant, "ROGER BRUNE."

Everything was as he had said. The photograph on the stove was that of a young girl of nineteen or twenty, dressed in an old-fashioned style, with hair gathered backward in a knot. The eyes gazed at you with a little frown, the lips were tightly closed; the expression of the face was eager, quick, wilful, and, above all, young.

The tin trunk was scented with dry fragments of some herb, the history of which in that trunk man knoweth not.... There were a few clothes, but very few, all older than those he usually wore. Besides the Byron and Pilgrim's Progress were Scott's Quentin Durward, Captain Marryat's Midshipman Easy, a pocket Testament, and a long and frightfully stiff book on the art of fortifying towns, much thumbed, and bearing date 1863. By far the most interesting thing I found, however, was a diary, kept down to the preceding Christmas. It was a pathetic document, full of calculations of the price of meals; resolutions to be careful over this or that; doubts whether he must not give up smoking; sentences of fear that Freda had not enough to eat. It appeared that he had tried to live on ninety pounds a year, and send the other hundred pounds home to Lucy for the child; in this struggle he was always failing, having to send less than the amount—the entries showed that this was a nightmare to him. The last words, written on Christmas Day, were these "What is the use of writing this, since it records nothing but failure!"

The landlady's daughter and myself were at the funeral. The same afternoon I went into the concert-room, where I had spoken to him first. When I came out Freda was lying at the entrance, looking into the faces of every one that passed, and sniffing idly at their heels. Close by the landlady's daughter hovered, a biscuit in her hand, and a puzzled, sorry look on her face.

September 1900.

TO

MY BROTHER HUBERT GALSWORTHY

SALVATION OF A FORSYTE

I

Swithin Forsyte lay in bed. The corners of his mouth under his white moustache drooped towards his double chin. He panted:

"My doctor says I'm in a bad way, James."

His twin-brother placed his hand behind his ear. "I can't hear you. They tell me I ought to take a cure. There's always a cure wanted for something. Emily had a cure."

Swithin replied: "You mumble so. I hear my man, Adolph. I trained him.... You ought to have an ear-trumpet. You're getting very shaky, James."

There was silence; then James Forsyte, as if galvanised, remarked: "I s'pose you've made your will. I s'pose you've left your money to the family; you've nobody else to leave it to. There was Danson died the other day, and left his money to a hospital"

The hairs of Swithin's white moustache bristled. "My fool of a doctor told me to make my will," he said, "I hate a fellow who tells you to make your will. My appetite's good; I ate a partridge last night. I'm all the better for eating. He told me to leave off champagne! I eat a good breakfast. I'm not eighty. You're the same age, James. You look very shaky."

James Forsyte said: "You ought to have another opinion. Have Blank; he's the first man now. I had him for Emily; cost me two hundred guineas. He sent her to Homburg; that's the first place now. The Prince was there—everybody goes there."

Swithin Forsyte answered: "I don't get any sleep at night, now I can't get out; and I've bought a new carriage—gave a pot of money for it. D' you ever have bronchitis? They tell me champagne's dangerous; it's my belief I couldn't take a better thing."

James Forsyte rose.

"You ought to have another opinion. Emily sent her love; she would have come in, but she had to go to Niagara. Everybody goes there; it's the place now. Rachel goes every morning: she overdoes it—she'll be laid up one of these days. There's a fancy ball there to-night; the Duke gives the prizes."

Swithin Forsyte said angrily: "I can't get things properly cooked here; at the club I get spinach decently done." The bed-clothes jerked at the tremor of his legs.

James Forsyte replied: "You must have done well with Tintos; you must have made a lot of money by them. Your ground-rents must be falling in, too. You must have any amount you don't know what to do with." He mouthed the words, as if his lips were watering.

Swithin Forsyte glared. "Money!" he said; "my doctor's bill's enormous."

James Forsyte stretched out a cold, damp hand "Goodbye! You ought to have another opinion. I can't keep the horses waiting: they're a new pair—stood me in three hundred. You ought to take care of yourself. I shall speak to Blank about you. You ought to have him—everybody says he's the first man. Good-bye!"

Swithin Forsyte continued to stare at the ceiling. He thought: 'A poor thing, James! a selfish beggar! Must be worth a couple of hundred thousand!' He wheezed, meditating on life....

He was ill and lonely. For many years he had been lonely, and for two years ill; but as he had smoked his first cigar, so he would live his life-stoutly, to its predestined end. Every day he was driven to the club; sitting forward on the spring cushions of a single brougham, his hands on his knees, swaying a little, strangely solemn. He ascended the steps into that marble hall—the folds of his chin wedged into the aperture of his collar—walking squarely with a stick. Later he would dine, eating majestically, and savouring his food, behind a bottle of champagne set in an ice-pail—his waistcoat defended by a napkin, his eyes rolling a little or glued in a stare on the waiter. Never did he suffer his head or back to droop, for it was not distinguished so to do.

Because he was old and deaf, he spoke to no one; and no one spoke to him. The club gossip, an Irishman, said to each newcomer: "Old Forsythe! Look at 'um! Must ha' had something in his life to sour 'um!" But Swithin had had nothing in his life to sour him.

For many days now he had lain in bed in a room exuding silver, crimson, and electric light, smelling of opopanax and of cigars. The curtains were drawn, the firelight gleamed; on a table by his bed were a jug of barley-water and the Times. He made an attempt to read, failed, and fell again to thinking. His face with its square chin, looked like a block of pale leather bedded in the pillow. It was lonely! A woman in the room would have made all the difference! Why had he never married? He breathed hard, staring froglike at the ceiling; a memory had come into his mind. It was a long time ago—forty odd years—but it seemed like yesterday....

It happened when he was thirty-eight, for the first and only time in his life travelling on the Continent, with his twin-brother James and a man named Traquair. On the way from Germany to Venice, he had found himself at the Hotel Goldene Alp at Salzburg. It was late August, and weather for the gods: sunshine on the walls and the shadows of the vine-leaves, and at night, the moonlight, and again on the walls the shadows of the vine-leaves. Averse to the suggestions of other people, Swithin had refused to visit the Citadel; he had spent the day alone in the window of his bedroom, smoking a succession of cigars, and disparaging the appearance of the passers-by. After dinner he was driven by boredom into the streets. His chest puffed out like a pigeon's, and with something of a pigeon's cold and inquiring eye, he strutted, annoyed at the frequency of uniforms, which seemed to him both needless and offensive. His spleen rose at this crowd of foreigners, who spoke an unintelligible language, wore hair on their faces, and smoked bad tobacco. 'A queer lot!' he thought. The sound of music from a cafe attracted him; he walked in, vaguely moved by a wish for the distinction of adventure, without the trouble which adventure usually brought with it; spurred too, perhaps, by an after-dinner demon. The cafe was the bier-halle of the 'Fifties, with a door at either end, and lighted by a large wooden lantern. On a small dais three musicians were fiddling. Solitary men, or groups, sat at some dozen tables, and the waiters hurried about replenishing glasses; the air was thick with smoke. Swithin sat down. "Wine!" he said sternly. The astonished waiter brought him wine. Swithin pointed to a beer glass on the table. "Here!" he said, with the same ferocity. The waiter poured out the wine. 'Ah!' thought Swithin, 'they can understand if they like.' A group of officers close by were laughing; Swithin stared at them uneasily. A hollow cough sounded almost in his ear. To his left a man sat reading, with his elbows on the corners of a journal, and his gaunt shoulders raised almost to his eyes. He had a thin, long nose, broadening suddenly at the nostrils; a black-brown beard, spread in a savage fan over his chest; what was visible of the face was the colour of old parchment. A strange, wild, haughty-looking creature! Swithin observed his clothes with some displeasure—they were the clothes of a journalist or strolling actor. And yet he was impressed. This was singular. How could he be impressed by a fellow in such clothes! The man reached out a hand, covered with black hairs, and took up a tumbler that contained a dark-coloured fluid. 'Brandy!' thought Swithin. The crash of a falling chair startled him—his neighbour had risen. He was of immense height, and very thin; his great beard seemed to splash away from his mouth; he was glaring at the group of officers, and speaking. Swithin made out two words: "Hunde! Deutsche Hunde!" 'Hounds! Dutch hounds!' he thought: 'Rather strong!' One of the officers had jumped up, and now drew his sword. The tall man swung his chair up, and brought it down with a thud. Everybody round started up and closed on him. The tall man cried out, "To me, Magyars!"

Swithin grinned. The tall man fighting such odds excited his unwilling admiration; he had a momentary impulse to go to his assistance. 'Only get a broken nose!' he thought, and looked for a safe corner. But at that moment a thrown lemon struck him on the jaw. He jumped out of his chair and rushed at the officers. The Hungarian, swinging his chair, threw him a look of gratitude—Swithin glowed with momentary admiration of himself. A sword blade grazed his—arm; he felt a sudden dislike of the Hungarian. 'This is too much,' he thought, and, catching up a chair, flung it at the wooden lantern. There was a crash—faces and swords vanished. He struck a match, and by the light of it bolted for the door. A second later he was in the street.

II

A voice said in English, "God bless you, brother!"

Swithin looked round, and saw the tall Hungarian holding out his hand. He took it, thinking, 'What a fool I've been!' There was something in the Hungarian's gesture which said, "You are worthy of me!"

It was annoying, but rather impressive. The man seemed even taller than before; there was a cut on his cheek, the blood from which was trickling down his beard. "You English!" he said. "I saw you stone Haynau—I saw you cheer Kossuth. The free blood of your people cries out to us." He looked at Swithin. "You are a big man, you have a big soul—and strong, how you flung them down! Ha!" Swithin had an impulse to take to his heels. "My name," said the Hungarian, "is Boleskey. You are my friend." His English was good.

'Bulsh-kai-ee, Burlsh-kai-ee,' thought Swithin; 'what a devil of a name!' "Mine," he said sulkily, "is Forsyte."

The Hungarian repeated it.

"You've had a nasty jab on the cheek," said Swithin; the sight of the matted beard was making him feel sick. The Hungarian put his fingers to his cheek, brought them away wet, stared at them, then with an indifferent air gathered a wisp of his beard and crammed it against the cut.

"Ugh!" said Swithin. "Here! Take my handkerchief!"

The Hungarian bowed. "Thank you!" he said; "I couldn't think of it! Thank you a thousand times!"

"Take it!" growled Swithin; it seemed to him suddenly of the first importance. He thrust the handkerchief into the Hungarian's hand, and felt a pain in his arm. "There!" he thought, 'I've strained a muscle.'

The Hungarian kept muttering, regardless of passers-by, "Swine! How you threw them over! Two or three cracked heads, anyway—the cowardly swine!"

"Look here!" said Swithin suddenly; "which is my way to the Goldene Alp?"

The Hungarian replied, "But you are coming with me, for a glass of wine?"

Swithin looked at the ground. 'Not if I know it!' he thought.

"Ah!" said the Hungarian with dignity, "you do not wish for my friendship!"

'Touchy beggar!' thought Swithin. "Of course," he stammered, "if you put it in that way—"

The Hungarian bowed, murmuring, "Forgive me!"

They had not gone a dozen steps before a youth, with a beardless face and hollow cheeks, accosted them. "For the love of Christ, gentlemen," he said, "help me!"

"Are you a German?" asked Boleskey.

"Yes," said the youth.

"Then you may rot!"

"Master, look here!" Tearing open his coat, the youth displayed his skin, and a leather belt drawn tight round it. Again Swithin felt that desire to take to his heels. He was filled with horrid forebodings—a sense of perpending intimacy with things such as no gentleman had dealings with.

The Hungarian crossed himself. "Brother," he said to the youth, "come you in!"

Swithin looked at them askance, and followed. By a dim light they groped their way up some stairs into a large room, into which the moon was shining through a window bulging over the street. A lamp burned low; there was a smell of spirits and tobacco, with a faint, peculiar scent, as of rose leaves. In one corner stood a czymbal, in another a great pile of newspapers. On the wall hung some old-fashioned pistols, and a rosary of yellow beads. Everything was tidily arranged, but dusty. Near an open fireplace was a table with the remains of a meal. The ceiling, floor, and walls were all of dark wood. In spite of the strange disharmony, the room had a sort of refinement. The Hungarian took a bottle out of a cupboard and, filling some glasses, handed one to Swithin. Swithin put it gingerly to his nose. 'You never know your luck! Come!' he thought, tilting it slowly into his mouth. It was thick, too sweet, but of a fine flavour.

"Brothers!" said the Hungarian, refilling, "your healths!"

The youth tossed off his wine. And Swithin this time did the same; he pitied this poor devil of a youth now. "Come round to-morrow!" he said, "I'll give you a shirt or two." When the youth was gone,

however, he remembered with relief that he had not given his address.

'Better so,' he reflected. 'A humbug, no doubt.'

"What was that you said to him?" he asked of the Hungarian.

"I said," answered Boleskey, "'You have eaten and drunk; and now you are my enemy!'"

"Quite right!" said Swithin, "quite right! A beggar is every man's enemy."

"You do not understand," the Hungarian replied politely. "While he was a beggar—I, too, have had to beg" (Swithin thought, 'Good God! this is awful!'), "but now that he is no longer hungry, what is he but a German? No Austrian dog soils my floors!"

His nostrils, as it seemed to Swithin, had distended in an unpleasant fashion; and a wholly unnecessary raucousness invaded his voice. "I am an exile—all of my blood are exiles. Those Godless dogs!" Swithin hurriedly assented.

As he spoke, a face peeped in at the door.

"Rozsi!" said the Hungarian. A young girl came in. She was rather short, with a deliciously round figure and a thick plait of hair. She smiled, and showed her even teeth; her little, bright, wide-set grey eyes glanced from one man to the other. Her face was round, too, high in the cheekbones, the colour of wild roses, with brows that had a twist-up at the corners. With a gesture of alarm, she put her hand to her cheek, and called, "Margit!" An older girl appeared, taller, with fine shoulders, large eyes, a pretty mouth, and what Swithin described to himself afterwards as a "pudding" nose. Both girls, with little cooing sounds, began attending to their father's face.

Swithin turned his back to them. His arm pained him.

'This is what comes of interfering,' he thought sulkily; 'I might have had my neck broken!' Suddenly a soft palm was placed in his, two eyes, half-fascinated, half-shy, looked at him; then a voice called, "Rozsi!" the door was slammed, he was alone again with the Hungarian, harassed by a sense of soft disturbance.

"Your daughter's name is Rosy?" he said; "we have it in England—from rose, a flower."

"Rozsi (Rozgi)," the Hungarian replied; "your English is a hard tongue, harder than French, German, or Czechish, harder than Russian, or Roumanian—I know no more."

"What?" said Swithin, "six languages?" Privately he thought, 'He knows how to lie, anyway.'

"If you lived in a country like mine," muttered the Hungarian, "with all men's hands against you! A free people—dying—but not dead!"

Swithin could not imagine what he was talking of. This man's face, with its linen bandage, gloomy eyes, and great black wisps of beard, his fierce mutterings, and hollow cough, were all most unpleasant. He seemed to be suffering from some kind of mental dog-bite. His emotion indeed appeared so indecent, so uncontrolled and open, that its obvious sincerity produced a sort of awe in Swithin. It was like being forced to look into a furnace. Boleskey stopped roaming up and down. "You think it's over?" he said; "I tell you, in the breast of each one of us Magyars there is a hell. What is sweeter than life? What is more sacred than each breath we draw? Ah! my country!" These words were uttered so slowly, with such intense mournfulness, that Swithin's jaw relaxed; he converted the movement to a yawn.

"Tell me," said Boleskey, "what would you do if the French conquered you?"

Swithin smiled. Then suddenly, as though something had hurt him, he grunted, "The 'Froggies'? Let 'em try!"

"Drink!" said Boleskey—"there is nothing like it"; he filled Swithin's glass. "I will tell you my story."

Swithin rose hurriedly. "It's late," he said. "This is good stuff, though; have you much of it?"

"It is the last bottle."

"What?" said Swithin; "and you gave it to a beggar?"

"My name is Boleskey—Stefan," the Hungarian said, raising his head; "of the Komorn Boleskeys." The simplicity of this phrase—as who shall say: What need of further description?—made an impression on

Swithin; he stopped to listen. Boleskey's story went on and on. "There were many abuses," boomed his deep voice, "much wrong done—much cowardice. I could see clouds gathering—rolling over our plains. The Austrian wished to strangle the breath of our mouths—to take from us the shadow of our liberty—the shadow—all we had. Two years ago—the year of '48, when every man and boy answered the great voice—brother, a dog's life!—to use a pen when all of your blood are fighting, but it was decreed for me! My son was killed; my brothers taken—and myself was thrown out like a dog—I had written out my heart, I had written out all the blood that was in my body!" He seemed to tower, a gaunt shadow of a man, with gloomy, flickering eyes staring at the wall.

Swithin rose, and stammered, "Much obliged—very interesting." Boleskey made no effort to detain him, but continued staring at the wall. "Good-night!" said Swithin, and stamped heavily downstairs.

III

When at last Swithin reached the Goldene Alp, he found his brother and friend standing uneasily at the door. Traquair, a prematurely dried-up man, with whiskers and a Scotch accent, remarked, "Ye're airy, man!" Swithin growled something unintelligible, and swung up to bed. He discovered a slight cut on his arm. He was in a savage temper—the elements had conspired to show him things he did not want to see; yet now and then a memory of Rozsi, of her soft palm in his, a sense of having been stroked and flattered, came over him. During breakfast next morning his brother and Traquair announced their intention of moving on. James Forsyte, indeed, remarked that it was no place for a "collector," since all the "old" shops were in the hands of Jews or very grasping persons—he had discovered this at once. Swithin pushed his cup aside. "You may do what you like," he said, "I'm staying here."

James Forsyte replied, tumbling over his own words: "Why! what do you want to stay here for? There's nothing for you to do here—there's nothing to see here, unless you go up the Citadel, an' you won't do that."

Swithin growled, "Who says so?" Having gratified his perversity, he felt in a better temper. He had slung his arm in a silk sash, and accounted for it by saying he had slipped. Later he went out and walked on to the bridge. In the brilliant sunshine spires were glistening against the pearly background of the hills; the town had a clean, joyous air. Swithin glanced at the Citadel and thought, 'Looks a strong place! Shouldn't wonder if it were impregnable!' And this for some occult reason gave him pleasure. It occurred to him suddenly to go and look for the Hungarian's house.

About noon, after a hunt of two hours, he was gazing about him blankly, pale with heat, but more obstinate than ever, when a voice above him called, "Mister!" He looked up and saw Rozsi. She was leaning her round chin on her round hand, gazing down at him with her deepset, clever eyes. When Swithin removed his hat, she clapped her hands. Again he had the sense of being admired, caressed. With a careless air, that sat grotesquely on his tall square person, he walked up to the door; both girls stood in the passage. Swithin felt a confused desire to speak in some foreign tongue. "Maam'selles," he began, "er—bong jour-er, your father—pare, comment?"

"We also speak English," said the elder girl; "will you come in, please?"

Swithin swallowed a misgiving, and entered. The room had a worn appearance by daylight, as if it had always been the nest of tragic or vivid lives. He sat down, and his eyes said: "I am a stranger, but don't try to get the better of me, please—that is impossible." The girls looked at him in silence. Rozsi wore a rather short skirt of black stuff, a white shirt, and across her shoulders an embroidered yoke; her sister was dressed in dark green, with a coral necklace; both girls had their hair in plaits. After a minute Rozsi touched the sleeve of his hurt arm.

"It's nothing!" muttered Swithin.

"Father fought with a chair, but you had no chair," she said in a wondering voice.

He doubled the fist of his sound arm and struck a blow at space. To his amazement she began to laugh. Nettled at this, he put his hand beneath the heavy table and lifted it. Rozsi clapped her hands. "Ah I now I see—how strong you are!" She made him a curtsey and whisked round to the window. He found the quick intelligence of her eyes confusing; sometimes they seemed to look beyond him at something invisible—this, too, confused him. From Margit he learned that they had been two years in England, where their father had made his living by teaching languages; they had now been a year in

Salzburg.

"We wait," suddenly said. Rozsi; and Margit, with a solemn face, repeated, "We wait."

Swithin's eyes swelled a little with his desire to see what they were waiting for. How queer they were, with their eyes that gazed beyond him! He looked at their figures. 'She would pay for dressing,' he thought, and he tried to imagine Rozsi in a skirt with proper flounces, a thin waist, and hair drawn back over her ears. She would pay for dressing, with that supple figure, fluffy hair, and little hands! And instantly his own hands, face, and clothes disturbed him. He got up, examined the pistols on the wall, and felt resentment at the faded, dusty room. 'Smells like a pot-house!' he thought. He sat down again close to Rozsi.

"Do you love to dance?" she asked; "to dance is to live. First you hear the music—how your feet itch! It is wonderful! You begin slow, quick—quicker; you fly—you know nothing—your feet are in the air. It is wonderful!"

A slow flush had mounted into Swithin's face.

"Ah!" continued Rozsi, her eyes fixed on him, "when I am dancing—out there I see the plains—your feet go one—two—three—quick, quick, quick, quicker—you fly."

She stretched herself, a shiver seemed to pass all down her. "Margit! dance!" and, to Swithin's consternation, the two girls—their hands on each other's shoulders—began shuffling their feet and swaying to and fro. Their heads were thrown back, their eyes half-closed; suddenly the step quickened, they swung to one side, then to the other, and began whirling round in front of him. The sudden fragrance of rose leaves enveloped him. Round they flew again. While they were still dancing, Boleskey came into the room. He caught Swithin by both hands.

"Brother, welcome! Ah! your arm is hurt! I do not forget." His yellow face and deep-set eyes expressed a dignified gratitude. "Let me introduce to you my friend Baron Kasteliz."

Swithin bowed to a man with a small forehead, who had appeared softly, and stood with his gloved hands touching his waist. Swithin conceived a sudden aversion for this catlike man. About Boleskey there was that which made contempt impossible—the sense of comradeship begotten in the fight; the man's height; something lofty and savage in his face; and an obscure instinct that it would not pay to show distaste; but this Kasteliz, with his neat jaw, low brow, and velvety, volcanic look, excited his proper English animosity. "Your friends are mine," murmured Kasteliz. He spoke with suavity, and hissed his s's. A long, vibrating twang quavered through the room. Swithin turned and saw Rozsi sitting at the cymbal; the notes rang under the little hammers in her hands, incessant, metallic, rising and falling with that strange melody. Kasteliz had fixed his glowing eyes on her; Boleskey, nodding his head, was staring at the floor; Margit, with a pale face, stood like a statue.

'What can they see in it?' thought Swithin; 'it's not a tune.' He took up his hat. Rozsi saw him and stopped; her lips had parted with a faintly dismayed expression. His sense of personal injury diminished; he even felt a little sorry for her. She jumped up from her seat and twirled round with a pout. An inspiration seized on Swithin. "Come and dine with me," he said to Boleskey, "to-morrow—the Goldene Alp—bring your friend." He felt the eyes of the whole room on him—the Hungarian's fine eyes; Margit's wide glance; the narrow, hot gaze of Kasteliz; and lastly—Rozsi's. A glow of satisfaction ran down his spine. When he emerged into the street he thought gloomily, 'Now I've done it!' And not for some paces did he look round; then, with a forced smile, turned and removed his hat to the faces at the window.

Notwithstanding this moment of gloom, however, he was in an exalted state all day, and at dinner kept looking at his brother and Traquair enigmatically. 'What do they know of life?' he thought; 'they might be here a year and get no farther.' He made jokes, and pinned the menu to the waiter's coat-tails. "I like this place," he said, "I shall spend three weeks here." James, whose lips were on the point of taking in a plum, looked at him uneasily.

IV

On the day of the dinner Swithin suffered a good deal. He reflected gloomily on Boleskey's clothes. He had fixed an early hour—there would be fewer people to see them. When the time approached he

attired himself with a certain neat splendour, and though his arm was still sore, left off the sling....

Nearly three hours afterwards he left the Goldene Alp between his guests. It was sunset, and along the riverbank the houses stood out, unsoftened by the dusk; the streets were full of people hurrying home. Swithin had a hazy vision of empty bottles, of the ground before his feet, and the accessibility of all the world. Dim recollections of the good things he had said, of his brother and Traquair seated in the background eating ordinary meals with inquiring, acid visages, caused perpetual smiles to break out on his face, and he steered himself stubbornly, to prove that he was a better man than either' of his guests. He knew, vaguely, that he was going somewhere with an object; Rozsi's face kept dancing before him, like a promise. Once or twice he gave Kasteliz a glassy stare. Towards Boleskey, on the other hand, he felt quite warm, and recalled with admiration the way he had set his glass down empty, time after time. 'I like to see him take his liquor,' he thought; 'the fellow's a gentleman, after all.' Boleskey strode on, savagely inattentive to everything; and Kasteliz had become more like a cat than ever. It was nearly dark when they reached a narrow street close to the cathedral. They stopped at a door held open by an old woman. The change from the fresh air to a heated corridor, the noise of the door closed behind him, the old woman's anxious glances, sobered Swithin.

"I tell her," said Boleskey, "that I reply for you as for my son."

Swithin was angry. What business had this man to reply for him!

They passed into a large room, crowded with men all women; Swithin noticed that they all looked fit him. He stared at them in turn—they seemed of all classes, some in black coats or silk dresses, others in the clothes of work-people; one man, a cobbler, still wore his leather apron, as if he had rushed there straight from his work. Laying his hand on Swithin's arm, Boleskey evidently began explaining who he was; hands were extended, people beyond reach bowed to him. Swithin acknowledged the greetings with a stiff motion of his head; then seeing other people dropping into seats, he, too, sat down. Some one whispered his name—Margit and Rozsi were just behind him.

"Welcome!" said Margit; but Swithin was looking at Rozsi. Her face was so alive and quivering! 'What's the excitement all about?' he thought. 'How pretty she looks!' She blushed, drew in her hands with a quick tense movement, and gazed again beyond him into the room. 'What is it?' thought Swithin; he had a longing to lean back and kiss her lips. He tried angrily to see what she was seeing in those faces turned all one way.

Boleskey rose to speak. No one moved; not a sound could be heard but the tone of his deep voice. On and on he went, fierce and solemn, and with the rise of his voice, all those faces—fair or swarthy—seemed to be glowing with one and the same feeling. Swithin felt the white heat in those faces—it was not decent! In that whole speech he only understood the one word—"Magyar" which came again and again. He almost dozed off at last. The twang of a cymbal woke him. 'What?' he thought, 'more of that infernal music!' Margit, leaning over him, whispered: "Listen! Racoczy! It is forbidden!" Swithin saw that Rozsi was no longer in her seat; it was she who was striking those forbidden notes. He looked round—everywhere the same unmoving faces, the same entrancement, and fierce stillness. The music sounded muffled, as if it, too, were bursting its heart in silence. Swithin felt within him a touch of panic. Was this a den of tigers? The way these people listened, the ferocity of their stillness, was frightful...! He gripped his chair and broke into a perspiration; was there no chance to get away? 'When it stops,' he thought, 'there'll be a rush!' But there was only a greater silence. It flashed across him that any hostile person coming in then would be torn to pieces. A woman sobbed. The whole thing was beyond words unpleasant. He rose, and edged his way furtively towards the doorway. There was a cry of "Police!" The whole crowd came pressing after him. Swithin would soon have been out, but a little behind he caught sight of Rozsi swept off her feet. Her frightened eyes angered him. 'She doesn't deserve it,' he thought sulkily; 'letting all this loose!' and forced his way back to her. She clung to him, and a fever went stealing through his veins; he butted forward at the crowd, holding her tight. When they were outside he let her go.

"I was afraid," she said.

"Afraid!" muttered Swithin; "I should think so." No longer touching her, he felt his grievance revive.

"But you are so strong," she murmured.

"This is no place for you," growled Swithin, "I'm going to see you home."

"Oh!" cried Rozsi; "but papa and—Margit!"

"That's their look-out!" and he hurried her away.

She slid her hand under his arm; the soft curves of her form brushed him gently, each touch only

augmented his ill-humour. He burned with a perverse rage, as if all the passions in him were simmering and ready to boil over; it was as if a poison were trying to work its way out of him, through the layers of his stolid flesh. He maintained a dogged silence; Rozsi, too, said nothing, but when they reached the door, she drew her hand away.

"You are angry!" she said.

"Angry," muttered Swithin; "no! How d'you make that out?" He had a torturing desire to kiss her.

"Yes, you are angry," she repeated; "I wait here for papa and Margit."

Swithin also waited, wedged against the wall. Once or twice, for his sight was sharp, he saw her steal a look at him, a beseeching look, and hardened his heart with a kind of pleasure. After five minutes Boleskey, Margit, and Kasteliz appeared. Seeing Rozsi they broke into exclamations of relief, and Kasteliz, with a glance at Swithin, put his lips to her hand. Rozsi's look said, "Wouldn't you like to do that?" Swithin turned short on his heel, and walked away.

V

All night he hardly slept, suffering from fever, for the first time in his life. Once he jumped out of bed, lighted a candle, and going to the glass, scrutinised himself long and anxiously. After this he fell asleep, but had frightful dreams. His first thought when he woke was, 'My liver's out of order!' and, thrusting his head into cold water, he dressed hastily and went out. He soon left the house behind. Dew covered everything; blackbirds whistled in the bushes; the air was fresh and sweet. He had not been up so early since he was a boy. Why was he walking through a damp wood at this hour of the morning? Something intolerable and unfamiliar must have sent him out. No fellow in his senses would do such a thing! He came to a dead stop, and began unsteadily to walk back. Regaining the hotel, he went to bed again, and dreamed that in some wild country he was living in a room full of insects, where a housemaid—Rozsi—holding a broom, looked at him with mournful eyes. There seemed an unexplained need for immediate departure; he begged her to forward his things; and shake them out carefully before she put them into the trunk. He understood that the charge for sending would be twenty-two shillings, thought it a great deal, and had the horrors of indecision. "No," he muttered, "pack, and take them myself." The housemaid turned suddenly into a lean creature; and he awoke with a sore feeling in his heart.

His eye fell on his wet boots. The whole thing was scaring, and jumping up, he began to throw his clothes into his trunks. It was twelve o'clock before he went down, and found his brother and Traquair still at the table arranging an itinerary; he surprised them by saying that he too was coming; and without further explanation set to work to eat. James had heard that there were salt-mines in the neighbourhood—his proposal was to start, and halt an hour or so on the road for their inspection; he said: "Everybody'll ask you if you've seen the salt-mines: I shouldn't like to say I hadn't seen the salt-mines. What's the good, they'd say, of your going there if you haven't seen the salt-mines?" He wondered, too, if they need fee the second waiter—an idle chap!

A discussion followed; but Swithin ate on glumly, conscious that his mind was set on larger affairs. Suddenly on the far side of the street Rozsi and her sister passed, with little baskets on their arms. He started up, and at that moment Rozsi looked round—her face was the incarnation of enticement, the chin tilted, the lower lip thrust a little forward, her round neck curving back over her shoulder. Swithin muttered, "Make your own arrangements—leave me out!" and hurried from the room, leaving James beside himself with interest and alarm.

When he reached the street, however, the girls had disappeared. He hailed a carriage. "Drive!" he called to the man, with a flourish of his stick, and as soon as the wheels had begun to clatter on the stones he leaned back, looking sharply to right and left. He soon had to give up thought of finding them, but made the coachman turn round and round again. All day he drove about, far into the country, and kept urging the driver to use greater speed. He was in a strange state of hurry and elation. Finally, he dined at a little country inn; and this gave the measure of his disturbance—the dinner was atrocious.

Returning late in the evening he found a note written by Traquair. "Are you in your senses, man?" it asked; "we have no more time to waste idling about here. If you want to rejoin us, come on to Danielli's Hotel, Venice." Swithin chuckled when he read it, and feeling frightfully tired, went to bed and slept like a log.

VI

Three weeks later he was still in Salzburg, no longer at the Goldene Alp, but in rooms over a shop near the Boleskeys'. He had spent a small fortune in the purchase of flowers. Margit would croon over them, but Rozsi, with a sober "Many tanks!" as if they were her right, would look long at herself in the glass, and pin one into her hair. Swithin ceased to wonder; he ceased to wonder at anything they did. One evening he found Boleskey deep in conversation with a pale, dishevelled-looking person.

"Our friend Mr. Forsyte—Count D....," said Boleskey.

Swithin experienced a faint, unavoidable emotion; but looking at the Count's trousers, he thought: 'Doesn't look much like one!' And with an ironic bow to the silent girls, he turned, and took his hat. But when he had reached the bottom of the dark stairs he heard footsteps. Rozsi came running down, looked out at the door, and put her hands up to her breast as if disappointed; suddenly with a quick glance round she saw him. Swithin caught her arm. She slipped away, and her face seemed to bubble with defiance or laughter; she ran up three steps, stopped, looked at him across her shoulder, and fled on up the stairs. Swithin went out bewildered and annoyed.

'What was she going to say to me?' he kept thinking. During these three weeks he had asked himself all sorts of questions: whether he were being made a fool of; whether she were in love with him; what he was doing there, and sometimes at night, with all his candles burning as if he wanted light, the breeze blowing on him through the window, his cigar, half-smoked, in his hand, he sat, an hour or more, staring at the wall. 'Enough of this!' he thought every morning. Twice he packed fully—once he ordered his travelling carriage, but countermanded it the following day. What definitely he hoped, intended, resolved, he could not have said. He was always thinking of Rozsi, he could not read the riddle in her face—she held him in a vice, notwithstanding that everything about her threatened the very fetishes of his existence. And Boleskey! Whenever he looked at him he thought, 'If he were only clean?' and mechanically fingered his own well-tied cravat. To talk with the fellow, too, was like being forced to look at things which had no place in the light of day. Freedom, equality, self-sacrifice!

'Why can't he settle down at some business,' he thought, 'instead of all this talk?' Boleskey's sudden diffidences, self-depreciation, fits of despair, irritated him. "Morbid beggar!" he would mutter; "thank God I haven't a thin skin." And proud too! Extraordinary! An impecunious fellow like that! One evening, moreover, Boleskey had returned home drunk. Swithin had hustled him away into his bedroom, helped him to undress, and stayed until he was asleep. 'Too much of a good thing!' he thought, 'before his own daughters, too!' It was after this that he ordered his travelling carriage. The other occasion on which he packed was one evening, when not only Boleskey, but Rozsi herself had picked chicken bones with her fingers.

Often in the mornings he would go to the Mirabell Garden to smoke his cigar; there, in stolid contemplation of the statues—rows of half-heroic men carrying off half-distressful females—he would spend an hour pleasantly, his hat tilted to keep the sun off his nose. The day after Rozsi had fled from him on the stairs, he came there as usual. It was a morning of blue sky and sunlight glowing on the old prim garden, on its yew-trees, and serio-comic statues, and walls covered with apricots and plums. When Swithin approached his usual seat, who should be sitting there but Rozsi—"Good-morning," he stammered; "you knew this was my seat then?"

Rozsi looked at the ground. "Yes," she answered.

Swithin felt bewildered. "Do you know," he said, "you treat me very funnily?"

To his surprise Rozsi put her little soft hand down and touched his; then, without a word, sprang up and rushed away. It took him a minute to recover. There were people present; he did not like to run, but overtook her on the bridge, and slipped her hand beneath his arm.

"You shouldn't have done that," he said; "you shouldn't have run away from me, you know."

Rozsi laughed. Swithin withdrew his arm; a desire to shake her seized him. He walked some way before he said, "Will you have the goodness to tell me what you came to that seat for?"

Rozsi flashed a look at him. "To-morrow is the fete," she answered.

Swithin muttered, "Is that all?"

"If you do not take us, we cannot go."

"Suppose I refuse," he said sullenly, "there are plenty of others."

Rozsi bent her head, scurrying along. "No," she murmured, "if you do not go—I do not wish."

Swithin drew her hand back within his arm. How round and soft it was! He tried to see her face. When she was nearly home he said goodbye, not wishing, for some dark reason, to be seen with her. He watched till she had disappeared; then slowly retraced his steps to the Mirabell Garden. When he came to where she had been sitting, he slowly lighted his cigar, and for a long time after it was smoked out remained there in the silent presence of the statues.

VII

A crowd of people wandered round the booths, and Swithin found himself obliged to give the girls his arms. 'Like a little Cockney clerk!' he thought. His indignation passed unnoticed; they talked, they laughed, each sight and sound in all the hurly-burly seemed to go straight into their hearts. He eyed them ironically—their eager voices, and little coos of sympathy seemed to him vulgar. In the thick of the crowd he slipped his arm out of Margit's, but, just as he thought that he was free, the unwelcome hand slid up again. He tried again, but again Margit reappeared, serene, and full of pleasant humour; and his failure this time appeared to him in a comic light. But when Rozsi leaned across him, the glow of her round cheek, her curving lip, the inscrutable grey gleam of her eyes, sent a thrill of longing through him. He was obliged to stand by while they parleyed with a gipsy, whose matted locks and skinny hands inspired him with a not unwarranted disgust. "Folly!" he muttered, as Rozsi held out her palm. The old woman mumbled, and shot a malignant look at him. Rozsi drew back her hand, and crossed herself. 'Folly!' Swithin thought again; and seizing the girls' arms, he hurried them away.

"What did the old hag say?" he asked.

Rozsi shook her head.

"You don't mean that you believe?"

Her eyes were full of tears. "The gipsies are wise," she murmured.

"Come, what did she tell you?"

This time Rozsi looked hurriedly round, and slipped away into the crowd. After a hunt they found her, and Swithin, who was scared, growled: "You shouldn't do such things—it's not respectable."

On higher ground, in the centre of a clear space, a military band was playing. For the privilege of entering this charmed circle Swithin paid three kronen, choosing naturally the best seats. He ordered wine, too, watching Rozsi out of the corner of his eye as he poured it out. The protecting tenderness of yesterday was all lost in this medley. It was every man for himself, after all! The colour had deepened again in her cheeks, she laughed, pouting her lips. Suddenly she put her glass aside. "Thank you, very much," she said, "it is enough!"

Margit, whose pretty mouth was all smiles, cried, "Lieber Gott! is it not good-life?" It was not a question Swithin could undertake to answer. The band began to play a waltz. "Now they will dance. Lieber Gott! and are the lights not wonderful?" Lamps were flickering beneath the trees like a swarm of fireflies. There was a hum as from a gigantic beehive. Passers-by lifted their faces, then vanished into the crowd; Rozsi stood gazing at them spellbound, as if their very going and coming were a delight.

The space was soon full of whirling couples. Rozsi's head began to beat time. "O Margit!" she whispered.

Swithin's face had assumed a solemn, uneasy expression. A man raising his hat, offered his arm to Margit. She glanced back across her shoulder to reassure Swithin. "It is a friend," she said.

Swithin looked at Rozsi—her eyes were bright, her lips tremulous. He slipped his hand along the table and touched her fingers. Then she flashed a look at him—appeal, reproach, tenderness, all were expressed in it. Was she expecting him to dance? Did she want to mix with the rift-raff there; wish him to make an exhibition of himself in this hurly-burly? A voice said, "Good-evening!" Before them stood Kasteliz, in a dark coat tightly buttoned at the waist.

"You are not dancing, Rozsi Kozsanony?" (Miss Rozsi). "Let me, then, have the pleasure." He held out his arm. Swithin stared in front of him. In the very act of going she gave him a look that said as plain as

words: "Will you not?" But for answer he turned his eyes away, and when he looked again she was gone. He paid the score and made his way into the crowd. But as he went she danced by close to him, all flushed and panting. She hung back as if to stop him, and he caught the glistening of tears. Then he lost sight of her again. To be deserted the first minute he was alone with her, and for that jackanapes with the small head and the volcanic glances! It was too much! And suddenly it occurred to him that she was alone with Kasteliz—alone at night, and far from home. 'Well,' he thought, 'what do I care?' and shouldered his way on through the crowd. It served him right for mixing with such people here. He left the fair, but the further he went, the more he nursed his rage, the more heinous seemed her offence, the sharper grew his jealousy. "A beggarly baron!" was his thought.

A figure came alongside—it was Boleskey. One look showed Swithin his condition. Drunk again! This was the last straw!

Unfortunately Boleskey had recognised him. He seemed violently excited. "Where—where are my daughters?" he began.

Swithin brushed past, but Boleskey caught his arm. "Listen—brother!" he said; "news of my country! After to-morrow...."

"Keep it to yourself!" growled Swithin, wrenching his arm free. He went straight to his lodgings, and, lying on the hard sofa of his unlighted sitting-room, gave himself up to bitter thoughts. But in spite of all his anger, Rozsi's supply-moving figure, with its pouting lips, and roguish appealing eyes, still haunted him.

VIII

Next morning there was not a carriage to be had, and Swithin was compelled to put off his departure till the morrow. The day was grey and misty; he wandered about with the strained, inquiring look of a lost dog in his eyes.

Late in the afternoon he went back to his lodgings. In a corner of the sitting-room stood Rozsi. The thrill of triumph, the sense of appeasement, the emotion, that seized on him, crept through to his lips in a faint smile. Rozsi made no sound, her face was hidden by her hands. And this silence of hers weighed on Swithin. She was forcing him to break it. What was behind her hands? His own face was visible! Why didn't she speak? Why was she here? Alone? That was not right surely.

Suddenly Rozsi dropped her hands; her flushed face was quivering—it seemed as though a word, a sign, even, might bring a burst of tears.

He walked over to the window. 'I must give her time!' he thought; then seized by unreasoning terror at this silence, spun round, and caught her by the arms. Rozsi held back from him, swayed forward and buried her face on his breast....

Half an hour later Swithin was pacing up and down his room. The scent of rose leaves had not yet died away. A glove lay on the floor; he picked it up, and for a long time stood weighing it in his hand. All sorts of confused thoughts and feelings haunted him. It was the purest and least selfish moment of his life, this moment after she had yielded. But that pure gratitude at her fiery, simple abnegation did not last; it was followed by a petty sense of triumph, and by uneasiness. He was still weighing the little glove in his hand, when he had another visitor. It was Kasteliz.

"What can I do for you?" Swithin asked ironically.

The Hungarian seemed suffering from excitement. Why had Swithin left his charges the night before? What excuse had he to make? What sort of conduct did he call this?

Swithin, very like a bull-dog at that moment, answered: What business was it of his?

The business of a gentleman! What right had the Englishman to pursue a young girl?

"Pursue?" said Swithin; "you've been spying, then?"

"Spying—I—Kasteliz—Maurus Johann—an insult!"

"Insult!" sneered Swithin; "d'you mean to tell me you weren't in the street just now?"

Kasteliz answered with a hiss, "If you do not leave the city I will make you, with my sword—do you understand?"

"And if you do not leave my room I will throw you out of the window!"

For some minutes Kasteliz spoke in pure Hungarian while Swithin waited, with a forced smile and a fixed look in his eye. He did not understand Hungarian.

"If you are still in the city to-morrow evening," said Kasteliz at last in English, "I will spit you in the street."

Swithin turned to the window and watched his visitor's retiring back with a queer mixture of amusement, stubbornness, and anxiety. 'Well,' he thought, 'I suppose he'll run me through!' The thought was unpleasant; and it kept recurring, but it only served to harden his determination. His head was busy with plans for seeing Rozsi; his blood on fire with the kisses she had given him.

IX

Swithin was long in deciding to go forth next day. He had made up his mind not to go to Rozsi till five o'clock. 'Mustn't make myself too cheap,' he thought. It was a little past that hour when he at last sallied out, and with a beating heart walked towards Boleskey's. He looked up at the window, more than half expecting to see Rozsi there; but she was not, and he noticed with faint surprise that the window was not open; the plants, too, outside, looked singularly arid. He knocked. No one came. He beat a fierce tattoo. At last the door was opened by a man with a reddish beard, and one of those sardonic faces only to be seen on shoemakers of Teutonic origin.

"What do you want, making all this noise?" he asked in German.

Swithin pointed up the stairs. The man grinned, and shook his head.

"I want to go up," said Swithin.

The cobbler shrugged his shoulders, and Swithin rushed upstairs. The rooms were empty. The furniture remained, but all signs of life were gone. One of his own bouquets, faded, stood in a glass; the ashes of a fire were barely cold; little scraps of paper strewn the hearth; already the room smelt musty. He went into the bedrooms, and with a feeling of stupefaction stood staring at the girls' beds, side by side against the wall. A bit of ribbon caught his eye; he picked it up and put it in his pocket—it was a piece of evidence that she had once existed. By the mirror some pins were dropped about; a little powder had been spilled. He looked at his own disquiet face and thought, 'I've been cheated!'

The shoemaker's voice aroused him. "Tausend Teufel! Eilen Sie, nur! Zeit is Geld! Kann nich' Langer warten!" Slowly he descended.

"Where have they gone?" asked Swithin painfully. "A pound for every English word you speak. A pound!" and he made an O with his fingers.

The corners of the shoemaker's lips curled. "Geld! Mf! Eilen Sie, nur!"

But in Swithin a sullen anger had begun to burn. "If you don't tell me," he said, "it'll be the worse for you."

"Sind ein komischer Kerl!" remarked the shoemaker. "Hier ist meine Frau!"

A battered-looking woman came hurrying down the passage, calling out in German, "Don't let him go!"

With a snarling sound the shoemaker turned his back, and shambled off.

The woman furtively thrust a letter into Swithin's hand, and furtively waited.

The letter was from Rozsi.

"Forgive me"—it ran—"that I leave you and do not say goodbye. To-day our father had the call from

our dear Father-town so long awaited. In two hours we are ready. I pray to the Virgin to keep you ever safe, and that you do not quite forget me.—Your unforgetting good friend, ROZSI"

When Swithin read it his first sensation was that of a man sinking in a bog; then his obstinacy stiffened. 'I won't be done,' he thought. Taking out a sovereign he tried to make the woman comprehend that she could earn it, by telling him where they had gone. He got her finally to write the words out in his pocket-book, gave her the sovereign, and hurried to the Goldene Alp, where there was a waiter who spoke English. The translation given him was this:

"At three o'clock they start in a carriage on the road to Linz—they have bad horses—the Herr also rides a white horse."

Swithin at once hailed a carriage and started at full gallop on the road to Linz. Outside the Mirabell Garden he caught sight of Kasteliz and grinned at him. 'I've sold him anyway,' he thought; 'for all their talk, they're no good, these foreigners!'

His spirits rose, but soon fell again. What chance had he of catching them? They had three hours' start! Still, the roads were heavy from the rain of the last two nights—they had luggage and bad horses; his own were good, his driver bribed—he might overtake them by ten o'clock! But did he want to? What a fool he had been not to bring his luggage; he would then have had a respectable position. What a brute he would look without a change of shirt, or anything to shave with! He saw himself with horror, all bristly, and in soiled linen. People would think him mad. 'I've given myself away,' flashed across him, 'what the devil can I say to them?' and he stared sullenly at the driver's back. He read Rozsi's letter again; it had a scent of her. And in the growing darkness, jolted by the swinging of the carriage, he suffered tortures from his prudence, tortures from his passion.

It grew colder and dark. He turned the collar of his coat up to his ears. He had visions of Piccadilly. This wild-goose chase appeared suddenly a dangerous, unfathomable business. Lights, fellowship, security! 'Never again!' he brooded; 'why won't they let me alone?' But it was not clear whether by 'they' he meant the conventions, the Boleskeys, his passions, or those haunting memories of Rozsi. If he had only had a bag with him! What was he going to say? What was he going to get by this? He received no answer to these questions. The darkness itself was less obscure than his sensations. From time to time he took out his watch. At each village the driver made inquiries. It was past ten when he stopped the carriage with a jerk. The stars were bright as steel, and by the side of the road a reedy lake showed in the moonlight. Swithin shivered. A man on a horse had halted in the centre of the road. "Drive on!" called Swithin, with a stolid face. It turned out to be Boleskey, who, on a gaunt white horse, looked like some winged creature. He stood where he could bar the progress of the carriage, holding out a pistol.

'Theatrical beggar!' thought Swithin, with a nervous smile. He made no sign of recognition. Slowly Boleskey brought his lean horse up to the carriage. When he saw who was within he showed astonishment and joy.

"You?" he cried, slapping his hand on his attenuated thigh, and leaning over till his beard touched Swithin. "You have come? You followed us?"

"It seems so," Swithin grunted out.

"You throw in your lot with us. Is it possible? You—you are a knight-errant then!"

"Good God!" said Swithin. Boleskey, flogging his dejected steed, cantered forward in the moonlight. He came back, bringing an old cloak, which he insisted on wrapping round Swithin's shoulders. He handed him, too, a capacious flask.

"How cold you look!" he said. "Wonderful! Wonderful! you English!" His grateful eyes never left Swithin for a moment. They had come up to the heels of the other carriage now, but Swithin, hunched in the cloak, did not try to see what was in front of him. To the bottom of his soul he resented the Hungarian's gratitude. He remarked at last, with wasted irony:

"You're in a hurry, it seems!"

"If we had wings," Boleskey answered, "we would use them."

"Wings!" muttered Swithin thickly; "legs are good enough for me."

X

Arrived at the inn where they were to pass the night, Swithin waited, hoping to get into the house without a "scene," but when at last he alighted the girls were in the doorway, and Margit greeted him with an admiring murmur, in which, however, he seemed to detect irony. Rozsi, pale and tremulous, with a half-scared look, gave him her hand, and, quickly withdrawing it, shrank behind her sister. When they had gone up to their room Swithin sought Boleskey. His spirits had risen remarkably. "Tell the landlord to get us supper," he said; "we'll crack a bottle to our luck." He hurried on the landlord's preparations. The window of the room faced a wood, so near that he could almost touch the trees. The scent from the pines blew in on him. He turned away from that scented darkness, and began to draw the corks of winebottles. The sound seemed to conjure up Boleskey. He came in, splashed all over, smelling slightly of stables; soon after, Margit appeared, fresh and serene, but Rozsi did not come.

"Where is your sister?" Swithin said. Rozsi, it seemed, was tired. "It will do her good to eat," said Swithin. And Boleskey, murmuring, "She must drink to our country," went out to summon her, Margit followed him, while Swithin cut up a chicken. They came back without her. She had "a megrim of the spirit."

Swithin's face fell. "Look here!" he said, "I'll go and try. Don't wait for me."

"Yes," answered Boleskey, sinking mournfully into a chair; "try, brother, try-by all means, try."

Swithin walked down the corridor with an odd, sweet, sinking sensation in his chest; and tapped on Rozsi's door. In a minute, she peeped forth, with her hair loose, and wondering eyes.

"Rozsi," he stammered, "what makes you afraid of me, now?"

She stared at him, but did not answer.

"Why won't you come?"

Still she did not speak, but suddenly stretched out to him her bare arm. Swithin pressed his face to it. With a shiver, she whispered above him, "I will come," and gently shut the door.

Swithin stealthily retraced his steps, and paused a minute outside the sitting-room to regain his self-control.

The sight of Boleskey with a bottle in his hand steadied him.

"She is coming," he said. And very soon she did come, her thick hair roughly twisted in a plait.

Swithin sat between the girls; but did not talk, for he was really hungry. Boleskey too was silent, plunged in gloom; Rozsi was dumb; Margit alone chattered.

"You will come to our Father-town? We shall have things to show you. Rozsi, what things we will show him!" Rozsi, with a little appealing movement of her hands, repeated, "What things we will show you!" She seemed suddenly to find her voice, and with glowing cheeks, mouths full, and eyes bright as squirrels', they chattered reminiscences of the "dear Father-town," of "dear friends," of the "dear home."

'A poor place!' Swithin could not help thinking. This enthusiasm seemed to him common; but he was careful to assume a look of interest, feeding on the glances flashed at him from Rozsi's restless eyes.

As the wine waned Boleskey grew more and more gloomy, but now and then a sort of gleaming flicker passed over his face. He rose to his feet at last.

"Let us not forget," he said, "that we go perhaps to ruin, to death; in the face of all this we go, because our country needs—in this there is no credit, neither to me nor to you, my daughters; but for this noble Englishman, what shall we say? Give thanks to God for a great heart. He comes—not for country, not for fame, not for money, but to help the weak and the oppressed. Let us drink, then, to him; let us drink again and again to heroic Forsyte!" In the midst of the dead silence, Swithin caught the look of suppliant mockery in Rozsi's eyes. He glanced at the Hungarian. Was he laughing at him? But Boleskey, after drinking up his wine, had sunk again into his seat; and there suddenly, to the surprise of all, he began to snore. Margit rose and, bending over him like a mother, murmured: "He is tired—it is the ride!" She raised him in her strong arms, and leaning on her shoulder Boleskey staggered from the room. Swithin and Rozsi were left alone. He slid his hand towards her hand that lay

so close, on the rough table-cloth. It seemed to await his touch. Something gave way in him, and words came welling up; for the moment he forgot himself, forgot everything but that he was near her. Her head dropped on his shoulder, he breathed the perfume of her hair. "Good-night!" she whispered, and the whisper was like a kiss; yet before he could stop her she was gone. Her footsteps died away in the passage, but Swithin sat gazing intently at a single bright drop of spilt wine quivering on the table's edge. In that moment she, in her helplessness and emotion, was all in all to him—his life nothing; all the real things—his conventions, convictions, training, and himself—all seemed remote, behind a mist of passion and strange chivalry. Carefully with a bit of bread he soaked up the bright drop; and suddenly he thought: 'This is tremendous!' For a long time he stood there in the window, close to the dark pine-trees.

XI

In the early morning he awoke, full of the discomfort of this strange place and the medley of his dreams. Lying, with his nose peeping over the quilt, he was visited by a horrible suspicion. When he could bear it no longer, he started up in bed. What if it were all a plot to get him to marry her? The thought was treacherous, and inspired in him a faint disgust. Still, she might be ignorant of it! But was she so innocent? What innocent girl would have come to his room like that? What innocent girl? Her father, who pretended to be caring only for his country? It was not probable that any man was such a fool; it was all part of the game—a scheming rascal! Kasteliz, too—his threats! They intended him to marry her! And the horrid idea was strengthened by his reverence for marriage. It was the proper, the respectable condition; he was genuinely afraid of this other sort of liaison—it was somehow too primitive! And yet the thought of that marriage made his blood run cold. Considering that she had already yielded, it would be all the more monstrous! With the cold, fatal clearness of the morning light he now for the first time saw his position in its full bearings. And, like a fish pulled out of water, he gasped at what was disclosed. Sullen resentment against this attempt to force him settled deep into his soul.

He seated himself on the bed, holding his head in his hands, solemnly thinking out what such marriage meant. In the first place it meant ridicule, in the next place ridicule, in the last place ridicule. She would eat chicken bones with her fingers—those fingers his lips still burned to kiss. She would dance wildly with other men. She would talk of her "dear Father-town," and all the time her eyes would look beyond him, some where or other into some d—d place he knew nothing of. He sprang up and paced the room, and for a moment thought he would go mad.

They meant him to marry her! Even she—she meant him to marry her! Her tantalising inscrutability; her sudden little tendernesses; her quick laughter; her swift, burning kisses; even the movements of her hands; her tears—all were evidence against her. Not one of these things that Nature made her do counted on her side, but how they fanned his longing, his desire, and distress! He went to the glass and tried to part his hair with his fingers, but being rather fine, it fell into lank streaks. There was no comfort to be got from it. He drew his muddy boots on. Suddenly he thought: 'If I could see her alone, I could arrive at some arrangement!' Then, with a sense of stupefaction, he made the discovery that no arrangement could possibly be made that would not be dangerous, even desperate. He seized his hat, and, like a rabbit that has been fired at, bolted from the room. He plodded along amongst the damp woods with his head down, and resentment and dismay in his heart. But, as the sun rose, and the air grew sweet with pine scent, he slowly regained a sort of equability. After all, she had already yielded; it was not as if...! And the tramp of his own footsteps lulled him into feeling that it would all come right.

'Look at the thing practically,' he thought. The faster he walked the firmer became his conviction that he could still see it through. He took out his watch—it was past seven—he began to hasten back. In the yard of the inn his driver was harnessing the horses; Swithin went up to him.

"Who told you to put them in?" he asked.

The driver answered, "Der Herr."

Swithin turned away. 'In ten minutes,' he thought, 'I shall be in that carriage again, with this going on in my head! Driving away from England, from all I'm used to-driving to-what? Could he face it? Could he face all that he had been through that morning; face it day after day, night after night? Looking up, he saw Rozsi at her open window gazing down at him; never had she looked sweeter, more roguish. An inexplicable terror seized on him; he ran across the yard and jumped into his carriage. "To Salzburg!"

he cried; "drive on!" And rattling out of the yard without a look behind, he flung a sovereign at the hostler. Flying back along the road faster even than he had come, with pale face, and eyes blank and staring like a pug-dog's, Swithin spoke no single word; nor, till he had reached the door of his lodgings, did he suffer the driver to draw rein.

XII

Towards evening, five days later, Swithin, yellow and travel-worn, was ferried in a gondola to Danielli's Hotel. His brother, who was on the steps, looked at him with an apprehensive curiosity.

"Why, it's you!" he mumbled. "So you've got here safe?"

"Safe?" growled Swithin.

James replied, "I thought you wouldn't leave your friends!" Then, with a jerk of suspicion, "You haven't brought your friends?"

"What friends?" growled Swithin.

James changed the subject. "You don't look the thing," he said.

"Really!" muttered Swithin; "what's that to you?"

He appeared at dinner that night, but fell asleep over his coffee. Neither Traquair nor James asked him any further question, nor did they allude to Salzburg; and during the four days which concluded the stay in Venice Swithin went about with his head up, but his eyes half-closed like a dazed man. Only after they had taken ship at Genoa did he show signs of any healthy interest in life, when, finding that a man on board was perpetually strumming, he locked the piano up and pitched the key into the sea.

That winter in London he behaved much as usual, but fits of moroseness would seize on him, during which he was not pleasant to approach.

One evening when he was walking with a friend in Piccadilly, a girl coming from a side-street accosted him in German. Swithin, after staring at her in silence for some seconds, handed her a five-pound note, to the great amazement of his friend; nor could he himself have explained the meaning of this freak of generosity.

Of Rozsi he never heard again....

This, then, was the substance of what he remembered as he lay ill in bed. Stretching out his hand he pressed the bell. His valet appeared, crossing the room like a cat; a Swede, who had been with Swithin many years; a little man with a dried face and fierce moustache, morbidly sharp nerves, and a queer devotion to his master.

Swithin made a feeble gesture. "Adolf," he said, "I'm very bad."

"Yes, sir!"

"Why do you stand there like a cow?" asked Swithin; "can't you see I'm very bad?"

"Yes, sir!" The valet's face twitched as though it masked the dance of obscure emotions.

"I shall feel better after dinner. What time is it?"

"Five o'clock."

"I thought it was more. The afternoons are very long."

"Yes, sir!" Swithin sighed, as though he had expected the consolation of denial.

"Very likely I shall have a nap. Bring up hot water at half-past six and shave me before dinner."

The valet moved towards the door. Swithin raised himself.

"What did Mr. James say to you?"

"He said you ought to have another doctor; two doctors, he said, better than one. He said, also, he would look in again on his way 'home.'"

Swithin grunted, "Umph! What else did he say?"

"He said you didn't take care of yourself."

Swithin glared.

"Has anybody else been to see me?"

The valet turned away his eyes. "Mrs. Thomas Forsyte came last Monday fortnight."

"How long have I been ill?"

"Five weeks on Saturday."

"Do you think I'm very bad?"

Adolf's face was covered suddenly with crow's-feet. "You have no business to ask me question like that! I am not paid, sir, to answer question like that."

Swithin said faintly: "You're a peppery fool! Open a bottle of champagne!"

Adolf took a bottle of champagne—from a cupboard and held nippers to it. He fixed his eyes on Swithin. "The doctor said—"

"Open the bottle!"

"It is not—"

"Open the bottle—or I give you warning."

Adolf removed the cork. He wiped a glass elaborately, filled it, and bore it scrupulously to the bedside. Suddenly twirling his moustaches, he wrung his hands, and burst out: "It is poison."

Swithin grinned faintly. "You foreign fool!" he said. "Get out!"

The valet vanished.

'He forgot himself!' thought Swithin. Slowly he raised the glass, slowly put it back, and sank gasping on his pillows. Almost at once he fell asleep.

He dreamed that he was at his club, sitting after dinner in the crowded smoking-room, with its bright walls and trefoils of light. It was there that he sat every evening, patient, solemn, lonely, and sometimes fell asleep, his square, pale old face nodding to one side. He dreamed that he was gazing at the picture over the fireplace, of an old statesman with a high collar, supremely finished face, and sceptical eyebrows—the picture, smooth, and reticent as sealing-wax, of one who seemed for ever exhaling the narrow wisdom of final judgments. All round him, his fellow members were chattering. Only he himself, the old sick member, was silent. If fellows only knew what it was like to sit by yourself and feel ill all the time! What they were saying he had heard a hundred times. They were talking of investments, of cigars, horses, actresses, machinery. What was that? A foreign patent for cleaning boilers? There was no such thing; boilers couldn't be cleaned, any fool knew that! If an Englishman couldn't clean a boiler, no foreigner could clean one. He appealed to the old statesman's eyes. But for once those eyes seemed hesitating, blurred, wanting in finality. They vanished. In their place were Rozsi's little deep-set eyes, with their wide and far-off look; and as he gazed they seemed to grow bright as steel, and to speak to him. Slowly the whole face grew to be there, floating on the dark background of the picture; it was pink, aloof, unfathomable, enticing, with its fluffy hair and quick lips, just as he had last seen it. "Are you looking for something?" she seemed to say: "I could show you."

"I have everything safe enough," answered Swithin, and in his sleep he groaned.

He felt the touch of fingers on his forehead. 'I'm dreaming,' he thought in his dream.

She had vanished; and far away, from behind the picture, came a sound of footsteps.

Aloud, in his sleep, Swithin muttered: "I've missed it."

Again he heard the rustling of those light footsteps, and close in his ear a sound, like a sob. He awoke; the sob was his own. Great drops of perspiration stood on his forehead. 'What is it?' he thought; 'what have I lost?' Slowly his mind travelled over his investments; he could not think of any single one

that was unsafe. What was it, then, that he had lost? Struggling on his pillows, he clutched the wine-glass. His lips touched the wine. "This isn't the "Heidseck"! he thought angrily, and before the reality of that displeasure all the dim vision passed away. But as he bent to drink, something snapped, and, with a sigh, Swithin Forsyte died above the bubbles....

When James Forsyte came in again on his way home, the valet, trembling took his hat and stick.

"How's your master?"

"My master is dead, sir!"

"Dead! He can't be! I left him safe an hour ago."

On the bed Swithin's body was doubled like a sack; his hand still grasped the glass.

James Forsyte paused. "Swithin!" he said, and with his hand to his ear he waited for an answer; but none came, and slowly in the glass a last bubble rose and burst.

December 1900.

To

MY SISTER MABEL EDITH REYNOLDS

THE SILENCE

I

In a car of the Naples express a mining expert was diving into a bag for papers. The strong sunlight showed the fine wrinkles on his brown face and the shabbiness of his short, rough beard. A newspaper cutting slipped from his fingers; he picked it up, thinking: 'How the dickens did that get in here?' It was from a colonial print of three years back; and he sat staring, as if in that forlorn slip of yellow paper he had encountered some ghost from his past.

These were the words he read: "We hope that the setback to civilisation, the check to commerce and development, in this promising centre of our colony may be but temporary; and that capital may again come to the rescue. Where one man was successful, others should surely not fail? We are convinced that it only needs...." And the last words: "For what can be sadder than to see the forest spreading its lengthening shadows, like symbols of defeat, over the untenanted dwellings of men; and where was once the merry chatter of human voices, to pass by in the silence...."

On an afternoon, thirteen years before, he had been in the city of London, at one of those emporiums where mining experts perch, before fresh flights, like sea-gulls on some favourite rock. A clerk said to him: "Mr. Scorrier, they are asking for you downstairs—Mr. Hemmings of the New Colliery Company."

Scorrier took up the speaking tube. "Is that you, Mr. Scorrier? I hope you are very well, sir, I am—Hemmings—I am—coming up."

In two minutes he appeared, Christopher Hemmings, secretary of the New Colliery Company, known in the City—behind his back—as "Down-by-the-starn" Hemmings. He grasped Scorrier's hand—the gesture was deferential, yet distinguished. Too handsome, too capable, too important, his figure, the cut of his iron-grey beard, and his intrusively fine eyes, conveyed a continual courteous invitation to inspect their infallibilities. He stood, like a City "Atlas," with his legs apart, his coat-tails gathered in his hands, a whole globe of financial matters deftly balanced on his nose. "Look at me!" he seemed to say. "It's heavy, but how easily I carry it. Not the man to let it down, Sir!"

"I hope I see you well, Mr. Scorrier," he began. "I have come round about our mine. There is a question of a fresh field being opened up—between ourselves, not before it's wanted. I find it difficult to get my Board to take a comprehensive view. In short, the question is: Are you prepared to go out for us, and report on it? The fees will be all right." His left eye closed. "Things have been very—er—dicky; we are going to change our superintendent. I have got little Pippin—you know little Pippin?"

Scorrier murmured, with a feeling of vague resentment: "Oh yes. He's not a mining man!"

Hemmings replied: "We think that he will do." 'Do you?' thought Scorrier; 'that's good of you!'

He had not altogether shaken off a worship he had felt for Pippin—"King" Pippin he was always called, when they had been boys at the Camborne Grammar-school. "King" Pippin! the boy with the bright colour, very bright hair, bright, subtle, elusive eyes, broad shoulders, little stoop in the neck, and a way of moving it quickly like a bird; the boy who was always at the top of everything, and held his head as if looking for something further to be the top of. He remembered how one day "King" Pippin had said to him in his soft way, "Young Scorrie, I'll do your sums for you"; and in answer to his dubious, "Is that all right?" had replied, "Of course—I don't want you to get behind that beast Blake, he's not a Cornishman" (the beast Blake was an Irishman not yet twelve). He remembered, too, an occasion when "King" Pippin with two other boys fought six louts and got a licking, and how Pippin sat for half an hour afterwards, all bloody, his head in his hands, rocking to and fro, and weeping tears of mortification; and how the next day he had sneaked off by himself, and, attacking the same gang, got frightfully mauled a second time.

Thinking of these things he answered curtly: "When shall I start?"

"Down-by-the-starn" Hemmings replied with a sort of fearful sprightliness: "There's a good fellow! I will send instructions; so glad to see you well." Conferring on Scorrier a look—fine to the verge of vulgarity—he withdrew. Scorrier remained, seated; heavy with insignificance and vague oppression, as if he had drunk a tumbler of sweet port.

A week later, in company with Pippin, he was on board a liner.

The "King" Pippin of his school-days was now a man of forty-four. He awakened in Scorrier the uncertain wonder with which men look backward at their uncomplicated teens; and staggering up and down the decks in the long Atlantic roll, he would steal glances at his companion, as if he expected to find out from them something about himself. Pippin had still "King" Pippin's bright, fine hair, and dazzling streaks in his short beard; he had still a bright colour and suave voice, and what there were of wrinkles suggested only subtleties of humour and ironic sympathy. From the first, and apparently without negotiation, he had his seat at the captain's table, to which on the second day Scorrier too found himself translated, and had to sit, as he expressed it ruefully, "among the big-wigs."

During the voyage only one incident impressed itself on Scorrier's memory, and that for a disconcerting reason. In the fore-castle were the usual complement of emigrants. One evening, leaning across the rail to watch them, he felt a touch on his arm; and, looking round, saw Pippin's face and beard quivering in the lamplight. "Poor people!" he said. The idea flashed on Scorrier that he was like some fine wire sound-recording instrument.

'Suppose he were to snap!' he thought. Impelled to justify this fancy, he blurted out: "You're a nervous chap. The way you look at those poor devils!"

Pippin hustled him along the deck. "Come, come, you took me off my guard," he murmured, with a sly, gentle smile, "that's not fair."

He found it a continual source of wonder that Pippin, at his age, should cut himself adrift from the associations and security of London life to begin a new career in a new country with dubious prospect of success. 'I always heard he was doing well all round,' he thought; 'thinks he'll better himself, perhaps. He's a true Cornishman.'

The morning of arrival at the mines was grey and cheerless; a cloud of smoke, beaten down by drizzle, clung above the forest; the wooden houses straggled dismally in the unkempt semblance of a street, against a background of endless, silent woods. An air of blank discouragement brooded over everything; cranes jutted idly over empty trucks; the long jetty oozed black slime; miners with listless faces stood in the rain; dogs fought under their very legs. On the way to the hotel they met no one busy or serene except a Chinese who was polishing a dish-cover.

The late superintendent, a cowed man, regaled them at lunch with his forebodings; his attitude toward the situation was like the food, which was greasy and uninspiring. Alone together once more, the two newcomers eyed each other sadly.

"Oh dear!" sighed Pippin. "We must change all this, Scorrier; it will never do to go back beaten. I shall not go back beaten; you will have to carry me on my shield;" and slyly: "Too heavy, eh? Poor fellow!" Then for a long time he was silent, moving his lips as if adding up the cost. Suddenly he sighed, and grasping Scorrier's arm, said: "Dull, aren't I? What will you do? Put me in your report, 'New

Superintendent—sad, dull dog—not a word to throw at a cat!" And as if the new task were too much for him, he sank back in thought. The last words he said to Scorrier that night were: "Very silent here. It's hard to believe one's here for life. But I feel I am. Mustn't be a coward, though!" and brushing his forehead, as though to clear from it a cobweb of faint thoughts, he hurried off.

Scorrier stayed on the veranda smoking. The rain had ceased, a few stars were burning dimly; even above the squalor of the township the scent of the forests, the interminable forests, brooded. There sprang into his mind the memory of a picture from one of his children's fairy books—the picture of a little bearded man on tiptoe, with poised head and a great sword, slashing at the castle of a giant. It reminded him of Pippin. And suddenly, even to Scorrier—whose existence was one long encounter with strange places—the unseen presence of those woods, their heavy, healthy scent, the little sounds, like squeaks from tiny toys, issuing out of the gloomy silence, seemed intolerable, to be shunned, from the mere instinct of self-preservation. He thought of the evening he had spent in the bosom of "Down-by-the-starn" Hemmings' family, receiving his last instructions—the security of that suburban villa, its discouraging gentility; the superior acidity of the Miss Hemmings; the noble names of large contractors, of company promoters, of a peer, dragged with the lightness of gun-carriages across the conversation; the autocracy of Hemmings, rasped up here and there, by some domestic contradiction. It was all so nice and safe—as if the whole thing had been fastened to an anchor sunk beneath the pink cabbages of the drawing-room carpet! Hemmings, seeing him off the premises, had said with secrecy: "Little Pippin will have a good thing. We shall make his salary L——. He'll be a great man—quite a king. Ha-ha!"

Scorrier shook the ashes from his pipe. 'Salary!' he thought, straining his ears; 'I wouldn't take the place for five thousand pounds a year. And yet it's a fine country,' and with ironic violence he repeated, 'a dashed fine country!'

Ten days later, having finished his report on the new mine, he stood on the jetty waiting to go aboard the steamer for home.

"God bless you!" said Pippin. "Tell them they needn't be afraid; and sometimes when you're at home think of me, eh?"

Scorrier, scrambling on board, had a confused memory of tears in his eyes, and a convulsive handshake.

II

It was eight years before the wheels of life carried Scorrier back to that disenchanted spot, and this time not on the business of the New Colliery Company. He went for another company with a mine some thirty miles away. Before starting, however, he visited Hemmings. The secretary was surrounded by pigeon-holes and finer than ever; Scorrier blinked in the full radiance of his courtesy. A little man with eyebrows full of questions, and a grizzled beard, was seated in an arm-chair by the fire.

"You know Mr. Booker," said Hemmings—"one of my directors. This is Mr. Scorrier, sir—who went out for us."

These sentences were murmured in a way suggestive of their uncommon value. The director uncrossed his legs, and bowed. Scorrier also bowed, and Hemmings, leaning back, slowly developed the full resources of his waistcoat.

"So you are going out again, Scorrier, for the other side? I tell Mr. Scorrier, sir, that he is going out for the enemy. Don't find them a mine as good as you found us, there's a good man."

The little director asked explosively: "See our last dividend? Twenty per cent; eh, what?"

Hemmings moved a finger, as if reproving his director. "I will not disguise from you," he murmured, "that there is friction between us and—the enemy; you know our position too well—just a little too well, eh? 'A nod's as good as a wink.'"

His diplomatic eyes flattered Scorrier, who passed a hand over his brow—and said: "Of course."

"Pippin doesn't hit it off with them. Between ourselves, he's a leetle too big for his boots. You know what it is when a man in his position gets a sudden rise!"

Scorrier caught himself searching on the floor for a sight of Hemmings' boots; he raised his eyes guiltily. The secretary continued: "We don't hear from him quite as often as we should like, in fact."

To his own surprise Scorrier murmured: "It's a silent place!"

The secretary smiled. "Very good! Mr. Scorrier says, sir, it's a silent place; ha-ha! I call that very good!" But suddenly a secret irritation seemed to bubble in him; he burst forth almost violently: "He's no business to let it affect him; now, has he? I put it to you, Mr. Scorrier, I put it to you, sir!"

But Scorrier made no reply, and soon after took his leave: he had been asked to convey a friendly hint to Pippin that more frequent letters would be welcomed. Standing in the shadow of the Royal Exchange, waiting to thread his way across, he thought: 'So you must have noise, must you—you've got some here, and to spare....'

On his arrival in the new world he wired to Pippin asking if he might stay with him on the way up country, and received the answer: "Be sure and come."

A week later he arrived (there was now a railway) and found Pippin waiting for him in a phaeton. Scorrier would not have known the place again; there was a glitter over everything, as if some one had touched it with a wand. The tracks had given place to roads, running firm, straight, and black between the trees under brilliant sunshine; the wooden houses were all painted; out in the gleaming harbour amongst the green of islands lay three steamers, each with a fleet of busy boats; and here and there a tiny yacht floated, like a sea-bird on the water. Pippin drove his long-tailed horses furiously; his eyes brimmed with subtle kindness, as if according Scorrier a continual welcome. During the two days of his stay Scorrier never lost that sense of glamour. He had every opportunity for observing the grip Pippin had over everything. The wooden doors and walls of his bungalow kept out no sounds. He listened to interviews between his host and all kinds and conditions of men. The voices of the visitors would rise at first—angry, discontented, matter-of-fact, with nasal twang, or guttural drawl; then would come the soft patter of the superintendent's feet crossing and recrossing the room. Then a pause, the sound of hard breathing, and quick questions—the visitor's voice again, again the patter, and Pippin's ingratiating but decisive murmurs. Presently out would come the visitor with an expression on his face which Scorrier soon began to know by heart, a kind of pleased, puzzled, helpless look, which seemed to say, "I've been done, I know—I'll give it to myself when I'm round the corner."

Pippin was full of wistful questions about "home." He wanted to talk of music, pictures, plays, of how London looked, what new streets there were, and, above all, whether Scorrier had been lately in the West Country. He talked of getting leave next winter, asked whether Scorrier thought they would "put up with him at home"; then, with the agitation which had alarmed Scorrier before, he added: "Ah! but I'm not fit for home now. One gets spoiled; it's big and silent here. What should I go back to? I don't seem to realise."

Scorrier thought of Hemmings. "'Tis a bit cramped there, certainly," he muttered.

Pippin went on as if divining his thoughts. "I suppose our friend Hemmings would call me foolish; he's above the little weaknesses of imagination, eh? Yes; it's silent here. Sometimes in the evening I would give my head for somebody to talk to—Hemmings would never give his head for anything, I think. But all the same, I couldn't face them at home. Spoiled!" And slyly he murmured: "What would the Board say if they could hear that?"

Scorrier blurted out: "To tell you the truth, they complain a little of not hearing from you."

Pippin put out a hand, as if to push something away. "Let them try the life here!" he broke out; "it's like sitting on a live volcano—what with our friends, 'the enemy,' over there; the men; the American competition. I keep it going, Scorrier, but at what a cost—at what a cost!"

"But surely—letters?"

Pippin only answered: "I try—I try!"

Scorrier felt with remorse and wonder that he had spoken the truth. The following day he left for his inspection, and while in the camp of "the enemy" much was the talk he heard of Pippin.

"Why!" said his host, the superintendent, a little man with a face somewhat like an owl's, "d'you know the name they've given him down in the capital—'the King'—good, eh? He's made them 'sit up' all along this coast. I like him well enough—good—hearted man, shocking nervous; but my people down there can't stand him at any price. Sir, he runs this colony. You'd think butter wouldn't melt in that mouth of his; but he always gets his way; that's what riles 'em so; that and the success he's making of his mine. It puzzles me; you'd think he'd only be too glad of a quiet life, a man with his nerves. But no, he's never

happy unless he's fighting, something where he's got a chance to score a victory. I won't say he likes it, but, by Jove, it seems he's got to do it. Now that's funny! I'll tell you one thing, though shouldn't be a bit surprised if he broke down some day; and I'll tell you another," he added darkly, "he's sailing very near the wind, with those large contracts that he makes. I wouldn't care to take his risks. Just let them have a strike, or something that shuts them down for a spell—and mark my words, sir—it'll be all up with them. But," he concluded confidentially, "I wish I had his hold on the men; it's a great thing in this country. Not like home, where you can go round a corner and get another gang. You have to make the best you can out of the lot you have; you won't, get another man for love or money without you ship him a few hundred miles." And with a frown he waved his arm over the forests to indicate the barrenness of the land.

Scorrier finished his inspection and went on a shooting trip into the forest. His host met him on his return. "Just look at this!" he said, holding out a telegram. "Awful, isn't it?" His face expressed a profound commiseration, almost ludicrously mixed with the ashamed contentment that men experience at the misfortunes of an enemy.

The telegram, dated the day before, ran thus "Frightful explosion New Colliery this morning, great loss of life feared."

Scorrier had the bewildered thought: 'Pippin will want me now.'

He took leave of his host, who called after him: "You'd better wait for a steamer! It's a beastly drive!"

Scorrier shook his head. All night, jolting along a rough track cut through the forest, he thought of Pippin. The other miseries of this calamity at present left him cold; he barely thought of the smothered men; but Pippin's struggle, his lonely struggle with this hydra-headed monster, touched him very nearly. He fell asleep and dreamed of watching Pippin slowly strangled by a snake; the agonised, kindly, ironic face peeping out between two gleaming coils was so horribly real, that he awoke. It was the moment before dawn: pitch-black branches barred the sky; with every jolt of the wheels the gleams from the lamps danced, fantastic and intrusive, round ferns and tree-stems, into the cold heart of the forest. For an hour or more Scorrier tried to feign sleep, and hide from the stillness, and overmastering gloom of these great woods. Then softly a whisper of noises stole forth, a stir of light, and the whole slow radiance of the morning glory. But it brought no warmth; and Scorrier wrapped himself closer in his cloak, feeling as though old age had touched him.

Close on noon he reached the township. Glamour seemed still to hover over it. He drove on to the mine. The winding-engine was turning, the pulley at the top of the head-gear whizzing round; nothing looked unusual. 'Some mistake!' he thought. He drove to the mine buildings, alighted, and climbed to the shaft head. Instead of the usual rumbling of the trolleys, the rattle of coal discharged over the screens, there was silence. Close by, Pippin himself was standing, smirched with dirt. The cage, coming swift and silent from below, shot open its doors with a sharp rattle. Scorrier bent forward to look. There lay a dead man, with a smile on his face.

"How many?" he whispered.

Pippin answered: "Eighty-four brought up—forty-seven still below," and entered the man's name in a pocket-book.

An older man was taken out next; he too was smiling—there had been vouchsafed to him, it seemed, a taste of more than earthly joy. The sight of those strange smiles affected Scorrier more than all the anguish or despair he had seen scored on the faces of other dead men. He asked an old miner how long Pippin had been at work.

"Thirty hours. Yesterday he wer' below; we had to nigh carry mun up at last. He's for goin' down again, but the chaps won't lower mun;" the old man gave a sigh. "I'm waiting for my boy to come up, I am."

Scorrier waited too—there was fascination about those dead, smiling faces. The rescuing of these men who would never again breathe went on and on. Scorrier grew sleepy in the sun. The old miner woke him, saying: "Rummy stuff this here chokedamp; see, they all dies drunk!" The very next to be brought up was the chief engineer. Scorrier had known him quite well, one of those Scotsmen who are born at the age of forty and remain so all their lives. His face—the only one that wore no smile—seemed grieving that duty had deprived it of that last luxury. With wide eyes and drawn lips he had died protesting.

Late in the afternoon the old miner touched Scorrier's arm, and said: "There he is—there's my boy!" And he departed slowly, wheeling the body on a trolley.

As the sun set, the gang below came up. No further search was possible till the fumes had cleared. Scorrier heard one man say: "There's some we'll never get; they've had sure burial"

Another answered him: "'Tis a gude enough bag for me!" They passed him, the whites of their eyes gleaming out of faces black as ink.

Pippin drove him home at a furious pace, not uttering a single word. As they turned into the main street, a young woman starting out before the horses obliged Pippin to pull up. The glance he bent on Scorrier was ludicrously prescient of suffering. The woman asked for her husband. Several times they were stopped thus by women asking for their husbands or sons. "This is what I have to go through," Pippin whispered.

When they had eaten, he said to Scorrier: "It was kind of you to come and stand by me! They take me for a god, poor creature that I am. But shall I ever get the men down again? Their nerve's shaken. I wish I were one of those poor lads, to die with a smile like that!"

Scorrier felt the futility of his presence. On Pippin alone must be the heat and burden. Would he stand under it, or would the whole thing come crashing to the ground? He urged him again and again to rest, but Pippin only gave him one of his queer smiles. "You don't know how strong I am!" he said.

IV

He himself slept heavily; and, waking at dawn, went down. Pippin was still at his desk; his pen had dropped; he was asleep. The ink was wet; Scorrier's eye caught the opening words:

"GENTLEMEN,—Since this happened I have not slept...."

He stole away again with a sense of indignation that no one could be dragged in to share that fight. The London Board-room rose before his mind. He imagined the portentous gravity of Hemmings; his face and voice and manner conveying the impression that he alone could save the situation; the six directors, all men of commonsense and certainly humane, seated behind large turret-shaped inkpots; the concern and irritation in their voices, asking how it could have happened; their comments: "An awful thing!" "I suppose Pippin is doing the best he can!" "Wire him on no account to leave the mine idle!" "Poor devils!" "A fund? Of course, what ought we to give?" He had a strong conviction that nothing of all this would disturb the commonsense with which they would go home and eat their mutton. A good thing too; the less it was taken to heart the better! But Scorrier felt angry. The fight was so unfair! A fellow all nerves—with not a soul to help him! Well, it was his own lookout! He had chosen to centre it all in himself, to make himself its very soul. If he gave way now, the ship must go down! By a thin thread, Scorrier's hero-worship still held. 'Man against nature,' he thought, 'I back the man.' The struggle in which he was so powerless to give aid, became intensely personal to him, as if he had engaged his own good faith therein.

The next day they went down again to the pit-head; and Scorrier himself descended. The fumes had almost cleared, but there were some places which would never be reached. At the end of the day all but four bodies had been recovered. "In the day o' judgment," a miner said, "they four'll come out of here." Those unclaimed bodies haunted Scorrier. He came on sentences of writing, where men waiting to be suffocated had written down their feelings. In one place, the hour, the word "Sleepy," and a signature. In another, "A. F.—done for." When he came up at last Pippin was still waiting, pocket-book in hand; they again departed at a furious pace.

Two days later Scorrier, visiting the shaft, found its neighbourhood deserted—not a living thing of any sort was there except one Chinaman poking his stick into the rubbish. Pippin was away down the coast engaging an engineer; and on his return, Scorrier had not the heart to tell him of the desertion. He was spared the effort, for Pippin said: "Don't be afraid—you've got bad news? The men have gone on strike."

Scorrier sighed. "Lock, stock, and barrel"

"I thought so—see what I have here!" He put before Scorrier a telegram:

"At all costs keep working—fatal to stop—manage this somehow.
—HEMMINGS."

Breathing quickly, he added: "As if I didn't know! 'Manage this somehow'—a little hard!"

"What's to be done?" asked Scorrier.

"You see I am commanded!" Pippin answered bitterly. "And they're quite right; we must keep working—our contracts! Now I'm down—not a soul will spare me!"

The miners' meeting was held the following day on the outskirts of the town. Pippin had cleared the place to make a public recreation-ground—a sort of feather in the company's cap; it was now to be the spot whereon should be decided the question of the company's life or death.

The sky to the west was crossed by a single line of cloud like a bar of beaten gold; tree shadows crept towards the groups of men; the evening savour, that strong fragrance of the forest, sweetened the air. The miners stood all round amongst the burnt tree-stumps, cowed and sullen. They looked incapable of movement or expression. It was this dumb paralysis that frightened Scorrier. He watched Pippin speaking from his phaeton, the butt of all those sullen, restless eyes. Would he last out? Would the wires hold? It was like the finish of a race. He caught a baffled look on Pippin's face, as if he despaired of piercing that terrible paralysis. The men's eyes had begun to wander. 'He's lost his hold,' thought Scorrier; 'it's all up!'

A miner close beside him muttered: "Look out!"

Pippin was leaning forward, his voice had risen, the words fell like a whiplash on the faces of the crowd: "You shan't throw me over; do you think I'll give up all I've done for you? I'll make you the first power in the colony! Are you turning tail at the first shot? You're a set of cowards, my lads!"

Each man round Scorrier was listening with a different motion of the hands—one rubbed them, one clenched them, another moved his closed fist, as if stabbing some one in the back. A grisly-bearded, beetle-browed, twinkling-eyed old Cornishman muttered: "A'hm not troublin' about that." It seemed almost as if Pippin's object was to get the men to kill him; they had gathered closer, crouching for a rush. Suddenly Pippin's voice dropped to a whisper: "I'm disgraced Men, are you going back on me?"

The old miner next Scorrier called out suddenly: "Anny that's Cornishmen here to stand by the superintendent?" A group drew together, and with murmurs and gesticulation the meeting broke up.

In the evening a deputation came to visit Pippin; and all night long their voices and the superintendent's footsteps could be heard. In the morning, Pippin went early to the mine. Before supper the deputation came again; and again Scorrier had to listen hour after hour to the sound of voices and footsteps till he fell asleep. Just before dawn he was awakened by a light. Pippin stood at his bedside. "The men go down to-morrow," he said: "What did I tell you? Carry me home on my shield, eh?"

In a week the mine was in full work.

V

Two years later, Scorrier heard once more of Pippin. A note from Hemmings reached him asking if he could make it convenient to attend their Board meeting the following Thursday. He arrived rather before the appointed time. The secretary received him, and, in answer to inquiry, said: "Thank you, we are doing well—between ourselves, we are doing very well."

"And Pippin?"

The secretary frowned. "Ah, Pippin! We asked you to come on his account. Pippin is giving us a lot of trouble. We have not had a single line from him for just two years!" He spoke with such a sense of personal grievance that Scorrier felt quite sorry for him. "Not a single line," said Hemmings, "since that explosion—you were there at the time, I remember! It makes it very awkward; I call it personal to me."

"But how—" Scorrier began.

"We get—telegrams. He writes to no one, not even to his family. And why? Just tell me why? We hear of him; he's a great nob out there. Nothing's done in the colony without his finger being in the pie. He turned out the last Government because they wouldn't grant us an extension for our railway—shows he

can't be a fool. Besides, look at our balance-sheet!"

It turned out that the question on which Scorrier's opinion was desired was, whether Hemmings should be sent out to see what was the matter with the superintendent. During the discussion which ensued, he was an unwilling listener to strictures on Pippin's silence. "The explosion," he muttered at last, "a very trying time!"

Mr. Booker pounced on him. "A very trying time! So it was—to all of us. But what excuse is that—now, Mr. Scorrier, what excuse is that?"

Scorrier was obliged to admit that it was none.

"Business is business—eh, what?"

Scorrier, gazing round that neat Board-room, nodded. A deaf director, who had not spoken for some months, said with sudden fierceness: "It's disgraceful!" He was obviously letting off the fume of long-unuttered disapprovals. One perfectly neat, benevolent old fellow, however, who had kept his hat on, and had a single vice—that of coming to the Board-room with a brown paper parcel tied up with string—murmured: "We must make all allowances," and started an anecdote about his youth. He was gently called to order by his secretary. Scorrier was asked for his opinion. He looked at Hemmings. "My importance is concerned," was written all over the secretary's face. Moved by an impulse of loyalty to Pippin, Scorrier answered, as if it were all settled: "Well, let me know when you are starting, Hemmings—I should like the trip myself."

As he was going out, the chairman, old Jolyon Forsyte, with a grave, twinkling look at Hemmings, took him aside. "Glad to hear you say that about going too, Mr. Scorrier; we must be careful—Pippin's such a good fellow, and so sensitive; and our friend there—a bit heavy in the hand, um?"

Scorrier did in fact go out with Hemmings. The secretary was sea-sick, and his prostration, dignified but noisy, remained a memory for ever; it was sonorous and fine—the prostration of superiority; and the way in which he spoke of it, taking casual acquaintances into the caves of his experience, was truly interesting.

Pippin came down to the capital to escort them, provided for their comforts as if they had been royalty, and had a special train to take them to the mines.

He was a little stouter, brighter of colour, greyer of beard, more nervous perhaps in voice and breathing. His manner to Hemmings was full of flattering courtesy; but his sly, ironical glances played on the secretary's armour like a fountain on a hippopotamus. To Scorrier, however, he could not show enough affection:

The first evening, when Hemmings had gone to his room, he jumped up like a boy out of school. "So I'm going to get a wiggling," he said; "I suppose I deserve it; but if you knew—if you only knew...! Out here they've nicknamed me 'the King'—they say I rule the colony. It's myself that I can't rule"; and with a sudden burst of passion such as Scorrier had never seen in him: "Why did they send this man here? What can he know about the things that I've been through?" In a moment he calmed down again. "There! this is very stupid; worrying you like this!" and with a long, kind look into Scorrier's face, he hustled him off to bed.

Pippin did not break out again, though fire seemed to smoulder behind the bars of his courteous irony. Intuition of danger had evidently smitten Hemmings, for he made no allusion to the object of his visit. There were moments when Scorrier's common-sense sided with Hemmings—these were moments when the secretary was not present.

'After all,' he told himself, 'it's a little thing to ask—one letter a month. I never heard of such a case.' It was wonderful indeed how they stood it! It showed how much they valued Pippin! What was the matter with him? What was the nature of his trouble? One glimpse Scorrier had when even Hemmings, as he phrased it, received "quite a turn." It was during a drive back from the most outlying of the company's trial mines, eight miles through the forest. The track led through a belt of trees blackened by a forest fire. Pippin was driving. The secretary seated beside him wore an expression of faint alarm, such as Pippin's driving was warranted to evoke from almost any face. The sky had darkened strangely, but pale streaks of light, coming from one knew not where, filtered through the trees. No breath was stirring; the wheels and horses' hoofs made no sound on the deep fern mould. All around, the burnt tree-trunks, leafless and jagged, rose like withered giants, the passages between them were black, the sky black, and black the silence. No one spoke, and literally the only sound was Pippin's breathing. What was it that was so terrifying? Scorrier had a feeling of entombment; that nobody could help him; the feeling of being face to face with Nature; a sensation as if all the comfort and security of words and rules had dropped away from him. And-nothing happened. They reached home and dined.

During dinner he had again that old remembrance of a little man chopping at a castle with his sword. It came at a moment when Pippin had raised his hand with the carving-knife grasped in it to answer some remark of Hemmings' about the future of the company. The optimism in his uplifted chin, the strenuous energy in his whispering voice, gave Scorrier a more vivid glimpse of Pippin's nature than he had perhaps ever had before. This new country, where nothing but himself could help a man—that was the castle! No wonder Pippin was impatient of control, no wonder he was out of hand, no wonder he was silent—chopping away at that! And suddenly he thought: 'Yes, and all the time one knows, Nature must beat him in the end!'

That very evening Hemmings delivered himself of his reproof. He had sat unusually silent; Scorrier, indeed, had thought him a little drunk, so portentous was his gravity; suddenly, however he rose. It was hard on a man, he said, in his position, with a Board (he spoke as of a family of small children), to be kept so short of information. He was actually compelled to use his imagination to answer the shareholders' questions. This was painful and humiliating; he had never heard of any secretary having to use his imagination! He went further—it was insulting! He had grown grey in the service of the company. Mr. Scorrier would bear him out when he said he had a position to maintain—his name in the City was a high one; and, by George! he was going to keep it a high one; he would allow nobody to drag it in the dust—that ought clearly to be understood. His directors felt they were being treated like children; however that might be, it was absurd to suppose that he (Hemmings) could be treated like a child...! The secretary paused; his eyes seemed to bully the room.

"If there were no London office," murmured Pippin, "the shareholders would get the same dividends."

Hemmings gasped. "Come!" he said, "this is monstrous!"

"What help did I get from London when I first came here? What help have I ever had?"

Hemmings swayed, recovered, and with a forced smile replied that, if this were true, he had been standing on his head for years; he did not believe the attitude possible for such a length of time; personally he would have thought that he too had had a little something to say to the company's position, but no matter...! His irony was crushing.... It was possible that Mr. Pippin hoped to reverse the existing laws of the universe with regard to limited companies; he would merely say that he must not begin with a company of which he (Hemmings) happened to be secretary. Mr. Scorrier had hinted at excuses; for his part, with the best intentions in the world, he had great difficulty in seeing them. He would go further—he did not see them! The explosion...! Pippin shrank so visibly that Hemmings seemed troubled by a suspicion that he had gone too far.

"We know," he said, "that it was trying for you...."

"Trying!" "burst out Pippin.

"No one can say," Hemmings resumed soothingly, "that we have not dealt liberally." Pippin made a motion of the head. "We think we have a good superintendent; I go further, an excellent superintendent. What I say is: Let's be pleasant! I am not making an unreasonable request!" He ended on a fitting note of jocularly; and, as if by consent, all three withdrew, each to his own room, without another word.

In the course of the next day Pippin said to Scorrier: "It seems I have been very wicked. I must try to do better"; and with a touch of bitter humour, "They are kind enough to think me a good superintendent, you see! After that I must try hard."

Scorrier broke in: "No man could have done so much for them;" and, carried away by an impulse to put things absolutely straight, went on "But, after all, a letter now and then—what does it amount to?"

Pippin besieged him with a subtle glance. "You too?" he said—"I must indeed have been a wicked man!" and turned away.

Scorrier felt as if he had been guilty of brutality; sorry for Pippin, angry with himself; angry with Pippin, sorry for himself. He earnestly desired to see the back of Hemmings. The secretary gratified the wish a few days later, departing by steamer with ponderous expressions of regard and the assurance of his goodwill.

Pippin gave vent to no outburst of relief, maintaining a courteous silence, making only one allusion to his late guest, in answer to a remark of Scorrier:

"Ah! don't tempt me! mustn't speak behind his back."

A month passed, and Scorrier still—remained Pippin's guest. As each mail-day approached he experienced a queer suppressed excitement. On one of these occasions Pippin had withdrawn to his room; and when Scorrier went to fetch him to dinner he found him with his head leaning on his hands, amid a perfect fitter of torn paper. He looked up at Scorrier.

"I can't do it," he said, "I feel such a hypocrite; I can't put myself into leading-strings again. Why should I ask these people, when I've settled everything already? If it were a vital matter they wouldn't want to hear—they'd simply wire, 'Manage this somehow!'"

Scorrier said nothing, but thought privately 'This is a mad business!' What was a letter? Why make a fuss about a letter? The approach of mail-day seemed like a nightmare to the superintendent; he became feverishly nervous like a man under a spell; and, when the mail had gone, behaved like a respited criminal. And this had been going on two years! Ever since that explosion. Why, it was monomania!

One day, a month after Hemmings' departure, Pippin rose early from dinner; his face was flushed, he had been drinking wine. "I won't be beaten this time," he said, as he passed Scorrier. The latter could hear him writing in the next room, and looked in presently to say that he was going for a walk. Pippin gave him a kindly nod.

It was a cool, still evening: innumerable stars swarmed in clusters over the forests, forming bright hieroglyphics in the middle heavens, showering over the dark harbour into the sea. Scorrier walked slowly. A weight seemed lifted from his mind, so entangled had he become in that uncanny silence. At last Pippin had broken through the spell. To get that, letter sent would be the laying of a phantom, the rehabilitation of commonsense. Now that this silence was in the throes of being broken, he felt curiously tender towards Pippin, without the hero-worship of old days, but with a queer protective feeling. After all, he was different from other men. In spite of his feverish, tenacious energy, in spite of his ironic humour, there was something of the woman in him! And as for this silence, this horror of control—all geniuses had "bees in their bonnets," and Pippin was a genius in his way!

He looked back at the town. Brilliantly lighted it had a thriving air—difficult to believe of the place he remembered ten years back; the sounds of drinking, gambling, laughter, and dancing floated to his ears. 'Quite a city!' he thought.

With this queer elation on him he walked slowly back along the street, forgetting that he was simply an oldish mining expert, with a look of shabbiness, such as clings to men who are always travelling, as if their "nap" were for ever being rubbed off. And he thought of Pippin, creator of this glory.

He had passed the boundaries of the town, and had entered the forest. A feeling of discouragement instantly beset him. The scents and silence, after the festive cries and odours of the town, were undefinably oppressive. Notwithstanding, he walked a long time, saying to himself that he would give the letter every chance. At last, when he thought that Pippin must have finished, he went back to the house.

Pippin had finished. His forehead rested on the table, his arms hung at his sides; he was stone-dead! His face wore a smile, and by his side lay an empty laudanum bottle.

The letter, closely, beautifully written, lay before him. It was a fine document, clear, masterly, detailed, nothing slurred, nothing concealed, nothing omitted; a complete review of the company's position; it ended with the words: "Your humble servant, RICHARD PIPPIN."

Scorrier took possession of it. He dimly understood that with those last words a wire had snapped. The border-line had been overpassed; the point reached where that sense of proportion, which alone makes life possible, is lost. He was certain that at the moment of his death Pippin could have discussed bimetallism, or any intellectual problem, except the one problem of his own heart; that, for some mysterious reason, had been too much for him. His death had been the work of a moment of supreme revolt—a single instant of madness on a single subject! He found on the blotting-paper, scrawled across the impress of the signature, "Can't stand it!" The completion of that letter had been to him a struggle ungraspable by Scorrier. Slavery? Defeat? A violation of Nature? The death of justice? It were better not to think of it! Pippin could have told—but he would never speak again. Nature, at whom, unaided, he had dealt so many blows, had taken her revenge...!

In the night Scorrier stole down, and, with an ashamed face, cut off a lock of the fine grey hair. 'His daughter might like it!' he thought...

He waited till Pippin was buried, then, with the letter in his pocket, started for England.

He arrived at Liverpool on a Thursday morning, and travelling to town, drove straight to the office of

the company. The Board were sitting. Pippin's successor was already being interviewed. He passed out as Scorrier came in, a middle-aged man with a large, red beard, and a foxy, compromising face. He also was a Cornishman. Scorrier wished him luck with a very heavy heart.

As an unsentimental man, who had a proper horror of emotion, whose living depended on his good sense, to look back on that interview with the Board was painful. It had excited in him a rage of which he was now heartily ashamed. Old Jolyon Forsyte, the chairman, was not there for once, guessing perhaps that the Board's view of this death would be too small for him; and little Mr. Booker sat in his place. Every one had risen, shaken hands with Scorrier, and expressed themselves indebted for his coming. Scorrier placed Pippin's letter on the table, and gravely the secretary read out to his Board the last words of their superintendent. When he had finished, a director said, "That's not the letter of a madman!" Another answered: "Mad as a hatter; nobody but a madman would have thrown up such a post." Scorrier suddenly withdrew. He heard Hemmings calling after him. "Aren't you well, Mr. Scorrier? aren't you well, sir?"

He shouted back: "Quite sane, I thank you...."

The Naples "express" rolled round the outskirts of the town. Vesuvius shone in the sun, uncrowned by smoke. But even as Scorrier looked, a white puff went soaring up. It was the footnote to his memories.

February 1901.

THE END.

SAINTS PROGRESS

By John Galsworthy

PART I

I

Such a day made glad the heart. All the flags of July were waving; the sun and the poppies flaming; white butterflies spiring up and twining, and the bees busy on the snapdragons. The lime-trees were coming into flower. Tall white lilies in the garden beds already rivaled the delphiniums; the York and Lancaster roses were full-blown round their golden hearts. There was a gentle breeze, and a swish and stir and hum rose and fell above the head of Edward Pierson, coming back from his lonely ramble over Tintern Abbey. He had arrived at Kestrel, his brother Robert's home on the bank of the Wye only that morning, having stayed at Bath on the way down; and now he had got his face burnt in that parti-coloured way peculiar to the faces of those who have been too long in London. As he came along the narrow, rather overgrown avenue, the sound of a waltz thrummed out on a piano fell on his ears, and he smiled, for music was the greatest passion he had. His dark grizzled hair was pushed back off his hot brow, which he fanned with his straw hat. Though not broad, that brow was the broadest part of a narrow oval face whose length was increased by a short, dark, pointed beard—a visage such as Vandyk might have painted, grave and gentle, but for its bright grey eyes, cinder-lashed and crow's-footed, and its strange look of not seeing what was before it. He walked quickly, though he was tired and hot; tall, upright, and thin, in a grey parsonical suit, on whose black kerseymere vest a little gold cross dangled.

Above his brother's house, whose sloping garden ran down to the railway line and river, a large room had been built out apart. Pierson stood where the avenue forked, enjoying the sound of the waltz, and the cool whipping of the breeze in the sycamores and birches. A man of fifty, with a sense of beauty, born and bred in the country, suffers fearfully from nostalgia during a long unbroken spell of London; so that his afternoon in the old Abbey had been almost holy. He had let his senses sink into the sunlit

greenery of the towering woods opposite; he had watched the spiders and the little shining beetles, the flycatchers, and sparrows in the ivy; touched the mosses and the lichens; looked the speedwells in the eye; dreamed of he knew not what. A hawk had been wheeling up there above the woods, and he had been up there with it in the blue. He had taken a real spiritual bath, and washed the dusty fret of London off his soul.

For a year he had been working his parish single-handed—no joke—for his curate had gone for a chaplain; and this was his first real holiday since the war began, two years ago; his first visit, too, to his brother's home. He looked down at the garden, and up at the trees of the avenue. Bob had found a perfect retreat after his quarter of a century in Ceylon. Dear old Bob! And he smiled at the thought of his elder brother, whose burnt face and fierce grey whiskers somewhat recalled a Bengal tiger; the kindest fellow that ever breathed! Yes, he had found a perfect home for Thirza and himself. And Edward Pierson sighed. He too had once had a perfect home, a perfect wife; the wound of whose death, fifteen years ago, still bled a little in his heart. Their two daughters, Gratian and Noel, had not "taken after" her; Gratian was like his own mother, and Noel's fair hair and big grey eyes always reminded him of his cousin Leila, who—poor thing!—had made that sad mess of her life, and now, he had heard, was singing for a living, in South Africa. Ah! What a pretty girl she had been!

Drawn by that eternal waltz tune he reached the doorway of the music-room. A chintz curtain hung there, and to the sound of feet slipping on polished boards, he saw his daughter Noel waltzing slowly in the arms of a young officer in khaki: Round and round they went, circling, backing, moving sideways with curious steps which seemed to have come in recently, for he did not recognise them. At the piano sat his niece Eve, with a teasing smile on her rosy face. But it was at his young daughter that Edward Pierson looked. Her eyes were half-closed, her cheeks rather pale, and her fair hair, cut quite short, curled into her slim round neck. Quite cool she seemed, though the young man in whose arms she was gliding along looked fiery hot; a handsome boy, with blue eyes and a little golden down on the upper lip of his sunny red-cheeked face. Edward Pierson thought: 'Nice couple!' And had a moment's vision of himself and Leila, dancing at that long-ago Cambridge May Week—on her seventeenth birthday, he remembered, so that she must have been a year younger than Nollie was now! This would be the young man she had talked of in her letters during the last three weeks. Were they never going to stop?

He passed into view of those within, and said:

"Aren't you very hot, Nollie?"

She blew him a kiss; the young man looked startled and self-conscious, and Eve called out:

"It's a bet, Uncle. They've got to dance me down."

Pierson said mildly:

"A bet? My dears!"

Noel murmured over her shoulder:

"It's all right, Daddy!" And the young man gasped:

"She's bet us one of her puppies against one of mine, sir!"

Pierson sat down, a little hypnotized by the sleepy strumming, the slow giddy movement of the dancers, and those half-closed swimming eyes of his young daughter, looking at him over her shoulder as she went by. He sat with a smile on his lips. Nollie was growing up! Now that Gratian was married, she had become a great responsibility. If only his dear wife had lived! The smile faded from his lips; he looked suddenly very tired. The struggle, physical and spiritual, he had been through, these fifteen years, sometimes weighed him almost to the ground: Most men would have married again, but he had always felt it would be sacrilege. Real unions were for ever, even though the Church permitted remarriage.

He watched his young daughter with a mixture of aesthetic pleasure and perplexity. Could this be good for her? To go on dancing indefinitely with one young man could that possibly be good for her? But they looked very happy; and there was so much in young creatures that he did not understand. Noel, so affectionate, and dreamy, seemed sometimes possessed of a little devil. Edward Pierson was naif; attributed those outbursts of demonic possession to the loss of her mother when she was such a mite; Gratian, but two years older, had never taken a mother's place. That had been left to himself, and he was more or less conscious of failure.

He sat there looking up at her with a sort of whimsical distress. And, suddenly, in that dainty voice of hers, which seemed to spurn each word a little, she said:

"I'm going to stop!" and, sitting down beside him, took up his hat to fan herself.

Eve struck a triumphant chord. "Hurrah I've won!"

The young man muttered:

"I say, Noel, we weren't half done!"

"I know; but Daddy was getting bored, weren't you, dear? This is Cyril Morland."

Pierson shook the young man's hand.

"Daddy, your nose is burnt!"

"My dear; I know."

"I can give you some white stuff for it. You have to sleep with it on all night. Uncle and Auntie both use it."

"Nollie!"

"Well, Eve says so. If you're going to bathe, Cyril, look out for that current!"

The young man, gazing at her with undisguised adoration, muttered:

"Rather!" and went out.

Noel's eyes lingered after him; Eve broke a silence.

"If you're going to have a bath before tea, Nollie, you'd better hurry up."

"All right. Was it jolly in the Abbey, Daddy?"

"Lovely; like a great piece of music."

"Daddy always puts everything into music. You ought to see it by moonlight; it's gorgeous then. All right, Eve; I'm coming." But she did not get up, and when Eve was gone, cuddled her arm through her father's and murmured:

"What d'you think of Cyril?"

"My dear, how can I tell? He seems a nice-looking young man."

"All right, Daddy; don't strain yourself. It's jolly down here, isn't it?" She got up, stretched herself a little, and moved away, looking like a very tall child, with her short hair curling in round her head.

Pierson, watching her vanish past the curtain, thought: 'What a lovely thing she is!' And he got up too, but instead of following, went to the piano, and began to play Mendelssohn's Prelude and Fugue in E minor. He had a fine touch, and played with a sort of dreamy passion. It was his way out of perplexities, regrets, and longings; a way which never quite failed him.

At Cambridge, he had intended to take up music as a profession, but family tradition had destined him for Holy Orders, and an emotional Church revival of that day had caught him in its stream. He had always had private means, and those early years before he married had passed happily in an East-End parish. To have not only opportunity but power to help in the lives of the poor had been fascinating; simple himself, the simple folk of his parish had taken hold of his heart. When, however, he married Agnes Heriot, he was given a parish of his own on the borders of East and West, where he had been ever since, even after her death had nearly killed him. It was better to go on where work and all reminded him of one whom he had resolved never to forget in other ties. But he knew that his work had not the zest it used to have in her day, or even before her day. It may well be doubted whether he, who had been in Holy Orders twenty-six years, quite knew now what he believed. Everything had become circumscribed, and fixed, by thousands of his own utterances; to have taken fresh stock of his faith, to have gone deep into its roots, would have been like taking up the foundations of a still-standing house. Some men naturally root themselves in the inexpressible—for which one formula is much the same as another; though Edward Pierson, gently dogmatic, undoubtedly preferred his High-Church statement of the inexpressible to that of, say, the Zoroastrians. The subtleties of change, the modifications by science, left little sense of inconsistency or treason on his soul. Sensitive, charitable, and only combative deep down, he instinctively avoided discussion on matters where he might hurt others or they hurt him. And, since explanation was the last thing which could be expected of one who did not

base himself on Reason, he had found but scant occasion ever to examine anything. Just as in the old Abbey he had soared off into the infinite with the hawk, the beetles, and the grasses, so now, at the piano, by these sounds of his own making, he was caught away again into emotionalism, without realising that he was in one of his, most religious moods.

"Aren't you coming to tea, Edward?"

The woman standing behind him, in a lilac-coloured gown, had one of those faces which remain innocent to the end of the chapter, in spite of the complete knowledge of life which appertains to mothers. In days of suffering and anxiety, like these of the great war, Thirza Pierson was a valuable person. Without ever expressing an opinion on cosmic matters, she reconfirmed certain cosmic truths, such as that though the whole world was at war, there was such a thing as peace; that though all the sons of mothers were being killed, there remained such a thing as motherhood; that while everybody was living for the future, the present still existed. Her tranquil, tender, matter-of-fact busyness, and the dew in her eyes, had been proof against twenty-three years of life on a tea-plantation in the hot part of Ceylon; against Bob Pierson; against the anxiety of having two sons at the front, and the confidences of nearly every one she came across. Nothing disturbed her. She was like a painting of "Goodness" by an Old Master, restored by Kate Greenaway. She never went to meet life, but when it came, made the best of it. This was her secret, and Pierson always felt rested in her presence.

He rose, and moved by her side, over the lawn, towards the big tree at the bottom of the garden.

"How d'you think Noel is looking, Edward?"

"Very pretty. That young man, Thirza?"

"Yes; I'm afraid he's over head and ears in love with her."

At the dismayed sound he uttered, she slipped her soft round arm within his. "He's going to the front soon, poor boy!"

"Have they talked to you?"

"He has. Nollie hasn't yet."

"Nollie is a queer child, Thirza."

"Nollie is a darling, but rather a desperate character, Edward."

Pierson sighed.

In a swing under the tree, where the tea-things were set out, the "rather desperate character" was swaying. "What a picture she is!" he said, and sighed again.

The voice of his brother came to them,—high and steamy, as though corrupted by the climate of Ceylon:

"You incorrigible dreamy chap, Ted! We've eaten all the raspberries. Eve, give him some jam; he must be dead! Phew! the heat! Come on, my dear, and pour out his tea. Hallo, Cyril! Had a good bathe? By George, wish my head was wet! Squattez-vous down over there, by Nollie; she'll swing, and keep the flies off you."

"Give me a cigarette, Uncle Bob—"

"What! Your father doesn't—"

"Just for the flies. You don't mind, Daddy?"

"Not if it's necessary, my dear."

Noel smiled, showing her upper teeth, and her eyes seemed to swim under their long lashes.

"It isn't necessary, but it's nice."

"Ah, ha!" said Bob Pierson. "Here you are, Nollie!"

But Noel shook her head. At that moment she struck her father as startlingly grown-up-so composed, swaying above that young man at her feet, whose sunny face was all adoration. 'No longer a child!' he thought. 'Dear Nollie!'

Awakened by that daily cruelty, the advent of hot water, Edward Pierson lay in his chintz-curtained room, fancying himself back in London. A wild bee hunting honey from the bowl of flowers on the window-sill, and the scent of sweetbrier, shattered that illusion. He drew the curtain, and, kneeling on the window-seat thrust his head out into the morning. The air was intoxicatingly sweet. Haze clung over the river and the woods beyond; the lawn sparkled with dew, and two wagtails strutted in the dewy sunshine. 'Thank God for loveliness!' he thought. 'Those poor boys at the front!' And kneeling with his elbows on the sill, he began to say his prayers. The same feeling which made him beautify his church, use vestments, good music, and incense, filled him now. God was in the loveliness of His world, as well as in His churches. One could worship Him in a grove of beech trees, in a beautiful garden, on a high hill, by the banks of a bright river. God was in the rustle of the leaves, and the hum of a bee, in the dew on the grass, and the scent of flowers; God was in everything! And he added to his usual prayer this whisper: "I give Thee thanks for my senses, O Lord. In all of us, keep them bright, and grateful for beauty." Then he remained motionless, prey to a sort of happy yearning very near, to melancholy. Great beauty ever had that effect on him. One could capture so little of it—could never enjoy it enough! Who was it had said not long ago: "Love of beauty is really only the sex instinct, which nothing but complete union satisfies." Ah! yes, George—Gratian's husband. George Laird! And a little frown came between his brows, as though at some thorn in the flesh. Poor George! But then, all doctors were materialists at heart—splendid fellows, though; a fine fellow, George, working himself to death out there in France. One must not take them too seriously. He plucked a bit of sweetbrier and put it to his nose, which still retained the shine of that bleaching ointment Noel had insisted on his using. The sweet smell of those little rough leaves stirred up an acute aching. He dropped them, and drew back. No longings, no melancholy; one ought to be out, this beautiful morning!

It was Sunday; but he had not to take three Services and preach at least one sermon; this day of rest was really to be his own, for once. It was almost disconcerting; he had so long felt like the cab horse who could not be taken out of the shafts lest he should fall down. He dressed with extraordinary deliberation, and had not quite finished when there came a knock on his door, and Noel's voice said: "Can I come in, Daddy?"

In her flax-blue frock, with a Gloire de Dijon rose pinned where it met on her faintly browned neck, she seemed to her father a perfect vision of freshness.

"Here's a letter from Gratian; George has been sent home ill, and he's gone to our house. She's got leave from her hospital to come home and nurse him."

Pierson read the letter. "Poor George!"

"When are you going to let me be a nurse, Daddy?"

"We must wait till you're eighteen, Nollie."

"I could easily say I was. It's only a month; and I look much more."

Pierson smiled.

"Don't I?"

"You might be anything from fifteen to twenty-five, my dear, according as you behave."

"I want to go out as near the front as possible."

Her head was poised so that the sunlight framed her face, which was rather broad—the brow rather too broad—under the waving light-brown hair, the nose short and indeterminate; cheeks still round from youth, almost waxen-pale, and faintly hollowed under the eyes. It was her lips, dainty yet loving, and above all her grey eyes, big and dreamily alive, which made her a swan. He could not imagine her in nurse's garb.

"This is new, isn't it, Nollie?"

"Cyril Morland's sisters are both out; and he'll be going soon. Everybody goes."

"Gratian hasn't got out yet: It takes a long time to get trained."

"I know; all the more reason to begin."

She got up, looked at him, looked at her hands, seemed about to speak, but did not. A little colour had come into her cheeks. Then, obviously making conversation, she asked:

"Are you going to church? It's worth anything to hear Uncle Bob read the Lessons, especially when he loses his place. No; you're not to put on your long coat till just before church time. I won't have it!"

Obediently Pierson resigned his long coat.

"Now, you see, you can have my rose. Your nose is better!" She kissed his nose, and transferred her rose to the buttonhole of his short coat.

"That's all. Come along!" And with her arm through his, they went down. But he knew she had come to say something which she had not said.

2

Bob Pierson, in virtue of greater wealth than the rest of the congregation, always read the Lessons, in his high steamy voice, his breathing never adjusted to the length of any period. The congregation, accustomed, heard nothing peculiar; he was the necessary gentry with the necessary finger in the pie. It was his own family whom he perturbed. In the second row, Noel, staring solemnly at the profile of her father in the front row, was thinking: 'Poor Daddy! His eyes look as if they were coming out. Oh, Daddy! Smile! or it'll hurt you!' Young Morland beside her, rigid in his tunic, was thinking: 'She isn't thinking of me!' And just then her little finger crooked into his. Edward Pierson was thinking: 'Oh! My dear old Bob! Oh!' And, beside him, Thirza thought: 'Poor dear Ted I how nice for him to be having a complete rest! I must make him eat he's so thin!' And Eve was thinking: 'Oh, Father! Mercy!' But Bob Pierson was thinking: 'Cheer oh! Only another three verses!' Noel's little finger unhooked itself, but her eyes stole round to young Morland's eyes, and there was a light in them which lingered through the singing and the prayers. At last, in the reverential rustle of the settling congregation, a surpliced figure mounted the pulpit.

"I come not to bring Peace, but a sword."

Pierson looked up. He felt deep restfulness. There was a pleasant light in this church; the hum of a country bluebottle made all the difference to the quality of silence. No critical thought stirred within him, nor any excitement. He was thinking: 'Now I shall hear something for my good; a fine text; when did I preach from it last?' Turned a little away from the others, he saw nothing but the preacher's homely face up there above the carved oak; it was so long since he had been preached to, so long since he had had a rest! The words came forth, dropped on his forehead, penetrated, met something which absorbed them, and disappeared. 'A good plain sermon!' he thought. 'I suppose I'm stale; I don't seem —' "Let us not, dear brethren," droned the preacher's earnest voice, "think that our dear Lord, in saying that He brought a sword, referred to a physical sword. It was the sword of the spirit to which He was undoubtedly referring, that bright sword of the spirit which in all ages has cleaved its way through the fetters imposed on men themselves by their own desires, imposed by men on other men in gratification of their ambitions, as we have had so striking an example in the invasion by our cruel enemies of a little neighbouring country which had done them no harm. Dear brethren, we may all bring swords." Pierson's chin jerked; he raised his hand quickly and passed it over his face. 'All bring swords,' he thought, 'swords—I wasn't asleep—surely!' "But let us be sure that our swords are bright; bright with hope, and bright with faith, that we may see them flashing among the carnal desires of this mortal life, carving a path for us towards that heavenly kingdom where alone is peace, perfect peace. Let us pray."

Pierson did not shut his eyes; he opened them as he fell on his knees. In the seat behind, Noel and young Morland had also fallen on their knees their faces covered each with a single hand; but her left hand and his right hung at their sides. They prayed a little longer than any others and, on rising, sang the hymn a little louder.

3

No paper came on Sundays—not even the local paper, which had so long and so nobly done its bit with headlines to win the war. No news whatever came, of men blown up, to enliven the hush of the hot July afternoon, or the sense of drugging—which followed Aunt Thirza's Sunday lunch. Some slept, some thought they were awake; but Noel and young Morland walked upward through the woods towards a high common of heath and furze, crowned by what was known as Kestrel rocks. Between these two young people no actual word of love had yet been spoken. Their loving had advanced by glance and touch alone.

Young Morland was a school and college friend of the two Pierson boys now at the front. He had no home of his own, for his parents were dead; and this was not his first visit to Kestrel. Arriving three weeks ago, for his final leave before he should go out, he had found a girl sitting in a little wagonette outside the station, and had known his fate at once. But who knows when Noel fell in love? She was—one supposes—just ready for that sensation. For the last two years she had been at one of those high-class finishing establishments where, in spite of the healthy curriculum, perhaps because of it, there is ever an undercurrent of interest in the opposing sex; and not even the gravest efforts to eliminate instinct are quite successful. The disappearance of every young male thing into the maw of the military machine put a premium on instinct. The thoughts of Noel and her school companions were turned, perforce, to that which, in pre-war freedom of opportunity they could afford to regard as of secondary interest. Love and Marriage and Motherhood, fixed as the lot of women by the countless ages, were threatened for these young creatures. They not unnaturally pursued what they felt to be receding.

When young Morland showed, by following her about with his eyes, what was happening to him, Noel was pleased. From being pleased, she became a little excited; from being excited she became dreamy. Then, about a week before her father's arrival, she secretly began to follow the young man about with her eyes; became capricious too, and a little cruel. If there had been another young man to favour—but there was not; and she favoured Uncle Bob's red setter. Cyril Morland grew desperate. During those three days the demon her father dreaded certainly possessed her. And then, one evening, while they walked back together from the hay-fields, she gave him a sidelong glance; and he gasped out: "Oh! Noel, what have I done?" She caught his hand, and gave it a quick squeeze. What a change! What blissful alteration ever since!

Through the wood young Morland mounted silently, screwing himself up to put things to the touch. Noel too mounted silently, thinking: 'I will kiss him if he kisses me!' Eagerness, and a sort of languor, were running in her veins; she did not look at him from under her shady hat. Sun light poured down through every chink in the foliage; made the greenness of the steep wood marvellously vivid and alive; flashed on beech leaves, ash leaves, birch leaves; fell on the ground in little runlets; painted bright patches on trunks and grass, the beech mast, the ferns; butterflies chased each other in that sunlight, and myriads of ants and gnats and flies seemed possessed by a frenzy of life. The whole wood seemed possessed, as if the sunshine were a happy Being which had come to dwell therein. At a half-way spot, where the trees opened and they could see, far below them, the gleam of the river, she sat down on the bole of a beech-tree, and young Morland stood looking at her. Why should one face and not an other, this voice and not that, make a heart beat; why should a touch from one hand awaken rapture, and a touch from another awaken nothing? He knelt down and pressed his lips to her foot. Her eyes grew very bright; but she got up and ran on—she had not expected him to kiss her foot. She heard him hurrying after her, and stopped, leaning against a birch trunk. He rushed to her, and, without a word spoken, his lips were on her lips. The moment in life, which no words can render, had come for them. They had found their enchanted spot, and they moved no further, but sat with their arms round each other, while the happy Being of the wood watched. A marvellous speeder-up of Love is War. What might have taken six months, was thus accomplished in three weeks.

A short hour passed, then Noel said:

"I must tell Daddy, Cyril. I meant to tell him something this morning, only I thought I'd better wait, in case you didn't."

Morland answered: "Oh, Noel!" It was the staple of his conversation while they sat there.

Again a short hour passed, and Morland said:

"I shall go off my chump if we're not married before I go out."

"How long does it take?"

"No time, if we hurry up. I've got six days before I rejoin, and perhaps the Chief will give me another week, if I tell him."

"Poor Daddy! Kiss me again; a long one."

When the long one was over, she said:

"Then I can come and be near you till you go out? Oh, Cyril!"

"Oh, Noel!"

"Perhaps you won't go so soon. Don't go if you can help it!"

"Not if I can help it, darling; but I shan't be able."

"No, of course not; I know."

Young Morland clutched his hair. "Everyone's in the same boat, but it can't last for ever; and now we're engaged we can be together all the time till I've got the licence or whatever it is. And then—!"

"Daddy won't like our not being married in a church; but I don't care!"

Looking down at her closed eyes, and their lashes resting on her cheeks, young Morland thought:

'My God! I'm in heaven!'

Another short hour passed before she freed herself.

"We must go, Cyril. Kiss me once more!"

It was nearly dinner-time, and they ran down. 4

Edward Pierson, returning from the Evening Service, where he had read the Lessons, saw them in the distance, and compressed his lips. Their long absence had vexed him. What ought he to do? In the presence of Love's young dream, he felt strange and helpless. That night, when he opened the door of his room, he saw Noel on the window-seat, in her dressing-gown, with the moonlight streaming in on her.

"Don't light up, Daddy; I've got something to say."

She took hold of the little gold cross on his vest, and turned it over.

"I'm engaged to Cyril; we want to be married this week."

It was exactly as if someone had punched him in the ribs; and at the sound he made she hurried on:

"You see, we must be; he may be going out any day."

In the midst of his aching consternation, he admitted a kind of reason in her words. But he said:

"My dear, you're only a child. Marriage is the most serious thing in life; you've only known him three weeks."

"I know all that, Daddy" her voice sounded so ridiculously calm; "but we can't afford to wait. He might never come back, you see, and then I should have missed him."

"But, Noel, suppose he never did come back; it would only be much worse for you."

She dropped the little cross, and took hold of his hand, pressing it against her heart. But still her voice was calm:

"No; much better, Daddy; you think I don't know my own feelings, but I do,"

The man in Pierson softened; the priest hardened.

"Nollie, true marriage is the union of souls; and for that, time is wanted. Time to know that you feel and think the same, and love the same things."

"Yes, I know; but we do."

"You can't tell that, my dear; no one could in three weeks."

"But these aren't ordinary times, are they? People have to do things in a hurry. Oh, Daddy! Be an angel! Mother would have understood, and let me, I know!"

Pierson drew away his hand; the words hurt, from reminder of his loss, from reminder of the poor substitute he was.

"Look, Nollie!" he said. "After all these years since she left us, I'm as lonely as ever, because we were really one. If you marry this young man without knowing more of your own hearts than you can in such a little time, you may regret it dreadfully; you may find it turn out, after all, nothing but a little empty passion; or again, if anything happens to him before you've had any real married life together, you'll have a much greater grief and sense of loss to put up with than if you simply stay engaged till after the war. Besides, my child, you're much too young."

She sat so still that he looked at her in alarm. "But I must!"

He bit his lips, and said sharply: "You can't, Nollie!"

She got up, and before he could stop her, was gone. With the closing of the door, his anger evaporated, and distress took its place. Poor child! What to do with this wayward chicken just out of the egg, and wanting to be full-fledged at once? The thought that she would be lying miserable, crying, perhaps, beset him so that he went out into the passage and tapped on her door. Getting no answer, he went in. It was dark but for a streak of moonlight, and in that he saw her, lying on her bed, face down; and stealing up laid his hand on her head. She did not move; and, stroking her hair, he said gently:

"Nollie dear, I didn't mean to be harsh. If I were your mother, I should know how to make you see, but I'm only an old bumble-daddy."

She rolled over, scrambling into a cross-legged posture on the bed. He could see her eyes shining. But she did not speak; she seemed to know that in silence was her strength.

He said with a sort of despair:

"You must let me talk it over with your aunt. She has a lot of good sense."

"Yes."

He bent over and kissed her hot forehead.

"Good night, my dear; don't cry. Promise me!"

She nodded, and lifted her face; he felt her hot soft lips on his forehead, and went away a little comforted.

But Noel sat on her bed, hugging her knees, listening to the night, to the emptiness and silence; each minute so much lost of the little, little time left, that she might have been with him.

III

Pierson woke after a troubled and dreamful night, in which he had thought himself wandering in heaven like a lost soul.

After regaining his room last night nothing had struck him more forcibly than the needlessness of his words: "Don't cry, Nollie!" for he had realised with uneasiness that she had not been near crying. No; there was in her some emotion very different from the tearful. He kept seeing her cross-legged figure on the bed in that dim light; tense, enigmatic, almost Chinese; kept feeling the feverish touch of her lips. A good girlish burst of tears would have done her good, and been a guarantee. He had the uncomfortable conviction that his refusal had passed her by, as if unspoken. And, since he could not go and make music at that time of night, he had ended on his knees, in a long search for guidance, which was not vouchsafed him.

The culprits were demure at breakfast; no one could have told that for the last hour they had been sitting with their arms round each other, watching the river flow by, talking but little, through lips too busy. Pierson pursued his sister-in-law to the room where she did her flowers every morning. He watched her for a minute dividing ramblers from pansies, cornflowers from sweet peas, before he said:

"I'm very troubled, Thirza. Nollie came to me last night. Imagine! They want to get married—those two!"

Accepting life as it came, Thirza showed no dismay, but her cheeks grew a little pinker, and her eyes a little rounder. She took up a sprig of mignonette, and said placidly:

"Oh, my dear!"

"Think of it, Thirza—that child! Why, it's only a year or two since she used to sit on my knee and tickle my face with her hair."

Thirza went on arranging her flowers.

"Noel is older than you think, Edward; she is more than her age. And real married life wouldn't begin for them till after—if it ever began."

Pierson experienced a sort of shock. His sister-in-law's words seemed criminally light-hearted.

"But—but—" he stammered; "the union, Thirza! Who can tell what will happen before they come together again!"

She looked at his quivering face, and said gently:

"I know, Edward; but if you refuse, I should be afraid, in these days, of what Noel might do. I told you there's a streak of desperation in her."

"Noel will obey me."

"I wonder! There are so many of these war marriages now."

Pierson turned away.

"I think they're dreadful. What do they mean—Just a momentary gratification of passion. They might just as well not be."

"They mean pensions, as a rule," said Thirza calmly.

"Thirza, that is cynical; besides, it doesn't affect this case. I can't bear to think of my little Nollie giving herself for a moment which may come to nothing, or may turn out the beginning of an unhappy marriage. Who is this boy—what is he? I know nothing of him. How can I give her to him—it's impossible! If they had been engaged some time and I knew something of him—yes, perhaps; even at her age. But this hasty passionateness—it isn't right, it isn't decent. I don't understand, I really don't—how a child like that can want it. The fact is, she doesn't know what she's asking, poor little Nollie. She can't know the nature of marriage, and she can't realise its sacredness. If only her mother were here! Talk to her, Thirza; you can say things that I can't!"

Thirza looked after the retreating figure. In spite of his cloth, perhaps a little because of it, he seemed to her like a child who had come to show her his sore finger. And, having finished the arrangement of her flowers, she went out to find her niece. She had not far to go; for Noel was standing in the hall, quite evidently lying in wait. They went out together to the avenue.

The girl began at once:

"It isn't any use talking to me, Auntie; Cyril is going to get a license."

"Oh! So you've made up your minds?"

"Quite."

"Do you think that's fair by me, Nollie? Should I have asked him here if I'd thought this was going to happen?"

Noel only smiled.

"Have you the least idea what marriage means?"

Noel nodded.

"Really?"

"Of course. Gratian is married. Besides, at school—"

"Your father is dead against it. This is a sad thing for him. He's a perfect saint, and you oughtn't to hurt him. Can't you wait, at least till Cyril's next leave?"

"He might never have one, you see."

The heart of her whose boys were out there too, and might also never have another leave; could not but be responsive to those words. She looked at her niece, and a dim appreciation of this revolt of life menaced by death, of youth threatened with extinction, stirred in her. Noel's teeth were clenched, her lips drawn back, and she was staring in front of her.

"Daddy oughtn't to mind. Old people haven't to fight, and get killed; they oughtn't to mind us taking what we can. They've had their good time."

It was such a just little speech that Thirza answered:

"Yes; perhaps he hasn't quite realised that."

"I want to make sure of Cyril, Auntie; I want everything I can have with him while there's the chance. I don't think it's much to ask, when perhaps I'll never have any more of him again."

Thirza slipped her hand through the girl's arm.

"I understand," she said. "Only, Nollie, suppose, when all this is over, and we breathe and live naturally once more, you found you'd made a mistake?"

Noel shook her head. "I haven't."

"We all think that, my dear; but thousands of mistakes are made by people who no more dream they're making them than you do now; and then it's a very horrible business. It would be especially horrible for you; your father believes heart and soul in marriage being for ever."

"Daddy's a darling; but I don't always believe what he believes, you know. Besides, I'm not making a mistake, Auntie! I love Cyril ever so."

Thirza gave her waist a squeeze.

"You mustn't make a mistake. We love you too much, Nollie. I wish we had Gratian here."

"Gratian would back me up," said Noel; "she knows what the war is. And you ought to, Auntie. If Rex or Harry wanted to be married, I'm sure you'd never oppose them. And they're no older than Cyril. You must understand what it means to me Auntie dear, to feel that we belong to each other properly before—before it all begins for him, and—and there may be no more. Daddy doesn't realise. I know he's awfully good, but—he's forgotten."

"My dear, I think he remembers only too well. He was desperately attached to your mother."

Noel clenched her hands.

"Was he? Well, so am I to Cyril, and he to me. We wouldn't be unreasonable if it wasn't—wasn't necessary. Talk, to Cyril, Auntie; then you'll understand. There he is; only, don't keep him long, because I want him. Oh! Auntie; I want him so badly!"

She turned; and slipped back into the house; and Thirza, conscious of having been decoyed to this young man, who stood there with his arms folded, like Napoleon before a battle, smiled and said:

"Well, Cyril, so you've betrayed me!"

Even in speaking she was conscious of the really momentous change in this sunburnt, blue-eyed, lazily impudent youth since the day he arrived, three weeks ago, in their little wagonette. He took her arm, just as Noel had, and made her sit down beside him on the rustic bench, where he had evidently been told to wait.

"You see, Mrs. Pierson," he said, "it's not as if Noel were an ordinary girl in an ordinary time, is it? Noel is the sort of girl one would knock one's brains out for; and to send me out there knowing that I could have been married to her and wasn't, will take all the heart out of me. Of course I mean to come back, but chaps do get knocked over, and I think it's cruel that we can't take what we can while we can. Besides, I've got money; and that would be hers anyway. So, do be a darling, won't you?" He put his arm round her waist, just as if he had been her son, and her heart, which wanted her own boys so badly, felt warmed within her.

"You see, I don't know Mr. Pierson, but he seems awfully gentle and jolly, and if he could see into me he wouldn't mind, I know. We don't mind risking our lives and all that, but we do think we ought to have the run of them while we're alive. I'll give him my dying oath or anything, that I could never change towards Noel, and she'll do the same. Oh! Mrs. Pierson, do be a jolly brick, and put in a word for me, quick! We've got so few days!"

"But, my dear boy," said Thirza feebly, "do you think it's fair to such a child as Noel?"

"Yes, I do. You don't understand; she's simply had to grow up. She is grown-up—all in this week; she's quite as old as I am, really—and I'm twenty-two. And you know it's going to be—it's got to be—a young world, from now on; people will begin doing things much earlier. What's the use of pretending it's like what it was, and being cautious, and all that? If I'm going to be killed, I think we've got a right to be married first; and if I'm not, then what does it matter?"

"You've known each other twenty-one days, Cyril."

"No; twenty-one years! Every day's a year when Oh! Mrs. Pierson, this isn't like you, is it? You never go to meet trouble, do you?"

At that shrewd remark, Thirza put her hand on the hand which still clasped her waist, and pressed it closer.

"Well, my dear," she said softly, "we must see what can be done."

Cyril Morland kissed her cheek. "I will bless you for ever," he said. "I haven't got any people, you know, except my two sisters."

And something like tears started up on Thirza's eyelashes. They seemed to her like the babes in the wood—those two!

IV

1

In the dining-room of her father's house in that old London Square between East and West, Gratian Laird, in the outdoor garb of a nurse, was writing a telegram: "Reverend Edward Pierson, Kestrel, Tintern, Monmouthshire. George terribly ill. Please come if you can. Gratian." Giving it to a maid, she took off her long coat and sat down for a moment. She had been travelling all night, after a full day's work, and had only just arrived, to find her husband between life and death. She was very different from Noel; not quite so tall, but of a stronger build; with dark chestnut-coloured hair, clear hazel eyes, and a broad brow. The expression of her face was earnest, with a sort of constant spiritual enquiry; and a singularly truthful look: She was just twenty; and of the year that she had been married, had only spent six weeks with her husband; they had not even a house of their own as yet. After resting five minutes, she passed her hand vigorously over her face, threw back her head, and walked up stairs to the room where he lay. He was not conscious, and there was nothing to be done but sit and watch him.

'If he dies,' she thought, 'I shall hate God for His cruelty. I have had six weeks with George; some people have sixty years.' She fixed her eyes on his face, short and broad, with bumps of "observation" on the brows. He had been sunburnt. The dark lashes of his closed eyes lay on deathly yellow cheeks; his thick hair grew rather low on his broad forehead. The lips were just open and showed strong white teeth. He had a little clipped moustache, and hair had grown on his clean-cut jaw. His pyjama jacket had fallen open. Gratian drew it close. It was curiously still, for a London day, though the window was wide open. Anything to break this heavy stupor, which was not only George's, but her own, and the very world's! The cruelty of it—when she might be going to lose him for ever, in a few hours or days! She thought of their last parting. It had not been very loving, had come too soon after one of those arguments they were inclined to have, in which they could not as yet disagree with suavity. George had said there was no future life for the individual; she had maintained there was. They had grown hot and impatient. Even in the cab on the way to his train they had pursued the wretched discussion, and the last kiss had been from lips on lips yet warm from disagreement.

Ever since, as if in compunction, she had been wavering towards his point of view; and now, when he was perhaps to solve the problem—find out for certain—she had come to feel that if he died, she would never see him after. It was cruel that such a blight should have come on her belief at this, of all moments.

She laid her hand on his. It was warm, felt strong, although so motionless and helpless. George was so vigorous, so alive, and strong-willed; it seemed impossible that life might be going to play him false. She recalled the unflinching look of his steel-bright eyes, his deep, queerly vibrating voice, which had no trace of self-consciousness or pretence. She slipped her hand on to his heart, and began very slowly, gently rubbing it. He, as doctor, and she, as nurse, had both seen so much of death these last two years! Yet it seemed suddenly as if she had never seen death, and that the young faces she had seen, empty and white, in the hospital wards, had just been a show. Death would appear to her for the first time, if this face which she loved were to be drained for ever of light and colour and movement and meaning.

A humblebee from the Square Garden boomed in and buzzed idly round the room. She caught her

breath in a little sob....

2

Pierson received that telegram at midday, returning from a lonely walk after his talk with Thirza. Coming from Gratian so self-reliant—it meant the worst. He prepared at once to catch the next train. Noel was out, no one knew where: so with a sick feeling he wrote: "DEAREST CHILD,

"I am going up to Gratian; poor George is desperately ill. If it goes badly you should be with your sister. I will wire to-morrow morning early. I leave you in your aunt's hands, my dear. Be reasonable and patient. God bless you.

"Your devoted
"DADDY."

He was alone in his third-class compartment, and, leaning forward, watched the ruined Abbey across the river till it was out of sight. Those old monks had lived in an age surely not so sad as this. They must have had peaceful lives, remote down here, in days when the Church was great and lovely, and men laid down their lives for their belief in her, and built everlasting fanes to the glory of God! What a change to this age of rush and hurry, of science, trade, material profit, and this terrible war! He tried to read his paper, but it was full of horrors and hate. 'When will it end?' he thought. And the train with its rhythmic jolting seemed grinding out the answer: "Never—never!"

At Chepstow a soldier got in, followed by a woman with a very flushed face and curious, swimmy eyes; her hair was in disorder, and her lip bleeding, as if she had bitten it through. The soldier, too, looked strained and desperate. They sat down, far apart, on the seat opposite. Pierson, feeling that he was in their way, tried to hide himself behind his paper; when he looked again, the soldier had taken off his tunic and cap and was leaning out of the window. The woman, on the seat's edge, sniffing and wiping her face, met his glance with resentful eyes, then, getting up, she pulled the man's sleeve.

"Sit dahn; don't 'ang out o' there."

The soldier flung himself back on the seat and looked at Pierson.

"The wife an' me's 'ad a bit of a row," he said companionably. "Gits on me nerves; I'm not used to it. She was in a raid, and 'er nerves are all gone funny; ain't they, old girl? Makes me feel me 'ead. I've been wounded there, you know; can't stand much now. I might do somethin' if she was to go on like this for long."

Pierson looked at the woman, but her eyes still met his resentfully. The soldier held out a packet of cigarettes. "Take one," he said. Pierson took one and, feeling that the soldier wanted him to speak, murmured: "We all have these troubles with those we're fond of; the fonder we are of people, the more we feel them, don't we? I had one with my daughter last night."

"Ah!" said the soldier; "that's right. The wife and me'll make it up. 'Ere, come orf it, old girl."

From behind his paper he soon became conscious of the sounds of reconciliation—reproaches because someone had been offered a drink, kisses mixed with mild slappings, and abuse. When they got out at Bristol the soldier shook his hand warmly, but the woman still gave him her resentful stare, and he thought dreamily: 'The war! How it affects everyone!' His carriage was invaded by a swarm of soldiers, and the rest of the journey was passed in making himself small. When at last he reached home, Gratian met him in the hall.

"Just the same. The doctor says we shall know in a few hours now. How sweet of you to come! You must be tired, in this heat. It was dreadful to spoil your holiday."

"My dear! As if May I go up and see him?"

George Laird was still lying in that stupor. And Pierson stood gazing down at him compassionately. Like most parsons, he had a wide acquaintance with the sick and dying; and one remorseless fellowship with death. Death! The commonest thing in the world, now—commoner than life! This young doctor must have seen many die in these last two years, saved many from death; and there he lay, not able to lift a finger to save himself. Pierson looked at his daughter; what a strong, promising young couple they were! And putting his arm round her, he led her away to the sofa, whence they could see the sick man.

"If he dies, Dad—" she whispered.

"He will have died for the Country, my love, as much as ever our soldiers do."

"I know; but that's no comfort. I've been watching here all day; I've been thinking; men will be just as brutal afterwards—more brutal. The world will go on the same."

"We must hope not. Shall we pray, Gracie?"

Gratian shook her head.

"If I could believe that the world—if I could believe anything! I've lost the power, Dad; I don't even believe in a future life. If George dies, we shall never meet again."

Pierson stared at her without a word.

Gratian went on: "The last time we talked, I was angry with George because he laughed at my belief; now that I really want belief, I feel that he was right."

Pierson said tremulously:

"No, no, my dear; it's only that you're overwrought. God in His mercy will give you back belief."

"There is no God, Dad"

"My darling child, what are you saying?"

"No God who can help us; I feel it. If there were any God who could take part in our lives, alter anything without our will, knew or cared what we did—He wouldn't let the world go on as it does."

"But, my dear, His purposes are inscrutable. We dare not say He should not do this or that, or try to fathom to what ends He is working."

"Then He's no good to us. It's the same as if He didn't exist. Why should I pray for George's life to One whose ends are just His own? I know George oughtn't to die. If there's a God who can help, it will be a wicked shame if George dies; if there's a God who can help, it's a wicked shame when babies die, and all these millions of poor boys. I would rather think there's no God than a helpless or a wicked God —"

Her father had suddenly thrown up his hands to his ears. She moved closer, and put her arm round him.

"Dad dear, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you."

Pierson pressed her face down to his shoulder; and said in a dull voice:

"What do you think would have happened to me, Gracie, if I had lost belief when your mother died? I have never lost belief. Pray God I never shall!"

Gratian murmured:

"George would not wish me to pretend I believe—he would want me to be honest. If I'm not honest, I shan't deserve that he should live. I don't believe, and I can't pray."

"My darling, you're overtired."

"No, Dad." She raised her head from his shoulder and, clasping her hands round her knees, looked straight before her. "We can only help ourselves; and I can only bear it if I rebel."

Pierson sat with trembling lips, feeling that nothing he could say would touch her just then. The sick man's face was hardly visible now in the twilight, and Gratian went over to his bed. She stood looking down at him a long time.

"Go and rest, Dad; the doctor's coming again at eleven. I'll call you if I want anything. I shall lie down a little, beside him."

Pierson kissed her, and went out. To lie there beside him would be the greatest comfort she could get. He went to the bare narrow little room he had occupied ever since his wife died; and, taking off his boots, walked up and down, with a feeling of almost crushing loneliness. Both his daughters in such trouble, and he of no use to them! It was as if Life were pushing him utterly aside! He felt confused, helpless, bewildered. Surely if Gratian loved George, she had not left God's side, whatever she might say. Then, conscious of the profound heresy of this thought, he stood still at the open window.

Earthly love—heavenly love; was there any analogy between them?

From the Square Gardens the indifferent whisper of the leaves answered; and a news vendor at the far end, bawling his nightly tale of murder. 3

George Laird passed the crisis of his illness that night, and in the morning was pronounced out of danger. He had a splendid constitution, and—Scotsman on his father's side—a fighting character. He came back to life very weak, but avid of recovery; and his first words were: "I've been hanging over the edge, Gracie!"

A very high cliff, and his body half over, balancing; one inch, the merest fraction of an inch more, and over he would have gone. Deuced rum sensation! But not so horrible as it would have been in real life. With the slip of that last inch he felt he would have passed at once into oblivion, without the long horror of a fall. So this was what it was for all the poor fellows he had seen slip in the past two years! Mercifully, at the end, one was not alive enough to be conscious of what one was leaving, not alive enough even to care. If he had been able to take in the presence of his young wife, able to realise that he was looking at her face, touching her for the last time—it would have been hell; if he had been up to realising sunlight, moonlight, the sound of the world's life outside, the softness of the bed he lay on—it would have meant the most poignant anguish of defraudment. Life was a rare good thing, and to be squashed out of it with your powers at full, a wretched mistake in Nature's arrangements, a wretched villainy on the part of Man—for his own death, like all those other millions of premature deaths, would have been due to the idiocy and brutality of men! He could smile now, with Gratian looking down at him, but the experience had heaped fuel on a fire which had always smouldered in his doctor's soul against that half emancipated breed of apes, the human race. Well, now he would get a few days off from his death-carnival! And he lay, feasting his returning senses on his wife. She made a pretty nurse, and his practised eye judged her a good one—firm and quiet.

George Laird was thirty. At the opening of the war he was in an East-End practice, and had volunteered at once for service with the Army. For the first nine months he had been right up in the thick of it. A poisoned arm; rather than the authorities, had sent him home. During that leave he married Gratian. He had known the Piersons some time; and, made conscious of the instability of life, had resolved to marry her at the first chance he got. For his father-in-law he had respect and liking, ever mixed with what was not quite contempt and not quite pity. The blend of authority with humility, cleric with dreamer, monk with artist, mystic with man of action, in Pierson, excited in him an interested, but often irritated, wonder. He saw things so differently himself, and had little of the humorous curiosity which enjoys what is strange simply because it is strange. They could never talk together without soon reaching a point when he wanted to say: "If we're not to trust our reason and our senses for what they're worth, sir—will you kindly tell me what we are to trust? How can we exert them to the utmost in some matters, and in others suddenly turn our backs on them?" Once, in one of their discussions, which often bordered on acrimony, he had expounded himself at length.

"I grant," he had said, "that there's a great ultimate Mystery, that we shall never know anything for certain about the origin of life and the principle of the Universe; but why should we suddenly shut up our enquiring apparatus and deny all the evidence of our reason—say, about the story of Christ, or the question of a future life, or our moral code? If you want me to enter a temple of little mysteries, leaving my reason and senses behind—as a Mohammedan leaves his shoes—it won't do to say to me simply: 'There it is! Enter!' You must show me the door; and you can't! And I'll tell you why, sir. Because in your brain there's a little twist which is not in mine, or the lack of a little twist which is in mine. Nothing more than that divides us into the two main species of mankind, one of whom worships, and one of whom doesn't. Oh, yes! I know; you won't admit that, because it makes your religions natural instead of what you call supernatural. But I assure you there's nothing more to it. Your eyes look up or they look down—they never look straight before them. Well, mine do just the opposite."

That day Pierson had been feeling very tired, and though to meet this attack was vital, he had been unable to meet it. His brain had stammered. He had turned a little away, leaning his cheek on his hand, as if to cover that momentary break in his defences. Some days later he had said:

"I am able now to answer your questions, George. I think I can make you understand."

Laird had answered: "All right, sir; go ahead."

"You begin by assuming that the human reason is the final test of all things. What right have you to assume that? Suppose you were an ant. You would take your ant's reason as the final test, wouldn't you? Would that be the truth?" And a smile had fixed itself on his lips above his little grave beard.

George Laird also had smiled.

"That seems a good point, sir," he said, "until you recognise that I don't take, the human reason as final test in any absolute sense. I only say it's the highest test we can apply; and that, behind that test all is quite dark and unknowable."

"Revelation, then, means nothing to you?"

"Nothing, sir."

"I don't think we can usefully go on, George."

"I don't think we can, sir. In talking with you, I always feel like fighting a man with one hand tied behind his back."

"And I, perhaps, feel that I am arguing with one who was blind from birth."

For all that, they had often argued since; but never without those peculiar smiles coming on their faces. Still, they respected each other, and Pierson had not opposed his daughter's marriage to this heretic, whom he knew to be an honest and trustworthy man. It had taken place before Laird's arm was well, and the two had snatched a month's honeymoon before he went back to France, and she to her hospital in Manchester. Since then, just one February fortnight by the sea had been all their time together....

In the afternoon he had asked for beef tea, and, having drunk a cup, said:

"I've got something to tell your father."

But warned by the pallor of his smiling lips, Gratian answered:

"Tell me first, George."

"Our last talk, Gracie; well—there's nothing—on the other side. I looked over; it's as black as your hat."

Gratian shivered.

"I know. While you were lying here last night, I told father."

He squeezed her hand, and said: "I also want to tell him."

"Dad will say the motive for life is gone."

"I say it leaps out all the more, Gracie. What a mess we make of it—we angel-apes! When shall we be men, I wonder? You and I, Gracie, will fight for a decent life for everybody. No hands-upping about that! Bend down! It's good to touch you again; everything's good. I'm going to have a sleep...."

After the relief of the doctor's report in the early morning Pierson had gone through a hard struggle. What should he wire to Noel? He longed to get her back home, away from temptation to the burning indiscretion of this marriage. But ought he to suppress reference to George's progress? Would that be honest? At last he sent this telegram: "George out of danger but very weak. Come up." By the afternoon post, however, he received a letter from Thirza:

"I have had two long talks with Noel and Cyril. It is impossible to budge them. And I really think, dear Edward, that it will be a mistake to oppose it rigidly. He may not go out as soon as we think. How would it be to consent to their having banns published?—that would mean another three weeks anyway, and in absence from each other they might be influenced to put it off. I'm afraid this is the only chance, for if you simply forbid it, I feel they will run off and get married somewhere at a registrar's."

Pierson took this letter out with him into the Square Garden, for painful cogitation. No man can hold a position of spiritual authority for long years without developing the habit of judgment. He judged Noel's conduct to be headlong and undisciplined, and the vein of stubbornness in his character fortified the father and the priest within him. Thirza disappointed him; she did not seem to see the irretrievable gravity of this hasty marriage. She seemed to look on it as something much lighter than it was, to consider that it might be left to Chance, and that if Chance turned out unfavourable, there would still be a way out. To him there would be no way out. He looked up at the sky, as if for inspiration. It was such a beautiful day, and so bitter to hurt his child, even for her good! What would her mother have advised? Surely Agnes had felt at least as deeply as himself the utter solemnity of marriage! And, sitting there in the sunlight, he painfully hardened his heart. He must do what he thought right, no matter what the consequences. So he went in and wrote that he could not agree, and wished Noel to come back home at once.

But on the same afternoon, just about that hour, Noel was sitting on the river-bank with her arms folded tight across her chest, and by her side Cyril Morland, with despair in his face, was twisting a telegram "Rejoin tonight. Regiment leaves to-morrow."

What consolation that a million such telegrams had been read and sorrowed over these last two years! What comfort that the sun was daily blotted dim for hundreds of bright eyes; the joy of life poured out and sopped up by the sands of desolation!

"How long have we got, Cyril?"

"I've engaged a car from the Inn, so I needn't leave till midnight. I've packed already, to have more time."

"Let's have it to ourselves, then. Let's go off somewhere. I've got some chocolate."

Morland answered miserably:

"I can send the car up here for my things, and have it pick me up at the Inn, if you'll say goodbye to them for me, afterwards. We'll walk down the line, then we shan't meet anyone."

And in the bright sunlight they walked hand in hand on each side of a shining rail. About six they reached the Abbey.

"Let's get a boat," said Noel. "We can come back here when it's moonlight. I know a way of getting in, after the gate's shut."

They hired a boat, rowed over to the far bank, and sat on the stern seat, side by side under the trees where the water was stained deep green by the high woods. If they talked, it was but a word of love now and then, or to draw each other's attention to a fish, a bird, a dragon-fly. What use making plans—for lovers the chief theme? Longing paralysed their brains. They could do nothing but press close to each other, their hands enlaced, their lips meeting now and then. On Noel's face was a strange fixed stillness, as if she were waiting—expecting! They ate their chocolates. The sun set, dew began to fall; the river changed, and grew whiter; the sky paled to the colour of an amethyst; shadows lengthened, dissolved slowly. It was past nine already; a water-rat came out, a white owl flew over the river, towards the Abbey. The moon had come up, but shed no light as yet. They saw no beauty in all this—to young, too passionate, too unhappy.

Noel said: "When she's over those trees, Cyril, let's go. It'll be half dark."

They waited, watching the moon, which crept with infinite slowness up and up, brightening ever so little every minute.

"Now!" said Noel. And Morland rowed across.

They left the boat, and she led the way past an empty cottage, to a shed with a roof sloping up to the Abbey's low outer wall.

"We can get over here," she whispered.

They clambered up, and over, to a piece of grassy courtyard, and passed on to an inner court, under the black shadow of the high walls.

"What's the time?" said Noel.

"Half-past ten."

"Already! Let's sit here in the dark, and watch for the moon."

They sat down close together. Noel's face still had on it that strange look of waiting; and Morland sat obedient, with his hand on her heart, and his own heart beating almost to suffocation. They sat, still as mice, and the moon crept up. It laid a first vague greyness on the high wall, which spread slowly down, and brightened till the lichen and the grasses up there were visible; then crept on, silvering the dark above their heads. Noel pulled his sleeve, and whispered: "See!" There came the white owl, soft as a snowflake, drifting across in that unearthly light, as if flying to the moon. And just then the top of the

moon itself looked over the wall, a shaving of silvery gold. It grew, became a bright spread fan, then balanced there, full and round, the colour of pale honey.

"Ours!" Noel whispered.

2

From the side of the road Noel listened till the sound of the car was lost in the folds of the valley. She did not cry, but passed her hands over her face, and began to walk home, keeping to the shadow of the trees. How many years had been added to her age in those six hours since the telegram came! Several times in that mile and a half she stepped into a patch of brighter moonlight, to take out and kiss a little photograph, then slip it back next her heart, heedless that so warm a place must destroy any effigy. She felt not the faintest compunction for the recklessness of her love—it was her only comfort against the crushing loneliness of the night. It kept her up, made her walk on with a sort of pride, as if she had got the best of Fate. He was hers for ever now, in spite of anything that could be done. She did not even think what she would say when she got in. She came to the avenue, and passed up it still in a sort of dream. Her uncle was standing before the porch; she could hear his mutterings. She moved out of the shadow of the trees, went straight up to him, and, looking in his perturbed face, said calmly:

"Cyril asked me to say good-bye to you all, Uncle. Good night!"

"But, I say, Nollie look here you!"

She had passed on. She went up to her room. There, by the door, her aunt was standing, and would have kissed her. She drew back:

"No, Auntie. Not to-night!" And, slipping by, she locked her door.

Bob and Thirza Pierson, meeting in their own room, looked at each other askance. Relief at their niece's safe return was confused by other emotions. Bob Pierson expressed his first:

"Phew! I was beginning to think we should w have to drag the river. What girls are coming to!"

"It's the war, Bob."

"I didn't like her face, old girl. I don't know what it was, but I didn't like her face."

Neither did Thirza, but she would not admit it, and encourage Bob to take it to heart. He took things so hardly, and with such a noise!

She only said: "Poor young things! I suppose it will be a relief to Edward!"

"I love Nollie!" said Bob Pierson suddenly. "She's an affectionate creature. D-nit, I'm sorry about this. It's not so bad for young Morland; he's got the excitement—though I shouldn't like to be leaving Nollie, if I were young again. Thank God, neither of our boys is engaged. By George! when I think of them out there, and myself here, I feel as if the top of my head would come off. And those politician chaps spouting away in every country—how they can have the cheek!"

Thirza looked at him anxiously.

"And no dinner!" he said suddenly. "What d'you think they've been doing with themselves?"

"Holding each other's hands, poor dears! D'you know what time it is, Bob? Nearly one o'clock."

"Well, all I can say is, I've had a wretched evening. Get to bed, old girl. You'll be fit for nothing."

He was soon asleep, but Thirza lay awake, not exactly worrying, for that was not her nature, but seeing Noel's face, pale, languid, passionate, possessed by memory.

VI

Noel reached her father's house next day late in the afternoon. There was a letter in the hall for her. She tore it open, and read: "MY DARLING LOVE,

"I got back all right, and am posting this at once to tell you we shall pass through London, and go from Charing Cross, I expect about nine o'clock to-night. I shall look out for you, there, in case you are up in time. Every minute I think of you, and of last night. Oh! Noel!

"Your devoted lover, "C."

She looked at the wrist-watch which, like every other little patriot, she possessed. Past seven! If she waited, Gratian or her father would seize on her.

"Take my things up, Dinah. I've got a headache from travelling; I'm going to walk it off. Perhaps I shan't be in till past nine or so. Give my love to them all."

"Oh, Miss Noel, you can't,—"

But Noel was gone. She walked towards Charing Cross; and, to kill time, went into a restaurant and had that simple repast, coffee and a bun, which those in love would always take if Society did not forcibly feed them on other things. Food was ridiculous to her. She sat there in the midst of a perfect hive of creatures eating hideously. The place was shaped like a modern prison, having tiers of gallery round an open space, and in the air was the smell of viands and the clatter of plates and the music of a band. Men in khaki everywhere, and Noel glanced from form to form to see if by chance one might be that which represented, for her, Life and the British Army. At half-past eight she went out and made her way: through the crowd, still mechanically searching "khaki" for what she wanted; and it was perhaps fortunate that there was about her face and walk something which touched people. At the station she went up to an old porter, and, putting a shilling into his astonished hand, asked him to find out for her whence Morland's regiment would start. He came back presently, and said:

"Come with me, miss."

Noel went. He was rather lame, had grey whiskers, and a ghostly thin resemblance to her uncle Bob, which perhaps had been the reason why she had chosen him. 64

"Brother goin' out, miss?"

Noel nodded.

"Ah! It's a crool war. I shan't be sorry when it's over. Goin' out and comin' in, we see some sad sights 'ere. Wonderful spirit they've got, too. I never look at the clock now but what I think: 'There you go, slow-coach! I'd like to set you on to the day the boys come back!' When I puts a bag in: 'Another for 'ell' I thinks. And so it is, miss, from all I can 'ear. I've got a son out there meself. It's 'ere they'll come along. You stand quiet and keep a lookout, and you'll get a few minutes with him when he's done with 'is men. I wouldn't move, if I were you; he'll come to you, all right—can't miss you, there.' And, looking at her face, he thought: 'Astonishin' what a lot o' brothers go. Wot oh! Poor little missy! A little lady, too. Wonderful collected she is. It's 'ard!'" And trying to find something consoling to say, he mumbled out: "You couldn't be in a better place for seen'im off. Good night, miss; anything else I can do for you?"

"No, thank you; you're very kind."

He looked back once or twice at her blue-clad figure standing very still. He had left her against a little oasis of piled-up empty milk-cans, far down the platform where a few civilians in similar case were scattered. The trainway was empty as yet. In the grey immensity of the station and the turmoil of its noise, she felt neither lonely nor conscious of others waiting; too absorbed in the one thought of seeing him and touching him again. The empty train began backing in, stopped, and telescoped with a series of little clattering bangs, backed on again, and subsided to rest. Noel turned her eyes towards the station arch ways. Already she felt tremulous, as though the regiment were sending before it the vibration of its march.

She had not as yet seen a troop-train start, and vague images of brave array, of a flag fluttering, and the stir of drums, beset her. Suddenly she saw a brown swirling mass down there at the very edge, out of which a thin brown trickle emerged towards her; no sound of music, no waved flag. She had a longing to rush down to the barrier, but remembering the words of the porter, stayed where she was, with her hands tightly squeezed together. The trickle became a stream, a flood, the head of which began to reach her. With a turbulence of voices, sunburnt men, burdened up to the nose, passed, with rifles jutting at all angles; she strained her eyes, staring into that stream as one might into a walking wood, to isolate a single tree. Her head reeled with the strain of it, and the effort to catch his voice among the hubbub of all those cheery, common, happy-go-lucky sounds. Some who saw her clucked

their tongues, some went by silent, others seemed to scan her as though she might be what they were looking for. And ever the stream and the hubbub melted into the train, and yet came pouring on. And still she waited motionless, with an awful fear. How could he ever find her, or she him? Then she saw that others of those waiting had found their men. And the longing to rush up and down the platform almost overcame her; but still she waited. And suddenly she saw him with two other officer boys, close to the carriages, coming slowly down towards her. She stood with her eyes fixed on his face; they passed, and she nearly cried out. Then he turned, broke away from the other two, and came straight to her. He had seen her before she had seen him. He was very flushed, had a little fixed frown between his blue eyes and a set jaw. They stood looking at each other, their hands hard gripped; all the emotion of last night welling up within them, so that to speak would have been to break down. The milk-cans formed a kind of shelter, and they stood so close together that none could see their faces. Noel was the first to master her power of speech; her words came out, dainty as ever, through trembling lips:

"Write to me as much as ever you can, Cyril. I'm going to be a nurse at once. And the first leave you get, I shall come to you—don't forget."

"Forget! Move a little back, darling; they can't see us here. Kiss me!" She moved back, thrust her face forward so that he need not stoop, and put her lips up to his. Then, feeling that she might swoon and fall over among the cans, she withdrew her mouth, leaving her forehead against his lips. He murmured:

"Was it all right when you got in last night?"

"Yes; I said good-bye for you."

"Oh! Noel—I've been afraid—I oughtn't—I oughtn't—"

"Yes, yes; nothing can take you from me now."

"You have got pluck. More than!"

Along whistle sounded. Morland grasped her hands convulsively:

"Good-bye, my little wife! Don't fret. Goodbye! I must go. God bless you, Noel!"

"I love you."

They looked at each other, just another moment, then she took her hands from his and stood back in the shadow of the milk-cans, rigid, following him with her eyes till he was lost in the train.

Every carriage window was full of those brown figures and red-brown faces, hands were waving vaguely, voices calling vaguely, here and there one cheered; someone leaning far out started to sing: "If auld acquaintance—" But Noel stood quite still in the shadow of the milk-cans, her lips drawn in, her hands hard clenched in front of her; and young Morland at his window gazed back at her.

2

How she came to be sitting in Trafalgar Square she did not know. Tears had formed a mist between her and all that seething, summer-evening crowd. Her eyes mechanically followed the wandering search-lights, those new milky ways, quartering the heavens and leading nowhere. All was wonderfully beautiful, the sky a deep dark blue, the moonlight whitening the spire of St. Martin's, and everywhere endowing the great blacked-out buildings with dream-life. Even the lions had come to life, and stared out over this moonlit desert of little human figures too small to be worth the stretching out of a paw. She sat there, aching dreadfully, as if the longing of every bereaved heart in all the town had settled in her. She felt it tonight a thousand times worse; for last night she had been drugged on the new sensation of love triumphantly fulfilled. Now she felt as if life had placed her in the corner of a huge silent room, blown out the flame of joy, and locked the door. A little dry sob came from her. The hay-fields and Cyril, with shirt unbuttoned at the neck, pitching hay and gazing at her while she dabbled her fork in the thin leavings. The bright river, and their boat grounded on the shallows, and the swallows flitting over them. And that long dance, with the feel of his hand between her shoulder-blades! Memories so sweet and sharp that she almost cried out. She saw again their dark grassy courtyard in the Abbey, and the white owl flying over them. The white owl! Flying there again to-night, with no lovers on the grass below! She could only picture Cyril now as a brown atom in that swirling brown flood of men, flowing to a huge brown sea. Those cruel minutes on the platform, when she had searched and searched the walking wood for her, one tree, seemed to have burned themselves into her eyes. Cyril was lost, she could not single him out, all blurred among those thousand other shapes. And suddenly she thought: 'And I—I'm lost to him; he's never seen me at home, never seen me in London; he won't be able to imagine me. It's all in the past, only the past—for both of us. Is there anybody so

unhappy?' And the town's voices—wheels, and passing feet, whistles, talk, laughter—seemed to answer callously: 'Not one.' She looked at her wrist-watch; like his, it had luminous hands: 'Half-past ten' was greenishly imprinted there. She got up in dismay. They would think she was lost, or run over, or something silly! She could not find an empty taxi, and began to walk, uncertain of her way at night. At last she stopped a policeman, and said:

"Which is the way towards Bloomsbury, please? I can't find a taxi." The man looked at her, and took time to think it over; then he said:

"They're linin' up for the theatres," and looked at her again. Something seemed to move in his mechanism:

"I'm goin' that way, miss. If you like, you can step along with me."
Noel stepped along.

"The streets aren't what they ought to be," the policeman said. "What with the darkness, and the war turning the girls' heads—you'd be surprised the number of them that comes out. It's the soldiers, of course."

Noel felt her cheeks burning.

"I daresay you wouldn't have noticed it," the policeman went on: "but this war's a funny thing. The streets are gayer and more crowded at night than I've ever seen them; it's a fair picnic all the time. What we're goin' to settle down to when peace comes, I don't know. I suppose you find it quiet enough up your way, miss?"

"Yes," said Noel; "quite quiet."

"No soldiers up in Bloomsbury. You got anyone in the Army, miss?"

Noel nodded.

"Ah! It's anxious times for ladies. What with the Zeps, and their brothers and all in France, it's 'arassin'. I've lost a brother meself, and I've got a boy out there in the Garden of Eden; his mother carries on dreadful about him. What we shall think of it when it's all over, I can't tell. These Huns are a wicked tough lot!"

Noel looked at him; a tall man, regular and orderly, with one of those perfectly decent faces so often seen in the London police.

"I'm sorry you've lost someone," she said. "I haven't lost anyone very near, yet."

"Well, let's 'ope you won't, miss. These times make you feel for others, an' that's something. I've noticed a great change in folks you'd never think would feel for anyone. And yet I've seen some wicked things too; we do, in the police. Some of these English wives of aliens, and 'armless little German bakers, an' Austrians, and what-not: they get a crool time. It's their misfortune, not their fault, that's what I think; and the way they get served—well, it makes you ashamed o' bein' English sometimes—it does straight: And the women are the worst. I said to my wife only last night, I said: 'They call themselves Christians,' I said, 'but for all the charity that's in 'em they might as well be Huns.' She couldn't see it—not she!' Well, why do they drop bombs?" she says. 'What!' I said, 'those English wives and bakers drop bombs? Don't be silly,' I said. 'They're as innocent as we.' It's the innocent that gets punished for the guilty. 'But they're all spies,' she says. 'Oh!' I said, 'old lady! Now really! At your time of life!' But there it is; you can't get a woman to see reason. It's readin' the papers. I often think they must be written by women—beggin' your pardon, miss—but reely, the 'ystersics and the 'atred—they're a fair knockout. D'you find much hatred in your household, miss?"

Noel shook her head. "No; my father's a clergyman, you see."

"Ah!" said the policeman. And in the glance he bestowed on her could be seen an added respect.

"Of course," he went on, "you're bound to have a sense of justice against these Huns; some of their ways of goin' on have been above the limit. But what I always think is—of course I don't say these things—no use to make yourself unpopular—but to meself I often think: Take 'em man for man, and you'd find 'em much the same as we are, I daresay. It's the vicious way they're brought up, of actin' in the mass, that's made 'em such a crool lot. I see a good bit of crowds in my profession, and I've a very low opinion of them. Crowds are the most blunderin' blighted things that ever was. They're like an angry woman with a bandage over her eyes, an' you can't have anything more dangerous than that. These Germans, it seems, are always in a crowd. They get a state o' mind read out to them by Bill Kaser and all that bloody-minded lot, an' they never stop to think for themselves."

"I suppose they'd be shot if they did," said Noel.

"Well, there is that," said the policeman reflectively. "They've brought discipline to an 'igh pitch, no doubt. An' if you ask me,"—he lowered his voice till it was almost lost in his chin-strap, "we'll be runnin' 'em a good second 'ere, before long. The things we 'ave to protect now are gettin' beyond a joke. There's the City against lights, there's the streets against darkness, there's the aliens, there's the aliens' shops, there's the Belgians, there's the British wives, there's the soldiers against the women, there's the women against the soldiers, there's the Peace Party, there's 'orses against croolty, there's a Cabinet Minister every now an' then; and now we've got these Conchies. And, mind you, they haven't raised our pay; no war wages in the police. So far as I can see, there's only one good result of the war—the burglaries are off. But there again, you wait a bit and see if we don't have a prize crop of 'm, or my name's not 'Arris."

"You must have an awfully exciting life!" said Noel.

The policeman looked down at her sideways, without lowering his face, as only a policeman can, and said indulgently:

"We're used to it, you see; there's no excitement in what you're used to. They find that in the trenches, I'm told. Take our seamen—there's lots of 'em been blown up over and over again, and there they go and sign on again next day. That's where the Germans make their mistake! England in war-time! I think a lot, you know, on my go; you can't 'elp it—the mind will work—an' the more I think, the more I see the fightin' spirit in the people. We don't make a fuss about it like Bill Kaser. But you watch a little shopman, one o' those fellows who's had his house bombed; you watch the way he looks at the mess—sort of disgusted. You watch his face, and you see he's got his teeth into it. You watch one of our Tommies on 'is crutches, with the sweat pourin' off his forehead an' 'is eyes all strainy, stumpin' along—that gives you an idea! I pity these Peace fellows, reely I pity them; they don't know what they're up against. I expect there's times when you wish you was a man, don't you, miss? I'm sure there's times when I feel I'd like to go in the trenches. That's the worst o' my job; you can't be a human bein'—not in the full sense of the word. You mustn't let your passions rise, you mustn't drink, you mustn't talk; it's a narrow walk o' life. Well, here you are, miss; your Square's the next turnin' to the right. Good night and thank you for your conversation."

Noel held out her hand. "Good night!" she said.

The policeman took her hand with a queer, flattered embarrassment.

"Good night, miss," he said again. "I see you've got a trouble; and I'm sure I hope it'll turn out for the best."

Noel gave his huge hand a squeeze; her eyes had filled with tears, and she turned quickly up towards the Square, where a dark figure was coming towards her, in whom she recognised her father. His face was worn and harassed; he walked irresolutely, like a man who has lost something.

"Nollie!" he said. "Thank God!" In his voice was an infinite relief. "My child, where have you been?"

"It's all right, Daddy. Cyril has just gone to the front. I've been seeing him off from Charing Cross."

Pierson slipped his arm round her. They entered the house without speaking.... 3

By the rail of his transport, as far—about two feet—as he could get from anyone, Cyril Morland stood watching Calais, a dream city, brighten out of the heat and grow solid. He could hear the guns already, the voice of his new life-talking in the distance. It came with its strange excitement into a being held by soft and marvellous memories, by one long vision of Noel and the moonlit grass, under the dark Abbey wall. This moment of passage from wonder to wonder was quite too much for a boy unused to introspection, and he stood staring stupidly at Calais, while the thunder of his new life came rolling in on that passionate moonlit dream.

VII

After the emotions of those last three days Pierson woke with the feeling a ship must have when it makes landfall. Such reliefs are natural, and as a rule delusive; for events are as much the parents of

the future as they were the children of the past. To be at home with both his girls, and resting—for his holiday would not be over for ten days—was like old times. Now George was going on so well Gratian would be herself again; now Cyril Morland was gone Noel would lose that sudden youthful love fever. Perhaps in two or three days if George continued to progress, one might go off with Noel somewhere for one's last week. In the meantime the old house, wherein was gathered so much remembrance of happiness and pain, was just as restful as anywhere else, and the companionship of his girls would be as sweet as on any of their past rambling holidays in Wales or Ireland. And that first morning of perfect idleness—for no one knew he was back in London—pottering, and playing the piano in the homely drawing-room where nothing to speak of was changed since his wife's day, was very pleasant. He had not yet seen the girls, for Noel did not come down to breakfast, and Gratian was with George.

Discovery that there was still a barrier between him and them came but slowly in the next two days. He would not acknowledge it, yet it was there, in their voices, in their movements—rather an absence of something old than the presence of something new. It was as if each had said to him: "We love you, but you are not in our secrets—and you must not be, for you would try to destroy them." They showed no fear of him, but seemed to be pushing him unconsciously away, lest he should restrain or alter what was very dear to them. They were both fond of him, but their natures had set foot on definitely diverging paths. The closer the affection, the more watchful they were against interference by that affection. Noel had a look on her face, half dazed, half proud, which touched, yet vexed him. What had he done to forfeit her confidence—surely she must see how natural and right his opposition had been! He made one great effort to show the real sympathy he felt for her. But she only said: "I can't talk of Cyril, Daddy; I simply can't!" And he, who easily shrank into his shell, could not but acquiesce in her reserve.

With Gratian it was different. He knew that an encounter was before him; a struggle between him and her husband—for characteristically he set the change in her, the defection of her faith, down to George, not to spontaneous thought and feeling in herself. He dreaded and yet looked forward to this encounter. It came on the third day, when Laird was up, lying on that very sofa where Pierson had sat listening to Gratian's confession of disbelief. Except for putting in his head to say good morning, he had not yet seen his son-in-law: The young doctor could not look fragile, the build of his face, with that law and those heavy cheekbones was too much against it, but there was about him enough of the look of having come through a hard fight to give Pierson's heart a squeeze.

"Well, George," he said, "you gave us a dreadful fright! I thank God's mercy." With that half-mechanical phrase he had flung an unconscious challenge. Laird looked up whimsically.

"So you really think God merciful, sir?"

"Don't let us argue, George; you're not strong enough."

"Oh! I'm pining for something to bite on."

Pierson looked at Gratian, and said softly:

"God's mercy is infinite, and you know it is."

Laird also looked at Gratian, before he answered:

"God's mercy is surely the amount of mercy man has succeeded in arriving at. How much that is, this war tells you, sir."

Pierson flushed. "I don't follow you," he said painfully. "How can you say such things, when you yourself are only just No; I refuse to argue, George; I refuse."

Laird stretched out his hand to his wife, who came to him, and stood clasping it with her own. "Well, I'm going to argue," he said; "I'm simply bursting with it. I challenge you, sir, to show me where there's any sign of altruistic pity, except in man. Mother love doesn't count—mother and child are too much one."

The curious smile had come already, on both their faces.

"My dear George, is not man the highest work of God, and mercy the highest quality in man?"

"Not a bit. If geological time be taken as twenty-four hours, man's existence on earth so far equals just two seconds of it; after a few more seconds, when man has been frozen off the earth, geological time will stretch for as long again, before the earth bumps into something, and becomes nebula once more. God's hands haven't been particularly full, sir, have they—two seconds out of twenty-four hours—if man is His pet concern? And as to mercy being the highest quality in, man, that's only a modern

fashion of talking. Man's highest quality is the sense of proportion, for that's what keeps him alive; and mercy, logically pursued, would kill him off. It's a sort of a luxury or by-product."

"George! You can have no music in your soul! Science is such a little thing, if you could only see."

"Show me a bigger, sir."

"Faith."

"In what?"

"In what has been revealed to us."

"Ah! There it is again! By whom—how?"

"By God Himself—through our Lord."

A faint flush rose in Laird's yellow face, and his eyes brightened.

"Christ," he said; "if He existed, which some people, as you know, doubt, was a very beautiful character; there have been others. But to ask us to believe in His supernaturalness or divinity at this time of day is to ask us to walk through the world blindfold. And that's what you do, don't you?"

Again Pierson looked at his daughter's face. She was standing quite still, with her eyes fixed on her husband. Somehow he was aware that all these words of the sick man's were for her benefit. Anger, and a sort of despair rose within him, and he said painfully:

"I cannot explain. There are things that I can't make clear, because you are wilfully blind to all that I believe in. For what do you imagine we are fighting this great war, if it is not to reestablish the belief in love as the guiding principle of life?"

Laird shook his head. "We are fighting to redress a balance, which was in danger of being lost."

"The balance of power?"

"Heavens!—no! The balance of philosophy."

Pierson smiled. "That sounds very clever, George; but again, I don't follow you."

"The balance between the sayings: 'Might is Right,' and 'Right is Might.' They're both half-truth, but the first was beating the other out of the field. All the rest of it is cant, you know. And by the way, sir, your Church is solid for punishment of the evildoer. Where's mercy there? Either its God is not merciful, or else it doesn't believe in its God."

"Just punishment does not preclude mercy, George."

"It does in Nature."

"Ah! Nature, George—always Nature. God transcends Nature."

"Then why does He give it a free rein? A man too fond of drink, or women—how much mercy does he get from Nature? His overindulgence brings its exact equivalent of penalty; let him pray to God as much as he likes—unless he alters his ways he gets no mercy. If he does alter his ways, he gets no mercy either; he just gets Nature's due reward. We English who have neglected brain and education—how much mercy are we getting in this war? Mercy's a man-made ornament, disease, or luxury—call it what you will. Except that, I've nothing to say against it. On the contrary, I am all for it."

Once more Pierson looked at his daughter. Something in her face hurt him—the silent intensity with which she was hanging on her husband's words, the eager search of her eyes. And he turned to the door, saying:

"This is bad for you, George."

He saw Gratian put her hand on her husband's forehead, and thought—jealously: 'How can I save my poor girl from this infidelity? Are my twenty years of care to go for nothing, against this modern spirit?'

Down in his study, the words went through his mind: "Holy, holy, holy, Merciful and Mighty!" And going to the little piano in the corner, he opened it, and began playing the hymn. He played it softly on the shabby keys of this thirty-year old friend, which had been with him since College days; and sang it softly in his worn voice.

A sound made him look up. Gratian had come in. She put her hand on his shoulder, and said:

"I know it hurts you, Dad. But we've got to find out for ourselves, haven't we? All the time you and George were talking, I felt that you didn't see that it's I who've changed. It's not what he thinks, but what I've come to think of my own accord. I wish you'd understand that I've got a mind of my own, Dad."

Pierson looked up with amazement.

"Of course you have a mind."

Gratian shook her head. "No, you thought my mind was yours; and now you think it's George's. But it's my own. When you were my age weren't you trying hard to find the truth yourself, and differing from your father?"

Pierson did not answer. He could not remember. It was like stirring a stick amongst a drift of last year's leaves, to awaken but a dry rustling, a vague sense of unsubstantiality. Searched? No doubt he had searched, but the process had brought him nothing. Knowledge was all smoke! Emotional faith alone was truth—reality!

"Ah, Gracie!" he said, "search if you must, but where will you find bottom? The well is too deep for us. You will come back to God, my child, when you're tired out; the only rest is there."

"I don't want to rest. Some people search all their lives, and die searching. Why shouldn't I."

"You will be most unhappy, my child."

"If I'm unhappy, Dad, it'll be because the world's unhappy. I don't believe it ought to be; I think it only is, because it shuts its eyes."

Pierson got up. "You think I shut my eyes?"

Gratian nodded.

"If I do, it is because there is no other way to happiness."

"Are you happy; Dad?"

"As happy as my nature will let me be. I miss your mother. If I lose you and Noel—"

"Oh, but we won't let you!"

Pierson smiled. "My dear," he said, "I think I have!"

VIII

1

Some wag, with a bit of chalk, had written the word "Peace" on three successive doors of a little street opposite Buckingham Palace.

It caught the eye of Jimmy Fort, limping home to his rooms from a very late discussion at his Club, and twisted his lean shaven lips into a sort of smile. He was one of those rolling-stone Englishmen, whose early lives are spent in all parts of the world, and in all kinds of physical conflict—a man like a hickory stick, tall, thin, bolt-upright, knotty, hard as nails, with a curved fighting back to his head and a straight fighting front to his brown face. His was the type which becomes, in a generation or so, typically Colonial or American; but no one could possibly have taken Jimmy Fort for anything but an Englishman. Though he was nearly forty, there was still something of the boy in his face, something frank and curly-headed, gallant and full of steam, and his small steady grey eyes looked out on life with a sort of combative humour. He was still in uniform, though they had given him up as a bad job after keeping him nine months trying to mend a wounded leg which would never be sound again; and he was now in the War Office in connection with horses, about which he knew. He did not like it, having lived too long with all sorts and conditions of men who were neither English nor official, a combination which he found trying. His life indeed, just now, bored him to distraction, and he would ten times rather have

been back in France. This was why he found the word "Peace" so exceptionally tantalising.

Reaching his rooms, he threw off his tunic, to whose stiff regularity he still had a rooted aversion; and, pulling out a pipe, filled it and sat down at his window.

Moonshine could not cool the hot town, and it seemed sleeping badly—the seven million sleepers in their million homes. Sound lingered on, never quite ceased; the stale odours clung in the narrow street below, though a little wind was creeping about to sweeten the air. 'Curse the war!' he thought. 'What wouldn't I give to be sleeping out, instead of in this damned city!' They who slept in the open, neglecting morality, would certainly have the best of it tonight, for no more dew was falling than fell into Jimmy Fort's heart to cool the fret of that ceaseless thought: 'The war! The cursed war!' In the unending rows of little grey houses, in huge caravanserais, and the mansions of the great, in villas, and high slum tenements; in the government offices, and factories, and railway stations where they worked all night; in the long hospitals where they lay in rows; in the camp prisons of the interned; in bar racks, work-houses, palaces—no head, sleeping or waking, would be free of that thought: 'The, cursed war!' A spire caught his eye, rising ghostly over the roofs. Ah! churches alone, void of the human soul, would be unconscious! But for the rest, even sleep would not free them! Here a mother would be whispering the name of her boy; there a merchant would snore and dream he was drowning, weighted with gold; and a wife would be turning to stretch out her arms to no one; and a wounded soldier wake out of a dream trench with sweat on his brow; and a news vendor in his garret mutter hoarsely. By thousands the bereaved would be tossing, stifling their moans; by thousands the ruined would be gazing into the dark future; and housewives struggling with sums; and soldiers sleeping like logs—for to-morrow they died; and children dreaming of them; and prostitutes lying in stale wonder at the busyness of their lives; and journalists sleeping the sleep of the just. And over them all, in the moonlight that thought 'The cursed war!' flapped its black wings, like an old crow! "If Christ were real," he mused, "He'd reach that moon down, and go chalking 'Peace' with it on every door of every house, all over Europe. But Christ's not real, and Hindenburg and Harmsworth are!" As real they were as two great bulls he had once seen in South Africa, fighting. He seemed to hear again the stamp and snort and crash of those thick skulls, to see the beasts recoiling and driving at each other, and the little red eyes of them. And pulling a letter out of his pocket, he read it again by the light of the moon:

"15, Camelot Mansions, "St. John's Wood.

"DEAR MR. FORT, "I came across your Club address to-night, looking at some old letters. Did you know that I was in London? I left Steenbok when my husband died, five years ago. I've had a simply terrific time since. While the German South West campaign was on I was nursing out there, but came back about a year ago to lend a hand here. It would be awfully nice to meet you again, if by any chance you are in England. I'm working in a V. A. D. hospital in these parts, but my evenings are usually free. Do you remember that moonlit night at grape harvest? The nights here aren't scented quite like that. Listerine! Oh! This war! "With all good remembrances, "LEILA LYNCH."

A terrific time! If he did not mistake, Leila Lynch had always had a terrific time. And he smiled, seeing again the stoep of an old Dutch house at High Constantia, and a woman sitting there under the white flowers of a sweet-scented creeper—a pretty woman, with eyes which could put a spell on you, a woman he would have got entangled with if he had not cut and run for it! Ten years ago, and here she was again, refreshing him out of the past. He sniffed the fragrance of the little letter. How everybody always managed to work into a letter what they were doing in the war! If he answered her he would be sure to say: "Since I got lamed, I've been at the War Office, working on remounts, and a dull job it is!" Leila Lynch! Women didn't get younger, and he suspected her of being older than himself. But he remembered agreeably her white shoulders and that turn of her neck when she looked at you with those big grey eyes of hers. Only a five-day acquaintanceship, but they had crowded much into it as one did in a strange land. The episode had been a green and dangerous spot, like one of those bright mossy bits of bog when you were snipe-shooting, to set foot on which was to let you down up to the neck, at least. Well, there was none of that danger now, for her husband was dead-poor chap! It would be nice, in these dismal days, when nobody spent any time whatever except in the service of the country, to improve his powers of service by a few hours' recreation in her society. 'What humbugs we are!' he thought: 'To read the newspapers and the speeches you'd believe everybody thought of nothing but how to get killed for the sake of the future. Drunk on verbiage! What heads and mouths we shall all have when we wake up some fine morning with Peace shining in at the window! Ah! If only we could; and enjoy ourselves again!' And he gazed at the moon. She was dipping already, reeling away into the dawn. Water carts and street sweepers had come out into the glimmer; sparrows twittered in the eaves. The city was raising a strange unknown face to the grey light, shuttered and deserted as Babylon. Jimmy Fort tapped out his pipe, sighed, and got into bed.

Coming off duty at that very moment, Leila Lynch decided to have her hour's walk before she went home. She was in charge of two wards, and as a rule took the day watches; but some slight upset had given her this extra spell. She was, therefore, at her worst, or perhaps at her best, after eighteen hours in hospital. Her cheeks were pale, and about her eyes were little lines, normally in hiding. There was in this face a puzzling blend of the soft and hard, for the eyes, the rather full lips, and pale cheeks, were naturally soft; but they were hardened by the self-containment which grows on women who have to face life for themselves, and, conscious of beauty, intend to keep it, in spite of age. Her figure was contradictory, also; its soft modelling a little too rigidified by stays. In this desert of the dawn she let her long blue overcoat flap loose, and swung her hat on a finger, so that her light-brown, touched-up hair took the morning breeze with fluffy freedom. Though she could not see herself, she appreciated her appearance, swaying along like that, past lonely trees and houses. A pity there was no one to see her in that round of Regent's Park, which took her the best part of an hour, walking in meditation, enjoying the colour coming back into the world, as if especially for her.

There was character in Leila Lynch, and she had lived an interesting life from a certain point of view. In her girlhood she had fluttered the hearts of many besides Cousin Edward Pierson, and at eighteen had made a passionate love match with a good-looking young Indian civilian, named Fane. They had loved each other to a standstill in twelve months. Then had begun five years of petulance, boredom, and growing cynicism, with increasing spells of Simla, and voyages home for her health which was really harmed by the heat. All had culminated, of course, in another passion for a rifleman called Lynch. Divorce had followed, remarriage, and then the Boer War, in which he had been badly wounded. She had gone out and nursed him back to half his robust health, and, at twenty-eight, taken up life with him on an up-country farm in Cape Colony. This middle period had lasted ten years, between the lonely farm and an old Dutch house at High Constantia. Lynch was not a bad fellow, but, like most soldiers of the old Army, had been quite carefully divested of an aesthetic sense. And it was Leila's misfortune to have moments when aesthetic sense seemed necessary. She had struggled to overcome this weakness, and that other weakness of hers—a liking for men's admiration; but there had certainly been intervals when she had not properly succeeded. Her acquaintance with Jimmy Fort had occurred during one of these intervals, and when he went back to England so abruptly, she had been feeling very tenderly towards him. She still remembered him with a certain pleasure. Before Lynch died, these "intervals" had been interrupted by a spell of returning warmth for the invalided man to whom she had joined her life under the romantic conditions of divorce. He had failed, of course, as a farmer, and his death left her with nothing but her own settled income of a hundred and fifty pounds a year. Faced by the prospect of having almost to make her living, at thirty-eight, she felt but momentary dismay—for she had real pluck. Like many who have played with amateur theatricals, she fancied herself as an actress; but, after much effort, found that only her voice and the perfect preservation of her legs were appreciated by the discerning managers and public of South Africa; and for three chequered years she made face against fortune with the help of them, under an assumed name. What she did—keeping a certain bloom of refinement, was far better than the achievements of many more respectable ladies in her shoes. At least she never bemoaned her "reduced circumstances," and if her life was irregular and had at least three episodes, it was very human. She bravely took the rough with the smooth, never lost the power of enjoying herself, and grew in sympathy with the hardships of others. But she became deadly tired. When the war broke out, remembering that she was a good nurse, she took her real name again and a change of occupation. For one who liked to please men, and to be pleased by them, there was a certain attraction about that life in war-time; and after two years of it she could still appreciate the way her Tommies turned their heads to look at her when she passed their beds. But in a hard school she had learned perfect self-control; and though the sour and puritanical perceived her attraction, they knew her to be forty-three. Besides, the soldiers liked her; and there was little trouble in her wards. The war moved her in simple ways; for she was patriotic in the direct fashion of her class. Her father had been a sailor, her husbands an official and a soldier; the issue for her was uncomplicated by any abstract meditation. The Country before everything! And though she had tended during those two years so many young wrecked bodies, she had taken it as all in the a day's work, lavishing her sympathy on the individual, without much general sense of pity and waste. Yes, she had worked really hard, had "done her bit"; but of late she had felt rising within her the old vague craving for "life," for pleasure, for something more than the mere negative admiration bestowed on her by her "Tommies." Those old letters—to look them through them had been a sure sign of this vague craving—had sharpened to poignancy the feeling that life was slipping away from her while she was still comely. She had been long out of England, and so hard-worked since she came back that there were not many threads she could pick up suddenly. Two letters out of that little budget of the past, with a far cry between them, had awakened within her certain sentimental longings. "DEAR LADY OF THE STARRY FLOWERS,

"Exiturus (sic) to saluto! The tender carries you this message of good-bye. Simply speaking, I hate leaving South Africa. And of all my memories, the last will live the longest. Grape harvest at Constantia, and you singing: 'If I could be the falling dew: If ever you and your husband come to England, do let me

know, that I may try and repay a little the happiest five days I've spent out here.

"Your very faithful servant,
"TIMMY FORT."

She remembered a very brown face, a tall slim figure, and something gallant about the whole of him. What was he like after ten years? Grizzled, married, with a large family? An odious thing—Time! And Cousin Edward's little yellow letter.

Good heavens! Twenty-six years ago—before he was a parson, or married or anything! Such a good partner, really musical; a queer, dear fellow, devoted, absentminded, easily shocked, yet with flame burning in him somewhere. 'DEAR LEILA,

"After our last dance I went straight off—I couldn't go in. I went down to the river, and walked along the bank; it was beautiful, all grey and hazy, and the trees whispered, and the cows looked holy; and I walked along and thought of you. And a farmer took me for a lunatic, in my dress clothes. Dear Leila, you were so pretty last night, and I did love our dances. I hope you are not tired, and that I shall see you soon again:

"Your affectionate cousin,
"EDWARD PIERSON."

And then he had gone and become a parson, and married, and been a widower fifteen years. She remembered the death of his wife, just before she left for South Africa, at that period of disgrace when she had so shocked her family by her divorce. Poor Edward—quite the nicest of her cousins! The only one she would care to see again. He would be very old and terribly good and proper, by now.

Her wheel of Regent's Park was coming full circle, and the sun was up behind the houses, but still no sound of traffic stirred. She stopped before a flower-bed where was some heliotrope, and took a long, luxurious sniff: She could not resist plucking a sprig, too, and holding it to her nose. A sudden want of love had run through every nerve and fibre of her; she shivered, standing there with her eyes half closed, above the pale violet blossom. Then, noting by her wrist-watch that it was four o'clock, she hurried on, to get to her bed, for she would have to be on duty again at noon. Oh! the war! She was tired! If only it were over, and one could live!...

Somewhere by Twickenham the moon had floated down; somewhere up from Kentish Town the sun came soaring; wheels rolled again, and the seven million sleepers in their million houses woke from morning sleep to that same thought....

IX

Edward Pierson, dreaming over an egg at breakfast, opened a letter in a handwriting which he did not recognise.

"V. A. D. Hospital,

"Mulberry Road, St. John's Wood N. W.
"DEAR COUSIN EDWARD,

"Do you remember me, or have I gone too far into the shades of night? I was Leila Pierson once upon a time, and I often think of you and wonder what you are like now, and what your girls are like. I have been here nearly a year, working for our wounded, and for a year before that was nursing in South Africa. My husband died five years ago out there. Though we haven't met for I dare not think how long, I should awfully like to see you again. Would you care to come some day and look over my hospital? I have two wards under me; our men are rather dears.

"Your forgotten but still affectionate cousin
"LEILA LYNCH."

"P. S. I came across a little letter you once wrote me; it brought back old days."

No! He had not forgotten. There was a reminder in the house. And he looked up at Noel sitting

opposite. How like the eyes were! And he thought: 'I wonder what Leila has become. One mustn't be uncharitable. That man is dead; she has been nursing two years. She must be greatly changed; I should certainly like to see her. I will go!' Again he looked at Noel. Only yesterday she had renewed her request to be allowed to begin her training as a nurse.

"I'm going to see a hospital to-day, Nollie," he said; "if you like, I'll make enquiries. I'm afraid it'll mean you have to begin by washing up."

"I know; anything, so long as I do begin."

"Very well; I'll see about it." And he went back to his egg.

Noel's voice roused him. "Do you feel the war much, Daddy? Does it hurt you here?" She had put her hand on her heart. "Perhaps it doesn't, because you live half in the next world, don't you?"

The words: "God forbid," sprang to Pierson's lips; he did not speak them, but put his egg-spoon down, hurt and bewildered. What did the child mean? Not feel the war! He smiled.

"I hope I'm able to help people sometimes, Nollie," and was conscious that he had answered his own thoughts, not her words. He finished his breakfast quickly, and very soon went out. He crossed the Square, and passed East, down two crowded streets to his church. In the traffic of those streets, all slipshod and confused, his black-clothed figure and grave face, with its Vandyk beard, had a curious remote appearance, like a moving remnant of a past civilisation. He went in by the side door. Only five days he had been away, but they had been so full of emotion that the empty familiar building seemed almost strange to him. He had come there unconsciously, groping for anchorage and guidance in this sudden change of relationship between him and his daughters. He stood by the pale brazen eagle, staring into the chancel. The choir were wanting new hymn-books—he must not forget to order them! His eyes sought the stained-glass window he had put in to the memory of his wife. The sun, too high to slant, was burnishing its base, till it glowed of a deep sherry colour. "In the next world!" What strange words of Noel's! His eyes caught the glimmer of the organ-pipes; and, mounting to the loft, he began to play soft chords wandering into each other. He finished, and stood gazing down. This space within high walls, under high vaulted roof, where light was toned to a perpetual twilight, broken here and there by a little glow of colour from glass and flowers, metal, and dark wood, was his home, his charge, his refuge. Nothing moved down there, and yet—was not emptiness mysteriously living, the closed-in air imprinted in strange sort, as though the drone of music and voices in prayer and praise clung there still? Had not sanctity a presence? Outside, a barrel-organ drove its tune along; a wagon staggered on the paved street, and the driver shouted to his horses; some distant guns boomed out in practice, and the rolling of wheels on wheels formed a net of sound. But those invading noises were transmuted to a mere murmuring in here; only the silence and the twilight were real to Pierson, standing there, a little black figure in a great empty space.

When he left the church, it was still rather early to go to Leila's hospital; and, having ordered the new hymn-books, he called in at the house of a parishioner whose son had been killed in France. He found her in her kitchen; an oldish woman who lived by charring. She wiped a seat for the Vicar.

"I was just makin' meself a cup o' tea, sir."

"Ah! What a comfort tea is, Mrs. Soles!" And he sat down, so that she should feel "at home."

"Yes; it gives me 'eart-burn; I take eight or ten cups a day, now. I take 'em strong, too. I don't seem able to get on without it. I 'ope the young ladies are well, sir?"

"Very well, thank you. Miss Noel is going to begin nursing, too."

"Deary-me! She's very young; but all the young gells are doin' something these days. I've got a niece in munitions-makin' a pretty penny she is. I've been meanin' to tell you—I don't come to church now; since my son was killed, I don't seem to 'ave the 'eart to go anywhere—'aven't been to a picture-palace these three months. Any excitement starts me cryin'."

"I know; but you'd find rest in church."

Mrs. Soles shook her head, and the small twisted bob of her discoloured hair wobbled vaguely.

"I can't take any recreation," she said. "I'd rather sit 'ere, or be at work. My son was a real son to me. This tea's the only thing that does me any good. I can make you a fresh cup in a minute."

"Thank you, Mrs. Soles, but I must be getting on. We must all look forward to meeting our beloved again, in God's mercy. And one of these days soon I shall be seeing you in church, shan't I."

Mrs. Soles shifted her weight from one slippered foot to the other.

"Well! let's 'ope so," she said. "But I dunno when I shall 'ave the spirit. Good day, sir, and thank you kindly for calling, I'm sure."

Pierson walked away with a very faint smile. Poor queer old soul!—she was no older than himself, but he thought of her as ancient—cut off from her son, like so many—so many; and how good and patient! The melody of an anthem began running in his head. His fingers moved on the air beside him, and he stood still, waiting for an omnibus to take him to St. John's Wood. A thousand people went by while he was waiting, but he did not notice them, thinking of that anthem, of his daughters, and the mercy of God; and on the top of his 'bus, when it came along, he looked lonely and apart, though the man beside him was so fat that there was hardly any seat left to sit on. Getting down at Lord's Cricket-ground, he asked his way of a lady in a nurse's dress.

"If you'll come with me," she said, "I'm just going there."

"Oh! Do you happen to know a Mrs. Lynch who nurses"

"I am Mrs. Lynch. Why, you're Edward Pierson!"

He looked into her face, which he had not yet observed.

"Leila!" he said.

"Yes, Leila! How awfully nice of you to come, Edward!"

They continued to stand, searching each for the other's youth, till she murmured:

"In spite of your beard, I should have known you anywhere!" But she thought: 'Poor Edward! He is old, and monk-like!'

And Pierson, in answer, murmured:

"You're very little changed, Leila! We haven't, seen each other since my youngest girl was born. She's just a little like you." But he thought: 'My Nollie! So much more dewy; poor Leila!'

They walked on, talking of his daughters, till they reached the hospital.

"If you'll wait here a minute, I'll take you over my wards."

She had left him in a bare hall, holding his hat in one hand and touching his gold cross with the other; but she soon came back, and a little warmth crept about his heart. How works of mercy suited women! She looked so different, so much softer, beneath the white coif, with a white apron over the bluish frock.

At the change in his face, a little warmth crept about Leila, too, just where the bib of her apron stopped; and her eyes slid round at him while they went towards what had once been a billiard-room.

"My men are dears," she said; "they love to be talked to."

Under a skylight six beds jutted out from a green distempered wall, opposite to six beds jutting out from another green distempered wall, and from each bed a face was turned towards them young faces, with but little expression in them. A nurse, at the far end, looked round, and went on with her work. The sight of the ward was no more new to Pierson than to anyone else in these days. It was so familiar, indeed, that it had practically no significance. He stood by the first bed, and Leila stood alongside. The man smiled up when she spoke, and did not smile when he spoke, and that again was familiar to him. They passed from bed to bed, with exactly the same result, till she was called away, and he sat down by a young soldier with a long, very narrow head and face, and a heavily bandaged shoulder. Touching the bandage reverently, Pierson said:

"Well, my dear fellow—still bad?"

"Ah!" replied the soldier. "Shrapnel wound: It's cut the flesh properly."

"But not the spirit, I can see!"

The young soldier gave him a quaint look, as much as to say: "Not 'arf bad!" and a gramophone close to the last bed began to play: "God bless Daddy at the war!"

"Are you fond of music?"

"I like it well enough. Passes the time."

"I'm afraid the time hangs heavy in hospital."

"Yes; it hangs a bit 'eavy; it's just 'orspital life. I've been wounded before, you see. It's better than bein' out there. I expect I'll lose the proper use o' this arm. I don't worry; I'll get my discharge."

"You've got some good nurses here."

"Yes; I like Mrs. Lynch; she's the lady I like."

"My cousin."

"I see you come in together. I see everything 'ere. I think a lot, too. Passes the time."

"Do they let you smoke?"

"Oh, yes! They let us smoke."

"Have one of mine?"

The young soldier smiled for the first time. "Thank you; I've got plenty."

The nurse came by, and smiled at Pierson.

"He's one of our blase ones; been in before, haven't you, Simson?"

Pierson looked at the young man, whose long, narrow face; where one sandy-lashed eyelid drooped just a little, seemed armoured with a sort of limited omniscience. The gramophone had whirred and grunted into "Sidi Brahim." The nurse passed on.

"Seedy Abram," said the young soldier. "The Frenchies sing it; they takes it up one after the other, ye know."

"Ah!" murmured Pierson; "it's pretty." And his fingers drummed on the counterpane, for the tune was new to him. Something seemed to move in the young man's face, as if a blind had been drawn up a little.

"I don't mind France," he said abruptly; "I don't mind the shells and that; but I can't stick the mud. There's a lot o' wounded die in the mud; can't get up—smothered." His unwounded arm made a restless movement. "I was nearly smothered myself. Just managed to keep me nose up."

Pierson shuddered. "Thank God you did!"

"Yes; I didn't like that. I told Mrs. Lynch about that one day when I had the fever. She's a nice lady; she's seen a lot of us boys: That mud's not right, you know." And again his unwounded arm made that restless movement; while the gramophone struck up: "The boys in brown." The movement of the arm affected Pierson horribly; he rose and, touching the bandaged shoulder, said:

"Good-bye; I hope you'll soon be quite recovered."

The young soldier's lips twisted in the semblance of a smile; his drooped eyelid seemed to try and raise itself.

"Good day, sir," he said; "and thank you."

Pierson went back to the hall. The sunlight fell in a pool just inside the open door, and an uncontrollable impulse made him move into it, so that it warmed him up to the waist. The mud! How ugly life was! Life and Death! Both ugly! Poor boys! Poor boys!

A voice behind him said:

"Oh! There you are, Edward! Would you like to see the other ward, or shall I show you our kitchen?"

Pierson took her hand impulsively. "You're doing a noble work, Leila. I wanted to ask you: Could you arrange for Noel to come and get trained here? She wants to begin at once. The fact is, a boy she is attracted to has just gone out to the Front."

"Ah!" murmured Leila, and her eyes looked very soft. "Poor child! We shall be wanting an extra hand next week. I'll see if she could come now. I'll speak to our Matron, and let you know to-night." She

squeezed his hand hard.

"Dear Edward, I'm so glad to see you again. You're the first of our family I've seen for sixteen years. I wonder if you'd bring Noel to have supper at my flat to-night—Just nothing to eat, you know! It's a tiny place. There's a Captain Fort coming; a nice man."

Pierson accepted, and as he walked away he thought: 'Dear Leila! I believe it was Providence. She wants sympathy. She wants to feel the past is the past. How good women are!'

And the sun, blazing suddenly out of a cloud, shone on his black figure and the little gold cross, in the middle of Portland Place.

X

Men, even if they are not artistic, who have been in strange places and known many nooks of the world, get the scenic habit, become open to pictorial sensation. It was as a picture or series of pictures that Jimmy Fort ever afterwards remembered his first supper at Leila's. He happened to have been all day in the open, motoring about to horse farms under a hot sun; and Leila's hock cup possessed a bland and subtle strength. The scenic sense derived therefrom had a certain poignancy, the more so because the tall child whom he met there did not drink it, and her father seemed but to wet his lips, so that Leila and he had all the rest. Rather a wonderful little scene it made in his mind, very warm, glowing, yet with a strange dark sharpness to it, which came perhaps from the black walls.

The flat had belonged to an artist who was at the war. It was but a pocket dwelling on the third floor. The two windows of the little square sitting-room looked out on some trees and a church. But Leila, who hated dining by daylight, had soon drawn curtains of a deep blue over them. The picture which Fort remembered was this: A little four-square table of dark wood, with a Chinese mat of vivid blue in the centre, whereon stood a silver lustre bowl of clove carnations; some greenish glasses with hock cup in them; on his left, Leila in a low lilac frock, her neck and shoulders very white, her face a little powdered, her eyes large, her lips smiling; opposite him a black-clothed padre with a little gold cross, over whose thin darkish face, with its grave pointed beard, passed little gentle smiles, but whose deep sunk grey eyes were burnt and bright; on his right, a girl in a high grey frock, almost white, just hollowed at the neck, with full sleeves to the elbow, so that her slim arms escaped; her short fair hair a little tumbled; her big grey eyes grave; her full lips shaping with a strange daintiness round every word—and they not many; brilliant red shades over golden lights dotting the black walls; a blue divan; a little black piano flush with the wall; a dark polished floor; four Japanese prints; a white ceiling. He was conscious that his own khaki spoiled something as curious and rare as some old Chinese tea-chest. He even remembered what they ate; lobster; cold pigeon pie; asparagus; St. Ivel cheese; raspberries and cream. He did not remember half so well what they talked of, except that he himself told them stories of the Boer War, in which he had served in the Yeomanry, and while he was telling them, the girl, like a child listening to a fairy-tale, never moved her eyes from his face. He remembered that after supper they all smoked cigarettes, even the tall child, after the padre had said to her mildly, "My dear!" and she had answered: "I simply must, Daddy, just one." He remembered Leila brewing Turkish coffee—very good, and how beautiful her white arms looked, hovering about the cups. He remembered her making the padre sit down at the piano, and play to them. And she and the girl on the divan together, side by side, a strange contrast; with just as strange a likeness to each other. He always remembered how fine and rare that music sounded in the little room, flooding him with a dreamy beatitude. Then—he remembered—Leila sang, the padre standing-by; and the tall child on the divan bending forward over her knees, with her chin on her hands. He remembered rather vividly how Leila turned her neck and looked up, now at the padre, now at himself; and, all through, the delightful sense of colour and warmth, a sort of glamour over all the evening; and the lingering pressure of Leila's hand when he said good-bye and they went away, for they all went together. He remembered talking a great deal to the padre in the cab, about the public school they had both been at, and thinking: 'It's a good padre—this!' He remembered how their taxi took them to an old Square which he did not know, where the garden trees looked densely black in the starshine. He remembered that a man outside the house had engaged the padre in earnest talk, while the tall child and himself stood in the open doorway, where the hall beyond was dark. Very exactly he remembered the little conversation which then took place between them, while they waited for her father.

"Is it very horrid in the trenches, Captain Fort?"

"Yes, Miss Pierson; it is very horrid, as a rule."

"Is it dangerous all the time?"

"Pretty well."

"Do officers run more risks than the men?"

"Not unless there's an attack."

"Are there attacks very often?"

It had seemed to him so strangely primitive a little catechism, that he had smiled. And, though it was so dark, she had seen that smile, for her face went proud and close all of a sudden. He had cursed himself, and said gently:

"Have you a brother out there?"

She shook her head.

"But someone?"

"Yes."

Someone! He had heard that answer with a little shock. This child—this fairy princess of a child already to have someone! He wondered if she went about asking everyone these questions, with that someone in her thoughts. Poor child! And quickly he said:

"After all, look at me! I was out there a year, and here I am with only half a game leg; times were a lot worse, then, too. I often wish I were back there. Anything's better than London and the War Office." But just then he saw the padre coming, and took her hand. "Good night, Miss Pierson. Don't worry. That does no good, and there isn't half the risk you think."

Her hand stirred, squeezed his gratefully, as a child's would squeeze.

"Good night," she murmured; "thank you awfully."

And, in the dark cab again, he remembered thinking: 'Fancy that child! A jolly lucky boy, out there! Too bad! Poor little fairy princess!'

PART II

I

1

To wash up is not an exciting operation. To wash up in August became for Noel a process which taxed her strength and enthusiasm. She combined it with other forms of instruction in the art of nursing, had very little leisure, and in the evenings at home would often fall asleep curled up in a large chintz-covered chair.

George and Gratian had long gone back to their respective hospitals, and she and her father had the house to themselves. She received many letters from Cyril which she carried about with her and read on her way to and from the hospital; and every other day she wrote to him. He was not yet in the firing line; his letters were descriptive of his men, his food, or the natives, or reminiscent of Kestrel; hers descriptive of washing up, or reminiscent of Kestrel. But in both there was always some little word of the longing within them.

It was towards the end of August when she had the letter which said that he had been moved up. From now on he would be in hourly danger! That evening after dinner she did not go to sleep in the chair, but sat under the open window, clenching her hands, and reading "Pride and Prejudice" without understanding a word. While she was so engaged her father came up and said:

"Captain Fort, Nollie. Will you give him some coffee? I'm afraid I must go out."

When he had gone, Noel looked at her visitor drinking his coffee. He had been out there, too, and he was alive; with only a little limp. The visitor smiled and said:

"What were you thinking about when we came in?"

"Only the war."

"Any news of him?"

Noel frowned, she hated to show her feelings.

"Yes! he's gone to the Front. Won't you have a cigarette?"

"Thanks. Will you?"

"I want one awfully. I think sitting still and waiting is more dreadful than anything in the world."

"Except, knowing that others are waiting. When I was out there I used to worry horribly over my mother. She was ill at the time. The cruelest thing in war is the anxiety of people about each other—nothing touches that."

The words exactly summed up Noel's hourly thought. He said nice things, this man with the long legs and the thin brown bumpy face!

"I wish I were a man," she said, "I think women have much the worst time in the war. Is your mother old?" But of course she was old why he was old himself!

"She died last Christmas."

"Oh! I'm so sorry!"

"You lost your mother when you were a babe, didn't you?"

"Yes. That's her portrait." At the end of the room, hanging on a strip of black velvet was a pastel, very faint in colouring, as though faded, of a young woman, with an eager, sweet face, dark eyes, and bent a little forward, as if questioning her painter. Fort went up to it.

"It's not a bit like you. But she must have been a very sweet woman."

"It's a sort of presence in the room. I wish I were like her!"

Fort turned. "No," he said; "no. Better as you are. It would only have spoiled a complete thing."

"She was good."

"And aren't you?"

"Oh! no. I get a devil."

"You! Why, you're out of a fairy-tale!"

"It comes from Daddy—only he doesn't know, because he's a perfect saint; but I know he's had a devil somewhere, or he couldn't be the saint he is."

"H'm!" said Fort. "That's very deep: and I believe it's true—the saints did have devils."

"Poor Daddy's devil has been dead ages. It's been starved out of him, I think."

"Does your devil ever get away with you?"

Noel felt her cheeks growing red under his stare, and she turned to the window:

"Yes. It's a real devil."

Vividly there had come before her the dark Abbey, and the moon balancing over the top of the crumbling wall, and the white owl flying across. And, speaking to the air, she said:

"It makes you do things that you want to do."

She wondered if he would laugh—it sounded so silly. But he did not.

"And damn the consequences? I know. It's rather a jolly thing to have."

Noel shook her head. "Here's Daddy coming back!"

Fort held out his hand.

"I won't stay. Good night; and don't worry too much, will you?"

He kept her hand rather a long time, and gave it a hard squeeze.

Don't worry! What advice! Ah! if she could see Cyril just for a minute!

2

In September, 1916, Saturday still came before Sunday, in spite of the war. For Edward Pierson this Saturday had been a strenuous day, and even now, at nearly midnight, he was still conning his just-completed sermon.

A patriot of patriots, he had often a passionate longing to resign his parish, and go like his curate for a chaplain at the Front. It seemed to him that people must think his life idle and sheltered and useless. Even in times of peace he had been sensitive enough to feel the cold draughty blasts which the Church encounters in a material age. He knew that nine people out of ten looked on him as something of a parasite, with no real work in the world. And since he was nothing if not conscientious, he always worked himself to the bone.

To-day he had risen at half-past six, and after his bath and exercises, had sat down to his sermon—for, even now, he wrote a new sermon once a month, though he had the fruits of twenty-six years to choose from. True, these new sermons were rather compiled than written, because, bereft of his curate, he had not time enough for fresh thought on old subjects. At eight he had breakfasted with Noel, before she went off to her hospital, whence she would return at eight in the evening. Nine to ten was his hour for seeing parishioners who had troubles, or wanted help or advice, and he had received three to-day who all wanted help, which he had given. From ten to eleven he had gone back to his sermon, and had spent from eleven to one at his church, attending to small matters, writing notices, fixing hymns, holding the daily half-hour Service instituted during wartime, to which but few ever came. He had hurried back to lunch, scamping it so that he might get to his piano for an hour of forgetfulness. At three he had christened a very noisy baby, and been detained by its parents who wished for information on a variety of topics. At half-past four he had snatched a cup of tea, reading the paper; and had spent from five to seven visiting two Parish Clubs, and those whose war-pension matters he had in hand, and filling up forms which would be kept in official places till such time as the system should be changed and a fresh set of forms issued. From seven to eight he was at home again, in case his flock wanted to see him; to-day four sheep had come, and gone away, he was afraid, but little the wiser. From half-past eight to half-past nine he had spent in choir practice, because the organist was on his holiday. Slowly in the cool of the evening he had walked home, and fallen asleep in his chair on getting in. At eleven he had woken with a start, and, hardening his heart, had gone back to his sermon. And now, at nearly midnight, it was still less than twenty minutes long. He lighted one of his rare cigarettes, and let thought wander. How beautiful those pale pink roses were in that old silver bowl—like a little strange poem, or a piece of Debussy music, or a Mathieu Maris picture—reminding him oddly of the word Leila. Was he wrong in letting Noel see so much of Leila? But then she was so improved—dear Leila!... The pink roses were just going to fall! And yet how beautiful!... It was quiet to-night; he felt very drowsy.... Did Nollie still think of that young man, or had it passed? She had never confided in him since! After the war, it would be nice to take her to Italy, to all the little towns. They would see the Assisi of St. Francis. The Little Flowers of St. Francis. The Little Flowers!... His hand dropped, the cigarette went out. He slept with his face in shadow. Slowly into the silence of his sleep little sinister sounds intruded. Short concussions, dragging him back out of that deep slumber. He started up. Noel was standing at the door, in a long coat. She said in her calm voice:

"Zeps, Daddy!"

"Yes, my dear. Where are the maids?"

An Irish voice answered from the hall: "Here, sir; trustin' in God; but 'tis better on the ground floor."

He saw a huddle of three figures, queerly costumed, against the stairs.

"Yes, Yes, Bridgie; you're safe down here." Then he noticed that Noel was gone. He followed her out into the Square, alive with faces faintly luminous in the darkness, and found her against the garden railings.

"You must come back in, Nollie."

"Oh, no! Cyril has this every day."

He stood beside her; not loth, for excitement had begun to stir his blood. They stayed there for some minutes, straining their eyes for sight of anything save the little zagged splashes of bursting shrapnel, while voices buzzed, and muttered: "Look! There! There! There it is!"

But the seers had eyes of greater faith than Pierson's, for he saw nothing: He took her arm at last, and led her in. In the hall she broke from him.

"Let's go up on the roof, Daddy!" and ran upstairs.

Again he followed, mounting by a ladder, through a trapdoor on to the roof.

"It's splendid up here!" she cried.

He could see her eyes blazing, and thought: 'How my child does love excitement—it's almost terrible!'

Over the wide, dark, star-strewn sky travelling searchlights, were lighting up the few little clouds; the domes and spires rose from among the spread-out roofs, all fine and ghostly. The guns had ceased firing, as though puzzled. One distant bang rumbled out.

"A bomb! Oh! If we could only get one of the Zeps!"

A furious outburst of firing followed, lasting perhaps a minute, then ceased as if by magic. They saw two searchlights converge and meet right overhead.

"It's above us!" murmured Noel.

Pierson put his arm round her waist. 'She feels no fear!' he thought. The search-lights switched apart; and suddenly, from far away, came a confusion of weird sounds.

"What is it? They're cheering. Oh! Daddy, look!" There in the heavens, towards the east, hung a dull red thing, lengthening as they gazed.

"They've got it. It's on fire! Hurrah!"

Through the dark firmament that fiery orange shape began canting downward; and the cheering swelled in a savage frenzy of sound. And Pierson's arm tightened on her waist.

"Thank God!" he muttered.

The bright oblong seemed to break and spread, tilted down below the level of the roofs; and suddenly the heavens flared, as if some huge jug of crimson light had been flung out on them. Something turned over in Pierson's heart; he flung up his hand to his eyes.

"The poor men in it!" he said. "How terrible!"

Noel's voice answered, hard and pitiless:

"They needn't have come. They're murderers!"

Yes, they were murderers—but how terrible! And he stood quivering, with his hands pressed to his face, till the cheering had died out into silence.

"Let's pray, Nollie!" he whispered. "O God, Who in Thy great mercy hath delivered us from peril, take into Thy keeping the souls of these our enemies, consumed by Thy wrath before our eyes; give us the power to pity them—men like ourselves."

But even while he prayed he could see Noel's face flame-white in the darkness; and, as that glow in the sky faded out, he felt once more the thrill of triumph.

They went down to tell the maids, and for some time after sat up together, talking over what they had seen, eating biscuits and drinking milk, which they warmed on an etna. It was nearly two o'clock before they went to bed. Pierson fell asleep at once, and never turned till awakened at half-past six by his alarm. He had Holy Communion to administer at eight, and he hurried to get early to his church and see that nothing untoward had happened to it. There it stood in the sunlight; tall, grey, quiet, unharmed, with bell gently ringing.

And at that hour Cyril Morland, under the parapet of his trench, tightening his belt, was looking at his wrist-watch for the hundredth time, calculating exactly where he meant to put foot and hand for the going over: 'I absolutely mustn't let those chaps get in front of me,' he thought. So many yards before the first line of trenches, so many yards to the second line, and there stop. So his rehearsals had gone; it was the performance now! Another minute before the terrific racket of the drum-fire should become the curtain-fire, which would advance before them. He ran his eye down the trench. The man next him was licking his two first fingers, as if he might be going to bowl at cricket. Further down, a man was feeling his puttees. A voice said: "Wot price the orchestra nah!" He saw teeth gleam in faces burnt almost black. Then he looked up; the sky was blue beyond the brownish film of dust raised by the striking shells. Noel! Noel! Noel!... He dug his fingers deep into the left side of his tunic till he could feel the outline of her photograph between his dispatch-case and his heart. His heart fluttered just as it used when he was stretched out with hand touching the ground, before the start of the "hundred yards" at school. Out of the corner of his eye he caught the flash of a man's "briquet" lighting a cigarette. All right for those chaps, but not for him; he wanted all his breath—this rifle, and kit were handicap enough! Two days ago he had been reading in some paper how men felt just before an attack. And now he knew. He just felt nervous. If only the moment would come, and get itself over! For all the thought he gave to the enemy there might have been none—nothing but shells and bullets, with lives of their own. He heard the whistle; his foot was on the spot he had marked down; his hand where he had seen it; he called out: "Now, boys!" His head was over the top, his body over; he was conscious of someone falling, and two men neck and neck beside him. Not to try and run, not to break out of a walk; to go steady, and yet keep ahead! D—n these holes! A bullet tore through his sleeve, grazing his arm—a red-hot sensation, like the touch of an iron. A British shell from close over his head burst sixty yards ahead; he stumbled, fell flat, picked himself up. Three ahead of him now! He walked faster, and drew alongside. Two of them fell. 'What luck!' he thought; and gripping his rifle harder, pitched headlong into a declivity. Dead bodies lay there! The first German trench line, and nothing alive in it, nothing to clean up, nothing of it left! He stopped, getting his wind; watching the men panting and stumbling in. The roar of the guns was louder than ever again, barraging the second line. So far, good! And here was his captain!

"Ready, boys? On, then!"

This time he moved more slowly still, over terrible going, all holes and hummocks. Half consciously he took cover all he could. The air was alive with the whistle from machine-gun fire storming across zigzag fashion—alive it was with bullets, dust, and smoke. 'How shall I tell her?' he thought. There would be nothing to tell but just a sort of jagged brown sensation. He kept his eyes steadily before him, not wanting to see the men falling, not wanting anything to divert him from getting there. He felt the faint fanning of the passing bullets. The second line must be close now. Why didn't that barrage lift? Was this new dodge of firing till the last second going to do them in? Another hundred yards and he would be bang into it. He flung himself flat and waited; looking at his wrist-watch he noted that his arm was soaked with blood. He thought: 'A wound! Now I shall go home. Thank God! Oh, Noel!' The passing bullets whirled above him; he could hear them even through the screech and thunder of the shell-fire. 'The beastly things!' he thought: A voice beside him gasped out:

"It's lifted, sir."

He called: "Come on, boys!" and went forward, stooping. A bullet struck his rifle. The shock made him stagger and sent an electric shock spinning up his arm. 'Luck again!' he thought. 'Now for it! I haven't seen a German yet!' He leaped forward, spun round, flung up his arms, and fell on his back, shot through and through....

The position was consolidated, as they say, and in the darkness stretcher-bearers were out over the half-mile. Like will-o'-the-wisps, with their shaded lanterns, they moved, hour after hour, slowly quartering the black honeycomb which lay behind the new British line. Now and then in the light of some star-shell their figures were disclosed, bending and raising the forms of the wounded, or wielding pick and shovel.

"Officer."

"Dead?"

"Sure."

"Search."

From the shaded lantern, lowered to just above the body, a yellowish glare fell on face and breast. The hands of the searcher moved in that little pool of light. The bearer who was taking notes bent down.

"Another boy," he said. "That all he has?"

The searcher raised himself.

"Just those, and a photo."

"Dispatch-case; pound loose; cigarette-case; wristwatch; photo. Let's see it."

The searcher placed the photo in the pool of light. The tiny face of a girl stared up at them, unmoved, from its short hair.

"Noel," said the searcher, reading.

"H'm! Take care of it. Stick it in his case. Come on!"

The pool of light dissolved, and darkness for ever covered Cyril Morland.

II

When those four took their seats in the Grand Circle at Queen's Hall the programme was already at the second number, which, in spite of all the efforts of patriotism, was of German origin—a Brandenburg concerto by Bach. More curious still, it was encored. Pierson did not applaud, he was too far gone in pleasure, and sat with a rapt smile on his face, oblivious of his surroundings. He remained thus removed from mortal joys and sorrows till the last applause had died away, and Leila's voice said in his ear:

"Isn't it a wonderful audience, Edward? Look at all that khaki. Who'd have thought those young men cared for music—good music—German music, too?"

Pierson looked down at the patient mass of standing figures in straw hats and military caps, with faces turned all one way, and sighed.

"I wish I could get an audience like that in my church."

A smile crept out at the corner of Leila's lips. She was thinking: 'Ah! Your Church is out of date, my dear, and so are you! Your Church, with its smell of mould and incense, its stained-glass, and narrowed length and droning organ. Poor Edward, so out of the world!' But she only pressed his arm, and whispered:

"Look at Noel!"

The girl was talking to Jimmy Fort. Her cheeks were gushed, and she looked prettier than Pierson had seen her look for a long time now, ever since Kestrel, indeed. He heard Leila sigh.

"Does she get news of her boy? Do you remember that May Week, Edward? We were very young then; even you were young. That was such a pretty little letter you wrote me. I can see you still-wandering in your dress clothes along the river, among the 'holy' cows."

But her eyes slid round again, watching her other neighbour and the girl. A violinist had begun to play the Cesar Franck Sonata. It was Pierson's favourite piece of music, bringing him, as it were, a view of heaven, of devotional blue air where devout stars were shining in a sunlit noon, above ecstatic trees and waters where ecstatic swans were swimming.

"Queer world, Mr. Pierson! Fancy those boys having to go back to barrack life after listening to that! What's your feeling? Are we moving back to the apes? Did we touch top note with that Sonata?"

Pierson turned and contemplated his questioner shrewdly.

"No, Captain Fort, I do not think we are moving back to the apes; if we ever came from them. Those boys have the souls of heroes!"

"I know that, sir, perhaps better than you do."

"Ah! yes," said Pierson humbly, "I forgot, of course." But he still looked at his neighbour doubtfully. This Captain Fort, who was a friend of Leila's, and who had twice been to see them, puzzled him. He

had a frank face, a frank voice, but queer opinions, or so it seemed to, Pierson—little bits of Moslemism, little bits of the backwoods, and the veldt; queer unexpected cynicisms, all sorts of side views on England had lodged in him, and he did not hide them. They came from him like bullets, in that frank voice, and drilled little holes in the listener. Those critical sayings flew so much more poignantly from one who had been through the same educational mill as himself, than if they had merely come from some rough diamond, some artist, some foreigner, even from a doctor like George. And they always made him uncomfortable, like the touch of a prickly leaf; they did not amuse him. Certainly Edward Pierson shrank from the rough touches of a knock-about philosophy. After all, it was but natural that he should.

He and Noel left after the first part of the concert, parting from the other two at the door. He slipped his hand through her arm; and, following out those thoughts of his in the concert-hall, asked:

"Do you like Captain Fort, Nollie?"

"Yes; he's a nice man."

"He seems a nice man, certainly; he has a nice smile, but strange views, I'm afraid."

"He thinks the Germans are not much worse than we are; he says that a good many of us are bullies too."

"Yes, that is the sort of thing I mean."

"But are we, Daddy?"

"Surely not."

"A policeman I talked to once said the same. Captain Fort says that very few men can stand having power put into their hands without being spoiled. He told me some dreadful stories. He says we have no imagination, so that we often do things without seeing how brutal they are."

"We're not perfect, Nollie; but on the whole I think we're a kind people."

Noel was silent a moment, then said suddenly:

"Kind people often think others are kind too, when they really aren't. Captain Fort doesn't make that mistake."

"I think he's a little cynical, and a little dangerous."

"Are all people dangerous who don't think like others, Daddy?"

Pierson, incapable of mockery, was not incapable of seeing when he was being mocked. He looked at his daughter with a smile.

"Not quite so bad as that, Nollie; but Mr. Fort is certainly subversive. I think perhaps he has seen too many queer sides of life."

"I like him the better for that."

"Well, well," Pierson answered absently. He had work to do in preparation for a Confirmation Class, and sought his study on getting in.

Noel went to the dining-room to drink her hot milk. The curtains were not drawn, and bright moonlight was coming in. Without lighting up, she set the etna going, and stood looking at the moon-full for the second time since she and Cyril had waited for it in the Abbey. And pressing her hands to her breast, she shivered. If only she could summon him from the moonlight out there; if only she were a witch—could see him, know where he was, what doing! For a fortnight now she had received no letter. Every day since he had left she had read the casualty lists, with the superstitious feeling that to do so would keep him out of them. She took up the Times. There was just enough light, and she read the roll of honour—till the moon shone in on her, lying on the floor, with the dropped journal....

But she was proud, and soon took grief to her room, as on that night after he left her, she had taken love. No sign betrayed to the house her disaster; the journal on the floor, and the smell of the burnt milk which had boiled over, revealed nothing. After all, she was but one of a thousand hearts which spent that moonlit night in agony. Each night, year in, year out, a thousand faces were buried in pillows to smother that first awful sense of desolation, and grope for the secret spirit-place where bereaved souls go, to receive some feeble touch of healing from knowledge of each other's trouble....

In the morning she got up from her sleepless bed, seemed to eat her breakfast, and went off to her hospital. There she washed up plates and dishes, with a stony face, dark under the eyes.

The news came to Pierson in a letter from Thirza, received at lunch-time. He read it with a dreadful aching. Poor, poor little Nollie! What an awful trouble for her! And he, too, went about his work with the nightmare thought that he had to break the news to her that evening. Never had he felt more lonely, more dreadfully in want of the mother of his children. She would have known how to soothe, how to comfort. On her heart the child could have sobbed away grief. And all that hour, from seven to eight, when he was usually in readiness to fulfil the functions of God's substitute to his parishioners, he spent in prayer of his own, for guidance how to inflict and heal this blow. When, at last, Noel came, he opened the door to her himself, and, putting back the hair from her forehead, said: "Come in here a moment, my darling!" Noel followed him into the study, and sat down. "I know already, Daddy." Pierson was more dismayed by this stoicism than he would have been by any natural outburst. He stood, timidly stroking her hair, murmuring to her what he had said to Gratian, and to so many others in these days: "There is no death; look forward to seeing him again; God is merciful" And he marvelled at the calmness of that pale face—so young.

"You are very brave, my child!" he said.

"There's nothing else to be, is there?"

"Isn't there anything I can do for you, Nollie?"

"No, Daddy."

"When did you see it?"

"Last night." She had already known for twenty-four hours without telling him!

"Have you prayed, my darling?"

"No."

"Try, Nollie!"

"No."

"Ah, try!"

"It would be ridiculous, Daddy; you don't know."

Grievously upset and bewildered, Pierson moved away from her, and said:

"You look dreadfully tired. Would you like a hot bath, and your dinner in bed?"

"I'd like some tea; that's all." And she went out.

When he had seen that the tea had gone up to her, he too went out; and, moved by a longing for woman's help, took a cab to Leila's flat.

III

On leaving the concert Leila and Jimmy Fort had secured a taxi; a vehicle which, at night, in wartime, has certain advantages for those who desire to become better acquainted. Vibration, sufficient noise, darkness, are guaranteed; and all that is lacking for the furtherance of emotion is the scent of honeysuckle and roses, or even of the white flowering creeper which on the stoep at High Constantia had smelled so much sweeter than petrol.

When Leila found herself with Fort in that loneliness to which she had been looking forward, she was overcome by an access of nervous silence. She had been passing through a strange time for weeks past. Every night she examined her sensations without quite understanding them as yet. When a woman comes to her age, the world-force is liable to take possession, saying:

"You were young, you were beautiful, you still have beauty, you are not, cannot be, old. Cling to youth, cling to beauty; take all you can get, before your face gets lines and your hair grey; it is

impossible that you have been loved for the last time."

To see Jimmy Fort at the concert, talking to Noel, had brought this emotion to a head. She was not of a grudging nature, and could genuinely admire Noel, but the idea that Jimmy Fort might also admire disturbed her greatly. He must not; it was not fair; he was too old—besides, the girl had her boy; and she had taken care that he should know it. So, leaning towards him, while a bare-shouldered young lady sang, she had whispered:

"Penny?"

And he had whispered back:

"Tell you afterwards."

That had comforted her. She would make him take her home. It was time she showed her heart.

And now, in the cab, resolved to make her feelings known, in sudden shyness she found it very difficult. Love, to which for quite three years she had been a stranger, was come to life within her. The knowledge was at once so sweet, and so disturbing, that she sat with face averted, unable to turn the precious minutes to account. They arrived at the flat without having done more than agree that the streets were dark, and the moon bright. She got out with a sense of bewilderment, and said rather desperately:

"You must come up and have a cigarette. It's quite early, still."

He went up.

"Wait just a minute," said Leila.

Sitting there with his drink and his cigarette, he stared at some sunflowers in a bowl—Famille Rose—and waited just ten; smiling a little, recalling the nose of the fairy princess, and the dainty way her lips shaped the words she spoke. If she had not had that lucky young devil of a soldier boy, one would have wanted to buckle her shoes, lay one's coat in the mud for her, or whatever they did in fairytales. One would have wanted—ah! what would one not have wanted! Hang that soldier boy! Leila said he was twenty-two. By George! how old it made a man feel who was rising forty, and tender on the off-fore! No fairy princesses for him! Then a whiff of perfume came to his nostrils; and, looking up, he saw Leila standing before him, in a long garment of dark silk, whence her white arms peeped out.

"Another penny? Do you remember these things, Jimmy? The Malay women used to wear them in Cape Town. You can't think what a relief it is to get out of my slave's dress. Oh! I'm so sick of nursing! Jimmy, I want to live again a little!"

The garment had taken fifteen years off her age, and a gardenia, just where the silk crossed on her breast, seemed no whiter than her skin. He wondered whimsically whether it had dropped to her out of the dark!

"Live?" he said. "Why! Don't you always?"

She raised her hands so that the dark silk fell, back from the whole length of those white arms.

"I haven't lived for two years. Oh, Jimmy! Help me to live a little! Life's so short, now."

Her eyes disturbed him, strained and pathetic; the sight of her arms; the scent of the flower disturbed him; he felt his cheeks growing warm, and looked down.

She slipped suddenly forward on to her knees at his feet, took his hand, pressed it with both of hers, and murmured:

"Love me a little! What else is there? Oh! Jimmy, what else is there?"

And with the scent of the flower, crushed by their hands, stirring his senses, Fort thought: 'Ah, what else is there, in these forsaken days?'

To Jimmy Fort, who had a sense of humour, and was in some sort a philosopher, the haphazard way life settled things seldom failed to seem amusing. But when he walked away from Leila's he was pensive. She was a good sort, a pretty creature, a sportswoman, an enchantress; but—she was decidedly mature. And here he was—involved in helping her to "live"; involved almost alarmingly, for there had been no mistaking the fact that she had really fallen in love with him.

This was flattering and sweet. Times were sad, and pleasure scarce, but—! The roving instinct which had kept him, from his youth up, rolling about the world, shied instinctively at bonds, however pleasant, the strength and thickness of which he could not gauge; or, was it that perhaps for the first time in his life he had been peeping into fairyland of late, and this affair with Leila was by no means fairyland? He had another reason, more unconscious, for uneasiness. His heart, for all his wanderings, was soft, he had always found it difficult to hurt anyone, especially anyone who did him the honour to love him. A sort of presentiment weighed on him while he walked the moonlit streets at this most empty hour, when even the late taxis had ceased to run. Would she want him to marry her? Would it be his duty, if she did? And then he found himself thinking of the concert, and that girl's face, listening to the tales he was telling her. 'Deuced queer world,' he thought, 'the way things go! I wonder what she would think of us, if she knew—and that good padre! Phew!'

He made such very slow progress, for fear of giving way in his leg, and having to spend the night on a door-step, that he had plenty of time for rumination; but since it brought him no confidence whatever, he began at last to feel: 'Well; it might be a lot worse. Take the goods the gods send you and don't fuss!' And suddenly he remembered with extreme vividness that night on the stoep at High Constantia, and thought with dismay: 'I could have plunged in over head and ears then; and now—I can't! That's life all over! Poor Leila! Me miserum, too, perhaps—who knows!'

IV

When Leila opened her door to Edward Pierson, her eyes were smiling, and her lips were soft. She seemed to smile and be soft all over, and she took both his hands. Everything was a pleasure to her that day, even the sight of this sad face. She was in love and was loved again; had a present and a future once more, not only her own full past; and she must finish with Edward in half an hour, for Jimmy was coming. She sat down on the divan, took his hand in a sisterly way, and said:

"Tell me, Edward; I can see you're in trouble. What is it?"

"Noel. The boy she was fond of has been killed."

She dropped his hand.

"Oh, no! Poor child! It's too cruel!" Tears started up in her grey eyes, and she touched them with a tiny handkerchief. "Poor, poor little Noel! Was she very fond of him?"

"A very sudden, short engagement; but I'm afraid she takes it desperately to heart. I don't know how to comfort her; only a woman could. I came to ask you: Do you think she ought to go on with her work? What do you think, Leila? I feel lost!"

Leila, gazing at him, thought: 'Lost? Yes, you look lost, my poor Edward!'

"I should let her go on," she said: "it helps; it's the only thing that does help. I'll see if I can get them to let her come into the wards. She ought to be in touch with suffering and the men; that kitchen work will try her awfully just now: Was he very young?"

"Yes. They wanted to get married. I was opposed to it."

Leila's lip curled ever so little. 'You would be!' she thought.

"I couldn't bear to think of Nollie giving herself hastily, like that; they had only known each other three weeks. It was very hard for me, Leila. And then suddenly he was sent to the front."

Resentment welled up in Leila. The kill-Joys! As if life didn't kill joy fast enough! Her cousin's face at that moment was almost abhorrent to her, its gentle perplexed goodness darkened and warped by that monkish look. She turned away, glanced at the clock over the hearth, and thought: 'Yes, and he would stop Jimmy and me! He would say: "Oh, no! dear Leila—you mustn't love—it's sin!" How I hate that word!'

"I think the most dreadful thing in life," she said abruptly, "is the way people suppress their natural instincts; what they suppress in themselves they make other people suppress too, if they can; and that's the cause of half the misery in this world."

Then at the surprise on his face at this little outburst, whose cause he could not know, she added hastily: "I hope Noel will get over it quickly, and find someone else."

"Yes. If they had been married—how much worse it would have been. Thank God, they weren't!"

"I don't know. They would have had an hour of bliss. Even an hour of bliss is worth something in these days."

"To those who only believe in this 'life—perhaps."

'Ten minutes more!' she thought: 'Oh, why doesn't he go?' But at that very moment he got up, and instantly her heart went out to him again.

"I'm so sorry, Edward. If I can help in any way—I'll try my best with Noel to-morrow; and do come to me whenever you feel inclined."

She took his hand in hers; afraid that he would sit down again, she yet could not help a soft glance into his eyes, and a little rush of pitying warmth in the pressure of her hand.

Pierson smiled; the smile which always made her sorry for him.

"Good-bye, Leila; you're very good and kind to me. Good-bye."

Her bosom swelled with relief and compassion; and—she let him out.

Running upstairs again she thought: 'I've just time. What shall I put on? Poor Edward, poor Noel! What colour does Jimmy like? Oh! Why didn't I keep him those ten years ago—what utter waste!' And, feverishly adorning herself, she came back to the window, and stood there in the dark to watch, while some jasmine which grew below sent up its scent to her. 'Would I marry him?' she thought, 'if he asked me? But he won't ask me—why should he now? Besides, I couldn't bear him to feel I wanted position or money from him. I only want love—love—love!' The silent repetition of that word gave her a wonderful sense of solidity and comfort. So long as she only wanted love, surely he would give it.

A tall figure turned down past the church, coming towards her. It was he! And suddenly she bethought herself. She went to the little black piano, sat down, and began to sing the song she had sung to him ten years ago: "If I could be the falling dew and fall on thee all day!" She did not even look round when he came in, but continued to croon out the words, conscious of him just behind her shoulder in the dark. But when she had finished, she got up and threw her arms round him, strained him to her, and burst into tears on his shoulder; thinking of Noel and that dead boy, thinking of the millions of other boys, thinking of her own happiness, thinking of those ten years wasted, of how short was life, and love; thinking—hardly knowing what she thought! And Jimmy Fort, very moved by this emotion which he only half understood, pressed her tightly in his arms, and kissed her wet cheeks and her neck, pale and warm in the darkness.

V

1

Noel went on with her work for a month, and then, one morning, fainted over a pile of dishes. The noise attracted attention, and Mrs. Lynch was summoned.

The sight of her lying there so deadly white taxed Leila's nerves severely. But the girl revived quickly, and a cab was sent for. Leila went with her, and told the driver to stop at Camelot Mansions. Why take her home in this state, why not save the jolting, and let her recover properly? They went upstairs arm in arm. Leila made her lie down on the divan, and put a hot-water bottle to her feet. Noel was still so passive and pale that even to speak to her seemed a cruelty. And, going to her little sideboard, Leila stealthily extracted a pint bottle of some champagne which Jimmy Fort had sent in, and took it with two glasses and a corkscrew into her bedroom. She drank a little herself, and came out bearing a glass to the girl. Noel shook her head, and her eyes seemed to say: "Do you really think I'm so easily mended?" But Leila had been through too much in her time to despise earthly remedies, and she held it to the girl's lips until she drank. It was excellent champagne, and, since Noel had never yet touched alcohol, had an instantaneous effect. Her eyes brightened; little red spots came up in her cheeks. And suddenly

she rolled over and buried her face deep in a cushion. With her short hair, she looked so like a child lying there, that Leila knelt down, stroking her head, and saying: "There, there; my love! There, there!"

At last the girl raised herself; now that the pallid, masklike despair of the last month was broken, she seemed on fire, and her face had a wild look. She withdrew herself from Leila's touch, and, crossing her arms tightly across her chest, said:

"I can't bear it; I can't sleep. I want him back; I hate life—I hate the world. We hadn't done anything—only just loved each other. God likes punishing; just because we loved each other; we had only one day to love each other—only one day—only one!"

Leila could see the long white throat above those rigid arms straining and swallowing; it gave her a choky feeling to watch it. The voice, uncannily dainty for all the wildness of the words and face, went on:

"I won't—I don't want to live. If there's another life, I shall go to him. And if there isn't—it's just sleep."

Leila put out her hand to ward off these wild wanderings. Like most women who live simply the life of their senses and emotions, she was orthodox; or rather never speculated on such things.

"Tell me about yourself and him," she said.

Noel fastened her great eyes on her cousin. "We loved each other; and children are born, aren't they, after you've loved? But mine won't be!" From the look on her face rather than from her words, the full reality of her meaning came to Leila, vanished, came again. Nonsense! But—what an awful thing, if true! That which had always seemed to her such an exaggerated occurrence in the common walks of life—why! now, it was a tragedy! Instinctively she raised herself and put her arms round the girl.

"My poor dear!" she said; "you're fancying things!"

The colour had faded out of Noel's face, and, with her head thrown back and her eyelids half-closed, she looked like a scornful young ghost.

"If it is—I shan't live. I don't mean to—it's easy to die. I don't mean Daddy to know."

"Oh! my dear, my dear!" was all Leila could stammer.

"Was it wrong, Leila?"

"Wrong? I don't know—wrong? If it really is so—it was—unfortunate. But surely, surely—you're mistaken?"

Noel shook her head. "I did it so that we should belong to each other. Nothing could have taken him from me."

Leila caught at the girl's words.

"Then, my dear—he hasn't quite gone from you, you see?"

Noel's lips formed a "No" which was inaudible. "But Daddy!" she whispered.

Edward's face came before Leila so vividly that she could hardly see the girl for the tortured shape of it. Then the hedonist in her revolted against that ascetic vision. Her worldly judgment condemned and deplored this calamity, her instinct could not help applauding that hour of life and love, snatched out of the jaws of death. "Need he ever know?" she said.

"I could never lie to Daddy. But it doesn't matter. Why should one go on living, when life is rotten?"

Outside the sun was shining brightly, though it was late October. Leila got up from her knees. She stood at the window thinking hard.

"My dear," she said at last, "you mustn't get morbid. Look at me! I've had two husbands, and—and—well, a pretty stormy up and down time of it; and I daresay I've got lots of trouble before me. But I'm not going to cave in. Nor must you. The Piersons have plenty of pluck; you mustn't be a traitor to your blood. That's the last thing. Your boy would have told you to stick it. These are your 'trenches,' and you're not going to be downed, are you?"

After she had spoken there was a long silence, before Noel said:

"Give me a cigarette, Leila."

Leila produced the little flat case she carried.

"That's brave," she said. "Nothing's incurable at your age. Only one thing's incurable—getting old."

Noel laughed. "That's curable too, isn't it?"

"Not without surrender."

Again there was a silence, while the blue fume from two cigarettes fast-smoked, rose towards the low ceiling. Then Noel got up from the divan, and went over to the piano. She was still in her hospital dress of lilac-coloured linen, and while she stood there touching the keys, playing a chord now, and then, Leila's heart felt hollow from compassion; she was so happy herself just now, and this child so very wretched!

"Play to me," she said; "no—don't; I'll play to you." And sitting down, she began to play and sing a little French song, whose first line ran: "Si on est jolie, jolie comme vous." It was soft, gay, charming. If the girl cried, so much the better. But Noel did not cry. She seemed suddenly to have recovered all her self-possession. She spoke calmly, answered Leila's questions without emotion, and said she would go home. Leila went out with her, and walked some way in the direction of her home; distressed, but frankly at a loss. At the bottom of Portland Place Noel stopped and said: "I'm quite all right now, Leila; thank you awfully. I shall just go home and lie down. And I shall come to-morrow, the same as usual. Goodbye!" Leila could only grasp the girl's hand, and say: "My dear, that's splendid. There's many a slip—besides, it's war-time."

With that saying, enigmatic even to herself, she watched the girl moving slowly away; and turned back herself towards her hospital, with a disturbed and compassionate heart.

2

But Noel did not go east; she walked down Regent Street. She had received a certain measure of comfort, been steadied by her experienced cousin's vitality, and the new thoughts suggested by those words: "He hasn't quite gone from you, has he?" "Besides, it's war-time." Leila had spoken freely, too, and the physical ignorance in which the girl had been groping these last weeks was now removed. Like most proud natures, she did not naturally think much about the opinion of other people; besides, she knew nothing of the world, its feelings and judgments. Her nightmare was the thought of her father's horror and grief. She tried to lessen that nightmare by remembering his opposition to her marriage, and the resentment she had felt. He had never realised, never understood, how she and Cyril loved. Now, if she were really going to have a child, it would be Cyril's—Cyril's son—Cyril over again. The instinct stronger than reason, refinement, tradition, upbringing, which had pushed her on in such haste to make sure of union—the irrepressible pulse of life faced with annihilation—seemed to revive within her, and make her terrible secret almost precious. She had read about "War babies" in the papers, read with a dull curiosity; but now the atmosphere, as it were, of those writings was illumined for her. These babies were wrong, were a "problem," and yet, behind all that, she seemed now to know that people were glad of them; they made up, they filled the gaps. Perhaps, when she had one, she would be proud, secretly proud, in spite of everyone, in spite of her father! They had tried to kill Cyril—God and everyone; but they hadn't been able, he was alive within her! A glow came into her face, walking among the busy shopping crowd, and people turned to look at her; she had that appearance of seeing no one, nothing, which is strange and attractive to those who have a moment to spare from contemplation of their own affairs. Fully two hours she wandered thus, before going in, and only lost that exalted feeling when, in her own little room, she had taken up his photograph, and was sitting on her bed gazing at it. She had a bad breakdown then. Locked in there, she lay on her bed, crying, dreadfully lonely, till she fell asleep exhausted, with the tear-stained photograph clutched in her twitching fingers. She woke with a start. It was dark, and someone was knocking on her door.

"Miss Noel!"

Childish perversity kept her silent. Why couldn't they leave her alone? They would leave her alone if they knew. Then she heard another kind of knocking, and her father's voice:

"Nollie! Nollie!"

She scrambled up, and opened. He looked scared, and her heart smote her.

"It's all right, Daddy; I was asleep."

"My dear, I'm sorry, but dinner's ready."

"I don't want any dinner; I think I'll go to bed."

The frown between his brows deepened.

"You shouldn't lock your door, Nollie: I was quite frightened. I went round to the hospital to bring you home, and they told me about your fainting. I want you to see a doctor."

Noel shook her head vigorously. "Oh, no! It's nothing!"

"Nothing? To faint like that? Come, my child. To please me." He took her face in his hands. Noel shrank away.

"No, Daddy. I won't see a doctor. Extravagance in wartime! I won't. It's no good trying to make me. I'll come down if you like; I shall be all right to-morrow."

With this Pierson had to be content; but, often that evening, she saw him looking at her anxiously. And when she went up, he came out of his study, followed to her room, and insisted on lighting her fire. Kissing her at the door, he said very quietly:

"I wish I could be a mother to you, my child!"

For a moment it flashed through Noel: 'He knows!' then, by the puzzled look on his face, she knew that he did not. If only he did know; what a weight it would be off her mind! But she answered quietly too; "Good night, Daddy dear!" kissed him, and shut the door.

She sat down before the little new fire, and spread her hands out to it; all was so cold and wintry in her heart. And the firelight flickered on her face, where shadows lay thick under her eyes, for all the roundness of her cheeks, and on her slim pale hands, and the supple grace of her young body. And out in the night, clouds raced over the moon, which had come full once more.

VI

1

Pierson went back to his study, and wrote to Gratian.

"If you can get leave for a few days, my dear, I want you at home. I am troubled about Nollie. Ever since that disaster happened to her she has been getting paler; and to-day she fainted. She won't see a doctor, but perhaps you could get her to see George. If you come up, he will surely be able to run up to us for a day or two. If not, you must take her down to him at the sea. I have just seen the news of your second cousin Charlie Pierson's death; he was killed in one of the last attacks on the Somme; he was nephew of my cousin Leila whom, as you know, Noel sees every day at her hospital. Bertram has the D. S. O. I have been less hard-pressed lately; Lauder has been home on leave and has taken some Services for me. And now the colder weather has come, I am feeling much fresher. Try your best to come. I am seriously concerned for our beloved child. "Your affectionate father "EDWARD PIERSON."

Gratian answered that she could get week-end leave, and would come on Friday. He met her at the station, and they drove thence straight to the hospital, to pick up Noel. Leila came to them in the waiting-room, and Pierson, thinking they would talk more freely about Noel's health if he left them alone, went into the recreation room, and stood watching a game of bagatelle between two convalescents. When he returned to the little sitting-room they were still standing by the hearth, talking in low voices. Gratian must surely have been stooping over the fire, for her face was red, almost swollen, and her eyes looked as if she had scorched them.

Leila said lightly:

"Well, Edward, aren't the men delightful? When are we going to another concert together?"

She, too, was flushed and looking almost young.

"Ah! If we could do the things we want to.

"That's very pretty, Edward; but you should, you know—for a tonic." He shook his head and smiled.

"You're a temptress, Leila. Will you let Nollie know, please, that we can take her back with us? Can you let her off to-morrow?"

"For as long as you like; she wants a rest. I've been talking to Gratian. We oughtn't to have let her go on after a shock like that—my fault, I'm afraid. I thought that work might be best."

Pierson was conscious of Gratian walking past him out of the room. He held out his hand to Leila, and followed. A small noise occurred behind him such as a woman makes when she has put a foot through her own skirt, or has other powerful cause for dismay. Then he saw Noel in the hall, and was vaguely aware of being the centre of a triangle of women whose eyes were playing catch-gance. His daughters kissed each other; and he became seated between them in the taxi. The most unobservant of men, he parted from them in the hall without having perceived anything except that they were rather silent; and, going to his study, he took up a *Life of Sir Thomas More*. There was a passage therein which he itched to show George Laird, who was coming up that evening.

Gratian and Noel had mounted the stairs with lips tight set, and eyes averted; both were very pale. When they reached the door of Gratian's room the room which had been their mother's—Noel was for passing on, but Gratian caught her by the arm, and said: "Come in." The fire was burning brightly in there, and the two sisters stood in front of it, one on each side, their hands clutching the mantel-shelf, staring at the flames. At last Noel put one hand in front of her eyes, and said:

"I asked her to tell you."

Gratian made the movement of one who is gripped by two strong emotions, and longs to surrender to one or to the other.

"It's too horrible," was all she said.

Noel turned towards the door.

"Stop, Nollie!"

Noel stopped with her hand on the door knob. "I don't want to be forgiven and sympathised with. I just want to be let alone."

"How can you be let alone?"

The tide of misery surged up in Noel, and she cried out passionately:

"I hate sympathy from people who can't understand. I don't want anyone's. I can always go away, and lose myself."

The words "can't understand" gave Gratian a shock.

"I can understand," she said.

"You can't; you never saw him. You never saw—" her lips quivered so that she had to stop and bite them, to keep back a rush of tears.

"Besides you would never have done it yourself."

Gratian went towards her, but stopped, and sat down on the bed. It was true. She would never have done it herself; it was just that which, for all her longing to help her sister, iced her love and sympathy. How terrible, wretched, humiliating! Her own sister, her only sister, in the position of all those poor, badly brought up girls, who forgot themselves! And her father—their father! Till that moment she had hardly thought of him, too preoccupied by the shock to her own pride. The word: "Dad!" was forced from her.

Noel shuddered.

"That boy!" said Gratian suddenly; "I can't forgive him. If you didn't know—he did. It was—it was—" She stopped at the sight of Noel's face.

"I did know," she said. "It was I. He was my husband, as much as yours is. If you say a word against him, I'll never speak to you again: I'm glad, and you would be, if you were going to have one. What's the difference, except that you've had luck, and I—haven't." Her lips quivered again, and she was silent.

Gratian stared up at her. She had a longing for George—to know what he thought and felt.

"Do you mind if I tell George?" she said.

Noel shook her head. "No! not now. Tell anybody." And suddenly the misery behind the mask of her face went straight to Gratian's heart. She got up and put her arms round her sister.

"Nollie dear, don't look like that!"

Noel suffered the embrace without response, but when it was over, went to her own room.

Gratian stayed, sorry, sore and vexed, uncertain, anxious. Her pride was deeply wounded, her heart torn; she was angry with herself. Why couldn't she have been more sympathetic? And yet, now that Noel was no longer there, she again condemned the dead. What he had done was unpardonable. Nollie was such—a child! He had committed sacrilege. If only George would come, and she could talk it all out with him! She, who had married for love and known passion, had insight enough to feel that Noel's love had been deep—so far as anything, of course, could be deep in such a child. Gratian was at the mature age of twenty. But to have forgotten herself like that! And this boy! If she had known him, that feeling might have been mitigated by the personal element, so important to all human judgment; but never having seen him, she thought of his conduct as "caddish." And she knew that this was, and would be, the trouble between her and her sister. However she might disguise it, Noel would feel that judgment underneath.

She stripped off her nurse's garb, put on an evening frock, and fidgeted about the room. Anything rather than go down and see her father again before she must. This, which had happened, was beyond words terrible for him; she dreaded the talk with him about Noel's health which would have to come. She could say nothing, of course, until Noel wished; and, very truthful by nature, the idea, of having to act a lie distressed her.

She went down at last, and found them both in the drawing-room already; Noel in a frilly evening frock, sitting by the fire with her chin on her hand, while her father was reading out the war news from the evening paper. At sight of that cool, dainty, girlish figure brooding over the fire, and of her father's worn face, the tragedy of this business thrust itself on her with redoubled force. Poor Dad! Poor Nollie! Awful! Then Noel turned, and gave a little shake of her head, and her eyes said, almost as plainly as lips could have said it: 'Silence!' Gratian nodded, and came forward to the fire. And so began one of those calm, domestic evenings, which cover sometimes such depths of heartache.

2

Noel stayed up until her father went to bed, then went upstairs at once. She had evidently determined that they should not talk about her. Gratian sat on alone, waiting for her husband! It was nearly midnight when he came, and she did not tell him the family news till next morning. He received it with a curious little grunt. Gratian saw his eyes contract, as they might have, perhaps, looking at some bad and complicated wound, and then stare steadily at the ceiling. Though they had been married over a year, she did not yet know what he thought about many things, and she waited with a queer sinking at her heart. This skeleton in the family cupboard was a test of his affection for herself, a test of the quality of the man she had married. He did not speak for a little, and her anxiety grew. Then his hand sought hers, and gave it a hard squeeze.

"Poor little Nollie! This is a case for Mark Tapleyism. But cheer up, Gracie! We'll get her through somehow."

"But father! It's impossible to keep it from him, and impossible to tell him! Oh George! I never knew what family pride was till now. It's incredible. That wretched boy!"

"'De mortuis.' Come, Gracie! In the midst of death we are in life! Nollie was a plumb little idiot. But it's the war—the war! Your father must get used to it; it's a rare chance for his Christianity."

"Dad will be as sweet as anything—that's what makes it so horrible!"

George Laird redoubled his squeeze. "Quite right! The old-fashioned father could let himself go. But need he know? We can get her away from London, and later on, we must manage somehow. If he does hear, we must make him feel that Nollie was 'doing her bit.'"

Gratian withdrew her hand. "Don't!" she said in a muffled voice.

George Laird turned and looked at her. He was greatly upset himself, realising perhaps more truly than his young wife the violence of this disaster; he was quite capable, too, of feeling how deeply she was stirred and hurt; but, a born pragmatist, confronting life always in the experimental spirit, he was impatient of the: "How awful!" attitude. And this streak of her father's ascetic traditionalism in Gratian always roused in him a wish to break it up. If she had not been his wife he would have admitted at once that he might just as well try and alter the bone-formation of her head, as break down such a fundamental trait of character, but, being his wife, he naturally considered alteration as possible as putting a new staircase in a house, or throwing two rooms into one. And, taking her in his arms, he

said: "I know; but it'll all come right, if we put a good face on it. Shall I talk to Nollie?"

Gratian assented, from the desire to be able to say to her father: "George is seeing her!" and so stay the need for a discussion. But the whole thing seemed to her more and more a calamity which nothing could lessen or smooth away.

George Laird had plenty of cool courage, invaluable in men who have to inflict as well as to alleviate pain, but he did not like his mission "a little bit" as he would have said; and he proposed a walk because he dreaded a scene. Noel accepted for the same reason. She liked George, and with the disinterested detachment of a sister-in-law, and the shrewdness of extreme youth, knew him perhaps better than did his wife. She was sure, at all events, of being neither condemned nor sympathised with.

They might have gone, of course, in any direction, but chose to make for the City. Such deep decisions are subconscious. They sought, no doubt, a dry, unemotional region; or perhaps one where George, who was in uniform, might rest his arm from the automatic-toy game which the military play. They had reached Cheapside before he was conscious to the full of the bizarre nature of this walk with his pretty young sister-in-law among all the bustling, black-coated mob of money-makers. 'I wish the devil we hadn't come out!' he thought; 'it would have been easier indoors, after all.'

He cleared his throat, however, and squeezing her arm gently, began: "Gratian's told me, Nollie. The great thing is to keep your spirit up, and not worry."

"I suppose you couldn't cure me."

The words, in that delicate spurning voice, absolutely staggered George; but he said quickly:

"Out of the question, Nollie; impossible! What are you thinking of?"

"Daddy."

The words: "D—n Daddy!" rose to his teeth; he bit them off, and said: "Bless him! We shall have to see to all that. Do you really want to keep it from him? It must be one way or the other; no use concealing it, if it's to come out later."

"No."

He stole a look at her. She was gazing straight before her. How damnably young she was, how pretty! A lump came up in his throat.

"I shouldn't do anything yet," he said; "too early. Later on, if you'd like me to tell him. But that's entirely up to you, my dear; he need never know."

"No."

He could not follow her thought. Then she said:

"Gratian condemns Cyril. Don't let her. I won't have him badly thought of. It was my doing. I wanted to make sure of him."

George answered stoutly:

"Gracie's upset, of course, but she'll soon be all right. You mustn't let it come between you. The thing you've got to keep steadily before you is that life's a huge wide adaptable thing. Look at all these people! There's hardly one of them who hasn't got now, or hasn't had, some personal difficulty or trouble before them as big as yours almost; bigger perhaps. And here they are as lively as fleas. That's what makes the fascination of life—the jolly irony of it all. It would do you good to have a turn in France, and see yourself in proportion to the whole." He felt her fingers suddenly slip under his arm, and went on with greater confidence:

"Life's going to be the important thing in the future, Nollie; not comfort and cloistered virtue and security; but living, and pressure to the square inch. Do you twig? All the old hard-and-fast traditions and drags on life are in the melting-pot. Death's boiling their bones, and they'll make excellent stock for the new soup. When you prune and dock things, the sap flows quicker. Regrets and repinings and repressions are going out of fashion; we shall have no time or use for them in the future. You're going to make life—well, that's something to be thankful for, anyway. You've kept Cyril Morland alive. And—well, you know, we've all been born; some of us properly, and some improperly, and there isn't a ha'porth of difference in the value of the article, or the trouble of bringing it into the world. The cheerier you are the better your child will be, and that's all you've got to think about. You needn't begin to trouble at all for another couple of months, at least; after that, just let us know where you'd like to

go, and I'll arrange it somehow."

She looked round at him, and under that young, clear, brooding gaze he had the sudden uncomfortable feeling of having spoken like a charlatan. Had he really touched the heart of the matter? What good were his generalities to this young, fastidiously nurtured girl, brought up to tell the truth, by a father so old-fashioned and devoted, whom she loved? It was George's nature, too, to despise words; and the conditions of his life these last two years had given him a sort of horror of those who act by talking. He felt inclined to say: 'Don't pay the slightest attention to me; it's all humbug; what will be will be, and there's an end of it:

Then she said quietly:

"Shall I tell Daddy or not?"

He wanted to say: "No," but somehow couldn't. After all, the straightforward course was probably the best. For this would have to be a lifelong concealment. It was impossible to conceal a thing for ever; sooner or later he would find out. But the doctor rose up in him, and he said:

"Don't go to meet trouble, Nollie; it'll be time enough in two months. Then tell him, or let me."

She shook her head. "No; I will, if it is to be done."

He put his hand on hers, within his arm, and gave it a squeeze.

"What shall I do till then?" she asked.

"Take a week's complete rest, and then go on where you are."

Noel was silent a minute, then said: "Yes; I will."

They spoke no more on the subject, and George exerted himself to talk about hospital experiences, and that phenomenon, the British soldier. But just before they reached home he said:

"Look here, Nollie! If you're not ashamed of yourself, no one will be ashamed of you. If you put ashes on your own head, your fellow-beings will, assist you; for of such is their charity."

And, receiving another of those clear, brooding looks, he left her with the thought: 'A lonely child!'

VII

Noel went back to her hospital after a week's rest. George had done more for her than he suspected, for his saying: "Life's a huge wide adaptable thing!" had stuck in her mind. Did it matter what happened to her? And she used to look into the faces of the people she met, and wonder what was absorbing them. What secret griefs and joys were they carrying about with them? The loneliness of her own life now forced her to this speculation concerning others, for she was extraordinarily lonely; Gratian and George were back at work, her father must be kept at bay; with Leila she felt ill at ease, for the confession had hurt her pride; and family friends and acquaintances of all sorts she shunned like the plague. The only person she did not succeed in avoiding was Jimmy Fort, who came in one evening after dinner, bringing her a large bunch of hothouse violets. But then, he did not seem to matter—too new an acquaintance, too detached. Something he said made her aware that he had heard of her loss, and that the violets were a token of sympathy. He seemed awfully kind that evening, telling her "tales of Araby," and saying nothing which would shock her father. It was wonderful to be a man and roll about the world as he had, and see all life, and queer places, and people—Chinamen, and Gauchos, and Boers, and Mexicans. It gave her a kind of thirst. And she liked to watch his brown, humorous face; which seemed made of dried leather. It gave her the feeling that life and experience were all that mattered, doing and seeing things; it made her own trouble seem smaller; less important. She squeezed his hand when she said good night: "Thank you for my violets and for coming; it was awfully kind of you! I wish I could have adventures!" And he answered: "You will, my dear fairy princess!" He said it queerly and very kindly.

Fairy Princess! What a funny thing to call her! If he had only known!

There were not many adventures to be had in those regions where she washed up. Not much "wide

and adaptable life" to take her thoughts off herself. But on her journeys to and from the hospital she had more than one odd little experience. One morning she noticed a poorly dressed woman with a red and swollen face, flapping along Regent Street like a wounded bird, and biting strangely at her hand. Hearing her groan, Noel asked her what the matter was. The woman held out the hand. "Oh!" she moaned, "I was scrubbin' the floor and I got this great needle stuck through my 'and, and it's broke off, and I can't get it out. Oh! Oh!" She bit at the needle-end, not quite visible, but almost within reach of teeth, and suddenly went very white. In dismay, Noel put an arm round her, and turned her into a fine chemist's shop. Several ladies were in there, buying perfumes, and they looked with acerbity at this disordered dirty female entering among them. Noel went up to a man behind the counter. "Please give me something quick, for this poor woman, I think she's going to faint. She's run a needle through her hand, and can't get it out." The man gave her "something quick," and Noel pushed past two of the dames back to where the woman was sitting. She was still obstinately biting at her hand, and suddenly her chin flew up, and there, between her teeth, was the needle. She took it from them with her other hand, stuck it proudly in the front of her dress, and out tumbled the words: "Oh! there—I've got it!"

When she had swallowed the draught, she looked round her, bewildered, and said:

"Thank you kindly, miss!" and shuffled out. Noel paid for the draught, and followed; and, behind her, the shining shop seemed to exhale a perfumed breath of relief.

"You can't go back to work," she said to the woman. "Where do you live?"

"Ornsey, miss."

"You must take a 'bus and go straight home, and put your hand at once into weak Condy's fluid and water. It's swelling. Here's five shillings."

"Yes, miss; thank you, miss, I'm sure. It's very kind of you. It does ache cruel."

"If it's not better this afternoon, you must go to a doctor. Promise!"

"Oh, dear, yes. 'Ere's my 'bus. Thank you kindly, miss."

Noel saw her borne away, still sucking at her dirty swollen hand. She walked on in a glow of love for the poor woman, and hate for the ladies in the chemist's shop, and forgot her own trouble till she had almost reached the hospital.

Another November day, a Saturday, leaving early, she walked to Hyde Park. The plane-trees were just at the height of their spotted beauty. Few—very few—yellow leaves still hung; and the slender pretty trees seemed rejoicing in their freedom from summer foliage. All their delicate boughs and twigs were shaking and dancing in the wind; and their rain-washed leopard-like bodies had a lithe un-English gaiety. Noel passed down their line, and seated herself on a bench. Close by, an artist was painting. His easel was only some three yards away from her, and she could see the picture; a vista of the Park Lane houses through, the gay plane-tree screen. He was a tall man, about forty, evidently foreign, with a thin, long, oval, beardless face, high brow, large grey eyes which looked as if he suffered from headaches and lived much within himself. He cast many glances at her, and, pursuant of her new interest in "life" she watched him discreetly; a little startled however, when, taking off his broad-brimmed squash hat, he said in a broken accent:

"Forgive me the liberty I take, mademoiselle, but would you so very kindly allow me to make a sketch of you sitting there? I work very quick. I beg you will let me. I am Belgian, and have no manners, you see." And he smiled.

"If you like," said Noel.

"I thank you very much:"

He shifted his easel, and began to draw. She felt flattered, and a little fluttered. He was so pale, and had a curious, half-fed look, which moved her.

"Have you been long in England?" she said presently.

"Ever since the first months of the war."

"Do you like it?"

"I was very homesick at first. But I live in my pictures; there are wonderful things in London."

"Why did you want to sketch me?"

The painter smiled again. "Mademoiselle, youth is so mysterious. Those young trees I have been painting mean so much more than the old big trees. Your eyes are seeing things that have not yet happened. There is Fate in them, and a look of defending us others from seeing it. We have not such faces in my country; we are simpler; we do not defend our expressions. The English are very mysterious. We are like children to them. Yet in some ways you are like children to us. You are not people of the world at all. You English have been good to us, but you do not like us."

"And I suppose you do not like us, either?"

He smiled again, and she noticed how white his teeth were.

"Well, not very much. The English do things from duty, but their hearts they keep to themselves. And their Art—well, that is really amusing!"

"I don't know much about Art," Noel murmured.

"It is the world to me," said the painter, and was silent, drawing with increased pace and passion.

"It is so difficult to get subjects," he remarked abruptly. "I cannot afford to pay models, and they are not fond of me painting out of doors. If I had always a subject like you! You—you have a grief, have you not?"

At that startling little question, Noel looked up, frowning.

"Everybody has, now."

The painter grasped his chin; his eyes had suddenly become tragical.

"Yes," he said, "everybody. Tragedy is daily bread. I have lost my family; they are in Belgium. How they live I do not know."

"I'm sorry; very sorry, too, if we aren't nice to you, here. We ought to be."

He shrugged his shoulders. "What would you have? We are different. That is unpardonable. An artist is always lonely, too; he has a skin fewer than other people, and he sees things that they do not. People do not like you to be different. If ever in your life you act differently from others, you will find it so, mademoiselle."

Noel felt herself flushing. Was he reading her secret? His eyes had such a peculiar, secondsighted look.

"Have you nearly finished?" she asked.

"No, mademoiselle; I could go on for hours; but I do not wish to keep you. It is cold for you, sitting there."

Noel got up. "May I look?"

"Certainly."

She did not quite recognise herself—who does?—but she saw a face which affected her oddly, of a girl looking at something which was, and yet was not, in front of her.

"My name is Lavendie," the painter said; "my wife and I live here," and he gave her a card.

Noel could not help answering: "My name is Noel Pierson; I live with my father; here's the address"—she found her case, and fished out a card. "My father is a clergyman; would you care to come and see him? He loves music and painting."

"It would be a great pleasure; and perhaps I might be allowed to paint you. Alas! I have no studio."

Noel drew back. "I'm afraid that I work in a hospital all day, and—and I don't want to be painted, thank you. But, Daddy would like to meet you, I'm sure."

The painter bowed again; she saw that he was hurt.

"Of course I can see that you're a very fine painter," she said quickly; "only—only—I don't want to, you see. Perhaps you'd like to paint Daddy; he's got a most interesting face."

The painter smiled. "He is your father, mademoiselle. May I ask you one question? Why do you not want to be painted?"

"Because—because I don't, I'm afraid." She held out her hand. The painter bowed over it. "Au revoir, mademoiselle."

"Thank you," said Noel; "it was awfully interesting." And she walked away. The sky had become full of clouds round the westerly sun; and the foreign crinkled tracery of the plane-tree branches against that French-grey, golden-edged mass, was very lovely. Beauty, and the troubles of others, soothed her. She felt sorry for the painter, but his eyes saw too much! And his words: "If ever you act differently from others," made her feel him uncanny. Was it true that people always disliked and condemned those who acted differently? If her old school-fellows now knew what was before her, how would they treat her? In her father's study hung a little reproduction of a tiny picture in the Louvre, a "Rape of Europa," by an unknown painter—a humorous delicate thing, of an enraptured; fair-haired girl mounted on a prancing white bull, crossing a shallow stream, while on the bank all her white girl-companions were gathered, turning half-sour, half-envious faces away from that too-fearful spectacle, while one of them tried with timid desperation to mount astride of a sitting cow, and follow. The face of the girl on the bull had once been compared by someone with her own. She thought of this picture now, and saw her school fellows—a throng of shocked and wondering girls. Suppose one of them had been in her position! 'Should I have been turning my face away, like the rest? I wouldn't no, I wouldn't,' she thought; 'I should have understood!' But she knew there was a kind of false emphasis in her thought. Instinctively she felt the painter right. One who acted differently from others, was lost.

She told her father of the encounter, adding:

"I expect he'll come, Daddy."

Pierson answered dreamily: "Poor fellow, I shall be glad to see him if he does."

"And you'll sit to him, won't you?"

"My dear—I?"

"He's lonely, you know, and people aren't nice to him. Isn't it hateful that people should hurt others, because they're foreign or different?"

She saw his eyes open with mild surprise, and went on: "I know you think people are charitable, Daddy, but they aren't, of course."

"That's not exactly charitable, Nollie."

"You know they're not. I think sin often just means doing things differently. It's not real sin when it only hurts yourself; but that doesn't prevent people condemning you, does it?"

"I don't know what you mean, Nollie."

Noel bit her lips, and murmured: "Are you sure we're really Christians, Daddy?"

The question was so startling, from his own daughter, that Pierson took refuge in an attempt at wit. "I should like notice of that question, Nollie, as they say in Parliament."

"That means you don't."

Pierson flushed. "We're fallible enough; but, don't get such ideas into your head, my child. There's a lot of rebellious talk and writing in these days...."

Noel clasped her hands behind her head. "I think," she said, looking straight before her, and speaking to the air, "that Christianity is what you do, not what you think or say. And I don't believe people can be Christians when they act like others—I mean, when they join together to judge and hurt people."

Pierson rose and paced the room. "You have not seen enough of life to talk like that," he said. But Noel went on:

"One of the men in her hospital told Gratian about the treatment of conscientious objectors—it was horrible. Why do they treat them like that, just because they disagree? Captain Fort says it's fear which makes people bullies. But how can it be fear when they're hundreds to one? He says man has domesticated his animals but has never succeeded in domesticating himself. Man must be a wild beast, you know, or the world couldn't be so awfully brutal. I don't see much difference between being brutal for good reasons, and being brutal for bad ones."

Pierson looked down at her with a troubled smile. There was something fantastic to him in this sudden philosophising by one whom he had watched grow up from a tiny thing. Out of the mouths of

babes and sucklings—sometimes! But then the young generation was always something of a sealed book to him; his sensitive shyness, and, still more, his cloth, placed a sort of invisible barrier between him and the hearts of others, especially the young. There were so many things of which he was compelled to disapprove, or which at least he couldn't discuss. And they knew it too well. Until these last few months he had never realised that his own daughters had remained as undiscovered by him as the interior of Brazil. And now that he perceived this, he was bewildered, yet could not imagine how to get on terms with them.

And he stood looking at Noel, intensely puzzled, suspecting nothing of the hard fact which was altering her—vaguely jealous, anxious, pained. And when she had gone up to bed, he roamed up and down the room a long time, thinking. He longed for a friend to confide in, and consult; but he knew no one. He shrank from them all, as too downright, bluff, and active; too worldly and unaesthetic; or too stiff and narrow. Amongst the younger men in his profession he was often aware of faces which attracted him, but one could not confide deep personal questions to men half one's age. But of his own generation, or his elders, he knew not one to whom he could have gone.

VIII

Leila was deep in her new draught of life. When she fell in love it had always been over head and ears, and so far her passion had always burnt itself out before that of her partner. This had been, of course, a great advantage to her. Not that Leila had ever expected her passions to burn themselves out. When she fell in love she had always thought it was for always. This time she was sure it was, surer than she had ever been. Jimmy Fort seemed to her the man she had been looking for all her life. He was not so good-looking as either Farie or Lynch, but beside him these others seemed to her now almost ridiculous. Indeed they did not figure at all, they shrank, they withered, they were husks, together with the others for whom she had known passing weaknesses. There was only one man in the world for her now, and would be for evermore. She did not idealise him either, it was more serious than that; she was thrilled by his voice, and his touch, she dreamed of him, longed for him when he was not with her. She worried, too, for she was perfectly aware that he was not half as fond of her as she was of him. Such a new experience puzzled her, kept her instincts painfully on the alert. It was perhaps just this uncertainty about his affection which made him seem more precious than any of the others. But there was ever the other reason, too-consciousness that Time was after her, and this her last grand passion. She watched him as a mother-cat watches her kitten, without seeming to, of course, for she had much experience. She had begun to have a curious secret jealousy of Noel though why she could not have said. It was perhaps merely incidental to her age, or sprang from that vague resemblance between her and one who outrivalled even what she had been as a girl; or from the occasional allusions Fort made to what he called "that little fairy princess." Something intangible, instinctive, gave her that jealousy. Until the death of her young cousin's lover she had felt safe, for she knew that Jimmy Fort would not hanker after another man's property; had he not proved that in old days, with herself, by running away from her? And she had often regretted having told him of Cyril Morland's death. One day she determined to repair that error. It was at the Zoo, where they often went on Sunday afternoons. They were standing before a creature called the meercat, which reminded them both of old days on the veldt. Without turning her head she said, as if to the little animal: "Do you know that your fairy princess, as you call her, is going to have what is known as a war-baby?"

The sound of his "What!" gave her quite a stab. It was so utterly horrified.

She said stubbornly: "She came and told me all about it. The boy is dead, as you know. Yes, terrible, isn't it?" And she looked at him. His face was almost comic, so wrinkled up with incredulity.

"That lovely child! But it's impossible!"

"The impossible is sometimes true, Jimmy."

"I refuse to believe it."

"I tell you it is so," she said angrily.

"What a ghastly shame!"

"It was her own doing; she said so, herself."

"And her father—the padre! My God!"

Leila was suddenly smitten with a horrible doubt. She had thought it would disgust him, cure him of any little tendency to romanticise that child; and now she perceived that it was rousing in him, instead, a dangerous compassion. She could have bitten her tongue out for having spoken. When he got on the high horse of some championship, he was not to be trusted, she had found that out; was even finding it out bitterly in her own relations with him, constantly aware that half her hold on him, at least, lay in his sense of chivalry, aware that he knew her lurking dread of being flung on the beach, by age. Only ten minutes ago he had uttered a tirade before the cage of a monkey which seemed unhappy. And now she had roused that dangerous side of him in favour of Noel. What an idiot she had been!

"Don't look like that, Jimmy. I'm sorry I told you."

His hand did not answer her pressure in the least, but he muttered:

"Well, I do think that's the limit. What's to be done for her?"

Leila answered softly: "Nothing, I'm afraid. Do you love me?" And she pressed his hand hard.

"Of course."

But Leila thought: 'If I were that meercat he'd have taken more notice of my paw!' Her heart began suddenly to ache, and she walked on to the next cage with head up, and her mouth hard set.

Jimmy Fort walked away from Camelot Mansions that evening in extreme discomfort of mind. Leila had been so queer that he had taken leave immediately after supper. She had refused to talk about Noel; had even seemed angry when he had tried to. How extraordinary some women were! Did they think that a man could hear of a thing like that about such a dainty young creature without being upset! It was the most perfectly damnable news! What on earth would she do—poor little fairy princess! Down had come her house of cards with a vengeance! The whole of her life—the whole of her life! With her bringing-up and her father and all—it seemed inconceivable that she could ever survive it. And Leila had been almost callous about the monstrous business. Women were hard to each other! Bad enough, these things, when it was a simple working girl, but this dainty, sheltered, beautiful child! No, it was altogether too strong—too painful! And following an impulse which he could not resist, he made his way to the old Square. But having reached the house, he nearly went away again. While he stood hesitating with his hand on the bell, a girl and a soldier passed, appearing as if by magic out of the moonlit November mist, blurred and solid shapes embraced, then vanished into it again, leaving the sound of footsteps. Fort jerked the bell. He was shown into what seemed, to one coming out of that mist, to be a brilliant, crowded room, though in truth there were but two lamps and five people in it. They were sitting round the fire, talking, and paused when he came in. When he had shaken hands with Pierson and been introduced to "my daughter Gratian" and a man in khaki "my son-in-law George Laird," to a tall thin-faced, foreign-looking man in a black stock and seemingly no collar, he went up to Noel, who had risen from a chair before the fire. 'No!' he thought, 'I've dreamed it, or Leila has lied!' She was so perfectly the self-possessed, dainty maiden he remembered. Even the feel of her hand was the same—warm and confident; and sinking into a chair, he said: "Please go on, and let me chip in."

"We were quarrelling about the Universe, Captain Fort," said the man in khaki; "delighted to have your help. I was just saying that this particular world has no particular importance, no more than a newspaper-seller would accord to it if it were completely destroyed tomorrow—"Orrible catastrophe, total destruction of the world—six o'clock edition-pyper!" I say that it will become again the nebula out of which it was formed, and by friction with other nebula re-form into a fresh shape and so on ad infinitum—but I can't explain why. My wife wonders if it exists at all except in the human mind—but she can't explain what the human mind is. My father-in-law thinks that it is God's hobby—but he can't explain who or what God is. Nollie is silent. And Monsieur Lavendie hasn't yet told us what he thinks. What do you think, monsieur?" The thin-faced, big-eyed man put up his hand to his high, veined brow as if he had a headache, reddened, and began to speak in French, which Fort followed with difficulty.

"For me the Universe is a limitless artist, monsieur, who from all time and to all time is ever expressing himself in differing forms—always trying to make a masterpiece, and generally failing. For me this world, and all the worlds, are like ourselves, and the flowers and trees—little separate works of art, more or less perfect, whose little lives run their course, and are spilled or powdered back into this Creative Artist, whence issue ever fresh attempts at art. I agree with Monsieur Laird, if I understand him right; but I agree also with Madame Laird, if I understand her. You see, I think mind and matter are one, or perhaps there is no such thing as either mind or matter, only growth and decay and growth again, for ever and ever; but always conscious growth—an artist expressing himself in millions of ever-changing forms; decay and death as we call them, being but rest and sleep, the ebbing of the tide, which must ever come between two rising tides, or the night which comes between two days. But the

next day is never the same as the day before, nor the tide as the last tide; so the little shapes of the world and of ourselves, these works of art by the Eternal Artist, are never renewed in the same form, are never twice alike, but always fresh-fresh worlds, fresh individuals, fresh flowers, fresh everything. I do not see anything depressing in that. To me it would be depressing to think that I would go on living after death, or live again in a new body, myself yet not myself. How stale that would be! When I finish a picture it is inconceivable to me that this picture should ever become another picture, or that one can divide the expression from the mind-stuff it has expressed. The Great Artist who is the whole of Everything, is ever in fresh effort to achieve new things. He is as a fountain who throws up new drops, no two ever alike, which fall back into the water, flow into the pipe, and so are thrown up again in fresh-shaped drops. But I cannot explain why there should be this Eternal Energy, ever expressing itself in fresh individual shapes, this Eternal Working Artist, instead of nothing at all—just empty dark for always; except indeed that it must be one thing or the other, either all or nothing; and it happens to be this and not that, the all and not the nothing."

He stopped speaking, and his big eyes, which had fixed themselves on Fort's face, seemed to the latter not to be seeing him at all, but to rest on something beyond. The man in khaki, who had risen and was standing with his hand on his wife's shoulder, said:

"Bravo, monsieur; Jolly well put from the artist's point of view. The idea is pretty, anyway; but is there any need for an idea at all? Things are; and we have just to take them." Fort had the impression of something dark and writhing; the thin black form of his host, who had risen and come close to the fire.

"I cannot admit," he was saying, "the identity of the Creator with the created. God exists outside ourselves. Nor can I admit that there is no definite purpose and fulfilment. All is shaped to His great ends. I think we are too given to spiritual pride. The world has lost reverence; I regret it, I bitterly regret it."

"I rejoice at it," said the man in khaki. "Now, Captain Fort, your turn to bat!"

Fort, who had been looking at Noel, gave himself a shake, and said: "I think what monsieur calls expression, I call fighting. I suspect the Universe of being simply a long fight, a sum of conquests and defeats. Conquests leading to defeats, defeats to conquests. I want to win while I'm alive, and because I want to win, I want to live on after death. Death is a defeat. I don't want to admit it. While I have that instinct, I don't think I shall really die; when I lose it, I think I shall." He was conscious of Noel's face turning towards him, but had the feeling that she wasn't really listening. "I suspect that what we call spirit is just the fighting instinct; that what we call matter is the mood of lying down. Whether, as Mr. Pierson says, God is outside us, or, as monsieur thinks, we are all part of God, I don't know, I'm sure."

"Ah! There we are!" said the man in khaki. "We all speak after our temperaments, and none of us know. The religions of the world are just the poetic expressions of certain strongly marked temperaments. Monsieur was a poet just now, and his is the only temperament which has never yet been rammed down the world's throat in the form of religion. Go out and proclaim your views from the housetops, monsieur, and see what happens."

The painter shook his head with a smile which seemed to Fort very bright on the surface, and very sad underneath.

"Non, monsieur," he said; "the artist does not wish to impose his temperament. Difference of temperament is the very essence of his joy, and his belief in life. Without difference there would be no life for him. 'Tout casse, tout lasse,' but change goes on for ever: We artists reverence change, monsieur; we reverence the newness of each morning, of each night, of each person, of each expression of energy. Nothing is final for us; we are eager for all and always for more. We are in love, you see, even with-death."

There was a silence; then Fort heard Pierson murmur:

"That is beautiful, monsieur; but oh! how wrong!" "And what do you think, Nollie?" said the man in khaki suddenly. The girl had been sitting very still in her low chair, with her hands crossed in her lap, her eyes on the fire, and the lamplight shining down on her fair hair; she looked up, startled, and her eyes met Fort's.

"I don't know; I wasn't listening." Something moved in him, a kind of burning pity, a rage of protection. He said quickly:

"These are times of action. Philosophy seems to mean nothing nowadays. The one thing is to hate tyranny and cruelty, and protect everything that's weak and lonely. It's all that's left to make life worth living, when all the packs of all the world are out for blood."

Noel was listening now, and he went on fervently: "Why! Even we who started out to fight this Prussian pack, have caught the pack feeling—so that it's hunting all over the country, on every sort of scent. It's a most infectious thing."

"I cannot see that we are being infected, Captain Fort."

"I'm afraid we are, Mr. Pierson. The great majority of people are always inclined to run with the hounds; the pressure's great just now; the pack spirit's in the air."

Pierson shook his head. "No, I cannot see it," he repeated; "it seems to me that we are all more brotherly, and more tolerant."

"Ah! monsieur le cure," Fort heard the painter say very gently, "it is difficult for a good man to see the evil round him. There are those whom the world's march leaves apart, and reality cannot touch. They walk with God, and the bestialities of us animals are fantastic to them. The spirit of the pack, as monsieur says, is in the air. I see all human nature now, running with gaping mouths and red tongues lolling out, their breath and their cries spouting thick before them. On whom they will fall next—one never knows; the innocent with the guilty. Perhaps if you were to see some one dear to you devoured before your eyes, monsieur le cure, you would feel it too; and yet I do not know."

Fort saw Noel turn her face towards her father; her expression at that moment was very strange, searching, half frightened. No! Leila had not lied, and he had not dreamed! That thing was true!

When presently he took his leave, and was out again in the Square, he could see nothing but her face and form before him in the moonlight: its soft outline, fair colouring, slender delicacy, and the brooding of the big grey eyes. He had already crossed New Oxford Street and was some way down towards the Strand, when a voice behind him murmured: "Ah! c'est vous, monsieur!" and the painter loomed up at his elbow.

"Are you going my way?" said Fort. "I go slowly, I'm afraid."

"The slower the better, monsieur. London is so beautiful in the dark. It is the despair of the painter—these moonlit nights. There are moments when one feels that reality does not exist. All is in dreams—like the face of that young lady."

Fort stared sharply round at him. "Oh! She strikes you like that, does she?"

"Ah! What a charming figure! What an atmosphere of the past and future round her! And she will not let me paint her! Well, perhaps only Mathieu Maris." He raised his broad Bohemian hat, and ran his fingers through his hair.

"Yes," said Fort, "she'd make a wonderful picture. I'm not a judge of Art, but I can see that."

The painter smiled, and went on in his rapid French:

"She has youth and age all at once—that is rare. Her father is an interesting man, too; I am trying to paint him; he is very difficult. He sits lost in some kind of vacancy of his own; a man whose soul has gone before him somewhere, like that of his Church, escaped from this age of machines, leaving its body behind—is it not? He is so kind; a saint, I think. The other clergymen I see passing in the street are not at all like him; they look buttoned-up and busy, with faces of men who might be schoolmasters or lawyers, or even soldiers—men of this world. Do you know this, monsieur—it is ironical, but it is true, I think a man cannot be a successful priest unless he is a man of this world. I do not see any with that look of Monsieur Pierson, a little tortured within, and not quite present. He is half an artist, really a lover of music, that man. I am painting him at the piano; when he is playing his face is alive, but even then, so far away. To me, monsieur, he is exactly like a beautiful church which knows it is being deserted. I find him pathetic. Je suis socialiste, but I have always an aesthetic admiration for that old Church, which held its children by simple emotion. The times have changed; it can no longer hold them so; it stands in the dusk, with its spire to a heaven which exists no more, its bells, still beautiful but out of tune with the music of the streets. It is something of that which I wish to get into my picture of Monsieur Pierson; and sapristi! it is difficult!" Fort grunted assent. So far as he could make out the painter's words, it seemed to him a large order.

"To do it, you see," went on the painter, "one should have the proper background—these currents of modern life and modern types, passing him and leaving him untouched. There is no illusion, and no dreaming, in modern life. Look at this street. La, la!"

In the darkened Strand, hundreds of khaki-clad figures and girls were streaming by, and all their

voices had a hard, half-jovial vulgarity. The motor-cabs and buses pushed along remorselessly; newspaper-sellers muttered their ceaseless invitations. Again the painter made his gesture of despair: "How am I to get into my picture this modern life, which washes round him as round that church, there, standing in the middle of the street? See how the currents sweep round it, as if to wash it away; yet it stands, seeming not to see them. If I were a phantasiist, it would be easy enough: but to be a phantasiist is too simple for me—those romantic gentlemen bring what they like from anywhere, to serve their ends. *Moi, je suis realiste.* And so, monsieur, I have invented an idea. I am painting over his head while he sits there at the piano a picture hanging on the wall—of one of these young town girls who have no mysteriousness at all, no youth; nothing but a cheap knowledge and defiance, and good humour. He is looking up at it, but he does not see it. I will make the face of that girl the face of modern life, and he shall sit staring at it, seeing nothing. What do you think of my idea?"

But Fort had begun to feel something of the revolt which the man of action so soon experiences when he listens to an artist talking.

"It sounds all right," he said abruptly; "all the same, monsieur, all my sympathy is with modern life. Take these young girls, and these Tommies. For all their feather-pated vulgarity and they are damned vulgar, I must say—they're marvellous people; they do take the rough with the smooth; they're all 'doing their bit,' you know, and facing this particularly beastly world. Aesthetically, I daresay, they're deplorable, but can you say that on the whole their philosophy isn't an advance on anything we've had up till now? They worship nothing, it's true; but they keep their ends up marvellously."

The painter, who seemed to feel the wind blowing cold on his ideas, shrugged his shoulders.

"I am not concerned with that, monsieur; I set down what I see; better or worse, I do not know. But look at this!" And he pointed down the darkened and moonlit street. It was all jewelled and enamelled with little spots and splashes of subdued red and green-blue light, and the downward orange glow of the high lamps—like an enchanted dream-street peopled by countless moving shapes, which only came to earth-reality when seen close to. The painter drew his breath in with a hiss.

"Ah!" he said, "what beauty! And they don't see it—not one in a thousand! Pity, isn't it? Beauty is the holy thing!"

Fort, in his turn, shrugged his shoulders. "Every man to his vision!" he said. "My leg's beginning to bother me; I'm afraid I must take a cab. Here's my address; any time you like to come. I'm often in about seven. I can't take you anywhere, I suppose?"

"A thousand thanks, monsieur; but I go north. I loved your words about the pack. I often wake at night and hear the howling of all the packs of the world. Those who are by nature gentle nowadays feel they are strangers in a far land. Good night, monsieur!"

He took off his queer hat, bowed low, and crossed out into the Strand, like one who had come in a dream, and faded out with the waking. Fort hailed a cab, and went home, still seeing Noel's face. There was one, if you liked, waiting to be thrown to the wolves, waiting for the world's pack to begin howling round her—that lovely child; and the first, the loudest of all the pack, perhaps, must be her own father, the lean, dark figure with the gentle face, and the burnt bright eyes. What a ghastly business! His dreams that night were not such as Leila would have approved.

IX

When in the cupboard there is a real and very bony skeleton, carefully kept from the sight of a single member of the family, the position of that member is liable to become lonely. But Pierson, who had been lonely fifteen years, did not feel it so much, perhaps, as most men would have. In his dreamy nature there was a curious self-sufficiency, which only violent shocks disturbed, and he went on with his routine of duty, which had become for him as set as the pavements he trod on his way to and from it. It was not exactly true, as the painter had said, that this routine did not bring him into touch with life. After all he saw people when they were born, when they married, when they died. He helped them when they wanted money, and when they were ill; he told their children Bible stories on Sunday afternoons; he served those who were in need with soup and bread from his soup kitchen. He never spared himself in any way, and his ears were always at the service of their woes. And yet he did not understand them, and they knew that. It was as though he, or they, were colour-blind. The values were

all different. He was seeing one set of objects, they another.

One street of his parish touched a main line of thoroughfare, and formed a little part of the new hunting-grounds of women, who, chased forth from their usual haunts by the Authorities under pressure of the country's danger, now pursued their calling in the dark. This particular evil had always been a sort of nightmare to Pierson. The starvation which ruled his own existence inclined him to a particularly severe view and severity was not his strong point. In consequence there was ever within him a sort of very personal and poignant struggle going on beneath that seeming attitude of rigid disapproval. He joined the hunters, as it were, because he was afraid-not, of course, of his own instincts, for he was fastidious, a gentleman, and a priest, but of being lenient to a sin, to something which God abhorred: He was, as it were, bound to take a professional view of this particular offence. When in his walks abroad he passed one of these women, he would unconsciously purse his lips, and frown. The darkness of the streets seemed to lend them such power, such unholy sovereignty over the night. They were such a danger to the soldiers, too; and in turn, the soldiers were such a danger to the lambs of his flock. Domestic disasters in his parish came to his ears from time to time; cases of young girls whose heads were turned by soldiers, so that they were about to become mothers. They seemed to him pitiful indeed; but he could not forgive them for their giddiness, for putting temptation in the way of brave young men, fighting, or about to fight. The glamour which surrounded soldiers was not excuse enough. When the babies were born, and came to his notice, he consulted a Committee he had formed, of three married and two maiden ladies, who visited the mothers, and if necessary took the babies into a creche; for those babies had a new value to the country, and were not—poor little things!—to be held responsible for their mothers' faults. He himself saw little of the young mothers; shy of them, secretly afraid, perhaps, of not being censorious enough. But once in a way Life set him face to face with one.

On New Year's Eve he was sitting in his study after tea, at that hour which he tried to keep for his parishioners, when a Mrs. Mitchett was announced, a small bookseller's wife, whom he knew for an occasional Communicant. She came in, accompanied by a young dark-eyed girl in a loose mouse-coloured coat. At his invitation they sat down in front of the long bookcase on the two green leather chairs which had grown worn in the service of the parish; and, screwed round in his chair at the bureau, with his long musician's fingers pressed together, he looked at them and waited. The woman had taken out her handkerchief, and was wiping her eyes; but the girl sat quiet, as the mouse she somewhat resembled in that coat.

"Yes, Mrs. Mitchett?" He said gently, at last.

The woman put away her handkerchief, sniffed resolutely, and began:

"It's 'Ilda, sir. Such a thing Mitchett and me never could 'ave expected, comin' on us so sudden. I thought it best to bring 'er round, poor girl. Of course, it's all the war. I've warned 'er a dozen times; but there it is, comin' next month, and the man in France." Pierson instinctively averted his gaze from the girl, who had not moved her eyes from his face, which she scanned with a seeming absence of interest, as if she had long given up thinking over her lot, and left it now to others.

"That is sad," he said; "very, very sad."

"Yes," murmured Mrs. Mitchett; "that's what I tell 'Ilda."

The girl's glance, lowered for a second, resumed its impersonal scrutiny of Pierson's face.

"What is the man's name and regiment? Perhaps we can get leave for him to come home and marry Hilda at once."

Mrs. Mitchett sniffed. "She won't give it, sir. Now, 'Ilda, give it to Mr. Pierson." And her voice had a real note of entreaty. The girl shook her head. Mrs. Mitchett murmured dolefully: "That's 'ow she is, sir; not a word will she say. And as I tell her, we can only think there must 'ave been more than one. And that does put us to shame so!"

But still the girl made no sign.

"You speak to her, sir; I'm really at my wit's end."

"Why won't you tell us?" said Pierson. "The man will want to do the right thing, I'm sure."

The girl shook her head, and spoke for the first time.

"I don't know his name."

Mrs. Mitchett's face twitched.

"Oh, dear!" she said: "Think of that! She's never said as much to us."

"Not know his name?" Pierson murmured. "But how—how could you—" he stopped, but his face had darkened. "Surely you would never have done such a thing without affection? Come, tell me!"

"I don't know it," the girl repeated.

"It's these Parks," said Mrs. Mitchett, from behind her handkerchief. "And to think that this'll be our first grandchild and all! 'Ilda is difficult; as quiet, as quiet; but that stubborn—"

Pierson looked at the girl, who seemed, if anything, less interested than ever. This impenetrability and something mulish in her attitude annoyed him. "I can't think," he said, "how you could so have forgotten yourself. It's truly grievous."

Mrs. Mitchett murmured: "Yes, sir; the girls gets it into their heads that there's going to be no young men for them."

"That's right," said the girl sullenly.

Pierson's lips grew tighter. "Well, what can I do for you, Mrs. Mitchett?" he said. "Does your daughter come to church?"

Mrs. Mitchett shook her head mournfully. "Never since she had her byke."

Pierson rose from his chair. The old story! Control and discipline undermined, and these bitter apples the result!

"Well," he said, "if you need our creche, you have only to come to me," and he turned to the girl. "And you—won't you let this dreadful experience move your heart? My dear girl, we must all master ourselves, our passions, and our foolish wilfulness, especially in these times when our country needs us strong, and self-disciplined, not thinking of ourselves. I'm sure you're a good girl at heart."

The girl's dark eyes, unmoved from his face, roused in him a spasm of nervous irritation. "Your soul is in great danger, and you're very unhappy, I can see. Turn to God for help, and in His mercy everything will be made so different for you—so very different! Come!"

The girl said with a sort of surprising quietness: "I don't want the baby!"

The remark staggered him, almost as if she had uttered a hideous oath.

"'Ilda was in munitions," said her mother in an explanatory voice: "earnin' a matter of four pound a week. Oh! dear, it is a waste an' all!" A queer, rather terrible little smile curled Pierson's lips.

"A judgment!" he said. "Good evening, Mrs. Mitchett. Good evening, Hilda. If you want me when the time comes, send for me."

They stood up; he shook hands with them; and was suddenly aware that the door was open, and Noel standing there. He had heard no sound; and how long she had been there he could not tell. There was a singular fixity in her face and attitude. She was staring at the girl, who, as she passed, lifted her face, so that the dark eyes and the grey eyes met. The door was shut, and Noel stood there alone with him.

"Aren't you early, my child?" said Pierson. "You came in very quietly."

"Yes; I heard."

A slight shock went through him at the tone of her voice; her face had that possessed look which he always dreaded. "What did you hear?" he said.

"I heard you say: 'A judgment!' You'll say the same to me, won't you? Only, I do want my baby."

She was standing with her back to the door, over which a dark curtain hung; her face looked young and small against its stuff, her eyes very large. With one hand she plucked at her blouse, just over her heart.

Pierson stared at her, and gripped the back of the chair he had been sitting in. A lifetime of repression served him in the half-realised horror of that moment. He stammered out the single word—

"Nollie!"

"It's quite true," she said, turned round, and went out.

Pierson had a sort of vertigo; if he had moved, he must have fallen down. Nollie! He slid round and sank into his chair, and by some horrible cruel fiction of his nerves, he seemed to feel Noel on his knee, as, when a little girl, she had been wont to sit, with her fair hair fluffing against his cheek. He seemed to feel that hair tickling his skin; it used to be the greatest comfort he had known since her mother died. At that moment his pride shrivelled like a flower held to a flame; all that abundant secret pride of a father who loves and admires, who worships still a dead wife in the children she has left him; who, humble by nature, yet never knows how proud he is till the bitter thing happens; all the long pride of the priest who, by dint of exhortation and remonstrance has coated himself in a superiority he hardly suspects—all this pride shrivelled in him. Then something writhed and cried within, as a tortured beast cries, at loss to know why it is being tortured. How many times has not a man used those words: "My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken me!" He sprang up and tried to pace his way out of this cage of confusion: His thoughts and feelings made the strangest medley, spiritual and worldly—Social ostracism—her soul in peril—a trial sent by God! The future! Imagination failed him. He went to his little piano, opened it, closed it again; took his hat, and stole out. He walked fast, without knowing where. It was very cold—a clear, bitter evening. Silent rapid motion in the frosty air was some relief. As Noel had fled from him, having uttered her news, so did he fly from her. The afflicted walk fast. He was soon down by the river, and turned West along its wall. The moon was up, bright and nearly full, and the steel-like shimmer of its light burnished the ebbing water. A cruel night! He came to the Obelisk, and leaned against it, overcome by a spasm of realisation. He seemed to see his dead wife's face staring at him out of the past, like an accusation. "How have you cared for Nollie, that she should have come to this?" It became the face of the moonlit sphinx, staring straight at him, the broad dark face with wide nostrils, cruel lips, full eyes blank of pupils, all livened and whitened by the moonlight—an embodiment of the marvellous unseeing energy of Life, twisting and turning hearts without mercy. He gazed into those eyes with a sort of scared defiance. The great clawed paws of the beast, the strength and remorseless serenity of that crouching creature with human head, made living by his imagination and the moonlight, seemed to him like a temptation to deny God, like a refutation of human virtue.

Then, the sense of beauty stirred in him; he moved where he could see its flanks coated in silver by the moonlight, the ribs and the great muscles, and the tail with tip coiled over the haunch, like the head of a serpent. It was weirdly living; fine and cruel, that great man-made thing. It expressed something in the soul of man, pitiless and remote from love—or rather, the remorselessness which man had seen, lurking within man's fate. Pierson recoiled from it, and resumed his march along the Embankment, almost deserted in the bitter cold. He came to where, in the opening of the Underground railway, he could see the little forms of people moving, little orange and red lights glowing. The sight arrested him by its warmth and motion. Was it not all a dream? That woman and her daughter, had they really come? Had not Noel been but an apparition, her words a trick which his nerves had played him? Then, too vividly again, he saw her face against the dark stuff of the curtain, the curve of her hand plucking at her blouse, heard the sound of his own horrified: "Nollie!" No illusion, no deception! The edifice of his life was in the dust. And a queer and ghastly company of faces came about him; faces he had thought friendly, of good men and women whom he knew, yet at that moment did not know, all gathered round Noel, with fingers pointing at her. He staggered back from that vision, could not bear it, could not recognise this calamity. With a sort of comfort, yet an aching sense of unreality, his mind flew to all those summer holidays spent in Scotland, Ireland, Cornwall, Wales, by mountain and lake, with his two girls; what sunsets, and turning leaves, birds, beasts, and insects they had watched together! From their youthful companionship, their eagerness, their confidence in him, he had known so much warmth and pleasure. If all those memories were true, surely this could not be true. He felt suddenly that he must hurry back, go straight to Noel, tell her that she had been cruel to him, or assure himself that, for the moment, she had been insane: His temper rose suddenly, took fire. He felt anger against her, against every one he knew, against life itself. Thrusting his hands deep into the pockets of his thin black overcoat, he plunged into that narrow glowing tunnel of the station booking-office, which led back to the crowded streets. But by the time he reached home his anger had evaporated; he felt nothing but utter lassitude. It was nine o'clock, and the maids had cleared the dining table. In despair Noel had gone up to her room. He had no courage left, and sat down supperless at his little piano, letting his fingers find soft painful harmonies, so that Noel perhaps heard the faint far thrumming of that music through uneasy dreams. And there he stayed, till it became time for him to go forth to the Old Year's Midnight Service.

When he returned, Pierson wrapped himself in a rug and lay down on the old sofa in his study. The maid, coming in next morning to "do" the grate, found him still asleep. She stood contemplating him in awe; a broad-faced, kindly, fresh-coloured girl. He lay with his face resting on his hand, his dark, just grizzling hair unruffled, as if he had not stirred all night; his other hand clutched the rug to his chest, and his booted feet protruded beyond it. To her young eyes he looked rather appallingly neglected. She gazed with interest at the hollows in his cheeks, and the furrows in his brow, and the lips, dark-moustached and bearded, so tightly compressed, even in sleep. Being holy didn't make a man happy, it seemed! What fascinated her were the cindery eyelashes resting on the cheeks, the faint movement of

face and body as he breathed, the gentle hiss of breath escaping through the twitching nostrils. She moved nearer, bending down over him, with the childlike notion of counting those lashes. Her lips parted in readiness to say: "Oh!" if he waked. Something in his face, and the little twitches which passed over it, made her feel "that sorry" for him. He was a gentleman, had money, preached to her every Sunday, and was not so very old—what more could a man want? And yet—he looked so tired, with those cheeks.

She pitied him; helpless and lonely he seemed to her, asleep there instead of going to bed properly. And sighing, she tiptoed towards the door.

"Is that you, Bessie?"

The girl turned: "Yes, sir. I'm sorry I woke you, sir. 'Appy New Year, sir!"

"Ah, yes. A Happy New Year, Bessie."

She saw his usual smile, saw it die, and a fixed look come on his face; it scared her, and she hurried away. Pierson had remembered. For full five minutes he lay there staring at nothing. Then he rose, folded the rug mechanically, and looked at the clock. Eight! He went upstairs, knocked on Noel's door, and entered.

The blinds were drawn up, but she was still in bed. He stood looking down at her. "A Happy New Year, my child!" he said; and he trembled all over, shivering visibly. She looked so young and innocent, so round-faced and fresh, after her night's sleep, that the thought sprang up in him again: 'It must have been a dream!' She did not move, but a slow flush came up in her cheeks. No dream—dream! He said tremulously: "I can't realise. I—I hoped I had heard wrong. Didn't I, Nollie? Didn't I?"

She just shook her head.

"Tell me—everything," he said; "for God's sake!"

He saw her lips moving, and caught the murmur: "There 's nothing more. Gratian and George know, and Leila. It can't be undone, Daddy. Perhaps I wouldn't have wanted to make sure, if you hadn't tried to stop Cyril and me—and I'm glad sometimes, because I shall have something of his—" She looked up at him. "After all, it's the same, really; only, there's no ring. It's no good talking to me now, as if I hadn't been thinking of this for ages. I'm used to anything you can say; I've said it to myself, you see. There's nothing but to make the best of it."

Her hot hand came out from under the bedclothes, and clutched his very tight. Her flush had deepened, and her eyes seemed to him to glitter.

"Oh, Daddy! You do look tired! Haven't you been to bed? Poor Daddy!"

That hot clutch, and the words: "Poor Daddy!" brought tears into his eyes. They rolled slowly down to his beard, and he covered his face with the other hand. Her grip tightened convulsively; suddenly she dragged it to her lips, kissed it, and let it drop.

"Don't!" she said, and turned away her face.

Pierson effaced his emotion, and said quite calmly:

"Shall you wish to be at home, my dear, or to go elsewhere?"

Noel had begun to toss her head on her pillow, like a feverish child whose hair gets in its eyes and mouth.

"Oh! I don't know; what does it matter?"

"Kestrel; would you like to go there? Your aunt—I could write to her." Noel stared at him a moment; a struggle seemed going on within her.

"Yes," she said, "I would. Only, not Uncle Bob."

"Perhaps your uncle would come up here, and keep me company."

She turned her face away, and that tossing movement of the limbs beneath the clothes began again. "I don't care," she said; "anywhere—it doesn't matter."

Pierson put his chilly hand on her forehead. "Gently!" he said, and knelt down by the bed. "Merciful Father," he murmured, "give us strength to bear this dreadful trial. Keep my beloved child safe, and

bring her peace; and give me to understand how I have done wrong, how I have failed towards Thee, and her. In all things chasten and strengthen her, my child, and me."

His thoughts moved on in the confused, inarticulate suspense of prayer, till he heard her say: "You haven't failed; why do you talk of failing—it isn't true; and don't pray for me, Daddy."

Pierson raised himself, and moved back from the bed. Her words confounded him, yet he was afraid to answer. She pushed her head deep into the pillow, and lay looking up at the ceiling.

"I shall have a son; Cyril won't quite have died. And I don't want to be forgiven."

He dimly perceived what long dumb processes of thought and feeling had gone on in her to produce this hardened state of mind, which to him seemed almost blasphemous. And in the very midst of this turmoil in his heart, he could not help thinking how lovely her face looked, lying back so that the curve of her throat was bared, with the short tendrils of hair coiling about it. That flung-back head, moving restlessly from side to side in the heat of the soft pillow, had such a passion of protesting life in it! And he kept silence.

"I want you to know it was all me. But I can't pretend. Of course I'll try and not let it hurt you more than I possibly can. I'm sorry for you, poor Daddy; oh! I'm sorry for you!" With a movement incredibly lithe and swift, she turned and pressed her face down in the pillow, so that all he could see was her tumbled hair and the bedclothes trembling above her shoulders. He tried to stroke that hair, but she shook her head free, and he stole out.

She did not come to breakfast; and when his own wretched meal was over, the mechanism of his professional life caught him again at once. New Year's Day! He had much to do. He had, before all, to be of a cheerful countenance before his flock, to greet all and any with an air of hope and courage.

X

1

Thirza Pierson, seeing her brother-in-law's handwriting, naturally said:
"Here's a letter from Ted."

Bob Pierson, with a mouth full of sausage, as naturally responded:

"What does he say?"

In reading on, she found that to answer that question was one of the most difficult tasks ever set her. Its news moved and disturbed her deeply. Under her wing this disaster had happened! Down here had been wrought this most deplorable miracle, fraught with such dislocation of lives! Noel's face, absorbed and passionate, outside the door of her room on the night when Cyril Morland went away—her instinct had been right!

"He wants you to go up and stay with him, Bob."

"Why not both of us?"

"He wants Nollie to come down to me; she's not well."

"Not well? What's the matter?"

To tell him seemed disloyalty to her sex; not to tell him, disloyalty to her husband. A simple consideration of fact and not of principle, decided her. He would certainly say in a moment: 'Here! Pitch it over!' and she would have to. She said tranquilly:

"You remember that night when Cyril Morland went away, and Noel behaved so strangely. Well, my dear; she is going to have a child at the beginning of April. The poor boy is dead, Bob; he died for the Country."

She saw the red tide flow up into his face.

"What!"

"Poor Edward is dreadfully upset. We must do what we can. I blame myself." By instinct she used those words.

"Blame yourself? Stuff! That young—!" He stopped.

Thirza said quietly: "No, Bob; of the two, I'm sure it was Noel; she was desperate that day. Don't you remember her face? Oh! this war! It's turned the whole world upside down. That's the only comfort; nothing's normal"

Bob Pierson possessed beyond most men the secret of happiness, for he was always absorbed in the moment, to the point of unself-consciousness. Eating an egg, cutting down a tree, sitting on a Tribunal, making up his accounts, planting potatoes, looking at the moon, riding his cob, reading the Lessons—no part of him stood aside to see how he was doing it, or wonder why he was doing it, or not doing it better. He grew like a cork-tree, and acted like a sturdy and well-natured dog. His griefs, angers, and enjoyments were simple as a child's, or as his somewhat noisy slumbers. They were notably well-suited, for Thirza had the same secret of happiness, though her, absorption in the moment did not—as became a woman—prevent her being conscious of others; indeed, such formed the chief subject of her absorptions. One might say that they neither of them had philosophy yet were as philosophic a couple as one could meet on this earth of the self-conscious. Daily life to these two was still of simple savour. To be absorbed in life—the queer endless tissue of moments and things felt and done and said and made, the odd inspiriting conjunctions of countless people—was natural to them; but they never thought whether they were absorbed or not, or had any particular attitude to Life or Death—a great blessing at the epoch in which they were living.

Bob Pierson, then, paced the room, so absorbed in his dismay and concern, that he was almost happy.

"By Jove!" he said, "what a ghastly thing!

"Nollie, of all people! I feel perfectly wretched, Thirza; wretched beyond words." But with each repetition his voice grew cheerier, and Thirza felt that he was already over the worst.

"Your coffee's getting cold!" she said.

"What do you advise? Shall I go up, heh?"

"I think you'll be a godsend to poor Ted; you'll keep his spirits up. Eve won't get any leave till Easter; and I can be quite alone, and see to Nollie here. The servants can have a holiday—, Nurse and I will run the house together. I shall enjoy it."

"You're a good woman, Thirza!" Taking his wife's hand, he put it to his lips. "There isn't another woman like you in the world."

Thirza's eyes smiled. "Pass me your cup; I'll give you some fresh coffee."

It was decided to put the plan into operation at mid-month, and she bent all her wits to instilling into her husband the thought that a baby more or less was no great matter in a world which already contained twelve hundred million people. With a man's keener sense of family propriety, he could not see that this baby would be the same as any other baby. "By heaven!" he would say, "I simply can't get used to it; in our family! And Ted a parson! What the devil shall we do with it?"

"If Nollie will let us, why shouldn't we adopt it? It'll be something to take my thoughts off the boys."

"That's an idea! But Ted's a funny fellow. He'll have some doctrine of atonement, or other in his bonnet."

"Oh, bother!" said Thirza with asperity.

The thought of sojourning in town for a spell was not unpleasant to Bob Pierson. His Tribunal work was over, his early, potatoes in, and he had visions of working for the Country, of being a special constable, and dining at his Club. The nearer he was to the front, and the more he could talk about the war, the greater the service he felt he would be doing. He would ask for a job where his brains would be of use. He regretted keenly that Thirza wouldn't be with him; a long separation like this would be a great trial. And he would sigh and run his fingers through his whiskers. Still for the Country, and for Nollie, one must put up with it!

When Thirza finally saw him into the train, tears stood in the eyes of both, for they were honestly attached, and knew well enough that this job, once taken in hand, would have to be seen through; a three months' separation at least.

"I shall write every day."

"So shall I, Bob."

"You won't fret, old girl?"

"Only if you do."

"I shall be up at 5.5, and she'll be down at 4.50. Give us a kiss—damn the porters. God bless you! I suppose she'd mind if—I—were to come down now and then?"

"I'm afraid she would. It's—it's—well, you know."

"Yes, Yes; I do." And he really did; for underneath, he had true delicacy.

Her last words: "You're very sweet, Bob," remained in his ears all the way to Severn Junction.

She went back to the house, emptied of her husband, daughter, boys, and maids; only the dogs left and the old nurse whom she had taken into confidence. Even in that sheltered, wooded valley it was very cold this winter. The birds hid themselves, not one flower bloomed, and the red-brown river was full and swift. The sound of trees being felled for trench props, in the wood above the house resounded all day long in the frosty air. She meant to do the cooking herself; and for the rest of the morning and early afternoon she concocted nice things, and thought out how she herself would feel if she were Noel and Noel she, so as to smooth out of the way anything which would hurt the girl. In the afternoon she went down to the station in the village car, the same which had borne Cyril Morland away that July night, for their coachman had been taken for the army, and the horses were turned out.

Noel looked tired and white, but calm—too calm. Her face seemed to Thirza to have fined down, and with those brooding eyes, to be more beautiful. In the car she possessed herself of the girl's hand, and squeezed it hard; their only allusion to the situation, except Noel's formal:

"Thank you so much, Auntie, for having me; it's most awfully sweet of you and Uncle Bob."

"There's no one in the house, my dear, except old Nurse. It'll be very dull for you; but I thought I'd teach you to cook; it's rather useful."

The smile which slipped on to Noel's face gave Thirza quite a turn.

She had assigned the girl a different room, and had made it extraordinarily cheerful with a log fire, chrysanthemums, bright copper candlesticks, warming-pans, and such like.

She went up with her at bedtime, and standing before the fire, said:

"You know, Nollie, I absolutely refuse to regard this as any sort of tragedy. To bring life into the worlds in these days, no matter how, ought to make anyone happy. I only wish I could do it again, then I should feel some use. Good night dear; and if you want anything, knock on the wall. I'm next door. Bless you!" She saw that the girl was greatly moved, underneath her pale mask; and went out astonished at her niece's powers of self-control.

But she did not sleep at all well; for in imagination, she kept on seeing Noel turning from side to side in the big bed, and those great eyes of hers staring at the dark.

2

The meeting of the brothers Pierson took place at the dinner-hour, and was characterised by a truly English lack of display. They were so extremely different, and had been together so little since early days in their old Buckinghamshire home, that they were practically strangers, with just the potent link of far-distant memories in common. It was of these they talked, and about the war. On this subject they agreed in the large, and differed in the narrow. For instance, both thought they knew about Germany and other countries, and neither of course had any real knowledge of any country outside their own; for, though both had passed through considerable tracts of foreign ground at one time or another, they had never remarked anything except its surface,—its churches, and its sunsets. Again, both assumed that they were democrats, but neither knew the meaning of the word, nor felt that the working man could be really trusted; and both revered Church and King: Both disliked conscription, but considered it necessary. Both favoured Home Rule for Ireland, but neither thought it possible to grant it. Both wished for the war to end, but were for prosecuting it to Victory, and neither knew what they meant by that word. So much for the large. On the narrower issues, such as strategy, and the personality of their country's leaders, they were opposed. Edward was a Westerner, Robert an Easterner, as was natural in one who had lived twenty-five years in Ceylon. Edward favoured the fallen government, Robert the

risen. Neither had any particular reasons for their partisanship except what he had read in the journals. After all—what other reasons could they have had? Edward disliked the Harmsworth Press; Robert thought it was doing good. Robert was explosive, and rather vague; Edward dreamy, and a little didactic. Robert thought poor Ted looking like a ghost; Edward thought poor Bob looking like the setting sun. Their faces were indeed as curiously contrasted as their views and voices; the pale-dark, hollowed, narrow face of Edward, with its short, pointed beard, and the red-skinned, broad, full, whiskered face of Robert. They parted for the night with an affectionate hand-clasp. So began a queer partnership which consisted, as the days went on, of half an hour's companionship at breakfast, each reading the paper; and of dinner together perhaps three times a week. Each thought his brother very odd, but continued to hold the highest opinion of him. And, behind it all, the deep tribal sense that they stood together in trouble, grew. But of that trouble they never spoke, though not seldom Robert would lower his journal, and above the glasses perched on his well-shaped nose, contemplate his brother, and a little frown of sympathy would ridge his forehead between his bushy eyebrows. And once in a way he would catch Edward's eyes coming off duty from his journal, to look, not at his brother, but at—the skeleton; when that happened, Robert would adjust his glasses hastily, damn the newspaper type, and apologise to Edward for swearing. And he would think: 'Poor Ted! He ought to drink port, and—and enjoy himself, and forget it. What a pity he's a parson!'

In his letters to Thirza he would deplore Edward's asceticism. "He eats nothing, he drinks nothing, he smokes a miserable cigarette once in a blue moon. He's as lonely as a coot; it's a thousand pities he ever lost his wife. I expect to see his wings sprout any day; but—dash it all I—I don't believe he's got the flesh to grow them on. Send him up some clotted cream; I'll see if I can get him to eat it." When the cream came, he got Edward to eat some the first morning, and at tea time found that he had finished it himself. "We never talk about Nollie," he wrote, "I'm always meaning to have it out with him and tell him to buck up, but when it comes to the point I dry up; because, after all, I feel it too; it sticks in my gizzard horribly. We Piersons are pretty old, and we've always been respectable, ever since St. Bartholomew, when that Huguenot chap came over and founded us. The only black sheep I ever heard of is Cousin Leila. By the way, I saw her the other day; she came round here to see Ted. I remember going to stay with her and her first husband; young Fane, at Simla, when I was coming home, just before we were married. Phew! That was a queer menage; all the young chaps fluttering round her, and young Fane looking like a cynical ghost. Even now she can't help setting her cap a little at Ted, and he swallows her whole; thinks her a devoted creature reformed to the nines with her hospital and all that. Poor old Ted; he is the most dreamy chap that ever was."

"We have had Gratian and her husband up for the week-end," he wrote a little later; "I don't like her so well as Nollie; too serious and downright for me. Her husband seems a sensible fellow, though; but the devil of a free-thinker. He and poor Ted are like cat and dog. We had Leila in to dinner again on Saturday, and a man called Fort came too. She's sweet on him, I could see with half an eye, but poor old Ted can't. The doctor and Ted talked up hill and down dale. The doctor said a thing which struck me. 'What divides us from the beasts? Will power: nothing else. What's this war, really, but a death carnival of proof that man's will is invincible?' I stuck it down to tell you, when I got upstairs. He's a clever fellow. I believe in God, as you know, but I must say when it comes to an argument, poor old Ted does seem a bit weak, with his: 'We're told this,' and 'We're told that: Nobody mentioned Nollie. I must have the whole thing out with Ted; we must know how to act when it's all over.'"

But not till the middle of March, when the brothers had been sitting opposite each other at meals for two months, was the subject broached between them, and then not by Robert. Edward, standing by the hearth after dinner, in his familiar attitude, one foot on the fender, one hand grasping the mantel-shelf, and his eyes fixed on the flames, said: "I've never asked your forgiveness, Bob."

Robert, lingering at the table over his glass of port, started, looked at Edward's back in its parson's coat, and answered:

"My dear old chap!"

"It has been very difficult to speak of this."

"Of course, of course!" And there was a silence, while Robert's eyes travelled round the walls for inspiration. They encountered only the effigies of past Piersons very oily works, and fell back on the dining-table. Edward went on speaking to the fire:

"It still seems to me incredible. Day and night I think of what it's my duty to do."

"Nothing!" ejaculated Robert. "Leave the baby with Thirza; we'll take care of it, and when Nollie's fit, let her go back to work in a hospital again. She'll soon get over it." He saw his brother shake his head, and thought: 'Ah! yes; now there's going to be some d—d conscientious complication.'

Edward turned round on him: "That is very sweet of you both, but it would be wrong and cowardly for me to allow it."

The resentment which springs up in fathers when other fathers dispose of young lives, rose in Robert.

"Dash it all, my dear Ted, that's for Nollie to say. She's a woman now, remember."

A smile went straying about in the shadows of his brother's face. "A woman? Little Nollie! Bob, I've made a terrible mess of it with my girls." He hid his lips with his hand, and turned again to the flames. Robert felt a lump in his throat. "Oh! Hang it, old boy, I don't think that. What else could you have done? You take too much on yourself. After all, they're fine girls. I'm sure Nollie's a darling. It's these modern notions, and this war. Cheer up! It'll all dry straight." He went up to his brother and put a hand on his shoulder. Edward seemed to stiffen under that touch.

"Nothing comes straight," he said, "unless it's faced; you know that, Bob."

Robert's face was a study at that moment. His cheeks filled and collapsed again like a dog's when it has been rebuked. His colour deepened, and he rattled some money in a trouser pocket.

"Something in that, of course," he said gruffly. "All the same, the decision's with Nollie. We'll see what Thirza says. Anyway, there's no hurry. It's a thousand pities you're a parson; the trouble's enough without that."

Edward shook his head. "My position is nothing; it's the thought of my child, my wife's child. It's sheer pride; and I can't subdue it. I can't fight it down. God forgive me, I rebel."

And Robert thought: 'By George, he does take it to heart! Well, so should I! I do, as it is!' He took out his pipe, and filled it, pushing the tobacco down and down.

"I'm not a man of the world," he heard his brother say; "I'm out of touch with many things. It's almost unbearable to me to feel that I'm joining with the world to condemn my own daughter; not for their reasons, perhaps—I don't know; I hope not, but still, I'm against her."

Robert lit his pipe.

"Steady, old man!" he said. "It's a misfortune. But if I were you I should feel: 'She's done a wild, silly thing, but, hang it, if anybody says a word against her, I'll wring his neck.' And what's more, you'll feel much the same, when it comes to the point." He emitted a huge puff of smoke, which obscured his brother's face, and the blood, buzzing in his temples, seemed to thicken the sound of Edward's voice.

"I don't know; I've tried to see clearly. I have prayed to be shown what her duty is, and mine. It seems to me there can be no peace for her until she has atoned, by open suffering; that the world's judgment is her cross, and she must bear it; especially in these days, when all the world is facing suffering so nobly. And then it seems so hard—so bitter; my poor little Nollie!"

There was a silence, broken only by the gurgling of Robert's pipe, till he said abruptly:

"I don't follow you, Ted; no, I don't. I think a man should screen his children all he can. Talk to her as you like, but don't let the world do it. Dash it, the world's a rotten gabbling place. I call myself a man of the world, but when it comes to private matters—well, then I draw the line. It seems to me it seems to me inhuman. What does George Laird think about it? He's a knowing chap. I suppose you've—no, I suppose you haven't—" For a peculiar smile had come on Edward's face.

"No," he said, "I should hardly ask George Laird's opinion."

And Robert realised suddenly the stubborn loneliness of that thin black figure, whose fingers were playing with a little gold cross. 'By Jove!' he thought, 'I believe old Ted's like one of those Eastern chaps who go into lonely places. He's got himself surrounded by visions of things that aren't there. He lives in unreality—something we can't understand. I shouldn't be surprised if he heard voices, like—'who was it? Tt, tt! What a pity!' Ted was deceptive. He was gentle and—all that, a gentleman of course, and that disguised him; but underneath; what was there—a regular ascetic, a fakir! And a sense of bewilderment, of dealing with something which he could not grasp, beset Bob Pierson, so that he went back to the table, and sat down again beside his port.

"It seems to me," he said rather gruffly, "that the chicken had better be hatched before we count it." And then, sorry for his brusqueness, emptied his glass. As the fluid passed over his palate, he thought: 'Poor old Ted! He doesn't even drink—hasn't a pleasure in life, so far as I can see, except doing his duty, and doesn't even seem to know what that is. There aren't many like him—luckily! And yet I love

him—pathetic chap!

The "pathetic chap" was still staring at the flames. 3

And at this very hour, when the brothers were talking—for thought and feeling do pass mysteriously over the invisible wires of space Cyril Morland's son was being born of Noel, a little before his time.

PART III

I

Down by the River Wye, among plum-trees in blossom, Noel had laid her baby in a hammock, and stood reading a letter:

"MY DEAREST NOLLIE, "Now that you are strong again, I feel that I must put before you my feeling as to your duty in this crisis of your life. Your aunt and uncle have made the most kind and generous offer to adopt your little boy. I have known that this was in their minds for some time, and have thought it over day and night for weeks. In the worldly sense it would be the best thing, no doubt. But this is a spiritual matter. The future of our souls depends on how we meet the consequences of our conduct. And painful, dreadful, indeed, as they must be, I am driven to feel that you can only reach true peace by facing them in a spirit of brave humility. I want you to think and think—till you arrive at a certainty which satisfies your conscience. If you decide, as I trust you will, to come back to me here with your boy, I shall do all in my power to make you happy while we face the future together. To do as your aunt and uncle in their kindness wish, would, I am sore afraid, end in depriving you of the inner strength and happiness which God only gives to those who do their duty and try courageously to repair their errors. I have confidence in you, my dear child. "Ever your most loving father, "EDWARD PIERSON."

She read it through a second time, and looked at her baby. Daddy seemed to think that she might be willing to part from this wonderful creature! Sunlight fell through the plum blossom, in an extra patchwork quilt over the bundle lying there, touched the baby's nose and mouth, so that he sneezed. Noel laughed, and put her lips close to his face. 'Give you up!' she thought: 'Oh, no! And I'm going to be happy too. They shan't stop me:

In answer to the letter she said simply that she was coming up; and a week later she went, to the dismay of her uncle and aunt. The old nurse went too. Everything had hitherto been so carefully watched and guarded against by Thirza, that Noel did not really come face to face with her position till she reached home.

Gratian, who had managed to get transferred to a London Hospital, was now living at home. She had provided the house with new maids against her sister's return; and though Noel was relieved not to meet her old familiars, she encountered with difficulty the stolid curiosity of new faces. That morning before she left Kestrel, her aunt had come into her room while she was dressing, taken her left hand and slipped a little gold band on to its third finger. "To please me, Nollie, now that you're going, just for the foolish, who know nothing about you."

Noel had suffered it with the thought: 'It's all very silly!' But now, when the new maid was pouring out her hot water, she was suddenly aware of the girl's round blue eyes wandering, as it were, mechanically to her hand. This little hoop of gold, then, had an awful power! A rush of disgust came over her. All life seemed suddenly a thing of forms and sham. Everybody then would look at that little ring; and she was a coward, saving herself from them! When she was alone again, she slipped it off, and laid it on the washstand, where the sunlight fell. Only this little shining band of metal, this little yellow ring, stood between her and the world's hostile scorn! Her lips trembled. She took up the ring, and went to the open window; to throw it out. But she did not, uncertain and unhappy—half realising the cruelty of life. A knock at the door sent her flying back to the washstand. The visitor was Gratian.

"I've been looking at him," she said softly; "he's like you, Nollie, except for his nose."

"He's hardly got one yet. But aren't his eyes intelligent? I think they're wonderful." She held up the ring: "What shall I do about this, Gratian?"

Gratian flushed. "Wear it. I don't see why outsiders should know. For the sake of Dad I think you ought. There's the parish."

Noel slipped the ring back on to her finger. "Would you?"

"I can't tell. I think I would."

Noel laughed suddenly. "I'm going to get cynical; I can feel it in my bones. How is Daddy looking?"

"Very thin; Mr. Lauder is back again from the Front for a bit, and taking some of the work now."

"Do I hurt him very much still?"

"He's awfully pleased that you've come. He's as sweet as he can be about you."

"Yes," murmured Noel, "that's what's dreadful. I'm glad he wasn't in when I came. Has he told anyone?"

Gratian shook her head. "I don't think anybody knows; unless—perhaps Captain Fort. He came in again the other night; and somehow—"

Noel flushed. "Leila!" she said enigmatically. "Have you seen her?"

"I went to her flat last week with Dad—he likes her."

"Delilah is her real name, you know. All men like her. And Captain Fort is her lover."

Gratian gasped. Noel would say things sometimes which made her feel the younger of the two.

"Of course he is," went on Noel in a hard voice. "She has no men friends; her sort never have, only lovers. Why do you think he knows about me?"

"When he asked after you he looked—"

"Yes; I've seen him look like that when he's sorry for anything. I don't care. Has Monsieur Lavendie been in lately?"

"Yes; he looks awfully unhappy."

"His wife drugs."

"Oh, Nollie! How do you know?"

"I saw her once; I'm sure she does; there was a smell; and she's got wandering eyes that go all glassy. He can paint me now, if he likes. I wouldn't let him before. Does he know?"

"Of course not."

"He knows there was something; he's got second sight, I think. But I mind him less than anybody. Is his picture of Daddy good?"

"Powerful, but it hurts, somehow."

"Let's go down and see it."

The picture was hung in the drawing-room, and its intense modernity made that old-fashioned room seem lifeless and strange. The black figure, with long pale fingers touching the paler piano keys, had a frightening actuality. The face, three-quarters full, was raised as if for inspiration, and the eyes rested, dreamy and unseeing, on the face of a girl painted and hung on a background of wall above the piano.

"It's the face of that girl," said Gratian, when they had looked at the picture for some time in silence:

"No," said Noel, "it's the look in his eyes."

"But why did he choose such a horrid, common girl? Isn't she fearfully alive, though? She looks as if she were saying: 'Cheerio!'"

"She is; it's awfully pathetic, I think. Poor Daddy!"

"It's a libel," said Gratian stubbornly.

"No. That's what hurts. He isn't quite—quite all there. Will he be coming in soon?"

Gratian took her arm, and pressed it hard. "Would you like me at dinner or not; I can easily be out?"

Noel shook her head. "It's no good to funk it. He wanted me, and now he's got me. Oh! why did he?"

It'll be awful for him."

Gratian sighed. "I've tried my best, but he always said: 'I've thought so long about it all that I can't think any longer. I can only feel the braver course is the best. When things are bravely and humbly met, there will be charity and forgiveness.'"

"There won't," said Noel, "Daddy's a saint, and he doesn't see."

"Yes, he is a saint. But one must think for oneself—one simply must. I can't believe as he does, any more; can you, Nollie?"

"I don't know. When I was going through it, I prayed; but I don't know whether I really believed. I don't think I mind much about that, one way or the other."

"I mind terribly," said Gratian, "I want the truth."

"I don't know what I want," said Noel slowly, "except that sometimes I want—life; awfully."

And the two sisters were silent, looking at each other with a sort of wonder.

Noel had a fancy to put on a bright-coloured blue frock that evening, and at her neck she hung a Breton cross of old paste, which had belonged to her mother. When she had finished dressing she went into the nursery and stood by the baby's cot. The old nurse who was sitting there beside him, got up at once and said:

"He's sleeping beautiful—the lamb. I'll go down and get a cup o' tea, and come up, ma'am, when the gong goes." In the way peculiar to those who have never to initiate, but only to support positions in which they are placed by others, she had adopted for herself the theory that Noel was a real war-widow. She knew the truth perfectly; for she had watched that hurried little romance at Kestrel, but by dint of charity and blurred meditations it was easy for her to imagine the marriage ceremony which would and should have taken place; and she was zealous that other people should imagine it too. It was so much more regular and natural like that, and "her" baby invested with his proper dignity. She went downstairs to get a "cup o' tea," thinking: 'A picture they make—that they do, bless his little heart; and his pretty little mother—no more than a child, all said and done.'

Noel had been standing there some minutes in the failing light, absorbed in the face of the sleeping baby, when, raising her eyes, she saw in a mirror the reflection of her father's dark figure by the door. She could hear him breathing as if the ascent of the stairs had tired him; and moving to the head of the cot, she rested her hand on it, and turned her face towards him. He came up and stood beside her, looking silently down at the baby. She saw him make the sign of the Cross above it, and the movement of his lips in prayer. Love for her father, and rebellion against this intercession for her perfect baby fought so hard in the girl's heart that she felt suffocated, and glad of the dark, so that he could not see her eyes. Then he took her hand and put it to his lips, but still without a word; and for the life of her she could not speak either. In silence, he kissed her forehead; and there mounted in Noel a sudden passion of longing to show him her pride and love for her baby. She put her finger down and touched one of his hands. The tiny sleeping fingers uncurled and, like some little sea anemone, clutched round it. She heard her father draw his breath in; saw him turn away quickly, silently, and go out. And she stayed, hardly breathing, with the hand of her baby squeezing her finger.

II

1

When Edward Pierson, afraid of his own emotion, left the twilit nursery, he slipped into his own room, and fell on his knees beside his bed, absorbed in the vision he had seen. That young figure in Madonna blue, with the halo of bright hair; the sleeping babe in the fine dusk; the silence, the adoration in that white room! He saw, too; a vision of the past, when Noel herself had been the sleeping babe within her mother's arm, and he had stood beside them, wondering and giving praise. It passed with its other-worldliness and the fine holiness which belongs to beauty, passed and left the tormenting realism of life. Ah! to live with only the inner meaning, spiritual and beautified, in a rare wonderment such as he had experienced just now!

His alarm clock, while he knelt in his narrow, monkish little room—ticked the evening hour away

into darkness. And still he knelt, dreading to come back into it all, to face the world's eyes, and the sound of the world's tongue, and the touch of the rough, the gross, the unseemly. How could he guard his child? How preserve that vision in her life, in her spirit, about to enter such cold, rough waters? But the gong sounded; he got up, and went downstairs.

But this first family moment, which all had dreaded, was relieved, as dreaded moments so often are, by the unexpected appearance of the Belgian painter. He had a general invitation, of which he often availed himself; but he was so silent, and his thin, beardless face, which seemed all eyes and brow, so mournful, that all three felt in the presence of a sorrow deeper even than their own family grief. During the meal he gazed silently at Noel. Once he said: "You will let me paint you now, mademoiselle, I hope?" and his face brightened a little when she nodded. There was never much talk when he came, for any depth of discussion, even of art, brought out at once too wide a difference. And Pierson could never avoid a vague irritation with one who clearly had spirituality, but of a sort which he could not understand. After dinner he excused himself, and went off to his study. Monsieur would be happier alone with the two girls! Gratian, too, got up. She had remembered Noel's words: "I mind him less than anybody." It was a chance for Nollie to break the ice.

2

"I have not seen you for a long time, mademoiselle," said the painter, when they were alone.

Noel was sitting in front of the empty drawing-room hearth, with her arms stretched out as if there had been a fire there.

"I've been away. How are you going to paint me, monsieur?"

"In that dress, mademoiselle; Just as you are now, warming yourself at the fire of life."

"But it isn't there."

"Yes, fires soon go out. Mademoiselle, will you come and see my wife?
She is ill."

"Now?" asked Noel, startled.

"Yes, now. She is really ill, and I have no one there. That is what I came to ask of your sister; but—now you are here, it's even better. She likes you."

Noel got up. "Wait one minute!" she said, and ran upstairs. Her baby was asleep, and the old nurse dozing. Putting on a cloak and cap of grey rabbit's fur, she ran down again to the hall where the painter was waiting; and they went out together.

"I do not know if I am to blame," he said, "my wife has been no real wife to me since she knew I had a mistress and was no real husband to her."

Noel stared round at his face lighted by a queer, smile.

"Yes," he went on, "from that has come her tragedy. But she should have known before I married her. Nothing was concealed. Bon Dieu! she should have known! Why cannot a woman see things as they are? My mistress, mademoiselle, is not a thing of flesh. It is my art. It has always been first with me, and always will. She has never accepted that, she is incapable of accepting it. I am sorry for her. But what would you? I was a fool to marry her. Chere mademoiselle, no troubles are anything beside the trouble which goes on day and night, meal after meal, year, after year, between two people who should never have married, because one loves too much and requires all, and the other loves not at all—no, not at all, now, it is long dead—and can give but little."

"Can't you separate?" asked Noel, wondering.

"It is hard to separate from one who craves for you as she craves her drugs—yes, she takes drugs now, mademoiselle. It is impossible for one who has any compassion in his soul. Besides, what would she do? We live from hand to mouth, in a strange land. She has no friends here, not one. How could I leave her while this war lasts? As well could two persons on a desert island separate. She is killing herself, too, with these drugs, and I cannot stop her."

"Poor madame!" murmured Noel. "Poor monsieur!"

The painter drew his hand across his eyes.

"I cannot change my nature," he said in a stifled voice, "nor she hers. So we go on. But life will stop

suddenly some day for one of us. After all, it is much worse for her than for me. Enter, mademoiselle. Do not tell her I am going to paint you; she likes you, because you refused to let me."

Noel went up the stairs, shuddering; she had been there once before, and remembered that sickly scent of drugs. On the third floor they entered a small sitting-room whose walls were covered with paintings and drawings; from one corner a triangular stack of canvases jutted out. There was little furniture save an old red sofa, and on this was seated a stoutish man in the garb of a Belgian soldier, with his elbows on his knees and his bearded cheeks resting on his doubled fists. Beside him on the sofa, nursing a doll, was a little girl, who looked up at Noel. She had a most strange, attractive, pale little face, with pointed chin and large eyes, which never moved from this apparition in grey rabbits' skins.

"Ah, Barra! You here!" said the painter:

"Mademoiselle, this is Monsieur Barra, a friend of ours from the front; and this is our landlady's little girl. A little refugee, too, aren't you, Chica?"

The child gave him a sudden brilliant smile and resumed her grave scrutiny of the visitor. The soldier, who had risen heavily, offered Noel one of his podgy hands, with a sad and heavy giggle.

"Sit down, mademoiselle," said Lavendie, placing a chair for her: "I will bring my wife in," and he went out through some double doors.

Noel sat down. The soldier had resumed his old attitude, and the little girl her nursing of the doll, though her big eyes still watched the visitor. Overcome by strangeness, Noel made no attempt to talk. And presently through the double doors the painter and his wife came in. She was a thin woman in a red wrapper, with hollow cheeks, high cheek-bones, and hungry eyes; her dark hair hung loose, and one hand played restlessly with a fold of her gown. She took Noel's hand; and her uplifted eyes seemed to dig into the girl's face, to let go suddenly, and flutter.

"How do you do?" she said in English. "So Pierre brought you, to see me again. I remember you so well. You would not let him paint you. Ah! que c'est drole! You are so pretty, too. Hein, Monsieur Barra, is not mademoiselle pretty?"

The soldier gave his heavy giggle, and resumed his scrutiny of the floor.

"Henriette," said Lavendie, "sit down beside Chica—you must not stand. Sit down, mademoiselle, I beg."

"I'm so sorry you're not well," said Noel, and sat down again.

The painter stood leaning against the wall, and his wife looked up at his tall, thin figure, with eyes which had in them anger, and a sort of cunning.

"A great painter, my husband, is he not?" she said to Noel. "You would not imagine what that man can do. And how he paints—all day long; and all night in his head. And so you would not let him paint you, after all?"

Lavendie said impatiently: "Voyons, Henriette, causez d'autre chose."

His wife plucked nervously at a fold in her red gown, and gave him the look of a dog that has been rebuked.

"I am a prisoner here, mademoiselle, I never leave the house. Here I live day after day—my husband is always painting. Who would go out alone under this grey sky of yours, and the hatreds of the war in every face? I prefer to keep my room. My husband goes painting; every face he sees interests him, except that which he sees every day. But I am a prisoner. Monsieur Barra is our first visitor for a long time."

The soldier raised his face from his fists. "Prisonnier, madame! What would you say if you were out there?" And he gave his thick giggle. "We are the prisoners, we others. What would you say to imprisonment by explosion day and night; never a minute free. Bom! Bom! Bom! Ah! les tranchees! It's not so free as all that, there."

"Every one has his own prison," said Lavendie bitterly. "Mademoiselle even, has her prison—and little Chica, and her doll. Every one has his prison, Barra. Monsieur Barra is also a painter, mademoiselle."

"Moi!" said Barra, lifting his heavy hairy hand. "I paint puddles, star-bombs, horses' ribs—I paint holes and holes and holes, wire and wire and wire, and water—long white ugly water. I paint splinters,

and men's souls naked, and men's bodies dead, and nightmare—nightmare—all day and all night—I paint them in my head." He suddenly ceased speaking and relapsed into contemplation of the carpet, with his bearded cheeks resting on his fists. "And their souls as white as snow, les camarades," he added suddenly and loudly, "millions of Belgians, English, French, even the Boches, with white souls. I paint those souls!"

A little shiver ran through Noel, and she looked appealingly at Lavendie.

"Barra," he said, as if the soldier were not there, "is a great painter, but the Front has turned his head a little. What he says is true, though. There is no hatred out there. It is here that we are prisoners of hatred, mademoiselle; avoid hatreds—they are poison!"

His wife put out her hand and touched the child's shoulder.

"Why should we not hate?" she said. "Who killed Chica's father, and blew her home to-rags? Who threw her out into this horrible England—pardon, mademoiselle, but it is horrible. Ah! les Boches! If my hatred could destroy them there would not be one left. Even my husband was not so mad about his painting when we lived at home. But here—!" Her eyes darted at his face again, and then sank as if rebuked. Noel saw the painter's lips move. The sick woman's whole figure writhed.

"It is mania, your painting!" She looked at Noel with a smile. "Will you have some tea, mademoiselle? Monsieur Barra, some tea?"

The soldier said thickly: "No, madame; in the trenches we have tea enough. It consoles us. But when we get away—give us wine, le bon vin; le bon petit vin!"

"Get some wine, Pierre!"

Noel saw from the painter's face that there was no wine, and perhaps no money to get any; but he went quickly out. She rose and said:

"I must be going, madame."

Madame Lavendie leaned forward and clutched her wrist. "Wait a little, mademoiselle. We shall have some wine, and Pierre shall take you back presently. You cannot go home alone—you are too pretty. Is she not, Monsieur Barra?"

The soldier looked up: "What would you say," he said, "to bottles of wine bursting in the air, bursting red and bursting white, all day long, all night long? Great steel bottles, large as Chica: bits of bottles, carrying off men's heads? Bsum, garra-a-a, and a house comes down, and little bits of people ever so small, ever so small, tiny bits in the air and all over the ground. Great souls out there, madame. But I will tell you a secret," and again he gave his heavy giggle, "all a little, little mad; nothing to speak of—just a little bit mad; like a watch, you know, that you can wind for ever. That is the discovery of this war, mademoiselle," he said, addressing Noel for the first time, "you cannot gain a great soul till you are a little mad." And lowering his piggy grey eyes at once, he resumed his former attitude. "It is that madness I shall paint some day," he announced to the carpet; "lurking in one tiny corner of each soul of all those millions, as it creeps, as it peeps, ever so sudden, ever so little when we all think it has been put to bed, here—there, now—then, when you least think; in and out like a mouse with bright eyes. Millions of men with white souls, all a little mad. A great subject, I think," he added heavily. Involuntarily Noel put her hand to her heart, which was beating fast. She felt quite sick.

"How long have you been at the Front, monsieur?"

"Two years, mademoiselle. Time to go home and paint, is it not? But art—!" he shrugged his heavy round shoulders, his whole bear-like body. "A little mad," he muttered once more. "I will tell you a story. Once in winter after I had rested a fortnight, I go back to the trenches at night, and I want some earth to fill up a hole in the ground where I was sleeping; when one has slept in a bed one becomes particular. Well, I scratch it from my parapet, and I come to something funny. I strike my briquet, and there is a Boche's face all frozen and earthy and dead and greeny-white in the flame from my briquet."

"Oh, no!"

"Oh! but yes, mademoiselle; true as I sit here. Very useful in the parapet—dead Boche. Once a man like me. But in the morning I could not stand him; we dug him out and buried him, and filled the hole up with other things. But there I stood in the night, and my face as close to his as this"—and he held his thick hand a foot before his face. "We talked of our homes; he had a soul, that man. 'Il me disait des choses', how he had suffered; and I, too, told him my sufferings. Dear God, we know all; we shall never know more than we know out there, we others, for we are mad—nothing to speak of, but just a little,

little mad. When you see us, mademoiselle, walking the streets, remember that." And he dropped his face on to his fists again.

A silence had fallen in the room—very queer and complete. The little girl nursed her doll, the soldier gazed at the floor, the woman's mouth moved stealthily, and in Noel the thought rushed continually to the verge of action: 'Couldn't I get up and run downstairs?' But she sat on, hypnotised by that silence, till Lavendie reappeared with a bottle and four glasses.

"To drink our health, and wish us luck, mademoiselle," he said.

Noel raised the glass he had given her. "I wish you all happiness."

"And you, mademoiselle," the two men murmured.

She drank a little, and rose.

"And now, mademoiselle," said Lavendie, "if you must go, I will see you home."

Noel took Madame Lavendie's hand; it was cold, and returned no pressure; her eyes had the glazed look that she remembered. The soldier had put his empty glass down on the floor, and was regarding it unconscious of her. Noel turned quickly to the door; the last thing she saw was the little girl nursing her doll.

In the street the painter began at once in his rapid French:

'I ought not to have asked you to come, mademoiselle; I did not know our friend Barra was there. Besides, my wife is not fit to receive a lady; vous voyez qu'il y a de la manie dans cette pauvre tote. I should not have asked you; but I was so miserable.'

"Oh!" murmured Noel, "I know."

"In our home over there she had interests. In this great town she can only nurse her grief against me. Ah! this war! It seems to me we are all in the stomach of a great coiling serpent. We lie there, being digested. In a way it is better out there in the trenches; they are beyond hate, they have attained a height that we have not. It is wonderful how they still can be for going on till they have beaten the Boche; that is curious and it is very great. Did Barra tell you how, when they come back—all these fighters—they are going to rule, and manage the future of the world? But it will not be so. They will mix in with life, separate—be scattered, and they will be ruled as they were before. The tongue and the pen will rule them: those who have not seen the war will rule them."

"Oh!" cried Noel, "surely they will be the bravest and strongest in the future."

The painter smiled.

"War makes men simple," he said, "elemental; life in peace is neither simple nor elemental, it is subtle, full of changing environments, to which man must adapt himself; the cunning, the astute, the adaptable, will ever rule in times of peace. It is pathetic, the belief of those brave soldiers that the future is theirs."

"He said, a strange thing," murmured Noel; "that they were all a little mad."

"He is a man of queer genius—Barra; you should see some of his earlier pictures. Mad is not quite the word, but something is loosened, is rattling round in them, they have lost proportion, they are being forced in one direction. I tell you, mademoiselle, this war is one great forcing-house; every living plant is being made to grow too fast, each quality, each passion; hate and love, intolerance and lust and avarice, courage and energy; yes, and self-sacrifice—all are being forced and forced beyond their strength, beyond the natural flow of the sap, forced till there has come a great wild luxuriant crop, and then—Psum! Presto! The change comes, and these plants will wither and rot and stink. But we who see Life in forms of Art are the only ones who feel that; and we are so few. The natural shape of things is lost. There is a mist of blood before all eyes. Men are afraid of being fair. See how we all hate not only our enemies, but those who differ from us. Look at the streets too—see how men and women rush together, how Venus reigns in this forcing-house. Is it not natural that Youth about to die should yearn for pleasure, for love, for union, before death?"

Noel stared up at him. 'Now!' she thought: I will.'

"Yes," she said, "I know that's true, because I rushed, myself. I'd like you to know. We couldn't be married—there wasn't time. And—he was killed. But his son is alive. That's why I've been away so long. I want every one to know." She spoke very calmly, but her cheeks felt burning hot.

The painter had made an upward movement of his hands, as if they had been jerked by an electric current, then he said quite quietly:

"My profound respect, mademoiselle, and my great sympathy. And your father?"

"It's awful for him."

The painter said gently: "Ah! mademoiselle, I am not so sure. Perhaps he does not suffer so greatly. Perhaps not even your trouble can hurt him very much. He lives in a world apart. That, I think, is his true tragedy to be alive, and yet not living enough to feel reality. Do you know Anatole France's description of an old woman: 'Elle vivait, mais si peu.' Would that not be well said of the Church in these days: 'Elle vivait, mais si peu.' I see him always like a rather beautiful dark spire in the night-time when you cannot see how it is attached to the earth. He does not know, he never will know, Life."

Noel looked round at him. "What do you mean by Life, monsieur? I'm always reading about Life, and people talk of seeing Life! What is it—where is it? I never see anything that you could call Life."

The painter smiled.

"To 'see life!'" he said. "Ah! that is different. To enjoy yourself! Well, it is my experience that when people are 'seeing life' as they call it, they are not enjoying themselves. You know when one is very thirsty one drinks and drinks, but the thirst remains all the same. There are places where one can see life as it is called, but the only persons you will see enjoying themselves at such places are a few humdrums like myself, who go there for a talk over a cup of coffee. Perhaps at your age, though, it is different."

Noel clasped her hands, and her eyes seemed to shine in the gloom. "I want music and dancing and light, and beautiful things and faces; but I never get them."

"No, there does not exist in this town, or in any other, a place which will give you that. Fox-trots and ragtime and paint and powder and glare and half-drunken young men, and women with red lips you can get them in plenty. But rhythm and beauty and charm never. In Brussels when I was younger I saw much 'life' as they call it, but not one lovely thing unspoiled; it was all as ashes in the mouth. Ah! you may smile, but I know what I am talking of. Happiness never comes when you are looking for it, mademoiselle; beauty is in Nature and in real art, never in these false silly make believes. There is a place just here where we Belgians go; would you like to see how true my words are?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Tres-bien! Let us go in?"

They passed into a revolving doorway with little glass compartments which shot them out into a shining corridor. At the end of this the painter looked at Noel and seemed to hesitate, then he turned off from the room they were about to enter into a room on the right. It was large, full of gilt and plush and marble tables, where couples were seated; young men in khaki and older men in plain clothes, together or with young women. At these last Noel looked, face after face, while they were passing down a long way to an empty table. She saw that some were pretty, and some only trying to be, that nearly all were powdered and had their eyes darkened and their lips reddened, till she felt her own face to be dreadfully ungarnished: Up in a gallery a small band was playing an attractive jingling hollow little tune; and the buzz of talk and laughter was almost deafening.

"What will you have, mademoiselle?" said the painter. "It is just nine o'clock; we must order quickly."

"May I have one of those green things?"

"Deux cremes de menthe," said Lavendie to the waiter.

Noel was too absorbed to see the queer, bitter little smile hovering about his face. She was busy looking at the faces of women whose eyes, furtively cold and enquiring, were fixed on her; and at the faces of men with eyes that were furtively warm and wondering.

"I wonder if Daddy was ever in a place like this?" she said, putting the glass of green stuff to her lips. "Is it nice? It smells of peppermint."

"A beautiful colour. Good luck, mademoiselle!" and he chinked his glass with hers.

Noel sipped, held it away, and sipped again.

"It's nice; but awfully sticky. May I have a cigarette?"

"Des cigarettes," said Lavendie to the waiter, "Et deux cafes noirs. Now, mademoiselle," he murmured when they were brought, "if we imagine that we have drunk a bottle of wine each, we shall have exhausted all the preliminaries of what is called Vice. Amusing, isn't it?" He shrugged his shoulders.

His face struck Noel suddenly as tarnished and almost sullen.

"Don't be angry, monsieur, it's all new to me, you see."

The painter smiled, his bright, skin-deep smile.

"Pardon! I forget myself. Only, it hurts me to see beauty in a place like this. It does not go well with that tune, and these voices, and these faces. Enjoy yourself, mademoiselle; drink it all in! See the way these people look at each other; what love shines in their eyes! A pity, too, we cannot hear what they are saying. Believe me, their talk is most subtle, tres-spirituel. These young women are 'doing their bit,' as you call it; bringing le plaisir to all these who are serving their country. Eat, drink, love, for tomorrow we die. Who cares for the world simple or the world beautiful, in days like these? The house of the spirit is empty."

He was looking at her sidelong as if he would enter her very soul.

Noel got up. "I'm ready to go, monsieur."

He put her cloak on her shoulders, paid the bill, and they went out, threading again through the little tables, through the buzz of talk and laughter and the fumes of tobacco, while another hollow little tune jingled away behind them.

"Through there," said the painter, pointing to another door, "they dance. So it goes. London in war-time! Well, after all, it is never very different; no great town is. Did you enjoy your sight of 'life,' mademoiselle?"

"I think one must dance, to be happy. Is that where your friends go?"

"Oh, no! To a room much rougher, and play dominoes, and drink coffee and beer, and talk. They have no money to throw away."

"Why didn't you show me?"

"Mademoiselle, in that room you might see someone perhaps whom one day you would meet again; in the place we visited you were safe enough at least I hope so."

Noel shrugged. "I suppose it doesn't matter now, what I do."

And a rush of emotion caught at her throat—a wave from the past—the moonlit night, the dark old Abbey, the woods and the river. Two tears rolled down her cheeks.

"I was thinking of—something," she said in a muffled voice. "It's all right."

"Chere mademoiselle!" Lavendie murmured; and all the way home he was timid and distressed. Shaking his hand at the door, she murmured:

"I'm sorry I was such a fool; and thank you awfully, monsieur. Good night."

"Good night; and better dreams. There is a good time coming—Peace and Happiness once more in the world. It will not always be this Forcing-House. Good night, chere mademoiselle!"

Noel went up to the nursery, and stole in. A night-light was burning, Nurse and baby were fast asleep. She tiptoed through into her own room. Once there, she felt suddenly so tired that she could hardly undress; and yet curiously rested, as if with that rush of emotion, Cyril and the past had slipped from her for ever.

III

Noel's first encounter with Opinion took place the following day. The baby had just come in from its

airing; she had seen it comfortably snoozing, and was on her way downstairs, when a voice from the hall said:

"How do you do?" and she saw the khaki-clad figure of Adrian Lauder, her father's curate! Hesitating just a moment, she finished her descent, and put her fingers in his. He was a rather heavy, dough-coloured young man of nearly thirty, unsuited by khaki, with a round white collar buttoned behind; but his aspiring eyes redeemed him, proclaiming the best intentions in the world, and an inclination towards sentiment in the presence of beauty.

"I haven't seen you for ages," he said rather fatuously, following her into her father's study.

"No," said Noel. "How—do you like being at the Front?"

"Ah!" he said, "they're wonderful!" And his eyes shone. "It's so nice to see you again."

"Is it?"

He seemed puzzled by that answer; stammered, and said:

"I didn't know your sister had a baby. A jolly baby."

"She hasn't."

Lauder's mouth opened. 'A silly mouth,' she thought.

"Oh!" he said. "Is it a protegee—Belgian or something?"

"No, it's mine; my own." And, turning round, she slipped the little ring off her finger. When she turned back to him, his face had not recovered from her words. It had a hapless look, as of one to whom such a thing ought not to have happened.

"Don't look like that," said Noel. "Didn't you understand? It's mine-mine." She put out her left hand. "Look! There's no ring."

He stammered: "I say, you oughtn't to—you oughtn't to—!"

"What?"

"Joke about—about such things; ought you?"

"One doesn't joke if one's had a baby without being married, you know."

Lauder went suddenly slack. A shell might have burst a few paces from him. And then, just as one would in such a case, he made an effort, braced himself, and said in a curious voice, both stiff and heavy: "I can't—one doesn't—it's not—"

"It is," said Noel. "If you don't believe me, ask Daddy."

He put his hand up to his round collar; and with the wild thought that he was going to tear it off, she cried: "Don't!"

"You!" he said. "You! But—"

Noel turned away from him to the window: She stood looking out, but saw nothing whatever.

"I don't want it hidden," she said without turning round, "I want every one to know. It's stupid as it is—stupid!" and she stamped her foot. "Can't you see how stupid it is—everybody's mouth falling open!"

He uttered a little sound which had pain in it, and she felt a real pang of compunction. He had gripped the back of a chair; his face had lost its heaviness. A dull flush coloured his cheeks. Noel had a feeling, as if she had been convicted of treachery. It was his silence, the curious look of an impersonal pain beyond power of words; she felt in him something much deeper than mere disapproval—something which echoed within herself. She walked quickly past him and escaped. She ran upstairs and threw herself on her bed. He was nothing: it was not that! It was in herself, the awful feeling, for the first time developed and poignant, that she had betrayed her caste, forfeited the right to be thought a lady, betrayed her secret reserve and refinement, repaid with black ingratitude the love lavished on her up bringing, by behaving like any uncared-for common girl. She had never felt this before—not even when Gratian first heard of it, and they had stood one at each end of the hearth, unable to speak. Then she still had her passion, and her grief for the dead. That was gone now as if it had never been; and she had no defence, nothing between her and this crushing humiliation and chagrin. She had been mad! She must have been mad! The Belgian Barra was right: "All a little mad" in this "forcing-house" of a war!

She buried her face deep in the pillow, till it almost stopped her power of breathing; her head and cheeks and ears seemed to be on fire. If only he had shown disgust, done something which roused her temper, her sense of justice, her feeling that Fate had been too cruel to her; but he had just stood there, bewilderment incarnate, like a creature with some very deep illusion shattered. It was horrible! Then, feeling that she could not stay still, must walk, run, get away somehow from this feeling of treachery and betrayal, she sprang up. All was quiet below, and she slipped downstairs and out, speeding along with no knowledge of direction, taking the way she had taken day after day to her hospital. It was the last of April, trees and shrubs were luscious with blossom and leaf; the dogs ran gaily; people had almost happy faces in the sunshine. 'If I could get away from myself, I wouldn't care,' she thought. Easy to get away from people, from London, even from England perhaps; but from oneself—impossible! She passed her hospital; and looked at it dully, at the Red Cross flag against its stucco wall, and a soldier in his blue slops and red tie, coming out. She had spent many miserable hours there, but none quite so miserable as this. She passed the church opposite to the flats where Leila lived, and running suddenly into a tall man coming round the corner, saw Fort. She bent her head, and tried to hurry past. But his hand was held out, she could not help putting hers into it; and looking up hardily, she said:

"You know about me, don't you?"

His face, naturally so frank, seemed to clench up, as if he were riding at a fence. 'He'll tell a lie,' she thought bitterly. But he did not.

"Yes, Leila told me."

And she thought: 'I suppose he'll try and pretend that I've not been a beast!'

"I admire your pluck," he said.

"I haven't any."

"We never know ourselves, do we? I suppose you wouldn't walk my pace a minute or two, would you? I'm going the same way."

"I don't know which way I'm going."

"That is my case, too."

They walked on in silence.

"I wish to God I were back in France," said Fort abruptly. "One doesn't feel clean here."

Noel's heart applauded.

Ah! to get away—away from oneself! But at the thought of her baby, her heart fell again. "Is your leg quite hopeless?" she said.

"Quite."

"That must be horrid."

"Hundreds of thousands would look on it as splendid luck; and so it is if you count it better to be alive than dead, which I do, in spite of the blues."

"How is Cousin Leila?"

"Very well. She goes on pegging away at the hospital; she's a brick." But he did not look at her, and again there was silence, till he stopped by Lord's Cricket-ground.

"I mustn't keep you crawling along at this pace."

"Oh, I don't mind!"

"I only wanted to say that if I can be of any service to you at any time in any way whatever, please command me."

He gave her hand a squeeze, took his hat off; and Noel walked slowly on. The little interview, with its suppressions, and its implications, had but exasperated her restlessness, and yet, in a way, it had soothed the soreness of her heart. Captain Fort at all events did not despise her; and he was in trouble like herself. She felt that somehow by the look of his face, and the tone of his voice when he spoke of Leila. She quickened her pace. George's words came back to her: "If you're not ashamed of yourself, no

one will be of you!" How easy to say! The old days, her school, the little half grown-up dances she used to go to, when everything was happy. Gone! All gone!

But her meetings with Opinion were not over for the day, for turning again at last into the home Square, tired out by her three hours' ramble, she met an old lady whom she and Gratian had known from babyhood—a handsome dame, the widow of an official, who spent her days, which showed no symptom of declining, in admirable works. Her daughter, the widow of an officer killed at the Marne, was with her, and the two greeted Noel with a shower of cordial questions: So she was back from the country, and was she quite well again? And working at her hospital? And how was her dear father? They had thought him looking very thin and worn. But now Gratian was at home—How dreadfully the war kept husbands and wives apart! And whose was the dear little baby they had in the house?

"Mine," said Noel, walking straight past them with her head up. In every fibre of her being she could feel the hurt, startled, utterly bewildered looks of those firm friendly persons left there on the pavement behind her; could feel the way they would gather themselves together, and walk on, perhaps without a word, and then round the corner begin: "What has come to Noel? What did she mean?" And taking the little gold hoop out of her pocket, she flung it with all her might into the Square Garden. The action saved her from a breakdown; and she went in calmly. Lunch was long over, but her father had not gone out, for he met her in the hall and drew her into the dining-room.

"You must eat, my child," he said. And while she was swallowing down what he had caused to be kept back for her, he stood by the hearth in that favourite attitude of his, one foot on the fender, and one hand gripping the mantel-shelf.

"You've got your wish, Daddy," she said dully: "Everybody knows now. I've told Mr. Lauder, and Monsieur, and the Dinnafords."

She saw his fingers uncrisp, then grip the shelf again. "I'm glad," he said.

"Aunt Thirza gave me a ring to wear, but I've thrown it away."

"My dearest child," he began, but could not go on, for the quivering of his lips.

"I wanted to say once more, Daddy, that I'm fearfully sorry about you. And I am ashamed of myself; I thought I wasn't, but I am—only, I think it was cruel, and I'm not penitent to God; and it's no good trying to make me."

Pierson turned and looked at her. For a long time after, she could not get that look out of her memory.

Jimmy Fort had turned away from Noel feeling particularly wretched. Ever since the day when Leila had told him of the girl's misfortune he had been aware that his liaison had no decent foundation, save a sort of pity. One day, in a queer access of compunction, he had made Leila an offer of marriage. She had refused; and he had respected her the more, realising by the quiver in her voice and the look in her eyes that she refused him, not because she did not love him well enough, but because she was afraid of losing any of his affection. She was a woman of great experience.

To-day he had taken advantage of the luncheon interval to bring her some flowers, with a note to say that he could not come that evening. Letting himself in with his latchkey, he had carefully put those Japanese azaleas in the bowl "Famille Rose," taking water from her bedroom. Then he had sat down on the divan with his head in his hands.

Though he had rolled so much about the world, he had never had much to do with women. And there was nothing in him of the Frenchman, who takes what life puts in his way as so much enjoyment on the credit side, and accepts the ends of such affairs as they naturally and rather rapidly arrive. It had been a pleasure, and was no longer a pleasure; but this apparently did not dissolve it, or absolve him. He felt himself bound by an obscure but deep instinct to go on pretending that he was not tired of her, so long as she was not tired of him. And he sat there trying to remember any sign, however small, of such a consummation, quite without success. On the contrary, he had even the wretched feeling that if only he had loved her, she would have been much more likely to have tired of him by now. For her he was still the unconquered, in spite of his loyal endeavour to seem conquered. He had made a fatal mistake, that evening after the concert at Queen's Hall, to let himself go, on a mixed tide of desire and pity!

His folly came to him with increased poignancy after he had parted from Noel. How could he have been such a base fool, as to have committed himself to Leila on an evening when he had actually been in the company of that child? Was it the vague, unseizable likeness between them which had pushed him over the edge? 'I've been an ass,' he thought; 'a horrible ass.' I would always have given every hour I've ever spent with Leila, for one real smile from that girl.'

This sudden sight of Noel after months during which he had tried loyally to forget her existence, and not succeeded at all, made him realise as he never had yet that he was in love with her; so very much in love with her that the thought of Leila was become nauseating. And yet the instincts of a gentleman seemed to forbid him to betray that secret to either of them. It was an accursed coil! He hailed a cab, for he was late; and all the way back to the War Office he continued to see the girl's figure and her face with its short hair. And a fearful temptation rose within him. Was it not she who was now the real object for chivalry and pity? Had he not the right to consecrate himself to championship of one in such a deplorable position? Leila had lived her life; but this child's life—pretty well wrecked—was all before her. And then he grinned from sheer disgust. For he knew that this was Jesuitry. Not chivalry was moving him, but love! Love! Love of the unattainable! And with a heavy heart, indeed, he entered the great building, where, in a small room, companioned by the telephone, and surrounded by sheets of paper covered with figures, he passed his days. The war made everything seem dreary, hopeless. No wonder he had caught at any distraction which came along—caught at it, till it had caught him!

IV

1

To find out the worst is, for human nature, only a question of time. But where the "worst" is attached to a family haloed, as it were, by the authority and reputation of an institution like the Church, the process of discovery has to break through many a little hedge. Sheer unlikelihood, genuine respect, the defensive instinct in those identified with an institution, who will themselves feel weaker if its strength be diminished, the feeling that the scandal is too good to be true—all these little hedges, and more, had to be broken through. To the Dinnafords, the unholy importance of what Noel had said to them would have continued to keep them dumb, out of self-protection; but its monstrosity had given them the feeling that there must be some mistake, that the girl had been overtaken by a wild desire to "pull their legs" as dear Charlie would say. With the hope of getting this view confirmed, they lay in wait for the old nurse who took the baby out, and obtained the information, shortly imparted: "Oh, yes; Miss Noel's. Her 'usband was killed—poor lamb!" And they felt rewarded. They had been sure there was some mistake. The relief of hearing that word "'usband" was intense. One of these hasty war marriages, of which the dear Vicar had not approved, and so it had been kept dark. Quite intelligible, but so sad! Enough misgiving however remained in their minds, to prevent their going to condole with the dear Vicar; but not enough to prevent their roundly contradicting the rumours and gossip already coming to their ears. And then one day, when their friend Mrs. Curtis had said too positively: "Well, she doesn't wear a wedding-ring, that I'll swear, because I took very good care to look!" they determined to ask Mr. Lauder. He would—indeed must—know; and, of course, would not tell a story. When they asked him it was so manifest that he did know, that they almost withdrew the question. The poor young man had gone the colour of a tomato.

"I prefer not to answer," he said. The rest of a very short interview was passed in exquisite discomfort. Indeed discomfort, exquisite and otherwise, within a few weeks of Noel's return, had begun to pervade all the habitual congregation of Pierson's church. It was noticed that neither of the two sisters attended Service now. Certain people who went in the sincere hope of seeing Noel, only fell off again when she did not appear. After all, she would not have the face! And Gratian was too ashamed, no doubt. It was constantly remarked that the Vicar looked very grave and thin, even for him. As the rumours hardened into certainty, the feeling towards him became a curious medley of sympathy and condemnation. There was about the whole business that which English people especially resent. By the very fact of his presence before them every Sunday, and his public ministrations, he was exhibiting to them, as it were, the seamed and blushing face of his daughter's private life, besides affording one long and glaring demonstration of the failure of the Church to guide its flock: If a man could not keep his own daughter in the straight path—whom could he? Resign! The word began to be thought about, but not yet spoken. He had been there so long; he had spent so much money on the church and the parish; his gentle dreamy manner was greatly liked. He was a gentleman; and had helped many people; and, though his love of music and vestments had always caused heart-burnings, yet it had given a certain cachet to the church. The women, at any rate, were always glad to know that the church they went to was capable of drawing their fellow women away from other churches. Besides, it was war-time, and moral delinquency which in time of peace would have bulked too large to neglect, was now less insistently dwelt on, by minds preoccupied by food and air-raids. Things, of course, could not go on as they were; but as yet they did go on.

The talked-about is always the last to hear the talk; and nothing concrete or tangible came Pierson's way. He went about his usual routine without seeming change. And yet there was a change, secret and creeping. Wounded almost to death himself, he felt as though surrounded by one great wound in others; but it was some weeks before anything occurred to rouse within him the weapon of anger or the protective impulse.

And then one day a little swift brutality shook him to the very soul. He was coming home from a long parish round, and had turned into the Square, when a low voice behind him said:

"Wot price the little barstard?"

A cold, sick feeling stifled his very breathing; he gasped, and spun round, to see two big loutish boys walking fast away. With swift and stealthy passion he sprang after them, and putting his hands on their two neighbouring shoulders, wrenched them round so that they faced him, with mouths fallen open in alarm. Shaking them with all his force, he said:

"How dare you—how dare you use that word?" His face and voice must have been rather terrible, for the scare in their faces brought him to sudden consciousness of his own violence, and he dropped his hands. In two seconds they were at the corner. They stopped there for a second; one of them shouted "Gran'pa"; then they vanished. He was left with lips and hands quivering, and a feeling that he had not known for years—the weak white empty feeling one has after yielding utterly to sudden murderous rage. He crossed over, and stood leaning against the Garden railings, with the thought: 'God forgive me! I could have killed them—I could have killed them!' There had been a devil in him. If he had had something in his hand, he might now have been a murderer: How awful! Only one had spoken; but he could have killed them both! And the word was true, and was in all mouths—all low common mouths, day after day, of his own daughter's child! The ghastliness of this thought, brought home so utterly, made him writhe, and grasp the railings as if he would have bent them.

From that day on, a creeping sensation of being rejected of men, never left him; the sense of identification with Noel and her tiny outcast became ever more poignant, more real; the desire to protect them ever more passionate; and the feeling that round about there were whispering voices, pointing fingers, and a growing malevolence was ever more sickening. He was beginning too to realise the deep and hidden truth: How easily the breath of scandal destroys the influence and sanctity of those endowed therewith by vocation; how invaluable it is to feel untarnished, and how difficult to feel that when others think you tarnished.

He tried to be with Noel as much as possible; and in the evenings they sometimes went walks together, without ever talking of what was always in their minds. Between six and eight the girl was giving sittings to Lavendie in the drawing-room, and sometimes Pierson would come there and play to them. He was always possessed now by a sense of the danger Noel ran from companionship with any man. On three occasions, Jimmy Fort made his appearance after dinner. He had so little to say that it was difficult to understand why he came; but, sharpened by this new dread for his daughter, Pierson noticed his eyes always following her. 'He admires her,' he thought; and often he would try his utmost to grasp the character of this man, who had lived such a roving life. 'Is he—can he be the sort of man I would trust Nollie to?' he would think. 'Oh, that I should have to hope like this that some good man would marry her—my little Nollie, a child only the other day!'

In these sad, painful, lonely weeks he found a spot of something like refuge in Leila's sitting-room, and would go there often for half an hour when she was back from her hospital. That little black-walled room with its Japanese prints and its flowers, soothed him. And Leila soothed him, innocent as he was of any knowledge of her latest aberration, and perhaps conscious that she herself was not too happy. To watch her arranging flowers, singing her little French songs, or to find her beside him, listening to his confidences, was the only real pleasure he knew in these days. And Leila, in turn, would watch him and think: 'Poor Edward! He has never lived; and never will; now!' But sometimes the thought would shoot through her: 'Perhaps he's to be envied. He doesn't feel what I feel, anyway. Why did I fall in love again?'

They did not speak of Noel as a rule, but one evening she expressed her views roundly.

"It was a great mistake to make Noel come back. Edward. It was Quixotic. You'll be lucky if real mischief doesn't come of it. She's not a patient character; one day she'll do something rash. And, mind you, she'll be much more likely to break out if she sees the world treating you badly than if it happens to herself. I should send her back to the country, before she makes bad worse."

"I can't do that, Leila. We must live it down together."

"Wrong, Edward. You should take things as they are."

With a heavy sigh Pierson answered:

"I wish I could see her future. She's so attractive. And her defences are gone. She's lost faith, and belief in all that a good woman should be. The day after she came back she told me she was ashamed of herself. But since—she's not given a sign. She's so proud—my poor little Nollie. I see how men admire her, too. Our Belgian friend is painting her. He's a good man; but he finds her beautiful, and who can wonder. And your friend Captain Fort. Fathers are supposed to be blind, but they see very clear sometimes."

Leila rose and drew down a blind.

"This sun," she said. "Does Jimmy Fort come to you—often?"

"Oh! no; very seldom. But still—I can see."

'You bat—you blunderer!' thought Leila: 'See! You can't even see this beside you!'

"I expect he's sorry for her," she said in a queer voice.

"Why should he be sorry? He doesn't know:"

"Oh, yes! He knows; I told him."

"You told him!"

"Yes," Leila repeated stubbornly; "and he's sorry for her."

And even then "this monk" beside her did not see, and went blundering on.

"No, no; it's not merely that he's sorry. By the way he looks at her, I know I'm not mistaken. I've wondered—what do you think, Leila. He's too old for her; but he seems an honourable, kind man."

"Oh! a most honourable, kind man." But only by pressing her hand against her lips had she smothered a burst of bitter laughter. He, who saw nothing, could yet notice Fort's eyes when he looked at Noel, and be positive that he was in love with her! How plainly those eyes must speak! Her control gave way.

"All this is very interesting," she said, spurning her words like Noel, "considering that he's more than my friend, Edward." It gave her a sort of pleasure to see him wince. 'These blind bats!' she thought, terribly stung that he should so clearly assume her out of the running. Then she was sorry, his face had become so still and wistful. And turning away, she said:

"Oh! I shan't break my heart; I'm a good loser. And I'm a good fighter, too; perhaps I shan't lose." And snapping off a sprig of geranium, she pressed it to her lips.

"Forgive me," said Pierson slowly; "I didn't know. I'm stupid. I thought your love for your poor soldiers had left no room for other feelings."

Leila uttered a shrill laugh. "What have they to do with each other? Did you never hear of passion, Edward? Oh! Don't look at me like that. Do you think a woman can't feel passion at my age? As much as ever, more than ever, because it's all slipping away."

She took her hand from her lips, but a geranium petal was left clinging there, like a bloodstain. "What has your life been all these years," she went on vehemently—"suppression of passion, nothing else! You monks twist Nature up with holy words, and try to disguise what the eeriest simpleton can see. Well, I haven't suppressed passion, Edward. That's all."

"And are you happier for that?"

"I was; and I shall be again."

A little smile curled Pierson's lips. "Shall be?" he said. "I hope so. It's just two ways of looking at things, Leila."

"Oh, Edward! Don't be so gentle! I suppose you don't think a person like me can ever really love?"

He was standing before her with his head down, and a sense that, naive and bat-like as he was, there was something in him she could not reach or understand, made her cry out:

"I've not been nice to you. Forgive me, Edward! I'm so unhappy."

"There was a Greek who used to say: 'God is the helping of man by man.' It isn't true, but it's beautiful. Good-bye, dear Leila, and don't be sorrowful"

She squeezed his hand, and turned to the window.

She stood there watching his black figure cross the road in the sunshine, and pass round the corner by the railings of the church. He walked quickly, very upright; there was something unseeing even about that back view of him; or was it that he saw another world? She had never lost the mental habits of her orthodox girlhood, and in spite of all impatience, recognised his sanctity. When he had disappeared she went into her bedroom. What he had said, indeed, was no discovery. She had known. Oh! She had known. 'Why didn't I accept Jimmy's offer? Why didn't I marry him? Is it too late?' she thought. 'Could I? Would he—even now?' But then she started away from her own thought. Marry him! knowing his heart was with this girl?

She looked long at her face in the mirror, studying with a fearful interest the little hard lines and markings there beneath their light coating of powder. She examined the cunning touches of colouring matter here and there in her front hair. Were they cunning enough? Did they deceive? They seemed to her suddenly to stare out. She fingered and smoothed the slight looseness and fulness of the skin below her chin. She stretched herself, and passed her hands down over her whole form, searching as it were for slackness, or thickness. And she had the bitter thought: 'I'm all out. I'm doing all I can.' The lines of a little poem Fort had showed her went thrumming through her head:

"Time, you old gipsy man
Will you not stay
Put up your caravan
Just for a day?"

What more could she do? He did not like to see her lips reddened. She had marked his disapprovals, watched him wipe his mouth after a kiss, when he thought she couldn't see him. 'I need'nt!' she thought. 'Noel's lips are no redder, really. What has she better than I? Youth—dew on the grass!' That didn't last long! But long enough to "do her in" as her soldier-men would say. And, suddenly she revolted against herself, against Fort, against this chilled and foggy country; felt a fierce nostalgia for African sun, and the African flowers; the happy-go-lucky, hand-to-mouth existence of those five years before the war began. High Constantia at grape harvest! How many years ago—ten years, eleven years! Ah! To have before her those ten years, with him! Ten years in the sun! He would have loved her then, and gone on loving her! And she would not have tired of him, as she had tired of those others. 'In half an hour,' she thought, 'he'll be here, sit opposite me; I shall see him struggling forcing himself to seem affectionate! It's too humbling! But I don't care; I want him!'

She searched her wardrobe, for some garment or touch of colour, novelty of any sort, to help her. But she had tried them all—those little tricks—was bankrupt. And such a discouraged, heavy mood came on her, that she did not even "change," but went back in her nurse's dress and lay down on the divan, pretending to sleep, while the maid set out the supper. She lay there moody and motionless, trying to summon courage, feeling that if she showed herself beaten she was beaten; knowing that she only held him by pity. But when she heard his footstep on the stairs she swiftly passed her hands over her cheeks, as if to press the blood out of them, and lay absolutely still. She hoped that she was white, and indeed she was, with finger-marks under the eyes, for she had suffered greatly this last hour. Through her lashes she saw him halt, and look at her in surprise. Asleep, or-ill, which? She did not move. She wanted to watch him. He tiptoed across the room and stood looking down at her. There was a furrow between his eyes. 'Ah!' she thought, 'it would suit you, if I were dead, my kind friend.' He bent a little towards her; and she wondered suddenly whether she looked graceful lying there, sorry now that she had not changed her dress. She saw him shrug his shoulders ever so faintly with a puzzled little movement. He had not seen that she was shamming. How nice his face was—not mean, secret, callous! She opened her eyes, which against her will had in them the despair she was feeling. He went on his knees, and lifting her hand to his lips, hid them with it.

"Jimmy," she said gently, "I'm an awful bore to you. Poor Jimmy! No! Don't pretend! I know what I know!" 'Oh, God! What am I saying?' she thought. 'It's fatal-fatal. I ought never!' And drawing his head to her, she put it to her heart. Then, instinctively aware that this moment had been pressed to its uttermost, she scrambled up, kissed his forehead, stretched herself, and laughed.

"I was asleep, dreaming; dreaming you loved me. Wasn't it funny? Come along. There are oysters, for the last time this season."

All that evening, as if both knew they had been looking over a precipice, they seemed to be treading warily, desperately anxious not to rouse emotion in each other, or touch on things which must bring a scene. And Leila talked incessantly of Africa.

"Don't you long for the sun, Jimmy? Couldn't we—couldn't you go? Oh! why doesn't this wretched war end? All that we've got here at home every scrap of wealth, and comfort, and age, and art, and music, I'd give it all for the light and the sun out there. Wouldn't you?"

And Fort said he would, knowing well of one thing which he would not give. And she knew that, as well as he.

They were both gayer than they had been for a long time; so that when he had gone, she fell back once more on to the divan, and burying her face in a cushion, wept bitterly.

V

1

It was not quite disillusionment that Pierson felt while he walked away. Perhaps he had not really believed in Leila's regeneration. It was more an acute discomfort, an increasing loneliness. A soft and restful spot was now denied him; a certain warmth and allurements had gone out of his life. He had not even the feeling that it was his duty to try and save Leila by persuading her to marry Fort. He had always been too sensitive, too much as it were of a gentleman, for the robust sorts of evangelism. Such delicacy had been a stumbling-block to him all through professional life. In the eight years when his wife was with him, all had been more certain, more direct and simple, with the help of her sympathy, judgment; and companionship. At her death a sort of mist had gathered in his soul. No one had ever spoken plainly to him. To a clergyman, who does? No one had told him in so many words that he should have married again—that to stay unmarried was bad for him, physically and spiritually, fogging and perverting life; not driving him, indeed, as it drove many, to intolerance and cruelty, but to that half-living dreaminess, and the vague unhappy yearnings which so constantly beset him. All these celibate years he had really only been happy in his music, or in far-away country places, taking strong exercise, and losing himself in the beauties of Nature; and since the war began he had only once, for those three days at Kestrel, been out of London.

He walked home, going over in his mind very anxiously all the evidence he had of Fort's feeling for Noel. How many times had he been to them since she came back? Only three times—three evening visits! And he had not been alone with her a single minute! Before this calamity befell his daughter, he would never have observed anything in Fort's demeanour; but, in his new watchfulness, he had seen the almost reverential way he looked at her, noticed the extra softness of his voice when he spoke to her, and once a look of sudden pain, a sort of dulling of his whole self, when Noel had got up and gone out of the room. And the girl herself? Twice he had surprised her gazing at Fort when he was not looking, with a sort of brooding interest. He remembered how, as a little girl, she would watch a grown-up, and then suddenly one day attach herself to him, and be quite devoted. Yes, he must warn her, before she could possibly become entangled. In his fastidious chastity, the opinion he had held of Fort was suddenly lowered. He, already a free-thinker, was now revealed as a free-liver. Poor little Nollie! Endangered again already! Every man a kind of wolf waiting to pounce on her!

He found Lavendie and Noel in the drawing-room, standing before the portrait which was nearing completion. He looked at it for a long minute, and turned away:

"Don't you think it's like me, Daddy?"

"It's like you; but it hurts me. I can't tell why."

He saw the smile of a painter whose picture is being criticised come on Lavendie's face.

"It is perhaps the colouring which does not please you, monsieur?"

"No, no; deeper. The expression; what is she waiting for?"

The defensive smile died on Lavendie's lips.

"It is as I see her, monsieur le cure."

Pierson turned again to the picture, and suddenly covered his eyes. "She looks 'fey,'" he said, and went out of the room.

Lavendie and Noel remained staring at the picture. "Fey? What does that mean, mademoiselle?"

"Possessed, or something."

And they continued to stare at the picture, till Lavendie said:

"I think there is still a little too much light on that ear."

The same evening, at bedtime, Pierson called Noel back.

"Nollie, I want you to know something. In all but the name, Captain Fort is a married man."

He saw her flush, and felt his own face darkening with colour.

She said calmly: "I know; to Leila."

"Do you mean she has told you?"

Noel shook her head.

"Then how?"

"I guessed. Daddy, don't treat me as a child any more. What's the use, now?"

He sat down in the chair before the hearth, and covered his face with his hands. By the quivering of those hands, and the movement of his shoulders, she could tell that he was stifling emotion, perhaps even crying; and sinking down on his knees she pressed his hands and face to her, murmuring: "Oh, Daddy dear! Oh, Daddy dear!"

He put his arms round her, and they sat a long time with their cheeks pressed together, not speaking a word.

VI

1

The day after that silent outburst of emotion in the drawing-room was a Sunday. And, obeying the longing awakened overnight to be as good as she could to her father; Noel said to him:

"Would you like me to come to Church?"

"Of course, Nollie."

How could he have answered otherwise? To him Church was the home of comfort and absolution, where people must bring their sins and troubles—a haven of sinners, the fount of charity, of forgiveness, and love. Not to have believed that, after all these years, would have been to deny all his usefulness in life, and to cast a slur on the House of God.

And so Noel walked there with him, for Gratian had gone down to George, for the week-end. She slipped quietly up the side aisle to their empty pew, under the pulpit. Never turning her eyes from the chancel, she remained unconscious of the stir her presence made, during that hour and twenty minutes. Behind her, the dumb currents of wonder, disapproval, and resentment ran a stealthy course. On her all eyes were fixed sooner or later, and every mind became the play ground of judgments. From every soul, kneeling, standing, or sitting, while the voice of the Service droned, sang, or spoke, a kind of glare radiated on to that one small devoted head, which seemed so ludicrously devout. She disturbed their devotions, this girl who had betrayed her father, her faith, her class. She ought to repent, of course, and Church was the right place; yet there was something brazen in her repenting there before their very eyes; she was too palpable a flaw in the crystal of the Church's authority, too visible a rent in the raiment of their priest. Her figure focused all the uneasy amazement and heart searchings of these last weeks. Mothers quivered with the knowledge that their daughters could see her; wives with the idea that their husbands were seeing her. Men experienced sensations varying from condemnation to a sort of covetousness. Young folk wondered, and felt inclined to giggle. Old maids could hardly bear to look. Here and there a man or woman who had seen life face to face, was simply sorry! The consciousness of all who knew her personally was at stretch how to behave if they came within reach of

her in going out. For, though only half a dozen would actually rub shoulders with her, all knew that they might be, and many felt it their duty to be, of that half-dozen, so as to establish their attitude once for all. It was, in fact, too severe a test for human nature and the feelings which Church ought to arouse. The stillness of that young figure, the impossibility of seeing her face and judging of her state of mind thereby; finally, a faint lurking shame that they should be so intrigued and disturbed by something which had to do with sex, in this House of Worship—all combined to produce in every mind that herd-feeling of defence, which so soon becomes, offensive. And, half unconscious, half aware of it all, Noel stood, and sat, and knelt. Once or twice she saw her father's eyes fixed on her; and, still in the glow of last night's pity and remorse, felt a kind of worship for his thin grave face. But for the most part, her own wore the expression Lavendie had translated to his canvas—the look of one ever waiting for the extreme moments of life, for those few and fleeting poignancies which existence holds for the human heart. A look neither hungry nor dissatisfied, but dreamy and expectant, which might blaze into warmth and depth at any moment, and then go back to its dream.

When the last notes of the organ died away she continued to sit very still, without looking round.

There was no second Service, and the congregation melted out behind her, and had dispersed into the streets and squares long before she came forth. After hesitating whether or no to go to the vestry door, she turned away and walked home alone.

It was this deliberate evasion of all contact which probably clinched the business. The absence of vent, of any escape-pipe for the feelings, is always dangerous. They felt cheated. If Noel had come out amongst all those whose devotions her presence had disturbed, if in that exit, some had shown and others had witnessed one knows not what of a manifested ostracism, the outraged sense of social decency might have been appeased and sleeping dogs allowed to lie, for we soon get used to things; and, after all, the war took precedence in every mind even over social decency. But none of this had occurred, and a sense that Sunday after Sunday the same little outrage would happen to them, moved more than a dozen quite unrelated persons, and caused the posting that evening of as many letters, signed and unsigned, to a certain quarter. London is no place for parish conspiracy, and a situation which in the country would have provoked meetings more or less public, and possibly a resolution, could perhaps only thus be dealt with. Besides, in certain folk there is ever a mysterious itch to write an unsigned letter—such missives satisfy some obscure sense of justice, some uncontrollable longing to get even with those who have hurt or disturbed them, without affording the offenders chance for further hurt or disturbance.

Letters which are posted often reach their destination.

On Wednesday morning Pierson was sitting in his study at the hour devoted to the calls of his parishioners, when the maid announced, "Canon Rushbourne, sir," and he saw before him an old College friend whom he had met but seldom in recent years. His visitor was a short, grey-haired man of rather portly figure, whose round, rosy, good-humoured face had a look of sober goodness, and whose light-blue eyes shone a little. He grasped Pierson's hand, and said in a voice to whose natural heavy resonance professional duty had added a certain unctious:

"My dear Edward, how many years it is since we met! Do you remember dear old Blakeway? I saw him only yesterday. He's just the same. I'm delighted to see you again," and he laughed a little soft nervous laugh. Then for a few moments he talked of the war and old College days, and Pierson looked at him and thought: 'What has he come for?'

"You've something to say to me, Alec," he said, at last.

Canon Rushbourne leaned forward in his chair, and answered with evident effort: "Yes; I wanted to have a little talk with you, Edward. I hope you won't mind. I do hope you won't."

"Why should I mind?"

Canon Rushbourne's eyes shone more than ever, there was real friendliness in his face.

"I know you've every right to say to me: 'Mind your own business.' But I made up my mind to come as a friend, hoping to save you from—er" he stammered, and began again: "I think you ought to know of the feeling in your parish that—er—that—er—your position is very delicate. Without breach of confidence I may tell you that letters have been sent to headquarters; you can imagine perhaps what I mean. Do believe, my dear friend, that I'm actuated by my old affection for you; nothing else, I do assure you."

In the silence, his breathing could be heard, as of a man a little touched with asthma, while he continually smoothed his thick black knees, his whole face radiating an anxious kindness. The sun shone brightly on those two black figures, so very different, and drew out of their well-worn garments

the faint latent green mossiness which underlies the clothes of clergymen.

At last Pierson said: "Thank you, Alec; I understand."

The Canon uttered a resounding sigh. "You didn't realise how very easily people misinterpret her being here with you; it seems to them a kind—a kind of challenge. They were bound, I think, to feel that; and I'm afraid, in consequence—" He stopped, moved by the fact that Pierson had closed his eyes.

"I am to choose, you mean, between my daughter and my parish?"

The Canon seemed, with a stammer of words, to try and blunt the edge of that clear question.

"My visit is quite informal, my dear fellow; I can't say at all. But there is evidently much feeling; that is what I wanted you to know. You haven't quite seen, I think, that—"

Pierson raised his hand. "I can't talk of this."

The Canon rose. "Believe me, Edward, I sympathise deeply. I felt I had to warn you." He held out his hand. "Good-bye, my dear friend, do forgive me"; and he went out. In the hall an adventure befell him so plump, and awkward, that he could barely recite it to Mrs. Rushbourne that night.

"Coming out from my poor friend," he said, "I ran into a baby's perambulator and that young mother, whom I remember as a little thing"—he held his hand at the level of his thigh—"arranging it for going out. It startled me; and I fear I asked quite foolishly: 'Is it a boy?' The poor young thing looked up at me. She has very large eyes, quite beautiful, strange eyes. 'Have you been speaking to Daddy about me?' 'My dear young lady,' I said, 'I'm such an old friend, you see. You must forgive me.' And then she said: 'Are they going to ask him to resign?' 'That depends on you,' I said. Why do I say these things, Charlotte? I ought simply to have held my tongue. Poor young thing; so very young! And the little baby!" "She has brought it on herself, Alec," Mrs. Rushbourne replied.

VII

1

The moment his visitor had vanished, Pierson paced up and down the study, with anger rising in his heart. His daughter or his parish! The old saw, "An Englishman's house is his castle!" was being attacked within him. Must he not then harbour his own daughter, and help her by candid atonement to regain her inward strength and peace? Was he not thereby acting as a true Christian, in by far the hardest course he and she could pursue? To go back on that decision and imperil his daughter's spirit, or else resign his parish—the alternatives were brutal! This was the centre of his world, the only spot where so lonely a man could hope to feel even the semblance of home; a thousand little threads tethered him to his church, his parishioners, and this house—for, to live on here if he gave up his church was out of the question. But his chief feeling was a bewildered anger that for doing what seemed to him his duty, he should be attacked by his parishioners.

A passion of desire to know what they really thought and felt—these parishioners of his, whom he had befriended, and for whom he had worked so long—beset him now, and he went out. But the absurdity of his quest struck him before he had gone the length of the Square. One could not go to people and say: "Stand and deliver me your inmost judgments." And suddenly he was aware of how far away he really was from them. Through all his ministrations had he ever come to know their hearts? And now, in this dire necessity for knowledge, there seemed no way of getting it. He went at random into a stationer's shop; the shopman sang bass in his choir. They had met Sunday after Sunday for the last seven years. But when, with this itch for intimate knowledge on him, he saw the man behind the counter, it was as if he were looking on him for the first time. The Russian proverb, "The heart of another is a dark forest," gashed into his mind, while he said:

"Well, Hodson, what news of your son?"

"Nothing more, Mr. Pierson, thank you, sir, nothing more at present."

And it seemed to Pierson, gazing at the man's face clothed in a short, grizzling beard cut rather like his own, that he must be thinking: 'Ah! sir, but what news of your daughter?' No one would ever tell him to his face what he was thinking. And buying two pencils, he went out. On the other side of the

road was a bird-fancier's shop, kept by a woman whose husband had been taken for the Army. She was not friendly towards him, for it was known to her that he had expostulated with her husband for keeping larks, and other wild birds. And quite deliberately he crossed the road, and stood looking in at the window, with the morbid hope that from this unfriendly one he might hear truth. She was in her shop, and came to the door.

"Have you any news of your husband, Mrs. Cherry?"

"No, Mr. Pierson, I 'ave not; not this week."

"He hasn't gone out yet?"

"No, Mr. Pierson; 'e 'as not."

There was no expression on her face, perfectly blank it was—Pierson had a mad longing to say 'For God's sake, woman, speak out what's in your mind; tell me what you think of me and my daughter. Never mind my cloth!' But he could no more say it than the woman could tell him what was in her mind. And with a "Good morning" he passed on. No man or woman would tell him anything, unless, perhaps, they were drunk. He came to a public house, and for a moment even hesitated before it, but the thought of insult aimed at Noel stopped him, and he passed that too. And then reality made itself known to him. Though he had come out to hear what they were thinking, he did not really want to hear it, could not endure it if he did. He had been too long immune from criticism, too long in the position of one who may tell others what he thinks of them. And standing there in the crowded street, he was attacked by that longing for the country which had always come on him when he was hard pressed. He looked at his memoranda. By stupendous luck it was almost a blank day. An omnibus passed close by which would take him far out. He climbed on to it, and travelled as far as Hendon; then getting down, set forth on foot. It was bright and hot, and the May blossom in full foam. He walked fast along the perfectly straight road till he came to the top of Elstree Hill. There for a few moments he stood gazing at the school chapel, the cricket-field, the wide land beyond. All was very quiet, for it was lunch-time. A horse was tethered there, and a strolling cat, as though struck by the tall black incongruity of his figure, paused in her progress, then, slithering under the wicket gate, arched her back and rubbed herself against his leg, crinkling and waving the tip of her tail. Pierson bent down and stroked the creature's head; but uttering a faint miaou, the cat stepped daintily across the road, Pierson too stepped on, past the village, and down over the stile, into a field path. At the edge of the young clover, under a bank of hawthorn, he lay down on his back, with his hat beside him and his arms crossed over his chest, like the effigy of some crusader one may see carved on an old tomb. Though he lay quiet as that old knight, his eyes were not closed, but fixed on the blue, where a lark was singing. Its song refreshed his spirit; its passionate light-heartedness stirred all the love of beauty in him, awoke revolt against a world so murderous and uncharitable. Oh! to pass up with that song into a land of bright spirits, where was nothing ugly, hard, merciless, and the gentle face of the Saviour radiated everlasting love! The scent of the mayflowers, borne down by the sun shine, drenched his senses; he closed his eyes, and, at once, as if resenting that momentary escape, his mind resumed debate with startling intensity. This matter went to the very well-springs, had a terrible and secret significance. If to act as conscience bade him rendered him unfit to keep his parish, all was built on sand, had no deep reality, was but rooted in convention. Charity, and the forgiveness of sins honestly atoned for—what became of them? Either he was wrong to have espoused straightforward confession and atonement for her, or they were wrong in chasing him from that espousal. There could be no making those extremes to meet. But if he were wrong, having done the hardest thing already—where could he turn? His Church stood bankrupt of ideals. He felt as if pushed over the edge of the world, with feet on space, and head in some blinding cloud. 'I cannot have been wrong,' he thought; 'any other course was so much easier. I sacrificed my pride, and my poor girl's pride; I would have loved to let her run away. If for this we are to be stoned and cast forth, what living force is there in the religion I have loved; what does it all come to? Have I served a sham? I cannot and will not believe it. Something is wrong with me, something is wrong—but where—what?' He rolled over, lay on his face, and prayed. He prayed for guidance and deliverance from the gusts of anger which kept sweeping over him; even more for relief from the feeling of personal outrage, and the unfairness of this thing. He had striven to be loyal to what he thought the right, had sacrificed all his sensitiveness, all his secret fastidious pride in his child and himself. For that he was to be thrown out! Whether through prayer, or in the scent and feel of the clover, he found presently a certain rest. Away in the distance he could see the spire of Harrow Church.

The Church! No! She was not, could not be, at fault. The fault was in himself. 'I am unpractical,' he thought. 'It is so, I know. Agnes used to say so, Bob and Thirza think so. They all think me unpractical and dreamy. Is it a sin—I wonder?' There were lambs in the next field; he watched their gambollings and his heart relaxed; brushing the clover dust off his black clothes, he began to retrace his steps. The boys were playing cricket now, and he stood a few minutes watching them. He had not seen cricket played since the war began; it seemed almost otherworldly, with the click of the bats, and the shrill

young 'voices, under the distant drone of that sky-hornet threshing along to Hendon. A boy made a good leg hit. "Well played!" he called. Then, suddenly conscious of his own incongruity and strangeness in that green spot, he turned away on the road back to London. To resign; to await events; to send Noel away—of those three courses, the last alone seemed impossible. 'Am I really so far from them,' he thought, 'that they can wish me to go, for this? If so, I had better go. It will be just another failure. But I won't believe it yet; I can't believe it.'

The heat was sweltering, and he became very tired before at last he reached his omnibus, and could sit with the breeze cooling his hot face. He did not reach home till six, having eaten nothing since breakfast. Intending to have a bath and lie down till dinner, he went upstairs.

Unwonted silence reigned. He tapped on the nursery door. It was deserted; he passed through to Noel's room; but that too was empty. The wardrobe stood open as if it had been hastily ransacked, and her dressing-table was bare. In alarm he went to the bell and pulled it sharply. The old-fashioned ring of it jingled out far below. The parlour-maid came up.

"Where are Miss Noel and Nurse, Susan?"

"I didn't know you were in, sir. Miss Noel left me this note to give you. They—I—"

Pierson stopped her with his hand. "Thank you, Susan; get me some tea, please." With the note unopened in his hand, he waited till she was gone. His head was going round, and he sat down on the side of Noel's bed to read: "DARLING DADDY,

"The man who came this morning told me of what is going to happen. I simply won't have it. I'm sending Nurse and baby down to Kestrel at once, and going to Leila's for the night, until I've made up my mind what to do. I knew it was a mistake my coming back. I don't care what happens to me, but I won't have you hurt. I think it's hateful of people to try and injure you for my fault. I've had to borrow money from Susan—six pounds. Oh! Daddy dear, forgive me.

"Your loving
"NOLLIE."

He read it with unutterable relief; at all events he knew where she was—poor, wilful, rushing, loving-hearted child; knew where she was, and could get at her. After his bath and some tea, he would go to Leila's and bring her back. Poor little Nollie, thinking that by just leaving his house she could settle this deep matter! He did not hurry, feeling decidedly exhausted, and it was nearly eight before he set out, leaving a message for Gratian, who did not as a rule come in from her hospital till past nine.

The day was still glowing, and now, in the cool of evening, his refreshed senses soaked up its beauty. 'God has so made this world,' he thought, 'that, no matter what our struggles and sufferings, it's ever a joy to live when the sun shines, or the moon is bright, or the night starry. Even we can't spoil it.' In Regent's Park the lilacs and laburnums were still in bloom though June had come, and he gazed at them in passing, as a lover might at his lady. His conscience pricked him suddenly. Mrs. Mitchett and the dark-eyed girl she had brought to him on New Year's Eve, the very night he had learned of his own daughter's tragedy—had he ever thought of them since? How had that poor girl fared? He had been too impatient of her impenetrable mood. What did he know of the hearts of others, when he did not even know his own, could not rule his feelings of anger and revolt, had not guided his own daughter into the waters of safety! And Leila! Had he not been too censorious in thought? How powerful, how strange was this instinct of sex, which hovered and swooped on lives, seized them, bore them away, then dropped them exhausted and defenceless! Some munition-wagons, painted a dull grey, lumbered past, driven by sunburned youths in drab. Life-force, Death-force—was it all one; the great unknowable momentum from which there was but the one escape, in the arms of their Heavenly Father? Blake's little old stanzas came into his mind:

"And we are put on earth a little space,
That we may learn to bear the beams of love;
And these black bodies and this sunburnt face
Are but a cloud, and like a shady grove.

"For when our souls have learned the heat to bear,
The cloud will vanish, we shall hear His voice,
Saying: Come out from the grove, my love and care,
And round my golden tent like lambs rejoice!"

Learned the heat to bear! Those lambs he had watched in a field that afternoon, their sudden little leaps and rushes, their funny quivering wriggling tails, their tiny nuzzling black snouts—what little

miracles of careless joy among the meadow flowers! Lambs, and flowers, and sunlight! Famine, lust, and the great grey guns! A maze, a wilderness; and but for faith, what issue, what path for man to take which did not keep him wandering hopeless, in its thicket? 'God preserve our faith in love, in charity, and the life to come!' he thought. And a blind man with a dog, to whose neck was tied a little deep dish for pennies, ground a hurdy-gurdy as he passed. Pierson put a shilling in the dish. The man stopped playing, his whitish eyes looked up. "Thank you kindly, sir; I'll go home now. Come on, Dick!" He tapped his way round the corner, with his dog straining in front. A blackbird hidden among the blossoms of an acacia, burst into evening song, and another great grey munition-wagon rumbled out through the Park gate. 2

The Church-clock was striking nine when he reached Leila's flat, went up, and knocked. Sounds from a piano ceased; the door was opened by Noel. She recoiled when she saw who it was, and said:

"Why did you come, Daddy? It was much better not."

"Are you alone here?"

"Yes; Leila gave me her key. She has to be at the hospital till ten to-night"

"You must come home with me, my dear."

Noel closed the piano, and sat down on the divan. Her face had the same expression as when he had told her that she could not marry Cyril Morland.

"Come, Nollie," he said; "don't be unreasonable. We must see this through together."

"No."

"My dear, that's childish. Do you think the mere accident of your being or not being at home can affect my decision as to what my duty is?"

"Yes; it's my being there that matters. Those people don't care, so long as it isn't an open scandal"

"Nollie!"

"But it is so, Daddy. Of course it's so, and you know it. If I'm away they'll just pity you for having a bad daughter. And quite right too. I am a bad daughter."

Pierson smiled. "Just like when you were a tiny."

"I wish I were a tiny again, or ten years older. It's this half age—But I'm not coming back with you, Daddy; so it's no good."

Pierson sat down beside her.

"I've been thinking this over all day," he said quietly. "Perhaps in my pride I made a mistake when I first knew of your trouble. Perhaps I ought to have accepted the consequences of my failure, then, and have given up, and taken you away at once. After all, if a man is not fit to have the care of souls, he should have the grace to know it."

"But you are fit," cried Noel passionately; "Daddy, you are fit!"

"I'm afraid not. There is something wanting in me, I don't know exactly what; but something very wanting."

"There isn't. It's only that you're too good—that's why!"

Pierson shook his head. "Don't, Nollie!"

"I will," cried Noel. "You're too gentle, and you're too good. You're charitable, and you're simple, and you believe in another world; that's what's the matter with you, Daddy. Do you think they do, those people who want to chase us out? They don't even begin to believe, whatever they say or think. I hate them, and sometimes I hate the Church; either it's hard and narrow, or else it's worldly." She stopped at the expression on her father's face, the most strange look of pain, and horror, as if an unspoken treachery of his own had been dragged forth for his inspection.

"You're talking wildly," he said, but his lips were trembling. "You mustn't say things like that; they're blasphemous and wicked."

Noel bit her lips, sitting very stiff and still, against a high blue cushion. Then she burst out again:

"You've slaved for those people years and years, and you've had no pleasure and you've had no love; and they wouldn't care that if you broke your heart. They don't care for anything, so long as it all seems proper. Daddy, if you let them hurt you, I won't forgive you!"

"And what if you hurt me now, Nollie?"

Noel pressed his hand against her warm cheek.

"Oh, no! Oh, no! I don't—I won't. Not again. I've done that already."

"Very well, my dear! then come home with me, and we'll see what's best to be done. It can't be settled by running away."

Noel dropped his hand. "No. Twice I've done what you wanted, and it's been a mistake. If I hadn't gone to Church on Sunday to please you, perhaps it would never have come to this. You don't see things, Daddy. I could tell, though I was sitting right in front. I knew what their faces were like, and what they were thinking."

"One must do right, Nollie, and not mind."

"Yes; but what is right? It's not right for me to hurt you, and I'm not going to."

Pierson understood all at once that it was useless to try and move her.

"What are you going to do, then?"

"I suppose I shall go to Kestrel to-morrow. Auntie will have me, I know; I shall talk to Leila."

"Whatever you do, promise to let me know."

Noel nodded.

"Daddy, you—look awfully, awfully tired. I'm going to give you some medicine." She went to a little three-cornered cupboard, and bent down. Medicine! The medicine he wanted was not for the body; knowledge of what his duty was—that alone could heal him!

The loud popping of a cork roused him. "What are you doing, Nollie?"

Noel rose with a flushed face, holding in one hand a glass of champagne, in the other a biscuit.

"You're to take this; and I'm going to have some myself."

"My dear," said Pierson bewildered; "it's not yours."

"Drink it; Daddy! Don't you know that Leila would never forgive me if I let you go home looking like that. Besides, she told me I was to eat. Drink it. You can send her a nice present. Drink it!" And she stamped her foot.

Pierson took the glass, and sat there nibbling and sipping. It was nice, very! He had not quite realised how much he needed food and drink. Noel returned from the cupboard a second time; she too had a glass and a biscuit.

"There, you look better already. Now you're to go home at once, in a cab if you can get one; and tell Gratian to make you feed up, or you won't have a body at all; you can't do your duty if you haven't one, you know."

Pierson smiled, and finished the champagne.

Noel took the glass from him. "You're my child to-night, and I'm going to send you to bed. Don't worry, Daddy; it'll all come right." And, taking his arm, she went downstairs with him, and blew him a kiss from the doorway.

He walked away in a sort of dream. Daylight was not quite gone, but the moon was up, just past its full, and the search-lights had begun their nightly wanderings. It was a sky of ghosts and shadows, fitting to the thought which came to him. The finger of Providence was in all this, perhaps! Why should he not go out to France! At last; why not? Some better man, who understood men's hearts, who knew the world, would take his place; and he could go where death made all things simple, and he could not fail. He walked faster and faster, full of an intoxicating relief. Thirza and Gratian would take care of Nollie far better than he. Yes, surely it was ordained! Moonlight had the town now; and all was steel blue, the very air steel-blue; a dream-city of marvellous beauty, through which he passed, exalted. Soon

he would be where that poor boy, and a million others, had given their lives; with the mud and the shells and the scarred grey ground, and the jagged trees, where Christ was daily crucified—there where he had so often longed to be these three years past. It was ordained!

And two women whom he met looked at each other when he had gone by, and those words 'the blighted crow' which they had been about to speak, died on their lips.

VIII

Noel felt light-hearted too, as if she had won a victory. She found some potted meat, spread it on another biscuit, ate it greedily, and finished the pint bottle of champagne. Then she hunted for the cigarettes, and sat down at the piano. She played old tunes—"There is a Tavern in the Town," "Once I Loved a Maiden Fair," "Mowing the Barley," "Clementine," "Lowlands," and sang to them such words as she remembered. There was a delicious running in her veins, and once she got up and danced. She was kneeling at the window, looking out, when she heard the door open, and without getting up, cried out:

"Isn't it a gorgeous night! I've had Daddy here. I gave him some of your champagne, and drank the rest—" then was conscious of a figure far too tall for Leila, and a man's voice saying:

"I'm awfully sorry. It's only I, Jimmy Fort."

Noel scrambled up. "Leila isn't in; but she will be directly—it's past ten."

He was standing stock-still in the middle of the room.

"Won't you sit down? Oh! and won't you have a cigarette?"

"Thanks."

By the flash of his briquette she saw his face clearly; the look on it filled her with a sort of malicious glee.

"I'm going now," she said. "Would you mind telling Leila that I found I couldn't stop?" She made towards the divan to get her hat. When she had put it on, she found him standing just in front of her.

"Noel-if you don't mind me calling you that?"

"Not a bit."

"Don't go; I'm going myself."

"Oh, no! Not for worlds." She tried to slip past, but he took hold of her wrist.

"Please; just one minute!"

Noel stayed motionless, looking at him, while his hand still held her wrist. He said quietly:

"Do you mind telling me why you came here?"

"Oh, just to see Leila."

"Things have come to a head at home, haven't they?"

Noel shrugged her shoulders.

"You came for refuge, didn't you?"

"From whom?"

"Don't be angry; from the need of hurting your father."

She nodded.

"I knew it would come to that. What are you going to do?"

"Enjoy myself." She was saying something fatuous, yet she meant it.

"That's absurd. Don't be angry! You're quite right. Only, you must begin at the right end, mustn't you? Sit down!"

Noel tried to free her wrist.

"No; sit down, please."

Noel sat down; but as he loosed her wrist, she laughed. This was where he sat with Leila, where they would sit when she was gone. "It's awfully funny, isn't it?" she said.

"Funny?" he muttered savagely. "Most things are, in this funny world."

The sound of a taxi stopping not far off had come to her ears, and she gathered her feet under her, planting them firmly. If she sprang up, could she slip by him before he caught her arm again, and get that taxi?

"If I go now," he said, "will you promise me to stop till you've seen Leila?"

"No."

"That's foolish. Come, promise!"

Noel shook her head. She felt a perverse pleasure at his embarrassment.

"Leila's lucky, isn't she? No children, no husband, no father, no anything. Lovely!"

She saw his arm go up as if to ward off a blow. "Poor Leila!" he said.

"Why are you sorry for her? She has freedom! And she has you!"

She knew it would hurt; but she wanted to hurt him.

"You needn't envy her for that."

He had just spoken, when Noel saw a figure over by the door.

She jumped up, and said breathlessly:

"Oh, here you are, Leila! Father's been here, and we've had some of your champagne!"

"Capital! You are in the dark!"

Noel felt the blood rush into her cheeks. The light leaped up, and Leila came forward. She looked extremely pale, calm, and self-contained, in her nurse's dress; her full lips were tightly pressed together, but Noel could see her breast heaving violently. A turmoil of shame and wounded pride began raging in the girl. Why had she not flown long ago? Why had she let herself be trapped like this? Leila would think she had been making up to him! Horrible! Disgusting! Why didn't he—why didn't some one, speak? Then Leila said:

"I didn't expect you, Jimmy; I'm glad you haven't been dull. Noel is staying here to-night. Give me a cigarette. Sit down, both of you. I'm awfully tired!"

She sank into a chair, leaning back, with her knees crossed; and at that moment Noel admired her. She had said it beautifully; she looked so calm. Fort was lighting her cigarette; his hand was shaking, his face all sorry and mortified.

"Give Noel one, too, and draw the curtains, Jimmy. Quick! Not that it makes any difference; it's as light as day. Sit down, dear."

But Noel remained standing.

"What have you been talking of? Love and Chinese lanterns, or only me?"

At those words Fort, who was drawing the last curtain, turned round; his tall figure was poised awkwardly against the wall, his face, unsuited to diplomacy, had a look as of flesh being beaten. If weals had started up across it, Noel would not have been surprised.

He said with painful slowness:

"I don't exactly know; we had hardly begun, had we?"

"The night is young," said Leila. "Go on while I just take off my things."

She rose with the cigarette between her lips, and went into the inner room. In passing, she gave Noel a look. What there was in that look, the girl could never make clear even to herself. Perhaps a creature shot would gaze like that, with a sort of profound and distant questioning, reproach, and anger, with a sort of pride, and the quiver of death. As the door closed, Fort came right across the room.

"Go to her;" cried Noel; "she wants you. Can't you see, she wants you?"

And before he could move, she was at the door. She flew downstairs, and out into the moonlight. The taxi, a little way off, was just beginning to move away; she ran towards it, calling out:

"Anywhere! Piccadilly!" and jumping in, blotted herself against the cushions in the far corner.

She did not come to herself, as it were, for several minutes, and then feeling she 'could no longer bear the cab, stopped it, and got out. Where was she? Bond Street! She began, idly, wandering down its narrow length; the fullest street by day, the emptiest by night. Oh! it had been horrible! Nothing said by any of them—nothing, and yet everything dragged out—of him, of Leila, of herself! She seemed to have no pride or decency left, as if she had been caught stealing. All her happy exhilaration was gone, leaving a miserable recklessness. Nothing she did was right, nothing turned out well, so what did it all matter? The moonlight flooding down between the tall houses gave her a peculiar heady feeling. "Fey" her father had called her. She laughed. 'But I'm not going home,' she thought. Bored with the street's length; she turned off, and was suddenly in Hanover Square. There was the Church, grey-white, where she had been bridesmaid to a second cousin, when she was fifteen. She seemed to see it all again—her frock, the lilies in her hand, the surplices of the choir, the bride's dress, all moonlight-coloured, and unreal. 'I wonder what's become of her!' she thought. 'He's dead, I expect, like Cyril!' She saw her father's face as he was marrying them, heard his voice: "For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do you part." And the moonlight on the Church seemed to shift and quiver—some pigeons perhaps had been disturbed up there. Then instead of that wedding vision, she saw Monsieur Barra, sitting on his chair, gazing at the floor, and Chica nursing her doll. "All mad, mademoiselle, a little mad. Millions of men with white souls, but all a little tiny bit mad, you know." Then Leila's face came before her, with that look in her eyes. She felt again the hot clasp of Fort's fingers on her wrist, and walked on, rubbing it with the other hand. She turned into Regent Street. The wide curve of the Quadrant swept into a sky of unreal blue, and the orange-shaded lamps merely added to the unreality. 'Love and Chinese lanterns! I should like some coffee,' she thought suddenly. She was quite close to the place where Lavendie had taken her. Should she go in there? Why not? She must go somewhere. She turned into the revolving cage of glass. But no sooner was she imprisoned there than in a flash Lavendie's face of disgust; and the red-lipped women, the green stuff that smelled of peppermint came back, filling her with a rush of dismay. She made the full circle in the revolving cage; and came out into the street again with a laugh. A tall young man in khaki stood there: "Hallo!" he said. "Come in and dance!" She started, recoiled from him and began to walk away as fast as ever she could. She passed a woman whose eyes seemed to scorch her. A woman like a swift vision of ruin with those eyes, and thickly powdered cheeks, and loose red mouth. Noel shuddered and fled along, feeling that her only safety lay in speed. But she could not walk about all night. There would be no train for Kestrel till the morning—and did she really want to go there, and eat her heart out? Suddenly she thought of George. Why should she not go down to him? He would know what was best for her to do. At the foot of the steps below the Waterloo Column she stood still. All was quiet there and empty, the great buildings whitened, the trees blurred and blue; and sweeter air was coming across their flowering tops. The queer "fey" moony sensation was still with her; so that she felt small and light, as if she could have floated through a ring. Faint rims of light showed round the windows of the Admiralty. The war! However lovely the night, however sweet the lilac smelt—that never stopped! She turned away and passed out under the arch, making for the station. The train of the wounded had just come in, and she stood in the cheering crowd watching the ambulances run out. Tears of excited emotion filled her eyes, and trickled down. Steady, smooth, grey, one after the other they came gliding, with a little burst of cheers greeting each one. All were gone now, and she could pass in. She went to the buffet and got a large cup of coffee, and a bun. Then, having noted the time of her early morning train, she sought the ladies' waiting-room, and sitting down in a corner, took out her purse and counted her money. Two pounds fifteen—enough to go to the hotel, if she liked. But, without luggage—it was so conspicuous, and she could sleep in this corner all right, if she wanted. What did girls do who had no money, and no friends to go to? Tucked away in the corner of that empty, heavy, varnished room, she seemed to see the cruelty and hardness of life as she had never before seen it, not even when facing her confinement. How lucky she had been, and was! Everyone was good to her. She had no real want or dangers, to face. But, for women—yes, and men too—who had no one to fall back on, nothing but their own hands and health and luck, it must be awful. That girl whose eyes had scorched her—perhaps she had no one—nothing. And people who were born ill, and the millions of poor women, like those whom she had gone visiting with Gratian sometimes in the poorer streets of her father's parish—for the first time she

seemed to really know and feel the sort of lives they led. And then, Leila's face came back to her once more—Leila whom she had robbed. And the worst of it was, that, alongside her remorseful sympathy, she felt a sort of satisfaction. She could not help his not loving Leila, she could not help it if he loved herself! And he did—she knew it! To feel that anyone loved her was so comforting. But it was all awful! And she—the cause of it! And yet—she had never done or said anything to attract him. No! She could not have helped it.

She had begun to feel drowsy, and closed her eyes. And gradually there came on her a cosy sensation, as if she were leaning up against someone with her head tucked in against his shoulder, as she had so often leaned as a child against her father, coming back from some long darkening drive in Wales or Scotland. She seemed even to feel the wet soft Westerly air on her face and eyelids, and to sniff the scent of a frieze coat; to hear the jog of hoofs and the rolling of the wheels; to feel the closing in of the darkness. Then, so dimly and drowsily, she seemed to know that it was not her father, but someone—someone—then no more, no more at all.

IX

She was awakened by the scream of an engine, and looked around her amazed. Her neck had fallen sideways while she slept, and felt horribly stiff; her head ached, and she was shivering. She saw by the clock that it was past five. 'If only I could get some tea!' she thought. 'Anyway I won't stay here any longer!' When she had washed, and rubbed some of the stiffness out of her neck, the tea renewed her sense of adventure wonderfully. Her train did not start for an hour; she had time for a walk, to warm herself, and went down to the river. There was an early haze, and all looked a little mysterious; but people were already passing on their way to work. She walked along, looking at the water flowing up under the bright mist to which the gulls gave a sort of hovering life. She went as far as Blackfriars Bridge, and turning back, sat down on a bench under a plane-tree, just as the sun broke through. A little pasty woman with a pinched yellowish face was already sitting there, so still, and seeming to see so little, that Noel wondered of what she could be thinking. While she watched, the woman's face began puckering, and tears rolled slowly, down, trickling from pucker to pucker, till, summoning up her courage, Noel sidled nearer, and said:

"Oh! What's the matter?"

The tears seemed to stop from sheer surprise; little grey eyes gazed round, patient little eyes from above an almost bridgeless nose.

"I'd a baby. It's dead.... its father's dead in France.... I was goin' in the water, but I didn't like the look of it, and now I never will."

That "Now I never will," moved Noel terribly. She slid her arm along the back of the bench and clasped the skinniest of shoulders.

"Don't cry!"

"It was my first. I'm thirty-eight. I'll never 'ave another. Oh! Why didn't I go in the water?"

The face puckered again, and the squeezed-out tears ran down. 'Of course she must cry,' thought Noel; 'cry and cry till it feels better.' And she stroked the shoulder of the little woman, whose emotion was disengaging the scent of old clothes.

"The father of my baby was killed in France, too," she said at last. The little sad grey eyes looked curiously round.

"Was 'e? 'Ave you got your baby still?"

"Yes, oh, yes!"

"I'm glad of that. It 'urts so bad, it does. I'd rather lose me 'usband than me baby, any day." The sun was shining now on a cheek of that terribly patient face; its brightness seemed cruel perching there.

"Can I do anything to help you?" Noel murmured.

"No, thank you, miss. I'm goin' 'ome now. I don't live far. Thank you kindly." And raising her eyes for

one more of those half-bewildered looks, she moved away along the Embankment wall. When she was out of sight, Noel walked back to the station. The train was in, and she took her seat. She had three fellow passengers, all in khaki; very silent and moody, as men are when they have to get up early. One was tall, dark, and perhaps thirty-five; the second small, and about fifty, with cropped, scanty grey hair; the third was of medium height and quite sixty-five, with a long row of little coloured patches on his tunic, and a bald, narrow, well-shaped head, grey hair brushed back at the sides, and the thin, collected features and drooping moustache of the old school. It was at him that Noel looked. When he glanced out of the window, or otherwise retired within himself, she liked his face; but when he turned to the ticket-collector or spoke to the others, she did not like it half so much. It was as if the old fellow had two selves, one of which he used when alone, the other in which he dressed every morning to meet the world. They had begun to talk about some Tribunal on which they had to sit. Noel did not listen, but a word or two carried to her now and then.

"How many to-day?" she heard the old fellow ask, and the little cropped man answering: "Hundred and fourteen."

Fresh from the sight of the poor little shabby woman and her grief, she could not help a sort of shrinking from that trim old soldier, with his thin, regular face, who held the fate of a "Hundred and fourteen" in his firm, narrow grasp, perhaps every day. Would he understand their troubles or wants? Of course he wouldn't! Then, she saw him looking at her critically with his keen eyes. If he had known her secret, he would be thinking: 'A lady and act like that! Oh, no! Quite-quite out of the question!' And she felt as if she could, sink under the seat with shame. But no doubt he was only thinking: 'Very young to be travelling by herself at this hour of the morning. Pretty too!' If he knew the real truth of her—how he would stare! But why should this utter stranger, this old disciplinarian, by a casual glance, by the mere form of his face, make her feel more guilty and ashamed than she had yet felt? That puzzled her. He was, must be, a narrow, conventional old man; but he had this power to make her feel ashamed, because she felt that he had faith in his gods, and was true to them; because she knew he would die sooner than depart from his creed of conduct. She turned to the window, biting her lips-angry and despairing. She would never—never get used to her position; it was no good! And again she had the longing of her dream, to tuck her face away into that coat, smell the scent of the frieze, snuggle in, be protected, and forget. 'If I had been that poor lonely little woman,' she thought, 'and had lost everything, I should have gone into the water. I should have rushed and jumped. It's only luck that I'm alive. I won't look at that old man again: then I shan't feel so bad.'

She had bought some chocolate at the station, and nibbled it, gazing steadily at the fields covered with daisies and the first of the buttercups and cowslips. The three soldiers were talking now in carefully lowered voices. The words: "women," "under control," "perfect plague," came to her, making her ears burn. In the hypersensitive mood caused by the strain of yesterday, her broken night, and the emotional meeting with the little woman, she felt as if they were including her among those "women." 'If we stop, I'll get out,' she thought. But when the train did stop it was they who got out. She felt the old General's keen veiled glance sum her up for the last time, and looked full at him just for a moment. He touched his cap, and said: "Will you have the window up or down?" and lingered to draw it half-way up.' His punctiliousness made her feel worse than ever. When the train had started again she roamed up and down her empty carriage; there was no more a way out of her position than out of this rolling cushioned carriage! And then she seemed to hear Fort's voice saying: 'Sit down, please!' and to feel his fingers clasp her wrist, Oh! he was nice and comforting; he would never reproach or remind her! And now, probably, she would never see him again.

The train drew up at last. She did not know where George lodged, and would have to go to his hospital. She planned to get there at half past nine, and having eaten a sort of breakfast at the station, went forth into the town. The seaside was still wrapped in the early glamour which haunts chalk of a bright morning. But the streets were very much alive. Here was real business of the war. She passed houses which had been wrecked. Trucks clanged and shunted, great lorries rumbled smoothly by. Sea—and Air-planes were moving like great birds far up in the bright haze, and khaki was everywhere. But it was the sea Noel wanted. She made her way westward to a little beach; and, sitting down on a stone, opened her arms to catch the sun on her face and chest. The tide was nearly up, with the wavelets of a blue bright sea. The great fact, the greatest fact in the world, except the sun; vast and free, making everything human seem small and transitory! It did her good, like a tranquillising friend. The sea might be cruel and terrible, awful things it could do, and awful things were being done on it; but its wide level line, its never-ending song, its sane savour, were the best medicine she could possibly have taken. She rubbed the Shelly sand between her fingers in absurd ecstasy; took off her shoes and stockings, paddled, and sat drying her legs in the sun.

When she left the little beach, she felt as if someone had said to her:

'Your troubles are very little. There's the sun, the sea, the air; enjoy them. They can't take those from

you.'

At the hospital she had to wait half an hour in a little bare room before George came.

"Nollie! Splendid. I've got an hour. Let's get out of this cemetery. We'll have time for a good stretch on the tops. Jolly of you to have come to me. Tell us all about it."

When she had finished, he squeezed her arm. 348

"I knew it wouldn't do. Your Dad forgot that he's a public figure, and must expect to be damned accordingly. But though you've cut and run, he'll resign all the same, Nollie."

"Oh, no!" cried Noel.

George shook his head.

"Yes, he'll resign, you'll see, he's got no worldly sense; not a grain."

"Then I shall have spoiled his life, just as if—oh, no!"

"Let's sit down here. I must be back at eleven."

They sat down on a bench, where the green cliff stretched out before them, over a sea quite clear of haze, far down and very blue.

"Why should he resign," cried Noel again, "now that I've gone? He'll be lost without it all."

George smiled.

"Found, my dear. He'll be where he ought to be, Nollie, where the Church is, and the Churchmen are not—in the air!"

"Don't!" cried Noel passionately.

"No, no, I'm not chaffing. There's no room on earth for saints in authority. There's use for a saintly symbol, even if one doesn't hold with it, but there's no mortal use for those who try to have things both ways—to be saints and seers of visions, and yet to come the practical and worldly and rule ordinary men's lives. Saintly example yes; but not saintly governance. You've been his deliverance, Nollie."

"But Daddy loves his Church."

George frowned. "Of course, it'll be a wrench. A man's bound to have a cosey feeling about a place where he's been boss so long; and there is something about a Church—the drone, the scent, the half darkness; there's beauty in it, it's a pleasant drug. But he's not being asked to give up the drug habit; only to stop administering drugs to others. Don't worry, Nollie; I don't believe that's ever suited him, it wants a thicker skin than he's got."

"But all the people he helps?"

"No reason he shouldn't go on helping people, is there?"

"But to go on living there, without—Mother died there, you know!"

George grunted. "Dreams, Nollie, all round him; of the past and the future, of what people are and what he can do with them. I never see him without a skirmish, as you know, and yet I'm fond of him. But I should be twice as fond, and half as likely to skirmish, if he'd drop the habits of authority. Then I believe he'd have some real influence over me; there's something beautiful about him, I know that quite well."

"Yes," murmured Noel fervently.

"He's such a queer mixture," mused George. "Clean out of his age; chalks above most of the parsons in a spiritual sense and chalks below most of them in the worldly. And yet I believe he's in the right of it. The Church ought to be a forlorn hope, Nollie; then we should believe in it. Instead of that, it's a sort of business that no one can take too seriously. You see, the Church spiritual can't make good in this age—has no chance of making good, and so in the main it's given it up for vested interests and social influence. Your father is a symbol of what the Church is not. But what about you, my dear? There's a room at my boarding-house, and only one old lady besides myself, who knits all the time. If Grace can get shifted we'll find a house, and you can have the baby. They'll send your luggage on from Paddington if you write; and in the meantime Gracie's got some things here that you can have."

"I'll have to send a wire to Daddy."

"I'll do that. You come to my diggings at half past one, and I'll settle you in. Until then, you'd better stay up here."

When he had gone she roamed a little farther, and lay down on the short grass, where the chalk broke through in patches. She could hear a distant rumbling, very low, travelling in that grass, the long mutter of the Flanders guns. 'I wonder if it's as beautiful a day there,' she thought. 'How dreadful to see no green, no butterflies, no flowers—not even sky—for the dust of the shells. Oh! won't it ever, ever end?' And a sort of passion for the earth welled up in her, the warm grassy earth along which she lay, pressed so close that she could feel it with every inch of her body, and the soft spikes of the grass against her nose and lips. An aching sweetness tortured her, she wanted the earth to close its arms about her, she wanted the answer to her embrace of it. She was alive, and wanted love. Not death—not loneliness—not death! And out there, where the guns muttered, millions of men would be thinking that same thought!

X

Pierson had passed nearly the whole night with the relics of his past, the records of his stewardship, the tokens of his short married life. The idea which had possessed him walking home in the moonlight sustained him in that melancholy task of docketing and destruction. There was not nearly so much to do as one would have supposed, for, with all his dreaminess, he had been oddly neat and businesslike in all parish matters. But a hundred times that night he stopped, overcome by memories. Every corner, drawer, photograph, paper was a thread in the long-spun web of his life in this house. Some phase of his work, some vision of his wife or daughters started forth from each bit of furniture, picture, doorway. Noiseless, in his slippers, he stole up and down between the study, dining-room, drawing-room, and anyone seeing him at his work in the dim light which visited the staircase from above the front door and the upper-passage window, would have thought: 'A ghost, a ghost gone into mourning for the condition of the world.' He had to make this reckoning to-night, while the exaltation of his new idea was on him; had to rummage out the very depths of old association, so that once for all he might know whether he had strength to close the door on the past. Five o'clock struck before he had finished, and, almost dropping from fatigue, sat down at his little piano in bright daylight. The last memory to beset him was the first of all; his honeymoon, before they came back to live in this house, already chosen, furnished, and waiting for them. They had spent it in Germany—the first days in Baden-baden, and each morning had been awakened by a Chorale played down in the gardens of the Kurhaus, a gentle, beautiful tune, to remind them that they were in heaven. And softly, so softly that the tunes seemed to be but dreams he began playing those old Chorales, one after another, so that the stilly sounds floated out, through the opened window, puzzling the early birds and cats and those few humans who were abroad as yet.....

He received the telegram from Noel in the afternoon of the same day, just as he was about to set out for Leila's to get news of her; and close on the top of it came Lavendie. He found the painter standing disconsolate in front of his picture.

"Mademoiselle has deserted me?"

"I'm afraid we shall all desert you soon, monsieur."

"You are going?"

"Yes, I am leaving here. I hope to go to France."

"And mademoiselle?"

"She is at the sea with my son-in-law."

The painter ran his hands through his hair, but stopped them half-way, as if aware that he was being guilty of ill-breeding.

"Mon dieu!" he said: "Is this not a calamity for you, monsieur le cure?" But his sense of the calamity was so patently limited to his unfinished picture that Pierson could not help a smile.

"Ah, monsieur!" said the painter, on whom nothing was lost. "Comme je suis egoiste! I show my

feelings; it is deplorable. My disappointment must seem a bagatelle to you, who will be so distressed at leaving your old home. This must be a time of great trouble. Believe me; I understand. But to sympathise with a grief which is not shown would be an impertinence, would it not? You English gentlemen do not let us share your griefs; you keep them to yourselves."

Pierson stared. "True," he said. "Quite true!"

"I am no judge of Christianity, monsieur, but for us artists the doors of the human heart stand open, our own and others. I suppose we have no pride—*c'est tres-indelicat*. Tell me, monsieur, you would not think it worthy of you to speak to me of your troubles, would you, as I have spoken of mine?"

Pierson bowed his head, abashed.

"You preach of universal charity and love," went on Lavendie; "but how can there be that when you teach also secretly the keeping of your troubles to yourselves? Man responds to example, not to teaching; you set the example of the stranger, not the brother. You expect from others what you do not give. Frankly, monsieur, do you not feel that with every revelation of your soul and feelings, virtue goes out of you? And I will tell you why, if you will not think it an offence. In opening your hearts you feel that you lose authority. You are officers, and must never forget that. Is it not so?"

Pierson grew red. "I hope there is another feeling too. I think we feel that to speak of our sufferings or, deeper feelings is to obtrude oneself, to make a fuss, to be self-concerned, when we might be concerned with others."

"Monsieur, au fond we are all concerned with self. To seem selfless is but your particular way of cultivating the perfection of self. You admit that not to obtrude self is the way to perfect yourself. Eh bien! What is that but a deeper concern with self? To be free of this, there is no way but to forget all about oneself in what one is doing, as I forget everything when I am painting. But," he added, with a sudden smile, "you would not wish to forget the perfecting of self—it would not be right in your profession. So I must take away this picture, must I not? It is one of my best works: I regret much not to have finished it."

"Some day, perhaps—"

"Some day! The picture will stand still, but mademoiselle will not. She will rush at something, and behold! this face will be gone. No; I prefer to keep it as it is. It has truth now." And lifting down the canvas, he stood it against the wall and folded up the easel. "Bon soir, monsieur, you have been very good to me." He wrung Pierson's hand; and his face for a moment seemed all eyes and spirit. "Adieu!"

"Good-bye," Pierson murmured. "God bless you!"

"I don't know if I have great confidence in Him," replied Lavendie, "but I shall ever remember that so good a man as you has wished it. To mademoiselle my distinguished salutations, if you please. If you will permit me, I will come back for my other things to-morrow." And carrying easel and canvas, he departed.

Pierson stayed in the old drawing-room, waiting for Gratian to come in, and thinking over the painter's words. Had his education and position really made it impossible for him to be brotherly? Was this the secret of the impotence which he sometimes felt; the reason why charity and love were not more alive in the hearts of his congregation? 'God knows I've no consciousness of having felt myself superior,' he thought; 'and yet I would be truly ashamed to tell people of my troubles and of my struggles. Can it be that Christ, if he were on earth, would count us Pharisees, believing ourselves not as other men? But surely it is not as Christians but rather as gentlemen that we keep ourselves to ourselves. Officers, he called us. I fear—I fear it is true.' Ah, well! There would not be many more days now. He would learn out there how to open the hearts of others, and his own. Suffering and death levelled all barriers, made all men brothers. He was still sitting there when Gratian came in; and taking her hand, he said:

"Noel has gone down to George, and I want you to get transferred and go to them, Gracie. I'm giving up the parish and asking for a chaplaincy."

"Giving up? After all this time? Is it because of Nollie?"

"No, I think not; I think the time has come. I feel my work here is barren."

"Oh, no! And even if it is, it's only because—"

Pierson smiled. "Because of what, Gracie?"

"Dad, it's what I've felt in myself. We want to think and decide things for ourselves, we want to own our consciences, we can't take things at second-hand any longer."

Pierson's face darkened. "Ah!" he said, "to have lost faith is a grievous thing."

"We're gaining charity," cried Gratian.

"The two things are not opposed, my dear."

"Not in theory; but in practice I think they often are. Oh, Dad! you look so tired. Have you really made up your mind? Won't you feel lost?"

"For a little. I shall find myself, out there."

But the look on his face was too much for Gratian's composure, and she turned away.

Pierson went down to his study to write his letter of resignation. Sitting before that blank sheet of paper, he realised to the full how strongly he had resented the public condemnation passed on his own flesh and blood, how much his action was the expression of a purely mundane championship of his daughter; of a mundane mortification. 'Pride,' he thought. 'Ought I to stay and conquer it?' Twice he set his pen down, twice took it up again. He could not conquer it. To stay where he was not wanted, on a sort of sufferance—never! And while he sat before that empty sheet of paper he tried to do the hardest thing a man can do—to see himself as others see him; and met with such success as one might expect—harking at once to the verdicts, not of others at all, but of his own conscience; and coming soon to that perpetual gnawing sense which had possessed him ever since the war began, that it was his duty to be dead. This feeling that to be alive was unworthy of him when so many of his flock had made the last sacrifice, was reinforced by his domestic tragedy and the bitter disillusionment it had brought. A sense of having lost caste weighed on him, while he sat there with his past receding from him, dusty and unreal. He had the queerest feeling of his old life falling from him, dropping round his feet like the outworn scales of a serpent, rung after rung of tasks and duties performed day after day, year after year. Had they ever been quite real? Well, he had shed them now, and was to move out into life illumined by the great reality-death! And taking up his pen, he wrote his resignation.

XI

1

The last Sunday, sunny and bright! Though he did not ask her to go, Gratian went to every Service that day. And the sight of her, after this long interval, in their old pew, where once he had been wont to see his wife's face, and draw refreshment therefrom, affected Pierson more than anything else. He had told no one of his coming departure, shrinking from the falsity and suppression which must underlie every allusion and expression of regret. In the last minute of his last sermon he would tell them! He went through the day in a sort of dream. Truly proud and sensitive, under this social blight, he shrank from all alike, made no attempt to single out supporters or adherents from those who had fallen away. He knew there would be some, perhaps many, seriously grieved that he was going; but to try and realise who they were, to weigh them in the scales against the rest and so forth, was quite against his nature. It was all or nothing. But when for the last time of all those hundreds, he mounted the steps of his dark pulpit, he showed no trace of finality, did not perhaps even feel it yet. For so beautiful a summer evening the congregation was large. In spite of all reticence, rumour was busy and curiosity still rife. The writers of the letters, anonymous and otherwise, had spent a week, not indeed in proclaiming what they had done, but in justifying to themselves the secret fact that they had done it. And this was best achieved by speaking to their neighbours of the serious and awkward situation of the poor Vicar. The result was visible in a better attendance than had been seen since summer-time began.

Pierson had never been a great preacher, his voice lacked resonance and pliancy, his thought breadth and buoyancy, and he was not free from, the sing-song which mars the utterance of many who have to speak professionally. But he always made an impression of goodness and sincerity. On this last Sunday evening he preached again the first sermon he had ever preached from that pulpit, fresh from the honeymoon with his young wife. "Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." It lacked now the happy fervour of that most happy of all his days, yet gained poignancy, coming from so worn a face and voice. Gratian, who knew that he was going to end with his farewell, was in a choke of emotion long before he came to it. She sat winking away her tears, and not till he paused, for so long that she

thought his strength had failed, did she look up. He was leaning a little forward, seeming to see nothing; but his hands, grasping the pulpit's edge, were quivering. There was deep silence in the Church, for the look of his face and figure was strange, even to Gratian. When his lips parted again to speak, a mist covered her eyes, and she lost sight of him.

"Friends, I am leaving you; these are the last words I shall ever speak in this place. I go to other work. You have been very good to me. God has been very good to me. I pray with my whole heart that He may bless you all. Amen! Amen!"

The mist cleared into tears, and she could see him again gazing down at her. Was it at her? He was surely seeing something—some vision sweeter than reality, something he loved more dearly. She fell on her knees, and buried her face in her hand. All through the hymn she knelt, and through his clear slow Benediction: "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be amongst you and remain with you always." And still she knelt on; till she was alone in the Church. Then she rose and stole home. He did not come in; she did not expect him. 'It's over,' she kept thinking; 'all over. My beloved Daddy! Now he has no home; Nollie and I have pulled him down. And yet I couldn't help it, and perhaps she couldn't. Poor Nollie!...'

2

Pierson had stayed in the vestry, talking with his choir and wardens; there was no hitch, for his resignation had been accepted, and he had arranged with a friend to carry on till the new Vicar was appointed. When they were gone he went back into the empty Church, and mounted to the organ-loft. A little window up there was open, and he stood leaning against the stone, looking out, resting his whole being. Only now that it was over did he know what stress he had been through. Sparrows were chirping, but sound of traffic had almost ceased, in that quiet Sunday hour of the evening meal. Finished! Incredible that he would never come up here again, never see those roof-lines, that corner of Square Garden, and hear this familiar chirping of the sparrows. He sat down at the organ and began to play. The last time the sound would roll out and echo 'round the emptied House of God. For a long time he played, while the building darkened slowly down there below him. Of all that he would leave, he would miss this most—the right to come and play here in the darkening Church, to release emotional sound in this dim empty space growing ever more beautiful. From chord to chord he let himself go deeper and deeper into the surge and swell of those sound waves, losing all sense of actuality, till the music and the whole dark building were fused in one rapturous solemnity. Away down there the darkness crept over the Church, till the pews, the altar—all was invisible, save the columns; and the walls. He began playing his favourite slow movement from Beethoven's Seventh Symphony—kept to the end, for the visions it ever brought him. And a cat, which had been stalking the sparrows, crept in through the little window, and crouched, startled, staring at him with her green eyes. He closed the organ, went quickly down, and locked up his Church for the last time. It was warmer outside than in, and lighter, for daylight was not quite gone. He moved away a few yards, and stood looking up. Walls, buttresses, and spire were clothed in milky shadowy grey. The top of the spire seemed to touch a star. 'Goodbye, my Church!' he thought. 'Good-bye, good-bye!' He felt his face quiver; clenched his teeth, and turned away.

XII

When Noel fled, Fort had started forward to stop her; then, realising that with his lameness he could never catch her, he went back and entered Leila's bedroom.

She had taken off her dress, and was standing in front of her glass, with the cigarette still in her mouth; and the only movement was the curling of its blue smoke. He could see her face reflected, pale, with a little spot of red in each cheek, and burning red ears. She had not seemed to hear him coming in, but he saw her eyes change when they caught his reflection in the mirror. From lost and blank, they became alive and smouldering.

"Noel's gone!" he said.

She answered, as if to his reflection in the glass

"And you haven't gone too? Ah, no! Of course—your leg! She fled, I suppose? It was rather a jar, my

coming in, I'm afraid."

"No; it was my coming in that was the jar."

Leila turned round. "Jimmy! I wonder you could discuss me. The rest—" She shrugged her shoulders—"But that!"

"I was not discussing you. I merely said you were not to be envied for having me. Are you?"

The moment he had spoken, he was sorry. The anger in her eyes changed instantly, first to searching, then to misery. She cried out:

"I was to be envied. Oh! Jimmy; I was!" and flung herself face down on the bed.

Through Fort's mind went the thought: 'Atrocious!' How could he soothe—make her feel that he loved her, when he didn't—that he wanted her, when he wanted Noel. He went up to the bedside and touched her timidly:

"Leila, what is it? You're overtired. What's the matter? I couldn't help the child's being here. Why do you let it upset you? She's gone. It's all right. Things are just as they were."

"Yes!" came the strangled echo; "just!"

He knelt down and stroked her arm. It shivered under the touch, seemed to stop shivering and wait for the next touch, as if hoping it might be warmer; shivered again.

"Look at me!" he said. "What is it you want? I'm ready to do anything."

She turned and drew herself up on the bed, screwing herself back against the pillow as if for support, with her knees drawn under her. He was astonished at the strength of her face and figure, thus entrenched.

"My dear Jimmy!" she said, "I want you to do nothing but get me another cigarette. At my age one expects no more than one gets!" She held out her thumb and finger: "Do you mind?"

Fort turned away to get the cigarette. With what bitter restraint and curious little smile she had said that! But no sooner was he out of the room and hunting blindly for the cigarettes, than his mind was filled with an aching concern for Noel, fleeing like that, reckless and hurt, with nowhere to go. He found the polished birch-wood box which held the cigarettes, and made a desperate effort to dismiss the image of the girl before he again reached Leila. She was still sitting there, with her arms crossed, in the stillness of one whose every nerve and fibre was stretched taut.

"Have one yourself," she said. "The pipe of peace."

Fort lit the cigarettes, and sat down on the edge of the bed; and his mind at once went back to Noel.

"Yes," she said suddenly; "I wonder where she's gone. Can you see her? She might do something reckless a second time. Poor Jimmy! It would be a pity. And so that monk's been here, and drunk champagne. Good idea! Get me some, Jimmy!"

Again Fort went, and with him the image of the girl. When he came back the second time; she had put on that dark silk garment in which she had appeared suddenly radiant the fatal night after the Queen's Hall concert. She took the wineglass, and passed him, going into the sitting-room.

"Come and sit down," she said. "Is your leg hurting you?"

"Not more than usual," and he sat down beside her.

"Won't you have some? 'In vino veritas;' my friend."

He shook his head, and said humbly: "I admire you, Leila."

"That's lucky. I don't know anyone else who, would." And she drank her champagne at a draught.

"Don't you wish," she said suddenly, "that I had been one of those wonderful New Women, all brain and good works. How I should have talked the Universe up and down, and the war, and Causes, drinking tea, and never boring you to try and love me. What a pity!"

But to Fort there had come Noel's words: "It's awfully funny, isn't it?"

"Leila," he said suddenly, "something's got to be done. So long as you don't wish me to, I'll promise never to see that child again."

"My dear boy, she's not a child. She's ripe for love; and—I'm too ripe for love. That's what's the matter, and I've got to lump it." She wrenched her hand out of his and, dropping the empty glass, covered her face. The awful sensation which visits the true Englishman when a scene stares him in the face spun in Fort's brain. Should he seize her hands, drag them down, and kiss her? Should he get up and leave her alone? Speak, or keep silent; try to console; try to pretend? And he did absolutely nothing. So far as a man can understand that moment in a woman's life when she accepts the defeat of Youth and Beauty, he understood perhaps; but it was only a glimmering. He understood much better how she was recognising once for all that she loved where she was not loved.

'And I can't help that,' he thought dumbly; 'simply can't help that!' Nothing he could say or do would alter it. No words can convince a woman when kisses have lost reality. Then, to his infinite relief, she took her hands from her face, and said:

"This is very dull. I think you'd better go, Jimmy."

He made an effort to speak, but was too afraid of falsity in his voice.

"Very nearly a scene!" said Leila. "My God!

"How men hate them! So do I. I've had too many in my time; nothing comes of them but a headache next morning. I've spared you that, Jimmy. Give me a kiss for it."

He bent down and put his lips to hers. With all his heart he tried to answer the passion in her kiss. She pushed him away suddenly, and said faintly:

"Thank you; you did try!"

Fort dashed his hand across his eyes. The sight of her face just then moved him horribly. What a brute he felt! He took her limp hand, put it to his lips, and murmured:

"I shall come in to-morrow. We'll go to the theatre, shall we? Good night, Leila!"

But, in opening the door, he caught sight of her face, staring at him, evidently waiting for him to turn; the eyes had a frightened look. They went suddenly soft, so soft as to give his heart a squeeze.

She lifted her hand, blew him a kiss, and he saw her smiling. Without knowing what his own lips answered, he went out. He could not make up his mind to go away, but, crossing to the railings, stood leaning against them, looking up at her windows. She had been very good to him. He felt like a man who has won at cards, and sneaked away without giving the loser his revenge. If only she hadn't loved him; and it had been a soulless companionship, a quite sordid business. Anything rather than this! English to the backbone, he could not divest himself of a sense of guilt. To see no way of making up to her, of straightening it out, made him feel intensely mean. 'Shall I go up again?' he thought. The window-curtain moved. Then the shreds of light up there vanished. 'She's gone to bed,' he thought. 'I should only upset her worse. Where is Noel, now, I wonder? I shall never see her again, I suppose. Altogether a bad business. My God, yes! A bad-bad business!'

And, painfully, for his leg was hurting him, he walked away.

Leila was only too well aware of a truth that feelings are no less real, poignant, and important to those outside morality's ring fence than to those within. Her feelings were, indeed, probably even more real and poignant, just as a wild fruit's flavour is sharper than that of the tame product. Opinion—she knew—would say, that having wilfully chosen a position outside morality she had not half the case for brokenheartedness she would have had if Fort had been her husband: Opinion—she knew—would say she had no claim on him, and the sooner an illegal tie was broken, the better! But she felt fully as wretched as if she had been married. She had not wanted to be outside morality; never in her life wanted to be that. She was like those who by confession shed their sins and start again with a clear conscience. She never meant to sin, only to love, and when she was in love, nothing else mattered for the moment. But, though a gambler, she had always so far paid up. Only, this time the stakes were the heaviest a woman can put down. It was her last throw; and she knew it. So long as a woman believed in her attraction, there was hope, even when the curtain fell on a love-affair! But for Leila the lamp of belief had suddenly gone out, and when this next curtain dropped she felt that she must sit in the dark until old age made her indifferent. And between forty-four and real old age a gulf is fixed. This was the first time a man had tired of her. Why! he had been tired before he began, or so she felt. In one swift moment as of a drowning person, she saw again all the passages of their companionship, knew with certainty that it had never been a genuine flame. Shame ran, consuming, in her veins. She buried her

face in the cushions. This girl had possessed his real heart all the time. With a laugh she thought: 'I put my money on the wrong horse; I ought to have backed Edward. I could have turned that poor monk's head. If only I had never seen Jimmy again; if I had torn his letter up, I could have made poor Edward love me!' Ifs! What folly! Things happened as they must!

And, starting up, she began to roam the little room. Without Jimmy she would be wretched, with him she would be wretched too! 'I can't bear to see his face,' she thought; 'and I can't live here without him! It's really funny!' The thought of her hospital filled her with loathing. To go there day after day with this despair eating at her heart—she simply could not. She went over her resources. She had more money than she thought; Jimmy had given her a Christmas present of five hundred pounds. She had wanted to tear up the cheque, or force him to take it back; but the realities of the previous five years had prevailed with her, and she had banked it. She was glad now. She had not to consider money. Her mind sought to escape in the past. She thought of her first husband, Ronny Fane; of their mosquito-curtained rooms in that ghastly Madras heat. Poor Ronny! What a pale, cynical young ghost started up under that name. She thought of Lynch, his horsey, matter-of-fact solidity. She had loved them both—for a time. She thought of the veldt, of Constantia, and the loom of Table Mountain under the stars; and the first sight of Jimmy, his straight look, the curve of his crisp head, the kind, fighting-schoolboy frankness of his face. Even now, after all those months of their companionship, that long-ago evening at grape harvest, when she sang to him under the scented creepers, was the memory of him most charged with real feeling. That one evening at any rate he had longed for her, eleven: years ago, when she was in her prime. She could have held her own then; Noel would have come in vain. To think that this girl had still fifteen years before she would be even in her prime. Fifteen years of witchery; and then another ten before she was on the shelf. Why! if Noel married Jimmy, he would be an old man doting on her still, by the time she had reached this fatal age of forty-four: She felt as if she must scream, and; stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth, turned out the light. Darkness cooled her, a little. She pulled aside the curtains, and let in the moon light. Jimmy and that girl were out in it some where, seeking each other, if not in body, then in thought. And soon, somehow, somewhere, they would come together—come together because Fate meant them to! Fate which had given her young cousin a likeness to herself; placed her, too, in just such a hopeless position as appealed to Jimmy, and gave him a chance against younger men. She saw it with bitter surety. Good gamblers cut their losses! Yes, and proud women did not keep unwilling lovers! If she had even an outside chance, she would trail her pride, drag it through the mud, through thorns! But she had not. And she clenched her fist, and struck out at the night, as though at the face of that Fate which one could never reach—impalpable, remorseless, surrounding Fate with its faint mocking smile, devoid of all human warmth. Nothing could set back the clock, and give her what this girl had. Time had "done her in," as it "did in" every woman, one by one. And she saw herself going down the years, powdering a little more, painting a little more, touching up her hair, till it was all artifice, holding on by every little device—and all, to what end? To see his face get colder and colder, hear his voice more and more constrained to gentleness; and know that underneath, aversion was growing with the thought 'You are keeping me from life, and love!' till one evening, in sheer nerve-break, she would say or do some fearful thing, and he would come no more. 'No, Jimmy!' she thought; 'find her, and stay with her. You're not worth all that!' And puffing to the curtains, as though with that gesture she could shut out her creeping fate, she turned up the light and sat down at her writing table. She stayed some minutes motionless, her chin resting on her hands, the dark silk fallen down from her arms. A little mirror, framed in curiously carved ivory, picked up by her in an Indian bazaar twenty-five years ago, hung on a level with her face and gave that face back to her. 'I'm not ugly,' she thought passionately, 'I'm not. I still have some looks left. If only that girl hadn't come. And it was all my doing. Oh, what made me write to both of them, Edward and Jimmy?' She turned the mirror aside, and took up a pen.

"MY DEAR JIMMY," she wrote: "It will be better for us both if you take a holiday from here. Don't come again till I write for you. I'm sorry I made you so much disturbance to-night. Have a good time, and a good rest; and don't worry. "Your—"

So far she had written when a tear dropped on the page, and she had to tear it up and begin again. This time she wrote to the end—"Your Leila." 'I must post it now,' she thought, 'or he may not get it before to-morrow evening. I couldn't go through with this again.' She hurried out with it and slipped it in a pillar box. The night smelled of flowers; and, hastening back, she lay down, and stayed awake for hours, tossing, and staring at the dark.

Leila had pluck, but little patience. Her one thought was to get away and she at once began settling up her affairs and getting a permit to return to South Africa. The excitements of purchase and preparation were as good an anodyne as she could have taken. The perils of the sea were at full just then, and the prospect of danger gave her a sort of pleasure. 'If I go down,' she thought, 'all the better; brisk, instead of long and dreary.' But when she had the permit and her cabin was booked, the irrevocability of her step came to her with full force. Should she see him again or no? Her boat started in three days, and she must decide. If in compunction he were to be affectionate, she knew she would never keep to her decision, and then the horror would begin again, till again she was forced to this same action. She let the hours go and go till the very day before, when the ache to see him and the dread of it had become so unbearable that she could not keep quiet. Late that afternoon—everything, to the last label, ready—she went out, still undecided. An itch to turn the dagger in her wound, to know what had become of Noel, took her to Edward's house. Almost unconsciously she had put on her prettiest frock, and spent an hour before the glass. A feverishness of soul, more than of body, which had hung about her ever since that night, gave her colour. She looked her prettiest; and she bought a gardenia at a shop in Baker Street and fastened it in her dress. Reaching the old Square, she was astonished to see a board up with the words: "To let," though the house still looked inhabited. She rang, and was shown into the drawing-room. She had only twice been in this house before; and for some reason, perhaps because of her own unhappiness, the old, rather shabby room struck her as pathetic, as if inhabited by the past. 'I wonder what his wife was like,' she thought: And then she saw, hanging against a strip of black velvet on the wall, that faded colour sketch of the slender young woman leaning forward, with her hands crossed in her lap. The colouring was lavender and old ivory, with faint touches of rose. The eyes, so living, were a little like Gratian's; the whole face delicate, eager, good. 'Yes,' she thought, 'he must have loved you very much. To say good-bye must have been hard.' She was still standing before it when Pierson came in.

"That's a dear face, Edward. I've come to say good-bye. I'm leaving for South Africa to-morrow." And, as her hand touched his, she thought: 'I must have been mad to think I could ever have made him love me.'

"Are you—are you leaving him?"

Leila nodded:

"That's very brave, and wonderful."

"Oh! no. Needs must when the devil drives—that's all. I don't give up happiness of my own accord. That's not within a hundred miles of the truth. What I shall become, I don't know, but nothing better, you may be sure. I give up because I can't keep, and you know why. Where is Noel?"

"Down at the sea, with George and Gratian."

He was looking at her in wonder; and the pained, puzzled expression on his face angered her.

"I see the house is to let. Who'd have thought a child like that could root up two fossils like us? Never mind, Edward, there's the same blood in us. We'll keep our ends up in our own ways. Where are you going?"

"They'll give me a chaplaincy in the East, I think."

For a wild moment Leila thought: 'Shall I offer to go with him—the two lost dogs together?'

"What would have happened, Edward, if you had proposed to me that May week, when we were—a little bit in love? Which would it have been, worst for, you or me?"

"You wouldn't have taken me, Leila."

"Oh, one never knows. But you'd never have been a priest then, and you'd never have become a saint."

"Don't use that silly word. If you knew—"

"I do; I can see that you've been half burned alive; half burned and half buried! Well, you have your reward, whatever it is, and I mine. Good-bye, Edward!" She took his hand. "You might give me your blessing; I want it."

Pierson put his other hand on her shoulder and, bending forward, kissed her forehead.

The tears rushed up in Leila's eyes. "Ah me!" she said, "it's a sad world!" And wiping the quivering off her lips with the back of her gloved hand, she went quickly past him to the door. She looked back from there. He had not stirred, but his lips were moving. 'He's praying for me!' she thought. 'How funny!'

2

The moment she was outside, she forgot him; the dreadful ache for Fort seemed to have been whipped up within her, as if that figure of lifelong repression had infuriated the love of life and pleasure in her. She must and would see Jimmy again, if she had to wait and seek for him all night! It was nearly seven, he would surely have finished at the War Office; he might be at his Club or at his rooms. She made for the latter.

The little street near Buckingham Gate, where no wag had chalked "Peace" on the doors for nearly a year now, had an arid look after a hot day's sun. The hair-dresser's shop below his rooms was still open, and the private door ajar: 'I won't ring,' she thought; 'I'll go straight up.' While she was mounting the two flights of stairs, she stopped twice, breathless, from a pain in her side. She often had that pain now, as if the longing in her heart strained it physically. On the modest landing at the top, outside his rooms, she waited, leaning against the wall, which was covered with a red paper. A window at the back was open and the confused sound of singing came in—a chorus "Vive-la, vive-la, vive-la ve. Vive la compagnie." So it came to her. 'O God!' she thought: 'Let him be in, let him be nice to me. It's the last time.' And, sick from anxiety, she opened the door. He was in—lying on a wicker-couch against the wall in the far corner, with his arms crossed behind his head, and a pipe in his mouth; his eyes were closed, and he neither moved, nor opened them, perhaps supposing her to be the servant. Noiseless as a cat, Leila crossed the room till she stood above him. And waiting for him to come out of that defiant lethargy, she took her fill of his thin, bony face, healthy and hollow at the same time. With teeth clenched on the pipe it had a look of hard resistance, as of a man with his head back, his arms pinioned to his sides, stiffened against some creature, clinging and climbing and trying to drag him down. The pipe was alive, and dribbled smoke; and his leg, the injured one, wriggled restlessly, as if worrying him; but the rest of him was as utterly and obstinately still as though he were asleep. His hair grew thick and crisp, not a thread of grey in it, the teeth which held the pipe glinted white and strong. His face was young; so much younger than hers. Why did she love it—the face of a man who couldn't love her? For a second she felt as if she could seize the cushion which had slipped down off the couch, and smother him as he lay there, refusing, so it seemed to her, to come to consciousness. Love despised! Humiliation! She nearly turned and stole away. Then through the door, left open, behind her, the sound of that chorus: "Vive-la, vive-la, vive-la ve!" came in and jolted her nerves unbearably. Tearing the gardenia from her breast, she flung it on to his upturned face.

"Jimmy!"

Fort struggled up, and stared at her. His face was comic from bewilderment, and she broke into a little nervous laugh.

"You weren't dreaming of me, dear Jimmy, that's certain. In what garden were you wandering?"

"Leila! You! How—how jolly!"

"How—how jolly! I wanted to see you, so I came. And I have seen you, as you are, when you aren't with me. I shall remember it; it was good for me—awfully good for me."

"I didn't hear you."

"Far, far away, my dear. Put my gardenia in, your buttonhole. Stop, I'll pin it in. Have you had a good rest all this week? Do you like my dress? It's new. You wouldn't have noticed it, would you?"

"I should have noticed. I think it's charming."

"Jimmy, I believe that nothing—nothing will ever shake your chivalry."

"Chivalry? I have none."

"I am going to shut the door, do you mind?" But he went to the door himself, shut it, and came back to her. Leila looked up at him.

"Jimmy, if ever you loved me a little bit, be nice to me today. And if I say things—if I'm bitter—don't mind; don't notice it. Promise!"

"I promise."

She took off her hat and sat leaning against him on the couch, so that she could not see his face. And with his arm round her, she let herself go, deep into the waters of illusion; down-down, trying to forget there was a surface to which she must return; like a little girl she played that game of make-believe. 'He loves me—he loves me—he loves me!' To lose herself like that for, just an hour, only an hour; she felt that she would give the rest of the time vouchsafed to her; give it all and willingly. Her hand clasped his against her heart, she turned her face backward, up to his, closing her eyes so as still not to see his face; the scent of the gardenia in his coat hurt her, so sweet and strong it was.

3

When with her hat on she stood ready to go, it was getting dark. She had come out of her dream now, was playing at make-believe no more. And she stood with a stony smile, in the half-dark, looking between her lashes at the mortified expression on his unconscious face.

"Poor Jimmy!" she said; "I'm not going to keep you from dinner any longer. No, don't come with me. I'm going alone; and don't light up, for heaven's sake."

She put her hand on the lapel of his coat. "That flower's gone brown at the edges. Throw it away; I can't bear faded flowers. Nor can you. Get yourself a fresh one tomorrow."

She pulled the flower from his buttonhole and, crushing it in her hand, held her face up.

"Well, kiss me once more; it won't hurt you."

For one moment her lips clung to his with all their might. She wrenched them away, felt for the handle blindly, opened the door, and, shutting it in his face, went slowly, swaying a little, down the stairs. She trailed a gloved hand along the wall, as if its solidity could help her. At the last half-landing, where a curtain hung, dividing off back premises, she stopped and listened. There wasn't a sound. 'If I stand here behind this curtain,' she thought, 'I shall see him again.' She slipped behind the curtain, close drawn but for a little chink. It was so dark there that she could not see her own hand. She heard the door open, and his slow footsteps coming down the stairs. His feet, knees, whole figure came into sight, his face just a dim blur. He passed, smoking a cigarette. She crammed her hand against her mouth to stop herself from speaking and the crushed gardenia filled her nostrils with its cold, fragrant velvet. He was gone, the door below was shut. A wild, half-stupid longing came on her to go up again, wait till he came in, throw herself upon him, tell him she was going, beg him to keep her with him. Ah! and he would! He would look at her with that haggard pity she could not bear, and say, "Of course, Leila, of course." No! By God, no! "I am going quietly home," she muttered; "just quietly home! Come along, be brave; don't be a fool! Come along!" And she went down into the street: At the entrance to the Park she saw him, fifty yards in front, dawdling along. And, as if she had been his shadow lengthened out to that far distance, she moved behind him. Slowly, always at that distance, she followed him under the plane-trees, along the Park railings, past St. James's Palace, into Pall Mall. He went up some steps, and vanished into his Club. It was the end. She looked up at the building; a monstrous granite tomb, all dark. An emptied cab was just moving from the door. She got in. "Camelot Mansions, St. John's Wood." And braced against the cushions, panting, and clenching her hands, she thought: 'Well, I've seen him again. Hard crust's better than no bread. Oh, God! All finished—not a crumb, not a crumb! Vive-la, vive-la, vive-la ve. Vive-la compagnie!'

XIV

Fort had been lying there about an hour, sleeping and awake, before that visit: He had dreamed a curious and wonderfully emotionalising dream. A long grey line, in a dim light, neither of night nor morning, the whole length of the battle-front in France, charging in short drives, which carried the line a little forward, with just a tiny pause and suck-back; then on again irresistibly, on and on; and at each rush, every voice, his own among them, shouted "Hooray! the English! Hooray! the English!" The sensation of that advancing tide of dim figures in grey light, the throb and roar, the wonderful, rhythmic steady drive of it, no more to be stopped than the waves of an incoming tide, was gloriously fascinating; life was nothing, death nothing. "Hooray, the English!" In that dream, he was his country, he was every one of that long charging line, driving forward in those great heaving pulsations, irresistible, on and on. Out of the very centre of this intoxicating dream he had been dragged by some street noise, and had closed his eyes again, in the vain hope that he might dream it on to its end. But it came no more; and lighting his pipe, he lay there wondering at its fervid, fantastic realism. Death was

nothing, if his country lived and won. In waking hours he never had quite that single-hearted knowledge of himself. And what marvellously real touches got mixed into the fantastic stuff of dreams, as if something were at work to convince the dreamer in spite of himself—"Hooray!" not "Hurrah!" Just common "Hooray!" And "the English," not the literary "British." And then the soft flower had struck his forehead, and Leila's voice cried: "Jimmy!"

When she left him, his thought was just a tired: 'Well, so it's begun again!' What did it matter, since common loyalty and compassion cut him off from what his heart desired; and that desire was absurd, as little likely of attainment as the moon. What did it matter? If it gave her any pleasure to love him, let it go on! Yet, all the time that he was walking across under the plane trees, Noel seemed to walk in front of him, just out of reach, so that he ached with the thought that he would never catch her up, and walk beside her.

Two days later, on reaching his rooms in the evening, he found this letter on ship's note-paper, with the Plymouth postmark—

"Fare thee well, and if for ever,
Then for ever fare thee well"
"Leila"

He read it with a really horrible feeling, for all the world as if he had been accused of a crime and did not know whether he had committed it or not. And, trying to collect his thoughts, he took a cab and drove to her fiat. It was closed, but her address was given him; a bank in Cape Town. He had received his release. In his remorse and relief, so confusing and so poignant, he heard the driver of the cab asking where he wanted to go now. "Oh, back again!" But before they had gone a mile he corrected the address, in an impulse of which next moment he felt thoroughly ashamed. What he was doing indeed, was as indecent as if he were driving from the funeral of his wife to the boudoir of another woman. When he reached the old Square, and the words "To let" stared him in the face, he felt a curious relief, though it meant that he would not see her whom to see for ten minutes he felt he would give a year of life. Dismissing his cab, he stood debating whether to ring the bell. The sight of a maid's face at the window decided him. Mr. Pierson was out, and the young ladies were away. He asked for Mrs. Laird's address, and turned away, almost into the arms of Pierson himself. The greeting was stiff and strange. 'Does he know that Leila's gone?' he thought. 'If so, he must think me the most awful skunk. And am I? Am I?' When he reached home, he sat down to write to Leila. But having stared at the paper for an hour and written these three lines—

"MY DEAR LEILA, "I cannot express to you the feelings with which I received your letter—"

he tore it up. Nothing would be adequate, nothing would be decent. Let the dead past bury its dead—the dead past which in his heart had never been alive! Why pretend? He had done his best to keep his end up. Why pretend?

PART IV

I

In the boarding-house, whence the Lairds had not yet removed, the old lady who knitted, sat by the fireplace, and light from the setting sun threw her shadow on the wall, moving spidery and grey, over the yellowish distemper, in time to the tune of her needles. She was a very old lady—the oldest lady in the world, Noel thought—and she knitted without stopping, without breathing, so that the girl felt inclined to scream. In the evening when George and Gratian were not in, Noel would often sit watching the needles, brooding over her as yet undecided future. And now and again the old lady would look up above her spectacles; move the corners of her lips ever so slightly, and drop her gaze again. She had pitted herself against Fate; so long as she knitted, the war could not stop—such was the conclusion Noel had come to. This old lady knitted the epic of acquiescence to the tune of her needles; it was she who kept the war going such a thin old lady! 'If I were to hold her elbows from behind,' the girl used to think, 'I believe she'd die. I expect I ought to; then the war would stop. And if the war stopped, there'd be love and life again.' Then the little silvery tune would click itself once more into her brain, and stop her thinking. In her lap this evening lay a letter from her father. "MY DEAREST NOLLIE,

"I am glad to say I have my chaplaincy, and am to start for Egypt very soon. I should have wished to go to France, but must take what I can get, in view of my age, for they really don't want us who are

getting on, I fear. It is a great comfort to me to think that Gratian is with you, and no doubt you will all soon be in a house where my little grandson can join you. I have excellent accounts of him in a letter from your aunt, just received: My child, you must never again think that my resignation has been due to you. It is not so. You know, or perhaps you don't, that ever since the war broke out, I have chafed over staying at home, my heart has been with our boys out there, and sooner or later it must have come to this, apart from anything else. Monsieur Lavendie has been round in the evening, twice; he is a nice man, I like him very much, in spite of our differences of view. He wanted to give me the sketch he made of you in the Park, but what can I do with it now? And to tell you the truth, I like it no better than the oil painting. It is not a likeness, as I know you. I hope I didn't hurt his feelings, the feelings of an artist are so very easily wounded. There is one thing I must tell you. Leila has gone back to South Africa; she came round one evening about ten days ago, to say goodbye. She was very brave, for I fear it means a great wrench for her. I hope and pray she may find comfort and tranquillity out there. And now, my dear, I want you to promise me not to see Captain Fort. I know that he admires you. But, apart from the question of his conduct in regard to Leila, he made the saddest impression on me by coming to our house the very day after her departure. There is something about that which makes me feel he cannot be the sort of man in whom I could feel any confidence. I don't suppose for a moment that he is in your thoughts, and yet before going so far from you, I feel I must warn you. I should rejoice to see you married to a good man; but, though I don't wish to think hardly of anyone, I cannot believe Captain Fort is that.

"I shall come down to you before I start, which may be in quite a short time now. My dear love to you and Gracie, and best wishes to George.

"Your ever loving father, "EDWARD PIERSON

Across this letter lying on her knees, Noel gazed at the spidery movement on the wall. Was it acquiescence that the old lady knitted, or was it resistance—a challenge to death itself, a challenge dancing to the tune of the needles like the grey ghost of human resistance to Fate! She wouldn't give in, this oldest lady in the world, she meant to knit till she fell into the grave. And so Leila had gone! It hurt her to know that; and yet it pleased her. Acquiescence—resistance! Why did Daddy always want to choose the way she should go? So gentle he was, yet he always wanted to! And why did he always make her feel that she must go the other way? The sunlight ceased to stream in, the old lady's shadow faded off the wall, but the needles still sang their little tune. And the girl said:

"Do you enjoy knitting, Mrs. Adam?"

The old lady looked at her above the spectacles.

"Enjoy, my dear? It passes the time."

"But do you want the time to pass?"

There was no answer for a moment, and Noel thought: 'How dreadful of me to have said that!'

"Eh?" said the old lady.

"I said: Isn't it very tiring?"

"Not when I don't think about it, my dear."

"What do you think about?"

The old lady cackled gently.

"Oh—well!" she said.

And Noel thought: 'It must be dreadful to grow old, and pass the time!'

She took up her father's letter, and bent it meditatively against her chin. He wanted her to pass the time—not to live, not to enjoy! To pass the time. What else had he been doing himself, all these years, ever since she could remember, ever since her mother died, but just passing the time? Passing the time because he did not believe in this life; not living at all, just preparing for the life he did believe in. Denying himself everything that was exciting and nice, so that when he died he might pass pure and saintly to his other world. He could not believe Captain Fort a good man, because he had not passed the time, and resisted Leila; and Leila was gone! And now it was a sin for him to love someone else; he must pass the time again. 'Daddy doesn't believe in life,' she thought; 'it's monsieur's picture. Daddy's a saint; but I don't want to be a saint, and pass the time. He doesn't mind making people unhappy, because the more they're repressed, the saintlier they'll be. But I can't bear to be unhappy, or to see others unhappy. I wonder if I could bear to be unhappy to save someone else—as Leila is? I admire her!

Oh! I admire her! She's not doing it because she thinks it good for her soul; only because she can't bear making him unhappy. She must love him very much. Poor Leila! And she's done it all by herself, of her own accord.' It was like what George said of the soldiers; they didn't know why they were heroes, it was not because they'd been told to be, or because they believed in a future life. They just had to be, from inside somewhere, to save others. 'And they love life as much as I do,' she thought. 'What a beast it makes one feel!' Those needles! Resistance—acquiescence? Both perhaps. The oldest lady in the world, with her lips moving at the corners, keeping things in, had lived her life, and knew it. How dreadful to live on when you were of no more interest to anyone, but must just "pass the time" and die. But how much more dreadful to "pass the time" when you were strong, and life and love were yours for the taking! 'I shan't answer Daddy,' she thought.

II

The maid, who one Saturday in July opened the door to Jimmy Fort, had never heard the name of Laird, for she was but a unit in the ceaseless procession which pass through the boarding-houses of places subject to air-raids. Placing him in a sitting-room, she said she would find Miss 'Allow. There he waited, turning the leaves of an illustrated Journal, wherein Society beauties; starving Servians, actresses with pretty legs, prize dogs, sinking ships, Royalties, shells bursting, and padres reading funeral services, testified to the catholicity of the public taste, but did not assuage his nerves. What if their address were not known here? Why, in his fear of putting things to the test, had he let this month go by? An old lady was sitting by the hearth, knitting, the click of whose needles blended with the buzzing of a large bee on the window-pane. 'She may know,' he thought, 'she looks as if she'd been here for ever.' And approaching her, he said:

"I can assure you those socks are very much appreciated, ma'am."

The old lady bridled over her spectacles.

"It passes the time," she said.

"Oh, more than that; it helps to win the war, ma'am."

The old lady's lips moved at the corners; she did not answer. 'Deaf!' he thought.

"May I ask if you knew my friends, Doctor and Mrs. Laird, and Miss Pierson?"

The old lady cackled gently.

"Oh, yes! A pretty young girl; as pretty as life. She used to sit with me. Quite a pleasure to watch her; such large eyes she had."

"Where have they gone? Can you tell me?"

"Oh, I don't know at all."

It was a little cold douche on his heart. He longed to say: 'Stop knitting a minute, please. It's my life, to know.' But the tune of the needles answered: 'It's my life to knit.' And he turned away to the window.

"She used to sit just there; quite still; quite still."

Fort looked down at the window-seat. So, she used to sit just here, quite still.

"What a dreadful war this is!" said the old lady. "Have you been at the front?"

"Yes."

"To think of the poor young girls who'll never have husbands! I'm sure I think it's dreadful."

"Yes," said Fort; "it's dreadful—" And then a voice from the doorway said:

"Did you want Doctor and Mrs. Laird, sir? East Bungalow their address is; it's a little way out on the North Road. Anyone will tell you."

With a sigh of relief Fort looked gratefully at the old lady who had called Noel as pretty as life. "Good

afternoon, ma'am."

"Good afternoon." The needles clicked, and little movements occurred at the corners of her mouth. Fort went out. He could not find a vehicle, and was a long time walking. The Bungalow was ugly, of yellow brick pointed with red. It lay about two-thirds up between the main road and cliffs, and had a rock-garden and a glaring, brand-new look, in the afternoon sunlight. He opened the gate, uttering one of those prayers which come so glibly from unbelievers when they want anything. A baby's crying answered it, and he thought with ecstasy: 'Heaven, she is here!' Passing the rock-garden he could see a lawn at the back of the house and a perambulator out there under a holm-oak tree, and Noel—surely Noel herself! Hardening his heart, he went forward. In a lilac sunbonnet she was bending over the perambulator. He trod softly on the grass, and was quite close before she heard him. He had prepared no words, but just held out his hand. The baby, interested in the shadow falling across its pram, ceased crying. Noel took his hand. Under the sunbonnet, which hid her hair, she seemed older and paler, as if she felt the heat. He had no feeling that she was glad to see him.

"How do you do? Have you seen Gratian; she ought to be in."

"I didn't come to see her; I came to see you."

Noel turned to the baby.

"Here he is."

Fort stood at the end of the perambulator, and looked at that other fellow's baby. In the shade of the hood, with the frilly clothes, it seemed to him lying with its head downhill. It had scratched its snub nose and bumpy forehead, and it stared up at its mother with blue eyes, which seemed to have no underlids so fat were its cheeks.

"I wonder what they think about," he said.

Noel put her finger into the baby's fist.

"They only think when they want some thing."

"That's a deep saying; but his eyes are awfully interested in you."

Noel smiled; and very slowly the baby's curly mouth unclosed, and discovered his toothlessness.

"He's a darling," she said in a whisper.

'And so are you,' he thought, 'if only I dared say it!'

"Daddy is here," she said suddenly, without looking up. "He's sailing for Egypt the day after to-morrow. He doesn't like you."

Fort's heart gave a jump. Why did she tell him that, unless—unless she was just a little on his side?

"I expected that," he said. "I'm a sinner, as you know."

Noel looked up at him. "Sin!" she said, and bent again over her baby. The word, the tone in which she said it, crouching over her baby, gave him the thought: 'If it weren't for that little creature, I shouldn't have a dog's chance.' He said, "I'll go and see your father. Is he in?"

"I think so."

"May I come to-morrow?"

"It's Sunday; and Daddy's last day."

"Ah! Of course." He did not dare look back, to see if her gaze was following him, but he thought: 'Chance or no chance, I'm going to fight for her tooth and nail.'

In a room darkened against the evening sun Pierson was sitting on a sofa reading. The sight of that figure in khaki disconcerted Fort, who had not realised that there would be this metamorphosis. The narrow face, clean-shaven now, with its deep-set eyes and compressed lips, looked more priestly than ever, in spite of this brown garb. He felt his hope suddenly to be very forlorn indeed. And rushing at the fence, he began abruptly:

"I've come to ask you, sir, for your permission to marry Noel, if she will have me."

He had thought Pierson's face gentle; it was not gentle now. "Did you know I was here, then, Captain

Fort?"

"I saw Noel in the garden. I've said nothing to her, of course. But she told me you were starting tomorrow for Egypt, so I shall have no other chance."

"I am sorry you have come. It is not for me to judge, but I don't think you will make Noel happy."

"May I ask you why, sir?"

"Captain Fort, the world's judgment of these things is not mine; but since you ask me. I will tell you frankly. My cousin Leila has a claim on you. It is her you should ask to marry you."

"I did ask her; she refused."

"I know. She would not refuse you again if you went out to her."

"I am not free to go out to her; besides, she would refuse. She knows I don't love her, and never have."

"Never have?"

"No."

"Then why—"

"Because I'm a man, I suppose, and a fool"

"If it was simply, 'because you are a man' as you call it, it is clear that no principle or faith governs you. And yet you ask me to give you Noel; my poor Noel, who wants the love and protection not of a 'man' but of a good man. No, Captain Fort, no!"

Fort bit his lips. "I'm clearly not a good man in your sense of the word; but I love her terribly, and I would protect her. I don't in the least know whether she'll have me. I don't expect her to, naturally. But I warn you that I mean to ask her, and to wait for her. I'm so much in love that I can do nothing else."

"The man who is truly in love does what is best for the one he loves." Fort bent his head; he felt as if he were at school again, confronting his head-master. "That's true," he said. "And I shall never trade on her position. If she can't feel anything for me now or in the future, I shan't trouble her, you may be sure of that. But if by some wonderful chance she should, I know I can make her happy, sir."

"She is a child."

"No, she's not a child," said Fort stubbornly.

Pierson touched the lapel of his new tunic. "Captain Fort, I am going far away from her, and leaving her without protection. I trust to your chivalry not to ask her, till I come back."

Fort threw back his head. "No, no, I won't accept that position. With or without your presence the facts will be the same. Either she can love me, or she can't. If she can, she'll be happier with me. If she can't, there's an end of it."

Pierson came slowly up to him. "In my view," he said, "you are as bound to Leila as if you were married to her."

"You can't, expect me to take the priest's view, sir."

Pierson's lips trembled.

"You call it a priest's view; I think it is only the view of a man of honour."

Fort reddened. "That's for my conscience," he said stubbornly. "I can't tell you, and I'm not going to, how things began. I was a fool. But I did my best, and I know that Leila doesn't think I'm bound. If she had, she would never have gone. When there's no feeling—there never was real feeling on my side—and when there's this terribly real feeling for Noel, which I never sought, which I tried to keep down, which I ran away from—"

"Did you?"

"Yes. To go on with the other was foul. I should have thought you might have seen that, sir; but I did go on with it. It was Leila who made an end."

"Leila behaved nobly, I think."

"She was splendid; but that doesn't make me a brute."

Pierson turned away to the window, whence he must see Noel.

"It is repugnant to me," he said. "Is there never to be any purity in her life?"

"Is there never to be any life for her? At your rate, sir, there will be none. I'm no worse than other men, and I love her more than they could."

For fully a minute Pierson stood silent, before he said: "Forgive me if I've spoken harshly. I didn't mean to. I love her intensely; I wish for nothing but her good. But all my life I have believed that for a man there is only one woman—for a woman only one man."

"Then, Sir," Fort burst out, "you wish her—"

Pierson had put his hand up, as if to ward off a blow; and, angry though he was, Fort stopped.

"We are all made of flesh and blood," he continued coldly, "and it seems to me that you think we aren't."

"We have spirits too, Captain Fort." The voice was suddenly so gentle that Fort's anger evaporated.

"I have a great respect for you, sir; but a greater love for Noel, and nothing in this world will prevent me trying to give my life to her."

A smile quivered over Pierson's face. "If you try, then I can but pray that you will fail."

Fort did not answer, and went out.

He walked slowly away from the bungalow, with his head down, sore, angry, and yet-relieved. He knew where he stood; nor did he feel that he had been worsted—those strictures had not touched him. Convicted of immorality, he remained conscious of private justifications, in a way that human beings have. Only one little corner of memory, unseen and uncriticised by his opponent, troubled him. He pardoned himself the rest; the one thing he did not pardon was the fact that he had known Noel before his liaison with Leila commenced; had even let Leila sweep him away on, an evening when he had been in Noel's company. For that he felt a real disgust with himself. And all the way back to the station he kept thinking: 'How could I? I deserve to lose her! Still, I shall try; but not now—not yet!' And, wearily enough, he took the train back to town.

III

Both girls rose early that last day, and went with their father to Communion. As Gratian had said to George: "It's nothing to me now, but it will mean a lot to him out there, as a memory of us. So I must go." And he had answered: "Quite right, my dear. Let him have all he can get of you both to-day. I'll keep out of the way, and be back the last thing at night." Their father's smile when he saw them waiting for him went straight to both their hearts. It was a delicious day, and the early freshness had not yet dried out of the air, when they were walking home to breakfast. Each girl had slipped a hand under his arm. 'It's like Moses or was it Aaron?' Noel thought absurdly Memory had complete hold of her. All the old days! Nursery hours on Sundays after tea, stories out of the huge Bible bound in mother-o'-pearl, with photogravures of the Holy Land—palms, and hills, and goats, and little Eastern figures, and funny boats on the Sea of Galilee, and camels—always camels. The book would be on his knee, and they one on each arm of his chair, waiting eagerly for the pages to be turned so that a new picture came. And there would be the feel of his cheek, prickly against theirs; and the old names with the old glamour—to Gratian, Joshua, Daniel, Mordecai, Peter; to Noel Absalom because of his hair, and Haman because she liked the sound, and Ruth because she was pretty and John because he leaned on Jesus' breast. Neither of them cared for Job or David, and Elijah and Elisha they detested because they hated the name Eliza. And later days by firelight in the drawing-room, roasting chestnuts just before evening church, and telling ghost stories, and trying to make Daddy eat his share. And hours beside him at the piano, each eager for her special hymns—for Gratian, "Onward, Christian Soldiers," "Lead, Kindly Light," and "O God Our Help"; for Noel, "Nearer, My God, to Thee," the one with "The Hosts of Midian" in it, and "For Those in Peril on the Sea." And carols! Ah! And Choristers! Noel had loved one deeply—the word

"chorister" was so enchanting; and because of his whiteness, and hair which had no grease on it, but stood up all bright; she had never spoken to him—a far worship, like that for a star. And always, always Daddy had been gentle; sometimes angry, but always gentle; and they sometimes not at all! And mixed up with it all, the dogs they had had, and the cats they had had, and the cockatoo, and the governesses, and their red cloaks, and the curates, and the pantomimes, and "Peter Pan," and "Alice in Wonderland"—Daddy sitting between them, so that one could snuggle up. And later, the school-days, the hockey, the prizes, the holidays, the rush into his arms; and the great and wonderful yearly exodus to far places, fishing and bathing; walks and drives; rides and climbs, always with him. And concerts and Shakespeare plays in the Christmas and Easter holidays; and the walk home through the streets—all lighted in those days—one on each side of him. And this was the end! They waited on him at breakfast: they kept stealing glances at him, photographing him in their minds. Gratian got her camera and did actually photograph him in the morning sunlight with Noel, without Noel, with the baby; against all regulations for the defence of the realm. It was Noel who suggested: "Daddy, let's take lunch out and go for all day on the cliffs, us three, and forget there's a war."

So easy to say, so difficult to do, with the boom of the guns travelling to their ears along the grass, mingled with the buzz of insects. Yet that hum of summer, the innumerable voices of tiny lives, gossamer things all as alive as they, and as important to their frail selves; and the white clouds, few and so slow-moving, and the remote strange purity which clings to the chalky downs, all this white and green and blue of land and sea had its peace, which crept into the spirits of those three alone with Nature, this once more, the last time for—who could say how long? They talked, by tacit agreement, of nothing but what had happened before the war began, while the flock of the blown dandelions drifted past. Pierson sat cross-legged on the grass, without his cap, suffering a little still from the stiffness of his unwonted garments. And the girls lay one on each side of him, half critical, and half admiring. Noel could not bear his collar.

"If you had a soft collar you'd be lovely, Daddy. Perhaps out there they'll let you take it off. It must be fearfully hot in Egypt. Oh! I wish I were going. I wish I were going everywhere in the world. Some day!" Presently he read to them, Murray's "Hippolytus" of Euripides. And now and then Gratian and he discussed a passage. But Noel lay silent, looking at the sky. Whenever his voice ceased, there was the song of the larks, and very faint, the distant mutter of the guns.

They stayed up there till past six, and it was time to go and have tea before Evening Service. Those hours in the baking sun had drawn virtue out of them; they were silent and melancholy all the evening. Noel was the first to go up to her bedroom. She went without saying good night—she knew her father would come to her room that last evening. George had not yet come in; and Gratian was left alone with Pierson in the drawing-room, round whose single lamp, in spite of close-drawn curtains, moths were circling: She moved over to him on the sofa.

"Dad, promise me not to worry about Nollie; we'll take care of her."

"She can only take care of herself, Gracie, and will she? Did you know that Captain Fort was here yesterday?"

"She told me."

"What is her feeling about him?"

"I don't think she knows. Nollie dreams along, and then suddenly rushes."

"I wish she were safe from that man."

"But, Dad, why? George likes him and so do I."

A big grey moth was fluttering against the lamp. Pierson got up and caught it in the curve of his palm. "Poor thing! You're like my Nollie; so soft, and dreamy, so feckless, so reckless." And going to the curtains, he thrust his hand through, and released the moth.

"Dad!" said Gratian suddenly, "we can only find out for ourselves, even if we do singe our wings in doing it. We've been reading James's 'Pragmatism.' George says the only chapter that's important is missing—the one on ethics, to show that what we do is not wrong till it's proved wrong by the result. I suppose he was afraid to deliver that lecture."

Pierson's face wore the smile which always came on it when he had to deal with George, the smile which said: "Ah, George, that's very clever; but I know."

"My dear," he said, "that doctrine is the most dangerous in the world. I am surprised at George."

"I don't think George is in danger, Dad."

"George is a man of wide experience and strong judgment and character; but think how fatal it would be for Nollie, my poor Nollie, whom a little gust can blow into the candle."

"All the same," said Gratian stubbornly, "I don't think anyone can be good or worth anything unless they judge for themselves and take risks."

Pierson went close to her; his face was quivering.

"Don't let us differ on this last night; I must go up to Nollie for a minute, and then to bed. I shan't see you to-morrow; you mustn't get up; I can bear parting better like this. And my train goes at eight. God bless you, Gracie; give George my love. I know, I have always known that he's a good man, though we do fight so. Good-bye, my darling."

He went out with his cheeks wet from Gratian's tears, and stood in the porch a minute to recover his composure. The shadow of the house stretched velvet and blunt over the rock-garden. A night-jar was spinning; the churring sound affected him oddly. The last English night-bird he would hear. England! What a night-to say good-bye! 'My country!' he thought; 'my beautiful country!' The dew was lying thick and silvery already on the little patch of grass—the last dew, the last scent of an English night. The call of a bugle floated out. "England!" he prayed; "God be about you!" A little sound answered from across the grass, like an old man's cough, and the scrape and rattle of a chain. A face emerged at the edge of the house's shadow; bearded and horned like that of Pan, it seemed to stare at him. And he saw the dim grey form of the garden goat, heard it scuttle round the stake to which it was tethered, as though alarmed at this visitor to its' domain.

He went up the half-flight of stairs to Noel's narrow little room, next the nursery. No voice answered his tap. It was dark, but he could see her at the window, leaning far out, with her chin on her hands.

"Nollie!"

She answered without turning: "Such a lovely night, Daddy. Come and look! I'd like to set the goat free, only he'd eat the rock plants. But it is his night, isn't it? He ought to be running and skipping in it: it's such a shame to tie things up. Did you never, feel wild in your heart, Daddy?"

"Always, I think, Nollie; too wild. It's been hard to tame oneself."

Noel slipped her hand through his arm. "Let's go and take the goat and skip together on the hills. If only we had a penny whistle! Did you hear the bugle? The bugle and the goat!"

Pierson pressed the hand against him.

"Nollie, be good while I'm away. You know what I don't want. I told you in my letter." He looked at her cheek, and dared say no more. Her face had its "fey" look again.

"Don't you feel," she said suddenly, "on a night like this, all the things, all the things—the stars have lives, Daddy, and the moon has a big life, and the shadows have, and the moths and the birds and the goats and the trees, and the flowers, and all of us—escaped? Oh! Daddy, why is there a war? And why are people so bound and so unhappy? Don't tell me it's God—don't!"

Pierson could not answer, for there came into his mind the Greek song he had been reading aloud that afternoon—

"O for a deep and dewy Spring,
With runlets cold to draw and drink,
And a great meadow blossoming,
Long-grassed, and poplars in a ring,
To rest me by the brink.
O take me to the mountain, O,
Past the great pines and through the wood,
Up where the lean hounds softly go,
A-whine for wild things' blood,
And madly flies the dappled roe,
O God, to shout and speed them there;
An arrow by my chestnut hair
Drawn tight and one keen glimmering spear
Ah! if I could!"

All that in life had been to him unknown, of venture and wild savour; all the emotion he had stifled;

the swift Pan he had denied; the sharp fruits, the burning suns, the dark pools, the unearthly moonlight, which were not of God—all came with the breath of that old song, and the look on the girl's face. And he covered his eyes.

Noel's hand tugged at his arm. "Isn't beauty terribly alive," she murmured, "like a lovely person? it makes you ache to kiss it."

His lips felt parched. "There is a beauty beyond all that," he said stubbornly.

"Where?"

"Holiness, duty, faith. O Nollie, my love!" But Noel's hand tightened on his arm.

"Shall I tell you what I should like?" she whispered. "To take God's hand and show Him things. I'm certain He's not seen everything."

A shudder went through Pierson, one of those queer sudden shivers, which come from a strange note in a voice, or a new sharp scent or sight.

"My dear, what things you say!"

"But He hasn't, and it's time He did. We'd creep, and peep, and see it all for once, as He can't in His churches. Daddy, oh! Daddy! I can't bear it any more; to think of them being killed on a night like this; killed and killed so that they never see it all again—never see it—never see it!" She sank down, and covered her face with her arms.

"I can't, I can't! Oh! take it all away, the cruelty! Why does it come—why the stars and the flowers, if God doesn't care any more than that?"

Horribly affected he stood bending over her, stroking her head. Then the habit of a hundred deathbeds helped him. "Come, Nollie! This life is but a minute. We must all die."

"But not they—not so young!" She clung to his knees, and looked up. "Daddy, I don't want you to go; promise me to come back!"

The childishness of those words brought back his balance.

"My dear sweetheart, of course! Come, Nollie, get up. The sun's been too much for you."

Noel got up, and put her hands on her father's shoulders. "Forgive me for all my badness, and all my badness to come, especially all my badness to come!"

Pierson smiled. "I shall always forgive you, Nollie; but there won't be—there mustn't be any badness to come. I pray God to keep you, and make you like your mother."

"Mother never had a devil, like you and me."

He was silent from surprise. How did this child know the devil of wild feeling he had fought against year after year; until with the many years he had felt it weakening within him! She whispered on: "I don't hate my devil."

"Why should I?—it's part of me. Every day when the sun sets, I'll think of you, Daddy; and you might do the same—that'll keep me good. I shan't come to the station tomorrow, I should only cry. And I shan't say good-bye now. It's unlucky."

She flung her arms round him; and half smothered by that fervent embrace, he kissed her cheeks and hair. Freed of each other at last, he stood for a moment looking at her by the moonlight.

"There never was anyone more loving than you; Nollie!" he said quietly. "Remember my letter. And good night, my love!" Then, afraid to stay another second, he went quickly out of the dark little room....

George Laird, returning half an hour later, heard a voice saying softly: "George, George!"

Looking up, he saw a little white blur at the window, and Noel's face just visible.

"George, let the goat loose, just for to-night, to please me."

Something in that voice, and in the gesture of her stretched-out arm moved George in a queer way, although, as Pierson had once said, he had no music in his soul. He loosed the goat.

IV

1

In the weeks which succeeded Pierson's departure, Gratian and George often discussed Noel's conduct and position by the light of the Pragmatic theory. George held a suitably scientific view. Just as he would point out to his wife—in the physical world, creatures who diverged from the normal had to justify their divergence in competition with their environments, or else go under, so in the ethical world it was all a question of whether Nollie could make good her vagary. If she could, and grew in strength of character thereby, it was ipso facto all right, her vagary would be proved an advantage, and the world enriched. If not, the world by her failure to make good would be impoverished, and her vagary proved wrong. The orthodox and academies—he insisted—were always forgetting the adaptability of living organisms; how every action which was out of the ordinary, unconsciously modified all the other actions together with the outlook, and philosophy of the doer. "Of course Nollie was crazy," he said, "but when she did what she did, she at once began to think differently about life and morals. The deepest instinct we all have is the instinct that we must do what we must, and think that what we've done is really all right; in fact the—instinct of self-preservation. We're all fighting animals; and we feel in our bones that if we admit we're beaten—we are beaten; but that every fight we win, especially against odds, hardens those bones. But personally I don't think she can make good on her own."

Gratian, whose Pragmatism was not yet fully baked, responded doubtfully:

"No, I don't think she can. And if she could I'm not sure. But isn't Pragmatism a perfectly beastly word, George? It has no sense of humour in it at all."

"It is a bit thick, and in the hands of the young, deuced likely to become Prigmatism; but not with Nollie."

They watched the victim of their discussions with real anxiety. The knowledge that she would never be more sheltered than she was with them, at all events until she married, gravely impeded the formation of any judgment as to whether or no she could make good. Now and again there would come to Gratian who after all knew her sister better than George—the disquieting thought that whatever conclusion Noel led them to form, she would almost certainly force them to abandon sooner or later.

Three days after her father's departure Noel had declared that she wanted to work on the land. This George had promptly vetoed.

"You aren't strong enough yet, my dear: Wait till the harvest begins. Then you can go and help on the farm here. If you can stand that without damage, we'll think about it."

But the weather was wet and harvest late, and Noel had nothing much to do but attend to her baby, already well attended to by Nurse, and dream and brood, and now and then cook an omelette or do some housework for the sake of a gnawing conscience. Since Gratian and George were away in hospital all day, she was very much alone. Several times in the evenings Gratian tried to come at the core of her thoughts, Twice she flew the kite of Leila. The first time Noel only answered: "Yes, she's a brick." The second time, she said: "I don't want to think about her."

But, hardening her heart, Gratian went on: "Don't you think it's queer we've never heard from Captain Fort since he came down?"

In her calmest voice Noel answered: "Why should we, after being told that he wasn't liked?"

"Who told him that?"

"I told him, that Daddy didn't; but I expect Daddy said much worse things." She gave a little laugh, then softly added: "Daddy's wonderful, isn't he?"

"How?"

"The way he drives one to do the other thing. If he hadn't opposed my marriage to Cyril, you know, that wouldn't have happened, it just made all the difference. It stirred me up so fearfully." Gratian stared at her, astonished that she could see herself so clearly. Towards the end of August she had a letter from Fort.

"DEAR MRS. LAIRD, "You know all about things, of course, except the one thing which to me is all important. I can't go on without knowing whether I have a chance with your sister. It is against your father's expressed wish that she should have anything to do with me, but I told him that I could not and

would not promise not to ask her. I get my holiday at the end of this month, and am coming down to put it to the touch. It means more to me than you can possibly imagine. "I am, dear Mrs. Laird, "Your very faithful servant, "JAMES FORT."

She discussed the letter with George, whose advice was: "Answer it politely, but say nothing; and nothing to Nollie. I think it would be a very good thing. Of course it's a bit of a make-shift—twice her age; but he's a genuine man, if not exactly brilliant."

Gratian answered almost sullenly: "I've always wanted the very best for Nollie."

George screwed up his steel-coloured eyes, as he might have looked at one on whom he had to operate. "Quite so," he said. "But you must remember, Gracie, that out of the swan she was, Nollie has made herself into a lame duck. Fifty per cent at least is off her value, socially. We must look at things as they are."

"Father is dead against it."

George smiled, on the point of saying: 'That makes me feel it must be a good thing!' But he subdued the impulse.

"I agree that we're bound by his absence not to further it actively. Still Nollie knows his wishes, and it's up to her and no one else. After all, she's no longer a child."

His advice was followed. But to write that polite letter, which said nothing, cost Gratian a sleepless night, and two or three hours' penmanship. She was very conscientious. Knowledge of this impending visit increased the anxiety with which she watched her sister, but the only inkling she obtained of Noel's state of mind was when the girl showed her a letter she had received from Thirza, asking her to come back to Kestrel. A postscript, in Uncle Bob's handwriting, added these words:

"We're getting quite fossilised down here; Eve's gone and left us again. We miss you and the youngster awfully. Come along down, Nollie there's a dear!"

"They're darlings," Noel said, "but I shan't go. I'm too restless, ever since Daddy went; you don't know how restless. This rain simply makes me want to die."

2

The weather improved next day, and at the end of that week harvest began. By what seemed to Noel a stroke of luck the farmer's binder was broken; he could not get it repaired, and wanted all the human binders he could get. That first day in the fields blistered her hands, burnt her face and neck, made every nerve and bone in her body ache; but was the happiest day she had spent for weeks, the happiest perhaps since Cyril Morland left her, over a year ago. She had a bath and went to bed the moment she got in.

Lying there nibbling chocolate and smoking a cigarette, she luxuriated in the weariness which had stilled her dreadful restlessness. Watching the smoke of her cigarette curl up against the sunset glow which filled her window, she mused: If only she could be tired out like this every day! She would be all right then, would lose the feeling of not knowing what she wanted, of being in a sort of large box, with the lid slammed down, roaming round it like a dazed and homesick bee in an overturned tumbler; the feeling of being only half alive, of having a wing maimed so that she could only fly a little way, and must then drop.

She slept like a top that night. But the next day's work was real torture, and the third not much better. By the end of the week, however, she was no longer stiff.

Saturday was cloudless; a perfect day. The field she was working in lay on a slope. It was the last field to be cut, and the best wheat yet, with a glorious burnt shade in its gold and the ears blunt and full. She had got used now to the feel of the great sheaves in her arms, and the binding wisps drawn through her hand till she held them level, below the ears, ready for the twist. There was no new sensation in it now; just steady, rather dreamy work, to keep her place in the row, to the swish-swish of the cutter and the call of the driver to his horses at the turns; with continual little pauses, to straighten and rest her back a moment, and shake her head free from the flies, or suck her finger, sore from the constant pushing of the straw ends under. So the hours went on, rather hot and wearisome, yet with a feeling of something good being done, of a job getting surely to its end. And gradually the centre patch narrowed, and the sun slowly slanted down.

When they stopped for tea, instead of running home as usual, she drank it cold out of a flask she had

brought, ate a bun and some chocolate, and lay down on her back against the hedge. She always avoided that group of her fellow workers round the tea-cans which the farmer's wife brought out. To avoid people, if she could, had become habitual to her now. They must know about her, or would soon if she gave them the chance. She had never lost consciousness of her ring-finger, expecting every eye to fall on it as a matter of course. Lying on her face, she puffed her cigarette into the grass, and watched a beetle, till one of the sheep-dogs, scouting for scraps, came up, and she fed him with her second bun. Having finished the bun, he tried to eat the beetle, and, when she rescued it, convinced that she had nothing more to give him, sneezed at her, and went away. Pressing the end of her cigarette out against the bank, she turned over. Already the driver was perched on his tiny seat, and his companion, whose business it was to free the falling corn, was getting up alongside. Swish-swish! It had begun again. She rose, stretched herself, and went back to her place in the row. The field would be finished to-night; she would have a lovely rest-all Sunday I Towards seven o'clock a narrow strip, not twenty yards broad, alone was left. This last half hour was what Noel dreaded. To-day it was worse, for the farmer had no cartridges left, and the rabbits were dealt with by hullabaloo and sticks and chasing dogs. Rabbits were vermin, of course, and ate the crops, and must be killed; besides, they were good food, and fetched two shillings apiece; all this she knew but to see the poor frightened things stealing out, pounced on, turned, shouted at, chased, rolled over by great swift dogs, fallen on by the boys and killed and carried with their limp grey bodies upside down, so dead and soft and helpless, always made her feel quite sick. She stood very still, trying not to see or hear, and in the corn opposite to her a rabbit stole along, crouched, and peeped. 'Oh!' she thought, 'come out here, bunny. I'll let you away—can't you see I will? It's your only chance. Come out!' But the rabbit crouched, and gazed, with its little cowed head poked forward, and its ears laid flat; it seemed trying to understand whether this still thing in front of it was the same as those others. With the thought, 'Of course it won't while I look at it,' Noel turned her head away. Out of the corner of her eye she could see a man standing a few yards off. The rabbit bolted out. Now the man would shout and turn it. But he did not, and the rabbit scuttled past him and away to the hedge. She heard a shout from the end of the row, saw a dog galloping. Too late! Hurrah! And clasping her hands, she looked at the man. It was Fort! With the queerest feeling—amazement, pleasure, the thrill of conspiracy, she saw him coming up to her.

"I did want that rabbit to get off," she sighed out; "I've been watching it. Thank you!"

He looked at her. "My goodness!" was all he said.

Noel's hands flew up to her cheeks. "Yes, I know; is my nose very red?"

"No; you're as lovely as Ruth, if she was lovely."

Swish-swish! The cutter came by; Noel started forward to her place in the row; but catching her arm, he said: "No, let me do this little bit. I haven't had a day in the fields since the war began. Talk to me while I'm binding."

She stood watching him. He made a different, stronger twist from hers, and took larger sheaves, so that she felt a sort of jealousy.

"I didn't know you knew about this sort of thing."

"Oh, Lord, yes! I had a farm once out West. Nothing like field-work, to make you feel good. I've been watching you; you bind jolly well."

Noel gave a sigh of pleasure.

"Where have you come from?" she asked.

"Straight from the station. I'm on my holiday." He looked up at her, and they both fell silent.

Swish-swish! The cutter was coming again. Noel went to the beginning of her portion of the falling corn, he to the end of it. They worked towards each other, and met before the cutter was on them a third time.

"Will you come in to supper?"

"I'd love to."

"Then let's go now, please. I don't want to see any more rabbits killed."

They spoke very little on the way to the bungalow, but she felt his eyes on her all the time. She left him with George and Gratian who had just come in, and went up for her bath.

Supper had been laid out in the verandah, and it was nearly dark before they had finished. In rhyme with the failing of the light Noel became more and more silent. When they went in, she ran up to her baby. She did not go down again, but as on the night before her father went away, stood at her window, leaning out. A dark night, no moon; in the starlight she could only just see the dim garden, where no goat was grazing. Now that her first excitement had worn off, this sudden reappearance of Fort filled her with nervous melancholy: She knew perfectly well what he had come for, she had always known. She had no certain knowledge of her own mind; but she knew that all these weeks she had been between his influence and her father's, listening to them, as it were, pleading with her. And, curiously, the pleading of each, instead of drawing her towards the pleader, had seemed dragging her away from him, driving her into the arms of the other. To the protection of one or the other she felt she must go; and it humiliated her to think that in all the world there was no other place for her. The wildness of that one night in the old Abbey seemed to have power to govern all her life to come. Why should that one night, that one act, have this uncanny power to drive her this way or that, to those arms or these? Must she, because of it, always need protection? Standing there in the dark it was almost as if they had come up behind her, with their pleadings; and a shiver ran down her back. She longed to turn on them, and cry out: "Go away; oh; go away! I don't want either of you; I just want to be left alone!" Then something, a moth perhaps, touched her neck. She gasped and shook herself. How silly!

She heard the back door round the corner of the house opening; a man's low voice down in the dark said:

"Who's the young lady that comes out in the fields?"

Another voice—one of the maids—answered:

"The Missis's sister."

"They say she's got a baby."

"Never you mind what she's got."

Noel heard the man's laugh. It seemed to her the most odious laugh she had ever heard. She thought swiftly and absurdly: 'I'll get away from all this.' The window was only a few feet up. She got out on to the ledge, let herself down, and dropped. There was a flower-bed below, quite soft, with a scent of geranium-leaves and earth. She brushed herself, and went tiptoeing across the gravel and the little front lawn, to the gate. The house was quite dark, quite silent. She walked on, down the road. 'Jolly!' she thought. 'Night after night we sleep, and never see the nights: sleep until we're called, and never see anything. If they want to catch me they'll have to run.' And she began running down the road in her evening frock and shoes, with nothing on her head. She stopped after going perhaps three hundred yards, by the edge of the wood. It was splendidly dark in there, and she groped her way from trunk to trunk, with a delicious, half-scared sense of adventure and novelty. She stopped at last by a thin trunk whose bark glimmered faintly. She felt it with her cheek, quite smooth—a birch tree; and, with her arms round it, she stood perfectly still. Wonderfully, magically silent, fresh and sweet-scented and dark! The little tree trembled suddenly within her arms, and she heard the low distant rumble, to which she had grown so accustomed—the guns, always at work, killing—killing men and killing trees, little trees perhaps like this within her arms, little trembling trees! Out there, in this dark night, there would not be a single unscarred tree like this smooth quivering thing, no fields of corn, not even a bush or a blade of grass, no leaves to rustle and smell sweet, not a bird, no little soft-footed night beasts, except the rats; and she shuddered, thinking of the Belgian soldier-painter. Holding the tree tight, she squeezed its smooth body against her. A rush of the same helpless, hopeless revolt and sorrow overtook her, which had wrung from her that passionate little outburst to her father, the night before he went away. Killed, torn, and bruised; burned, and killed, like Cyril! All the young things, like this little tree.

Rumble! Rumble! Quiver! Quiver! And all else so still, so sweet and still, and starry, up there through the leaves.... 'I can't bear it!' she thought. She pressed her lips, which the sun had warmed all day, against the satiny smooth bark. But the little tree stood within her arms insentient, quivering only to the long rumbles. With each of those dull mutterings, life and love were going out, like the flames of candles on a Christmas-tree, blown, one by one. To her eyes, accustomed by now to the darkness in there, the wood seemed slowly to be gathering a sort of life, as though it were a great thing watching her; a great thing with hundreds of limbs and eyes, and the power of breathing. The little tree, which had seemed so individual and friendly, ceased to be a comfort and became a part of the whole living wood, absorbed in itself, and coldly watching her, this intruder of the mischievous breed, the fatal breed which loosed those rumblings on the earth. Noel unlocked her arms, and recoiled. A bough scraped her neck, some leaves flew against her eyes; she stepped aside, tripped over a root, and fell. A bough had hit her too, and she lay a little dazed, quivering at such dark unfriendliness. She held her hands up to her face for the mere pleasure of seeing something a little less dark; it was childish, and absurd, but she was frightened. The wood seemed to have so many eyes, so many arms, and all

unfriendly; it seemed waiting to give her other blows, other falls, and to guard her within its darkness until—! She got up, moved a few steps, and stood still, she had forgotten from where she had come in. And afraid of moving deeper into the unfriendly wood, she turned slowly round, trying to tell which way to go. It was all just one dark watching thing, of limbs on the ground and in the air. 'Any way,' she thought; 'any way of course will take me out!' And she groped forward, keeping her hands up to guard her face. It was silly, but she could not help the sinking, scattered feeling which comes to one bushed, or lost in a fog. If the wood had not been so dark, so,—alive! And for a second she had the senseless, terrifying thought of a child: 'What if I never get out!' Then she laughed at it, and stood still again, listening. There was no sound to guide her, no sound at all except that faint dull rumble, which seemed to come from every side, now. And the trees watched her. 'Ugh!' she thought; 'I hate this wood!' She saw it now, its snaky branches, its darkness, and great forms, as an abode of giants and witches. She groped and scrambled on again, tripped once more, and fell, hitting her forehead against a trunk. The blow dazed and sobered her. 'It's idiotic,' she thought; 'I'm a baby! I'll just walk very slowly till I reach the edge. I know it isn't a large wood!' She turned deliberately to face each direction; solemnly selected that from which the muttering of the guns seemed to come, and started again, moving very slowly with her hands stretched out. Something rustled in the undergrowth, quite close; she saw a pair of green eyes shining. Her heart jumped into her mouth. The thing sprang—there was a swish of ferns and twigs, and silence. Noel clasped her breast. A poaching cat! And again she moved forward. But she had lost direction. 'I'm going round and round,' she thought. 'They always do.' And the sinking scattered feeling of the "bushed" clutched at her again. 'Shall I call?' she thought. 'I must be near the road. But it's so babyish.' She moved on again. Her foot struck something soft. A voice muttered a thick oath; a hand seized her ankle. She leaped, and dragged and wrenched it free; and, utterly unnerved, she screamed, and ran forward blindly.

V

No one could have so convinced a feeling as Jimmy Fort that he would be a 'bit of a makeshift' for Noel. He had spent the weeks after his interview with her father obsessed by her image, often saying to himself "It won't do. It's playing it too low down to try and get that child, when I know that, but for her trouble, I shouldn't have a chance." He had never had much opinion of his looks, but now he seemed to himself absurdly old and dried-up in this desert of a London. He loathed the Office job to which they had put him, and the whole atmosphere of officialdom. Another year of it, and he would shrivel like an old apple! He began to look at himself anxiously, taking stock of his physical assets now that he had this dream of young beauty. He would be forty next month, and she was nineteen! But there would be times too when he would feel that, with her, he could be as much of a "three-year-old" as the youngster she had loved. Having little hope of winning her, he took her "past" but lightly. Was it not that past which gave him what chance he had? On two things he was determined: He would not trade on her past. And if by any chance she took him, he would never show her that he remembered that she had one.

After writing to Gratian he had spent the week before his holiday began, in an attempt to renew the youthfulness of his appearance, which made him feel older, leaner, bonier and browner than ever. He got up early, rode in the rain, took Turkish baths, and did all manner of exercises; neither smoked nor drank, and went to bed early, exactly as if he had been going to ride a steeplechase. On the afternoon, when at last he left on that terrific pilgrimage, he gazed at his face with a sort of despair, it was so lean, and leather-coloured, and he counted almost a dozen grey hairs.

When he reached the bungalow, and was told that she was working in the corn-fields, he had for the first time a feeling that Fate was on his side. Such a meeting would be easier than any other! He had been watching her for several minutes before she saw him, with his heart beating more violently than it had ever beaten in the trenches; and that new feeling of hope stayed with him—all through the greeting, throughout supper, and even after she had left them and gone upstairs. Then, with the suddenness of a blind drawn down, it vanished, and he sat on, trying to talk, and slowly getting more and more silent and restless.

"Nollie gets so tired, working," Gratian said: He knew she meant it kindly but that she should say it at all was ominous. He got up at last, having lost hope of seeing Noel again, conscious too that he had answered the last three questions at random.

In the porch George said: "You'll come in to lunch tomorrow, won't you?"

"Oh, thanks, I'm afraid it'll bore you all."

"Not a bit. Nollie won't be so tired."

Again—so well meant. They were very kind. He looked up from the gate, trying to make out which her window might be; but all was dark. A little way down the road he stopped to light a cigarette; and, leaning against a gate, drew the smoke of it deep into his lungs, trying to assuage the ache in his heart. So it was hopeless! She had taken the first, the very first chance, to get away from him! She knew that he loved her, could not help knowing, for he had never been able to keep it out of his eyes and voice. If she had felt ever so little for him, she would not have avoided him this first evening. 'I'll go back to that desert,' he thought; 'I'm not going to whine and crawl. I'll go back, and bite on it; one must have some pride. Oh, why the hell am I crooked-up like this? If only I could get out to France again!' And then Noel's figure bent over the falling corn formed before him. 'I'll have one more try,' he thought; 'one more—tomorrow somewhere, I'll get to know for certain. And if I get what Leila's got I shall deserve it, I suppose. Poor Leila! Where is she? Back at High Constantia?' What was that? A cry—of terror—in that wood! Crossing to the edge, he called "Coo-ee!" and stood peering into its darkness. He heard the sound of bushes being brushed aside, and whistled. A figure came bursting out, almost into his arms.

"Hallo!" he said; "what's up?"

A voice gasped: "Oh! It's—it's nothing!"

He saw Noel. She had swayed back, and stood about a yard away. He could dimly see her covering her face with her arms. Feeling instinctively that she wanted to hide her fright, he said quietly:

"What luck! I was just passing. It's awfully dark."

"I—I got lost; and a man—caught my foot, in there!"

Moved beyond control by the little gulps and gasps of her breathing, he stepped forward and put his hands on her shoulders. He held her lightly, without speaking, terrified lest he should wound her pride.

"I-I got in there," she gasped, "and the trees—and I stumbled over a roan asleep, and he—"

"Yes, Yes, I know," he murmured, as if to a child. She had dropped her arms now, and he could see her face, with eyes unnaturally dilated, and lips quivering. Then moved again beyond control, he drew her so close that he could feel the throbbing of her heart, and put his lips to her forehead all wet with heat. She closed her eyes, gave a little choke, and buried her face against his coat.

"There, there, my darling!" he kept on saying. "There, there, my darling!" He could feel the snuggling of her cheek against his shoulder. He had got her—had got her! He was somehow certain that she would not draw back now. And in the wonder and ecstasy of that thought, all the world above her head, the stars in their courses, the wood which had frightened her, seemed miracles of beauty and fitness. By such fortune as had never come to man, he had got her! And he murmured over and over again:

"I love you!" She was resting perfectly quiet against him, while her heart ceased gradually to beat so fast. He could feel her cheek rubbing against his coat of Harris tweed. Suddenly she sniffed at it, and whispered:

"It smells good."

VI

When summer sun has burned all Egypt, the white man looks eagerly each day for evening, whose rose-coloured veil melts opalescent into the dun drift, of the hills, and iridescent above, into the slowly deepening blue. Pierson stood gazing at the mystery of the desert from under the little group of palms and bougainvillea which formed the garden of the hospital. Even-song was in full voice: From the far wing a gramophone was grinding out a music-hall ditty; two aeroplanes, wheeling exactly like the buzzards of the desert, were letting drip the faint whirl of their flight; metallic voices drifted from the Arab village; the wheels of the water-wells creaked; and every now and then a dry rustle was stirred from the palm-leaves by puffs of desert wind. On either hand an old road ran out, whose line could be marked by the little old watch-towers of another age. For how many hundred years had human life passed along it to East and West; the brown men and their camels, threading that immemorial track

over the desert, which ever filled him with wonder, so still it was, so wide, so desolate, and every evening so beautiful! He sometimes felt that he could sit for ever looking at it; as though its cruel mysterious loveliness were—home; and yet he never looked at it without a spasm of homesickness.

So far his new work had brought him no nearer to the hearts of men. Or at least he did not feel it had. Both at the regimental base, and now in this hospital—an intermediate stage—waiting for the draft with which he would be going into Palestine, all had been very nice to him, friendly, and as it were indulgent; so might schoolboys have treated some well-intentioned dreamy master, or business men a harmless idealistic inventor who came visiting their offices. He had even the feeling that they were glad to have him about, just as they were glad to have their mascots and their regimental colours; but of heart-to-heart simple comradeship—it seemed they neither wanted it of him nor expected him to give it, so that he had a feeling that he would be forward and impertinent to offer it. Moreover, he no longer knew how. He was very lonely. 'When I come face to face with death,' he would think, 'it will be different. Death makes us all brothers. I may be of real use to them then.'

They brought him a letter while he stood there listening to that even-song, gazing at the old desert road. "DARLING DAD,

"I do hope this will reach you before you move on to Palestine. You said in your last—at the end of September, so I hope you'll just get it. There is one great piece of news, which I'm afraid will hurt and trouble you; Nollie is married to Jimmy Fort. They were married down here this afternoon, and have just gone up to Town. They have to find a house of course. She has been very restless, lonely, and unhappy ever since you went, and I'm sure it is really for the best: She is quite another creature, and simply devoted, headlong. It's just like Nollie. She says she didn't know what she wanted, up to the last minute. But now she seems as if she could never want anything else.

"Dad dear, Nollie could never have made good by herself. It isn't her nature, and it's much better like this, I feel sure, and so does George. Of course it isn't ideal—and one wanted that for her; but she did break her wing, and he is so awfully good and devoted to her, though you didn't believe it, and perhaps won't, even now. The great thing is to feel her happy again, and know she's safe. Nollie is capable of great devotion; only she must be anchored. She was drifting all about; and one doesn't know what she might have done, in one of her moods. I do hope you won't grieve about it. She's dreadfully anxious about how you'll feel. I know it will be wretched for you, so far off; but do try and believe it's for the best.... She's out of danger; and she was really in a horrible position. It's so good for the baby, too, and only fair to him. I do think one must take things as they are, Dad dear. It was impossible to mend Nollie's wing. If she were a fighter, and gloried in it, or if she were the sort who would 'take the veil'—but she isn't either. So it is all right, Dad. She's writing to you herself. I'm sure Leila didn't want Jimmy Fort to be unhappy because he couldn't love her; or she would never have gone away. George sends you his love; we are both very well. And Nollie is looking splendid still, after her harvest work. All, all my love, Dad dear. Is there anything we can get, and send you? Do take care of your blessed self, and don't grieve about Nollie. "GRATIAN."

A half-sheet of paper fluttered down; he picked it up from among the parched fibre of dead palm-leaves. "DADDY DARLING,

"I've done it. Forgive me—I'm so happy.

"Your NOLLIE."

The desert shimmered, the palm-leaves rustled, and Pierson stood trying to master the emotion roused in him by those two letters. He felt no anger, not even vexation; he felt no sorrow, but a loneliness so utter and complete that he did not know how to bear it. It seemed as if some last link with life had 'snapped. 'My girls are happy,' he thought. 'If I am not—what does it matter? If my faith and my convictions mean nothing to them—why should they follow? I must and will not feel lonely. I ought to have the sense of God present, to feel His hand in mine. If I cannot, what use am I—what use to the poor fellows in there, what use in all the world?'

An old native on a donkey went by, piping a Soudanese melody on a little wooden Arab flute. Pierson turned back into the hospital humming it. A nurse met him there.

"The poor boy at the end of A ward is sinking fast, sir; I expect he'd like to see you,"

He went into A ward, and walked down between the beds to the west window end, where two screens had been put, to block off the cot. Another nurse, who was sitting beside it, rose at once.

"He's quite conscious," she whispered; "he can still speak a little. He's such a dear." A tear rolled down her cheek, and she passed out behind the screens. Pierson looked down at the boy; perhaps he was twenty, but the unshaven down on his cheeks was soft and almost colourless. His eyes were closed.

He breathed regularly, and did not seem in pain; but there was about him that which told he was going; something resigned, already of the grave. The window was wide open, covered by mosquito-netting, and a tiny line of sunlight, slanting through across the foot of the cot, crept slowly backwards over the sheets and the boy's body, shortening as it crept. In the grey whiteness of the walls; the bed, the boy's face, just that pale yellow bar of sunlight, and one splash of red and blue from a little flag on the wall glowed out. At this cooler hour, the ward behind the screens was almost empty, and few sounds broke the stillness; but from without came that intermittent rustle of dry palm-leaves. Pierson waited in silence, watching the sun sink. If the boy might pass like this, it would be God's mercy. Then he saw the boy's eyes open, wonderfully clear eyes of the lighted grey which has dark rims; his lips moved, and Pierson bent down to hear.

"I'm goin' West, zurr." The whisper had a little soft burr; the lips quivered; a pucker as of a child formed on his face, and passed.

Through Pierson's mind there flashed the thought: 'O God! Let me be some help to him!'

"To God, my dear son!" he said.

A flicker of humour, of ironic question, passed over the boy's lips.

Terribly moved, Pierson knelt down, and began softly, fervently praying. His whispering mingled with the rustle of the palm-leaves, while the bar of sunlight crept up the body. In the boy's smile had been the whole of stoic doubt, of stoic acquiescence. It had met him with an unconscious challenge; had seemed to know so much. Pierson took his hand, which lay outside the sheet. The boy's lips moved, as though in thanks; he drew a long feeble breath, as if to suck in the thread of sunlight; and his eyes closed. Pierson bent over the hand. When he looked up the boy was dead. He kissed his forehead and went quietly out.

The sun had set, and he walked away from the hospital to a hillock beyond the track on the desert's edge, and stood looking at the afterglow. The sun and the boy—together they had gone West, into that wide glowing nothingness.

The muezzin call to sunset prayer in the Arab village came to him clear and sharp, while he sat there, unutterably lonely. Why had that smile so moved him? Other death smiles had been like this evening smile on the desert hills—a glowing peace, a promise of heaven. But the boy's smile had said: 'Waste no breath on me—you cannot help. Who knows—who knows? I have no hope, no faith; but I am adventuring. Good-bye!' Poor boy! He had braved all things, and moved out uncertain, yet undaunted! Was that, then, the uttermost truth, was faith a smaller thing? But from that strange notion he recoiled with horror. 'In faith I have lived, in faith I will die!' he thought, 'God helping me!' And the breeze, ruffling the desert sand, blew the grains against the palms of his hands, outstretched above the warm earth.

THE END.

THE ISLAND PHARISEES

By John Galsworthy

"But this is a worshipful society"
KING JOHN

PREFACE

Each man born into the world is born like Shelton in this book—to go a journey, and for the most part he is born on the high road. At first he sits there in the dust, with his little chubby hands reaching at nothing, and his little solemn eyes staring into space. As soon as he can toddle, he moves, by the queer instinct we call the love of life, straight along this road, looking neither to the right nor left, so pleased is he to walk. And he is charmed with everything—with the nice flat road, all broad and white, with his own feet, and with the prospect he can see on either hand. The sun shines, and he finds the road a little hot and dusty; the rain falls, and he splashes through the muddy puddles. It makes no matter—all is pleasant; his fathers went this way before him; they made this road for him to tread, and, when they bred him, passed into his fibre the love of doing things as they themselves had done them. So he walks on and on, resting comfortably at nights under the roofs that have been raised to shelter him, by those who went before.

Suddenly one day, without intending to, he notices a path or opening in the hedge, leading to right or left, and he stands, looking at the undiscovered. After that he stops at all the openings in the hedge; one day, with a beating heart, he tries one.

And this is where the fun begins.

Out of ten of him that try the narrow path, nine of him come back to the broad road, and, when they pass the next gap in the hedge, they say: "No, no, my friend, I found you pleasant for a while, but after that—ah! after that! The way my fathers went is good enough for me, and it is obviously the proper one; for nine of me came back, and that poor silly tenth—I really pity him!"

And when he comes to the next inn, and snuggles in his well-warmed, bed, he thinks of the wild waste of heather where he might have had to spend the night alone beneath the stars; nor does it, I think, occur to him that the broad road he treads all day was once a trackless heath itself.

But the poor silly tenth is faring on. It is a windy night that he is travelling through a windy night, with all things new around, and nothing to help him but his courage. Nine times out of ten that courage fails, and he goes down into the bog. He has seen the undiscovered, and—like Ferrand in this book—the undiscovered has engulfed him; his spirit, tougher than the spirit of the nine that burned back to sleep in inns, was yet not tough enough. The tenth time he wins across, and on the traces he has left others follow slowly, cautiously—a new road is opened to mankind! A true saying goes: Whatever is, is right! And if all men from the world's beginning had said that, the world would never have begun—at all. Not even the protoplasmic jelly could have commenced its journey; there would have been no motive force to make it start.

And so, that other saying had to be devised before the world could set up business: Whatever is, is wrong! But since the Cosmic Spirit found that matters moved too fast if those that felt "All things that are, are wrong" equalled in number those that felt "All things that are, are right," It solemnly devised polygamy (all, be it said, in a spiritual way of speaking); and to each male spirit crowing "All things that are, are wrong" It decreed nine female spirits clucking "All things that are, are right." The Cosmic Spirit, who was very much an artist, knew its work, and had previously devised a quality called courage, and divided it in three, naming the parts spiritual, moral, physical. To all the male-bird spirits, but to no female (spiritually, not corporeally speaking), It gave courage that was spiritual; to nearly all, both male and female, It gave courage that was physical; to very many hen-bird spirits It gave moral courage too. But, because It knew that if all the male-bird spirits were complete, the proportion of male to female—one to ten—would be too great, and cause upheavals, It so arranged that only one in ten male-bird spirits should have all three kinds of courage; so that the other nine, having spiritual courage, but lacking either in moral or in physical, should fail in their extensions of the poultry-run. And having started them upon these lines, it left them to get along as best they might.

Thus, in the subdivision of the poultry-run that we call England, the proportion of the others to the complete male-bird spirit, who, of course, is not infrequently a woman, is ninety-nine to one; and with every Island Pharisee, when he or she starts out in life, the interesting question ought to be, "Am I that one?" Ninety very soon find out that they are not, and, having found it out, lest others should discover, they say they are. Nine of the other ten, blinded by their spiritual courage, are harder to convince; but one by one they sink, still proclaiming their virility. The hundredth Pharisee alone sits out the play.

Now, the journey of this young man Shelton, who is surely not the hundredth Pharisee, is but a ragged effort to present the working of the truth "All things that are, are wrong," upon the truth "All things that are, are right."

The Institutions of this country, like the Institutions of all other countries, are but half-truths; they are the working daily clothing of the nation; no more the body's permanent dress than is a baby's frock. Slowly but surely they wear out, or are outgrown; and in their fashion they are always thirty years at least behind the fashions of those spirits who are concerned with what shall take their place. The

conditions that dictate our education, the distribution of our property, our marriage laws, amusements, worship, prisons, and all other things, change imperceptibly from hour to hour; the moulds containing them, being inelastic, do not change, but hold on to the point of bursting, and then are hastily, often clumsily, enlarged. The ninety desiring peace and comfort for their spirit, the ninety of the well-warmed beds, will have it that the fashions need not change, that morality is fixed, that all is ordered and immutable, that every one will always marry, play, and worship in the way that they themselves are marrying, playing, worshipping. They have no speculation, and they hate with a deep hatred those who speculate with thought. This is the function they were made for. They are the dough, and they dislike that yeasty stuff of life which comes and works about in them. The Yeasty Stuff—the other ten—chafed by all things that are, desirous ever of new forms and moulds, hate in their turn the comfortable ninety. Each party has invented for the other the hardest names that it can think of: Philistines, Bourgeois, Mrs. Grundy, Rebels, Anarchists, and Ne'er-do-weels. So we go on! And so, as each of us is born to go his journey, he finds himself in time ranged on one side or on the other, and joins the choruses of name-slingers.

But now and then—ah! very seldom—we find ourselves so near that thing which has no breadth, the middle line, that we can watch them both, and positively smile to see the fun.

When this book was published first, many of its critics found that Shelton was the only Pharisee, and a most unsatisfactory young man—and so, no doubt, he is. Belonging to the comfortable ninety, they felt, in fact, the need of slinging names at one who obviously was of the ten. Others of its critics, belonging to the ten, wielded their epithets upon Antonia, and the serried ranks behind her, and called them Pharisees; as dull as ditch-water—and so, I fear, they are.

One of the greatest charms of authorship is the privilege it gives the author of studying the secret springs of many unseen persons, of analysing human nature through the criticism that his work evokes—criticism welling out of the instinctive likings or aversions, out of the very fibre of the human being who delivers it; criticism that often seems to leap out against the critic's will, startled like a fawn from some deep bed, of sympathy or of antipathy. And so, all authors love to be abused—as any man can see.

In the little matter of the title of this book, we are all Pharisees, whether of the ninety or the ten, and we certainly do live upon an Island.

JOHN GALSWORTHY.

January 1, 1908

PART I

THE TOWN

CHAPTER I

SOCIETY

A quiet, well-dressed man named Shelton, with a brown face and a short, fair beard, stood by the bookstall at Dover Station. He was about to journey up to London, and had placed his bag in the corner of a third-class carriage.

After his long travel, the flat-vowelled voice of the bookstall clerk offering the latest novel sounded pleasant—pleasant the independent answers of a bearded guard, and the stodgy farewell sayings of a man and wife. The limber porters trundling their barrows, the greyness of the station and the good stolid humour clinging to the people, air, and voices, all brought to him the sense of home. Meanwhile he wavered between purchasing a book called Market Hayborough, which he had read and would certainly enjoy a second time, and Carlyle's French Revolution, which he had not read and was doubtful of enjoying; he felt that he ought to buy the latter, but he did not relish giving up the former. While he hesitated thus, his carriage was beginning to fill up; so, quickly buying both, he took up a position from

which he could defend his rights. "Nothing," he thought, "shows people up like travelling."

The carriage was almost full, and, putting his bag, up in the rack, he took his seat. At the moment of starting yet another passenger, a girl with a pale face, scrambled in.

"I was a fool to go third," thought Shelton, taking in his neighbours from behind his journal.

They were seven. A grizzled rustic sat in the far corner; his empty pipe, bowl downwards, jutted like a handle from his face, all bleared with the smear of nothingness that grows on those who pass their lives in the current of hard facts. Next to him, a ruddy, heavy-shouldered man was discussing with a grey-haired, hatchet-visaged person the condition of their gardens; and Shelton watched their eyes till it occurred to him how curious a look was in them—a watchful friendliness, an allied distrust—and that their voices, cheerful, even jovial, seemed to be cautious all the time. His glance strayed off, and almost rebounded from the semi-Roman, slightly cross, and wholly self-complacent face of a stout lady in a black-and-white costume, who was reading the Strand Magazine, while her other, sleek, plump hand, freed from its black glove, and ornamented with a thick watch-bracelet, rested on her lap. A younger, bright-cheeked, and self-conscious female was sitting next her, looking at the pale girl who had just got in.

"There's something about that girl," thought Shelton, "they don't like." Her brown eyes certainly looked frightened, her clothes were of a foreign cut. Suddenly he met the glance of another pair of eyes; these eyes, prominent and blue, stared with a sort of subtle roguery from above a thin, lopsided nose, and were at once averted. They gave Shelton the impression that he was being judged, and mocked, enticed, initiated. His own gaze did not fall; this sanguine face, with its two-day growth of reddish beard, long nose, full lips, and irony, puzzled him. "A cynical face!" he thought, and then, "but sensitive!" and then, "too cynical," again.

The young man who owned it sat with his legs parted at the knees, his dusty trouser-ends and boots slanting back beneath the seat, his yellow finger-tips crisped as if rolling cigarettes. A strange air of detachment was about that youthful, shabby figure, and not a scrap of luggage filled the rack above his head.

The frightened girl was sitting next this pagan personality; it was possibly the lack of fashion in his looks that caused, her to select him for her confidence.

"Monsieur," she asked, "do you speak French?"

"Perfectly."

"Then can you tell me where they take the tickets?"

"The young man shook his head.

"No," said he, "I am a foreigner."

The girl sighed.

"But what is the matter, ma'moiselle?"

The girl did not reply, twisting her hands on an old bag in her lap. Silence had stolen on the carriage—a silence such as steals on animals at the first approach of danger; all eyes were turned towards the figures of the foreigners.

"Yes," broke out the red-faced man, "he was a bit squiffy that evening—old Tom."

"Ah!" replied his neighbour, "he would be."

Something seemed to have destroyed their look of mutual distrust. The plump, sleek hand of the lady with the Roman nose curved convulsively; and this movement corresponded to the feeling agitating Shelton's heart. It was almost as if hand and heart feared to be asked for something.

"Monsieur," said the girl, with a tremble in her voice, "I am very unhappy; can you tell me what to do? I had no money for a ticket."

The foreign youth's face flickered.

"Yes?" he said; "that might happen to anyone, of course."

"What will they do to me?" sighed the girl.

"Don't lose courage, ma'moiselle." The young man slid his eyes from left to right, and rested them on Shelton. "Although I don't as yet see your way out."

"Oh, monsieur!" sighed the girl, and, though it was clear that none but Shelton understood what they were saying, there was a chilly feeling in the carriage.

"I wish I could assist you," said the foreign youth; "unfortunately——" he shrugged his shoulders, and again his eyes returned to Shelton.

The latter thrust his hand into his pocket.

"Can I be of any use?" he asked in English.

"Certainly, sir; you could render this young lady the greatest possible service by lending her the money for a ticket."

Shelton produced a sovereign, which the young man took. Passing it to the girl, he said:

"A thousand thanks—'voila une belle action'!"

The misgivings which attend on casual charity crowded up in Shelton's mind; he was ashamed of having them and of not having them, and he stole covert looks at this young foreigner, who was now talking to the girl in a language that he did not understand. Though vagabond in essence, the fellow's face showed subtle spirit, a fortitude and irony not found upon the face of normal man, and in turning from it to the other passengers Shelton was conscious of revolt, contempt, and questioning, that he could not define. Leaning back with half-closed eyes, he tried to diagnose this new sensation. He found it disconcerting that the faces and behaviour of his neighbours lacked anything he could grasp and secretly abuse. They continued to converse with admirable and slightly conscious phlegm, yet he knew, as well as if each one had whispered to him privately, that this shady incident had shaken them. Something unsettling to their notions of propriety—something dangerous and destructive of complacency—had occurred, and this was unforgivable. Each had a different way, humorous or philosophic, contemptuous, sour, or sly, of showing this resentment. But by a flash of insight Shelton saw that at the bottom of their minds and of his own the feeling was the same. Because he shared in their resentment he was enraged with them and with himself. He looked at the plump, sleek hand of the woman with the Roman nose. The insulation and complacency of its pale skin, the passive righteousness about its curve, the prim separation from the others of the fat little finger, had acquired a wholly unaccountable importance. It embodied the verdict of his fellow-passengers, the verdict of Society; for he knew that, whether or no repugnant to the well-bred mind, each assemblage of eight persons, even in a third-class carriage, contains the kernel of Society.

But being in love, and recently engaged, Shelton had a right to be immune from discontent of any kind, and he reverted to his mental image of the cool, fair face, quick movements, and the brilliant smile that now in his probationary exile haunted his imagination; he took out his fiancée's last letter, but the voice of the young foreigner addressing him in rapid French caused him to put it back abruptly.

"From what she tells me, sir," he said, bending forward to be out of hearing of the girl, "hers is an unhappy case. I should have been only too glad to help her, but, as you see"—and he made a gesture by which Shelton observed that he had parted from his waistcoat—"I am not Rothschild. She has been abandoned by the man who brought her over to Dover under promise of marriage. Look"—and by a subtle flicker of his eyes he marked how the two ladies had edged away from the French girl "they take good care not to let their garments touch her. They are virtuous women. How fine a thing is virtue, sir! and finer to know you have it, especially when you are never likely to be tempted."

Shelton was unable to repress a smile; and when he smiled his face grew soft.

"Haven't you observed," went on the youthful foreigner, "that those who by temperament and circumstance are worst fitted to pronounce judgment are usually the first to judge? The judgments of Society are always childish, seeing that it's composed for the most part of individuals who have never smelt the fire. And look at this: they who have money run too great a risk of parting with it if they don't accuse the penniless of being rogues and imbeciles."

Shelton was startled, and not only by an outburst of philosophy from an utter stranger in poor clothes, but at this singular wording of his own private thoughts. Stifling his sense of the unusual for the queer attraction this young man inspired, he said:

"I suppose you're a stranger over here?"

"I've been in England seven months, but not yet in London," replied the other. "I count on doing some

good there—it is time!" A bitter and pathetic smile showed for a second on his lips. "It won't be my fault if I fail. You are English, Sir?"

Shelton nodded.

"Forgive my asking; your voice lacks something I've nearly always noticed in the English a kind of —'comment cela s'appelle'—cocksureness, coming from your nation's greatest quality."

"And what is that?" asked Shelton with a smile.

"Complacency," replied the youthful foreigner.

"Complacency!" repeated Shelton; "do you call that a great quality?"

"I should rather say, monsieur, a great defect in what is always a great people. You are certainly the most highly-civilised nation on the earth; you suffer a little from the fact. If I were an English preacher my desire would be to prick the heart of your complacency."

Shelton, leaning back, considered this impertinent suggestion.

"Hum!" he said at last, "you'd be unpopular; I don't know that we're any cockier than other nations."

The young foreigner made a sign as though confirming this opinion.

"In effect," said he, "it is a sufficiently widespread disease. Look at these people here"—and with a rapid glance he pointed to the inmates of the cage,— "very average persons! What have they done to warrant their making a virtuous nose at those who do not walk as they do? That old rustic, perhaps, is different—he never thinks at all—but look at those two occupied with their stupidities about the price of hops, the prospects of potatoes, what George is doing, a thousand things all of that sort—look at their faces; I come of the bourgeoisie myself—have they ever shown proof of any quality that gives them the right to pat themselves upon the back? No fear! Outside potatoes they know nothing, and what they do not understand they dread and they despise—there are millions of that breed. 'Voila la Societe!' The sole quality these people have shown they have is cowardice. I was educated by the Jesuits," he concluded; "it has given me a way of thinking."

Under ordinary circumstances Shelton would have murmured in a well-bred voice, "Ah! quite so," and taken refuge in the columns of the Daily Telegraph. In place of this, for some reason that he did not understand, he looked at the young foreigner, and asked,

"Why do you say all this to me?"

The tramp—for by his boots he could hardly have been better—hesitated.

"When you've travelled like me," he said, as if resolved to speak the truth, "you acquire an instinct in choosing to whom and how you speak. It is necessity that makes the law; if you want to live you must learn all that sort of thing to make face against life."

Shelton, who himself possessed a certain subtlety, could not but observe the complimentary nature of these words. It was like saying "I'm not afraid of you misunderstanding me, and thinking me a rascal just because I study human nature."

"But is there nothing to be done for that poor girl?"

His new acquaintance shrugged his shoulders.

"A broken jug," said he; "—you'll never mend her. She's going to a cousin in London to see if she can get help; you've given her the means of getting there—it's all that you can do. One knows too well what'll become of her."

Shelton said gravely,

"Oh! that's horrible! Could n't she be induced to go back home? I should be glad—"

The foreign vagrant shook his head.

"Mon cher monsieur," he said, "you evidently have not yet had occasion to know what the 'family' is like. 'The family' does not like damaged goods; it will have nothing to say to sons whose hands have dipped into the till or daughters no longer to be married. What the devil would they do with her? Better put a stone about her neck and let her drown at once. All the world is Christian, but Christian and good Samaritan are not quite the same."

Shelton looked at the girl, who was sitting motionless, with her hands crossed on her bag, and a revolt against the unfair ways of life arose within him.

"Yes," said the young foreigner, as if reading all his thoughts, "what's called virtue is nearly always only luck." He rolled his eyes as though to say: "Ah! La, Conventions? Have them by all means—but don't look like peacocks because you are preserving them; it is but cowardice and luck, my friends—but cowardice and luck!"

"Look here," said Shelton, "I'll give her my address, and if she wants to go back to her family she can write to me."

"She'll never go back; she won't have the courage."

Shelton caught the cringing glance of the girl's eyes; in the droop of her lip there was something sensuous, and the conviction that the young man's words were true came over him.

"I had better not give them my private address," he thought, glancing at the faces opposite; and he wrote down the following: "Richard Paramor Shelton, c/o Paramor and Herring, Lincoln's Inn Fields."

"You're very good, sir. My name is Louis Ferrand; no address at present. I'll make her understand; she's half stupefied just now."

Shelton returned to the perusal of his paper, too disturbed to read; the young vagrant's words kept sounding in his ears. He raised his eyes. The plump hand of the lady with the Roman nose still rested on her lap; it had been recased in its black glove with large white stitching. Her frowning gaze was fixed on him suspiciously, as if he had outraged her sense of decency.

"He did n't get anything from me," said the voice of the red-faced man, ending a talk on tax-gatherers. The train whistled loudly, and Shelton reverted to his paper. This time he crossed his legs, determined to enjoy the latest murder; once more he found himself looking at the vagrant's long-nosed, mocking face. "That fellow," he thought, "has seen and felt ten times as much as I, although he must be ten years younger."

He turned for distraction to the landscape, with its April clouds, trim hedgerows, homely coverts. But strange ideas would come, and he was discontented with himself; the conversation he had had, the personality of this young foreigner, disturbed him. It was all as though he had made a start in some fresh journey through the fields of thought.

CHAPTER II

ANTONIA

Five years before the journey just described Shelton had stood one afternoon on the barge of his old college at the end of the summer races. He had been "down" from Oxford for some years, but these Olympian contests still attracted him.

The boats were passing, and in the usual rush to the barge side his arm came in contact with a soft young shoulder. He saw close to him a young girl with fair hair knotted in a ribbon, whose face was eager with excitement. The pointed chin, long neck, the fluffy hair, quick gestures, and the calm strenuousness of her grey-blue eyes, impressed him vividly.

"Oh, we must bump them!" he heard her sigh.

"Do you know my people, Shelton?" said a voice behind his back; and he was granted a touch from the girl's shy, impatient hand, the warmer fingers of a lady with kindly eyes resembling a hare's, the dry hand-clasp of a gentleman with a thin, arched nose, and a quizzical brown face.

"Are you the Mr. Shelton who used to play the 'bones' at Eton?" said the lady. "Oh; we so often heard of you from Bernard! He was your fag, was n't he? How distressin' it is to see these poor boys in the boats!"

"Mother, they like it!" cried the girl.

"Antonia ought to be rowing, herself," said her father, whose name was

Dennant.

Shelton went back with them to their hotel, walking beside Antonia through the Christchurch meadows, telling her details of his college life. He dined with them that evening, and, when he left, had a feeling like that produced by a first glass of champagne.

The Dennants lived at Holm Oaks, within six miles of Oxford, and two days later he drove over and paid a call. Amidst the avocations of reading for the Bar, of cricket, racing, shooting, it but required a whiff of some fresh scent—hay, honeysuckle, clover—to bring Antonia's face before him, with its uncertain colour and its frank, distant eyes. But two years passed before he again saw her. Then, at an invitation from Bernard Dennant, he played cricket for the Manor of Holm Oaks against a neighbouring house; in the evening there was dancing on the lawn. The fair hair was now turned up, but the eyes were quite unchanged. Their steps went together, and they outlasted every other couple on the slippery grass. Thence, perhaps, sprang her respect for him; he was wiry, a little taller than herself, and seemed to talk of things that interested her. He found out she was seventeen, and she found out that he was twenty-nine. The following two years Shelton went to Holm Oaks whenever he was asked; to him this was a period of enchanted games, of cub-hunting, theatricals, and distant sounds of practised music, and during it Antonia's eyes grew more friendly and more curious, and his own more shy, and schooled, more furtive and more ardent. Then came his father's death, a voyage round the world, and that peculiar hour of mixed sensations when, one March morning, abandoning his steamer at Marseilles, he took train for Hyeres.

He found her at one of those exclusive hostelries amongst the pines where the best English go, in common with Americans, Russian princesses, and Jewish families; he would not have been shocked to find her elsewhere, but he would have been surprised. His sunburnt face and the new beard, on which he set some undefined value, apologetically displayed, were scanned by those blue eyes with rapid glances, at once more friendly and less friendly. "Ah!" they seemed to say, "here you are; how glad I am! But—what now?"

He was admitted to their sacred table at the table d'hote, a snowy oblong in an airy alcove, where the Honourable Mrs. Dennant, Miss Dennant, and the Honourable Charlotte Penguin, a maiden aunt with insufficient lungs, sat twice a day in their own atmosphere. A momentary weakness came on Shelton the first time he saw them sitting there at lunch. What was it gave them their look of strange detachment? Mrs. Dennant was bending above a camera.

"I'm afraid, d' you know, it's under-exposed," she said.

"What a pity! The kitten was rather nice!" The maiden aunt, placing the knitting of a red silk tie beside her plate, turned her aspiring, well-bred gaze on Shelton.

"Look, Auntie," said Antonia in her clear, quick voice, "there's the funny little man again!"

"Oh," said the maiden aunt—a smile revealed her upper teeth; she looked for the funny little man (who was not English)—"he's rather nice!"

Shelton did not look for the funny little man; he stole a glance that barely reached Antonia's brow, where her eyebrows took their tiny upward slant at the outer corners, and her hair was still ruffled by a windy walk. From that moment he became her slave.

"Mr. Shelton, do you know anything about these periscopic binoculars?" said Mrs. Dennant's voice; "they're splendid for buildin's, but buildin's are so disappointin'. The thing is to get human interest, isn't it?" and her glance wandered absently past Shelton in search of human interest.

"You haven't put down what you've taken, mother."

From a little leather bag Mrs. Dennant took a little leather book.

"It's so easy to forget what they're about," she said, "that's so annoyin'."

Shelton was not again visited by his uneasiness at their detachment; he accepted them and all their works, for there was something quite sublime about the way that they would leave the dining-room, unconscious that they themselves were funny to all the people they had found so funny while they had been sitting there, and he would follow them out unnecessarily upright and feeling like a fool.

In the ensuing fortnight, chaperoned by the maiden aunt, for Mrs. Dennant disliked driving, he sat opposite to Antonia during many drives; he played sets of tennis with her; but it was in the evenings after dinner—those long evenings on a parquet floor in wicker chairs dragged as far as might be from the heating apparatus—that he seemed so very near her. The community of isolation drew them closer.

In place of a companion he had assumed the part of friend, to whom she could confide all her home-sick aspirations. So that, even when she was sitting silent, a slim, long foot stretched out in front, bending with an air of cool absorption over some pencil sketches which she would not show him—even then, by her very attitude, by the sweet freshness that clung about her, by her quick, offended glances at the strange persons round, she seemed to acknowledge in some secret way that he was necessary. He was far from realising this; his intellectual and observant parts were hypnotised and fascinated even by her failings. The faint freckling across her nose, the slim and virginal severeness of her figure, with its narrow hips and arms, the curve of her long neck—all were added charms. She had the wind and rain look, a taste of home; and over the glaring roads, where the palm-tree shadows lay so black, she seemed to pass like the very image of an English day.

One afternoon he had taken her to play tennis with some friends, and afterwards they strolled on to her favourite view. Down the Toulon road gardens and hills were bathed in the colour of ripe apricot; an evening crispness had stolen on the air; the blood, released from the sun's numbing, ran gladly in the veins. On the right hand of the road was a Frenchman playing bowls. Enormous, busy, pleased, and upright as a soldier, pathetically trotting his vast carcass from end to end, he delighted Shelton. But Antonia threw a single look at the huge creature, and her face expressed disgust. She began running up towards the ruined tower.

Shelton let her keep in front, watching her leap from stone to stone and throw back defiant glances when he pressed behind. She stood at the top, and he looked up at her. Over the world, gloriously spread below, she, like a statue, seemed to rule. The colour was brilliant in her cheeks, her young bosom heaved, her eyes shone, and the flowing droop of her long, full sleeves gave to her poised figure the look of one who flies. He pulled himself up and stood beside her; his heart choked him, all the colour had left his cheeks.

"Antonia," he said, "I love you."

She started, as if his whisper had intruded on her thoughts; but his face must have expressed his hunger, for the resentment in her eyes vanished.

They stood for several minutes without speaking, and then went home. Shelton painfully revolved the riddle of the colour in her face. Had he a chance then? Was it possible? That evening the instinct vouchsafed at times to lovers in place of reason caused him to pack his bag and go to Cannes. On returning, two days later, and approaching the group in the centre of the Winter Garden, the voice of the maiden aunt reading aloud an extract from the Morning Post reached him across the room.

"Don't you think that's rather nice?" he heard her ask, and then: "Oh, here you aye! It's very nice to see you back!"

Shelton slipped into a wicker chair. Antonia looked up quickly from her sketch-book, put out a hand, but did not speak.

He watched her bending head, and his eagerness was changed to gloom. With desperate vivacity he sustained the five intolerable minutes of inquiry, where had he been, what had he been doing? Then once again the maiden aunt commenced her extracts from the Morning Post.

A touch on his sleeve startled him. Antonia was leaning forward; her cheeks were crimson above the pallor of her neck.

"Would you like to see my sketches?"

To Shelton, bending above those sketches, that drawl of the well-bred maiden aunt intoning the well-bred paper was the most pleasant sound that he had ever listened to.

"My dear Dick," Mrs. Dennant said to him a fortnight later, "we would rather, after you leave here, that you don't see each other again until July. Of course I know you count it an engagement and all that, and everybody's been writin' to congratulate you. But Algie thinks you ought to give yourselves a chance. Young people don't always know what they're about, you know; it's not long to wait."

"Three months!" gasped Shelton.

He had to swallow down this pill with what grace he could command. There was no alternative. Antonia had acquiesced in the condition with a queer, grave pleasure, as if she expected it to do her good.

"It'll be something to look forward to, Dick," she said.

He postponed departure as long as possible, and it was not until the end of April that he left for

England. She came alone to see him off. It was drizzling, but her tall, slight figure in the golf cape looked impervious to cold and rain amongst the shivering natives. Desperately he clutched her hand, warm through the wet glove; her smile seemed heartless in its brilliancy. He whispered "You will write?"

"Of course; don't be so stupid, you old Dick!"

She ran forward as the train began to move; her clear "Good-bye!" sounded shrill and hard above the rumble of the wheels. He saw her raise her hand, an umbrella waving, and last of all, vivid still amongst receding shapes, the red spot of her scarlet tam-o'-shanter.

CHAPTER III

A ZOOLOGICAL GARDEN

After his journey up from Dover, Shelton was still fathering his luggage at Charing Cross, when the foreign girl passed him, and, in spite of his desire to say something cheering, he could get nothing out but a shame-faced smile. Her figure vanished, wavering into the hurly-burly; one of his bags had gone astray, and so all thought of her soon faded from his mind. His cab, however, overtook the foreign vagrant marching along towards Pall Mall with a curious, lengthy stride—an observant, disillusioned figure.

The first bustle of installation over, time hung heavy on his hands. July loomed distant, as in some future century; Antonia's eyes beckoned him faintly, hopelessly. She would not even be coming back to England for another month.

. . . I met a young foreigner in the train from Dover [he wrote to her]—a curious sort of person altogether, who seems to have infected me. Everything here has gone flat and unprofitable; the only good things in life are your letters John Noble dined with me yesterday; the poor fellow tried to persuade me to stand for Parliament. Why should I think myself fit to legislate for the unhappy wretches one sees about in the streets? If people's faces are a fair test of their happiness, I'd rather not feel in any way responsible

The streets, in fact, after his long absence in the East, afforded him much food for thought: the curious smugness of the passers-by; the utterly unending bustle; the fearful medley of miserable, over-driven women, and full-fed men, with leering, bull-beef eyes, whom he saw everywhere—in club windows, on their beats, on box seats, on the steps of hotels, discharging dilatory duties; the appalling chaos of hard-eyed, capable dames with defiant clothes, and white-cheeked hunted-looking men; of splendid creatures in their cabs, and cadging creatures in their broken hats—the callousness and the monotony!

One afternoon in May he received this letter couched in French:

3, BLANK ROW WESTMINSTER. MY DEAR SIR,

Excuse me for recalling to your memory the offer of assistance you so kindly made me during the journey from Dover to London, in which I was so fortunate as to travel with a man like you. Having beaten the whole town, ignorant of what wood to make arrows, nearly at the end of my resources, my spirit profoundly discouraged, I venture to avail myself of your permission, knowing your good heart. Since I saw you I have run through all the misfortunes of the calendar, and cannot tell what door is left at which I have not knocked. I presented myself at the business firm with whose name you supplied me, but being unfortunately in rags, they refused to give me your address. Is this not very much in the English character? They told me to write, and said they would forward the letter. I put all my hopes in you. Believe me, my dear sir, (whatever you may decide) Your devoted LOUIS FERRAND.

Shelton looked at the envelope, and saw, that it, bore date a week ago. The face of the young vagrant rose before him, vital, mocking, sensitive; the sound of his quick French buzzed in his ears, and, oddly, the whole whiff of him had a power of raising more vividly than ever his memories of Antonia. It had been at the end of the journey from Hyeres to London that he had met him; that seemed to give the youth a claim.

He took his hat and hurried, to Blank Row. Dismissing his cab at the corner of Victoria Street he with

difficulty found the house in question. It was a doorless place, with stone-flagged corridor—in other words, a "doss-house." By tapping on a sort of ticket-office with a sliding window, he attracted the attention of a blowsy woman with soap-suds on her arms, who informed him that the person he was looking for had gone without leaving his address.

"But isn't there anybody," asked Shelton, "of whom I can make inquiry?"

"Yes; there's a Frenchman." And opening an inner door she bellowed: "Frenchy! Wanted!" and disappeared.

A dried-up, yellow little man, cynical and weary in the face, as if a moral steam-roller had passed over it, answered this call, and stood, sniffing, as it were, at Shelton, on whom he made the singular impression of some little creature in a cage.

"He left here ten days ago, in the company of a mulatto. What do you want with him, if I may ask?" The little man's yellow cheeks were wrinkled with suspicion.

Shelton produced the letter.

"Ah! now I know you"—a pale smile broke through the Frenchman's crow's-feet—"he spoke of you. 'If I can only find him,' he used to say, 'I 'm saved.' I liked that young man; he had ideas."

"Is there no way of getting at him through his consul?"

The Frenchman shook his head.

"Might as well look for diamonds at the bottom of the sea."

"Do you think he will come back here? But by that time I suppose, you'll hardly be here yourself?"

A gleam of amusement played about the Frenchman's teeth:

"I? Oh, yes, sir! Once upon a time I cherished the hope of emerging; I no longer have illusions. I shave these specimens for a living, and shall shave them till the day of judgment. But leave a letter with me by all means; he will come back. There's an overcoat of his here on which he borrowed money—it's worth more. Oh, yes; he will come back—a youth of principle. Leave a letter with me; I'm always here."

Shelton hesitated, but those last three words, "I'm always here," touched him in their simplicity. Nothing more dreadful could be said.

"Can you find me a sheet of paper, then?" he asked; "please keep the change for the trouble I am giving you."

"Thank you," said the Frenchman simply; "he told me that your heart was good. If you don't mind the kitchen, you could write there at your ease."

Shelton wrote his letter at the table of this stone-flagged kitchen in company with an aged, dried-up gentleman; who was muttering to himself; and Shelton tried to avoid attracting his attention, suspecting that he was not sober. Just as he was about to take his leave, however, the old fellow thus accosted him:

"Did you ever go to the dentist, mister?" he said, working at a loose tooth with his shrivelled fingers. "I went to a dentist once, who professed to stop teeth without giving pain, and the beggar did stop my teeth without pain; but did they stay in, those stoppings? No, my bhoj; they came out before you could say Jack Robinson. Now, I shimplify ask you, d'you call that dentistry?" Fixing his eyes on Shelton's collar, which had the misfortune to be high and clean, he resumed with drunken scorn: "Ut's the same all over this pharisaical counthry. Talk of high morality and Anglo-Shaxon civilisation! The world was never at such low ebb! Phwhat's all this morality? Ut stinks of the shop. Look at the condition of Art in this counthry! look at the fools you see upon th' stage! look at the pictures and books that sell! I know what I'm talking about, though I am a sandwich man. Phwhat's the secret of ut all? Shop, my bhoj! Ut don't pay to go below a certain depth! Scratch the skin, but pierce ut—Oh! dear, no! We hate to see the blood fly, eh?"

Shelton stood disconcerted, not knowing if he were expected to reply; but the old gentleman, pursing up his lips, went on:

"Sir, there are no extremes in this fog-smitten land. Do ye think blanks loike me ought to exist? Whoy don't they kill us off? Palliatives—palliatives—and whoy? Because they object to th' extreme course. Look at women: the streets here are a scandal to the world. They won't recognise that they exist—their noses are so dam high! They blink the truth in this middle-class counthry. My bhoj"—and he whispered

confidentially—"ut pays 'em. Eh? you say, why shouldn't they, then?" (But Shelton had not spoken.) "Well, let 'em! let 'em! But don't tell me that'sh morality, don't tell me that'sh civilisation! What can you expect in a counthry where the crimson, emotions are never allowed to smell the air? And what'sh the result? My bhoy, the result is sentiment, a yellow thing with blue spots, like a fungus or a Stilton cheese. Go to the theatre, and see one of these things they call plays. Tell me, are they food for men and women? Why, they're pap for babes and shop-boys! I was a blanky actor moysself!"

Shelton listened with mingled feelings of amusement and dismay, till the old actor, having finished, resumed his crouching posture at the table.

"You don't get dhrunk, I suppose?" he said suddenly—"too much of 'n Englishman, no doubt."

"Very seldom," said Shelton.

"Pity! Think of the pleasures of oblivion! Oi 'm dhrunk every night."

"How long will you last at that rate?"

"There speaks the Englishman! Why should Oi give up me only pleasure to keep me wretched life in? If you've anything left worth the keeping shober for, keep shober by all means; if not, the sooner you are dhrunk the better—that stands to reason."

In the corridor Shelton asked the Frenchman where the old man came from.

"Oh, and Englishman! Yes, yes, from Belfast very drunken old man. You are a drunken nation"—he made a motion with his hands "he no longer eats—no inside left. It is unfortunate—a man of spirit. If you have never seen one of these palaces, monsieur, I shall be happy to show you over it."

Shelton took out his cigarette case.

"Yes, yes," said the Frenchman, making a wry nose and taking a cigarette; "I'm accustomed to it. But you're wise to fumigate the air; one is n't in a harem."

And Shelton felt ashamed of his fastidiousness.

"This," said the guide, leading him up-stairs and opening a door, "is a specimen of the apartments reserved for these princes of the blood." There were four empty beds on iron legs, and, with the air of a showman, the Frenchman twitched away a dingy quilt. "They go out in the mornings, earn enough to make them drunk, sleep it off, and then begin again. That's their life. There are people who think they ought to be reformed. 'Mon cher monsieur', one must face reality a little, even in this country. It would be a hundred times better for these people to spend their time reforming high Society. Your high Society makes all these creatures; there's no harvest without cutting stalks. 'Selon moi'," he continued, putting back the quilt, and dribbling cigarette smoke through his nose, "there's no grand difference between your high Society and these individuals here; both want pleasure, both think only of themselves, which is very natural. One lot have had the luck, the other—well, you see." He shrugged. "A common set! I've been robbed here half a dozen times. If you have new shoes, a good waistcoat, an overcoat, you want eyes in the back of your head. And they are populated! Change your bed, and you'll run all the dangers of not sleeping alone. 'V'la ma clientele! The half of them don't pay me!" He, snapped his yellow sticks of fingers. "A penny for a shave, twopence a cut! 'Quelle vie!' Here," he continued, standing by a bed, "is a gentleman who owes me fivepence. Here's one who was a soldier; he's done for! All brutalised; not one with any courage left! But, believe me, monsieur," he went on, opening another door, "when you come down to houses of this sort you must have a vice; it's as necessary as breath is to the lungs. No matter what, you must have a vice to give you a little solace—'un peu de soulagement'. Ah, yes! before you judge these swine, reflect on life! I've been through it. Monsieur, it is not nice never to know where to get your next meal. Gentlemen who have food in their stomachs, money in their pockets, and know where to get more, they never think. Why should they—'pas de danger!' All these cages are the same. Come down, and you shall see the pantry." He took Shelton through the kitchen, which seemed the only sitting-room of the establishment, to an inner room furnished with dirty cups and saucers, plates, and knives. Another fire was burning there. "We always have hot water," said the Frenchman, "and three times a week they make a fire down there"—he pointed to a cellar—"for our clients to boil their vermin. Oh, yes, we have all the luxuries."

Shelton returned to the kitchen, and directly after took leave of the little Frenchman, who said, with a kind of moral button-holing, as if trying to adopt him as a patron:

"Trust me, monsieur; if he comes back—that young man—he shall have your letter without fail. My name is Carolan Jules Carolan; and I am always at your service."

CHAPTER IV

THE PLAY

Shelton walked away; he had been indulging in a nightmare. "That old actor was drunk," thought he, "and no doubt he was an Irishman; still, there may be truth in what he said. I am a Pharisee, like all the rest who are n't in the pit. My respectability is only luck. What should I have become if I'd been born into his kind of life?" and he stared at a stream of people coming from the Stares, trying to pierce the mask of their serious, complacent faces. If these ladies and gentlemen were put into that pit into which he had been looking, would a single one of them emerge again? But the effort of picturing them there was too much for him; it was too far—too ridiculously far.

One particular couple, a large; fine man and wife, who, in the midst of all the dirt and rumbling hurry, the gloomy, ludicrous, and desperately jovial streets, walked side by side in well-bred silence, had evidently bought some article which pleased them. There was nothing offensive in their manner; they seemed quite unconcerned at the passing of the other people. The man had that fine solidity of shoulder and of waist, the glossy self-possession that belongs to those with horses, guns, and dressing-bags. The wife, her chin comfortably settled in her fur, kept her grey eyes on the ground, and, when she spoke, her even and unruffled voice reached Shelton's ears above all the whirring of the traffic. It was leisurely precise, as if it had never hurried, had never been exhausted, or passionate, or afraid. Their talk, like that of many dozens of fine couples invading London from their country places, was of where to dine, what theatre they should go to, whom they had seen, what they should buy. And Shelton knew that from day's end to end, and even in their bed, these would be the subjects of their conversation. They were the best-bred people of the sort he met in country houses and accepted as of course, with a vague discomfort at the bottom of his soul. Antonia's home, for instance, had been full of them. They were the best-bred people of the sort who supported charities, knew everybody, had clear, calm judgment, and intolerance of all such conduct as seemed to them "impossible," all breaches of morality, such as mistakes of etiquette, such as dishonesty, passion, sympathy (except with a canonised class of objects—the legitimate sufferings, for instance, of their own families and class). How healthy they were! The memory of the doss-house worked in Shelton's mind like poison. He was conscious that in his own groomed figure, in the undemonstrative assurance of his walk, he bore resemblance to the couple he apostrophised. "Ah!" he thought, "how vulgar our refinement is!" But he hardly believed in his own outburst. These people were so well mannered, so well conducted, and so healthy, he could not really understand what irritated him. What was the matter with them? They fulfilled their duties, had good appetites, clear consciences, all the furniture of perfect citizens; they merely lacked-feelers, a loss that, he had read, was suffered by plants and animals which no longer had a need for using them. Some rare national faculty of seeing only the obvious and materially useful had destroyed their power of catching gleams or scents to right or left.

The lady looked up at her husband. The light of quiet, proprietary affection shone in her calm grey eyes, decorously illumining her features slightly reddened by the wind. And the husband looked back at her, calm, practical, protecting. They were very much alike. So doubtless he looked when he presented himself in snowy shirt-sleeves for her to straighten the bow of his white tie; so nightly she would look, standing before the full-length mirror, fixing his gifts upon her bosom. Calm, proprietary, kind! He passed them and walked behind a second less distinguished couple, who manifested a mutual dislike as matter-of-fact and free from nonsense as the unruffled satisfaction of the first; this dislike was just as healthy, and produced in Shelton about the same sensation. It was like knocking at a never-opened door, looking at a circle—couple after couple all the same. No heads, toes, angles of their souls stuck out anywhere. In the sea of their environments they were drowned; no leg braved the air, no arm emerged wet and naked waving at the skies; shop-persons, aristocrats, workmen, officials, they were all respectable. And he himself as respectable as any.

He returned, thus moody, to his rooms and, with the impetuosity which distinguished him when about to do an unwise thing, he seized a pen and poured out before Antonia some of his impressions:

. . . . Mean is the word, darling; we are mean, that's what 's the matter with us, dukes and dustmen, the whole human species—as mean as caterpillars. To secure our own property and our own comfort, to dole out our sympathy according to rule just so that it won't really hurt us, is what we're all after. There's something about human nature that is awfully repulsive, and the healthier people are, the more repulsive they seem to me to be

He paused, biting his pen. Had he one acquaintance who would not counsel him to see a doctor for writing in that style? How would the world go round, how could Society exist, without common-sense, practical ability, and the lack of sympathy?

He looked out of the open window. Down in the street a footman was settling the rug over the knees of a lady in a carriage, and the decorous immovability of both their faces, which were clearly visible to him, was like a portion of some well-oiled engine.

He got up and walked up and down. His rooms, in a narrow square skirting Belgravia, were unchanged since the death of his father had made him a man of means. Selected for their centrality, they were furnished in a very miscellaneous way. They were not bare, but close inspection revealed that everything was damaged, more or less, and there was absolutely nothing that seemed to have an interest taken in it. His goods were accidents, presents, or the haphazard acquisitions of a pressing need. Nothing, of course, was frowsy, but everything was somewhat dusty, as if belonging to a man who never rebuked a servant. Above all, there was nothing that indicated hobbies.

Three days later he had her answer to his letter:

. . . I don't think I understand what you mean by "the healthier people are, the more repulsive they seem to be"; one must be healthy to be perfect, must n't one? I don't like unhealthy people. I had to play on that wretched piano after reading your letter; it made me feel unhappy. I've been having a splendid lot of tennis lately, got the back-handed lifting stroke at last—hurrah! . . .

By the same post, too, came the following note in an autocratic writing:

DEAR BIRD [for this was Shelton's college nickname], My wife has gone down to her people, so I'm 'en garcon' for a few days. If you've nothing better to do, come and dine to-night at seven, and go to the theatre. It's ages since I saw you. Yours as ever, B. M. HALIDOME.

Shelton had nothing better to do, for pleasant were his friend Halidome's well-appointed dinners. At seven, therefore, he went to Chester Square. His friend was in his study, reading Matthew Arnold by the light of an electric lamp. The walls of the room were hung with costly etchings, arranged with solid and unflinching taste; from the carving of the mantel-piece to the binding of the books, from the miraculously-coloured meerschaums to the chased fire-irons, everything displayed an unpretentious luxury, an order and a finish significant of life completely under rule of thumb. Everything had been collected. The collector rose as Shelton entered, a fine figure of a man, clean shaven,—with dark hair, a Roman nose, good eyes, and the rather weighty dignity of attitude which comes from the assurance that one is in the right.

Taking Shelton by the lapel, he drew him into the radius of the lamp, where he examined him, smiling a slow smile. "Glad to see you, old chap. I rather like your beard," he said with genial brusqueness; and nothing, perhaps, could better have summed up his faculty for forming independent judgments which Shelton found so admirable. He made no apology for the smallness of the dinner, which, consisting of eight courses and three wines, served by a butler and one footman, smacked of the same perfection as the furniture; in fact, he never apologised for anything, except with a jovial brusqueness that was worse than the offence. The suave and reasonable weight of his dislikes and his approvals stirred Shelton up to feel ironical and insignificant; but whether from a sense of the solid, humane, and healthy quality of his friend's egoism, or merely from the fact that this friendship had been long in bottle, he did not resent his mixed sensations.

"By the way, I congratulate you, old chap," said Halidome, while driving to the theatre; there was no vulgar hurry about his congratulations, no more than about himself. "They're awfully nice people, the Dennants."

A sense of having had a seal put on his choice came over Shelton.

"Where are you going to live? You ought to come down and live near us; there are some ripping houses to be had down there; it's really a ripping neighbourhood. Have you chucked the Bar? You ought to do something, you know; it'll be fatal for you to have nothing to do. I tell you what, Bird: you ought to stand for the County Council."

But before Shelton had replied they reached the theatre, and their energies were spent in sidling to their stalls. He had time to pass his neighbours in review before the play began. Seated next to him was a lady with large healthy shoulders, displayed with splendid liberality; beyond her a husband, red-cheeked, with drooping, yellow-grey moustache and a bald head; beyond him again two men whom he had known at Eton. One of them had a clean-shaven face, dark hair, and a weather-tanned complexion; his small mouth with its upper lip pushed out above the lower, his eyelids a little drooped over his watchful eyes, gave him a satirical and resolute expression. "I've got hold of your tail, old fellow," he seemed to say, as though he were always busy with the catching of some kind of fox. The other's goggling eyes rested on Shelton with a chaffing smile; his thick, sleek hair, brushed with water and parted in the middle, his neat moustache and admirable waistcoat, suggested the sort of dandyism that

despises women. From his recognition of these old schoolfellows Shelton turned to look at Halidome, who, having cleared his throat, was staring straight before him at the curtain. Antonia's words kept running in her lover's head, "I don't like unhealthy people." Well, all these people, anyway, were healthy; they looked as if they had defied the elements to endow them with a spark of anything but health. Just then the curtain rose.

Slowly, unwillingly, for he was of a trustful disposition, Shelton recognised that this play was one of those masterpieces of the modern drama whose characters were drawn on the principle that men were made for morals rather than morals made by men, and he watched the play unfold with all its careful sandwiching of grave and gay.

A married woman anxious to be ridded of her husband was the pivot of the story, and a number of scenes, ingeniously contrived, with a hundred reasons why this desire was wrong and inexpedient, were revealed to Shelton's eyes. These reasons issued mainly from the mouth of a well-preserved old gentleman who seemed to play the part of a sort of Moral Salesman. He turned to Halidome and whispered:

"Can you stand that old woman?"

His friend fixed his fine eyes on him wonderingly.

"What old woman?"

"Why, the old ass with the platitudes!"

Halidome's countenance grew cold, a little shocked, as though he had been assailed in person.

"Do you mean Pirbright?" he said. "I think he's ripping."

Shelton turned to the play rebuffed; he felt guilty of a breach of manners, sitting as he was in one of his friend's stalls, and he naturally set to work to watch the play more critically than ever. Antonia's words again recurred to him, "I don't like unhealthy people," and they seemed to throw a sudden light upon this play. It was healthy!

The scene was a drawing-room, softly lighted by electric lamps, with a cat (Shelton could not decide whether she was real or not) asleep upon the mat.

The husband, a thick-set, healthy man in evening dress, was drinking off neat whisky. He put down his tumbler, and deliberately struck a match; then with even greater deliberation he lit a gold-tipped cigarette....

Shelton was no inexperienced play-goer. He shifted his elbows, for he felt that something was about to happen; and when the match was pitched into the fire, he leaned forward in his seat. The husband poured more whisky out, drank it at a draught, and walked towards the door; then, turning to the audience as if to admit them to the secret of some tremendous resolution, he puffed at them a puff of smoke. He left the room, returned, and once more filled his glass. A lady now entered, pale of face and dark of eye—his wife. The husband crossed the stage, and stood before the fire, his legs astride, in the attitude which somehow Shelton had felt sure he would assume. He spoke:

"Come in, and shut the door."

Shelton suddenly perceived that he was face to face with one of those dumb moments in which two people declare their inextinguishable hatred—the hatred underlying the sexual intimacy of two ill-assorted creatures—and he was suddenly reminded of a scene he had once witnessed in a restaurant. He remembered with extreme minuteness how the woman and the man had sat facing each other across the narrow patch of white, emblazoned by a candle with cheap shades and a thin green vase with yellow flowers. He remembered the curious scornful anger of their voices, subdued so that only a few words reached him. He remembered the cold loathing in their eyes. And, above all, he remembered his impression that this sort of scene happened between them every other day, and would continue so to happen; and as he put on his overcoat and paid his bill he had asked himself, "Why in the name of decency do they go on living together?" And now he thought, as he listened to the two players wrangling on the stage: "What 's the good of all this talk? There's something here past words."

The curtain came down upon the act, and he looked at the lady next him. She was shrugging her shoulders at her husband, whose face was healthy and offended.

"I do dislike these unhealthy women," he was saying, but catching Shelton's eye he turned square in his seat and sniffed ironically.

The face of Shelton's friend beyond, composed, satirical as ever, was clothed with a mask of scornful curiosity, as if he had been listening to something that had displeased him not a little. The goggle-eyed man was yawning. Shelton turned to Halidome:

"Can you stand this sort of thing?" said he.

"No; I call that scene a bit too hot," replied his friend.

Shelton wriggled; he had meant to say it was not hot enough.

"I'll bet you anything," he said, "I know what's going to happen now. You'll have that old ass—what's his name?—lunching off cutlets and champagne to fortify himself—for a lecture to the wife. He'll show her how unhealthy her feelings are—I know him—and he'll take her hand and say, 'Dear lady, is there anything in this poor world but the good opinion of Society?' and he'll pretend to laugh at himself for saying it; but you'll see perfectly well that the old woman means it. And then he'll put her into a set of circumstances that are n't her own but his version of them, and show her the only way of salvation is to kiss her husband"; and Shelton grinned. "Anyway, I'll bet you anything he takes her hand and says, 'Dear lady.'"

Halidome turned on him the disapproval of his eyes, and again he said,

"I think Pirbright 's ripping!"

But as Shelton had predicted, so it turned out, amidst great applause.

CHAPTER V

THE GOOD CITIZEN

Leaving the theatre, they paused a moment in the hall to don their coats; a stream of people with spotless bosoms eddied round the doors, as if in momentary dread of leaving this hothouse of false morals and emotions for the wet, gusty streets, where human plants thrive and die, human weeds flourish and fade under the fresh, impartial skies. The lights revealed innumerable solemn faces, gleamed innumerable on jewels, on the silk of hats, then passed to whiten a pavement wet with newly-fallen rain, to flare on horses, on the visages of cabmen, and stray, queer objects that do not bear the light.

"Shall we walk?" asked Halidome.

"Has it ever struck you," answered Shelton, "that in a play nowadays there's always a 'Chorus of Scandalmongers' which seems to have acquired the attitude of God?"

Halidome cleared his throat, and there was something portentous in the sound.

"You're so d—d fastidious," was his answer.

"I've a prejudice for keeping the two things separate," went on Shelton. "That ending makes me sick."

"Why?" replied Halidome. "What other end is possible? You don't want a play to leave you with a bad taste in your mouth."

"But this does."

Halidome increased his stride, already much too long; for in his walk, as in all other phases of his life, he found it necessary to be in front.

"How do you mean?" he asked urbanely; "it's better than the woman making a fool of herself."

"I'm thinking of the man."

"What man?"

"The husband."

"What 's the matter with him? He was a bit of a bounder, certainly."

"I can't understand any man wanting to live with a woman who doesn't want him."

Some note of battle in Shelton's voice, rather than the sentiment itself, caused his friend to reply with dignity:

"There's a lot of nonsense talked about that sort of thing. Women don't really care; it's only what's put into their heads."

"That's much the same as saying to a starving man: 'You don't really want anything; it's only what's put into your head!' You are begging the question, my friend."

But nothing was more calculated to annoy Halidome than to tell him he was "begging the question," for he prided himself on being strong in logic.

"That be d—d," he said.

"Not at all, old chap. Here is a case where a woman wants her freedom, and you merely answer that she doesn't want it."

"Women like that are impossible; better leave them out of court."

Shelton pondered this and smiled; he had recollected an acquaintance of his own, who, when his wife had left him, invented the theory that she was mad, and this struck him now as funny. But then he thought: "Poor devil! he was bound to call her mad! If he didn't, it would be confessing himself distasteful; however true, you can't expect a man to consider himself that." But a glance at his friend's eye warned him that he, too, might think his wife mad in such a case.

"Surely," he said, "even if she's his wife, a man's bound to behave like a gentleman."

"Depends on whether she behaves like a lady."

"Does it? I don't see the connection."

Halidome paused in the act of turning the latch-key in his door; there was a rather angry smile in his fine eyes.

"My dear chap," he said, "you're too sentimental altogether."

The word "sentimental" nettled Shelton. "A gentleman either is a gentleman or he is n't; what has it to do with the way other people behave?"

Halidome turned the key in the lock and opened the door into his hall, where the firelight fell on the decanters and huge chairs drawn towards the blaze.

"No, Bird," he said, resuming his urbanity, and gathering his coat-tails in his hands; "it's all very well to talk, but wait until you're married. A man must be master, and show it, too."

An idea occurred to Shelton.

"Look here, Hal," he said: "what should you do if your wife got tired of you?"

The expression on Halidome's face was a mixture of amusement and contempt.

"I don't mean anything personal, of course, but apply the situation to yourself."

Halidome took out a toothpick, used it brusquely, and responded:

"I shouldn't stand any humbug—take her travelling; shake her mind up. She'd soon come round."

"But suppose she really loathed you?"

Halidome cleared his throat; the idea was so obviously indecent. How could anybody loathe him? With great composure, however, regarding Shelton as if he were a forward but amusing child, he answered:

"There are a great many things to be taken into consideration."

"It appears to me," said Shelton, "to be a question of common pride. How can you, ask anything of a woman who doesn't want to give it."

His friend's voice became judicial.

"A man ought not to suffer," he said, poring over his whisky, "because a woman gets hysteria. You have to think of Society, your children, house, money arrangements, a thousand things. It's all very well to talk. How do you like this whisky?"

"The part of the good citizen, in fact," said Shelton, "self-preservation!"

"Common-sense," returned his friend; "I believe in justice before sentiment." He drank, and callously blew smoke at Shelton. "Besides, there are many people with religious views about it."

"It's always seemed to me," said Shelton, "to be quaint that people should assert that marriage gives them the right to 'an eye for an eye,' and call themselves Christians. Did you ever know anybody stand on their rights except out of wounded pride or for the sake of their own comfort? Let them call their reasons what they like, you know as well as I do that it's cant."

"I don't know about that," said Halidome, more and more superior as Shelton grew more warm; "when you stand on your rights, you do it for the sake of Society as well as for your own. If you want to do away with marriage, why don't you say so?"

"But I don't," said Shelton, "is it likely? Why, I'm going—" He stopped without adding the words "to be married myself," for it suddenly occurred to him that the reason was not the most lofty and philosophic in the world. "All I can say is," he went on soberly, "that you can't make a horse drink by driving him. Generosity is the surest way of tightening the knot with people who've any sense of decency; as to the rest, the chief thing is to prevent their breeding."

Halidome smiled.

"You're a rum chap," he said.

Shelton jerked his cigarette into the fire.

"I tell you what"—for late at night a certain power of vision came to him—"it's humbug to talk of doing things for the sake of Society; it's nothing but the instinct to keep our own heads above the water."

But Halidome remained unruffled.

"All right," he said, "call it that. I don't see why I should go to the wall; it wouldn't do any good."

"You admit, then," said Shelton, "that our morality is the sum total of everybody's private instinct of self-preservation?"

Halidome stretched his splendid frame and yawned.

"I don't know," he began, "that I should quite call it that—"

But the compelling complacency of his fine eyes, the dignified posture of his healthy body, the lofty slope of his narrow forehead, the perfectly humane look of his cultivated brutality, struck Shelton as ridiculous.

"Hang it, Hall" he cried, jumping from his chair, "what an old fraud you are! I'll be off."

"No, look here!" said Halidome; the faintest shade of doubt had appeared upon his face; he took Shelton by a lapel: "You're quite wrong—"

"Very likely; good-night, old chap!"

Shelton walked home, letting the spring wind into him. It was Saturday, and he passed many silent couples. In every little patch of shadow he could see two forms standing or sitting close together, and in their presence Words the Impostors seemed to hold their tongues. The wind rustled the buds; the stars, one moment bright as diamonds, vanished the next. In the lower streets a large part of the world was under the influence of drink, but by this Shelton was far from being troubled. It seemed better than Drama, than dressing-bagged men, unruffled women, and padded points of view, better than the immaculate solidity of his friend's possessions.

"So," he reflected, "it's right for every reason, social, religious, and convenient, to inflict one's society where it's not desired. There are obviously advantages about the married state; charming to feel respectable while you're acting in a way that in any other walk of life would bring on you contempt. If old Halidome showed that he was tired of me, and I continued to visit him, he'd think me a bit of a cad;

but if his wife were to tell him she couldn't stand him, he'd still consider himself a perfect gentleman if he persisted in giving her the burden of his society; and he has the cheek to bring religion into it—a religion that says, 'Do unto others!'"

But in this he was unjust to Halidome, forgetting how impossible it was for him to believe that a woman could not stand him. He reached his rooms, and, the more freely to enjoy the clear lamplight, the soft, gusty breeze, and waning turmoil of the streets, waited a moment before entering.

"I wonder," thought he, "if I shall turn out a cad when I marry, like that chap in the play. It's natural. We all want our money's worth, our pound of flesh! Pity we use such fine words—'Society, Religion, Morality.' Humbug!"

He went in, and, throwing his window open, remained there a long time, his figure outlined against the lighted room for the benefit of the dark square below, his hands in his pockets, his head down, a reflective frown about his eyes. A half-intoxicated old ruffian, a policeman, and a man in a straw hat had stopped below, and were holding a palaver.

"Yus," the old ruffian said, "I'm a rackety old blank; but what I say is, if we wus all alike, this would n't be a world!"

They went their way, and before the listener's eyes there rose Antonia's face, with its unruffled brow; Halidome's, all health and dignity; the forehead of the goggle-eyed man, with its line of hair parted in the centre, and brushed across. A light seemed to illumine the plane of their existence, as the electric lamp with the green shade had illumined the pages of the Matthew Arnold; serene before Shelton's vision lay that Elysium, untouched by passion or extremes of any kind, autocratic; complacent, possessive, and well-kept as any Midland landscape. Healthy, wealthy, wise! No room but for perfection, self-preservation, the survival of the fittest! "The part of the good citizen," he thought: "no, if we were all alike, this would n't be a world!"

CHAPTER VI

MARRIAGE SETTLEMENT

"My dear Richard" (wrote Shelton's uncle the next day), "I shall be glad to see you at three o'clock to-morrow afternoon upon the question of your marriage settlement...." At that hour accordingly Shelton made his way to Lincoln's Inn Fields, where in fat black letters the names "Paramor and Herring (Commissioners for Oaths)" were written on the wall of a stone entrance. He ascended the solid steps with nervousness, and by a small red-haired boy was introduced to a back room on the first floor. Here, seated at a table in the very centre, as if he thereby better controlled his universe, a pug-featured gentleman, without a beard, was writing. He paused. "Ow, Mr. Richard!" he said; "glad to see you, sir. Take a chair. Your uncle will be disengaged in 'arf a minute"; and in the tone of his allusion to his employer was the satirical approval that comes with long and faithful service. "He will do everything himself," he went on, screwing up his sly, greenish, honest eyes, "and he 's not a young man."

Shelton never saw his uncle's clerk without marvelling at the prosperity deepening upon his face. In place of the look of harassment which on most faces begins to grow after the age of fifty, his old friend's countenance, as though in sympathy with the nation, had expanded—a little greasily, a little genially, a little coarsely—every time he met it. A contemptuous tolerance for people who were not getting on was spreading beneath its surface; it left each time a deeper feeling that its owner could never be in the wrong.

"I hope you're well, sir," he resumed: "most important for you to have your health now you're going-to"—and, feeling for the delicate way to put it, he involuntarily winked—"to become a family man. We saw it in the paper. My wife said to me the other morning at breakfast: 'Bob, here's a Mr. Richard Paramor Shelton goin' to be married. Is that any relative of your Mr. Shelton?' 'My dear,' I said to her, 'it's the very man!'"

It disquieted Shelton to perceive that his old friend did not pass the whole of his life at that table writing in the centre of the room, but that somewhere (vistas of little grey houses rose before his eyes) he actually lived another life where someone called him "Bob." Bob! And this, too, was a revelation. Bob! Why, of course, it was the only name for him! A bell rang.

"That's your uncle"; and again the head clerk's voice sounded ironical.
"Good-bye, sir."

He seemed to clip off intercourse as one clips off electric light. Shelton left him writing, and preceded the red-haired boy to an enormous room in the front where his uncle waited.

Edmund Paramor was a medium-sized and upright man of seventy, whose brown face was perfectly clean-shaven. His grey, silky hair was brushed in a cock's comb from his fine forehead, bald on the left side. He stood before the hearth facing the room, and his figure had the springy abruptness of men who cannot fatten. There was a certain youthfulness, too, in his eyes, yet they had a look as though he had been through fire; and his mouth curled at the corners in surprising smiles. The room was like the man—morally large, void of red-tape and almost void of furniture; no tin boxes were ranged against the walls, no papers littered up the table; a single bookcase contained a complete edition of the law reports, and resting on the Law Directory was a single red rose in a glass of water. It looked the room of one with a sober magnanimity, who went to the heart of things, despised haggling, and before whose smiles the more immediate kinds of humbug faded.

"Well, Dick," said he, "how's your mother?"

Shelton replied that his mother was all right.

"Tell her that I'm going to sell her Easterns after all, and put into this Brass thing. You can say it's safe, from me."

Shelton made a face.

"Mother," said he, "always believes things are safe."

His uncle looked through him with his keen, half-suffering glance, and up went the corners of his mouth.

"She's splendid," he said.

"Yes," said Shelton, "splendid."

The transaction, however, did not interest him; his uncle's judgment in such matters had a breezy soundness he would never dream of questioning.

"Well, about your settlement"; and, touching a bell three times, Mr. Paramor walked up and down the room. "Bring me the draft of Mr. Richard's marriage settlement."

The stalwart commissionaire reappearing with a document—"Now then, Dick," said Mr. Paramor. "She 's not bringing anything into settlement, I understand; how 's that?"

"I did n't want it," replied Shelton, unaccountably ashamed.

Mr. Paramor's lips quivered; he drew the draft closer, took up a blue pencil, and, squeezing Shelton's arm, began to read. The latter, following his uncle's rapid exposition of the clauses, was relieved when he paused suddenly.

"If you die and she marries again," said Mr. Paramor, "she forfeits her life interest—see?"

"Oh!" said Shelton; "wait a minute, Uncle Ted."

Mr. Paramor waited, biting his pencil; a smile flickered on his mouth, and was decorously subdued. It was Shelton's turn to walk about.

"If she marries again," he repeated to himself.

Mr. Paramor was a keen fisherman; he watched his nephew as he might have watched a fish he had just landed.

"It's very usual," he remarked.

Shelton took another turn.

"She forfeits," thought he; "exactly."

When he was dead, he would have no other way of seeing that she continued to belong to him.

Exactly!

Mr. Paramor's haunting eyes were fastened on his nephew's face.

"Well, my dear," they seemed to say, "what 's the matter?"

Exactly! Why should she have his money if she married again? She would forfeit it. There was comfort in the thought. Shelton came back and carefully reread the clause, to put the thing on a purely business basis, and disguise the real significance of what was passing in his mind.

"If I die and she marries again," he repeated aloud, "she forfeits."

What wiser provision for a man passionately in love could possibly have been devised? His uncle's eye travelled beyond him, humanely turning from the last despairing wriggles of his fish.

"I don't want to tie her," said Shelton suddenly.

The corners of Mr. Paramour's mouth flew up.

"You want the forfeiture out?" he asked.

The blood rushed into Shelton's face; he felt he had been detected in a piece of sentiment.

"Ye-es," he stammered.

"Sure?"

"Quite!" The answer was a little sulky.

Her uncle's pencil descended on the clause, and he resumed the reading of the draft, but Shelton could not follow it; he was too much occupied in considering exactly why Mr. Paramor had been amused, and to do this he was obliged to keep his eyes upon him. Those features, just pleasantly rugged; the springy poise of the figure; the hair neither straight nor curly, neither short nor long; the haunting look of his eyes and the humorous look of his mouth; his clothes neither shabby nor dandified; his serviceable, fine hands; above all, the equability of the hovering blue pencil, conveyed the impression of a perfect balance between heart and head, sensibility and reason, theory and its opposite.

"During coverture," quoted Mr. Paramor, pausing again, "you understand, of course, if you don't get on, and separate, she goes on taking?"

If they didn't get on! Shelton smiled. Mr. Paramor did not smile, and again Shelton had the sense of having knocked up against something poised but firm. He remarked irritably:

"If we 're not living together, all the more reason for her having it."

This time his uncle smiled. It was difficult for Shelton to feel angry at that ironic merriment, with its sudden ending; it was too impersonal to irritate: it was too concerned with human nature.

"If—hum—it came to the other thing," said Mr. Paramor, "the settlement's at an end as far as she 's concerned. We 're bound to look at every case, you know, old boy."

The memory of the play and his conversation with Halidome was still strong in Shelton. He was not one of those who could not face the notion of transferred affections—at a safe distance.

"All right, Uncle Ted," said he. For one mad moment he was attacked by the desire to "throw in" the case of divorce. Would it not be common chivalry to make her independent, able to change her affections if she wished, unhampered by monetary troubles? You only needed to take out the words "during coverture."

Almost anxiously he looked into his uncle's face. There was no meanness there, but neither was there encouragement in that comprehensive brow with its wide sweep of hair. "Quixotism," it seemed to say, "has merits, but—" The room, too, with its wide horizon and tall windows, looking as if it dealt habitually in common-sense, discouraged him. Innumerable men of breeding and the soundest principles must have bought their wives in here. It was perfumed with the atmosphere of wisdom and law-calf. The aroma of Precedent was strong; Shelton swerved his lance, and once more settled down to complete the purchase of his wife.

"I can't conceive what you're—in such a hurry for; you 're not going to be married till the autumn," said Mr. Paramor, finishing at last.

Replacing the blue pencil in the rack, he took the red rose from the glass, and sniffed at it. "Will you

come with me as far as Pall Mall? I 'm going to take an afternoon off; too cold for Lord's, I suppose?"

They walked into the Strand.

"Have you seen this new play of Borogrove's?" asked Shelton, as they passed the theatre to which he had been with Halidome.

"I never go to modern plays," replied Mr. Paramor; "too d—d gloomy."

Shelton glanced at him; he wore his hat rather far back on his head, his eyes haunted the street in front; he had shouldered his umbrella.

"Psychology 's not in your line, Uncle Ted?"

"Is that what they call putting into words things that can't be put in words?"

"The French succeed in doing it," replied Shelton, "and the Russians; why should n't we?"

Mr. Paramor stopped to look in at a fishmonger's.

"What's right for the French and Russians, Dick," he said "is wrong for us. When we begin to be real, we only really begin to be false. I should like to have had the catching of that fellow; let's send him to your mother." He went in and bought a salmon:

"Now, my dear," he continued, as they went on, "do you tell me that it's decent for men and women on the stage to writhe about like eels? Is n't life bad enough already?"

It suddenly struck Shelton that, for all his smile, his uncle's face had a look of crucifixion. It was, perhaps, only the stronger sunlight in the open spaces of Trafalgar Square.

"I don't know," he said; "I think I prefer the truth."

"Bad endings and the rest," said Mr. Paramor, pausing under one of Nelson's lions and taking Shelton by a button. "Truth 's the very devil!"

He stood there, very straight, his eyes haunting his nephew's face; there seemed to Shelton a touching muddle in his optimism—a muddle of tenderness and of intolerance, of truth and second-handedness. Like the lion above him, he seemed to be defying Life to make him look at her.

"No, my dear," he said, handing sixpence to a sweeper; "feelings are snakes! only fit to be kept in bottles with tight corks. You won't come to my club? Well, good-bye, old boy; my love to your mother when you see her"; and turning up the Square, he left Shelton to go on to his own club, feeling that he had parted, not from his uncle, but from the nation of which they were both members by birth and blood and education.

CHAPTER VII

THE CLUB

He went into the library of his club, and took up Burke's Peerage. The words his uncle had said to him on hearing his engagement had been these: "Dennant! Are those the Holm Oaks Dennants? She was a Penguin."

No one who knew Mr. Paramor connected him with snobbery, but there had been an "Ah! that 's right; this is due to us" tone about the saying.

Shelton hunted for the name of Baltimore: "Charles Penguin, fifth Baron Baltimore. Issue: Alice, b. 184-, m. 186-Algernon Dennant, Esq., of Holm Oaks, Cross Eaton, Oxfordshire." He put down the Peerage and took up the 'Landed Gentry': "Dennant, Algernon Cuffe, eldest son of the late Algernon Cuffe Dennant, Esq., J. P., and Irene, 2nd daur. of the Honble. Philip and Lady Lillian March Mallow; ed. Eton and Ch. Ch., Oxford, J. P. for Oxfordshire. Residence, Holm Oaks," etc., etc. Dropping the 'Landed Gentry', he took up a volume of the 'Arabian Nights', which some member had left reposing on the book-rest of his chair, but instead of reading he kept looking round the room. In almost every seat, reading or snoozing, were gentlemen who, in their own estimation, might have married Penguins. For

the first time it struck him with what majestic leisureliness they turned the pages of their books, trifled with their teacups, or lightly snored. Yet no two were alike—a tall man-with dark moustache, thick hair, and red, smooth cheeks; another, bald, with stooping shoulders; a tremendous old buck, with a grey, pointed beard and large white waistcoat; a clean-shaven dapper man past middle age, whose face was like a bird's; a long, sallow, misanthrope; and a sanguine creature fast asleep. Asleep or awake, reading or snoring, fat or thin, hairy or bald, the insulation of their red or pale faces was complete. They were all the creatures of good form. Staring at them or reading the Arabian Nights Shelton spent the time before dinner. He had not been long seated in the dining-room when a distant connection strolled up and took the next table.

"Ah, Shelton! Back? Somebody told me you were goin' round the world."
He scrutinised the menu through his eyeglass. "Clear soup! . . . Read Jellaby's speech? Amusing the way he squashes all those fellows. Best man in the House, he really is."

Shelton paused in the assimilation of asparagus; he, too, had been in the habit of admiring Jellaby, but now he wondered why. The red and shaven face beside him above a broad, pure shirt-front was swollen by good humour; his small, very usual, and hard eyes were fixed introspectively on the successful process of his eating.

"Success!" thought Shelton, suddenly enlightened—"success is what we admire in Jellaby. We all want success Yes," he admitted, "a successful beast."

"Oh!" said his neighbour, "I forgot. You're in the other camp?"

"Not particularly. Where did you get that idea?"

His neighbour looked round negligently.

"Oh," said he, "I somehow thought so"; and Shelton almost heard him adding, "There's something not quite sound about you."

"Why do you admire Jellaby?" he asked.

"Knows his own mind," replied his neighbour; "it 's more than the others do This whitebait is n't fit for cats! Clever fellow, Jellaby! No nonsense about him! Have you ever heard him speak? Awful good sport to watch him sittin' on the Opposition. A poor lot they are!" and he laughed, either from appreciation of Jellaby sitting on a small minority, or from appreciation of the champagne bubbles in his glass.

"Minorities are always depressing," said Shelton dryly.

"Eh? what?"

"I mean," said Shelton, "it's irritating to look at people who have n't a chance of success—fellows who make a mess of things, fanatics, and all that."

His neighbour turned his eyes inquisitively.

"Er—yes, quite," said he; "don't you take mint sauce? It's the best part of lamb, I always think."

The great room with its countless little tables, arranged so that every man might have the support of the gold walls to his back, began to regain its influence on Shelton. How many times had he not sat there, carefully nodding to acquaintances, happy if he got the table he was used to, a paper with the latest racing, and someone to gossip with who was not a bounder; while the sensation of having drunk enough stole over him. Happy! That is, happy as a horse is happy who never leaves his stall.

"Look at poor little Bing puffin' about," said his neighbour, pointing to a weazened, hunchy waiter. "His asthma's aw'f'ly bad; you can hear him wheezin' from the street."

He seemed amused.

"There 's no such thing as moral asthma, I suppose?" said Shelton.

His neighbour dropped his eyeglass.

"Here, take this away; it's overdone;" said he. "Bring me some lamb."

Shelton pushed his table back.

"Good-night," he said; "the Stilton's excellent!"

His neighbour raised his brows, and dropped his eyes again upon his plate.

In the hall Shelton went from force of habit to the weighing-scales and took his weight. "Eleven stone!" he thought; "gone up!" and, clipping a cigar, he sat down in the smoking-room with a novel.

After half an hour he dropped the book. There seemed something rather fatuous about this story, for though it had a thrilling plot, and was full of well-connected people, it had apparently been contrived to throw no light on anything whatever. He looked at the author's name; everyone was highly recommending it. He began thinking, and staring at the fire

Looking up, he saw Antonia's second brother, a young man in the Rifles, bending over him with sunny cheeks and lazy smile, clearly just a little drunk.

"Congratulate you, old chap! I say, what made you grow that b-b-eastly beard?"

Shelton grinned.

"Pillbottle of the Duchess!" read young Dennant, taking up the book. "You been reading that? Rippin', is n't it?"

"Oh, ripping!" replied Shelton.

"Rippin' plot! When you get hold of a novel you don't want any rot about—what d'you call it?—psychology, you want to be amused."

"Rather!" murmured Shelton.

"That's an awfully good bit where the President steals her diamonds
There's old Benjy! Hallo, Benjy!"

"Hallo, Bill, old man!"

This Benjy was a young, clean-shaven creature, whose face and voice and manner were a perfect blend of steel and geniality.

In addition to this young man who was so smooth and hard and cheery, a grey, short-bearded gentleman, with misanthropic eyes, called Stroud, came up; together with another man of Shelton's age, with a moustache and a bald patch the size of a crown-piece, who might be seen in the club any night of the year when there was no racing out of reach of London.

"You know," began young Dennant, "that this bounder"—he slapped the young man Benjy on the knee—"is going to be spliced to-morrow. Miss Casserol—you know the Casserols—Muncaster Gate."

"By Jove!" said Shelton, delighted to be able to say something they would understand.

"Young Champion's the best man, and I 'm the second best. I tell you what, old chap, you 'd better come with me and get your eye in; you won't get such another chance of practice. Benjy 'll give you a card."

"Delighted!" murmured Benjy.

"Where is it?"

"St. Briabas; two-thirty. Come and see how they do the trick. I'll call for you at one; we'll have some lunch and go together"; again he patted Benjy's knee.

Shelton nodded his assent; the piquant callousness of the affair had made him shiver, and furtively he eyed the steely Benjy, whose suavity had never wavered, and who appeared to take a greater interest in some approaching race than in his coming marriage. But Shelton knew from his own sensations that this could not really be the case; it was merely a question of "good form," the conceit of a superior breeding, the duty not to give oneself away. And when in turn he marked the eyes of Stroud fixed on Benjy, under shaggy brows, and the curious greedy glances of the racing man, he felt somehow sorry for him.

"Who 's that fellow with the game leg—I'm always seeing him about?" asked the racing man.

And Shelton saw a sallow man, conspicuous for a want of parting in his hair and a certain restlessness of attitude.

"His name is Bayes," said Stroud; "spends half his time among the Chinese—must have a grudge against them! And now he 's got his leg he can't go there any more."

"Chinese? What does he do to them?"

"Bibles or guns. Don't ask me! An adventurer."

"Looks a bit of a bounder," said the racing man.

Shelton gazed at the twitching eyebrows of old Stroud; he saw at once how it must annoy a man who had a billet in the "Woods and Forests," and plenty of time for "bridge" and gossip at his club, to see these people with untidy lives. A minute later the man with the "game leg" passed close behind his chair, and Shelton perceived at once how intelligible the resentment of his fellow-members was. He had eyes which, not uncommon in this country, looked like fires behind steel bars; he seemed the very kind of man to do all sorts of things that were "bad form," a man who might even go as far as chivalry. He looked straight at Shelton, and his uncompromising glance gave an impression of fierce loneliness; altogether, an improper person to belong to such a club. Shelton remembered the words of an old friend of his father's: "Yes, Dick, all sorts of fellows belong here, and they come here for all sorts o' reasons, and a lot of em come because they've nowhere else to go, poor beggars"; and, glancing from the man with the "game leg" to Stroud, it occurred to Shelton that even he, old Stroud, might be one of these poor beggars. One never knew! A look at Benjy, contained and cheery, restored him. Ah, the lucky devil! He would not have to come here any more! and the thought of the last evening he himself would be spending before long flooded his mind with a sweetness that was almost pain.

"Benjy, I'll play you a hundred up!" said young Bill Dennant.

Stroud and the racing man went to watch the game; Shelton was left once more to reverie.

"Good form!" thought he; "that fellow must be made of steel. They'll go on somewhere; stick about half the night playing poker, or some such foolery."

He crossed over to the window. Rain had begun to fall; the streets looked wild and draughty. The cabmen were putting on their coats. Two women scurried by, huddled under one umbrella, and a thin-clothed, dogged-looking scarecrow lounged past with a surly, desperate step. Shelton, returning to his chair, threaded his way amongst his fellow-members. A procession of old school and college friends came up before his eyes. After all, what had there been in his own education, or theirs, to give them any other standard than this "good form"? What had there been to teach them anything of life? Their imbecility was incredible when you came to think of it. They had all the air of knowing everything, and really they knew nothing—nothing of Nature, Art, or the Emotions; nothing of the bonds that bind all men together. Why, even such words were not "good form"; nothing outside their little circle was "good form." They had a fixed point of view over life because they came of certain schools, and colleges, and regiments! And they were those in charge of the state, of laws, and science, of the army, and religion. Well, it was their system—the system not to start too young, to form healthy fibre, and let the after-life develop it!

"Successful!" he thought, nearly stumbling over a pair of patent-leather boots belonging to a moon-faced, genial-looking member with gold nose-nippers; "oh, it 's successful!"

Somebody came and picked up from the table the very volume which had originally inspired this train of thought, and Shelton could see his solemn pleasure as he read. In the white of his eye there was a torpid and composed abstraction. There was nothing in that book to startle him or make him think.

The moon-faced member with the patent boots came up and began talking of his recent visit to the south of France. He had a scandalous anecdote or two to tell, and his broad face beamed behind his gold nose-nippers; he was a large man with such a store of easy, worldly humour that it was impossible not to appreciate his gossip, he gave so perfect an impression of enjoying life, and doing himself well. "Well, good-night!" he murmured—"An engagement!"—and the certainty he left behind that his engagement must be charming and illicit was pleasant to the soul.

And, slowly taking up his glass, Shelton drank; the sense of well-being was upon him. His superiority to these his fellow-members soothed him. He saw through all the sham of this club life, the meanness of this worship of success, the sham of kid-gloved novelists, "good form," and the terrific decency of our education. It was soothing thus to see through things, soothing thus to be superior; and from the soft recesses of his chair he puffed out smoke and stretched his limbs toward the fire; and the fire burned back at him with a discreet and venerable glow.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WEDDING

Punctual to his word, Bill Dennant called for Shelton at one o'clock.

"I bet old Benjy's feeling a bit cheap," said he, as they got out of their cab at the church door and passed between the crowded files of unelect, whose eyes, so curious and pitiful, devoured them from the pavement.

The ashen face of a woman, with a baby in her arms and two more by her side, looked as eager as if she had never experienced the pangs of ragged matrimony. Shelton went in inexplicably uneasy; the price of his tie was their board and lodging for a week. He followed his future brother-in-law to a pew on the bridegroom's side, for, with intuitive perception of the sexes' endless warfare, each of the opposing parties to this contract had its serried battalion, the arrows of whose suspicion kept glancing across and across the central aisle.

Bill Dennant's eyes began to twinkle.

"There's old Benjy!" he whispered; and Shelton looked at the hero of the day. A subdued pallor was traceable under the weathered uniformity of his shaven face; but the well-bred, artificial smile he bent upon the guests had its wonted steely suavety. About his dress and his neat figure was that studied ease which lifts men from the ruck of common bridegrooms. There were no holes in his armour through which the impertinent might pry.

"Good old Benjy!" whispered young Dennant; "I say, they look a bit short of class, those Casserols."

Shelton, who was acquainted with this family, smiled. The sensuous sanctity all round had begun to influence him. A perfume of flowers and dresses fought with the natural odour of the church; the rustle of whisperings and skirts struck through the native silence of the aisles, and Shelton idly fixed his eyes on a lady in the pew in front; without in the least desiring to make a speculation of this sort, he wondered whether her face was as charming as the lines of her back in their delicate, skin-tight setting of pearl grey; his glance wandered to the chancel with its stacks of flowers, to the grave, business faces of the presiding priests, till the organ began rolling out the wedding march.

"They're off!" whispered young Dermant.

Shelton was conscious of a shiver running through the audience which reminded him of a bullfight he had seen in Spain. The bride came slowly up the aisle. "Antonia will look like that," he thought, "and the church will be filled with people like this . . . She'll be a show to them!" The bride was opposite him now, and by an instinct of common chivalry he turned away his eyes; it seemed to him a shame to look at that downcast head above the silver mystery of her perfect raiment; the modest head full, doubtless, of devotion and pure yearnings; the stately head where no such thought as "How am I looking, this day of all days, before all London?" had ever entered; the proud head, which no such fear as "How am I carrying it off?" could surely be besmirching.

He saw below the surface of this drama played before his eyes, and set his face, as a man might who found himself assisting at a sacrifice. The words fell, unrelenting, on his ears: "For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health—" and opening the Prayer Book he found the Marriage Service, which he had not looked at since he was a boy, and as he read he had some very curious sensations.

All this would soon be happening to himself! He went on reading in a kind of stupor, until aroused by his companion whispering, "No luck!" All around there rose a rustling of skirts; he saw a tall figure mount the pulpit and stand motionless. Massive and high-featured, sunken of eye, he towered, in snowy cambric and a crimson stole, above the blackness of his rostrum; it seemed he had been chosen for his beauty. Shelton was still gazing at the stitching of his gloves, when once again the organ played the Wedding March. All were smiling, and a few were weeping, craning their heads towards the bride. "Carnival of second-hand emotions!" thought Shelton; and he, too, craned his head and brushed his hat. Then, smirking at his friends, he made his way towards the door.

In the Casserols' house he found himself at last going round the presents with the eldest Casserol surviving, a tall girl in pale violet, who had been chief bridesmaid.

"Did n't it go off well, Mr. Shelton?" she was saying

"Oh, awfully!"

"I always think it's so awkward for the man waiting up there for the bride to come."

"Yes," murmured Shelton.

"Don't you think it's smart, the bridesmaids having no hats?"

Shelton had not noticed this improvement, but he agreed.

"That was my idea; I think it 's very chic. They 've had fifteen tea-sets-so dull, is n't it?"

"By Jove!" Shelton hastened to remark.

"Oh, its fearfully useful to have a lot of things you don't want; of course, you change them for those you do."

The whole of London seemed to have disgorged its shops into this room; he looked at Miss Casserol's face, and was greatly struck by the shrewd acquisitiveness of her small eyes.

"Is that your future brother-in-law?" she asked, pointing to Bill Dennant with a little movement of her chin; "I think he's such a bright boy. I want you both to come to dinner, and help to keep things jolly. It's so deadly after a wedding."

And Shelton said they would.

They adjourned to the hall now, to wait for the bride's departure. Her face as she came down the stairs was impassive, gay, with a furtive trouble in the eyes, and once more Shelton had the odd sensation of having sinned against his manhood. Jammed close to him was her old nurse, whose puffy, yellow face was pouting with emotion, while tears rolled from her eyes. She was trying to say something, but in the hubbub her farewell was lost. There was a scamper to the carriage, a flurry of rice and flowers; the shoe was flung against the sharply drawn-up window. Then Benjy's shaven face was seen a moment, bland and steely; the footman folded his arms, and with a solemn crunch the brougham wheels rolled away. "How splendidly it went off!" said a voice on Shelton's right. "She looked a little pale," said a voice on Shelton's left. He put his hand up to his forehead; behind him the old nurse sniffed.

"Dick," said young Dennant in his ear, "this isn't good enough; I vote we bolt."

Shelton assenting, they walked towards the Park; nor could he tell whether the slight nausea he experienced was due to afternoon champagne or to the ceremony that had gone so well.

"What's up with you?" asked Dennant; "you look as glum as any m-monkey."

"Nothing," said Shelton; "I was only thinking what humbugs we all are!"

Bill Dennant stopped in the middle of the crossing, and clapped his future brother-in-law upon the shoulder.

"Oh," said he, "if you're going to talk shop, I 'm off."

CHAPTER IX

THE DINNER

The dinner at the Casserols' was given to those of the bride's friends who had been conspicuous in the day's festivities. Shelton found himself between Miss Casserol and a lady undressed to much the same degree. Opposite sat a man with a single diamond stud, a white waistcoat, black moustache, and hawk-like face. This was, in fact, one of those interesting houses occupied by people of the upper middle class who have imbibed a taste for smart society. Its inhabitants, by nature acquisitive and cautious, economical, tenacious, had learnt to worship the word "smart." The result was a kind of heavy froth, an air of thoroughly domestic vice. In addition to the conventionally fast, Shelton had met there one or two ladies, who, having been divorced, or having yet to be, still maintained their position in "society." Divorced ladies who did not so maintain their place were never to be found, for the Casserols had a great respect for marriage. He had also met there American ladies who were "too amusing"—never, of course, American men, Mesopotamians of the financial or the racing type, and several of

those gentlemen who had been, or were about to be, engaged in a transaction which might or again might not, "come off," and in conduct of an order which might, or again might not be spotted. The line he knew, was always drawn at those in any category who were actually found out, for the value of these ladies and these gentlemen was not their claim to pity—nothing so sentimental—but their "smartness," clothes, jokes, racing tips, their "bridge parties," and their motors.

In sum, the house was one whose fundamental domesticity attracted and sheltered those who were too "smart" to keep their heads for long above the water.

His host, a grey, clean-shaven city man, with a long upper lip, was trying to understand a lady the audacity of whose speech came ringing down the table. Shelton himself had given up the effort with his neighbours, and made love to his dinner, which, surviving the incoherence of the atmosphere, emerged as a work of art. It was with surprise that he found Miss Casserol addressing him.

"I always say that the great thing is to be jolly. If you can't find anything to make you laugh, pretend you do; it's so much 'smarter to be amusin'. Now don't you agree?"

The philosophy seemed excellent.

"We can't all be geniuses, but we can all look jolly."

Shelton hastened to look jolly.

"I tell the governor, when he 's glum, that I shall put up the shutters and leave him. What's the good of mopin' and lookin' miserable? Are you going to the Four-in-Hand Meet? We're making a party. Such fun; all the smart people!"

The splendour of her shoulders, her frizzy hair (clearly not two hours out of the barber's hands), might have made him doubtful; but the frank shrewdness in her eyes, and her carefully clipped tone of voice, were guarantees that she was part of the element at the table which was really quite respectable. He had never realised before how "smart" she was, and with an effort abandoned himself to a sort of gaiety that would have killed a Frenchman.

And when she left him, he reflected upon the expression of her eyes when they rested on a lady opposite, who was a true bird-of-prey. "What is it," their envious, inquisitive glance had seemed to say, "that makes you so really 'smart'?" And while still seeking for the reason, he noticed his host pointing out the merits of his port to the hawk-like man, with a deferential air quite pitiful to see, for the hawk-like man was clearly a "bad hat." What in the name of goodness did these staid bourgeois mean by making up to vice? Was it a craving to be thought distinguished, a dread of being dull, or merely an effect of overfeeding? Again he looked at his host, who had not yet enumerated all the virtues of his port, and again felt sorry for him.

"So you're going to marry Antonia Dennant?" said a voice on his right, with that easy coarseness which is a mark of caste. "Pretty girl! They've a nice place, the, Dennants. D' ye know, you're a lucky feller!"

The speaker was an old baronet, with small eyes, a dusky, ruddy face, and peculiar hail-fellow-well-met expression, at once morose and sly. He was always hard up, but being a man of enterprise knew all the best people, as well as all the worst, so that he dined out every night.

"You're a lucky feller," he repeated; "he's got some deuced good shootin', Dennant! They come too high for me, though; never touched a feather last time I shot there. She's a pretty girl. You 're a lucky feller!"

"I know that," said Shelton humbly.

"Wish I were in your shoes. Who was that sittin' on the other side of you? I'm so dashed short-sighted. Mrs. Carruther? Oh, ay!" An expression which, if he had not been a baronet, would have been a leer, came on his lips.

Shelton felt that he was referring to the leaf in his mental pocket-book covered with the anecdotes, figures, and facts about that lady. "The old ogre means," thought he, "that I'm lucky because his leaf is blank about Antonia." But the old baronet had turned, with his smile, and his sardonic, well-bred air, to listen to a bit of scandal on the other side.

The two men to Shelton's left were talking.

"What! You don't collect anything? How's that? Everybody collects something. I should be lost without my pictures."

"No, I don't collect anything. Given it up; I was too awfully had over my Walkers."

Shelton had expected a more lofty reason; he applied himself to the Madeira in his glass. That, had been "collected" by his host, and its price was going up! You couldn't get it every day; worth two guineas a bottle! How precious the idea that other people couldn't get it, made it seem! Liquid delight; the price was going up! Soon there would be none left; immense! Absolutely no one, then, could drink it!

"Wish I had some of this," said the old baronet, "but I have drunk all mine."

"Poor old chap!" thought Shelton; "after all, he's not a bad old boy. I wish I had his pluck. His liver must be splendid."

The drawing-room was full of people playing a game concerned with horses ridden by jockeys with the latest seat. And Shelton was compelled to help in carrying on this sport till early in the morning. At last he left, exhausted by his animation.

He thought of the wedding; he thought over his dinner and the wine that he had drunk. His mood of satisfaction fizzled out. These people were incapable of being real, even the smartest, even the most respectable; they seemed to weigh their pleasures in the scales and to get the most that could be gotten for their money.

Between the dark, safe houses stretching for miles and miles, his thoughts were of Antonia; and as he reached his rooms he was overtaken by the moment when the town is born again. The first new air had stolen down; the sky was living, but not yet alight; the trees were quivering faintly; no living creature stirred, and nothing spoke except his heart. Suddenly the city seemed to breathe, and Shelton saw that he was not alone; an unconsidered trifle with inferior boots was asleep upon his doorstep.

CHAPTER X

AN ALIEN

The individual on the doorstep had fallen into slumber over his own knees. No greater air of prosperity clung about him than is conveyed by a rusty overcoat and wisps of cloth in place of socks. Shelton endeavoured to pass unseen, but the sleeper woke.

"Ah, it's you, monsieur!" he said "I received your letter this evening, and have lost no time." He looked down at himself and tittered, as though to say, "But what a state I 'm in!"

The young foreigner's condition was indeed more desperate than on the occasion of their first meeting, and Shelton invited him upstairs.

"You can well understand," stammered Ferrand, following his host, "that I did n't want to miss you this time. When one is like this—" and a spasm gripped his face.

"I 'm very glad you came," said Shelton doubtfully.

His visitor's face had a week's growth of reddish beard; the deep tan of his cheeks gave him a robust appearance at variance with the fit of, trembling which had seized on him as soon as he had entered.

"Sit down-sit down," said Shelton; "you 're feeling ill!"

Ferrand smiled. "It's nothing," said he; "bad nourishment."

Shelton left him seated on the edge of an armchair, and brought him in some whisky.

"Clothes," said Ferrand, when he had drunk, "are what I want. These are really not good enough."

The statement was correct, and Shelton, placing some garments in the bath-room, invited his visitor to make himself at home. While the latter, then, was doing this, Shelton enjoyed the luxuries of self-denial, hunting up things he did not want, and laying them in two portmanteaus. This done, he waited for his visitor's return.

The young foreigner at length emerged, unshaved indeed, and innocent of boots, but having in other

respects an air of gratifying affluence.

"This is a little different," he said. "The boots, I fear"—and, pulling down his, or rather Shelton's, socks he exhibited sores the size of half a crown. "One does n't sow without reaping some harvest or another. My stomach has shrunk," he added simply. "To see things one must suffer. 'Voyager, c'est plus fort que moi!'"

Shelton failed to perceive that this was one way of disguising the human animal's natural dislike of work—there was a touch of pathos, a suggestion of God-knows-what-might-have-been, about this fellow.

"I have eaten my illusions," said the young foreigner, smoking a cigarette. "When you've starved a few times, your eyes are opened. 'Savoir, c'est mon metier; mais remarquez ceci, monsieur': It 's not always the intellectuals who succeed."

"When you get a job," said Shelton, "you throw it away, I suppose."

"You accuse me of restlessness? Shall I explain what I think about that? I'm restless because of ambition; I want to reconquer an independent position. I put all my soul into my trials, but as soon as I see there's no future for me in that line, I give it up and go elsewhere. 'Je ne veux pas etre rond de cuir,' breaking my back to economise sixpence a day, and save enough after forty years to drag out the remains of an exhausted existence. That's not in my character." This ingenious paraphrase of the words "I soon get tired of things" he pronounced with an air of letting Shelton into a precious secret.

"Yes; it must be hard," agreed the latter.

Ferrand shrugged his shoulders.

"It's not all butter," he replied; "one is obliged to do things that are not too delicate. There's nothing I pride myself on but frankness."

Like a good chemist, however, he administered what Shelton could stand in a judicious way. "Yes, yes," he seemed to say, "you'd like me to think that you have a perfect knowledge of life: no morality, no prejudices, no illusions; you'd like me to think that you feel yourself on an equality with me, one human animal talking to another, without any barriers of position, money, clothes, or the rest—'ca c'est un peu trop fort!' You're as good an imitation as I 've come across in your class, notwithstanding your unfortunate education, and I 'm grateful to you, but to tell you everything, as it passes through my mind would damage my prospects. You can hardly expect that."

In one of Shelton's old frock-coats he was impressive, with his air of natural, almost sensitive refinement. The room looked as if it were accustomed to him, and more amazing still was the sense of familiarity that he inspired, as, though he were a part of Shelton's soul. It came as a shock to realise that this young foreign vagabond had taken such a place within his thoughts. The pose of his limbs and head, irregular but not ungraceful; his disillusioned lips; the rings of smoke that issued from them—all signified rebellion, and the overthrow of law and order. His thin, lopsided nose, the rapid glances of his goggling, prominent eyes, were subtlety itself; he stood for discontent with the accepted.

"How do I live when I am on the tramp?" he said, "well, there are the consuls. The system is not delicate, but when it's a question of starving, much is permissible; besides, these gentlemen were created for the purpose. There's a coterie of German Jews in Paris living entirely upon consuls." He hesitated for the fraction of a second, and resumed: "Yes, monsieur; if you have papers that fit you, you can try six or seven consuls in a single town. You must know a language or two; but most of these gentlemen are not too well up in the tongues of the country they represent. Obtaining money under false pretences? Well, it is. But what's the difference at bottom between all this honourable crowd of directors, fashionable physicians, employers of labour, ferry-builders, military men, country priests, and consuls themselves perhaps, who take money and give no value for it, and poor devils who do the same at far greater risk? Necessity makes the law. If those gentlemen were in my position, do you think that they would hesitate?"

Shelton's face remaining doubtful, Ferrand went on instantly: "You're right; they would, from fear, not principle. One must be hard pressed before committing these indelicacies. Look deep enough, and you will see what indelicate things are daily done by the respectable for not half so good a reason as the want of meals."

Shelton also took a cigarette—his own income was derived from property for which he gave no value in labour.

"I can give you an instance," said Ferrand, "of what can be done by resolution. One day in a German town, 'etant dans la misere', I decided to try the French consul. Well, as you know, I am a Fleming, but

something had to be screwed out somewhere. He refused to see me; I sat down to wait. After about two hours a voice bellowed: 'Has n't the brute gone?' and my consul appears. 'I 've nothing for fellows like you,' says he; 'clear out!'

"Monsieur,' I answered, 'I am skin and bone; I really must have assistance.'

"Clear out,' he says, 'or the police shall throw you out!'

"I don't budge. Another hour passes, and back he comes again.

"Still here?' says he. 'Fetch a sergeant.'

"The sergeant comes.

"Sergeant,' says the consul, 'turn this creature out.'

"Sergeant,' I say, 'this house is France!' Naturally, I had calculated upon that. In Germany they're not too fond of those who undertake the business of the French.

"He is right,' says the sergeant; 'I can do nothing.'

"You refuse?'

"Absolutely.' And he went away.

"What do you think you'll get by staying?' says my consul.

"I have nothing to eat or drink, and nowhere to sleep,' says I.

"What will you go for?'

"Ten marks.'

"Here, then, get out!' I can tell you, monsieur, one must n't have a thin skin if one wants to exploit consuls."

His yellow fingers slowly rolled the stump of his cigarette, his ironical lips flickered. Shelton thought of his own ignorance of life. He could not recollect ever having gone without a meal.

"I suppose," he said feebly, "you've often starved." For, having always been so well fed, the idea of starvation was attractive.

Ferrand smiled.

"Four days is the longest," said he. "You won't believe that story. . . . It was in Paris, and I had lost my money on the race-course. There was some due from home which didn't come. Four days and nights I lived on water. My clothes were excellent, and I had jewellery; but I never even thought of pawning them. I suffered most from the notion that people might guess my state. You don't recognise me now?"

"How old were you then?" said Shelton.

"Seventeen; it's curious what one's like at that age."

By a flash of insight Shelton saw the well-dressed boy, with sensitive, smooth face, always on the move about the streets of Paris, for fear that people should observe the condition of his stomach. The story was a valuable commentary. His thoughts were brusquely interrupted; looking in Ferrand's face, he saw to his dismay tears rolling down his cheeks.

"I 've suffered too much," he stammered; "what do I care now what becomes of me?"

Shelton was disconcerted; he wished 'to say something sympathetic,' but, being an Englishman, could only turn away his eyes.

"Your turn 's coming," he said at last.

"Ah! when you've lived my life," broke out his visitor, "nothing 's any good. My heart's in rags. Find me anything worth keeping, in this menagerie."

Moved though he was, Shelton wriggled in his chair, a prey to racial instinct, to an ingrained over-tenderness, perhaps, of soul that forbade him from exposing his emotions, and recoiled from the revelation of other people's. He could stand it on the stage, he could stand it in a book, but in real life he could not stand it. When Ferrand had gone off with a portmanteau in each hand, he sat down and

told Antonia:

. . . The poor chap broke down and sat crying like a child; and instead of making me feel sorry, it turned me into stone. The more sympathetic I wanted to be, the gruffer I grew. Is it fear of ridicule, independence, or consideration, for others that prevents one from showing one's feelings?

He went on to tell her of Ferrand's starving four days sooner than face a pawnbroker; and, reading the letter over before addressing it, the faces of the three ladies round their snowy cloth arose before him—Antonia's face, so fair and calm and wind-fresh; her mother's face, a little creased by time and weather; the maiden aunt's somewhat too thin—and they seemed to lean at him, alert and decorous, and the words "That's rather nice!" rang in his ears. He went out to post the letter, and buying a five-shilling order enclosed it to the little barber, Carolan, as a reward for delivering his note to Ferrand. He omitted to send his address with this donation, but whether from delicacy or from caution he could not have said. Beyond doubt, however, on receiving through Ferrand the following reply, he felt ashamed and pleased.

3, BLANK Row, WESTMINSTER.

From every well-born soul humanity is owing. A thousand thanks. I received this morning your postal order; your heart henceforth for me will be placed beyond all praise.

J. CAROLAN.

CHAPTER XI

THE VISION

A few days later he received a letter from Antonia which filled him with excitement:

. . . Aunt Charlotte is ever so much better, so mother thinks we can go home-hurrah! But she says that you and I must keep to our arrangement not to see each other till July. There will be something fine in being so near and having the strength to keep apart . . . All the English are gone. I feel it so empty out here; these people are so funny—all foreign and shallow. Oh, Dick! how splendid to have an ideal to look up to! Write at once to Brewer's Hotel and tell me you think the same . . . We arrive at Charing Cross on Sunday at half-past seven, stay at Brewer's for a couple of nights, and go down on Tuesday to Holm Oaks.

Always your
ANTONIA.

"To-morrow!" he thought; "she's coming tomorrow!" and, leaving his neglected breakfast, he started out to walk off his emotion. His square ran into one of those slums that still rub shoulders with the most distinguished situations, and in it he came upon a little crowd assembled round a dogfight. One of the dogs was being mauled, but the day was muddy, and Shelton, like any well-bred Englishman, had a horror of making himself conspicuous even in a decent cause; he looked for a policeman. One was standing by, to see fair play, and Shelton made appeal to him. The official suggested that he should not have brought out a fighting dog, and advised him to throw cold water over them.

"It is n 't my dog," said Shelton.

"Then I should let 'em be," remarked the policeman with evident surprise.

Shelton appealed indefinitely to the lower orders. The lower orders, however, were afraid of being bitten.

"I would n't meddle with that there job if I was you," said one.

"Nasty breed o' dawg is that."

He was therefore obliged to cast away respectability, spoil his trousers and his gloves, break his umbrella, drop his hat in the mud, and separate the dogs. At the conclusion of the "job," the lower orders said to him in a rather shamefaced spanner:

"Well, I never thought you'd have managed that, sir"; but, like all men of inaction, Shelton after

action was more dangerous.

"D—n it!" he said, "one can't let a dog be killed"; and he marched off, towing the injured dog with his pocket-handkerchief, and looking scornfully at harmless passers-by. Having satisfied for once the smouldering fires within him, he felt entitled to hold a low opinion of these men in the street. "The brutes," he thought, "won't stir a finger to save a poor dumb creature, and as for policemen—" But, growing cooler, he began to see that people weighted down by "honest toil" could not afford to tear their trousers or get a bitten hand, and that even the policeman, though he had looked so like a demi-god, was absolutely made of flesh and blood. He took the dog home, and, sending for a vet., had him sewn up.

He was already tortured by the doubt whether or no he might venture to meet Antonia at the station, and, after sending his servant with the dog to the address marked on its collar, he formed the resolve to go and see his mother, with some vague notion that she might help him to decide. She lived in Kensington, and, crossing the Brompton Road, he was soon amongst that maze of houses into the fibre of whose structure architects have wrought the motto: "Keep what you have—wives, money, a good address, and all the blessings of a moral state!"

Shelton pondered as he passed house after house of such intense respectability that even dogs were known to bark at them. His blood was still too hot; it is amazing what incidents will promote the loftiest philosophy. He had been reading in his favourite review an article eulogising the freedom and expansion which had made the upper middle class so fine a body; and with eyes wandering from side to side he nodded his head ironically. "Expansion and freedom," ran his thoughts: "Freedom and expansion!"

Each house-front was cold and formal, the shell of an owner with from three to five thousand pounds a year, and each one was armoured against the opinion of its neighbours by a sort of daring regularity. "Conscious of my rectitude; and by the strict observance of exactly what is necessary and no more, I am enabled to hold my head up in the world. The person who lives in me has only four thousand two hundred and fifty-five pounds each year, after allowing for the income tax." Such seemed the legend of these houses.

Shelton passed ladies in ones and twos and threes going out shopping, or to classes of drawing, cooking, ambulance. Hardly any men were seen, and they were mostly policemen; but a few disillusioned children were being wheeled towards the Park by fresh-cheeked nurses, accompanied by a great army of hairy or of hairless dogs.

There was something of her brother's large liberality about Mrs. Shelton, a tiny lady with affectionate eyes, warm cheeks, and chilly feet; fond as a cat of a chair by the fire, and full of the sympathy that has no insight. She kissed her son at once with rapture, and, as usual, began to talk of his engagement. For the first time a tremor of doubt ran through her son; his mother's view of it grated on him like the sight of a blue-pink dress; it was too rosy. Her splendid optimism, damped him; it had too little traffic with the reasoning powers.

"What right," he asked himself, "has she to be so certain? It seems to me a kind of blasphemy."

"The dear!" she cooed. "And she is coming back to-morrow? Hurrah! how I long to see her!"

"But you know, mother, we've agreed not to meet again until July."

Mrs. Shelton rocked her foot, and, holding her head on one side like a little bird, looked at her son with shining eyes.

"Dear old Dick!" she said, "how happy you must be!"

Half a century of sympathy with weddings of all sorts—good, bad, indifferent—beamed from her.

"I suppose," said Shelton gloomily, "I ought not to go and see her at the station."

"Cheer up!" replied the mother, and her son felt dreadfully depressed.

That "Cheer-up!"—the panacea which had carried her blind and bright through every evil—was as void of meaning to him as wine without a flavour.

"And how is your sciatica?" he asked.

"Oh, pretty bad," returned his mother; "I expect it's all right, really. Cheer up!" She stretched her little figure, canting her head still more.

"Wonderful woman!" Shelton thought. She had, in fact, like many of her fellow-countrymen, mislaid the darker side of things, and, enjoying the benefits of orthodoxy with an easy conscience, had kept as young in heart as any girl of thirty.

Shelton left her house as doubtful whether he might meet Antonia as when he entered it. He spent a restless afternoon.

The next day—that of her arrival—was a Sunday. He had made Ferrand a promise to go with him to hear a sermon in the slums, and, catching at any diversion which might allay excitement, he fulfilled it. The preacher in question—an amateur, so Ferrand told him—had an original method of distributing the funds that he obtained. To male sheep he gave nothing, to ugly female sheep a very little, to pretty female sheep the rest. Ferrand hazarded an inference, but he was a foreigner. The Englishman preferred to look upon the preacher as guided by a purely abstract love of beauty. His eloquence, at any rate, was unquestionable, and Shelton came out feeling sick.

It was not yet seven o'clock, so, entering an Italian restaurant to kill the half-hour before Antonia's arrival, he ordered a bottle of wine for his companion, a cup of coffee for himself, and, lighting a cigarette, compressed his lips. There was a strange, sweet sinking in his heart. His companion, ignorant of this emotion, drank his wine, crumbled his roll, and blew smoke through his nostrils, glancing caustically at the rows of little tables, the cheap mirrors, the hot, red velvet, the chandeliers. His juicy lips seemed to be murmuring, "Ah! if you only knew of the dirt behind these feathers!" Shelton watched him with disgust. Though his clothes were now so nice, his nails were not quite clean, and his fingertips seemed yellow to the bone. An anaemic waiter in a shirt some four days old, with grease-spots on his garments and a crumpled napkin on his arm, stood leaning an elbow amongst doubtful fruits, and reading an Italian journal. Resting his tired feet in turn, he looked like overwork personified, and when he moved, each limb accused the sordid smartness of the walls. In the far corner sat a lady eating, and, mirrored opposite, her feathered hat, her short, round face, its coat of powder, and dark eyes, gave Shelton a shiver of disgust. His companion's gaze rested long and subtly on her.

"Excuse me, monsieur," he said at length. "I think I know that lady!" And, leaving his host, he crossed the room, bowed, accosted her, and sat down. With Pharisaic delicacy, Shelton refrained from looking. But presently Ferrand came back; the lady rose and left the restaurant; she had been crying. The young foreigner was flushed, his face contorted; he did not touch his wine.

"I was right," he said; "she is the wife of an old friend. I used to know her well."

He was suffering from emotion, but someone less absorbed than Shelton might have noticed a kind of relish in his voice, as though he were savouring life's dishes, and glad to have something new, and spiced with tragic sauce, to set before his patron.

"You can find her story by the hundred in your streets, but nothing hinders these paragons of virtue"—he nodded at the stream of carriages—"from turning up their eyes when they see ladies of her sort pass. She came to London—just three years ago. After a year one of her little boys took fever—the shop was avoided—her husband caught it, and died. There she was, left with two children and everything gone to pay the debts. She tried to get work; no one helped her. There was no money to pay anyone to stay with the children; all the work she could get in the house was not enough to keep them alive. She's not a strong woman. Well, she put the children out to nurse, and went to the streets. The first week was frightful, but now she's used to it—one gets used to anything."

"Can nothing be done?" asked Shelton, startled.

"No," returned his companion. "I know that sort; if they once take to it all's over. They get used to luxury. One does n't part with luxury, after tasting destitution. She tells me she does very nicely; the children are happy; she's able to pay well and see them sometimes. She was a girl of good family, too, who loved her husband, and gave up much for him. What would you have? Three quarters of your virtuous ladies placed in her position would do the same if they had the necessary looks."

It was evident that he felt the shock of this discovery, and Shelton understood that personal acquaintance makes a difference, even in a vagabond.

"This is her beat," said the young foreigner, as they passed the illuminated crescent, where nightly the shadows of hypocrites and women fall; and Shelton went from these comments on Christianity to the station of Charing Cross. There, as he stood waiting in the shadow, his heart was in his mouth; and it struck him as odd that he should have come to this meeting fresh from a vagabond's society.

Presently, amongst the stream of travellers, he saw Antonia. She was close to her mother, who was parleying with a footman; behind them were a maid carrying a bandbox and a porter with the travelling-bags. Antonia's figure, with its throat settled in the collar of her cape, slender, tall, severe,

looked impatient and remote amongst the bustle. Her eyes, shadowed by the journey, glanced eagerly about, welcoming all she saw; a wisp of hair was loose above her ear, her cheeks glowed cold and rosy. She caught sight of Shelton, and bending her neck, stag-like, stood looking at him; a brilliant smile parted her lips, and Shelton trembled. Here was the embodiment of all he had desired for weeks. He could not tell what was behind that smile of hers—passionate aching or only some ideal, some chaste and glacial intangibility. It seemed to be shining past him into the gloomy station. There was no trembling and uncertainty, no rage of possession in that brilliant smile; it had the gleam of fixedness, like the smiling of a star. What did it matter? She was there, beautiful as a young day, and smiling at him; and she was his, only divided from him by a space of time. He took a step; her eyes fell at once, her face regained aloofness; he saw her, encircled by mother, footman, maid, and porter, take her seat and drive away. It was over; she had seen him, she had smiled, but alongside his delight lurked another feeling, and, by a bitter freak, not her face came up before him but the face of that lady in the restaurant—short, round, and powdered, with black-circled eyes. What right had we to scorn them? Had they mothers, footmen, porters, maids? He shivered, but this time with physical disgust; the powdered face with dark-fringed eyes had vanished; the fair, remote figure of the railway-station came back again.

He sat long over dinner, drinking, dreaming; he sat long after, smoking, dreaming, and when at length he drove away, wine and dreams fumed in his brain. The dance of lamps, the cream-cheese moon, the rays of clean wet light on his horse's harness, the jingling of the cab bell, the whirring wheels, the night air and the branches—it was all so good! He threw back the hansom doors to feel the touch of the warm breeze. The crowds on the pavement gave him strange delight; they were like shadows, in some great illusion, happy shadows, thronging, wheeling round the single figure of his world.

CHAPTER XII

ROTTEN ROW

With a headache and a sense of restlessness, hopeful and unhappy, Shelton mounted his hack next morning for a gallop in the Park.

In the sky was mingled all the languor and the violence of the spring. The trees and flowers wore an awakened look in the gleams of light that came stealing down from behind the purple of the clouds. The air was rain-washed, and the passers by seemed to wear an air of tranquil carelessness, as if anxiety were paralysed by their responsibility of the firmament.

Thronged by riders, the Row was all astir.

Near to Hyde Park Corner a figure by the rails caught Shelton's eye. Straight and thin, one shoulder humped a little, as if its owner were reflecting, clothed in a frock-coat and a brown felt hat pinched up in lawless fashion, this figure was so detached from its surroundings that it would have been noticeable anywhere. It belonged to Ferrand, obviously waiting till it was time to breakfast with his patron. Shelton found pleasure in thus observing him unseen, and sat quietly on his horse, hidden behind a tree.

It was just at that spot where riders, unable to get further, are for ever wheeling their horses for another turn; and there Ferrand, the bird of passage, with his head a little to one side, watched them cantering, trotting, wheeling up and down.

Three men walking along the rails were snatching off their hats before a horsewoman at exactly the same angle and with precisely the same air, as though in the modish performance of this ancient rite they were satisfying some instinct very dear to them.

Shelton noted the curl of Ferrand's lip as he watched this sight. "Many thanks, gentlemen," it seemed to say; "in that charming little action you have shown me all your souls."

What a singular gift the fellow had of divesting things and people of their garments, of tearing away their veil of shams, and their phylacteries! Shelton turned and cantered on; his thoughts were with Antonia, and he did not want the glamour stripped away.

He was glancing at the sky, that every moment threatened to discharge a violent shower of rain,

when suddenly he heard his name called from behind, and who should ride up to him on either side but Bill Dennant and—Antonia herself!

They had been galloping; and she was flushed—flushed as when she stood on the old tower at Hyeres, but with a joyful radiance different from the calm and conquering radiance of that other moment. To Shelton's delight they fell into line with him, and all three went galloping along the strip between the trees and rails. The look she gave him seemed to say, "I don't care if it is forbidden!" but she did not speak. He could not take his eyes off her. How lovely she looked, with the resolute curve of her figure, the glimpse of gold under her hat, the glorious colour in her cheeks, as if she had been kissed.

"It 's so splendid to be at home! Let 's go faster, faster!" she cried out.

"Take a pull. We shall get run in," grumbled her brother, with a chuckle.

They reined in round the bend and jogged more soberly down on the far side; still not a word from her to Shelton, and Shelton in his turn spoke only to Bill Dennant. He was afraid to speak to her, for he knew that her mind was dwelling on this chance forbidden meeting in a way quite different from his own.

Approaching Hyde Park Corner, where Ferrand was still standing against the rails, Shelton, who had forgotten his existence, suffered a shock when his eyes fell suddenly on that impassive figure. He was about to raise his hand, when he saw that the young foreigner, noting his instinctive feeling, had at once adapted himself to it. They passed again without a greeting, unless that swift inquisition; followed by unconsciousness in Ferrand's eyes, could so be called. But the feeling of idiotic happiness left Shelton; he grew irritated at this silence. It tantalised him more and more, for Bill Dennant had lagged behind to chatter to a friend; Shelton and Antonia were alone, walking their horses, without a word, not even looking at each other. At one moment he thought of galloping ahead and leaving her, then of breaking the vow of muteness she seemed to be imposing on him, and he kept thinking: "It ought to be either one thing or the other. I can't stand this." Her calmness was getting on his nerves; she seemed to have determined just how far she meant to go, to have fixed cold-bloodedly a limit. In her happy young beauty and radiant coolness she summed up that sane consistent something existing in nine out of ten of the people Shelton knew. "I can't stand it long," he thought, and all of a sudden spoke; but as he did so she frowned and cantered on. When he caught her she was smiling, lifting her face to catch the raindrops which were falling fast. She gave him just a nod, and waved her hand as a sign for him to go; and when he would not, she frowned. He saw Bill Dennant, posting after them, and, seized by a sense of the ridiculous, lifted his hat, and galloped off.

The rain was coming down in torrents now, and every one was scurrying for shelter. He looked back from the bend, and could still make out Antonia riding leisurely, her face upturned, and revelling in the shower. Why had n't she either cut him altogether or taken the sweets the gods had sent? It seemed wicked to have wasted such a chance, and, ploughing back to Hyde Park Corner, he turned his head to see if by any chance she had relented.

His irritation was soon gone, but his longing stayed. Was ever anything so beautiful as she had looked with her face turned to the rain? She seemed to love the rain. It suited her—suited her ever so much better than the sunshine of the South. Yes, she was very English! Puzzling and fretting, he reached his rooms. Ferrand had not arrived, in fact did not turn up that day. His non-appearance afforded Shelton another proof of the delicacy that went hand in hand with the young vagrant's cynicism. In the afternoon he received a note.

. . . You see, Dick [he read], I ought to have cut you; but I felt too crazy—everything seems so jolly at home, even this stuffy old London. Of course, I wanted to talk to you badly—there are heaps of things one can't say by letter—but I should have been sorry afterwards. I told mother. She said I was quite right, but I don't think she took it in. Don't you feel that the only thing that really matters is to have an ideal, and to keep it so safe that you can always look forward and feel that you have been—I can't exactly express my meaning.

Shelton lit a cigarette and frowned. It seemed to him queer that she should set more store by an "ideal" than by the fact that they had met for the first and only time in many weeks.

"I suppose she 's right," he thought—"I suppose she 's right. I ought not to have tried to speak to her!" As a matter of fact, he did not at all feel that she was right.

CHAPTER XIII

AN "AT HOME"

On Tuesday morning he wandered off to Paddington, hoping for a chance view of her on her way down to Holm Oaks; but the sense of the ridiculous, on which he had been nurtured, was strong enough to keep him from actually entering the station and lurking about until she came. With a pang of disappointment he retraced his steps from Praed Street to the Park, and once there tried no further to waylay her. He paid a round of calls in the afternoon, mostly on her relations; and, seeking out Aunt Charlotte, he dolorously related his encounter in the Row. But she found it "rather nice," and on his pressing her with his views, she murmured that it was "quite romantic, don't you know."

"Still, it's very hard," said Shelton; and he went away disconsolate.

As he was dressing for dinner his eye fell on a card announcing the "at home" of one of his own cousins. Her husband was a composer, and he had a vague idea that he would find at the house of a composer some quite unusually free kind of atmosphere. After dining at the club, therefore, he set out for Chelsea. The party was held in a large room on the ground-floor, which was already crowded with people when Shelton entered. They stood or sat about in groups with smiles fixed on their lips, and the light from balloon-like lamps fell in patches on their heads and hands and shoulders. Someone had just finished rendering on the piano a composition of his own. An expert could at once have picked out from amongst the applauding company those who were musicians by profession, for their eyes sparkled, and a certain acidity pervaded their enthusiasm. This freemasonry of professional intolerance flew from one to the other like a breath of unanimity, and the faint shrugging of shoulders was as harmonious as though one of the high windows had been opened suddenly, admitting a draught of chill May air.

Shelton made his way up to his cousin—a fragile, grey-haired woman in black velvet and Venetian lace, whose starry eyes beamed at him, until her duties, after the custom of these social gatherings, obliged her to break off conversation just as it began to interest him. He was passed on to another lady who was already talking to two gentlemen, and, their volubility being greater than his own, he fell into the position of observer. Instead of the profound questions he had somehow expected to hear raised, everybody seemed gossiping, or searching the heart of such topics as where to go this summer, or how to get new servants. Trifling with coffee-cups, they dissected their fellow artists in the same way as his society friends of the other night had dissected the fellow—"smart"; and the varnish on the floor, the pictures, and the piano were reflected on all the faces around. Shelton moved from group to group disconsolate.

A tall, imposing person stood under a Japanese print holding the palm of one hand outspread; his unwieldy trunk and thin legs wobbled in concert to his ingratiating voice.

"War," he was saying, "is not necessary. War is not necessary. I hope I make myself clear. War is not necessary; it depends on nationality, but nationality is not necessary." He inclined his head to one side, "Why do we have nationality? Let us do away with boundaries—let us have the warfare of commerce. If I see France looking at Brighton"—he laid his head upon one side, and beamed at Shelton,—"what do I do? Do I say 'Hands off'? No. 'Take it,' I say—take it!" He archly smiled. "But do you think they would?"

And the softness of his contours fascinated Shelton.

"The soldier," the person underneath the print resumed, "is necessarily on a lower plane—intellectually—oh, intellectually—than the philanthropist. His sufferings are less acute; he enjoys the compensations of advertisement—you admit that?" he breathed persuasively. "For instance—I am quite impersonal—I suffer; but do I talk about it?" But, someone gazing at his well-filled waistcoat, he put his thesis in another form: "I have one acre and one cow, my brother has one acre and one cow: do I seek to take them away from him?"

Shelton hazarded, "Perhaps you 're weaker than your brother."

"Come, come! Take the case of women: now, I consider our marriage laws are barbarous."

For the first time Shelton conceived respect for them; he made a comprehensive gesture, and edged himself into the conversation of another group, for fear of having all his prejudices overturned. Here an Irish sculptor, standing in a curve, was saying furiously, "Bees are not bhumpkins, d—n their sowls!" A Scotch painter, who listened with a curly smile, seemed trying to compromise this proposition, which appeared to have relation to the middle classes; and though agreeing with the Irishman, Shelton felt nervous over his discharge of electricity. Next to them two American ladies, assembled under the tent of hair belonging to a writer of songs, were discussing the emotions aroused in them by Wagner's

operas.

"They produce a strange condition of affairs in me," said the thinner one.

"They 're just divine," said the fatter.

"I don't know if you can call the fleshly lusts divine," replied the thinner, looking into the eyes of the writer of the songs.

Amidst all the hum of voices and the fumes of smoke, a sense of formality was haunting Shelton. Sandwiched between a Dutchman and a Prussian poet, he could understand neither of his neighbours; so, assuming an intelligent expression, he fell to thinking that an assemblage of free spirits is as much bound by the convention of exchanging their ideas as commonplace people are by the convention of having no ideas to traffic in. He could not help wondering whether, in the bulk, they were not just as dependent on each other as the inhabitants of Kensington; whether, like locomotives, they could run at all without these opportunities for blowing off the steam, and what would be left when the steam had all escaped. Somebody ceased playing the violin, and close to him a group began discussing ethics. Aspirations were in the air all round, like a lot of hungry ghosts. He realised that, if tongue be given to them, the flavour vanishes from ideas which haunt the soul.

Again the violinist played.

"Cock gracious!" said the Prussian poet, falling into English as the fiddle ceased: "Colossal! 'Aber, wie er ist grossartig'!"

"Have you read that thing of Besom's?" asked shrill voice behind.

"Oh, my dear fellow! too horrid for words; he ought to be hanged!"

"The man's dreadful," pursued the voice, shriller than ever; "nothing but a volcanic eruption would cure him."

Shelton turned in alarm to look at the authors of these statements. They were two men of letters talking of a third.

"'C'est un grand naif, vous savez,'" said the second speaker.

"These fellows don't exist," resumed the first; his small eyes gleamed with a green light, his whole face had a look as if he gnawed himself. Though not a man of letters, Shelton could not help recognising from those eyes what joy it was to say those words: "These fellows don't exist!"

"Poor Besom! You know what Moulter said . . ."

Shelton turned away, as if he had been too close to one whose hair smelt of cantharides; and, looking round the room, he frowned. With the exception of his cousin, he seemed the only person there of English blood. Americans, Mesopotamians, Irish, Italians, Germans, Scotch, and Russians. He was not contemptuous of them for being foreigners; it was simply that God and the climate had made him different by a skin or so.

But at this point his conclusions were denied (as will sometimes happen) by his introduction to an Englishman—a Major Somebody, who, with smooth hair and blond moustache, neat eyes and neater clothes, seemed a little anxious at his own presence there. Shelton took a liking to him, partly from a fellow-feeling, and partly because of the gentle smile with which he was looking at his wife. Almost before he had said "How do you do?" he was plunged into a discussion on imperialism.

"Admitting all that," said Shelton, "what I hate is the humbug with which we pride ourselves on benefiting the whole world by our so-called civilising methods."

The soldier turned his reasonable eyes.

"But is it humbug?"

Shelton saw his argument in peril. If we really thought it, was it humbug? He replied, however:

"Why should we, a small portion of the world's population, assume that our standards are the proper ones for every kind of race? If it 's not humbug, it 's sheer stupidity."

The soldier, without taking his hands out of his pockets, but by a forward movement of his face showing that he was both sincere and just, re-replied:

"Well, it must be a good sort of stupidity; it makes us the nation that we are."

Shelton felt dazed. The conversation buzzed around him; he heard the smiling prophet saying, "Altruism, altruism," and in his voice a something seemed to murmur, "Oh, I do so hope I make a good impression!"

He looked at the soldier's clear-cut head with its well-opened eyes, the tiny crow's-feet at their corners, the conventional moustache; he envied the certainty of the convictions lying under that well-parted hair.

"I would rather we were men first and then Englishmen," he muttered; "I think it's all a sort of national illusion, and I can't stand illusions."

"If you come to that," said the soldier, "the world lives by illusions. I mean, if you look at history, you'll see that the creation of illusions has always been her business, don't you know."

This Shelton was unable to deny.

"So," continued the soldier (who was evidently a highly cultivated man), "if you admit that movement, labour, progress, and all that have been properly given to building up these illusions, that—er—in fact, they're what you might call—er—the outcome of the world's crescendo," he rushed his voice over this phrase as if ashamed of it—"why do you want to destroy them?"

Shelton thought a moment, then, squeezing his body with his folded arms, replied:

"The past has made us what we are, of course, and cannot be destroyed; but how about the future? It's surely time to let in air. Cathedrals are very fine, and everybody likes the smell of incense; but when they've been for centuries without ventilation you know what the atmosphere gets like."

The soldier smiled.

"By your own admission," he said, "you'll only be creating a fresh set of illusions."

"Yes," answered Shelton, "but at all events they'll be the honest necessities of the present."

The pupils of the soldier's eyes contracted; he evidently felt the conversation slipping into generalities; he answered:

"I can't see how thinking small beer of ourselves is going to do us any good!"

An "At Home!"

Shelton felt in danger of being thought unpractical in giving vent to the remark:

"One must trust one's reason; I never can persuade myself that I believe in what I don't."

A minute later, with a cordial handshake, the soldier left, and Shelton watched his courteous figure shepherding his wife away.

"Dick, may I introduce you to Mr. Wilfrid Curly?" said his cousin's voice behind, and he found his hand being diffidently shaken by a fresh-cheeked youth with a dome-like forehead, who was saying nervously:

"How do you do? Yes, I am very well, thank you!"

He now remembered that when he had first come in he had watched this youth, who had been standing in a corner indulging himself in private smiles. He had an uncommon look, as though he were in love with life—as though he regarded it as a creature to whom one could put questions to the very end—interesting, humorous, earnest questions. He looked diffident, and amiable, and independent, and he, too, was evidently English.

"Are you good at argument?" said Shelton, at a loss for a remark.

The youth smiled, blushed, and, putting back his hair, replied:

"Yes—no—I don't know; I think my brain does n't work fast enough for argument. You know how many motions of the brain-cells go to each remark. It's awfully interesting"; and, bending from the waist in a mathematical position, he extended the palm of one hand, and started to explain.

Shelton stared at the youth's hand, at his frowns and the taps he gave his forehead while he found the expression of his meaning; he was intensely interested. The youth broke off, looked at his watch, and,

blushing brightly, said:

"I 'm afraid I have to go; I have to be at the 'Den' before eleven."

"I must be off, too," said Shelton. Making their adieux together, they sought their hats and coats.

CHAPTER XIV

THE NIGHT CLUB

"May I ask," said Shelton, as he and the youth came out into the chilly street, "What it is you call the 'Den'?"

His companion smilingly answered:

"Oh, the night club. We take it in turns. Thursday is my night. Would you like to come? You see a lot of types. It's only round the corner."

Shelton digested a momentary doubt, and answered:

"Yes, immensely."

They reached the corner house in an angle of a, dismal street, through the open door of which two men had just gone in. Following, they ascended some wooden, fresh-washed stairs, and entered a large boarded room smelling of sawdust, gas, stale coffee, and old clothes. It was furnished with a bagatelle board, two or three wooden tables, some wooden forms, and a wooden bookcase. Seated on these wooden chairs, or standing up, were youths, and older men of the working class, who seemed to Shelton to be peculiarly dejected. One was reading, one against the wall was drinking coffee with a disillusioned air, two were playing chess, and a group of four made a ceaseless clatter with the bagatelle.

A little man in a dark suit, with a pale face, thin lips, and deep-set, black-encircled eyes, who was obviously in charge, came up with an anaemic smile.

"You 're rather late," he said to Curly, and, looking ascetically at Shelton, asked, without waiting for an introduction: "Do you play chess? There 's young Smith wants a game."

A youth with a wooden face, already seated before a fly-blown chess-board, asked him drearily if he would have black or white. Shelton took white; he was oppressed by the virtuous odour of this room.

The little man with the deep blue eyes came up, stood in an uneasy attitude, and watched:

"Your play's improving, young Smith," he said; "I should think you'd be able to give Banks a knight." His eyes rested on Shelton, fanatical and dreary; his monotonous voice was suffering and nasal; he was continually sucking in his lips, as though determined to subdue 'the flesh. "You should come here often," he said to Shelton, as the latter received checkmate; "you 'd get some good practice. We've several very fair players. You're not as good as Jones or Bartholomew," he added to Shelton's opponent, as though he felt it a duty to put the latter in his place. "You ought to come here often," he repeated to Shelton; "we have a lot of very good young fellows"; and, with a touch of complacence, he glanced around the dismal room. "There are not so many here tonight as usual. Where are Toombs and Body?"

Shelton, too, looked anxiously around. He could not help feeling sympathy with Toombs and Body.

"They 're getting slack, I'm afraid," said the little deep-eyed man. "Our principle is to amuse everyone. Excuse me a minute; I see that Carpenter is doing nothing." He crossed over to the man who had been drinking coffee, but Shelton had barely time to glance at his opponent and try to think of a remark, before the little man was back. "Do you know anything about astronomy?" he asked of Shelton. "We have several very interested in astronomy; if you could talk to them a little it would help."

Shelton made a motion of alarm.

"Please-no," said he; "I—"

"I wish you'd come sometimes on Wednesdays; we have most interesting talks, and a service afterwards. We're always anxious to get new blood"; and his eyes searched Shelton's brown, rather tough-looking face, as though trying to see how much blood there was in it. "Young Curly says you 've just been around the world; you could describe your travels."

"May I ask," said Shelton, "how your club is made up?"

Again a look of complacency, and blessed assuagement, visited the little man.

"Oh," he said, "we take anybody, unless there 's anything against them. The Day Society sees to that. Of course, we shouldn't take anyone if they were to report against them. You ought to come to our committee meetings; they're on Mondays at seven. The women's side, too—"

"Thank you," said Shelton; "you 're very kind—"

"We should be pleased," said the little man; and his face seemed to suffer more than ever. "They 're mostly young fellows here to-night, but we have married men, too. Of course, we 're very careful about that," he added hastily, as though he might have injured Shelton's prejudices—"that, and drink, and anything criminal, you know."

"And do you give pecuniary assistance, too?"

"Oh yes," replied the little man; "if you were to come to our committee meetings you would see for yourself. Everything is most carefully gone into; we endeavour to sift the wheat from the chaff."

"I suppose," said Shelton, "you find a great deal of chaff?"

The little man smiled a suffering smile. The twang of his toneless voice sounded a trifle shriller.

"I was obliged to refuse a man to-day—a man and a woman, quite young people, with three small children. He was ill and out of work; but on inquiry we found that they were not man and wife."

There was a slight pause; the little man's eyes were fastened on his nails, and, with an appearance of enjoyment, he began to bite them. Shelton's face had grown a trifle red.

"And what becomes of the woman and the children in a case like that?" he said.

The little man's eyes began to smoulder.

"We make a point of not encouraging sin, of course. Excuse me a minute; I see they've finished bagatelle."

He hurried off, and in a moment the clack of bagatelle began again. He himself was playing with a cold and spurious energy, running after the balls and exhorting the other players, upon whom a wooden acquiescence seemed to fall.

Shelton crossed the room, and went up to young Curly. He was sitting on a bench, smiling to himself his private smiles.

"Are you staying here much longer?" Shelton asked.

Young Curly rose with nervous haste.

"I 'm afraid," he said, "there 's nobody very interesting here to-night."

"Oh, not at all!" said Shelton; "on the contrary. Only I 've had a rather tiring day, and somehow I don't feel up to the standard here."

His new acquaintance smiled.

"Oh, really! do you think—that is—"

But he had not time to finish before the clack of bagatelle balls ceased, and the voice of the little deep-eyed man was heard saying: "Anybody who wants a book will put his name down. There will be the usual prayer-meeting on Wednesday next. Will you all go quietly? I am going to turn the lights out."

One gas-jet vanished, and the remaining jet flared suddenly. By its harder glare the wooden room looked harder too, and disenchanting. The figures of its occupants began filing through the door. The little man was left in the centre of the room, his deep eyes smouldering upon the backs of the retreating members, his thumb and finger raised to the turncock of the metre.

"Do you know this part?" asked young Curly as they emerged into the street. "It 's really jolly; one of the darkest bits in London—it is really. If you care, I can take you through an awfully dangerous place where the police never go." He seemed so anxious for the honour that Shelton was loath to disappoint him. "I come here pretty often," he went on, as they ascended a sort of alley rambling darkly between a wall and row of houses.

"Why?" asked Shelton; "it does n't smell too nice."

The young man threw up his nose and sniffed, as if eager to add any new scent that might be about to his knowledge of life.

"No, that's one of the reasons, you know," he said; "one must find out. The darkness is jolly, too; anything might happen here. Last week there was a murder; there 's always the chance of one."

Shelton stared; but the charge of morbidness would not lie against this fresh-cheeked stripling.

"There's a splendid drain just here," his guide resumed; "the people are dying like flies of typhoid in those three houses"; and under the first light he turned his grave, cherubic face to indicate the houses. "If we were in the East End, I could show you other places quite as good. There's a coffee-stall keeper in one that knows all the thieves in London; he 's a splendid type, but," he added, looking a little anxiously at Shelton, "it might n't be safe for you. With me it's different; they 're beginning to know me. I've nothing to take, you see."

"I'm afraid it can't be to-night," said Shelton; "I must get back."

"Do you mind if I walk with you? It's so jolly now the stars are out."

"Delighted," said Shelton; "do you often go to that club?"

His companion raised his hat, and ran his fingers through his hair.

"They 're rather too high-class for me," he said. "I like to go where you can see people eat—school treats, or somewhere in the country. It does one good to see them eat. They don't get enough, you see, as a rule, to make bone; it's all used up for brain and muscle. There are some places in the winter where they give them bread and cocoa; I like to go to those."

"I went once," said Shelton, "but I felt ashamed for putting my nose in."

"Oh, they don't mind; most of them are half-dead with cold, you know. You see splendid types; lots of dipsomaniacs . . . It 's useful to me," he went on as they passed a police-station, "to walk about at night; one can take so much more notice. I had a jolly night last week in Hyde Park; a chance to study human nature there."

"And do you find it interesting?" asked Shelton.

His companion smiled.

"Awfully," he replied; "I saw a fellow pick three pockets."

"What did you do?"

"I had a jolly talk with him."

Shelton thought of the little deep-eyed man; who made a point of not encouraging sin.

"He was one of the professionals from Notting Hill, you know; told me his life. Never had a chance, of course. The most interesting part was telling him I 'd seen him pick three pockets—like creeping into a cave, when you can't tell what 's inside."

"Well?"

"He showed me what he 'd got—only fivepence halfpenny."

"And what became of your friend?" asked Shelton.

"Oh, went off; he had a splendidly low forehead."

They had reached Shelton's rooms.

"Will you come in," said the latter, "and have a drink?"

The youth smiled, blushed, and shook his head.

"No, thank you," he said; "I have to walk to Whitechapel. I 'm living on porridge now; splendid stuff for making bone. I generally live on porridge for a week at the end of every month. It 's the best diet if you're hard up"; once more blushing and smiling, he was gone.

Shelton went upstairs and sat down on his bed. He felt a little miserable. Sitting there, slowly pulling out the ends of his white tie, disconsolate, he had a vision of Antonia with her gaze fixed wonderingly on him. And this wonder of hers came as a revelation—just as that morning, when, looking from his window, he had seen a passer-by stop suddenly and scratch his leg; and it had come upon him in a flash that that man had thoughts and feelings of his own. He would never know what Antonia really felt and thought. "Till I saw her at the station, I did n't know how much I loved her or how little I knew her"; and, sighing deeply, he hurried into bed.

CHAPTER XV

POLE TO POLE

The waiting in London for July to come was daily more unbearable to Shelton, and if it had not been for Ferrand, who still came to breakfast, he would have deserted the Metropolis. On June first the latter presented himself rather later than was his custom, and announced that, through a friend, he had heard of a position as interpreter to an hotel at Folkestone.

"If I had money to face the first necessities," he said, swiftly turning over a collection of smeared papers with his yellow fingers, as if searching for his own identity, "I 'd leave today. This London blackens my spirit."

"Are you certain to get this place," asked Shelton.

"I think so," the young foreigner replied; "I 've got some good enough recommendations."

Shelton could not help a dubious glance at the papers in his hand. A hurt look passed on to Ferrand's curly lips beneath his nascent red moustache.

"You mean that to have false papers is as bad as theft. No, no; I shall never be a thief—I 've had too many opportunities," said he, with pride and bitterness. "That's not in my character. I never do harm to anyone. This"—he touched the papers—"is not delicate, but it does harm to no one. If you have no money you must have papers; they stand between you and starvation. Society, has an excellent eye for the helpless—it never treads on people unless they 're really down." He looked at Shelton.

"You 've made me what I am, amongst you," he seemed to say; "now put up with me!"

"But there are always the workhouses," Shelton remarked at last.

"Workhouses!" returned Ferrand; "certainly there are—regular palaces: I will tell you one thing: I've never been in places so discouraging as your workhouses; they take one's very heart out."

"I always understood," said Shelton coldly; "that our system was better than that of other countries."

Ferrand leaned over in his chair, an elbow on his knee, his favourite attitude when particularly certain of his point.

"Well," he replied, "it 's always permissible to think well of your own country. But, frankly, I've come out of those places here with little strength and no heart at all, and I can tell you why." His lips lost their bitterness, and he became an artist expressing the result of his experience. "You spend your money freely, you have fine buildings, self-respecting officers, but you lack the spirit of hospitality. The reason is plain; you have a horror of the needy. You invite us—and when we come you treat us justly enough, but as if we were numbers, criminals, beneath contempt—as if we had inflicted a personal injury on you; and when we get out again, we are naturally degraded."

Shelton bit his lips.

"How much money will you want for your ticket, and to make a start?" he asked.

The nervous gesture escaping Ferrand at this juncture betrayed how far the most independent thinkers are dependent when they have no money in their pockets. He took the note that Shelton proffered him.

"A thousand thanks," said he; "I shall never forget what you have done for me"; and Shelton could not help feeling that there was true emotion behind his titter of farewell.

He stood at the window watching Ferrand start into the world again; then looked back at his own comfortable room, with the number of things that had accumulated somehow—the photographs of countless friends, the old arm-chairs, the stock of coloured pipes. Into him restlessness had passed with the farewell clasp of the foreigner's damp hand. To wait about in London was unbearable.

He took his hat, and, heedless of direction, walked towards the river. It was a clear, bright day, with a bleak wind driving showers before it. During one of such Shelton found himself in Little Blank Street. "I wonder how that little Frenchman that I saw is getting on!" he thought. On a fine day he would probably have passed by on the other side; he now entered and tapped upon the wicket.

No. 3 Little Blank Street had abated nothing of its stone-flagged dreariness; the same blowsy woman answered his inquiry. Yes, Carolan was always in; you could never catch him out—seemed afraid to go into the street! To her call the little Frenchman made his appearance as punctually as if he had been the rabbit of a conjurer. His face was as yellow as a guinea.

"Ah! it's you, monsieur!" he said.

"Yes," said Shelton; "and how are you?"

"It 's five days since I came out of hospital," muttered the little Frenchman, tapping on his chest; "a crisis of this bad atmosphere. I live here, shut up in a box; it does me harm, being from the South. If there's anything I can do for you, monsieur, it will give me pleasure."

"Nothing," replied Shelton, "I was just passing, and thought I should like to hear how you were getting on."

"Come into the kitchen,—monsieur, there is nobody in there. 'Brr! Il fait un froid etonnant!'"

"What sort of customers have you just now?" asked Shelton, as they passed into the kitchen.

"Always the same clientele," replied the little man; "not so numerous, of course, it being summer."

"Could n't you find anything better than this to do?"

The barber's crow's-feet radiated irony.

"When I first came to London," said he, "I secured an engagement at one of your public institutions. I thought my fortune made. Imagine, monsieur, in that sacred place I was obliged to shave at the rate of ten a penny! Here, it's true, they don't pay me half the time; but when I'm paid, I 'm paid. In this, climate, and being 'poitrinaire', one doesn't make experiments. I shall finish my days here. Have you seen that young man who interested you? There 's another! He has spirit, as I had once—'il fait de la philosophie', as I do—and you will see, monsieur, it will finish him. In this world what you want is to have no spirit. Spirit ruins you."

Shelton looked sideways at the little man with his sardonic, yellow, half-dead face, and the incongruity of the word "spirit" in his mouth struck him so sharply that he smiled a smile with more pity in it than any burst of tears.

"Shall we 'sit down?" he said, offering a cigarette.

"Merci, monsieur, it is always a pleasure to smoke a good cigarette. You remember, that old actor who gave you a Jeremiad? Well, he's dead. I was the only one at his bedside; 'un vrai drole'. He was another who had spirit. And you will see, monsieur, that young man in whom you take an interest, he'll die in a hospital, or in some hole or other, or even on the highroad; having closed his eyes once too often some cold night; and all because he has something in him which will not accept things as they are, believing always that they should be better. 'Il n'y a riens de plus tragique!'"

"According to you, then," said Shelton—and the conversation seemed to him of a sudden to have taken too personal a turn—"rebellion of any sort is fatal."

"Ah!" replied the little man, with the eagerness of one whose ideal it is to sit under the awning of a cafe, and talk life upside down, "you pose me a great problem there! If one makes rebellion; it is always probable that one will do no good to any one and harm one's self. The law of the majority arranges that.

But I would draw your attention to this"—and he paused; as if it were a real discovery to blow smoke through his nose—"if you rebel it is in all likelihood because you are forced by your nature to rebel; this is one of the most certain things in life. In any case, it is necessary to avoid falling between two stools—which is unpardonable," he ended with complacency.

Shelton thought he had never seen a man who looked more completely as if he had fallen between two stools, and he had inspiration enough to feel that the little barber's intellectual rebellion and the action logically required by it had no more than a bowing acquaintanceship.

"By nature," went on the little man, "I am an optimist; it is in consequence of this that I now make pessimism. I have always had ideals; seeing myself cut off from them for ever, I must complain; to complain, monsieur, is very sweet!"

Shelton wondered what these ideals had been, but had no answer ready; so he nodded, and again held out his cigarettes, for, like a true Southerner, the little man had thrown the first away, half smoked.

"The greatest pleasure in life," continued the Frenchman, with a bow, "is to talk a little to a being who is capable of understanding you. At present we have no one here, now that that old actor's dead. Ah! there was a man who was rebellion incarnate! He made rebellion as other men make money, 'c'etait son metier'; when he was no longer capable of active revolution, he made it getting drunk. At the last this was his only way of protesting against Society. An interesting personality, 'je le regrette beaucoup'. But, as you see, he died in great distress, without a soul to wave him farewell, because as you can well understand, monsieur, I don't count myself. He died drunk. 'C'etait un homme!'"

Shelton had continued staring kindly at the little man; the barber added hastily:

"It's difficult to make an end like that one has moments of weakness."

"Yes," assented Shelton, "one has indeed."

The little barber looked at him with cynical discretion.

"Oh!" he said, "it 's to the destitute that such things are important. When one has money, all these matters—"

He shrugged his shoulders. A smile had lodged amongst his crow's-feet; he waved his hand as though to end the subject.

A sense of having been exposed came over Shelton.

"You think, then," said he, "that discontent is peculiar to the destitute?"

"Monsieur," replied the little barber, "a plutocrat knows too well that if he mixes in that 'galere' there 's not a dog in the streets more lost than he."

Shelton rose.

"The rain is over. I hope you 'll soon be better; perhaps you 'll accept this in memory of that old actor," and he slipped a sovereign into the little Frenchman's hand.

The latter bowed.

"Whenever you are passing, monsieur," he said eagerly, "I shall be charmed to see you."

And Shelton walked away. "'Not a dog in the streets more lost,'" thought he; "now what did he mean by that?"

Something of that "lost dog" feeling had gripped his spirit. Another month of waiting would kill all the savour of anticipation, might even kill his love. In the excitement of his senses and his nerves, caused by this strain of waiting, everything seemed too vivid; all was beyond life size; like Art—whose truths; too strong for daily use, are thus, unpopular with healthy people. As will the, bones in a worn face, the spirit underlying things had reached the surface; the meanness and intolerable measure of hard facts, were too apparent. Some craving for help, some instinct, drove him into Kensington, for he found himself before his, mother's house. Providence seemed bent on flinging him from pole to pole.

Mrs. Shelton was in town; and, though it was the first of June, sat warming her feet before a fire; her face, with its pleasant colour, was crow's-footed like the little barber's, but from optimism, not rebellion. She, smiled when she saw her son; and the wrinkles round her eyes twinkled, with vitality.

"Well, my dear boy," she said, "it's lovely to see you. And how is that sweet girl?"

"Very well, thank you," replied Shelton.

"She must be such a dear!"

"Mother," stammered Shelton, "I must give it up."

"Give it up? My dear Dick, give what up? You look quite worried. Come and sit down, and have a cosy chat. Cheer up!" And Mrs. Shelton; with her head askew, gazed at her son quite irrepressibly.

"Mother," said Shelton, who, confronted by her optimism, had never, since his time of trial began, felt so wretchedly dejected, "I can't go on waiting about like this."

"My dear boy, what is the matter?";

"Everything is wrong!"

"Wrong?" cried Mrs. Shelton. "Come, tell me all, about it!"

But Shelton, shook his head.

"You surely have not had a quarrel——"

Mrs. Shelton stopped; the question seemed so vulgar—one might have asked it of a groom.

"No," said Shelton, and his answer sounded like a groan.

"You know, my dear old Dick," murmured his mother, "it seems a little mad."

"I know it seems mad."

"Come!" said Mrs. Shelton, taking his hand between her own; "you never used to be like this."

"No," said Shelton, with a laugh; "I never used to be like this."

Mrs. Shelton snuggled in her Chuda shawl.

"Oh," she said, with cheery sympathy, "I know exactly how you feel!"

Shelton, holding his head, stared at the fire, which played and bubbled like his mother's face.

"But you're so fond of each other," she began again. "Such a sweet girl!"

"You don't understand," muttered Shelton gloomily; "it 's not her—it's nothing—it's—myself!"

Mrs. Shelton again seized his hand, and this time pressed it to her soft, warm cheek, that had lost the elasticity of youth.

"Oh!" she cried again; "I understand. I know exactly what you 're feeling." But Shelton saw from the fixed beam in her eyes that she had not an inkling. To do him justice, he was not so foolish as to try to give her one. Mrs. Shelton sighed. "It would be so lovely if you could wake up to-morrow and think differently. If I were you, my dear, I would have a good long walk, and then a Turkish bath; and then I would just write to her, and tell her all about it, and you'll see how beautifully it'll all come straight"; and in the enthusiasm of advice Mrs. Shelton rose, and, with a faint stretch of her tiny figure, still so young, clasped her hands together. "Now do, that 's a dear old Dick! You 'll just see how lovely it'll be!" Shelton smiled; he had not the heart to chase away this vision. "And give her my warmest love, and tell her I 'm longing for the wedding. Come, now, my dear boy, promise me that's what you 'll do."

And Shelton said: "I'll think about it."

Mrs. Shelton had taken up her stand with one foot on the fender, in spite of her sciatica.

"Cheer up!" she cried; her eyes beamed as if intoxicated by her sympathy.

Wonderful woman! The uncomplicated optimism that carried her through good and ill had not descended to her son.

From pole to pole he had been thrown that day, from the French barber, whose intellect accepted nothing without carping, and whose little fingers worked all day, to save himself from dying out, to his own mother, whose intellect accepted anything presented with sufficient glow, but who, until she died, would never stir a finger. When Shelton reached his rooms, he wrote to Antonia:

I can't wait about in London any longer; I am going down to Bideford to start a walking tour. I shall work my way to Oxford, and stay there till I may come to Holm Oaks. I shall send you my address; do write as usual.

He collected all the photographs he had of her—amateur groups, taken by Mrs. Dennant—and packed them in the pocket of his shooting-jacket. There was one where she was standing just below her little brother, who was perched upon a wall. In her half-closed eyes, round throat, and softly tilted chin, there was something cool and watchful, protecting the ragamuffin up above her head. This he kept apart to be looked at daily, as a man says his prayers.

PART II

THE COUNTRY

CHAPTER XVI

THE INDIAN CIVILIAN

One morning then, a week later, Shelton found himself at the walls of Princetown Prison.

He had seen this lugubrious stone cage before. But the magic of his morning walk across the moor, the sight of the pagan tors, the songs of the last cuckoo, had unprepared him for that dreary building. He left the street, and, entering the fosse, began a circuit, scanning the walls with morbid fascination.

This, then, was the system by which men enforced the will of the majority, and it was suddenly borne in on him that all the ideas and maxims which his Christian countrymen believed themselves to be fulfilling daily were stultified in every cellule of the social honeycomb. Such teachings as "He that is without sin amongst you" had been pronounced unpractical by peers and judges, bishops, statesmen, merchants, husbands—in fact, by every truly Christian person in the country.

"Yes," thought Shelton, as if he had found out something new, "the more Christian the nation, the less it has to do with the Christian spirit."

Society was a charitable organisation, giving nothing for nothing, little for sixpence; and it was only fear that forced it to give at all!

He took a seat on a wall, and began to watch a warder who was slowly paring a last year's apple. The expression of his face, the way he stood with his solid legs apart, his head poked forward and his lower jaw thrust out, all made him a perfect pillar of Society. He was undisturbed by Shelton's scrutiny, watching the rind coil down below the apple; until in a springing spiral it fell on the path and collapsed like a toy snake. He took a bite; his teeth were jagged; and his mouth immense. It was obvious that he considered himself a most superior man. Shelton frowned, got down slowly, from the wall, and proceeded on his way.

A little further down the hill he stopped again to watch a group of convicts in a field. They seemed to be dancing in a slow and sad cotillon, while behind the hedge on every side were warders armed with guns. Just such a sight, substituting spears could have been seen in Roman times.

While he thus stood looking, a man, walking, rapidly, stopped beside him, and asked how many miles it was to Exeter. His round visage; and long, brown eyes, sliding about beneath their, brows, his cropped hair and short neck, seemed familiar.

"Your name is Crocker, is n't it?"

"Why! it's the Bird!" exclaimed the traveller; putting out his hand.
"Have n't seen you since we both went down."

Shelton returned his handgrip. Crocker had lived above his head at college, and often kept him, sleepless half the night by playing on the hautboy.

"Where have you sprung from?"

"India. Got my long leave. I say, are you going this way? Let's go together."

They went, and very fast; faster and faster every minute.

"Where are you going at this pace?" asked Shelton.

"London."

"Oh! only as far as London?"

"I 've set myself to do it in a week."

"Are you in training?"

"No."

"You 'll kill yourself."

Crocker answered with a chuckle.

Shelton noted with alarm the expression of his eye; there was a sort of stubborn aspiration in it. "Still an idealist!" he thought; "poor fellow!" "Well," he inquired, "what sort of a time have you had in India?"

"Oh," said the Indian civilian absently, "I've, had the plague."

"Good God!"

Crocker smiled, and added:

"Caught it on famine duty."

"I see," said Shelton; "plague and famine! I suppose you fellows really think you 're doing good out there?"

His companion looked at him surprised, then answered modestly:

"We get very good screws."

"That 's the great thing," responded Shelton.

After a moment's silence, Crocker, looking straight before him, asked:

"Don't you think we are doing good?"

"I 'm not an authority; but, as a matter of fact, I don't."

Crocker seemed disconcerted.

"Why?" he bluntly asked.

Shelton was not anxious to explain his views, and he did not reply.

His friend repeated:

"Why don't you think we're doing good in India?"

"Well," said Shelton gruffly, "how can progress be imposed on nations from outside?"

The Indian civilian, glancing at Shelton in an affectionate and doubtful way, replied:

"You have n't changed a bit, old chap."

"No, no," said Shelton; "you 're not going to get out of it that way. Give me a single example of a nation, or an individual, for that matter, who 's ever done any good without having worked up to it from within."

Crocker, grunting, muttered, "Evils."

"That 's it," said Shelton; "we take peoples entirely different from our own, and stop their natural

development by substituting a civilisation grown for our own use. Suppose, looking at a tropical fern in a hothouse, you were to say: 'This heat 's unhealthy for me; therefore it must be bad for the fern, I 'll take it up and plant it outside in the fresh air.'

"Do you know that means giving up India?" said the Indian civilian shrewdly.

"I don't say that; but to talk about doing good to India is—h'm!"

Crocker knitted his brows, trying to see the point of view his friend was showing him.

"Come, now! Should we go on administering India if it were dead loss? No. Well, to talk about administering the country for the purpose of pocketing money is cynical, and there 's generally some truth in cynicism; but to talk about the administration of a country by which we profit, as if it were a great and good thing, is cant. I hit you in the wind for the benefit of myself—all right: law of nature; but to say it does you good at the same time is beyond me."

"No, no," returned Crocker, grave and anxious; "you can't persuade me that we 're not doing good."

"Wait a bit. It's all a question of horizons; you look at it from too close. Put the horizon further back. You hit India in the wind, and say it's virtuous. Well, now let's see what happens. Either the wind never comes back, and India gasps to an untimely death, or the wind does come back, and in the pant of reaction your blow—that's to say your labour—is lost, morally lost labour that you might have spent where it would n't have been lost."

"Are n't you an Imperialist?" asked Crocker, genuinely concerned.

"I may be, but I keep my mouth shut about the benefits we 're conferring upon other people."

"Then you can't believe in abstract right, or justice?"

"What on earth have our ideas of justice or right got to do with India?"

"If I thought as you do," sighed the unhappy Crocker, "I should be all adrift."

"Quite so. We always think our standards best for the whole world. It's a capital belief for us. Read the speeches of our public men. Does n't it strike you as amazing how sure they are of being in the right? It's so charming to benefit yourself and others at the same time, though, when you come to think of it, one man's meat is usually another's poison. Look at nature. But in England we never look at nature—there's no necessity. Our national point of view has filled our pockets, that's all that matters."

"I say, old chap, that's awfully bitter," said Crocker, with a sort of wondering sadness.

"It 's enough to make any one bitter the way we Pharisees wax fat, and at the same time give ourselves the moral airs of a balloon. I must stick a pin in sometimes, just to hear the gas escape." Shelton was surprised at his own heat, and for some strange reason thought of Antonia—surely, she was not a Pharisee.

His companion strode along, and Shelton felt sorry for the signs of trouble on his face.

"To fill your pockets," said Crocker, "is n't the main thing. One has just got to do things without thinking of why we do them."

"Do you ever see the other side to any question?" asked Shelton. "I suppose not. You always begin to act before you stop thinking, don't you?"

Crocker grinned.

"He's a Pharisee, too," thought Shelton, "without a Pharisee's pride. Queer thing that!"

After walking some distance, as if thinking deeply, Crocker chuckled out:

"You 're not consistent; you ought to be in favour of giving up India."

Shelton smiled uneasily.

"Why should n't we fill our pockets? I only object to the humbug that we talk."

The Indian civilian put his hand shyly through his arm.

"If I thought like you," he said, "I could n't stay another day in

India."

And to this Shelton made no reply.

The wind had now begun to drop, and something of the morning's magic was stealing again upon the moor. They were nearing the outskirt fields of cultivation. It was past five when, dropping from the level of the tors, they came into the sunny vale of Monkland.

"They say," said Crocker, reading from his guide-book—"they say this place occupies a position of unique isolation."

The two travellers, in tranquil solitude, took their seats under an old lime-tree on the village green. The smoke of their pipes, the sleepy air, the warmth from the baked ground, the constant hum, made Shelton drowsy.

"Do you remember," his companion asked, "those 'jaws' you used to have with Busgate and old Halidome in my rooms on Sunday evenings? How is old Halidome?"

"Married," replied Shelton.

Crocker sighed. "And are you?" he asked.

"Not yet," said Shelton grimly; "I 'm—engaged."

Crocker took hold of his arm above the elbow, and, squeezing it, he grunted. Shelton had not received congratulations that pleased him more; there was the spice of envy in them.

"I should like to get married while I 'm home," said the civilian after a long pause. His legs were stretched apart, throwing shadows on the green, his hands deep thrust into his pockets, his head a little to one side. An absent-minded smile played round his mouth.

The sun had sunk behind a tor, but the warmth kept rising from the ground, and the sweet-briar on a cottage bathed them with its spicy perfume. From the converging lanes figures passed now and then, lounged by, staring at the strangers, gossiping amongst themselves, and vanished into the cottages that headed the incline. A clock struck seven, and round the shady lime-tree a chafer or some heavy insect commenced its booming rushes. All was marvellously sane and slumbrous. The soft air, the drawling voices, the shapes and murmurs, the rising smell of wood-smoke from fresh-kindled fires—were full of the spirit of security and of home. The outside world was far indeed. Typical of some island nation was this nest of refuge—where men grew quietly tall, fattened, and without fuss dropped off their perches; where contentment flourished, as sunflowers flourished in the sun.

Crocker's cap slipped off; he was nodding, and Shelton looked at him. From a manor house in some such village he had issued; to one of a thousand such homes he would find his way at last, untouched by the struggles with famines or with plagues, uninfected in his fibre, his prejudices, and his principles, unchanged by contact with strange peoples, new conditions, odd feelings, or queer points of view!

The chafer buzzed against his shoulder, gathered flight again, and boomed away. Crocker roused himself, and, turning his amiable face, jogged Shelton's arm.

"What are you thinking about, Bird?" he asked.

CHAPTER XVII

A PARSON

Shelton continued to travel with his college friend, and on Wednesday night, four days after joining company, they reached the village of Dowdenham. All day long the road had lain through pastureland, with thick green hedges and heavily feathered elms. Once or twice they had broken the monotony by a stretch along the towing-path of a canal, which, choked with water-lily plants and shining weeds, brooded sluggishly beside the fields. Nature, in one of her ironic moods, had cast a grey and iron-hard cloak over all the country's bland luxuriance. From dawn till darkness fell there had been no movement in the steely distant sky; a cold wind ruffed in the hedge-tops, and sent shivers through the branches of the elms. The cattle, dappled, pied, or bay, or white, continued grazing with an air of grumbling at their

birthright. In a meadow close to the canal Shelton saw five magpies, and about five o'clock the rain began, a steady, coldly-sneering rain, which Crocker, looking at the sky, declared was going to be over in a minute. But it was not over in a minute; they were soon drenched. Shelton was tired, and it annoyed him very much that his companion, who was also tired, should grow more cheerful. His thoughts kept harping upon Ferrand: "This must be something like what he described to me, tramping on and on when you're dead-beat, until you can cadge up supper and a bed." And sulkily he kept on ploughing through the mud with glances at the exasperating Crocker, who had skinned one heel and was limping horribly. It suddenly came home to him that life for three quarters of the world meant physical exhaustion every day, without a possibility of alternative, and that as soon as, for some cause beyond control, they failed thus to exhaust themselves, they were reduced to beg or starve. "And then we, who don't know the meaning of the word exhaustion, call them 'idle scamps,'" he said aloud.

It was past nine and dark when they reached Dowdenhame. The street yielded no accommodation, and while debating where to go they passed the church, with a square tower, and next to it a house which was certainly the parsonage.

"Suppose," said Crocker, leaning on his arms upon the gate, "we ask him where to go"; and, without waiting for Shelton's answer, he rang the bell.

The door was opened by the parson, a bloodless and clean-shaven man, whose hollow cheeks and bony hands suggested a perpetual struggle. Ascetically benevolent were his grey eyes; a pale and ghostly smile played on the curves of his thin lips.

"What can I do for you?" he asked. "Inn? yes, there's the Blue Chequers, but I 'm afraid you 'll find it shut. They 're early people, I 'm glad to say"; and his eyes seemed to muse over the proper fold for these damp sheep. "Are you Oxford men, by any chance?" he asked, as if that might throw some light upon the matter. "Of Mary's? Really! I'm of Paul's myself. Ladyman—Billington Ladyman; you might remember my youngest brother. I could give you a room here if you could manage without sheets. My housekeeper has two days' holiday; she's foolishly taken the keys."

Shelton accepted gladly, feeling that the intonation in the parson's voice was necessary unto his calling, and that he did not want to patronise.

"You 're hungry, I expect, after your tramp. I'm very much afraid there 's—er—nothing in the house but bread; I could boil you water; hot lemonade is better than nothing."

Conducting them into the kitchen, he made a fire, and put a kettle on to boil; then, after leaving them to shed their soaking clothes, returned with ancient, greenish coats, some carpet slippers, and some blankets. Wrapped in these, and carrying their glasses, the travellers followed to the study, where, by doubtful lamp-light, he seemed, from books upon the table, to have been working at his sermon.

"We 're giving you a lot of trouble," said Shelton, "it's really very good of you."

"Not at all," the parson answered; "I'm only grieved the house is empty."

It was a truly dismal contrast to the fatness of the land they had been passing through, and the parson's voice issuing from bloodless lips, although complacent, was pathetic. It was peculiar, that voice of his, seeming to indicate an intimate acquaintanceship with what was fat and fine, to convey contempt for the vulgar need of money, while all the time his eyes—those watery, ascetic eyes—as plain as speech they said, "Oh, to know what it must be like to have a pound or two to spare just once a year, or so!"

Everything in the room had been bought for cheapness; no luxuries were there, and necessaries not enough. It was bleak and bare; the ceiling cracked, the wall-paper discoloured, and those books—prim, shining books, fat-backed, with arms stamped on them—glared in the surrounding barrenness.

"My predecessor," said the parson, "played rather havoc with the house. The poor fellow had a dreadful struggle, I was told. You can, unfortunately, expect nothing else these days, when livings have come down so terribly in value! He was a married man—large family!"

Crocker, who had drunk his steaming lemonade, was smiling and already nodding in his chair; with his black garment buttoned closely round his throat, his long legs rolled up in a blanket, and stretched towards the feeble flame of the newly-lighted fire, he had a rather patchy air. Shelton, on the other hand, had lost his feeling of fatigue; the strangeness of the place was stimulating his brain; he kept stealing glances at the scantiness around; the room, the parson, the furniture, the very fire, all gave him the feeling caused by seeing legs that have outgrown their trousers. But there was something underlying that leanness of the landscape, something superior and academic, which defied all sympathy. It was pure nervousness which made him say:

"Ah! why do they have such families?"

A faint red mounted to the parson's cheeks; its appearance there was startling, and Crocker chuckled, as a sleepy man will chuckle who feels bound to show that he is not asleep.

"It's very unfortunate," murmured the parson, "certainly, in many cases."

Shelton would now have changed the subject, but at this moment the unhappy Crocker snored. Being a man of action, he had gone to sleep.

"It seems to me," said Shelton hurriedly, as he saw the parson's eyebrows rising at the sound, "almost what you might call wrong."

"Dear me, but how can it be wrong?"

Shelton now felt that he must justify his saying somehow.

"I don't know," he said, "only one hears of such a lot of cases—clergymen's families; I've two uncles of my own, who—"

A new expression gathered on the parson's face; his mouth had tightened, and his chin receded slightly. "Why, he 's like a mule!" thought Shelton. His eyes, too, had grown harder, greyer, and more parrotly. Shelton no longer liked his face.

"Perhaps you and I," the parson said, "would not understand each other on such matters."

And Shelton felt ashamed.

"I should like to ask you a question in turn, however," the parson said, as if desirous of meeting Shelton on his low ground: "How do you justify marriage if it is not to follow the laws of nature?"

"I can only tell you what I personally feel."

"My dear sir, you forget that a woman's chief delight is in her motherhood."

"I should have thought it a pleasure likely to pall with too much repetition. Motherhood is motherhood, whether of one or of a dozen."

"I 'm afraid," replied the parson, with impatience, though still keeping on his guest's low ground, "your theories are not calculated to populate the world."

"Have you ever lived in London?" Shelton asked. "It always makes me feel a doubt whether we have any right to have children at all."

"Surely," said the parson with wonderful restraint, and the joints of his fingers cracked with the grip he had upon his chair, "you are leaving out duty towards the country; national growth is paramount!"

"There are two ways of looking at that. It depends on what you want your country to become."

"I did n't know," said the parson—fanaticism now had crept into his smile—"there could be any doubt on such a subject."

The more Shelton felt that commands were being given him, the more controversial he naturally became—apart from the merits of this subject, to which he had hardly ever given thought.

"I dare say I'm wrong," he said, fastening his eyes on the blanket in which his legs were wrapped; "but it seems to me at least an open question whether it's better for the country to be so well populated as to be quite incapable of supporting itself."

"Surely," said the parson, whose face regained its pallor, "you're not a Little Englander?"

On Shelton this phrase had a mysterious effect. Resisting an impulse to discover what he really was, he answered hastily:

"Of course I'm not!"

The parson followed up his triumph, and, shifting the ground of the discussion from Shelton's to his own, he gravely said:

"Surely you must see that your theory is founded in immorality. It is, if I may say so, extravagant, even wicked."

But Shelton, suffering from irritation at his own dishonesty, replied with heat:

"Why not say at once, sir, 'hysterical, unhealthy'? Any opinion which goes contrary to that of the majority is always called so, I believe."

"Well," returned the parson, whose eyes seemed trying to bind Shelton to his will, "I must say your ideas do seem to me both extravagant and unhealthy. The propagation of children is enjoined of marriage."

Shelton bowed above his blanket, but the parson did not smile.

"We live in very dangerous times," he said, "and it grieves me when a man of your standing panders to these notions."

"Those," said Shelton, "whom the shoe does n't pinch make this rule of morality, and thrust it on to such as the shoe does pinch."

"The rule was never made," said the parson; "it was given us."

"Oh!" said Shelton, "I beg your pardon." He was in danger of forgetting the delicate position he was in. "He wants to ram his notions down my throat," he thought; and it seemed to him that the parson's face had grown more like a mule's, his accent more superior, his eyes more dictatorial: To be right in this argument seemed now of great importance, whereas, in truth, it was of no importance whatsoever. That which, however, was important was the fact that in nothing could they ever have agreed.

But Crocker had suddenly ceased to snore; his head had fallen so that a peculiar whistling arose instead. Both Shelton and the parson looked at him, and the sight sobered them.

"Your friend seems very tired," said the parson.

Shelton forgot all his annoyance, for his host seemed suddenly pathetic, with those baggy garments, hollow cheeks, and the slightly reddened nose that comes from not imbibing quite enough. A kind fellow, after all!

The kind fellow rose, and, putting his hands behind his back, placed himself before the blackening fire. Whole centuries of authority stood behind him. It was an accident that the mantelpiece was chipped and rusty, the fire-irons bent and worn, his linen frayed about the cuffs.

"I don't wish to dictate," said he, "but where it seems to me that you are wholly wrong in that your ideas foster in women those lax views of the family life that are so prevalent in Society nowadays."

Thoughts of Antonia with her candid eyes, the touch of freckling on her pink-white skin, the fair hair gathered back, sprang up in Shelton, and that word—"lax" seemed ridiculous. And the women he was wont to see dragging about the streets of London with two or three small children, Women bent beneath the weight of babies that they could not leave, women going to work with babies still unborn, anaemic-looking women, impecunious mothers in his own class, with twelve or fourteen children, all the victims of the sanctity of marriage, and again the word "lax" seemed to be ridiculous.

"We are not put into the world to exercise our wits,"—muttered Shelton.

"Our wanton wills," the parson said severely.

"That, sir, may have been all right for the last generation, the country is more crowded now. I can't see why we should n't decide it for ourselves."

"Such a view of morality," said the parson, looking down at Crocker with a ghostly smile, "to me is unintelligible."

Cracker's whistling grew in tone and in variety.

"What I hate," said Shelton, "is the way we men decide what women are to bear, and then call them immoral, decadent, or what you will, if they don't fall in with our views."

"Mr. Shelton," said the parson, "I think we may safely leave it in the hands of God."

Shelton was silent.

"The questions of morality," said the parson promptly, "have always lain through God in the hands of

men, not women. We are the reasonable sex."

Shelton stubbornly replied

"We 're certainly the greater humbugs, if that 's the same."

"This is too bad," exclaimed the parson with some heat.

"I 'm sorry, sir; but how can you expect women nowadays to have the same views as our grandmothers? We men, by our commercial enterprise, have brought about a different state of things; yet, for the sake of our own comfort, we try to keep women where they were. It's always those men who are most keen about their comfort"—and in his heat the sarcasm of using the word "comfort" in that room was lost on him—"who are so ready to accuse women of deserting the old morality."

The parson quivered with impatient irony.

"Old morality! new morality!" he said. "These are strange words."

"Forgive me," explained Shelton; "we 're talking of working morality, I imagine. There's not a man in a million fit to talk of true morality."

The eyes of his host contracted.

"I think," he said—and his voice sounded as if he had pinched it in the endeavour to impress his listener—"that any well-educated man who honestly tries to serve his God has the right humbly—I say humbly—to claim morality."

Shelton was on the point of saying something bitter, but checked himself. "Here am I," thought he, "trying to get the last word, like an old woman."

At this moment there was heard a piteous mewling; the parson went towards the door.

"Excuse me a moment; I 'm afraid that's one of my cats out in the wet." He returned a minute later with a wet cat in his arms. "They will get out," he said to Shelton, with a smile on his thin face, suffused by stooping. And absently he stroked the dripping cat, while a drop of wet ran off his nose. "Poor pussy, poor pussy!" The sound of that "Poor pussy!" like nothing human in its cracked superiority, the softness of that smile, like the smile of gentleness itself, haunted Shelton till he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVIII

ACADEMIC

The last sunlight was playing on the roofs when the travellers entered that High Street grave and holy to all Oxford men. The spirit hovering above the spires was as different from its concretions in their caps and gowns as ever the spirit of Christ was from church dogmas.

"Shall we go into Grinnings'?" asked Shelton, as they passed the club.

But each looked at his clothes, for two elegant young men in flannel suits were coming out.

"You go," said Crocker, with a smirk.

Shelton shook his head. Never before had he felt such love for this old city. It was gone now from out his life, but everything about it seemed so good and fine; even its exclusive air was not ignoble. Clothed in the calm of history, the golden web of glorious tradition, radiant with the alchemy of memories, it bewitched him like the perfume of a woman's dress. At the entrance of a college they glanced in at the cool grey patch of stone beyond, and the scarlet of a window flowerbox—secluded, mysteriously calm—a narrow vision of the sacred past. Pale and trencher-capped, a youth with pimply face and random nose, grabbing at his cloven gown, was gazing at the noticeboard. The college porter—large man, fresh-faced, and small-mouthed—stood at his lodge door in a frank and deferential attitude. An image of routine, he looked like one engaged to give a decorous air to multitudes of peca-dilloes. His blue eyes rested on the travellers. "I don't know you, sirs, but if you want to speak I shall be glad to hear the observations you may have to make," they seemed to say.

Against the wall reposed a bicycle with tennis-racquet buckled to its handle. A bull-dog bitch, working her snout from side to side, was snuffing horribly; the great iron-studded door to which her chain was fastened stayed immovable. Through this narrow mouth, human metal had been poured for centuries—poured, moulded, given back.

"Come along," said Shelton.

They now entered the Bishop's Head, and had their dinner in the room where Shelton had given his Derby dinner to four-and-twenty well-bred youths; here was the picture of the racehorse that the wineglass, thrown by one of them, had missed when it hit the waiter; and there, serving Crocker with anchovy sauce, was the very waiter. When they had finished, Shelton felt the old desire to rise with difficulty from the table; the old longing to patrol the streets with arm hooked in some other arm; the old eagerness to dare and do something heroic—and unlawful; the old sense that he was of the forest set, in the forest college, of the forest country in the finest world. The streets, all grave and mellow in the sunset, seemed to applaud this after-dinner stroll; the entrance quad of his old college—spaciously majestic, monastically modern, for years the heart of his universe, the focus of what had gone before it in his life, casting the shadow of its grey walls over all that had come after—brought him a sense of rest from conflict, and trust in his own important safety. The garden-gate, whose lofty spikes he had so often crowned with empty water-bottles, failed to rouse him. Nor when they passed the staircase where he had flung a leg of lamb at some indelicate disturbing tutor, did he feel remorse. High on that staircase were the rooms in which he had crammed for his degree, upon the system by which the scholar simmers on the fire of cramming, boils over at the moment of examination, and is extinct for ever after. His coach's face recurred to him, a man with thrusting eyes, who reeled off knowledge all the week, and disappeared to town on Sundays.

They passed their tutor's staircase.

"I wonder if little Turl would remember us?" said Crocker; "I should like to see him. Shall we go and look him up?"

"Little Turl?" said Shelton dreamily.

Mounting, they knocked upon a solid door.

"Come in," said the voice of Sleep itself.

A little man with a pink face and large red ears was sitting in a fat pink chair, as if he had been grown there.

"What do you want?" he asked of them, blinking.

"Don't you know me, sir?"

"God bless me! Crocker, isn't it? I didn't recognise you with a beard."

Crocker, who had not been shaved since starting on his travels, chuckled feebly.

"You remember Shelton, sir?" he said.

"Shelton? Oh yes! How do you do, Shelton? Sit down; take a cigar"; and, crossing his fat little legs, the little gentleman looked them up and down with drowsy interest, as who should say, "Now, after, all you know, why come and wake me up like this?"

Shelton and Crocker took two other chairs; they too seemed thinking, "Yes, why did we come and wake him up like this?" And Shelton, who could not tell the reason why, took refuge in the smoke of his cigar. The panelled walls were hung with prints of celebrated Greek remains; the soft, thick carpet on the floor was grateful to his tired feet; the backs of many books gleamed richly in the light of the oil lamps; the culture and tobacco smoke stole on his senses; he but vaguely comprehended Crocker's amiable talk, vaguely the answers of his little host, whose face, blinking behind the bowl of his huge meerschaum pipe, had such a queer resemblance to a moon. The door was opened, and a tall creature, whose eyes were large and brown, whose face was rosy and ironical, entered with a manly stride.

"Oh!" he said, looking round him with his chin a little in the air, "am I intruding, Turl?"

The little host, blinking more than ever, murmured,

"Not at all, Berryman—take a pew!"

The visitor called Berryman sat down, and gazed up at the wall with his fine eyes.

Shelton had a faint remembrance of this don, and bowed; but the newcomer sat smiling, and did not notice the salute.

"Trimmer and Washer are coming round," he said, and as he spoke the door opened to admit these gentlemen. Of the same height, but different appearance, their manner was faintly jocular, faintly supercilious, as if they tolerated everything. The one whose name was Trimmer had patches of red on his large cheek-bones, and on his cheeks a bluish tint. His lips were rather full, so that he had a likeness to a spider. Washer, who was thin and pale, wore an intellectual smile.

The little fat host moved the hand that held the meerschaum.

"Crocker, Shelton," he said.

An awkward silence followed. Shelton tried to rouse the cultured portion of his wits; but the sense that nothing would be treated seriously paralysed his faculties; he stayed silent, staring at the glowing tip of his cigar. It seemed to him unfair to have intruded on these gentlemen without its having been made quite clear to them beforehand who and what he was; he rose to take his leave, but Washer had begun to speak.

"Madame Bovary!" he said quizzically, reading the title of the book on the little fat man's bookrest; and, holding it closer to his boiled-looking eyes, he repeated, as though it were a joke, "Madame Bovary!"

"Do you mean to say, Turl, that you can stand that stuff?" said Berryman.

As might have been expected, this celebrated novel's name had galvanised him into life; he strolled over to the bookcase, took down a book, opened it, and began to read, wandering in a desultory way about the room.

"Ha! Berryman," said a conciliatory voice behind—it came from Trimmer, who had set his back against the hearth, and grasped with either hand a fistful of his gown—"the book's a classic!"

"Classic!" exclaimed Berryman, transfixing Shelton with his eyes; "the fellow ought to have been horsewhipped for writing such putridity!"

A feeling of hostility instantly sprang up in Shelton; he looked at his little host, who, however, merely blinked.

"Berryman only means," explains Washer, a certain malice in his smile, "that the author is n't one of his particular pets."

"For God's sake, you know, don't get Berryman on his horse!" growled the little fat man suddenly.

Berryman returned his volume to the shelf and took another down. There was something almost godlike in his sarcastic absent-mindedness.

"Imagine a man writing that stuff," he said, "if he'd ever been at Eton! What do we want to know about that sort of thing? A writer should be a sportsman and a gentleman"; and again he looked down over his chin at Shelton, as though expecting him to controvert the sentiment.

"Don't you—" began the latter.

But Berryman's attention had wandered to the wall.

"I really don't care," said he, "to know what a woman feels when she is going to the dogs; it does n't interest me."

The voice of Trimmer made things pleasant:

"Question of moral standards, that, and nothing more."

He had stretched his legs like compasses,—and the way he grasped his gown-wings seemed to turn him to a pair of scales. His lowering smile embraced the room, deprecating strong expressions. "After all," he seemed to say, "we are men of the world; we know there 's not very much in anything. This is the modern spirit; why not give it a look in?"

"Do I understand you to say, Berryman, that you don't enjoy a spicy book?" asked Washer with his smile; and at this question the little fat man sniggered, blinking tempestuously, as if to say, "Nothing pleasanter, don't you know, before a hot fire in cold weather."

Berryman paid no attention to the impertinent inquiry, continuing to dip into his volume and walk up and down.

"I've nothing to say," he remarked, stopping before Shelton, and looking down, as if at last aware of him, "to those who talk of being justified through Art. I call a spade a spade."

Shelton did not answer, because he could not tell whether Berryman was addressing him or society at large. And Berryman went on:

"Do we want to know about the feelings of a middle-class woman with a taste for vice? Tell me the point of it. No man who was in the habit of taking baths would choose such a subject."

"You come to the question of-ah-subjects," the voice of Trimmer genially buzzed he had gathered his garments tight across his back—"my dear fellow, Art, properly applied, justifies all subjects."

"For Art," squeaked Berryman, putting back his second volume and taking down a third, "you have Homer, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Ossian; for garbage, a number of unwashed gentlemen."

There was a laugh; Shelton glanced round at all in turn. With the exception of Crocker, who was half asleep and smiling idiotically, they wore, one and all, a look as if by no chance could they consider any subject fit to move their hearts; as if, one and all, they were so profoundly anchored on the sea of life that waves could only seem impertinent. It may have been some glimmer in this glance of Shelton's that brought Trimmer once more to the rescue with his compromising air.

"The French," said he, "have quite a different standard from ourselves in literature, just as they have a different standard in regard to honour. All this is purely artificial."

What he, meant, however, Shelton found it difficult to tell.

"Honour," said Washer, "'l'honneur, die Ehre' duelling, unfaithful wives—"

He was clearly going to add to this, but it was lost; for the little fat man, taking the meerschaum with trembling fingers, and holding it within two inches of his chin, murmured:

"You fellows, Berryman's awf'ly strong on honour."

He blinked twice, and put the meerschaum back between his lips.

Without returning the third volume to its shelf, Berryman took down a fourth; with chest expanded, he appeared about to use the books as dumb-bells.

"Quite so," said Trimmer; "the change from duelling to law courts is profoundly—"

Whether he were going to say "significant" or "insignificant," in Shelton's estimate he did not know himself. Fortunately Berryman broke in:

"Law courts or not, when a man runs away with a wife of mine, I shall punch his head!"

"Come, come!" said Turner, spasmodically grasping his two wings.

Shelton had a gleam of inspiration. "If your wife deceived you," he thought, looking at Trimmer's eyes, "you 'd keep it quiet, and hold it over her."

Washer passed his hand over his pale chaps: his smile had never wavered; he looked like one for ever lost in the making of an epigram.

The punching theorist stretched his body, holding the books level with his shoulders, as though to stone his hearers with his point of view. His face grew paler, his fine eyes finer, his lips ironical. Almost painful was this combination of the "strong" man and the student who was bound to go to pieces if you hit him a smart blow.

"As for forgiving faithless wives," he said, "and all that sort of thing, I don't believe in sentiment."

The words were high-pitched and sarcastic. Shelton looked hastily around. All their faces were complacent. He grew red, and suddenly remarked, in a soft; clear voice:

"I see!"

He was conscious that he had never before made an impression of this sort, and that he never would again. The cold hostility flashing out all round was most enlightening; it instantly gave way to the

polite, satirical indulgence peculiar to highly-cultivated men. Crocker rose nervously; he seemed scared, and was obviously relieved when Shelton, following his example, grasped the little fat man's hand, who said good-night in a voice shaken by tobacco.

"Who are your unshaven friends?" he heard as the door was closed behind them.

CHAPTER XIX

AN INCIDENT

"Eleven o'clock," said Crocker, as they went out of college. "I don't feel sleepy; shall we stroll along the 'High' a bit?"

Shelton assented; he was too busy thinking of his encounter with the dons to heed the soreness of his feet. This, too, was the last day of his travels, for he had not altered his intention of waiting at Oxford till July.

"We call this place the heart of knowledge," he said, passing a great building that presided, white and silent, over darkness; "it seems to me as little that, as Society is the heart of true gentility."

Crocker's answer was a grunt; he was looking at the stars, calculating possibly in how long he could walk to heaven.

"No," proceeded Shelton; "we've too much common-sense up here to strain our minds. We know when it's time to stop. We pile up news of Papias and all the verbs in 'ui' but as for news of life or of oneself! Real seekers after knowledge are a different sort. They fight in the dark—no quarter given. We don't grow that sort up here."

"How jolly the limes smell!" said Crocker.

He had halted opposite a garden, and taken hold of Shelton by a button of his coat. His eyes, like a dog's, stared wistfully. It seemed as though he wished to speak, but feared to give offence.

"They tell you," pursued Shelton, "that we learn to be gentlemen up here. We learn that better through one incident that stirs our hearts than we learn it here in all the time we're up."

"Hum!" muttered Crocker, twisting at the button; "those fellows who seemed the best sorts up here have turned out the best sorts afterwards."

"I hope not," said Shelton gloomily; "I was a snob when I was up here. I believed all I was told, anything that made things pleasant; my "set" were nothing but—"

Crocker smiled in the darkness; he had been too "cranky" to belong to Shelton's "set."

"You never were much like your 'set,' old chap," he said.

Shelton turned away, sniffing the perfume of the limes. Images were thronging through his mind. The faces of his old friends strangely mixed with those of people he had lately met—the girl in the train, Ferrand, the lady with the short, round, powdered face, the little barber; others, too, and floating, mysterious,—connected with them all, Antonia's face. The scent of the lime-trees drifted at him with its magic sweetness. From the street behind, the footsteps of the passers-by sounded muffled, yet exact, and on the breeze was borne the strain: "For he's a jolly good fellow!"

"For he's a jolly good fellow! For he's a jolly good fe-ellow! And so say all of us!"

"Ah!" he said, "they were good chaps."

"I used to think," said Crocker dreamily, "that some of them had too much side."

And Shelton laughed.

"The thing sickens me," said he, "the whole snobbish, selfish business. The place sickens me, lined with cotton-wool-made so beastly comfortable."

Crocker shook his head.

"It's a splendid old place," he said, his eyes fastening at last on Shelton's boots. "You know, old chap," he stammered, "I think you—you ought to take care!"

"Take care? What of?"

Crocker pressed his arm convulsively.

"Don't be waxy, old boy," he said; "I mean that you seem somehow—to be—to be losing yourself."

"Losing myself! Finding myself, you mean!"

Crocker did not answer; his face was disappointed. Of what exactly was he thinking? In Shelton's heart there was a bitter pleasure in knowing that his friend was uncomfortable on his account, a sort of contempt, a sort of aching. Crocker broke the silence.

"I think I shall do a bit more walking to-night," he said; "I feel very fit. Don't you really mean to come any further with me, Bird?"

And there was anxiety in his voice, as though Shelton were in danger of missing something good. The latter's feet had instantly begun to ache and burn.

"No!?" he said; "you know what I'm staying here for."

Crocker nodded.

"She lives near here. Well, then, I'll say good-bye. I should like to do another ten miles to-night."

"My dear fellow, you're tired and lame."

Crocker chuckled.

"No," he said; "I want to get on. See you in London. Good-bye!" and, gripping Shelton's hand, he turned and limped away.

Shelton called after him: "Don't be an idiot: You 'll only knock yourself up."

But the sole answer was the pale moon of Crocker's face screwed round towards him in the darkness, and the waving of his stick.

Shelton strolled slowly on; leaning over the bridge, he watched the oily gleam of lamps, on the dark water underneath the trees. He felt relieved, yet sorry. His thoughts were random, curious, half mutinous, half sweet. That afternoon five years ago, when he had walked back from the river with Antonia across the Christchurch meadows, was vivid to his mind; the scent of that afternoon had never died away from him—the aroma of his love. Soon she would be his wife—his wife! The faces of the dons sprang up before him. They had wives, perhaps. Fat, lean, satirical, and compromising—what was it that through diversity they had in common? Cultured intolerance! . . . Honour! . . . A queer subject to discuss. Honour! The honour that made a fuss, and claimed its rights! And Shelton smiled. "As if man's honour suffered when he's injured!" And slowly he walked along the echoing, empty street to his room at the Bishop's Head. Next morning he received the following wire:

Thirty miles left eighteen hours heel bad but going strong CROCKER

He passed a fortnight at the Bishop's Head, waiting for the end of his probation, and the end seemed long in coming. To be so near Antonia, and as far as if he lived upon another planet, was worse than ever. Each day he took a sculling skiff, and pulled down to near Holm Oaks, on the chance of her being on the river; but the house was two miles off, and the chance but slender. She never came. After spending the afternoons like this he would return, pulling hard against the stream, with a queer feeling of relief, dine heartily, and fall a-dreaming over his cigar. Each morning he awoke in an excited mood, devoured his letter if he had one, and sat down to write to her. These letters of his were the most amazing portion of that fortnight. They were remarkable for failing to express any single one of his real thoughts, but they were full of sentiments which were not what he was truly feeling; and when he set himself to analyse, he had such moments of delirium that he was scared, and shocked, and quite unable to write anything. He made the discovery that no two human beings ever tell each other what they really feel, except, perhaps, in situations with which he could not connect Antonia's ice-blue eyes and brilliant smile. All the world was too engaged in planning decency.

Absorbed by longings, he but vaguely realised the turmoil of Commemoration, which had gathered its hundreds for their annual cure of

salmon mayonnaise and cheap champagne. In preparation for his visit to Holm Oaks he shaved his beard and had some clothes sent down from London. With them was forwarded a letter from Ferrand, which ran as follows:

IMPERIAL PEACOCK HOTEL, FOLKESTONE,

June 20.
MY DEAR SIR,

Forgive me for not having written to you before, but I have been so bothered that I have felt no taste for writing; when I have the time, I have some curious stories to tell you. Once again I have encountered that demon of misfortune which dogs my footsteps. Being occupied all day and nearly all night upon business which brings me a heap of worries and next to no profit, I have no chance to look after my things. Thieves have entered my room, stolen everything, and left me an empty box. I am once again almost without clothes, and know not where to turn to make that figure necessary for the fulfilment of my duties. You see, I am not lucky. Since coming to your country, the sole piece of fortune I have had was to tumble on a man like you. Excuse me for not writing more at this moment. Hoping that you are in good health, and in affectionately pressing your hand, I am, Always your devoted LOUIS FERRAND.

Upon reading this letter Shelton had once more a sense of being exploited, of which he was ashamed; he sat down immediately and wrote the following reply:

BISHOPS HEAD HOTEL, OXFORD,

June 25.
MY DEAR FERRAND,

I am grieved to hear of your misfortunes. I was much hoping that you had made a better start. I enclose you Post Office Orders for four pounds. Always glad to hear from you.

Yours sincerely,
RICHARD SHELTON.

He posted it with the satisfaction that a man feels who nobly shakes off his responsibilities.

Three days before July he met with one of those disturbing incidents which befall no persons who attend quietly to their, property and reputation.

The night was unbearably hot, and he had wandered out with his cigar; a woman came sidling up and spoke to him. He perceived her to be one of those made by men into mediums for their pleasure, to feel sympathy with whom was sentimental. Her face was flushed, her whisper hoarse; she had no attractions but the curves of a tawdry figure. Shelton was repelled by her proprietary tone, by her blowzy face, and by the scent of patchouli. Her touch on his arm startled him, sending a shiver through his marrow; he almost leaped aside, and walked the faster. But her breathing as she followed sounded laboured; it suddenly seemed pitiful that a woman should be panting after him like that.

"The least I can do," he thought, "is to speak to her." He stopped, and, with a mixture of hardness and compassion, said, "It 's impossible."

In spite of her smile, he saw by her disappointed eyes that she accepted the impossibility.

"I 'm sorry," he said.

She muttered something. Shelton shook his head.

"I 'm sorry," he said once more. "Good.-night."

The woman bit her lower lip.

"Good-night," she answered dully.

At the corner of the street he turned his head. The woman was hurrying uneasily; a policeman coming from behind had caught her by the arm.

His heart began to beat. "Heavens!" he thought, "what shall I do now?" His first impulse was to walk away, and think no more about it—to act, indeed, like any averagely decent man who did not care to be concerned in such affairs.

He retraced his steps, however, and halted half a dozen paces from their figures.

"Ask the gentleman! He spoke to me," she was saying in her brassy voice, through the emphasis of which Shelton could detect her fear.

"That's all right," returned the policeman, "we know all about that."

"You—police!" cried the woman tearfully; "I 've got to get my living, have n't I, the same as you?"

Shelton hesitated, then, catching the expression in her frightened face, stepped forward. The policeman turned, and at the sight of his pale, heavy jowl, cut by the cheek-strap, and the bullying eyes, he felt both hate and fear, as if brought face to face with all that he despised and loathed, yet strangely dreaded. The cold certainty of law and order upholding the strong, treading underfoot the weak, the smug front of meanness that only the purest spirits may attack, seemed to be facing him. And the odd thing was, this man was only carrying out his duty. Shelton moistened his lips.

"You're not going to charge her?"

"Aren't I?" returned the policeman.

"Look here; constable, you 're making a mistake."

The policeman took out his note-book.

"Oh, I 'm making a mistake? I 'll take your name and address, please; we have to report these things."

"By all means," said Shelton, angrily giving it. "I spoke to her first."

"Perhaps you'll come up to the court tomorrow morning, and repeat that," replied the policeman, with incivility.

Shelton looked at him with all the force at his command.

"You had better be careful, constable," he said; but in the act of uttering these words he thought how pitiable they sounded.

"We 're not to be trifled with," returned the policeman in a threatening voice.

Shelton could think of nothing but to repeat:

"You had better be careful, constable."

"You're a gentleman," replied the policeman. "I'm only a policeman. You've got the riches, I've got the power."

Grasping the woman's arm, he began to move along with her.

Shelton turned, and walked away.

He went to Grinnings' Club, and flung himself down upon a sofa. His feeling was not one of pity for the woman, nor of peculiar anger with the policeman, but rather of dissatisfaction with himself.

"What ought I to have done?" he thought, "the beggar was within his rights."

He stared at the pictures on the wall, and a tide of disgust surged up in him.

"One or other of us," he reflected, "we make these women what they are. And when we've made them, we can't do without them; we don't want to; but we give them no proper homes, so that they're reduced to prowl about the streets, and then we run them in. Ha! that's good—that's excellent! We run them in! And here we sit and carp. But what do we do? Nothing! Our system is the most highly moral known. We get the benefit without soiling even the hem of our phylacteries—the women are the only ones that suffer. And why should n't they—inferior things?"

He lit a cigarette, and ordered the waiter to bring a drink.

"I'll go to the Court," he thought; but suddenly it occurred to him that the case would get into the local papers. The press would never miss so nice a little bit of scandal—"Gentleman v. Policeman!" And he had a vision of Antonia's father, a neighbouring and conscientious magistrate, solemnly reading this. Someone, at all events, was bound to see his name and make a point of mentioning it too good to be missed! And suddenly he saw with horror that to help the woman he would have to assert again that he had spoken to her first. "I must go to the Court!" he kept thinking, as if to assure himself that he was

not a coward.

He lay awake half the night worrying over this dilemma.

"But I did n't speak to her first," he told himself; "I shall only be telling a lie, and they 'll make me swear it, too!"

He tried to persuade himself that this was against his principles, but at the bottom of his heart he knew that he would not object to telling such a lie if only guaranteed immune from consequences; it appeared to him, indeed, but obvious humanity.

"But why should I suffer?" he thought; "I've done nothing. It's neither reasonable nor just."

He hated the unhappy woman who was causing him these horrors of uncertainty. Whenever he decided one way or other, the policeman's face, with its tyrannical and muddy eyes, rose before him like a nightmare, and forced him to an opposite conviction. He fell asleep at last with the full determination to go and see what happened.

He woke with a sense of odd disturbance. "I can do no good by going," he thought, remembering, aid lying very still; "they 're certain to believe the policeman; I shall only blacken myself for nothing;" and the combat began again within him, but with far less fury. It was not what other people thought, not even the risk of perjury that mattered (all this he made quite clear)—it was Antonia. It was not fair to her to put himself in such a false position; in fact, not decent.

He breakfasted. In the room were some Americans, and the face of one young girl reminded him a little of Antonia. Fainter and fainter grew the incident; it seemed to have its right proportions.

Two hours later, looking at the clock, he found that it was lunch-time. He had not gone, had not committed perjury; but he wrote to a daily paper, pointing out the danger run by the community from the power which a belief in their infallibility places in the hands of the police—how, since they are the sworn abettors of right and justice, their word is almost necessarily taken to be gospel; how one and all they hang together, from mingled interest and esprit de corps. Was it not, he said, reasonable to suppose that amongst thousands of human beings invested with such opportunities there would be found bullies who would take advantage of them, and rise to distinction in the service upon the helplessness of the unfortunate and the cowardice of people with anything to lose? Those who had in their hands the sacred duties of selecting a practically irresponsible body of men were bound, for the sake of freedom and humanity, to exercise those duties with the utmost care and thoroughness

However true, none of this helped him to think any better of himself at heart, and he was haunted by the feeling that a stout and honest bit of perjury was worth more than a letter to a daily paper.

He never saw his letter printed, containing, as it did, the germs of an unpalatable truth.

In the afternoon he hired a horse, and galloped on Port Meadow. The strain of his indecision over, he felt like a man recovering from an illness, and he carefully abstained from looking at the local papers. There was that within him, however, which resented the worsening of his chivalry.

CHAPTER XX

HOLM OAKS

Holm Oaks stood back but little from the road—an old manor-house, not set upon display, but dwelling close to its barns, stables, and walled gardens, like a good mother; long, flat-roofed, red, it had Queen Anne windows, on whose white-framed diamond panes the sunbeams glinted.

In front of it a fringe of elms, of all trees the tree of most established principle, bordered the stretch of turf between the gravel drive and road; and these elms were the homes of rooks of all birds the most conventional. A huge aspen—impressionable creature—shivered and shook beyond, apologising for appearance among such imperturbable surroundings. It was frequented by a cuckoo, who came once a year to hoot at the rules of life, but seldom made long stay; for boys threw stones at it, exasperated by the absence of its morals.

The village which clustered in the dip had not yet lost its dread of motor-cars. About this group of

flat-faced cottages with gabled roofs the scent of hay, manure, and roses clung continually; just now the odour of the limes troubled its servile sturdiness. Beyond the dip, again, a square-towered church kept within grey walls the record of the village flock, births, deaths, and marriages—even the births of bastards, even the deaths of suicides—and seemed to stretch a hand invisible above the heads of common folk to grasp the forgers of the manor-house. Decent and discreet, the two roofs caught the eye to the exclusion of all meaner dwellings, seeming to have joined in a conspiracy to keep them out of sight.

The July sun had burned his face all the way from Oxford, yet pale was Shelton when he walked up the drive and rang the bell.

"Mrs. Dennant at home, Dobson?" he asked of the grave butler, who, old servant that he was, still wore coloured trousers (for it was not yet twelve o'clock, and he regarded coloured trousers up to noon as a sacred distinction between the footmen and himself).

"Mrs. Dennant," replied this personage, raising his round and hairless face, while on his mouth appeared that apologetic pout which comes of living with good families—"Mrs. Dennant has gone into the village, sir; but Miss Antonia is in the morning-room."

Shelton crossed the panelled, low-roofed hall, through whose far side the lawn was visible, a vision of serenity. He mounted six wide, shallow steps, and stopped. From behind a closed door there came the sound of scales, and he stood, a prey to his emotions, the notes mingling in his ears with the beating of his heart. He softly turned the handle, a fixed smile on his lips.

Antonia was at the piano; her head was bobbing to the movements of her fingers, and pressing down the pedals were her slim monotonously moving feet. She had been playing tennis, for a racquet and her tam-o'-shanter were flung down, and she was dressed in a blue skirt and creamy blouse, fitting collarless about her throat. Her face was flushed, and wore a little frown; and as her fingers raced along the keys, her neck swayed, and the silk clung and shivered on her arms.

Shelton's eyes fastened on the silent, counting lips, on the fair hair about her forehead, the darker eyebrows slanting down towards the nose, the undimpled cheeks with the faint finger-marks beneath the ice-blue eyes, the softly-pouting and undimpled chin, the whole remote, sweet, suntouched, glacial face.

She turned her head, and, springing up, cried:

"Dick! What fun!" She gave him both her hands, but her smiling face said very plainly, "Oh; don't let us be sentimental!"

"Are n't you glad to see me?" muttered Shelton.

"Glad to see you! You are funny, Dick!—as if you did n't know! Why, you 've shaved your beard! Mother and Sybil have gone into the village to see old Mrs. Hopkins. Shall we go out? Thea and the boys are playing tennis. It's so jolly that you 've come!" She caught up the tam-o'-shanter, and pinned it to her hair. Almost as tall as Shelton, she looked taller, with arms raised and loose sleeves quivering like wings to the movements of her fingers. "We might have a game before lunch; you can have my other racquet."

"I've got no things," said Shelton blankly.

Her calm glance ran over him.

"You can have some of old Bernard's; he's got any amount. I'll wait for you." She swung her racquet, looked at Shelton, cried, "Be quick!" and vanished.

Shelton ran up-stairs, and dressed in the undecided way of men assuming other people's clothes. She was in the hall when he descended, humming a tune and prodding at her shoe; her smile showed all her pearly upper teeth. He caught hold of her sleeve and whispered:

"Antonia!"

The colour rushed into her cheeks; she looked back across her shoulder.

"Come along, old Dick!" she cried; and, flinging open the glass door, ran into the garden.

Shelton followed.

The tennis-ground was divided by tall netting from a paddock. A holm oak tree shaded one corner, and its thick dark foliage gave an unexpected depth to the green smoothness of the scene. As Shelton

and Antonia came up, Bernard Dennant stopped and cordially grasped Shelton's hand. From the far side of the net Thea, in a shortish skirt, tossed back her straight fair hair, and, warding off the sun, came strolling up to them. The umpire, a small boy of twelve, was lying on his stomach, squealing and tickling a collie. Shelton bent and pulled his hair.

"Hallo, Toddles! you young ruffian!"

One and all they stood round Shelton, and there was a frank and pitiless inquiry in their eyes, in the angle of their noses something chaffing and distrustful, as though about him were some subtle poignant scent exciting curiosity and disapproval.

When the setts were over, and the girls resting in the double hammock underneath the holm oak, Shelton went with Bernard to the paddock to hunt for the lost balls.

"I say, old chap," said his old school-fellow, smiling dryly, "you're in for a wiggling from the Mater."

"A wiggling?" murmured Shelton.

"I don't know much about it, but from something she let drop it seems you've been saying some queer things in your letters to Antonia"; and again he looked at Shelton with his dry smile.

"Queer things?" said the latter angrily. "What d' you mean?"

"Oh, don't ask me. The Mater thinks she's in a bad way—unsettled, or what d' you call at. You've been telling her that things are not what they seem. That's bad, you know"; and still smiling he shook his head.

Shelton dropped his eyes.

"Well, they are n't!" he said.

"Oh, that's all right! But don't bring your philosophy down here, old chap."

"Philosophy!" said Shelton, puzzled.

"Leave us a sacred prejudice or two."

"Sacred! Nothing's sacred, except—" But Shelton did not finish his remark. "I don't understand," he said.

"Ideals, that sort of thing! You've been diving down below the line of 'practical politics,' that's about the size of it, my boy"; and, stooping suddenly, he picked up the last ball. "There is the Mater!" Shelton saw Mrs. Dennant coming down the lawn with her second daughter, Sybil.

By the time they reached the holm oak the three girls had departed towards the house, walking arm in arm, and Mrs. Dennant was standing there alone, in a grey dress, talking to an undergardener. Her hands, cased in tan gauntlets, held a basket which warding off the bearded gardener from the severe but ample lines of her useful-looking skirt. The collie, erect upon his haunches, looked at their two faces, pricking his ears in his endeavour to appreciate how one of these two bipeds differed from the other.

"Thank you; that 'll do, Bunyan. Ah, Dick! Charmin' to see you here, at last!"

In his intercourse with Mrs. Dennant, Shelton never failed to mark the typical nature of her personality. It always seemed to him that he had met so many other ladies like her. He felt that her undoubtable quality had a non-individual flavour, as if standing for her class. She thought that standing for herself was not the thing; yet she was full of character. Tall, with nose a trifle beaked, long, sloping chin, and an assured, benevolent mouth, showing, perhaps, too many teeth—though thin, she was not unsubstantial. Her accent in speaking showed her heritage; it was a kind of drawl which disregarded vulgar merits such as tone; leaned on some syllables, and despised the final 'g'—the peculiar accent, in fact, of aristocracy, adding its deliberate joys to life.

Shelton knew that she had many interests; she was never really idle, from the time (7 A.M.) when her maid brought her a little china pot of tea with a single biscuit and her pet dog, Tops, till eleven o'clock at night, when she lighted a wax candle in a silver candlestick, and with this in one hand, and in the other a new novel, or, better still, one of those charming volumes written by great people about the still greater people they have met, she said good-night to her children and her guests. No! What with photography, the presidency of a local league, visiting the rich, superintending all the poor, gardening, reading, keeping all her ideas so tidy that no foreign notions might stray in, she was never idle. The information she collected from these sources was both vast and varied, but she never let it flavour her

opinions, which lacked sauce, and were drawn from some sort of dish into which, with all her class, she dipped her fingers.

He liked her. No one could help liking her. She was kind, and of such good quality, with a suggestion about her of thin, excellent, and useful china; and she was scented, too—not with verbena, violets, or those essences which women love, but with nothing, as if she had taken stand against all meretricity. In her intercourse with persons not "quite the thing" (she excepted the vicar from this category, though his father had dealt in haberdashery), her refinement, gently, unobtrusively, and with great practical good sense, seemed continually to murmur, "I am, and you—well, are you, don't you know?" But there was no self-consciousness about this attitude, for she was really not a common woman. She simply could not help it; all her people had done this. Their nurses breathed above them in their cradles something that, inhaled into their systems, ever afterwards prevented them from taking good, clear breaths. And her manner! Ah! her manner—it concealed the inner woman so as to leave doubt of her existence!

Shelton listened to the kindly briskness with which she dwelt upon the under-gardener.

"Poor Bunyan! he lost his wife six months ago, and was quite cheerful just at first, but now he 's really too distressin'. I 've done all I can to rouse him; it's so melancholy to see him mopin'. And, my dear Dick, the way he mangles the new rose-trees! I'm afraid he's goin' mad; I shall have to send him away; poor fellow!"

It was clear that she sympathised with Bunyan, or, rather, believed him entitled to a modicum of wholesome grief, the loss of wives being a canonised and legal, sorrow. But excesses! O dear, no!

"I 've told him I shall raise his wages," she sighed. "He used to be such a splendid gardener! That reminds me, my dear Dick; I want to have a talk with you. Shall we go in to lunch?"

Consulting the memorandum-book in which she had been noting the case of Mrs. Hopkins, she slightly preceded Shelton to the house.

It was somewhat late that afternoon when Shelton had his "wiggling"; nor did it seem to him, hypnotised by the momentary absence of Antonia, such a very serious affair.

"Now, Dick," the Honourable Mrs. Dennant said, in her decisive drawl, "I don't think it 's right to put ideas into Antonia's head."

"Ideas!" murmured Shelton in confusion.

"We all know," continued Mrs. Dennant, "that things are not always what they ought to be."

Shelton looked at her; she was seated at her writing-table, addressing in her large, free writing a dinner invitation to a bishop. There was not the faintest trace of awkwardness about her, yet Shelton could not help a certain sense of shock. If she—she—did not think things were what they ought to be—in a bad way things must be indeed!

"Things!" he muttered.

Mrs. Dennant looked at him firmly but kindly with the eyes that would remind him of a hare's.

"She showed me some of your letters, you know. Well, it 's not a bit of use denyin', my dear Dick, that you've been thinkin' too much lately."

Shelton perceived that he had done her an injustice; she handled "things" as she handled under-gardeners—put them away when they showed signs of running to extremes.

"I can't help that, I 'm afraid," he answered.

"My dear boy! you'll never get on that way. Now, I want you to promise me you won't talk to Antonia about those sort of things."

Shelton raised his eyebrows.

"Oh, you know what I mean!"

He saw that to press Mrs. Dennant to say what she meant by "things" would really hurt her sense of form; it would be cruel to force her thus below the surface!

He therefore said, "Quite so!"

To his extreme surprise, flushing the peculiar and pathetic flush of women past their prime, she drawled out:

"About the poor—and criminals—and marriages—there was that wedding, don't you know?"

Shelton bowed his head. Motherhood had been too strong for her; in her maternal flutter she had committed the solecism of touching in so many words on "things."

"Does n't she really see the fun," he thought, "in one man dining out of gold and another dining in the gutter; or in two married people living on together in perfect discord 'pour encourage les autres', or in worshipping Jesus Christ and claiming all her rights at the same time; or in despising foreigners because they are foreigners; or in war; or in anything that is funny?" But he did her a certain amount of justice by recognising that this was natural, since her whole life had been passed in trying not to see the fun in all these things.

But Antonia stood smiling in the doorway. Brilliant and gay she looked, yet resentful, as if she knew they had been talking of her. She sat down by Shelton's side, and began asking him about the youthful foreigner whom he had spoken of; and her eyes made him doubt whether she, too, saw the fun that lay in one human being patronising others.

"But I suppose he's really good," she said, "I mean, all those things he told you about were only—"

"Good!" he answered, fidgeting; "I don't really know what the word means."

Her eyes clouded. "Dick, how can you?" they seemed to say.

Shelton stroked her sleeve.

"Tell us about Mr. Crocker," she said, taking no heed of his caress.

"The lunatic!" he said.

"Lunatic! Why, in your letters he was splendid."

"So he is," said Shelton, half ashamed; "he's not a bit mad, really—that is, I only wish I were half as mad."

"Who's that mad?" queried Mrs. Dennant from behind the urn—"Tom Crocker? Ah, yes! I knew his mother; she was a Springer."

"Did he do it in the week?" said Thea, appearing in the window with a kitten.

"I don't know," Shelton was obliged to answer.

Thea shook back her hair.

"I call it awfully slack of you not to have found out," she said.

Antonia frowned.

"You were very sweet to that young foreigner, Dick," she murmured with a smile at Shelton. "I wish that we could see him."

But Shelton shook his head.

"It seems to me," he muttered, "that I did about as little for him as I could."

Again her face grew thoughtful, as though his words had chilled her.

"I don't see what more you could have done," she answered.

A desire to get close to her, half fear, half ache, a sense of futility and bafflement, an inner burning, made him feel as though a flame were licking at his heart.

CHAPTER XXI

Just as Shelton was starting to walk back to Oxford he met Mr. Dennant coming from a ride. Antonia's father was a spare man of medium height, with yellowish face, grey moustache, ironical eyebrows, and some tiny crow's-feet. In his old, short grey coat, with a little slit up the middle of the back, his drab cord breeches, ancient mahogany leggings, and carefully blacked boots, he had a dry, threadbare quality not without distinction.

"Ah, Shelton!" he said, in his quietly festive voice; "glad to see the pilgrim here, at last. You're not off already?" and, laying his hand on Shelton's arm, he proposed to walk a little way with him across the fields.

This was the first time they had met since the engagement; and Shelton began to nerve himself to express some sentiment, however bald, about it. He squared his shoulders, cleared his throat, and looked askance at Mr. Dennant. That gentleman was walking stiffly, his cord breeches faintly squeaking. He switched a yellow, jointed cane against his leggings, and after each blow looked at his legs satirically. He himself was rather like that yellow cane-pale, and slim, and jointed, with features arching just a little, like the arching of its handle.

"They say it'll be a bad year for fruit," Shelton said at last.

"My dear fellow, you don't know your farmer, I 'm afraid. We ought to hang some farmers—do a world of good. Dear souls! I've got some perfect strawberries."

"I suppose," said Shelton, glad to postpone the evil moment, "in a climate like this a man must grumble."

"Quite so, quite so! Look at us poor slaves of land-owners; if I couldn't abuse the farmers I should be wretched. Did you ever see anything finer than this pasture? And they want me to lower their rents!"

And Mr. Dennant's glance satirically wavered, rested on Shelton, and whisked back to the ground as though he had seen something that alarmed him. There was a pause.

"Now for it!" thought the younger man.

Mr. Dennant kept his eyes fixed on his boots.

"If they'd said, now," he remarked jocosely, "that the frost had nipped the partridges, there 'd have been some sense in it; but what can you expect? They've no consideration, dear souls!"

Shelton took a breath, and, with averted eyes, he hurriedly began:

"It's awfully hard, sir, to—"

Mr. Dennant switched his cane against his shin.

"Yes," he said, "it 's awfully hard to put up with, but what can a fellow do? One must have farmers. Why, if it was n't for the farmers, there 'd be still a hare or two about the place!"

Shelton laughed spasmodically; again he glanced askance at his future father-in-law. What did the waggling of his head mean, the deepening of his crow's-feet, the odd contraction of the mouth? And his eye caught Mr. Dennant's eye; its expression was queer above the fine, dry nose (one of the sort that reddens in a wind).

"I've never had much to do with farmers," he said at last.

"Have n't you? Lucky fellow! The most—yes, quite the most trying portion of the human species—next to daughters."

"Well, sir, you can hardly expect me—" began Shelton.

"I don't—oh, I don't! D 'you know, I really believe we're in for a ducking."

A large black cloud had covered up the sun, and some drops were spattering on Mr. Dennant's hard felt hat.

Shelton welcomed the shower; it appeared to him an intervention on the part of Providence. He would have to say something, but not now, later.

"I 'll go on," he said; "I don't mind the rain. But you'd better get back, sir."

"Dear me! I've a tenant in this cottage," said Mr. Dennant in his, leisurely, dry manner "and a beggar he is to poach, too. Least we can do 's to ask for a little shelter; what do you think?" and smiling sarcastically, as though deprecating his intention to keep dry, he rapped on the door of a prosperous-looking cottage.

It was opened by a girl of Antonia's age and height.

"Ah, Phoebe! Your father in?"

"No," replied the girl, fluttering; "father's out, Mr. Dennant."

"So sorry! Will you let us bide a bit out of the rain?"

The sweet-looking Phoebe dusted them two chairs, and, curtsying, left them in the parlour.

"What a pretty girl!" said Shelton.

"Yes, she's a pretty girl; half the young fellows are after her, but she won't leave her father. Oh, he 's a charming rascal is that fellow!"

This remark suddenly brought home to Shelton the conviction that he was further than ever from avoiding the necessity for speaking. He walked over to the window. The rain was coming down with fury, though a golden line far down the sky promised the shower's quick end. "For goodness' sake," he thought, "let me say something, however idiotic, and get it over!" But he did not turn; a kind of paralysis had seized on him.

"Tremendous heavy rain!" he said at last; "coming down in waterspouts."

It would have been just as easy to say: "I believe your daughter to be the sweetest thing on earth; I love her, and I 'm going to make her happy!" Just as easy, just about the same amount of breath required; but he couldn't say it! He watched the rain stream and hiss against the leaves and churn the dust on the parched road with its insistent torrent; and he noticed with precision all the details of the process going on outside how the raindrops darted at the leaves like spears, and how the leaves shook themselves free a hundred times a minute, while little runnels of water, ice-clear, rolled over their edges, soft and quick. He noticed, too, the mournful head of a sheltering cow that was chewing at the hedge.

Mr. Dennant had not replied to his remark about the rain. So disconcerting was this silence that Shelton turned. His future father-in-law, upon his wooden chair, was staring at his well-blackened boots, bending forward above his parted knees, and prodding at the carpet; a glimpse at his face disturbed Shelton's resolution. It was not forbidding, stern, discouraging—not in the least; it had merely for the moment ceased to look satirical. This was so startling that Shelton lost his chance of speaking. There seemed a heart to Mr. Dennant's gravity; as though for once he were looking grave because he felt so. But glancing up at Shelton, his dry jocosity reappeared at once.

"What a day for ducks!" he said; and again there was unmistakable alarm about the eye. Was it possible that he, too, dreaded something?

"I can't express—" began Shelton hurriedly.

"Yes, it's beastly to get wet," said Mr. Dennant, and he sang—

"For we can wrestle and fight, my boys,
And jump out anywhere."

"You 'll be with us for that dinner-party next week, eh? Capital! There's the Bishop of Blumenthal and old Sir Jack Buckwell; I must get my wife to put you between them—"

"For it's my delight of a starry night—"

"The Bishop's a great anti-divorce man, and old Buckwell 's been in the court at least twice—"

"In the season of the year!"

"Will you please to take some tea, gentlemen?" said the voice of Phoebe in the doorway.

"No, thank you, Phoebe. That girl ought to get married," went on Mr. Dennant, as Phoebe blushing withdrew. A flush showed queerly on his sallow cheeks. "A shame to keep her tied like this to her father's apron-strings—selfish fellow, that!" He looked up sharply, as if he had made a dangerous remark.

The keeper he was watching us,
For him we did n't care!

Shelton suddenly felt certain that Antonia's father was just as anxious to say something expressive of his feelings, and as unable as himself. And this was comforting.

"You know, sir—" he began.

But Mr. Dennant's eyebrows rose, his crow's-feet twinkled; his personality seemed to shrink together.

"By Jove!" he said, "it's stopped! Now's our chance! Come along, my dear fellow; delays are dangerous!" and with his bantering courtesy he held the door for Shelton to pass out. "I think we'll part here," he said—"I almost think so. Good luck to you!"

He held out his dry, yellow hand. Shelton seized it, wrung it hard, and muttered the word:

"Grateful!"

Again Mr. Dennant's eyebrows quivered as if they had been tweaked; he had been found out, and he disliked it. The colour in his face had died away; it was calm, wrinkled, dead-looking under the flattened, narrow brim of his black hat; his grey moustache drooped thinly; the crow's-feet hardened round his eyes; his nostrils were distended by the queerest smile.

"Gratitude!" he said; "almost a vice, is n't it? Good-night!"

Shelton's face quivered; he raised his hat, and, turning as abruptly as his senior, proceeded on his way. He had been playing in a comedy that could only have been played in England. He could afford to smile now at his past discomfort, having no longer the sense of duty unfulfilled. Everything had been said that was right and proper to be said, in the way that we such things should say. No violence had been done; he could afford to smile—smile at himself, at Mr. Dennant, at to-morrow; smile at the sweet aroma of the earth, the shy, unwilling sweetness that only rain brings forth.

CHAPTER XXII

THE COUNTRY HOUSE

The luncheon hour at Holm Oaks, was, as in many well-bred country houses—out of the shooting season, be it understood—the soulful hour. The ferment of the daily doings was then at its full height, and the clamour of its conversation on the weather, and the dogs, the horses, neighbours, cricket, golf, was mingled with a literary murmur; for the Dennants were superior, and it was quite usual to hear remarks like these "Have you read that charmin' thing of Poser's?" or, "Yes, I've got the new edition of old Bablington: delightfully bound—so light." And it was in July that Holm Oaks, as a gathering-place of the elect, was at its best. For in July it had become customary to welcome there many of those poor souls from London who arrived exhausted by the season, and than whom no seamstress in a two-pair back could better have earned a holiday. The Dennants themselves never went to London for the season. It was their good pleasure not to. A week or fortnight of it satisfied them. They had a radical weakness for fresh air, and Antonia, even after her presentation two seasons back, had insisted on returning home, stigmatising London balls as "stuffy things."

When Shelton arrived the stream had only just begun, but every day brought fresh, or rather jaded, people to occupy the old, dark, sweet-smelling bedrooms. Individually, he liked his fellow-guests, but he found himself observing them. He knew that, if a man judged people singly, almost all were better than himself; only when judged in bulk were they worthy of the sweeping criticisms he felt inclined to pass on them. He knew this just as he knew that the conventions, having been invented to prevent man following his natural desires, were merely the disapproving sums of innumerable individual approvals.

It was in the bulk; then, that he found himself observing. But with his amiability and dread of notoriety he remained to all appearance a well-bred, docile creature, and he kept his judgments to himself.

In the matter of intellect he made a rough division of the guests—those who accepted things without a murmur, those who accepted them with carping jocularly; in the matter of morals he found they all accepted things without the semblance of a kick. To show sign of private moral judgment was to have

lost your soul, and, worse, to be a bit of an outsider. He gathered this by intuition rather than from conversation; for conversation naturally tabooed such questions, and was carried on in the loud and cheerful tones peculiar to people of good breeding. Shelton had never been able to acquire this tone, and he could not help feeling that the inability made him more or less an object of suspicion. The atmosphere struck him as it never had before, causing him to feel a doubt of his gentility. Could a man suffer from passion, heart-searchings, or misgivings, and remain a gentleman? It seemed improbable. One of his fellow-guests, a man called Edgbaston, small-eyed and semi-bald, with a dark moustache and a distinguished air of meanness, disconcerted him one day by remarking of an unknown person, "A half-bred lookin' chap; did n't seem to know his mind." Shelton was harassed by a horrid doubt.

Everything seemed divided into classes, carefully docketed and valued. For instance, a Briton was of more value than a man, and wives than women. Those things or phases of life with which people had no personal acquaintance were regarded with a faint amusement and a certain disapproval. The principles of the upper class, in fact, were strictly followed.

He was in that hypersensitive and nervous state favourable for recording currents foreign to itself. Things he had never before noticed now had profound effect on him, such as the tone in which men spoke of women—not precisely with hostility, nor exactly with contempt best, perhaps, described as cultured jeering; never, of course, when men spoke of their own wives, mothers, sisters, or immediate friends, but merely when they spoke of any other women. He reflected upon this, and came to the conclusion that, among the upper classes, each man's own property was holy, while other women were created to supply him with gossip, jests, and spice. Another thing that struck him was the way in which the war then going on was made into an affair of class. In their view it was a baddish business, because poor hack Blank and Peter Blank-Blank had lost their lives, and poor Teddy Blank had now one arm instead of two. Humanity in general was omitted, but not the upper classes, nor, incidentally, the country which belonged to them. For there they were, all seated in a row, with eyes fixed on the horizon of their lawns.

Late one evening, billiards and music being over and the ladies gone, Shelton returned from changing to his smoking-suit, and dropped into one of the great arm-chairs that even in summer made a semicircle round the fendered hearth. Fresh from his good-night parting with Antonia, he sat perhaps ten minutes before he began to take in all the figures in their parti-coloured smoking jackets, cross-legged, with glasses in their hands, and cigars between their teeth.

The man in the next chair roused him by putting down his tumbler with a tap, and seating himself upon the cushioned fender. Through the mist of smoke, with shoulders hunched, elbows and knees crooked out, cigar protruding, beak-ways, below his nose, and the crimson collar of his smoking jacket buttoned close as plumage on his breast, he looked a little like a gorgeous bird.

"They do you awfully well," he said.

A voice from the chair on Shelton's right replied,

"They do you better at Verado's."

"The Veau d'Or 's the best place; they give you Turkish baths for nothing!" drawled a fat man with a tiny mouth.

The suavity of this pronouncement enfolded all as with a blessing. And at once, as if by magic, in the old, oak-panelled room, the world fell naturally into its three departments: that where they do you well; that where they do you better; and that where they give you Turkish baths for nothing.

"If you want Turkish baths," said a tall youth with clean red face, who had come into the room, and stood, his mouth a little open, and long feet jutting with sweet helplessness in front of him, "you should go, you know, to Buda Pesth; most awfully rippin' there."

Shelton saw an indescribable appreciation rise on every face, as though they had been offered truffles or something equally delicious.

"Oh no, Poodles," said the man perched on the fender. "A Johnny I know tells me they 're nothing to Sofia." His face was transfigured by the subtle gloating of a man enjoying vice by proxy.

"Ah!" drawled the small-mouthed man, "there 's nothing fit to hold a candle to Baghda-ad."

Once again his utterance enfolded all as with a blessing, and once again the world fell into its three departments: that where they do you well; that where they do you better; and—Baghdad.

Shelton thought to himself: "Why don't I know a place that's better than

Baghdad?"

He felt so insignificant. It seemed that he knew none of these delightful spots; that he was of no use to any of his fellow-men; though privately he was convinced that all these speakers were as ignorant as himself, and merely found it warming to recall such things as they had heard, with that peculiar gloating look. Alas! his anecdotes would never earn for him that prize of persons in society, the label of a "good chap" and "sportsman."

"Have you ever been in Baghdad?" he feebly asked.

The fat man did not answer; he had begun an anecdote, and in his broad expanse of face his tiny mouth writhed like a caterpillar. The anecdote was humorous.

With the exception of Antonia, Shelton saw but little of the ladies, for, following the well-known custom of the country house, men and women avoided each other as much as might be. They met at meals, and occasionally joined in tennis and in croquet; otherwise it seemed—almost Orientally—agreed that they were better kept apart.

Chancing one day to enter the withdrawing room, while searching for Antonia, he found that he had lighted on a feminine discussion; he would have beaten a retreat, of course, but it seemed too obvious that he was merely looking for his fiancée, so, sitting down, he listened.

The Honourable Charlotte Penguin, still knitting a silk tie—the sixth since that she had been knitting at Hyeres—sat on the low window-seat close to a hydrangea, the petals of whose round flowers almost kissed her sanguine cheek. Her eyes were fixed with languid aspiration on the lady who was speaking. This was a square woman of medium height, with grey hair brushed from her low forehead, the expression of whose face was brisk and rather cross. She was standing with a book, as if delivering a sermon. Had she been a man she might have been described as a bright young man of business; for, though grey, she never could be old, nor ever lose the power of forming quick decisions. Her features and her eyes were prompt and slightly hard, tinged with faith fanatical in the justice of her judgments, and she had that fussy simpleness of dress which indicates the right to meddle. Not red, not white, neither yellow nor quite blue, her complexion was suffused with a certain mixture of these colours, adapted to the climate; and her smile had a strange sour sweetness, like nothing but the flavour of an apple on the turn.

"I don't care what they tell you," she was saying—not offensively, though her voice seemed to imply that she had no time to waste in pleasing—"in all my dealings with them I've found it best to treat them quite like children."

A lady, behind the Times, smiled; her mouth—indeed, her whole hard, handsome face—was reminiscent of dappled rocking-horses found in the Soho Bazaar. She crossed her feet, and some rich and silk stuff rustled. Her whole personality seemed to creak as, without looking, she answered in harsh tones:

"I find the poor are most delightful persons."

Sybil Dennant, seated on the sofa, with a feathery laugh shot a barking terrier dog at Shelton.

"Here's Dick," she said. "Well, Dick, what's your opinion?"

Shelton looked around him, scared. The elder ladies who had spoken had fixed their eyes on him, and in their gaze he read his utter insignificance.

"Oh, that young man!" they seemed to say. "Expect a practical remark from him? Now, come!"

"Opinion," he stammered, "of the poor? I haven't any."

The person on her feet, whose name was Mrs. Mattock, directing her peculiar sweet-sour smile at the distinguished lady with the Times, said:

"Perhaps you 've not had experience of them in London, Lady Bonington?"

Lady Bonington, in answer, rustled.

"Oh, do tell us about the slums, Mrs. Mattock!" cried Sybil.

"Slumming must be splendid! It's so deadly here—nothing but flannel petticoats."

"The poor, my dear," began Mrs. Mattock, "are not the least bit what you think them—"

"Oh, d' you know, I think they're rather nice!" broke in Aunt Charlotte close to the hydrangea.

"You think so?" said Mrs. Mattock sharply. "I find they do nothing but grumble."

"They don't grumble at me: they are delightful persons", and Lady Bonington gave Shelton a grim smile.

He could not help thinking that to grumble in the presence of that rich, despotic personality would require a superhuman courage.

"They're the most ungrateful people in the world," said Mrs. Mattock.

"Why, then," thought Shelton, "do you go amongst them?"

She continued, "One must do them good, one, must do one's duty, but as to getting thanks—"

Lady Bonington sardonically said,

"Poor things! they have a lot to bear."

"The little children!" murmured Aunt Charlotte, with a flushing cheek and shining eyes; "it 's rather pathetic."

"Children indeed!" said Mrs. Mattock. "It puts me out of all patience to see the way that they neglect them. People are so sentimental about the poor."

Lady Bonington creaked again. Her splendid shoulders were wedged into her chair; her fine dark hair, gleaming with silver, sprang back upon her brow; a ruby bracelet glowed on the powerful wrist that held the journal; she rocked her copper-slippered foot. She did not appear to be too sentimental.

"I know they often have a very easy time," said Mrs. Mattock, as if some one had injured her severely. And Shelton saw, not without pity, that Fate had scored her kind and squashed-up face with wrinkles, whose tiny furrows were eloquent of good intentions frustrated by the unpractical and discontented poor. "Do what you will, they are never satisfied; they only resent one's help, or else they take the help and never thank you for it!"

"Oh!" murmured Aunt Charlotte, "that's rather hard."

Shelton had been growing, more uneasy. He said abruptly:

"I should do the same if I were they."

Mrs. Mattock's brown eyes flew at him; Lady Bonington spoke to the Times; her ruby bracelet and a bangle jingled.

"We ought to put ourselves in their places."

Shelton could not help a smile; Lady Bonington in the places of the poor!

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Mattock, "I put myself entirely in their place. I quite understand their feelings. But ingratitude is a repulsive quality."

"They seem unable to put themselves in your place," murmured Shelton; and in a fit of courage he took the room in with a sweeping glance.

Yes, that room was wonderfully consistent, with its air of perfect second-handedness, as if each picture, and each piece of furniture, each book, each lady present, had been made from patterns. They were all widely different, yet all (like works of art seen in some exhibitions) had the look of being after the designs of some original spirit. The whole room was chaste, restrained, derived, practical, and comfortable; neither in virtue nor in work, neither in manner, speech, appearance, nor in theory, could it give itself away.

CHAPTER XXIII

Still looking for Antonia, Shelton went up to the morning-room. Thea Dennant and another girl were seated in the window, talking. From the look they gave him he saw that he had better never have been born; he hastily withdrew. Descending to the hall, he came on Mr. Dennant crossing to his study, with a handful of official-looking papers.

"Ah, Shelton!" said he, "you look a little lost. Is the shrine invisible?"

Shelton grinned, said "Yes," and went on looking. He was not fortunate. In the dining-room sat Mrs. Dennant, making up her list of books.

"Do give me your opinion, Dick," she said. "Everybody 's readin' this thing of Katherine Asterick's; I believe it's simply because she's got a title."

"One must read a book for some reason or other," answered Shelton.

"Well," returned Mrs. Dennant, "I hate doin' things just because other people do them, and I sha'n't get it."

"Good!"

Mrs. Dennant marked the catalogue.

"Here 's Linseed's last, of course; though I must say I don't care for him, but I suppose we ought to have it in the house. And there's Quality's 'The Splendid Diatribes': that 's sure to be good, he's always so refined. But what am I to do about this of Arthur Baal's? They say that he's a charlatan, but everybody reads him, don't you know"; and over the catalogue Shelton caught the gleam of hare-like eyes.

Decision had vanished from her face, with its arched nose and slightly sloping chin, as though some one had suddenly appealed to her to trust her instincts. It was quite pathetic. Still, there was always the book's circulation to form her judgment by.

"I think I 'd better mark it," she said, "don't you? Were you lookin' for Antonia? If you come across Bunyan in the garden, Dick, do say I want to see him; he's gettin' to be a perfect nuisance. I can understand his feelin's, but really he 's carryin' it too far."

Primed with his message to the under-gardener, Shelton went. He took a despairing look into the billiard-room. Antonia was not there. Instead, a tall and fat-cheeked gentleman with a neat moustache, called Mabbey, was practising the spot-stroke. He paused as Shelton entered, and, pouting like a baby, asked in a sleepy voice,

"Play me a hundred up?"

Shelton shook his head, stammered out his sorrow, and was about to go.

The gentleman called Mabbey, plaintively feeling the places where his moustaches joined his pink and glossy cheeks, asked with an air of some surprise,

"What's your general game, then?"

"I really don't know," said Shelton.

The gentleman called Mabbey chalked his cue, and, moving his round, knock-kneed legs in their tight trousers, took up his position for the stroke.

"What price that?" he said, as he regained the perpendicular; and his well-fed eyes followed Shelton with sleepy inquisition. "Curious dark horse, Shelton," they seemed to say.

Shelton hurried out, and was about to run down the lower lawn, when he was accosted by another person walking in the sunshine—a slight-built man in a turned-down collar, with a thin and fair moustache, and a faint bluish tint on one side of his high forehead, caused by a network of thin veins. His face had something of the youthful, optimistic, stained-glass look peculiar to the refined English type. He walked elastically, yet with trim precision, as if he had a pleasant taste in furniture and churches, and held the Spectator in his hand.

"Ah, Shelton!" he said in high-tuned tones, halting his legs in such an easy attitude that it was impossible to interrupt it: "come to take the air?"

Shelton's own brown face, nondescript nose, and his amiable but dogged chin contrasted strangely with the clear-cut features of the stained-glass man.

"I hear from Halidome that you're going to stand for Parliament," the latter said.

Shelton, recalling Halidome's autocratic manner of settling other people's business, smiled.

"Do I look like it?" he asked.

The eyebrows quivered on the stained-glass man. It had never occurred to him, perhaps, that to stand for Parliament a man must look like it; he examined Shelton with some curiosity.

"Ah, well," he said, "now you mention it, perhaps not." His eyes, so carefully ironical, although they differed from the eyes of Mabbey, also seemed to ask of Shelton what sort of a dark horse he was.

"You 're still in the Domestic Office, then?" asked Shelton.

The stained-glass man stooped to sniff a rosebush. "Yes," he said; "it suits me very well. I get lots of time for my art work."

"That must be very interesting," said Shelton, whose glance was roving for Antonia; "I never managed to begin a hobby."

"Never had a hobby!" said the stained-glass man, brushing back his hair (he was walking with no hat); "why, what the deuce d' you do?"

Shelton could not answer; the idea had never troubled him.

"I really don't know," he said, embarrassed; "there's always something going on, as far as I can see."

The stained-glass man placed his hands within his pockets, and his bright glance swept over his companion.

"A fellow must have a hobby to give him an interest in life," he said.

"An interest in life?" repeated Shelton grimly; "life itself is good enough for me."

"Oh!" replied the stained-glass man, as though he disapproved of regarding life itself as interesting.

"That's all very well, but you want something more than that. Why don't you take up woodcarving?"

"Wood-carving?"

"The moment I get fagged with office papers and that sort of thing I take up my wood-carving; good as a game of hockey."

"I have n't the enthusiasm."

The eyebrows of the stained-glass man twitched; he twisted his moustache.

"You 'll find not having a hobby does n't pay," he said; "you 'll get old, then where 'll you be?"

It came as a surprise that he should use the words "it does n't pay," for he had a kind of partially enamelled look, like that modern jewellery which really seems unconscious of its market value.

"You've given up the Bar? Don't you get awfully bored having nothing to do?" pursued the stained-glass man, stopping before an ancient sundial.

Shelton felt a delicacy, as a man naturally would, in explaining that being in love was in itself enough to do. To do nothing is unworthy of a man! But he had never felt as yet the want of any occupation. His silence in no way disconcerted his acquaintance.

"That's a nice old article of virtue," he said, pointing with his chin; and, walking round the sundial, he made its acquaintance from the other side. Its grey profile cast a thin and shortening shadow on the turf; tongues of moss were licking at its sides; the daisies clustered thick around its base; it had acquired a look of growing from the soil. "I should like to get hold of that," the stained-glass man remarked; "I don't know when I 've seen a better specimen," and he walked round it once again.

His eyebrows were still ironically arched, but below them his eyes were almost calculating, and below them, again, his mouth had opened just a little. A person with a keener eye would have said his face looked greedy, and even Shelton was surprised, as though he had read in the Spectator a confession of commercialism.

"You could n't uproot a thing like that," he said; "it would lose all its charm."

His companion turned impatiently, and his countenance looked wonderfully genuine.

"Couldn't I?" he said. "By Jove! I thought so. 1690! The best period." He ran his finger round the sundial's edge. "Splendid line-clean as the day they made it. You don't seem to care much about that sort of thing"; and once again, as though accustomed to the indifference of Vandals, his face regained its mask.

They strolled on towards the kitchen gardens, Shelton still busy searching every patch of shade. He wanted to say "Can't stop," and hurry off; but there was about the stained-glass man a something that, while stinging Shelton's feelings, made the showing of them quite impossible. "Feelings!" that person seemed to say; "all very well, but you want more than that. Why not take up wood-carving? . . . Feelings! I was born in England, and have been at Cambridge."

"Are you staying long?" he asked Shelton. "I go on to Halidome's to-morrow; suppose I sha'n't see you there? Good, chap, old Halidome! Collection of etchings very fine!"

"No; I 'm staying on," said Shelton.

"Ah!" said the stained-glass man, "charming people, the Dennants!"

Shelton, reddening slowly, turned his head away; he picked a gooseberry, and muttered, "Yes."

"The eldest girl especially; no nonsense about her. I thought she was a particularly nice girl."

Shelton heard this praise of Antonia with an odd sensation; it gave him the reverse of pleasure, as though the words had cast new light upon her. He grunted hastily,

"I suppose you know that we 're engaged?"

"Really!" said the stained-glass man, and again his bright, clear, iron-committal glance swept over Shelton—"really! I didn't know. Congratulate you!"

It was as if he said: "You're a man of taste; I should say she would go well in almost any drawing-room!"

"Thanks," said Shelton; "there she' is. If you'll excuse me, I want to speak to her."

CHAPTER XXIV

PARADISE

Antonia, in a sunny angle of the old brick wall, amid the pinks and poppies and cornflowers, was humming to herself. Shelton saw the stained-glass man pass out of sight, then, unobserved, he watched her smelling at the flowers, caressing her face with each in turn, casting away spoiled blossoms, and all the time humming that soft tune.

In two months, or three, all barriers between himself and this inscrutable young Eve would break; she would be a part of him, and he a part of her; he would know all her thoughts, and she all his; together they would be as one, and all would think of them, and talk of them, as one; and this would come about by standing half an hour together in a church, by the passing of a ring, and the signing of their names.

The sun was burnishing her hair—she wore no hat flushing her cheeks, sweetening and making sensuous her limbs; it had warmed her through and through, so that, like the flowers and bees, the sunlight and the air, she was all motion, light, and colour.

She turned and saw Shelton standing there.

"Oh, Dick!" she said: "Lend me your hand-kerchief to put these flowers in, there 's a good boy!"

Her candid eyes, blue as the flowers in her hands, were clear and cool as ice, but in her smile was all the warm profusion of that corner; the sweetness had soaked into her, and was welling forth again. The sight of those sun-warmed cheeks, and fingers twining round the flower-stalks, her pearly teeth, and hair all fragrant, stole the reason out of Shelton. He stood before her, weak about the knees.

"Found you at last!" he said.

Curving back her neck, she cried out, "Catch!" and with a sweep of both her hands flung the flowers into Shelton's arms.

Under the rain of flowers, all warm and odorous, he dropped down on his knees, and put them one by one together, smelling at the pinks, to hide the violence of his feelings. Antonia went on picking flowers, and every time her hand was full she dropped them on his hat, his shoulder, or his arms, and went on plucking more; she smiled, and on her lips a little devil danced, that seemed to know what he was suffering. And Shelton felt that she did know.

"Are you tired?" she asked; "there are heaps more wanted. These are the bedroom-flowers—fourteen lots. I can't think how people can live without flowers, can you?" and close above his head she buried her face in pinks.

He kept his eyes on the plucked flowers before him on the grass, and forced himself to answer,

"I think I can hold out."

"Poor old Dick!" She had stepped back. The sun lit the clear-cut profile of her cheek, and poured its gold over the bosom of her blouse. "Poor old Dick! Awfully hard luck, is n't it?" Burdened with mignonette, she came so close again that now she touched his shoulder, but Shelton did not look; breathless, with wildly beating heart, he went on sorting out the flowers. The seeds of mignonette rained on his neck, and as she let the blossoms fall, their perfume fanned his face. "You need n't sort them out!" she said.

Was she enticing him? He stole a look; but she was gone again, swaying and sniffing at the flowers.

"I suppose I'm only hindering you," he growled; "I 'd better go."

She laughed.

"I like to see you on your knees, you look so funny!" and as she spoke she flung a clove carnation at him. "Does n't it smell good?"

"Too good Oh, Antonia! why are you doing this?"

"Why am I doing what?"

"Don't you know what you are doing?"

"Why, picking flowers!" and once more she was back, bending and sniffing at the blossoms.

"That's enough."

"Oh no," she called; "it's not not nearly."

"Keep on putting them together, if you love me."

"You know I love you," answered Shelton, in a smothered voice.

Antonia gazed at him across her shoulder; puzzled and inquiring was her face.

"I'm not a bit like you," she said. "What will you have for your room?"

"Choose!"

"Cornflowers and clove pinks. Poppies are too frivolous, and pinks too—"

"White," said Shelton.

"And mignonette too hard and—"

"Sweet. Why cornflowers?"

Antonia stood before him with her hands against her sides; her figure was so slim and young, her face uncertain and so grave.

"Because they're dark and deep."

"And why clove pinks?"

Antonia did not answer.

"And why clove pinks?"

"Because," she said, and, flushing, touched a bee that had settled on her skirt, "because of something in you I don't understand."

"Ah! And what flowers shall t give YOU?"

She put her hands behind her.

"There are all the other flowers for me."

Shelton snatched from the mass in front of him an Iceland poppy with straight stem and a curved neck, white pinks, and sprigs of hard, sweet mignonette, and held it out to her.

"There," he said, "that's you." But Antonia did not move.

"Oh no, it is n't!" and behind her back her fingers slowly crushed the petals of a blood-red poppy. She shook her head, smiling a brilliant smile. The blossoms fell, he flung his arms around her, and kissed her on the lips.

But his hands dropped; not fear exactly, nor exactly shame, had come to him. She had not resisted, but he had kissed the smile away; had kissed a strange, cold, frightened look, into her eyes.

"She did n't mean to tempt me, then," he thought, in surprise and anger. "What did she mean?" and, like a scolded dog, he kept his troubled watch upon her face.

CHAPTER XXV

THE RIDE

"Where now?" Antonia asked, wheeling her chestnut mare, as they turned up High Street, Oxford City. "I won't go back the same way, Dick!"

"We could have a gallop on Port Meadow, cross the Upper River twice, and get home that way; but you 'll be tired."

Antonia shook her head. Aslant her cheek the brim of a straw hat threw a curve of shade, her ear glowed transparent in the sun.

A difference had come in their relations since that kiss; outwardly she was the same good comrade, cool and quick. But as before a change one feels the subtle difference in the temper of the wind, so Shelton was affected by the inner change in her. He had made a blot upon her candour; he had tried to rub it out again, but there was left a mark, and it was ineffaceable. Antonia belonged to the most civilised division of the race most civilised in all the world, whose creed is "Let us love and hate, let us work and marry, but let us never give ourselves away; to give ourselves away is to leave a mark, and that is past forgive ness. Let our lives be like our faces, free from every kind of wrinkle, even those of laughter; in this way alone can we be really civilised."

He felt that she was ruffled by a vague discomfort. That he should give himself away was natural, perhaps, and only made her wonder, but that he should give her the feeling that she had given herself away was a very different thing.

"Do you mind if I just ask at the Bishop's Head for letters?" he said, as they passed the old hotel.

A dirty and thin envelope was brought to him, addressed "Mr. Richard Shelton, Esq.," in handwriting that was passionately clear, as though the writer had put his soul into securing delivery of the letter. It was dated three days back, and, as they rode away, Shelton read as follows:

IMPERIAL PEACOCK HOTEL, FOLKESTONE. MON CHER MONSIEUR SHELTON,

This is already the third time I have taken up pen to write to you, but, having nothing but misfortune to recount, I hesitated, awaiting better days. Indeed, I have been so profoundly discouraged that if I

had not thought it my duty to let you know of my fortunes I know not even now if I should have found the necessary spirit. 'Les choses vont de mal en mal'. From what I hear there has never been so bad a season here. Nothing going on. All the same, I am tormented by a mob of little matters which bring me not sufficient to support my life. I know not what to do; one thing is certain, in no case shall I return here another year. The patron of this hotel, my good employer, is one of those innumerable specimens who do not forge or steal because they have no need, and if they had would lack the courage; who observe the marriage laws because they have been brought up to believe in them, and know that breaking them brings risk and loss of reputation; who do not gamble because they dare not; do not drink because it disagrees with them; go to church because their neighbours go, and to procure an appetite for the mid-day meal; commit no murder because, not transgressing in any other fashion, they are not obliged. What is there to respect in persons of this sort? Yet they are highly esteemed, and form three quarters of Society. The rule with these good gentlemen is to shut their eyes, never use their thinking powers, and close the door on all the dogs of life for fear they should get bitten.

Shelton paused, conscious of Antonia's eyes fixed on him with the inquiring look that he had come to dread. In that chilly questioning she seemed to say: "I am waiting. I am prepared to be told things—that is, useful things—things that help one to believe without the risk of too much thinking."

"It's from that young foreigner," he said; and went on reading to himself.

I have eyes, and here I am; I have a nose 'pour, flairer le humbug'. I see that amongst the value of things nothing is the equal of "free thought." Everything else they can take from me, 'on ne pent pas m'oter cela!' I see no future for me here, and certainly should have departed long ago if I had had the money, but, as I have already told you, all that I can do barely suffices to procure me 'de quoi vivre'. 'Je me sens ecceuye'. Do not pay too much attention to my Jeremiads; you know what a pessimist I am. 'Je ne perds pas courage'.

Hoping that you are well, and in the cordial pressing of your hand, I subscribe myself,

Your very devoted

LOUIS FERRAND.

He rode with the letter open in his hand, frowning at the curious turmoil which Ferrand excited in his heart. It was as though this foreign vagrant twanged within him a neglected string, which gave forth moans of a mutiny.

"What does he say?" Antonia asked.

Should he show it to her? If he might not, what should he do when they were married?

"I don't quite know," he said at last; "it 's not particularly cheering."

"What is he like, Dick—I mean, to look at? Like a gentleman, or what?"

Shelton stifled a desire to laugh.

"He looks very well in a frock-coat," he replied; "his father was a wine merchant."

Antonia flicked her whip against her skirt.

"Of course," she murmured, "I don't want to hear if there's anything I ought not."

But instead of soothing Shelton, these words had just the opposite effect. His conception of the ideal wife was not that of one from whom the half of life must be excluded.

"It's only," he stammered again, "that it's not cheerful."

"Oh, all right!" she cried, and, touching her horse, flew off in front.

"I hate dismal things."

Shelton bit his lips. It was not his fault that half the world was dark. He knew her words were loosed against himself, and, as always at a sign of her displeasure, was afraid. He galloped after her on the scorched turf.

"What is it?" he said. "You 're angry with me!"

"Oh no!"

"Darling, I can't help it if things are n't cheerful. We have eyes," he added, quoting from the letter.

Antonia did not look at him; but touched her horse again.

"Well, I don't want to see the gloomy side," she said, "and I can't see why YOU should. It's wicked to be discontented;" and she galloped off.

It was not his fault if there were a thousand different kinds of men, a thousand different points of view, outside the fence of her experience! "What business," he thought, digging in his dummy spurs, "has our class to patronise? We 're the only people who have n't an idea of what life really means." Chips of dried turf and dust came flying back, stinging his face. He gained on her, drew almost within reach, then, as though she had been playing with him, was left hopelessly behind.

She stooped under the far hedge, fanning her flushed face with dock-leaves:

"Aha, Dick! I knew you'd never catch me" and she patted the chestnut mare, who turned her blowing muzzle with contemptuous humour towards Shelton's steed, while her flanks heaved rapturously, gradually darkening with sweat.

"We'd better take them steadily," grunted Shelton, getting off and loosening his girths, "if we mean to get home at all."

"Don't be cross, Dick!"

"We oughtn't to have galloped them like this; they 're not in condition. We'd better go home the way we came."

Antonia dropped the reins, and straightened her back hair.

"There 's no fun in that," she said. "Out and back again; I hate a dog's walk."

"Very well," said Shelton; he would have her longer to himself!

The road led up and up a hill, and from the top a vision of Saxonia lay disclosed in waves of wood and pasture. Their way branched down a gateless glade, and Shelton sidled closer till his knee touched the mare's off-flank.

Antonia's profile conjured up visions. She was youth itself; her eyes so brilliant, and so innocent, her cheeks so glowing, and her brow unruffled; but in her smile and in the setting of her jaw lurked something resolute and mischievous. Shelton put his hand out to the mare's mane.

"What made you promise to marry me?" he said.

She smiled.

"Well, what made you?"

"I?" cried Shelton.

She slipped her hand over his hand.

"Oh, Dick!" she said.

"I want," he stammered, "to be everything to you. Do you think I shall?"

"Of course!"

Of course! The words seemed very much or very little.

She looked down at the river, gleaming below the glade in a curving silver line. "Dick, there are such a lot of splendid things that we might do."

Did she mean, amongst those splendid things, that they might understand each other; or were they fated to pretend to only, in the old time-honoured way?

They crossed the river by a ferry, and rode a long time in silence, while the twilight slowly fell behind the aspens. And all the beauty of the evening, with its restless leaves, its grave young moon, and lighted campion flowers, was but a part of her; the scents, the witchery and shadows, the quaint field noises, the yokels' whistling, and the splash of water-fowl, each seemed to him enchanted. The flighting bats, the forms of the dim hayricks, and sweet-brier perfume—she summed them all up in herself. The fingermarks had deepened underneath her eyes, a languor came upon her; it made her the more sweet and youthful. Her shoulders seemed to bear on them the very image of our land—grave and aspiring, eager yet contained—before there came upon that land the grin of greed, the folds of wealth, the

simpler of content. Fair, unconscious, free!

And he was silent, with a beating heart.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE BIRD 'OF PASSAGE

That night, after the ride, when Shelton was about to go to bed, his eyes fell on Ferrand's letter, and with a sleepy sense of duty he began to read it through a second time. In the dark, oak-panelled bedroom, his four-post bed, with back of crimson damask and its dainty sheets, was lighted by the candle glow; the copper pitcher of hot water in the basin, the silver of his brushes, and the line of his well-polished boots all shone, and Shelton's face alone was gloomy, staring at the yellowish paper in his hand.

"The poor chap wants money, of course," he thought. But why go on for ever helping one who had no claim on him, a hopeless case, incurable—one whom it was his duty to let sink for the good of the community at large? Ferrand's vagabond refinement had beguiled him into charity that should have been bestowed on hospitals, or any charitable work but foreign missions. To give a helping hand, a bit of himself, a nod of fellowship to any fellow-being irrespective of a claim, merely because he happened to be down, was sentimental nonsense! The line must be drawn! But in the muttering of this conclusion he experienced a twinge of honesty. "Humbug! You don't want to part with your money, that's all!"

So, sitting down in shirt-sleeves at his writing table, he penned the following on paper stamped with the Holm Oaks address and crest: MY DEAR FERRAND,

I am sorry you are having such a bad spell. You seem to be dead out of luck. I hope by the time you get this things will have changed for the better. I should very much like to see you again and have a talk, but shall be away for some time longer, and doubt even when I get back whether I should be able to run down and look you up. Keep me 'au courant' as to your movements. I enclose a cheque.

Yours sincerely,

RICHARD SHELTON.

Before he had written out the cheque, a moth fluttering round the candle distracted his attention, and by the time he had caught and put it out he had forgotten that the cheque was not enclosed. The letter, removed with his clothes before he was awake, was posted in an empty state.

One morning a week later he was sitting in the smoking-room in the company of the gentleman called Mabbey, who was telling him how many grouse he had deprived of life on August 12 last year, and how many he intended to deprive of life on August 12 this year, when the door was opened, and the butler entered, carrying his head as though it held some fatal secret.

"A young man is asking for you, sir," he said to Shelton, bending down discreetly; "I don't know if you would wish to see him, sir."

"A young man!" repeated Shelton; "what sort of a young man?"

"I should say a sort of foreigner, sir," apologetically replied the butler. "He's wearing a frock-coat, but he looks as if he had been walking a good deal."

Shelton rose with haste; the description sounded to him ominous.

"Where is he?"

"I put him in the young ladies' little room, sir."

"All right," said Shelton; "I 'll come and see him. Now, what the deuce!" he thought, running down the stairs.

It was with a queer commingling of pleasure and vexation that he entered the little chamber sacred to the birds, beasts, racquets, golf-clubs, and general young ladies' litter. Ferrand was standing underneath the cage of a canary, his hands folded on his pinched-up hat, a nervous smile upon his lips.

He was dressed in Shelton's old frock-coat, tightly buttoned, and would have cut a stylish figure but for his look of travel. He wore a pair of pince-nez, too, which somewhat veiled his cynical blue eyes, and clashed a little with the pagan look of him. In the midst of the strange surroundings he still preserved that air of knowing, and being master of, his fate, which was his chief attraction.

"I 'm glad to see you," said Shelton, holding out his hand.

"Forgive this liberty," began Ferrand, "but I thought it due to you after all you've done for me not to throw up my efforts to get employment in England without letting you know first. I'm entirely at the end of my resources."

The phrase struck Shelton as one that he had heard before.

"But I wrote to you," he said; "did n't you get my letter?"

A flicker passed across the vagrant's face; he drew the letter from his pocket and held it out.

"Here it is, monsieur."

Shelton stared at it.

"Surely," said he, "I sent a cheque?"

Ferrand did not smile; there was a look about him as though Shelton by forgetting to enclose that cheque had done him a real injury.

Shelton could not quite hide a glance of doubt.

"Of course," he said, "I—I—meant to enclose a cheque."

Too subtle to say anything, Ferrand curled his lip. "I am capable of much, but not of that," he seemed to say; and at once Shelton felt the meanness of his doubt.

"Stupid of me," he said.

"I had no intention of intruding here," said Ferrand; "I hoped to see you in the neighbourhood, but I arrive exhausted with fatigue. I've eaten nothing since yesterday at noon, and walked thirty miles." He shrugged his shoulders. "You see, I had no time to lose before assuring myself whether you were here or not."

"Of course—" began Shelton, but again he stopped.

"I should very much like," the young foreigner went on, "for one of your good legislators to find himself in these country villages with a penny in his pocket. In other countries bakers are obliged to sell you an equivalent of bread for a penny; here they won't sell you as much as a crust under twopence. You don't encourage poverty."

"What is your idea now?" asked Shelton, trying to gain time.

"As I told you," replied Ferrand, "there 's nothing to be done at Folkestone, though I should have stayed there if I had had the money to defray certain expenses"; and again he seemed to reproach his patron with the omission of that cheque. "They say things will certainly be better at the end of the month. Now that I know English well, I thought perhaps I could procure a situation for teaching languages."

"I see," said Shelton.

As a fact, however, he was far from seeing; he literally did not know what to do. It seemed so brutal to give Ferrand money and ask him to clear out; besides, he chanced to have none in his pocket.

"It needs philosophy to support what I 've gone through this week," said Ferrand, shrugging his shoulders. "On Wednesday last, when I received your letter, I had just eighteen-pence, and at once I made a resolution to come and see you; on that sum I 've done the journey. My strength is nearly at an end."

Shelton stroked his chin.

"Well," he had just begun, "we must think it over," when by Ferrand's face he saw that some one had come in. He turned, and saw Antonia in the doorway. "Excuse me," he stammered, and, going to Antonia, drew her from the room.

With a smile she said at once: "It's the young foreigner; I'm certain. Oh, what fun!"

"Yes," answered Shelton slowly; "he's come to see me about getting some sort of tutorship or other. Do you think your mother would mind if I took him up to have a wash? He's had a longish walk. And might he have some breakfast? He must be hungry."

"Of course! I'll tell Dobson. Shall I speak to mother? He looks nice, Dick."

He gave her a grateful, furtive look, and went back to his guest; an impulse had made him hide from her the true condition of affairs.

Ferrand was standing where he had been left his face still clothed in mordant impassivity.

"Come up to my room!" said Shelton; and while his guest was washing, brushing, and otherwise embellishing his person, he stood reflecting that Ferrand was by no means unrepresentable, and he felt quite grateful to him.

He took an opportunity, when the young man's back was turned, of examining his counterfoils. There was no record, naturally, of a cheque drawn in Ferrand's favour. Shelton felt more mean than ever.

A message came from Mrs. Dennant; so he took the traveller to the dining-room and left him there, while he himself went to the lady of the house. He met Antonia coming down.

"How many days did you say he went without food that time—you know?" she asked in passing.

"Four."

"He does n't look a bit common, Dick."

Shelton gazed at her dubiously.

"They're surely not going to make a show of him!" he thought.

Mrs. Dennant was writing, in a dark-blue dress starred over with white spots, whose fine lawn collar was threaded with black velvet.

"Have you seen the new hybrid Algy's brought me back from Kidstone? Is n't it charmin'?" and she bent her face towards this perfect rose. "They say unique; I'm awfully interested to find out if that's true. I've told Algy I really must have some."

Shelton thought of the unique hybrid breakfasting downstairs; he wished that Mrs. Dennant would show in him the interest she had manifested in the rose. But this was absurd of him, he knew, for the potent law of hobbies controlled the upper classes, forcing them to take more interest in birds, and roses, missionaries, or limited and highly-bound editions of old books (things, in a word, in treating which you knew exactly where you were) than in the manifestations of mere life that came before their eyes.

"Oh, Dick, about that young Frenchman. Antonia says he wants a tutorship; now, can you really recommend him? There's Mrs. Robinson at the Gateways wants someone to teach her boys languages; and, if he were quite satisfactory, it's really time Toddles had a few lessons in French; he goes to Eton next half."

Shelton stared at the rose; he had suddenly realised why it was that people take more interest in roses than in human beings—one could do it with a quiet heart.

"He's not a Frenchman, you know," he said to gain a little time.

"He's not a German, I hope," Mrs. Dennant answered, passing her fingers round a petal, to impress its fashion on her brain; "I don't like Germans. Is n't he the one you wrote about—come down in the world? Such a pity with so young a fellow! His father was a merchant, I think you told us. Antonia says he 's quite refined to look at."

"Oh, yes," said Shelton, feeling on safe ground; "he's refined enough to look at."

Mrs. Dennant took the rose and put it to her nose.

"Delicious perfume! That was a very touchin' story about his goin' without food in Paris. Old Mrs. Hopkins has a room to let; I should like to do her a good turn. I'm afraid there's a hole in the ceilin',

though. Or there's the room here in the left wing on the ground-floor where John the footman used to sleep. It's quite nice; perhaps he could have that."

"You 're awfully kind," said Shelton, "but—"

"I should like to do something to restore his self-respect," went on Mrs. Dennant, "if, as you say, he 's clever and all that. Seein' a little refined life again might make a world of difference to him. It's so sad when a young man loses self-respect."

Shelton was much struck by the practical way in which she looked at things. Restore his self-respect! It seemed quite a splendid notion! He smiled, and said,

"You're too kind. I think—"

"I don't believe in doin' things by halves," said Mrs. Dennant; "he does n't drink, I suppose?"

"Oh, no," said Shelton. "He's rather a tobacco maniac, of course."

"Well, that's a mercy! You would n't believe the trouble I 've had with drink, especially over cooks and coachmen. And now Bunyan's taken to it."

"Oh, you'd have no trouble with Ferrand," returned Shelton; "you couldn't tell him from a gentleman as far as manners go."

Mrs. Dennant smiled one of her rather sweet and kindly smiles.

"My dear Dick," she said, "there's not much comfort in that. Look at poor Bobby Surcingle, look at Oliver Semples and Victor Medallion; you could n't have better families. But if you 're sure he does n't drink! Algy 'll laugh, of course; that does n't matter—he laughs at everything."

Shelton felt guilty; being quite unprepared for so rapid an adoption of his client.

"I really believe there's a lot of good in him," he stammered; "but, of course, I know very little, and from what he tells me he's had a very curious life. I shouldn't like—"

"Where was he educated?" inquired Mrs. Dennant. "They have no public schools in France, so I 've been told; but, of course, he can't help that, poor young fellow! Oh, and, Dick, there 's one thing—has he relations? One has always to be so careful about that. It 's one thing to help a young fellow, but quite another to help his family too. One sees so many cases of that where men marry girls without money, don't you know."

"He has told me," answered Shelton, "his only relations are some cousins, and they are rich."

Mrs. Dennant took out her handkerchief, and, bending above the rose, removed a tiny insect.

"These green-fly get in everywhere," she said.

"Very sad story; can't they do anything for him?" and she made researches in the rose's heart.

"He's quarrelled with them, I believe," said Shelton; "I have n't liked to press him, about that."

"No, of course not," assented Mrs. Dennant absently—she had found another green-fly "I always think it's painful when a young man seems so friendless."

Shelton was silent; he was thinking deeply. He had never before felt so distrustful of the youthful foreigner.

"I think," he said at last, "the best thing would be for you to see him for yourself."

"Very well," said Mrs. Dennant. "I should be so glad if you would tell him to come up. I must say I do think that was a most touchin' story about Paris. I wonder whether this light's strong enough now for me to photograph this rose."

Shelton withdrew and went down-stairs. Ferrand was still at breakfast. Antonia stood at the sideboard carving beef for him, and in the window sat Thea with her Persian kitten.

Both girls were following the traveller's movements with inscrutable blue eyes. A shiver ran down Shelton's spine. To speak truth, he cursed the young man's coming, as though it affected his relations with Antonia.

CHAPTER XXVII

SUB ROSA

From the interview, which Shelton had the mixed delight of watching, between Ferrand and the Honourable Mrs. Dennant, certain definite results accrued, the chief of which was the permission accorded the young wanderer to occupy the room which had formerly been tenanted by the footman John. Shelton was lost in admiration of Ferrand's manner in this scene.. Its subtle combination of deference and dignity was almost paralysing; paralysing, too, the subterranean smile upon his lips.

"Charmin' young man, Dick," said Mrs. Dennant, when Shelton lingered to say once more that he knew but very little of him; "I shall send a note round to Mrs. Robinson at once. They're rather common, you know—the Robinsons. I think they'll take anyone I recommend."

"I 'm sure they will," said Shelton; "that's why I think you ought to know—"

But Mrs. Dennant's eyes, fervent, hare-like, were fixed on something far away; turning, he saw the rose in a tall vase on a tall and spindly stool. It seemed to nod towards them in the sunshine. Mrs. Dennant dived her nose towards her camera.

"The light's perfect now," she said, in a voice muffled by the cloth. "I feel sure that livin' with decent people will do wonders for him. Of course, he understands that his meals will be served to him apart."

Shelton, doubly anxious, now that his efforts had lodged his client in a place of trust, fell, back on hoping for the best; his instinct told him that, vagabond as Ferrand was, he had a curious self-respect, that would save him from a mean ingratitude.

In fact, as Mrs. Dennant, who was by no means void of common-sense, foresaw, the arrangement worked all right. Ferrand entered on his duties as French tutor to the little Robinsons. In the Dennants' household he kept himself to his own room, which, day and night, he perfumed with tobacco, emerging at noon into the garden, or, if wet, into the study, to teach young Toddles French. After a time it became customary for him to lunch with the house-party, partly through a mistake of Toddles, who seemed to think that it was natural, and partly through John Noble, one of Shelton's friends, who had come to stay, and discovered Ferrand to be a most awfully interesting person he was always, indeed, discovering the most awfully interesting persons. In his grave and toneless voice, brushing his hair from off his brow, he descanted upon Ferrand with enthusiasm, to which was joined a kind of shocked amusement, as who should say, "Of course, I know it's very odd, but really he 's such an awfully interesting person." For John Noble was a politician, belonging to one of those two Peculiar parties, which, thoroughly in earnest, of an honesty above suspicion, and always very busy, are constitutionally averse to anything peculiar for fear of finding they have overstepped the limit of what is practical in politics. As such he inspired confidence, not caring for things unless he saw some immediate benefit to be had from them, having a perfect sense of decency, and a small imagination. He discussed all sorts of things with Ferrand; on one occasion Shelton overheard them arguing on anarchism.

"No Englishman approves of murder," Noble was saying, in the gloomy voice that contrasted with the optimistic cast of his fine head, "but the main principle is right. Equalisation of property is bound to come. I sympathise with them, not with their methods."

"Forgive me," struck in Ferrand; "do you know any anarchists?"

"No," returned Noble; "I certainly do not."

"You say you sympathise with them, but the first time it comes to action—"

"Well?"

"Oh, monsieur! one doesn't make anarchism with the head."

Shelton perceived that he had meant to add, "but with the heart, the lungs, the liver." He drew a deeper meaning from the saying, and seemed to see, curling with the smoke from Ferrand's lips, the words: "What do you, an English gentleman, of excellent position, and all the prejudices of your class, know about us outcasts? If you want to understand us you must be an outcast too; we are not playing at the game."

This talk took place upon the lawn, at the end of one of Toddles's French lessons, and Shelton left John Noble maintaining to the youthful foreigner, with stubborn logic, that he, John Noble, and the anarchists had much, in common. He was returning to the house, when someone called his name from

underneath the holm oak. There, sitting Turkish fashion on the grass, a pipe between his teeth, he found a man who had arrived the night before, and impressed him by his friendly taciturnity. His name was Whyddon, and he had just returned from Central Africa; a brown-faced, large-jawed man, with small but good and steady eyes, and strong, spare figure.

"Oh, Mr. Shelton!" he said, "I wondered if you could tell me what tips I ought to give the servants here; after ten years away I've forgotten all about that sort of thing."

Shelton sat down beside him; unconsciously assuming, too, a cross-legged attitude, which caused him much discomfort.

"I was listening," said his new acquaintance, "to the little chap learning his French. I've forgotten mine. One feels a hopeless duffer knowing no, languages."

"I suppose you speak Arabic?" said Shelton.

"Oh, Arabic, and a dialect or two; they don't count. That tutor has a curious face."

"You think so?" said Shelton, interested. "He's had a curious life."

The traveller spread his hands, palms downwards, on the grass and looked at Shelton with, a smile.

"I should say he was a rolling stone," he said. "It 's odd, I've seen white men in Central Africa with a good deal of his look about them."

"Your diagnosis is a good one," answered Shelton.

"I 'm always sorry for those fellows. There's generally some good in them. They are their own enemies. A bad business to be unable to take pride in anything one does!" And there was a look of pity on his face.

"That's exactly it," said Shelton. "I've often tried to put it into words. Is it incurable?"

"I think so."

"Can you tell me why?"

Whyddon pondered.

"I rather think," he said at last, "it must be because they have too strong a faculty of criticism. You can't teach a man to be proud of his own work; that lies in his blood "; folding his arms across his breast, he heaved a sigh. Under the dark foliage, his eyes on the sunlight, he was the type of all those Englishmen who keep their spirits bright and wear their bodies out in the dark places of hard work. "You can't think," he said, showing his teeth in a smile, "how delightful it is to be at home! You learn to love the old country when you're away from it."

Shelton often thought, afterwards; of this diagnosis of the vagabond, for he was always stumbling on instances of that power of subtle criticism which was the young foreigner's prime claim to be "a most awfully interesting" and perhaps a rather shocking person.

An old school-fellow of Shelton's and his wife were staying in the house, who offered to the eye the picture of a perfect domesticity. Passionless and smiling, it was impossible to imagine they could ever have a difference. Shelton, whose bedroom was next to theirs, could hear them in the mornings talking in exactly the tones they used at lunch, and laughing the same laughs. Their life seemed to accord them perfect satisfaction; they were supplied with their convictions by Society just as, when at home, they were supplied with all the other necessaries of life by some co-operative stores. Their fairly handsome faces, with the fairly kind expressions, quickly and carefully regulated by a sense of compromise, began to worry him so much that when in the same room he would even read to avoid the need of looking at them. And yet they were kind—that is, fairly kind—and clean and quiet in the house, except when they laughed, which was often, and at things which made him want to howl as a dog howls at music.

"Mr. Shelton," Ferrand said one day, "I 'm not an amateur of marriage—never had the chance, as you may well suppose; but, in any case, you have some people in the house who would make me mark time before I went committing it. They seem the ideal young married people—don't quarrel, have perfect health, agree with everybody, go to church, have children—but I should like to hear what is beautiful in their life," and he grimaced. "It seems to me so ugly that I can only gasp. I would much rather they ill-treated each other, just to show they had the corner of a soul between them. If that is marriage, 'Dieu m'en garde!'"

But Shelton did not answer; he was thinking deeply.

The saying of John Noble's, "He's really a most interesting person," grew more and more upon his nerves; it seemed to describe the Dennant attitude towards this stranger within their gates. They treated him with a sort of wonder on the "don't touch" system, like an object in an exhibition. The restoration, however, of his self-respect proceeded with success. For all the semblance of having grown too big for Shelton's clothes, for all his vividly burnt face, and the quick but guarded play of cynicism on his lips—he did much credit to his patrons. He had subdued his terror of a razor, and looked well in a suit of Shelton's flannels. For, after all, he had only been eight years exiled from middle-class gentility, and he had been a waiter half that time. But Shelton wished him at the devil. Not for his manners' sake—he was never tired of watching how subtly the vagabond adapted his conduct to the conduct of his hosts, while keeping up his critical detachment—but because that critical detachment was a constant spur to his own vision, compelling him to analyse the life into which, he had been born and was about to marry. This process was disturbing; and to find out when it had commenced, he had to go back to his meeting with Ferrand on the journey up from Dover.

There was kindness in a hospitality which opened to so strange a bird; admitting the kindness, Shelton fell to analysing it. To himself, to people of his class, the use of kindness was a luxury, not significant of sacrifice, but productive of a pleasant feeling in the heart, such as massage will setup in the legs. "Everybody's kind," he thought; "the question is, What understanding is there, what real sympathy?" This problem gave him food for thought.

The progress, which Mrs. Dennant not unfrequently remarked upon, in Ferrand's conquest of his strange position, seemed to Shelton but a sign that he was getting what he could out of his sudden visit to green pastures; under the same circumstances, Shelton thought that he himself would do the same. He felt that the young foreigner was making a convenient bow to property, but he had more respect for the sarcastic smile on the lips of Ferrand's heart.

It was not long before the inevitable change came in the spirit of the situation; more and more was Shelton conscious of a quaint uneasiness in the very breathing of the household.

"Curious fellow you've got hold of there, Shelton," Mr. Dennant said to him during a game of croquet; "he 'll never do any good for himself, I'm afraid."

"In one sense I'm afraid not," admitted Shelton.

"Do you know his story? I will bet you sixpence"—and Mr. Dennant paused to swing his mallet with a proper accuracy "that he's been in prison."

"Prison!" ejaculated Shelton.

"I think," said Mr. Dennant, with bent knees carefully measuring his next shot, "that you ought to make inquiries—ah! missed it! Awkward these hoops! One must draw the line somewhere."

"I never could draw," returned Shelton, nettled and uneasy; "but I understand—I 'll give him a hint to go."

"Don't," said Mr. Dennant, moving after his second ball, which Shelton had smitten to the farther end, "be offended, my dear Shelton, and by no means give him a hint; he interests me very much—a very clever, quiet young fellow."

That this was not his private view Shelton inferred by studying Mr. Dennant's manner in the presence of the vagabond. Underlying the well-bred banter of the tranquil voice, the guarded quizzicality of his pale brown face, it could be seen that Algernon Cuffe Dennant, Esq., J.P., accustomed to laugh at other people, suspected that he was being laughed at. What more natural than that he should grope about to see how this could be? A vagrant alien was making himself felt by an English Justice of the Peace—no small tribute, this, to Ferrand's personality. The latter would sit silent through a meal, and yet make his effect. He, the object of their kindness, education, patronage, inspired their fear. There was no longer any doubt; it was not of Ferrand that they were afraid, but of what they did not understand in him; of horrid subtleties meandering in the brain under that straight, wet-looking hair; of something bizarre popping from the curving lips below that thin, lopsided nose.

But to Shelton in this, as in all else, Antonia was what mattered. At first, anxious to show her lover that she trusted him, she seemed never tired of doing things for his young protege, as though she too had set her heart on his salvation; but, watching her eyes when they rested on the vagabond, Shelton was perpetually reminded of her saying on the first day of his visit to Holm Oaks, "I suppose he 's really good—I mean all these things you told me about were only...."

Curiosity never left her glance, nor did that story of his four days' starving leave her mind; a

sentimental picturesqueness clung about that incident more valuable by far than this mere human being with whom she had so strangely come in contact. She watched Ferrand, and Shelton watched her. If he had been told that he was watching her, he would have denied it in good faith; but he was bound to watch her, to find out with what eyes she viewed this visitor who embodied all the rebellious under-side of life, all that was absent in herself.

"Dick," she said to him one day, "you never talk to me of Monsieur Ferrand."

"Do you want to talk of him?"

"Don't you think that he's improved?"

"He's fatter."

Antonia looked grave.

"No, but really?"

"I don't know," said Shelton; "I can't judge him."

Antonia turned her face away, and something in her attitude alarmed him.

"He was once a sort of gentleman," she said; "why shouldn't he become one again?"

Sitting on the low wall of the kitchen-garden, her head was framed by golden plums. The sun lay barred behind the foliage of the holm oak, but a little patch filtering through a gap had rested in the plum-tree's heart. It crowned the girl. Her raiment, the dark leaves, the red wall, the golden plums, were woven by the passing glow to a block of pagan colour. And her face above it, chaste, serene, was like the scentless summer evening. A bird amongst the currant bushes kept a little chant vibrating; and all the plum-tree's shape and colour seemed alive.

"Perhaps he does n't want to be a gentleman," said Shelton.

Antonia swung her foot.

"How can he help wanting to?"

"He may have a different philosophy of life."

Antonia was slow to answer.

"I know nothing about philosophies of life," she said at last.

Shelton answered coldly,

"No two people have the same."

With the falling sun-glow the charm passed off the tree. Chilled and harder, yet less deep, it was no more a block of woven colour, warm and impassive, like a southern goddess; it was now a northern tree, with a grey light through its leaves.

"I don't understand you in the least," she said; "everyone wishes to be good."

"And safe?" asked Shelton gently.

Antonia stared.

"Suppose," he said—"I don't pretend to know, I only suppose—what Ferrand really cares for is doing things differently from other people? If you were to load him with a character and give him money on condition that he acted as we all act, do you think he would accept it?"

"Why not?"

"Why are n't cats dogs; or pagans Christians?"

Antonia slid down from the wall.

"You don't seem to think there 's any use in trying," she said, and turned away.

Shelton made a movement as if he would go after her, and then stood still, watching her figure slowly

pass, her head outlined above the wall, her hands turned back across her narrow hips. She halted at the bend, looked back, then, with an impatient gesture, disappeared.

Antonia was slipping from him!

A moment's vision from without himself would have shown him that it was he who moved and she who was standing still, like the figure of one watching the passage of a stream with clear, direct, and sullen eyes.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE RIVER

One day towards the end of August Shelton took Antonia on the river—the river that, like soft music, soothes the land; the river of the reeds and poplars, the silver swan-sails, sun and moon, woods, and the white slumbrous clouds; where cuckoos, and the wind, the pigeons, and the weirs are always singing; and in the flash of naked bodies, the play of waterlily leaves, queer goblin stumps, and the twilight faces of the twisted tree-roots, Pan lives once more.

The reach which Shelton chose was innocent of launches, champagne bottles and loud laughter; it was uncivilised, and seldom troubled by these humanising influences. He paddled slowly, silent and absorbed, watching Antonia. An unaccustomed languor clung about her; her eyes had shadows, as though she had not slept; colour glowed softly in her cheeks, her frock seemed all alight with golden radiance. She made Shelton pull into the reeds, and plucked two rounded lilies sailing like ships against slow-moving water.

"Pull into the shade, please," she said; "it's too hot out here."

The brim of her linen hat kept the sun from her face, but her head was drooping like a flower's head at noon.

Shelton saw that the heat was really harming her, as too hot a day will dim the icy freshness of a northern plant. He dipped his sculls, the ripples started out and swam in grave diminuendo till they touched the banks.

He shot the boat into a cleft, and caught the branches of an overhanging tree. The skiff rested, balancing with mutinous vibration, like a living thing.

"I should hate to live in London," said Antonia suddenly; "the slums must be so awful. What a pity, when there are places like this! But it's no good thinking."

"No," answered Shelton slowly! "I suppose it is no good."

"There are some bad cottages at the lower end of Cross Eaton. I went them one day with Miss Truecote. The people won't help themselves. It's so discouraging to help people who won't help themselves."

She was leaning her elbows on her knees, and, with her chin resting on her hands, gazed up at Shelton. All around them hung a tent of soft, thick leaves, and, below, the water was deep-dyed with green refraction. Willow boughs, swaying above the boat, caressed Antonia's arms and shoulders; her face and hair alone were free.

"So discouraging," she said again.

A silence fell.... Antonia seemed thinking deeply.

"Doubts don't help you," she said suddenly; "how can you get any good from doubts? The thing is to win victories."

"Victories?" said Shelton. "I 'd rather understand than conquer!"

He had risen to his feet, and grasped stunted branch, canting the boat towards the bank.

"How can you let things slide like that, Dick? It's like Ferrand."

"Have you such a bad opinion of him, then?" asked Shelton. He felt on the verge of some, discovery.

She buried her chin deeper in her hands.

"I liked him at first," she said; "I thought that he was different. I thought he couldn't really be—"

"Really be what?"

Antonia did not answer.

"I don't know," she said at last. "I can't explain. I thought—"

Shelton still stood, holding to the branch, and the oscillation of the boat freed an infinity of tiny ripples.

"You thought—what?" he said.

He ought to have seen her face grow younger, more childish, even timid. She said in a voice smooth, round, and young:

"You know, Dick, I do think we ought to try. I know I don't try half hard enough. It does n't do any good to think; when you think, everything seems so mixed, as if there were nothing to lay hold of. I do so hate to feel like that. It is n't as if we didn't know what's right. Sometimes I think, and think, and it 's all no good, only a waste of time, and you feel at the end as if you had been doing wrong."

Shelton frowned.

"What has n't been through fire's no good," he said; and, letting go the branch, sat down. Freed from restraint, the boat edged out towards the current. "But what about Ferrand?"

"I lay awake last night wondering what makes you like him so. He's so bitter; he makes me feel unhappy. He never seems content with anything. And he despises"—her face hardened—"I mean, he hates us all!"

"So should I if I were he," said Shelton.

The boat was drifting on, and gleams of sunlight chased across their faces. Antonia spoke again.

"He seems to be always looking at dark things, or else he seems as if—as if he could—enjoy himself too much. I thought—I thought at first," she stammered, "that we could do him good."

"Do him good! Ha, ha!"

A startled rat went swimming for its life against the stream; and Shelton saw that he had done a dreadful thing: he had let Antonia with a jerk into a secret not hitherto admitted even by himself—the secret that her eyes were not his eyes, her way of seeing things not his nor ever would be. He quickly muffled up his laughter. Antonia had dropped her gaze; her face regained its languor, but the bosom of her dress was heaving. Shelton watched her, racking his brains to find excuses for that fatal laugh; none could he find. It was a little piece of truth. He paddled slowly on, close to the bank, in the long silence of the river.

The breeze had died away, not a fish was rising; save for the lost music of the larks no birds were piping; alone, a single pigeon at brief intervals cooed from the neighbouring wood.

They did not stay much longer in the boat.

On the homeward journey in the pony-cart, rounding a corner of the road, they came on Ferrand in his pince-nez, holding a cigarette between his fingers and talking to a tramp, who was squatting on the bank. The young foreigner recognised them, and at once removed his hat.

"There he is," said Shelton, returning the salute.

Antonia bowed.

"Oh!" she, cried, when they were out of hearing, "I wish he 'd go. I can't bear to see him; it's like looking at the dark."

CHAPTER XXIX

ON THE WING

That night, having gone up to his room, Shelton filled his pipe for his unpleasant duty. He had resolved to hint to Ferrand that he had better go. He was still debating whether to write or go himself to the young foreigner, when there came a knock and Ferrand himself appeared.

"I should be sorry," he said, breaking an awkward silence, "if you were to think me ungrateful, but I see no future for me here. It would be better for me to go. I should never be content to pass my life in teaching languages 'ce n'est guere dans mon caractre'."

As soon as what he had been cudgelling his brains to find a way of saying had thus been said for him, Shelton experienced a sense of disapproval.

"What do you expect to get that's better?" he said, avoiding Ferrand's eyes.

"Thanks to your kindness," replied the latter, "I find myself restored. I feel that I ought to make some good efforts to dominate my social position."

"I should think it well over, if I were you!" said Shelton.

"I have, and it seems to me that I'm wasting my time. For a man with any courage languages are no career; and, though I 've many defects, I still have courage."

Shelton let his pipe go out, so pathetic seemed to him this young man's faith in his career; it was no pretended faith, but neither was it, he felt, his true motive for departure. "He's tired," he thought; "that 's it. Tired of one place." And having the instinctive sense that nothing would keep Ferrand, he redoubled his advice.

"I should have thought," he said, "that you would have done better to have held on here and saved a little before going off to God knows what."

"To save," said Ferrand, "is impossible for me, but, thanks to you and your good friends, I 've enough to make front to first necessities. I'm in correspondence with a friend; it's of great importance for me to reach Paris before all the world returns. I 've a chance to get, a post in one of the West African companies. One makes fortunes out there—if one survives, and, as you know, I don't set too much store by life."

"We have a proverb," said Shelton, "'A bird in the hand is worth two birds in the bush!'"

"That," returned Ferrand, "like all proverbs, is just half true. This is an affair of temperament. It 's not in my character to dandle one when I see two waiting to be caught; 'voyager, apprendre, c'est plus fort que moi'." He paused; then, with a nervous goggle of the eyes and an ironic smile he said: "Besides, 'mon cher monsieur', it is better that I go. I have never been one to hug illusions, and I see pretty clearly that my presence is hardly acceptable in this house."

"What makes you say that?" asked, Shelton, feeling that the murder was now out."

"My dear sir, all the world has not your understanding and your lack of prejudice, and, though your friends have been extremely kind to me, I am in a false position; I cause them embarrassment, which is not extraordinary when you reflect what I have been, and that they know my history."

"Not through me," said Shelton quickly, "for I don't know it myself."

"It's enough," the vagrant said, "that they feel I'm not a bird of their feather. They cannot change, neither can I. I have never wanted to remain where I 'm not welcome."

Shelton turned to the window, and stared into the darkness; he would never quite understand this vagabond, so delicate, so cynical, and he wondered if Ferrand had been swallowing down the words, "Why, even you won't be sorry to see my back!"

"Well," he said at last, "if you must go, you must. When do you start?"

"I 've arranged with a man to carry my things to the early train. I think it better not to say good-bye. I 've written a letter instead; here it is. I left it open for you to read if you should wish,"

"Then," said Shelton, with a curious mingling of relief, regret, good-will, "I sha'n't see you again?"

Ferrand gave his hand a stealthy rub, and held it out.

"I shall never forget what you have done for me," he said.

"Mind you write," said Shelton.

"Yes, yes"—the vagrant's face was oddly twisted—"you don't know what a difference it makes to have a correspondent; it gives one courage. I hope to remain a long time in correspondence with you."

"I dare say you do," thought Shelton grimly, with a certain queer emotion.

"You will do me the justice to remember that I have never asked you for anything," said Ferrand. "Thank you a thousand times. Good-bye!"

He again wrung his patron's hand in his damp grasp, and, going out, left Shelton with an odd sensation in his throat. "You will do me the justice to remember that I have never asked you for anything." The phrase seemed strange, and his mind flew back over all this queer acquaintanceship. It was a fact: from the beginning to the end the youth had never really asked for anything. Shelton sat down on his bed, and began to read the letter in his hand. It was in French.

DEAR MADAME (it ran),

It will be insupportable to me, after your kindness, if you take me for ungrateful. Unfortunately, a crisis has arrived which plunges me into the necessity of leaving your hospitality. In all lives, as you are well aware, there arise occasions that one cannot govern, and I know that you will pardon me that I enter into no explanation on an event which gives me great chagrin, and, above all, renders me subject to an imputation of ingratitude, which, believe me, dear Madame, by no means lies in my character. I know well enough that it is a breach of politeness to leave you without in person conveying the expression of my profound reconnaissance, but if you consider how hard it is for me to be compelled to abandon all that is so distinguished in domestic life, you will forgive my weakness. People like me, who have gone through existence with their eyes open, have remarked that those who are endowed with riches have a right to look down on such as are not by wealth and breeding fitted to occupy the same position. I shall never dispute a right so natural and salutary, seeing that without this distinction, this superiority, which makes of the well-born and the well-bred a race apart, the rest of the world would have no standard by which to rule their lives, no anchor to throw into the depths of that vast sea of fortune and of misfortune on which we others drive before the wind. It is because of this, dear Madame, that I regard myself so doubly fortunate to have been able for a few minutes in this bitter pilgrimage called life, to sit beneath the tree of safety. To have been able, if only for an hour, to sit and set the pilgrims pass, the pilgrims with the blistered feet and ragged clothes, and who yet, dear Madame, guard within their hearts a certain joy in life, illegal joy, like the desert air which travellers will tell you fills men as with wine to be able thus to sit an hour, and with a smile to watch them pass, lame and blind, in all the rags of their deserved misfortunes, can you not conceive, dear Madame, how that must be for such as I a comfort? Whatever one may say, it is sweet, from a position of security, to watch the sufferings of others; it gives one a good sensation in the heart.

In writing this, I recollect that I myself once had the chance of passing all my life in this enviable safety, and as you may suppose, dear Madame, I curse myself that I should ever have had the courage to step beyond the boundaries of this fine tranquil state. Yet, too, there have been times when I have asked myself: "Do we really differ from the wealthy—we others, birds of the fields, who have our own philosophy, grown from the pains of needing bread—we who see that the human heart is not always an affair of figures, or of those good maxims that one finds in copy-books—do we really differ?" It is with shame that I confess to have asked myself a question so heretical. But now, when for these four weeks I have had the fortune of this rest beneath your roof, I see how wrong I was to entertain such doubts. It is a great happiness to have decided once for all this point, for it is not in my character to pass through life uncertain—mistaken, perhaps—on psychological matters such as these. No, Madame; rest happily assured that there is a great difference, which in the future will be sacred for me. For, believe me, Madame, it would be calamity for high Society if by chance there should arise amongst them any understanding of all that side of life which—vast as the plains and bitter as the sea, black as the ashes of a corpse, and yet more free than any wings of birds who fly away—is so justly beyond the grasp of their philosophy. Yes, believe me, dear Madame, there is no danger in the world so much to be avoided by all the members of that circle, most illustrious, most respectable, called high Society.

From what I have said you may imagine how hard it is for me to take my flight. I shall always keep for you the most distinguished sentiments. With the expression of my full regard for you and your good family, and of a gratitude as sincere as it is badly worded,

Believe me, dear Madame,

Your devoted
LOUIS FERRAND.

Shelton's first impulse was to tear the letter up, but this he reflected he had no right to do. Remembering, too, that Mrs. Dennant's French was orthodox, he felt sure she would never understand the young foreigner's subtle innuendoes. He closed the envelope and went to bed, haunted still by Ferrand's parting look.

It was with no small feeling of embarrassment, however, that, having sent the letter to its destination by an early footman, he made his appearance at the breakfast-table. Behind the Austrian coffee-urn, filled with French coffee, Mrs. Dennant, who had placed four eggs in a German egg-boiler, said "Good-morning," with a kindly smile.

"Dick, an egg?" she asked him, holding up a fifth.

"No, thank you," replied Shelton, greeting the table and fitting down.

He was a little late; the buzz of conversation rose hilariously around.

"My dear," continued Mr. Dennant, who was talking to his youngest daughter, "you'll have no chance whatever—not the least little bit of chance."

"Father, what nonsense! You know we shall beat your heads off!"

"Before it 's too late, then, I will eat a muffin. Shelton, pass the muffins!" But in making this request, Mr. Dennant avoided looking in his face.

Antonia, too, seemed to keep her eyes away from him. She was talking to a Connoisseur on Art of supernatural appearances, and seemed in the highest spirits. Shelton rose, and, going to the sideboard, helped himself to grouse.

"Who was the young man I saw yesterday on the lawn?" he heard the Connoisseur remark. "Struck me as having an—er—quite intelligent physiog."

His own intelligent physiog, raised at a slight slant so that he might look the better through his nose-nippers, was the very pattern of approval. "It's curious how one's always meeting with intelligence;" it seemed to say. Mrs. Dennant paused in the act of adding cream, and Shelton scrutinised her face; it was hare-like, and superior as ever. Thank goodness she had smelt no rat! He felt strangely disappointed.

"You mean Monsieur Ferrand, teachin' Toddles French? Dobson, the Professor's cup."

"I hope I shall see him again," cooed the Connoisseur; "he was quite interesting on the subject of young German working men. It seems they tramp from place to place to learn their trades. What nationality was he, may I ask?"

Mr. Dennant, of whom he asked this question, lifted his brows, and said,

"Ask Shelton."

"Half Dutch, half French."

"Very interesting breed; I hope I shall see him again."

"Well, you won't," said Thea suddenly; "he's gone."

Shelton saw that their good breeding alone prevented all from adding, "And thank goodness, too!"

"Gone? Dear me, it's very—"

"Yes," said Mr. Dennant, "very sudden."

"Now, Algie," murmured Mrs. Dennant, "it 's quite a charmin' letter. Must have taken the poor young man an hour to write."

"Oh, mother!" cried Antonia.

And Shelton felt his face go crimson. He had suddenly remembered that her French was better than her mother's.

"He seems to have had a singular experience," said the Connoisseur.

"Yes," echoed Mr. Dennant; "he 's had some singular experience. If you want to know the details, ask friend Shelton; it's quite romantic. In the meantime, my dear; another cup?"

The Connoisseur, never quite devoid of absent-minded malice, spurred his curiosity to a further effort; and, turning his well-defended eyes on Shelton, murmured,

"Well, Mr. Shelton, you are the historian, it seems."

"There is no history," said Shelton, without looking up.

"Ah, that's very dull," remarked the Connoisseur.

"My dear Dick," said Mrs. Dennant, "that was really a most touchin' story about his goin' without food in Paris."

Shelton shot another look at Antonia; her face was frigid. "I hate your d—d superiority!" he thought, staring at the Connoisseur.

"There's nothing," said that gentleman, "more enthralling than starvation. Come, Mr Shelton."

"I can't tell stories," said Shelton; "never could."

He cared not a straw for Ferrand, his coming, going, or his history; for, looking at Antonia, his heart was heavy.

CHAPTER XXX

THE LADY FROM BEYOND

The morning was sultry, brooding, steamy. Antonia was at her music, and from the room where Shelton tried to fix attention on a book he could hear her practising her scales with a cold fury that cast an added gloom upon his spirit. He did not see her until lunch, and then she again sat next the Connoisseur. Her cheeks were pale, but there was something feverish in her chatter to her neighbour; she still refused to look at Shelton. He felt very miserable. After lunch, when most of them had left the table, the rest fell to discussing country neighbours.

"Of course," said Mrs. Dennant, "there are the Foliots; but nobody calls on them."

"Ah!" said the Connoisseur, "the Foliots—the Foliots—the people—er—who—quite so!"

"It's really distressin'; she looks so sweet ridin' about. Many people with worse stories get called on," continued Mrs. Dennant, with that large frankness of intrusion upon doubtful subjects which may be made by certain people in a certain way, "but, after all, one couldn't ask them to meet anybody."

"No," the Connoisseur assented. "I used to know Foliot. Thousand pities. They say she was a very pretty woman."

"Oh, not pretty!" said Mrs. Dennant! "more interestin than pretty, I should say."

Shelton, who knew the lady slightly, noticed that they spoke of her as in the past. He did not look towards Antonia; for, though a little troubled at her presence while such a subject was discussed, he hated his conviction that her face, was as unruffled as though the Foliots had been a separate species. There was, in fact, a curiosity about her eyes, a faint impatience on her lips; she was rolling little crumbs of bread. Suddenly yawning, she muttered some remark, and rose. Shelton stopped her at the door.

"Where are you going?"

"For a walk."

"May n't I come?"

She shook her head.

"I 'm going to take Toddles."

Shelton held the door open, and went back to the table.

"Yes," the Connoisseur said, sipping at his sherry, "I 'm afraid it's all over with young Foliot."

"Such a pity!" murmured Mrs. Dennant, and her kindly face looked quite disturbed. "I've known him ever since he was a boy. Of course, I think he made a great mistake to bring her down here. Not even bein' able to get married makes it doubly awkward. Oh, I think he made a great mistake!"

"Ah!" said the Connoisseur, "but d' you suppose that makes much difference? Even if What 's—his-name gave her a divorce, I don't think, don't you know, that—"

"Oh, it does! So many people would be inclined to look over it in time. But as it is it's hopeless, quite. So very awkward for people, too, meetin' them about. The Telfords and the Butterwicks—by the way, they're comin' here to dine to-night—live near them, don't you know."

"Did you ever meet her before-er-before the flood?" the Connoisseur inquired; and his lips parting and unexpectedly revealing teeth gave him a shadowy resemblance to a goat.

"Yes; I did meet her once at the Branksomes'. I thought her quite a charmin' person."

"Poor fellow!" said the Connoisseur; "they tell me he was going to take the hounds."

"And there are his delightful coverts, too. Algie often used to shoot there, and now they say he just has his brother down to shoot with him. It's really quite too melancholy! Did you know him, Dick?"

"Foliot?" replied Shelton absently. "No; I never met him: I've seen her once or twice at Ascot."

Through the window he could see Antonia in her scarlet Tam-o'-shanter, swinging her stick, and he got up feigning unconcern. Just then Toddles came bounding up against his sister. They went off arm in arm. She had seen him at the window, yet she gave no friendly glance; Shelton felt more miserable than ever. He stepped out upon the drive. There was a lurid, gloomy canopy above; the elm-trees drooped their heavy blackish green, the wonted rustle of the aspen-tree was gone, even the rooks were silent. A store of force lay heavy on the heart of nature. He started pacing slowly up and down, his pride forbidding him to follow her, and presently sat down on an old stone seat that faced the road. He stayed a long time staring at the elms, asking himself what he had done and what he ought to do. And somehow he was frightened. A sense of loneliness was on him, so real, so painful, that he shivered in the sweltering heat. He was there, perhaps, an hour, alone, and saw nobody pass along the road. Then came the sound of horse's hoofs, and at the same time he heard a motor-car approaching from the opposite direction. The rider made appearance first, riding a grey horse with an Arab's high set head and tail. She was holding him with difficulty, for the whirr of the approaching car grew every moment louder. Shelton rose; the car flashed by. He saw the horse stagger in the gate-way, crushing its rider up against the gatepost.

He ran, but before he reached the gate the lady was on foot, holding the plunging horse's bridle.

"Are you hurt?" cried Shelton breathlessly, and he, too, grabbed the bridle. "Those beastly cars!"

"I don't know," she said. "Please don't; he won't let strangers touch him."

Shelton let go, and watched her coax the horse. She was rather tall, dressed in a grey habit, with a grey Russian cap upon her head, and he suddenly recognised the Mrs. Foliot whom they had been talking of at lunch.

"He 'll be quiet now," she said, "if you would n't mind holding him a minute."

She gave the reins to him, and leaned against the gate. She was very pale.

"I do hope he has n't hurt you," Shelton said. He was quite close to her, well able to see her face—a curious face with high cheek-bones and a flatfish moulding, enigmatic, yet strangely passionate for all its listless pallor. Her smiling, tightened lips were pallid; pallid, too, her grey and deep-set eyes with greenish tints; above all, pale the ashy mass of hair coiled under her grey cap.

"Th-thanks!" she said; "I shall be all right directly. I'm sorry to have made a fuss."

She bit her lips and smiled.

"I 'm sure you're hurt; do let me go for—" stammered Shelton. "I can easily get help."

"Help!" she said, with a stony little laugh; "oh, no, thanks!"

She left the gate, and crossed the road to where he held the horse. Shelton, to conceal embarrassment, looked at the horse's legs, and noticed that the grey was resting one of them. He ran his hand down.

"I 'm afraid," he said, "your horse has knocked his off knee; it's swelling."

She smiled again.

"Then we're both cripples."

"He'll be lame when he gets cold. Would n't you like to put him in the stable here? I 'm sure you ought to drive home."

"No, thanks; if I 'm able to ride him he can carry me. Give me a hand up."

Her voice sounded as though something had offended her. Rising from inspection of the horse's leg, Shelton saw Antonia and Toddles standing by. They had come through a wicketgate leading from the fields.

The latter ran up to him at once.

"We saw it," he whispered—"jolly smash-up. Can't I help?"

"Hold his bridle," answered Shelton, and he looked from one lady to the other.

There are moments when the expression of a face fixes itself with painful clearness; to Shelton this was such a moment. Those two faces close together, under their coverings of scarlet and of grey, showed a contrast almost cruelly vivid. Antonia was flushed, her eyes had grown deep blue; her look of startled doubt had passed and left a question in her face.

"Would you like to come in and wait? We could send you home, in the brougham," she said.

The lady called Mrs. Foliot stood, one arm across the crupper of her saddle, biting her lips and smiling still her enigmatic smile, and it was her face that stayed most vividly on Shelton's mind, its ashy hail, its pallor, and fixed, scornful eyes.

"Oh, no, thanks! You're very kind."

Out of Antonia's face the timid, doubting friendliness had fled, and was replaced by enmity. With a long, cold look at both of them she turned away. Mrs. Foliot gave a little laugh, and raised her foot for Shelton's help. He heard a hiss of pain as he swung her up, but when he looked at her she smiled.

"Anyway," he said impatiently, "let me come and see you don't break down."

She shook her head. "It 's only two miles. I'm not made of sugar."

"Then I shall simply have to follow."

She shrugged her shoulders, fixing her resolute eyes on him.

"Would that boy like to come?" she asked.

Toddles left the horse's head.

"By Jove!" he cried. "Would n't I just!"

"Then," she said, "I think that will be best. You 've been so kind."

She bowed, smiled inscrutably once more, touched the Arab with her whip, and started, Toddles trotting at her side.

Shelton was left with Antonia underneath the elms. A sudden puff of tepid air blew in their faces, like a warning message from the heavy, purple heat clouds; low rumbling thunder travelled slowly from afar.

"We're going to have a storm," he said.

Antonia nodded. She was pale now, and her face still wore its cold look of offence.

"I 've got a headache," she said, "I shall go in and lie down."

Shelton tried to speak, but something kept him silent—submission to what was coming, like the mute submission of the fields and birds to the menace of the storm.

He watched her go, and went back to his seat. And the silence seemed to grow; the flowers ceased to exude their fragrance, numbed by the weighty air. All the long house behind him seemed asleep, deserted. No noise came forth, no laughter, the echo of no music, the ringing of no bell; the heat had wrapped it round with drowsiness. And the silence added to the solitude within him. What an unlucky chance, that woman's accident! Designed by Providence to put Antonia further from him than before! Why was not the world composed of the immaculate alone? He started pacing up and down, tortured by a dreadful heartache.

"I must get rid of this," he thought. "I 'll go for a good tramp, and chance the storm."

Leaving the drive he ran on Toddles, returning in the highest spirits.

"I saw her home," he crowed. "I say, what a ripper, isn't she? She 'll be as lame as a tree to-morrow; so will the gee. Jolly hot!"

This meeting showed Shelton that he had been an hour on the stone seat; he had thought it some ten minutes, and the discovery alarmed him. It seemed to bring the import of his miserable fear right home to him. He started with a swinging stride, keeping his eyes fixed on the road, the perspiration streaming down his face.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE STORM

It was seven and more when Shelton returned, from his walk; a few heat drops had splashed the leaves, but the storm had not yet broken. In brooding silence the world seemed pent beneath the purple firmament.

By rapid walking in the heat Shelton had got rid of his despondency. He felt like one who is to see his mistress after long estrangement. He, bathed, and, straightening his tie-ends, stood smiling at the glass. His fear, unhappiness, and doubts seemed like an evil dream; how much worse off would he not have been, had it all been true?

It was dinner-party night, and when he reached the drawing-room the guests were there already, chattering of the coming storm. Antonia was not yet down, and Shelton stood by the piano waiting for her entry. Red faces, spotless shirt-fronts, white arms; and freshly-twisted hair were all around him. Some one handed him a clove carnation, and, as he held it to his nose, Antonia came in, breathless, as though she had rushed down-stairs. Her cheeks were pale no longer; her hand kept stealing to her throat. The flames of the coming storm seemed to have caught fire within her, to be scorching her in her white frock; she passed him close, and her fragrance whipped his senses.

She had never seemed to him so lovely.

Never again will Shelton breathe the perfume of melons and pineapples without a strange emotion. From where he sat at dinner he could not see Antonia, but amidst the chattering of voices, the clink of glass and silver, the sights and sounds and scents of feasting, he thought how he would go to her and say that nothing mattered but her love. He drank the frosted, pale-gold liquid of champagne as if it had been water.

The windows stood wide open in the heat; the garden lay in thick, soft shadow, where the pitchy shapes of trees could be discerned. There was not a breath of air to fan the candle-flames above the flowers; but two large moths, fearful of the heavy dark, flew in and wheeled between the lights over the diners' heads. One fell scorched into a dish of fruit, and was removed; the other, eluding all the swish of napkins and the efforts of the footmen, continued to make soft, fluttering rushes till Shelton rose and caught it in his hand. He took it to the window and threw it out into the darkness, and he noticed that the air was thick and tepid to his face. At a sign from Mr. Dennant the muslin curtains were then drawn across the windows, and in gratitude, perhaps, for this protection, this filmy barrier between them and the muffled threats of Nature, everyone broke out in talk. It was such a night as comes in summer after perfect weather, frightening in its heat, and silence, which was broken by the distant thunder travelling

low along the ground like the muttering of all dark places on the earth—such a night as seems, by very breathlessness, to smother life, and with its fateful threats to justify man's cowardice.

The ladies rose at last. The circle of the rosewood dining-table, which had no cloth, strewn with flowers and silver gilt, had a likeness to some autumn pool whose brown depths of oily water gleam under the sunset with red and yellow leaves; above it the smoke of cigarettes was clinging, like a mist to water when the sun goes down. Shelton became involved in argument with his neighbour on the English character.

"In England we've mislaid the recipe of life," he said. "Pleasure's a lost art. We don't get drunk, we're ashamed of love, and as to beauty, we've lost the eye for' it. In exchange we have got money, but what 's the good of money when we don't know how to spend it?" Excited by his neighbour's smile, he added: "As to thought, we think so much of what our neighbours think that we never think at all.... Have you ever watched a foreigner when he's listening to an Englishman? We 're in the habit of despising foreigners; the scorn we have for them is nothing to the scorn they have for us. And they are right! Look at our taste! What is the good of owning riches if we don't know how to use them?"

"That's rather new to me," his neighbour said. "There may be something in it.... Did you see that case in the papers the other day of old Hornblower, who left the 1820 port that fetched a guinea a bottle? When the purchaser—poor feller!—came to drink it he found eleven bottles out of twelve completely ullaged—ha! ha! Well, there's nothing wrong with this"; and he drained his glass.

"No," answered Shelton.

When they rose to join the ladies, he slipped out on the lawn.

At once he was enveloped in a bath of heat. A heavy odour, sensual, sinister, was in the air, as from a sudden flowering of amorous shrubs. He stood and drank it in with greedy nostrils. Putting his hand down, he felt the grass; it was dry, and charged with electricity. Then he saw, pale and candescent in the blackness, three or four great lilies, the authors of that perfume. The blossoms seemed to be rising at him through the darkness; as though putting up their faces to be kissed. He straightened himself abruptly and went in.

The guests were leaving when Shelton, who was watching; saw Antonia slip through the drawing-room window. He could follow the white glimmer of her frock across the lawn, but lost it in the shadow of the trees; casting a hasty look to see that he was not observed, he too slipped out. The blackness and the heat were stifling he took great breaths of it as if it were the purest mountain air, and, treading softly on the grass, stole on towards the holm oak. His lips were dry, his heart beat painfully. The mutter of the distant thunder had quite ceased; waves of hot air came wheeling in his face, and in their midst a sudden rush of cold. He thought, "The storm is coming now!" and stole on towards the tree. She was lying in the hammock, her figure a white blur in, the heart of the tree's shadow, rocking gently to a little creaking of the branch. Shelton held his breath; she had not heard him. He crept up close behind the trunk till he stood in touch of her. "I mustn't startle her," he thought. "Antonia!"

There was a faint stir in the hammock, but no answer. He stood over her, but even then he could not see her face; he only, had a sense of something breathing and alive within a yard of him—of something warm and soft. He whispered again, "Antonia!" but again there came no answer, and a sort of fear and frenzy seized on him. He could no longer hear her breathe; the creaking of the branch had ceased. What was passing in that silent, living creature there so close? And then he heard again the sound of breathing, quick and scared, like the fluttering of a bird; in a moment he was staring in the dark at an empty hammock.

He stayed beside the empty hammock till he could bear uncertainty no longer. But as he crossed the lawn the sky was rent from end to end by jagged lightning, rain spattered him from head to foot, and with a deafening crack the thunder broke.

He sought the smoking-room, but, recoiling at the door, went to his own room, and threw himself down on the bed. The thunder groaned and sputtered in long volleys; the lightning showed him the shapes of things within the room, with a weird distinctness that rent from them all likeness to the purpose they were made for, bereaved them of utility, of their matter-of-factness, presented them as skeletons, abstractions, with indecency in their appearance, like the naked nerves and sinews of a leg preserved in, spirit. The sound of the rain against the house stunned his power of thinking, he rose to shut his windows; then, returning to his bed, threw himself down again. He stayed there till the storm was over, in a kind of stupor; but when the boom of the retreating thunder grew every minute less distinct, he rose. Then for the first time he saw something white close by the door.

It was a note:

I have made a mistake. Please forgive me, and go away.—ANTONIA.

CHAPTER XXXII

WILDERNESS

When he had read this note, Shelton put it down beside his sleeve-links on his dressing table, stared in the mirror at himself, and laughed. But his lips soon stopped him laughing; he threw himself upon his bed and pressed his face into the pillows. He lay there half-dressed throughout the night, and when he rose, soon after dawn, he had not made his mind up what to do. The only thing he knew for certain was that he must not meet Antonia.

At last he penned the following:

I have had a sleepless night with toothache, and think it best to run up to the dentist at once. If a tooth must come out, the sooner the better.

He addressed it to Mrs. Dennant, and left it on his table. After doing this he threw himself once more upon his bed, and this time fell into a doze.

He woke with a start, dressed, and let himself quietly out. The likeness of his going to that of Ferrand struck him. "Both outcasts now," he thought.

He tramped on till noon without knowing or caring where he went; then, entering a field, threw himself down under the hedge, and fell asleep.

He was awakened by a whirr. A covey of partridges, with wings glistening in the sun, were straggling out across the adjoining field of mustard. They soon settled in the old-maidish way of partridges, and began to call upon each other.

Some cattle had approached him in his sleep, and a beautiful bay cow, with her head turned sideways, was snuffing at him gently, exhaling her peculiar sweetness. She was as fine in legs and coat as any race-horse. She dribbled at the corners of her black, moist lips; her eye was soft and cynical. Breathing the vague sweetness of the mustard-field, rubbing dry grasp-stalks in his fingers, Shelton had a moment's happiness—the happiness of sun and sky, of the eternal quiet, and untold movements of the fields. Why could not human beings let their troubles be as this cow left the flies that clung about her eyes? He dozed again, and woke up with a laugh, for this was what he dreamed:

He fancied he was in a room, at once the hall and drawing-room of some country house. In the centre of this room a lady stood, who was looking in a hand-glass at her face. Beyond a door or window could be seen a garden with a row of statues, and through this door people passed without apparent object.

Suddenly Shelton saw his mother advancing to the lady with the hand-glass, whom now he recognised as Mrs. Foliot. But, as he looked, his mother changed to Mrs. Dennant, and began speaking in a voice that was a sort of abstract of refinement. "Je fais de la philosophic," it said; "I take the individual for what she's worth. I do not condemn; above all, one must have spirit!" The lady with the mirror continued looking in the glass; and, though he could not see her face, he could see its image-pale, with greenish eyes, and a smile like scorn itself. Then, by a swift transition, he was walking in the garden talking to Mrs. Dennant.

It was from this talk that he awoke with laughter. "But," she had been saying, "Dick, I've always been accustomed to believe what I was told. It was so unkind of her to scorn me just because I happen to be second-hand." And her voice awakened Shelton's pity; it was like a frightened child's. "I don't know what I shall do if I have to form opinions for myself. I was n't brought up to it. I've always had them nice and secondhand. How am I to go to work? One must believe what other people do; not that I think much of other people, but, you do know what it is—one feels so much more comfortable," and her skirts rustled. "But, Dick, whatever happens"—her voice entreated—"do let Antonia get her judgments secondhand. Never mind for me—if I must form opinions for myself, I must—but don't let her; any old opinions so long as they are old. It 's dreadful to have to think out new ones for oneself." And he awoke. His dream had had in it the element called Art, for, in its gross absurdity, Mrs. Dennant had said things that showed her soul more fully than anything she would have said in life.

"No," said a voice quite close, behind the hedge, "not many Frenchmen, thank the Lord! A few coveys

of Hungarians over from the Duke's. Sir James, some pie?"

Shelton raised himself with drowsy curiosity—still half asleep—and applied his face to a gap in the high, thick osiers of the hedge. Four men were seated on camp-stools round a folding-table, on which was a pie and other things to eat. A game-cart, well-adorned with birds and hares, stood at a short distance; the tails of some dogs were seen moving humbly, and a valet opening bottles. Shelton had forgotten that it was "the first." The host was a soldierly and freckled man; an older man sat next him, square-jawed, with an absent-looking eye and sharpened nose; next him, again, there was a bearded person whom they seemed to call the Commodore; in the fourth, to his alarm, Shelton recognised the gentleman called Mabbey. It was really no matter for surprise to meet him miles from his own place, for he was one of those who wander with a valet and two guns from the twelfth of August to the end of January, and are then supposed to go to Monte Carlo or to sleep until the twelfth of August comes again.

He was speaking.

"Did you hear what a bag we made on the twelfth, Sir James?"

"Ah! yes; what was that? Have you sold your bay horse, Glennie?"

Shelton had not decided whether or no to sneak away, when the Commodore's thick voice began:

"My man tellsh me that Mrs. Foliot—haw—has lamed her Arab. Does she mean to come out cubbing?"

Shelton observed the smile that came on all their faces. "Foliot 's paying for his good time now; what a donkey to get caught!" it seemed to say. He turned his back and shut his eyes.

"Cubbing?" replied Glennie; "hardly."

"Never could shee anything wonderful in her looks," went on the Commodore; "so quiet, you never knew that she was in the room. I remember sayin' to her once, 'Mrs. Lutheran, now what do you like besht in all the world?' and what do you think she answered? 'Music!' Haw!"

The voice of Mabbey said:

"He was always a dark horse, Foliot: It 's always the dark horses that get let in for this kind of thing"; and there was a sound as though he licked his lips.

"They say," said the voice of the host, "he never gives you back a greeting now. Queer fish; they say that she's devoted to him."

Coming so closely on his meeting with this lady, and on the dream from which he had awakened, this conversation mesmerised the listener behind the hedge.

"If he gives up his huntin' and his shootin', I don't see what the deuce he 'll do; he's resigned his clubs; as to his chance of Parliament—" said the voice of Mabbey.

"Thousand pities," said Sir James; "still, he knew what to expect."

"Very queer fellows, those Foliots," said the Commodore. "There was his father: he 'd always rather talk to any scarecrow he came across than to you or me. Wonder what he'll do with all his horses; I should like that chestnut of his."

"You can't tell what a fellow 'll do," said the voice of Mabbey—"take to drink or writin' books. Old Charlie Wayne came to gazin' at stars, and twice a week he used to go and paddle round in Whitechapel, teachin' pothooks—"

"Glennie," said Sir James, "what 's become of Smollett, your old keeper?"

"Obliged to get rid of him." Shelton tried again to close his ears, but again he listened. "Getting a bit too old; lost me a lot of eggs last season."

"Ah!" said the Commodore, "when they oncesh begin to lose eggsh—"

"As a matter of fact, his son—you remember him, Sir James, he used to load for you?—got a girl into trouble; when her people gave her the chuck old Smollet took her in; beastly scandal it made, too. The girl refused to marry Smollett, and old Smollett backed her up. Naturally, the parson and the village cut up rough; my wife offered to get her into one of those reformatory what-d' you-call-'ems, but the old fellow said she should n't go if she did n't want to. Bad business altogether; put him quite off his stroke. I only got five hundred pheasants last year instead of eight."

There was a silence. Shelton again peeped through the hedge. All were eating pie.

"In Warwickshire," said the Commodore, "they always marry—haw—and live respectable ever after."

"Quite so," remarked the host; "it was a bit too thick, her refusing to marry him. She said he took advantage of her."

"She's sorry by this time," said Sir James; "lucky escape for young Smollett. Queer, the obstinacy of some of these old fellows!"

"What are we doing after lunch?" asked the Commodore.

"The next field," said the host, "is pasture. We line up along the hedge, and drive that mustard towards the roots; there ought to be a good few birds."

"Shelton rose, and, crouching, stole softly to the gate:

"On the twelfth, shootin' in two parties," followed the voice of Mabbey from the distance.

Whether from his walk or from his sleepless night, Shelton seemed to ache in every limb; but he continued his tramp along the road. He was no nearer to deciding what to do. It was late in the afternoon when he reached Maidenhead, and, after breaking fast, got into a London train and went to sleep. At ten o'clock that evening he walked into St. James's Park and there sat down.

The lamplight dappled through the tired foliage on to these benches which have rested many vagrants. Darkness has ceased to be the lawful cloak of the unhappy; but Mother Night was soft and moonless, and man had not despoiled her of her comfort, quite.

Shelton was not alone upon the seat, for at the far end was sitting a young girl with a red, round, sullen face; and beyond, and further still, were dim benches and dim figures sitting on them, as though life's institutions had shot them out in an endless line of rubbish.

"Ah!" thought Shelton, in the dreamy way of tired people; "the institutions are all right; it's the spirit that's all—"

"Wrong?" said a voice behind him; "why, of course! You've taken the wrong turn, old man."

He saw a policeman, with a red face shining through the darkness, talking to a strange old figure like some aged and dishevelled bird.

"Thank you, constable," the old man said, "as I've come wrong I'll take a rest." Chewing his gums, he seemed to fear to take the liberty of sitting down.

Shelton made room, and the old fellow took the vacant place.

"You'll excuse me, sir, I'm sure," he said in shaky tones, and snatching at his battered hat; "I see you was a gentleman"—and lovingly he dwelt upon the word—"would n't disturb you for the world. I'm not used to being out at night, and the seats do get so full. Old age must lean on something; you'll excuse me, sir, I'm sure."

"Of course," said Shelton gently.

"I'm a respectable old man, really," said his neighbour; "I never took a liberty in my life. But at my age, sir, you get nervous; standin' about the streets as I been this last week, an' sleepin' in them doss-houses—Oh, they're dreadful rough places—a dreadful rough lot there! Yes," the old man said again, as Shelton turned to look at him, struck by the real self-pity in his voice, "dreadful rough places!"

A movement of his head, which grew on a lean, plucked neck like that of an old fowl, had brought his face into the light. It was long, and run to seed, and had a large, red nose; its thin, colourless lips were twisted sideways and apart, showing his semi-toothless mouth; and his eyes had that aged look of eyes in which all colour runs into a thin rim round the iris; and over them kept coming films like the films over parrots' eyes. He was, or should have been, clean-shaven. His hair—for he had taken off his hat was thick and lank, of dusty colour, as far as could be seen, without a speck of grey, and parted very beautifully just about the middle.

"I can put up with that," he said again. "I never interferes with nobody, and nobody don't interfere with me; but what frightens me"—his voice grew steady, as if too terrified to shake, is never knowin' day to day what 's to become of yer. Oh, that 'a dreadful, that is!"

"It must be," answered Shelton.

"Ah! it is," the old man said; "and the winter cumin' on. I never was much used to open air, bein' in domestic service all my life; but I don't mind that so long as I can see my way to earn a livin'. Well, thank God! I've got a job at last"; and his voice grew cheerful suddenly. "Sellin' papers is not what I been accustomed to; but the Westminster, they tell me that's one of the most respectable of the evenin' papers—in fact, I know it is. So now I'm sure to get on; I try hard."

"How did you get the job?" asked Shelton.

"I 've got my character," the old fellow said, making a gesture with a skinny hand towards his chest, as if it were there he kept his character.

"Thank God, nobody can't take that away! I never parts from that"; and fumbling, he produced a packet, holding first one paper to the light, and then another, and he looked anxiously at Shelton. "In that house where I been sleepin' they're not honest; they 've stolen a parcel of my things—a lovely shirt an' a pair of beautiful gloves a gentleman gave me for holdin' of his horse. Now, would n't you prosecute 'em, sir?"

"It depends on what you can prove."

"I know they had 'em. A man must stand up for his rights; that's only proper. I can't afford to lose beautiful things like them. I think I ought to prosecute, now, don't you, sir?"

Shelton restrained a smile.

"There!" said the old man, smoothing out a piece of paper shakily, "that's Sir George!" and his withered finger-tips trembled on the middle of the page: 'Joshua Creed, in my service five years as butler, during which time I have found him all that a servant should be.' And this 'ere—he fumbled with another—"this 'ere 's Lady Glengow: 'Joshua Creed—' I thought I'd like you to read 'em since you've been so kind."

"Will you have a pipe?"

"Thank ye, sir," replied the aged butler, filling his clay from Shelton's pouch; then, taking a front tooth between his finger and his thumb, he began to feel it tenderly, working it to and fro with a sort of melancholy pride.

"My teeth's a-comin' out," he said; "but I enjoys pretty good health for a man of my age."

"How old is that?"

"Seventy-two! Barrin' my cough, and my rupture, and this 'ere affliction"—he passed his hand over his face—"I 've nothing to complain of; everybody has somethin', it seems. I'm a wonder for my age, I think."

Shelton, for all his pity, would have given much to laugh.

"Seventy-two!" he said; "yes, a great age. You remember the country when it was very different to what it is now?"

"Ah!" said the old butler, "there was gentry then; I remember them drivin' down to Newmarket (my native place, sir) with their own horses. There was n't so much o' these here middle classes then. There was more, too, what you might call the milk o' human kindness in people then—none o' them amalgamated stores, every man keepin' his own little shop; not so eager to cut his neighbour's throat, as you might say. And then look at the price of bread! O dear! why, it is n't a quarter what it was!"

"And are people happier now than they were then?" asked Shelton.

The old butler sucked his pipe.

"No," he answered, shaking his old head; "they've lost the contented spirit. I see people runnin' here and runnin' there, readin' books, findin' things out; they ain't not so self-contented as they were."

"Is that possible?" thought Shelton.

"No," repeated the old man, again sucking at his pipe, and this time blowing out a lot of smoke; "I don't see as much happiness about, not the same look on the faces. 'T isn't likely. See these 'ere motorcars, too; they say 'orses is goin' out"; and, as if dumbfounded at his own conclusion, he sat silent for some time, engaged in the lighting and relighting of his pipe.

The girl at the far end stirred, cleared her throat, and settled down again; her movement disengaged

a scent of frowsy clothes. The policeman had approached and scrutinised these ill-assorted faces; his glance was jovially contemptuous till he noticed Shelton, and then was modified by curiosity.

"There's good men in the police," the aged butler said, when the policeman had passed on—"there's good men in the police, as good men as you can see, and there 's them that treats you like the dirt—a dreadful low class of man. Oh dear, yes! when they see you down in the world, they think they can speak to you as they like; I don't give them no chance to worry me; I keeps myself to myself, and speak civil to all the world. You have to hold the candle to them; for, oh dear! if they 're crossed—some of them—they 're a dreadful unscrup'lous lot of men!"

"Are you going to spend the night here?"

"It's nice and warm to-night," replied the aged butler. "I said to the man at that low place I said: 'Don't you ever speak to me again,' I said, 'don't you come near me!' Straightforward and honest 's been my motto all my life; I don't want to have nothing to say to them low fellows"—he made an annihilating gesture—"after the way they treated me, takin' my things like that. Tomorrow I shall get a room for three shillin's a week, don't you think so, sir? Well, then I shall be all right. I 'm not afraid now; the mind at rest. So long as I ran keep myself, that's all I want. I shall do first-rate, I think"; and he stared at Shelton, but the look in his eyes and the half-scared optimism of his voice convinced the latter that he lived in dread. "So long as I can keep myself," he said again, "I sha'n't need no workhouse nor lose respectability."

"No," thought Shelton; and for some time sat without a word. "When you can;" he said at last, "come and see me; here's my card."

The aged butler became conscious with a jerk, for he was nodding.

"Thank ye, sir; I will," he said, with pitiful alacrity. "Down by Belgravia? Oh, I know it well; I lived down in them parts with a gentleman of the name of Bateson—perhaps you knew him; he 's dead now—the Honourable Bateson. Thank ye, sir; I'll be sure to come"; and, snatching at his battered hat, he toilsomely secreted Shelton's card amongst his character. A minute later he began again to nod.

The policeman passed a second time; his gaze seemed to say, "Now, what's a toff doing on that seat with those two rotters?" And Shelton caught his eye.

"Ah!" he thought; "exactly! You don't know what to make of me—a man of my position sitting here! Poor devil! to spend your days in spying on your fellow-creatures! Poor devil! But you don't know that you 're a poor devil, and so you 're not one."

The man on the next bench sneezed—a shrill and disapproving sneeze.

The policeman passed again, and, seeing that the lower creatures were both dozing, he spoke to Shelton:

"Not very safe on these 'ere benches, sir," he said; "you never know who you may be sittin' next to. If I were you, sir, I should be gettin' on—if you 're not goin' to spend the night here, that is"; and he laughed, as at an admirable joke.

Shelton looked at him, and itched to say, "Why shouldn't I?" but it struck him that it would sound very odd. "Besides," he thought, "I shall only catch a cold"; and, without speaking, he left the seat, and went along towards his rooms.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE END

He reached his rooms at midnight so exhausted that, without waiting to light up, he dropped into a chair. The curtains and blinds had been removed for cleaning, and the tall windows admitted the night's staring gaze. Shelton fixed his eyes on that outside darkness, as one lost man might fix his eyes upon another.

An unaired, dusty odour clung about the room, but, like some God-sent whiff of grass or flowers wafted to one sometimes in the streets, a perfume came to him, the spice from the withered clove

carnation still clinging, to his button-hole; and he suddenly awoke from his queer trance. There was a decision to be made. He rose to light a candle; the dust was thick on everything he touched. "Ugh!" he thought, "how wretched!" and the loneliness that had seized him on the stone seat at Holm Oaks the day before returned with fearful force.

On his table, heaped without order, were a pile of bills and circulars. He opened them, tearing at their covers with the random haste of men back from their holidays. A single long envelope was placed apart.

MY DEAR DICK [he read],

I enclose you herewith the revised draft of your marriage settlement. It is now shipshape. Return it before the end of the week, and I will have it engrossed for signature. I go to Scotland next Wednesday for a month; shall be back in good time for your wedding. My love to your mother when you see her.

Your-affectionate uncle,
EDMUND PARAMOR.

Shelton smiled and took out the draft.

"This Indenture made the ___ day of 190_, between Richard Paramor Shelton—"

He put it down and sank back in his chair, the chair in which the foreign vagrant had been wont to sit on mornings when he came to preach philosophy.

He did not stay there long, but in sheer unhappiness got up, and, taking his candle, roamed about the room, fingering things, and gazing in the mirror at his face, which seemed to him repulsive in its wretchedness. He went at last into the hall and opened the door, to go downstairs again into the street; but the sudden certainty that, in street or house, in town or country, he would have to take his trouble with him, made him shut it to. He felt in the letterbox, drew forth a letter, and with this he went back to the sitting-room.

It was from Antonia. And such was his excitement that he was forced to take three turns between the window and the wall before he could read; then, with a heart beating so that he could hardly hold the paper, he began:

I was wrong to ask you to go away. I see now that it was breaking my promise, and I did n't mean to do that. I don't know why things have come to be so different. You never think as I do about anything.

I had better tell you that that letter of Monsieur Ferrand's to mother was impudent. Of course you did n't know what was in it; but when Professor Brayne was asking you about him at breakfast, I felt that you believed that he was right and we were wrong, and I can't understand it. And then in the afternoon, when that woman hurt her horse, it was all as if you were on her side. How can you feel like that?

I must say this, because I don't think I ought to have asked you to go away, and I want you to believe that I will keep my promise, or I should feel that you and everybody else had a right to condemn me. I was awake all last night, and have a bad headache this morning. I can't write any more. ANTONIA.

His first sensation was a sort of stupefaction of relief that had in it an element of anger. He was reprieved! She would not break her promise; she considered herself bound! In the midst of the exaltation of this thought he smiled, and that smile was strange.

He read it through again, and, like a judge, began to weigh what she had written, her thoughts when she was writing, the facts which had led up to this.

The vagrant's farewell document had done the business. True to his fatal gift of divesting things of clothing, Ferrand had not vanished without showing up his patron in his proper colours; even to Shelton those colours were made plain. Antonia had felt her lover was a traitor. Sounding his heart even in his stress of indecision, Shelton knew that this was true.

"Then in the afternoon, when that woman hurt her horse—" That woman! "It was as if you were on her side!"

He saw too well her mind, its clear rigidity, its intuitive perception of that with which it was not safe to sympathise, its instinct for self-preservation, its spontaneous contempt for those without that instinct. And she had written these words considering herself bound to him—a man of sentiment, of rebellious sympathies, of untidiness of principle! Here was the answer to the question he had asked all

day: "How have things come to such a pass?" and he began to feel compassion for her.

Poor child! She could not jilt him; there was something vulgar in the word! Never should it be said that Antonia Dennant had accented him and thrown him over. No lady did these things! They were impossible! At the bottom of his heart he had a queer, unconscious sympathy with, this impossibility.

Once again he read the letter, which seemed now impregnated with fresh meaning, and the anger which had mingled with his first sensation of relief detached itself and grew in force. In that letter there was something tyrannous, a denial of his right to have a separate point of view. It was like a finger pointed at him as an unsound person. In marrying her he would be marrying not only her, but her class—his class. She would be there always to make him look on her and on himself, and all the people that they knew and all the things they did, complacently; she would be there to make him feel himself superior to everyone whose life was cast in other moral moulds. To feel himself superior, not blatantly, not consciously, but with subconscious righteousness.

But his anger, which was like the paroxysm that two days before had made him mutter at the Connoisseur, "I hate your d—d superiority," struck him all at once as impotent and ludicrous. What was the good of being angry? He was on the point of losing her! And the anguish of that thought, reacting on his anger, intensified it threefold. She was so certain of herself, so superior to her emotions, to her natural impulses—superior to her very longing to be free from him. Of that fact, at all events, Shelton had no longer any doubt. It was beyond argument. She did not really love him; she wanted to be free of him!

A photograph hung in his bedroom at Holm Oaks of a group round the hall door; the Honourable Charlotte Penguin, Mrs. Dennant, Lady Bonington, Halidome, Mr. Dennant, and the stained-glass man—all were there; and on the left-hand side, looking straight in front of her, Antonia. Her face in its youthfulness, more than all those others, expressed their point of view: Behind those calm young eyes lay a world of safety and tradition. "I am not as others are," they seemed to say.

And from that photograph Mr. and Mrs. Dennant singled themselves out; he could see their faces as they talked—their faces with a peculiar and uneasy look on them; and he could hear their voices, still decisive, but a little acid, as if they had been quarrelling:

"He 's made a donkey of himself!"

"Ah! it's too distressin'!"

They, too, thought him unsound, and did n't want him; but to save the situation they would be glad to keep him. She did n't want him, but she refused to lose her right to say, "Commoner girls may break their promises; I will not!" He sat down at the table between the candles, covering his face. His grief and anger grew and grew within him. If she would not free herself, the duty was on him! She was ready without love to marry him, as a sacrifice to her ideal of what she ought to be!

But she had n't, after all, the monopoly of pride!

As if she stood before him, he could see the shadows underneath her eyes that he had dreamed of kissing, the eager movements of her lips. For several minutes he remained, not moving hand or limb. Then once more his anger blazed. She was going to sacrifice herself and—him! All his manhood scoffed at such a senseless sacrifice. That was not exactly what he wanted!

He went to the bureau, took a piece of paper and an envelope, and wrote as follows:

There never was, is not, and never would have been any question of being bound between us. I refuse to trade on any such thing. You are absolutely free. Our engagement is at an end by mutual consent.

RICHARD SHELTON.

He sealed it, and, sitting with his hands between his knees, he let his forehead droop lower and lower to the table, till it rested on his marriage settlement. And he had a feeling of relief, like one who drops exhausted at his journey's end.

THE END.

THE COUNTRY HOUSE

By John Galsworthy

CHAPTER I

A PARTY AT WORSTED SKEYNES

The year was 1891, the month October, the day Monday. In the dark outside the railway-station at Worsted Skeynes Mr. Horace Pendyce's omnibus, his brougham, his luggage-cart, monopolised space. The face of Mr. Horace Pendyce's coachman monopolised the light of the solitary station lantern. Rosy-gilled, with fat close-clipped grey whiskers and inscrutably pursed lips, it presided high up in the easterly air like an emblem of the feudal system. On the platform within, Mr. Horace Pendyce's first footman and second groom in long livery coats with silver buttons, their appearance slightly relieved by the rakish cock of their top-hats, awaited the arrival of the 6.15.

The first footman took from his pocket a half-sheet of stamped and crested notepaper covered with Mr. Horace Pendyce's small and precise calligraphy. He read from it in a nasal, derisive voice:

"Hon. Geoff, and Mrs. Winlow, blue room and dress; maid, small drab. Mr. George, white room. Mrs. Jasper Bellew, gold. The Captain, red. General Pendyce, pink room; valet, back attic. That's the lot."

The groom, a red-cheeked youth, paid no attention.

"If this here Ambler of Mr. George's wins on Wednesday," he said, "it's as good as five pounds in my pocket. Who does for Mr. George?"

"James, of course."

The groom whistled.

"I'll try an' get his loadin' to-morrow. Are you on, Tom?"

The footman answered:

"Here's another over the page. Green room, right wing—that Foxleigh; he's no good. 'Take all you can and give nothing' sort! But can't he shoot just! That's why they ask him!"

From behind a screen of dark trees the train ran in.

Down the platform came the first passengers—two cattlemen with long sticks, slouching by in their frieze coats, diffusing an odour of beast and black tobacco; then a couple, and single figures, keeping as far apart as possible, the guests of Mr. Horace Pendyce. Slowly they came out one by one into the loom of the carriages, and stood with their eyes fixed carefully before them, as though afraid they might recognise each other. A tall man in a fur coat, whose tall wife carried a small bag of silver and shagreen, spoke to the coachman:

"How are you, Benson? Mr. George says Captain Pendyce told him he wouldn't be down till the 9.30. I suppose we'd better——"

Like a breeze tuning through the frigid silence of a fog, a high, clear voice was heard:

"Oh, thanks; I'll go up in the brougham."

Followed by the first footman carrying her wraps, and muffled in a white veil, through which the Hon. Geoffrey Winlow's leisurely gaze caught the gleam of eyes, a lady stepped forward, and with a backward glance vanished into the brougham. Her head appeared again behind the swathe of gauze.

"There's plenty of room, George."

George Pendyce walked quickly forward, and disappeared beside her. There was a crunch of wheels; the brougham rolled away.

The Hon. Geoffrey Winlow raised his face again.

"Who was that, Benson?"

The coachman leaned over confidentially, holding his podgy white-gloved hand outspread on a level with the Hon. Geoffrey's hat.

"Mrs. Jaspar Bellew, sir. Captain Bellew's lady, of the Firs."

"But I thought they weren't—"

"No, sir; they're not, sir."

"Ah!"

A calm rarefied voice was heard from the door of the omnibus:

"Now, Geoff!"

The Hon. Geoffrey Winlow followed his wife, Mr. Foxleigh, and General Pendyce into the omnibus, and again Mrs. Winlow's voice was heard:

"Oh, do you mind my maid? Get in, Tookson!"

Mr. Horace Pendyce's mansion, white and long and low, standing well within its acres, had come into the possession of his great-great-great-grandfather through an alliance with the last of the Worsteds. Originally a fine property let in smallish holdings to tenants who, having no attention bestowed on them, did very well and paid excellent rents, it was now farmed on model lines at a slight loss. At stated intervals Mr. Pendyce imported a new kind of cow, or partridge, and built a wing to the schools. His income was fortunately independent of this estate. He was in complete accord with the Rector and the sanitary authorities, and not infrequently complained that his tenants did not stay on the land. His wife was a Totteridge, and his coverts admirable. He had been, needless to say, an eldest son. It was his individual conviction that individualism had ruined England, and he had set himself deliberately to eradicate this vice from the character of his tenants. By substituting for their individualism his own tastes, plans, and sentiments, one might almost say his own individualism, and losing money thereby, he had gone far to demonstrate his pet theory that the higher the individualism the more sterile the life of the community. If, however, the matter was thus put to him he grew both garrulous and angry, for he considered himself not an individualist, but what he called a "Tory Communist." In connection with his agricultural interests he was naturally a Fair Trader; a tax on corn, he knew, would make all the difference in the world to the prosperity of England. As he often said: "A tax of three or four shillings on corn, and I should be farming my estate at a profit."

Mr. Pendyce had other peculiarities, in which he was not too individual. He was averse to any change in the existing order of things, made lists of everything, and was never really so happy as when talking of himself or his estate. He had a black spaniel dog called John, with a long nose and longer ears, whom he had bred himself till the creature was not happy out of his sight.

In appearance Mr. Pendyce was rather of the old school, upright and active, with thin side-whiskers, to which, however, for some years past he had added moustaches which drooped and were now grizzled. He wore large cravats and square-tailed coats. He did not smoke.

At the head of his dining-table loaded with flowers and plate, he sat between the Hon. Mrs. Winlow and Mrs. Jaspar Bellew, nor could he have desired more striking and contrasted supporters. Equally tall, full-figured, and comely, Nature had fixed between these two women a gulf which Mr. Pendyce, a man of spare figure, tried in vain to fill. The composure peculiar to the ashen type of the British aristocracy wintered permanently on Mrs. Winlow's features like the smile of a frosty day. Expressionless to a degree, they at once convinced the spectator that she was a woman of the best breeding. Had an expression ever arisen upon these features, it is impossible to say what might have been the consequences. She had followed her nurse's adjuration: "Lor, Miss Truda, never you make a face—You might grow so!" Never since that day had Gertrude Winlow, an Honourable in her own right and in that of her husband, made a face, not even, it is believed, when her son was born. And then to find on the other side of Mr. Pendyce that puzzling Mrs. Bellew with the green-grey eyes, at which the best people of her own sex looked with instinctive disapproval! A woman in her position should avoid anything conspicuous, and Nature had given her a too-striking appearance. People said that when, the year before last, she had separated from Captain Bellew, and left the Firs, it was simply because they were tired of one another. They said, too, that it looked as if she were encouraging the attentions of George, Mr. Pendyce's eldest son.

Lady Maiden had remarked to Mrs. Winlow in the drawing-room before dinner:

"What is it about that Mrs. Bellew? I never liked her. A woman situated as she is ought to be more careful. I don't understand her being asked here at all, with her husband still at the Firs, only just over

the way. Besides, she's very hard up. She doesn't even attempt to disguise it. I call her almost an adventuress."

Mrs. Winlow had answered:

"But she's some sort of cousin to Mrs. Pendyce. The Pendyces are related to everybody! It's so boring. One never knows—"

Lady Maiden replied:

"Did you know her when she was living down here? I dislike those hard-riding women. She and her husband were perfectly reckless. One heard of nothing else but what she had jumped and how she had jumped it; and she bets and goes racing. If George Pendyce is not in love with her, I'm very much mistaken. He's been seeing far too much of her in town. She's one of those women that men are always hanging about!"

At the head of his dinner-table, where before each guest was placed a menu carefully written in his eldest daughter's handwriting, Horace Pendyce supped his soup.

"This soup," he said to Mrs. Bellew, "reminds me of your dear old father; he was extraordinarily fond of it. I had a great respect for your father—a wonderful man! I always said he was the most determined man I'd met since my own dear father, and he was the most obstinate man in the three kingdoms!"

He frequently made use of the expression "in the three kingdoms," which sometimes preceded a statement that his grandmother was descended from Richard III., while his grandfather came down from the Cornish giants, one of whom, he would say with a disparaging smile, had once thrown a cow over a wall.

"Your father was too much of an individualist, Mrs. Bellew. I have a lot of experience of individualism in the management of my estate, and I find that an individualist is never contented. My tenants have everything they want, but it's impossible to satisfy them. There's a fellow called Peacock, now, a most pig-headed, narrowminded chap. I don't give in to him, of course. If he had his way, he'd go back to the old days, farm the land in his own fashion. He wants to buy it from me. Old vicious system of yeoman farming. Says his grandfather had it. He's that sort of man. I hate individualism; it's ruining England. You won't find better cottages, or better farm-buildings anywhere than on my estate. I go in for centralisation. I dare say you know what I call myself—a 'Tory Communist.' To my mind, that's the party of the future. Now, your father's motto was: 'Every man for himself!' On the land that would never do. Landlord and tenant must work together. You'll come over to Newmarket with us on Wednesday? George has a very fine horse running in the Rutlandshire a very fine horse. He doesn't bet, I'm glad to say. If there's one thing I hate more than another, it's gambling!"

Mrs. Bellew gave him a sidelong glance, and a little ironical smile peeped out on her full red lips. But Mr. Pendyce had been called away to his soup. When he was ready to resume the conversation she was talking to his son, and the Squire, frowning, turned to the Hon. Mrs. Winlow. Her attention was automatic, complete, monosyllabic; she did not appear to fatigue herself by an over-sympathetic comprehension, nor was she subservient. Mr. Pendyce found her a competent listener.

"The country is changing," he said, "changing every day. Country houses are not what they were. A great responsibility rests on us landlords. If we go, the whole thing goes."

What, indeed, could be more delightful than this country-house life of Mr. Pendyce; its perfect cleanliness, its busy leisure, its combination of fresh air and scented warmth, its complete intellectual repose, its essential and professional aloofness from suffering of any kind, and its soup—emblematically and above all, its soup—made from the rich remains of pampered beasts?

Mr. Pendyce thought this life the one right life; those who lived it the only right people. He considered it a duty to live this life, with its simple, healthy, yet luxurious curriculum, surrounded by creatures bred for his own devouring, surrounded, as it were, by a sea of soup! And that people should go on existing by the million in the towns, preying on each other, and getting continually out of work, with all those other depressing concomitants of an awkward state, distressed him. While suburban life, that living in little rows of slate-roofed houses so lamentably similar that no man of individual taste could bear to see them, he much disliked. Yet, in spite of his strong prejudice in favour of country-house life, he was not a rich man, his income barely exceeding ten thousand a year.

The first shooting-party of the season, devoted to spinneys and the outlying coverts, had been, as usual, made to synchronise with the last Newmarket Meeting, for Newmarket was within an uncomfortable distance of Worsted Skeynes; and though Mr. Pendyce had a horror of gaming, he liked to figure there and pass for a man interested in sport for sport's sake, and he was really rather proud of

the fact that his son had picked up so good a horse as the Ambler promised to be for so little money, and was racing him for pure sport.

The guests had been carefully chosen. On Mrs. Winlow's right was Thomas Brandwhite (of Brown and Brandwhite), who had a position in the financial world which could not well be ignored, two places in the country, and a yacht. His long, lined face, with very heavy moustaches, wore habitually a peevish look. He had retired from his firm, and now only sat on the Boards of several companies. Next to him was Mrs. Hussell Barter, with that touching look to be seen on the faces of many English ladies, that look of women who are always doing their duty, their rather painful duty; whose eyes, above cheeks creased and withered, once rose-leaf hued, now over-coloured by strong weather, are starry and anxious; whose speech is simple, sympathetic, direct, a little shy, a little hopeless, yet always hopeful; who are ever surrounded by children, invalids, old people, all looking to them for support; who have never known the luxury of breaking down—of these was Mrs. Hussell Barter, the wife of the Reverend Hussell Barter, who would shoot to-morrow, but would not attend the race-meeting on the Wednesday. On her other hand was Gilbert Foxleigh, a lean-flanked man with a long, narrow head, strong white teeth, and hollow, thirsting eyes. He came of a county family of Foxleighs, and was one of six brothers, invaluable to the owners of coverts or young, half-broken horses in days when, as a Foxleigh would put it, "hardly a Johnny of the lot could shoot or ride for nuts." There was no species of beast, bird, or fish, that he could not and did not destroy with equal skill and enjoyment. The only thing against him was his income, which was very small. He had taken in Mrs. Brandwhite, to whom, however, he talked but little, leaving her to General Pencyce, her neighbour on the other side.

Had he been born a year before his brother, instead of a year after, Charles Pencyce would naturally have owned Worsted Skeynes, and Horace would have gone into the Army instead. As it was, having almost imperceptibly become a Major-General, he had retired, taking with him his pension. The third brother, had he chosen to be born, would have gone into the Church, where a living awaited him; he had elected otherwise, and the living had passed perforce to a collateral branch. Between Horace and Charles, seen from behind, it was difficult to distinguish. Both were spare, both erect, with the least inclination to bottle shoulders, but Charles Pencyce brushed his hair, both before and behind, away from a central parting, and about the back of his still active knees there was a look of feebleness. Seen from the front they could readily be differentiated, for the General's whiskers broadened down his cheeks till they reached his moustaches, and there was in his face and manner a sort of formal, though discontented, effacement, as of an individualist who has all his life been part of a system, from which he has issued at last, unconscious indeed of his loss, but with a vague sense of injury. He had never married, feeling it to be comparatively useless, owing to Horace having gained that year on him at the start, and he lived with a valet close to his club in Pall Mall.

In Lady Maiden, whom he had taken in to dinner, Worsted Skeynes entertained a good woman and a personality, whose teas to Working Men in the London season were famous. No Working Man who had attended them had ever gone away without a wholesome respect for his hostess. She was indeed a woman who permitted no liberties to be taken with her in any walk of life. The daughter of a Rural Dean, she appeared at her best when seated, having rather short legs. Her face was well-coloured, her mouth, firm and rather wide, her nose well-shaped, her hair dark. She spoke in a decided voice, and did not mince her words. It was to her that her husband, Sir James, owed his reactionary principles on the subject of woman.

Round the corner at the end of the table the Hon. Geoffrey Winlow was telling his hostess of the Balkan Provinces, from a tour in which he had just returned. His face, of the Norman type, with regular, handsome features, had a leisurely and capable expression. His manner was easy and pleasant; only at times it became apparent that his ideas were in perfect order, so that he would naturally not care to be corrected. His father, Lord Montrossor, whose seat was at Coldingham six miles away, would ultimately yield to him his place in the House of Lords.

And next him sat Mrs. Pencyce. A portrait of this lady hung over the sideboard at the end of the room, and though it had been painted by a fashionable painter, it had caught a gleam of that "something" still in her face these twenty years later. She was not young, her dark hair was going grey; but she was not old, for she had been married at nineteen and was still only fifty-two. Her face was rather long and very pale, and her eyebrows arched and dark and always slightly raised. Her eyes were dark grey, sometimes almost black, for the pupils dilated when she was moved; her lips were the least thing parted, and the expression of those lips and eyes was of a rather touching gentleness, of a rather touching expectancy. And yet all this was not the "something"; that was rather the outward sign of an inborn sense that she had no need to ask for things, of an instinctive faith that she already had them. By that "something," and by her long, transparent hands, men could tell that she had been a Totteridge. And her voice, which was rather slow, with a little, not unpleasant, trick of speech, and her eyelids by second nature just a trifle lowered, confirmed this impression. Over her bosom, which hid the heart of a lady, rose and fell a piece of wonderful old lace.

Round the corner again Sir James Maiden and Bee Pendyce (the eldest daughter) were talking of horses and hunting—Bee seldom from choice spoke of anything else. Her face was pleasant and good, yet not quite pretty, and this little fact seemed to have entered into her very nature, making her shy and ever willing to do things for others.

Sir James had small grey whiskers and a carved, keen visage. He came of an old Kentish family which had migrated to Cambridgeshire; his coverts were exceptionally fine; he was also a Justice of the Peace, a Colonel of Yeomanry, a keen Churchman, and much feared by poachers. He held the reactionary views already mentioned, being a little afraid of Lady Malden.

Beyond Miss Pendyce sat the Reverend Hussell Barter, who would shoot to-morrow, but would not attend the race-meeting on Wednesday.

The Rector of Worsted Skeynes was not tall, and his head had been rendered somewhat bald by thought. His broad face, of very straight build from the top of the forehead to the base of the chin, was well-coloured, clean-shaven, and of a shape that may be seen in portraits of the Georgian era. His cheeks were full and folded, his lower lip had a habit of protruding, and his eyebrows jutted out above his full, light eyes. His manner was authoritative, and he articulated his words in a voice to which long service in the pulpit had imparted remarkable carrying-power—in fact, when engaged in private conversation, it was with difficulty that he was not overheard. Perhaps even in confidential matters he was not unwilling that what he said should bear fruit. In some ways, indeed, he was typical. Uncertainty, hesitation, toleration—except of such opinions as he held—he did not like. Imagination he distrusted. He found his duty in life very clear, and other people's perhaps clearer, and he did not encourage his parishioners to think for themselves. The habit seemed to him a dangerous one. He was outspoken in his opinions, and when he had occasion to find fault, spoke of the offender as "a man of no character," "a fellow like that," with such a ring of conviction that his audience could not but be convinced of the immorality of that person. He had a bluff jolly way of speaking, and was popular in his parish—a good cricketer, a still better fisherman, a fair shot, though, as he said, he could not really afford time for shooting. While disclaiming interference in secular matters, he watched the tendencies of his flock from a sound point of view, and especially encouraged them to support the existing order of things—the British Empire and the English Church. His cure was hereditary, and he fortunately possessed some private means, for he had a large family. His partner at dinner was Norah, the younger of the two Pendyce girls, who had a round, open face, and a more decided manner than her sister Bee.

Her brother George, the eldest son, sat on her right. George was of middle height, with a red-brown, clean-shaved face and solid jaw. His eyes were grey; he had firm lips, and darkish, carefully brushed hair, a little thin on the top, but with that peculiar gloss seen on the hair of some men about town. His clothes were unostentatiously perfect. Such men may be seen in Piccadilly at any hour of the day or night. He had been intended for the Guards, but had failed to pass the necessary examination, through no fault of his own, owing to a constitutional inability to spell. Had he been his younger brother Gerald, he would probably have fulfilled the Pendyce tradition, and passed into the Army as a matter of course. And had Gerald (now Captain Pendyce) been George the elder son, he might possibly have failed. George lived at his club in town on an allowance of six hundred a year, and sat a great deal in a bay-window reading Ruff's "Guide to the Turf."

He raised his eyes from the menu and looked stealthily round. Helen Bellew was talking to his father, her white shoulder turned a little away. George was proud of his composure, but there was a strange longing in his face. She gave, indeed, just excuse for people to consider her too good-looking for the position in which she was placed. Her figure was tall and supple and full, and now that she no longer hunted was getting fuller. Her hair, looped back in loose bands across a broad low brow, had a peculiar soft lustre.

There was a touch of sensuality about her lips. The face was too broad across the brow and cheekbones, but the eyes were magnificent—ice-grey, sometimes almost green, always luminous, and set in with dark lashes.

There was something pathetic in George's gaze, as of a man forced to look against his will.

It had been going on all that past summer, and still he did not know where he stood. Sometimes she seemed fond of him, sometimes treated him as though he had no chance. That which he had begun as a game was now deadly earnest. And this in itself was tragic. That comfortable ease of spirit which is the breath of life was taken away; he could think of nothing but her. Was she one of those women who feed on men's admiration, and give them no return? Was she only waiting to make her conquest more secure? These riddles he asked of her face a hundred times, lying awake in the dark. To George Pendyce, a man of the world, unaccustomed to privation, whose simple creed was "Live and enjoy," there was something terrible about a longing which never left him for a moment, which he could not help any more than he could help eating, the end of which he could not see. He had known her when

she lived at the Firs, he had known her in the hunting-field, but his passion was only of last summer's date. It had sprung suddenly out of a flirtation started at a dance.

A man about town does not psychologise himself; he accepts his condition with touching simplicity. He is hungry; he must be fed. He is thirsty; he must drink. Why he is hungry, when he became hungry, these inquiries are beside the mark. No ethical aspect of the matter troubled him; the attainment of a married woman, not living with her husband, did not impinge upon his creed. What would come after, though full of unpleasant possibilities, he left to the future. His real disquiet, far nearer, far more primitive and simple, was the feeling of drifting helplessly in a current so strong that he could not keep his feet.

"Ah yes; a bad case. Dreadful thing for the Sweetenham! That young fellow's been obliged to give up the Army. Can't think what old Sweetenham was about. He must have known his son was hit. I should say Bethany himself was the only one in the dark. There's no doubt Lady Rose was to blame!" Mr. Pendyce was speaking.

Mrs. Bellew smiled.

"My sympathies are all with Lady Rose. What do you say, George?"

George frowned.

"I always thought," he said, "that Bethany was an ass."

"George," said Mr. Pendyce, "is immoral. All young men are immoral. I notice it more and more. You've given up your hunting, I hear."

Mrs. Bellew sighed.

"One can't hunt on next to nothing!"

"Ah, you live in London. London spoils everybody. People don't take the interest in hunting and farming they used to. I can't get George here at all. Not that I'm a believer in apron-strings. Young men will be young men!"

Thus summing up the laws of Nature, the Squire resumed his knife and fork.

But neither Mrs. Bellew nor George followed his example; the one sat with her eyes fixed on her plate and a faint smile playing on her lips, the other sat without a smile, and his eyes, in which there was such a deep resentful longing, looked from his father to Mrs. Bellew, and from Mrs. Bellew to his mother. And as though down that vista of faces and fruits and flowers a secret current had been set flowing, Mrs. Pendyce nodded gently to her son.

CHAPTER II

THE COVERT SHOOT

At the head of the breakfast-table sat Mr. Pendyce, eating methodically. He was somewhat silent, as became a man who has just read family prayers; but about that silence, and the pile of half-opened letters on his right, was a hint of autocracy.

"Be informal—do what you like, dress as you like, sit where you like, eat what you like, drink tea or coffee, but—" Each glance of his eyes, each sentence of his sparing, semi-genial talk, seemed to repeat that "but."

At the foot of the breakfast-table sat Mrs. Pendyce behind a silver urn which emitted a gentle steam. Her hands worked without ceasing amongst cups, and while they worked her lips worked too in spasmodic utterances that never had any reference to herself. Pushed a little to her left and entirely neglected, lay a piece of dry toast on a small white plate. Twice she took it up, buttered a bit of it, and put it down again. Once she rested, and her eyes, which fell on Mrs. Bellew, seemed to say: "How very charming you look, my dear!" Then, taking up the sugar-tongs, she began again.

On the long sideboard covered with a white cloth reposed a number of edibles only to be found amongst that portion of the community which breeds creatures for its own devouring. At one end of this

row of viands was a large game pie with a triangular gap in the pastry; at the other, on two oval dishes, lay four cold partridges in various stages of decomposition. Behind them a silver basket of openwork design was occupied by three bunches of black, one bunch of white grapes, and a silver grape-cutter, which performed no function (it was so blunt), but had once belonged to a Totteridge and wore their crest.

No servants were in the room, but the side-door was now and again opened, and something brought in, and this suggested that behind the door persons were collected, only waiting to be called upon. It was, in fact, as though Mr. Pendyce had said: "A butler and two footmen at least could hand you things, but this is a simple country house."

At times a male guest rose, napkin in hand, and said to a lady: "Can I get you anything from the sideboard?" Being refused, he went and filled his own plate. Three dogs—two fox-terriers and a decrepit Skye circled round uneasily, smelling at the visitors' napkins. And there went up a hum of talk in which sentences like these could be distinguished: "Rippin' stand that, by the wood. D'you remember your rockettin' woodcock last year, Jerry?" "And the dear old Squire never touched a feather! Did you, Squire?" "Dick—Dick! Bad dog!—come and do your tricks. Trust-trust! Paid for! Isn't he rather a darling?"

On Mr. Pendyce's foot, or by the side of his chair, whence he could see what was being eaten, sat the spaniel John, and now and then Mr. Pendyce, taking a small portion of something between his finger and thumb, would say:

"John!—Make a good breakfast, Sir James; I always say a half-breakfasted man is no good!"

And Mrs. Pendyce, her eyebrows lifted, would look anxiously up and down the table, murmuring: "Another cup, dear; let me see—are you sugar?"

When all had finished a silence fell, as if each sought to get away from what he had been eating, as if each felt he had been engaged in an unworthy practice; then Mr. Pendyce, finishing his last grape, wiped his mouth.

"You've a quarter of an hour, gentlemen; we start at ten-fifteen."

Mrs. Pendyce, left seated with a vague, ironical smile, ate one mouthful of her buttered toast, now very old and leathery, gave the rest to "the dear dogs," and called:

"George! You want a new shooting tie, dear boy; that green one's quite faded. I've been meaning to get some silks down for ages. Have you had any news of your horse this morning?"

"Yes, Blacksmith says he's fit as a fiddle."

"I do so hope he'll win that race for you. Your Uncle Hubert once lost four thousand pounds over the Rutlandshire. I remember perfectly; my father had to pay it. I'm so glad you don't bet, dear boy!"

"My dear mother, I do bet."

"Oh, George, I hope not much! For goodness' sake, don't tell your father; he's like all the Pendyces, can't bear a risk."

"My dear mother, I'm not likely to; but, as a matter of fact, there is no risk. I stand to win a lot of money to nothing."

"But, George, is that right?"

"Of course it's all right."

"Oh, well, I don't understand." Mrs. Pendyce dropped her eyes, a flush came into her white cheeks; she looked up again and said quickly: "George, I should like just a little bet on your horse—a real bet, say about a sovereign."

George Pendyce's creed permitted the show of no emotion. He smiled.

"All right, mother, I'll put it on for you. It'll be about eight to one."

"Does that mean that if he wins I shall get eight?"

George nodded.

Mrs. Pendyce looked abstractedly at his tie.

"I think it might be two sovereigns; one seems very little to lose, because I do so want him to win. Isn't Helen Bellew perfectly charming this morning! It's delightful to see a woman look her best in the morning."

George turned, to hide the colour in his cheeks.

"She looks fresh enough, certainly."

Mrs. Pendyce glanced up at him; there was a touch of quizzicality in one of her lifted eyebrows.

"I mustn't keep you, dear; you'll be late for the shooting."

Mr. Pendyce, a sportsman of the old school, who still kept pointers, which, in the teeth of modern fashion, he was unable to employ, set his face against the use of two guns.

"Any man," he would say, "who cares to shoot at Worsted Skeynes must do with one gun, as my dear old father had to do before me. He'll get a good day's sport—no barndoor birds" (for he encouraged his pheasants to remain lean, that they might fly the better), "but don't let him expect one of these battues—sheer butchery, I call them."

He was excessively fond of birds—it was, in fact, his hobby, and he had collected under glass cases a prodigious number of specimens of those species which are in danger of becoming extinct, having really, in some Pendycean sort of way, a feeling that by this practice he was doing them a good turn, championing them, as it were, to a world that would soon be unable to look upon them in the flesh. He wished, too, that his collection should become an integral part of the estate, and be passed on to his son, and his son's son after him.

"Look at this Dartford Warbler," he would say; "beautiful little creature—getting rarer every day. I had the greatest difficulty in procuring this specimen. You wouldn't believe me if I told you what I had to pay for him!"

Some of his unique birds he had shot himself, having in his youth made expeditions to foreign countries solely with this object, but the great majority he had been compelled to purchase. In his library were row upon row of books carefully arranged and bearing on this fascinating subject; and his collection of rare, almost extinct, birds' eggs was one of the finest in the "three kingdoms." One egg especially he would point to with pride as the last obtainable of that particular breed. "This was procured," he would say, "by my dear old gillie Angus out of the bird's very nest. There was just the single egg. The species," he added, tenderly handling the delicate, porcelain-like oval in his brown hand covered with very fine, blackish hairs, "is now extinct." He was, in fact, a true bird-lover, strongly condemning cockneys, or rough, ignorant persons who, with no collections of their own, wantonly destroyed kingfishers, or scarce birds of any sort, out of pure stupidity. "I would have them flogged," he would say, for he believed that no such bird should be killed except on commission, and for choice—barring such extreme cases as that Dartford Warbler—in some foreign country or remoter part of the British Isles. It was indeed illustrative of Mr. Pendyce's character and whole point of view that whenever a rare, winged stranger appeared on his own estate it was talked of as an event, and preserved alive with the greatest care, in the hope that it might breed and be handed down with the property; but if it were personally known to belong to Mr. Fuller or Lord Quarryman, whose estates abutted on Worsted Skeynes, and there was grave and imminent danger of its going back, it was promptly shot and stuffed, that it might not be lost to posterity. An encounter with another landowner having the same hobby, of whom there were several in his neighbourhood, would upset him for a week, making him strangely morose, and he would at once redouble his efforts to add something rarer than ever to his own collection.

His arrangements for shooting were precisely conceived. Little slips of paper with the names of the "guns" written thereon were placed in a hat, and one by one drawn out again, and this he always did himself. Behind the right wing of the house he held a review of the beaters, who filed before him out of the yard, each with a long stick in his hand, and no expression on his face. Five minutes of directions to the keeper, and then the guns started, carrying their own weapons and a sufficiency of cartridges for the first drive in the old way.

A misty radiance clung over the grass as the sun dried the heavy dew; the thrushes hopped and ran and hid themselves, the rooks cawed peacefully in the old elms. At an angle the game cart, constructed on Mr. Pendyce's own pattern, and drawn by a hairy horse in charge of an aged man, made its way slowly to the end of the first beat:

George lagged behind, his hands deep in his pockets, drinking in the joy of the tranquil day, the soft bird sounds, so clear and friendly, that chorus of wild life. The scent of the coverts stole to him, and he thought:

'What a ripping day for shooting!'

The Squire, wearing a suit carefully coloured so that no bird should see him, leather leggings, and a cloth helmet of his own devising, ventilated by many little holes, came up to his son; and the spaniel John, who had a passion for the collection of birds almost equal to his master's, came up too.

"You're end gun, George," he said; "you'll get a nice high bird!"

George felt the ground with his feet, and blew a speck of dust off his barrels, and the smell of the oil sent a delicious tremor darting through him. Everything, even Helen Bellew, was forgotten. Then in the silence rose a far-off clamour; a cock pheasant, skimming low, his plumage silken in the sun, dived out of the green and golden spinney, curled to the right, and was lost in undergrowth. Some pigeons passed over at a great height. The tap-tap of sticks beating against trees began; then with a fitful rushing noise a pheasant came straight out. George threw up his gun and pulled. The bird stopped in mid-air, jerked forward, and fell headlong into the grass sods with a thud. In the sunlight the dead bird lay, and a smirk of triumph played on George's lips. He was feeling the joy of life.

During his covert shoots the Squire had the habit of recording his impressions in a mental note-book. He put special marks against such as missed, or shot birds behind the waist, or placed lead in them to the detriment of their market value, or broke only one leg of a hare at a time, causing the animal to cry like a tortured child, which some men do not like; or such as, anxious for fame, claimed dead creatures that they had not shot, or peopled the next beat with imaginary slain, or too frequently "wiped an important neighbour's eye," or shot too many beaters in the legs. Against this evidence, however, he unconsciously weighed the more undeniable social facts, such as the title of Winlow's father; Sir James Malden's coverts, which must also presently be shot; Thomas Brandwhite's position in the financial world; General Pencyce's relationship to himself; and the importance of the English Church. Against Foxleigh alone he could put no marks. The fellow destroyed everything that came within reach with utter precision, and this was perhaps fortunate, for Foxleigh had neither title, coverts, position, nor cloth! And the Squire weighed one thing else besides—the pleasure of giving them all a good day's sport, for his heart was kind.

The sun had fallen well behind the home wood when the guns stood waiting for the last drive of the day. From the keeper's cottage in the hollow, where late threads of crimson clung in the brown network of Virginia creeper, rose a mist of wood smoke, dispersed upon the breeze. Sound there was none, only that faint stir—the far, far callings of men and beasts and birds—that never quite dies of a country evening. High above the wood some startled pigeons were still wheeling, no other life in sight; but a gleam of sunlight stole down the side of the covert and laid a burnish on the turned leaves till the whole wood seemed quivering with magic. Out of that quivering wood a wounded rabbit had stolen and was dying. It lay on its side on the slope of a tussock of grass, its hind legs drawn under it, its forelegs raised like the hands of a praying child. Motionless as death, all its remaining life was centred in its black soft eyes. Uncomplaining, ungrudging, unknowing, with that poor soft wandering eye, it was going back to Mother Earth. There Foxleigh, too, some day must go, asking of Nature why she had murdered him.

CHAPTER III

THE BLISSFUL HOUR

It was the hour between tea and dinner, when the spirit of the country house was resting, conscious of its virtue, half asleep.

Having bathed and changed, George Pencyce took his betting-book into the smoking-room. In a nook devoted to literature, protected from draught and intrusion by a high leather screen, he sat down in an armchair and fell into a doze.

With legs crossed, his chin resting on one hand, his comely figure relaxed, he exhaled a fragrance of soap, as though in this perfect peace his soul were giving off its natural odour. His spirit, on the borderland of dreams, trembled with those faint stirrings of chivalry and aspiration, the outcome of physical well-being after a long day in the open air, the outcome of security from all that is unpleasant and fraught with danger. He was awakened by voices.

"George is not a bad shot!"

"Gave a shocking exhibition at the last stand; Mrs. Bellew was with him. They were going over him like smoke; he couldn't touch a feather."

It was Winlow's voice. A silence, then Thomas Brandwhite's:

"A mistake, the ladies coming out. I never will have them myself. What do you say, Sir James?"

"Bad principle—very bad!"

A laugh—Thomas Brandwhite's laugh, the laugh of a man never quite sure of himself.

"That fellow Bellew is a cracked chap. They call him the 'desperate character' about here. Drinks like a fish, and rides like the devil. She used to go pretty hard, too. I've noticed there's always a couple like that in a hunting country. Did you ever see him? Thin, high-shouldered, white-faced chap, with little dark eyes and a red moustache."

"She's still a young woman?"

"Thirty or thirty-two."

"How was it they didn't get on?"

The sound of a match being struck.

"Case of the kettle and the pot."

"It's easy to see she's fond of admiration. Love of admiration plays old Harry with women!"

Winlow's leisurely tones again

"There was a child, I believe, and it died. And after that—I know there was some story; you never could get to the bottom of it. Bellew chucked his regiment in consequence. She's subject to moods, they say, when nothing's exciting enough; must skate on thin ice, must have a man skating after her. If the poor devil weighs more than she does, in he goes."

"That's like her father, old Cheriton. I knew him at the club—one of the old sort of squires; married his second wife at sixty and buried her at eighty. Old 'Claret and Piquet,' they called him; had more children under the rose than any man in Devonshire. I saw him playing half-crown points the week before he died. It's in the blood. What's George's weight?—ah, ha!"

"It's no laughing matter, Brandwhite. There's time for a hundred up before dinner if you care for a game, Winlow?"

The sound of chairs drawn back, of footsteps, and the closing of a door. George was alone again, a spot of red in either of his cheeks. Those vague stirrings of chivalry and aspiration were gone, and gone that sense of well-earned ease. He got up, came out of his corner, and walked to and fro on the tiger-skin before the fire. He lit a cigarette, threw it away, and lit another.

Skating on thin ice! That would not stop him! Their gossip would not stop him, nor their sneers; they would but send him on the faster!

He threw away the second cigarette. It was strange for him to go to the drawing-room at this hour of the day, but he went.

Opening the door quietly, he saw the long, pleasant room lighted with tall oil-lamps, and Mrs. Bellew seated at the piano, singing. The tea-things were still on a table at one end, but every one had finished. As far away as might be, in the embrasure of the bay-window, General Pencyce and Bee were playing chess. Grouped in the centre of the room, by one of the lamps, Lady Maiden, Mrs. Winlow, and Mrs. Brandwhite had turned their faces towards the piano, and a sort of slight unwillingness or surprise showed on those faces, a sort of "We were having a most interesting talk; I don't think we ought to have been stopped" expression.

Before the fire, with his long legs outstretched, stood Gerald Pencyce. And a little apart, her dark eyes fixed on the singer, and a piece of embroidery in her lap, sat Mrs. Pencyce, on the edge of whose skirt lay Roy, the old Skye terrier.

"But had I wist, before I lost,
That love had been sae ill to win;

I had lockt my heart in a case of gowd
And pinn'd it with a siller pin....
O waly! waly! but love be bonny
A little time while it is new,
But when 'tis auld, it waxeth cauld,
And fades awa' like morning dew!"

This was the song George heard, trembling and dying to the chords of the fine piano that was a little out of tune.

He gazed at the singer, and though he was not musical, there came a look into his eyes that he quickly hid away.

A slight murmur occurred in the centre of the room, and from the fireplace Gerald called out, "Thanks; that's rippin!"

The voice of General Pendyce rose in the bay-window: "Check!"

Mrs. Pendyce, taking up her embroidery, on which a tear had dropped, said gently:

"Thank you, dear; most charming!"

Mrs. Bellew left the piano, and sat down beside her. George moved into the bay-window. He knew nothing of chess-indeed, he could not stand the game; but from here, without attracting attention, he could watch Mrs. Bellew.

The air was drowsy and sweet-scented; a log of cedarwood had just been put on the fire; the voices of his mother and Mrs. Bellew, talking of what he could not hear, the voices of Lady Malden, Mrs. Brandwhite, and Gerald, discussing some neighbours, of Mrs. Winlow dissenting or assenting in turn, all mingled in a comfortable, sleepy sound, clipped now and then by the voice of General Pendyce calling, "Check!" and of Bee saying, "Oh, uncle!"

A feeling of rage rose in George. Why should they all be so comfortable and cosy while this perpetual fire was burning in himself? And he fastened his moody eyes on her who was keeping him thus dancing to her pipes.

He made an awkward movement which shook the chess-table. The General said behind him: "Look out, George! What—what!"

George went up to his mother.

"Let's have a look at that, Mother."

Mrs. Pendyce leaned back in her chair and handed up her work with a smile of pleased surprise.

"My dear boy, you won't understand it a bit. It's for the front of my new frock."

George took the piece of work. He did not understand it, but turning and twisting it he could breathe the warmth of the woman he loved. In bending over the embroidery he touched Mrs. Bellew's shoulder; it was not drawn away, a faint pressure seemed to answer his own. His mother's voice recalled him:

"Oh, my needle, dear! It's so sweet of you, but perhaps"

George handed back the embroidery. Mrs. Pendyce received it with a grateful look. It was the first time he had ever shown an interest in her work.

Mrs. Bellew had taken up a palm-leaf fan to screen her face from the fire. She said slowly:

"If we win to-morrow I'll embroider you something, George."

"And if we lose?"

Mrs. Bellew raised her eyes, and involuntarily George moved so that his mother could not see the sort of slow mesmerism that was in them.

"If we lose," she said, "I shall sink into the earth. We must win, George."

He gave an uneasy little laugh, and glanced quickly at his mother. Mrs. Pendyce had begun to draw her needle in and out with a half-startled look on her face.

"That's a most haunting little song you sang, dear," she said.

Mrs. Bellew answered: "The words are so true, aren't they?"

George felt her eyes on him, and tried to look at her, but those half-smiling, half-threatening eyes seemed to twist and turn him about as his hands had twisted and turned about his mother's embroidery. Again across Mrs. Pendyce's face flitted that half-startled look.

Suddenly General Pendyce's voice was heard saying very loud, "Stale? Nonsense, Bee, nonsense! Why, damme, so it is!"

A hum of voices from the centre of the room covered up that outburst, and Gerald, stepping to the hearth, threw another cedar log upon the fire. The smoke came out in a puff.

Mrs. Pendyce leaned back in her chair smiling, and wrinkling her fine, thin nose.

"Delicious!" she said, but her eyes did not leave her son's face, and in them was still that vague alarm.

CHAPTER IV

THE HAPPY HUNTING-GROUND

Of all the places where, by a judicious admixture of whip and spur, oats and whisky, horses are caused to place one leg before another with unnecessary rapidity, in order that men may exchange little pieces of metal with the greater freedom, Newmarket Heath is "the topmost, and merriest, and best."

This museum of the state of flux—the secret reason of horse-racing being to afford an example of perpetual motion (no proper racing-man having ever been found to regard either gains or losses in the light of an accomplished fact)—this museum of the state of flux has a climate unrivalled for the production of the British temperament.

Not without a due proportion of that essential formative of character, east wind, it has at once the hottest sun, the coldest blizzards, the wettest rain, of any place of its size in the "three kingdoms." It tends—in advance even of the City of London—to the nurture and improvement of individualism, to that desirable "I'll see you d—d" state of mind which is the proud objective of every Englishman, and especially of every country gentleman. In a word—a mother to the self-reliant secretiveness which defies intrusion and forms an integral part in the Christianity of this country—Newmarket Heath is beyond all others the happy hunting-ground of the landed classes.

In the Paddock half an hour before the Rutlandshire Handicap was to be run numbers of racing-men were gathered in little knots of two and three, describing to each other with every precaution the points of strength in the horses they had laid against, the points of weakness in the horses they had backed, or vice versa, together with the latest discrepancies of their trainers and jockeys. At the far end George Pendyce, his trainer Blacksmith, and his jockey Swells, were talking in low tones. Many people have observed with surprise the close-buttoned secrecy of all who have to do with horses. It is no matter for wonder. The horse is one of those generous and somewhat careless animals that, if not taken firmly from the first, will surely give itself away. Essential to a man who has to do with horses is a complete closeness of physiognomy, otherwise the animal will never know what is expected of him. The more that is expected of him, the closer must be the expression of his friends, or a grave fiasco may have to be deplored.

It was for these reasons that George's face wore more than its habitual composure, and the faces of his trainer and his jockey were alert, determined, and expressionless. Blacksmith, a little man, had in his hand a short notched cane, with which, contrary to expectation, he did not switch his legs. His eyelids drooped over his shrewd eyes, his upper lip advanced over the lower, and he wore no hair on his face. The Jockey Swells' pinched-up countenance, with jutting eyebrows and practically no cheeks, had under George's racing-cap of "peacock blue" a subfusc hue like that of old furniture.

The Ambler had been bought out of the stud of Colonel Dorking, a man opposed on high grounds to the racing of two-year-olds, and at the age of three had never run. Showing more than a suspicion of

form in one or two home trials, he ran a bye in the Fane Stakes, when obviously not up to the mark, and was then withdrawn from the public gaze. The Stable had from the start kept its eye on the Rutlandshire Handicap, and no sooner was Goodwood over than the commission was placed in the hands of Barney's, well known for their power to enlist at the most appropriate moment the sympathy of the public in a horse's favour. Almost coincidentally with the completion of the Stable Commission it was found that the public were determined to support the Ambler at any price over seven to one. Barney's at once proceeded judiciously to lay off the Stable Money, and this having been done, George found that he stood to win four thousand pounds to nothing. If he had now chosen to bet this sum against the horse at the then current price of eight to one, it is obvious that he could have made an absolute certainty of five hundred pounds, and the horse need never even have started. But George, who would have been glad enough of such a sum, was not the man to do this sort of thing. It was against the tenets of his creed. He believed, too, in his horse; and had enough of the Totteridge in him to like a race for a race's sake. Even when beaten there was enjoyment to be had out of the imperturbability with which he could take that beating, out of a sense of superiority to men not quite so sportsmanlike as himself.

"Come and see the nag saddled," he said to his brother Gerald.

In one of the long line of boxes the Ambler was awaiting his toilette, a dark-brown horse, about sixteen hands, with well-placed shoulders, straight hocks, a small head, and what is known as a rat-tail. But of all his features, the most remarkable was his eye. In the depths of that full, soft eye was an almost uncanny gleam, and when he turned it, half-circled by a moon of white, and gave bystanders that look of strange comprehension, they felt that he saw to the bottom of all this that was going on around him. He was still but three years old, and had not yet attained the age when people apply to action the fruits of understanding; yet there was little doubt that as he advanced in years he would manifest his disapproval of a system whereby men made money at his expense. And with that eye half-circled by the moon he looked at George, and in silence George looked back at him, strangely baffled by the horse's long, soft, wild gaze. On this heart beating deep within its warm, dark satin sheath, on the spirit gazing through that soft, wild eye, too much was hanging, and he turned away.

"Mount, jockeys!"

Through the crowd of hard-looking, hatted, muffled, two-legged men, those four-legged creatures in their chestnut, bay, and brown, and satin nakedness, most beautiful in all the world, filed proudly past, as though going forth to death. The last vanished through the gate, the crowd dispersed.

Down by the rails of Tattersall's George stood alone. He had screwed himself into a corner, whence he could watch through his long glasses that gay-coloured, shifting wheel at the end of the mile and more of turf. At this moment, so pregnant with the future, he could not bear the company of his fellows.

"They're off!"

He looked no longer, but hunched his shoulders, holding his elbows stiff, that none might see what he was feeling. Behind him a man said:

"The favourite's beat. What's that in blue on the rails?"

Out by himself on the far rails, out by himself, sweeping along like a home-coming bird, was the Ambler. And George's heart leaped, as a fish leaps of a summer evening out of a dark pool.

"They'll never catch him. The Ambler wins! It's a walk-over! The Ambler!"

Silent amidst the shouting throng, George thought: 'My horse! my horse!' and tears of pure emotion sprang into his eyes. For a full minute he stood quite still; then, instinctively adjusting hat and tie, made his way calmly to the Paddock. He left it to his trainer to lead the Ambler back, and joined him at the weighing-room.

The little jockey was seated, nursing his saddle, negligent and saturnine, awaiting the words "All right."

Blacksmith said quietly:

"Well, sir, we've pulled it off. Four lengths. I've told Swells he does no more riding for me. There's a gold-mine given away. What on earth was he about to come in by himself like that? We shan't get into the 'City' now under nine stone. It's enough to make a man cry!"

And, looking at his trainer, George saw the little man's lips quiver.

In his stall, streaked with sweat, his hind-legs outstretched, fretting under the ministrations of the groom, the Ambler stayed the whisking of his head to look at his owner, and once more George met that long, proud, soft glance. He laid his gloved hand on the horse's lather-flecked neck. The Ambler tossed his head and turned it away.

George came out into the open, and made his way towards the Stand. His trainer's words had instilled a drop of poison into his cup. "A goldmine given away!"

He went up to Swells. On his lips were the words: "What made you give the show away like that?" He did not speak them, for in his soul he felt it would not become him to ask his jockey why he had not dissembled and won by a length. But the little jockey understood at once.

"Mr. Blacksmith's been at me, sir. You take my tip: he's a queer one, that 'orse. I thought it best to let him run his own race. Mark my words, he knows what's what. When they're like that, they're best let alone."

A voice behind him said:

"Well, George, congratulate you! Not the way I should have ridden the race myself. He should have lain off to the distance. Remarkable turn of speed that horse. There's no riding nowadays!"

The Squire and General Pencyce were standing there. Erect and slim, unlike and yet so very much alike, the eyes of both of them seemed saying:

'I shall differ from you; there are no two opinions about it. I shall differ from you!'

Behind them stood Mrs. Bellew. Her eyes could not keep still under their lashes, and their light and colour changed continually. George walked on slowly at her side. There was a look of triumph and softness about her; the colour kept deepening in her cheeks, her figure swayed. They did not look at each other.

Against the Paddock railings stood a man in riding-clothes, of spare figure, with a horseman's square, high shoulders, and thin long legs a trifle bowed. His narrow, thin-lipped, freckled face, with close-cropped sandy hair and clipped red moustache, was of a strange dead pallor. He followed the figures of George and his companion with little fiery dark-brown eyes, in which devils seemed to dance. Someone tapped him on the arm.

"Hallo, Bellew! had a good race?"

"Devil take you, no! Come and have a drink?"

Still without looking at each other, George and Mrs. Bellew walked towards the gate.

"I don't want to see any more," she said. "I should like to get away at once."

"We'll go after this race," said George. "There's nothing running in the last."

At the back of the Grand Stand, in the midst of all the hurrying crowd, he stopped.

"Helen?" he said.

Mrs. Bellew raised her eyes and looked full into his.

Long and cross-country is the drive from Royston Railway Station to Worsted Skeynes. To George Pencyce, driving the dog cart, with Helen Bellew beside him, it seemed but a minute—that strange minute when the heaven is opened and a vision shows between. To some men that vision comes but once, to some men many times. It comes after long winter, when the blossom hangs; it comes after parched summer, when the leaves are going gold; and of what hues it is painted—of frost-white and fire, of wine and purple, of mountain flowers, or the shadowy green of still deep pools—the seer alone can tell. But this is certain—the vision steals from him who looks on it all images of other things, all sense of law, of order, of the living past, and the living present. It is the future, fair-scented, singing, jewelled, as when suddenly between high banks a bough of apple-blossom hangs quivering in the wind loud with the song of bees.

George Pencyce gazed before him at this vision over the grey mare's back, and she who sat beside him muffled in her fur was touching his arm with hers. And back to them the second groom, hugging himself above the road that slipped away beneath, saw another kind of vision, for he had won five pounds, and his eyes were closed. And the grey mare saw a vision of her warm light stall, and the oats dropping between her manger bars, and fled with light hoofs along the lanes where the side-lamps shot two moving gleams over dark beech-hedges that rustled crisply in the northeast wind. Again and again

she sneezed in the pleasure of that homeward flight, and the light foam of her nostrils flicked the faces of those behind. And they sat silent, thrilling at the touch of each other's arms, their cheeks glowing in the windy darkness, their eyes shining and fixed before them.

The second groom awoke suddenly from his dream.

"If I owned that 'orse, like Mr. George, and had such a topper as this 'ere Mrs. Bellew beside me, would I be sittin' there without a word?"

CHAPTER V

MRS. PENDYCE'S DANCE

Mrs. Pendyce believed in the practice of assembling county society for the purpose of inducing it to dance, a hardy enterprise in a county where the souls, and incidentally the feet, of the inhabitants were shaped for more solid pursuits. Men were her chief difficulty, for in spite of really national discouragement, it was rare to find a girl who was not "fond of dancing."

"Ah, dancing; I did so love it! Oh, poor Cecil Tharp!" And with a queer little smile she pointed to a strapping red-faced youth dancing with her daughter. "He nearly trips Bee up every minute, and he hugs her so, as if he were afraid of falling on his head. Oh, dear, what a bump! It's lucky she's so nice and solid. I like to see the dear boy. Here come George and Helen Bellew. Poor George is not quite up to her form, but he's better than most of them. Doesn't she look lovely this evening?"

Lady Maiden raised her glasses to her eyes by the aid of a tortoise-shell handle.

"Yes, but she's one of those women you never can look at without seeing that she has a—a—body. She's too-too—d'you see what I mean? It's almost—almost like a Frenchwoman!"

Mrs. Bellew had passed so close that the skirt of her seagreen dress brushed their feet with a swish, and a scent as of a flower-bed was wafted from it. Mrs. Pendyce wrinkled her nose.

"Much nicer. Her figure's so delicious," she said.

Lady Maiden pondered.

"She's a dangerous woman. James quite agrees with me."

Mrs. Pendyce raised her eyebrows; there was a touch of scorn in that gentle gesture.

"She's a very distant cousin of mine," she said. "Her father was quite a wonderful man. It's an old Devonshire family. The Cheritons of Bovey are mentioned in Twisdom. I like young people to enjoy themselves."

A smile illumined softly the fine wrinkles round her eyes. Beneath her lavender satin bodice, with strips of black velvet banding it at intervals, her heart was beating faster than usual. She was thinking of a night in her youth, when her old playfellow, young Trefane of the Blues, danced with her nearly all the evening, and of how at her window she saw the sun rise, and gently wept because she was married to Horace Pendyce.

"I always feel sorry for a woman who can dance as she does. I should have liked to have got some men from town, but Horace will only have the county people. It's not fair to the girls. It isn't so much their dancing, as their conversation—all about the first meet, and yesterday's cubbing, and to-morrow's covert-shooting, and their fox-terriers (though I'm awfully fond of the dear dogs), and then that new golf course. Really, it's quite distressing to me at times." Again Mrs. Pendyce looked out into the room with her patient smile, and two little lines of wrinkles formed across her forehead between the regular arching of her eyebrows that were still dark-brown. "They don't seem able to be gay. I feel they don't really care about it. They're only just waiting till to-morrow morning, so that they can go out and kill something. Even Bee's like that!"

Mrs. Pendyce was not exaggerating. The guests at Worsted Skeynes on the night of the Rutlandshire Handicap were nearly all county people, from the Hon. Gertrude Winlow, revolving like a faintly coloured statue, to young Tharp, with his clean face and his fair bullety head, who danced as though he

were riding at a bullfinch. In a niche old Lord Quarryman, the Master of the Gaddesdon, could be discerned in conversation with Sir James Malden and the Reverend Hussell Barter.

Mrs. Pendyce said:

"Your husband and Lord Quarryman are talking of poachers; I can tell that by the look of their hands. I can't help sympathising a little with poachers."

Lady Malden dropped her eyeglasses.

"James takes a very just view of them," she said. "It's such an insidious offence. The more insidious the offence the more important it is to check it. It seems hard to punish people for stealing bread or turnips, though one must, of course; but I've no sympathy with poachers. So many of them do it for sheer love of sport!"

Mrs. Pendyce answered:

"That's Captain Maydew dancing with her now. He is a good dancer. Don't their steps fit? Don't they look happy? I do like people to enjoy themselves! There is such a dreadful lot of unnecessary sadness and suffering in the world. I think it's really all because people won't make allowances for each other."

Lady Malden looked at her sideways, pursing her lips; but Mrs. Pendyce, by race a Totteridge, continued to smile. She had been born unconscious of her neighbours' scrutinies.

"Helen Bellew," she said, "was such a lovely girl. Her grandfather was my mother's cousin. What does that make her? Anyway, my cousin, Gregory Vigil, is her first cousin once removed—the Hampshire Vigils. Do you know him?"

Lady Malden answered:

"Gregory Vigil? The man with a lot of greyish hair? I've had to do with him in the S.R.W.C."

But Mrs. Pendyce was dancing mentally.

"Such a good fellow! What is that—the—?"

Lady Malden gave her a sharp look.

"Society for the Rescue of Women and Children, of course. Surely you know about that?"

Mrs. Pendyce continued to smile.

"Ah, yes, that is nice! What a beautiful figure she has! It's so refreshing. I envy a woman with a figure like that; it looks as if it would never grow old. 'Society for the Regeneration of Women'? Gregory's so good about that sort of thing. But he never seems quite successful, have you noticed? There was a woman he was very interested in this spring. I think she drank."

"They all do," said Lady Malden; "it's the curse of the day."

Mrs. Pendyce wrinkled her forehead.

"Most of the Totteridges," she said, "were great drinkers. They ruined their constitutions. Do you know Jaspar Bellew?"

"No."

"It's such a pity he drinks. He came to dinner here once, and I'm afraid he must have come intoxicated. He took me in; his little eyes quite burned me up. He drove his dog cart into a ditch on the way home. That sort of thing gets about so. It's such a pity. He's quite interesting. Horace can't stand him."

The music of the waltz had ceased. Lady Maiden put her glasses to her eyes. From close beside them George and Mrs. Bellew passed by. They moved on out of hearing, but the breeze of her fan had touched the arching hair on Lady Maiden's forehead, the down on her upper lip.

"Why isn't she with her husband?" she asked abruptly.

Mrs. Pendyce lifted her brows.

"Do you concern yourself to ask that which a well-bred woman leaves unanswered?" she seemed to say, and a flush coloured her cheeks.

Lady Maiden winced, but, as though it were forced through her mouth by some explosion in her soul, she said:

"You have only to look and see how dangerous she is!"

The colour in Mrs. Pendyce's cheeks deepened to a blush like a girl's.

"Every man," she said, "is in love with Helen Bellew. She's so tremendously alive. My cousin Gregory has been in love with her for years, though he is her guardian or trustee, or whatever they call them now. It's quite romantic. If I were a man I should be in love with her myself." The flush vanished and left her cheeks to their true colour, that of a faded rose.

Once more she was listening to the voice of young Trefane, "Ah, Margery, I love you!"—to her own half whispered answer, "Poor boy!" Once more she was looking back through that forest of her life where she had wandered so long, and where every tree was Horace Pendyce.

"What a pity one can't always be young!" she said.

Through the conservatory door, wide open to the lawn, a full moon flooded the country with pale gold light, and in that light the branches of the cedar-trees seemed printed black on the grey-blue paper of the sky; all was cold, still witchery out there, and not very far away an owl was hooting.

The Reverend Husell Barter, about to enter the conservatory for a breath of air, was arrested by the sight of a couple half-hidden by a bushy plant; side by side they were looking at the moonlight, and he knew them for Mrs. Bellew and George Pendyce. Before he could either enter or retire, he saw George seize her in his arms. She seemed to bend her head back, then bring her face to his. The moonlight fell on it, and on the full, white curve of her neck. The Rector of Worsted Skeynes saw, too, that her eyes were closed, her lips parted.

CHAPTER VI

INFLUENCE OF THE REVEREND HUSSELL BARTER

Along the walls of the smoking-room, above a leather dado, were prints of horsemen in night-shirts and nightcaps, or horsemen in red coats and top-hats, with words underneath such as:

"'Yeoicks' says Thruster; 'Yeoicks' says Dick. 'My word! these d---d Quornites shall now see the trick!'"

Two pairs of antlers surmounted the hearth, mementoes of Mr. Pendyce's deer-forest, Strathbegally, now given up, where, with the assistance of his dear old gillie Angus McBane, he had secured the heads of these monarchs of the glen. Between them was the print of a personage in trousers, with a rifle under his arm and a smile on his lips, while two large deerhounds worried a dying stag, and a lady approached him on a pony.

The Squire and Sir James Malden had retired; the remaining guests were seated round the fire. Gerald Pendyce stood at a side-table, on which was a tray of decanters, glasses, and mineral water.

"Who's for a dhrop of the craythur? A wee dhrop of the craythur? Rector, a dhrop of the craythur? George, a dhrop—"

George shook his head. A smile was on his lips, and that smile had in it a quality of remoteness, as though it belonged to another sphere, and had strayed on to the lips of this man of the world against his will. He seemed trying to conquer it, to twist his face into its habitual shape, but, like the spirit of a strange force, the smile broke through. It had mastered him, his thoughts, his habits, and his creed; he was stripped of fashion, as on a thirsty noon a man stands stripped for a cool plunge from which he hardly cares if he come up again.

And this smile, not by intrinsic merit, but by virtue of its strangeness, attracted the eye of each man in the room; so, in a crowd, the most foreign-looking face will draw all glances.

The Reverend Husell Barter with a frown watched that smile, and strange thoughts chased through his mind.

"Uncle Charles, a dhrop of the craythur a wee dhrop of the craythur?"

General Pendyce caressed his whisker.

"The least touch," he said, "the least touch! I hear that our friend Sir Percival is going to stand again."

Mr. Barter rose and placed his back before the fire.

"Outrageous!" he said. "He ought to be told at once that we can't have him."

The Hon. Geoffrey Winlow answered from his chair:

"If he puts up, he'll get in; they can't afford to lose him." And with a leisurely puff of smoke: "I must say, sir, I don't quite see what it has to do with his public life."

Mr. Barter thrust forth his lower lip.

"An impenitent man," he said.

"But a woman like that! What chance has a fellow if she once gets hold of him?"

"When I was stationed at Halifax," began General Pendyce, "she was the belle of the place—"

Again Mr. Barter thrust out his lower lip.

"Don't let's talk of her—the jade!" Then suddenly to George: "Let's hear your opinion, George. Dreaming of your victories, eh?" And the tone of his voice was peculiar.

But George got up.

"I'm too sleepy," he said; "good-night." Curtly nodding, he left the room.

Outside the door stood a dark oak table covered with silver candlesticks; a single candle burned thereon, and made a thin gold path in the velvet blackness. George lighted his candle, and a second gold path leaped out in front; up this he began to ascend. He carried his candle at the level of his breast, and the light shone sideways and up over his white shirt-front and the comely, bulldog face above it. It shone, too, into his eyes, 'grey and slightly bloodshot, as though their surfaces concealed passions violently struggling for expression. At the turning platform of the stair he paused. In darkness above and in darkness below the country house was still; all the little life of its day, its petty sounds, movements, comings, goings, its very breathing, seemed to have fallen into sleep. The forces of its life had gathered into that pool of light where George stood listening. The beating of his heart was the only sound; in that small sound was all the pulse of this great slumbering space. He stood there long, motionless, listening to the beating of his heart, like a man fallen into a trance. Then floating up through the darkness came the echo of a laugh. George started. "The d——d parson!" he muttered, and turned up the stairs again; but now he moved like a man with a purpose, and held his candle high so that the light fell far out into the darkness. He went beyond his own room, and stood still again. The light of the candle showed the blood flushing his forehead, beating and pulsing in the veins at the side of his temples; showed, too, his lips quivering, his shaking hand. He stretched out that hand and touched the handle of a door, then stood again like a man of stone, listening for the laugh. He raised the candle, and it shone into every nook; his throat clicked, as though he found it hard to swallow....

It was at Barnard Scrolls, the next station to Worsted Skeynes, on the following afternoon, that a young man entered a first-class compartment of the 3.10 train to town. The young man wore a Newmarket coat, natty white gloves, and carried an eyeglass. His face was well coloured, his chestnut moustache well brushed, and his blue eyes with their loving expression seemed to say, "Look at me—come, look at me—can anyone be better fed?" His valise and hat-box, of the best leather, bore the inscription, "E. Maydew, 8th Lancers."

There was a lady leaning back in a corner, wrapped to the chin in a fur garment, and the young man, encountering through his eyeglass her cool, ironical glance, dropped it and held out his hand.

"Ah, Mrs. Bellew, great pleasure t'see you again so soon. You goin' up to town? Jolly dance last night, wasn't it? Dear old sort, the Squire, and Mrs. Pendyce such an awf'ly nice woman."

Mrs. Bellew took his hand, and leaned back again in her corner. She was rather paler than usual, but it became her, and Captain Maydew thought he had never seen so charming a creature.

"Got a week's leave, thank goodness. Most awf'ly slow time of year. Cubbin's pretty well over, an' we don't open till the first."

He turned to the window. There in the sunlight the hedgerows ran golden and brown away from the clouds of trailing train smoke. Young Maydew shook his head at their beauty.

"The country's still very blind," he said. "Awful pity you've given up your huntin'."

Mrs. Bellew did not trouble to answer, and it was just that certainty over herself, the cool assurance of a woman who has known the world, her calm, almost negligent eyes, that fascinated this young man. He looked at her quite shyly.

'I suppose you will become my slave,' those eyes seemed to say, 'but I can't help you, really.'

"Did you back George's horse? I had an awf'ly good race. I was at school with George. Charmin' fellow, old George."

In Mrs. Bellew's eyes something seemed to stir down in the depths, but young Maydew was looking at his glove. The handle of the carriage had left a mark that saddened him.

"You know him well, I suppose, old George?"

"Very well."

"Some fellows, if they have a good thing, keep it so jolly dark. You fond of racin', Mrs. Bellew?"

"Passionately."

"So am I" And his eyes continued, 'It's ripping to like what you like,' for, hypnotised, they could not tear themselves away from that creamy face, with its full lips and the clear, faintly smiling eyes above the high collar of white fur.

At the terminus his services were refused, and rather crestfallen, with his hat raised, he watched her walk away. But soon, in his cab, his face regained its normal look, his eyes seemed saying to the little mirror, 'Look at me come, look at me—can anyone be better fed?'

CHAPTER VII

SABBATH AT WORSTED SKEYNES

In the white morning-room which served for her boudoir Mrs. Pendyce sat with an opened letter in her lap. It was her practice to sit there on Sunday mornings for an hour before she went to her room adjoining to put on her hat for church. It was her pleasure during that hour to do nothing but sit at the window, open if the weather permitted, and look over the home paddock and the squat spire of the village church rising among a group of elms. It is not known what she thought about at those times, unless of the countless Sunday mornings she had sat there with her hands in her lap waiting to be roused at 10.45 by the Squire's entrance and his "Now, my dear, you'll be late!" She had sat there till her hair, once dark-brown, was turning grey; she would sit there until it was white. One day she would sit there no longer, and, as likely as not, Mr. Pendyce, still well preserved, would enter and say, "Now, my dear, you'll be late!" having for the moment forgotten.

But this was all to be expected, nothing out of the common; the same thing was happening in hundreds of country houses throughout the "three kingdoms," and women were sitting waiting for their hair to turn white, who, long before, at the altar of a fashionable church, had parted with their imaginations and all the changes and chances of this mortal life.

Round her chair "the dear dogs" lay—this was their practice too, and now and again the Skye (he was getting very old) would put out a long tongue and lick her little pointed shoe. For Mrs. Pendyce had been a pretty woman, and her feet were as small as ever.

Beside her on a spindley table stood a china bowl filled with dried rose-leaves, whereon had been scattered an essence smelling like sweetbriar, whose secret she had learned from her mother in the old Warwickshire home of the Totteridges, long since sold to Mr. Abraham Brightman. Mrs. Pendyce, born in the year 1840, loved sweet perfumes, and was not ashamed of using them.

The Indian summer sun was soft and bright; and wistful, soft, and bright were Mrs. Pendyce's eyes, fixed on the letter in her lap. She turned it over and began to read again. A wrinkle visited her brow. It

was not often that a letter demanding decision or involving responsibility came to her hands past the kind and just censorship of Horace Pendyce. Many matters were under her control, but were not, so to speak, connected with the outer world. Thus ran the letter:

"S.R.W.C., HANOVER SQUARE,
"November 1, 1891.

"DEAR MARGERY,

"I want to see you and talk something over, so I'm running down on Sunday afternoon. There is a train of sorts. Any loft will do for me to sleep in if your house is full, as it may be, I suppose, at this time of year. On second thoughts I will tell you what I want to see you about. You know, of course, that since her father died I am Helen Bellew's only guardian. Her present position is one in which no woman should be placed; I am convinced it ought to be put an end to. That man Bellew deserves no consideration. I cannot write of him coolly, so I won't write at all. It is two years now since they separated, entirely, as I consider, through his fault. The law has placed her in a cruel and helpless position all this time; but now, thank God, I believe we can move for a divorce. You know me well enough to realise what I have gone through before coming to this conclusion. Heaven knows if I could hit on some other way in which her future could be safeguarded, I would take it in preference to this, which is most repugnant; but I cannot. You are the only woman I can rely on to be interested in her, and I must see Bellew. Let not the fat and just Benson and his estimable horses be disturbed on my account; I will walk up and carry my toothbrush.

"Affectionately your cousin,
"GREGORY VIGIL."

Mrs. Pendyce smiled. She saw no joke, but she knew from the wording of the last sentence that Gregory saw one, and she liked to give it a welcome; so smiling and wrinkling her forehead, she mused over the letter. Her thoughts wandered. The last scandal—Lady Rose Bethany's divorce—had upset the whole county, and even now one had to be careful what one said. Horace would not like the idea of another divorce-suit, and that so close to Worsted Skeynes. When Helen left on Thursday he had said:

"I'm not sorry she's gone. Her position is a queer one. People don't like it. The Maidens were quite ___"

And Mrs. Pendyce remembered with a glow at her heart how she had broken in:

"Ellen Maiden is too bourgeoise for anything!"

Nor had Mr. Pendyce's look of displeasure effaced the comfort of that word.

Poor Horace! The children took after him, except George, who took after her brother Hubert. The dear boy had gone back to his club on Friday—the day after Helen and the others went. She wished he could have stayed. She wished—The wrinkle deepened on her brow. Too much London was bad for him! Too much—Her fancy flew to the London which she saw now only for three weeks in June and July, for the sake of the girls, just when her garden was at its best, and when really things were such a whirl that she never knew whether she was asleep or awake. It was not like London at all—not like that London under spring skies, or in early winter lamplight, where all the passers-by seemed so interesting, living all sorts of strange and eager lives, with strange and eager pleasures, running all sorts of risks, hungry sometimes, homeless even—so fascinating, so unlike—

"Now, my dear, you'll be late!"

Mr. Pendyce, in his Norfolk jacket, which he was on his way to change for a black coat, passed through the room, followed by the spaniel John. He turned at the door, and the spaniel John turned too.

"I hope to goodness Barter'll be short this morning. I want to talk to old Fox about that new chaff-cutter."

Round their mistress the three terriers raised their heads; the aged Skye gave forth a gentle growl. Mrs. Pendyce leaned over and stroked his nose.

"Roy, Roy, how can you, dear?"

Mr. Pendyce said:

"The old dog's losing all his teeth; he'll have to be put away."

His wife flushed painfully.

"Oh no, Horace—oh no!"

The Squire coughed.

"We must think of the dog!" he said.

Mrs. Pendyce rose, and crumpling the letter nervously, followed him from the room.

A narrow path led through the home paddock towards the church, and along it the household were making their way. The maids in feathers hurried along guiltily by twos and threes; the butler followed slowly by himself. A footman and a groom came next, leaving trails of pomatum in the air. Presently General Pendyce, in a high square-topped bowler hat, carrying a malacca cane, and Prayer-Book, appeared walking between Bee and Norah, also carrying Prayer-Books, with fox-terriers by their sides. Lastly, the Squire in a high hat, six or seven paces in advance of his wife, in a small velvet toque.

The rooks had ceased their wheeling and their cawing; the five-minutes bell, with its jerky, toneless tolling, alone broke the Sunday hush. An old horse, not yet taken up from grass, stood motionless, resting a hind-leg, with his face turned towards the footpath. Within the churchyard wicket the Rector, firm and square, a low-crowned hat tilted up on his bald forehead, was talking to a deaf old cottager. He raised his hat and nodded to the ladies; then, leaving his remark unfinished, disappeared within the vestry. At the organ Mrs. Barter was drawing out stops in readiness to play her husband into church, and her eyes, half-shining and half-anxious, were fixed intently on the vestry door.

The Squire and Mrs. Pendyce, now almost abreast, came down the aisle and took their seats beside their daughters and the General in the first pew on the left. It was high and cushioned. They knelt down on tall red hassocks. Mrs. Pendyce remained over a minute buried in thought; Mr. Pendyce rose sooner, and looking down, kicked the hassock that had been put too near the seat. Fixing his glasses on his nose, he consulted a worn old Bible, then rising, walked to the lectern and began to find the Lessons. The bell ceased; a wheezing, growling noise was heard. Mrs. Barter had begun to play; the Rector, in a white surplice, was coming in. Mr. Pendyce, with his back turned, continued to find the Lessons. The service began.

Through a plain glass window high up in the right-hand aisle the sun shot a gleam athwart the Pencyces' pew. It found its last resting-place on Mrs. Barter's face, showing her soft crumpled cheeks painfully flushed, the lines on her forehead, and those shining eyes, eager and anxious, travelling ever from her husband to her music and back again. At the least fold or frown on his face the music seemed to quiver, as to some spasm in the player's soul. In the Pencyces' pew the two girls sang loudly and with a certain sweetness. Mr. Pendyce, too, sang, and once or twice he looked in surprise at his brother, as though he were not making a creditable noise.

Mrs. Pendyce did not sing, but her lips moved, and her eyes followed the millions of little dust atoms dancing in the long slanting sunbeam. Its gold path canted slowly from her, then, as by magic, vanished. Mrs. Pendyce let her eyes fall. Something had fled from her soul with the sunbeam; her lips moved no more.

The Squire sang two loud notes, spoke three, sang two again; the Psalms ceased. He left his seat, and placing his hands on the lectern's sides, leaned forward and began to read the Lesson. He read the story of Abraham and Lot, and of their flocks and herds, and how they could not dwell together, and as he read, hypnotised by the sound of his own voice, he was thinking:

'This Lesson is well read by me, Horace Pendyce. I am Horace Pendyce—Horace Pendyce. Amen, Horace Pendyce!'

And in the first pew on the left Mrs. Pendyce fixed her eyes upon him, for this was her habit, and she thought how, when the spring came again, she would run up to town, alone, and stay at Green's Hotel, where she had always stayed with her father when a girl. George had promised to look after her, and take her round the theatres. And forgetting that she had thought this every autumn for the last ten years, she gently smiled and nodded. Mr. Pendyce said:

"'And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee. Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord.' Here endeth the first Lesson."

The sun, reaching the second window, again shot a gold pathway athwart the church; again the millions of dust atoms danced, and the service went on.

There came a hush. The spaniel John, crouched close to the ground outside, poked his long black

nose under the churchyard gate; the fox-terriers, seated patient in the grass, pricked their ears. A voice speaking on one note broke the hush. The spaniel John sighed, the fox-terriers dropped their ears, and lay down heavily against each other. The Rector had begun to preach. He preached on fruitfulness, and in the first right-hand pew six of his children at once began to fidget. Mrs. Barter, sideways and unsupported on her seat, kept her starry eyes fixed on his cheek; a line of perplexity furrowed her brow. Now and again she moved as though her back ached. The Rector quartered his congregation with his gaze, lest any amongst them should incline to sleep. He spoke in a loud-sounding voice.

God—he said—wished men to be fruitful, intended them to be fruitful, commanded them to be fruitful. God—he said—made men, and made the earth; He made man to be fruitful in the earth; He made man neither to question nor answer nor argue; He made him to be fruitful and possess the land. As they had heard in that beautiful Lesson this morning, God had set bounds, the bounds of marriage, within which man should multiply; within those bounds it was his duty to multiply, and that exceedingly—even as Abraham multiplied. In these days dangers, pitfalls, snares, were rife; in these days men went about and openly, unashamedly advocated shameful doctrines. Let them beware. It would be his sacred duty to exclude such men from within the precincts of that parish entrusted to his care by God. In the language of their greatest poet, "Such men were dangerous"—dangerous to Christianity, dangerous to their country, and to national life. They were not brought into this world to follow sinful inclination, to obey their mortal reason. God demanded sacrifices of men. Patriotism demanded sacrifices of men, it demanded that they should curb their inclinations and desires. It demanded of them their first duty as men and Christians, the duty of being fruitful and multiplying, in order that they might till this fruitful earth, not selfishly, not for themselves alone. It demanded of them the duty of multiplying in order that they and their children might be equipped to smite the enemies of their Queen and country, and uphold the name of England in whatever quarrel, against all who rashly sought to drag her flag in the dust.

The Squire opened his eyes and looked at his watch. Folding his arms, he coughed, for he was thinking of the chaff-cutter. Beside him Mrs. Pencyce, with her eyes on the altar, smiled as if in sleep. She was thinking, 'Skyward's in Bond Street used to have lovely lace. Perhaps in the spring I could— Or there was Goblin's, their Point de Venise—'

Behind them, four rows back, an aged cottage woman, as upright as a girl, sat with a rapt expression on her carved old face. She never moved, her eyes seemed drinking in the movements of the Rector's lips, her whole being seemed hanging on his words. It is true her dim eyes saw nothing but a blur, her poor deaf ears could not hear one word, but she sat at the angle she was used to, and thought of nothing at all. And perhaps it was better so, for she was near her end.

Outside the churchyard, in the sun-warmed grass, the fox-terriers lay one against the other, pretending to shiver, with their small bright eyes fixed on the church door, and the rubbery nostrils of the spaniel John worked ever busily beneath the wicket gate.

CHAPTER VIII

GREGORY VIGIL PROPOSES

About three o'clock that afternoon a tall man walked up the avenue at Worsted Skeynes, in one hand carrying his hat, in the other a small brown bag. He stopped now and then, and took deep breaths, expanding the nostrils of his straight nose. He had a fine head, with wings of grizzled hair. His clothes were loose, his stride was springy. Standing in the middle of the drive, taking those long breaths, with his moist blue eyes upon the sky, he excited the attention of a robin, who ran out of a rhododendron to see, and when he had passed began to whistle. Gregory Vigil turned, and screwed up his humorous lips, and, except that he was completely lacking in embonpoint, he had a certain resemblance to this bird, which is supposed to be peculiarly British.

He asked for Mrs. Pencyce in a high, light voice, very pleasant to the ear, and was at once shown to the white morning-room.

She greeted him affectionately, like many women who have grown used to hearing from their husbands the formula "Oh! your people!"—she had a strong feeling for her kith and kin.

"You know, Grig," she said, when her cousin was seated, "your letter was rather disturbing. Her separation from Captain Bellew has caused such a lot of talk about here. Yes; it's very common, I know, that sort of thing, but Horace is so—! All the squires and parsons and county people we get about

here are just the same. Of course, I'm very fond of her, she's so charming to look at; but, Gregory, I really don't dislike her husband. He's a desperate sort of person—I think that's rather, refreshing; and you know I do think she's a little like him in that!"

The blood rushed up into Gregory Vigil's forehead; he put his hand to his head, and said:

"Like him? Like that man? Is a rose like an artichoke?"

Mrs. Pendyce went on:

"I enjoyed having her here immensely. It's the first time she's been here since she left the Firs. How long is that? Two years? But you know, Grig, the Maidens were quite upset about her. Do you think a divorce is really necessary?"

Gregory Vigil answered: "I'm afraid it is."

Mrs. Pendyce met her cousin's gaze serenely; if anything, her brows were uplifted more than usual; but, as at the stirring of secret trouble, her fingers began to twine and twist. Before her rose a vision of George and Mrs. Bellew side by side. It was a vague maternal feeling, an instinctive fear. She stilled her fingers, let her eyelids droop, and said:

"Of course, dear Grig, if I can help you in any way—Horace does so dislike anything to do with the papers."

Gregory Vigil drew in his breath.

"The papers!" he said. "How hateful it is! To think that our civilisation should allow women to be cast to the dogs! Understand, Margery, I'm thinking of her. In this matter I'm not capable of considering anything else."

Mrs. Pendyce murmured: "Of course, dear Grig, I quite understand."

"Her position is odious; a woman should not have to live like that, exposed to everyone's foul gossip."

"But, dear Grig, I don't think she minds; she seemed to me in such excellent spirits."

Gregory ran his fingers through his hair.

"Nobody understands her," he said; "she's so plucky!"

Mrs. Pendyce stole a glance at him, and a little ironical smile flickered over her face.

"No one can look at her without seeing her spirit. But, Grig, perhaps you don't quite understand her either!"

Gregory Vigil put his hand to his head.

"I must open the window a moment," he said.

Again Mrs. Pendyce's fingers began twisting, again she stilled them.

"We were quite a large party last week, and now there's only Charles. Even George has gone back; he'll be so sorry to have missed you!"

Gregory neither turned nor answered, and a wistful look came into Mrs. Pendyce's face.

"It was so nice for the dear boy to win that race! I'm afraid he bets rather! It's such a comfort Horace doesn't know."

Still Gregory did not speak.

Mrs. Pendyce's face lost its anxious look, and gained a sort of gentle admiration.

"Dear Grig," she said, "where do you go about your hair? It is so nice and long and wavy!"

Gregory turned with a blush.

"I've been wanting to get it cut for ages. Do you really mean, Margery, that your husband can't realise the position she's placed in?"

Mrs. Pendyce fixed her eyes on her lap.

"You see, Grig," she began, "she was here a good deal before she left the Firs, and, of course, she's related to me—though it's very distant. With those horrid cases, you never know what will happen. Horace is certain to say that she ought to go back to her husband; or, if that's impossible, he'll say she ought to think of Society. Lady Rose Bethany's case has shaken everybody, and Horace is nervous. I don't know how it is, there's a great feeling amongst people about here against women asserting themselves. You should hear Mr. Barter and Sir James Maiden, and dozens of others; the funny thing is that the women take their side. Of course, it seems odd to me, because so many of the Totteridges ran away, or did something funny. I can't help sympathising with her, but I have to think of—of—In the country, you don't know how things that people do get about before they've done them! There's only that and hunting to talk of."

Gregory Vigil clutched at his head.

"Well, if this is what chivalry has come to, thank God I'm not a squire!"

Mrs. Pendyce's eyes flickered.

"Ah!" she said, "I've thought like that so often."

Gregory broke the silence.

"I can't help the customs of the country. My duty's plain. There's nobody else to look after her."

Mrs. Pendyce sighed, and, rising from her chair, said: "Very well, dear Grig; do let us go and have some tea."

Tea at Worsted Skeynes was served in the hall on Sundays, and was usually attended by the Rector and his wife. Young Cecil Tharp had walked over with his dog, which could be heard whimpering faintly outside the front-door.

General Pendyce, with his knees crossed and the tips of his fingers pressed together, was leaning back in his chair and staring at the wall. The Squire, who held his latest bird's-egg in his hand, was showing its spots to the Rector.

In a corner by a harmonium, on which no one ever played, Norah talked of the village hockey club to Mrs. Barter, who sat with her eyes fixed on her husband. On the other side of the fire Bee and young Tharp, whose chairs seemed very close together, spoke of their horses in low tones, stealing shy glances at each other. The light was failing, the wood logs crackled, and now and then over the cosy hum of talk there fell short, drowsy silences—silences of sheer warmth and comfort, like the silence of the spaniel John asleep against his master's boot.

"Well," said Gregory softly, "I must go and see this man."

"Is it really necessary, Grig, to see him at all? I mean—if you've made up your mind——"

Gregory ran his hand through his hair.

"It's only fair, I think!" And crossing the hall, he let himself out so quietly that no one but Mrs. Pendyce noticed he had gone.

An hour and a half later, near the railway-station, on the road from the village back to Worsted Skeynes, Mr. Pendyce and his daughter Bee were returning from their Sunday visit to their old butler, Bigson. The Squire was talking.

"He's failing, Bee-dear old Bigson's failing. I can't hear what he says, he mumbles so; and he forgets. Fancy his forgetting that I was at Oxford. But we don't get servants like him nowadays. That chap we've got now is a sleepy fellow. Sleepy! he's—What's that in the road? They've no business to be coming at that pace. Who is it? I can't see."

Down the middle of the dark road a dog cart was approaching at top speed. Bee seized her father's arm and pulled it vigorously, for Mr. Pendyce was standing stock-still in disapproval. The dog cart passed within a foot of him and vanished, swinging round into the station. Mr. Pendyce turned in his tracks.

"Who was that? Disgraceful! On Sunday, too! The fellow must be drunk; he nearly ran over my legs. Did you see, Bee, he nearly ran over——"

Bee answered:

"It was Captain Bellew, Father; I saw his face." "Bellew? That drunken fellow? I shall summons him."

Did you see, Bee, he nearly ran over my——"

"Perhaps he's had bad news," said Bee. "There's the train going out now; I do hope he caught it!"

"Bad news! Is that an excuse for driving over me? You hope he caught it? I hope he's thrown himself out. The ruffian! I hope he's killed himself."

In this strain Mr. Pendyce continued until they reached the church. On their way up the aisle they passed Gregory Vigil leaning forward with his elbows on the desk and his hand covering his eyes....

At eleven o'clock that night a man stood outside the door of Mrs. Bellew's flat in Chelsea violently ringing the bell. His face was deathly white, but his little dark eyes sparkled. The door was opened, and Helen Bellew in evening dress stood there holding a candle in her hand.

"Who are you? What do you want?"

The man moved into the light.

"Jaspar! You? What on earth——"

"I want to talk."

"Talk? Do you know what time it is?"

"Time—there's no such thing. You might give me a kiss after two years. I've been drinking, but I'm not drunk."

Mrs. Bellew did not kiss him, neither did she draw back her face. No trace of alarm showed in her ice-grey eyes. She said: "If I let you in, will you promise to say what you want to say quickly, and go away?"

The little brown devils danced in Bellew's face. He nodded. They stood by the hearth in the sitting-room, and on the lips of both came and went a peculiar smile.

It was difficult to contemplate too seriously a person with whom one had lived for years, with whom one had experienced in common the range of human passion, intimacy, and estrangement, who knew all those little daily things that men and women living together know of each other, and with whom in the end, without hatred, but because of one's nature, one had ceased to live. There was nothing for either of them to find out, and with a little smile, like the smile of knowledge itself, Jaspar Bellew and Helen his wife looked at each other.

"Well," she said again; "what have you come for?"

Bellew's face had changed. Its expression was furtive; his mouth twitched; a furrow had come between his eyes.

"How—are—you?" he said in a thick, muttering voice.

Mrs. Bellew's clear voice answered:

"Now, Jaspar, what is it that you want?"

The little brown devils leaped up again in Jaspar's face.

"You look very pretty to-night!"

His wife's lips curled.

"I'm much the same as I always was," she said.

A violent shudder shook Bellew. He fixed his eyes on the floor a little beyond her to the left; suddenly he raised them. They were quite lifeless.

"I'm perfectly sober," he murmured thickly; then with startling quickness his eyes began to sparkle again. He came a step nearer.

"You're my wife!" he said.

Mrs. Bellew smiled.

"Come," she answered, "you must go!" and she put out her bare arm to push him back. But Bellew

recoiled of his own accord; his eyes were fixed again on the floor a little beyond her to the left.

"What's that?" he stammered. "What's that—that black——?"

The devilry, mockery, admiration, bemusement, had gone out of his face; it was white and calm, and horribly pathetic.

"Don't turn me out," he stammered; "don't turn me out!"

Mrs. Bellew looked at him hard; the defiance in her eyes changed to a sort of pity. She took a quick step and put her hand on his shoulder.

"It's all right, old boy—all right!" she said. "There's nothing there!"

CHAPTER IX

MR. PARAMOR DISPOSES

Mrs. Pendyce, who, in accordance with her husband's wish, still occupied the same room as Mr. Pendyce, chose the ten minutes before he got up to break to him Gregory's decision. The moment was auspicious, for he was only half awake.

"Horace," she said, and her face looked young and anxious, "Grig says that Helen Bellew ought not to go on in her present position. Of course, I told him that you'd be annoyed, but Grig says that she can't go on like this, that she simply must divorce Captain Bellew."

Mr. Pendyce was lying on his back.

"What's that?" he said.

Mrs. Pendyce went on

"I knew it would worry you; but really"—she fixed her eyes on the ceiling—"I suppose we ought only to think of her."

The Squire sat up.

"What was that," he said, "about Bellew?"

Mrs. Pendyce went on in a languid voice and without moving her eyes:

"Don't be angrier than you can help, dear; it is so wearing. If Grig says she ought to divorce Captain Bellew, then I'm sure she ought."

Horace Pendyce subsided on his pillow with a bounce, and he too lay with his eyes fixed on the ceiling.

"Divorce him!" he said—"I should think so! He ought to be hanged, a fellow like that. I told you last night he nearly drove over me. Living just as he likes, setting an example of devilry to the whole neighbourhood! If I hadn't kept my head he'd have bowled me over like a ninepin, and Bee into the bargain."

Mrs. Pendyce sighed.

"It was a narrow escape," she said.

"Divorce him!" resumed Mr. Pendyce—"I should think so! She ought to have divorced him long ago. It was the nearest thing in the world; another foot and I should have been knocked off my feet!"

Mrs. Pendyce withdrew her glance from the ceiling.

"At first," she said, "I wondered whether it was quite—but I'm very glad you've taken it like this."

"Taken it! I can tell you, Margery, that sort of thing makes one think. All the time Barter was preaching last night I was wondering what on earth would have happened to this estate if—if——" And he looked round with a frown. "Even as it is, I barely make the two ends of it meet. As to George, he's

no more fit at present to manage it than you are; he'd make a loss of thousands."

"I'm afraid George is too much in London. That's the reason I wondered whether—I'm afraid he sees too much of——"

Mrs. Pendyce stopped; a flush suffused her cheeks; she had pinched herself violently beneath the bedclothes.

"George," said Mr. Pendyce, pursuing his own thoughts, "has no gumption. He'd never manage a man like Peacock—and you encourage him! He ought to marry and settle down."

Mrs. Pendyce, the flush dying in her cheeks, said:

"George is very like poor Hubert."

Horace Pendyce drew his watch from beneath his pillow.

"Ah!" But he refrained from adding, "Your people!" for Hubert Totteridge had not been dead a year. "Ten minutes to eight! You keep me talking here; it's time I was in my bath."

Clad in pyjamas with a very wide blue stripe, grey-eyed, grey-moustached, slim and erect, he paused at the door.

"The girls haven't a scrap of imagination. What do you think Bee said? 'I hope he hasn't lost his train.' Lost his train! Good God! and I might have—I might have——" The Squire did not finish his sentence; no words but what seemed to him violent and extreme would have fulfilled his conception of the danger he had escaped, and it was against his nature and his training to exaggerate a physical risk.

At breakfast he was more cordial than usual to Gregory, who was going up by the first train, for as a rule Mr. Pendyce rather distrusted him, as one would a wife's cousin, especially if he had a sense of humour.

"A very good fellow," he was wont to say of him, "but an out-and-out Radical." It was the only label he could find for Gregory's peculiarities.

Gregory departed without further allusion to the object of his visit. He was driven to the station in a brougham by the first groom, and sat with his hat off and his head at the open window, as if trying to get something blown out of his brain. Indeed, throughout the whole of his journey up to town he looked out of the window, and expressions half humorous and half puzzled played on his face. Like a panorama slowly unrolled, country house after country house, church after church, appeared before his eyes in the autumn sunlight, among the hedgerows and the coverts that were all brown and gold; and far away on the rising uplands the slow ploughman drove, outlined against the sky:

He took a cab from the station to his solicitors' in Lincoln's Inn Fields. He was shown into a room bare of all legal accessories, except a series of Law Reports and a bunch of violets in a glass of fresh water. Edmund Paramor, the senior partner of Paramor and Herring, a clean-shaven man of sixty, with iron-grey hair brushed in a cockscomb off his forehead, greeted him with a smile.

"Ah, Vigil, how are you? Up from the country?"

"From Worsted Skeynes."

"Horace Pendyce is a client of mine. Well, what can we do for you? Your Society up a tree?"

Gregory Vigil, in the padded leather chair that had held so many aspirants for comfort, sat a full minute without speaking; and Mr. Paramor, too, after one keen glance at his client that seemed to come from very far down in his soul, sat motionless and grave. There was at that moment something a little similar in the eyes of these two very different men, a look of kindred honesty and aspiration. Gregory spoke at last.

"It's a painful subject to me."

Mr. Paramor drew a face on his blotting-paper.

"I have come," went on Gregory, "about a divorce for my ward."

"Mrs. Jaspar Bellew?"

"Yes; her position is intolerable."

Mr. Paramor gave him a searching look.

"Let me see: I think she and her husband have been separated for some time."

"Yes, for two years."

"You're acting with her consent, of course?"

"I have spoken to her."

"You know the law of divorce, I suppose?"

Gregory answered with a painful smile:

"I'm not very clear about it; I hardly ever look at those cases in the paper. I hate the whole idea."

Mr. Paramor smiled again, became instantly grave, and said:

"We shall want evidence of certain things, Have you got any evidence?"

Gregory ran his hand through his hair.

"I don't think there'll be any difficulty," he said. "Bellew agrees—they both agree!"

Mr. Paramor stared.

"What's that to do with it?"

Gregory caught him up.

"Surely, where both parties are anxious, and there's no opposition, it can't be difficult."

"Good Lord!" said Mr. Paramor.

"But I've seen Bellew; I saw him yesterday. I'm sure I can get him to admit anything you want!"

Mr. Paramor drew his breath between his teeth.

"Did you ever," he said drily, "hear of what's called collusion?"

Gregory got up and paced the room.

"I don't know that I've ever heard anything very exact about the thing at all," he said. "The whole subject is hateful to me. I regard marriage as sacred, and when, which God forbid, it proves unsacred, it is horrible to think of these formalities. This is a Christian country; we are all flesh and blood. What is this slime, Paramor?"

With this outburst he sank again into the chair, and leaned his head on his hand. And oddly, instead of smiling, Mr. Paramor looked at him with haunting eyes.

"Two unhappy persons must not seem to agree to be parted," he said. "One must be believed to desire to keep hold of the other, and must pose as an injured person. There must be evidence of misconduct, and in this case of cruelty or of desertion. The evidence must be impartial. This is the law."

Gregory said without looking up:

"But why?"

Mr. Paramor took his violets out of the water, and put them to his nose.

"How do you mean—why?"

"I mean, why this underhand, roundabout way?"

Mr. Paramor's face changed with startling speed from its haunting look back to his smile.

"Well," he said, "for the preservation of morality. What do you suppose?"

"Do you call it moral so to imprison people that you drive them to sin in order to free themselves?"

Mr. Paramor obliterated the face on his blotting-pad.

"Where's your sense of humour?" he said.

"I see no joke, Paramor."

Mr. Paramor leaned forward.

"My dear friend," he said earnestly, "I don't say for a minute that our system doesn't cause a great deal of quite unnecessary suffering; I don't say that it doesn't need reform. Most lawyers and almost any thinking man will tell you that it does. But that's a wide question which doesn't help us here. We'll manage your business for you, if it can be done. You've made a bad start, that's all. The first thing is for us to write to Mrs. Bellew, and ask her to come and see us. We shall have to get Bellew watched."

Gregory said:

"That's detestable. Can't it be done without that?"

Mr. Paramor bit his forefinger.

"Not safe," he said. "But don't bother; we'll see to all that."

Gregory rose and went to the window. He said suddenly:

"I can't bear this underhand work."

Mr. Paramor smiled.

"Every honest man," he said, "feels as you do. But, you see, we must think of the law."

Gregory burst out again:

"Can no one get a divorce, then, without making beasts or spies of themselves?"

Mr. Paramor said gravely

"It is difficult, perhaps impossible. You see, the law is based on certain principles."

"Principles?"

A smile wreathed Mr. Paramor's mouth, but died instantly.

"Ecclesiastical principles, and according to these a person desiring a divorce 'ipso facto' loses caste. That they should have to make spies or beasts of themselves is not of grave importance."

Gregory came back to the table, and again buried his head in his hands.

"Don't joke, please, Paramor," he said; "it's all so painful to me."

Mr. Paramor's eyes haunted his client's bowed head.

"I'm not joking," he said. "God forbid! Do you read poetry?" And opening a drawer, he took out a book bound in red leather. "This is a man I'm fond of:

"Life is mostly froth and bubble;
Two things stand like stone—
KINDNESS in another's trouble,
COURAGE in your own."

"That seems to me the sum of all philosophy."

"Paramor," said Gregory, "my ward is very dear to me; she is dearer to me than any woman I know. I am here in a most dreadful dilemma. On the one hand there is this horrible underhand business, with all its publicity; and on the other there is her position—a beautiful woman, fond of gaiety, living alone in this London, where every man's instincts and every woman's tongue look upon her as fair game. It has been brought home to me only too painfully of late. God forgive me! I have even advised her to go back to Bellew, but that seems out of the question. What am I to do?"

Mr. Paramor rose.

"I know," he said—"I know. My dear friend, I know!" And for a full minute he remained motionless, a little turned from Gregory. "It will be better," he said suddenly, "for her to get rid of him. I'll go and see her myself. We'll spare her all we can. I'll go this afternoon, and let you know the result."

As though by mutual instinct, they put out their hands, which they shook with averted faces. Then Gregory, seizing his hat, strode out of the room.

He went straight to the rooms of his Society in Hanover Square. They were on the top floor, higher than the rooms of any other Society in the building—so high, in fact, that from their windows, which began five feet up, you could practically only see the sky.

A girl with sloping shoulders, red cheeks, and dark eyes, was working a typewriter in a corner, and sideways to the sky at a bureau littered with addressed envelopes, unanswered letters, and copies of the Society's publications, was seated a grey-haired lady with a long, thin, weatherbeaten face and glowing eyes, who was frowning at a page of manuscript.

"Oh, Mr. Vigil," she said, "I'm so glad you've come. This paragraph mustn't go as it is. It will never do."

Gregory took the manuscript and read the paragraph in question.

"This case of Eva Nevill is so horrible that we ask those of our women readers who live in the security, luxury perhaps, peace certainly, of their country homes, what they would have done, finding themselves suddenly in the position of this poor girl—in a great city, without friends, without money, almost without clothes, and exposed to all the craft of one of those fiends in human form who prey upon our womankind. Let each one ask herself: Should I have resisted where she fell?"

"It will never do to send that out," said the lady again.

"What is the matter with it, Mrs. Shortman?"

"It's too personal. Think of Lady Maiden, or most of our subscribers. You can't expect them to imagine themselves like poor Eva. I'm sure they won't like it."

Gregory clutched at his hair.

"Is it possible they can't stand that?" he said.

"It's only because you've given such horrible details of poor Eva."

Gregory got up and paced the room.

Mrs. Shortman went on

"You've not lived in the country for so long, Mr. Vigil, that you don't remember. You see, I know. People don't like to be harrowed. Besides, think how difficult it is for them to imagine themselves in such a position. It'll only shock them, and do our circulation harm."

Gregory snatched up the page and handed it to the girl who sat at the typewriter in the corner.

"Read that, please, Miss Mallow."

The girl read without raising her eyes.

"Well, is it what Mrs. Shortman says?"

The girl handed it back with a blush.

"It's perfect, of course, in itself, but I think Mrs. Shortman is right. It might offend some people."

Gregory went quickly to the window, threw it up, and stood gazing at the sky. Both women looked at his back.

Mrs. Shortman said gently:

"I would only just alter it like this, from after 'country homes': 'whether they do not pity and forgive this poor girl in a great city, without friends, without money, almost without clothes, and exposed to all the craft of one of those fiends in human form who prey upon our womankind,' and just stop there."

Gregory returned to the table.

"Not 'forgive,'" he said, "not 'forgive!'"

Mrs. Shortman raised her pen.

"You don't know," she said, "what a strong feeling there is. Mind, it has to go to numbers of parsonages, Mr. Vigil. Our principle has always been to be very careful. And you have been plainer than

usual in stating the case. It's not as if they really could put themselves in her position; that's impossible. Not one woman in a hundred could, especially among those who live in the country and have never seen life. I'm a squire's daughter myself."

"And I a parson's," said Gregory, with a smile.

Mrs. Shortman looked at him reproachfully.

"Joking apart, Mr. Vigil, it's touch and go with our paper as it is; we really can't afford it. I've had lots of letters lately complaining that we put the cases unnecessarily strongly. Here's one:

"BOURNEFIELD RECTORY,
"November 1.

"DEAR MADAM,

"While sympathising with your good work, I am afraid I cannot become a subscriber to your paper while it takes its present form, as I do not feel that it is always fit reading for my girls. I cannot think it either wise or right that they should become acquainted with such dreadful aspects of life, however true they may be.

"I am, dear madam,
"Respectfully yours,
"WINIFRED TUDDENHAM.

"P.S.—I could never feel sure, too, that my maids would not pick it up, and perhaps take harm."

"I had that only this morning."

Gregory buried his face in his hands, and sitting thus he looked so like a man praying that no one spoke. When he raised his face it was to say:

"Not 'forgive,' Mrs. Shortman, not 'forgive'!"

Mrs. Shortman ran her pen through the word.

"Very well, Mr. Vigil," she said; "it's a risk."

The sound of the typewriter, which had been hushed, began again from the corner.

"That case of drink, Mr. Vigil—Millicent Porter—I'm afraid there's very little hope there."

Gregory asked:

"What now?"

"Relapsed again; it's the fifth time."

Gregory turned his face to the window, and looked at the sky.

"I must go and see her. Just give me her address."

Mrs. Shortman read from a green book:

"Mrs. Porter, 2 Bilcock Buildings, Bloomsbury.' Mr. Vigil!"

"Yes."

"Mr. Vigil, I do sometimes wish you would not persevere so long with those hopeless cases; they never seem to come to anything, and your time is so valuable."

"How can I give them up, Mrs. Shortman? There's no choice."

"But, Mr. Vigil, why is there no choice? You must draw the line somewhere. Do forgive me for saying that I think you sometimes waste your time."

Gregory turned to the girl at the typewriter.

"Miss Mallow, is Mrs. Shortman right? do I waste my time?"

The girl at the typewriter blushed vividly, and, without looking round, said:

"How can I tell, Mr. Vigil? But it does worry one."

A humorous and perplexed smile passed over Gregory's lips.

"Now I know I shall cure her," he said. "2 Bilcock Buildings." And he continued to look at the sky. "How's your neuralgia, Mrs. Shortman?"

Mrs. Shortman smiled.

"Awful!"

Gregory turned quickly.

"You feel that window, then; I'm so sorry."

Mrs. Shortman shook her head.

"No, but perhaps Molly does."

The girl at the typewriter said:

"Oh no; please, Mr. Vigil, don't shut it for me."

"Truth and honour?"

"Truth and honour," replied both women. And all three for a moment sat looking at the sky. Then Mrs. Shortman said:

"You see, you can't get to the root of the evil—that husband of hers."

Gregory turned.

"Ah," he said, "that man! If she could only get rid of him! That ought to have been done long ago, before he drove her to drink like this. Why didn't she, Mrs. Shortman, why didn't she?"

Mrs. Shortman raised her eyes, which had such a peculiar spiritual glow.

"I don't suppose she had the money," she said; "and she must have been such a nice woman then. A nice woman doesn't like to divorce—"

Gregory looked at her.

"What, Mrs. Shortman, you too, you too among the Pharisees?"

Mrs. Shortman flushed.

"She wanted to save him," she said; "she must have wanted to save him."

"Then you and I——" But Gregory did not finish, and turned again to the window. Mrs. Shortman, too, biting her lips, looked anxiously at the sky.

Miss Mallow at the typewriter, with a scared face, plied her fingers faster than ever.

Gregory was the first to speak.

"You must please forgive me," he said gently. "A personal matter; I forgot myself."

Mrs. Shortman withdrew her gaze from the sky.

"Oh, Mr. Vigil, if I had known——"

Gregory Gregory smiled.

"Don't, don't!" he said; "we've quite frightened poor Miss Mallow!"

Miss Mallow looked round at him, he looked at her, and all three once more looked at the sky. It was the chief recreation of this little society.

Gregory worked till nearly three, and walked out to a bun-shop, where he lunched off a piece of cake and a cup of coffee. He took an omnibus, and getting on the top, was driven West with a smile on his face and his hat in his hand. He was thinking of Helen Bellew. It had become a habit with him to think of her, the best and most beautiful of her sex—a habit in which he was growing grey, and with which, therefore, he could not part. And those women who saw him with his uncovered head smiled, and thought:

'What a fine-looking man!'

But George Pendyce, who saw him from the window of the Stoics' Club, smiled a different smile; the sight of him was always a little unpleasant to George.

Nature, who had made Gregory Vigil a man, had long found that he had got out of her hands, and was living in celibacy, deprived of the comfort of woman, even of those poor creatures whom he befriended; and Nature, who cannot bear that man should escape her control, avenged herself through his nerves and a habit of blood to the head. Extravagance, she said, I cannot have, and when I made this man I made him quite extravagant enough. For his temperament (not uncommon in a misty climate) had been born seven feet high; and as a man cannot add a cubit to his stature, so neither can he take one off. Gregory could not bear that a yellow man must always remain a yellow man, but trusted by care and attention some day to see him white. There lives no mortal who has not a philosophy as distinct from every other mortal's as his face is different from their faces; but Gregory believed that philosophers unfortunately alien must gain in time a likeness to himself if he were careful to tell them often that they had been mistaken. Other men in this Great Britain had the same belief.

To Gregory's reforming instinct it was a constant grief that he had been born refined. A natural delicacy would interfere and mar his noblest efforts. Hence failures deplored by Mrs. Pendyce to Lady Maiden the night they danced at Worsted Skeynes.

He left his bus near to the flat where Mrs. Bellow lived; with reverence he made the tour of the building and back again. He had long fixed a rule, which he never broke, of seeing her only once a fortnight; but to pass her windows he went out of his way most days and nights. And having made this tour, not conscious of having done anything ridiculous, still smiling, and with his hat on his knee, perhaps really happier because he had not seen her, was driven East, once more passing George Pendyce in the bow-window of the Stoics' Club, and once more raising on his face a jeering smile.

He had been back at his rooms in Buckingham Street half an hour when a club commissionaire arrived with Mr. Paramor's promised letter.

He opened it hastily.

"THE NELSON CLUB, "TRAFALGAR SQUARE. "MY DEAR VIGIL,

"I've just come from seeing your ward. An embarrassing complexion is lent to affairs by what took place last night. It appears that after your visit to him yesterday afternoon her husband came up to town, and made his appearance at her flat about eleven o'clock. He was in a condition bordering on delirium tremens, and Mrs. Bellew was obliged to keep him for the night. 'I could not,' she said to me, 'have refused a dog in such a state.' The visit lasted until this afternoon—in fact, the man had only just gone when I arrived. It is a piece of irony, of which I must explain to you the importance. I think I told you that the law of divorce is based on certain principles. One of these excludes any forgiveness of offences by the party moving for a divorce. In technical language, any such forgiveness or overlooking is called condonation, and it is a complete bar to further action for the time being. The Court is very jealous of this principle of non-forgiveness, and will regard with grave suspicion any conduct on the part of the offended party which might be construed as amounting to condonation. I fear that what your ward tells me will make it altogether inadvisable to apply for a divorce on any evidence that may lie in the past. It is too dangerous. In other words, the Court would almost certainly consider that she has condoned offences so far. Any further offence, however, will in technical language 'revive' the past, and under these circumstances, though nothing can be done at present, there may be hope in the future. After seeing your ward, I quite appreciate your anxiety in the matter, though I am by no means sure that you are right in advising this divorce. If you remain in the same mind, however, I will give the matter my best personal attention, and my counsel to you is not to worry. This is no matter for a layman, especially not for one who, like you, judges of things rather as they ought to be than as they are.

"I am, my dear Vigil,
"Very sincerely yours,
"EDMUND PARAMOR.

"GREGORY VIGIL, ESQ.

"If you want to see me, I shall be at my club all the evening.-E. P."

When Gregory had read this note he walked to the window, and stood looking out over the lights on the river. His heart beat furiously, his temples were crimson. He went downstairs, and took a cab to the Nelson Club.

Mr. Paramor, who was about to dine, invited his visitor to join him.

Gregory shook his head.

"No, thanks," he said; "I don't feel like dining. What is this, Paramor? Surely there's some mistake? Do you mean to tell me that because she acted like a Christian to that man she is to be punished for it in this way?"

Mr. Paramor bit his finger.

"Don't confuse yourself by dragging in Christianity. Christianity has nothing to do with law."

"You talked of principles," said Gregory—"ecclesiastical"

"Yes, yes; I meant principles imported from the old ecclesiastical conception of marriage, which held man and wife to be undivorceable. That conception has been abandoned by the law, but the principles still haunt——"

"I don't understand."

Mr. Paramor said slowly:

"I don't know that anyone does. It's our usual muddle. But I know this, Vigil—in such a case as your ward's we must tread very carefully. We must 'save face,' as the Chinese say. We must pretend we don't want to bring this divorce, but that we have been so injured that we are obliged to come forward. If Bellew says nothing, the Judge will have to take what's put before him. But there's always the Queen's Proctor. I don't know if you know anything about him?"

"No," said Gregory, "I don't."

"Well, if he can find out anything against our getting this divorce, he will. It is not my habit to go into Court with a case in which anybody can find out anything."

"Do you mean to say"

"I mean to say that she must not ask for a divorce merely because she is miserable, or placed in a position that no woman should be placed in, but only if she has been offended in certain technical ways; and if—by condonation, for instance—she has given the Court technical reason for refusing her a divorce, that divorce will be refused her. To get a divorce, Vigil, you must be as hard as nails and as wary as a cat. Now do you understand?"

Gregory did not answer.

Mr. Paramor looked searchingly and rather pityingly in his face.

"It won't do to go for it at present," he said. "Are you still set on this divorce? I told you in my letter that I am not sure you are right."

"How can you ask me, Paramor? After that man's conduct last night, I am more than ever set on it."

"Then," said Mr. Paramor, "we must keep a sharp eye on Bellew, and hope for the best."

Gregory held out his hand.

"You spoke of morality," he said. "I can't tell you how inexpressibly mean the whole thing seems to me. Goodnight."

And, turning rather quickly, he went out.

His mind was confused and his heart torn. He thought of Helen Bellew as of the woman dearest to him in the coils of a great slimy serpent, and the knowledge that each man and woman unhappily married was, whether by his own, his partner's, or by no fault at all, in the same embrace, afforded him no comfort whatsoever. It was long before he left the windy streets to go to his home.

CHAPTER X

There comes now and then to the surface of our modern civilisation one of those great and good men who, unconscious, like all great and good men, of the goodness and greatness of their work, leave behind a lasting memorial of themselves before they go bankrupt.

It was so with the founder of the Stoics' Club.

He came to the surface in the year 187-, with nothing in the world but his clothes and an idea. In a single year he had floated the Stoics' Club, made ten thousand pounds, lost more, and gone down again.

The Stoics' Club lived after him by reason of the immortal beauty of his idea. In 1891 it was a strong and corporate body, not perhaps quite so exclusive as it had been, but, on the whole, as smart and aristocratic as any club in London, with the exception of that one or two into which nobody ever got. The idea with which its founder had underpinned the edifice was, like all great ideas, simple, permanent, and perfect—so simple, permanent, and perfect that it seemed amazing no one had ever thought of it before. It was embodied in No. 1 of the members' rules:

"No member of this club shall have any occupation whatsoever."

Hence the name of a club renowned throughout London for the excellence of its wines and cuisine.

Its situation was in Piccadilly, fronting the Green Park, and through the many windows of its ground-floor smoking-room the public were privileged to see at all hours of the day numbers of Stoics in various attitudes reading the daily papers or gazing out of the window.

Some of them who did not direct companies, grow fruit, or own yachts, wrote a book, or took an interest in a theatre. The greater part eked out existence by racing horses, hunting foxes, and shooting birds. Individuals among them, however, had been known to play the piano, and take up the Roman Catholic religion. Many explored the same spots of the Continent year after year at stated seasons. Some belonged to the Yeomanry; others called themselves barristers; once in a way one painted a picture or devoted himself to good works. They were, in fact, of all sorts and temperaments, but their common characteristic was an independent income, often so settled by Providence that they could not in any way get rid of it.

But though the principle of no occupation overruled all class distinctions, the Stoics were mainly derived from the landed gentry. An instinct that the spirit of the club was safest with persons of this class guided them in their elections, and eldest sons, who became members almost as a matter of course, lost no time in putting up their younger brothers, thereby keeping the wine as pure as might be, and preserving that fine old country-house flavour which is nowhere so appreciated as in London.

After seeing Gregory pass on the top of a bus, George Pendyce went into the card-room, and as it was still empty, set to contemplation of the pictures on the walls. They were effigies of all those members of the Stoics' Club who from time to time had come under the notice of a celebrated caricaturist in a celebrated society paper. Whenever a Stoic appeared, he was at once cut out, framed, glassed, and hung alongside his fellows in this room. And George moved from one to another till he came to the last. It was himself. He was represented in very perfectly cut clothes, with slightly crooked elbows, and race-glasses slung across him. His head, disproportionately large, was surmounted by a black billycock hat with a very flat brim. The artist had thought long and carefully over the face. The lips and cheeks and chin were moulded so as to convey a feeling of the unimaginative joy of life, but to their shape and complexion was imparted a suggestion of obstinacy and choler. To the eyes was given a glazed look, and between them set a little line, as though their owner were thinking:

'Hard work, hard work! Noblesse oblige. I must keep it going!'

Underneath was written: "The Ambler."

George stood long looking at the apotheosis of his fame. His star was high in the heavens. With the eye of his mind he saw a long procession of turf triumphs, a long vista of days and nights, and in them, round them, of them—Helen Bellow; and by an odd coincidence, as he stood there, the artist's glazed look came over his eyes, the little line sprang up between them.

He turned at the sound of voices and sank into a chair. To have been caught thus gazing at himself would have jarred on his sense of what was right.

It was twenty minutes past seven, when, in evening dress, he left the club, and took a shilling's-worth to Buckingham Gate. Here he dismissed his cab, and turned up the large fur collar of his coat. Between

the brim of his opera-hat and the edge of that collar nothing but his eyes were visible. He waited, compressing his lips, scrutinising each hansom that went by. In the soft glow of one coming fast he saw a hand raised to the trap. The cab stopped; George stepped out of the shadow and got in. The cab went on, and Mrs. Bellew's arm was pressed against his own.

It was their simple formula for arriving at a restaurant together.

In the third of several little rooms, where the lights were shaded, they sat down at a table in a corner, facing each a wall, and, underneath, her shoe stole out along the floor and touched his patent leather boot. In their eyes, for all their would-be wariness, a light smouldered which would not be put out. An habitue, sipping claret at a table across the little room, watched them in a mirror, and there came into his old heart a glow of warmth, half ache, half sympathy; a smile of understanding stirred the crow's-feet round his eyes. Its sweetness ebbed, and left a little grin about his shaven lips. Behind the archway in the neighbouring room two waiters met, and in their nods and glances was that same unconscious sympathy, the same conscious grin. And the old habitue thought:

'How long will it last?'.... "Waiter, some coffee and my bill!"

He had meant to go to the play, but he lingered instead to look at Mrs. Bellew's white shoulders and bright eyes in the kindly mirror. And he thought:

'Young days at present. Ah, young days!'....

"Waiter, a Benedictine!" And hearing her laugh, O his old heart ached. 'No one,' he thought, 'will ever laugh like that for me again!'.... "Here, waiter, how's this? You've charged me for an ice!" But when the waiter had gone he glanced back into the mirror, and saw them clink their glasses filled with golden bubbling wine, and he thought: 'Wish you good luck! For a flash of those teeth, my dear, I'd give——'

But his eyes fell on the paper flowers adorning his little table—yellow and red and green; hard, lifeless, tawdry. He saw them suddenly as they were, with the dregs of wine in his glass, the spill of gravy on the cloth, the ruin of the nuts that he had eaten. Wheezing and coughing, 'This place is not what it was,' he thought; 'I shan't come here again!'

He struggled into his coat to go, but he looked once more in the mirror, and met their eyes resting on himself. In them he read the careless pity of the young for the old. His eyes answered the reflection of their eyes, 'Wait, wait! It is young days yet! I wish you no harm, my dears!' and limping-for one of his legs was lame—he went away.

But George and his partner sat on, and with every glass of wine the light in their eyes grew brighter. For who was there now in the room to mind? Not a living soul! Only a tall, dark young waiter, a little cross-eyed, who was in consumption; only the little wine-waiter, with a pallid face, and a look as if he suffered. And the whole world seemed of the colour of the wine they had been drinking; but they talked of indifferent things, and only their eyes, bemused and shining, really spoke. The dark young waiter stood apart, unmoving, and his cross-eyed glance, fixed on her shoulders, had all unconsciously the longing of a saint in some holy picture. Unseen, behind the serving screen, the little wine-waiter poured out and drank a glass from a derelict bottle. Through a chink of the red blinds an eye peered in from the chill outside, staring and curious, till its owner passed on in the cold.

It was long after nine when they rose. The dark young waiter laid her cloak upon her with adoring hands. She looked back at him, and in her eyes was an infinite indulgence. 'God knows,' she seemed to say, 'if I could make you happy as well, I would. Why should one suffer? Life is strong and good!'

The young waiter's cross-eyed glance fell before her, and he bowed above the money in his hand. Quickly before them the little wine-waiter hurried to the door, his suffering face screwed into one long smile.

"Good-night, madam; good-night, sir. Thank you very much!"

And he, too, remained bowed over his hand, and his smile relaxed.

But in the cab George's arm stole round her underneath the cloak, and they were borne on in the stream of hurrying hansoms, carrying couples like themselves, cut off from all but each other's eyes, from all but each other's touch; and with their eyes turned in the half-dark they spoke together in low tones.

PART II

CHAPTER I

GREGORY REOPENS THE CAMPAIGN

At one end of the walled garden which Mr. Pendyce had formed in imitation of that at dear old Strathbegally, was a virgin orchard of pear and cherry trees. They blossomed early, and by the end of the third week in April the last of the cherries had broken into flower. In the long grass, underneath, a wealth of daffodils, jonquils, and narcissus, came up year after year, and sunned their yellow stars in the light which dappled through the blossom.

And here Mrs. Pendyce would come, tan gauntlets on her hands, and stand, her face a little flushed with stooping, as though the sight of all that bloom was restful. It was due to her that these old trees escaped year after year the pruning and improvements which the genius of the Squire would otherwise have applied. She had been brought up in an old Totteridge tradition that fruit-trees should be left to themselves, while her husband, possessed of a grasp of the subject not more than usually behind the times, was all for newer methods. She had fought for those trees. They were as yet the only things she had fought for in her married life, and Horace Pendyce still remembered with a discomfort robbed by time of poignancy how she had stood with her back to their bedroom door and said, "If you cut those poor trees, Horace, I won't live here!" He had at once expressed his determination to have them pruned; but, having put off the action for a day or two, the trees still stood unpruned thirty-three years later. He had even come to feel rather proud of the fact that they continued to bear fruit, and would speak of them thus: "Queer fancy of my wife's, never been cut. And yet, remarkable thing, they do better than any of the others!"

This spring, when all was so forward, and the cuckoos already in full song, when the scent of young larches in the New Plantation (planted the year of George's birth) was in the air like the perfume of celestial lemons, she came to the orchard more than usual, and her spirit felt the stirring, the old, half-painful yearning for she knew not what, that she had felt so often in her first years at Worsted Skeynes. And sitting there on a green-painted seat under the largest of the cherry-trees, she thought even more than her wont of George, as though her son's spirit, vibrating in its first real passion, were calling to her for sympathy.

He had been down so little all that winter, twice for a couple of days' shooting, once for a week-end, when she had thought him looking thinner and rather worn. He had missed Christmas for the first time. With infinite precaution she had asked him casually if he had seen Helen Bellew, and he had answered, "Oh yes, I see her once in a way!"

Secretly all through the winter she consulted the Times newspaper for mention of George's horse, and was disappointed not to find any. One day, however, in February, discovering him absolutely at the head of several lists of horses with figures after them, she wrote off at once with a joyful heart. Of five lists in which the Ambler's name appeared, there was only one in which he was second. George's answer came in the course of a week or so. "MY DEAR MOTHER,

"What you saw were the weights for the Spring Handicaps. They've simply done me out of everything. In great haste,

"Your affectionate son,
"GEORGE PENDYCE."

As the spring approached, the vision of her independent visit to London, which had sustained her throughout the winter, having performed its annual function, grew mistier and mistier, and at last faded away. She ceased even to dream of it, as though it had never been, nor did George remind her, and as usual, she ceased even to wonder whether he would remind her. She thought instead of the season visit, and its scurry of parties, with a sort of languid fluttering. For Worsted Skeynes, and all that Worsted Skeynes stood for, was like a heavy horseman guiding her with iron hands along a narrow lane; she dreamed of throwing him in the open, but the open she never reached.

She woke at seven with her tea, and from seven to eight made little notes on tablets, while on his back Mr. Pendyce snored lightly. She rose at eight. At nine she poured out coffee. From half-past nine to ten she attended to the housekeeper and her birds. From ten to eleven she attended to the gardener

and her dress. From eleven to twelve she wrote invitations to persons for whom she did not care, and acceptances to persons who did not care for her; she drew out also and placed in due sequence cheques for Mr. Pendyce's signature; and secured receipts, carefully docketed on the back, within an elastic band; as a rule, also, she received a visit from Mrs. Husell Barter. From twelve to one she walked with her and "the dear dogs" to the village, where she stood hesitatingly in the cottage doors of persons who were shy of her. From half-past one to two she lunched. From two to three she rested on a sofa in the white morning-room with the newspaper in her hand, trying to read the Parliamentary debate, and thinking of other things. From three to half-past four she went to her dear flowers, from whom she was liable to be summoned at any moment by the arrival of callers; or, getting into the carriage, was driven to some neighbour's mansion, where she sat for half an hour and came away. At half-past four she poured out tea. At five she knitted a tie, or socks, for George or Gerald, and listened with a gentle smile to what was going on. From six to seven she received from the Squire his impressions of Parliament and things at large. From seven to seven-thirty she changed to a black low dress, with old lace about the neck. At seven-thirty she dined. At a quarter to nine she listened to Norah playing two waltzes of Chopin's, and a piece called "Serenade du Printemps" by Baff, and to Bee singing "The Mikado," or the "Saucy Girl" From nine to ten thirty she played a game called piquet, which her father had taught her, if she could get anyone with whom to play; but as this was seldom, she played as a rule patience by herself. At ten-thirty she went to bed. At eleven-thirty punctually the Squire woke her. At one o'clock she went to sleep. On Mondays she wrote out in her clear Totteridge hand, with its fine straight strokes, a list of library books, made up without distinction of all that were recommended in the Ladies' Paper that came weekly to Worsted Skeynes. Periodically Mr. Pendyce would hand her a list of his own, compiled out of the Times and the Field in the privacy of his study; this she sent too.

Thus was the household supplied with literature unerringly adapted to its needs; nor was it possible for any undesirable book to find its way into the house—not that this would have mattered much to Mrs. Pendyce, for as she often said with gentle regret, "My dear, I have no time to read."

This afternoon it was so warm that the bees were all around among the blossoms, and two thrushes, who had built in a yew-tree that watched over the Scotch garden, were in a violent flutter because one of their chicks had fallen out of the nest. The mother bird, at the edge of the long orchard grass, was silent, trying by example to still the tiny creature's cheeping, lest it might attract some large or human thing.

Mrs. Pendyce, sitting under the oldest cherry-tree, looked for the sound, and when she had located it, picked up the baby bird, and, as she knew the whereabouts of all the nests, put it back into its cradle, to the loud terror and grief of the parent birds. She went back to the bench and sat down again.

She had in her soul something of the terror of the mother thrush. The Maidens had been paying the call that preceded their annual migration to town, and the peculiar glow which Lady Maiden had the power of raising had not yet left her cheeks. True, she had the comfort of the thought, 'Ellen Maiden is so bourgeoisie,' but to-day it did not still her heart.

Accompanied by one pale daughter who never left her, and two pale dogs forced to run all the way, now lying under the carriage with their tongues out, Lady Maiden had come and stayed full time; and for three-quarters of that time she had seemed, as it were, labouring under a sense of duty unfulfilled; for the remaining quarter Mrs. Pendyce had laboured under a sense of duty fulfilled.

"My dear," Lady Maiden had said, having told the pale daughter to go into the conservatory, "I'm the last person in the world to repeat gossip, as you know; but I think it's only right to tell you that I've been hearing things. You see, my boy Fred" (who would ultimately become Sir Frederick Maiden) "belongs to the same club as your son George—the Stoics. All young men belong there of course—I mean, if they're anybody. I'm sorry to say there's no doubt about it; your son has been seen dining at—perhaps I ought not to mention the name—Blafard's, with Mrs. Bellew. I dare say you don't know what sort of a place Blafard's is—a lot of little rooms where people go when they don't want to be seen. I've never been there, of course; but I can imagine it perfectly. And not once, but frequently. I thought I would speak to you, because I do think it's so scandalous of her in her position."

An azalea in a blue and white pot had stood between them, and in this plant Mrs. Pendyce buried her cheeks and eyes; but when she raised her face her eyebrows were lifted to their utmost limit, her lips trembled with anger.

"Oh," she said, "didn't you know? There's nothing in that; it's the latest thing!"

For a moment Lady Maiden wavered, then duskily flushed; her temperament and principles had recovered themselves.

"If that," she said with some dignity, "is the latest thing, I think it is quite time we were back in town."

She rose, and as she rose, such was her unfortunate conformation, it flashed through Mrs. Pendyce's mind 'Why was I afraid? She's only—' And then as quickly: 'Poor woman! how can she help her legs being short?'

But when she was gone, side by side with the pale daughter, the pale dogs once more running behind the carriage, Margery Pendyce put her hand to her heart.

And out here amongst the bees and blossom, where the blackbirds were improving each minute their new songs, and the air was so fainting sweet with scents, her heart would not be stilled, but throbbed as though danger were coming on herself; and she saw her son as a little boy again in a dirty holland suit with a straw hat down the back of his neck, flushed and sturdy, as he came to her from some adventure.

And suddenly a gush of emotion from deep within her heart and the heart of the spring day, a sense of being severed from him by a great, remorseless power, came over her; and taking out a tiny embroidered handkerchief, she wept. Round her the bees hummed carelessly, the blossom dropped, the dappled sunlight covered her with a pattern as of her own fine lace. From the home farm came the lowing of the cows on their way to milking, and, strange sound in that well-ordered home, a distant piping on a penny flute

"Mother, Mother, Mo-o-ther!"

Mrs. Pendyce passed her handkerchief across her eyes, and instinctively obeying the laws of breeding, her face lost all trace of its emotion. She waited, crumpling the tiny handkerchief in her gauntleted hand.

"Mother! Oh, there you are! Here's Gregory Vigil!"

Norah, a fox-terrier on either side, was coming down the path; behind her, unhatted, showed Gregory's sanguine face between his wings of grizzled hair.

"I suppose you're going to talk. I'm going over to the Rectory. Ta-to!"

And preceded by her dogs, Norah went on.

Mrs. Pendyce put out her hand.

"Well, Grig," she said, "this is a surprise."

Gregory seated himself beside her on the bench.

"I've brought you this," he said. "I want you to look at it before I answer."

Mrs. Pendyce, who vaguely felt that he would want her to see things as he was seeing them, took a letter from him with a sinking heart.

"Private.

"LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS,
"April 21, 1892.

"MY DEAR VIGIL,

"I have now secured such evidence as should warrant our instituting a suit. I've written your ward to that effect, and am awaiting her instructions. Unfortunately, we have no act of cruelty, and I've been obliged to draw her attention to the fact that, should her husband defend the suit, it will be very difficult to get the Court to accept their separation in the light of desertion on his part—difficult indeed, even if he doesn't defend the suit. In divorce cases one has to remember that what has to be kept out is often more important than what has to be got in, and it would be useful to know, therefore, whether there is likelihood of opposition. I do not advise any direct approaching of the husband, but if you are possessed of the information you might let me know. I hate humbug, my dear Vigil, and I hate anything underhand, but divorce is always a dirty business, and while the law is shaped as at present, and the linen washed in public, it will remain impossible for anyone, guilty or innocent, and even for us lawyers, to avoid soiling our hands in one way or another. I regret it as much as you do.

"There is a new man writing verse in the Tertiary, some of it quite first-rate. You might look at the last number. My blossom this year is magnificent.

"With kind regards, I am,
"Very sincerely yours,
"EDMUND PARAMOR.

"Gregory Vigil, Esq."

Mrs. Pendency dropped the letter in her lap, and looked at her cousin.

"He was at Harrow with Horace. I do like him. He is one of the very nicest men I know."

It was clear that she was trying to gain time.

Gregory began pacing up and down.

"Paramor is a man for whom I have the highest respect. I would trust him before anyone."

It was clear that he, too, was trying to gain time.

"Oh, mind my daffodils, please!"

Gregory went down on his knees, and raised the bloom that he had trodden on. He then offered it to Mrs. Pendency. The action was one to which she was so unaccustomed that it struck her as slightly ridiculous.

"My dear Grig, you'll get rheumatism, and spoil that nice suit; the grass comes off so terribly!"

Gregory got up, and looked shamefacedly at his knees.

"The knee is not what it used to be," he said.

Mrs. Pendency smiled.

"You should keep your knees for Helen Bellow, Grig. I was always five years older than you."

Gregory rumbled up his hair.

"Kneeling's out of fashion, but I thought in the country you wouldn't mind!"

"You don't notice things, dear Grig. In the country it's still more out of fashion. You wouldn't find a woman within thirty miles of here who would like a man to kneel to her. We've lost the habit. She would think she was being made fun of. We soon grow out of vanity!"

"In London," said Gregory, "I hear all women intend to be men; but in the country I thought——"

"In the country, Grig, all women would like to be men, but they don't dare to try. They trot behind."

As if she had been guilty of thoughts too insightful, Mrs. Pendency blushed.

Gregory broke out suddenly:

"I can't bear to think of women like that!"

Again Mrs. Pendency smiled.

"You see, Grig dear, you are not married."

"I detest the idea that marriage changes our views, Margery; I loathe it."

"Mind my daffodils!" murmured Mrs. Pendency.

She was thinking all the time: 'That dreadful letter! What am I to do?'

And as though he knew her thoughts, Gregory said:

"I shall assume that Bellew will not defend the case. If he has a spark of chivalry in him he will be only too glad to see her free. I will never believe that any man could be such a soulless clod as to wish to keep her bound. I don't pretend to understand the law, but it seems to me that there's only one way for a man to act and after all Bellew's a gentleman. You'll see that he will act like one!"

Mrs. Pendency looked at the daffodil in her lap.

"I have only seen him three or four times, but it seemed to me, Grig, that he was a man who might act in one way today and another tomorrow. He is so very different from all the men about here."

"When it comes to the deep things of life," said Gregory, "one man is much as another. Is there any man you know who would be so lacking in chivalry as to refuse in these circumstances?"

Mrs. Pendyce looked at him with a confused expression—wonder, admiration, irony, and even fear, struggled in her eyes.

"I can think of dozens."

Gregory clutched his forehead.

"Margery," he said, "I hate your cynicism. I don't know where you get it from."

"I'm so sorry; I didn't mean to be cynical—I didn't, really. I only spoke from what I've seen."

"Seen?" said Gregory. "If I were to go by what I saw daily, hourly, in London in the course of my work I should commit suicide within a week."

"But what else can one go by?"

Without answering, Gregory walked to the edge of the orchard, and stood gazing over the Scotch garden, with his face a little tilted towards the sky. Mrs. Pendyce felt he was grieving that she failed to see whatever it was he saw up there, and she was sorry. He came back, and said:

"We won't discuss it any more."

Very dubiously she heard those words, but as she could not express the anxiety and doubt torturing her soul, she told him tea was ready. But Gregory would not come in just yet out of the sun.

In the drawing-room Beatrix was already giving tea to young Tharp and the Reverend Husell Barter. And the sound of these well-known voices restored to Mrs. Pendyce something of her tranquillity. The Rector came towards her at once with a teacup in his hand.

"My wife has got a headache," he said. "She wanted to come over with me, but I made her lie down. Nothing like lying down for a headache. We expect it in June, you know. Let me get you your tea."

Mrs. Pendyce, already aware even to the day of what he expected in June, sat down, and looked at Mr. Barter with a slight feeling of surprise. He was really a very good fellow; it was nice of him to make his wife lie down! She thought his broad, red-brown face, with its protecting, not unhumorous, lower lip, looked very friendly. Roy, the Skye terrier at her feet, was smelling at the reverend gentleman's legs with a slow movement of his tail.

"The old dog likes me," said the Rector; "they know a dog-lover when they see one wonderful creature, dogs! I'm sometimes tempted to think they may have souls!"

Mrs. Pendyce answered:

"Horace says he's getting too old."

The dog looked up in her face, and her lip quivered.

The Rector laughed.

"Don't you worry about that; there's plenty of life in him." And he added unexpectedly: "I couldn't bear to put a dog away, the friend of man. No, no; let Nature see to that."

Over at the piano Bee and young Tharp were turning the pages of the "Saucy Girl"; the room was full of the scent of azaleas; and Mr. Barter, astride of a gilt chair, looked almost sympathetic, gazing tenderly at the old Skye.

Mrs. Pendyce felt a sudden yearning to free her mind, a sudden longing to ask a man's advice.

"Oh, Mr. Barter," she said, "my cousin, Gregory Vigil, has just brought me some news; it is confidential, please. Helen Bellew is going to sue for a divorce. I wanted to ask you whether you could tell me——" Looking in the Rector's face, she stopped.

"A divorce! H'm! Really!"

A chill of terror came over Mrs. Pendyce.

"Of course you will not mention it to anyone, not even to Horace. It has nothing to do with us."

Mr. Barter bowed; his face wore the expression it so often wore in school on Sunday mornings.

"H'm!" he said again.

It flashed through Mrs. Pendyce that this man with the heavy jowl and menacing eyes, who sat so square on that flimsy chair, knew something. It was as though he had answered:

"This is not a matter for women; you will be good enough to leave it to me."

With the exception of those few words of Lady Malden's, and the recollection of George's face when he had said, "Oh yes, I see her now and then," she had no evidence, no knowledge, nothing to go on; but she knew from some instinctive source that her son was Mrs. Bellew's lover.

So, with terror and a strange hope, she saw Gregory entering the room.

"Perhaps," she thought, "he will make Grig stop it."

She poured out Gregory's tea, followed Bee and Cecil Tharp into the conservatory, and left the two men together:

CHAPTER II

CONTINUED INFLUENCE OF THE REVEREND HUSSELL BARTER

To understand and sympathise with the feelings and action of the Rector of Worsted Skeynes, one must consider his origin and the circumstances of his life.

The second son of an old Suffolk family, he had followed the routine of his house, and having passed at Oxford through certain examinations, had been certificated at the age of twenty-four as a man fitted to impart to persons of both sexes rules of life and conduct after which they had been groping for twice or thrice that number of years. His character, never at any time undecided, was by this fortunate circumstance crystallised and rendered immune from the necessity for self-search and spiritual struggle incidental to his neighbours. Since he was a man neither below nor above the average, it did not occur to him to criticise or place himself in opposition to a system which had gone on so long and was about to do him so much good. Like all average men, he was a believer in authority, and none the less because authority placed a large portion of itself in his hands. It would, indeed, have been unwarrantable to expect a man of his birth, breeding, and education to question the machine of which he was himself a wheel.

He had dropped, therefore, at the age of twenty-six, insensibly, on the death of an uncle, into the family living at Worsted Skeynes. He had been there ever since. It was a constant and natural grief to him that on his death the living would go neither to his eldest nor his second son, but to the second son of his elder brother, the Squire. At the age of twenty-seven he had married Miss Rose Twining, the fifth daughter of a Huntingdonshire parson, and in less than eighteen years begotten ten children, and was expecting the eleventh, all healthy and hearty like him self. A family group hung over the fireplace in the study, under the framed and illuminated text, "Judge not, that ye be not judged," which he had chosen as his motto in the first year of his cure, and never seen any reason to change. In that family group Mr. Barter sat in the centre with his dog between his legs; his wife stood behind him, and on both sides the children spread out like the wings of a fan or butterfly. The bills of their schooling were beginning to weigh rather heavily, and he complained a good deal; but in principle he still approved of the habit into which he had got, and his wife never complained of anything.

The study was furnished with studious simplicity; many a boy had been, not unkindly, caned there, and in one place the old Turkey carpet was rotted away, but whether by their tears or by their knees, not even Mr. Barter knew. In a cabinet on one side of the fire he kept all his religious books, many of them well worn; in a cabinet on the other side he kept his bats, to which he was constantly attending; a fishing-rod and a gun-case stood modestly in a corner. The archway between the drawers of his writing-table held a mat for his bulldog, a prize animal, wont to lie there and guard his master's legs when he was writing his sermons. Like those of his dog, the Rector's good points were the old English virtues of obstinacy, courage, intolerance, and humour; his bad points, owing to the circumstances of his life, had never been brought to his notice.

When, therefore, he found himself alone with Gregory Vigil, he approached him as one dog will

approach another, and came at once to the matter in hand.

"It's some time since I had the pleasure of meeting you, Mr. Vigil," he said. "Mrs. Pendyce has been giving me in confidence the news you've brought down. I'm bound to tell you at once that I'm surprised."

Gregory made a little movement of recoil, as though his delicacy had received a shock.

"Indeed!" he said, with a sort of quivering coldness.

The Rector, quick to note opposition, repeated emphatically:

"More than surprised; in fact, I think there must be some mistake."

"Indeed?" said Gregory again.

A change came over Mr. Barter's face. It had been grave, but was now heavy and threatening.

"I have to say to you," he said, "that somehow—somehow, this divorce must be put a stop to."

Gregory flushed painfully.

"On what grounds? I am not aware that my ward is a parishioner of yours, Mr. Barter, or that if she were——"

The Rector closed in on him, his head thrust forward, his lower lip projecting.

"If she were doing her duty," he said, "she would be. I'm not considering her—I'm considering her husband; he is a parishioner of mine, and I say this divorce must be stopped."

Gregory retreated no longer.

"On what grounds?" he said again, trembling all over.

"I've no wish to enter into particulars," said Mr. Barter, "but if you force me to, I shall not hesitate."

"I regret that I must," answered Gregory.

"Without mentioning names, then, I say that she is not a fit person to bring a suit for divorce!"

"You say that?" said Gregory. "You——"

He could not go on.

"You will not move me, Mr. Vigil," said the Rector, with a grim little smile. "I have my duty to do."

Gregory recovered possession of himself with an effort.

"You have said that which no one but a clergyman could say with impunity," he said freezingly. "Be so good as to explain yourself."

"My explanation," said Mr. Barter, "is what I have seen with my own eyes."

He raised those eyes to Gregory. Their pupils were contracted to pin-points, the light-grey irises around had a sort of swimming glitter, and round these again the whites were injected with blood.

"If you must know, with my own eyes I've seen her in that very conservatory over there kissing a man."

Gregory threw up his hand.

"How dare you!" he whispered.

Again Mr. Barter's humorous under-lip shot out.

"I dare a good deal more than that, Mr. Vigil," he said, "as you will find; and I say this to you—stop this divorce, or I'll stop it myself!"

Gregory turned to the window. When he came back he was outwardly calm.

"You have been guilty of indelicacy," he said. "Continue in your delusion, think what you like, do what you like. The matter will go on. Good-evening, sir."

And turning on his heel, he left the room.

Mr. Barter stepped forward. The words, "You have been guilty of indelicacy," whirled round his brain till every blood vessel in his face and neck was swollen to bursting, and with a hoarse sound like that of an animal in pain he pursued Gregory to the door. It was shut in his face. And since on taking Orders he had abandoned for ever the use of bad language, he was very near an apoplectic fit. Suddenly he became aware that Mrs. Pendyce was looking at him from the conservatory door. Her face was painfully white, her eyebrows lifted, and before that look Mr. Barter recovered a measure of self-possession.

"Is anything the matter, Mr. Barter?"

The Rector smiled grimly.

"Nothing, nothing," he said. "I must ask you to excuse me, that's all. I've a parish matter to attend to."

When he found himself in the drive, the feeling of vertigo and suffocation passed, but left him unrelieved. He had, in fact, happened on one of those psychological moments which enable a man's true nature to show itself. Accustomed to say of himself bluffly, "Yes, yes; I've a hot temper, soon over," he had never, owing to the autocracy of his position, had a chance of knowing the tenacity of his soul. So accustomed and so able for many years to vent displeasure at once, he did not himself know the wealth of his old English spirit, did not know of what an ugly grip he was capable. He did not even know it at this minute, conscious only of a sort of black wonder at this monstrous conduct to a man in his position, doing his simple duty. The more he reflected, the more intolerable did it seem that a woman like this Mrs. Bellew should have the impudence to invoke the law of the land in her favour a woman who was no better than a common baggage—a woman he had seen kissing George Pendyce. To have suggested to Mr. Barter that there was something pathetic in this black wonder of his, pathetic in the spectacle of his little soul delivering its little judgments, stumbling its little way along with such blind certainty under the huge heavens, amongst millions of organisms as important as itself, would have astounded him; and with every step he took the blacker became his wonder, the more fixed his determination to permit no such abuse of morality, no such disregard of Hussell Barter.

"You have been guilty of indelicacy!" This indictment had a wriggling sting, and lost no venom from the fact that he could in no wise have perceived where the indelicacy of his conduct lay. But he did not try to perceive it. Against himself, clergyman and gentleman, the monstrosity of the charge was clear. This was a point of morality. He felt no anger against George; it was the woman that excited his just wrath. For so long he had been absolute among women, with the power, as it were, over them of life and death. This was flat immorality! He had never approved of her leaving her husband; he had never approved of her at all! He turned his steps towards the Firs.

From above the hedges the sleepy cows looked down; a yaffle laughed a field or two away; in the sycamores, which had come out before their time, the bees hummed. Under the smile of the spring the innumerable life of the fields went carelessly on around that square black figure ploughing along the lane with head bent down under a wide-brimmed hat.

George Pendyce, in a fly drawn by an old grey horse, the only vehicle that frequented the station at Worsted Skeynes, passed him in the lane, and leaned back to avoid observation. He had not forgotten the tone of the Rector's voice in the smoking-room on the night of the dance. George was a man who could remember as well as another. In the corner of the old fly, that rattled and smelled of stables and stale tobacco, he fixed his moody eyes on the driver's back and the ears of the old grey horse, and never stirred till they set him down at the hall door.

He went at once to his room, sending word that he had come for the night. His mother heard the news with feelings of joy and dread, and she dressed quickly for dinner, that she might see him the sooner. The Squire came into her room just as she was going down. He had been engaged all day at Sessions, and was in one of the moods of apprehension as to the future which but seldom came over him.

"Why didn't you keep Vigil to dinner?" he said. "I could have given him things for the night. I wanted to talk to him about insuring my life; he knows, about that. There'll be a lot of money wanted, to pay my death-duties. And if the Radicals get in I shouldn't be surprised if they put them up fifty per cent."

"I wanted to keep him," said Mrs. Pendyce, "but he went away without saying good-bye."

"He's an odd fellow!"

For some moments Mr. Pendyce made reflections on this breach of manners.

He had a nice standard of conduct in all social affairs.

"I'm having trouble with that man Peacock again. He's the most pig-headed—What are you in such a hurry for, Margery?"

"George is here!"

"George? Well, I suppose he can wait till dinner. I have a lot of things I want to tell you about. We had a case of arson to-day. Old Quarryman was away, and I was in the chair. It was that fellow Woodford that we convicted for poaching—a very gross case. And this is what he does when he comes out. They tried to prove insanity. It's the rankest case of revenge that ever came before me. We committed him, of course. He'll get a swinging sentence. Of all dreadful crimes, arson is the most——"

Mr. Pendyce could find no word to characterise his opinion of this offence, and drawing his breath between his teeth, passed into his dressing-room. Mrs. Pendyce hastened quietly out, and went to her son's room. She found George in his shirtsleeves, inserting the links of his cuffs.

"Let me do that for you, my dear boy! How dreadfully they starch your cuffs! It is so nice to do something for you sometimes!"

George answered her:

"Well, Mother, and how have you been?"

Over Mrs. Pendyce's face came a look half sorrowful, half arch, but wholly pathetic. 'What! is it beginning already? Oh, don't put me away from you!' she seemed to say.

"Very well, thank you, dear. And you?"

George did not meet her eyes.

"So-so," he said. "I took rather a nasty knock over the 'City' last week."

"Is that a race?" asked Mrs. Pendyce.

And by some secret process she knew that he had hurried out that piece of bad news to divert her attention from another subject, for George had never been a "crybaby."

She sat down on the edge of the sofa, and though the gong was about to sound, incited him to dawdle and stay with her.

"And have you any other news, dear? It seems such an age since we've seen you. I think I've told you all our budget in my letters. You know there's going to be another event at the Rectory?"

"Another? I passed Barter on the way up. I thought he looked a bit blue."

A look of pain shot into Mrs. Pendyce's eyes.

"Oh, I'm afraid that couldn't have been the reason, dear." And she stopped, but to still her own fears hurried on again. "If I'd known you'd been coming, I'd have kept Cecil Tharp. Vic has had such dear little puppies. Would you like one? They've all got that nice black smudge round the eye."

She was watching him as only a mother can watch—stealthily, minutely, longingly, every little movement, every little change of his face, and more than all, that fixed something behind which showed the abiding temper and condition of his heart.

'Something is making him unhappy,' she thought. 'He is changed since I saw him last, and I can't get at it. I seem to be so far from him—so far!'

And somehow she knew he had come down this evening because he was lonely and unhappy, and instinct had made him turn to her.

But she knew that trying to get nearer would only make him put her farther off, and she could not bear this, so she asked him nothing, and bent all her strength on hiding from him the pain she felt.

She went downstairs with her arm in his, and leaned very heavily on it, as though again trying to get close to him, and forget the feeling she had had all that winter—the feeling of being barred away, the feeling of secrecy and restraint.

Mr. Pendyce and the two girls were in the drawing-room.

"Well, George," said the Squire dryly, "I'm glad you've come. How you can stick in London at this time of year! Now you're down you'd better stay a couple of days. I want to take you round the estate; you know nothing about anything. I might die at any moment, for all you can tell. Just make up your mind to stay."

George gave him a moody look.

"Sorry," he said; "I've got an engagement in town."

Mr. Pendyce rose and stood with his back to the fire.

"That's it," he said: "I ask you to do a simple thing for your own good—and—you've got an engagement. It's always like that, and your mother backs you up. Bee, go and play me something."

The Squire could not bear being played to, but it was the only command likely to be obeyed that came into his head.

The absence of guests made little difference to a ceremony esteemed at Worsted Skeynes the crowning blessing of the day. The courses, however, were limited to seven, and champagne was not drunk. The Squire drank a glass or so of claret, for, as he said, "My dear old father took his bottle of port every night of his life, and it never gave him a twinge. If I were to go on at that rate it would kill me in a year."

His daughters drank water. Mrs. Pendyce, cherishing a secret preference for champagne, drank sparingly of a Spanish burgundy, procured for her by Mr. Pendyce at a very reasonable price, and corked between meals with a special cork. She offered it to George.

"Try some of my burgundy, dear; it's so nice."

But George refused and asked for whisky-and-soda, glancing at the butler, who brought it in a very yellow state.

Under the influence of dinner the Squire recovered equanimity, though he still dwelt somewhat sadly on the future.

"You young fellows," he said, with a friendly look at George, "are such individualists. You make a business of enjoying yourselves. With your piquet and your racing and your billiards and what not, you'll be used up before you're fifty. You don't let your imaginations work. A green old age ought to be your ideal, instead of which it seems to be a green youth. Ha!" Mr. Pendyce looked at his daughters till they said:

"Oh, Father, how can you!"

Norah, who had the more character of the two, added:

"Isn't Father rather dreadful, Mother?"

But Mrs. Pendyce was looking at her son. She had longed so many evenings to see him sitting there.

"We'll have a game of piquet to-night, George."

George looked up and nodded with a glum smile.

On the thick, soft carpet round the table the butler and second footman moved. The light of the wax candles fell lustrous and subdued on the silver and fruit and flowers, on the girls' white necks, on George's well-coloured face and glossy shirt-front, gleamed in the jewels on his mother's long white fingers, showed off the Squire's erect and still spruce figure; the air was languorously sweet with the perfume of azaleas and narcissus bloom. Bee, with soft eyes, was thinking of young Tharp, who to-day had told her that he loved her, and wondering if father would object. Her mother was thinking of George, stealing timid glances at his moody face. There was no sound save the tinkle of forks and the voices of Norah and the Squire, talking of little things. Outside, through the long opened windows, was the still, wide country; the full moon, tinted apricot and figured like a coin, hung above the cedar-trees, and by her light the whispering stretches of the silent fields lay half enchanted, half asleep, and all beyond that little ring of moonshine, unfathomed and unknown, was darkness—a great darkness wrapping from their eyes the restless world.

CHAPTER III

THE SINISTER NIGHT

On the day of the big race at Kempton Park, in which the Ambler, starting favourite, was left at the post, George Pendyce had just put his latch-key in the door of the room he had taken near Mrs. Bellew, when a man, stepping quickly from behind, said:

"Mr. George Pendyce, I believe."

George turned.

"Yes; what do you want?"

The man put into George's hand a long envelope.

"From Messrs. Frost and Tuckett."

George opened it, and read from the top of a slip of paper:

"ADMIRALTY, PROBATE, AND DIVORCE. The humble petition of Jaspar Bellew—"

He lifted his eyes, and his look, uncannily impassive, unresenting, unangered, dogged, caused the messenger to drop his gaze as though he had hit a man who was down.

"Thanks. Good-night!"

He shut the door, and read the document through. It contained some precise details, and ended in a claim for damages, and George smiled.

Had he received this document three months ago, he would not have taken it thus. Three months ago he would have felt with rage that he was caught. His thoughts would have run thus 'I have got her into a mess; I have got myself into a mess. I never thought this would happen. This is the devil! I must see someone—I must stop it. There must be a way out.' Having but little imagination, his thoughts would have beaten their wings against this cage, and at once he would have tried to act. But this was not three months ago, and now—

He lit a cigarette and sat down on the sofa, and the chief feeling in his heart was a strange hope, a sort of funereal gladness. He would have to go and see her at once, that very night; an excuse—no need to wait in here—to wait—wait on the chance of her coming.

He got up and drank some whisky, then went back to the sofa and sat down again.

'If she is not here by eight,' he thought, 'I will go round.'

Opposite was a full-length mirror, and he turned to the wall to avoid it. There was fixed on his face a look of gloomy determination, as though he were thinking, 'I'll show them all that I'm not beaten yet.'

At the click of a latch-key he scrambled off the sofa, and his face resumed its mask. She came in as usual, dropped her opera cloak, and stood before him with bare shoulders. Looking in her face, he wondered if she knew.

"I thought I'd better come," she said. "I suppose you've had the same charming present?"

George nodded. There was a minute's silence.

"It's really rather funny. I'm sorry for you, George."

George laughed too, but his laugh was different.

"I will do all I can," he said.

Mrs. Bellew came close to him.

"I've seen about the Kempton race. What shocking luck! I suppose you've lost a lot. Poor boy! It never rains but it pours."

George looked down.

"That's all right; nothing matters when I have you."

He felt her arms fasten behind his neck, but they were cool as marble; he met her eyes, and they were mocking and compassionate.

Their cab, wheeling into the main thoroughfare, joined in the race of cabs flying as for life toward the East—past the Park, where the trees, new-leafed, were swinging their skirts like ballet-dancers in the wind; past the Stoics' and the other clubs, rattling, jingling, jostling for the lead, shooting past omnibuses that looked cosy in the half-light with their lamps and rows of figures solemnly opposed.

At Blafard's the tall dark young waiter took her cloak with reverential fingers; the little wine-waiter smiled below the suffering in his eyes. The same red-shaded lights fell on her arms and shoulders, the same flowers of green and yellow grew bravely in the same blue vases. On the menu were written the same dishes. The same idle eye peered through the chink at the corner of the red blinds with its stare of apathetic wonder.

Often during that dinner George looked at her face by stealth, and its expression baffled him, so careless was it. And, unlike her mood of late, that had been glum and cold, she was in the wildest spirits.

People looked round from the other little tables, all full now that the season had begun, her laugh was so infectious; and George felt a sort of disgust. What was it in this woman that made her laugh, when his own heart was heavy? But he said nothing; he dared not even look at her, for fear his eyes should show his feeling.

'We ought to be squaring our accounts,' he thought—'looking things in the face. Something must be done; and here she is laughing and making everyone stare!' Done! But what could be done, when it was all like quicksand?

The other little tables emptied one by one.

"George," she said, "take me somewhere where we can dance!"

George stared at her.

"My dear girl, how can I? There is no such place!"

"Take me to your Bohemians!"

"You can't possibly go to a place like that."

"Why not? Who cares where we go, or what we do?"

"I care!"

"Ah, my dear George, you and your sort are only half alive!"

Sullenly George answered:

"What do you take me for? A cad?"

But there was fear, not anger, in his heart.

"Well, then, let's drive into the East End. For goodness' sake, let's do something not quite proper!"

They took a hansom and drove East. It was the first time either had ever been in that unknown land.

"Close your cloak, dear; it looks odd down here."

Mrs. Bellew laughed.

"You'll be just like your father when you're sixty, George."

And she opened her cloak the wider. Round a barrel-organ at the corner of a street were girls in bright colours dancing.

She called to the cabman to stop.

"Let's watch those children!"

"You'll only make a show of us."

Mrs. Bellew put her hands on the cab door.

"I've a good mind to get out and dance with them!"

"You're mad to-night," said George. "Sit still!"

He stretched out his arm and barred her way. The passers-by looked curiously at the little scene. A crowd began to collect.

"Go on!" cried George.

There was a cheer from the crowd; the driver whipped his horse; they darted East again.

It was striking twelve when the cab put them down at last near the old church on Chelsea Embankment, and they had hardly spoken for an hour.

And all that hour George was feeling:

'This is the woman for whom I've given it all up. This is the woman to whom I shall be tied. This is the woman I cannot tear myself away from. If I could, I would never see her again. But I can't live without her. I must go on suffering when she's with me, suffering when she's away from me. And God knows how it's all to end!'

He took her hand in the darkness; it was cold and unresponsive as a stone. He tried to see her face, but could read nothing in those greenish eyes staring before them, like a cat's, into the darkness.

When the cab was gone they stood looking at each other by the light of a street lamp. And George thought:

'So I must leave her like this, and what then?'

She put her latch-key in the door, and turned round to him. In the silent, empty street, where the wind was rustling and scraping round the corners of tall houses, and the lamplight flickered, her face and figure were so strange, motionless, Sphinx-like. Only her eyes seemed alive, fastened on his own.

"Good-night!" he muttered.

She beckoned.

"Take what you can of me, George!" she said.

CHAPTER IV

Mr. PENDYCE'S HEAD

Mr. Pendyce's head, seen from behind at his library bureau, where it was his practice to spend most mornings from half-past nine to eleven or even twelve, was observed to be of a shape to throw no small light upon his class and character. Its contour was almost national. Bulging at the back, and sloping rapidly to a thin and wiry neck, narrow between the ears and across the brow, prominent in the jaw, the length of a line drawn from the back headland to the promontory at the chin would have been extreme. Upon the observer there was impressed the conviction that here was a skull denoting, by surplusage of length, great precision of character and disposition to action, and, by deficiency of breadth, a narrow tenacity which might at times amount to wrong-headedness. The thin cantankerous neck, on which little hairs grew low, and the intelligent ears, confirmed this impression; and when his face, with its clipped hair, dry rosiness, into which the east wind had driven a shade of yellow and the sun a shade of brown, and grey, rather discontented eyes, came into view, the observer had no longer any hesitation in saying that he was in the presence of an Englishman, a landed proprietor, and, but for Mr. Pendyce's rooted belief to the contrary, an individualist. His head, indeed, was like nothing so much as the Admiralty Pier at Dover—that strange long narrow thing, with a slight twist or bend at the end, which first disturbs the comfort of foreigners arriving on these shores, and strikes them with a sense of wonder and dismay.

He sat very motionless at his bureau, leaning a little over his papers like a man to whom things do not come too easily; and every now and then he stopped to refer to the calendar at his left hand, or to a

paper in one of the many pigeonholes. Open, and almost out of reach, was a back volume of *Punch*, of which periodical, as a landed proprietor, he had an almost professional knowledge. In leisure moments it was one of his chief recreations to peruse lovingly those aged pictures, and at the image of John Bull he never failed to think: 'Fancy making an Englishman out a fat fellow like that!'

It was as though the artist had offered an insult to himself, passing him over as the type, and conferring that distinction on someone fast going out of fashion. The Rector, whenever he heard Mr. Pendyce say this, strenuously opposed him, for he was himself of a square, stout build, and getting stouter.

With all their aspirations to the character of typical Englishmen, Mr. Pendyce and Mr. Barter thought themselves far from the old beef and beer, port and pigskin types of the Georgian and early Victorian era. They were men of the world, abreast of the times, who by virtue of a public school and 'Varsity training had acquired a manner, a knowledge of men and affairs, a standard of thought on which it had really never been needful to improve. Both of them, but especially Mr. Pendyce, kept up with all that was going forward by visiting the Metropolis six or seven or even eight times a year. On these occasions they rarely took their wives, having almost always important business in hand—old College, Church, or Conservative dinners, cricket-matches, Church Congress, the Gaiety Theatre, and for Mr. Barter the Lyceum. Both, too, belonged to clubs—the Rector to a comfortable, old-fashioned place where he could get a rubber without gambling, and Mr. Pendyce to the Temple of things as they had been, as became a man who, having turned all social problems over in his mind, had decided that there was no real safety but in the past.

They always went up to London grumbling, but this was necessary, and indeed salutary, because of their wives; and they always came back grumbling, because of their livers, which a good country rest always fortunately reduced in time for the next visit. In this way they kept themselves free from the taint of provincialism.

In the silence of his master's study the spaniel John, whose head, too, was long and narrow, had placed it over his paw, as though suffering from that silence, and when his master cleared his throat he guttered his tail and turned up an eye with a little moon of white, without stirring his chin.

The clock ticked at the end of the long, narrow room; the sunlight through the long, narrow windows fell on the long, narrow backs of books in the glassed book-case that took up the whole of one wall; and this room, with its slightly leathery smell, seemed a fitting place for some long, narrow ideal to be worked out to its long and narrow ending.

But Mr. Pendyce would have scouted the notion of an ending to ideals having their basis in the hereditary principle.

"Let me do my duty and carry on the estate as my dear old father did, and hand it down to my son enlarged if possible," was sometimes his saying, very, very often his thought, not seldom his prayer. "I want to do no more than that."

The times were bad and dangerous. There was every chance of a Radical Government being returned, and the country going to the dogs. It was but natural and human that he should pray for the survival of the form of things which he believed in and knew, the form of things bequeathed to him, and embodied in the salutary words "Horace Pendyce." It was not his habit to welcome new ideas. A new idea invading the country of the Squire's mind was at once met with a rising of the whole population, and either prevented from landing, or if already on shore instantly taken prisoner. In course of time the unhappy creature, causing its squeaks and groans to penetrate the prison walls, would be released from sheer humaneness and love of a quiet life, and even allowed certain privileges, remaining, however, "that poor, queer devil of a foreigner." One day, in an inattentive moment, the natives would suffer it to marry, or find that in some disgraceful way it had caused the birth of children unrecognised by law; and their respect for the accomplished fact, for something that already lay in the past, would then prevent their trying to unmarry it, or restoring the children to an unborn state, and very gradually they would tolerate this intrusive brood. Such was the process of Mr. Pendyce's mind. Indeed, like the spaniel John, a dog of conservative instincts, at the approach of any strange thing he placed himself in the way, barking and showing his teeth; and sometimes truly he suffered at the thought that one day Horace Pendyce would no longer be there to bark. But not often, for he had not much imagination.

All the morning he had been working at that old vexed subject of Common Rights on Worsted Scotton, which his father had fenced in and taught him once for all to believe was part integral of Worsted Skeynes. The matter was almost beyond doubt, for the cottagers—in a poor way at the time of the fencing, owing to the price of bread—had looked on apathetically till the very last year required by law to give the old Squire squatter's rights, when all of a sudden that man, Peacock's father, had made a gap in the fence and driven in beasts, which had reopened the whole unfortunate question. This had

been in '65, and ever since there had been continual friction bordering on a law suit. Mr. Pendyce never for a moment allowed it to escape his mind that the man Peacock was at the bottom of it all; for it was his way to discredit all principles as ground of action, and to refer everything to facts and persons; except, indeed, when he acted himself, when he would somewhat proudly admit that it was on principle. He never thought or spoke on an abstract question; partly because his father had avoided them before him, partly because he had been discouraged from doing so at school, but mainly because he temperamentally took no interest in such unpractical things.

It was, therefore, a source of wonder to him that tenants of his own should be ungrateful. He did his duty by them, as the Rector, in whose keeping were their souls, would have been the first to affirm; the books of his estate showed this, recording year by year an average gross profit of some sixteen hundred pounds, and (deducting raw material incidental to the upkeep of Worsted Skeynes) a net loss of three.

In less earthly matters, too, such as non-attendance at church, a predisposition to poaching, or any inclination to moral laxity, he could say with a clear conscience that the Rector was sure of his support. A striking instance had occurred within the last month, when, discovering that his under-keeper, an excellent man at his work, had got into a scrape with the postman's wife, he had given the young fellow notice, and cancelled the lease of his cottage.

He rose and went to the plan of the estate fastened to the wall, which he unrolled by pulling a green silk cord, and stood there scrutinising it carefully and placing his finger here and there. His spaniel rose too, and settled himself unobtrusively on his master's foot. Mr. Pendyce moved and trod on him. The spaniel yelped.

"D—n the dog! Oh, poor fellow, John!" said Mr. Pendyce. He went back to his seat, but since he had identified the wrong spot he was obliged in a minute to return again to the plan. The spaniel John, cherishing the hope that he had been justly treated, approached in a half circle, fluttering his tail; he had scarcely reached Mr. Pendyce's foot when the door was opened, and the first footman brought in a letter on a silver salver.

Mr. Pendyce took the note, read it, turned to his bureau, and said: "No answer."

He sat staring at this document in the silent room, and over his face in turn passed anger, alarm, distrust, bewilderment. He had not the power of making very clear his thought, except by speaking aloud, and he muttered to himself. The spaniel John, who still nurtured a belief that he had sinned, came and lay down very close against his leg.

Mr. Pendyce, never having reflected profoundly on the working morality of his times, had the less difficulty in accepting it. Of violating it he had practically no opportunity, and this rendered his position stronger. It was from habit and tradition rather than from principle and conviction that he was a man of good moral character.

And as he sat reading this note over and over, he suffered from a sense of nausea.

It was couched in these terms:

"THE FIRS,
"May 20.

"DEAR SIR,

"You may or may not have heard that I have made your son, Mr. George Pendyce, correspondent in a divorce suit against my wife. Neither for your sake nor your son's, but for the sake of Mrs. Pendyce, who is the only woman in these parts that I respect, I will withdraw the suit if your son will give his word not to see my wife again.

"Please send me an early answer.

"I am,
"Your obedient servant,

"JASPAR BELLEW."

The acceptance of tradition (and to accept it was suitable to the Squire's temperament) is occasionally marred by the impingement of tradition on private life and comfort. It was legendary in his class that young men's peccadilloes must be accepted with a certain indulgence. They would, he said, be young men. They must, he would remark, sow their wild oats. Such was his theory. The only difficulty he now had was in applying it to his own particular case, a difficulty felt by others in times past, and to be felt again in times to come. But, since he was not a philosopher, he did not perceive the inconsistency between his theory and his dismay. He saw his universe reeling before that note, and he

was not a man to suffer tamely; he felt that others ought to suffer too. It was monstrous that a fellow like this Bellew, a loose fish, a drunkard, a man who had nearly run over him, should have it in his power to trouble the serenity of Worsted Skeynes. It was like his impudence to bring such a charge against his son. It was like his d—d impudence! And going abruptly to the bell, he trod on his spaniel's ear.

"D—n the dog! Oh, poor fellow, John!" But the spaniel John, convinced at last that he had sinned, hid himself in a far corner whence he could see nothing, and pressed his chin closely to the ground.

"Ask your mistress to come here."

Standing by the hearth, waiting for his wife, the Squire displayed to greater advantage than ever the shape of his long and narrow head; his neck had grown conspicuously redder; his eyes, like those of an offended swan, stabbed, as it were, at everything they saw.

It was not seldom that Mrs. Pendyce was summoned to the study to hear him say: "I want to ask your advice. So-and-so has done such and such.... I have made up my mind."

She came, therefore, in a few minutes. In compliance with his "Look at that, Margery," she read the note, and gazed at him with distress in her eyes, and he looked back at her with wrath in his. For this was tragedy.

Not to everyone is it given to take a wide view of things—to look over the far, pale streams, the purple heather, and moonlit pools of the wild marches, where reeds stand black against the sundown, and from long distance comes the cry of a curlew—nor to everyone to gaze from steep cliffs over the wine-dark, shadowy sea—or from high mountainsides to see crowned chaos, smoking with mist, or gold-bright in the sun.

To most it is given to watch assiduously a row of houses, a back-yard, or, like Mrs. and Mr. Pendyce, the green fields, trim coverts, and Scotch garden of Worsted Skeynes. And on that horizon the citation of their eldest son to appear in the Divorce Court loomed like a cloud, heavy with destruction.

So far as such an event could be realised imagination at Worsted Skeynes was not too vivid—it spelled ruin to an harmonious edifice of ideas and prejudice and aspiration. It would be no use to say of that event, "What does it matter? Let people think what they like, talk as they like." At Worsted Skeynes (and Worsted Skeynes was every country house) there was but one set of people, one church, one pack of hounds, one everything. The importance of a clear escutcheon was too great. And they who had lived together for thirty-four years looked at each other with a new expression in their eyes; their feelings were for once the same. But since it is always the man who has the nicer sense of honour, their thoughts were not the same, for Mr. Pendyce was thinking: 'I won't believe it—disgracing us all!' and Mrs. Pendyce was thinking: 'My boy!'

It was she who spoke first.

"Oh, Horace!"

The sound of her voice restored the Squire's fortitude.

"There you go, Margery! D'you mean to say you believe what this fellow says? He ought to be horsewhipped. He knows my opinion of him.

"It's a piece of his confounded impudence! He nearly ran over me, and now——"

Mrs. Pendyce broke in:

"But, Horace, I'm afraid it's true! Ellen Maiden——"

"Ellen Maiden?" said Mr. Pendyce. "What business has she——" He was silent, staring gloomily at the plan of Worsted Skeynes, still unrolled, like an emblem of all there was at stake. "If George has really," he burst out, "he's a greater fool than I took him for! A fool? He's a knave!"

Again he was silent.

Mrs. Pendyce flushed at that word, and bit her lips.

"George could never be a knave!" she said.

Mr. Pendyce answered heavily:

"Disgracing his name!"

Mrs. Pendyce bit deeper into her lips.

"Whatever he has done," she said, "George is sure to have behaved like a gentleman!"

An angry smile twisted the Squire's mouth.

"Just like a woman!" he said.

But the smile died away, and on both their faces came a helpless look. Like people who have lived together without real sympathy—though, indeed, they had long ceased to be conscious of that—now that something had occurred in which their interests were actually at one, they were filled with a sort of surprise. It was no good to differ. Differing, even silent differing, would not help their son.

"I shall write to George," said Mr. Pendyce at last. "I shall believe nothing till I've heard from him. He'll tell us the truth, I suppose."

There was a quaver in his voice.

Mrs. Pendyce answered quickly:

"Oh, Horace, be careful what you say! I'm sure he is suffering!"

Her gentle soul, disposed to pleasure, was suffering, too, and the tears stole up in her eyes. Mr. Pendyce's sight was too long to see them. The infirmity had been growing on him ever since his marriage.

"I shall say what I think right," he said. "I shall take time to consider what I shall say; I won't be hurried by this ruffian."

Mrs. Pendyce wiped her lips with her lace-edged handkerchief.

"I hope you will show me the letter," she said.

The Squire looked at her, and he realised that she was trembling and very white, and, though this irritated him, he answered almost kindly:

"It's not a matter for you, my dear."

Mrs. Pendyce took a step towards him; her gentle face expressed a strange determination.

"He is my son, Horace, as well as yours."

Mr. Pendyce turned round uneasily.

"It's no use your getting nervous, Margery. I shall do what's best. You women lose your heads. That damned fellow's lying! If he isn't——"

At these words the spaniel John rose from his corner and advanced to the middle of the floor. He stood there curved in a half-circle, and looked darkly at his master.

"Confound it!" said Mr. Pendyce. "It's—it's damnable!"

And as if answering for all that depended on Worsted Skeynes, the spaniel John deeply wagged that which had been left him of his tail.

Mrs. Pendyce came nearer still.

"If George refuses to give you that promise, what will you do, Horace?"

Mr. Pendyce stared.

"Promise? What promise?"

Mrs. Pendyce thrust forward the note.

"This promise not to see her again."

Mr. Pendyce motioned it aside.

"I'll not be dictated to by that fellow Bellew," he said. Then, by an afterthought: "It won't do to give him a chance. George must promise me that in any case."

Mrs. Pendyce pressed her lips together.

"But do you think he will?"

"Think—think who will? Think he will what? Why can't you express yourself, Margery? If George has really got us into this mess he must get us out again."

Mrs. Pendyce flushed.

"He would never leave her in the lurch!"

The Squire said angrily:

"Lurch! Who said anything about lurch? He owes it to her. Not that she deserves any consideration, if she's been—You don't mean to say you think he'll refuse? He'd never be such a donkey?"

Mrs. Pendyce raised her hands and made what for her was a passionate gesture.

"Oh, Horace!" she said, "you don't understand. He's in love with her!"

Mr. Pendyce's lower lip trembled, a sign with him of excitement or emotion. All the conservative strength of his nature, all the immense dumb force of belief in established things, all that stubborn hatred and dread of change, that incalculable power of imagining nothing, which, since the beginning of time, had made Horace Pendyce the arbiter of his land, rose up within his sorely tried soul.

"What on earth's that to do with it?" he cried in a rage. "You women! You've no sense of anything! Romantic, idiotic, immoral—I don't know what you're at. For God's sake don't go putting ideas into his head!"

At this outburst Mrs. Pendyce's face became rigid; only the flicker of her eyelids betrayed how her nerves were quivering. Suddenly she threw her hands up to her ears.

"Horace!" she cried, "do—Oh, poor John!"

The Squire had stepped hastily and heavily on to his dog's paw. The creature gave a grievous howl. Mr. Pendyce went down on his knees and raised the limb.

"Damn the dog!" he stuttered. "Oh, poor fellow, John!"

And the two long and narrow heads for a moment were close together.

CHAPTER V

RECTOR AND SQUIRE

The efforts of social man, directed from immemorial time towards the stability of things, have culminated in Worsted Skeynes. Beyond commercial competition—for the estate no longer paid for living on it—beyond the power of expansion, set with tradition and sentiment, it was an undoubted jewel, past need of warranty. Cradled within it were all those hereditary institutions of which the country was most proud, and Mr. Pendyce sometimes saw before him the time when, for services to his party, he should call himself Lord Worsted, and after his own death continue sitting in the House of Lords in the person of his son. But there was another feeling in the Squire's heart—the air and the woods and the fields had passed into his blood a love for this, his home and the home of his fathers.

And so a terrible unrest pervaded the whole household after the receipt of Jaspar Bellew's note. Nobody was told anything, yet everybody knew there was something; and each after his fashion, down to the very dogs, betrayed their sympathy with the master and mistress of the house.

Day after day the girls wandered about the new golf course knocking the balls aimlessly; it was all they could do. Even Cecil Tharp, who had received from Bee the qualified affirmative natural under the circumstances, was infected. The off foreleg of her grey mare was being treated by a process he had recently discovered, and in the stables he confided to Bee that the dear old Squire seemed "off his feed;" he did not think it was any good worrying him at present. Bee, stroking the mare's neck, looked at him shyly and slowly.

"It's about George," she said; "I know it's about George! Oh, Cecil! I do wish I had been a boy!"

Young Tharp assented in spite of himself:

"Yes; it must be beastly to be a girl."

A faint flush coloured Bee's cheeks. It hurt her a little that he should agree; but her lover was passing his hand down the mare's shin.

"Father is rather trying," she said. "I wish George would marry."

Cecil Tharp raised his bullet head; his blunt, honest face was extremely red from stooping.

"Clean as a whistle," he said; "she's all right, Bee. I expect George has too good a time."

Bee turned her face away and murmured:

"I should loathe living in London." And she, too, stooped and felt the mare's shin.

To Mrs. Pendency in these days the hours passed with incredible slowness. For thirty odd years she had waited at once for everything and nothing; she had, so to say, everything she could wish for, and—nothing, so that even waiting had been robbed of poignancy; but to wait like this, in direct suspense, for something definite was terrible. There was hardly a moment when she did not conjure up George, lonely and torn by conflicting emotions; for to her, long paralysed by Worsted Skeynes, and ignorant of the facts, the proportions of the struggle in her son's soul appeared Titanic; her mother instinct was not deceived as to the strength of his passion. Strange and conflicting were the sensations with which she awaited the result; at one moment thinking, 'It is madness; he must promise—it is too awful!' at another, 'Ah! but how can he, if he loves her so? It is impossible; and she, too—ah! how awful it is!'

Perhaps, as Mr. Pendency had said, she was romantic; perhaps it was only the thought of the pain her boy must suffer. The tooth was too big, it seemed to her; and, as in old days, when she took him to Cornmarket to have an aching tooth out, she ever sat with his hand in hers while the little dentist pulled, and ever suffered the tug, too, in her own mouth, so now she longed to share this other tug, so terrible, so fierce.

Against Mrs. Bellew she felt only a sort of vague and jealous aching; and this seemed strange even to herself—but, again, perhaps she was romantic.

Now it was that she found the value of routine. Her days were so well and fully occupied that anxiety was forced below the surface. The nights were far more terrible; for then, not only had she to bear her own suspense, but, as was natural in a wife, the fears of Horace Pendency as well. The poor Squire found this the only time when he could get relief from worry; he came to bed much earlier on purpose. By dint of reiterating dreads and speculation he at length obtained some rest. Why had not George answered? What was the fellow about? And so on and so on, till, by sheer monotony, he caused in himself the need for slumber. But his wife's torments lasted till after the birds, starting with a sleepy cheeping, were at full morning chorus. Then only, turning softly for fear she should awaken him, the poor lady fell asleep.

For George had not answered.

In her morning visits to the village Mrs. Pendency found herself, for the first time since she had begun this practice, driven by her own trouble over that line of diffident distrust which had always divided her from the hearts of her poorer neighbours. She was astonished at her own indelicacy, asking questions, prying into their troubles, pushed on by a secret aching for distraction; and she was surprised how well they took it—how, indeed, they seemed to like it, as though they knew that they were doing her good. In one cottage, where she had long noticed with pitying wonder a white-faced, black-eyed girl, who seemed to crouch away from everyone, she even received a request. It was delivered with terrified secrecy in a back-yard, out of Mrs. Barter's hearing.

"Oh, ma'am! Get me away from here! I'm in trouble—it's comin', and I don't know what I shall do."

Mrs. Pendency shivered, and all the way home she thought: 'Poor little soul—poor little thing!' racking her brains to whom she might confide this case and ask for a solution; and something of the white-faced, black-eyed girl's terror and secrecy fell on her, for, she found no one not even Mrs. Barter, whose heart, though soft, belonged to the Rector. Then, by a sort of inspiration, she thought of Gregory.

'How can I write to him,' she mused, 'when my son——'

But she did write, for, deep down, the Totteridge instinct felt that others should do things for her; and she craved, too, to allude, however distantly, to what was on her mind. And, under the Pendency eagle

and the motto: 'Strenuus aureaque penna', thus her letter ran: "DEAR GRIG,

"Can you do anything for a poor little girl in the village here who is 'in trouble'?—you know what I mean. It is such a terrible crime in this part of the country, and she looks so wretched and frightened, poor little thing! She is twenty years old. She wants a hiding-place for her misfortune, and somewhere to go when it is over. Nobody, she says, will have anything to do with her where they know; and, really, I have noticed for a long time how white and wretched she looks, with great black frightened eyes. I don't like to apply to our Rector, for though he is a good fellow in many ways, he has such strong opinions; and, of course, Horace could do nothing. I would like to do something for her, and I could spare a little money, but I can't find a place for her to go, and that makes it difficult. She seems to be haunted, too, by the idea that wherever she goes it will come out. Isn't it dreadful? Do do something, if you can. I am rather anxious about George. I hope the dear boy is well. If you are passing his club some day you might look in and just ask after him. He is sometimes so naughty about writing. I wish we could see you here, dear Grig; the country is looking beautiful just now—the oak-trees especially—and the apple-blossom isn't over, but I suppose you are too busy. How is Helen Bellew? Is she in town?

"Your affectionate cousin,
"MARGERIE PENDYCE."

It was four o'clock this same afternoon when the second groom, very much out of breath, informed the butler that there was a fire at Peacock's farm. The butler repaired at once to the library. Mr. Pendyce, who had been on horseback all the morning, was standing in his riding-clothes, tired and depressed, before the plan of Worsted Skeynes.

"What do you want, Bester?"

"There is a fire at Peacock's farm, sir." Mr. Pendyce stared.

"What?" he said. "A fire in broad daylight! Nonsense!"

"You can see the flames from the front, sir." The worn and querulous look left Mr. Pendyce's face.

"Ring the stable-bell!" he said. "Tell them all to run with buckets and ladders. Send Higson off to Cornmarket on the mare. Go and tell Mr. Barter, and rouse the village. Don't stand there—God bless me! Ring the stable-bell!" And snatching up his riding-crop and hat, he ran past the butler, closely followed by the spaniel John.

Over the stile and along the footpath which cut diagonally across a field of barley he moved at a stiff trot, and his spaniel, who had not grasped the situation, frolicked ahead with a certain surprise. The Squire was soon out of breath—it was twenty years or more since he had run a quarter of a mile. He did not, however, relax his speed. Ahead of him in the distance ran the second groom; behind him a labourer and a footman. The stable-bell at Worsted Skeynes began to ring. Mr. Pendyce crossed the stile and struck into the lane, colliding with the Rector, who was running, too, his face flushed to the colour of tomatoes. They ran on, side by side.

"You go on!" gasped Mr. Pendyce at last, "and tell them I'm coming."

The Rector hesitated—he, too, was very out of breath—and started again, panting. The Squire, with his hand to his side, walked painfully on; he had run himself to a standstill. At a gap in the corner of the lane he suddenly saw pale-red tongues of flame against the sunlight.

"God bless me!" he gasped, and in sheer horror started to run again. Those sinister tongues were licking at the air over a large barn, some ricks, and the roofs of stables and outbuildings. Half a dozen figures were dashing buckets of water on the flames. The true insignificance of their efforts did not penetrate the Squire's mind. Trembling, and with a sickening pain in his lungs, he threw off his coat, wrenched a bucket from a huge agricultural labourer, who resigned it with awe, and joined the string of workers. Peacock, the farmer, ran past him; his face and round red beard were the colour of the flames he was trying to put out; tears dropped continually from his eyes and ran down that fiery face. His wife, a little dark woman with a twisted mouth, was working like a demon at the pump. Mr. Pendyce gasped to her:

"This is dreadful, Mrs. Peacock—this is dreadful!"

Conspicuous in black clothes and white shirt-sleeves, the Rector was hewing with an axe at the boarding of a cowhouse, the door end of which was already in flames, and his voice could be heard above the tumult shouting directions to which nobody paid any heed.

"What's in that cow-house?" gasped Mr. Pendyce.

Mrs. Peacock, in a voice harsh with rage and grief answered:

"It's the old horse and two of the cows!"

"God bless me!" cried the Squire, rushing forward with his bucket.

Some villagers came running up, and he shouted to these, but what he said neither he nor they could tell. The shrieks and snortings of the horse and cows, the steady whirr of the flames, drowned all lesser sounds. Of human cries, the Rector's voice alone was heard, between the crashing blows of his axe upon the woodwork.

Mr. Pendyce tripped; his bucket rolled out of his hand; he lay where he had fallen, too exhausted to move. He could still hear the crash of the Rector's axe, the sound of his shouts. Somebody helped him up, and trembling so that he could hardly stand, he caught an axe out of the hand of a strapping young fellow who had just arrived, and placing himself by the Rector's side, swung it feebly against the boarding. The flames and smoke now filled the whole cow-house, and came rushing through the gap that they were making. The Squire and the Rector stood their ground. With a furious blow Mr. Barter cleared a way. A cheer rose behind them, but no beast came forth. All three were dead in the smoke and flames.

The Squire, who could see in, flung down his axe, and covered his eyes with his hands. The Rector uttered a sound like a deep oath, and he, too, flung down his axe.

Two hours later, with torn and blackened clothes, the Squire stood by the ruins of the barn. The fire was out, but the ashes were still smouldering. The spaniel John, anxious, panting, was licking his master's boots, as though begging forgiveness that he had been so frightened, and kept so far away. Yet something in his eye seemed to be saying:

"Must you really have these fires, master?"

A black hand grasped the Squire's arm, a hoarse voice said:

"I shan't forget, Squire!"

"God bless me, Peacock!" returned Mr. Pendyce, "that's nothing! You're insured, I hope?"

"Aye, I'm insured; but it's the beasts I'm thinking of!"

"Ah!" said the Squire, with a gesture of horror.

The brougham took him and the Rector back together. Under their feet crouched their respective dogs, faintly growling at each other. A cheer from the crowd greeted their departure.

They started in silence, deadly tired. Mr. Pendyce said suddenly:

"I can't get those poor beasts out of my head, Barter!"

The Rector put his hand up to his eyes.

"I hope to God I shall never see such a sight again! Poor brutes, poor brutes!"

And feeling secretly for his dog's muzzle, he left his hand against the animal's warm, soft, rubbery mouth, to be licked again and again.

On his side of the brougham Mr. Pendyce, also unseen, was doing precisely the same thing.

The carriage went first to the Rectory, where Mrs. Barter and her children stood in the doorway. The Rector put his head back into the brougham to say:

"Good-night, Pendyce. You'll be stiff tomorrow. I shall get my wife to rub me with Elliman!"

Mr. Pendyce nodded, raised his hat, and the carriage went on. Leaning back, he closed his eyes; a pleasanter sensation was stealing over him. True, he would be stiff to-morrow, but he had done his duty. He had shown them all that blood told; done something to bolster up that system which was-himself. And he had a new and kindly feeling towards Peacock, too. There was nothing like a little danger for bringing the lower classes closer; then it was they felt the need for officers, for something!

The spaniel John's head rose between his knees, turning up eyes with a crimson touch beneath.

'Master,' he seemed to say, 'I am feeling old. I know there are things beyond me in this life, but you, who know all things, will arrange that we shall be together even when we die.'

The carriage stopped at the entrance of the drive, and the Squire's thoughts changed. Twenty years ago he would have beaten Barter running down that lane. Barter was only forty-five. To give him fourteen years and a beating was a bit too much to expect: He felt a strange irritation with Barter—the fellow had cut a very good figure! He had shirked nothing. Elliman was too strong! Homocea was the thing. Margery would have to rub him! And suddenly, as though springing naturally from the name of his wife, George came into Mr. Pendyce's mind, and the respite that he had enjoyed from care was over. But the spaniel John, who scented home, began singing feebly for the brougham to stop, and beating a careless tail against his master's boot.

It was very stiffly, with frowning brows and a shaking under-lip, that the Squire descended from the brougham, and began sorely to mount the staircase to his wife's room.

CHAPTER VI

THE PARK

There comes a day each year in May when Hyde Park is possessed. A cool wind swings the leaves; a hot sun glistens on Long Water, on every bough, on every blade of grass. The birds sing their small hearts out, the band plays its gayest tunes, the white clouds race in the high blue heaven. Exactly why and how this day differs from those that came before and those that will come after, cannot be told; it is as though the Park said: 'To-day I live; the Past is past. I care not for the Future!'

And on this day they who chance in the Park cannot escape some measure of possession. Their steps quicken, their skirts swing, their sticks flourish, even their eyes brighten—those eyes so dulled with looking at the streets; and each one, if he has a Love, thinks of her, and here and there among the wandering throng he has her with him. To these the Park and all sweet-blooded mortals in it nod and smile.

There had been a meeting that afternoon at Lady Maiden's in Prince's Gate to consider the position of the working-class woman. It had provided a somewhat heated discussion, for a person had got up and proved almost incontestably that the working-class woman had no position whatsoever.

Gregory Vigil and Mrs. Shortman had left this meeting together, and, crossing the Serpentine, struck a line over the grass.

"Mrs. Shortman," said Gregory, "don't you think we're all a little mad?"

He was carrying his hat in his hand, and his fine grizzled hair, rumped in the excitement of the meeting, had not yet subsided on his head.

"Yes, Mr. Vigil. I don't exactly——"

"We are all a little mad! What did that woman, Lady Maiden, mean by talking as she did? I detest her!"

"Oh, Mr. Vigil! She has the best intentions!"

"Intentions?" said Gregory. "I loathe her! What did we go to her stuffy drawing-room for? Look at that sky!"

Mrs. Shortman looked at the sky.

"But, Mr. Vigil," she said earnestly, "things would never get done. Sometimes I think you look at everything too much in the light of the way it ought to be!"

"The Milky Way," said Gregory.

Mrs. Shortman pursed her lips; she found it impossible to habituate herself to Gregory's habit of joking.

They had scant talk for the rest of their journey to the S. R. W. C., where Miss Mallow, at the typewriter, was reading a novel.

"There are several letters for you, Mr. Vigil"

"Mrs. Shortman says I am unpractical," answered Gregory. "Is that true, Miss Mallow?"

The colour in Miss Mallow's cheeks spread to her sloping shoulders.

"Oh no. You're most practical, only—perhaps—I don't know, perhaps you do try to do rather impossible things, Mr. Vigil"

"Bilcock Buildings!"

There was a minute's silence. Then Mrs. Shortman at her bureau beginning to dictate, the typewriter started clicking.

Gregory, who had opened a letter, was seated with his head in his hands. The voice ceased, the typewriter ceased, but Gregory did not stir. Both women, turning a little in their seats, glanced at him. Their eyes caught each other's and they looked away at once. A few seconds later they were looking at him again. Still Gregory did not stir. An anxious appeal began to creep into the women's eyes.

"Mr. Vigil," said Mrs. Shortman at last, "Mr. Vigil, do you think—"

Gregory raised his face; it was flushed to the roots of his hair.

"Read that, Mrs. Shortman."

Handing her a pale grey letter stamped with an eagle and the motto 'Strenuus aureaque penna' he rose and paced the room. And as with his long, light stride he was passing to and fro, the woman at the bureau coned steadily the writing, the girl at the typewriter sat motionless with a red and jealous face.

Mrs. Shortman folded the letter, placed it on the top of the bureau, and said without raising her eyes

"Of course, it is very sad for the poor little girl; but surely, Mr. Vigil, it must always be, so as to check, to check——"

Gregory stopped, and his shining eyes disconcerted her; they seemed to her unpractical. Sharply lifting her voice, she went on:

"If there were no disgrace, there would be no way of stopping it. I know the country better than you do, Mr. Vigil."

Gregory put his hands to his ears.

"We must find a place for her at once."

The window was fully open, so that he could not open it any more, and he stood there as though looking for that place in the sky. And the sky he looked at was very blue, and large white birds of cloud were flying over it.

He turned from the window, and opened another letter.

"LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS,
"May 24, 1892.

"MY DEAR VIGIL,

"I gathered from your ward when I saw her yesterday that she has not told you of what, I fear, will give you much pain. I asked her point-blank whether she wished the matter kept from you, and her answer was, 'He had better know—only I'm sorry for him.' In sum it is this: Bellow has either got wind of our watching him, or someone must have put him up to it; he has anticipated us and brought a suit against your ward, joining George Pendency in the cause. George brought the citation to me. If necessary he's prepared to swear there's nothing in it. He takes, in fact, the usual standpoint of the 'man of honour.'

"I went at once to see your ward. She admitted that the charge is true. I asked her if she wished the suit defended, and a counter-suit brought against her husband. Her answer to that was: 'I absolutely don't care.' I got nothing from her but this, and, though it sounds odd, I believe it to be true. She appears to be in a reckless mood, and to have no particular ill-will against her husband.

"I want to see you, but only after you have turned this matter over carefully. It is my duty to put some considerations before you. The suit, if brought, will be a very unpleasant matter for George, a still more unpleasant, even disastrous one, for his people. The innocent in such cases are almost always the

greatest sufferers. If the cross-suit is instituted, it will assume at once, considering their position in Society, the proportions of a 'cause celebre', and probably occupy the court and the daily presses anything from three days to a week, perhaps more, and you know what that means. On the other hand, not to defend the suit, considering what we know, is, apart from ethics, revolting to my instincts as a fighter. My advice, therefore, is to make every effort to prevent matters being brought into court at all.

"I am an older man than you by thirteen years. I have a sincere regard for you, and I wish to save you pain. In the course of our interviews I have observed your ward very closely, and at the risk of giving you offence, I am going to speak out my mind. Mrs. Bellew is a rather remarkable woman. From two or three allusions that you have made in my presence, I believe that she is altogether different from what you think. She is, in my opinion, one of those very vital persons upon whom our judgments, censures, even our sympathies, are wasted. A woman of this sort, if she comes of a county family, and is thrown by circumstances with Society people, is always bound to be conspicuous. If you would realise something of this, it would, I believe, save you a great deal of pain. In short, I beg of you not to take her, or her circumstances, too seriously. There are quite a number of such men and women as her husband and herself, and they are always certain to be more or less before the public eye. Whoever else goes down, she will swim, simply because she can't help it. I want you to see things as they are.

"I ask you again, my dear Vigil, to forgive me for writing thus, and to believe that my sole desire is to try and save you unnecessary suffering.

"Come and see me as soon as you have reflected:

"I am,
"Your sincere friend,
"EDMUND PARAMOR."

Gregory made a movement like that of a blind man. Both women were on their feet at once.

"What is it, Mr. Vigil? Can I get you anything?"

"Thanks; nothing, nothing. I've had some rather bad news. I'll go out and get some air. I shan't be back to-day."

He found his hat and went.

He walked towards the Park, unconsciously attracted towards the biggest space, the freshest air; his hands were folded behind him, his head bowed. And since, of all things, Nature is ironical, it was fitting that he should seek the Park this day when it was gayest. And far in the Park, as near the centre as might be, he lay down on the grass. For a long time he lay without moving, his hands over his eyes, and in spite of Mr. Paramor's reminder that his suffering was unnecessary, he suffered.

And mostly he suffered from black loneliness, for he was a very lonely man, and now he had lost that which he had thought he had. It is difficult to divide suffering, difficult to say how much he suffered, because, being in love with her, he had secretly thought she must love him a little, and how much he suffered because his private portrait of her, the portrait that he, and he alone, had painted, was scored through with the knife. And he lay first on his face, and then on his back, with his hand always over his eyes. And around him were other men lying on the grass, and some were lonely, and some hungry, and some asleep, and some were lying there for the pleasure of doing nothing and for the sake of the hot sun on their cheeks; and by the side of some lay their girls, and it was these that Gregory could not bear to see, for his spirit and his senses were a-hungered. In the plantations close by were pigeons, and never for a moment did they stop cooing; never did the blackbirds cease their courting songs; the sun its hot, sweet burning; the clouds above their love-chase in the sky. It was the day without a past, without a future, when it is not good for man to be alone. And no man looked at him, because it was no man's business, but a woman here and there cast a glance on that long, tweed-suited figure with the hand over the eyes, and wondered, perhaps, what was behind that hand. Had they but known, they would have smiled their woman's smile that he should so have mistaken one of their sex.

Gregory lay quite still, looking at the sky, and because he was a loyal man he did not blame her, but slowly, very slowly, his spirit, like a spring stretched to the point of breaking, came back upon itself, and since he could not bear to see things as they were, he began again to see them as they were not.

'She has been forced into this,' he thought. 'It is George Pendyce's fault. To me she is, she must be, the same!'

He turned again on to his face. And a small dog who had lost its master sniffed at his boots, and sat down a little way off, to wait till Gregory could do something for him, because he smelled that he was that sort of man.

CHAPTER VII

DOUBTFUL POSITION AT WORSTED SKEYNES

Then George's answer came at last, the flags were in full bloom round the Scotch garden at Worsted Skeynes. They grew in masses and of all shades, from deep purple to pale grey, and their scent, very penetrating, very delicate, floated on the wind.

While waiting for that answer, it had become Mr. Pendyce's habit to promenade between these beds, his hand to his back, for he was still a little stiff, followed at a distance of seven paces by the spaniel John, very black, and moving his rubbery nostrils uneasily from side to side.

In this way the two passed every day the hour from twelve to one. Neither could have said why they walked thus, for Mr. Pendyce had a horror of idleness, and the spaniel John disliked the scent of irises; both, in fact, obeyed that part of themselves which is superior to reason. During this hour, too, Mrs. Pendyce, though longing to walk between her flowers, also obeyed that part of her, superior to reason, which told her that it would be better not.

But George's answer came at last.

"STOICS' CLUB. "DEAR FATHER,

"Yes, Bellew is bringing a suit. I am taking steps in the matter. As to the promise you ask for, I can give no promise of the sort. You may tell Bellew I will see him d—d first.

"Your affectionate son,
"GEORGE PENDYCE."

Mr. Pendyce received this at the breakfast-table, and while he read it there was a hush, for all had seen the handwriting on the envelope.

Mr. Pendyce read it through twice, once with his glasses on and once without, and when he had finished the second reading he placed it in his breast pocket. No word escaped him; his eyes, which had sunk a little the last few days, rested angrily on his wife's white face. Bee and Norah looked down, and, as if they understood, the four dogs were still. Mr. Pendyce pushed his plate back, rose, and left the room.

Norah looked up.

"What's the matter, Mother?"

Mrs. Pendyce was swaying. She recovered herself in a moment.

"Nothing, dear. It's very hot this morning, don't you think? I'll just go to my room and take some sal volatile."

She went out, followed by old Roy, the Skye; the spaniel John, who had been cut off at the door by his master's abrupt exit, preceded her. Norah and Bee pushed back their plates.

"I can't eat, Norah," said Bee. "It's horrible not to know what's going on."

Norah answered

"It's perfectly brutal not being a man. You might just as well be a dog as a girl, for anything anyone tells you!"

Mrs. Pendyce did not go to her room; she went to the library. Her husband, seated at his table, had George's letter before him. A pen was in his hand, but he was not writing.

"Horace," she said softly, "here is poor John!"

Mr. Pendyce did not answer, but put down the hand that did not hold his pen. The spaniel John covered it with kisses.

"Let me see the letter, won't you?"

Mr. Pendyce handed it to her without a word. She touched his shoulder gratefully, for his unusual silence went to her heart. Mr. Pendyce took no notice, staring at his pen as though surprised that, of its

own accord, it did not write his answer; but suddenly he flung it down and looked round, and his look seemed to say: 'You brought this fellow into the world; now see the result!'

He had had so many days to think and put his finger on the doubtful spots of his son's character. All that week he had become more and more certain of how, without his wife, George would have been exactly like himself. Words sprang to his lips, and kept on dying there. The doubt whether she would agree with him, the feeling that she sympathised with her son, the certainty that something even in himself responded to those words: "You can tell Bellew I will see him d—d first!"—all this, and the thought, never out of his mind, 'The name—the estate!' kept him silent. He turned his head away, and took up his pen again.

Mrs. Pendyce had read the letter now three times, and instinctively had put it in her bosom. It was not hers, but Horace must know it by heart, and in his anger he might tear it up. That letter, for which they had waited so long; told her nothing; she had known all there was to tell. Her hand had fallen from Mr. Pendyce's shoulder, and she did not put it back, but ran her fingers through and through each other, while the sunlight, traversing the narrow windows, caressed her from her hair down to her knees. Here and there that stream of sunlight formed little pools in her eyes, giving them a touching, anxious brightness; in a curious heart-shaped locket of carved steel, worn by her mother and her grandmother before her, containing now, not locks of their son's hair, but a curl of George's; in her diamond rings, and a bracelet of amethyst and pearl which she wore for the love of pretty things. And the warm sunlight disengaged from her a scent of lavender. Through the library door a scratching noise told that the dear dogs knew she was not in her bedroom. Mr. Pendyce, too, caught that scent of lavender, and in some vague way it augmented his discomfort. Her silence, too, distressed him. It did not occur to him that his silence was distressing her. He put down his pen.

"I can't write with you standing there, Margery!"

Mrs. Pendyce moved out of the sunlight.

"George says he is taking steps. What does that mean, Horace?"

This question, focusing his doubts, broke down the Squire's dumbness.

"I won't be treated like this!" he said. "I'll go up and see him myself!"

He went by the 10.20, saying that he would be down again by the 5.55

Soon after seven the same evening a dogcart driven by a young groom and drawn by a raking chestnut mare with a blaze face, swung into the railway-station at Worsted Skeynes, and drew up before the booking-office. Mr. Pendyce's brougham, behind a brown horse, coming a little later, was obliged to range itself behind. A minute before the train's arrival a wagonette and a pair of bays, belonging to Lord Quarryman, wheeled in, and, filing past the other two, took up its place in front. Outside this little row of vehicles the station fly and two farmers' gigs presented their backs to the station buildings. And in this arrangement there was something harmonious and fitting, as though Providence itself had guided them all and assigned to each its place. And Providence had only made one error—that of placing Captain Bellew's dogcart precisely opposite the booking-office, instead of Lord Quarryman's wagonette, with Mr. Pendyce's brougham next.

Mr. Pendyce came out first; he stared angrily at the dogcart, and moved to his own carriage. Lord Quarryman came out second. His massive sun-burned head—the back of which, sparsely adorned by hairs, ran perfectly straight into his neck—was crowned by a grey top-hat. The skirts of his grey coat were square-shaped, and so were the toes of his boots.

"Hallo, Pendyce!" he called out heartily; "didn't see you on the platform. How's your wife?"

Mr. Pendyce, turning to answer, met the little burning eyes of Captain Bellew, who came out third. They failed to salute each other, and Bellew, springing into his cart, wrenched his mare round, circled the farmers' gigs, and, sitting forward, drove off at a furious pace. His groom, running at full speed, clung to the cart and leaped on to the step behind. Lord Quarryman's wagonette backed itself into the place left vacant. And the mistake of Providence was rectified.

"Cracked chap, that fellow Bellew. D'you see anything of him?"

Mr. Pendyce answered:

"No; and I want to see less. I wish he'd take himself off!"

His lordship smiled.

"A huntin' country seems to breed fellows like that; there's always one of 'em to every pack of hounds. Where's his wife now? Good-lookin' woman; rather warm member, eh?"

It seemed to Mr. Pendyce that Lord Quarryman's eyes searched his own with a knowing look, and muttering "God knows!" he vanished into his brougham.

Lord Quarryman looked kindly at his horses.

He was not a man who reflected on the whys, the wherefores, the because, of this life. The good God had made him Lord Quarryman, had made his eldest son Lord Quantock; the good God had made the Gaddesdon hounds—it was enough!

When Mr. Pendyce reached home he went to his dressing-room. In a corner by the bath the spaniel John lay surrounded by an assortment of his master's slippers, for it was thus alone that he could soothe in measure the bitterness of separation. His dark brown eye was fixed upon the door, and round it gleamed a crescent moon of white. He came to the Squire fluttering his tail, with a slipper in his mouth, and his eye said plainly: 'Oh, master, where have you been? Why have you been so long? I have been expecting you ever since half-past ten this morning!'

Mr. Pendyce's heart opened a moment and closed again. He said "John!" and began to dress for dinner.

Mrs. Pendyce found him tying his white tie. She had plucked the first rosebud from her garden; she had plucked it because she felt sorry for him, and because of the excuse it would give her to go to his dressing-room at once.

"I've brought you a buttonhole, Horace. Did you see him?"

"No."

Of all answers this was the one she dreaded most. She had not believed that anything would come of an interview; she had trembled all day long at the thought of their meeting; but now that they had not met she knew by the sinking in her heart that anything was better than uncertainty. She waited as long as she could, then burst out:

"Tell me something, Horace!"

Mr. Pendyce gave her an angry glance.

"How can I tell you, when there's nothing to tell? I went to his club. He's not living there now. He's got rooms, nobody knows where. I waited all the afternoon. Left a message at last for him to come down here to-morrow. I've sent for Paramor, and told him to come down too. I won't put up with this sort of thing."

Mrs. Pendyce looked out of the window, but there was nothing to see save the ha-ha, the coverts, the village spire, the cottage roofs, which for so long had been her world.

"George won't come down here," she said.

"George will do what I tell him."

Again Mrs. Pendyce shook her head, knowing by instinct that she was right.

Mr. Pendyce stopped putting on his waist-coat.

"George had better take care," he said; "he's entirely dependent on me."

And as if with those words he had summed up the situation, the philosophy of a system vital to his son, he no longer frowned. On Mrs. Pendyce those words had a strange effect. They stirred within her terror. It was like seeing her son's back bared to a lifted whip-lash; like seeing the door shut against him on a snowy night. But besides terror they stirred within her a more poignant feeling yet, as though someone had dared to show a whip to herself, had dared to defy that something more precious than life in her soul, that something which was of her blood, so utterly and secretly passed by the centuries into her fibre that no one had ever thought of defying it before. And there flashed before her with ridiculous concreteness the thought: 'I've got three hundred a year of my own!' Then the whole feeling left her, just as in dreams a mordant sensation grips and passes, leaving a dull ache, whose cause is forgotten, behind.

"There's the gong, Horace," she said. "Cecil Tharp is here to dinner. I asked the Barthers, but poor Rose didn't feel up to it. Of course they are expecting it very soon now. They talk of the 15th of June."

Mr. Pendyce took from his wife his coat, passing his arms down the satin sleeves.

"If I could get the cottagers to have families like that," he said, "I shouldn't have much trouble about labour. They're a pig-headed lot—do nothing that they're told. Give me some eau-de-Cologne, Margery."

Mrs. Pendyce dabbed the wicker flask on her husband's handkerchief.

"Your eyes look tired," she said. "Have you a headache, dear?"

CHAPTER VIII

COUNCIL AT WORSTED SKEYNES

It was on the following evening—the evening on which he was expecting his son and Mr. Paramor that the Squire leaned forward over the dining-table and asked:

"What do you say, Barter? I'm speaking to you as a man of the world."

The Rector bent over his glass of port and moistened his lower lip.

"There's no excuse for that woman," he answered. "I always thought she was a bad lot."

Mr. Pendyce went on:

"We've never had a scandal in my family. I find the thought of it hard to bear, Barter—I find it hard to bear—"

The Rector emitted a low sound. He had come from long usage to have a feeling like affection for his Squire.

Mr. Pendyce pursued his thoughts.

"We've gone on," he said, "father and son for hundreds of years. It's a blow to me, Barter."

Again the Rector emitted that low sound.

"What will the village think?" said Mr. Pendyce; "and the farmers—I mind that more than anything. Most of them knew my dear old father—not that he was popular. It's a bitter thing."

The Rector said:

"Well, well, Pendyce, perhaps it won't come to that."

He looked a little shamefaced, and his light eyes were full of something like contrition.

"How does Mrs. Pendyce take it?"

The Squire looked at him for the first time.

"Ah!" he said; "you never know anything about women. I'd as soon trust a woman to be just as I'd—I'd finish that magnum; it'd give me gout in no time."

The Rector emptied his glass.

"I've sent for George and my solicitor," pursued the Squire; "they'll be here directly."

Mr. Barter pushed his chair back, and raising his right ankle on to his left leg, clasped his hands round his right knee; then, leaning forward, he stared up under his jutting brows at Mr. Pendyce. It was the attitude in which he thought best.

Mr. Pendyce ran on:

"I've nursed the estate ever since it came to me; I've carried on the tradition as best I could; I've not been as good a man, perhaps, as I should have wished, but I've always tried to remember my old father's words: 'I'm done for, Horry; the estate's in your hands now.'" He cleared his throat.

For a full minute there was no sound save the ticking of the clock. Then the spaniel John, coming silently from under the sideboard, fell heavily down against his master's leg with a lengthy snore of satisfaction. Mr. Pendyce looked down.

"This fellow of mine," he muttered, "is getting fat."

It was evident from the tone of his voice that he desired his emotion to be forgotten. Something very deep in Mr. Barter respected that desire.

"It's a first-rate magnum," he said.

Mr. Pendyce filled his Rector's glass.

"I forget if you knew Paramor. He was before your time. He was at Harrow with me."

The Rector took a prolonged sip.

"I shall be in the way," he said. "I'll take myself off."

The Squire put out his hand affectionately.

"No, no, Barter, don't you go. It's all safe with you. I mean to act. I can't stand this uncertainty. My wife's cousin Vigil is coming too—he's her guardian. I wired for him. You know Vigil? He was about your time."

The Rector turned crimson, and set his underlip. Having scented his enemy, nothing would now persuade him to withdraw; and the conviction that he had only done his duty, a little shaken by the Squire's confidence, returned as though by magic.

"Yes, I know him."

"We'll have it all out here," muttered Mr. Pendyce, "over this port. There's the carriage. Get up, John."

The spaniel John rose heavily, looked sardonically at Mr. Barter, and again flopped down against his master's leg.

"Get up, John," said Mr. Pendyce again. The spaniel John snored.

'If I move, you'll move too, and uncertainty will begin for me again,' he seemed to say.

Mr. Pendyce disengaged his leg, rose, and went to the door. Before reaching it he turned and came back to the table.

"Barter," he said, "I'm not thinking of myself—I'm not thinking of myself—we've been here for generations—it's the principle." His face had the least twist to one side, as though conforming to a kink in his philosophy; his eyes looked sad and restless.

And the Rector, watching the door for the sight of his enemy, also thought:

'I'm not thinking of myself—I'm satisfied that I did right—I'm Rector of this parish it's the principle.'

The spaniel John gave three short barks, one for each of the persons who entered the room. They were Mrs. Pendyce, Mr. Paramor, and Gregory Vigil.

"Where's George?" asked the Squire, but no one answered him.

The Rector, who had resumed his seat, stared at a little gold cross which he had taken out of his waistcoat pocket. Mr. Paramor lifted a vase and sniffed at the rose it contained; Gregory walked to the window.

When Mr. Pendyce realised that his son had not come, he went to the door and held it open.

"Be good enough to take John out, Margery," he said. "John!"

The spaniel John, seeing what lay before him, rolled over on his back.

Mrs. Pendyce fixed her eyes on her husband, and in those eyes she put all the words which the nature of a lady did not suffer her to speak.

'I claim to be here. Let me stay; it is my right. Don't send me away.' So her eyes spoke, and so those

of the spaniel John, lying on his back, in which attitude he knew that he was hard to move.

Mr. Pendyce turned him over with his foot.

"Get up, John! Be good enough to take John out, Margery."

Mrs. Pendyce flushed, but did not move.

"John," said Mr. Pendyce, "go with your mistress." The spaniel John fluttered a drooping tail. Mr. Pendyce pressed his foot to it.

"This is not a subject for women."

Mrs. Pendyce bent down.

"Come, John," she said. The spaniel John, showing the whites of his eyes, and trying to back through his collar, was assisted from the room. Mr. Pendyce closed the door behind them.

"Have a glass of port, Vigil; it's the '47. My father laid it down in '56, the year before he died. Can't drink it myself—I've had to put down two hogsheads of the Jubilee wine. Paramor, fill your glass. Take that chair next to Paramor, Vigil. You know Barter?"

Both Gregory's face and the Rector's were very red.

"We're all Harrow men here," went on Mr. Pendyce. And suddenly turning to Mr. Paramor, he said: "Well?"

Just as round the hereditary principle are grouped the State, the Church, Law, and Philanthropy, so round the dining-table at Worsted Skeynes sat the Squire, the Rector, Mr. Paramor, and Gregory Vigil, and none of them wished to be the first to speak. At last Mr. Paramor, taking from his pocket Bellew's note and George's answer, which were pinned in strange alliance, returned them to the Squire.

"I understand the position to be that George refuses to give her up; at the same time he is prepared to defend the suit and deny everything. Those are his instructions to me." Taking up the vase again, he sniffed long and deep at the rose.

Mr. Pendyce broke the silence.

"As a gentleman," he said in a voice sharpened by the bitterness of his feelings, "I suppose he's obliged——"

Gregory, smiling painfully, added:

"To tell lies."

Mr. Pendyce turned on him at once.

"I've nothing to say about that, Vigil. George has behaved abominably. I don't uphold him; but if the woman wishes the suit defended he can't play the cur—that's what I was brought up to believe."

Gregory leaned his forehead on his hand.

"The whole system is odious——" he was beginning.

Mr. Paramor chimed in.

"Let us keep to the facts; without the system."

The Rector spoke for the first time.

"I don't know what you mean about the system; both this man and this woman are guilty——"

Gregory said in a voice that quivered with rage:

"Be so kind as not to use the expression, 'this woman.'"

The Rector glowered.

"What expression then——"

Mr. Pendyce's voice, to which the intimate trouble of his thoughts lent a certain dignity, broke in:

"Gentlemen, this is a question concerning the honour of my house."

There was another and a longer silence, during which Mr. Paramor's eyes haunted from face to face, while beyond the rose a smile writhed on his lips.

"I suppose you have brought me down here, Pendency, to give you my opinion," he said at last. "Well; don't let these matters come into court. If there is anything you can do to prevent it, do it. If your pride stands in the way, put it in your pocket. If your sense of truth stands in the way, forget it. Between personal delicacy and our law of divorce there is no relation; between absolute truth and our law of divorce there is no relation. I repeat, don't let these matters come into court. Innocent and guilty, you will all suffer; the innocent will suffer more than the guilty, and nobody will benefit. I have come to this conclusion deliberately. There are cases in which I should give the opposite opinion. But in this case, I repeat, there's nothing to be gained by it. Once more, then, don't let these matters come into court. Don't give people's tongues a chance. Take my advice, appeal to George again to give you that promise. If he refuses, well, we must try and bluff Bellew out of it."

Mr. Pendency had listened, as he had formed the habit of listening to Edmund Paramor, in silence. He now looked up and said:

"It's all that red-haired ruffian's spite. I don't know what you were about to stir things up, Vigil. You must have put him on the scent." He looked moodily at Gregory. Mr. Barter, too, looked at Gregory with a sort of half-ashamed defiance.

Gregory, who had been staring at his untouched wineglass, turned his face, very flushed, and began speaking in a voice that emotion and anger caused to tremble. He avoided looking at the Rector, and addressed himself to Mr. Paramor.

"George can't give up the woman who has trusted herself to him; that would be playing the cur, if you like. Let them go and live together honestly until they can be married. Why do you all speak as if it were the man who mattered? It is the woman that we should protect!"

The Rector first recovered speech.

"You're talking rank immorality," he said almost good-humouredly.

Mr. Pendency rose.

"Marry her!" he cried. "What on earth—that's worse than all—the very thing we're trying to prevent! We've been here, father and son—father and son—for generations!"

"All the more shame," burst out Gregory, "if you can't stand by a woman at the end of them——!"

Mr. Paramor made a gesture of reproof.

"There's moderation in all things," he said. "Are you sure that Mrs. Bellew requires protection? If you are right, I agree; but are you right?"

"I will answer for it," said Gregory.

Mr. Paramor paused a full minute with his head resting on his hand.

"I am sorry," he said at last, "I must trust to my own judgment."

The Squire looked up.

"If the worst comes to the worst, can I cut the entail, Paramor?"

"No."

"What? But that's all wrong—that's——"

"You can't have it both ways," said Mr. Paramor.

The Squire looked at him dubiously, then blurted out:

"If I choose to leave him nothing but the estate, he'll soon find himself a beggar. I beg your pardon, gentlemen; fill your glasses! I'm forgetting everything!"

The Rector filled his glass.

"I've said nothing so far," he began; "I don't feel that it's my business. My conviction is that there's far too much divorce nowadays. Let this woman go back to her husband, and let him show her where she's

to blame"—his voice and his eyes hardened—"then let them forgive each other like Christians. You talk," he said to Gregory, "about standing up for the woman. I've no patience with that; it's the way immorality's fostered in these days. I raise my voice against this sentimentalism. I always have, and I always shall!"

Gregory jumped to his feet.

"I've told you once before," he said, "that you were indelicate; I tell you so again."

Mr. Barter got up, and stood bending over the table, crimson in the face, staring at Gregory, and unable to speak.

"Either you or I," he said at last, stammering with passion, "must leave this room!"

Gregory tried to speak; then turning abruptly, he stepped out on to the terrace, and passed from the view of those within.

The Rector said:

"Good-night, Pendyce; I'm going, too!"

The Squire shook the hand held out to him with a face perplexed to sadness. There was silence when Mr. Barter had left the room.

The Squire broke it with a sigh.

"I wish we were back at Oxenham's, Paramor. This serves me right for deserting the old house. What on earth made me send George to Eton?"

Mr. Paramor buried his nose in the vase. In this saying of his old schoolfellow was the whole of the Squire's creed:

'I believe in my father, and his father, and his father's father, the makers and keepers of my estate; and I believe in myself and my son and my son's son. And I believe that we have made the country, and shall keep the country what it is. And I believe in the Public Schools, and especially the Public School that I was at. And I believe in my social equals and the country house, and in things as they are, for ever and ever. Amen.'

Mr. Pendyce went on:

"I'm not a Puritan, Paramor; I dare say there are allowances to be made for George. I don't even object to the woman herself; she may be too good for Bellew; she must be too good for a fellow like that! But for George to marry her would be ruination. Look at Lady Rose's case! Anyone but a star-gazing fellow like Vigil must see that! It's taboo! It's sheer taboo! And think—think of my—my grandson! No, no, Paramor; no, no, by God!"

The Squire covered his eyes with his hand.

Mr. Paramor, who had no son himself, answered with feeling:

"Now, now, old fellow; it won't come to that!"

"God knows what it will come to, Paramor! My nerve's shaken! You know yourself that if there's a divorce he'll be bound to marry her!"

To this Mr. Paramor made no reply, but pressed his lips together.

"There's your poor dog whining," he said.

And without waiting for permission he opened the door. Mrs. Pendyce and the spaniel John came in. The Squire looked up and frowned. The spaniel John, panting with delight, rubbed against him. 'I have been through torment, master,' he seemed to say. 'A second separation at present is not possible for me!'

Mrs. Pendyce stood waiting silently, and Mr. Paramor addressed himself to her.

"You can do more than any of us, Mrs. Pendyce, both with George and with this man Bellew—and, if I am not mistaken, with his wife."

The Squire broke in:

"Don't think that I'll have any humble pie eaten to that fellow Bellew!"

The look Mr. Paramor gave him at those words, was like that of a doctor diagnosing a disease. Yet there was nothing in the expression of the Squire's face with its thin grey whiskers and moustache, its twist to the left, its swan-like eyes, decided jaw, and sloping brow, different from what this idea might bring on the face of any country gentleman.

Mrs. Pendyce said eagerly

"Oh, Mr. Paramor, if I could only see George!"

She longed so for a sight of her son that her thoughts carried her no further.

"See him!" cried the Squire. "You'll go on spoiling him till he's disgraced us all!"

Mrs. Pendyce turned from her husband to his solicitor. Excitement had fixed an unwonted colour in her cheeks; her lips twitched as if she wished to speak.

Mr. Paramor answered for her:

"No, Pendyce; if George is spoilt, the system is to blame."

"System!" said the Squire. "I've never had a system for him. I'm no believer in systems! I don't know what you're talking of. I have another son, thank God!"

Mrs. Pendyce took a step forward.

"Horace," she said, "you would never——"

Mr. Pendyce turned from his wife, and said sharply:

"Paramor, are you sure I can't cut the entail?"

"As sure," said Mr. Paramor, "as I sit here!"

CHAPTER IX

DEFINITION OF "PENDYICITIS"

Gregory walked long in the Scotch garden with his eyes on the stars. One, larger than all the rest, over the larches, shone on him ironically, for it was the star of love. And on his beat between the yew-trees that, living before Pencyces came to Worsted Skeynes, would live when they were gone, he cooled his heart in the silver light of that big star. The irises restrained their perfume lest it should whip his senses; only the young larch-trees and the far fields sent him their fugitive sweetness through the dark. And the same brown owl that had hooted when Helen Bellew kissed George Pendyce in the conservatory hooted again now that Gregory walked grieving over the fruits of that kiss.

His thoughts were of Mr. Barter, and with the injustice natural to a man who took a warm and personal view of things, he painted the Rector in colours darker than his cloth.

'Indelicate, meddlesome,' he thought. 'How dare he speak of her like that!'

Mr. Paramor's voice broke in on his meditations.

"Still cooling your heels? Why did you play the deuce with us in there?"

"I hate a sham," said Gregory. "This marriage of my ward's is a sham. She had better live honestly with the man she really loves!"

"So you said just now," returned Mr. Paramor. "Would you apply that to everyone?"

"I would."

"Well," said Mr. Paramor with a laugh, "there is nothing like an idealist for-making hay! You once told me, if I remember, that marriage was sacred to you!"

"Those are my own private feelings, Paramor. But here the mischief's done already. It is a sham, a hateful sham, and it ought to come to an end!"

"That's all very well," replied Mr. Paramor, "but when you come to put it into practice in that wholesale way it leads to goodness knows what. It means reconstructing marriage on a basis entirely different from the present. It's marriage on the basis of the heart, and not on the basis of property. Are you prepared to go to that length?"

"I am."

"You're as much of an extremist one way as Barter is the other. It's you extremists who do all the harm. There's a golden mean, my friend. I agree that something ought to be done. But what you don't see is that laws must suit those they are intended to govern. You're too much in the stars, Vigil. Medicine must be graduated to the patient. Come, man, where's your sense of humour? Imagine your conception of marriage applied to Pendyce and his sons, or his Rector, or his tenants, and the labourers on his estate."

"No, no," said Gregory; "I refuse to believe——"

"The country classes," said Mr. Paramor quietly, "are especially backward in such matters. They have strong, meat-fed instincts, and what with the county Members, the Bishops, the Peers, all the hereditary force of the country, they still rule the roast. And there's a certain disease—to make a very poor joke, call it 'Pendycitis' with which most of these people are infected. They're 'crass.' They do things, but they do them the wrong way! They muddle through with the greatest possible amount of unnecessary labour and suffering! It's part of the hereditary principle. I haven't had to do with them thirty five years for nothing!"

Gregory turned his face away.

"Your joke is very poor," he said. "I don't believe they are like that! I won't admit it. If there is such a disease, it's our business to find a remedy."

"Nothing but an operation will cure it," said Mr. Paramor; "and before operating there's a preliminary process to be gone through. It was discovered by Lister."

Gregory answered

"Paramor, I hate your pessimism!"

Mr. Paramor's eyes haunted Gregory's back.

"But I am not a pessimist," he said. "Far from it.

"When daisies pied and violets blue,
And lady-smocks all silver-white,
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight,
The cuckoo then, on every tree——"

Gregory turned on him.

"How can you quote poetry, and hold the views you do? We ought to construct——"

"You want to build before you've laid your foundations," said Mr. Paramor. "You let your feelings carry you away, Vigil. The state of the marriage laws is only a symptom. It's this disease, this grudging narrow spirit in men, that makes such laws necessary. Unlovely men, unlovely laws—what can you expect?"

"I will never believe that we shall be content to go on living in a slough of—of——"

"Provincialism!" said Mr. Paramor. "You should take to gardening; it makes one recognise what you idealists seem to pass over—that men, my dear friend, are, like plants, creatures of heredity and environment; their growth is slow. You can't get grapes from thorns, Vigil, or figs from thistles—at least, not in one generation—however busy and hungry you may be!"

"Your theory degrades us all to the level of thistles."

"Social laws depend for their strength on the harm they have it in their power to inflict, and that harm depends for its strength on the ideals held by the man on whom the harm falls. If you dispense with the marriage tie, or give up your property and take to Brotherhood, you'll have a very thistley

time, but you won't mind that if you're a fig. And so on ad lib. It's odd, though, how soon the thistles that thought themselves figs get found out. There are many things I hate, Vigil. One is extravagance, and another humbug!"

But Gregory stood looking at the sky.

"We seem to have wandered from the point," said Mr. Paramor, "and I think we had better go in. It's nearly eleven."

Throughout the length of the low white house there were but three windows lighted, three eyes looking at the moon, a fairy shallop sailing the night sky. The cedar-trees stood black as pitch. The old brown owl had ceased his hooting. Mr. Paramor gripped Gregory by the arm.

"A nightingale! Did you hear him down in that spinney? It's a sweet place, this! I don't wonder Pencyce is fond of it. You're not a fisherman, I think? Did you ever watch a school of fishes coasting along a bank? How blind they are, and how they follow their leader! In our element we men know just about as much as the fishes do. A blind lot, Vigil! We take a mean view of things; we're damnably provincial!"

Gregory pressed his hands to his forehead.

"I'm trying to think," he said, "what will be the consequences to my ward of this divorce."

"My friend, listen to some plain speaking. Your ward and her husband and George Pencyce are just the sort of people for whom our law of divorce is framed. They've all three got courage, they're all reckless and obstinate, and—forgive me—thick-skinned. Their case, if fought, will take a week of hard swearing, a week of the public's money and time. It will give admirable opportunities to eminent counsel, excellent reading to the general public, first-rate sport all round.

"The papers will have a regular carnival. I repeat, they are the very people for whom our law of divorce is framed. There's a great deal to be said for publicity, but all the same it puts a premium on insensibility, and causes a vast amount of suffering to innocent people. I told you once before, to get a divorce, even if you deserve it, you mustn't be a sensitive person. Those three will go through it all splendidly, but every scrap of skin will be torn off you and our poor friends down here, and the result will be a drawn battle at the end! That's if it's fought, and if it comes on I don't see how we can let it go unfought; it's contrary to my instincts. If we let it go undefended, mark my words, your ward and George Pencyce will be sick of each other before the law allows them to marry, and George, as his father says, for the sake of 'morality,' will have to marry a woman who is tired of him, or of whom he is tired. Now you've got it straight from the shoulder, and I'm going up to bed. It's a heavy dew. Lock this door after you."

Mr. Paramor made his way into the conservatory. He stopped and came back.

"Pencyce," he said, "perfectly understands all I've been telling you. He'd give his eyes for the case not to come on, but you'll see he'll rub everything up the wrong way, and it'll be a miracle if we succeed. That's 'Pendycitis'! We've all got a touch of it. Good-night!"

Gregory was left alone outside the country house with his big star. And as his thoughts were seldom of an impersonal kind he did not reflect on "Pendycitis," but on Helen Bellew. And the longer he thought the more he thought of her as he desired to think, for this was natural to him; and ever more ironical grew the twinkling of his star above the spinney where the nightingale was singing.

CHAPTER X

GEORGE GOES FOR THE GLOVES

On the Thursday of the Epsom Summer Meeting, George Pencyce sat in the corner of a first-class railway-carriage trying to make two and two into five. On a sheet of Stoics' Club note-paper his racing-debts were stated to a penny—one thousand and forty five pounds overdue, and below, seven hundred and fifty lost at the current meeting. Below these again his private debts were indicated by the round figure of one thousand pounds. It was round by courtesy, for he had only calculated those bills which had been sent in, and Providence, which knows all things, preferred the rounder figure of fifteen

hundred. In sum, therefore, he had against him a total of three thousand two hundred and ninety-five pounds. And since at Tattersalls and the Stock Exchange, where men are engaged in perpetual motion, an almost absurd punctiliousness is required in the payment of those sums which have for the moment inadvertently been lost, seventeen hundred and ninety-five of this must infallibly be raised by Monday next. Indeed, only a certain liking for George, a good loser and a good winner, and the fear of dropping a good customer, had induced the firm of bookmakers to let that debt of one thousand and forty-five stand over the Epsom Meeting.

To set against these sums (in which he had not counted his current trainer's bill, and the expenses, which he could not calculate, of the divorce suit), he had, first, a bank balance which he might still overdraw another twenty pounds; secondly, the Ambler and two bad selling platers; and thirdly (more considerable item), X, or that which he might, or indeed must, win over the Ambler's race this afternoon.

Whatever else, it was not pluck that was lacking in the character of George Pendyce. This quality was in his fibre, in the consistency of his blood, and confronted with a situation which, to some men, and especially to men not brought up on the hereditary plan, might have seemed desperate, he exhibited no sign of anxiety or distress. Into the consideration of his difficulties he imported certain principles: (1) He did not intend to be posted at Tattersalls. Sooner than that he would go to the Jews; the entail was all he could look to borrow on; the Hebrews would force him to pay through the nose. (2) He did not intend to show the white feather, and in backing his horse meant to "go for the gloves." (3) He did not intend to think of the future; the thought of the present was quite bad enough.

The train bounded and swung as though rushing onwards to a tune, and George sat quietly in his corner.

Amongst his fellows in the carriage was the Hon. Geoffrey Winlow, who, though not a racing-man, took a kindly interest in our breed of horses, which by attendance at the principal meetings he hoped to improve.

"Your horse going to run, George?"

George nodded.

"I shall have a fiver on him for luck. I can't afford to bet. Saw your mother at the Foxholme garden-party last week. You seen them lately?"

George shook his head and felt an odd squeeze: at his heart.

"You know they had a fire at old Peacock's farm; I hear the Squire and Barter did wonders. He's as game as a pebble, the Squire."

Again George nodded, and again felt that squeeze at his heart.

"Aren't they coming to town this season?"

"Haven't heard," answered George. "Have a cigar?"

Winlow took the cigar, and cutting it with a small penknife, scrutinised George's square face with his leisurely eyes. It needed a physiognomist to penetrate its impassivity. Winlow thought to himself:

'I shouldn't be surprised if what they say about old George is true.' .
. . "Had a good meeting so far?"

"So-so."

They parted on the racecourse. George went at once to see his trainer and thence into Tattersalls' ring. He took with him that equation with X, and sought the society of two gentlemen quietly dressed, one of whom was making a note in a little book with a gold pencil. They greeted him respectfully, for it was to them that he owed the bulk of that seventeen hundred and ninety-five pounds.

"What price will you lay against my horse?"

"Evens, Mr. Pendyce," replied the gentleman with the gold pencil, "to a monkey."

George booked the bet. It was not his usual way of doing business, but to-day everything seemed different, and something stronger than custom was at work.

'I am going for the gloves,' he thought; 'if it doesn't come off, I'm done anyhow.'

He went to another quietly dressed gentleman with a diamond pin and a Jewish face. And as he went from one quietly dressed gentleman to another there preceded him some subtle messenger, who breathed the words, 'Mr. Pendyce is going for the gloves,' so that at each visit he found they had greater confidence than ever in his horse. Soon he had promised to pay two thousand pounds if the Ambler lost, and received the assurance of eminent gentlemen, quietly dressed, that they would pay him fifteen hundred if the Ambler won. The odds now stood at two to one on, and he had found it impossible to back the Ambler for "a place," in accordance with his custom.

'Made a fool of myself,' he thought; 'ought never to have gone into the ring at all; ought to have let Barney's work it quietly. It doesn't matter!'

He still required to win three hundred pounds to settle on the Monday, and laid a final bet of seven hundred to three hundred and fifty pounds upon his horse. Thus, without spending a penny, simply by making a few promises, he had solved the equation with X.

On leaving the ring, he entered the bar and drank some whisky. He then went to the paddock. The starting-bell for the second race had rung; there was hardly anyone there, but in a far corner the Ambler was being led up and down by a boy.

George glanced round to see that no acquaintances were near, and joined in this promenade. The Ambler turned his black, wild eye, crescented with white, threw up his head, and gazed far into the distance.

'If one could only make him understand!' thought George.

When his horse left the paddock for the starting-post George went back to the stand. At the bar he drank some more whisky, and heard someone say:

"I had to lay six to four. I want to find Pendyce; they say he's backed it heavily."

George put down his glass, and instead of going to his usual place, mounted slowly to the top of the stand.

'I don't want them buzzing round me,' he thought.

At the top of the stand—that national monument, visible for twenty miles around—he knew himself to be safe. Only "the many" came here, and amongst the many he thrust himself till at the very top he could rest his glasses on a rail and watch the colours. Besides his own peacock blue there was a straw, a blue with white stripes, a red with white stars.

They say that through the minds of drowning men troop ghosts of past experience. It was not so with George; his soul was fastened on that little daub of peacock blue. Below the glasses his lips were colourless from hard compression; he moistened them continually. The four little Coloured daubs stole into line, the flag fell.

"They're off!" That roar, like the cry of a monster, sounded all around. George steadied his glasses on the rail. Blue with white stripes was leading, the Ambler lying last. Thus they came round the further bend. And Providence, as though determined that someone should benefit by his absorption, sent a hand sliding under George's elbows, to remove the pin from his tie and slide away. Round Tattenham Corner George saw his horse take the lead. So, with straw closing up, they came into the straight. The Ambler's jockey looked back and raised his whip; in that instant, as if by magic, straw drew level; down came the whip on the Ambler's flank; again as by magic straw was in front. The saying of his old jockey darted through George's mind: "Mark my words, sir, that 'orse knows what's what, and when they're like that they're best let alone."

"Sit still, you fool!" he muttered.

The whip came down again; straw was two lengths in front.

Someone behind said:

"The favourite's beat! No, he's not, by Jove!" For as though George's groan had found its way to the jockey's ears, he dropped his whip. The Ambler sprang forward. George saw that he was gaining. All his soul went out to his horse's struggle. In each of those fifteen seconds he died and was born again; with each stride all that was loyal and brave in his nature leaped into flame, all that was base sank, for he himself was racing with his horse, and the sweat poured down his brow. And his lips babbled broken sounds that no one heard, for all around were babbling too.

Locked together, the Ambler and straw ran home. Then followed a hush, for no one knew which of

the two had won. The numbers went up "Seven-Two-Five."

"The favourite's second! Beaten by a nose!" said a voice.

George bowed his head, and his whole spirit felt numb. He closed his glasses and moved with the crowd to the stairs. A voice behind him said:

"He'd have won in another stride!"

Another answered:

"I hate that sort of horse. He curled up at the whip."

George ground his teeth.

"Curse you!" he muttered, "you little Cockney; what do you know about a horse?"

The crowd surged; the speakers were lost to sight.

The long descent from the stand gave him time. No trace of emotion showed on his face when he appeared in the paddock. Blacksmith the trainer stood by the Ambler's stall.

"That idiot Tipping lost us the race, sir," he began with quivering lips. "If he'd only left him alone, the horse would have won in a canter. What on earth made him use his whip? He deserves to lose his license. He——"

The gall and bitterness of defeat surged into George's brain.

"It's no good your talking, Blacksmith," he said; "you put him up. What the devil made you quarrel with Swells?"

The little man's chin dropped in sheer surprise.

George turned away, and went up to the jockey, but at the sick look on the poor youth's face the angry words died off his tongue.

"All right, Tipping; I'm not going to rag you." And with the ghost of a smile he passed into the Ambler's stall. The groom had just finished putting him to rights; the horse stood ready to be led from the field of his defeat. The groom moved out, and George went to the Ambler's head. There is no place, no corner, on a racecourse where a man may show his heart. George did but lay his forehead against the velvet of his horse's muzzle, and for one short second hold it there. The Ambler awaited the end of that brief caress, then with a snort threw up his head, and with his wild, soft eyes seemed saying, 'You fools! what do you know of me?'

George stepped to one side.

"Take him away," he said, and his eyes followed the Ambler's receding form.

A racing-man of a different race, whom he knew and did not like, came up to him as he left the paddock.

"I suppothe you won't thell your horse, Pendythe?" he said. "I'll give you five thou. for him. He ought never to have loht; the beating won't help him with the handicappers a little bit."

'You carrion crow!' thought George.

"Thanks; he's not for sale," he answered.

He went back to the stand, but at every step and in each face, he seemed to see the equation which now he could only solve with X2. Thrice he went into the bar. It was on the last of these occasions that he said to himself: "The horse must go. I shall never have a horse like him again."

Over that green down which a hundred thousand feet had trodden brown, which a hundred thousand hands had strewn with bits of paper, cigar-ends, and the fragments of discarded food, over the great approaches to the battlefield, where all was pathway leading to and from the fight, those who make livelihood in such a fashion, least and littlest followers, were bawling, hawking, whining to the warriors flushed with victory or wearied by defeat: Over that green down, between one-legged men and ragged acrobats, women with babies at the breast, thimble-riggers, touts, walked George Pendyce, his mouth hard set and his head bent down.

"Good luck, Captain, good luck to-morrow; good luck, good luck!... For the love of Gawd, your lordship!... Roll, bowl, or pitch!"

The sun, flaming out after long hiding, scorched the back of his neck; the free down wind, fouled by foetid odours, brought to his ears the monster's last cry, "They're off!"

A voice hailed him.

George turned and saw Winlow, and with a curse and a smile he answered:

"Hallo!"

The Hon. Geoffrey ranged alongside, examining George's face at leisure.

"Afraid you had a bad race, old chap! I hear you've sold the Ambler to that fellow Guilderstein."

In George's heart something snapped.

'Already?' he thought. 'The brute's been crowing. And it's that little bouncer that my horse—my horse'

He answered calmly:

"Wanted the money."

Winlow, who was not lacking in cool discretion, changed the subject.

Late that evening George sat in the Stoics' window overlooking Piccadilly. Before his eyes, shaded by his hand, the hansoms passed, flying East and West, each with the single pale disc of face, or the twin discs of faces close together; and the gentle roar of the town came in, and the cool air refreshed by night. In the light of the lamps the trees of the Green Park stood burnished out of deep shadow where nothing moved; and high over all, the stars and purple sky seemed veiled with golden gauze. Figures without end filed by. Some glanced at the lighted windows and the man in the white shirt-front sitting there. And many thought: 'Wish I were that swell, with nothing to do but step into his father's shoes;' and to many no thought came. But now and then some passer murmured to himself: "Looks lonely sitting there."

And to those faces gazing up, George's lips were grim, and over them came and went a little bitter smile; but on his forehead he felt still the touch of his horse's muzzle, and his eyes, which none could see, were dark with pain.

CHAPTER XI

MR. BARTER TAKES A WALK

The event at the Rectory was expected every moment. The Rector, who practically never suffered, disliked the thought and sight of others' suffering. Up to this day, indeed, there had been none to dislike, for in answer to inquiries his wife had always said "No, dear, no; I'm all right—really, it's nothing." And she had always said it smiling, even when her smiling lips were white. But this morning in trying to say it she had failed to smile. Her eyes had lost their hopelessly hopeful shining, and sharply between her teeth she said: "Send for Dr. Wilson, Hussell"

The Rector kissed her, shutting his eyes, for he was afraid of her face with its lips drawn back, and its discoloured cheeks. In five minutes the groom was hastening to Cornmarket on the roan cob, and the Rector stood in his study, looking from one to another of his household gods, as though calling them to his assistance. At last he took down a bat and began oiling it. Sixteen years ago, when Husell was born, he had been overtaken by sounds that he had never to this day forgotten; they had clung to the nerves of his memory, and for no reward would he hear them again. They had never been uttered since, for like most wives, his wife was a heroine; but, used as he was to this event, the Rector had ever since suffered from panic. It was as though Providence, storing all the anxiety which he might have felt throughout, let him have it with a rush at the last moment. He put the bat back into its case, corked the oil-bottle, and again stood looking at his household gods. None came to his aid. And his thoughts were as they had nine times been before. 'I ought not to go out. I ought to wait for Wilson. Suppose anything

were to happen. Still, nurse is with her, and I can do nothing. Poor Rose—poor darling! It's my duty to ——What's that? I'm better out of the way.'

Softly, without knowing that it was softly, he opened the door; softly, without knowing it was softly, he stepped to the hat-rack and took his black straw hat; softly, without knowing it was softly, he went out, and, unfaltering, hurried down the drive.

Three minutes later he appeared again, approaching the house faster than he had set forth.

He passed the hall door, ran up the stairs, and entered his wife's room.

"Rose dear, Rose, can I do anything?"

Mrs. Barter put out her hand, a gleam of malice shot into her eyes. Through her set lips came a vague murmur, and the words:

"No, dear, nothing. Better go for your walk."

Mr. Barter pressed his lips to her quivering hand, and backed from the room. Outside the door he struck at the air with his fist, and, running downstairs, was once more lost to sight. Faster and faster he walked, leaving the village behind, and among the country sights and sounds and scents—his nerves began to recover. He was able to think again of other things: of Cecil's school report—far from satisfactory; of old Hermon in the village, whom he suspected of overdoing his bronchitis with an eye to port; of the return match with Coldingham, and his belief that their left-hand bowler only wanted "hitting"; of the new edition of hymn-books, and the slackness of the upper village in attending church—five households less honest and ductile than the rest, a foreign look about them, dark people, un-English. In thinking of these things he forgot what he wanted to forget; but hearing the sound of wheels, he entered a field as though to examine the crops until the vehicle had passed.

It was not Wilson, but it might have been, and at the next turning he unconsciously branched off the Cornmarket road.

It was noon when he came within sight of Coldingham, six miles from Worsted Skeynes. He would have enjoyed a glass of beer, but, unable to enter the public-house, he went into the churchyard instead. He sat down on a bench beneath a sycamore opposite the Winlow graves, for Coldingham was Lord Montrossor's seat, and it was here that all the Winlows lay. Bees were busy above them in the branches, and Mr. Barter thought:

'Beautiful site. We've nothing like this at Worsted Skeynes....'

But suddenly he found that he could not sit there and think. Suppose his wife were to die! It happened sometimes; the wife of John Tharp of Bletchingham had died in giving birth to her tenth child! His forehead was wet, and he wiped it. Casting an angry glance at the Winlow graves, he left the seat.

He went down by the further path, and came out on the green. A cricket-match was going on, and in spite of himself the Rector stopped. The Coldingham team were in the field. Mr. Barter watched. As he had thought, that left-hand bowler bowled a good pace, and "came in" from the off, but his length was poor, very poor! A determined batsman would soon knock him off! He moved into line with the wickets to see how much the fellow "came in," and he grew so absorbed that he did not at first notice the Hon. Geoffrey Winlow in pads and a blue and green blazer, smoking a cigarette astride of a camp-stool.

"Ah, Winlow, it's your team against the village. Afraid I can't stop to see you bat. I was just passing—matter I had to attend to—must get back!"

The real solemnity of his face excited Winlow's curiosity.

"Can't you stop and have lunch with us?"

"No, no; my wife—Must get back!"

Winlow murmured:

"Ah yes, of course." His leisurely blue eyes, always in command of the situation, rested on the Rector's heated face. "By the way," he said, "I'm afraid George Pendency is rather hard hit. Been obliged to sell his horse. I saw him at Epsom the week before last."

The Rector brightened.

"I made certain he'd come to grief over that betting," he said. "I'm very sorry—very sorry indeed."

"They say," went on Winlow, "that he dropped four thousand over the Thursday race.

"He was pretty well dipped before, I know. Poor old George! such an awfully good chap!"

"Ah," repeated Mr. Barter, "I'm very sorry—very sorry indeed. Things were bad enough as it was."

A ray of interest illumined the leisureliness of the Hon. Geoffrey's eyes.

"You mean about Mrs.—H'm, yes?" he said. "People are talking; you can't stop that. I'm so sorry for the poor Squire, and Mrs. Pendyce. I hope something'll be done."

The Rector frowned.

"I've done my best," he said. "Well hit, sir! I've always said that anyone with a little pluck can knock off that lefthand man you think so much of. He 'comes in' a bit, but he bowls a shocking bad length. Here I am dawdling. I must get back!"

And once more that real solemnity came over Mr. Barter's face.

"I suppose you'll be playing for Coldingham against us on Thursday? Good-bye!"

Nodding in response to Winlow's salute, he walked away.

He avoided the churchyard, and took a path across the fields. He was hungry and thirsty. In one of his sermons there occurred this passage: "We should habituate ourselves to hold our appetites in check. By constantly accustoming our selves to abstinence little abstinences in our daily life—we alone can attain to that true spirituality without which we cannot hope to know God." And it was well known throughout his household and the village that the Rector's temper was almost dangerously spiritual if anything detained him from his meals. For he was a man physiologically sane and healthy to the core, whose digestion and functions, strong, regular, and straightforward as the day, made calls upon him which would not be denied. After preaching that particular sermon, he frequently for a week or more denied himself a second glass of ale at lunch, or his after-dinner cigar, smoking a pipe instead. And he was perfectly honest in his belief that he attained a greater spirituality thereby, and perhaps indeed he did. But even if he did not, there was no one to notice this, for the majority of his flock accepted his spirituality as matter of course, and of the insignificant minority there were few who did not make allowance for the fact that he was their pastor by virtue of necessity, by virtue of a system which had placed him there almost mechanically, whether he would or no. Indeed, they respected him the more that he was their Rector, and could not be removed, and were glad that theirs was no common Vicar like that of Coldingham, dependent on the caprices of others. For, with the exception of two bad characters and one atheist, the whole village, Conservatives or Liberals (there were Liberals now that they were beginning to believe that the ballot was really secret), were believers in the hereditary system.

Insensibly the Rector directed himself towards Bletchingham, where there was a temperance house. At heart he loathed lemonade and gingerbeer in the middle of the day, both of which made his economy cold and uneasy, but he felt he could go nowhere else. And his spirits rose at the sight of Bletchingham spire.

'Bread and cheese,' he thought. 'What's better than bread and cheese? And they shall make me a cup of coffee.'

In that cup of coffee there was something symbolic and fitting to his mental state. It was agitated and thick, and impregnated with the peculiar flavour of country coffee. He swallowed but little, and resumed his march. At the first turning he passed the village school, whence issued a rhythmic but discordant hum, suggestive of some dull machine that had served its time. The Rector paused to listen. Leaning on the wall of the little play-yard, he tried to make out the words that, like a religious chant, were being intoned within. It sounded like, "Twice two's four, twice four's six, twice six's eight," and he passed on, thinking, 'A fine thing; but if we don't take care we shall go too far; we shall unfit them for their stations,' and he frowned. Crossing a stile, he took a footpath. The air was full of the singing of larks, and the bees were pulling down the clover-stalks. At the bottom of the field was a little pond overhung with willows. On a bare strip of pasture, within thirty yards, in the full sun, an old horse was tethered to a peg. It stood with its face towards the pond, baring its yellow teeth, and stretching out its head, all bone and hollows, to the water which it could not reach. The Rector stopped. He did not know the horse personally, for it was three fields short of his parish, but he saw that the poor beast wanted water. He went up, and finding that the knot of the halter hurt his fingers, stooped down and wrenched at the peg. While he was thus straining and tugging, crimson in the face, the old horse stood still,

gazing at him out of his bleary eyes. Mr. Barter sprang upright with a jerk, the peg in his hand, and the old horse started back.

"So ho, boy!" said the Rector, and angrily he muttered: "A shame to tie the poor beast up here in the sun. I should like to give his owner a bit of my mind!"

He led the animal towards the water. The old horse followed tranquilly enough, but as he had done nothing to deserve his misfortune, neither did he feel any gratitude towards his deliverer. He drank his fill, and fell to grazing. The Rector experienced a sense of disillusionment, and drove the peg again into the softer earth under the willows; then raising himself, he looked hard at the old horse.

The animal continued to graze. The Rector took out his handkerchief, wiped the perspiration from his brow, and frowned. He hated ingratitude in man or beast.

Suddenly he realised that he was very tired.

"It must be over by now," he said to himself, and hastened on in the heat across the fields.

The Rectory door was open. Passing into the study, he sat down a moment to collect his thoughts. People were moving above; he heard a long moaning sound that filled his heart with terror.

He got up and rushed to the bell, but did not ring it, and ran upstairs instead. Outside his wife's room he met his children's old nurse. She was standing on the mat, with her hands to her ears, and the tears were rolling down her face.

"Oh, sir!" she said—"oh, sir!"

The Rector glared.

"Woman!" he cried—"woman!"

He covered his ears and rushed downstairs again. There was a lady in the hall. It was Mrs. Pendyce, and he ran to her, as a hurt child runs to its mother.

"My wife," he said—"my poor wife! God knows what they're doing to her up there, Mrs. Pendyce!" and he hid his face in his hands.

She, who had been a Totteridge, stood motionless; then, very gently putting her gloved hand on his thick arm, where the muscles stood out from the clenching of his hands, she said:

"Dear Mr. Barter, Dr. Wilson is so clever! Come into the drawing-room!"

The Rector, stumbling like a blind man, suffered himself to be led. He sat down on the sofa, and Mrs. Pendyce sat down beside him, her hand still on his arm; over her face passed little quivers, as though she were holding herself in. She repeated in her gentle voice:

"It will be all right—it will be all right. Come, come!"

In her concern and sympathy there was apparent, not aloofness, but a faint surprise that she should be sitting there stroking the Rector's arm.

Mr. Barter took his hands from before his face.

"If she dies," he said in a voice unlike his own, "I'll not bear it."

In answer to those words, forced from him by that which is deeper than habit, Mrs. Pendyce's hand slipped from his arm and rested on the shiny chintz covering of the sofa, patterned with green and crimson. Her soul shrank from the violence in his voice.

"Wait here," she said. "I will go up and see."

To command was foreign to her nature, but Mr. Barter, with a look such as a little rueful boy might give, obeyed.

When she was gone he stood listening at the door for some sound—for any sound, even the sound of her dress—but there was none, for her petticoat was of lawn, and the Rector was alone with a silence that he could not bear. He began to pace the room in his thick boots, his hands clenched behind him, his forehead butting the air, his lips folded; thus a bull, penned for the first time, turns and turns, showing the whites of its full eyes.

His thoughts drove here and there, fearful, angered, without guidance; he did not pray. The words he

had spoken so many times left him as though of malice. "We are all in the hands of God!—we are all in the hands of God!" Instead of them he could think of nothing but the old saying Mr. Paramor had used in the Squire's dining-room, "There is moderation in all things," and this with cruel irony kept humming in his ears. "Moderation in all things—moderation in all things!" and his wife lying there—his doing, and

There was a sound. The Rector's face, so brown and red, could not grow pale, but his great fists relaxed. Mrs. Pendyce was standing in the doorway with a peculiar half-pitiful, half-excited smile.

"It's all right—a boy. The poor dear has had a dreadful time!"

The Rector looked at her, but did not speak; then abruptly he brushed past her in the doorway, hurried into his study and locked the door. Then, and then only, he kneeled down, and remained there many minutes, thinking of nothing.

CHAPTER XII

THE SQUIRE MAKES UP HIS MIND

That same evening at nine o'clock, sitting over the last glass of a pint of port, Mr. Barter felt an irresistible longing for enjoyment, an impulse towards expansion and his fellow-men.

Taking his hat and buttoning his coat—for though the June evening was fine the easterly breeze was eager—he walked towards the village.

Like an emblem of that path to God of which he spoke on Sundays, the grey road between trim hedges threaded the shadow of the elm-trees where the rooks had long since gone to bed. A scent of wood-smoke clung in the air; the cottages appeared, the forge, the little shops facing the village green. Lights in the doors and windows deepened; a breeze, which hardly stirred the chestnut leaves, fled with a gentle rustling through the aspens. Houses and trees, houses and trees! Shelter through the past and through the days to come!

The Rector stopped the first man he saw.

"Fine weather for the hay, Aiken! How's your wife doing—a girl? Ah, ha! You want some boys! You heard of our event at the Rectory? I'm thankful to say——"

From man to man and house to house he soothed his thirst for fellowship, for the lost sense of dignity that should efface again the scar of suffering. And above him the chestnuts in their breathing stillness, the aspens with their tender rustling, seemed to watch and whisper: "Oh, little men! oh, little men!"

The moon, at the end of her first quarter, sailed out of the shadow of the churchyard—the same young moon that had sailed in her silver irony when the first Barter preached, the first Pendyce was Squire at Worsted Skeynes; the same young moon that, serene, ineffable, would come again when the last Barter slept, the last Pendyce was gone, and on their gravestones, through the amethystine air, let fall her gentle light.

The Rector thought:

'I shall set Stedman to work on that corner. We must have more room; the stones there are a hundred and fifty years old if they're a day. You can't read a single word. They'd better be the first to go.'

He passed on along the paddock footway leading to the Squire's.

Day was gone, and only the moonbeams lighted the tall grasses.

At the Hall the long French windows of the dining-room were open; the Squire was sitting there alone, brooding sadly above the remnants of the fruit he had been eating. Flanking him on either wall hung a silent company, the effigies of past Pencyces; and at the end, above the oak and silver of the sideboard, the portrait of his wife was looking at them under lifted brows, with her faint wonder.

He raised his head.

"Ah, Barter! How's your wife?"

"Doing as well as can be expected."

"Glad to hear that! A fine constitution—wonderful vitality. Port or claret?"

"Thanks; just a glass of port."

"Very trying for your nerves. I know what it is. We're different from the last generation; they thought nothing of it. When Charles was born my dear old father was out hunting all day. When my wife had George, it made me as nervous as a cat!"

The Squire stopped, then hurriedly added:

"But you're so used to it."

Mr. Barter frowned.

"I was passing Coldingham to-day," he said. "I saw Winlow. He asked after you."

"Ah! Winlow! His wife's a very nice woman. They've only the one child, I think?"

The Rector winced.

"Winlow tells me," he said abruptly, "that George has sold his horse."

The Squire's face changed. He glanced suspiciously at Mr. Barter, but the Rector was looking at his glass.

"Sold his horse! What's the meaning of that? He told you why, I suppose?"

The Rector drank off his wine.

"I never ask for reasons," he said, "where racing-men are concerned. It's my belief they know no more what they're about than so many dumb animals."

"Ah! racing-men!" said Mr. Pendency. "But George doesn't bet."

A gleam of humour shot into the Rector's eyes. He pressed his lips together.

The Squire rose.

"Come now, Barter!" he said.

The Rector blushed. He hated tale-bearing—that is, of course, in the case of a man; the case of a woman was different—and just as, when he went to Bellew he had been careful not to give George away, so now he was still more on his guard.

"No, no, Pendency."

The Squire began to pace the room, and Mr. Barter felt something stir against his foot; the spaniel John emerging at the end, just where the moonlight shone, a symbol of all that was subservient to the Squire, gazed up at his master with tragic eyes. 'Here, again,' they seemed to say, 'is something to disturb me!'

The Squire broke the silence.

"I've always counted on you, Barter; I count on you as I would on my own brother. Come, now, what's this about George?"

'After all,' thought the Rector, 'it's his father!'—"I know nothing but what they say," he blurted forth; "they talk of his having lost a lot of money. I dare say it's all nonsense. I never set much store by rumour. And if he's sold the horse, well, so much the better. He won't be tempted to gamble again."

But Horace Pendency made no answer. A single thought possessed his bewildered, angry mind:

'My son a gambler! Worsted Skeynes in the hands of a gambler!'

The Rector rose.

"It's all rumour. You shouldn't pay any attention. I should hardly think he's been such a fool. I only know that I must get back to my wife. Good-night."

And, nodding but confused, Mr. Barter went away through the French window by which he had come.

The Squire stood motionless.

A gambler!

To him, whose existence was bound up in Worsted Skeynes, whose every thought had some direct or indirect connection with it, whose son was but the occupier of that place he must at last vacate, whose religion was ancestor-worship, whose dread was change, no word could be so terrible. A gambler!

It did not occur to him that his system was in any way responsible for George's conduct. He had said to Mr. Paramor: "I never had a system; I'm no believer in systems." He had brought him up simply as a gentleman. He would have preferred that George should go into the Army, but George had failed; he would have preferred that George should devote himself to the estate, marry, and have a son, instead of idling away his time in town, but George had failed; and so, beyond furthering his desire to join the Yeomanry, and getting him proposed for the Stoics' Club, what was there he could have done to keep him out of mischief? And now he was a gambler!

Once a gambler always a gambler!

To his wife's face, looking down from the wall, he said:

"He gets it from you!"

But for all answer the face stared gently.

Turning abruptly, he left the room, and the spaniel John, for whom he had been too quick, stood with his nose to the shut door, scenting for someone to come and open it.

Mr. Pendyce went to his study, took some papers from a locked drawer, and sat a long time looking at them. One was the draft of his will, another a list of the holdings at Worsted Skeynes, their acreage and rents, a third a fair copy of the settlement, re-settling the estate when he had married. It was at this piece of supreme irony that Mr. Pendyce looked longest. He did not read it, but he thought:

'And I can't cut it! Paramor says so! A gambler!'

That "crassness" common to all men in this strange world, and in the Squire intensified, was rather a process than a quality—obedience to an instinctive dread of what was foreign to himself, an instinctive fear of seeing another's point of view, an instinctive belief in precedent. And it was closely allied to his most deep and moral quality—the power of making a decision. Those decisions might be "crass" and stupid, conduce to unnecessary suffering, have no relation to morality or reason; but he could make them, and he could stick to them. By virtue of this power he was where he was, had been for centuries, and hoped to be for centuries to come. It was in his blood. By this alone he kept at bay the destroying forces that Time brought against him, his order, his inheritance; by this alone he could continue to hand down that inheritance to his son. And at the document which did hand it down he looked with angry and resentful eyes.

Men who conceive great resolutions do not always bring them forth with the ease and silence which they themselves desire. Mr. Pendyce went to his bedroom determined to say no word of what he had resolved to do. His wife was asleep. The Squire's entrance wakened her, but she remained motionless, with her eyes closed, and it was the sight of that immobility, when he himself was so disturbed, which drew from him the words:

"Did you know that George was a gambler?"

By the light of the candle in his silver candlestick her dark eyes seemed suddenly alive.

"He's been betting; he's sold his horse. He'd never have sold that horse unless he were pushed. For all I know, he may be posted at Tattersalls!"

The sheets shivered as though she who lay within them were struggling. Then came her voice, cool and gentle:

"All young men bet, Horace; you must know that!"

The Squire at the foot of the bed held up the candle; the movement had a sinister significance.

"Do you defend him?" it seemed to say. "Do you defy me?"

Gripping the bed-rail, he cried:

"I'll have no gambler and profligate for my son! I'll not risk the estate!"

Mrs. Pendyce raised herself, and for many seconds stared at her husband. Her heart beat furiously. It had come! What she had been expecting all these days had come! Her pale lips answered:

"What do you mean? I don't understand you, Horace."

Mr. Pendyce's eyes searched here and there for what, he did not know.

"This has decided me," he said. "I'll have no half-measures. Until he can show me he's done with that woman, until he can prove he's given up this betting, until—until the heaven's fallen, I'll have no more to do with him!"

To Margery Pendyce, with all her senses quivering, that saying, "Until the heaven's fallen," was frightening beyond the rest. On the lips of her husband, those lips which had never spoken in metaphors, never swerved from the direct and commonplace, nor deserted the shibboleth of his order, such words had an evil and malignant sound.

He went on:

"I've brought him up as I was brought up myself. I never thought to have had a scamp for my son!"

Mrs. Pendyce's heart stopped fluttering.

"How dare you, Horace!" she cried.

The Squire, letting go the bed-rail, paced to and fro. There was something savage in the sound of his footsteps through the utter silence.

"I've made up my mind," he said. "The estate——"

There broke from Mrs. Pendyce a torrent of words:

"You talk of the way you brought George up! You—you never understood him! You—you never did anything for him! He just grew up like you all grow up in this——" But no word followed, for she did not know herself what was that against which her soul had blindly fluttered its wings. "You never loved him as I do! What do I care about the estate? I wish it were sold! D'you think I like living here? D'you think I've ever liked it? D'you think I've ever——" But she did not finish that saying: D'you think I've ever loved you? "My boy a scamp! I've heard you laugh and shake your head and say a hundred times: 'Young men will be young men!' You think I don't know how you'd all go on if you dared! You think I don't know how you talk among yourselves! As for gambling, you'd gamble too, if you weren't afraid! And now George is in trouble——"

As suddenly as it had broken forth the torrent of her words dried up.

Mr. Pendyce had come back to the foot of the bed, and once more gripped the rail whereon the candle, still and bright, showed them each other's faces, very changed from the faces that they knew. In the Squire's lean brown throat, between the parted points of his stiff collar, a string seemed working. He stammered:

"You—you're talking like a madwoman! My father would have cut me off, his father would have cut him off! By God! do you think I'll stand quietly by and see it all played ducks and drakes with, and see that woman here, and see her son, a—a bastard, or as bad as a bastard, in my place? You don't know me!"

The last words came through his teeth like the growl of a dog. Mrs. Pendyce made the crouching movement of one who gathers herself to spring.

"If you give him up, I shall go to him; I will never come back!"

The Squire's grip on the rail relaxed; in the light of the candle, still and steady and bright—his jaw could be seen to fall. He snapped his teeth together, and turning abruptly, said:

"Don't talk such rubbish!"

Then, taking the candle, he went into his dressing-room.

And at first his feelings were simple enough; he had merely that sore sensation, that sense of raw offence, as at some gross and violent breach of taste.

'What madness,' he thought, 'gets into women! It would serve her right if I slept here!'

He looked around him. There was no place where he could sleep, not even a sofa, and taking up the candle, he moved towards the door. But a feeling of hesitation and forlornness rising, he knew not whence, made him pause irresolute before the window.

The young moon, riding low, shot her light upon his still, lean figure, and in that light it was strange to see how grey he looked—grey from head to foot, grey, and sad, and old, as though in summary of all the squires who in turn had looked upon that prospect frosted with young moonlight to the boundary of their lands. Out in the paddock he saw his old hunter Bob, with his head turned towards the house; and from the very bottom of his heart he sighed.

In answer to that sigh came a sound of something falling outside against the door. He opened it to see what might be there. The spaniel John, lying on a cushion of blue linen, with his head propped up against the wall, darkly turned his eyes.

'I am here, master,' he seemed to say; 'it is late—I was about to go to sleep; it has done me good, however, to see you;' and hiding his eyes from the light under a long black ear, he drew a stertorous breath. Mr. Pendyce shut to the door. He had forgotten the existence of his dog. But, as though with the sight of that faithful creature he had regained belief in all that he was used to, in all that he was master of, in all that was—himself, he opened the bedroom door and took his place beside his wife.

And soon he was asleep.

PART III

CHAPTER I

MRS. PENDYCE'S ODYSSEY

But Mrs. Pendyce did not sleep. That blessed anodyne of the long day spent in his farmyards and fields was on her husband's eyes—no anodyne on hers; and through them, all that was deep, most hidden, sacred, was laid open to the darkness. If only those eyes could have been seen that night! But if the darkness had been light, nothing of all this so deep and sacred would have been there to see, for more deep, more sacred still, in Margery Pendyce, was the instinct of a lady. So elastic and so subtle, so interwoven of consideration for others and consideration for herself, so old, so very old, this instinct wrapped her from all eyes, like a suit of armour of the finest chain. The night must have been black indeed when she took that off and lay without it in the darkness.

With the first light she put it on again, and stealing from bed, bathed long and stealthily those eyes which felt as though they had been burned all night; thence went to the open window and leaned out. Dawn had passed, the birds were at morning music. Down there in the garden her flowers were meshed with the grey dew, and the trees were grey, spun with haze; dim and spectrelike, the old hunter, with his nose on the paddock rail, dozed in the summer mist.

And all that had been to her like prison out there, and all that she had loved, stole up on the breath of the unaired morning, and kept beating in her face, fluttering at the white linen above her heart like the wings of birds flying.

The first morning song ceased, and at the silence the sun smiled out in golden irony, and everything was shot with colour. A wan glow fell on Mrs. Pendyce's spirit, that for so many hours had been heavy and grey in lonely resolution. For to her gentle soul, unused to action, shrinking from violence, whose strength was the gift of the ages, passed into it against her very nature, the resolution she had formed was full of pain. Yet painful, even terrible in its demand for action, it did not waver, but shone like a star behind the dark and heavy clouds. In Margery Pendyce (who had been a Totteridge) there was no irascible and acrid "people's blood," no fierce misgivings, no ill-digested beer and cider—it was pure claret in her veins—she had nothing thick and angry in her soul to help her; that which she had resolved she must carry out, by virtue of a thin, fine flame, breathing far down in her—so far that nothing could extinguish it, so far that it had little warmth. It was not "I will not be overridden" that her spirit felt, but "I must not be over-ridden, for if I am over-ridden, I, and in me something beyond me,

more important than myself, is all undone." And though she was far from knowing this, that something was her country's civilisation, its very soul, the meaning of it all gentleness, balance. Her spirit, of that quality so little gross that it would never set up a mean or petty quarrel, make mountains out of mole-hills, distort proportion, or get images awry, had taken its stand unconsciously, no sooner than it must, no later than it ought, and from that stand would not recede. The issue had passed beyond mother love to that self-love, deepest of all, which says:

"Do this, or forfeit the essence of your soul"

And now that she stole to her bed again, she looked at her sleeping husband whom she had resolved to leave, with no anger, no reproach, but rather with a long, incurious look which toad nothing even to herself.

So, when the morning came of age and it was time to rise, by no action, look, or sign, did she betray the presence of the unusual in her soul. If this which was before her must be done, it would be carried out as though it were of no import, as though it were a daily action; nor did she force herself to quietude, or pride herself thereon, but acted thus from instinct, the instinct for avoiding fuss and unnecessary suffering that was bred in her.

Mr. Pendyce went out at half-past ten accompanied by his bailiff and the spaniel John. He had not the least notion that his wife still meant the words she had spoken overnight. He had told her again while dressing that he would have no more to do with George, that he would cut him out of his will, that he would force him by sheer rigour to come to heel, that, in short, he meant to keep his word, and it would have been unreasonable in him to believe that a woman, still less his wife, meant to keep hers.

Mrs. Pendyce spent the early part of the morning in the usual way. Half an hour after the Squire went out she ordered the carriage round, had two small trunks, which she had packed herself, brought down, and leisurely, with her little green bag, got in. To her maid, to the butler Bester, to the coachman Benson, she said that she was going up to stay with Mr. George. Norah and Bee were at the Tharps', so that there was no one to take leave of but old Roy, the Skye; and lest that leave-taking should prove too much for her, she took him with her to the station.

For her husband she left a little note, placing it where she knew he must see it at once, and no one else see it at all. "DEAR HORACE,

"I have gone up to London to be with George. My address will be Green's Hotel, Bond Street. You will remember what I said last night. Perhaps you did not quite realise that I meant it. Take care of poor old Roy, and don't let them give him too much meat this hot weather. Jackman knows better than Ellis how to manage the roses this year. I should like to be told how poor Rose Barter gets on. Please do not worry about me. I shall write to dear Gerald when necessary, but I don't feel like writing to him or the girls at present.

"Good-bye, dear Horace; I am sorry if I grieve you.

"Your wife,
"MARGERY PENDYCE."

Just as there was nothing violent in her manner of taking this step, so there was nothing violent in her conception of it. To her it was not running away, a setting of her husband at defiance; there was no concealment of address, no melodramatic "I cannot come back to you." Such methods, such pistol-holdings, would have seemed to her ridiculous. It is true that practical details, such as the financial consequences, escaped the grasp of her mind, but even in this, her view, or rather lack of view, was really the wide, the even one. Horace would not let her starve: the idea was inconceivable. There was, too, her own three hundred a year. She had, indeed, no idea how much this meant, or what it represented, neither was she concerned, for she said to herself, "I should be quite happy in a cottage with Roy and my flowers;" and though, of course, she had not the smallest experience to go by, it was quite possible that she was right. Things which to others came only by money, to a Totteridge came without, and even if they came not, could well be dispensed with—for to this quality of soul, this gentle self-sufficiency, had the ages worked to bring her.

Yet it was hastily and with her head bent that she stepped from the carriage at the station, and the old Skye, who from the brougham seat could just see out of the window, from the tears on his nose that were not his own, from something in his heart that was, knew this was no common parting and whined behind the glass.

Mrs. Pendyce told her cabman to drive to Green's Hotel, and it was only after she had arrived, arranged her things, washed, and had lunch, that the beginnings of confusion and home-sickness stirred within her. Up to then a simmering excitement had kept her from thinking of how she was to

act, or of what she had hoped, expected, dreamed, would come of her proceedings. Taking her sunshade, she walked out into Bond Street.

A passing man took off his hat.

'Dear me,' she thought, 'who was that? I ought to know!'

She had a rather vague memory for faces, and though she could not recall his name, felt more at home at once, not so lonely and adrift. Soon a quaint brightness showed in her eyes, looking at the toilettes of the passers-by, and at each shop-front, more engrossing than the last. Pleasure, like that which touches the soul of a young girl at her first dance, the souls of men landing on strange shores, touched Margery Pendency. A delicious sense of entering the unknown, of braving the unexpected, and of the power to go on doing this delightfully for ever, enveloped her with the gay London air of this bright June day. She passed a perfume shop, and thought she had never smelt anything so nice. And next door she lingered long looking at some lace; and though she said to herself, "I must not buy anything; I shall want all my money for poor George," it made no difference to that sensation of having all things to her hand.

A list of theatres, concerts, operas confronted her in the next window, together with the effigies of prominent artistes. She looked at them with an eagerness that might have seemed absurd to anyone who saw her standing there. Was there, indeed, all this going on all day and every day, to be seen and heard for so few shillings? Every year, religiously, she had visited the opera once, the theatre twice, and no concerts; her husband did not care for music that was "classical." While she was standing there a woman begged of her, looking very tired and hot, with a baby in her arms so shrivelled and so small that it could hardly be seen. Mrs. Pendency took out her purse and gave her half a crown, and as she did so felt a gush of feeling which was almost rage.

'Poor little baby!' she thought. 'There must be thousands like that, and I know nothing of them!'

She smiled to the woman, who smiled back at her; and a fat Jewish youth in a shop doorway, seeing them smile, smiled too, as though he found them charming. Mrs. Pendency had a feeling that the town was saying pretty things to her, and this was so strange and pleasant that she could hardly believe it, for Worsted Skeynes had omitted to say that sort of thing to her for over thirty years. She looked in the window of a hat shop, and found pleasure in the sight of herself. The window was kind to her grey linen, with black velvet knots and guipure, though it was two years old; but, then, she had only been able to wear it once last summer, owing to poor Hubert's death. The window was kind, too, to her cheeks, and eyes, which had that touching brightness, and to the silver-powdered darkness of her hair. And she thought: 'I don't look so very old!' But her own hat reflected in the hat-shop window displeased her now; it turned down all round, and though she loved that shape, she was afraid it was not fashionable this year. And she looked long in the window of that shop, trying to persuade herself that the hats in there would suit her, and that she liked what she did not like. In other shop windows she looked, too. It was a year since she had seen any, and for thirty-four years past she had only seen them in company with the Squire or with her daughters, none of whom cared much for shops.

The people, too, were different from the people that she saw when she went about with Horace or her girls. Almost all seemed charming, having a new, strange life, in which she—Margery Pendency—had unaccountably a little part; as though really she might come to know them, as though they might tell her something of themselves, of what they felt and thought, and even might stand listening, taking a kindly interest in what she said. This, too, was strange, and a friendly smile became fixed upon her face, and of those who saw it—shop-girls, women of fashion, coachmen, clubmen, policemen—most felt a little warmth about their hearts; it was pleasant to see on the lips of that faded lady with the silvered arching hair under a hat whose brim turned down all round.

So Mrs. Pendency came to Piccadilly and turned westward towards George's club. She knew it well, for she never failed to look at the windows when she passed, and once—on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Jubilee—had spent a whole day there to see that royal show.

She began to tremble as she neared it, for though she did not, like the Squire, torture her mind with what might or might not come to pass, care had nested in her heart.

George was not in his club, and the porter could not tell her where he was. Mrs. Pendency stood motionless. He was her son; how could she ask for his address? The porter waited, knowing a lady when he saw one. Mrs. Pendency said gently:

"Is there a room where I could write a note, or would it be——"

"Certainly not, ma'am. I can show you to a room at once."

And though it was only a mother to a son, the porter preceded her with the quiet discretion of one who aids a mistress to her lover; and perhaps he was right in his view of the relative values of love, for he had great experience, having lived long in the best society.

On paper headed with the fat white "Stoics' Club," so well known on George's letters, Mrs. Pendyce wrote what she had to say. The little dark room where she sat was without sound, save for the buzzing of a largish fly in a streak of sunlight below the blind. It was dingy in colour; its furniture was old. At the Stoics' was found neither the new art nor the resplendent drapings of those larger clubs sacred to the middle classes. The little writing-room had an air of mourning: "I am so seldom used; but be at home in me; you might find me tucked away in almost any country-house!"

Yet many a solitary Stoic had sat there and written many a note to many a woman. George, perhaps, had written to Helen Bellew at that very table with that very pen, and Mrs. Pendyce's heart ached jealously.

"DEAREST GEORGE" (she wrote),

"I have something very particular to tell you. Do come to me at Green's Hotel. Come soon, my dear. I shall be lonely and unhappy till I see you.

"Your loving
"MARGERY PENDYCE."

And this note, which was just what she would have sent to a lover, took that form, perhaps unconsciously, because she had never had a lover thus to write to.

She slipped the note and half a crown diffidently into the porter's hand; refused his offer of some tea, and walked vaguely towards the Park.

It was five o'clock; the sun was brighter than ever. People in carriages and people on foot in one leisurely, unending stream were filing in at Hyde Park Corner. Mrs. Pendyce went, too, and timidly—she was unused to traffic—crossed to the further side and took a chair. Perhaps George was in the Park and she might see him; perhaps Helen Bellew was there, and she might see her; and the thought of this made her heart beat and her eyes under their uplifted brows stare gently at each figure—old men and young men, women of the world, fresh young girls. How charming they looked, how sweetly they were dressed! A feeling of envy mingled with the joy she ever felt at seeing pretty things; she was quite unconscious that she herself was pretty under that hat whose brim turned down all round. But as she sat a leaden feeling slowly closed her heart, varied by nervous flutterings, when she saw someone whom she ought to know. And whenever, in response to a salute, she was forced to bow her head, a blush rose in her cheeks, a wan smile seemed to make confession:

"I know I look a guy; I know it's odd for me to be sitting here alone!"

She felt old—older than she had ever felt before. In the midst of this gay crowd, of all this life and sunshine, a feeling of loneliness which was almost fear—a feeling of being utterly adrift, cut off from all the world—came over her; and she felt like one of her own plants, plucked up from its native earth, with all its poor roots hanging bare, as though groping for the earth to cling to. She knew now that she had lived too long in the soil that she had hated; and was too old to be transplanted. The custom of the country—that weighty, wingless creature born of time and of the earth—had its limbs fast twined around her. It had made of her its mistress, and was not going to let her go.

CHAPTER II

THE SON AND THE MOTHER

Harder than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle is it for a man to become a member of the Stoics' Club, except by virtue of the hereditary principle; for unless he be nourished he cannot be elected, and since by the club's first rule he may have no occupation whatsoever, he must be nourished by the efforts of those who have gone before. And the longer they have gone before the more likely he is to receive no blackballs.

Yet without entering into the Stoics' Club it is difficult for a man to attain that supreme outward

control which is necessary to conceal his lack of control within; and, indeed, the club is an admirable instance of how Nature places the remedy to hand for the disease. For, perceiving how George Pendyce and hundreds of other young men "to the manner born" had lived from their birth up in no connection whatever with the struggles and sufferings of life, and fearing lest, when Life in her careless and ironical fashion brought them into abrupt contact with ill-bred events they should make themselves a nuisance by their cries of dismay and wonder, Nature had devised a mask and shaped it to its highest form within the portals of the Stoics' Club. With this mask she clothed the faces of these young men whose souls she doubted, and called them—gentlemen. And when she, and she alone, heard their poor squeaks behind that mask, as Life placed clumsy feet on them, she pitied them, knowing that it was not they who were in fault, but the unpruned system which had made them what they were. And in her pity she endowed many of them with thick skins, steady feet, and complacent souls, so that, treading in well-worn paths their lives long, they might slumber to their deaths in those halls where their fathers had slumbered to their deaths before them. But sometimes Nature (who was not yet a Socialist) rustled her wings and heaved a sigh, lest the excesses and excrescences of their system should bring about excesses and excrescences of the opposite sort. For extravagance of all kinds was what she hated, and of that particular form of extravagance which Mr. Paramor so vulgarly called "Pendycitis" she had a horror.

It may happen that for long years the likeness between father and son will lie dormant, and only when disintegrating forces threaten the links of the chain binding them together will that likeness leap forth, and by a piece of Nature's irony become the main factor in destroying the hereditary principle for which it is the silent, the most worthy, excuse.

It is certain that neither George nor his father knew the depth to which this "Pendycitis" was rooted in the other; neither suspected, not even in themselves, the amount of essential bulldog at the bottom of their souls, the strength of their determination to hold their own in the way that would cause the greatest amount of unnecessary suffering. They did not deliberately desire to cause unnecessary suffering; they simply could not help an instinct passed by time into their fibre, through atrophy of the reasoning powers and the constant mating, generation after generation, of those whose motto had been, "Kings of our own dunghills." And now George came forward, defying his mother's belief that he was a Totteridge, as champion of the principle in tail male; for in the Totteridges, from whom in this stress he diverged more and more towards his father's line, there was some freer strain, something non-provincial, and this had been so ever since Hubert de-Totteridge had led his private crusade, from which he had neglected to return. With the Pendyces it had been otherwise; from immemorial time "a county family," they had construed the phrase literally, had taken no poetical licences. Like innumerable other county families, they were perforce what their tradition decreed—provincial in their souls.

George, a man-about-town, would have stared at being called provincial, but a man cannot stare away his nature. He was provincial enough to keep Mrs. Bellew bound when she herself was tired of him, and consideration for her, and for his own self-respect asked him to give her up. He had been keeping her bound for two months or more. But there was much excuse for him. His heart was sore to breaking-point; he was sick with longing, and deep, angry wonder that he, of all men, should be cast aside like a worn-out glove. Men tired of women daily—that was the law. But what was this? His dogged instinct had fought against the knowledge as long as he could, and now that it was certain he fought against it still. George was a true Pendyce!

To the world, however, he behaved as usual. He came to the club about ten o'clock to eat his breakfast and read the sporting papers. Towards noon a hansom took him to the railway-station appropriate to whatever race-meeting was in progress, or, failing that, to the cricket-ground at Lord's, or Prince's Tennis Club. Half-past six saw him mounting the staircase at the Stoics' to that card-room where his effigy still hung, with its look of "Hard work, hard work; but I must keep it going!" At eight he dined, a bottle of champagne screwed deep down into ice, his face flushed with the day's sun, his shirt-front and his hair shining with gloss. What happier man in all great London!

But with the dark the club's swing-doors opened for his passage into the lighted streets, and till next morning the world knew him no more. It was then that he took revenge for all the hours he wore a mask. He would walk the pavements for miles trying to wear himself out, or in the Park fling himself down on a chair in the deep shadow of the trees, and sit there with his arms folded and his head bowed down. On other nights he would go into some music-hall, and amongst the glaring lights, the vulgar laughter, the scent of painted women, try for a moment to forget the face, the laugh, the scent of that woman for whom he craved. And all the time he was jealous, with a dumb, vague jealousy of he knew not whom; it was not his nature to think impersonally, and he could not believe that a woman would drop him except for another man. Often he went to her Mansions, and walked round and round casting a stealthy stare at her windows. Twice he went up to her door, but came away without ringing the bell. One evening, seeing a light in her sitting-room, he rang, but there came no answer. Then an evil spirit

leaped up in him, and he rang again and again. At last he went away to his room—a studio he had taken near—and began to write to her. He was long composing that letter, and many times tore it up; he despised the expression of feelings in writing. He only tried because his heart wanted relief so badly. And this, in the end, was all that he produced:

"I know you were in to-night. It's the only time I've come. Why couldn't you have let me in? You've no right to treat me like this. You are leading me the life of a dog."

GEORGE.

The first light was silvering the gloom above the river, the lamps were paling to the day, when George went out and dropped this missive in the letter-box. He came back to the river and lay down on an empty bench under the plane-trees of the Embankment, and while he lay there one of those without refuge or home, who lie there night after night, came up unseen and looked at him.

But morning comes, and with it that sense of the ridiculous, so merciful to suffering men. George got up lest anyone should see a Stoic lying there in his evening clothes; and when it became time he put on his mask and sallied forth. At the club he found his mother's note, and set out for her hotel.

Mrs. Pendyce was not yet down, but sent to ask him to come up. George found her standing in her dressing-gown in the middle of the room, as though she knew not where to place herself for this, their meeting. Only when he was quite close did she move and throw her arms round his neck. George could not see her face, and his own was hidden from her, but through the thin dressing-gown he felt her straining to him, and her arms that had pulled his head down quivering; and for a moment it seemed to him as if he were dropping a burden. But only for a moment, for at the clinging of those arms his instinct took fright. And though she was smiling, the tears were in her eyes, and this offended him.

"Don't, mother!"

Mrs. Pendyce's answer was a long look. George could not bear it, and turned away.

"Well," he said gruffly, "when you can tell me what's brought you up——"

Mrs. Pendyce sat down on the sofa. She had been brushing her hair; though silvered, it was still thick and soft, and the sight of it about her shoulders struck George. He had never thought of her having hair that would hang down.

Sitting on the sofa beside her, he felt her fingers stroking his, begging him not to take offence and leave her. He felt her eyes trying to see his eyes, and saw her lips trembling; but a stubborn, almost evil smile was fixed upon his face.

"And so, dear—and so," she stammered, "I told your father that I couldn't see that done, and so I came up to you."

Many sons have found no hardship in accepting all that their mothers do for them as a matter of right, no difficulty in assuming their devotion a matter of course, no trouble in leaving their own affections to be understood; but most sons have found great difficulty in permitting their mothers to diverge one inch from the conventional, to swerve one hair's breadth from the standard of propriety appropriate to mothers of men of their importance.

It is decreed of mothers that their birth pangs shall not cease until they die.

And George was shocked to hear his mother say that she had left his father to come to him. It affected his self-esteem in a strange and subtle way. The thought that tongues might wag about her revolted his manhood and his sense of form. It seemed strange, incomprehensible, and wholly wrong; the thought, too, gashed through his mind: 'She is trying to put pressure on me!'

"If you think I'll give her up, Mother——" he said.

Mrs. Pendyce's fingers tightened.

"No, dear," she answered painfully; "of course, if she loves you so much, I couldn't ask you. That's why I——"

George gave a grim little laugh.

"What on earth can you do, then? What's the good of your coming up like this? How are you to get on here all alone? I can fight my own battles. You'd much better go back."

Mrs. Pendyce broke in:

"Oh, George; I can't see you cast off from us! I must be with you!"

George felt her trembling all over. He got up and walked to the window.

Mrs. Pendyce's voice followed:

"I won't try to separate you, George; I promise, dear. I couldn't, if she loves you, and you love her so!"

Again George laughed that grim little laugh. And the fact that he was deceiving her, meant to go on deceiving her, made him as hard as iron.

"Go back, Mother!" he said. "You'll only make things worse. This isn't a woman's business. Let father do what he likes; I can hold on!"

Mrs. Pendyce did not answer, and he was obliged to look round. She was sitting perfectly still with her hands in her lap, and his man's hatred of anything conspicuous happening to a woman, to his own mother of all people, took fiercer fire.

"Go back!" he repeated, "before there's any fuss! What good can you possibly do? You can't leave father; that's absurd! You must go!"

Mrs. Pendyce answered:

"I can't do that, dear."

George made an angry sound, but she was so motionless and pale that he dimly perceived how she was suffering, and how little he knew of her who had borne him.

Mrs. Pendyce broke the silence:

"But you, George dear? What is going to happen? How are you going to manage?" And suddenly clasping her hands: "Oh! what is coming?"

Those words, embodying all that had been in his heart so long, were too much for George. He went abruptly to the door.

"I can't stop now," he said; "I'll come again this evening."

Mrs. Pendyce looked up.

"Oh, George"

But as she had the habit of subordinating her feelings to the feelings of others, she said no more, but tried to smile.

That smile smote George to the heart.

"Don't worry, Mother; try and cheer up. We'll go to the theatre. You get the tickets!"

And trying to smile too, but turning lest he should lose his self-control, he went away.

In the hall he came on his uncle, General Pendyce. He came on him from behind, but knew him at once by that look of feeble activity about the back of his knees, by his sloping yet upright shoulders, and the sound of his voice, with its dry and querulous precision, as of a man whose occupation has been taken from him.

The General turned round.

"Ah, George," he said, "your mother's here, isn't she? Look at this that your father's sent me!"

He held out a telegram in a shaky hand.

"Margery up at Green's Hotel. Go and see her at once.

HORACE."

And while George read the General looked at his nephew with eyes that were ringed by little circles of darker pigment, and had crow's-footed purses of skin beneath, earned by serving his country in tropical climes.

"What's the meaning of it?" he said. "Go and see her? Of course, I'll go and see her! Always glad to see your mother. But where's all the hurry?"

George perceived well enough that his father's pride would not let him write to her, and though it was for himself that his mother had taken this step, he sympathised with his father. The General fortunately gave him little time to answer.

"She's up to get herself some dresses, I suppose? I've seen nothing of you for a long time. When are you coming to dine with me? I heard at Epsom that you'd sold your horse. What made you do that? What's your father telegraphing to me like this for? It's not like him. Your mother's not ill, is she?"

George shook his head, and muttering something about "Sorry, an engagement—awful hurry," was gone.

Left thus abruptly to himself, General Pendyce summoned a page, slowly pencilled something on his card, and with his back to the only persons in the hall, waited, his hands folded on the handle of his cane. And while he waited he tried as far as possible to think of nothing. Having served his country, his time now was nearly all devoted to waiting, and to think fatigued and made him feel discontented, for he had had sunstroke once, and fever several times. In the perfect precision of his collar, his boots, his dress, his figure; in the way from time to time he cleared his throat, in the strange yellow driedness of his face between his carefully brushed whiskers, in the immobility of his white hands on his cane, he gave the impression of a man sucked dry by a system. Only his eyes, restless and opinionated, betrayed the essential Pendyce that was behind.

He went up to the ladies' drawing-room, clutching that telegram. It worried him. There was something odd about it, and he was not accustomed to pay calls in the morning. He found his sister-in-law seated at an open window, her face unusually pink, her eyes rather defiantly bright. She greeted him gently, and General Pendyce was not the man to discern what was not put under his nose. Fortunately for him, that had never been his practice.

"How are you, Margery?" he said. "Glad to see you in town. How's Horace? Look here what he's sent me!" He offered her the telegram, with the air of slightly avenging an offence; then added in surprise, as though he had just thought of it: "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Mrs. Pendyce read the telegram, and she, too, like George, felt sorry for the sender.

"Nothing, thanks, dear Charles," she said slowly. "I'm all right. Horace gets so nervous!"

General Pendyce looked at her; for a moment his eyes flickered, then, since the truth was so improbable and so utterly in any case beyond his philosophy, he accepted her statement.

"He shouldn't go sending telegrams like this," he said. "You might have been ill for all I could tell. It spoiled my breakfast!" For though, as a fact, it had not prevented his completing a hearty meal, he fancied that he felt hungry. "When I was quartered at Halifax there was a fellow who never sent anything but telegrams. Telegraph Jo they called him. He commanded the old Bluebottles. You know the old Bluebottles? If Horace is going to take to this sort of thing he'd better see a specialist; it's almost certain to mean a breakdown. You're up about dresses, I see. When do you come to town? The season's getting on."

Mrs. Pendyce was not afraid of her husband's brother, for though punctilious and accustomed to his own way with inferiors, he was hardly a man to inspire awe in his social equals. It was, therefore, not through fear that she did not tell him the truth, but through an instinct for avoiding all unnecessary suffering too strong for her, and because the truth was really untellable. Even to herself it seemed slightly ridiculous, and she knew the poor General would take it so dreadfully to heart.

"I don't know about coming up this season. The garden is looking so beautiful, and there's Bee's engagement. The dear child is so happy!"

The General caressed a whisker with his white hand.

"Ah yes," he said—"young Tharp! Let's see, he's not the eldest. His brother's in my old corps. What does this young fellow do with himself?"

Mrs. Pendyce answered:

"He's only farming. I'm afraid he'll have nothing to speak of, but he's a dear good boy. It'll be a long engagement. Of course, there's nothing in farming, and Horace insists on their having a thousand a year. It depends so much on Mr. Tharp. I think they could do perfectly well on seven hundred to start with, don't you, Charles?"

General Pendyce's answer was not more conspicuously to the point than usual, for he was a man who loved to pursue his own trains of thought.

"What about George?", he said. "I met him in the hall as I was coming in, but he ran off in the very deuce of a hurry. They told me at Epsom that he was hard hit."

His eyes, distracted by a fly for which he had taken a dislike, failed to observe his sister-in-law's face.

"Hard hit?" she repeated.

"Lost a lot of money. That won't do, you know, Margery—that won't do. A little mild gambling's one thing."

Mrs. Pendyce said nothing; her face was rigid: It was the face of a woman on the point of saying: "Do not compel me to hint that you are boring me!"

The General went on:

"A lot of new men have taken to racing that no one knows anything about. That fellow who bought George's horse, for instance; you'd never have seen his nose in Tattersalls when I was a young man. I find when I go racing I don't know half the colours. It spoils the pleasure. It's no longer the close borough that it was. George had better take care what he's about. I can't imagine what we're coming to!"

On Margery Pendyce's hearing, those words, "I can't imagine what we're coming to," had fallen for four-and-thirty years, in every sort of connection, from many persons. It had become part of her life, indeed, to take it for granted that people could imagine nothing; just as the solid food and solid comfort of Worsted Skeynes and the misty mornings and the rain had become part of her life. And it was only the fact that her nerves were on edge and her heart bursting that made those words seem intolerable that morning; but habit was even now too strong, and she kept silence.

The General, to whom an answer was of no great moment, pursued his thoughts.

"And you mark my words, Margery; the elections will go against us. The country's in a dangerous state."

Mrs. Pendyce said:

"Oh, do you think the Liberals will really get in?"

From custom there was a shade of anxiety in her voice which she did not feel.

"Think?" repeated General Pendyce. "I pray every night to God they won't!"

Folding both hands on the silver knob of his Malacca cane, he stared over them at the opposing wall; and there was something universal in that fixed stare, a sort of blank and not quite selfish apprehension. Behind his personal interests his ancestors had drilled into him the impossibility of imagining that he did not stand for the welfare of his country. Mrs. Pendyce, who had so often seen her husband look like that, leaned out of the window above the noisy street.

The General rose.

"Well," he said, "if I can't do anything for you, Margery, I'll take myself off; you're busy with your dressmakers. Give my love to Horace, and tell him not to send me another telegram like that."

And bending stiffly, he pressed her hand with a touch of real courtesy and kindness, took up his hat, and went away. Mrs. Pendyce, watching him descend the stairs, watching his stiff sloping shoulders, his head with its grey hair brushed carefully away from the centre parting, the backs of his feeble, active knees, put her hand to her breast and sighed, for with him she seemed to see descending all her past life, and that one cannot see unmoved.

CHAPTER III

MRS. BELLEW SQUARES HER ACCOUNTS

Mrs. Bellew sat on her bed smoothing out the halves of a letter; by her side was her jewel-case. Taking from it an amethyst necklet, an emerald pendant, and a diamond ring, she wrapped them in

cottonwool, and put them in an envelope. The other jewels she dropped one by one into her lap, and sat looking at them. At last, putting two necklets and two rings back into the jewel-case, she placed the rest in a little green box, and taking that and the envelope, went out. She called a hansom, drove to a post-office, and sent a telegram:

PENDYCE, STOICS' CLUB.

"Be at studio six to seven.—H."

From the post-office she drove to her jeweller's, and many a man who saw her pass with the flush on her cheeks and the smouldering look in her eyes, as though a fire were alight within her, turned in his tracks and bitterly regretted that he knew not who she was, or whither going. The jeweller took the jewels from the green box, weighed them one by one, and slowly examined each through his lens. He was a little man with a yellow wrinkled face and a weak little beard, and having fixed in his mind the sum that he would give, he looked at his client prepared to mention less. She was sitting with her elbows on the counter, her chin resting in her hands, and her eyes were fixed on him. He decided somehow to mention the exact sum.

"Is that all?"

"Yes, madam; that is the utmost."

"Very well, but I must have it now in cash!"

The jeweller's eyes flickered.

"It's a large sum," he said—"most unusual. I haven't got such a sum in the place."

"Then please send out and get it, or I must go elsewhere."

The jeweller brought his hands together, and washed them nervously.

"Excuse me a moment; I'll consult my partner."

He went away, and from afar he and his partner spied her nervously. He came back with a forced smile. Mrs. Bellew was sitting as he had left her.

"It's a fortunate chance; I think we can just do it, madam."

"Give me notes, please, and a sheet of paper." The jeweller brought them.

Mrs. Bellew wrote a letter, enclosed it with the bank notes in the bulky envelope she had brought, addressed it, and sealed the whole.

"Call a cab, please!"

The jeweller called a cab.

"Chelsea Embankment!"

The cab bore her away.

Again in the crowded streets so full of traffic, people turned to look after her. The cabman, who put her down at the Albert Bridge, gazed alternately at the coins in his hands and the figure of his fare, and wheeling his cab towards the stand, jerked his thumb in her direction.

Mrs. Bellew walked fast down a street till, turning a corner, she came suddenly on a small garden with three poplar-trees in a row. She opened its green gate without pausing, went down a path, and stopped at the first of three green doors. A young man with a beard, resembling an artist, who was standing behind the last of the three doors, watched her with a knowing smile on his face. She took out a latch-key, put it in the lock, opened the door, and passed in.

The sight of her face seemed to have given the artist an idea. Propping his door open, he brought an easel and canvas, and setting them so that he could see the corner where she had gone in, began to sketch.

An old stone fountain with three stone frogs stood in the garden near that corner, and beyond it was a flowering currant-bush, and beyond this again the green door on which a slanting gleam of sunlight fell. He worked for an hour, then put his easel back and went out to get his tea.

Mrs. Bellew came out soon after he was gone. She closed the door behind her, and stood still. Taking from her pocket the bulky envelope, she slipped it into the letter-box; then bending down, picked up a

twig, and placed it in the slit, to prevent the lid falling with a rattle. Having done this, she swept her hands down her face and breast as though to brush something from her, and walked away. Beyond the outer gate she turned to the left, and took the same street back to the river. She walked slowly, luxuriously, looking about her. Once or twice she stopped, and drew a deep breath, as though she could not have enough of the air. She went as far as the Embankment, and stood leaning her elbows on the parapet. Between the finger and thumb of one hand she held a small object on which the sun was shining. It was a key. Slowly, luxuriously, she stretched her hand out over the water, parted her thumb and finger, and let it fall.

CHAPTER IV

MRS. PENDYCE'S INSPIRATION

But George did not come to take his mother to the theatre, and she whose day had been passed in looking forward to the evening, passed that evening in a drawing-room full of furniture whose history she did not know, and a dining-room full of people eating in twos and threes and fours, at whom she might look, but to whom she must not speak, to whom she did not even want to speak, so soon had the wheel of life rolled over her wonder and her expectation, leaving it lifeless in her breast. And all that night, with one short interval of sleep, she ate of bitter isolation and futility, and of the still more bitter knowledge: "George does not want me; I'm no good to him!"

Her heart, seeking consolation, went back again and again to the time when he had wanted her; but it was far to go, to the days of holland suits, when all those things that he desired—slices of pineapple, Benson's old carriage-whip, the daily reading out of "Tom Brown's School-days," the rub with Elliman when he sprained his little ankle, the tuck-up in bed—were in her power alone to give.

This night she saw with fatal clearness that since he went to school he had never wanted her at all. She had tried so many years to believe that he did, till it had become part of her life, as it was part of her life to say her prayers night and morning; and now she found it was all pretence. But, lying awake, she still tried to believe it, because to that she had been bound when she brought him, firstborn, into the world. Her other son, her daughters, she loved them too, but it was not the same thing, quite; she had never wanted them to want her, because that part of her had been given once for all to George.

The street noises died down at last; she had slept two hours when they began again. She lay listening. And the noises and her thoughts became tangled in her exhausted brain—one great web of weariness, a feeling that it was all senseless and unnecessary, the emanation of cross-purposes and cross-grainedness, the negation of that gentle moderation, her own most sacred instinct. And an early wasp, attracted by the sweet perfumes of her dressing-table, roused himself from the corner where he had spent the night, and began to hum and hover over the bed. Mrs. Pendyce was a little afraid of wasps, so, taking a moment when he was otherwise engaged, she stole out, and fanned him with her nightdress-case till, perceiving her to be a lady, he went away. Lying down again, she thought: 'People will worry them until they sting, and then kill them; it's so unreasonable,' not knowing that she was putting all her thoughts on suffering in a single nutshell.

She breakfasted upstairs, unsolaced by any news from George. Then with no definite hope, but a sort of inner certainty, she formed the resolution to call on Mrs. Bellew. She determined, however, first to visit Mr. Paramor, and, having but a hazy notion of the hour when men begin to work, she did not dare to start till past eleven, and told her cabman to drive her slowly. He drove her, therefore, faster than his wont. In Leicester Square the passage of a Personage between two stations blocked the traffic, and on the footways were gathered a crowd of simple folk with much in their hearts and little in their stomachs, who raised a cheer as the Personage passed. Mrs. Pendyce looked eagerly from her cab, for she too loved a show.

The crowd dispersed, and the cab went on.

It was the first time she had ever found herself in the business apartment of any professional man less important than a dentist. From the little waiting-room, where they handed her the Times, which she could not read from excitement, she caught sight of rooms lined to the ceilings with leather books and black tin boxes, initialed in white to indicate the brand, and of young men seated behind lumps of paper that had been written on. She heard a perpetual clicking noise which roused her interest, and smelled a peculiar odour of leather and disinfectant which impressed her disagreeably. A youth with

reddish hair and a pen in his hand passed through and looked at her with a curious stare immediately averted. She suddenly felt sorry for him and all those other young men behind the lumps of paper, and the thought went flashing through her mind, 'I suppose it's all because people can't agree.'

She was shown in to Mr. Paramor at last. In his large empty room, with its air of past grandeur, she sat gazing at three La France roses in a tumbler of water with the feeling that she would never be able to begin.

Mr. Paramor's eyebrows, which jutted from his clean, brown face like little clumps of pothooks, were iron-grey, and iron-grey his hair brushed back from his high forehead. Mrs. Pendyce wondered why he looked five years younger than Horace, who was his junior, and ten years younger than Charles, who, of course, was younger still. His eyes, which from iron-grey some inner process of spiritual manufacture had made into steel colour, looked young too, although they were grave; and the smile which twisted up the corners of his mouth looked very young.

"Well," he said, "it's a great pleasure to see you."

Mrs. Pendyce could only answer with a smile.

Mr. Paramor put the roses to his nose.

"Not so good as yours," he said, "are they? but the best I can do."

Mrs. Pendyce blushed with pleasure.

"My garden is looking so beautiful——" Then, remembering that she no longer had a garden, she stopped; but remembering also that, though she had lost her garden, Mr. Paramor still had his, she added quickly: "And yours, Mr. Paramor—I'm sure it must be looking lovely."

Mr. Paramor drew out a kind of dagger with which he had stabbed some papers to his desk, and took a letter from the bundle.

"Yes," he said, "it's looking very nice. You'd like to see this, I expect."

"Bellew v. Bellew and Pendyce" was written at the top. Mrs. Pendyce stared at those words as though fascinated by their beauty; it was long before she got beyond them. For the first time the full horror of these matters pierced the kindly armour that lies between mortals and what they do not like to think of. Two men and a woman wrangling, fighting, tearing each other before the eyes of all the world. A woman and two men stripped of charity and gentleness, of moderation and sympathy—stripped of all that made life decent and lovable, squabbling like savages before the eyes of all the world. Two men, and one of them her son, and between them a woman whom both of them had loved! "Bellew v. Bellew and Pendyce"! And this would go down to fame in company with the pitiful stories she had read from time to time with a sort of offended interest; in company with "Snooks v. Snooks and Stiles," "Horaday v. Horaday," "Bethany v. Bethany and Sweetenham." In company with all those cases where everybody seemed so dreadful, yet where she had often and often felt so sorry, as if these poor creatures had been fastened in the stocks by some malignant, loutish spirit, for all that would to come and jeer at. And horror filled her heart. It was all so mean, and gross, and common.

The letter contained but a few words from a firm of solicitors confirming an appointment. She looked up at Mr. Paramor. He stopped pencilling on his blotting-paper, and said at once:

"I shall be seeing these people myself tomorrow afternoon. I shall do my best to make them see reason."

She felt from his eyes that he knew what she was suffering, and was even suffering with her.

"And if—if they won't?"

"Then I shall go on a different tack altogether, and they must look out for themselves."

Mrs. Pendyce sank back in her chair; she seemed to smell again that smell of leather and disinfectant, and hear a sound of incessant clicking. She felt faint, and to disguise that faintness asked at random, "What does 'without prejudice' in this letter mean?"

Mr. Paramor smiled.

"That's an expression we always use," he said. "It means that when we give a thing away, we reserve to ourselves the right of taking it back again."

Mrs. Pendyce, who did not understand, murmured:

"I see. But what have they given away?"

Paramor put his elbows on the desk, and lightly pressed his finger-tips together.

"Well," he said, "properly speaking, in a matter like this, the other side and I are cat and dog.

"We are supposed to know nothing about each other and to want to know less, so that when we do each other a courtesy we are obliged to save our faces by saying, 'We don't really do you one.' D'you understand?"

Again Mrs. Pendyce murmured:

"I see."

"It sounds a little provincial, but we lawyers exist by reason of provincialism. If people were once to begin making allowances for each other, I don't know where we should be."

Mrs. Pendyce's eyes fell again on those words, "Bellew v. Bellew and Pendyce," and again, as though fascinated by their beauty, rested there.

"But you wanted to see me about something else too, perhaps?" said Mr. Paramor.

A sudden panic came over her.

"Oh no, thank you. I just wanted to know what had been done. I've come up on purpose to see George. You told me that I——"

Mr. Paramor hastened to her aid.

"Yes, yes; quite right—quite right."

"Horace hasn't come with me."

"Good!"

"He and George sometimes don't quite——"

"Hit it off? They're too much alike."

"Do you think so? I never saw——"

"Not in face, not in face; but they've both got——"

Mr. Paramor's meaning was lost in a smile; and Mrs. Pendyce, who did not know that the word "Pendycitis" was on the tip of his tongue, smiled vaguely too.

"George is very determined," she said. "Do you think—oh, do you think, Mr. Paramor, that you will be able to persuade Captain Bellew's solicitors——"

Mr. Paramor threw himself back in his chair, and his hand covered what he had written on his blotting-paper.

"Yes," he said slowly——"oh yes, yes!"

But Mrs. Pendyce had had her answer. She had meant to speak of her visit to Helen Bellew, but now her thought was:

'He won't persuade them; I feel it. Let me get away!'

Again she seemed to hear the incessant clicking, to smell leather and disinfectant, to see those words, "Bellew v. Bellew and, Pendyce."

She held out her hand.

Mr. Paramor took it in his own and looked at the floor.

"Good-bye," he said—"good-bye. What's your address—Green's Hotel? I'll come and tell you what I do. I know—I know!"

Mrs. Pendyce, on whom those words "I know—I know!" had a strange, emotionalising effect, as though no one had ever known before, went away with quivering lips. In her life no one had ever

"known"—not indeed that she could or would complain of such a trifle, but the fact remained. And at this moment, oddly, she thought of her husband, and wondered what he was doing, and felt sorry for him.

But Mr. Paramor went back to his seat and stared at what he had written on his blotting paper. It ran thus:

"We stand on our petty rights here,
And our potty dignity there;
We make no allowance for others,
They make no allowance for us;
We catch hold of them by the ear,
They grab hold of us by the hair
The result is a bit of a muddle
That ends in a bit of a fuss."

He saw that it neither rhymed nor scanned, and with a grave face he tore it up.

Again Mrs. Pendyce told her cabman to drive slowly, and again he drove her faster than usual; yet that drive to Chelsea seemed to last for ever, and interminable were the turnings which the cabman took, each one shorter than the last, as if he had resolved to see how much his horse's mouth could bear.

'Poor thing!' thought Mrs. Pendyce; 'its mouth must be so sore, and it's quite unnecessary.' She put her hand up through the trap. "Please take me in a straight line. I don't like corners."

The cabman obeyed. It worried him terribly to take one corner instead of the six he had purposed on his way; and when she asked him his fare, he charged her a shilling extra for the distance he had saved by going straight. Mrs. Pendyce paid it, knowing no better, and gave him sixpence over, thinking it might benefit the horse; and the cabman, touching his hat, said:

"Thank you, my lady," for to say "my lady" was his principle when he received eighteen pence above his fare.

Mrs. Pendyce stood quite a minute on the pavement, stroking the horse's nose and thinking:

'I must go in; it's silly to come all this way and not go in!'

But her heart beat so that she could hardly swallow.

At last she rang.

Mrs. Bellew was seated on the sofa in her little drawing-room whistling to a canary in the open window. In the affairs of men there is an irony constant and deep, mingled with the very springs of life. The expectations of Mrs. Pendyce, those timid apprehensions of this meeting which had racked her all the way, were lamentably unfulfilled. She had rehearsed the scene ever since it came into her head; the reality seemed unfamiliar. She felt no nervousness and no hostility, only a sort of painful interest and admiration. And how could this or any other woman help falling in love with George?

The first uncertain minute over, Mrs. Bellew's eyes were as friendly as if she had been quite within her rights in all she had done; and Mrs. Pendyce could not help meeting friendliness halfway.

"Don't be angry with me for coming. George doesn't know. I felt I must come to see you. Do you think that you two quite know all you're doing? It seems so dreadful, and it's not only yourselves, is it?"

Mrs. Bellew's smile vanished.

"Please don't say 'you two,'" she said.

Mrs. Pendyce stammered:

"I don't understand."

Mrs. Bellew looked her in the face and smiled; and as she smiled she seemed to become a little coarser.

"Well, I think it's quite time you did! I don't love your son. I did once, but I don't now. I told him so yesterday, once for all."

Mrs. Pendyce heard those words, which made so vast, so wonderful a difference—words which should

have been like water in a wilderness —with a sort of horror, and all her spirit flamed up into her eyes.

"You don't love him?" she cried.

She felt only a blind sense of insult and affront.

This woman tire of George? Tire of her son? She looked at Mrs. Bellew, on whose face was a kind of inquisitive compassion, with eyes that had never before held hatred.

"You have tired of him? You have given him up? Then the sooner I go to him the better! Give me the address of his rooms, please."

Helen Bellew knelt down at the bureau and wrote on an envelope, and the grace of the woman pierced Mrs. Pendyce to the heart.

She took the paper. She had never learned the art of abuse, and no words could express what was in her heart, so she turned and went out.

Mrs. Bellew's voice sounded quick and fierce behind her.

"How could I help getting tired? I am not you. Now go!"

Mrs. Pendyce wrenched open the outer door. Descending the stairs, she felt for the bannister. She had that awful sense of physical soreness and shrinking which violence, whether their own or others', brings to gentle souls.

CHAPTER V

THE MOTHER AND THE SON

To Mrs. Pendyce, Chelsea was an unknown land, and to find her way to George's rooms would have taken her long had she been by nature what she was by name, for Pendyces never asked their way to anything, or believed what they were told, but found out for themselves with much unnecessary trouble, of which they afterwards complained.

A policeman first, and then a young man with a beard, resembling an artist, guided her footsteps. The latter, who was leaning by a gate, opened it.

"In here," he said; "the door in the corner on the right."

Mrs. Pendyce walked down the little path, past the ruined fountain with its three stone frogs, and stood by the first green door and waited. And while she waited she struggled between fear and joy; for now that she was away from Mrs. Bellew she no longer felt a sense of insult. It was the actual sight of her that had aroused it, so personal is even the most gentle heart.

She found the rusty handle of a bell amongst the creeper-leaves, and pulled it. A cracked metallic tinkle answered her, but no one came; only a faint sound as of someone pacing to and fro. Then in the street beyond the outer gate a coster began calling to the sky, and in the music of his prayers the sound was lost. The young man with a beard, resembling an artist, came down the path.

"Perhaps you could tell me, sir, if my son is out?"

"I've not seen him go out; and I've been painting here all the morning."

Mrs. Pendyce looked with wonder at an easel which stood outside another door a little further on. It seemed to her strange that her son should live in such a place.

"Shall I knock for you?" said the artist. "All these knockers are stiff."

"If you would be so kind!"

The artist knocked.

"He must be in," he said. "I haven't taken my eyes off his door, because I've been painting it."

Mrs. Pendyce gazed at the door.

"I can't get it," said the artist. "It's worrying me to death."

Mrs. Pendyce looked at him doubtfully.

"Has he no servant?" she said.

"Oh no," said the artist; "it's a studio. The light's all wrong. I wonder if you would mind standing just as you are for one second; it would help me a lot!"

He moved back and curved his hand over his eyes, and through Mrs. Pendyce there passed a shiver.

'Why doesn't George open the door?' she thought. 'What—what is this man doing?'

The artist dropped his hand.

"Thanks so much!" he said. "I'll knock again. There! that would raise the dead!"

And he laughed.

An unreasoning terror seized on Mrs. Pendyce.

"Oh," she stammered, "I must get in—I must get in!"

She took the knocker herself, and fluttered it against the door.

"You see," said the artist, "they're all alike; these knockers are as stiff' as pokers."

He again curved his hand over his eyes. Mrs. Pendyce leaned against the door; her knees were trembling violently.

'What is happening?' she thought. 'Perhaps he's only asleep, perhaps—Oh God!'

She beat the knocker with all her force. The door yielded, and in the space stood George. Choking back a sob, Mrs. Pendyce went in. He banged the door behind her.

For a full minute she did not speak, possessed still by that strange terror and by a sort of shame. She did not even look at her son, but cast timid glances round his room. She saw a gallery at the far end, and a conical roof half made of glass. She saw curtains hanging all the gallery length, a table with tea-things and decanters, a round iron stove, rugs on the floor, and a large full-length mirror in the centre of the wall. A silver cup of flowers was reflected in that mirror. Mrs. Pendyce saw that they were dead, and the sense of their vague and nauseating odour was her first definite sensation.

"Your flowers are dead, my darling," she said. "I must get you some fresh!"

Not till then did she look at George. There were circles under his eyes; his face was yellow; it seemed to her that it had shrunk. This terrified her, and she thought:

'I must show nothing; I must keep my head!'

She was afraid—afraid of something desperate in his face, of something desperate and headlong, and she was afraid of his stubbornness, the dumb, unthinking stubbornness that holds to what has been because it has been, that holds to its own when its own is dead. She had so little of this quality herself that she could not divine where it might lead him; but she had lived in the midst of it all her married life, and it seemed natural that her son should be in danger from it now.

Her terror called up her self-possession. She drew George down on the sofa by her side, and the thought flashed through her: 'How many times has he not sat here with that woman in his arms!'

"You didn't come for me last night, dear! I got the tickets, such good ones!"

George smiled.

"No," he said; "I had something else to see to!"

At sight of that smile Margery Pendyce's heart beat till she felt sick, but she, too, smiled.

"What a nice place you have here, darling!"

"There's room to walk about."

Mrs. Pendyce remembered the sound she had heard of pacing to and fro. From his not asking her how she had found out where he lived she knew that he must have guessed where she had been, that there was nothing for either of them to tell the other. And though this was a relief, it added to her terror—the terror of that which is desperate. All sorts of images passed through her mind. She saw George back in her bedroom after his first run with the hounds, his chubby cheek scratched from forehead to jaw, and the bloodstained pad of a cub fox in his little gloved hand. She saw him sauntering into her room the last day of the 1880 match at Lord's, with a battered top-hat, a blackened eye, and a cane with a light-blue tassel. She saw him deadly pale with tightened lips that afternoon after he had escaped from her, half cured of laryngitis, and stolen out shooting by himself, and she remembered his words: "Well, Mother, I couldn't stand it any longer; it was too beastly slow!"

Suppose he could not stand it now! Suppose he should do something rash! She took out her handkerchief.

"It's very hot in here, dear; your forehead is quite wet!"

She saw his eyes turn on her suspiciously, and all her woman's wit stole into her own eyes, so that they did not flicker, but looked at him with matter-of-fact concern.

"That skylight is what does it," he said. "The sun gets full on there."

Mrs. Pendyce looked at the skylight.

"It seems odd to see you here, dear, but it's very nice—so unconventional. You must let me put away those poor flowers!" She went to the silver cup and bent over them. "My dear boy, they're quite nasty! Do throw them outside somewhere; it's so dreadful, the smell of old flowers!"

She held the cup out, covering her nose with her handkerchief.

George took the cup, and like a cat spying a mouse, Mrs. Pendyce watched him take it out into the garden. As the door closed, quicker, more noiseless than a cat, she slipped behind the curtains.

'I know he has a pistol,' she thought.

She was back in an instant, gliding round the room, hunting with her eyes and hands, but she saw nothing, and her heart lightened, for she was terrified of all such things.

'It's only these terrible first hours,' she thought.

When George came back she was standing where he had left her. They sat down in silence, and in that silence, the longest of her life, she seemed to feel all that was in his heart, all the blackness and bitter aching, the rage of defeat and starved possession, the lost delight, the sensation of ashes and disgust; and yet her heart was full enough already of relief and shame, compassion, jealousy, love, and deep longing. Only twice was the silence broken. Once when he asked her whether she had lunched, and she who had eaten nothing all day answered:

"Yes, dear—yes."

Once when he said:

"You shouldn't have come here, Mother; I'm a bit out of sorts!"

She watched his face, dearest to her in all the world, bent towards the floor, and she so yearned to hold it to her breast that, since she dared not, the tears stole up, and silently rolled down her cheeks. The stillness in that room, chosen for remoteness, was like the stillness of a tomb, and, as in a tomb, there was no outlook on the world, for the glass of the skylight was opaque.

That deathly stillness settled round her heart; her eyes fixed themselves on the skylight, as though beseeching it to break and let in sound. A cat, making a pilgrimage from roof to roof, the four dark moving spots of its paws, the faint blur of its body, was all she saw. And suddenly, unable to bear it any longer, she cried:

"Oh, George, speak to me! Don't put me away from you like this!"

George answered:

"What do you want me to say, Mother?"

"Nothing—only——"

And falling on her knees beside her son, she pulled his head down against her breast, and stayed rocking herself to and fro, silently shifting closer till she could feel his head lie comfortably; so, she had his face against her heart, and she could not bear to let it go. Her knees hurt her on the boarded floor, her back and all her body ached; but not for worlds would she relax an inch, believing that she could comfort him with her pain, and her tears fell on his neck. When at last he drew his face away she sank down on the floor, and could not rise, but her fingers felt that the bosom of her dress was wet. He said hoarsely:

"It's all right, Mother; you needn't worry!"

For no reward would she have looked at him just then, but with a deeper certainty than reason she knew that he was safe.

Stealthily on the sloping skylight the cat retraced her steps, its four paws dark moving spots, its body a faint blur.

Mrs. Pendyce rose.

"I won't stay now, darling. May I use your glass?"

Standing before that mirror, smoothing back her hair, passing her handkerchief over her cheeks and eyes and lips, she thought:

'That woman has stood here! That woman has smoothed her hair, looking in this glass, and wiped his kisses from her cheeks! May God give to her the pain that she has given to my son!'

But when she had wished that wish she shivered.

She turned to George at the door with a smile that seemed to say:

'It's no good to weep, or try and tell you what is in my heart, and so, you see, I'm smiling. Please smile, too, so as to comfort me a little.'

George put a small paper parcel in her hand and tried to smile.

Mrs. Pendyce went quickly out. Bewildered by the sunlight, she did not look at this parcel till she was beyond the outer gate. It contained an amethyst necklace, an emerald pendant, and a diamond ring. In the little grey street that led to this garden with its poplars, old fountain, and green gate, the jewels glowed and sparkled as though all light and life had settled there. Mrs. Pendyce, who loved colour and glowing things, saw that they were beautiful.

That woman had taken them, used their light and colour, and then flung them back! She wrapped them again in the paper, tied the string, and went towards the river. She did not hurry, but walked with her eyes steadily before her. She crossed the Embankment, and stood leaning on the parapet with her hands over the grey water. Her thumb and fingers unclosed; the white parcel dropped, floated a second, and then disappeared.

Mrs. Pendyce looked round her with a start.

A young man with a beard, whose face was familiar, was raising his hat.

"So your son was in," he said. "I'm very glad. I must thank you again for standing to me just that minute; it made all the difference. It was the relation between the figure and the door that I wanted to get. Good-morning!"

Mrs. Pendyce murmured "Good-morning," following him with startled eyes, as though he had caught her in the commission of a crime. She had a vision of those jewels, buried, poor things! in the grey slime, a prey to gloom, and robbed for ever of their light and colour. And, as though she had sinned, wronged the gentle essence of her nature, she hurried away.

CHAPTER VI

Gregory Vigil called Mr. Paramor a pessimist it was because, like other people, he did not know the meaning of, the term; for with a confusion common to the minds of many persons who have been conceived in misty moments, he thought that, to see things as they were, meant, to try and make them worse. Gregory had his own way of seeing things that was very dear to him—so dear that he would shut his eyes sooner than see them any other way. And since things to him were not the same as things to Mr. Paramor, it cannot, after all, be said that he did not see things as they were. But dirt upon a face that he wished to be clean he could not see—a fluid in his blue eyes dissolved that dirt while the image of the face was passing on to their retinae. The process was unconscious, and has been called idealism. This was why the longer he reflected the more agonisedly certain he became that his ward was right to be faithful to the man she loved, right to join her life to his. And he went about pressing the blade of this thought into his soul.

About four o'clock on the day of Mrs. Pendyce's visit to the studio a letter was brought him by a page-boy.

"GREEN'S HOTEL,
"Thursday.

"DEAR GRIG,

"I have seen Helen Bellew, and have just come from George. We have all been living in a bad dream. She does not love him—perhaps has never loved him. I do not know; I do not wish to judge. She has given him up. I will not trust myself to say anything about that. From beginning to end it all seems so unnecessary, such a needless, cross-grained muddle. I write this line to tell you how things really are, and to beg you, if you have a moment to spare, to look in at George's club this evening and let me know if he is there and how he seems. There is no one else that I could possibly ask to do this for me. Forgive me if this letter pains you.

"Your affectionate cousin,
"MARGERY PENDYCE."

To those with the single eye, the narrow personal view of all things human, by whom the irony underlying the affairs of men is unseen and unenjoyed, whose simple hearts afford that irony its most precious smiles, who, vanquished by that irony, remain invincible—to these no blow of Fate, no reversal of their ideas, can long retain importance. The darts stick, quaver, and fall off, like arrows from chain-armour, and the last dart, slipping upwards under the harness, quivers into the heart to the cry of "What—you! No, no; I don't believe you're here!"

Such as these have done much of what has had to be done in this old world, and perhaps still more of what has had to be undone.

When Gregory received this letter he was working on the case of a woman with the morphia habit. He put it into his pocket and went on working. It was all he was capable of doing.

"Here is the memorandum, Mrs. Shortman. Let them take her for six weeks. She will come out a different woman."

Mrs. Shortman, supporting her thin face in her thin hand, rested her glowing eyes on Gregory.

"I'm afraid she has lost all moral sense," she said. "Do you know, Mr. Vigil, I'm almost afraid she never had any!"

"What do you mean?"

Mrs. Shortman turned her eyes away.

"I'm sometimes tempted to think," she said, "that there are such people. I wonder whether we allow enough for that. When I was a girl in the country I remember the daughter of our vicar, a very pretty creature. There were dreadful stories about her, even before she was married, and then we heard she was divorced. She came up to London and earned her own living by playing the piano until she married again. I won't tell you her name, but she is very well known, and nobody has ever seen her show the slightest signs of being ashamed. If there is one woman like that there may be dozens, and I sometimes think we waste——"

Gregory said dryly:

"I have heard you say that before."

Mrs. Shortman bit her lips.

"I don't think," she said, "that I grudge my efforts or my time."

Gregory went quickly up, and took her hand.

"I know that—oh, I know that," he said with feeling.

The sound of Miss Mallow furiously typing rose suddenly from the corner. Gregory removed his hat from the peg on which it hung.

"I must go now," he said. "Good-night."

Without warning, as is the way with hearts, his heart had begun to bleed, and he felt that he must be in the open air. He took no omnibus or cab, but strode along with all his might, trying to think, trying to understand. But he could only feel-confused and battered feelings, with now and then odd throbs of pleasure of which he was ashamed. Whether he knew it or not, he was making his way to Chelsea, for though a man's eyes may be fixed on the stars, his feet cannot take him there, and Chelsea seemed to them the best alternative. He was not alone upon this journey, for many another man was going there, and many a man had been and was coming now away, and the streets were the one long streaming crowd of the summer afternoon. And the men he met looked at Gregory, and Gregory looked at them, and neither saw the other, for so it is written of men, lest they pay attention to cares that are not their own. The sun that scorched his face fell on their backs, the breeze that cooled his back blew on their cheeks. For the careless world, too, was on its way, along the pavement of the universe, one of millions going to Chelsea, meeting millions coming away....

"Mrs. Bellew at home?"

He went into a room fifteen feet square and perhaps ten high, with a sulky canary in a small gilt cage, an upright piano with an open operatic score, a sofa with piled-up cushions, and on it a woman with a flushed and sullen face, whose elbows were resting on her knees, whose chin was resting on her hand, whose gaze was fixed on nothing. It was a room of that size, with all these things, but Gregory took into it with him some thing that made it all seem different to Gregory. He sat down by the window with his eyes care fully averted, and spoke in soft tones broken by something that sounded like emotion. He began by telling her of his woman with the morphia habit, and then he told her that he knew every thing. When he had said this he looked out of the window, where builders had left by inadvertence a narrow strip of sky. And thus he avoided seeing the look on her face, contemptuous, impatient, as though she were thinking: 'You are a good fellow, Gregory, but for Heaven's sake do see things for once as they are! I have had enough of it.' And he avoided seeing her stretch her arms out and spread the fingers, as an angry cat will stretch and spread its toes. He told her that he did not want to worry her, but that when she wanted him for anything she must send for him—he was always there; and he looked at her feet, so that he did not see her lip curl. He told her that she would always be the same to him, and he asked her to believe that. He did not see the smile which never left her lips again while he was there—the smile he could not read, because it was the smile of life, and of a woman that he did not understand. But he did see on that sofa a beautiful creature for whom he had longed for years, and so he went away, and left her standing at the door with her teeth fastened on her lip: And since with him Gregory took his eyes, he did not see her reseated on the sofa, just as she had been before he came in, her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hand, her moody eyes like those of a gambler staring into the distance....

In the streets of tall houses leading away from Chelsea were many men, some, like Gregory, hungry for love, and some hungry for bread—men in twos and threes, in crowds, or by themselves, some with their eyes on the ground, some with their eyes level, some with their eyes on the sky, but all with courage and loyalty of one poor kind or another in their hearts. For by courage and loyalty alone it is written that man shall live, whether he goes to Chelsea or whether he comes away. Of all these men, not one but would have smiled to hear Gregory saying to himself: "She will always be the same to me! She will always be the same to me!" And not one that would have grinned....

It was getting on for the Stoics' dinner hour when Gregory found himself in Piccadilly, and, Stoic after Stoic, they were getting out of cabs and passing the club doors. The poor fellows had been working hard all day on the racecourse, the cricket-ground, at Hurlingham, or in the Park; some had been to the Royal Academy, and on their faces was a pleasant look: "Ah, God is good—we can rest at last!" And many of them had had no lunch, hoping to keep their weights down, and many who had lunched had not done themselves as well as might be hoped, and some had done themselves too well; but in all their hearts the trust burned bright that they might do themselves better at dinner, for their God was good, and dwelt between the kitchen and the cellar of the Stoics' Club. And all—for all had poetry in their souls—looked forward to those hours in paradise when, with cigars between their lips, good wine below, they might dream the daily dream that comes to all true Stoics for about fifteen shillings or even less, all told.

From a little back slum, within two stones' throw of the god of the Stoics' Club, there had come out two seamstresses to take the air; one was in consumption, having neglected to earn enough to feed herself properly for some years past, and the other looked as if she would be in consumption shortly, for the same reason. They stood on the pavement, watching the cabs drive up. Some of the Stoics saw them and thought: 'Poor girls! they look awfully bad.' Three or four said to themselves: "It oughtn't to be allowed. I mean, it's so painful to see; and it's not as if one could do anything. They're not beggars, don't you know, and so what can one do?"

But most of the Stoics did not look at them at all, feeling that their soft hearts could not stand these painful sights, and anxious not to spoil their dinners. Gregory did not see them either, for it so happened that he was looking at the sky, and just then the two girls crossed the road and were lost among the passers-by, for they were not dogs, who could smell out the kind of man he was.

"Mr. Pencyce is in the club; I will send your name up, sir." And rolling a little, as though Gregory's name were heavy, the porter gave it to the boy, who went away with it.

Gregory stood by the empty hearth and waited, and while he waited, nothing struck him at all, for the Stoics seemed very natural, just mere men like himself, except that their clothes were better, which made him think: 'I shouldn't care to belong here and have to dress for dinner every night.'

"Mr. Pencyce is very sorry, sir, but he's engaged."

Gregory bit his lip, said "Thank you," and went away.

'That's all Margery wants,' he thought; 'the rest is nothing to me,' and, getting on a bus, he fixed his eyes once more on the sky.

But George was not engaged. Like a wounded animal taking its hurt for refuge to its lair, he sat in his favourite window overlooking Piccadilly. He sat there as though youth had left him, unmoving, never lifting his eyes. In his stubborn mind a wheel seemed turning, grinding out his memories to the last grain. And Stoics, who could not bear to see a man sit thus throughout that sacred hour, came up from time to time.

"Aren't you going to dine, Pencyce?"

Dumb brutes tell no one of their pains; the law is silence. So with George. And as each Stoic came up, he only set his teeth and said:

"Presently, old chap."

CHAPTER VII

TOUR WITH THE SPANIEL JOHN

Now the spaniel John—whose habit was to smell of heather and baked biscuits when he rose from a night's sleep—was in disgrace that Thursday. Into his long and narrow head it took time for any new idea to enter, and not till forty hours after Mrs. Pencyce had gone did he recognise fully that something definite had happened to his master. During the agitated minutes that this conviction took in forming, he worked hard. Taking two and a half brace of his master's shoes and slippers, and placing them in unaccustomed spots, he lay on them one by one till they were warm, then left them for some bird or other to hatch out, and returned to Mr. Pencyce's door. It was for all this that the Squire said, "John!" several times, and threatened him with a razorstrop. And partly because he could not bear to leave his master for a single second—the scolding had made him love him so—and partly because of that new idea, which let him have no peace, he lay in the hall waiting.

Having once in his hot youth inadvertently followed the Squire's horse, he could never be induced to follow it again. He both personally disliked this needlessly large and swift form of animal, and suspected it of designs upon his master; for when the creature had taken his master up, there was not a smell of him left anywhere—not a whiff of that pleasant scent that so endeared him to the heart. As soon, therefore, as the horse appeared, the spaniel John would lie down on his stomach with his forepaws close to his nose, and his nose close to the ground; nor until the animal vanished could he be induced to abandon an attitude in which he resembled a couching Sphinx.

But this afternoon, with his tail down, his lips pouting, his shoulders making heavy work of it, his nose lifted in deprecation of that ridiculous and unnecessary plane on which his master sat, he followed at a measured distance. In such-wise, aforetime, the village had followed the Squire and Mr. Barter when they introduced into it its one and only drain.

Mr. Pendyce rode slowly; his feet, in their well-blacked boots, his nervous legs in Bedford cord and mahogany-coloured leggings, moved in rhyme to the horse's trot. A long-tailed coat fell clean and full over his thighs; his back and shoulders were a wee bit bent to lessen motion, and above his neat white stock under a grey bowler hat his lean, grey-whiskered and moustachioed face, with harassed eyes, was preoccupied and sad. His horse, a brown blood mare, ambled lazily, head raking forward, and bang tail floating outward from her hocks. And so, in the June sunshine, they went, all three, along the leafy lane to Worsted Scotton....

On Tuesday, the day that Mrs. Pendyce had left, the Squire had come in later than usual, for he felt that after their difference of the night before, a little coolness would do her no harm. The first hour of discovery had been as one confused and angry minute, ending in a burst of nerves and the telegram to General Pendyce. He took the telegram himself, returning from the village with his head down, a sudden prey to a feeling of shame—an odd and terrible feeling that he never remembered to have felt before, a sort of fear of his fellow-creatures. He would have chosen a secret way, but there was none, only the highroad, or the path across the village green, and through the churchyard to his paddocks. An old cottager was standing at the turnstile, and the Squire made for him with his head down, as a bull makes for a fence. He had meant to pass in silence, but between him and this old broken husbandman there was a bond forged by the ages. Had it meant death, Mr. Pendyce could not have passed one whose fathers had toiled for his fathers, eaten his fathers' bread, died with his fathers, without a word and a movement of his hand.

"Evenin', Squire; nice evenin'. Faine weather fur th' hay!"

The voice was warped and wavery.

'This is my Squire,' it seemed to say, 'whatever ther' be agin him!'

Mr. Pendyce's hand went up to his hat.

"Evenin', Hermon. Aye, fine weather for the hay! Mrs. Pendyce has gone up to London. We young bachelors, ha!"

He passed on.

Not until he had gone some way did he perceive why he had made that announcement. It was simply because he must tell everyone, everyone; then no one could be astonished.

He hurried on to the house to dress in time for dinner, and show all that nothing was amiss. Seven courses would have been served him had the sky fallen; but he ate little, and drank more claret than was his wont. After dinner he sat in his study with the windows open, and in the mingled day and lamp light read his wife's letter over again. As it was with the spaniel John, so with his master—a new idea penetrated but slowly into his long and narrow head.

She was cracked about George; she did not know what she was doing; would soon come to her senses. It was not for him to take any steps. What steps, indeed, could he take without confessing that Horace Pendyce had gone too far, that Horace Pendyce was in the wrong? That had never been his habit, and he could not alter now. If she and George chose to be stubborn, they must take the consequences, and fend for themselves.

In the silence and the lamplight, growing mellow each minute under the green silk shade, he sat confusedly thinking of the past. And in that dumb reverie, as though of fixed malice, there came to him no memories that were not pleasant, no images that were not fair. He tried to think of her unkindly, he tried to paint her black; but with the perversity born into the world when he was born, to die when he was dead, she came to him softly, like the ghost of gentleness, to haunt his fancy. She came to him smelling of sweet scents, with a slight rustling of silk, and the sound of her expectant voice, saying, "Yes, dear?" as though she were not bored. He remembered when he brought her first to Worsted Skeynes thirty-four years ago, "That timid, and like a rose, but a lady every hinch, the love!" as his old nurse had said.

He remembered her when George was born, like wax for whiteness and transparency, with eyes that were all pupils, and a hovering smile. So many other times he remembered her throughout those years, but never as a woman faded, old; never as a woman of the past. Now that he had not got her, for the first time Mr. Pendyce realised that she had not grown old, that she was still to him "timid, and like a

rose, but a lady every hinch, the love!" And he could not bear this thought; it made him feel so miserable and lonely in the lamplight, with the grey moths hovering round, and the spaniel John asleep upon his foot.

So, taking his candle, he went up to bed. The doors that barred away the servants' wing were closed. In all that great remaining space of house his was the only candle, the only sounding footstep. Slowly he mounted as he had mounted many thousand times, but never once like this, and behind him, like a shadow, mounted the spaniel John.

And She that knows the hearts of men and dogs, the Mother from whom all things come, to whom they all go home, was watching, and presently, when they were laid, the one in his deserted bed, the other on blue linen, propped against the door, She gathered them to sleep.

But Wednesday came, and with it Wednesday duties. They who have passed the windows of the Stoics' Club and seen the Stoics sitting there have haunting visions of the idle landed classes. These visions will not let them sleep, will not let their tongues to cease from bitterness, for they so long to lead that "idle" life themselves. But though in a misty land illusions be our cherished lot, that we may all think falsely of our neighbours and enjoy ourselves, the word "idle" is not at all the word.

Many and heavy tasks weighed on the Squire at Worsted Skeynes. There was the visit to the stables to decide as to firing Beldame's hock, or selling the new bay horse because he did not draw men fast enough, and the vexed question of Bruggan's oats or Beal's, talked out with Benson, in a leather belt and flannel shirt-sleeves, like a corpulent, white-whiskered boy. Then the long sitting in the study with memorandums and accounts, all needing care, lest So-and-so should give too little for too little, or too little for too much; and the smart walk across to Jarvis, the head keeper, to ask after the health of the new Hungarian bird, or discuss a scheme whereby in the last drive so many of those creatures he had nurtured from their youth up might be deterred from flying over to his friend Lord Quarryman. And this took long, for Jarvis's feelings forced him to say six times, "Well, Mr. Pendyce, sir, what I say is we didn't oughter lose s'many birds in that last drive;" and Mr. Pendyce to answer: "No, Jarvis, certainly not. Well, what do you suggest?" And that other grievous question—how to get plenty of pheasants and plenty of foxes to dwell together in perfect harmony—discussed with endless sympathy, for, as the Squire would say, "Jarvis is quite safe with foxes." He could not bear his covers to be drawn blank.

Then back to a sparing lunch, or perhaps no lunch at all, that he might keep fit and hard; and out again at once on horseback or on foot to the home farm or further, as need might take him, and a long afternoon, with eyes fixed on the ribs of bullocks, the colour of swedes, the surfaces of walls or gates or fences.

Then home again to tea and to the Times, which had as yet received. but fleeting glances, with close attention to all those Parliamentary measures threatening, remotely, the existing state of things, except, of course, that future tax on wheat so needful to the betterment of Worsted Skeynes. There were occasions, too, when they brought him tramps to deal with, to whom his one remark would be, "Hold out your hands, my man," which, being found unwarped by honest toil, were promptly sent to gaol. When found so warped, Mr. Pendyce was at a loss, and would walk up and down, earnestly trying to discover what his duty was to them. There were days, too, almost entirely occupied by sessions, when many classes of offenders came before him, to whom he meted justice according to the heinousness of the offence, from poaching at the top down and down to wife-beating at the bottom; for, though a humane man, tradition did not suffer him to look on this form of sport as really criminal—at any rate, not in the country.

It was true that all these matters could have been settled in a fraction of the time by a young and trained intelligence, but this would have wronged tradition, disturbed the Squire's settled conviction that he was doing his duty, and given cause for slanderous tongues to hint at idleness. And though, further, it was true that all this daily labour was devoted directly or indirectly to interests of his own, what was that but doing his duty to the country and asserting the prerogative of every Englishman at all costs to be provincial?

But on this Wednesday the flavour of the dish was gone. To be alone amongst his acres, quite alone—to have no one to care whether he did anything at all, no one to whom he might confide that Beldame's hock was to be fired, that Peacock was asking for more gates, was almost more than he could bear. He would have wired to the girls to come home, but he could not bring him self to face their questions. Gerald was at Gib! George—George was no son of his!—and his pride forbade him to write to her who had left him thus to solitude and shame. For deep down below his stubborn anger it was shame that the Squire felt—shame that he should have to shun his neighbours, lest they should ask him questions which, for his own good name and his own pride, he must answer with a lie; shame that he should not be master in his own house—still more, shame that anyone should see that he was not. To be sure, he did not know that he felt shame, being unused to introspection, having always kept it at arm's length.

For he always meditated concretely, as, for instance, when he looked up and did not see his wife at breakfast, but saw Bester making coffee, he thought, 'That fellow knows all about it, I shouldn't wonder!' and he felt angry for thinking that. When he saw Mr. Barter coming down the drive he thought, 'Confound it! I can't meet him,' and slipped out, and felt angry that he had thus avoided him. When in the Scotch garden he came on Jackman syringing the rose-trees, he said to him, "Your mistress has gone to London," and abruptly turned away, angry that he had been obliged by a mysterious impulse to tell him that:

So it was, all through that long, sad day, and the only thing that gave him comfort was to score through, in the draft of his will, bequests to his eldest son, and busy himself over drafting a clause to take their place:

"Forasmuch as my eldest son, George Hubert, has by conduct unbecoming to a gentleman and a Pendyce, proved himself unworthy of my confidence, and forasmuch as to my regret I am unable to cut the entail of my estate, I hereby declare that he shall in no way participate in any division of my other property or of my personal effects, conscientiously believing that it is my duty so to do in the interests of my family and of the country, and I make this declaration without anger."

For, all the anger that he was balked of feeling against his wife, because he missed her so, was added to that already felt against his son.

By the last post came a letter from General Pendyce. He opened it with fingers as shaky as his brother's writing.

"ARMY AND NAVY CLUB. "DEAR HORACE,

"What the deuce and all made you send that telegram? It spoiled my breakfast, and sent me off in a tearing hurry, to find Margery perfectly well. If she'd been seedy or anything I should have been delighted, but there she was, busy about her dresses and what not, and I dare say she thought me a lunatic for coming at that time in the morning. You shouldn't get into the habit of sending telegrams. A telegram is a thing that means something—at least, I've always thought so. I met George coming away from her in a deuce of a hurry. I can't write any more now. I'm just going to have my lunch.

"Your affectionate brother,

"CHARLES PENDYCE."

She was well. She had been seeing George. With a hardened heart the Squire went up to bed.

And Wednesday came to an end....

And so on the Thursday afternoon the brown blood mare carried Mr. Pendyce along the lane, followed by the spaniel John. They passed the Firs, where Bellew lived, and, bending sharply to the right, began to mount towards the Common; and with them mounted the image of that fellow who was at the bottom of it all—an image that ever haunted the Squire's mind nowadays; a ghost, high-shouldered, with little burning eyes, clipped red moustaches, thin bowed legs. A plague spot on that system which he loved, a whipping-post to heredity, a scourge like Attila the Hun; a sort of damnable caricature of all that a country gentleman should be—of his love of sport and open air, of his "hardness" and his pluck; of his powers of knowing his own mind, and taking his liquor like a man; of his creed, now out of date, of gallantry. Yes—a kind of cursed bogey of a man, a spectral follower of the hounds, a desperate character—a man that in old days someone would have shot; a drinking, white-faced devil who despised Horace Pendyce, whom Horace Pendyce hated, yet could not quite despise. "Always one like that in a hunting country!" A black dog on the shoulders of his order. 'Post equitem sedet' Jaspar Bellew!

The Squire came out on the top of the rise, and all Worsted Scotton was in sight. It was a sandy stretch of broom and gorse and heather, with a few Scotch firs; it had no value at all, and he longed for it, as a boy might long for the bite someone else had snatched out of his apple. It distressed him lying there, his and yet not his, like a wife who was no wife—as though Fortune were enjoying her at his expense. Thus was he deprived of the fulness of his mental image; for as with all men, so with the Squire, that which he loved and owned took definite form—a some thing that he saw. Whenever the words "Worsted Skeynes" were in his mind—and that was almost always—there rose before him an image defined and concrete, however indescribable; and what ever this image was, he knew that Worsted Scot ton spoiled it. It was true that he could not think of any use to which to put the Common, but he felt deeply that it was pure dog-in-the-mangerism of the cottagers, and this he could not stand. Not one beast in two years had fattened on its barrenness. Three old donkeys alone eked out the

remnants of their days. A bundle of firewood or old bracken, a few peat sods from one especial corner, were all the selfish peasants gathered. But the cottagers were no great matter—he could soon have settled them; it was that fellow Peacock whom he could not settle, just because he happened to abut on the Common, and his fathers had been nasty before him. Mr. Pendyce rode round looking at the fence his father had put up, until he came to the portion that Peacock's father had pulled down; and here, by a strange fatality—such as will happen even in printed records—he came on Peacock himself standing in the gap, as though he had foreseen this visit of the Squire's. The mare stopped of her own accord, the spaniel John at a measured distance lay down to think, and all those yards away he could be heard doing it, and now and then swallowing his tongue.

Peacock stood with his hands in his breeches' pockets. An old straw hat was on his head, his little eyes were turned towards the ground; and his cob, which he had tied to what his father had left standing of the fence, had his eyes, too, turned towards the ground, for he was eating grass. Mr. Pendyce's fight with his burning stable had stuck in the farmer's "gizzard" ever since. He felt that he was forgetting it day by day—would soon forget it altogether. He felt the old sacred doubts inherited from his fathers rising every hour within him. And so he had come up to see what looking at the gap would do for his sense of gratitude. At sight of the Squire his little eyes turned here and there, as a pig's eyes turn when it receives a blow behind. That Mr. Pendyce should have chosen this moment to come up was as though Providence, that knoweth all things, knew the natural thing for Mr. Pendyce to do.

"Afternoon, Squire. Dry weather; rain's badly wanted. I'll get no feed if this goes on."

Mr. Pendyce answered:

"Afternoon, Peacock. Why, your fields are first-rate for grass."

They hastily turned their eyes away, for at that moment they could not bear to see each other.

There was a silence; then Peacock said:

"What about those gates of mine, Squire?" and his voice quavered, as though gratitude might yet get the better of him.

The Squire's irritable glance swept over the unfenced space to right and left, and the thought flashed through his mind:

'Suppose I were to give the beggar those gates, would he—would he let me enclose the Scotton again?'

He looked at that square, bearded man, and the infallible instinct, christened so wickedly by Mr. Paramor, guided him.

"What's wrong with your gates, man, I should like to know?"

Peacock looked at him full this time; there was no longer any quaver in his voice, but a sort of rough good-humour.

"Wy, the 'arf o' them's as rotten as matchwood!" he said; and he took a breath of relief, for he knew that gratitude was dead within his soul.

"Well, I wish mine at the home farm were half as good. Come, John!" and, touching the mare with his heel, Mr. Pendyce turned; but before he had gone a dozen paces he was back.

"Mrs. Peacock well, I hope? Mrs. Pendyce has gone up to London."

And touching his hat, without waiting for Peacock's answer, he rode away. He took the lane past Peacock's farm across the home paddocks, emerging on the cricket-ground, a field of his own which he had caused to be converted.

The return match with Coldingham was going on, and, motionless on his horse, the Squire stopped to watch. A tall figure in the "long field" came leisurely towards him. It was the Hon. Geoffrey Winlow. Mr. Pendyce subdued an impulse to turn the mare and ride away.

"We're going to give you a licking, Squire! How's Mrs. Pendyce? My wife sent her love."

On the Squire's face in the full sun was more than the sun's flush.

"Thanks," he said, "she's very well. She's gone up to London."

"And aren't you going up yourself this season?"

The Squire crossed those leisurely eyes with his own.

"I don't think so," he said slowly.

The Hon. Geoffrey returned to his duties.

"We got poor old Barter for a 'blob'!" he said over his shoulder.

The Squire became aware that Mr. Barter was approaching from behind.

"You see that left-hand fellow?" he said, pouting. "Just watch his foot. D'you mean to say that wasn't a no-ball? He bowled me with a no-ball. He's a rank no-batter. That fellow Locke's no more an umpire than——"

He stopped and looked earnestly at the bowler.

The Squire 'did not answer, sitting on his mare as though carved in stone. Suddenly his throat clicked.

"How's your wife?" he said. "Margery would have come to see her, but—but she's gone up to London."

The Rector did not turn his head.

"My wife? Oh, going on first-rate. There's another! I say, Winlow, this is too bad!"

The Hon. Geoffrey's pleasant voice was heard:

"Please not to speak to the man at the wheel!"

The Squire turned the mare and rode away; and the spaniel John, who had been watching from a measured distance, followed after, his tongue lolling from his mouth.

The Squire turned through a gate down the main aisle of the home covert, and the nose and the tail of the spaniel John, who scented creatures to the left and right, were in perpetual motion. It was cool in there. The June foliage made one long colonnade, broken by a winding river of sky. Among the oaks and hazels; the beeches and the elms, the ghostly body of a birch-tree shone here and there, captured by those grosser trees which seemed to cluster round her, proud of their prisoner, loth to let her go, that subtle spirit of their wood. They knew that, were she gone, their forest lady, wilder and yet gentler than themselves—they would lose credit, lose the grace and essence of their corporate being.

The Squire dismounted, tethered his horse, and sat under one of those birch-trees, on the fallen body of an elm. The spaniel John also sat and loved him with his eyes. And sitting there they thought their thoughts, but their thoughts were different.

For under this birch-tree Horace Pendyce had stood and kissed his wife the very day he brought her home to Worsted Skeynes, and though he did not see the parallel between her and the birch-tree that some poor imaginative creature might have drawn, yet was he thinking of that long past afternoon. But the spaniel John was not thinking of it; his recollection was too dim, for he had been at that time twenty-eight years short of being born.

Mr. Pendyce sat there long with his horse and with his dog, and from out the blackness of the spaniel John, who was more than less asleep, there shone at times an eye turned on his master like some devoted star. The sun, shining too, gilded the stem of the birch-tree. The birds and beasts began their evening stir all through the undergrowth, and rabbits, popping out into the ride, looked with surprise at the spaniel John, and popped in back again. They knew that men with horses had no guns, but could not bring themselves to trust that black and hairy thing whose nose so twitched whenever they appeared. The gnats came out to dance, and at their dancing, every sound and scent and shape became the sounds and scents and shapes of evening; and there was evening in the Squire's heart.

Slowly and stiffly he got up from the log and mounted to ride home. It would be just as lonely when he got there, but a house is better than a wood, where the gnats dance, the birds and creatures stir and stir, and shadows lengthen; where the sun steals upwards on the tree-stems, and all is careless of its owner, Man.

It was past seven o'clock when he went to his study. There was a lady standing at the window, and Mr. Pendyce said:

"I beg your pardon?"

The lady turned; it was his wife. The Squire stopped with a hoarse sound, and stood silent, covering his eyes with his hand.

CHAPTER VIII

ACUTE ATTACK OF 'PENDYICITIS'

Mrs. Pendyce felt very faint when she hurried away from Chelsea. She had passed through hours of great emotion, and eaten nothing.

Like sunset clouds or the colours in mother-o'-pearl, so, it is written, shall be the moods of men—interwoven as the threads of an embroidery, less certain than an April day, yet with a rhythm of their own that never fails, and no one can quite scan.

A single cup of tea on her way home, and her spirit revived. It seemed suddenly as if there had been a great ado about nothing! As if someone had known how stupid men could be, and been playing a fantasia on that stupidity. But this gaiety of spirit soon died away, confronted by the problem of what she should do next.

She reached her hotel without making a decision. She sat down in the reading-room to write to Gregory, and while she sat there with her pen in her hand a dreadful temptation came over her to say bitter things to him, because by not seeing people as they were he had brought all this upon them. But she had so little practice in saying bitter things that she could not think of any that were nice enough, and in the end she was obliged to leave them out. After finishing and sending off the note she felt better. And it came to her suddenly that, if she packed at once, there was just time to catch the 5.55 to Worsted Skeynes.

As in leaving her home, so in returning, she followed her instinct, and her instinct told her to avoid unnecessary fuss and suffering.

The decrepit station fly, mouldy and smelling of stables, bore her almost lovingly towards the Hall. Its old driver, clean-faced, cheery, somewhat like a bird, drove her almost furiously, for, though he knew nothing, he felt that two whole days and half a day were quite long enough for her to be away. At the lodge gate old Roy, the Skye, was seated on his haunches, and the sight of him set Mrs. Pendyce trembling as though till then she had not realised that she was coming home.

Home! The long narrow lane without a turning, the mists and stillness, the driving rain and hot bright afternoons; the scents of wood smoke and hay and the scent of her flowers; the Squire's voice, the dry rattle of grass-cutters, the barking of dogs, and distant hum of threshing; and Sunday sounds—church bells and rooks, and Mr. Barter's preaching; the tastes, too, of the very dishes! And all these scents and sounds and tastes, and the feel of the air to her cheeks, seemed to have been for ever in the past, and to be going on for ever in the time to come.

She turned red and white by turns, and felt neither joy nor sadness, for in a wave the old life came over her. She went at once to the study to wait for her husband to come in. At the hoarse sound he made, her heart beat fast, while old Roy and the spaniel John growled gently at each other.

"John," she murmured, "aren't you glad to see me, dear?"

The spaniel John, without moving, beat his tail against his master's foot.

The Squire raised his head at last.

"Well, Margery?" was all he said.

It shot through her mind that he looked older, and very tired!

The dinner-gong began to sound, and as though attracted by its long monotonous beating, a swallow flew in at one of the narrow windows and fluttered round the room. Mrs. Pendyce's eyes followed its flight.

The Squire stepped forward suddenly and took her hand.

"Don't run away from me again, Margery!" he said; and stooping down, he kissed it.

At this action, so unlike her husband, Mrs. Pendyce blushed like a girl. Her eyes above his grey and close-cropped head seemed grateful that he did not reproach her, glad of that caress.

"I have some news to tell you, Horace. Helen Bellew has given George up!"

The Squire dropped her hand.

"And quite time too," he said. "I dare say George has refused to take his dismissal. He's as obstinate as a mule."

"I found him in a dreadful state."

Mr. Pendyce asked uneasily:

"What? What's that?"

"He looked so desperate."

"Desperate?" said the Squire, with a sort of startled anger.

Mrs. Pendyce went on:

"It was dreadful to see his face. I was with him this afternoon—"

The Squire said suddenly:

"He's not ill, is he?"

"No, not ill. Oh, Horace, don't you understand? I was afraid he might do something rash. He was so—miserable."

The Squire began to walk up and down.

"Is he is he safe now?" he burst out.

Mrs. Pendyce sat down rather suddenly in the nearest chair.

"Yes," she said with difficulty, "I—I think so."

"Think! What's the good of that? What—Are you feeling faint, Margery?"

Mrs. Pendyce, who had closed her eyes, said:

"No dear, it's all right."

Mr. Pendyce came close, and since air and quiet were essential to her at that moment, he bent over and tried by every means in his power to rouse her; and she, who longed to be let alone, sympathised with him, for she knew that it was natural that he should do this. In spite of his efforts the feeling of faintness passed, and, taking his hand, she stroked it gratefully.

"What is to be done now, Horace?"

"Done!" cried the Squire. "Good God! how should I know? Here you are in this state, all because of that d—d fellow Bellew and his d—d wife! What you want is some dinner."

So saying, he put his arm around her, and half leading, half carrying, took her to her room.

They did not talk much at dinner, and of indifferent things, of Mrs. Barter, Peacock, the roses, and Beldame's hock. Only once they came too near to that which instinct told them to avoid, for the Squire said suddenly:

"I suppose you saw that woman?"

And Mrs. Pendyce murmured:

"Yes."

She soon went to her room, and had barely got into bed when he appeared, saying as though ashamed:

"I'm very early."

She lay awake, and every now and then the Squire would ask her, "Are you asleep, Margery?" hoping that she might have dropped off, for he himself could not sleep. And she knew that he meant to be nice to her, and she knew, too, that as he lay awake, turning from side to side, he was thinking like herself: "What's to be done next?" And that his fancy, too, was haunted by a ghost, high-shouldered, with little burning eyes, red hair, and white freckled face. For, save that George was miserable, nothing was altered, and the cloud of vengeance still hung over Worsted Skeynes. Like some weary lesson she rehearsed her thoughts: 'Now Horace can answer that letter of Captain Bellow's, can tell him that George will not—indeed, cannot—see her again. He must answer it. But will he?'

She groped after the secret springs of her husband's character, turning and turning and trying to understand, that she might know the best way of approaching him. And she could not feel sure, for behind all the little outside points of his nature, that she thought so "funny," yet could comprehend, there was something which seemed to her as unknown, as impenetrable as the dark, a sort of thickness of soul, a sort of hardness, a sort of barbaric-what? And as when in working at her embroidery the point of her needle would often come to a stop against stiff buckram, so now was the point of her soul brought to a stop against the soul of her husband. 'Perhaps,' she thought, 'Horace feels like that with me.' She need not so have thought, for the Squire never worked embroideries, nor did the needle of his soul make voyages of discovery.

By lunch-time the next day she had not dared to say a word. 'If I say nothing,' she thought, 'he may write it of his own accord.'

Without attracting his attention, therefore, she watched every movement of his morning. She saw him sitting at his bureau with a creased and crumpled letter, and knew it was Bellew's; and she hovered about, coming softly in and out, doing little things here and there and in the hall, outside. But the Squire gave no sign, motionless as the spaniel John couched along the ground with his nose between his paws.

After lunch she could bear it no longer.

"What do you think ought to be done now, Horace?"

The Squire looked at her fixedly.

"If you imagine," he said at last, "that I'll have anything to do with that fellow Bellew, you're very much mistaken."

Mrs. Pencyce was arranging a vase of flowers, and her hand shook so that some of the water was spilled over the cloth. She took out her handkerchief and dabbed it up.

"You never answered his letter, dear," she said.

The Squire put his back against the sideboard; his stiff figure, with lean neck and angry eyes, whose pupils were mere pin-points, had a certain dignity.

"Nothing shall induce me!" he said, and his voice was harsh and strong, as though he spoke for something bigger than himself. "I've thought it over all the morning, and I'm d—d if I do! The man is a ruffian. I won't knuckle under to him!"

Mrs. Pencyce clasped her hands.

"Oh, Horace," she said; "but for the sake of us all! Only just give him that assurance."

"And let him crow over me!" cried the Squire. "By Jove, no!"

"But, Horace, I thought that was what you wanted George to do. You wrote to him and asked him to promise."

The Squire answered:

"You know nothing about it, Margery; you know nothing about me. D'you think I'm going to tell him that his wife has thrown my son over—let him keep me gasping like a fish all this time, and then get the best of it in the end? Not if I have to leave the county—not if I——"

But, as though he had imagined the most bitter fate of all, he stopped.

Mrs. Pencyce, putting her hands on the lapels of his coat, stood with her head bent. The colour had gushed into her cheeks, her eyes were bright with tears. And there came from her in her emotion a

warmth and fragrance, a charm, as though she were again young, like the portrait under which they stood.

"Not if I ask you, Horace?"

The Squire's face was suffused with dusky colour; he clenched his hands and seemed to sway and hesitate.

"No, Margery," he said hoarsely; "it's—it's—I can't!"

And, breaking away from her, he left the room.

Mrs. Pendyce looked after him; her fingers, from which he had torn his coat, began twining the one with the other.

CHAPTER IX

BELLEW BOWS TO A LADY

There was silence at the Firs, and in that silent house, where only five rooms were used, an old manservant sat in his pantry on a wooden chair, reading from an article out of Rural Life. There was no one to disturb him, for the master was asleep, and the housekeeper had not yet come to cook the dinner. He read slowly, through spectacles, engraving the words for ever on the tablets of his mind. He read about the construction and habits of the owl: "In the tawny, or brown, owl there is a manubrial process; the furcula, far from being joined to the keel of the sternum, consists of two stylets, which do not even meet; while the posterior margin of the sternum presents two pairs of projections, with corresponding fissures between." The old manservant paused, resting his blinking eyes on the pale sunlight through the bars of his narrow window, so that a little bird on the window-sill looked at him and instantly flew away.

The old manservant read on again: "The pterylogical characters of *Photodilus* seem not to have been investigated, but it has been found to want the tarsal loop, as well as the manubrial process, while its clavicles are not joined in a furcula, nor do they meet the keel, and the posterior margin of the sternum has processes and fissures like the tawny section." Again he paused, and his gaze was satisfied and bland.

Up in the little smoking-room in a leather chair his master sat asleep. In front of him were stretched his legs in dusty riding-boots. His lips were closed, but through a little hole at one corner came a tiny puffing sound. On the floor by his side was an empty glass, between his feet a Spanish bulldog. On a shelf above his head reposed some frayed and yellow novels with sporting titles, written by persons in their inattentive moments. Over the chimney-piece presided the portrait of Mr. Jorrocks persuading his horse to cross a stream.

And the face of Jasper Bellew asleep was the face of a man who has ridden far, to get away from himself, and to-morrow will have to ride far again. His sandy eyebrows twitched with his dreams against the dead-white, freckled skin above high cheekbones, and two hard ridges were fixed between his brows; now and then over the sleeping face came the look of one riding at a gate.

In the stables behind the house she who had carried him on his ride, having rummaged out her last grains of corn, lifted her nose and poked it through the bars of her loosebox to see what he was doing who had not carried her master that sweltering afternoon, and seeing that he was awake, she snorted lightly, to tell him there was thunder in the air. All else in the stables was deadly quiet; the shrubberies around were still; and in the hushed house the master slept.

But on the edge of his wooden chair in the silence of his pantry the old manservant read, "This bird is a voracious feeder," and he paused, blinking his eyes and nervously puckering his lips, for he had partially understood....

Mrs. Pendyce was crossing the fields. She had on her prettiest frock, of smoky-grey crepe, and she looked a little anxiously at the sky. Gathered in the west a coming storm was chasing the whitened sunlight. Against its purple the trees stood blackish-green. Everything was very still, not even the poplars stirred, yet the purple grew with sinister, unmoving speed. Mrs. Pendyce hurried, grasping her skirts in both her hands, and she noticed that the cattle were all grouped under the hedge.

'What dreadful-looking clouds!' she thought. 'I wonder if I shall get to the Firs before it comes?' But though her frock made her hasten, her heart made her stand still, it fluttered so, and was so full. Suppose he were not sober! She remembered those little burning eyes, which had frightened her so the night he dined at Worsted Skeynes and fell out of his dogcart afterwards. A kind of legendary malevolence clung about his image.

'Suppose he is horrid to me!' she thought.

She could not go back now; but she wished—how she wished!—that it were over. A heat-drop splashed her glove. She crossed the lane and opened the Firs gate. Throwing frightened glances at the sky, she hastened down the drive. The purple was couched like a pall on the treetops, and these had begun to sway and moan as though struggling and weeping at their fate. Some splashes of warm rain were falling. A streak of lightning tore the firmament. Mrs. Pendyce rushed into the porch covering her ears with her hands.

'How long will it last?' she thought. 'I'm so frightened!'...

A very old manservant, whose face was all puckers, opened the door suddenly to peer out at the storm, but seeing Mrs. Pendyce, he peered at her instead.

"Is Captain Bellew at home?"

"Yes, ma'am. The Captain's in the study. We don't use the drawing-room now. Nasty storm coming on, ma'am—nasty storm. Will you please to sit down a minute, while I let the Captain know?"

The hall was low and dark; the whole house was low and dark, and smelled a little of woodrot. Mrs. Pendyce did not sit down, but stood under an arrangement of three foxes' heads, supporting two hunting-crops, with their lashes hanging down. And the heads of those animals suggested to her the thought: 'Poor man! He must be very lonely here.'

She started. Something was rubbing against her knees: it was only an enormous bulldog. She stooped down to pat it, and having once begun, found it impossible to leave off, for when she took her hand away the creature pressed against her, and she was afraid for her frock.

"Poor old boy—poor old boy!" she kept on murmuring. "Did he want a little attention?"

A voice behind her said:

"Get out, Sam! Sorry to have kept you waiting. Won't you come in here?"

Mrs. Pendyce, blushing and turning pale by turns, passed into a low, small, panelled room, smelling of cigars and spirits. Through the window, which was cut up into little panes, she could see the rain driving past, the shrubs bent and dripping from the downpour.

"Won't you sit down?"

Mrs. Pendyce sat down. She had clasped her hands together; she now raised her eyes and looked timidly at her host.

She saw a thin, high-shouldered figure, with bowed legs a little apart, rumpled sandy hair, a pale, freckled face, and little dark blinking eyes.

"Sorry the room's in such a mess. Don't often have the pleasure of seeing a lady. I was asleep; generally am at this time of year!"

The bristly red moustache was contorted as though his lips were smiling.

Mrs. Pendyce murmured vaguely.

It seemed to her that nothing of this was real, but all some horrid dream. A clap of thunder made her cover her ears.

Bellew walked to the window, glanced at the sky, and came back to the hearth. His little burning eyes seemed to look her through and through. 'If I don't speak at once,' she thought, 'I never shall speak at all.'

"I've come," she began, and with those words she lost her fright; her voice, that had been so uncertain hitherto, regained its trick of speech; her eyes, all pupil, stared dark and gentle at this man who had them all in his power—"I've come to tell you something, Captain Bellew!"

The figure by the hearth bowed, and her fright, like some evil bird, came guttering down on her again. It was dreadful, it was barbarous that she, that anyone, should have to speak of such things; it was barbarous that men and women should so misunderstand each other, and have so little sympathy and consideration; it was barbarous that she, Margery Pendyce, should have to talk on this subject that must give them both such pain. It was all so mean and gross and common! She took out her handkerchief and passed it over her lips.

"Please forgive me for speaking. Your wife has given my son up, Captain Bellew!"

Bellew did not move.

"She does not love him; she told me so herself! He will never see her again!"

How hateful, how horrible, how odious!

And still Bellew did not speak, but stood devouring her with his little eyes; and how long this went on she could not tell.

He turned his back suddenly, and leaned against the mantelpiece.

Mrs. Pendyce passed her hand over her brow to get rid of a feeling of unreality.

"That is all," she said.

Her voice sounded to herself unlike her own.

'If that is really all,' she thought, 'I suppose I must get up and go!' And it flashed through her mind: 'My poor dress will be ruined!'

Bellew turned round.

"Will you have some tea?"

Mrs. Pendyce smiled a pale little smile.

"No, thank you; I don't think I could drink any tea."

"I wrote a letter to your husband."

"Yes."

"He didn't answer it."

"No."

Mrs. Pendyce saw him staring at her, and a desperate struggle began within her. Should she not ask him to keep his promise, now that George—? Was not that what she had come for? Ought she not—ought she not for all their sakes?

Bellew went up to the table, poured out some whisky, and drank it off.

"You don't ask me to stop the proceedings," he said.

Mrs. Pendyce's lips were parted, but nothing came through those parted lips. Her eyes, black as sloes in her white face, never moved from his; she made no sound.

Bellew dashed his hand across his brow.

"Well, I will!" he said, "for your sake. There's my hand on it. You're the only lady I know!"

He gripped her gloved fingers, brushed past her, and she saw that she was alone.

She found her own way out, with the tears running down her face. Very gently she shut the hall door.

'My poor dress!' she thought. 'I wonder if I might stand here a little? The rain looks nearly over!'

The purple cloud had passed, and sunk behind the house, and a bright white sky was pouring down a sparkling rain; a patch of deep blue showed behind the fir-trees in the drive. The thrushes were out already after worms. A squirrel scampering along a branch stopped and looked at Mrs. Pendyce, and Mrs. Pendyce looked absently at the squirrel from behind the little handkerchief with which she was

drying her eyes.

'That poor man!' she thought 'poor solitary creature! There's the sun!'

And it seemed to her that it was the first time the sun had shone all this fine hot year. Gathering her dress in both hands, she stepped into the drive, and soon was back again in the fields.

Every green thing glittered, and the air was so rain-sweet that all the summer scents were gone, before the crystal scent of nothing. Mrs. Pendyce's shoes were soon wet through.

'How happy I am!' she thought 'how glad and happy I am!'

And the feeling, which was not as definite as this, possessed her to the exclusion of all other feelings in the rain-soaked fields.

The cloud that had hung over Worsted Skeynes so long had spent itself and gone. Every sound seemed to be music, every moving thing danced. She longed to get to her early roses, and see how the rain had treated them. She had a stile to cross, and when she was safely over she paused a minute to gather her skirts more firmly. It was a home-field she was in now, and right before her lay the country house. Long and low and white it stood in the glamorous evening haze, with two bright panes, where the sunlight fell, watching, like eyes, the confines of its acres; and behind it, to the left, broad, square, and grey among its elms, the village church. Around, above, beyond, was peace—the sleepy, misty peace of the English afternoon.

Mrs. Pendyce walked towards her garden. When she was near it, away to the right, she saw the Squire and Mr. Barter. They were standing together looking at a tree and—symbol of a subservient under-world—the spaniel John was seated on his tail, and he, too, was looking at the tree. The faces of the Rector and Mr. Pendyce were turned up at the same angle, and different as those faces and figures were in their eternal rivalry of type, a sort of essential likeness struck her with a feeling of surprise. It was as though a single spirit seeking for a body had met with these two shapes, and becoming confused, decided to inhabit both.

Mrs. Pendyce did not wave to them, but passed quickly, between the yew-trees, through the wicket-gate....

In her garden bright drops were falling one by one from every rose-leaf, and in the petals of each rose were jewels of water. A little down the path a weed caught her eye; she looked closer, and saw that there were several.

'Oh,' she thought, 'how dreadfully they've let the weeds I must really speak to Jackman!'

A rose-tree, that she herself had planted, rustled close by, letting fall a shower of drops.

Mrs. Pendyce bent down, and took a white rose in her fingers. With her smiling lips she kissed its face. 1907.

THE END.

FRATERNITY

By John Galsworthy

CHAPTER I

THE SHADOW

In the afternoon of the last day of April, 190-, a billowy sea of little broken clouds crowned the thin air above High Street, Kensington. This soft tumult of vapours, covering nearly all the firmament, was in onslaught round a patch of blue sky, shaped somewhat like a star, which still gleamed—a single gentian flower amongst innumerable grass. Each of these small clouds seemed fitted with a pair of unseen wings, and, as insects flight on their too constant journeys, they were setting forth all ways round this starry blossom which burned so clear with the colour of its far fixity. On one side they were massed in fleecy congeries, so crowding each other that no edge or outline was preserved; on the

other, higher, stronger, emergent from their fellow-clouds, they seemed leading the attack on that surviving gleam of the ineffable. Infinite was the variety of those million separate vapours, infinite the unchanging unity of that fixed blue star.

Down in the street beneath this eternal warring of the various soft-winged clouds on the unmisted ether, men, women, children, and their familiars—horses, dogs, and cats—were pursuing their occupations with the sweet zest of the Spring. They streamed along, and the noise of their frequenting rose in an unbroken roar: "I, I—I, I!"

The crowd was perhaps thickest outside the premises of Messrs. Rose and Thorn. Every kind of being, from the highest to the lowest, passed in front of the hundred doors of this establishment; and before the costume window a rather tall, slight, graceful woman stood thinking: "It really is gentian blue! But I don't know whether I ought to buy it, with all this distress about!"

Her eyes, which were greenish-grey, and often ironical lest they should reveal her soul, seemed probing a blue gown displayed in that window, to the very heart of its desirability.

"And suppose Stephen doesn't like me in it!" This doubt set her gloved fingers pleating the bosom of her frock. Into that little pleat she folded the essence of herself, the wish to have and the fear of having, the wish to be and the fear of being, and her veil, falling from the edge of her hat, three inches from her face, shrouded with its tissue her half-decided little features, her rather too high cheek-bones, her cheeks which were slightly hollowed, as though Time had kissed them just too much.

The old man, with a long face, eyes rimmed like a parrot's, and discoloured nose, who, so long as he did not sit down, was permitted to frequent the pavement just there and sell the 'Westminster Gazette', marked her, and took his empty pipe out of his mouth.

It was his business to know all the passers-by, and his pleasure too; his mind was thus distracted from the condition of his feet. He knew this particular lady with the delicate face, and found her puzzling; she sometimes bought the paper which Fate condemned him, against his politics, to sell. The Tory journals were undoubtedly those which her class of person ought to purchase. He knew a lady when he saw one. In fact, before Life threw him into the streets, by giving him a disease in curing which his savings had disappeared, he had been a butler, and for the gentry had a respect as incurable as was his distrust of "all that class of people" who bought their things at "these 'ere large establishments," and attended "these 'ere subscription dances at the Town 'All over there." He watched her with special interest, not, indeed, attempting to attract attention, though conscious in every fibre that he had only sold five copies of his early issues. And he was sorry and surprised when she passed from his sight through one of the hundred doors.

The thought which spurred her into Messrs. Rose and Thorn's was this: "I am thirty-eight; I have a daughter of seventeen. I cannot afford to lose my husband's admiration. The time is on me when I really must make myself look nice!"

Before a long mirror, in whose bright pool there yearly bathed hundreds of women's bodies, divested of skirts and bodices, whose unruffled surface reflected daily a dozen women's souls divested of everything, her eyes became as bright as steel; but having ascertained the need of taking two inches off the chest of the gentian frock, one off its waist, three off its hips, and of adding one to its skirt, they clouded again with doubt, as though prepared to fly from the decision she had come to. Resuming her bodice, she asked:

"When could you let me have it?"

"At the end of the week, madam."

"Not till then?"

"We are very pressed, madam."

"Oh, but you must let me have it by Thursday at the latest, please."

The fitter sighed: "I will do my best."

"I shall rely on you. Mrs. Stephen Dallison, 76, The Old Square."

Going downstairs she thought: "That poor girl looked very tired; it's a shame they give them such long hours!" and she passed into the street.

A voice said timidly behind her: "Westminster, marm?"

"That's the poor old creature," thought Cecilia Dallison, "whose nose is so unpleasant. I don't really think I—" and she felt for a penny in her little bag. Standing beside the "poor old creature" was a woman clothed in worn but neat black clothes, and an ancient toque which had once known a better head. The wan remains of a little bit of fur lay round her throat. She had a thin face, not without refinement, mild, very clear brown eyes, and a twist of smooth black hair. Beside her was a skimpy little boy, and in her arms a baby. Mrs. Dallison held out two-pence for the paper, but it was at the woman that she looked.

"Oh, Mrs. Hughs," she said, "we've been expecting you to hem the curtains!"

The woman slightly pressed the baby.

"I am very sorry, ma'am. I knew I was expected, but I've had such trouble."

Cecilia winced. "Oh, really?"

"Yes, m'm; it's my husband."

"Oh, dear!" Cecilia murmured. "But why didn't you come to us?"

"I didn't feel up to it, ma'am; I didn't really—"

A tear ran down her cheek, and was caught in a furrow near the mouth.

Mrs. Dallison said hurriedly: "Yes, yes; I'm very sorry."

"This old gentleman, Mr. Creed, lives in the same house with us, and he is going to speak to my husband."

The old man wagged his head on its lean stalk of neck.

"He ought to know better than be 'ave 'imself so disrespectful," he said.

Cecilia looked at him, and murmured: "I hope he won't turn on you!"

The old man shuffled his feet.

"I likes to live at peace with everybody. I shall have the police to 'im if he misdemeans hissself with me!... Westminster, sir?" And, screening his mouth from Mrs. Dallison, he added in a loud whisper: "Execution of the Shoreditch murderer!"

Cecilia felt suddenly as though the world were listening to her conversation with these two rather seedy persons.

"I don't really know what I can do for you, Mrs. Hughs. I'll speak to Mr. Dallison, and to Mr. Hilary too."

"Yes, ma'am; thank you, ma'am."

With a smile which seemed to deprecate its own appearance, Cecilia grasped her skirts and crossed the road. "I hope I wasn't unsympathetic," she thought, looking back at the three figures on the edge of the pavement—the old man with his papers, and his discoloured nose thrust upwards under iron-rimmed spectacles; the seamstress in her black dress; the skimpy little boy. Neither speaking nor moving, they were looking out before them at the traffic; and something in Cecilia revolted at this sight. It was lifeless, hopeless, unaesthetic.

"What can one do," she thought, "for women like Mrs. Hughs, who always look like that? And that poor old man! I suppose I oughtn't to have bought that dress, but Stephen is tired of this."

She turned out of the main street into a road preserved from commoner forms of traffic, and stopped at a long low house half hidden behind the trees of its front garden.

It was the residence of Hilary Dallison, her husband's brother, and himself the husband of Bianca, her own sister.

The queer conceit came to Cecilia that it resembled Hilary. Its look was kindly and uncertain; its colour a palish tan; the eyebrows of its windows rather straight than arched, and those deep-set eyes, the windows, twinkled hospitably; it had, as it were, a sparse moustache and beard of creepers, and dark marks here and there, like the lines and shadows on the faces of those who think too much. Beside it, and apart, though connected by a passage, a studio stood, and about that studio—of white rough-cast, with a black oak door, and peacock-blue paint—was something a little hard and fugitive, well

suiting to Bianca, who used it, indeed, to paint in. It seemed to stand, with its eyes on the house, shrinking defiantly from too close company, as though it could not entirely give itself to anything. Cecilia, who often worried over the relations between her sister and her brother-in-law, suddenly felt how fitting and symbolical this was.

But, mistrusting inspirations, which, experience told her, committed one too much, she walked quickly up the stone-flagged pathway to the door. Lying in the porch was a little moonlight-coloured lady bulldog, of toy breed, who gazed up with eyes like agates, delicately waving her bell-rope tail, as it was her habit to do towards everyone, for she had been handed down clearer and paler with each generation, till she had at last lost all the peculiar virtues of dogs that bait the bull.

Speaking the word "Miranda!" Mrs. Stephen Dallison tried to pat this daughter of the house. The little bulldog withdrew from her caress, being also unaccustomed to commit herself....

Mondays were Blanca's "days," and Cecilia made her way towards the studio. It was a large high room, full of people.

Motionless, by himself, close to the door, stood an old man, very thin and rather bent, with silvery hair, and a thin silvery beard grasped in his transparent fingers. He was dressed in a suit of smoke-grey cottage tweed, which smelt of peat, and an Oxford shirt, whose collar, ceasing prematurely, exposed a lean brown neck; his trousers, too, ended very soon, and showed light socks. In his attitude there was something suggestive of the patience and determination of a mule. At Cecilia's approach he raised his eyes. It was at once apparent why, in so full a room, he was standing alone. Those blue eyes looked as if he were about to utter a prophetic statement.

"They have been speaking to me of an execution," he said.

Cecilia made a nervous movement.

"Yes, Father?"

"To take life," went on the old man in a voice which, though charged with strong emotion, seemed to be speaking to itself, "was the chief mark of the insensate barbarism still prevailing in those days. It sprang from that most irreligious fetish, the belief in the permanence of the individual ego after death. From the worship of that fetish had come all the sorrows of the human race."

Cecilia, with an involuntary quiver of her little bag, said:

"Father, how can you?"

"They did not stop to love each other in this life; they were so sure they had all eternity to do it in. The doctrine was an invention to enable men to act like dogs with clear consciences. Love could never come to full fruition till it was destroyed."

Cecilia looked hastily round; no one had heard. She moved a little sideways, and became merged in another group. Her father's lips continued moving. He had resumed the patient attitude which so slightly suggested mules. A voice behind her said: "I do think your father is such an interesting man, Mrs. Dallison."

Cecilia turned and saw a woman of middle height, with her hair done in the early Italian fashion, and very small, dark, lively eyes, which looked as though her love of living would keep her busy each minute of her day and all the minutes that she could occupy of everybody else's days.

"Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace? Oh! how do you do? I've been meaning to come and see you for quite a long time, but I know you're always so busy."

With doubting eyes, half friendly and half defensive, as though chaffing to prevent herself from being chaffed, Cecilia looked at Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace, whom she had met several times at Bianca's house. The widow of a somewhat famous connoisseur, she was now secretary of the League for Educating Orphans who have Lost both Parents, vice-president of the Forlorn Hope for Maids in Peril, and treasurer to Thursday Hops for Working Girls. She seemed to know every man and woman who was worth knowing, and some besides; to see all picture-shows; to hear every new musician; and attend the opening performance of every play. With regard to literature, she would say that authors bored her; but she was always doing them good turns, inviting them to meet their critics or editors, and sometimes—though this was not generally known—pulling them out of the holes they were prone to get into, by lending them a sum of money—after which, as she would plaintively remark; she rarely saw them more.

She had a peculiar spiritual significance to Mrs. Stephen Dallison, being just on the borderline between those of Bianca's friends whom Cecilia did not wish and those whom she did wish to come to

her own house, for Stephen, a barrister in an official position, had a keen sense of the ridiculous. Since Hilary wrote books and was a poet, and Bianca painted, their friends would naturally be either interesting or queer; and though for Stephen's sake it was important to establish which was which, they were so very often both. Such people stimulated, taken in small doses, but neither on her husband's account nor on her daughter's did Cecilia desire that they should come to her in swarms. Her attitude of mind towards them was, in fact, similar—a sort of pleasurable dread—to that in which she purchased the Westminster Gazette to feel the pulse of social progress.

Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace's dark little eyes twinkled.

"I hear that Mr. Stone—that is your father's name, I think—is writing a book which will create quite a sensation when it comes out."

Cecilia bit her lips. "I hope it never will come out," she was on the point of saying.

"What will it be called?" asked Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace. "I gather that it's a book of Universal Brotherhood. That's so nice!"

Cecilia made a movement of annoyance. "Who told you?"

"Ah!" said Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace, "I do think your sister gets such attractive people at her At Homes. They all take such interest in things."

A little surprised at herself, Cecilia answered "Too much for me!"

Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace smiled. "I mean in art and social questions. Surely one can't be too interested in them?"

Cecilia said rather hastily:

"Oh no, of course not." And both ladies looked around them. A buzz of conversation fell on Cecilia's ears.

"Have you seen the 'Aftermath'? It's really quite wonderful!"

"Poor old chap! he's so rococo...."

"There's a new man.

"She's very sympathetic.

"But the condition of the poor...."

"Is that Mr. Balladyce? Oh, really.

"It gives you such a feeling of life.

"Bourgeois!..."

The voice of Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace broke through: "But do please tell me who is that young girl with the young man looking at the picture over there. She's quite charming!"

Cecilia's cheeks went a very pretty pink.

"Oh, that's my little daughter."

"Really! Have you a daughter as big as that? Why, she must be seventeen!"

"Nearly eighteen!"

"What is her name?"

"Thyme," said Cecilia, with a little smile. She felt that Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace was about to say: 'How charming!'

Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace saw her smile and paused. "Who is the young man with her?"

"My nephew, Martin Stone."

"The son of your brother who was killed with his wife in that dreadful Alpine accident? He looks a very decided sort of young man. He's got that new look. What is he?"

"He's very nearly a doctor. I never know whether he's quite finished or not."

"I thought perhaps he might have something to do with Art."

"Oh no, he despises Art."

"And does your daughter despise it, too?"

"No; she's studying it."

"Oh, really! How interesting! I do think the rising generation amusing, don't you? They're so independent."

Cecilia looked uneasily at the rising generation. They were standing side by side before the picture, curiously observant and detached, exchanging short remarks and glances. They seemed to watch all these circling, chatting, bending, smiling people with a sort of youthful, matter-of-fact, half-hostile curiosity. The young man had a pale face, clean-shaven, with a strong jaw, a long, straight nose, a rather bumpy forehead which did not recede, and clear grey eyes. His sarcastic lips were firm and quick, and he looked at people with disconcerting straightness. The young girl wore a blue-green frock. Her face was charming, with eager, hazel-grey eyes, a bright colour, and fluffy hair the colour of ripe nuts.

"That's your sister's picture, 'The Shadow,' they're looking at, isn't it?" asked Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace. "I remember seeing it on Christmas Day, and the little model who was sitting for it—an attractive type! Your brother-in-law told me how interested you all were in her. Quite a romantic story, wasn't it, about her fainting from want of food when she first came to sit?"

Cecilia murmured something. Her hands were moving nervously; she looked ill at ease.

These signs passed unperceived by Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace, whose eyes were busy.

"In the F.H.M.P., of course, I see a lot of young girls placed in delicate positions, just on the borders, don't you know? You should really join the F.H.M.P., Mrs. Dallison. It's a first-rate thing—most absorbing work."

The doubting deepened in Cecilia's eyes.

"Oh, it must be!" she said. "I've so little time."

Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace went on at once.

"Don't you think that we live in the most interesting days? There are such a lot of movements going on. It's quite exciting. We all feel that we can't shut our eyes any longer to social questions. I mean the condition of the people alone is enough to give one nightmare!"

"Yes, yes," said Cecilia; "it is dreadful, of course."

"Politicians and officials are so hopeless, one can't look for anything from them."

Cecilia drew herself up. "Oh, do you think so?" she said.

"I was just talking to Mr. Balladyce. He says that Art and Literature must be put on a new basis altogether."

"Yes," said Cecilia; "really? Is he that funny little man?"

"I think he's so monstrously clever."

Cecilia answered quickly: "I know—I know. Of course, something must be done."

"Yes," said Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace absently, "I think we all feel that. Oh, do tell me! I've been talking to such a delightful person—just the type you see when you go into the City—thousands of them, all in such good black coats. It's so unusual to really meet one nowadays; and they're so refreshing, they have such nice simple views. There he is, standing just behind your sister."

Cecilia by a nervous gesture indicated that she recognized the personality alluded to. "Oh, yes," she said; "Mr. Purcey. I don't know why he comes to see us."

"I think he's so delicious!" said Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace dreamily. Her little dark eyes, like bees, had flown to sip honey from the flower in question—a man of broad build and medium height, dressed with accuracy, who seemed just a little out of his proper bed. His mustachioed mouth wore a set smile; his

cheerful face was rather red, with a forehead of no extravagant height or breadth, and a conspicuous jaw; his hair was thick and light in colour, and his eyes were small, grey, and shrewd. He was looking at a picture.

"He's so delightfully unconscious," murmured Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace. "He didn't even seem to know that there was a problem of the lower classes."

"Did he tell you that he had a picture?" asked Cecilia gloomily.

"Oh yes, by Harpignies, with the accent on the 'pig.' It's worth three times what he gave for it. It's so nice to be made to feel that there is still all that mass of people just simply measuring everything by what they gave for it."

"And did he tell you my grandfather Carfax's dictum in the Banstock case?" muttered Cecilia.

"Oh yes: 'The man who does not know his own mind should be made an Irishman by Act of Parliament.' He said it was so awfully good."

"He would," replied Cecilia.

"He seems to depress you, rather!"

"Oh no; I believe he's quite a nice sort of person. One can't be rude to him; he really did what he thought a very kind thing to my father. That's how we came to know him. Only it's rather trying when he will come to call regularly. He gets a little on one's nerves."

"Ah, that's just what I feel is so jolly about him; no one would ever get on his nerves. I do think we've got too many nerves, don't you? Here's your brother-in-law. He's such an uncommon-looking man; I want to have a talk with him about that little model. A country girl, wasn't she?"

She had turned her head towards a tall man with a very slight stoop and a brown, thin, bearded face, who was approaching from the door. She did not see that Cecilia had flushed, and was looking at her almost angrily. The tall thin man put his hand on Cecilia's arm, saying gently: "Hallo Cis! Stephen here yet?"

Cecilia shook her head.

"You know Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace, Hilary?"

The tall man bowed. His hazel-coloured eyes were shy, gentle, and deep-set; his eyebrows, hardly ever still, gave him a look of austere whimsicality. His dark brown hair was very lightly touched with grey, and a frequent kindly smile played on his lips. His unmannerised manner was quiet to the point of extinction. He had long, thin, brown hands, and nothing peculiar about his dress.

"I'll leave you to talk to Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace," Cecilia said.

A knot of people round Mr. Balladyce prevented her from moving far, however, and the voice of Mrs. Smallpeace travelled to her ears.

"I was talking about that little model. It was so good of you to take such interest in the girl. I wondered whether we could do anything for her."

Cecilia's hearing was too excellent to miss the tone of Hilary's reply:

"Oh, thank you; I don't think so."

"I fancied perhaps you might feel that our Society—hers is an unsatisfactory profession for young girls!"

Cecilia saw the back of Hilary's neck grow red. She turned her head away.

"Of course, there are many very nice models indeed," said the voice of Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace. "I don't mean that they are necessarily at all—if they're girls of strong character; and especially if they don't sit for the—the altogether."

Hilary's dry, staccato answer came to Cecilia's ears: "Thank you; it's very kind of you."

"Oh, of course, if it's not necessary. Your wife's picture was so clever, Mr. Dallison—such an interesting type."

Without intention Cecilia found herself before that picture. It stood with its face a little turned

towards the wall, as though somewhat in disgrace, portraying the full-length figure of a girl standing in deep shadow, with her arms half outstretched, as if asking for something. Her eyes were fixed on Cecilia, and through her parted lips breath almost seemed to come. The only colour in the picture was the pale blue of those eyes, the pallid red of those parted lips, the still paler brown of the hair; the rest was shadow. In the foreground light was falling as though from a street-lamp.

Cecilia thought: "That girl's eyes and mouth haunt me. Whatever made Blanca choose such a subject? It is clever, of course—for her."

CHAPTER II

A FAMILY DISCUSSION

The marriage of Sylvanus Stone, Professor of the Natural Sciences, to Anne, daughter of Mr. Justice Carfax, of the well-known county family—the Carfaxes of Spring Deans, Hants—was recorded in the sixties. The baptisms of Martin, Cecilia, and Bianca, son and daughters of Sylvanus and Anne Stone, were to be discovered registered in Kensington in the three consecutive years following, as though some single-minded person had been connected with their births. After this the baptisms of no more offspring were to be found anywhere, as if that single mind had encountered opposition. But in the eighties there was noted in the register of the same church the burial of "Anne, nee Carfax, wife of Sylvanus Stone." In that "nee Carfax" there was, to those who knew, something more than met the eye. It summed up the mother of Cecilia and Bianca, and, in more subtle fashion, Cecilia and Bianca, too. It summed up that fugitive, barricading look in their bright eyes, which, though spoken of in the family as "the Carfax eyes," were in reality far from coming from old Mr. Justice Carfax. They had been his wife's in turn, and had much annoyed a man of his decided character. He himself had always known his mind, and had let others know it, too; reminding his wife that she was an impracticable woman, who knew not her own mind; and devoting his lawful gains to securing the future of his progeny. It would have disturbed him if he had lived to see his grand-daughters and their times. Like so many able men of his generation, far-seeing enough in practical affairs, he had never considered the possibility that the descendants of those who, like himself, had laid up treasure for their children's children might acquire the quality of taking time, balancing pros and cons, looking ahead, and not putting one foot down before picking the other up. He had not foreseen, in deed, that to wobble might become an art, in order that, before anything was done, people might know the full necessity for doing some thing, and how impossible it would be to do indeed, foolish to attempt to do—that which would fully meet the case. He, who had been a man of action all his life, had not perceived how it would grow to be matter of common instinct that to act was to commit oneself, and that, while what one had was not precisely what one wanted, what one had not (if one had it) would be as bad. He had never been self-conscious—it was not the custom of his generation—and, having but little imagination, had never suspected that he was laying up that quality for his descendants, together with a competence which secured them a comfortable leisure.

Of all the persons in his grand-daughter's studio that afternoon, that stray sheep Mr. Purcey would have been, perhaps, the only one whose judgments he would have considered sound. No one had laid up a competence for Mr. Purcey, who had been in business from the age of twenty.

It is uncertain whether the mere fact that he was not in his own fold kept this visitor lingering in the studio when all other guests were gone; or whether it was simply the feeling that the longer he stayed in contact with really artistic people the more distinguished he was becoming. Probably the latter, for the possession of that Harpignies, a good specimen, which he had bought by accident, and subsequently by accident discovered to have a peculiar value, had become a factor in his life, marking him out from all his friends, who went in more for a neat type of Royal Academy landscape, together with reproductions of young ladies in eighteenth-century costumes seated on horseback, or in Scotch gardens. A junior partner in a banking-house of some importance, he lived at Wimbledon, whence he passed up and down daily in his car. To this he owed his acquaintance with the family of Dallison. For one day, after telling his chauffeur to meet him at the Albert Gate, he had set out to stroll down Rotten Row, as he often did on the way home, designing to nod to anybody that he knew. It had turned out a somewhat barren expedition. No one of any consequence had met his eye; and it was with a certain almost fretful longing for distraction that in Kensington Gardens he came on an old man feeding birds out of a paper bag. The birds having flown away on seeing him, he approached the feeder to apologize.

"I'm afraid I frightened your birds, sir," he began.

This old man, who was dressed in smoke-grey tweeds which exhaled a poignant scent of peat, looked at him without answering.

"I'm afraid your birds saw me coming," Mr. Purcey said again.

"In those days," said the aged stranger, "birds were afraid of men."

Mr. Purcey's shrewd grey eyes perceived at once that he had a character to deal with.

"Ah, yes!" he said; "I see—you allude to the present time. That's very nice. Ha, ha!"

The old man answered: "The emotion of fear is inseparably connected with a primitive state of fratricidal rivalry."

This sentence put Mr. Purcey on his guard.

'The old chap,' he thought, 'is touched. He evidently oughtn't to be out here by himself.' He debated, therefore, whether he should hasten away toward his car, or stand by in case his assistance should be needed. Being a kind-hearted man, who believed in his capacity for putting things to rights, and noticing a certain delicacy—a "sort of something rather distinguished," as he phrased it afterwards—in the old fellow's face and figure, he decided to see if he could be of any service. They walked along together, Mr. Purcey watching his new friend askance, and directing the march to where he had ordered his chauffeur to await him.

"You are very fond of birds, I suppose," he said cautiously.

"The birds are our brothers."

The answer was of a nature to determine Mr. Purcey in his diagnosis of the case.

"I've got my car here," he said. "Let me give you a lift home."

This new but aged acquaintance did not seem to hear; his lips moved as though he were following out some thought.

"In those days," Mr. Purcey heard him say, "the congeries of men were known as rookeries. The expression was hardly just towards that handsome bird."

Mr. Purcey touched him hastily on the arm.

"I've got my car here, sir," he said. "Do let me put you down!"

Telling the story afterwards, he had spoken thus:

"The old chap knew where he lived right enough; but dash me if I believe he noticed that I was taking him there in my car—I had the A.i. Damer out. That's how I came to make the acquaintance of these Dallisons. He's the writer, you know, and she paints—rather the new school—she admires Harpignies. Well, when I got there in the car I found Dallison in the garden. Of course I was careful not to put my foot into it. I told him: 'I found this old gentleman wandering about. I've just brought him back in my car.' Who should the old chap turn out to be but her father! They were awfully obliged to me. Charmin' people, but very what d'you call it 'fin de siecle'—like all these professors, these artistic pigs—seem to know rather a queer set, advanced people, and all that sort of cuckoo, always talkin' about the poor, and societies, and new religions, and that kind of thing."

Though he had since been to see them several times, the Dallisons had never robbed him of the virtuous feeling of that good action—they had never let him know that he had brought home, not, as he imagined, a lunatic, but merely a philosopher.

It had been somewhat of a quiet shock to him to find Mr. Stone close to the doorway when he entered Bianca's studio that afternoon; for though he had seen him since the encounter in Kensington Gardens, and knew that he was writing a book, he still felt that he was not quite the sort of old man that one ought to meet about. He had at once begun to tell him of the hanging of the Shoreditch murderer, as recorded in the evening papers. Mr. Stone's reception of that news had still further confirmed his original views. When all the guests were gone—with the exception of Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Dallison and Miss Dallison, "that awfully pretty girl," and the young man "who was always hangin' about her"—he had approached his hostess for some quiet talk. She stood listening to him, very well bred, with just that habitual spice of mockery in her smile, which to Mr. Purcey's eyes made her "a very strikin'-lookin' woman, but rather—" There he would stop, for it required a greater psychologist than he to describe a secret disharmony which a little marred her beauty. Due to some too violent cross of blood, to an environment too unsuited, to what not—it was branded on her. Those who knew Bianca Dallison better

than Mr. Purcey were but too well aware of this fugitive, proud spirit permeating one whose beauty would otherwise have passed unquestioned.

She was a little taller than Cecilia, her figure rather fuller and more graceful, her hair darker, her eyes, too, darker and more deeply set, her cheek-bones higher, her colouring richer. That spirit of the age, Disharmony, must have presided when a child so vivid and dark-coloured was christened Bianca.

Mr. Purcey, however, was not a man who allowed the finest shades of feeling to interfere with his enjoyments. She was a "strikin'-lookin' woman," and there was, thanks to Harpignies, a link between them.

"Your father and I, Mrs. Dallison, can't quite understand each other," he began. "Our views of life don't seem to hit it off exactly."

"Really," murmured Bianca; "I should have thought that you'd have got on so well."

"He's a little bit too—er—scriptural for me, perhaps," said Mr. Purcey, with some delicacy.

"Did we never tell you," Bianca answered softly, "that my father was a rather well-known man of science before his illness?"

"Ah!" replied Mr. Purcey, a little puzzled; "that, of course. D'you know, of all your pictures, Mrs. Dallison, I think that one you call 'The Shadow' is the most rippin'. There's a something about it that gets hold of you. That was the original, wasn't it, at your Christmas party—attractive girl—it's an awf'ly good likeness."

Bianca's face had changed, but Mr. Purcey was not a man to notice a little thing like that.

"If ever you want to part with it," he said, "I hope you'll give me a chance. I mean it'd be a pleasure to me to have it. I think it'll be worth a lot of money some day."

Bianca did not answer, and Mr. Purcey, feeling suddenly a little awkward, said: "I've got my car waiting. I must be off—really." Shaking hands with all of them, he went away.

When the door had closed behind his back, a universal sigh went up. It was followed by a silence, which Hilary broke.

"We'll smoke, Stevie, if Cis doesn't mind."

Stephen Dallison placed a cigarette between his moustacheless lips, always rather screwed up, and ready to nip with a smile anything that might make him feel ridiculous.

"Phew!" he said. "Our friend Purcey becomes a little tedious. He seems to take the whole of Philistia about with him."

"He's a very decent fellow," murmured Hilary.

"A bit heavy, surely!" Stephen Dallison's face, though also long and narrow, was not much like his brother's. His eyes, though not unkind, were far more scrutinising, inquisitive, and practical; his hair darker, smoother.

Letting a puff of smoke escape, he added:

"Now, that's the sort of man to give you a good sound opinion. You should have asked him, Cis."

Cecilia answered with a frown:

"Don't chaff, Stephen; I'm perfectly serious about Mrs. Hughs."

"Well, I don't see what I can do for the good woman, my dear. One can't interfere in these domestic matters."

"But it seems dreadful that we who employ her should be able to do nothing for her. Don't you think so, B.?"

"I suppose we could do something for her if we wanted to badly enough."

Bianca's voice, which had the self-distrustful ring of modern music, suited her personality.

A glance passed between Stephen and his wife.

"That's B. all over!" it seemed to say....

"Hound Street, where they live, is a horrid place."

It was Thyme who spoke, and everybody looked round at her.

"How do you know that?" asked Cecilia.

"I went to see."

"With whom?"

"Martin."

The lips of the young man whose name she mentioned curled sarcastically.

Hilary asked gently:

"Well, my dear, what did you see?"

"Most of the doors are open—"

Bianca murmured: "That doesn't tell us much."

"On the contrary," said Martin suddenly, in a deep bass voice, "it tells you everything. Go on."

"The Hughs live on the top floor at No. 1. It's the best house in the street. On the ground-floor are some people called Budgen; he's a labourer, and she's lame. They've got one son. The Hughs have let off the first-floor front-room to an old man named Creed—"

"Yes, I know," Cecilia muttered.

"He makes about one and tenpence a day by selling papers. The back-room on that floor they let, of course, to your little model, Aunt B."

"She is not my model now."

There was a silence such as falls when no one knows how far the matter mentioned is safe to touch on. Thyme proceeded with her report.

"Her room's much the best in the house; it's airy, and it looks out over someone's garden. I suppose she stays there because it's so cheap. The Hughs' rooms are—" She stopped, wrinkling her straight nose.

"So that's the household," said Hilary. "Two married couples, one young man, one young girl"—his eyes travelled from one to another of the two married couples, the young man, and the young girl, collected in this room—"and one old man," he added softly.

"Not quite the sort of place for you to go poking about in, Thyme," Stephen said ironically. "Do you think so, Martin?"

"Why not?"

Stephen raised his brows, and glanced towards his wife. Her face was dubious, a little scared. There was a silence. Then Bianca spoke:

"Well?" That word, like nearly all her speeches, seemed rather to disconcert her hearers.

"So Hughs ill-treats her?" said Hilary.

"She says so," replied Cecilia—"at least, that's what I understood. Of course, I don't know any details."

"She had better get rid of him, I should think," Bianca murmured.

Out of the silence that followed Thyme's clear voice was heard saying:

"She can't get a divorce; she could get a separation."

Cecilia rose uneasily. These words concreted suddenly a wealth of half-acknowledged doubts about her little daughter. This came of letting her hear people talk, and go about with Martin! She might even have been listening to her grandfather—such a thought was most disturbing. And, afraid, on the one

hand, of gainsaying the liberty of speech, and, on the other, of seeming to approve her daughter's knowledge of the world, she looked at her husband.

But Stephen did not speak, feeling, no doubt, that to pursue the subject would be either to court an ethical, even an abstract, disquisition, and this one did not do in anybody's presence, much less one's wife's or daughter's; or to touch on sordid facts of doubtful character, which was equally distasteful in the circumstances. He, too, however, was uneasy that Thyme should know so much.

The dusk was gathering outside; the fire threw a flickering light, fitfully outlining their figures, making those faces, so familiar to each other, a little mysterious.

At last Stephen broke the silence. "Of course, I'm very sorry for her, but you'd better let it alone—you can't tell with that sort of people; you never can make out what they want—it's safer not to meddle. At all events, it's a matter for a Society to look into first!"

Cecilia answered: "But she's, on my conscience, Stephen."

"They're all on my conscience," muttered Hilary.

Bianca looked at him for the first time; then, turning to her nephew, said: "What do you say, Martin?"

The young man, whose face was stained by the firelight the colour of pale cheese, made no answer.

But suddenly through the stillness came a voice:

"I have thought of something."

Everyone turned round. Mr. Stone was seen emerging from behind "The Shadow"; his frail figure, in its grey tweeds, his silvery hair and beard, were outlined sharply against the wall.

"Why, Father," Cecilia said, "we didn't know that you were here!"

Mr. Stone looked round bewildered; it seemed as if he, too, had been ignorant of that fact.

"What is it that you've thought of?"

The firelight leaped suddenly on to Mr. Stone's thin yellow hand.

"Each of us," he said, "has a shadow in those places—in those streets."

There was a vague rustling, as of people not taking a remark too seriously, and the sound of a closing door.

CHAPTER III

HILARY'S BROWN STUDY

"What do you really think, Uncle Hilary?"

Turning at his writing-table to look at the face of his young niece, Hilary Dallison answered:

"My dear, we have had the same state of affairs since the beginning of the world. There is no chemical process; so far as my knowledge goes, that does not make waste products. What your grandfather calls our 'shadows' are the waste products of the social process. That there is a submerged tenth is as certain as that there is an emerged fiftieth like ourselves; exactly who they are and how they come, whether they can ever be improved away, is, I think, as uncertain as anything can be."

The figure of the girl seated in the big armchair did not stir. Her lips pouted contemptuously, a frown wrinkled her forehead.

"Martin says that a thing is only impossible when we think it so."

"Faith and the mountain, I'm afraid."

Thyme's foot shot forth; it nearly came into contact with Miranda, the little bulldog.

"Oh, duckie!"

But the little moonlight bulldog backed away.

"I hate these slums, uncle; they're so disgusting!"

Hilary leaned his face on his thin hand; it was his characteristic attitude.

"They are hateful, disgusting, and heartrending. That does not make the problem any the less difficult, does it?"

"I believe we simply make the difficulties ourselves by seeing them."

Hilary smiled. "Does Martin say that too?"

"Of course he does."

"Speaking broadly," murmured Hilary, "I see only one difficulty—human nature."

Thyme rose. "I think it horrible to have a low opinion of human nature."

"My dear," said Hilary, "don't you think perhaps that people who have what is called a low opinion of human nature are really more tolerant of it, more in love with it, in fact, than those who, looking to what human nature might be, are bound to hate what human nature is."

The look which Thyme directed at her uncle's amiable, attractive face, with its pointed beard, high forehead, and special little smile, seemed to alarm Hilary.

"I don't want you to have an unnecessarily low opinion of me, my dear. I'm not one of those people who tell you that everything's all right because the rich have their troubles as well as the poor. A certain modicum of decency and comfort is obviously necessary to man before we can begin to do anything but pity him; but that doesn't make it any easier to know how you're going to insure him that modicum of decency and comfort, does it?"

"We've got to do it," said Thyme; "it won't wait any longer."

"My dear," said Hilary, "think of Mr. Purcey! What proportion of the upper classes do you imagine is even conscious of that necessity? We, who have got what I call the social conscience, rise from the platform of Mr. Purcey; we're just a gang of a few thousands to Mr. Purcey's tens of thousands, and how many even of us are prepared, or, for the matter of that, fitted, to act on our consciousness? In spite of your grandfather's ideas, I'm afraid we're all too much divided into classes; man acts, and always has acted, in classes."

"Oh—classes!" answered Thyme—"that's the old superstition, uncle."

"Is it? I thought one's class, perhaps, was only oneself exaggerated—not to be shaken off. For instance, what are you and I, with our particular prejudices, going to do?"

Thyme gave him the cruel look of youth, which seemed to say: 'You are my very good uncle, and a dear; but you are more than twice my age. That, I think, is conclusive!'

"Has something been settled about Mrs. Hughs?" she asked abruptly.

"What does your father say this morning?"

Thyme picked up her portfolio of drawings, and moved towards the door.

"Father's hopeless. He hasn't an idea beyond referring her to the S.P.B."

She was gone; and Hilary, with a sigh, took his pen up, but he wrote nothing down

Hilary and Stephen Dallison were grandsons of that Canon Dallison, well known as friend, and sometime adviser, of a certain Victorian novelist. The Canon, who came of an old Oxfordshire family, which for three hundred years at least had served the Church or State, was himself the author of two volumes of "Socratic Dialogues." He had bequeathed to his son—a permanent official in the Foreign Office—if not his literary talent, the tradition at all events of culture. This tradition had in turn been handed on to Hilary and Stephen.

Educated at a public school and Cambridge, blessed with competent, though not large, independent incomes, and brought up never to allude to money if it could possibly be helped, the two young men

had been turned out of the mint with something of the same outward stamp on them. Both were kindly, both fond of open-air pursuits, and neither of them lazy. Both, too, were very civilised, with that bone-deep decency, that dislike of violence, nowhere so prevalent as in the upper classes of a country whose settled institutions are as old as its roads, or the walls which insulate its parks. But as time went on, the one great quality which heredity and education, environment and means, had bred in both of them—self-consciousness—acted in these two brothers very differently. To Stephen it was preservative, keeping him, as it were, in ice throughout hot-weather seasons, enabling him to know exactly when he was in danger of decomposition, so that he might nip the process in the bud; it was with him a healthy, perhaps slightly chemical, ingredient, binding his component parts, causing them to work together safely, homogeneously. In Hilary the effect seemed to have been otherwise; like some slow and subtle poison, this great quality, self-consciousness, had soaked his system through and through; permeated every cranny of his spirit, so that to think a definite thought, or do a definite deed, was obviously becoming difficult to him. It took in the main the form of a sort of gentle desiccating humour.

"It's a remarkable thing," he had one day said to Stephen, "that by the process of assimilating little bits of chopped-up cattle one should be able to form the speculation of how remarkable a thing it is."

Stephen had paused a second before answering—they were lunching off roast beef in the Law Courts—he had then said:

"You're surely not going to eschew the higher mammals, like our respected father-in-law?"

"On the contrary," said Hilary, "to chew them; but it is remarkable, for all that; you missed my point."

It was clear that a man who could see anything remarkable in such a thing was far gone, and Stephen had murmured:

"My dear old chap, you're getting too introspective."

Hilary, having given his brother the special retiring smile, which seemed not only to say; "Don't let me bore you," but also, "Well, perhaps you had better wait outside," the conversation closed.

That smile of Hilary's, which jibbed away from things, though disconcerting and apt to put an end to intercourse, was natural enough. A sensitive man, who had passed his life amongst cultivated people in the making of books, guarded from real wants by modest, not vulgar, affluence, had not reached the age of forty-two without finding his delicacy sharpened to the point of fastidiousness. Even his dog could see the sort of man he was. She knew that he would take no liberties, either with her ears or with her tail. She knew that he would never hold her mouth ajar, and watch her teeth, as some men do; that when she was lying on her back he would gently rub her chest without giving her the feeling that she was doing wrong, as women will; and if she sat, as she was sitting now, with her eyes fixed on his study fire, he would never, she knew, even from afar, prevent her thinking of the nothing she loved to think on.

In his study, which smelt of a particular mild tobacco warranted to suit the nerves of any literary man, there was a bust of Socrates, which always seemed to have a strange attraction for its owner. He had once described to a fellow-writer the impression produced on him by that plaster face, so capaciously ugly, as though comprehending the whole of human life, sharing all man's gluttony and lust, his violence and rapacity, but sharing also his strivings toward love and reason and serenity.

"He's telling us," said Hilary, "to drink deep, to dive down and live with mermaids, to lie out on the hills under the sun, to sweat with helots, to know all things and all men. No seat, he says, among the Wise, unless we've been through it all before we climb! That's how he strikes me—not too cheering for people of our sort!"

Under the shadow of this bust Hilary rested his forehead on his hand. In front of him were three open books and a pile of manuscript, and pushed to one side a little sheaf of pieces of green-white paper, press-cuttings of his latest book.

The exact position occupied by his work in the life of such a man is not too easy to define. He earned an income by it, but he was not dependent on that income. As poet, critic, writer of essays, he had made himself a certain name—not a great name, but enough to swear by. Whether his fastidiousness could have stood the conditions of literary existence without private means was now and then debated by his friends; it could probably have done so better than was supposed, for he sometimes startled those who set him down as a dilettante by a horny way of retiring into his shell for the finish of a piece of work.

Try as he would that morning to keep his thoughts concentrated on his literary labour, they wandered to his conversation with his niece and to the discussion on Mrs. Hughs; the family seamstress, in his

wife's studio the day before. Stephen had lingered behind Cecilia and Thyme when they went away after dinner, to deliver a last counsel to his brother at the garden gate.

"Never meddle between man and wife—you know what the lower classes are!"

And across the dark garden he had looked back towards the house. One room on the ground-floor alone was lighted. Through its open window the head and shoulders of Mr. Stone could be seen close to a small green reading-lamp. Stephen shook his head, murmuring:

"But, I say, our old friend, eh? 'In those places—in those streets!' It's worse than simple crankiness—the poor old chap is getting almost—"

And, touching his forehead lightly with two fingers, he had hurried off with the ever-springy step of one whose regularity habitually controls his imagination.

Pausing a minute amongst the bushes, Hilary too had looked at the lighted window which broke the dark front of his house, and his little moonlight bulldog, peering round his legs, had gazed up also. Mr. Stone was still standing, pen in hand, presumably deep in thought. His silvered head and beard moved slightly to the efforts of his brain. He came over to the window, and, evidently not seeing his son-in-law, faced out into the night.

In that darkness were all the shapes and lights and shadows of a London night in spring: the trees in dark bloom; the wan yellow of the gas-lamps, pale emblems of the self-consciousness of towns; the clustered shades of the tiny leaves, spilled, purple, on the surface of the road, like bunches of black grapes squeezed down into the earth by the feet of the passers-by. There, too, were shapes of men and women hurrying home, and the great blocked shapes of the houses where they lived. A halo hovered above the City—a high haze of yellow light, dimming the stars. The black, slow figure of a policeman moved noiselessly along the railings opposite.

From then till eleven o'clock, when he would make himself some cocoa on a little spirit-lamp, the writer of the "Book of Universal Brotherhood" would alternate between his bent posture above his manuscript and his blank consideration of the night....

With a jerk, Hilary came back to his reflections beneath the bust of Socrates.

"Each of us has a shadow in those places—in those streets!"

There certainly was a virus in that notion. One must either take it as a jest, like Stephen; or, what must one do? How far was it one's business to identify oneself with other people, especially the helpless—how far to preserve oneself intact—'integer vita'? Hilary was no young person, like his niece or Martin, to whom everything seemed simple; nor was he an old person like their grandfather, for whom life had lost its complications.

And, very conscious of his natural disabilities for a decision on a like, or indeed on any, subject except, perhaps, a point of literary technique, he got up from his writing-table, and, taking his little bulldog, went out. His intention was to visit Mrs. Hughs in Hound Street, and see with his own eyes the state of things. But he had another reason, too, for wishing to go there

CHAPTER IV

THE LITTLE MODEL

When in the preceding autumn Bianca began her picture called "The Shadow," nobody was more surprised than Hilary that she asked him to find her a model for the figure. Not knowing the nature of the picture, nor having been for many years—perhaps never—admitted into the workings of his wife's spirit, he said:

"Why don't you ask Thyme to sit for you?"

Blanca answered: "She's not the type at all—too matter-of-fact. Besides, I don't want a lady; the figure's to be half draped."

Hilary smiled.

Blanca knew quite well that he was smiling at this distinction between ladies and other women, and understood that he was smiling, not so much at her, but at himself, for secretly agreeing with the distinction she had made.

And suddenly she smiled too.

There was the whole history of their married life in those two smiles. They meant so much: so many thousand hours of suppressed irritation, so many baffled longings and earnest efforts to bring their natures together. They were the supreme, quiet evidence of the divergence of two lives—that slow divergence which had been far from being wilful, and was the more hopeless in that it had been so gradual and so gentle. They had never really had a quarrel, having enlightened views of marriage; but they had smiled. They had smiled so often through so many years that no two people in the world could very well be further from each other. Their smiles had banned the revelation even to themselves of the tragedy of their wedded state. It is certain that neither could help those smiles, which were not intended to wound, but came on their faces as naturally as moonlight falls on water, out of their inimically constituted souls.

Hilary spent two afternoons among his artist friends, trying, by means of the indications he had gathered, to find a model for "The Shadow." He had found one at last. Her name, Barton, and address had been given him by a painter of still life, called French.

"She's never sat to me," he said; "my sister discovered her in the West Country somewhere. She's got a story of some sort. I don't know what. She came up about three months ago, I think."

"She's not sitting to your sister now?" Hilary asked.

"No," said the painter of still life; "my sister's married and gone out to India. I don't know whether she'd sit for the half-draped, but I should think so. She'll have to, sooner or later; she may as well begin, especially to a woman. There's a something about her that's attractive—you might try her!" And with these words he resumed the painting of still life which he had broken off to talk to Hilary.

Hilary had written to this girl to come and see him. She had come just before dinner the same day.

He found her standing in the middle of his study, not daring, as it seemed, to go near the furniture, and as there was very little light, he could hardly see her face. She was resting a foot, very patient, very still, in an old brown skirt, an ill-shaped blouse, and a blue-green tam-o'-shanter cap. Hilary turned up the light. He saw a round little face with broad cheekbones, flower-blue eyes, short lamp-black lashes, and slightly parted lips. It was difficult to judge of her figure in those old clothes, but she was neither short nor tall; her neck was white and well set on, her hair pale brown and abundant. Hilary noted that her chin, though not receding, was too soft and small; but what he noted chiefly was her look of patient expectancy, as though beyond the present she were seeing something, not necessarily pleasant, which had to come. If he had not known from the painter of still life that she was from the country, he would have thought her a town-bred girl, she looked so pale. Her appearance, at all events, was not "too matter-of-fact." Her speech, however, with its slight West-Country burr, was matter-of-fact enough, concerned entirely with how long she would have to sit, and the pay she was to get for it. In the middle of their conversation she sank down on the floor, and Hilary was driven to restore her with biscuits and liqueur, which in his haste he took for brandy. It seemed she had not eaten since her breakfast the day before, which had consisted of a cup of tea. In answer to his remonstrance, she made this matter-of-fact remark:

"If you haven't money, you can't buy things.... There's no one I can ask up here; I'm a stranger."

"Then you haven't been getting work?"

"No," the little model answered sullenly; "I don't want to sit as most of them want me to till I'm obliged." The blood rushed up in her face with startling vividness, then left it white again.

'Ah!' thought Hilary, 'she has had experience already.'

Both he and his wife were accessible to cases of distress, but the nature of their charity was different. Hilary was constitutionally unable to refuse his aid to anything that held out a hand for it. Bianca (whose sociology was sounder), while affirming that charity was wrong, since in a properly constituted State no one should need help, referred her cases, like Stephen, to the "Society for the Prevention of Begging," which took much time and many pains to ascertain the worst.

But in this case what was of importance was that the poor girl should have a meal, and after that to find out if she were living in a decent house; and since she appeared not to be, to recommend her somewhere better. And as in charity it is always well to kill two birds with one expenditure of force, it was found that Mrs. Hughs, the seamstress, had a single room to let unfurnished, and would be more than glad of four shillings, or even three and six, a week for it. Furniture was also found for her: a bed that creaked, a washstand, table, and chest of drawers; a carpet, two chairs, and certain things to cook with; some of those old photographs and prints that hide in cupboards, and a peculiar little clock, which frequently forgot the time of day. All these and some elementary articles of dress were sent round in a little van, with three ferns whose time had nearly come, and a piece of the plant called "honesty." Soon after this she came to "sit." She was a very quiet and passive little model, and was not required to pose half-draped, Bianca having decided that, after all, "The Shadow" was better represented fully clothed; for, though she discussed the nude, and looked on it with freedom, when it came to painting unclothed people, she felt a sort of physical aversion.

Hilary, who was curious, as a man naturally would be, about anyone who had fainted from hunger at his feet, came every now and then to see, and would sit watching this little half-starved girl with kindly and screwed-up eyes. About his personality there was all the evidence of that saying current among those who knew him: "Hilary would walk a mile sooner than tread on an ant." The little model, from the moment when he poured liqueur between her teeth, seemed to feel he had a claim on her, for she reserved her small, matter-of-fact confessions for his ears. She made them in the garden, coming in or going out; or outside, and, now and then, inside his study, like a child who comes and shows you a sore finger. Thus, quite suddenly:

"I've four shillings left over this week, Mr. Dallison," or, "Old Mr. Creed's gone to the hospital to-day, Mr. Dallison."

Her face soon became less bloodless than on that first evening, but it was still pale, inclined to colour in wrong places on cold days, with little blue veins about the temples and shadows under the eyes. The lips were still always a trifle parted, and she still seemed to be looking out for what was coming, like a little Madonna, or Venus, in a Botticelli picture. This look of hers, coupled with the matter-of-factness of her speech, gave its flavour to her personality....

On Christmas Day the picture was on view to Mr. Purcey, who had chanced to "give his car a run," and to other connoisseurs. Bianca had invited her model to be present at this function, intending to get her work. But, slipping at once into a corner, the girl had stood as far as possible behind a canvas. People, seeing her standing there, and noting her likeness to the picture, looked at her with curiosity, and passed on, murmuring that she was an interesting type. They did not talk to her, either because they were afraid she could not talk of the things they could talk of, or that they could not talk of the things she could talk of, or because they were anxious not to seem to patronize her. She talked to one, therefore. This occasioned Hilary some distress. He kept coming up and smiling at her, or making tentative remarks or jests, to which she would reply, "Yes, Mr. Dallison," or "No, Mr. Dallison," as the case might be.

Seeing him return from one of these little visits, an Art Critic standing before the picture had smiled, and his round, clean-shaven, sensual face had assumed a greenish tint in eyes and cheeks, as of the fat in turtle soup.

The only two other people who had noticed her particularly were those old acquaintances, Mr. Purcey and Mr. Stone. Mr. Purcey had thought, 'Rather a good-lookin' girl,' and his eyes strayed somewhat continually in her direction. There was something piquant and, as it were, unlawfully enticing to him in the fact that she was a real artist's model.

Mr. Stone's way of noticing her had been different. He had approached in his slightly inconvenient way, as though seeing but one thing in the whole world.

"You are living by yourself?" he had said. "I shall come and see you."

Made by the Art Critic or by Mr. Purcey, that somewhat strange remark would have had one meaning; made by Mr. Stone it obviously had another. Having finished what he had to say, the author of the book of "Universal Brotherhood" had bowed and turned to go. Perceiving that he saw before him the door and nothing else, everybody made way for him at once. The remarks that usually arose behind his back began to be heard—"Extraordinary old man!" "You know, he bathes in the Serpentine all the year round?" "And he cooks his food himself, and does his own room, they say; and all the rest of his time he writes a book!" "A perfect crank!"

CHAPTER V

THE COMEDY BEGINS

The Art Critic who had smiled was—like all men—a subject for pity rather than for blame. An Irishman of real ability, he had started life with high ideals and a belief that he could live with them. He had hoped to serve Art, to keep his service pure; but, having one day let his acid temperament out of hand to revel in an orgy of personal retaliation, he had since never known when she would slip her chain and come home smothered in mire. Moreover, he no longer chastised her when she came. His ideals had left him, one by one; he now lived alone, immune from dignity and shame, soothing himself with whisky. A man of rancour, meet for pity, and, in his cups, contented. He had lunched freely before coming to Blanca's Christmas function, but by four o'clock, the gases which had made him feel the world a pleasant place had nearly all evaporated, and he was suffering from a wish to drink again. Or it may have been that this girl, with her soft look, gave him the feeling that she ought to have belonged to him; and as she did not, he felt, perhaps, a natural irritation that she belonged, or might belong, to somebody else. Or, again, it was possibly his natural male distaste for the works of women painters which induced an awkward frame of mind.

Two days later in a daily paper over no signature, appeared this little paragraph: "We learn that 'The Shadow,' painted by Bianca Stone, who is not generally known to be the wife of the writer, Mr. Hilary Dallison, will soon be exhibited at the Bencox Gallery. This very 'fin-de-siecle' creation, with its unpleasant subject, representing a woman (presumably of the streets) standing beneath a gas-lamp, is a somewhat anaemic piece of painting. If Mr. Dallison, who finds the type an interesting one, embodies her in one of his very charming poems, we trust the result will be less bloodless."

The little piece of green-white paper containing this information was handed to Hilary by his wife at breakfast. The blood mounted slowly in his cheeks. Bianca's eyes fastened themselves on that flush. Whether or no—as philosophers say—little things are all big with the past, of whose chain they are the latest links, they frequently produce what apparently are great results.

The marital relations of Hilary and his wife, which till then had been those of, at all events, formal conjugality, changed from that moment. After ten o'clock at night their lives became as separate as though they lived in different houses. And this change came about without expostulations, reproach, or explanation, just by the turning of a key; and even this was the merest symbol, employed once only, to save the ungracefulness of words. Such a hint was quite enough for a man like Hilary, whose delicacy, sense of the ridiculous, and peculiar faculty of starting back and retiring into himself, put the need of anything further out of the question. Both must have felt, too, that there was nothing that could be explained. An anonymous double entendre was not precisely evidence on which to found a rupture of the marital tie. The trouble was so much deeper than that—the throbbing of a woman's wounded self-esteem, of the feeling that she was no longer loved, which had long cried out for revenge.

One morning in the middle of the week after this incident the innocent author of it presented herself in Hilary's study, and, standing in her peculiar patient attitude, made her little statements. As usual, they were very little ones; as usual, she seemed helpless, and suggested a child with a sore finger. She had no other work; she owed the week's rent; she did not know what would happen to her; Mrs. Dallison did not want her any more; she could not tell what she had done! The picture was finished, she knew, but Mrs. Dallison had said she was going to paint her again in another picture....

Hilary did not reply.

"....That old gentleman, Mr.—Mr. Stone, had been to see her. He wanted her to come and copy out his book for two hours a day, from four to six, at a shilling an hour. Ought she to come, please? He said his book would take him years."

Before answering her Hilary stood for a full minute staring at the fire. The little model stole a look at him. He suddenly turned and faced her. His glance was evidently disconcerting to the girl. It was, indeed, a critical and dubious look, such as he might have bent on a folio of doubtful origin.

"Don't you think," he said at last, "that it would be much better for you to go back into the country?"

The little model shook her head vehemently.

"Oh no!"

"Well, but why not? This is a most unsatisfactory sort of life."

The girl stole another look at him, then said sullenly:

"I can't go back there."

"What is it? Aren't your people nice to you?"

She grew red.

"No; and I don't want to go"; then, evidently seeing from Hilary's face that his delicacy forbade his questioning her further, she brightened up, and murmured: "The old gentleman said it would make me independent."

"Well," replied Hilary, with a shrug, "you'd better take his offer."

She kept turning her face back as she went down the path, as though to show her gratitude. And presently, looking up from his manuscript, he saw her face still at the railings, peering through a lilac bush. Suddenly she skipped, like a child let out of school. Hilary got up, perturbed. The sight of that skipping was like the rays of a lantern turned on the dark street of another human being's life. It revealed, as in a flash, the loneliness of this child, without money and without friends, in the midst of this great town.

The months of January, February, March passed, and the little model came daily to copy the "Book of Universal Brotherhood."

Mr. Stone's room, for which he insisted on paying rent, was never entered by a servant. It was on the ground-floor, and anyone passing the door between the hours of four and six could hear him dictating slowly, pausing now and then to spell a word. In these two hours it appeared to be his custom to read out, for fair copying, the labours of the other seven.

At five o'clock there was invariably a sound of plates and cups, and out of it the little model's voice would rise, matter-of-fact, soft, monotoned, making little statements; and in turn Mr. Stone's, also making statements which clearly lacked cohesion with those of his young friend. On one occasion, the door being open, Hilary heard distinctly the following conversation:

The LITTLE MODEL: "Mr. Creed says he was a butler. He's got an ugly nose." (A pause.)

Mr. STONE: "In those days men were absorbed in thinking of their individualities. Their occupations seemed to them important—"

The LITTLE MODEL: "Mr. Creed says his savings were all swallowed up by illness."

Mr. STONE: "—it was not so."

The LITTLE MODEL: "Mr. Creed says he was always brought up to go to church."

Mr. STONE (suddenly): "There has been no church worth going to since A. D. 700."

The LITTLE MODEL: "But he doesn't go."

And with a flying glance through the just open door Hilary saw her holding bread-and-butter with inky fingers, her lips a little parted, expecting the next bite, and her eyes fixed curiously on Mr. Stone, whose transparent hand held a teacup, and whose eyes were immovably fixed on distance.

It was one day in April that Mr. Stone, heralded by the scent of Harris tweed and baked potatoes which habitually encircled him, appeared at five o'clock in Hilary's study doorway.

"She has not come," he said.

Hilary laid down his pen. It was the first real Spring day.

"Will you come for a walk with me, sir, instead?" he asked.

"Yes," said Mr. Stone.

They walked out into Kensington Gardens, Hilary with his head rather bent towards the ground, and Mr. Stone, with eyes fixed on his far thoughts, slightly poking forward his silver beard.

In their favourite firmaments the stars of crocuses and daffodils were shining. Almost every tree had its pigeon cooing, every bush its blackbird in full song. And on the paths were babies in perambulators. These were their happy hunting-grounds, and here they came each day to watch from a safe distance

the little dirty girls sitting on the grass nursing little dirty boys, to listen to the ceaseless chatter of these common urchins, and learn to deal with the great problem of the lowest classes. And babies sat in their perambulators, thinking and sucking india-rubber tubes. Dogs went before them, and nursemaids followed after.

The spirit of colour was flying in the distant trees, swathing them with brownish-purple haze; the sky was saffroned by dying sunlight. It was such a day as brings a longing to the heart, like that which the moon brings to the hearts of children.

Mr. Stone and Hilary sat down in the Broad Walk.

"Elm-trees!" said Mr. Stone. "It is not known when they assumed their present shape. They have one universal soul. It is the same with man." He ceased, and Hilary looked round uneasily. They were alone on the bench.

Mr. Stone's voice rose again. "Their form and balance is their single soul; they have preserved it from century to century. This is all they live for. In those days"—his voice sank; he had plainly forgotten that he was not alone—"when men had no universal conceptions, they would have done well to look at the trees. Instead of fostering a number of little souls on the pabulum of varying theories of future life, they should have been concerned to improve their present shapes, and thus to dignify man's single soul"

"Elms were always considered dangerous trees, I believe," said Hilary.

Mr. Stone turned, and, seeing his son-in-law beside him, asked:

"You spoke to me, I think?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Stone said wistfully:

"Shall we walk?"

They rose from the bench and walked on....

The explanation of the little model's absence was thus stated by herself to Hilary: "I had an appointment."

"More work?"

"A friend of Mr. French."

"Yes—who?"

"Mr. Lennard. He's a sculptor; he's got a studio in Chelsea. He wants me to pose to him."

"Ah!"

She stole a glance at Hilary, and hung her head.

Hilary turned to the window. "You know what posing to a sculptor means, of course?"

The little model's voice sounded behind him, matter-of-fact as ever: "He said I was just the figure he was looking for."

Hilary continued to stare through the window. "I thought you didn't mean to begin standing for the nude."

"I don't want to stay poor always."

Hilary turned round at the strange tone of these unexpected words.

The girl was in a streak of sunlight; her pale cheeks flushed; her pale, half-opened lips red; her eyes, in their setting of short black lashes, wide and mutinous; her young round bosom heaving as if she had been running.

"I don't want to go on copying books all my life."

"Oh, very well."

"Mr. Dallison! I didn't mean that—I didn't really! I want to do what you tell me to do—I do!"

Hilary stood contemplating her with the dubious, critical look, as though asking: "What is there behind you? Are you really a genuine edition, or what?" which had so disconcerted her before. At last he said: "You must do just as you like. I never advise anybody."

"But you don't want me to—I know you don't. Of course, if you don't want me to, then it'll be a pleasure not to!"

Hilary smiled.

"Don't you like copying for Mr. Stone?"

The little model made a face. "I like Mr. Stone—he's such a funny old gentleman."

"That is the general opinion," answered Hilary. "But Mr. Stone, you know, thinks that we are funny."

The little model smiled faintly, too; the streak of sunlight had slanted past her, and, standing there behind its glamour and million floating specks of gold-dust, she looked for the moment like the young Shade of Spring, watching with expectancy for what the year would bring her.

With the words "I am ready," spoken from the doorway, Mr. Stone interrupted further colloquy....

But though the girl's position in the household had, to all seeming, become established, now and then some little incident—straws blowing down the wind—showed feelings at work beneath the family's apparent friendliness, beneath that tentative and almost apologetic manner towards the poor or helpless, which marks out those who own what Hilary had called the "social conscience." Only three days, indeed, before he sat in his brown study, meditating beneath the bust of Socrates, Cecilia, coming to lunch, had let fall this remark:

"Of course, I know nobody can read his handwriting; but I can't think why father doesn't dictate to a typist, instead of to that little girl. She could go twice the pace!"

Blanca's answer, deferred for a few seconds, was:

"Hilary perhaps knows."

"Do you dislike her coming here?" asked Hilary.

"Not particularly. Why?"

"I thought from your tone you did."

"I don't dislike her coming here for that purpose."

"Does she come for any other?"

Cecilia, dropping her quick glance to her fork, said just a little hastily: "Father is extraordinary, of course."

But the next three days Hilary was out in the afternoon when the little model came.

This, then, was the other reason, on the morning of the first of May, which made him not averse to go and visit Mrs. Hughs in Hound Street, Kensington.

CHAPTER VI

FIRST PILGRIMAGE TO HOUND STREET

Hilary and his little bulldog entered Hound Street from its eastern end. It was a grey street of three-storied houses, all in one style of architecture. Nearly all their doors were open, and on the doorsteps babes and children were enjoying Easter holidays. They sat in apathy, varied by sudden little slaps and bursts of noise. Nearly all were dirty; some had whole boots, some half boots, and two or three had none. In the gutters more children were at play; their shrill tongues and febrile movements gave Hilary the feeling that their "caste" exacted of them a profession of this faith: "To-day we live; to-morrow—if there be one—will be like to-day."

He had unconsciously chosen the very centre of the street to walk in, and Miranda, who had never in her life demeaned herself to this extent, ran at his heels, turning up her eyes, as though to say: 'One thing I make a point of—no dog must speak to me!'

Fortunately, there were no dogs; but there were many cats, and these cats were thin.

Through the upper windows of the houses Hilary had glimpses of women in poor habiliments doing various kinds of work, but stopping now and then to gaze into the street. He walked to the end, where a wall stopped him, and, still in the centre of the road, he walked the whole length back. The children stared at his tall figure with indifference; they evidently felt that he was not of those who, like themselves, had no to-morrow.

No. 1, Hound Street, abutting on the garden of a house of better class, was distinctly the show building of the street. The door, however, was not closed, and pulling the remnant of a bell, Hilary walked in.

The first thing that he noticed was a smell; it was not precisely bad, but it might have been better. It was a smell of walls and washing, varied rather vaguely by red herrings. The second thing he noticed was his moonlight bulldog, who stood on the doorstep eyeing a tiny sandy cat. This very little cat, whose back was arched with fury, he was obliged to chase away before his bulldog would come in. The third thing he noticed was a lame woman of short stature, standing in the doorway of a room. Her face, with big cheek-bones, and wide-open, light grey, dark-lashed eyes, was broad and patient; she rested her lame leg by holding to the handle of the door.

"I dunno if you'll find anyone upstairs. I'd go and ask, but my leg's lame."

"So I see," said Hilary; "I'm sorry."

The woman sighed: "Been like that these five years"; and turned back into her room.

"Is there nothing to be done for it?"

"Well, I did think so once," replied the woman, "but they say the bone's diseased; I neglected it at the start."

"Oh dear!"

"We hadn't the time to give to it," the woman said defensively, retiring into a room so full of china cups, photographs, coloured prints, waxwork fruits, and other ornaments, that there seemed no room for the enormous bed.

Wishing her good-morning, Hilary began to mount the stairs. On the first floor he paused. Here, in the back room, the little model lived.

He looked around him. The paper on the passage walls was of a dingy orange colour, the blind of the window torn, and still pursuing him, pervading everything, was the scent of walls and washing and red herrings. There came on him a sickness, a sort of spiritual revolt. To live here, to pass up these stairs, between these dingy, bilious walls, on this dirty carpet, with this—ugh! every day; twice, four times, six times, who knew how many times a day! And that sense, the first to be attracted or revolted, the first to become fastidious with the culture of the body, the last to be expelled from the temple of the pure-spirit; that sense to whose refinement all breeding and all education is devoted; that sense which, ever an inch at least in front of man, is able to retard the development of nations, and paralyse all social schemes—this Sense of Smell awakened within him the centuries of his gentility, the ghosts of all those Dallisons who, for three hundred years and more, had served Church or State. It revived the souls of scents he was accustomed to, and with them, subtly mingled, the whole live fabric of aestheticism, woven in fresh air and laid in lavender. It roused the simple, non-extravagant demand of perfect cleanliness. And though he knew that chemists would have certified the composition of his blood to be the same as that of the dwellers in this house, and that this smell, composed of walls and washing and red herrings, was really rather healthy, he stood frowning fixedly at the girl's door, and the memory of his young niece's delicately wrinkled nose as she described the house rose before him. He went on upstairs, followed by his moonlight bulldog.

Hilary's tall thin figure appearing in the open doorway of the top-floor front, his kind and worried face, and the pale agate eyes of the little bulldog peeping through his legs, were witnessed by nothing but a baby, who was sitting in a wooden box in the centre of the room. This baby, who was very like a piece of putty to which Nature had by some accident fitted two movable black eyes, was clothed in a woman's knitted undervest, spreading beyond his feet and hands, so that nothing but his head was visible. This vest divided him from the wooden shavings on which he sat, and, since he had not yet

attained the art of rising to his feet, the box divided him from contacts of all other kinds. As completely isolated from his kingdom as a Czar of all the Russias, he was doing nothing. In this realm there was a dingy bed, two chairs, and a washstand, with one lame leg, supported by an aged footstool. Clothes and garments were hanging on nails, pans lay about the hearth, a sewing-machine stood on a bare deal table. Over the bed was hung an oleograph, from a Christmas supplement, of the birth of Jesus, and above it a bayonet, under which was printed in an illiterate hand on a rough scroll of paper: "Gave three of em what for at Elandslaagte. S. Hughs." Some photographs adorned the walls, and two drooping ferns stood on the window-ledge. The room withal had a sort of desperate tidiness; in a large cupboard, slightly open, could be seen stowed all that must not see the light of day. The window of the baby's kingdom was tightly closed; the scent was the scent of walls and washing and red herrings, and—of other things.

Hilary looked at the baby, and the baby looked at him. The eyes of that tiny scrap of grey humanity seemed saying:

'You are not my mother, I believe?'

He stooped down and touched its cheek. The baby blinked its black eyes once.

'No,' it seemed, to say again, 'you are not my mother.'

A lump rose in Hilary's throat; he turned and went downstairs. Pausing outside the little model's door, he knocked, and, receiving no answer, turned the handle. The little square room was empty; it was neat and clean enough, with a pink-flowered paper of comparatively modern date. Through its open window could be seen a pear-tree in full bloom. Hilary shut the door again with care, ashamed of having opened it.

On the half-landing, staring up at him with black eyes like the baby's, was a man of medium height and active build, whose short face, with broad cheekbones, cropped dark hair, straight nose, and little black moustache, was burnt a dark dun colour. He was dressed in the uniform of those who sweep the streets—a loose blue blouse, and trousers tucked into boots reaching half-way up his calves; he held a peaked cap in his hand.

After some seconds of mutual admiration, Hilary said:

"Mr. Hughs, I believe?" Yes.

"I've been up to see your wife."

"Have you?"

"You know me, I suppose?"

"Yes, I know you."

"Unfortunately, there's only your baby at home."

Hughs motioned with his cap towards the little model's room. "I thought perhaps you'd been to see her," he said. His black eyes smouldered; there was more than class resentment in the expression of his face.

Flushing slightly and giving him a keen look, Hilary passed down the stairs without replying. But Miranda had not followed. She stood, with one paw delicately held up above the topmost step.

'I don't know this man,' she seemed to say, 'and I don't like his looks.'

Hughs grinned. "I never hurt a dumb animal," he said; "come on, tykie!"

Stimulated by a word she had never thought to hear, Miranda descended rapidly.

'He meant that for impudence,' thought Hilary as he walked away.

"Westminister, sir? Oh dear!"

A skinny trembling hand was offering him a greenish newspaper.

"Terrible cold wind for the time o' year!"

A very aged man in black-rimmed spectacles, with a distended nose and long upper lip and chin, was tentatively fumbling out change for sixpence.

"I seem to know your face," said Hilary.

"Oh dear, yes. You deals with this 'ere shop—the tobacco department. I've often seen you when you've a-been agoin' in. Sometimes you has the Pell Mell off o' this man here." He jerked his head a trifle to the left, where a younger man was standing armed with a sheaf of whiter papers. In that gesture were years of envy, heart-burning, and sense of wrong. 'That's my paper,' it seemed to say, 'by all the rights of man; and that low-class fellow sellin' it, takin' away my profits!'

"I sells this 'ere Westminster. I reads it on Sundays—it's a gentleman's paper, 'igh-class paper—notwithstandin' of its politics. But, Lor', sir, with this 'ere man a-sellin' the Pell Mell"—lowering his voice, he invited Hilary to confidence—"so many o' the gentry takes that; an' there ain't too many o' the gentry about 'ere—I mean, not o' the real gentry—that I can afford to 'ave 'em took away from me."

Hilary, who had stopped to listen out of delicacy, had a flash of recollection. "You live in Hound Street?"

The old man answered eagerly: "Oh dear! Yes, sir—No. 1, name of Creed. You're the gentleman where the young person goes for to copy of a book!"

"It's not my book she copies."

"Oh no; it's an old gentleman; I know 'im. He come an' see me once. He come in one Sunday morning. 'Here's a pound o' tobacco for you!' 'e says. 'You was a butler,' 'e says. 'Butlers!' 'e says, 'there'll be no butlers in fifty years.' An' out 'e goes. Not quite"—he put a shaky hand up to his head—"not quite—oh dear!"

"Some people called Hughs live in your house, I think?"

"I rents my room off o' them. A lady was a-speakin' to me yesterday about 'em; that's not your lady, I suppose, sir?"

His eyes seemed to apostrophise Hilary's hat, which was of soft felt: 'Yes, yes—I've seen your sort a-stayin' about in the best houses. They has you down because of your learnin'; and quite the manners of a gentleman you've got.'

"My wife's sister, I expect."

"Oh dear! She often has a paper off o' me. A real lady—not one o' these"—again he invited Hilary to confidence—"you know what I mean, sir—that buys their things a' ready-made at these 'ere large establishments. Oh, I know her well."

"The old gentleman who visited you is her father."

"Is he? Oh dear!" The old butler was silent, evidently puzzled.

Hilary's eyebrows began to execute those intricate manoeuvres which always indicated that he was about to tax his delicacy.

"How-how does Hughs treat the little girl who lives in the next room to you?"

The old butler replied in a rather gloomy tone:

"She takes my advice, and don't 'ave nothin' to say to 'im. Dreadful foreign-lookin' man 'e is. Wherever 'e was brought up I can't think!"

"A soldier, wasn't he?"

"So he says. He's one o' these that works for the Vestry; an' then 'e'll go an' get upon the drink, an' when that sets 'im off, it seems as if there wasn't no respect for nothing in 'im; he goes on against the gentry, and the Church, and every sort of institution. I never met no soldiers like him. Dreadful foreign—Welsh, they tell me."

"What do you think of the street you're living in?"

"I keeps myself to myself; low class o' street it is; dreadful low class o' person there—no self-respect about 'em."

"Ah!" said Hilary.

"These little 'ouses, they get into the hands o' little men, and they don't care so long as they makes their rent out o' them. They can't help themselves—low class o' man like that; 'e's got to do the best 'e

can for 'imself. They say there's thousands o' these 'ouses all over London. There's some that's for pullin' of 'em down, but that's talkin' rubbish; where are you goin' to get the money for to do it? These 'ere little men, they can't afford not even to put a paper on the walls, and the big ground landlords—you can't expect them to know what's happenin' behind their backs. There's some ignorant fellers like this Hughs talks a lot o' wild nonsense about the duty o' ground landlords; but you can't expect the real gentry to look into these sort o' things. They've got their estates down in the country. I've lived with them, and of course I know."

The little bulldog, incommoded by the passers-by, now took the opportunity of beating with her tail against the old butler's legs.

"Oh dear! what's this? He don't bite, do 'e? Good Sambo!"

Miranda sought her master's eye at once. 'You see what happens to her if a lady loiters in the streets,' she seemed to say.

"It must be hard standing about here all day, after the life you've led," said Hilary.

"I mustn't complain; it's been the salvation o' me."

"Do you get shelter?"

Again the old butler seemed to take him into confidence.

"Sometimes of a wet night they lets me stand up in the archway there; they know I'm respectable. 'T wouldn't never do for that man"—he nodded at his rival—"or any of them boys to get standin' there, obstructin' of the traffic."

"I wanted to ask you, Mr. Creed, is there anything to be done for Mrs. Hughs?"

The frail old body quivered with the vindictive force of his answer.

"Accordin' to what she says, if I'm a-to believe 'er, I'd have him up before the magistrate, sure as my name's Creed, an' get a separation, an' I wouldn't never live with 'im again: that's what she ought to do. An' if he come to go for her after that, I'd have 'im in prison, if 'e killed me first! I've no patience with a low class o' man like that! He insulted of me this morning."

"Prison's a dreadful remedy," murmured Hilary.

The old butler answered stoutly: "There ain't but one way o' treatin' them low fellers—ketch hold o' them until they holler!"

Hilary was about to reply when he found himself alone. At the edge of the pavement some yards away, Creed, his face upraised to heaven, was embracing with all his force the second edition of the Westminster Gazette, which had been thrown him from a cart.

'Well,' thought Hilary, walking on, 'you know your own mind, anyway!'

And trotting by his side, with her jaw set very firm, his little bulldog looked up above her eyes, and seemed to say: 'It was time we left that man of action!'

CHAPTER VII

CECILIA'S SCATTERED THOUGHTS

In her morning room Mrs. Stephen Dallison sat at an old oak bureau collecting her scattered thoughts. They lay about on pieces of stamped notepaper, beginning "Dear Cecilia," or "Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace requests," or on bits of pasteboard headed by the names of theatres, galleries, or concert-halls; or, again, on paper of not quite so good a quality, commencing, "Dear Friend," and ending with a single well-known name like "Wessex," so that no suspicion should attach to the appeal contained between the two. She had before her also sheets of her own writing-paper, headed "76, The Old Square, Kensington," and two little books. One of these was bound in marbled paper, and on it written: "Please keep this book in safety"; across the other, cased in the skin of some small animal

deceased, was inscribed the solitary word "Engagements."

Cecilia had on a Persian-green silk blouse with sleeves that would have hidden her slim hands, but for silver buttons made in the likeness of little roses at her wrists; on her brow was a faint frown, as though she were wondering what her thoughts were all about. She sat there every morning catching those thoughts, and placing them in one or other of her little books. Only by thus working hard could she keep herself, her husband, and daughter, in due touch with all the different movements going on. And that the touch might be as due as possible, she had a little headache nearly every day. For the dread of letting slip one movement, or of being too much taken with another, was very real to her; there were so many people who were interesting, so many sympathies of hers and Stephen's which she desired to cultivate, that it was a matter of the utmost import not to cultivate any single one too much. Then, too, the duty of remaining feminine with all this going forward taxed her constitution. She sometimes thought enviously of the splendid isolation now enjoyed by Blanca, of which some subtle instinct, rather than definite knowledge, had informed her; but not often, for she was a loyal little person, to whom Stephen and his comforts were of the first moment. And though she worried somewhat because her thoughts WOULD come by every post, she did not worry very much—hardly more than the Persian kitten on her lap, who also sat for hours trying to catch her tail, with a line between her eyes, and two small hollows in her cheeks.

When she had at last decided what concerts she would be obliged to miss, paid her subscription to the League for the Suppression of Tinned Milk, and accepted an invitation to watch a man fall from a balloon, she paused. Then, dipping her pen in ink, she wrote as follows:

"Mrs. Stephen Dallison would be glad to have the blue dress ordered by her yesterday sent home at once without alteration.—Messrs. Rose and Thorn, High Street, Kensington."

Ringing the bell, she thought: 'It will be a job for Mrs. Hughs, poor thing. I believe she'll do it quite as well as Rose and Thorn.'—"Would you please ask Mrs. Hughs to come to me?—Oh, is that you, Mrs. Hughs? Come in."

The seamstress, who had advanced into the middle of the room, stood with her worn hands against her sides, and no sign of life but the liquid patience in her large brown eyes. She was an enigmatic figure. Her presence always roused a sort of irritation in Cecilia, as if she had been suddenly confronted with what might possibly have been herself if certain little accidents had omitted to occur. She was so conscious that she ought to sympathise, so anxious to show that there was no barrier between them, so eager to be all she ought to be, that her voice almost purred.

"Are you Getting on with the curtains, Mrs. Hughs?"

"Yes, m'm, thank you, m'm."

"I shall have another job for you to-morrow—altering a dress. Can you come?"

"Yes, m'm, thank you, m'm."

"Is the baby well?"

"Yes, m'm, thank you, m'm."

There was a silence.

'It's no good talking of her domestic matters,' thought Cecilia; 'not that I don't care!' But the silence getting on her nerves, she said quickly: "Is your husband behaving himself better?"

There was no answer; Cecilia saw a tear trickle slowly down the woman's cheek.

'Oh dear, oh dear,' she thought; 'poor thing! I'm in for it!'

Mrs. Hughs' whispering voice began: "He's behaving himself dreadful, m'm. I was going to speak to you. It's ever since that young girl"—her face hardened—"come to live down in my room there; he seem to—he seem to—just do nothing but neglect me."

Cecilia's heart gave the little pleasurable flutter which the heart must feel at the love dramas of other people, however painful.

"You mean the little model?" she said.

The seamstress answered in an agitated voice: "I don't want to speak against her, but she's put a spell on him, that's what she has; he don't seem able to do nothing but talk of her, and hang about her room. It was that troubling me when I saw you the other day. And ever since yesterday midday, when

Mr. Hilary came—he's been talking that wild—and he pushed me—and—and—" Her lips ceased to form articulate words, but, since it was not etiquette to cry before her superiors, she used them to swallow down her tears, and something in her lean throat moved up and down.

At the mention of Hilary's name the pleasurable sensation in Cecilia had undergone a change. She felt curiosity, fear, offence.

"I don't quite understand you," she said.

The seamstress plaited at her frock. "Of course, I can't help the way he talks, m'm. I'm sure I don't like to repeat the wicked things he says about Mr. Hilary. It seems as if he were out of his mind when he gets talkin' about that young girl."

The tone of those last three words was almost fierce.

Cecilia was on the point of saying: 'That will do, please; I want to hear no more.' But her curiosity and queer subtle fear forced her instead to repeat: "I don't understand. Do you mean he insinuates that Mr. Hilary has anything to do with—with this girl, or what?" And she thought: 'I'll stop that, at any rate.'

The seamstress's face was distorted by her efforts to control her voice.

"I tell him he's wicked to say such things, m'm, and Mr. Hilary such a kind gentleman. And what business is it of his, I say, that's got a wife and children of his own? I've seen him in the street, I've watched him hanging about Mrs. Hilary's house when I've been working there waiting for that girl, and following her—home—" Again her lips refused to do service, except in the swallowing of her tears.

Cecilia thought: 'I must tell Stephen at once. That man is dangerous.' A spasm gripped her heart, usually so warm and snug; vague feelings she had already entertained presented themselves now with startling force; she seemed to see the face of sordid life staring at the family of Dallison. Mrs. Hughs' voice, which did not dare to break, resumed:

"I've said to him: 'Whatever are you thinking of? And after Mrs. Hilary's been so kind to me! But he's like a madman when he's in liquor, and he says he'll go to Mrs. Hilary—'"

"Go to my sister? What about? The ruffian!"

At hearing her husband called a ruffian by another woman the shadow of resentment passed across Mrs. Hughs' face, leaving it quivering and red. The conversation had already made a strange difference in the manner of these two women to each other. It was as though each now knew exactly how much sympathy and confidence could be expected of the other, as though life had suddenly sucked up the mist, and shown them standing one on either side of a deep trench. In Mrs. Hughs' eyes there was the look of those who have long discovered that they must not answer back for fear of losing what little ground they have to stand on; and Cecilia's eyes were cold and watchful. 'I sympathise,' they seemed to say, 'I sympathise; but you must please understand that you cannot expect sympathy if your affairs compromise the members of my family.' Her, chief thought now was to be relieved of the company of this woman, who had been betrayed into showing what lay beneath her dumb, stubborn patience. It was not callousness, but the natural result of being fluttered. Her heart was like a bird agitated in its gilt-wire cage by the contemplation of a distant cat. She did not, however, lose her sense of what was practical, but said calmly: "Your husband was wounded in South Africa, you told me? It looks as if he wasn't quite.... I think you should have a doctor!"

The seamstress's answer, slow and matter-of-fact, was worse than her emotion.

"No, m'm, he isn't mad."

Crossing to the hearth-whose Persian-blue tiling had taken her so long to find—Cecilia stood beneath a reproduction of Botticelli's "Primavera," and looked doubtfully at Mrs. Hughs. The Persian kitten, sleepy and disturbed on the bosom of her blouse, gazed up into her face. 'Consider me,' it seemed to say; 'I am worth consideration; I am of a piece with you, and everything round you. We are both elegant and rather slender; we both love warmth and kittens; we both dislike interference with our fur. You took a long time to buy me, so as to get me perfect. You see that woman over there! I sat on her lap this morning while she was sewing your curtains. She has no right in here; she's not what she seems; she can bite and scratch, I know; her lap is skinny; she drops water from her eyes. She made me wet all down my back. Be careful what you're doing, or she'll make you wet down yours!'

All that was like the little Persian kitten within Cecilia—cosiness and love of pretty things, attachment to her own abode with its high-art lining, love for her mate and her own kitten, Thyme, dread of disturbance—all made her long to push this woman from the room; this woman with the skimpy figure,

and eyes that, for all their patience, had in them something virago-like; this woman who carried about with her an atmosphere of sordid grief, of squalid menaces, and scandal. She longed all the more because it could well be seen from the seamstress's helpless attitude that she too would have liked an easy life. To dwell on things like this was to feel more than thirty-eight!

Cecilia had no pocket, Providence having removed it now for some time past, but from her little bag she drew forth the two essentials of gentility. Taking her nose, which she feared was shining, gently within one, she fumbled in the other. And again she looked doubtfully at Mrs. Hughs. Her heart said: 'Give the poor woman half a sovereign; it might comfort her!' But her brain said: 'I owe her four-and-six; after what she's just been saying about her husband and that girl and Hilary, it mayn't be safe to give her more.' She held out two half-crowns, and had an inspiration: "I shall mention to my sister what you've said; you can tell your husband that!"

No sooner had she said this, however, than she saw, from a little smile devoid of merriment and quickly extinguished, that Mrs. Hughs did not believe she would do anything of the kind; from which she concluded that the seamstress was convinced of Hilary's interest in the little model. She said hastily:

"You can go now, Mrs. Hughs."

Mrs. Hughs went, making no noise or sign of any sort.

Cecilia returned to her scattered thoughts. They lay there still, with a gleam of sun from the low window smearing their importance; she felt somehow that it did not now matter very much whether she and Stephen, in the interests of science, saw that man fall from his balloon, or, in the interests of art, heard Herr von Kraaffe sing his Polish songs; she experienced, too, almost a revulsion in favour of tinned milk. After meditatively tearing up her note to Messrs. Rose and Thorn, she lowered the bureau lid and left the room.

Mounting the stairs, whose old oak banisters on either side were a real joy, she felt she was stupid to let vague, sordid rumours, which, after all, affected her but indirectly, disturb her morning's work. And entering Stephen's dressing-room she stood looking at his boots.

Inside each one of them was a wooden soul; none had any creases, none had any holes. The moment they wore out, their wooden souls were taken from them and their bodies given to the poor, whilst—in accordance with that theory, to hear a course of lectures on which a scattered thought was even now inviting her—the wooden souls migrated instantly to other leathern bodies.

Looking at that polished row of boots, Cecilia felt lonely and unsatisfied. Stephen worked in the Law Courts, Thyme worked at Art; both were doing something definite. She alone, it seemed, had to wait at home, and order dinner, answer letters, shop, pay calls, and do a dozen things that failed to stop her thoughts from dwelling on that woman's tale. She was not often conscious of the nature of her life, so like the lives of many hundred women in this London, which she said she could not stand, but which she stood very well. As a rule, with practical good sense, she kept her doubting eyes fixed friendlily on every little phase in turn, enjoying well enough fitting the Chinese puzzle of her scattered thoughts, setting out on each small adventure with a certain cautious zest, and taking Stephen with her as far as he allowed. This last year or so, now that Thyme was a grown girl, she had felt at once a loss of purpose and a gain of liberty. She hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry. It freed her for the tasting of more things, more people, and more Stephen; but it left a little void in her heart, a little soreness round it. What would Thyme think if she heard this story about her uncle? The thought started a whole train of doubts that had of late beset her. Was her little daughter going to turn out like herself? If not, why not? Stephen joked about his daughter's skirts, her hockey, her friendship with young men. He joked about the way Thyme refused to let him joke about her art or about her interest in "the people." His joking was a source of irritation to Cecilia. For, by woman's instinct rather than by any reasoning process, she was conscious of a disconcerting change. Amongst the people she knew, young men were not now attracted by girls as they had been in her young days. There was a kind of cool and friendly matter-of-factness in the way they treated them, a sort of almost scientific playfulness. And Cecilia felt uneasy as to how far this was to go. She seemed left behind. If young people were really becoming serious, if youths no longer cared about the colour of Thyme's eyes, or dress, or hair, what would there be left to care for—that is, up to the point of definite relationship? Not that she wanted her daughter to be married. It would be time enough to think of that when she was twenty-five. But her own experiences had been so different. She had spent so many youthful hours in wondering about men, had seen so many men cast furtive looks at her; and now there did not seem in men or girls anything left worth the other's while to wonder or look furtive about. She was not of a philosophic turn of mind, and had attached no deep meaning to Stephen's jest—"If young people will reveal their ankles, they'll soon have no ankles to reveal."

To Cecilia the extinction of the race seemed threatened; in reality her species of the race alone was vanishing, which to her, of course, was very much the same disaster. With her eyes on Stephen's boots she thought: 'How shall I prevent what I've heard from coming to Bianca's ears? I know how she would take it! How shall I prevent Thyme's hearing? I'm sure I don't know what the effect would be on her! I must speak to Stephen. He's so fond of Hilary.'

And, turning away from Stephen's boots, she mused: 'Of course it's nonsense. Hilary's much too—too nice, too fastidious, to be more than just interested; but he's so kind he might easily put himself in a false position. And—it's ugly nonsense! B. can be so disagreeable; even now she's not—on terms with him!' And suddenly the thought of Mr. Purcey leaped into her mind—Mr. Purcey, who, as Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace had declared, was not even conscious that there was a problem of the poor. To think of him seemed somehow at that moment comforting, like rolling oneself in a blanket against a draught. Passing into her room, she opened her wardrobe door.

'Bother the woman!' she thought. 'I do want that gentian dress got ready, but now I simply can't give it to her to do.'

CHAPTER VIII

THE SINGLE MIND OF MR. STONE

Since in the flutter of her spirit caused by the words of Mrs. Hughs, Cecilia felt she must do something, she decided to change her dress.

The furniture of the pretty room she shared with Stephen had not been hastily assembled. Conscious, even fifteen years ago, when they moved into this house, of the grave Philistinism of the upper classes, she and Stephen had ever kept their duty to aestheticism green; and, in the matter of their bed, had lain for two years on two little white affairs, comfortable, but purely temporary, that they might give themselves a chance. The chance had come at last—a bed in real keeping with the period they had settled on, and going for twelve pounds. They had not let it go, and now slept in it—not quite so comfortable, perhaps, but comfortable enough, and conscious of duty done.

For fifteen years Cecilia had been furnishing her house; the process approached completion. The only things remaining on her mind—apart, that is, from Thyme's development and the condition of the people—were: item, a copper lantern that would allow some light to pass its framework; item, an old oak washstand not going back to Cromwell's time. And now this third anxiety had come!

She was rather touching, as she stood before the wardrobe glass divested of her bodice, with dimples of exertion in her thin white arms while she hooked her skirt behind, and her greenish eyes troubled, so anxious to do their best for everyone, and save risk of any sort. Having put on a bramble-coloured frock, which laced across her breast with silver lattice-work, and a hat (without feathers, so as to encourage birds) fastened to her head with pins (bought to aid a novel school of metal-work), she went to see what sort of day it was.

The window looked out at the back over some dreary streets, where the wind was flinging light drifts of smoke athwart the sunlight. They had chosen this room, not indeed for its view over the condition of the people, but because of the sky effects at sunset, which were extremely fine. For the first time, perhaps, Cecilia was conscious that a sample of the class she was so interested in was exposed to view beneath her nose. 'The Hughs live somewhere there,' she thought. 'After all I think B. ought to know about that man. She might speak to father, and get him to give up having the girl to copy for him—the whole thing's so worrying.'

In pursuance of this thought, she lunched hastily, and went out, making her way to Hilary's. With every step she became more uncertain. The fear of meddling too much, of not meddling enough, of seeming meddlesome; timidity at touching anything so awkward; distrust, even ignorance, of her sister's character, which was like, yet so very unlike, her own; a real itch to get the matter settled, so that nothing whatever should come of it—all this she felt. She hurried, dawdled, finished the adventure almost at a run, then told the servant not to announce her. The vision of Bianca's eyes, while she listened to this tale, was suddenly too much for Cecilia. She decided to pay a visit to her father first.

Mr. Stone was writing, attired in his working dress—a thick brown woollen gown, revealing his thin neck above the line of a blue shirt, and tightly gathered round the waist with tasselled cord; the lower

portions of grey trousers were visible above woollen-slipped feet. His hair straggled over his thin long ears. The window, wide open, admitted an east wind; there was no fire. Cecilia shivered.

"Come in quickly," said Mr. Stone. Turning to a big high desk of stained deal which occupied the middle of one wall, he began methodically to place the inkstand, a heavy paper-knife, a book, and stones of several sizes, on his guttering sheets of manuscript.

Cecilia looked about her; she had not been inside her father's room for several months. There was nothing in it but that desk, a camp bed in the far corner (with blankets, but no sheets), a folding washstand, and a narrow bookcase, the books in which Cecilia unconsciously told off on the fingers of her memory. They never varied. On the top shelf the Bible and the works of Plautus and Diderot; on the second from the top the plays of Shakespeare in a blue edition; on the third from the bottom Don Quixote, in four volumes, covered with brown paper; a green Milton; the "Comedies of Aristophanes"; a leather book, partially burned, comparing the philosophy of Epicurus with the philosophy of Spinoza; and in a yellow binding Mark Twain's "Huckleberry Finn." On the second from the bottom was lighter literature: "The Iliad"; a "Life of Francis of Assisi"; Speke's "Discovery of the Sources of the Nile"; the "Pickwick Papers"; "Mr. Midshipman Easy"; The Verses of Theocritus, in a very old translation; Renan's "Life of Christ"; and the "Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini." The bottom shelf of all was full of books on natural science.

The walls were whitewashed, and, as Cecilia knew, came off on anybody who leaned against them. The floor was stained, and had no carpet. There was a little gas cooking-stove, with cooking things ranged on it; a small bare table; and one large cupboard. No draperies, no pictures, no ornaments of any kind; but by the window an ancient golden leather chair. Cecilia could never bear to sit in that oasis; its colour in this wilderness was too precious to her spirit.

"It's an east wind, father; aren't you terribly cold without a fire?"

Mr. Stone came from his writing-desk, and stood so that light might fall on a sheet of paper in his hand. Cecilia noted the scent that went about with him of peat and baked potatoes. He spoke:

"Listen to this: 'In the condition of society, dignified in those days with the name of civilisation, the only source of hope was the persistence of the quality called courage. Amongst a thousand nerve-destroying habits, amongst the dramshops, patent medicines, the undigested chaos of inventions and discoveries, while hundreds were prating in their pulpits of things believed in by a negligible fraction of the population, and thousands writing down today what nobody would want to read in two days' time; while men shut animals in cages, and made bears jig to please their children, and all were striving one against the other; while, in a word, like gnats above a stagnant pool on a summer's evening, man danced up and down without the faintest notion why—in this condition of affairs the quality of courage was alive. It was the only fire within that gloomy valley.'" He stopped, though evidently anxious to go on, because he had read the last word on that sheet of paper. He moved towards the writing-desk. Cecilia said hastily:

"Do you mind if I shut the window, father?"

Mr. Stone made a movement of his head, and Cecilia saw that he held a second sheet of paper in his hand. She rose, and, going towards him, said:

"I want to talk to you, Dad!" Taking up the cord of his dressing-gown, she pulled it by its tassel.

"Don't!" said Mr. Stone; "it secures my trousers."

Cecilia dropped the cord. 'Father is really terrible!' she thought.

Mr. Stone, lifting the second sheet of paper, began again:

"The reason, however, was not far to seek—"

Cecilia said desperately:

"It's about that girl who comes to copy for you."

Mr. Stone lowered the sheet of paper, and stood, slightly curved from head to foot; his ears moved as though he were about to lay them back; his blue eyes, with little white spots of light alongside the tiny black pupils, stared at his daughter.

Cecilia thought: 'He's listening now.'

She made haste. "Must you have her here? Can't you do without her?"

"Without whom?" said Mr. Stone.

"Without the girl who comes to copy for you."

"Why?"

"For this very good reason—"

Mr. Stone dropped his eyes, and Cecilia saw that he had moved the sheet of paper up as far as his waist.

"Does she copy better than any other girl could?" she asked hastily.

"No," said Mr. Stone.

"Then, Father, I do wish, to please me, you'd get someone else. I know what I'm talking about, and I —" Cecilia stopped; her father's lips and eyes were moving; he was obviously reading to himself.

'I've no patience with him,' she thought; 'he thinks of nothing but his wretched book.'

Aware of his daughter's silence, Mr. Stone let the sheet of paper sink, and waited patiently again.

"What do you want, my dear?" he said.

"Oh, Father, do listen just a minute!"

"Yes, Yes."

"It's about that girl who comes to copy for you. Is there any reason why she should come instead of any other girl?"

"Yes," said Mr. Stone.

"What reason?"

"Because she has no friends."

So awkward a reply was not expected by Cecilia; she looked at the floor, forced to search within her soul. Silence lasted several seconds; then Mr. Stone's voice rose above a whisper:

"The reason was not far to seek. Man, differentiated from the other apes by his desire to know, was from the first obliged to steel himself against the penalties of knowledge. Like animals subjected to the rigours of an Arctic climate, and putting forth more fur with each reduction in the temperature, man's hide of courage thickened automatically to resist the spear-thrusts dealt him by his own insatiate curiosity. In those days of which we speak, when undigested knowledge, in a great invading horde, had swarmed all his defences, man, suffering from a foul dyspepsia, with a nervous system in the latest stages of exhaustion, and a reeling brain, survived by reason of his power to go on making courage. Little heroic as (in the then general state of petty competition) his deeds appeared to be, there never had yet been a time when man in bulk was more courageous, for there never had yet been a time when he had more need to be. Signs were not wanting that this desperate state of things had caught the eyes of the community. A little sect—" Mr. Stone stopped; his eyes had again tumbled over the bottom edge; he moved hurriedly towards the desk. Just as his hand removed a stone and took up a third sheet, Cecilia cried out:

"Father!"

Mr. Stone stopped, and turned towards her. His daughter saw that he had gone quite pink; her annoyance vanished.

"Father! About that girl—"

Mr. Stone seemed to reflect. "Yes, yes," he said.

"I don't think Bianca likes her coming here."

Mr. Stone passed his hand across his brow.

"Forgive me for reading to you, my dear," he said; "it's a great relief to me at times."

Cecilia went close to him, and refrained with difficulty from taking up the tasselled cord.

"Of course, dear," she said: "I quite understand that."

Mr. Stone looked full in her face, and before a gaze which seemed to go through her and see things the other side, Cecilia dropped her eyes.

"It is strange," he said, "how you came to be my daughter!"

To Cecilia, too, this had often seemed a problem.

"There is a great deal in atavism," said Mr. Stone, "that we know nothing of at present."

Cecilia cried with heat, "I do wish you would attend a minute, Father; it's really an important matter," and she turned towards the window, tears being very near her eyes.

The voice of Mr. Stone said humbly: "I will try, my dear."

But Cecilia thought: 'I must give him a good lesson. He really is too self-absorbed'; and she did not move, conveying by the posture of her shoulders how gravely she was vexed.

She could see nursemaids wheeling babies towards the Gardens, and noted their faces gazing, not at the babies, but, uppishly, at other nursemaids, or, with a sort of cautious longing, at men who passed. How selfish they looked! She felt a little glow of satisfaction that she was making this thin and bent old man behind her conscious of his egoism.

'He will know better another time,' she thought. Suddenly she heard a whistling, squeaking sound—it was Mr. Stone whispering the third page of his manuscript:

"—animated by some admirable sentiments, but whose doctrines—riddled by the fact that life is but the change of form to form—were too constricted for the evils they designed to remedy; this little sect, who had as yet to learn the meaning of universal love, were making the most strenuous efforts, in advance of the community at large, to understand themselves. The necessary, movement which they voiced—reaction against the high-tide of the fratricidal system then prevailing—was young, and had the freshness and honesty of youth...."

Without a word Cecilia turned round and hurried to the door. She saw her father drop the sheet of paper; she saw his face, all pink and silver, stooping after it; and remorse visited her anger.

In the corridor outside she was arrested by a noise. The uncertain light of London halls fell there; on close inspection the sufferer was seen to be Miranda, who, unable to decide whether she wanted to be in the garden or the house, was seated beneath the hatrack snuffling to herself. On seeing Cecilia she came out.

"What do you want, you little beast?"

Peering at her over the tops of her eyes, Miranda vaguely lifted a white foot. 'Why ask me that?' she seemed to say. 'How am I to know? Are we not all like this?'

Her conduct, coming at that moment, over-ried Cecilia's nerves. She threw open Hilary's study-door, saying sharply: "Go in and find your master!"

Miranda did not move, but Hilary came out instead. He had been correcting proofs to catch the post, and wore the look of a man abstracted, faintly contemptuous of other forms of life.

Cecilia, once more saved from the necessity of approaching her sister, the mistress of the house, so fugitive, haunting, and unseen, yet so much the centre of this situation, said:

"Can I speak to you a minute, Hilary?"

They went into his study, and Miranda came creeping in behind.

To Cecilia her brother-in-law always seemed an amiable and more or less pathetic figure. In his literary preoccupations he allowed people to impose on him. He looked unsubstantial beside the bust of Socrates, which moved Cecilia strangely—it was so very massive and so very ugly! She decided not to beat about the bush.

"I've been hearing some odd things from Mrs. Hughs about that little model, Hilary."

Hilary's smile faded from his eyes, but remained clinging to his lips.

"Indeed!"

Cecilia went on nervously: "Mrs. Hughs says it's because of her that Hughs behaves so badly. I don't want to say anything against the girl, but she seems—she seems to have—"

"Yes?" said Hilary.

"To have cast a spell on Hughs, as the woman puts it."

"On Hughs!" repeated Hilary.

Cecilia found her eyes resting on the bust of Socrates, and hastily proceeded:

"She says he follows her about, and comes down here to lie in wait for her. It's a most strange business altogether. You went to see them, didn't you?"

Hilary nodded.

"I've been speaking to Father," Cecilia murmured; "but he's hopeless—I, couldn't get him to pay the least attention."

Hilary seemed thinking deeply.

"I wanted him," she went on, "to get some other girl instead to come and copy for him."

"Why?"

Under the seeming impossibility of ever getting any farther, without saying what she had come to say, Cecilia blurted out:

"Mrs. Hughs says that Hughs has threatened you."

Hilary's face became ironical.

"Really!" he said. "That's good of him! What for?"

The frightful indelicacy of her situation at this moment, the feeling of unfairness that she should be placed in it, almost overwhelmed Cecilia. "Goodness knows I don't want to meddle. I never meddle in anything—it's horrible!"

Hilary took her hand.

"My dear Cis," he said, "of course! But we'd better have this out!"

Grateful for the pressure of his hand, she gave it a convulsive squeeze.

"It's so sordid, Hilary!"

"Sordid! H'm! Let's get it over, then."

Cecilia had grown crimson. "Do you want me to tell you everything?"

"Certainly."

"Well, Hughs evidently thinks you're interested in the girl. You can't keep anything from servants and people who work about your house; they always think the worst of everything—and, of course, they know that you and B. don't—aren't—"

Hilary nodded.

"Mrs. Hughs actually said the man meant to go to B.!"

Again the vision of her sister seemed to float into the room, and she went on desperately: "And, Hilary, I can see Mrs. Hughs really thinks you are interested. Of course, she wants to, for if you were, it would mean that a man like her husband could have no chance."

Astonished at this flash of cynical inspiration, and ashamed of such plain speaking, she checked herself. Hilary had turned away.

Cecilia touched his arm. "Hilary, dear," she said, "isn't there any chance of you and B—"

Hilary's lips twitched. "I should say not."

Cecilia looked sadly at the floor. Not since Stephen was bad with pleurisy had she felt so worried. The sight of Hilary's face brought back her doubts with all their force. It might, of course, be only anger at the man's impudence, but it might be—she hardly liked to frame her thought—a more personal feeling.

"Don't you think," she said, "that, anyway, she had better not come here again?"

Hilary paced the room.

"It's her only safe and certain piece of work; it keeps her independent. It's much more satisfactory than this sitting. I can't have any hand in taking it away from her."

Cecilia had never seen him moved like this. Was it possible that he was not incorrigibly gentle, but had in him some of that animality which she, in a sense, admired? This uncertainty terribly increased the difficulties of the situation.

"But, Hilary," she said at last, "are you satisfied about the girl—I mean, are you satisfied that she really is worth helping?"

"I don't understand."

"I mean," murmured Cecilia, "that we don't know anything about her past." And, seeing from the movement of his eyebrows that she was touching on what had evidently been a doubt with him, she went on with great courage: "Where are her friends and relations? I mean, she may have had a—adventures."

Hilary withdrew into himself.

"You can hardly expect me," he said, "to go into that with her."

His reply made Cecilia feel ridiculous.

"Well," she said in a hard little voice, "if this is what comes of helping the poor, I don't see the use of it."

The outburst evoked no reply from Hilary; she felt more tremulous than ever. The whole thing was so confused, so unnatural. What with the dark, malignant Hughs and that haunting vision of Bianca, the matter seemed almost Italian. That a man of Hughs' class might be affected by the passion of love had somehow never come into her head. She thought of the back streets she had looked out on from her bedroom window. Could anything like passion spring up in those dismal alleys? The people who lived there, poor downtrodden things, had enough to do to keep themselves alive. She knew all about them; they were in the air; their condition was deplorable! Could a person whose condition was deplorable find time or strength for any sort of lurid exhibition such as this? It was incredible.

She became aware that Hilary was speaking.

"I daresay the man is dangerous!"

Hearing her fears confirmed, and in accordance with the secret vein of hardness which kept her living, amid all her sympathies and hesitations, Cecilia felt suddenly that she had gone as far as it was in her to go.

"I shall have no more to do with them," she said; "I've tried my best for Mrs. Hughs. I know quite as good a needlewoman, who'll be only too glad to come instead. Any other girl will do as well to copy father's book. If you take my advice, Hilary, you'll give up trying to help them too."

Hilary's smile puzzled and annoyed her. If she had known, this was the smile that stood between him and her sister.

"You may be right," he said, and shrugged his shoulders:

"Very well," said Cecilia, "I've done all I can. I must go now. Good-bye."

During her progress to the door she gave one look behind. Hilary was standing by the bust of Socrates. Her heart smote her to leave him thus embarrassed. But again the vision of Bianca—fugitive in her own house, and with something tragic in her mocking immobility—came to her, and she hastened away.

A voice said: "How are you, Mrs. Dallison? Your sister at home?"

Cecilia saw before her Mr. Purcey, rising and falling a little with the oscillation of his A.i. Damyer.

A sense as of having just left a house visited by sickness or misfortune made Cecilia murmur:

"I'm afraid she's not."

"Bad luck!" said Mr. Purcey. His face fell as far as so red and square a face could fall. "I was hoping perhaps I might be allowed to take them for a run. She's wanting exercise." Mr. Purcey laid his hand on the flank of his palpitating car. "Know these A.i. Damyers, Mrs. Dallison? Best value you can get, simply rippin' little cars. Wish you'd try her."

The A.i. Damyer, diffusing an aroma of the finest petrol, leaped and trembled, as though conscious of her master's praise. Cecilia looked at her.

"Yes," she said, "she's very sweet."

"Now do!" said Mr. Purcey. "Let me give you a run—Just to please me, I mean. I'm sure you'll like her."

A little compunction, a little curiosity, a sudden revolt against all the discomfiture and sordid doubts she had been suffering from, made Cecilia glance softly at Mr. Purcey's figure; almost before she knew it, she was seated in the A.i. Damyer. It trembled, emitted two small sounds, one large scent, and glided forward. Mr. Purcey said:

"That's rippin' of you!"

A postman, dog, and baker's cart, all hurrying at top speed, seemed to stand still; Cecilia felt the wind beating her cheeks. She gave a little laugh.

"You must just take me home, please."

Mr. Purcey touched the chauffeur's elbow.

"Round the park," he said. "Let her have it."

The A.i. Damyer uttered a tiny shriek. Cecilia, leaning back in her padded corner, glanced askance at Mr. Purcey leaning back in his; an unholy, astonished little smile played on her lips.

'What am I doing?' it seemed to say. 'The way he got me here—really! And now I am here I'm just going to enjoy it!'

There were no Hughs, no little model—all that sordid life had vanished; there was nothing but the wind beating her cheeks and the A.i. Damyer leaping under her.

Mr. Purcey said: "It just makes all the difference to me; keeps my nerves in order."

"Oh," Cecilia murmured, "have you got nerves."

Mr. Purcey smiled. When he smiled his cheeks formed two hard red blocks, his trim moustache stood out, and many little wrinkles ran from his light eyes.

"Chock full of them," he said; "least thing upsets me. Can't bear to see a hungry-lookin' child, or anything."

A strange feeling of admiration for this man had come upon Cecilia. Why could not she, and Thyme, and Hilary, and Stephen, and all the people they knew and mixed with, be like him, so sound and healthy, so unravaged by disturbing sympathies, so innocent of "social conscience," so content?

As though jealous of these thoughts about her master, the A.i. Damyer stopped of her own accord.

"Hallo," said Mr. Purcey, "hallo, I say! Don't you get out; she'll be all right directly."

"Oh," said Cecilia, "thanks; but I must go in here, anyhow; I think I'll say good-bye. Thank you so much. I have enjoyed it."

From the threshold of a shop she looked back. Mr. Purcey, on foot, was leaning forward from the waist, staring at his A.i. Damyer with profound concentration.

CHAPTER IX

The ethics of a man like Hilary were not those of the million pure bred Purceys of this life, founded on a sense of property in this world and the next; nor were they precisely the morals and religion of the aristocracy, who, though aestheticised in parts, quietly used, in bulk, their fortified position to graft on Mr. Purcey's ethics the principle of 'You be damned!' In the eyes of the majority he was probably an immoral and irreligious man; but in fact his morals and religion were those of his special section of society—the cultivated classes, "the professors, the artistic pigs, advanced people, and all that sort of cuckoo," as Mr. Purcey called them—a section of society supplemented by persons, placed beyond the realms of want, who speculated in ideas.

Had he been required to make confession of his creed he would probably have framed it in some such way as this: "I disbelieve in all Church dogmas, and do not go to church; I have no definite ideas about a future state, and do not want to have; but in a private way I try to identify myself as much as possible with what I see about me, feeling that if I could ever really be at one with the world I live in I should be happy. I think it foolish not to trust my senses and my reason; as for what my senses and my reason will not tell me, I assume that all is as it had to be, for if one could get to know the why of everything in one would be the Universe. I do not believe that chastity is a virtue in itself, but only so far as it ministers to the health and happiness of the community. I do not believe that marriage confers the rights of ownership, and I loathe all public wrangling on such matters; but I am temperamentally averse to the harming of my neighbours, if in reason it can be avoided. As to manners, I think that to repeat a bit of scandal, and circulate backbiting stories, are worse offences than the actions that gave rise to them. If I mentally condemn a person, I feel guilty of moral lapse. I hate self-assertion; I am ashamed of self-advertisement. I dislike loudness of any kind. Probably I have too much tendency to negation of all sorts. Small-talk bores me to extinction, but I will discuss a point of ethics or psychology half the night. To make capital out of a person's weakness is repugnant to me. I want to be a decent man, but—I really can't take myself too seriously."

Though he had preserved his politeness towards Cecilia, he was in truth angry, and grew angrier every minute. He was angry with her, himself, and the man Hughs; and suffered from this anger as only they can who are not accustomed to the rough-and-tumble of things.

Such a retiring man as Hilary was seldom given the opportunity for an obvious display of chivalry. The tenor of his life removed him from those situations. Such chivalry as he displayed was of a negative order. And confronted suddenly with the conduct of Hughs, who, it seemed, knocked his wife about, and dogged the footsteps of a helpless girl, he took it seriously to heart.

When the little model came walking up the garden on her usual visit, he fancied her face looked scared. Quieting the growling of Miranda, who from the first had stubbornly refused to know this girl, he sat down with a book to wait for her to go away. After sitting an hour or more, turning over pages, and knowing little of their sense, he saw a man peer over his garden gate. He was there for half a minute, then lounged across the road, and stood hidden by some railings.

'So?' thought Hilary. 'Shall I go out and warn the fellow to clear off, or shall I wait to see what happens when she goes away?'

He determined on the latter course. Presently she came out, walking with her peculiar gait, youthful and pretty, but too matter-of-fact, and yet, as it were, too purposeless to be a lady's. She looked back at Hilary's window, and turned uphill.

Hilary took his hat and stick and waited. In half a minute Hughs came out from under cover of the railings and followed. Then Hilary, too, set forth.

There is left in every man something of the primeval love of stalking. The delicate Hilary, in cooler blood, would have revolted at the notion of dogging people's footsteps. He now experienced the holy pleasures of the chase. Certain that Hughs was really following the girl, he had but to keep him in sight and remain unseen. This was not hard for a man given to mountain-climbing, almost the only sport left to one who thought it immoral to hurt anybody but himself.

Taking advantage of shop-windows, omnibuses, passers-by, and other bits of cover, he prosecuted the chase up the steepy heights of Campden Hill. But soon a nearly fatal check occurred; for, chancing to take his eyes off Hughs, he saw the little model returning on her tracks. Ready enough in physical emergencies, Hilary sprang into a passing omnibus. He saw her stopping before the window of a picture-shop. From the expression of her face and figure, she evidently had no idea that she was being followed, but stood with a sort of slack-lipped wonder, lost in admiration of a well-known print. Hilary had often wondered who could possibly admire that picture—he now knew. It was obvious that the girl's aesthetic sense was deeply touched.

While this was passing through his mind, he caught sight of Hughs lurking outside a public-house.

The dark man's face was sullen and dejected, and looked as if he suffered. Hilary felt a sort of pity for him.

The omnibus leaped forward, and he sat down smartly almost on a lady's lap. This was the lap of Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace, who greeted him with a warm, quiet smile, and made a little room.

"Your sister-in-law has just been to see me, Mr. Dallison. She's such a dear-so interested in everything. I tried to get her to come on to my meeting with me."

Raising his hat, Hilary frowned. For once his delicacy was at fault. He said:

"Ah, yes! Excuse me!" and got out.

Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace looked after him, and then glanced round the omnibus. His conduct was very like the conduct of a man who had got in to keep an assignation with a lady, and found that lady sitting next his aunt. She was unable to see a soul who seemed to foster this view, and sat thinking that he was "rather attractive." Suddenly her dark busy eyes lighted on the figure of the little model strolling along again.

'Oh!' she thought. 'Ah! Yes, really! How very interesting!'

Hilary, to avoid meeting the girl point-blank, had turned up a by-street, and, finding a convenient corner, waited. He was puzzled. If this man were persecuting her with his attentions, why had he not gone across when she was standing at the picture-shop?

She passed across the opening of the by-street, still walking in the slack way of one who takes the pleasures of the streets. She passed from view; Hilary strained his eyes to see if Hughs were following. He waited several minutes. The man did not appear. The chase was over! And suddenly it flashed across him that Hughs had merely dogged her to see that she had no assignation with anybody. They had both been playing the same game! He flushed up in that shady little street, in which he was the only person to be seen. Cecilia was right! It was a sordid business. A man more in touch with facts than Hilary would have had some mental pigeonhole into which to put an incident like this; but, being by profession concerned mainly with ideas and thoughts, he did not quite know where he was. The habit of his mind precluded him from thinking very definitely on any subject except his literary work—precluded him especially in a matter of this sort, so inextricably entwined with that delicate, dim question, the impact of class on class.

Pondering deeply, he ascended the leafy lane that leads between high railings from Notting Hill to Kensington.

It was so far from traffic that every tree on either side was loud with the Spring songs of birds; the scent of running sap came forth shyly as the sun sank low. Strange peace, strange feeling of old Mother Earth up there above the town; wild tunes, and the quiet sight of clouds. Man in this lane might rest his troubled thoughts, and for a while trust the goodness of the Scheme that gave him birth, the beauty of each day, that laughs or broods itself into night. Some budding lilacs exhaled a scent of lemons; a sandy cat on the coping of a garden wall was basking in the setting sun.

In the centre of the lane a row of elm-trees displayed their gnarled, knotted roots. Human beings were seated there, whose matted hair clung round their tired faces. Their gaunt limbs were clothed in rags; each had a stick, and some sort of dirty bundle tied to it. They were asleep. On a bench beyond, two toothless old women sat, moving their eyes from side to side, and a crimson-faced woman was snoring. Under the next tree a Cockney youth and his girl were sitting side by side—pale young things, with loose mouths, and hollow cheeks, and restless eyes. Their arms were enlaced; they were silent. A little farther on two young men in working clothes were looking straight before them, with desperately tired faces. They, too, were silent.

On the last bench of all Hilary came on the little model, seated slackly by herself.

CHAPTER X

THE TROUSSEAU

This the first time these two had each other at large, was clearly not a comfortable event for either of

them. The girl blushed, and hastily got off her seat. Hilary, who raised his hat and frowned, sat down on it.

"Don't get up," he said; "I want to talk to you."

The little model obediently resumed her seat. A silence followed. She had on the old brown skirt and knitted jersey, the old blue-green tam-o'-shanter cap, and there were marks of weariness beneath her eyes.

At last Hilary remarked: "How are you getting on?"

The little model looked at her feet.

"Pretty well, thank you, Mr. Dallison."

"I came to see you yesterday."

She slid a look at him which might have meant nothing or meant much, so perfect its shy stolidity.

"I was out," she said, "sitting to Miss Boyle."

"So you have some work?"

"It's finished now."

"Then you're only getting the two shillings a day from Mr. Stone?"

She nodded.

"H'm!"

The unexpected fervour of this grunt seemed to animate the little model.

"Three and sixpence for my rent, and breakfast costs threepence nearly—only bread-and-butter—that's five and two; and washing's always at least tenpence—that's six; and little things last week was a shilling—even when I don't take buses—seven; that leaves five shillings for my dinners. Mr. Stone always gives me tea. It's my clothes worries me." She tucked her feet farther beneath the seat, and Hilary refrained from looking down. "My hat is awful, and I do want some—" She looked Hilary in the face for the first time. "I do wish I was rich."

"I don't wonder."

The little model gritted her teeth, and, twisting at her dirty gloves, said: "Mr. Dallison, d'you know the first thing I'd buy if I was rich?"

"No."

"I'd buy everything new on me from top to toe, and I wouldn't ever wear any of these old things again."

Hilary got up: "Come with me now, and buy everything new from top to toe."

"Oh!"

Hilary had already perceived that he had made an awkward, even dangerous, proposal; short, however, of giving her money, the idea of which offended his sense of delicacy, there was no way out of it. He said brusquely: "Come along!"

The little model rose obediently. Hilary noticed that her boots were split, and this—as though he had seen someone strike a child—so moved his indignation that he felt no more qualms, but rather a sort of pleasant glow, such as will come to the most studious man when he levels a blow at the conventions.

He looked down at his companion—her eyes were lowered; he could not tell at all what she was thinking of.

"This is what I was going to speak to you about," he said: "I don't like that house you're in; I think you ought to be somewhere else. What do you say?"

"Yes, Mr. Dallison."

"You'd better make a change, I think; you could find another room, couldn't you?"

The little model answered as before: "Yes, Mr. Dallison."

"I'm afraid that Hughs is-a dangerous sort of fellow."

"He's a funny man."

"Does he annoy you?"

Her expression baffled Hilary; there seemed a sort of slow enjoyment in it. She looked up knowingly.

"I don't mind him—he won't hurt me. Mr. Dallison, do you think blue or green?"

Hilary answered shortly: "Bluey-green."

She clasped her hands, changed her feet with a hop, and went on walking as before.

"Listen to me," said Hilary; "has Mrs. Hughs been talking to you about her husband?"

The little model smiled again.

"She goes on," she said.

Hilary bit his lips.

"Mr. Dallison, please—about my hat?"

"What about your hat?"

"Would you like me to get a large one or a small one?"

"For God's sake," answered Hilary, "a small one—no feathers."

"Oh!"

"Can you attend to me a minute? Have either Hughs or Mrs. Hughs spoken to you about—coming to my house, about—me?"

The little model's face remained impassive, but by the movement of her fingers Hilary saw that she was attending now.

"I don't care what they say."

Hilary looked away; an angry flush slowly mounted in his face.

With surprising suddenness the little model said:

"Of course, if I was a lady, I might mind!"

"Don't talk like that!" said Hilary; "every woman is a lady."

The stolidity of the girl's face, more mocking far than any smile, warned him of the cheapness of this verbiage.

"If I was a lady," she repeated simply, "I shouldn't be livin' there, should I?"

"No," said Hilary; "and you had better not go on living there, anyway."

The little model making no answer, Hilary did not quite know what to say. It was becoming apparent to him that she viewed the situation with a very different outlook from himself, and that he did not understand that outlook.

He felt thoroughly at sea, conscious that this girl's life contained a thousand things he did not know, a thousand points of view he did not share.

Their two figures attracted some attention in the crowded street, for Hilary-tall and slight, with his thin, bearded face and soft felt hat—was what is known as "a distinguished-looking man"; and the little model, though not "distinguished-looking" in her old brown skirt and tam-o'-shanter cap, had the sort of face which made men and even women turn to look at her. To men she was a little bit of strangely interesting, not too usual, flesh and blood; to women, she was that which made men turn to look at her. Yet now and again there would rise in some passer-by a feeling more impersonal, as though the God of Pity had shaken wings overhead, and dropped a tiny feather.

So walking, and exciting vague interest, they reached the first of the hundred doors of Messrs. Rose

and Thorn.

Hilary had determined on this end door, for, as the adventure grew warmer, he was more alive to its dangers. To take this child into the very shop frequented by his wife and friends seemed a little mad; but that same reason which caused them to frequent it—the fact that there was no other shop of the sort half so handy—was the reason which caused Hilary to go there now. He had acted on impulse; he knew that if he let his impulse cool he would not act at all. The bold course was the wise one; this was why he chose the end door round the corner. Standing aside for her to go in first, he noticed the girl's brightened eyes and cheeks; she had never looked so pretty. He glanced hastily round; the department was barren for their purposes, filled entirely with pyjamas. He felt a touch on his arm. The little model, rather pink, was looking up at him.

"Mr. Dallison, am I to get more than one set of—underthings?"

"Three-three," muttered Hilary; and suddenly he saw that they were on the threshold of that sanctuary. "Buy them," he said, "and bring me the bill."

He waited close beside a man with a pink face, a moustache, and an almost perfect figure, who was standing very still, dressed from head to foot in blue-and-white stripes. He seemed the apotheosis of what a man should be, his face composed in a deathless simper: "Long, long have been the struggles of man, but civilization has produced me at last. Further than this it cannot go. Nothing shall make me continue my line. In me the end is reached. See my back: 'The Amateur. This perfect style, 8s. 11d. Great reduction.'"

He would not talk to Hilary, and the latter was compelled to watch the shopmen. It was but half an hour to closing time; the youths were moving languidly, bickering a little, in the absence of their customers—like flies on a pane unable to get out into the sun. Two of them came and asked him what they might serve him with; they were so refined and pleasant that Hilary was on the point of buying what he did not want. The reappearance of the little model saved him.

"It's thirty shillings; five and eleven was the cheapest, and stockings, and I bought some sta—"

Hilary produced the money hastily.

"This is a very dear shop," she said.

When she had paid the bill, and Hilary had taken from her a large brown-paper parcel, they journeyed on together. He had armoured his face now in a slightly startled quizzicality, as though, himself detached, he were watching the adventure from a distance.

On the central velvet seat of the boot and shoe department, a lady, with an egret in her hat, was stretching out a slim silk-stockinged foot, waiting for a boot. She looked with negligent amusement at this common little girl and her singular companion. This look of hers seemed to affect the women serving, for none came near the little model. Hilary saw them eyeing her boots, and, suddenly forgetting his role of looker-on, he became very angry. Taking out his watch, he went up to the eldest woman.

"If somebody," he said, "does not attend this young lady within a minute, I shall make a personal complaint to Mr. Thorn."

The hand of the watch, however, had not completed its round before a woman was at the little model's side. Hilary saw her taking off her boot, and by a sudden impulse he placed himself between her and the lady. In doing this, he so far forgot his delicacy as to fix his eyes on the little model's foot. The sense of physical discomfort which first attacked him became a sort of aching in his heart. That brown, dingy stocking was darned till no stocking, only darning, and one toe and two little white bits of foot were seen, where the threads refused to hold together any longer.

The little model wagged the toe uneasily—she had hoped, no doubt, that it would not protrude, then concealed it with her skirt. Hilary moved hastily away; when he looked again, it was not at her, but at the lady.

Her face had changed; it was no longer amused and negligent, but stamped with an expression of offence. 'Intolerable,' it seemed to say, 'to bring a girl like that into a shop like this! I shall never come here again!' The expression was but the outward sign of that inner physical discomfort Hilary himself had felt when he first saw the little model's stocking. This naturally did not serve to lessen his anger, especially as he saw her animus mechanically reproduced on the faces of the serving women.

He went back to the little model, and sat down by her side.

"Does it fit? You'd better walk in it and see."

The little model walked.

"It squeezes me," she said.

"Try another, then," said Hilary.

The lady rose, stood for a second with her eyebrows raised and her nostrils slightly distended, then went away, and left a peculiarly pleasant scent of violets behind.

The second pair of boots not "squeezing" her, the little model was soon ready to go down. She had all her trousseau now, except the dress—selected and, indeed, paid for, but which, as she told Hilary, she was coming back to try on tomorrow, when—when—. She had obviously meant to say when she was all new underneath. She was laden with one large and two small parcels, and in her eyes there was a holy look.

Outside the shop she gazed up in his face.

"Well, you are happy now?" asked Hilary.

Between the short black lashes were seen two very bright, wet shining eyes; her parted lips began to quiver.

"Good-night, then," he said abruptly, and walked away.

But looking round, he saw her still standing there, half buried in parcels, gazing after him. Raising his hat, he turned into the High Street towards home....

The old man, known to that low class of fellow with whom he was now condemned to associate as "Westminister," was taking a whiff or two out of his old clay pipe, and trying to forget his feet. He saw Hilary coming, and carefully extended a copy of the last edition.

"Good-evenin', sir! Quite seasonable to-day for the time of year! Ho, yes! 'Westminister!'"

His eyes followed Hilary's retreat. He thought:

"Oh dear! He's a-given me an 'arf-a-crown. He does look well—I like to see 'im look as well as that—quite young! Oh dear!"

The sun—that smoky, faring ball, which in its time had seen so many last editions of the Westminster Gazette—was dropping down to pass the night in Shepherd's Bush. It made the old butler's eyelids blink when he turned to see if the coin really was a half-crown, or too good to be true.

And all the spires and house-roofs, and the spaces up above and underneath them, glittered and swam, and men and horses looked as if they had been powdered with golden dust.

CHAPTER XI

PEAR BLOSSOM

Weighed down by her three parcels, the little model pursued her way to Hound Street. At the door of No. 1 the son of the lame woman, a tall weedy youth with a white face, was resting his legs alternately, and smoking a cigarette. Closing one eye, he addressed her thus:

"'Allo, miss! Kerry your parcels for you?"

The little model gave him a look. 'Mind your own business!' it said; but there was that in the flicker of her eyelashes which more than nullified this snub.

Entering her room, she deposited the parcels on her bed, and untied the strings with quick, pink fingers. When she had freed the garments from wrappings and spread them out, she knelt down, and began to touch them, putting her nose down once or twice to sniff the linen and feel its texture. There were little frills attached here and there, and to these she paid particular attention, ruffling their edges with the palms of her hands, while the holy look came back to her face. Rising at length, she locked the

door, drew down the blind, undressed from head to foot, and put on the new garments. Letting her hair down, she turned herself luxuriously round and round before the too-small looking-glass. There was utter satisfaction in each gesture of that whole operation, as if her spirit, long starved, were having a good meal. In this rapt contemplation of herself, all childish vanity and expectancy, and all that wonderful quality found in simple unspiritual natures of delighting in the present moment, were perfectly displayed. So, motionless, with her hair loose on her neck, she was like one of those half-hours of Spring that have lost their restlessness and are content just to be.

Presently, however, as though suddenly remembering that her happiness was not utterly complete, she went to a drawer, took out a packet of pear-drops, and put one in her mouth.

The sun, near to setting, had found its way through a hole in the blind, and touched her neck. She turned as though she had received a kiss, and, raising a corner of the blind, peered out. The pear-tree, which, to the annoyance of its proprietor, was placed so close to the back court of this low-class house as almost to seem to belong to it, was bathed in slanting sunlight. No tree in all the world could have looked more fair than it did just then in its garb of gilded bloom. With her hand up to her bare neck, and her cheeks indrawn from sucking the sweet, the little model fixed her eyes on the tree. Her expression did not change; she showed no signs of admiration. Her gaze passed on to the back windows of the house that really owned the pear-tree, spying out whether anyone could see her—hoping, perhaps, someone would see her while she was feeling so nice and new. Then, dropping the blind, she went back to the glass and began to pin her hair up. When this was done she stood for a long minute looking at her old brown skirt and blouse, hesitating to defile her new-found purity. At last she put them on and drew up the blind. The sunlight had passed off the pear-tree; its bloom was now white, and almost as still as snow. The little model put another sweet into her mouth, and producing from her pocket an ancient leather purse, counted out her money. Evidently discovering that it was no more than she expected, she sighed, and rummaged out of a top drawer an old illustrated magazine.

She sat down on the bed, and, turning the leaves rapidly till she reached a certain page, rested the paper in her lap. Her eyes were fixed on a photograph in the left-hand corner—one of those effigies of writers that appear occasionally in the public press. Under it were printed the words: "Mr. Hilary Dallison." And suddenly she heaved a sigh.

The room grew darker; the wind, getting up as the sun went down, blew a few dropped petals of the pear-tree against the window-pane.

CHAPTER XII

SHIPS IN SAIL

In due accord with the old butler's comment on his looks, Hilary had felt so young that, instead of going home, he mounted an omnibus, and went down to his club—the "Pen and Ink," so called because the man who founded it could not think at the moment of any other words. This literary person had left the club soon after its initiation, having conceived for it a sudden dislike. It had indeed a certain reputation for bad cooking, and all its members complained bitterly at times that you never could go in without meeting someone you knew. It stood in Dover Street. Unlike other clubs, it was mainly used to talk in, and had special arrangements for the safety of umbrellas and such books as had not yet vanished from the library; not, of course, owing to any speculative tendency among its members, but because, after interchanging their ideas, those members would depart, in a long row, each grasping some material object in his hand. Its maroon-coloured curtains, too, were never drawn, because, in the heat of their discussions, the members were always drawing them. On the whole, those members did not like each other much; wondering a little, one by one, why the others wrote; and when the printed reasons were detailed to them, reading them with irritation. If really compelled to hazard an opinion about each other's merits, they used to say that, no doubt "So-and-so" was "very good," but they had never read him! For it had early been established as the principle underlying membership not to read the writings of another man, unless you could be certain he was dead, lest you might have to tell him to his face that you disliked his work. For they were very jealous of the purity of their literary consciences. Exception was made, however, in the case of those who lived by written criticism, the opinions of such persons being read by all, with a varying smile, and a certain cerebral excitement. Now and then, however, some member, violating every sense of decency, would take a violent liking for another member's books. This he would express in words, to the discomfort of his fellows, who, with a sudden chilly feeling in the stomach, would wonder why it was not their books that he was praising.

Almost every year, and generally in March, certain aspirations would pass into the club; members would ask each other why there was no Academy of British Letters; why there was no concerted movement to limit the production of other authors' books; why there was no prize given for the best work of the year. For a little time it almost seemed as if their individualism were in danger; but, the windows having been opened wider than usual some morning, the aspirations would pass out, and all would feel secretly as a man feels when he has swallowed the mosquito that has been worrying him all night—relieved, but just a little bit embarrassed. Socially sympathetic in their dealings with each other—they were mostly quite nice fellows—each kept a little fame-machine, on which he might be seen sitting every morning about the time the papers and his correspondence came, wondering if his fame were going up.

Hilary stayed in the club till half-past nine; then, avoiding a discussion which was just setting in, he took his own umbrella, and bent his steps towards home.

It was the moment of suspense in Piccadilly; the tide had flowed up to the theatres, and had not yet begun to ebb. The tranquil trees, still feathery, draped their branches along the farther bank of that broad river, resting from their watch over the tragi-comedies played on its surface by men, their small companions. The gentle sighs which distilled from their plume-like boughs seemed utterances of the softest wisdom. Not far beyond their trunks it was all dark velvet, into which separate shapes, adventuring, were lost, as wild birds vanishing in space, or the souls of men received into their Mother's heart.

Hilary walked, hearing no sighs of wisdom, noting no smooth darkness, wrapped in thought. The mere fact of having given pleasure was enough to produce a warm sensation in a man so naturally kind. But, as with all self-conscious, self-distrustful, natures, that sensation had not lasted. He was left with a feeling of emptiness and disillusionment, as of having given himself a good mark without reason.

While walking, he was a target for the eyes of many women, who passed him rapidly, like ships in sail. The special fastidious shyness of his face attracted those accustomed to another kind of face. And though he did not precisely look at them, they in turn inspired in him the compassionate, morbid curiosity which persons who live desperate lives necessarily inspire in the leisured, speculative mind. One of them deliberately approached him from a side-street. Though taller and fuller, with heightened colour, frizzy hair, and a hat with feathers; she was the image of the little model—the same shape of face, broad cheek-bones, mouth a little open; the same flower-coloured eyes and short black lashes, all coarsened and accentuated as Art coarsens and accentuates the lines of life. Looking boldly into Hilary's startled face, she laughed. Hilary winced and walked on quickly.

He reached home at half-past ten. The lamp was burning in Mr. Stone's room, and his window was, as usual, open; that which was not usual, however, was a light in Hilary's own bedroom. He went gently up. Through the door-ajar he saw, to his surprise, the figure of his wife. She was reclining in a chair, her elbows on its arms, the tips of her fingers pressed together. Her face, with its dark hair, vivid colouring, and sharp lines, was touched with shadows, her head turned as though towards somebody beside her; her neck gleamed white. So—motionless, dimly seen—she was like a woman sitting alongside her own life, scrutinising, criticising, watching it live, taking no part in it. Hilary wondered whether to go in or slip away from his strange visitor.

"Ah! it's you," she said.

Hilary approached her. For all her mocking of her own charms, this wife of his was strangely graceful. After nineteen years in which to learn every line of her face and body, every secret of her nature, she still eluded him; that elusiveness, which had begun by being such a charm, had got on his nerves, and extinguished the flame it had once lighted. He had so often tried to see, and never seen, the essence of her soul. Why was she made like this? Why was she for ever mocking herself, himself, and every other thing? Why was she so hard to her own life, so bitter a foe to her own happiness? Leonardo da Vinci might have painted her, less sensual and cruel than his women, more restless and disharmonic, but physically, spiritually enticing, and, by her refusals to surrender either to her spirit or her senses, baffling her own enticements.

"I don't know why I came," she said.

Hilary found no better answer than: "I am sorry I was out to dinner."

"Has the wind gone round? My room is cold."

"Yes, north-east. Stay here."

Her hand touched his; that warm and restless clasp was agitating.

"It's good of you to ask me; but we'd better not begin what we can't keep up."

"Stay here," said Hilary again, kneeling down beside her chair.

And suddenly he began to kiss her face and neck. He felt her answering kisses; for a moment they were clasped together in a fierce embrace. Then, as though by mutual consent, their arms relaxed; their eyes grew furtive, like the eyes of children who have egged each other on to steal; and on their lips appeared the faintest of faint smiles. It was as though those lips were saying: "Yes, but we are not quite animals!"

Hilary got up and sat down on his bed. Blanca stayed in the chair, looking straight before her, utterly inert, her head thrown back, her white throat gleaming, on her lips and in her eyes that flickering smile. Not a word more, nor a look, passed between them.

Then rising, without noise, she passed behind him and went out.

Hilary had a feeling in his mouth as though he had been chewing ashes. And a phrase—as phrases sometimes fill the spirit of a man without rhyme or reason—kept forming on his lips: "The house of harmony!"

Presently he went to her door, and stood there listening. He could hear no sound whatever. If she had been crying if she had been laughing—it would have been better than this silence. He put his hands up to his ears and ran down-stairs.

CHAPTER XIII

SOUND IN THE NIGHT

He passed his study door, and halted at Mr. Stone's; the thought of the old man, so steady and absorbed in the face of all external things, refreshed him.

Still in his brown woollen gown, Mr. Stone was sitting with his eyes fixed on something in the corner, whence a little perfumed steam was rising.

"Shut the door," he said; "I am making cocoa; will you have a cup?"

"Am I disturbing you?" asked Hilary.

Mr. Stone looked at him steadily before answering:

"If I work after cocoa, I find it clogs the liver."

"Then, if you'll let me, sir, I'll stay a little."

"It is boiling," said Mr. Stone. He took the saucepan off the flame, and, distending his frail cheeks, blew. Then, while the steam mingled with his frosty beard, he brought two cups from a cupboard, filled one of them, and looked at Hilary.

"I should like you," he said, "to hear three or four pages I have just completed; you may perhaps be able to suggest a word or two."

He placed the saucepan back on the stove, and grasped the cup he had filled.

"I will drink my cocoa, and read them to you."

Going to the desk, he stood, blowing at the cup.

Hilary turned up the collar of his coat against the night wind which was visiting the room, and glanced at the empty cup, for he was rather hungry. He heard a curious sound: Mr. Stone was blowing his own tongue. In his haste to read, he had drunk too soon and deeply of the cocoa.

"I have burnt my mouth," he said.

Hilary moved hastily towards him: "Badly? Try cold milk, sir."

Mr. Stone lifted the cup.

"There is none," he said, and drank again.

'What would I not give,' thought Hilary, 'to have his singleness of heart!'

There was the sharp sound of a cup set down. Then, out of a rustling of papers, a sort of droning rose:

"The Proletariat—with a cynicism natural to those who really are in want, and even amongst their leaders only veiled when these attained a certain position in the public eye—desired indeed the wealth and leisure of their richer neighbours, but in their long night of struggle with existence they had only found the energy to formulate their pressing needs from day to day. They were a heaving, surging sea of creatures, slowly, without consciousness or real guidance, rising in long tidal movements to set the limits of the shore a little farther back, and cast afresh the form of social life; and on its pea-green bosom " Mr. Stone paused. "She has copied it wrong," he said; "the word is 'seagreen.' 'And on its sea-green bosom sailed a fleet of silver cockle-shells, wafted by the breath of those not in themselves driven by the wind of need. The voyage of these silver cockle-shells, all heading across each other's bows, was, in fact, the advanced movement of that time. In the stern of each of these little craft, blowing at the sails, was seated a by-product of the accepted system. These by-products we should now examine."

Mr. Stone paused, and looked into his cup. There were some grounds in it. He drank them, and went on:

"The fratricidal principle of the survival of the fittest, which in those days was England's moral teaching, had made the country one huge butcher's shop. Amongst the carcasses of countless victims there had fattened and grown purple many butchers, physically strengthened by the smell of blood and sawdust. These had begotten many children. Following out the laws of Nature providing against surfeit, a proportion of these children were born with a feeling of distaste for blood and sawdust; many of them, compelled for the purpose of making money to follow in their fathers' practices, did so unwillingly; some, thanks to their fathers' butchery, were in a position to abstain from practising; but whether in practice or at leisure, distaste for the scent of blood and sawdust was the common feature that distinguished them. Qualities hitherto but little known, and generally despised—not, as we shall see, without some reason—were developed in them. Self-consciousness, aestheticism, a dislike for waste, a hatred of injustice; these—or some one of these, when coupled with that desire natural to men throughout all ages to accomplish something—constituted the motive forces which enabled them to work their bellows. In practical affairs those who were under the necessity of labouring were driven, under the then machinery of social life, to the humaner and less exacting kinds of butchery, such as the Arts, Education, the practice of Religions and Medicine, and the paid representation of their fellow-creatures. Those not so driven occupied themselves in observing and complaining of the existing state of thing. Each year saw more of their silver cockleshells putting out from port, and the cheeks of those who blew the sails more violently distended. Looking back on that pretty voyage, we see the reason why those ships were doomed never to move, but, seated on the sea-green bosom of that sea, to heave up and down, heading across each other's bows in the self-same place for ever. That reason, in few words, was this: 'The man who blew should have been in the sea, not on the ship.'"

The droning ceased. Hilary saw that Mr. Stone was staring fixedly at his sheet of paper, as though the merits of this last sentence were surprising him. The droning instantly began again: "In social effort, as in the physical processes of Nature, there had ever been a single fertilising agent—the mysterious and wonderful attraction known as Love. To this—that merging of one being in another—had been due all the progressive variance of form, known by man under the name of Life. It was this merger, this mysterious, unconscious Love, which was lacking to the windy efforts of those who tried to sail that fleet. They were full of reason, conscience, horror, full of impatience, contempt, revolt; but they did not love the masses of their fellow-men. They could not fling themselves into the sea. Their hearts were glowing; but the wind which made them glow was not the salt and universal zephyr: it was the desert wind of scorn. As with the flowering of the aloe-tree—so long awaited, so strange and swift when once it comes—man had yet to wait for his delirious impulse to Universal Brotherhood, and the forgetfulness of Self."

Mr. Stone had finished, and stood gazing at his visitor with eyes that clearly saw beyond him. Hilary could not meet those eyes; he kept his own fixed on the empty cocoa cup. It was not, in fact, usual for those who heard Mr. Stone read his manuscript to look him in the face. He stood thus absorbed so long that Hilary rose at last, and glanced into the saucepan. There was no cocoa in it. Mr. Stone had only made enough for one. He had meant it for his visitor, but self-forgetfulness had supervened.

"You know what happens to the aloe, sir, when it has flowered?" asked Hilary with malice.

Mr. Stone moved, but did not answer.

"It dies," said Hilary.

"No," said Mr. Stone; "it is at peace."

"When is self at peace, sir? The individual is surely as immortal as the universal. That is the eternal comedy of life."

"What is?" said Mr. Stone.

"The fight or game between the two."

Mr. Stone stood a moment looking wistfully at his son-in-law. He laid down the sheet of manuscript. "It is time for me to do my exercises." So saying, he undid the tasselled cord tied round the middle of his gown.

Hilary hastened to the door. From that point of vantage he looked back.

Divested of his gown and turned towards the window, Mr. Stone was already rising on his toes, his arms were extended, his palms pressed hard together in the attitude of prayer, his trousers slowly slipping down.

"One, two, three, four, five!" There was a sudden sound of breath escaping....

In the corridor upstairs, flooded with moonlight from a window at the end, Hilary stood listening again. The only sound that came to him was the light snoring of Miranda, who slept in the bathroom, not caring to lie too near to anyone. He went to his room, and for a long time sat buried in thought; then, opening the side window, he leaned out. On the trees of the next garden, and the sloping roofs of stables and outhouses, the moonlight had come down like a flight of milk-white pigeons; with outspread wings, vibrating faintly as though yet in motion, they covered everything. Nothing stirred. A clock was striking two. Past that flight of milk-white pigeons were black walls as yet unvisited. Then, in the stillness, Hilary seemed to hear, deep and very faint, the sound as of some monster breathing, or the far beating of muffled drums. From every side of the pale sleeping town it seemed to come, under the moon's cold glamour. It rose, and fell, and rose, with a weird, creepy rhythm, like a groaning of the hopeless and hungry. A hansom cab rattled down the High Street; Hilary strained his ears after the failing clatter of hoofs and bell. They died; there was silence. Creeping nearer, drumming, throbbing, he heard again the beating of that vast heart. It grew and grew. His own heart began thumping. Then, emerging from that sinister dumb groan, he distinguished a crunching sound, and knew that it was no muttering echo of men's struggles, but only the waggons journeying to Covent Garden Market.

CHAPTER XIV

A WALK ABROAD

Thyme Dallison, in the midst of her busy life, found leisure to record her recollections and ideas in the pages of old school notebooks. She had no definite purpose in so doing, nor did she desire the solace of luxuriating in her private feelings—this she would have scorned as out of date and silly. It was done from the fulness of youthful energy, and from the desire to express oneself that was "in the air." It was everywhere, that desire: among her fellow-students, among her young men friends, in her mother's drawing-room, and her aunt's studio. Like sentiment and marriage to the Victorian miss, so was this duty to express herself to Thyme; and, going hand-in-hand with it, the duty to have a good and jolly youth. She never read again the thoughts which she recorded, she took no care to lock them up, knowing that her liberty, development, and pleasure were sacred things which no one would dream of touching—she kept them stuffed down in a drawer among her handkerchiefs and ties and blouses, together with the indelible fragment of a pencil.

This journal, naive and slipshod, recorded without order the current impression of things on her mind.

In the early morning of the 4th of May she sat, night-gowned, on the foot of her white bed, with chestnut hair all fluffy about her neck, eyes bright and cheeks still rosy with sleep, scribbling away and rubbing one bare foot against the other in the ecstasy of self-expression. Now and then, in the middle of

a sentence, she would stop and look out of the window, or stretch herself deliciously, as though life were too full of joy for her to finish anything.

"I went into grandfather's room yesterday, and stayed while he was dictating to the little model. I do think grandfather's so splendid. Martin says an enthusiast is worse than useless; people, he says, can't afford to dabble in ideas or dreams. He calls grandfather's idea paleolithic. I hate him to be laughed at. Martin's so cocksure. I don't think he'd find many men of eighty who'd bathe in the Serpentine all the year round, and do his own room, cook his own food, and live on about ninety pounds a year out of his pension of three hundred, and give all the rest away. Martin says that's unsound, and the 'Book of Universal Brotherhood' rot. I don't care if it is; it's fine to go on writing it as he does all day. Martin admits that. That's the worst of him: he's so cool, you can't score him off; he seems to be always criticising you; it makes me wild.... That little model is a hopeless duffer. I could have taken it all down in half the time. She kept stopping and looking up with that mouth of hers half open, as if she had all day before her. Grandfather's so absorbed he doesn't notice; he likes to read the thing over and over, to hear how the words sound. That girl would be no good at any sort of work, except 'sitting,' I suppose. Aunt B. used to say she sat well. There's something queer about her face; it reminds me a little of that Botticelli Madonna in the National Gallery, the full-face one; not so much in the shape as in the expression—almost stupid, and yet as if things were going to happen to her. Her hands and arms are pretty, and her feet are smaller than mine. She's two years older than me. I asked her why she went in for being a model, which is beastly work. She said she was glad to get anything! I asked her why she didn't go into a shop or into service. She didn't answer at once, and then said she hadn't had any recommendations—didn't know where to try; then, all of a sudden, she grew quite sulky, and said she didn't want to...."

Thyme paused to pencil in a sketch of the little model's profile....

"She had on a really pretty frock, quite simple and well made—it must have cost three or four pounds. She can't be so very badly off, or somebody gave it her...."

And again Thyme paused.

"She looked ever so much prettier in it than she used to in her old brown skirt, I thought Uncle Hilary came to dinner last night. We talked of social questions; we always discuss things when he comes. I can't help liking Uncle Hilary; he has such kind eyes, and he's so gentle that you never lose your temper with him. Martin calls him weak and unsatisfactory because he's not in touch with life. I should say it was more as if he couldn't bear to force anyone to do anything; he seems to see both sides of every question, and he's not good at making up his mind, of course. He's rather like Hamlet might have been, only nobody seems to know now what Hamlet was really like. I told him what I thought about the lower classes. One can talk to him. I hate father's way of making feeble little jokes, as if nothing were serious. I said I didn't think it was any use to dabble; we ought to go to the root of everything. I said that money and class distinctions are two bogeys we have got to lay. Martin says, when it comes to real dealing with social questions and the poor, all the people we know are amateurs. He says that we have got to shake ourselves free of all the old sentimental notions, and just work at putting everything to the test of Health. Father calls Martin a 'Sanitist'; and Uncle Hilary says that if you wash people by law they'll all be as dirty again tomorrow...."

Thyme paused again. A blackbird in the garden of the Square was uttering a long, low, chuckling trill. She ran to the window and peeped out. The bird was on a plane-tree, and, with throat uplifted, was letting through his yellow beak that delicious piece of self-expression. All things he seemed to praise—the sky, the sun, the trees, the dewy grass, himself:

'You darling!' thought Thyme. With a shudder of delight she dropped her notebook back into the drawer, flung off her nightgown, and flew into her bath.

That same morning she slipped out quietly at ten o'clock. Her Saturdays were free of classes, but she had to run the gauntlet of her mother's liking for her company and her father's wish for her to go with him to Richmond and play golf.

For on Saturdays Stephen almost always left the precincts of the Courts before three o'clock. Then, if he could induce his wife or daughter to accompany him, he liked to get a round or two in preparation for Sunday, when he always started off at half-past ten and played all day. If Cecilia and Thyme failed him, he would go to his club, and keep himself in touch with every kind of social movement by reading the reviews.

Thyme walked along with her head up and a wrinkle in her brow, as though she were absorbed in serious reflection; if admiring glances were flung at her, she did not seem aware of them. Passing not far from Hilary's, she entered the Broad Walk, and crossed it to the farther end.

On a railing, stretching out his long legs and observing the passers-by, sat her cousin, Martin Stone. He got down as she came up.

"Late again," he said. "Come on!"

"Where are we going first?" Thyme asked.

"The Notting Hill district's all we can do to-day if we're to go again to Mrs. Hughs'. I must be down at the hospital this afternoon."

Thyme frowned. "I do envy you living by yourself, Martin. It's silly having to live at home."

Martin did not answer, but one nostril of his long nose was seen to curve, and Thyme acquiesced in this without remark. They walked for some minutes between tall houses, looking about them calmly. Then Martin said: "All Purceys round here."

Thyme nodded. Again there was silence; but in these pauses there was no embarrassment, no consciousness apparently that it was silence, and their eyes—those young, impatient, interested eyes—were for ever busy observing.

"Boundary line. We shall be in a patch directly."

"Black?" asked Thyme.

"Dark blue—black farther on."

They were passing down a long, grey, curving road, whose narrow houses, hopelessly unpainted, showed marks of grinding poverty. The Spring wind was ruffling straw and little bits of paper in the gutters; under the bright sunlight a bleak and bitter struggle seemed raging. Thyme said:

"This street gives me a hollow feeling."

Martin nodded. "Worse than the real article. There's half a mile of this. Here it's all grim fighting. Farther on they've given it up."

And still they went on up the curving street, with its few pinched shops and its unending narrow grimness.

At the corner of a by-street Martin said: "We'll go down here."

Thyme stood still, wrinkling her nose. Martin eyed her.

"Don't funk!"

"I'm not funking, Martin, only I can't stand the smells."

"You'll have to get used to them."

"Yes, I know; but—but I forgot my eucalyptus."

The young man took out a handkerchief which had not yet been unfolded.

"Here, take mine."

"They do make me feel so—it's a shame to take yours," and she took the handkerchief.

"That's all right," said Martin. "Come on!"

The houses of this narrow street, inside and out, seemed full of women. Many of them had babies in their arms; they were working or looking out of windows or gossiping on doorsteps. And all stopped to stare as the young couple passed. Thyme stole a look at her companion. His long stride had not varied; there was the usual pale, observant, sarcastic expression on his face. Clenching the handkerchief in readiness, and trying to imitate his callous air, she looked at a group of five women on the nearest doorstep.

Three were seated and two were standing. One of these, a young woman with a round, open face, was clearly very soon to have a child; the other, with a short, dark face and iron-grey, straggling hair, was smoking a clay pipe. Of the three seated, one, quite young, had a face as grey white as a dirty sheet, and a blackened eye; the second, with her ragged dress disarranged, was nursing a baby; the third, in the centre, on the top step, with red arms akimbo, her face scored with drink, was shouting friendly obscenities to a neighbour in the window opposite. In Thyme's heart rose the passionate feeling, 'How

disgusting! how disgusting!' and since she did not dare to give expression to it, she bit her lips and turned her head from them, resenting, with all a young girl's horror, that her sex had given her away. The women stared at her, and in those faces, according to their different temperaments, could be seen first the same vague, hard interest that had been Thyme's when she first looked at them, then the same secret hostility and criticism, as though they too felt that by this young girl's untouched modesty, by her gushed cheeks and unsoiled clothes, their sex had given them away. With contemptuous movements of their lips and bodies, on that doorstep they proclaimed their emphatic belief in the virtue and reality of their own existences and in the vice and unreality of her intruding presence.

"Give the doll to Bill; 'e'd make 'er work for once, the—-" In a burst of laughter the epithet was lost.

Martin's lips curled.

"Purple just here," he said.

Thyme's cheeks were crimson.

At the end of the little street he stopped before a shop.

"Come on," he said, "you'll see the sort of place where they buy their grub."

In the doorway were standing a thin brown spaniel, a small fair woman with a high, bald forehead, from which the hair was gleaned into curlpapers, and a little girl with some affection of the skin.

Nodding coolly, Martin motioned them aside. The shop was ten feet square; its counters, running parallel to two of the walls, were covered with plates of cake, sausages, old ham-bones, peppermint sweets, and household soap; there was also bread, margarine, suet in bowls, sugar, bloaters—many bloaters—Captain's biscuits, and other things besides. Two or three dead rabbits hung against the wall. All was uncovered, so that what flies there were sat feeding socialistically. Behind the counter a girl of seventeen was serving a thin-faced woman with portions of a cheese which she was holding down with her strong, dirty hand, while she sawed it with a knife. On the counter, next the cheese, sat a quiet-looking cat.

They all glanced round at the two young people, who stood and waited.

"Finish what you're at," said Martin, "then give me three pennyworth of bull's-eyes."

The girl, with a violent effort, finished severing the cheese. The thin-faced woman took it, and, coughing above it, went away. The girl, who could not take her eyes off Thyme, now served them with three pennyworth of bull's-eyes, which she took out with her fingers, for they had stuck. Putting them in a screw of newspaper, she handed them to Martin. The young man, who had been observing negligently, touched Thyme's elbow. She, who had stood with eyes cast down, now turned. They went out, Martin handing the bull's-eyes to the little girl with an affection of the skin.

The street now ended in a wide road formed of little low houses.

"Black," said Martin, "here; all down this road-casual labour, criminals, loafers, drunkards, consumps. Look at the faces!"

Thyme raised her eyes obediently. In this main thoroughfare it was not as in the by-street, and only dull or sullen glances, or none at all, were bent on her. Some of the houses had ragged plants on the window-sills; in one window a canary was singing. Then, at a bend, they came into a blacker reach of human river. Here were outbuildings, houses with broken windows, houses with windows boarded up, fried-fish shops, low public-houses, houses without doors. There were more men here than women, and those men were wheeling barrows full of rags and bottles, or not even full of rags and bottles; or they were standing by the public-houses gossiping or quarrelling in groups of three or four; or very slowly walking in the gutters, or on the pavements, as though trying to remember if they were alive. Then suddenly some young man with gaunt violence in his face would pass, pushing his barrow desperately, striding fiercely by. And every now and then, from a fried-fish or hardware shop, would come out a man in a dirty apron to take the sun and contemplate the scene, not finding in it, seemingly, anything that in any way depressed his spirit. Amongst the constant, crawling, shifting stream of passengers were seen women carrying food wrapped up in newspaper, or with bundles beneath their shawls. The faces of these women were generally either very red and coarse or of a sort of bluish-white; they wore the expression of such as know themselves to be existing in the way that Providence has arranged they should exist. No surprise, revolt, dismay, or shame was ever to be seen on those faces; in place of these emotions a drab and brutish acquiescence or mechanical coarse jocularity. To pass like this about their business was their occupation each morning of the year; it was needful to accept it. Not having any hope of ever, being different, not being able to imagine any other life, they were not so wasteful of their

strength as to attempt either to hope or to imagine. Here and there, too, very slowly passed old men and women, crawling along, like winter bees who, in some strange and evil moment, had forgotten to die in the sunlight of their toil, and, too old to be of use, had been chivied forth from their hive to perish slowly in the cold twilight of their days.

Down the centre of the street Thyme saw a brewer's dray creeping its way due south under the sun. Three horses drew it, with braided tails and beribboned manes, the brass glittering on their harness. High up, like a god, sat the drayman, his little slits of eyes above huge red cheeks fixed immovably on his horses' crests. Behind him, with slow, unceasing crunch, the dray rolled, piled up with hogsheads, whereon the drayman's mate lay sleeping. Like the slumbrous image of some mighty unrelenting Power, it passed, proud that its monstrous bulk contained all the joy and blessing those shadows on the pavement had ever known.

The two young people emerged on to the high road running east and west.

"Cross here," said Martin, "and cut down into Kensington. Nothing more of interest now till we get to Hound Street. Purceys and Purceys all round about this part."

Thyme shook herself.

"O Martin, let's go down a road where there's some air. I feel so dirty." She put her hand up to her chest.

"There's one here," said Martin.

They turned to the left into a road that had many trees. Now that she could breathe and look about her, Thyme once more held her head erect and began to swing her arms.

"Martin, something must be done!"

The young doctor did not reply; his face still wore its pale, sarcastic, observant look. He gave her arm a squeeze with a half-contemptuous smile.

CHAPTER XV

SECOND PILGRIMAGE TO HOUND STREET

Arriving in Hound Street, Martin Stone and his companion went straight up to Mrs. Hughs' front room. They found her doing the week's washing, and hanging out before a scanty fire part of the little that the week had been suffered to soil. Her arms were bare, her face and eyes red; the steam of soapsuds had congealed on them.

Attached to the bolster by a towel, under his father's bayonet and the oleograph depicting the Nativity, sat the baby. In the air there was the scent of him, of walls, and washing, and red herrings. The two young people took their seat on the window-sill.

"May we open the window, Mrs. Hughs?" said Thyme. "Or will it hurt the baby?"

"No, miss."

"What's the matter with your wrists?" asked Martin.

The seamstress, muffing her arms with the garment she was dipping in soapy water, did not answer.

"Don't do that. Let me have a look."

Mrs. Hughs held out her arms; the wrists were swollen and discoloured.

"The brute!" cried Thyme.

The young doctor muttered: "Done last night. Got any arnica?"

"No, Sir."

"Of course not." He laid a sixpence on the sill. "Get some and rub it in. Mind you don't break the

skin."

Thyme suddenly burst out: "Why don't you leave him, Mrs. Hughs? Why do you live with a brute like that?"

Martin frowned.

"Any particular row," he said, "or only just the ordinary?"

Mrs. Hughs turned her face to the scanty fire. Her shoulders heaved spasmodically.

Thus passed three minutes, then she again began rubbing the soapy garment.

"If you don't mind, I'll smoke," said Martin. "What's your baby's name? Bill? Here, Bill!" He placed his little finger in the baby's hand. "Feeding him yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"What's his number?"

"I've lost three, sir; there's only his brother Stanley now."

"One a year?"

"No, Sir. I missed two years in the war, of course."

"Hughs wounded out there?"

"Yes, sir—in the head."

"Ah! And fever?"

"Yes, Sir."

Martin tapped his pipe against his forehead. "Least drop of liquor goes to it, I suppose?"

Mrs. Hughs paused in the dipping of a cloth; her tear-stained face expressed resentment, as though she had detected an attempt to find excuses for her husband.

"He didn't ought to treat me as he does," she said.

All three now stood round the bed, over which the baby presided with solemn gaze.

Thyme said: "I wouldn't care what he did, Mrs. Hughs; I wouldn't stay another day if I were you. It's your duty as a woman."

To hear her duty as a woman Mrs. Hughs turned; slow vindictiveness gathered on her thin face.

"Yes, miss?" she said. "I don't know what to do."

"Take the children and go. What's the good of waiting? We'll give you money if you haven't got enough."

But Mrs. Hughs did not answer.

"Well?" said Martin, blowing out a cloud of smoke.

Thyme burst out again: "Just go, the very minute your little boy comes back from school. Hughs 'll never find you. It 'll serve him right. No woman ought to put up with what you have; it's simply weakness, Mrs. Hughs."

As though that word had forced its way into her very heart and set the blood free suddenly, Mrs. Hughs' face turned the colour of tomatoes. She poured forth words:

"And leave him to that young girl—and leave him to his wickedness! After I've been his wife eight years and borne him five! after I've done what I have for him! I never want no better husband than what he used to be, till she came with her pale face and her prinky manners, and—and her mouth that you can tell she's bad by. Let her keep to her profession—sitting naked's what she's fit for—coming here to decent folk—" And holding out her wrists to Thyme, who had shrunk back, she cried: "He's never struck me before. I got these all because of her new clothes!"

Hearing his mother speak with such strange passion, the baby howled. Mrs. Hughs stopped, and took him up. Pressing him close to her thin bosom, she looked above his little dingy head at the two young people.

"I got my wrists like this last night, wrestling with him. He swore he'd go and leave me, but I held him, I did. And don't you ever think that I'll let him go to that young girl—not if he kills me first!"

With those words the passion in her face died down. She was again a meek, mute woman.

During this outbreak, Thyme, shrinking, stood by the doorway with lowered eyes. She now looked up at Martin, clearly asking him to come away. The latter had kept his gaze fixed on Mrs. Hughs, smoking silently. He took his pipe out of his mouth, and pointed with it at the baby.

"This gentleman," he said, "can't stand too much of that."

In silence all three bent their eyes on the baby. His little fists, and nose, and forehead, even his little naked, crinkled feet, were thrust with all his feeble strength against his mother's bosom, as though he were striving to creep into some hole away from life. There was a sort of dumb despair in that tiny pushing of his way back to the place whence he had come. His head, covered with dingy down, quivered with his effort to escape. He had been alive so little; that little had sufficed. Martin put his pipe back into his mouth.

"This won't do, you know," he said. "He can't stand it. And look here! If you stop feeding him, I wouldn't give that for him tomorrow!" He held up the circle of his thumb and finger. "You're the best judge of what sort of chance you've got of going on in your present state of mind!" Then, motioning to Thyme, he went down the stairs.

CHAPTER XVI

BENEATH THE ELMS

Spring was in the hearts of men, and their tall companions, trees. Their troubles, the stiflings of each other's growth, and all such things, seemed of little moment. Spring had them by the throat. It turned old men round, and made them stare at women younger than themselves. It made young men and women walking side by side touch each other, and every bird on the branches tune his pipe. Flying sunlight speckled the fluttered leaves, and gushed the cheeks of crippled boys who limped into the Gardens, till their pale Cockney faces shone with a strange glow.

In the Broad Walk, beneath those dangerous trees, the elms, people sat and took the sun—cheek by jowl, generals and nursemaids, parsons and the unemployed. Above, in that Spring wind, the elm-tree boughs were swaying, rustling, creaking ever so gently, carrying on the innumerable talk of trees—their sapient, wordless conversation over the affairs of men. It was pleasant, too, to see and hear the myriad movement of the million little separate leaves, each shaped differently, fighting never twice alike, yet all obedient to the single spirit of their tree.

Thyme and Martin were sitting on a seat beneath the largest of all the elms. Their manner lacked the unconcern and dignity of the moment, when, two hours before, they had started forth on their discovery from the other end of the Broad Walk. Martin spoke:

"It's given you the hump! First sight of blood, and you're like all the rest of them!"

"I'm not, Martin. How perfectly beastly of you!"

"Oh yes, you are. There's plenty of aestheticism about you and your people—plenty of good intentions—but not an ounce of real business!"

"Don't abuse my people; they're just as kind as you!"

"Oh, they're kind enough, and they can see what's wrong. It's not that which stops them. But your dad's a regular official. He's got so much sense of what he ought not to do that he never does anything; Just as Hilary's got so much consciousness of what he ought to do that he never does anything. You went to that woman's this morning with your ideas of helping her all cut and dried, and now that you find the facts aren't what you thought, you're stumped!"

"One can't believe anything they say. That's what I hate. I thought Hughs simply knocked her about. I didn't know it was her jealousy—"

"Of course you didn't. Do you imagine those people give anything away to our sort unless they're forced? They know better."

"Well, I hate the whole thing—it's all so sordid!"

"O Lord!"

"Well, it is! I don't feel that I want to help a woman who can say and feel such horrid things, or the girl, or any of them."

"Who cares what they say or feel? that's not the point. It's simply a case of common sense: Your people put that girl there, and they must get her to clear out again sharp. It's just a question of what's healthy."

"Well, I know it's not healthy for me to have anything to do with, and I won't! I don't believe you can help people unless they want to be helped."

Martin whistled.

"You're rather a brute, I think," said Thyme.

"A brute, not rather a brute. That's all the difference."

"For the worse!"

"I don't think so, Thyme!"

There was no answer.

"Look at me."

Very slowly Thyme turned her eyes.

"Well?"

"Are you one of us, or are you not?"

"Of course I am."

"You're not!"

"I am."

"Well, don't let's fight about it. Give me your hand."

He dropped his hand on hers. Her face had flushed rose colour. Suddenly she freed herself. "Here's Uncle Hilary!"

It was indeed Hilary, with Miranda, trotting in advance. His hands were crossed behind him, his face bent towards the ground. The two young people on the bench sat looking at him.

"Buried in self-contemplation," murmured Martin; "that's the way he always walks. I shall tell him about this!"

The colour of Thyme's face deepened from rose to crimson.

"No!"

"Why not?"

"Well—those new—-" She could not bring out that word "clothes." It would have given her thoughts away.

Hilary seemed making for their seat, but Miranda, aware of Martin, stopped. "A man of action!" she appeared to say. "The one who pulls my ears." And turning, as though unconscious, she endeavoured to lead Hilary away. Her master, however, had already seen his niece. He came and sat down on the bench beside her.

"We wanted you!" said Martin, eyeing him slowly, as a young dog will eye another of a different age

and breed. "Thyme and I have been to see the Hughs in Hound Street. Things are blowing up for a mess. You, or whoever put the girl there, ought to get her away again as quick as possible."

Hilary seemed at once to withdraw into himself.

"Well," he said, "let us hear all about it."

"The woman's jealous of her: that's all the trouble!"

"Oh!" said Hilary; "that's all the trouble?"

Thyme murmured: "I don't see a bit why Uncle Hilary should bother. If they will be so horrid—I didn't think the poor were like that. I didn't think they had it in them. I'm sure the girl isn't worth it, or the woman either!"

"I didn't say they were," growled Martin. "It's a question of what's healthy."

Hilary looked from one of his young companions to the other.

"I see," he said. "I thought perhaps the matter was more delicate."

Martin's lip curled.'

"Ah, your precious delicacy! What's the good of that? What did it ever do? It's the curse that you're all suffering from. Why don't you act? You could think about it afterwards."

A flush came into Hilary's sallow cheeks.

"Do you never think before you act, Martin?"

Martin got up and stood looking down on Hilary.

"Look here!" he said; "I don't go in for your subtleties. I use my eyes and nose. I can see that the woman will never be able to go on feeding the baby in the neurotic state she's in. It's a matter of health for both of them."

"Is everything a matter of health with you?"

"It is. Take any subject that you like. Take the poor themselves —what's wanted? Health. Nothing on earth but health! The discoveries and inventions of the last century have knocked the floor out of the old order; we've got to put a new one in, and we're going to put it in, too—the floor of health. The crowd doesn't yet see what it wants, but they're looking for it, and when we show it them they'll catch on fast enough."

"But who are 'you'?" murmured Hilary.

"Who are we? I'll tell you one thing. While all the reformers are pecking at each other we shall quietly come along and swallow up the lot. We've simply grasped this elementary fact, that theories are no basis for reform. We go on the evidence of our eyes and noses; what we see and smell is wrong we correct by practical and scientific means."

"Will you apply that to human nature?"

"It's human nature to want health."

"I wonder! It doesn't look much like it at present."

"Take the case of this woman."

"Yes," said Hilary, "take her case. You can't make this too clear to me, Martin."

"She's no use—poor sort altogether. The man's no use. A man who's been wounded in the head, and isn't a teetotaler, is done for. The girl's no use—regular pleasure-loving type!"

Thyme flushed crimson, and, seeing that flood of colour in his niece's face, Hilary bit his lips.

"The only things worth considering are the children. There's this baby-well, as I said, the important thing is that the mother should be able to look after it properly. Get hold of that, and let the other facts go hang."

"Forgive me, but my difficulty is to isolate this question of the baby's health from all the other

circumstances of the case."

Martin grinned.

"And you'll make that an excuse, I'm certain, for doing nothing."

Thyme slipped her hand into Hilary's.

"You are a brute, Martin," she-murmured.

The young man turned on her a look that said: 'It's no use calling me a brute; I'm proud of being one. Besides, you know you don't dislike it.'

"It's better to be a brute than an amateur," he said.

Thyme, pressing close to Hilary, as though he needed her protection, cried out:

"Martin, you really are a Goth!"

Hilary was still smiling, but his face quivered.

"Not at all," he said. "Martin's powers of diagnosis do him credit."

And, raising his hat, he walked away.

The two young people, both on their feet now, looked after him. Martin's face was a queer study of contemptuous compunction; Thyme's was startled, softened, almost tearful.

"It won't do him any harm," muttered the young man. "It'll shake him up."

Thyme flashed a vicious look at him.

"I hate you sometimes," she said. "You're so coarse-grained—your skin's just like leather."

Martin's hand descended on her wrist.

"And yours," he said, "is tissue-paper. You're all the same, you amateurs."

"I'd rather be an amateur than a—than a bounder!"

Martin made a queer movement of his jaw, then smiled. That smile seemed to madden Thyme. She wrenched her wrist away and darted after Hilary.

Martin impassively looked after her. Taking out his pipe, he filled it with tobacco, slowly pressing the golden threads down into the bowl with his little finger.

CHAPTER XVII

TWO BROTHERS

If has been said that Stephen Dallison, when unable to get his golf on Saturdays, went to his club, and read reviews. The two forms of exercise, in fact, were very similar: in playing golf you went round and round; in reading reviews you did the same, for in course of time you were assured of coming to articles that, nullified articles already read. In both forms of sport the balance was preserved which keeps a man both sound and young.

And to be both sound and young was to Stephen an everyday necessity. He was essentially a Cambridge man, springy and undemonstrative, with just that air of taking a continual pinch of really perfect snuff. Underneath this manner he was a good worker, a good husband, a good father, and nothing could be urged against him except his regularity and the fact that he was never in the wrong. Where he worked, and indeed in other places, many men were like him. In one respect he resembled them, perhaps, too much—he disliked leaving the ground unless he knew precisely where he was coming down again.

He and Cecilia had "got on" from the first. They had both desired to have one child—no more; they had both desired to keep up with the times—no more; they now both considered Hilary's position

awkward—no more; and when Cecilia, in the special Jacobean bed, and taking care to let him have his sleep out first, had told him of this matter of the Hughs, they had both turned it over very carefully, lying on their backs, and speaking in grave tones. Stephen was of opinion that poor old Hilary must look out what he was doing. Beyond this he did not go, keeping even from his wife the more unpleasant of what seemed to him the possibilities.

Then, in the words she had used to Hilary, Cecilia spoke:

"It's so sordid, Stephen."

He looked at her, and almost with one accord they both said:

"But it's all nonsense!"

These speeches, so simultaneous, stimulated them to a robuster view. What was this affair, if real, but the sort of episode that they read of in their papers? What was it, if true, but a duplicate of some bit of fiction or drama which they daily saw described by that word "sordid"? Cecilia, indeed, had used this word instinctively. It had come into her mind at once. The whole affair disturbed her ideals of virtue and good taste—that particular mental atmosphere mysteriously, inevitably woven round the soul by the conditions of special breeding and special life. If, then, this affair were real it was sordid, and if it were sordid it was repellent to suppose that her family could be mixed up in it; but her people were mixed up in it, therefore it must be—nonsense!

So the matter rested until Thyme came back from her visit to her grandfather, and told them of the little model's new and pretty clothes. When she detailed this news they were all sitting at dinner, over the ordering of which Cecilia's loyalty had been taxed till her little headache came, so that there might be nothing too conventional to over-nourish Stephen or so essentially aesthetic as not to nourish him at all. The man servant being in the room, they neither of them raised their eyes. But when he was gone to fetch the bird, each found the other looking furtively across the table. By some queer misfortune the word "sordid" had leaped into their minds again. Who had given her those clothes? But feeling that it was sordid to pursue this thought, they looked away, and, eating hastily, began pursuing it. Being man and woman, they naturally took a different line of chase, Cecilia hunting in one grove and Stephen in another.

Thus ran Stephen's pack of meditations:

'If old Hilary has been giving her money and clothes and that sort of thing, he's either a greater duffer than I took him for, or there's something in it. B.'s got herself to thank, but that won't help to keep Hughs quiet. He wants money, I expect. Oh, damn!'

Cecilia's pack ran other ways:

'I know the girl can't have bought those things out of her proper earnings. I believe she's a really bad lot. I don't like to think it, but it must be so. Hilary can't have been so stupid after what I said to him. If she really is bad, it simplifies things very much; but Hilary is just the sort of man who will never believe it. Oh dear!'

It was, to be quite fair, immensely difficult for Stephen and his wife—or any of their class and circle—in spite of genuinely good intentions, to really feel the existence of their "shadows," except in so far as they saw them on the pavements. They knew that these people lived, because they saw them, but they did not feel it—with such extraordinary care had the web of social life been spun. They were, and were bound to be, as utterly divorced from understanding of, or faith in, all that shadowy life, as those "shadows" in their by-streets were from knowledge or belief that gentleness really existed except in so far as they had money from them.

Stephen and Cecilia, and their thousands, knew these "shadows" as "the people," knew them as slums, as districts, as sweated industries, of different sorts of workers, knew them in the capacity of persons performing odd jobs for them; but as human beings possessing the same faculties and passions with themselves, they did not, could not, know them. The reason, the long reason, extending back through generations, was so plain, so very simple, that it was never mentioned—in their heart of hearts, where there was no room for cant, they knew it to be just a little matter of the senses. They knew that, whatever they might say, whatever money they might give, or time devote, their hearts could never open, unless—unless they closed their ears, and eyes, and noses. This little fact, more potent than all the teaching of philosophers, than every Act of Parliament, and all the sermons ever preached, reigned paramount, supreme. It divided class from class, man from his shadow—as the Great Underlying Law had set dark apart from light.

On this little fact, too gross to mention, they and their kind had in secret built and built, till it was not

too much to say that laws, worship, trade, and every art were based on it, if not in theory, then in fact. For it must not be thought that those eyes were dull or that nose plain—no, no, those eyes could put two and two together; that nose, of myriad fancy, could imagine countless things unsmelled which must lie behind a state of life not quite its own. It could create, as from the scent of an old slipper dogs create their masters.

So Stephen and Cecilia sat, and their butler brought in the bird. It was a nice one, nourished down in Surrey, and as he cut it into portions the butler's soul turned sick within him—not because he wanted some himself, or was a vegetarian, or for any sort of principle, but because he was by natural gifts an engineer, and deadly tired of cutting up and handing birds to other people and watching while they ate them. Without a glimmer of expression on his face he put the portions down before the persons who, having paid him to do so, could not tell his thoughts.

That same night, after working at a Report on the present Laws of Bankruptcy, which he was then drawing up, Stephen entered the joint apartment with excessive caution, having first made all his dispositions, and, stealing to the bed, slipped into it. He lay there, offering himself congratulations that he had not awakened Cecilia, and Cecilia, who was wide awake, knew by his unwonted carefulness that he had come to some conclusion which he did not wish to impart to her. Devoured, therefore, by disquiet, she lay sleepless till the clock struck two.

The conclusion to which Stephen had come was this: Having twice gone through the facts—Hilary's corporeal separation from Bianca (communicated to him by Cecilia), cause unknowable; Hilary's interest in the little model, cause unknown; her known poverty; her employment by Mr. Stone; her tenancy of Mrs. Hughs' room; the latter's outburst to Cecilia; Hughs' threat; and, finally, the girl's pretty clothes—he had summed it up as just a common "plant," to which his brother's possibly innocent, but in any case imprudent, conduct had laid him open. It was a man's affair. He resolutely tried to look on the whole thing as unworthy of attention, to feel that nothing would occur. He failed dismally, for three reasons. First, his inherent love of regularity, of having everything in proper order; secondly, his ingrained mistrust of and aversion from Bianca; thirdly, his unavowed conviction, for all his wish to be sympathetic to them, that the lower classes always wanted something out of you. It was a question of how much they would want, and whether it were wise to give them anything. He decided that it would not be wise at all. What then? Impossible to say. It worried him. He had a natural horror of any sort of scandal, and he was very fond of Hilary. If only he knew the attitude Bianca would take up! He could not even guess it.

Thus, on that Saturday afternoon, the 4th of May, he felt for once such a positive aversion from the reading of reviews, as men will feel from their usual occupations when their nerves have been disturbed. He stayed late at Chambers, and came straight home outside an omnibus.

The tide of life was flowing in the town. The streets were awash with wave on wave of humanity, sucked into a thousand crossing currents. Here men and women were streaming out from the meeting of a religious congress, there streaming in at the gates of some social function; like bright water confined within long shelves of rock and dyed with myriad scales of shifting colour, they thronged Rotten Row, and along the closed shop-fronts were woven into an inextricable network of little human runlets. And everywhere amongst this sea of men and women could be seen their shadows, meandering like streaks of grey slime stirred up from the lower depths by some huge, never-ceasing finger. The innumerable roar of that human sea climbed out above the roofs and trees, and somewhere in illimitable space blended, and slowly reached the meeting-point of sound and silence—that Heart where Life, leaving its little forms and barriers, clasps Death, and from that clasp springs forth new-formed, within new barriers.

Above this crowd of his fellow-creatures, Stephen drove, and the same Spring wind which had made the elm-trees talk, whispered to him, and tried to tell him of the million flowers it had fertilised, the million leaves uncurled, the million ripples it had awakened on the sea, of the million flying shadows flung by it across the Downs, and how into men's hearts its scent had driven a million longings and sweet pains.

It was but moderately successful, for Stephen, like all men of culture and neat habits, took Nature only at those moments when he had gone out to take her, and of her wild heart he had a secret fear.

On his own doorstep he encountered Hilary coming out.

"I ran across Thyme and Martin in the Gardens," the latter said. "Thyme brought me back to lunch, and here I've been ever since."

"Did she bring our young Sanitist in too?" asked Stephen dubiously.

"No," said Hilary.

"Good! That young man gets on my nerves." Taking his elder brother by the arm, he added: "Will you come in again, old boy, or shall we go for a stroll?"

"A stroll," said Hilary.

Though different enough, perhaps because they were so different, these two brothers had the real affection for each other which depends on something deeper and more elementary than a similarity of sentiments, and is permanent because unconnected with the reasoning powers.

It depended on the countless times they had kissed and wrestled as tiny boys, slept in small beds alongside, refused to "tell" about each other, and even now and then taken up the burden of each other's peccadilloes. They might get irritated or tired of being in each other's company, but it would have been impossible for either to have been disloyal to the other in any circumstances, because of that traditional loyalty which went back to their cribs.

Preceded by Miranda, they walked along the flower walk towards the Park, talking of indifferent things, though in his heart each knew well enough what was in the other's.

Stephen broke through the hedge.

"Cis has been telling me," he said, "that this man Hughs is making trouble of some sort."

Hilary nodded.

Stephen glanced a little anxiously at his brother's face; it struck him as looking different, neither so gentle nor so impersonal as usual.

"He's a ruffian, isn't he?"

"I can't tell you," Hilary answered. "Probably not."

"He must be, old chap," murmured Stephen. Then, with a friendly pressure of his brother's arm, he added: "Look here, old boy, can I be of any use?"

"In what?" asked Hilary.

Stephen took a hasty mental view of his position; he had been in danger of letting Hilary see that he suspected him. Frowning slightly, and with some colour in his clean-shaven face, he said:

"Of course, there's nothing in it."

"In what?" said Hilary again.

"In what this ruffian says."

"No," said Hilary, "there's nothing in it, though what there may be if people give me credit for what there isn't, is another thing."

Stephen digested this remark, which hurt him. He saw that his suspicions had been fathomed, and this injured his opinion of his own diplomacy.

"You mustn't lose your head, old man," he said at last.

They were crossing the bridge over the Serpentine. On the bright waters, below, young clerks were sculling their inamoratas up and down; the ripples set free by their oars gleamed beneath the sun, and ducks swam lazily along the banks. Hilary leaned over.

"Look here, Stephen, I take an interest in this child—she's a helpless sort of little creature, and she seems to have put herself under my protection. I can't help that. But that's all. Do you understand?"

This speech produced a queer turmoil in Stephen, as though his brother had accused him of a petty view of things. Feeling that he must justify himself somehow, he began:

"Oh, of course I understand, old boy! But don't think, anyway, that I should care a damn—I mean as far as I'm concerned—even if you had gone as far as ever you liked, considering what you have to put up with. What I'm thinking of is the general situation."

By this clear statement of his point of view Stephen felt he had put things back on a broad basis, and recovered his position as a man of liberal thought. He too leaned over, looking at the ducks. There was

a silence. Then Hilary said:

"If Bianca won't get that child into some fresh place, I shall."

Stephen looked at his brother in surprise, amounting almost to dismay; he had spoken with such unwonted resolution.

"My dear old chap," he said, "I wouldn't go to B. Women are so funny."

Hilary smiled. Stephen took this for a sign of restored impersonality.

"I'll tell you exactly how the thing appeals to me. It'll be much better for you to chuck it altogether. Let Cis see to it!"

Hilary's eyes became bright with angry humour.

"Many thanks," he said, "but this is entirely our affair."

Stephen answered hastily:

"That's exactly what makes it difficult for you to look at it all round. That fellow Hughs could make himself quite nasty. I wouldn't give him any sort of chance. I mean to say—giving the girl clothes and that kind of thing—"

"I see," said Hilary.

"You know, old man," Stephen went on hastily, "I don't think you'll get Bianca to look at things in your light. If you were on—on terms, of course it would be different. I mean the girl, you know, is rather attractive in her way."

Hilary roused himself from contemplation of the ducks, and they moved on towards the Powder Magazine. Stephen carefully abstained from looking at his brother; the respect he had for Hilary—result, perhaps, of the latter's seniority, perhaps of the feeling that Hilary knew more of him than he of Hilary—was beginning to assert itself in a way he did not like. With every word, too, of this talk, the ground, instead of growing firmer, felt less and less secure. Hilary spoke:

"You mistrust my powers of action?"

"No, no," said Stephen. "I don't want you to act at all."

Hilary laughed. Hearing that rather bitter laugh, Stephen felt a little ache about his heart.

"Come, old boy," he said, "we can trust each other, anyway."

Hilary gave his brother's arm a squeeze.

Moved by that pressure, Stephen spoke:

"I hate you to be worried over such a rotten business."

The whizz of a motor-car rapidly approaching them became a sort of roar, and out of it a voice shouted: "How are you?" A hand was seen to rise in salute. It was Mr. Purcey driving his A.I. Damyer back to Wimbledon. Before him in the sunlight a little shadow fled; behind him the reek of petrol seemed to darken the road.

"There's a symbol for you," muttered Hilary.

"How do you mean?" said Stephen dryly. The word "symbol" was distasteful to him.

"The machine in the middle moving on its business; shadows like you and me skipping in front; oil and used-up stuff dropping behind. Society-body, beak, and bones."

Stephen took time to answer. "That's rather far-fetched," he said. "You mean these Hughs and people are the droppings?"

"Quite so," was Hilary's sardonic answer. "There's the body of that fellow and his car between our sort and them—and no getting over it, Stevie."

"Well, who wants to? If you're thinking of our old friend's Fraternity, I'm not taking any." And Stephen suddenly added: "Look here, I believe this affair is all 'a plant.'"

"You see that Powder Magazine?" said Hilary. "Well, this business that you call a 'plant' is more like

that. I don't want to alarm you, but I think you as well as our young friend Martin, are inclined to underrate the emotional capacity of human nature."

Disquietude broke up the customary mask on Stephen's face: "I don't understand," he stammered.

"Well, we're none of us machines, not even amateurs like me—not even under-dogs like Hughs. I fancy you may find a certain warmth, not to say violence, about this business. I tell you frankly that I don't live in married celibacy quite with impunity. I can't answer for anything, in fact. You had better stand clear, Stephen—that's all."

Stephen marked his thin hands quivering, and this alarmed him as nothing else had done.

They walked on beside the water. Stephen spoke quietly, looking at the ground. "How can I stand clear, old man, if you are going to get into a mess? That's impossible."

He saw at once that this shot, which indeed was from his heart, had gone right home to Hilary's. He sought within him how to deepen the impression.

"You mean a lot to us," he said. "Cis and Thyme would feel it awfully if you and B.—" He stopped.

Hilary was looking at him; that faintly smiling glance, searching him through and through, suddenly made Stephen feel inferior. He had been detected trying to extract capital from the effect of his little piece of brotherly love. He was irritated at his brother's insight.

"I have no right to give advice, I suppose," he said; "but in my opinion you should drop it—drop it dead. The girl is not worth your looking after. Turn her over to that Society—Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace's thing whatever it's called."

At a sound as of mirth Stephen, who was not accustomed to hear his brother laugh, looked round.

"Martin," said Hilary, "also wants the case to be treated on strictly hygienic grounds."

Nettled by this, Stephen answered:

"Don't confound me with our young Sanitist, please; I simply think there are probably a hundred things you don't know about the girl which ought to be cleared up."

"And then?"

"Then," said Stephen, "they could—er—deal with her accordingly."

Hilary shrank so palpably at this remark that he added rather hastily:

"You call that cold-blooded, I suppose; but I think, you know, old chap, that you're too sensitive."

Hilary stopped rather abruptly.

"If you don't mind, Stevie," he said, "we'll part here. I want to think it over." So saying, he turned back, and sat down on a seat that faced the sun.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PERFECT DOG

Hilary sat long in the sun, watching the pale bright waters and many well-bred ducks circling about the shrubs, searching with their round, bright eyes for worms. Between the bench where he was sitting and the spiked iron railings people passed continually—men, women, children of all kinds. Every now and then a duck would stop and cast her knowing glance at these creatures, as though comparing the condition of their forms and plumage with her own. 'If I had had the breeding of you,' she seemed to say, 'I could have made a better fist of it than that. A worse-looking lot of ducks, take you all round. I never wish to see!' And with a quick but heavy movement of her shoulders, she would turn away and join her fellows.

Hilary, however, got small distraction from the ducks. The situation gradually developing was something of a dilemma to a man better acquainted with ideas than facts, with the trimming of words

than with the shaping of events. He turned a queer, perplexed, almost quizzical eye on it. Stephen had irritated him profoundly. He had such a way of pettifying things! Yet, in truth, the affair would seem ridiculous enough to an ordinary observer. What would a man of sound common sense, like Mr. Purcey, think of it? Why not, as Stephen had suggested, drop it? Here, however, Hilary approached the marshy ground of feeling.

To give up befriending a helpless girl the moment he found himself personally menaced was exceedingly distasteful. But would she be friendless? Were there not, in Stephen's words, a hundred things he did not know about her? Had she not other resources? Had she not a story? But here, too, he was hampered by his delicacy: one did not pry into the private lives of others!

The matter, too, was hopelessly complicated by the domestic troubles of the Hughs family. No conscientious man—and whatever Hilary lacked, no one ever accused him of a lack of conscience—could put aside that aspect of the case.

Wandering among these reflections were his thoughts about Bianca. She was his wife. However he might feel towards her now, whatever their relations, he must not put her in a false position. Far from wishing to hurt her, he desired to preserve her, and everyone, from trouble and annoyance. He had told Stephen that his interest in the girl was purely protective. But since the night when, leaning out into the moonlight, he heard the waggons coming in to Covent Garden Market, a strange feeling had possessed him—the sensation of a man who lies, with a touch of fever on him, listening to the thrum of distant music—sensuous, not unpleasurable.

Those who saw him sitting there so quietly, with his face resting on his hand, imagined, no doubt, that he was wrestling with some deep, abstract proposition, some great thought to be given to mankind; for there was that about Hilary which forced everyone to connect him instantly with the humaner arts.

The sun began to leave the long pale waters.

A nursemaid and two children came and sat down beside him. Then it was that, underneath his seat, Miranda found what she had been looking for all her life. It had no smell, made no movement, was pale-grey in colour, like herself. It had no hair that she could find; its tail was like her own; it took no liberties, was silent, had no passions, committed her to nothing. Standing a few inches from its head, closer than she had ever been of her free will to any dog, she smelt its smelllessness with a long, delicious snuffling, wrinkling up the skin on her forehead, and through her upturned eyes her little moonlight soul looked forth. 'How unlike you are,' she seemed to say, 'to all the other dogs I know! I would love to live with you. Shall I ever find a dog like you again? "The latest-sterilised cloth—see white label underneath: 4s. 3d.!"' Suddenly she slithered out her slender grey-pink tongue and licked its nose. The creature moved a little way and stopped. Miranda saw that it had wheels. She lay down close to it, for she knew it was the perfect dog.

Hilary watched the little moonlight lady lying vigilant, affectionate, beside this perfect dog, who could not hurt her. She panted slightly, and her tongue showed between her lips. Presently behind his seat he saw another idyll. A thin white spaniel had come running up. She lay down in the grass quite close, and three other dogs who followed, sat and looked at her. A poor, dirty little thing she was, who seemed as if she had not seen a home for days. Her tongue lolled out, she panted piteously, and had no collar. Every now and then she turned her eyes, but though they were so tired and desperate, there was a gleam in them. 'For all its thirst and hunger and exhaustion, this is life!' they seemed to say. The three dogs, panting too, and watching till it should be her pleasure to begin to run again, seemed with their moist, loving eyes to echo: 'This is life!'

Because of this idyll, people near were moving on.

And suddenly the thin white spaniel rose, and, like a little harried ghost, slipped on amongst the trees, and the three dogs followed her.

CHAPTER XIX

BIANCA

In her studio that afternoon Blanca stood before her picture of the little model—the figure with

parted pale-red lips and haunting, pale-blue eyes, gazing out of shadow into lamplight.

She was frowning, as though resentful of a piece of work which had the power to kill her other pictures. What force had moved her to paint like that? What had she felt while the girl was standing before her, still as some pale flower placed in a cup of water? Not love—there was no love in the presentment of that twilight figure; not hate—there was no hate in the painting of her dim appeal. Yet in the picture of this shadow girl, between the gloom and glimmer, was visible a spirit, driving the artist on to create that which had the power to haunt the mind.

Blanca turned away and went up to a portrait of her husband, painted ten years before. She looked from one picture to the other, with eyes as hard and stabbing as the points of daggers.

In the more poignant relationships of human life there is a point beyond which men and women do not quite truthfully analyse their feelings—they feel too much. It was Blanca's fortune, too, to be endowed to excess with that quality which, of all others, most obscures the real significance of human issues. Her pride had kept her back from Hilary, till she had felt herself a failure. Her pride had so revolted at that failure that she had led the way to utter estrangement. Her pride had forced her to the attitude of one who says "Live your own life; I should be ashamed to let you see that I care what happens between us." Her pride had concealed from her the fact that beneath her veil of mocking liberality there was an essential woman tenacious of her dues, avid of affection and esteem. Her pride prevented the world from guessing that there was anything amiss. Her pride even prevented Hilary from really knowing what had spoiled his married life—this ungovernable itch to be appreciated, governed by ungovernable pride. Hundreds of times he had been baffled by the hedge round that disharmonic nature. With each failure something had shrivelled in him, till the very roots of his affection had dried up. She had worn out a man who, to judge from his actions and appearance, was naturally long-suffering to a fault. Beneath all manner of kindness and consideration for each other—for their good taste, at all events, had never given way—this tragedy of a woman, who wanted to be loved, slowly killing the power of loving her in the man, had gone on year after year. It had ceased to be tragedy, as far as Hilary was concerned; the nerve of his love for her was quite dead, slowly frozen out of him. It was still active tragedy with Bianca, the nerve of whose jealous desire for his appreciation was not dead. Her instinct, too, ironically informed her that, had he been a man with some brutality, a man who had set himself to ride and master her, instead of one too delicate, he might have trampled down the hedge. This gave her a secret grudge against him, a feeling that it was not she who was to blame.

Pride was Bianca's fate, her flavour, and her charm. Like a shadowy hill-side behind glamorous bars of waning sunlight, she was enveloped in smiling pride—mysterious; one thinks, even to herself. This pride of hers took part even in her many generous impulses, kind actions which she did rather secretly and scoffed at herself for doing. She scoffed at herself continually, even for putting on dresses of colours which Hilary was fond of. She would not admit her longing to attract him.

Standing between those two pictures, pressing her mahl-stick against her bosom, she suggested somewhat the image of an Italian saint forcing the dagger of martyrdom into her heart.

That other person, who had once brought the thought of Italy into Cecilia's mind—the man Hughs—had been for the last eight hours or so walking the streets, placing in a cart the refuses of Life; nor had he at all suggested the aspect of one tortured by the passions of love and hate: For the first two hours he had led the horse without expression of any sort on his dark face, his neat soldier's figure garbed in the costume which had made "Westminster" describe him as a "dreadful foreign-lookin' man." Now and then he had spoken to the horse; save for those speeches, of no great importance, he had been silent. For the next two hours, following the cart, he had used a shovel, and still his square, short face, with little black moustache and still blacker eyes, had given no sign of conflict in his breast. So he had passed the day. Apart from the fact, indeed, that men of any kind are not too given to expose private passions to public gaze, the circumstances of a life devoted from the age of twenty onwards to the service of his country, first as a soldier, now in the more defensive part of Vestry scavenger, had given him a kind of gravity. Life had cloaked him with passivity—the normal look of men whose bread and cheese depends on their not caring much for anything. Had Hughs allowed his inclinations play, or sought to express himself, he could hardly have been a private soldier; still less, on his retirement from that office with an honourable wound, would he have been selected out of many others as a Vestry scavenger. For such an occupation as the lifting from the streets of the refuses of Life—a calling greatly sought after, and, indeed, one of the few open to a man who had served his country—charm of manner, individuality, or the engaging quality of self-expression, were perhaps out of place.

He had never been trained in the voicing of his thoughts, and, ever since he had been wounded, felt at times a kind of desperate looseness in his head. It was not, therefore, remarkable that he should be liable to misconstruction, more especially by those who had nothing in common with him, except that

somewhat negligible factor, common humanity. The Dallisons had misconstrued him as much as, but no more than, he had misconstrued them when, as "Westminister" had informed Hilary, he "went on against the gentry." He was, in fact, a ragged screen, a broken vessel, that let light through its holes. A glass or two of beer, the fumes of which his wounded head no longer dominated, and he at once became "dreadful foreign." Unfortunately, it was his custom, on finishing his work, to call at the "Green Glory." On this particular afternoon the glass had become three, and in sallying forth he had felt a confused sense of duty urging him to visit the house where this girl for whom he had conceived his strange infatuation "carried on her games." The "no-tale-bearing" tradition of a soldier fought hard with this sense of duty; his feelings were mixed when he rang the bell and asked for Mrs. Dallison. Habit, however, masked his face, and he stood before her at "attention," his black eyes lowered, clutching his peaked cap.

Blanca noted curiously the scar on the left side of his cropped black head.

Whatever Hughs had to say was not said easily.

"I've come," he began at last in a dogged voice, "to let you know. I never wanted to come into this house. I never wanted to see no one."

Blanca could see his lips and eyelids quivering in a way strangely out of keeping with his general stolidity.

"My wife has told you tales of me, I suppose. She's told you I knock her about, I daresay. I don't care what she tells you or any o' the people that she works for. But this I'll say: I never touched her but she touched me first. Look here! that's marks of hers!" and, drawing up his sleeve he showed a scratch on his sinewy tattooed forearm. "I've not come here about her; that's no business of anyone's."

Bianca turned towards her pictures. "Well?" she said, "but what have you come about, please? You see I'm busy."

Hughs' face changed. Its stolidity vanished, the eyes became as quick, passionate, and leaping as a dark torrent. He was more violently alive than she had ever seen a man. Had it been a woman she would have felt—as Cecilia had felt with Mrs. Hughs—the indecency, the impudence of this exhibition; but from that male violence the feminine in her derived a certain satisfaction. So in Spring, when all seems lowering and grey, the hedges and trees suddenly flare out against the purple clouds, their twigs all in flame. The next moment that white glare is gone, the clouds are no longer purple, fiery light no longer quivers and leaps along the hedgerows. The passion in Hughs' face was gone as soon. Bianca felt a sense of disappointment, as though she could have wished her life held a little more of that. He stole a glance at her out of his dark eyes, which, when narrowed, had a velvety look, like the body of a wild bee, then jerked his thumb at the picture of the little model.

"It's about her I come to speak."

Blanca faced him frigidly.

"I have not the slightest wish to hear."

Hughs looked round, as though to find something that would help him to proceed; his eyes lighted on Hilary's portrait.

"Ah! I'd put the two together if I was you," he said.

Blanca walked past him to the door.

"Either you or I must leave the room."

The man's face was neither sullen now nor passionate, but simply miserable.

"Look here, lady," he said, "don't take it hard o' me coming here. I'm not out to do you a harm. I've got a wife of my own, and Gawd knows I've enough to put up with from her about this girl. I'll be going in the water one of these days. It's him giving her them clothes that set me coming here."

Blanca opened the door. "Please go," she said.

"I'll go quiet enough," he muttered, and, hanging his head, walked out.

Having seen him through the side door out into the street, Blanca went back to where she had been standing before he came. She found some difficulty in swallowing; for once there was no armour on her face. She stood there a long time without moving, then put the pictures back into their places and went down the little passage to the house. Listening outside her father's door, she turned the handle quietly

and went in.

Mr. Stone, holding some sheets of paper out before him, was dictating to the little model, who was writing laboriously with her face close above her arm. She stopped at Blanca's entrance. Mr. Stone did not stop, but, holding up his other hand, said:

"I will take you through the last three pages again. Follow!"

Blanca sat down at the window.

Her father's voice, so thin and slow, with each syllable disjointed from the other, rose like monotony itself.

"There were tra-cea-able indeed, in those days, certain rudi-men-tary at-tempts to f-u-s-e the classes...."

It went on unwavering, neither rising high nor falling low, as though the reader knew he had yet far to go, like a runner that brings great news across mountains, plains, and rivers.

To Blanca that thin voice might have been the customary sighing of the wind, her attention was so fast fixed on the girl, who sat following the words down the pages with her pen's point.

Mr. Stone paused.

"Have you got the word 'insane'?" he asked.

The little model raised her face. "Yes, Mr. Stone."

"Strike it out."

With his eyes fixed on the trees he stood breathing audibly. The little model moved her fingers, freeing them from cramp. Blanca's curious, smiling scrutiny never left her, as though trying to fix an indelible image on her mind. There was something terrifying in that stare, cruel to herself, cruel to the girl.

"The precise word," said Mr. Stone, "eludes me. Leave a blank. Follow!... 'Neither that sweet fraternal interest of man in man, nor a curiosity in phenomena merely as phenomena....'" His voice pursued its tenuous path through spaces, frozen by the calm eternal presence of his beloved idea, which, like a golden moon, far and cold, presided glamorously above the thin track of words. And still the girl's pen-point traced his utterance across the pages: Mr. Stone paused again, and looking at his daughter as though surprised to see her sitting there, asked:

"Do you wish to speak to me, my dear?"

Blanca shook her head.

"Follow!" said Mr. Stone.

But the little model's glance had stolen round to meet the scrutiny fixed on her.

A look passed across her face which seemed to say: 'What have I done to you, that you should stare at me like this?'

Furtive and fascinated, her eyes remained fixed on Bianca, while her hand moved, mechanically ticking the paragraphs. That silent duel of eyes went on—the woman's fixed, cruel, smiling; the girl's uncertain, resentful. Neither of them heard a word that Mr. Stone was reading. They treated it as, from the beginning, Life has treated Philosophy—and to the end will treat it.

Mr. Stone paused again, seeming to weigh his last sentences.

"That, I think," he murmured to himself, "is true." And suddenly he addressed his daughter. "Do you agree with me, my dear?"

He was evidently waiting with anxiety for her answer, and the little silver hairs that straggled on his lean throat beneath his beard were clearly visible.

"Yes, Father, I agree."

"Ah!" said Mr. Stone, "I am glad that you confirm me. I was anxious. Follow!"

Bianca rose. Burning spots of colour had settled in her cheeks. She went towards the door, and the little model pursued her figure with a long look, cringing, mutinous, and wistful.

CHAPTER XX

THE HUSBAND AND THE WIFE

It was past six o'clock when Hilary at length reached home, preceded a little by Miranda, who almost felt within her the desire to eat. The lilac bushes, not yet in flower, were giving forth spicy fragrance. The sun still netted their top boughs, as with golden silk, and a blackbird, seated on a low branch of the acacia-tree, was summoning the evening. Mr. Stone, accompanied by the little model, dressed in her new clothes, was coming down the path. They were evidently going for a walk, for Mr. Stone wore his hat, old and soft and black, with a strong green tinge, and carried a paper parcel, which leaked crumbs of bread at every step.

The girl grew very red. She held her head down, as though afraid of Hilary's inspection of her new clothes. At the gate she suddenly looked up. His face said: 'Yes, you look very nice!' And into her eyes a look leaped such as one may see in dogs' eyes lifted in adoration to their masters' faces. Manifestly disconcerted, Hilary turned to Mr. Stone. The old man was standing very still; a thought had evidently struck him. "I have not, I think," he said, "given enough consideration to the question whether force is absolutely, or only relatively, evil. If I saw a man ill-treat a cat, should I be justified in striking him?"

Accustomed to such divagations, Hilary answered: "I don't know whether you would be justified, but I believe that you would strike him."

"I am not sure," said Mr. Stone. "We are going to feed the birds."

The little model took the paper bag. "It's all dropping out," she said. From across the road she turned her head.... 'Won't you come, too?' she seemed to say.

But Hilary passed rather hastily into the garden and shut the gate behind him. He sat in his study, with Miranda near him, for fully an hour, without doing anything whatever, sunk in a strange, half-pleasurable torpor. At this hour he should have been working at his book; and the fact that his idleness did not trouble him might well have given him uneasiness. Many thoughts passed through his mind, imaginings of things he had thought left behind forever—sensations and longings which to the normal eye of middle age are but dried forms hung in the museum of memory. They started up at the whip of the still-living youth, the lost wildness at the heart of every man. Like the reviving flame of half-spent fires, longing for discovery leaped and flickered in Hilary—to find out once again what things were like before he went down the hill of age.

No trivial ghost was beckoning him; it was the ghost, with unseen face and rosy finger, which comes to men when youth has gone.

Miranda, hearing him so silent, rose. At this hour it was her master's habit to scratch paper. She, who seldom scratched anything, because it was not delicate, felt dimly that this was what he should be doing. She held up a slim foot and touched his knee. Receiving no discouragement, she delicately sprang into his lap, and, forgetting for once her modesty, placed her arms on his chest, and licked his face all over.

It was while receiving this embrace that Hilary saw Mr. Stone and the little model returning across the garden. The old man was walking very rapidly, holding out the fragment of a broken stick. He was extremely pink.

Hilary went to meet them.

"What's the matter, sir?" he said.

"I cut him over the legs," said Mr. Stone. "I do not regret it"; and he walked on to his room.

Hilary turned to the little model.

"It was a little dog. The man kicked it, and Mr. Stone hit him. He broke his stick. There were several men; they threatened us." She looked up at Hilary. "I-I was frightened. Oh! Mr. Dallison, isn't he

funny?"

"All heroes are funny," murmured Hilary.

"He wanted to hit them again, after his stick was broken. Then a policeman came, and they all ran away."

"That was quite as it should be," said Hilary. "And what did you do?"

Perceiving that she had not as yet made much effect, the little model cast down her eyes.

"I shouldn't have been frightened if you had been there!"

"Heavens!" muttered Hilary. "Mr. Stone is far more valiant than I."

"I don't think he is," she replied stubbornly, and again looked up at him.

"Well, good-night!" said Hilary hastily. "You must run off...."

That same evening, driving with his wife back from a long, dull dinner, Hilary began:

"I've something to say to you."

An ironic "Yes?" came from the other corner of the cab.

"There is some trouble with the little model."

"Really!"

"This man Hughs has become infatuated with her. He has even said, I believe, that he was coming to see you."

"What about?"

"Me."

"And what is he going to say about you?"

"I don't know; some vulgar gossip—nothing true."

There was a silence, and in the darkness Hilary moistened his dry lips.

Bianca spoke: "May I ask how you knew of this?"

"Cecilia told me."

A curious noise, like a little strangled laugh, fell on Hilary's ears.

"I am very sorry," he muttered.

Presently Bianca said:

"It was good of you to tell me, considering that we go our own ways. What made you?"

"I thought it right."

"And—of course, the man might have come to me!"

"That you need not have said."

"One does not always say what one ought."

"I have made the child a present of some clothes which she badly needed. So far as I know, that's all I've done!"

"Of course!"

This wonderful "of course" acted on Hilary like a tonic. He said dryly:

"What do you wish me to do?"

"I?" No gust of the east wind, making the young leaves curl and shiver, the gas jets flare and die down in their lamps, could so have nipped the flower of amity. Through Hilary's mind flashed Stephen's

almost imploring words: "Oh, I wouldn't go to her! Women are so funny!"

He looked round. A blue gauze scarf was wrapped over his wife's dark head. There, in her corner, as far away from him as she could get, she was smiling. For a moment Hilary had the sensation of being stifled by fold on fold of that blue gauze scarf, as if he were doomed to drive for ever, suffocated, by the side of this woman who had killed his love for her.

"You will do what you like, of course," she said suddenly.

A desire to laugh seized Hilary. "What do you wish me to do?" "You will do what you like, of course!" Could civilised restraint and tolerance go further?

"B." he said, with an effort, "the wife is jealous. We put the girl into that house—we ought to get her out."

Blanca's reply came slowly.

"From the first," she said, "the girl has been your property; do what you like with her. I shall not meddle."

"I am not in the habit of regarding people as my property."

"No need to tell me that—I have known you twenty years."

Doors sometimes slam in the minds of the mildest and most restrained of men.

"Oh, very well! I have told you; you can see Hughs when he comes—or not, as you like."

"I have seen him."

Hilary smiled.

"Well, was his story very terrible?"

"He told me no story."

"How was that?"

Blanca suddenly sat forward, and threw back the blue scarf, as though she, too, were stifling. In her flushed face her eyes were bright as stars; her lips quivered.

"Is it likely," she said, "that I should listen? That's enough, please, of these people."

Hilary bowed. The cab, bearing them fast home, turned into the last short cut. This narrow street was full of men and women circling round barrows and lighted booths. The sound of coarse talk and laughter floated out into air thick with the reek of paraffin and the scent of frying fish. In every couple of those men and women Hilary seemed to see the Hughs, that other married couple, going home to wedded happiness above the little model's head. The cab turned out of the gay alley.

"Enough, please, of these people!"

That same night, past one o'clock, he was roused from sleep by hearing bolts drawn back. He got up, hastened to the window, and looked out. At first he could distinguish nothing. The moonless night; like a dark bird, had nested in the garden; the sighing of the lilac bushes was the only sound. Then, dimly, just below him, on the steps of the front door, he saw a figure standing.

"Who is that?" he called.

The figure did not move.

"Who are you?" said Hilary again.

The figure raised its face, and by the gleam of his white beard Hilary knew that it was Mr. Stone.

"What is it, sir?" he said. "Can I do anything?"

"No," answered Mr. Stone. "I am listening to the wind. It has visited everyone to-night." And lifting his hand, he pointed out into the darkness.

CHAPTER XXI

A DAY OF REST

Cecilia's house in the Old Square was steeped from roof to basement in the peculiar atmosphere brought by Sunday to houses whose inmates have no need of religion or of rest.

Neither she nor Stephen had been to church since Thyme was christened; they did not expect to go again till she was married, and they felt that even to go on these occasions was against their principles; but for the sake of other people's feelings they had made the sacrifice, and they meant to make it once more, when the time came. Each Sunday, therefore, everything tried to happen exactly as it happened on every other day, with indifferent success. This was because, for all Cecilia's resolutions, a joint of beef and Yorkshire pudding would appear on the luncheon-table, notwithstanding the fact that Mr. Stone—who came when he remembered that it was Sunday—did not devour the higher mammals. Every week, when it appeared, Cecilia, who for some reason carved on Sundays, regarded it with a frown. Next week she would really discontinue it; but when next week came, there it was, with its complexion that reminded her so uncomfortably of cabmen. And she would partake of it with unexpected heartiness. Something very old and deep, some horrible whole-hearted appetite, derived, no doubt, from Mr. Justice Carfax, rose at that hour precisely every week to master her. Having given Thyme the second helping which she invariably took, Cecilia, who detested carving, would look over the fearful joint at a piece of glass procured by her in Venice, and at the daffodils standing upright in it, apparently without support. Had it not been for this joint of beef, which had made itself smelt all the morning, and would make itself felt all the afternoon, it need never have come into her mind at all that it was Sunday—and she would cut herself another slice.

To have told Cecilia that there was still a strain of the Puritan in her would have been to occasion her some uneasiness, and provoked a strenuous denial; yet her way of observing Sunday furnished indubitable evidence of this singular fact. She did more that day than any other. For, in the morning she invariably "cleared off" her correspondence; at lunch she carved the beef; after lunch she cleared off the novel or book on social questions she was reading; went to a concert, clearing off a call on the way back; and on first Sundays—a great bore—stayed at home to clear off the friends who came to visit her. In the evening she went to some play or other, produced by Societies for the benefit of persons compelled, like her, to keep a Sunday with which they felt no sympathy.

On this particular "first Sunday," having made the circuit of her drawing-room, which extended the whole breadth of her house, and through long, low windows cut into leaded panes, looked out both back and front, she took up Mr. Balladyce's latest book. She sat, with her paper-knife pressed against the tiny hollow in her flushed cheek, and pretty little bits of lace and real old jewellery nestling close to her. And while she turned the pages of Mr. Balladyce's book Thyme sat opposite in a bright blue frock, and turned the pages of Darwin's work on earthworms.

Regarding her "little daughter," who was so much more solid than herself, Cecilia's face wore a very sweet, faintly surprised expression.

'My kitten is a bonny thing,' it seemed to say. 'It is queer that I should have a thing so large.'

Outside in the Square Gardens a shower, the sunlight, and blossoms, were entangled. It was the time of year when all the world had kittens; young things were everywhere—soft, sweet, uncouth. Cecilia felt this in her heart. It brought depth into her bright, quick eyes. What a secret satisfaction it was that she had once so far committed herself as to have borne a child! What a queer vague feeling she sometimes experienced in the Spring—almost amounting to a desire to bear another! So one may mark the warm eye of a staid mare, following with her gaze the first strayings of her foal. 'I must get used to it,' she seems to say. 'I certainly do miss the little creature, though I used to threaten her with my hoofs, to show I couldn't be bullied by anything of that age. And there she goes! Ah, well!'

Remembering suddenly, however, that she was sitting there to clear off Mr. Balladyce, because it was so necessary to keep up with what he wrote, Cecilia dropped her gaze to the page before her; and instantly, by uncomfortable chance, not the choice pastures of Mr. Balladyce appeared, where women might browse at leisure, but a vision of the little model. She had not thought of her for quite an hour; she had tired herself out with thinking-not, indeed, of her, but of all that hinged on her, ever since Stephen had spoken of his talk with Hilary. Things Hilary had said seemed to Cecilia's delicate and rather timid soul so ominous, so unlike himself. Was there really going to be complete disruption between him and Bianca—worse, an ugly scandal? She, who knew her sister better, perhaps, than anyone, remembered from schoolroom days Bianca's moody violence when anything had occurred to wound her—remembered, too, the long fits of brooding that followed. This affair, which she had tried to

persuade herself was exaggerated, loomed up larger than ever. It was not an isolated squib; it was a lighted match held to a train of gunpowder. This girl of the people, coming from who knew where, destined for who knew what—this young, not very beautiful, not even clever child, with nothing but a sort of queer haunting naivete' to give her charm—might even be a finger used by Fate! Cecilia sat very still before that sudden vision of the girl. There was no staid mare to guard that foal with the dark devotion of her eye. There was no wise whinnying to answer back those tiny whinnies; no long look round to watch the little creature nodding to sleep on its thin trembling legs in the hot sunlight; no ears to prick up and hoofs to stamp at the approach of other living things. These thoughts passed through Cecilia's mind and were gone, being too far and pale to stay. Turning the page which she had not been reading, she heaved a sigh. Thyme sighed also.

"These worms are fearfully interesting," she said. "Is anybody coming in this afternoon?"

"Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace was going to bring a young man in, a Signor Pozzi-Egregio Pozzi, or some such name. She says he is the coming pianist." Cecilia's face was spiced with faint amusement. Some strain of her breeding (the Carfax strain, no doubt) still heard such names and greeted such proclivities with an inclination to derision.

Thyme snatched up her book. "Well," she said, "I shall be in the attic. If anyone interesting comes you might send up to me."

She stood, luxuriously stretching, and turning slowly round in a streak of sunlight so as to bathe her body in it. Then, with a long soft yawn, she flung up her chin till the sun streamed on her face. Her eyelashes rested on cheeks already faintly browned; her lips were parted; little shivers of delight ran down her; her chestnut hair glowed, burnished by the kisses of the sun.

'Ah!' Cecilia thought, 'if that other girl were like this, now, I could understand well enough!'

"Oh, Lord!" said Thyme, "there they are!" She flew towards the door.

"My dear," murmured Cecilia, "if you must go, do please tell Father."

A minute later Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace came in, followed by a young man with an interesting, pale face and a crop of dusky hair.

Let us consider for a minute the not infrequent case of a youth cursed with an Italian mother and a father of the name of Potts, who had baptised him William. Had he emanated from the lower classes, he might with impunity have ground an organ under the name of Bill; but springing from the bourgeoisie, and playing Chopin at the age of four, his friends had been confronted with a problem of no mean difficulty. Heaven, on the threshold of his career, had intervened to solve it. Hovering, as it were, with one leg raised before the gladiatorial arena of musical London, where all were waiting to turn their thumbs down on the figure of the native Potts, he had received a letter from his mother's birthplace. It was inscribed: "Egregio Signor Pozzi." He was saved. By the simple inversion of the first two words, the substitution of z's for t's, without so fortunately making any difference in the sound, and the retention of that i, all London knew him now to be the rising pianist.

He was a quiet, well-mannered youth, invaluable just then to Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace, a woman never happy unless slightly leading a genius in strings.

Cecilia, while engaging them to right and left in her half-sympathetic, faintly mocking way—as if doubting whether they really wanted to see her or she them—heard a word of fear.

"Mr. Purcey."

'Oh Heaven!' she thought.

Mr. Purcey, whose A.i. Damyer could be heard outside, advanced in his direct and simple way.

"I thought I'd give my car a run," he said. "How's your sister?" And seeing Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace, he added: "How do you do? We met the other day."

"We did," said Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace, whose little eyes were sparkling. "We talked about the poor, do you remember?"

Mr. Purcey, a sensitive man if you could get through his skin, gave her a shrewd look. 'I don't quite cotton to this woman,' he seemed saying; 'there's a laugh about her I don't like.'

"Ah! yes—you were tellin' me about them."

"Oh, Mr. Purcey, but you had heard of them, you remember!"

Mr. Purcey made a movement of his face which caused it to seem all jaw. It was a sort of unconscious declaration of a somewhat formidable character. So one may see bulldogs, those amiable animals, suddenly disclose their tenacity.

"It's rather a blue subject," he said bluntly.

Something in Cecilia fluttered at those words. It was like the saying of a healthy man looking at a box of pills which he did not mean to open. Why could not she and Stephen keep that lid on, too? And at this moment, to her deep astonishment, Stephen entered. She had sent for him, it is true, but had never expected he would come.

His entrance, indeed, requires explanation.

Feeling, as he said, a little "off colour," Stephen had not gone to Richmond to play golf. He had spent the day instead in the company of his pipe and those ancient coins, of which he had the best collection of any man he had ever met. His thoughts had wandered from them, more than he thought proper, to Hilary and that girl. He had felt from the beginning that he was so much more the man to deal with an affair like this than poor old Hilary. When, therefore, Thyme put her head into his study and said, "Father, Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace!" he had first thought, 'That busybody!' and then, 'I wonder—perhaps I'd better go and see if I can get anything out of her.'

In considering Stephen's attitude towards a woman so firmly embedded in the various social movements of the day, it must be remembered that he represented that large class of men who, unhappily too cultivated to put aside, like Mr. Purcey, all blue subjects, or deny the need for movements to make them less blue, still could not move, for fear of being out of order. He was also temperamentally distrustful of anything too feminine; and Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace was undoubtedly extremely feminine. Her merit, in his eyes, consisted of her attachment to Societies. So long as mankind worked through Societies, Stephen, who knew the power of rules and minute books, did not despair of too little progress being made. He sat down beside her, and turned the conversation on her chief work—"the Maids in Peril."

Searching his face with those eyes so like little black bees sipping honey from all the flowers that grew, Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace said:

"Why don't you get your wife to take an interest in our work?"

To Stephen this question was naturally both unexpected and annoying, one's wife being the last person he wished to interest in other people's movements. He kept his head.

"Ah well!" he said, "we haven't all got a talent for that sort of thing."

The voice of Mr. Purcey travelled suddenly across the room.

"Do tell me! How do you go to work to worm things out of them?"

Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace, prone to laughter, bubbled.

"Oh, that is such a delicious expression, Mr. Purcey! I almost think we ought to use it in our Report. Thank you!"

Mr. Purcey bowed. "Not at all!" he said.

Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace turned again to Stephen.

"We have our trained inquirers. That is the advantage of Societies such as ours; so that we don't personally have the unpleasantness. Some cases do baffle everybody. It's such very delicate work."

"You sometimes find you let in a rotter?" said Mr. Purcey, "or, I should say, a rotter lets you in! Ha, ha!"

Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace's eyes flew deliciously down his figure.

"Not often," she said; and turning rather markedly once more to Stephen:

"Have you any special case that you are interested in, Mr. Dallison?"

Stephen consulted Cecilia with one of those masculine half-glances so discreet that Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace intercepted it without looking up. She found it rather harder to catch Cecilia's reply, but she caught it before Stephen did. It was, 'You'd better wait, perhaps,' conveyed by a tiny raising of the left eyebrow and a slight movement to the right of the lower lip. Putting two and two together, she felt

within her bones that they were thinking of the little model. And she remembered the interesting moment in the omnibus when that attractive-looking man had got out so hastily.

There was no danger whatever from Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace feeling anything. The circle in which she moved did not now talk scandal, or, indeed, allude to matters of that sort without deep sympathy; and in the second place she was really far too good a fellow, with far too dear a love of life, to interfere with anybody else's love of it. At the same time it was interesting.

"That little model, now," she said, "what about her?"

"Is that the girl I saw?" broke in Mr. Purcey, with his accustomed shrewdness.

Stephen gave him the look with which he was accustomed to curdle the blood of persons who gave evidence before Commissions.

'This fellow is impossible,' he thought.

The little black bees flying below Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace's dark hair, done in the Early Italian fashion, tranquilly sucked honey from Stephen's face.

"She seemed to me," she answered, "such a very likely type."

"Ah!" murmured Stephen, "there would be, I suppose, a danger—" And he looked angrily at Cecilia.

Without ceasing to converse with Mr. Purcey and Signor Egregio Pozzi, she moved her left eye upwards. Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace understood this to mean: 'Be frank, and guarded!' Stephen, however, interpreted it otherwise. To him it signified: 'What the deuce do you look at me for?' And he felt justly hurt. He therefore said abruptly:

"What would you do in a case like that?"

Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace, sliding her face sideways, with a really charming little smile, asked softly:

"In a case like what?"

And her little eyes fled to Thyme, who had slipped into the room, and was whispering to her mother.

Cecilia rose.

"You know my daughter," she said. "Will you excuse me just a minute? I'm so very sorry." She glided towards the door, and threw a flying look back. It was one of those social moments precious to those who are escaping them.

Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace was smiling, Stephen frowning at his boots; Mr. Purcey stared admiringly at Thyme, and Thyme, sitting very upright, was calmly regarding the unfortunate Egregio Pozzi, who apparently could not bring himself to speak.

When Cecilia found herself outside, she stood still a moment to compose her nerves. Thyme had told her that Hilary was in the dining-room, and wanted specially to see her.

As in most women of her class and bringing-up, Cecilia's qualities of reticence and subtlety, the delicate treading of her spirit, were seen to advantage in a situation such as this. Unlike Stephen, who had shown at once that he had something on his mind, she received Hilary with that exact shade of friendly, intimate, yet cool affection long established by her as the proper manner towards her husband's brother. It was not quite sisterly, but it was very nearly so. It seemed to say: 'We understand each other as far as it is right and fitting that we should; we even sympathise with the difficulties we have each of us experienced in marrying the other's sister or brother, as the case may be. We know the worst. And we like to see each other, too, because there are bars between us, which make it almost piquant.'

Giving him her soft little hand, she began at once to talk of things farthest from her heart. She saw that she was deceiving Hilary, and this feather in the cap of her subtlety gave her pleasure. But her nerves fluttered at once when he said: "I want to speak to you, Cis. You know that Stephen and I had a talk yesterday, I suppose?"

Cecilia nodded.

"I have spoken to B.!"

"Oh!" Cecilia murmured. She longed to ask what Bianca had said, but did not dare, for Hilary had his

armour on, the retired, ironical look he always wore when any subject was broached for which he was too sensitive.

She waited.

"The whole thing is distasteful to me," he said; "but I must do something for this child. I can't leave her completely in the lurch."

Cecilia had an inspiration.

"Hilary," she said softly, "Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace is in the drawing-room. She was just speaking of the girl to Stephen. Won't you come in, and arrange with her quietly?"

Hilary looked at his sister-in-law for a moment without speaking, then said:

"I draw the line there. No, thank you. I'll see this through myself."

Cecilia fluttered out:

"Oh, but, Hilary, what do you mean?"

"I am going to put an end to it."

It needed all Cecilia's subtlety to hide her consternation. End to what? Did he mean that he and B. were going to separate?

"I won't have all this vulgar gossip about the poor girl. I shall go and find another room for her."

Cecilia sighed with relief.

"Would you—would you like me to come too, Hilary?"

"It's very good of you," said Hilary dryly. "My actions appear to rouse suspicions."

Cecilia blushed.

"Oh, that's absurd! Still, no one could think anything if I come with you. Hilary, have you thought that if she continues coming to Father—"

"I shall tell her that she mustn't!"

Cecilia's heart gave two thumps, the first with pleasure, the second with sympathy.

"It will be horrid for you," she said. "You hate doing anything of that sort."

Hilary nodded.

"But I'm afraid it's the only way," went on Cecilia, rather hastily. "And, of course, it will be no good saying anything to Father; one must simply let him suppose that she has got tired of it."

Again Hilary nodded.

"He will think it very funny," murmured Cecilia pensively. "Oh, and have you thought that taking her away from where she is will only make those people talk the more?"

Hilary shrugged his shoulders.

"It may make that man furious," Cecilia added.

"It will."

"Oh, but then, of course, if you don't see her afterwards, they will have no—no excuse at all."

"I shall not see her afterwards," said Hilary, "if I can avoid it."

Cecilia looked at him.

"It's very sweet of you, Hilary."

"What is sweet?" asked Hilary stonily.

"Why, to take all this trouble. Is it really necessary for you to do anything?" But looking in his face, she went on hastily: "Yes, yes, it's best. Let's go at once. Oh, those people in the drawing-room! Do wait

ten minutes."

A little later, running up to put her hat on, she wondered why it was that Hilary always made her want to comfort him. Stephen never affected her like this.

Having little or no notion where to go, they walked in the direction of Bayswater. To place the Park between Hound Street and the little model was the first essential. On arriving at the other side of the Broad Walk, they made instinctively away from every sight of green. In a long, grey street of dismally respectable appearance they found what they were looking for, a bed-sitting room furnished, advertised on a card in the window. The door was opened by the landlady, a tall woman of narrow build, with a West-Country accent, and a rather hungry sweetness running through her hardness. They stood talking with her in a passage, whose oilcloth of variegated pattern emitted a faint odour. The staircase could be seen climbing steeply up past walls covered with a shining paper cut by narrow red lines into small yellow squares. An almanack, of so floral a design that nobody would surely want to steal it, hung on the wall; below it was an umbrella stand without umbrellas. The dim little passage led past two grimly closed doors painted rusty red to two half-open doors with dull glass in their panels. Outside, in the street from which they had mounted by stone steps, a shower of sleet had begun to fall. Hilary shut the door, but the cold spirit of that shower had already slipped into the bleak, narrow house.

"This is the apartment, m'm," said the landlady, opening the first of the rusty-coloured doors. The room, which had a paper of blue roses on a yellow ground, was separated from another room by double doors.

"I let the rooms together sometimes, but just now that room's taken—a young gentleman in the City; that's why I'm able to let this cheap."

Cecilia looked at Hilary. "I hardly think—"

The landlady quickly turned the handles of the doors, showing that they would not open.

"I keep the key," she said. "There's a bolt on both sides."

Reassured, Cecilia walked round the room as far as this was possible, for it was practically all furniture. There was the same little wrinkle across her nose as across Thyme's nose when she spoke of Hound Street. Suddenly she caught sight of Hilary. He was standing with his back against the door. On his face was a strange and bitter look, such as a man might have on seeing the face of Ugliness herself, feeling that she was not only without him, but within—a universal spirit; the look of a man who had thought that he was chivalrous, and found that he was not; of a leader about to give an order that he would not himself have executed.

Seeing that look, Cecilia said with some haste:

"It's all very nice and clean; it will do very well, I think. Seven shillings a week, I believe you said. We will take it for a fortnight, at all events."

The first glimmer of a smile appeared on the landlady's grim face, with its hungry eyes, sweetened by patience.

"When would she be coming in?" she asked.

"When do you think, Hilary?"

"I don't know," muttered Hilary. "The sooner the better—if it must be. To-morrow, or the day after."

And with one look at the bed, covered by a piece of cheap red-and-yellow tasselled tapestry, he went out into the street. The shower was over, but the house faced north, and no sun was shining on it.

CHAPTER XXII

HILARY PUTS AN END TO IT

Like flies caught among the impalpable and smoky threads of cobwebs, so men struggle in the webs of their own natures, giving here a start, there a pitiful small jerking, long sustained, and failing into

stillness. Enmeshed they were born, enmeshed they die, fighting according to their strength to the end; to fight in the hope of freedom, their joy; to die, not knowing they are beaten, their reward. Nothing, too, is more to be remarked than the manner in which Life devises for each man the particular dilemmas most suited to his nature; that which to the man of gross, decided, or fanatic turn of mind appears a simple sum, to the man of delicate and speculative temper seems to have no answer.

So it was with Hilary in that special web wherein his spirit struggled, sunrise unto sunset, and by moonlight afterward. Inclination, and the circumstances of a life which had never forced him to grips with either men or women, had detached him from the necessity for giving or taking orders. He had almost lost the faculty. Life had been a picture with blurred outlines melting into a softly shaded whole. Not for years had anything seemed to him quite a case for "Yes" or "No." It had been his creed, his delight, his business, too, to try and put himself in everybody's place, so that now there were but few places where he did not, speculatively speaking, feel at home.

Putting himself into the little model's place gave him but small delight. Making due allowance for the sentiment men naturally import into their appreciation of the lives of women, his conception of her place was doubtless not so very wrong.

Here was a child, barely twenty years of age, country bred, neither a lady nor quite a working-girl, without a home or relatives, according to her own account—at all events, without those who were disposed to help her—without apparently any sort of friend; helpless by nature, and whose profession required a more than common wariness—this girl he was proposing to set quite adrift again by cutting through the single slender rope which tethered her. It was like digging up a little rose-tree planted with one's own hands in some poor shelter, just when it had taken root, and setting it where the full winds would beat against it. To do so brusque and, as it seemed to Hilary, so inhumane a thing was foreign to his nature. There was also the little matter of that touch of fever—the distant music he had been hearing since the waggons came in to Covent Garden.

With a feeling that was almost misery, therefore, he waited for her on Monday afternoon, walking to and fro in his study, where all the walls were white, and all the woodwork coloured like the leaf of a cigar; where the books were that colour too, in Hilary's special deerskin binding; where there were no flowers nor any sunlight coming through the windows, but plenty of sheets of paper—a room which youth seemed to have left for ever, the room of middle age!

He called her in with the intention of at once saying what he had to say, and getting it over in the fewest words. But he had not reckoned fully either with his own nature or with woman's instinct. Nor had he allowed—being, for all his learning, perhaps because of it, singularly unable to gauge the effects of simple actions—for the proprietary relations he had established in the girl's mind by giving her those clothes.

As a dog whose master has it in his mind to go away from him, stands gazing up with tragic inquiry in his eyes, scenting to his soul that coming cruelty—as a dog thus soon to be bereaved, so stood the little model.

By the pose of every limb, and a fixed gaze bright as if tears were behind it, and by a sort of trembling, she seemed to say: 'I know why you have sent for me.'

When Hilary saw her stand like that he felt as a man might when told to flog his fellow-creature. To gain time he asked her what she did with herself all day. The little model evidently tried to tell herself that her foreboding had been needless.

Now that the mornings were nice—she said with some animation—she got up much earlier, and did her needlework first thing; she then "did out" the room. There were mouse-holes in her room, and she had bought a trap. She had caught a mouse last night. She hadn't liked to kill it; she had put it in a tin box, and let it go when she went out. Quick to see that Hilary was interested in this, as well he might be, she told him that she could not bear to see cats hungry or lost dogs, especially lost dogs, and she described to him one that she had seen. She had not liked to tell a policeman; they stared so hard. Those words were of strange omen, and Hilary turned his head away. The little model, perceiving that she had made an effect of some sort, tried to deepen it. She had heard they did all sorts of things to people—but, seeing at once from Hilary's face that she was not improving her effect, she broke off suddenly, and hastily began to tell him of her breakfast, of how comfortable she was now she had got her clothes; how she liked her room; how old Mr. Creed was very funny, never taking any notice of her when he met her in the morning. Then followed a minute account of where she had been trying to get work; of an engagement promised; Mr. Lennard, too, still wanted her to pose to him. At this she gashed a look at Hilary, then cast down her eyes. She could get plenty of work if she began that way. But she hadn't, because he had told her not, and, of course, she didn't want to; she liked coming to Mr. Stone so much. And she got on very well, and she liked London, and she liked the shops. She mentioned neither

Hughs nor Mrs. Hughs. In all this rigmarole, told with such obvious purpose, stolidity was strangely mingled with almost cunning quickness to see the effect made; but the dog-like devotion was never quite out of her eyes when they were fixed on Hilary.

This look got through the weakest places in what little armour Nature had bestowed on him. It touched one of the least conceited and most amiable of men profoundly. He felt it an honour that anything so young as this should regard him in that way. He had always tried to keep out of his mind that which might have given him the key to her special feeling for himself—those words of the painter of still life: "She's got a story of some sort." But it flashed across him suddenly like an inspiration: If her story were the simplest of all stories—the direct, rather brutal, love affair of a village boy and girl—would not she, naturally given to surrender, be forced this time to the very antithesis of that young animal amour which had brought on her such, sharp consequences?

But, wherever her devotion came from, it seemed to Hilary the grossest violation of the feelings of a gentleman to treat it ungratefully. Yet it was as if for the purpose of saying, "You are a nuisance to me, or worse!" that he had asked her to his study. Her presence had hitherto chiefly roused in him the half-amused, half-tender feelings of one who strokes a foal or calf, watching its soft uncouthness; now, about to say good-bye to her, there was the question of whether that was the only feeling.

Miranda, stealing out between her master and his visitor, growled.

The little model, who was stroking a china ash-tray with her ungloved, inky fingers, muttered, with a smile, half pathetic, half cynical: "She doesn't like me! She knows I don't belong here. She hates me to come. She's jealous!"

Hilary said abruptly:

"Tell me! Have you made any friends since you've been in London?"

The girl flashed a look at him that said:

'Could I make you jealous?'

Then, as though guilty of a far too daring thought, drooped her head, and answered:

"No."

"Not one?"

The little model repeated almost passionately: "No. I don't want any friends; I only want to be let alone."

Hilary began speaking rapidly.

"But these Hughs have not left you alone. I told you, I thought you ought to move; I've taken another room for you quite away from them. Leave your furniture with a week's rent, and take your trunk quietly away to-morrow in a cab without saying a word to anyone. This is the new address, and here's the money for your expenses. They're dangerous for you, those people."

The little model muttered desperately: "But I don't care what they do!"

Hilary went on: "Listen! You mustn't come here again, or the man will trace you. We will take care you have what's necessary till you can get other work."

The little model looked up at him without a word. Now that the thin link which bound her to some sort of household gods had snapped, all the patience and submission bred in her by village life, by the hard facts of her story, and by these last months in London, served her well enough. She made no fuss. Hilary saw a tear roll down her cheek.

He turned his head away, and said: "Don't cry, my child!"

Quite obediently the little model swallowed the tear. A thought seemed to strike her:

"But I could see you, Mr. Dallison, couldn't I, sometimes?"

Seeing from his face that this was not in the programme, she stood silent again, looking up at him.

It was a little difficult for Hilary to say: "I can't see you because my wife is jealous!" It was cruel to tell her: "I don't want to see you!" besides, it was not true.

"You'll soon be making friends," he said at last, "and you can always write to me"; and with a queer

smile he added: "You're only just beginning life; you mustn't take these things to heart; you'll find plenty of people better able to advise and help you than ever I shall be!"

The little model answered this by seizing his hand with both of hers. She dropped it again at once, as if guilty of presumption, and stood with her head bent. Hilary, looking down on the little hat which, by his special wish, contained no feathers, felt a lump rise in his throat.

"It's funny," he said; "I don't know your Christian name."

"Ivy," muttered the little model.

"Ivy! Well, I'll write to you. But you must promise me to do exactly as I said."

The girl looked up; her face was almost ugly—like a child's in whom a storm of feeling is repressed.

"Promise!" repeated Hilary.

With a bitter droop of her lower lip, she nodded, and suddenly put her hand to her heart. That action, of which she was clearly unconscious, so naively, so almost automatically was it done, nearly put an end to Hilary's determination.

"Now you must go," he said.

The little model choked, grew very red, and then quite white.

"Aren't I even to say good-bye to Mr. Stone?"

Hilary shook his head.

"He'll miss me," she said desperately. "He will. I know he will!"

"So shall I," said Hilary. "We can't help that."

The little model drew herself up to her full height; her breast heaved beneath the clothes which had made her Hilary's. She was very like "The Shadow" at that moment, as though whatever Hilary might do there she would be—a little ghost, the spirit of the helpless submerged world, for ever haunting with its dumb appeal the minds of men.

"Give me your hand," said Hilary.

The little model put out her not too white, small hand. It was soft, clinging; and as hot as fire.

"Good-bye, my dear, and bless you!"

The little model gave him a look with who-knows-what of reproach in it, and, faithful to her training, went submissively away.

Hilary did not look after her, but, standing by the lofty mantelpiece above the ashes of the fire, rested his forehead on his arm. Not even a fly's buzzing broke the stillness. There was sound for all that—not of distant music, but of blood beating in his ears and temples.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE "BOOK OF UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD"

It is fitting that a few words should be said about the writer of the "Book of Universal Brotherhood."

Sylvanus Stone, having graduated very highly at the London University, had been appointed at an early age lecturer to more than one Public Institution. He had soon received the professorial robes due to a man of his profound learning in the natural sciences, and from that time till he was seventy his life had flowed on in one continual round of lectures, addresses, disquisitions, and arguments on the subjects in which he was a specialist. At the age of seventy, long after his wife's death and the marriages of his three children, he had for some time been living by himself, when a very serious illness

—the result of liberties taken with an iron constitution by a single mind—prostrated him.

During the long convalescence following this illness the power of contemplation, which the Professor had up to then given to natural science, began to fix itself on life at large. But the mind which had made of natural science an idea, a passion, was not content with vague reflections on life. Slowly, subtly, with irresistible centrifugal force—with a force which perhaps it would not have acquired but for that illness—the idea, the passion of Universal Brotherhood had sucked into itself all his errant wonderings on the riddle of existence. The single mind of this old man, divorced by illness from his previous existence, pensioned and permanently shelved, began to worship a new star, that with every week and month and year grew brighter, till all other stars had lost their glimmer and died out.

At the age of seventy-four he had begun his book. Under the spell of his subject and of advancing age, his extreme inattention to passing matters became rapidly accentuated. His figure had become almost too publicly conspicuous before Bianca, finding him one day seated on the roof of his lonely little top-story flat, the better to contemplate his darling Universe, had inveigled him home with her, and installed him in a room in her own house. After the first day or two he had not noticed any change to speak of.

His habits in his new home were soon formed, and once formed, they varied not at all; for he admitted into his life nothing which took him from the writing of his book.

On the afternoon following Hilary's dismissal of the little model, being disappointed of his amanuensis, Mr. Stone had waited for an hour, reading his pages over and over to himself. He had then done his exercises. At the usual time for tea he had sat down, and, with his cup and brown bread-and-butter alternately at his lips, had looked long and fixedly at the place where the girl was wont to sit. Having finished, he left the room and went about the house. He found no one but Miranda, who, seated in the passage leading to the studio, was trying to keep one eye on the absence of her master and the other on the absence of her mistress. She joined Mr. Stone, maintaining a respect-compelling interval behind him when he went before, and before him when he went behind. When they had finished hunting, Mr. Stone went down to the garden gate. Here Bianca found him presently motionless, without a hat, in the full sun, craning his white head in the direction from which he knew the little model habitually came. The mistress of the house was herself returning from her annual visit to the Royal Academy, where she still went, as dogs, from some perverted sense, will go and sniff round other dogs to whom they have long taken a dislike. A loose-hanging veil depended from her mushroom-shaped and coloured hat. Her eyes were brightened by her visit. Mr. Stone soon seemed to take in who she was, and stood regarding her a minute without speaking. His attitude towards his daughters was rather like that of an old drake towards two swans whom he has inadvertently begotten—there was inquiry in it, disapproval, admiration, and faint surprise.

"Why has she not come?" he said.

Bianca winced behind her veil. "Have you asked Hilary?"

"I cannot find him," answered Mr. Stone. Something about his patient stooping figure and white head, on which the sunlight was falling, made Bianca slip her hand through his arm.

"Come in, Dad. I'll do your copying."

Mr. Stone looked at her intently, and shook his head.

"It would be against my principles; I cannot take an unpaid service. But if you would come, my dear, I should like to read to you. It is stimulating."

At that request Bianca's eyes grew dim. Pressing Mr. Stone's shaggy arm against her breast, she moved with him towards the house.

"I think I may have written something that will interest you," Mr. Stone said, as they went along.

"I am sure you have," Bianca murmured.

"It is universal," said Mr. Stone; "it concerns birth. Sit at the table. I will begin, as usual, where I left off yesterday."

Bianca took the little model's seat, resting her chin on her hand, as motionless as any of the statues she had just been viewing. It almost seemed as if Mr. Stone were feeling nervous. He twice arranged his papers; cleared his throat; then, lifting a sheet suddenly, took three steps, turned his back on her, and began to read.

"In that slow, incessant change of form to form, called Life, men, made spasmodic by perpetual

action, had seized on a certain moment, no more intrinsically notable than any other moment, and had called it Birth. This habit of honouring one single instant of the universal process to the disadvantage of all the other instants had done more, perhaps, than anything to obfuscate the crystal clearness of the fundamental flux. As well might such as watch the process of the green, unfolding earth, emerging from the brumous arms of winter, isolate a single day and call it Spring. In the tides of rhythm by which the change of form to form was governed"—Mr. Stone's voice, which had till then been but a thin, husky murmur, gradually grew louder and louder, as though he were addressing a great concourse—"the golden universal haze in which men should have flown like bright wing-beats round the sun gave place to the parasitic halo which every man derived from the glorifying of his own nativity. To this primary mistake could be traced his intensely personal philosophy. Slowly but surely there had dried up in his heart the wish to be his brother."

He stopped reading suddenly.

"I see him coming in," he said.

The next minute the door opened, and Hilary entered.

"She has not come," said Mr. Stone; and Bianca murmured:

"We miss her!"

"Her eyes," said Mr. Stone, "have a peculiar look; they help me to see into the future. I have noticed the same look in the eyes of female dogs."

With a little laugh, Bianca murmured again:

"That is good!"

"There is one virtue in dogs," said Hilary, "which human beings lack—they are incapable of mockery."

But Bianca's lips, parted, indrawn, seemed saying: 'You ask too much! I no longer attract you. Am I to sympathise in the attraction this common little girl has for you?'

Mr. Stone's gaze was fixed intently on the wall.

"The dog," he said, "has lost much of its primordial character."

And, moving to his desk, he took up his quill pen.

Hilary and Bianca made no sound, nor did they look at one another; and in this silence, so much more full of meaning than any talk, the scratching of the quill went on. Mr. Stone put it down at last, and, seeing two persons in the room, read:

"Looking back at those days when the doctrine of evolution had reached its pinnacle, one sees how the human mind, by its habit of continual crystallisations, had destroyed all the meaning of the process. Witness, for example, that sterile phenomenon, the pagoda of 'caste'! Like this Chinese building, so was Society then formed. Men were living there in layers, as divided from each other, class from class—" He took up the quill, and again began to write.

"You understand, I suppose," said Hilary in a low voice, "that she has been told not to come?"

Bianca moved her shoulders.

With a most unwonted look of anger, he added:

"Is it within the scope of your generosity to credit me with the desire to meet your wishes?"

Bianca's answer was a laugh so strangely hard, so cruelly bitter, that Hilary involuntarily turned, as though to retrieve the sound before it reached the old man's ears.

Mr. Stone had laid down his pen. "I shall write no more to-day," he said; "I have lost my feeling—I am not myself." He spoke in a voice unlike his own.

Very tired and worn his old figure looked; as some lean horse, whose sun has set, stands with drooped head, the hollows in his neck showing under his straggling mane. And suddenly, evidently quite oblivious that he had any audience, he spoke:

"O Great Universe, I am an old man of a faint spirit, with no singleness of purpose. Help me to write on—help me to write a book such as the world has never seen!"

A dead silence followed that strange prayer; then Bianca, with tears rolling down her face, got up and rushed out of the room.

Mr. Stone came to himself. His mute, white face had suddenly grown scared and pink. He looked at Hilary.

"I fear that I forgot myself. Have I said anything peculiar?"

Not feeling certain of his voice, Hilary shook his head, and he, too, moved towards the door.

CHAPTER XXIV

SHADOWLAND

"Each of us has a shadow in those places—in those streets."

That saying of Mr. Stone's, which—like so many of his sayings—had travelled forth to beat the air, might have seemed, even "in those days," not altogether without meaning to anyone who looked into the room of Mr. Joshua Creed in Hound Street.

This aged butler lay in bed waiting for the inevitable striking of a small alarum clock placed in the very centre of his mantelpiece. Flanking that round and ruthless arbiter, which drove him day by day to stand up on feet whose time had come to rest, were the effigies of his past triumphs. On the one hand, in a papier-mache frame, slightly tinged with smuts, stood a portrait of the "Honorable Bateson," in the uniform of his Yeomanry. Creed's former master's face wore that dare-devil look with which he had been wont to say: "D—n it, Creed! lend me a pound. I've got no money!" On the other hand, in a green frame which had once been plush, and covered by a glass with a crack in the left-hand corner, was a portrait of the Dowager Countess of Glengower, as this former mistress of his appeared, conceived by the local photographer, laying the foundation-stone of the local almshouse. During the wreck of Creed's career, which, following on a lengthy illness, had preceded his salvation by the Westminister Gazette, these two household gods had lain at the bottom of an old tin trunk, in the possession of the keeper of a lodging-house, waiting to be bailed out. The "Honorable Bateson" was now dead, nor had he paid as yet the pounds he had borrowed. Lady Glengower, too, was in heaven, remembering that she had forgotten all her servants in her will. He who had served them was still alive, and his first thought, when he had secured his post on the "Westminister," was to save enough to rescue them from a dishonourable confinement. It had taken him six months. He had found them keeping company with three pairs of woollen drawers; an old but respectable black tail-coat; a plaid cravat; a Bible; four socks, two of which had toes and two of which had heels; some darning-cotton and a needle; a pair of elastic-sided boots; a comb and a sprig of white heather, wrapped up with a little piece of shaving-soap and two pipe-cleaners in a bit of the Globe newspaper; also two collars, whose lofty points, separated by gaps of quite two inches, had been wont to reach their master's gills; the small alarum clock aforesaid; and a tiepin formed in the likeness of Queen Victoria at the date of her first Jubilee. How many times had he not gone in thought over those stores of treasure while he was parted from them! How many times since they had come back to him had he not pondered with a slow but deathless anger on the absence of a certain shirt, which he could have sworn had been amongst them.

But now he lay in bed waiting to hear the clock go off, with his old bristly chin beneath the bedclothes, and his old discoloured nose above. He was thinking the thoughts which usually came into his mind about this hour—that Mrs. Hughs ought not to scrape the butter off his bread for breakfast in the way she did; that she ought to take that sixpence off his rent; that the man who brought his late editions in the cart ought to be earlier, letting 'that man' get his Pell Mell's off before him, when he himself would be having the one chance of his day; that, sooner than pay the ninepence which the bootmaker had proposed to charge for resoling him, he would wait until the summer came 'low class o' feller' as he was, he'd be glad enough to sole him then for sixpence.

And the high-souled critic, finding these reflections sordid, would have thought otherwise, perhaps, had he been standing on those feet (now twitching all by themselves beneath the bedclothes) up to eleven o'clock the night before, because there were still twelve numbers of the late edition that nobody would buy. No one knew more surely than Joshua Creed himself that, if he suffered himself to entertain any large and lofty views of life, he would infallibly find himself in that building to keep out of which he was in the habit of addressing to God his only prayer to speak of. Fortunately, from a boy up, together with a lengthy, oblong, square-jawed face, he had been given by Nature a single-minded view of life. In

fact, the mysterious, stout tenacity of a soul born in the neighbourhood of Newmarket could not have been done justice to had he constitutionally seen—any more than Mr. Stone himself—two things at a time. The one thing he had seen, for the five years that he had now stood outside Messrs. Rose and Thorn's, was the workhouse; and, as he was not going there so long as he was living, he attended carefully to all little matters of expense in this somewhat sordid way.

While attending thus, he heard a scream. Having by temperament considerable caution, but little fear, he waited till he heard another, and then got out of bed. Taking the poker in his hand, and putting on his spectacles, he hurried to the door. Many a time and oft in old days had he risen in this fashion to defend the plate of the "Honorable Bateson" and the Dowager Countess of Glengower from the periodical attacks of his imagination. He stood with his ancient nightgown flapping round his still more ancient legs, slightly shivering; then, pulling the door open, he looked forth. On the stairs just above him Mrs. Hughs, clasping her baby with one arm, was holding the other out at full length between herself and Hughs. He heard the latter say: "You've drove me to it; I'll do a swing for you!" Mrs. Hughs' thin body brushed past into his room; blood was dripping from her wrist. Creed saw that Hughs had his bayonet in his hand. With all his might he called out: "Ye ought to be ashamed of yourself!" raising the poker to a position of defence. At this moment—more really dangerous than any he had ever known—it was remarkable that he instinctively opposed to it his most ordinary turns of speech. It was as though the extravagance of this un-English violence had roused in him the full measure of a native moderation. The sight of the naked steel deeply disgusted him; he uttered a long sentence. What did Hughs call this—disgracin' of the house at this time in the mornin'? Where was he brought up? Call 'imself a soldier, attackin' of old men and women in this way? He ought to be ashamed!

While these words were issuing between the yellow stumps of teeth in that withered mouth, Hughs stood silent, the back of his arm covering his eyes. Voices and a heavy tread were heard. Distinguishing in that tread the advancing footsteps of the Law, Creed said: "You attack me if you dare!"

Hughs dropped his arm. His short, dark face had a desperate look, as of a caged rat; his eyes were everywhere at once.

"All right, daddy," he said; "I won't hurt you. She's drove my head all wrong again. Catch hold o' this; I can't trust myself." He held out the bayonet.

"Westminister" took it gingerly in his shaking hand.

"To use a thing like that!" he said. "An' call yourself an Englishman! I'll ketch me death standin' here, I will."

Hughs made no answer leaning against the wall. The old butler regarded him severely. He did not take a wide or philosophic view of him, as a tortured human being, driven by the whips of passion in his dark blood; a creature whose moral nature was the warped, stunted tree his life had made it; a poor devil half destroyed by drink and by his wound. The old butler took a more single-minded and old-fashioned line. 'Ketch 'old of 'im!' he thought. 'With these low fellers there's nothin' else to be done. Ketch 'old of 'im until he squeals.'

Nodding his ancient head, he said:

"Here's an orficer. I shan't speak for yer; you deserves all you'll get, and more."

Later, dressed in an old Newmarket coat, given him by some client, and walking towards the police-station alongside Mrs. Hughs, he was particularly silent, presenting a front of some austerity, as became a man mixed up in a low class of incident like this. And the seamstress, very thin and scared, with her wounded wrist slung in a muffler of her husband's, and carrying the baby on her other arm, because the morning's incident had upset the little thing, slipped along beside him, glancing now and then into his face.

Only once did he speak, and to himself:

"I don't know what they'll say to me down at the orffice, when I go again-missin' my day like this! Oh dear, what a misfortune! What put it into him to go on like that?"

At this, which was far from being intended as encouragement, the waters of speech broke up and flowed from Mrs. Hughs. She had only told Hughs how that young girl had gone, and left a week's rent, with a bit of writing to say she wasn't coming back; it wasn't her fault that she was gone—that ought never to have come there at all, a creature that knew no better than to come between husband and wife. She couldn't tell no more than he could where that young girl had gone!

The tears, stealing forth, chased each other down the seamstress's thin cheeks. Her face had now but

little likeness to the face with which she had stood confronting Hughs when she informed him of the little model's flight. None of the triumph which had leaped out of her bruised heart, none of the strident malice with which her voice, whether she would or no, strove to avenge her wounded sense of property; none of that unconscious abnegation, so very near to heroism, with which she had rushed and caught up her baby from beneath the bayonet, when, goaded by her malice and triumph, Hughs had rushed to seize that weapon. None of all that, but, instead, a pitiable terror of the ordeal before her—a pitiful, mute, quivering distress, that this man, against whom, two hours before, she had felt such a store of bitter rancour, whose almost murderous assault she had so narrowly escaped, should now be in this plight.

The sight of her emotion penetrated through his spectacles to something lying deep in the old butler.

"Don't you take on," he said; "I'll stand by yer. He shan't treat yer with impuniness."

To his uncomplicated nature the affair was still one of tit for tat. Mrs. Hughs became mute again. Her torn heart yearned to cancel the penalty that would fall on all of them, to deliver Hughs from the common enemy—the Law; but a queer feeling of pride and bewilderment, and a knowledge, that, to demand an eye for an eye was expected of all self-respecting persons, kept her silent.

Thus, then, they reached the great consoler, the grey resolver of all human tangles, haven of men and angels, the police court. It was situated in a back street. Like trails of ooze, when the tide, neither ebb nor flow, is leaving and making for some estuary, trails of human beings were moving to and from it. The faces of these shuffling "shadows" wore a look as though masked with some hard but threadbare stuff—the look of those whom Life has squeezed into a last resort. Within the porches lay a stagnant marsh of suppliants, through whose centre trickled to and fro that stream of ooze. An old policeman, too, like some grey lighthouse, marked the entrance to the port of refuge. Close to that lighthouse the old butler edged his way. The love of regularity, and of an established order of affairs, born in him and fostered by a life passed in the service of the "Honorable Bateson" and the other gentry, made him cling instinctively to the only person in this crowd whom he could tell for certain to be on the side of law and order. Something in his oblong face and lank, scanty hair parted precisely in the middle, something in that high collar supporting his lean gills, not subservient exactly, but as it were suggesting that he was in league against all this low-class of fellow, made the policeman say to him:

"What's your business, daddy?"

"Oh!" the old butler answered. "This poor woman. I'm a witness to her battery."

The policeman cast his not unkindly look over the figure of the seamstress. "You stand here," he said; "I'll pass you in directly."

And soon by his offices the two were passed into the port of refuge.

They sat down side by side on the edge of a long, hard, wooden bench; Creed fixing his eyes, whose colour had run into a brownish rim round their centres, on the magistrate, as in old days sun-worshippers would sit blinking devoutly at the sun; and Mrs. Hughs fixing her eyes on her lap, while tears of agony trickled down her face. On her unwounded arm the baby slept. In front of them, and unregarded, filed one by one those shadows who had drunk the day before too deeply of the waters of forgetfulness. To-day, instead, they were to drink the water of remembrance, poured out for them with no uncertain hand. And somewhere very far away, it may have been that Justice sat with her ironic smile watching men judge their shadows. She had watched them so long about that business. With her elementary idea that hares and tortoises should not be made to start from the same mark she had a little given up expecting to be asked to come and lend a hand; they had gone so far beyond her. Perhaps she knew, too, that men no longer punished, but now only reformed, their erring brothers, and this made her heart as light as the hearts of those who had been in the prisons where they were no longer punished.

The old butler, however, was not thinking of her; he had thoughts of a simpler order in his mind. He was reflecting that he had once valeted the nephew of the late Lord Justice Hawthorn, and in the midst of this low-class business the reminiscence brought him refreshment. Over and over to himself he conned these words: "I interpylated in between them, and I says, 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself; call yourself an Englishman, I says, attackin' of old men and women with cold steel, I says!'" And suddenly he saw that Hughs was in the dock.

The dark man stood with his hands pressed to his sides, as though at attention on parade. A pale profile, broken by a line of black moustache, was all "Westminister" could see of that impassive face, whose eyes, fixed on the magistrate, alone betrayed the fires within. The violent trembling of the seamstress roused in Joshua Creed a certain irritation, and seeing the baby open his black eyes, he

nudged her, whispering: "Ye've woke the baby!"

Responding to words, which alone perhaps could have moved her at such a moment, Mrs. Hughs rocked this dumb spectator of the drama. Again the old butler nudged her.

"They want yer in the box," he said.

Mrs. Hughs rose, and took her place.

He who wished to read the hearts of this husband and wife who stood at right angles, to have their wounds healed by Law, would have needed to have watched the hundred thousand hours of their wedded life, known and heard the million thoughts and words which had passed in the dim spaces of their world, to have been cognisant of the million reasons why they neither of them felt that they could have done other than they had done. Reading their hearts by the light of knowledge such as this, he would not have been surprised that, brought into this place of remedy, they seemed to enter into a sudden league. A look passed between them. It was not friendly, it had no appeal; but it sufficed. There seemed to be expressed in it the knowledge bred by immemorial experience and immemorial time: This law before which we stand was not made by us! As dogs, when they hear the crack of a far whip, will shrink, and in their whole bearing show wary quietude, so Hughs and Mrs. Hughs, confronted by the questionings of Law, made only such answers as could be dragged from them. In a voice hardly above a whisper Mrs. Hughs told her tale. They had fallen out. What about? She did not know. Had he attacked her? He had had it in his hand. What then? She had slipped, and hurt her wrist against the point. At this statement Hughs turned his eyes on her, and seemed to say: "You drove me to it; I've got to suffer, for all your trying to get me out of what I've done. I gave you one, and I don't want your help. But I'm glad you stick to me against this Law!" Then, lowering his eyes, he stood motionless during her breathless little outburst. He was her husband; she had borne him five; he had been wounded in the war. She had never wanted him brought here.

No mention of the little model....

The old butler dwelt on this reticence of Mrs. Hughs, when, two hours afterwards, in pursuance of his instinctive reliance on the gentry, he called on Hilary.

The latter, surrounded by books and papers—for, since his dismissal of the girl, he had worked with great activity—was partaking of lunch, served to him in his study on a tray.

"There's an old gentleman to see you, sir; he says you know him; his name is Creed."

"Show him in," said Hilary.

Appearing suddenly from behind the servant in the doorway, the old butler came in at a stealthy amble; he looked round, and, seeing a chair, placed his hat beneath it, then advanced, with nose and spectacles upturned, to Hilary. Catching sight of the tray, he stopped, checked in an evident desire to communicate his soul.

"Oh dear," he said, "I'm intrudin' on your luncheon. I can wait; I'll go and sit in the passage."

Hilary, however, shook his hand, faded now to skin and bone, and motioned him to a chair.

He sat down on the edge of it, and again said:

"I'm intrudin' on yer."

"Not at all. Is there anything I can do?"

Creed took off his spectacles, wiped them to help himself to see more clearly what he had to say, and put them on again.

"It's a-concerning of these domestic matters," he said. "I come up to tell yer, knowing as you're interested in this family."

"Well," said Hilary. "What has happened?"

"It's along of the young girl's having left them, as you may know."

"Ah!"

"It's brought things to a crisax," explained Creed.

"Indeed, how's that?"

The old butler related the facts of the assault. "I took 'is bayonet away from him," he ended; "he didn't frighten me."

"Is he out of his mind?" asked Hilary.

"I've no conscience of it," replied Creed. "His wife, she's gone the wrong way to work with him, in my opinion, but that's particular to women. She's a-goaded of him respecting a certain party. I don't say but what that young girl's no better than what she ought to be; look at her profession, and her a country girl, too! She must be what she oughtn't to. But he ain't the sort o' man you can treat like that. You can't get thorns from figs; you can't expect it from the lower orders. They only give him a month, considerin' of him bein' wounded in the war. It'd been more if they'd a-known he was a-hankerin' after that young girl—a married man like him; don't ye think so, sir?"

Hilary's face had assumed its retired expression. 'I cannot go into that with you,' it seemed to say.

Quick to see the change, Creed rose. "But I'm intrudin' on your dinner," he said—"your luncheon, I should say. The woman goes on irritatin' of him, but he must expect of that, she bein' his wife. But what a misfortune! He'll be back again in no time, and what'll happen then? It won't improve him, shut up in one of them low prisons!" Then, raising his old face to Hilary: "Oh dear! It's like awalkin' on a black night, when ye can't see your 'and before yer."

Hilary was unable to find a suitable answer to this simile.

The impression made on him by the old butler's recital was queerly twofold; his more fastidious side felt distinct relief that he had severed connection with an episode capable of developments so sordid and conspicuous. But all the side of him—and Hilary was a complicated product—which felt compassion for the helpless, his suppressed chivalry, in fact, had also received its fillip. The old butler's references to the girl showed clearly how the hands of all men and women were against her. She was that pariah, a young girl without property or friends, spiritually soft, physically alluring.

To recompense "Westminister" for the loss of his day's work, to make a dubious statement that nights were never so black as they appeared to be, was all that he could venture to do. Creed hesitated in the doorway.

"Oh dear," he said, "there's a-one thing that the woman was a-saying that I've forgot to tell you. It's a-concernin' of what this 'ere man was boastin' in his rage. 'Let them,' he says, 'as is responsive for the movin' of her look out,' he says; 'I ain't done with them!' That's conspiracy, I should think!"

Smiling away this diagnosis of Hughs' words, Hilary shook the old man's withered hand, and closed the door. Sitting down again at his writing-table, he buried himself almost angrily in his work. But the queer, half-pleasurable, fevered feeling, which had been his, since the night he walked down Piccadilly, and met the image of the little model, was unfavourable to the austere process of his thoughts.

CHAPTER XXV

MR. STONE IN WAITING

That same afternoon, while Mr. Stone was writing, he heard a voice saying:

"Dad, stop writing just a minute, and talk to me."

Recognition came into his eyes. It was his younger daughter.

"My dear," he said, "are you unwell?"

Keeping his hand, fragile and veined and chill, under her own warm grasp, Bianca answered: "Lonely."

Mr. Stone looked straight before him.

"Loneliness," he said, "is man's chief fault"; and seeing his pen lying on the desk, he tried to lift his hand. Bianca held it down. At that hot clasp something seemed to stir in Mr. Stone. His cheeks grew pink.

"Kiss me, Dad."

Mr. Stone hesitated. Then his lips resolutely touched her eye. "It is wet," he said. He seemed for a moment struggling to grasp the meaning of moisture in connection with the human eye. Soon his face again became serene. "The heart," he said, "is a dark well; its depth unknown. I have lived eighty years. I am still drawing water."

"Draw a little for me, Dad."

This time Mr. Stone looked at his daughter anxiously, and suddenly spoke, as if afraid that if he waited he might forget.

"You are unhappy!"

Bianca put her face down to his tweed sleeve. "How nice your coat smells!" she murmured.

"You are unhappy," repeated Mr. Stone.

Bianca dropped his hand, and moved away.

Mr. Stone followed her. "Why?" he said. Then, grasping his brow, he added: "If it would do you any good, my dear, to hear a page or two, I could read to you."

Bianca shook her head.

"No; talk to me!"

Mr. Stone answered simply: "I have forgotten."

"You talk to that little girl," murmured Bianca.

Mr. Stone seemed to lose himself in reverie.

"If that is true," he said, following out his thoughts, "it must be due to the sex instinct not yet quite extinct. It is stated that the blackcock will dance before his females to a great age, though I have never seen it."

"If you dance before her," said Bianca, with her face averted, "can't you even talk to me?"

"I do not dance, my dear," said Mr. Stone; "I will do my best to talk to you."

There was a silence, and he began to pace the room. Bianca, by the empty fireplace, watched a shower of rain driving past the open window.

"This is the time of year," said Mr. Stone suddenly; "when lambs leap off the ground with all four legs at a time." He paused as though for an answer; then, out of the silence, his voice rose again—it sounded different: "There is nothing in Nature more symptomatic of that principle which should underlie all life. Live in the future; regret nothing; leap! A lamb which has left earth with all four legs at once is the symbol of true life. That she must come down again is but an inevitable accident. 'In those days men were living on their pasts. They leaped with one, or, at the most, two legs at a time; they never left the ground, or in leaving, they wished to know the reason why. It was this paralysis'"—Mr. Stone did not pause, but, finding himself close beside his desk, took up his pen—"it was this paralysis of the leaping nerve which undermined their progress. Instead of millions of leaping lambs, ignorant of why they leaped, they were a flock of sheep lifting up one leg and asking whether it was or was not worth their while to lift another."

The words were followed by a silence, broken only by the scratching of the quill with which Mr. Stone was writing.

Having finished, he again began to pace the room, and coming suddenly on his daughter, stopped short. Touching her shoulder timidly, he said: "I was talking to you, I think, my dear; where were we?"

Bianca rubbed her cheek against his hand.

"In the air, I think."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Stone, "I remember. You must not let me wander from the point again."

"No, dear."

"Lambs," said Mr. Stone, "remind me at times of that young girl who comes to copy for me. I make

her skip to promote her circulation before tea. I myself do this exercise." Leaning against the wall, with his feet twelve inches from it, he rose slowly on his toes. "Do you know that exercise? It is excellent for the calves of the legs, and for the lumbar regions." So saying, Mr. Stone left the wall, and began again to pace the room; the whitewash had also left the wall, and clung in a large square patch on his shaggy coat. "I have seen sheep in Spring," he said, "actually imitate their lambs in rising from the ground with all four legs at once." He stood still. A thought had evidently struck him.

"If Life is not all Spring, it is of no value whatsoever; better to die, and to begin again. Life is a tree putting on a new green gown; it is a young moon rising—no, that is not so, we do not see the young moon rising—it is a young moon setting, never younger than when we are about to die—"

Bianca cried out sharply: "Don't, Father! Don't talk like that; it's so untrue! Life is all autumn, it seems to me!"

Mr. Stone's eyes grew very blue.

"That is a foul heresy," he stammered; "I cannot listen to it. Life is the cuckoo's song; it is a hill-side bursting into leaf; it is the wind; I feel it in me every day!"

He was trembling like a leaf in the wind he spoke of, and Bianca moved hastily towards him, holding out her arms. Suddenly his lips began to move; she heard him mutter: "I have lost force; I will boil some milk. I must be ready when she comes." And at those words her heart felt like a lump of ice.

Always that girl! And without again attracting his attention she went away. As she passed out through the garden she saw him at the window holding a cup of milk, from which the steam was rising.

CHAPTER XXVI

THIRD PILGRIMAGE TO HOUND STREET

Like water, human character will find its level; and Nature, with her way of fitting men to their environment, had made young Martin Stone what Stephen called a "Sanitist." There had been nothing else for her to do with him.

This young man had come into the social scheme at a moment when the conception of existence as a present life corrected by a life to come, was tottering; and the conception of the world as an upper-class preserve somewhat seriously disturbed.

Losing his father and mother at an early age, and brought up till he was fourteen by Mr. Stone, he had formed the habit of thinking for himself. This had rendered him unpopular, and added force to the essential single-heartedness transmitted to him through his grandfather. A particular aversion to the sights and scenes of suffering, which had caused him as a child to object to killing flies, and to watching rabbits caught in traps, had been regulated by his training as a doctor. His fleshly horror of pain and ugliness was now disciplined, his spiritual dislike of them forced into a philosophy. The peculiar chaos surrounding all young men who live in large towns and think at all, had made him gradually reject all abstract speculation; but a certain fire of aspiration coming, we may suppose, through Mr. Stone, had nevertheless impelled him to embrace something with all his might. He had therefore embraced health. And living, as he did, in the Euston Road, to be in touch with things, he had every need of the health which he embraced.

Late in the afternoon of the day when Hughes had committed his assault, having three hours of respite from his hospital, Martin dipped his face and head into cold water, rubbed them with a corrugated towel, put on a hard bowler hat, took a thick stick in his hand, and went by Underground to Kensington.

With his usual cool, high-handed air he entered his aunt's house, and asked for Thyme. Faithful to his definite, if somewhat crude theory, that Stephen and Cecilia and all their sort were amateurs, he never inquired for them, though not unfrequently he would, while waiting, stroll into Cecilia's drawing-room, and let his sarcastic glance sweep over the pretty things she had collected, or, lounging in some luxurious chair, cross his long legs, and fix his eyes on the ceiling.

Thyme soon came down. She wore a blouse of some blue stuff bought by Cecilia for the relief of people in the Balkan States, a skirt of purplish tweed woven by Irish gentlewomen in distress, and held in her hand an open envelope addressed in Cecilia's writing to Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace.

"Hallo!" she said.

Martin answered by a look that took her in from head to foot.

"Get on a hat! I haven't got much time. That blue thing's new."

"It's pure flax. Mother bought it."

"It's rather decent. Hurry up!"

Thyme raised her chin; that lazy movement showed her round, creamy neck in all its beauty.

"I feel rather slack," she said; "besides, I must get back to dinner, Martin."

"Dinner!"

Thyme turned quickly to the door. "Oh, well, I'll come," and ran upstairs.

When they had purchased a postal order for ten shillings, placed it in the envelope addressed to Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace, and passed the hundred doors of Messrs. Rose and Thorn, Martin said: "I'm going to see what that precious amateur has done about the baby. If he hasn't moved the girl, I expect to find things in a pretty mess."

Thyme's face changed at once.

"Just remember," she said, "that I don't want to go there. I don't see the good, when there's such a tremendous lot waiting to be done."

"Every other case, except the one in hand!"

"It's not my case. You're so disgustingly unfair, Martin. I don't like those people."

"Oh, you amateur!"

Thyme flushed crimson. "Look here!" she said, speaking with dignity, "I don't care what you call me, but I won't have you call Uncle Hilary an amateur."

"What is he, then?"

"I like him."

"That's conclusive."

"Yes, it is."

Martin did not reply, looking sideways at Thyme with his queer, protective smile. They were passing through a street superior to Hound Street in its pretensions to be called a slum.

"Look here!" he said suddenly; "a man like Hilary's interest in all this sort of thing is simply sentimental. It's on his nerves. He takes philanthropy just as he'd take sulphonal for sleeplessness."

Thyme looked shrewdly up at him.

"Well," she said, "it's just as much on your nerves. You see it from the point of view of health; he sees it from the point of view of sentiment, that's all."

"Oh! you think so?"

"You just treat all these people as if they were in hospital."

The young man's nostrils quivered. "Well, and how should they be treated?"

"How would you like to be looked at as a 'case'?" muttered Thyme.

Martin moved his hand in a slow half-circle.

"These houses and these people," he said, "are in the way—in the way of you and me, and everyone."

Thyme's eyes followed that slow, sweeping movement of her cousin's hand. It seemed to fascinate her.

"Yes, of course; I know," she murmured. "Something must be done!"

And she reared her head up, looking from side to side, as if to show him that she, too, could sweep away things. Very straight, and solid, fair, and fresh, she looked just then.

Thus, in the hypnotic silence of high thoughts, the two young "Sanitists" arrived in Hound Street.

In the doorway of No. 1 the son of the lame woman, Mrs. Budgen—the thin, white youth as tall as Martin, but not so broad-stood, smoking a dubious-looking cigarette. He turned his lack-lustre, jeering gaze on the visitors.

"Who d'you want?" he said. "If it's the girl, she's gone away, and left no address."

"I want Mrs. Hughs," said Martin.

The young man coughed. "Right-o! You'll find her; but for him, apply Wormwood Scrubs."

"Prison! What for?"

"Stickin' her through the wrist with his bayonet;" and the young man let a long, luxurious fume of smoke trickle through his nose.

"How horrible!" said Thyme.

Martin regarded the young man, unmoved. "That stuff you're smoking's rank," he said. "Have some of mine; I'll show you how to make them. It'll save you one and three per pound of baccy, and won't rot your lungs."

Taking out his pouch, he rolled a cigarette. The white young man bent his dull wink on Thyme, who, wrinkling her nose, was pretending to be far away.

Mounting the narrow stairs that smelt of walls and washing and red herrings, Thyme spoke: "Now, you see, it wasn't so simple as you thought. I don't want to go up; I don't want to see her. I shall wait for you here." She took her stand in the open doorway of the little model's empty room. Martin ascended to the second floor.

There, in the front room, Mrs. Hughs was seen standing with the baby in her arms beside the bed. She had a frightened and uncertain air. After examining her wrist, and pronouncing it a scratch, Martin looked long at the baby. The little creature's toes were stiffened against its mother's waist, its eyes closed, its tiny fingers crisped against her breast. While Mrs. Hughs poured forth her tale, Martin stood with his eyes still fixed on the baby. It could not be gathered from his face what he was thinking, but now and then he moved his jaw, as though he were suffering from toothache. In truth, by the look of Mrs. Hughs and her baby, his recipe did not seem to have achieved conspicuous success. He turned away at last from the trembling, nerveless figure of the seamstress, and went to the window. Two pale hyacinth plants stood on the inner edge; their perfume penetrated through the other savours of the room—and very strange they looked, those twin, starved children of the light and air.

"These are new," he said.

"Yes, sir," murmured Mrs. Hughs. "I brought them upstairs. I didn't like to see the poor things left to die."

From the bitter accent of these words Martin understood that they had been the little model's.

"Put them outside," he said; "they'll never live in here. They want watering, too. Where are your saucers?"

Mrs. Hughs laid the baby down, and, going to the cupboard where all the household gods were kept, brought out two old, dirty saucers. Martin raised the plants, and as he held them, from one close, yellow petal there rose up a tiny caterpillar. It reared a green, transparent body, feeling its way to a new resting-place. The little writhing shape seemed, like the wonder and the mystery of life, to mock the young doctor, who watched it with eyebrows raised, having no hand at liberty to remove it from the plant.

"She came from the country. There's plenty of men there for her!"

Martin put the plants down, and turned round to the seamstress.

"Look here!" he said, "it's no good crying over spilt milk. What you've got to do is to set to and get some work."

"Yes, sir."

"Don't say it in that sort of way," said Martin; "you must rise to the occasion."

"Yes, sir."

"You want a tonic. Take this half-crown, and get in a dozen pints of stout, and drink one every day."

And again Mrs. Hughs said, "Yes, sir."

"And about that baby."

Motionless, where it had been placed against the footrail of the bed, the baby sat with its black eyes closed. The small grey face was curled down on the bundle of its garments.

"It's a silent gentleman," Martin muttered.

"It never was a one to cry," said Mrs. Hughs.

"That's lucky, anyway. When did you feed it last?"

Mrs. Hughs did not reply at first. "About half-past six last evening, sir."

"What?"

"It slept all night; but to-day, of course, I've been all torn to pieces; my milk's gone. I've tried it with the bottle, but it wouldn't take it."

Martin bent down to the baby's face, and put his finger on its chin; bending lower yet, he raised the eyelid of the tiny eye....

"It's dead," he said.

At the word "dead" Mrs. Hughs, stooping behind him, snatched the baby to her throat. With its drooping head close to her she, she clutched and rocked it without sound. Full five minutes this desperate mute struggle with eternal silence lasted—the feeling, and warming, and breathing on the little limbs. Then, sitting down, bent almost double over her baby, she moaned. That single sound was followed by utter silence. The tread of footsteps on the creaking stairs broke it. Martin, rising from his crouching posture by the bed, went towards the door.

His grandfather was standing there, with Thyme behind him.

"She has left her room," said Mr. Stone. "Where has she gone?"

Martin, understanding that he meant the little model, put his finger to his lips, and, pointing to Mrs. Hughs, whispered:

"This woman's baby has just died."

Mr. Stone's face underwent the queer discoloration which marked the sudden summoning of his far thoughts. He stepped past Martin, and went up to Mrs. Hughs.

He stood there a long time gazing at the baby, and at the dark head bending over it with such despair. At last he spoke:

"Poor woman! He is at peace."

Mrs. Hughs looked up, and, seeing that old face, with its hollows and thin silver hair, she spoke:

"He's dead, sir."

Mr. Stone put out his veined and fragile hand, and touched the baby's toes. "He is flying; he is everywhere; he is close to the sun—Little brother!" And turning on his heel, he went out.

Thyme followed him as he walked on tiptoe down stairs which seemed to creak the louder for his caution. Tears were rolling down her cheeks.

Martin sat on, with the mother and her baby, in the close, still room, where, like strange visiting spirits, came stealing whiffs of the perfume of hyacinths.

CHAPTER XXVII

STEPHEN'S PRIVATE LIFE

Mr. Stone and Thyme, going out, again passed the tall, white young man. He had thrown away the hand-made cigarette, finding that it had not enough saltpetre to make it draw, and was smoking one more suited to the action of his lungs. He directed towards them the same lack-lustre, jeering stare.

Unconscious, seemingly, of where he went, Mr. Stone walked with his eyes fixed on space. His head jerked now and then, as a dried flower will shiver in a draught.

Scared at these movements, Thyme took his arm. The touch of that soft young arm squeezing his own brought speech back to Mr. Stone.

"In those places...." he said, "in those streets! ...I shall not see the flowering of the aloe—I shall not see the living peace! 'As with dogs, each couched over his proper bone, so men were living then!'" Thyme, watching him askance, pressed still closer to his side, as though to try and warm him back to every day.

'Oh!' went her guttered thoughts. 'I do wish grandfather would say something one could understand. I wish he would lose that dreadful stare.'

Mr. Stone spoke in answer to his granddaughter's thoughts.

"I have seen a vision of fraternity. A barren hillside in the sun, and on it a man of stone talking to the wind. I have heard an owl hooting in the daytime; a cuckoo singing in the night."

"Grandfather, grandfather!"

To that appeal Mr. Stone responded: "Yes, what is it?"

But Thyme, thus challenged, knew not what to say, having spoken out of terror.

"If the poor baby had lived," she stammered out, "it would have grown up.... It's all for the best, isn't it?"

"Everything is for the best," said Mr. Stone. "In those days men, possessed by thoughts of individual life, made moan at death, careless of the great truth that the world was one unending song."

Thyme thought: 'I have never seen him as bad as this!' She drew him on more quickly. With deep relief she saw her father, latchkey in hand, turning into the Old Square.

Stephen, who was still walking with his springy step, though he had come on foot the whole way from the Temple, hailed them with his hat. It was tall and black, and very shiny, neither quite oval nor positively round, and had a little curly brim. In this and his black coat, cut so as to show the front of him and cover the behind, he looked his best. The costume suited his long, rather narrow face, corrugated by two short parallel lines slanting downwards from his eyes and nostrils on either cheek; suited his neat, thin figure and the close-lipped corners of his mouth. His permanent appointment in the world of Law had ousted from his life (together with all uncertainty of income) the need for putting on a wig and taking his moustache off; but he still preferred to go clean-shaved.

"Where have you two sprung from?" he inquired, admitting them into the hall.

Mr. Stone gave him no answer, but passed into the drawing-room, and sat down on the verge of the first chair he came across, leaning forward with his hands between his knees.

Stephen, after one dry glance at him, turned to his daughter.

"My child," he said softly, "what have you brought the old boy here for? If there happens to be anything of the high mammalian order for dinner, your mother will have a fit."

Thyme answered: "Don't chaff, Father!"

Stephen, who was very fond of her, saw that for some reason she was not herself. He examined her with unwonted gravity. Thyme turned away from him. He heard, to his alarm, a little gulping sound.

"My dear!" he said.

Conscious of her sentimental weakness, Thyme made a violent effort.

"I've seen a baby dead," she cried in a quick, hard voice; and, without another word, she ran upstairs.

In Stephen there was a horror of emotion amounting almost to disease. It would have been difficult to say when he had last shown emotion; perhaps not since Thyme was born, and even then not to anyone except himself, having first locked the door, and then walked up and down, with his teeth almost meeting in the mouthpiece of his favourite pipe. He was unaccustomed, too, to witness this weakness on the part of other people. His looks and speech unconsciously discouraged it, so that if Cecilia had been at all that way inclined, she must long ago have been healed. Fortunately, she never had been, having too much distrust of her own feelings to give way to them completely. And Thyme, that healthy product of them both, at once younger for her age, and older, than they had ever been, with her incapacity for nonsense, her love for open air and facts—that fresh, rising plant, so elastic and so sane—she had never given them a single moment of uneasiness.

Stephen, close to his hat-rack, felt soreness in his heart. Such blows as Fortune had dealt, and meant to deal him, he had borne, and he could bear, so long as there was nothing in his own manner, or in that of others, to show him they were blows.

Hurriedly depositing his hat, he ran to Cecilia. He still preserved the habit of knocking on her door before he entered, though she had never, so far, answered, "Don't come in!" because she knew his knock. The custom gave, in fact, the measure of his idealism. What he feared, or what he thought he feared, after nineteen years of unchecked entrance, could never have been ascertained; but there it was, that flower of something formal and precise, of something reticent, within his soul.

This time, for once, he did not knock, and found Cecilia hooking up her tea-gown and looking very sweet. She glanced at him with mild surprise.

"What's this, Cis," he said, "about a baby dead? Thyme's quite upset about it; and your dad's in the drawing-room!"

With the quick instinct that was woven into all her gentle treading, Cecilia's thoughts flew—she could not have told why—first to the little model, then to Mrs. Hughs.

"Dead?" she said. "Oh, poor woman!"

"What woman?" Stephen asked.

"It must be Mrs. Hughs."

The thought passed darkly through Stephen's mind: 'Those people again! What now?' He did not express it, being neither brutal nor lacking in good taste.

A short silence followed, then Cecilia said suddenly: "Did you say that father was in the drawing-room? There's fillet of beef, Stephen!"

Stephen turned away. "Go and see Thyme!" he said.

Outside Thyme's door Cecilia paused, and, hearing no sound, tapped gently. Her knock not being answered, she slipped in. On the bed of that white room, with her face pressed into the pillow, her little daughter lay. Cecilia stood aghast. Thyme's whole body was quivering with suppressed sobs.

"My darling!" said Cecilia, "what is it?"

Thyme's answer was inarticulate.

Cecilia sat down on the bed and waited, drawing her fingers through the girl's hair, which had fallen loose; and while she sat there she experienced all that sore, strange feeling—as of being skinned—which comes to one who watches the emotion of someone near and dear without knowing the exact cause.

'This is dreadful,' she thought. 'What am I to do?'

To see one's child cry was bad enough, but to see her cry when that child's whole creed of honour and conduct for years past had precluded this relief as unfeminine, was worse than disconcerting.

Thyme raised herself on her elbow, turning her face carefully away.

"I don't know what's the matter with me," she said, choking. "It's—it's purely physical"

"Yes, darling," murmured Cecilia; "I know."

"Oh, Mother!" said Thyme suddenly, "it looked so tiny."

"Yes, yes, my sweet."

Thyme faced round; there was a sort of passion in her darkened eyes, rimmed pink with grief, and in all her gushed, wet face.

"Why should it have been choked out like that? It's—it's so brutal!"

Cecilia slid an arm round her.

"I'm so distressed you saw it, dear," she said.

"And grandfather was so—" A long sobbing quiver choked her utterance.

"Yes, yes," said Cecilia; "I'm sure he was."

Clasping her hands together in her lap, Thyme muttered: "He called him 'Little brother.'"

A tear trickled down Cecilia's cheek, and dropped on her daughter's wrist. Feeling that it was not her own tear, Thyme started up.

"It's weak and ridiculous," she said. "I won't!"

"Oh, go away, Mother, please. I'm only making you feel bad, too. You'd better go and see to grandfather."

Cecilia saw that she would cry no more, and since it was the sight of tears which had so disturbed her, she gave the girl a little hesitating stroke, and went away. Outside she thought: 'How dreadfully unlucky and pathetic; and there's father in the drawing-room!' Then she hurried down to Mr. Stone.

He was sitting where he had first placed himself, motionless. It struck her suddenly how frail and white he looked. In the shadowy light of her drawing-room, he was almost like a spirit sitting there in his grey tweed—silvery from head to foot. Her conscience smote her. It is written of the very old that they shall pass, by virtue of their long travel, out of the country of the understanding of the young, till the natural affections are blurred by creeping mists such as steal across the moors when the sun is going down.

Cecilia's heart ached with a little ache for all the times she had thought: 'If father were only not quite so—'; for all the times she had shunned asking him to come to them, because he was so—; for all the silences she and Stephen had maintained after he had spoken; for all the little smiles she had smiled. She longed to go and kiss his brow, and make him feel that she was aching. But she did not dare; he seemed so far away; it would be ridiculous.

Coming down the room, and putting her slim foot on the fender with a noise, so that if possible he might both see and hear her, she turned her anxious face towards him, and said: "Father!"

Mr. Stone looked up, and seeing somebody who seemed to be his elder daughter, answered "Yes, my dear?"

"Are you sure you're feeling quite the thing? Thyme said she thought seeing that poor baby had upset you."

Mr. Stone felt his body with his hand.

"I am not conscious of any pain," he said.

"Then you'll stay to dinner, dear, won't you?"

Mr. Stone's brow contracted as though he were trying to recall his past.

"I have had no tea," he said. Then, with a sudden, anxious look at his daughter: "The little girl has not come to me. I miss her. Where is she?"

The ache within Cecilia became more poignant.

"It is now two days," said Mr. Stone, "and she has left her room in that house—in that street."

Cecilia, at her wits' end, answered: "Do you really miss her, Father?"

"Yes," said Mr. Stone. "She is like—" His eyes wandered round the room as though seeking something which would help him to express himself. They fixed themselves on the far wall. Cecilia, following their gaze, saw a little solitary patch of sunlight dancing and trembling there. It had escaped the screen of trees and houses, and, creeping through some chink, had quivered in. "She is like that," said Mr. Stone, pointing with his finger. "It is gone!" His finger dropped; he uttered a deep sigh.

'How dreadful this is!' Cecilia thought. 'I never expected him to feel it, and yet I can do nothing!' Hastily she asked: "Would it do if you had Thyme to copy for you? I'm sure she'd love to come."

"She is my grand-daughter," Mr. Stone said simply. "It would not be the same."

Cecilia could think of nothing now to say but: "Would you like to wash your hands, dear?"

"Yes," said Mr. Stone.

"Then will you go up to Stephen's dressing-room for hot water, or will you wash them in the lavatory?"

"In the lavatory," said Mr. Stone. "I shall be freer there."

When he had gone Cecilia thought: 'Oh dear, how shall I get through the evening? Poor darling, he is so single-minded!'

At the sounding of the dinner-gong they all assembled—Thyme from her bedroom with cheeks and eyes still pink, Stephen with veiled inquiry in his glance, Mr. Stone from freedom in the lavatory—and sat down, screened, but so very little, from each other by sprays of white lilac. Looking round her table, Cecilia felt rather like one watching a dew-belled cobweb, most delicate of all things in the world, menaced by the tongue of a browsing cow.

Both soup and fish had been achieved, however, before a word was spoken. It was Stephen who, after taking a mouthful of dry sherry, broke the silence.

"How are you getting on with your book, sir?"

Cecilia heard that question with something like dismay. It was so bald; for, however inconvenient Mr. Stone's absorption in his manuscript might be, her delicacy told her how precious beyond life itself that book was to him. To her relief, however, her father was eating spinach.

"You must be getting near the end, I should think," proceeded Stephen.

Cecilia spoke hastily: "Isn't this white lilac lovely, Dad?"

Mr. Stone looked up.

"It is not white; it is really pink. The test is simple." He paused with his eyes fixed on the lilac.

'Ah!' thought Cecilia, 'now, if I can only keep him on natural science he used to be so interesting.'

"All flowers are one!" said Mr. Stone. His voice had changed.

'Oh!' thought Cecilia, 'he is gone!'

"They have but a single soul. In those days men divided, and subdivided them, oblivious of the one pale spirit which underlay those seemingly separate forms."

Cecilia's glance passed swiftly from the manservant to Stephen.

She saw one of her husband's eyes rise visibly. Stephen did so hate one thing to be confounded with another.

"Oh, come, sir," she heard him say; "you don't surely tell us that dandelions and roses have the same pale spirit!"

Mr. Stone looked at him wistfully.

"Did I say that?" he said. "I had no wish to be dogmatic."

"Not at all, sir, not at all," murmured Stephen.

Thyme, leaning over to her mother, whispered "Oh, Mother, don't let grandfather be queer; I can't bear it to-night!"

Cecilia, at her wits' end, said hurriedly:

"Dad, will you tell us what sort of character you think that little girl who comes to you has?"

Mr. Stone paused in the act of drinking water; his attention had evidently been riveted; he did not, however, speak. And Cecilia, seeing that the butler, out of the perversity which she found so conspicuous in her servants, was about to hand him beef, made a desperate movement with her lips. "No, Charles, not there, not there!"

The butler, tightening his lips, passed on. Mr. Stone spoke:

"I had not considered that. She is rather of a Celtic than an Anglo-Saxon type; the cheekbones are prominent; the jaw is not massive; the head is broad—if I can remember I will measure it; the eyes are of a peculiar blue, resembling chicory flowers; the mouth—," Mr. Stone paused.

Cecilia thought: 'What a lucky find! Now perhaps he will go on all right!'

"I do not know," Mr. Stone resumed, speaking in a far-off voice, "whether she would be virtuous."

Cecilia heard Stephen drinking sherry; Thyme, too, was drinking something; she herself drank nothing, but, pink and quiet, for she was a well-bred woman, said:

"You have no new potatoes, dear. Charles, give Mr. Stone some new potatoes."

By the almost vindictive expression on Stephen's face she saw, however, that her failure had decided him to resume command of the situation. "Talking of brotherhood, sir," he said dryly, "would you go so far as to say that a new potato is the brother of a bean?"

Mr. Stone, on whose plate these two vegetables reposed, looked almost painfully confused.

"I do not perceive," he stammered, "any difference between them."

"It's true," said Stephen; "the same pale spirit can be extracted from them both."

Mr. Stone looked up at him.

"You laugh at me," he said. "I cannot help it; but you must not laugh at life—that is blasphemy."

Before the piercing wistfulness of that sudden gaze Stephen was abashed. Cecilia saw him bite his lower lip.

"We're talking too much," he said; "we really must let your father eat!"
And the rest of the dinner was achieved in silence.

When Mr. Stone, refusing to be accompanied, had taken his departure, and Thyme had gone to bed, Stephen withdrew to his study. This room, which had a different air from any other portion of the house, was sacred to his private life. Here, in specially designed compartments, he kept his golf clubs, pipes, and papers. Nothing was touched by anyone except himself, and twice a week by one particular housemaid. Here was no bust of Socrates, no books in deerskin bindings, but a bookcase filled with treatises on law, Blue Books, reviews, and the novels of Sir Walter Scott; two black oak cabinets stood side by side against the wall filled with small drawers. When these cabinets were opened and the drawers drawn forward there emerged a scent of metal polish. If the green-baize covers of the drawers were lifted, there were seen coins, carefully arranged with labels—as one may see plants growing in rows, each with its little name tied on. To these tidy rows of shining metal discs Stephen turned in moments when his spirit was fatigued. To add to them, touch them, read their names, gave him the sweet, secret feeling which comes to a man who rubs one hand against the other. Like a dram-drinker, Stephen drank—in little doses—of the feeling these coins gave him. They were his creative work, his history of the world. To them he gave that side of him which refused to find its full expression in summarising law, playing golf, or reading the reviews; that side of a man which aches, he knows not wherefore, to construct something ere he die. From Rameses to George IV. the coins lay within those drawers—links of the long unbroken chain of authority.

Putting on an old black velvet jacket laid out for him across a chair, and lighting the pipe that he could never bring himself to smoke in his formal dinner clothes, he went to the right-hand cabinet, and opened it. He stood with a smile, taking up coins one by one. In this particular drawer they were of the best Byzantine dynasty, very rare. He did not see that Cecilia had stolen in, and was silently regarding him. Her eyes seemed doubting at that moment whether or no she loved him who stood there touching that other mistress of his thoughts—that other mistress with whom he spent so many evening hours. The little green-baize cover fell. Cecilia said suddenly:

"Stephen, I feel as if I must tell Father where that girl is!"

Stephen turned.

"My dear child," he answered in his special voice, which, like champagne, seemed to have been dried by artifice, "you don't want to reopen the whole thing?"

"But I can see he really is upset about it; he's looking so awfully white and thin."

"He ought to give up that bathing in the Serpentine. At his age it's monstrous. And surely any other girl will do just as well?"

"He seems to set store by reading to her specially."

Stephen shrugged his shoulders. It had happened to him on one occasion to be present when Mr. Stone was declaiming some pages of his manuscript. He had never forgotten the discomfort of the experience. "That crazy stuff," as he had called it to Cecilia afterwards, had remained on his mind, heavy and damp, like a cold linseed poultice. His wife's father was a crank, and perhaps even a little more than a crank, a wee bit "touched"—that she couldn't help, poor girl; but any allusion to his cranky produce gave Stephen pain. Nor had he forgotten his experience at dinner.

"He seems to have grown fond of her," murmured Cecilia.

"But it's absurd at his time of life!"

"Perhaps that makes him feel it more; people do miss things when they are old!"

Stephen slid the drawer back into its socket. There was dry decision in that gesture.

"Look here! Let's exercise a little common sense; it's been sacrificed to sentiment all through this wretched business. One wants to be kind, of course; but one's got to draw the line."

"Ah!" said Cecilia; "where?"

"The thing," went on Stephen, "has been a mistake from first to last. It's all very well up to a certain point, but after that it becomes destructive of all comfort. It doesn't do to let these people come into personal contact with you. There are the proper channels for that sort of thing."

Cecilia's eyes were lowered, as though she did not dare to let him see her thoughts.

"It seems so horrid," she said; "and father is not like other people."

"He is not," said Stephen dryly; "we had a pretty good instance of that this evening. But Hilary and your sister are. There's something most distasteful to me, too, about Thyme's going about slumming. You see what she's been let in for this afternoon. The notion of that baby being killed through the man's treatment of his wife, and that, no doubt, arising from the girl's leaving them, is most repulsive!"

To these words Cecilia answered with a sound almost like a gasp. "I hadn't thought of that. Then we're responsible; it was we who advised Hilary to make her change her lodging."

Stephen stared; he regretted sincerely that his legal habit of mind had made him put the case so clearly.

"I can't imagine," he said, almost violently, "what possesses everybody! We—responsible! Good gracious! Because we gave Hilary some sound advice! What next?"

Cecilia turned to the empty hearth.

"Thyme has been telling me about that poor little thing. It seems so dreadful, and I can't get rid of the feeling that we're—we're all mixed up with it!"

"Mixed up with what?"

"I don't know; it's just a feeling like—like being haunted."

Stephen took her quietly by the arm.

"My dear old girl," he said, "I'd no idea that you were run down like this. To-morrow's Thursday, and I can get away at three. We'll motor down to Richmond, and have a round or two!"

Cecilia quivered; for a moment it seemed that she was about to burst out crying. Stephen stroked her

shoulder steadily. Cecilia must have felt his dread; she struggled loyally with her emotion.

"That will be very jolly," she said at last.

Stephen drew a deep breath.

"And don't you worry, dear," he said, "about your dad; he'll have forgotten the whole thing in a day or two; he's far too wrapped up in his book. Now trot along to bed; I'll be up directly."

Before going out Cecilia looked back at him. How wonderful was that look, which Stephen did not—perhaps intentionally—see. Mocking, almost hating, and yet thanking him for having refused to let her be emotional and yield herself up for once to what she felt, showing him too how clearly she saw through his own masculine refusal to be made to feel, and how she half-admired it—all this was in that look, and more. Then she went out.

Stephen glanced quickly at the door, and, pursing up his lips, frowned. He threw the window open, and inhaled the night air.

'If I don't look out,' he thought, 'I shall be having her mixed up with this. I was an ass ever to have spoken to old Hilary. I ought to have ignored the matter altogether. It's a lesson not to meddle with people in those places. I hope to God she'll be herself tomorrow!'

Outside, under the soft black foliage of the Square, beneath the slim sickle of the moon, two cats were hunting after happiness; their savage cries of passion rang in the blossom-scented air like a cry of dark humanity in the jungle of dim streets. Stephen, with a shiver of disgust, for his nerves were on edge, shut the window with a slam.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HILARY HEARS THE CUCKOO SING

It was not left to Cecilia alone to remark how very white Mr. Stone looked in these days.

The wild force which every year visits the world, driving with its soft violence snowy clouds and their dark shadows, breaking through all crusts and sheaths, covering the earth in a fierce embrace; the wild force which turns form to form, and with its million leapings, swift as the flight of swallows and the arrow-darts of the rain, hurries everything on to sweet mingling—this great, wild force of universal life, so-called the Spring, had come to Mr. Stone, like new wine to some old bottle. And Hilary, to whom it had come, too, watching him every morning setting forth with a rough towel across his arm, wondered whether the old man would not this time leave his spirit swimming in the chill waters of the Serpentine—so near that spirit seemed to breaking through its fragile shell.

Four days had gone by since the interview at which he had sent away the little model, and life in his household—that quiet backwater choked with lilies—seemed to have resumed the tranquillity enjoyed before this intrusion of rude life. The paper whiteness of Mr. Stone was the only patent evidence that anything disturbing had occurred—that and certain feelings about which the strictest silence was preserved.

On the morning of the fifth day, seeing the old man stumble on the level flagstones of the garden, Hilary finished dressing hastily, and followed. He overtook him walking forward feebly beneath the candelabra of flowering chestnut-trees, with a hail-shower striking white on his high shoulders; and, placing himself alongside, without greeting—for forms were all one to Mr. Stone—he said:

"Surely you don't mean to bathe during a hail storm, sir! Make an exception this once. You're not looking quite yourself."

Mr. Stone shook his head; then, evidently following out a thought which Hilary had interrupted, he remarked:

"The sentiment that men call honour is of doubtful value. I have not as yet succeeded in relating it to universal brotherhood."

"How is that, sir?"

"In so far," said Mr. Stone, "as it consists in fidelity to principle, one might assume it worthy of conjunction. The difficulty arises when we consider the nature of the principle There is a family of young thrushes in the garden. If one of them finds a worm, I notice that his devotion to that principle of self-preservation which prevails in all low forms of life forbids his sharing it with any of the other little thrushes."

Mr. Stone had fixed his eyes on distance.

"So it is, I fear," he said, "with 'honour.' In those days men looked on women as thrushes look on worms."

He paused, evidently searching for a word; and Hilary, with a faint smile, said:

"And how did women look on men, sir?"

Mr. Stone observed him with surprise. "I did not perceive that it was you," he said. "I have to avoid brain action before bathing."

They had crossed the road dividing the Gardens from the Park, and, seeing that Mr. Stone had already seen the water where he was about to bathe, and would now see nothing else, Hilary stopped beside a little lonely birch-tree. This wild, small, graceful visitor, who had long bathed in winter, was already draping her bare limbs in a scarf of green. Hilary leaned against her cool, pearly body. Below were the chilly waters, now grey, now starch-blue, and the pale forms of fifteen or twenty bathers. While he stood shivering in the frozen wind, the sun, bursting through the hail-cloud, burned his cheeks and hands. And suddenly he heard, clear, but far off, the sound which, of all others, stirs the hearts of men: "Cuckoo, cuckoo!"

Four times over came the unexpected call. Whence had that ill-advised, indelicate grey bird flown into this great haunt of men and shadows? Why had it come with its arrowy flight and mocking cry to pierce the heart and set it aching? There were trees enough outside the town, cloud-swept hollows, tangled brakes of furze just coming into bloom, where it could preside over the process of Spring. What solemn freak was this which made it come and sing to one who had no longer any business with the Spring?

With a real spasm in his heart Hilary turned away from that distant bird, and went down to the water's edge. Mr. Stone was swimming, slower than man had ever swum before. His silver head and lean arms alone were visible, parting the water feebly; suddenly he disappeared. He was but a dozen yards from the shore; and Hilary, alarmed at not seeing him reappear, ran in. The water was not deep. Mr. Stone, seated at the bottom, was doing all he could to rise. Hilary took him by his bathing-dress, raised him to the surface, and supported him towards the land. By the time they reached the shore he could just stand on his legs. With the assistance of a policeman, Hilary enveloped him in garments and got him to a cab. He had regained some of his vitality, but did not seem aware of what had happened.

"I was not in as long as usual," he mused, as they passed out into the high road.

"Oh, I think so, sir."

Mr. Stone looked troubled.

"It is odd," he said. "I do not recollect leaving the water."

He did not speak again till he was being assisted from the cab.

"I wish to recompense the man. I have half a crown indoors."

"I will get it, sir," said Hilary.

Mr. Stone, who shivered violently now that he was on his feet, turned his face up to the cabman.

"Nothing is nobler than the horse," he said; "take care of him."

The cabman removed his hat. "I will, sir," he answered.

Walking by himself, but closely watched by Hilary, Mr. Stone reached his room. He groped about him as though not distinguishing objects too well through the crystal clearness of the fundamental flux.

"If I might advise you," said Hilary, "I would get back into bed for a few minutes. You seem a little chilly."

Mr. Stone, who was indeed shaking so that he could hardly stand, allowed

Hilary to assist him into bed and tuck the blankets round him.

"I must be at work by ten o'clock," he said.

Hilary, who was also shivering, hastened to Bianca's room. She was just coming down, and exclaimed at seeing him all wet. When he had told her of the episode she touched his shoulder.

"What about you?"

"A hot bath and drink will set me right. You'd better go to him."

He turned towards the bathroom, where Miranda stood, lifting a white foot. Compressing her lips, Bianca ran downstairs. Startled by his tale, she would have taken his wet body in her arms; if the ghosts of innumerable moments had not stood between. So this moment passed too, and itself became a ghost.

Mr. Stone, greatly to his disgust, had not succeeded in resuming work at ten o'clock. Failing simply because he could not stand on his legs, he had announced his intention of waiting until half-past three, when he should get up, in preparation for the coming of the little girl. Having refused to see a doctor, or have his temperature taken, it was impossible to tell precisely what degree of fever he was in. In his cheeks, just visible over the blankets, there was more colour than there should have been; and his eyes, fixed on the ceiling, shone with suspicious brilliancy. To the dismay of Bianca—who sat as far out of sight as possible, lest he should see her, and fancy that she was doing him a service—he pursued his thoughts aloud:

"Words—words—they have taken away brotherhood!" Bianca shuddered, listening to that uncanny sound. "In those days of words they called it death—pale death—*mors pallida*. They saw that word like a gigantic granite block suspended over them, and slowly coming down. Some, turning up their faces at the sight, trembled painfully, awaiting their obliteration. Others, unable, while they still lived, to face the thought of nothingness, inflated by some spiritual wind, and thinking always of their individual forms, called out unceasingly that those selves of theirs would and must survive this word—that in some fashion, which no man could understand, each self-conscious entity reaccumulated after distribution. Drunk with this thought, these, too, passed away. Some waited for it with grim, dry eyes, remarking that the process was molecular, and thus they also met their so-called death."

His voice ceased, and in place of it rose the sound of his tongue moistening his palate. Bianca, from behind, placed a glass of barley-water to his lips. He drank it with a slow, clucking noise; then, seeing that a hand held the glass, said: "Is that you? Are you ready for me? Follow. 'In those days no one leaped up to meet pale riding Death; no one saw in her face that she was brotherhood incarnate; no one with a heart as light as gossamer kissed her feet, and, smiling, passed into the Universe.'" His voice died away, and when next he spoke it was in a quick, husky whisper: "I must—I must—I must—" There was silence; then he added: "Give me my trousers."

Bianca placed them by his bed. The sight seemed to reassure him. He was once more silent.

For more than an hour after this he was so absolutely still that Bianca rose continually to look at him. Each time, his eyes, wide open, were fixed on a little dark mark across the ceiling; his face had a look of the most singular determination, as though his spirit were slowly, relentlessly, regaining mastery over his fevered body. He spoke suddenly:

"Who is there?"

"Bianca."

"Help me out of bed!"

The flush had left his face, the brilliance had faded from his eyes; he looked just like a ghost. With a sort of terror Bianca helped him out of bed. This weird display of mute white will-power was unearthly.

When he was dressed in his woollen gown and seated before the fire, she gave him a cup of strong beef-tea, with brandy. He swallowed it with great avidity.

"I should like some more of that," he said, and fell asleep.

While he was asleep Cecilia came, and the two sisters watched his slumber, and, watching it, felt nearer to each other than they had for many years. Before she went away Cecilia whispered—

"B. if he seems to want that little girl while he's like this, don't you think she ought to come?"

Bianca answered: "I don't know where she is."

"I do."

"Ah!" said Bianca; "of course!" And she turned her head away.

Disconcerted by that sarcastic little speech, Cecilia was silent; then, summoning all her courage, she said:

"Here's the address, B. I've written it down for you;" and, with puckers of anxiety in her face, she left the room.

Bianca sat on in the old golden chair, watching the deep hollows beneath the sleeper's temples, the puffs of breath stirring the silver round his mouth. Her ears burned crimson. Carried out of herself by the sight of that old form, dearer to her than she had thought, fighting its great battle for the sake of its idea, her spirit grew all tremulous and soft within her. With eagerness she embraced the thought of self-effacement. It did not seem to matter whether she were first with Hilary. Her spirit should so manifest its capacity for sacrifice that she would be first with him through sheer nobility. At this moment she could almost have taken that common little girl into her arms and kissed her. So would all disquiet end! Some harmonious messenger had fluttered to her for a second—the gold-winged bird of peace. In this sensuous exaltation her nerves vibrated like the strings of a violin.

When Mr. Stone woke it was past three o'clock and Bianca at once handed him another cup of strong beef-tea.

He swallowed it, and said: "What is this?"

"Beef-tea."

Mr. Stone looked at the empty cup.

"I must not drink it. The cow and the sheep are on the same plane as man."

"But how do you feel, dear?"

"I feel," said Mr. Stone, "able to dictate what I have already written—not more. Has she come?"

"Not yet; but I will go and find her if you like."

Mr. Stone looked at his daughter wistfully.

"That will be taking up your time," he said.

Bianca answered: "My time is of no consequence."

Mr. Stone stretched his hands out to the fire.

"I will not consent," he said, evidently to himself, "to be a drag on anyone. If that has come, then I must go!"

Bianca, placing herself beside him on her knees, pressed her hot cheek against his temple.

"But it has not come, Dad."

"I hope not," said Mr. Stone. "I wish to end my book first."

The sudden grim coherence of his last two sayings terrified Bianca more than all his feverish utterances.

"I rely on your sitting quite still," she said, "while I go and find her." And with a feeling in her heart as though two hands had seized and were pulling it asunder, she went out.

Some half-hour later Hilary slipped quietly in, and stood watching at the door. Mr. Stone, seated on the very verge of his armchair, with his hands on its arms, was slowly rising to his feet, and slowly falling back again, not once, but many times, practising a standing posture. As Hilary came into his line of sight, he said:

"I have succeeded twice."

"I am very glad," said Hilary. "Won't you rest now, sir?"

"It is my knees," said Mr. Stone. "She has gone to find her."

Hilary heard those words with bewilderment, and, sitting down on the other chair, waited.

"I have fancied," said Mr. Stone, looking at him wistfully, "that when we pass away from life we may become the wind. Is that your opinion?"

"It is a new thought to me," said Hilary.

"It is not tenable," said Mr. Stone. "But it is restful. The wind is everywhere and nowhere, and nothing can be hidden from it. When I have missed that little girl, I have tried, in a sense, to become the wind; but I have found it difficult."

His eyes left Hilary's face, whose mournful smile he had not noticed, and fixed themselves on the bright fire. "In those days," he said, "men's relation to the eternal airs was the relation of a billion little separate draughts blowing against the south-west wind. They did not wish to merge themselves in that soft, moon-uttered sigh, but blew in its face through crevices, and cracks, and keyholes, and were borne away on the pellucid journey, whistling out their protests."

He again tried to stand, evidently wishing to get to his desk to record this thought, but, failing, looked painfully at Hilary. He seemed about to ask for something, but checked himself.

"If I practise hard," he murmured, "I shall master it."

Hilary rose and brought him paper and a pencil. In bending, he saw that Mr. Stone's eyes were dim with moisture. This sight affected him so that he was glad to turn away and fetch a book to form a writing-pad.

When Mr. Stone had finished, he sat back in his chair with closed eyes. A supreme silence reigned in the bare room above those two men of different generations and of such strange dissimilarity of character. Hilary broke that silence.

"I heard the cuckoo sing to-day," he said, almost in a whisper, lest Mr. Stone should be asleep.

"The cuckoo," replied Mr. Stone, "has no sense of brotherhood."

"I forgive him-for his song," murmured Hilary.

"His song," said Mr. Stone, "is alluring; it excites the sexual instinct."

Then to himself he added:

"She has not come, as yet!"

Even as he spoke there was heard by Hilary a faint tapping on the door. He rose and opened it. The little model stood outside.

CHAPTER XXIX

RETURN OF THE LITTLE MODEL

That same afternoon in High Street, Kensington, "Westminster," with his coat-collar raised against the inclement wind, his old hat spotted with rain, was drawing at a clay pipe and fixing his iron-rimmed gaze on those who passed him by. It had been a day when singularly few as yet had bought from him his faintly green-tinged journal, and the low class of fellow who sold the other evening prints had especially exasperated him. His single mind, always torn to some extent between an ingrained loyalty to his employers and those politics of his which differed from his paper's, had vented itself twice since coming on his stand; once in these words to the seller of "Pell Mells": "I stipulated with you not to come beyond the lamp-post. Don't you never speak to me again—a-crowdin' of me off my stand"; and once to the younger vendors of the less expensive journals, thus: "Oh, you boys! I'll make you regret of it—a-snappin' up my customers under my very nose! Wait until ye're old!" To which the boys had answered: "All right, daddy; don't you have a fit. You'll be a deader soon enough without that, y'know!"

It was now his time for tea, but "Pell Mell" having gone to partake of this refreshment, he waited on,

hoping against hope to get a customer or two of that low fellow's. And while in black insulation he stood there a timid voice said at his elbow—

"Mr. Creed!"

The aged butler turned, and saw the little model.

"Oh," he said dryly, "it's you, is it?" His mind, with its incessant love of rank, knowing that she earned her living as a handmaid to that disorderly establishment, the House of Art, had from the first classed her as lower than a lady's-maid. Recent events had made him think of her unkindly. Her new clothes, which he had not been privileged to see before, while giving him a sense of Sunday, deepened his moral doubts.

"And where are you living now?" he said in tones incorporating these feelings.

"I'm not to tell you."

"Oh, very well. Keep yourself to yourself."

The little model's lower lip drooped more than ever. There were dark marks beneath her eyes; her face was altogether rather pinched and pitiful.

"Won't you tell me any news?" she said in her matter-of-fact voice.

The old butler gave a strange grunt.

"Ho!" he said. "The baby's dead, and buried to-morrer."

"Dead!" repeated the little model.

"I'm a-goin' to the funeral—Brompton Cemetery. Half-past nine I leave the door. And that's a-beginnin' at the end. The man's in prison, and the woman's gone a shadder of herself."

The little model rubbed her hands against her skirt.

"What did he go to prison for?"

"For assaultin' of her; I was witness to his battery."

"Why did he assault her?"

Creed looked at her, and, wagging his head, answered:

"That's best known to them as caused of it."

The little model's face went the colour of carnations.

"I can't help what he does," she said. "What should I want him for—a man like that? It wouldn't be him I'd want!" The genuine contempt in that sharp burst of anger impressed the aged butler.

"I'm not a-sayin' anything," he said; "it's all a-one to me. I never mixes up with no other people's business. But it's very ill-convenient. I don't get my proper breakfast. That poor woman—she's half off her head. When the baby's buried I'll have to go and look out for another room before he gets a-comin' out."

"I hope they'll keep him there," muttered the little model suddenly.

"They give him a month," said Creed.

"Only a month!"

The old butler looked at her. 'There's more stuff in you,' he seemed to say, 'than ever I had thought.'

"Because of his servin' of his country," he remarked aloud.

"I'm sorry about the poor little baby," said the little model in her stolid voice.

"Westminister" shook his head. "I never suspected him of goin' to live," he said.

The girl, biting the finger-tip of her white cotton glove, was staring out at the traffic. Like a pale ray of light entering the now dim cavern of the old man's mind, the thought came to Creed that he did not quite understand her. He had in his time had occasion to class many young persons, and the feeling

that he did not quite know her class of person was like the sensation a bat might have, surprised by daylight.

Suddenly, without saying good-bye to him, she walked away.

'Well,' he thought, looking after her, 'your manners ain't improved by where you're living, nor your appearance neither, for all your new clothes.' And for some time he stood thinking of the stare in her eyes and that abrupt departure.

Through the crystal clearness of the fundamental flux the mind could see at that same moment Bianca leaving her front gate.

Her sensuous exaltation, her tremulous longing after harmony, had passed away; in her heart, strangely mingled, were these two thoughts: 'If only she were a lady!' and, 'I am glad she is not a lady!'

Of all the dark and tortuous places of this life, the human heart is the most dark and tortuous; and of all human hearts none are less clear, more intricate than the hearts of all that class of people among whom Bianca had her being. Pride was a simple quality when joined with a simple view of life, based on the plain philosophy of property; pride was no simple quality when the hundred paralysing doubts and aspirations of a social conscience also hedged it round. In thus going forth with the full intention of restoring the little model to her position in the household, her pride fought against her pride, and her woman's sense of ownership in the man whom she had married wrestled with the acquired sentiments of freedom, liberality, equality, good taste. With her spirit thus confused, and her mind so at variance with itself, she was really acting on the simple instinct of compassion.

She had run upstairs from Mr. Stone's room, and now walked fast, lest that instinct, the most physical, perhaps, of all—awakened by sights and sounds, and requiring constant nourishment—should lose its force.

Rapidly, then, she made her way to the grey street in Bayswater where Cecilia had told her that the girl now lived.

The tall, gaunt landlady admitted her.

"Have you a Miss Barton lodging here?" Bianca asked.

"Yes," said the landlady, "but I think she's out."

She looked into the little model's room.

"Yes," she said; "she's out; but if you'd like to leave a note you could write in here. If you're looking for a model, she wants work, I believe."

That modern faculty of pressing on an aching nerve was assuredly not lacking to Bianca. To enter the girl's room was jabbing at the nerve indeed.

She looked round her. The mental vacuity of that little room! There was not one single thing—with the exception of a torn copy of Tit-Bits—which suggested that a mind of any sort lived there. For all that, perhaps because of that, it was neat enough.

"Yes," said the landlady, "she keeps her room tidy. Of course, she's a country girl—comes from down my way." She said this with a dry twist of her grim, but not unkindly, features. "If it weren't for that," she went on, "I don't think I should care to let to one of her profession."

Her hungry eyes, gazing at Bianca, had in them the aspirations of all Nonconformity.

Bianca pencilled on her card:

"If you can come to my father to-day or tomorrow, please do."

"Will you give her this, please? It will be quite enough."

"I'll give it her," the landlady said; "she'll be glad of it, I daresay. I see her sitting here. Girls like that, if they've got nothing to do—see, she's been moping on her bed...."

The impress of a form was, indeed, clearly visible on the red and yellow tasselled tapestry of the bed.

Bianca cast a look at it.

"Thank you," she said; "good day."

With the jabbed nerve aching badly she came slowly homewards.

Before the garden gate the little model herself was gazing at the house, as if she had been there some time. Approaching from across the road, Bianca had an admirable view of that young figure, now very trim and neat, yet with something in its lines—more supple, perhaps, but less refined—which proclaimed her not a lady; a something fundamentally undisciplined or disciplined by the material facts of life alone, rather than by a secret creed of voluntary rules. It showed here and there in ways women alone could understand; above all, in the way her eyes looked out on that house which she was clearly longing to enter. Not 'Shall I go in?' was in that look, but 'Dare I go in?'

Suddenly she saw Bianca. The meeting of these two was very like the ordinary meeting of a mistress and her maid. Bianca's face had no expression, except the faint, distant curiosity which seems to say: 'You are a sealed book to me; I have always found you so. What you really think and do I shall never know.'

The little model's face wore a half-caught-out, half-stolid look.

"Please go in," Bianca said; "my father will be glad to see you."

She held the garden gate open for the girl to pass through. Her feeling at that moment was one of slight amusement at the futility of her journey. Not even this small piece of generosity was permitted her, it seemed.

"How are you getting on?"

The little model made an impulsive movement at such an unexpected question. Checking it at once, she answered:

"Very well, thank you; that is, not very—"

"You will find my father tired to-day; he has caught a chill. Don't let him read too much, please."

The little model seemed to try and nerve herself to make some statement, but, failing, passed into the house.

Bianca did not follow, but stole back into the garden, where the sun was still falling on a bed of wallflowers at the far end. She bent down over these flowers till her veil touched them. Two wild bees were busy there, buzzing with smoky wings, clutching with their black, tiny legs at the orange petals, plunging their black, tiny tongues far down into the honeyed centres. The flowers quivered beneath the weight of their small dark bodies. Bianca's face quivered too, bending close to them, nor making the slightest difference to their hunt.

Hilary, who, it has been seen, lived in thoughts about events rather than in events themselves, and to whom crude acts and words had little meaning save in relation to what philosophy could make of them, greeted with a startled movement the girl's appearance in the corridor outside Mr. Stone's apartment. But the little model, who mentally lived very much from hand to mouth, and had only the philosophy of wants, acted differently. She knew that for the last five days, like a spaniel dog shut away from where it feels it ought to be, she had wanted to be where she was now standing; she knew that, in her new room with its rust-red doors, she had bitten her lips and fingers till blood came, and, as newly caged birds will flutter, had beaten her wings against those walls with blue roses on a yellow ground. She remembered how she had lain, brooding, on that piece of red and yellow tapestry, twisting its tassels, staring through half-closed eyes at nothing.

There was something different in her look at Hilary. It had lost some of its childish devotion; it was bolder, as if she had lived and felt, and brushed a good deal more down off her wings during those few days.

"Mrs. Dallison told me to come," she said. "I thought I might. Mr. Creed told me about him being in prison."

Hilary made way for her, and, following her into Mr. Stone's presence, shut the door.

"The truant has returned," he said.

Hearing herself called so unjustly by that name, the little model gushed deeply, and tried to speak. She stopped at the smile on Hilary's face, and gazed from him to Mr. Stone and back again, the victim of mingled feelings.

Mr. Stone was seen to have risen to his feet, and to be very slowly moving towards his desk. He

leaned both arms on his papers for support, and, seeming to gather strength, began sorting out his manuscript.

Through the open window the distant music of a barrel-organ came drifting in. Faint, and much too slow, was the sound of the waltz it played, but there was invitation, allurements, in that tune. The little model turned towards it, and Hilary looked hard at her. The girl and that sound together—there, quite plain, was the music he had heard for many days, like a man lying with the touch of fever on him.

"Are you ready?" said Mr. Stone.

The little model dipped her pen in ink. Her eyes crept towards the door, where Hilary was still standing with the same expression on his face. He avoided her eyes, and went up to Mr. Stone.

"Must you read to-day, sir?"

Mr. Stone looked at him with anger.

"Why not?" he said.

"You are hardly strong enough."

Mr. Stone raised his manuscript.

"We are three days behind;" and very slowly he began dictating: "Bar-ba-rous ha-bits in those days, such as the custom known as War ——" His voice died away; it was apparent that his elbows, leaning on the desk, alone prevented his collapse.

Hilary moved the chair, and, taking him beneath the arms, lowered him gently into it.

Noticing that he was seated, Mr. Stone raised his manuscript and read on: "—were pursued regardless of fraternity. It was as though a herd of horn-ed cattle driven through green pastures to that Gate, where they must meet with certain dissolution, had set about to prematurely gore and disembowel each other, out of a passionate devotion to those individual shapes which they were so soon to lose. So men—tribe against tribe, and country against country—glared across the valleys with their ensanguined eyes; they could not see the moonlit wings, or feel the embalming airs of brotherhood."

Slower and slower came his sentences, and as the last word died away he was heard to be asleep, breathing through a tiny hole left beneath the eave of his moustache. Hilary, who had waited for that moment, gently put the manuscript on the desk, and beckoned to the girl. He did not ask her to his study, but spoke to her in the hall.

"While Mr. Stone is like this he misses you. You will come, then, at present, please, so long as Hughs is in prison. How do you like your room?"

The little model answered simply: "Not very much."

"Why not?"

"It's lonely there. I shan't mind, now I'm coming here again."

"Only for the present," was all Hilary could find to say.

The little model's eyes were lowered.

"Mrs. Hughs' baby's to be buried to-morrow," she said suddenly.

"Where?"

"In Brompton Cemetery. Mr. Creed's going."

"What time is the funeral?"

The girl looked up stealthily.

"Mr. Creed's going to start at half-past nine."

"I should like to go myself," said Hilary.

A gleam of pleasure passing across her face was instantly obscured behind the cloud of her stolidity.

Then, as she saw Hilary move nearer to the door, her lip began to droop.

"Well, good-bye," he said.

The little model flushed and quivered. 'You don't even look at me,' she seemed to say; 'you haven't spoken kindly to me once.' And suddenly she said in a hard voice:

"Now I shan't go to Mr. Lennard's any more."

"Oh, then you have been to him!"

Triumph at attracting his attention, fear of what she had admitted, supplication, and a half-defiant shame—all this was in her face.

"Yes," she said.

Hilary did not speak.

"I didn't care any more when you told me I wasn't to come here."

Still Hilary did not speak.

"I haven't done anything wrong," she said, with tears in her voice.

"No, no," said Hilary; "of course not!"

The little model choked.

"It's my profession."

"Yes, yes," said Hilary; "it's all right."

"I don't care what he thinks; I won't go again so long as I can come here."

Hilary touched her shoulder.

"Well, well," he said, and opened the front door.

The little model, tremulous, like a flower kissed by the sun after rain, went out with a light in her eyes.

The master of the house returned to Mr. Stone. Long he sat looking at the old man's slumber. "A thinker meditating upon action!" So might Hilary's figure, with its thin face resting on its hand, a furrow between the brows, and that painful smile, have been entitled in any catalogue of statues.

CHAPTER XXX

FUNERAL OF A BABY

Following out the instinct planted so deeply in human nature for treating with the utmost care and at great expense when dead those, who, when alive, have been served with careless parsimony, there started from the door of No. 1 in Hound Street a funeral procession of three four-wheeled cabs. The first bore the little coffin, on which lay a great white wreath (gift of Cecilia and Thyme). The second bore Mrs. Hughes, her son Stanley, and Joshua Creed. The third bore Martin Stone. In the first cab Silence was presiding with the scent of lilies over him who in his short life had made so little noise, the small grey shadow which had crept so quietly into being, and, taking his chance when he was not noticed, had crept so quietly out again. Never had he felt so restful, so much at home, as in that little common coffin, washed as he was to an unnatural whiteness, and wrapped in his mother's only spare sheet. Away from all the strife of men he was Journeying to a greater peace. His little aloe-plant had flowered; and, between the open windows of the only carriage he had ever been inside, the wind—which, who knows? he had perhaps become—stirred the fronds of fern and the flowers of his funeral wreath. Thus he was going from that world where all men were his brothers.

From the second cab the same wind was rigidly excluded, and there was silence, broken by the aged butler's breathing. Dressed in his Newmarket coat, he was recalling with a certain sense of luxury past,

journeys in four-wheeled cabs—occasions when, seated beside a box corded and secured with sealing-wax, he had taken his master's plate for safety to the bank; occasions when, under a roof piled up with guns and boxes, he had sat holding the "Honorable Bateson's" dog; occasions when, with some young person by his side, he had driven at the tail of a baptismal, nuptial, or funeral cortege. These memories of past grandeur came back to him with curious poignancy, and for some reason the words kept rising in his mind: 'For richer or poorer, for better or worsen, in health and in sick places, till death do us part.' But in the midst of the exaltation of these recollections the old heart beneath his old red flannel chest-protector—that companion of his exile—twittering faintly at short intervals, made him look at the woman by his side. He longed to convey to her some little of the satisfaction he felt in the fact that this was by no means the low class of funeral it might have been. He doubted whether, with her woman's mind, she was getting all the comfort she could out of three four-wheeled cabs and a wreath of lilies. The seamstress's thin face, with its pinched, passive look, was indeed thinner, quieter, than ever. What she was thinking of he could not tell. There were so many things she might be thinking of. She, too, no doubt, had seen her grandeur, if but in the solitary drive away from the church where, eight years ago, she and Hughs had listened to the words now haunting Creed. Was she thinking of that; of her lost youth and comeliness, and her man's dead love; of the long descent to shadowland; of the other children she had buried; of Hughs in prison; of the girl that had "put a spell on him"; or only of the last precious tugs the tiny lips at rest in the first four-wheeled cab had given at her breast? Or was she, with a nicer feeling for proportion, reflecting that, had not people been so kind, she might have had to walk behind a funeral provided by the parish?

The old butler could not tell, but he—whose one desire now, coupled with the wish to die outside a workhouse, was to save enough to bury his own body without the interference of other people—was inclined to think she must be dwelling on the brighter side of things; and, designing to encourage her, he said: "Wonderful improvement in these 'ere four-wheel cabs! Oh dear, yes! I remember of them when they were the shadders of what they are at the present time of speakin'."

The seamstress answered in her quiet voice: "Very comfortable this is. Sit still, Stanley!" Her little son, whose feet did not reach the floor, was drumming his heels against the seat. He stopped and looked at her, and the old butler addressed him.

"You'll a-remember of this occasion," he said, "when you gets older."

The little boy turned his black eyes from his mother to him who had spoken last.

"It's a beautiful wreath," continued Creed. "I could smell of it all the way up the stairs. There's been no expense spared; there's white laylock in it—that's a class of flower that's very extravagant."

A train of thought having been roused too strong for his discretion, he added: "I saw that young girl yesterday. She came interrogatin' of me in the street."

On Mrs. Hughs' face, where till now expression had been buried, came such a look as one may see on the face of an owl—hard, watchful, cruel; harder, more cruel, for the softness of the big dark eyes.

"She'd show a better feeling," she said, "to keep a quiet tongue. Sit still, Stanley!"

Once more the little boy stopped drumming his heels, and shifted his stare from the old butler back to her who spoke. The cab, which had seemed to hesitate and start, as though jibbing at something in the road, resumed its ambling pace. Creed looked through the well-closed window. There before him, so long that it seemed to have no end, like a building in a nightmare, stretched that place where he did not mean to end his days. He faced towards the horse again. The colour had deepened in his nose. He spoke:

"If they'd a-give me my last edition earlier, 'stead of sending of it down after that low-class feller's taken all my customers, that'd make a difference to me o' two shillin's at the utmost in the week, and all clear savin's." To these words, dark with hidden meaning, he received no answer save the drumming of the small boy's heels; and, reverting to the subject he had been distracted from, he murmured: "She was a-wearin' of new clothes."

He was startled by the fierce tone of a voice he hardly knew. "I don't want to hear about her; she's not for decent folk to talk of."

The old butler looked round askance. The seamstress was trembling violently. Her fierceness at such a moment shocked him. "Dust to dust," he thought.

"Don't you be considerate of it," he said at last, summoning all his knowledge of the world; "she'll come to her own place." And at the sight of a slow tear trickling over her burning cheek, he added hurriedly: "Think of your baby—I'll see yer through. Sit still, little boy—sit still! Ye're disturbin' of your

mother."

Once more the little boy stayed the drumming of his heels to look at him who spoke; and the closed cab rolled on with its slow, jingling sound.

In the third four-wheeled cab, where the windows again were wide open, Martin Stone, with his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his coat, and his long legs crossed, sat staring at the roof, with a sort of twisted scorn on his pale face.

Just inside the gate, through which had passed in their time so many dead and living shadows, Hilary stood waiting. He could probably not have explained why he had come to see this tiny shade committed to the earth—in memory, perhaps, of those two minutes when the baby's eyes had held parley with his own, or in the wish to pay a mute respect to her on whom life had weighed so hard of late. For whatever reason he had come, he was keeping quietly to one side. And unobserved, he, too, had his watcher—the little model, sheltering behind a tall grave.

Two men in rusty black bore the little coffin; then came the white-robed chaplain; then Mrs. Hughs and her little son; close behind, his head thrust forward with trembling movements from side to side, old Creed; and, last of all, young Martin Stone. Hilary joined the young doctor. So the five mourners walked.

Before a small dark hole in a corner of the cemetery they stopped. On this forest of unflowered graves the sun was falling; the east wind, with its faint reek, touched the old butler's plastered hair, and brought moisture to the corners of his eyes, fixed with absorption on the chaplain. Words and thoughts hunted in his mind.

'He's gettin' Christian burial. Who gives this woman away? I do. Ashes to ashes. I never suspected him of livin'.' The conning of the burial service, shortened to fit the passing of that tiny shade, gave him pleasurable sensation; films came down on his eyes; he listened like some old parrot on its perch, his head a little to one side.

'Them as dies young,' he thought, 'goes straight to heaven. We trusts in God—all mortal men; his godfathers and his godmothers in his baptism. Well, so it is! I'm not afeared o' death!'

Seeing the little coffin tremble above the hole, he craned his head still further forward. It sank; a smothered sobbing rose. The old butler touched the arm in front of him with shaking fingers.

"Don't 'e," he whispered; "he's a-gone to glory."

But, hearing the dry rattle of the earth, he took out his own handkerchief and put it to his nose.

'Yes, he's a-gone,' he thought; 'another little baby. Old men an' maidens, young men an' little children; it's a-goin' on all the time. Where 'e is now there'll be no marryin', no, nor givin' out in marriage; till death do us part.'

The wind, sweeping across the filled-in hole, carried the rustle of his husky breathing, the dry, smothered sobbing of the seamstress, out across the shadows' graves, to those places, to those streets....

From the baby's funeral Hilary and Martin walked away together, and far behind them, across the road, the little model followed. For some time neither spoke; then Hilary, stretching out his hand towards a squalid alley, said:

"They haunt us and drag us down. A long, dark passage. Is there a light at the far end, Martin?"

"Yes," said Martin gruffly.

"I don't see it."

Martin looked at him.

"Hamlet!"

Hilary did not reply.

The young man watched him sideways. "It's a disease to smile like that!"

Hilary ceased to smile. "Cure me, then," he said, with sudden anger, "you man of health!"

The young "Sanitist's" sallow cheeks flushed. "Atrophy of the nerve of action," he muttered; "there's no cure for that!"

"Ah!" said Hilary: "All kinds of us want social progress in our different ways. You, your grandfather, my brother, myself; there are four types for you. Will you tell me any one of us is the right man for the job? For instance, action's not natural to me."

"Any act," answered Martin, "is better than no act."

"And myopia is natural to you, Martin. Your prescription in this case has not been too successful, has it?"

"I can't help it if people will be d---d fools."

"There you hit it. But answer me this question: Isn't a social conscience, broadly speaking, the result of comfort and security?"

Martin shrugged his shoulders.

"And doesn't comfort also destroy the power of action?"

Again Martin shrugged.

"Then, if those who have the social conscience and can see what is wrong have lost their power of action, how can you say there is any light at the end of this dark passage?"

Martin took his pipe out, filled it, and pressed the filling with his thumb.

"There is light," he said at last, "in spite of all invertebrates. Good-bye! I've wasted enough time," and he abruptly strode away.

"And in spite of myopia?" muttered Hilary.

A few minutes later, coming out from Messrs. Rose and Thorn's, where he had gone to buy tobacco, he came suddenly on the little model, evidently waiting.

"I was at the funeral," she, said; and her face added plainly: 'I've followed you.' Uninvited, she walked on at his side.

'This is not the same girl,' he thought, 'that I sent away five days ago. She has lost something, gained something. I don't know her.'

There seemed such a stubborn purpose in her face and manner. It was like the look in a dog's eyes that says: 'Master, you thought to shut me up away from you; I know now what that is like. Do what you will, I mean in future to be near you.'

This look, by its simplicity, frightened one to whom the primitive was strange. Desiring to free himself of his companion, yet not knowing how, Hilary sat down in Kensington Gardens on the first bench they came to. The little model sat down beside him. The quiet siege laid to him by this girl was quite uncanny. It was as though someone were binding him with toy threads, swelling slowly into rope before his eyes. In this fear of Hilary's there was at first much irritation. His fastidiousness and sense of the ridiculous were roused. What did this little creature with whom he had no thoughts and no ideas in common, whose spirit and his could never hope to meet, think that she could get from him? Was she trying to weave a spell over him too, with her mute, stubborn adoration? Was she trying to change his protective weakness for her to another sort of weakness? He turned and looked; she dropped her eyes at once, and sat still as a stone figure.

As in her spirit, so in her body, she was different; her limbs looked freer, rounder; her breath seemed stirring her more deeply; like a flower of early June she was opening before his very eyes. This, though it gave him pleasure, also added to his fear. The strange silence, in its utter naturalness—for what could he talk about with her?—brought home to him more vividly than anything before, the barriers of class. All he thought of was how not to be ridiculous! She was inviting him in some strange, unconscious, subtle way to treat her as a woman, as though in spirit she had linked her round young arms about his neck, and through her half-closed lips were whispering the eternal call of sex to sex. And he, a middle-aged and cultivated man, conscious of everything, could not even speak for fear of breaking through his shell of delicacy. He hardly breathed, disturbed to his very depths by the young figure sitting by his side, and by the dread of showing that disturbance.

Beside the cultivated plant the self-sown poppy rears itself; round the stem of a smooth tree the honeysuckle twines; to a trim wall the ivy clings.

In her new-found form and purpose this girl had gained a strange, still power; she no longer felt it mattered whether he spoke or looked at her; her instinct, piercing through his shell, was certain of the throbbing of his pulses, the sweet poison in his blood.

The perception of this still power, more than all else, brought fear to Hilary. He need not speak; she would not care! He need not even look at her; she had but to sit there silent, motionless, with the breath of youth coming through her parted lips, and the light of youth stealing through her half-closed eyes.

And abruptly he got up and walked away.

CHAPTER XXXI

SWAN SONG

The new wine, if it does not break the old bottle, after fierce effervescence seethes and bubbles quietly.

It was so in Mr. Stone's old bottle, hour by hour and day by day, throughout the month. A pinker, robuster look came back to his cheeks; his blue eyes, fixed on distance, had in them more light; his knees regained their powers; he bathed, and, all unknown to him, for he only saw the waters he cleaved with his ineffably slow stroke, Hilary and Martin, on alternate weeks, and keeping at a proper distance, for fear he should see them doing him a service, attended at that function in case Mr. Stone should again remain too long seated at the bottom of the Serpentine. Each morning after his cocoa and porridge he could be heard sweeping out his room with extraordinary vigour, and as ten o'clock came near anyone who listened would remark a sound of air escaping, as he moved up and down on his toes in preparation for the labours of the day. No letters, of course, nor any newspapers disturbed the supreme and perfect self-containment of this life devoted to Fraternity—no letters, partly because he lacked a known address, partly because for years he had not answered them; and with regard to newspapers, once a month he went to a Public Library, and could be seen with the last four numbers of two weekly reviews before him, making himself acquainted with the habits of those days, and moving his lips as though in prayer. At ten each morning anyone in the corridor outside his room was startled by the whirr of an alarum clock; perfect silence followed; then rose a sound of shuffling, whistling, rustling, broken by sharply muttered words; soon from this turbid lake of sound the articulate, thin fluting of an old man's voice streamed forth. This, alternating with the squeak of a quill pen, went on till the alarum clock once more went off. Then he who stood outside could smell that Mr. Stone would shortly eat; if, stimulated by that scent, he entered; he might see the author of the "Book of Universal Brotherhood" with a baked potato in one hand and a cup of hot milk in the other; on the table, too, the ruined forms of eggs, tomatoes, oranges, bananas, figs, prunes, cheese, and honeycomb, which had passed into other forms already, together with a loaf of wholemeal bread. Mr. Stone would presently emerge in his cottage-woven tweeds, and old hat of green-black felt; or, if wet, in a long coat of yellow gaberdine, and sou'wester cap of the same material; but always with a little osier fruit-bag in his hand. Thus equipped, he walked down to Rose and Thorn's, entered, and to the first man he saw handed the osier fruit-bag, some coins, and a little book containing seven leaves, headed "Food: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday," and so forth. He then stood looking through the pickles in some jar or other at things beyond, with one hand held out, fingers upwards, awaiting the return of his little osier fruit-bag. Feeling, presently that it had been restored to him, he would turn and walk out of the shop. Behind his back, on the face of the department, the same protecting smile always rose. Long habit had perfected it. All now felt that, though so very different from themselves, this aged customer was dependent on them. By not one single farthing or one pale slip of cheese would they have defrauded him for all the treasures of the moon, and any new salesman who laughed at that old client was promptly told to "shut his head."

Mr. Stone's frail form, bent somewhat to one side by the increased gravamen of the osier bag, was now seen moving homewards. He arrived perhaps ten minutes before the three o'clock alarum, and soon passing through preliminary chaos, the articulate, thin fluting of his voice streamed forth again, broken by the squeaking and spluttering of his quill.

But towards four o'clock signs of cerebral excitement became visible; his lips would cease to utter sounds, his pen to squeak. His face, with a flushed forehead, would appear at the open window. As soon

as the little model came in sight—her eyes fixed, not on his window, but on Hilary's—he turned his back, evidently waiting for her to enter by the door. His first words were uttered in a tranquil voice: "I have several pages. I have placed your chair. Are you ready? Follow!"

Except for that strange tranquillity of voice and the disappearance of the flush on his brow, there was no sign of the rejuvenescence that she brought, of such refreshment as steals on the traveller who sits down beneath a lime-tree toward the end of a long day's journey; no sign of the mysterious comfort distilled into his veins by the sight of her moody young face, her young, soft limbs. So from some stimulant men very near their end will draw energy, watching, as it were, a shape beckoning them forward, till suddenly it disappears in darkness.

In the quarter of an hour sacred to their tea and conversation he never noticed that she was always listening for sounds beyond; it was enough that in her presence he felt singleness of purpose strong within him.

When she had gone, moving languidly, moodily away, her eyes darting about for signs of Hilary, Mr. Stone would sit down rather suddenly and fall asleep, to dream, perhaps, of Youth—Youth with its scent of sap, its close beckonings; Youth with its hopes and fears; Youth that hovers round us so long after it is dead! His spirit would smile behind its covering—that thin china of his face; and, as dogs hunting in their sleep work their feet, so he worked the fingers resting on his woollen knees.

The seven o'clock alarm woke him to the preparation of the evening meal. This eaten, he began once more to pace up and down, to pour words out into the silence, and to drive his squeaking quill.

So was being written a book such as the world had never seen!

But the girl who came so moodily to bring him refreshment, and went so moodily away, never in these days caught a glimpse of that which she was seeking.

Since the morning when he had left her abruptly, Hilary had made a point of being out in the afternoons and not returning till past six o'clock. By this device he put off facing her and himself, for he could no longer refuse to see that he had himself to face. In the few minutes of utter silence when the girl sat beside him, magnetic, quivering with awakening force, he had found that the male in him was far from dead. It was no longer vague, sensuous feeling; it was warm, definite desire. The more she was in his thoughts, the less spiritual his feeling for this girl of the people had become.

In those days he seemed much changed to such as knew him well. Instead of the delicate, detached, slightly humorous suavity which he had accustomed people to expect from him, the dry kindness which seemed at once to check confidence and yet to say, 'If you choose to tell me anything, I should never think of passing judgment on you, whatever you have done'—instead of that rather abstracted, faintly quizzical air, his manner had become absorbed and gloomy. He seemed to jib away from his friends. His manner at the "Pen and Ink" was wholly unsatisfying to men who liked to talk. He was known to be writing a new book; they suspected him of having "got into a hat"—this Victorian expression, found by Mr. Balladyce in some chronicle of post-Thackerayan manners, and revived by him in his incomparable way, as who should say, 'What delicious expressions those good bourgeois had!' now flourished in second childhood.

In truth, Hilary's difficulty with his new book was merely the one of not being able to work at it at all. Even the housemaid who "did" his study noticed that day after day she was confronted by Chapter XXIV., in spite of her employer's staying in, as usual, every morning.

The change in his manner and face, which had grown strained and harassed, had been noticed by Bianca, though she would have died sooner than admit she had noticed anything about him. It was one of those periods in the lives of households like an hour of a late summer's day—brooding, electric, as yet quiescent, but charged with the currents of coming storms.

Twice only in those weeks while Hughs was in prison did Hilary see the girl. Once he met her when he was driving home; she blushed crimson and her eyes lighted up. And one morning, too, he passed her on the bench where they had sat together. She was staring straight before her, the corners of her mouth drooping discontentedly. She did not see him.

To a man like Hilary—for whom running after women had been about the last occupation in the world, who had, in fact, always fought shy of them and imagined that they would always fight shy of him—there was an unusual enticement and dismay in the feeling that a young girl really was pursuing him. It was at once too good, too unlikely, and too embarrassing to be true. His sudden feeling for her was the painful sensation of one who sees a ripe nectarine hanging within reach. He dreamed continually of stretching out his hand, and so he did not dare, or thought he did not dare, to pass that way. All this did not favour the tenor of a studious, introspective life; it also brought a sense of unreality which made

him avoid his best friends. This, partly, was why Stephen came to see him one Sunday, his other reason for the visit being the calculation that Hughs would be released on the following Wednesday.

'This girl,' he thought, 'is going to the house still, and Hilary will let things drift till he can't stop them, and there'll be a real mess.'

The fact of the man's having been in prison gave a sinister turn to an affair regarded hitherto as merely sordid by Stephen's orderly and careful mind.

Crossing the garden, he heard Mr. Stone's voice issuing through the open window.

'Can't the old crank stop even on Sundays?' he thought.

He found Hilary in his study, reading a book on the civilisation of the Maccabees, in preparation for a review. He gave Stephen but a dubious welcome.

Stephen broke ground gently.

"We haven't seen you for an age. I hear our old friend at it. Is he working double tides to finish his magnum opus? I thought he observed the day of rest."

"He does as a rule," said Hilary.

"Well, he's got the girl there now dictating."

Hilary winced. Stephen continued with greater circumspection "You couldn't get the old boy to finish by Wednesday, I suppose? He must be quite near the end by now."

The notion of Mr. Stone's finishing his book by Wednesday procured a pale smile from Hilary.

"Could you get your Law Courts," he said, "to settle up the affairs of mankind for good and all by Wednesday?"

"By Jove! Is it as bad as that? I thought, at any rate, he must be meaning to finish some day."

"When men are brothers," said Hilary, "he will finish."

Stephen whistled.

"Look here, dear boy!" he said, "that ruffian comes out on Wednesday. The whole thing will begin over again."

Hilary rose and paced the room. "I refuse," he said, "to consider Hughs a ruffian. What do we know about him, or any of them?"

"Precisely! What do we know of this girl?"

"I am not going to discuss that," Hilary said shortly.

For a moment the faces of the two brothers wore a hard, hostile look, as though the deep difference between their characters had at last got the better of their loyalty. They both seemed to recognise this, for they turned their heads away.

"I just wanted to remind you," Stephen said, "though you know your own business best, of course." And at Hilary's nod he thought:

'That's just exactly what he doesn't!'

He soon left, conscious of an unwonted awkwardness in his brother's presence. Hilary watched him out through the wicket gate, then sat down on the solitary garden bench.

Stephen's visit had merely awakened perverse desires in him. Strong sunlight was falling on that little London garden, disclosing its native shadowiness; streaks, and smudges such as Life smears over the faces of those who live too consciously. Hilary, beneath the acacia-tree not yet in bloom, marked an early butterfly flitting over the geraniums blossoming round an old sundial. Blackbirds were holding evensong; the late perfume of the lilac came stealing forth into air faintly smeared with chimney smoke. There was brightness, but no glory, in that little garden; scent, but no strong air blown across golden lakes of buttercups, from seas of springing clover, or the wind-silver of young wheat; music, but no full choir of sound, no hum. Like the face and figure of its master, so was this little garden, whose sundial the sun seldom reached-refined, self-conscious, introspective, obviously a creature of the town. At that moment, however, Hilary was not looking quite himself; his face was flushed, his eyes angry,

almost as if he had been a man of action.

The voice of Mr. Stone was still audible, fitfully quavering out into the air, and the old man himself could now and then be seen holding up his manuscript, his profile clear-cut against the darkness of the room. A sentence travelled out across the garden:

"Amidst the tur-bu-lent dis-cov-eries of those days, which, like cross-currented and multibillowed seas, lapped and hollowed every rock "

A motor-car dashing past drowned the rest, and when the voice rose again it was evidently dictating another paragraph.

"In those places, in those streets, the shadows swarmed, whispering and droning like a hive of dying bees, who, their honey eaten, wander through the winter day seeking flowers that are frozen and dead."

A great bee which had been busy with the lilac began to circle, booming, round his hair. Suddenly Hilary saw Mr. Stone raise both his arms.

"In huge congeries, crowded, devoid of light and air, they were assembled, these bloodless imprints from forms of higher caste. They lay, like the reflection of leaves which, fluttering free in the sweet winds, let fall to the earth wan resemblances. Imponderous, dark ghosts, wandering ones chained to the ground, they had no hope of any Lovely City, nor knew whence they had come. Men cast them on the pavements and marched on. They did not in Universal Brotherhood clasp their shadows to sleep within their hearts—for the sun was not then at noon, when no man has a shadow."

As those words of swan song died away he swayed and trembled, and suddenly disappeared below the sight-line, as if he had sat down. The little model took his place in the open window. She started at seeing Hilary; then, motionless, stood gazing at him. Out of the gloom of the opening her eyes were all pupil, two spots of the surrounding darkness imprisoned in a face as pale as any flower. Rigid as the girl herself, Hilary looked up at her.

A voice behind him said: "How are you? I thought I'd give my car a run." Mr. Purcey was coming from the gate, his eyes fixed on the window where the girl stood. "How is your wife?" he added.

The bathos of this visit roused an acid fury in Hilary. He surveyed Mr. Purcey's figure from his cloth-topped boots to his tall hat, and said: "Shall we go in and find her?"

As they went along Mr. Purcey said: "That's the young—the—er—model I met in your wife's studio, isn't it? Pretty girl!"

Hilary compressed his lips.

"Now, what sort of living do those girls make?" pursued Mr. Purcey. "I suppose they've most of them other resources. Eh, what?"

"They make the living God will let them, I suppose, as other people do."

Mr. Purcey gave him a sharp look. It was almost as if Dallison had meant to snub him.

"Oh, exactly! I should think this girl would have no difficulty." And suddenly he saw a curious change come over "that writing fellow," as he always afterwards described Hilary. Instead of a mild, pleasant-looking chap enough, he had become a regular cold devil.

"My wife appears to be out," Hilary said. "I also have an engagement."

In his surprise and anger Mr. Purcey said with great simplicity, "Sorry I'm 'de trop!" and soon his car could be heard bearing him away with some unnecessary noise.

CHAPTER XXXII

But Bianca was not out. She had been a witness of Hilary's long look at the little model. Coming from her studio through the glass passage to the house, she could not, of course, see what he was gazing at, but she knew as well as if the girl had stood before her in the dark opening of the window. Hating herself for having seen, she went to her room, and lay on her bed with her hands pressed to her eyes. She was used to loneliness—that necessary lot of natures such as hers; but the bitter isolation of this hour was such as to drive even her lonely nature to despair.

She rose at last, and repaired the ravages made in her face and dress, lest anyone should see that she was suffering. Then, first making sure that Hilary had left the garden, she stole out.

She wandered towards Hyde Park. It was Whitsuntide, a time of fear to the cultivated Londoner. The town seemed all arid jollity and paper bags whirled on a dusty wind. People swarmed everywhere in clothes which did not suit them; desultory, dead-tired creatures who, in these few green hours of leisure out of the sandy eternity of their toil, were not suffered to rest, but were whipped on by starved instincts to hunt pleasures which they longed for too dreadfully to overtake.

Bianca passed an old tramp asleep beneath a tree. His clothes had clung to him so long and lovingly that they were falling off, but his face was calm as though masked with the finest wax. Forgotten were his sores and sorrows; he was in the blessed fields of sleep.

Bianca hastened away from the sight of such utter peace. She wandered into a grove of trees which had almost eluded the notice of the crowd. They were limes, guarding still within them their honey bloom. Their branches of light, broad leaves, near heart-shaped, were spread out like wide skirts. The tallest of these trees, a beautiful, gay creature, stood tremulous, like a mistress waiting for her tardy lover. What joy she seemed to promise, what delicate enticement, with every veined quivering leaf! And suddenly the sun caught hold of her, raised her up to him, kissed her all over; she gave forth a sigh of happiness, as though her very spirit had travelled through her lips up to her lover's heart.

A woman in a lilac frock came stealing through the trees towards Bianca, and sitting down not far off, kept looking quickly round under her sunshade.

Presently Bianca saw what she was looking for. A young man in black coat and shining hat came swiftly up and touched her shoulder. Half hidden by the foliage they sat, leaning forward, prodding gently at the ground with stick and parasol; the stealthy murmur of their talk, so soft and intimate that no word was audible, stole across the grass; and secretly he touched her hand and arm. They were not of the holiday crowd, and had evidently chosen out this vulgar afternoon for a stolen meeting.

Bianca rose and hurried on amongst the trees. She left the Park. In the streets many couples, not so careful to conceal their intimacy, were parading arm-in-arm. The sight of them did not sting her like the sight of those lovers in the Park; they were not of her own order. But presently she saw a little boy and girl asleep on the doorstep of a mansion, with their cheeks pressed close together and their arms round each other, and again she hurried on. In the course of that long wandering she passed the building which "Westminster" was so anxious to avoid. In its gateway an old couple were just about to separate, one to the men's, the other to the women's quarters. Their toothless mouths were close together. "Well, goodnight, Mother!" "Good-night, Father, good-night-take care o' yourself!"

Once more Bianca hurried on.

It was past nine when she turned into the Old Square, and rang the bell of her sister's house with the sheer physical desire to rest—somewhere that was not her home.

At one end of the long, low drawing-room Stephen, in evening dress, was reading aloud from a review. Cecilia was looking dubiously at his sock, where she seemed to see a tiny speck of white that might be Stephen. In the window at the far end Thyme and Martin were exchanging speeches at short intervals; they made no move at Bianca's entrance; and their faces said: "We have no use for that handshaking nonsense!"

Receiving Cecilia's little, warm, doubting kiss and Stephen's polite, dry handshake, Bianca motioned to him not to stop reading. He resumed. Cecilia, too, resumed her scrutiny of Stephen's sock.

'Oh dear!' she thought. 'I know B.'s come here because she's unhappy. Poor thing! Poor Hilary! It's that wretched business again, I suppose.'

Skilled in every tone of Stephen's voice, she knew that Bianca's entry had provoked the same train of thought in him; to her he seemed reading out these words: 'I disapprove—I disapprove. She's Cis's sister. But if it wasn't for old Hilary I wouldn't have the subject in the house!'

Bianca, whose subtlety recorded every shade of feeling, could see that she was not welcome. Leaning

back with veil raised, she seemed listening to Stephen's reading, but in fact she was quivering at the sight of those two couples.

Couples, couples—for all but her! What crime had she committed? Why was the china of her cup flawed so that no one could drink from it? Why had she been made so that nobody could love her? This, the most bitter of all thoughts, the most tragic of all questionings, haunted her.

The article which Stephen read—explaining exactly how to deal with people so that from one sort of human being they might become another, and going on to prove that if, after this conversion, they showed signs of a reversion, it would then be necessary to know the reason why—fell dryly on ears listening to that eternal question: Why is it with me as it is? It is not fair!—listening to the constant murmuring of her pride: I am not wanted here or anywhere. Better to efface myself!

From their end of the room Thyme and Martin scarcely looked at her. To them she was Aunt B., an amateur, the mockery of whose eyes sometimes penetrated their youthful armour; they were besides too interested in their conversation to perceive that she was suffering. The skirmish of that conversation had lasted now for many days—ever since the death of the Hughs' baby.

"Well," Martin was saying, "what are you going to do? It's no good to base it on the baby; you must know your own mind all round. You can't go rushing into real work on mere sentiment."

"You went to the funeral, Martin. It's bosh to say you didn't feel it too!"

Martin deigned no answer to this insinuation.

"We've gone past the need for sentiment," he said: "it's exploded; so is Justice, administered by an upper class with a patch over one eye and a squint in the other. When you see a dying donkey in a field, you don't want to refer the case to a society, as your dad would; you don't want an essay of Hilary's, full of sympathy with everybody, on 'Walking in a field: with reflections on the end of donkeys'—you want to put a bullet in the donkey."

"You're always down on Uncle Hilary," said Thyme.

"I don't mind Hilary himself; I object to his type."

"Well, he objects to yours," said Thyme.

"I'm not so sure of that," said Martin slowly; "he hasn't got character enough."

Thyme raised her chin, and, looking at him through half-closed eyes, said: "Well, I do think, of all the conceited persons I ever met you're the worst."

Martin's nostril curled.

"Are you prepared," he said, "to put a bullet in the donkey, or are you not?"

"I only see one donkey, and not a dying one!"

Martin stretched out his hand and gripped her arm below the elbow. Retaining it luxuriously, he said: "Don't wander!"

Thyme tried to free her arm. "Let go!"

Martin was looking straight into her eyes. A flush had risen in his cheeks.

Thyme, too, went the colour of the old-rose curtain behind which she sat.

"Let go!"

"I won't! I'll make you know your mind. What do you mean to do? Are you coming in a fit of sentiment, or do you mean business?"

Suddenly, half-hypnotised, the young girl ceased to struggle. Her face had the strangest expression of submission and defiance—a sort of pain, a sort of delight. So they sat full half a minute staring at each other's eyes. Hearing a rustling sound, they looked, and saw Bianca moving to the door. Cecilia, too, had risen.

"What is it, B.?"

Bianca, opening the door, went out. Cecilia followed swiftly, too late to catch even a glimpse of her sister's face behind the veil...

In Mr. Stone's room the green lamp burned dimly, and he who worked by it was sitting on the edge of his campbed, attired in his old brown woollen gown and slippers.

And suddenly it seemed to him that he was not alone.

"I have finished for to-night," he said. "I am waiting for the moon to rise. She is nearly full; I shall see her face from here."

A form sat down by him on the bed, and a voice said softly:

"Like a woman's."

Mr. Stone saw his younger daughter. "You have your hat on. Are you going out, my dear?"

"I saw your light as I came in."

"The moon," said Mr. Stone, "is an arid desert. Love is unknown there."

"How can you bear to look at her, then?" Bianca whispered.

Mr. Stone raised his finger. "She has risen."

The wan moon had slipped out into the darkness. Her light stole across the garden and through the open window to the bed where they were sitting.

"Where there is no love, Dad," Bianca said, "there can be no life, can there?"

Mr. Stone's eyes seemed to drink the moonlight.

"That," he said, "is the great truth. The bed is shaking!"

With her arms pressed tight across her breast, Bianca was struggling with violent, noiseless sobbing. That desperate struggle seemed to be tearing her to death before his eyes, and Mr. Stone sat silent, trembling. He knew not what to do. From his frosted heart years of Universal Brotherhood had taken all knowledge of how to help his daughter. He could only sit touching her tremulously with thin fingers.

The form beside him, whose warmth he felt against his arm, grew stiller, as though, in spite of its own loneliness, his helplessness had made it feel that he, too; was lonely. It pressed a little closer to him. The moonlight, gaining pale mastery over the flickering lamp, filled the whole room.

Mr. Stone said: "I want her mother!"

The form beside him ceased to struggle.

Finding out an old, forgotten way, Mr. Stone's arm slid round that quivering body.

"I do not know what to say to her," he muttered, and slowly he began to rock himself.

"Motion," he said, "is soothing."

The moon passed on. The form beside him sat so still that Mr. Stone ceased moving. His daughter was no longer sobbing. Suddenly her lips seared his forehead.

Trembling from that desperate caress, he raised his fingers to the spot and looked round.

She was gone.

CHAPTER XXXIII

HILARY DEALS WITH THE SITUATION

To understand the conduct of Hilary and Bianca at what "Westminister" would have called this "crisax," not only their feelings as sentient human beings, but their matrimonial philosophy, must be taken into account. By education and environment they belonged to a section of society which had "in those days" abandoned the more old-fashioned views of marriage. Such as composed this section, finding themselves in opposition, not only to the orthodox proprietary creed, but even to their own legal

rights, had been driven to an attitude of almost blatant freedom. Like all folk in opposition, they were bound, as a simple matter of principle, to disagree with those in power, to view with a contemptuous resentment that majority which said, "I believe the thing is mine, and mine it shall remain"—a majority which by force of numbers made this creed the law. Unable legally to, be other than the proprietors of wife or husband, as the case might be, they were obliged, even in the most happy unions, to be very careful not to become disgusted with their own position. Their legal status was, as it were, a goad, spurring them on to show their horror of it. They were like children sent to school with trousers that barely reached their knees, aware that they could neither reduce their stature to the proportions of their breeches nor make their breeches grow. They were furnishing an instance of that immemorial "change of form to form" to which Mr. Stone had given the name of Life. In a past age thinkers and dreamers and "artistic pigs" rejecting the forms they found, had given unconscious shape to this marriage law, which, after they had become the wind, had formed itself out of their exiled pictures and thoughts and dreams. And now this particular law in turn was the dried rind, devoid of pips or speculation; and the thinkers and dreamers and "artistic pigs" were again rejecting it, and again themselves in exile.

This exiled faith, this honour amongst thieves, animated a little conversation between Hilary and Bianca on the Tuesday following the night when Mr. Stone sat on his bed to watch the rising moon.

Quietly Bianca said: "I think I shall be going away for a time."

"Wouldn't you rather that I went instead?" "You are wanted; I am not."

That ice-cold, ice-clear remark contained the pith of the whole matter; and Hilary said:

"You are not going at once?"

"At the end of the week, I think."

Noting his eyes fixed on her, she added:

"Yes; we're neither of us looking quite our best."

"I am sorry."

"I know you are."

This had been all. It had been sufficient to bring Hilary once more face to face with the situation.

Its constituent elements remained the same; relative values had much changed. The temptations of St. Anthony were becoming more poignant every hour. He had no "principles" to pit against them: he had merely the inveterate distaste for hurting anybody, and a feeling that if he yielded to his inclination he would be faced ultimately with a worse situation than ever. It was not possible for him to look at the position as Mr. Purcey might have done, if his wife had withdrawn from him and a girl had put herself in his way. Neither hesitation because of the defenceless position of the girl, nor hesitation because of his own future with her, would have troubled Mr. Purcey. He—good man—in his straightforward way, would have only thought about the present—not, indeed, intending to have a future with a young person of that class. Consideration for a wife who had withdrawn from the society of Mr. Purcey would also naturally have been absent from the equation. That Hilary worried over all these questions was the mark of his 'fin de sieclism.' And in the meantime the facts demanded a decision.

He had not spoken to this girl since the day of the baby's funeral, but in that long look from the garden he had in effect said: 'You are drawing me to the only sort of union possible to us!' And she in effect had answered: 'Do what you like with me!'

There were other facts, too, to be reckoned with. Hughs would be released to-morrow; the little model would not stop her visits unless forced to; Mr. Stone could not well do without her; Bianca had in effect declared that she was being driven out of her own house. It was this situation which Hilary, seated beneath the bust of Socrates, turned over and over in his mind. Long and painful reflection brought him back continually to the thought that he himself, and not Bianca, had better go away. He was extremely bitter and contemptuous towards himself that he had not done so long ago. He made use of the names Martin had given him. "Hamlet," "Amateur," "Invertebrate." They gave him, unfortunately, little comfort.

In the afternoon he received a visit. Mr. Stone came in with his osier fruit-bag in his hand. He remained standing, and spoke at once.

"Is my daughter happy?"

At this unexpected question Hilary walked over to the fireplace.

"No," he said at last; "I am afraid she is not."

"Why?"

Hilary was silent; then, facing the old man, he said:

"I think she will be glad, for certain reasons, if I go away for a time."

"When are you going?" asked Mr. Stone.

"As soon as I can."

Mr. Stone's eyes, wistfully bright, seemed trying to see through heavy fog.

"She came to me, I think," he said; "I seem to recollect her crying. You are good to her?"

"I have tried to be," said Hilary.

Mr. Stone's face was discoloured by a flush. "You have no children," he said painfully; "do you live together?"

Hilary shook his head.

"You are estranged?" said Mr. Stone.

Hilary bowed. There was a long silence. Mr. Stone's eyes had travelled to the window.

"Without love there cannot be life," he said at last; and fixing his wistful gaze on Hilary, asked: "Does she love another?"

Again Hilary shook his head.

When Mr. Stone next spoke it was clearly to himself.

"I do not know why I am glad. Do you love another?"

At this question Hilary's eyebrows settled in a frown. "What do you mean by love?" he said.

Mr. Stone did not reply; it was evident that he was reflecting deeply. His lips began to move: "By love I mean the forgetfulness of self. Unions are frequent in which only the sexual instincts, or the remembrance of self, are roused—"

"That is true," muttered Hilary.

Mr. Stone looked up; painful traces of confusion showed in his face.

"We were discussing something."

"I was telling you," said Hilary, "that it would be better for your daughter—if I go away for a time."

"Yes," said Mr. Stone; "you are estranged."

Hilary went back to his stand before the empty fireplace.

"There is one thing, sir," he said, "on my conscience to say before I go, and I must leave it to you to decide. The little girl who comes to you no longer lives where she used to live."

"In that street...." said Mr. Stone.

Hilary went on quickly. "She was obliged to leave because the husband of the woman with whom she used to lodge became infatuated with her. He has been in prison, and comes out tomorrow. If she continues to come here he will, of course, be able to find her. I'm afraid he will pursue her again. Have I made it clear to you?"

"No," said Mr. Stone.

"The man," resumed Hilary patiently, "is a poor, violent creature, who has been wounded in the head; he is not quite responsible. He may do the girl an injury."

"What injury?"

"He has stabbed his wife already."

"I will speak to him," said Mr. Stone.

Hilary smiled. "I am afraid that words will hardly meet the case. She ought to disappear."

There was silence.

"My book!" said Mr. Stone.

It smote Hilary to see how white his face had become. 'It's better,' he thought, 'to bring his will-power into play; she will never come here, anyway, after I'm gone.'

But, unable to bear the tragedy in the old man's eyes, he touched him on the arm.

"Perhaps she will take the risk, sir, if you ask her."

Mr. Stone did not answer, and, not knowing what more to say, Hilary went back to the window. Miranda was slumbering lightly out there in the speckled shade, where it was not too warm and not too cold, her cheek resting on her paw and white teeth showing.

Mr. Stone's voice rose again. "You are right; I cannot ask her to run a risk like that!"

"She is just coming up the garden," Hilary said huskily. "Shall I tell her to come in?"

"Yes," said Mr. Stone.

Hilary beckoned.

The girl came in, carrying a tiny bunch of lilies of the valley; her face fell at sight of Mr. Stone; she stood still, raising the lilies to her breast. Nothing could have been more striking than the change from her look of guttered expectancy to a sort of hard dismay. A spot of red came into both her cheeks. She gazed from Mr. Stone to Hilary and back again. Both were staring at her. No one spoke. The little model's bosom began heaving as though she had been running; she said faintly: "Look; I brought you this, Mr. Stone!" and held out to him the bunch of lilies. But Mr. Stone made no sign. "Don't you like them?"

Mr. Stone's eyes remained fastened on her face.

To Hilary this suspense was, evidently, most distressing. "Come, will you tell her, sir," he said, "or shall I?"

Mr. Stone spoke.

"I shall try and write my book without you. You must not run this risk. I cannot allow it."

The little model turned her eyes from side to side. "But I like to copy out your book," she said.

"The man will injure you," said Mr. Stone.

The little model looked at Hilary.

"I don't care if he does; I'm not afraid of him. I can look after myself; I'm used to it."

"I am going away," said Hilary quietly.

After a desperate look, that seemed to ask, 'Am I going, too?' the little model stood as though frozen.

Wishing to end the painful scene, Hilary went up to Mr. Stone.

"Do you want to dictate to her this afternoon, sir?"

"No," said Mr. Stone.

"Nor to-morrow?"

"Will you come a little walk with me?"

Mr. Stone bowed.

Hilary turned to the little model. "It is goodbye, then," he said.

She did not take his hand. Her eyes, turned sideways, glinted; her teeth were fastened on her lower lip. She dropped the lilies, suddenly looked up at him, gulped, and slunk away. In passing she had smeared the lilies with her foot.

Hilary picked up the fragments of the flowers, and dropped them into the grate. The fragrance of the bruised blossoms remained clinging to the air.

"Shall we get ready for our walk?" he said.

Mr. Stone moved feebly to the door, and very soon they were walking silently towards the Gardens.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THYME'S ADVENTURE

This same afternoon Thyme, wheeling a bicycle and carrying a light valise, was slipping into a back street out of the Old Square. Putting her burden down at the pavement's edge, she blew a whistle. A hansom-cab appeared, and a man in ragged clothes, who seemed to spring out of the pavement, took hold of her valise. His lean, unshaven face was full of wolfish misery.

"Get off with you!" the cabman said.

"Let him do it!" murmured Thyme.

The cab-runner hoisted up the trunk, then waited motionless beside the cab.

Thyme handed him two coppers. He looked at them in silence, and went away.

'Poor man,' she thought; 'that's one of the things we've got to do away with!'

The cab now proceeded in the direction of the Park, Thyme following on her bicycle, and trying to stare about her calmly.

'This,' she thought, 'is the end of the old life. I won't be romantic, and imagine I'm doing anything special; I must take it all as a matter of course.' She thought of Mr. Purcey's face—'that person!'—if he could have seen her at this moment turning her back on comfort. 'The moment I get there,' she mused, 'I shall let mother know; she can come out to-morrow, and see for herself. I can't have hysterics about my disappearance, and all that. They must get used to the idea that I mean to be in touch with things. I can't be stopped by what anybody thinks!'

An approaching motor-car brought a startled frown across her brow. Was it 'that person'? But though it was not Mr. Purcey and his A.i. Danyer, it was somebody so like him as made no difference. Thyme uttered a little laugh.

In the Park a cool light danced and glittered on the trees and water, and the same cool, dancing glitter seemed lighting the girl's eyes.

The cabman, unseen, took an admiring look at her. 'Nice little bit, this!' it said.

'Grandfather bathes here,' thought Thyme. 'Poor darling! I pity everyone that's old.'

The cab passed on under the shade of trees out into the road.

'I wonder if we have only one self in us,' thought Thyme. 'I sometimes feel that I have two—Uncle Hilary would understand what I mean. The pavements are beginning to smell horrid already, and it's only June to-morrow. Will mother feel my going very much? How glorious if one didn't feel!'

The cab turned into a narrow street of little shops.

'It must be dreadful to have to serve in a small shop. What millions of people there are in the world! Can anything be of any use? Martin says what matters is to do one's job; but what is one's job?'

The cab emerged into a broad, quiet square.

'But I'm not going to think of anything,' thought Thyme; 'that's fatal.'

Suppose father stops my allowance; I should have to earn my living as a typist, or something of that sort; but he won't, when he sees I mean it. Besides, mother wouldn't let him.'

The cab entered the Euston Road, and again the cabman's broad face was turned towards Thyme with an inquiring stare.

'What a hateful road!' Thyme thought. 'What dull, ugly, common-looking faces all the people seem to have in London! as if they didn't care for anything but just to get through their day somehow. I've only seen two really pretty faces!'

The cab stopped before a small tobacconist's on the south side of the road.

'Have I got to live here?' thought Thyme.

Through the open door a narrow passage led to a narrow staircase covered with oilcloth. She raised her bicycle and wheeled it in. A Jewish-looking youth emerging from the shop accosted her.

"Your gentleman friend says you are to stay in your rooms, please, until he comes."

His warm red-brown eyes dwelt on her lovingly. "Shall I take your luggage up, miss?"

"Thank you; I can manage."

"It's the first floor," said the young man.

The little rooms which Thyme entered were stuffy, clean, and neat. Putting her trunk down in her bedroom, which looked out on a bare yard, she went into the sitting-room and threw the window up. Down below the cabman and tobacconist were engaged in conversation. Thyme caught the expression on their faces—a sort of leering curiosity.

'How disgusting and horrible men are!' she thought, moodily staring at the traffic. All seemed so grim, so inextricable, and vast, out there in the grey heat and hurry, as though some monstrous devil were sporting with a monstrous ant-heap. The reek of petrol and of dung rose to her nostrils. It was so terribly big and hopeless; it was so ugly! 'I shall never do anything,' thought Thyme—'never—never! Why doesn't Martin come?'

She went into her bedroom and opened her valise. With the scent of lavender that came from it, there sprang up a vision of her white bedroom at home, and the trees of the green garden and the blackbirds on the grass.

The sound of footsteps on the stairs brought her back into the sitting-room. Martin was standing in the doorway.

Thyme ran towards him, but stopped abruptly. "I've come, you see. What made you choose this place?"

"I'm next door but two; and there's a girl here—one of us. She'll show you the ropes."

"Is she a lady?"

Martin raised his shoulders. "She is what is called a lady," he said; "but she's the right sort, all the same. Nothing will stop her."

At this proclamation of supreme virtue, the look on Thyme's face was very queer. 'You don't trust me,' it seemed to say, 'and you trust that girl. You put me here for her to watch over me!...'

"I 'want to send this telegram," she said

Martin read the telegram. "You oughtn't to have funk'd telling your mother what you meant to do."

Thyme crimsoned. "I'm not cold-blooded, like you."

"This is a big matter," said Martin. "I told you that you had no business to come at all if you couldn't look it squarely in the face."

"If you want me to stay you had better be more decent to me, Martin."

"It must be your own affair," said Martin.

Thyme stood at the window, biting her lips to keep the tears back from her eyes. A very pleasant

voice behind her said: "I do think it's so splendid of you to come!"

A girl in grey was standing there—thin, delicate, rather plain, with a nose ever so little to one side, lips faintly smiling, and large, shining, greenish eyes.

"I am Mary Daunt. I live above you. Have you had some tea?"

In the gentle question of this girl with the faintly smiling lips and shining eyes Thyme fancied that she detected mockery.

"Yes, thanks. I want to be shown what my work's to be, at once, please."

The grey girl looked at Martin.

"Oh! Won't to-morrow do for all that sort of thing? I'm sure you must be tired. Mr. Stone, do make her rest!"

Martin's glance seemed to say: 'Please leave your femininities!'

"If you mean business, your work will be the same as hers," he said; "you're not qualified. All you can do will be visiting, noting the state of the houses and the condition of the children."

The girl in grey said gently: "You see, we only deal with sanitation and the children. It seems hard on the grown people and the old to leave them out; but there's sure to be so much less money than we want, so that it must all go towards the future."

There was a silence. The girl with the shining eyes added softly: "1950!"

"1950!" repeated Martin. It seemed to be some formula of faith.

"I must send this telegram!" muttered Thyme.

Martin took it from her and went out.

Left alone in the little room, the two girls did not at first speak. The girl in grey was watching Thyme half timidly, as if she could not tell what to make of this young creature who looked so charming, and kept shooting such distrustful glances.

"I think it's so awfully sweet of you to come," she said at last. "I know what a good time you have at home; your cousin's often told me. Don't you think he's splendid?"

To that question Thyme made no answer.

"Isn't this work horrid," she said—"prying into people's houses?"

The grey girl smiled. "It is rather awful sometimes. I've been at it six months now. You get used to it. I've had all the worst things said to me by now, I should think."

Thyme shuddered.

"You see," said the grey girl's faintly smiling lips, "you soon get the feeling of having to go through with it. We all realise it's got to be done, of course. Your cousin's one of the best of us; nothing seems to put him out. He has such a nice sort of scornful kindness. I'd rather work with him than anyone."

She looked past her new associate into that world outside, where the sky seemed all wires and yellow heat-dust. She did not notice Thyme appraising her from head to foot, with a stare hostile and jealous, but pathetic, too, as though confessing that this girl was her superior.

"I'm sure I can't do that work!" she said suddenly.

The grey girl smiled. "Oh, I thought that at first." Then, with an admiring look: "But I do think it's rather a shame for you, you're so pretty. Perhaps they'd put you on to tabulation work, though that's awfully dull. We'll ask your cousin."

"No; I'll do the whole or nothing."

"Well," said the grey girl, "I've got one house left to-day. Would you like to come and see the sort of thing?"

She took a small notebook from a side pocket in her skirt.

"I can't get on without a pocket. You must have something that you can't leave behind. I left four little

bags and two dozen handkerchiefs in five weeks before I came back to pockets. It's rather a horrid house, I'm afraid!"

"I shall be all right," said Thyme shortly.

In the shop doorway the young tobacconist was taking the evening air. He greeted them with his polite but constitutionally leering smile.

"Good-evening, mith," he said; "nithe evening!"

"He's rather an awful little man," the grey girl said when they had achieved the crossing of the street; "but he's got quite a nice sense of humour."

"Ah!" said Thyme.

They had turned into a by-street, and stopped before a house which had obviously seen better days. Its windows were cracked, its doors unpainted, and down in the basement could be seen a pile of rags, an evil-looking man seated by it, and a blazing fire. Thyme felt a little gulping sensation. There was a putrid scent as of burning refuse. She looked at her companion. The grey girl was consulting her notebook, with a faint smile on her lips. And in Thyme's heart rose a feeling almost of hatred for this girl, who was so business-like in the presence of such sights and scents.

The door was opened by a young red-faced woman, who looked as if she had been asleep.

The grey girl screwed up her shining eyes. "Oh, do you mind if we come in a minute?" she said. "It would be so good of you. We're making a report."

"There's nothing to report here," the young woman answered. But the grey girl had slipped as gently past as though she had been the very spirit of adventure.

"Of course, I see that, but just as a matter of form, you know."

"I've parted with most of my things," the young woman said defensively, "since my husband died. It's a hard life."

"Yes, yes, but not worse than mine—always poking my nose into other people's houses."

The young woman was silent, evidently surprised.

"The landlord ought to keep you in better repair," said the grey girl. "He owns next door, too, doesn't he?"

The young woman nodded. "He's a bad landlord. All down the street 'ere it's the same. Can't get nothing done."

The grey girl had gone over to a dirty bassinette where a half-naked child sprawled. An ugly little girl with fat red cheeks was sitting on a stool beside it, close to an open locker wherein could be seen a number of old meat bones.'

"Your chickabiddies?" said the grey girl. "Aren't they sweet?"

The young woman's face became illumined by a smile.

"They're healthy," she said.

"That's more than can be said for all the children in the house, I expect," murmured the grey girl.

The young woman replied emphatically, as though voicing an old grievance: "The three on the first floor's not so bad, but I don't let 'em 'ave anything to do with that lot at the top."

Thyme saw her new friend's hand hover over the child's head like some pale dove. In answer to that gesture, the mother nodded. "Just that; you've got to clean 'em every time they go near them children at the top."

The grey girl looked at Thyme. 'That's where we've got to go, evidently,' she seemed to say.

"A dirty lot!" muttered the young woman.

"It's very hard on you."

"It is. I'm workin' at the laundry all day when I can get it. I can't look after the children—they get

everywhere."

"Very hard," murmured the grey girl. "I'll make a note of that."

Together with the little book, in which she was writing furiously, she had pulled out her handkerchief, and the sight of this handkerchief reposing on the floor gave Thyme a queer satisfaction, such as comes when one remarks in superior people the absence of a virtue existing in oneself.

"Well, we mustn't keep you, Mrs.—Mrs.—?"

"Cleary."

"Cleary. How old's this little one? Four? And the other? Two? They are ducks. Good-bye!"

In the corridor outside the grey girl whispered: "I do like the way we all pride ourselves on being better than someone else. I think it's so hopeful and jolly. Shall we go up and see the abyss at the top?"

CHAPTER XXXV

A YOUNG GIRL'S MIND

A young girl's mind is like a wood in Spring—now a rising mist of bluebells and flakes of dappled sunlight; now a world of still, wan, tender saplings, weeping they know not why. Through the curling twigs of boughs just green, its wings fly towards the stars; but the next moment they have drooped to mope beneath the damp bushes. It is ever yearning for and trembling at the future; in its secret places all the countless shapes of things that are to be are taking stealthy counsel of how to grow up without letting their gown of mystery fall. They rustle, whisper, shriek suddenly, and as suddenly fall into a delicious silence. From the first hazel-bush to the last may-tree it is an unending meeting-place of young solemn things eager to find out what they are, eager to rush forth to greet the kisses of the wind and sun, and for ever trembling back and hiding their faces. The spirit of that wood seems to lie with her ear close to the ground, a pale petal of a hand curved like a shell behind it, listening for the whisper of her own life. There she lies, white and supple, with dewy, wistful eyes, sighing: 'What is my meaning? Ah, I am everything! Is there in all the world a thing so wonderful as I?... Oh, I am nothing—my wings are heavy; I faint, I die!'

When Thyme, attended by the grey girl, emerged from the abyss at the top, her cheeks were flushed and her hands clenched. She said nothing. The grey girl, too, was silent, with a look such as a spirit divested of its body by long bathing in the river of reality might bend on one who has just come to dip her head. Thyme's quick eyes saw that look, and her colour deepened. She saw, too, the glance of the Jewish youth when Martin joined them in the doorway.

'Two girls now,' he seemed to say. 'He goes it, this young man!'

Supper was laid in her new friend's room—pressed beef, potato salad, stewed prunes, and ginger ale. Martin and the grey girl talked. Thyme ate in silence, but though her eyes seemed fastened on her plate, she saw every glance that passed between them, heard every word they said. Those glances were not remarkable, nor were those words particularly important, but they were spoken in tones that seemed important to Thyme. 'He never talks to me like that,' she thought.

When supper was over they went out into the streets to walk, but at the door the grey girl gave Thyme's arm a squeeze, her cheek a swift kiss, and turned back up the stairs.

"Aren't you coming?" shouted Martin.

Her voice was heard answering from above: "No, not tonight."

With the back of her hand Thyme rubbed off the kiss. The two cousins walked out amongst the traffic.

The evening was very warm and close; no breeze fanned the reeking town. Speaking little, they wandered among endless darkening streets, whence to return to the light and traffic of the Euston Road seemed like coming back to Heaven. At last, close again to her new home, Thyme said: "Why should one bother? It's all a horrible great machine, trying to blot us out; people are like insects when you put your thumb on them and smear them on a book. I hate—I loathe it!"

"They might as well be healthy insects while they last," answered Martin.

Thyme faced round at him. "I shan't sleep tonight, Martin; get out my bicycle for me."

Martin scrutinised her by the light of the street lamp. "All right," he said; "I'll come too."

There are, say moralists, roads that lead to Hell, but it was on a road that leads to Hampstead that the two young cyclists set forth towards eleven o'clock. The difference between the character of the two destinations was soon apparent, for whereas man taken in bulk had perhaps made Hell, Hampstead had obviously been made by the upper classes. There were trees and gardens, and instead of dark canals of sky banked by the roofs of houses and hazed with the yellow scum of London lights, the heavens spread out in a wide trembling pool. From that rampart of the town, the Spaniard's Road, two plains lay exposed to left and right; the scent of may-tree blossom had stolen up the hill; the rising moon clung to a fir-tree bough. Over the country the far stars presided, and sleep's dark wings were spread above the fields—silent, scarce breathing, lay the body of the land. But to the south, where the town, that restless head, was lying, the stars seemed to have fallen and were sown in the thousand furrows of its great grey marsh, and from the dark miasma of those streets there travelled up a rustle, a whisper, the far allurements of some deathless dancer, dragging men to watch the swirl of her black, spangled drapery, the gleam of her writhing limbs. Like the song of the sea in a shell was the murmur of that witch of motion, clasping to her the souls of men, drawing them down into a soul whom none had ever known to rest.

Above the two young cousins, scudding along that ridge between the country and the town, three thin white clouds trailed slowly towards the west-like tired seabirds drifting exhausted far out from land on a sea blue to blackness with unfathomable depth.

For an hour those two rode silently into the country.

"Have we come far enough?" Martin said at last.

Thyme shook her head. A long, steep hill beyond a little sleeping village had brought them to a standstill. Across the shadowy fields a pale sheet of water gleamed out in moonlight. Thyme turned down towards it.

"I'm hot," she said; "I want to bathe my face. Stay here. Don't come with me."

She left her bicycle, and, passing through a gate, vanished among the trees.

Martin stayed leaning against the gate. The village clock struck one. The distant call of a hunting owl, "Qu-wheek, qu-wheek!" sounded through the grave stillness of this last night of May. The moon at her curve's summit floated at peace on the blue surface of the sky, a great closed water-lily. And Martin saw through the trees scimitar-shaped reeds clustering black along the pool's shore. All about him the may-flowers were alight. It was such a night as makes dreams real and turns reality to dreams.

'All moonlit nonsense!' thought the young man, for the night had disturbed his heart.

But Thyme did not come back. He called to her, and in the death-like silence following his shouts he could hear his own heart beat. He passed in through the gate. She was nowhere to be seen. Why was she playing him this trick?

He turned up from the water among the trees, where the incense of the may-flowers hung heavy in the air.

'Never look for a thing!' he thought, and stopped to listen. It was so breathless that the leaves of a low bough against his cheek did not stir while he stood there. Presently he heard faint sounds, and stole towards them. Under a beech-tree he almost stumbled over Thyme, lying with her face pressed to the ground. The young doctor's heart gave a sickening leap; he quickly knelt down beside her. The girl's body, pressed close to the dry beech-mat, was being shaken by long sobs. From head to foot it quivered; her hat had been torn off, and the fragrance of her hair mingled with the fragrance of the night. In Martin's heart something seemed to turn over and over, as when a boy he had watched a rabbit caught in a snare. He touched her. She sat up, and, dashing her hand across her eyes, cried: "Go away! Oh, go away!"

He put his arm round her and waited. Five minutes passed. The air was trembling with a sort of pale vibration, for the moonlight had found a hole in the dark foliage and flooded on to the ground beside them, whitening the black beech-husks. Some tiny bird, disturbed by these unwonted visitors, began chirruping and fluttering, but was soon still again. To Martin, so strangely close to this young creature in the night, there came a sense of utter disturbance.

'Poor little thing!' he thought; 'be careful of her, comfort her!' Hardness seemed so broken out of her, and the night so wonderful! And there came into the young man's heart a throb of the knowledge—very rare with him, for he was not, like Hilary, a philosophising person—that she was as real as himself—suffering, hoping, feeling, not his hopes and feelings, but her own. His fingers kept pressing her shoulder through her thin blouse. And the touch of those fingers was worth more than any words, as this night, all moonlit dreams, was worth more than a thousand nights of sane reality.

Thyme twisted herself away from him at last. "I can't," she sobbed. "I'm not what you thought me—I'm not made for it!"

A scornful little smile curled Martin's lip. So that was it! But the smile soon died away. One did not hit what was already down!

Thyme's voice wailed through the silence. "I thought I could—but I want beautiful things. I can't bear it all so grey and horrible. I'm not like that girl. I'm-an-amateur!"

'If I kissed her—' Martin thought.

She sank down again, burying her face in the dark beech-mat. The moonlight had passed on. Her voice came faint and stifled, as out of the tomb of faith. "I'm no good. I never shall be. I'm as bad as mother!"

But to Martin there was only the scent of her hair.

"No," murmured Thyme's voice, "I'm only fit for miserable Art.... I'm only fit for—nothing!"

They were so close together on the dark beech mat that their bodies touched, and a longing to clasp her in his arms came over him.

"I'm a selfish beast!" moaned the smothered voice. "I don't really care for all these people—I only care because they're ugly for me to see!"

Martin reached his hand out to her hair. If she had shrunk away he would have seized her, but as though by instinct she let it rest there. And at her sudden stillness, strange and touching, Martin's quick passion left him. He slipped his arm round her and raised her up, as if she had been a child, and for a long time sat listening with a queer twisted smile to the moanings of her lost illusions.

The dawn found them still sitting there against the bole of the beech-tree. Her lips were parted; the tears had dried on her sleeping face, pillowed against his shoulder, while he still watched her sideways with the ghost of that twisted smile.

And beyond the grey water, like some tired wanton, the moon in an orange hood was stealing down to her rest between the trees.

CHAPTER XXXVI

STEPHEN SIGNS CHEQUES

Cecilia received the mystic document containing these words "Am quite all right. Address, 598, Euston Road, three doors off Martin. Letter follows explaining. Thyme," she had not even realised her little daughter's departure. She went up to Thyme's room at once, and opening all the drawers and cupboards, stared into them one by one. The many things she saw there allayed the first pangs of her disquiet.

'She has only taken one little trunk,' she thought, 'and left all her evening frocks.'

This act of independence alarmed rather than surprised her, such had been her sense of the unrest in the domestic atmosphere during the last month. Since the evening when she had found Thyme in foods of tears because of the Hughs' baby, her maternal eyes had not failed to notice something new in the child's demeanour—a moodiness, an air almost of conspiracy, together with an emphatic increase of youthful sarcasm: Fearful of probing deep, she had sought no confidence, nor had she divulged her doubts to Stephen.

Amongst the blouses a sheet of blue ruled paper, which had evidently escaped from a notebook,

caught her eye. Sentences were scrawled on it in pencil. Cecilia read: "That poor little dead thing was so grey and pinched, and I seemed to realise all of a sudden how awful it is for them. I must—I must—I will do something!"

Cecilia dropped the sheet of paper; her hand was trembling. There was no mystery in that departure now, and Stephen's words came into her mind: "It's all very well up to a certain point, and nobody sympathises with them more than I do; but after that it becomes destructive of all comfort, and that does no good to anyone."

The sound sense of those words had made her feel queer when they were spoken; they were even more sensible than she had thought. Did her little daughter, so young and pretty, seriously mean to plunge into the rescue work of dismal slums, to cut herself adrift from sweet sounds and scents and colours, from music and art, from dancing, flowers, and all that made life beautiful? The secret forces of fastidiousness, an inborn dread of the fanatical, and all her real ignorance of what such a life was like, rose in Cecilia with a force which made her feel quite sick. Better that she herself should do this thing than that her own child should be deprived of air and light and all the just environment of her youth and beauty. 'She must come back—she must listen to me!' she thought. 'We will begin together; we will start a nice little creche of our own, or—perhaps Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace could find us some regular work on one of her committees.'

Then suddenly she conceived a thought which made her blood run positively cold. What if it were a matter of heredity? What if Thyme had inherited her grandfather's single-mindedness? Martin was giving proof of it. Things, she knew, often skipped a generation and then set in again. Surely, surely, it could not have done that! With longing, yet with dread, she waited for the sound of Stephen's latchkey. It came at its appointed time.

Even in her agitation Cecilia did not forget to spare him, all she could. She began by giving him a kiss, and then said casually: "Thyme has got a whim into her head."

"What whim?"

"It's rather what you might expect," faltered Cecilia, "from her going about so much with Martin."

Stephen's face assumed at once an air of dry derision; there was no love lost between him and his young nephew-in-law.

"The Sanitist?" he said; "ah! Well?"

"She has gone off to do work—some place in the Euston Road. I've had a telegram. Oh, and I found this, Stephen."

She held out to him half-heartedly the two bits of paper, one pinkish-brown, the other blue. Stephen saw that she was trembling. He took them from her, read them, and looked at her again. He had a real affection for his wife, and the tradition of consideration for other people's feelings was bred in him, so that at this moment, so vitally disturbing, the first thing he did was to put his hand on her shoulder and give it a reassuring squeeze. But there was also in Stephen a certain primitive virility, pickled, it is true, at Cambridge, and in the Law Courts dried, but still preserving something of its possessive and assertive quality, and the second thing he did was to say, "No, I'm damned!"

In that little sentence lay the whole psychology of his attitude towards this situation and all the difference between two classes of the population. Mr. Purcey would undoubtedly have said: "Well, I'm damned!" Stephen, by saying "No, I'm damned!" betrayed that before he could be damned he had been obliged to wrestle and contend with something, and Cecilia, who was always wrestling too, knew this something to be that queer new thing, a Social Conscience, the dim bogey stalking pale about the houses of those who, through the accidents of leisure or of culture, had once left the door open to the suspicion: Is it possible that there is a class of people besides my own, or am I dreaming? Happy the millions, poor or rich, not yet condemned to watch the wistful visiting or hear the husky mutter of that ghost, happy in their homes, blessed by a less disquieting god. Such were Cecilia's inner feelings.

Even now she did not quite plumb the depths of Stephen's; she felt his struggle with the ghost; she felt and admired his victory. What she did not, could not, perhaps, realise, was the precise nature of the outrage inflicted on him by Thyme's action. With her—being a woman—the matter was more practical; she did not grasp, had never grasped, the architectural nature of Stephen's mind—how really hurt he was by what did not seem to him in due and proper order.

He spoke: "Why on earth, if she felt like that, couldn't she have gone to work in the ordinary way? She could have put herself in connection with some proper charitable society—I should never have objected to that. It's all that young Sanitary idiot!"

"I believe," Cecilia faltered, "that Martin's is a society. It's a kind of medical Socialism, or something of that sort. He has tremendous faith in it."

Stephen's lip curled.

"He may have as much faith as he likes," he said, with the restraint that was one of his best qualities, "so long as he doesn't infect my daughter with it."

Cecilia said suddenly: "Oh! what are we to do, Stephen? Shall I go over there to-night?"

As one may see a shadow pass down on a cornfield, so came the cloud on Stephen's face. It was as though he had not realised till then the full extent of what this meant. For a minute he was silent. "Better wait for her letter," he said at last. "He's her cousin, after all, and Mrs. Grundy's dead—in the Euston Road, at all events."

So, trying to spare each other all they could of anxiety, and careful to abstain from any hint of trouble before the servants, they dined and went to bed.

At that hour between the night and morning, when man's vitality is lowest, and the tremors of his spirit, like birds of ill omen, fly round and round him, beating their long plumes against his cheeks, Stephen woke.

It was very still. A bar of pearly-grey dawn showed between the filmy curtains, which stirred with a regular, faint movement, like the puffing of a sleeper's lips. The tide of the wind, woven in Mr. Stone's fancy of the souls of men, was at low ebb. Feebly it fanned the houses and hovels where the myriad forms of men lay sleeping, unconscious of its breath; so faint life's pulse, that men and shadows seemed for that brief moment mingled in the town's sleep. Over the million varied roofs, over the hundred million little different shapes of men and things, the wind's quiet, visiting wand had stilled all into the wonder state of nothingness, when life is passing into death, death into new life, and self is at its feeblest.

And Stephen's self, feeling the magnetic currents of that ebb-tide drawing it down into murmurous slumber, out beyond the sand-bars of individuality and class, threw up its little hands and began to cry for help. The purple sea of self-forgetfulness, under the dim, impersonal sky, seemed to him so cold and terrible. It had no limit that he could see, no rules but such as hung too far away, written in the hieroglyphics of paling stars. He could feel no order in the lift and lap of the wan waters round his limbs. Where would those waters carry him? To what depth of still green silence? Was his own little daughter to go down into this sea that knew no creed but that of self-forgetfulness, that respected neither class nor person—this sea where a few wandering streaks seemed all the evidence of the precious differences between mankind? God forbid it!

And, turning on his elbow, he looked at her who had given him this daughter. In the mystery of his wife's sleeping face—the face of her most near and dear to him—he tried hard not to see a likeness to Mr. Stone. He fell back somewhat comforted with the thought: 'That old chap has his one idea—his Universal Brotherhood. He's absolutely absorbed in it. I don't see it in Cis's face a bit. Quite the contrary.'

But suddenly a flash of clear, hard cynicism amounting to inspiration utterly disturbed him: The old chap, indeed, was so wrapped up in himself and his precious book as to be quite unconscious that anyone else was alive. Could one be everybody's brother if one were blind to their existence? But this freak of Thyme's was an actual try to be everybody's sister. For that, he supposed, one must forget oneself. Why, it was really even a worse case than that of Mr. Stone! And to Stephen there was something awful in this thought.

The first small bird of morning, close to the open window, uttered a feeble chirrup. Into Stephen's mind there leaped without reason recollection of the morning after his first term at school, when, awakened by the birds, he had started up and fished out from under his pillow his catapult and the box of shot he had brought home and taken to sleep with him. He seemed to see again those leaden shot with their bluish sheen, and to feel them, round, and soft, and heavy, rolling about his palm. He seemed to hear Hilary's surprised voice saying: "Hallo, Stevie! you awake?"

No one had ever had a better brother than old Hilary. His only fault was that he had always been too kind. It was his kindness that had done for him, and made his married life a failure. He had never asserted himself enough with that woman, his wife. Stephen turned over on his other side. 'All this confounded business,' he thought, 'comes from over-sympathising. That's what's the matter with Thyme, too.' Long he lay thus, while the light grew stronger, listening to Cecilia's gentle breathing, disturbed to his very marrow by these thoughts.

The first post brought no letter from Thyme, and the announcement soon after, that Mr. Hilary had come to breakfast, was received by both Stephen and Cecilia with a welcome such as the anxious give to anything which shows promise of distracting them.

Stephen made haste down. Hilary, with a very grave and harassed face, was in the dining-room. It was he, however, who, after one look at Stephen, said:

"What's the matter, Stevie?"

Stephen took up the Standard. In spite of his self-control, his hand shook a little.

"It's a ridiculous business," he said. "That precious young Sanitist has so worked his confounded theories into Thyme that she has gone off to the Euston Road to put them into practice, of all things!"

At the half-concerned amusement on Hilary's face his quick and rather narrow eyes glinted.

"It's not exactly for you to laugh, Hilary," he said. "It's all of a piece with your cursed sentimentality about those Hughs, and that girl. I knew it would end in a mess."

Hilary answered this unjust and unexpected outburst by a look, and Stephen, with the strange feeling of inferiority which would come to him in Hilary's presence against his better judgment, lowered his own glance.

"My dear boy," said Hilary, "if any bit of my character has crept into Thyme, I'm truly sorry."

Stephen took his brother's hand and gave it a good grip; and, Cecilia coming in, they all sat down.

Cecilia at once noted what Stephen in his preoccupation had not—that Hilary had come to tell them something. But she did not like to ask him what it was, though she knew that in the presence of their trouble Hilary was too delicate to obtrude his own. She did not like, either, to talk of her trouble in the presence of his. They all talked, therefore, of indifferent things—what music they had heard, what plays they had seen—eating but little, and drinking tea. In the middle of a remark about the opera, Stephen, looking up, saw Martin himself standing in the doorway. The young Sanitist looked pale, dusty, and dishevelled. He advanced towards Cecilia, and said with his usual cool determination:

"I've brought her back, Aunt Cis."

At that moment, fraught with such relief, such pure joy, such desire to say a thousand things, Cecilia could only murmur: "Oh, Martin!"

Stephen, who had jumped up, asked: "Where is she?"

"Gone to her room."

"Then perhaps," said Stephen, regaining at once his dry composure, "you will give us some explanation of this folly."

"She's no use to us at present."

"Indeed!"

"None."

"Then," said Stephen, "kindly understand that we have no use for you in future, or any of your sort."

Martin looked round the table, resting his eyes on each in turn.

"You're right," he said. "Good-bye!"

Hilary and Cecilia had risen, too. There was silence. Stephen crossed to the door.

"You seem to me," he said suddenly, in his driest voice, "with your new manners and ideas, quite a pernicious youth."

Cecilia stretched her hands out towards Martin, and there was a faint tinkling as of chains.

"You must know, dear," she said, "how anxious we've all been. Of course, your uncle doesn't mean that."

The same scornful tenderness with which he was wont to look at Thyme passed into Martin's face.

"All right, Aunt Cis," he said; "if Stephen doesn't mean it, he ought to. To mean things is what matters." He stooped and kissed her forehead. "Give that to Thyme for me," he said. "I shan't see her for a bit."

"You'll never see her, sir," said Stephen dryly, "if I can help it! The liquor of your Sanitism is too bright and effervescent."

Martin's smile broadened. "For old bottles," he said, and with another slow look round went out.

Stephen's mouth assumed its driest twist. "Bumptious young devil!" he said. "If that is the new young man, defend us!"

Over the cool dining-room, with its faint scent of pinks, of melon, and of ham, came silence. Suddenly Cecilia glided from the room. Her light footsteps were heard hurrying, now that she was not visible, up to Thyme.

Hilary, too, had moved towards the door. In spite of his preoccupation, Stephen could not help noticing how very worn his brother looked.

"You look quite seedy, old boy," he said. "Will you have some brandy?"

Hilary shook his head.

"Now that you've got Thyme back," he said, "I'd better let you know my news. I'm going abroad tomorrow. I don't know whether I shall come back again to live with B."

Stephen gave a low whistle; then, pressing Hilary's arm, he said: "Anything you decide, old man, I'll always back you in, but—"

"I'm going alone."

In his relief Stephen violated the laws of reticence.

"Thank Heaven for that! I was afraid you were beginning to lose your head about that girl!"

"I'm not quite fool enough," said Hilary, "to imagine that such a liaison would be anything but misery in the long-run. If I took the child I should have to stick to her; but I'm not proud of leaving her in the lurch, Stevie."

The tone of his voice was so bitter that Stephen seized his hand.

"My dear old man, you're too kind. Why, she's no hold on you—not the smallest in the world!"

"Except the hold of this devotion I've roused in her, God knows how, and her destitution."

"You let these people haunt you," said Stephen. "It's quite a mistake—it really is."

"I had forgotten to mention that I am not an iceberg," muttered Hilary.

Stephen looked into his face without speaking, then with the utmost earnestness he said:

"However much you may be attracted, it's simply unthinkable for a man like you to go outside his class."

"Class! Yes!" muttered Hilary: "Good-bye!"

And with a long grip of his brother's hand he went away.

Stephen turned to the window. For all the care and contrivance bestowed on the view, far away to the left the back courts of an alley could be seen; and as though some gadfly had planted in him its small poisonous sting, he moved back from the sight at once. 'Confusion!' he thought. 'Are we never to get rid of these infernal people?'

His eyes lighted on the melon. A single slice lay by itself on a blue-green dish. Leaning over a plate, with a desperation quite unlike himself, he took an enormous bite. Again and again he bit the slice, then almost threw it from him, and dipped his fingers in a bowl.

'Thank God!' he thought, 'that's over! What an escape!'

Whether he meant Hilary's escape or Thyme's was doubtful, but there came on him a longing to rush up to his little daughter's room, and hug her. He suppressed it, and sat down at the bureau; he was

suddenly experiencing a sensation such as he had sometimes felt on a perfect day, or after physical danger, of too much benefit, of something that he would like to return thanks for, yet knew not how. His hand stole to the inner pocket of his black coat. It stole out again; there was a cheque-book in it. Before his mind's eye, starting up one after the other, he saw the names of the societies he supported, or meant sometime, if he could afford it, to support. He reached his hand out for a pen. The still, small noise of the nib travelling across the cheques mingled with the buzzing of a single fly.

These sounds Cecilia heard, when, from the open door, she saw the thin back of her husband's neck, with its softly graduated hair, bent forward above the bureau. She stole over to him, and pressed herself against his arm.

Stephen, staying the progress of his pen, looked up at her. Their eyes met, and, bending down, Cecilia put her cheek to his.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE FLOWERING OF THE ALOE

This same day, returning through Kensington Gardens, from his preparations for departure, Hilary came suddenly on Bianca standing by the shores of the Round Pond.

To the eyes of the frequenters of these Elysian fields, where so many men and shadows daily steal recreation, to the eyes of all drinking in those green gardens their honeyed draught of peace, this husband and wife appeared merely a distinguished-looking couple, animated by a leisured harmony. For the time was not yet when men were one, and could tell by instinct what was passing in each other's hearts.

In truth, there were not too many people in London who, in their situation, would have behaved with such seemliness—not too many so civilised as they!

Estranged, and soon to part, they retained the manner of accord up to the last. Not for them the matrimonial brawl, the solemn accusation and recrimination, the pathetic protestations of proprietary rights. For them no sacred view that at all costs they must make each other miserable—not even the belief that they had the right to do so. No, there was no relief for their sore hearts. They walked side by side, treating each other's feelings with respect, as if there had been no terrible heart-turnings throughout the eighteen years in which they had first loved, then, through mysterious disharmony, drifted apart; as if there were now between them no question of this girl.

Presently Hilary said:

"I've been into town and made my preparations; I'm starting tomorrow for the mountains. There will be no necessity for you to leave your father."

"Are you taking her?"

It was beautifully uttered, without a trace of bias or curiosity, with an unforced accent, neither indifferent nor too interested—no one could have told whether it was meant for generosity or malice. Hilary took it for the former.

"Thank you," he said; "but that comedy is finished."

Close to the edge of the Round Pond a swanlike cutter was putting out to sea; in the wake of this fair creature a tiny scooped-out bit of wood, with three feathers for masts, bobbed and trembled; and the two small ragged boys who owned that little galley were stretching bits of branch out towards her over the bright waters.

Bianca looked, without seeing, at this proof of man's pride in his own property. A thin gold chain hung round her neck; suddenly she thrust it into the bosom of her dress. It had broken into two, between her fingers.

They reached home without another word.

At the door of Hilary's study sat Miranda. The little person answered his caress by a shiver of her

sleek skin, then curled herself down again on the spot she had already warmed.

"Aren't you coming in with me?" he said.

Miranda did not move.

The reason for her refusal was apparent when Hilary had entered. Close to the long bookcase, behind the bust of Socrates, stood the little model. Very still, as if fearing to betray itself by sound or movement, was her figure in its blue-green frock, and a brimless toque of brown straw, with two purplish roses squashed together into a band of darker velvet. Beside those roses a tiny peacock's feather had been slipped in—unholy little visitor, slanting backward, trying, as it were, to draw all eyes, yet to escape notice. And, wedged between the grim white bust and the dark bookcase, the girl herself was like some unlawful spirit which had slid in there, and stood trembling and vibrating, ready to be shuttered out.

Before this apparition Hilary recoiled towards the door, hesitated, and returned.

"You should not have come here," he muttered, "after what we said to you yesterday."

The little model answered quickly: "But I've seen Hughs, Mr. Dallison. He's found out where I live. Oh, he does look dreadful; he frightens me. I can't ever stay there now."

She had come a little out of her hiding-place, and stood fidgeting her hands and looking down.

'She's not speaking the truth,' thought Hilary.

The little model gave him a furtive glance. "I did see him," she said. "I must go right away now; it wouldn't be safe, would it?" Again she gave him that swift look.

Hilary thought suddenly: 'She is using my own weapon against me. If she has seen the man, he didn't frighten her. It serves me right!' With a dry laugh, he turned his back.

There was a rustling sound. The little model had moved out of her retreat, and stood between him and the door. At this stealthy action, Hilary felt once more the tremor which had come over him when he sat beside her in the Broad Walk after the baby's funeral. Outside in the garden a pigeon was pouring forth a continuous love song; Hilary heard nothing of it, conscious only of the figure of the girl behind him—that young figure which had twined itself about his senses.

"Well, what is it you want?" he said at last.

The little model answered by another question.

'Are you really going away, Mr. Dallison?'

"I am."

She raised her hands to the level of her breast, as though she meant to clasp them together; without doing so, however, she dropped them to her sides. They were cased in very worn suede gloves, and in this dire moment of embarrassment Hilary's eyes fastened themselves on those slim hands moving against her skirt.

The little model tried at once to slip them away behind her. Suddenly she said in her matter-of-fact voice: "I only wanted to ask—Can't I come too?"

At this question, whose simplicity might have made an angel smile, Hilary experienced a sensation as if his bones had been turned to water. It was strange—delicious—as though he had been suddenly offered all that he wanted of her, without all those things that he did not want. He stood regarding her silently. Her cheeks and neck were red; there was a red tinge, too, in her eyelids, deepening the "chicory-flower" colour of her eyes. She began to speak, repeating a lesson evidently learned by heart.

"I wouldn't be in your way. I wouldn't cost much. I could do everything you wanted. I could learn typewriting. I needn't live too near, or that; if you didn't want me, because of people talking; I'm used to being alone. Oh, Mr. Dallison, I could do everything for you. I wouldn't mind anything, and I'm not like some girls; I do know what I'm talking about."

"Do you?"

The little model put her hands up, and, covering her face, said:

"If you'd try and see!"

Hilary's sensuous feeling almost vanished; a lump rose in his throat instead.

"My child," he said, "you are too generous!"

The little model seemed to know instinctively that by touching his spirit she had lost ground. Uncovering her face, she spoke breathlessly, growing very pale:

"Oh no, I'm not. I want to be let come; I don't want to stay here. I know I'll get into mischief if you don't take me—oh, I know I will!"

"If I were to let you come with me," said Hilary, "what then? What sort of companion should I be to you, or you to me? You know very well. Only one sort. It's no use pretending, child, that we've any interests in common."

The little model came closer.

"I know what I am," she said, "and I don't want to be anything else. I can do what you tell me to, and I shan't ever complain. I'm not worth any more!"

"You're worth more," muttered Hilary, "than I can ever give you, and I'm worth more than you can ever give me."

The little model tried to answer, but her words would not pass her throat; she threw her head back trying to free them, and stood, swaying. Seeing her like this before him, white as a sheet, with her eyes closed and her lips parted, as though about to faint, Hilary seized her by the shoulders. At the touch of those soft shoulders, his face became suffused with blood, his lips trembled. Suddenly her eyes opened ever so little between their lids, and looked at him. And the perception that she was not really going to faint, that it was a little desperate wile of this child Delilah, made him wrench away his hands. The moment she felt that grasp relax she sank down and clasped his knees, pressing them to her bosom so that he could not stir. Closer and closer she pressed them to her, till it seemed as though she must be bruising her flesh. Her breath came in sobs; her eyes were closed; her lips quivered upwards. In the clutch of her clinging body there seemed suddenly the whole of woman's power of self-abandonment. It was just that, which, at this moment, so horribly painful to him, prevented Hilary from seizing her in his arms just that queer seeming self-effacement, as though she were lost to knowledge of what she did. It seemed too brutal, too like taking advantage of a child.

From calm is born the wind, the ripple from the still pool, self out of nothingness—so all passes imperceptibly, no man knows how. The little model's moment of self-oblivion passed, and into her wet eyes her plain, twisting spirit suddenly writhed up again, for all the world as if she had said: 'I won't let you go; I'll keep you—I'll keep you.'

Hilary broke away from her, and she fell forward on her face.

"Get up, child," he said—"get up; for God's sake, don't lie there!"

She rose obediently, choking down her sobs, mopping her face with a small, dirty handkerchief. Suddenly, taking a step towards him, she clenched both her hands and struck them downwards.

"I'll go to the bad," she said—"I will—if you don't take me!" And, her breast heaving, her hair all loose, she stared straight into his face with her red-rimmed eyes. Hilary turned suddenly, took a book up from the writing-table, and opened it. His face was again suffused with blood; his hands and lips trembled; his eyes had a queer fixed stare.

"Not now, not now," he muttered; "go away now. I'll come to you to-morrow."

The little model gave him the look a dog gives you when it asks if you are deceiving him. She made a sign on her breast, as a Catholic might make the sign of his religion, drawing her fingers together, and clutching at herself with them, then passed her little dirty handkerchief once more over her eyes, and, turning round, went out.

Hilary remained standing where he was, reading the open book without apprehending what it was.

There was a wistful sound, as of breath escaping hurriedly. Mr. Stone was standing in the open doorway.

"She has been here," he said. "I saw her go away."

Hilary dropped the book; his nerves were utterly unstrung. Then, pointing to a chair, he said: "Won't

you sit down, sir?"

Mr. Stone came close up to his son-in-law.

"Is she in trouble?"

"Yes," murmured Hilary.

"She is too young to be in trouble. Did you tell her that?"

Hilary shook his head.

"Has the man hurt her?"

Again Hilary shook his head.

"What is her trouble, then?" said Mr. Stone. The closeness of this catechism, the intent stare of the old man's eyes, were more than Hilary could bear. He turned away.

"You ask me something that I cannot answer.

"Why?"

"It is a private matter."

With the blood still beating in his temples, his lips still quivering, and the feeling of the girl's clasp round his knees, he almost hated this old man who stood there putting such blind questions.

Then suddenly in Mr. Stone's eyes he saw a startling change, as in the face of a man who regains consciousness after days of vacancy. His whole countenance had become alive with a sort of jealous understanding. The warmth which the little model brought to his old spirit had licked up the fog of his Idea, and made him see what was going on before his eyes.

At that look Hilary braced himself against the wall.

A flush spread slowly over Mr. Stone's face. He spoke with rare hesitation. In this sudden coming back to the world of men and things he seemed astray.

"I am not going," he stammered, "to ask you any more. I could not pry into a private matter. That would not be—" His voice failed; he looked down.

Hilary bowed, touched to the quick by the return to life of this old man, so long lost to facts, and by the delicacy in that old face.

"I will not intrude further on your trouble," said Mr. Stone, "whatever it may be. I am sorry that you are unhappy, too."

Very slowly, and without again looking up at his son-in-law, he went out.

Hilary remained standing where he had been left against the wall.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE HOME-COMING OF HUGHS

Hilary had evidently been right in thinking the little model was not speaking the truth when she said she had seen Hughs, for it was not until early on the following morning that three persons traversed the long winding road leading from Wormwood Scrubs to Kensington. They preserved silence, not because there was nothing in their hearts to be expressed, but because there was too much; and they walked in the giraffe-like formation peculiar to the lower classes—Hughs in front; Mrs. Hughs to the left, a foot or two behind; and a yard behind her, to the left again, her son Stanley. They made no sign of noticing anyone in the road besides themselves, and no one in the road gave sign of noticing that they were there; but in their three minds, so differently fashioned, a verb was dumbly, and with varying emotion, being conjugated:

"I've been in prison." "You've been in prison. He's been in prison."

Beneath the seeming acquiescence of a man subject to domination from his birth up, those four words covered in Hughs such a whirlpool of surging sensation, such ferocity of bitterness, and madness, and defiance, that no outpouring could have appreciably relieved its course. The same four words summed up in Mrs. Hughs so strange a mingling of fear, commiseration, loyalty, shame, and trembling curiosity at the new factor which had come into the life of all this little family walking giraffe-like back to Kensington that to have gone beyond them would have been like plunging into a wintry river. To their son the four words were as a legend of romance, conjuring up no definite image, lighting merely the glow of wonder.

"Don't lag, Stanley. Keep up with your father."

The little boy took three steps at an increased pace, then fell behind again. His black eyes seemed to answer: 'You say that because you don't know what else to say.' And without alteration in their giraffe-like formation, but again in silence, the three proceeded.

In the heart of the seamstress doubt and fear were being slowly knit into dread of the first sound to pass her husband's lips. What would he ask? How should she answer? Would he talk wild, or would he talk sensible? Would he have forgotten that young girl, or had he nursed and nourished his wicked fancy in the house of grief and silence? Would he ask where the baby was? Would he speak a kind word to her? But alongside her dread there was guttering within her the undying resolution not to 'let him go from her, if it were ever so, to that young girl'

"Don't lag, Stanley!"

At the reiteration of those words Hughs spoke.

"Let the boy alone! You'll be nagging at the baby next!"

Hoarse and grating, like sounds issuing from a damp vault, was this first speech.

The seamstress's eyes brimmed over.

"I won't get the chance," she stammered out. "He's gone!"

Hughs' teeth gleamed like those of a dog at bay.

"Who's taken him? You let me know the name."

Tears rolled down the seamstress's cheeks; she could not answer. Her little son's thin voice rose instead:

"Baby's dead. We buried him in the ground. I saw it. Mr. Creed came in the cab with me."

White flecks appeared suddenly at the corners of Hughs' lips. He wiped the back of his hand across his mouth, and once more, giraffe-like, the little family marched on....

"Westminster," in his threadbare summer jacket—for the day was warm—had been standing for some little time in Mrs. Budgen's doorway on the ground floor at Hound Street. Knowing that Hughs was to be released that morning early, he had, with the circumspection and foresight of his character, reasoned thus: 'I shan't lie easy in my bed, I shan't hev no peace until I know that low feller's not a-goin' to misdemean himself with me. It's no good to go a-puttin' of it off. I don't want him comin' to my room attackin' of old men. I'll be previous with him in the passage. The lame woman 'll let me. I shan't trouble her. She'll be palliable between me and him, in case he goes for to attack me. I ain't afraid of him.'

But, as the minutes of waiting went by, his old tongue, like that of a dog expecting chastisement, appeared ever more frequently to moisten his twisted, discoloured lips. 'This comes of mixin' up with soldiers,' he thought, 'and a lowclass o' man like that. I ought to ha' changed my lodgin's. He'll be askin' me where that young girl is, I shouldn't wonder, an' him lost his character and his job, and everything, and all because o' women!'

He watched the broad-faced woman, Mrs. Budgen, in whose grey eyes the fighting light so fortunately never died, painfully doing out her rooms, and propping herself against the chest of drawers whereon clustered china cups and dogs as thick as toadstools on a bank.

"I've told my Charlie," she said, "to keep clear of Hughs a bit. They comes out as prickly as hedgehogs. Pick a quarrel as soon as look at you, they will."

'Oh dear,' thought Creed, 'she's full o' cold comfort.' But, careful of his dignity, he answered, "I'm a-waitin' here to engage the situation. You don't think he'll attack of me with definition at this time in the mornin'?"

The lame woman shrugged her shoulders. "He'll have had a drop of something," she said, "before he comes home. They gets a cold feelin' in the stomach in them places, poor creatures!"

The old butler's heart quavered up into his mouth. He lifted his shaking hand, and put it to his lips, as though to readjust himself.

"Oh yes," he said; "I ought to ha' given notice, and took my things away; but there, poor woman, it seemed a-hittin' of her when she was down. And I don't want to make no move. I ain't got no one else that's interested in me. This woman's very good about mendin' of my clothes. Oh dear, yes; she don't grudge a little thing like that!"

The lame woman hobbled from her post of rest, and began to make the bed with the frown that always accompanied a task which strained the contracted muscles of her leg. "If you don't help your neighbour, your neighbour don't help you," she said sententiously.

Creed fixed his iron-rimmed gaze on her in silence. He was considering perhaps how he stood with regard to Hughs in the light of that remark.

"I attended of his baby's funeral," he said. "Oh dear, he's here a'ready!"

The family of Hughs, indeed, stood in the doorway. The spiritual process by which "Westminster" had gone through life was displayed completely in the next few seconds. 'It's so important for me to keep alive and well,' his eyes seemed saying. 'I know the class of man you are, but now you're here it's not a bit o' use my bein' frightened. I'm bound to get up-sides with you. Ho! yes; keep yourself to yourself, and don't you let me hev any o' your nonsense, 'cause I won't stand it. Oh dear, no!'

Beads of perspiration stood thick on his patchily coloured forehead; with lips stiffening, and intently staring eyes, he waited for what the released prisoner would say.

Hughs, whose face had blanched in the prison to a sallow grey-white hue, and whose black eyes seemed to have sunk back into his head, slowly looked the old man up and down. At last he took his cap off, showing his cropped hair.

"You got me that, daddy," he said, "but I don't bear you malice. Come up and have a cup o' tea with us."

And, turning on his heel, he began to mount the stairs, followed by his wife and child. Breathing hard, the old butler mounted too.

In the room on the second floor, where the baby no longer lived, a haddock on the table was endeavouring to be fresh; round it were slices of bread on plates, a piece of butter in a pie-dish, a teapot, brown sugar in a basin, and, side by side a little jug of cold blue milk and a half-empty bottle of red vinegar. Close to one plate a bunch of stocks and gilly flowers reposed on the dirty tablecloth, as though dropped and forgotten by the God of Love. Their faint perfume stole through the other odours. The old butler fixed his eyes on it.

'The poor woman bought that,' he thought, 'hopin' for to remind him of old days. "She had them flowers on her weddin'-day, I shouldn't wonder!" This poetical conception surprising him, he turned towards the little boy, and said "This 'll be a memorial to you, as you gets older." And without another word all sat down. They ate in silence, and the old butler thought "That 'addick ain't what it was; but a beautiful cup o' tea. He don't eat nothing; he's more amenable to reason than I expected. There's no one won't be too pleased to see him now!'

His eyes, travelling to the spot from which the bayonet had been removed, rested on the print of the Nativity. "'Suffer little children to come unto Me,'" he thought, "'and forbid them not." He'll be glad to hear there was two carriages followed him home.'

And, taking his time, he cleared his throat in preparation for speech. But before the singular muteness of this family sounds would not come. Finishing his tea, he tremblingly arose. Things that he might have said jostled in his mind. 'Very pleased to 'a seen you. Hope you're in good health at the present time of speaking. Don't let me intrude on you. We've all a-got to die some time or other!' They remained unuttered. Making a vague movement of his skinny hand, he walked feebly but quickly to the door. When he stood but half-way within the room, he made his final effort.

"I'm not a-goin' to say nothing," he said; "that'd be superlative! I wish you a good-morning."

Outside he waited a second, then grasped the banister.

'For all he sets so quiet, they've done him no good in that place,' he thought. 'Them eyes of his!' And slowly he descended, full of a sort of very deep surprise. 'I misjudged of him,' he was thinking; 'he never was nothing but a 'armless human being. We all has our predijuces—I misjudged of him. They've broke his 'eart between 'em—that they have.'

The silence in the room continued after his departure. But when the little boy had gone to school, Hughs rose and lay down on the bed. He rested there, unmoving, with his face towards the wall, his arms clasped round his head to comfort it. The seamstress, stealing about her avocations, paused now and then to look at him. If he had raged at her, if he had raged at everything, it would not have been so terrifying as this utter silence, which passed her comprehension—this silence as of a man flung by the sea against a rock, and pinned there with the life crushed out of him. All her inarticulate longing, now that her baby was gone, to be close to something in her grey life, to pass the unfranchisable barrier dividing her from the world, seemed to well up, to flow against this wall of silence and to recoil.

Twice or three times she addressed him timidly by name, or made some trivial remark. He did not answer, as though in very truth he had been the shadow of a man lying there. And the injustice of this silence seemed to her so terrible. Was she not his wife? Had she not borne him five, and toiled to keep him from that girl? Was it her fault if she had made his life a hell with her jealousy, as he had cried out that morning before he went for her, and was "put away"? He was her "man." It had been her right—nay, more, her duty!

And still he lay there silent. From the narrow street where no traffic passed, the cries of a coster and distant whistlings mounted through the unwholesome air. Some sparrows in the eave were chirruping incessantly. The little sandy house-cat had stolen in, and, crouched against the doorpost, was fastening her eyes on the plate which, held the remnants of the fish. The seamstress bowed her forehead to the flowers on the table; unable any longer to bear the mystery of this silence, she wept. But the dark figure on the bed only pressed his arms closer round his head, as though there were within him a living death passing the speech of men.

The little sandy cat, creeping across the floor, fixed its claws in the backbone of the fish, and drew it beneath the bed.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE DUEL

Bianca did not see her husband after their return together from the Round Pond. She dined out that evening, and in the morning avoided any interview. When Hilary's luggage was brought down and the cab summoned, she slipped up to take shelter in her room. Presently the sound of his footsteps coming along the passage stopped outside her door. He tapped. She did not answer.

Good-bye would be a mockery! Let him go with the words unsaid! And as though the thought had found its way through the closed door, she heard his footsteps recede again. She saw him presently go out to the cab with his head bent down, saw him stoop and pat Miranda. Hot tears sprang into her eyes. She heard the cab-wheels roll away.

The heart is like the face of an Eastern woman—warm and glowing, behind swathe on swathe of fabric. At each fresh touch from the fingers of Life, some new corner, some hidden curve or angle, comes into view, to be seen last of all perhaps never to be seen by the one who owns them.

When the cab had driven away there came into Bianca's heart a sense of the irreparable, and, mysteriously entwined with that arid ache, a sort of bitter pity: What would happen to this wretched girl now that he was gone? Would she go completely to the bad—till she became one of those poor creatures like the figure in "The Shadow," who stood beneath lampposts in the streets? Out of this speculation, which was bitter as the taste of aloes, there came to her a craving for some palliative, some sweetness, some expression of that instinct of fellow-feeling deep in each human breast, however disharmonic. But even with that craving was mingled the itch to justify herself, and prove that she could rise above jealousy.

She made her way to the little model's lodging.

A child admitted her into the bleak passage that served for hall. The strange medley of emotions passing through Bianca's breast while she stood outside the girl's door did not show in her face, which wore its customary restrained, half-mocking look.

The little model's voice faintly said: "Come in."

The room was in disorder, as though soon to be deserted. A closed and corded trunk stood in the centre of the floor; the bed, stripped of clothing, lay disclosed in all the barrenness of discoloured ticking. The china utensils of the washstand were turned head downwards. Beside that washstand the little model, with her hat on—the hat with the purplish-pink roses and the little peacock's feather—stood in the struck, shrinking attitude of one who, coming forward in the expectation of a kiss, has received a blow.

"You are leaving here, then?" Bianca said quietly.

"Yes," the girl murmured.

"Don't you like this part? Is it too far from your work?"

Again the little model whispered: "Yes."

Bianca's eyes travelled slowly over the blue beflowered walls and rust-red doors; through the dusty closeness of this dismantled room a rank scent of musk and violets rose, as though a cheap essence had been scattered as libation. A small empty scent-bottle stood on the shabby looking-glass.

"Have you found new lodgings?"

The little model edged closer to the window. A stealthy watchfulness was creeping into her shrinking, dazed face.

She shook her head.

"I don't know where I'm going."

Obeying a sudden impulse to see more clearly, Bianca lifted her veil. "I came to tell you," she said, "that I shall always be ready to help you."

The girl did not answer, but suddenly through her black lashes she stole a look upward at her visitor. 'Can you,' it seemed to say, 'you—help me? Oh no; I think not!' And, as though she had been stung by that glance, Bianca said with deadly slowness:

"It is my business, of course, entirely, now that Mr. Dallison has gone abroad."

The little model received this saying with a quivering jerk. It might have been an arrow transfixing her white throat. For a moment she seemed almost about to fall, but, gripping the window-sill, held herself erect. Her eyes, like an animal's in pain, darted here, there, everywhere, then rested on her visitor's breast, quite motionless. This stare, which seemed to see nothing, but to be doing, as it were, some fateful calculation, was uncanny. Colour came gradually back into her lips and eyes and cheeks; she seemed to have succeeded in her calculation, to be reviving from that stab.

And suddenly Bianca understood. This was the meaning of the packed trunk, the dismantled room. He was going to take her, after all!

In the turmoil of this discovery two words alone escaped her:

"I see!"

They were enough. The girl's face at once lost all trace of its look of desperate calculation, brightened, became guilty, and from guilty sullen.

The antagonism of all the long past months was now declared between these two—Bianca's pride could no longer conceal, the girl's submissiveness no longer obscure it. They stood like duellists, one on each side of the trunk—that common, brown-Japanned, tin trunk, corded with rope. Bianca looked at it.

"You," she said, "and he? Ha, ha; ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!"

Against that cruel laughter—more poignant than a hundred homilies on caste, a thousand scornful words—the little model literally could not stand; she sat down in the low chair where she had evidently been sitting to watch the street. But as a taste of blood will infuriate a hound, so her own laughter seemed to bereave Bianca of all restraint.

"What do you imagine he's taking you for, girl? Only out of pity! It's not exactly the emotion to live on in exile. In exile—but that you do not understand!"

The little model staggered to her feet again. Her face had grown painfully red.

"He wants me!" she said.

"Wants you? As he wants his dinner. And when he's eaten it—what then? No, of course he'll never abandon you; his conscience is too tender. But you'll be round his neck—like this!" Bianca raised her arms, looped, and dragged them slowly down, as a mermaid's arms drag at a drowning sailor.

The little model stammered: "I'll do what he tells me! I'll do what he tells me!"

Bianca stood silent, looking at the girl, whose heaving breast and little peacock's feather, whose small round hands twisting in front of her, and scent about her clothes, all seemed an offence.

"And do you suppose that he'll tell you what he wants? Do you imagine he'll have the necessary brutality to get rid of you? He'll think himself bound to keep you till you leave him, as I suppose you will some day!"

The girl dropped her hands. "I'll never leave him—never!" she cried out passionately.

"Then Heaven help him!" said Bianca.

The little model's eyes seemed to lose all pupil, like two chicory flowers that have no dark centres. Through them, all that she was feeling struggled to find an outlet; but, too deep for words, those feelings would not pass her lips, utterly unused to express emotion. She could only stammer:

"I'm not—I'm not—I will—" and press her hands again to her breast.

Bianca's lip curled.

"I see; you imagine yourself capable of sacrifice. Well, you have your chance. Take it!" She pointed to the corded trunk. "Now's your time; you have only to disappear!"

The little model shrank back against the windowsill. "He wants me!" she muttered. "I know he wants me."

Bianca bit her lips till the blood came.

"Your idea of sacrifice," she said, "is perfect! If you went now, in a month's time he'd never think of you again."

The girl gulped. There was something so pitiful in the movements of her hands that Bianca turned away. She stood for several seconds staring at the door, then, turning round again, said:

"Well?"

But the girl's whole face had changed. All tear-stained, indeed, she had already masked it with a sort of immovable stolidity.

Bianca went swiftly up to the trunk.

"You shall!" she said. "Take that thing and go."

The little model did not move.

"So you won't?"

The girl trembled violently all over. She moistened her lips, tried to speak, failed, again moistened them, and this time murmured; "I'll only—I'll only—if he tells me!"

"So you still imagine he will tell you!"

The little model merely repeated: "I won't—won't do anything without he tells me!"

Bianca laughed. "Why, it's like a dog!" she said.

But the girl had turned abruptly to the window. Her lips were parted. She was shrinking, fluttering, trembling at what she saw. She was indeed like a spaniel dog who sees her master coming. Bianca had no need of being told that Hilary was outside. She went into the passage and opened the front door.

He was coming up the steps, his face worn like that of a man in fever, and at the sight of his wife he stood quite still, looking into her face.

Without the quiver of an eyelid, without the faintest trace of emotion, or the slightest sign that she knew him to be there, Bianca passed and slowly walked away.

CHAPTER XL

FINISH OF THE COMEDY

Those who may have seen Hilary driving towards the little model's lodgings saw one who, by a fixed red spot on either cheek, and the over-compression of his quivering lips, betrayed the presence of that animality which underlies even the most cultivated men.

After eighteen hours of the purgatory of indecision, he had not so much decided to pay that promised visit on which hung the future of two lives, as allowed himself to be borne towards the girl.

There was no one in the passage to see him after he had passed Bianca in the doorway, but it was with a face darkened by the peculiar stabbing look of wounded egoism that he entered the little model's room.

The sight of it coming so closely on the struggle she had just been through was too much for the girl's self-control.

Instead of going up to him, she sat down on the corded trunk and began to sob. It was the sobbing of a child whose school-treat has been cancelled, of a girl whose ball-dress has not come home in time. It only irritated Hilary, whose nerves had already borne all they could bear. He stood literally trembling, as though each one of these common little sobs were a blow falling on the drum-skin of his spirit; and through every fibre he took in the features of the dusty, scent-besprinkled room—the brown tin trunk, the dismantled bed, the rust-red doors.

And he realised that she had burned her boats to make it impossible for a man of sensibility to disappoint her!

The little model raised her face and looked at him. What she saw must have been less reassuring even than the first sight had been, for it stopped her sobbing. She rose and turned to the window, evidently trying with handkerchief and powder-puff to repair the ravages caused by her tears; and when she had finished she still stood there with her back to him. Her deep breathing made her young form quiver from her waist up to the little peacock's feather in her hat; and with each supple movement it seemed offering itself to Hilary.

In the street a barrel-organ had begun to play the very waltz it had played the afternoon when Mr. Stone had been so ill. Those two were neither of them conscious of that tune, too absorbed in their emotions; and yet, quietly, it was bringing something to the girl's figure like the dowering of scent that the sun brings to a flower. It was bringing the compression back to Hilary's lips, the flush to his ears and cheeks, as a draught of wind will blow to redness a fire that has been choked. Without knowing it, without sound, inch by inch he moved nearer to her; and as though, for all there was no sign of his advance, she knew of it, she stayed utterly unmoving except for the deep breathing that so stirred the warm youth in her. In that stealthy progress was the history of life and the mystery of sex. Inch by inch he neared her; and she swayed, mesmerising his arms to fold round her thus poised, as if she must fall backward; mesmerising him to forget that there was anything there, anything in all the world, but just her young form waiting for him—nothing but that!

The barrel-organ stopped; the spell had broken! She turned round to him. As a wind obscures with grey wrinkles the still green waters of enchantment into which some mortal has been gazing, so Hilary's reason suddenly swept across the situation, and showed it once more as it was. Quick to mark every shade that passed across his face, the girl made as though she would again burst into tears; then, since tears had been so useless, she pressed her hand over her eyes.

Hilary looked at that round, not too cleanly hand. He could see her watching him between her fingers. It was uncanny, almost horrible, like the sight of a cat watching a bird; and he stood appalled at the terrible reality of his position, at the sight of his own future with this girl, with her traditions,

customs, life, the thousand and one things that he did not know about her, that he would have to live with if he once took her. A minute passed, which seemed eternity, for into it was condensed every force of her long pursuit, her instinctive clutching at something that she felt to be security, her reaching upwards, her twining round him.

Conscious of all this, held back by that vision of his future, yet whipped towards her by his senses, Hilary swayed like a drunken man. And suddenly she sprang at him, wreathed her arms round his neck, and fastened her mouth to his. The touch of her lips was moist and hot. The scent of stale violet powder came from her, warmed by her humanity. It penetrated to Hilary's heart. He started back in sheer physical revolt.

Thus repulsed, the girl stood rigid, her breast heaving, her eyes unnaturally dilated, her mouth still loosened by the kiss. Snatching from his pocket a roll of notes, Hilary flung them on the bed.

"I can't take you!" he almost groaned. "It's madness! It's impossible!" And he went out into the passage. He ran down the steps and got into his cab. An immense time seemed to pass before it began to move. It started at last, and Hilary sat back in it, his hands clenched, still as a dead man.

His mortified face was recognised by the landlady, returning from her morning's visit to the shops. The gentleman looked, she thought, as if he had received bad news! She not unnaturally connected his appearance with her lodger. Tapping on the girl's door, and receiving no answer, she went in.

The little model was lying on the dismantled bed, pressing her face into the blue and white ticking of the bolster. Her shoulders shook, and a sound of smothered sobbing came from her. The landlady stood staring silently.

Coming of Cornish chapel-going stock, she had never liked this girl, her instinct telling her that she was one for whom life had already been too much. Those for whom life had so early been too much, she knew, were always "ones for pleasure!" Her experience of village life had enabled her to construct the little model's story—that very simple, very frequent little story. Sometimes, indeed, trouble of that sort was soon over and forgotten; but sometimes, if the young man didn't do the right thing by her, and the girl's folk took it hardly, well, then—! So had run the reasoning of this good woman. Being of the same class, she had looked at her lodger from the first without obliquity of vision.

But seeing her now apparently so overwhelmed, and having something soft and warm down beneath her granitic face and hungry eyes, she touched her on the back.

"Come, now!" she said; "you mustn't take on! What is it?"

The little model shook off the hand as a passionate child shakes itself free of consolation. "Let me alone!" she muttered.

The landlady drew back. "Has anyone done you a harm?" she said.

The little model shook her head.

Baffled by this dumb grief, the landlady was silent; then, with the stolidity of those whose lives are one long wrestling with fortune, she muttered:

"I don't like to see anyone cry like that!"

And finding that the girl remained obstinately withdrawn from sight or sympathy, she moved towards the door.

"Well," she said, with ironical compassion, "if you want me, I'll be in the kitchen."

The little model remained lying on her bed. Every now and then she gulped, like a child flung down on the grass apart from its comrades, trying to swallow down its rage, trying to bury in the earth its little black moment of despair. Slowly those gulps grew fewer, feebler, and at last died away. She sat up, sweeping Hilary's bundle of notes, on which she had been lying, to the floor.

At sight of that bundle she broke out afresh, flinging herself down sideways with her cheek on the wet bolster; and, for some time after her sobs had ceased again, still lay there. At last she rose and dragged herself over to the looking-glass, scrutinising her streaked, discoloured face, the stains in the cheeks, the swollen eyelids, the marks beneath her eyes; and listlessly she tidied herself. Then, sitting down on the brown tin trunk, she picked the bundle of notes off the floor. They gave forth a dry peculiar crackle. Fifteen ten-pound notes—all Hilary's travelling money. Her eyes opened wider and wider as she counted; and tears, quite suddenly, rolled down on to those thin slips of paper.

Then slowly she undid her dress, and forced them down till they rested, with nothing but her vest between them and the quivering warm flesh which hid her heart.

CHAPTER XLI

THE HOUSE OF HARMONY

At half-past ten that evening Stephen walked up the stone-flagged pathway of his brother's house.

"Can I see Mrs. Hilary?"

"Mr. Hilary went abroad this morning, sir, and Mrs. Hilary has not yet come in."

"Will you give her this letter? No, I'll wait. I suppose I can wait for her in the garden?"

"Oh yes, sit!"

"Very well."

"I'll leave the door open, sir, in case you want to come in."

Stephen walked across to the rustic bench and sat down. He stared gloomily through the dusk at his patent-leather boots, and every now and then he flicked his evening trousers with the letter. Across the dark garden, where the boughs hung soft, unmoved by wind, the light from Mr. Stone's open window flowed out in a pale river; moths, born of the sudden heat, were fluttering up this river to its source.

Stephen looked irritably at the figure of Mr. Stone, which could be seen, bowed, and utterly still, beside his desk; so, by lifting the spy-hole thatch, one may see a convict in his cell stand gazing at his work, without movement, numb with solitude.

'He's getting awfully broken up,' thought Stephen. 'Poor old chap! His ideas are killing him. They're not human nature, never will be.' Again he flicked his trousers with the letter, as though that document emphasised the fact. 'I can't help being sorry for the sublime old idiot!'

He rose, the better to see his father-in-law's unconscious figure. It looked as lifeless and as cold as though Mr. Stone had followed some thought below the ground, and left his body standing there to await his return. Its appearance oppressed Stephen.

'You might set the house on fire,' he thought; 'he'd never notice.'

Mr. Stone's figure moved; the sound of a long sigh came out to Stephen in the windless garden. He turned his eyes away, with the sudden feeling that it was not the thing to watch the old chap like this; then, getting up, he went indoors. In his brother's study he stood turning over the knick-knacks on the writing-table.

'I warned Hilary that he was burning his fingers,' he thought.

At the sound of the latch-key he went back to the hall.

However much he had secretly disapproved of her from the beginning, because she had always seemed to him such an uncomfortable and tantalising person, Stephen was impressed that night by the haunting unhappiness of Bianca's face; as if it had been suddenly disclosed to him that she could not help herself. This was disconcerting, being, in a sense, a disorderly way of seeing things.

"You look tired, B.," he said. "I'm sorry, but I thought it better to bring this round tonight."

Bianca glanced at the letter.

"It is to you," she said. "I don't wish to read it, thank you."

Stephen compressed his lips.

"But I wish you to hear it, please," he said. "I'll read it out, if you'll allow me."

"CHARING CROSS STATION.

"DEAR STEVIE,

"I told you yesterday morning that I was going abroad alone. Afterwards I changed my mind—I meant to take her. I went to her lodgings for the purpose. I have lived too long amongst sentiments for such a piece of reality as that. Class has saved me; it has triumphed over my most primitive instincts.

"I am going alone—back to my sentiments. No slight has been placed on Bianca—but my married life having become a mockery, I shall not return to it. The following address will find me, and I shall ask you presently to send on my household gods.

"Please let Bianca know the substance of this letter.

"Ever your affectionate brother,

"HILARY DALLISON."

With a frown Stephen folded up the letter, and restored it to his breast pocket.

'It's more bitter than I thought,' he reflected; 'and yet he's done the only possible thing!'

Bianca was leaning her elbow on the mantelpiece with her face turned to the wall. Her silence irritated Stephen, whose loyalty to his brother longed to fend a vent.

"I'm very much relieved, of course," he said at last. "It would have been fatal"

She did not move, and Stephen became increasingly aware that this was a most awkward matter to touch on.

"Of course," he began again. "But, B., I do think you—rather—I mean—" And again he stopped before her utter silence, her utter immobility. Then, unable to go away without having in some sort expressed his loyalty to Hilary, he tried once more: "Hilary is the kindest man I know. It's not his fault if he's out of touch with life—if he's not fit to deal with things. He's negative!"

And having thus in a single word, somewhat to his own astonishment, described his brother, he held out his hand.

The hand which Bianca placed in it was feverishly hot. Stephen felt suddenly compunctious.

"I'm awfully sorry," he stammered, "about the whole thing. I'm awfully sorry for you—"

Bianca drew back her hand.

With a little shrug Stephen turned away.

'What are you to do with women like that?' was his thought, and saying dryly, "Good-night, B.," he went.

For some time Bianca sat in Hilary's chair. Then, by the faint glimmer coming through the half-open door, she began to wander round the room, touching the walls, the books, the prints, all the familiar things among which he had lived so many years....

In that dim continual journey she was like a disharmonic spirit traversing the air above where its body lies.

The door creaked behind her. A voice said sharply:

"What are you doing in this house?"

Mr. Stone was standing beside the bust of Socrates. Bianca went up to him.

"Father!"

Mr. Stone stared. "It is you! I thought it was a thief! Where is Hilary?"

"Gone away."

"Alone?"

Bianca bowed her head. "It is very late, Dad," she whispered.

Mr. Stone's hand moved as though he would have stroked her.

"The human heart," he murmured, "is the tomb of many feelings."

Bianca put her arm round him.

"You must go to bed, Dad," she said, trying to get him to the door, for in her heart something seemed giving way.

Mr. Stone stumbled; the door swung to; the room was plunged in darkness. A hand, cold as ice, brushed her cheek. With all her force she stifled a scream.

"I am here," Mr. Stone said.

His hand, wandering downwards, touched her shoulder, and she seized it with her own burning hand. Thus linked, they groped their way out into the passage towards his room.

"Good-night, dear," Bianca murmured.

By the light of his now open door Mr. Stone seemed to try and see her face, but she would not show it him. Closing the door gently, she stole upstairs.

Sitting down in her bedroom by the open window, it seemed to her that the room was full of people—her nerves were so unstrung. It was as if walls had not the power this night to exclude human presences. Moving, or motionless, now distinct, then covered suddenly by the thick veil of some material object, they circled round her quiet figure, lying back in the chair with shut eyes. These disharmonic shadows flitting in the room made a stir like the rubbing of dry straw or the hum of bees among clover stalks. When she sat up they vanished, and the sounds became the distant din of homing traffic; but the moment she closed her eyes, her visitors again began to steal round her with that dry, mysterious hum.

She fell asleep presently, and woke with a start. There, in a glimmer of pale light, stood the little model, as in the fatal picture Bianca had painted of her. Her face was powder white, with shadows beneath the eyes. Breath seemed coming through her parted lips, just touched with colour. In her hat lay the tiny peacock's feather beside the two purplish-pink roses. A scent came from her, too—but faint, as ever was the scent of chicory flower. How long had she been standing there? Bianca started to her feet, and as she rose the vision vanished.

She went towards the spot. There was nothing in that corner but moonlight; the scent she had perceived was merely that of the trees drifting in.

But so vivid had that vision been that she stood at the window, panting for air, passing her hand again and again across her eyes.

Outside, over the dark gardens, the moon hung full and almost golden. Its honey-pale light filtered down on every little shape of tree, and leaf, and sleeping flower. That soft, vibrating radiance seemed to have woven all into one mysterious whole, stilling disharmony, so that each little separate shape had no meaning to itself.

Bianca looked long at the rain of moonlight falling on the earth's carpet, like a covering shower of blossom which bees have sucked and spilled. Then, below her, out through candescent space, she saw a shadow dart forth along the grass, and to her fright a voice rose, tremulous and clear, seeming to seek enfranchisement beyond the barrier of the dark trees: "My brain is clouded. Great Universe! I cannot write! I can no longer discover to my brothers that they are one. I am not worthy to stay here. Let me pass into You, and die!"

Bianca saw her father's fragile arms stretch out into the night through the sleeves of his white garment, as though expecting to be received at once into the Universal Brotherhood of the thin air.

There ensued a moment, when, by magic, every little dissonance in all the town seemed blended into a harmony of silence, as it might be the very death of self upon the earth.

Then, breaking that trance, Mr. Stone's voice rose again, trembling out into the night, as though blown through a reed.

"Brothers!" he said.

Behind the screen of lilac bushes at the gate Bianca saw the dark helmet of a policeman. He stood there staring steadily in the direction of that voice. Raising his lantern, he flashed it into every corner of the garden, searching for those who had been addressed. Satisfied, apparently, that no one was there, he moved it to right and left, lowered it to the level of his breast, and walked slowly on.

THE PATRICIAN

By John Galsworthy

CHAPTER I

Light, entering the vast room—a room so high that its carved ceiling refused itself to exact scrutiny—travelled, with the wistful, cold curiosity of the dawn, over a fantastic storehouse of Time. Light, unaccompanied by the prejudice of human eyes, made strange revelation of incongruities, as though illuminating the dispassionate march of history.

For in this dining hall—one of the finest in England—the Caradoc family had for centuries assembled the trophies and records of their existence. Round about this dining hall they had built and pulled down and restored, until the rest of Monkland Court presented some aspect of homogeneity. Here alone they had left virgin the work of the old quasi-monastic builders, and within it unconsciously deposited their souls. For there were here, meeting the eyes of light, all those rather touching evidences of man's desire to persist for ever, those shells of his former bodies, the fetishes and queer proofs of his faiths, together with the remorseless demonstration of their treatment at the hands of Time.

The annalist might here have found all his needed confirmations; the analyst from this material formed the due equation of high birth; the philosopher traced the course of aristocracy, from its primeval rise in crude strength or subtlety, through centuries of power, to picturesque decadence, and the beginnings of its last stand. Even the artist might here, perchance, have seized on the dry ineffable pervading spirit, as one visiting an old cathedral seems to scent out the constriction of its heart.

From the legendary sword of that Welsh chieftain who by an act of high, rewarded treachery had passed into the favour of the conquering William, and received, with the widow of a Norman, many lands in Devonshire, to the Cup purchased for Geoffrey Caradoc; present Earl of Valleys, by subscription of his Devonshire tenants on the occasion of his marriage with the Lady Gertrude Semmering—no insignia were absent, save the family portraits in the gallery of Valleys House in London. There was even an ancient duplicate of that yellow tattered scroll royally, reconfirming lands and title to John, the most distinguished of all the Caradocs, who had unfortunately neglected to be born in wedlock, by one of those humorous omissions to be found in the genealogies of most old families. Yes, it was there, almost cynically hung in a corner; for this incident, though no doubt a burning question in the fifteenth century, was now but staple for an ironical little tale, in view of the fact that descendants of John's 'own' brother Edmund were undoubtedly to be found among the cottagers of a parish not far distant.

Light, glancing from the suits of armour to the tiger skins beneath them, brought from India but a year ago by Bertie Caradoc, the younger son, seemed recording, how those, who had once been foremost by virtue of that simple law of Nature which crowns the adventuring and strong, now being almost washed aside out of the main stream of national life, were compelled to devise adventure, lest they should lose belief in their own strength.

The unsparing light of that first half-hour of summer morning recorded many other changes, wandering from austere tapestries to the velvety carpets, and dragging from the contrast sure proof of a common sense which denied to the present Earl and Countess the asceticisms of the past. And then it seemed to lose interest in this critical journey, as though longing to clothe all in witchery. For the sun had risen, and through the Eastern windows came pouring its level and mysterious joy. And with it, passing in at an open lattice, came a wild bee to settle among the flowers on the table athwart the Eastern end, used when there was only a small party in the house. The hours fled on silent, till the sun

was high, and the first visitors came—three maids, rosy, not silent, bringing brushes. They passed, and were followed by two footmen—scouts of the breakfast brigade, who stood for a moment professionally doing nothing, then soberly commenced to set the table. Then came a little girl of six, to see if there were anything exciting—little Ann Shropton, child of Sir William Shropton by his marriage with Lady Agatha, and eldest daughter of the house, the only one of the four young Caradocs as yet wedded. She came on tiptoe, thinking to surprise whatever was there. She had a broad little face, and wide frank hazel eyes over a little nose that came out straight and sudden. Encircled by a loose belt placed far below the waist of her holland frock, as if to symbolize freedom, she seemed to think everything in life good fun. And soon she found the exciting thing.

"Here's a bumble bee, William. Do you think I could tame it in my little glass bog?"

"No, I don't, Miss Ann; and look out, you'll be stung!"

"It wouldn't sting me."

"Why not?"

"Because it wouldn't."

"Of course—if you say so——"

"What time is the motor ordered?"

"Nine o'clock."

"I'm going with Grandpapa as far as the gate."

"Suppose he says you're not?"

"Well, then I shall go all the same."

"I see."

"I might go all the way with him to London! Is Auntie Babs going?"

"No, I don't think anybody is going with his lordship."

"I would, if she were. William!"

"Yes."

"Is Uncle Eustace sure to be elected?"

"Of course he is."

"Do you think he'll be a good Member of Parliament?"

"Lord Miltoun is very clever, Miss Ann."

"Is he?"

"Well, don't you think so?"

"Does Charles think so?"

"Ask him."

"William!"

"Yes."

"I don't like London. I like here, and I like Cotton, and I like home pretty well, and I love Pendridny—and—I like Ravensham."

"His lordship is going to Ravensham to-day on his way up, I heard say."

"Oh! then he'll see great-granny. William——"

"Here's Miss Wallace."

From the doorway a lady with a broad pale patient face said:

"Come, Ann."

"All right! Hallo, Simmons!"

The entering butler replied:

"Hallo, Miss Ann!"

"I've got to go."

"I'm sure we're very sorry."

"Yes."

The door banged faintly, and in the great room rose the busy silence of those minutes which precede repasts. Suddenly the four men by the breakfast table stood back. Lord Valleys had come in.

He approached slowly, reading a blue paper, with his level grey eyes divided by a little uncharacteristic frown. He had a tanned yet ruddy, decisively shaped face, with crisp hair and moustache beginning to go iron-grey—the face of a man who knows his own mind and is contented with that knowledge. His figure too, well-braced and upright, with the back of the head carried like a soldier's, confirmed the impression, not so much of self-sufficiency, as of the sufficiency of his habits of life and thought. And there was apparent about all his movements that peculiar unconsciousness of his surroundings which comes to those who live a great deal in the public eye, have the material machinery of existence placed exactly to their hands, and never need to consider what others think of them. Taking his seat, and still perusing the paper, he at once began to eat what was put before him; then noticing that his eldest daughter had come in and was sitting down beside him, he said:

"Bore having to go up in such weather!"

"Is it a Cabinet meeting?"

"Yes. This confounded business of the balloons." But the rather anxious dark eyes of Agatha's delicate narrow face were taking in the details of a tray for keeping dishes warm on a sideboard, and she was thinking: "I believe that would be better than the ones I've got, after all. If William would only say whether he really likes these large trays better than single hot-water dishes!" She contrived how-ever to ask in her gentle voice—for all her words and movements were gentle, even a little timid, till anything appeared to threaten the welfare of her husband or children:

"Do you think this war scare good for Eustace's prospects, Father?"

But her father did not answer; he was greeting a new-comer, a tall, fine-looking young man, with dark hair and a fair moustache, between whom and himself there was no relationship, yet a certain negative resemblance. Claud Fresnay, Viscount Harbinger, was indeed also a little of what is called the 'Norman' type—having a certain firm regularity of feature, and a slight aquilinity of nose high up on the bridge—but that which in the elder man seemed to indicate only an unconscious acceptance of self as a standard, in the younger man gave an impression at once more assertive and more uneasy, as though he were a little afraid of not chaffing something all the time.

Behind him had come in a tall woman, of full figure and fine presence, with hair still brown—Lady Valleys herself. Though her eldest son was thirty, she was, herself, still little more than fifty. From her voice, manner, and whole personality, one might suspect that she had been an acknowledged beauty; but there was now more than a suspicion of maturity about her almost jovial face, with its full grey-blue eyes; and coarsened complexion. Good comrade, and essentially 'woman of the world,' was written on every line of her, and in every tone of her voice. She was indeed a figure suggestive of open air and generous living, endowed with abundant energy, and not devoid of humour. It was she who answered Agatha's remark.

"Of course, my dear, the very best thing possible."

Lord Harbinger chimed in:

"By the way, Brabrook's going to speak on it. Did you ever hear him, Lady Agatha? 'Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise—and with me rises the democratic principle——'"

But Agatha only smiled, for she was thinking:

"If I let Ann go as far as the gate, she'll only make it a stepping-stone to something else to-morrow." Taking no interest in public affairs, her inherited craving for command had resorted for expression to a meticulous ordering of household matters. It was indeed a cult with her, a passion—as though she felt

herself a sort of figurehead to national domesticity; the leader of a patriotic movement.

Lord Valleys, having finished what seemed necessary, arose.

"Any message to your mother, Gertrude?"

"No, I wrote last night."

"Tell Miltoun to keep—an eye on that Mr. Courtier. I heard him speak one day—he's rather good."

Lady Valleys, who had not yet sat down, accompanied her husband to the door.

"By the way, I've told Mother about this woman, Geoff."

"Was it necessary?"

"Well, I think so; I'm uneasy—after all, Mother has some influence with Miltoun."

Lord Valleys shrugged his shoulders, and slightly squeezing his wife's arm, went out.

Though himself vaguely uneasy on that very subject, he was a man who did not go to meet disturbance. He had the nerves which seem to be no nerves at all—especially found in those of his class who have much to do with horses. He temperamentally regarded the evil of the day as quite sufficient to it. Moreover, his eldest son was a riddle that he had long given up, so far as women were concerned.

Emerging into the outer hall, he lingered a moment, remembering that he had not seen his younger and favourite daughter.

"Lady Barbara down yet?" Hearing that she was not, he slipped into the motor coat held for him by Simmons, and stepped out under the white portico, decorated by the Caradoc hawks in stone.

The voice of little Ann reached him, clear and high above the smothered whirring of the car.

"Come on, Grandpapa!"

Lord Valleys grimaced beneath his crisp moustache—the word grandpapa always fell queerly on the ears of one who was but fifty-six, and by no means felt it—and jerking his gloved hand towards Ann, he said:

"Send down to the lodge gate for this."

The voice of little Ann answered loudly:

"No; I'm coming back by myself."

The car starting, drowned discussion.

Lord Valleys, motoring, somewhat pathetically illustrated the invasion of institutions by their destroyer, Science. A supporter of the turf, and not long since Master of Foxhounds, most of whose soul (outside politics) was in horses, he had been, as it were, compelled by common sense, not only to tolerate, but to take up and even press forward the cause of their supplanters. His instinct of self-preservation was secretly at work, hurrying him to his own destruction; forcing him to persuade himself that science and her successive victories over brute nature could be wooed into the service of a prestige which rested on a crystallized and stationary base. All this keeping pace with the times, this immersion in the results of modern discoveries, this speeding-up of existence so that it was all surface and little root—the increasing volatility, cosmopolitanism, and even commercialism of his life, on which he rather prided himself as a man of the world—was, with a secrecy too deep for his perception, cutting at the aloofness logically demanded of one in his position. Stubborn, and not spiritually subtle, though by no means dull in practical matters, he was resolutely letting the waters bear him on, holding the tiller firmly, without perceiving that he was in the vortex of a whirlpool. Indeed, his common sense continually impelled him, against the sort of reactionaryism of which his son Miltoun had so much, to that easier reactionaryism, which, living on its spiritual capital, makes what material capital it can out of its enemy, Progress.

He drove the car himself, shrewd and self-contained, sitting easily, with his cap well drawn over those steady eyes; and though this unexpected meeting of the Cabinet in the Whitsuntide recess was not only a nuisance, but gave food for anxiety, he was fully able to enjoy the swift smooth movement through the summer air, which met him with such friendly sweetness under the great trees of the long avenue. Beside him, little Ann was silent, with her legs stuck out rather wide apart. Motoring was a

new excitement, for at home it was forbidden; and a meditative rapture shone in her wide eyes above her sudden little nose. Only once she spoke, when close to the lodge the car slowed down, and they passed the lodge-keeper's little daughter.

"Hallo, Susie!"

There was no answer, but the look on Susie's small pale face was so humble and adoring that Lord Valleys, not a very observant man, noticed it with a sort of satisfaction. "Yes," he thought, somewhat irrelevantly, "the country is sound at heart!"

CHAPTER II

At Ravensham House on the borders of Richmond Park, suburban seat of the Casterley family, ever since it became usual to have a residence within easy driving distance of Westminster—in a large conservatory adjoining the hall, Lady Casterley stood in front of some Japanese lilies. She was a slender, short old woman, with an ivory-coloured face, a thin nose, and keen eyes half-veiled by delicate wrinkled lids. Very still, in her grey dress, and with grey hair, she gave the impression of a little figure carved out of fine, worn steel. Her firm, spidery hand held a letter written in free somewhat sprawling style:

MONKLAND COURT, "DEVON. "MY DEAR, MOTHER,

"Geoffrey is motoring up to-morrow. He'll look in on you on the way if he can. This new war scare has taken him up. I shan't be in Town myself till Miltoun's election is over. The fact is, I daren't leave him down here alone. He sees his 'Anonyma' every day. That Mr. Courtier, who wrote the book against War—rather cool for a man who's been a soldier of fortune, don't you think?—is staying at the inn, working for the Radical. He knows her, too—and, one can only hope, for Miltoun's sake, too well—an attractive person, with red moustaches, rather nice and mad. Bertie has just come down; I must get him to have a talk with Miltoun, and see if he cant find out how the land lies. One can trust Bertie—he's really very astute. I must say, that she's quite a sweet-looking woman; but absolutely nothing's known of her here except that she divorced her husband. How does one find out about people? Miltoun's being so extraordinarily strait-laced makes it all the more awkward. The earnestness of this rising generation is most remarkable. I don't remember taking such a serious view of life in my youth."

Lady Casterley lowered the coronetted sheet of paper. The ghost of a grimace haunted her face—she had not forgotten her daughter's youth. Raising the letter again, she read on:

"I'm sure Geoffrey and I feel years younger than either Miltoun or Agatha, though we did produce them. One doesn't feel it with Bertie or Babs, luckily. The war scare is having an excellent effect on Miltoun's candidature. Claud Harbinger is with us, too, working for Miltoun; but, as a matter of fact, I think he's after Babs. It's rather melancholy, when you think that Babs isn't quite twenty—still, one can't expect anything else, I suppose, with her looks; and Claud is rather a fine specimen. They talk of him a lot now; he's quite coming to the fore among the young Tories."

Lady Casterley again lowered the letter, and stood listening. A prolonged, muffled sound as of distant cheering and groans had penetrated the great conservatory, vibrating among the pale petals of the lilies and setting free their scent in short waves of perfume. She passed into the hall; where, stood an old man with sallow face and long white whiskers.

"What was that noise, Clifton?"

"A posse of Socialists, my lady, on their way to Putney to hold a demonstration; the people are hooting them. They've got blocked just outside the gates."

"Are they making speeches?"

"They are talking some kind of rant, my lady."

"I'll go and hear them. Give me my black stick."

Above the velvet-dark, flat-toughed cedar trees, which rose like pagodas of ebony on either side of the drive, the sky hung lowering in one great purple cloud, endowed with sinister life by a single white beam striking up into it from the horizon. Beneath this canopy of cloud a small phalanx of dusty,

dishevelled-looking men and women were drawn up in the road, guarding, and encouraging with cheers, a tall, black-coated orator. Before and behind this phalanx, a little mob of men and boys kept up an accompaniment of groans and jeering.

Lady Casterley and her 'major-domo' stood six paces inside the scrolled iron gates, and watched. The slight, steel-coloured figure with steel-coloured hair, was more arresting in its immobility than all the vociferations and gestures of the mob. Her eyes alone moved under their half-drooped lids; her right hand clutched tightly the handle of her stick. The speaker's voice rose in shrill protest against the exploitation of 'the people'; it sank in ironical comment on Christianity; it demanded passionately to be free from the continuous burden of 'this insensate militarist taxation'; it threatened that the people would take things into their own hands.

Lady Casterley turned her head:

"He is talking nonsense, Clifton. It is going to rain. I shall go in."

Under the stone porch she paused. The purple cloud had broken; a blind fury of rain was deluging the fast-scattering crowd. A faint smile came on Lady Casterley's lips.

"It will do them good to have their ardour damped a little. You will get wet, Clifton—hurry! I expect Lord Valleys to dinner. Have a room got ready for him to dress. He's motoring from Monkland."

CHAPTER III

In a very high, white-panelled room, with but little furniture, Lord Valleys greeted his mother-in-law respectfully.

"Motored up in nine hours, Ma'am—not bad going."

"I am glad you came. When is Miltoun's election?"

"On the twenty-ninth."

"Pity! He should be away from Monkland, with that—anonymous woman living there."

"Ah! yes; you've heard of her!"

Lady Casterley replied sharply:

"You're too easy-going, Geoffrey."

Lord Valleys smiled.

"These war scares," he said, "are getting a bore. Can't quite make out what the feeling of the country is about them."

Lady Casterley rose:

"It has none. When war comes, the feeling will be all right. It always is. Give me your arm. Are you hungry?"...

When Lord Valleys spoke of war, he spoke as one who, since he arrived at years of discretion, had lived within the circle of those who direct the destinies of States. It was for him—as for the lilies in the great glass house—impossible to see with the eyes, or feel with the feelings of a flower of the garden outside. Soaked in the best prejudices and manners of his class, he lived a life no more shut off from the general than was to be expected. Indeed, in some sort, as a man of facts and common sense, he was fairly in touch with the opinion of the average citizen. He was quite genuine when he said that he believed he knew what the people wanted better than those who prated on the subject; and no doubt he was right, for temperamentally he was nearer to them than their own leaders, though he would not perhaps have liked to be told so. His man-of-the-world, political shrewdness had been superimposed by life on a nature whose prime strength was its practicality and lack of imagination. It was his business to be efficient, but not strenuous, or desirous of pushing ideas to their logical conclusions; to be neither narrow nor puritanical, so long as the shell of 'good form' was preserved intact; to be a liberal landlord up to the point of not seriously damaging his interests; to be well-disposed towards the arts until those

arts revealed that which he had not before perceived; it was his business to have light hands, steady eyes, iron nerves, and those excellent manners that have no mannerisms. It was his nature to be easy-going as a husband; indulgent as a father; careful and straightforward as a politician; and as a man, addicted to pleasure, to work, and to fresh air. He admired, and was fond of his wife, and had never regretted his marriage. He had never perhaps regretted anything, unless it were that he had not yet won the Derby, or quite succeeded in getting his special strain of blue-ticked pointers to breed absolutely true to type. His mother-in-law he respected, as one might respect a principle.

There was indeed in the personality of that little old lady the tremendous force of accumulated decision—the inherited assurance of one whose prestige had never been questioned; who, from long immunity, and a certain clear-cut matter-of-factness, bred by the habit of command, had indeed lost the power of perceiving that her prestige ever could be questioned. Her knowledge of her own mind was no ordinary piece of learning, had not, in fact, been learned at all, but sprang full-fledged from an active dominating temperament. Fortified by the necessity, common to her class, of knowing thoroughly the more patent side of public affairs; armoured by the tradition of a culture demanded by leadership; inspired by ideas, but always the same ideas; owning no master, but in servitude to her own custom of leading, she had a mind, formidable as the two-edged swords wielded by her ancestors the Fitz-Harolds, at Agincourt or Poitiers—a mind which had ever instinctively rejected that inner knowledge of herself or of the selves of others; produced by those foolish practices of introspection, contemplation, and understanding, so deleterious to authority. If Lord Valleys was the body of the aristocratic machine, Lady Casterley was the steel spring inside it. All her life studiously unaffected and simple in attire; of plain and frugal habit; an early riser; working at something or other from morning till night, and as little worn-out at seventy-eight as most women of fifty, she had only one weak spot—and that was her strength—blindness as to the nature and size of her place in the scheme of things. She was a type, a force.

Wonderfully well she went with the room in which they were dining, whose grey walls, surmounted by a deep frieze painted somewhat in the style of Fragonard, contained many nymphs and roses now rather dim; with the furniture, too, which had a look of having survived into times not its own. On the tables were no flowers, save five lilies in an old silver chalice; and on the wall over the great sideboard a portrait of the late Lord Casterley.

She spoke:

"I hope Miltoun is taking his own line?"

"That's the trouble. He suffers from swollen principles—only wish he could keep them out of his speeches."

"Let him be; and get him away from that woman as soon as his election's over. What is her real name?"

"Mrs. something Lees Noel."

"How long has she been there?"

"About a year, I think."

"And you don't know anything about her?"

Lord Valleys raised his shoulders.

"Ah!" said Lady Casterley; "exactly! You're letting the thing drift. I shall go down myself. I suppose Gertrude can have me? What has that Mr. Courtier to do with this good lady?"

Lord Valleys smiled. In this smile was the whole of his polite and easy-going philosophy. "I am no meddler," it seemed to say; and at sight of that smile Lady Casterley tightened her lips.

"He is a firebrand," she said. "I read that book of his against War—most inflammatory. Aimed at Grant and Rosenstern, chiefly. I've just seen, one of the results, outside my own gates. A mob of anti-War agitators."

Lord Valleys controlled a yawn.

"Really? I'd no idea Courtier had any influence."

"He is dangerous. Most idealists are negligible—his book was clever."

"I wish to goodness we could see the last of these scares, they only make both countries look foolish,"

muttered Lord Valleys.

Lady Casterley raised her glass, full of a bloody red wine. "The war would save us," she said.

"War is no joke."

"It would be the beginning of a better state of things."

"You think so?"

"We should get the lead again as a nation, and Democracy would be put back fifty years."

Lord Valleys made three little heaps of salt, and paused to count them; then, with a slight uplifting of his eyebrows, which seemed to doubt what he was going to say, he murmured: "I should have said that we were all democrats nowadays.... What is it, Clifton?"

"Your chauffeur would like to know, what time you will have the car?"

"Directly after dinner."

Twenty minutes later, he was turning through the scrolled iron gates into the road for London. It was falling dark; and in the tremulous sky clouds were piled up, and drifted here and there with a sort of endless lack of purpose. No direction seemed to have been decreed unto their wings. They had met together in the firmament like a flock of giant magpies crossing and re-crossing each others' flight. The smell of rain was in the air. The car raised no dust, but bored swiftly on, searching out the road with its lamps. On Putney Bridge its march was stayed by a string of waggons. Lord Valleys looked to right and left. The river reflected the thousand lights of buildings piled along her sides, lamps of the embankments, lanterns of moored barges. The sinuous pallid body of this great Creature, for ever gliding down to the sea, roused in his mind no symbolic image. He had had to do with her, years back, at the Board of Trade, and knew her for what she was, extremely dirty, and getting abominably thin just where he would have liked her plump. Yet, as he lighted a cigar, there came to him a queer feeling—as if he were in the presence of a woman he was fond of.

"I hope to God," he thought, "nothing'll come of these scares!" The car glided on into the long road, swarming with traffic, towards the fashionable heart of London. Outside stationers' shops, however, the posters of evening papers were of no reassuring order.

'THE PLOT THICKENS.' 'MORE REVELATIONS.' 'GRAVE SITUATION THREATENED.'

And before each poster could be seen a little eddy in the stream of the passers-by—formed by persons glancing at the news, and disengaging themselves, to press on again. The Earl of Valleys caught himself wondering what they thought of it! What was passing behind those pale rounds of flesh turned towards the posters?

Did they think at all, these men and women in the street? What was their attitude towards this vaguely threatened cataclysm? Face after face, stolid and apathetic, expressed nothing, no active desire, certainly no enthusiasm, hardly any dread. Poor devils! The thing, after all, was no more within their control than it was within the power of ants to stop the ruination of their ant-heap by some passing boy! It was no doubt quite true, that the people had never had much voice in the making of war. And the words of a Radical weekly, which as an impartial man he always forced himself to read, recurred to him. "Ignorant of the facts, hypnotized by the words 'Country' and 'Patriotism'; in the grip of mob-instinct and inborn prejudice against the foreigner; helpless by reason of his patience, stoicism, good faith, and confidence in those above him; helpless by reason of his snobbery, mutual distrust, carelessness for the morrow, and lack of public spirit—in the face of War how impotent and to be pitied is the man in the street!" That paper, though clever, always seemed to him intolerably hifalutin'!

It was doubtful whether he would get to Ascot this year. And his mind flew for a moment to his promising two-year-old Casetta; then dashed almost violently, as though in shame, to the Admiralty and the doubt whether they were fully alive to possibilities. He himself occupied a softer spot of Government, one of those almost nominal offices necessary to qualify into the Cabinet certain tried minds, for whom no more strenuous post can for the moment be found. From the Admiralty again his thoughts leaped to his mother-in-law. Wonderful old woman! What a statesman she would have made! Too reactionary! Deuce of a straight line she had taken about Mrs. Lees Noel! And with a connoisseur's twinge of pleasure he recollected that lady's face and figure seen that morning as he passed her cottage. Mysterious or not, the woman was certainly attractive! Very graceful head with its dark hair waved back from the middle over either temple—very charming figure, no lumber of any sort! Bouquet about her! Some story or other, no doubt—no affair of his! Always sorry for that sort of woman!

A regiment of Territorials returning from a march stayed the progress of his car. He leaned forward watching them with much the same contained, shrewd, critical look he would have bent on a pack of hounds. All the mistiness and speculation in his mind was gone now. Good stamp of man, would give a capital account of themselves! Their faces, flushed by a day in the open, were masked with passivity, or, with a half-aggressive, half-jocular self-consciousness; they were clearly not troubled by abstract doubts, or any visions of the horrors of war.

Someone raised a cheer 'for the Terriers!' Lord Valleys saw round him a little sea of hats, rising and falling, and heard a sound, rather shrill and tentative, swell into hoarse, high clamour, and suddenly die out. "Seem keen enough!" he thought. "Very little does it! Plenty of fighting spirit in the country." And again a thrill of pleasure shot through him.

Then, as the last soldier passed, his car slowly forged its way through the straggling crowd, pressing on behind the regiment—men of all ages, youths, a few women, young girls, who turned their eyes on him with a negligent stare as if their lives were too remote to permit them to take interest in this passing man at ease.

CHAPTER IV

At Monkland, that same hour, in the little whitewashed 'withdrawing-room' of a thatched, whitewashed cottage, two men sat talking, one on either side of the hearth; and in a low chair between them a dark-eyed woman leaned back, watching, the tips of her delicate thin fingers pressed together, or held out transparent towards the fire. A log, dropping now and then, turned up its glowing underside; and the firelight and the lamplight seemed so to have soaked into the white walls that a wan warmth exuded. Silvery dun moths, fluttering in from the dark garden, kept vibrating, like spun shillings, over a jade-green bowl of crimson roses; and there was a scent, as ever in that old thatched cottage, of woodsmoke, flowers, and sweetbriar.

The man on the left was perhaps forty, rather above middle height, vigorous, active, straight, with blue eyes and a sanguine face that glowed on small provocation. His hair was very bright, almost red, and his fiery moustaches which descended to the level of his chin, like Don Quixote's seemed bristling and charging.

The man on the right was nearer thirty, evidently tall, wiry, and very thin. He sat rather crumpled, in his low armchair, with hands clasped round a knee; and a little crucified smile haunted the lips of his lean face, which, with its parchments, tanned, shaven cheeks, and deep-set, very living eyes, had a certain beauty.

These two men, so extravagantly unlike, looked at each other like neighbouring dogs, who, having long decided that they are better apart, suddenly find that they have met at some spot where they cannot possibly have a fight. And the woman watched; the owner, as it were, of one, but who, from sheer love of dogs, had always stroked and patted the other.

"So, Mr. Courtier," said the younger man, whose dry, ironic voice, like his smile, seemed defending the fervid spirit in his eyes; "all you say only amounts, you see, to a defence of the so-called Liberal spirit; and, forgive my candour, that spirit, being an importation from the realms of philosophy and art, withers the moment it touches practical affairs."

The man with the red moustaches laughed; the sound was queer—at once so genial and so sardonic.

"Well put!" he said: "And far be it from me to gainsay. But since compromise is the very essence of politics, high-priests of caste and authority, like you, Lord Miltoun, are every bit as much out of it as any Liberal professor."

"I don't agree!"

"Agree or not, your position towards public affairs is very like the Church's attitude towards marriage and divorce; as remote from the realities of life as the attitude of the believer in Free Love, and not more likely to catch on. The death of your point of view lies in itself—it's too dried-up and far from things ever to understand them. If you don't understand you can never rule. You might just as well keep your hands in your pockets, as go into politics with your notions!"

"I fear we must continue to agree to differ."

"Well; perhaps I do pay you too high a compliment. After all, you are a patrician."

"You speak in riddles, Mr. Courtier."

The dark-eyed woman stirred; her hands gave a sort of flutter, as though in deprecation of acerbity.

Rising at once, and speaking in a deferential voice, the elder man said:

"We're tiring Mrs. Noel. Good-night, Audrey, It's high time I was off." Against the darkness of the open French window, he turned round to fire a parting shot.

"What I meant, Lord Miltoun, was that your class is the driest and most practical in the State—it's odd if it doesn't save you from a poet's dreams. Good-night!" He passed out on to the lawn, and vanished.

The young man sat unmoving; the glow of the fire had caught his face, so that a spirit seemed clinging round his lips, gleaming out of his eyes. Suddenly he said:

"Do you believe that, Mrs. Noel?"

For answer Audrey Noel smiled, then rose and went over to the window.

"Look at my dear toad! It comes here every evening!" On a flagstone of the verandah, in the centre of the stream of lamplight, sat a little golden toad. As Miltoun came to look, it waddled to one side, and vanished.

"How peaceful your garden is!" he said; then taking her hand, he very gently raised it to his lips, and followed his opponent out into the darkness.

Truly peace brooded over that garden. The Night seemed listening—all lights out, all hearts at rest. It watched, with a little white star for every tree, and roof, and slumbering tired flower, as a mother watches her sleeping child, leaning above him and counting with her love every hair of his head, and all his tiny tremors.

Argument seemed child's babble indeed under the smile of Night. And the face of the woman, left alone at her window, was a little like the face of this warm, sweet night. It was sensitive, harmonious; and its harmony was not, as in some faces, cold—but seemed to tremble and glow and flutter, as though it were a spirit which had found its place of resting.

In her garden,—all velvety grey, with black shadows beneath the yew-trees, the white flowers alone seemed to be awake, and to look at her wistfully. The trees stood dark and still. Not even the night birds stirred. Alone, the little stream down in the bottom raised its voice, privileged when day voices were hushed.

It was not in Audrey Noel to deny herself to any spirit that was abroad; to repel was an art she did not practise. But this night, though the Spirit of Peace hovered so near, she did not seem to know it. Her hands trembled, her cheeks were burning; her breast heaved, and sighs fluttered from her lips, just parted.

CHAPTER V

Eustace Cardoc, Viscount Miltoun, had lived a very lonely life, since he first began to understand the peculiarities of existence. With the exception of Clifton, his grandmother's 'majordomo,' he made, as a small child, no intimate friend. His nurses, governesses, tutors, by their own confession did not understand him, finding that he took himself with unnecessary seriousness; a little afraid, too, of one whom they discovered to be capable of pushing things to the point of enduring pain in silence. Much of that early time was passed at Ravensham, for he had always been Lady Casterley's favourite grandchild. She recognized in him the purposeful austerity which had somehow been omitted from the composition of her daughter. But only to Clifton, then a man of fifty with a great gravity and long black whiskers, did Eustace relieve his soul. "I tell you this, Clifton," he would say, sitting on the sideboard, or the arm of the big chair in Clifton's room, or wandering amongst the raspberries, "because you are my friend."

And Clifton, with his head a little on one side, and a sort of wise concern at his 'friend's' confidences, which were sometimes of an embarrassing description, would answer now and then: "Of course, my lord," but more often: "Of course, my dear."

There was in this friendship something fine and suitable, neither of these 'friends' taking or suffering liberties, and both being interested in pigeons, which they would stand watching with a remarkable attention.

In course of time, following the tradition of his family, Eustace went to Harrow. He was there five years—always one of those boys a little out at wrists and ankles, who may be seen slouching, solitary, along the pavement to their own haunts, rather dusty, and with one shoulder slightly raised above the other, from the habit of carrying something beneath one arm. Saved from being thought a 'smug,' by his title, his lack of any conspicuous scholastic ability, his obvious independence of what was thought of him, and a sarcastic tongue, which no one was eager to encounter, he remained the ugly duckling who refused to paddle properly in the green ponds of Public School tradition. He played games so badly that in sheer self-defence his fellows permitted him to play without them. Of 'fives' they made an exception, for in this he attained much proficiency, owing to a certain windmill-like quality of limb. He was noted too for daring chemical experiments, of which he usually had one or two brewing, surreptitiously at first, and afterwards by special permission of his house-master, on the principle that if a room must smell, it had better smell openly. He made few friendships, but these were lasting.

His Latin was so poor, and his Greek verse so vile, that all had been surprised when towards the finish of his career he showed a very considerable power of writing and speaking his own language. He left school without a pang. But when in the train he saw the old Hill and the old spire on the top of it fading away from him, a lump rose in his throat, he swallowed violently two or three times, and, thrusting himself far back into the carriage corner, appeared to sleep.

At Oxford, he was happier, but still comparatively lonely; remaining, so long as custom permitted, in lodgings outside his College, and clinging thereafter to remote, panelled rooms high up, overlooking the gardens and a portion of the city wall. It was at Oxford that he first developed that passion for self-discipline which afterwards distinguished him. He took up rowing; and, though thoroughly unsuited by nature to this pastime, secured himself a place in his College 'torpid.' At the end of a race he was usually supported from his stretcher in a state of extreme extenuation, due to having pulled the last quarter of the course entirely with his spirit. The same craving for self-discipline guided him in the choice of Schools; he went out in 'Greats,' for which, owing to his indifferent mastery of Greek and Latin, he was the least fitted. With enormous labour he took a very good degree. He carried off besides, the highest distinctions of the University for English Essays. The ordinary circles of College life knew nothing of him. Not once in the whole course of his University career, was he the better for wine. He did not hunt; he never talked of women, and none talked of women in his presence. But now and then he was visited by those gusts which come to the ascetic, when all life seemed suddenly caught up and devoured by a flame burning night and day, and going out mercifully, he knew not why, like a blown candle. However unsocial in the proper sense of the word, he by no means lacked company in these Oxford days. He knew many, both dons and undergraduates. His long stride, and determined absence of direction, had severely tried all those who could stomach so slow a pastime as walking for the sake of talking. The country knew him—though he never knew the country—from Abingdon to Bablock Hythe. His name stood high, too, at the Union, where he made his mark during his first term in a debate on a 'Censorship of Literature' which he advocated with gloom, pertinacity, and a certain youthful brilliance that might well have carried the day, had not an Irishman got up and pointed out the danger hanging over the Old Testament. To that he had retorted: "Better, sir, it should run a risk than have no risk to run." From which moment he was notable.

He stayed up four years, and went down with a sense of bewilderment and loss. The matured verdict of Oxford on this child of hers, was "Eustace Miltoun! Ah! Queer bird! Will make his mark!"

He had about this time an interview with his father which confirmed the impression each had formed of the other. It took place in the library at Monkland Court, on a late November afternoon.

The light of eight candles in thin silver candlesticks, four on either side of the carved stone hearth, illumined that room. Their gentle radiance penetrated but a little way into the great dark space lined with books, panelled and floored with black oak, where the acrid fragrance of leather and dried roseleaves seemed to drench the, very soul with the aroma of the past. Above the huge fireplace, with light falling on one side of his shaven face, hung a portrait—painter unknown—of that Cardinal Caradoc who suffered for his faith in the sixteenth century. Ascetic, crucified, with a little smile clinging to the lips and deep-set eyes, he presided, above the bluefish flames of a log fire.

Father and son found some difficulty in beginning.

Each of those two felt as though he were in the presence of someone else's very near relation. They had, in fact, seen extremely little of each other, and not seen that little long.

Lord Valleys uttered the first remark:

"Well, my dear fellow, what are you going to do now? I think we can make certain of this seat down here, if you like to stand."

Miltoun had answered: "Thanks, very much; I don't think so at present."

Through the thin fume of his cigar Lord Valleys watched that long figure sunk deep in the chair opposite.

"Why not?" he said. "You can't begin too soon; unless you think you ought to go round the world."

"Before I can become a man of it?"

Lord Valleys gave a rather disconcerted laugh.

"There's nothing in politics you can't pick up as you go along," he said. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-four."

"You look older." A faint line, as of contemplation, rose between his eyes. Was it fancy that a little smile was hovering about Miltoun's lips?

"I've got a foolish theory," came from those lips, "that one must know the conditions first. I want to give at least five years to that."

Lord Valleys raised his eyebrows. "Waste of time," he said. "You'd know more at the end of it, if you went into the House at once. You take the matter too seriously."

"No doubt."

For fully a minute Lord Valleys made no answer; he felt almost ruffled. Waiting till the sensation had passed, he said: "Well, my dear fellow, as you please."

Miltoun's apprenticeship to the profession of politics was served in a slum settlement; on his father's estates; in Chambers at the Temple; in expeditions to Germany, America, and the British Colonies; in work at elections; and in two forlorn hopes to capture a constituency which could be trusted not to change its principles. He read much, slowly, but with conscientious tenacity, poetry, history, and works on philosophy, religion, and social matters.

Fiction, and especially foreign fiction, he did not care for. With the utmost desire to be wide and impartial, he sucked in what ministered to the wants of his nature, rejecting unconsciously all that by its unsuitability endangered the flame of his private spirit. What he read, in fact, served only to strengthen those profounder convictions which arose from his temperament. With a contempt of the vulgar gewgaws of wealth and rank he combined a humble but intense and growing conviction of his capacity for leadership, of a spiritual superiority to those whom he desired to benefit. There was no trace, indeed, of the common Pharisee in Miltoun, he was simple and direct; but his eyes, his gestures, the whole man, proclaimed the presence of some secret spring of certainty, some fundamental well into which no disturbing glimmers penetrated. He was not devoid of wit, but he was devoid of that kind of wit which turns its eyes inward, and sees something of the fun that lies in being what you are. Miltoun saw the world and all the things thereof shaped like spires—even when they were circles. He seemed to have no sense that the Universe was equally compounded of those two symbols, whose point of reconciliation had not yet been discovered.

Such was he, then, when the Member for his native division was made a peer.

He had reached the age of thirty without ever having been in love, leading a life of almost savage purity, with one solitary breakdown. Women were afraid of him. And he was perhaps a little afraid of woman. She was in theory too lovely and desirable—the half-moon in a summer sky; in practice too cloying, or too harsh. He had an affection for Barbara, his younger sister; but to his mother, his grandmother, or his elder sister Agatha, he had never felt close. It was indeed amusing to see Lady Valleys with her first-born. Her fine figure, the blown roses of her face, her grey-blue eyes which had a slight tendency to roll, as though amusement just touched with naughtiness bubbled behind them; were reduced to a queer, satirical decorum in Miltoun's presence. Thoughts and sayings verging on the risky were characteristic of her robust physique, of her soul which could afford to express almost all that

occurred to it. Miltoun had never, not even as a child, given her his confidence. She bore him no resentment, being of that large, generous build in body and mind, rarely—never in her class—associated with the capacity for feeling aggrieved or lowered in any estimation, even its own. He was, and always had been, an odd boy, and there was an end of it! Nothing had perhaps so disconcerted Lady Valleys as his want of behaviour in regard to women. She felt it abnormal, just as she recognized the essential if duly veiled normality of her husband and younger son. It was this feeling which made her realize almost more vividly than she had time for, in the whirl of politics and fashion, the danger of his friendship with this lady to whom she alluded so discreetly as 'Anonyma.'

Pure chance had been responsible for the inception of that friendship. Going one December afternoon to the farmhouse of a tenant, just killed by a fall from his horse, Miltoun had found the widow in a state of bewildered grief, thinly cloaked in the manner of one who had almost lost the power to express her feelings, and quite lost it in presence of 'the gentry.' Having assured the poor soul that she need have no fear about her tenancy, he was just leaving, when he met, in the stone-flagged entrance, a lady in a fur cap and jacket, carrying in her arms a little crying boy, bleeding from a cut on the forehead. Taking him from her and placing him on a table in the parlour, Miltoun looked at this lady, and saw that she was extremely grave, and soft, and charming. He inquired of her whether the mother should be told.

She shook her head.

"Poor thing, not just now: let's wash it, and bind it up first."

Together therefore they washed and bound up the cut. Having finished, she looked at Miltoun, and seemed to say: "You would do the telling so much better than I."

He, therefore, told the mother and was rewarded by a little smile from the grave lady.

From that meeting he took away the knowledge of her name, Audrey Lees Noel, and the remembrance of a face, whose beauty, under a cap of squirrel's fur, pursued him. Some days later passing by the village green, he saw her entering a garden gate. On this occasion he had asked her whether she would like her cottage re-thatched; an inspection of the roof had followed; he had stayed talking a long time. Accustomed to women—over the best of whom, for all their grace and lack of affectation, high-caste life had wrapped the manner which seems to take all things for granted—there was a peculiar charm for Miltoun in this soft, dark-eyed lady who evidently lived quite out of the world, and had so poignant, and shy, a flavour. Thus from a chance seed had blossomed swiftly one of those rare friendships between lonely people, which can in short time fill great spaces of two lives.

One day she asked him: "You know about me, I suppose?" Miltoun made a motion of his head, signifying that he did. His informant had been the vicar.

"Yes, I am told, her story is a sad one—a divorce."

"Do you mean that she has been divorced, or—"

For the fraction of a second the vicar perhaps had hesitated.

"Oh! no—no. Sinned against, I am sure. A nice woman, so far as I have seen; though I'm afraid not one of my congregation."

With this, Miltoun, in whom chivalry had already been awakened, was content. When she asked if he knew her story, he would not for the world have had her rake up what was painful. Whatever that story, she could not have been to blame. She had begun already to be shaped by his own spirit; had become not a human being as it was, but an expression of his aspiration....

On the third evening after his passage of arms with Courtier, he was again at her little white cottage sheltering within its high garden walls. Smothered in roses, and with a black-brown thatch overhanging the old-fashioned leaded panes of the upper windows, it had an air of hiding from the world. Behind, as though on guard, two pine trees spread their dark boughs over the outhouses, and in any south-west wind could be heard speaking gravely about the weather. Tall lilac bushes flanked the garden, and a huge lime-tree in the adjoining field sighed and rustled, or on still days let forth the drowsy hum of countless small dusky bees who frequented that green hostelry.

He found her altering a dress, sitting over it in her peculiar delicate fashion—as if all objects whatsoever, dresses, flowers, books, music, required from her the same sympathy.

He had come from a long day's electioneering, had been heckled at two meetings, and was still sore from the experience. To watch her, to be soothed, and ministered to by her had never been so restful; and stretched out in a long chair he listened to her playing.

Over the hill a Pierrot moon was slowly moving up in a sky the colour of grey irises. And in a sort of trance Miltoun stared at the burnt-out star, travelling in bright pallor.

Across the moor a sea of shallow mist was rolling; and the trees in the valley, like browsing cattle, stood knee-deep in whiteness, with all the air above them wan from an innumerable rain as of moondust, falling into that white sea. Then the moon passed behind the lime-tree, so that a great lighted Chinese lantern seemed to hang blue-black from the sky.

Suddenly, jarring and shivering the music, came a sound of hooting. It swelled, died away, and swelled again.

Miltoun rose.

"That has spoiled my vision," he said. "Mrs. Noel, I have something I want to say." But looking down at her, sitting so still, with her hands resting on the keys, he was silent in sheer adoration.

A voice from the door ejaculated:

"Oh! ma'am—oh! my lord! They're devilling a gentleman on the green!"

CHAPTER VI

When the immortal Don set out to ring all the bells of merriment, he was followed by one clown. Charles Courtier on the other hand had always been accompanied by thousands, who really could not understand the conduct of this man with no commercial sense. But though he puzzled his contemporaries, they did not exactly laugh at him, because it was reported that he had really killed some men, and loved some women. They found such a combination irresistible, when coupled with an appearance both vigorous and gallant. The son of an Oxfordshire clergyman, and mounted on a lost cause, he had been riding through the world ever since he was eighteen, without once getting out of the saddle. The secret of this endurance lay perhaps in his unconsciousness that he was in the saddle at all. It was as much his natural seat as office stools to other mortals. He made no capital out of errantry, his temperament being far too like his red-gold hair, which people compared to flames, consuming all before them. His vices were patent; too incurable an optimism; an admiration for beauty such as must sometimes have caused him to forget which woman he was most in love with; too thin a skin; too hot a heart; hatred of humbug, and habitual neglect of his own interest. Unmarried, and with many friends, and many enemies, he kept his body like a sword-blade, and his soul always at white heat.

That one who admitted to having taken part in five wars should be mixing in a by-election in the cause of Peace, was not so inconsistent as might be supposed; for he had always fought on the losing side, and there seemed to him at the moment no side so losing as that of Peace. No great politician, he was not an orator, nor even a glib talker; yet a quiet mordancy of tongue, and the white-hot look in his eyes, never failed to make an impression of some kind on an audience.

There was, however, hardly a corner of England where orations on behalf of Peace had a poorer chance than the Bucklandbury division. To say that Courtier had made himself unpopular with its matter-of-fact, independent, stolid, yet quick-tempered population, would be inadequate. He had outraged their beliefs, and roused the most profound suspicions. They could not, for the life of them, make out what he was at. Though by his adventures and his book, "Peace—a lost Cause," he was, in London, a conspicuous figure, they had naturally never heard of him; and his adventure to these parts seemed to them an almost ludicrous example of pure idea poking its nose into plain facts—the idea that nations ought to, and could live in peace being so very pure; and the fact that they never had, so very plain!

At Monkland, which was all Court estate, there were naturally but few supporters of Miltoun's opponent, Mr. Humphrey Chilcox, and the reception accorded to the champion of Peace soon passed from curiosity to derision, from derision to menace, till Courtier's attitude became so defiant, and his sentences so heated that he was only saved from a rough handling by the influential interposition of the vicar.

Yet when he began to address them he had felt irresistibly attracted. They looked such capital, independent fellows. Waiting for his turn to speak, he had marked them down as men after his own heart. For though Courtier knew that against an unpopular idea there must always be a majority, he

never thought so ill of any individual as to suppose him capable of belonging to that ill-omened body.

Surely these fine, independent fellows were not to be hoodwinked by the jingoes! It had been one more disillusion. He had not taken it lying down; neither had his audience. They dispersed without forgiving; they came together again without having forgotten.

The village Inn, a little white building whose small windows were overgrown with creepers, had a single guest's bedroom on the upper floor, and a little sitting-room where Courtier took his meals. The rest of the house was but stone-floored bar with a long wooden bench against the back wall, whence nightly a stream of talk would issue, all harsh a's, and sudden soft u's; whence too a figure, a little unsteady, would now and again emerge, to a chorus of 'Gude naights,' stand still under the ash-trees to light his pipe, then move slowly home.

But on that evening, when the trees, like cattle, stood knee-deep in the moon-dust, those who came out from the bar-room did not go away; they hung about in the shadows, and were joined by other figures creeping furtively through the bright moonlight, from behind the Inn. Presently more figures moved up from the lanes and the churchyard path, till thirty or more were huddled there, and their stealthy murmur of talk distilled a rare savour of illicit joy. Unholy hilarity, indeed, seemed lurking in the deep tree-shadow, before the wan Inn, whence from a single lighted window came forth the half-chanting sound of a man's voice reading out loud. Laughter was smothered, talk whispered.

"He'm a-practisin' his spaches." "Smoke the cunnin' old vox out!" "Red pepper's the proper stuff." "See men sneeze! We've a-screed up the door."

Then, as a face showed at the lighted window, a burst of harsh laughter broke the hush.

He at the window was seen struggling violently to wrench away a bar. The laughter swelled to hooting. The prisoner forced his way through, dropped to the ground, rose, staggered, and fell.

A voice said sharply:

"What's this?"

Out of the sounds of scuffling and scattering came the whisper: "His lordship!" And the shade under the ash-trees became deserted, save by the tall dark figure of a man, and a woman's white shape.

"Is that you, Mr. Courtier? Are you hurt?"

A chuckle rose from the recumbent figure.

"Only my knee. The beggars! They precious nearly choked me, though."

CHAPTER VII

Bertie Caradoc, leaving the smoking-room at Monkland Court that same evening,—on his way to bed, went to the Georgian corridor, where his pet barometer was hanging. To look at the glass had become the nightly habit of one who gave all the time he could spare from his profession to hunting in the winter and to racing in the summer.'

The Hon. Hubert Caradoc, an apprentice to the calling of diplomacy, more completely than any living Caradoc embodied the characteristic strength and weaknesses of that family. He was of fair height, and wiry build. His weathered face, under sleek, dark hair, had regular, rather small features, and wore an expression of alert resolution, masked by impassivity. Over his inquiring, hazel-grey eyes the lids were almost religiously kept half drawn. He had been born reticent, and great, indeed, was the emotion under which he suffered when the whole of his eyes were visible. His nose was finely chiselled, and had little flesh. His lips, covered by a small, dark moustache, scarcely opened to emit his speeches, which were uttered in a voice singularly muffled, yet unexpectedly quick. The whole personality was that of a man practical, spirited, guarded, resourceful, with great power of self-control, who looked at life as if she were a horse under him, to whom he must give way just so far as was necessary to keep mastery of her. A man to whom ideas were of no value, except when wedded to immediate action; essentially neat; demanding to be 'done well,' but capable of stoicism if necessary; urbane, yet always in readiness to thrust; able only to condone the failings and to compassionate the kinds of distress which his own experience had taught him to understand. Such was Miltoun's younger brother at the age of twenty-six.

Having noted that the glass was steady, he was about to seek the stairway, when he saw at the farther end of the entrance-hall three figures advancing arm-in-arm. Habitually both curious and wary, he waited till they came within the radius of a lamp; then, seeing them to be those of Miltoun and a footman, supporting between them a lame man, he at once hastened forward.

"Have you put your knee out, sir? Hold on a minute! Get a chair, Charles."

Seating the stranger in this chair, Bertie rolled up the trouser, and passed his fingers round the knee. There was a sort, of loving-kindness in that movement, as of a hand which had in its time felt the joints and sinews of innumerable horses.

"H'm!" he said; "can you stand a bit of a jerk? Catch hold of him behind, Eustace. Sit down on the floor, Charles, and hold the legs of the chair. Now then!" And taking up the foot, he pulled. There was a click, a little noise of teeth ground together; and Bertie said: "Good man—shan't have to have the vet. to you, this time."

Having conducted their lame guest to a room in the Georgian corridor hastily converted to a bedroom, the two brothers presently left him to the attentions of the footman.

"Well, old man," said Bertie, as they sought their rooms; "that's put paid to his name—won't do you any more harm this journey. Good plucked one, though!"

The report that Courtier was harboured beneath their roof went the round of the family before breakfast, through the agency of one whose practice it was to know all things, and to see that others partook of that knowledge, Little Ann, paying her customary morning visit to her mother's room, took her stand with face turned up and hands clasping her belt, and began at once.

"Uncle Eustace brought a man last night with a wounded leg, and Uncle Bertie pulled it out straight. William says that Charles says he only made a noise like this"—there was a faint sound of small chumping teeth: "And he's the man that's staying at the Inn, and the stairs were too narrow to carry him up, William says; and if his knee was put out he won't be able to walk without a stick for a long time. Can I go to Father?"

Agatha, who was having her hair brushed, thought:

"I'm not sure whether belts so low as that are wholesome," murmured:

"Wait a minute!"

But little Ann was gone; and her voice could be heard in the dressing-room climbing up towards Sir William, who from the sound of his replies, was manifestly shaving. When Agatha, who never could resist a legitimate opportunity of approaching her husband, looked in, he was alone, and rather thoughtful—a tall man with a solid, steady face and cautious eyes, not in truth remarkable except to his own wife.

"That fellow Courtier's caught by the leg," he said. "Don't know what your Mother will say to an enemy in the camp."

"Isn't he a freethinker, and rather——"

Sir William, following his own thoughts, interrupted:

"Just as well, of course, so far as Miltoun's concerned, to have got him here."

Agatha sighed: "Well, I suppose we shall have to be nice to him. I'll tell Mother."

Sir William smiled.

"Ann will see to that," he said.

Ann was seeing to that.

Seated in the embrasure of the window behind the looking-glass, where Lady Valleys was still occupied, she was saying:

"He fell out of the window because of the red pepper. Miss Wallace says he is a hostage—what does hostage mean, Granny?"

When six years ago that word had first fallen on Lady Valleys' ears, she had thought: "Oh! dear! Am I

really Granny?" It had been a shock, had seemed the end of so much; but the matter-of-fact heroism of women, so much quicker to accept the inevitable than men, had soon come to her aid, and now, unlike her husband, she did not care a bit. For all that she answered nothing, partly because it was not necessary to speak in order to sustain a conversation with little Ann, and partly because she was deep in thought.

The man was injured! Hospitality, of course—especially since their own tenants had committed the outrage! Still, to welcome a man who had gone out of his way to come down here and stump the country against her own son, was rather a tall order. It might have been worse, no doubt. If; for instance, he had been some 'impossible' Nonconformist Radical! This Mr. Courtier was a free lance—rather a well-known man, an interesting creature. She must see that he felt 'at home' and comfortable. If he were pumped judiciously, no doubt one could find out about this woman. Moreover, the acceptance of their 'salt' would silence him politically if she knew anything of that type of man, who always had something in him of the Arab's creed. Her mind, that of a capable administrator, took in all the practical significance of this incident, which, although untoward, was not without its comic side to one disposed to find zest and humour in everything that did not absolutely run counter to her interests and philosophy.

The voice of little Ann broke in on her reflections.

"I'm going to Auntie Babs now."

"Very well; give me a kiss first."

Little Ann thrust up her face, so that its sudden little nose penetrated Lady Valleys' soft curving lips....

When early that same afternoon Courtier, leaning on a stick, passed from his room out on to the terrace, he was confronted by three sunlit peacocks marching slowly across a lawn towards a statue of Diana. With incredible dignity those birds moved, as if never in their lives had they been hurried. They seemed indeed to know that when they got there, there would be nothing for them to do but to come back again. Beyond them, through the tall trees, over some wooded foot-hills of the moorland and a promised land of pinkish fields, pasture, and orchards, the prospect stretched to the far sea. Heat clothed this view with a kind of opalescence, a fairy garment, transmuting all values, so that the four square walls and tall chimneys of the pottery-works a few miles down the valley seemed to Courtier like a vision of some old fortified Italian town. His sensations, finding himself in this galley, were peculiar. For his feeling towards Miltoun, whom he had twice met at Mrs. Noel's, was, in spite of disagreements, by no means unfriendly; while his feeling towards Miltoun's family was not yet in existence. Having lived from hand to mouth, and in many countries, since he left Westminster School, he had now practically no class feelings. An attitude of hostility to aristocracy because it was aristocracy, was as incomprehensible to him as an attitude of deference.

His sensations habitually shaped themselves in accordance with those two permanent requirements of his nature, liking for adventure, and hatred of tyranny. The labourer who beat his wife, the shopman who sweated his 'hands,' the parson who consigned his parishioners to hell, the peer who rode roughshod—all were equally odious to him. He thought of people as individuals, and it was, as it were, by accident that he had conceived the class generalization which he had fired back at Miltoun from Mrs. Noel's window. Sanguine, accustomed to queer environments, and always catching at the moment as it flew, he had not to fight with the timidities and irritations of a nervous temperament. His cheery courtesy was only disturbed when he became conscious of some sentiment which appeared to him mean or cowardly. On such occasions, not perhaps infrequent, his face looked as if his heart were physically fuming, and since his shell of stoicism was never quite melted by this heat, a very peculiar expression was the result, a sort of calm, sardonic, desperate, jolly look.

His chief feeling, then, at the outrage which had laid him captive in the enemy's camp, was one of vague amusement, and curiosity. People round about spoke fairly well of this Caradoc family. There did not seem to be any lack of kindly feeling between them and their tenants; there was said to be no griping destitution, nor any particular ill-housing on their estate. And if the inhabitants were not encouraged to improve themselves, they were at all events maintained at a certain level, by steady and not ungenerous supervision. When a roof required thatching it was thatched; when a man became too old to work, he was not suffered to lapse into the Workhouse. In bad years for wool, or beasts, or crops, the farmers received a graduated remission of rent. The pottery-works were run on a liberal if autocratic basis. It was true that though Lord Valleys was said to be a staunch supporter of a 'back to the land' policy, no disposition was shown to encourage people to settle on these particular lands, no doubt from a feeling that such settlers would not do them so much justice as their present owner. Indeed so firmly did this conviction seemingly obtain, that Lord Valleys' agent was not unfrequently observed to be buying a little bit more.

But, since in this life one notices only what interests him, all this gossip, half complimentary, half not, had fallen but lightly on the ears of the champion of Peace during his campaign, for he was, as has, been said, but a poor politician, and rode his own horse very much his own way.

While he stood there enjoying the view, he heard a small high voice, and became conscious of a little girl in a very shady hat so far back on her brown hair that it did not shade her; and of a small hand put out in front. He took the hand, and answered:

"Thank you, I am well—and you?" perceiving the while that a pair of wide frank eyes were examining his leg.

"Does it hurt?"

"Not to speak of."

"My pony's leg was blistered. Granny is coming to look at it."

"I see."

"I have to go now. I hope you'll soon be better. Good-bye!"

Then, instead of the little girl, Courtier saw a tall and rather florid woman regarding him with a sort of quizzical dignity. She wore a stiffish fawn-coloured dress that seemed to be cut a little too tight round her substantial hips, for it quite neglected to embrace her knees. She had on no hat, no gloves, no ornaments, except the rings on her fingers, and a little jewelled watch in a leather bracelet on her wrist. There was, indeed, about her whole figure an air of almost professional escape from finery.

Stretching out a well-shaped but not small hand, she said:

"I most heartily apologize to you, Mr. Courtier."

"Not at all."

"I do hope you're comfortable. Have they given you everything you want?"

"More than everything."

"It really was disgraceful! However it's brought us the pleasure of making your acquaintance. I've read your book, of course."

To Courtier it seemed that on this lady's face had come a look which seemed to say: Yes, very clever and amusing, quite enjoyable! But the ideas——What? You know very well they won't do—in fact they mustn't do!

"That's very nice of you."

But into Lady Valleys' answer, "I don't agree with it a bit, you know!" there had crept a touch of asperity, as though she knew that he had smiled inside. "What we want preached in these days are the warlike virtues—especially by a warrior."

"Believe me, Lady Valleys, the warlike virtues are best left to men of more virgin imagination."

He received a quick look, and the words: "Anyway, I'm sure you don't care a rap for politics. You know Mrs. Lees Noel, don't you? What a pretty woman she is!"

But as she spoke Courtier saw a young girl coming along the terrace. She had evidently been riding, for she wore high boots and a skirt which had enabled her to sit astride. Her eyes were blue, and her hair—the colour of beech-leaves in autumn with the sun shining through—was coiled up tight under a small soft hat. She was tall, and moved towards them like one endowed with great length from the hip joint to the knee. Joy of life, serene, unconscious vigour, seemed to radiate from her whole face and figure.

At Lady Valleys' words:

"Ah, Babs! My daughter Barbara—Mr. Courtier," he put out his hand, received within it some gauntleted fingers held out with a smile, and heard her say:

"Miltoun's gone up to Town, Mother; I was going to motor in to Bucklandbury with a message he gave me; so I can fetch Granny out from the station:"

"You had better take Ann, or she'll make our lives a burden; and perhaps Mr. Courtier would like an airing. Is your knee fit, do you think?"

Glancing at the apparition, Courtier replied:

"It is."

Never since the age of seven had he been able to look on feminine beauty without a sense of warmth and faint excitement; and seeing now perhaps the most beautiful girl he had ever beheld, he desired to be with her wherever she might be going. There was too something very fascinating in the way she smiled, as if she had a little seen through his sentiments.

"Well then," she said, "we'd better look for Ann."

After short but vigorous search little Ann was found—in the car, instinct having told her of a forward movement in which it was her duty to take part. And soon they had started, Ann between them in that peculiar state of silence to which she became liable when really interested.

From the Monkland estate, flowered, lawned, and timbered, to the open moor, was like passing to another world; for no sooner was the last lodge of the Western drive left behind, than there came into sudden view the most pagan bit of landscape in all England. In this wild parliament-house, clouds, rocks, sun, and winds met and consulted. The 'old' men, too, had left their spirits among the great stones, which lay couched like lions on the hill-tops, under the white clouds, and their brethren, the hunting buzzard hawks. Here the very rocks were restless, changing form, and sense, and colour from day to day, as though worshipping the unexpected, and refusing themselves to law. The winds too in their passage revolted against their courses, and came tearing down wherever there were combs or crannies, so that men in their shelters might still learn the power of the wild gods.

The wonders of this prospect were entirely lost on little Ann, and somewhat so on Courtier, deeply engaged in reconciling those two alien principles, courtesy, and the love of looking at a pretty face. He was wondering too what this girl of twenty, who had the self-possession of a woman of forty, might be thinking. It was little Ann who broke the silence.

"Auntie Babs, it wasn't a very strong house, was it?"

Courtier looked in the direction of her small finger. There was the wreck of a little house, which stood close to a stone man who had obviously possessed that hill before there were men of flesh. Over one corner of the sorry ruin, a single patch of roof still clung, but the rest was open.

"He was a silly man to build it, wasn't he, Ann? That's why they call it Ashman's Folly."

"Is he alive?"

"Not quite—it's just a hundred years ago."

"What made him build it here?"

"He hated women, and—the roof fell in on him."

"Why did he hate women?"

"He was a crank."

"What is a crank?"

"Ask Mr. Courtier."

Under this girl's calm quizzical glance, Courtier endeavoured to find an answer to that question.

"A crank," he said slowly, "is a man like me."

He heard a little laugh, and became acutely conscious of Ann's dispassionate examining eyes.

"Is Uncle Eustace a crank?"

"You know now, Mr. Courtier, what Ann thinks of you. You think a good deal of Uncle Eustace, don't you, Ann?"

"Yes," said Ann, and fixed her eyes before her. But Courtier gazed sideways—over her hatless head.

His exhilaration was increasing every moment. This girl reminded him of a two-year-old filly he had once seen, stepping out of Ascot paddock for her first race, with the sun glistening on her satin chestnut skin, her neck held high, her eyes all fire—as sure to win, as that grass was green. It was difficult to believe her Miltoun's sister. It was difficult to believe any of those four young Caradocs related. The grave ascetic Miltoun, wrapped in the garment of his spirit; mild, domestic, strait-laced Agatha; Bertie, muffled, shrewd, and steely; and this frank, joyful conquering Barbara—the range was wide.

But the car had left the moor, and, down a steep hill, was passing the small villas and little grey workmen's houses outside the town of Bucklandbury.

"Ann and I have to go on to Miltoun's headquarters. Shall I drop you at the enemy's, Mr. Courtier? Stop, please, Frith."

And before Courtier could assent, they had pulled up at a house on which was inscribed with extraordinary vigour: "Chilcox for Bucklandbury."

Hobbling into the Committee-room of Mr. Humphrey Chilcox, which smelled of paint, Courtier took with him the scented memory of youth, and ambergris, and Harris tweed.

In that room three men were assembled round a table; the eldest of whom, endowed with little grey eyes, a stubby beard, and that mysterious something only found in those who have been mayors, rose at once and came towards him.

"Mr. Courtier, I believe," he said bluffly. "Glad to see you, sir. Most distressed to hear of this outrage. Though in a way, it's done us good. Yes, really. Grossly against fair play. Shouldn't be surprised if it turned a couple of hundred votes. You carry the effects of it about with you, I see."

A thin, refined man, with wiry hair, also came up, holding a newspaper in his hand.

"It has had one rather embarrassing effect," he said. "Read this

"OUTRAGE ON A DISTINGUISHED VISITOR.

"LORD MILTOUN'S EVENING ADVENTURE."

Courtier read a paragraph.

The man with the little eyes broke the ominous silence which ensued.

"One of our side must have seen the whole thing, jumped on his bicycle and brought in the account before they went to press. They make no imputation on the lady—simply state the facts. Quite enough," he added with impersonal grimness; "I think he's done for himself, sir."

The man with the refined face added nervously:

"We couldn't help it, Mr. Courtier; I really don't know what we can do. I don't like it a bit."

"Has your candidate seen this?" Courtier asked.

"Can't have," struck in the third Committee-man; "we hadn't seen it ourselves until an hour ago."

"I should never have permitted it," said the man with the refined face; "I blame the editor greatly."

"Come to that——" said the little-eyed man, "it's a plain piece of news. If it makes a stir, that's not our fault. The paper imputes nothing, it states. Position of the lady happens to do the rest. Can't help it, and moreover, sir, speaking for self, don't want to. We'll have no loose morals in public life down here, please God!" There was real feeling in his words; then, catching sight of Courtier's face, he added: "Do you know this lady?"

"Ever since she was a child. Anyone who speaks evil of her, has to reckon with me."

The man with the refined face said earnestly:

"Believe me, Mr. Courtier, I entirely sympathize. We had nothing to do with the paragraph. It's one of those incidents where one benefits against one's will. Most unfortunate that she came out on to the green with Lord Miltoun; you know what people are."

"It's the head-line that does it," said the third Committee-man; "they've put what will attract the public."

"I don't know, I don't know," said the little-eyed man stubbornly; "if Lord Miltoun will spend his evenings with lonely ladies, he can't blame anybody but himself."

Courtier looked from face to face.

"This closes my connection with the campaign," he said: "What's the address of this paper?" And without waiting for an answer, he took up the journal and hobbled from the room. He stood a minute outside finding the address, then made his way down the street.

CHAPTER VIII

By the side of little Ann, Barbara sat leaning back amongst the cushions of the car. In spite of being already launched into high-caste life which brings with it an early knowledge of the world, she had still some of the eagerness in her face which makes children lovable. Yet she looked negligently enough at the citizens of Bucklandbury, being already a little conscious of the strange mixture of sentiment peculiar to her countrymen in presence of herself—that curious expression on their faces resulting from the continual attempt to look down their noses while slanting their eyes upwards. Yes, she was already alive to that mysterious glance which had built the national house and insured it afterwards—foe to cynicism, pessimism, and anything French or Russian; parent of all the national virtues, and all the national vices; of idealism and muddle-headedness, of independence and servility; fosterer of conduct, murderer of speculation; looking up, and looking down, but never straight at anything; most high, most deep, most queer; and ever bubbling-up from the essential Well of Emulation.

Surrounded by that glance, waiting for Courtier, Barbara, not less British than her neighbours, was secretly slanting her own eyes up and down over the absent figure of her new acquaintance. She too wanted something she could look up to, and at the same time see damned first. And in this knight-errant it seemed to her that she had got it.

He was a creature from another world. She had met many men, but not as yet one quite of this sort. It was rather nice to be with a clever man, who had none the less done so many outdoor things, been through so many bodily adventures. The mere writers, or even the 'Bohemians,' whom she occasionally met, were after all only 'chaplains to the Court,' necessary to keep aristocracy in touch with the latest developments of literature and art. But this Mr. Courtier was a man of action; he could not be looked on with the amused, admiring toleration suited to men remarkable only for ideas, and the way they put them into paint or ink. He had used, and could use, the sword, even in the cause of Peace. He could love, had loved, or so they said: If Barbara had been a girl of twenty in another class, she would probably never have heard of this, and if she had heard, it might very well have dismayed or shocked her. But she had heard, and without shock, because she had already learned that men were like that, and women too sometimes.

It was with quite a little pang of concern that she saw him hobbling down the street towards her; and when he was once more seated, she told the chauffeur: "To the station, Frith. Quick, please!" and began:

"You are not to be trusted a bit. What were you doing?"

But Courtier smiled grimly over the head of Ann, in silence.

At this, almost the first time she had ever yet encountered a distinct rebuff, Barbara quivered, as though she had been touched lightly with a whip. Her lips closed firmly, her eyes began to dance. "Very well, my dear," she thought. But presently stealing a look at him, she became aware of such a queer expression on his face, that she forgot she was offended.

"Is anything wrong, Mr. Courtier?"

"Yes, Lady Barbara, something is very wrong—that miserable mean thing, the human tongue."

Barbara had an intuitive knowledge of how to handle things, a kind of moral sangfroid, drawn in from the faces she had watched, the talk she had heard, from her youth up. She trusted those intuitions, and letting her eyes conspire with his over Ann's brown hair, she said:

"Anything to do with Mrs. N——-?" Seeing "Yes" in his eyes, she added quickly: "And M——-?"

Courtier nodded.

"I thought that was coming. Let them babble! Who cares?"

She caught an approving glance, and the word, "Good!"

But the car had drawn up at Bucklandbury Station.

The little grey figure of Lady Casterley, coming out of the station doorway, showed but slight sign of her long travel. She stopped to take the car in, from chauffeur to Courtier.

"Well, Frith!—Mr. Courtier, is it? I know your book, and I don't approve of you; you're a dangerous man—How do you do? I must have those two bags. The cart can bring the rest.... Randle, get up in front, and don't get dusty. Ann!" But Ann was already beside the chauffeur, having long planned this improvement. "H'm! So you've hurt your leg, sir? Keep still! We can sit three.... Now, my dear, I can kiss you! You've grown!"

Lady Casterley's kiss, once received, was never forgotten; neither perhaps was Barbara's. Yet they were different. For, in the case of Lady Casterley, the old eyes, bright and investigating, could be seen deciding the exact spot for the lips to touch; then the face with its firm chin was darted forward; the lips paused a second, as though to make quite certain, then suddenly dug hard and dry into the middle of the cheek, quavered for the fraction of a second as if trying to remember to be soft, and were relaxed like the elastic of a catapult. And in the case of Barbara, first a sort of light came into her eyes, then her chin tilted a little, then her lips pouted a little, her body quivered, as if it were getting a size larger, her hair breathed, there was a small sweet sound; it was over.

Thus kissing her grandmother, Barbara resumed her seat, and looked at Courtier. 'Sitting three' as they were, he was touching her, and it seemed to her somehow that he did not mind.

The wind had risen, blowing from the West, and sunshine was flying on it. The call of the cuckoos—a little sharpened—followed the swift-travelling car. And that essential sweetness of the moor, born of the heather roots and the South-West wind, was stealing out from under the young ferns.

With her thin nostrils distended to this scent, Lady Casterley bore a distinct resemblance to a small, fine game-bird.

"You smell nice down here," she said. "Now, Mr. Courtier, before I forget—who is this Mrs. Lees Noel that I hear so much of?"

At that question, Barbara could not help sliding her eyes round. How would he stand up to Granny? It was the moment to see what he was made of. Granny was terrific!

"A very charming woman, Lady Casterley."

"No doubt; but I am tired of hearing that. What is her story?"

"Has she one?"

"Ha!" said Lady Casterley.

Ever so slightly Barbara let her arm press against Courtiers. It was so delicious to hear Granny getting no forwarder.

"I may take it she has a past, then?"

"Not from me, Lady Casterley."

Again Barbara gave him that imperceptible and flattering touch.

"Well, this is all very mysterious. I shall find out for myself. You know her, my dear. You must take me to see her."

"Dear Granny! If people hadn't pasts, they wouldn't have futures."

Lady Casterley let her little claw-like hand descend on her grand-daughter's thigh.

"Don't talk nonsense, and don't stretch like that!" she said; "you're too large already...."

At dinner that night they were all in possession of the news. Sir William had been informed by the

local agent at Staverton, where Lord Harbinger's speech had suffered from some rude interruptions. The Hon. Geoffrey Winlow; having sent his wife on, had flown over in his biplane from Winkleigh, and brought a copy of 'the rag' with him. The one member of the small house-party who had not heard the report before dinner was Lord Dennis Fitz-Harold, Lady Casterley's brother.

Little, of course, was said. But after the ladies had withdrawn, Harbinger, with that plain-spoken spontaneity which was so unexpected, perhaps a little intentionally so, in connection with his almost classically formed face, uttered words to the effect that, if they did not fundamentally kick that rumour, it was all up with Miltoun. Really this was serious! And the beggars knew it, and they were going to work it. And Miltoun had gone up to Town, no one knew what for. It was the devil of a mess!

In all the conversation of this young man there was that peculiar brand of voice, which seems ever rebutting an accusation of being serious—a brand of voice and manner warranted against anything save ridicule; and in the face of ridicule apt to disappear. The words, just a little satirically spoken: "What is, my dear young man?" stopped him at once.

Looking for the complement and counterpart of Lady Casterley, one would perhaps have singled out her brother. All her abrupt decision was negated in his profound, ironical urbanity. His voice and look and manner were like his velvet coat, which had here and there a whitish sheen, as if it had been touched by moonlight. His hair too had that sheen. His very delicate features were framed in a white beard and moustache of Elizabethan shape. His eyes, hazel and still clear, looked out very straight, with a certain dry kindliness. His face, though unweathered and unseamed, and much too fine and thin in texture, had a curious affinity to the faces of old sailors or fishermen who have lived a simple, practical life in the light of an overmastering tradition. It was the face of a man with a very set creed, and inclined to be satiric towards innovations, examined by him and rejected full fifty years ago. One felt that a brain not devoid either of subtlety or aesthetic quality had long given up all attempts to interfere with conduct; that all shrewdness of speculation had given place to shrewdness of practical judgment based on very definite experience. Owing to lack of advertising power, natural to one so conscious of his dignity as to have lost all care for it, and to his devotion to a certain lady, only closed by death, his life had been lived, as it were, in shadow. Still, he possessed a peculiar influence in Society, because it was known to be impossible to get him to look at things in a complicated way. He was regarded rather as a last resort, however. "Bad as that? Well, there's old Fitz-Harold! Try him! He won't advise you, but he'll say something."

And in the heart of that irreverent young man, Harbinger, there stirred a sort of misgiving. Had he expressed himself too freely? Had he said anything too thick? He had forgotten the old boy! Stirring Bertie up with his foot, he murmured "Forgot you didn't know, sir. Bertie will explain."

Thus called on, Bertie, opening his lips a very little way, and fixing his half-closed eyes on his great-uncle, explained. There was a lady at the cottage—a nice woman—Mr. Courtier knew her—old Miltoun went there sometimes—rather late the other evening—these devils were making the most of it—suggesting—lose him the election, if they didn't look out. Perfect rot, of course!

In his opinion, old Miltoun, though as steady as Time, had been a flat to let the woman come out with him on to the Green, showing clearly where he had been, when he ran to Courtier's rescue. You couldn't play about with women who had no form that anyone knew anything of, however promising they might look.

Then, out of a silence Winlow asked: What was to be done? Should Miltoun be wired for? A thing like this spread like wildfire! Sir William—a man not accustomed to underrate difficulties—was afraid it was going to be troublesome. Harbinger expressed the opinion that the editor ought to be kicked. Did anybody know what Courtier had done when he heard of it. Where was he—dining in his room? Bertie suggested that if Miltoun was at Valleys House, it mightn't be too late to wire to him. The thing ought to be stemmed at once! And in all this concern about the situation there kept cropping out quaint little outbursts of desire to disregard the whole thing as infernal insolence, and metaphorically to punch the beggars' heads, natural to young men of breeding.

Then, out of another silence came the voice of Lord Dennis:

"I am thinking of this poor lady."

Turning a little abruptly towards that dry suave voice, and recovering the self-possession which seldom deserted him, Harbinger murmured:

"Quite so, sir; of course!"

CHAPTER IX

In the lesser withdrawing room, used when there was so small a party, Mrs. Winlow had gone to the piano and was playing to herself, for Lady Casterley, Lady Valleys, and her two daughters had drawn together as though united to face this invading rumour.

It was curious testimony to Miltoun's character that, no more here than in the dining-hall, was there any doubt of the integrity of his relations with Mrs. Noel. But whereas, there the matter was confined to its electioneering aspect, here that aspect was already perceived to be only the fringe of its importance. Those feminine minds, going with intuitive swiftness to the core of anything which affected their own males, had already grasped the fact that the rumour would, as it were, chain a man of Miltoun's temper to this woman.

But they were walking on such a thin crust of facts, and there was so deep a quagmire of supposition beneath, that talk was almost painfully difficult. Never before perhaps had each of these four women realized so clearly how much Miltoun—that rather strange and unknown grandson, son, and brother—counted in the scheme of existence. Their suppressed agitation was manifested in very different ways. Lady Casterley, upright in her chair, showed it only by an added decision of speech, a continual restless movement of one hand, a thin line between her usually smooth brows. Lady Valleys wore a puzzled look, as if a little surprised that she felt serious. Agatha looked frankly anxious. She was in her quiet way a woman of much character, endowed with that natural piety, which accepts without questioning the established order in life and religion. The world to her being home and family, she had a real, if gently expressed, horror of all that she instinctively felt to be subversive of this ideal. People judged her a little quiet, dull, and narrow; they compared her to a hen for ever clucking round her chicks. The streak of heroism that lay in her nature was not perhaps of patent order. Her feeling about her brother's situation however was sincere and not to be changed or comforted. She saw him in danger of being damaged in the only sense in which she could conceive of a man—as a husband and a father. It was this that went to her heart, though her piety proclaimed to her also the peril of his soul; for she shared the High Church view of the indissolubility of marriage.

As to Barbara, she stood by the hearth, leaning her white shoulders against the carved marble, her hands behind her, looking down. Now and then her lips curled, her level brows twitched, a faint sigh came from her; then a little smile would break out, and be instantly suppressed. She alone was silent—Youth criticizing Life; her judgment voiced itself only in the untroubled rise and fall of her young bosom, the impatience of her brows, the downward look of her blue eyes, full of a lazy, inextinguishable light:

Lady Valleys sighed.

"If only he weren't such a queer boy! He's quite capable of marrying her from sheer perversity."

"What!" said Lady Casterley.

"You haven't seen her, my dear. A most unfortunately attractive creature—quite a charming face."

Agatha said quietly:

"Mother, if she was divorced, I don't think Eustace would."

"There's that, certainly," murmured Lady Valleys; "hope for the best!"

"Don't you even know which way it was?" said Lady Casterley.

"Well, the vicar says she did the divorcing. But he's very charitable; it may be as Agatha hopes."

"I detest vagueness. Why doesn't someone ask the woman?"

"You shall come with me, Granny dear, and ask her yourself; you will do it so nicely."

Lady Casterley looked up.

"We shall see," she said. Something struggled with the autocratic criticism in her eyes. No more than the rest of the world could she help indulging Barbara. As one who believed in the divinity of her order, she liked this splendid child. She even admired—though admiration was not what she excelled in—that warm joy in life, as of some great nymph, parting the waves with bare limbs, tossing from her the foam of breakers. She felt that in this granddaughter, rather than in the good Agatha, the patrician spirit was

housed. There were points to Agatha, earnestness and high principle; but something morally narrow and over-Anglican slightly offended the practical, this-worldly temper of Lady Casterley. It was a weakness, and she disliked weakness. Barbara would never be squeamish over moral questions or matters such as were not really, essential to aristocracy. She might, indeed, err too much the other way from sheer high spirits. As the impudent child had said: "If people had no pasts, they would have no futures." And Lady Casterley could not bear people without futures. She was ambitious; not with the low ambition of one who had risen from nothing, but with the high passion of one on the top, who meant to stay there.

"And where have you been meeting this—er—anonymous creature?" she asked.

Barbara came from the hearth, and bending down beside Lady Casterley's chair, seemed to envelop her completely.

"I'm all right, Granny; she couldn't corrupt me."

Lady Casterley's face peered out doubtfully from that warmth, wearing a look of disapproving pleasure.

"I know your wiles!" she said. "Come, now!"

"I see her about. She's nice to look at. We talk."

Again with that hurried quietness Agatha said:

"My dear Babs, I do think you ought to wait."

"My dear Angel, why? What is it to me if she's had four husbands?"

Agatha bit her lips, and Lady Valleys murmured with a laugh:

"You really are a terror, Babs."

But the sound of Mrs. Winlow's music had ceased—the men had come in. And the faces of the four women hardened, as if they had slipped on masks; for though this was almost or quite a family party, the Winlows being second cousins, still the subject was one which each of these four in their very different ways felt to be beyond general discussion. Talk, now, began glancing from the war scare—Winlow had it very specially that this would be over in a week—to Brabrook's speech, in progress at that very moment, of which Harbinger provided an imitation. It sped to Winlow's flight—to Andrew Grant's articles in the 'Parthenon'—to the caricature of Harbinger in the 'Cackler', inscribed 'The New Tory. Lord H-rb-ng-r brings Social Reform beneath the notice of his friends,' which depicted him introducing a naked baby to a number of coroneted old ladies. Thence to a dancer. Thence to the Bill for Universal Assurance. Then back to the war scare; to the last book of a great French writer; and once more to Winlow's flight. It was all straightforward and outspoken, each seeming to say exactly what came into the head. For all that, there was a curious avoidance of the spiritual significances of these things; or was it perhaps that such significances were not seen?

Lord Dennis, at the far end of the room, studying a portfolio of engravings, felt a touch on his cheek; and conscious of a certain fragrance, said without turning his head:

"Nice things, these, Babs!"

Receiving no answer he looked up.

There indeed stood Barbara.

"I do hate sneering behind people's backs!"

There had always been good comradeship between these two, since the days when Barbara, a golden-haired child, astride of a grey pony, had been his morning companion in the Row all through the season. His riding days were past; he had now no outdoor pursuit save fishing, which he followed with the ironic persistence of a self-contained, high-spirited nature, which refuses to admit that the mysterious finger of old age is laid across it. But though she was no longer his companion, he still had a habit of expecting her confidences; and he looked after her, moving away from him to a window, with surprised concern.

It was one of those nights, dark yet gleaming, when there seems a flying malice in the heavens; when the stars, from under and above the black clouds, are like eyes frowning and flashing down at men with purposed malevolence. The great sighing trees even had caught this spirit, save one, a dark, spire-like cypress, planted three hundred and fifty years before, whose tall form incarnated the very spirit of

tradition, and neither swayed nor sougled like the others. From her, too close-fibred, too resisting, to admit the breath of Nature, only a dry rustle came. Still almost exotic, in spite of her centuries of sojourn, and now brought to life by the eyes of night, she seemed almost terrifying, in her narrow, spear-like austerity, as though something had dried and died within her soul. Barbara came back from the window.

"We can't do anything in our lives, it seems to me," she said, "but play at taking risks!"

Lord Dennis replied dryly:

"I don't think I understand, my dear."

"Look at Mr. Courtier!" muttered Barbara. "His life's so much more risky altogether than any of our men folk lead. And yet they sneer at him."

"Let's see, what has he done?"

"Oh! I dare say not very much; but it's all neck or nothing. But what does anything matter to Harbinger, for instance? If his Social Reform comes to nothing, he'll still be Harbinger, with fifty thousand a year."

Lord Dennis looked up a little queerly.

"What! Is it possible you don't take the young man seriously, Babs?"

Barbara shrugged; a strap slipped a little off one white shoulder.

"It's all play really; and he knows it—you can tell that from his voice. He can't help its not mattering, of course; and he knows that too."

"I have heard that he's after you, Babs; is that true?"

"He hasn't caught me yet."

"Will he?"

Barbara's answer was another shrug; and, for all their statuesque beauty, the movement of her shoulders was like the shrug of a little girl in her pinafore.

"And this Mr. Courtier," said Lord Dennis dryly: "Are you after him?"

"I'm after everything; didn't you know that, dear?"

"In reason, my child."

"In reason, of course—like poor Eusty!" She stopped. Harbinger himself was standing there close by, with an air as nearly approaching reverence as was ever to be seen on him. In truth, the way in which he was looking at her was almost timorous.

"Will you sing that song I like so much, Lady Babs?"

They moved away together; and Lord Dennis, gazing after that magnificent young couple, stroked his beard gravely.

CHAPTER X

Miltoun's sudden journey to London had been undertaken in pursuance of a resolve slowly forming from the moment he met Mrs. Noel in the stone flagged passage of Burracombe Farm. If she would have him and since last evening he believed she would—he intended to marry her.

It has been said that except for one lapse his life had been austere, but this is not to assert that he had no capacity for passion. The contrary was the case. That flame which had been so jealously guarded smouldered deep within him—a smothered fire with but little air to feed on. The moment his spirit was touched by the spirit of this woman, it had flared up. She was the incarnation of all that he desired. Her hair, her eyes, her form; the tiny tuck or dimple at the corner of her mouth just where a

child places its finger; her way of moving, a sort of unconscious swaying or yielding to the air; the tone in her voice, which seemed to come not so much from happiness of her own as from an innate wish to make others happy; and that natural, if not robust, intelligence, which belongs to the very sympathetic, and is rarely found in women of great ambitions or enthusiasms—all these things had twined themselves round his heart. He not only dreamed of her, and wanted her; he believed in her. She filled his thoughts as one who could never do wrong; as one who, though a wife would remain a mistress, and though a mistress, would always be the companion of his spirit.

It has been said that no one spoke or gossiped about women in Miltoun's presence, and the tale of her divorce was present to his mind simply in the form of a conviction that she was an injured woman. After his interview with the vicar, he had only once again alluded to it, and that in answer to the speech of a lady staying at the Court: "Oh! yes, I remember her case perfectly. She was the poor woman who ——" "Did not, I am certain, Lady Bonington." The tone of his voice had made someone laugh uneasily; the subject was changed.

All divorce was against his convictions, but in a blurred way he admitted that there were cases where release was unavoidable. He was not a man to ask for confidences, or expect them to be given him. He himself had never confided his spiritual struggles to any living creature; and the unspiritual struggle had little interest for Miltoun. He was ready at any moment to stake his life on the perfection of the idol he had set up within his soul, as simply and straightforwardly as he would have placed his body in front of her to shield her from harm.

The same fanaticism, which looked on his passion as a flower by itself, entirely apart from its suitability to the social garden, was also the driving force which sent him up to London to declare his intention to his father before he spoke to Mrs. Noel. The thing should be done simply, and in right order. For he had the kind of moral courage found in those who live retired within the shell of their own aspirations. Yet it was not perhaps so much active moral courage as indifference to what others thought or did, coming from his inbred resistance to the appreciation of what they felt.

That peculiar smile of the old Tudor Cardinal—which had in it invincible self-reliance, and a sort of spiritual sneer—played over his face when he speculated on his father's reception of the coming news; and very soon he ceased to think of it at all, burying himself in the work he had brought with him for the journey. For he had in high degree the faculty, so essential to public life, of switching off his whole attention from one subject to another.

On arriving at Paddington he drove straight to Valleys House.

This large dwelling with its pillared portico, seemed to wear an air of faint surprise that, at the height of the season, it was not more inhabited. Three servants relieved Miltoun of his little luggage; and having washed, and learned that his father would be dining in, he went for a walk, taking his way towards his rooms in the Temple. His long figure, somewhat carelessly garbed, attracted the usual attention, of which he was as usual unaware. Strolling along, he meditated deeply on a London, an England, different from this flatulent hurly-burly, this 'omniuin gatherum', this great discordant symphony of sharps and flats. A London, an England, kempt and self-respecting; swept and garnished of slums, and plutocrats, advertisement, and jerry-building, of sensationalism, vulgarity, vice, and unemployment. An England where each man should know his place, and never change it, but serve in it loyally in his own caste. Where every man, from nobleman to labourer, should be an oligarch by faith, and a gentleman by practice. An England so steel-bright and efficient that the very sight should suffice to impose peace. An England whose soul should be stoical and fine with the stoicism and fineness of each soul amongst her many million souls; where the town should have its creed and the country its creed, and there should be contentment and no complaining in her streets.

And as he walked down the Strand, a little ragged boy cheeped out between his legs:

"Bloodee discoveree in a Bank—Grite sensytion! Pi-er!"

Miltoun paid no heed to that saying; yet, with it, the wind that blows where man lives, the careless, wonderful, unordered wind, had dispersed his austere and formal vision. Great was that wind—the myriad aspiration of men and women, the praying of the uncounted multitude to the goddess of Sensation—of Chance, and Change. A flowing from heart to heart, from lip to lip, as in Spring the wistful air wanders through a wood, imparting to every bush and tree the secrets of fresh life, the passionate resolve to grow, and become—no matter what! A sighing, as eternal as the old murmuring of the sea, as little to be hushed, as prone to swell into sudden roaring!

Miltoun held on through the traffic, not looking overmuch at the present forms of the thousands he passed, but seeing with the eyes of faith the forms he desired to see. Near St. Paul's he stopped in front of an old book-shop. His grave, pallid, not unhandsome face, was well-known to William Rimall, its

small proprietor, who at once brought out his latest acquisition—a Mores 'Utopia.' That particular edition (he assured Miltoun) was quite unprocurable—he had never sold but one other copy, which had been literally, crumbling away. This copy was in even better condition. It could hardly last another twenty years—a genuine book, a bargain. There wasn't so much movement in More as there had been a little time back.

Miltoun opened the tome, and a small book-louse who had been sleeping on the word 'Tranibore,' began to make its way slowly towards the very centre of the volume.

"I see it's genuine," said Miltoun.

"It's not to read, my lord," the little man warned him: "Hardly safe to turn the pages. As I was saying—I've not had a better piece this year. I haven't really!"

"Shrewd old dreamer," muttered Miltoun; "the Socialists haven't got beyond him, even now."

The little man's eyes blinked, as though apologizing for the views of Thomas More.

"Well," he said, "I suppose he was one of them. I forget if your lordship's very strong on politics?"

Miltoun smiled.

"I want to see an England, Rimall, something like the England of Mores dream. But my machinery will be different. I shall begin at the top."

The little man nodded.

"Quite so, quite so," he said; "we shall come to that, I dare say."

"We must, Rimall." And Miltoun turned the page.

The little man's face quivered.

"I don't think," he said, "that book's quite strong enough for you, my lord, with your taste for reading. Now I've a most curious old volume here—on Chinese temples. It's rare—but not too old. You can peruse it thoroughly. It's what I call a book to browse on just suit your palate. Funny principle they built those things on," he added, opening the volume at an engraving, "in layers. We don't build like that in England."

Miltoun looked up sharply; the little man's face wore no signs of understanding.

"Unfortunately we don't, Rimall," he said; "we ought to, and we shall. I'll take this book."

Placing his finger on the print of the pagoda, he added: "A good symbol."

The little bookseller's eye strayed down the temple to the secret price mark.

"Exactly, my lord," he said; "I thought it'd be your fancy. The price to you will be twenty-seven and six."

Miltoun, pocketing the bargain, walked out. He made his way into the Temple, left the book at his Chambers, and passed on down to the bank of Mother Thames. The Sun was loving her passionately that afternoon; he had kissed her into warmth and light and colour. And all the buildings along her banks, as far as the towers at Westminster, seemed to be smiling. It was a great sight for the eyes of a lover. And another vision came haunting Miltoun, of a soft-eyed woman with a low voice, bending amongst her flowers. Nothing would be complete without her; no work bear fruit; no scheme could have full meaning.

Lord Valleys greeted his son at dinner with good fellowship and a faint surprise.

"Day off, my dear fellow? Or have you come up to hear Brabrook pitch into us? He's rather late this time—we've got rid of that balloon business no trouble after all."

And he eyed Miltoun with that clear grey stare of his, so cool, level, and curious. Now, what sort of bird is this? it seemed saying. Certainly not the partridge I should have expected from its breeding!

Miltoun's answer: "I came up to tell you some thing, sir," riveted his father's stare for a second longer than was quite urbane.

It would not be true to say that Lord Valleys was afraid of his son. Fear was not one of his emotions, but he certainly regarded him with a respectful curiosity that bordered on uneasiness. The oligarchic temper of Miltoun's mind and political convictions almost shocked one who knew both by temperament and experience how to wait in front. This instruction he had frequently had occasion to give his jockeys when he believed his horses could best get home first in that way. And it was an instruction he now longed to give his son. He himself had 'waited in front' for over fifty years, and he knew it to be the finest way of insuring that he would never be compelled to alter this desirable policy—for something in Lord Valleys' character made him fear that, in real emergency, he would exert himself to the point of the gravest discomfort sooner than be left to wait behind. A fellow like young Harbinger, of course, he understood—versatile, 'full of beans,' as he expressed it to himself in his more confidential moments, who had imbibed the new wine (very intoxicating it was) of desire for social reform. He would have to be given his head a little—but there would be no difficulty with him, he would never 'run out'—light handy build of horse that only required steadying at the corners. He would want to hear himself talk, and be let feel that he was doing something. All very well, and quite intelligible. But with Miltoun (and Lord Valleys felt this to be no, mere parental fancy) it was a very different business. His son had a way of forcing things to their conclusions which was dangerous, and reminded him of his mother-in-law. He was a baby in public affairs, of course, as yet; but as soon as he once got going, the intensity of his convictions, together with his position, and real gift—not of the gab, like Harbinger's—but of restrained, biting oratory, was sure to bring him to the front with a bound in the present state of parties. And what were those convictions? Lord Valleys had tried to understand them, but up to the present he had failed. And this did not surprise him exactly, since, as he often said, political convictions were not, as they appeared on the surface, the outcome of reason, but merely symptoms of temperament. And he could not comprehend, because he could not sympathize with, any attitude towards public affairs that was not essentially level, attached to the plain, common-sense factors of the case as they appeared to himself. Not that he could fairly be called a temporizer, for deep down in him there was undoubtedly a vein of obstinate, fundamental loyalty to the traditions of a caste which prized high spirit beyond all things. Still he did feel that Miltoun was altogether too much the 'pukka' aristocrat—no better than a Socialist, with his confounded way of seeing things all cut and dried; his ideas of forcing reforms down people's throats and holding them there with the iron hand! With his way too of acting on his principles! Why! He even admitted that he acted on his principles! This thought always struck a very discordant note in Lord Valleys' breast. It was almost indecent; worse-ridiculous! The fact was, the dear fellow had unfortunately a deeper habit of thought than was wanted in politics—dangerous—very! Experience might do something for him! And out of his own long experience the Earl of Valleys tried hard to recollect any politician whom the practice of politics had left where he was when he started. He could not think of one. But this gave him little comfort; and, above a piece of late asparagus his steady eyes sought his son's. What had he come up to tell him?

The phrase had been ominous; he could not recollect Miltoun's ever having told him anything. For though a really kind and indulgent father, he had—like so many men occupied with public and other lives—a little acquired towards his offspring the look and manner: Is this mine? Of his four children, Barbara alone he claimed with conviction. He admired her; and, being a man who savoured life, he was unable to love much except where he admired. But, the last person in the world to hustle any man or force a confidence, he waited to hear his son's news, betraying no uneasiness.

Miltoun seemed in no hurry. He described Courtier's adventure, which tickled Lord Valleys a good deal.

"Ordeal by red pepper! Shouldn't have thought them equal to that," he said. "So you've got him at Monkland now. Harbinger still with you?"

"Yes. I don't think Harbinger has much stamina.

"Politically?"

Miltoun nodded.

"I rather resent his being on our side—I don't think he does us any good. You've seen that cartoon, I suppose; it cuts pretty deep. I couldn't recognize you amongst the old women, sir."

Lord Valleys smiled impersonally.

"Very clever thing. By the way; I shall win the Eclipse, I think."

And thus, spasmodically, the conversation ran till the last servant had left the room.

Then Miltoun, without preparation, looked straight at his father and said:

"I want to marry Mrs. Noel, sir."

Lord Valleys received the shot with exactly the same expression as that with which he was accustomed to watch his horses beaten. Then he raised his wineglass to his lips; and set it down again untouched. This was the only sign he gave of interest or discomfiture.

"Isn't this rather sudden?"

Miltoun answered: "I've wanted to from the moment I first saw her."

Lord Valleys, almost as good a judge of a man and a situation as of a horse or a pointer dog, leaned back in his chair, and said with faint sarcasm:

"My dear fellow, it's good of you to have told me this; though, to be quite frank, it's a piece of news I would rather not have heard."

A dusky flush burned slowly up in Miltoun's cheeks. He had underrated his father; the man had coolness and courage in a crisis.

"What is your objection, sir?" And suddenly he noticed that a wafer in Lord Valleys' hand was quivering. This brought into his eyes no look of compunction, but such a smouldering gaze as the old Tudor Churchman might have bent on an adversary who showed a sign of weakness. Lord Valleys, too, noticed the quivering of that wafer, and ate it.

"We are men of the world," he said.

Miltoun answered: "I am not."

Showing his first real symptom of impatience Lord Valleys rapped out:

"So be it! I am."

"Yes?", said Miltoun.

"Eustace!"

Nursing one knee, Miltoun faced that appeal without the faintest movement. His eyes continued to burn into his father's face. A tremor passed over Lord Valleys' heart. What intensity of feeling there was in the fellow, that he could look like this at the first breath of opposition!

He reached out and took up the cigar-box; held it absently towards his son, and drew it quickly back.

"I forgot," he said; "you don't."

And lighting a cigar, he smoked gravely, looking straight before him, a furrow between his brows. He spoke at last:

"She looks like a lady. I know nothing else about her."

The smile deepened round Miltoun's mouth.

"Why should you want to know anything else?"

Lord Valleys shrugged. His philosophy had hardened.

"I understand for one thing," he said coldly; "that there is a matter of a divorce. I thought you took the Church's view on that subject."

"She has not done wrong."

"You know her story, then?"

"No."

Lord Valleys raised his brows, in irony and a sort of admiration.

"Chivalry the better part of discretion?"

Miltoun answered:

"You don't, I think, understand the kind of feeling I have for Mrs. Noel. It does not come into your scheme of things. It is the only feeling, however, with which I should care to marry, and I am not likely to feel it for anyone again."

Lord Valleys felt once more that uncanny sense of insecurity. Was this true? And suddenly he felt Yes, it is true! The face before him was the face of one who would burn in his own fire sooner than depart from his standards. And a sudden sense of the utter seriousness of this dilemma dumbed him.

"I can say no more at the moment," he muttered and got up from the table.

CHAPTER XI

Lady Casterley was that inconvenient thing—an early riser. No woman in the kingdom was a better judge of a dew carpet. Nature had in her time displayed before her thousands of those pretty fabrics, where all the stars of the past night, dropped to the dark earth, were waiting to glide up to heaven again on the rays of the sun. At Ravensham she walked regularly in her gardens between half-past seven and eight, and when she paid a visit, was careful to subordinate whatever might be the local custom to this habit.

When therefore her maid Randle came to Barbara's maid at seven o'clock, and said: "My old lady wants Lady Babs to get up," there was no particular pain in the breast of Barbara's maid, who was doing up her corsets. She merely answered "I'll see to it. Lady Babs won't be too pleased!" And ten minutes later she entered that white-walled room which smelled of pinks—a temple of drowsy sweetness, where the summer light was vaguely stealing through flowered chintz curtains.

Barbara was sleeping with her cheek on her hand, and her tawny hair, gathered back, streaming over the pillow. Her lips were parted; and the maid thought: "I'd like to have hair and a mouth like that!" She could not help smiling to herself with pleasure; Lady Babs looked so pretty—prettier asleep even than awake! And at sight of that beautiful creature, sleeping and smiling in her sleep, the earthy, hothouse fumes steeping the mind of one perpetually serving in an atmosphere unsuited to her natural growth, dispersed. Beauty, with its queer touching power of freeing the spirit from all barriers and thoughts of self, sweetened the maid's eyes, and kept her standing, holding her breath. For Barbara asleep was a symbol of that Golden Age in which she so desperately believed. She opened her eyes, and seeing the maid, said:

"Is it eight o'clock, Stacey?"

"No, but Lady Casterley wants you to walk with her."

"Oh! bother! I was having such a dream!"

"Yes; you were smiling."

"I was dreaming that I could fly."

"Fancy!"

"I could see everything spread out below me, as close as I see you; I was hovering like a buzzard hawk. I felt that I could come down exactly where I wanted. It was fascinating. I had perfect power, Stacey."

And throwing her neck back, she closed her eyes again. The sunlight streamed in on her between the half-drawn curtains.

The queerest impulse to put out a hand and stroke that full white throat shot through the maid's mind.

"These flying machines are stupid," murmured Barbara; "the pleasure's in one's body—wings!"

"I can see Lady Casterley in the garden."

Barbara sprang out of bed. Close by the statue of Diana Lady Casterley was standing, gazing down at some flowers, a tiny, grey figure. Barbara sighed. With her, in her dream, had been another buzzard hawk, and she was filled with a sort of surprise, and queer pleasure that ran down her in little shivers while she bathed and dressed.

In her haste she took no hat; and still busy with the fastening of her linen frock, hurried down the stairs and Georgian corridor, towards the garden. At the end of it she almost ran into the arms of

Courtier.

Awakening early this morning, he had begun first thinking of Audrey Noel, threatened by scandal; then of his yesterday's companion, that glorious young creature, whose image had so gripped and taken possession of him. In the pleasure of this memory he had steeped himself. She was youth itself! That perfect thing, a young girl without callowness.

And his words, when she nearly ran into him, were: "The Winged Victory!"

Barbara's answer was equally symbolic: "A buzzard hawk! Do you know, I dreamed we were flying, Mr. Courtier."

Courtier gravely answered

"If the gods give me that dream——"

From the garden door Barbara turned her head, smiled, and passed through.

Lady Casterley, in the company of little Ann, who had perceived that it was novel to be in the garden at this hour, had been scrutinizing some newly founded colonies of a flower with which she was not familiar. On seeing her granddaughter approach, she said at once:

"What is this thing?"

"Nemesia."

"Never heard of it."

"It's rather the fashion, Granny."

"Nemesia?" repeated Lady Casterley. "What has Nemesis to do with flowers? I have no patience with gardeners, and these idiotic names. Where is your hat? I like that duck's egg colour in your frock. There's a button undone." And reaching up her little spidery hand, wonderfully steady considering its age, she buttoned the top button but one of Barbara's bodice.

"You look very blooming, my dear," she said. "How far is it to this woman's cottage? We'll go there now."

"She wouldn't be up."

Lady Casterley's eyes gleamed maliciously.

"You tell me she's so nice," she said. "No nice unencumbered woman lies in bed after half-past seven. Which is the very shortest way? No, Ann, we can't take you."

Little Ann, after regarding her great-grandmother rather too intently, replied:

"Well, I can't come, you see, because I've got to go."

"Very well," said Lady Casterley, "then trot along."

Little Ann, tightening her lips, walked to the next colony of Nemesia, and bent over the colonists with concentration, showing clearly that she had found something more interesting than had yet been encountered.

"Ha!" said Lady Casterley, and led on at her brisk pace towards the avenue.

All the way down the drive she discoursed on woodcraft, glancing sharply at the trees. Forestry—she said-like building, and all other pursuits which required, faith and patient industry, was a lost art in this second-hand age. She had made Barbara's grandfather practise it, so that at Catton (her country place) and even at Ravensham, the trees were worth looking at. Here, at Monkland, they were monstrously neglected. To have the finest Italian cypress in the country, for example, and not take more care of it, was a downright scandal!

Barbara listened, smiling lazily. Granny was so amusing in her energy and precision, and her turns of speech, so deliberately homespun, as if she—than whom none could better use a stiff and polished phrase, or the refinements of the French language—were determined to take what liberties she liked. To the girl, haunted still by the feeling that she could fly, almost drunk on the sweetness of the air that summer morning, it seemed funny that anyone should be like that. Then for a second she saw her grandmother's face in repose, off guard, grim with anxious purpose, as if questioning its hold on life; and in one of those flashes of intuition which come to women—even when young and conquering like

Barbara—she felt suddenly sorry, as though she had caught sight of the pale spectre never yet seen by her. "Poor old dear," she thought; "what a pity to be old!"

But they had entered the footpath crossing three long meadows which climbed up towards Mrs. Noel's. It was so golden-sweet here amongst the million tiny saffron cups frosted with lingering dewshine; there was such flying glory in the limes and ash-trees; so delicate a scent from the late whins and may-flower; and, on every tree a greybird calling to be sorry was not possible!

In the far corner of the first field a chestnut mare was standing, with ears pricked at some distant sound whose charm she alone perceived. On viewing the intruders, she laid those ears back, and a little vicious star gleamed out at the corner of her eye. They passed her and entered the second field. Half way across, Barbara said quietly:

"Granny, that's a bull!"

It was indeed an enormous bull, who had been standing behind a clump of bushes. He was moving slowly towards them, still distant about two hundred yards; a great red beast, with the huge development of neck and front which makes the bull, of all living creatures, the symbol of brute force.

Lady Casterley envisaged him severely.

"I dislike bulls," she said; "I think I must walk backward."

"You can't; it's too uphill."

"I am not going to turn back," said Lady Casterley. "The bull ought not to be here. Whose fault is it? I shall speak to someone. Stand still and look at him. We must prevent his coming nearer."

They stood still and looked at the bull, who continued to approach.

"It doesn't stop him," said Lady Casterley. "We must take no notice. Give me your arm, my dear; my legs feel rather funny."

Barbara put her arm round the little figure. They walked on.

"I have not been used to bulls lately," said Lady Casterley. The bull came nearer.

"Granny," said Barbara, "you must go quietly on to the stile. When you're over I'll come too."

"Certainly not," said Lady Casterley, "we will go together. Take no notice of him; I have great faith in that."

"Granny darling, you must do as I say, please; I remember this bull, he is one of ours."

At those rather ominous words Lady Casterley gave her a sharp glance.

"I shall not go," she said. "My legs feel quite strong now. We can run, if necessary."

"So can the bull," said Barbara.

"I'm not going to leave you," muttered Lady Casterley. "If he turns vicious I shall talk to him. He won't touch me. You can run faster than I; so that's settled."

"Don't be absurd, dear," answered Barbara; "I am not afraid of bulls."

Lady Casterley flashed a look at her which had a gleam of amusement.

"I can feel you," she said; "you're just as trembly as I am."

The bull was now distant some eighty yards, and they were still quite a hundred from the stile.

"Granny," said Barbara, "if you don't go on as I tell you, I shall just leave you, and go and meet him! You mustn't be obstinate!"

Lady Casterley's answer was to grip her granddaughter round the waist; the nervous force of that thin arm was surprising.

"You will do nothing of the sort," she said. "I refuse to have anything more to do with this bull; I shall simply pay no attention."

The bull now began very slowly ambling towards them.

"Take no notice," said Lady Casterley, who was walking faster than she had ever walked before.

"The ground is level now," said Barbara; "can you run?"

"I think so," gasped Lady Casterley; and suddenly she found herself half-lifted from the ground, and, as it were, flying towards the stile. She heard a noise behind; then Barbara's voice:

"We must stop. He's on us. Get behind me."

She felt herself caught and pinioned by two arms that seemed set on the wrong way. Instinct, and a general softness told her that she was back to back with her granddaughter.

"Let me go!" she gasped; "let me go!"

And suddenly she felt herself being propelled by that softness forward towards the stile.

"Shoo!" she said; "shoo!"

"Granny," Barbara's voice came, calm and breathless, "don't! You only excite him! Are we near the stile?"

"Ten yards," panted Lady Casterley.

"Look out, then!" There was a sort of warm flurry round her, a rush, a heave, a scramble; she was beyond the stile. The bull and Barbara, a yard or two apart, were just the other side. Lady Casterley raised her handkerchief and fluttered it. The bull looked up; Barbara, all legs and arms, came slipping down beside her.

Without wasting a moment Lady Casterley leaned forward and addressed the bull:

"You awful brute!" she said; "I will have you well flogged."

Gently pawing the ground, the bull snuffled.

"Are you any the worse, child?"

"Not a scrap," said Barbara's serene, still breathless voice.

Lady Casterley put up her hands, and took the girl's face between them.

"What legs you have!" she said. "Give me a kiss!"

Having received a hot, rather quivering kiss, she walked on, holding somewhat firmly to Barbara's arm.

"As for that bull," she murmured, "the brute—to attack women!"

Barbara looked down at her.

"Granny," she said, "are you sure you're not shaken?"

Lady Casterley, whose lips were quivering, pressed them together very hard.

"Not a b-b-bit."

"Don't you think," said Barbara, "that we had better go back, at once—the other way?"

"Certainly not. There are no more bulls, I suppose, between us and this woman?"

"But are you fit to see her?"

Lady Casterley passed her handkerchief over her lips, to remove their quivering.

"Perfectly," she answered.

"Then, dear," said Barbara, "stand still a minute, while I dust you behind."

This having been accomplished, they proceeded in the direction of Mrs. Noel's cottage.

At sight of it, Lady Casterley said:

"I shall put my foot down. It's out of the question for a man of Miltoun's prospects. I look forward to

seeing him Prime Minister some day." Hearing Barbara's voice murmuring above her, she paused: "What's that you say?"

"I said: What is the use of our being what we are, if we can't love whom we like?"

"Love!" said Lady Casterley; "I was talking of marriage."

"I am glad you admit the distinction, Granny dear."

"You are pleased to be sarcastic," said Lady Casterley. "Listen to me! It's the greatest nonsense to suppose that people in our caste are free to do as they please. The sooner you realize that, the better, Babs. I am talking to you seriously. The preservation of our position as a class depends on our observing certain decencies. What do you imagine would happen to the Royal Family if they were allowed to marry as they liked? All this marrying with Gaiety girls, and American money, and people with pasts, and writers, and so forth, is most damaging. There's far too much of it, and it ought to be stopped. It may be tolerated for a few cranks, or silly young men, and these new women, but for Eustace—" Lady Casterley paused again, and her fingers pinched Barbara's arm, "or for you—there's only one sort of marriage possible. As for Eustace, I shall speak to this good lady, and see that he doesn't get entangled further."

Absorbed in the intensity of her purpose, she did not observe a peculiar little smile playing round Barbara's lips.

"You had better speak to Nature, too, Granny!"

Lady Casterley stopped short, and looked up in her granddaughter's face.

"Now what do you mean by that?" she said "Tell me!"

But noticing that Barbara's lips had closed tightly, she gave her arm a hard—if unintentional—pinch, and walked on.

CHAPTER XII

Lady Casterley's rather malicious diagnosis of Audrey Noel was correct. The unencumbered woman was up and in her garden when Barbara and her grandmother appeared at the Wicket gate; but being near the lime-tree at the far end she did not hear the rapid colloquy which passed between them.

"You are going to be good, Granny?"

"As to that—it will depend."

"You promised."

"H'm!"

Lady Casterley could not possibly have provided herself with a better introduction than Barbara, whom Mrs. Noel never met without the sheer pleasure felt by a sympathetic woman when she sees embodied in someone else that 'joy in life' which Fate has not permitted to herself.

She came forward with her head a little on one side, a trick of hers not at all affected, and stood waiting.

The unembarrassed Barbara began at once:

"We've just had an encounter with a bull. This is my grandmother, Lady Casterley."

The little old lady's demeanour, confronted with this very pretty face and figure was a thought less autocratic and abrupt than usual. Her shrewd eyes saw at once that she had no common adventuress to deal with. She was woman of the world enough, too, to know that 'birth' was not what it had been in her young days, that even money was rather rococo, and that good looks, manners, and a knowledge of literature, art, and music (and this woman looked like one of that sort), were often considered socially more valuable. She was therefore both wary and affable.

"How do you do?" she said. "I have heard of you. May we sit down for a minute in your garden? The bull was a wretch!"

But even in speaking, she was uneasily conscious that Mrs. Noel's clear eyes were seeing very well what she had come for. The look in them indeed was almost cynical; and in spite of her sympathetic murmurs, she did not somehow seem to believe in the bull. This was disconcerting. Why had Barbara condescended to mention the wretched brute? And she decided to take him by the horns.

"Babs," she said, "go to the Inn and order me a 'fly.' I shall drive back, I feel very shaky," and, as Mrs. Noel offered to send her maid, she added:

"No, no, my granddaughter will go."

Barbara having departed with a quizzical look, Lady Casterley patted the rustic seat, and said:

"Do come and sit down, I want to talk to you:"

Mrs. Noel obeyed. And at once Lady Casterley perceived that "she had a most difficult task before her. She had not expected a woman with whom one could take no liberties. Those clear dark eyes, and that soft, perfectly graceful manner—to a person so 'sympathetic' one should be able to say anything, and—one couldn't! It was awkward. And suddenly she noticed that Mrs. Noel was sitting perfectly upright, as upright—more upright, than she was herself. A bad, sign—a very bad sign! Taking out her handkerchief, she put it to her lips.

"I suppose you think," she said, "that we were not chased by a bull."

"I am sure you were."

"Indeed! Ah! But I've something else to talk to you about."

Mrs. Noel's face quivered back, as a flower might when it was going to be plucked; and again Lady Casterley put her handkerchief to her lips. This time she rubbed them hard. There was nothing to come off; to do so, therefore, was a satisfaction.

"I am an old woman," she said, "and you mustn't mind what I say."

Mrs. Noel did not answer, but looked straight at her visitor; to whom it seemed suddenly that this was another person. What was it about that face, staring at her! In a weird way it reminded her of a child that one had hurt—with those great eyes and that soft hair, and the mouth thin, in a line, all of a sudden. And as if it had been jerked out of her, she said:

"I don't want to hurt you, my dear. It's about my grandson, of course."

But Mrs. Noel made neither sign nor motion; and the feeling of irritation which so rapidly attacks the old when confronted by the unexpected, came to Lady Casterley's aid.

"His name," she said, "is being coupled with yours in a way that's doing him a great deal of harm. You don't wish to injure him, I'm sure."

Mrs. Noel shook her head, and Lady Casterley went on:

"I don't know what they're not saying since the evening your friend Mr. Courtier hurt his knee. Miltoun has been most unwise. You had not perhaps realized that."

Mrs. Noel's answer was bitterly distinct:

"I didn't know anyone was sufficiently interested in my doings."

Lady Casterley suffered a gesture of exasperation to escape her.

"Good heavens!" she said; "every common person is interested in a woman whose position is anomalous. Living alone as you do, and not a widow, you're fair game for everybody, especially in the country."

Mrs. Noel's sidelong glance, very clear and cynical, seemed to say: "Even for you."

"I am not entitled to ask your story," Lady Casterley went on, "but if you make mysteries you must expect the worst interpretation put on them. My grandson is a man of the highest principle; he does not see things with the eyes of the world, and that should have made you doubly careful not to compromise him, especially at a time like this."

Mrs. Noel smiled. This smile startled Lady Casterley; it seemed, by concealing everything, to reveal depths of strength and subtlety. Would the woman never show her hand? And she said abruptly:

"Anything serious, of course, is out of the question."

"Quite."

That word, which of all others seemed the right one, was spoken so that Lady Casterley did not know in the least what it meant. Though occasionally employing irony, she detested it in others. No woman should be allowed to use it as a weapon! But in these days, when they were so foolish as to want votes, one never knew what women would be at. This particular woman, however, did not look like one of that sort. She was feminine—very feminine—the sort of creature that spoiled men by being too nice to them. And though she had come determined to find out all about everything and put an end to it, she saw Barbara re-entering the wicket gate with considerable relief.

"I am ready to walk home now," she said. And getting up from the rustic seat, she made Mrs. Noel a satirical little bow.

"Thank you for letting me rest. Give me your arm, child."

Barbara gave her arm, and over her shoulder threw a swift smile at Mrs. Noel, who did not answer it, but stood looking quietly after them, her eyes immensely dark and large.

Out in the lane Lady Casterley walked on, very silent, digesting her emotions.

"What about the 'fly,' Granny?"

"What 'fly'?"

"The one you told me to order."

"You don't mean to say that you took me seriously?"

"No," said Barbara.

"Ha!"

They proceeded some little way farther before Lady Casterley said suddenly:

"She is deep."

"And dark," said Barbara. "I am afraid you were not good!"

Lady Casterley glanced upwards.

"I detest this habit," she said, "amongst you young people, of taking nothing seriously. Not even bulls," she added, with a grim smile.

Barbara threw back her head and sighed.

"Nor 'flies,'" she said.

Lady Casterley saw that she had closed her eyes and opened her lips. And she thought:

"She's a very beautiful girl. I had no idea she was so beautiful—but too big!" And she added aloud:

"Shut your mouth! You will get one down!"

They spoke no more till they had entered the avenue; then Lady Casterley said sharply:

"Who is this coming down the drive?"

"Mr. Courtier, I think."

"What does he mean by it, with that leg?"

"He is coming to talk to you, Granny."

Lady Casterley stopped short.

"You are a cat," she said; "a sly cat. Now mind, Babs, I won't have it!"

"No, darling," murmured Barbara; "you shan't have it—I'll take him off your hands."

"What does your mother mean," stammered Lady Casterley, "letting you grow up like this! You're as bad as she was at your age!"

"Worse!" said Barbara. "I dreamed last night that I could fly!"

"If you try that," said Lady Casterley grimly, "you'll soon come to grief. Good-morning, sir; you ought to be in bed!"

Courtier raised his hat.

"Surely it is not for me to be where you are not!" And he added gloomily: "The war scare's dead!"

"Ah!" said Lady Casterley: "your occupation's gone then. You'll go back to London now, I suppose." Looking suddenly at Barbara she saw that the girl's eyes were half-closed, and that she was smiling; it seemed to Lady Casterley too or was it fancy?—that she shook her head.

CHAPTER XIII

Thanks to Lady Valleys, a patroness of birds, no owl was ever shot on the Monkland Court estate, and those soft-flying spirits of the dusk hooted and hunted, to the great benefit of all except the creeping voles. By every farm, cottage, and field, they passed invisible, quartering the dark air. Their voyages of discovery stretched up on to the moor as far as the wild stone man, whose origin their wisdom perhaps knew. Round Audrey Noel's cottage they were as thick as thieves, for they had just there two habitations in a long, old, holly-grown wall, and almost seemed to be guarding the mistress of that thatched dwelling—so numerous were their fluttering rushes, so tenderly prolonged their soft sentinel callings. Now that the weather was really warm, so that joy of life was in the voles, they found those succulent creatures of an extraordinarily pleasant flavour, and on them each pair was bringing up a family of exceptionally fine little owls, very solemn, with big heads, bright large eyes, and wings as yet only able to fly downwards. There was scarcely any hour from noon of the day (for some of them had horns) to the small sweet hours when no one heard them, that they forgot to salute the very large, quiet, wingless owl whom they could espy moving about by day above their mouse-runs, or preening her white and sometimes blue and sometimes grey feathers morning and evening in a large square hole high up in the front wall. And they could not understand at all why no swift depredating graces nor any habit of long soft hooting belonged to that lady-bird.

On the evening of the day when she received that early morning call, as soon as dusk had fallen, wrapped in a long thin cloak, with black lace over her dark hair, Audrey Noel herself fluttered out into the lanes, as if to join the grave winged hunters of the invisible night. Those far, continual sounds, not stilled in the country till long after the sun dies, had but just ceased from haunting the air, where the late May-scent clung as close as fragrance clings to a woman's robe. There was just the barking of a dog, the boom of migrating chafers, the song of the stream, and of the owls, to proclaim the beating in the heart of this sweet Night. Nor was there any light by which Night's face could be seen; it was hidden, anonymous; so that when a lamp in a cottage threw a blink over the opposite bank, it was as if some wandering painter had wrought a picture of stones and leaves on the black air, framed it in purple, and left it hanging. Yet, if it could only have been come at, the Night was as full of emotion as this woman who wandered, shrinking away against the banks if anyone passed, stopping to cool her hot face with the dew on the ferns, walking swiftly to console her warm heart. Anonymous Night seeking for a symbol could have found none better than this errant figure, to express its hidden longings, the fluttering, unseen rushes of its dark wings, and all its secret passion of revolt against its own anonymity....

At Monkland Court, save for little Ann, the morning passed but dumbly, everyone feeling that something must be done, and no one knowing what. At lunch, the only allusion to the situation had been Harbinger's inquiry:

"When does Miltoun return?"

He had wired, it seemed, to say that he was motoring down that night.

"The sooner the better," Sir William murmured: "we've still a fortnight."

But all had felt from the tone in which he spoke these words, how serious was the position in the eyes of that experienced campaigner.

What with the collapse of the war scare, and this canard about Mrs. Noel, there was indeed cause for alarm.

The afternoon post brought a letter from Lord Valleys marked Express.

Lady Valleys opened it with a slight grimace, which deepened as she read. Her handsome, florid face wore an expression of sadness seldom seen there. There was, in fact, more than a touch of dignity in her reception of the unpalatable news.

"Eustace declares his intention of marrying this Mrs. Noel"—so ran her husband's letter—"I know, unfortunately, of no way in which I can prevent him. If you can discover legitimate means of dissuasion, it would be well to use them. My dear, it's the very devil."

It was the very devil! For, if Miltoun had already made up his mind to marry her, without knowledge of the malicious rumour, what would not be his determination now? And the woman of the world rose up in Lady Valleys. This marriage must not come off. It was contrary to almost every instinct of one who was practical not only by character, but by habit of life and training. Her warm and full-blooded nature had a sneaking sympathy with love and pleasure, and had she not been practical, she might have found this side of her a serious drawback to the main tenor of a life so much in view of the public eye. Her consciousness of this danger in her own case made her extremely alive to the risks of an undesirable connection—especially if it were a marriage—to any public man. At the same time the mother-heart in her was stirred. Eustace had never been so deep in her affection as Bertie, still he was her first-born; and in face of news which meant that he was lost to her—for this must indeed be 'the marriage of two minds' (or whatever that quotation was)—she felt strangely jealous of a woman, who had won her son's love, when she herself had never won it. The aching of this jealousy gave her face for a moment almost a spiritual expression, then passed away into impatience. Why should he marry her? Things could be arranged. People spoke of it already as an illicit relationship; well then, let people have what they had invented. If the worst came to the worst, this was not the only constituency in England; and a dissolution could not be far off. Better anything than a marriage which would handicap him all his life! But would it be so great a handicap? After all, beauty counted for much! If only her story were not too conspicuous! But what was her story? Not to know it was absurd! That was the worst of people who were not in Society, it was so difficult to find out! And there rose in her that almost brutal resentment, which ferments very rapidly in those who from their youth up have been hedged round with the belief that they and they alone are the whole of the world. In this mood Lady Valleys passed the letter to her daughters. They read, and in turn handed it to Bertie, who in silence returned it to his mother.

But that evening, in the billiard-room, having manoeuvred to get him to herself, Barbara said to Courtier:

"I wonder if you will answer me a question, Mr. Courtier?"

"If I may, and can."

Her low-cut dress was of yew-green, with, little threads of flame-colour, matching her hair, so that there was about her a splendour of darkness and whiteness and gold, almost dazzling; and she stood very still, leaning back against the lighter green of the billiard-table, grasping its edge so tightly that the smooth strong backs of her hands quivered.

"We have just heard that Miltoun is going to ask Mrs. Noel to marry him. People are never mysterious, are they, without good reason? I wanted you to tell me—who is she?"

"I don't think I quite grasp the situation," murmured Courtier. "You said—to marry him?"

Seeing that she had put out her hand, as if begging for the truth, he added: "How can your brother marry her—she's married!"

"Oh!"

"I'd no idea you didn't know that much."

"We thought there was a divorce."

The expression of which mention has been made—that peculiar white-hot sardonically jolly look—visited Courtier's face at once. "Hoist with their own petard! The usual thing. Let a pretty woman live alone—the tongues of men will do the rest."

"It was not so bad as that," said Barbara dryly; "they said she had divorced her husband."

Caught out thus characteristically riding past the hounds Courtier bit his lips.

"You had better hear the story now. Her father was a country parson, and a friend of my father's; so that I've known her from a child. Stephen Lees Noel was his curate. It was a 'snap' marriage—she was only twenty, and had met hardly any men. Her father was ill and wanted to see her settled before he died. Well, she found out almost directly, like a good many other people, that she'd made an utter mistake."

Barbara came a little closer.

"What was the man like?"

"Not bad in his way, but one of those narrow, conscientious pig-headed fellows who make the most trying kind of husband—bone egoistic. A parson of that type has no chance at all. Every mortal thing he has to do or say helps him to develop his worst points. The wife of a man like that's no better than a slave. She began to show the strain of it at last; though she's the sort who goes on till she snaps. It took him four years to realize. Then, the question was, what were they to do? He's a very High Churchman, with all their feeling about marriage; but luckily his pride was wounded. Anyway, they separated two years ago; and there she is, left high and dry. People say it was her fault. She ought to have known her own mind—at twenty! She ought to have held on and hidden it up somehow. Confound their thick-skinned charitable souls, what do they know of how a sensitive woman suffers? Forgive me, Lady Barbara—I get hot over this." He was silent; then seeing her eyes fixed on him, went on: "Her mother died when she was born, her father soon after her marriage. She's enough money of her own, luckily, to live on quietly. As for him, he changed his parish and runs one somewhere in the Midlands. One's sorry for the poor devil, too, of course! They never see each other; and, so far as I know, they don't correspond. That, Lady Barbara, is the simple history."

Barbara, said, "Thank you," and turned away; and he heard her mutter: "What a shame!"

But he could not tell whether it was Mrs. Noel's fate, or the husband's fate, or the thought of Miltoun that had moved her to those words.

She puzzled him by her self-possession, so almost hard, her way of refusing to show feeling.' Yet what a woman she would make if the drying curse of high-caste life were not allowed to stereotype and shrivel her! If enthusiasm were suffered to penetrate and fertilize her soul! She reminded him of a great tawny lily. He had a vision of her, as that flower, floating, freed of roots and the mould of its cultivated soil, in the liberty of the impartial air. What a passionate and noble thing she might become! What radiance and perfume she would exhale! A spirit Fleur-de-Lys! Sister to all the noble flowers of light that inhabited the wind!

Leaning in the deep embrasure of his window, he looked at anonymous Night. He could hear the owls hoot, and feel a heart beating out there somewhere in the darkness, but there came no answer to his wondering. Would she—this great tawny lily of a girl—ever become unconscious of her environment, not in manner merely, but in the very soul, so that she might be just a woman, breathing, suffering, loving, and rejoicing with the poet soul of all mankind? Would she ever be capable of riding out with the little company of big hearts, naked of advantage? Courtier had not been inside a church for twenty years, having long felt that he must not enter the mosques of his country without putting off the shoes of freedom, but he read the Bible, considering it a very great poem. And the old words came haunting him: 'Verily I say unto you, It is harder for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven.' And now, looking into the Night, whose darkness seemed to hold the answer to all secrets, he tried to read the riddle of this girl's future, with which there seemed so interwoven that larger enigma, how far the spirit can free itself, in this life, from the matter that encompasseth.

The Night whispered suddenly, and low down, as if rising from the sea, came the moon, dropping a wan robe of light till she gleamed out nude against the sky-curtain. Night was no longer anonymous. There in the dusky garden the statue of Diana formed slowly before his eyes, and behind her—as it were, her temple—rose the tall spire of the cypress tree.

CHAPTER XIV

A copy of the Bucklandbury News, containing an account of his evening adventure, did not reach Miltoun till he was just starting on his return journey. It came marked with blue pencil together with a note. "MY DEAR EUSTACE,

"The enclosed—however unwarranted and impudent—requires attention. But we shall do nothing till you come back.

"Yours ever,
"WILLIAM SHROPTON."

The effect on Miltoun might perhaps have been different had he not been so conscious of his intention to ask Audrey Noel to be his wife; but in any circumstances it is doubtful whether he would have done more than smile, and tear the paper up. Truly that sort of thing had so little power to hurt or disturb him personally, that he was incapable of seeing how it could hurt or disturb others. If those who read it were affected, so much the worse for them. He had a real, if unobtrusive, contempt for groundlings, of whatever class; and it never entered his head to step an inch out of his course in deference to their vagaries. Nor did it come home to him that Mrs. Noel, wrapped in the glamour which he cast about her, could possibly suffer from the meanness of vulgar minds. Shropton's note, indeed, caused him the more annoyance of those two documents. It was like his brother-in-law to make much of little!

He hardly dozed at all during his swift journey through the sleeping country; nor when he reached his room at Monkland did he go to bed. He had the wonderful, upborne feeling of man on the verge of achievement. His spirit and senses were both on fire—for that was the quality of this woman, she suffered no part of him to sleep, and he was glad of her exactions.

He drank some tea; went out, and took a path up to the moor. It was not yet eight o'clock when he reached the top of the nearest tor. And there, below him, around, and above, was a land and sky transcending even his exaltation. It was like a symphony of great music; or the nobility of a stupendous mind laid bare; it was God up there, in His many moods. Serenity was spread in the middle heavens, blue, illimitable, and along to the East, three huge clouds, like thoughts brooding over the destinies below, moved slowly toward the sea, so that great shadows filled the valleys. And the land that lay under all the other sky was gleaming, and quivering with every colour, as it were, clothed with the divine smile. The wind, from the North, whereon floated the white birds of the smaller clouds, had no voice, for it was above barriers, utterly free. Before Miltoun, turning to this wind, lay the maze of the lower lands, the misty greens, rose pinks, and browns of the fields, and white and grey dots and strokes of cottages and church towers, fading into the blue veil of distance, confined by a far range of hills. Behind him there was nothing but the restless surface of the moor, coloured purplish-brown. On that untamed sea of graven wildness could be seen no ship of man, save one, on the far horizon—the grim hulk, Dartmoor Prison. There was no sound, no scent, and it seemed to Miltoun as if his spirit had left his body, and become part of the solemnity of God. Yet, as he stood there, with his head bared, that strange smile which haunted him in moments of deep feeling, showed that he had not surrendered to the Universal, that his own spirit was but being fortified, and that this was the true and secret source of his delight. He lay down in a scoop of the stones. The sun entered there, but no wind, so that a dry sweet scent exuded from the young shoots of heather. That warmth and perfume crept through the shield of his spirit, and stole into his blood; ardent images rose before him, the vision of an unending embrace. Out of an embrace sprang Life, out of that the World was made, this World, with its innumerable forms, and natures—no two alike! And from him and her would spring forms to take their place in the great pattern. This seemed wonderful, and right-for they would be worthy forms, who would hand on those traditions which seemed to him so necessary and great. And then there broke on him one of those delirious waves of natural desire, against which he had so often fought, so often with great pain conquered. He got up, and ran downhill, leaping over the stones, and the thicker clumps of heather.

Audrey Noel, too, had been early astir, though she had gone late enough to bed. She dressed languidly, but very carefully, being one of those women who put on armour against Fate, because they are proud, and dislike the thought that their sufferings should make others suffer; because, too, their bodies are to them as it were sacred, having been given them in trust, to cause delight. When she had finished, she looked at herself in the glass rather more distrustfully than usual. She felt that her sort of woman was at a discount in these days, and being sensitive, she was never content either with her appearance, or her habits. But, for all that, she went on behaving in unsatisfactory ways, because she incorrigibly loved to look as charming as she could; and even if no one were going to see her, she never felt that she looked charming enough. She was—as Lady Casterley had shrewdly guessed—the kind of woman who spoils men by being too nice to them; of no use to those who wish women to assert themselves; yet having a certain passive stoicism, very disconcerting. With little or no power of initiative, she would do what she was set to do with a thoroughness that would shame an initiator;

temperamentally unable to beg anything of anybody, she required love as a plant requires water; she could give herself completely, yet remain oddly incorruptible; in a word, hopeless, and usually beloved of those who thought her so.

With all this, however, she was not quite what is called a 'sweet woman—a phrase she detested—for there was in her a queer vein of gentle cynicism. She 'saw' with extraordinary clearness, as if she had been born in Italy and still carried that clear dry atmosphere about her soul. She loved glow and warmth and colour; such mysticism as she felt was pagan; and she had few aspirations—sufficient to her were things as they showed themselves to be.

This morning, when she had made herself smell of geraniums, and fastened all the small contrivances that hold even the best of women together, she went downstairs to her little dining-room, set the spirit lamp going, and taking up her newspaper, stood waiting to make tea.

It was the hour of the day most dear to her. If the dew had been brushed off her life, it was still out there every morning on the face of Nature, and on the faces of her flowers; there was before her all the pleasure of seeing how each of those little creatures in the garden had slept; how many children had been born since the Dawn; who was ailing, and needed attention. There was also the feeling, which renews itself every morning in people who live lonely lives, that they are not lonely, until, the day wearing on, assures them of the fact. Not that she was idle, for she had obtained through Courtier the work of reviewing music in a woman's paper, for which she was intuitively fitted. This, her flowers, her own music, and the affairs of certain families of cottagers, filled nearly all her time. And she asked no better fate than to have every minute occupied, having that passion for work requiring no initiation, which is natural to the owners of lazy minds.

Suddenly she dropped her newspaper, went to the bowl of flowers on the breakfast-table, and plucked forth two stalks of lavender; holding them away from her, she went out into the garden, and flung them over the wall.

This strange immolation of those two poor sprigs, born so early, gathered and placed before her with such kind intention by her maid, seemed of all acts the least to be expected of one who hated to hurt people's feelings, and whose eyes always shone at the sight of flowers. But in truth the smell of lavender—that scent carried on her husband's handkerchief and clothes—still affected her so strongly that she could not bear to be in a room with it. As nothing else did, it brought before her one, to live with whom had slowly become torture. And freed by that scent, the whole flood of memory broke in on her. The memory of three years when her teeth had been set doggedly, on her discovery that she was chained to unhappiness for life; the memory of the abrupt end, and of her creeping away to let her scorched nerves recover. Of how during the first year of this release which was not freedom, she had twice changed her abode, to get away from her own story—not because she was ashamed of it, but because it reminded her of wretchedness. Of how she had then come to Monkland, where the quiet life had slowly given her elasticity again. And then of her meeting with Miltoun; the unexpected delight of that companionship; the frank enjoyment of the first four months. And she remembered all her secret rejoicing, her silent identification of another life with her own, before she acknowledged or even suspected love. And just three weeks ago now, helping to tie up her roses, he had touched her, and she had known. But even then, until the night of Courtier's accident, she had not dared to realize. More concerned now for him than for herself, she asked herself a thousand times if she had been to blame. She had let him grow fond of her, a woman out of court, a dead woman! An unpardonable sin! Yet surely that depended on what she was prepared to give! And she was frankly ready to give everything, and ask for nothing. He knew her position, he had told her that he knew. In her love for him she gloried, would continue to glory; would suffer for it without regret. Miltoun was right in believing that newspaper gossip was incapable of hurting her, though her reasons for being so impervious were not what he supposed. She was not, like him, secured from pain because such insinuations about the private affairs of others were mean and vulgar and beneath notice; it had not as yet occurred to her to look at the matter in so lofty and general a light; she simply was not hurt, because she was already so deeply Miltoun's property in spirit, that she was almost glad that they should assign him all the rest of her. But for Miltoun's sake she was disturbed to the soul. She had tarnished his shield in the eyes of men; and (for she was oddly practical, and saw things in very clear proportion) perhaps put back his career, who knew how many years!

She sat down to drink her tea. Not being a crying woman, she suffered quietly. She felt that Miltoun would be coming to her. She did not know at all what she should say when he did come. He could not care for her so much as she cared for him! He was a man; men soon forget! Ah! but he was not like most men. One could not look at his eyes without feeling that he could suffer terribly! In all this her own reputation concerned her not at all. Life, and her clear way of looking at things, had rooted in her the conviction that to a woman the preciousness of her reputation was a fiction invented by men entirely for man's benefit; a second-hand fetish insidiously, inevitably set-up by men for worship, in

novels, plays, and law-courts. Her instinct told her that men could not feel secure in the possession of their women unless they could believe that women set tremendous store by sexual reputation. What they wanted to believe, that they did believe! But she knew otherwise. Such great-minded women as she had met or read of had always left on her the impression that reputation for them was a matter of the spirit, having little to do with sex. From her own feelings she knew that reputation, for a simple woman, meant to stand well in the eyes of him or her whom she loved best. For worldly women—and there were so many kinds of those, besides the merely fashionable—she had always noted that its value was not intrinsic, but commercial; not a crown of dignity, but just a marketable asset. She did not dread in the least what people might say of her friendship with Miltoun; nor did she feel at all that her indissoluble marriage forbade her loving him. She had secretly felt free as soon as she had discovered that she had never really loved her husband; she had only gone on dutifully until the separation, from sheer passivity, and because it was against her nature to cause pain to anyone. The man who was still her husband was now as dead to her as if he had never been born. She could not marry again, it was true; but she could and did love. If that love was to be starved and die away, it would not be because of any moral scruples.

She opened her paper languidly; and almost the first words she read, under the heading of Election News, were these:

'Apropos of the outrage on Mr. Courtier, we are requested to state that the lady who accompanied Lord Miltoun to the rescue of that gentleman was Mrs. Lees Noel, wife of the Rev. Stephen Lees Noel, vicar of Clathampton, Warwickshire.'

This dubious little daub of whitewash only brought a rather sad smile to her lips. She left her tea, and went out into the air. There at the gate was Miltoun coming in. Her heart leaped. But she went forward quietly, and greeted him with cast-down eyes, as if nothing were out of the ordinary.

CHAPTER XV

Exaltation had not left Miltoun. His sallow face was flushed, his eyes glowed with a sort of beauty; and Audrey Noel who, better than most women, could read what was passing behind a face, saw those eyes with the delight of a moth fluttering towards a lamp. But in a very unemotional voice she said:

"So you have come to breakfast. How nice of you!"

It was not in Miltoun to observe the formalities of attack. Had he been going to fight a duel there would have been no preliminary, just a look, a bow, and the swords crossed. So in this first engagement of his with the soul of a woman!

He neither sat down nor suffered her to sit, but stood looking intently into her face, and said:

"I love you."

Now that it had come, with this disconcerting swiftness, she was strangely calm, and unashamed. The elation of knowing for sure that she was loved was like a wand waving away all tremors, stilling them to sweetness. Since nothing could take away that knowledge, it seemed that she could never again be utterly unhappy. Then, too, in her nature, so deeply, unreasoningly incapable of perceiving the importance of any principle but love, there was a secret feeling of assurance, of triumph. He did love her! And she, him! Well! And suddenly panic-stricken, lest he should take back those words, she put her hand up to his breast, and said:

"And I love you."

The feel of his arms round her, the strength and passion of that moment, were so terribly sweet, that she died to thought, just looking up at him, with lips parted and eyes darker with the depth of her love than he had ever dreamed that eyes could be. The madness of his own feeling kept him silent. And they stood there, so merged in one another that they knew and cared nothing for any other mortal thing. It was very still in the room; the roses and carnations in the lustre bowl, seeming to know that their mistress was caught up into heaven, had let their perfume steal forth and occupy every cranny of the abandoned air; a hovering bee, too, circled round the lovers' heads, scenting, it seemed, the honey in their hearts.

It has been said that Miltoun's face was not unhandsome; for Audrey Noel at this moment when his eyes were so near hers, and his lips touching her, he was transfigured, and had become the spirit of all beauty. And she, with heart beating fast against him, her eyes, half closing from delight, and her hair asking to be praised with its fragrance, her cheeks fainting pale with emotion, and her arms too languid with happiness to embrace him—she, to him, was the incarnation of the woman that visits dreams.

So passed that moment.

The bee ended it; who, impatient with flowers that hid their honey so deep, had entangled himself in Audrey's hair. And then, seeing that words, those dreaded things, were on his lips, she tried to kiss them back. But they came:

"When will you marry me?"

It all swayed a little. And with marvellous rapidity the whole position started up before her. She saw, with preternatural insight, into its nooks and corners. Something he had said one day, when they were talking of the Church view of marriage and divorce, lighted all up. So he had really never known about her! At this moment of utter sickness, she was saved from fainting by her sense of humour—her cynicism. Not content to let her be, people's tongues had divorced her; he had believed them! And the crown of irony was that he should want to marry her, when she felt so utterly, so sacredly his, to do what he liked with sans forms or ceremonies. A surge of bitter feeling against the man who stood between her and Miltoun almost made her cry out. That man had captured her before she knew the world or her own soul, and she was tied to him, till by some beneficent chance he drew his last breath when her hair was grey, and her eyes had no love light, and her cheeks no longer grew pale when they were kissed; when twilight had fallen, and the flowers, and bees no longer cared for her.

It was that feeling, the sudden revolt of the desperate prisoner, which steeled her to put out her hand, take up the paper, and give it to Miltoun.

When he had read the little paragraph, there followed one of those eternities which last perhaps two minutes.

He said, then:

"It's true, I suppose?" And, at her silence, added: "I am sorry."

This queer dry saying was so much more terrible than any outcry, that she remained, deprived even of the power of breathing, with her eyes still fixed on Miltoun's face.

The smile of the old Cardinal had come up there, and was to her like a living accusation. It seemed strange that the hum of the bees and flies and the gentle swishing of the limetree should still go on outside, insisting that there was a world moving and breathing apart from her, and careless of her misery. Then some of her courage came back, and with it her woman's mute power. It came haunting about her face, perfectly still, about her lips, sensitive and drawn, about her eyes, dark, almost mutinous under their arched brows. She stood, drawing him with silence and beauty.

At last he spoke:

"I have made a foolish mistake, it seems. I believed you were free."

Her lips just moved for the words to pass: "I thought you knew. I never, dreamed you would want to marry me."

It seemed to her natural that he should be thinking only of himself, but with the subtlest defensive instinct, she put forward her own tragedy:

"I suppose I had got too used to knowing I was dead."

"Is there no release?"

"None. We have neither of us done wrong; besides with him, marriage is—for ever."

"My God!"

She had broken his smile, which had been cruel without meaning to be cruel; and with a smile of her own that was cruel too, she said:

"I didn't know that you believed in release either."

Then, as though she had stabbed herself in stabbing him, her face quivered.

He looked at her now, conscious at last that she was suffering. And she felt that he was holding himself in with all his might from taking her again into his arms. Seeing this, the warmth crept back to her lips, and a little light into her eyes, which she kept hidden from him. Though she stood so proudly still, some wistful force was coming from her, as from a magnet, and Miltoun's hands and arms and face twitched as though palsied. This struggle, dumb and pitiful, seemed never to be coming to an end in the little white room, darkened by the thatch of the verandah, and sweet with the scent of pinks and of a wood fire just lighted somewhere out at the back. Then, without a word, he turned and went out. She heard the wicket gate swing to. He was gone.

CHAPTER XVI

Lord Denis was fly-fishing—the weather just too bright to allow the little trout of that shallow, never silent stream to embrace with avidity the small enticements which he threw in their direction. Nevertheless he continued to invite them, exploring every nook of their watery pathway with his soft-swishing line. In a rough suit and battered hat adorned with those artificial and other flies, which infest Harris tweed, he crept along among the hazel bushes and thorn-trees, perfectly happy. Like an old spaniel, who has once gloried in the fetching of hares, rabbits, and all manner of fowl, and is now glad if you will but throw a stick for him, so one, who had been a famous fisher before the Lord, who had harried the waters of Scotland and Norway, Florida and Iceland, now pursued trout no bigger than sardines. The glamour of a thousand memories hallowed the hours he thus spent by that brown water. He fished unhasting, religious, like some good Catholic adding one more to the row of beads already told, as though he would fish himself, gravely, without complaint, into the other world. With each fish caught he experienced a solemn satisfaction.

Though he would have liked Barbara with him that morning, he had only looked at her once after breakfast in such a way that she could not see him, and with a dry smile gone off by himself. Down by the stream it was dappled, both cool and warm, windless; the trees met over the river, and there were many stones, forming little basins which held up the ripple, so that the casting of a fly required much cunning. This long dingle ran for miles through the foot-growth of folding hills. It was beloved of jays; but of human beings there were none, except a chicken-farmer's widow, who lived in a house thatched almost to the ground, and made her livelihood by directing tourists, with such cunning that they soon came back to her for tea.

It was while throwing a rather longer line than usual to reach a little dark piece of crisp water that Lord Dennis heard the swishing and crackling of someone advancing at full speed. He frowned slightly, feeling for the nerves of his fishes, whom he did not wish startled. The invader was Miltoun, hot, pale, dishevelled, with a queer, hunted look on his face. He stopped on seeing his great-uncle, and instantly assumed the mask of his smile.

Lord Dennis was not the man to see what was not intended for him, and he merely said:

"Well, Eustace!" as he might have spoken, meeting his nephew in the hall of one of his London Clubs.

Miltoun, no less polite, murmured:

"Hope I haven't lost you anything."

Lord Dennis shook his head, and laying his rod on the bank, said:

"Sit down and have a chat, old fellow. You don't fish, I think?"

He had not, in the least, missed the suffering behind Miltoun's mask; his eyes were still good, and there was a little matter of some twenty years' suffering of his own on account of a woman—ancient history now—which had left him quaintly sensitive, for an old man, to signs of suffering in others.

Miltoun would not have obeyed that invitation from anyone else, but there was something about Lord Dennis which people did not resist; his power lay in a dry ironic suavety which could not but persuade people that impoliteness was altogether too new and raw a thing to be indulged in.

The two sat side by side on the roots of trees. At first they talked a little of birds, and then were dumb, so dumb that the invisible creatures of the woods consulted together audibly. Lord Dennis broke that silence.

"This place," he said, "always reminds me of Mark Twain's writings—can't tell why, unless it's the ever-greenness. I like the evergreen philosophers, Twain and Meredith. There's no salvation except through courage, though I never could stomach the 'strong man'—captain of his soul, Henley and Nietzsche and that sort—goes against the grain with me. What do you say, Eustace?"

"They meant well," answered Miltoun, "but they protested too much."

Lord Dennis moved his head in assent.

"To be captain of your soul!" continued Miltoun in a bitter voice; "it's a pretty phrase!"

"Pretty enough," murmured Lord Dennis.

Miltoun looked at him.

"And suitable to you," he said.

"No, my dear," Lord Dennis answered dryly, "a long way off that, thank God!"

His eyes were fixed intently on the place where a large trout had risen in the stillest toffee-coloured pool. He knew that fellow, a half-pounder at least, and his thoughts began flitting round the top of his head, hovering over the various merits of the flies. His fingers itched too, but he made no movement, and the ash-tree under which he sat let its leaves tremble, as though in sympathy.

"See that hawk?" said Miltoun.

At a height more than level with the tops of the hills a buzzard hawk was stationary in the blue directly over them. Inspired by curiosity at their stillness, he was looking down to see whether they were edible; the upcurved ends of his great wings flirted just once to show that he was part of the living glory of the air—a symbol of freedom to men and fishes.

Lord Dennis looked at his great-nephew. The boy—for what else was thirty to seventy-six?—was taking it hard, whatever it might be, taking it very hard! He was that sort—ran till he dropped. The worst kind to help—the sort that made for trouble—that let things gnaw at them! And there flashed before the old man's mind the image of Prometheus devoured by the eagle. It was his favourite tragedy, which he still read periodically, in the Greek, helping himself now and then out of his old lexicon to the meaning of some word which had flown to Erebus. Yes, Eustace was a fellow for the heights and depths!

He said quietly:

"You don't care to talk about it, I suppose?"

Miltoun shook his head, and again there was silence.

The buzzard hawk having seen them move, quivered his wings like a moth's, and deserted that plane of air. A robin from the dappled warmth of a mossy stone, was regarding them instead. There was another splash in the pool.

Lord Dennis said gently:

"That fellow's risen twice; I believe he'd take a 'Wistman's treasure.'" Extracting from his hat its latest fly, and binding it on, he began softly to swish his line.

"I shall have him yet!" he muttered. But Miltoun had stolen away....

The further piece of information about Mrs. Noel, already known by Barbara, and diffused by the 'Bucklandbury News', had not become common knowledge at the Court till after Lord Dennis had started out to fish. In combination with the report that Miltoun had arrived and gone out without breakfast, it had been received with mingled feelings. Bertie, Harbinger, and Shropton, in a short conclave, after agreeing that from the point of view of the election it was perhaps better than if she had been a divorcee, were still inclined to the belief that no time was to be lost—in doing what, however, they were unable to determine. Apart from the impossibility of knowing how a fellow like Miltoun would take the matter, they were faced with the devilish subtlety of all situations to which the proverb 'Least said, soonest mended' applies. They were in the presence of that awe-inspiring thing, the power of scandal. Simple statements of simple facts, without moral drawn (to which no legal exception could be taken) laid before the public as pieces of interesting information, or at the worst exposed in perfect good faith, lest the public should blindly elect as their representative one whose private life might not stand the inspection of daylight—what could be more justifiable! And yet Miltoun's supporters knew

that this simple statement of where he spent his evenings had a poisonous potency, through its power of stimulating that side of the human imagination the most easily excited. They recognized only too well, how strong was a certain primitive desire, especially in rural districts, by yielding to which the world was made to go, and how remarkably hard it, was not to yield to it, and how interesting and exciting to see or hear of others yielding to it, and how (though here, of course, men might differ secretly) reprehensible of them to do so! They recognized, too well, how a certain kind of conscience would appreciate this rumour; and how the puritans would lick their lengthened chops. They knew, too, how irresistible to people of any imagination at all, was the mere combination of a member of a class, traditionally supposed to be inclined to having what it wanted, with a lady who lived alone! As Harbinger said: It was really devilish awkward! For, to take any notice of it would be to make more people than ever believe it true. And yet, that it was working mischief, they felt by the secret voice in their own souls, telling them that they would have believed it if they had not known better. They hung about, waiting for Miltoun to come in.

The news was received by Lady Valleys with a sigh of intense relief, and the remark that it was probably another lie. When Barbara confirmed it, she only said: "Poor Eustace!" and at once wrote off to her husband to say that 'Anonyma' was still married, so that the worst fortunately could not happen.

Miltoun came in to lunch, but from his face and manner nothing could be guessed. He was a thought more talkative than usual, and spoke of Brabrook's speech—some of which he had heard. He looked at Courtier meaningly, and after lunch said to him:

"Will you come round to my den?"

In that room, the old withdrawing-room of the Elizabethan wing—where once had been the embroideries, tapestries, and missals of beruffled dames were now books, pamphlets, oak-panels, pipes, fencing gear, and along one wall a collection of Red Indian weapons and ornaments brought back by Miltoun from the United States. High on the wall above these reigned the bronze death-mask of a famous Apache Chief, cast from a plaster taken of the face by a professor of Yale College, who had declared it to be a perfect specimen of the vanishing race. That visage, which had a certain weird resemblance to Dante's, presided over the room with cruel, tragic stoicism. No one could look on it without feeling that, there, the human will had been pushed to its farthest limits of endurance.

Seeing it for the first time, Courtier said:

"Fine thing—that! Only wants a soul."

Miltoun nodded:

"Sit down," he said.

Courtier sat down.

There followed one of those silences in which men whose spirits, though different, have a certain bigness in common—can say so much to one another:

At last Miltoun spoke:

"I have been living in the clouds, it seems. You are her oldest friend. The immediate question is how to make it easiest for her in face of this miserable rumour!"

Not even Courtier himself could have put such whip-lash sting into the word 'miserable.'

He answered:

"Oh! take no notice of that. Let them stew in their own juice. She won't care."

Miltoun listened, not moving a muscle of his face.

"Your friends here," went on Courtier with a touch of contempt, "seem in a flutter. Don't let them do anything, don't let them say a word. Treat the thing as it deserves to be treated. It'll die."

Miltoun, however, smiled.

"I'm not sure," he said, "that the consequences will be as you think, but I shall do as you say."

"As for your candidature, any man with a spark of generosity in his soul will rally to you because of it."

"Possibly," said Miltoun. "It will lose me the election, for all that."

Then, dimly conscious that their last words had revealed the difference of their temperaments and creeds, they stared at one another.

"No," said Courtier, "I never will believe that people can be so mean!"

"Until they are."

"Anyway, though we get at it in different ways, we agree."

Miltoun leaned his elbow on the mantelpiece, and shading his face with his hand, said:

"You know her story. Is there any way out of that, for her?"

On Courtier's face was the look which so often came when he was speaking for one of his lost causes—as if the fumes from a fire in his heart had mounted to his head.

"Only the way," he answered calmly, "that I should take if I were you."

"And that?"

"The law into your own hands."

Miltoun unshaded his face. His gaze seemed to have to travel from an immense distance before it reached Courtier. He answered:

"Yes, I thought you would say that."

CHAPTER XVII

When everything, that night, was quiet, Barbara, her hair hanging loose outside her dressing gown, slipped from her room into the dim corridor. With bare feet thrust into fur-crowned slippers which made no noise, she stole along looking at door after door. Through a long Gothic window, uncurtained, the mild moonlight was coming. She stopped just where that moonlight fell, and tapped. There came no answer. She opened the door a little way, and said:

"Are you asleep, Eusty?"

There still came no answer, and she went in.

The curtains were drawn, but a chink of moonlight peering through fell on the bed. This was empty. Barbara stood uncertain, listening. In the heart of that darkness there seemed to be, not sound, but, as it were, the muffled soul of sound, a sort of strange vibration, like that of a flame noiselessly licking the air. She put her hand to her heart, which beat as though it would leap through the thin silk covering. From what corner of the room was that mute tremor coming? Stealing to the window, she parted the curtains, and stared back into the shadows. There, on the far side, lying on the floor with his arms pressed tightly round his head and his face to the wall, was Miltoun. Barbara let fall the curtains, and stood breathless, with such a queer sensation in her breast as she had never felt; a sense of something outraged-of scarred pride. It was gone at once, in a rush of pity. She stepped forward quickly in the darkness, was visited by fear, and stopped. He had seemed absolutely himself all the evening. A little more talkative, perhaps, a little more caustic than usual. And now to find him like this! There was no great share of reverence in Barbara, but what little she possessed had always been kept for her eldest brother. He had impressed her, from a child, with his aloofness, and she had been proud of kissing him because he never seemed to let anybody else do so. Those caresses, no doubt, had the savour of conquest; his face had been the undiscovered land for her lips. She loved him as one loves that which ministers to one's pride; had for him, too, a touch of motherly protection, as for a doll that does not get on too well with the other dolls; and withal a little unaccustomed awe.

Dared she now plunge in on this private agony? Could she have borne that anyone should see herself thus prostrate? He had not heard her, and she tried to regain the door. But a board creaked; she heard him move, and flinging away her fears, said: "It's me! Babs!" and dropped on her knees beside him. If it had not been so pitch dark she could never have done that. She tried at once to take his head into her arms, but could not see it, and succeeded indifferently. She could but stroke his arm continually,

wondering whether he would hate her ever afterwards, and blessing the darkness, which made it all seem as though it were not happening, yet so much more poignant than if it had happened. Suddenly she felt him slip away from her, and getting up, stole out. After the darkness of that room, the corridor seemed full of grey filmy light, as though dream-spiders had joined the walls with their cobwebs, in which innumerable white moths, so tiny that they could not be seen, were struggling. Small eerie noises crept about. A sudden frightened longing for warmth, and light, and colour came to Barbara. She fled back to her room. But she could not sleep. That terrible mute unseen vibration in the unlighted room-like the noiseless licking of a flame at bland air; the touch of Miltoun's hand, hot as fire against her cheek and neck; the whole tremulous dark episode, possessed her through and through. Thus had the wayward force of Love chosen to manifest itself to her in all its wistful violence. At this fiat sight of the red flower of passion her cheeks burned; up and down her, between the cool sheets, little hot cruel shivers ran; she lay, wide-eyed, staring at the ceiling. She thought, of the woman whom he so loved, and wondered if she too were lying sleepless, flung down on a bare floor, trying to cool her forehead and lips against a cold wall.

Not for hours did she fall asleep, and then dreamed of running desperately through fields full of tall spiky asphodel-like flowers, and behind her was running herself.

In the morning she dreaded to go down. Could she meet Miltoun now that she knew of the passion in him, and he knew that she knew it? She had her breakfast brought upstairs. Before she had finished Miltoun himself came in. He looked more than usually self-contained, not to say ironic, and only remarked: "If you're going to ride you might take this note for me over to old Haliday at Wippincott." By his coming she knew that he was saying all he ever meant to say about that dark incident. And sympathizing completely with a reticence which she herself felt to be the only possible way out for both of them, Barbara looked at him gratefully, took the note and said: "All right!"

Then, after glancing once or twice round the room, Miltoun went away.

He left her restless, divested of the cloak 'of course,' in a strange mood of questioning, ready as it were for the sight of the magpie wings of Life, and to hear their quick flutterings. Talk jarred on her that morning, with its sameness and attachment to the facts of the present and the future, its essential concern with the world as it was—she avoided all companionship on her ride. She wanted to be told of things that were not, yet might be, to peep behind the curtain, and see the very spirit of mortal happenings escaped from prison. And this was all so unusual with Barbara, whose body was too perfect, too sanely governed by the flow of her blood not to revel in the moment and the things thereof. She knew it was unusual. After her ride she avoided lunch, and walked out into the lanes. But about two o'clock, feeling very hungry, she went into a farmhouse, and asked for milk. There, in the kitchen, like young jackdaws in a row with their mouths a little open, were the three farm boys, seated on a bench gripped to the alcove of the great fire-way, munching bread and cheese. Above their heads a gun was hung, trigger upwards, and two hams were mellowing in the smoke. At the feet of a black-haired girl, who was slicing onions, lay a sheep dog of tremendous age, with nose stretched out on paws, and in his little blue eyes a gleam of approaching immortality. They all stared at Barbara. And one of the boys, whose face had the delightful look of him who loses all sense of other things in what he is seeing at the moment, smiled, and continued smiling, with sheer pleasure. Barbara drank her milk, and wandered out again; passing through a gate at the bottom of a steep, rocky tor, she sat down on a sun-warmed stone. The sunlight fell greedily on her here, like an invisible swift hand touching her all over, and specially caressing her throat and face. A very gentle wind, which dived over the tor tops into the young fern; stole down at her, spiced with the fern sap. All was warmth and peace, and only the cuckoos on the far thorn trees—as though stationed by the Wistful Master himself—were there to disturb her heart: But all the sweetness and piping of the day did not soothe her. In truth, she could not have said what was the matter, except that she felt so discontented, and as it were empty of all but a sort of aching impatience with—what exactly she could not say. She had that rather dreadful feeling of something slipping by which she could not catch. It was so new to her to feel like that—for no girl was less given to moods and repinings. And all the time a sort of contempt for this soft and almost sentimental feeling made her tighten her lips and frown. She felt distrustful and sarcastic towards a mood so utterly subversive of that fetich 'Hardness,' to the unconscious worship of which she had been brought up. To stand no sentiment or nonsense either in herself or others was the first article of faith; not to slop-over anywhere. So that to feel as she did was almost horrible to Barbara. Yet she could not get rid of the sensation. With sudden recklessness she tried giving herself up to it entirely. Undoing the scarf at her throat, she let the air play on her bared neck, and stretched out her arms as if to hug the wind to her; then, with a sigh, she got up, and walked on. And now she began thinking of 'Anonyma'; turning her position over and over. The idea that anyone young and beautiful should thus be clipped off in her life, roused her impatient indignation. Let them try it with her! They would soon see! For all her cultivated 'hardness,' Barbara really hated anything to suffer. It seemed to her unnatural. She never went to that hospital where Lady Valleys had a ward, nor to their summer camp for crippled children,

nor to help in their annual concert for sweated workers, without a feeling of such vehement pity that it was like being seized by the throat: Once, when she had been singing to them, the rows of wan, pinched faces below had been too much for her; she had broken down, forgotten her words, lost memory of the tune, and just ended her performance with a smile, worth more perhaps to her audience than those lost verses. She never came away from such sights and places without a feeling of revolt amounting almost to rage; and she only continued to go because she dimly knew that it was expected of her not to turn her back on such things, in her section of Society.

But it was not this feeling which made her stop before Mrs. Noel's cottage; nor was it curiosity. It was a quite simple desire to squeeze her hand.

'Anonyma' seemed taking her trouble as only those women who are no good at self-assertion can take things—doing exactly as she would have done if nothing had happened; a little paler than usual, with lips pressed rather tightly together.

They neither of them spoke at first, but stood looking, not at each other's faces, but at each other's breasts. At last Barbara stepped forward impulsively and kissed her.

After that, like two children who kiss first, and then make acquaintance, they stood apart, silent, faintly smiling. It had been given and returned in real sweetness and comradeship, that kiss, for a sign of womanhood making face against the world; but now that it was over, both felt a little awkward. Would that kiss have been given if Fate had been auspicious? Was it not proof of misery? So Mrs. Noel's smile seemed saying, and Barbara's smile unwillingly admitted. Perceiving that if they talked it could only be about the most ordinary things, they began speaking of music, flowers, and the queerness of bees' legs. But all the time, Barbara, though seemingly unconscious, was noting with her smiling eyes, the tiny movement's, by which one woman can tell what is passing in another. She saw a little quiver tighten the corner of the lips, the eyes suddenly grow large and dark, the thin blouse desperately rise and fall. And her fancy, quickened by last night's memory, saw this woman giving herself up to the memory of love in her thoughts. At this sight she felt a little of that impatience which the conquering feel for the passive, and perhaps just a touch of jealousy.

Whatever Miltoun decided, that would this woman accept! Such resignation, while it simplified things, offended the part of Barbara which rebelled against all inaction, all dictation, even from her favourite brother. She said suddenly:

"Are you going to do nothing? Aren't you going to try and free yourself? If I were in your position, I would never rest till I'd made them free me."

But Mrs. Noel did not answer; and sweeping her glance from that crown of soft dark hair, down the soft white figure, to the very feet, Barbara cried:

"I believe you are a fatalist."

Soon after that, not knowing what more to say, she went away. But walking home across the fields, where full summer was swinging on the delicious air and there was now no bull but only red cows to crop short the 'milk-maids' and buttercups, she suffered from this strange revelation of the strength of softness and passivity—as though she had seen in the white figure of 'Anonyma,' and heard in her voice something from beyond, symbolic, inconceivable, yet real.

CHAPTER XVIII

Lord Valleys, relieved from official pressure by subsidence of the war scare, had returned for a long week-end. To say that he had been intensely relieved by the news that Mrs. Noel was not free, would be to put it mildly. Though not old-fashioned, like his mother-in-law, in regard to the mixing of the castes, prepared to admit that exclusiveness was out of date, to pass over with a shrug and a laugh those numerous alliances by which his order were renewing the sinews of war, and indeed in his capacity of an expert, often pointing out the dangers of too much in-breeding—yet he had a peculiar personal feeling about his own family, and was perhaps a little extra sensitive because of Agatha; for Shropton, though a good fellow, and extremely wealthy, was only a third baronet, and had originally been made of iron. It was inadvisable to go outside the inner circle where there was no material necessity for so doing. He had not done it himself. Moreover there was a sentiment about these things!

On the morning after his arrival, visiting the kennels before breakfast, he stood chatting with his head man, and caressing the wet noses of his two favourite pointers,—with something of the feeling of a boy let out of school. Those pleasant creatures, cowering and quivering with pride against his legs, and turning up at him their yellow Chinese eyes, gave him that sense of warmth and comfort which visits men in the presence of their hobbies. With this particular pair, inbred to the uttermost, he had successfully surmounted a great risk. It was now touch and go whether he dared venture on one more cross to the original strain, in the hope of eliminating the last clinging of liver colour. It was a gamble—and it was just that which rendered it so vastly interesting.

A small voice diverted his attention; he looked round and saw little Ann. She had been in bed when he arrived the night before, and he was therefore the newest thing about.

She carried in her arms a guinea-pig, and began at once:

"Grandpapa, Granny wants you. She's on the terrace; she's talking to Mr. Courtier. I like him—he's a kind man. If I put my guinea-pig down, will they bite it? Poor darling—they shan't! Isn't it a darling!"

Lord Valleys, twirling his moustache, regarded the guinea-pig without favour; he had rather a dislike for all senseless kinds of beasts.

Pressing the guinea-pig between her hands, as it might be a concertina, little Ann jiggled it gently above the pointers, who, wrinkling horribly their long noses, gazed upwards, fascinated.

"Poor darlings, they want it—don't they? Grandpapa"

"Yes."

"Do you think the next puppies will be spotted quite all over?"

Continuing to twirl his moustache, Lord Valleys answered:

"I think it is not improbable, Ann."

"Why do you like them spotted like that? Oh! they're kissing Sambo—I must go!"

Lord Valleys followed her, his eyebrows a little raised.

As he approached the terrace his wife came, towards him. Her colour was, deeper than usual, and she had the look, higher and more resolute, peculiar to her when she had been opposed. In truth she had just been through a passage of arms with Courtier, who, as the first revealer of Mrs. Noel's situation, had become entitled to a certain confidence on this subject. It had arisen from what she had intended as a perfectly natural and not unkind remark, to the effect that all the trouble had come from Mrs. Noel not having made her position clear to Miltoun from the first.

He had at once grown very red.

"It's easy, Lady Valleys, for those who have never been in the position of a lonely woman, to blame her."

Unaccustomed to be withstood, she had looked at him intently:

"I am the last person to be hard on a woman for conventional reasons. But I think it showed lack of character."

Courtier's reply had been almost rude.

"Plants are not equally robust, Lady Valleys. Some, as we know, are actually sensitive."

She had retorted with decision

"If you like to so dignify the simpler word 'weak'"

He had become very rigid at that, biting deeply into his moustache.

"What crimes are not committed under the sanctity of that creed 'survival of the fittest,' which suits the book of all you fortunate people so well!"

Priding herself on her restraint, Lady Valleys answered:

"Ah! we must talk that out. On the face of them your words sound a little unphilosophic, don't they?"

He had looked straight at her with a queer, unpleasant smile; and she had felt at once disturbed and angry. It was all very well to pet and even to admire these original sort of men, but there were limits. Remembering, however, that he was her guest, she had only said:

"Perhaps after all we had better not talk it out;" and moving away, she heard him answer: "In any case, I'm certain Audrey Noel never wilfully kept your son in the dark; she's much too proud."

Though rude, she could not help liking the way he stuck up for this woman; and she threw back at him the words:

"You and I, Mr. Courtier, must have a good fight some day!"

She went towards her husband conscious of the rather pleasurable sensation which combat always roused in her.

These two were very good comrades. Theirs had been a love match, and making due allowance for human nature beset by opportunity, had remained, throughout, a solid and efficient alliance. Taking, as they both did, such prominent parts in public and social matters, the time they spent together was limited, but productive of mutual benefit and reinforcement. They had not yet had an opportunity of discussing their son's affair; and, slipping her hand through his arm, Lady Valleys drew him away from the house.

"I want to talk to you about Miltoun, Geoff."

"H'm!" said Lord Valleys; "yes. The boy's looking worn. Good thing when this election's over."

"If he's beaten and hasn't something new and serious to concentrate himself on, he'll fret his heart out over that woman."

Lord Valleys meditated a little before replying.

"I don't think that, Gertrude. He's got plenty of spirit."

"Of course! But it's a real passion. And, you know, he's not like most boys, who'll take what they can."

She said this rather wistfully.

"I'm sorry for the woman," mused Lord Valleys; "I really am."

"They say this rumour's done a lot of harm."

"Our influence is strong enough to survive that."

"It'll be a squeak; I wish I knew what he was going to do. Will you ask him?"

"You're clearly the person to speak to him," replied Lord Valleys. "I'm no hand at that sort of thing."

But Lady Valleys, with genuine discomfort, murmured:

"My dear, I'm so nervous with Eustace. When he puts on that smile of his I'm done for, at once."

"This is obviously a woman's business; nobody like a mother."

"If it were only one of the others," muttered Lady Valleys: "Eustace has that queer way of making you feel lumpy."

Lord Valleys looked at her askance. He had that kind of critical fastidiousness which a word will rouse into activity. Was she lumpy? The idea had never struck him.

"Well, I'll do it, if I must," sighed Lady Valleys.

When after breakfast she entered Miltoun's 'den,' he was buckling on his spurs preparatory, to riding out to some of the remoter villages. Under the mask of the Apache chief, Bertie was standing, more inscrutable and neat than ever, in a perfectly tied cravatte, perfectly cut riding breeches, and boots worn and polished till a sooty glow shone through their natural russet. Not specially dandified in his usual dress, Bertie Caradoc would almost sooner have died than disgrace a horse. His eyes, the sharper because they had only half the space of the ordinary eye to glance from, at once took in the fact that his mother wished to be alone with 'old Miltoun,' and he discreetly left the room.

That which disconcerted all who had dealings with Miltoun was the discovery made soon or late, that

they could not be sure how anything would strike him. In his mind, as in his face, there was a certain regularity, and then—impossible to say exactly where—it would, shoot off and twist round a corner. This was the legacy no doubt of the hard-bitten individuality, which had brought to the front so many of his ancestors; for in Miltoun was the blood not only of the Caradocs and Fitz-Harolds, but of most other prominent families in the kingdom, all of whom, in those ages before money made the man, must have had a forbear conspicuous by reason of qualities, not always fine, but always poignant.

And now, though Lady Valleys had the audacity of her physique, and was not customarily abashed, she began by speaking of politics, hoping her son would give her an opening. But he gave her none, and she grew nervous. At last, summoning all her coolness, she said:

"I'm dreadfully sorry about this affair, dear boy. Your father told me of your talk with him. Try not to take it too hard."

Miltoun did not answer, and silence being that which Lady Valleys habitually most dreaded, she took refuge in further speech, outlining for her son the whole episode as she saw it from her point of view, and ending with these words:

"Surely it's not worth it."

Miltoun heard her with his peculiar look, as of a man peering through a vizor. Then smiling, he said:

"Thank you;" and opened the door.

Lady Valleys, without quite knowing whether he intended her to do so, indeed without quite knowing anything at the moment, passed out, and Miltoun closed the door behind her.

Ten minutes later he and Bertie were seen riding down the drive.

CHAPTER XIX

That afternoon the wind, which had been rising steadily, brought a flurry of clouds up from the South-West. Formed out on the heart of the Atlantic, they sailed forward, swift and fleecy at first, like the skirmishing white shallops of a great fleet; then, in serried masses, darkened the sun. About four o'clock they broke in rain, which the wind drove horizontally with a cold whiffling murmur. As youth and glamour die in a face before the cold rains of life, so glory died on the moor. The tors, from being uplifted wild castles, became mere grey excrescences. Distance failed. The cuckoos were silent. There was none of the beauty that there is in death, no tragic greatness—all was moaning and monotony. But about seven the sun tore its way back through the swathe, and flared out. Like some huge star, whose rays were stretching down to the horizon, and up to the very top of the hill of air, it shone with an amazing murky glamour; the clouds splintered by its shafts, and tinged saffron, piled themselves up as if in wonder. Under the sultry warmth of this new great star, the heather began to steam a little, and the glitter of its wet unopened bells was like that of innumerable tiny smoking fires. The two brothers were drenched as they cantered silently home. Good friends always, they had never much to say to one another. For Miltoun was conscious that he thought on a different plane from Bertie; and Bertie grudged even to his brother any inkling of what was passing in his spirit, just as he grudged parting with diplomatic knowledge, or stable secrets, or indeed anything that might leave him less in command of life. He grudged it, because in a private sort of way it lowered his estimation of his own stoical self-sufficiency; it hurt something proud in the withdrawing-room of his soul. But though he talked little, he had the power of contemplation—often found in men of decided character, with a tendency to liver. Once in Nepal, where he had gone to shoot, he had passed a month quite happily with only a Ghoorka servant who could speak no English. To those who asked him if he had not been horribly bored, he had always answered: "Not a bit; did a lot of thinking."

With Miltoun's trouble he had the professional sympathy of a brother and the natural intolerance of a confirmed bachelor. Women were to him very kittle-cattle. He distrusted from the bottom of his soul those who had such manifest power to draw things from you. He was one of those men in whom some day a woman might awaken a really fine affection; but who, until that time, would maintain the perfectly male attitude to the entire sex, and, after it, to all the sex but one. Women were, like Life itself, creatures to be watched, carefully used, and kept duly subservient. The only allusion therefore that he made to Miltoun's trouble was very sudden.

"Old man, I hope you're going to cut your losses."

The words were followed by undisturbed silence: But passing Mrs. Noel's cottage Miltoun said:

"Take my horse on; I want to go in here."....

She was sitting at her piano with her hands idle, looking at a line of music.... She had been sitting thus for many minutes, but had not yet taken in the notes.

When Miltoun's shadow blotted the light by which she was seeing so little, she gave a slight start, and got up. But she neither went towards him, nor spoke. And he, without a word, came in and stood by the hearth, looking down at the empty grate. A tortoise-shell cat which had been watching swallows, disturbed by his entrance, withdrew from the window beneath a chair.

This silence, in which the question of their future lives was to be decided, seemed to both interminable; yet, neither could end it.

At last, touching his sleeve, she said: "You're wet!"

Miltoun shivered at that timid sign of possession. And they again stood in silence broken only by the sound of the cat licking its paws.

But her faculty for dumbness was stronger than his, and—he had to speak first.

"Forgive me for coming; something must be settled. This—rumour——"

"Oh! that!" she said. "Is there anything I can do to stop the harm to you?"

It was the turn of Miltoun's lips to curl. "God! no; let them talk!"

Their eyes had come together now, and, once together, seemed unable to part.

Mrs. Noel said at last:

"Will you ever forgive me?"

"What for—it was my fault."

"No; I should have known you better."

The depth of meaning in those words—the tremendous and subtle admission they contained of all that she had been ready to do, the despairing knowledge in them that he was not, and never had been, ready to 'bear it out even to the edge of doom'—made Miltoun wince away.

"It is not from fear—believe that, anyway."

"I do."

There followed another long, long silence! But though so close that they were almost touching, they no longer looked at one another. Then Miltoun said:

"There is only to say good-bye, then."

At those clear words spoken by lips which, though just smiling, failed so utterly to hide his misery, Mrs. Noel's face became colourless as her white gown. But her eyes, which had grown immense, seemed from the sheer lack of all other colour, to have drawn into them the whole of her vitality; to be pouring forth a proud and mournful reproach.

Shivering, and crushing himself together with his arms, Miltoun walked towards the window. There was not the faintest sound from her, and he looked back. She was following him with her eyes. He threw his hand up over his face, and went quickly out. Mrs. Noel stood for a little while where he had left her; then, sitting down once more at the piano, began again to con over the line of music. And the cat stole back to the window to watch the swallows. The sunlight was dying slowly on the top branches of the lime-tree; a, drizzling rain began to fall.

CHAPTER XX

Claud Fresnay, Viscount Harbinger was, at the age of thirty-one, perhaps the least encumbered peer in the United Kingdom. Thanks to an ancestor who had acquired land, and departed this life one hundred and thirty years before the town of Nettlefold was built on a small portion of it, and to a father who had died in his son's infancy, after judiciously selling the said town, he possessed a very large income independently of his landed interests. Tall and well-built, with handsome, strongly-marked features, he gave at first sight an impression of strength—which faded somewhat when he began to talk. It was not so much the manner of his speech—with its rapid slang, and its way of turning everything to a jest—as the feeling it produced, that the brain behind it took naturally the path of least resistance. He was in fact one of those personalities who are often enough prominent in politics and social life, by reason of their appearance, position, assurance, and of a certain energy, half genuine, and half mere inherent predilection for short cuts. Certainly he was not idle, had written a book, travelled, was a Captain of Yeomanry, a Justice of the Peace, a good cricketer, and a constant and glib speaker. It would have been unfair to call his enthusiasm for social reform spurious. It was real enough in its way, and did certainly testify that he was not altogether lacking either in imagination or good-heartedness. But it was over and overlaid with the public-school habit—that peculiar, extraordinarily English habit, so powerful and beguiling that it becomes a second nature stronger than the first—of relating everything in the Universe to the standards and prejudices of a single class. Since practically all his intimate associates were immersed in it, he was naturally not in the least conscious of this habit; indeed there was nothing he deprecated so much in politics as the narrow and prejudiced outlook, such as he had observed in the Nonconformist, or labour politician. He would never have admitted for a moment that certain doors had been banged-to at his birth, bolted when he went to Eton, and padlocked at Cambridge. No one would have denied that there was much that was valuable in his standards—a high level of honesty, candour, sportsmanship, personal cleanliness, and self-reliance, together with a dislike of such cruelty as had been officially (so to speak) recognized as cruelty, and a sense of public service to a State run by and for the public schools; but it would have required far more originality than he possessed ever to look at Life from any other point of view than that from which he had been born and bred to watch Her. To fully understand harbinger, one must, and with unprejudiced eyes and brain, have attended one of those great cricket matches in which he had figured conspicuously as a boy, and looking down from some high impartial spot have watched the ground at lunch time covered from rope to rope and stand to stand with a marvellous swarm, all walking in precisely the same manner, with precisely the same expression on their faces, under precisely the same hats—a swarm enshrining the greatest identity of, creed and habit ever known since the world began. No, his environment had not been favourable to originality. Moreover he was naturally rapid rather than deep, and life hardly ever left him alone or left him silent. Brought into contact day and night with people to whom politics were more or less a game; run after everywhere; subjected to no form of discipline—it was a wonder that he was as serious as he was. Nor had he ever been in love, until, last year, during her first season, Barbara had, as he might have expressed it—in the case of another 'bowled him middle stump. Though so deeply smitten, he had not yet asked her to marry him—had not, as it were, had time, nor perhaps quite the courage, or conviction. When he was near her, it seemed impossible that he could go on longer without knowing his fate; when he was away from her it was almost a relief, because there were so many things to be done and said, and so little time to do or say them in. But now, during this fortnight, which, for her sake, he had devoted to Miltoun's cause, his feeling had advanced beyond the point of comfort.

He did not admit that the reason of this uneasiness was Courtier, for, after all, Courtier was, in a sense, nobody, and 'an extremist' into the bargain, and an extremist always affected the centre of Harbinger's anatomy, causing it to give off a peculiar smile and tone of voice. Nevertheless, his eyes, whenever they fell on that sanguine, steady, ironic face, shone with a sort of cold inquiry, or were even darkened by the shade of fear. They met seldom, it is true, for most of his day was spent in motoring and speaking, and most of Courtier's in writing and riding, his leg being still too weak for walking. But once or twice in the smoking room late at night, he had embarked on some bantering discussion with the champion of lost causes; and very soon an ill-concealed impatience had crept into his voice. Why a man should waste his time, flogging dead horses on a journey to the moon, was incomprehensible! Facts were facts, human nature would never be anything but human nature! And it was peculiarly galling to see in Courtier's eye a gleam, to catch in his voice a tone, as if he were thinking: "My young friend, your soup is cold!"

On a morning after one of these encounters, seeing Barbara sally forth in riding clothes, he asked if he too might go round the stables, and started forth beside her, unwontedly silent, with an odd feeling about his heart, and his throat unaccountably dry.

The stables at Monkland Court were as large as many country houses. Accommodating thirty horses, they were at present occupied by twenty-one, including the pony of little Ann. For height, perfection of lighting, gloss, shine, and purity of atmosphere they were unequalled in the county. It seemed indeed impossible that any horse could ever so far forget himself in such a place as to remember that he was a horse. Every morning a little bin of carrots, apples, and lumps of sugar, was set close to the main

entrance, ready for those who might desire to feed the dear inhabitants.

Reined up to a brass ring on either side of their stalls with their noses towards the doors, they were always on view from nine to ten, and would stand with their necks arched, ears pricked, and coats gleaming, wondering about things, soothed by the faint hissing of the still busy grooms, and ready to move their noses up and down the moment they saw someone enter.

In a large loose-box at the end of the north wing Barbara's favourite chestnut hunter, all but one saving sixteenth of whom had been entered in the stud book, having heard her footstep, was standing quite still with his neck turned. He had been crumpling up an apple placed amongst his feed, and his senses struggled between the lingering flavour of that delicacy,—and the perception of a sound with which he connected carrots. When she unlatched his door, and said "Hal," he at once went towards his manger, to show his independence, but when she said: "Oh! very well!" he turned round and came towards her. His eyes, which were full and of a soft brilliance, under thick chestnut lashes, explored her all over. Perceiving that her carrots were not in front, he elongated his neck, let his nose stray round her waist, and gave her gauntleted hand a nip with his lips. Not tasting carrot, he withdrew his nose, and snuffled. Then stepping carefully so as not to tread on her foot, he bunted her gently with his shoulder, till with a quick manoeuvre he got behind her and breathed low and long on her neck. Even this did not smell of carrots, and putting his muzzle over her shoulder against her cheek, he slobbered a very little. A carrot appeared about the level of her waist, and hanging his head over, he tried to reach it. Feeling it all firm and soft under his chin, he snuffled again, and gave her a gentle dig with his knee. But still unable to reach the carrot, he threw his head up, withdrew, and pretended not to see her. And suddenly he felt two long substances round his neck, and something soft against his nose. He suffered this in silence, laying his ears back. The softness began puffing on his muzzle. Pricking his ears again, he puffed back a little harder, with more curiosity, and the softness was withdrawn. He perceived suddenly that he had a carrot in his mouth.

Harbinger had witnessed this episode, oddly pale, leaning against the loose-box wall. He spoke, as it came to an end:

"Lady Babs!"

The tone of his voice must have been as strange as it sounded to himself, for Barbara spun round.

"Yes?"

"How long am I going on like this?"

Neither changing colour nor dropping her eyes, she regarded him with a faintly inquisitive interest. It was not a cruel look, had not a trace of mischief, or sex malice, and yet it frightened him by its serene inscrutability. Impossible to tell what was going on behind it. He took her hand, bent over it, and said in a low voice:

"You know what I feel; don't be cruel to me!"

She did not pull away her hand; it was as if she had not thought of it.

"I am not a bit cruel."

Looking up, he saw her smiling.

"Then—Babs!"

His face was close to hers, but Barbara did not shrink back. She just shook her head; and Harbinger flushed up.

"Why?" he asked; and as though the enormous injustice of that rejecting gesture had suddenly struck him, he dropped her hand.

"Why?" he said again, sharply.

But the silence was only broken by the cheeping of sparrows outside the round window, and the sound of the horse, Hal, munching the last morsel of his carrot. Harbinger was aware in his every nerve of the sweetish, slightly acrid, husky odour of the loosebox, mingling with the scent of Barbara's hair and clothes. And rather miserably, he said for the third time:

"Why?"

But folding her hands away behind her back she answered gently:

"My dear, how should I know why?"

She was calmly exposed to his embrace if he had only dared; but he did not dare, and went back to the loose-box wall. Biting his finger, he stared at her gloomily. She was stroking the muzzle of her horse; and a sort of dry rage began whisking and rustling in his heart. She had refused him—Harbinger! He had not known, had not suspected how much he wanted her. How could there be anybody else for him, while that young, calm, sweet-scented, smiling thing lived, to make his head go round, his senses ache, and to fill his heart with longing! He seemed to himself at that moment the most unhappy of all men.

"I shall not give you up," he muttered.

Barbara's answer was a smile, faintly curious, compassionate, yet almost grateful, as if she had said:

"Thank you—who knows?"

And rather quickly, a yard or so apart, and talking of horses, they returned to the house.

It was about noon, when, accompanied by Courtier, she rode forth.

The Sou-Westerly spell—a matter of three days—had given way before radiant stillness; and merely to be alive was to feel emotion. At a little stream running beside the moor under the wild stone man, the riders stopped their horses, just to listen, and, inhale the day. The far sweet chorus of life was tuned to a most delicate rhythm; not one of those small mingled pipings of streams and the lazy air, of beasts, men, birds, and bees, jarred out too harshly through the garment of sound enwrapping the earth. It was noon—the still moment—but this hymn to the sun, after his too long absence, never for a moment ceased to be murmured. And the earth wore an under-robe of scent, delicious, very finely woven of the young fern sap, heather buds; larch-trees not yet odourless, gorse just going brown, drifted woodsmoke, and the breath of hawthorn. Above Earth's twin vestments of sound and scent, the blue enwrapping scarf of air, that wistful wide campaign, was spanned only by the wings of Freedom.

After that long drink of the day, the riders mounted almost in silence to the very top of the moor. There again they sat quite still on their horses, examining the prospect. Far away to South and East lay the sea, plainly visible. Two small groups of wild ponies were slowly grazing towards each other on the hillside below.

Courtier said in a low voice:

"Thus will I sit and sing, with love in my arms; watching our two herds mingle together, and below us the far, divine, cerulean sea."

And, after another silence, looking steadily in Barbara's face, he added:

"Lady Barbara, I am afraid this is the last time we shall be alone together. While I have the chance, therefore, I must do homage.... You will always be the fixed star for my worship. But your rays are too bright; I shall worship from afar. From your seventh Heaven, therefore, look down on me with kindly eyes, and do not quite forget me."

Under that speech, so strangely compounded of irony and fervour, Barbara sat very still, with glowing cheeks.

"Yes," said Courtier, "only an immortal must embrace a goddess. Outside the purlieus of Authority I shall sit cross-legged, and prostrate myself three times a day."

But Barbara answered nothing.

"In the early morning," went on Courtier, "leaving the dark and dismal homes of Freedom I shall look towards the Temples of the Great; there with the eye of faith I shall see you."

He stopped, for Barbara's lips were moving.

"Don't hurt me, please."

Courtier leaned over, took her hand, and put it to his lips. "We will now ride on...."

That night at dinner Lord Dennis, seated opposite his great-niece, was struck by her appearance.

"A very beautiful child," he thought, "a most lovely young creature!"

She was placed between Courtier and Harbinger. And the old man's still keen eyes carefully watched

those two. Though attentive to their neighbours on the other side, they were both of them keeping the corner of an eye on Barbara and on each other. The thing was transparent to Lord Dennis, and a smile settled in that nest of gravity between his white peaked beard and moustaches. But he waited, the instinct of a fisherman bidding him to neglect no piece of water, till he saw the child silent and in repose, and watched carefully to see what would rise. Although she was so calmly, so healthily eating, her eyes stole round at Courtier. This quick look seemed to Lord Dennis perturbed, as if something were exciting her. Then Harbinger spoke, and she turned to answer him. Her face was calm now, faintly smiling, a little eager, provocative in its joy of life. It made Lord Dennis think of his own youth. What a splendid couple! If Babs married young Harbinger there would not be a finer pair in all England. His eyes travelled back to Courtier. Manly enough! They called him dangerous! There was a look of effervescence, carefully corked down—might perhaps be attractive to a girl! To his essentially practical and sober mind, a type like Courtier was puzzling. He liked the look of him, but distrusted his ironic expression, and that appearance of blood to the head. Fellow—no doubt—that would ride off on his ideas, humanitarian! To Lord Dennis there was something queer about humanitarians. They offended perhaps his dry and precise sense of form. They were always looking out for cruelty or injustice; seemed delighted when they found it—swelled up, as it were, when they scented it, and as there was a good deal about, were never quite of normal size. Men who lived for ideas were, in fact, to one for whom facts sufficed always a little worrying! A movement from Barbara brought him back to actuality. Was the possessor of that crown of hair and those divine young shoulders the little Babs who had ridden with him in the Row? Time was certainly the Devil! Her eyes were searching for something; and following the direction of that glance, Lord Dennis found himself observing Miltoun. What a difference between those two! Both no doubt in the great trouble of youth; which sometimes, as he knew too well, lasted on almost to old age. It was a curious look the child was giving her brother, as if asking him to help her. Lord Dennis had seen in his day many young creatures leave the shelter of their freedom and enter the house of the great lottery; many, who had drawn a prize and thereat lost forever the coldness of life; many too, the light of whose eyes had faded behind the shutters of that house, having drawn a blank. The thought of 'little' Babs on the threshold of that inexorable saloon, filled him with an eager sadness; and the sight of the two men watching for her, waiting for her, like hunters, was to him distasteful. In any case, let her not, for Heaven's sake, go ranging as far as that red fellow of middle age, who might have ideas, but had no pedigree; let her stick to youth and her own order, and marry the—young man, confound him, who looked like a Greek god, of the wrong period, having grown a moustache. He remembered her words the other evening about these two and the different lives they lived. Some romantic notion or other was working in her! And again he looked at Courtier. A Quixotic type—the sort that rode slap-bang at everything! All very well—but not for Babs! She was not like the glorious Garibaldi's glorious Anita! It was truly characteristic of Lord Dennis—and indeed of other people—that to him champions of Liberty when dead were far dearer than champions of Liberty when living. Yes, Babs would want more, or was it less, than just a life of sleeping under the stars for the man she loved, and the cause he fought for. She would want pleasure, and, not too much effort, and presently a little power; not the uncomfortable after-fame of a woman who went through fire, but the fame and power of beauty, and Society prestige. This, fancy of hers, if it were a fancy, could be nothing but the romanticism of a young girl. For the sake of a passing shadow, to give up substance? It wouldn't do! And again Lord Dennis fixed his shrewd glance on his great-niece. Those eyes, that smile! Yes! She would grow out of this. And take the Greek god, the dying Gaul—whichever that young man was!

CHAPTER XXI

It was not till the morning of polling day itself that Courtier left Monkland Court. He had already suffered for some time from bad conscience. For his knee was practically cured, and he knew well that it was Barbara, and Barbara alone, who kept him staying there. The atmosphere of that big house with its army of servants, the impossibility of doing anything for himself, and the feeling of hopeless insulation from the vivid and necessitous sides of life, galled him greatly. He felt a very genuine pity for these people who seemed to lead an existence as it were smothered under their own social importance. It was not their fault. He recognized that they did their best. They were good specimens of their kind; neither soft nor luxurious, as things went in a degenerate and extravagant age; they evidently tried to be simple—and this seemed to him to heighten the pathos of their situation. Fate had been too much for them. What human spirit could emerge untrammelled and unshrunk from that great encompassing host of material advantage? To a Bedouin like Courtier, it was as though a subtle, but very terrible tragedy was all the time being played before his eyes; and in, the very centre of this tragedy was the girl who so greatly attracted him. Every night when he retired to that lofty room,

which smelt so good, and where, without ostentation, everything was so perfectly ordered for his comfort, he thought:

"My God, to-morrow I'll be off!"

But every morning when he met her at breakfast his thought was precisely the same, and there were moments when he caught himself wondering: "Am I falling under the spell of this existence—am I getting soft?" He recognized as never before that the peculiar artificial 'hardness' of the patrician was a brine or pickle, in which, with the instinct of self-preservation they deliberately soaked themselves, to prevent the decay of their overprotected fibre. He perceived it even in Barbara—a sort of sentiment-proof overall, a species of mistrust of the emotional or lyrical, a kind of contempt of sympathy and feeling. And every day he was more and more tempted to lay rude hands on this garment; to see whether he could not make her catch fire, and flare up with some emotion or idea. In spite of her tantalizing, youthful self-possession, he saw that she felt this longing in him, and now and then he caught a glimpse of a streak of recklessness in her which lured him on:

And yet, when at last he was saying good-bye on the night before polling day, he could not flatter himself that he had really struck any spark from her. Certainly she gave him no chance, at that final interview, but stood amongst the other women, calm and smiling, as if determined that he should not again mock her with his ironical devotion.

He got up very early the next morning, intending to pass away unseen. In the car put at his disposal; he found a small figure in a holland-frock, leaning back against the cushions so that some sandalled toes pointed up at the chauffeur's back. They belonged to little Ann, who in the course of business had discovered the vehicle before the door. Her sudden little voice under her sudden little nose, friendly but not too friendly, was comforting to Courtier.

"Are you going? I can come as, far as the gate." "That is lucky."

"Yes. Is that all your luggage?"

"I'm afraid it is."

"Oh! It's quite a lot, really, isn't it?"

"As much as I deserve."

"Of course you don't have to take guinea-pigs about with you?"

"Not as a rule."

"I always do. There's great-Granny!"

There certainly was Lady Casterley, standing a little back from the drive, and directing a tall gardener how to deal with an old oak-tree. Courtier alighted, and went towards her to say good-bye. She greeted him with a certain grim cordiality.

"So you are going! I am glad of that, though you quite understand that I like you personally."

"Quite!"

Her eyes gleamed maliciously.

"Men who laugh like you are dangerous, as I've told you before!"

Then, with great gravity; she added

"My granddaughter will marry Lord Harbinger. I mention that, Mr. Courtier, for your peace of mind. You are a man of honour; it will go no further."

Courtier, bowing over her hand, answered:

"He will be lucky."

The little old lady regarded him unflinchingly.

"He will, sir. Good-bye!"

Courtier smilingly raised his hat. His cheeks were burning. Regaining the car, he looked round. Lady Casterley was busy once more exhorting the tall gardener. The voice of little Ann broke in on his thoughts:

"I hope you'll come again. Because I expect I shall be here at Christmas; and my brothers will be here then, that is, Jock and Tiddy, not Christopher because he's young. I must go now. Good-bye! Hallo, Susie!"

Courtier saw her slide away, and join the little pale adoring figure of the lodge-keeper's daughter.

The car passed out into the lane.

If Lady Casterley had planned this disclosure, which indeed she had not, for the impulse had only come over her at the sound of Courtier's laugh, she could not have, devised one more effectual, for there was deep down in him all a wanderer's very real distrust, amounting almost to contempt, of people so settled and done for; as aristocrats or bourgeois, and all a man of action's horror of what he called puking and muling. The pursuit of Barbara with any other object but that of marriage had naturally not occurred to one who had little sense of conventional morality, but much self-respect; and a secret endeavour to cut out Harbinger, ending in a marriage whereat he would figure as a sort of pirate, was quite as little to the taste of a man not unaccustomed to think himself as good as other people.

He caused the car to deviate up the lane that led to Audrey Noel's, hating to go away without a hail of cheer to that ship in distress.

She came out to him on the verandah. From the clasp of her hand, thin and faintly browned—the hand of a woman never quite idle—he felt that she relied on him to understand and sympathize; and nothing so awakened the best in Courtier as such mute appeals to his protection. He said gently:

"Don't let them think you're down;" and, squeezing her hand hard: "Why should you be wasted like this? It's a sin and shame!"

But he stopped in what he felt to be an unlucky speech at sight of her face, which without movement expressed so much more than his words. He was protesting as a civilized man; her face was the protest of Nature, the soundless declaration of beauty wasted against its will, beauty that was life's invitation to the embrace which gave life birth.

"I'm clearing out, myself," he said: "You and I, you know, are not good for these people. No birds of freedom allowed!"

Pressing his hand, she turned away into the house, leaving Courtier gazing at the patch of air where her white figure had stood. He had always had a special protective feeling for Audrey Noel, a feeling which with but little encouragement might have become something warmer. But since she had been placed in her anomalous position, he would not for the world have brushed the dew off her belief that she could trust him. And, now that he had fixed his own gaze elsewhere, and she was in this bitter trouble, he felt on her account the rancour that a brother feels when Justice and Pity have conspired to flout his sister. The voice of Frith the chauffeur roused him from gloomy reverie.

"Lady Barbara, sir!"

Following the man's eyes, Courtier saw against the sky-line on the far above Ashman's Folly, an equestrian statue. He stopped the car at once, and got out.

He reached her at the ruin, screened from the road, by that divine chance which attends on men who take care that it shall. He could not tell whether she knew of his approach, and he would have given all he had, which was not much, to have seen through the stiff grey of her coat, and the soft cream of her body, into that mysterious cave, her heart. To have been for a moment, like Ashman, done for good and all with material things, and living the white life where are no barriers between man and woman. The smile on her lips so baffled him, puffed there by her spirit, as a first flower is puffed through the surface of earth to mock at the spring winds. How tell what it signified! Yet he rather prided himself on his knowledge of women, of whom he had seen something. But all he found to say was:

"I'm glad of this chance."

Then suddenly looking up, he found her strangely pale and quivering.

"I shall see you in London!" she said; and, touching her horse with her whip, without looking back, she rode away over the hill.

Courtier returned to the moor road, and getting into the car, muttered:

"Faster, please, Frith!"....

CHAPTER XXII

Polling was already in brisk progress when Courtier arrived in Bucklandbury; and partly from a not unnatural interest in the result, partly from a half-unconscious clinging to the chance of catching another glimpse of Barbara, he took his bag to the hotel, determined to stay for the announcement of the poll. Strolling out into the High Street he began observing the humours of the day. The bloom of political belief had long been brushed off the wings of one who had so flown the world's winds. He had seen too much of more vivid colours to be capable now of venerating greatly the dull and dubious tints of blue and yellow. They left him feeling extremely philosophic. Yet it was impossible to get away from them, for the very world that day seemed blue and yellow, nor did the third colour of red adopted by both sides afford any clear assurance that either could see virtue in the other; rather, it seemed to symbolize the desire of each to have his enemy's blood. But Courtier soon observed by the looks cast at his own detached, and perhaps sarcastic, face, that even more hateful to either side than its antagonist, was the philosophic eye. Unanimous was the longing to heave half a brick at it whenever it showed itself. With its d—d impartiality, its habit of looking through the integument of things to see if there might be anything inside, he felt that they regarded it as the real adversary—the eternal foe to all the little fat 'facts,' who, dressed up in blue and yellow, were swaggering and staggering, calling each other names, wiping each other's eyes, bleeding each other's noses. To these little solemn delicious creatures, all front and no behind, the philosophic eye, with its habit of looking round the corner, was clearly detestable. The very yellow and very blue bodies of these roistering small warriors with their hands on their tin swords and their lips on their tin trumpets, started up in every window and on every wall confronting each citizen in turn, persuading him that they and they alone were taking him to Westminster. Nor had they apparently for the most part much trouble with electors, who, finding uncertainty distasteful, passionately desired to be assured that the country could at once be saved by little yellow facts or little blue facts, as the case might be; who had, no doubt, a dozen other good reasons for being on the one side or the other; as, for instance, that their father had been so before them; that their bread was buttered yellow or buttered blue; that they had been on the other side last time; that they had thought it over and made up their minds; that they had innocent blue or naive yellow beer within; that his lordship was the man; or that the words proper to their mouths were 'Chilcox for Bucklandbury'; and, above all, the one really creditable reason, that, so far as they could tell with the best of their intellect and feelings, the truth at the moment was either blue or yellow.

The narrow high street was thronged with voters. Tall policemen stationed there had nothing to do. The certainty of all, that they were going to win, seemed to keep everyone in good humour. There was as yet no need to break anyone's head, for though the sharpest lookout was kept for any signs of the philosophic eye, it was only to be found—outside Courtier—in the perambulators of babies, in one old man who rode a bicycle waveringly along the street and stopped to ask a policeman what was the matter in the town, and in two rather green-faced fellows who trundled barrows full of favours both blue and yellow.

But though Courtier eyed the 'facts' with such suspicion, the keenness of everyone about the business struck him as really splendid. They went at it with a will. Having looked forward to it for months, they were going to look back on it for months. It was evidently a religious ceremony, summing up most high feelings; and this seemed to one who was himself a man of action, natural, perhaps pathetic, but certainly no matter for scorn.

It was already late in the afternoon when there came debouching into the high street a long string of sandwichmen, each bearing before and behind him a poster containing these words beautifully situated in large dark blue letters against a pale blue ground:

"NEW COMPLICATIONS. DANGER NOT PAST. VOTE FOR MILTOUN AND THE GOVERNMENT, AND SAVE THE EMPIRE."

Courtier stopped to look at them with peculiar indignation. Not only did this poster tramp in again on his cherished convictions about Peace, but he saw in it something more than met the unphilosophic eye. It symbolized for him all that was catch-penny in the national life—an epitaph on the grave of generosity, unutterably sad. Yet from a Party point of view what could be more justifiable? Was it not desperately important that every blue nerve should be strained that day to turn yellow nerves, if not blue, at all events green, before night fell? Was it not perfectly true that the Empire could only be saved by voting blue? Could they help a blue paper printing the words, 'New complications,' which he had read that morning? No more than the yellows could help a yellow journal printing the words 'Lord Miltoun's Evening Adventure.' Their only business was to win, ever fighting fair. The yellows had not fought fair, they never did, and one of their most unfair tactics was the way they had of always accusing the blues of unfair fighting, an accusation truly ludicrous! As for truth! That which helped the

world to be blue, was obviously true; that which didn't, as obviously not. There was no middle policy! The man who saw things neither was a softy, and no proper citizen. And as for giving the yellows credit for sincerity—the yellows never gave them credit! But though Courtier knew all that, this poster seemed to him particularly damnable, and he could not for the life of him resist striking one of the sandwich-boards with his cane. The resounding thwack startled a butcher's pony standing by the pavement. It reared, and bolted forward, with Courtier, who had naturally seized the rein, hanging on. A dog dashed past. Courtier tripped and fell. The pony, passing over, struck him on the head with a hoof. For a moment he lost consciousness; then coming to himself, refused assistance, and went to his hotel. He felt very giddy, and, after bandaging a nasty cut, lay down on his bed.

Miltoun, returning from that necessary exhibition of himself, the crowning fact, at every polling centre, found time to go and see him.

"That last poster of yours!" Courtier began, at once.

"I'm having it withdrawn."

"It's done the trick—congratulations—you'll get in!"

"I knew nothing of it."

"My dear fellow, I didn't suppose you did."

"When there is a desert, Courtier, between a man and the sacred city, he doesn't renounce his journey because he has to wash in dirty water on the way: The mob—how I loathe it!"

There was such pent-up fury in those words as to astonish even one whose life had been passed in conflict with majorities.

"I hate its mean stupidities, I hate the sound of its voice, and the look on its face—it's so ugly, it's so little. Courtier, I suffer purgatory from the thought that I shall scrape in by the votes of the mob. There is sin in using this creature and I am expiating it."

To this strange outburst, Courtier at first made no reply.

"You've been working too hard," he said at last, "you're off your balance. After all, the mob's made up of men like you and me."

"No, Courtier, the mob is not made up of men like you and me. If it were it would not be the mob."

"It looks," Courtier answered gravely, "as if you had no business in this galley. I've always steered clear of it myself."

"You follow your feelings. I have not that happiness."

So saying, Miltoun turned to the door.

Courtier's voice pursued him earnestly.

"Drop your politics—if you feel like this about them; don't waste your life following whatever it is you follow; don't waste hers!"

But Miltoun did not answer.

It was a wondrous still night, when, a few minutes before twelve, with his forehead bandaged under his hat, the champion of lost causes left the hotel and made his way towards the Grammar School for the declaration of the poll. A sound as of some monster breathing guided him, till, from a steep empty street he came in sight of a surging crowd, spread over the town square, like a dark carpet patterned by splashes of lamplight. High up above that crowd, on the little peaked tower of the Grammar School, a brightly lighted clock face presided; and over the passionate hopes in those thousands of hearts knit together by suspense the sky had lifted; and showed no cloud between them and the purple fields of air. To Courtier descending towards the square, the swaying white faces, turned all one way, seemed like the heads of giant wild flowers in a dark field, shivered by wind. The night had charmed away the blue and yellow facts, and breathed down into that throng the spirit of emotion. And he realized all at once the beauty and meaning of this scene—expression of the quivering forces, whose perpetual flux, controlled by the Spirit of Balance, was the soul of the world. Thousands of hearts with the thought of self lost in one over-mastering excitement!

An old man with a long grey beard, standing close to his elbow, murmured:

"'Tis anxious work—I wouldn't ha' missed this for anything in the world."

"Fine, eh?" answered Courtier.

"Aye," said the old man, "'tis fine. I've not seen the like o' this since the great year—forty-eight. There they are—the aristocrats!"

Following the direction of that skinny hand Courtier saw on a balcony Lord and Lady Valleys, side by side, looking steadily down at the crowd. There too, leaning against a window and talking to someone behind, was Barbara. The old man went on muttering, and Courtier could see that his eyes had grown very bright, his whole face transfigured by intense hostility; he felt drawn to this old creature, thus moved to the very soul. Then he saw Barbara looking down at him, with her hand raised to her temple to show that she saw his bandaged head. He had the presence of mind not to lift his hat.

The old man spoke again.

"You wouldn't remember forty-eight, I suppose. There was a feeling in the people then—we would ha' died for things in those days. I'm eighty-four," and he held his shaking hand up to his breast, "but the spirit's alive here yet! God send the Radical gets in!" There was wafted from him a scent as of potatoes.

Far behind, at the very edge of the vast dark throng, some voices began singing: "Way down upon the Swanee ribber." The tune floated forth, ceased, spurted up once more, and died.

Then, in the very centre of the square a stentorian baritone roared forth: "Should auld acquaintance be forgot!"

The song swelled, till every kind of voice, from treble to the old Chartist's quavering bass, was chanting it; here and there the crowd heaved with the movement of linked arms. Courtier found the soft fingers of a young woman in his right hand, the old Chartist's dry trembling paw in his left. He himself sang loudly. The grave and fearful music sprang straight up into the air, rolled out right and left, and was lost among the hills. But it had no sooner died away than the same huge baritone yelled "God save our gracious King!" The stature of the crowd seemed at once to leap up two feet, and from under that platform of raised hats rose a stupendous shouting.

"This," thought Courtier, "is religion!"

They were singing even on the balconies; by the lamplight he could see Lord Valleys' mouth not opened quite enough, as though his voice were just a little ashamed of coming out, and Barbara with her head flung back against the pillar, pouring out her heart. No mouth in all the crowd was silent. It was as though the soul of the English people were escaping from its dungeon of reserve, on the pinions of that chant.

But suddenly, like a shot bird closing wings, the song fell silent and dived headlong back to earth. Out from under the clock-face had moved a thin dark figure. More figures came behind. Courtier could see Miltoun. A voice far away cried: "Up; Chilcox!" A huge: "Husill" followed; then such a silence, that the sound of an engine shunting a mile away could be heard plainly.

The dark figure moved forward, and a tiny square of paper gleamed out white against the black of his frock-coat.

"Ladies and gentlemen. Result of the Poll:

"Miltoun Four thousand eight hundred and ninety-eight. Chilcox Four thousand eight hundred and two."

The silence seemed to fall to earth, and break into a thousand pieces. Through the pandemonium of cheers and groaning, Courtier with all his strength forced himself towards the balcony. He could see Lord Valleys leaning forward with a broad smile; Lady Valleys passing her hand across her eyes; Barbara with her hand in Harbinger's, looking straight into his face. He stopped. The old Chartist was still beside him, tears rolling down his cheeks into his beard.

Courtier saw Miltoun come forward, and stand, unsmiling, deathly pale.

PART II

CHAPTER I

At three o'clock in the afternoon of the nineteenth of July little Ann Shropton commenced the ascent of the main staircase of Valleys House, London. She climbed slowly, in the very middle, an extremely small white figure on those wide and shining stairs, counting them aloud. Their number was never alike two days running, which made them attractive to one for whom novelty was the salt of life.

Coming to that spot where they branched, she paused to consider which of the two flights she had used last, and unable to remember, sat down. She was the bearer of a message. It had been new when she started, but was already comparatively old, and likely to become older, in view of a design now conceived by her of travelling the whole length of the picture gallery. And while she sat maturing this plan, sunlight flooding through a large window drove a white refulgence down into the heart of the wide polished space of wood and marble, whence she had come. The nature of little Ann habitually rejected fairies and all fantastic things, finding them quite too much in the air, and devoid of sufficient reality and 'go'; and this refulgence, almost unearthly in its travelling glory, passed over her small head and played strangely with the pillars in the hall, without exciting in her any fancies or any sentiment. The intention of discovering what was at the end of the picture gallery absorbed the whole of her essentially practical and active mind. Deciding on the left-hand flight of stairs, she entered that immensely long, narrow, and—with blinds drawn—rather dark saloon. She walked carefully, because the floor was very slippery here, and with a kind of seriousness due partly to the darkness and partly to the pictures. They were indeed, in this light, rather formidable, those old Caradocs black, armoured creatures, some of them, who seemed to eye with a sort of burning, grim, defensive greed the small white figure of their descendant passing along between them. But little Ann, who knew they were only pictures, maintained her course steadily, and every now and then, as she passed one who seemed to her rather uglier than the others, wrinkled her sudden little nose. At the end, as she had thought; appeared a door. She opened it, and passed on to a landing. There was a stone staircase in the corner, and there were two doors. It would be nice to go up the staircase, but it would also be nice to open the doors. Going towards the first door, with a little thrill, she turned the handle. It was one of those rooms, necessary in houses, for which she had no great liking; and closing this door rather loudly she opened the other one, finding herself in a chamber not resembling the rooms downstairs, which were all high and nicely gilded, but more like where she had lessons, low, and filled with books and leather chairs. From the end of the room which she could not see, she heard a sound as of someone kissing something, and instinct had almost made her turn to go away when the word: "Hallo!" suddenly opened her lips. And almost directly she saw that Granny and Grandpapa were standing by the fireplace. Not knowing quite whether they were glad to see her, she went forward and began at once:

"Is this where you sit, Grandpapa?"

"It is."

"It's nice, isn't it, Granny? Where does the stone staircase go to?"

"To the roof of the tower, Ann."

"Oh! I have to give a message, so I must go now."

"Sorry to lose you."

"Yes; good-bye!"

Hearing the door shut behind her, Lord and Lady Valleys looked at each other with a dubious smile.

The little interview which she had interrupted, had arisen in this way.

Accustomed to retire to this quiet and homely room, which was not his official study where he was always liable to the attacks of secretaries, Lord Valleys had come up here after lunch to smoke and chew the cud of a worry.

The matter was one in connection with his Pendridny estate, in Cornwall. It had long agitated both his agent and himself, and had now come to him for final decision. The question affected two villages to the north of the property, whose inhabitants were solely dependent on the working of a large quarry, which had for some time been losing money.

A kindly man, he was extremely averse to any measure which would plunge his tenants into distress, and especially in cases where there had been no question of opposition between himself and them. But, reduced to its essentials, the matter stood thus: Apart from that particular quarry the Pendridny estate

was not only a going, but even a profitable concern, supporting itself and supplying some of the sinews of war towards Valleys House and the racing establishment at Newmarket and other general expenses; with this quarry still running, allowing for the upkeep of Pendridny, and the provision of pensions to superannuated servants, it was rather the other way.

Sitting there, that afternoon, smoking his favourite pipe, he had at last come to the conclusion that there was nothing for it but to close down. He had not made this resolution lightly; though, to do him justice, the knowledge that the decision would be bound to cause an outcry in the local, and perhaps the National Press, had secretly rather spurred him on to the resolve than deterred him from it. He felt as if he were being dictated to in advance, and he did not like dictation. To have to deprive these poor people of their immediate living was, he knew, a good deal more irksome to him than to those who would certainly make a fuss about it, his conscience was clear, and he could discount that future outcry as mere Party spite. He had very honestly tried to examine the thing all round; and had reasoned thus: If I keep this quarry open, I am really admitting the principle of pauperization, since I naturally look to each of my estates to support its own house, grounds, shooting, and to contribute towards the support of this house, and my family, and racing stable, and all the people employed about them both.

To allow any business to be run on my estates which does not contribute to the general upkeep, is to protect and really pauperize a portion of my tenants at the expense of the rest; it must therefore be false economics and a secret sort of socialism. Further, if logically followed out, it might end in my ruin, and to allow that, though I might not personally object, would be to imply that I do not believe that I am by virtue of my traditions and training, the best machinery through which the State can work to secure the welfare of the people....

When he had reached that point in his consideration of the question, his mind, or rather perhaps, his essential self, had not unnaturally risen up and said: Which is absurd!

Impersonality was in fashion, and as a rule he believed in thinking impersonally. There was a point, however, where the possibility of doing so ceased, without treachery to oneself, one's order, and the country. And to the argument which he was quite shrewd enough to put to himself, sooner than have it put by anyone else, that it was disproportionate for a single man by a stroke of the pen to be able to dispose of the livelihood of hundreds whose senses and feelings were similar to his own—he had answered: "If I didn't, some plutocrat or company would—or, worse still, the State!" Cooperative enterprise being, in his opinion, foreign to the spirit of the country, there was, so far as he could see, no other alternative. Facts were facts and not to be got over!

Notwithstanding all this, the necessity for the decision made him sorry, for if he had no great sense of proportion, he was at least humane.

He was still smoking his pipe and staring at a sheet of paper covered with small figures when his wife entered. Though she had come to ask his advice on a very different subject, she saw at once that he was vexed, and said:

"What's the matter, Geoff?"

Lord Valleys rose, went to the hearth, deliberately tapped out his pipe, then held out to her the sheet of paper.

"That quarry! Nothing for it—must go!"

Lady Valleys' face changed.

"Oh, no! It will mean such dreadful distress."

Lord Valleys stared at his nails. "It's putting a drag on the whole estate," he said.

"I know, but how could we face the people—I should never be able to go down there. And most of them have such enormous families."

Since Lord Valleys continued to bend on his nails that slow, thought-forming stare, she went on earnestly:

"Rather than that I'd make sacrifices. I'd sooner Pendridny were let than throw all those people out of work. I suppose it would let."

"Let? Best woodcock shooting in the world."

Lady Valleys, pursuing her thoughts, went on:

"In time we might get the people drafted into other things. Have you consulted Miltoun?"

"No," said Lord Valleys shortly, "and don't mean to—he's too unpractical."

"He always seems to know what he wants very well."

"I tell you," repeated Lord Valleys, "Miltoun's no good in a matter of this sort—he and his ideas throw back to the Middle Ages."

Lady Valleys went closer, and took him by the lapels of his collar.

"Geoff-really, to please me; some other way!"

Lord Valleys frowned, staring at her for some time; and at last answered:

"To please you—I'll leave it over another year."

"You think that's better than letting?"

"I don't like the thought of some outsider there. Time enough to come to that if we must. Take it as my Christmas present."

Lady Valleys, rather flushed, bent forward and kissed his ear.

It was at this moment that little Ann had entered.

When she was gone, and they had exchanged that dubious look, Lady Valleys said:

"I came about Babs. I don't know what to make of her since we came up. She's not putting her heart into things."

Lord Valleys answered almost sulkily:

"It's the heat probably—or Claud Harbinger." In spite of his easy-going parentalism, he disliked the thought of losing the child whom he so affectionately admired.

"Ah!" said Lady Valleys slowly, "I'm not so sure."

"How do you mean?"

"There's something queer about her. I'm by no means certain she hasn't got some sort of feeling for that Mr. Courtier."

"What!" said Lord Valleys, growing most unphilosophically red.

"Exactly!"

"Confound it, Gertrude, Miltoun's business was quite enough for one year."

"For twenty," murmured Lady Valleys. "I'm watching her. He's going to Persia, they say."

"And leaving his bones there, I hope," muttered Lord Valleys. "Really, it's too much. I should think you're all wrong, though."

Lady Valleys raised her eyebrows. Men were very queer about such things! Very queer and worse than helpless!

"Well," she said, "I must go to my meeting. I'll take her, and see if I can get at something," and she went away.

It was the inaugural meeting of the Society for the Promotion of the Birth Rate, over which she had promised to preside. The scheme was one in which she had been prominent from the start, appealing as it did to her large and full-blooded nature. Many movements, to which she found it impossible to refuse her name, had in themselves but small attraction; and it was a real comfort to feel something approaching enthusiasm for one branch of her public work. Not that there was any academic consistency about her in the matter, for in private life amongst her friends she was not narrowly dogmatic on the duty of wives to multiply exceedingly. She thought imperially on the subject, without bigotry. Large, healthy families, in all cases save individual ones! The prime idea at the back of her mind was—National Expansion! Her motto, and she intended if possible to make it the motto of the League, was: 'De l'audace, et encore de l'audace!' It was a question of the full realization of the nation.

She had a true, and in a sense touching belief in 'the flag,' apart from what it might cover. It was her idealism. "You may talk," she would say, "as much as you like about directing national life in accordance with social justice! What does the nation care about social justice? The thing is much bigger than that. It's a matter of sentiment. We must expand!"

On the way to the meeting, occupied with her speech, she made no attempt to draw Barbara into conversation. That must wait. The child, though languid, and pale, was looking so beautiful that it was a pleasure to have her support in such a movement.

In a little dark room behind the hall the Committee were already assembled, and they went at once on to the platform.

CHAPTER II

Unmoved by the stares of the audience, Barbara sat absorbed in moody thoughts.

Into the three weeks since Miltoun's election there had been crowded such a multitude of functions that she had found, as it were, no time, no energy to know where she stood with herself. Since that morning in the stable, when he had watched her with the horse Hal, Harbinger had seemed to live only to be close to her. And the consciousness of his passion gave her a tingling sense of pleasure. She had been riding and dancing with him, and sometimes this had been almost blissful. But there were times too, when she felt—though always with a certain contempt of herself, as when she sat on that sunwarmed stone below the tor—a queer dissatisfaction, a longing for something outside a world where she had to invent her own starvations and simplicities, to make-believe in earnestness.

She had seen Courtier three times. Once he had come to dine, in response to an invitation from Lady Valleys worded in that charming, almost wistful style, which she had taught herself to use to those below her in social rank, especially if they were intelligent; once to the Valleys House garden party; and next day, having told him what time she would be riding, she had found him in the Row, not mounted, but standing by the rail just where she must pass, with that look on his face of mingled deference and ironic self-containment, of which he was a master. It appeared that he was leaving England; and to her questions why, and where, he had only shrugged his shoulders. Up on this dusty platform, in the hot bare hall, facing all those people, listening to speeches whose sense she was too languid and preoccupied to take in, the whole medley of thoughts, and faces round her, and the sound of the speakers' voices, formed a kind of nightmare, out of which she noted with extreme exactitude the colour of her mother's neck beneath a large black hat, and the expression on the face of a Committee man to the right, who was biting his fingers under cover of a blue paper. She realized that someone was speaking amongst the audience, casting forth, as it were, small bunches of words. She could see him—a little man in a black coat, with a white face which kept jerking up and down.

"I feel that this is terrible," she heard him say; "I feel that this is blasphemy. That we should try to tamper with the greatest force, the greatest and the most sacred and secret-force, that—that moves in the world, is to me horrible. I cannot bear to listen; it seems to make everything so small!" She saw him sit down, and her mother rising to answer.

"We must all sympathize with the sincerity and to a certain extent with the intention of our friend in the body of the hall. But we must ask ourselves:

"Have we the right to allow ourselves the luxury, of private feelings in a matter which concerns the national expansion. We must not give way to sentiment. Our friend in the body of the hall spoke—he will forgive me for saying so—like a poet, rather than a serious reformer. I am afraid that if we let ourselves drop into poetry, the birth rate of this country will very soon drop into poetry too. And that I think it is impossible for us to contemplate with folded hands. The resolution I was about to propose when our friend in the body of the hall—"

But Barbara's attention, had wandered off again into that queer medley of thoughts, and feelings, out of which the little man had so abruptly roused her. Then she realized that the meeting was breaking up, and her mother saying:

"Now, my dear, it's hospital day. We've just time."

When they were once more in the car, she leaned back very silent, watching the traffic.

Lady Valleys eyed her sidelong.

"What a little bombshell," she said, "from that small person! He must have got in by mistake. I hear Mr. Courtier has a card for Helen Gloucester's ball to-night, Babs."

"Poor man!"

"You will be there," said Lady Valleys dryly.

Barbara drew back into her corner.

"Don't tease me, Mother!"

An expression of compunction crossed Lady Valleys' face; she tried to possess herself of Barbara's hand. But that languid hand did not return her squeeze.

"I know the mood you're in, dear. It wants all one's pluck to shake it off; don't let it grow on you. You'd better go down to Uncle Dennis to-morrow. You've been overdoing it."

Barbara sighed.

"I wish it were to-morrow."

The car had stopped, and Lady Valleys said:

"Will you come in, or are you too tired? It always does them good to see you."

"You're twice as tired as me," Barbara answered; "of course I'll come."

At the entrance of the two ladies, there rose at once a faint buzz and murmur. Lady Valleys, whose ample presence radiated suddenly a businesslike and cheery confidence, went to a bedside and sat down. But Barbara stood in a thin streak of the July sunlight, uncertain where to begin, amongst the faces turned towards her. The poor dears looked so humble, and so wistful, and so tired. There was one lying quite flat, who had not even raised her head to see who had come in. That slumbering, pale, high cheek-boned face had a frailty as if a touch, a breath, would shatter it; a wisp of the blackest hair, finer than silk, lay across the forehead; the closed eyes were deep sunk; one hand, scarred almost to the bone with work, rested above her breast. She breathed between lips which had no colour. About her, sleeping, was a kind of beauty. And there came over the girl a queer rush of emotion. The sleeper seemed so apart from everything there, from all the formality and stiffness of the ward. To look at her swept away the languid, hollow feeling with which she had come in; it made her think of the tors at home, when the wind was blowing, and all was bare, and grand, and sometimes terrible. There was something elemental in that still sleep. And the old lady in the next bed, with a brown wrinkled face and bright black eyes brimful of life, seemed almost vulgar beside such remote tranquillity, while she was telling Barbara that a little bunch of heather in the better half of a soap-dish on the window-sill had come from Wales, because, as she explained: "My mother was born in Stirling, dearie; so I likes a bit of heather, though I never been out o' Bethnal Green meself."

But when Barbara again passed, the sleeping woman was sitting up, and looked but a poor ordinary thing—her strange fragile beauty all withdrawn.

It was a relief when Lady Valleys said:

"My dear, my Naval Bazaar at five-thirty; and while I'm there you must go home and have a rest, and freshen yourself up for the evening. We dine at Plassey House."

The Duchess of Gloucester's Ball, a function which no one could very well miss, had been fixed for this late date owing to the Duchess's announced desire to prolong the season and so help the hackney cabmen; and though everybody sympathized, it had been felt by most that it would be simpler to go away, motor up on the day of the Ball, and motor down again on the following morning. And throughout the week by which the season was thus prolonged, in long rows at the railway stations, and on their stands, the hackney cabmen, unconscious of what was being done for them, waited, patient as their horses. But since everybody was making this special effort, an exceptionally large, exclusive, and brilliant company reassembled at Gloucester House.

In the vast ballroom over the medley of entwined revolving couples, punkahs had been fixed, to clear and freshen the languid air, and these huge fans, moving with incredible slowness, drove a faint refreshing draught down over the sea of white shirt-fronts and bare necks, and freed the scent from innumerable flowers.

Late in the evening, close by one of the great clumps of bloom, a very pretty woman stood talking to

Bertie Caradoc. She was his cousin, Lily Malvezin, sister of Geoffrey Winlow, and wife of a Liberal peer, a charming creature, whose pink cheeks, bright eyes, quick lips, and rounded figure, endowed her with the prettiest air of animation. And while she spoke she kept stealing sly glances at her partner, trying as it were to pierce the armour of that self-contained young man.

"No, my dear," she said in her mocking voice, "you'll never persuade me that Miltoun is going to catch on. 'Il est trop intransigent'. Ah! there's Babs!"

For the girl had come gliding by, her eyes wandering lazily, her lips just parted; her neck, hardly less pale than her white frock; her face pale, and marked with languor, under the heavy coil of her tawny hair; and her swaying body seeming with each turn of the waltz to be caught by the arms of her partner from out of a swoon.

With that immobility of lips, learned by all imprisoned in Society, Lily Malvezin murmured:

"Who's that she's dancing with? Is it the dark horse, Bertie?"

Through lips no less immobile Bertie answered:

"Forty to one, no takers."

But those inquisitive bright eyes still followed Barbara, drifting in the dance, like a great waterlily caught in the swirl of a mill pool; and the thought passed through that pretty head:

"She's hooked him. It's naughty of Babs, really!" And then she saw leaning against a pillar another whose eyes also were following those two; and she thought: "H'm! Poor Claud—no wonder he's looking like that. Oh! Babs!"

By one of the statues on the terrace Barbara and her partner stood, where trees, disfigured by no gaudy lanterns, offered the refreshment of their darkness and serenity.

Wrapped in her new pale languor, still breathing deeply from the waltz, she seemed to Courtier too utterly moulded out of loveliness. To what end should a man frame speeches to a vision! She was but an incarnation of beauty imprinted on the air, and would fade out at a touch-like the sudden ghosts of enchantment that came to one under the blue, and the starlit snow of a mountain night, or in a birch wood all wistful golden! Speech seemed but desecration! Besides, what of interest was there for him to say in this world of hers, so bewildering and of such glib assurance—this world that was like a building, whose every window was shut and had a blind drawn down. A building that admitted none who had not sworn, as it were, to believe it the world, the whole world, and nothing but the world, outside which were only the nibbled remains of what had built it. This, world of Society, in which he felt like one travelling through a desert, longing to meet a fellow-creature.

The voice of Harbinger behind them said:

"Lady-Babs!"

Long did the punkahs waft their breeze over that brave-hued wheel of pleasure, and the sound of the violins quaver and wail out into the morning. Then quickly, as the spangles of dew vanish off grass when the sun rises, all melted away; and in the great rooms were none but flunkeys presiding over the polished surfaces like flamingoes by some lakeside at dawn.

CHAPTER III

A brick dower-house of the Fitz-Harolds, just outside the little seaside town of Nettlefold, sheltered the tranquil days of Lord Dennis. In that south-coast air, sanest and most healing in all England, he raged very slowly, taking little thought of death, and much quiet pleasure in his life. Like the tall old house with its high windows and squat chimneys, he was marvellously self-contained. His books, for he somewhat passionately examined old civilizations, and described their habits from time to time with a dry and not too poignant pen in a certain old-fashioned magazine; his microscope, for he studied infusoria; and the fishing boat of his friend John Bogle, who had long perceived that Lord Dennis was the biggest fish he ever caught; all these, with occasional visitors, and little runs to London, to Monkland, and other country houses, made up the sum of a life which, if not desperately beneficial, was

uniformly kind and harmless, and, by its notorious simplicity, had a certain negative influence not only on his own class but on the relations of that class with the country at large. It was commonly said in Nettlefold, that he was a gentleman; if they were all like him there wasn't much in all this talk against the Lords. The shop people and lodging-house keepers felt that the interests of the country were safer in his hands: than in the hands of people who wanted to meddle with everything for the good of those who were only anxious to be let alone. A man too who could so completely forget he was the son of a Duke, that other people never forgot it, was the man for their money. It was true that he had never had a say in public affairs; but this was overlooked, because he could have had it if he liked, and the fact that he did not like, only showed once more that he was a gentleman.

Just as he was the one personality of the little town against whom practically nothing was ever, said, so was his house the one house which defied criticism. Time had made it utterly suitable. The ivied walls, and purplish roof lichened yellow in places, the quiet meadows harbouring ponies and kine, reaching from it to the sea—all was mellow. In truth it made all the other houses of the town seem shoddy—standing alone beyond them, like its, master, if anything a little too esthetically remote from common wants.

He had practically no near neighbours of whom he saw anything, except once in a way young Harbinger three miles distant at Whitewater. But since he had the faculty of not being bored with his own society, this did not worry him. Of local charity, especially to the fishers of the town, whose winter months were nowadays very bare of profit, he was prodigal to the verge of extravagance, for his income was not great. But in politics, beyond acting as the figure-head of certain municipal efforts, he took little or no part. His Toryism indeed was of the mild order, that had little belief in the regeneration of the country by any means but those of kindly feeling between the classes. When asked how that was to be brought about, he would answer with his dry, slightly malicious, suavity, that if you stirred hornets' nests with sticks the hornets would come forth. Having no land, he was shy of expressing himself on that vexed question; but if resolutely attacked would give utterance to some such sentiment as this: "The land's best in our hands on the whole, but we want fewer dogs-in-the-manger among us."

He had, as became one of his race, a feeling for land, tender and protective, and could not bear to think of its being put out to farm with that cold Mother, the State. He was ironical over the views of Radicals or Socialists, but disliked to hear such people personally abused behind their backs. It must be confessed, however, that if contradicted he increased considerably the ironical decision of his sentiments. Withdrawn from all chance in public life of enforcing his views on others, the natural aristocrat within him was forced to find some expression.

Each year, towards the end of July, he placed his house at the service of Lord Valleys, who found it a convenient centre for attending Goodwood.

It was on the morning after the Duchess of Gloucester's Ball, that he received this note:

"VALLEYS HOUSE. "DEAREST UNCLE DENNIS,

"May I come down to you a little before time and rest? London is so terribly hot. Mother has three functions still to stay for, and I shall have to come back again for our last evening, the political one—so I don't want to go all the way to Monkland; and anywhere else, except with you, would be rackets. Eustace looks so seedy. I'll try and bring him, if I may. Granny is terribly well.

"Best love, dear, from your.
"BABS."

The same afternoon she came, but without Miltoun, driving up from the station in a fly. Lord Dennis met her at the gate; and, having kissed her, looked at her somewhat anxiously, caressing his white peaked beard. He had never yet known Babs sick of anything, except when he took her out in John Bogle's boat. She was certainly looking pale, and her hair was done differently—a fact disturbing to one who did not discover it. Slipping his arm through hers he led her out into a meadow still full of buttercups, where an old white pony, who had carried her in the Row twelve years ago, came up to them and rubbed his muzzle against her waist. And suddenly there rose in Lord Dennis the thoroughly discomforting and strange suspicion that, though the child was not going to cry, she wanted time to get over the feeling that she was. Without appearing to separate himself from her, he walked to the wall at the end of the field, and stood looking at the sea.

The tide was nearly up; the South wind driving over it brought him the scent of the sea-flowers, and the crisp rustle of little waves swimming almost to his feet. Far out, where the sunlight fell, the smiling waters lay white and mysterious in July haze, giving him a queer feeling. But Lord Dennis, though he had his moments of poetic sentiment, was on the whole quite able to keep the sea in its proper place—for after all it was the English Channel; and like a good Englishman he recognized that if you once let

things get away from their names, they ceased to be facts, and if they ceased to be facts, they became—the devil! In truth he was not thinking much of the sea, but of Barbara. It was plain that she was in trouble of some kind. And the notion that Babs could find trouble in life was extraordinarily queer; for he felt, subconsciously, what a great driving force of disturbance was necessary to penetrate the hundred folds of the luxurious cloak enwrapping one so young and fortunate. It was not Death; therefore it must be Love; and he thought at once of that fellow with the red moustaches. Ideas were all very well—no one would object to as many as you liked, in their proper place—the dinner-table, for example. But to fall in love, if indeed it were so, with a man who not only had ideas, but an inclination to live up to them, and on them, and on nothing else, seemed to Lord Dennis 'outré'.

She had followed him to the wall, and he looked—at her dubiously.

"To rest in the waters of Lethe, Babs? By the way, seen anything of our friend Mr. Courtier? Very picturesque—that Quixotic theory of life!"

And in saying that, his voice (like so many refined voices which have turned their backs on speculation) was triple-toned-mocking at ideas, mocking at itself for mocking at ideas, yet showing plainly that at bottom it only mocked at itself for mocking at ideas, because it would be, as it were, crude not to do so.

But Barbara did not answer his question, and began to speak of other things. And all that afternoon and evening she talked away so lightly that Lord Dennis, but for his instinct, would have been deceived.

That wonderful smiling mask—the inscrutability of Youth—was laid aside by her at night. Sitting at her window, under the moon, 'a gold-bright moth slow-spinning up the sky,' she watched the darkness hungrily, as though it were a great thought into whose heart she was trying to see. Now and then she stroked herself, getting strange comfort out of the presence of her body. She had that old unhappy feeling of having two selves within her. And this soft night full of the quiet stir of the sea, and of dark immensity, woke in her a terrible longing to be at one with something, somebody, outside herself. At the Ball last night the 'flying feeling' had seized on her again; and was still there—a queer manifestation of her streak of recklessness. And this result of her contacts with Courtier, this 'cacoethes volandi', and feeling of clipped wings, hurt her—as being forbidden hurts a child.

She remembered how in the housekeeper's room at Monkland there lived a magpie who had once sought shelter in an orchid-house from some pursuer. As soon as they thought him wedded to civilization, they had let him go, to see whether he would come back. For hours he had sat up in a high tree, and at last come down again to his cage; whereupon, fearing lest the rooks should attack him when he next took this voyage of discovery, they clipped one of his wings. After that the twilight bird, though he lived happily enough, hopping about his cage and the terrace which served him for exercise yard, would seem at times restive and frightened, moving his wings as if flying in spirit, and sad that he must stay on earth.

So, too, at her window Barbara fluttered her wings; then, getting into bed, lay sighing and tossing. A clock struck three; and seized by an intolerable impatience at her own discomfort, she slipped a motor coat over her night-gown, put on slippers, and stole out into the passage. The house was very still. She crept downstairs, smothering her footsteps. Groping her way through the hall, inhabited by the thin ghosts of would-be light, she slid back the chain of the door, and fled towards the sea. She made no more noise running in the dew, than a bird following the paths of air; and the two ponies, who felt her figure pass in the darkness, snuffled, sending out soft sighs of alarm amongst the closed buttercups. She climbed the wall over to the beach. While she was running, she had fully meant to dash into the sea and cool herself, but it was so black, with just a thin edging scarf of white, and the sky was black, bereft of lights, waiting for the day!

She stood, and looked. And all the leapings and pulsings of flesh and spirit slowly died in that wide dark loneliness, where the only sound was the wistful breaking of small waves. She was well used to these dead hours—only last night, at this very time, Harbinger's arm had been round her in a last waltz! But here the dead hours had such different faces, wide-eyed, solemn, and there came to Barbara, staring out at them, a sense that the darkness saw her very soul, so that it felt little and timid within her. She shivered in her fur-lined coat, as if almost frightened at finding herself so marvellously nothing before that black sky and dark sea, which seemed all one, relentlessly great.... And crouching down, she waited for the dawn to break.

It came from over the Downs, sweeping a rush of cold air on its wings, flighting towards the sea. With it the daring soon crept back into her blood. She stripped, and ran down into the dark water, fast growing pale. It covered her jealously, and she set to work to swim. The water was warmer than the air. She lay on her back and splashed, watching the sky flush. To bathe like this in the half-dark, with her hair floating out, and no wet clothes clinging to her limbs, gave her the joy of a child doing a

naughty thing. She swam out of her depth, then scared at her own adventure, swam in again as the sun rose.

She dashed into her two garments, climbed the wall, and scurried back to the house. All her dejection, and feverish uncertainty were gone; she felt keen, fresh, terribly hungry, and stealing into the dark dining-room, began rummaging for food. She found biscuits, and was still munching, when in the open doorway she saw Lord Dennis, a pistol in one hand and a lighted candle in the other. With his carved features and white beard above an old blue dressing-gown, he looked impressive, having at the moment a distinct resemblance to Lady Casterley, as though danger had armoured him in steel.

"You call this resting!" he said, dryly; then, looking at her drowned hair, added: "I see you have already entrusted your trouble to the waters of Lethe."

But without answer Barbara vanished into the dim hall and up the stairs.

CHAPTER IV

While Barbara was swimming to meet the dawn, Miltoun was bathing in those waters of mansuetude and truth which roll from wall to wall in the British House of Commons.

In that long debate on the Land question, for which he had waited to make his first speech, he had already risen nine times without catching the Speaker's eye, and slowly a sense of unreality was creeping over him. Surely this great Chamber, where without end rose the small sound of a single human voice, and queer mechanical bursts of approbation and resentment, did not exist at all but as a gigantic fancy of his own! And all these figures were figments of his brain! And when he at last spoke, it would be himself alone that he addressed! The torpid air tainted with human breath, the unwinking stare of the countless lights, the long rows of seats, the queer distant rounds of pale listening flesh perched up so high, they were all emanations of himself! Even the coming and going in the gangway was but the coming and going of little wilful parts of him! And rustling deep down in this Titanic creature of his fancy was 'the murmuration' of his own unspoken speech, sweeping away the puff balls of words flung up by that far-away, small, varying voice.

Then, suddenly all that dream creature had vanished; he was on his feet, with a thumping heart, speaking.

Soon he had no tremors, only a dim consciousness that his words sounded strange, and a queer icy pleasure in flinging them out into the silence. Round him there seemed no longer men, only mouths and eyes. And he had enjoyment in the feeling that with these words of his he was holding those hungry mouths and eyes dumb and unmoving. Then he knew that he had reached the end of what he had to say, and sat down, remaining motionless in the centre of a various sound; staring at the back of the head in front of him, with his hands clasped round his knee. And soon, when that little faraway voice was once more speaking, he took his hat, and glancing neither to right nor left, went out.

Instead of the sensation of relief and wild elation which fills the heart of those who have taken the first plunge, Miltoun had nothing in his deep dark well but the waters of bitterness. In truth, with the delivery of that speech he had but parted with what had been a sort of anodyne to suffering. He had only put the fine point on his conviction, of how vain was his career now that he could not share it with Audrey Noel. He walked slowly towards the Temple, along the riverside, where the lamps were paling into nothingness before that daily celebration of Divinity, the meeting of dark and light.

For Miltoun was not one of those who take things lying down; he took things desperately, deeply, and with revolt. He took them like a rider riding himself, plunging at the dig of his own spurs, chafing and wincing at the cruel tugs of his own bitt; bearing in his friendless, proud heart all the burden of struggles which shallower or more genial natures shared with others.

He looked hardly less haggard, walking home, than some of those homeless ones who slept nightly by the river, as though they knew that to lie near one who could so readily grant oblivion, alone could save them from seeking that consolation. He was perhaps unhappier than they, whose spirits, at all events, had long ceased to worry them, having oozed out from their bodies under the foot of Life:

Now that Audrey Noel was lost to him, her loveliness and that indescribable quality which made her lovable, floated before him, the very torture-flowers of a beauty never to be grasped—yet, that he could

grasp, 'if he only would! That was the heart and fervour of his suffering. To be grasped if he only would! He was suffering, too, physically from a kind of slow fever, the result of his wetting on the day when he last saw her. And through that latent fever, things and feelings, like his sensations in the House before his speech, were all as it were muffled in a horrible way, as if they all came to him wrapped in a sort of flannel coating, through which he could not cut. And all the time there seemed to be within him two men at mortal grips with one another; the man of faith in divine sanction and authority, on which all his beliefs had hitherto hinged, and a desperate warm-blooded hungry creature. He was very miserable, craving strangely for the society of someone who could understand what he was feeling, .and, from long habit of making no confidants, not knowing how to satisfy that craving.

It was dawn when he reached his rooms; and, sure that he would not sleep, he did not even go to bed, but changed his clothes, made himself some coffee, and sat down at the window which overlooked the flowered courtyard.

In Middle Temple Hall a Ball was still in progress, though the glamour from its Chinese lanterns was already darkened and gone. Miltoun saw a man and a girl, sheltered by an old fountain, sitting out their last dance. Her head had sunk on her partner's shoulder; their lips were joined. And there floated up to the window the scent of heliotrope, with the tune of the waltz that those two should have been dancing. This couple so stealthily enlaced, the gleam of their furtively turned eyes, the whispering of their lips, that stony niche below the twittering sparrows, so cunningly sought out—it was the world he had abjured! When he looked again, they—like a vision seen—had stolen away and gone; the music too had ceased, there was no scent of heliotrope. In the stony niche crouched a stray cat watching the twittering sparrows.

Miltoun went out, and, turning into the empty Strand, walked on—without heeding where, till towards five o'clock he found himself on Putney Bridge.

He rested there, leaning over the parapet, looking down at the grey water. The sun was just breaking through the heat haze; early waggons were passing, and already men were coming in to work. To what end did the river wander up and down; and a human river flow across it twice every day? To what end were men and women suffering? Of the full current of this life Miltoun could no more see the aim, than that of the wheeling gulls in the early sunlight.

Leaving the bridge he made towards Barnes Common. The night was still ensnared there on the gorse bushes grey with cobwebs and starry dewdrops. He passed a tramp family still sleeping, huddled all together. Even the homeless lay in each other's arms!

From the Common he emerged on the road near the gates of Ravensham; turning in there, he found his way to the kitchen garden, and sat down on a bench close to the raspberry bushes. They were protected from thieves, but at Miltoun's approach two blackbirds flustered out through the netting and flew away.

His long figure resting so motionless impressed itself on the eyes of a gardener, who caused a report to be circulated that his young lordship was in the fruit garden. It reached the ears of Clifton, who himself came out to see what this might mean. The old man took his stand in front of Miltoun very quietly.

"You have come to breakfast, my lord?"

"If my grandmother will have me, Clifton."

"I understood your lordship was speaking last night."

"I was."

"You find the House of Commons satisfactory, I hope."

"Fairly, thank you, Clifton."

"They are not what they were in the great days of your grandfather, I believe. He had a very good opinion of them. They vary, no doubt."

"Tempora mutantur."

"That is so. I find quite anew spirit towards public affairs. The ha'penny Press; one takes it in, but one hardly approves. I shall be anxious to read your speech. They say a first speech is a great strain."

"It is rather."

"But you had no reason to be anxious. I'm sure it was beautiful."

Miltoun saw that the old man's thin sallow cheeks had flushed to a deep orange between his snow-white whiskers.

"I have looked forward to this day," he stammered, "ever since I knew your lordship—twenty-eight years. It is the beginning."

"Or the end, Clifton."

The old man's face fell in a look of deep and concerned astonishment.

"No, no," he said; "with your antecedents, never."

Miltoun took his hand.

"Sorry, Clifton—didn't mean to shock you."

And for a minute neither spoke, looking at their clasped hands as if surprised.

"Would your lordship like a bath—breakfast is still at eight. I can procure you a razor."

When Miltoun entered the breakfast room, his grandmother, with a copy of the Times in her hands, was seated before a grape fruit, which, with a shredded wheat biscuit, constituted her first meal. Her appearance hardly warranted Barbara's description of 'terribly well'; in truth she looked a little white, as if she had been feeling the heat. But there was no lack of animation in her little steel-grey eyes, nor of decision in her manner.

"I see," she said, "that you've taken a line of your own, Eustace. I've nothing to say against that; in fact, quite the contrary. But remember this, my dear, however you may change you mustn't wobble. Only one thing counts in that place, hitting the same nail on the head with the same hammer all the time. You aren't looking at all well."

Miltoun, bending to kiss her, murmured:

"Thanks, I'm all right."

"Nonsense," replied Lady Casterley. "They don't look after you. Was your mother in the House?"

"I don't think so."

"Exactly. And what is Barbara about? She ought to be seeing to you."

"Barbara is down with Uncle Dennis."

Lady Casterley set her jaw; then looking her grandson through and through, said:

"I shall take you down there this very day. I shall have the sea to you. What do you say, Clifton?"

"His lordship does look pale."

"Have the carriage, and we'll go from Clapham Junction. Thomas can go in and fetch you some clothes. Or, better, though I dislike them, we can telephone to your mother for a car. It's very hot for trains. Arrange that, please, Clifton!"

To this project Miltoun raised no objection. And all through the drive he remained sunk in an indifference and lassitude which to Lady Casterley seemed in the highest degree ominous. For lassitude, to her, was the strange, the unpardonable, state. The little great lady—casket of the aristocratic principle—was permeated to the very backbone with the instinct of artificial energy, of that alert vigour which those who have nothing socially to hope for are forced to develop, lest they should decay and be again obliged to hope. To speak honest truth, she could not forbear an itch to run some sharp and foreign substance into her grandson, to rouse him somehow, for she knew the reason of his state, and was temperamentally out of patience with such a cause for backsliding. Had it been any other of her grandchildren she would not have hesitated, but there was that in Miltoun which held even Lady Casterley in check, and only once during the four hours of travel did she attempt to break down his reserve. She did it in a manner very soft for her—was he not of all living things the hope and pride of her heart? Tucking her little thin sharp hand under his arm, she said quietly:

"My dear, don't brood over it. That will never do."

But Miltoun removed her hand gently, and laid it back on the dust rug, nor did he answer, or show other sign of having heard.

And Lady Casterley, deeply wounded, pressed her faded lips together, and said sharply:

"Slower, please, Frith!"

CHAPTER V

It was to Barbara that Miltoun unfolded, if but little, the trouble of his spirit, lying that same afternoon under a ragged tamarisk hedge with the tide far out. He could never have done this if there had not been between them the accidental revelation of that night at Monkland; nor even then perhaps had he not felt in this young sister of his the warmth of life for which he was yearning. In such a matter as love Barbara was the elder of these two. For, besides the motherly knowledge of the heart peculiar to most women, she had the inherent woman-of-the-worldliness to be expected of a daughter of Lord and Lady Valleys. If she herself were in doubt as to the state of her affections, it was not as with Miltoun, on the score of the senses and the heart, but on the score of her spirit and curiosity, which Courtier had awakened and caused to flap their wings a little. She worried over Miltoun's forlorn case; it hurt her too to think of Mrs. Noel eating her heart out in that lonely cottage. A sister so—good and earnest as Agatha had ever inclined Barbara to a rebellious view of morals, and disinclined her altogether to religion. And so, she felt that if those two could not be happy apart, they should be happy together, in the name of all the joy there was in life!

And while her brother lay face to the sky under the tamarisks, she kept trying to think of how to console him, conscious that she did not in the least understand the way he thought about things. Over the fields behind, the larks were hymning the promise of the unripe corn; the foreshore was painted all colours, from vivid green to mushroom pink; by the edge of the blue sea little black figures stooped, gathering sapphire. The air smelled sweet in the shade of the tamarisk; there was ineffable peace. And Barbara, covered by the network of sunlight, could not help impatience with a suffering which seemed to her so corrigible by action. At last she ventured:

"Life is short, Eusty!"

Miltoun's answer, given without movement, startled her:

"Persuade me that it is, Babs, and I'll bless you. If the singing of these larks means nothing, if that blue up there is a morass of our invention, if we are pettily, creeping on furthering nothing, if there's no purpose in our lives, persuade me of it, for God's sake!"

Carried suddenly beyond her depth, Barbara could only put out her hand, and say: "Oh! don't take things so hard!"

"Since you say that life is short," Miltoun muttered, with his smile, "you shouldn't spoil it by feeling pity! In old days we went to the Tower for our convictions. We can stand a little private roasting, I hope; or has the sand run out of us altogether?"

Stung by his tone, Barbara answered in rather a hard voice:

"What we must bear, we must, I suppose. But why should we make trouble? That's what I can't stand!"

"O profound wisdom!"

Barbara flushed.

"I love Life!" she said.

The galleons of the westering sun were already sailing in a broad gold fleet straight for that foreshore where the little black stooping figures had not yet finished their toil, the larks still sang over the unripe corn—when Harbinger, galloping along the sands from Whitewater to Sea House, came on that silent couple walking home to dinner.

It would not be safe to say of this young man that he readily diagnosed a spiritual atmosphere, but this was the less his demerit, since everything from his cradle up had conspired to keep the spiritual

thermometer of his surroundings at 60 in the shade. And the fact that his own spiritual thermometer had now run up so that it threatened to burst the bulb, rendered him less likely than ever to see what was happening with other people's. Yet, he did notice that Barbara was looking pale, and—it seemed—sweeter than ever.... With her eldest brother he always somehow felt ill at ease. He could not exactly afford to despise an uncompromising spirit in one of his own order, but he was no more impervious than others to Miltoun's caustic, thinly-veiled contempt for the commonplace; and having a full-blooded belief in himself—usual with men of fine physique, whose lots are so cast that this belief can never or almost never be really shaken—he greatly disliked the feeling of being a little looked down on. It was an intense relief, when, saying that he wanted a certain magazine, Miltoun strode off into the town.

To Harbinger, no less than to Miltoun and Barbara, last night had been bitter and restless. The sight of that pale swaying figure, with the parted lips, whirling round in Courtier's arms, had clung to his vision ever since, the Ball. During his own last dance with her he had been almost savagely silent; only by a great effort restraining his tongue from mordant allusions to that 'prancing, red-haired fellow,' as he secretly called the champion of lost causes. In fact, his sensations there and since had been a revelation, or would have been if he could have stood apart to see them. True, he had gone about next day with his usual cool, off-hand manner, because one naturally did not let people see, but it was with such an inner aching and rage of want and jealousy as to really merit pity. Men of his physically big, rather rushing, type, are the last to possess their souls in patience. Walking home after the Ball he had determined to follow her down to the sea, where she had said, so maliciously; that she was going. After a second almost sleepless night he had no longer any hesitation. He must see her! After all, a man might go to his own 'place' with impunity; he did not care if it were a pointed thing to do.... Pointed! The more pointed the better! There was beginning to be roused in him an ugly stubbornness of male determination. She should not escape him!

But now that he was walking at her side, all that determination and assurance melted to perplexed humility. He marched along by his horse with his head down, just feeling the ache of being so close to her and yet so far; angry with his own silence and awkwardness, almost angry with her for her loveliness, and the pain it made him suffer. When they reached the house, and she left him at the stable-yard, saying she was going to get some flowers, he jerked the beast's bridle and swore at it for its slowness in entering the stable. He, was terrified that she would be gone before he could get into the garden; yet half afraid of finding her there. But she was still plucking carnations by the box hedge which led to the conservatories. And as she rose from gathering those blossoms, before he knew what he was doing, Harbinger had thrown his arm around her, held her as in a vice, kissed her unmercifully.

She seemed to offer no resistance, her smooth cheeks growing warmer and warmer, even her lips passive; but suddenly he recoiled, and his heart stood still at his own outrageous daring. What had he done? He saw her leaning back almost buried in the clipped box hedge, and heard her say with a sort of faint mockery: "Well!"

He would have flung himself down on his knees to ask for pardon but for the thought that someone might come. He muttered hoarsely: "By God, I was mad!" and stood glowering in sullen suspense between hardihood and fear. He heard her say, quietly:

"Yes, you were-rather."

Then seeing her put her hand up to her lips as if he had hurt them, he muttered brokenly:

"Forgive me, Babs!"

There was a full minute's silence while he stood there, no longer daring to look at her, beaten all over by his emotions. Then, with bewilderment, he heard her say:

"I didn't mind it—for once!"

He looked up at that. How could she love him, and speak so coolly! How could she not mind, if she did not love him! She was passing her hands over her face and neck and hair, repairing the damage of his kisses.

"Now shall we go in?" she said.

Harbinger took a step forward.

"I love you so," he said; "I will put my life in your hands, and you shall throw it away."

At those words, of whose exact nature he had very little knowledge, he saw her smile.

"If I let you come within three yards, will you be good?"

He bowed; and, in silence, they walked towards the house.

Dinner that evening was a strange, uncomfortable meal. But its comedy, too subtly played for Miltoun and Lord Dennis, seemed transparent to the eyes of Lady Casterley; for, when Harbinger had sallied forth to ride back along the sands, she took her candle and invited Barbara to retire. Then, having admitted her granddaughter to the apartment always reserved for herself, and specially furnished with practically nothing, she sat down opposite that tall, young, solid figure, as it were taking stock of it, and said:

"So you are coming to your senses, at all events. Kiss me!"

Barbara, stooping to perform this rite, saw a tear stealing down the carved fine nose. Knowing that to notice it would be too dreadful, she raised herself, and went to the window. There, staring out over the dark fields and dark sea, by the side of which Harbinger was riding home, she put her hand up to her lips, and thought for the hundredth time:

"So that's what it's like!"

CHAPTER VI

Three days after his first, and as he promised himself, his last Society Ball, Courtier received a note from Audrey Noel, saying that she had left Monkland for the present, and come up to a little flat—on the riverside not far from Westminster.

When he made his way there that same July day, the Houses of Parliament were bright under a sun which warmed all the grave air emanating from their counsels of perfection: Courtier passed by dubiously. His feelings in the presence of those towers were always a little mixed. There was not so much of the poet in him as to cause him to see nothing there at all save only same lines against the sky, but there was enough of the poet to make him long to kick something; and in this mood he wended his way to the riverside.

Mrs. Noel was not at home, but since the maid informed him that she would be in directly, he sat down to wait. Her flat, which was on—the first floor, overlooked the river and had evidently been taken furnished, for there were visible marks of a recent struggle with an Edwardian taste which, flushed from triumph over Victorianism, had filled the rooms with early Georgian remains. On the only definite victory, a rose-coloured window seat of great comfort and little age, Courtier sat down, and resigned himself to doing nothing with the ease of an old soldier.

To the protective feeling he had once had for a very graceful, dark-haired child, he joined not only the championing pity of a man of warm heart watching a woman in distress, but the impatience of one, who, though temperamentally incapable of feeling oppressed himself, rebelled at sight of all forms of tyranny affecting others.

The sight of the grey towers, still just visible, under which Miltoun and his father sat, annoyed him deeply; symbolizing to him, Authority—foe to his deathless mistress, the sweet, invincible lost cause of Liberty. But presently the river; bringing up in flood the unbound water that had bathed every shore, touched all sands, and seen the rising and falling of each mortal star, so soothed him with its soundless hymn to Freedom, that Audrey Noel coming in with her hands full of flowers, found him sleeping firmly, with his mouth shut.

Noiselessly putting down the flowers, she waited for his awakening. That sanguine visage, with its prominent chin, flaring moustaches, and eyebrows raised rather V-shaped above his closed eyes, wore an expression of cheery defiance even in sleep; and perhaps no face in all London was so utterly its obverse, as that of this dark, soft-haired woman, delicate, passive, and tremulous with pleasure at sight of the only person in the world from whom she felt she might learn of Miltoun, without losing her self-respect.

He woke at last, and manifesting no discomfiture, said:

"It was like you not to wake me."

They sat for a long while talking, the riverside traffic drowsily accompanying their voices, the flowers

drowsily filling the room with scent; and when Courtier left, his heart was sore. She had not spoken of herself at all, but had talked nearly all the time of Barbara, praising her beauty and high spirit; growing pale once or twice, and evidently drinking in with secret avidity every allusion to Miltoun. Clearly, her feelings had not changed, though she would not show them! Courtier's pity for her became well-nigh violent.

It was in such a mood, mingled with very different feelings, that he donned evening clothes and set out to attend the last gathering of the season at Valleys House, a function which, held so late in July, was perforce almost perfectly political.

Mounting the wide and shining staircase, that had so often baffled the arithmetic of little Ann, he was reminded of a picture entitled 'The Steps to Heaven' in his nursery four-and-thirty years before. At the top of this staircase, and surrounded by acquaintances, he came on Harbinger, who nodded curtly. The young man's handsome face and figure appeared to Courtier's jaundiced eye more obviously successful and complacent than ever; so that he passed him by sardonically, and manoeuvred his way towards Lady Valleys, whom he could perceive stationed, like a general, in a little cleared space, where to and fro flowed constant streams of people, like the rays of a star. She was looking her very best, going well with great and highly-polished spaces; and she greeted Courtier with a special cordiality of tone, which had in it, besides kindness towards one who must be feeling a strange bird, a certain diplomatic quality, compounded of desire, as it were, to 'warn him off,' and fear of saying something that might irritate and make him more dangerous. She had heard, she said, that he was bound for Persia; she hoped he was not going to try and make things more difficult there; then with the words: "So good of you to have come!" she became once more the centre of her battlefield.

Perceiving that he was finished with, Courtier stood back against a wall and watched. Thus isolated, he was like a solitary cuckoo contemplating the gyrations of a flock of rooks. Their motions seemed a little meaningless to one so far removed from all the fetishes and shibboleths of Westminster. He heard them discussing Miltoun's speech, the real significance of which apparently had only just been grasped. The words 'doctrinaire,' 'extremist,' came to his ears, together with the saying 'a new force.' People were evidently puzzled, disturbed, not pleased—as if some star not hitherto accounted for had suddenly appeared amongst the proper constellations.

Searching this crowd for Barbara, Courtier had all the time an uneasy sense of shame. What business had he to come amongst these people so strange to him, just for the sake of seeing her! What business had he to be hankering after this girl at all, knowing in his heart that he could not stand the atmosphere she lived in for a week, and that she was utterly unsuited for any atmosphere that he could give her; to say nothing of the unlikelihood that he could flutter the pulses of one half his age!

A voice, behind him said: "Mr. Courtier!"

He turned, and there was Barbara.

"I want to talk to you about something serious: Will you come into the picture gallery?"

When at last they were close to a family group of Georgian Caradocs, and could as it were shut out the throng sufficiently for private speech, she began:

"Miltoun's so horribly unhappy; I don't know what to do for him: He's making himself ill!"

And she suddenly looked up, in Courtier's face. She seemed to him very young, and touching, at that moment. Her eyes had a gleam of faith in them, like a child's eyes; as if she relied on him to straighten out this tangle, to tell her not only about Miltoun's trouble, but about all life, its meaning, and the secret of its happiness: And he said gently:

"What can I do? Mrs. Noel is in Town. But that's no good, unless—" Not knowing how to finish this sentence; he was silent.

"I wish I were Miltoun," she muttered.

At that quaint saying, Courtier was hard put to it not to take hold of the hands so close to him. This flash of rebellion in her had quickened all his blood. But she seemed to have seen what had passed in him, for her next speech was chilly.

"It's no good; stupid of me to be worrying you."

"It is quite impossible for you to worry me."

Her eyes lifted suddenly from her glove, and looked straight into his.

"Are you really going to Persia?"

"Yes."

"But I don't want you to, not yet!" and turning suddenly, she left him.

Strangely disturbed, Courtier remained motionless, consulting the grave stare of the group of Georgian Caradocs.

A voice said:

"Good painting, isn't it?"

Behind him was Lord Harbinger. And once more the memory of Lady Casterley's words; the memory of the two figures with joined hands on the balcony above the election crowd; all his latent jealousy of this handsome young Colossus, his animus against one whom he could, as it were, smell out to be always fighting on the winning side; all his consciousness too of what a lost cause his own was, his doubt whether he were honourable to look on it as a cause at all, flared up in Courtier, so that his answer was a stare. On Harbinger's face, too, there had come a look of stubborn violence slowly working up towards the surface.

"I said: 'Good, isn't it?' Mr. Courtier."

"I heard you."

"And you were pleased to answer?"

"Nothing."

"With the civility which might be expected of your habits."

Coldly disdainful, Courtier answered:

"If you want to say that sort of thing, please choose a place where I can reply to you," and turned abruptly on his heel.

But he ground his teeth as he made his way out into the street.

In Hyde Park the grass was parched and dewless under a sky whose stars were veiled by the heat and dust haze. Never had Courtier so bitterly wanted the sky's consolation—the blessed sense of insignificance in the face of the night's dark beauty, which, dwarfing all petty rage and hunger, made men part of its majesty, exalted them to a sense of greatness.

CHAPTER VII

It was past four o'clock the following day when Barbara issued from Valleys House on foot; clad in a pale buff frock, chosen for quietness, she attracted every eye. Very soon entering a taxi-cab, she drove to the Temple, stopped at the Strand entrance, and walked down the little narrow lane into the heart of the Law. Its votaries were hurrying back from the Courts, streaming up from their Chambers for tea, or escaping desperately to Lord's or the Park—young votaries, unbound as yet by the fascination of fame or fees. And each, as he passed, looked at Barbara, with his fingers itching to remove his hat, and a feeling that this was She. After a day spent amongst precedents and practice, after six hours at least of trying to discover what chance A had of standing on his rights, or B had of preventing him, it was difficult to feel otherwise about that calm apparition—like a golden slim tree walking. One of them, asked by her the way to Miltoun's staircase, preceded her with shy ceremony, and when she had vanished up those dusty stairs, lingered on, hoping that she might find her visitee out, and be obliged to return and ask him the way back. But she did not come, and he went sadly away, disturbed to the very bottom of all that he owned in fee simple.

In fact, no one answered Barbara's knock, and discovering that the door yielded, she walked through the lobby past the clerk's den, converted to a kitchen, into the sitting-room. It was empty. She had never been to Miltoun's rooms before, and she stared about her curiously. Since he did not practise, much of the proper gear was absent. The room indeed had a worn carpet, a few old chairs, and was lined from floor to ceiling with books. But the wall space between the windows was occupied by an

enormous map of England, scored all over with figures and crosses; and before this map stood an immense desk, on which were piles of double foolscap covered with Miltoun's neat and rather pointed writing. Barbara examined them, puckering up her forehead; she knew that he was working at a book on the land question; but she had never realized that the making of a book required so much writing. Papers, too, and Blue Books littered a large bureau on which stood bronze busts of AEschylus and Dante.

"What an uncomfortable place!" she thought. The room, indeed, had an atmosphere, a spirit, which depressed her horribly. Seeing a few flowers down in the court below, she had a longing to get out to them. Then behind her she heard the sound of someone talking. But there was no one in the room; and the effect of this disrupted soliloquy, which came from nowhere, was so uncanny, that she retreated to the door. The sound, as of two spirits speaking in one voice, grew louder, and involuntarily she glanced at the busts. They seemed quite blameless. Though the sound had been behind her when she was at the window, it was again behind her now that she was at the door; and she suddenly realized that it was issuing from a bookcase in the centre of the wall. Barbara had her father's nerve, and walking up to the bookcase she perceived that it had been affixed to, and covered, a door that was not quite closed. She pulled it towards her, and passed through. Across the centre of an unkempt bedroom Miltoun was striding, dressed only in his shirt and trousers. His feet were bare, and his head and hair dripping wet; the look on his thin dark face went to Barbara's heart. She ran forward, and took his hand. This was burning hot, but the sight of her seemed to have frozen his tongue and eyes. And the contrast of his burning hand with this frozen silence, frightened Barbara horribly. She could think of nothing but to put her other hand to his forehead. That too was burning hot!

"What brought you here?" he said.

She could only murmur:

"Oh! Eusty! Are you ill?"

Miltoun took hold of her wrists.

"It's all right, I've been working too hard; got a touch of fever."

"So I can feel," murmured Barbara. "You ought to be in bed. Come home with me."

Miltoun smiled. "It's not a case for leeches."

The look of his smile, the sound of his voice, sent a shudder through her.

"I'm not going to leave you here alone."

But Miltoun's grasp tightened on her wrists.

"My dear Babs, you will do what I tell you. Go home, hold your tongue, and leave me to burn out in peace."

Barbara sustained that painful grip without wincing; she had regained her calmness.

"You must come! You haven't anything here, not even a cool drink."

"My God! Barley water!"

The scorn he put into those two words was more withering than a whole philippic against redemption by creature comforts. And feeling it dart into her, Barbara closed her lips tight. He had dropped her wrists, and again, begun pacing up and down; suddenly he stopped:

"The stars, sun, moon all shrink away,
A desert vast, without a bound,
And nothing left to eat or drink,

"And a dark desert all around."

"You should read your Blake, Audrey."

Barbara turned quickly, and went out frightened. She passed through the sitting-room and corridor on to the staircase. He was ill-raving! The fever in Miltoun's veins seemed to have stolen through the clutch of his hands into her own veins. Her face was burning, she thought confusedly, breathed unevenly. She felt sore, and at the same time terribly sorry; and withal there kept rising in her the gusty memory of Harbingers kiss.

She hurried down the stairs, turned by instinct down-hill and found herself on the Embankment. And suddenly, with her inherent power of swift decision, she hailed a cab, and drove to the nearest telephone office.

CHAPTER VIII

To a woman like Audrey Noel, born to be the counterpart and complement of another,—whose occupations and effort were inherently divorced from the continuity of any stiff and strenuous purpose of her own, the uprooting she had voluntarily undergone was a serious matter.

Bereaved of the faces of her flowers, the friendly sighing of her lime-tree, the wants of her cottagers; bereaved of that busy monotony of little home things which is the stay and solace of lonely women, she was extraordinarily lost. Even music for review seemed to have failed her. She had never lived in London, so that she had not the refuge of old haunts and habits, but had to make her own—and to make habits and haunts required a heart that could at least stretch out feelers and lay hold of things, and her heart was not now able. When she had struggled with her Edwardian flat, and laid down her simple routine of meals, she was as stranded as ever was, convict let out of prison. She had not even that great support, the necessity of hiding her feelings for fear of disturbing others. She was planted there, with her longing and grief, and nothing, nobody, to take her out of herself. Having wilfully embraced this position, she tried to make the best of it, feeling it less intolerable, at all events, than staying on at Monkland, where she had made that grievous, and unpardonable error—falling in love.

This offence, on the part of one who felt within herself a great capacity to enjoy and to confer happiness, had arisen—like the other grievous and unpardonable offence, her marriage—from too much disposition to yield herself to the personality of another. But it was cold comfort to know that the desire to give and to receive love had twice over left her—a dead woman. Whatever the nature of those immature sensations with which, as a girl of twenty, she had accepted her husband, in her feeling towards Miltoun there was not only abandonment, but the higher flame of self-renunciation. She wanted to do the best for him, and had not even the consolation of the knowledge that she had sacrificed herself for his advantage. All had been taken out of her hands! Yet with characteristic fatalism she did not feel rebellious. If it were ordained that she should, for fifty, perhaps sixty years, repent in sterility and ashes that first error of her girlhood, rebellion was, none the less, too far-fetched. If she rebelled, it would not be in spirit, but in action. General principles were nothing to her; she lost no force brooding over the justice or injustice of her situation, but merely tried to digest its facts.

The whole day, succeeding Courtier's visit, was spent by her in the National Gallery, whose roof, alone of all in London, seemed to offer her protection. She had found one painting, by an Italian master, the subject of which reminded her of Miltoun; and before this she sat for a very long time, attracting at last the gouty stare of an official. The still figure of this lady, with the oval face and grave beauty, both piqued his curiosity, and stimulated certain moral qualms. She, was undoubtedly waiting for her lover. No woman, in his experience, had ever sat so long before a picture without ulterior motive; and he kept his eyes well opened to see what this motive would be like. It gave him, therefore, a sensation almost amounting to chagrin when coming round once more, he found they had eluded him and gone off together without coming under his inspection. Feeling his feet a good deal, for he had been on them all day, he sat down in the hollow which she had left behind her; and against his will found himself also looking at the picture. It was painted in a style he did not care for; the face of the subject, too, gave him the queer feeling that the gentleman was being roasted inside. He had not been sitting there long, however, before he perceived the lady standing by the picture, and the lips of the gentleman in the picture moving. It seemed to him against the rules, and he got up at once, and went towards it; but as he did so, he found that his eyes were shut, and opened them hastily. There was no one there.

From the National Gallery, Audrey had gone into an A.B.C. for tea, and then home. Before the Mansions was a taxi-cab, and the maid met her with the news that 'Lady Caradoc' was in the sitting-room.

Barbara was indeed standing in the middle of the room with a look on her face such as her father wore sometimes on the racecourse, in the hunting field, or at stormy Cabinet Meetings, a look both resolute and sharp. She spoke at once:

"I got your address from Mr. Courtier. My brother is ill. I'm afraid it'll be brain fever, I think you had

better go and see him at his rooms in the Temple; there's no time to be lost."

To Audrey everything in the room seemed to go round; yet all her senses were preternaturally acute, so that she could distinctly smell the mud of the river at low tide. She said, with a shudder:

"Oh! I will go; yes, I will go at once."

"He's quite alone. He hasn't asked for you; but I think your going is the only chance. He took me for you. You told me once you were a good nurse."

"Yes."

The room was steady enough now, but she had lost the preternatural acuteness of her senses, and felt confused. She heard Barbara say: "I can take you to the door in my cab," and murmuring: "I will get ready," went into her bedroom. For a moment she was so utterly bewildered that she did nothing. Then every other thought was lost in a strange, soft, almost painful delight, as if some new instinct were being born in her; and quickly, but without confusion or hurry, she began packing. She put into a valise her own toilet things; then flannel, cotton-wool, eau de Cologne, hot-water bottle, Etna, shawls, thermometer, everything she had which could serve in illness. Changing to a plain dress, she took up the valise and returned to Barbara. They went out together to the cab. The moment it began to bear her to this ordeal at once so longed-for and so terrible, fear came over her again, so that she screwed herself into the corner, very white and still. She was aware of Barbara calling to the driver: "Go by the Strand, and stop at a poulterer's for ice!" And, when the bag of ice had been handed in, heard her saying: "I will bring you all you want—if he is really going to be ill."

Then, as the cab stopped, and the open doorway of the staircase was before her, all her courage came back.

She felt the girl's warm hand against her own, and grasping her valise and the bag of ice, got out, and hurried up the steps.

CHAPTER IX

On leaving Nettlefold, Miltoun had gone straight back to his rooms, and begun at once to work at his book on the land question. He worked all through that night—his third night without sleep, and all the following day. In the evening, feeling queer in the head, he went out and walked up and down the Embankment. Then, fearing to go to bed and lie sleepless, he sat down in his arm-chair. Falling asleep there, he had fearful dreams, and awoke unrefreshed. After his bath, he drank coffee, and again forced himself to work. By the middle of the day he felt dizzy and exhausted, but utterly disinclined to eat. He went out into the hot Strand, bought himself a necessary book, and after drinking more coffee, came back and again began to work. At four o'clock he found that he was not taking in the words. His head was burning hot, and he went into his bedroom to bathe it. Then somehow he began walking up and down, talking to himself, as Barbara had found him.

She had no sooner gone, than he felt utterly exhausted. A small crucifix hung over his bed, and throwing himself down before it, he remained motionless with his face buried in the coverlet, and his arms stretched out towards the wall. He did not pray, but merely sought rest from sensation. Across his half-hypnotized consciousness little threads of burning fancy kept shooting. Then he could feel nothing but utter physical sickness, and against this his will revolted. He resolved that he would not be ill, a ridiculous log for women to hang over. But the moments of sickness grew longer and more frequent; and to drive them away he rose from his knees, and for some time again walked up and down; then, seized with vertigo, he was obliged to sit on the bed to save himself from falling. From being burning hot he had become deadly cold, glad to cover himself with the bedclothes. The heat soon flamed up in him again; but with a sick man's instinct he did not throw off the clothes, and stayed quite still. The room seemed to have turned to a thick white substance like a cloud, in which he lay enwrapped, unable to move hand or foot. His sense of smell and hearing had become unnaturally acute; he smelled the distant streets, flowers, dust, and the leather of his books, even the scent left by Barbara's clothes, and a curious odour of river mud. A clock struck six, he counted each stroke; and instantly the whole world seemed full of striking clocks, the sound of horses' hoofs, bicycle bells, people's footfalls. His sense of vision, on the contrary, was absorbed in consciousness of this white blanket of cloud wherein he was lifted above the earth, in the midst of a dull incessant hammering. On the surface of the cloud there seemed to be forming a number of little golden spots; these spots were moving, and he saw that they

were toads. Then, beyond them, a huge face shaped itself, very dark, as if of bronze, with eyes burning into his brain. The more he struggled to get away from these eyes, the more they bored and burned into him. His voice was gone, so that he was unable to cry out, and suddenly the face marched over him.

When he recovered consciousness his head was damp with moisture trickling from something held to his forehead by a figure leaning above him. Lifting his hand he touched a cheek; and hearing a sob instantly suppressed, he sighed. His hand was gently taken; he felt kisses on it.

The room was so dark, that he could scarcely see her face—his sight too was dim; but he could hear her breathing and the least sound of her dress and movements—the scent too of her hands and hair seemed to envelop him, and in the midst of all the acute discomfort of his fever, he felt the band round his brain relax. He did not ask how long she had been there, but lay quite still, trying to keep his eyes on her, for fear of that face, which seemed lurking behind the air, ready to march on him again. Then feeling suddenly that he could not hold it back, he beckoned, and clutched at her, trying to cover himself with the protection of her breast. This time his swoon was not so deep; it gave way to delirium, with intervals when he knew that she was there, and by the shaded candle light could see her in a white garment, floating close to him, or sitting still with her hand on his; he could even feel the faint comfort of the ice cap, and of the scent of eau de Cologne. Then he would lose all consciousness of her presence, and pass through into the incoherent world, where the crucifix above his bed seemed to bulge and hang out, as if it must fall on him. He conceived a violent longing to tear it down, which grew till he had struggled up in bed and wrenched it from off the wall. Yet a mysterious consciousness of her presence permeated even his darkest journeys into the strange land; and once she seemed to be with him, where a strange light showed them fields and trees, a dark line of moor, and a bright sea, all whitened, and flashing with sweet violence.

Soon after dawn he had a long interval of consciousness, and took in with a sort of wonder her presence in the low chair by his bed. So still she sat in a white loose gown, pale with watching, her eyes immovably fixed on him, her lips pressed together, and quivering at his faintest motion. He drank in desperately the sweetness of her face, which had so lost remembrance of self.

CHAPTER X

Barbara gave the news of her brother's illness to no one else, common sense telling her to run no risk of disturbance. Of her own initiative, she brought a doctor, and went down twice a day to hear reports of Miltoun's progress.

As a fact, her father and mother had gone to Lord Dennis, for Goodwood, and the chief difficulty had been to excuse her own neglect of that favourite Meeting. She had fallen back on the half-truth that Eustace wanted her in Town; and, since Lord and Lady Valleys had neither of them shaken off a certain uneasiness about their son, the pretext sufficed:

It was not until the sixth day, when the crisis was well past and Miltoun quite free from fever, that she again went down to Nettlefold.

On arriving she at once sought out her mother, whom she found in her bedroom, resting. It had been very hot at Goodwood.

Barbara was not afraid of her—she was not, indeed, afraid of anyone, except Miltoun, and in some strange way, a little perhaps of Courtier; yet, when the maid had gone, she did not at once begin her tale. Lady Valleys, who at Goodwood had just heard details of a Society scandal, began a carefully expurgated account of it suitable to her daughter's ears—for some account she felt she must give to somebody.

"Mother," said Barbara suddenly, "Eustace has been ill. He's out of danger now, and going on all right." Then, looking hard at the bewildered lady, she added: "Mrs. Noel is nursing him."

The past tense in which illness had been mentioned, checking at the first moment any rush of panic in Lady Valleys, left her confused by the situation conjured up in Barbara's last words. Instead of feeding that part of man which loves a scandal, she was being fed, always an unenviable sensation. A woman did not nurse a man under such circumstances without being everything to him, in the world's eyes. Her daughter went on:

"I took her to him. It seemed the only thing to do—since it's all through fretting for her. Nobody knows, of course, except the doctor, and—Stacey."

"Heavens!" muttered Lady Valleys.

"It has saved him."

The mother instinct in Lady Valleys took sudden fright. "Are you telling me the truth, Babs? Is he really out of danger? How wrong of you not to let me know before?"

But Barbara did not flinch; and her mother relapsed into rumination.

"Stacey is a cat!" she said suddenly. The expurgated details of the scandal she had been retailing to her daughter had included the usual maid. She could not find it in her to enjoy the irony of this coincidence. Then, seeing Barbara smile, she said tartly:

"I fail to see the joke."

"Only that I thought you'd enjoy my throwing Stacey in, dear."

"What! You mean she doesn't know?"

"Not a word."

Lady Valleys smiled.

"What a little wretch you are, Babs!" Maliciously she added: "Claud and his mother are coming over from Whitewater, with Bertie and Lily Malvezin, you'd better go and dress;" and her eyes searched her daughter's so shrewdly, that a flush rose to the girl's cheeks.

When she had gone, Lady Valleys rang for her maid again, and relapsed into meditation. Her first thought was to consult her husband; her second that secrecy was strength. Since no one knew but Barbara, no one had better know.

Her astuteness and experience comprehended the far-reaching probabilities of this affair. It would not do to take a single false step. If she had no one's action to control but her own and Barbara's, so much the less chance of a slip. Her mind was a strange medley of thoughts and feelings, almost comic, well-nigh tragic; of worldly prudence, and motherly instinct; of warm-blooded sympathy with all love-affairs, and cool-blooded concern for her son's career. It was not yet too late perhaps to prevent real mischief; especially since it was agreed by everyone that the woman was no adventuress. Whatever was done, they must not forget that she had nursed him—saved him, Barbara had said! She must be treated with all kindness and consideration.

Hastening her toilette, she in turn went to her daughter's room.

Barbara was already dressed, leaning out of her window towards the sea.

Lady Valleys began almost timidly:

"My dear, is Eustace out of bed yet?"

"He was to get up to-day for an hour or two."

"I see. Now, would there be any danger if you and I went up and took charge over from Mrs. Noel?"

"Poor Eusty!"

"Yes, yes! But, exercise your judgment. Would it harm him?"

Barbara was silent. "No," she said at last, "I don't suppose it would, now; but it's for the doctor to say."

Lady Valleys exhibited a manifest relief.

"We'll see him first, of course. Eustace will have to have an ordinary nurse, I suppose, for a bit."

Looking stealthily at Barbara, she added:

"I mean to be very nice to her; but one mustn't be romantic, you know, Babs."

From the little smile on Barbara's lips she derived no sense of certainty; indeed she was visited by all

her late disquietude about her young daughter, by all the feeling that she, as well as Miltoun, was hovering on the verge of some folly.

"Well, my dear," she said, "I am going down."

But Barbara lingered a little longer in that bedroom where ten nights ago she had lain tossing, till in despair she went and cooled herself in the dark sea.

Her last little interview with Courtier stood between her and a fresh meeting with Harbinger, whom at the Valleys House gathering she had not suffered to be alone with her. She came down late.

That same evening, out on the beach road, under a sky swarming with stars, the people were strolling—folk from the towns, down for their fortnight's holiday. In twos and threes, in parties of six or eight, they passed the wall at the end of Lord Dennis's little domain; and the sound of their sparse talk and laughter, together with the sighing of the young waves, was blown over the wall to the ears of Harbinger, Bertie, Barbara, and Lily Malvezin, when they strolled out after dinner to sniff the sea. The holiday-makers stared dully at the four figures in evening dress looking out above their heads; they had other things than these to think of, becoming more and more silent as the night grew dark. The four young people too were rather silent. There was something in this warm night, with its sighing, and its darkness, and its stars, that was not favourable to talk, so that presently they split into couples, drifting a little apart.

Standing there, gripping the wall, it seemed to Harbinger that there were no words left in the world. Not even his worst enemy could have called this young man romantic; yet that figure beside him, the gleam of her neck and her pale cheek in the dark, gave him perhaps the most poignant glimpse of mystery that he had ever had. His mind, essentially that of a man of affairs, by nature and by habit at home amongst the material aspects of things, was but gropingly conscious that here, in this dark night, and the dark sea, and the pale figure of this girl whose heart was dark to him and secret, there was perhaps something—yes, something—which surpassed the confines of his philosophy, something beckoning him on out of his snug compound into the desert of divinity. If so, it was soon gone in the aching of his senses at the scent of her hair, and the longing to escape from this weird silence.

"Babs," he said; "have you forgiven me?"

Her answer came, without turn of head, natural, indifferent:

"Yes—I told you so."

"Is that all you have to say to a fellow?"

"What shall we talk about—the running of Casetta?"

Deep down within him Harbinger uttered a noiseless oath. Something sinister was making her behave like this to him! It was that fellow—that fellow! And suddenly he said:

"Tell me this——" then speech seemed to stick in his throat. No! If there were anything in that, he preferred not to hear it. There was a limit!

Down below, a pair of lovers passed, very silent, their arms round each other's waists.

Barbara turned and walked away towards the house.

CHAPTER XI

The days when Miltoun was first allowed out of bed were a time of mingled joy and sorrow to her who had nursed him. To see him sitting up, amazed at his own weakness, was happiness, yet to think that he would be no more wholly dependent, no more that sacred thing, a helpless creature, brought her the sadness of a mother whose child no longer needs her. With every hour he would now get farther from her, back into the fastnesses of his own spirit. With every hour she would be less his nurse and comforter, more the woman he loved. And though that thought shone out in the obscure future like a glamorous flower, it brought too much wistful uncertainty to the present. She was very tired, too, now that all excitement was over—so tired that she hardly knew what she did or where she moved. But a smile had become so faithful to her eyes that it clung there above the shadows of fatigue, and kept

taking her lips prisoner.

Between the two bronze busts she had placed a bowl of lilies of the valley; and every free niche in that room of books had a little vase of roses to welcome Miltoun's return.

He was lying back in his big leather chair, wrapped in a Turkish gown of Lord Valleys'—on which Barbara had laid hands, having failed to find anything resembling a dressing-gown amongst her brother's austere clothing. The perfume of lilies had overcome the scent of books, and a bee, dusky, adventurer, filled the room with his pleasant humming.

They did not speak, but smiled faintly, looking at one another. In this still moment, before passion had returned to claim its own, their spirits passed through the sleepy air, and became entwined, so that neither could withdraw that soft, slow, encountering glance. In mutual contentment, each to each, close as music to the strings of a violin, their spirits clung—so lost, the one in the other, that neither for that brief time seemed to know which was self.

In fulfilment of her resolution, Lady Valleys, who had returned to Town by a morning train, started with Barbara for the Temple about three in the afternoon, and stopped at the doctor's on the way. The whole thing would be much simpler if Eustace were fit to be moved at once to Valleys House; and with much relief she found that the doctor saw no danger in this course. The recovery had been remarkable—touch and go for bad brain fever just avoided! Lord Miltoun's constitution was extremely sound. Yes, he would certainly favour a removal. His rooms were too confined in this weather. Well nursed—(decidedly) Oh; yes! Quite! And the doctor's eyes became perhaps a trifle more intense. Not a professional, he understood. It might be as well to have another nurse, if they were making the change. They would have this lady knocking up. Just so! Yes, he would see to that. An ambulance carriage he thought advisable. That could all be arranged for this afternoon—at once—he himself would look to it. They might take Lord Miltoun off just as he was; the men would know what to do. And when they had him at Valleys House, the moment he showed interest in his food, down to the sea—down to the sea! At this time of year nothing like it! Then with regard to nourishment, he would be inclined already to shove in a leetle stimulant, a thimbleful perhaps four times a day with food—not without—mixed with an egg, with arrowroot, with custard. A week would see him on his legs, a fortnight at the sea make him as good a man as ever. Overwork—burning the candle—a leetlemore would have seen a very different state of things! Quite so! quite so! Would come round himself before dinner, and make sure. His patient might feel it just at first! He bowed Lady Valleys out; and when she had gone, sat down at his telephone with a smile flickering on his clean-cut lips,

Greatly fortified by this interview, Lady Valleys rejoined her daughter in the ear; but while it slid on amongst the multitudinous traffic, signs of unwonted nervousness began to start out through the placidity of her face.

"I wish, my dear," she said suddenly, "that someone else had to do this. Suppose Eustace refuses!"

"He won't," Barbara answered; "she looks so tired, poor dear. Besides——"

Lady Valleys gazed with curiosity at that young face, which had flushed pink. Yes, this daughter of hers was a woman already, with all a woman's intuitions. She said gravely:

"It was a rash stroke of yours, Babs; let's hope it won't lead to disaster."

Barbara bit her lips.

"If you'd seen him as I saw him! And, what disaster? Mayn't they love each other, if they want?"

Lady Valleys swallowed a grimace. It was so exactly her own point of view. And yet——!

"That's only the beginning," she said; "you forget the sort of boy Eustace is."

"Why can't the poor thing be let out of her cage?" cried Barbara. "What good does it do to anyone? Mother, if ever, when I am married, I want to get free, I will!"

The tone of her voice was so quivering, and unlike the happy voice of Barbara, that Lady Valleys involuntarily caught hold of her hand and squeezed it hard.

"My dear sweet," she said, "don't let's talk of such gloomy things."

"I mean it. Nothing shall stop me."

But Lady Valleys' face had suddenly become rather grim.

"So we think, child; it's not so simple."

"It can't be worse, anyway," muttered Barbara, "than being buried alive as that wretched woman is."

For answer Lady Valleys only murmured:

"The doctor promised that ambulance carriage at four o'clock. What am I going to say?"

"She'll understand when you look at her. She's that sort."

The door was opened to them by Mrs. Noel herself.

It was the first time Lady Valleys had seen her in a house, and there was real curiosity mixed with the assurance which masked her nervousness. A pretty creature, even lovely! But the quite genuine sympathy in her words: "I am truly grateful. You must be quite worn out," did not prevent her adding hastily: "The doctor says he must be got home out of these hot rooms. We'll wait here while you tell him."

And then she saw that it was true; this woman was the sort who understood.

Left in the dark passage, she peered round at Barbara.

The girl was standing against the wall with her head thrown back. Lady Valleys could not see her face; but she felt all of a sudden exceedingly uncomfortable, and whispered:

"Two murders and a theft, Babs; wasn't it 'Our Mutual Friend'?"

"Mother!"

"What?"

"Her face! When you're going to throw away a flower, it looks at you!"

"My dear!" murmured Lady Valleys, thoroughly distressed, "what things you're saying to-day!"

This lurking in a dark passage, this whispering girl—it was all queer, unlike an experience in proper life.

And then through the reopened door she saw Miltoun, stretched out in a chair, very pale, but still with that look about his eyes and lips, which of all things in the world had a chastening effect on Lady Valleys, making her feel somehow incurably mundane.

She said rather timidly:

"I'm so glad you're better, dear. What a time you must have had! It's too bad that I knew nothing till yesterday!"

But Miltoun's answer was, as usual, thoroughly disconcerting.

"Thanks, yes! I have had a perfect time—and have now to pay for it, I suppose."

Held back by his smile from bending to kiss him, poor Lady Valleys fidgeted from head to foot. A sudden impulse of sheer womanliness caused a tear to fall on his hand.

When Miltoun perceived that moisture, he said:

"It's all right, mother. I'm quite willing to come."

Still wounded by his voice, Lady Valleys hardened instantly. And while preparing for departure she watched the two furtively. They hardly looked at one another, and when they did, their eyes baffled her. The expression was outside her experience, belonging as it were to a different world, with its faintly smiling, almost shining, gravity.

Vastly relieved when Miltoun, covered with a fur, had been taken down to the carriage, she lingered to speak to Mrs. Noel.

"We owe you a great debt. It might have been so much worse. You mustn't be disconsolate. Go to bed and have a good long rest." And from the door, she murmured again: "He will come and thank you, when he's well."

Descending the stone stairs, she thought: "'Anonyma'—'Anonyma'—yes, it was quite the name." And suddenly she saw Barbara come running up again.

"What is it, Babs?"

Barbara answered:

"Eustace would like some of those lilies." And, passing Lady Valleys, she went on up to Miltoun's chambers.

Mrs. Noel was not in the sitting-room, and going to the bedroom door, the girl looked in.

She was standing by the bed, drawing her hand over and over the white surface of the pillow. Stealing noiselessly back, Barbara caught up the bunch of lilies, and fled.

CHAPTER XII

Miltoun, whose constitution, had the steel-like quality of Lady Casterley's, had a very rapid convalescence. And, having begun to take an interest in his food, he was allowed to travel on the seventh day to Sea House in charge of Barbara.

The two spent their time in a little summer-house close to the sea; lying out on the beach under the groynes; and, as Miltoun grew stronger, motoring and walking on the Downs.

To Barbara, keeping a close watch, he seemed tranquilly enough drinking in from Nature what was necessary to restore balance after the struggle, and breakdown of the past weeks. Yet she could never get rid of a queer feeling that he was not really there at all; to look at him was like watching an uninhabited house that was waiting for someone to enter.

During a whole fortnight he did not make a single allusion to Mrs. Noel, till, on the very last morning, as they were watching the sea, he said with his queer smile:

"It almost makes one believe her theory, that the old gods are not dead. Do you ever see them, Babs; or are you, like me, obtuse?"

Certainly about those lithe invasions of the sea-nymph waves, with ashy, streaming hair, flinging themselves into the arms of the land, there was the old pagan rapture, an inexhaustible delight, a passionate soft acceptance of eternal fate, a wonderful acquiescence in the untiring mystery of life.

But Barbara, ever disconcerted by that tone in his voice, and by this quick dive into the waters of unaccustomed thought, failed to find an answer.

Miltoun went on:

"She says, too, we can hear Apollo singing. Shall we try."

But all that came was the sigh of the sea, and of the wind in the tamarisk.

"No," muttered Miltoun at last, "she alone can hear it."

And Barbara saw, once more on his face that look, neither sad nor impatient, but as of one uninhabited and waiting.

She left Sea House next day to rejoin her mother, who, having been to Cowes, and to the Duchess of Gloucester's, was back in Town waiting for Parliament to rise, before going off to Scotland. And that same afternoon the girl made her way to Mrs. Noel's flat. In paying this visit she was moved not so much by compassion, as by uneasiness, and a strange curiosity. Now that Miltoun was well again, she was seriously disturbed in mind. Had she made a mistake in summoning Mrs. Noel to nurse him?

When she went into the little drawing-room Audrey was sitting in the deep-cushioned window-seat with a book on her knee; and by the fact that it was open at the index, Barbara judged that she had not been reading too attentively. She showed no signs of agitation at the sight of her visitor, nor any eagerness to hear news of Miltoun. But the girl had not been five minutes in the room before the

thought came to her: "Why! She has the same look as Eustace!" She, too, was like an empty tenement; without impatience, discontent, or grief—waiting! Barbara had scarcely realized this with a curious sense of discomposure, when Courtier was announced. Whether there was in this an absolute coincidence or just that amount of calculation which might follow on his part from receipt of a note written from Sea House—saying that Miltoun was well again, that she was coming up and meant to go and thank Mrs. Noel—was not clear, nor were her own sensations; and she drew over her face that armoured look which she perhaps knew Courtier could not bear to see. His face, at all events, was very red when he shook hands. He had come, he told Mrs. Noel, to say good-bye. He was definitely off next week. Fighting had broken out; the revolutionaries were greatly outnumbered. Indeed he ought to have been there long before!

Barbara had gone over to the window; she turned suddenly, and said:

"You were preaching peace two months ago!"

Courtier bowed.

"We are not all perfectly consistent, Lady Barbara. These poor devils have a holy cause."

Barbara held out her hand to Mrs. Noel.

"You only think their cause holy because they happen to be weak. Good-bye, Mrs. Noel; the world is meant for the strong, isn't it!"

She intended that to hurt him; and from the tone of his voice, she knew it had.

"Don't, Lady Barbara; from your mother, yes; not from you!"

"It's what I believe. Good-bye!" And she went out.

She had told him that she did not want him to go—not yet; and he was going!

But no sooner had she got outside, after that strange outburst, than she bit her lips to keep back an angry, miserable feeling. He had been rude to her, she had been rude to him; that was the way they had said good-bye! Then, as she emerged into the sunlight, she thought: "Oh! well; he doesn't care, and I'm sure I don't!"

She heard a voice behind her.

"May I get you a cab?" and at once the sore feeling began to die away; but she did not look round, only smiled, and shook her head, and made a little room for him on the pavement.

But though they walked, they did not at first talk. There was rising within Barbara a tantalizing devil of desire to know the feelings that really lay behind that deferential gravity, to make him show her how much he really cared. She kept her eyes demurely lowered, but she let the glimmer of a smile flicker about her lips; she knew too that her cheeks were glowing, and for that she was not sorry. Was she not to have any—any—was he calmly to go away—without—And she thought: "He shall say something! He shall show me, without that horrible irony of his!"

She said suddenly:

"Those two are just waiting—something will happen!"

"It is probable," was his grave answer.

She looked at him then—it pleased her to see him quiver as if that glance had gone right into him; and she said softly:

"And I think they will be quite right."

She knew those were reckless words, nor cared very much what they meant; but she knew the revolt in them would move him. She saw from his face that it had; and after a little pause, said:

"Happiness is the great thing," and with soft, wicked slowness: "Isn't it, Mr. Courtier?"

But all the cheeriness had gone out of his face, which had grown almost pale. He lifted his hand, and let it drop. Then she felt sorry. It was just as if he had asked her to spare him.

"As to that," he said: "The rough, unfortunately, has to be taken with the smooth. But life's frightfully jolly sometimes."

"As now?"

He looked at her with firm gravity, and answered

"As now."

A sense of utter mortification seized on Barbara. He was too strong for her—he was quixotic—he was hateful! And, determined not to show a sign, to be at least as strong as he, she said calmly:

"Now I think I'll have that cab!"

When she was in the cab, and he was standing with his hat lifted, she looked at him in the way that women can, so that he did not realize that she had looked.

CHAPTER XIII

When Miltoun came to thank her, Audrey Noel was waiting in the middle of the room, dressed in white, her lips smiling, her dark eyes smiling, still as a flower on a windless day.

In that first look passing between them, they forgot everything but happiness. Swallows, on the first day of summer, in their discovery of the bland air, can neither remember that cold winds blow, nor imagine the death of sunlight on their feathers, and, flitting hour after hour over the golden fields, seem no longer birds, but just the breathing of a new season—swallows were no more forgetful of misfortune than were those two. His gaze was as still as her very self; her look at him had in at the quietude of all emotion.

When they' sat down to talk it was as if they had gone back to those days at Monkland, when he had come to her so often to discuss everything in heaven and earth. And yet, over that tranquil eager drinking—in of each other's presence, hovered a sort of awe. It was the mood of morning before the sun has soared. The dew-grey cobwebs enwrapped the flowers of their hearts—yet every prisoned flower could be seen. And he and she seemed looking through that web at the colour and the deep-down forms enshrouded so jealously; each feared too much to unveil the other's heart. They were like lovers who, rambling in a shy wood, never dare stay their babbling talk of the trees and birds and lost bluebells, lest in the deep waters of a kiss their star of all that is to come should fall and be drowned. To each hour its familiar—and the spirit of that hour was the spirit of the white flowers in the bowl on the window-sill above her head.

They spoke of Monk-land, and Miltoun's illness; of his first speech, his impressions of the House of Commons; of music, Barbara, Courtier, the river. He told her of his health, and described his days down by the sea. She, as ever, spoke little of herself, persuaded that it could not interest even him; but she described a visit to the opera; and how she had found a picture in the National Gallery which reminded her of him. To all these trivial things and countless others, the tone of their voices—soft, almost murmuring, with a sort of delighted gentleness—gave a high, sweet importance, a halo that neither for the world would have dislodged from where it hovered.

It was past six when he got up to go, and there had not been a moment to break the calm of that sacred feeling in both their hearts. They parted with another tranquil look, which seemed to say: 'It is well with us—we have drunk of happiness.'

And in this same amazing calm Miltoun remained after he had gone away, till about half-past nine in the evening, he started forth, to walk down to the House. It was now that sort of warm, clear night, which in the country has firefly magic, and even over the Town spreads a dark glamour. And for Miltoun, in the delight of his new health and well-being, with every sense alive and clean, to walk through the warmth and beauty of this night was sheer pleasure. He passed by way of St. James's Park, treading down the purple shadows of plane-tree leaves into the pools of lamplight, almost with remorse—so beautiful, and as if alive, were they. There were moths abroad, and gnats, born on the water, and scent of new-mown grass drifted up from the lawns. His heart felt light as a swallow he had seen that morning; swooping at a grey feather, carrying it along, letting it flutter away, then diving to seize it again. Such was his elation, this beautiful night! Nearing the House of Commons, he thought he would walk a little longer, and turned westward to the river: On that warm evening the water, without movement at turn of tide, was like the black, snake-smooth hair of Nature streaming out on her couch of Earth, waiting for the caress of a divine hand. Far away on the further; bank throbbed some huge

machine, not stilled as yet. A few stars were out in the dark sky, but no moon to invest with pallor the gleam of the lamps. Scarcely anyone passed. Miltoun strolled along the river wall, then crossed, and came back in front of the Mansions where she lived. By the railing he stood still. In the sitting-room of her little flat there was no light, but the casement window was wide open, and the crown of white flowers in the bowl on the window-sill still gleamed out in the darkness like a crescent moon lying on its face. Suddenly, he saw two pale hands rise—one on either side of that bowl, lift it, and draw it in. And he quivered, as though they had touched him. Again those two hands came floating up; they were parted now by darkness; the moon of flowers was gone, in its place had been set handfuls of purple or crimson blossoms. And a puff of warm air rising quickly out of the night drifted their scent of cloves into his face, so that he held his breath for fear of calling out her name.

Again the hands had vanished—through the open window there was nothing to be seen but darkness; and such a rush of longing seized on Miltoun as stole from him all power of movement. He could hear her playing, now. The murmurous current of that melody was like the night itself, sighing, throbbing, languorously soft. It seemed that in this music she was calling him, telling him that she, too, was longing; her heart, too, empty. It died away; and at the window her white figure appeared. From that vision he could not, nor did he try to shrink, but moved out into the, lamplight. And he saw her suddenly stretch out her hands to him, and withdraw them to her breast. Then all save the madness of his longing deserted Miltoun. He ran down the little garden, across the hall, up the stairs.

The door was open. He passed through. There, in the sitting-room, where the red flowers in the window scented all the air, it was dark, and he could not at first see her, till against the piano he caught the glimmer of her white dress. She was sitting with hands resting on the pale notes. And falling on his knees, he buried his face against her. Then, without looking up, he raised his hands. Her tears fell on them covering her heart, that throbbed as if the passionate night itself were breathing in there, and all but the night and her love had stolen forth.

CHAPTER XIV

On a spur of the Sussex Downs, inland from Nettle-Cold, there stands a beech-grove. The traveller who enters it out of the heat and brightness, takes off the shoes of his spirit before its, sanctity; and, reaching the centre, across the clean beech-mat, he sits refreshing his brow with air, and silence. For the flowers of sunlight on the ground under those branches are pale and rare, no insects hum, the birds are almost mute. And close to the border trees are the quiet, milk-white sheep, in congregation, escaping from noon heat. Here, above fields and dwellings, above the ceaseless network of men's doings, and the vapour of their talk, the traveller feels solemnity. All seems conveying divinity—the great white clouds moving their wings above him, the faint longing murmur of the boughs, and in far distance, the sea.... And for a space his restlessness and fear know the peace of God.

So it was with Miltoun when he reached this temple, three days after that passionate night, having walked for hours, alone and full of conflict. During those three days he had been borne forward on the flood tide; and now, tearing himself out of London, where to think was impossible, he had come to the solitude of the Downs to walk, and face his new position.

For that position he saw to be very serious. In the flush of full realization, there was for him no question of renunciation. She was his, he hers; that was determined. But what, then, was he to do? There was no chance of her getting free. In her husband's view, it seemed, under no circumstances was marriage dissoluble. Nor, indeed, to Miltoun would divorce have made things easier, believing as he did that he and she were guilty, and that for the guilty there could be no marriage. She, it was true, asked nothing but just to be his in secret; and that was the course he knew most men would take, without further thought. There was no material reason in the world why he should not so act, and maintain unchanged every other current of his life. It would be easy, usual. And, with her faculty for self-effacement, he knew she would not be unhappy. But conscience, in Miltoun, was a terrible and fierce thing. In the delirium of his illness it had become that Great Face which had marched over him. And, though during the weeks of his recuperation, struggle of all kind had ceased, now that he had yielded to his passion, conscience, in a new and dismal shape, had crept up again to sit above his heart: He must and would let this man, her husband, know; but even if that caused no open scandal, could he go on deceiving those who, if they knew of an illicit love, would no longer allow him to be their representative? If it were known that she was his mistress, he could no longer maintain his position in public life—was he not therefore in honour bound; of his own accord, to resign it? Night and day he was haunted by the thought: How can I, living in defiance of authority, pretend to authority over my

fellows? How can I remain in public life? But if he did not remain in public life, what was he to do? That way of life was in his blood; he had been bred and born into it; had thought of nothing else since he was a boy. There was no other occupation or interest that could hold him for a moment—he saw very plainly that he would be cast away on the waters of existence.

So the battle raged in his proud and twisted spirit, which took everything so hard—his nature imperatively commanding him to keep his work and his power for usefulness; his conscience telling him as urgently that if he sought to wield authority, he must obey it.

He entered the beech-grove at the height of this misery, flaming with rebellion against the dilemma which Fate had placed before him; visited by gusts of resentment against a passion, which forced him to pay the price, either of his career, or of his self-respect; gusts, followed by remorse that he could so for one moment regret his love for that tender creature. The face of Lucifer was not more dark, more tortured, than Miltoun's face in the twilight of the grove, above those kingdoms of the world, for which his ambition and his conscience fought. He threw himself down among the trees; and stretching out his arms, by chance touched a beetle trying to crawl over the grassless soil. Some bird had maimed it. He took the little creature up. The beetle truly could no longer work, but it was spared the fate lying before himself. The beetle was not, as he would be, when his power of movement was destroyed, conscious of his own wasted life. The world would not roll away down there. He would still see himself cumbering the ground, when his powers were taken, from him. This thought was torture. Why had he been suffered to meet her, to love her, and to be loved by her? What had made him so certain from the first moment, if she were not meant for him? If he lived to be a hundred, he would never meet another. Why, because of his love, must he bury the will and force of a man? If there were no more coherence in God's scheme than this, let him too be incoherent! Let him hold authority, and live outside authority! Why stifle his powers for the sake of a coherence which did not exist! That would indeed be madness greater than that of a mad world!

There was no answer to his thoughts in the stillness of the grove, unless it were the cooing of a dove, or the faint thudding of the sheep issuing again into sunlight. But slowly that stillness stole into Miltoun's spirit. "Is it like this in the grave?" he thought. "Are the boughs of those trees the dark earth over me? And the sound in them the sound the dead hear when flowers are growing, and the wind passing through them? And is the feel of this earth how it feels to lie looking up for ever at nothing? Is life anything but a nightmare, a dream; and is not this the reality? And why my fury, my insignificant flame, blowing here and there, when there is really no wind, only a shroud of still air, and these flowers of sunlight that have been dropped on me! Why not let my spirit sleep, instead of eating itself away with rage; why not resign myself at once to wait for the substance, of which this is but the shadow!"

And he lay scarcely breathing, looking up at the unmoving branches setting with their darkness the pearls of the sky.

"Is not peace enough?" he thought. "Is not love enough? Can I not be reconciled, like a woman? Is not that salvation, and happiness? What is all the rest, but 'sound and fury, signifying nothing?'"

And as though afraid to lose his hold of that thought, he got up and hurried from the grove.

The whole wide landscape of field and wood, cut by the pale roads, was glimmering under the afternoon sun. Here was no wild, wind-swept land, gleaming red and purple, and guarded by the grey rocks; no home of the winds, and the wild gods. It was all serene and silver-golden. In place of the shrill wailing pipe of the hunting buzzard-hawks half lost up in the wind, invisible larks were letting fall hymns to tranquillity; and even the sea—no adventuring spirit sweeping the shore with its wing—seemed to lie resting by the side of the land.

CHAPTER XV

When on the afternoon of that same day Miltoun did not come, all the chilly doubts which his presence alone kept away, crowded thick and fast into the mind of one only too prone to distrust her own happiness. It could not last—how could it?

His nature and her own were so far apart! Even in that giving of herself which had been such happiness, she had yet doubted; for there was so much in him that was to her mysterious. All that he loved in poetry and nature, had in it something craggy and culminating. The soft and fiery, the subtle and harmonious, seemed to leave him cold. He had no particular love for all those simple natural

things, birds, bees, animals, trees, and flowers, that seemed to her precious and divine.

Though it was not yet four o'clock she was already beginning to droop like a flower that wants water. But she sat down to her piano, resolutely, till tea came; playing on and on with a spirit only half present, the other half of her wandering in the Town, seeking for Miltoun. After tea she tried first to read, then to sew, and once more came back to her piano. The clock struck six; and as if its last stroke had broken the armour of her mind, she felt suddenly sick with anxiety. Why was he so long? But she kept on playing, turning the pages without taking in the notes, haunted by the idea that he might again have fallen ill. Should she telegraph? What good, when she could not tell in the least where he might be? And all the unreasoning terror of not knowing where the loved one is, beset her so that her hands, in sheer numbness, dropped from the keys. Unable to keep still, now, she wandered from window to door, out into the little hall, and back hastily to the window. Over her anxiety brooded a darkness, compounded of vague growing fears. What if it were the end? What if he had chosen this as the most merciful way of leaving her? But surely he would never be so cruel! Close on the heels of this too painful thought came reaction; and she told herself that she was a fool. He was at the House; something quite ordinary was keeping him. It was absurd to be anxious! She would have to get used to this now. To be a drag on him would be dreadful. Sooner than that she would rather—yes—rather he never came back! And she took up her book, determined to read quietly till he came. But the moment she sat down her fears returned with redoubled force—the cold sickly horrible feeling of uncertainty, of the knowledge that she could do nothing but wait till she was relieved by something over which she had no control. And in the superstition that to stay there in the window where she could see him come, was keeping him from her, she went into her bedroom. From there she could watch the sunset clouds wine-dark over the river. A little talking wind shivered along the houses; the dusk began creeping in. She would not turn on the light, unwilling to admit that it was really getting late, but began to change her dress, lingering desperately over every little detail of her toilette, deriving therefrom a faint, mysterious comfort, trying to make herself feel beautiful. From sheer dread of going back before he came, she let her hair fall, though it was quite smooth and tidy, and began brushing it. Suddenly she thought with horror of her efforts at adornment—by specially preparing for him, she must seem presumptuous to Fate. At any little sound she stopped and stood listening—save for her hair and eyes, as white from head to foot as a double narcissus flower in the dusk, bending towards some faint tune played to it somewhere oft in the fields. But all those little sounds ceased, one after another—they had meant nothing; and each time, her spirit returning—within the pale walls of the room, began once more to inhabit her lingering fingers. During that hour in her bedroom she lived through years. It was dark when she left it.

CHAPTER XVI

When Miltoun at last came it was past nine o'clock.

Silent, but quivering all over; she clung to him in the hall; and this passion of emotion, without sound to give it substance, affected him profoundly. How terribly sensitive and tender she was! She seemed to have no armour. But though so stirred by her emotion, he was none the less exasperated. She incarnated at that moment the life to which he must now resign himself—a life of unending tenderness, consideration, and passivity.

For a long time he could not bring himself to speak of his decision. Every look of her eyes, every movement of her body, seemed pleading with him to keep silence. But in Miltoun's character there was an element of rigidity, which never suffered him to diverge from an objective once determined.

When he had finished telling her, she only said:

"Why can't we go on in secret?"

And he felt with a sort of horror that he must begin his struggle over again. He got up, and threw open the window. The sky was dark above the river; the wind had risen. That restless murmur, and the width of the night with its scattered stars, seemed to come rushing at his face. He withdrew from it, and leaning on the sill looked down at her. What flower-like delicacy she had! There flashed across him the memory of a drooping blossom, which, in the Spring, he had seen her throw into the flames; with the words: "I can't bear flowers to fade, I always want to burn them." He could see again those waxen petals yield to the fierce clutch of the little red creeping sparks, and the slender stalk quivering, and glowing, and writhing to blackness like a live thing. And, distraught, he began:

"I can't live a lie. What right have I to lead, if I can't follow? I'm not like our friend Courtier who believes in Liberty. I never have, I never shall. Liberty? What is Liberty? But only those who conform to authority have the right to wield authority. A man is a churl who enforces laws, when he himself has not the strength to observe them. I will not be one of whom it can be said: 'He can rule others, himself —!'"

"No one will know."

Miltoun turned away.

"I shall know," he said; but he saw clearly that she did not understand him. Her face had a strange, brooding, shut-away look, as though he had frightened her. And the thought that she could not understand, angered him.

He said, stubbornly: "No, I can't remain in public life."

"But what has it to do with politics? It's such a little thing."

"If it had been a little thing to me, should I have left you at Monkland, and spent those five weeks in purgatory before my illness? A little thing!"

She exclaimed with sudden fire:

"Circumstances aye the little thing; it's love that's the great thing."

Miltoun stared at her, for the first time understanding that she had a philosophy as deep and stubborn as his own. But he answered cruelly:

"Well! the great thing has conquered me!"

And then he saw her looking at him, as if, seeing into the recesses of his soul, she had made some ghastly discovery. The look was so mournful, so uncannily intent that he turned away from it.

"Perhaps it is a little thing," he muttered; "I don't know. I can't see my way. I've lost my bearings; I must find them again before I can do anything."

But as if she had not heard, or not taken in the sense of his words, she said again:

"Oh! don't let us alter anything; I won't ever want what you can't give."

And this stubbornness, when he was doing the very thing that would give him to her utterly, seemed to him unreasonable.

"I've had it out with myself," he said. "Don't let's talk about it any more."

Again, with a sort of dry anguish, she murmured:

"No, no! Let us go on as we are!"

Feeling that he had borne all he could, Miltoun put his hands on her shoulders, and said: "That's enough!"

Then, in sudden remorse, he lifted her, and clasped her to him.

But she stood inert in his arms, her eyes closed, not returning his kisses.

CHAPTER XVII

On the last day before Parliament rose, Lord Valleys, with a light heart, mounted his horse for a gallop in the Row. Though she was a blood mare he rode her with a plain snaffle, having the horsemanship of one who has hunted from the age of seven, and been for twenty years a Colonel of Yeomanry. Greeting affably everyone he knew, he maintained a frank demeanour on all subjects, especially of Government policy, secretly enjoying the surmises and prognostications, so pleasantly wide of the mark, and the way questions and hints perished before his sphinx-like candour. He spoke cheerily too of Miltoun, who was 'all right again,' and 'burning for the fray' when the House met again in the autumn. And he

chaffed Lord Malvezin about his wife. If anything—he said—could make Bertie take an interest in politics, it would be she. He had two capital gallops, being well known to the police: The day was bright, and he was sorry to turn home. Falling in with Harbinger, he asked him to come back to lunch. There had seemed something different lately, an almost morose look, about young Harbinger; and his wife's disquieting words about Barbara came back to Lord Valleys with a shock. He had seen little of the child lately, and in the general clearing up of this time of year had forgotten all about the matter.

Agatha, who was still staying at Valleys House with little Ann, waiting to travel up to Scotland with her mother, was out, and there was no one at lunch except Lady Valleys and Barbara herself. Conversation flagged; for the young people were extremely silent, Lady Valleys was considering the draft of a report which had to be settled before she left, and Lord Valleys himself was rather carefully watching his daughter. The news that Lord Miltoun was in the study came as a surprise, and somewhat of a relief to all. To an exhortation to luring him in to lunch; the servant replied that Lord Miltoun had lunched, and would wait.

"Does he know there's no one here?"

"Yes, my lady."

Lady Valleys pushed back her plate, and rose:

"Oh, well!" she said, "I've finished."

Lord Valleys also got up, and they went out together, leaving Barbara, who had risen, looking doubtfully at the door.

Lord Valleys had recently been told of the nursing episode, and had received the news with the dubious air of one hearing something about an eccentric person, which, heard about anyone else, could have had but one significance. If Eustace had been a normal young man his father would have shrugged his shoulder's, and thought: "Oh, well! There it is!" As it was, he had literally not known what to think.

And now, crossing the saloon which intervened between the dining-room and the study, he said to his wife uneasily:

"Is it this woman again, Gertrude—or what?"

Lady Valleys answered with a shrug:

"Goodness knows, my dear."

Miltoun was standing in the embrasure of a window above the terrace. He looked well, and his greeting was the same as usual.

"Well, my dear fellow," said Lord Valleys, "you're all right again evidently—what's the news?"

"Only that I've decided to resign my seat."

Lord Valleys stared.

"What on earth for?"

But Lady Valleys, with the greater quickness of women, divining already something of the reason, had flushed a deep pink.

"Nonsense, my dear," she said; "it can't possibly be necessary, even if——" Recovering herself, she added dryly:

"Give us some reason."

"The reason is simply that I've joined my life to Mrs. Noel's, and I can't go on as I am, living a lie. If it were known I should obviously have to resign at once."

"Good God!" exclaimed Lord Valleys.

Lady Valleys made a rapid movement. In the face of what she felt to be a really serious crisis between these two utterly different creatures of the other sex, her husband and her son, she had dropped her mask and become a genuine woman. Unconsciously both men felt this change, and in speaking, turned towards her.

"I can't argue it," said Miltoun; "I consider myself bound in honour."

"And then?" she asked.

Lord Valleys, with a note of real feeling, interjected:

"By Heaven! I did think you put your country above your private affairs."

"Geoff!" said Lady Valleys.

But Lord Valleys went on:

"No, Eustace, I'm out of touch with your view of things altogether. I don't even begin to understand it."

"That is true," said Miltoun.

"Listen to me, both of you!" said Lady Valleys: "You two are altogether different; and you must not quarrel. I won't have that. Now, Eustace, you are our son, and you have got to be kind and considerate. Sit down, and let's talk it over."

And motioning her husband to a chair, she sat down in the embrasure of a window. Miltoun remained standing. Visited by a sudden dread, Lady Valleys said:

"Is it—you've not—there isn't going to be a scandal?"

Miltoun smiled grimly.

"I shall tell this man, of course, but you may make your minds easy, I imagine; I understand that his view of marriage does not permit of divorce in any case whatever."

Lady Valleys sighed with an utter and undisguised relief.

"Well, then, my dear boy," she began, "even if you do feel you must tell him, there is surely no reason why it should not otherwise be kept secret."

Lord Valleys interrupted her:

"I should be glad if you would point out the connection between your honour and the resignation of your seat," he said stiffly.

Miltoun shook his head.

"If you don't see already, it would be useless."

"I do not see. The whole matter is—is unfortunate, but to give up your work, so long as there is no absolute necessity, seems to me far-fetched and absurd. How many men are, there into whose lives there has not entered some such relation at one time or another? This idea would disqualify half the nation." His eyes seemed in that crisis both to consult and to avoid his wife's, as though he were at once asking her endorsement of his point of view, and observing the proprieties. And for a moment in the midst of her anxiety, her sense of humour got the better of Lady Valleys. It was so funny that Geoff should have to give himself away; she could not for the life of her help fixing him with her eyes.

"My dear," she murmured, "you underestimate three-quarters, at the very least!"

But Lord Valleys, confronted with danger, was growing steadier.

"It passes my comprehension;" he said, "why you should want to mix up sex and politics at all."

Miltoun's answer came very slowly, as if the confession were hurting his lips:

"There is—forgive me for using the word—such a thing as one's religion. I don't happen to regard life as divided into public and private departments. My vision is gone—broken—I can see no object before me now in public life—no goal—no certainty."

Lady Valleys caught his hand:

"Oh! my dear," she said, "that's too dreadfully puritanical!" But at Miltoun's queer smile, she added hastily: "Logical—I mean."

"Consult your common sense, Eustace, for goodness' sake," broke in Lord Valleys. "Isn't it your simple duty to put your scruples in your pocket, and do the best you can for your country with the powers that have been given you?"

"I have no common sense."

"In that case, of course, it may be just as well that you should leave public life."

Miltoun bowed.

"Nonsense!" cried Lady Valleys. "You don't understand, Geoffrey. I ask you again, Eustace, what will you do afterwards?"

"I don't know."

"You will eat your heart out."

"Quite possibly."

"If you can't come to a reasonable arrangement with your conscience," again broke in Lord Valleys, "for Heaven's sake give her up, like a man, and cut all these knots."

"I beg your pardon, sir!" said Miltoun icily.

Lady Valleys laid her hand on his arm. "You must allow us a little logic too, my dear. You don't seriously imagine that she would wish you to throw away your life for her? I'm not such a bad judge of character as that."

She stopped before the expression on Miltoun's face.

"You go too fast," he said; "I may become a free spirit yet."

To this saying, which seemed to her cryptic and sinister, Lady Valleys did not know what to answer.

"If you feel, as you say," Lord Valleys began once more, "that the bottom has been knocked out of things for you by this—this affair, don't, for goodness' sake, do anything in a hurry. Wait! Go abroad! Get your balance back! You'll find the thing settle itself in a few months. Don't precipitate matters; you can make your health an excuse to miss the Autumn session."

Lady Valleys chimed in eagerly

"You really are seeing the thing out of all proportion. What is a love-affair. My dear boy, do you suppose for a moment anyone would think the worse of you, even if they knew? And really not a soul need know."

"It has not occurred to me to consider what they would think."

"Then," cried Lady Valleys, nettled, "it's simply your own pride."

"You have said."

Lord Valleys, who had turned away, spoke in an almost tragic voice

"I did not think that on a point of honour I should differ from my son."

Catching at the word honour, Lady Valleys cried suddenly:

"Eustace, promise me, before you do anything, to consult your Uncle Dennis."

Miltoun smiled.

"This becomes comic," he said.

At that word, which indeed seemed to them quite wanton, Lord and Lady Valleys turned on their son, and the three stood staring, perfectly silent. A little noise from the doorway interrupted them.

CHAPTER XVIII

Left by her father and mother to the further entertainment of Harbinger,

Barbara had said:

"Let's have coffee in here," and passed into the withdrawing room.

Except for that one evening, when together by the sea wall they stood contemplating the populace, she had not been alone with him since he kissed her under the shelter of the box hedge. And now, after the first moment, she looked at him calmly, though in her breast there was a fluttering, as if an imprisoned bird were struggling ever so feebly against that soft and solid cage. Her last jangled talk with Courtier had left an ache in her heart. Besides, did she not know all that Harbinger could give her?

Like a nymph pursued by a faun who held dominion over the groves, she, fugitive, kept looking back. There was nothing in that fair wood of his with which she was not familiar, no thicket she had not travelled, no stream she had not crossed, no kiss she could not return. His was a discovered land, in which, as of right, she would reign. She had nothing to hope from him but power, and solid pleasure. Her eyes said: How am I to know whether I shall not want more than you; feel suffocated in your arms; be surfeited by all that you will bring me? Have I not already got all that?

She knew, from his downcast gloomy face, how cruel she seemed, and was sorry. She wanted to be good to him, and said almost shyly:

"Are you angry with me, Claud?"

Harbinger looked up.

"What makes you so cruel?"

"I am not cruel."

"You are. Where is your heart?"

"Here!" said Barbara, touching her breast.

"Ah!" muttered Harbinger; "I'm not joking."

She said gently:

"Is it as bad as that, my dear?"

But the softness of her voice seemed to fan the smouldering fires in him.

"There's something behind all this," he stammered, "you've no right to make a fool of me!"

"And what is the something, please?"

"That's for you to say. But I'm not blind. What about this fellow Courtier?"

At that moment there was revealed to Barbara a new acquaintance—the male proper. No, to live with him would not be quite lacking in adventure!

His face had darkened; his eyes were dilated, his whole figure seemed to have grown. She suddenly noticed the hair which covered his clenched fists. All his suavity had left him. He came very close.

How long that look between them lasted, and of all there was in it, she had no clear knowledge; thought after thought, wave after wave of feeling, rushed through her. Revolt and attraction, contempt and admiration, queer sensations of disgust and pleasure, all mingled—as on a May day one may see the hail fall, and the sun suddenly burn through and steam from the grass.

Then he said hoarsely:

"Oh! Babs, you madden me so!"

Smoothing her lips, as if to regain control of them, she answered:

"Yes, I think I have had enough," and went out into her father's study.

The sight of Lord and Lady Valleys so intently staring at Miltoun restored her self-possession.

It struck her as slightly comic, not knowing that the little scene was the outcome of that word. In truth, the contrast between Miltoun and his parents at this moment was almost ludicrous.

Lady Valleys was the first to speak.

"Better comic than romantic. I suppose Barbara may know, considering her contribution to this matter. Your brother is resigning his seat, my dear; his conscience will not permit him to retain it, under certain circumstances that have arisen."

"Oh!" cried Barbara: "but surely——"

"The matter has been argued, Babs," Lord Valleys said shortly; "unless you have some better reason to advance than those of ordinary common sense, public spirit, and consideration for one's family, it will hardly be worth your while to reopen the discussion."

Barbara looked up at Miltoun, whose face, all but the eyes, was like a mask.

"Oh, Eusty!" she said, "you're not going to spoil your life like this! Just think how I shall feel."

Miltoun answered stonily:

"You did what you thought right; as I am doing."

"Does she want you to?"

"No."

"There is, I should imagine," put in Lord Valleys, "not a solitary creature in the whole world except your brother himself who would wish for this consummation. But with him such a consideration does not weigh!"

"Oh!" sighed Barbara; "think of Granny!"

"I prefer not to think of her," murmured Lady Valleys.

"She's so wrapped up in you, Eusty. She always has believed in you intensely."

Miltoun sighed. And, encouraged by that sound, Barbara went closer.

It was plain enough that, behind his impassivity, a desperate struggle was going on in Miltoun. He spoke at last:

"If I have not already yielded to one who is naturally more to me than anything, when she begged and entreated, it is because I feel this in a way you don't realize. I apologize for using the word comic just now, I should have said tragic. I'll enlighten Uncle Dennis, if that will comfort you; but this is not exactly a matter for anyone, except myself." And, without another look or word, he went out.

As the door closed, Barbara ran towards it; and, with a motion strangely like the wringing of hands, said:

"Oh, dear! Oh! dear!" Then, turning away to a bookcase, she began to cry.

This ebullition of feeling, surpassing even their own, came as a real shock to Lady and Lord Valleys, ignorant of how strung-up she had been before she entered the room. They had not seen Barbara cry since she was a tiny girl. And in face of her emotion any animus they might have shown her for having thrown Miltoun into Mrs. Noel's arms, now melted away. Lord Valleys, especially moved, went up to his daughter, and stood with her in that dark corner, saying nothing, but gently stroking her hand. Lady Valleys, who herself felt very much inclined to cry, went out of sight into the embrasure of the window.

Barbara's sobbing was soon subdued.

"It's his face," she said: "And why? Why? It's so unnecessary!"

Lord Valleys, continually twisting his moustache, muttered:

"Exactly! He makes things for himself!"

"Yes," murmured Lady Valleys from the window, "he was always uncomfortable, like that. I remember him as a baby. Bertie never was."

And then the silence was only broken by the little angry sounds of Barbara blowing her nose.

"I shall go and see mother," said Lady Valleys, suddenly: "The boy's whole life may be ruined if we can't stop this. Are you coming, child?"

But Barbara refused.

She went to her room, instead. This crisis in Miltoun's life had strangely shaken her. It was as if Fate had suddenly revealed all that any step out of the beaten path might lead to, had brought her sharply up against herself. To wing out into the blue! See what it meant! If Miltoun kept to his resolve, and gave up public life, he was lost! And she herself! The fascination of Courtier's chivalrous manner, of a sort of innate gallantry, suggesting the quest of everlasting danger—was it not rather absurd? And—was she fascinated? Was it not simply that she liked the feeling of fascinating him? Through the maze of these thoughts, darted the memory of Harbinger's face close to her own, his clenched hands, the swift revelation of his dangerous masculinity. It was all a nightmare of scaring queer sensations, of things that could never be settled. She was stirred for once out of all her normal conquering philosophy. Her thoughts flew back to Miltoun. That which she had seen in their faces, then, had come to pass! And picturing Agatha's horror, when she came to hear of it, Barbara could not help a smile. Poor Eustace! Why did he take things so hardly? If he really carried out his resolve—and he never changed his mind—it would be tragic! It would mean the end of everything for him!

Perhaps now he would get tired of Mrs. Noel. But she was not the sort of woman a man would get tired of. Even Barbara in her inexperience felt that. She would always be too delicately careful never to cloy him, never to exact anything from him, or let him feel that he was bound to her by so much as a hair. Ah! why couldn't they go on as if nothing had happened? Could nobody persuade him? She thought again of Courtier. If he, who knew them both, and was so fond of Mrs. Noel, would talk to Miltoun, about the right to be happy, the right to revolt? Eustace ought to revolt! It was his duty. She sat down to write; then, putting on her hat, took the note and slipped downstairs.

CHAPTER XIX

The flowers of summer in the great glass house at Ravensham were keeping the last afternoon-watch when Clifton summoned Lady Casterley with the words:

"Lady Valleys in the white room."

Since the news of Miltoun's illness, and of Mrs. Noel's nursing, the little old lady had possessed her soul in patience; often, it is true, afflicted with poignant misgivings as to this new influence in the life of her favourite, affected too by a sort of jealousy, not to be admitted, even in her prayers, which, though regular enough, were perhaps somewhat formal. Having small liking now for leaving home, even for Catton, her country place, she was still at Ravensham, where Lord Dennis had come up to stay with her as soon as Miltoun had left Sea House. But Lady Casterley was never very dependent on company. She retained unimpaired her intense interest in politics, and still corresponded freely with prominent men. Of late, too, a slight revival of the June war scare had made its mark on her in a certain rejuvenescence, which always accompanied her contemplation of national crises, even when such were a little in the air. At blast of trumpet her spirit still leaped forward, unsheathed its sword, and stood at the salute. At such times, she rose earlier, went to bed later, was far less susceptible to draughts, and refused with asperity any food between meals. She wrote too with her own hand letters which she would otherwise have dictated to her secretary. Unfortunately the scare had died down again almost at once; and the passing of danger always left her rather irritable. Lady Valleys' visit came as a timely consolation.

She kissed her daughter critically; for there was that about her manner which she did not like.

"Yes, of course I am well!" she said. "Why didn't you bring Barbara?"

"She was tired!"

"H'm! Afraid of meeting me, since she committed that piece of folly over Eustace. You must be careful of that child, Gertrude, or she will be doing something silly herself. I don't like the way she keeps Claud Harbinger hanging in the wind."

Her daughter cut her short:

"There is bad news about Eustace."

Lady Casterley lost the little colour in her cheeks; lost, too, all her superfluity of irritable energy.

"Tell me, at once!"

Having heard, she said nothing; but Lady Valleys noticed with alarm that over her eyes had come suddenly the peculiar filminess of age.

"Well, what do you advise?" she asked.

Herself tired, and troubled, she was conscious of a quite unwonted feeling of discouragement before this silent little figure, in the silent white room. She had never before seen her mother look as if she heard Defeat passing on its dark wings. And moved by sudden tenderness for the little frail body that had borne her so long ago, she murmured almost with surprise:

"Mother, dear!"

"Yes," said Lady Casterley, as if speaking to herself, "the boy saves things up; he stores his feelings—they burst and sweep him away. First his passion; now his conscience. There are two men in him; but this will be the death of one of them." And suddenly turning on her daughter, she said:

"Did you ever hear about him at Oxford, Gertrude? He broke out once, and ate husks with the Gadarenes. You never knew. Of course—you never have known anything of him."

Resentment rose in Lady Valleys, that anyone should know her son better than herself; but she lost it again looking at the little figure, and said, sighing:

"Well?"

Lady Casterley murmured:

"Go away, child; I must think. You say he's to consult Dennis? Do you know her address? Ask Barbara when you get back and telephone it to me. And at her daughter's kiss, she added grimly:

"I shall live to see him in the saddle yet, though I am seventy-eight."

When the sound of her daughter's car had died away, she rang the bell.

"If Lady Valleys rings up, Clifton, don't take the message, but call me." And seeing that Clifton did not move she added sharply: "Well?"

"There is no bad news of his young lordship's health, I hope?"

"No."

"Forgive me, my lady, but I have had it on my mind for some time to ask you something."

And the old man raised his hand with a peculiar dignity, seeming to say: You will excuse me that for the moment I am a human being speaking to a human being.

"The matter of his attachment," he went on, "is known to me; it has given me acute anxiety, knowing his lordship as I do, and having heard him say something singular when he was here in July. I should be grateful if you would assure—me that there is to be no hitch in his career, my lady."

The expression on Lady Casterley's face was strangely compounded of surprise, kindness, defence, and impatience as with a child.

"Not if I can prevent it, Clifton," she said shortly; "in fact, you need not concern yourself."

Clifton bowed.

"Excuse me mentioning it, my lady;" a quiver ran over his face between its long white whiskers, "but his young lordship's career is more to me than my own."

When he had left her, Lady Casterley sat down in a little low chair—long she sat there by the empty hearth, till the daylight, was all gone.

CHAPTER XX

Not far from the dark-haloed indeterminate limbo where dwelt that bugbear of Charles Courtier, the great Half-Truth Authority, he himself had a couple of rooms at fifteen shillings a week. Their chief attraction was that the great Half-Truth Liberty had recommended them. They tied him to nothing, and were ever at his disposal when he was in London; for his landlady, though not bound by agreement so to do, let them in such a way, that she could turn anyone else out at a week's notice. She was a gentle soul, married to a socialistic plumber twenty years her senior. The worthy man had given her two little boys, and the three of them kept her in such permanent order that to be in the presence of Courtier was the greatest pleasure she knew. When he disappeared on one of his nomadic missions, explorations, or adventures, she enclosed the whole of his belongings in two tin trunks and placed them in a cupboard which smelled a little of mice. When he reappeared the trunks were reopened, and a powerful scent of dried rose-leaves would escape. For, recognizing the mortality of things human, she procured every summer from her sister, the wife of a market gardener, a consignment of this commodity, which she passionately sewed up in bags, and continued to deposit year by year, in Courtier's trunks.

This, and the way she made his toast—very crisp—and aired his linen—very dry, were practically the only things she could do for a man naturally inclined to independence, and accustomed from his manner of life to fend for himself.

At first signs of his departure she would go into some closet or other, away from the plumber and the two marks of his affection, and cry quietly; but never in Courtier's presence did she dream of manifesting grief—as soon weep in the presence of death or birth, or any other fundamental tragedy or joy. In face of the realities of life she had known from her youth up the value of the simple verb 'sto—stare-to stand fast.'

And to her Courtier was a reality, the chief reality of life, the focus of her aspiration, the morning and the evening star.

The request, then five days after his farewell visit to Mrs. Noel—for the elephant-hide trunk which accompanied his rovings, produced her habitual period of seclusion, followed by her habitual appearance in his sitting-room bearing a note, and some bags of dried rose—leaves on a tray. She found him in his shirt sleeves, packing.

"Well, Mrs. Benton; off again!"

Mrs. Benton, plaiting her hands, for she had not yet lost something of the look and manner of a little girl, answered in her flat, but serene voice:

"Yes, sir; and I hope you're not going anywhere very dangerous this time. I always think you go to such dangerous places."

"To Persia, Mrs. Benton, where the carpets come from."

"Oh! yes, sir. Your washing's just come home."

Her, apparently cast-down, eyes stored up a wealth of little details; the way his hair grew, the set of his back, the colour of his braces. But suddenly she said in a surprising voice:

"You haven't a photograph you could spare, sir, to leave behind? Mr. Benton was only saying to me yesterday, we've nothing to remember him by, in case he shouldn't come back."

"Here's an old one."

Mrs. Benton took the photograph.

"Oh!" she said; "you can see who it is." And holding it perhaps too tightly, for her fingers trembled, she added:

"A note, please, sir; and the messenger boy is waiting for—an answer."

While he read the note she noticed with concern how packing had brought the blood into his head....

When, in response to that note, Courtier entered the well-known confectioner's called Gustard's, it was still not quite tea-time, and there seemed to him at first no one in the room save three middle-aged women packing sweets; then in the corner he saw Barbara. The blood was no longer in his head; he

was pale, walking down that mahogany-coloured room impregnated with the scent of wedding-cake. Barbara, too, was pale.

So close to her that he could count her every eyelash, and inhale the scent of her hair and clothes to listen to her story of Miltoun, so hesitatingly, so wistfully told, seemed very like being kept waiting with the rope already round his neck, to hear about another person's toothache. He felt this to have been unnecessary on the part of Fate! And there came to him perversely the memory of that ride over the sun-warmed heather, when he had paraphrased the old Sicilian song: 'Here will I sit and sing.' He was a long way from singing now; nor was there love in his arms. There was instead a cup of tea; and in his nostrils the scent of cake, with now and then a whiff of orange-flower water.

"I see," he said, when she had finished telling him: "'Liberty's a glorious feast!' You want me to go to your brother, and quote Bums? You know, of course, that he regards me as dangerous."

"Yes; but he respects and likes you."

"And I respect and like him," answered Courtier.

One of the middle-aged females passed, carrying a large white card-board box; and the creaking of her stays broke the hush.

"You have been very sweet to me," said Barbara, suddenly.

Courtier's heart stirred, as if it were turning over within him; and gazing into his teacup, he answered

—
"All men are decent to the evening star. I will go at once and find your brother. When shall I bring you news?"

"To-morrow at five I'll be at home."

And repeating, "To-morrow at five," he rose.

Looking back from the door, he saw her face puzzled, rather reproachful, and went out gloomily. The scent of cake, and orange-flower water, the creaking of the female's stays, the colour of mahogany, still clung to his nose and ears, and eyes; but within him it was all dull baffled rage. Why had he not made the most of this unexpected chance; why had he not made desperate love to her? A conscientious ass! And yet—the whole thing was absurd! She was so young! God knew he would be glad to be out of it. If he stayed he was afraid that he would play the fool. But the memory of her words: "You have been very sweet to me!" would not leave him; nor the memory of her face, so puzzled, and reproachful. Yes, if he stayed he would play the fool! He would be asking her to marry a man double her age, of no position but that which he had carved for himself, and without a rap. And he would be asking her in such a way that she might possibly have some little difficulty in refusing. He would be letting himself go. And she was only twenty—for all her woman-of-the-world air, a child! No! He would be useful to her, if possible, this once, and then clear out!

CHAPTER XXI

When Miltoun left Valleys House he walked in the direction of Westminster. During the five days that he had been back in London he had not yet entered the House of Commons. After the seclusion of his illness, he still felt a yearning, almost painful, towards the movement and stir of the town. Everything he heard and saw made an intensely vivid impression. The lions in Trafalgar Square, the great buildings of Whitehall, filled him with a sort of exultation. He was like a man, who, after a long sea voyage, first catches sight of land, and stands straining his eyes, hardly breathing, taking in one by one the lost features of that face. He walked on to Westminster Bridge, and going to an embrasure in the very centre, looked back towards the towers.

It was said that the love of those towers passed into the blood. It was said that he who had sat beneath them could never again be quite the same. Miltoun knew that it was true—desperately true, of himself. In person he had sat there but three weeks, but in soul he seemed to have been sitting there hundreds of years. And now he would sit there no more! An almost frantic desire to free himself from this coil rose up within him. To be held a prisoner by that most secret of all his instincts, the instinct for authority! To be unable to wield authority because to wield authority was to insult authority. God! It

was hard! He turned his back on the towers; and sought distraction in the faces of the passers-by.

Each of these, he knew, had his struggle to keep self-respect! Or was it that they were unconscious of struggle or of self-respect, and just let things drift? They looked like that, most of them! And all his inherent contempt for the average or common welled up as he watched them. Yes, they looked like that! Ironically, the sight of those from whom he had desired the comfort of compromise, served instead to stimulate that part of him which refused to let him compromise. They looked soft, soggy, without pride or will, as though they knew that life was too much for them, and had shamefully accepted the fact. They so obviously needed to be told what they might do, and which way they should, go; they would accept orders as they accepted their work, or pleasures: And the thought that he was now debarred from the right to give them orders, rankled in him furiously. They, in their turn, glanced casually at his tall figure leaning against the parapet, not knowing how their fate was trembling in the balance. His thin, sallow face, and hungry eyes gave one or two of them perhaps a feeling of interest or discomfort; but to most he was assuredly no more than any other man or woman in the hurly-burly. That dark figure of conscious power struggling in the fetters of its own belief in power, was a piece of sculpture they had neither time nor wish to understand, having no taste for tragedy—for witnessing the human spirit driven to the wall.

It was five o'clock before Miltoun left the Bridge, and passed, like an exile, before the gates of Church and State, on his way to his uncle's Club. He stopped to telegraph to Audrey the time he would be coming to-morrow afternoon; and on leaving the Post-Office, noticed in the window of the adjoining shop some reproductions of old Italian masterpieces, amongst them one of Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus.' He had never seen that picture; and, remembering that she had told him it was her favourite, he stopped to look at it. Averagely well versed in such matters, as became one of his caste, Miltoun had not the power of letting a work of art insidiously steal the private self from his soul, and replace it with the self of all the world; and he examined this far-famed presentment of the heathen goddess with aloofness, even irritation. The drawing of the body seemed to him crude, the whole picture a little flat and Early; he did not like the figure of the Flora. The golden serenity, and tenderness, of which she had spoken, left him cold. Then he found himself looking at the face, and slowly, but with uncanny certainty, began to feel that he was looking at the face of Audrey herself. The hair was golden and different, the eyes grey and different, the mouth a little fuller; yet—it was her face; the same oval shape, the same far-apart, arched brows, the same strangely tender, elusive spirit. And, as though offended, he turned and walked on. In the window of that little shop was the effigy of her for whom he had bartered away his life—the incarnation of passive and entwining love, that gentle creature, who had given herself to him so utterly, for whom love, and the flowers, and trees, and birds, music, the sky, and the quick-flowing streams, were all-sufficing; and who, like the goddess in the picture, seemed wondering at her own existence. He had a sudden glimpse of understanding, strange indeed in one who had so little power of seeing into others' hearts: Ought she ever to have been born into a world like this? But the flash of insight yielded quickly to that sickening consciousness of his own position, which never left him now. Whatever else he did, he must get rid of that malaise! But what could he do in that coming life? Write books? What sort of books could he write? Only such as expressed his views of citizenship, his political and social beliefs. As well remain sitting and speaking beneath those towers! He could never join the happy band of artists, those soft and indeterminate spirits, for whom barriers had no meaning, content-to understand, interpret, and create. What should he be doing in that galley? The thought was inconceivable. A career at the Bar—yes, he might take that up; but to what end? To become a judge! As well continue to sit beneath those towers! Too late for diplomacy. Too late for the Army; besides, he had not the faintest taste for military glory. Bury himself in the country like Uncle Dennis, and administer one of his father's estates? It would be death. Go amongst the poor? For a moment he thought he had found a new vocation. But in what capacity—to order their lives, when he himself could not order his own; or, as a mere conduit pipe for money, when he believed that charity was rotting the nation to its core? At the head of every avenue stood an angel or devil with drawn sword. And then there came to him another thought. Since he was being cast forth from Church and State, could he not play the fallen spirit like a man—be Lucifer, and destroy! And instinctively he at once saw himself returning to those towers, and beneath them crossing the floor; joining the revolutionaries, the Radicals, the freethinkers, scourging his present Party, the party of authority and institutions. The idea struck him as supremely comic, and he laughed out loud in the street....

The Club which Lord Dennis frequented was in St. James's untouched by the tides of the waters of fashion—steadily swinging to its moorings in a quiet backwater, and Miltoun found his uncle in the library. He was reading a volume of Burton's travels, and drinking tea.

"Nobody comes here," he said, "so, in spite of that word on the door, we shall talk. Waiter, bring some more tea, please."

Impatiently, but with a sort of pity, Miltoun watched Lord Dennis's urbane movements, wherein old age was, pathetically, trying to make each little thing seem important, if only to the doer. Nothing his

great-uncle could say would outweigh the warning of his picturesque old figure! To be a bystander; to see it all go past you; to let your sword rust in its sheath, as this poor old fellow had done! The notion of explaining what he had come about was particularly hateful to Miltoun; but since he had given his word, he nerved himself with secret anger, and began:

"I promised my mother to ask you a question, Uncle Dennis. You know of my attachment, I believe?"

Lord Dennis nodded.

"Well, I have joined my life to this lady's. There will be no scandal, but I consider it my duty to resign my seat, and leave public life alone. Is that right or wrong according to, your view?"

Lord Dennis looked at his nephew in silence. A faint flush coloured his brown cheeks. He had the appearance of one travelling in mind over the past.

"Wrong, I think," he said, at last.

"Why, if I may ask?"

"I have not the pleasure of knowing this lady, and am therefore somewhat in the dark; but it appears to me that your decision is not fair to her."

"That is beyond me," said Miltoun.

Lord Dennis answered firmly:

"You have asked me a frank question, expecting a frank answer, I suppose?"

Miltoun nodded.

"Then, my dear, don't blame me if what I say is unpalatable."

"I shall not."

"Good! You say you are going to give up public life for the sake of your conscience. I should have no criticism to make if it stopped there."

He paused, and for quite a minute remained silent, evidently searching for words to express some intricate thread of thought.

"But it won't, Eustace; the public man in you is far stronger than the other. You want leadership more than you want love. Your sacrifice will kill your affection; what you imagine is your loss and hurt, will prove to be this lady's in the end."

Miltoun smiled.

Lord Dennis continued very dryly and with a touch of malice:

"You are not listening to me; but I can see very well that the process has begun already underneath. There's a curious streak of the Jesuit in you, Eustace. What you don't want to see, you won't look at."

"You advise me, then, to compromise?"

"On the contrary, I point out that you will be compromising if you try to keep both your conscience and your love. You will be seeking to have, it both ways."

"That is interesting."

"And you will find yourself having it neither," said Lord Dennis sharply.

Miltoun rose. "In other words, you, like the others, recommend me to desert this lady who loves me, and whom I love. And yet, Uncle, they say that in your own case——"

But Lord Dennis had risen, too, having lost all the appanage and manner of old age.

"Of my own case," he said bluntly, "we won't talk. I don't advise you to desert anyone; you quite mistake me. I advise you to know yourself. And I tell you my opinion of you—you were cut out by Nature for a statesman, not a lover! There's something dried-up in you, Eustace; I'm not sure there isn't something dried-up in all our caste. We've had to do with forms and ceremonies too long. We're not good at taking the lyrical point of view."

"Unfortunately," said Miltoun, "I cannot, to fit in with a theory of yours, commit a baseness."

Lord Dennis began pacing up and down. He was keeping his lips closed very tight.

"A man who gives advice," he said at last, "is always something of a fool. For all that, you have mistaken mine. I am not so presumptuous as to attempt to enter the inner chamber of your spirit. I have merely told you that, in my opinion, it would be more honest to yourself, and fairer to this lady, to compound with your conscience, and keep both your love and your public life, than to pretend that you were capable of sacrificing what I know is the stronger element in you for the sake of the weaker. You remember the saying, Democritus I think: 'each man's nature or character is his fate or God'. I recommend it to you."

For a full minute Miltoun stood without replying, then said:

"I am sorry to have troubled you, Uncle Dennis. A middle policy is no use to me. Good-bye!" And without shaking hands, he went out.

CHAPTER XXII

In the hall someone rose from a sofa, and came towards him. It was Courtier.

"Run you to earth at last," he said; "I wish you'd come and dine with me. I'm leaving England to-morrow night, and there are things I want to say."

There passed through Miltoun's mind the rapid thought: 'Does he know?' He assented, however, and they went out together.

"It's difficult to find a quiet place," said Courtier; "but this might do."

The place chosen was a little hostel, frequented by racing men, and famed for the excellence of its steaks. And as they sat down opposite each other in the almost empty room, Miltoun thought: Yes, he does know! Can I stand any more of this? He waited almost savagely for the attack he felt was coming.

"So you are going to give up your seat?" said Courtier.

Miltoun looked at him for some seconds, before replying.

"From what town-crier did you hear that?"

But there was that in Courtier's face which checked his anger; its friendliness was transparent.

"I am about her only friend," Courtier proceeded earnestly; "and this is my last chance—to say nothing of my feeling towards you, which, believe me, is very cordial."

"Go on, then," Miltoun muttered.

"Forgive me for putting it bluntly. Have you considered what her position was before she met you?"

Miltoun felt the blood rushing to his face, but he sat still, clenching his nails into the palms of his hands.

"Yes, yes," said Courtier, "but that attitude of mind—you used to have it yourself—which decrees either living death, or spiritual adultery to women, makes my blood boil. You can't deny that those were the alternatives, and I say you had the right fundamentally to protest against them, not only in words but deeds. You did protest, I know; but this present decision of yours is a climb down, as much as to say that your protest was wrong."

Miltoun rose from his seat. "I cannot discuss this," he said; "I cannot."

"For her sake, you must. If you give up your public work, you'll spoil her life a second time."

Miltoun again sat down. At the word 'must' a steely feeling had come to his aid; his eyes began to resemble the old Cardinal's. "Your nature and mine, Courtier," he said, "are too far apart; we shall never understand each other."

"Never mind that," answered Courtier. "Admitting those two alternatives to be horrible, which you

never would have done unless the facts had been brought home to you personally—"

"That," said Miltoun icily, "I deny your right to say."

"Anyway, you do admit them—if you believe you had not the right to rescue her, on what principle do you base that belief?"

Miltoun placed his elbow on the table, and leaning his chin on his hand, regarded the champion of lost causes without speaking. There was such a turmoil going on within him that with difficulty he could force his lips to obey him.

"By what right do you ask me that?" he said at last. He saw Courtier's face grow scarlet, and his fingers twisting furiously at those flame-like moustaches; but his answer was as steadily ironical as usual.

"Well, I can hardly sit still, my last evening in England, without lifting a finger, while you immolate a woman to whom I feel like a brother. I'll tell you what your principle is: Authority, unjust or just, desirable or undesirable, must be implicitly obeyed. To break a law, no matter on what provocation, or for whose sake, is to break the commandment"

"Don't hesitate—say, of God."

"Of an infallible fixed Power. Is that a true definition of your principle?"

"Yes," said Miltoun, between his teeth, "I think so."

"Exceptions prove the rule."

"Hard cases make bad law."

Courtier smiled: "I knew you were coming out with that. I deny that they do with this law, which is altogether behind the times. You had the right to rescue this woman."

"No, Courtier, if we must fight, let us fight on the naked facts. I have not rescued anyone. I have merely stolen sooner than starve. That is why I cannot go on pretending to be a pattern. If it were known, I could not retain my seat an hour; I can't take advantage of an accidental secrecy. Could you?"

Courtier was silent; and with his eyes Miltoun pressed on him, as though he would despatch him with that glance.

"I could," said Courtier at last. "When this law, by enforcing spiritual adultery on those who have come to hate their mates, destroys the sanctity of the married state—the very sanctity it professes to uphold, you must expect to have it broken by reasoning men and women without their feeling shame, or losing self-respect."

In Miltoun there was rising that vast and subtle passion for dialectic combat, which was of his very fibre. He had almost lost the feeling that this was his own future being discussed. He saw before him in this sanguine man, whose voice and eyes had such a white-hot sound and look, the incarnation of all that he temperamentally opposed.

"That," he said, "is devil's advocacy. I admit no individual as judge in his own case."

"Ah! Now we're coming to it. By the way, shall we get out of this heat?"

They were no sooner in the cooler street, than the voice of Courtier began again:

"Distrust of human nature, fear—it's the whole basis of action for men of your stamp. You deny the right of the individual to judge, because you've no faith in the essential goodness of men; at heart you believe them bad. You give them no freedom, you allow them no consent, because you believe that their decisions would move downwards, and not upwards. Well, it's the whole difference between the aristocratic and the democratic view of life. As you once told me, you hate and fear the crowd."

Miltoun eyed that steady sanguine face askance:

"Yes," he said, "I do believe that men are raised in spite of themselves."

"You're honest. By whom?"

Again Miltoun felt rising within him a sort of fury. Once for all he would slay this red-haired rebel; he answered with almost savage irony:

"Strangely enough, by that Being to mention whom you object—working through the medium of the best."

"High-Priest! Look at that girl slinking along there, with her eye on us; suppose, instead of withdrawing your garment, you went over and talked to her, got her to tell you what she really felt and thought, you'd find things that would astonish you. At bottom, mankind is splendid. And they're raised, sir, by the aspiration that's in all of them. Haven't you ever noticed that public sentiment is always in advance of the Law?"

"And you," said Miltoun, "are the man who is never on the side of the majority?"

The champion of lost causes uttered a short laugh.

"Not so logical as all that," he answered; "the wind still blows; and Life's not a set of rules hung up in an office. Let's see, where are we?" They had been brought to a stand-still by a group on the pavement in front of the Queen's Hall: "Shall we go in, and hear some music, and cool our tongues?"

Miltoun nodded, and they went in.

The great lighted hall, filled with the faint bluefish vapour from hundreds of little rolls of tobacco leaf, was crowded from floor to ceiling.

Taking his stand among the straw-hatted throng, Miltoun heard that steady ironical voice behind him:

"Profanum vulgus! Come to listen to the finest piece of music ever written! Folk whom you wouldn't trust a yard to know what was good for them! Deplorable sight, isn't it?"

He made no answer. The first slow notes of the seventh Symphony of Beethoven had begun to steal forth across the bank of flowers; and, save for the steady rising of that bluefish vapour, as it were incense burnt to the god of melody, the crowd had become deathly still, as though one mind, one spirit, possessed each pale face inclined towards that music rising and falling like the sighing of the winds, that welcome from death the freed spirits of the beautiful.

When the last notes had died away, he turned and walked out.

"Well," said the voice behind him, "hasn't that shown you how things swell and grow; how splendid the world is?"

Miltoun smiled.

"It has shown me how beautiful the world can be made by a great man."

And suddenly, as if the music had loosened some band within him, he began to pour forth words:

"Look at the crowd in this street, Courtier, which of all crowds in the whole world can best afford to be left to itself; secure from pestilence, earthquake, cyclone, drought, from extremes of heat and cold, in the heart of the greatest and safest city in the world; and yet-see the figure of that policeman! Running through all the good behaviour of this crowd, however safe and free it looks, there is, there always must be, a central force holding it together. Where does that central force come from? From the crowd itself, you say. I answer: No. Look back at the origin of human States. From the beginnings of things, the best man has been the unconscious medium of authority, of the controlling principle, of the divine force; he felt that power within him—physical, at first—he used it to take the lead, he has held the lead ever since, he must always hold it. All your processes of election, your so-called democratic apparatus, are only a blind to the inquiring, a sop to the hungry, a salve to the pride of the rebellious. They are merely surface machinery; they cannot prevent the best man from coming to the top; for the best man stands nearest to the Deity, and is the first to receive the waves that come from Him. I'm not speaking of heredity. The best man is not necessarily born in my class, and I, at all events, do not believe he is any more frequent there than in other classes."

He stopped as suddenly as he had begun.

"You needn't be afraid," answered Courtier, "that I take you for an average specimen. You're at one end, and I at the other, and we probably both miss the golden mark. But the world is not ruled by power, and the fear which power produces, as you think, it's ruled by love. Society is held together by the natural decency in man, by fellow-feeling. The democratic principle, which you despise, at root means nothing at all but that. Man left to himself is on the upward lay. If it weren't so, do you imagine for a moment your 'boys in blue' could keep order? A man knows unconsciously what he can and what he can't do, without losing his self-respect. He sucks that knowledge in with every breath. Laws and authority are not the be-all and end-all, they are conveniences, machinery, conduit pipes, main roads.

They're not of the structure of the building—they're only scaffolding."

Miltoun lunged out with the retort

"Without which no building could be built."

Courtier parried.

"That's rather different, my friend, from identifying them with the building. They are things to be taken down as fast as ever they can be cleared away, to make room for an edifice that begins on earth, not in the sky. All the scaffolding of law is merely there to save time, to prevent the temple, as it mounts, from losing its way, and straying out of form."

"No," said Miltoun, "no! The scaffolding, as you call it, is the material projection of the architect's conception, without which the temple does not and cannot rise; and the architect is God, working through the minds and spirits most akin to Himself."

"We are now at the bed-rock," cried Courtier, "your God is outside this world. Mine within it."

"And never the twain shall meet!"

In the silence that followed Miltoun saw that they were in Leicester Square, all quiet as yet before the theatres had disgorged; quiet yet waiting, with the lights, like yellow stars low-driven from the dark heavens, clinging to the white shapes of music-halls and cafes, and a sort of flying glamour blanching the still foliage of the plane trees.

"A 'whitely wanton'—this Square!" said Courtier: "Alive as a face; no end to its queer beauty! And, by Jove, if you went deep enough, you'd find goodness even here."

"And you'd ignore the vice," Miltoun answered.

He felt weary all of a sudden, anxious to get to his rooms, unwilling to continue this battle of words, that brought him no nearer to relief. It was with strange lassitude that he heard the voice still speaking:

"We must make a night of it, since to-morrow we die.... You would curb licence from without—I from within. When I get up and when I go to bed, when I draw a breath, see a face, or a flower, or a tree—if I didn't feel that I was looking on the Deity, I believe I should quit this palace of varieties, from sheer boredom. You, I understand, can't look on your God, unless you withdraw into some high place. Isn't it a bit lonely there?"

"There are worse things than loneliness." And they walked on, in silence; till suddenly Miltoun broke out:

"You talk of tyranny! What tyranny could equal this tyranny of your freedom? What tyranny in the world like that of this 'free' vulgar, narrow street, with its hundred journals teeming like ants' nests, to produce-what? In the entrails of that creature of your freedom, Courtier, there is room neither for exaltation, discipline, nor sacrifice; there is room only for commerce, and licence."

There was no answer for a moment; and from those tall houses, whose lighted windows he had apostrophized, Miltoun turned away towards the river. "No," said the voice beside him, "for all its faults, the wind blows in that street, and there's a chance for everything. By God, I would rather see a few stars struggle out in a black sky than any of your perfect artificial lighting."

And suddenly it seemed to Miltoun that he could never free himself from the echoes of that voice—it was not worth while to try. "We are repeating ourselves," he said, dryly.

The river's black water was making stilly, slow recessional under a half-moon. Beneath the cloak of night the chaos on the far bank, the forms of cranes, high buildings, jetties, the bodies of the sleeping barges, a—million queer dark shapes, were invested with emotion. All was religious out there, all beautiful, all strange. And over this great quiet friend of man, lamps—those humble flowers of night, were throwing down the faint continual glamour of fallen petals; and a sweet-scented wind stole along from the West, very slow as yet, bringing in advance the tremor and perfume of the innumerable trees and fields which the river had loved as she came by.

A murmur that was no true sound, but like the whisper of a heart to a heart, accompanied this voyage of the dark water.

Then a small blunt skiff—manned by two rowers came by under the wall, with the thudding and the creak of oars.

"So 'To-morrow we die'?" said Miltoun: "You mean, I suppose, that 'public life' is the breath of my nostrils, and I must die, because I give it up?"

Courtier nodded.

"Am I right in thinking that it was my young sister who sent you on this crusade?"

Courtier did not answer.

"And so," Miltoun went on, looking him through and through; "to-morrow is to be your last day, too? Well, you're right to go. She is not an ugly duckling, who can live out of the social pond; she'll always want her native element. And now, we'll say goodbye! Whatever happens to us both, I shall remember this evening." Smiling, he put out his hand 'Moriturus te saluto.'

CHAPTER XXIII

Courtier sat in Hyde Park waiting for five o'clock. The day had recovered somewhat from a grey morning, as though the glow of that long hot summer were too burnt-in on the air to yield to the first assault. The sun, piercing the crisped clouds, those breast feathers of heavenly doves, darted its beams at the mellowed leaves, and showered to the ground their delicate shadow stains. The first, too early, scent from leaves about to fall, penetrated to the heart. And sorrowful sweet birds were tuning their little autumn pipes, blowing into them fragments of Spring odes to Liberty.

Courtier thought of Miltoun and his mistress. By what a strange fate had those two been thrown together; to what end was their love coming? The seeds of grief were already sown, what flowers of darkness, or of tumult would come up? He saw her again as a little, grave, considering child, with her soft eyes, set wide apart under the dark arched brows, and the little tuck at the corner of her mouth that used to come when he teased her. And to that gentle creature who would sooner die than force anyone to anything, had been given this queer lover; this aristocrat by birth and nature, with the dried fervent soul, whose every fibre had been bred and trained in and to the service of Authority; this rejecter of the Unity of Life; this worshipper of an old God! A God that stood, whip in hand, driving men to obedience. A God that even now Courtier could conjure up staring at him from the walls of his nursery. The God his own father had believed in. A God of the Old Testament, knowing neither sympathy nor understanding. Strange that He should be alive still; that there should still be thousands who worshipped Him. Yet, not so very strange, if, as they said, man made God in his own image! Here indeed was a curious mating of what the philosophers would call the will to Love, and the will to Power!

A soldier and his girl came and sat down on a bench close by. They looked askance at this trim and upright figure with the fighting face; then, some subtle thing informing them that he was not of the disturbing breed called officer, they ceased to regard him, abandoning themselves to dumb and inexpressive felicity. Arm in arm, touching each other, they seemed to Courtier very jolly, having that look of living entirely in the moment, which always especially appealed to one whose blood ran too fast to allow him to speculate much upon the future or brood much over the past.

A leaf from the bough above him, loosened by the sun's kisses, dropped, and fell yellow at his feet. The leaves were turning very soon?

It was characteristic of this man, who could be so hot over the lost causes of others, that, sitting there within half an hour of the final loss of his own cause, he could be so calm, so almost apathetic. This apathy was partly due to the hopelessness, which Nature had long perceived, of trying to make him feel oppressed, but also to the habits of a man incurably accustomed to carrying his fortunes in his hand, and that hand open. It did not seem real to him that he was actually going to suffer a defeat, to have to confess that he had hankered after this girl all these past weeks, and that to-morrow all would be wasted, and she as dead to him as if he had never seen her. No, it was not exactly resignation, it was rather sheer lack of commercial instinct. If only this had been the lost cause of another person. How gallantly he would have rushed to the assault, and taken her by storm! If only he himself could have been that other person, how easily, how passionately could he not have pleaded, letting forth from him all those words which had knocked at his teeth ever since he knew her, and which would have seemed so ridiculous and so unworthy, spoken on his own behalf. Yes, for that other person he could have cut her out from under the guns of the enemy; he could have taken her, that fairest prize. And in queer, cheery-looking apathy—not far removed perhaps from despair—he sat, watching the leaves turn over and fall, and now and then cutting with his stick at the air, where autumn was already riding. And, if in

imagination he saw himself carrying her away into the wilderness, and with his devotion making her happiness to grow, it was so far a flight, that a smile crept about his lips, and once or twice he snapped his jaws.

The soldier and his girl rose, passing in front of him down the Row. He watched their scarlet and blue figures, moving slowly towards the sun, and another couple close to the rails, crossing those receding forms. Very straight and tall, there was something exhilarating in the way this new couple swung along, holding their heads up, turning towards each other, to exchange words or smiles. Even at that distance they could be seen to be of high fashion; in their gait was the almost insolent poise of those who are above doubts and cares, certain of the world and of themselves. The girl's dress was tawny brown, her hair and hat too of the same hue, and the pursuing sunlight endowed her with a hazy splendour. Then, Courtier saw who they were—that couple!

Except for an unconscious grinding of his teeth, he made no sound or movement, so that they went by without seeing him. Her voice, though not the words, came to him distinctly. He saw her hand slip up under Harbinger's arm and swiftly down again. A smile, of whose existence he was unaware, settled on his lips. He got up, shook himself, as a dog shakes off a beating, and walked away, with his mouth set very firm.

CHAPTER XXIV

Left alone among the little mahogany tables of Gustard's, where the scent of cake and of orange-flower water made happy all the air, Barbara had sat for some minutes, her eyes cast down—as a child from whom a toy has been taken contemplates the ground, not knowing precisely what she is feeling. Then, paying one of the middle-aged females, she went out into the Square. There a German band was playing Delibes' Coppelia; and the murdered tune came haunting her, a very ghost of incongruity.

She went straight back to Valleys House. In the room where three hours ago she had been left alone after lunch with Harbinger, her sister was seated in the window, looking decidedly upset. In fact, Agatha had just spent an awkward hour. Chancing, with little Ann, into that confectioner's where she could best obtain a particularly gummy sweet which she believed wholesome for her children, she had been engaged in purchasing a pound, when looking down, she perceived Ann standing stock-still, with her sudden little nose pointed down the shop, and her mouth opening; glancing in the direction of those frank, enquiring eyes, Agatha saw to her amazement her sister, and a man whom she recognized as Courtier. With a readiness which did her complete credit, she placed a sweet in Ann's mouth, and saying to the middle-aged female: "Then you'll send those, please. Come, Ann!" went out. Shocks never coming singly, she had no sooner reached home, than from her father she learned of the development of Miltoun's love affair. When Barbara returned, she was sitting, unfeignedly disturbed and grieved; unable to decide whether or no she ought to divulge what she herself had seen, but withal buoyed-up by that peculiar indignation of the essentially domestic woman, whose ideals have been outraged.

Judging at once from the expression of her face that she must have heard the news of Miltoun, Barbara said:

"Well, my dear Angel, any lecture for me?"

Agatha answered coldly:

"I think you were quite mad to take Mrs. Noel to him."

"The whole duty of woman," murmured Barbara, "includes a little madness."

Agatha looked at her in silence.

"I can't make you out," she said at last; "you're not a fool!"

"Only a knave."

"You may think it right to joke over the ruin of Miltoun's life," murmured Agatha; "I don't."

Barbara's eyes grew bright; and in a hard voice she answered:

"The world is not your nursery, Angel!"

Agatha closed her lips very tightly, as who should imply: "Then it ought to be!" But she only answered:

"I don't think you know that I saw you just now in Gustard's."

Barbara eyed her for a moment in amazement, and began to laugh.

"I see," she said; "monstrous depravity—poor old Gustard's!" And still laughing that dangerous laugh, she turned on her heel and went out.

At dinner and afterwards that evening she was very silent, having on her face the same look that she wore out hunting, especially when in difficulties of any kind, or if advised to 'take a pull.' When she got away to her own room she had a longing to relieve herself by some kind of action that would hurt someone, if only herself. To go to bed and toss about in a fever—for she knew herself in these thwarted moods—was of no use! For a moment she thought of going out. That would be fun, and hurt them, too; but it was difficult. She did not want to be seen, and have the humiliation of an open row. Then there came into her head the memory of the roof of the tower, where she had once been as a little girl. She would be in the air there, she would be able to breathe, to get rid of this feverishness. With the unhappy pleasure of a spoiled child taking its revenge, she took care to leave her bedroom door open, so that her maid would wonder where she was, and perhaps be anxious, and make them anxious. Slipping through the moonlit picture gallery on to the landing, outside her father's sanctum, whence rose the stone staircase leading to the roof, she began to mount. She was breathless when, after that unending flight of stairs she emerged on to the roof at the extreme northern end of the big house, where, below her, was a sheer drop of a hundred feet. At first she stood, a little giddy, grasping the rail that ran round that garden of lead, still absorbed in her brooding, rebellious thoughts. Gradually she lost consciousness of everything save the scene before her. High above all neighbouring houses, she was almost appalled by the majesty of what she saw. This night-clothed city, so remote and dark, so white-gleaming and alive, on whose purple hills and valleys grew such myriad golden flowers of light, from whose heart came this deep incessant murmur—could it possibly be the same city through which she had been walking that very day! From its sleeping body the supreme wistful spirit had emerged in dark loveliness, and was low-flying down there, tempting her. Barbara turned round, to take in all that amazing prospect, from the black glades of Hyde Park, in front, to the powdery white ghost of a church tower, away to the East. How marvellous was this city of night! And as, in presence of that wide darkness of the sea before dawn, her spirit had felt little and timid within her—so it felt now, in face of this great, brooding, beautiful creature, whom man had made. She singled out the shapes of the Piccadilly hotels, and beyond them the palaces and towers of Westminster and Whitehall; and everywhere the inextricable loveliness of dim blue forms and sinuous pallid lines of light, under an indigo-dark sky. Near at hand, she could see plainly the still-lighted windows, the motorcars gliding by far down, even the tiny shapes of people walking; and the thought that each of them meant someone like herself, seemed strange.

Drinking of this wonder-cup, she began to experience a queer intoxication, and lost the sense of being little; rather she had the feeling of power, as in her dream at Monkland. She too, as well as this great thing below her, seemed to have shed her body, to be emancipated from every barrier-floating deliciously identified with air. She seemed to be one with the enfranchised spirit of the city, drowned in perception of its beauty. Then all that feeling went, and left her frowning, shivering, though the wind from the West was warm. Her whole adventure of coming up here seemed bizarre, ridiculous. Very stealthily she crept down, and had reached once more the door into 'the picture gallery, when she heard her mother's voice say in amazement: "That you, Babs?" And turning, saw her coming from the doorway of the sanctum.

Of a sudden very cool, with all her faculties about her, Barbara smiled, and stood looking at Lady Valleys, who said with hesitation:

"Come in here, dear, a minute, will you?"

In that room resorted to for comfort, Lord Valleys was standing with his back to the hearth, and an expression on his face that wavered between vexation and decision. The doubt in Agatha's mind whether she should tell or no, had been terribly resolved by little Ann, who in a pause of conversation had announced: "We saw Auntie Babs and Mr. Courtier in Gustard's, but we didn't speak to them."

Upset by the events of the afternoon, Lady Valleys had not shown her usual 'savoir faire'. She had told her husband. A meeting of this sort in a shop celebrated for little save its wedding cakes was in a sense of no importance; but, being disturbed already by the news of Miltoun, it seemed to them both nothing less than sinister, as though the heavens were in league for the demolition of their house. To Lord Valleys it was peculiarly mortifying, because of his real admiration for his daughter, and because he had paid so little attention to his wife's warning of some weeks back. In consultation, however, they

had only succeeded in deciding that Lady Valleys should talk with her. Though without much spiritual insight, they had, each of them, a certain cool judgment; and were fully alive to the danger of thwarting Barbara. This had not prevented Lord Valleys from expressing himself strongly on the 'confounded unscrupulousness of that fellow,' and secretly forming his own plan for dealing with this matter. Lady Valleys, more deeply conversant with her daughter's nature, and by reason of femininity more lenient towards the other sex, had not tried to excuse Courtier, but had thought privately: 'Babs is rather a flirt.' For she could not altogether help remembering herself at the same age.

Summoned thus unexpectedly, Barbara, her lips very firmly pressed together, took her stand, coolly enough, by her father's writing-table.

Seeing her suddenly appear, Lord Valleys instinctively relaxed his frown; his experience of men and things, his thousands of diplomatic hours, served to give him an air of coolness and detachment which he was very far from feeling. In truth he would rather have faced a hostile mob than his favourite daughter in such circumstances. His tanned face with its crisp grey moustache, his whole head indeed, took on, unconsciously, a more than ordinarily soldier-like appearance. His eyelids drooped a little, his brows rose slightly.

She was wearing a blue wrap over her evening frock, and he seized instinctively on that indifferent trifle to begin this talk.

"Ah! Babs, have you been out?"

Alive to her very finger-nails, with every nerve tingling, but showing no sign, Barbara answered:

"No; on the roof of the tower."

It gave her a real malicious pleasure to feel the perplexity beneath her father's dignified exterior. And detecting that covert mockery, Lord Valleys said dryly:

"Star-gazing?"

Then, with that sudden resolution peculiar to him, as though he were bored with having to delay and temporize, he added:

"Do you know, I doubt whether it's wise to make appointments in confectioner's shops when Ann is in London."

The dangerous little gleam in Barbara's eyes escaped his vision but not that of Lady Valleys, who said at once:

"No doubt you had the best of reasons, my dear."

Barbara curled her lip. Had it not been for the scene they had been through that day with Miltoun, and for their very real anxiety, both would have seen, then, that while their daughter was in this mood, least said was soonest mended. But their nerves were not quite within control; and with more than a touch of impatience Lord Valleys ejaculated:

"It doesn't appear to you, I suppose, to require any explanation?"

Barbara answered:

"No."

"Ah!" said Lord Valleys: "I see. An explanation can be had no doubt from the gentleman whose sense of proportion was such as to cause him to suggest such a thing."

"He did not suggest it. I did."

Lord Valleys' eyebrows rose still higher.

"Indeed!" he said.

"Geoffrey!" murmured Lady Valleys, "I thought I was to talk to Babs."

"It would no doubt be wiser."

In Barbara, thus for the first time in her life seriously reprimanded, there was at work the most peculiar sensation she had ever felt, as if something were scraping her very skin—a sick, and at the same time devilish, feeling. At that moment she could have struck her father dead. But she showed nothing, having lowered the lids of her eyes.

"Anything else?" she said.

Lord Valleys' jaw had become suddenly more prominent.

"As a sequel to your share in Miltoun's business, it is peculiarly entrancing."

"My dear," broke in Lady Valleys very suddenly, "Babs will tell me. It's nothing, of course."

Barbara's calm voice said again:

"Anything else?"

The repetition of this phrase in that maddening, cool voice almost broke down her father's sorely tried control.

"Nothing from you," he said with deadly coldness. "I shall have the honour of telling this gentleman what I think of him."

At those words Barbara drew herself together, and turned her eyes from one face to the other.

Under that gaze, which for all its cool hardness, was so furiously alive, neither Lord nor Lady Valleys could keep quite still. It was as if she had stripped from them the well-bred mask of those whose spirits, by long unquestioning acceptance of themselves, have become inelastic, inexpansive, commoner than they knew. In fact a rather awful moment! Then Barbara said:

"If there's nothing else, I'm going to bed. Goodnight!"

And as calmly as she had come in, she went out.

When she had regained her room, she locked the door, threw off her cloak, and looked at herself in the glass. With pleasure she saw how firmly her teeth were clenched, how her breast was heaving, and how her eyes seemed to be stabbing herself. And all the time she thought:

"Very well! My dears! Very well!"

CHAPTER XXV

In that mood of rebellious mortification she fell asleep. And, curiously enough, dreamed not of him whom she had in mind been so furiously defending, but of Harbinger. She fancied herself in prison, lying in a cell fashioned like the drawing-room at Sea house; and in the next cell, into which she could somehow look, Harbinger was digging at the wall with his nails. She could distinctly see the hair on the back of his hands, and hear him breathing. The hole he was making grew larger and larger. Her heart began to beat furiously; she awoke.

She rose with a new and malicious resolution to show no sign of rebellion, to go through the day as if nothing had happened, to deceive them all, and then—! Exactly what 'and then' meant, she did not explain even to herself.

In accordance with this plan of action she presented an untroubled front at breakfast, went out riding with little Ann, and shopping with her mother afterwards. Owing to this news of Miltoun the journey to Scotland had been postponed. She parried with cool ingenuity each attempt made by Lady Valleys to draw her into conversation on the subject of that meeting at Gustard's, nor would she talk of her brother; in every other way she was her usual self. In the afternoon she even volunteered to accompany her mother to old Lady Harbinger's in the neighbourhood of Prince's Gate. She knew that Harbinger would be there, and with the thought of meeting that other at 'five o'clock,' had a cynical pleasure in thus encountering him. It was so complete a blind to them all! Then, feeling that she was accomplishing a masterstroke; she even told him, in her mother's hearing, that she would walk home, and he might come if he cared. He did care.

But when once she had begun to swing along in the mellow afternoon, under the mellow trees, where the air was sweetened by the South-West wind, all that mutinous, reckless mood of hers vanished, she felt suddenly happy and kind, glad to be walking with him. To-day too he was cheerful, as if determined not to spoil her gaiety; and she was grateful for this. Once or twice she even put her hand up and touched his sleeve, calling his attention to birds or trees, friendly, and glad, after all those hours of

bitter feelings, to be giving happiness. When they parted at the door of Valleys House, she looked back at him with a queer, half-rueful smile. For, now the hour had come!

In a little unfrequented ante-room, all white panels and polish, she sat down to wait. The entrance drive was visible from here; and she meant to encounter Courtier casually in the hall. She was excited, and a little scornful of her own excitement. She had expected him to be punctual, but it was already past five; and soon she began to feel uneasy, almost ridiculous, sitting in this room where no one ever came. Going to the window, she looked out.

A sudden voice behind her, said:

"Auntie Babs!".

Turning, she saw little Ann regarding her with those wide, frank, hazel eyes. A shiver of nerves passed through Barbara.

"Is this your room? It's a nice room, isn't it?"

She answered:

"Quite a nice room, Ann."

"Yes. I've never been in here before. There's somebody just come, so I must go now."

Barbara involuntarily put her hands up to her cheeks, and quickly passed with her niece into the hall. At the very door the footman William handed her a note. She looked at the superscription. It was from Courtier. She went back into the room. Through its half-closed door the figure of little Ann could be seen, with her legs rather wide apart, and her hands clasped on her low-down belt, pointing up at William her sudden little nose. Barbara shut the door abruptly, broke the seal, and read: "DEAR LADY BARBARA,

"I am sorry to say my interview with your brother was fruitless.

"I happened to be sitting in the Park just now, and I want to wish you every happiness before I go. It has been the greatest pleasure to know you. I shall never have a thought of you that will not be my pride; nor a memory that will not help me to believe that life is good. If I am tempted to feel that things are dark, I shall remember that you are breathing this same mortal air. And to beauty and joy' I shall take off my hat with the greater reverence, that once I was permitted to walk and talk, with you. And so, good-bye, and God bless you. "Your faithful servant, "CHARLES COURTIER."

Her cheeks burned, quick sighs escaped her lips; she read the letter again, but before getting to the end could not see the words for mist. If in that letter there had been a word of complaint or even of regret! She could not let him go like this, without good-bye, without any explanation at all. He should not think of her as a cold, stony flirt, who had been merely stealing a few weeks' amusement out of him. She would explain to him at all events that it had not been that. She would make him understand that it was not what he thought—that something in her wanted—wanted—! Her mind was all confused. "What was it?" she thought: "What did I do?" And sore with anger at herself, she screwed the letter up in her glove, and ran out. She walked swiftly down to Piccadilly, and crossed into the Green Park. There she passed Lord Malvezin and a friend strolling up towards Hyde Park Corner, and gave them a very faint bow. The composure of those two precise and well-groomed figures sickened her just then. She wanted to run, to fly to this meeting that should remove from him the odious feelings he must have, that she, Barbara Caradoc, was a vulgar enchantress, a common traitress and coquette! And his letter—without a syllable of reproach! Her cheeks burned so, that she could not help trying to hide them from people who passed.

As she drew nearer to his rooms she walked slower, forcing herself to think what she should do, what she should let him do! But she continued resolutely forward. She would not shrink now—whatever came of it! Her heart fluttered, seemed to stop beating, fluttered again. She set her teeth; a sort of desperate hilarity rose in her. It was an adventure! Then she was gripped by the feeling that had come to her on the roof. The whole thing was bizarre, ridiculous! She stopped, and drew the letter from her glove. It might be ridiculous, but it was due from her; and closing her lips very tight, she walked on. In thought she was already standing close to him, her eyes shut, waiting, with her heart beating wildly, to know what she would feel when his lips had spoken, perhaps touched her face or hand. And she had a sort of mirage vision of herself, with eyelashes resting on her cheeks, lips a little parted, arms helpless at her sides. Yet, incomprehensibly, his figure was invisible. She discovered then that she was standing before his door.

She rang the bell calmly, but instead of dropping her hand, pressed the little bare patch of palm left

open by the glove to her face, to see whether it was indeed her own cheek flaming so.

The door had been opened by some unseen agency, disclosing a passage and flight of stairs covered by a red carpet, at the foot of which lay an old, tangled, brown-white dog full of fleas and sorrow. Unreasoning terror seized on Barbara; her body remained rigid, but her spirit began flying back across the Green Park, to the very hall of Valleys House. Then she saw coming towards her a youngish woman in a blue apron, with mild, reddened eyes.

"Is this where Mr. Courtier lives?"

"Yes, miss." The teeth of the young woman were few in number and rather black; and Barbara could only stand there saying nothing, as if her body had been deserted between the sunlight and this dim red passage, which led to-what?

The woman spoke again:

"I'm sorry if you was wanting him, miss, he's just gone away."

Barbara felt a movement in her heart, like the twang and quiver of an elastic band, suddenly relaxed. She bent to stroke the head of the old dog, who was smelling her shoes. The woman said:

"And, of course, I can't give you his address, because he's gone to foreign parts."

With a murmur, of whose sense she knew nothing, Barbara hurried out into the sunshine. Was she glad? Was she sorry? At the corner of the street she turned and looked back; the two heads, of the woman and the dog, were there still, poked out through the doorway.

A horrible inclination to laugh seized her, followed by as horrible a desire to cry.

CHAPTER XXVI

By the river the West wind, whose murmuring had visited Courtier and Miltoun the night before, was bringing up the first sky of autumn. Slow-creeping and fleecy grey, the clouds seemed trying to overpower a sun that shone but fitfully even thus early in the day. While Audrey Noel was dressing sunbeams danced desperately on the white wall, like little lost souls with no to-morrow, or gnats that wheel and wheel in brief joy, leaving no footmarks on the air. Through the chinks of a side window covered by a dark blind some smoky filaments of light were tethered to the back of her mirror. Compounded of trembling grey spirals, so thick to the eye that her hand felt astonishment when it failed to grasp them, and so jealous as ghosts of the space they occupied, they brought a moment's distraction to a heart not happy. For how could she be happy, her lover away from her now thirty hours, without having overcome with his last kisses the feeling of disaster which had settled on her when he told her of his resolve. Her eyes had seen deeper than his; her instinct had received a message from Fate.

To be the dragger-down, the destroyer of his usefulness; to be not the helpmate, but the clog; not the inspiring sky, but the cloud! And because of a scruple which she could not understand! She had no anger with that unintelligible scruple; but her fatalism, and her sympathy had followed it out into his future. Things being so, it could not be long before he felt that her love was maiming him; even if he went on desiring her, it would be only with his body. And if, for this scruple, he were capable of giving up his public life, he would be capable of living on with her after his love was dead! This thought she could not bear. It stung to the very marrow of her nerves. And yet surely Life could not be so cruel as to have given her such happiness meaning to take it from her! Surely her love was not to be only one summer's day; his love but an embrace, and then—for ever nothing!

This morning, fortified by despair, she admitted her own beauty. He would, he must want her more than that other life, at the very thought of which her face darkened. That other life so hard, and far from her! So loveless, formal, and yet—to him so real, so desperately, accursedly real! If he must indeed give up his career, then surely the life they could live together would make up to him—a life among simple and sweet things, all over the world, with music and pictures, and the flowers and all Nature, and friends who sought them for themselves, and in being kind to everyone, and helping the poor and the unfortunate, and loving each other! But he did not want that sort of life! What was the good of pretending that he did? It was right and natural he should want, to use his powers! To lead and

serve! She would not have him otherwise: With these thoughts hovering and darting within her, she went on twisting and coiling her dark hair, and burying her heart beneath its lace defences. She noted too, with her usual care, two fading blossoms in the bowl of flowers on her dressing-table, and, removing their, emptied out the water and refilled the bowl.

Before she left her bedroom the sunbeams had already ceased to dance, the grey filaments of light were gone. Autumn sky had come into its own. Passing the mirror in the hall which was always rough with her, she had not courage to glance at it. Then suddenly a woman's belief in the power of her charm came to her aid; she felt almost happy—surely he must love her better than his conscience! But that confidence was very tremulous, ready to yield to the first rebuff. Even the friendly fresh—cheeked maid seemed that morning to be regarding her with compassion; and all the innate sense, not of 'good form,' but of form, which made her shrink from anything that should disturb or hurt another, or make anyone think she was to be pitied, rose up at once within her; she became more than ever careful to show nothing even to herself. So she passed the morning, mechanically doing the little usual things. An overpowering longing was with her all the time, to get him away with her from England, and see whether the thousand beauties she could show him would not fire him with love of the things she loved. As a girl she had spent nearly three years abroad. And Eustace had never been to Italy, nor to her beloved mountain valleys! Then, the remembrance of his rooms at the Temple broke in on that vision, and shattered it. No Titian's feast of gentian, tawny brown, and alpen-rose could intoxicate the lover of those books, those papers, that great map. And the scent of leather came to her now as poignantly as if she were once more flitting about noiselessly on her business of nursing. Then there rushed through her again the warm wonderful sense that had been with her all those precious days—of love that knew secretly of its approaching triumph and fulfilment; the delicious sense of giving every minute of her time, every thought, and movement; and all the sweet unconscious waiting for the divine, irrevocable moment when at last she would give herself and be his. The remembrance too of how tired, how sacredly tired she had been, and of how she had smiled all the time with her inner joy of being tired for him.

The sound of the bell startled her. His telegram had said, the afternoon! She determined to show nothing of the trouble darkening the whole world for her, and drew a deep breath, waiting for his kiss.

It was not Miltoun, but Lady Casterley.

The shock sent the blood buzzing into her temples. Then she noticed that the little figure before her was also trembling; drawing up a chair, she said: "Won't you sit down?"

The tone of that old voice, thanking her, brought back sharply the memory of her garden, at Monkland, bathed in the sweetness and shimmer of summer, and of Barbara standing at her gate towering above this little figure, which now sat there so silent, with very white face. Those carved features, those keen, yet veiled eyes, had too often haunted her thoughts; they were like a bad dream come true.

"My grandson is not here, is he?"

Audrey shook her head.

"We have heard of his decision. I will not beat about the bush with you. It is a disaster for me a calamity. I have known and loved him since he was born, and I have been foolish enough to dream, dreams about him. I wondered perhaps whether you knew how much we counted on him. You must forgive an old woman's coming here like this. At my age there are few things that matter, but they matter very much."

And Audrey thought: "And at my age there is but one thing that matters, and that matters worse than death." But she did not speak. To whom, to what should she speak? To this hard old woman, who personified the world? Of what use, words?

"I can say to you," went on the voice of the little figure, that seemed so to fill the room with its grey presence, "what I could not bring myself to say to others; for you are not hard-hearted."

A quiver passed up from the heart so praised to the still lips. No, she was not hard-hearted! She could even feel for this old woman from whose voice anxiety had stolen its despotism.

"Eustace cannot live without his career. His career is himself, he must be doing, and leading, and spending his powers. What he has given you is not his true self. I don't want to hurt you, but the truth is the truth, and we must all bow before it. I may be hard, but I can respect sorrow."

To respect sorrow! Yes, this grey visitor could do that, as the wind passing over the sea respects its surface, as the air respects the surface of a rose, but to penetrate to the heart, to understand her

sorrow, that old age could not do for youth! As well try to track out the secret of the twistings in the flight of those swallows out there above the river, or to follow to its source the faint scent of the lilies in that bowl! How should she know what was passing in here—this little old woman whose blood was cold? And Audrey had the sensation of watching someone pelt her with the rind and husks of what her own spirit had long devoured. She had a longing to get up, and take the hand, the chill, spidery hand of age, and thrust it into her breast, and say: "Feel that, and cease!"

But, withal, she never lost her queer dull compassion for the owner of that white carved face. It was not her visitor's fault that she had come! Again Lady Casterley was speaking.

"It is early days. If you do not end it now, at once, it will only come harder on you presently. You know how determined he is. He will not change his mind. If you cut him off from his work in life, it will but recoil on you. I can only expect your hatred, for talking like this, but believe me, it's for your good, as well as his, in the long run."

A tumultuous heart-beating of ironical rage seized on the listener to that speech. Her good! The good of a corse that the breath is just abandoning; the good of a flower beneath a heel; the good of an old dog whose master leaves it for the last time! Slowly a weight like lead stopped all that fluttering of her heart. If she did not end it at once! The words had now been spoken that for so many hours, she knew, had lain unspoken within her own breast. Yes, if she did not, she could never know a moment's peace, feeling that she was forcing him to a death in life, desecrating her own love and pride! And the spur had been given by another! The thought that someone—this hard old woman of the hard world—should have shaped in words the hauntings of her love and pride through all those ages since Miltoun spoke to her of his resolve; that someone else should have had to tell her what her heart had so long known it must do—this stabbed her like a knife! This, at all events, she could not bear!

She stood up, and said:

"Please leave me now! I have a great many things to do, before I go."

With a sort of pleasure she saw a look of bewilderment cover that old face; with a sort of pleasure she marked the trembling of the hands raising their owner from the chair; and heard the stammering in the voice: "You are going? Before-before he comes? You-you won't be seeing him again?" With a sort of pleasure she marked the hesitation, which did not know whether to thank, or bless, or just say nothing and creep away. With a sort of pleasure she watched the flush mount in the faded cheeks, the faded lips pressed together. Then, at the scarcely whispered words: "Thank you, my dear!" she turned, unable to bear further sight or sound. She went to the window and pressed her forehead against the glass, trying to think of nothing. She heard the sound of wheels—Lady Casterley had gone. And then, of all the awful feelings man or woman can know, she experienced the worst: She could not cry!

At this most bitter and deserted moment of her life, she felt strangely calm, foreseeing clearly, exactly; what she must do, and where go. Quickly it must be done, or it would never be done! Quickly! And without fuss! She put some things together, sent the maid out for a cab, and sat down to write.

She must do and say nothing that could excite him, and bring back his illness. Let it all be sober, reasonable! It would be easy to let him know where she was going, to write a letter that would bring him flying after her. But to write the calm, reasonable words that would keep him waiting and thinking, till he never again came to her, broke her heart.

When she had finished and sealed the letter, she sat motionless with a numb feeling in hands and brain, trying to realize what she had next to do. To go, and that was all!

Her trunks had been taken down already. She chose the little hat that he liked her best in, and over it fastened her thickest veil. Then, putting on her travelling coat and gloves, she looked in the long mirror, and seeing that there was nothing more to keep her, lifted her dressing bag, and went down.

Over on the embankment a child was crying; and the passionate screaming sound, broken by the gulping of tears, made her cover her lips, as though she had heard her own escaped soul wailing out there.

She leaned out of the cab to say to the maid:

"Go and comfort that crying, Ella."

Only when she was alone in the train, secure from all eyes, did she give way to desperate weeping. The white smoke rolling past the windows was not more evanescent than her joy had been. For she had no illusions—it was over! From first to last—not quite a year! But even at this moment, not for all the world would she have been without her love, gone to its grave, like a dead child that evermore would

be touching her breast with its wistful fingers.

CHAPTER XXVII

Barbara returning from her visit to Courtier's deserted rooms, was met at Valleys House with the message: Would she please go at once to Lady Casterley?

When, in obedience, she reached Ravensham, she found her grandmother and Lord-Dennis in the white room. They were standing by one of the tall windows, apparently contemplating the view. They turned indeed at sound of Barbara's approach, but neither of them spoke or nodded. Not having seen her grandfather since before Miltoun's illness, Barbara found it strange to be so treated; she too took her stand silently before the window. A very large wasp was crawling up the pane, then slipping down with a faint buzz.

Suddenly Lady Casterley spoke.

"Kill that thing!"

Lord Dennis drew forth his handkerchief.

"Not with that, Dennis. It will make a mess. Take a paper knife."

"I was going to put it out," murmured Lord Dennis.

"Let Barbara with her gloves."

Barbara moved towards the pane.

"It's a hornet, I think," she said.

"So he is!" said Lord Dennis, dreamily:

"Nonsense," murmured Lady Casterley, "it's a common wasp."

"I know it's a hornet, Granny. The rings are darker."

Lady Casterley bent down; when she raised herself she had a slipper in her hand.

"Don't irritate him!" cried Barbara, catching her wrist. But Lady Casterley freed her hand.

"I will," she said, and brought the sole of the slipper down on the insect, so that it dropped on the floor, dead. "He has no business in here."

And, as if that little incident had happened to three other people, they again stood silently looking through the window.

Then Lady Casterley turned to Barbara.

"Well, have you realized the mischief that you've done?"

"Ann!" murmured Lord Dennis.

"Yes, yes; she is your favourite, but that won't save her. This woman—to her great credit—I say to her great credit—has gone away, so as to put herself out of Eustace's reach, until he has recovered his senses."

With a sharp-drawn breath Barbara said:

"Oh! poor thing!"

But on Lady Casterley's face had come an almost cruel look.

"Ah!" she said: "Exactly. But, curiously enough, I am thinking of Eustace." Her little figure was quivering from head to foot: "This will be a lesson to you not to play with fire!"

"Ann!" murmured Lord Dennis again, slipping his arm through Barbara's.

"The world," went on Lady Casterley, "is a place of facts, not of romantic fancies. You have done more harm than can possibly be repaired. I went to her myself. I was very much moved.' If it hadn't been for your foolish conduct——"

"Ann!" said Lord Dennis once more.

Lady Casterley paused, tapping the floor with her little foot. Barbara's eyes were gleaming.

"Is there anything else you would like to squash, dear?"

"Babs!" murmured Lord Dennis; but, unconsciously pressing his hand against her heart, the girl went on.

"You are lucky to be abusing me to-day—if it had been yesterday——"

At these dark words Lady Casterley turned away, her shoes leaving little dull stains on the polished floor.

Barbara raised to her cheek the fingers which she had been so convulsively embracing. "Don't let her go on, uncle," she whispered, "not just now!"

"No, no, my dear," Lord Dennis murmured, "certainly not—it is enough."

"It has been your sentimental folly," came Lady Casterley's voice from a far corner, "which has brought this on the boy."

Responding to the pressure of the hand, back now at her waist, Barbara did not answer; and the sound of the little feet retracing their steps rose in the stillness. Neither of those two at the window turned their heads; once more the feet receded, and again began coming back.

Suddenly Barbara, pointing to the floor, cried:

"Oh! Granny, for Heaven's sake, stand still; haven't you squashed the hornet enough, even if he did come in where he hadn't any business?"

Lady Casterley looked down at the debris of the insect.

"Disgusting!" she said; but when she next spoke it was in a less hard, more querulous voice.

"That man—what was his name—have you got rid of him?"

Barbara went crimson.

"Abuse my friends, and I will go straight home and never speak to you again."

For a moment Lady Casterley looked almost as if she might strike her granddaughter; then a little sardonic smile broke out on her face.

"A creditable sentiment!" she said.

Letting fall her uncle's hand, Barbara cried:

"In any case, I'd better go. I don't know why you sent for me."

Lady Casterley answered coldly:

"To let you and your mother know of this woman's most unselfish behaviour; to put you on the 'qui vive' for what Eustace may do now; to give you a chance to make up for your folly. Moreover to warn you against——" she paused.

"Yes?"

"Let me——" interrupted Lord Dennis.

"No, Uncle Dennis, let Granny take her shoe!"

She had withdrawn against the wall, tall, and as it were, formidable, with her head up. Lady Casterley remained silent.

"Have you got it ready?" cried Barbara: "Unfortunately he's flown!"

A voice said:

"Lord Miltoun."

He had come in quietly and quickly, preceding the announcement, and stood almost touching that little group at the window before they caught sight of him. His face had the rather ghastly look of sunburnt faces from which emotion has driven the blood; and his eyes, always so much the most living part of him, were full of such stabbing anger, that involuntarily they all looked down.

"I want to speak to you alone," he said to Lady Casterley.

Visibly, for perhaps the first time in her life, that indomitable little figure flinched. Lord Dennis drew Barbara away, but at the door he whispered:

"Stay here quietly, Babs; I don't like the look of this."

Unnoticed, Barbara remained hovering.

The two voices, low, and so far off in the long white room, were uncannily distinct, emotion charging each word with preternatural power of penetration; and every movement of the speakers had to the girl's excited eyes a weird precision, as of little figures she had once seen at a Paris puppet show. She could hear Miltoun reproaching his grandmother in words terribly dry and bitter. She edged nearer and nearer, till, seeing that they paid no more heed to her than if she were an attendant statue, she had regained her position by the window.

Lady Casterley was speaking.

"I was not going to see you ruined before my eyes, Eustace. I did what I did at very great cost. I did my best for you."

Barbara saw Miltoun's face transfigured by a dreadful smile—the smile of one defying his torturer with hate. Lady Casterley went on:

"Yes, you stand there looking like a devil. Hate me if you like—but don't betray us, moaning and moping because you can't have the moon. Put on your armour, and go down into the battle. Don't play the coward, boy!"

Miltoun's answer cut like the lash of a whip.

"By God! Be silent!"

And weirdly, there was silence. It was not the brutality of the words, but the sight of force suddenly naked of all disguise—like a fierce dog let for a moment off its chain—which made Barbara utter a little dismayed sound. Lady Casterley had dropped into a chair, trembling. And without a look Miltoun passed her. If their grandmother had fallen dead, Barbara knew he would not have stopped to see. She ran forward, but the old woman waved her away.

"Go after him," she said, "don't let him go alone."

And infected by the fear in that wizened voice, Barbara flew.

She caught her brother as he was entering the taxi-cab in which he had come, and without a word slipped in beside him. The driver's face appeared at the window, but Miltoun only motioned with his head, as if to say: Anywhere, away from here!

The thought flashed through Barbara: "If only I can keep him in here with me!"

She leaned out, and said quietly:

"To Nettlefold, in Sussex—never mind your petrol—get more on the road. You can have what fare you like. Quick!"

The man hesitated, looked in her face, and said:

"Very well; miss. By Dorking, ain't it?"

Barbara nodded.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The clock over the stables was chiming seven when Miltoun and Barbara passed out of the tall iron gates, in their swift-moving small world, that smelled faintly of petrol. Though the cab was closed, light spurts of rain drifted in through the open windows, refreshing the girl's hot face, relieving a little her dread of this drive. For, now that Fate had been really cruel, now that it no longer lay in Miltoun's hands to save himself from suffering, her heart bled for him; and she remembered to forget herself. The immobility with which he had received her intrusion, was ominous. And though silent in her corner, she was desperately working all her woman's wits to discover a way of breaking into the house of his secret mood. He appeared not even to have noticed that they had turned their backs on London, and passed into Richmond Park.

Here the trees, made dark by rain, seemed to watch gloomily the progress of this whirring-wheeled red box, unreconciled even yet to such harsh intruders on their wind-scented tranquillity. And the deer, pursuing happiness on the sweet grasses, raised disquieted noses, as who should say: Poisoners of the fern, defilers of the trails of air!

Barbara vaguely felt the serenity out there in the clouds, and the trees, and wind. If it would but creep into this dim, travelling prison, and help her; if it would but come, like sleep, and steal away dark sorrow, and in one moment make grief-joy. But it stayed outside on its wistful wings; and that grand chasm which yawns between soul and soul remained unbridged. For what could she say? How make him speak of what he was going to do? What alternatives indeed were now before him? Would he sullenly resign his seat, and wait till he could find Audrey Noel again? But even if he did find her, they would only be where they were. She had gone, in order not to be a drag on him—it would only be the same thing all over again! Would he then, as Granny had urged him, put on his armour, and go down into the fight? But that indeed would mean the end, for if she had had the strength to go away now, she would surely never come back and break in on his life a second time. And a grim thought swooped down on Barbara. What if he resigned everything! Went out into the dark! Men did sometimes—she knew—caught like this in the full flush of passion. But surely not Miltoun, with his faith! 'If the lark's song means nothing—if that sky is a morass of our invention—if we are pettily creeping on, furthering nothing—persuade me of it, Babs, and I'll bless you.' But had he still that anchorage, to prevent him slipping out to sea? This sudden thought of death to one for whom life was joy, who had never even seen the Great Stillness, was very terrifying. She fixed her eyes on the back of the chauffeur, in his drab coat with the red collar, finding some comfort in its solidity. They were in a taxi-cab, in Richmond Park! Death—incongruous, incredible death! It was stupid to be frightened! She forced herself to look at Miltoun. He seemed to be asleep; his eyes were closed, his arms folded—only a quivering of his eyelids betrayed him. Impossible to tell what was going on in that grim waking sleep, which made her feel that she was not there at all, so utterly did he seem withdrawn into himself!

He opened his eyes, and said suddenly:

"So you think I'm going to lay hands on myself, Babs?"

Horribly startled by this reading of her thoughts, Barbara could only edge away and stammer:

"No; oh, no!"

"Where are we going in this thing?"

"Nettlefold. Would you like him stopped?"

"It will do as well as anywhere."

Terrified lest he should relapse into that grim silence, she timidly possessed herself of his hand.

It was fast growing dark; the cab, having left the villas of Surbiton behind, was flying along at great speed among pine-trees and stretches of heather gloomy with faded daylight.

Miltoun said presently, in a queer, slow voice "If I want, I have only to open that door and jump. You who believe that 'to-morrow we die'—give me the faith to feel that I can free myself by that jump, and out I go!" Then, seeming to pity her terrified squeeze of his hand, he added: "It's all right, Babs; we, shall sleep comfortably enough in our beds tonight."

But, so desolate to the girl was his voice, that she hoped now for silence.

"Let us be skinned quietly," muttered Miltoun, "if nothing else. Sorry to have disturbed you."

Pressing close up to him, Barbara murmured:

"If only——Talk to me!".

But Miltoun, though he stroked her hand, was silent.

The cab, moving at unaccustomed speed along these deserted roads, moaned dismally; and Barbara was possessed now by a desire which she dared not put in practice, to pull his head down, and rock it against her. Her heart felt empty, and timid; to have something warm resting on it would have made all the difference. Everything real, substantial, comforting, seemed to have slipped away. Among these flying dark ghosts of pine-trees—as it were the unfrequented borderland between two worlds—the feeling of a cheek against her breast alone could help muffle the deep disquiet in her, lost like a child in a wood.

The cab slackened speed, the driver was lighting his lamps; and his red face appeared at the window.

"We'll 'ave to stop here, miss; I'm out of petrol. Will you get some dinner, or go through?"

"Through," answered Barbara:

While they were passing the little their, buying then petrol, asking the way, she felt less miserable, and even looked about her with a sort of eagerness. Then when they had started again, she thought: If I could get him to sleep—the sea will comfort him! But his eyes were staring, wide-open. She feigned sleep herself; letting her head slip a little to one side, causing small sounds of breathing to escape. The whirring of the wheels, the moaning of the cab joints, the dark trees slipping by, the scent of the wet fern drifting in, all these must surely help! And presently she felt that he was indeed slipping into darkness—and then—she felt nothing.

When she awoke from the sleep into which she had seen Miltoun fall, the cab was slowly mounting a steep hill, above which the moon had risen. The air smelled strong and sweet, as though it had passed over leagues of grass.

"The Downs!" she thought; "I must have been asleep!"

In sudden terror, she looked round for Miltoun. But he was still there, exactly as before, leaning back rigid in his corner of the cab, with staring eyes, and no other signs of life. And still only half awake, like a great warm sleepy child startled out of too deep slumber, she clutched, and clung to him. The thought that he had been sitting like that, with his spirit far away, all the time that she had been betraying her watch in sleep, was dreadful. But to her embrace there was no response, and awake indeed now, ashamed, sore, Barbara released him, and turned her face to the air.

Out there, two thin, dense-black, long clouds, shaped like the wings of a hawk, had joined themselves together, so that nothing of the moon showed but a living brightness imprisoned, like the eyes and life of a bird, between those swift sweeps of darkness. This great uncanny spirit, brooding malevolent over the high leagues of moon-wan grass, seemed waiting to swoop, and pluck up in its talons, and devour, all that intruded on the wild loneliness of these far-up plains of freedom. Barbara almost expected to hear coming from it the lost whistle of the buzzard hawks. And her dream came back to her. Where were her wings—the wings that in sleep had borne her to the stars; the wings that would never lift her—waking—from the ground? Where too were Miltoun's wings? She crouched back into her corner; a tear stole up and trickled out between her closed lids—another and another followed. Faster and faster they came. Then she felt Miltoun's arm round her, and heard him say: "Don't cry, Babs!" Instinct telling her what to do, she laid her head against his chest, and sobbed bitterly. Struggling with those sobs, she grew less and less unhappy—knowing that he could never again feel quite so desolate, as before he tried to give her comfort. It was all a bad dream, and they would soon wake from it! And they would be happy; as happy as they had been before—before these last months! And she whispered:

"Only a little while, Eusty!"

CHAPTER XXIX

Old Lady Harbinger dying in the early February of the following year, the marriage of Barbara with her son was postponed till June.

Much of the wild sweetness of Spring still clung to the high moor borders of Monkland on the early morning of the wedding day.

Barbara was already up and dressed for riding when her maid came to call her; and noting Stacey's astonished eyes fix themselves on her boots, she said:

"Well, Stacey?"

"It'll tire you."

"Nonsense; I'm not going to be hung."

Refusing the company of a groom, she made her way towards the stretch of high moor where she had ridden with Courtier a year ago. Here over the short, as yet unflowering, heather, there was a mile or more of level galloping ground. She mounted steadily, and her spirit rode, as it were, before her, longing to get up there among the peewits and curlew, to feel the crisp, peaty earth slip away under her, and the wind drive in her face, under that deep blue sky. Carried by this warm-blooded sweetheart of hers, ready to jump out of his smooth hide with pleasure, snuffling and sneezing in sheer joy, whose eye she could see straying round to catch a glimpse of her intentions, from whose lips she could hear issuing the sweet bitt-music, whose vagaries even seemed designed to startle from her a closer embracing—she was filled with a sort of delicious impatience with everything that was not this perfect communing with vigour.

Reaching the top, she put him into a gallop. With the wind furiously assailing her face and throat, every muscle crisped; and all her blood tingling—this was a very ecstasy of motion!

She reined in at the cairn whence she and Courtier had looked down at the herds of ponies. It was the merest memory now, vague and a little sweet, like the remembrance of some exceptional Spring day, when trees seem to flower before your eyes, and in sheer wantonness exhale a scent of lemons. The ponies were there still, and in distance the shining sea. She sat thinking of nothing, but how good it was to be alive. The fullness and sweetness of it all, the freedom and strength! Away to the West over a lonely farm she could see two buzzard hawks hunting in wide circles. She did not envy them—so happy was she, as happy as the morning. And there came to her suddenly the true, the overmastering longing of mountain tops.

"I must," she thought; "I simply must!"

Slipping off her horse she lay down on her back, and at once everything was lost except the sky. Over her body, supported above solid earth by the warm, soft heather, the wind skimmed without sound or touch. Her spirit became one with that calm unimaginable freedom. Transported beyond her own contentment, she no longer even knew whether she was joyful.

The horse Hal, attempting to eat her sleeve, aroused her. She mounted him, and rode down. Near home she took a short cut across a meadow, through which flowed two thin bright streams, forming a delta full of lingering 'milkmaids,' mauve marsh orchis, and yellow flags. From end to end of this long meadow, so varied, so pied with trees and stones, and flowers, and water, the last of the Spring was passing.

Some ponies, shyly curious of Barbara and her horse, stole up, and stood at a safe distance, with their noses dubiously stretched out, swishing their lean tails. And suddenly, far up, following their own music, two cuckoos flew across, seeking the thorn-trees out on the moor. While she was watching the arrowy birds, she caught sight of someone coming towards her from a clump of beech-trees, and suddenly saw that it was Mrs. Noel!

She rode forward, flushing. What dared she say? Could she speak of her wedding, and betray Miltoun's presence? Could she open her mouth at all without rousing painful feeling of some sort? Then, impatient of indecision, she began:

"I'm so glad to see you again. I didn't know you were still down here."

"I only came back to England yesterday, and I'm just here to see to the packing of my things."

"Oh!" murmured Barbara. "You know what's happening to me, I suppose?"

Mrs. Noel smiled, looked up, and said: "I heard last night. All joy to you!"

A lump rose in Barbara's throat.

"I'm so glad to have seen you," she murmured once more; "I expect I ought to be getting on," and

with the word "Good-bye," gently echoed, she rode away.

But her mood of delight was gone; even the horse Hal seemed to tread unevenly, for all that he was going back to that stable which ever appeared to him desirable ten minutes after he had left it.

Except that her eyes seemed darker, Mrs. Noel had not changed. If she had shown the faintest sign of self-pity, the girl would never have felt, as she did now, so sorry and upset.

Leaving the stables, she saw that the wind was driving up a huge, white, shining cloud. "Isn't it going to be fine after all!" she thought.

Re-entering the house by an old and so-called secret stairway that led straight to the library, she had to traverse that great dark room. There, buried in an armchair in front of the hearth she saw Miltoun with a book on his knee, not reading, but looking up at the picture of the old Cardinal. She hurried on, tiptoeing over the soft carpet, holding her breath, fearful of disturbing the queer interview, feeling guilty, too, of her new knowledge, which she did not mean to impart. She had burnt her fingers once at the flame between them; she would not do so a second time!

Through the window at the far end she saw that the cloud had burst; it was raining furiously. She regained her bedroom unseen. In spite of her joy out there on the moor, this last adventure of her girlhood had not been all success; she had again the old sensations, the old doubts, the dissatisfaction which she had thought dead. Those two! To shut one's eyes, and be happy—was it possible! A great rainbow, the nearest she had ever seen, had sprung up in the park, and was come to earth again in some fields close by. The sun was shining out already through the wind-driven bright rain. Jewels of blue had begun to star the black and white and golden clouds. A strange white light-ghost of Spring passing in this last violent outburst-painted the leaves of every tree; and a hundred savage hues had come down like a motley of bright birds on moor and fields.

The moment of desperate beauty caught Barbara by the throat. Its spirit of galloping wildness flew straight into her heart. She clasped her hands across her breast to try and keep that moment. Far out, a cuckoo hooted—and the immortal call passed on the wind. In that call all the beauty, and colour, and rapture of life seemed to be flying by. If she could only seize and evermore have it in her heart, as the buttercups out there imprisoned the sun, or the fallen raindrops on the sweetbriars round the windows enclosed all changing light! If only there were no chains, no walls, and finality were dead!

Her clock struck ten. At this time to-morrow! Her cheeks turned hot; in a mirror she could see them burning, her lips scornfully curved, her eyes strange. Standing there, she looked long at herself, till, little by little, her face lost every vestige of that disturbance, became solid and resolute again. She ceased to have the galloping wild feeling in her heart, and instead felt cold. Detached from herself she watched, with contentment, her own calm and radiant beauty resume the armour it had for that moment put off.

After dinner that night, when the men left the dining-hall, Miltoun slipped away to his den. Of all those present in the little church he had seemed most unemotional, and had been most moved. Though it had been so quiet and private a wedding, he had resented all cheap festivity accompanying the passing of his young sister. He would have had that ceremony in the little dark disused chapel at the Court; those two, and the priest alone. Here, in this half-pagan little country church smothered hastily in flowers, with the raw singing of the half-pagan choir, and all the village curiosity and homage—everything had jarred, and the stale aftermath sickened him. Changing his swallow-tail to an old smoking jacket, he went out on to the lawn. In the wide darkness he could rid himself of his exasperation.

Since the day of his election he had not once been at Monkland; since Mrs. Noel's flight he had never left London. In London and work he had buried himself; by London and work he had saved himself! He had gone down into the battle.

Dew had not yet fallen, and he took the path across the fields. There was no moon, no stars, no wind; the cattle were noiseless under the trees; there were no owls calling, no night-jars churring, the fly-by-night chafers were not abroad. The stream alone was alive in the quiet darkness. And as Miltoun followed the wispy line of grey path cleaving the dim glamour of daisies and buttercups, there came to him the feeling that he was in the presence, not of sleep, but of eternal waiting. The sound of his footfalls seemed desecration. So devotional was that hush, burning the spicy incense of millions of leaves and blades of grass.

Crossing the last stile he came out, close to her deserted cottage, under her lime-tree, which on the night of Courtier's adventure had hung blue-black round the moon. On that side, only a rail, and a few shrubs confined her garden.

The house was all dark, but the many tall white flowers, like a bright vapour rising from earth, clung to the air above the beds. Leaning against the tree Miltoun gave himself to memory.

From the silent boughs which drooped round his dark figure, a little sleepy bird uttered a faint cheep; a hedgehog, or some small beast of night, rustled away in the grass close by; a moth flew past, seeking its candle flame. And something in Miltoun's heart took wings after it, searching for the warmth and light of his blown candle of love. Then, in the hush he heard a sound as of a branch ceaselessly trailed through long grass, fainter and fainter, more and more distinct; again fainter; but nothing could he see that should make that homeless sound. And the sense of some near but unseen presence crept on him, till the hair moved on his scalp. If God would light the moon or stars, and let him see! If God would end the expectation of this night, let one wan glimmer down into her garden, and one wan glimmer into his breast! But it stayed dark, and the homeless noise never ceased. The weird thought came to Miltoun that it was made by his own heart, wandering out there, trying to feel warm again. He closed his eyes and at once knew that it was not his heart, but indeed some external presence, unconsolated. And stretching his hands out he moved forward to arrest that sound. As he reached the railing, it ceased. And he saw a flame leap up, a pale broad pathway of light blanching the grass.

And, realizing that she was there, within, he gasped. His fingernails bent and broke against the iron railing without his knowing. It was not as on that night when the red flowers on her windowsill had wafted their scent to him; it was no sheer overpowering rush of passion. Profounder, more terrible, was this rising up within him of yearning for love—as if, now defeated, it would nevermore stir, but lie dead on that dark grass beneath those dark boughs. And if victorious—what then? He stole back under the tree.

He could see little white moths travelling down that path of lamplight; he could see the white flowers quite plainly now, a pale watch of blossoms guarding the dark sleepy ones; and he stood, not reasoning, hardly any longer feeling; stunned, battered by struggle. His face and hands were sticky with the honey-dew, slowly, invisibly distilling from the lime-tree. He bent down and felt the grass. And suddenly there came over him the certainty of her presence. Yes, she was there—out on the verandah! He could see her white figure from head to foot; and, not realizing that she could not see him, he expected her to utter some cry. But no sound came from her, no gesture; she turned back into the house. Miltoun ran forward to the railing. But there, once more, he stopped—unable to think, unable to feel; as it were abandoned by himself. And he suddenly found his hand up at his mouth, as though there were blood there to be staunched that had escaped from his heart.

Still holding that hand before his mouth, and smothering the sound of his feet in the long grass, he crept away.

CHAPTER XXX

In the great glass house at Ravensham, Lady Casterley stood close to some Japanese lilies, with a letter in her hand. Her face was very white, for it was the first day she had been allowed down after an attack of influenza; nor had the hand in which she held the letter its usual steadiness. She read:

"MONKLAND COURT.

"Just a line, dear, before the post goes, to tell you that Babs has gone off happily. The child looked beautiful. She sent you her love, and some absurd message—that you would be glad to hear, she was perfectly safe, with both feet firmly on the ground."

A grim little smile played on Lady Casterley's pale lips:—Yes, indeed, and time too! The child had been very near the edge of the cliffs! Very near committing a piece of romantic folly! That was well over! And raising the letter again, she read on:

"We were all down for it, of course, and come back tomorrow. Geoffrey is quite cut up. Things can't be what they were without our Babs. I've watched Eustace very carefully, and I really believe he's safely over that affair at last. He is doing extraordinarily well in the House just now. Geoffrey says his speech on the Poor Law was head and shoulders the best made."

Lady Casterley let fall the hand which held the letter. Safe? Yes, he was safe! He had done the right—the natural thing! And in time he would be happy! He would rise now to that pinnacle of desired authority which she had dreamed of for him, ever since he was a tiny thing, ever since his little thin

brown hand had clasped hers in their wanderings amongst the flowers, and the furniture of tall rooms. But, as she stood—crumpling the letter, grey-white as some small resolute ghost, among her tall lilies that filled with their scent the great glass house—shadows flitted across her face. Was it the fugitive noon sunshine? Or was it some glimmering perception of the old Greek saying—'Character is Fate;' some sudden sense of the universal truth that all are in bond to their own natures, and what a man has most desired shall in the end enslave him?

THE END.

THE BURNING SPEAR

by John Galsworthy

Being the Experiences of Mr. John Lavender in the Time of War

Recorded by: A. R. P—M [John Galsworthy]

[NOTE: John Galsworthy said of this work: "'The Burning Spear' was revenge of the nerves. It was bad enough to have to bear the dreads and strains and griefs of war." Several years after its first publication he admitted authorship and it was included in the collected edition of his works. D.W.]

"With a heart of furious fancies,
Whereof I am commander,
With a burning spear and a horse of air
In the wilderness I wander;
With a night of ghosts and shadows
I summoned am to tourney
Ten leagues beyond the wide world's end
For me it is no journey."

TOM O'BEDLAM

THE BURNING SPEAR

I

THE HERO

In the year — there dwelt on Hampstead Heath a small thin gentleman of fifty-eight, gentle disposition, and independent means, whose wits had become somewhat addled from reading the writings and speeches of public men. The castle which, like every Englishman, he inhabited was embedded in lilac bushes and laburnums, and was attached to another castle, embedded, in deference to our national dislike of uniformity, in acacias and laurustinus. Our gentleman, whose name was John Lavender, had until the days of the Great War passed one of those curious existences are sometimes to be met with, in doing harm to nobody. He had been brought up to the Bar, but like most barristers had never practised, and had spent his time among animals and the wisdom of the past. At the period in

which this record opens he owned a young female sheep-dog called Blink, with beautiful eyes obscured by hair; and was attended to by a thin and energetic housekeeper, in his estimation above all weakness, whose name was Marian Petty, and by her husband, his chauffeur, whose name was Joe.

It was the ambition of our hero to be, like all public men, without fear and without reproach. He drank not, abstained from fleshly intercourse, and habitually spoke the truth. His face was thin, high cheek-boned, and not unpleasing, with one loose eyebrow over which he had no control; his eyes, bright and of hazel hue, looked his fellows in the face without seeing what was in it. Though his moustache was still dark, his thick waving hair was permanently white, for his study was lined from floor to ceiling with books, pamphlets, journals, and the recorded utterances of great mouths. He was of a frugal habit, ate what was put before him without question, and if asked what he would have, invariably answered: "What is there?" without listening to the reply. For at mealtimes it was his custom to read the writings of great men.

"Joe," he would say to his chauffeur, who had a slight limp, a green wandering eye, and a red face, with a rather curved and rather redder nose, "You must read this."

And Joe would answer:

"Which one is that, sir?"

"Hummingtop; a great man, I think, Joe."

"A brainy chap, right enough, sir."

"He has done wonders for the country. Listen to this." And Mr. Lavender would read as follows: "If I had fifty sons I would give them all. If I had forty daughters they should nurse and scrub and weed and fill shells; if I had thirty country-houses they should all be hospitals; if I had twenty pens I would use them all day long; if had ten voices they should never cease to inspire and aid my country."

"If 'e had nine lives," interrupted Joe, with a certain suddenness, "'e'd save the lot."

Mr. Lavender lowered the paper.

"I cannot bear cynicism, Joe; there is no quality so unbecoming to a gentleman."

"Me and 'im don't put in for that, sir."

"Joe, Mr. Lavender would say you are, incorrigible...."

Our gentleman, in common with all worthy of the name, had a bank-book, which, in hopes that it would disclose an unsuspected balance, he would have "made up" every time he read an utterance exhorting people to invest and save their country.

One morning at the end of May, finding there was none, he called in his housekeeper and said:

"Mrs. Petty, we are spending too much; we have again been exhorted to save. Listen! 'Every penny diverted from prosecution of the war is one more spent in the interests of the enemies of mankind. No patriotic person, I am confident; will spend upon him or herself a stiver which could be devoted to the noble ends so near to all our hearts. Let us make every spare copper into bullets to strengthen the sinews of war!' A great speech. What can we do without?"

"The newspapers, sir."

"Don't be foolish, Mrs. Petty. From what else could we draw our inspiration and comfort in these terrible days?"

Mrs. Petty sniffed. "Well, you can't eat less than you do," she said; "but you might stop feedin' Blink out of your rations—that I do think."

"I have not found that forbidden as yet in any public utterance," returned Mr. Lavender; "but when the Earl of Betternot tells us to stop, I shall follow his example, you may depend on that. The country comes before everything." Mrs. Petty tossed her head and murmured darkly—

"Do you suppose he's got an example, Sir?"

"Mrs. Petty," replied Mr. Lavender, "that is quite unworthy of you. But, tell me, what can we do without?"

"I could do without Joe," responded Mrs. Petty, "now that you're not using him as chauffeur."

"Please be serious. Joe is an institution; besides, I am thinking of offering myself to the Government as a speaker now that we may use gas."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Petty.

"I am going down about it to-morrow."

"Indeed, sir!"

"I feel my energies are not fully employed."

"No, sir?"

"By the way, there was a wonderful leader on potatoes yesterday. We must dig up the garden. Do you know what the subsoil is?"

"Brickbats and dead cats, I expect, sir."

"Ah! We shall soon improve that. Every inch of land reclaimed is a nail in the coffin of our common enemies."

And going over to a bookcase, Mr. Lavender took out the third from the top of a pile of newspapers. "Listen!" he said. "The problem before us is the extraction of every potential ounce of food. No half measures must content us. Potatoes! Potatoes! No matter how, where, when the prime national necessity is now the growth of potatoes. All Britons should join in raising a plant which may be our very salvation.

"Fudge!" murmured Mrs. Petty.

Mr. Lavender read on, and his eyes glowed.

"Ah!" he thought, "I, too, can do my bit to save England.... It needs but the spark to burn away the dross of this terrible horse-sense which keeps the country back.

"Mrs. Petty!" But Mrs. Petty was already not.

.....

The grass never grew under the feet of Mr. Lavender, No sooner had he formed his sudden resolve than he wrote to what he conceived to be the proper quarter, and receiving no reply, went down to the centre of the official world. It was at time of change and no small national excitement; brooms were sweeping clean, and new offices had arisen everywhere. Mr. Lavender passed bewildered among large stone buildings and small wooden buildings, not knowing where to go. He had bought no clothes since the beginning of the war, except the various Volunteer uniforms which the exigencies of a shifting situation had forced the authorities to withdraw from time to time; and his, small shrunken figure struck somewhat vividly on the eye, with elbows and knees shining in the summer sunlight. Stopping at last before the only object which seemed unchanged, he said:

"Can you tell me where the Ministry is?"

The officer looked down at him.

"What for?"

"For speaking about the country."

"Ministry of Propagation? First on the right, second door on the left."

"Thank you. The Police are wonderful."

"None of that," said the officer coldly.

"I only said you were wonderful."

"I 'eard you."

"But you are. I don't know what the country would do without you. Your solid qualities, your imperturbable bonhomie, your truly British tenderness towards——"

"Pass away!" said the officer.

"I am only repeating what we all say of you," rejoined Mr. Lavender reproachfully.

"Did you 'ear me say 'Move on,'" said the officer; "or must I make you an example?"

"YOU are the example," said Mr. Lavender warmly.

"Any more names," returned the officer, "and I take you to the station." And he moved out into the traffic. Puzzled by his unfriendliness Mr. Lavender resumed his search, and, arriving at the door indicated, went in. A dark, dusty, deserted corridor led him nowhere, till he came on a little girl in a brown frock, with her hair down her back.

"Can you tell me, little one——" he said, laying his hand on her head.

"Chuck it!" said the little girl.

"No, no!" responded Mr. Lavender, deeply hurt. "Can you tell me where I can find the Minister?"

"Ave you an appointment?"

"No; but I wrote to him. He should expect me."

"Wot nyme?"

"John Lavender. Here is my card."

"I'll tyke it in. Wyte 'ere!"

"Wonderful!" mused Mr. Lavender; "the patriotic impulse already stirring in these little hearts! What was the stanza of that patriotic poet?"

"Lives not a babe who shall not feel the pulse
Of Britain's need beat wild in Britain's wrist.
And, sacrificial, in the world's convulse
Put up its lips to be by Britain kissed."

"So young to bring their lives to the service of the country!"

"Come on," said the little girl, reappearing suddenly; "e'll see you."

Mr. Lavender entered a room which had a considerable resemblance to the office of a lawyer save for the absence of tomes. It seemed furnished almost exclusively by the Minister, who sat with knees crossed, in a pair of large round tortoiseshell spectacles, which did not, however, veil the keenness of his eyes. He was a man with close cropped grey hair, a broad, yellow, clean-shaven face, and thrusting grey eyes.

"Mr. Lavender," he said, in a raw, forcible voice; "sit down, will you?"

"I wrote to you," began our hero, "expressing the wish to offer myself as a speaker."

"Ah!" said the Minister. "Let's see—Lavender, Lavender. Here's your letter." And extracting a letter from a file he read it, avoiding with difficulty his tortoise-shell spectacles. "You want to stump the country? M.A., Barrister, and Fellow of the Zoological. Are you a good speaker?"

"If zeal——" began Mr. Lavender.

"That's it; spark! We're out to win this war, sir."

"Quite so," began Mr. Lavender. "If devotion——"

"You'll have to use gas," said the Minister; and we don't pay."

"Pay!" cried Mr. Lavender with horror; "no, indeed!"

The Minister bent on him a shrewd glance.

"What's your line? Anything particular, or just general patriotism? I recommend that; but you'll have to put some punch into it, you know."

"I have studied all the great orators of the war, sir," said Mr. Lavender, "and am familiar with all the great writers on, it. I should form myself on them; and if enthusiasm——"

"Quite!" said the Minister. "If you want any atrocities we can give you them. No facts and no figures; just general pat."

"I shall endeavour——" began Mr. Lavender.

"Well, good-bye," said the Minister, rising. "When do you start?"

Mr. Lavender rose too. "To-morrow," he said, "if I can get inflated."

The Minister rang a bell.

"You're on your own, mind," he said. "No facts; what they want is ginger. Yes, Mr. Japes?"

And seeing that the Minister was looking over his tortoiseshell spectacles at somebody behind him, Mr. Lavender turned and went out. In the corridor he thought, "What terseness! How different from the days when Dickens wrote his 'Circumlocution Office'! Punch!" And opening the wrong door, he found himself in the presence of six little girls in brown frocks, sitting against the walls with their thumbs in their mouths.

"Oh!" he said, "I'm afraid I've lost my way."

The eldest of the little girls withdrew a thumb.

"What d'yer want?"

"The door," said Mr. Lavender.

"Second on the right."

"Goodbye," said Mr. Lavender.

The little girls did not answer. And he went out thinking, "These children are really wonderful! What devotion one sees! And yet the country is not yet fully roused!"

II

THE VALET

Joe Petty stood contemplating the car which, purchased some fifteen years before had not been used since the war began. Birds had nested in its hair. It smelled of mould inside; it creaked from rust. "The Guv'nor must be cracked," he thought, "to think we can get anywhere in this old geyser. Well, well, it's summer; if we break down it won't break my 'eart. Government job—better than diggin' or drillin'. Good old Guv!" So musing, he lit his pipe and examined the recesses beneath the driver's seat. "A bottle or three," he thought, "in case our patriotism should get us stuck a bit off the beaten; a loaf or two, some 'oney in a pot, and a good old 'am.

"A life on the rollin' road——' 'Ow they can give 'im the job I can't think!" His soliloquy was here interrupted by the approach of his wife, bearing a valise.

"Don't you wish you was comin', old girl?" he remarked to her lightly.

"I do not; I'm glad to be shut of you. Keep his feet dry. What have you got under there?"

Joe Petty winked.

"What a lumbering great thing it looks!" said Mrs. Petty, gazing upwards.

"Ah!" returned her husband thoughtfully, we'll 'ave the population round us without advertisement. And taking the heads of two small boys who had come up, he knocked them together in an absent-minded fashion.

"Well," said Mrs. Petty, "I can't waste time. Here's his extra set of teeth. Don't lose them. Have you got your own toothbrush? Use it, and behave yourself. Let me have a line. And don't let him get excited." She tapped her forehead.

"Go away, you boys; shoo!"

The boys, now six in number, raised a slight cheer; for at that moment Mr. Lavender, in a broad-

brimmed grey felt hat and a holland dust-coat, came out through his garden-gate carrying a pile of newspapers and pamphlets so large that his feet, legs, and hat alone were visible.

"Open the door, Joe!" he said, and stumbled into the body of the vehicle. A shrill cheer rose from the eight boys, who could see him through the further window. Taking this for an augury Of success, Mr. Lavender removed his hat, and putting his head through the window, thus addressed the ten boys:

"I thank you. The occasion is one which I shall ever remember. The Government has charged me with the great task of rousing our country in days which demand of each of us the utmost exertions. I am proud to feel that I have here, on the very threshold of my task, an audience of bright young spirits, each one of whom in this democratic country has in him perhaps the makings of a General or even of a Prime Minister. Let it be your earnest endeavour, boys——"

At this moment a piece of indiarubber rebounded from Mr. Lavender's forehead, and he recoiled into the body of the car.

"Are you right, sir?" said Joe, looking in; and without waiting for reply he started the engine. The car moved out amid a volley of stones, balls, cheers, and other missiles from the fifteen boys who pursued it with frenzy. Swaying slightly from side to side, with billowing bag, it gathered speed, and, turning a corner, took road for the country. Mr. Lavender, somewhat dazed, for the indiarubber had been hard, sat gazing through the little back window at the great city he was leaving. His lips moved, expressing unconsciously the sentiments of innumerable Lord Mayors: "Greatest City in the world, Queen of Commerce, whose full heart I can still hear beating behind me, in mingled pride and regret I leave you. With the most sacred gratitude I lay down my office. I go to other work, whose——Joe!"

"Sir?"

"Do you see that?"

"I see your 'ead, that's all, sir."

"We seem to be followed by a little column of dust, which keeps ever at the same distance in the middle of the road. Do you think it can be an augury."

"No; I should think it's a dog."

"In that case, hold hard!" said Mr. Lavender, who had a weakness for dog's. Joe slackened the car's pace, and leaned his head round the corner. The column of dust approached rapidly.

"It is a dog," said Mr. Lavender, "it's Blink."

The female sheep-dog, almost flat with the ground from speed, emerged from the dust, wild with hair and anxiety, white on the cheeks and chest and top of the head, and grey in the body and the very little tail, and passed them like a streak of lightning.

"Get on!" cried Mr. Lavender, excited; "follow her she's trying to catch us up!"

Joe urged on the car, which responded gallantly, swaying from side to side, while the gas-bag bellied and shook; but the faster it went the faster the sheep-dog flew in front of it.

"This is dreadful!" said Mr. Lavender in anguish, leaning far out.

"Blink! Blink!"

His cries were drowned in the roar of the car.

"Damn the brute!" muttered Joe at this rate she'll be over the edge in 'alf a mo'. Wherever does she think we are?"

"Blink! Blink!" wailed Mr. Lavender. "Get on, Joe, get on! She's gaining on us!"

"Well I never see anything like this," said Joe, "chasin' wot's chasing you! Hi! Hi!"

Urged on by their shouts and the noise of the pursuing car, the poor dog redoubled her efforts to rejoin her master, and Mr. Lavender, Joe, and the car, which had begun to emit the most lamentable creaks and odours, redoubled theirs.

"I shall bust her up," said Joe.

"I care not!" cried Mr. Lavender. "I must recover the dog."

They flashed through the outskirts of the Garden City. "Stop her, stop her!" called Mr. Lavender to

such of the astonished inhabitants as they had already left behind. "This is a nightmare, Joe!"

"It's a blinkin' day-dream," returned Joe, forcing the car to an expiring spurt.

"If she gets to that 'ill before we ketch 'er, we're done; the old geyser can't 'alf crawl up 'ills."

"We're gaining," shrieked Mr. Lavender; "I can see her tongue."

As though it heard his voice, the car leaped forward and stopped with a sudden and most formidable jerk; the door burst open, and Mr. Lavender fell out upon his sheep-dog.

Fortunately they were in the only bed of nettles in that part of the world, and its softness and that of Blink assuaged the severity of his fall, yet it was some minutes before he regained the full measure of his faculties. He came to himself sitting on a milestone, with his dog on her hind legs between his knees, licking his face clean, and panting down his throat.

"Joe," he said; "where are you?"

The voice of Joe replied from underneath the car: "Here sir. She's popped."

"Do you mean that our journey is arrested?"

"Ah! We're in irons. You may as well walk 'ome, sir. It ain't two miles.

"No! no!" said Mr. Lavender. "We passed the Garden City a little way back; I could go and hold a meeting. How long will you be?"

"A day or two," said Joe.

Mr. Lavender sighed, and at this manifestation of his grief his sheep-dog redoubled her efforts to comfort him. "Nothing becomes one more than the practice of philosophy," he thought. "I always admired those great public men who in moments of national peril can still dine with a good appetite. We will sit in the car a little, for I have rather a pain, and think over a speech." So musing he mounted the car, followed by his dog, and sat down in considerable discomfort.

"What subject can I choose for a Garden City?" he thought, and remembering that he had with him the speech of a bishop on the subject of babies, he dived into his bundle of literature, and extracting a pamphlet began to con its periods. A sharp blow from a hammer on the bottom of the car just below where Blink was sitting caused him to pause and the dog to rise and examine her tiny tail.

"Curious," thought Mr. Lavender dreamily, "how Joe always does the right thing in the wrong place. He is very English." The hammering continued, and the dog, who traced it to the omnipotence of her master, got up on the seat where she could lick his face. Mr. Lavender was compelled to stop.

"Joe," he said, leaning out and down; "must you?"

The face of Joe, very red, leaned out and up. "What's the matter now, sir?"

"I am preparing a speech; must you hammer?"

"No," returned Joe, "I needn't."

"I don't wish you to waste your time," said Mr Lavender.

"Don't worry about that, sir," replied Joe; "there's plenty to do."

"In that case I shall be glad to finish my speech."

Mr. Lavender resumed his seat and Blink her position on the floor, with her head on his feet. The sound of his voice soon rose again in the car like the buzzing of large flies. "If we are to win this war we must have an ever-increasing population. In town and countryside, in the palace and the slum, above all in the Garden City, we must have babies."

Here Blink, who had been regarding him with lustrous eyes, leaped on to his knees and licked his mouth. Again Mr. Lavender was compelled to stop.

"Down, Blink, down! I am not speaking to you. 'The future of our country depends on the little citizens born now. I especially appeal to women. It is to them we must look——"

"Will you 'ave a glass, sir?"

Mr. Lavender saw before him a tumbler containing a yellow fluid.

"Joe," he said sadly, "you know my rule——"

"'Ere's the exception, sir."

Mr. Lavender sighed. "No, no; I must practise what I preach. I shall soon be rousing the people on the liquor question, too."

"Well, 'ere's luck," said Joe, draining the glass. "Will you 'ave a slice of 'am?"

"That would not be amiss," said Mr. Lavender, taking Joe's knife with the slice of ham upon its point. "It is to them that we must look," he resumed, "'to rejuvenate the Empire and make good the losses in the firing-line.'" And he raised the knife to his mouth. No result followed, while Blink wriggled on her base and licked her lips.

"Blink!" said Mr. Lavender reproachfully. "Joe!"

"Sir!"

"When you've finished your lunch and repaired the car you will find me in the Town Hall or market-place. Take care of Blink. I'll tie her up. Have you some string?"

Having secured his dog to the handle of the door and disregarded the intensity of her gaze, Mr. Lavender walked back towards the Garden City with a pamphlet in one hand and a crutch-handled stick in the other. Restoring the ham to its nest behind his feet, Joe finished the bottle of Bass. "This is a bit of all right!" he thought dreamily. "Lie down, you bitch! Quiet! How can I get my nap while you make that row? Lie down! That's better."

Blink was silent, gnawing at her string. The smile deepened on Joe's face, his head fell a little one side his mouth fell open a fly flew into it.

"Ah!" he thought, spitting it out; "dog's quiet now." He slept.

III

MR. LAVENDER ADDRESSES A CROWD OF HUNS

"Give them ginger!" thought Mr. Lavender, approaching the first houses. "My first task, however, will be to collect them."

"Can you tell me," he said to a dustman, "where the market-place is?"

"Ain't none."

"The Town Hall, then?"

"Likewise."

"What place is there, then," said Mr. Lavender, "where people congregate?"

"They don't."

"Do they never hold public meetings here?"

"Ah!" said the dustman mysteriously.

"I wish to address them on the subject of babies."

"Bill! Gent abaht babies. Where'd he better go?"

The man addressed, however, who carried a bag of tools, did not stop.

"You, 'ear?" said the dustman, and urging his horse, passed on.

"How rude!" thought Mr. Lavender. Something cold and wet was pressed against his hand, he felt a

turmoil, and saw Blink moving round and round him, curved like a horseshoe, with a bit of string dangling from her white neck. At that moment of discouragement the sight of one who believed in him gave Mr. Lavender nothing but pleasure. "How wonderful dogs are!" he murmured. The sheep-dog responded by bounds and ear-splitting barks, so that two boys and a little girl wheeling a perambulator stopped to look and listen.

"She is like Mercury," thought Mr. Lavender; and taking advantage of her interest in his hat, which she had knocked off in her effusions, he placed his hand on her head and crumpled her ear. The dog passed into an hypnotic trance, broken by soft grumblings of pleasure. "The most beautiful eyes in the world!" thought Mr. Lavender, replacing his hat; "the innocence and goodness of her face are entrancing."

In his long holland coat, with his wide-brimmed felt hat all dusty, and the crutch-handled stick in his hand, he had already arrested the attention of five boys, the little girl with the perambulator, a postman, a maid-servant, and three old ladies.

"What a beautiful dog yours is!" said one of the old ladies; "dear creature! Are you a shepherd?"

Mr. Lavender removed his hat.

"No, madam," he said; "a public speaker."

"How foolish of me!" replied the old lady.

"Not at all, madam; the folly is mine." And Mr. Lavender bowed. "I have come here to give an address on babies."

The old lady looked at him shrewdly, and, saying something in a low voice to her companions, passed on, to halt again a little way off.

In the meantime the rumour that there was a horse down in the Clemenceau Road had spread rapidly, and more boys, several little girls, and three soldiers in blue, with red ties, had joined the group round Mr. Lavender, to whom there seemed something more than providential in this rapid assemblage. Looking round him for a platform from which to address them, he saw nothing but the low wall of the little villa garden outside which he was standing. Mounting on this, therefore, and firmly grasping the branch of a young acacia tree to steady himself, he stood upright, while Blink, on her hind legs, scratched at the wall, whining and sniffing his feet.

Encouraged by the low murmur of astonishment, which swelled idly into a shrill cheer, Mr. Lavender removed his hat, and spoke as follows:

"Fellow Britons, at this crisis in the history of our country I make no apology for addressing myself to the gathering I see around me. Here, in the cradle of patriotism and the very heart of Movements, I may safely assume that you are aware of the importance of Man-power. At a moment when every man of a certain age and over is wanted at the front, and every woman of marriageable years is needed in hospitals, in factories, on the land, or where not, we see as never before the paramount necessity of mobilizing the forces racial progress and increasing the numbers of our population. Not a man, not a woman can be spared from the great task in which they are now engaged, of defeating the common enemy. Side by side with our American cousins, with la belle France, and the Queen of the Adriatic, we are fighting to avert the greatest menace which ever threatened civilization. Our cruel enemies are strong and ruthless. While I have any say in this matter, no man or woman shall be withdrawn from the sacred cause of victory; better they should die to the last unit than that we should take our hands from the plough. But, ladies and gentlemen, we must never forget that in the place of every one who dies we must put two. Do not be content with ordinary measures; these are no piping times of peace. Never was there in the history of this country such a crying need for—for twins, if I may put it picturesquely. In each family, in each home where there are no families, let there be two babies where there was one, for thus only can we triumph over the devastation of this war." At this moment the now considerable audience, which had hitherto been silent, broke into a shrill "'Ear, 'ear!" and Mr. Lavender, taking his hand from the acacia branch to silence them, fell off the wall into the garden. Seeing her master thus vanish, Blink, who had never ceased to whine and sniff his toes, leaped over and landed on his chest. Rising with difficulty, Mr. Lavender found himself in front of an elderly man with a commercial cast of countenance, who said: "You're trespassing!"

"I am aware of it," returned Mr. Lavender and I beg your pardon. It was quite inadvertent, however.

"Rubbish!" said the man.

"I fell off the wall."

"Whose wall do you think it is?" said the man.

"How should I know?" said Mr. Lavender; "I am a stranger."

"Out you go," said the man, applying his boot to Blink.

Mr. Lavender's eyes blazed. "You may insult me," he said, "but you must not kick my dog, or I shall do you an injury."

"Try!" said the man.

"I will," responded Mr. Lavender, taking off his holland coat.

To what extremities he would have proceeded cannot be told, for at this moment the old lady who had taken him for a shepherd appeared on the path, tapping her forehead with finger.

"All right!" said the owner of the garden, "take him away."

The old lady laced her hand within Mr. Lavender's arm. "Come with me, sir," she said, "and your nice doggie."

Mr. Lavender, whose politeness to ladies was invariable, bowed, and resuming his coat accompanied her through the 'garden gate. "He kicked my dog," he said; "no action could be more despicable."

"Yes, yes," said the old lady soothingly. "Poor doggie!"

The crowd, who had hoped for better things, here gave vent to a prolonged jeer.

"Stop!" said Mr. Lavender; "I am going to take a collection."

"There, there!" said the old lady. "Poor man!"

"I don't know what you mean by that, madam," said Mr. Lavender, whose spirit was roused; "I shall certainly take a collection, in the interests of our population." So saying he removed his hat, and disengaging his arm from the old lady's hand, moved out into the throng, extending the hat. A boy took it from him at once, and placing it on his head, ran off, pursued by Blink, who, by barking and jumping up increased the boy's speed to one of which he could never have thought himself capable. Mr. Lavender followed, calling out "Blink!" at the top of his voice. The crowd followed Mr. Lavender, and the old lady followed crowd. Thus they proceeded until the boy, arriving at a small piece of communal water, flung the hat into the middle of it, and, scaling the wall, made a strategic detour and became a disinterested spectator among the crowd. The hat, after skimming the surface of the pond, settled like a water-lily, crown downwards, while Blink, perceiving in all this the hand of her master, stood barking at it wildly. Mr. Lavender arrived at the edge of the pond slightly in advance of the crowd.

"Good Blink!" he said. "Fetch it! Good Blink!"

Blink looked up into his face, and, with the acumen for which her breed is noted, perceiving he desired her to enter the water backed away from it.

"She is not a water dog," explained Mr. Lavender to the three soldiers in blue clothes.

"Good dog; fetch it!" Blink backed into the soldiers, who, bending down, took her by head tail, threw her into the pond, and encouraged her on with small stones pitched at the hat. Having taken the plunge, the intelligent animal waded boldly to the hat, and endeavoured by barking and making little rushes at it with her nose, to induce it to return to shore.

"She thinks it's a sheep," said Mr. Lavender; "a striking instance of hereditary instinct."

Blink, unable to persuade the hat, mounted it with her fore-paws and trod it under.

"Ooray!" shouted the crowd.

"Give us a shilling, guv'nor, an' I'll get it for yer?"

"Thank you, my boy," said Mr. Lavender, producing a shilling.

The boy—the same boy who had thrown it in—stepped into the water and waded towards the hat. But as he approached, Blink interposed between him and the hat, growling and showing her teeth.

"Does she bite?" yelled the boy.

"Only strangers," cried Mr. Lavender.

Excited by her master's appeal, Blink seized the jacket of the boy, who made for the shore, while the hat rested in the centre of the pond, the cynosure of the stones with which the soldiers were endeavouring to drive it towards the bank. By this, time the old lady had rejoined Mr. Lavender.

"Your nice hat she murmured.

"I thank you for your sympathy, madam," Lavender, running his hand through his hair; "in moments like these one realizes the deep humanity of the British people. I really believe that in no other race could you find such universal interest and anxiety to recover a hat. Say what you will, we are a great nation, who only, need rousing to show our best qualities. Do you remember the words of the editor: 'In the spavined and spatch-cocked ruin to which our inhuman enemies have reduced civilization, we of the island shine with undimmed effulgence in all those qualities which mark man out from the ravening beast?'"

"But how are you going to get your hat?" asked the old lady.

"I know not," returned Mr. Lavender, still under the influence of the sentiment he had quoted; "but if I had fifteen hats I would take them all off to the virtues which have been ascribed to the British people by all those great men who have written and spoken since the war began."

"Yes," said the old lady soothingly. "But, I think you had better come under my sunshade. The sun is very strong."

"Madam," said Mr. Lavender, "you are very good, but your sunshade is too small. To deprive you of even an inch of its shade would be unworthy of anyone in public life." So saying, he recoiled from the proffered sunshade into the pond, which he had forgotten was behind him.

"Oh, dear!" said the old lady; "now you've got your feet wet!"

"It is nothing," responded Mr. Lavender gallantly. And seeing that he was already wet, he rolled up his trousers, and holding up the tails of his holland coat, turned round and proceeded towards his hat, to the frantic delight of the crowd.

"The war is a lesson to us to make little of little things," he thought, securing the hat and wringing it out. "My feet are wet, but—how much wetter they would be in the trenches, if feet can be wetter than wet through," he mused with some exactitude. "Down, Blink, down!" For Blink was plastering him with the water-marks of joy and anxiety. "Nothing is quite so beautiful as the devotion of one's own dog," thought Mr. Lavender, resuming the hat, and returning towards the shore. The by-now-considerable throng were watching him with every mark of acute enjoyment; and the moment appeared to Mr. Lavender auspicious for addressing them. Without, therefore, emerging from the pond, which he took for his, platform, he spoke as follows:

"Circumstances over which I have no control have given me the advantage of your presence in numbers which do credit to the heart of the nation to which we all belong. In the midst of the greatest war which ever threatened the principle of Liberty, I rejoice to see so many people able to follow the free and spontaneous impulses of their inmost beings. For, while we must remember that our every hour is at the disposal of our country, we must not forget the maxim of our fathers: 'Britons never will be slaves.' Only by preserving the freedom of individual conscience, and at the same time surrendering it whole-heartedly to every which the State makes on us, can we hope defeat the machinations of the arch enemies of mankind."

At this moment a little stone hit him sharply on the hand.

"Who threw that stone?" said Mr. Lavender. "Let him stand out."

The culprit, no other indeed than he who had thrown the hat in, and not fetched it out for a shilling, thus menaced with discovery made use of a masterly device, and called out loudly:

"Pro-German!"

Such was the instinctive patriotism of the crowd that the cry was taken up in several quarters; and for the moment Mr. Lavender remained speechless from astonishment. The cries of "Pro-German!" increased in volume, and a stone hitting her on the nose caused Blink to utter a yelp; Mr. Lavender's eyes blazed.

"Huns!" he cried; "Huns! I am coming out."

With this prodigious threat he emerged from the pond at the very moment that a car scattered the throng, and a well-known voice said:

"Well, sir, you 'ave been goin' it!"

"Joe," said Mr. Lavender, "don't speak to me!"

"Get in."

"Never!"

"Pro-Germans!" yelled the crowd.

"Get in!" repeated Joe.

And seizing Mr. Lavender as if collaring him at football, he knocked off his hat, propelled him into the car, banged the door, mounted, and started at full speed, with Blink leaping and barking in front of them.

Debouching from Piave Parade into Bottomley Lane he drove up it till the crowd was but a memory before he stopped to examine the condition his master. Mr. Lavender was hanging out of window, looking back, and shivering violently.

"Well, sir," said Joe. "I don't think!"

"Joe," said Mr. Lavender that crowd ought not to be at large. They were manifestly Huns.

"The speakin's been a bit too much for you, sir," said Joe. "But you've got it off your chest, anyway."

Mr. Lavender regarded him for a moment in silence; then putting his hand to his throat, said hoarsely:

"No, on my chest, I think, Joe. All public speakers do. It is inseparable from that great calling."

"Alf a mo'!" grunted Joe, diving into the recesses beneath the driving-seat. "'Ere, swig that off, sir."

Mr. Lavender raised the tumbler of fluid to his mouth, and drank it off; only from the dregs left on his moustache did he perceive that it smelled of rum and honey.

"Joe," he said reproachfully, "you have made me break my pledge."

Joe smiled. "Well, what are they for, sir? You'll sleep at 'ome to-night."

"Never," said Mr. Lavender. "I shall sleep at High Barnet; I must address them there tomorrow on abstinence during the war."

"As you please, sir. But try and 'ave a nap while we go along." And lifting Blink into the car, where she lay drenched and exhausted by excitement, with the petal of a purple flower clinging to her black nose, he mounted to his seat and drove off. Mr. Lavender, for years unaccustomed to spirituous liquor, of which he had swallowed nearly half a pint neat, passed rapidly into a state of coma. Nor did he fully regain consciousness till he awoke in bed the next morning.

IV

INTO THE DANGERS OF A PUBLIC LIFE

"At what time is my meeting?" thought Mr. Lavender vaguely, gazing at the light filtering through the Venetian blind. "Blink!"

His dog, who was lying beside his bed gnawing a bone which with some presence of mind she had brought in, raised herself and regarded him with the innocence of her species. "She has an air of divine madness," thought Mr. Lavender, "which is very pleasing to me. I have a terrible headache." And seeing a bellrope near his hand he pulled it.

A voice said: "Yes, sir."

"I wish to see my, servant, Joe Petty," said Lavender. "I shall not require any breakfast thank you. What is the population of High Barnet?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about, sir," answered the voice, which seemed to be that of his housekeeper; "but you can't see Joe; he's gone out with a flea in his ear. The idea of his letting you get your feet wet like that!

"How is this?" said Mr. Lavender. "I thought you were the chambermaid of the inn at High Barnet?"

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Petty soothingly, placing a thermometer in his mouth. "Smoke that a minute, sir. Oh! look at what this dog's brought in! Fie!" And taking the bone between thumb and finger she cast it out of the window; while Blink, aware that she was considered in the wrong, and convinced that she was in the right, spread out her left paw, laid her head on her right paw, and pressed her chin hard against it. Mrs. Petty, returning from the window, stood above her master, who lay gazing up with the thermometer jutting out through the middle of his moustache.

"I thought so!" she said, removing it; "a hundred and one. No getting up for you, sir! That Joe!"

"Mrs. Petty," said Mr. Lavender rather feebly, for his head pained him excessively, "bring me the morning papers."

"No, sir. The thermometer bursts at an an' ten. I'll bring you the doctor."

Mr. Lavender was about to utter a protest when he reflected that all public men had doctors.

"About the bulletin?" he said faintly.

"What?" ejaculated Mrs. Petty, whose face seemed to Mr. Lavender to have become all cheekbones, eyes, and shadows. Joe never said a about a bullet. Where? and however did you get it in?

"I did not say 'bullet in'," murmured Mr. Lavender closing his eyes! "I said bulletin. They have it."

At this mysterious sentence Mrs. Petty lifted her hands, and muttering the word "Ravin'!" hastened from the room. No sooner had she gone, however, than Blink, whose memory was perfect, rose, and going to the window placed her forepaws on the sill. Seeing her bone shining on the lawn below, with that disregard of worldly consequence which she shared with all fine characters, she leaped through. The rattle of the Venetian blind disturbed Mr. Lavender from the lethargy to which he had reverted. "Mr. John Lavender passed a good night," he thought, "but his condition is still critical." And in his disordered imagination he seemed to see people outside Tube stations, standing stock-still in the middle of the traffic, reading that bulletin in the evening papers. "Let me see," he mused, "how will they run?" To-morrow I shall be better, but not yet able to leave my bed; the day after to-morrow I shall have a slight relapse, and my condition will still give cause for anxiety; on the day following—What is that noise. For a sound like the whiffling of a wind through dry sticks combined with the creaking of a saw had, impinged on his senses. It was succeeded by scratching. "Blink!" said Mr. Lavender. A heartrending whine came from outside the door. Mr. Lavender rose and opened it. His dog came in carrying her bone, and putting it down by the bed divided her attention between it and her master's legs, revealed by the nightshirt which, in deference to the great Disraeli, he had never abandoned in favour of pyjamas. Having achieved so erect a posture Mr. Lavender, whose heated imagination had now carried him to the convalescent stage of his indisposition, felt that a change of air would do him good, and going to the window, leaned out above a lilac-tree.

"Mr. John Lavender," he murmured, "has gone to his seat to recuperate before resuming his public duties."

While he stood there his attention was distracted by a tall young lady of fine build and joyous colour, who was watering some sweet-peas in the garden of the adjoining castle: Naturally delicate, Mr. Lavender at once sought a jacket, and, having put it on, resumed his position at the window. He had not watched her more than two minutes before he saw that she was cultivating soil, and, filled with admiration, he leaned still further out, and said:

"My dear young madam, you are doing a great work."

Thus addressed, the young lady, who had those roving grey eyes which see everything and betoken a large nature not devoid of merry genius, looked up and smiled.

"Believe me," continued Mr. Lavender, "no task in these days is so important as the cultivation of the soil; now that we are fighting to the last man and the last dollar every woman and child in the islands should put their hands to the plough. And at that word his vision became feverishly enlarged, so that he seemed to see not merely the young lady, but quantities of young ladies, filling the whole garden.

"This," he went on, raising his voice, "is the psychological moment, the turning-point in the history of these islands. The defeat of our common enemies imposes on us the sacred duty of feeding ourselves once more. 'There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to—Oh!' For in his desire to stir his audience, Mr. Lavender had reached out too far, and losing foothold on his polished bedroom floor, was slipping down into the lilac-bush. He was arrested by a jerk from behind; where Blink, moved by this sudden elopement of her master, had seized him by the nightshirt tails, and was staying his descent.

"Is anything up?" said the young lady.

"I have lost my balance," thickly answered Mr. Lavender, whose blood was running to his head, which was now lower than his feet. "Fortunately, my dog seems to be holding me from behind. But if someone could assist her it would be an advantage, for I fear that I am slipping."

"Hold on!" cried the young lady. And breaking through the low privet hedge which separated the domains, she vanished beneath him with a low gurgling sound.

Mr. Lavender, who dared not speak again for fear that Blink, hearing his voice, might let go to answer, remained suspended, torn with anxiety about his costume. "If she comes in," he thought, "I shall die from shame. And if she doesn't, I shall die from a broken neck. What a dreadful alternative!" And he firmly grasped the most substantial lilac-boughs within his reach, listening with the ears of a hare for any sound within the room, in which he no longer was to any appreciable extent. Then the thought of what a public man should feel in his position came to his rescue. "We die but once," he mused; "rather than shock that charming lady let me seek oblivion." And the words of his obituary notice at once began to dance before his eyes. "This great public servant honoured his country no less in his death than in his life." Then striking out vigorously with his feet he launched his body forward. The words "My goodness!" resounded above him, as all restraining influence was suddenly relaxed; Mr. Lavender slid into the lilac-bush, turned heels over head, and fell bump on the ground. He lay there at full length, conscious of everything, and especially of the faces of Blink and the young lady looking down on him from the window.

"Are you hurt?" she called.

"No," said Mr. Lavender, "that is—er—yes," he added, ever scrupulously exact.

"I'm coming down," said the young lady.

"Don't move!"

With a great effort Mr. Lavender arranged his costume, and closed his eyes. "How many lie like this, staring at the blue heavens!" he thought.

"Where has it got you?" said a voice; and he saw the young lady bending over him.

"In the dorsal region, I think," said Mr. Lavender. "But I suffer more from the thought that I—that you—"

"That's all right," said the young lady; "I'm a V.A.D. It WAS a bump! Let's see if you can—" and taking his hands she raised him to a sitting posture. "Does it work?"

"Yes," said Mr. Lavender rather faintly.

"Try and stand," said the young lady, pulling.

Mr. Lavender tried, and stood; but no, sooner was he on his feet than she turned her face away. Great tears rolled down her cheeks; and she writhed and shook all over.

"Don't!" cried Mr. Lavender, much concerned. "I beg you not to cry. It's nothing, I assure you—nothing!" The young lady with an effort controlled her emotion, and turned her large grey eyes on him.

"The angelic devotion of nurses!" murmured Mr. Lavender, leaning against the wall of the house with his hand to his back. "Nothing like it has been seen since the world began."

"I shall never forget the sight!" said the young lady, choking.

Mr. Lavender, who took the noises she made for sobbing, was unutterably disturbed.

"I can't bear to see you distressed on my account," he said. "I am quite well, I assure you; look—I can walk!" And he started forth up the garden in his nightshirt and Norfolk jacket. When he turned round she was no longer there, sounds of uncontrollable emotion were audible from the adjoining garden.

Going to the privet hedge, he looked over. She was lying gracefully on the grass, with her face smothered in her hands, and her whole body shaking. "Poor thing!" thought Mr. Lavender. "No doubt she is one of those whose nerves have been destroyed by the terrible sights she has seen!" But at that moment the young lady rose and ran as if demented into her castle. Mr. Lavender stayed transfixed. "Who would not be ill for the pleasure of drinking from a cup held by her hand?" he thought. "I am fortunate to have received injuries in trying to save her from confusion. Down, Blink, down!"

For his dog, who had once more leaped from the window, was frantically endeavouring to lick his face. Soothing her, and feeling his anatomy, Mr. Lavender became conscious that he was not alone. An old lady was standing on the gardenpath which led to the front gate, holding in her hand a hat. Mr. Lavender sat down at once, and gathering his nightshirt under him, spoke as follows:

"There are circumstances, madam, which even the greatest public servants cannot foresee, and I, who am the humblest of them, ask you to forgive me for receiving you in this costume."

"I have brought your hat back," said the old lady with a kindling eye; "they told me you lived here and I was anxious to know that you and your dear dog were none the worse."

"Madam," replied Mr. Lavender, "I am infinitely obliged to you. Would you very kindly hang my hat up on the—er—weeping willow tree?"

At this moment a little white dog, who accompanied the old lady, began sniffing round Mr. Lavender, and Blink, wounded in her proprietary instincts, placed her paws at once on her master's shoulders, so that he fell prone. When he recovered a sitting posture neither the old lady nor the little dog were in sight, but his hat was hanging on a laurel bush. "There seems to be something fateful about this morning," he mused; "I had better go in before the rest of the female population—" and recovering his feet with difficulty, he took his hat, and was about to enter the house when he saw the young lady watching him from an upper window of the adjoining castle. Thinking to relieve her anxiety, he said at once:

"My dear young lady, I earnestly beg you to believe that such a thing never happens to me, as a rule."

Her face was instantly withdrawn, and, sighing deeply, Mr. Lavender entered the house and made his way upstairs. "Ah!" he thought, painfully recumbent in his bed once more, "though my bones ache and my head burns I have performed an action not unworthy of the traditions of public life. There is nothing more uplifting than to serve Youth and Beauty at the peril of one's existence. Humanity and Chivalry have ever been the leading characteristics of the British race;" and, really half-delirious now, he cried aloud: "This incident will for ever inspire those who have any sense of beauty to the fulfilment of our common task. Believe me, we shall never sheathe the sword until the cause of humanity and chivalry is safe once more."

Blink, ever uneasy about sounds which seemed to her to have no meaning, stood up on her hind legs and endeavoured to stay them by licking his face; and Mr. Lavender, who had become so stiff that he could not stir without great pain, had to content himself by moving his head feebly from side to side until his dog, having taken her fill, resumed the examination of her bone. Perceiving presently that whenever he began to talk she began to lick his face, he remained silent, with his mouth open and his eyes shut, in an almost unconscious condition, from which he was roused by a voice saying:

"He is suffering from alcoholic poisoning."

The monstrous injustice of these words restored his faculties, and seeing before him what he took to be a large concourse of people—composed in reality of Joe Petty, Mrs. Petty, and the doctor—he thus addressed them in a faint, feverish voice:

"The pressure of these times, ladies and gentlemen, brings to the fore the most pushing and obstreperous blackguards. We have amongst us persons who, under the thin disguise of patriotism, do not scruple to bring hideous charges against public men. Such but serve the blood-stained cause of our common enemies. Conscious of the purity of our private lives, we do not care what is said of us so long as we can fulfil our duty to our country. Abstinence from every form of spirituous liquor has been the watchword of all public men since this land was first threatened by the most stupendous cataclysm which ever hung over the heads of a great democracy. We have never ceased to preach the need for it, and those who say the contrary are largely Germans or persons lost to a sense of decency." So saying, he threw off all the bedclothes, and fell back with a groan.

"Easy, easy, my dear sir!" said the voice.

"Have you a pain in your back?"

"I shall not submit," returned our hero, "to the ministrations of a Hun; sooner will I breathe my last."

"Turn him over," said the voice. And Mr. Lavender found himself on his face.

"Do you feel that?" said the voice.

Mr. Lavender answered faintly into his pillow:

"It is useless for you to torture me. No German hand shall wring from me a groan."

"Is there mania in his family?" asked the voice. At this cruel insult Mr. Lavender, who was nearly smothered, made a great effort, and clearing his mouth of the pillow, said:

"Since we have no God nowadays, I call the God of my fathers to witness that there is no saner public man than I."

It was, however, his last effort, for the wriggle he had given to his spine brought on a kind of vertigo, and he relapsed into unconsciousness.

V

IS CONVICTED OF A NEW DISEASE

Those who were assembled round the bed of Mr. Lavender remained for a moment staring at him with their mouths open, while Blink growled faintly from underneath.

"Put your hand here," said the doctor at last.

"There is a considerable swelling, an appearance of inflammation, and the legs are a curious colour. You gave him three-quarters of a tumbler of rum—how much honey?"

Thus addressed, Joe Petty, leaning his head a little to one side, answered:

"Not 'alf a pot, sir."

"Um! There are all the signs here of something quite new. He's not had a fall, has he?"

"Has he?" said Mrs. Petty severely to her husband.

"No," replied Joe.

"Singular!" said the doctor. Turn him back again; I want to feel his head. Swollen; it may account for his curious way of talking. Well, shove in quinine, and keep him quiet, with hot bottles to his feet. I think we have come on a new war disease. I'll send you the quinine. Good morning.

"Wot oh!" said Joe to his wife, when they were left alone with the unconscious body of their master. "Poor old Guv! Watch and pray!"

"However could you have given him such a thing?"

"Wet outside, wet your inside," muttered Joe sulkily, "'as always been my motto. Sorry I give 'im the honey. Who'd ha' thought the product of an 'armless insect could 'a done 'im in like this?"

Fiddle said Mrs. Petty. "In my belief it's come on through reading those newspapers. If I had my way I'd bum the lot. Can I trust you to watch him while I go and get the bottles filled?"

Joe drooped his lids over his greenish eyes, and, with a whisk of her head, his wife left the room.

"Gawd 'elp us!" thought Joe, gazing at his unconscious master, and fingering his pipe; "'ow funny women are! If I was to smoke in 'ere she'd have a fit. I'll just 'ave a whiff in the window, though!" And, leaning out, he drew the curtains to behind him and lighted his pipe.

The sound of Blink gnawing her bone beneath the bed alone broke the silence.

"I could do with a pint o' bitter," thought Joe; and, noticing the form of the weekly gardener down below, he said softly:

"Ello, Bob!"

"Ello?" replied the gardener. "'Ow's yours?"

"Nicely."

"Goin' to 'ave some rain?"

"Ah!"

"What's the matter with that?"

"Good for the crops."

"Missis well?"

"So, so."

"Wish mine was."

"Wot's the matter with her?"

"Busy!" replied Joe, sinking his voice. Never 'ave a woman permanent; that's my experience.

The gardener did not reply, but stood staring at the lilac-bush below Joe Petty's face. He was a thin man, rather like an old horse.

"Do you think we can win this war?" resumed Joe.

"Dunno," replied the gardener apathetically.

"We seem to be goin' back nicely all the time."

Joe wagged his head. "You've 'it it," he said. And, jerking his head back towards the room behind him, "Guv'nor's got it now."

"What?"

"The new disease."

"What new disease?"

"Wy, the Run-abaht-an-tell-'em-'ow-to-do-it."

"Ah!"

"'E's copped it fair. In bed."

"You don't say!"

"Not 'alf!" Joe sank his voice still lower. "Wot'll you bet me I don't ketch it soon?"

The gardener uttered a low gurgle.

"The cats 'ave been in that laylock," he replied, twisting off a broken branch. "I'll knock off now for a bit o' lunch."

But at that moment the sound of a voice speaking as it might be from a cavern, caused him and Joe Petty to stare at each other as if petrified.

"Wot is it?" whispered Joe at last.

The gardener jerked his head towards a window on the ground floor.

"Someone in pain," he said.

"Sounds like the Guv'nor's voice."

"Ah!" said the gardener.

"Alf a mo'!" And, drawing in his head, Joe peered through the curtains. The bed was empty and the door open.

"Watch it! 'E's loose!" he called to the gardener, and descended the stairs at a run.

In fact, Mr. Lavender had come out of his coma at the words, "D'you think we can win this war?" And, at once conscious that he had not read the morning papers, had got out of bed. Sallying forth just as he was he had made his way downstairs, followed by Blink. Seeing the journals lying on the chest in the hall, he took all five to where he usually went at this time of the morning, and sat down to read. Once there, the pain he was in, added to the disorder occasioned in his brain by the five leaders, caused him to give forth a summary of their contents, while Blink pressed his knees with her chin whenever the rising of his voice betokened too great absorption, as was her wont when she wanted him to feed her. Joe Petty joined the gardener in considerable embarrassment.

"Shan't I not 'alf cop it from the Missis?" he murmured. "The door's locked."

The voice of Mr. Lavender maintained its steady flow, rising and falling with the tides of his pain and his feelings. "What, then, is our duty? Is it not plain and simple? We require every man in the Army, for that is the 'sine qua non' of victory. We must greatly reinforce the ranks of labour in our shipyards—ships, ships, ships, always more ships; for without them we shall infallibly be defeated. We cannot too often repeat that we must see the great drama that is being played before our eyes steadily, and we must see it whole.... Not a man must be taken from the cultivation of our soil, for on that depends our very existence as a nation. Without abundant labour of the right sort on the land we cannot hope to cope with the menace of the pirate submarine. We must have the long vision, and not be scuppered by the fears of those who would deplete our most vital industry In munition works," wailed Mr. Lavender's voice, as he reached the fourth leader, "we still require the maximum of effort, and a considerable reinforcement of manpower will in that direction be necessary to enable us to establish the overwhelming superiority in the air and in guns which alone can ensure the defeat of our enemies".... He reached the fifth in what was almost a scream. "Every man up to sixty must be mobilized but here we would utter the most emphatic caveat. In the end this war will be won by the country whose financial position stands the strain best. The last copper bullet will be the deciding factor. Our economic strength must on no account be diminished. We cannot at this time of day afford to deplete the ranks of trade and let out the very life-blood in our veins." "We must see," groaned Mr. Lavender, "the problem steadily, and see it whole."

"Poor old geyser!" said the gardener; "'e do seem bad."

"Old me!" said Joe.

"I'll get on the sill and see what I can do through the top o' the window."

He got up, and, held by the gardener, put his arm through. There was the sound of considerable disturbance, and through the barking of Blink, Mr. Lavender's voice was heard again: "Stanch in the middle of the cataclysm, unruffled by the waters of heaven and hell, let us be captains of our souls. Down, Blink, down!"

"He's out!" said Joe, rejoining the gardener. "Now for it, before my missis comes!" and he ran into the house.

Mr. Lavender was walking dazedly in the hall with the journals held out before him.

"Joe," he said, catching sight of his servant, "get the car ready. I must be in five places at once, for only thus can we defeat the greatest danger which ever threatened the future of civilization."

"Right-o, sir," replied Joe; and, waiting till his master turned round, he seized him round the legs, and lifting that thin little body ascended the stairs, while Mr. Lavender, with the journals waving fanlike in his hands, his white hair on end, and his legs kicking, endeavoured to turn his head to see what agency was moving him.

At the top of the stairs they came on Mrs. Petty, who, having Scotch blood in her veins, stood against the wall to let them pass, with a hot bottle in either hand. Having placed Mr. Lavender in his bed and drawn the clothes up to his eyes, Joe Petty passed the back of his hand across his brow, and wrung it out.

"Phew!" he gasped; "he's artful!"

His wife, who had followed them in, was already fastening her eyes on the carpet.

"What's that?" she said, sniffing.

"That?" repeated Joe, picking up his pipe; "why, I had to run to ketch 'im, and it fell out o' me pocket."

"And lighted itself," said Mrs. Petty, darting, at the floor and taking up a glowing quid which had burned a little round hole in the carpet. "You're a pretty one!"

"You can't foresee those sort o' things," said Joe.

"You can't foresee anything," replied his wife; "you might be a Government. Here! hold the clothes while I get the bottles to his feet. Well I never! If he hasn't got—" And from various parts of Mr. Lavender's body she recovered the five journals. "For putting things in the wrong place, Joe Petty, I've never seen your like!"

"They'll keep 'im warm," said Joe.

Mr. Lavender who, on finding himself in bed, had once more fallen into a comatose condition, stirred, and some words fell from his lips. "Five in one, and one in five."

"What does he say?" said Mrs. Petty, tucking him up.

"It's the odds against Candelabra for the Derby."

"Only faith," cried Mr. Lavender, "can multiply exceedingly."

"Here, take them away!" muttered Mrs. Petty, and dealing the journals a smart slap, she handed them to Joe.

"Faith!" repeated Mr. Lavender, and fell into a doze.

"About this new disease," said Joe. "D'you think it's ketchin'? I feel rather funny meself."

"Stuff!" returned his wife. "Clear away those papers and that bone, and go and take Blink out, and sit on a seat; it's all you're fit for. Of all the happy-go-luckys you're the worst."

"Well, I never could worry," said Joe from the doorway; "'t isn't in me. So long!"

And, dragging Blink by the collar, he withdrew.

Alone with her patient, Mrs. Petty, an enthusiast for cleanliness and fresh air, went on her knees, and, having plucked out the charred ring of the little hole in the carpet, opened the window wider to rid the room of the smell of burning. "If it wasn't for me," she thought, leaning out into the air, "I don't know what'd become of them."

A voice from a few feet away said:

"I hope he's none the worse. What does the doctor say?"

Looking round in astonishment, Mrs. Petty saw a young lady leaning out of a window on her right.

"We can't tell at present," she said, with a certain reserve he is going on satisfactory.

"It's not hydrophobia, is it?" asked the young lady. "You know he fell out of the window?"

"What!" ejaculated Mrs. Petty.

"Where the lilac's broken. If I can give you a hand I shall be very glad. I'm a V.A.D."

"Thank you, I'm sure," said Mrs. Petty stiffly, for the passion of jealousy, to which she was somewhat prone, was rising in her, "there is no call." And she thought, "V.A. indeed! I know them."

Poor dear said the young lady. "He did come a bump. It was awfully funny! Is he—er——?" And she touched her forehead, where tendrils of fair hair were blowing in the breeze.

Inexpressibly outraged by such a question concerning one for whom she had a proprietary reverence, Mrs. Petty answered acidly:

"Oh dear no! He is much wiser than some people!"

"It was only that he mentioned the last man and the last dollar, you know," said the young lady, as if to herself, "but, of course, that's no real sign." And she uttered a sudden silvery laugh.

Mrs. Petty became aware of something tickling her left ear, and turning round, found her master leaning out beside her, in his dressing-gown.

"Leave me, Mrs. Petty," he said with such dignity that she instinctively recoiled. "It may seem to you," continued Mr. Lavender, addressing the young lady, "indelicate on my part to resume my justification,

but as a public man, I suffer, knowing that I have committed a breach of decorum."

"Don't you think you ought to keep quiet in bed?" Mrs. Petty heard the young lady ask.

"My dear young lady," Mr. Lavender replied, "the thought of bed is abhorrent to me at a time like this. What more ignoble fate than to die in, one's bed?"

"I'm only asking you to live in it," said the young lady, while Mrs. Petty grasped her master by the skirts of his gown.

"Down, Blink, down!" said Mr. Lavender, leaning still further out.

"For pity's sake," wailed the young lady, "don't fall out again, or I shall burst."

"Ah, believe me," said Mr. Lavender in a receding voice, "I would not pain you further for the world —"

Mrs. Petty, exerting all her strength, had hauled him in.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, sir," she said severely, "talking to a young lady like that in your dressing-gown?"

"Mrs. Petty," said Mr. Lavender mysteriously, "it might have been worse.... I should like some tea with a little lemon in it."

Taking this for a sign of returning reason Mrs. Petty drew him gently towards the bed, and, having seen him get in, tucked him up and said:

"Now, sir, you never break your word, do you?"

"No public man——" began Mr. Lavender.

"Oh, bother! Now, promise me to stay quiet in bed while I get you that tea."

"I certainly shall," replied our hero, "for I feel rather faint."

"That's right," said Mrs. Petty. "I trust you." And, bolting the window, she whisked out of the room and locked the door behind her.

Mr. Lavender lay with his eyes fixed on the ceiling, clucking his parched tongue. "God," he thought, "for one must use that word when the country is in danger—God be thanked for Beauty! But I must not allow it to unsteel my soul. Only when the cause of humanity has triumphed, and with the avenging sword and shell we have exterminated that criminal nation, only then shall I be entitled to let its gentle influence creep about my being." And drinking off the tumbler of tea which Mrs. Petty was holding to his lips, he sank almost immediately into a deep slumber.

VI

MAKES A MISTAKE, AND MEETS A MOON-CAT

The old lady, whose name was Sinkin, and whose interest in Mr. Lavender had become so deep, lived in a castle in Frogнал; and with her lived her young nephew, a boy of forty-five, indissolubly connected with the Board of Guardians. It was entirely due to her representations that he presented himself at Mr. Lavender's on the following day, and, sending in his card, was admitted to our hero's presence.

Mr. Lavender, pale and stiff, was sitting in his study, with Blink on his feet, reading a speech.

"Excuse my getting up, sir," he said; "and pray be seated."

The nephew, who had a sleepy, hairless face and little Chinese eyes, bowed, and sitting down, stared at Mr. Lavender with a certain embarrassment.

"I have come," he said at last, "to ask you a few questions on behalf of—"

"By all means," said Mr. Lavender, perceiving at once that he was being interviewed. "I shall be most

happy to give you my views. Please take a cigarette, for I believe that is usual. I myself do not smoke. If it is the human touch you want, you may like to know that I gave it up when that appeal in your contemporary flooded the trenches with cigarettes and undermined the nerves of our heroes. By setting an example of abstinence, and at the same time releasing more tobacco for our men, I felt that I was but doing my duty. Please don't mention that, though. And while we are on the personal note, which I sincerely deprecate, you might like to stroll round the room and look at the portrait of my father, behind the door, and of my mother, over the fireplace. Forgive my not accompanying you. The fact is—this is an interesting touch—I have always been rather subject to lumbago." And seeing the nephew Sinkin, who had risen to his suggestion, standing somewhat irresolutely in front of him, he added: "Perhaps you would like to look a little more closely at my eyes. Every now and then they flash with an almost uncanny insight." For by now he had quite forgotten his modesty in the identification he felt with the journal which was interviewing him. "I am fifty-eight," he added quickly; "but I do not look my years, though my hair, still thick and full of vigour, is prematurely white—so often the case with men whose brains are continually on the stretch. The little home, far from grandiose, which forms the background to this most interesting personality is embowered in trees. Cats have made their mark on its lawns, and its owner's love of animals was sharply illustrated by the sheep-dog which lay on his feet clad in Turkish slippers. Get up, Blink!"

Blink, disturbed by the motion of her master's feet, rose and gazed long into his face.

"Look!" said Mr. Lavender, "she has the most beautiful eyes in the world."

At this remark, which appeared to him no saner than the others he had heard—so utterly did he misjudge Mr. Lavender's character—the nephew put down the notebook he had taken out of his pocket, and said:

"Has there ever been anything—er—remarkable about your family?"

"Indeed, yes," said Mr. Lavender. Born of poor but lofty parentage in the city of Rochester, my father made his living as a publisher; my mother was a true daughter of the bards, the scion of a stock tracing its decent from the Druids; her name was originally Jones."

"Ah!" said the nephew Sinkin, writing.

"She has often told me at her knee," continued Mr. Lavender, "that there was a strong vein of patriotism in her family."

"She did not die—in—in——"

"No, indeed," interrupted Mr. Lavender; she is still living there."

"Ah!" said the nephew. "And your brothers and sisters?"

"One of my brothers," replied Mr. Lavender, with pardonable pride, "is the editor of Cud Bits. The other is a clergyman."

"Eccentric," murmured the nephew absently. "Tell me, Mr. Lavender, do you find your work a great strain? Does it——" and he touched the top of his head, covered with moist black hair.

Mr. Lavender sighed. "At a time like this," he said, "we must all be prepared to sacrifice our health. No public man, as you know, can call his head his own for a moment. I should count myself singularly lacking if I stopped to consider—er—such a consideration."

"Consider—er—such a consideration," repeated the nephew, jotting it down.

"He carries on," murmured Mr. Lavender, once more identifying himself with the journal, "grappling with the intricacies of this enormous problem; happy in the thought that nothing—not even reason itself—is too precious to sacrifice on the altar of his duty to his country. The public may rest confident in the knowledge that he will so carry on till they carry him out on his shield." And aware subconsciously that the interview could go no further than that phrase, Mr. Lavender was silent, gazing up with rather startled eyes.

"I see," said the nephew; "I am very much obliged to you. Is your dog safe?" For Blink had begun to growl in a low and uneasy manner.

"The gentlest creature in the world," replied Lavender, "and the most sociable. I sometimes think," he went on in a changed voice, "that we have all gone mad, and that animals alone retain the sweet reasonableness which used to be esteemed a virtue in human society. Don't take that down," he added quickly, "we are all subject to moments of weakness. It was just an 'obiter dictum'."

"Make your mind easy," said the nephew, rising, "it does not serve my purpose. Just one thing, Mr. Lavender."

At this moment Blink, whose instinct had long been aware of some sinister purpose in this tall and heavy man, whose trousers did not smell of dogs, seeing him approach too near, bit him gently in the calf.

The nephew started back. "She's bitten me!" he said, in a hushed voice.

"My God!" ejaculated Mr. Lavender and falling back again, so stiff was he. "Is it possible? There must be some good reason. Blink!"

Blink wagged her little tail, thrust her nose into his hand, removed it, and growled again.

"She is quite well, I assure you," Mr. Lavender added hastily, "her nose is icy."

"She's bitten me," repeated the nephew, pulling up his trouser leg. "There's no mark, but she distinctly bit me."

"Treasure!" said Mr. Lavender, endeavouring to interest him in the dog. "Do you notice how dark the rims of her eyes are, and how clear the whites? Extraordinarily well bred. Blink!"

Aware that she was being talked of Blink continued to be torn between the desire to wag her tail and to growl. Unable to make up her mind, she sighed heavily and fell on her side against her side against her master's legs.

"Wonderful with sheep, too," said Mr. Lavender; "at least, she would be if they would let her.... You should see her with them on the Heath. They simply can't bear her."

"You will hear from me again," said the nephew sourly.

"Thank you," said Mr. Lavender. "I shall be glad of a proof; it is always safer, I believe."

"Good morning," said the nephew.

Blink, who alone perceived the dark meaning in these words, seeing him move towards the door began to bark and run from side to side behind him, for all the world as if he had been a flock of sheep.

"Keep her off!" said the nephew anxiously. "Keep her off. I refuse to be bitten again."

"Blink!" called Mr. Lavender in some agony. Blink, whose obedience was excessive, came back to him at once, and stood growling from under her master's hand, laid on the white hair which flowed back from her collar, till the nephew's footsteps had died away. "I cannot imagine," thought Mr. Lavender, "why she should have taken exception to that excellent journalist. Perhaps he did not smell quite right? One never knows."

And with her moustachioed muzzle pressed to his chin Mr. Lavender sought for explanation in the innocent and living darkness of his dog's eyes....

On leaving Mr. Lavender's the nephew forthwith returned to the castle in Frognal, and sought his aunt.

"Mad as a March hare, Aunt Rosie; and his dog bit me."

"That dear doggie?"

"They're dangerous."

"You were always funny about dogs, dear," said his aunt soothingly. "Why, even Sealey doesn't really like you." And calling to the little low white dog she quite failed to attract his attention. "Did you notice his dress. The first time I took him for a shepherd, and the second time—! What do you think ought to be done?"

"He'll have to be watched," said the nephew. "We can't have lunatics at large in Hampstead."

"But, Wilfred," said the old lady, "will our man-power stand it? Couldn't they watch each other? Or, if it would be any help, I could watch him myself. I took such a fancy to his dear dog."

"I shall take steps," said the nephew.

"No, don't do that. I'll go and call on the people, next door. Their name is Scarlet. They'll know about

him, no doubt. We mustn't do anything inconsiderate."

The nephew, muttering and feeling his calf, withdrew to his study. And the old lady, having put on her bonnet, set forth placidly, unaccompanied by her little white dog.

On arriving at the castle embedded in acacias and laurustinus she asked of the maid who opened:

"Can I see Mrs. Scarlet?"

"No," replied the girl dispassionately; "she's dead."

"Mr. Scarlet, then?"

"No," replied the girl he's a major."

"Oh, dear!" said the old lady.

"Miss Isabel's at home," said the girl, who appeared, like so many people in time of war, to be of a simple, plain-spoken nature; "you'll find her in the garden." And she let the old lady out through a French window.

At the far end, under an acacia, Mrs. Sinkin could see the form of a young lady in a blue dress, lying in a hammock, with a cigarette between her lips and a yellow book in her hands. She approached her thinking, "Dear me! how comfortable, in these days!" And, putting her head a little on one side, she said with a smile: "My name is Sinkin. I hope I'm not disturbing you."

The young lady rose with a vigorous gesture.

"Oh, no! Not a bit."

"I do admire some people," said the old lady; "they seem to find time for everything."

The young lady stretched herself joyously.

"I'm taking it out before going to my new hospital. Try it," she said touching the hammock; "it's not bad. Will you have a cigarette?"

"I'm afraid I'm too old for both," said the old lady, "though I've often thought they must be delightfully soothing. I wanted to speak to you about your neighbour."

The young lady rolled her large grey eyes. "Ah!" she said, "he's perfectly sweet."

"I know," said the old lady, "and has such a dear dog. My nephew's very interested in them. You may have heard of him—Wilfred Sinkin—a very clever man; on so many Committees."

"Not really?" said the young lady.

"Oh, yes! He has one of those heads which nothing can disturb; so valuable in these days."

"And what sort of a heart?" asked the young lady, emitting a ring of smoke.

"Just as serene. I oughtn't to say so, but I think he's rather a wonderful machine."

"So long as he's not a doctor! You can't think how they get on your nerves when they're, like that. I've bumped up against so many of them. They fired me at last!"

"Really? Where? I thought they only did that to the dear horses. Oh, what a pretty laugh you have! It's so pleasant to hear anyone laugh, in these days."

"I thought no one did anything else! I mean, what else can you do, except die, don't you know?"

"I think that's rather a gloomy view," said the old lady placidly. But about your neighbour. What is his name?"

"Lavender. But I call him Don Pickwixote."

"Dear me, do you indeed? Have you noticed anything very eccentric about him?"

"That depends on what you call eccentric. Wearing a nightshirt, for instance? I don't know what your standard is, you see."

The old lady was about to reply when a voice from the adjoining garden was heard saying:

"Blink! Don't touch that charming mooncat!"

"Hush!" murmured the young lady; and seizing her visitor's arm, she drew her vigorously beneath the acacia tree. Sheltered from observation by those thick and delicate branches, they stooped, and applying their eyes to holes in the privet hedge, could see a very little cat, silvery-fawn in colour and far advanced in kittens, holding up its paw exactly like a dog, and gazing with sherry-coloured eyes at Mr. Lavender, who stood in the middle of his lawn, with Blink behind him.

"If you see me going to laugh," whispered the young lady, "pinch me hard."

"Moon-cat," repeated Mr. Lavender, "where have you come from? And what do you want, holding up your paw like that? What curious little noises you make, duckie!" The cat, indeed, was uttering sounds rather like a duck. It came closer to Mr. Lavender, circled his legs, drubbed itself against Blink's chest, while its tapered tail, barred with silver, brushed her mouth.

"This is extraordinary," they heard Mr. Lavender say; "I would stroke it if I wasn't so stiff. How nice of you little moon-cat to be friendly to my play-girl! For what is there in all the world so pleasant to see as friendliness between a dog and cat!"

At those words the old lady, who was a great lover of animals, was so affected that she pinched the young lady by mistake.

"Not yet!" whispered the latter in some agony. "Listen!"

"Moon-cat," Mr. Lavender was saying, "Arcadia is in your golden eyes. You have come, no doubt, to show us how far we have strayed away from it." And too stiff to reach the cat by bending, Mr. Lavender let himself slowly down till he could sit. "Pan is dead," he said, as he arrived on the grass and crossed his feet, "and Christ is not alive. Moon-cat!"

The little cat had put its head into his hand, while Blink was thrusting her nose into his mouth.

"I'm going to sneeze!" whispered the old lady, strangely affected.

"Pull your upper lip down hard, like the German Empress, and count nine!" murmured the young.

While the old lady was doing this Mr. Lavender had again begun to speak.

"Life is now nothing but explosions. Gentleness has vanished, and beauty is a dream. When you have your kittens, moon-cat, bring them up in amity, to love milk, dogs, and the sun."

The moon-cat, who had now reached his shoulder, brushed the tip of her tail across his loose right eyebrow, while Blink's jealous tongue avidly licked his high left cheekbone. With one hand Mr. Lavender was cuddling the cat's head, with the other twiddling Blink's forelock, and the watchers could see his eyes shining, and his white hair standing up all ruffled.

"Isn't it sweet?" murmured the old lady.

"Ah! moon-cat," went on Mr. Lavender, "come and live with us. You shall have your kittens in the bathroom, and forget this age of blood and iron."

Both the old lady and the young were removing moisture from their eyes when, the voice of Mr. Lavender, very changed, recalled them to their vigil. His face had become strained and troubled.

"Never," he was saying, "will we admit that doctrine of our common enemies. Might is not right gentlemen those who take the sword shall perish by the sword. With blood and iron we will ourselves stamp out this noxious breed. No stone shall be left standing, and no babe sleeping in that abandoned country. We will restore the tide of humanity, if we have to wade through rivers of blood across mountains of iron."

"Whom is he calling gentlemen?" whispered the old lady.

But Blink, by anxiously licking Mr. Lavender's lips, had produced a silence in which the young-lady did not dare reply. The sound of the little cat's purring broke the hush.

"Down, Blink, down!" said Mr. Lavender.

"Watch this little moon-cat and her perfect manners! We may all learn from her how not to be crude. See the light shining through her pretty ears!"

The little cat, who had seen a bird, had left Mr. Lavender's shoulder, and was now crouching and

moving the tip of its tail from side to side.

"She would like a bird inside her; but let us rather go and find her some milk instead," said Mr. Lavender, and he began to rise.

"Do you know, I think he's quite sane," whispered the old lady, "except, perhaps, at intervals. What do you?"

"Glorious print!" cried Mr. Lavender suddenly, for a journal had fallen from his pocket, and the sight of it lying there, out of his reach, excited him. "Glorious print! I can read you even from here. When the enemy of mankind uses the word God he commits blasphemy! How different from us!" And raising his eyes from the journal Mr. Lavender fastened them, as it seemed to his anxious listeners, on the tree which sheltered them. "Yes! Those unseen presences, who search out the workings of our heart, know that even the most jingo among us can say, 'I am not as they are!' Come, mooncat!"

So murmuring, he turned and moved towards the house, clucking with his tongue, and followed by Blink.

"Did he mean us?" said the old lady nervously.

"No; that was one of his intervals. He's not mad; he's just crazy."

"Is there any difference, my dear?"

"Why, we're all crazy about something, you know; it's only a question of what."

"But what is his what?"

"He's got a message. They're in the air, you know."

"I haven't come across them," said the old lady. "I fear I live a very quiet life—except for picking over sphagnum moss."

"Oh, well! There's no hurry."

"Well, I shall tell my nephew what I've seen," said the old lady.
"Good-bye."

"Good-bye," responded the young; and, picking up her yellow book, she got back into the hammock and relighted her cigarette.

VII

SEES AND EDITOR, AND FINDS A FARMER

Not for some days after his fall from the window did Mr. Lavender begin to regain the elasticity of body necessary to the resumption of public life. He spent the hours profitably, however, in digesting the newspapers and storing ardour. On Tuesday morning, remembering that no proof of his interview had yet been sent him, and feeling that he ought not to neglect so important a matter, he set forth to the office of the great journal from which, in the occult fashion of the faithful, he was convinced the reporter had come. While he was asking for the editor in the stony entrance, a young man who was passing looked at him attentively and said: "Ah, sir, here you are! He's waiting for you. Come up, will you?"

Mr. Lavender followed up some stairs, greatly gratified at the thought that he was expected. The young man led him through one or two swing doors into an outer office, where a young woman was typing.

Mr. Lavender shook his head, and sat down on the edge of a green leather chair. The editor, resuming his seat, crossed his legs deferentially, and sinking his chin again on his chest, began:

"About your article. My only trouble, of course, is that I'm running that stunt on British prisoners—great success! You've seen it, I suppose?"

"Yes, indeed," said Mr. Lavender; I read you every day.

The editor made a little movement which showed that he was flattered, and sinking his chin still further into his chest, resumed:

"It might run another week, or it might fall down to-morrow—you never can tell. But I'm getting lots of letters. Tremendous public interest."

"Yes, yes," assented Mr. Lavender, "it's most important."

"Of course, we might run yours with it," said the editor. "But I don't know; I think it'd kill the other. Still——"

"I shouldn't like——" began Mr. Lavender.

"I don't believe in giving them more than they want, you know," resumed the editor. "I think I'll have my news editor in," and he blew into a tube. "Send me Mr. Crackamup. This thing of yours is very important, sir. Suppose we began to run it on Thursday. Yes, I should think they'll be tired of British prisoners by then."

"Don't let me," began Mr. Lavender.

The editor's eye became unveiled for the Moment. "You'll be wanting to take it somewhere else if we——Quite! Well, I think we could run them together. See here, Mr. Crackamup"—Mr. Lavender saw a small man like Beethoven frowning from behind spectacles—"could we run this German prisoner stunt alongside the British, or d'you think it would kill it?"

Mr. Lavender almost rose from his chair in surprise. "Are you——" he said; "is it——"

The small man hiccoughed, and said in a raw voice:

"The letters are falling off."

"Ah!" murmured the editor, "I thought we should be through by Thursday. We'll start this new stunt Thursday. Give it all prominence, Crackamup. It'll focus fury. All to the good—all to the good. Opinion's ripe." Then for a moment he seemed to hesitate, and his chin sank back on his chest. "I don't know," he murmured of course it may——"

"Please," began Mr. Lavender, rising, while the small man hiccoughed again. The two motions seemed to determine the editor.

"That's all right, sir," he said, rising also; "that's quite all right. We'll say Thursday, and risk it. Thursday, Crackamup." And he held out his hand to Mr. Lavender. "Good morning, sir, good morning. Delighted to have seen you. You wouldn't put your name to it? Well, well, it doesn't matter; only you could have written it. The turn of phrase—immense! They'll tumble all right!" And Mr. Lavender found himself, with Mr. Crackamup, in the lobby. "It's bewildering," he thought, "how quickly he settled that. And yet he had such repose. But is there some mistake?" He was about to ask his companion, but with a distant hiccough the small man had vanished. Thus deserted, Mr. Lavender was in two minds whether to ask to be readmitted, when the four gentlemen with notebooks repassed him in single file into the editor's room.

"My name is Lavender," he said resolutely to the young woman. "Is that all right?"

"Quite," she answered, without looking up.

Mr. Lavender went out slowly, thinking, "I may perhaps have said more in that interview than I remember. Next time I really will insist on having a proof. Or have they taken me for some other public man?" This notion was so disagreeable, however, that he dismissed it, and passed into the street.

On Thursday, the day fixed for his fresh tour of public speaking, he opened the great journal eagerly. Above the third column was the headline: OUR VITAL DUTY: BY A GREAT PUBLIC MAN. "That must be it," he thought. The article, which occupied just a column of precious space, began with an appeal so moving that before he had read twenty lines Mr. Lavender had identified himself completely with the writer; and if anyone had told him that he had not uttered these sentiments, he would have given him the lie direct. Working from heat to heat the article finished in a glorious outburst with a passionate appeal to the country to starve all German prisoners.

Mr. Lavender put it down in a glow of exultation. "I shall translate words into action," he thought; "I shall at once visit a rural district where German prisoners are working on the land, and see that the farmers do their duty." And, forgetting in his excitement to eat his breakfast, he put the journal in his

pocket, wrapped himself in his dust-coat and broad-brimmed hat, and went out to his car, which was drawn up, with Blink, who had not forgotten her last experience, inside.

"We will go to a rural district, Joe," he said, getting in.

"Very good, sir," answered Joe; and, unnoticed by the population, they glided into the hazy heat of the June morning.

"Well, what abaht it, sir?" said Joe, after they had proceeded for some three hours. "Here we are."

Mr. Lavender, who had been lost in the beauty of the scenes through which he was passing, awoke from reverie, and said:

"I am looking for German prisoners, Joe; if you see a farmer, you might stop."

"Any sort of farmer?" asked Joe.

"Is there more than one sort?" returned Mr. Lavender, smiling.

Joe cocked his eye. "Ain't you never lived in the country, sir?"

"Not for more than a few weeks at a time, Joe, unless Rochester counts. Of course, I know Eastbourne very well."

"I know Eastbourne from the inside," said Joe discursively. "I was a waiter there once."

"An interesting life, a waiter's, Joe, I should think."

"Ah! Everything comes to 'im who waits, they say. But abaht farmers—you've got a lot to learn, sir."

"I am always conscious of that, Joe; the ramifications of public life are innumerable."

"I could give you some rummikins abaht farmers. I once travelled in breeches."

"You seem to have done a great many things Joe."

"That's right, sir. I've been a sailor, a 'traveller,' a waiter, a scene-shifter, and a shover, and I don't know which was the cushiest job. But, talking of farmers: there's the old English type that wears Bedfords—don't you go near 'im, 'e bites. There's the modern scientific farmer, but it'll take us a week to find 'im. And there's the small-'older, wearin' trahsers, likely as not; I don't think 'e'd be any use to you.

"What am I to do then?" asked Mr Lavender.

"Ah!" said Joe, "'ave lunch."

Mr. Lavender sighed, his hunger quarelling with his sense of duty. "I should like to have found a farmer first," he said.

"Well, sir, I'll drive up to that clump o'beeches, and you can have a look round for one while I get lunch ready.

"That will do admirably."

"There's just one thing, sir," said Joe, when his master was about to start; "don't you take any house you come across for a farm. They're mostly cottages o' gentility nowadays, in'abited by lunatics."

"I shall be very careful," said Mr. Lavender.

"This glorious land!" he thought, walking away from the beech clump, with Blink at his heels; "how wonderful to see it being restored to its former fertility under pressure of the war! The farmer must be a happy man, indeed, working so nobly for his country, without thought of his own prosperity. How flowery those beans look already!" he mused, glancing at a field of potatoes. "Now that I am here I shall be able to combine my work on German prisoners with an effort to stimulate food production. Blink!" For Blink was lingering in a gateway. Moving back to her, Mr. Lavender saw that the sagacious animal was staring through the gate at a farmer who was standing in a field perfectly still, with his back turned, about thirty yards away.

"Have you——" Mr. Lavender began eagerly; "is it—are you employing any German prisoners, sir?"

The farmer did not seem to hear. "He must," thought Mr. Lavender, "be of the old stolid English variety."

The farmer, who was indeed attired in a bowler hat and Bedford cords, continued to gaze over his land, unconscious of Mr. Lavender's presence.

"I am asking you a question, sir," resumed the latter in a louder voice. "And however patriotically absorbed you may be in cultivating your soil, there is no necessity for rudeness."

The farmer did not move a muscle.

"Sir," began Mr. Lavender again, very patiently, "though I have always heard that the British farmer is of all men least amenable to influence and new ideas, I have never believed it, and I am persuaded that if you will but listen I shall be able to alter your whole outlook about the agricultural future of this country." For it had suddenly occurred to him that it might be a long time before he had again such an opportunity of addressing a rural audience on the growth of food, and he was loth to throw away the chance. The farmer, however, continued to stand with his hack to the speaker, paying no more heed to his voice than to the buzzing of a fly.

"You SHALL hear me," cried Mr. Lavender, unconsciously miming a voice from the past, and catching, as he thought, the sound of a titter, he flung his hand out, and exclaimed:

"Grass, gentlemen, grass is the hub of the matter. We have put our hand to the plough"—and, his imagination taking flight at those words, he went on in a voice calculated to reach the great assembly of farmers which he now saw before him with their backs turned—"and never shall we take it away till we have reduced every acre in the country to an arable condition. In the future not only must we feed ourselves, but our dogs, our horses, and our children, and restore the land to its pristine glory in the front rank of the world's premier industry. But me no buts," he went on with a winning smile, remembering that geniality is essential in addressing a country audience, "and butter me no butter, for in future we shall require to grow our margarine as well. Let us, in a word, put behind us all prejudice and pusillanimity till we see this country of ours once more blooming like one great cornfield, covered with cows. Sirs, I am no iconoclast; let us do all this without departing in any way from those great principles of Free Trade, Industrialism, and Individual Liberty which have made our towns the largest, most crowded, and wealthiest under that sun which never sets over the British Empire. We do but need to see this great problem steadily and to see it whole, and we shall achieve this revolution in our national life without the sacrifice of a single principle or a single penny. Believe me, gentlemen, we shall yet eat our cake and have it."

Mr. Lavender paused for breath, the headlines of his great speech in tomorrow's paper dancing before his eyes: "THE CLIMACTERIC—EATS CAKE AND HAS IT—A GREAT CONCLUSION." The wind, which had risen somewhat during Mr. Lavender's speech, fluttered the farmer's garments at this moment, so that they emitted a sound like the stir which runs through an audience at a moment of strong emotion.

"Ah!" cried Mr. Lavender, "I see that I move you, gentlemen. Those have traduced you who call you unimpressionable. After all, are you not the backbone of this country up which runs the marrow which feeds the brain; and shall you not respond to an appeal at once so simple and so fundamental? I assure you, gentlemen, it needs no thought; indeed, the less you think about it the better, for to do so will but weaken your purpose and distract your attention. Your duty is to go forward with stout hearts, firm steps, and kindling eyes; in this way alone shall we defeat our common enemies. And at those words, which he had uttered at the top of his voice, Mr. Lavender stood like a clock which has run down, rubbing his eyes. For Blink, roaming the field during the speech, and encountering quadruped called rabbit, which she had never seen before, had backed away from it in dismay, brushed against the farmer's legs and caused his breeches to fall down, revealing the sticks on which they had been draped. When Mr. Lavender saw this he called out in a loud voice Sir, you have deceived me. I took you for a human being. I now perceive that you are but a selfish automaton, rooted to your own business, without a particle of patriotic sense. Farewell!"

VIII

After parting with the scarecrow Mr. Lavender who felt uncommonly hungry' was about to despair of finding any German prisoners when he saw before him a gravel-pit, and three men working therein. Clad in dungaree, and very dusty, they had a cast of countenance so unmistakably Teutonic that Mr. Lavender stood still. They paid little or no attention to him, however, but went on sadly and silently with their work, which was that of sifting gravel. Mr. Lavender sat down on a milestone opposite, and his heart contracted within him. "They look very thin and sad," he thought, "I should not like to be a prisoner myself far from my country, in the midst of a hostile population, without a woman or a dog to throw me a wag of the tail. Poor men! For though it is necessary to hate the Germans, it seems impossible to forget that we are all human beings. This is weakness," he added to himself, "which no editor would tolerate for a moment. I must fight against it if I am to fulfil my duty of rousing the population to the task of starving them. How hungry they look already—their checks are hollow! I must be firm. Perhaps they have wives and families at home, thinking of them at this moment. But, after all, they are Huns. What did the great writer say? 'Vermin—creatures no more worthy of pity than the tiger or the rat.' How true! And yet—Blink!" For his dog, seated on her haunches, was looking at him with that peculiarly steady gaze which betokened in her the desire for food. "Yes," mused Mr. Lavender, "pity is the mark of the weak man. It is a vice which was at one time rampant in this country; the war has made one beneficial change at least—we are moving more and more towards the manly and unforgiving vigour of the tiger and the rat. To be brutal! This is the one lesson that the Germans can teach us, for we had almost forgotten the art. What danger we were in! Thank God, we have past masters again among us now!" A frown became fixed between his brows. "Yes, indeed, past masters. How I venerate those good journalists and all the great crowd of witnesses who have dominated the mortal weakness, pity. 'The Hun must and shall be destroyed—root and branch—hip and thigh—bag and baggage man, woman, and babe—this is the sole duty of the great and humane British people. Roll up, ladies and gentlemen, roll up! Great thought—great language! And yet——"

Here Mr. Lavender broke into a gentle sweat, while the Germans went on sifting gravel in front of him, and Blink continued to look up into his face with her fixed, lustrous eyes. "What an awful thing," he thought, "to be a man. If only I were just a public man and could, as they do, leave out the human and individual side of everything, how simple it would be! It is the being a man as well which is so troublesome. A man has feelings; it is wrong—wrong! There should be no connection whatever between public duty and the feelings of a man. One ought to be able to starve one's enemy without a quiver, to watch him drown without a wink. In fact, one ought to be a German. We ought all to be Germans. Blink, we ought all to be Germans, dear! I must steel myself!" And Mr. Lavender wiped his forehead, for, though a great idea had come to him, he still lacked the heroic savagery to put it into execution. "It is my duty," he thought, "to cause those hungry, sad-looking men to follow me and watch me eat my lunch. It is my duty. God give me strength! For unless I make this sacrifice of my gentler nature I shall be unworthy to call myself a public man, or to be reported in the newspapers. 'En avant, de Bracy!'" So musing, he rose, and Blink with him. Crossing the road, he clenched his fists, and said in a voice which anguish made somewhat shrill:

"Are you hungry, my friends?"

The Germans stopped sifting gravel, looked up at him, and one of them nodded.

"And thirsty?"

This time they all three nodded.

"Come on, then," said Mr. Lavender.

And he led the way back along the road, followed by Blink and the three Germans. Arriving at the beech clump whose great trees were already throwing shadows, denoting that it was long past noon, Mr. Lavender saw that Joe had spread food on the smooth ground, and was, indeed, just finishing his own repast.

"What is there to eat?" thought Mr. Lavender, with a soft of horror. "For I feel as if I were about to devour a meal of human flesh." And he looked round at the three Germans slouching up shamefacedly behind him.

"Sit down, please," he said. The three men sat down.

"Joe," said Mr. Lavender to his surprised chauffeur, "serve my lunch. Give me a large helping, and a glass of ale." And, paler than his holland dust-coat, he sat resolutely down on the bole of a beech, with Blink on her haunches beside him. While Joe was filling a plate with pigeon-pie and pouring out a glass of foaming Bass, Mr. Lavender stared at the three Germans and suffered the tortures of the damned. "I will not flinch," he thought; "God helping me, I certainly will not flinch. Nothing shall prevent my going through with it." And his eyes, more prominent than a hunted rabbit's, watched the approach of Joe

with the plate and glass. The three men also followed the movements of the chauffeur, and it seemed to Mr. Lavender that their eyes were watering. "Courage!" he murmured to himself, transfixing a succulent morsel with his fork and conveying it to his lips. For fully a minute he revolved the tasty mouthful, which he could not swallow, while the three men's eyes watched him with a sort of lugubrious surprise. "If," he thought with anguish, "if I were a prisoner in Germany! Come, come! One effort, it's only the first mouthful!" and with a superhuman effort, he swallowed. "Look at me!" he cried to the three Germans, "look at me! I—I—I'm going to be sick!" and putting down his plate, he rose and staggered forward. "Joe," he said in a dying voice, "feed these poor men, feed them; make them drink; feed them!" And rushing headlong to the edge of the grove, he returned what he had swallowed—to the great interest of Brink. Then, waving away the approach of Joe, and consumed with shame and remorse at his lack of heroism, he ran and hid himself in a clump of hazel bushes, trying to slink into the earth. "No," he thought; "no; I am not for public life. I have failed at the first test. Was ever so squeamish an exhibition? I have betrayed my country and the honour of public life. These Germans are now full of beer and pigeon-pie. What am I but a poltroon, unworthy to lace the shoes of the great leaders of my land? The sun has witnessed my disgrace."

How long he stayed there lying on his face he did not know before he heard the voice of Joe saying, "Wot oh, sir!"

"Joe," replied Mr. Lavender faintly, "my body is here, but my spirit has departed."

"Ah!" said Joe, "a rum upset—that there. Swig this down, sir!" and he held out to his master, a flask-cup filled with brandy. Mr. Lavender swallowed it.

"Have they gone?" he said, gasping.

"They 'ave, sir," replied Joe, "and not 'alf full neither. Where did you pick 'em up?"

"In a gravel-pit," said Mr. Lavender. "I can never forgive myself for this betrayal of my King and country. I have fed three Germans. Leave me, for I am not fit to mingle with my fellows."

"Well, I don't think," said Joe. "Germans?"

Gazing up into his face Mr. Lavender read the unmistakable signs of uncontrolled surprise.

"Why do you look at me like that?" he said.

"Germans?" repeated Joe; "what Germans? Three blighters workin' on the road, as English as you or me. Wot are you talkin' about, sir?"

"What!" cried Mr. Lavender do you tell me they were not Germans?"

"Well, their names was Tompkins, 'Obson, and Brown, and they 'adn't an 'aitch in their 'eads."

"God be praised!" said Mr. Lavender. "I am, then, still an English gentleman. Joe, I am very hungry; is there nothing left?"

"Nothin' whatever, sir," replied Joe.

"Then take me home," said Mr. Lavender; "I care not, for my spirit has come back to me."

So saying, he rose, and supported by Joe, made his way towards the car, praising God in his heart that he had not disgraced his country.

IX

CONVERSES WITH A CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR

"Yes," said Mr. Lavender, when they had proceeded some twenty miles along the road for home, "my hunger is excessive. If we come across an hotel, Joe, pull up."

"Right-o, sir," returned Joe. "'Otels, ain't what they were, but we'll find something. I've got your coupons."

Mr. Lavender, who was seated beside his chauffeur on the driving-seat, while Blink occupied in

solitude the body of the car, was silent for a minute, revolving a philosophic thought.

"Do you find," he said suddenly, "that compulsory sacrifice is doing you good, Joe?"

"It's good for my thirst, sir," replied Joe. "Never was so powerful thirsty in me life as I've been since they watered beer. There's just 'enough in it to tickle you. That bottle o' Bass you would 'ave 'ad at lunch is the last of the old stock at 'ome, sir; an' the sight of it fair gave me the wind up. To think those blighters 'ad it! Wish I'd known they was Germans—I wouldn't 'ave weakened on it."

"Do not, I beg," said Mr. Lavender, "remind me of that episode. I sometimes think," he went on as dreamily as his hunger would permit, "that being forced to deprive oneself awakens one's worst passions; that is, of course, speaking rather as a man than a public man. What do you think will happen, Joe, when we are no longer obliged to sacrifice ourselves?"

"Do wot we've been doin all along—sacrifice someone else," said Joe lightly.

"Be serious, Joe," said Mr. Lavender.

"Well," returned Joe, "I don't know what'll 'appen to you, sir, but I shall go on the bust permanent."

Mr. Lavender sighed. "I do so wonder whether I shall, too," he said.

Joe looked round at him, and a gleam of compassion twinkled in his greenish eyes. "Don't you worry, sir," he said; "it's a question of constitootion. A week'd sew you up."

"A week!" said Mr. Lavender with watering lips, "I trust I may not forget myself so long as that. Public men do not go 'on the bust,' Joe, as you put it."

"Be careful, sir! I can't drive with one eye."

"How can they, indeed?" went on Mr. Lavender; "they are like athletes, ever in training for their unending conflict with the national life."

"Well," answered Joe indulgently, "they 'as their own kind of intoxication, too—that's true; and the fumes is permanent; they're gassed all the time, and chloroformed the rest."

"I don't know to what you allude, Joe," said Mr. Lavender severely.

"'Aven't you never noticed, sir, that there's two worlds—the world as it is, and the world as it seems to the public man?"

"That may be," said Mr. Lavender with some excitement. "But which is the greater, which is the nobler, Joe? And what does the other matter? Surely that which flourishes in great minds, and by their utterances is made plain. Is it not better to live in a world where nobody shrinks from being starved or killed so long as they can die for their kings and countries, rather than in a world where people merely wish to live?"

"Ah!" said Joe, "we're all ready to die for our countries if we've got to. But we don't look on it, like the public speakers, as a picnic. They're a bit too light-'earted."

"Joe," said Mr. Lavender, covering his ears, and instantly uncovering them again, "this is the most horrible blasphemy I have ever listened to."

"I can do better than that, sir," answered Joe. "Shall I get on with it?"

"Yes," said Mr. Lavender, clenching his hands, "a public man shrinks from nothing—not even from the gibes of his enemies."

"Well, wot abaht it, sir? Look at the things they say, and at what really is. Mind you, I'm not speakin' particular of the public men in this country—or any other country; I'm speakin' of the lot of 'em in every country. They're a sort of secret society, brought up on gas. And every now and then someone sets a match to it, and we get it in the neck. Look 'ere, sir. Dahn squats one on his backside an' writes something in 'igh words. Up pops another and says something in 'igher; an' so they go on poppin' up an' squattin' dahn till you get an atmosphere where you can't breathe; and all the time all we want is to be let alone, and 'uman kindness do the rest. All these fellers 'ave got two weaknesses—one's ideas, and the other's their own importance. They've got to be conspicuous, and without ideas they can't, so it's a vicious circle. When I see a man bein' conspicuous, I says to meself: 'Gawd 'elp us, we shall want it!' And sooner or later we always do. I'll tell you what's the curse of the world, sir; it's the gift of expressin' what ain't your real feeling. And—Lord! what a lot of us 'ave got it!"

"Joe," said Mr. Lavender, whose eyes were almost starting from his head, "your words are the knell of poetry, philosophy, and prose—especially of prose. They are the grave of history, which, as you know, is made up of the wars and intrigues which have originated in the brains of public men. If your sordid views were true, how do you suppose for one minute that in this great epic struggle we could be consoled by the thought that we are 'making history'? Has there been a single utterance of any note which has not poured the balm of those words into our ears? Think how they have sustained the widow and the orphan, and the wounded lying out in agony under the stars. 'To make history,' 'to act out the great drama'—that thought, ever kept before us, has been our comfort and their stay. And you would take it from us? Shame—shame!" repeated Mr. Lavender. You would destroy all glamour, and be the death of every principle."

"Give me facts," said Joe stubbornly, "an' you may 'ave my principles. As to the other thing, I don't know what it is, but you may 'ave it, too. And 'ere's another thing, sir: haven't you never noticed that when a public man blows off and says something, it does 'im in? No matter what 'appens afterwards, he's got to stick to it or look a fool."

"I certainly have not," said Mr. Lavender. I have never, or very seldom, noticed that narrowness in public men, nor have I ever seen them 'looking fools' as you rudely put it."

"Where are your eyes, sir?" answered Joe; "where are your eyes? I give you my word it's one or the other, though I admit they've brought camouflage to an 'igh art. But, speaking soberly, sir, if that's possible, public men are a good thing' and you can 'ave too much of it. But you began it, sir," he added soothingly, "and 'ere's your hotel. You'll feel better with something inside you."

So saying, he brought the car to a standstill before a sign which bore the words, "Royal Goat."

Mr. Lavender, deep sunk in the whirlpool of feeling which had been stirred in him by his chauffeur's cynicism, gazed at the square redbrick building with bewildered eyes.

"It's quite O. K.," said Joe; "I used to call here regular when I was travellin' in breeches. Where the commercials are gathered together the tap is good," he added, laying a finger against the side of his nose. "And they've a fine brand of pickles. Here's your coupon."

Thus encouraged, Mr. Lavender descended from the car, and, accompanied by Blink, entered the hotel and sought the coffee-room.

A maid of robust and comely appearance, with a fine free eye, divested him of his overcoat and the coupon, and pointed to a table and a pale and intellectual-looking young man in spectacles who was eating.

"Have you any more beef?" said the latter without looking up.

"No, sir," replied the maid.

"Then bring me the ham and eggs," he added.

"Here's another coupon—and anything else you've got."

Mr. Lavender, whose pangs had leaped in him at the word "beef," gazed at the bare bone of the beef-joint, and sighed.

"I, too, will have some ham and a couple of poached eggs," he said.

"You can have ham, sir," replied the maid, "but there are only eggs enough for one."

"And I am the one," said the young man, looking up for the first time.

Mr. Lavender at once conceived an aversion from him; his appearance was unhealthy, and his eyes ravened from behind the spectacles beneath his high forehead.

"I have no wish to deprive you of your eggs, sir," he said, "though I have had nothing to eat all day."

"I have had nothing to eat to speak of for six months," replied the young man, "and in a fortnight's time I shall have nothing to eat again for two years."

Mr. Lavender, who habitually spoke the truth, looked at him with a sort of horror. But the young man had again concentrated his attention on his plate. "How deceptive are appearances," thought Mr. Lavender; "one would say an intellectual, not to say a spiritual type, and yet he eats like a savage, and lies like a trooper!" And the pinchings of his hunger again attacking him, he said rather acidly:

May I ask you, sir, whether you consider it amusing to tell such untruths to a stranger?

The young man, who had finished what was on his plate, paused, and with a faint smile said:

"I spoke figuratively. You, sir, I expect, have never been in prison."

At the word 'prison' Mr. Lavender's natural kindness reasserted itself at once. "Forgive me," he said gently; "please eat all the ham. I can easily do with bread and cheese. I am extremely sorry you have had that misfortune, and would on no account do anything which might encourage you to incur it again. If it is a question of money or anything of that sort," he went on timidly, "please command me. I abhor prisons; I consider them inhuman; people should only be confined upon their honours."

The young man's eyes kindled behind his spectacles.

"I have been confined," he said, "not upon my honour, but because of my honour; to break it in."

"How is that?" cried Mr. Lavender, aghast, "to break it in?"

"Yes," said the young man, cutting a large slice of bread, "there's no other way of putting it with truth. They want me to go back on my word to go back on my faith, and I won't. In a fortnight's time they'll gaol me again, so I MUST eat—excuse me. I shall want all my strength." And he filled his mouth too full to go on speaking.

Mr. Lavender stared at him, greatly perturbed.

"How unjustly I judged him," he thought; and seeing that the maid had placed the end of a ham before him he began carving off what little there was left on it, and, filling a plate, placed it before the young man. The latter thanked him, and without looking up ate rapidly on. Mr. Lavender watched him with beaming eyes. "It's lovely to see him!" he thought; "poor fellow!"

"Where are the eggs?" said the young man suddenly.

Mr. Lavender got up and rang the bell.

"Please bring those eggs for him," he said.

"Yes, sir," said the maid. "And what are you going to have? There's nothing in the house now."

"Oh!" said Mr. Lavender, startled. "A cup of coffee and a slice of bread, thank you. I can always eat at any time."

The maid went away muttering to herself, and bringing the eggs, plumped them down before the young man, who ate them more hastily than words could tell.

"I mean," he said, "to do all I can in this fort-night to build up my strength. I shall eat almost continuously. They shall never break me." And, reaching out, he took the remainder of the loaf.

Mr. Lavender watched it disappear with a certain irritation which he subdued at once. "How selfish of me," he thought, "even to think of eating while this young hero is still hungry."

"Are you, then," he said, "the victim of some religious or political plot?"

"Both," replied the young man, leaning back with a sigh of repletion, and wiping his mouth. "I was released to-day, and, as I said, I shall be court-martialled again to-day fortnight. It'll be two years this time. But they can't break me."

Mr. Lavender gasped, for at the word "court-martialled" a dreadful doubt had assailed him.

"Are you," he stammered—"you are not—you cannot be a Conscientious Objector?"

"I can," said the young man.

Mr. Lavender half rose in horror.

"I don't approve," he ejaculated; "I do not approve of you."

"Of course not," said the young man with a little smile at once proud and sad, "who does? If you did I shouldn't have to eat like this, nor should I have the consciousness of spiritual loneliness to sustain me. You look on me as a moral outcast, as a leper. That is my comfort and my strength. For though I have a genuine abhorrence of war, I know full well that I could not stick this if it were not for the feeling that I

must not and will not lower myself to the level of mere opportunists like you, and sink myself in the herd of men in the street."

At hearing himself thus described Mr. Lavender flushed.

"I yield to no one," he said, "in my admiration of principle. It is because of my principles that I regard you as a——"

"Shirker," put in the young man calmly. "Go on; don't mince words; we're used to them."

"Yes," said Mr. Lavender, kindling, "a shirker. Excuse me! A renegade from the camp of Liberty, a deserter from the ranks of Humanity, if you will pardon me."

"Say a Christian, and have done with it," said the young man.

"No," said Mr. Lavender, who had risen to his feet, "I will not go so far as that. You are not a Christian, you are a Pharisee. I abhor you."

"And I abhor you," said the young man suddenly. "I am a Christian Socialist, but I refuse to consider you my brother. And I can tell you this: Some day when through our struggle the triumph of Christian Socialism and of Peace is assured, we shall see that you firebrands and jingoes get no chance to put up your noxious heads and disturb the brotherhood of the world. We shall stamp you out. We shall do you in. We who believe in love will take jolly good care that you apostles of hate get all we've had and more—if you provoke us enough that is."

He stopped, for Mr. Lavender's figure had rigidified on the other side of the table into the semblance of one who is about to address the House of Lords.

"I can find here," he cried, "no analogy with religious persecution. This is a simple matter. The burden of defending his country falls equally on every citizen. I know not, and I care not, what promises were made to you, or in what spirit the laws of compulsory service were passed. You will either serve or go to prison till you do. I am a plain Englishman, expressing the view of my plain countrymen."

The young man, tilting back in his chair, rapped on the table with the handle of his dinner-knife.

"Hear, hear!" he murmured.

"And let me tell you this," continued Mr. Lavender, "you have no right to put a mouthful of food between your lips so long as you are not prepared to die for it. And if the Huns came here tomorrow I would not lift a finger to save you from the fate you would undoubtedly receive."

During this colloquy their voices had grown so loud that the maid, entering in dismay, had gone into the bar and informed the company that a Conscientious Objector had eaten all the food and was "carrying on outrageous" in the coffee-room. On hearing this report those who were assembled—being four commercial travellers far gone in liquor—taking up the weapons which came nearest to hand—to wit, four syphons—formed themselves two deep and marched into the coffee-room. Aware at once from Mr. Lavender's white hair and words that he was not the Objector in question, they advanced upon the young man, who was still seated, and taking up the four points of the compass, began squirting him unmercifully with soda-water. Blinded and dripping, the unfortunate young fellow tried desperately to elude the cordon of his persecutors, only to receive a fresh stream in his face at each attempt. Seeing him thus tormented, amid the coarse laughter of these half-drunken "travellers," Mr. Lavender suffered a moment of the most poignant struggle between his principles and his chivalry. Then, almost unconsciously grasping the ham-bone, he advanced and called out loudly:

"Stop! Do not persecute that young man. You are four and he is one. Drop it, I tell you—Huns that you are!"

The commercial fellows, however, laughed; and this infuriating Mr. Lavender, he dealt one of them a blow with the ham-bone, which, lighting on the funny point of his elbow, caused him to howl and spin round the room. One of the others promptly avenged him with a squirt of syphon in Mr. Lavender's left eye; whereon he incontinently attacked them all, whirling the ham-bone round his head like a shillelagh. And had it not been that Blink and the maid seized his coat-tails he would have done them severe injury. It was at this moment that Joe Petty, attracted by the hullabaloo, arrived in the doorway, and running up to his master, lifted him from behind and carried him from the room, still brandishing the ham-bone and kicking out with his legs. Dumping him into the car, Joe mounted hastily and drove off. Mr. Lavender sat for two or three minutes coming to his senses before full realization of what he had done dawned on him. Then, flinging the ham-bone from him, he sank back among the cushions, with his chin buried on his chest. "What have I done?" he thought over and over again. "What have I

done? Taken up the bone for a Conscientious Objector—defended a renegade against great odds! My God! I am indeed less than a public man!"

And in this state of utter dejection, inanition, and collapse, with Blink asleep on his feet, he was driven back to Hampstead.

X

DREAMS A DREAM AND SEES A VISION

Though habitually abstemious, Mr. Lavender was so very hungry that evening when he sat down to supper that he was unable to leave the lobster which Mrs. Petty had provided until it was reduced to mere integument. Since his principles prevented his lightening it with anything but ginger-beer he went to bed in some discomfort, and, tired out with the emotions of the day, soon fell into a heavy slumber, which at dawn became troubled by a dream of an extremely vivid character. He fancied himself, indeed, dressed in khaki, with a breastplate composed of newspapers containing reports of speeches which he had been charged to deliver to soldiers at the front. He was passing in a winged tank along those scenes of desolation of which he had so often read in his daily papers, and which his swollen fancy now coloured even more vividly than had those striking phrases of the past, when presently the tank turned a somersault, and shot him out into a morass lighted up by countless star-shells whizzing round and above. In this morass were hundreds and thousands of figures sunk like himself up to the waist, and waving their arms above their heads. "These," thought Mr. Lavender, "must be the soldiers I have come to speak to," and he tore a sheet off his breastplate; but before he could speak from its columns it became thin air in his hand; and he went on tearing off sheet after sheet, hoping to find a speech which would stay solid long enough for him to deliver it. At last a little corner stayed substantial in his hand, and he called out in a loud voice: "Heroes!"

But at the word the figures vanished with a wail, sinking into the mud, which was left covered with bubbles iridescent in the light of the star-shells. At this moment one of these, bursting over his head, turned into a large bright moon; and Mr. Lavender saw to his amazement that the bubbles were really butterflies, perched on the liquid moonlit mud, fluttering their crimson wings, and peering up at him with tiny human faces. "Who are you?" he cried; "oh! who are you?" The butterflies closed their wings; and on each of their little faces came a look so sad and questioning that Mr. Lavender's tears rolled down into his breastplate of speeches. A whisper rose from them. "We are the dead." And they flew up suddenly in swarms, and beat his face with their wings.

Mr. Lavender woke up sitting in the middle of the floor, with light shining in on him through a hole in the curtain, and Blink licking off the tears which were streaming down his face.

"Blink," he said, "I have had a horrible dream." And still conscious of that weight on his chest, as of many undelivered speeches, he was afraid to go back to bed; so, putting on some clothes, he went carefully downstairs and out of doors into the morning. He walked with his dog towards the risen sun, alone in the silvery light of Hampstead, meditating deeply on his dream. "I have evidently," he thought, "not yet acquired that felicitous insensibility which is needful for successful public speaking. This is undoubtedly the secret of my dream. For the sub-conscious knowledge of my deficiency explains the weight on my chest and the futile tearing of sheet after sheet, which vanished as I tore them away. I lack the self-complacency necessary to the orator in any surroundings, and that golden certainty which has enchanted me in the outpourings of great men, whether in ink or speech. This is, however, a matter which I can rectify with practice." And coming to a little may-tree in full blossom, he thus addressed it:

"Little tree, be my audience, for I see in you, tipped with the sunlight, a vision of the tranquil and beautiful world, which, according to every authority, will emerge out of this carnival of blood and iron."

And the little tree lifted up its voice and answered him with the song of a blackbird.

Mr. Lavender's heart, deeply responsive to the voice of Nature, melted within him.

"What are the realms of this earth, the dreams of statesmen, and all plots and policies," he said, "compared with the beauty of this little tree? She—or is it a he?—breathes, in her wild and simple dress, just to be lovely and loved. He harbours the blackbird, and shakes fragrance into the morning; and with her blossom catches the rain and the sun drops of heaven. I see in him the witchery of God; and of her prettiness would I make a song of redemption."

So saying he knelt down before the little tree, while Blink on her haunches, very quiet beside him, looked wiser than many dogs.

A familiar gurgling sound roused him from his devotions, and turning his head he saw his young neighbour in the garb of a nurse, standing on the path behind him. "She has dropped from heaven," he thought for all nurses are angels.

And, taking off his hat, he said:

"You surprised me at a moment of which I am not ashamed; I was communing with Beauty. And behold! Aurora is with me."

"Say, rather, Borealis," said the young lady. "I was so fed-up with hospital that I had to have a scamper before turning in. If you're going home we might go together?"

"It would, indeed, be a joy," said Mr. Lavender. "The garb of mercy becomes you."

"Do you think so?" replied the young lady, in whose cheeks a lovely flush had not deepened. "I call it hideous. Do you always come out and pray to that tree?"

"I am ashamed to say," returned Mr. Lavender, "that I do not. But I intend to do so in future, since it has brought me such a vision."

And he looked with such deferential and shining eyes at his companion that she placed the back of her hand before her mouth, and her breast rose.

"I'm most fearfully sleepy," she said. "Have you had any adventures lately—you and Samjoe?"

"Samjoe?" repeated Mr. Lavender.

"Your chauffeur—I call him that. He's very like Sam Weller and Sancho Panza, don't you think, Don Pickwixote?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Lavender, bewildered; "Joe, you mean. A good fellow. He has in him the sort of heroism which I admire more than any other."

"Which is that?" asked the young lady.

"That imperturbable humour in the face of adverse circumstances for which our soldiers are renowned."

"You are a great believer in heroics, Don Pickwixote," said the young lady.

"What would life be without them?" returned Mr. Lavender. "The war could not go on for a minute."

"You're right there," said the young lady bitterly.

"You surely," said Mr. Lavender, aghast, cannot wish it to stop until we have destroyed our common enemies?"

"Well," said the young lady, "I'm not a Pacifist; but when you see as many people without arms and legs as I do, heroics get a bit off, don't you know." And she increased her pace until Mr. Lavender, who was not within four inches of her stature, was almost compelled to trot. "If I were a Tommy," she added, "I should want to shoot every man who uttered a phrase. Really, at this time of day, they are the limit."

"Aurora," said Mr. Lavender, "if you will permit me, who am old enough —alas!—to be your father, to call you that, you must surely be aware that phrases are the very munitions of war, and certainly not less important than mere material explosives. Take the word 'Liberty,' for instance; would you deprive us of it?"

The young lady fixed on him those large grey eyes which had in them the roll of genius. "Dear Don Pickwixote," she said, "I would merely take it from the mouths of those who don't know what it means; and how much do you think would be left? Not enough to butter the parsnips of a Borough Council, or fill one leader in a month of Sundays. Have you not discovered, Don Pickwixote, that Liberty means the special form of tyranny which one happens to serve under; and that our form of tyranny is GAS."

"High heaven!" cried Mr. Lavender, "that I should hear such words from so red lips!"

"I've not been a Pacifist, so far," continued the young lady, stifling a yawn, "because I hate cruelty, I hate it enough to want to be cruel to it. I want the Huns to lap their own sauce. I don't want to be

revengeful, but I just can't help it."

"My dear young lady," said Mr. Lavender soothingly, "you are not—you cannot be revengeful; for every great writer and speaker tells us that revengefulness is an emotion alien to the Allies, who are merely just.

"Rats!"

At this familiar word, Blink who had been following their conversation quietly, threw up her nose and licked the young lady's hand so unexpectedly that she started and added:

"Darling!"

Mr. Lavender, who took the expression as meant for himself, coloured furiously.

"Aurora," he said in a faint voice, "the rapture in my heart prevents my taking advantage of your sweet words. Forgive me, and let us go quietly in, with the vision I have seen, for I know my place."

The young lady's composure seemed to tremble in the balance, and her lips twitched; then holding out her hand she took Mr. Lavender's and gave it a good squeeze.

"You really are a dear," she said. "I think you ought to be in bed. My name's Isabel, you know."

"Not to me," said Mr. Lavender. You are the Dawn; nothing shall persuade me to the contrary. And from henceforth I swear to rise with you every morning."

"Oh, no!" cried the young lady please don't imagine that I sniff the matutinal as a rule. I just happened to be in a night shift."

"No matter," said Mr. Lavender; "I shall see you with the eye of faith, in your night shifts, and draw from the vision strength to continue my public work beckoned by the fingers of the roseate future."

"Well," murmured the young lady, "so long for now; and do go back to bed. It's only about five." And waving the tips of those fingers, she ran lightly up the garden-path and disappeared into her house.

Mr. Lavender remained for a moment as if transfigured; then entering his garden, he stood gazing up at her window, until the thought that she might appear there was too much for him, and he went in.

XI

BREAKS UP A PEACE MEETING

While seated at breakfast on the morning after he had seen this vision, Mr. Lavender, who read his papers as though they had been Holy Writ, came on an announcement that a meeting would be held that evening at a chapel in Holloway under the auspices of the "Free Speakers' League," an association which his journals had often branded with a reputation, for desiring Peace. On reading the names of the speakers Mr. Lavender felt at once that it would be his duty to attend. "There will," he thought, "very likely be no one there to register a protest. For in this country we have pushed the doctrine of free speech to a limit which threatens the noble virtue of patriotism. This is no doubt a recrudescence of that terrible horse-sense in the British people which used to permit everybody to have his say, no matter what he said. Yet I would rather stay at home," he mused "for they will do me violence, I expect; cowardice, however, would not become me, and I must go."

He was in a state of flurry all day, thinking of his unpleasant duty towards those violent persons, and garbishing up his memory by reading such past leaders in his five journals as bore on the subject. He spoke no word of his intentions, convinced that he ran a considerable risk at the hands of the Pacifists, but too sensible of his honour to assist anyone to put that spoke in his wheel which he could not help longing for.

At six o'clock he locked Blink into his study, and arming himself with three leaders, set forth on his perilous adventure. Seven o'clock saw him hurrying along the dismal road to the chapel, at whose door he met with an unexpected check.

"Where is your ticket?" said a large man.

"I have none," replied Mr. Lavender, disconcerted; "for this is a meeting of the Free Speakers' League, and it is for that reason that I have come."

The large man looked at him attentively. "No admittance without ticket," he said.

"I protest," said Mr. Lavender. "How can you call yourselves by that name and not let me in?"

The large man smiled.

"Well, he said, you haven't the strength of—of a rabbit—in you go!"

Mr. Lavender found himself inside and some indignation.

The meeting had begun, and a tall man at the pulpit end, with the face of a sorrowful bull, was addressing an audience composed almost entirely of women and old men, while his confederates sat behind him trying to look as if they were not present. At the end of a row, about half-way up the chapel, Mr. Lavender composed himself to listen, thinking, "However eager I may be to fulfil my duty and break up this meeting, it behoves me as a fair-minded man to ascertain first what manner of meeting it is that I am breaking up." But as the speaker progressed, in periods punctuated by applause from what, by his experience at the door, Mr. Lavender knew to be a packed audience, he grew more and more uneasy. It cannot be said that he took in what the speaker was saying, obsessed as he was by the necessity of formulating a reply, and of revolving, to the exclusion of all else, the flowers and phrases of the leaders which during the day he had almost learned by heart. But by nature polite he waited till the orator was sitting down before he rose, and, with the three leaders firmly grasped in his hand, walked deliberately up to the seated speakers. Turning his back on them, he said, in a voice to which nervousness and emotion lent shrillness:

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is now your turn, in accordance with the tradition of your society, to listen to me. Let us not mince matters with mealy mouths. There are in our midst certain viperous persons, like that notorious gentleman who had the sulphurous impudence to have a French father—French! gentlemen; not German, ladies-mark the cunning and audacity of the fellow; like that renegade Labour leader, who has never led anything, yet, if he had his will, would lead us all into the pit of destruction; like those other high-brow emasculates who mistake their pettifogging pedantry for pearls of price, and plaster the plain issue before us with perfidious and Pacifistic platitudes. We say at once, and let them note it, we will have none of them; we will have——" Here his words were drowned by an interruption greater even than that; which was fast gathering among the row of speakers behind him, and the surprised audience in front; and he could see the large man being forced from the door and up the aisle by a posse of noisy youths, till he stood with arms pinioned, struggling to turn round, just in front of Mr. Lavender. Seeing his speech thus endangered, the latter cried out at the top of his voice: "Free speech, gentlemen, free speech; I have come here expressly to see that we have nothing of the sort." At this the young men, who now filled the aisle, raised a mighty booming.

"Gentlemen," shouted Mr. Lavender, waving his leaders, "gentlemen——" But at this moment the large man was hurled into contact with what served Mr. Lavender for stomach, and the two fell in confusion. An uproar ensued of which Mr. Lavender was more than vaguely conscious, for many feet went over him. He managed, however, to creep into a corner, and, getting up, surveyed the scene. The young men who had invaded the meeting, much superior in numbers and strength to the speakers, to the large man, and the three or four other able-bodied persons who had rallied to them from among the audience, were taking every advantage of their superiority; and it went to Mr. Lavender's heart to see how they thumped and maltreated their opponents. The sight of their brutality, indeed, rendered him so furious that, forgetting all his principles and his purpose in coming to the meeting, he climbed on to a form, and folding his arms tightly on his breast, called out at the top of his voice:

"Cads! Do not thus take advantage of your numbers. Cads!" Having thus defended what in his calmer moments he would have known to be the wrong, he awaited his own fate calmly. But in the hubbub his words had passed unnoticed. "It is in moments like these," he thought, "that the great speaker asserts his supremacy, quells the storm, and secures himself a hearing." And he began to rack his brains to remember how they did it. "It must require the voice of an ox," he thought, "and the skin of an alligator. Alas! How deficient I am in public qualities!" But his self-depreciation was here cut off with the electric light. At this sheer intervention of Providence Mr. Lavender, listening to the disentangling sounds which rose in the black room, became aware that he had a chance such as he had not yet had of being heard.

"Stay, my friends!" he said; "here in darkness we can see better the true proportions of this great question of free speech. There are some who contend that in a democracy every opinion should be heard; that, just because the good sense of the majority will ever lead the country into the right paths, the minority should be accorded full and fair expression, for they cannot deflect the country's course,

and because such expression acts as a healthful safety-valve. Moreover, they say there is no way of preventing the minority from speaking save that of force, which is unworthy of a majority, and the negation of what we are fighting for in this war. But I say, following the great leader-writers, that in a time of national danger nobody ought to say anything except what is in accord with the opinions of the majority; for only in this way can we present a front which will seem to be united to our common enemies. I say, and since I am the majority I must be in the right, that no one who disagrees with me must say anything if we are to save the cause of freedom and humanity. I deprecate violence, but I am thoroughly determined to stand no nonsense, and shall not hesitate to suppress by every means in the power of the majority—including, if need be, Prussian measures—any whisper from those misguided and unpatriotic persons whose so-called principles induce them to assert their right to have opinions of their own. This has ever been a free country, and they shall not imperil its freedom by their volubility and self-conceit." Here Mr. Lavender paused for breath, and in the darkness a faint noise, as of a mouse scattling at a wainscot, attracted his attention. "Wonderful," he thought, elated by the silence, "that I should so have succeeded in riveting their attention as to be able to hear a mouse gnawing. I must have made a considerable impression." And, fearing to spoil it by further speech, he set to work to grope his way round the chapel wall in the hope of coming to the door. He had gone but a little way when his outstretched hand came into contact with something warm, which shrank away with a squeal.

"Oh!" cried Mr. Lavender, while a shiver went down his spine, "what is that?"

"Me," said a stifled voice. "Who are you?"

"A public speaker, madam," answered Mr. Lavender, unutterably relieved. Don't be alarmed.

"Ouch!" whispered the voice. That madman!

"I assure you, madam," replied Mr. Lavender, striving to regain contact, "I wouldn't harm you for the world. Can you tell me in what portion of the hall we are?" And crouching down he stretched out his arms and felt about him. No answer came; but he could tell that he was between two rows of chairs, and, holding to the top of one, he began to sidle along, crouching, so as not to lose touch with the chairs behind him. He had not proceeded the length of six chairs in the pitchy darkness when the light was suddenly turned up, and he found himself glaring over the backs of the chairs in front into the eyes of a young woman, who was crouching and glaring back over the same chairs.

"Dear me," said Mr. Lavender, as with a certain dignity they both rose to their full height, "I had no conception——"

Without a word, the young woman put her hand up to her back hair, sidled swiftly down the row of chairs, ran down the aisle, and vanished. There was no one else in the chapel. Mr. Lavender, after surveying the considerable wreckage, made his way to the door and passed out into the night. "Like a dream," he thought; "but I have done my duty, for no meeting was ever more completely broken up. With a clear conscience and a good appetite I can now go home."

XII

SPEEDS UP TRANSPORT, AND SEES A DOCTOR

Greatly cheered by his success at the Peace meeting, Mr. Lavender searched his papers next morning to find a new field for his activities; nor had he to read far before he came on this paragraph:

"Everything is dependent on transport, and we cannot sufficiently urge that this should be speeded up by every means in our power."

"How true!" he thought. And, finishing his breakfast hastily, he went out with Blink to think over what he could do to help. "I can exhort," he mused, "anyone engaged in transport who is not exerting himself to the utmost. It will not be pleasant to do so, for it will certainly provoke much ill-feeling. I must not, however, be deterred by that, for it is the daily concomitant of public life, and hard words break no bones, as they say, but rather serve to thicken the skins and sharpen the tongues of us public men, so that, we are able to meet our opponents with their own weapons. I perceive before me, indeed, a liberal education in just those public qualities wherein I am conscious of being as yet deficient." And his heart sank within him, thinking of the carts on the hills of Hampstead and the boys who drove them. "What is

lacking to them," he mused, "is the power of seeing this problem steadily and seeing it whole. Let me endeavour to impart this habit to all who have any connection with transport."

He had just completed this reflection when, turning a corner, he came on a large van standing stockstill at the top of an incline. The driver was leaning idly against the hind wheel filling a pipe. Mr. Lavender glanced at the near horse, and seeing that he was not distressed, he thus addressed the man:

"Do you not know, my friend, that every minute is of importance in this national crisis? If I could get you to see the question of transport steadily, and to see it whole, I feel convinced that you would not be standing there lighting your pipe when perhaps this half-hour's delay in the delivery of your goods may mean the death of one of your comrades at the front."

The man, who was wizened, weathered, and old, with but few teeth, looked up at him from above the curved hands with which he was coaxing the flame of a match into the bowl of his pipe. His brow was wrinkled, and moisture stood at the corners of his eyes.

"I assure you," went on Mr. Lavender, "that we have none of us the right in these days to delay for a single minute the delivery of anything—not even of speeches. When I am tempted to do so, I think of our sons and brothers in the trenches, and how every shell and every word saves their lives, and I deliver——"

The old man, who had finished lighting his pipe, took a long pull at it, and said hoarsely:

"Go on!"

"I will," said Mr. Lavender, "for I perceive that I can effect a revolution in your outlook, so that instead of wasting the country's time by leaning against that wheel you will drive on zealously and help to win the war."

The old man looked at him, and one side of his face became drawn up in a smile, which seemed to Mr. Lavender so horrible that he said: "Why do you look at me like that?"

"Cawn't 'elp it," said the man.

"What makes you," continued Mr. Lavender, "pause here with your job half finished? It is not the hill which keeps you back, for you are at the top, and your horses seem rested."

"Yes," said the old man, with another contortion of his face, "they're rested—leastways, one of 'em."

"Then what delays you—if not that British sluggishness which we in public life find such a terrible handicap to our efforts in conducting the war?"

"Ah!" said the old man. "But out of one you don't make two, guv'nor. Git on the offside and you'll see it a bit steadier and a bit 'oler than you 'ave 'itherto."

Struck by his words, which were accompanied by a painful puckering of the checks, Mr. Lavender moved round the van looking for some defect in its machinery, and suddenly became aware that the off horse was lying on the ground, with the traces cut. It lay on its side, and did not move.

"Oh!" cried Mr. Lavender; "oh!" And going up to the horse's head he knelt down. The animal's eye was glazing.

"Oh!" he cried again, "poor horse! Don't die!" And tears dropped out of his eyes on to the horse's cheek. The eye seemed to give him a look, and became quite glazed.

"Dead!" said Mr. Lavender in an awed whisper. "This is horrible! What a thin horse—nothing but bones!" And his gaze haunted the ridge and furrow of the horse's carcase, while the living horse looked round and down at its dead fellow, from whose hollow face a ragged forelock drooped in the dust.

"I must go and apologize to that old man," said Mr. Lavender aloud, "for no doubt he is even more distressed than I am."

"Not 'e, guv'nor," said a voice, and looking beside him he saw the aged driver standing beside him; "not 'e; for of all the crool jobs I ever 'ad—drivin' that 'orse these last three months 'as been the croolest. There 'e lies and 'es aht of it; and that's where they'd all like to be. Speed, done 'im in, savin' 'is country's 'time an' 'is country's oats; that done 'im in. A good old 'orse, a willin' old 'orse, 'as broke 'is 'eart tryin' to do 'is bit on 'alf rations. There 'e lies; and I'm glad 'e does." And with the back of his hand the old fellow removed some brown moisture which was trembling on his jaw. Mr. Lavender rose from his knees.

"Dreadful!—monstrous!" he cried; "poor horse! Who is responsible for this?"

"Why," said the old driver, "the gents as sees it steady and sees it 'ole from one side o' the van, same as you."

So smitten to the heart was Mr. Lavender by those words that he covered his ears with his hands and almost ran from the scene, nor did he stop till he had reached the shelter of his study, and was sitting in his arm-chair with Blink upon his feet. "I will buy a go-cart," he thought, "Blink and I will pull our weight and save the poor horses. We can at least deliver our own milk and vegetables."

He had not been sitting there for half-an-hour revolving the painful complexities of national life before the voice of Mrs. Petty recalled him from that sad reverie.

"Dr. Gobang to see you, sir."

At sight of the doctor who had attended him for alcoholic poisoning Mr. Lavender experienced one or those vaguely disagreeable sensations which follow on half-realized insults.

"Good-morning, sir," said the doctor; thought I'd just look in and make my mind easy about you. That was a nasty attack. Do you still feel your back?"

"No," said Mr. Lavender rather coldly, while Blink growled.

"Nor your head?"

"I have never felt my head," replied Mr. Lavender, still more coldly.

"I seem to remember——" began the doctor.

"Doctor," said Mr. Lavender with dignity, "surely you know that public men—do not feel—their heads—it would not do. They sometimes suffer from their throats, but otherwise they have perfect health, fortunately."

The doctor smiled.

"Well, what do you think of the war?" he asked chattily.

"Be quiet, Blink," said Mr. Lavender. Then, in a far-away voice, he added: "Whatever the clouds which have gathered above our heads for the moment, and whatever the blows which Fate may have in store for us, we shall not relax our efforts till we have attained our aims and hurled our enemies back. Nor shall we stop there," he went on, warming at his own words. "It is but a weak-kneed patriotism which would be content with securing the objects for which we began to fight. We shall not hesitate to sacrifice the last of our men, the last of our money, in the sacred task of achieving the complete ruin of the fiendish Power which has brought this great calamity on the world. Even if our enemies surrender we will fight on till we have dictated terms on the doorsteps of Potsdam."

The doctor, who, since Mr. Lavender began to speak, had been looking at him with strange intensity, dropped his eyes.

"Quite so," he said heartily, "quite so. Well, good-morning. I only just ran in!" And leaving Mr. Lavender to the exultation he was evidently feeling, this singular visitor went out and closed the door. Outside the garden-gate he rejoined the nephew Sinkin.

"Well?" asked the latter.

"Sane as you or me," said the doctor. "A little pedantic in his way of expressing himself, but quite all there, really."

"Did his dog bite you?" muttered the nephew. "No," said the doctor absently. "I wish to heaven everyone held his views. So long. I must be getting on." And they parted.

But Mr. Lavender, after pacing the room six times, had sat down again in his chair, with a cold feeling in the pit of his stomach, such as other men feel on mornings after a debauch.

ADDRESSES SOME SOLDIERS ON THEIR FUTURE

On pleasant afternoons Mr. Lavender would often take his seat on one of the benches which adorned the Spaniard's Road to enjoy the beams of the sun and the towers of the City confused in smoky distance. And strolling forth with Blink on the afternoon of the day on which the doctor had come to see him he sat down to read a periodical, which enjoined on everyone the necessity of taking the utmost interest in soldiers disabled by the war. "Yes," he thought, "it is indeed our duty to force them, no matter what their disablements, to continue and surpass the heroism they displayed out there, and become superior to what they once were." And it seemed to him a distinct dispensation of Providence when the rest of his bench was suddenly occupied by three soldiers in the blue garments and red ties of hospital life. They had been sitting there for some minutes, divided by the iron bars necessary to the morals of the neighbourhood, while Mr. Lavender cudgelled his brains for an easy and natural method of approach, before Blink supplied the necessary avenue by taking her stand before a soldier and looking up into his eye.

"Lord!" said the one thus accosted, "what a fyce! Look at her moustache! Well, cocky, 'oo are you starin' at?"

"My dog," said Mr. Lavender, perceiving his chance, "has an eye for the strange and beautiful.

"Wow said the soldier, whose face was bandaged, she'll get it 'ere, won't she?"

Encouraged by the smiles of the soldier and his comrades, Mr. Lavender went on in the most natural voice he could assume.

"I'm sure you appreciate, my friends, the enormous importance of your own futures?"

The three soldiers, whose faces were all bandaged, looked as surprised as they could between them, and did not answer. Mr. Lavender went on, dropping unconsciously into the diction of the article he had been reading: "We are now at the turning-point of the ways, and not a moment is to be lost in impressing on the disabled man the paramount necessity of becoming again the captain of his soul. He who was a hero in the field must again lead us in those qualities of enterprise and endurance which have made him the admiration of the world."

The three soldiers had turned what was visible of their faces towards Mr. Lavender, and, seeing that he had riveted their attention, he proceeded: "The apathy which hospital produces, together with the present scarcity of labour, is largely responsible for the dangerous position in which the disabled man now finds himself. Only we who have not to face his future can appreciate what that future is likely to be if he does not make the most strenuous efforts to overcome it. Boys," he added earnestly, remembering suddenly that this was the word which those who had the personal touch ever employed, "are you making those efforts? Are you equipping your minds? Are you taking advantage of your enforced leisure to place yourselves upon some path of life in which you can largely hold your own against all comers?"

He paused for a reply.

The soldiers, silent for a moment, in what seemed to Mr. Lavender to be sheer astonishment, began to fidget; then the one next him turned to his neighbour, and said:

"Are we, Alf? Are we doin' what the gentleman says?"

"I can answer that for you," returned Mr. Lavender brightly; "for I can tell by your hospitalized faces that you are living in the present; a habit which, according to our best writers, is peculiar to the British. I assure you," he went on with a winning look, "there is no future in that. If you do not at once begin to carve fresh niches for yourselves in the temple of industrialism you will be engulfed by the returning flood, and left high and dry upon the beach of fortune."

During these last few words the half of an irritated look on the faces of the soldiers changed to fragments of an indulgent and protective expression.

"Right you are, guv'nor," said the one in the middle. Don't you worry, we'll see you home all right.

"It is you," said Mr. Lavender, "that I must see home. For that is largely the duty of us who have not had the great privilege of fighting for our country."

These words, which completed the soldiers' conviction that Mr. Lavender was not quite all there, caused them to rise.

"Come on, then," said one; we'll see each other home. We've got to be in by five. You don't have a

string to your dog, I see."

"Oh no!" said Mr. Lavender puzzled "I am not blind."

"Balmy," said the soldier soothingly. "Come on, sir, an' we can talk abahit it on the way."

Mr. Lavender, delighted at the impression he had made, rose and walked beside them, taking insensibly the direction for home.

"What do you advise us to do, then, guv'nor?" said one of the soldiers.

"Throw away all thought of the present," returned Mr. Lavender, with intense earnestness; "forget the past entirely, wrap yourselves wholly in the future. Do nothing which will give you immediate satisfaction. Do not consider your families, or any of those transient considerations such as pleasure, your homes, your condition of health, or your economic position; but place yourselves unreservedly in the hands of those who by hard thinking on this subject are alone in the condition to appreciate the individual circumstances of each of you. For only by becoming a flock of sheep can you be conducted into those new pastures where the grass of your future will be sweet and plentiful. Above all, continue to be the heroes which you were under the spur of your country's call, for you must remember that your country is still calling you."

"That's right," said the soldier on Mr. Lavender's left. "Puss, puss! Does your dog swot cats?"

At so irrelevant a remark Mr. Lavender looked suspiciously from left to right, but what there was of the soldiers' faces told him nothing.

"Which is your hospital?" he asked.

"Down the 'ill, on the right," returned the soldier. "Which is yours?"

"Alas! it is not in a hospital that I——"

"I know," said the soldier delicately, "don't give it a name; no need. We're all friends 'ere. Do you get out much?"

"I always take an afternoon stroll," said Mr. Lavender, "when my public life permits. If you think your comrades would like me to come and lecture to them on their future I should be only too happy."

"D'you 'ear, Alf?" said the soldier. "D'you think they would?"

The soldier, addressed put a finger to the sound side of his mouth and uttered a catcall.

"I might effect a radical change in their views," continued Mr. Lavender, a little puzzled. "Let me leave you this periodical. Read it, and you will see how extremely vital all that I have been saying is. And then, perhaps, if you would send me a round robin, such as is usual in a democratic country, I could pop over almost any day after five. I sometimes feel"—and here Mr. Lavender stopped in the middle of the road, overcome by sudden emotion—"that I have really no right to be alive when I see what you have suffered for me."

"That's all right, old bean," said the soldier on his left; "you'd 'a done the same for us but for your disabilities. We don't grudge it you."

"Boys," said Mr. Lavender, "you are men. I cannot tell you how much I admire and love you."

"Well, give it a rest, then; t'ain't good for yer. And, look 'ere! Any time they don't treat you fair in there, tip us the wink, and we'll come over and do in your 'ousekeeper."

Mr. Lavender smiled.

"My poor housekeeper!" he said. "I thank you all the same for your charming goodwill. This is where I live," he added, stopping at the gate of the little house smothered in lilac and laburnum. "Can I offer you some tea?"

The three soldiers looked at each other, and Mr. Lavender, noticing their surprise, attributed it to the word tea.

"I regret exceedingly that I am a total abstainer," he said.

The remark, completing the soldiers' judgment of his case, increased their surprise at the nature of his residence; it remained unanswered, save by a shuffling of the feet.

Mr. Lavender took off his hat.

"I consider it a great privilege," he said, "to have been allowed to converse with you. Goodbye, and God bless you!"

So saying, he opened the gate and entered his little garden carrying his hat in his hand, and followed by Blink.

The soldiers watched him disappear within, then continued on their way down the hill in silence.

"Blimy," said one suddenly, "some of these old civilians 'ave come it balmy on the crumpet since the war began. Give me the trenches!"

XIV

ENDEAVOURS TO INTERN A GERMAN

Aglow with satisfaction at what he had been able to do for the wounded soldiers, Mr. Lavender sat down in his study to drink the tea which he found there. "There is nothing in life," he thought, "which gives one such satisfaction as friendliness and being able to do something for others. Moon-cat!"

The moon-cat, who, since Mr. Lavender had given her milk, abode in his castle, awaiting her confinement, purred loudly, regarding him with burning eyes, as was her fashion when she wanted milk, Mr. Lavender put down the saucer and continued his meditations. "Everything is vain; the world is full of ghosts and shadows; but in friendliness and the purring of a little cat there is solidity."

"A lady has called, sir."

Looking up, Mr. Lavender became aware of Mrs. Petty.

"How very agreeable!

"I don't know, sir," returned his housekeeper in her decisive voice; "but she wants to see you. Name of Pullbody."

"Pullbody," repeated Mr. Lavender dreamily; "I don't seem—Ask her in, Mrs. Petty, ask her in."

"It's on your head, sir," said Mrs. Petty, and went out.

Mr. Lavender was immediately conscious of a presence in dark green silk, with a long upper lip, a loose lower lip, and a fixed and faintly raddled air, moving stealthily towards him.

"Sit down, madam, I beg. Will you have some tea?"

The lady sat down. "Thank you, I have had tea. It was on the recommendation of your next-door neighbour, Miss Isabel Scarlet—"

"Indeed," replied Mr. Lavender, whose heart began to beat; "command me, for I am entirely at her service."

"I have come to see you," began the lady with a peculiar sinuous smile, "as a public man and a patriot."

Mr. Lavender bowed, and the lady went on: "I am in very great trouble. The fact is, my sister's husband's sister is married to a German."

"Is it possible, madam?" murmured Mr. Lavender, crossing his knees, and joining the tips of his fingers.

"Yes," resumed the lady, "and what's more, he is still at large."

Mr. Lavender, into whose mind there had instantly rushed a flood of public utterances, stood gazing at her haggard face in silent sympathy.

"You may imagine my distress, sir, and the condition of my conscience," pursued the lady, "when I tell you that my sister's husband's sister is a very old friend of mine—and, indeed, so was this German. The two are a very attached young couple, and, being childless, are quite wrapped up in each other. I have come to you, feeling it my duty to secure his internment."

Mr. Lavender, moved by the human element in her words, was about to say, "But why, madam?" when the lady continued:

"I have not myself precisely heard him speak well of his country. But the sister of a friend of mine who was having tea in their house distinctly heard him say that there were two sides to every question, and that he could not believe all that was said in the English papers.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lavender, troubled; "that is serious."

"Yes," went on the lady; "and on another occasion my sister's husband himself heard him remark that a man could not help loving his country and hoping that it would win."

"But that is natural," began Mr. Lavender.

"What!" said the lady, nearly rising, "when that country is Germany?"

The word revived Mr. Lavender's sense of proportion.

"True," he said, "true. I was forgetting for the moment. It is extraordinary how irresponsible one's thoughts are sometimes. Have you reason to suppose that he is dangerous?"

"I should have thought that what I have said might have convinced you," replied the lady reproachfully; "but I don't wish you to act without satisfying yourself. It is not as if you knew him, of course. I have easily been able to get up an agitation among his friends, but I should not expect an outsider—so I thought if I gave you his address you could form your own opinion."

"Yes," murmured Mr. Lavender, "yes. It is in the last degree undesirable that any man of German origin should remain free to work possible harm to our country. There is no question in this of hatred or of mere rabid patriotism," he went on, in a voice growing more and more far-away; "it is largely the A. B. C. of common prudence."

"I ought to say," interrupted his visitor, "that we all thought him, of course, an honourable man until this war, or we should not have been his friends. He is a dentist," she added, "and, I suppose, may be said to be doing useful work, which makes it difficult. I suggest that you go to him to have a tooth out."

Mr. Lavender quivered, and insensibly felt his teeth.

"Thank you," he said I will see if I can find one. It is certainly a matter which cannot be left to chance. We public men, madam, often have to do very hard and even inhumane things for no apparent reason. Our consciences alone support us. An impression, I am told, sometimes gets abroad that we yield to clamour. Those alone who know us realize how unfounded that aspersion is."

"This is his address," said the lady, rising, and handing him an envelope. "I shall not feel at rest until he is safely interned. You will not mention my name, of course. It is tragic to be obliged to work against one's friends in the dark. Your young neighbour spoke in enthusiastic terms of your zeal, and I am sure that in choosing you for my public man she was not pulling—er—was not making a mistake."

Mr. Lavender bowed.

"I hope not, madam, he said humbly I try to do my duty."

The lady smiled her sinuous smile and moved towards the door, leaving on the air a faint odour of vinegar and sandalwood.

When she was gone Mr. Lavender sat down on the edge of his chair before the tea-tray and extracted his teeth while Blink, taking them for a bone, gazed at them lustroously, and the moon-cat between his feet purred from repletion. "There is reason in all things," he thought, running his finger over what was left in his mouth, "but not in patriotism, for that would prevent us from consummating the destruction of our common enemies. It behoves us public men ever to set an extreme example. Which one can I spare, I wonder?" And he fixed upon a large rambling tooth on the left wing of his lower jaw. "It will hurt horribly, I'm afraid; and if I have an anaesthetic there will be someone else present; and not improbably I shall feel ill afterwards, and be unable to form a clear judgment. I must steel myself. Blink!"

For Blink was making tremulous advances to the teeth. "How pleasant to be a dog!" thought Mr.

Lavender, "and know nothing of Germans and teeth. I shall be very unhappy till this is out; but Aurora recommended me, and I must not complain, but rather consider myself the most fortunate of public men." And, ruffling his hair till it stood up all over his head, while his loose eyebrow worked up and down, he gazed at the moon-cat.

"Moon-cat," he said suddenly, "we are but creatures of chance, unable to tell from one day to another what Fate has in store for us. My tooth is beginning to ache already. That is, perhaps, as it should be, for I shall not forget which one it is." So musing he resumed his teeth; and, going to his bookcase, sought fortitude and inspiration in the records of a Parliamentary debate on enemy aliens.

It was not without considerable trepidation, however, on the following afternoon that he made his way up Welkin Street, and rang at the number on the envelope in his hand.

"Yes sir, doctor is at home," said the maid.

Mr. Lavender's heart was about to fail him when, conjuring up the vision of Aurora, he said in a faint voice: "I wish to see him professionally." And, while the maid departed up the stairs, he waited in the narrow hall, alternately taking his hat off and putting it on again, so great was his spiritual confusion.

"Doctor will see you at once, sir."

Putting his hat on hastily, Mr. Lavender followed her upstairs, feeling at his tooth to make quite sure that he remembered which it was. His courage mounted as he came nearer to his fate, and he marched into the room behind the maid holding his hat on firmly with one hand and his tooth in firmly with the other. There, beside a red velvet dentist's chair, he saw a youngish man dressed in a white coat, with round eyes and a domestic face, who said in good English:

"What can I do for you, my dear sir? I fear you are in bain."

"In great pain," replied Mr. Lavender faintly, "in great pain." And, indeed, he was; for the nervous crisis from which he was suffering had settled in the tooth, on which he still pressed a finger through his cheek.

"Sit down, sir, sit down," said the young man, "and perhaps it would be better if you should remove your hat. We shall not hurt you—no, no, we shall not hurt you."

At those words, which seemed to cast doubt on his courage, Mr. Lavender recovered all his presence of mind. He took off his hat, advanced resolutely to the chair, sat down in it, and, looking up, said:

"Do to me what you will; I shall not flinch, nor depart in any way from the behaviour of those whose duty it is to set an example to others."

So saying, he removed his teeth, and placing them in a bowl on the little swinging table which he perceived on his left hand, he closed his eyes, put his finger in his mouth, and articulated:

"'Ith one."

"Excuse me, sir," said the young German, "but do you wish a dooth oud?"

"'At ish my deshire," said Mr. Lavender, keeping his finger on his tooth, and his eyes closed. "'At one."

"I cannot give you gas without my anaesthetist."

"I dow," said Mr. Lavender; "be wick."

And, feeling the little cold spy-glass begin to touch his gums, he clenched his hands and thought: "This is the moment to prove that I, too, can die for a good cause. If I am not man enough to bear for my country so small a woe I can never again look Aurora in the face."

The voice of the young dentist dragged him rudely from the depth of his resignation.

"Excuse me, but which dooth did you say?"

Mr. Lavender again inserted his finger, and opened his eyes.

The dentist shook his head. "Imbossible," he said; "that dooth is perfectly sound. The other two are rotten. But they do not ache?"

Mr. Lavender shook his head and repeated:

"At one."

"You are my first client this week, sir," said the young German calmly, "but I cannot that dooth dake out."

At those words Mr. Lavender experienced a sensation as if his soul were creeping back up his legs; he spoke as it reached his stomach.

"Noc?" he said.

"No," replied the young German. It is nod the dooth which causes you the bain.

Mr. Lavender, suddenly conscious that he had no pain, took his finger out.

"Sir," he said, "I perceive that you are an honourable man. There is something sublime in your abnegation if, indeed, you have had no other client this week.

"No fear," said the young German. "Haf I, Cicely?"

Mr. Lavender became conscious for the first time of a young woman leaning up against the wall, with a pair of tweezers in her hand.

"Take it out, Otto," she said in a low voice, "if he wants it."

"No no," said Mr. Lavender sharply, resuming his teeth; "I would not for the world burden your conscience."

"My clients are all batriots," said the young dentist, "and my bractice is Kaput. We are in a bad way, sir," he added, with a smile, "but we try to do the correct ting."

Mr. Lavender saw the young woman move the tweezers in a manner which caused his blood to run a little cold.

"We must live," he heard her say.

"Young madam," he said, "I honour the impulse which makes you desire to extend your husband's practice. Indeed, I perceive you both to be so honourable that I cannot but make you a confession. My tooth is indeed sound, though, since I have been pretending that it isn't, it has caused me much discomfort. I came here largely to form an opinion of your husband's character, with a view to securing his internment."

At that word the two young people shrank together till they were standing side by side, staring at Mr Lavender with eyes full of anxiety and wonder. Their hands, which still held the implements of dentistry, insensibly sought each other.

"Be under no apprehension," cried Mr. Lavender, much moved; "I can see that you are greatly attached, and even though your husband is a German, he is still a man, and I could never bring myself to separate him from you."

"Who are you?" said the young woman in a frightened voice, putting her arm round her husband's waist.

"Just a public man," answered Mr. Lavender.

"I came here from a sense of duty; nothing more, assure you."

"Who put you up to it?"

"That," said Mr. Lavender, bowing as best he could from the angle he was in, "I am not at liberty to disclose. But, believe me, you have nothing to fear from this visit; I shall never do anything to distress a woman. And please charge me as if the tooth had been extracted."

The young German smiled, and shook his head.

"Sir," he said, "I am grateful to you for coming, for it shows us what danger we are in. The hardest ting to bear has been the uncertainty of our bosition, and the feeling that our friends were working behind our backs. Now we know that this is so we shall vordify our souls to bear the worst. But, tell me," he went on, "when you came here, surely you must have subbosd that to tear me away from my wife would be very bainful to her and to myself. You say now you never could do that, how was it, then, you came?"

"Ah, sir!" cried Mr. Lavender, running his hands through his hair and staring at the ceiling, "I feared this might seem inconsistent to your logical German mind. But there are many things we public men

would never do if we could see them being done. Fortunately, as a rule we cannot. Believe me, when I leave you I shall do my best to save you from a fate which I perceive to be unnecessary."

So saying, he rose from the chair, and, picking up his hat, backed towards the door.

"I will not offer you my hand," he said, "for I am acutely conscious that my position is neither dignified nor decent. I owe you a tooth that I shall not readily forget. Good-bye!"

XV.

And backing through the doorway he made his way down the stairs and out into the street, still emotionalized by the picture of the two young people holding each other by the waist. He had not, however, gone far before reason resumed its sway, and he began to see that the red velvet chair in which he had been sitting was in reality a wireless apparatus reaching to Berlin, or at least concealed a charge of dynamite to blow up some King or Prime Minister; and that the looking-glasses, of which he had noticed two at least, were surely used for signalling to Gothas or Zeppelins. This plunged him into a confusion so poignant that, rather by accident than design, he found himself again at Hampstead instead of at Scotland Yard. "In the society of Aurora alone," he thought, "can I free myself from the goadings of conscience, for it was she who sent me on that errand." And, instead of going in, he took up a position on his lawn whence he could attract her attention by waving his arms. He had been doing this for some time, to the delight of Blink, who thought it a new game, before he saw her in her nurse's dress coming out of a French-window with her yellow book in her hand. Redoubling his efforts till he had arrested her attention, he went up to the privet hedge, and said, in a deep and melancholy voice:

"Aurora, I have failed in my duty, and the errand on which you sent me is unfulfilled. Mrs. Pullbody's sister's husband's sister's husband is still, largely speaking, at large."

"I knew he would be," replied the young lady, with her joyous smile, "that's why I put her on to you—the cat!"

At a loss to understand her meaning, Mr. Lavender, who had bent forward above the hedge in his eagerness to explain, lost his balance, and, endeavouring to save the hedge, fell over into some geranium pots.

"Dear Don Pickwixote," cried the young lady, assisting him to rise, "have you hurt your nose?"

"It is not that," said Mr. Lavender, removing some mould from his hair, and stifling the attentions of Blink; "but rather my honour, for I have allowed my duty to my country to be overridden by the common emotion of pity."

"Hurrah!" cried the young lady. "It'll do you ever so much good."

"Aurora!" cried Mr. Lavender aghast, walking at her side. But the young lady only uttered her enchanting laugh.

"Come and lie down in the hammock!" she said you're looking like a ghost. I'll cover you up with a rug, and smoke a cigarette to keep the midges off you. Tuck up your legs; that's right!"

"No!" said Mr. Lavender from the recesses of the hammock, feeling his nose, "let the bidges bide me. I deserve they should devour me alive.

"All right," said the young lady. "But have a nap, anyway!" And sitting down in a low chair, she opened her book and lit a cigarette.

Mr. Lavender remained silent, watching her with the eyes of an acolyte, and wondering whether he was in his senses to have alighted on so rare a fortune. Nor was it long before he fell into a hypnotic doze.

How long Mr. Lavender had been asleep he could not of course tell before he dreamed that he was caught in a net, the meshes of which were formed of the cries of newspaper boys announcing atrocities by land and sea. He awoke looking into the eyes of Aurora, who, to still his struggles, had taken hold of his ankles.

"My goodness! You are thin!" were the first words he heard. "No wonder you're lightheaded."

Mr. Lavender, whose returning chivalry struggled with unconscious delight, murmured with difficulty:

"Let me go, let me go; it is too heavenly!

"Well, have you finished kicking?" asked the young lady.

"Yes," returned Mr. Lavender in a fainting voice—"alas!"

The young lady let go of his ankles, and, aiding him to rise from the hammock, said: "I know what's the matter with you now—you're starving yourself. You ought to be kept on your back for three months at least, and fed on butter."

Mr. Lavender, soothing the feelings of Blink, who, at his struggles, had begun to pant deeply, answered with watering lips:

"Everyone in these days must do twice as much as he ought, and I eat half, for only in this way can we compass the defeat of our common enemies." The young lady's answer, which sounded like "Bosh!" was lost in Mr. Lavender's admiration of her magnificent proportions as she bent to pick up her yellow book.

"Aurora," he said, "I know not what secret you share with the goddesses; suffer me to go in and give thanks for this hour spent in your company."

And he was about to recross the privet hedge when she caught him by the coat-tag, saying:

"No, Don Pickwixote, you must dine with us. I want you to meet my father. Come along!" And, linking her arm in his, she led him towards her castle. Mr. Lavender, who had indeed no option but to obey, such was the vigour of her arm, went with a sense of joy not unmingled with consternation lest the personage she spoke of should have viewed him in the recent extravagance of his dreaming moments.

"I don't believe," said the young lady, gazing down at him, "that you weigh an ounce more than seven stone. It's appalling!

"Not," returned Mr. Lavender, "by physical weight and force shall we win this war, for it is at bottom a question of morale. Right is, ever victorious in the end, and though we have infinitely greater material resources than our foes, we should still triumph were we reduced to the last ounce, because of the inherent nobility of our cause."

"You'll be reduced to the last ounce if we don't feed, you up somehow," said the young lady.

"Would you like to wash your hands?"

Mr. Lavender having signified his assent, she left him alone in a place covered with linoleum. When, at length, followed by Blink, he emerged from dreamy ablutions, Mr. Lavender, saw that she had changed her dress to a flowing blue garment of diaphanous character, which made her appear, like an emanation of the sky. He was about to say so when he noticed a gentleman in khaki scrutinizing him with lively eyes slightly injected with blood.

"Don Pickwixote," said the young lady; "my father, Major Scarlet."

Mr. Lavender's hand was grasped by one which seemed to him made of iron.

"I am honoured, sir," he said painfully, "to meet the father of my charming young neighbour."

The Major answered in a voice as clipped as his grey bottle-brush moustache, "Delighted! Dinner's ready. Come along!"

Mr. Lavender saw that he had a mouth which seemed to have a bitt in it; several hairs on a finely rounded head; and an air of efficient and truculent bonhomie tanned and wrinkled by the weather.

The table at which they became seated seemed to one accustomed to frugality to groan with flowers and china and glass; and Mr. Lavender had hardly supped his rich and steaming soup before his fancy took fire; nor did he notice that he was drinking from a green glass in which was a yellow fluid.

"I get Army rations," said the Major, holding a morsel of fillet of beef towards Blink. "Nice dog, Mr. Lavender."

"Yes," replied Mr. Lavender, ever delighted that his favourite should receive attention, "she is an angel."

"Too light," said the Major, "and a bit too narrow in front; but a nice dog. What's your view of the war?"

Before Mr. Lavender could reply he felt Aurora's foot pressing his, and heard her say:

"Don Pickwixote's views are after your own heart, Dad; he's for the complete destruction of the Hun."

"Indeed, yes," cried Mr. Lavender with shining eyes. "Right and justice demand it. We seek to gain nothing!"

"But we'll take all we can get," said the Major.

"They'll never get their Colonies back. We'll stick to them fast enough."

Mr. Lavender stared at him for a moment, then, remembering what he had so often read, he murmured:

"Aggrandizement is not our object; but we can never forget that so long as any territory remains in the hands of our treacherous foe the arteries of our far-flung Empire are menaced at the roots."

"Right-o," said the Major, "we've got the chance of our lives, and we're going to take it."

Mr. Lavender sat forward a little on his chair. "I shall never admit," he said, "that we are going to take anything, for that would be contrary to the principles which we are pledged to support, and to our avowed intention of seeking only the benefit of the human race; but our inhuman foes have compelled us to deprive them of the power to injure others."

"Yes," said the Major, "we must just go on killing Germans and collaring every bit of their property we can."

Mr. Lavender sat a little further forward on his chair, and the trouble in his eyes grew.

"After all's said and done," continued the Major; "it's a simple war—us or them! And in the long run it's bound to be us. We've got the cards." Mr. Lavender started, and said in a weak and wavering voice:

"We shall never sheathe the sword until——"

"The whole bag of tricks is in our hands. Might isn't Right, but Right's Might, Mr. Lavender; ha, ha!"

Mr. Lavender's eyes lighted on his glass, and he emptied it in his confusion. When he looked up again he could not see the Major very well, but could distinctly hear the truculent bonhomie of his voice.

"Every German ought to be interned; all their property ought to be confiscated; all their submarines' and Zeppelins' crews ought to be hung; all German prisoners ought to be treated as they treat our men. We ought to give 'em no quarter. We ought to bomb their towns out of existence. I draw the line at their women. Short of that there's nothing too bad for them. I'd treat 'em like rabbits. Vermin they were, and vermin they remain."

During this speech the most astounding experience befell Mr. Lavender, so that his eyes nearly started from his head. It seemed to him, indeed, that he was seated at dinner with a Prussian, and the Major's voice had no sooner ceased its genial rasping than with a bound forward on his chair, he ejaculated:

"Behold the man—the Prussian in his jack-boot!" And, utterly oblivious of the fact that he was addressing Aurora's father, he went on with almost terrible incoherence: "Although you have conquered this country, sir, never shall you subdue in my breast the sentiments of liberty and generosity which make me an Englishman. I abhor you—invader of the world—trampler underfoot of the humanities—enemy of mankind—apostle of force! You have blown out the sparks of love and kindness, and have for ever robbed the Universe. Prussian!"

The emphasis with which he spoke that word caused his chair, on the edge of which he was sitting, to tilt up under him so that he slid under the table, losing the vision of that figure in helmet and field-grey which he had been apostrophizing.

"Hold up!" said a voice, while Blink joined him nervously beneath the board.

"Never!" cried Mr. Lavender. "Imprison, maltreat me do what you will. You have subdued her body, but never will I admit that you have conquered the honour of Britain and trodden her gentle culture into the mud."

And, convinced that he would now be dragged away to be confined in some dungeon on bread and water, he clasped the leg of the dining-table with all his might, while Blink, sagaciously aware that something peculiar was occurring to her master, licked the back of his neck. He had been sitting there perhaps half a minute, with his ears stretched to catch the half-whispered sounds above, when he saw a shining object appear under the table, the head, indeed, of the Prussian squatting there to look at him.

"Go up, thou bald-head," he called out at once; "I will make no terms with the destroyer of justice and humanity."

"All right, my dear sir," replied the head.

"Will you let my daughter speak to you?"

"Prussian blasphemer," responded Mr. Lavender, shifting his position so as to be further away, and clasping instead of the table leg some soft silken objects, which he was too excited to associate with Aurora, "you have no daughter, for no woman would own one whose hated presence poisons this country."

"Well, well," said the Major. "How shall we get him out?"

Hearing these words, and believing them addressed to a Prussian guard, Mr. Lavender clung closer to the objects, but finding them wriggle in his clasp let go, and, bolting forward like a rabbit on his hands and knees, came into contact with the Major's head. The sound of the concussion, the Major's oaths, Mr. Lavender's moans, Blink's barking, and the peals of laughter from Aurora made up a noise which might have been heard in Portugal. The situation was not eased until Mr. Lavender crawled out, and taking up a dinner-knife, rolled his napkin round his arm, and prepared to defend himself against the German Army.

"Well, I'm damned," said the Major when he saw these preparations; "I am damned."

Aurora, who had been leaning against the wall from laughter, here came forward, gasping:

"Go away, Dad, and leave him to me."

"To you!" cried the Major. "He's not safe!"

"Oh yes, he is; it's only you that are exciting him. Come along!"

And taking her father by the arm she conducted him from the room. Closing the door behind him, and putting her back against it, she said, gently:

"Dear Don Pickwixote, all danger is past. The enemy has been repulsed, and we are alone in safety. Ha, ha, ha!"

Her voice recalled Mr. Lavender from his strange hallucination. "What?" he said weakly.

"Why? Who? Where? When?"

"You have been dreaming again. Let me take you home, and tuck you into bed." And taking from him the knife and napkin, she opened the French-window, and passed out on to the lawn.

Lavender, who now that his reason had come back, would have followed her to the death, passed out also, accompanied by Blink, and watched by the Major, who had put his head in again at the door. Unfortunately, the spirit moved Mr. Lavender to turn round at this moment, and seeing the head he cried out in a loud voice:

"He is there! He is there! Arch enemy of mankind! Let me go and die under his jackboot, for never over my living body shall he rule this land." And the infatuated gentleman would certainly have rushed at his host had not Aurora stayed him by the slack of his nether garments. The Major withdrawing his head, Mr. Lavender's excitement again passed from him, and he suffered himself to be led dazedly away and committed to the charge of Mrs. Petty and Joe, who did not leave him till he was in bed with a strong bromide to keep him company.

FIGHTS THE FIGHT OF FAITH

The strenuous experiences through which Mr. Lavender had passed resulted in what Joe Petty called "a fair knock-out," and he was forced to spend three days in the seclusion of his bed, deprived of his newspapers. He instructed Mrs. Petty, however, on no account to destroy or mislay any journal, but to keep them in a pile in his study. This she did, for though her first impulse was to light the kitchen fire with the five of them every morning, deliberate reflection convinced her that twenty journals read at one sitting would produce on him a more soporific effect than if he came down to a mere five.

Mr. Lavender passed his three days, therefore, in perfect repose, feeding Blink, staring at the ceiling, and conversing with Joe. An uneasy sense that he had been lacking in restraint caused his mind to dwell on life as seen by the monthly rather than the daily papers, and to hold with his chauffeur discussions of a somewhat philosophical character.

"As regards the government of this country, Joe," he said, on the last evening of his retirement, "who do you consider really rules? For it is largely on this that our future must depend."

"Can't say, sir," answered Joe, "unless it's Botty."

"I do not know whom or what you signify by that word," replied Mr. Lavender; "I am wondering if it is the People who rule."

"The People!" replied Joe; "the People's like a gent in a lunatic asylum, allowed to 'ave instincts but not to express 'em. One day it'll get aht, and we shall all step lively."

"It is, perhaps, Public Opinion," continued Mr. Lavender to himself, "as expressed in the Press."

"Not it," said Joe the nearest opinion the Press gets to expressin' is that of Mayors. 'Ave you never noticed, sir, that when the Press is 'ard up for support of an opinion that the public don't 'old, they go to the Mayors, and get 'em in two columns?"

"Mayors are most valuable public men," said Mr. Lavender.

"I've nothin' against 'em," replied Joe; "very average lot in their walk of life; but they ain't the People."

Mr. Lavender sighed. "What, then, is the People, Joe?"

"I am," replied Joe; "I've got no opinions on anything except that I want to live a quiet life—just enough beer and 'baccy, short hours, and no worry."

"If you compare that with the aspirations of Mayors you will see how sordid such a standard is," said Mr. Lavender, gravely.

"Sordid it may be, sir," replied Joe; "but there's, a thing abaht it you 'aven't noticed. I don't want to sacrifice nobody to satisfy my aspirations. Why? Because I've got none. That's priceless. Take the Press, take Parlyment, take Mayors—all mad on aspirations. Now it's Free Trade, now it's Imperialism; now it's Liberty in Europe; now it's Slavery in Ireland; now it's sacrifice of the last man an' the last dollar. You never can tell what aspiration'll get 'em next. And the 'ole point of an aspiration is the sacrifice of someone else. Don't you make a mistake, sir. I defy you to make a public speech which 'asn't got that at the bottom of it."

"We are wandering from the point, Joe," returned Mr. Lavender. "Who is it that governs, the country?"

"A Unseen Power," replied Joe promptly.

"How?"

"Well, sir, we're a democratic country, ain't we? Parlyment's elected by the People, and Gover'ment's elected by Parlyment. All right so far; but what 'appens? Gover'ment says 'I'm going to do this.' So long as it meets with the approval of the Unseen Power, well an' good. But what if it don't? The U.P. gets busy; in an 'undred papers there begins to appear what the U.P. calls Public Opinion, that's to say the opinion of the people that agree with the U.P. There you 'ave it, sir, only them—and it appears strong. Attacks on the Gover'ment policy, nasty things said abaht members of it that's indiscreet enough to speak aht what, they think—German fathers, and other secret vices; an' what's more than all, not a peep at any opinion that supports the Gover'ment. Well, that goes on day after day, playin' on the mind of Parlyment, if they've got any, and gittin' on the Gover'ment's nerves, which they've got weak, till they says: 'Look 'ere, it's no go; Public Opinion won't stand it. We shall be outed; and that'll never do,

because there's no other set of fellows that can save this country.' Then they 'ave a meetin' and change their policy. And what they've never seen is that they've never seen Public Opinion at all. All they've seen is what the U.P. let 'em. Now if I was the Gover'nent, I'd 'ave it out once for all with the U. P."

"Ah!" cried Mr. Lavender, whose eyes were starting from his, head, so profoundly was he agitated by what was to him a new thought.

"Yes," continued Joe, "if I was the Gover'nent, next time it 'appened, I'd say: 'All right, old cock, do your damnest. I ain't responsible to you. Attack, suppress, and all the rest of it. We're goin' to do what we say, all the same!' And then I'd do it. And what'd come of it? Either the U.P. would go beyond the limits of the Law—and then I'd jump on it, suppress its papers, and clap it into quod—or it'd take it lyin' down. Whichever 'appened it'd be all up with the U. P. I'd a broke its chain off my neck for good. But I ain't the Gover'nent, an Gover'nent's got tender feet. I ask you, sir, wot's the good of havin' a Constitooshion, and a the bother of electing these fellows, if they can't act according to their judgment for the short term of their natural lives? The U.P. may be patriotic and estimable, and 'ave the best intentions and all that, but its outside the Constitooshion; and what's more, I'm not goin' to spend my last blood an' my last money in a democratic country to suit the tastes of any single man, or triumpherate, or wotever it may be made of. If the Government's uncertain wot the country wants they can always ask it in the proper way, but they never ought to take it on 'earsay from the papers. That's wot I think."

While he was speaking Mr. Lavender had become excited to the point of fever, for, without intending it, Joe had laid bare to him a yawning chasm between his worship of public men and his devotion to the Press. And no sooner had his chauffeur finished than he cried: "Leave me, Joe, for I must think this out."

"Right, sir," answered Joe with his smile, and taking the tea-tray from off his master, he set it where it must infallibly be knocked over, and went out.

"Can it be possible," thought Mr. Lavender, when he was alone, "that I am serving God and Mammon? And which is God and which is Mammon?" he added, letting his thoughts play over the countless speeches and leading articles which had formed his spiritual diet since the war began. "Or, indeed, are they not both God or both Mammon? If what Joe says is true, and nothing is recorded save what seems good to this Unseen Power, have I not been listening to ghosts and shadows; and am I, indeed, myself anything but the unsubstantial image of a public man? For it is true that I have no knowledge of anything save what is recorded in the papers." And perceiving that the very basis of his faith was endangered, he threw off the bedclothes, and began to pace the room. "Are we, then, all," he thought, "being bounded like india-rubber balls by an unseen hand; and is there no one of us strong enough to bounce into the eye of our bounder and overthrow him? My God, I am unhappy; for it is a terrible thing not to know which my God is, and whether I am a public man or an india-rubber ball." And the more he thought the more dreadful it seemed to him, now that he perceived that all those journals, pamphlets, and reports with which his study walls were lined might not be the truth, but merely authorized versions of it.

"This," he said aloud, "is a nightmare from which I must awaken or lose all my power of action and my ability to help my country in its peril."

And sudden sweat broke out on his brow, for he perceived that he had now no means of telling even whether there was a peril, so strangely had Joe's words affected his powers of credulity.

"But surely," he thought, steadying himself by gripping his washstand, "there was, at least, a peril once. And yet, how do I know even that, for I have only been told so; and the tellers themselves were only told so by this Unseen Power; and suppose it has made a mistake or has some private ends to serve! Oh! it is terrible, and there is no end to it." And he shook the crockery in the spasms which followed the first awakenings of these religious doubts. "Where, then, am I to go," he cried, "for knowledge of the truth? For even books would seem dependent on the good opinion of this Unseen Power, and would not reach my eyes unless they were well spoken of by it."

And the more he thought the more it seemed to him that nothing could help him but to look into the eyes of this Unseen Power, so that he might see for himself whether it was the Angel of Truth or some Demon jumping on the earth. No sooner had this conviction entered his brain than he perceived how in carrying out such an enterprise he would not only be setting his own mind at rest, and re-establishing or abolishing his faith, but would be doing the greatest service which he could render to his country and to all public men. "Thus," he thought, "shall I cannonize my tourney, and serve Aurora, who is the dawn of truth and beauty in the world. I am not yet worthy, however, of this adventure, which will, indeed, be far more arduous and distressing to accomplish than any which I have yet undertaken. What can I do to brighten and equip my mind and divest it of all those prejudices in which it may

unconsciously have become steeped? If I could leave the earth a short space and commune with the clouds it might be best. I will go to Hendon and see if someone will take me up for a consideration; for on earth I can no longer be sure of anything."

And having rounded off his purpose with this lofty design, he went back to bed with his head lighter than a puff-ball.

XVII

ADDRESSES THE CLOUDS

On the morning following his resurrection Mr. Lavender set out very early for the celebrated flying ground without speaking of his intention to anyone. At the bottom of the hill he found to his annoyance that Blink had divined his purpose and was following. This, which compelled him to walk, greatly delayed his arrival. But chance now favoured him, for he found he was expected, and at once conducted to a machine which was about to rise. A taciturn young man, with a long jaw, and wings on his breast, was standing there gazing at it with an introspective eye.

"Ready, sir?" he said.

"Yes," replied Mr. Lavender, enveloped to the eyes in a garment of fur and leather. "Will you kindly hold my dog?" he added, stroking Blink with the feeling that he was parting for ever with all that was most dear to him.

An attendant having taken hold of her by the collar, Mr. Lavender was heaved into the machine, where the young airman was already seated in front of him.

"Shall I feel sick?" asked Mr. Lavender.

"Probably," said the young airman.

"That will not deter me, for the less material I become the better it will be."

The young airman turned his head, and Mr. Lavender caught the surprised yellow of his eye.

"Hold on," said the airman, "I'm going to touch her off."

Mr. Lavender held on, and the machine moved but at this moment Blink, uttering a dismal howl, leapt forward, and, breaking from the attendant's grasp, landed in the machine against Mr. Lavender's chest.

"Stop! stop he cried!" my dog.

"Stuff her down," said the unmoved airman, "between your legs. She's not the first to go up and won't be the last to come down."

Mr. Lavender stuffed her down as best he could. "If we are to be killed," he thought, "it will be together. Blink!" The faithful creature, who bitterly regretted her position now that the motion had begun, looked up with a darkened eye at Mr. Lavender, who was stopping his ears against the horrible noises which had now begun. He too, had become aware of the pit of his stomach; but this sensation soon passed away in the excitement he felt at getting away from the earth, for they were already at the height of a house, and rising rapidly.

"It is not at all like a little bird," he thought, "but rather resembles a slow train on the surface of the sea, or a horse on a switchback merry-go-round. I feel, however, that my spirit will soon be free, for the earth is becoming like a board whereon a game is played by an unseen hand, and I am leaving it." And craning his head out a little too far he felt his chin knock against his spine. Drawing it in with difficulty he concentrated his attention upon that purification of his spirit which was the object of his journey.

"I am now," he thought, "in the transcendent ether. It should give me an amazing power of expression such as only the greatest writers and orators attain; and, divorced as I am rapidly becoming from all sordid reality, truth will appear to me like one of those stars towards which I am undoubtedly flying though I cannot as yet see it."

Blink, who between his legs had hitherto been unconscious of their departure from the earth, now

squirmed irresistibly up till her forepaws were on her master's chest, and gazed lugubriously at the fearful prospect. Mr. Lavender clasped her convulsively. They were by now rapidly nearing a flock of heavenly sheep, which as they approached became ever more gigantic till they were transformed into monstrous snow-fleeces intersected by wide drifts of blue.

"Can it be that we are to adventure above them?" thought Mr. Lavender. "I hope not, for they seem to me fearful." His alarm was soon appeased, for the machine began to take a level course a thousand feet, perhaps, below the clouds, whence little wraiths wandering out now and again dimmed Mr. Lavender's vision and moistened his brow.

Blink having retired again between her master's legs, a sense of security and exaltation was succeeding to the natural trepidation of Mr. Lavender's mood. "I am now," he thought, "lifted above all petty plots and passions on the wings of the morning. Soon will great thoughts begin to jostle in my head, and I shall see the truth of all things made clear at last."

But the thoughts did not jostle, a curious lethargy began stealing over him instead, so that his head fell back, and his mouth fell open. This might have endured until he returned to earth had not the airman stopped the engines so that they drifted ruminantly in space below the clouds. With the cessation of the noise Mr. Lavender's brain regained its activity, and he was enchanted to hear the voice of his pilot saying:

"How are you getting on, sir?"

"As regards the sensation," Mr. Lavender replied, "it is marvellous, for after the first minute or two, during which the unwonted motion causes a certain inconvenience, one grasps at once the exhilaration and joy of this great adventure. To be in motion towards the spheres, and see the earth laid out like a chess-board below you; to feel the lithe creature beneath your body responding so freely to every call of its gallant young pilot; to be filled with the scream of the engines, as of an eagle at sport; to know that at the least aberration of the intrepid airman we should be dashed into a million pieces; all this is largely to experience an experience so unforgettable that one will never—er—er—forget it."

"Gosh!" said the young airman.

"Yes," pursued Mr. Lavender, who was now unconsciously reading himself in his morning's paper, "one can only compare the emotion to that which the disembodied spirit might feel passing straight from earth to heaven. We saw at a great depth below us on a narrow white riband of road two crawling black specks, and knew that they were human beings, the same and no more than we had been before we left that great common place called Earth."

"Gum!" said the young airman, as Lavender paused, "you're getting it fine, sir! Where will it appear?"

"Those great fleecy beings the clouds," went on Mr. Lavender, without taking on the interruption, "seemed to await our coming in the morning glory of their piled-up snows; and we, with the rarefied air in our lungs, felt that we must shout to them." And so carried away was Mr. Lavender by his own style that he really did begin to address the clouds: "Ghosts of the sky, who creep cold about this wide blue air, we small adventuring mortals great-hearted salute you. Humbly proud of our daring have we come to sport with you and the winds of Ouranos, and, in the rapturous corridors between you, play hide-and seek, avoiding your glorious moisture with the dips and curves and skimming of our swallow flights—we, the little unconquerable Spirits of the Squirth!"

The surprise which Mr. Lavender felt at having uttered so peculiar a word, in the middle of such a flow of poetry reduced him to sudden silence.

"Golly!" said the airman with sudden alarm in his voice. "Hold tight!" And they began to shoot towards earth faster than they had risen. They came down, by what seemed a miracle to Mr. Lavender, who was still contemplative, precisely where they had gone up. A little group was collected there, and as they stepped out a voice said, "I beg your pardon," in a tone so dry that it pierced even the fogged condition in which Mr. Lavender alighted. The gentleman who spoke had a dark moustache and thick white hair, and, except that he wore a monocle, and was perhaps three inches taller, bore a striking resemblance to himself.

"Thank you," he replied, "certainly."

"No," said the gentleman, "not at all—on the contrary, Who the hell are you?"

"A public man," said Mr. Lavender, surprised; "at least," he added conscientiously, "I am not quite certain."

"Well," said the gentleman, "you've jolly well stolen my stunt."

"Who, then, are you?" asked Mr. Lavender.

"I?" replied the gentleman, evidently intensely surprised that he was not known; "I—my name——"

But at this moment Mr. Lavender's attention was diverted by the sight of Blink making for the horizon, and crying out in a loud voice: "My dog!" he dropped the coat in which he was still enveloped and set off running after her at full speed, without having taken in the identity of the gentleman or disclosed his own. Blink, indeed, scenting another flight in the air, had made straight for the entrance of the enclosure, and finding a motor cab there with the door open had bolted into it, taking it for her master's car. Mr. Lavender sprang in after her. At the shake which this imparted to the cab, the driver, who had been dozing, turned his head.

"Want to go back, sir?" he said.

"Yes," replied Mr. Lavender, breathless; "London."

XVIII

SEES TRUTH FACE TO FACE

"I fear," thought Mr. Lavender, as they sped towards Town, "that I have inadvertently taken a joy-ride which belonged to that distinguished person with the eyeglass. No matter, my spirit is now bright for the adventure I have in hand. If only I knew where I could find the Unseen Power—but possibly its movements may be recorded in these journals." And taking from his pocket his morning papers, which he had not yet had time to peruse, he buried himself in their contents. He was still deeply absorbed when the cab stopped and the driver knocked on the window. Mr. Lavender got out, followed by Blink, and was feeling in his pocket for the fare when an exclamation broke from the driver:

"Gorblimy! I've brought the wrong baby!"

And before Mr. Lavender had recovered from his surprise, he had whipped the car round and was speeding back towards the flying ground.

"How awkward!" thought Mr. Lavender, who was extremely nice in money matters; "what shall I do now?" And he looked around him. There, as it were by a miracle, was the office of a great journal, whence obviously his distinguished colleague had set forth to the flying grounds, and to which he had been returned in error by the faithful driver.

Perceiving in all this the finger of Providence, Mr. Lavender walked in. Those who have followed his experiences so far will readily understand how no one could look on Mr. Lavender without perceiving him to be a man of extreme mark, and no surprise need be felt when he was informed that the Personage he sought was on the point of visiting Brighton to open a hospital, and might yet be overtaken at Victoria Station.

With a beating heart he took up the trail in another taxi-cab, and, arriving at Victoria, purchased tickets for himself and Blink, and inquired for the Brighton train.

"Hurry up!" replied the official. Mr. Lavender ran, searching the carriage windows for any indication of his objective. The whistle had been blown, and he was in despair, when his eye caught the label "Reserved" on a first-class window, and looking in he saw a single person evidently of the highest consequence smoking a cigar, surrounded by papers. Without a moment's hesitation he opened the door, and, preceded by Blink, leaped in. "This carriage is reserved, sir," said the Personage, as the train moved out.

"I know," said Mr. Lavender, who had fallen on to the edge of the seat opposite; "and only the urgency of my business would have caused me to violate the sanctity of your retreat, for, believe me, I have the instincts if not the habits of a gentleman."

The Personage, who had made a move of his hand as if to bring the train to a standstill, abandoning his design, replaced his cigar, and contemplated Mr. Lavender from above it.

The latter remained silent, returning that remarkable stare, while Blink withdrew beneath the seat and pressed her chin to the ground, savouring the sensation of a new motion.

"Yes," he thought, "those eyes have an almost superhuman force and cunning. They are the eyes of a spider in the centre of a great web. They seem to draw me."

"You are undoubtedly the Unseen Power, sir," he said suddenly, "and I have reached the heart of the mystery. From your own lips I shall soon know whether I am a puppet or a public man."

The Personage, who by his movements was clearly under the impression that he had to do with a lunatic, sat forward with his hands on his knees ready to rise at a moment's notice; he kept his cigar in his mouth, however, and an enforced smile on the folds of his face.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he said.

"Will you have a cigar?"

"No, thank you," replied Mr. Lavender, "I must keep the eyes of my spirit clear, and come to the point. Do you rule this country or do you not? For it is largely on the answer to this that my future depends. In telling others what to do am I speaking as my conscience or as your conscience dictates; and, further, if indeed I am speaking as your conscience dictates, have you a conscience?"

The Personage, who had evidently made up his mind to humour the intruder, flipped the ash off his cigar.

Well, sir, he said, I don't know who the devil you may be, but my conscience is certainly as good as yours."

"That," returned Mr. Lavender with a sigh, is a great relief, for whether you rule the country or not, you are undoubtedly the source from which I, together with the majority of my countrymen, derive our inspirations. You are the fountainhead at which we draw and drink. And to know that your waters are pure, unstained by taint of personal prejudice and the love of power, will fortify us considerably. Am I to assume, then, that above all passion and pettiness, you are an impersonal force whose innumerable daily editions reflect nothing but abstract truth, and are in no way the servants of a preconceived and personal view of the situation?"

"You want to know too much, don't you think?" said the Personage with a smile.

"How can that be, sir?" asked Mr. Lavender: If you are indeed the invisible king swaying the currents of national life, and turning its tides at will, it is essential that we should believe in you; and before we can believe in you must we not know all about you?"

"By Jove, sir," replied the Personage, "that strikes me as being contrary to all the rules of religion. I thought faith was the ticket."

By this answer Mr. Lavender was so impressed that he sat for a moment in silence, with his eyebrow working up and down.

"Sir," he said at last, "you have given me a new thought. If you are right, to disbelieve in you and the acts which you perform, or rather the editions which you issue, is blasphemy."

"I should think so," said the Personage, emitting a long whiff of smoke. Hadn't that ever occurred to you before?"

"No," replied Mr. Lavender, naively, "for I have never yet disbelieved anything in those journals."

The Personage coughed heartily.

"I have always regarded them," went on Mr. Lavender, "as I myself should wish to be regarded, 'without fear and without reproach.' For that is, as I understand it, the principle on which a gentleman must live, ever believing of others what he would wish believed of himself. With the exception of Germans," he added hastily.

"Naturally," returned the Personage. "And I'll defy you to find anything in them which disagrees with that formula. Everything they print refers to Germans if not directly then obliquely. Germans are the 'idee fixe', and without an 'idee fixe', as you know, there's no such thing as religion. Do you get me?"

"Yes, indeed," cried Mr. Lavender, enthused, for the whole matter now seemed to him to fall into coherence, and, what was more, to coincide with his preconceptions, so that he had no longer any doubts. "You, sir—the Unseen Power—are but the crystallized embodiment of the national sentiment in

time of war; in serving you, and fulfilling the ideas which you concrete in your journals, we public men are servants of the general animus, which in its turn serves the blind and burning instinct of justice. This is eminently satisfactory to me, who would wish no better fate than to be a humble lackey in that house." He had no sooner, however, spoken those words than Joe Petty's remarks about Public Opinion came back to him, and he added: "But are you really the general animus, or are you only the animus of Mayors, that is the question?"

The personage seemed to follow this thought with difficulty. "What's that?" he said.

Mr. Lavender ran his hands through his hair.

"And turns," he said, "on what is the unit of national feeling and intelligence? Is it or is it not a Mayor?"

The Personage smiled. "Well, what do you think?" he said. "Haven't you ever heard them after dinner? There's no question about it. Make your mind easy if that's your only trouble."

Mr. Lavender, greatly cheered by the genial certainty in this answer, said: "I thank you, sir. I shall go back and refute that common scoffer, that caster of doubts. I have seen the Truth face, to face, and am greatly encouraged to further public effort. With many apologies I can now get out," he added, as the train stopped at South Croydon. "Blink!" And, followed by his dog, he stepped from the train.

The Personage, who was indeed no other than the private secretary of the private secretary of it whom Mr. Lavender had designated as the Truth watched him from the window.

"Well, that WAS a treat, dear papa!" he murmured to himself, emitting a sigh of smoke after his retreating interlocutor.

XIX

IS IN PERIL OF THE STREET

On the Sunday following this interview with the Truth Mr. Lavender, who ever found the day of rest irksome to his strenuous spirit, left his house after an early supper. It, had been raining all day, but the sinking sun had now emerged and struck its level light into the tree tops from a still cloudy distance. Followed by Blink, he threaded the puddled waste which lies to the west of the Spaniard's Road, nor was it long before the wild beauty of the scene infected his spirit, and he stood still to admire the world spread out. The smoke rack of misted rain was still drifting above the sunset radiance in an apple-green sky; and behind Mr. Lavender, as he gazed at those clouds symbolical of the world's unrest, a group of tall, dark pine-trees, wild and witch-like, had collected as if in audience of his cosmic mood. He formed a striking group for a painter, with the west wind flinging back his white hair, and fluttering his dark moustache along his cheeks, while Blink, a little in front of him, pointed at the prospect and emitted barks whose vigour tossed her charming head now to this side now to that.

"How beautiful is this earth!" thought Mr. Lavender, "and how simple to be good and happy thereon. Yet must we journey ten leagues beyond the wide world's end to find justice and liberty. There are dark powers like lions ever in the path. Yes," he continued, turning round to the pinetrees, who were creaking slightly in the wind, "hate and oppression, greed, lust, and ambition! There you stand malevolently regarding me. Out upon you, dark witches of evil! If I had but an axe I would lay you lower than the dust." But the poor pine-trees paid no attention save to creak a little louder. And so incensed was Mr. Lavender by this insensibility on the part of those which his own words had made him perceive were the powers of darkness that he would very likely have barked his knuckles on them if Blink by her impatience had not induced him to resume his walk and mount on to the noble rampart of the Spaniard's Road.

Along this he wandered and down the hill with the countless ghosts and shadows of his brain, liberating the world in fancy from all the hindrances which beset the paths of public men, till dark fell, and he was compelled to turn towards home. Closely attended by the now sobered Blink he had reached the Tube Station when he perceived in the inky war-time dusk that a woman was following him. Dimly aware that she was tall and graceful he hurried to avoid her, but before long could but note that she was walking parallel and turning her face towards him. Her gloved hand seemed to make a beckoning movement, and perceiving at once that he was the object of that predatory instinct which he

knew from the many letters and protests in his journals to be one of the most distressing features of the War, he would have broken into a run if he had not been travelling up-hill; being deprived of this means of escape, his public nature prevailed, and he saw that it was his duty to confront the woman, and strike a blow at, the national evil stalking beside him. But he was in a difficulty, for his natural delicacy towards women seemed to preclude him from treating her as if she were what she evidently was, while his sense of duty—urged him with equal force to do so.

A whiff of delicious scent determined him. "Madam," he said, without looking in her face, which, indeed, was not visible—so great was the darkness, "it is useless to pursue one who not only has the greatest veneration for women but regards you as a public danger at a time when all the energies of the country should be devoted to the defeat of our common enemies."

The woman, uttering a sound like a laugh, edged towards him, and Mr. Lavender edged away, so that they proceeded up the street crabwise, with Blink adhering jealously to her master's heels.

"Do you know," said Mr. Lavender, with all the delicacy in his power, "how terribly subversive of the national effort it is to employ your beauty and your grace to snare and slacken the sinews of our glorious youth? The mystery of a woman's glance in times like these should be used solely to beckon our heroes on to death in the field. But you, madam, than whom no one indeed has a more mysterious glance, have turned it to ends which, in the words of a great public man, profane the temple of our—our——"

Mr. Lavender stopped, for his delicacy would not allow him even in so vital a cause to call bodies bodies. The woman here edged so close that he bolted across her in affright, and began to slant back towards the opposite side of the street.

"Madam," he said, "you must have perceived by now that I am, alas! not privileged by age to be one of the defenders of my country; and though I am prepared to yield to you, if by so doing I can save some young hero from his fate, I wish you to clearly understand that only my sense of duty as a public man would induce me to do any such thing." At this he turned his eyes dreadfully upon her graceful form still sidling towards him, and, conscious again of that delightful scent, felt a swooning sensation which made him lean against a lamp-post. "Spare me, madam," he said in a faint voice, "for my country's sake I am ready to do anything, but I must tell you that I worship another of your sex from afar, and if you are a woman you will not seek to make me besmirch that adoration or imperil my chivalry."

So saying, he threw his arms round the lamppost and closed his eyes, expecting every moment to be drawn away against his will into a life of vice.

A well-known voice, strangled to the pitch almost of inaudibility, said in his ear:

"Oh, Don Pickwixote, Don Pickwixote, you will be the death of me!"

Electrified, Mr. Lavender opened his eyes, and in the dull orange rays of the heavily shaded lamp he saw beside him no other than the writhing, choking figure of Aurora herself. Shocked beyond measure by the mistake he had made, Mr. Lavender threw up his hands and bolted past her through the gateway of his garden; nor did he cease running till he had reached his bedroom and got under the bed, so terribly was he upset. There, in the company of Blink, he spent perhaps the most shame-stricken hours of his existence, cursing the memory of all those bishops and novelists who had caused him to believe that every woman in a dark street was a danger to the State; nor could the persuasion of Mrs. Petty or Joe induce him to come out, so that in despair they were compelled to leave him to pass the night in this penitential position, which he did without even taking out his teeth.

XX

RECEIVES A REVELATION

Fully a week elapsed before Mr. Lavender recovered from the effects of the night which he had spent under his bed and again took his normal interest in the course of national affairs. That which at length tore him from his torpid condition and refixed his imagination was an article in one of his journals on the League of Nations, which caused him suddenly to perceive that this was the most important subject of the day. Carefully extracting the address of the society who had the matter in hand, he determined to

go down forthwith and learn from their own lips how he could best induce everybody to join them in their noble undertaking. Shutting every window, therefore and locking Blink carefully into his study, he set forth and took the Tube to Charing Cross.

Arriving at the premises indicated he made his way in lifts and corridors till he came to the name of this great world undertaking upon the door of Room 443, and paused for a moment to recover from the astonishment he felt that the whole building at least was not occupied by the energies of such a prodigious association.

"Appearances, however, are deceptive," he thought; "and from a single grain of mustard-seed whole fields will flower." He knocked on the door, therefore, and receiving the reply, "Cub id," in a female voice, he entered a room where two young ladies with bad colds were feebly tapping type-writers.

"Can I see the President?" asked Mr. Lavender.

"Dot at the bobent," said one of the young ladies. "Will the Secretary do?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Lavender "for I seek information."

The young ladies indulged in secret confabulation, from which the perpetual word "He" alone escaped to Mr. Lavender's ears.

Then one of them slipped into an inner room, leaving behind her a powerful trail of eucalyptus. She came back almost directly, saying, "Go id."

The room which Mr Lavender entered contained two persons, one seated at a bureau and the other pacing up and down and talking in a powerful bass voice. He paused, looked at Mr. Lavender from under bushy brows, and at once went on walking and talking, with a sort of added zest.

"This must be He," thought Mr. Lavender, sitting down to listen, for there was something about the gentleman which impressed him at once. He had very large red ears, and hardly a hair on his head, while his full, bearded face and prominent eyes were full of force and genius.

"It won't do a little bit, Titmarsh," he was saying, "to allow the politicians to meddle in this racket. We want men of genius, whose imaginations carry them beyond the facts of the moment. This is too big a thing for those blasted politicians. They haven't shown a sign so far of paying attention to what I've been telling them all this time. We must keep them out, Titmarsh. Machinery without mechanism, and a change of heart in the world. It's very simple. A single man of genius from each country, no pettifogging opposition, no petty prejudices."

The other gentleman, whom Mr. Lavender took for the Secretary, and who was leaning his head rather wearily on his hand, interjected: "Quite so! And whom would you choose besides yourself? In France, for instance?"

He who was walking stopped a moment, again looked at Mr. Lavender intently, and again began to speak as if he were not there.

"France?" he said. "There isn't anybody—Anatole's too old—there isn't anybody."

"America, then?" hazarded the Secretary.

"America!" replied the other; "they haven't got even half a man. There's that fellow in Germany that I used to influence; but I don't know—no, I don't think he'd be any good."

"D'Annunzio, surely——" began the Secretary.

"D'Annunzio? My God! D'Annunzio! No! There's nobody in Italy or Holland—she's as bankrupt as Spain; and there's not a cat in Austria. Russia might, perhaps, give us someone, but I can't at the moment think of him. No, Titmarsh, it's difficult."

Mr. Lavender had been growing more and more excited at each word he overheard, for a scheme of really stupendous proportions was shaping itself within him. He suddenly rose, and said: "I have an idea."

The Secretary sat up as if he had received a Faradic shock, and he who was walking up and down stood still. "The deuce you have, sir," he said.

"Yes," cried Mr. Lavender and in concentration and marvellous simplicity, "it has, I am sure, never been surpassed. It is clear to me, sir, that you, and you alone, must be this League of Nations. For if it

is entirely in your hands there will be no delay. The plan will spring full fledged from the head of Jove, and this great and beneficial change in the lot of mankind will at once become an accomplished fact. There will be no need for keeping in touch with human nature, no call for patience and all that laborious upbuilding stone by stone which is so apt to discourage mankind and imperil the fruition of great reforms. No, sir; you—you must be this League, and we will all work to the end that tomorrow at latest there may be perfected this crowning achievement of the human species."

The gentleman, who had commenced to walk again, looked furtively from Mr. Lavender to the Secretary, and said:

"By Jingo! some idea!"

"Yes," cried Mr. Lavender, entranced that his grand notion should be at once accepted; "for it is only men like you who can both soaringly conceive and immediately concrete in action; and, what is more, there will be no fear of your tiring of this job and taking up another, for you will be IT; and one cannot change oneself."

The gentleman looked at Mr. Lavender very suddenly at the words "tiring of this job," and transferred his gaze to the Secretary, who had bent his face down to his papers, and was smothering a snigger with his hand.

"Who are you, sir?" he said sharply.

"Merely one," returned Mr. Lavender, "who wishes to do all in his power to forward a project so fraught with beneficence to all mankind. I count myself fortunate beyond measure to have come here this morning and found the very Heart of the matter, the grain of mustard-seed."

The gentleman, who had begun to walk again, here muttered words which would have sounded like "Damned impudence" if Mr. Lavender had not been too utterly carried away by his idea to hear them.

"I shall go forth at once," he said, "and make known the good tidings that the fields are sown, the League formed. Henceforth there are no barriers between nations, and the reign of perpetual Peace is assured. It is colossal."

The gentleman abruptly raised his boot, but, seeming to think better of it, lowered it again, and turned away to the window.

Mr. Lavender, having bowed to his back, went out, and, urged on by his enthusiasm, directed his steps at once towards Trafalgar Square.

Arriving at this hub of the universe he saw that Chance was on his side, for a meeting was already in progress, and a crowd of some forty persons assembled round one of the lions. Owing to his appearance Mr. Lavender was able without opposition to climb up on the plinth and join the speaker, a woman of uncertain years. He stood there awaiting his turn and preparing his oration, while she continued her discourse, which seemed to be a protest against any interference with British control of the freedom of the seas. A Union Jack happened to be leaning against the monument, and when she had at last finished, Mr. Lavender seized it and came forward to the edge.

"Great tidings!" he said at once, waving the flag, and without more ado plunged into an oration, which, so far as it went, must certainly be ranked among his masterpieces. "Great tidings, Friends! I have planted the grain of mustard seed or, in common parlance, have just come from the meeting which has incepted the League of Nations; and it will be my task this morning briefly to make known to you the principles which in future must dominate the policy of the world. Since it is for the closer brotherhood of man and the reign of perpetual peace that we are struggling, we must first secure the annihilation of our common enemies. Those members of the human race whose infamies have largely placed them beyond the pale must be eliminated once for all."

Loud cheers greeted this utterance, and stimulated by the sound Mr. Lavender proceeded: "What, however, must the civilized nations do when at last they have clean sheets? In the first place, all petty prejudices and provincial aspirations must be set aside; and though the world must be firmly founded upon the principle of nationality it must also act as one great people. This, my fellow-countrymen, is no mere contradiction in terms, for though in their new solidarities each nation will be prouder of itself, and more jealous of its good name and independence than ever, that will not prevent its' sacrificing its inalienable rights for the good of the whole human nation of which it is a member. Friends, let me give you a simple illustration, which in a nutshell will make the whole thing clear. We, here in Britain, are justly proud and tenacious of our sea power—in the words of the poet, 'We hold all the gates of the water.' Now it is abundantly and convincingly plain that this reinforced principle of nationality bids us to retain and increase them, while internationalism bids us give—them up."

His audience—which had hitherto listened with open mouths, here closed them, and a strident voice exclaimed:

"Give it a name, gov'nor. D'you say we ought to give up Gib?"

This word pierced Mr. Lavender, standing where he was, to the very marrow, and he fell into such confusion of spirit that his words became inaudible.

"My God!" he thought, appalled; "is it possible that I have not got to the bottom of this question?" And, turning his back on the audience, he gazed in a sort of agony at the figure of Nelson towering into the sky above him. He was about to cry out piteously: "Countrymen, I know not what I think. Oh! I am unhappy!" when he inadvertently stepped back over the edge of the plinth, and, still entangled in the flag, was picked up by two policemen and placed in a dazed condition and a deserted spot opposite the National Gallery.

It was while he was standing there, encircled by, pigeons and forgotten by his fellow man, that there came to him a spiritual revelation. "Strange!" he thought; "I notice a certain inconsistency in myself, and even in my utterances. I am two men, one of whom is me and one not me; and the one which is not me is the one which causes me to fall into the arms of policemen and other troubles. The one which is me loves these pigeons, and desires to live quietly with my dog, not considering public affairs, which, indeed, seem to be suited to persons of another sort. Whence, then, comes the one which is not me? Can it be that it is derived from the sayings and writings of others, and is but a spurious spirit only meet to be outcast? Do I, to speak in the vernacular, care any buttons whether we stick to Gibraltar or not so long as men do but live in kindness? And if that is so, have I the right to say I do? Ought I not, rather, to be true to my private self and leave the course of public affairs to those who have louder voices and no private selves?" The thought was extremely painful, for it seemed to disclose to him grave inconsistency in the recent management of his life. And, thoroughly mortified, he turned round with a view of entering the National Gallery and soothing his spirit with art, when he was arrested by the placard which covered it announcing which town had taken which sum of bonds. This lighted up such a new vista of public utility that his brain would certainly have caught fire again if one of the policemen who had conducted him across the Square had not touched him on the arm, and said:

"How are you now, sir?"

"I am pretty well, thank you, policeman," replied Mr. Lavender, "and sorry that I occasioned so much disturbance."

"Don't mention it, sir," answered the policeman; "you came a nasty crump."

"Tell me," said Mr. Lavender, suddenly looking up into his face, "do you consider that a man is justified in living a private life? For, as regards my future, it is largely on your opinion that I shall act."

The policeman, whose solid face showed traces of astonishment, answered slowly: "As a general thing, a man's private life don't bear lookin' into, as you know, sir."

"I have not lived one for some time," said Mr. Lavender.

"Well," remarked the policeman, "if you take my advice you won't try it a-gain. I should say you 'adn't the constitution."

"I fear you do not catch my meaning," returned Mr. Lavender, whose whole body was aching from his fall; "it is my public life which tries me."

"Well, then, I should chuck it," said the policeman.

"Really?" murmured Mr. Lavender eagerly, "would you?"

"Why not?" said the policeman.

So excited was Mr. Lavender by this independent confirmation of his sudden longing that he took out half a crown.

"You will oblige me greatly," he said, "by accepting this as a token of my gratitude."

"Well, sir, I'll humour you," answered the policeman; "though it was no trouble, I'm sure; you're as light as a feather. Goin' anywhere in particular?" he added.

"Yes," said Mr. Lavender, rather faintly, "the Tube Station."

"Come along with me, then."

Mr. Lavender went along, not sorry to have the protection of that stalwart form, for his nerve was shaken, not so much by physical suffering as by the revelation he had received.

"If you'll take my tip, sir," said the policeman, parting from him, "you won't try no private life again; you don't look strong."

"Thank you, policeman," said Mr. Lavender musingly; "it is kind of you to take an interest in me. Good-bye!"

Safely seated in the Tube for Hampstead he continued the painful struggle of his meditations. "If, indeed," he thought, "as a public man I do more harm than good, I am prepared to sacrifice all for my country's sake and retire into private life. But the policeman said that would be dangerous for me. What, then, is left? To live neither a public nor a private life!"

This thought, at once painful and heroic, began to take such hold of him that he arrived at his house in a high fever of the brain.

XXI

AND ASCENDS TO PARADISE

Now when Mr. Lavender once slept over an idea it became so strong that no power on earth could prevent his putting it into execution, and all night long he kept Blink awake by tramping up and down his bedroom and planning the details of such a retirement as would meet his unfortunate case. For at once he perceived that to retire from both his lives without making the whole world know of it would be tantamount to not retiring. "Only by a public act," he thought, "of so striking a character that nobody can miss it can I bring the moral home to all public and private men." And a hundred schemes swarmed like ants in his brain. Nor was it till the cock crew that one adequate to this final occasion occurred to him.

"It will want very careful handling," he thought, "for otherwise I shall be prevented, and perhaps even arrested in the middle, which will be both painful and ridiculous. So sublime, however, was his idea that he shed many tears over it, and often paused in his tramping to regard the unconscious Blink with streaming eyes. All the next day he went about the house and heath taking a last look at objects which had been dear, and at mealtimes ate and drank even less than usual, absorbed by the pathos of his coming renunciation. He determined to make his preparations for the final act during the night, when Mrs. Petty would be prevented by Joe's snoring from hearing the necessary sounds; and at supper he undertook the delicate and harrowing task of saying good-bye to, his devoted housekeeper without letting her know that he, was doing it.

"Mrs—Petty," he said, trifling with a morsel of cheese, "it is useless to disguise, from you that I may be going a journey, and I feel that I shall not be able to part from all the care you have, bestowed on me without recording in words my heartfelt appreciation of your devotion. I shall miss it, I shall miss it terribly, if, that is, I am permitted to miss anything."

Mrs. Petty, whose mind instantly ran to his bed socks, answered: "Don't you worry, sir; I won't forget them. But wherever are you going now?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Lavender subtly, "it is all in the air at present; but now that the lime-trees are beginning to smell a certain restlessness is upon me, and you may see some change in my proceedings. Whatever happens to me, however, I commit my dear Blink to your care; feed her as if she were myself, and love her as if she were Joe, for it is largely on food and affection that dogs depend for happiness.

"Why, good gracious, sir," said Mrs. Petty, "you talk as if you were going for a month of Sundays. Are you thinking of Eastbourne?"

Mr. Lavender sighed deeply at that word, for the memory of a town where he had spent many happy days added to the gentle melancholy of his feelings on this last evening.

"As regards that I shall not inform you at present; for, indeed, I am by no means certain what my destination will be. Largely speaking, no pub —public man," he stammered, doubtful whether he was any longer that, "knows where he will be going to-morrow. Sufficient unto the day are the intentions in his head.

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Petty frankly, "you can't go anywhere without Joe or me, that's flat."

Mr. Lavender smiled.

"Dear Mrs. Petty," he murmured, "there are sacrifices one cannot demand even of the most faithful friends. But," he went on with calculated playfulness, "we need not consider that point until the day after to-morrow at least, for I have much to do in the meantime."

Reassured by those words and the knowledge that Mr. Lavender's plans seldom remained the same for more than two days, Mrs. Petty tossed her head slightly and went to the door. "Well, it is a mystery, I'm sure," she said.

"I should like to see Joe," said Mr. Lavender, with a lingering look at his devoted housekeeper.

"The beauty!" muttered Mrs. Petty; "I'll send him," and withdrew.

Giving the morsel of cheese to Blink, who, indeed, had eaten practically the whole of this last meal, Mr. Lavender took the moon-cat on his shoulder, and abandoned himself for a moment to the caresses of his two favourites.

"Blink," he said in a voice which trembled slightly, "be good to this moon-cat while I am away; and if I am longer than you expect, darling, do not be unhappy. Perhaps some day you will rejoin me; and even if we are not destined to meet again, I would not, in the fashion of cruel men, wish to hinder your second marriage, or to stand in the way of your happy forgetfulness of me. Be as light-hearted as you can, my dear, and wear no mourning for your master."

So saying, he flung his arms round her, and embraced her warmly, inhaling with the most poignant emotion her sheep-like odour. He was still engaged with her when the door was opened, and Joe came in.

"Joe," said Mr. Lavender resolutely, "sit down and light your pipe. You will find a bottle of pre-war port in the sideboard. Open it, and, drink my health; indeed, I myself will drink it too, for it may give me courage. We have been good friends, Joe," he went on while Joe was drawing the cork, "and have participated in pleasant and sharp adventures. I have called you in at this moment, which may some day seem to you rather solemn, partly to shake your hand and partly to resume the discussion on public men which we held some days ago, if you remember."

"Ah!" said Joe, with his habitual insouciance, "when I told you that they give me the 'ump."

"Yes, what abaht it, sir? 'Ave they been sayin' anything particular vicious?" His face flying up just then with the cork which he was extracting encountered the expression on Mr. Lavender's visage, and he added: "Don't take wot I say to 'eart, sir; try as you like you'll never be a public man."

Those words, which seemed to Mr. Lavender to seal his doom, caused a faint pink flush to invade his cheeks.

"No," continued Joe, pouring out the wine; you 'aven't got the brass in times like these. I dare say you've noticed, sir, that the times is favourable for bringing out the spots on the body politic. 'Ere's 'ealth!"

"Joe," said Mr. Lavender, raising the glass to his lips with solemnity, "I wish you a most happy and prosperous life. Let us drink to all those qualities which make you par excellence one of that great race, the best hearted in the world, which never thinks of to-morrow, never knows when it is beaten, and seldom loses its sense of humour.

"Ah!" returned Joe enigmatically, half-closing one of his greenish eyes, and laying the glass to one side of his reddish nose. Then, with a quick movement, he swallowed its contents and refilled it before Mr. Lavender had succeeded in absorbing more than a drop.

"I don't say," he continued, "but what there's a class o' public man that's got its uses, like the little 'un that keeps us all alive, or the perfect English gentleman what did his job, and told nobody nothin' abaht it. You can 'ave confidence in a man like that—that's why 'e's gone an' retired; 'e's civilized, you see, the finished article; but all this raw material, this 'get-on' or 'get-out' lot, that's come from 'oo knows where, well, I wish they'd stayed there with their tell-you-how-to-do-it and their 'ymns of 'ate."

"Joe," said Mr. Lavender, "are you certain that therein does not speak the snob inherent in the national bosom? Are you not unconsciously paying deference to the word gentleman?"

"Why not, sir?" replied Joe, tossing off his second glass. "It'd be a fine thing for the country if we was

all gentlemen—straight, an' a little bit stupid, and 'ad 'alf a thought for others." And he refilled his master's glass. "I don't measure a gentleman by 'is money, or 'is title, not even by 'is clothes—I measure 'im by whether he can stand 'avin' power in 'is 'ands without gettin' unscrupled or swollen 'eaded, an' whether 'e can do what he thinks right without payin' attention, to clamour. But, mind you, 'e's got to 'ave right thoughts too, and a feelin' 'eart. 'Ere's luck, sir."

Mr. Lavender, who, absorbed in his chauffeur's sentiments, had now drunk two glasses, rose from his chair, and clutching his hair said: "I will not conceal from you, Joe, that I have always assumed every public man came up to that standard, at least."

"Crikey said Joe. 'Ave you really, sir? My Gawd! Got any use for the rest of this bottle?"

"No, Joe, no. I shall never have use for a bottle again."

"In that case I might as well," said Joe, pouring what remained into a tumbler and drinking it off. "Is there any other topic you'd like to mention? If I can 'ave any influence on you, I shall be very glad."

"Thank you, Joe," returned Mr. Lavender, "what I have most need of at this moment is solitude and your good wishes. And will you kindly take Blink away, and when she has had her run, place her in my bedroom, with the window closed. Good-night, Joe. Call me late tomorrow morning.

"Certainly, sir. Good-night, sir."

"Good-night, Joe. Shake hands."

When Joe was gone, accompanied by the unwilling Blink, turning her beautiful dark eyes back to the last, Mr. Lavender sat down at his bureau, and drawing a sheet of paper to him, wrote at the top of it.

"My last Will and Testament."

It was a long time before he got further, and then entirely omitted to leave anything in it, completely preoccupied by the preamble, which gradually ran as follows:

"I, John Lavender, make known to all men by these presents that the act which I contemplate is symbolical, and must in no sense be taken as implying either weariness of life or that surrender to misfortune which is unbecoming to an English public gentleman." (Over this description of himself Mr. Lavender was obliged to pause some time hovering between the two designations, and finally combining them as the only way out of his difficulty.) "Long and painful experience has convinced me that only by retiring from the former can I retain the latter character, and only by retiring from both can I point the moral ever demanded by my countrymen. Conscious, indeed, that a mere act of private resignation would have no significance to the body politic, nor any deflecting influence on the national life, I have chosen rather to disappear in blue flame, so that every Englishman may take to heart my lesson, and learn from my strange fate how to be himself uninfluenced by the verbiage of others. At the same time, with the utmost generosity, I wish to acknowledge in full my debt towards all those great writers and speakers on the war who have exercised so intoxicating an influence on my mind." (Here followed an alphabetical list of names beginning with B and ending with S.)

"I wish to be dissociated firmly from the views of my chauffeur Joe Petty, and to go to my last account with an emphatic assertion that my failure to become a perfect public gentleman is due to private idiosyncrasies rather than to any conviction that it is impossible, or to anything but admiration of the great men I have mentioned. If anybody should wish to paint me after I am dead, I desire that I may be represented with my face turned towards the Dawn; for it is at that moment so symptomatic of a deep adoration—which I would scorn to make the common property of gossiping tongues—that I intend to depart. If there should be anything left of me—which is less than probable considering the inflammatory character of the material I design for my pyre—I would be obliged if, without giving anybody any trouble, it could be buried in my garden, with the usual Hampstead tablet.

"JOHN LAVENDER, THE PUBLIC MAN, WHO DIED FOR HIS COUNTRY'S GOOD, LIVED HERE."

"In conclusion, I would say a word to that land I have loved and served: 'Be not extreme! Distrust the words, of others. To yourself be true! As you are strong be gentle, as you are brave be modest! Beloved country, farewell!'"

Having written that final sentence he struggled long with himself before he could lay down the pen. But by this time the port he had drunk had begun to have its usual effect, and he fell into a doze, from which he was awakened five hours later by the beams of a full moon striking in on him.

"The hour has come," he thought, and, opening the French-window, he went out on to the lawn, where the dew lay white. The freshness in the air, the glamour of the moonlight, and the fumes of the port combined to make him feel strangely rhumantic, and if he had possessed a musical instrument he would very likely have begun to play on it. He spent some moments tracking to and fro in the dew before he settled on the centre of the lawn as the most suitable spot for the act which he contemplated, for thence he would be able to turn his last looks towards Aurora's bedroom-window without interference from foliage. Having drawn a twelve-foot circle in the dew with his toe he proceeded in the bright moonlight to the necessary accumulation of his funeral pile, conveying from his study, book by book, journal by journal, pamphlet by pamphlet, the hoarded treasures of the last four years; and as he carefully placed each one, building up at once a firm and cunning structure, he gave a little groan, thinking of the intoxications of the past, and all the glorious thoughts embodied in that literature. Underneath, in the heart of the pile, he reserved a space for the most inflammable material, which he selected from a special file of a special journal, and round the circumference of the lofty and tapering mound he carefully deposited the two hundred and four war numbers of a certain weekly, so that a ring of flame might lick well up the sides and permeate the more solid matter on which he would be sitting. For two hours he worked in the waning moonlight till he had completed this weird and heroic erection; and just before the dawn, sat down by the light of the candle with which he meant to apply the finishing touch, to compose that interview with himself whereby he intended to convey to the world the message of his act.

"I found him," he began, in the words of the interviewer, "sitting upon a journalistic pile of lovely leaves of thought, which in the dawning of a new day glowed with a certain restrained flamboyance, as though the passion stored within those exotic pages gave itself willingly to the 'eclaircissement' of the situation, and of his lineaments on which suffering had already set their stamp.

"I should like you," I said, approaching as near as I could, for the sparks, like little fireflies on a Riviera evening, were playing profoundly round my trousers, "I should like to hear from your own lips the reasons which have caused you to resign."

"Certainly," he replied, with the courtesy which I have always found characteristic of him in moments which would try the suavity of more ordinary men; and with the utmost calm and clarity he began to tell me the inner workings of his mind, while the growing dawn-light irradiated his wasted and expressive features, and the flames slowly roasted his left boot.

"Yes," he said quietly, and his eyes turned inwards, "I have at last seen the problem clearly, and seen it whole. It is largely because of this that I have elected to seek the seclusion of another world. What that world contains for me I know not, though so many public men have tried to tell me; but it has never been my way to recoil from the Unknown, and I am ready for my journey beyond the wide world's end."

"I was greatly struck by the large-hearted way in which he spoke those words, and I interrupted him to ask whether he did not think that there was something fundamental in the British character which would leap as one man at such an act of daring sacrifice and great adventure.

"As regards that," he replied fearlessly, while in the light of the ever-brightening dawn I could, see the suspender on his right leg gradually charring, so that he must already have been in great pain, "as regards that, it is largely the proneness of the modern British to leap to verbal extremity which is inducing me to afford them this object-lesson in restraint and commonsense. Ouch!"

"This momentary ejaculation seemed to escape him in spite of all his iron control; and the smell of burning flesh brought home to me as nothing else, perhaps, could have done the tortures he must have been suffering.

"I feel," he went on very gravely, "that extravagance of word and conduct is fatal to my country, and having so profoundly experienced its effects upon myself, I am now endeavouring by a shining example to supply a remedy for a disease which is corroding the vitals and impairing the sanity of my countrymen and making them a race of second-hand spiritual drunkards. Ouch!"

"I confess that at this moment the tears started to my eyes, for a more sublime show than the spectacle of this devoted man slowly roasting himself to death before my eyes for the good of his country I had seldom seen. It had a strange, an appalling interest, and for nothing on earth could I have torn my gaze away. I now realized to the full for the first time the will-power and heroism of the human species, and I rejoiced with a glorious new feeling that I was of the same breed as this man, made of such stern stuff that not even a tear rolled down his cheeks to quench the flames that leaped around him ever higher and higher. And the dawn came up in the eastern sky; and I knew that a great day was preparing for mankind; and with my eyes fixed upon him as he turned blacker and blacker I let my heart loose in a great thanksgiving that I had lived to see this moment. It was then that he cried out in

a loud voice:

"I call Aurora to witness that I have died without a falter, grasping a burning spear, to tilt at the malpractice which has sent me mad!" And I saw that he held in his fast-consuming hand a long roll of journals sharpened to a point of burning flame.

"Aurora!" he cried again, and with that enigmatic word on his lips was incinerated in the vast and towering belch of the devouring element.

"It was among the most inspiring sights I have ever witnessed."

When Mr. Lavender had completed that record, whose actuality and wealth of moving detail had greatly affected him, and marked it "For the Press-Immediate," he felt very cold. It was, in fact, that hour of dawn when a shiver goes through the world; and, almost with pleasurable anticipation he took up his lighted candle and stole shivering out to his pile, rising ghostly to the height of some five feet in the middle of the dim lawn whereon a faint green tinge was coming with the return of daylight. Having reached it, he walked round it twice, and readjusted four volumes of the history of the war as stepping-stones to the top; then lowering the candle, whose flame burned steadily in the stillness, he knelt down in the grey dew and set fire to an article in a Sunday paper. Then, sighing deeply, he returned to his little ladder and, with some difficulty preserving his balance, mounted to the top, and sat down with his legs towards the house and his eyes fixed on Aurora's bedroom-window. He had been there perhaps ten minutes before he realized that nothing was happening below him, and, climbing down again, proceeded to the aperture where he had inserted the burning print. There, by the now considerable daylight, he saw that the flame had gone out at the words "The Stage is now set for the last act of this colossal world drama." And convinced that Providence had intended that heartening sentence to revive his somewhat drooping courage, he thought, "I, too, shall be making history this morning," and relighting the journal, went on his hands and knees and began manfully to blow the flames.

Now the young lady in the adjoining castle, who had got out of bed, happened, as she sometimes did, to go to the window for a look at the sun rising over Parliament Hill. Attracted by the smell of burning paper she saw Mr. Lavender in this act of blowing up the flames.

"What on earth is the poor dear doing now?" she thought. "This is really the limit!" And slipping on her slippers and blue dressing-gown she ensconced herself behind the curtain to await developments.

Mr. Lavender had now backed away from the flames at which he had been blowing, and remained on his hands and knees, apparently assuring himself that they had really obtained hold. He then rose, and to her intense surprise began climbing up on to the pile. She watched him at first with an amused astonishment, so ludicrous was his light little figure, crowned by stivered-up white hair, and the expression of eager melancholy on his thin, high-cheekboned face upturned towards her window. Then, to her dismay, she saw that the flame had really caught, and, suddenly persuaded that he had some crazy intention of injuring himself with the view, perhaps, of attracting her attention, she ran out of her room and down the stairs, and emerging from the back door just as she was, circled her garden, so that she might enter Mr. Lavender's garden from behind him, ready for any eventuality. She arrived within arm's reach of him without his having heard her, for Blink, whose anxious face as she watched her master wasting, could be discerned at the bedroom-window, was whining, and Mr. Lavender himself had now broken into a strange and lamentable chantey, which, in combination with the creeping flutter of the flames in the weekly journals encircling the base of the funeral pyre, well-nigh made her blood curdle.

"Aurora," sang Mr. Lavender, in that most dolorous voice,

"Aurora, my heart I bring,
For I know well it will not burn,
Oh! when the leaves puff out in Spring
And when the leaves in Autumn turn
Think, think of me!
Aurora, I pass away!
Upon my horse of air I ride;
Here let my grizzled ashes stay,
But take, ah! take my heart inside!
Aurora! Aurora!"

At this moment, just as a fit of the most uncontrollable laughter was about to seize her, she saw a flame which had just consumed the word Horatio reach Mr. Lavender's right calf.

"Oh!" he cried out in desperate tones, stretching up his arms to the sky. "Now is my hour come!

Sweet-sky, open and let me see her face! Behold! behold her with the eyes of faith. It is enough. Courage, brother; let me now consume in silence!" So saying, he folded his arm tightly across his breast and closed his lips. The flame rising to the bottom of the weekly which had indeed been upside down, here nipped him vigorously, so that with a wholly unconscious movement he threw up his little legs, and, losing his balance, fell backwards into the arms of Aurora, watchfully outstretched to receive him. Uplifted there, close to that soft blue bosom away from the reek of the flame, he conceived that he was consumed and had passed already from his night of ghosts and shadows into the arms of the morning, and through his swooning lips came forth the words:

"I am in Paradise."

THE END.

FIVE TALES

by John Galsworthy

"Life calls the tune, we dance."

CONTENTS:

THE FIRST AND LAST THE FIRST AND LAST

A STOIC A STOIC

THE APPLE TREE THE APPLE TREE

THE JURYMAN THE JURYMAN

INDIAN SUMMER OF A FORSYTE [Also posted as Etext #2594]

[In this 1919 edition of "Five Tales" the fifth tale was "Indian Summer of a Forsyte;" in later collections, "Indian Summer..." became the first section of the second volume of The Forsyte Saga]

THE FIRST AND LAST

"So the last shall be first, and the first last."—HOLY WRIT.

It was a dark room at that hour of six in the evening, when just the single oil reading-lamp under its green shade let fall a dapple of light over the Turkey carpet; over

the covers of books taken out of the bookshelves, and the open pages of the one selected; over the deep blue and gold of the coffee service on the little old stool with its Oriental embroidery. Very dark in the winter, with drawn curtains, many rows of leather-bound volumes, oak-panelled walls and ceiling. So large, too, that the lighted spot before the fire where he sat was just an oasis. But that was what Keith Darrant liked, after his day's work—the hard early morning study of his "cases," the fret and strain of the day in court; it was his rest, these two hours before dinner, with books, coffee, a pipe, and sometimes a nap. In red Turkish slippers and his old brown velvet coat, he was well suited to that framing of glow and darkness. A painter would have seized avidly on his clear-cut, yellowish face, with its black eyebrows twisting up over eyes—grey or brown, one could hardly tell, and its dark grizzling hair still plentiful, in spite of those daily hours of wig. He seldom thought of his work while he sat there, throwing off with practised ease the strain of that long attention to the multiple threads of argument and evidence to be disentangled—work profoundly interesting, as a rule, to his clear intellect, trained to almost instinctive rejection of all but the essential, to selection of what was legally vital out of the mass of confused tactical and human detail presented to his scrutiny; yet sometimes tedious and wearing. As for instance to-day, when he had suspected his client of perjury, and was almost convinced that he must throw up his brief. He had disliked the weak-looking, white-faced fellow from the first, and his nervous, shifty answers, his prominent startled eyes—a type too common in these days of canting tolerations and weak humanitarianism; no good, no good!

Of the three books he had taken down, a Volume of Voltaire—curious fascination that Frenchman had, for all his destructive irony!—a volume of Burton's travels, and Stevenson's "New Arabian Nights," he had pitched upon the last. He felt, that evening, the want of something sedative, a desire to rest from thought of any kind. The court had been crowded, stuffy; the air, as he walked home, soft, sou'-westerly, charged with coming moisture, no quality of vigour in it; he felt relaxed, tired, even nervy, and for once the loneliness of his house seemed strange and comfortless.

Lowering the lamp, he turned his face towards the fire. Perhaps he would get a sleep before that boring dinner at the Tellasson's. He wished it were vacation, and Maisie back from school. A widower for many years, he had lost the habit of a woman about him; yet to-night he had a positive yearning for the society of his young daughter, with her quick ways, and bright, dark eyes. Curious what perpetual need of a woman some men had! His brother Laurence—wasted—all through women—atrophy of willpower! A man on the edge of things; living from hand to mouth; his gifts all down at heel! One would have thought the Scottish strain might have saved him; and yet, when a Scotsman did begin to go downhill, who could go faster? Curious that their mother's blood should have worked so differently in her two sons. He himself had always felt he owed all his success to it.

His thoughts went off at a tangent to a certain issue troubling his legal conscience. He had not wavered in the usual assumption of omniscience, but he was by no means sure that he had given right advice. Well! Without that power to decide and hold to decision in spite of misgiving, one would never have been fit for one's position at the Bar, never have been fit for anything. The longer he lived, the more certain he became of the prime necessity of virile and decisive action in all the affairs of life. A word and a blow—and the blow first! Doubts, hesitations, sentiment the muling and puking of this twilight age—! And there welled up on his handsome face a smile that was almost devilish—the tricks of firelight are so many! It faded again in sheer drowsiness; he slept....

He woke with a start, having a feeling of something out beyond the light, and without turning his head said: "What's that?" There came a sound as if somebody had caught his breath. He turned up the lamp.

"Who's there?"

A voice over by the door answered:

"Only I—Larry."

Something in the tone, or perhaps just being startled out of sleep like this, made him shiver. He said:

"I was asleep. Come in!"

It was noticeable that he did not get up, or even turn his head, now that he knew who it was, but waited, his half-closed eyes fixed on the fire, for his brother to come forward. A visit from Laurence was not an unmixed blessing. He could hear him breathing, and became conscious of a scent of whisky. Why could not the fellow at least abstain when he was coming here! It was so childish, so lacking in any sense of proportion or of decency! And he said sharply:

"Well, Larry, what is it?"

It was always something. He often wondered at the strength of that sense of trusteeship, which kept

him still tolerant of the troubles, amenable to the petitions of this brother of his; or was it just "blood" feeling, a Highland sense of loyalty to kith and kin; an old-time quality which judgment and half his instincts told him was weakness but which, in spite of all, bound him to the distressful fellow? Was he drunk now, that he kept lurking out there by the door? And he said less sharply:

"Why don't you come and sit down?"

He was coming now, avoiding the light, skirting along the walls just beyond the radiance of the lamp, his feet and legs to the waist brightly lighted, but his face disintegrated in shadow, like the face of a dark ghost.

"Are you ill, man?"

Still no answer, save a shake of that head, and the passing up of a hand, out of the light, to the ghostly forehead under the dishevelled hair. The scent of whisky was stronger now; and Keith thought:

'He really is drunk. Nice thing for the new butler to see! If he can't behave—'

The figure against the wall heaved a sigh—so truly from an overburdened heart that Keith was conscious with a certain dismay of not having yet fathomed the cause of this uncanny silence. He got up, and, back to the fire, said with a brutality born of nerves rather than design:

"What is it, man? Have you committed a murder, that you stand there dumb as a fish?"

For a second no answer at all, not even of breathing; then, just the whisper:

"Yes."

The sense of unreality which so helps one at moments of disaster enabled Keith to say vigorously:

"By Jove! You have been drinking!"

But it passed at once into deadly apprehension.

"What do you mean? Come here, where I can see you. What's the matter with you, Larry?"

With a sudden lurch and dive, his brother left the shelter of the shadow, and sank into a chair in the circle of light. And another long, broken sigh escaped him.

"There's nothing the matter with me, Keith! It's true!"

Keith stepped quickly forward, and stared down into his brother's face; and instantly he saw that it was true. No one could have simulated the look in those eyes—of horrified wonder, as if they would never again get on terms with the face to which they belonged. To see them squeezed the heart-only real misery could look like that. Then that sudden pity became angry bewilderment.

"What in God's name is this nonsense?"

But it was significant that he lowered his voice; went over to the door, too, to see if it were shut. Laurence had drawn his chair forward, huddling over the fire—a thin figure, a worn, high-cheekboned face with deep-sunk blue eyes, and wavy hair all ruffled, a face that still had a certain beauty. Putting a hand on that lean shoulder, Keith said:

"Come, Larry! Pull yourself together, and drop exaggeration."

"It's true; I tell you; I've killed a man."

The noisy violence of that outburst acted like a douche. What was the fellow about—shouting out such words! But suddenly Laurence lifted his hands and wrung them. The gesture was so utterly painful that it drew a quiver from Keith's face.

"Why did you come here," he said, "and tell me this?"

Larry's face was really unearthly sometimes, such strange gleams passed up on to it!

"Whom else should I tell? I came to know what I'm to do, Keith? Give myself up, or what?"

At that sudden introduction of the practical Keith felt his heart twitch. Was it then as real as all that? But he said, very quietly:

"Just tell me—How did it come about, this—affair?"

That question linked the dark, gruesome, fantastic nightmare on to actuality.

"When did it happen?"

"Last night."

In Larry's face there was—there had always been—something childishly truthful. He would never stand a chance in court! And Keith said:

"How? Where? You'd better tell me quietly from the beginning. Drink this coffee; it'll clear your head."

Laurence took the little blue cup and drained it.

"Yes," he said. "It's like this, Keith. There's a girl I've known for some months now—"

Women! And Keith said between his teeth: "Well?"

"Her father was a Pole who died over here when she was sixteen, and left her all alone. A man called Walenn, a mongrel American, living in the same house, married her, or pretended to—she's very pretty, Keith—he left her with a baby six months old, and another coming. That one died, and she did nearly. Then she starved till another fellow took her on. She lived with him two years; then Walenn turned up again, and made her go back to him. The brute used to beat her black and blue, all for nothing. Then he left her again. When I met her she'd lost her elder child, too, and was taking anybody who came along."

He suddenly looked up into Keith's face.

"But I've never met a sweeter woman, nor a truer, that I swear. Woman! She's only twenty now! When I went to her last night, that brute—that Walenn—had found her out again; and when he came for me, swaggering and bullying—Look!"—he touched a dark mark on his forehead—"I took his throat in my hands, and when I let go—"

"Yes?"

"Dead. I never knew till afterwards that she was hanging on to him behind."

Again he made that gesture-wringing his hands.

In a hard voice Keith said:

"What did you do then?"

"We sat by it a long time. Then I carried it on my back down the street, round a corner to an archway."

"How far?"

"About fifty yards."

"Was anyone—did anyone see?"

"No."

"What time?"

"Three."

"And then?"

"Went back to her."

"Why—in Heaven's name?"

"She was lonely and afraid; so was I, Keith."

"Where is this place?"

"Forty-two, Borrow Street, Soho."

"And the archway?"

"Corner of Glove Lane."

"Good God! Why—I saw it in the paper!"

And seizing the journal that lay on his bureau, Keith read again that paragraph: "The body of a man was found this morning under an archway in Glove Lane, Soho. From marks about the throat grave suspicions of foul play are entertained. The body had apparently been robbed, and nothing was discovered leading to identification."

It was real earnest, then. Murder! His own brother! He faced round and said:

"You saw this in the paper, and dreamed it. Understand—you dreamed it!"

The wistful answer came:

"If only I had, Keith—if only I had!"

In his turn, Keith very nearly wrung his hands.

"Did you take anything from the—body?"

"This dropped while we were struggling.",

It was an empty envelope with a South American post-mark addressed: "Patrick Walenn, Simon's Hotel, Farrier Street, London." Again with that twitching in his heart, Keith said:

"Put it in the fire."

Then suddenly he stooped to pluck it out. By that command—he had—identified himself with this—this—But he did not pluck it out. It blackened, writhed, and vanished. And once more he said:

"What in God's name made you come here and tell me?"

"You know about these things. I didn't mean to kill him. I love the girl. What shall I do, Keith?"

"Simple! How simple! To ask what he was to do! It was like Larry! And he said:

"You were not seen, you think?" "It's a dark street. There was no one about."

"When did you leave this girl the second time?"

"About seven o'clock."

"Where did you go?"

"To my rooms."

"In Fitzroy Street?"

"Yes."

"Did anyone see you come in?"

"No."

"What have you done since?"

"Sat there."

"Not been out?"

"No."

"Not seen the girl?"

"No."

"You don't know, then, what she's done since?"

"No."

"Would she give you away?"

"Never."

"Would she give herself away—hysteria?"

"No."

"Who knows of your relations with her?"

"No one."

"No one?"

"I don't know who should, Keith."

"Did anyone see you going in last night, when you first went to her?"

"No. She lives on the ground floor. I've got keys."

"Give them to me. What else have you that connects you with her?"

"Nothing."

"In your rooms?"

"No."

"No photographs. No letters?"

"No."

"Be careful."

"Nothing."

"No one saw you going back to her the second time?"

"No."

"No one saw you leave her in the morning?"

"No."

"You were fortunate. Sit down again, man. I must think."

Think! Think out this accursed thing—so beyond all thought, and all belief. But he could not think. Not a coherent thought would come. And he began again:

"Was it his first reappearance with her?"

"Yes."

"She told you so?"

"Yes."

"How did he find out where she was?"

"I don't know."

"How drunk were you?"

"I was not drunk."

"How much had you drunk?"

"About two bottles of claret—nothing."

"You say you didn't mean to kill him?"

"No-God knows!"

"That's something."

What made you choose the arch?"

"It was the first dark place."

"Did his face look as if he had been strangled?"

"Don't!"

"Did it?"

"Yes."

"Very disfigured?"

"Yes."

"Did you look to see if his clothes were marked?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Why not? My God! If you had done it!"

"You say he was disfigured. Would he be recognisable?"

"I don't know."

"When she lived with him last—where was that?"

"I don't know for certain. Pimlico, I think."

"Not Soho?"

"No."

"How long has she been at the Soho place?"

"Nearly a year."

"Always the same rooms?"

"Yes."

"Is there anyone living in that house or street who would be likely to know her as his wife?"

"I don't think so."

"What was he?"

"I should think he was a professional 'bully.'"

"I see. Spending most of his time abroad, then?"

"Yes."

"Do you know if he was known to the police?"

"I haven't heard of it."

"Now, listen, Larry. When you leave here go straight home, and don't go out till I come to you, tomorrow morning. Promise that!"

"I promise."

"I've got a dinner engagement. I'll think this out. Don't drink. Don't talk! Pull yourself together."

"Don't keep me longer than you can help, Keith!"

That white face, those eyes, that shaking hand! With a twinge of pity in the midst of all the turbulence of his revolt, and fear, and disgust Keith put his hand on his brother's shoulder, and said:

"Courage!"

And suddenly he thought: 'My God! Courage! I shall want it all myself!'

II

Laurence Darrant, leaving his brother's house in the Adelphi, walked northwards, rapidly, slowly, rapidly again. For, if there are men who by force of will do one thing only at a time, there are men who from lack of will do now one thing, now another; with equal intensity. To such natures, to be gripped by the Nemesis which attends the lack of self-control is no reason for being more self-controlled. Rather does it foster their pet feeling: "What matter? To-morrow we die!" The effort of will required to go to Keith had relieved, exhausted and exasperated him. In accordance with those three feelings was the progress of his walk. He started from the door with the fixed resolve to go home and stay there quietly till Keith came. He was in Keith's hands, Keith would know what was to be done. But he had not gone three hundred yards before he felt so utterly weary, body and soul, that if he had but had a pistol in his pocket he would have shot himself in the street. Not even the thought of the girl—this young unfortunate with her strange devotion, who had kept him straight these last five months, who had roused in him a depth of feeling he had never known before—would have availed against that sudden black defection. Why go on—a waif at the mercy of his own nature, a straw blown here and there by every gust which rose in him? Why not have done with it for ever, and take it out in sleep?

He was approaching the fatal street, where he and the girl, that early morning, had spent the hours clutched together, trying in the refuge of love to forget for a moment their horror and fear. Should he go in? He had promised Keith not to. Why had he promised? He caught sight of himself in a chemist's lighted window. Miserable, shadowy brute! And he remembered suddenly a dog he had picked up once in the streets of Pera, a black-and-white creature—different from the other dogs, not one of their breed, a pariah of pariahs, who had strayed there somehow. He had taken it home to the house where he was staying, contrary to all custom of the country; had got fond of it; had shot it himself, sooner than leave it behind again to the mercies of its own kind in the streets. Twelve years ago! And those sleeve-links made of little Turkish coins he had brought back for the girl at the hairdresser's in Chancery Lane where he used to get shaved—pretty creature, like a wild rose. He had asked of her a kiss for payment. What queer emotion when she put her face forward to his lips—a sort of passionate tenderness and shame, at the softness and warmth of that flushed cheek, at her beauty and trustful gratitude. She would soon have given herself to him—that one! He had never gone there again! And to this day he did not know why he had abstained; to this day he did not know whether he were glad or sorry not to have plucked that rose. He must surely have been very different then! Queer business, life—queer, queer business!—to go through it never knowing what you would do next. Ah! to be like Keith, steady, buttoned-up in success; a brass pot, a pillar of society! Once, as a boy, he had been within an ace of killing Keith, for sneering at him. Once in Southern Italy he had been near killing a driver who was flogging his horse. And now, that dark-faced, swinish bully who had ruined the girl he had grown to love—he had done it! Killed him! Killed a man!

He who did not want to hurt a fly. The chemist's window comforted him with the sudden thought that he had at home that which made him safe, in case they should arrest him. He would never again go out without some of those little white tablets sewn into the lining of his coat. Restful, even exhilarating thought! They said a man should not take his own life. Let them taste horror—those glib citizens! Let them live as that girl had lived, as millions lived all the world over, under their canting dogmas! A man might rather even take his life than watch their cursed inhumanities.

He went into the chemist's for a bromide; and, while the man was mixing it, stood resting one foot like a tired horse. The "life" he had squeezed out of that fellow! After all, a billion living creatures gave up life each day, had it squeezed out of them, mostly. And perhaps not one a day deserved death so much as that loathly fellow. Life! a breath—afire! Nothing! Why, then, this icy clutching at his heart?

The chemist brought the draught.

"Not sleeping, sir?"

"No."

The man's eyes seemed to say: 'Yes! Burning the candle at both ends—I know!' Odd life, a chemist's; pills and powders all day long, to hold the machinery of men together! Devilish odd trade!

In going out he caught the reflection of his face in a mirror; it seemed too good altogether for a man who had committed murder. There was a sort of brightness underneath, an amiability lurking about its shadows; how—how could it be the face of a man who had done what he had done? His head felt lighter now, his feet lighter; he walked rapidly again.

Curious feeling of relief and oppression all at once! Frightful—to long for company, for talk, for

distraction; and—to be afraid of it! The girl—the girl and Keith were now the only persons who would not give him that feeling of dread. And, of those two—Keith was not...! Who could consort with one who was never wrong, a successful, righteous fellow; a chap built so that he knew nothing about himself, wanted to know nothing, a chap all solid actions? To be a quicksand swallowing up one's own resolutions was bad enough! But to be like Keith—all willpower, marching along, treading down his own feelings and weaknesses! No! One could not make a comrade of a man like Keith, even if he were one's brother? The only creature in all the world was the girl. She alone knew and felt what he was feeling; would put up with him and love him whatever he did, or was done to him. He stopped and took shelter in a doorway, to light a cigarette. He had suddenly a fearful wish to pass the archway where he had placed the body; a fearful wish that had no sense, no end in view, no anything; just an insensate craving to see the dark place again. He crossed Borrow Street to the little lane. There was only one person visible, a man on the far side with his shoulders hunched against the wind; a short, dark figure which crossed and came towards him in the flickering lamplight. What a face! Yellow, ravaged, clothed almost to the eyes in a stubbly greyish growth of beard, with blackish teeth, and haunting bloodshot eyes. And what a figure of rags—one shoulder higher than the other, one leg a little lame, and thin! A surge of feeling came up in Laurence for this creature, more unfortunate than himself. There were lower depths than his!

"Well, brother," he said, "you don't look too prosperous!"

The smile which gleamed out on the man's face seemed as unlikely as a smile on a scarecrow.

"Prosperity doesn't come my way," he said in a rusty voice. "I'm a failure—always been a failure. And yet you wouldn't think it, would you?—I was a minister of religion once."

Laurence held out a shilling. But the man shook his head.

"Keep your money," he said. "I've got more than you to-day, I daresay. But thank you for taking a little interest. That's worth more than money to a man that's down."

"You're right."

"Yes," the rusty voice went on; "I'd as soon die as go on living as I do. And now I've lost my self-respect. Often wondered how long a starving man could go without losing his self-respect. Not so very long. You take my word for that." And without the slightest change in the monotony of that creaking voice he added:

"Did you read of the murder? Just here. I've been looking at the place."

The words: 'So have I!' leaped up to Laurence's lips; he choked them down with a sort of terror.

"I wish you better luck," he said. "Goodnight!" and hurried away. A sort of ghastly laughter was forcing its way up in his throat. Was everyone talking of the murder he had committed? Even the very scarecrows?

III

There are some natures so constituted that, due to be hung at ten o'clock, they will play chess at eight. Such men invariably rise. They make especially good bishops, editors, judges, impresarios, Prime ministers, money-lenders, and generals; in fact, fill with exceptional credit any position of power over their fellow-men. They have spiritual cold storage, in which are preserved their nervous systems. In such men there is little or none of that fluid sense and continuity of feeling known under those vague terms, speculation, poetry, philosophy. Men of facts and of decision switching imagination on and off at will, subordinating sentiment to reason... one does not think of them when watching wind ripple over cornfields, or swallows flying.

Keith Darrant had need for being of that breed during his dinner at the Tellassons. It was just eleven when he issued from the big house in Portland Place and refrained from taking a cab. He wanted to walk that he might better think. What crude and wanton irony there was in his situation! To have been made father-confessor to a murderer, he—well on towards a judgeship! With his contempt for the kind of weakness which landed men in such abysses, he felt it all so sordid, so "impossible," that he could hardly bring his mind to bear on it at all. And yet he must, because of two powerful instincts—self-

preservation and blood-loyalty.

The wind had still the sapping softness of the afternoon, but rain had held off so far. It was warm, and he unbuttoned his fur overcoat. The nature of his thoughts deepened the dark austerity of his face, whose thin, well-cut lips were always pressing together, as if, by meeting, to dispose of each thought as it came up. He moved along the crowded pavements glumly. That air of festive conspiracy which drops with the darkness on to lighted streets, galled him. He turned off on a darker route.

This ghastly business! Convinced of its reality, he yet could not see it. The thing existed in his mind, not as a picture, but as a piece of irrefutable evidence. Larry had not meant to do it, of course. But it was murder, all the same. Men like Larry—weak, impulsive, sentimental, introspective creatures—did they ever mean what they did? This man, this Walenn, was, by all accounts, better dead than alive; no need to waste a thought on him! But, crime—the ugliness—Justice unsatisfied! Crime concealed—and his own share in the concealment! And yet—brother to brother! Surely no one could demand action from him! It was only a question of what he was going to advise Larry to do. To keep silent, and disappear? Had that a chance of success? Perhaps if the answers to his questions had been correct. But this girl! Suppose the dead man's relationship to her were ferreted out, could she be relied on not to endanger Larry? These women were all the same, unstable as water, emotional, shiftless pests of society. Then, too, a crime untracked, dogging all his brother's after life; a secret following him wherever he might vanish to; hanging over him, watching for some drunken moment, to slip out of his lips. It was bad to think of. A clean breast of it? But his heart twitched within him. "Brother of Mr. Keith Darrant, the well-known King's Counsel"—visiting a woman of the town, strangling with his bare hands the woman's husband! No intention to murder, but—a dead man! A dead man carried out of the house, laid under a dark archway! Provocation! Recommended to mercy—penal servitude for life! Was that the advice he was going to give Larry to-morrow morning?

And he had a sudden vision of shaven men with clay-coloured features, run, as it were, to seed, as he had seen them once in Pentonville, when he had gone there to visit a prisoner. Larry! Whom, as a baby creature, he had watched straddling; whom, as a little fellow, he had fagged; whom he had seen through scrapes at college; to whom he had lent money time and again, and time and again admonished in his courses. Larry! Five years younger than himself; and committed to his charge by their mother when she died. To become for life one of those men with faces like diseased plants; with no hair but a bushy stubble; with arrows marked on their yellow clothes! Larry! One of those men herded like sheep; at the beck and call of common men! A gentleman, his own brother, to live that slave's life, to be ordered here and there, year after year, day in, day out. Something snapped within him. He could not give that advice. Impossible! But if not, he must make sure of his ground, must verify, must know. This Glove Lane—this arch way? It would not be far from where he was that very moment. He looked for someone of whom to make enquiry. A policeman was standing at the corner, his stolid face illumined by a lamp; capable and watchful—an excellent officer, no doubt; but, turning his head away, Keith passed him without a word. Strange to feel that cold, uneasy feeling in presence of the law! A grim little driving home of what it all meant! Then, suddenly, he saw that the turning to his left was Borrow Street itself. He walked up one side, crossed over, and returned. He passed Number Forty-two, a small house with business names printed on the lifeless windows of the first and second floors; with dark curtained windows on the ground floor, or was there just a slink of light in one corner? Which way had Larry turned? Which way under that grisly burden? Fifty paces of this squalid street-narrow, and dark, and empty, thank heaven! Glove Lane! Here it was! A tiny runlet of a street. And here—! He had run right on to the arch, a brick bridge connecting two portions of a warehouse, and dark indeed.

"That's right, gov'nor! That's the place!" He needed all his self-control to turn leisurely to the speaker. "'Ere's where they found the body—very spot leanin' up 'ere. They ain't got 'im yet. Lytest—me lord!"

It was a ragged boy holding out a tattered yellowish journal. His lynx eyes peered up from under lanky wisps of hair, and his voice had the proprietary note of one making "a corner" in his news. Keith took the paper and gave him twopence. He even found a sort of comfort in the young ghoul's hanging about there; it meant that others besides himself had come morbidly to look. By the dim lamplight he read: "Glove Lane garrotting mystery. Nothing has yet been discovered of the murdered man's identity; from the cut of his clothes he is supposed to be a foreigner." The boy had vanished, and Keith saw the figure of a policeman coming slowly down this gutter of a street. A second's hesitation, and he stood firm. Nothing obviously could have brought him here save this "mystery," and he stayed quietly staring at the arch. The policeman moved up abreast. Keith saw that he was the one whom he had passed just now. He noted the cold offensive question die out of the man's eyes when they caught the gleam of white shirt-front under the opened fur collar. And holding up the paper, he said:

"Is this where the man was found?"

"Yes, sir."

"Still a mystery, I see?"

"Well, we can't always go by the papers. But I don't fancy they do know much about it, yet."

"Dark spot. Do fellows sleep under here?"

The policeman nodded. "There's not an arch in London where we don't get 'em sometimes."

"Nothing found on him—I think I read?"

"Not a copper. Pockets inside out. There's some funny characters about this quarter. Greeks, Hitalians—all sorts."

Queer sensation this, of being glad of a policeman's confidential tone!

"Well, good-night!"

"Good-night, sir. Good-night!"

He looked back from Borrow Street. The policeman was still standing there holding up his lantern, so that its light fell into the archway, as if trying to read its secret.

Now that he had seen this dark, deserted spot, the chances seemed to him much better. "Pockets inside out!" Either Larry had had presence of mind to do a very clever thing, or someone had been at the body before the police found it. That was the more likely. A dead backwater of a place. At three o'clock—loneliest of all hours—Larry's five minutes' grim excursion to and fro might well have passed unseen! Now, it all depended on the girl; on whether Laurence had been seen coming to her or going away; on whether, if the man's relationship to her were discovered, she could be relied on to say nothing. There was not a soul in Borrow Street now; hardly even a lighted window; and he took one of those rather desperate decisions only possible to men daily accustomed to the instant taking of responsibility. He would go to her, and see for himself. He came to the door of Forty-two, obviously one of those which are only shut at night, and tried the larger key. It fitted, and he was in a gas-lighted passage, with an oil-clothed floor, and a single door to his left. He stood there undecided. She must be made to understand that he knew everything. She must not be told more than that he was a friend of Larry's. She must not be frightened, yet must be forced to give her very soul away. A hostile witness—not to be treated as hostile—a matter for delicate handling! But his knock was not answered.

Should he give up this nerve-racking, bizarre effort to come at a basis of judgment; go away, and just tell Laurence that he could not advise him? And then—what? Something must be done. He knocked again. Still no answer. And with that impatience of being thwarted, natural to him, and fostered to the full by the conditions of his life, he tried the other key. It worked, and he opened the door. Inside all was dark, but a voice from some way off, with a sort of breathless relief in its foreign tones, said:

"Oh! then it's you, Larry! Why did you knock? I was so frightened. Turn up the light, dear. Come in!"

Feeling by the door for a switch in the pitch blackness he was conscious of arms round his neck, a warm thinly clad body pressed to his own; then withdrawn as quickly, with a gasp, and the most awful terror-stricken whisper:

"Oh! Who is it?"

With a glacial shiver down his own spine, Keith answered

"A friend of Laurence. Don't be frightened!"

There was such silence that he could hear a clock ticking, and the sound of his own hand passing over the surface of the wall, trying to find the switch. He found it, and in the light which leaped up he saw, stiffened against a dark curtain evidently screening off a bedroom, a girl standing, holding a long black coat together at her throat, so that her face with its pale brown hair, short and square-cut and curling up underneath, had an uncanny look of being detached from any body. Her face was so alabaster pale that the staring, startled eyes, dark blue or brown, and the faint rose of the parted lips, were like colour stainings on a white mask; and it had a strange delicacy, truth, and pathos, such as only suffering brings. Though not susceptible to aesthetic emotion, Keith was curiously affected. He said gently:

"You needn't be afraid. I haven't come to do you harm—quite the contrary. May I sit down and talk?" And, holding up the keys, he added: "Laurence wouldn't have given me these, would he, if he hadn't trusted me?"

Still she did not move, and he had the impression that he was looking at a spirit—a spirit startled out of its flesh. Nor at the moment did it seem in the least strange that he should conceive such an odd thought. He stared round the room—clean and tawdry, with its tarnished gilt mirror, marble-topped side-table, and plush-covered sofa. Twenty years and more since he had been in such a place. And he said:

"Won't you sit down? I'm sorry to have startled you."

But still she did not move, whispering:

"Who are you, please?"

And, moved suddenly beyond the realm of caution by the terror in that whisper, he answered:

"Larry's brother."

She uttered a little sigh of relief which went to Keith's heart, and, still holding the dark coat together at her throat, came forward and sat down on the sofa. He could see that her feet, thrust into slippers, were bare; with her short hair, and those candid startled eyes, she looked like a tall child. He drew up a chair and said:

"You must forgive me coming at such an hour; he's told me, you see." He expected her to flinch and gasp; but she only clasped her hands together on her knees, and said:

"Yes?"

Then horror and discomfort rose up in him, afresh.

"An awful business!"

Her whisper echoed him:

"Yes, oh! yes! Awful—it is awful!"

And suddenly realising that the man must have fallen dead just where he was sitting, Keith became stock silent, staring at the floor.

"Yes," she whispered; "Just there. I see him now always falling!"

How she said that! With what a strange gentle despair! In this girl of evil life, who had brought on them this tragedy, what was it which moved him to a sort of unwilling compassion?

"You look very young," he said.

"I am twenty."

"And you are fond of—my brother?"

"I would die for him."

Impossible to mistake the tone of her voice, or the look in her eyes, true deep Slav eyes; dark brown, not blue as he had thought at first. It was a very pretty face—either her life had not eaten into it yet, or the suffering of these last hours had purged away those marks; or perhaps this devotion of hers to Larry. He felt strangely at sea, sitting there with this child of twenty; he, over forty, a man of the world, professionally used to every side of human nature. But he said, stammering a little:

"I—I have come to see how far you can save him. Listen, and just answer the questions I put to you."

She raised her hands, squeezed them together, and murmured:

"Oh! I will answer anything."

"This man, then—your—your husband—was he a bad man?"

"A dreadful man."

"Before he came here last night, how long since you saw him?"

"Eighteen months."

"Where did you live when you saw him last?"

"In Pimlico."

"Does anybody about here know you as Mrs. Walenn?"

"No. When I came here, after my little girl died, I came to live a bad life. Nobody knows me at all. I am quite alone."

"If they discover who he was, they will look for his wife?"

"I do not know. He did not let people think I was married to him. I was very young; he treated many, I think, like me."

"Do you think he was known to the police?"

She shook her head. "He was very clever."

"What is your name now?"

"Wanda Livinska."

"Were you known by that name before you were married?"

"Wanda is my Christian name. Livinska—I just call myself."

"I see; since you came here."

"Yes."

"Did my brother ever see this man before last night?"

"Never."

"You had told him about his treatment of you?"

"Yes. And that man first went for him."

"I saw the mark. Do you think anyone saw my brother come to you?"

"I do not know. He says not."

"Can you tell if anyone saw him carrying the—the thing away?"

"No one in this street—I was looking."

"Nor coming back?"

"No one."

"Nor going out in the morning?"

"I do not think it."

"Have you a servant?"

"Only a woman who comes at nine in the morning for an hour."

"Does she know Larry?"

"No."

"Friends, acquaintances?"

"No; I am very quiet. And since I knew your brother, I see no one. Nobody comes here but him for a long time now."

"How long?"

"Five months."

"Have you been out to-day?"

"No."

"What have you been doing?"

"Crying."

It was said with a certain dreadful simplicity, and pressing her hands together, she went on:

"He is in danger, because of me. I am so afraid for him." Holding up his hand to check that emotion, he said:

"Look at me!"

She fixed those dark eyes on him, and in her bare throat, from which the coat had fallen back, he could see her resolutely swallowing down her agitation.

"If the worst comes to the worst, and this man is traced to you, can you trust yourself not to give my brother away?"

Her eyes shone. She got up and went to the fireplace:

"Look! I have burned all the things he has given me—even his picture. Now I have nothing from him."

Keith, too, got up.

"Good! One more question: Do the police know you, because—because of your life?"

She shook her head, looking at him intently, with those mournfully true eyes. And he felt a sort of shame.

"I was obliged to ask. Do you know where he lives?"

"Yes."

"You must not go there. And he must not come to you, here."

Her lips quivered; but she bowed her head. Suddenly he found her quite close to him, speaking almost in a whisper:

"Please do not take him from me altogether. I will be so careful. I will not do anything to hurt him; but if I cannot see him sometimes, I shall die. Please do not take him from me." And catching his hand between her own, she pressed it desperately. It was several seconds before Keith said:

"Leave that to me. I will see him. I shall arrange. You must leave that to me."

"But you will be kind?"

He felt her lips kissing his hand. And the soft moist touch sent a queer feeling through him, protective, yet just a little brutal, having in it a shiver of sensuality. He withdrew his hand. And as if warned that she had been too pressing, she recoiled humbly. But suddenly she turned, and stood absolutely rigid; then almost inaudibly whispered: "Listen! Someone out—out there!" And darting past him she turned out the light.

Almost at once came a knock on the door. He could feel—actually feel the terror of this girl beside him in the dark. And he, too, felt terror. Who could it be? No one came but Larry, she had said. Who else then could it be? Again came the knock, louder! He felt the breath of her whisper on his cheek: "If it is Larry! I must open." He shrank back against the wall; heard her open the door and say faintly: "Yes. Please! Who?"

Light painted a thin moving line on the wall opposite, and a voice which Keith recognised answered:

"All right, miss. Your outer door's open here. You ought to keep it shut after dark."

God! That policeman! And it had been his own doing, not shutting the outer door behind him when he came in. He heard her say timidly in her foreign voice: "Thank you, sir!" the policeman's retreating steps, the outer door being shut, and felt her close to him again. That something in her youth and strange prettiness which had touched and kept him gentle, no longer blunted the edge of his exasperation, now that he could not see her. They were all the same, these women; could not speak the truth! And he said brusquely:

"You told me they didn't know you!"

Her voice answered like a sigh:

"I did not think they did, sir. It is so long I was not out in the town, not since I had Larry."

The repulsion which all the time seethed deep in Keith welled up at those words. His brother—son of his mother, a gentleman—the property of this girl, bound to her, body and soul, by this unspeakable event! But she had turned up the light. Had she some intuition that darkness was against her? Yes, she was pretty with that soft face, colourless save for its lips and dark eyes, with that face somehow so touchingly, so unaccountably good, and like a child's.

"I am going now," he said. "Remember! He mustn't come here; you mustn't go to him. I shall see him to-morrow. If you are as fond of him as you say—take care, take care!"

She sighed out, "Yes! oh, yes!" and Keith went to the door. She was standing with her back to the wall, and to follow him she only moved her head—that dove-like face with all its life in eyes which seemed saying: 'Look into us; nothing we hide; all—all is there!'

And he went out.

In the passage he paused before opening the outer door. He did not want to meet that policeman again; the fellow's round should have taken him well out of the street by now, and turning the handle cautiously, he looked out. No one in sight. He stood a moment, wondering if he should turn to right or left, then briskly crossed the street. A voice to his right hand said:

"Good-night, sir."

There in the shadow of a doorway the policeman was standing. The fellow must have seen him coming out! Utterly unable to restrain a start, and muttering "Goodnight!" Keith walked on rapidly:

He went full quarter of a mile before he lost that startled and uneasy feeling in sardonic exasperation that he, Keith Darrant, had been taken for a frequenter of a lady of the town. The whole thing—the whole thing!—a vile and disgusting business! His very mind felt dirty and breathless; his spirit, drawn out of sheath, had slowly to slide back before he could at all focus and readjust his reasoning faculty. Certainly, he had got the knowledge he wanted. There was less danger than he thought. That girl's eyes! No mistaking her devotion. She would not give Larry away. Yes! Larry must clear out—South America—the East—it did not matter. But he felt no relief. The cheap, tawdry room had wrapped itself round his fancy with its atmosphere of murky love, with the feeling it inspired, of emotion caged within those yellowish walls and the red stuff of its furniture. That girl's face! Devotion; truth, too, and beauty, rare and moving, in its setting of darkness and horror, in that nest of vice and of disorder!... The dark archway; the street arab, with his gleeful: "They 'ain't got 'im yet!"; the feel of those bare arms round his neck; that whisper of horror in the darkness; above all, again, her child face looking into his, so truthful! And suddenly he stood quite still in the street. What in God's name was he about? What grotesque juggling amongst shadows, what strange and ghastly eccentricity was all this? The forces of order and routine, all the actualities of his daily life, marched on him at that moment, and swept everything before them. It was a dream, a nightmare not real! It was ridiculous! That he—he should thus be bound up with things so black and bizarre!

He had come by now to the Strand, that street down which every day he moved to the Law Courts, to his daily work; his work so dignified and regular, so irreproachable, and solid. No! The thing was all a monstrous nightmare! It would go, if he fixed his mind on the familiar objects around, read the names on the shops, looked at the faces passing. Far down the thoroughfare he caught the outline of the old church, and beyond, the loom of the Law Courts themselves. The bell of a fire-engine sounded, and the horses came galloping by, with the shining metal, rattle of hoofs and hoarse shouting. Here was a sensation, real and harmless, dignified and customary! A woman flaunting round the corner looked up at him, and leered out: "Good-night!" Even that was customary, tolerable. Two policemen passed, supporting between them a man the worse for liquor, full of fight and expletives; the sight was soothing, an ordinary thing which brought passing annoyance, interest, disgust. It had begun to rain; he felt it on his face with pleasure—an actual thing, not eccentric, a thing which happened every day!

He began to cross the street. Cabs were going at furious speed now that the last omnibus had ceased to run; it distracted him to take this actual, ordinary risk run so often every day. During that crossing of the Strand, with the rain in his face and the cabs shooting past, he regained for the first time his assurance, shook off this unreal sense of being in the grip of something, and walked resolutely to the corner of his home turning. But passing into that darker stretch, he again stood still. A policeman had also turned into that street on the other side. Not—surely not! Absurd! They were all alike to look at—those fellows! Absurd! He walked on sharply, and let himself into his house. But on his way upstairs he could not for the life of him help raising a corner of a curtain and looking from the staircase window. The policeman was marching solemnly, about twenty-five yards away, paying apparently no attention to anything whatever.

IV

Keith woke at five o'clock, his usual hour, without remembrance. But the grisly shadow started up when he entered his study, where the lamp burned, and the fire shone, and the coffee was set ready, just as when yesterday afternoon Larry had stood out there against the wall. For a moment he fought against realisation; then, drinking off his coffee, sat down sullenly at the bureau to his customary three hours' study of the day's cases.

Not one word of his brief could he take in. It was all jumbled with murky images and apprehensions, and for full half an hour he suffered mental paralysis. Then the sheer necessity of knowing something of the case which he had to open at half-past ten that morning forced him to a concentration which never quite subdued the malaise at the bottom of his heart. Nevertheless, when he rose at half-past eight and went into the bathroom, he had earned his grim satisfaction in this victory of will-power. By half-past nine he must be at Larry's. A boat left London for the Argentine to-morrow. If Larry was to get away at once, money must be arranged for. And then at breakfast he came on this paragraph in the paper:

"SOHO MURDER.

"Enquiry late last night established the fact that the Police have discovered the identity of the man found strangled yesterday morning under an archway in Glove Lane. An arrest has been made."

By good fortune he had finished eating, for the words made him feel physically sick. At this very minute Larry might be locked up, waiting to be charged—might even have been arrested before his own visit to the girl last night. If Larry were arrested, she must be implicated. What, then, would be his own position? Idiot to go and look at that archway, to go and see the girl! Had that policeman really followed him home? Accessory after the fact! Keith Darrant, King's Counsel, man of mark! He forced himself by an effort, which had something of the heroic, to drop this panicky feeling. Panic never did good. He must face it, and see. He refused even to hurry, calmly collected the papers wanted for the day, and attended to a letter or two, before he set out in a taxi-cab to Fitzroy Street.

Waiting outside there in the grey morning for his ring to be answered, he looked the very picture of a man who knew his mind, a man of resolution. But it needed all his will-power to ask without tremor: "Mr. Darrant in?" to hear without sign of any kind the answer: "He's not up yet, sir."

"Never mind; I'll go in and see him. Mr. Keith Darrant."

On his way to Laurence's bedroom, in the midst of utter relief, he had the self-possession to think: 'This arrest is the best thing that could have happened. It'll keep their noses on a wrong scent till Larry's got away. The girl must be sent off too, but not with him.' Panic had ended in quite hardening his resolution. He entered the bedroom with a feeling of disgust. The fellow was lying there, his bare arms crossed behind his tousled head, staring at the ceiling, and smoking one of many cigarettes whose ends littered a chair beside him, whose sickly reek tainted the air. That pale face, with its jutting cheek-bones and chin, its hollow cheeks and blue eyes far sunk back—what a wreck of goodness!

He looked up at Keith through the haze of smoke and said quietly: "Well, brother, what's the sentence? 'Transportation for life, and then to be fined forty pounds?'"

The flippancy revolted Keith. It was Larry all over! Last night horrified and humble, this morning, "Don't care" and feather-headed. He said sourly:

"Oh! You can joke about it now?"

Laurence turned his face to the wall.

"Must."

Fatalism! How detestable were natures like that!

"I've been to see her," he said.

"You?"

"Last night. She can be trusted."

Laurence laughed.

"That I told you."

"I had to see for myself. You must clear out at once, Larry. She can come out to you by the next boat; but you can't go together. Have you any money?"

"No."

"I can foot your expenses, and lend you a year's income in advance. But it must be a clean cut; after you get out there your whereabouts must only be known to me."

A long sigh answered him.

"You're very good to me, Keith; you've always been very good. I don't know why."

Keith answered drily

"Nor I. There's a boat to the Argentine tomorrow. You're in luck; they've made an arrest. It's in the paper."

"What?"

The cigarette end dropped, the thin pyjama'd figure writhed up and stood clutching at the bedrail.

"What?"

The disturbing thought flitted through Keith's brain: 'I was a fool. He takes it queerly; what now?'

Laurence passed his hand over his forehead, and sat down on the bed.

"I hadn't thought of that," he said; "It does me!"

Keith stared. In his relief that the arrested man was not Laurence, this had not occurred to him. What folly!

"Why?" he said quickly; "an innocent man's in no danger. They always get the wrong man first. It's a piece of luck, that's all. It gives us time."

How often had he not seen that expression on Larry's face, wistful, questioning, as if trying to see the thing with his—Keith's-eyes, trying to submit to better judgment? And he said, almost gently—

"Now, look here, Larry; this is too serious to trifle with. Don't worry about that. Leave it to me. Just get ready to be off'. I'll take your berth and make arrangements. Here's some money for kit. I can come round between five and six, and let you know. Pull yourself together, man. As soon as the girl's joined you out there, you'd better get across to Chile, the further the better. You must simply lose yourself: I must go now, if I'm to get to the Bank before I go down to the courts." And looking very steadily at his brother, he added:

"Come! You've got to think of me in this matter as well as of yourself. No playing fast and loose with the arrangements. Understand?"

But still Larry gazed up at him with that wistful questioning, and not till he had repeated, "Understand?" did he receive "Yes" for answer.

Driving away, he thought: 'Queer fellow! I don't know him, shall never know him!' and at once began to concentrate on the practical arrangements. At his bank he drew out L400; but waiting for the notes to be counted he suffered qualms. A clumsy way of doing things! If there had been more time! The thought: 'Accessory after the fact!' now infected everything. Notes were traceable. No other way of getting him away at once, though. One must take lesser risks to avoid greater. From the bank he drove to the office of the steamship line. He had told Larry he would book his passage. But that would not do! He must only ask anonymously if there were accommodation. Having discovered that there were vacant berths, he drove on to the Law Courts. If he could have taken a morning off, he would have gone down to the police court and seen them charge this man. But even that was not too safe, with a face so well known as his. What would come of this arrest? Nothing, surely! The police always took somebody up, to keep the public quiet. Then, suddenly, he had again the feeling that it was all a nightmare; Larry had never done it; the police had got the right man! But instantly the memory of the girl's awe-stricken face, her figure huddling on the sofa, her words "I see him always falling!" came back. God! What a business!

He felt he had never been more clear-headed and forcible than that morning in court. When he came out for lunch he bought the most sensational of the evening papers. But it was yet too early for news, and he had to go back into court no whit wiser concerning the arrest. When at last he threw off wig and gown, and had got through a conference and other necessary work, he went out to Chancery Lane,

buying a paper on the way. Then he hailed a cab, and drove once more to Fitzroy Street.

V

Laurence had remained sitting on his bed for many minutes. An innocent man in no danger! Keith had said it—the celebrated lawyer! Could he rely on that? Go out 8,000 miles, he and the girl, and leave a fellow-creature perhaps in mortal peril for an act committed by himself?

In the past night he had touched bottom, as he thought: become ready to face anything. When Keith came in he would without murmur have accepted the advice: "Give yourself up!" He was prepared to pitch away the end of his life as he pitched from him the fag-ends of his cigarettes. And the long sigh he had heaved, hearing of reprieve, had been only half relief. Then, with incredible swiftness there had rushed through him a feeling of unutterable joy and hope. Clean away—into a new country, a new life! The girl and he! Out there he wouldn't care, would rejoice even to have squashed the life out of such a noisome beetle of a man. Out there! Under a new sun, where blood ran quicker than in this foggy land, and people took justice into their own hands. For it had been justice on that brute even though he had not meant to kill him. And then to hear of this arrest! They would be charging the man to-day. He could go and see the poor creature accused of the murder he himself had committed! And he laughed. Go and see how likely it was that they might hang a fellow-man in place of himself? He dressed, but too shaky to shave himself, went out to a barber's shop. While there he read the news which Keith had seen. In this paper the name of the arrested man was given: "John Evan, no address." To be brought up on the charge at Bow Street. Yes! He must go. Once, twice, three times he walked past the entrance of the court before at last he entered and screwed himself away among the tag and bobtail.

The court was crowded; and from the murmurs round he could tell that it was his particular case which had brought so many there. In a dazed way he watched charge after charge disposed of with lightning quickness. But were they never going to reach his business? And then suddenly he saw the little scarecrow man of last night advancing to the dock between two policemen, more ragged and miserable than ever by light of day, like some shaggy, wan, grey animal, surrounded by sleek hounds.

A sort of satisfied purr was rising all round; and with horror Laurence perceived that this—this was the man accused of what he himself had done—this queer, battered unfortunate to whom he had shown a passing friendliness. Then all feeling merged in the appalling interest of listening. The evidence was very short. Testimony of the hotel-keeper where Walenn had been staying, the identification of his body, and of a snake-shaped ring he had been wearing at dinner that evening. Testimony of a pawnbroker, that this same ring was pawned with him the first thing yesterday morning by the prisoner. Testimony of a policeman that he had noticed the man Evan several times in Glove Lane, and twice moved him on from sleeping under that arch. Testimony of another policeman that, when arrested at midnight, Evan had said: "Yes; I took the ring off his finger. I found him there dead I know I oughtn't to have done it.... I'm an educated man; it was stupid to pawn the ring. I found him with his pockets turned inside out."

Fascinating and terrible to sit staring at the man in whose place he should have been; to wonder when those small bright-grey bloodshot eyes would spy him out, and how he would meet that glance. Like a baited raccoon the little man stood, screwed back into a corner, mournful, cynical, fierce, with his ridged, obtuse yellow face, and his stubbly grey beard and hair, and his eyes wandering now and again amongst the crowd. But with all his might Laurence kept his face unmoved. Then came the word "Remanded"; and, more like a baited beast than ever, the man was led away.

Laurence sat on, a cold perspiration thick on his forehead. Someone else, then, had come on the body and turned the pockets inside out before John Evan took the ring. A man such as Walenn would not be out at night without money. Besides, if Evan had found money on the body he would never have run the risk of taking that ring. Yes, someone else had come on the body first. It was for that one to come forward, and prove that the ring was still on the dead man's finger when he left him, and thus clear Evan. He clung to that thought; it seemed to make him less responsible for the little man's position; to remove him and his own deed one step further back. If they found the person who had taken the money, it would prove Evan's innocence. He came out of the court in a sort of trance. And a craving to get drunk attacked him. One could not go on like this without the relief of some oblivion. If he could only get drunk, keep drunk till this business was decided and he knew whether he must give himself up or no. He had now no fear at all of people suspecting him; only fear of himself—fear that he might go and give himself up. Now he could see the girl; the danger from that was as nothing compared with the

danger from his own conscience. He had promised Keith not to see her. Keith had been decent and loyal to him—good old Keith! But he would never understand that this girl was now all he cared about in life; that he would rather be cut off from life itself than be cut off from her. Instead of becoming less and less, she was becoming more and more to him—experience strange and thrilling! Out of deep misery she had grown happy—through him; out of a sordid, shifting life recovered coherence and bloom, through devotion to him, of all people in the world! It was a miracle. She demanded nothing of him, adored him, as no other woman ever had—it was this which had anchored his drifting barque; this—and her truthful mild intelligence, and that burning warmth of a woman, who, long treated by men as but a sack of sex, now loves at last.

And suddenly, mastering his craving to get drunk, he made towards Soho. He had been a fool to give those keys to Keith. She must have been frightened by his visit; and, perhaps, doubly miserable since, knowing nothing, imagining everything! Keith was sure to have terrified her. Poor little thing!

Down the street where he had stolen in the dark with the dead body on his back, he almost ran for the cover of her house. The door was opened to him before he knocked, her arms were round his neck, her lips pressed to his. The fire was out, as if she had been unable to remember to keep warm. A stool had been drawn to the window, and there she had evidently been sitting, like a bird in a cage, looking out into the grey street. Though she had been told that he was not to come, instinct had kept her there; or the pathetic, aching hope against hope which lovers never part with.

Now that he was there, her first thoughts were for his comfort. The fire was lighted. He must eat, drink, smoke. There was never in her doings any of the "I am doing this for you, but you ought to be doing that for me" which belongs to so many marriages, and liaisons. She was like a devoted slave, so in love with the chains that she never knew she wore them. And to Laurence, who had so little sense of property, this only served to deepen tenderness, and the hold she had on him. He had resolved not to tell her of the new danger he ran from his own conscience. But resolutions with him were but the opposites of what was sure to come; and at last the words:

"They've arrested someone," escaped him.

From her face he knew she had grasped the danger at once; had divined it, perhaps, before he spoke. But she only twined her arms round him and kissed his lips. And he knew that she was begging him to put his love for her above his conscience. Who would ever have thought that he could feel as he did to this girl who had been in the arms of many! The stained and suffering past of a loved woman awakens in some men only chivalry; in others, more respectable, it rouses a tigerish itch, a rancorous jealousy of what in the past was given to others. Sometimes it will do both. When he had her in his arms he felt no remorse for killing the coarse, handsome brute who had ruined her. He savagely rejoiced in it. But when she laid her head in the hollow of his shoulder, turning to him her white face with the faint colour-staining on the parted lips, the cheeks, the eyelids; when her dark, wide-apart, brown eyes gazed up in the happiness of her abandonment—he felt only tenderness and protection.

He left her at five o'clock, and had not gone two streets' length before the memory of the little grey vagabond, screwed back in the far corner of the dock like a baited raccoon, of his dreary, creaking voice, took possession of him again; and a kind of savagery mounted in his brain against a world where one could be so tortured without having meant harm to anyone.

At the door of his lodgings Keith was getting out of a cab. They went in together, but neither of them sat down; Keith standing with his back to the carefully shut door, Laurence with his back to the table, as if they knew there was a tug coming. And Keith said: "There's room on that boat. Go down and book your berth before they shut. Here's the money!"

"I'm going to stick it, Keith."

Keith stepped forward, and put a roll of notes on the table.

"Now look here, Larry. I've read the police court proceedings. There's nothing in that. Out of prison, or in prison for a few weeks, it's all the same to a night-bird of that sort. Dismiss it from your mind—there's not nearly enough evidence to convict. This gives you your chance. Take it like a man, and make a new life for yourself."

Laurence smiled; but the smile had a touch of madness and a touch of malice. He took up the notes.

"Clear out, and save the honour of brother Keith. Put them back in your pocket, Keith, or I'll put them in the fire. Come, take them!" And, crossing to the fire, he held them to the bars. "Take them, or in they go!"

Keith took back the notes.

"I've still got some kind of honour, Keith; if I clear out I shall have none, not the rag of any, left. It may be worth more to me than that—I can't tell yet—I can't tell." There was a long silence before Keith answered. "I tell you you're mistaken; no jury will convict. If they did, a judge would never hang on it. A ghoul who can rob a dead body ought to be in prison. What he did is worse than what you did, if you come to that!" Laurence lifted his face. "Judge not, brother," he said; "the heart is a dark well." Keith's yellowish face grew red and swollen, as though he were mastering the tickle of a bronchial cough. "What are you going to do, then? I suppose I may ask you not to be entirely oblivious of our name; or is such a consideration unworthy of your honour?" Laurence bent his head. The gesture said more clearly than words: 'Don't kick a man when he's down!'

"I don't know what I'm going to do—nothing at present. I'm awfully sorry, Keith; awfully sorry."

Keith looked at him, and without another word went out.

VI

To any, save philosophers, reputation may be threatened almost as much by disgrace to name and family as by the disgrace of self. Keith's instinct was always to deal actively with danger. But this blow, whether it fell on him by discovery or by confession, could not be countered. As blight falls on a rose from who knows where, the scandalous murk would light on him. No repulse possible! Not even a wriggling from under! Brother of a murderer hung or sent to penal servitude! His daughter niece to a murderer! His dead mother—a murderer's mother! And to wait day after day, week after week, not knowing whether the blow would fall, was an extraordinarily atrocious penance, the injustice of which, to a man of rectitude, seemed daily the more monstrous.

The remand had produced evidence that the murdered man had been drinking heavily on the night of his death, and further evidence of the accused's professional vagabondage and destitution; it was shown, too, that for some time the archway in Glove Lane had been his favourite night haunt. He had been committed for trial in January. This time, despite misgivings, Keith had attended the police court. To his great relief Larry was not there. But the policeman who had come up while he was looking at the archway, and given him afterwards that scare in the girl's rooms, was chief witness to the way the accused man haunted Glove Lane. Though Keith held his silk hat high, he still had the uncomfortable feeling that the man had recognised him.

His conscience suffered few, if any, twinges for letting this man rest under the shadow of the murder. He genuinely believed that there was not evidence enough to convict; nor was it in him to appreciate the tortures of a vagabond shut up. The scamp deserved what he had got, for robbing a dead body; and in any case such a scarecrow was better off in prison than sleeping out under archways in December. Sentiment was foreign to Keith's character, and his justice that of those who subordinate the fates of the weak and shiftless to the needful paramountcy of the strong and well established.

His daughter came back from school for the Christmas holidays. It was hard to look up from her bright eyes and rosy cheeks and see this shadow hanging above his calm and ordered life, as in a glowing room one's eye may catch an impending patch of darkness drawn like a spider's web across a corner of the ceiling.

On the afternoon of Christmas Eve they went, by her desire, to a church in Soho, where the Christmas Oratorio was being given; and coming away passed, by chance of a wrong turning, down Borrow Street. Ugh! How that startled moment, when the girl had pressed herself against him in the dark, and her terror-stricken whisper: "Oh! Who is it?" leaped out before him! Always that business—that ghastly business! After the trial he would have another try to get them both away. And he thrust his arm within his young daughter's, hurrying her on, out of this street where shadows filled all the winter air.

But that evening when she had gone to bed he felt uncontrollably restless. He had not seen Larry for weeks. What was he about? What desperations were hatching in his disorderly brain? Was he very miserable; had he perhaps sunk into a stupor of debauchery? And the old feeling of protectiveness rose up in him; a warmth born of long ago Christmas Eves, when they had stockings hung out in the night stuffed by a Santa Claus, whose hand never failed to tuck them up, whose kiss was their nightly waft into sleep.

Stars were sparkling out there over the river; the sky frosty-clear, and black. Bells had not begun to

ring as yet. And obeying an obscure, deep impulse, Keith wrapped himself once more into his fur coat, pulled a motoring cap over his eyes, and sallied forth. In the Strand he took a cab to Fitzroy Street. There was no light in Larry's windows, and on a card he saw the words "To Let." Gone! Had he after all cleared out for good? But how—without money? And the girl? Bells were ringing now in the silent frostiness. Christmas Eve! And Keith thought: 'If only this wretched business were off my mind! Monstrous that one should suffer for the faults of others!' He took a route which led him past Borrow Street. Solitude brooded there, and he walked resolutely down on the far side, looking hard at the girl's window. There was a light. The curtains just failed to meet, so that a thin gleam shone through. He crossed; and after glancing swiftly up and down, deliberately peered in.

He only stood there perhaps twenty seconds, but visual records gleaned in a moment sometimes outlast the visions of hours and days. The electric light was not burning; but, in the centre of the room the girl was kneeling in her nightgown before a little table on which were four lighted candles. Her arms were crossed on her breast; the candle-light shone on her fair cropped hair, on the profile of cheek and chin, on her bowed white neck. For a moment he thought her alone; then behind her saw his brother in a sleeping suit, leaning against the wall, with arms crossed, watching. It was the expression on his face which burned the whole thing in, so that always afterwards he was able to see that little scene—such an expression as could never have been on the face of one even faintly conscious that he was watched by any living thing on earth. The whole of Larry's heart and feeling seemed to have come up out of him. Yearning, mockery, love, despair! The depth of his feeling for this girl, his stress of mind, fears, hopes; the flotsam good and evil of his soul, all transfigured there, exposed and unforgettable. The candle-light shone upward on to his face, twisted by the strangest smile; his eyes, darker and more wistful than mortal eyes should be, seemed to beseech and mock the white-clad girl, who, all unconscious, knelt without movement, like a carved figure of devotion. The words seemed coming from his lips: "Pray for us! Bravo! Yes! Pray for us!" And suddenly Keith saw her stretch out her arms, and lift her face with a look of ecstasy, and Laurence starting forward. What had she seen beyond the candle flames? It is the unexpected which invests visions with poignancy. Nothing more strange could Keith have seen in this nest of the murky and illicit. But in sheer panic lest he might be caught thus spying he drew back and hurried on. So Larry was living there with her! When the moment came he could still find him.

Before going in, he stood full five minutes leaning on the terrace parapet before his house, gazing at the star-frosted sky, and the river cut by the trees into black pools, oiled over by gleams from the Embankment lamps. And, deep down, behind his mere thoughts, he ached—somehow, somewhere ached. Beyond the cage of all that he saw and heard and thought, he had perceived something he could not reach. But the night was cold, the bells silent, for it had struck twelve. Entering his house, he stole upstairs.

VII

If for Keith those six weeks before the Glove Lane murder trial came on were fraught with uneasiness and gloom, they were for Laurence almost the happiest since his youth. From the moment when he left his rooms and went to the girl's to live, a kind of peace and exaltation took possession of him. Not by any effort of will did he throw off the nightmare hanging over him. Nor was he drugged by love. He was in a sort of spiritual catalepsy. In face of fate too powerful for his will, his turmoil, anxiety, and even restlessness had ceased; his life floated in the ether of "what must come, will." Out of this catalepsy, his spirit sometimes fell headlong into black waters. In one such whirlpool he was struggling on the night of Christmas Eve. When the girl rose from her knees he asked her:

"What did you see?"

Pressing close to him, she drew him down on to the floor before the fire; and they sat, knees drawn up, hands clasped, like two children trying to see over the edge of the world.

"It was the Virgin I saw. She stood against the wall and smiled. We shall be happy soon."

"When we die, Wanda," he said, suddenly, "let it be together. We shall keep each other warm, out there."

Huddling to him she whispered: "Yes, oh, yes! If you die, I could not go on living."

It was this utter dependence on him, the feeling that he had rescued something, which gave him

sense of anchorage. That, and his buried life in the retreat of these two rooms. Just for an hour in the morning, from nine to ten, the charwoman would come, but not another soul all day. They never went out together. He would stay in bed late, while Wanda bought what they needed for the day's meals; lying on his back, hands clasped behind his head, recalling her face, the movements of her slim, rounded, supple figure, robing itself before his gaze; feeling again the kiss she had left on his lips, the gleam of her soft eyes, so strangely dark in so fair a face. In a sort of trance he would lie till she came back. Then get up to breakfast about noon off things which she had cooked, drinking coffee. In the afternoon he would go out alone and walk for hours, any where, so long as it was East. To the East there was always suffering to be seen, always that which soothed him with the feeling that he and his troubles were only a tiny part of trouble; that while so many other sorrowing and shadowy creatures lived he was not cut off. To go West was to encourage dejection. In the West all was like Keith, successful, immaculate, ordered, resolute. He would come back tired out, and sit watching her cook their little dinner. The evenings were given up to love. Queer trance of an existence, which both were afraid to break. No sign from her of wanting those excitements which girls who have lived her life, even for a few months, are supposed to need. She never asked him to take her anywhere; never, in word, deed, look, seemed anything but almost rapturously content. And yet he knew, and she knew, that they were only waiting to see whether Fate would turn her thumb down on them. In these days he did not drink. Out of his quarter's money, when it came in, he had paid his debts—their expenses were very small. He never went to see Keith, never wrote to him, hardly thought of him. And from those dread apparitions—Walenn lying with the breath choked out of him, and the little grey, driven animal in the dock—he hid, as only a man can who must hide or be destroyed. But daily he bought a newspaper, and feverishly, furtively scanned its columns.

VIII

Coming out of the Law Courts on the afternoon of January 28th, at the triumphant end of a desperately fought will case, Keith saw on a poster the words: "Glove Lane Murder: Trial and Verdict"; and with a rush of dismay he thought: 'Good God! I never looked at the paper this morning!' The elation which had filled him a second before, the absorption he had felt for two days now in the case so hardly won, seemed suddenly quite sickeningly trivial. What on earth had he been doing to forget that horrible business even for an instant? He stood quite still on the crowded pavement, unable, really unable, to buy a paper. But his face was like a piece of iron when he did step forward and hold his penny out. There it was in the Stop Press! "Glove Lane Murder. The jury returned a verdict of Guilty. Sentence of death was passed."

His first sensation was simple irritation. How had they come to commit such an imbecility? Monstrous! The evidence—! Then the futility of even reading the report, of even considering how they had come to record such a verdict struck him with savage suddenness. There it was, and nothing he could do or say would alter it; no condemnation of this idiotic verdict would help reverse it. The situation was desperate, indeed! That five minutes' walk from the Law Courts to his chambers was the longest he had ever taken.

Men of decided character little know beforehand what they will do in certain contingencies. For the imaginations of decided people do not endow mere contingencies with sufficient actuality. Keith had never really settled what he was going to do if this man were condemned. Often in those past weeks he had said to himself: "Of course, if they bring him in guilty, that's another thing!" But, now that they had, he was beset by exactly the same old arguments and feelings, the same instincts of loyalty and protection towards Laurence and himself, intensified by the fearful imminence of the danger. And yet, here was this man about to be hung for a thing he had not done! Nothing could get over that! But then he was such a worthless vagabond, a ghoul who had robbed a dead body. If Larry were condemned in his stead, would there be any less miscarriage of justice? To strangle a brute who had struck you, by the accident of keeping your hands on his throat a few seconds too long, was there any more guilt in that—was there even as much, as in deliberate theft from a dead man? Reverence for order, for justice, and established fact, will, often march shoulder to shoulder with Jesuitry in natures to whom success is vital.

In the narrow stone passage leading to his staircase, a friend had called out: "Bravo, Darrant! That was a squeak! Congratulations!" And with a bitter little smile Keith thought: 'Congratulations! I!'

At the first possible moment he hurried back to the Strand, and hailing a cab, he told the man to put him down at a turning near to Borrow Street.

It was the girl who opened to his knock. Startled, clasping her hands, she looked strange to Keith in her black skirt and blouse of some soft velvety stuff the colour of faded roses. Her round, rather long throat was bare; and Keith noticed fretfully that she wore gold earrings. Her eyes, so pitch dark against her white face, and the short fair hair, which curled into her neck, seemed both to search and to plead.

"My brother?"

"He is not in, sir, yet."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No."

"He is living with you here now?"

"Yes."

"Are you still as fond of him as ever, then?"

With a movement, as though she despaired of words, she clasped her hands over her heart. And he said:

"I see."

He had the same strange feeling as on his first visit to her, and when through the chink in the curtains he had watched her kneeling—of pity mingled with some faint sexual emotion. And crossing to the fire he asked:

"May I wait for him?"

"Oh! Please! Will you sit down?"

But Keith shook his head. And with a catch in her breath, she said:

"You will not take him from me. I should die."

He turned round on her sharply.

"I don't want him taken from you. I want to help you keep him. Are you ready to go away, at any time?"

"Yes. Oh, yes!"

"And he?"

She answered almost in a whisper:

"Yes; but there is that poor man."

"That poor man is a graveyard thief; a hyena; a ghou!—not worth consideration." And the rasp in his own voice surprised him.

"Ah!" she sighed. "But I am sorry for him. Perhaps he was hungry. I have been hungry—you do things then that you would not. And perhaps he has no one to love; if you have no one to love you can be very bad. I think of him often—in prison."

Between his teeth Keith muttered: "And Laurence?"

"We do never speak of it, we are afraid."

"He's not told you, then, about the trial?"

Her eyes dilated.

"The trial! Oh! He was strange last night. This morning, too, he got up early. Is it—is it over?"

"Yes."

"What has come?"

"Guilty."

For a moment Keith thought she was going to faint. She had closed her eyes, and swayed so that he

took a step, and put his hands on her arms.

"Listen!" he said. "Help me; don't let Laurence out of your sight. We must have time. I must see what they intend to do. They can't be going to hang this man. I must have time, I tell you. You must prevent his giving himself up."

She stood, staring in his face, while he still held her arms, gripping into her soft flesh through the velvety sleeves.

"Do you understand?"

"Yes-but if he has already!"

Keith felt the shiver which ran through her. And the thought rushed into his mind: 'My God! Suppose the police come round while I'm here!' If Larry had indeed gone to them! If that Policeman who had seen him here the night after the murder should find him here again just after the verdict! He said almost fiercely:

"Can I trust you not to let Larry out of your sight? Quick! Answer!"

Clasping her hands to her breast, she answered humbly:

"I will try."

"If he hasn't already done this, watch him like a lynx! Don't let him go out without you. I'll come to-morrow morning early. You're a Catholic, aren't you? Swear to me that you won't let him do anything till he's seen me again."

She did not answer, looking past him at the door; and Keith heard a key in the latch. There was Laurence himself, holding in his hand a great bunch of pink lilies and white narcissi. His face was pale and haggard. He said quietly:

"Hallo, Keith!"

The girl's eyes were fastened on Larry's face; and Keith, looking from one to the other, knew that he had never had more need for wariness.

"Have you seen?" he said.

Laurence nodded. His expression, as a rule so tell-tale of his emotions, baffled Keith utterly.

"Well?"

"I've been expecting it."

"The thing can't stand—that's certain. But I must have time to look into the report. I must have time to see what I can do. D'you understand me, Larry—I must have time." He knew he was talking at random. The only thing was to get them away at once out of reach of confession; but he dared not say so.

"Promise me that you'll do nothing, that you won't go out even till I've seen you to-morrow morning."

Again Laurence nodded. And Keith looked at the girl. Would she see that he did not break that promise? Her eyes were still fixed immovably on Larry's face. And with the feeling that he could get no further, Keith turned to go.

"Promise me," he said.

Laurence answered: "I promise."

He was smiling. Keith could make nothing of that smile, nor of the expression in the girl's eyes. And saying: "I have your promise, I rely on it!" he went.

To keep from any woman who loves, knowledge of her lover's mood, is as hard as to keep music from moving the heart. But when that woman has lived in suffering, and for the first time knows the comfort of love, then let the lover try as he may to disguise his heart—no use! Yet by virtue of subtler abnegation she will often succeed in keeping it from him that she knows.

When Keith was gone the girl made no outcry, asked no questions, managed that Larry should not suspect her intuition; all that evening she acted as if she knew of nothing preparing within him, and through him, within herself.

His words, caresses, the very zest with which he helped her to prepare the feast, the flowers he had brought, the wine he made her drink, the avoidance of any word which could spoil their happiness, all—all told her. He was too inexorably gay and loving. Not for her—to whom every word and every kiss had uncannily the desperate value of a last word and kiss—not for her to deprive herself of these by any sign or gesture which might betray her prescience. Poor soul—she took all, and would have taken more, a hundredfold. She did not want to drink the wine he kept tilting into her glass, but, with the acceptance learned by women who have lived her life, she did not refuse. She had never refused him anything. So much had been required of her by the detestable, that anything required by a loved one was but an honour.

Laurence drank deeply; but he had never felt clearer, never seen things more clearly. The wine gave him what he wanted, an edge to these few hours of pleasure, an exaltation of energy. It dulled his sense of pity, too. It was pity he was afraid of—for himself, and for this girl. To make even this tawdry room look beautiful, with firelight and candlelight, dark amber wine in the glasses, tall pink lilies spilling their saffron, exuding their hot perfume he and even himself must look their best. And with a weight as of lead on her heart, she managed that for him, letting him strew her with flowers and crush them together with herself. Not even music was lacking to their feast. Someone was playing a pianola across the street, and the sound, very faint, came stealing when they were silent—swelling, sinking, festive, mournful; having a far-off life of its own, like the flickering fire-flames before which they lay embraced, or the lilies delicate between the candles. Listening to that music, tracing with his finger the tiny veins on her breast, he lay like one recovering from a swoon. No parting. None! But sleep, as the firelight sleeps when flames die; as music sleeps on its deserted strings.

And the girl watched him.

It was nearly ten when he bade her go to bed. And after she had gone obedient into the bedroom, he brought ink and paper down by the fire. The drifter, the unstable, the good-for-nothing—did not falter. He had thought, when it came to the point, he would fail himself; but a sort of rage bore him forward. If he lived on, and confessed, they would shut him up, take from him the one thing he loved, cut him off from her; sand up his only well in the desert. Curse them! And he wrote by firelight which mellowed the white sheets of paper; while, against the dark curtain, the girl, in her nightgown, unconscious of the cold, stood watching.

Men, when they drown, remember their pasts. Like the lost poet he had "gone with the wind." Now it was for him to be true in his fashion. A man may falter for weeks and weeks, consciously, subconsciously, even in his dreams, till there comes that moment when the only thing impossible is to go on faltering. The black cap, the little driven grey man looking up at it with a sort of wonder—faltering had ceased!

He had finished now, and was but staring into the fire.

"No more, no more, the moon is dead,
And all the people in it;
The poppy maidens strew the bed,
We'll come in half a minute."

Why did doggerel start up in the mind like that? Wanda! The weed-flower become so rare he would not be parted from her! The fire, the candles, and the fire—no more the flame and flicker!

And, by the dark curtain, the girl watched.

Keith went, not home, but to his club; and in the room devoted to the reception of guests, empty at this hour, he sat down and read the report of the trial. The fools had made out a case that looked black enough. And for a long time, on the thick soft carpet which let out no sound of footfall, he paced up and down, thinking. He might see the defending counsel, might surely do that as an expert who thought there had been miscarriage of justice. They must appeal; a petition too might be started in the last event. The thing could—must be put right yet, if only Larry and that girl did nothing!

He had no appetite, but the custom of dining is too strong. And while he ate, he glanced with irritation at his fellow-members. They looked so at their ease. Unjust—that this black cloud should hang over one blameless as any of them! Friends, connoisseurs of such things—a judge among them—came specially to his table to express their admiration of his conduct of that will case. Tonight he had real excuse for pride, but he felt none. Yet, in this well-warmed quietly glowing room, filled with decorously eating, decorously talking men, he gained insensibly some comfort. This surely was reality; that shadowy business out there only the drear sound of a wind one must and did keep out—like the poverty and grime which had no real existence for the secure and prosperous. He drank champagne. It helped to fortify reality, to make shadows seem more shadowy. And down in the smoking-room he sat before the fire, in one of those chairs which embalm after-dinner dreams. He grew sleepy there, and at eleven o'clock rose to go home. But when he had once passed down the shallow marble steps, out through the revolving door which let in no draughts, he was visited by fear, as if he had drawn it in with the breath of the January wind. Larry's face; and the girl watching it! Why had she watched like that? Larry's smile; and the flowers in his hand? Buying flowers at such a moment! The girl was his slave—whatever he told her, she would do. But she would never be able to stop him. At this very moment he might be rushing to give himself up!

His hand, thrust deep into the pocket of his fur coat, came in contact suddenly with something cold. The keys Larry had given him all that time ago. There they had lain forgotten ever since. The chance touch decided him. He turned off towards Borrow Street, walking at full speed. He could but go again and see. He would sleep better if he knew that he had left no stone unturned. At the corner of that dismal street he had to wait for solitude before he made for the house which he now loathed with a deadly loathing. He opened the outer door and shut it to behind him. He knocked, but no one came. Perhaps they had gone to bed. Again and again he knocked, then opened the door, stepped in, and closed it carefully. Candles lighted, the fire burning; cushions thrown on the floor in front of it and strewn with flowers! The table, too, covered with flowers and with the remnants of a meal. Through the half-drawn curtain he could see that the inner room was also lighted. Had they gone out, leaving everything like this? Gone out! His heart beat. Bottles! Larry had been drinking!

Had it really come? Must he go back home with this murk on him; knowing that his brother was a confessed and branded murderer? He went quickly, to the half-drawn curtains and looked in. Against the wall he saw a bed, and those two in it. He recoiled in sheer amazement and relief. Asleep with curtains undrawn, lights left on? Asleep through all his knocking! They must both be drunk. The blood rushed up in his neck. Asleep! And rushing forward again, he called out: "Larry!" Then, with a gasp he went towards the bed. "Larry!" No answer! No movement! Seizing his brother's shoulder, he shook it violently. It felt cold. They were lying in each other's arms, breast to breast, lips to lips, their faces white in the light shining above the dressing-table. And such a shudder shook Keith that he had to grasp the brass rail above their heads. Then he bent down, and wetting his finger, placed it close to their joined lips. No two could ever swoon so utterly as that; not even a drunken sleep could be so fast. His wet finger felt not the faintest stir of air, nor was there any movement in the pulses of their hands. No breath! No life! The eyes of the girl were closed. How strangely innocent she looked! Larry's open eyes seemed to be gazing at her shut eyes; but Keith saw that they were sightless. With a sort of sob he drew down the lids. Then, by an impulse that he could never have explained, he laid a hand on his brother's head, and a hand on the girl's fair hair. The clothes had fallen down a little from her bare shoulder; he pulled them up, as if to keep her warm, and caught the glint of metal; a tiny gilt crucifix no longer than a thumbnail, on a thread of steel chain, had slipped down from her breast into the hollow of the arm which lay round Larry's neck. Keith buried it beneath the clothes and noticed an envelope pinned to the coverlet; bending down, he read: "Please give this at once to the police.—LAURENCE DARRANT." He thrust it into his pocket. Like elastic stretched beyond its uttermost, his reason, will, faculties of calculation and resolve snapped to within him. He thought with incredible swiftness: 'I must know nothing of this. I must go!' And, almost before he knew that he had moved, he was out again in the street.

He could never have told of what he thought while he was walking home. He did not really come to himself till he was in his study. There, with a trembling hand, he poured himself out whisky and drank it off. If he had not chanced to go there, the charwoman would have found them when she came in the morning, and given that envelope to the police! He took it out. He had a right—a right to know what was in it! He broke it open.

"I, Laurence Darrant, about to die by my own hand, declare that this is a solemn and true confession. I committed what is known as the Glove Lane Murder on the night of November the 27th last in the following way"—on and on to the last words—"We didn't want to die; but we could not bear separation, and I couldn't face letting an innocent man be hung for me. I do not see any other way. I beg that there may be no postmortem on our bodies. The stuff we have taken is some of that which will be found on the dressing-table. Please bury us together.

"LAURENCE DARRANT. "January the 28th, about ten o'clock p.m."

Full five minutes Keith stood with those sheets of paper in his hand, while the clock ticked, the wind moaned a little in the trees outside, the flames licked the logs with the quiet click and ruffle of their intense far-away life down there on the hearth. Then he roused himself, and sat down to read the whole again.

There it was, just as Larry had told it to him—nothing left out, very clear; even to the addresses of people who could identify the girl as having once been Walenn's wife or mistress. It would convince. Yes! It would convince.

The sheets dropped from his hand. Very slowly he was grasping the appalling fact that on the floor beside his chair lay the life or death of yet another man; that by taking this confession he had taken into his own hands the fate of the vagabond lying under sentence of death; that he could not give him back his life without incurring the smirch of this disgrace, without even endangering himself. If he let this confession reach the authorities, he could never escape the gravest suspicion that he had known of the whole affair during these two months. He would have to attend the inquest, be recognised by that policeman as having come to the archway to see where the body had lain, as having visited the girl the very evening after the murder. Who would believe in the mere coincidence of such visits on the part of the murderer's brother. But apart from that suspicion, the fearful scandal which so sensational an affair must make would mar his career, his life, his young daughter's life! Larry's suicide with this girl would make sensation enough as it was; but nothing to that other. Such a death had its romance; involved him in no way save as a mourner, could perhaps even be hushed up! The other—nothing could hush that up, nothing prevent its ringing to the house-tops. He got up from his chair, and for many minutes roamed the room unable to get his mind to bear on the issue. Images kept starting up before him. The face of the man who handed him wig and gown each morning, puffy and curious, with a leer on it he had never noticed before; his young daughter's lifted eyebrows, mouth drooping, eyes troubled; the tiny gilt crucifix glinting in the hollow of the dead girl's arm; the sightless look in Larry's unclosed eyes; even his own thumb and finger pulling the lids down. And then he saw a street and endless people passing, turning to stare at him. And, stopping in his tramp, he said aloud: "Let them go to hell! Seven days' wonder!" Was he not trustee to that confession! Trustee! After all he had done nothing to be ashamed of, even if he had kept knowledge dark. A brother! Who could blame him? And he picked up those sheets of paper. But, like a great murky hand, the scandal spread itself about him; its coarse malignant voice seemed shouting: "Paiper!... Paiper!... Glove Lane Murder!... Suicide and confession of brother of well-known K.C.... Well-known K.C.'s brother.... Murder and suicide.... Paiper!" Was he to let loose that flood of foulness? Was he, who had done nothing, to smirch his own little daughter's life; to smirch his dead brother, their dead mother—himself, his own valuable, important future? And all for a sewer rat! Let him hang, let the fellow hang if he must! And that was not certain. Appeal! Petition! He might—he should be saved! To have got thus far, and then, by his own action, topple himself down!

With a sudden darting movement he thrust the confession in among the burning coals. And a smile licked at the folds in his dark face, like those flames licking the sheets of paper, till they writhed and blackened. With the toe of his boot he dispersed their scorched and crumbling wafer. Stamp them in! Stamp in that man's life! Burnt! No more doubts, no more of this gnawing fear! Burnt? A man—an innocent-sewer rat! Recoiling from the fire he grasped his forehead. It was burning hot and seemed to be going round.

Well, it was done! Only fools without will or purpose regretted. And suddenly he laughed. So Larry had died for nothing! He had no will, no purpose, and was dead! He and that girl might now have been living, loving each other in the warm night, away at the other end of the world, instead of lying dead in the cold night here! Fools and weaklings regretted, suffered from conscience and remorse. A man trod firmly, held to his purpose, no matter what!

He went to the window and drew back the curtain. What was that? A gibbet in the air, a body hanging? Ah! Only the trees—the dark trees—the winter skeleton trees! Recoiling, he returned to his armchair and sat down before the fire. It had been shining like that, the lamp turned low, his chair drawn up, when Larry came in that afternoon two months ago. Bah! He had never come at all! It was a nightmare. He had been asleep. How his head burned! And leaping up, he looked at the calendar on his bureau. "January the 28th!" No dream! His face hardened and darkened. On! Not like Larry! On! 1914.

A STOIC

I

1

"Aequam memento rebus in arduis
Servare mentem:"—Horace.

In the City of Liverpool, on a January day of 1905, the Board-room of "The Island Navigation Company" rested, as it were, after the labours of the afternoon. The long table was still littered with the ink, pens, blotting-paper, and abandoned documents of six persons—a deserted battlefield of the brain. And, lonely, in his chairman's seat at the top end old Sylvanus Heythorp sat, with closed eyes, still and heavy as an image. One puffy, feeble hand, whose fingers quivered, rested on the arm of his chair; the thick white hair on his massive head glistened in the light from a green-shaded lamp. He was not asleep, for every now and then his sanguine cheeks filled, and a sound, half sigh, half grunt, escaped his thick lips between a white moustache and the tiny tuft of white hairs above his cleft chin. Sunk in the chair, that square thick trunk of a body in short black-braided coat seemed divested of all neck.

Young Gilbert Farney, secretary of "The Island Navigation Company," entering his hushed Board-room, stepped briskly to the table, gathered some papers, and stood looking at his chairman. Not more than thirty-five, with the bright hues of the optimist in his hair, beard, cheeks, and eyes, he had a nose and lips which curled ironically. For, in his view, he was the Company; and its Board did but exist to chequer his importance. Five days in the week for seven hours a day he wrote, and thought, and wove the threads of its business, and this lot came down once a week for two or three hours, and taught their grandmother to suck eggs. But watching that red-cheeked, white-haired, somnolent figure, his smile was not so contemptuous as might have been expected. For after all, the chairman was a wonderful old boy. A man of go and insight could not but respect him. Eighty! Half paralysed, over head and ears in debt, having gone the pace all his life—or so they said!—till at last that mine in Ecuador had done for him—before the secretary's day, of course, but he had heard of it. The old chap had bought it up on spec—"de l'audace, toujours de l'audace," as he was so fond of saying—paid for it half in cash and half in promises, and then—the thing had turned out empty, and left him with L20,000 worth of the old shares unredeemed. The old boy had weathered it out without a bankruptcy so far. Indomitable old buffer; and never fussy like the rest of them! Young Farney, though a secretary, was capable of attachment; and his eyes expressed a pitying affection. The Board meeting had been long and "snadgy"—a final settling of that Pillin business. Rum go the chairman forcing it on them like this! And with quiet satisfaction the secretary thought 'And he never would have got it through if I hadn't made up my mind that it really is good business!' For to expand the company was to expand himself. Still, to buy four ships with the freight market so depressed was a bit startling, and there would be opposition at the general meeting. Never mind! He and the chairman could put it through—put it through. And suddenly he saw the old man looking at him.

Only from those eyes could one appreciate the strength of life yet flowing underground in that well-nigh helpless carcase—deep-coloured little blue wells, tiny, jovial, round windows.

A sigh travelled up through layers of flesh, and he said almost inaudibly:

"Have they come, Mr. Farney?"

"Yes, sir. I've put them in the transfer office; said you'd be with them in a minute; but I wasn't going to wake you."

"Haven't been asleep. Help me up."

Grasping the edge of the table with his trembling hands, the old man pulled, and, with Farney heaving him behind, attained his feet. He stood about five feet ten, and weighed fully fourteen stone; not corpulent, but very thick all through; his round and massive head alone would have outweighed a baby. With eyes shut, he seemed to be trying to get the better of his own weight, then he moved with the slowness of a barnacle towards the door. The secretary, watching him, thought: 'Marvellous old chap! How he gets about by himself is a miracle! And he can't retire, they say—lives on his fees!'

But the chairman was through the green baize door. At his tortoise gait he traversed the inner office, where the youthful clerks suspended their figuring—to grin behind his back—and entered the transfer office, where eight gentlemen were sitting. Seven rose, and one did not. Old Heythorp raised a saluting hand to the level of his chest and moving to an arm-chair, lowered himself into it.

"Well, gentlemen?"

One of the eight gentlemen got up again.

"Mr. Heythorp, we've appointed Mr. Brownbee to voice our views. Mr. Brownbee!" And down he sat.

Mr. Brownbee rose a stoutish man some seventy years of age, with little grey side whiskers, and one of those utterly steady faces only to be seen in England, faces which convey the sense of business from father to son for generations; faces which make wars, and passion, and free thought seem equally incredible; faces which inspire confidence, and awaken in one a desire to get up and leave the room. Mr. Brownbee rose, and said in a suave voice:

"Mr. Heythorp, we here represent about L14,000. When we had the pleasure of meeting you last July, you will recollect that you held out a prospect of some more satisfactory arrangement by Christmas. We are now in January, and I am bound to say we none of us get younger."

From the depths of old Heythorp a preliminary rumble came travelling, reached the surface, and materialised—

"Don't know about you—feel a boy, myself."

The eight gentlemen looked at him. Was he going to try and put them off again? Mr. Brownbee said with unruffled calm:

"I'm sure we're very glad to hear it. But to come to the point. We have felt, Mr. Heythorp, and I'm sure you won't think it unreasonable, that—er—bankruptcy would be the most satisfactory solution. We have waited a long time, and we want to know definitely where we stand; for, to be quite frank, we don't see any prospect of improvement; indeed, we fear the opposite."

"You think I'm going to join the majority."

This plumping out of what was at the back of their minds produced in Mr. Brownbee and his colleagues a sort of chemical disturbance. They coughed, moved their feet, and turned away their eyes, till the one who had not risen, a solicitor named Ventnor, said bluffly:

"Well, put it that way if you like."

Old Heythorp's little deep eyes twinkled.

"My grandfather lived to be a hundred; my father ninety-six—both of them rips. I'm only eighty, gentlemen; blameless life compared with theirs."

"Indeed," Mr. Brownbee said, "we hope you have many years of this life before you."

"More of this than of another." And a silence fell, till old Heythorp added: "You're getting a thousand a year out of my fees. Mistake to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. I'll make it twelve hundred. If you force me to resign my directorships by bankruptcy, you won't get a rap, you know."

Mr. Brownbee cleared his throat:

"We think, Mr. Heythorp, you should make it at least fifteen hundred. In that case we might perhaps consider—"

Old Heythorp shook his head.

"We can hardly accept your assertion that we should get nothing in the event of bankruptcy. We fancy you greatly underrate the possibilities. Fifteen hundred a year is the least you can do for us."

"See you d—d first."

Another silence followed, then Ventnor, the solicitor, said irascibly:

"We know where we are, then."

Brownbee added almost nervously:

"Are we to understand that twelve hundred a year is your—your last word?"

Old Heythorp nodded. "Come again this day month, and I'll see what I can do for you;" and he shut his eyes.

Round Mr. Brownbee six of the gentlemen gathered, speaking in low voices; Mr. Ventnor nursed a leg and glowered at old Heythorp, who sat with his eyes closed. Mr. Brownbee went over and conferred with Mr. Ventnor, then clearing his throat, he said:

"Well, sir, we have considered your proposal; we agree to accept it for the moment. We will come again, as you suggest, in a month's time.

"We hope that you will by then have seen your way to something more substantial, with a view to avoiding what we should all regret, but which I fear will otherwise become inevitable."

Old Heythorp nodded. The eight gentlemen took their hats, and went out one by one, Mr. Brownbee courteously bringing up the rear.

The old man, who could not get up without assistance, stayed musing in his chair. He had diddled 'em for the moment into giving him another month, and when that month was up—he would diddle 'em again! A month ought to make the Pillin business safe, with all that hung on it. That poor funkey chap Joe Pillin! A gurgling chuckle escaped his red lips. What a shadow the fellow had looked, trotting in that evening just a month ago, behind his valet's announcement: "Mr. Pillin, sir."

What a parchenty, precise, thread-paper of a chap, with his bird's claw of a hand, and his muffled-up throat, and his quavery:

"How do you do, Sylvanus? I'm afraid you're not—"

"First rate. Sit down. Have some port."

"Port! I never drink it. Poison to me! Poison!"

"Do you good!"

"Oh! I know, that's what you always say."

You've a monstrous constitution, Sylvanus. If I drank port and smoked cigars and sat up till one o'clock, I should be in my grave to-morrow. I'm not the man I was. The fact is, I've come to see if you can help me. I'm getting old; I'm growing nervous...."

"You always were as chickeny as an old hen, Joe."

"Well, my nature's not like yours. To come to the point, I want to sell my ships and retire. I need rest. Freights are very depressed. I've got my family to think of."

"Crack on, and go broke; buck you up like anything!"

"I'm quite serious, Sylvanus."

"Never knew you anything else, Joe."

A quavering cough, and out it had come:

"Now—in a word—won't your 'Island Navigation Company' buy my ships?"

A pause, a twinkle, a puff of smoke. "Make it worth my while!" He had said it in jest; and then, in a flash, the idea had come to him. Rosamund and her youngsters! What a chance to put something between them and destitution when he had joined the majority! And so he said: "We don't want your silly ships."

That claw of a hand waved in deprecation. "They're very good ships—doing quite well. It's only my wretched health. If I were a strong man I shouldn't dream...."

"What d'you want for 'em?" Good Lord! how he jumped if you asked him a plain question. The chap was as nervous as a guinea-fowl!

"Here are the figures—for the last four years. I think you'll agree that I couldn't ask less than seventy thousand."

Through the smoke of his cigar old Heythorp had digested those figures slowly, Joe Pillin feeling his teeth and sucking lozenges the while; then he said:

"Sixty thousand! And out of that you pay me ten per cent., if I get it through for you. Take it or leave it."

"My dear Sylvanus, that's almost-cynical."

"Too good a price—you'll never get it without me."

"But a—but a commission! You could never disclose it!"

"Arrange that all right. Think it over. Freights'll go lower yet. Have some port."

"No, no! Thank you. No! So you think freights will go lower?"

"Sure of it."

"Well, I'll be going. I'm sure I don't know. It's—it's—I must think."

"Think your hardest."

"Yes, yes. Good-bye. I can't imagine how you still go on smoking those things and drinking port."

"See you in your grave yet, Joe." What a feeble smile the poor fellow had! Laugh-he couldn't! And, alone again, he had browsed, developing the idea which had come to him.

Though, to dwell in the heart of shipping, Sylvanus Heythorp had lived at Liverpool twenty years, he was from the Eastern Counties, of a family so old that it professed to despise the Conquest. Each of its generations occupied nearly twice as long as those of less tenacious men. Traditionally of Danish origin, its men folk had as a rule bright reddish-brown hair, red cheeks, large round heads, excellent teeth and poor morals. They had done their best for the population of any county in which they had settled; their offshoots swarmed. Born in the early twenties of the nineteenth century, Sylvanus Heythorp, after an education broken by escapades both at school and college, had fetched up in that simple London of the late forties, where claret, opera, and eight per cent. for your money ruled a cheery roost. Made partner in his shipping firm well before he was thirty, he had sailed with a wet sheet and a flowing tide; dancers, claret, Cliquot, and piquet; a cab with a tiger; some travel—all that delicious early-Victorian consciousness of nothing save a golden time. It was all so full and mellow that he was forty before he had his only love affair of any depth—with the daughter of one of his own clerks, a liaison so awkward as to necessitate a sedulous concealment. The death of that girl, after three years, leaving him a, natural son, had been the chief, perhaps the only real, sorrow of his life. Five years later he married. What for? God only knew! as he was in the habit of remarking. His wife had been a hard, worldly, well-connected woman, who presented him with two unnatural children, a girl and a boy, and grew harder, more worldly, less handsome, in the process. The migration to Liverpool, which took place when he was sixty and she forty-two, broke what she still had of heart, but she lingered on twelve years, finding solace in bridge, and being haughty towards Liverpool. Old Heythorp saw her to her rest without regret. He had felt no love for her whatever, and practically none for her two children—they were in his view colourless, pragmatical, very unexpected characters. His son Ernest—in the Admiralty—he thought a poor, careful stick. His daughter Adela, an excellent manager, delighting in spiritual conversation and the society of tame men, rarely failed to show him that she considered him a hopeless heathen. They saw as little as need be of each other. She was provided for under that settlement he had made on her mother fifteen years ago, well before the not altogether unexpected crisis in his affairs. Very different was the feeling he had bestowed on that son of his "under the rose." The boy, who had always gone by his mother's name of Larne, had on her death been sent to some relations of hers in Ireland, and there brought up. He had been called to the Dublin bar, and married, young, a girl half Cornish and half Irish; presently, having cost old Heythorp in all a pretty penny, he had died impecunious, leaving his fair Rosamund at thirty with a girl of eight and a boy of five. She had not spent six months of widowhood before coming over from Dublin to claim the old man's guardianship. A remarkably pretty woman, like a full-blown rose, with greenish hazel eyes, she had turned up one morning at the offices of "The Island Navigation Company," accompanied by her two children—for he had never divulged to them his private address. And since then they had always been more or less on his hands, occupying a small house in a suburb of Liverpool. He visited them there, but never asked them to the house in Sefton Park, which was in fact his daughter's; so that his proper family and friends were unaware of their existence.

Rosamund Larne was one of those precarious ladies who make uncertain incomes by writing full-bodied storyettes. In the most dismal circumstances she enjoyed a buoyancy bordering on the indecent; which always amused old Heythorp's cynicism. But of his grandchildren Phyllis and Jock (wild as colts) he had become fond. And this chance of getting six thousand pounds settled on them at a stroke had seemed to him nothing but heaven-sent. As things were, if he "went off"—and, of course, he might at any moment, there wouldn't be a penny for them; for he would "cut up" a good fifteen thousand to the bad. He was now giving them some three hundred a year out of his fees; and dead directors unfortunately earned no fees! Six thousand pounds at four and a half per cent., settled so that their

mother couldn't "blue it," would give them a certain two hundred and fifty pounds a year—better than beggary. And the more he thought the better he liked it, if only that shaky chap, Joe Pillin, didn't shy off when he'd bitten his nails short over it!

Four evenings later, the "shaky chap" had again appeared at his house in Sefton Park.

"I've thought it over, Sylvanus. I don't like it.

"No; but you'll do it."

"It's a sacrifice. Fifty-four thousand for four ships—it means a considerable reduction in my income."

"It means security, my boy."

"Well, there is that; but you know, I really can't be party to a secret commission. If it came out, think of my name and goodness knows what."

"It won't come out."

"Yes, yes, so you say, but—"

"All you've got to do's to execute a settlement on some third parties that I'll name. I'm not going to take a penny of it myself. Get your own lawyer to draw it up and make him trustee. You can sign it when the purchase has gone through. I'll trust you, Joe. What stock have you got that gives four and a half per cent.?"

"Midland"

"That'll do. You needn't sell."

"Yes, but who are these people?"

"Woman and her children I want to do a good turn to." What a face the fellow had made! "Afraid of being connected with a woman, Joe?"

"Yes, you may laugh—I am afraid of being connected with someone else's woman. I don't like it—I don't like it at all. I've not led your life, Sylvanus."

"Lucky for you; you'd have been dead long ago. Tell your lawyer it's an old flame of yours—you old dog!"

"Yes, there it is at once, you see. I might be subject to blackmail."

"Tell him to keep it dark, and just pay over the income, quarterly."

"I don't like it, Sylvanus—I don't like it."

"Then leave it, and be hanged to you. Have a cigar?"

"You know I never smoke. Is there no other way?"

"Yes. Sell stock in London, bank the proceeds there, and bring me six thousand pounds in notes. I'll hold 'em till after the general meeting. If the thing doesn't go through, I'll hand 'em back to you."

"No; I like that even less."

"Rather I trusted you, eh!"

"No, not at all, Sylvanus, not at all. But it's all playing round the law."

"There's no law to prevent you doing what you like with your money. What I do's nothing to you. And mind you, I'm taking nothing from it—not a mag. You assist the widowed and the fatherless—just your line, Joe!"

"What a fellow you are, Sylvanus; you don't seem capable of taking anything seriously."

"Care killed the cat!"

Left alone after this second interview he had thought: "The beggar'll jump."

And the beggar had. That settlement was drawn and only awaited signature. The Board to-day had

decided on the purchase; and all that remained was to get it ratified at the general meeting. Let him but get that over, and this provision for his grandchildren made, and he would snap his fingers at Brownbee and his crew—the canting humbugs! "Hope you have many years of this life before you!" As if they cared for anything but his money—their money rather! And becoming conscious of the length of his reverie, he grasped the arms of his chair, heaved at his own bulk, in an effort to rise, growing redder and redder in face and neck. It was one of the hundred things his doctor had told him not to do for fear of apoplexy, the humbug! Why didn't Farney or one of those young fellows come and help him up? To call out was undignified. But was he to sit there all night? Three times he failed, and after each failure sat motionless again, crimson and exhausted; the fourth time he succeeded, and slowly made for the office. Passing through, he stopped and said in his extinct voice:

"You young gentlemen had forgotten me."

"Mr. Farney said you didn't wish to be disturbed, sir."

"Very good of him. Give me my hat and coat."

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you. What time is it?"

"Six o'clock, sir."

"Tell Mr. Farney to come and see me tomorrow at noon, about my speech for the general meeting."

"Yes, Sir."

"Good-night to you."

"Good-night, Sir."

At his tortoise gait he passed between the office stools to the door, opened it feebly, and slowly vanished.

Shutting the door behind him, a clerk said:

"Poor old chairman! He's on his last!"

Another answered:

"Gosh! He's a tough old hulk. He'll go down fightin'."

2

Issuing from the offices of "The Island Navigation Company," Sylvanus Heythorp moved towards the corner whence he always took tram to Sefton Park. The crowded street had all that prosperous air of catching or missing something which characterises the town where London and New York and Dublin meet. Old Heythorp had to cross to the far side, and he sallied forth without regard to traffic. That snail-like passage had in it a touch of the sublime; the old man seemed saying: "Knock me down and be d—d to you—I'm not going to hurry." His life was saved perhaps ten times a day by the British character at large, compounded of phlegm and a liking to take something under its protection. The tram conductors on that line were especially used to him, never failing to catch him under the arms and heave him like a sack of coals, while with trembling hands he pulled hard at the rail and strap.

"All right, sir?"

"Thank you."

He moved into the body of the tram, where somebody would always get up from kindness and the fear that he might sit down on them; and there he stayed motionless, his little eyes tight closed. With his red face, tuft of white hairs above his square cleft block of shaven chin, and his big high-crowned bowler hat, which yet seemed too petty for his head with its thick hair—he looked like some kind of an idol dug up and decked out in gear a size too small.

One of those voices of young men from public schools and exchanges where things are bought and sold, said:

"How de do, Mr. Heythorp?"

Old Heythorp opened his eyes. That sleek cub, Joe Pillin's son! What a young pup—with his round eyes, and his round cheeks, and his little moustache, his fur coat, his spats, his diamond pin!

"How's your father?" he said.

"Thanks, rather below par, worryin' about his ships. Suppose you haven't any news for him, sir?"

Old Heythorp nodded. The young man was one of his pet abominations, embodying all the complacent, little-headed mediocrity of this new generation; natty fellows all turned out of the same mould, sippers and tasters, chaps without drive or capacity, without even vices; and he did not intend to gratify the cub's curiosity.

"Come to my house," he said; "I'll give you a note for him."

"Tha-anks; I'd like to cheer the old man up."

The old man! Cheeky brat! And closing his eyes he relapsed into immobility. The tram wound and ground its upward way, and he mused. When he was that cub's age—twenty-eight or whatever it might be—he had done most things; been up Vesuvius, driven four-in-hand, lost his last penny on the Derby and won it back on the Oaks, known all the dancers and operatic stars of the day, fought a duel with a Yankee at Dieppe and winged him for saying through his confounded nose that Old England was played out; been a controlling voice already in his shipping firm; drunk five other of the best men in London under the table; broken his neck steeple-chasing; shot a burglar in the legs; been nearly drowned, for a bet; killed snipe in Chelsea; been to Court for his sins; stared a ghost out of countenance; and travelled with a lady of Spain. If this young pup had done the last, it would be all he had; and yet, no doubt, he would call himself a "spark."

The conductor touched his arm.

"Ere you are, sir."

"Thank you."

He lowered himself to the ground, and moved in the bluish darkness towards the gate of his daughter's house. Bob Pillin walked beside him, thinking: 'Poor old josser, he is gettin' a back number!' And he said: "I should have thought you ought to drive, sir. My old guv'nor would knock up at once if he went about at night like this."

The answer rumbled out into the misty air:

"Your father's got no chest; never had."

Bob Pillin gave vent to one of those fat cackles which come so readily from a certain type of man; and old Heythorp thought:

'Laughing at his father! Parrot!'

They had reached the porch.

A woman with dark hair and a thin, straight face and figure was arranging some flowers in the hall. She turned and said:

"You really ought not to be so late, Father! It's wicked at this time of year. Who is it—oh! Mr. Pillin, how do you do? Have you had tea? Won't you come to the drawing-room; or do you want to see my father?"

"Tha-anks! I believe your father—" And he thought: 'By Jove! the old chap is a caution!' For old Heythorp was crossing the hall without having paid the faintest attention to his daughter. Murmuring again:

"Tha-anks awfully; he wants to give me something," he followed. Miss Heythorp was not his style at all; he had a kind of dread of that thin woman who looked as if she could never be unbuttoned. They said she was a great churchgoer and all that sort of thing.

In his sanctum old Heythorp had moved to his writing-table, and was evidently anxious to sit down.

"Shall I give you a hand, sir?"

Receiving a shake of the head, Bob Pillin stood by the fire and watched. The old "sport" liked to paddle his own canoe. Fancy having to lower yourself into a chair like that! When an old Johnny got to

such a state it was really a mercy when he snuffed out, and made way for younger men. How his Companies could go on putting up with such a fossil for chairman was a marvel! The fossil rumbled and said in that almost inaudible voice:

"I suppose you're beginning to look forward to your father's shoes?"

Bob Pillin's mouth opened. The voice went on:

"Dibs and no responsibility. Tell him from me to drink port—add five years to his life."

To this unwarranted attack Bob Pillin made no answer save a laugh; he perceived that a manservant had entered the room.

"A Mrs. Larne, sir. Will you see her?"

At this announcement the old man seemed to try and start; then he nodded, and held out the note he had written. Bob Pillin received it together with the impression of a murmur which sounded like: "Scratch a poll, Poll!" and passing the fine figure of a woman in a fur coat, who seemed to warm the air as she went by, he was in the hall again before he perceived that he had left his hat.

A young and pretty girl was standing on the bearskin before the fire, looking at him with round-eyed innocence. He thought: 'This is better; I mustn't disturb them for my hat'; and approaching the fire, said:

"Jolly cold, isn't it?"

The girl smiled: "Yes-jolly."

He noticed that she had a large bunch of violets at her breast, a lot of fair hair, a short straight nose, and round blue-grey eyes very frank and open. "Er" he said, "I've left my hat in there."

"What larks!" And at her little clear laugh something moved within Bob Pillin.

"You know this house well?"

She shook her head. "But it's rather scrummy, isn't it?"

Bob Pillin, who had never yet thought so answered:

"Quite O.K."

The girl threw up her head to laugh again. "O.K.? What's that?"

Bob Pillin saw her white round throat, and thought: 'She is a ripper!' And he said with a certain desperation:

"My name's Pillin. Yours is Larne, isn't it? Are you a relation here?"

"He's our Guardy. Isn't he a chook?"

That rumbling whisper like "Scratch a Poll, Poll!" recurring to Bob Pillin, he said with reservation:

"You know him better than I do." "Oh! Aren't you his grandson, or something?"

Bob Pillin did not cross himself.

"Lord! No! My dad's an old friend of his; that's all."

"Is your dad like him?"

"Not much."

"What a pity! It would have been lovely if they'd been Tweedles."

Bob Pillin thought: 'This bit is something new. I wonder what her Christian name is.' And he said:

"What did your godfather and godmothers in your baptism—?"

The girl laughed; she seemed to laugh at everything.

"Phyllis."

Could he say: "Is my only joy"? Better keep it! But-for what? He wouldn't see her again if he didn't look out! And he said:

"I live at the last house in the park—the red one. D'you know it? Where do you?"

"Oh! a long way—23, Millicent Villas. It's a poky little house. I hate it. We have awful larks, though."

"Who are we?"

"Mother, and myself, and Jock—he's an awful boy. You can't conceive what an awful boy he is. He's got nearly red hair; I think he'll be just like Guardy when he gets old. He's awful!"

Bob Pillin murmured:

"I should like to see him."

"Would you? I'll ask mother if you can. You won't want to again; he goes off all the time like a squib." She threw back her head, and again Bob Pillin felt a little giddy. He collected himself, and drawled:

"Are you going in to see your Guardy?"

"No. Mother's got something special to say. We've never been here before, you see. Isn't he fun, though?"

"Fun!"

"I think he's the greatest lark; but he's awfully nice to me. Jock calls him the last of the Stoic'uns."

A voice called from old Heythorp's den:

"Phyllis!" It had a particular ring, that voice, as if coming from beautifully formed red lips, of which the lower one must curve the least bit over; it had, too, a caressing vitality, and a kind of warm falsity.

The girl threw a laughing look back over her shoulder, and vanished through the door into the room.

Bob Pillin remained with his back to the fire and his puppy round eyes fixed on the air that her figure had last occupied. He was experiencing a sensation never felt before. Those travels with a lady of Spain, charitably conceded him by old Heythorp, had so far satisfied the emotional side of this young man; they had stopped short at Brighton and Scarborough, and been preserved from even the slightest intrusion of love. A calculated and hygienic career had caused no anxiety either to himself or his father; and this sudden swoop of something more than admiration gave him an uncomfortable choky feeling just above his high round collar, and in the temples a sort of buzzing—those first symptoms of chivalry. A man of the world does not, however, succumb without a struggle; and if his hat had not been out of reach, who knows whether he would not have left the house hurriedly, saying to himself: "No, no, my boy; Millicent Villas is hardly your form, when your intentions are honourable"? For somehow that round and laughing face, bob of glistening hair, those wide-opened grey eyes refused to awaken the beginnings of other intentions—such is the effect of youth and innocence on even the steadiest young men. With a kind of moral stammer, he was thinking: 'Can I—dare I offer to see them to their tram? Couldn't I even nip out and get the car round and send them home in it? No, I might miss them—better stick it out here! What a jolly laugh! What a tipping face—strawberries and cream, hay, and all that! Millicent Villas!' And he wrote it on his cuff.

The door was opening; he heard that warm vibrating voice: "Come along, Phyllis!"—the girl's laugh so high and fresh: "Right-o! Coming!" And with, perhaps, the first real tremor he had ever known, he crossed to the front door. All the more chivalrous to escort them to the tram without a hat! And suddenly he heard: "I've got your hat, young man!" And her mother's voice, warm, and simulating shock: "Phyllis, you awful gairl! Did you ever see such an awful gairl; Mr.—"

"Pillin, Mother."

And then—he did not quite know how—insulated from the January air by laughter and the scent of fur and violets, he was between them walking to their tram. It was like an experience out of the "Arabian Nights," or something of that sort, an intoxication which made one say one was going their way, though one would have to come all the way back in the same beastly tram. Nothing so warming had ever happened to him as sitting between them on that drive, so that he forgot the note in his pocket, and his desire to relieve the anxiety of the "old man," his father. At the tram's terminus they all got out. There issued a purr of invitation to come and see them some time; a clear: "Jock'll love to see you!" A low laugh: "You awful gairl!" And a flash of cunning zigzagged across his brain. Taking off his hat, he said:

"Thanks awfully; rather!" and put his foot back on the step of the tram. Thus did he delicately expose the depths of his chivalry!

"Oh! you said you were going our way! What one-ers you do tell! Oh!" The words were as music; the sight of those eyes growing rounder, the most perfect he had ever seen; and Mrs. Larne's low laugh, so warm yet so preoccupied, and the tips of the girl's fingers waving back above her head. He heaved a sigh, and knew no more till he was seated at his club before a bottle of champagne. Home! Not he! He wished to drink and dream. "The old man" would get his news all right to-morrow!

3

The words: "A Mrs. Larne to see you, sir," had been of a nature to astonish weaker nerves. What had brought her here? She knew she mustn't come! Old Heythorp had watched her entrance with cynical amusement. The way she whiffed herself at that young pup in passing, the way her eyes slid round! He had a very just appreciation of his son's widow; and a smile settled deep between his chin tuft and his moustache. She lifted his hand, kissed it, pressed it to her splendid bust, and said:

"So here I am at last, you see. Aren't you surprised?"

Old Heythorp, shook his head.

"I really had to come and see you, Guardy; we haven't had a sight of you for such an age. And in this awful weather! How are you, dear old Guardy?"

"Never better." And, watching her green-grey eyes, he added:

"Haven't a penny for you!"

Her face did not fall; she gave her feather-laugh.

"How dreadful of you to think I came for that! But I am in an awful fix, Guardy."

"Never knew you not to be."

"Just let me tell you, dear; it'll be some relief. I'm having the most terrible time."

She sank into a low chair, disengaging an overpowering scent of violets, while melancholy struggled to subdue her face and body.

"The most awful fix. I expect to be sold up any moment. We may be on the streets to-morrow. I daren't tell the children; they're so happy, poor darlings. I shall be obliged to take Jock away from school. And Phyllis will have to stop her piano and dancing; it's an absolute crisis. And all due to those Midland Syndicate people. I've been counting on at least two hundred for my new story, and the wretches have refused it."

With a tiny handkerchief she removed one tear from the corner of one eye. "It is hard, Guardy; I worked my brain silly over that story."

From old Heythorp came a mutter which sounded suspiciously like:

"Rats!"

Heaving a sigh, which conveyed nothing but the generosity of her breathing apparatus, Mrs. Larne went on:

"You couldn't, I suppose, let me have just one hundred?"

"Not a bob."

She sighed again, her eyes slid round the room; then in her warm voice she murmured:

"Guardy, you were my dear Philip's father, weren't you? I've never said anything; but of course you were. He was so like you, and so is Jock."

Nothing moved in old Heythorp's face. No pagan image consulted with flowers and song and sacrifice could have returned less answer. Her dear Philip! She had led him the devil of a life, or he was a Dutchman! And what the deuce made her suddenly trot out the skeleton like this? But Mrs. Larne's

eyes were still wandering.

"What a lovely house! You know, I think you ought to help me, Guardy. Just imagine if your grandchildren were thrown out into the street!"

The old man grinned. He was not going to deny his relationship—it was her look-out, not his. But neither was he going to let her rush him.

"And they will be; you couldn't look on and see it. Do come to my rescue this once. You really might do something for them."

With a rumbling sigh he answered:

"Wait. Can't give you a penny now. Poor as a church mouse."

"Oh! Guardy

"Fact."

Mrs. Larne heaved one of her most buoyant sighs. She certainly did not believe him.

"Well!" she said; "you'll be sorry when we come round one night and sing for pennies under your window. Wouldn't you like to see Phyllis? I left her in the hall. She's growing such a sweet gairl. Guardy just fifty!"

"Not a rap."

Mrs. Larne threw up her hands. "Well! You'll repent it. I'm at my last gasp." She sighed profoundly, and the perfume of violets escaped in a cloud; Then, getting up, she went to the door and called: "Phyllis!"

When the girl entered old Heythorp felt the nearest approach to a flutter of the heart for many years. She had put her hair up! She was like a spring day in January; such a relief from that scented humbug, her mother. Pleasant the touch of her lips on his forehead, the sound of her clear voice, the sight of her slim movements, the feeling that she did him credit—clean-run stock, she and that young scamp Jock—better than the holy woman, his daughter Adela, would produce if anyone were ever fool enough to marry her, or that pragmatist fellow, his son Ernest.

And when they were gone he reflected with added zest on the six thousand pounds he was getting for them out of Joe Pillin and his ships. He would have to pitch it strong in his speech at the general meeting. With freights so low, there was bound to be opposition. No dash nowadays; nothing but gabby caution! They were a scrim-shanking lot on the Board—he had had to pull them round one by one—the deuce of a tug getting this thing through! And yet, the business was sound enough. Those ships would earn money, properly handled—good money

His valet, coming in to prepare him for dinner, found him asleep. He had for the old man as much admiration as may be felt for one who cannot put his own trousers on. He would say to the housemaid Molly: "He's a game old blighter—must have been a rare one in his day. Cocks his hat at you, even now, I see!" To which the girl, Irish and pretty, would reply: "Well, an' sure I don't mind, if it gives um a pleasure. 'Tis better anyway than the sad eye I get from herself."

At dinner, old Heythorp always sat at one end of the rosewood table and his daughter at the other. It was the eminent moment of the day. With napkin tucked high into his waistcoat, he gave himself to the meal with passion. His palate was undimmed, his digestion unimpaired. He could still eat as much as two men, and drink more than one. And while he savoured each mouthful he never spoke if he could help it. The holy woman had nothing to say that he cared to hear, and he nothing to say that she cared to listen to. She had a horror, too, of what she called "the pleasures of the table"—those lusts of the flesh! She was always longing to dock his grub, he knew. Would see her further first! What other pleasures were there at his age? Let her wait till she was eighty. But she never would be; too thin and holy!

This evening, however, with the advent of the partridge she did speak.

"Who were your visitors, Father?"

Trust her for nosing anything out! Fixing his little blue eyes on her, he mumbled with a very full mouth: "Ladies."

"So I saw; what ladies?"

He had a longing to say: 'Part of one of my families under the rose.' As a fact it was the best part of the only one, but the temptation to multiply exceedingly was almost overpowering. He checked himself, however, and went on eating partridge, his secret irritation crimsoning his cheeks; and he watched her eyes, those cold precise and round grey eyes, noting it, and knew she was thinking: 'He eats too much.'

She said: "Sorry I'm not considered fit to be told. You ought not to be drinking hock."

Old Heythorp took up the long green glass, drained it, and repressing fumes and emotion went on with his partridge. His daughter pursed her lips, took a sip of water, and said:

"I know their name is Larne, but it conveyed nothing to me; perhaps it's just as well."

The old man, mastering a spasm, said with a grin:

"My daughter-in-law and my granddaughter."

"What! Ernest married—Oh! nonsense!"

He chuckled, and shook his head.

"Then do you mean to say, Father, that you were married before you married my mother?"

"No."

The expression on her face was as good as a play!

She said with a sort of disgust: "Not married! I see. I suppose those people are hanging round your neck, then; no wonder you're always in difficulties. Are there any more of them?"

Again the old man suppressed that spasm, and the veins in his neck and forehead swelled alarmingly. If he had spoken he would infallibly have choked. He ceased eating, and putting his hands on the table tried to raise himself. He could not and subsiding in his chair sat glaring at the stiff, quiet figure of his daughter.

"Don't be silly, Father, and make a scene before Meller. Finish your dinner."

He did not answer. He was not going to sit there to be dragooned and insulted! His helplessness had never so weighed on him before. It was like a revelation. A log—that had to put up with anything! A log! And, waiting for his valet to return, he cunningly took up his fork.

In that saintly voice of hers she said:

"I suppose you don't realise that it's a shock to me. I don't know what Ernest will think—"

"Ernest be d—d."

"I do wish, Father, you wouldn't swear."

Old Heythorp's rage found vent in a sort of rumble. How the devil had he gone on all these years in the same house with that woman, dining with her day after day! But the servant had come back now, and putting down his fork he said:

"Help me up!"

The man paused, thunderstruck, with the soufflé balanced. To leave dinner unfinished—it was a portent!

"Help me up!"

"Mr. Heythorp's not very well, Meller; take his other arm."

The old man shook off her hand.

"I'm very well. Help me up. Dine in my own room in future."

Raised to his feet, he walked slowly out; but in his sanctum he did not sit down, obsessed by this first overwhelming realisation of his helplessness. He stood swaying a little, holding on to the table, till the servant, having finished serving dinner, brought in his port.

"Are you waiting to sit down, sir?"

He shook his head. Hang it, he could do that for himself, anyway. He must think of something to fortify his position against that woman. And he said:

"Send me Molly!"

"Yes, sir." The man put down the port and went.

Old Heythorp filled his glass, drank, and filled again. He took a cigar from the box and lighted it. The girl came in, a grey-eyed, dark-haired damsel, and stood with her hands folded, her head a little to one side, her lips a little parted. The old man said:

"You're a human being."

"I would hope so, sirr."

"I'm going to ask you something as a human being—not a servant—see?"

"No, sirr; but I will be glad to do anything you like."

"Then put your nose in here every now and then, to see if I want anything. Meller goes out sometimes. Don't say anything; Just put your nose in."

"Oh! an' I will; 'tis a pleasure 'twill be to do ut."

He nodded, and when she had gone lowered himself into his chair with a sense of appeasement. Pretty girl! Comfort to see a pretty face—not a pale, pecky thing like Adela's. His anger burned up anew. So she counted on his helplessness, had begun to count on that, had she? She should see that there was life in the old dog yet! And his sacrifice of the uneaten soufflé, the still less eaten mushrooms, the peppermint sweet with which he usually concluded dinner, seemed to consecrate that purpose. They all thought he was a hulk, without a shot left in the locker! He had seen a couple of them at the Board that afternoon shrugging at each other, as though saying: 'Look at him!' And young Farney pitying him. Pity, forsooth! And that coarse-grained solicitor chap at the creditors' meeting curling his lip as much as to say: 'One foot in the grave!' He had seen the clerks dowsing the glim of their grins; and that young pup Bob Pillin screwing up his supercilious mug over his dog-collar. He knew that scented humbug Rosamund was getting scared that he'd drop off before she'd squeezed him dry. And his valet was always looking him up and down queerly. As to that holy woman—! Not quite so fast! Not quite so fast! And filling his glass for the fourth time, he slowly sucked down the dark red fluid, with the "old boots" flavour which his soul loved, and, drawing deep at his cigar, closed his eyes.

II

1

The room in the hotel where the general meetings of "The Island Navigation Company" were held was nearly full when the secretary came through the door which as yet divided the shareholders from their directors. Having surveyed their empty chairs, their ink and papers, and nodded to a shareholder or two, he stood, watch in hand, contemplating the congregation. A thicker attendance than he had ever seen! Due, no doubt, to the lower dividend, and this Pillin business. And his tongue curled. For if he had a natural contempt for his Board, with the exception of the chairman, he had a still more natural contempt for his shareholders. Amusing spectacle when you came to think of it, a general meeting! Unique! Eighty or a hundred men, and five women, assembled through sheer devotion to their money. Was any other function in the world so single-hearted. Church was nothing to it—so many motives were mingled there with devotion to one's soul. A well-educated young man—reader of Anatole France, and other writers—he enjoyed ironic speculation. What earthly good did they think they got by coming here? Half-past two! He put his watch back into his pocket, and passed into the Board-room.

There, the fumes of lunch and of a short preliminary meeting made cosy the February atmosphere. By the fire four directors were conversing rather restlessly; the fifth was combing his beard; the chairman sat with eyes closed and red lips moving rhythmically in the sucking of a lozenge, the slips of his speech ready in his hand. The secretary said in his cheerful voice: "Time, sir."

Old Heythorp swallowed, lifted his arms, rose with help, and walked through to his place at the centre of the table. The five directors followed. And, standing at the chairman's right, the secretary

read the minutes, forming the words precisely with his curling tongue. Then, assisting the chairman to his feet, he watched those rows of faces, and thought: 'Mistake to let them see he can't get up without help. He ought to have let me read his speech—I wrote it.'

The chairman began to speak:

"It is my duty and my pleasure,' ladies and gentlemen, for the nineteenth consecutive year to present to you the directors' report and the accounts for the past twelve months. You will all have had special notice of a measure of policy on which your Board has decided, and to which you will be asked to-day to give your adherence—to that I shall come at the end of my remarks...."

"Excuse me, sir; we can't hear a word down here."

'Ah!' thought the secretary, 'I was expecting that.'

The chairman went on, undisturbed. But several shareholders now rose, and the same speaker said testily: "We might as well go home. If the chairman's got no voice, can't somebody read for him?"

The chairman took a sip of water, and resumed. Almost all in the last six rows were now on their feet, and amid a hubbub of murmurs the chairman held out to the secretary the slips of his speech, and fell heavily back into his chair.

The secretary re-read from the beginning; and as each sentence fell from his tongue, he thought: 'How good that is!' 'That's very clear!' 'A neat touch!' 'This is getting them.' It seemed to him a pity they could not know it was all his composition. When at last he came to the Pillin sale he paused for a second.

"I come now to the measure of policy to which I made allusion at the beginning of my speech. Your Board has decided to expand your enterprise by purchasing the entire fleet of Pillin & Co., Ltd. By this transaction we become the owners of the four steamships Smyrna, Damascus, Tyre, and Sidon, vessels in prime condition with a total freight-carrying capacity of fifteen thousand tons, at the low inclusive price of sixty thousand pounds. Gentlemen, de l'audace, toujours de l'audace!"—it was the chairman's phrase, his bit of the speech, and the secretary did it more than justice. "Times are bad, but your Board is emphatically of the opinion that they are touching bottom; and this, in their view, is the psychological moment for a forward stroke. They confidently recommend your adoption of their policy and the ratification of this purchase, which they believe will, in the not far distant future, substantially increase the profits of the Company." The secretary sat down with reluctance. The speech should have continued with a number of appealing sentences which he had carefully prepared, but the chairman had cut them out with the simple comment: "They ought to be glad of the chance." It was, in his view, an error.

The director who had combed his beard now rose—a man of presence, who might be trusted to say nothing long and suavely. While he was speaking the secretary was busy noting whence opposition was likely to come. The majority were sitting owl-like—a good sign; but some dozen were studying their copies of the report, and three at least were making notes—Westgate, for, instance, who wanted to get on the Board, and was sure to make himself unpleasant—the time-honoured method of vinegar; and Batterson, who also desired to come on, and might be trusted to support the Board—the time-honoured method of oil; while, if one knew anything of human nature, the fellow who had complained that he might as well go home would have something uncomfortable to say. The director finished his remarks, combed his beard with his fingers, and sat down.

A momentary pause ensued. Then Messieurs Westgate and Batterson rose together. Seeing the chairman nod towards the latter, the secretary thought: 'Mistake! He should have humoured Westgate by giving him precedence.' But that was the worst of the old man, he had no notion of the suaviter in modo! Mr. Batterson thus unchained—would like, if he might be so allowed, to congratulate the Board on having piloted their ship so smoothly through the troublous waters of the past year. With their worthy chairman still at the helm, he had no doubt that in spite of the still low—he would not say falling—barometer, and the-er-unseasonable climacteric, they might rely on weathering the—er—he would not say storm. He would confess that the present dividend of four per cent. was not one which satisfied every aspiration (Hear, hear!), but speaking for himself, and he hoped for others—and here Mr. Batterson looked round—he recognised that in all the circumstances it was as much as they had the right—er—to expect. But following the bold but to his mind prudent development which the Board proposed to make, he thought that they might reasonably, if not sanguinely, anticipate a more golden future. ("No, no!") A shareholder said, 'No, no!' That might seem to indicate a certain lack of confidence in the special proposal before the meeting. ("Yes!") From that lack of confidence he would like at once to dissociate himself. Their chairman, a man of foresight and acumen, and valour proved on many a field and—er—sea, would not have committed himself to this policy without good reason. In his opinion they were in safe hands, and he was glad to register his support of the measure proposed. The

chairman had well said in his speech: 'de l'audace,toujours de l'audace!' Shareholders would agree with him that there could be no better motto for Englishmen. Ahem!

Mr. Batterson sat down. And Mr. Westgate rose: He wanted—he said—to know more, much more, about this proposition, which to his mind was of a very dubious wisdom.... 'Ah!' thought the secretary, 'I told the old boy he must tell them more'.... To whom, for instance, had the proposal first been made? To him!—the chairman said. Good! But why were Pillins selling, if freights were to go up, as they were told?

"Matter of opinion."

"Quite so; and in my opinion they are going lower, and Pillins were right to sell. It follows that we are wrong to buy." ("Hear, hear!" "No, no!") "Pillins are shrewd people. What does the chairman say? Nerves! Does he mean to tell us that this sale was the result of nerves?"

The chairman nodded.

"That appears to me a somewhat fantastic theory; but I will leave that and confine myself to asking the grounds on which the chairman bases his confidence; in fact, what it is which is actuating the Board in pressing on us at such a time what I have no hesitation in stigmatising as a rash proposal. In a word, I want light as well as leading in this matter."

Mr. Westgate sat down.

What would the chairman do now? The situation was distinctly awkward—seeing his helplessness and the lukewarmness of the Board behind him. And the secretary felt more strongly than ever the absurdity of his being an underling, he who in a few well-chosen words could so easily have twisted the meeting round his thumb. Suddenly he heard the long, rumbling sigh which precluded the chairman's speeches.

"Has any other gentleman anything to say before I move the adoption of the report?"

Phew! That would put their backs up. Yes, sure enough it had brought that fellow, who had said he might as well go home, to his feet! Now for something nasty!

"Mr. Westgate requires answering. I don't like this business. I don't impute anything to anybody; but it looks to me as if there were something behind it which the shareholders ought to be told. Not only that; but, to speak frankly, I'm not satisfied to be ridden over roughshod in this fashion by one who, whatever he may have been in the past, is obviously not now in the prime of his faculties."

With a gasp the secretary thought: 'I knew that was a plain-spoken man!'

He heard again the rumbling beside him. The chairman had gone crimson, his mouth was pursed, his little eyes were very blue.

"Help me up," he said.

The secretary helped him, and waited, rather breathless.

The chairman took a sip of water, and his voice, unexpectedly loud, broke an ominous hush:

"Never been so insulted in my life. My best services have been at your disposal for nineteen years; you know what measure of success this Company has attained. I am the oldest man here, and my experience of shipping is, I hope, a little greater than that of the two gentlemen who spoke last. I have done my best for you, ladies and gentlemen, and we shall see whether you are going to endorse an indictment of my judgment and of my honour, if I am to take the last speaker seriously. This purchase is for your good. 'There is a tide in the affairs of men'—and I for one am not content, never have been, to stagnate. If that is what you want, however, by all means give your support to these gentlemen and have done with it. I tell you freights will go up before the end of the year; the purchase is a sound one, more than a sound one—I, at any rate, stand or fall by it. Refuse to ratify it, if you like; if you do, I shall resign."

He sank back into his seat. The secretary, stealing a glance, thought with a sort of enthusiasm: 'Bravo! Who'd have thought he could rally his voice like that? A good touch, too, that about his honour! I believe he's knocked them.

It's still dicky, though, if that fellow at the back gets up again; the old chap can't work that stop a second time. 'Ah! here was 'old Apple-pie' on his hind legs. That was all right!

"I do not hesitate to say that I am an old friend of the chairman; we are, many of us, old friends of the

chairman, and it has been painful to me, and I doubt not to others, to hear an attack made on him. If he is old in body, he is young in mental vigour and courage. I wish we were all as young. We ought to stand by him; I say, we ought to stand by him." ("Hear, hear! Hear, hear!") And the secretary thought: 'That's done it!' And he felt a sudden odd emotion, watching the chairman bobbing his body, like a wooden toy, at old Appleby; and old Appleby bobbing back. Then, seeing a shareholder close to the door get up, thought: 'Who's that? I know his face—Ah! yes; Ventnor, the solicitor—he's one of the chairman's creditors that are coming again this afternoon. What now?'

"I can't agree that we ought to let sentiment interfere with our judgment in this matter. The question is simply: How are our pockets going to be affected? I came here with some misgivings, but the attitude of the chairman has been such as to remove them; and I shall support the proposition." The secretary thought: 'That's all right—only, he said it rather queerly—rather queerly.'

Then, after a long silence, the chairman, without rising, said:

"I move the adoption of the report and accounts."

"I second that."

"Those in favour signify the same in the usual way. Contrary? Carried."

The secretary noted the dissentients, six in number, and that Mr. Westgate did not vote.

A quarter of an hour later he stood in the body of the emptying room supplying names to one of the gentlemen of the Press. The passionless fellow said: "Haythorp, with an 'a'; oh! an 'e'; he seems an old man. Thank you. I may have the slips? Would you like to see a proof? With an 'a' you said—oh! an 'e.' Good afternoon!" And the secretary thought: 'Those fellows, what does go on inside them? Fancy not knowing the old chairman by now!'...

2

Back in the proper office of "The Island Navigation Company" old Heythorp sat smoking a cigar and smiling like a purring cat. He was dreaming a little of his triumph, sifting with his old brain, still subtle, the wheat from the chaff of the demurrers: Westgate—nothing in that—professional discontent till they silenced him with a place on the board—but not while he held the reins! That chap at the back—an ill-conditioned fellow! "Something behind!" Suspicious brute! There was something—but—hang it! they might think themselves lucky to get four ships at that price, and all due to him! It was on the last speaker that his mind dwelt with a doubt. That fellow Ventnor, to whom he owed money—there had been something just a little queer about his tone—as much as to say, "I smell a rat." Well! one would see that at the creditors' meeting in half an hour.

"Mr. Pillin, sir."

"Show him in!"

In a fur coat which seemed to extinguish his thin form, Joe Pillin entered. It was snowing, and the cold had nipped and yellowed his meagre face between its slight grey whiskering. He said thinly:

"How are you, Sylvanus? Aren't you perished in this cold?"

"Warm as a toast. Sit down. Take off your coat."

"Oh! I should be lost without it. You must have a fire inside you. So-so it's gone through?"

Old Heythorp nodded; and Joe Pillin, wandering like a spirit, scrutinised the shut door. He came back to the table, and said in a low voice:

"It's a great sacrifice."

Old Heythorp smiled.

"Have you signed the deed poll?"

Producing a parchment from his pocket Joe Pillin unfolded it with caution to disclose his signature, and said:

"I don't like it—it's irrevocable."

A chuckle escaped old Heythorp.

"As death."

Joe Pillin's voice passed up into the treble clef.

"I can't bear irrevocable things. I consider you stampeded me, playing on my nerves."

Examining the signatures old Heythorp murmured:

"Tell your lawyer to lock it up. He must think you a sad dog, Joe."

"Ah! Suppose on my death it comes to the knowledge of my wife!"

"She won't be able to make it hotter for you than you'll be already."

Joe Pillin replaced the deed within his coat, emitting a queer thin noise. He simply could not bear joking on such subjects.

"Well," he said, "you've got your way; you always do. Who is this Mrs. Larne? You oughtn't to keep me in the dark. It seems my boy met her at your house. You told me she didn't come there."

Old Heythorp said with relish:

"Her husband was my son by a woman I was fond of before I married; her children are my grandchildren. You've provided for them. Best thing you ever did."

"I don't know—I don't know. I'm sorry you told me. It makes it all the more doubtful. As soon as the transfer's complete, I shall get away abroad. This cold's killing me. I wish you'd give me your recipe for keeping warm."

"Get a new inside."

Joe Pillin regarded his old friend with a sort of yearning. "And yet," he said, "I suppose, with your full-blooded habit, your life hangs by a thread, doesn't it?"

"A stout one, my boy"

"Well, good-bye, Sylvanus. You're a Job's comforter; I must be getting home." He put on his hat, and, lost in his fur coat, passed out into the corridor. On the stairs he met a man who said:

"How do you do, Mr. Pillin? I know your son. Been' seeing the chairman? I see your sale's gone through all right. I hope that'll do us some good, but I suppose you think the other way?"

Peering at him from under his hat, Joe Pillin said:

"Mr. Ventnor, I think? Thank you! It's very cold, isn't it?" And, with that cautious remark, he passed on down.

Alone again, old Heythorp thought: 'By George! What a wavering, quavering, thread paper of a fellow! What misery life must be to a chap like that! He walks in fear—he wallows in it. Poor devil!' And a curious feeling swelled his heart, of elation, of lightness such as he had not known for years. Those two young things were safe now from penury—safe! After dealing with those infernal creditors of his he would go round and have a look at the children. With a hundred and twenty a year the boy could go into the Army—best place for a young scamp like that. The girl would go off like hot cakes, of course, but she needn't take the first calf that came along. As for their mother, she must look after herself; nothing under two thousand a year would keep her out of debt. But trust her for wheedling and bluffing her way out of any scrape! Watching his cigar-smoke curl and disperse he was conscious of the strain he had been under these last six weeks, aware suddenly of how greatly he had baulked at thought of today's general meeting. Yes! It might have turned out nasty. He knew well enough the forces on the Board, and off, who would be only too glad to shelve him. If he were shelved here his other two Companies would be sure to follow suit, and bang would go every penny of his income—he would be a pauper dependant on that holy woman. Well! Safe now for another year if he could stave off these sharks once more. It might be a harder job this time, but he was in luck—in luck, and it must hold. And taking a luxurious pull at his cigar, he rang the handbell.

"Bring 'em in here, Mr. Farney. And let me have a cup of China tea as strong as you can make it."

"Yes, sir. Will you see the proof of the press report, or will you leave it to me?"

"To you."

"Yes, sir. It was a good meeting, wasn't it?"

Old Heythorp nodded.

"Wonderful how your voice came back just at the right moment. I was afraid things were going to be difficult. The insult did it, I think. It was a monstrous thing to say. I could have punched his head."

Again old Heythorp nodded; and, looking into the secretary's fine blue eyes, he repeated: "Bring 'em in."

The lonely minute before the entrance of his creditors passed in the thought: 'So that's how it struck him! Short shrift I should get if it came out.'

The gentlemen, who numbered ten this time, bowed to their debtor, evidently wondering why the deuce they troubled to be polite to an old man who kept them out of their money. Then, the secretary reappearing with a cup of China tea, they watched while their debtor drank it. The feat was tremulous. Would he get through without spilling it all down his front, or choking? To those unaccustomed to his private life it was slightly miraculous. He put the cup down empty, tremblingly removed some yellow drops from the little white tuft below his lip, refit his cigar, and said:

"No use beating about the bush, gentlemen; I can offer you fourteen hundred a year so long as I live and hold my directorships, and not a penny more. If you can't accept that, you must make me bankrupt and get about sixpence in the pound. My qualifying shares will fetch a couple of thousand at market price. I own nothing else. The house I live in, and everything in it, barring my clothes, my wine, and my cigars, belong to my daughter under a settlement fifteen years old. My solicitors and bankers will give you every information. That's the position in a nutshell."

In spite of business habits the surprise of the ten gentlemen was only partially concealed. A man who owed them so much would naturally say he owned nothing, but would he refer them to his solicitors and bankers unless he were telling the truth? Then Mr. Ventnor said:

"Will you submit your pass books?"

"No, but I'll authorise my bankers to give you a full statement of my receipts for the last five years—longer, if you like."

The strategic stroke of placing the ten gentlemen round the Board table had made it impossible for them to consult freely without being overheard, but the low-voiced transference of thought travelling round was summed up at last by Mr. Brownbee.

"We think, Mr. Heythorp, that your fees and dividends should enable you to set aside for us a larger sum. Sixteen hundred, in fact, is what we think you should give us yearly. Representing, as we do, sixteen thousand pounds, the prospect is not cheering, but we hope you have some good years before you yet. We understand your income to be two thousand pounds."

Old Heythorp shook his head. "Nineteen hundred and thirty pounds in a good year. Must eat and drink; must have a man to look after me not as active as I was. Can't do on less than five hundred pounds. Fourteen hundred's all I can give you, gentlemen; it's an advance of two hundred pounds. That's my last word."

The silence was broken by Mr. Ventnor.

"And it's my last word that I'm not satisfied. If these other gentlemen accept your proposition I shall be forced to consider what I can do on my own account."

The old man stared at him, and answered:

"Oh! you will, sir; we shall see."

The others had risen and were gathered in a knot at the end of the table; old Heythorp and Mr. Ventnor alone remained seated. The old man's lower lip projected till the white hairs below stood out like bristles. 'You ugly dog,' he was thinking, 'you think you've got something up your sleeve. Well, do your worst!' The "ugly dog" rose abruptly and joined the others. And old Heythorp closed his eyes, sitting perfectly still, with his cigar, which had gone out, sticking up between his teeth. Mr. Brownbee turning to voice the decision come to, cleared his throat.

"Mr. Heythorp," he said, "if your bankers and solicitors bear out your statements, we shall accept your offer *faute de mieux*, in consideration of your—" but meeting the old man's eyes, which said so very plainly: "Blow your consideration!" he ended with a stammer: "Perhaps you will kindly furnish us

with the authorisation you spoke of?"

Old Heythorp nodded, and Mr. Brownbee, with a little bow, clasped his hat to his breast and moved towards the door. The nine gentlemen followed. Mr. Ventnor, bringing up the rear, turned and looked back. But the old man's eyes were already closed again.

The moment his creditors were gone, old Heythorp sounded the hand-bell.

"Help me up, Mr. Farney. That Ventnor—what's his holding?"

"Quite small. Only ten shares, I think."

"Ah! What time is it?"

"Quarter to four, sir."

"Get me a taxi."

After visiting his bank and his solicitors he struggled once more into his cab and caused it to be driven towards Millicent Villas. A kind of sleepy triumph permeated his whole being, bumped and shaken by the cab's rapid progress. So! He was free of those sharks now so long as he could hold on to his Companies; and he would still have a hundred a year or more to spare for Rosamund and her youngsters. He could live on four hundred, or even three-fifty, without losing his independence, for there would be no standing life in that holy woman's house unless he could pay his own scot! A good day's work! The best for many a long month!

The cab stopped before the villa.

3

There are rooms which refuse to give away their owners, and rooms which seem to say: 'They really are like this.' Of such was Rosamund Larne's—a sort of permanent confession, seeming to remark to anyone who entered: 'Her taste? Well, you can see—cheerful and exuberant; her habits—yes, she sits here all the morning in a dressing-gown, smoking cigarettes and dropping ink; kindly observe my carpet. Notice the piano—it has a look of coming and going, according to the exchequer. This very deep-cushioned sofa is permanent, however; the water-colours on the walls are safe, too—they're by herself. Mark the scent of mimosa—she likes flowers, and likes them strong. No clock, of course. Examine the bureau—she is obviously always ringing for "the drumstick," and saying: "Where's this, Ellen, and where's that? You naughty gairl, you've been tidying." Cast an eye on that pile of manuscript—she has evidently a genius for composition; it flows off her pen—like Shakespeare, she never blots a line. See how she's had the electric light put in, instead of that horrid gas; but try and turn either of them on—you can't; last quarter isn't paid, of course; and she uses an oil lamp, you can tell that by the ceiling: The dog over there, who will not answer to the name of 'Carmen,' a Pekinese spaniel like a little Djin, all prominent eyes rolling their blacks, and no nose between—yes, Carmen looks as if she didn't know what was coming next; she's right—it's a pet-and-slap-again life! Consider, too, the fittings of the tea-tray, rather soiled, though not quite tin, but I say unto you that no millionaire's in all its glory ever had a liqueur bottle on it.'

When old Heythorp entered this room, which extended from back to front of the little house, preceded by the announcement "Mr. Aesop," it was resonant with a very clatter-bodandigo of noises, from Phyllis playing the Machiche; from the boy Jock on the hearthrug, emitting at short intervals the most piercing notes from an ocarina; from Mrs. Larne on the sofa, talking with her trailing volubility to Bob Pillin; from Bob Pillin muttering: "Ye-es! Qui-ite! Ye-es!" and gazing at Phyllis over his collar. And, on the window-sill, as far as she could get from all this noise, the little dog Carmen was rolling her eyes. At sight of their visitor Jock blew one rending screech, and bolting behind the sofa, placed his chin on its top, so that nothing but his round pink unmoving face was visible; and the dog Carmen tried to climb the blind cord.

Encircled from behind by the arms of Phyllis, and preceded by the gracious perfumed bulk of Mrs. Larne, old Heythorp was escorted to the sofa. It was low, and when he had plumped down into it, the boy Jock emitted a hollow groan. Bob Pillin was the first to break the silence.

"How are you, sir? I hope it's gone through."

Old Heythorp nodded. His eyes were fixed on the liqueur, and Mrs. Larne murmured:

"Guardy, you must try our new liqueur. Jock, you awful boy, get up and bring Guardy a glass."

The boy Jock approached the tea-table, took up a glass, put it to his eye and filled it rapidly.

"You horrible boy, you could see that glass has been used."

In a high round voice rather like an angel's, Jock answered:

"All right, Mother; I'll get rid of it," and rapidly swallowing the yellow liquor, took up another glass.

Mrs. Larne laughed.

"What am I to do with him?"

A loud shriek prevented a response. Phyllis, who had taken her brother by the ear to lead him to the door, let him go to clasp her injured self.

Bob Pillin went hastening towards her; and following the young man with her chin, Mrs. Larne said, smiling:

"Aren't those children awful? He's such a nice fellow. We like him so much, Guardy."

The old man grinned. So she was making up to that young pup! Rosamund Larne, watching him, murmured:

"Oh! Guardy, you're as bad as Jock. He takes after you terribly. Look at the shape of his head. Jock, come here!" The innocent boy approached; with his girlish complexion, his flowery blue eyes, his perfect mouth, he stood before his mother like a large cherub. And suddenly he blew his ocarina in a dreadful manner. Mrs. Larne launched a box at his ears, and receiving the wind of it he fell prone.

"That's the way he behaves. Be off with you, you awful boy. I want to talk to Guardy."

The boy withdrew on his stomach, and sat against the wall cross-legged, fixing his innocent round eyes on old Heythorp. Mrs. Larne sighed.

"Things are worse and worse, Guardy. I'm at my wits' end to tide over this quarter. You wouldn't advance me a hundred on my new story? I'm sure to get two for it in the end."

The old man shook his head.

"I've done something for you and the children," he said. "You'll get notice of it in a day or two; ask no questions."

"Oh! Guardy! Oh! you dear!" And her gaze rested on Bob Pillin, leaning over the piano, where Phyllis again sat.

Old Heythorp snorted. "What are you cultivating that young gaby for? She mustn't be grabbed up by any fool who comes along."

Mrs. Larne murmured at once:

"Of course, the dear gairl is much too young. Phyllis, come and talk to Guardy!"

When the girl was installed beside him on the sofa, and he had felt that little thrill of warmth the proximity of youth can bring, he said:

"Been a good girl?"

She shook her head.

"Can't, when Jock's not at school. Mother can't pay for him this term."

Hearing his name, the boy Jock blew his ocarina till Mrs. Larne drove him from the room, and Phyllis went on:

"He's more awful than anything you can think of. Was my dad at all like him, Guardy? Mother's always so mysterious about him. I suppose you knew him well."

Old Heythorp, incapable of confusion, answered stolidly:

"Not very."

"Who was his father? I don't believe even mother knows."

"Man about town in my day."

"Oh! your day must have been jolly. Did you wear peg-top trousers, and dundreary's?"

Old Heythorp nodded.

"What larks! And I suppose you had lots of adventures with opera dancers and gambling. The young men are all so good now." Her eyes rested on Bob Pillin. "That young man's a perfect stick of goodness."

Old Heythorp grunted.

"You wouldn't know how good he was," Phyllis went on musingly, "unless you'd sat next him in a tunnel. The other day he had his waist squeezed and he simply sat still and did nothing. And then when the tunnel ended, it was Jock after all, not me. His face was—Oh! ah! ha! ha! Ah! ha!" She threw back her head, displaying all her white, round throat. Then edging near, she whispered:

"He likes to pretend, of course, that he's fearfully lively. He's promised to take mother and me to the theatre and supper afterwards. Won't it be scrummy! Only, I haven't anything to go in."

Old Heythorp said: "What do you want? Irish poplin?"

Her mouth opened wide: "Oh! Guardy! Soft white satin!"

"How many yards'll go round you?"

"I should think about twelve. We could make it ourselves. You are a chook!"

A scent of hair, like hay, enveloped him, her lips bobbed against his nose,—and there came a feeling in his heart as when he rolled the first sip of a special wine against his palate. This little house was a rumty-too affair, her mother was a humbug, the boy a cheeky young rascal, but there was a warmth here he never felt in that big house which had been his wife's and was now his holy daughter's. And once more he rejoiced at his day's work, and the success of his breach of trust, which put some little ground beneath these young feet, in a hard and unscrupulous world. Phyllis whispered in his ear:

"Guardy, do look; he will stare at me like that. Isn't it awful—like a boiled rabbit?"

Bob Pillin, attentive to Mrs. Larne, was gazing with all his might over her shoulder at the girl. The young man was moonstruck, that was clear! There was something almost touching in the stare of those puppy dog's eyes. And he thought 'Young beggar—wish I were his age!' The utter injustice of having an old and helpless body, when your desire for enjoyment was as great as ever! They said a man was as old as he felt! Fools! A man was as old as his legs and arms, and not a day younger. He heard the girl beside him utter a discomfortable sound, and saw her face cloud as if tears were not far off; she jumped up, and going to the window, lifted the little dog and buried her face in its brown and white fur. Old Heythorp thought: 'She sees that her humbugging mother is using her as a decoy.' But she had come back, and the little dog, rolling its eyes horribly at the strange figure on the sofa, in a desperate effort to escape succeeded in reaching her shoulder, where it stayed perched like a cat, held by one paw and trying to back away into space. Old Heythorp said abruptly:

"Are you very fond of your mother?"

"Of course I am, Guardy. I adore her."

"H'm! Listen to me. When you come of age or marry, you'll have a hundred and twenty a year of your own that you can't get rid of. Don't ever be persuaded into doing what you don't want. And remember: Your mother's a sieve, no good giving her money; keep what you'll get for yourself—it's only a pittance, and you'll want it all—every penny."

Phyllis's eyes had opened very wide; so that he wondered if she had taken in his words.

"Oh! Isn't money horrible, Guardy?"

"The want of it."

"No, it's beastly altogether. If only we were like birds. Or if one could put out a plate overnight, and have just enough in the morning to use during the day."

Old Heythorp sighed.

"There's only one thing in life that matters—independence. Lose that, and you lose everything. That's the value of money. Help me up."

Phyllis stretched out her hands, and the little dog, running down her back, resumed its perch on the window-sill, close to the blind cord.

Once on his feet, old Heythorp said:

"Give me a kiss. You'll have your satin tomorrow."

Then looking at Bob Pillin, he remarked:

"Going my way? I'll give you a lift."

The young man, giving Phyllis one appealing look, answered dully: "Tha-anks!" and they went out together to the taxi. In that draughtless vehicle they sat, full of who knows what contempt of age for youth; and youth for age; the old man resenting this young pup's aspiration to his granddaughter; the young man annoyed that this old image had dragged him away before he wished to go. Old Heythorp said at last:

"Well?"

Thus expected to say something, Bob Pillin muttered

"Glad your meetin' went off well, sir. You scored a triumph I should think."

"Why?"

"Oh! I don't know. I thought you had a good bit of opposition to contend with."

Old Heythorp looked at him.

"Your grandmother!" he said; then, with his habitual instinct of attack, added: "You make the most of your opportunities, I see."

At this rude assault Bob Pillin's red-cheeked face assumed a certain dignity. "I don't know what you mean, sir. Mrs. Larne is very kind to me."

"No doubt. But don't try to pick the flowers."

Thoroughly upset, Bob Pillin preserved a dogged silence. This fortnight, since he had first met Phyllis in old Heythorp's hall, had been the most singular of his existence up to now. He would never have believed that a fellow could be so quickly and completely bowled, could succumb without a kick, without even wanting to kick. To one with his philosophy of having a good time and never committing himself too far, it was in the nature of "a fair knock-out," and yet so pleasurable, except for the wear and tear about one's chances. If only he knew how far the old boy really counted in the matter! To say: "My intentions are strictly honourable" would be old-fashioned; besides—the old fellow might have no right to hear it. They called him Guardy, but without knowing more he did not want to admit the old curmudgeon's right to interfere.

"Are you a relation of theirs, sir?"

Old Heythorp nodded.

Bob Pillin went on with desperation:

"I should like to know what your objection to me is."

The old man turned his head so far as he was able; a grim smile bristled the hairs about his lips, and twinkled in his eyes. What did he object to? Why—everything! Object to! That sleek head, those puppy-dog eyes, fattish red cheeks, high collars, pearl pin, spats, and drawl-pah! the imbecility, the smugness of his mug; no go, no devil in any of his sort, in any of these fish-veined, coddled-up young bloods, nothing but playing for safety! And he wheezed out:

"Milk and water masquerading as port wine."

Bob Pillin frowned.

It was almost too much for the composure even of a man of the world. That this paralytic old fellow should express contempt for his virility was really the last thing in jests. Luckily he could not take it seriously. But suddenly he thought: 'What if he really has the power to stop my going there, and means

to turn them against me!" And his heart quailed.

"Awfully sorry, sir," he said, "if you don't think I'm wild enough. Anything I can do for you in that line—"

The old man grunted; and realising that he had been quite witty, Bob Pillin went on:

"I know I'm not in debt, no entanglements, got a decent income, pretty good expectations and all that; but I can soon put that all right if I'm not fit without."

It was perhaps his first attempt at irony, and he could not help thinking how good it was.

But old Heythorp preserved a deadly silence. He looked like a stuffed man, a regular Aunt Sally sitting there, with the fixed red in his cheeks, his stivered hair, square block of a body, and no neck that you could see—only wanting the pipe in his mouth! Could there really be danger from such an old idol? The idol spoke:

"I'll give you a word of advice. Don't hang round there, or you'll burn your fingers. Remember me to your father. Good-night!"

The taxi had stopped before the house in Sefton Park. An insensate impulse to remain seated and argue the point fought in Bob Pillin with an impulse to leap out, shake his fist in at the window, and walk off. He merely said, however:

"Thanks for the lift. Good-night!" And, getting out deliberately, he walked off.

Old Heythorp, waiting for the driver to help him up, thought 'Fatter, but no more guts than his father!'

In his sanctum he sank at once into his chair. It was wonderfully still there every day at this hour; just the click of the coals, just the faintest ruffle from the wind in the trees of the park. And it was cosily warm, only the fire lightening the darkness. A drowsy beatitude pervaded the old man. A good day's work! A triumph—that young pup had said. Yes! Something of a triumph! He had held on, and won. And dinner to look forward to, yet. A nap—a nap! And soon, rhythmic, soft, sonorous, his breathing rose, with now and then that pathetic twitching of the old who dream.

III

1

When Bob Pillin emerged from the little front garden of 23, Millicent Villas ten days later, his sentiments were ravelled, and he could not get hold of an end to pull straight the stuff of his mind.

He had found Mrs. Larne and Phyllis in the sitting-room, and Phyllis had been crying; he was sure she had been crying; and that memory still infected the sentiments evoked by later happenings. Old Heythorp had said: "You'll burn your fingers." The process had begun. Having sent her daughter away on a pretext really a bit too thin, Mrs. Larne had installed him beside her scented bulk on the sofa, and poured into his ear such a tale of monetary woe and entanglement, such a mass of present difficulties and rosy prospects, that his brain still whirled, and only one thing emerged clearly—that she wanted fifty pounds, which she would repay him on quarter-day; for their Guardy had made a settlement by which, until the dear children came of age, she would have sixty pounds every quarter. It was only a question of a few weeks; he might ask Messrs. Scriven and Coles; they would tell him the security was quite safe. He certainly might ask Messrs. Scriven and Coles—they happened to be his father's solicitors; but it hardly seemed to touch the point. Bob Pillin had a certain shrewd caution, and the point was whether he was going to begin to lend money to a woman who, he could see, might borrow up to seventy times seven on the strength of his infatuation for her daughter. That was rather too strong! Yet, if he didn't she might take a sudden dislike to him, and where would he be then? Besides, would not a loan make his position stronger? And then—such is the effect of love even on the younger generation—that thought seemed to him unworthy. If he lent at all, it should be from chivalry—ulterior motives might go hang! And the memory of the tear-marks on Phyllis's pretty pale-pink cheeks; and her petulantly mournful: "Oh! young man, isn't money beastly!" scraped his heart, and ravished his judgment. All the same, fifty pounds was fifty pounds, and goodness knew how much more; and what did he know of Mrs.

Larne, after all, except that she was a relative of old Heythorp's and wrote stories—told them too, if he was not mistaken? Perhaps it would be better to see Scrivens'. But again that absurd nobility assaulted him. Phyllis! Phyllis! Besides, were not settlements always drawn so that they refused to form security for anything? Thus, hampered and troubled, he hailed a cab. He was dining with the Ventnors on the Cheshire side, and would be late if he didn't get home sharp to dress.

Driving, white-tied—and waist-coated, in his father's car, he thought with a certain contumely of the younger Ventnor girl, whom he had been wont to consider pretty before he knew Phyllis. And seated next her at dinner, he quite enjoyed his new sense of superiority to her charms, and the ease with which he could chaff and be agreeable. And all the time he suffered from the suppressed longing which scarcely ever left him now, to think and talk of Phyllis. Ventnor's fizz was good and plentiful, his old Madeira absolutely first chop, and the only other man present a teetotal curate, who withdrew with the ladies to talk his parish shop. Favoured by these circumstances, and the perception that Ventnor was an agreeable fellow, Bob Pillin yielded to his secret itch to get near the subject of his affections.

"Do you happen," he said airily, "to know a Mrs. Larne—relative of old Heythorp's—rather a handsome woman—she writes stories."

Mr. Ventnor shook his head. A closer scrutiny than Bob Pillin's would have seen that he also moved his ears.

"Of old Heythorp's? Didn't know he had any, except his daughter, and that son of his in the Admiralty."

Bob Pillin felt the glow of his secret hobby spreading within him.

"She is, though—lives rather out of town; got a son and daughter. I thought you might know her stories—clever woman."

Mr. Ventnor smiled. "Ah!" he said enigmatically, "these lady novelists! Does she make any money by them?"

Bob Pillin knew that to make money by writing meant success, but that not to make money by writing was artistic, and implied that you had private means, which perhaps was even more distinguished. And he said:

"Oh! she has private means, I know."

Mr. Ventnor reached for the Madeira.

"So she's a relative of old Heythorp's," he said. "He's a very old friend of your father's. He ought to go bankrupt, you know."

To Bob Pillin, glowing with passion and Madeira, the idea of bankruptcy seemed discreditable in connection with a relative of Phyllis. Besides, the old boy was far from that! Had he not just made this settlement on Mrs. Larne? And he said:

"I think you're mistaken. That's of the past."

Mr. Ventnor smiled.

"Will you bet?" he said.

Bob Pillin also smiled. "I should be bettin' on a certainty."

Mr. Ventnor passed his hand over his whiskered face. "Don't you believe it; he hasn't a mag to his name. Fill your glass."

Bob Pillin said, with a certain resentment:

"Well, I happen to know he's just made a settlement of five or six thousand pounds. Don't know if you call that being bankrupt."

"What! On this Mrs. Larne?"

Confused, uncertain whether he had said something derogatory or indiscreet, or something which added distinction to Phyllis, Bob Pillin hesitated, then gave a nod.

Mr. Ventnor rose and extended his short legs before the fire.

"No, my boy," he said. "No!"

Unaccustomed to flat contradiction, Bob Pillin reddened.

"I'll bet you a tenner. Ask Scrivens."

Mr. Ventnor ejaculated:

"Scrivens—but they're not—" then, staring rather hard, he added: "I won't bet. You may be right. Scrivens are your father's solicitors too, aren't they? Always been sorry he didn't come to me. Shall we join the ladies?" And to the drawing-room he preceded a young man more uncertain in his mind than on his feet....

Charles Ventnor was not one to let you see that more was going on within than met the eye. But there was a good deal going on that evening, and after his conversation with young Bob he had occasion more than once to turn away and rub his hands together. When, after that second creditors' meeting, he had walked down the stairway which led to the offices of "The Island Navigation Company," he had been deep in thought. Short, squarely built, rather stout, with moustache and large mutton-chop whiskers of a red brown, and a faint floridity in face and dress, he impressed at first sight only by a certain truly British vulgarity. One felt that here was a hail-fellow—well-met man who liked lunch and dinner, went to Scarborough for his summer holidays, sat on his wife, took his daughters out in a boat and was never sick. One felt that he went to church every Sunday morning, looked upwards as he moved through life, disliked the unsuccessful, and expanded with his second glass of wine. But then a clear look into his well-clothed face and red-brown eyes would give the feeling: 'There's something fulvous here; he might be a bit too foxy.' A third look brought the thought: 'He's certainly a bully.' He was not a large creditor of old Heythorp. With interest on the original, he calculated his claim at three hundred pounds—unredeemed shares in that old Ecuador mine. But he had waited for his money eight years, and could never imagine how it came about that he had been induced to wait so long. There had been, of course, for one who liked "big pots," a certain glamour about the personality of old Heythorp, still a bit of a swell in shipping circles, and a bit of an aristocrat in Liverpool. But during the last year Charles Ventnor had realised that the old chap's star had definitely set—when that happens, of course, there is no more glamour, and the time has come to get your money. Weakness in oneself and others is despicable! Besides, he had food for thought, and descending the stairs he chewed it: He smelt a rat—creatures for which both by nature and profession he had a nose. Through Bob Pillin, on whom he sometimes dwelt in connection with his younger daughter, he knew that old Pillin and old Heythorp had been friends for thirty years and more. That, to an astute mind, suggested something behind this sale. The thought had already occurred to him when he read his copy of the report. A commission would be a breach of trust, of course, but there were ways of doing things; the old chap was devilish hard pressed, and human nature was human nature! His lawyerish mind habitually put two and two together. The old fellow had deliberately appointed to meet his creditors again just after the general meeting which would decide the purchase—had said he might do something for them then. Had that no significance?

In these circumstances Charles Ventnor had come to the meeting with eyes wide open and mouth tight closed. And he had watched. It was certainly remarkable that such an old and feeble man, with no neck at all, who looked indeed as if he might go off with apoplexy any moment, should actually say that he "stood or fell" by this purchase, knowing that if he fell he would be a beggar. Why should the old chap be so keen on getting it through? It would do him personally no good, unless—Exactly! He had left the meeting, therefore, secretly confident that old Heythorp had got something out of this transaction which would enable him to make a substantial proposal to his creditors. So that when the old man had declared that he was going to make none, something had turned sour in his heart, and he had said to himself: "All right, you old rascal! You don't know C. V." The cavalier manner of that beggarly old rip, the defiant look of his deep little eyes, had put a polish on the rancour of one who prided himself on letting no man get the better of him. All that evening, seated on one side of the fire, while Mrs. Ventnor sat on the other, and the younger daughter played Gounod's Serenade on the violin—he cogitated. And now and again he smiled, but not too much. He did not see his way as yet, but had little doubt that before long he would. It would not be hard to knock that chipped old idol off his perch. There was already a healthy feeling among the shareholders that he was past work and should be scrapped. The old chap should find that Charles V. was not to be defied; that when he got his teeth into a thing, he did not let it go. By hook or crook he would have the old man off his Boards, or his debt out of him as the price of leaving him alone. His life or his money—and the old fellow should determine which. With the memory of that defiance fresh within him, he almost hoped it might come to be the first, and turning to Mrs. Ventnor, he said abruptly:

"Have a little dinner Friday week, and ask young Pillin and the curate." He specified the curate, a tee-totaller, because he had two daughters, and males and females must be paired, but he intended to pack him off after dinner to the drawing-room to discuss parish matters while he and Bob Pillin sat over their wine. What he expected to get out of the young man he did not as yet know.

On the day of the dinner, before departing for the office, he had gone to his cellar. Would three bottles of Perrier Jouet do the trick, or must he add one of the old Madeira? He decided to be on the safe side. A bottle or so of champagne went very little way with him personally, and young Pillin might be another.

The Madeira having done its work by turning the conversation into such an admirable channel, he had cut it short for fear young Pillin might drink the lot or get wind of the rat. And when his guests were gone, and his family had retired, he stood staring into the fire, putting together the pieces of the puzzle. Five or six thousand pounds—six would be ten per cent. on sixty! Exactly! Scrivens—young Pillin had said! But Crow & Donkin, not Scriven & Coles, were old Heythorp's solicitors. What could that mean, save that the old man wanted to cover the tracks of a secret commission, and had handled the matter through solicitors who did not know the state of his affairs! But why Pillin's solicitors? With this sale just going through, it must look deuced fishy to them too. Was it all a mare's nest, after all? In such circumstances he himself would have taken the matter to a London firm who knew nothing of anybody. Puzzled, therefore, and rather disheartened, feeling too that touch of liver which was wont to follow his old Madeira, he went up to bed and woke his wife to ask her why the dickens they couldn't always have soup like that!

Next day he continued to brood over his puzzle, and no fresh light came; but having a matter on which his firm and Scrivens' were in touch, he decided to go over in person, and see if he could surprise something out of them. Feeling, from experience, that any really delicate matter would only be entrusted to the most responsible member of the firm, he had asked to see Scriven himself, and just as he had taken his hat to go, he said casually:

"By the way, you do some business for old Mr. Heythorp, don't you?"

Scriven, raising his eyebrows a little, murmured: "Er—no," in exactly the tone Mr. Ventnor himself used when he wished to imply that though he didn't as a fact do business, he probably soon would. He knew therefore that the answer was a true one. And non-plussed, he hazarded:

"Oh! I thought you did, in regard to a Mrs. Larne."

This time he had certainly drawn blood of sorts, for down came Scriven's eyebrows, and he said:

"Mrs. Larne—we know a Mrs. Larne, but not in that connection. Why?"

"Oh! Young Pillin told me—"

"Young Pillin? Why, it's his—!" A little pause, and then: "Old Mr. Heythorp's solicitors are Crow & Donkin, I believe."

Mr. Ventnor held out his hand. "Yes, yes," he said; "goodbye. Glad to have got that matter settled up," and out he went, and down the street, important, smiling. By George! He had got it! "It's his father"—Scriven had been going to say. What a plant! Exactly! Oh! neat! Old Pillin had made the settlement direct; and the solicitors were in the dark; that disposed of his difficulty about them. No money had passed between old Pillin and old Heythorp not a penny. Oh! neat! But not neat enough for Charles Ventnor, who had that nose for rats. Then his smile died, and with a little chill he perceived that it was all based on supposition—not quite good enough to go on! What then? Somehow he must see this Mrs. Larne, or better—old Pillin himself. The point to ascertain was whether she had any connection of her own with Pillin. Clearly young Pillin didn't know of it; for, according to him, old Heythorp had made the settlement. By Jove! That old rascal was deep—all the more satisfaction in proving that he was not as deep as C. V. To unmask the old cheat was already beginning to seem in the nature of a public service. But on what pretext could he visit Pillin? A subscription to the Windeatt almshouses! That would make him talk in self-defence and he would take care not to press the request to the actual point of getting a subscription. He caused himself to be driven to the Pillin residence in Sefton Park. Ushered into a room on the ground floor, heated in American fashion, Mr. Ventnor unbuttoned his coat. A man of sanguine constitution, he found this hot-house atmosphere a little trying. And having sympathetically obtained Joe Pillin's reluctant refusal—Quite so! One could not indefinitely extend one's subscriptions even for the best of causes!—he said gently:

"By the way, you know Mrs. Larne, don't you?"

The effect of that simple shot surpassed his highest hopes. Joe Pillin's face, never highly coloured, turned a sort of grey; he opened his thin lips, shut them quickly, as birds do, and something seemed to pass with difficulty down his scraggy throat. The hollows, which nerve exhaustion delves in the cheeks of men whose cheekbones are not high, increased alarmingly. For a moment he looked deathly; then, moistening his lips, he said:

"Larne—Larne? No, I don't seem—"

Mr. Ventnor, who had taken care to be drawing on his gloves, murmured:

"Oh! I thought—your son knows her; a relation of old Heythorp's," and he looked up.

Joe Pillin had his handkerchief to his mouth; he coughed feebly, then with more and more vigour:

"I'm in very poor health," he said, at last. "I'm getting abroad at once. This cold's killing me. What name did you say?" And he remained with his handkerchief against his teeth.

Mr. Ventnor repeated:

"Larne. Writes stories."

Joe Pillin muttered into his handkerchief

"Ali! H'm! No—I—no! My son knows all sorts of people. I shall have to try Mentone. Are you going? Good-bye! Good-bye! I'm sorry; ah! ha! My cough—ah! ha h'h'm! Very distressing. Ye-hes! My cough—ah! ha h'h'm! Most distressing. Ye-hes!"

Out in the drive Mr. Ventnor took a deep breath of the frosty air. Not much doubt now! The two names had worked like charms. This weakly old fellow would make a pretty witness, would simply crumple under cross-examination. What a contrast to that hoary old sinner Heythorp, whose brazenness nothing could affect. The rat was as large as life! And the only point was how to make the best use of it. Then—for his experience was wide—the possibility dawned on him, that after all, this Mrs. Larne might only have been old Pillin's mistress—or be his natural daughter, or have some other blackmailing hold on him. Any such connection would account for his agitation, for his denying her, for his son's ignorance. Only it wouldn't account for young Pillin's saying that old Heythorp had made the settlement. He could only have got that from the woman herself. Still, to make absolutely sure, he had better try and see her. But how? It would never do to ask Bob Pillin for an introduction, after this interview with his father. He would have to go on his own and chance it. Wrote stories did she? Perhaps a newspaper would know her address; or the Directory would give it—not a common name! And, hot on the scent, he drove to a post office. Yes, there it was, right enough! "Larne, Mrs. R., 23, Millicent Villas." And thinking to himself: 'No time like the present,' he turned in that direction. The job was delicate. He must be careful not to do anything which might compromise his power of making public use of his knowledge. Yes-ticklish! What he did now must have a proper legal bottom. Still, anyway you looked at it, he had a right to investigate a fraud on himself as a shareholder of "The Island Navigation Company," and a fraud on himself as a creditor of old Heythorp. Quite! But suppose this Mrs. Larne was really entangled with old Pillin, and the settlement a mere reward of virtue, easy or otherwise. Well! in that case there'd be no secret commission to make public, and he needn't go further. So that, in either event, he would be all right. Only—how to introduce himself? He might pretend he was a newspaper man wanting a story. No, that wouldn't do! He must not represent that he was what he was not, in case he had afterwards to justify his actions publicly, always a difficult thing, if you were not careful! At that moment there came into his mind a question Bob Pillin had asked the other night. "By the way, you can't borrow on a settlement, can you? Isn't there generally some clause against it?" Had this woman been trying to borrow from him on that settlement? But at this moment he reached the house, and got out of his cab still undecided as to how he was going to work the oracle. Impudence, constitutional and professional, sustained him in saying to the little maid:

"Mrs. Larne at home? Say Mr. Charles Ventnor, will you?"

His quick brown eyes took in the apparel of the passage which served for hall—the deep blue paper on the walls, lilac-patterned curtains over the doors, the well-known print of a nude young woman looking over her shoulder, and he thought: 'H'm! Distinctly tasty!' They noted, too, a small brown-and-white dog cowering in terror at the very end of the passage, and he murmured affably: "Fluffy! Come here, Fluffy!" till Carmen's teeth chattered in her head.

"Will you come in, sir?"

Mr. Ventnor ran his hand over his whiskers, and, entering a room, was impressed at once by its air of domesticity. On a sofa a handsome woman and a pretty young girl were surrounded by sewing apparatus and some white material. The girl looked up, but the elder lady rose.

Mr. Ventnor said easily

"You know my young friend, Mr. Robert Pillin, I think."

The lady, whose bulk and bloom struck him to the point of admiration, murmured in a full, sweet

drawl:

"Oh! Ye-es. Are you from Messrs. Scrivens?"

With the swift reflection: 'As I thought!' Mr. Ventnor answered:

"Er—not exactly. I am a solicitor though; came just to ask about a certain settlement that Mr. Pillin tells me you're entitled under."

"Phyllis dear!"

Seeing the girl about to rise from underneath the white stuff, Mr. Ventnor said quickly:

"Pray don't disturb yourself—just a formality!" It had struck him at once that the lady would have to speak the truth in the presence of this third party, and he went on: "Quite recent, I think. This'll be your first interest-on six thousand pounds? Is that right?" And at the limpid assent of that rich, sweet voice, he thought: 'Fine woman; what eyes!'

"Thank you; that's quite enough. I can go to Scrivens for any detail. Nice young fellow, Bob Pillin, isn't he?" He saw the girl's chin tilt, and Mrs. Larne's full mouth curling in a smile.

"Delightful young man; we're very fond of him."

And he proceeded:

"I'm quite an old friend of his; have you known him long?"

"Oh! no. How long, Phyllis, since we met him at Guardy's? About a month. But he's so unaffected—quite at home with us. A nice fellow."

Mr. Ventnor murmured:

"Very different from his father, isn't he?"

"Is he? We don't know his father; he's a shipowner, I think."

Mr. Ventnor rubbed his hands: "Ye-es," he said, "just giving up—a warm man. Young Pillin's a lucky fellow—only son. So you met him at old Mr. Heythorp's. I know him too—relation of yours, I believe."

"Our dear Guardy such a wonderful man."

Mr. Ventnor echoed: "Wonderful—regular old Roman."

"Oh! but he's so kind!" Mrs. Larne lifted the white stuff: "Look what he's given this naughty gairl!"

Mr. Ventnor murmured: "Charming! Charming! Bob Pillin said, I think, that Mr. Heythorp was your settlor."

One of those little clouds which visit the brows of women who have owed money in their time passed swiftly athwart Mrs. Larne's eyes. For a moment they seemed saying: 'Don't you want to know too much?' Then they slid from under it.

"Won't you sit down?" she said. "You must forgive our being at work."

Mr. Ventnor, who had need of sorting his impressions, shook his head.

"Thank you; I must be getting on. Then Messrs. Scriven can—a mere formality! Goodbye! Good-bye, Miss Larne. I'm sure the dress will be most becoming."

And with memories of a too clear look from the girl's eyes, of a warm firm pressure from the woman's hand, Mr. Ventnor backed towards the door and passed away just in time to avoid hearing in two voices:

"What a nice lawyer!"

"What a horrid man!"

Back in his cab, he continued to rub his hands. No, she didn't know old Pillin! That was certain; not from her words, but from her face. She wanted to know him, or about him, anyway. She was trying to hook young Bob for that sprig of a girl—it was clear as mud. H'm! it would astonish his young friend to hear that he had called. Well, let it! And a curious mixture of emotions beset Mr. Ventnor. He saw the

whole thing now so plainly, and really could not refrain from a certain admiration. The law had been properly diddled! There was nothing to prevent a man from settling money on a woman he had never seen; and so old Pillin's settlement could probably not be upset. But old Heythorp could. It was neat, though, oh! neat! And that was a fine woman—remarkably! He had a sort of feeling that if only the settlement had been in danger, it might have been worth while to have made a bargain—a woman like that could have made it worth while! And he believed her quite capable of entertaining the proposition! Her eye! Pity—quite a pity! Mrs. Ventnor was not a wife who satisfied every aspiration. But alas! the settlement was safe. This baulking of the sentiment of love, whipped up, if anything, the longing for justice in Mr. Ventnor. That old chap should feel his teeth now. As a piece of investigation it was not so bad—not so bad at all! He had had a bit of luck, of course,—no, not luck—just that knack of doing the right thing at the right moment which marks a real genius for affairs.

But getting into his train to return to Mrs. Ventnor, he thought: 'A woman like that would have been —!' And he sighed.

2

With a neatly written cheque for fifty pounds in his pocket Bob Pillin turned in at 23, Millicent Villas on the afternoon after Mr. Ventnor's visit. Chivalry had won the day. And he rang the bell with an elation which astonished him, for he knew he was doing a soft thing.

"Mrs. Larne is out, sir; Miss Phyllis is at home."

His heart leaped.

"Oh-h! I'm sorry. I wonder if she'd see me?"

The little maid answered

"I think she's been washin' 'er'air, sir, but it may be dry be now. I'll see."

Bob Pillin stood stock still beneath the young woman on the wall. He could scarcely breathe. If her hair were not dry—how awful! Suddenly he heard floating down a clear but smothered "Oh! Gefoozleme!" and other words which he could not catch. The little maid came running down.

"Miss Phyllis says, sir, she'll be with you in a jiffy. And I was to tell you that Master Jock is loose, sir."

Bob Pillin answered "Tha-anks," and passed into the drawing-room. He went to the bureau, took an envelope, enclosed the cheque, and addressing it: "Mrs. Larne," replaced it in his pocket. Then he crossed over to the mirror. Never till this last month had he really doubted his own face; but now he wanted for it things he had never wanted. It had too much flesh and colour. It did not reflect his passion. This was a handicap. With a narrow white piping round his waistcoat opening, and a buttonhole of tuberose, he had tried to repair its deficiencies. But do what he would, he was never easy about himself nowadays, never up to that pitch which could make him confident in her presence. And until this month to lack confidence had never been his wont. A clear, high, mocking voice said:

"Oh-h! Conceited young man!"

And spinning round he saw Phyllis in the doorway. Her light brown hair was fluffed out on her shoulders, so that he felt a kind of fainting-sweet sensation, and murmured inarticulately:

"Oh! I say—how jolly!"

"Lawks! It's awful! Have you come to see mother?"

Balanced between fear and daring, conscious of a scent of hay and verbena and camomile, Bob Pillin stammered:

"Ye-es. I—I'm glad she's not in, though."

Her laugh seemed to him terribly unfeeling.

"Oh! oh! Don't be foolish. Sit down. Isn't washing one's head awful?"

Bob Pillin answered feebly:

"Of course, I haven't much experience."

Her mouth opened.

"Oh! You are—aren't you?"

And he thought desperately: 'Dare I—oughtn't I—couldn't I somehow take her hand or put my arm round her, or something?' Instead, he sat very rigid at his end of the sofa, while she sat lax and lissom at the other, and one of those crises of paralysis which beset would-be lovers fixed him to the soul.

Sometimes during this last month memories of a past existence, when chaff and even kisses came readily to the lips, and girls were fair game, would make him think: 'Is she really such an innocent? Doesn't she really want me to kiss her?' Alas! such intrusions lasted but a moment before a blast of awe and chivalry withered them, and a strange and tragic delicacy—like nothing he had ever known—resumed its sway. And suddenly he heard her say:

"Why do you know such awful men?"

"What? I don't know any awful men."

"Oh yes, you do; one came here yesterday; he had whiskers, and he was awful."

"Whiskers?" His soul revolted in disclaimer. "I believe I only know one man with whiskers—a lawyer."

"Yes—that was him; a perfectly horrid man. Mother didn't mind him, but I thought he was a beast."

"Ventnor! Came here? How d'you mean?"

"He did; about some business of yours, too." Her face had clouded over. Bob Pillin had of late been harassed by the still-born beginning of a poem:

"I rode upon my way and saw
A maid who watched me from the door."

It never grew longer, and was prompted by the feeling that her face was like an April day. The cloud which came on it now was like an April cloud, as if a bright shower of rain must follow. Brushing aside the two distressful lines, he said:

"Look here, Miss Larne—Phyllis—look here!"

"All right, I'm looking!"

"What does it mean—how did he come? What did he say?"

She shook her head, and her hair quivered; the scent of camomile, verbena, hay was wafted; then looking at her lap, she muttered:

"I wish you wouldn't—I wish mother wouldn't—I hate it. Oh! Money! Beastly—beastly!" and a tearful sigh shivered itself into Bob Pillin's reddening ears.

"I say—don't! And do tell me, because—"

"Oh! you know."

"I don't—I don't know anything at all. I never—"

Phyllis looked up at him. "Don't tell fibs; you know mother's borrowing money from you, and it's hateful!"

A desire to lie roundly, a sense of the cheque in his pocket, a feeling of injustice, the emotion of pity, and a confused and black astonishment about Ventnor, caused Bob Pillin to stammer:

"Well, I'm d—d!" and to miss the look which Phyllis gave him through her lashes—a look saying:

"Ah! that's better!"

"I am d—d! Look here! D'you mean to say that Ventnor came here about my lending money? I never said a word to him—"

"There you see—you are lending!"

He clutched his hair.

"We've got to have this out," he added.

"Not by the roots! Oh! you do look funny. I've never seen you with your hair untidy. Oh! oh!"

Bob Pillin rose and paced the room. In the midst of his emotion he could not help seeing himself sidelong in the mirror; and on pretext of holding his head in both his hands, tried earnestly to restore his hair. Then coming to a halt he said:

"Suppose I am lending money to your mother, what does it matter? It's only till quarter-day. Anybody might want money."

Phyllis did not raise her face.

"Why are you lending it?"

"Because—because—why shouldn't I?" and diving suddenly, he seized her hands.

She wrenched them free; and with the emotion of despair, Bob Pillin took out the envelope.

"If you like," he said, "I'll tear this up. I don't want to lend it, if you don't want me to; but I thought—I thought—" It was for her alone he had been going to lend this money!

Phyllis murmured through her hair:

"Yes! You thought that I—that's what's so hateful!"

Apprehension pierced his mind.

"Oh! I never—I swear I never—"

"Yes, you did; you thought I wanted you to lend it."

She jumped up, and brushed past him into the window.

So she thought she was being used as a decoy! That was awful—especially since it was true. He knew well enough that Mrs. Larne was working his admiration for her daughter for all that it was worth. And he said with simple fervour:

"What rot!" It produced no effect, and at his wits' end, he almost shouted: "Look, Phyllis! If you don't want me to—here goes!" Phyllis turned. Tearing the envelope across he threw the bits into the fire. "There it is," he said.

Her eyes grew round; she said in an awed voice: "Oh!"

In a sort of agony of honesty he said:

"It was only a cheque. Now you've got your way."

Staring at the fire she answered slowly:

"I expect you'd better go before mother comes."

Bob Pillin's mouth fell afar; he secretly agreed, but the idea of sacrificing a moment alone with her was intolerable, and he said hardily:

"No, I shall stick it!"

Phyllis sneezed.

"My hair isn't a bit dry," and she sat down on the fender with her back to the fire.

A certain spirituality had come into Bob Pillin's face. If only he could get that wheeze off: "Phyllis is my only joy!" or even: "Phyllis—do you—won't you—mayn't I?" But nothing came—nothing.

And suddenly she said:

"Oh! don't breathe so loud; it's awful!"

"Breathe? I wasn't!"

"You were; just like Carmen when she's dreaming."

He had walked three steps towards the door, before he thought: 'What does it matter? I can stand

anything from her; and walked the three steps back again.

She said softly:

"Poor young man!"

He answered gloomily:

"I suppose you realise that this may be the last time you'll see me?"

"Why? I thought you were going to take us to the theatre."

"I don't know whether your mother will—after—"

Phyllis gave a little clear laugh.

"You don't know mother. Nothing makes any difference to her."

And Bob Pillin muttered:

"I see." He did not, but it was of no consequence. Then the thought of Ventnor again ousted all others. What on earth—how on earth! He searched his mind for what he could possibly have said the other night. Surely he had not asked him to do anything; certainly not given him their address. There was something very odd about it that had jolly well got to be cleared up! And he said:

"Are you sure the name of that Johnny who came here yesterday was Ventnor?"

Phyllis nodded.

"And he was short, and had whiskers?"

"Yes; red, and red eyes."

He murmured reluctantly:

"It must be him. Jolly good cheek; I simply can't understand. I shall go and see him. How on earth did he know your address?"

"I expect you gave it him."

"I did not. I won't have you thinking me a squirt."

Phyllis jumped up. "Oh! Lawks! Here's mother!" Mrs. Larne was coming up the garden. Bob Pillin made for the door. "Good-bye," he said; "I'm going." But Mrs. Larne was already in the hall. Enveloping him in fur and her rich personality, she drew him with her into the drawing-room, where the back window was open and Phyllis gone.

"I hope," she said, "those naughty children have been making you comfortable. That nice lawyer of yours came yesterday. He seemed quite satisfied."

Very red above his collar, Bob Pillin stammered:

"I never told him to; he isn't my lawyer. I don't know what it means."

Mrs. Larne smiled. "My dear boy, it's all right. You needn't be so squeamish. I want it to be quite on a business footing."

Restraining a fearful inclination to blurt out: "It's not going to be on any footing!" Bob Pillin mumbled: "I must go; I'm late."

"And when will you be able—?"

"Oh! I'll—I'll send—I'll write. Good-bye!" And suddenly he found that Mrs. Larne had him by the lapel of his coat. The scent of violets and fur was overpowering, and the thought flashed through him: 'I believe she only wanted to take money off old Joseph in the Bible. I can't leave my coat in her hands! What shall I do?'

Mrs. Larne was murmuring:

"It would be so sweet of you if you could manage it today"; and her hand slid over his chest. "Oh! You have brought your cheque-book—what a nice boy!"

Bob Pillin took it out in desperation, and, sitting down at the bureau, wrote a cheque similar to that which he had torn and burned. A warm kiss lighted on his eyebrow, his head was pressed for a moment to a furry bosom; a hand took the cheque; a voice said: "How delightful!" and a sigh immersed him in a bath of perfume. Backing to the door, he gasped:

"Don't mention it; and—and don't tell Phyllis, please. Good-bye!"

Once through the garden gate, he thought: 'By gum! I've done it now. That Phyllis should know about it at all! That beast Ventnor!'

His face grew almost grim. He would go and see what that meant anyway!

3

Mr. Ventnor had not left his office when his young friend's card was brought to him. Tempted for a moment to deny his own presence, he thought: 'No! What's the good? Bound to see him some time!' If he had not exactly courage, he had that peculiar blend of self-confidence and insensibility which must needs distinguish those who follow the law; nor did he ever forget that he was in the right.

"Show him in!" he said.

He would be quite bland, but young Pillin might whistle for an explanation; he was still tormented, too, by the memory of rich curves and moving lips, and the possibilities of better acquaintanceship.

While shaking the young man's hand his quick and fulvous eye detected at once the discomposure behind that mask of cheek and collar, and relapsing into one of those swivel chairs which give one an advantage over men more statically seated, he said:

"You look pretty bobbish. Anything I can do for you?"

Bob Pillin, in the fixed chair of the consultor, nursed his bowler on his knee.

"Well, yes, there is. I've just been to see Mrs. Larne."

Mr. Ventnor did not flinch.

"Ah! Nice woman; pretty daughter, too!" And into those words he put a certain meaning. He never waited to be bullied. Bob Pillin felt the pressure of his blood increasing.

"Look here, Ventnor," he said, "I want an explanation."

"What of?"

"Why, of your going there, and using my name, and God knows what."

Mr. Ventnor gave his chair two little twiddles before he said

"Well, you won't get it."

Bob Pillin remained for a moment taken aback; then he muttered resolutely:

"It's not the conduct of a gentleman."

Every man has his illusions, and no man likes them disturbed. The gingery tint underlying Mr. Ventnor's colouring overlaid it; even the whites of his eyes grew red."

"Oh!" he said; "indeed! You mind your own business, will you?"

"It is my business—very much so. You made use of my name, and I don't choose—"

"The devil you don't! Now, I tell you what—"

Mr. Ventnor leaned forward—"you'd better hold your tongue, and not exasperate me. I'm a good-tempered man, but I won't stand your impudence."

Clenching his bowler hat, and only kept in his seat by that sense of something behind, Bob Pillin ejaculated:

"Impudence! That's good—after what you did! Look here, why did you? It's so extraordinary!"

Mr. Ventnor answered:

"Oh! is it? You wait a bit, my friend!"

Still more moved by the mystery of this affair, Bob Pillin could only mutter:

"I never gave you their address; we were only talking about old Heythorp."

And at the smile which spread between Mr. Ventnor's whiskers, he jumped up, crying:

"It's not the thing, and you're not going to put me off. I insist on an explanation."

Mr. Ventnor leaned back, crossing his stout legs, joining the tips of his thick fingers. In this attitude he was always self-possessed.

"You do—do you?"

"Yes. You must have had some reason."

Mr. Ventnor gazed up at him.

"I'll give you a piece of advice, young cock, and charge you nothing for it, too: Ask no questions, and you'll be told no lies. And here's another: Go away before you forget yourself again."

The natural stolidity of Bob Pillin's face was only just proof against this speech. He said thickly:

"If you go there again and use my name, I'll Well, it's lucky for you you're not my age. Anyway I'll relieve you of my acquaintanceship in future. Good-evening!" and he went to the door. Mr. Ventnor had risen.

"Very well," he said loudly. "Good riddance! You wait and see which boot the leg is on!"

But Bob Pillin was gone, leaving the lawyer with a very red face, a very angry heart, and a vague sense of disorder in his speech. Not only Bob Pillin, but his tender aspirations had all left him; he no longer dallied with the memory of Mrs. Larne, but like a man and a Briton thought only of how to get his own back, and punish evildoers. The atrocious words of his young friend, "It's not the conduct of a gentleman," festered in the heart of one who was made gentle not merely by nature but by Act of Parliament, and he registered a solemn vow to wipe the insult out, if not with blood, with verjuice. It was his duty, and they should d—d well see him do it!

IV

Sylvanus Heythorp seldom went to bed before one or rose before eleven. The latter habit alone kept his valet from handing in the resignation which the former habit prompted almost every night.

Propped on his pillows in a crimson dressing-gown, and freshly shaved, he looked more Roman than he ever did, except in his bath. Having disposed of coffee, he was wont to read his letters, and *The Morning Post*, for he had always been a Tory, and could not stomach paying a halfpenny for his news. Not that there were many letters—when a man has reached the age of eighty, who should write to him, except to ask for money?

It was Valentine's Day. Through his bedroom window he could see the trees of the park, where the birds were in song, though he could not hear them. He had never been interested in Nature—full-blooded men with short necks seldom are.

This morning indeed there were two letters, and he opened that which smelt of something. Inside was a thing like a Christmas card, save that the naked babe had in his hands a bow and arrow, and words coming out of his mouth: "To be your Valentine." There was also a little pink note with one blue forget-me-not printed at the top. It ran:

"DEAREST GUARDY,—I'm sorry this is such a mangy little valentine; I couldn't go out to get it because I've got a beastly cold, so I asked Jock, and the pig bought this. The satin is simply scrumptious. If you don't come and see me in it some time soon, I shall come and show it to you. I wish

I had a moustache, because my top lip feels just like a matchbox, but it's rather ripping having breakfast in bed. Mr. Pillin's taking us to the theatre the day after to-morrow evening. Isn't it nummy! I'm going to have rum and honey for my cold.

"Good-bye, "Your PHYLLIS."

So this that quivered in his thick fingers, too insensitive to feel it, was a valentine for him!

Forty years ago that young thing's grandmother had given him his last. It made him out a very old chap! Forty years ago! Had that been himself living then? And himself, who, as a youth came on the town in 'forty-five? Not a thought, not a feeling the same! They said you changed your body every seven years. The mind with it, too, perhaps! Well, he had come to the last of his bodies, now! And that holy woman had been urging him to take it to Bath, with her face as long as a tea-tray, and some gammon from that doctor of his. Too full a habit—dock his port—no alcohol—might go off in a coma any night! Knock off not he! Rather die any day than turn tee-totaller! When a man had nothing left in life except his dinner, his bottle, his cigar, and the dreams they gave him—these doctors forsooth must want to cut them off! No, no! Carpe diem! while you lived, get something out of it. And now that he had made all the provision he could for those youngsters, his life was no good to any one but himself; and the sooner he went off the better, if he ceased to enjoy what there was left, or lost the power to say: "I'll do this and that, and you be jiggered!" Keep a stiff lip until you crashed, and then go clean! He sounded the bell beside him twice-for Molly, not his man. And when the girl came in, and stood, pretty in her print frock, her fluffy over-fine dark hair escaping from under her cap, he gazed at her in silence.

"Yes, sirr?"

"Want to look at you, that's all."

"Oh I an' I'm not tidy, sirr."

"Never mind. Had your valentine?"

"No, sirr; who would send me one, then?"

"Haven't you a young man?"

"Well, I might. But he's over in my country.

"What d'you think of this?"

He held out the little boy.

The girl took the card and scrutinised it reverently; she said in a detached voice:

"Indeed, an' ut's pretty, too."

"Would you like it?"

"Oh I if 'tis not taking ut from you."

Old Heythorp shook his head, and pointed to the dressing-table.

"Over there—you'll find a sovereign. Little present for a good girl."

She uttered a deep sigh. "Oh! sirr, 'tis too much; 'tis kingly."

"Take it."

She took it, and came back, her hands clasping the sovereign and the valentine, in an attitude as of prayer.

The old man's gaze rested on her with satisfaction.

"I like pretty faces—can't bear sour ones. Tell Meller to get my bath ready."

When she had gone he took up the other letter—some lawyer's writing, and opening it with the usual difficulty, read:

"February 13, 1905.

"SIR,—Certain facts having come to my knowledge, I deem it my duty to call a special meeting of the shareholders of 'The Island Navigation Coy.,' to consider circumstances in connection with the

purchase of Mr. Joseph Pillin's fleet. And I give you notice that at this meeting your conduct will be called in question.

"I am, Sir, "Yours faithfully,
"CHARLES VENTNOR.
"SYLVANUS HEYTHORP, ESQ."

Having read this missive, old Heythorp remained some minutes without stirring. Ventnor! That solicitor chap who had made himself unpleasant at the creditors' meetings!

There are men whom a really bad bit of news at once stampedes out of all power of coherent thought and action, and men who at first simply do not take it in. Old Heythorp took it in fast enough; coming from a lawyer it was about as nasty as it could be. But, at once, with stoic wariness his old brain began casting round. What did this fellow really know? And what exactly could he do? One thing was certain; even if he knew everything, he couldn't upset that settlement. The youngsters were all right. The old man grasped the fact that only his own position was at stake. But this was enough in all conscience; a name which had been before the public fifty odd years—income, independence, more perhaps. It would take little, seeing his age and feebleness, to make his Companies throw him over. But what had the fellow got hold of? How decide whether or no to take notice; to let him do his worst, or try and get into touch with him? And what was the fellow's motive? He held ten shares! That would never make a man take all this trouble, and over a purchase which was really first-rate business for the Company. Yes! His conscience was quite clean. He had not betrayed his Company—on the contrary, had done it a good turn, got them four sound ships at a low price—against much opposition. That he might have done the Company a better turn, and got the ships at fifty-four thousand, did not trouble him—the six thousand was a deuced sight better employed; and he had not pocketed a penny piece himself! But the fellow's motive? Spite? Looked like it. Spite, because he had been disappointed of his money, and defied into the bargain! H'm! If that were so, he might still be got to blow cold again. His eyes lighted on the pink note with the blue forget-me-not. It marked as it were the high water mark of what was left to him of life; and this other letter in his hand-by Jove! Low water mark! And with a deep and rumbling sigh he thought: 'No, I'm not going to be beaten by this fellow.'

"Your bath is ready, sir."

Crumpling the two letters into the pocket of his dressing-gown, he said:

"Help me up; and telephone to Mr. Farney to be good enough to come round."

An hour later, when the secretary entered, his chairman was sitting by the fire perusing the articles of association. And, waiting for him to look up, watching the articles shaking in that thick, feeble hand, the secretary had one of those moments of philosophy not too frequent with his kind. Some said the only happy time of life was when you had no passions, nothing to hope and live for. But did you really ever reach such a stage? The old chairman, for instance, still had his passion for getting his own way, still had his prestige, and set a lot of store by it! And he said:

"Good morning, sir; I hope you're all right in this east wind. The purchase is completed."

"Best thing the company ever did. Have you heard from a shareholder called Ventnor. You know the man I mean?"

"No, sir. I haven't."

"Well! You may get a letter that'll make you open your eyes. An impudent scoundrel! Just write at my dictation."

"February 14th, 1905.

"CHARLES VENTNOR, Esq.

"SIR,—I have your letter of yesterday's date, the contents of which I am at a loss to understand. My solicitors will be instructed to take the necessary measures."

'Phew What's all this about?' the secretary thought.

"Yours truly...."

"I'll sign." And the shaky letters closed the page:
"SYLVANUS HEYTHORP."

"Post that as you go."

"Anything else I can do for you, sir?"

"Nothing, except to let me know if you hear from this fellow."

When the secretary had gone the old man thought: 'So! The ruffian hasn't called the meeting yet. That'll bring him round here fast enough if it's his money he wants-blackmailing scoundrel!'

"Mr. Pillin, sir; and will you wait lunch, or will you have it in the dining-room?"

"In the dining-room."

At sight of that death's-head of a fellow, old Heythorp felt a sort of pity. He looked bad enough already—and this news would make him look worse. Joe Pillin glanced round at the two closed doors.

"How are you, Sylvanus? I'm very poorly." He came closer, and lowered his voice: "Why did you get me to make that settlement? I must have been mad. I've had a man called Ventnor—I didn't like his manner. He asked me if I knew a Mrs. Larne."

"Ha! What did you say?"

"What could I say? I don't know her. But why did he ask?"

"Smells a rat."

Joe Pillin grasped the edge of the table with both hands.

"Oh!" he murmured. "Oh! don't say that!"

Old Heythorp held out to him the crumpled letter.

When he had read it Joe Pillin sat down abruptly before the fire.

"Pull yourself together, Joe; they can't touch you, and they can't upset either the purchase or the settlement. They can upset me, that's all."

Joe Pillin answered, with trembling lips:

"How you can sit there, and look the same as ever! Are you sure they can't touch me?"

Old Heyworth nodded grimly.

"They talk of an Act, but they haven't passed it yet. They might prove a breach of trust against me. But I'll diddle them. Keep your pecker up, and get off abroad."

"Yes, yes. I must. I'm very bad. I was going to-morrow. But I don't know, I'm sure, with this hanging over me. My son knowing her makes it worse. He picks up with everybody. He knows this man Ventnor too. And I daren't say anything to Bob. What are you thinking of, Sylvanus? You look very funny!"

Old Heythorp seemed to rouse himself from a sort of coma.

"I want my lunch," he said. "Will you stop and have some?"

Joe Pillin stammered out:

"Lunch! I don't know when I shall eat again. What are you going to do, Sylvanus?"

"Bluff the beggar out of it."

"But suppose you can't?"

"Buy him off. He's one—of my creditors."

Joe Pillin stared at him afresh. "You always had such nerve," he said yearningly. "Do you ever wake up between two and four? I do—and everything's black."

"Put a good stiff nightcap on, my boy, before going to bed."

"Yes; I sometimes wish I was less temperate. But I couldn't stand it. I'm told your doctor forbids you alcohol."

"He does. That's why I drink it."

Joe Pillin, brooding over the fire, said: "This meeting—d'you think they mean to have it? D'you think this man really knows? If my name gets into the newspapers—" but encountering his old friend's deep little eyes, he stopped. "So you advise me to get off to-morrow, then?"

Old Heythorp nodded.

"Your lunch is served, sir."

Joe Pillin started violently, and rose.

"Well, good-bye, Sylvanus-good-bye! I don't suppose I shall be back till the summer, if I ever come back!" He sank his voice: "I shall rely on you. You won't let them, will you?"

Old Heythorp lifted his hand, and Joe Pillin put into that swollen shaking paw his pale and spindly fingers. "I wish I had your pluck," he said sadly. "Good-bye, Sylvanus," and turning, he passed out.

Old Heythorp thought: 'Poor shaky chap. All to pieces at the first shot!' And, going to his lunch, ate more heavily than usual.

2

Mr. Ventnor, on reaching his office and opening his letters, found, as he had anticipated, one from "that old rascal." Its contents excited in him the need to know his own mind. Fortunately this was not complicated by a sense of dignity—he only had to consider the position with an eye on not being made to look a fool. The point was simply whether he set more store by his money than by his desire for—er—Justice. If not, he had merely to convene the special meeting, and lay before it the plain fact that Mr. Joseph Pillin, selling his ships for sixty thousand pounds, had just made a settlement of six thousand pounds on a lady whom he did not know, a daughter, ward, or what-not—of the purchasing company's chairman, who had said, moreover, at the general meeting, that he stood or fell by the transaction; he had merely to do this, and demand that an explanation be required from the old man of such a startling coincidence. Convinced that no explanation would hold water, he felt sure that his action would be at once followed by the collapse, if nothing more, of that old image, and the infliction of a nasty slur on old Pillin and his hopeful son. On the other hand, three hundred pounds was money; and, if old Heythorp were to say to him: "What do you want to make this fuss for—here's what I owe you!" could a man of business and the world let his sense of justice—however he might itch to have it satisfied—stand in the way of what was after all also his sense of Justice?—for this money had been owing to him for the deuce of along time. In this dilemma, the words:

"My solicitors will be instructed" were of notable service in helping him to form a decision, for he had a certain dislike of other solicitors, and an intimate knowledge of the law of libel and slander; if by any remote chance there should be a slip between the cup and the lip, Charles Ventnor might be in the soup—a position which he deprecated both by nature and profession. High thinking, therefore, decided him at last to answer thus:

"February 19th, 1905.

"SIR,—I have received your note. I think it may be fair, before taking further steps in this matter, to ask you for a personal explanation of the circumstances to which I alluded. I therefore propose with your permission to call on you at your private residence at five o'clock to-morrow afternoon.

"Yours faithfully,

"CHARLES VENTNOR.

"SYLVANUS HEYTHORP, Esq."

Having sent this missive, and arranged in his mind the damning, if circumstantial, evidence he had accumulated, he awaited the hour with confidence, for his nature was not lacking in the cock-surety of a Briton. All the same, he dressed himself particularly well that morning, putting on a blue and white striped waistcoat which, with a cream-coloured tie, set off his fulvous whiskers and full blue eyes; and he lunched, if anything, more fully than his wont, eating a stronger cheese and taking a glass of special Club ale. He took care to be late, too, to show the old fellow that his coming at all was in the nature of an act of grace. A strong scent of hyacinths greeted him in the hall; and Mr. Ventnor, who was an amateur of flowers, stopped to put his nose into a fine bloom and think uncontrollably of Mrs. Larne. Pity! The things one had to give up in life—fine women—one thing and another. Pity! The thought inspired in him a timely anger; and he followed the servant, intending to stand no nonsense from this paralytic old rascal.

The room he entered was lighted by a bright fire, and a single electric lamp with an orange shade on a table covered by a black satin cloth. There were heavily gleaming oil paintings on the walls, a heavy old brass chandelier without candles, heavy dark red curtains, and an indefinable scent of burnt acorns, coffee, cigars, and old man. He became conscious of a candescent spot on the far side of the hearth, where the light fell on old Heythorp's thick white hair.

"Mr. Ventnor, sir."

The candescent spot moved. A voice said: "Sit down."

Mr. Ventnor sat in an armchair on the opposite side of the fire; and, finding a kind of somnolence creeping over him, pinched himself. He wanted all his wits about him.

The old man was speaking in that extinct voice of his, and Mr. Ventnor said rather pettishly:

"Beg pardon, I don't get you."

Old Heythorp's voice swelled with sudden force:

"Your letters are Greek to me."

"Oh! indeed, I think we can soon make them into plain English!"

"Sooner the better."

Mr. Ventnor passed through a moment of indecision. Should he lay his cards on the table? It was not his habit, and the proceeding was sometimes attended with risk. The knowledge, however, that he could always take them up again, seeing there was no third person here to testify that he had laid them down, decided him, and he said:

"Well, Mr. Heythorp, the long and short of the matter is this: Our friend Mr. Pillin paid you a commission of ten per cent. on the sale of his ships. Oh! yes. He settled the money, not on you, but on your relative Mrs. Larne and her children. This, as you know, is a breach of trust on your part."

The old man's voice: "Where did you get hold of that cock-and-bull story?" brought him to his feet before the fire.

"It won't do, Mr. Heythorp. My witnesses are Mr. Pillin, Mrs. Larne, and Mr. Scriven."

"What have you come here for, then—blackmail?"

Mr. Ventnor straightened his waistcoat; a rush of conscious virtue had dyed his face.

"Oh! you take that tone," he said, "do you? You think you can ride roughshod over everything? Well, you're very much mistaken. I advise you to keep a civil tongue and consider your position, or I'll make a beggar of you. I'm not sure this isn't a case for a prosecution!"

"Gammon!"

The choler in Charles Ventnor kept him silent for a moment; then he burst out:

"Neither gammon nor spinach. You owe me three hundred pounds, you've owed it me for years, and you have the impudence to take this attitude with me, have you? Now, I never bluster; I say what I mean. You just listen to me. Either you pay me what you owe me at once, or I call this meeting and make what I know public. You'll very soon find out where you are. And a good thing, too, for a more unscrupulous—unscrupulous—" he paused for breath.

Occupied with his own emotion, he had not observed the change in old Heythorp's face. The imperial on that lower lip was bristling, the crimson of those cheeks had spread to the roots of his white hair. He grasped the arms of his chair, trying to rise; his swollen hands trembled; a little saliva escaped one corner of his lips. And the words came out as if shaken by his teeth:

"So-so-you-you bully me!"

Conscious that the interview had suddenly passed from the phase of negotiation, Mr. Ventnor looked hard at his opponent. He saw nothing but a decrepit, passionate, crimson-faced old man at bay, and all the instincts of one with everything on his side boiled up in him. The miserable old turkey-cock—the apoplectic image! And he said:

"And you'll do no good for yourself by getting into a passion. At your age, and in your condition, I

recommend a little prudence. Now just take my terms quietly, or you know what'll happen. I'm not to be intimidated by any of your airs." And seeing that the old man's rage was such that he simply could not speak, he took the opportunity of going on: "I don't care two straws which you do—I'm out to show you who's master. If you think in your dotage you can domineer any longer—well, you'll find two can play at that game. Come, now, which are you going to do?"

The old man had sunk back in his chair, and only his little deep-blue eyes seemed living. Then he moved one hand, and Mr. Ventnor saw that he was fumbling to reach the button of an electric bell at the end of a cord. 'I'll show him,' he thought, and stepping forward, he put it out of reach.

Thus frustrated, the old man remained-motionless, staring up. The word "blackmail" resumed its buzzing in Mr. Ventnor's ears. The impudence the consummate impudence of it from this fraudulent old ruffian with one foot in bankruptcy and one foot in the grave, if not in the dock.

"Yes," he said, "it's never too late to learn; and for once you've come up against someone a leetle bit too much for you. Haven't you now? You'd better cry 'Peccavi.'"

Then, in the deathly silence of the room, the moral force of his position, and the collapse as it seemed of his opponent, awakening a faint compunction, he took a turn over the Turkey carpet to readjust his mind.

"You're an old man, and I don't want to be too hard on you. I'm only showing you that you can't play fast and loose as if you were God Almighty any longer. You've had your own way too many years. And now you can't have it, see!" Then, as the old man again moved forward in his chair, he added: "Now, don't get into a passion again; calm yourself, because I warn you—this is your last chance. I'm a man of my word; and what I say, I do."

By a violent and unsuspected effort the old man jerked himself up and reached the bell. Mr. Ventnor heard it ring, and said sharply:

"Mind you, it's nothing to me which you do. I came for your own good. Please yourself. Well?"

He was answered by the click of the door and the old man's husky voice:

"Show this hound out! And then come back!"

Mr. Ventnor had presence of mind enough not to shake his fist. Muttering: "Very well, Mr. Heythorp! Ah! Very well!" he moved with dignity to the door. The careful shepherding of the servant renewed the fire of his anger. Hound! He had been called a hound!

3

After seeing Mr. Ventnor off the premises the man Meller returned to his master, whose face looked very odd—"all patchy-like," as he put it in the servants' hall, as though the blood driven to his head had mottled for good the snowy whiteness of the forehead. He received the unexpected order:

"Get me a hot bath ready, and put some pine stuff in it."

When the old man was seated there, the valet asked:

"How long shall I give you, sir?"

"Twenty minutes."

"Very good, sir."

Lying in that steaming brown fragrant liquid, old Heythorp heaved a stertorous sigh. By losing his temper with that ill-conditioned cur he had cooked his goose. It was done to a turn; and he was a ruined man. If only—oh! if only he could have seized the fellow by the neck and pitched him out of the room! To have lived to be so spoken to; to have been unable to lift hand or foot, hardly even his voice—he would sooner have been dead! Yes—sooner have been dead! A dumb and measureless commotion was still at work in the recesses of that thick old body, silver-brown in the dark water, whose steam he drew deep into his wheezing lungs, as though for spiritual relief. To be beaten by a cur like that! To have that common cad of a pettifogging lawyer drag him down and kick him about; tumble a name which had stood high, in the dust! The fellow had the power to make him a byword and a beggar! It was incredible! But it was a fact. And to-morrow he would begin to do it—perhaps had begun already.

His tree had come down with a crash! Eighty years—eighty good years! He regretted none of them—regretted nothing; least of all this breach of trust which had provided for his grandchildren—one of the best things he had ever done. The fellow was a cowardly hound, too! The way he had snatched the bell-pull out of his reach—despicable cur! And a chap like that was to put "paid" to the account of Sylvanus Heythorp, to "scratch" him out of life—so near the end of everything, the very end! His hand raised above the surface fell back on his stomach through the dark water, and a bubble or two rose. Not so fast—not so fast! He had but to slip down a foot, let the water close over his head, and "Good-bye" to Master Ventnor's triumph. Dead men could not be kicked off the Boards of Companies. Dead men could not be beggared, deprived of their independence. He smiled and stirred a little in the bath till the water reached the white hairs on his lower lip. It smelt nice! And he took a long sniff: He had had a good life, a good life! And with the thought that he had it in his power at any moment to put Master Ventnor's nose out of joint—to beat the beggar after all, a sense of assuagement and well-being crept over him. His blood ran more evenly again. He closed his eyes. They talked about an after-life—people like that holy woman. Gammon! You went to sleep—a long sleep; no dreams. A nap after dinner! Dinner! His tongue sought his palate! Yes! he could eat a good dinner! That dog hadn't put him off his stroke! The best dinner he had ever eaten was the one he gave to Jack Herring, Chichester, Thornworthy, Nick Treffry and Jolyon Forsyte at Pole's. Good Lord! In 'sixty—yes—'sixty-five? Just before he fell in love with Alice Larne—ten years before he came to Liverpool. That was a dinner! Cost twenty-four pounds for the six of them—and Forsyte an absurdly moderate fellow. Only Nick Treffry and himself had been three-bottle men! Dead! Every jack man of them. And suddenly he thought: 'My name's a good one—I was never down before—never beaten!'

A voice above the steam said:

"The twenty minutes is up, sir."

"All right; I'll get out. Evening clothes."

And Meller, taking out dress suit and shirt, thought: 'Now, what does the old bloomer want dressin' up again for; why can't he go to bed and have his dinner there? When a man's like a baby, the cradle's the place for him.'....

An hour later, at the scene of his encounter with Mr. Ventnor, where the table was already laid for dinner, old Heythorp stood and gazed. The curtains had been drawn back, the window thrown open to air the room, and he could see out there the shapes of the dark trees and a sky grape-coloured, in the mild, moist night. It smelt good. A sensuous feeling stirred in him, warm from his bath, clothed from head to foot in fresh garments. Deuce of a time since he had dined in full fig! He would have liked a woman dining opposite—but not the holy woman; no, by George!—would have liked to see light falling on a woman's shoulders once again, and a pair of bright eyes! He crossed, snail-like, towards the fire. There that bullying fellow had stood with his back to it—confound his impudence!—as if the place belonged to him. And suddenly he had a vision of his three secretaries' faces—especially young Farney's as they would look, when the pack got him by the throat and pulled him down. His co-directors, too! Old Heythorp! How are the mighty fallen! And that hound jubilant!

His valet passed across the room to shut the window and draw the curtains. This chap too! The day he could no longer pay his wages, and had lost the power to say "Shan't want your services any more"—when he could no longer even pay his doctor for doing his best to kill him off! Power, interest, independence, all—gone! To be dressed and undressed, given pap, like a baby in arms, served as they chose to serve him, and wished out of the way—broken, dishonoured!

By money alone an old man had his being! Meat, drink, movement, breath! When all his money was gone the holy woman would let him know it fast enough. They would all let him know it; or if they didn't, it would be out of pity! He had never been pitied yet—thank God! And he said:

"Get me up a bottle of Perrier Jouet. What's the menu?"

"Germane soup, sir; filly de sole; sweetbread; cutlet soubees, rum souffly."

"Tell her to give me a hors d'oeuvre, and put on a savoury."

"Yes, sir."

When the man had gone, he thought: 'I should have liked an oyster—too late now!' and going over to his bureau, he fumblingly pulled out the top drawer. There was little in it—Just a few papers, business papers on his Companies, and a schedule of his debts; not even a copy of his will—he had not made one, nothing to leave! Letters he had never kept. Half a dozen bills, a few receipts, and the little pink note with the blue forget-me-not. That was the lot! An old tree gives up bearing leaves, and its roots dry up, before it comes down in a wind; an old man's world slowly falls away from him till he stands alone in

the night. Looking at the pink note, he thought: 'Suppose I'd married Alice—a man never had a better mistress!' He fumbled the drawer to; but still he strayed feebly about the room, with a curious shrinking from sitting down, legacy from the quarter of an hour he had been compelled to sit while that hound worried at his throat. He was opposite one of the pictures now. It gleamed, dark and oily, limning a Scots Grey who had mounted a wounded Russian on his horse, and was bringing him back prisoner from the Balaclava charge. A very old friend—bought in 'fifty-nine. It had hung in his chambers in the Albany—hung with him ever since. With whom would it hang when he was gone? For that holy woman would scrap it, to a certainty, and stick up some Crucifixion or other, some new-fangled high art thing! She could even do that now if she liked—for she owned it, owned every mortal stick in the room, to the very glass he would drink his champagne from; all made over under the settlement fifteen years ago, before his last big gamble went wrong. "De l'audace, toujours de l'audace!" The gamble which had brought him down till his throat at last was at the mercy of a bullying hound. The pitcher and the well! At the mercy—! The sound of a popping cork dragged him from reverie. He moved to his seat, back to the window, and sat down to his dinner. By George! They had got him an oyster! And he said:

"I've forgotten my teeth!"

While the man was gone for them, he swallowed the oysters, methodically touching them one by one with cayenne, Chili vinegar, and lemon. Ummm! Not quite what they used to be at Pimm's in the best days, but not bad—not bad! Then seeing the little blue bowl lying before him, he looked up and said:

"My compliments to cook on the oysters. Give me the champagne." And he lifted his trembling teeth. Thank God, he could still put 'em in for himself! The creaming goldenish fluid from the napkined bottle slowly reached the brim of his glass, which had a hollow stem; raising it to his lips, very red between the white hairs above and below, he drank with a gurgling noise, and put the glass down-empty. Nectar! And just cold enough!

"I frapped it the least bit, sir."

"Quite right. What's that smell of flowers?"

"It's from those 'yacinths on the sideboard, sir. They come from Mrs. Larne, this afternoon."

"Put 'em on the table. Where's my daughter?"

"She's had dinner, sir; goin' to a ball, I think."

"A ball!"

"Charity ball, I fancy, sir."

"Ummm! Give me a touch of the old sherry with the soup."

"Yes, sir. I shall have to open a bottle:"

"Very well, then, do!"

On his way to the cellar the man confided to Molly, who was carrying the soup:

"The Gov'nor's going it to-night! What he'll be like tomorrow I dunno."

The girl answered softly:

"Poor old man, let um have his pleasure." And, in the hall, with the soup tureen against her bosom, she hummed above the steam, and thought of the ribbons on her new chemises, bought out of the sovereign he had given her.

And old Heythorp, digesting his osyters, snuffed the scent of the hyacinths, and thought of the St. Germain, his favourite soup. It would n't be first-rate, at this time of year—should be made with little young home-grown peas. Paris was the place for it. Ah! The French were the fellows for eating, and—looking things in the face! Not hypocrites—not ashamed of their reason or their senses!

The soup came in. He sipped it, bending forward as far as he could, his napkin tucked in over his shirt-front like a bib. He got the bouquet of that sherry to a T—his sense of smell was very keen to-night; rare old stuff it was—more than a year since he had tasted it—but no one drank sherry nowadays, hadn't the constitution for it! The fish came up, and went down; and with the sweetbread he took his second glass of champagne. Always the best, that second glass—the stomach well warmed, and the palate not yet dulled. Umm! So that fellow thought he had him beaten, did he? And he said suddenly:

"The fur coat in the wardrobe, I've no use for it. You can take it away to-night."

With tempered gratitude the valet answered:

"Thank you, sir; much obliged, I'm sure." So the old buffer had found out there was moth in it!

"Have I worried you much?"

"No, sir; not at all, sir—that is, no more than reason."

"Afraid I have. Very sorry—can't help it. You'll find that, when you get like me."

"Yes, sir; I've always admired your pluck, sir."

"Um! Very good of you to say so."

"Always think of you keepin' the flag flying', sir."

Old Heythorp bent his body from the waist.

"Much obliged to you."

"Not at all, sir. Cook's done a little spinach in cream with the soubrees."

"Ah! Tell her from me it's a capital dinner, so far."

"Thank you, sir."

Alone again, old Heythorp sat unmoving, his brain just narcotically touched. "The flag flyin'—the flag flyin'!" He raised his glass and sucked. He had an appetite now, and finished the three cutlets, and all the sauce and spinach. Pity! he could have managed a snipe fresh shot! A desire to delay, to lengthen dinner, was strong upon him; there were but the soufflé and the savoury to come. He would have enjoyed, too, someone to talk to. He had always been fond of good company—been good company himself, or so they said—not that he had had a chance of late. Even at the Boards they avoided talking to him, he had noticed for a long time. Well! that wouldn't trouble him again—he had sat through his last Board, no doubt. They shouldn't kick him off, though; he wouldn't give them that pleasure—had seen the beggars hankering after his chairman's shoes too long. The soufflé was before him now, and lifting his glass, he said:

"Fill up."

"These are the special glasses, sir; only four to the bottle."

"Fill up."

The servant filled, screwing up his mouth.

Old Heythorp drank, and put the glass down empty with a sigh. He had been faithful to his principles, finished the bottle before touching the sweet—a good bottle—of a good brand! And now for the soufflé! Delicious, flipped down with the old sherry! So that holy woman was going to a ball, was she! How deuced funny! Who would dance with a dry stick like that, all eaten up with a piety which was just sexual disappointment? Ah! yes, lots of women like that—had often noticed 'em—pitied 'em too, until you had to do with them and they made you as unhappy as themselves, and were tyrants into the bargain. And he asked:

"What's the savoury?"

"Cheese remmykin, sir."

His favourite.

"I'll have my port with it—the 'sixty-eight." The man stood gazing with evident stupefaction. He had not expected this. The old man's face was very flushed, but that might be the bath. He said feebly:

"Are you sure you ought, sir?"

"No, but I'm going to."

"Would you mind if I spoke to Miss Heythorp, Sir?"

"If you do, you can leave my service."

"Well, Sir, I don't accept the responsibility."

"Who asked you to?"

"No, Sir...."

"Well, get it, then; and don't be an ass."

"Yes, Sir." If the old man were not humoured he would have a fit, perhaps!

And the old man sat quietly staring at the hyacinths. He felt happy, his whole being lined and warmed and drowsed—and there was more to come! What had the holy folk to give you compared with the comfort of a good dinner? Could they make you dream, and see life rosy for a little? No, they could only give you promissory notes which never would be cashed. A man had nothing but his pluck—they only tried to undermine it, and make him squeal for help. He could see his precious doctor throwing up his hands: "Port after a bottle of champagne—you'll die of it!" And a very good death too—none better. A sound broke the silence of the closed-up room. Music? His daughter playing the piano overhead. Singing too! What a trickle of a voice! Jenny Lind! The Swedish nightingale—he had never missed the nights when she was singing—Jenny Lind!

"It's very hot, sir. Shall I take it out of the case?"

Ah! The ramequin!

"Touch of butter, and the cayenne!"

"Yes, sir."

He ate it slowly, savouring each mouthful; had never tasted a better. With cheese—port! He drank one glass, and said:

"Help me to my chair."

And settled there before the fire with decanter and glass and hand-bell on the little low table by his side, he murmured:

"Bring coffee, and my cigar, in twenty minutes."

To-night he would do justice to his wine, not smoking till he had finished. As old Horace said:

"*Aequam memento rebus in arduis Servare mentem.*"

And, raising his glass, he sipped slowly, spilling a drop or two, shutting his eyes.

The faint silvery squealing of the holy woman in the room above, the scent of hyacinths, the drowse of the fire, on which a cedar log had just been laid, the feeling of the port soaking down into the crannies of his being, made up a momentary Paradise. Then the music stopped; and no sound rose but the tiny groans of the log trying to resist the fire. Dreamily he thought: 'Life wears you out—wears you out. Logs on a fire!' And he filled his glass again. That fellow had been careless; there were dregs at the bottom of the decanter and he had got down to them! Then, as the last drop from his tilted glass trickled into the white hairs on his chin, he heard the coffee tray put down, and taking his cigar he put it to his ear, rolling it in his thick fingers. In prime condition! And drawing a first whiff, he said:

"Open that bottle of the old brandy in the sideboard."

"Brandy, sir? I really daren't, sir."

"Are you my servant or not?"

"Yes, sir, but—"

A minute of silence, then the man went hastily to the sideboard, took out the bottle, and drew the cork. The tide of crimson in the old man's face had frightened him.

"Leave it there."

The unfortunate valet placed the bottle on the little table. 'I'll have to tell her,' he thought; 'but if I take away the port decanter and the glass, it won't look so bad.' And, carrying them, he left the room.

Slowly the old man drank his coffee, and the liqueur of brandy. The whole gamut! And watching his cigar-smoke wreathing blue in the orange glow, he smiled. The last night to call his soul his own, the

last night of his independence. Send in his resignations to-morrow—not wait to be kicked off! Not give that fellow a chance!

A voice which seemed to come from far off, said:

"Father! You're drinking brandy! How can you—you know it's simple poison to you!" A figure in white, scarcely actual, loomed up close. He took the bottle to fill up his liqueur glass, in defiance; but a hand in a long white glove, with another dangling from its wrist, pulled it away, shook it at him, and replaced it in the sideboard. And, just as when Mr. Ventnor stood there accusing him, a swelling and churning in his throat prevented him from speech; his lips moved, but only a little froth came forth.

His daughter had approached again. She stood quite close, in white satin, thin-faced, sallow, with eyebrows raised, and her dark hair frizzed—yes! frizzed—the holy woman! With all his might he tried to say: 'So you bully me, do you—you bully me to-night!' but only the word "so" and a sort of whispering came forth. He heard her speaking. "It's no good your getting angry, Father. After champagne—it's wicked!" Then her form receded in a sort of rustling white mist; she was gone; and he heard the sputtering and growling of her taxi, bearing her to the ball. So! She tyrannised and bullied, even before she had him at her mercy, did she? She should see! Anger had brightened his eyes; the room came clear again. And slowly raising himself he sounded the bell twice, for the girl, not for that fellow Meller, who was in the plot. As soon as her pretty black and white-aproned figure stood before him, he said:

"Help me up."

Twice her soft pulling was not enough, and he sank back. The third time he struggled to his feet.

"Thank you; that'll do." Then, waiting till she was gone, he crossed the room, fumbled open the sideboard door, and took out the bottle. Reaching over the polished oak, he grasped a sherry glass; and holding the bottle with both hands, tipped the liquor into it, put it to his lips and sucked. Drop by drop it passed over his palate mild, very old, old as himself, coloured like sunlight, fragrant. To the last drop he drank it, then hugging the bottle to his shirt-front, he moved snail-like to his chair, and fell back into its depths. For some minutes he remained there motionless, the bottle clasped to his chest, thinking: 'This is not the attitude of a gentleman. I must put it down on the table—on the table;' but a thick cloud was between him and everything. It was with his hands he would have to put the bottle on the table! But he could not find his hands, could not feel them. His mind see-sawed in strophe and antistrophe: "You can't move!"—"I will move!" "You're beaten!"—"I'm not beat." "Give up!"—"I won't." That struggle to find his hands seemed to last for ever—he must find them! After that—go down—all standing—after that! Everything round him was red. Then the red cloud cleared just a little, and he could hear the clock—"tick-tick-tick"; a faint sensation spread from his shoulders down to his wrists, down his palms; and yes—he could feel the bottle! He redoubled his struggle to get forward in his chair; to get forward and put the bottle down. It was not dignified like this! One arm he could move now; but he could not grip the bottle nearly tight enough to put it down. Working his whole body forward, inch by inch, he shifted himself up in the chair till he could lean sideways, and the bottle, slipping down his chest, dropped slanting to the edge of the low stool-table. Then with all his might he screwed his trunk and arms an inch further, and the bottle stood. He had done it—done it! His lips twitched into a smile; his body sagged back to its old position. He had done it! And he closed his eyes

At half-past eleven the girl Molly, opening the door, looked at him and said softly: "Sirr! there's some ladies, and a gentleman!" But he did not answer. And, still holding the door, she whispered out into the hall:

"He's asleep, miss."

A voice whispered back:

"Oh! Just let me go in, I won't wake him unless he does. But I do want to show him my dress."

The girl moved aside; and on tiptoe Phyllis passed in. She walked to where, between the lamp-glow and the fire-glow, she was lighted up. White satin—her first low-cut dress—the flush of her first supper party—a gardenia at her breast, another in her fingers! Oh! what a pity he was asleep! How red he looked! How funnily old men breathed! And mysteriously, as a child might, she whispered:

"Guardy!"

No answer! And pouting, she stood twiddling the gardenia. Then suddenly she thought: 'I'll put it in his buttonhole! When he wakes up and sees it, how he'll jump!'

And stealing close, she bent and slipped it in. Two faces looked at her from round the door; she heard Bob Pillin's smothered chuckle; her mother's rich and feathery laugh. Oh! How red his forehead was!

She touched it with her lips; skipped back, twirled round, danced silently a second, blew a kiss, and like quicksilver was gone.

And the whispering, the chuckling, and one little out-pealing laugh rose in the hall.

But the old man slept. Nor until Meller came at his usual hour of half-past twelve, was it known that he would never wake.

THE APPLE TREE

"The Apple-tree, the singing and the gold."
MURRAY'S "HIPPOLYTUS of EURIPIDES."

In their silver-wedding day Ashurst and his wife were motoring along the outskirts of the moor, intending to crown the festival by stopping the night at Torquay, where they had first met. This was the idea of Stella Ashurst, whose character contained a streak of sentiment. If she had long lost the blue-eyed, flower-like charm, the cool slim purity of face and form, the apple-blossom colouring, which had so swiftly and so oddly affected Ashurst twenty-six years ago, she was still at forty-three a comely and faithful companion, whose cheeks were faintly mottled, and whose grey-blue eyes had acquired a certain fullness.

It was she who had stopped the car where the common rose steeply to the left, and a narrow strip of larch and beech, with here and there a pine, stretched out towards the valley between the road and the first long high hill of the full moor. She was looking for a place where they might lunch, for Ashurst never looked for anything; and this, between the golden furze and the feathery green larches smelling of lemons in the last sun of April—this, with a view into the deep valley and up to the long moor heights, seemed fitting to the decisive nature of one who sketched in water-colours, and loved romantic spots. Grasping her paint box, she got out.

"Won't this do, Frank?"

Ashurst, rather like a bearded Schiller, grey in the wings, tall, long-legged, with large remote grey eyes which sometimes filled with meaning and became almost beautiful, with nose a little to one side, and bearded lips just open—Ashurst, forty-eight, and silent, grasped the luncheon basket, and got out too.

"Oh! Look, Frank! A grave!"

By the side of the road, where the track from the top of the common crossed it at right angles and ran through a gate past the narrow wood, was a thin mound of turf, six feet by one, with a moorstone to the west, and on it someone had thrown a blackthorn spray and a handful of bluebells. Ashurst looked, and the poet in him moved. At cross-roads—a suicide's grave! Poor mortals with their superstitions! Whoever lay there, though, had the best of it, no clammy sepulchre among other hideous graves carved with futilities—just a rough stone, the wide sky, and wayside blessings! And, without comment, for he had learned not to be a philosopher in the bosom of his family, he strode away up on to the common, dropped the luncheon basket under a wall, spread a rug for his wife to sit on—she would turn up from her sketching when she was hungry—and took from his pocket Murray's translation of the "Hippolytus." He had soon finished reading of "The Cyprian" and her revenge, and looked at the sky instead. And watching the white clouds so bright against the intense blue, Ashurst, on his silver-wedding day, longed for—he knew not what. Maladjusted to life—man's organism! One's mode of life might be high and scrupulous, but there was always an, undercurrent of greediness, a hankering, and sense of waste. Did women have it too? Who could tell? And yet, men who gave vent to their appetites for novelty, their riotous longings for new adventures, new risks, new pleasures, these suffered, no doubt, from the reverse side of starvation, from surfeit. No getting out of it—a maladjusted animal, civilised man! There could be no garden of his choosing, of "the Apple-tree, the singing, and the gold," in the words of that lovely Greek chorus, no achievable elysium in life, or lasting haven of happiness for any man with a sense of beauty—nothing which could compare with the captured loveliness in a work of art, set down for ever, so that to look on it or read was always to have the same precious sense of exaltation and restful inebriety. Life no doubt had moments with that quality of beauty, of unbidden flying rapture, but the trouble was, they lasted no longer than the span of a cloud's flight over the sun; impossible to keep them with you, as Art caught beauty and held it fast. They were fleeting as one of the glimmering or golden visions one had of the soul in nature, glimpses of its remote and brooding spirit. Here, with the

sun hot on his face, a cuckoo calling from a thorn tree, and in the air the honey savour of gorse—here among the little fronds of the young fern, the starry blackthorn, while the bright clouds drifted by high above the hills and dreamy valleys here and now was such a glimpse. But in a moment it would pass—as the face of Pan, which looks round the corner of a rock, vanishes at your stare. And suddenly he sat up. Surely there was something familiar about this view, this bit of common, that ribbon of road, the old wall behind him. While they were driving he had not been taking notice—never did; thinking of far things or of nothing—but now he saw! Twenty-six years ago, just at this time of year, from the farmhouse within half a mile of this very spot he had started for that day in Torquay whence it might be said he had never returned. And a sudden ache beset his heart; he had stumbled on just one of those past moments in his life, whose beauty and rapture he had failed to arrest, whose wings had fluttered away into the unknown; he had stumbled on a buried memory, a wild sweet time, swiftly choked and ended. And, turning on his face, he rested his chin on his hands, and stared at the short grass where the little blue milkwort was growing....

I

And this is what he remembered.

On the first of May, after their last year together at college, Frank Ashurst and his friend Robert Garton were on a tramp. They had walked that day from Brent, intending to make Chagford, but Ashurst's football knee had given out, and according to their map they had still some seven miles to go. They were sitting on a bank beside the-road, where a track crossed alongside a wood, resting the knee and talking of the universe, as young men will. Both were over six feet, and thin as rails; Ashurst pale, idealistic, full of absence; Garton queer, round-the-corner, knotted, curly, like some primeval beast. Both had a literary bent; neither wore a hat.

Ashurst's hair was smooth, pale, wavy, and had a way of rising on either side of his brow, as if always being flung back; Carton's was a kind of dark unfathomed mop. They had not met a soul for miles.

"My dear fellow," Garton was saying, "pity's only an effect of self-consciousness; it's a disease of the last five thousand years. The world was happier without."

Ashurst, following the clouds with his eyes, answered:

"It's the pearl in the oyster, anyway."

"My dear chap, all our modern unhappiness comes from pity. Look at animals, and Red Indians, limited to feeling their own occasional misfortunes; then look at ourselves—never free from feeling the toothaches of others. Let's get back to feeling for nobody, and have a better time."

"You'll never practise that."

Garton pensively stirred the hotch-potch of his hair.

"To attain full growth, one mustn't be squeamish. To starve oneself emotionally's a mistake. All emotion is to the good—enriches life."

"Yes, and when it runs up against chivalry?"

"Ah! That's so English! If you speak of emotion the English always think you want something physical, and are shocked. They're afraid of passion, but not of lust—oh, no!—so long as they can keep it secret."

Ashurst did not answer; he had plucked a blue floweret, and was twiddling it against the sky. A cuckoo began calling from a thorn tree. The sky, the flowers, the songs of birds! Robert was talking through his hat! And he said:

"Well, let's go on, and find some farm where we can put up." In uttering those words, he was conscious of a girl coming down from the common just above them. She was outlined against the sky, carrying a basket, and you could see that sky through the crook of her arm. And Ashurst, who saw beauty without wondering how it could advantage him, thought: 'How pretty!' The wind, blowing her dark frieze skirt against her legs, lifted her battered peacock tam-o'-shanter; her greyish blouse was worn and old, her shoes were split, her little hands rough and red, her neck browned. Her dark hair waved untidy across her broad forehead, her face was short, her upper lip short, showing a glint of

teeth, her brows were straight and dark, her lashes long and dark, her nose straight; but her grey eyes were the wonder-dewy as if opened for the first time that day. She looked at Ashurst—perhaps he struck her as strange, limping along without a hat, with his large eyes on her, and his hair falling back. He could not take off what was not on his head, but put up his hand in a salute, and said:

"Can you tell us if there's a farm near here where we could stay the night? I've gone lame."

"There's only our farm near, sir." She spoke without shyness, in a pretty soft crisp voice.

"And where is that?"

"Down here, sir."

"Would you put us up?"

"Oh! I think we would."

"Will you show us the way?"

"Yes, Sir."

He limped on, silent, and Garton took up the catechism.

"Are you a Devonshire girl?"

"No, Sir."

"What then?"

"From Wales."

"Ah! I thought you were a Celt; so it's not your farm?"

"My aunt's, sir."

"And your uncle's?"

"He is dead."

"Who farms it, then?"

"My aunt, and my three cousins."

"But your uncle was a Devonshire man?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Have you lived here long?" "Seven years."

"And how d'you like it after Wales?" "I don't know, sir."

"I suppose you don't remember?" "Oh, yes! But it is different."

"I believe you!"

Ashurst broke in suddenly: "How old are you?"

"Seventeen, Sir."

"And what's your name?" "Megan David."

"This is Robert Garton, and I am Frank Ashurst. We wanted to get on to Chagford."

"It is a pity your leg is hurting you."

Ashurst smiled, and when he smiled his face was rather beautiful.

Descending past the narrow wood, they came on the farm suddenly—a long, low, stone-built dwelling with casement windows, in a farmyard where pigs and fowls and an old mare were straying. A short steep-up grass hill behind was crowned with a few Scotch firs, and in front, an old orchard of apple trees, just breaking into flower, stretched down to a stream and a long wild meadow. A little boy with oblique dark eyes was shepherding a pig, and by the house door stood a woman, who came towards

them. The girl said:

"It is Mrs. Narracombe, my aunt."

"Mrs. Narracombe, my aunt," had a quick, dark eye, like a mother wild-duck's, and something of the same snaky turn about her neck.

"We met your niece on the road," said Ashurst; "she thought you might perhaps put us up for the night."

Mrs. Narracombe, taking them in from head to heel, answered:

"Well, I can, if you don't mind one room. Megan, get the spare room ready, and a bowl of cream. You'll be wanting tea, I suppose."

Passing through a sort of porch made by two yew trees and some flowering-currant bushes, the girl disappeared into the house, her peacock tam-o'-shanter bright athwart that rosy-pink and the dark green of the yews.

"Will you come into the parlour and rest your leg? You'll be from college, perhaps?"

"We were, but we've gone down now."

Mrs. Narracombe nodded sagely.

The parlour, brick-floored, with bare table and shiny chairs and sofa stuffed with horsehair, seemed never to have been used, it was so terribly clean. Ashurst sat down at once on the sofa, holding his lame knee between his hands, and Mrs. Narracombe gazed at him. He was the only son of a late professor of chemistry, but people found a certain lordliness in one who was often so sublimely unconscious of them.

"Is there a stream where we could bathe?"

"There's the strame at the bottom of the orchard, but sittin' down you'll not be covered!"

"How deep?"

"Well, 'tis about a foot and a half, maybe."

"Oh! That'll do fine. Which way?"

"Down the lane, through the second gate on the right, an' the pool's by the big apple tree that stands by itself. There's trout there, if you can tickle them."

"They're more likely to tickle us!"

Mrs. Narracombe smiled. "There'll be the tea ready when you come back."

The pool, formed by the damming of a rock, had a sandy bottom; and the big apple tree, lowest in the orchard, grew so close that its boughs almost overhung the water; it was in leaf, and all but in flower—its crimson buds just bursting. There was not room for more than one at a time in that narrow bath, and Ashurst waited his turn, rubbing his knee and gazing at the wild meadow, all rocks and thorn trees and field flowers, with a grove of beeches beyond, raised up on a flat mound. Every bough was swinging in the wind, every spring bird calling, and a slanting sunlight dappled the grass. He thought of Theocritus, and the river Cherwell, of the moon, and the maiden with the dewy eyes; of so many things that he seemed to think of nothing; and he felt absurdly happy.

During a late and sumptuous tea with eggs to it, cream and jam, and thin, fresh cakes touched with saffron, Garton descanted on the Celts. It was about the period of the Celtic awakening, and the discovery that there was Celtic blood about this family had excited one who believed that he was a Celt himself. Sprawling on a horse hair chair, with a hand-made cigarette dribbling from the corner of his curly lips, he had been plunging his cold pin-points of eyes into Ashurst's and praising the refinement of the Welsh. To come out of Wales into England was like the change from china to earthenware! Frank, as a d—d Englishman, had not of course perceived the exquisite refinement and emotional capacity of that Welsh girl! And, delicately stirring in the dark mat of his still wet hair, he explained how exactly she illustrated the writings of the Welsh bard Morgan-ap-Something in the twelfth century.

Ashurst, full length on the horsehair sofa, and jutting far beyond its end, smoked a deeply-coloured pipe, and did not listen, thinking of the girl's face when she brought in a relay of cakes. It had been exactly like looking at a flower, or some other pretty sight in Nature—till, with a funny little shiver, she had lowered her glance and gone out, quiet as a mouse.

"Let's go to the kitchen," said Garton, "and see some more of her."

The kitchen was a white-washed room with rafters, to which were attached smoked hams; there were flower-pots on the window-sill, and guns hanging on nails, queer mugs, china and pewter, and portraits of Queen Victoria. A long, narrow table of plain wood was set with bowls and spoons, under a string of high-hung onions; two sheep-dogs and three cats lay here and there. On one side of the recessed fireplace sat two small boys, idle, and good as gold; on the other sat a stout, light-eyed, red-faced youth with hair and lashes the colour of the tow he was running through the barrel of a gun; between them Mrs. Narracombe dreamily stirred some savoury-scented stew in a large pot. Two other youths, oblique-eyed, dark-haired, rather sly-faced, like the two little boys, were talking together and lolling against the wall; and a short, elderly, clean-shaven man in corduroys, seated in the window, was conning a battered journal. The girl Megan seemed the only active creature—drawing cider and passing with the jugs from cask to table. Seeing them thus about to eat, Garton said:

"Ah! If you'll let us, we'll come back when supper's over," and without waiting for an answer they withdrew again to the parlour. But the colour in the kitchen, the warmth, the scents, and all those faces, heightened the bleakness of their shiny room, and they resumed their seats moodily.

"Regular gipsy type, those boys. There was only one Saxon—the fellow cleaning the gun. That girl is a very subtle study psychologically."

Ashurst's lips twitched. Garton seemed to him an ass just then. Subtle study! She was a wild flower. A creature it did you good to look at. Study!

Garton went on:

"Emotionally she would be wonderful. She wants awakening."

"Are you going to awaken her?"

Garton looked at him and smiled. 'How coarse and English you are!' that curly smile seemed saying.

And Ashurst puffed his pipe. Awaken her! That fool had the best opinion of himself! He threw up the window and leaned out. Dusk had gathered thick. The farm buildings and the wheel-house were all dim and bluish, the apple trees but a blurred wilderness; the air smelled of woodsmoke from the kitchen fire. One bird going to bed later than the others was uttering a half-hearted twitter, as though surprised at the darkness. From the stable came the snuffle and stamp of a feeding horse. And away over there was the loom of the moor, and away and away the shy stars which had not as yet full light, pricking white through the deep blue heavens. A quavering owl hooted. Ashurst drew a deep breath. What a night to wander out in! A padding of unshod hoofs came up the lane, and three dim, dark shapes passed—ponies on an evening march. Their heads, black and fuzzy, showed above the gate. At the tap of his pipe, and a shower of little sparks, they shied round and scampered. A bat went fluttering past, uttering its almost inaudible "chip, chip." Ashurst held out his hand; on the upturned palm he could feel the dew. Suddenly from overhead he heard little burring boys' voices, little thumps of boots thrown down, and another voice, crisp and soft—the girl's putting them to bed, no doubt; and nine clear words "No, Rick, you can't have the cat in bed"; then came a skirmish of giggles and gurgles, a soft slap, a laugh so low and pretty that it made him shiver a little. A blowing sound, and the glim of the candle which was fingering the dusk above, went out; silence reigned. Ashurst withdrew into the room and sat down; his knee pained him, and his soul felt gloomy.

"You go to the kitchen," he said; "I'm going to bed."

For Ashurst the wheel of slumber was wont to turn noiseless and slick and swift, but though he seemed sunk in sleep when his companion came up, he was really wide awake; and long after Carton, smothered in the other bed of that low-roofed room, was worshipping darkness with his upturned nose, he heard the owls. Barring the discomfort of his knee, it was not unpleasant—the cares of life did not loom large in night watches for this young man. In fact he had none; just enrolled a barrister, with literary aspirations, the world before him, no father or mother, and four hundred a year of his own. Did it matter where he went, what he did, or when he did it? His bed, too, was hard, and this preserved him

from fever. He lay, sniffing the scent of the night which drifted into the low room through the open casement close to his head. Except for a definite irritation with his friend, natural when you have tramped with a man for three days, Ashurst's memories and visions that sleepless night were kindly and wistful and exciting. One vision, specially clear and unreasonable, for he had not even been conscious of noting it, was the face of the youth cleaning the gun; its intent, stolid, yet startled uplook at the kitchen doorway, quickly shifted to the girl carrying the cider jug. This red, blue-eyed, light-lashed, tow-haired face stuck as firmly in his memory as the girl's own face, so dewy and simple. But at last, in the square of darkness through the uncurtained casement, he saw day coming, and heard one hoarse and sleepy caw. Then followed silence, dead as ever, till the song of a blackbird, not properly awake, adventured into the hush. And, from staring at the framed brightening light, Ashurst fell asleep.

Next day his knee was badly swollen; the walking tour was obviously over. Garton, due back in London on the morrow, departed at midday with an ironical smile which left a scar of irritation—healed the moment his loping figure vanished round the corner of the steep lane. All day Ashurst rested his knee, in a green-painted wooden chair on the patch of grass by the yew-tree porch, where the sunlight distilled the scent of stocks and gillyflowers, and a ghost of scent from the flowering-currant bushes. Beatifically he smoked, dreamed, watched.

A farm in spring is all birth-young things coming out of bud and shell, and human beings watching over the process with faint excitement feeding and tending what has been born. So still the young man sat, that a mother-goose, with stately cross-footed waddle, brought her six yellow-necked grey-backed goslings to strop their little beaks against the grass blades at his feet. Now and again Mrs. Narracombe or the girl Megan would come and ask if he wanted anything, and he would smile and say: "Nothing, thanks. It's splendid here." Towards tea-time they came out together, bearing a long poultice of some dark stuff in a bowl, and after a long and solemn scrutiny of his swollen knee, bound it on. When they were gone, he thought of the girl's soft "Oh!"—of her pitying eyes, and the little wrinkle in her brow. And again he felt that unreasoning irritation against his departed friend, who had talked such rot about her. When she brought out his tea, he said:

"How did you like my friend, Megan?"

She forced down her upper lip, as if afraid that to smile was not polite.
"He was a funny gentleman; he made us laugh. I think he is very clever."

"What did he say to make you laugh?"

"He said I was a daughter of the bards. What are they?"

"Welsh poets, who lived hundreds of years ago."

"Why am I their daughter, please?"

"He meant that you were the sort of girl they sang about."

She wrinkled her brows. "I think he likes to joke. Am I?"

"Would you believe me, if I told you?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, I think he was right."

She smiled.

And Ashurst thought: 'You are a pretty thing!'

"He said, too, that Joe was a Saxon type. What would that be?"

"Which is Joe? With the blue eyes and red face?"

"Yes. My uncle's nephew."

"Not your cousin, then?"

"No."

"Well, he meant that Joe was like the men who came over to England about fourteen hundred years ago, and conquered it."

"Oh! I know about them; but is he?"

"Garton's crazy about that sort of thing; but I must say Joe does look a bit Early Saxon."

"Yes."

That "Yes" tickled Ashurst. It was so crisp and graceful, so conclusive, and politely acquiescent in what was evidently. Greek to her.

"He said that all the other boys were regular gipsies. He should not have said that. My aunt laughed, but she didn't like it, of course, and my cousins were angry. Uncle was a farmer—farmers are not gipsies. It is wrong to hurt people."

Ashurst wanted to take her hand and give it a squeeze, but he only answered:

"Quite right, Megan. By the way, I heard you putting the little ones to bed last night."

She flushed a little. "Please to drink your tea—it is getting cold. Shall I get you some fresh?"

"Do you ever have time to do anything for yourself?"

"Oh! Yes."

"I've been watching, but I haven't seen it yet."

She wrinkled her brows in a puzzled frown, and her colour deepened.

When she was gone, Ashurst thought: 'Did she think I was chaffing her? I wouldn't for the world!' He was at that age when to some men "Beauty's a flower," as the poet says, and inspires in them the thoughts of chivalry. Never very conscious of his surroundings, it was some time before he was aware that the youth whom Garton had called "a Saxon type" was standing outside the stable door; and a fine bit of colour he made in his soiled brown velvet-cords, muddy gaiters, and blue shirt; red-armed, red-faced, the sun turning his hair from tow to flax; immovably stolid, persistent, unsmiling he stood. Then, seeing Ashurst looking at him, he crossed the yard at that gait of the young countryman always ashamed not to be slow and heavy-dwelling on each leg, and disappeared round the end of the house towards the kitchen entrance. A chill came over Ashurst's mood. Clods? With all the good will in the world, how impossible to get on terms with them! And yet—see that girl! Her shoes were split, her hands rough; but—what was it? Was it really her Celtic blood, as Garton had said?—she was a lady born, a jewel, though probably she could do no more than just read and write!

The elderly, clean-shaven man he had seen last night in the kitchen had come into the yard with a dog, driving the cows to their milking. Ashurst saw that he was lame.

"You've got some good ones there!"

The lame man's face brightened. He had the upward look in his eyes which prolonged suffering often brings.

"Yeas; they'm praaper buties; gude milkers tu."

"I bet they are."

"Ope as yure leg's better, zurr."

"Thank you, it's getting on."

The lame man touched his own: "I know what 'tes, meself; 'tes a main worritin' thing, the knee. I've 'ad mine bad this ten year."

Ashurst made the sound of sympathy which comes so readily from those who have an independent income, and the lame man smiled again.

"Mustn't complain, though—they mighty near 'ad it off."

"Ho!"

"Yeas; an' compared with what 'twas, 'tes almost so gude as nu."

"They've put a bandage of splendid stuff on mine."

"The maid she picks et. She'm a gude maid wi' the flowers. There's folks zeem to know the healin' in things. My mother was a rare one for that. 'Ope as yu'll zune be better, zurr. Goo ahn, therr!"

Ashurst smiled. "Wi' the flowers!" A flower herself!

That evening, after his supper of cold duck, junket, and cider, the girl came in.

"Please, auntie says—will you try a piece of our Mayday cake?"

"If I may come to the kitchen for it."

"Oh, yes! You'll be missing your friend."

"Not I. But are you sure no one minds?"

"Who would mind? We shall be very pleased."

Ashurst rose too suddenly for his stiff knee, staggered, and subsided. The girl gave a little gasp, and held out her hands. Ashurst took them, small, rough, brown; checked his impulse to put them to his lips, and let her pull him up. She came close beside him, offering her shoulder. And leaning on her he walked across the room. That shoulder seemed quite the pleasantest thing he had ever touched. But, he had presence of mind enough to catch his stick out of the rack, and withdraw his hand before arriving at the kitchen.

That night he slept like a top, and woke with his knee of almost normal size. He again spent the morning in his chair on the grass patch, scribbling down verses; but in the afternoon he wandered about with the two little boys Nick and Rick. It was Saturday, so they were early home from school; quick, shy, dark little rascals of seven and six, soon talkative, for Ashurst had a way with children. By four o'clock they had shown him all their methods of destroying life, except the tickling of trout; and with breeches tucked up, lay on their stomachs over the trout stream, pretending they had this accomplishment also. They tickled nothing, of course, for their giggling and shouting scared every spotted thing away. Ashurst, on a rock at the edge of the beech clump, watched them, and listened to the cuckoos, till Nick, the elder and less persevering, came up and stood beside him.

"The gipsy bogle zets on that stone," he said.

"What gipsy bogie?"

"Dunno; never zeen 'e. Megan zays 'e zets there; an' old Jim zeed 'e once. 'E was zettin' there naight afore our pony kicked—in father's 'ead. 'E plays the viddle."

"What tune does he play?"

"Dunno."

"What's he like?"

"'E's black. Old Jim zays 'e's all over 'air. 'E's a praaper bogle. 'E don' come only at naight." The little boy's oblique dark eyes slid round. "D'yu think 'e might want to take me away? Megan's feared of 'e."

"Has she seen him?"

"No. She's not afeared o' yu."

"I should think not. Why should she be?"

"She zays a prayer for yu."

"How do you know that, you little rascal?"

"When I was asleep, she said: 'God bless us all, an' Mr. Ashes.' I yeard 'er whisperin'."

"You're a little ruffian to tell what you hear when you're not meant to hear it!"

The little boy was silent. Then he said aggressively:

"I can skin rabbets. Megan, she can't bear skinnin' 'em. I like blood."

"Oh! you do; you little monster!"

"What's that?"

"A creature that likes hurting others."

The little boy scowled. "They'm only dead rabbets, what us eats."

"Quite right, Nick. I beg your pardon."

"I can skin frogs, tu."

But Ashurst had become absent. "God bless us all, and Mr. Ashes!" And puzzled by that sudden inaccessibility, Nick ran back to the stream where the giggling and shouts again arose at once.

When Megan brought his tea, he said:

"What's the gipsy bogle, Megan?"

She looked up, startled.

"He brings bad things."

"Surely you don't believe in ghosts?"

"I hope I will never see him."

"Of course you won't. There aren't such things. What old Jim saw was a pony."

"No! There are bogies in the rocks; they are the men who lived long ago."

"They aren't gipsies, anyway; those old men were dead long before gipsies came."

She said simply: "They are all bad."

"Why? If there are any, they're only wild, like the rabbits. The flowers aren't bad for being wild; the thorn trees were never planted—and you don't mind them. I shall go down at night and look for your bogie, and have a talk with him."

"Oh, no! Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes! I shall go and sit on his rock."

She clasped her hands together: "Oh, please!"

"Why! What 'does it matter if anything happens to me?"

She did not answer; and in a sort of pet he added:

"Well, I daresay I shan't see him, because I suppose I must be off soon."

"Soon?"

"Your aunt won't want to keep me here."

"Oh, yes! We always let lodgings in summer."

Fixing his eyes on her face, he asked:

"Would you like me to stay?"

"Yes."

"I'm going to say a prayer for you to-night!"

She flushed crimson, frowned, and went out of the room. He sat, cursing himself, till his tea was stewed. It was as if he had hacked with his thick boots at a clump of bluebells. Why had he said such a silly thing? Was he just a towny college ass like Robert Garton, as far from understanding this girl?

Ashurst spent the next week confirming the restoration of his leg, by exploration of the country within easy reach. Spring was a revelation to him this year. In a kind of intoxication he would watch the pink-white buds of some backward beech tree sprayed up in the sunlight against the deep blue sky, or the trunks and limbs of the few Scotch firs, tawny in violent light, or again, on the moor, the gale-bent larches which had such a look of life when the wind streamed in their young green, above the rusty black underboughs. Or he would lie on the banks, gazing at the clusters of dog-violets, or up in the dead bracken, fingering the pink, transparent buds of the dewberry, while the cuckoos called and yafes laughed, or a lark, from very high, dripped its beads of song. It was certainly different from any spring he had ever known, for spring was within him, not without. In the daytime he hardly saw the family; and when Megan brought in his meals she always seemed too busy in the house or among the young things in the yard to stay talking long. But in the evenings he installed himself in the window seat in the

kitchen, smoking and chatting with the lame man Jim, or Mrs. Narracombe, while the girl sewed, or moved about, clearing the supper things away. And sometimes, with the sensation a cat must feel when it purrs, he would become conscious that Megan's eyes—those dew-grey eyes—were fixed on him with a sort of lingering soft look which was strangely flattering.

It was on Sunday week in the evening, when he was lying in the orchard listening to a blackbird and composing a love poem, that he heard the gate swing to, and saw the girl come running among the trees, with the red-cheeked, stolid Joe in swift pursuit. About twenty yards away the chase ended, and the two stood fronting each other, not noticing the stranger in the grass—the boy pressing on, the girl fending him off. Ashurst could see her face, angry, disturbed; and the youth's—who would have thought that red-faced yokel could look so distraught! And painfully affected by that sight, he jumped up. They saw him then. Megan dropped her hands, and shrank behind a tree trunk; the boy gave an angry grunt, rushed at the bank, scrambled over and vanished. Ashurst went slowly up to her. She was standing quite still, biting her lip—very pretty, with her fine, dark hair blown loose about her face, and her eyes cast down.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

She gave him one upward look, from eyes much dilated; then, catching her breath, turned away. Ashurst followed.

"Megan!"

But she went on; and taking hold of her arm, he turned her gently round to him.

"Stop and speak to me."

"Why do you beg my pardon? It is not to me you should do that."

"Well, then, to Joe."

"How dare he come after me?"

"In love with you, I suppose."

She stamped her foot.

Ashurst uttered a short laugh. "Would you like me to punch his head?"

She cried with sudden passion:

"You laugh at me—you laugh at us!"

He caught hold of her hands, but she shrank back, till her passionate little face and loose dark hair were caught among the pink clusters of the apple blossom. Ashurst raised one of her imprisoned hands and put his lips to it. He felt how chivalrous he was, and superior to that clod Joe—just brushing that small, rough hand with his mouth! Her shrinking ceased suddenly; she seemed to tremble towards him. A sweet warmth overtook Ashurst from top to toe. This slim maiden, so simple and fine and pretty, was pleased, then, at the touch of his lips! And, yielding to a swift impulse, he put his arms round her, pressed her to him, and kissed her forehead. Then he was frightened—she went so pale, closing her eyes, so that the long, dark lashes lay on her pale cheeks; her hands, too, lay inert at her sides. The touch of her breast sent a shiver through him. "Megan!" he sighed out, and let her go. In the utter silence a blackbird shouted. Then the girl seized his hand, put it to her cheek, her heart, her lips, kissed it passionately, and fled away among the mossy trunks of the apple trees, till they hid her from him.

Ashurst sat down on a twisted old tree growing almost along the ground, and, all throbbing and bewildered, gazed vacantly at the blossom which had crowned her hair—those pink buds with one white open apple star. What had he done? How had he let himself be thus stampeded by beauty—pity—or—just the spring! He felt curiously happy, all the same; happy and triumphant, with shivers running through his limbs, and a vague alarm. This was the beginning of—what? The midges bit him, the dancing gnats tried to fly into his mouth, and all the spring around him seemed to grow more lovely and alive; the songs of the cuckoos and the blackbirds, the laughter of the yafies, the level-slanting sunlight, the apple blossom which had crowned her head! He got up from the old trunk and strode out of the orchard, wanting space, an open sky, to get on terms with these new sensations. He made for the moor, and from an ash tree in the hedge a magpie flew out to herald him.

Of man—at any age from five years on—who can say he has never been in love? Ashurst had loved his partners at his dancing class; loved his nursery governess; girls in school-holidays; perhaps never been quite out of love, cherishing always some more or less remote admiration. But this was different, not

remote at all. Quite a new sensation; terribly delightful, bringing a sense of completed manhood. To be holding in his fingers such a wild flower, to be able to put it to his lips, and feel it tremble with delight against them! What intoxication, and—embarrassment! What to do with it—how meet her next time? His first caress had been cool, pitiful; but the next could not be, now that, by her burning little kiss on his hand, by her pressure of it to her heart, he knew that she loved him. Some natures are coarsened by love bestowed on them; others, like Ashurst's, are swayed and drawn, warmed and softened, almost exalted, by what they feel to be a sort of miracle.

And up there among the tors he was racked between the passionate desire to revel in this new sensation of spring fulfilled within him, and a vague but very real uneasiness. At one moment he gave himself up completely to his pride at having captured this pretty, trustful, dewy-eyed thing! At the next he thought with factitious solemnity: 'Yes, my boy! But look out what you're doing! You know what comes of it!'

Dusk dropped down without his noticing—dusk on the carved, Assyrian-looking masses of the rocks. And the voice of Nature said: "This is a new world for you!" As when a man gets up at four o'clock and goes out into a summer morning, and beasts, birds, trees stare at him and he feels as if all had been made new.

He stayed up there for hours, till it grew cold, then groped his way down the stones and heather roots to the road, back into the lane, and came again past the wild meadow to the orchard. There he struck a match and looked at his watch. Nearly twelve! It was black and unstirring in there now, very different from the lingering, bird-befriended brightness of six hours ago! And suddenly he saw this idyll of his with the eyes of the outer world—had mental vision of Mrs. Narracombe's snake-like neck turned, her quick dark glance taking it all in, her shrewd face hardening; saw the gipsy-like cousins coarsely mocking and distrustful; Joe stolid and furious; only the lame man, Jim, with the suffering eyes, seemed tolerable to his mind. And the village pub!—the gossiping matrons he passed on his walks; and then—his own friends—Robert Carton's smile when he went off that morning ten days ago; so ironical and knowing! Disgusting! For a minute he literally hated this earthy, cynical world to which one belonged, willy-nilly. The gate where he was leaning grew grey, a sort of shimmer passed before him and spread into the bluish darkness. The moon! He could just see it over the bank behind; red, nearly round—a strange moon! And turning away, he went up the lane which smelled of the night and cowdung and young leaves. In the straw-yard he could see the dark shapes of cattle, broken by the pale sickles of their horns, like so many thin moons, fallen ends-up. He unlatched the farm gate stealthily. All was dark in the house. Muffling his footsteps, he gained the porch, and, blotted against one of the yew trees, looked up at Megan's window. It was open. Was she sleeping, or lying awake perhaps, disturbed—unhappy at his absence? An owl hooted while he stood there peering up, and the sound seemed to fill the whole night, so quiet was all else, save for the never-ending murmur of the stream running below the orchard. The cuckoos by day, and now the owls—how wonderfully they voiced this troubled ecstasy within him! And suddenly he saw her at her window, looking out. He moved a little from the yew tree, and whispered: "Megan!" She drew back, vanished, reappeared, leaning far down. He stole forward on the grass patch, hit his shin against the green-painted chair, and held his breath at the sound. The pale blur of her stretched-down arm and face did not stir; he moved the chair, and noiselessly mounted it. By stretching up his arm he could just reach. Her hand held the huge key of the front door, and he clasped that burning hand with the cold key in it. He could just see her face, the glint of teeth between her lips, her tumbled hair. She was still dressed—poor child, sitting up for him, no doubt! "Pretty Megan!" Her hot, roughened fingers clung to his; her face had a strange, lost look. To have been able to reach it—even with his hand! The owl hooted, a scent of sweetbriar crept into his nostrils. Then one of the farm dogs barked; her grasp relaxed, she shrank back.

"Good-night, Megan!"

"Good-night, sir!" She was gone! With a sigh he dropped back to earth, and sitting on that chair, took off his boots. Nothing for it but to creep in and go to bed; yet for a long while he sat unmoving, his feet chilly in the dew, drunk on the memory of her lost, half-smiling face, and the clinging grip of her burning fingers, pressing the cold key into his hand.

He awoke feeling as if he had eaten heavily overnight, instead of having eaten nothing. And far off, unreal, seemed yesterday's romance! Yet it was a golden morning. Full spring had burst at last—in one night the "goldie-cups," as the little boys called them, seemed to have made the field their own, and from his window he could see apple blossoms covering the orchard as with a rose and white quilt. He went down almost dreading to see Megan; and yet, when not she but Mrs. Narracombe brought in his

breakfast, he felt vexed and disappointed. The woman's quick eye and snaky neck seemed to have a new alacrity this morning. Had she noticed?

"So you an' the moon went walkin' last night, Mr. Ashurst! Did ye have your supper anywheres?"

Ashurst shook his head.

"We kept it for you, but I suppose you was too busy in your brain to think o' such a thing as that?"

Was she mocking him, in that voice of hers, which still kept some Welsh crispness against the invading burr of the West Country? If she knew! And at that moment he thought: 'No, no; I'll clear out. I won't put myself in such a beastly false position.'

But, after breakfast, the longing to see Megan began and increased with every minute, together with fear lest something should have been said to her which had spoiled everything. Sinister that she had not appeared, not given him even a glimpse of her! And the love poem, whose manufacture had been so important and absorbing yesterday afternoon under the apple trees, now seemed so paltry that he tore it up and rolled it into pipe spills. What had he known of love, till she seized his hand and kissed it! And now—what did he not know? But to write of it seemed mere insipidity! He went up to his bedroom to get a book, and his heart began to beat violently, for she was in there making the bed. He stood in the doorway watching; and suddenly, with turbulent joy, he saw her stoop and kiss his pillow, just at the hollow made by his head last night.

How let her know he had seen that pretty act of devotion? And yet, if she heard him stealing away, it would be even worse. She took the pillow up, holding it as if reluctant to shake out the impress of his cheek, dropped it, and turned round.

"Megan!"

She put her hands up to her cheeks, but her eyes seemed to look right into him. He had never before realised the depth and purity and touching faithfulness in those dew-bright eyes, and he stammered:

"It was sweet of you to wait up for me last night."

She still said nothing, and he stammered on:

"I was wandering about on the moor; it was such a jolly night. I—I've just come up for a book."

Then, the kiss he had seen her give the pillow afflicted him with sudden headiness, and he went up to her. Touching her eyes with his lips, he thought with queer excitement: 'I've done it! Yesterday all was sudden—anyhow; but now—I've done it!' The girl let her forehead rest against his lips, which moved downwards till they reached hers. That first real lover's kiss—strange, wonderful, still almost innocent—in which heart did it make the most disturbance?

"Come to the big apple tree to-night, after they've gone to bed. Megan-promise!"

She whispered back: "I promise."

Then, scared at her white face, scared at everything, he let her go, and went downstairs again. Yes! He had done it now! Accepted her love, declared his own! He went out to the green chair as devoid of a book as ever; and there he sat staring vacantly before him, triumphant and remorseful, while under his nose and behind his back the work of the farm went on. How long he had been sitting in that curious state of vacancy he had no notion when he saw Joe standing a little behind him to the right. The youth had evidently come from hard work in the fields, and stood shifting his feet, breathing loudly, his face coloured like a setting sun, and his arms, below the rolled-up sleeves of his blue shirt, showing the hue and furry sheen of ripe peaches. His red lips were open, his blue eyes with their flaxen lashes stared fixedly at Ashurst, who said ironically:

"Well, Joe, anything I can do for you?"

"Yeas."

"What, then?"

"Yu can goo away from yere. Us don' want yu."

Ashurst's face, never too humble, assumed its most lordly look.

"Very good of you, but, do you know, I prefer the others should speak for themselves."

The youth moved a pace or two nearer, and the scent of his honest heat afflicted Ashurst's nostrils.

"What d'yu stay yere for?"

"Because it pleases me."

"Twon't please yu when I've bashed yure head in!"

"Indeed! When would you like to begin that?"

Joe answered only with the loudness of his breathing, but his eyes looked like those of a young and angry bull. Then a sort of spasm seemed to convulse his face.

"Megan don' want yu."

A rush of jealousy, of contempt, and anger with this thick, loud-breathing rustic got the better of Ashurst's self-possession; he jumped up, and pushed back his chair.

"You can go to the devil!"

And as he said those simple words, he saw Megan in the doorway with a tiny brown spaniel puppy in her arms. She came up to him quickly:

"Its eyes are blue!" she said.

Joe turned away; the back of his neck was literally crimson.

Ashurst put his finger to the mouth of the little brown bullfrog of a creature in her arms. How cosy it looked against her!

"It's fond of you already. Ah I Megan, everything is fond of you."

"What was Joe saying to you, please?"

"Telling me to go away, because you didn't want me here."

She stamped her foot; then looked up at Ashurst. At that adoring look he felt his nerves quiver, just as if he had seen a moth scorching its wings.

"To-night!" he said. "Don't forget!"

"No." And smothering her face against the puppy's little fat, brown body, she slipped back into the house.

Ashurst wandered down the lane. At the gate of the wild meadow he came on the lame man and his cows.

"Beautiful day, Jim!"

"Ah! 'Tes brave weather for the grass. The ashes be later than th' oaks this year. 'When th' oak before th' ash—'"

Ashurst said idly: "Where were you standing when you saw the gipsy bogie, Jim?"

"It might be under that big apple tree, as you might say."

"And you really do think it was there?"

The lame man answered cautiously:

"I shouldn't like to say rightly that 't was there. 'Twas in my mind as 'twas there."

"What do you make of it?"

The lame man lowered his voice.

"They du zay old master, Mist' Narracombe come o' gipsy stock. But that's tellin'. They'm a wonderful people, yu know, for claimin' their own. Maybe they knu 'e was goin', and sent this feller along for company. That's what I've a-thought about it."

"What was he like?"

"'E 'ad 'air all over 'is face, an' goin' like this, he was, zame as if 'e 'ad a viddle. They zay there's no such thing as bogies, but I've a-zeen the 'air on this dog standin' up of a dark naight, when I couldn' zee nothin', meself."

"Was there a moon?"

"Yeas, very near full, but 'twas on'y just risen, gold-like be'ind them trees."

"And you think a ghost means trouble, do you?"

The lame man pushed his hat up; his aspiring eyes looked at Ashurst more earnestly than ever.

"'T'es not for me to zay that but 'tes they bein' so unrestin'like. There's things us don' understand, that's zartin, for zure. There's people that zee things, tu, an' others that don't never zee nothin'. Now, our Joe—yu might putt anything under'is eyes an e'd never zee it; and them other boys, tu, they'm rattlin' fellers. But yu take an' putt our Megan where there's suthin', she'll zee it, an' more tu, or I'm mistaken."

"She's sensitive, that's why."

"What's that?"

"I mean, she feels everything."

"Ah! She'm very lovin'-'earted."

Ashurst, who felt colour coming into his cheeks, held out his tobacco pouch.

"Have a fill, Jim?"

"Thank 'ee, sir. She'm one in an 'underd, I think."

"I expect so," said Ashurst shortly, and folding up his pouch, walked on.

"Lovin'-hearted!" Yes! And what was he doing? What were his intentions—as they say towards this loving-hearted girl? The thought dogged him, wandering through fields bright with buttercups, where the little red calves were feeding, and the swallows flying high. Yes, the oaks were before the ashes, brown-gold already; every tree in different stage and hue. The cuckoos and a thousand birds were singing; the little streams were very bright. The ancients believed in a golden age, in the garden of the Hesperides!... A queen wasp settled on his sleeve. Each queen wasp killed meant two thousand fewer wasps to thieve the apples which would grow from that blossom in the orchard; but who, with love in his heart, could kill anything on a day like this? He entered a field where a young red bull was feeding. It seemed to Ashurst that he looked like Joe. But the young bull took no notice of this visitor, a little drunk himself, perhaps, on the singing and the glamour of the golden pasture, under his short legs. Ashurst crossed out unchallenged to the hillside above the stream. From that slope a for mounted to its crown of rocks. The ground there was covered with a mist of bluebells, and nearly a score of crab-apple trees were in full bloom. He threw himself down on the grass. The change from the buttercup glory and oak-goldened glamour of the fields to this ethereal beauty under the grey for filled him with a sort of wonder; nothing the same, save the sound of running water and the songs of the cuckoos. He lay there a long time, watching the sunlight wheel till the crab-trees threw shadows over the bluebells, his only companions a few wild bees. He was not quite sane, thinking of that morning's kiss, and of to-night under the apple tree. In such a spot as this, fauns and dryads surely lived; nymphs, white as the crab-apple blossom, retired within those trees; fauns, brown as the dead bracken, with pointed ears, lay in wait for them. The cuckoos were still calling when he woke, there was the sound of running water; but the sun had couched behind the tor, the hillside was cool, and some rabbits had come out. 'Tonight!' he thought. Just as from the earth everything was pushing up, unfolding under the soft insistent fingers of an unseen hand, so were his heart and senses being pushed, unfolded. He got up and broke off a spray from a crab-apple tree. The buds were like Megan—shell-like, rose-pink, wild, and fresh; and so, too, the opening flowers, white, and wild; and touching. He put the spray into his coat. And all the rush of the spring within him escaped in a triumphant sigh. But the rabbits scurried away.

It was nearly eleven that night when Ashurst put down the pocket "Odyssey" which for half an hour he had held in his hands without reading, and slipped through the yard down to the orchard. The moon had just risen, very golden, over the hill, and like a bright, powerful, watching spirit peered through the bars of an ash tree's half-naked boughs. In among the apple trees it was still dark, and he stood making

sure of his direction, feeling the rough grass with his feet. A black mass close behind him stirred with a heavy grunting sound, and three large pigs settled down again close to each other, under the wall. He listened. There was no wind, but the stream's burbling whispering chuckle had gained twice its daytime strength. One bird, he could not tell what, cried "Pippip," "Pip-pip," with perfect monotony; he could hear a night-Jar spinning very far off; an owl hooting. Ashurst moved a step or two, and again halted, aware of a dim living whiteness all round his head. On the dark unstimulating trees innumerable flowers and buds all soft and blurred were being bewitched to life by the creeping moonlight. He had the oddest feeling of actual companionship, as if a million white moths or spirits had floated in and settled between dark sky and darker ground, and were opening and shutting their wings on a level with his eyes. In the bewildering, still, scentless beauty of that moment he almost lost memory of why he had come to the orchard. The flying glamour which had clothed the earth all day had not gone now that night had fallen, but only changed into this new form. He moved on through the thicket of stems and boughs covered with that live powdering whiteness, till he reached the big apple tree. No mistaking that, even in the dark, nearly twice the height and size of any other, and leaning out towards the open meadows and the stream. Under the thick branches he stood still again, to listen. The same sounds exactly, and a faint grunting from the sleepy pigs. He put his hands on the dry, almost warm tree trunk, whose rough mossy surface gave forth a peaty scent at his touch. Would she come—would she? And among these quivering, haunted, moon-witched trees he was seized with doubts of everything! All was unearthly here, fit for no earthly lovers; fit only for god and goddess, faun and nymph not for him and this little country girl. Would it not be almost a relief if she did not come? But all the time he was listening. And still that unknown bird went "Pip-pip," "Pip-pip," and there rose the busy chatter of the little trout stream, whereon the moon was flinging glances through the bars of her tree-prison. The blossom on a level with his eyes seemed to grow more living every moment, seemed with its mysterious white beauty more and more a part of his suspense. He plucked a fragment and held it close—three blossoms. Sacrilege to pluck fruit-tree blossom—soft, sacred, young blossom—and throw it away! Then suddenly he heard the gate close, the pigs stirring again and grunting; and leaning against the trunk, he pressed his hands to its mossy sides behind him, and held his breath. She might have been a spirit threading the trees, for all the noise she made! Then he saw her quite close—her dark form part of a little tree, her white face part of its blossom; so still, and peering towards him. He whispered: "Megan!" and held out his hands. She ran forward, straight to his breast. When he felt her heart beating against him, Ashurst knew to the full the sensations of chivalry and passion. Because she was not of his world, because she was so simple and young and headlong, adoring and defenceless, how could he be other than her protector, in the dark! Because she was all simple Nature and beauty, as much a part of this spring night as was the living blossom, how should he not take all that she would give him how not fulfil the spring in her heart and his! And torn between these two emotions he clasped her close, and kissed her hair. How long they stood there without speaking he knew not. The stream went on chattering, the owls hooting, the moon kept stealing up and growing whiter; the blossom all round them and above brightened in suspense of living beauty. Their lips had sought each other's, and they did not speak. The moment speech began all would be unreal! Spring has no speech, nothing but rustling and whispering. Spring has so much more than speech in its unfolding flowers and leaves, and the coursing of its streams, and in its sweet restless seeking! And sometimes spring will come alive, and, like a mysterious Presence stand, encircling lovers with its arms, laying on them the fingers of enchantment, so that, standing lips to lips, they forget everything but just a kiss. While her heart beat against him, and her lips quivered on his, Ashurst felt nothing but simple rapture—Destiny meant her for his arms, Love could not be flouted! But when their lips parted for breath, division began again at once. Only, passion now was so much the stronger, and he sighed:

"Oh! Megan! Why did you come?" She looked up, hurt, amazed.

"Sir, you asked me to."

"Don't call me 'sir,' my pretty sweet." "What should I be callin' you?"

"Frank."

"I could not. Oh, no!"

"But you love me—don't you?"

"I could not help lovin' you. I want to be with you—that's all."

"All!"

So faint that he hardly heard, she whispered: "I shall die if I can't be with you."

Ashurst took a mighty breath.

"Come and be with me, then!"

"Oh!"

Intoxicated by the awe and rapture in that "Oh!" he went on, whispering:

"We'll go to London. I'll show you the world.

"And I will take care of you, I promise, Megan. I'll never be a brute to you!"

"If I can be with you—that is all."

He stroked her hair, and whispered on:

"To-morrow I'll go to Torquay and get some money, and get you some clothes that won't be noticed, and then we'll steal away. And when we get to London, soon perhaps, if you love me well enough, we'll be married."

He could feel her hair shiver with the shake of her head.

"Oh, no! I could not. I only want to be with you!"

Drunk on his own chivalry, Ashurst went on murmuring, "It's I who am not good enough for you. Oh! Megan, when did you begin to love me?"

"When I saw you in the road, and you looked at me. The first night I loved you; but I never thought you would want me."

She slipped down suddenly to her knees, trying to kiss his feet.

A shiver of horror went through Ashurst; he lifted her up bodily and held her fast—too upset to speak.

She whispered: "Why won't you let me?"

"It's I who will kiss your feet!"

Her smile brought tears into his eyes. The whiteness of her moonlit face so close to his, the faint pink of her opened lips, had the living unearthly beauty of the apple blossom.

And then, suddenly, her eyes widened and stared past him painfully; she writhed out of his arms, and whispered: "Look!"

Ashurst saw nothing but the brightened stream, the furze faintly gilded, the beech trees glistening, and behind them all the wide loom of the moonlit hill. Behind him came her frozen whisper: "The gipsy bogie!"

"Where?"

"There—by the stone—under the trees!"

Exasperated, he leaped the stream, and strode towards the beech clump. Prank of the moonlight! Nothing! In and out of the boulders and thorn trees, muttering and cursing, yet with a kind of terror, he rushed and stumbled. Absurd! Silly! Then he went back to the apple tree. But she was gone; he could hear a rustle, the grunting of the pigs, the sound of a gate closing. Instead of her, only this old apple tree! He flung his arms round the trunk. What a substitute for her soft body; the rough moss against his face—what a substitute for her soft cheek; only the scent, as of the woods, a little the same! And above him, and around, the blossoms, more living, more moonlit than ever, seemed to glow and breathe.

Descending from the train at Torquay station, Ashurst wandered uncertainly along the front, for he did not know this particular queen of English watering places. Having little sense of what he had on, he was quite unconscious of being remarkable among its inhabitants, and strode along in his rough Norfolk jacket, dusty boots, and battered hat, without observing that people gazed at him rather blankly. He was seeking a branch of his London bank, and having found one, found also the first obstacle to his mood. Did he know anyone in Torquay? No. In that case, if he would wire to his bank in London, they would be happy to oblige him on receipt of the reply. That suspicious breath from the matter-of-fact world somewhat tarnished the brightness of his visions. But he sent the telegram.

Nearly opposite to the post office he saw a shop full of ladies' garments, and examined the window with strange sensations. To have to undertake the clothing of his rustic love was more than a little disturbing. He went in. A young woman came forward; she had blue eyes and a faintly puzzled forehead. Ashurst stared at her in silence.

"Yes, sir?"

"I want a dress for a young lady."

The young woman smiled. Ashurst frowned the peculiarity of his request struck him with sudden force.

The young woman added hastily:

"What style would you like—something modish?"

"No. Simple."

"What figure would the young lady be?"

"I don't know; about two inches shorter than you, I should say."

"Could you give me her waist measurement?"

Megan's waist!

"Oh! anything usual!"

"Quite!"

While she was gone he stood disconsolately eyeing the models in the window, and suddenly it seemed to him incredible that Megan—his Megan could ever be dressed save in the rough tweed skirt, coarse blouse, and tam-o'-shanter cap he was wont to see her in. The young woman had come back with several dresses in her arms, and Ashurst eyed her laying them against her own modish figure. There was one whose colour he liked, a dove-grey, but to imagine Megan clothed in it was beyond him. The young woman went away, and brought some more. But on Ashurst there had now come a feeling of paralysis. How choose? She would want a hat too, and shoes, and gloves; and, suppose, when he had got them all, they commonised her, as Sunday clothes always commonised village folk! Why should she not travel as she was? Ah! But conspicuousness would matter; this was a serious elopement. And, staring at the young woman, he thought: 'I wonder if she guesses, and thinks me a blackguard?'

"Do you mind putting aside that grey one for me?" he said desperately at last. "I can't decide now; I'll come in again this afternoon."

The young woman sighed.

"Oh! certainly. It's a very tasteful costume. I don't think you'll get anything that will suit your purpose better."

"I expect not," Ashurst murmured, and went out.

Freed again from the suspicious matter-of-factness of the world, he took a long breath, and went back to visions. In fancy he saw the trustful, pretty creature who was going to join her life to his; saw himself and her stealing forth at night, walking over the moor under the moon, he with his arm round her, and carrying her new garments, till, in some far-off wood, when dawn was coming, she would slip off her old things and put on these, and an early train at a distant station would bear them away on their honeymoon journey, till London swallowed them up, and the dreams of love came true.

"Frank Ashurst! Haven't seen you since Rugby, old chap!"

Ashurst's frown dissolved; the face, close to his own, was blue-eyed, suffused with sun—one of those faces where sun from within and without join in a sort of lustre. And he answered:

"Phil Halliday, by Jove!"

"What are you doing here?"

"Oh! nothing. Just looking round, and getting some money. I'm staying on the moor."

"Are you lunching anywhere? Come and lunch with us; I'm here with my young sisters. They've had measles."

Hooked in by that friendly arm Ashurst went along, up a hill, down a hill, away out of the town, while the voice of Halliday, redolent of optimism as his face was of sun, explained how "in this mouldy place the only decent things were the bathing and boating," and so on, till presently they came to a crescent of houses a little above and back from the sea, and into the centre one an hotel—made their way.

"Come up to my room and have a wash. Lunch'll be ready in a jiffy."

Ashurst contemplated his visage in a looking-glass. After his farmhouse bedroom, the comb and one spare shirt regime of the last fortnight, this room littered with clothes and brushes was a sort of Capua; and he thought: 'Queer—one doesn't realise But what—he did not quite know.

When he followed Halliday into the sitting room for lunch, three faces, very fair and blue-eyed, were turned suddenly at the words: "This is Frank Ashurst my young sisters."

Two were indeed young, about eleven and ten. The third was perhaps seventeen, tall and fair-haired too, with pink-and-white cheeks just touched by the sun, and eyebrows, rather darker than the hair, running a little upwards from her nose to their outer points. The voices of all three were like Halliday's, high and cheerful; they stood up straight, shook hands with a quick movement, looked at Ashurst critically, away again at once, and began to talk of what they were going to do in the afternoon. A regular Diana and attendant nymphs! After the farm this crisp, slangy, eager talk, this cool, clean, off-hand refinement, was queer at first, and then so natural that what he had come from became suddenly remote. The names of the two little ones seemed to be Sabina and Freda; of the eldest, Stella.

Presently the one called Sabina turned to him and said:

"I say, will you come shrimping with us?—it's awful fun!"

Surprised by this unexpected friendliness, Ashurst murmured:

"I'm afraid I've got to get back this afternoon."

"Oh!"

"Can't you put it off?"

Ashurst turned to the new speaker, Stella, shook his head, and smiled. She was very pretty! Sabina said regretfully: "You might!" Then the talk switched off to caves and swimming.

"Can you swim far?"

"About two miles."

"Oh!"

"I say!"

"How jolly!"

The three pairs of blue eyes, fixed on him, made him conscious of his new importance—The sensation was agreeable. Halliday said:

"I say, you simply must stop and have a bathe. You'd better stay the night."

"Yes, do!"

But again Ashurst smiled and shook his head. Then suddenly he found himself being catechised about his physical achievements. He had rowed—it seemed—in his college boat, played in his college football team, won his college mile; and he rose from table a sort of hero. The two little girls insisted that he must see "their" cave, and they set forth chattering like magpies, Ashurst between them, Stella and her brother a little behind. In the cave, damp and darkish like any other cave, the great feature was a pool with possibility of creatures which might be caught and put into bottles. Sabina and Freda, who wore no stockings on their shapely brown legs, exhorted Ashurst to join them in the middle of it, and help sieve the water. He too was soon bootless and sockless. Time goes fast for one who has a sense of beauty, when there are pretty children in a pool and a young Diana on the edge, to receive with wonder anything you can catch! Ashurst never had much sense of time. It was a shock when, pulling out his watch, he saw it was well past three. No cashing his cheque to-day—the bank would be closed before he could get there. Watching his expression, the little girls cried out at once:

"Hurrah! Now you'll have to stay!"

Ashurst did not answer. He was seeing again Megan's face, when at breakfast time he had whispered: "I'm going to Torquay, darling, to get everything; I shall be back this evening. If it's fine we can go to-night. Be ready." He was seeing again how she quivered and hung on his words. What would she think? Then he pulled himself together, conscious suddenly of the calm scrutiny of this other young girl, so tall and fair and Diana-like, at the edge of the pool, of her wondering blue eyes under those brows which slanted up a little. If they knew what was in his mind—if they knew that this very night he had meant! Well, there would be a little sound of disgust, and he would be alone in the cave. And with a curious mixture of anger, chagrin, and shame, he put his watch back into his pocket and said abruptly:

"Yes; I'm dished for to-day."

"Hurrah! Now you can bathe with us."

It was impossible not to succumb a little to the contentment of these pretty children, to the smile on Stella's lips, to Halliday's "Ripping, old chap! I can lend you things for the night!" But again a spasm of longing and remorse throbbed through Ashurst, and he said moodily:

"I must send a wire!"

The attractions of the pool palling, they went back to the hotel. Ashurst sent his wire, addressing it to Mrs. Narracombe: "Sorry, detained for the night, back to-morrow." Surely Megan would understand that he had too much to do; and his heart grew lighter. It was a lovely afternoon, warm, the sea calm and blue, and swimming his great passion; the favour of these pretty children flattered him, the pleasure of looking at them, at Stella, at Halliday's sunny face; the slight unreality, yet extreme naturalness of it all—as of a last peep at normality before he took this plunge with Megan! He got his borrowed bathing dress, and they all set forth. Halliday and he undressed behind one rock, the three girls behind another. He was first into the sea, and at once swam out with the bravado of justifying his self-given reputation. When he turned he could see Halliday swimming along shore, and the girls flopping and dipping, and riding the little waves, in the way he was accustomed to despise, but now thought pretty and sensible, since it gave him the distinction of the only deep-water fish. But drawing near, he wondered if they would like him, a stranger, to come into their splashing group; he felt shy, approaching that slim nymph. Then Sabina summoned him to teach her to float, and between them the little girls kept him so busy that he had no time even to notice whether Stella was accustomed to his presence, till suddenly he heard a startled sound from her: She was standing submerged to the waist, leaning a little forward, her slim white arms stretched out and pointing, her wet face puckered by the sun and an expression of fear.

"Look at Phil! Is he all right? Oh, look!"

Ashurst saw at once that Phil was not all right. He was splashing and struggling out of his depth, perhaps a hundred yards away; suddenly he gave a cry, threw up his arms, and went down. Ashurst saw the girl launch herself towards him, and crying out: "Go back, Stella! Go back!" he dashed out. He had never swum so fast, and reached Halliday just as he was coming up a second time. It was a case of cramp, but to get him in was not difficult, for he did not struggle. The girl, who had stopped where Ashurst told her to, helped as soon as he was in his depth, and once on the beach they sat down one on each side of him to rub his limbs, while the little ones stood by with scared faces. Halliday was soon smiling. It was—he said—rotten of him, absolutely rotten! If Frank would give him an arm, he could get to his clothes all right now. Ashurst gave him the arm, and as he did so caught sight of Stella's face, wet and flushed and tearful, all broken up out of its calm; and he thought: 'I called her Stella! Wonder if she minded?'

While they were dressing, Halliday said quietly, "You saved my life, old chap!"

"Rot!"

Clothed, but not quite in their right minds, they went up all together to the hotel and sat down to tea, except Halliday, who was lying down in his room. After some slices of bread and jam, Sabina said:

"I say, you know, you are a brick!" And Freda chimed in:

"Rather!"

Ashurst saw Stella looking down; he got up in confusion, and went to the window. From there he heard Sabina mutter: "I say, let's swear blood bond. Where's your knife, Freda?" and out of the corner of his eye could see each of them solemnly prick herself, squeeze out a drop of blood and dabble on a bit of paper. He turned and made for the door.

"Don't be a stoat! Come back!" His arms were seized; imprisoned between the little girls he was

brought back to the table. On it lay a piece of paper with an effigy drawn in blood, and the three names Stella Halliday, Sabina Halliday, Freda Halliday—also in blood, running towards it like the rays of a star. Sabina said:

"That's you. We shall have to kiss you, you know."

And Freda echoed:

"Oh! Blow—Yes!"

Before Ashurst could escape, some wettish hair dangled against his face, something like a bite descended on his nose, he felt his left arm pinched, and other teeth softly searching his cheek. Then he was released, and Freda said:

"Now, Stella."

Ashurst, red and rigid, looked across the table at a red and rigid Stella. Sabina giggled; Freda cried:

"Buck up—it spoils everything!"

A queer, ashamed eagerness shot through Ashurst: then he said quietly:

"Shut up, you little demons!"

Again Sabina giggled.

"Well, then, she can kiss her hand, and you can put it against your nose. It is on one side!"

To his amazement the girl did kiss her hand and stretch it out. Solemnly he took that cool, slim hand and laid it to his cheek. The two little girls broke into clapping, and Freda said:

"Now, then, we shall have to save your life at any time; that's settled. Can I have another cup, Stella, not so beastly weak?" Tea was resumed, and Ashurst, folding up the paper, put it in his pocket. The talk turned on the advantages of measles, tangerine oranges, honey in a spoon, no lessons, and so forth. Ashurst listened, silent, exchanging friendly looks with Stella, whose face was again of its normal sun-touched pink and white. It was soothing to be so taken to the heart of this jolly family, fascinating to watch their faces. And after tea, while the two little girls pressed seaweed, he talked to Stella in the window seat and looked at her water-colour sketches. The whole thing was like a pleasurable dream; time and incident hung up, importance and reality suspended. Tomorrow he would go back to Megan, with nothing of all this left save the paper with the blood of these children, in his pocket. Children! Stella was not quite that—as old as Megan! Her talk—quick, rather hard and shy, yet friendly—seemed to flourish on his silences, and about her there was something cool and virginal—a maiden in a bower. At dinner, to which Halliday, who had swallowed too much sea-water, did not come, Sabina said:

"I'm going to call you Frank."

Freda echoed:

"Frank, Frank, Franky."

Ashurst grinned and bowed.

"Every time Stella calls you Mr. Ashurst, she's got to pay a forfeit. It's ridiculous."

Ashurst looked at Stella, who grew slowly red. Sabina giggled; Freda cried:

"She's 'smoking'—'smoking!'—Yah!"

Ashurst reached out to right and left, and grasped some fair hair in each hand.

"Look here," he said, "you two! Leave Stella alone, or I'll tie you together!"

Freda gurgled:

"Ouch! You are a beast!"

Sabina murmured cautiously:

"You call her Stella, you see!"

"Why shouldn't I? It's a jolly name!"

"All right; we give you leave to!"

Ashurst released the hair. Stella! What would she call him—after this? But she called him nothing; till at bedtime he said, deliberately:

"Good-night, Stella!"

"Good-night, Mr.—Good-night, Frank! It was jolly of you, you know!"

"Oh-that! Bosh!"

Her quick, straight handshake tightened suddenly, and as suddenly became slack.

Ashurst stood motionless in the empty sitting-room. Only last night, under the apple tree and the living blossom, he had held Megan to him, kissing her eyes and lips. And he gasped, swept by that rush of remembrance. To-night it should have begun—his life with her who only wanted to be with him! And now, twenty-four hours and more must pass, because of not looking at his watch! Why had he made friends with this family of innocents just when he was saying good-bye to innocence, and all the rest of it? 'But I mean to marry her,' he thought; 'I told her so!'

He took a candle, lighted it, and went to his bedroom, which was next to Halliday's. His friend's voice called, as he was passing:

"Is that you, old chap? I say, come in."

He was sitting up in bed, smoking a pipe and reading.

"Sit down a bit."

Ashurst sat down by the open window.

"I've been thinking about this afternoon, you know," said Halliday rather suddenly. "They say you go through all your past. I didn't. I suppose I wasn't far enough gone."

"What did you think of?"

Halliday was silent for a little, then said quietly

"Well, I did think of one thing—rather odd—of a girl at Cambridge that I might have—you know; I was glad I hadn't got her on my mind. Anyhow, old chap, I owe it to you that I'm here; I should have been in the big dark by now. No more bed, or baccy; no more anything. I say, what d'you suppose happens to us?"

Ashurst murmured:

"Go out like flames, I expect."

"Phew!"

"We may flicker, and cling about a bit, perhaps."

"H'm! I think that's rather gloomy. I say, I hope my young sisters have been decent to you?"

"Awfully decent."

Halliday put his pipe down, crossed his hands behind his neck, and turned his face towards the window.

"They're not bad kids!" he said.

Watching his friend, lying there, with that smile, and the candle-light on his face, Ashurst shuddered. Quite true! He might have been lying there with no smile, with all that sunny look gone out for ever! He might not have been lying there at all, but "sanded" at the bottom of the sea, waiting for resurrection on the ninth day, was it? And that smile of Halliday's seemed to him suddenly something wonderful, as if in it were all the difference between life and death—the little flame—the all! He got up, and said softly:

"Well, you ought to sleep, I expect. Shall I blow out?"

Halliday caught his hand.

"I can't say it, you know; but it must be rotten to be dead. Good-night, old boy!"

Stirred and moved, Ashurst squeezed the hand, and went downstairs. The hall door was still open, and he passed out on to the lawn before the Crescent. The stars were bright in a very dark blue sky, and by their light some lilacs had that mysterious colour of flowers by night which no one can describe. Ashurst pressed his face against a spray; and before his closed eyes Megan started up, with the tiny brown spaniel pup against her breast. "I thought of a girl that I might have you know. I was glad I hadn't got her on my mind!" He jerked his head away from the lilac, and began pacing up and down over the grass, a grey phantom coming to substance for a moment in the light from the lamp at either end. He was with her again under the living, breathing white ness of the blossom, the stream chattering by, the moon glinting steel-blue on the bathing-pool; back in the rapture of his kisses on her upturned face of innocence and humble passion, back in the suspense and beauty of that pagan night. He stood still once more in the shadow of the lilacs. Here the sea, not the stream, was Night's voice; the sea with its sigh and rustle; no little bird, no owl, no night-Jar called or spun; but a piano tinkled, and the white houses cut the sky with solid curve, and the scent from the lilacs filled the air. A window of the hotel, high up, was lighted; he saw a shadow move across the blind. And most queer sensations stirred within him, a sort of churning, and twining, and turning of a single emotion on itself, as though spring and love, bewildered and confused, seeking the way, were baffled. This girl, who had called him Frank, whose hand had given his that sudden little clutch, this girl so cool and pure—what would she think of such wild, unlawful loving? He sank down on the grass, sitting there cross-legged, with his back to the house, motionless as some carved Buddha. Was he really going to break through innocence, and steal? Sniff the scent out of a wild flower, and—perhaps—throw it away? "Of a girl at Cambridge that I might have—you know!" He put his hands to the grass, one on each side, palms downwards, and pressed; it was just warm still—the grass, barely moist, soft and firm and friendly. 'What am I going to do?' he thought. Perhaps Megan was at her window, looking out at the blossom, thinking of him! Poor little Megan! 'Why not?' he thought. 'I love her! But do I really love her? or do I only want her because she is so pretty, and loves me? What am I going to do?' The piano tinkled on, the stars winked; and Ashurst gazed out before him at the dark sea, as if spell-bound. He got up at last, cramped and rather chilly. There was no longer light in any window. And he went in to bed.

Out of a deep and dreamless sleep he was awakened by the sound of thumping on the door. A shrill voice called:

"Hi! Breakfast's ready."

He jumped up. Where was he—? Ah!

He found them already eating marmalade, and sat down in the empty place between Stella and Sabina, who, after watching him a little, said:

"I say, do buck up; we're going to start at half-past nine."

"We're going to Berry Head, old chap; you must come!"

Ashurst thought: 'Come! Impossible. I shall be getting things and going back.' He looked at Stella. She said quickly:

"Do come!"

Sabina chimed in:

"It'll be no fun without you."

Freda got up and stood behind his chair.

"You've got to come, or else I'll pull your hair!"

Ashurst thought: 'Well—one day more—to think it over! One day more!' And he said:

"All right! You needn't tweak my mane!"

"Hurrah!"

At the station he wrote a second telegram to the farm, and then tore it up; he could not have explained why. From Brixham they drove in a very little wagonette. There, squeezed between Sabina and Freda, with his knees touching Stella's, they played "Up, Jenkins "; and the gloom he was feeling

gave way to frolic. In this one day more to think it over, he did not want to think! They ran races, wrestled, paddled—for to-day nobody wanted to bathe—they sang catches, played games, and ate all they had brought. The little girls fell asleep against him on the way back, and his knees still touched Stella's in the narrow wagonette. It seemed incredible that thirty hours ago he had never set eyes on any of those three flaxen heads. In the train he talked to Stella of poetry, discovering her favourites, and telling her his own with a pleasing sense of superiority; till suddenly she said, rather low:

"Phil says you don't believe in a future life, Frank. I think that's dreadful."

Disconcerted, Ashurst muttered:

"I don't either believe or not believe—I simply don't know."

She said quickly:

"I couldn't bear that. What would be the use of living?"

Watching the frown of those pretty oblique brows, Ashurst answered:

"I don't believe in believing things because a one wants to."

"But why should one wish to live again, if one isn't going to?"

And she looked full at him.

He did not want to hurt her, but an itch to dominate pushed him on to say:

"While one's alive one naturally wants to go on living for ever; that's part of being alive. But it probably isn't anything more."

"Don't you believe in the Bible at all, then?"

Ashurst thought: 'Now I shall really hurt her!'

"I believe in the Sermon on the Mount, because it's beautiful and good for all time."

"But don't you believe Christ was divine?"

He shook his head.

She turned her face quickly to the window, and there sprang into his mind Megan's prayer, repeated by little Nick: "God bless us all, and Mr. Ashes!" Who else would ever say a prayer for him, like her who at this moment must be waiting—waiting to see him come down the lane? And he thought suddenly: 'What a scoundrel I am!'

All that evening this thought kept coming back; but, as is not unusual, each time with less poignancy, till it seemed almost a matter of course to be a scoundrel. And—strange!—he did not know whether he was a scoundrel if he meant to go back to Megan, or if he did not mean to go back to her.

They played cards till the children were sent off to bed; then Stella went to the piano. From over on the window seat, where it was nearly dark, Ashurst watched her between the candles—that fair head on the long, white neck bending to the movement of her hands. She played fluently, without much expression; but what a Picture she made, the faint golden radiance, a sort of angelic atmosphere hovering about her! Who could have passionate thoughts or wild desires in the presence of that swaying, white-clothed girl with the seraphic head? She played a thing of Schumann's called "Warum?" Then Halliday brought out a flute, and the spell was broken. After this they made Ashurst sing, Stella playing him accompaniments from a book of Schumann songs, till, in the middle of "Ich grolle nicht," two small figures clad in blue dressing-gowns crept in and tried to conceal themselves beneath the piano. The evening broke up in confusion, and what Sabina called "a splendid rag."

That night Ashurst hardly slept at all. He was thinking, tossing and turning. The intense domestic intimacy of these last two days, the strength of this Halliday atmosphere, seemed to ring him round, and make the farm and Megan—even Megan—seem unreal. Had he really made love to her—really promised to take her away to live with him? He must have been bewitched by the spring, the night, the apple blossom! This May madness could but destroy them both! The notion that he was going to make her his mistress—that simple child not yet eighteen—now filled him with a sort of horror, even while it still stung and whipped his blood. He muttered to himself: "It's awful, what I've done—awful!" And the sound of Schumann's music throbbed and mingled with his fevered thoughts, and he saw again Stella's cool, white, fair-haired figure and bending neck, the queer, angelic radiance about her. 'I must have been—I must be-mad!' he thought. 'What came into me? Poor little Megan!' "God bless us all, and Mr.

Ashes!" "I want to be with you—only to be with you!" And burying his face in his pillow, he smothered down a fit of sobbing. Not to go back was awful! To go back—more awful still!

Emotion, when you are young, and give real vent to it, loses its power of torture. And he fell asleep, thinking: 'What was it—a few kisses—all forgotten in a month!'

Next morning he got his cheque cashed, but avoided the shop of the dove-grey dress like the plague; and, instead, bought himself some necessaries. He spent the whole day in a queer mood, cherishing a kind of sullenness against himself. Instead of the hankering of the last two days, he felt nothing but a blank—all passionate longing gone, as if quenched in that outburst of tears. After tea Stella put a book down beside him, and said shyly:

"Have you read that, Frank?"

It was Farrar's "Life of Christ." Ashurst smiled. Her anxiety about his beliefs seemed to him comic, but touching. Infectious too, perhaps, for he began to have an itch to justify himself, if not to convert her. And in the evening, when the children and Halliday were mending their shrimping nets, he said:

"At the back of orthodox religion, so far as I can see, there's always the idea of reward—what you can get for being good; a kind of begging for favours. I think it all starts in fear."

She was sitting on the sofa making reefer knots with a bit of string. She looked up quickly:

"I think it's much deeper than that."

Ashurst felt again that wish to dominate.

"You think so," he said; "but wanting the 'quid pro quo' is about the deepest thing in all of us! It's jolly hard to get to the bottom of it!"

She wrinkled her brows in a puzzled frown.

"I don't think I understand."

He went on obstinately:

"Well, think, and see if the most religious people aren't those who feel that this life doesn't give them all they want. I believe in being good because to be good is good in itself."

"Then you do believe in being good?"

How pretty she looked now—it was easy to be good with her! And he nodded and said:

"I say, show me how to make that knot!"

With her fingers touching his, in manoeuvring the bit of string, he felt soothed and happy. And when he went to bed he wilfully kept his thoughts on her, wrapping himself in her fair, cool sisterly radiance, as in some garment of protection.

Next day he found they had arranged to go by train to Totnes, and picnic at Berry Pomeroy Castle. Still in that resolute oblivion of the past, he took his place with them in the landau beside Halliday, back to the horses. And, then, along the sea front, nearly at the turning to the railway station, his heart almost leaped into his mouth. Megan—Megan herself!—was walking on the far pathway, in her old skirt and jacket and her tam-o'-shanter, looking up into the faces of the passers-by. Instinctively he threw his hand up for cover, then made a feint of clearing dust out of his eyes; but between his fingers he could see her still, moving, not with her free country step, but wavering, lost-looking, pitiful-like some little dog which has missed its master and does not know whether to run on, to run back—where to run. How had she come like this?—what excuse had she found to get away?—what did she hope for? But with every turn of the wheels bearing him away from her, his heart revolted and cried to him to stop them, to get out, and go to her! When the landau turned the corner to the station he could stand it no more, and opening the carriage door, muttered: "I've forgotten something! Go on—don't wait for me! I'll join you at the castle by the next train!" He jumped, stumbled, spun round, recovered his balance, and walked forward, while the carriage with the astonished Hallidays rolled on.

From the corner he could only just see Megan, a long way ahead now. He ran a few steps, checked himself, and dropped into a walk. With each step nearer to her, further from the Hallidays, he walked more and more slowly. How did it alter anything—this sight of her? How make the going to her, and that which must come of it, less ugly? For there was no hiding it—since he had met the Hallidays he had become gradually sure that he would not marry Megan. It would only be a wild love-time, a troubled, remorseful, difficult time—and then—well, then he would get tired, just because she gave him

everything, was so simple, and so trustful, so dewy. And dew—wears off! The little spot of faded colour, her tam-o'-shanter cap, wavered on far in front of him; she was looking up into every face, and at the house windows. Had any man ever such a cruel moment to go through? Whatever he did, he felt he would be a beast. And he uttered a groan which made a nursemaid turn and stare. He saw Megan stop and lean against the sea-wall, looking at the sea; and he too stopped. Quite likely she had never seen the sea before, and even in her distress could not resist that sight. 'Yes-she's seen nothing,' he thought; 'everything's before her. And just for a few weeks' passion, I shall be cutting her life to ribbons. I'd better go and hang myself rather than do it!' And suddenly he seemed to see Stella's calm eyes looking into his, the wave of fluffy hair on her forehead stirred by the wind. Ah! it would be madness, would mean giving up all that he respected, and his own self-respect. He turned and walked quickly back towards the station. But memory of that poor, bewildered little figure, those anxious eyes searching the passers-by, smote him too hard again, and once more he turned towards the sea.

The cap was no longer visible; that little spot of colour had vanished in the stream of the noon promenaders. And impelled by the passion of longing, the dearth which comes on one when life seems to be whirling something out of reach, he hurried forward. She was nowhere to be seen; for half an hour he looked for her; then on the beach flung himself face downward in the sand. To find her again he knew he had only to go to the station and wait till she returned from her fruitless quest, to take her train home; or to take train himself and go back to the farm, so that she found him there when she returned. But he lay inert in the sand, among the indifferent groups of children with their spades and buckets. Pity at her little figure wandering, seeking, was well-nigh merged in the spring-running of his blood; for it was all wild feeling now—the chivalrous part, what there had been of it, was gone. He wanted her again, wanted her kisses, her soft, little body, her abandonment, all her quick, warm, pagan emotion; wanted the wonderful feeling of that night under the moonlit apple boughs; wanted it all with a horrible intensity, as the faun wants the nymph. The quick chatter of the little bright trout-stream, the dazzle of the buttercups, the rocks of the old "wild men"; the calling of the cuckoos and yaffles, the hooting of the owls; and the red moon peeping out of the velvet dark at the living whiteness of the blossom; and her face just out of reach at the window, lost in its love-look; and her heart against his, her lips answering his, under the apple tree—all this besieged him. Yet he lay inert. What was it which struggled against pity and this feverish longing, and kept him there paralysed in the warm sand? Three flaxen heads—a fair face with friendly blue—grey eyes, a slim hand pressing his, a quick voice speaking his name—"So you do believe in being good?" Yes, and a sort of atmosphere as of some old walled-in English garden, with pinks, and cornflowers, and roses, and scents of lavender and lilacool and fair, untouched, almost holy—all that he had been brought up to feel was clean and good. And suddenly he thought: 'She might come along the front again and see me!' and he got up and made his way to the rock at the far end of the beach. There, with the spray biting into his face, he could think more coolly. To go back to the farm and love Megan out in the woods, among the rocks, with everything around wild and fitting—that, he knew, was impossible, utterly. To transplant her to a great town, to keep, in some little flat or rooms, one who belonged so wholly to Nature—the poet in him shrank from it. His passion would be a mere sensuous revel, soon gone; in London, her very simplicity, her lack of all intellectual quality, would make her his secret plaything—nothing else. The longer he sat on the rock, with his feet dangling over a greenish pool from which the sea was ebbing, the more clearly he saw this; but it was as if her arms and all of her were slipping slowly, slowly down from him, into the pool, to be carried away out to sea; and her face looking up, her lost face with beseeching eyes, and dark, wet hair-possessed, haunted, tortured him! He got up at last, scaled the low rock-cliff, and made his way down into a sheltered cove. Perhaps in the sea he could get back his control—lose this fever! And stripping off his clothes, he swam out. He wanted to tire himself so that nothing mattered and swam recklessly, fast and far; then suddenly, for no reason, felt afraid. Suppose he could not reach shore again—suppose the current set him out—or he got cramp, like Halliday! He turned to swim in. The red cliffs looked a long way off. If he were drowned they would find his clothes. The Hallidays would know; but Megan perhaps never—they took no newspaper at the farm. And Phil Halliday's words came back to him again: "A girl at Cambridge I might have Glad I haven't got her on my mind!" And in that moment of unreasoning fear he vowed he would not have her on his mind. Then his fear left him; he swam in easily enough, dried himself in the sun, and put on his clothes. His heart felt sore, but no longer ached; his body cool and refreshed.

When one is as young as Ashurst, pity is not a violent emotion. And, back in the Hallidays' sitting-room, eating a ravenous tea, he felt much like a man recovered from fever. Everything seemed new and clear; the tea, the buttered toast and jam tasted absurdly good; tobacco had never smelt so nice. And walking up and down the empty room, he stopped here and there to touch or look. He took up Stella's work-basket, fingered the cotton reels and a gaily-coloured plait of sewing silks, smelt at the little bag filled with woodroffe she kept among them. He sat down at the piano, playing tunes with one finger, thinking: 'To-night she'll play; I shall watch her while she's playing; it does me good to watch her.' He took up the book, which still lay where she had placed it beside him, and tried to read. But Megan's little, sad figure began to come back at once, and he got up and leaned in the window, listening to the

thrushes in the Crescent gardens, gazing at the sea, dreamy and blue below the trees. A servant came in and cleared the tea away, and he still stood, inhaling the evening air, trying not to think. Then he saw the Hallidays coming through the gate of the Crescent, Stella a little in front of Phil and the children, with their baskets, and instinctively he drew back. His heart, too sore and discomfited, shrank from this encounter, yet wanted its friendly solace—bore a grudge against this influence, yet craved its cool innocence, and the pleasure of watching Stella's face. From against the wall behind the piano he saw her come in and stand looking a little blank as though disappointed; then she saw him and smiled, a swift, brilliant smile which warmed yet irritated Ashurst.

"You never came after us, Frank."

"No; I found I couldn't."

"Look! We picked such lovely late violets!" She held out a bunch. Ashurst put his nose to them, and there stirred within him vague longings, chilled instantly by a vision of Megan's anxious face lifted to the faces of the passers-by.

He said shortly: "How jolly!" and turned away. He went up to his room, and, avoiding the children, who were coming up the stairs, threw himself on his bed, and lay there with his arms crossed over his face. Now that he felt the die really cast, and Megan given up, he hated himself, and almost hated the Hallidays and their atmosphere of healthy, happy English homes.

Why should they have chanced here, to drive away first love—to show him that he was going to be no better than a common seducer? What right had Stella, with her fair, shy beauty, to make him know for certain that he would never marry Megan; and, tarnishing it all, bring him such bitterness of regretful longing and such pity? Megan would be back by now, worn out by her miserable seeking—poor little thing!—expecting, perhaps, to find him there when she reached home. Ashurst bit at his sleeve, to stifle a groan of remorseful longing. He went to dinner glum and silent, and his mood threw a dinge even over the children. It was a melancholy, rather ill tempered evening, for they were all tired; several times he caught Stella looking at him with a hurt, puzzled expression, and this pleased his evil mood. He slept miserably; got up quite early, and wandered out. He went down to the beach. Alone there with the serene, the blue, the sunlit sea, his heart relaxed a little. Conceited fool—to think that Megan would take it so hard! In a week or two she would almost have forgotten! And he well, he would have the reward of virtue! A good young man! If Stella knew, she would give him her blessing for resisting that devil she believed in; and he uttered a hard laugh. But slowly the peace and beauty of sea and sky, the flight of the lonely seagulls, made him feel ashamed. He bathed, and turned homewards.

In the Crescent gardens Stella herself was sitting on a camp stool, sketching. He stole up close behind. How fair and pretty she was, bent diligently, holding up her brush, measuring, wrinkling her brows.

He said gently:

"Sorry I was such a beast last night, Stella."

She turned round, startled, flushed very pink, and said in her quick way:

"It's all right. I knew there was something. Between friends it doesn't matter, does it?"

Ashurst answered:

"Between friends—and we are, aren't we?"

She looked up at him, nodded vehemently, and her upper teeth gleamed again in that swift, brilliant smile.

Three days later he went back to London, travelling with the Hallidays. He had not written to the farm. What was there he could say?

On the last day of April in the following year he and Stella were married....

Such were Ashurst's memories, sitting against the wall among the gorse, on his silver-wedding day. At this very spot, where he had laid out the lunch, Megan must have stood outlined against the sky when he had first caught sight of her. Of all queer coincidences! And there moved in him a longing to go down and see again the farm and the orchard, and the meadow of the gipsy bogle. It would not take long; Stella would be an hour yet, perhaps.

How well he remembered it all—the little crowning group of pine trees, the steep-up grass hill behind! He paused at the farm gate. The low stone house, the yew-tree porch, the flowering currants—

not changed a bit; even the old green chair was out there on the grass under the window, where he had reached up to her that night to take the key. Then he turned down the lane, and stood leaning on the orchard gate—grey skeleton of a gate, as then. A black pig even was wandering in there among the trees. Was it true that twenty-six years had passed, or had he dreamed and awakened to find Megan waiting for him by the big apple tree? Unconsciously he put up his hand to his grizzled beard and brought himself back to reality. Opening the gate, he made his way down through the docks and nettles till he came to the edge, and the old apple tree itself. Unchanged! A little more of the greygreen lichen, a dead branch or two, and for the rest it might have been only last night that he had embraced that mossy trunk after Megan's flight and inhaled its woody savour, while above his head the moonlit blossom had seemed to breathe and live. In that early spring a few buds were showing already; the blackbirds shouting their songs, a cuckoo calling, the sunlight bright and warm. Incredibly the same—the chattering trout-stream, the narrow pool he had lain in every morning, splashing the water over his flanks and chest; and out there in the wild meadow the beech clump and the stone where the gipsy bogie was supposed to sit. And an ache for lost youth, a hankering, a sense of wasted love and sweetness, gripped Ashurst by the throat. Surely, on this earth of such wild beauty, one was meant to hold rapture to one's heart, as this earth and sky held it! And yet, one could not!

He went to the edge of the stream, and looking down at the little pool, thought: 'Youth and spring! What has become of them all, I wonder?'

And then, in sudden fear of having this memory jarred by human encounter, he went back to the lane, and pensively retraced his steps to the crossroads.

Beside the car an old, grey-bearded labourer was leaning on a stick, talking to the chauffeur. He broke off at once, as though guilty of disrespect, and touching his hat, prepared to limp on down the lane.

Ashurst pointed to the narrow green mound. "Can you tell me what this is?"

The old fellow stopped; on his face had come a look as though he were thinking: 'You've come to the right shop, mister!'

"'Tis a grave," he said.

"But why out here?"

The old man smiled. "That's a tale, as yu may say. An' not the first time as I've a-told et—there's plenty folks asks 'bout that bit o' turf. 'Maid's Grave' us calls et, 'ereabouts."

Ashurst held out his pouch. "Have a fill?"

The old man touched his hat again, and slowly filled an old clay pipe. His eyes, looking upward out of a mass of wrinkles and hair, were still quite bright.

"If yu don' mind, zurr, I'll zet down my leg's 'urtin' a bit today." And he sat down on the mound of turf.

"There's always a flower on this grave. An' 'tain't so very lonesome, neither; brave lot o' folks goes by now, in they new motor cars an' things—not as 'twas in th' old days. She've a got company up 'ere. 'Twas a poor soul killed 'erself."

"I see!" said Ashurst. "Cross-roads burial. I didn't know that custom was kept up."

"Ah! but 'twas a main long time ago. Us 'ad a parson as was very God-fearin' then. Let me see, I've a 'ad my pension six year come Michaelmas, an' I were just on fifty when t'appened. There's none livin' knows more about et than what I du. She belonged close 'ere; same farm as where I used to work along o' Mrs. Narracombe 'tes Nick Narracombe's now; I dus a bit for 'im still, odd times."

Ashurst, who was leaning against the gate, lighting his pipe, left his curved hands before his face for long after the flame of the match had gone out.

"Yes?" he said, and to himself his voice sounded hoarse and queer.

"She was one in an 'underd, poor maid! I putts a flower 'ere every time I passes. Pretty maid an' gude maid she was, though they wouldn't burry 'er up to th' church, nor where she wanted to be burried neither." The old labourer paused, and put his hairy, twisted hand flat down on the turf beside the bluebells.

"Yes?" said Ashurst.

"In a manner of speakin'," the old man went on, "I think as 'twas a love-story—though there's no one

never knu for zartin. Yu can't tell what's in a maid's 'ead but that's wot I think about it." He drew his hand along the turf. "I was fond o' that maid—don' know as there was anyone as wasn' fond of 'er. But she was to lovin'-'earted—that's where 'twas, I think." He looked up. And Ashurst, whose lips were trembling in the cover of his beard, murmured again: "Yes?"

"'Twas in the spring, 'bout now as 't might be, or a little later—blossom time—an' we 'ad one o' they young college gentlemen stayin' at the farm—nice feller tu, with 'is 'ead in the air. I liked 'e very well, an' I never see nothin' between 'em, but to my thinkin' 'e turned the maid's fancy." The old man took the pipe out of his mouth, spat, and went on:

"Yu see, 'e went away sudden one day, an' never come back. They got 'is knapsack and bits o' things down there still. That's what stuck in my mind—'is never sendin' for 'em. 'Is name was Ashes, or somethen' like that."

"Yes?" said Ashurst once more.

The old man licked his lips.

"'Er never said nothin', but from that day 'er went kind of dazed lukin'; didn't seem rightly therr at all. I never knu a'uman creature so changed in me life—never. There was another young feller at the farm—Joe Biddaford 'is name wer', that was praaperly sweet on 'er, tu; I guess 'e used to plague 'er wi' 'is attentions. She got to luke quite wild. I'd zee her sometimes of an avenin' when I was bringin' up the calves; ther' she'd stand in th' orchard, under the big apple tree, lukin' straight before 'er. 'Well,' I used t'think, 'I dunno what 'tes that's the matter wi' yu, but yu'm lukin' pittiful, that yu be!'"

The old man refit his pipe, and sucked at it reflectively.

"Yes?" said Ashurst.

"I remembers one day I said to 'er: 'What's the matter, Megan?'—'er name was Megan David, she come from Wales same as 'er aunt, ol' Missis Narracombe. 'Yu'm frettin' about somethin'. I says. 'No, Jim,' she says, 'I'm not frettin'.' 'Yes, yu be!' I says. 'No,' she says, and to tears cam' rollin' out. 'Yu'm cryin'—what's that, then?' I says. She putts 'er 'and over 'er 'eart: 'It 'urts me,' she says; 'but 'twill sune be better,' she says. 'But if anything shude 'appen to me, Jim, I wants to be burried under this 'ere apple tree.' I laughed. 'What's goin' to 'appen to yu?' I says; 'don't 'ee be fulish.' 'No,' she says, 'I won't be fulish.' Well, I know what maids are, an' I never thought no more about et, till two days arter that, 'bout six in the avenin' I was comin' up wi' the calves, when I see somethin' dark lyin' in the strame, close to that big apple tree. I says to meself: 'Is that a pig-funny place for a pig to get to!' an' I goes up to et, an' I see what 'twas."

The old man stopped; his eyes, turned upward, had a bright, suffering look.

"'Twas the maid, in a little narrer pool ther' that's made by the stoppin' of a rock—where I see the young gentleman bathin' once or twice. 'Er was lyin' on 'er face in the watter. There was a plant o' goldie-cups growin' out o' the stone just above 'er'ead. An' when I come to luke at 'er face, 'twas luvly, butiful, so calm's a baby's—wonderful butiful et was. When the doctor saw 'er, 'e said: 'Er culdn' never a-done it in that little bit o' watter ef' er 'adn't a-been in an extarsy.' Ah! an' judgin' from 'er face, that was just 'ow she was. Et made me cry praaper-butiful et was! 'Twas June then, but she'd afound a little bit of apple-blossom left over somewheres, and stuck et in 'er 'air. That's why I thinks 'er must abeen in an extarsy, to go to et gay, like that. Why! there wasn't more than a fute and 'arf o' watter. But I tell 'ee one thing—that meadder's 'arnted; I knu et, an' she knu et; an' no one'll persuade me as 'tesn't. I told 'em what she said to me 'bout bein' burried under th' apple tree. But I think that turned 'em—made et luke to much 's ef she'd 'ad it in 'er mind deliberate; an' so they burried 'er up 'ere. Parson we 'ad then was very particular, 'e was."

Again the old man drew his hand over the turf.

"'Tes wonderful, et seems," he added slowly, "what maids 'll du for love. She 'ad a lovin'-eart; I guess 'twas broken. But us never knu nothin'!"

He looked up as if for approval of his story, but Ashurst had walked past him as if he were not there.

Up on the top of the hill, beyond where he had spread the lunch, over, out of sight, he lay down on his face. So had his virtue been rewarded, and "the Cyprian," goddess of love, taken her revenge! And before his eyes, dim with tears, came Megan's face with the sprig of apple blossom in her dark, wet hair. 'What did I do that was wrong?' he thought. 'What did I do?' But he could not answer. Spring, with its rush of passion, its flowers and song—the spring in his heart and Megan's! Was it just Love seeking a victim! The Greek was right, then—the words of the "Hippolytus" as true to-day!

"For mad is the heart of Love,
And gold the gleam of his wing;
And all to the spell thereof
Bend when he makes his spring.
All life that is wild and young
In mountain and wave and stream
All that of earth is sprung,
Or breathes in the red sunbeam;
Yea, and Mankind. O'er all a royal throne,
Cyprian, Cyprian, is thine alone!"

The Greek was right! Megan! Poor little Megan—coming over the hill! Megan under the old apple tree waiting and looking! Megan dead, with beauty printed on her!

A voice said:

"Oh, there you are! Look!"

Ashurst rose, took his wife's sketch, and stared at it in silence.

"Is the foreground right, Frank?"

"Yes."

"But there's something wanting, isn't there?"

Ashurst nodded. Wanting? The apple tree, the singing, and the gold!

And solemnly he put his lips to her forehead. It was his silver-wedding day. 1916

THE JURYMAN

"Don't you see, brother, I was reading yesterday the Gospel about Christ, the little Father; how He suffered, how He walked on the earth. I suppose you have heard about it?"

"Indeed, I have," replied Stepanuitch; "but we are people in darkness; we can't read."—
TOLSTOI.

Mr. Henry Bosengate, of the London Stock Exchange, seated himself in his car that morning during the great war with a sense of injury. Major in a Volunteer Corps; member of all the local committees; lending this very car to the neighbouring hospital, at times even driving it himself for their benefit; subscribing to funds, so far as his diminished income permitted—he was conscious of being an asset to the country, and one whose time could not be wasted with impunity. To be summoned to sit on a jury at the local assizes, and not even the grand jury at that! It was in the nature of an outrage.

Strong and upright, with hazel eyes and dark eyebrows, pinkish-brown cheeks, a forehead white, well-shaped, and getting high, with greyish hair glossy and well-brushed, and a trim moustache, he might have been taken for that colonel of Volunteers which indeed he was in a fair way of becoming.

His wife had followed him out under the porch, and stood bracing her supple body clothed in lilac linen. Red rambler roses formed a sort of crown to her dark head; her ivory-coloured face had in it just a suggestion of the Japanese.

Mr. Bosengate spoke through the whirr of the engine:

"I don't expect to be late, dear. This business is ridiculous. There oughtn't to be any crime in these days."

His wife—her name was Kathleen—smiled. She looked very pretty and cool, Mr. Bosengate thought. To him bound on this dull and stuffy business everything he owned seemed pleasant—the geranium beds beside the gravel drive, his long, red-brick house mellowing decorously in its creepers and ivy, the little clock-tower over stables now converted to a garage, the dovecote, masking at the other end the conservatory which adjoined the billiard-room. Close to the red-brick lodge his two children, Kate and Harry, ran out from under the acacia trees, and waved to him, scrambling bare-legged on to the low,

red, ivy-covered wall which guarded his domain of eleven acres. Mr. Bosengate waved back, thinking: 'Jolly couple—by Jove, they are!' Above their heads, through the trees, he could see right away to some Downs, faint in the July heat haze. And he thought: 'Pretty a spot as one could have got, so close to Town!'

Despite the war he had enjoyed these last two years more than any of the ten since he built "Charmleigh" and settled down to semi-rural domesticity with his young wife. There had been a certain piquancy, a savour added to existence, by the country's peril, and all the public service and sacrifice it demanded. His chauffeur was gone, and one gardener did the work of three. He enjoyed—positively enjoyed, his committee work; even the serious decline of business and increase of taxation had not much worried one continually conscious of the national crisis and his own part therein. The country had wanted waking up, wanted a lesson in effort and economy; and the feeling that he had not spared himself in these strenuous times, had given a zest to those quiet pleasures of bed and board which, at his age, even the most patriotic could retain with a good conscience. He had denied himself many things—new clothes, presents for Kathleen and the children, travel, and that pine-apple house which he had been on the point of building when the war broke out; new wine, too, and cigars, and membership of the two Clubs which he had never used in the old days. The hours had seemed fuller and longer, sleep better earned—wonderful, the things one could do without when put to it! He turned the car into the high road, driving dreamily for he was in plenty of time. The war was going pretty well now; he was no fool optimist, but now that conscription was in force, one might reasonably hope for its end within a year. Then there would be a boom, and one might let oneself go a little. Visions of theatres and supper with his wife at the Savoy afterwards, and cosy night drives back into the sweet-smelling country behind your own chauffeur once more teased a fancy which even now did not soar beyond the confines of domestic pleasures. He pictured his wife in new dresses by Jay—she was fifteen years younger than himself, and "paid for dressing" as they said. He had always delighted—as men older than their wives will—in the admiration she excited from others not privileged to enjoy her charms. Her rather queer and ironical beauty, her cool irreproachable wifeliness, was a constant balm to him. They would give dinner parties again, have their friends down from town, and he would once more enjoy sitting at the foot of the dinner table while Kathleen sat at the head, with the light soft on her ivory shoulders, behind flowers she had arranged in that original way of hers, and fruit which he had grown in his hot-houses; once more he would take legitimate interest in the wine he offered to his guests—once more stock that Chinese cabinet wherein he kept cigars. Yes—there was a certain satisfaction in these days of privation, if only from the anticipation they created.

The sprinkling of villas had become continuous on either side of the high road; and women going out to shop, tradesmen's boys delivering victuals, young men in khaki, began to abound. Now and then a limping or bandaged form would pass—some bit of human wreckage; and Mr. Bosengate would think mechanically: 'Another of those poor devils! Wonder if we've had his case before us!'

Running his car into the best hotel garage of the little town, he made his way leisurely over to the court. It stood back from the market-place, and was already lapped by a sea of persons having, as in the outer ring at race meetings, an air of business at which one must not be caught out, together with a soaked or flushed appearance. Mr. Bosengate could not resist putting his handkerchief to his nose. He had carefully drenched it with lavender water, and to this fact owed, perhaps, his immunity from the post of foreman on the jury—for, say what you will about the English, they have a deep instinct for affairs.

He found himself second in the front row of the jury box, and through the odour of "Sanitas" gazed at the judge's face expressionless up there, for all the world like a bewigged bust. His fellows in the box had that appearance of falling between two classes characteristic of jurymen. Mr. Bosengate was not impressed. On one side of him the foreman sat, a prominent upholsterer, known in the town as "Gentleman Fox." His dark and beautifully brushed and oiled hair and moustache, his radiant linen, gold watch and chain, the white piping to his waistcoat, and a habit of never saying "Sir" had long marked him out from commoner men; he undertook to bury people too, to save them trouble; and was altogether superior. On the other side Mr. Bosengate had one of those men, who, except when they sit on juries, are never seen without a little brown bag, and the appearance of having been interrupted in a drink. Pale and shiny, with large loose eyes shifting from side to side, he had an underdone voice and uneasy flabby hands. Mr. Bosengate disliked sitting next to him. Beyond this commercial traveller sat a dark pale young man with spectacles; beyond him again, a short old man with grey moustache, mutton chops, and innumerable wrinkles; and the front row was completed by a chemist. The three immediately behind, Mr. Bosengate did not thoroughly master; but the three at the end of the second row he learned in their order of an oldish man in a grey suit, given to winking; an inanimate person with the mouth of a moustachioed codfish, over whose long bald crown three wisps of damp hair were carefully arranged; and a dried, dapperish, clean-shorn man, whose mouth seemed terrified lest it should be surprised without a smile. Their first and second verdicts were recorded without the

necessity for withdrawal, and Mr. Bosengate was already sleepy when the third case was called. The sight of khaki revived his drooping attention. But what a weedy-looking specimen! This prisoner had a truly nerveless pitiable dejected air. If he had ever had a military bearing it had shrunk into him during his confinement. His ill-shaped brown tunic, whose little brass buttons seemed trying to keep smiling, struck Mr. Bosengate as ridiculously short, used though he was to such things. 'Absurd,' he thought—'Lumbago! Just where they ought to be covered!' Then the officer and gentleman stirred in him, and he added to himself: 'Still, there must be some distinction made!' The little soldier's visage had once perhaps been tanned, but was now the colour of dark dough; his large brown eyes with white showing below the iris, as so often in the eyes of very nervous people—wandered from face to face, of judge, counsel, jury, and public. There were hollows in his cheeks, his dark hair looked damp; around his neck he wore a bandage. The commercial traveller on Mr. Bosengate's left turned, and whispered: "Felo de se! My hat! what a guy!" Mr. Bosengate pretended not to hear—he could not bear that fellow!—and slowly wrote on a bit of paper: "Owen Lewis." Welsh! Well, he looked it—not at all an English face. Attempted suicide—not at all an English crime! Suicide implied surrender, a putting-up of hands to Fate—to say nothing of the religious aspect of the matter. And suicide in khaki seemed to Mr. Bosengate particularly abhorrent; like turning tail in face of the enemy; almost meriting the fate of a deserter. He looked at the prisoner, trying not to give way to this prejudice. And the prisoner seemed to look at him, though this, perhaps, was fancy.

The Counsel for the prosecution, a little, alert, grey, decided man, above military age, began detailing the circumstances of the crime. Mr. Bosengate, though not particularly sensitive to atmosphere, could perceive a sort of current running through the Court. It was as if jury and public were thinking rhythmically in obedience to the same unexpressed prejudice of which he himself was conscious. Even the Caesar-like pale face up there, presiding, seemed in its ironic serenity responding to that current.

"Gentlemen of the jury, before I call my evidence, I direct your attention to the bandage the accused is still wearing. He gave himself this wound with his Army razor, adding, if I may say so, insult to the injury he was inflicting on his country. He pleads not guilty; and before the magistrates he said that absence from his wife was preying on his mind"—the advocate's close lips widened—"Well, gentlemen, if such an excuse is to weigh with us in these days, I'm sure I don't know what's to happen to the Empire."

'No, by George!' thought Mr. Bosengate.

The evidence of the first witness, a room-mate who had caught the prisoner's hand, and of the sergeant, who had at once been summoned, was conclusive and he began to cherish a hope that they would get through without withdrawing, and he would be home before five. But then a hitch occurred. The regimental doctor failed to respond when his name was called; and the judge having for the first time that day showed himself capable of human emotion, intimated that he would adjourn until the morrow.

Mr. Bosengate received the announcement with equanimity. He would be home even earlier! And gathering up the sheets of paper he had scribbled on, he put them in his pocket and got up. The would-be suicide was being taken out of the court—a shambling drab figure with shoulders hunched. What good were men like that in these days! What good! The prisoner looked up. Mr. Bosengate encountered in full the gaze of those large brown eyes, with the white showing underneath. What a suffering, wretched, pitiful face! A man had no business to give you a look like that! The prisoner passed on down the stairs, and vanished. Mr. Bosengate went out and across the market place to the garage of the hotel where he had left his car. The sun shone fiercely and he thought: 'I must do some watering in the garden.' He brought the car out, and was about to start the engine, when someone passing said: "Good evenin'. Seedy-lookin' beggar that last prisoner, ain't he? We don't want men of that stamp." It was his neighbour on the jury, the commercial traveller, in a straw hat, with a little brown bag already in his hand and the froth of an interrupted drink on his moustache. Answering curtly: "Good evening!" and thinking: 'Nor of yours, my friend!' Mr. Bosengate started the car with unnecessary clamour. But as if brought back to life by the commercial traveller's remark, the prisoner's figure seemed to speed along too, turning up at Mr. Bosengate his pitifully unhappy eyes. Want of his wife!—queer excuse that for trying to put it out of his power ever to see her again! Why! Half a loaf, even a slice, was better than no bread. Not many of that neurotic type in the Army—thank Heaven! The lugubrious figure vanished, and Mr. Bosengate pictured instead the form of his own wife bending over her "Gloire de Dijon roses" in the rosery, where she generally worked a little before tea now that they were short of gardeners. He saw her, as often he had seen her, raise herself and stand, head to one side, a gloved hand on her slender hip, gazing as it were ironically from under drooped lids at buds which did not come out fast enough. And the word 'Caline,' for he was something of a French scholar, shot through his mind: 'Kathleen—Caline!' If he found her there when he got in, he would steal up on the grass and—ah! but with great care not to crease her dress or disturb her hair! 'If only she weren't quite so self-contained,' he thought; 'It's like a cat you can't get near, not really near!'

The car, returning faster than it had come down that morning, had already passed the outskirt villas, and was breasting the hill to where, among fields and the old trees, Charmleigh lay apart from commoner life. Turning into his drive, Mr. Bosengate thought with a certain surprise: 'I wonder what she does think of! I wonder!' He put his gloves and hat down in the outer hall and went into the lavatory, to dip his face in cool water and wash it with sweet-smelling soap—delicious revenge on the unclean atmosphere in which he had been stewing so many hours. He came out again into the hall dazed by soap and the mellowed light, and a voice from half-way up the stairs said: "Daddy! Look!" His little daughter was standing up there with one hand on the banisters. She scrambled on to them and came sliding down, her frock up to her eyes, and her holland knickers to her middle. Mr. Bosengate said mildly:

"Well, that's elegant!"

"Tea's in the summer-house. Mummy's waiting. Come on!"

With her hand in his, Mr. Bosengate went on, through the drawing-room, long and cool, with sun-blinds down, through the billiard-room, high and cool, through the conservatory, green and sweet-smelling, out on to the terrace and the upper lawn. He had never felt such sheer exhilarated joy in his home surroundings, so cool, glistening and green under the July sun; and he said:

"Well, Kit, what have you all been doing?"

"I've fed my rabbits and Harry's; and we've been in the attic; Harry got his leg through the skylight."

Mr. Bosengate drew in his breath with a hiss.

"It's all right, Daddy; we got it out again, it's only grazed the skin. And we've been making swabs—I made seventeen, Mummy made thirty-three, and then she went to the hospital. Did you put many men in prison?"

Mr. Bosengate cleared his throat. The question seemed to him untimely.

"Only two."

"What's it like in prison, Daddy?"

Mr. Bosengate, who had no more knowledge than his little daughter, replied in an absent voice:

"Not very nice."

They were passing under a young oak tree, where the path wound round to the rosery and summer-house. Something shot down and clawed Mr. Bosengate's neck. His little daughter began to hop and suffocate with laughter.

"Oh, Daddy! Aren't you caught! I led you on purpose!"

Looking up, Mr. Bosengate saw his small son lying along a low branch above him—like the leopard he was declaring himself to be (for fear of error), and thought blithely: 'What an active little chap it is!' "Let me drop on your shoulders, Daddy—like they do on the deer."

"Oh, yes! Do be a deer, Daddy!"

Mr. Bosengate did not see being a deer; his hair had just been brushed. But he entered the rosery buoyantly between his offspring. His wife was standing precisely as he had imagined her, in a pale blue frock open at the neck, with a narrow black band round the waist, and little accordion pleats below. She looked her coolest. Her smile, when she turned her head, hardly seemed to take Mr. Bosengate seriously enough. He placed his lips below one of her half-drooped eyelids. She even smelled of roses. His children began to dance round their mother, and Mr. Bosengate,—firmly held between them, was also compelled to do this, until she said:

"When you've quite done, let's have tea!"

It was not the greeting he had imagined coming along in the car. Earwigs were plentiful in the summer-house—used perhaps twice a year, but indispensable to every country residence—and Mr. Bosengate was not sorry for the excuse to get out again. Though all was so pleasant, he felt oddly restless, rather suffocated; and lighting his pipe, began to move about among the roses, blowing tobacco at the greenfly; in war-time one was never quite idle! And suddenly he said:

"We're trying a wretched Tommy at the assizes."

His wife looked up from a rose.

"What for?"

"Attempted suicide."

"Why did he?"

"Can't stand the separation from his wife."

She looked at him, gave a low laugh, and said:

"Oh dear!"

Mr. Bosengate was puzzled. Why did she laugh? He looked round, saw that the children were gone, took his pipe from his mouth, and approached her.

"You look very pretty," he said. "Give me a kiss!"

His wife bent her body forward from the waist, and pushed her lips out till they touched his moustache. Mr. Bosengate felt a sensation as if he had arisen from breakfast, without having eaten marmalade. He mastered it, and said:

"That jury are a rum lot."

His wife's eyelids flickered. "I wish women sat on juries."

"Why?"

"It would be an experience."

Not the first time she had used that curious expression! Yet her life was far from dull, so far as he could see; with the new interests created by the war, and the constant calls on her time made by the perfection of their home life, she had a useful and busy existence. Again the random thought passed through him: 'But she never tells me anything!' And suddenly that lugubrious khaki-clad figure started up among the rose bushes. "We've got a lot to be thankful for!" he said abruptly. "I must go to work!" His wife, raising one eyebrow, smiled. "And I to weep!" Mr. Bosengate laughed—she had a pretty wit! And stroking his comely moustache where it had been kissed, he moved out into the sunshine. All the evening, throughout his labours, not inconsiderable, for this jury business had put him behind time, he was afflicted by that restless pleasure in his surroundings; would break off in mowing the lower lawn to look at the house through the trees; would leave his study and committee papers, to cross into the drawing-room and sniff its dainty fragrance; paid a special good-night visit to the children having supper in the schoolroom; pottered in and out from his dressing room to admire his wife while she was changing for dinner; dined with his mind perpetually on the next course; talked volubly of the war; and in the billiard room afterwards, smoking the pipe which had taken the place of his cigar, could not keep still, but roamed about, now in conservatory, now in the drawing-room, where his wife and the governess were still making swabs. It seemed to him that he could not have enough of anything. About eleven o'clock he strolled out beautiful night, only just dark enough—under the new arrangement with Time—and went down to the little round fountain below the terrace. His wife was playing the piano. Mr. Bosengate looked at the water and the flat dark water lily leaves which floated there; looked up at the house, where only narrow chinks of light showed, because of the Lighting Order. The dreamy music drifted out; there was a scent of heliotrope. He moved a few steps back, and sat in the children's swing under an old lime tree. Jolly—blissful—in the warm, bloomy dark! Of all hours of the day, this before going to bed was perhaps the pleasantest. He saw the light go up in his wife's bed room, unscreened for a full minute, and thought: 'Aha! If I did my duty as a special, I should "strafe" her for that.' She came to the window, her figure lighted, hands up to the back of her head, so that her bare arms gleamed. Mr. Bosengate wafted her a kiss, knowing he could not be seen. 'Lucky chap!' he mused; 'she's a great joy!' Up went her arm, down came the blind the house was dark again. He drew a long breath. 'Another ten minutes,' he thought, 'then I'll go in and shut up. By Jove! The limes are beginning to smell already!' And, the better to take in that acme of his well-being, he tilted the swing, lifted his feet from the ground, and swung himself toward the scented blossoms. He wanted to whelm his senses in their perfume, and closed his eyes. But instead of the domestic vision he expected, the face of the little Welsh soldier, hare-eyed, shadowy, pinched and dark and pitiful, started up with such disturbing vividness that he opened his eyes again at once. Curse! The fellow almost haunted one! Where would he be now poor little devil!—lying in his cell, thinking—thinking of his wife! Feeling suddenly morbid, Mr. Bosengate arrested the swing and stood up. Absurd!—all his well-being and mood of warm anticipation had deserted him! 'A d—d world!' he thought. 'Such a lot of misery! Why should I have to sit in judgment on that poor beggar, and condemn him?' He moved up on to the terrace and walked

briskly, to rid himself of this disturbance before going in. 'That commercial traveller chap,' he thought, 'the rest of those fellows—they see nothing!' And, abruptly turning up the three stone steps, he entered the conservatory, locked it, passed into the billiard room, and drank his barley water. One of the pictures was hanging crooked; he went up to put it straight. Still life. Grapes and apples, and—lobsters! They struck him as odd for the first time. Why lobsters? The whole picture seemed dead and oily. He turned off the light, and went upstairs, passed his wife's door, into his own room, and undressed. Clothed in his pyjamas he opened the door between the rooms. By the light coming from his own he could see her dark head on the pillow. Was she asleep? No—not asleep, certainly. The moment of fruition had come; the crowning of his pride and pleasure in his home. But he continued to stand there. He had suddenly no pride, no pleasure, no desire; nothing but a sort of dull resentment against everything. He turned back; shut the door, and slipping between the heavy curtains and his open window, stood looking out at the night. 'Full of misery!' he thought. 'Full of d—d misery!'

II

Filing into the jury box next morning, Mr. Bosengate collided slightly with a short juryman, whose square figure and square head of stiff yellow-red hair he had only vaguely noticed the day before. The man looked angry, and Mr. Bosengate thought: 'An ill-bred dog, that!'

He sat down quickly, and, to avoid further recognition of his fellows, gazed in front of him. His appearance on Saturdays was always military, by reason of the route march of his Volunteer Corps in the afternoon. Gentleman Fox, who belonged to the corps too, was also looking square; but that commercial traveller on his other side seemed more louche, and as if surprised in immorality, than ever; only the proximity of Gentleman Fox on the other side kept Mr. Bosengate from shrinking. Then he saw the prisoner being brought in, shadowy and dark behind the brightness of his buttons, and he experienced a sort of shock, this figure was so exactly that which had several times started up in his mind. Somehow he had expected a fresh sight of the fellow to dispel and disprove what had been haunting him, had expected to find him just an outside phenomenon, not, as it were, a part of his own life. And he gazed at the carven immobility of the judge's face, trying to steady himself, as a drunken man will, by looking at a light. The regimental doctor, unabashed by the judge's comment on his absence the day before, gave his evidence like a man who had better things to do, and the case for the prosecution was forthwith rounded in by a little speech from counsel. The matter—he said—was clear as daylight. Those who wore His Majesty's uniform, charged with the responsibility and privilege of defending their country, were no more entitled to desert their regiments by taking their own lives than they were entitled to desert in any other way. He asked for a conviction. Mr. Bosengate felt a sympathetic shuffle passing through all feet; the judge was speaking:

"Prisoner, you can either go into the witness box and make your statement on oath, in which case you may be cross-examined on it; or you can make your statement there from the dock, in which case you will not be cross-examined. Which do you elect to do?"

"From here, my lord."

Seeing him now full face, and, as it might be, come to life in the effort to convey his feelings, Mr. Bosengate had suddenly a quite different impression of the fellow. It was as if his khaki had fallen off, and he had stepped out of his own shadow, a live and quivering creature. His pinched clean-shaven face seemed to have an irregular, wilder, hairier look, his large nervous brown eyes darkened and glowed; he jerked his shoulders, his arms, his whole body, like a man suddenly freed from cramp or a suit of armour.

He spoke, too, in a quick, crisp, rather high voice, pinching his consonants a little, sharpening his vowels, like a true Welshman.

"My lord and misters the jury," he said: "I was a hairdresser when the call came on me to join the army. I had a little home and a wife. I never thought what it would be like to be away from them, I surely never did; and I'm ashamed to be speaking it out like this—how it can squeeze and squeeze a man, how it can prey on your mind, when you're nervous like I am. 'Tis not everyone that cares for his home—there's lots o' them never wants to see their wives again. But for me 'tis like being shut up in a cage, it is!" Mr. Bosengate saw daylight between the skinny fingers of the man's hand thrown out with a jerk. "I cannot bear it shut up away from wife and home like what you are in the army. So when I took my razor that morning I was wild—an' I wouldn't be here now but for that man catching my hand."

There was no reason in it, I'm willing to confess. It was foolish; but wait till you get feeling like what I was, and see how it draws you. Mist'ers the jury, don't send me back to prison; it is worse still there. If you have wives you will know what it is like for lots of us; only some is more nervous than others. I swear to you, sirs, I could not help it—?" Again the little man flung out his hand, his whole thin body shook and Mr. Bosengate felt the same sensation as when he drove his car over a dog—"Mist'ers the jury, I hope you may never in your lives feel as I've been feeling."

The little man ceased, his eyes shrank back into their sockets, his figure back into its mask of shadowy brown and gleaming buttons, and Mr. Bosengate was conscious that the judge was making a series of remarks; and, very soon, of being seated at a mahogany table in the jury's withdrawing room, hearing the, voice of the man with hair like an Irish terrier's saying: "Didn't he talk through his hat, that little blighter!" Conscious, too, of the commercial traveller, still on his left—always on his left!—mopping his brow, and muttering: "Phew! It's hot in there to-day!" while an effluvia, as of an inside accustomed to whisky came from him. Then the man with the underlip and the three plastered wisps of hair said:

"Don't know why we withdrew, Mr. Foreman!"

Mr. Bosengate looked round to where, at the head of the table, Gentleman Fox sat, in defensive gentility and the little white piping to his waistcoat saying blandly:

"I shall be happy to take the sense of the jury."

There was a short silence, then the chemist murmured:

"I should say he must have what they call claustrophobia."

"Clauster fiddlesticks! The feller's a shirker, that's all. Missed his wife—pretty excuse! Indecent, I call it!"

The speaker was the little wire-haired man; and emotion, deep and angry, stirred in Mr. Bosengate. That ill-bred little cur! He gripped the edge of the table with both hands.

"I think it's d——d natural!" he muttered. But almost before the words had left his lips he felt dismay. What had he said—he, nearly a colonel of volunteers—endorsing such a want of patriotism! And hearing the commercial traveller murmuring: "'Ear, 'ear!" he reddened violently.

The wire-headed man said roughly:

"There's too many of these blighted shirkers, and too much pampering of them."

The turmoil in Mr. Bosengate increased; he remarked in an icy voice:

"I agree to no verdict that'll send the man back to prison."

At this a real tremor seemed to go round the table, as if they all saw themselves sitting there through lunch time. Then the large grey-haired man given to winking, said:

"Oh! Come, sir—after what the judge said! Come, sir! What do you say, Mr. Foreman?"

Gentleman Fox—as who should say 'This is excellent value, but I don't wish to press it on you!'—answered:

"We are only concerned with the facts. Did he or did he not try to shorten his life?"

"Of course he did—said so himself," Mr. Bosengate heard the wire-haired man snap out, and from the following murmur of assent he alone abstained. Guilty! Well—yes! There was no way out of admitting that, but his feelings revolted against handing "that poor little beggar" over to the tender mercy of his country's law. His whole soul rose in arms against agreeing with that ill-bred little cur, and the rest of this job-lot. He had an impulse to get up and walk out, saying: "Settle it your own way. Good morning."

"It seems, sir," Gentleman Fox was saying, "that we're all agreed to guilty, except yourself. If you will allow me, I don't see how you can go behind what the prisoner himself admitted."

Thus brought up to the very guns, Mr. Bosengate, red in the face, thrust his hands deep into the side pockets of his tunic, and, staring straight before him, said:

"Very well; on condition we recommend him to mercy."

"What do you say, gentlemen; shall we recommend him to mercy?"

"'Ear, 'ear!" burst from the commercial traveller, and from the chemist came the murmur:

"No harm in that."

"Well, I think there is. They shoot deserters at the front, and we let this fellow off. I'd hang the cur."

Mr. Bosengate stared at that little wire-haired brute. "Haven't you any feeling for others?" he wanted to say. "Can't you see that this poor devil suffers tortures?" But the sheer impossibility of doing this before ten other men brought a slight sweat out on his face and hands; and in agitation he smote the table a blow with his fist. The effect was instantaneous. Everybody looked at the wire-haired man, as if saying: "Yes, you've gone a bit too far there!" The "little brute" stood it for a moment, then muttered surlily:

"Well, commend 'im to mercy if you like; I don't care."

"That's right; they never pay any attention to it," said the grey-haired man, winking heartily. And Mr. Bosengate filed back with the others into court.

But when from the jury box his eyes fell once more on the hare-eyed figure in the dock, he had his worst moment yet. Why should this poor wretch suffer so—for no fault, no fault; while he, and these others, and that snapping counsel, and the Caesar-like judge up there, went off to their women and their homes, blithe as bees, and probably never thought of him again? And suddenly he was conscious of the judge's voice:

"You will go back to your regiment, and endeavour to serve your country with better spirit. You may thank the jury that you are not sent to prison, and your good fortune that you were not at the front when you tried to commit this cowardly act. You are lucky to be alive."

A policeman pulled the little soldier by the arm; his drab figure with eyes fixed and lustreless, passed down and away. From his very soul Mr. Bosengate wanted to lean out and say: "Cheer up, cheer up! I understand."

It was nearly ten o'clock that evening before he reached home, motoring back from the route march. His physical tiredness was abated, for he had partaken of a snack and a whisky and soda at the hotel; but mentally he was in a curious mood. His body felt appeased, his spirit hungry. Tonight he had a yearning, not for his wife's kisses, but for her understanding. He wanted to go to her and say: "I've learnt a lot to-day—found out things I never thought of. Life's a wonderful thing, Kate, a thing one can't live all to oneself; a thing one shares with everybody, so that when another suffers, one suffers too. It's come to me that what one has doesn't matter a bit—it's what one does, and how one sympathises with other people. It came to me in the most extraordinary vivid way, when I was on that jury, watching that poor little rat of a soldier in his trap; it's the first time I've ever felt—the—the spirit of Christ, you know. It's a wonderful thing, Kate—wonderful! We haven't been close—really close, you and I, so that we each understand what the other is feeling. It's all in that, you know; understanding—sympathy—it's priceless. When I saw that poor little devil taken down and sent back to his regiment to begin his sorrows all over again—wanting his wife, thinking and thinking of her just as you know I would be thinking and wanting you, I felt what an awful outside sort of life we lead, never telling each other what we really think and feel, never being really close. I daresay that little chap and his wife keep nothing from each other—live each other's lives. That's what we ought to do. Let's get to feeling that what really matters is—understanding and loving, and not only just saying it as we all do, those fellows on the jury, and even that poor devil of a judge—what an awful life judging one's fellow-creatures.

"When I left that poor little Tommy this morning, and ever since, I've longed to get back here quietly to you and tell you about it, and make a beginning. There's something wonderful in this, and I want you to feel it as I do, because you mean such a lot to me."

This was what he wanted to say to his wife, not touching, or kissing her, just looking into her eyes, watching them soften and glow as they surely must, catching the infection of his new ardour. And he felt unsteady, fearfully unsteady with the desire to say it all as it should be said: swiftly, quietly, with the truth and fervour of his feeling.

The hall was not lit up, for daylight still lingered under the new arrangement. He went towards the drawing-room, but from the very door shied off to his study and stood irresolute under the picture of a "Man catching a flea" (Dutch school), which had come down to him from his father. The governess would be in there with his wife! He must wait. Essential to go straight to Kathleen and pour it all out, or he would never do it. He felt as nervous as an undergraduate going up for his viva' voce. This thing was so big, so astoundingly and unexpectedly important. He was suddenly afraid of his wife, afraid of her

coolness and her grace, and that something Japanese about her—of all those attributes he had been accustomed to admire most; afraid, as it were, of her attraction. He felt young to-night, almost boyish; would she see that he was not really fifteen years older than herself, and she not really a part of his collection, of all the admirable appointments of his home; but a companion spirit to one who wanted a companion badly. In this agitation of his soul he could keep still no more than he could last night in the agitation of his senses; and he wandered into the dining-room. A dainty supper was set out there, sandwiches, and cake, whisky and the cigarettes—even an early peach. Mr. Bosengate looked at this peach with sorrow rather than disgust. The perfection of it was of a piece with all that had gone before this new and sudden feeling. Its delicious bloom seemed to heighten his perception of the hedge around him, that hedge of the things he so enjoyed, carefully planted and tended these many years. He passed it by uneaten, and went to the window. Out there all was darkening, the fountain, the lime tree, the flower-beds, and the fields below, with the Jersey cows who would come to your call; darkening slowly, losing form, blurring into soft blackness, vanishing, but there none the less—all there—the hedge of his possessions. He heard the door of the drawing-room open, the voices of his wife and the governess in the hall, going up to bed. If only they didn't look in here! If only! The voices ceased. He was safe now—had but to follow in a few minutes, to make sure of Kathleen alone. He turned round and stared down the length of the dark dining-room, over the rosewood table, to where in the mirror above the sideboard at the far end, his figure bathed, a stain, a mere blurred shadow; he made his way down to it along the table edge, and stood before himself as close as he could get. His throat and the roof of his mouth felt dry with nervousness; he put out his finger and touched his face in the glass. 'You're an ass!' he thought. 'Pull yourself together, and get it over. She will see; of course she will!' He swallowed, smoothed his moustache, and walked out. Going up the stairs, his heart beat painfully; but he was in for it now, and marched straight into her room. Dressed only in a loose blue wrapper, she was brushing her dark hair before the glass. Mr. Bosengate went up to her and stood there silent, looking down. The words he had thought of were like a swarm of bees buzzing in his head, yet not one would fly from between his lips. His wife went on brushing her hair under the light which shone on her polished elbows. She looked up at him from beneath one lifted eyebrow.

"Well, dear—tired?"

With a sort of vehemence the single word "No" passed out. A faint, a quizzical smile flitted over her face; she shrugged her shoulders ever so gently. That gesture—he had seen it before! And in desperate desire to make her understand, he put his hand on her lifted arm.

"Kathleen, stop—listen to me!" His fingers tightened in his agitation and eagerness to make his great discovery known. But before he could get out a word he became conscious of that cool round arm, conscious of her eyes half-closed, sliding round at him, of her half-smiling lips, of her neck under the wrapper. And he stammered:

"I want—I must—Kathleen, I—"

She lifted her shoulders again in that little shrug. "Yes—I know; all right!"

A wave of heat and shame, and of God knows what came over Mr. Bosengate; he fell on his knees and pressed his forehead to her arm; and he was silent, more silent than the grave. Nothing—nothing came from him but two long sighs. Suddenly he felt her hand stroke his cheek—compassionately, it seemed to him. She made a little movement towards him; her lips met his, and he remembered nothing but that....

In his own room Mr. Bosengate sat at his wide open window, smoking a cigarette; there was no light. Moths went past, the moon was creeping up. He sat very calm, puffing the smoke out in to the night air. Curious thing-life! Curious world! Curious forces in it—making one do the opposite of what one wished; always—always making one do the opposite, it seemed! The furtive light from that creeping moon was getting hold of things down there, stealing in among the boughs of the trees. 'There's something ironical,' he thought, 'which walks about. Things don't come off as you think they will. I meant, I tried but one doesn't change like that all of a sudden, it seems. Fact is, life's too big a thing for one! All the same, I'm not the man I was yesterday—not quite!' He closed his eyes, and in one of those flashes of vision which come when the senses are at rest, he saw himself as it were far down below—down on the floor of a street narrow as a grave, high as a mountain, a deep dark slit of a street walking down there, a black midget of a fellow, among other black midgets—his wife, and the little soldier, the judge, and those jury chaps—fantoques straight up on their tiny feet, wandering down there in that dark, infinitely tall, and narrow street. 'Too much for one!' he thought; 'Too high for one—no getting on top of it. We've got to be kind, and help one another, and not expect too much, and not think too much. That's—all!' And, squeezing out his cigarette, he took six deep breaths of the night air, and got into bed.

INDIAN SUMMER OF A FORSYTE

"And Summer's lease hath all too short a date." —Shakespeare

I

In the last day of May in the early 'nineties, about six o'clock of the evening, old Jolyon Forsyte sat under the oak tree below the terrace of his house at Robin Hill. He was waiting for the midges to bite him, before abandoning the glory of the afternoon. His thin brown hand, where blue veins stood out, held the end of a cigar in its tapering, long-nailed fingers—a pointed polished nail had survived with him from those earlier Victorian days when to touch nothing, even with the tips of the fingers, had been so distinguished. His domed forehead, great white moustache, lean cheeks, and long lean jaw were covered from the westering sunshine by an old brown Panama hat. His legs were crossed; in all his attitude was serenity and a kind of elegance, as of an old man who every morning put eau de Cologne upon his silk handkerchief. At his feet lay a woolly brown-and-white dog trying to be a Pomeranian—the dog Balthasar between whom and old Jolyon primal aversion had changed into attachment with the years. Close to his chair was a swing, and on the swing was seated one of Holly's dolls—called 'Duffer Alice'—with her body fallen over her legs and her doleful nose buried in a black petticoat. She was never out of disgrace, so it did not matter to her how she sat. Below the oak tree the lawn dipped down a bank, stretched to the fernery, and, beyond that refinement, became fields, dropping to the pond, the coppice, and the prospect—'Fine, remarkable'—at which Swithin Forsyte, from under this very tree, had stared five years ago when he drove down with Irene to look at the house. Old Jolyon had heard of his brother's exploit—that drive which had become quite celebrated on Forsyte 'Change. Swithin! And the fellow had gone and died, last November, at the age of only seventy-nine, renewing the doubt whether Forsytes could live for ever, which had first arisen when Aunt Ann passed away. Died! and left only Jolyon and James, Roger and Nicholas and Timothy, Julia, Hester, Susan! And old Jolyon thought: 'Eighty-five! I don't feel it—except when I get that pain.'

His memory went searching. He had not felt his age since he had bought his nephew Soames' ill-starred house and settled into it here at Robin Hill over three years ago. It was as if he had been getting younger every spring, living in the country with his son and his grandchildren—June, and the little ones of the second marriage, Jolly and Holly; living down here out of the racket of London and the cackle of Forsyte 'Change,' free of his boards, in a delicious atmosphere of no work and all play, with plenty of occupation in the perfecting and mellowing of the house and its twenty acres, and in ministering to the whims of Holly and Jolly. All the knots and crankiness, which had gathered in his heart during that long and tragic business of June, Soames, Irene his wife, and poor young Bosinney, had been smoothed out. Even June had thrown off her melancholy at last—witness this travel in Spain she was taking now with her father and her stepmother. Curiously perfect peace was left by their departure; blissful, yet blank, because his son was not there. Jo was never anything but a comfort and a pleasure to him nowadays—an amiable chap; but women, somehow—even the best—got a little on one's nerves, unless of course one admired them.

Far-off a cuckoo called; a wood-pigeon was cooing from the first elm-tree in the field, and how the daisies and buttercups had sprung up after the last mowing! The wind had got into the sou' west, too—a delicious air, sappy! He pushed his hat back and let the sun fall on his chin and cheek. Somehow, to-day, he wanted company—wanted a pretty face to look at. People treated the old as if they wanted nothing. And with the un-Forsytean philosophy which ever intruded on his soul, he thought: 'One's never had enough. With a foot in the grave one'll want something, I shouldn't be surprised!' Down here—away from the exigencies of affairs—his grandchildren, and the flowers, trees, birds of his little domain, to say nothing of sun and moon and stars above them, said, 'Open, sesame,' to him day and night. And sesame had opened—how much, perhaps, he did not know. He had always been responsive to what they had begun to call 'Nature,' genuinely, almost religiously responsive, though he had never lost his habit of calling a sunset a sunset and a view a view, however deeply they might move him. But nowadays Nature actually made him ache, he appreciated it so. Every one of these calm, bright, lengthening days, with Holly's hand in his, and the dog Balthasar in front looking studiously for what he never found, he would stroll, watching the roses open, fruit budding on the walls, sunlight brightening the oak leaves and saplings in the coppice, watching the water-lily leaves unfold and glisten, and the silvery young corn of the one wheat field; listening to the starlings and skylarks, and the Alderney cows chewing the cud, flicking slow their tufted tails; and every one of these fine days he ached a little from sheer love of it all, feeling perhaps, deep down, that he had not very much longer to enjoy it. The thought that some day—perhaps not ten years hence, perhaps not five—all this world would be taken away from him, before he had exhausted his powers of loving it, seemed to him in the nature of an injustice brooding over his horizon. If anything came after this life, it wouldn't be what he wanted; not Robin Hill, and flowers and birds and pretty faces—too few, even now, of those about him! With the

years his dislike of humbug had increased; the orthodoxy he had worn in the 'sixties, as he had worn side-whiskers out of sheer exuberance, had long dropped off, leaving him reverent before three things alone—beauty, upright conduct, and the sense of property; and the greatest of these now was beauty. He had always had wide interests, and, indeed could still read *The Times*, but he was liable at any moment to put it down if he heard a blackbird sing. Upright conduct, property—somehow, they were tiring; the blackbirds and the sunsets never tired him, only gave him an uneasy feeling that he could not get enough of them. Staring into the stilly radiance of the early evening and at the little gold and white flowers on the lawn, a thought came to him: This weather was like the music of 'Orfeo,' which he had recently heard at Covent Garden. A beautiful opera, not like Meyerbeer, nor even quite Mozart, but, in its way, perhaps even more lovely; something classical and of the Golden Age about it, chaste and mellow, and the Ravogli 'almost worthy of the old days'—highest praise he could bestow. The yearning of Orpheus for the beauty he was losing, for his love going down to Hades, as in life love and beauty did go—the yearning which sang and throbbed through the golden music, stirred also in the lingering beauty of the world that evening. And with the tip of his cork-soled, elastic-sided boot he involuntarily stirred the ribs of the dog Balthasar, causing the animal to wake and attack his fleas; for though he was supposed to have none, nothing could persuade him of the fact. When he had finished he rubbed the place he had been scratching against his master's calf, and settled down again with his chin over the instep of the disturbing boot. And into old Jolyon's mind came a sudden recollection—a face he had seen at that opera three weeks ago—Irene, the wife of his precious nephew Soames, that man of property! Though he had not met her since the day of the 'At Home' in his old house at Stanhope Gate, which celebrated his granddaughter June's ill-starred engagement to young Bosinney, he had remembered her at once, for he had always admired her—a very pretty creature. After the death of young Bosinney, whose mistress she had so reprehensibly become, he had heard that she had left Soames at once. Goodness only knew what she had been doing since. That sight of her face—a side view—in the row in front, had been literally the only reminder these three years that she was still alive. No one ever spoke of her. And yet Jo had told him something once—something which had upset him completely. The boy had got it from George Forsyte, he believed, who had seen Bosinney in the fog the day he was run over—something which explained the young fellow's distress—an act of Soames towards his wife—a shocking act. Jo had seen her, too, that afternoon, after the news was out, seen her for a moment, and his description had always lingered in old Jolyon's mind—'wild and lost' he had called her. And next day June had gone there—bottled up her feelings and gone there, and the maid had cried and told her how her mistress had slipped out in the night and vanished. A tragic business altogether! One thing was certain—Soames had never been able to lay hands on her again. And he was living at Brighton, and journeying up and down—a fitting fate, the man of property! For when he once took a dislike to anyone—as he had to his nephew—old Jolyon never got over it. He remembered still the sense of relief with which he had heard the news of Irene's disappearance. It had been shocking to think of her a prisoner in that house to which she must have wandered back, when Jo saw her, wandered back for a moment—like a wounded animal to its hole after seeing that news, 'Tragic death of an Architect,' in the street. Her face had struck him very much the other night—more beautiful than he had remembered, but like a mask, with something going on beneath it. A young woman still—twenty-eight perhaps. Ah, well! Very likely she had another lover by now. But at this subversive thought—for married women should never love: once, even, had been too much—his instep rose, and with it the dog Balthasar's head. The sagacious animal stood up and looked into old Jolyon's face. 'Walk?' he seemed to say; and old Jolyon answered: "Come on, old chap!"

Slowly, as was their wont, they crossed among the constellations of buttercups and daisies, and entered the fernery. This feature, where very little grew as yet, had been judiciously dropped below the level of the lawn so that it might come up again on the level of the other lawn and give the impression of irregularity, so important in horticulture. Its rocks and earth were beloved of the dog Balthasar, who sometimes found a mole there. Old Jolyon made a point of passing through it because, though it was not beautiful, he intended that it should be, some day, and he would think: 'I must get Varr to come down and look at it; he's better than Beech.' For plants, like houses and human complaints, required the best expert consideration. It was inhabited by snails, and if accompanied by his grandchildren, he would point to one and tell them the story of the little boy who said: 'Have plummers got leggers, Mother? 'No, sonny.' 'Then darned if I haven't been and swallowed a snileybob.' And when they skipped and clutched his hand, thinking of the snileybob going down the little boy's 'red lane,' his eyes would twinkle. Emerging from the fernery, he opened the wicket gate, which just there led into the first field, a large and park-like area, out of which, within brick walls, the vegetable garden had been carved. Old Jolyon avoided this, which did not suit his mood, and made down the hill towards the pond. Balthasar, who knew a water-rat or two, gambolled in front, at the gait which marks an oldish dog who takes the same walk every day. Arrived at the edge, old Jolyon stood, noting another water-lily opened since yesterday; he would show it to Holly to-morrow, when 'his little sweet' had got over the upset which had followed on her eating a tomato at lunch—her little arrangements were very delicate. Now that Jolly had gone to school—his first term—Holly was with him nearly all day long, and he missed her badly. He felt that pain too, which often bothered him now, a little dragging at his left side. He looked

back up the hill. Really, poor young Bosinney had made an uncommonly good job of the house; he would have done very well for himself if he had lived! And where was he now? Perhaps, still haunting this, the site of his last work, of his tragic love affair. Or was Philip Bosinney's spirit diffused in the general? Who could say? That dog was getting his legs muddy! And he moved towards the coppice. There had been the most delightful lot of bluebells, and he knew where some still lingered like little patches of sky fallen in between the trees, away out of the sun. He passed the cow-houses and the hen-houses there installed, and pursued a path into the thick of the saplings, making for one of the bluebell plots. Balthasar, preceding him once more, uttered a low growl. Old Jolyon stirred him with his foot, but the dog remained motionless, just where there was no room to pass, and the hair rose slowly along the centre of his woolly back. Whether from the growl and the look of the dog's stivered hair, or from the sensation which a man feels in a wood, old Jolyon also felt something move along his spine. And then the path turned, and there was an old mossy log, and on it a woman sitting. Her face was turned away, and he had just time to think: 'She's trespassing—I must have a board put up!' before she turned. Powers above! The face he had seen at the opera—the very woman he had just been thinking of! In that confused moment he saw things blurred, as if a spirit—queer effect—the slant of sunlight perhaps on her violet-grey frock! And then she rose and stood smiling, her head a little to one side. Old Jolyon thought: 'How pretty she is!' She did not speak, neither did he; and he realized why with a certain admiration. She was here no doubt because of some memory, and did not mean to try and get out of it by vulgar explanation.

"Don't let that dog touch your frock," he said; "he's got wet feet. Come here, you!"

But the dog Balthasar went on towards the visitor, who put her hand down and stroked his head. Old Jolyon said quickly:

"I saw you at the opera the other night; you didn't notice me."

"Oh, yes! I did."

He felt a subtle flattery in that, as though she had added: 'Do you think one could miss seeing you?'

"They're all in Spain," he remarked abruptly. "I'm alone; I drove up for the opera. The Ravogli's good. Have you seen the cow-houses?"

In a situation so charged with mystery and something very like emotion he moved instinctively towards that bit of property, and she moved beside him. Her figure swayed faintly, like the best kind of French figures; her dress, too, was a sort of French grey. He noticed two or three silver threads in her amber-coloured hair, strange hair with those dark eyes of hers, and that creamy-pale face. A sudden sidelong look from the velvety brown eyes disturbed him. It seemed to come from deep and far, from another world almost, or at all events from some one not living very much in this. And he said mechanically:

"Where are you living now?"

"I have a little flat in Chelsea."

He did not want to hear what she was doing, did not want to hear anything; but the perverse word came out:

"Alone?"

She nodded. It was a relief to know that. And it came into his mind that, but for a twist of fate, she would have been mistress of this coppice, showing these cow-houses to him, a visitor.

"All Alderneys," he muttered; "they give the best milk. This one's a pretty creature. Woa, Myrtle!"

The fawn-coloured cow, with eyes as soft and brown as Irene's own, was standing absolutely still, not having long been milked. She looked round at them out of the corner of those lustrous, mild, cynical eyes, and from her grey lips a little dribble of saliva threaded its way towards the straw. The scent of hay and vanilla and ammonia rose in the dim light of the cool cow-house; and old Jolyon said:

"You must come up and have some dinner with me. I'll send you home in the carriage."

He perceived a struggle going on within her; natural, no doubt, with her memories. But he wanted her company; a pretty face, a charming figure, beauty! He had been alone all the afternoon. Perhaps his eyes were wistful, for she answered: "Thank you, Uncle Jolyon. I should like to."

He rubbed his hands, and said:

"Capital! Let's go up, then!" And, preceded by the dog Balthasar, they ascended through the field. The sun was almost level in their faces now, and he could see, not only those silver threads, but little lines, just deep enough to stamp her beauty with a coin-like fineness—the special look of life unshared with others. "I'll take her in by the terrace," he thought: "I won't make a common visitor of her."

"What do you do all day?" he said.

"Teach music; I have another interest, too."

"Work!" said old Jolyon, picking up the doll from off the swing, and smoothing its black petticoat. "Nothing like it, is there? I don't do any now. I'm getting on. What interest is that?"

"Trying to help women who've come to grief." Old Jolyon did not quite understand. "To grief?" he repeated; then realised with a shock that she meant exactly what he would have meant himself if he had used that expression. Assisting the Magdalenes of London! What a weird and terrifying interest! And, curiosity overcoming his natural shrinking, he asked:

"Why? What do you do for them?"

"Not much. I've no money to spare. I can only give sympathy and food sometimes."

Involuntarily old Jolyon's hand sought his purse. He said hastily: "How d'you get hold of them?"

"I go to a hospital."

"A hospital! Phew!"

"What hurts me most is that once they nearly all had some sort of beauty."

Old Jolyon straightened the doll. "Beauty!" he ejaculated: "Ha! Yes! A sad business!" and he moved towards the house. Through a French window, under sun-blinds not yet drawn up, he preceded her into the room where he was wont to study *The Times* and the sheets of an agricultural magazine, with huge illustrations of mangold wurzels, and the like, which provided Holly with material for her paint brush.

"Dinner's in half an hour. You'd like to wash your hands! I'll take you to June's room."

He saw her looking round eagerly; what changes since she had last visited this house with her husband, or her lover, or both perhaps—he did not know, could not say! All that was dark, and he wished to leave it so. But what changes! And in the hall he said:

"My boy Jo's a painter, you know. He's got a lot of taste. It isn't mine, of course, but I've let him have his way."

She was standing very still, her eyes roaming through the hall and music room, as it now was—all thrown into one, under the great skylight. Old Jolyon had an odd impression of her. Was she trying to conjure somebody from the shades of that space where the colouring was all pearl-grey and silver? He would have had gold himself; more lively and solid. But Jo had French tastes, and it had come out shadowy like that, with an effect as of the fume of cigarettes the chap was always smoking, broken here and there by a little blaze of blue or crimson colour. It was not his dream! Mentally he had hung this space with those gold-framed masterpieces of still and stiller life which he had bought in days when quantity was precious. And now where were they? Sold for a song! That something which made him, alone among Forsytes, move with the times had warned him against the struggle to retain them. But in his study he still had 'Dutch Fishing Boats at Sunset.'

He began to mount the stairs with her, slowly, for he felt his side.

"These are the bathrooms," he said, "and other arrangements. I've had them tiled. The nurseries are along there. And this is Jo's and his wife's. They all communicate. But you remember, I expect."

Irene nodded. They passed on, up the gallery and entered a large room with a small bed, and several windows.

"This is mine," he said. The walls were covered with the photographs of children and watercolour sketches, and he added doubtfully:

"These are Jo's. The view's first-rate. You can see the Grand Stand at Epsom in clear weather."

The sun was down now, behind the house, and over the 'prospect' a luminous haze had settled, emanation of the long and prosperous day. Few houses showed, but fields and trees faintly glistened,

away to a loom of downs.

"The country's changing," he said abruptly, "but there it'll be when we're all gone. Look at those thrushes—the birds are sweet here in the mornings. I'm glad to have washed my hands of London."

Her face was close to the window pane, and he was struck by its mournful look. 'Wish I could make her look happy!' he thought. 'A pretty face, but sad!' And taking up his can of hot water he went out into the gallery.

"This is June's room," he said, opening the next door and putting the can down; "I think you'll find everything." And closing the door behind her he went back to his own room. Brushing his hair with his great ebony brushes, and dabbing his forehead with eau de Cologne, he mused. She had come so strangely—a sort of visitation; mysterious, even romantic, as if his desire for company, for beauty, had been fulfilled by whatever it was which fulfilled that sort of thing. And before the mirror he straightened his still upright figure, passed the brushes over his great white moustache, touched up his eyebrows with eau de Cologne, and rang the bell.

"I forgot to let them know that I have a lady to dinner with me. Let cook do something extra, and tell Beacon to have the landau and pair at half-past ten to drive her back to Town to-night. Is Miss Holly asleep?"

The maid thought not. And old Jolyon, passing down the gallery, stole on tiptoe towards the nursery, and opened the door whose hinges he kept specially oiled that he might slip in and out in the evenings without being heard.

But Holly was asleep, and lay like a miniature Madonna, of that type which the old painters could not tell from Venus, when they had completed her. Her long dark lashes clung to her cheeks; on her face was perfect peace—her little arrangements were evidently all right again. And old Jolyon, in the twilight of the room, stood adoring her! It was so charming, solemn, and loving—that little face. He had more than his share of the blessed capacity of living again in the young. They were to him his future life—all of a future life that his fundamental pagan sanity perhaps admitted. There she was with everything before her, and his blood—some of it—in her tiny veins. There she was, his little companion, to be made as happy as ever he could make her, so that she knew nothing but love. His heart swelled, and he went out, stilling the sound of his patent-leather boots. In the corridor an eccentric notion attacked him: To think that children should come to that which Irene had told him she was helping! Women who were all, once, little things like this one sleeping there! 'I must give her a cheque!' he mused; 'Can't bear to think of them!' They had never borne reflecting on, those poor outcasts; wounding too deeply the core of true refinement hidden under layers of conformity to the sense of property—wounding too grievously the deepest thing in him—a love of beauty which could give him, even now, a flutter of the heart, thinking of his evening in the society of a pretty woman. And he went downstairs, through the swinging doors, to the back regions. There, in the wine-cellar, was a hock worth at least two pounds a bottle, a Steinberg Cabinet, better than any Johannisberg that ever went down throat; a wine of perfect bouquet, sweet as a nectarine—nectar indeed! He got a bottle out, handling it like a baby, and holding it level to the light, to look. Enshrined in its coat of dust, that mellow coloured, slender-necked bottle gave him deep pleasure. Three years to settle down again since the move from Town—ought to be in prime condition! Thirty-five years ago he had bought it—thank God he had kept his palate, and earned the right to drink it. She would appreciate this; not a spice of acidity in a dozen. He wiped the bottle, drew the cork with his own hands, put his nose down, inhaled its perfume, and went back to the music room.

Irene was standing by the piano; she had taken off her hat and a lace scarf she had been wearing, so that her gold-coloured hair was visible, and the pallor of her neck. In her grey frock she made a pretty picture for old Jolyon, against the rosewood of the piano.

He gave her his arm, and solemnly they went. The room, which had been designed to enable twenty-four people to dine in comfort, held now but a little round table. In his present solitude the big dining-table oppressed old Jolyon; he had caused it to be removed till his son came back. Here in the company of two really good copies of Raphael Madonnas he was wont to dine alone. It was the only disconsolate hour of his day, this summer weather. He had never been a large eater, like that great chap Swithin, or Sylvanus Heythorp, or Anthony Thornworthy, those cronies of past times; and to dine alone, overlooked by the Madonnas, was to him but a sorrowful occupation, which he got through quickly, that he might come to the more spiritual enjoyment of his coffee and cigar. But this evening was a different matter! His eyes twinkled at her across the little table and he spoke of Italy and Switzerland, telling her stories of his travels there, and other experiences which he could no longer recount to his son and granddaughter because they knew them. This fresh audience was precious to him; he had never become one of those old men who ramble round and round the fields of reminiscence. Himself quickly fatigued by the insensitive, he instinctively avoided fatiguing others, and his natural flirtatiousness towards beauty

guarded him specially in his relations with a woman. He would have liked to draw her out, but though she murmured and smiled and seemed to be enjoying what he told her, he remained conscious of that mysterious remoteness which constituted half her fascination. He could not bear women who threw their shoulders and eyes at you, and chattered away; or hard-mouthed women who laid down the law and knew more than you did. There was only one quality in a woman that appealed to him—charm; and the quieter it was, the more he liked it. And this one had charm, shadowy as afternoon sunlight on those Italian hills and valleys he had loved. The feeling, too, that she was, as it were, apart, cloistered, made her seem nearer to himself, a strangely desirable companion. When a man is very old and quite out of the running, he loves to feel secure from the rivalries of youth, for he would still be first in the heart of beauty. And he drank his hock, and watched her lips, and felt nearly young. But the dog Balthasar lay watching her lips too, and despising in his heart the interruptions of their talk, and the tilting of those greenish glasses full of a golden fluid which was distasteful to him.

The light was just failing when they went back into the music-room. And, cigar in mouth, old Jolyon said:

"Play me some Chopin."

By the cigars they smoke, and the composers they love, ye shall know the texture of men's souls. Old Jolyon could not bear a strong cigar or Wagner's music. He loved Beethoven and Mozart, Handel and Gluck, and Schumann, and, for some occult reason, the operas of Meyerbeer; but of late years he had been seduced by Chopin, just as in painting he had succumbed to Botticelli. In yielding to these tastes he had been conscious of divergence from the standard of the Golden Age. Their poetry was not that of Milton and Byron and Tennyson; of Raphael and Titian; Mozart and Beethoven. It was, as it were, behind a veil; their poetry hit no one in the face, but slipped its fingers under the ribs and turned and twisted, and melted up the heart. And, never certain that this was healthy, he did not care a rap so long as he could see the pictures of the one or hear the music of the other.

Irene sat down at the piano under the electric lamp festooned with pearl-grey, and old Jolyon, in an armchair, whence he could see her, crossed his legs and drew slowly at his cigar. She sat a few moments with her hands on the keys, evidently searching her mind for what to give him. Then she began and within old Jolyon there arose a sorrowful pleasure, not quite like anything else in the world. He fell slowly into a trance, interrupted only by the movements of taking the cigar out of his mouth at long intervals, and replacing it. She was there, and the hock within him, and the scent of tobacco; but there, too, was a world of sunshine lingering into moonlight, and pools with storks upon them, and bluish trees above, glowing with blurs of wine-red roses, and fields of lavender where milk-white cows were grazing, and a woman all shadowy, with dark eyes and a white neck, smiled, holding out her arms; and through air which was like music a star dropped and was caught on a cow's horn. He opened his eyes. Beautiful piece; she played well—the touch of an angel! And he closed them again. He felt miraculously sad and happy, as one does, standing under a lime-tree in full honey flower. Not live one's own life again, but just stand there and bask in the smile of a woman's eyes, and enjoy the bouquet! And he jerked his hand; the dog Balthasar had reached up and licked it.

"Beautiful!" He said: "Go on—more Chopin!"

She began to play again. This time the resemblance between her and 'Chopin' struck him. The swaying he had noticed in her walk was in her playing too, and the Nocturne she had chosen and the soft darkness of her eyes, the light on her hair, as of moonlight from a golden moon. Seductive, yes; but nothing of Delilah in her or in that music. A long blue spiral from his cigar ascended and dispersed. 'So we go out!' he thought. 'No more beauty! Nothing?'

Again Irene stopped.

"Would you like some Gluck? He used to write his music in a sunlit garden, with a bottle of Rhine wine beside him."

"Ah! yes. Let's have 'Orfeo.'" Round about him now were fields of gold and silver flowers, white forms swaying in the sunlight, bright birds flying to and fro. All was summer. Lingering waves of sweetness and regret flooded his soul. Some cigar ash dropped, and taking out a silk handkerchief to brush it off, he inhaled a mingled scent as of snuff and eau de Cologne. 'Ah!' he thought, 'Indian summer—that's all!' and he said: "You haven't played me 'Che faro.'"

She did not answer; did not move. He was conscious of something—some strange upset. Suddenly he saw her rise and turn away, and a pang of remorse shot through him. What a clumsy chap! Like Orpheus, she of course—she too was looking for her lost one in the hall of memory! And disturbed to the heart, he got up from his chair. She had gone to the great window at the far end. Gingerly he followed. Her hands were folded over her breast; he could just see her cheek, very white. And, quite

emotionalized, he said:

"There, there, my love!" The words had escaped him mechanically, for they were those he used to Holly when she had a pain, but their effect was instantaneously distressing. She raised her arms, covered her face with them, and wept.

Old Jolyon stood gazing at her with eyes very deep from age. The passionate shame she seemed feeling at her abandonment, so unlike the control and quietude of her whole presence was as if she had never before broken down in the presence of another being.

"There, there—there, there!" he murmured, and putting his hand out reverently, touched her. She turned, and leaned the arms which covered her face against him. Old Jolyon stood very still, keeping one thin hand on her shoulder. Let her cry her heart out—it would do her good.

And the dog Balthasar, puzzled, sat down on his stern to examine them.

The window was still open, the curtains had not been drawn, the last of daylight from without mingled with faint intrusion from the lamp within; there was a scent of new-mown grass. With the wisdom of a long life old Jolyon did not speak. Even grief sobbed itself out in time; only Time was good for sorrow—Time who saw the passing of each mood, each emotion in turn; Time the layer-to-rest. There came into his mind the words: 'As panteth the hart after cooling streams'—but they were of no use to him. Then, conscious of a scent of violets, he knew she was drying her eyes. He put his chin forward, pressed his moustache against her forehead, and felt her shake with a quivering of her whole body, as of a tree which shakes itself free of raindrops. She put his hand to her lips, as if saying: "All over now! Forgive me!"

The kiss filled him with a strange comfort; he led her back to where she had been so upset. And the dog Balthasar, following, laid the bone of one of the cutlets they had eaten at their feet.

Anxious to obliterate the memory of that emotion, he could think of nothing better than china; and moving with her slowly from cabinet to cabinet, he kept taking up bits of Dresden and Lowestoft and Chelsea, turning them round and round with his thin, veined hands, whose skin, faintly freckled, had such an aged look.

"I bought this at Jobson's," he would say; "cost me thirty pounds. It's very old. That dog leaves his bones all over the place. This old 'ship-bowl' I picked up at the sale when that precious rip, the Marquis, came to grief. But you don't remember. Here's a nice piece of Chelsea. Now, what would you say this was?" And he was comforted, feeling that, with her taste, she was taking a real interest in these things; for, after all, nothing better composes the nerves than a doubtful piece of china.

When the crunch of the carriage wheels was heard at last, he said:

"You must come again; you must come to lunch, then I can show you these by daylight, and my little sweet—she's a dear little thing. This dog seems to have taken a fancy to you."

For Balthasar, feeling that she was about to leave, was rubbing his side against her leg. Going out under the porch with her, he said:

"He'll get you up in an hour and a quarter. Take this for your protegees," and he slipped a cheque for fifty pounds into her hand. He saw her brightened eyes, and heard her murmur: "Oh! Uncle Jolyon!" and a real throb of pleasure went through him. That meant one or two poor creatures helped a little, and it meant that she would come again. He put his hand in at the window and grasped hers once more. The carriage rolled away. He stood looking at the moon and the shadows of the trees, and thought: 'A sweet night! She.....!' II

Two days of rain, and summer set in bland and sunny. Old Jolyon walked and talked with Holly. At first he felt taller and full of a new vigour; then he felt restless. Almost every afternoon they would enter the coppice, and walk as far as the log. 'Well, she's not there!' he would think, 'of course not!' And he would feel a little shorter, and drag his feet walking up the hill home, with his hand clapped to his left side. Now and then the thought would move in him: 'Did she come—or did I dream it?' and he would stare at space, while the dog Balthasar stared at him. Of course she would not come again! He opened the letters from Spain with less excitement. They were not returning till July; he felt, oddly, that he could bear it. Every day at dinner he screwed up his eyes and looked at where she had sat. She was not there, so he unscrewed his eyes again.

On the seventh afternoon he thought: 'I must go up and get some boots.' He ordered Beacon, and set out. Passing from Putney towards Hyde Park he reflected: 'I might as well go to Chelsea and see her.' And he called out: "Just drive me to where you took that lady the other night." The coachman turned his

broad red face, and his juicy lips answered: "The lady in grey, sir?"

"Yes, the lady in grey." What other ladies were there! Stodgy chap!

The carriage stopped before a small three-storied block of flats, standing a little back from the river. With a practised eye old Jolyon saw that they were cheap. 'I should think about sixty pound a year,' he mused; and entering, he looked at the name-board. The name 'Forsyte' was not on it, but against 'First Floor, Flat C' were the words: 'Mrs. Irene Heron.' Ah! She had taken her maiden name again! And somehow this pleased him. He went upstairs slowly, feeling his side a little. He stood a moment, before ringing, to lose the feeling of drag and fluttering there. She would not be in! And then—Boots! The thought was black. What did he want with boots at his age? He could not wear out all those he had.

"Your mistress at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Say Mr. Jolyon Forsyte."

"Yes, sir, will you come this way?"

Old Jolyon followed a very little maid—not more than sixteen one would say—into a very small drawing-room where the sun-blinds were drawn. It held a cottage piano and little else save a vague fragrance and good taste. He stood in the middle, with his top hat in his hand, and thought: 'I expect she's very badly off!' There was a mirror above the fireplace, and he saw himself reflected. An old-looking chap! He heard a rustle, and turned round. She was so close that his moustache almost brushed her forehead, just under her hair.

"I was driving up," he said. "Thought I'd look in on you, and ask you how you got up the other night."

And, seeing her smile, he felt suddenly relieved. She was really glad to see him, perhaps.

"Would you like to put on your hat and come for a drive in the Park?"

But while she was gone to put her hat on, he frowned. The Park! James and Emily! Mrs. Nicholas, or some other member of his precious family would be there very likely, prancing up and down. And they would go and wag their tongues about having seen him with her, afterwards. Better not! He did not wish to revive the echoes of the past on Forsyte 'Change. He removed a white hair from the lapel of his closely-buttoned-up frock coat, and passed his hand over his cheeks, moustache, and square chin. It felt very hollow there under the cheekbones. He had not been eating much lately—he had better get that little whippersnapper who attended Holly to give him a tonic. But she had come back and when they were in the carriage, he said:

"Suppose we go and sit in Kensington Gardens instead?" and added with a twinkle: "No prancing up and down there," as if she had been in the secret of his thoughts.

Leaving the carriage, they entered those select precincts, and strolled towards the water.

"You've gone back to your maiden name, I see," he said: "I'm not sorry."

She slipped her hand under his arm: "Has June forgiven me, Uncle Jolyon?"

He answered gently: "Yes—yes; of course, why not?"

"And have you?"

"I? I forgave you as soon as I saw how the land really lay." And perhaps he had; his instinct had always been to forgive the beautiful.

She drew a deep breath. "I never regretted—I couldn't. Did you ever love very deeply, Uncle Jolyon?"

At that strange question old Jolyon stared before him. Had he? He did not seem to remember that he ever had. But he did not like to say this to the young woman whose hand was touching his arm, whose life was suspended, as it were, by memory of a tragic love. And he thought: 'If I had met you when I was young I—I might have made a fool of myself, perhaps.' And a longing to escape in generalities beset him.

"Love's a queer thing," he said, "fatal thing often. It was the Greeks—wasn't it?—made love into a goddess; they were right, I dare say, but then they lived in the Golden Age."

"Phil adored them."

Phil! The word jarred him, for suddenly—with his power to see all round a thing, he perceived why she was putting up with him like this. She wanted to talk about her lover! Well! If it was any pleasure to her! And he said: "Ah! There was a bit of the sculptor in him, I fancy."

"Yes. He loved balance and symmetry; he loved the whole-hearted way the Greeks gave themselves to art."

Balance! The chap had no balance at all, if he remembered; as for symmetry—clean-built enough he was, no doubt; but those queer eyes of his, and high cheek-bones—Symmetry?

"You're of the Golden Age, too, Uncle Jolyon."

Old Jolyon looked round at her. Was she chaffing him? No, her eyes were soft as velvet. Was she flattering him? But if so, why? There was nothing to be had out of an old chap like him.

"Phil thought so. He used to say: 'But I can never tell him that I admire him.'"

Ah! There it was again. Her dead lover; her desire to talk of him! And he pressed her arm, half resentful of those memories, half grateful, as if he recognised what a link they were between herself and him.

"He was a very talented young fellow," he murmured. "It's hot; I feel the heat nowadays. Let's sit down."

They took two chairs beneath a chestnut tree whose broad leaves covered them from the peaceful glory of the afternoon. A pleasure to sit there and watch her, and feel that she liked to be with him. And the wish to increase that liking, if he could, made him go on:

"I expect he showed you a side of him I never saw. He'd be at his best with you. His ideas of art were a little new—to me"—he had stiffed the word 'fangled.'

"Yes: but he used to say you had a real sense of beauty." Old Jolyon thought: 'The devil he did!' but answered with a twinkle: "Well, I have, or I shouldn't be sitting here with you." She was fascinating when she smiled with her eyes, like that!

"He thought you had one of those hearts that never grow old. Phil had real insight."

He was not taken in by this flattery spoken out of the past, out of a longing to talk of her dead lover—not a bit; and yet it was precious to hear, because she pleased his eyes and heart which—quite true!—had never grown old. Was that because—unlike her and her dead lover, he had never loved to desperation, had always kept his balance, his sense of symmetry. Well! It had left him power, at eighty-four, to admire beauty. And he thought, 'If I were a painter or a sculptor! But I'm an old chap. Make hay while the sun shines.'

A couple with arms entwined crossed on the grass before them, at the edge of the shadow from their tree. The sunlight fell cruelly on their pale, squashed, unkempt young faces. "We're an ugly lot!" said old Jolyon suddenly. "It amazes me to see how—love triumphs over that."

"Love triumphs over everything!"

"The young think so," he muttered.

"Love has no age, no limit, and no death."

With that glow in her pale face, her breast heaving, her eyes so large and dark and soft, she looked like Venus come to life! But this extravagance brought instant reaction, and, twinkling, he said: "Well, if it had limits, we shouldn't be born; for by George! it's got a lot to put up with."

Then, removing his top hat, he brushed it round with a cuff. The great clumsy thing heated his forehead; in these days he often got a rush of blood to the head—his circulation was not what it had been.

She still sat gazing straight before her, and suddenly she murmured:

"It's strange enough that I'm alive."

Those words of Jo's 'Wild and lost' came back to him.

"Ah!" he said: "my son saw you for a moment—that day."

"Was it your son? I heard a voice in the hall; I thought for a second it was—Phil."

Old Jolyon saw her lips tremble. She put her hand over them, took it away again, and went on calmly: "That night I went to the Embankment; a woman caught me by the dress. She told me about herself. When one knows that others suffer, one's ashamed."

"One of those?"

She nodded, and horror stirred within old Jolyon, the horror of one who has never known a struggle with desperation. Almost against his will he muttered: "Tell me, won't you?"

"I didn't care whether I lived or died. When you're like that, Fate ceases to want to kill you. She took care of me three days—she never left me. I had no money. That's why I do what I can for them, now."

But old Jolyon was thinking: 'No money!' What fate could compare with that? Every other was involved in it.

"I wish you had come to me," he said. "Why didn't you?" But Irene did not answer.

"Because my name was Forsyte, I suppose? Or was it June who kept you away? How are you getting on now?" His eyes involuntarily swept her body. Perhaps even now she was—! And yet she wasn't thin—not really!

"Oh! with my fifty pounds a year, I make just enough." The answer did not reassure him; he had lost confidence. And that fellow Soames! But his sense of justice stifled condemnation. No, she would certainly have died rather than take another penny from him. Soft as she looked, there must be strength in her somewhere—strength and fidelity. But what business had young Bosinney to have got run over and left her stranded like this!

"Well, you must come to me now," he said, "for anything you want, or I shall be quite cut up." And putting on his hat, he rose. "Let's go and get some tea. I told that lazy chap to put the horses up for an hour, and come for me at your place. We'll take a cab presently; I can't walk as I used to."

He enjoyed that stroll to the Kensington end of the gardens—the sound of her voice, the glancing of her eyes, the subtle beauty of a charming form moving beside him. He enjoyed their tea at Ruffel's in the High Street, and came out thence with a great box of chocolates swung on his little finger. He enjoyed the drive back to Chelsea in a hansom, smoking his cigar. She had promised to come down next Sunday and play to him again, and already in thought he was plucking carnations and early roses for her to carry back to town. It was a pleasure to give her a little pleasure, if it WERE pleasure from an old chap like him! The carriage was already there when they arrived. Just like that fellow, who was always late when he was wanted! Old Jolyon went in for a minute to say good-bye. The little dark hall of the flat was impregnated with a disagreeable odour of patchouli, and on a bench against the wall—its only furniture—he saw a figure sitting. He heard Irene say softly: "Just one minute." In the little drawing-room when the door was shut, he asked gravely: "One of your proteges?"

"Yes. Now thanks to you, I can do something for her."

He stood, staring, and stroking that chin whose strength had frightened so many in its time. The idea of her thus actually in contact with this outcast grieved and frightened him. What could she do for them? Nothing. Only soil and make trouble for herself, perhaps. And he said: "Take care, my dear! The world puts the worst construction on everything."

"I know that."

He was abashed by her quiet smile. "Well then—Sunday," he murmured: "Good-bye."

She put her cheek forward for him to kiss.

"Good-bye," he said again; "take care of yourself." And he went out, not looking towards the figure on the bench. He drove home by way of Hammersmith; that he might stop at a place he knew of and tell them to send her in two dozen of their best Burgundy. She must want picking-up sometimes! Only in Richmond Park did he remember that he had gone up to order himself some boots, and was surprised that he could have had so paltry an idea.

The little spirits of the past which throng an old man's days had never pushed their faces up to his so seldom as in the seventy hours elapsing before Sunday came. The spirit of the future, with the charm of the unknown, put up her lips instead. Old Jolyon was not restless now, and paid no visits to the log, because she was coming to lunch. There is wonderful finality about a meal; it removes a world of doubts, for no one misses meals except for reasons beyond control. He played many games with Holly on the lawn, pitching them up to her who was batting so as to be ready to bowl to Jolly in the holidays. For she was not a Forsyte, but Jolly was—and Forsytes always bat, until they have resigned and reached the age of eighty-five. The dog Balthasar, in attendance, lay on the ball as often as he could, and the page-boy fielded, till his face was like the harvest moon. And because the time was getting shorter, each day was longer and more golden than the last. On Friday night he took a liver pill, his side hurt him rather, and though it was not the liver side, there is no remedy like that. Anyone telling him that he had found a new excitement in life and that excitement was not good for him, would have been met by one of those steady and rather defiant looks of his deep-set iron-grey eyes, which seemed to say: 'I know my own business best.' He always had and always would.

On Sunday morning, when Holly had gone with her governess to church, he visited the strawberry beds. There, accompanied by the dog Balthasar, he examined the plants narrowly and succeeded in finding at least two dozen berries which were really ripe. Stooping was not good for him, and he became very dizzy and red in the forehead. Having placed the strawberries in a dish on the dining-table, he washed his hands and bathed his forehead with eau de Cologne. There, before the mirror, it occurred to him that he was thinner. What a 'threadpaper' he had been when he was young! It was nice to be slim—he could not bear a fat chap; and yet perhaps his cheeks were too thin! She was to arrive by train at half-past twelve and walk up, entering from the road past Drage's farm at the far end of the coppice. And, having looked into June's room to see that there was hot water ready, he set forth to meet her, leisurely, for his heart was beating. The air smelled sweet, larks sang, and the Grand Stand at Epsom was visible. A perfect day! On just such a one, no doubt, six years ago, Soames had brought young Bosinney down with him to look at the site before they began to build. It was Bosinney who had pitched on the exact spot for the house—as June had often told him. In these days he was thinking much about that young fellow, as if his spirit were really haunting the field of his last work, on the chance of seeing—her. Bosinney—the one man who had possessed her heart, to whom she had given her whole self with rapture! At his age one could not, of course, imagine such things, but there stirred in him a queer vague aching—as it were the ghost of an impersonal jealousy; and a feeling, too, more generous, of pity for that love so early lost. All over in a few poor months! Well, well! He looked at his watch before entering the coppice—only a quarter past, twenty-five minutes to wait! And then, turning the corner of the path, he saw her exactly where he had seen her the first time, on the log; and realised that she must have come by the earlier train to sit there alone for a couple of hours at least. Two hours of her society missed! What memory could make that log so dear to her? His face showed what he was thinking, for she said at once:

"Forgive me, Uncle Jolyon; it was here that I first knew."

"Yes, yes; there it is for you whenever you like. You're looking a little Londony; you're giving too many lessons."

That she should have to give lessons worried him. Lessons to a parcel of young girls thumping out scales with their thick fingers.

"Where do you go to give them?" he asked.

"They're mostly Jewish families, luckily."

Old Jolyon stared; to all Forsytes Jews seem strange and doubtful.

"They love music, and they're very kind."

"They had better be, by George!" He took her arm—his side always hurt him a little going uphill—and said:

"Did you ever see anything like those buttercups? They came like that in a night."

Her eyes seemed really to fly over the field, like bees after the flowers and the honey. "I wanted you to see them—wouldn't let them turn the cows in yet." Then, remembering that she had come to talk about Bosinney, he pointed to the clock-tower over the stables:

"I expect he wouldn't have let me put that there—had no notion of time, if I remember."

But, pressing his arm to her, she talked of flowers instead, and he knew it was done that he might not feel she came because of her dead lover.

"The best flower I can show you," he said, with a sort of triumph, "is my little sweet. She'll be back from Church directly. There's something about her which reminds me a little of you," and it did not seem to him peculiar that he had put it thus, instead of saying: "There's something about you which reminds me a little of her." Ah! And here she was!

Holly, followed closely by her elderly French governess, whose digestion had been ruined twenty-two years ago in the siege of Strasbourg, came rushing towards them from under the oak tree. She stopped about a dozen yards away, to pat Balthasar and pretend that this was all she had in her mind. Old Jolyon, who knew better, said:

"Well, my darling, here's the lady in grey I promised you."

Holly raised herself and looked up. He watched the two of them with a twinkle, Irene smiling, Holly beginning with grave inquiry, passing into a shy smile too, and then to something deeper. She had a sense of beauty, that child—knew what was what! He enjoyed the sight of the kiss between them.

"Mrs. Heron, Mam'zelle Beauce. Well, Mam'zelle—good sermon?"

For, now that he had not much more time before him, the only part of the service connected with this world absorbed what interest in church remained to him. Mam'zelle Beauce stretched out a spidery hand clad in a black kid glove—she had been in the best families—and the rather sad eyes of her lean yellowish face seemed to ask: "Are you well-brrred?" Whenever Holly or Jolly did anything unpleasing to her—a not uncommon occurrence—she would say to them: "The little Tayleurs never did that—they were such well-brrred little children." Jolly hated the little Tayleurs; Holly wondered dreadfully how it was she fell so short of them. 'A thin rum little soul,' old Jolyon thought her—Mam'zelle Beauce.

Luncheon was a successful meal, the mushrooms which he himself had picked in the mushroom house, his chosen strawberries, and another bottle of the Steinberg cabinet filled him with a certain aromatic spirituality, and a conviction that he would have a touch of eczema to-morrow.

After lunch they sat under the oak tree drinking Turkish coffee. It was no matter of grief to him when Mademoiselle Beauce withdrew to write her Sunday letter to her sister, whose future had been endangered in the past by swallowing a pin—an event held up daily in warning to the children to eat slowly and digest what they had eaten. At the foot of the bank, on a carriage rug, Holly and the dog Balthasar teased and loved each other, and in the shade old Jolyon with his legs crossed and his cigar luxuriously savoured, gazed at Irene sitting in the swing. A light, vaguely swaying, grey figure with a fleck of sunlight here and there upon it, lips just opened, eyes dark and soft under lids a little drooped. She looked content; surely it did her good to come and see him! The selfishness of age had not set its proper grip on him, for he could still feel pleasure in the pleasure of others, realising that what he wanted, though much, was not quite all that mattered.

"It's quiet here," he said; "you mustn't come down if you find it dull. But it's a pleasure to see you. My little sweet is the only face which gives me any pleasure, except yours."

From her smile he knew that she was not beyond liking to be appreciated, and this reassured him. "That's not humbug," he said. "I never told a woman I admired her when I didn't. In fact I don't know when I've told a woman I admired her, except my wife in the old days; and wives are funny." He was silent, but resumed abruptly:

"She used to expect me to say it more often than I felt it, and there we were." Her face looked mysteriously troubled, and, afraid that he had said something painful, he hurried on: "When my little sweet marries, I hope she'll find someone who knows what women feel. I shan't be here to see it, but there's too much topsy-turvydom in marriage; I don't want her to pitch up against that." And, aware that he had made bad worse, he added: "That dog will scratch."

A silence followed. Of what was she thinking, this pretty creature whose life was spoiled; who had done with love, and yet was made for love? Some day when he was gone, perhaps, she would find another mate—not so disorderly as that young fellow who had got himself run over. Ah! but her husband?

"Does Soames never trouble you?" he asked.

She shook her head. Her face had closed up suddenly. For all her softness there was something irreconcilable about her. And a glimpse of light on the inexorable nature of sex antipathies strayed into a brain which, belonging to early Victorian civilisation—so much older than this of his old age—had never thought about such primitive things.

"That's a comfort," he said. "You can see the Grand Stand to-day. Shall we take a turn round?"

Through the flower and fruit garden, against whose high outer walls peach trees and nectarines were trained to the sun, through the stables, the vinery, the mushroom house, the asparagus beds, the rosery, the summer-house, he conducted her—even into the kitchen garden to see the tiny green peas which Holly loved to scoop out of their pods with her finger, and lick up from the palm of her little brown hand. Many delightful things he showed her, while Holly and the dog Balthasar danced ahead, or came to them at intervals for attention. It was one of the happiest afternoons he had ever spent, but it tired him and he was glad to sit down in the music room and let her give him tea. A special little friend of Holly's had come in—a fair child with short hair like a boy's. And the two sported in the distance, under the stairs, on the stairs, and up in the gallery. Old Jolyon begged for Chopin. She played studies, mazurkas, waltzes, till the two children, creeping near, stood at the foot of the piano their dark and golden heads bent forward, listening. Old Jolyon watched.

"Let's see you dance, you two!"

Shyly, with a false start, they began. Bobbing and circling, earnest, not very adroit, they went past and past his chair to the strains of that waltz. He watched them and the face of her who was playing turned smiling towards those little dancers thinking:

'Sweetest picture I've seen for ages.'

A voice said:

"Hollée! Mais enfin—qu'est-ce que tu fais la—danser, le dimanche! Viens, donc!"

But the children came close to old Jolyon, knowing that he would save them, and gazed into a face which was decidedly 'caught out.'

"Better the day, better the deed, Mam'zelle. It's all my doing. Trot along, chicks, and have your tea."

And, when they were gone, followed by the dog Balthasar, who took every meal, he looked at Irene with a twinkle and said:

"Well, there we are! Aren't they sweet? Have you any little ones among your pupils?"

"Yes, three—two of them darlings."

"Pretty?"

"Lovely!"

Old Jolyon sighed; he had an insatiable appetite for the very young. "My little sweet," he said, "is devoted to music; she'll be a musician some day. You wouldn't give me your opinion of her playing, I suppose?"

"Of course I will."

"You wouldn't like—" but he stifled the words "to give her lessons." The idea that she gave lessons was unpleasant to him; yet it would mean that he would see her regularly. She left the piano and came over to his chair.

"I would like, very much; but there is—June. When are they coming back?"

Old Jolyon frowned. "Not till the middle of next month. What does that matter?"

"You said June had forgiven me; but she could never forget, Uncle Jolyon."

Forget! She must forget, if he wanted her to.

But as if answering, Irene shook her head. "You know she couldn't; one doesn't forget."

Always that wretched past! And he said with a sort of vexed finality:

"Well, we shall see."

He talked to her an hour or more, of the children, and a hundred little things, till the carriage came round to take her home. And when she had gone he went back to his chair, and sat there smoothing his face and chin, dreaming over the day.

That evening after dinner he went to his study and took a sheet of paper. He stayed for some minutes

without writing, then rose and stood under the masterpiece 'Dutch Fishing Boats at Sunset.' He was not thinking of that picture, but of his life. He was going to leave her something in his Will; nothing could so have stirred the stilly deeps of thought and memory. He was going to leave her a portion of his wealth, of his aspirations, deeds, qualities, work—all that had made that wealth; going to leave her, too, a part of all he had missed in life, by his sane and steady pursuit of wealth. All! What had he missed? 'Dutch Fishing Boats' responded blankly; he crossed to the French window, and drawing the curtain aside, opened it. A wind had got up, and one of last year's oak leaves which had somehow survived the gardener's brooms, was dragging itself with a tiny clicking rustle along the stone terrace in the twilight. Except for that it was very quiet out there, and he could smell the heliotrope watered not long since. A bat went by. A bird uttered its last 'cheep.' And right above the oak tree the first star shone. Faust in the opera had bartered his soul for some fresh years of youth. Morbid notion! No such bargain was possible, that was real tragedy! No making oneself new again for love or life or anything. Nothing left to do but enjoy beauty from afar off while you could, and leave it something in your Will. But how much? And, as if he could not make that calculation looking out into the mild freedom of the country night, he turned back and went up to the chimney-piece. There were his pet bronzes—a Cleopatra with the asp at her breast; a Socrates; a greyhound playing with her puppy; a strong man reining in some horses. 'They last!' he thought, and a pang went through his heart. They had a thousand years of life before them!

'How much?' Well! enough at all events to save her getting old before her time, to keep the lines out of her face as long as possible, and grey from soiling that bright hair. He might live another five years. She would be well over thirty by then. 'How much?' She had none of his blood in her! In loyalty to the tenor of his life for forty years and more, ever since he married and founded that mysterious thing, a family, came this warning thought—None of his blood, no right to anything! It was a luxury then, this notion. An extravagance, a petting of an old man's whim, one of those things done in dotage. His real future was vested in those who had his blood, in whom he would live on when he was gone. He turned away from the bronzes and stood looking at the old leather chair in which he had sat and smoked so many hundreds of cigars. And suddenly he seemed to see her sitting there in her grey dress, fragrant, soft, dark-eyed, graceful, looking up at him. Why! She cared nothing for him, really; all she cared for was that lost lover of hers. But she was there, whether she would or no, giving him pleasure with her beauty and grace. One had no right to inflict an old man's company, no right to ask her down to play to him and let him look at her—for no reward! Pleasure must be paid for in this world. 'How much?' After all, there was plenty; his son and his three grandchildren would never miss that little lump. He had made it himself, nearly every penny; he could leave it where he liked, allow himself this little pleasure. He went back to the bureau. 'Well, I'm going to,' he thought, 'let them think what they like. I'm going to!' And he sat down.

'How much?' Ten thousand, twenty thousand—how much? If only with his money he could buy one year, one month of youth. And startled by that thought, he wrote quickly:

'DEAR HERRING,—Draw me a codicil to this effect: "I leave to my niece Irene Forsyte, born Irene Heron, by which name she now goes, fifteen thousand pounds free of legacy duty." 'Yours faithfully, 'JOLYON FORSYTE.'

When he had sealed and stamped the envelope, he went back to the window and drew in a long breath. It was dark, but many stars shone now.

IV

He woke at half-past two, an hour which long experience had taught him brings panic intensity to all awkward thoughts. Experience had also taught him that a further waking at the proper hour of eight showed the folly of such panic. On this particular morning the thought which gathered rapid momentum was that if he became ill, at his age not improbable, he would not see her. From this it was but a step to realisation that he would be cut off, too, when his son and June returned from Spain. How could he justify desire for the company of one who had stolen—early morning does not mince words—June's lover? That lover was dead; but June was a stubborn little thing; warm-hearted, but stubborn as wood, and—quite true—not one who forgot! By the middle of next month they would be back. He had barely five weeks left to enjoy the new interest which had come into what remained of his life. Darkness showed up to him absurdly clear the nature of his feeling. Admiration for beauty—a craving to see that which delighted his eyes.

Preposterous, at his age! And yet—what other reason was there for asking June to undergo such painful reminder, and how prevent his son and his son's wife from thinking him very queer? He would be reduced to sneaking up to London, which tired him; and the least indisposition would cut him off even from that. He lay with eyes open, setting his jaw against the prospect, and calling himself an old fool, while his heart beat loudly, and then seemed to stop beating altogether. He had seen the dawn lighting the window chinks, heard the birds chirp and twitter, and the cocks crow, before he fell asleep again, and awoke tired but sane. Five weeks before he need bother, at his age an eternity! But that early morning panic had left its mark, had slightly fevered the will of one who had always had his own way. He would see her as often as he wished! Why not go up to town and make that codicil at his solicitor's instead of writing about it; she might like to go to the opera! But, by train, for he would not have that fat chap Beacon grinning behind his back. Servants were such fools; and, as likely as not, they had known all the past history of Irene and young Bosinney—servants knew everything, and suspected the rest. He wrote to her that morning:

"MY DEAR IRENE,—I have to be up in town to-morrow. If you would like to have a look in at the opera, come and dine with me quietly"

But where? It was decades since he had dined anywhere in London save at his Club or at a private house. Ah! that new-fangled place close to Covent Garden....

"Let me have a line to-morrow morning to the Piedmont Hotel whether to expect you there at 7 o'clock." "Yours affectionately, "JOLYON FORSYTE."

She would understand that he just wanted to give her a little pleasure; for the idea that she should guess he had this itch to see her was instinctively unpleasant to him; it was not seemly that one so old should go out of his way to see beauty, especially in a woman.

The journey next day, short though it was, and the visit to his lawyer's, tired him. It was hot too, and after dressing for dinner he lay down on the sofa in his bedroom to rest a little. He must have had a sort of fainting fit, for he came to himself feeling very queer; and with some difficulty rose and rang the bell. Why! it was past seven! And there he was and she would be waiting. But suddenly the dizziness came on again, and he was obliged to relapse on the sofa. He heard the maid's voice say:

"Did you ring, sir?"

"Yes, come here"; he could not see her clearly, for the cloud in front of his eyes. "I'm not well, I want some sal volatile."

"Yes, sir." Her voice sounded frightened.

Old Jolyon made an effort.

"Don't go. Take this message to my niece—a lady waiting in the hall—a lady in grey. Say Mr. Forsyte is not well—the heat. He is very sorry; if he is not down directly, she is not to wait dinner."

When she was gone, he thought feebly: 'Why did I say a lady in grey—she may be in anything. Sal volatile!' He did not go off again, yet was not conscious of how Irene came to be standing beside him, holding smelling salts to his nose, and pushing a pillow up behind his head. He heard her say anxiously: "Dear Uncle Jolyon, what is it?" was dimly conscious of the soft pressure of her lips on his hand; then drew a long breath of smelling salts, suddenly discovered strength in them, and sneezed.

"Ha!" he said, "it's nothing. How did you get here? Go down and dine—the tickets are on the dressing-table. I shall be all right in a minute."

He felt her cool hand on his forehead, smelled violets, and sat divided between a sort of pleasure and a determination to be all right.

"Why! You are in grey!" he said. "Help me up." Once on his feet he gave himself a shake.

"What business had I to go off like that!" And he moved very slowly to the glass. What a cadaverous chap! Her voice, behind him, murmured:

"You mustn't come down, Uncle; you must rest."

"Fiddlesticks! A glass of champagne'll soon set me to rights. I can't have you missing the opera."

But the journey down the corridor was troublesome. What carpets they had in these newfangled places, so thick that you tripped up in them at every step! In the lift he noticed how concerned she looked, and said with the ghost of a twinkle:

"I'm a pretty host."

When the lift stopped he had to hold firmly to the seat to prevent its slipping under him; but after soup and a glass of champagne he felt much better, and began to enjoy an infirmity which had brought such solicitude into her manner towards him.

"I should have liked you for a daughter," he said suddenly; and watching the smile in her eyes, went on:

"You mustn't get wrapped up in the past at your time of life; plenty of that when you get to my age. That's a nice dress—I like the style."

"I made it myself."

Ah! A woman who could make herself a pretty frock had not lost her interest in life.

"Make hay while the sun shines," he said; "and drink that up. I want to see some colour in your cheeks. We mustn't waste life; it doesn't do. There's a new Marguerite to-night; let's hope she won't be fat. And Mephisto—anything more dreadful than a fat chap playing the Devil I can't imagine."

But they did not go to the opera after all, for in getting up from dinner the dizziness came over him again, and she insisted on his staying quiet and going to bed early. When he parted from her at the door of the hotel, having paid the cabman to drive her to Chelsea, he sat down again for a moment to enjoy the memory of her words: "You are such a darling to me, Uncle Jolyon!" Why! Who wouldn't be! He would have liked to stay up another day and take her to the Zoo, but two days running of him would bore her to death. No, he must wait till next Sunday; she had promised to come then. They would settle those lessons for Holly, if only for a month. It would be something. That little Mam'zelle Beauce wouldn't like it, but she would have to lump it. And crushing his old opera hat against his chest he sought the lift.

He drove to Waterloo next morning, struggling with a desire to say: 'Drive me to Chelsea.' But his sense of proportion was too strong. Besides, he still felt shaky, and did not want to risk another aberration like that of last night, away from home. Holly, too, was expecting him, and what he had in his bag for her. Not that there was any cupboard love in his little sweet—she was a bundle of affection. Then, with the rather bitter cynicism of the old, he wondered for a second whether it was not cupboard love which made Irene put up with him. No, she was not that sort either. She had, if anything, too little notion of how to butter her bread, no sense of property, poor thing! Besides, he had not breathed a word about that codicil, nor should he—sufficient unto the day was the good thereof.

In the victoria which met him at the station Holly was restraining the dog Balthasar, and their caresses made 'jubey' his drive home. All the rest of that fine hot day and most of the next he was content and peaceful, reposing in the shade, while the long lingering sunshine showered gold on the lawns and the flowers. But on Thursday evening at his lonely dinner he began to count the hours; sixty-five till he would go down to meet her again in the little coppice, and walk up through the fields at her side. He had intended to consult the doctor about his fainting fit, but the fellow would be sure to insist on quiet, no excitement and all that; and he did not mean to be tied by the leg, did not want to be told of an infirmity—if there were one, could not afford to hear of it at his time of life, now that this new interest had come. And he carefully avoided making any mention of it in a letter to his son. It would only bring them back with a run! How far this silence was due to consideration for their pleasure, how far to regard for his own, he did not pause to consider.

That night in his study he had just finished his cigar and was dozing off, when he heard the rustle of a gown, and was conscious of a scent of violets. Opening his eyes he saw her, dressed in grey, standing by the fireplace, holding out her arms. The odd thing was that, though those arms seemed to hold nothing, they were curved as if round someone's neck, and her own neck was bent back, her lips open, her eyes closed. She vanished at once, and there were the mantelpiece and his bronzes. But those bronzes and the mantelpiece had not been there when she was, only the fireplace and the wall! Shaken and troubled, he got up. 'I must take medicine,' he thought; 'I can't be well.' His heart beat too fast, he had an asthmatic feeling in the chest; and going to the window, he opened it to get some air. A dog was barking far away, one of the dogs at Gage's farm no doubt, beyond the coppice. A beautiful still night, but dark. 'I dropped off,' he mused, 'that's it! And yet I'll swear my eyes were open!' A sound like a sigh seemed to answer.

"What's that?" he said sharply, "who's there?"

Putting his hand to his side to still the beating of his heart, he stepped out on the terrace. Something soft scurried by in the dark. "Shoo!" It was that great grey cat. 'Young Bosinney was like a great cat!' he thought. 'It was him in there, that she—that she was—He's got her still!' He walked to the edge of

the terrace, and looked down into the darkness; he could just see the powdering of the daisies on the unmown lawn. Here to-day and gone to-morrow! And there came the moon, who saw all, young and old, alive and dead, and didn't care a dump! His own turn soon. For a single day of youth he would give what was left! And he turned again towards the house. He could see the windows of the night nursery up there. His little sweet would be asleep. 'Hope that dog won't wake her!' he thought. 'What is it makes us love, and makes us die! I must go to bed.'

And across the terrace stones, growing grey in the moonlight, he passed back within.

How should an old man live his days if not in dreaming of his well-spent past? In that, at all events, there is no agitating warmth, only pale winter sunshine. The shell can withstand the gentle beating of the dynamos of memory. The present he should distrust; the future shun. From beneath thick shade he should watch the sunlight creeping at his toes. If there be sun of summer, let him not go out into it, mistaking it for the Indian-summer sun! Thus peradventure he shall decline softly, slowly, imperceptibly, until impatient Nature clutches his wind-pipe and he gasps away to death some early morning before the world is aired, and they put on his tombstone: 'In the fulness of years!' yea! If he preserve his principles in perfect order, a Forsyte may live on long after he is dead.

Old Jolyon was conscious of all this, and yet there was in him that which transcended Forsyteism. For it is written that a Forsyte shall not love beauty more than reason; nor his own way more than his own health. And something beat within him in these days that with each throb fretted at the thinning shell. His sagacity knew this, but it knew too that he could not stop that beating, nor would if he could. And yet, if you had told him he was living on his capital, he would have stared you down. No, no; a man did not live on his capital; it was not done! The shibboleths of the past are ever more real than the actualities of the present. And he, to whom living on one's capital had always been anathema, could not have borne to have applied so gross a phrase to his own case. Pleasure is healthful; beauty good to see; to live again in the youth of the young—and what else on earth was he doing!

Methodically, as had been the way of his whole life, he now arranged his time. On Tuesdays he journeyed up to town by train; Irene came and dined with him. And they went to the opera. On Thursdays he drove to town, and, putting that fat chap and his horses up, met her in Kensington Gardens, picking up the carriage after he had left her, and driving home again in time for dinner. He threw out the casual formula that he had business in London on those two days. On Wednesdays and Saturdays she came down to give Holly music lessons. The greater the pleasure he took in her society, the more scrupulously fastidious he became, just a matter-of-fact and friendly uncle. Not even in feeling, really, was he more—for, after all, there was his age. And yet, if she were late he fidgeted himself to death. If she missed coming, which happened twice, his eyes grew sad as an old dog's, and he failed to sleep.

And so a month went by—a month of summer in the fields, and in his heart, with summer's heat and the fatigue thereof. Who could have believed a few weeks back that he would have looked forward to his son's and his grand-daughter's return with something like dread! There was such a delicious freedom, such recovery of that independence a man enjoys before he founds a family, about these weeks of lovely weather, and this new companionship with one who demanded nothing, and remained always a little unknown, retaining the fascination of mystery. It was like a draught of wine to him who has been drinking water for so long that he has almost forgotten the stir wine brings to his blood, the narcotic to his brain. The flowers were coloured brighter, scents and music and the sunlight had a living value—were no longer mere reminders of past enjoyment. There was something now to live for which stirred him continually to anticipation. He lived in that, not in retrospection; the difference is considerable to any so old as he. The pleasures of the table, never of much consequence to one naturally abstemious, had lost all value. He ate little, without knowing what he ate; and every day grew thinner and more worn to look at. He was again a 'threadpaper'; and to this thinned form his massive forehead, with hollows at the temples, gave more dignity than ever. He was very well aware that he ought to see the doctor, but liberty was too sweet. He could not afford to pet his frequent shortness of breath and the pain in his side at the expense of liberty. Return to the vegetable existence he had led among the agricultural journals with the life-size mangold wurzels, before this new attraction came into his life—no! He exceeded his allowance of cigars. Two a day had always been his rule. Now he smoked three and sometimes four—a man will when he is filled with the creative spirit. But very often he thought: 'I must give up smoking, and coffee; I must give up rattling up to town.' But he did not; there was no one in any sort of authority to notice him, and this was a priceless boon.

The servants perhaps wondered, but they were, naturally, dumb. Mam'zelle Beauce was too concerned with her own digestion, and too 'wellbrrred' to make personal allusions. Holly had not as yet an eye for the relative appearance of him who was her plaything and her god. It was left for Irene herself to beg him to eat more, to rest in the hot part of the day, to take a tonic, and so forth. But she did not tell him that she was the cause of his thinness—for one cannot see the havoc oneself is

working. A man of eighty-five has no passions, but the Beauty which produces passion works on in the old way, till death closes the eyes which crave the sight of Her.

On the first day of the second week in July he received a letter from his son in Paris to say that they would all be back on Friday. This had always been more sure than Fate; but, with the pathetic improvidence given to the old, that they may endure to the end, he had never quite admitted it. Now he did, and something would have to be done. He had ceased to be able to imagine life without this new interest, but that which is not imagined sometimes exists, as Forsytes are perpetually finding to their cost. He sat in his old leather chair, doubling up the letter, and mumbling with his lips the end of an unlighted cigar. After to-morrow his Tuesday expeditions to town would have to be abandoned. He could still drive up, perhaps, once a week, on the pretext of seeing his man of business. But even that would be dependent on his health, for now they would begin to fuss about him. The lessons! The lessons must go on! She must swallow down her scruples, and June must put her feelings in her pocket. She had done so once, on the day after the news of Bosinney's death; what she had done then, she could surely do again now. Four years since that injury was inflicted on her—not Christian to keep the memory of old sores alive. June's will was strong, but his was stronger, for his sands were running out. Irene was soft, surely she would do this for him, subdue her natural shrinking, sooner than give him pain! The lessons must continue; for if they did, he was secure. And lighting his cigar at last, he began trying to shape out how to put it to them all, and explain this strange intimacy; how to veil and wrap it away from the naked truth—that he could not bear to be deprived of the sight of beauty. Ah! Holly! Holly was fond of her, Holly liked her lessons. She would save him—his little sweet! And with that happy thought he became serene, and wondered what he had been worrying about so fearfully. He must not worry, it left him always curiously weak, and as if but half present in his own body.

That evening after dinner he had a return of the dizziness, though he did not faint. He would not ring the bell, because he knew it would mean a fuss, and make his going up on the morrow more conspicuous. When one grew old, the whole world was in conspiracy to limit freedom, and for what reason?—just to keep the breath in him a little longer. He did not want it at such cost. Only the dog Balthasar saw his lonely recovery from that weakness; anxiously watched his master go to the sideboard and drink some brandy, instead of giving him a biscuit. When at last old Jolyon felt able to tackle the stairs he went up to bed. And, though still shaky next morning, the thought of the evening sustained and strengthened him. It was always such a pleasure to give her a good dinner—he suspected her of undereating when she was alone; and, at the opera to watch her eyes glow and brighten, the unconscious smiling of her lips. She hadn't much pleasure, and this was the last time he would be able to give her that treat. But when he was packing his bag he caught himself wishing that he had not the fatigue of dressing for dinner before him, and the exertion, too, of telling her about June's return.

The opera that evening was 'Carmen,' and he chose the last entr'acte to break the news, instinctively putting it off till the latest moment.

She took it quietly, queerly; in fact, he did not know how she had taken it before the wayward music lifted up again and silence became necessary. The mask was down over her face, that mask behind which so much went on that he could not see. She wanted time to think it over, no doubt! He would not press her, for she would be coming to give her lesson to-morrow afternoon, and he should see her then when she had got used to the idea. In the cab he talked only of the Carmen; he had seen better in the old days, but this one was not bad at all. When he took her hand to say good-night, she bent quickly forward and kissed his forehead.

"Good-bye, dear Uncle Jolyon, you have been so sweet to me."

"To-morrow then," he said. "Good-night. Sleep well." She echoed softly: "Sleep well" and from the cab window, already moving away, he saw her face screwed round towards him, and her hand put out in a gesture which seemed to linger.

He sought his room slowly. They never gave him the same, and he could not get used to these 'spick-and-spandy' bedrooms with new furniture and grey-green carpets sprinkled all over with pink roses. He was wakeful and that wretched Habanera kept throbbing in his head.

His French had never been equal to its words, but its sense he knew, if it had any sense, a gipsy thing—wild and unaccountable. Well, there was in life something which upset all your care and plans—something which made men and women dance to its pipes. And he lay staring from deep-sunk eyes into the darkness where the unaccountable held sway. You thought you had hold of life, but it slipped away behind you, took you by the scruff of the neck, forced you here and forced you there, and then, likely as not, squeezed life out of you! It took the very stars like that, he shouldn't wonder, rubbed their noses together and flung them apart; it had never done playing its pranks. Five million people in this great blunderbuss of a town, and all of them at the mercy of that Life-Force, like a lot of little dried peas hopping about on a board when you struck your fist on it. Ah, well! Himself would not hop much longer

—a good long sleep would do him good!

How hot it was up here!—how noisy! His forehead burned; she had kissed it just where he always worried; just there—as if she had known the very place and wanted to kiss it all away for him. But, instead, her lips left a patch of grievous uneasiness. She had never spoken in quite that voice, had never before made that lingering gesture or looked back at him as she drove away.

He got out of bed and pulled the curtains aside; his room faced down over the river. There was little air, but the sight of that breadth of water flowing by, calm, eternal, soothed him. 'The great thing,' he thought 'is not to make myself a nuisance. I'll think of my little sweet, and go to sleep.' But it was long before the heat and throbbing of the London night died out into the short slumber of the summer morning. And old Jolyon had but forty winks.

When he reached home next day he went out to the flower garden, and with the help of Holly, who was very delicate with flowers, gathered a great bunch of carnations. They were, he told her, for 'the lady in grey'—a name still bandied between them; and he put them in a bowl in his study where he meant to tackle Irene the moment she came, on the subject of June and future lessons. Their fragrance and colour would help. After lunch he lay down, for he felt very tired, and the carriage would not bring her from the station till four o'clock. But as the hour approached he grew restless, and sought the schoolroom, which overlooked the drive. The sun-blinds were down, and Holly was there with Mademoiselle Beauce, sheltered from the heat of a stifling July day, attending to their silkworms. Old Jolyon had a natural antipathy to these methodical creatures, whose heads and colour reminded him of elephants; who nibbled such quantities of holes in nice green leaves; and smelled, as he thought, horrid. He sat down on a chintz-covered windowseat whence he could see the drive, and get what air there was; and the dog Balthasar who appreciated chintz on hot days, jumped up beside him. Over the cottage piano a violet dust-sheet, faded almost to grey, was spread, and on it the first lavender, whose scent filled the room. In spite of the coolness here, perhaps because of that coolness the beat of life vehemently impressed his ebb-down senses. Each sunbeam which came through the chinks had annoying brilliance; that dog smelled very strong; the lavender perfume was overpowering; those silkworms heaving up their grey-green backs seemed horribly alive; and Holly's dark head bent over them had a wonderfully silky sheen. A marvellous cruelly strong thing was life when you were old and weak; it seemed to mock you with its multitude of forms and its beating vitality. He had never, till those last few weeks, had this curious feeling of being with one half of him eagerly borne along in the stream of life, and with the other half left on the bank, watching that helpless progress. Only when Irene was with him did he lose this double consciousness.

Holly turned her head, pointed with her little brown fist to the piano—for to point with a finger was not 'well-brrred'—and said slyly:

"Look at the 'lady in grey,' Gran; isn't she pretty to-day?"

Old Jolyon's heart gave a flutter, and for a second the room was clouded; then it cleared, and he said with a twinkle:

"Who's been dressing her up?"

"Mam'zelle."

"Hollee! Don't be foolish!"

That prim little Frenchwoman! She hadn't yet got over the music lessons being taken away from her. That wouldn't help. His little sweet was the only friend they had. Well, they were her lessons. And he shouldn't budge shouldn't budge for anything. He stroked the warm wool on Balthasar's head, and heard Holly say: "When mother's home, there won't be any changes, will there? She doesn't like strangers, you know."

The child's words seemed to bring the chilly atmosphere of opposition about old Jolyon, and disclose all the menace to his new-found freedom. Ah! He would have to resign himself to being an old man at the mercy of care and love, or fight to keep this new and prized companionship; and to fight tired him to death. But his thin, worn face hardened into resolution till it appeared all jaw. This was his house, and his affair; he should not budge! He looked at his watch, old and thin like himself; he had owned it fifty years. Past four already! And kissing the top of Holly's head in passing, he went down to the hall. He wanted to get hold of her before she went up to give her lesson. At the first sound of wheels he stepped out into the porch, and saw at once that the victoria was empty.

"The train's in, sir; but the lady 'asn't come."

Old Jolyon gave him a sharp upward look, his eyes seemed to push away that fat chap's curiosity, and

defy him to see the bitter disappointment he was feeling.

"Very well," he said, and turned back into the house. He went to his study and sat down, quivering like a leaf. What did this mean? She might have lost her train, but he knew well enough she hadn't. 'Good-bye, dear Uncle Jolyon.' Why 'Good-bye' and not 'Good-night'? And that hand of hers lingering in the air. And her kiss. What did it mean? Vehement alarm and irritation took possession of him. He got up and began to pace the Turkey carpet, between window and wall. She was going to give him up! He felt it for certain—and he defenceless. An old man wanting to look on beauty! It was ridiculous! Age closed his mouth, paralysed his power to fight. He had no right to what was warm and living, no right to anything but memories and sorrow. He could not plead with her; even an old man has his dignity. Defenceless! For an hour, lost to bodily fatigue, he paced up and down, past the bowl of carnations he had plucked, which mocked him with its scent. Of all things hard to bear, the prostration of will-power is hardest, for one who has always had his way. Nature had got him in its net, and like an unhappy fish he turned and swam at the meshes, here and there, found no hole, no breaking point. They brought him tea at five o'clock, and a letter. For a moment hope beat up in him. He cut the envelope with the butter knife, and read:

"DEAREST UNCLE JOLYON,—I can't bear to write anything that may disappoint you, but I was too cowardly to tell you last night. I feel I can't come down and give Holly any more lessons, now that June is coming back. Some things go too deep to be forgotten. It has been such a joy to see you and Holly. Perhaps I shall still see you sometimes when you come up, though I'm sure it's not good for you; I can see you are tiring yourself too much. I believe you ought to rest quite quietly all this hot weather, and now you have your son and June coming back you will be so happy. Thank you a million times for all your sweetness to me.

"Lovingly your IRENE."

So, there it was! Not good for him to have pleasure and what he chiefly cared about; to try and put off feeling the inevitable end of all things, the approach of death with its stealthy, rustling footsteps. Not good for him! Not even she could see how she was his new lease of interest in life, the incarnation of all the beauty he felt slipping from him.

His tea grew cold, his cigar remained unlit; and up and down he paced, torn between his dignity and his hold on life. Intolerable to be squeezed out slowly, without a say of your own, to live on when your will was in the hands of others bent on weighing you to the ground with care and love. Intolerable! He would see what telling her the truth would do—the truth that he wanted the sight of her more than just a lingering on. He sat down at his old bureau and took a pen. But he could not write. There was something revolting in having to plead like this; plead that she should warm his eyes with her beauty. It was tantamount to confessing dotage. He simply could not. And instead, he wrote:

"I had hoped that the memory of old sores would not be allowed to stand in the way of what is a pleasure and a profit to me and my little grand-daughter. But old men learn to forego their whims; they are obliged to, even the whim to live must be foregone sooner or later; and perhaps the sooner the better. "My love to you, "JOLYON FORSYTE."

'Bitter,' he thought, 'but I can't help it. I'm tired.' He sealed and dropped it into the box for the evening post, and hearing it fall to the bottom, thought: 'There goes all I've looked forward to!'

That evening after dinner which he scarcely touched, after his cigar which he left half-smoked for it made him feel faint, he went very slowly upstairs and stole into the night-nursery. He sat down on the window-seat. A night-light was burning, and he could just see Holly's face, with one hand underneath the cheek. An early cockchafer buzzed in the Japanese paper with which they had filled the grate, and one of the horses in the stable stamped restlessly. To sleep like that child! He pressed apart two rungs of the venetian blind and looked out. The moon was rising, blood-red. He had never seen so red a moon. The woods and fields out there were dropping to sleep too, in the last glimmer of the summer light. And beauty, like a spirit, walked. 'I've had a long life,' he thought, 'the best of nearly everything. I'm an ungrateful chap; I've seen a lot of beauty in my time. Poor young Bosinney said I had a sense of beauty. There's a man in the moon to-night!' A moth went by, another, another. 'Ladies in grey!' He closed his eyes. A feeling that he would never open them again beset him; he let it grow, let himself sink; then, with a shiver, dragged the lids up. There was something wrong with him, no doubt, deeply wrong; he would have to have the doctor after all. It didn't much matter now! Into that coppice the moon-light would have crept; there would be shadows, and those shadows would be the only things awake. No birds, beasts, flowers, insects; just the shadows—moving; 'Ladies in grey!' Over that log they would climb; would whisper together. She and Bosinney! Funny thought! And the frogs and little things would whisper too! How the clock ticked, in here! It was all eerie—out there in the light of that red moon; in here with the little steady night-light and, the ticking clock and the nurse's dressing-gown hanging from the edge of the screen, tall, like a woman's figure. 'Lady in grey!' And a very odd thought beset him:

Did she exist? Had she ever come at all? Or was she but the emanation of all the beauty he had loved and must leave so soon? The violet-grey spirit with the dark eyes and the crown of amber hair, who walks the dawn and the moonlight, and at blue-bell time? What was she, who was she, did she exist? He rose and stood a moment clutching the window-sill, to give him a sense of reality again; then began tiptoeing towards the door. He stopped at the foot of the bed; and Holly, as if conscious of his eyes fixed on her, stirred, sighed, and curled up closer in defence. He tiptoed on and passed out into the dark passage; reached his room, undressed at once, and stood before a mirror in his night-shirt. What a scarecrow—with temples fallen in, and thin legs! His eyes resisted his own image, and a look of pride came on his face. All was in league to pull him down, even his reflection in the glass, but he was not down—yet! He got into bed, and lay a long time without sleeping, trying to reach resignation, only too well aware that fretting and disappointment were very bad for him.

He woke in the morning so unrefreshed and strengthless that he sent for the doctor. After sounding him, the fellow pulled a face as long as your arm, and ordered him to stay in bed and give up smoking. That was no hardship; there was nothing to get up for, and when he felt ill, tobacco always lost its savour. He spent the morning languidly with the sun-blinds down, turning and re-turning *The Times*, not reading much, the dog Balthasar lying beside his bed. With his lunch they brought him a telegram, running thus:

'Your letter received coming down this afternoon will be with you at four-thirty. Irene.'

Coming down! After all! Then she did exist—and he was not deserted. Coming down! A glow ran through his limbs; his cheeks and forehead felt hot. He drank his soup, and pushed the tray-table away, lying very quiet until they had removed lunch and left him alone; but every now and then his eyes twinkled. Coming down! His heart beat fast, and then did not seem to beat at all. At three o'clock he got up and dressed deliberately, noiselessly. Holly and Mam'zelle would be in the schoolroom, and the servants asleep after their dinner, he shouldn't wonder. He opened his door cautiously, and went downstairs. In the hall the dog Balthasar lay solitary, and, followed by him, old Jolyon passed into his study and out into the burning afternoon. He meant to go down and meet her in the coppice, but felt at once he could not manage that in this heat. He sat down instead under the oak tree by the swing, and the dog Balthasar, who also felt the heat, lay down beside him. He sat there smiling. What a revel of bright minutes! What a hum of insects, and cooing of pigeons! It was the quintessence of a summer day. Lovely! And he was happy—happy as a sand-boy, whatever that might be. She was coming; she had not given him up! He had everything in life he wanted—except a little more breath, and less weight—just here! He would see her when she emerged from the fernery, come swaying just a little, a violet-grey figure passing over the daisies and dandelions and 'soldiers' on the lawn—the soldiers with their flowery crowns. He would not move, but she would come up to him and say: 'Dear Uncle Jolyon, I am sorry!' and sit in the swing and let him look at her and tell her that he had not been very well but was all right now; and that dog would lick her hand. That dog knew his master was fond of her; that dog was a good dog.

It was quite shady under the tree; the sun could not get at him, only make the rest of the world bright so that he could see the Grand Stand at Epsom away out there, very far, and the cows cropping the clover in the field and swishing at the flies with their tails. He smelled the scent of limes, and lavender. Ah! that was why there was such a racket of bees. They were excited—busy, as his heart was busy and excited. Drowsy, too, drowsy and drugged on honey and happiness; as his heart was drugged and drowsy. Summer—summer—they seemed saying; great bees and little bees, and the flies too!

The stable clock struck four; in half an hour she would be here. He would have just one tiny nap, because he had had so little sleep of late; and then he would be fresh for her, fresh for youth and beauty, coming towards him across the sunlit lawn—lady in grey! And settling back in his chair he closed his eyes. Some thistle-down came on what little air there was, and pitched on his moustache more white than itself. He did not know; but his breathing stirred it, caught there. A ray of sunlight struck through and lodged on his boot. A bumble-bee alighted and strolled on the crown of his Panama hat. And the delicious surge of slumber reached the brain beneath that hat, and the head swayed forward and rested on his breast. Summer—summer! So went the hum.

The stable clock struck the quarter past. The dog Balthasar stretched and looked up at his master. The thistledown no longer moved. The dog placed his chin over the sunlit foot. It did not stir. The dog withdrew his chin quickly, rose, and leaped on old Jolyon's lap, looked in his face, whined; then, leaping down, sat on his haunches, gazing up. And suddenly he uttered a long, long howl.

But the thistledown was still as death, and the face of his old master.

Summer—summer—summer! The soundless footsteps on the grass! 1917

THE END.

CONTENTS:

CONCERNING LIFE, Part 1.

INN OF TRANQUILITY
MAGPIE OVER THE HILL
SHEEP-SHEARING
EVOLUTION
RIDING IN THE MIST
THE PROCESSION
A CHRISTIAN
WIND IN THE ROCKS
MY DISTANT RELATIVE
THE BLACK GODMOTHER

CONCERNING LIFE, Part 2.

QUALITY
THE GRAND JURY
GONE
THRESHING
THAT OLD-TIME PLACE
ROMANCE—THREE GLEAMS
MEMORIES
FELICITY

CONCERNING LETTERS A NOVELIST'S ALLEGORY SOME PLATITUDES CONCERNING DRAMA MEDITATION ON FINALITY WANTED—SCHOOLING ON OUR DISLIKE OF THINGS AS THEY ARE THE WINDLESTRAW

CENSORSHIP AND ART ABOUT CENSORSHIP VAGUE THOUGHTS ON ART

"Je vous dirai que l'exces est toujours un mal."

—ANATOLE FRANCE

CONCERNING LIFE

TABLE OF CONTENTS: INN OF TRANQUILITY MAGPIE OVER THE HILL SHEEP-SHEARING EVOLUTION RIDING IN THE MIST THE PROCESSION A CHRISTIAN WIND IN THE ROCKS MY DISTANT RELATIVE THE BLACK GODMOTHER

THE INN OF TRANQUILLITY

Under a burning blue sky, among the pine-trees and junipers, the cypresses and olives of that Odyssean coast, we came one afternoon on a pink house bearing the legend: "Osteria di Tranquillita,"; and, partly because of the name, and partly because we did not expect to find a house at all in those goat-haunted groves above the waves, we tarried for contemplation. To the familiar simplicity of that Italian building there were not lacking signs of a certain spiritual change, for out of the olive-grove which grew to its very doors a skittle-alley had been formed, and two baby cypress-trees were cut into the effigies of a cock and hen. The song of a gramophone, too, was breaking forth into the air, as it were the presiding voice of a high and cosmopolitan mind. And, lost in admiration, we became conscious of the odour of a full-flavoured cigar. Yes—in the skittle-alley a gentleman was standing who wore a bowler hat, a bright

brown suit, pink tie, and very yellow boots. His head was round, his cheeks fat and well-coloured, his lips red and full under a black moustache, and he was regarding us through very thick and half-closed eyelids.

Perceiving him to be the proprietor of the high and cosmopolitan mind, we accosted him.

"Good-day!" he replied: "I spik English. Been in Amurrica yes."

"You have a lovely place here."

Sweeping a glance over the skittle-alley, he sent forth a long puff of smoke; then, turning to my companion (of the politer sex) with the air of one who has made himself perfect master of a foreign tongue, he smiled, and spoke.

"Too-quiet!"

"Precisely; the name of your inn, perhaps, suggests——"

"I change all that—soon I call it Anglo-American hotel."

"Ah! yes; you are very up-to-date already."

He closed one eye and smiled.

Having passed a few more compliments, we saluted and walked on; and, coming presently to the edge of the cliff, lay down on the thyme and the crumbled leaf-dust. All the small singing birds had long been shot and eaten; there came to us no sound but that of the waves swimming in on a gentle south wind. The wanton creatures seemed stretching out white arms to the land, flying desperately from a sea of such stupendous serenity; and over their bare shoulders their hair floated back, pale in the sunshine. If the air was void of sound, it was full of scent—that delicious and enlivening perfume of mingled gum, and herbs, and sweet wood being burned somewhere a long way off; and a silky, golden warmth slanted on to us through the olives and umbrella pines. Large wine-red violets were growing near. On such a cliff might Theocritus have lain, spinning his songs; on that divine sea Odysseus should have passed. And we felt that presently the goat-god must put his head forth from behind a rock.

It seemed a little queer that our friend in the bowler hat should move and breathe within one short flight of a cuckoo from this home of Pan. One could not but at first feelingly remember the old Boer saying: "O God, what things man sees when he goes out without a gun!" But soon the infinite incongruity of this juxtaposition began to produce within one a curious eagerness, a sort of half-philosophical delight. It began to seem too good, almost too romantic, to be true. To think of the gramophone wedded to the thin sweet singing of the olive leaves in the evening wind; to remember the scent of his rank cigar marrying with this wild incense; to read that enchanted name, "Inn of Tranquillity," and hear the bland and affable remark of the gentleman who owned it—such were, indeed, phenomena to stimulate souls to speculation. And all unconsciously one began to justify them by thoughts of the other incongruities of existence—the strange, the passionate incongruities of youth and age, wealth and poverty, life and death; the wonderful odd bedfellows of this world; all those lurid contrasts which haunt a man's spirit till sometimes he is ready to cry out: "Rather than live where such things can be, let me die!"

Like a wild bird tracking through the air, one's meditation wandered on, following that trail of thought, till the chance encounter became spiritually luminous. That Italian gentleman of the world, with his bowler hat, his skittle-alley, his gramophone, who had planted himself down in this temple of wild harmony, was he not Progress itself—the blind figure with the stomach full of new meats and the brain of raw notions? Was he not the very embodiment of the wonderful child, Civilisation, so possessed by a new toy each day that she has no time to master its use—naive creature lost amid her own discoveries! Was he not the very symbol of that which was making economists thin, thinkers pale, artists haggard, statesmen bald—the symbol of Indigestion Incarnate! Did he not, delicious, gross, unconscious man, personify beneath his Americo-Italian polish all those rank and primitive instincts, whose satisfaction necessitated the million miseries of his fellows; all those thick rapacities which stir the hatred of the humane and thin-skinned! And yet, one's meditation could not stop there—it was not convenient to the heart!

A little above us, among the olive-trees, two blue-clothed peasants, man and woman, were gathering the fruit—from some such couple, no doubt, our friend in the bowler hat had sprung; more "virile" and adventurous than his brothers, he had not stayed in the home groves, but had gone forth to drink the waters of hustle and commerce, and come back—what he was. And he, in turn, would beget children, and having made his pile out of his 'Anglo-American hotel' would place those children beyond the coarser influences of life, till they became, perhaps, even as our selves, the salt of the earth, and

despised him. And I thought: "I do not despise those peasants—far from it. I do not despise myself—no more than reason; why, then, despise my friend in the bowler hat, who is, after all, but the necessary link between them and me?" I did not despise the olive-trees, the warm sun, the pine scent, all those material things which had made him so thick and strong; I did not despise the golden, tenuous imaginings which the trees and rocks and sea were starting in my own spirit. Why, then, despise the skittle-alley, the gramophone, those expressions of the spirit of my friend in the billy-cock hat? To despise them was ridiculous!

And suddenly I was visited by a sensation only to be described as a sort of smiling certainty, emanating from, and, as it were, still tingling within every nerve of myself, but yet vibrating harmoniously with the world around. It was as if I had suddenly seen what was the truth of things; not perhaps to anybody else, but at all events to me. And I felt at once tranquil and elated, as when something is met with which rouses and fascinates in a man all his faculties.

"For," I thought, "if it is ridiculous in me to despise my friend—that perfect marvel of disharmony—it is ridiculous in me to despise anything. If he is a little bit of continuity, as perfectly logical an expression of a necessary phase or mood of existence as I myself am, then, surely, there is nothing in all the world that is not a little bit of continuity, the expression of a little necessary mood. Yes," I thought, "he and I, and those olive-trees, and this spider on my hand, and everything in the Universe which has an individual shape, are all fit expressions of the separate moods of a great underlying Mood or Principle, which must be perfectly adjusted, volving and revolving on itself. For if It did not volve and revolve on Itself, It would peter out at one end or the other, and the image of this petering out no man with his mental apparatus can conceive. Therefore, one must conclude It to be perfectly adjusted and everlasting. But if It is perfectly adjusted and everlasting, we are all little bits of continuity, and if we are all little bits of continuity it is ridiculous for one of us to despise another. So," I thought, "I have now proved it from my friend in the billy-cock hat up to the Universe, and from the Universe down, back again to my friend."

And I lay on my back and looked at the sky. It seemed friendly to my thought with its smile, and few white clouds, saffron-tinged like the plumes of a white duck in sunlight. "And yet," I wondered, "though my friend and I may be equally necessary, I am certainly irritated by him, and shall as certainly continue to be irritated, not only by him, but by a thousand other men and so, with a light heart, you may go on being irritated with your friend in the bowler hat, you may go on loving those peasants and this sky and sea. But, since you have this theory of life, you may not despise any one or any thing, not even a skittle-alley, for they are all threaded to you, and to despise them would be to blaspheme against continuity, and to blaspheme against continuity would be to deny Eternity. Love you cannot help, and hate you cannot help; but contempt is—for you—the sovereign idiocy, the irreligious fancy!"

There was a bee weighing down a blossom of thyme close by, and underneath the stalk a very ugly little centipede. The wild bee, with his little dark body and his busy bear's legs, was lovely to me, and the creepy centipede gave me shudderings; but it was a pleasant thing to feel so sure that he, no less than the bee, was a little mood expressing himself out in harmony with Designs tiny thread on the miraculous quilt. And I looked at him with a sudden zest and curiosity; it seemed to me that in the mystery of his queer little creepings I was enjoying the Supreme Mystery; and I thought: "If I knew all about that wriggling beast, then, indeed, I might despise him; but, truly, if I knew all about him I should know all about everything—Mystery would be gone, and I could not bear to live!"

So I stirred him with my finger and he went away.

"But how"—I thought "about such as do not feel it ridiculous to despise; how about those whose temperaments and religions show them all things so plainly that they know they are right and others wrong? They must be in a bad way!" And for some seconds I felt sorry for them, and was discouraged. But then I thought: "Not at all—obviously not! For if they do not find it ridiculous to feel contempt, they are perfectly right to feel contempt, it being natural to them; and you have no business to be sorry for them, for that is, after all, only your euphemism for contempt. They are all right, being the expressions of contemptuous moods, having religions and so forth, suitable to these moods; and the religion of your mood would be Greek to them, and probably a matter for contempt. But this only makes it the more interesting. For though to you, for instance, it may seem impossible to worship Mystery with one lobe of the brain, and with the other to explain it, the thought that this may not seem impossible to others should not discourage you; it is but another little piece of that Mystery which makes life so wonderful and sweet."

The sun, fallen now almost to the level of the cliff, was slanting upward on to the burnt-red pine boughs, which had taken to themselves a quaint resemblance to the great brown limbs of the wild men Titian drew in his pagan pictures, and down below us the sea-nymphs, still swimming to shore, seemed eager to embrace them in the enchanted groves. All was fused in that golden glow of the sun going

down-sea and land gathered into one transcendent mood of light and colour, as if Mystery desired to bless us by showing how perfect was that worshipful adjustment, whose secret we could never know. And I said to myself: "None of those thoughts of yours are new, and in a vague way even you have thought them before; but all the same, they have given you some little feeling of tranquillity."

And at that word of fear I rose and invited my companion to return toward the town. But as we stealthily crept by the "Osteria di Tranquillita," our friend in the bowler hat came out with a gun over his shoulder and waved his hand toward the Inn.

"You come again in two week—I change all that! And now," he added, "I go to shoot little bird or two," and he disappeared into the golden haze under the olive-trees.

A minute later we heard his gun go off, and returned homeward with a prayer.

1910.

MAGPIE OVER THE HILL

I lay often that summer on a slope of sand and coarse grass, close to the Cornish sea, trying to catch thoughts; and I was trying very hard when I saw them coming hand in hand.

She was dressed in blue linen, and a little cloud of honey-coloured hair; her small face had serious eyes the colour of the chicory flowers she was holding up to sniff at—a clean sober little maid, with a very touching upward look of trust. Her companion was a strong, active boy of perhaps fourteen, and he, too, was serious—his deep-set, blacklashed eyes looked down at her with a queer protective wonder; the while he explained in a soft voice broken up between two ages, that exact process which bees adopt to draw honey out of flowers. Once or twice this hoarse but charming voice became quite fervent, when she had evidently failed to follow; it was as if he would have been impatient, only he knew he must not, because she was a lady and younger than himself, and he loved her.

They sat down just below my nook, and began to count the petals of a chicory flower, and slowly she nestled in to him, and he put his arm round her. Never did I see such sedate, sweet lovering, so trusting on her part, so guardianlike on his. They were like, in miniature—though more dewy,—those sober couples who have long lived together, yet whom one still catches looking at each other with confidential tenderness, and in whom, one feels, passion is atrophied from never having been in use.

Long I sat watching them in their cool communion, half-embraced, talking a little, smiling a little, never once kissing. They did not seem shy of that; it was rather as if they were too much each other's to think of such a thing. And then her head slid lower and lower down his shoulder, and sleep buttoned the lids over those chicory-blue eyes. How careful he was, then, not to wake her, though I could see his arm was getting stiff! He still sat, good as gold, holding her, till it began quite to hurt me to see his shoulder thus in chancery. But presently I saw him draw his arm away ever so carefully, lay her head down on the grass, and lean forward to stare at something. Straight in front of them was a magpie, balancing itself on a stripped twig of thorn-tree. The agitating bird, painted of night and day, was making a queer noise and flirting one wing, as if trying to attract attention. Rising from the twig, it circled, vivid and stealthy, twice round the tree, and flew to another a dozen paces off. The boy rose; he looked at his little mate, looked at the bird, and began quietly to move toward it; but uttering again its queer call, the bird glided on to a third thorn-tree. The boy hesitated then—but once more the bird flew on, and suddenly dipped over the hill. I saw the boy break into a run; and getting up quickly, I ran too.

When I reached the crest there was the black and white bird flying low into a dell, and there the boy, with hair streaming back, was rushing helter-skelter down the hill. He reached the bottom and vanished into the dell. I, too, ran down the hill. For all that I was prying and must not be seen by bird or boy, I crept warily in among the trees to the edge of a pool that could know but little sunlight, so thickly arched was it by willows, birch-trees, and wild hazel. There, in a swing of boughs above the water, was perched no pied bird, but a young, dark-haired girl with, dangling, bare, brown legs. And on the brink of the black water goldened, with fallen leaves, the boy was crouching, gazing up at her with all his soul. She swung just out of reach and looked down at him across the pool. How old was she, with her brown limbs, and her gleaming, slanting eyes? Or was she only the spirit of the dell, this elf-thing swinging there, entwined with boughs and the dark water, and covered with a shift of wet birch leaves. So strange a face she had, wild, almost wicked, yet so tender; a face that I could not take my eyes from. Her bare toes just touched the pool, and flicked up drops of water that fell on the boy's face.

From him all the sober steadfastness was gone; already he looked as wild as she, and his arms were stretched out trying to reach her feet. I wanted to cry to him: "Go back, boy, go back!" but could not; her elf eyes held me dumb—they looked so lost in their tender wildness.

And then my heart stood still, for he had slipped and was struggling in deep water beneath her feet. What a gaze was that he was turning up to her—not frightened, but so longing, so desperate; and hers how triumphant, and how happy!

And then he clutched her foot, and clung, and climbed; and bending down, she drew him up to her, all wet, and clasped him in the swing of boughs.

I took a long breath then. An orange gleam of sunlight had flamed in among the shadows and fell round those two where they swung over the dark water, with lips close together and spirits lost in one another's, and in their eyes such drowning ecstasy! And then they kissed! All round me pool, and leaves, and air seemed suddenly to swirl and melt—I could see nothing plain! . . . What time passed—I do not know—before their faces slowly again became visible! His face the sober boy's—was turned away from her, and he was listening; for above the whispering of leaves a sound of weeping came from over the hill. It was to that he listened.

And even as I looked he slid down from out of her arms; back into the pool, and began struggling to gain the edge. What grief and longing in her wild face then! But she did not wail. She did not try to pull him back; that elfish heart of dignity could reach out to what was coming, it could not drag at what was gone. Unmoving as the boughs and water, she watched him abandon her.

Slowly the struggling boy gained land, and lay there, breathless. And still that sound of lonely weeping came from over the hill.

Listening, but looking at those wild, mourning eyes that never moved from him, he lay. Once he turned back toward the water, but fire had died within him; his hands dropped, nerveless—his young face was all bewilderment.

And the quiet darkness of the pool waited, and the trees, and those lost eyes of hers, and my heart. And ever from over the hill came the little fair maiden's lonely weeping.

Then, slowly dragging his feet, stumbling, half-blinded, turning and turning to look back, the boy groped his way out through the trees toward that sound; and, as he went, that dark spirit-elf, abandoned, clasping her own lithe body with her arms, never moved her gaze from him.

I, too, crept away, and when I was safe outside in the pale evening sunlight, peered back into the dell. There under the dark trees she was no longer, but round and round that cage of passion, fluttering and wailing through the leaves, over the black water, was the magpie, fighting on its twilight wings.

I turned and ran and ran till I came over the hill and saw the boy and the little fair, sober maiden sitting together once more on the open slope, under the high blue heaven. She was nestling her tear-stained face against his shoulder and speaking already of indifferent things. And he—he was holding her with his arm and watching over her with eyes that seemed to see something else.

And so I lay, hearing their sober talk and gazing at their sober little figures, till I awoke and knew I had dreamed all that little allegory of sacred and profane love, and from it had returned to reason, knowing no more than ever which was which. 1912.

SHEEP-SHEARING

From early morning there had been bleating of sheep in the yard, so that one knew the creatures were being sheared, and toward evening I went along to see. Thirty or forty naked-looking ghosts of sheep were penned against the barn, and perhaps a dozen still inhabiting their coats. Into the wool of one of these bulky ewes the farmer's small, yellow-haired daughter was twisting her fist, hustling it toward Fate; though pulled almost off her feet by the frightened, stubborn creature, she never let go, till, with a despairing cough, the ewe had passed over the threshold and was fast in the hands of a shearer. At the far end of the barn, close by the doors, I stood a minute or two before shifting up to watch the shearing. Into that dim, beautiful home of age, with its great rafters and mellow stone archways, the June sunlight shone through loopholes and chinks, in thin glamour, powdering with its very strangeness

the dark cathedraled air, where, high up, clung a fog of old grey cobwebs so thick as ever were the stalactites of a huge cave. At this end the scent of sheep and wool and men had not yet routed that home essence of the barn, like the savour of acorns and withering beech leaves.

They were shearing by hand this year, nine of them, counting the postman, who, though farm-bred, "did'n putt much to the shearin'," but had come to round the sheep up and give general aid.

Sitting on the creatures, or with a leg firmly crooked over their heads, each shearer, even the two boys, had an air of going at it in his own way. In their white canvas shearing suits they worked very steadily, almost in silence, as if drowsed by the "click-clip, click-clip" of the shears. And the sheep, but for an occasional wriggle of legs or head, lay quiet enough, having an inborn sense perhaps of the fitness of things, even when, once in a way, they lost more than wool; glad too, mayhap, to be rid of their matted vestments. From time to time the little damsel offered each shearer a jug and glass, but no man drank till he had finished his sheep; then he would get up, stretch his cramped muscles, drink deep, and almost instantly sit down again on a fresh beast. And always there was the buzz of flies swarming in the sunlight of the open doorway, the dry rustle of the pollarded lime-trees in the sharp wind outside, the bleating of some released ewe, upset at her own nakedness, the scrape and shuffle of heels and sheep's limbs on the floor, together with the "click-clip, click-clip" of the shears.

As each ewe, finished with, struggled up, helped by a friendly shove, and bolted out dazedly into the pen, I could not help wondering what was passing in her head—in the heads of all those unceremoniously treated creatures; and, moving nearer to the postman, I said:

"They're really very good, on the whole."

He looked at me, I thought, queerly.

"Yaas," he answered; "Mr. Molton's the best of them."

I looked askance at Mr. Molton; but, with his knee crooked round a young ewe, he was shearing calmly.

"Yes," I admitted, "he is certainly good."

"Yaas," replied the postman.

Edging back into the darkness, away from that uncomprehending youth, I escaped into the air, and passing the remains of last year's stacks under the tall, toppling elms, sat down in a field under the bank. It seemed to me that I had food for thought. In that little misunderstanding between me and the postman was all the essence of the difference between that state of civilisation in which sheep could prompt a sentiment, and that state in which sheep could not.

The heat from the dropping sun, not far now above the moorline, struck full into the ferns and long grass of the bank where I was sitting, and the midges rioted on me in this last warmth. The wind was barred out, so that one had the full sweetness of the clover, fast becoming hay, over which the swallows were wheeling and swooping after flies. And far up, as it were the crown of Nature's beautiful devouring circle, a buzzard hawk, almost stationary on the air, floated, intent on something pleasant below him. A number of little hens crept through the gate one by one, and came round me. It seemed to them that I was there to feed them; and they held their neat red or yellow heads to one side and the other, inquiring with their beady eyes, surprised at my stillness. They were pretty with their speckled feathers, and as it seemed to me, plump and young, so that I wondered how many of them would in time feed me. Finding, however, that I gave them nothing to eat, they went away, and there arose, in place of their clucking, the thin singing of air passing through some long tube. I knew it for the whining of my dog, who had nosed me out, but could not get through the padlocked gate. And as I lifted him over, I was glad the postman could not see me—for I felt that to lift a dog over a gate would be against the principles of one for whom the connection of sheep with good behaviour had been too strange a thought. And it suddenly rushed into my mind that the time would no doubt come when the conduct of apples, being plucked from the mother tree, would inspire us, and we should say: "They're really very good!" And I wondered, were those future watchers of apple-gathering farther from me than I, watching sheep-shearing, from the postman? I thought, too, of the pretty dreams being dreamt about the land, and of the people who dreamed them. And I looked at that land, covered with the sweet pinkish-green of the clover, and considered how much of it, through the medium of sheep, would find its way into me, to enable me to come out here and be eaten by midges, and speculate about things, and conceive the sentiment of how good the sheep were. And it all seemed queer. I thought, too, of a world entirely composed of people who could see the sheen rippling on that clover, and feel a sort of sweet elation at the scent of it, and I wondered how much clover would be sown then? Many things I thought of, sitting there, till the sun sank below the moor line, the wind died off the clover, and the

midges slept. Here and there in the iris-coloured sky a star crept out; the soft-hooting owls awoke. But still I lingered, watching how, one after another, shapes and colours died into twilight; and I wondered what the postman thought of twilight, that inconvenient state, when things were neither dark nor light; and I wondered what the sheep were thinking this first night without their coats. Then, slinking along the hedge, noiseless, unheard by my sleeping spaniel, I saw a tawny dog stealing by. He passed without seeing us, licking his lean chops.

"Yes, friend," I thought, "you have been after something very unholy; you have been digging up buried lamb, or some desirable person of that kind!"

Sneaking past, in this sweet night, which stirred in one such sentiment, that ghoulish cur was like the omnivorousness of Nature. And it came to me, how wonderful and queer was a world which embraced within it, not only this red gloating dog, fresh from his feast on the decaying flesh of lamb, but all those hundreds of beings in whom the sight of a fly with one leg shortened produced a quiver of compassion. For in this savage, slinking shadow, I knew that I had beheld a manifestation of divinity no less than in the smile of the sky, each minute growing more starry. With what Harmony—I thought—can these two be enwrapped in this round world so fast that it cannot be moved! What secret, marvellous, all-pervading Principle can harmonise these things! And the old words 'good' and 'evil' seemed to me more than ever quaint.

It was almost dark, and the dew falling fast; I roused my spaniel to go in.

Over the high-walled yard, the barns, the moon-white porch, dusk had brushed its velvet. Through an open window came a roaring sound. Mr. Molton was singing "The Happy Warrior," to celebrate the finish of the shearing. The big doors into the garden, passed through, cut off the full sweetness of that song; for there the owls were already masters of night with their music.

On the dew-whitened grass of the lawn, we came on a little dark beast. My spaniel, liking its savour, stood with his nose at point; but, being called off, I could feel him obedient, still quivering, under my hand.

In the field, a wan huddle in the blackness, the dismantled sheep lay under a holly hedge. The wind had died; it was mist-warm. 1910

EVOLUTION

Coming out of the theatre, we found it utterly impossible to get a taxicab; and, though it was raining slightly, walked through Leicester Square in the hope of picking one up as it returned down Piccadilly. Numbers of hansoms and four-wheelers passed, or stood by the curb, hailing us feebly, or not even attempting to attract our attention, but every taxi seemed to have its load. At Piccadilly Circus, losing patience, we beckoned to a four-wheeler and resigned ourselves to a long, slow journey. A sou'-westerly air blew through the open windows, and there was in it the scent of change, that wet scent which visits even the hearts of towns and inspires the watcher of their myriad activities with thought of the restless Force that forever cries: "On, on!" But gradually the steady patter of the horse's hoofs, the rattling of the windows, the slow thudding of the wheels, pressed on us so drowsily that when, at last, we reached home we were more than half asleep. The fare was two shillings, and, standing in the lamplight to make sure the coin was a half-crown before handing it to the driver, we happened to look up. This cabman appeared to be a man of about sixty, with a long, thin face, whose chin and drooping grey moustaches seemed in permanent repose on the up-turned collar of his old blue overcoat. But the remarkable features of his face were the two furrows down his cheeks, so deep and hollow that it seemed as though that face were a collection of bones without coherent flesh, among which the eyes were sunk back so far that they had lost their lustre. He sat quite motionless, gazing at the tail of his horse. And, almost unconsciously, one added the rest of one's silver to that half-crown. He took the coins without speaking; but, as we were turning into the garden gate, we heard him say:

"Thank you; you've saved my life."

Not knowing, either of us, what to reply to such a curious speech, we closed the gate again and came back to the cab.

"Are things so very bad?"

"They are," replied the cabman. "It's done with—is this job. We're not wanted now." And, taking up his whip, he prepared to drive away.

"How long have they been as bad as this?"

The cabman dropped his hand again, as though glad to rest it, and answered incoherently:

"Thirty-five year I've been drivin' a cab."

And, sunk again in contemplation of his horse's tail, he could only be roused by many questions to express himself, having, as it seemed, no knowledge of the habit.

"I don't blame the taxis, I don't blame nobody. It's come on us, that's what it has. I left the wife this morning with nothing in the house. She was saying to me only yesterday: 'What have you brought home the last four months?' 'Put it at six shillings a week,' I said. 'No,' she said, 'seven.' Well, that's right—she enters it all down in her book."

"You are really going short of food?"

The cabman smiled; and that smile between those two deep hollows was surely as strange as ever shone on a human face.

"You may say that," he said. "Well, what does it amount to? Before I picked you up, I had one eighteen-penny fare to-day; and yesterday I took five shillings. And I've got seven bob a day to pay for the cab, and that's low, too. There's many and many a proprietor that's broke and gone—every bit as bad as us. They let us down as easy as ever they can; you can't get blood from a stone, can you?" Once again he smiled. "I'm sorry for them, too, and I'm sorry for the horses, though they come out best of the three of us, I do believe."

One of us muttered something about the Public.

The cabman turned his face and stared down through the darkness.

"The Public?" he said, and his voice had in it a faint surprise. "Well, they all want the taxis. It's natural. They get about faster in them, and time's money. I was seven hours before I picked you up. And then you was lookin' for a taxi. Them as take us because they can't get better, they're not in a good temper, as a rule. And there's a few old ladies that's frightened of the motors, but old ladies aren't never very free with their money—can't afford to be, the most of them, I expect."

"Everybody's sorry for you; one would have thought that——"

He interrupted quietly: "Sorrow don't buy bread I never had nobody ask me about things before." And, slowly moving his long face from side to side, he added: "Besides, what could people do? They can't be expected to support you; and if they started askin' you questions they'd feel it very awkward. They know that, I suspect. Of course, there's such a lot of us; the hansoms are pretty nigh as bad off as we are. Well, we're gettin' fewer every day, that's one thing."

Not knowing whether or no to manifest sympathy with this extinction, we approached the horse. It was a horse that "stood over" a good deal at the knee, and in the darkness seemed to have innumerable ribs. And suddenly one of us said: "Many people want to see nothing but taxis on the streets, if only for the sake of the horses."

The cabman nodded.

"This old fellow," he said, "never carried a deal of flesh. His grub don't put spirit into him nowadays; it's not up to much in quality, but he gets enough of it."

"And you don't?"

The cabman again took up his whip.

"I don't suppose," he said without emotion, "any one could ever find another job for me now. I've been at this too long. It'll be the workhouse, if it's not the other thing."

And hearing us mutter that it seemed cruel, he smiled for the third time.

"Yes," he said slowly, "it's a bit 'ard on us, because we've done nothing to deserve it. But things are like that, so far as I can see. One thing comes pushin' out another, and so you go on. I've thought about it—you get to thinkin' and worryin' about the rights o' things, sittin' up here all day. No, I don't see anything for it. It'll soon be the end of us now—can't last much longer. And I don't know that I'll be

sorry to have done with it. It's pretty well broke my spirit."

"There was a fund got up."

"Yes, it helped a few of us to learn the motor-drivin'; but what's the good of that to me, at my time of life? Sixty, that's my age; I'm not the only one—there's hundreds like me. We're not fit for it, that's the fact; we haven't got the nerve now. It'd want a mint of money to help us. And what you say's the truth—people want to see the end of us. They want the taxis—our day's over. I'm not complaining; you asked me about it yourself."

And for the third time he raised his whip.

"Tell me what you would have done if you had been given your fare and just sixpence over?"

The cabman stared downward, as though puzzled by that question.

"Done? Why, nothing. What could I have done?"

"But you said that it had saved your life."

"Yes, I said that," he answered slowly; "I was feelin' a bit low. You can't help it sometimes; it's the thing comin' on you, and no way out of it—that's what gets over you. We try not to think about it, as a rule."

And this time, with a "Thank you, kindly!" he touched his horse's flank with the whip. Like a thing aroused from sleep the forgotten creature started and began to draw the cabman away from us. Very slowly they travelled down the road among the shadows of the trees broken by lamplight. Above us, white ships of cloud were sailing rapidly across the dark river of sky on the wind which smelled of change. And, after the cab was lost to sight, that wind still brought to us the dying sound of the slow wheels. 1910.

RIDING IN MIST

Wet and hot, having her winter coat, the mare exactly matched the drenched fox-coloured beech-leaf drifts. As was her wont on such misty days, she danced along with head held high, her neck a little arched, her ears pricked, pretending that things were not what they seemed, and now and then vigorously trying to leave me planted on the air. Stones which had rolled out of the lane banks were her especial goblins, for one such had maltreated her nerves before she came into this ball-room world, and she had not forgotten.

There was no wind that day. On the beech-trees were still just enough of coppery leaves to look like fires lighted high-up to air the eeriness; but most of the twigs, pearled with water, were patterned very naked against universal grey. Berries were few, except the pink spindle one, so far the most beautiful, of which there were more than Earth generally vouchsafes. There was no sound in the deep lanes, none of that sweet, overhead sighing of yesterday at the same hour, but there was a quality of silence—a dumb mist murmuration. We passed a tree with a proud pigeon sitting on its top spire, quite too heavy for the twig delicacy below; undisturbed by the mare's hoofs or the creaking of saddle leather, he let us pass, absorbed in his world of tranquil turtledoves. The mist had thickened to a white, infinitesimal rain-dust, and in it the trees began to look strange, as though they had lost one another. The world seemed inhabited only by quick, soundless wraiths as one trotted past.

Close to a farm-house the mare stood still with that extreme suddenness peculiar to her at times, and four black pigs scuttled by and at once became white air. By now we were both hot and inclined to cling closely together and take liberties with each other; I telling her about her nature, name, and appearance, together with comments on her manners; and she giving forth that sterterous, sweet snuffle, which begins under the star on her forehead. On such days she did not sneeze, reserving those expressions of her joy for sunny days and the crisp winds. At a forking of the ways we came suddenly on one grey and three brown ponies, who shied round and flung away in front of us, a vision of pretty heads and haunches tangled in the thin lane, till, conscious that they were beyond their beat, they faced the bank and, one by one, scrambled over to join the other ghosts out on the dim common.

Dipping down now over the road, we passed hounds going home. Pied, dumb-footed shapes, padding along in that soft-eyed, remote world of theirs, with a tall riding splash of red in front, and a tall splash

of riding red behind. Then through a gate we came on to the moor, amongst whitened furze. The mist thickened. A curlew was whistling on its invisible way, far up; and that wistful, wild calling seemed the very voice of the day. Keeping in view the glint of the road, we galloped; rejoicing, both of us, to be free of the jog jog of the lanes.

And first the voice of the curlew died; then the glint of the road vanished; and we were quite alone. Even the furze was gone; no shape of anything left, only the black, peaty ground, and the thickening mist. We might as well have been that lonely bird crossing up there in the blind white nothingness, like a human spirit wandering on the undiscovered moor of its own future.

The mare jumped a pile of stones, which appeared, as it were, after we had passed over; and it came into my mind that, if we happened to strike one of the old quarry pits, we should infallibly be killed. Somehow, there was pleasure in this thought, that we might, or might not, strike that old quarry pit. The blood in us being hot, we had pure joy in charging its white, impalpable solidity, which made way, and at once closed in behind us. There was great fun in this yard-by-yard discovery that we were not yet dead, this flying, shelterless challenge to whatever might lie out there, five yards in front. We felt supremely above the wish to know that our necks were safe; we were happy, panting in the vapour that beat against our faces from the sheer speed of our galloping. Suddenly the ground grew lumpy and made up-hill. The mare slackened pace; we stopped. Before us, behind, to right and left, white vapour. No sky, no distance, barely the earth. No wind in our faces, no wind anywhere. At first we just got our breath, thought nothing, talked a little. Then came a chillness, a faint clutching over the heart. The mare snuffled; we turned and made down-hill. And still the mist thickened, and seemed to darken ever so little; we went slowly, suddenly doubtful of all that was in front. There came into our minds visions, so distant in that darkening vapour, of a warm stall and manger of oats; of tea and a log fire. The mist seemed to have fingers now, long, dark white, crawling fingers; it seemed, too, to have in its sheer silence a sort of muttered menace, a shuddery lurkingness, as if from out of it that spirit of the unknown, which in hot blood we had just now so gleefully mocked, were creeping up at us, intent on its vengeance. Since the ground no longer sloped, we could not go down-hill; there were no means left of telling in what direction we were moving, and we stopped to listen. There was no sound, not one tiny noise of water, wind in trees, or man; not even of birds or the moor ponies. And the mist darkened. The mare reached her head down and walked on, smelling at the heather; every time she sniffed, one's heart quivered, hoping she had found the way. She threw up her head, snorted, and stood still; and there passed just in front of us a pony and her foal, shapes of scampering dusk, whisked like blurred shadows across a sheet. Hoof-silent in the long heather—as ever were visiting ghosts—they were gone in a flash. The mare plunged forward, following. But, in the feel of her gallop, and the feel of my heart, there was no more that ecstasy of facing the unknown; there was only the cold, hasty dread of loneliness. Far asunder as the poles were those two sensations, evoked by this same motion. The mare swerved violently and stopped. There, passing within three yards, from the same direction as before, the soundless shapes of the pony and her foal flew by again, more intangible, less dusky now against the darker screen. Were we, then, to be haunted by those bewildering uncanny ones, flitting past ever from the same direction? This time the mare did not follow, but stood still; knowing as well as I that direction was quite lost. Soon, with a whimper, she picked her way on again, smelling at the heather. And the mist darkened!

Then, out of the heart of that dusky whiteness, came a tiny sound; we stood, not breathing, turning our heads. I could see the mare's eye fixed and straining at the vapour. The tiny sound grew till it became the muttering of wheels. The mare dashed forward. The muttering ceased untimely; but she did not stop; turning abruptly to the left, she slid, scrambled, and dropped into a trot. The mist seemed whiter below us; we were on the road. And involuntarily there came from me a sound, not quite a shout, not quite an oath. I saw the mare's eye turn back, faintly derisive, as who should say: Alone I did it! Then slowly, comfortably, a little ashamed, we jogged on, in the mood of men and horses when danger is over. So pleasant it seemed now, in one short half-hour, to have passed through the circle-swing of the emotions, from the ecstasy of hot recklessness to the clutching of chill fear. But the meeting-point of those two sensations we had left out there on the mysterious moor! Why, at one moment, had we thought it finer than anything on earth to risk the breaking of our necks; and the next, shuddered at being lost in the darkening mist with winter night fast coming on?

And very luxuriously we turned once more into the lanes, enjoying the past, scenting the future. Close to home, the first little eddy of wind stirred, and the song of dripping twigs began; an owl hooted, honey-soft, in the fog. We came on two farm hands mending the lane at the turn of the avenue, and, curled on the top of the bank, their cosy red collie pup, waiting for them to finish work for the day. He raised his sharp nose and looked at us dewily. We turned down, padding softly in the wet fox-red drifts under the beechtrees, whereon the last leaves still flickered out in the darkening whiteness, that now seemed so little eerie. We passed the grey-green skeleton of the farm-yard gate. A hen ran across us, clucking, into the dusk. The maze drew her long, home-coming snuffle, and stood still. 1910.

THE PROCESSION

In one of those corners of our land canopied by the fumes of blind industry, there was, on that day, a lull in darkness. A fresh wind had split the customary heaven, or roof of hell; was sweeping long drifts of creamy clouds across a blue still pallid with reek. The sun even shone—a sun whose face seemed white and wondering. And under that rare sun all the little town, among its slag heaps and few tall chimneys, had an air of living faster. In those continuous courts and alleys, where the women worked, smoke from each little forge rose and dispersed into the wind with strange alacrity; amongst the women, too, there was that same eagerness, for the sunshine had crept in and was making pale all those dark-raftered, sooted ceilings which covered them in, together with their immortal comrades, the small open furnaces. About their work they had been busy since seven o'clock; their feet pressing the leather lungs which fanned the conical heaps of glowing fuel, their hands poking into the glow a thin iron rod till the end could be curved into a fiery hook; snapping it with a mallet; threading it with tongs on to the chain; hammering, closing the link; and; without a second's pause, thrusting the iron rod again into the glow. And while they worked they chattered, laughed sometimes, now and then sighed. They seemed of all ages and all types; from her who looked like a peasant of Provence, broad, brown, and strong, to the weariest white consumptive wisp; from old women of seventy, with straggling grey hair, to fifteen-year-old girls. In the cottage forges there would be but one worker, or two at most; in the shop forges four, or even five, little glowing heaps; four or five of the grimy, pale lung-bellows; and never a moment without a fiery hook about to take its place on the growing chains, never a second when the thin smoke of the forges, and of those lives consuming slowly in front of them, did not escape from out of the dingy, whitewashed spaces past the dark rafters, away to freedom.

But there had been in the air that morning something more than the white sunlight. There had been anticipation. And at two o'clock began fulfilment. The forges were stilled, and from court and alley forth came the women. In their ragged working clothes, in their best clothes—so little different; in bonnets, in hats, bareheaded; with babies born and unborn, they swarmed into the high street and formed across it behind the band. A strange, magpie, jay-like flock; black, white, patched with brown and green and blue, shifting, chattering, laughing, seeming unconscious of any purpose. A thousand and more of them, with faces twisted and scored by those myriad deformings which a desperate town-toiling and little food fasten on human visages; yet with hardly a single evil or brutal face. Seemingly it was not easy to be evil or brutal on a wage that scarcely bound soul and body. A thousand and more of the poorest-paid and hardest-worked human beings in the world.

On the pavement alongside this strange, acquiescing assembly of revolt, about to march in protest against the conditions of their lives, stood a young woman without a hat and in poor clothes, but with a sort of beauty in her rough-haired, high cheek-boned, dark-eyed face. She was not one of them; yet, by a stroke of Nature's irony, there was graven on her face alone of all those faces, the true look of rebellion; a haughty, almost fierce, uneasy look—an untamed look. On all the other thousand faces one could see no bitterness, no fierceness, not even enthusiasm; only a half-stolid, half-vivacious patience and eagerness as of children going to a party.

The band played; and they began to march.

Laughing, talking, waving flags, trying to keep step; with the same expression slowly but surely coming over every face; the future was not; only the present—this happy present of marching behind the discordance of a brass band; this strange present of crowded movement and laughter in open air.

We others—some dozen accidentals like myself, and the tall, grey-haired lady interested in "the people," together with those few kind spirits in charge of "the show"—marched too, a little self-conscious, desiring with a vague military sensation to hold our heads up, but not too much, under the eyes of the curious bystanders. These—nearly all men—were well-wishers, it was said, though their faces, pale from their own work in shop or furnace, expressed nothing but apathy. They wished well, very dumbly, in the presence of this new thing, as if they found it queer that women should be doing something for themselves; queer and rather dangerous. A few, indeed, shuffled along between the column and the little hopeless shops and grimy factory sheds, and one or two accompanied their women, carrying the baby. Now and then there passed us some better-to-do citizen—a housewife, or lawyer's clerk, or ironmonger, with lips pressed rather tightly together and an air of taking no notice of this disturbance of traffic, as though the whole thing were a rather poor joke which they had already heard too often.

So, with laughter and a continual crack of voices our jay-like crew swung on, swaying and thumping in the strange ecstasy of irreflection, happy to be moving they knew not where, nor greatly why, under the visiting sun, to the sound of murdered music. Whenever the band stopped playing, discipline

became as tattered as the very flags and garments; but never once did they lose that look of essential order, as if indeed they knew that, being the worst-served creatures in the Christian world, they were the chief guardians of the inherent dignity of man.

Hatless, in the very front row, marched a tall slip of a girl, arrow-straight, and so thin, with dirty fair hair, in a blouse and skirt gaping behind, ever turning her pretty face on its pretty slim neck from side to side, so that one could see her blue eyes sweeping here, there, everywhere, with a sort of flower-like wildness, as if a secret embracing of each moment forbade her to let them rest on anything and break this pleasure of just marching. It seemed that in the never-still eyes of that anaemic, happy girl the spirit of our march had elected to enshrine itself and to make thence its little excursions to each ecstatic follower. Just behind her marched a little old woman—a maker of chains, they said, for forty years—whose black slits of eyes were sparkling, who fluttered a bit of ribbon, and reeled with her sense of the exquisite humour of the world. Every now and then she would make a rush at one of her leaders to demonstrate how immoderately glorious was life. And each time she spoke the woman next to her, laden with a heavy baby, went off into squeals of laughter. Behind her, again, marched one who beat time with her head and waved a little bit of stick, intoxicated by this noble music.

For an hour the pageant wound through the dejected street, pursuing neither method nor set route, till it came to a deserted slag-heap, selected for the speech-making. Slowly the motley regiment swung into that grim amphitheatre under the pale sunshine; and, as I watched, a strange fancy visited my brain. I seemed to see over every ragged head of those marching women a little yellow flame, a thin, flickering gleam, spiring upward and blown back by the wind. A trick of the sunlight, maybe? Or was it that the life in their hearts, the inextinguishable breath of happiness, had for a moment escaped prison, and was fluttering at the pleasure of the breeze?

Silent now, just enjoying the sound of the words thrown down to them, they stood, unimaginably patient, with that happiness of they knew not what gilding the air above them between the patchwork ribands of their poor flags. If they could not tell very much why they had come, nor believe very much that they would gain anything by coming; if their demonstration did not mean to the world quite all that oratory would have them think; if they themselves were but the poorest, humblest, least learned women in the land—for all that, it seemed to me that in those tattered, wistful figures, so still, so trustful, I was looking on such beauty as I had never beheld. All the elaborated glory of things made, the perfected dreams of aesthetes, the embroideries of romance, seemed as nothing beside this sudden vision of the wild goodness native in humble hearts. 1910.

A CHRISTIAN

One day that summer, I came away from a luncheon in company of an old College chum. Always exciting to meet those one hasn't seen for years; and as we walked across the Park together I kept looking at him askance. He had altered a good deal. Lean he always was, but now very lean, and so upright that his parson's coat was overhung by the back of his long and narrow head, with its dark grizzled hair, which thought had not yet loosened on his forehead. His clean-shorn face, so thin and oblong, was remarkable only for the eyes: dark-browed and lashed, and coloured like bright steel, they had a fixity in them, a sort of absence, on one couldn't tell what business. They made me think of torture. And his mouth always gently smiling, as if its pinched curly sweetness had been commanded, was the mouth of a man crucified—yes, crucified!

Tramping silently over the parched grass, I felt that if we talked, we must infallibly disagree; his straight-up, narrow forehead so suggested a nature divided within itself into compartments of iron.

It was hot that day, and we rested presently beside the Serpentine. On its bright waters were the usual young men, sculling themselves to and fro with their usual sad energy, the usual promenaders loitering and watching them, the usual dog that swam when it did not bark, and barked when it did not swim; and my friend sat smiling, twisting between his thin fingers the little gold cross on his silk vest.

Then all of a sudden we did begin to talk; and not of those matters of which the well-bred naturally converse—the habits of the rarer kinds of ducks, and the careers of our College friends, but of something never mentioned in polite society.

At lunch our hostess had told me the sad story of an unhappy marriage, and I had itched spiritually to find out what my friend, who seemed so far away from me, felt about such things. And now I

determined to find out.

"Tell me," I asked him, "which do you consider most important—the letter or the spirit of Christ's teachings?"

"My dear fellow," he answered gently, "what a question! How can you separate them?"

"Well, is it not the essence of His doctrine that the spirit is all important, and the forms of little value? Does not that run through all the Sermon on the Mount?"

"Certainly."

"If, then," I said, "Christ's teaching is concerned with the spirit, do you consider that Christians are justified in holding others bound by formal rules of conduct, without reference to what is passing in their spirits?"

"If it is for their good."

"What enables you to decide what is for their good?"

"Surely, we are told."

"Not to judge, that ye be not judged."

"Oh! but we do not, ourselves, judge; we are but impersonal ministers of the rules of God."

"Ah! Do general rules of conduct take account of the variations of the individual spirit?"

He looked at me hard, as if he began to scent heresy.

"You had better explain yourself more fully," he said. "I really don't follow."

"Well, let us take a concrete instance. We know Christ's saying of the married that they are one flesh! But we know also that there are wives who continue to live the married life with dreadful feelings of spiritual revolt wives who have found out that, in spite of all their efforts, they have no spiritual affinity with their husbands. Is that in accordance with the spirit of Christ's teaching, or is it not?"

"We are told——" he began.

"I have admitted the definite commandment: 'They twain shall be one flesh.' There could not be, seemingly, any more rigid law laid down; how do you reconcile it with the essence of Christ's teaching? Frankly, I want to know: Is there or is there not a spiritual coherence in Christianity, or is it only a gathering of laws and precepts, with no inherent connected spiritual philosophy?"

"Of course," he said, in his long-suffering voice, "we don't look at things like that—for us there is no questioning."

"But how do you reconcile such marriages as I speak of, with the spirit of Christ's teaching? I think you ought to answer me."

"Oh! I can, perfectly," he answered; "the reconciliation is through suffering. What a poor woman in such a case must suffer makes for the salvation of her spirit. That is the spiritual fulfilment, and in such a case the justification of the law."

"So then," I said, "sacrifice or suffering is the coherent thread of Christian philosophy?"

"Suffering cheerfully borne," he answered.

"You do not think," I said, "that there is a touch of extravagance in that? Would you say, for example, that an unhappy marriage is a more Christian thing than a happy one, where there is no suffering, but only love?"

A line came between his brows. "Well!" he said at last, "I would say, I think, that a woman who crucifies her flesh with a cheerful spirit in obedience to God's law, stands higher in the eyes of God than one who undergoes no such sacrifice in her married life." And I had the feeling that his stare was passing through me, on its way to an unseen goal.

"You would desire, then, I suppose, suffering as the greatest blessing for yourself?"

"Humbly," he said, "I would try to."

"And naturally, for others?"

"God forbid!"

"But surely that is inconsistent."

He murmured: "You see, I have suffered."

We were silent. At last I said: "Yes, that makes much which was dark quite clear to me."

"Oh?" he asked.

I answered slowly: "Not many men, you know, even in your profession, have really suffered. That is why they do not feel the difficulty which you feel in desiring suffering for others."

He threw up his head exactly as if I had hit him on the jaw: "It's weakness in me, I know," he said.

"I should have rather called it weakness in them. But suppose you are right, and that it's weakness not to be able to desire promiscuous suffering for others, would you go further and say that it is Christian for those, who have not experienced a certain kind of suffering, to force that particular kind on others?"

He sat silent for a full minute, trying evidently to reach to the bottom of my thought.

"Surely not," he said at last, "except as ministers of God's laws."

"You do not then think that it is Christian for the husband of such a woman to keep her in that state of suffering—not being, of course, a minister of God?"

He began stammering at that: "I—I——" he said. "No; that is, I think not-not Christian. No, certainly."

"Then, such a marriage, if persisted in, makes of the wife indeed a Christian, but of the husband—the reverse."

"The answer to that is clear," he said quietly: "The husband must abstain."

"Yes, that is, perhaps, coherently Christian, on your theory: They would then both suffer. But the marriage, of course, has become no marriage. They are no longer one flesh."

He looked at me, almost impatiently as if to say: Do not compel me to enforce silence on you!

"But, suppose," I went on, "and this, you know; is the more frequent case, the man refuses to abstain. Would you then say it was more Christian to allow him to become daily less Christian through his unchristian conduct, than to relieve the woman of her suffering at the expense of the spiritual benefit she thence derives? Why, in fact, do you favour one case more than the other?"

"All question of relief," he replied, "is a matter for Caesar; it cannot concern me."

There had come into his face a rigidity—as if I might hit it with my questions till my tongue was tired, and it be no more moved than the bench on which we were sitting.

"One more question," I said, "and I have done. Since the Christian teaching is concerned with the spirit and not forms, and the thread in it which binds all together and makes it coherent, is that of suffering——"

"Redemption by suffering," he put in.

"If you will—in one word, self-crucifixion—I must ask you, and don't take it personally, because of what you told me of yourself: In life generally, one does not accept from people any teaching that is not the result of firsthand experience on their parts. Do you believe that this Christian teaching of yours is valid from the mouths of those who have not themselves suffered—who have not themselves, as it were, been crucified?"

He did not answer for a minute; then he said, with painful slowness: "Christ laid hands on his apostles and sent them forth; and they in turn, and so on, to our day."

"Do you say, then, that this guarantees that they have themselves suffered, so that in spirit they are identified with their teaching?"

He answered bravely: "No—I do not—I cannot say that in fact it is always so."

"Is not then their teaching born of forms, and not of the spirit?"

He rose; and with a sort of deep sorrow at my stubbornness said: "We are not permitted to know the way of this; it is so ordained; we must have faith."

As he stood there, turned from me, with his hat off, and his neck painfully flushed under the sharp outcurve of his dark head, a feeling of pity surged up in me, as if I had taken an unfair advantage.

"Reason—coherence—philosophy," he said suddenly. "You don't understand. All that is nothing to me—nothing—nothing!" 1911

WIND IN THE ROCKS

Though dew-dark when we set forth, there was stealing into the frozen air an invisible white host of the wan-winged light—born beyond the mountains, and already, like a drift of doves, harbouring grey-white high up on the snowy skycaves of Monte Cristallo; and within us, tramping over the valley meadows, was the incredible elation of those who set out before the sun has risen; every minute of the precious day before us—we had not lost one!

At the mouth of that enchanted chine, across which for a million years the howdahed rock elephant has marched, but never yet passed from sight, we crossed the stream, and among the trees began our ascent. Very far away the first cowbells chimed; and, over the dark heights, we saw the thin, sinking moon, looking like the white horns of some devotional beast watching and waiting up there for the god of light. That god came slowly, stalking across far over our heads from top to top; then, of a sudden, his flame-white form was seen standing in a gap of the valley walls; the trees flung themselves along the ground before him, and censers of pine gum began swinging in the dark aisles, releasing their perfumed steam. Throughout these happy ravines where no man lives, he shows himself naked and unashamed, the colour of pale honey; on his golden hair such shining as one has not elsewhere seen; his eyes like old wine on fire. And already he had swept his hand across the invisible strings, for there had arisen, the music of uncurling leaves and flitting things.

A legend runs, that, driven from land to land by Christians, Apollo hid himself in Lower Austria, but those who ever they saw him there in the thirteenth century were wrong; it was to these enchanted chines, frequented only by the mountain shepherds, that he certainly came.

And as we were lying on the grass, of the first alp, with the star gentians—those fallen drops of the sky—and the burnt-brown dandelions, and scattered shrubs of alpen-rose round us, we were visited by one of these very shepherds, passing with his flock—the fiercest-looking man who ever, spoke in a gentle voice; six feet high, with an orange cloak, bare knees; burnt as the very dandelions, a beard blacker than black, and eyes more glorious than if sun and night had dived and were lying imprisoned in their depths. He spoke in an unknown tongue, and could certainly not understand any word of ours; but he smelled of the good earth, and only through interminable watches under sun and stars could so great a gentleman have been perfected.

Presently, while we rested outside that Alpine hut which faces the three sphinx-like mountains, there came back, from climbing the smallest and most dangerous of those peaks, one, pale from heat, and trembling with fatigue; a tall man, with long brown hands, and a long, thin, bearded face. And, as he sipped cautiously of red wine and water, he looked at his little conquered mountain. His kindly, screwed-up eyes, his kindly, bearded lips, even his limbs seemed smiling; and not for the world would we have jarred with words that rapt, smiling man, enjoying the sacred hour of him who has just proved himself. In silence we watched, in silence left him smiling, knowing somehow that we should remember him all our days. For there was in his smile the glamour of adventure just for the sake of danger; all that high instinct which takes a man out of his chair to brave what he need not.

Between that hut and the three mountains lies a saddle—astride of all beauty and all colour, master of a titanic chaos of deep clefts, tawny heights, red domes, far snow, and the purple of long shadows; and, standing there, we comprehended a little of what Earth had been through in her time, to have made this playground for most glorious demons. Mother Earth! What travail undergone, what long heroic throes, had brought on her face such majesty!

Hereabout edelweiss was clinging to smoothed-out rubble; but a little higher, even the everlasting plant was lost, there was no more life. And presently we lay down on the mountain side, rather far

apart. Up here above trees and pasture the wind had a strange, bare voice, free from all outer influence, sweeping along with a cold, whiffing sound. On the warm stones, in full sunlight, uplifted over all the beauty of Italy, one felt at first only delight in space and wild loveliness, in the unknown valleys, and the strength of the sun. It was so good to be alive; so ineffably good to be living in this most wonderful world, drinking air nectar.

Behind us, from the three mountains, came the frequent thud and scuffle of falling rocks, loosened by rains. The wind, mist, and winter snow had ground the powdery stones on which we lay to a pleasant bed, but once on a time they, too, had clung up there. And very slowly, one could not say how or when, the sense of joy began changing to a sense of fear. The awful impersonality of those great rock-creatures, the terrible impartiality of that cold, clinging wind which swept by, never an inch lifted above ground! Not one tiny soul, the size of a midge or rock flower, lived here. Not one little "I" breathed here, and loved!

And we, too, some day would no longer love, having become part of this monstrous, lovely earth, of that cold, whiffing air. To be no longer able to love! It seemed incredible, too grim to bear; yet it was true! To become powder, and the wind; no more to feel the sunlight; to be loved no more! To become a whiffing noise, cold, without one's self! To drift on the breath of that noise, homeless! Up here, there were not even those little velvet, grey-white flower-comrades we had plucked. No life! Nothing but the creeping wind, and those great rocky heights, whence came the sound of falling-symbols of that cold, untimely state into which we, too, must pass. Never more to love, nor to be loved! One could but turn to the earth, and press one's face to it, away from the wild loveliness. Of what use loveliness that must be lost; of what use loveliness when one could not love? The earth was warm and firm beneath the palms of the hands; but there still came the sound of the impartial wind, and the careless roar of the stories falling.

Below, in those valleys amongst the living trees and grass, was the comradeship of unnumbered life, so that to pass out into Peace, to step beyond, to die, seemed but a brotherly act, amongst all those others; but up here, where no creature breathed, we saw the heart of the desert that stretches before each little human soul. Up here, it froze the spirit; even Peace seemed mocking—hard as a stone. Yet, to try and hide, to tuck one's head under one's own wing, was not possible in this air so crystal clear, so far above incense and the narcotics of set creeds, and the fevered breath of prayers and protestations. Even to know that between organic and inorganic matter there is no gulf fixed, was of no peculiar comfort. The jealous wind came creeping over the lifeless limestone, removing even the poor solace of its warmth; one turned from it, desperate, to look up at the sky, the blue, burning, wide, ineffable, far sky.

Then slowly, without reason, that icy fear passed into a feeling, not of joy, not of peace, but as if Life and Death were exalted into what was neither life nor death, a strange and motionless vibration, in which one had been merged, and rested, utterly content, equipoised, divested of desire, endowed with life and death.

But since this moment had come before its time, we got up, and, close together, marched on rather silently, in the hot sun. 1910.

MY DISTANT RELATIVE

Though I had not seen my distant relative for years—not, in fact, since he was obliged to give Vancouver Island up as a bad job—I knew him at once, when, with head a little on one side, and tea-cup held high, as if, to confer a blessing, he said: "Hallo!" across the Club smoking-room.

Thin as a lath—not one ounce heavier—tall, and very upright, with his pale forehead, and pale eyes, and pale beard, he had the air of a ghost of a man. He had always had that air. And his voice—that matter-of-fact and slightly nasal voice, with its thin, pragmatism tone—was like a wraith of optimism, issuing between pale lips. I noticed; too, that his town habiliments still had their unspeakable pale neatness, as if, poor things, they were trying to stare the daylight out of countenance.

He brought his tea across to my bay window, with that wistful sociability of his, as of a man who cannot always find a listener.

"But what are you doing in town?" I said. "I thought you were in Yorkshire with your aunt."

Over his round, light eyes, fixed on something in the street, the lids fell quickly twice, as the film falls over the eyes of a parrot.

"I'm after a job," he answered. "Must be on the spot just now."

And it seemed to me that I had heard those words from him before.

"Ah, yes," I said, "and do you think you'll get it?"

But even as I spoke I felt sorry, remembering how many jobs he had been after in his time, and how soon they ended when he had got them.

He answered:

"Oh, yes! They ought to give it me," then added rather suddenly: "You never know, though. People are so funny!"

And crossing his thin legs, he went on to tell me, with quaint impersonality, a number of instances of how people had been funny in connection with jobs he had not been given.

"You see," he ended, "the country's in such a state—capital going out of it every day. Enterprise being killed all over the place. There's practically nothing to be had!"

"Ah!" I said, "you think it's worse, then, than it used to be?"

He smiled; in that smile there was a shade of patronage.

"We're going down-hill as fast as ever we can. National character's losing all its backbone. No wonder, with all this molly-coddling going on!"

"Oh!" I murmured, "molly-coddling? Isn't that excessive?"

"Well! Look at the way everything's being done for them! The working classes are losing their, self-respect as fast as ever they can. Their independence is gone already!"

"You think?"

"Sure of it! I'll give you an instance——" and he went on to describe to me the degeneracy of certain working men employed by his aunt and his eldest brother Claud and his youngest brother Alan.

"They don't do a stroke more than they're obliged," he ended; "they know jolly well they've got their Unions, and their pensions, and this Insurance, to fall back on."

It was evidently a subject on which he felt strongly.

"Yes," he muttered, "the nation is being rotted down."

And a faint thrill of surprise passed through me. For the affairs of the nation moved him so much more strongly than his own. His voice already had a different ring, his eyes a different look. He eagerly leaned forward, and his long, straight backbone looked longer and straighter than ever. He was less the ghost of a man. A faint flush even had come into his pale cheeks, and he moved his well-kept hands emphatically.

"Oh, yes!" he said: "The country is going to the dogs, right enough; but you can't get them to see it. They go on sapping and sapping the independence of the people. If the working man's to be looked after, whatever he does—what on earth's to become of his go, and foresight, and perseverance?"

In his rising voice a certain piquancy was left to its accent of the ruling class by that faint twang, which came, I remembered, from some slight defect in his tonsils.

"Mark my words! So long as we're on these lines, we shall do nothing. It's going against evolution. They say Darwin's getting old-fashioned; all I know is, he's good enough for me. Competition is the only thing."

"But competition," I said, "is bitter cruel, and some people can't stand against it!" And I looked at him rather hard: "Do you object to putting any sort of floor under the feet of people like that?"

He let his voice drop a little, as if in deference to my scruples.

"Ah!" he said; "but if you once begin this sort of thing, there's no end to it. It's so insidious. The more they have, the more they want; and all the time they're losing fighting power. I've thought pretty deeply

about this. It's shortsighted; it really doesn't do!"

"But," I said, "surely you're not against saving people from being knocked out of time by old age, and accidents like illness, and the fluctuations of trade?"

"Oh!" he said, "I'm not a bit against charity. Aunt Emma's splendid about that. And Claud's awfully good. I do what I can, myself." He looked at me, so queerly deprecating, that I quite liked him at that moment. At heart—I felt he was a good fellow. "All I think is," he went on, "that to give them something that they can rely on as a matter of course, apart from their own exertions, is the wrong principle altogether," and suddenly his voice began to rise again, and his eyes to stare. "I'm convinced that all this doing things for other people, and bolstering up the weak, is rotten. It stands to reason that it must be."

He had risen to his feet, so preoccupied with the wrongness of that principle that he seemed to have forgotten my presence. And as he stood there in the window the light was too strong for him. All the thin incapacity of that shadowy figure was pitilessly displayed; the desperate narrowness in that long, pale face; the wambling look of those pale, well-kept hands—all that made him such a ghost of a man. But his nasal, dogmatic voice rose and rose.

"There's nothing for it but bracing up! We must cut away all this State support; we must teach them to rely on themselves. It's all sheer pauperisation."

And suddenly there shot through me the fear that he might burst one of those little blue veins in his pale forehead, so vehement had he become; and hastily I changed the subject.

"Do you like living up there with your aunt?" I asked: "Isn't it a bit quiet?"

He turned, as if I had awakened him from a dream.

"Oh, well!" he said, "it's only till I get this job."

"Let me see—how long is it since you—?"

"Four years. She's very glad to have me, of course."

"And how's your brother Claud?"

"Oh! All right, thanks; a bit worried with the estate. The poor old gov'nor left it in rather a mess, you know."

"Ah! Yes. Does he do other work?"

"Oh! Always busy in the parish."

"And your brother Richard?"

"He's all right. Came home this year. Got just enough to live on, with his pension—hasn't saved a rap, of course."

"And Willie? Is he still delicate?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry."

"Easy job, his, you know. And even if his health does give out, his college pals will always find him some sort of sinecure. So jolly popular, old Willie!"

"And Alan? I haven't heard anything of him since his Peruvian thing came to grief. He married, didn't he?"

"Rather! One of the Burleys. Nice girl—heiress; lot of property in Hampshire. He looks after it for her now."

"Doesn't do anything else, I suppose?"

"Keeps up his antiquarianism."

I had exhausted the members of his family.

Then, as though by eliciting the good fortunes of his brothers I had cast some slur upon himself, he

said suddenly: "If the railway had come, as it ought to have, while I was out there, I should have done quite well with my fruit farm."

"Of course," I agreed; "it was bad luck. But after all, you're sure to get a job soon, and—so long as you can live up there with your aunt—you can afford to wait, and not bother."

"Yes," he murmured. And I got up.

"Well, it's been very jolly to hear about you all!"

He followed me out.

"Awfully glad, old man," he said, "to have seen you, and had this talk. I was feeling rather low. Waiting to know whether I get that job—it's not lively."

He came down the Club steps with me. By the door of my cab a loafer was standing; a tall tatterdemalion with a pale, bearded face. My distant relative fended him away, and leaning through the window, murmured: "Awful lot of these chaps about now!"

For the life of me I could not help looking at him very straight. But no flicker of apprehension crossed his face.

"Well, good-by again!" he said: "You've cheered me up a lot!"

I glanced back from my moving cab. Some monetary transaction was passing between him and the loafer, but, short-sighted as I am, I found it difficult to decide which of those tall, pale, bearded figures was giving the other one a penny. And by some strange freak an awful vision shot up before me—of myself, and my distant relative, and Claud, and Richard, and Willie, and Alan, all suddenly relying on ourselves. I took out my handkerchief to mop my brow; but a thought struck me, and I put it back. Was it possible for me, and my distant relatives, and their distant relatives, and so on to infinity of those who be longed to a class provided by birth with a certain position, raised by Providence on to a platform made up of money inherited, of interest, of education fitting us for certain privileged pursuits, of friends similarly endowed, of substantial homes, and substantial relatives of some sort or other, on whom we could fall back—was it possible for any of us ever to be in the position of having to rely absolutely on ourselves? For several minutes I pondered that question; and slowly I came to the conclusion that, short of crime, or that unlikely event, marooning, it was not possible. Never, never—try as we might—could any single one of us be quite in the position of one of those whose approaching pauperisation my distant relative had so vehemently deplored. We were already pauperised. If we served our country, we were pensioned.... If we inherited land, it could not be taken from us. If we went into the Church, we were there for life, whether we were suitable or no. If we attempted the more hazardous occupations of the law, medicine, the arts, or business, there were always those homes, those relations, those friends of ours to fall back on, if we failed. No! We could never have to rely entirely on ourselves; we could never be pauperised more than we were already! And a light burst in on me. That explained why my distant relative felt so keenly. It bit him, for he saw, of course, how dreadful it would be for these poor people of the working classes when legislation had succeeded in placing them in the humiliating position in which we already were—the dreadful position of having something to depend on apart from our own exertions, some sort of security in our lives. I saw it now. It was his secret pride, gnawing at him all the time, that made him so rabid on the point. He was longing, doubtless, day and night, not to have had a father who had land, and had left a sister well enough off to keep him while he was waiting for his job. He must be feeling how horribly degrading was the position of Claud—inheriting that land; and of Richard, who, just because he had served in the Indian Civil Service, had got to live on a pension all the rest of his days; and of Willie, who was in danger at any moment, if his health—always delicate—gave out, of having a sinecure found for him by his college friends; and of Alan, whose educated charm had enabled him to marry an heiress and live by managing her estates. All, all sapped of go and foresight and perseverance by a cruel Providence! That was what he was really feeling, and concealing, because he was too well-bred to show his secret grief. And I felt suddenly quite warm toward him, now that I saw how he was suffering. I understood how bound he felt in honour to combat with all his force this attempt to place others in his own distressing situation. At the same time I was honest enough to confess to myself sitting there in the cab—that I did not personally share that pride of his, or feel that I was being rotted by my own position; I even felt some dim gratitude that if my powers gave out at any time, and I had not saved anything, I should still not be left destitute to face the prospect of a bleak and impoverished old age; and I could not help a weak pleasure in the thought that a certain relative security was being guaranteed to those people of the working classes who had never had it before. At the same moment I quite saw that to a prouder and stronger heart it must indeed be bitter to have to sit still under your own security, and even more bitter to have to watch that pauperising security coming closer and closer to others—for the generous soul is always more concerned for others than for himself. No doubt, I thought, if truth were known, my

distant relative is consumed with longing to change places with that loafer who tried to open the door of my cab—for surely he must see, as I do, that that is just what he himself—having failed to stand the pressure of competition in his life—would be doing if it were not for the accident of his birth, which has so lamentably insured him against coming to that.

"Yes," I thought, "you have learnt something to-day; it does not do, you see, hastily to despise those distant relatives of yours, who talk about pauperising and molly-coddling the lower classes. No, no! One must look deeper than that! One must have generosity!"

And with that I stopped the cab and got out for I wanted a breath of air. 1911

THE BLACK GODMOTHER

Sitting out on the lawn at tea with our friend and his retriever, we had been discussing those massacres of the helpless which had of late occurred, and wondering that they should have been committed by the soldiery of so civilised a State, when, in a momentary pause of our astonishment, our friend, who had been listening in silence, crumpling the drooping soft ear of his dog, looked up and said, "The cause of atrocities is generally the violence of Fear. Panic's at the back of most crimes and follies."

Knowing that his philosophical statements were always the result of concrete instance, and that he would not tell us what that instance was if we asked him—such being his nature—we were careful not to agree.

He gave us a look out of those eyes of his, so like the eyes of a mild eagle, and said abruptly: "What do you say to this, then?.... I was out in the dog-days last year with this fellow of mine, looking for Osmunda, and stayed some days in a village—never mind the name. Coming back one evening from my tramp, I saw some boys stoning a mealy-coloured dog. I went up and told the young devils to stop it. They only looked at me in the injured way boys do, and one of them called out, 'It's mad, guv'nor!' I told them to clear off, and they took to their heels. The dog followed me. It was a young, leggy, mild looking mongrel, cross—I should say—between a brown retriever and an Irish terrier. There was froth about its lips, and its eyes were watery; it looked indeed as if it might be in distemper. I was afraid of infection for this fellow of mine, and whenever it came too close shooed it away, till at last it slunk off altogether. Well, about nine o'clock, when I was settling down to write by the open window of my sitting-room—still daylight, and very quiet and warm—there began that most maddening sound, the barking of an unhappy dog. I could do nothing with that continual 'Yap yap!' going on, and it was too hot to shut the window; so I went out to see if I could stop it. The men were all at the pub, and the women just finished with their gossip; there was no sound at all but the continual barking of this dog, somewhere away out in the fields. I travelled by ear across three meadows, till I came on a hay-stack by a pool of water. There was the dog sure enough—the same mealy-coloured mongrel, tied to a stake, yapping, and making frantic little runs on a bit of rusty chain; whirling round and round the stake, then standing quite still, and shivering. I went up and spoke to it, but it backed into the hay-stack, and there it stayed shrinking away from me, with its tongue hanging out. It had been heavily struck by something on the head; the cheek was cut, one eye half-closed, and an ear badly swollen. I tried to get hold of it, but the poor thing was beside itself with fear. It snapped and flew round so that I had to give it up, and sit down with this fellow here beside me, to try and quiet it—a strange dog, you know, will generally form his estimate of you from the way it sees you treat another dog. I had to sit there quite half an hour before it would let me go up to it, pull the stake out, and lead it away. The poor beast, though it was so feeble from the blows it had received, was still half-frantic, and I didn't dare to touch it; and all the time I took good care that this fellow here didn't come too near. Then came the question what was to be done. There was no vet, of course, and I'd no place to put it except my sitting-room, which didn't belong to me. But, looking at its battered head, and its half-mad eyes, I thought: 'No trusting you with these bumpkins; you'll have to come in here for the night!' Well, I got it in, and heaped two or three of those hairy little red rugs landladies are so fond of, up in a corner; and got it on to them, and put down my bread and milk. But it wouldn't eat—its sense of proportion was all gone, fairly destroyed by terror. It lay there moaning, and every now and then it raised its head with a 'yap' of sheer fright, dreadful to hear, and bit the air, as if its enemies were on it again; and this fellow of mine lay in the opposite corner, with his head on his paw, watching it. I sat up for a long time with that poor beast, sick enough, and wondering how it had come to be stoned and kicked and battered into this state; and next day I made it my business to find out."

Our friend paused, scanned us a little angrily, and then went on: "It had made its first appearance, it

seems, following a bicyclist. There are men, you know—save the mark—who, when their beasts get ill or too expensive, jump on their bicycles and take them for a quick run, taking care never to look behind them. When they get back home they say: 'Hallo! where's Fido?' Fido is nowhere, and there's an end! Well, this poor puppy gave up just as it got to our village; and, roaming shout in search of water, attached itself to a farm labourer. The man with excellent intentions—as he told me himself—tried to take hold of it, but too abruptly, so that it was startled, and snapped at him. Whereon he kicked it for a dangerous cur, and it went drifting back toward the village, and fell in with the boys coming home from school. It thought, no doubt, that they were going to kick it too, and nipped one of them who took it by the collar. Thereupon they hullabalooed and stoned it down the road to where I found them. Then I put in my little bit of torture, and drove it away, through fear of infection to my own dog. After that it seems to have fallen in with a man who told me: 'Well, you see, he came sneakin' round my house, with the children playin', and snapped at them when they went to stroke him, so that they came running in to their mother, an' she' called to me in a fine takin' about a mad dog. I ran out with a shovel and gave 'im one, and drove him out. I'm sorry if he wasn't mad, he looked it right enough; you can't be too careful with strange dogs.' Its next acquaintance was an old stone-breaker, a very decent sort. 'Well! you see,' the old man explained to me, 'the dog came smellin' round my stones, an' it wouldn' come near, an' it wouldn' go away; it was all froth and blood about the jaw, and its eyes glared green at me. I thought to meself, bein' the dog-days—I don't like the look o' you, you look funny! So I took a stone, an' got it here, just on the ear; an' it fell over. And I thought to meself: Well, you've got to finish it, or it'll go bitin' somebody, for sure! But when I come to it with my hammer, the dog it got up—an' you know how it is when there's somethin' you've 'alf killed, and you feel sorry, and yet you feel you must finish it, an' you hit at it blind, you hit at it agen an' agen. The poor thing, it wriggled and snapped, an' I was terrified it'd bite me, an' some'ow it got away.'" Again our friend paused, and this time we dared not look at him.

"The next hospitality it was shown," he went on presently, "was by a farmer, who, seeing it all bloody, drove it off, thinking it had been digging up a lamb that he'd just buried. The poor homeless beast came sneaking back, so he told his men to get rid of it. Well, they got hold of it somehow—there was a hole in its neck that looked as if they'd used a pitchfork—and, mortally afraid of its biting them, but not liking, as they told me, to drown it, for fear the owner might come on them, they got a stake and a chain, and fastened it up, and left it in the water by the hay-stack where I found it. I had some conversation with that farmer. 'That's right,' he said, 'but who was to know? I couldn't have my sheep worried. The brute had blood on his muzzle. These curs do a lot of harm when they've once been blooded. You can't run risks.'" Our friend cut viciously at a dandelion with his stick. "Run risks!" he broke out suddenly: "That was it from beginning to end of that poor beast's sufferings, fear! From that fellow on the bicycle, afraid of the worry and expense, as soon as it showed signs of distemper, to myself and the man with the pitch fork—not one of us, I daresay, would have gone out of our way to do it—a harm. But we felt fear, and so by the law of self-preservation, or what ever you like—it all began, till there the poor thing was, with a battered head and a hole in its neck, ravenous with hunger, and too distraught even to lap my bread and milk. Yes, and there's something uncanny about a suffering animal—we sat watching it, and again we were afraid, looking at its eyes and the way it bit the air. Fear! It's the black godmother of all damnable things!"

Our friend bent down, crumpling and crumpling at his dog's ears. We, too, gazed at the ground, thinking of, that poor lost puppy, and the horrible inevitability of all that happens, seeing men are what they are; thinking of all the foul doings in the world, whose black godmother is Fear.

"And what became of the poor dog?" one of us asked at last.

"When," said our friend slowly, "I'd had my fill of watching, I covered it with a rug, took this fellow away with me, and went to bed. There was nothing else to do. At dawn I was awakened by three dreadful cries—not like a dog's at all. I hurried down. There was the poor beast—wriggled out from under the rug—stretched on its side, dead. This fellow of mine had followed me in, and he went and sat down by the body. When I spoke to him he just looked round, and wagged his tail along the ground, but would not come away; and there he sat till it was buried, very interested, but not sorry at all."

Our friend was silent, looking angrily at something in the distance.

And we, too, were silent, seeing in spirit that vigil of early morning: The thin, lifeless, sandy-coloured body, stretched on those red mats; and this black creature—now lying at our feet—propped on its haunches like the dog in "The Death of Procris," patient, curious, ungrieved, staring down at it with his bright, interested eyes. 1912.

STUDIES AND ESSAYS

By John Galsworthy

"Je vous dirai que l'exces est toujours un mal."
—ANATOLE FRANCE

CONCERNING LIFE

TABLE OF CONTENTS: QUALITY THE GRAND JURY GONE THRESHING THAT OLD-TIME PLACE ROMANCE—
THREE GLEAMS MEMORIES FELICITY

QUALITY

I knew him from the days of my extreme youth, because he made my father's boots; inhabiting with his elder brother two little shops let into one, in a small by-street-now no more, but then most fashionably placed in the West End.

That tenement had a certain quiet distinction; there was no sign upon its face that he made for any of the Royal Family—merely his own German name of Gessler Brothers; and in the window a few pairs of boots. I remember that it always troubled me to account for those unvarying boots in the window, for he made only what was ordered, reaching nothing down, and it seemed so inconceivable that what he made could ever have failed to fit. Had he bought them to put there? That, too, seemed inconceivable. He would never have tolerated in his house leather on which he had not worked himself. Besides, they were too beautiful—the pair of pumps, so inexpressibly slim, the patent leathers with cloth tops, making water come into one's mouth, the tall brown riding boots with marvellous sooty glow, as if, though new, they had been worn a hundred years. Those pairs could only have been made by one who saw before him the Soul of Boot—so truly were they prototypes incarnating the very spirit of all foot-gear. These thoughts, of course, came to me later, though even when I was promoted to him, at the age of perhaps fourteen, some inkling haunted me of the dignity of himself and brother. For to make boots—such boots as he made—seemed to me then, and still seems to me, mysterious and wonderful.

I remember well my shy remark, one day, while stretching out to him my youthful foot:

"Isn't it awfully hard to do, Mr. Gessler?"

And his answer, given with a sudden smile from out of the sardonic redness of his beard: "Id is an Ardt!"

Himself, he was a little as if made from leather, with his yellow crinkly face, and crinkly reddish hair and beard; and neat folds slanting down his cheeks to the corners of his mouth, and his guttural and one-toned voice; for leather is a sardonic substance, and stiff and slow of purpose. And that was the character of his face, save that his eyes, which were grey-blue, had in them the simple gravity of one secretly possessed by the Ideal. His elder brother was so very like him—though watery, paler in every way, with a great industry—that sometimes in early days I was not quite sure of him until the interview was over. Then I knew that it was he, if the words, "I will ask my brudder," had not been spoken; and that, if they had, it was his elder brother.

When one grew old and wild and ran up bills, one somehow never ran them up with Gessler Brothers. It would not have seemed becoming to go in there and stretch out one's foot to that blue iron-spectacled glance, owing him for more than—say—two pairs, just the comfortable reassurance that one was still his client.

For it was not possible to go to him very often—his boots lasted terribly, having something beyond the temporary—some, as it were, essence of boot stitched into them.

One went in, not as into most shops, in the mood of: "Please serve me, and let me go!" but restfully, as one enters a church; and, sitting on the single wooden chair, waited—for there was never anybody there. Soon, over the top edge of that sort of well—rather dark, and smelling soothingly of leather—which formed the shop, there would be seen his face, or that of his elder brother, peering down. A guttural sound, and the tip-tap of bast slippers beating the narrow wooden stairs, and he would stand

before one without coat, a little bent, in leather apron, with sleeves turned back, blinking—as if awakened from some dream of boots, or like an owl surprised in daylight and annoyed at this interruption.

And I would say: "How do you do, Mr. Gessler? Could you make me a pair of Russia leather boots?"

Without a word he would leave me, retiring whence he came, or into the other portion of the shop, and I would, continue to rest in the wooden chair, inhaling the incense of his trade. Soon he would come back, holding in his thin, veined hand a piece of gold-brown leather. With eyes fixed on it, he would remark: "What a beaudiful biece!" When I, too, had admired it, he would speak again. "When do you wand dem?" And I would answer: "Oh! As soon as you conveniently can." And he would say: "Tomorrow fordnighd?" Or if he were his elder brother: "I will ask my brudder!"

Then I would murmur: "Thank you! Good-morning, Mr. Gessler." "Goot-morning!" he would reply, still looking at the leather in his hand. And as I moved to the door, I would hear the tip-tap of his bast slippers restoring him, up the stairs, to his dream of boots. But if it were some new kind of foot-gear that he had not yet made me, then indeed he would observe ceremony—divesting me of my boot and holding it long in his hand, looking at it with eyes at once critical and loving, as if recalling the glow with which he had created it, and rebuking the way in which one had disorganized this masterpiece. Then, placing my foot on a piece of paper, he would two or three times tickle the outer edges with a pencil and pass his nervous fingers over my toes, feeling himself into the heart of my requirements.

I cannot forget that day on which I had occasion to say to him; "Mr. Gessler, that last pair of town walking-boots creaked, you know."

He looked at me for a time without replying, as if expecting me to withdraw or qualify the statement, then said:

"Id shouldn'd 'ave greaked."

"It did, I'm afraid."

"You goddem wed before dey found demselves?"

"I don't think so."

At that he lowered his eyes, as if hunting for memory of those boots, and I felt sorry I had mentioned this grave thing.

"Zend dem back!" he said; "I will look at dem."

A feeling of compassion for my creaking boots surged up in me, so well could I imagine the sorrowful long curiosity of regard which he would bend on them.

"Zome boods," he said slowly, "are bad from birdt. If I can do noding wid dem, I dake dem off your bill."

Once (once only) I went absent-mindedly into his shop in a pair of boots bought in an emergency at some large firm's. He took my order without showing me any leather, and I could feel his eyes penetrating the inferior integument of my foot. At last he said:

"Dose are nod my boods."

The tone was not one of anger, nor of sorrow, not even of contempt, but there was in it something quiet that froze the blood. He put his hand down and pressed a finger on the place where the left boot, endeavouring to be fashionable, was not quite comfortable.

"Id 'urds you dere," he said. "Dose big virms 'ave no self-respect. Drash!" And then, as if something had given way within him, he spoke long and bitterly. It was the only time I ever heard him discuss the conditions and hardships of his trade.

"Dey get id all," he said, "dey get id by adverdisement, nod by work. Dey dake it away from us, who lofe our boods. Id gomes to this—bresently I haf no work. Every year id gets less you will see." And looking at his lined face I saw things I had never noticed before, bitter things and bitter struggle—and what a lot of grey hairs there seemed suddenly in his red beard!

As best I could, I explained the circumstances of the purchase of those ill-omened boots. But his face and voice made so deep impression that during the next few minutes I ordered many pairs. Nemesis fell! They lasted more terribly than ever. And I was not able conscientiously to go to him for nearly two years.

When at last I went I was surprised to find that outside one of the two little windows of his shop another name was painted, also that of a bootmaker-making, of course, for the Royal Family. The old familiar boots, no longer in dignified isolation, were huddled in the single window. Inside, the now contracted well of the one little shop was more scented and darker than ever. And it was longer than usual, too, before a face peered down, and the tip-tap of the bast slippers began. At last he stood before me, and, gazing through those rusty iron spectacles, said:

"Mr.—, isn'd it?"

"Ah! Mr. Gessler," I stammered, "but your boots are really too good, you know! See, these are quite decent still!" And I stretched out to him my foot. He looked at it.

"Yes," he said, "beople do nod wand good hoods, id seems."

To get away from his reproachful eyes and voice I hastily remarked: "What have you done to your shop?"

He answered quietly: "Id was too exbensif. Do you wand some boods?"

I ordered three pairs, though I had only wanted two, and quickly left. I had, I do not know quite what feeling of being part, in his mind, of a conspiracy against him; or not perhaps so much against him as against his idea of boot. One does not, I suppose, care to feel like that; for it was again many months before my next visit to his shop, paid, I remember, with the feeling: "Oh! well, I can't leave the old boy—so here goes! Perhaps it'll be his elder brother!"

For his elder brother, I knew, had not character enough to reproach me, even dumbly.

And, to my relief, in the shop there did appear to be his elder brother, handling a piece of leather.

"Well, Mr. Gessler," I said, "how are you?"

He came close, and peered at me.

"I am breddy well," he said slowly "but my elder brudder is dead."

And I saw that it was indeed himself—but how aged and wan! And never before had I heard him mention his brother. Much shocked; I murmured: "Oh! I am sorry!"

"Yes," he answered, "he was a good man, he made a good bood; but he is dead." And he touched the top of his head, where the hair had suddenly gone as thin as it had been on that of his poor brother, to indicate, I suppose, the cause of death. "He could nod ged over losing de oder shop. Do you wand any hoods?" And he held up the leather in his hand: "Id's a beaudiful biece."

I ordered several pairs. It was very long before they came—but they were better than ever. One simply could not wear them out. And soon after that I went abroad.

It was over a year before I was again in London. And the first shop I went to was my old friend's. I had left a man of sixty, I came back to one of seventy-five, pinched and worn and tremulous, who genuinely, this time, did not at first know me.

"Oh! Mr. Gessler," I said, sick at heart; "how splendid your boots are! See, I've been wearing this pair nearly all the time I've been abroad; and they're not half worn out, are they?"

He looked long at my boots—a pair of Russia leather, and his face seemed to regain steadiness. Putting his hand on my instep, he said:

"Do dey vid you here? I 'ad drouble wid dat bair, I remember."

I assured him that they had fitted beautifully.

"Do you wand any boods?" he said. "I can make dem quickly; id is a slack dime."

I answered: "Please, please! I want boots all round—every kind!"

"I will make a vresh model. Your food must be bigger." And with utter slowness, he traced round my foot, and felt my toes, only once looking up to say:

"Did I dell you my brudder was dead?"

To watch him was painful, so feeble had he grown; I was glad to get away.

I had given those boots up, when one evening they came. Opening the parcel, I set the four pairs out in a row. Then one by one I tried them on. There was no doubt about it. In shape and fit, in finish and quality of leather, they were the best he had ever made me. And in the mouth of one of the Town walking-boots I found his bill.

The amount was the same as usual, but it gave me quite a shock. He had never before sent it in till quarter day. I flew down-stairs, and wrote a cheque, and posted it at once with my own hand.

A week later, passing the little street, I thought I would go in and tell him how splendidly the new boots fitted. But when I came to where his shop had been, his name was gone. Still there, in the window, were the slim pumps, the patent leathers with cloth tops, the sooty riding boots.

I went in, very much disturbed. In the two little shops—again made into one—was a young man with an English face.

"Mr. Gessler in?" I said.

He gave me a strange, ingratiating look.

"No, sir," he said, "no. But we can attend to anything with pleasure. We've taken the shop over. You've seen our name, no doubt, next door. We make for some very good people."

"Yes, Yes," I said; "but Mr. Gessler?"

"Oh!" he answered; "dead."

"Dead! But I only received these boots from him last Wednesday week."

"Ah!" he said; "a shockin' go. Poor old man starved 'imself."

"Good God!"

"Slow starvation, the doctor called it! You see he went to work in such a way! Would keep the shop on; wouldn't have a soul touch his boots except himself. When he got an order, it took him such a time. People won't wait. He lost everybody. And there he'd sit, goin' on and on—I will say that for him not a man in London made a better boot! But look at the competition! He never advertised! Would 'ave the best leather, too, and do it all 'imself. Well, there it is. What could you expect with his ideas?"

"But starvation—!"

"That may be a bit flowery, as the sayin' is—but I know myself he was sittin' over his boots day and night, to the very last. You see I used to watch him. Never gave 'imself time to eat; never had a penny in the house. All went in rent and leather. How he lived so long I don't know. He regular let his fire go out. He was a character. But he made good boots."

"Yes," I said, "he made good boots."

And I turned and went out quickly, for I did not want that youth to know that I could hardly see. 1911

THE GRAND JURY—IN TWO PANELS AND A FRAME

Read that piece of paper, which summoned me to sit on the Grand Jury at the approaching Sessions, lying in a scoop of the shore close to the great rollers of the sea—that span of eternal freedom, deprived just there of too great liberty by the word "Atlantic." And I remember thinking, as I read, that in each breaking wave was some particle which had visited every shore in all the world—that in each sparkle of hot sunlight stealing that bright water up into the sky, was the microcosm of all change, and of all unity.

PANEL I

In answer to that piece of paper, I presented myself at the proper place in due course and with a certain trepidation. What was it that I was about to do? For I had no experience of these things. And,

being too early, I walked a little to and fro, looking at all those my partners in this matter of the purification of Society. Prosecutors, witnesses, officials, policemen, detectives, undetected, pressmen, barristers, loafers, clerks, cadgers, jurymen. And I remember having something of the feeling that one has when one looks into a sink without holding one's nose. There was such uneasy hurry, so strange a disenchanting look, a sort of spiritual dirt, about all that place, and there were—faces! And I thought: To them my face must seem as their faces seem to me!

Soon I was taken with my accomplices to have my name called, and to be sworn. I do not remember much about that process, too occupied with wondering what these companions of mine were like; but presently we all came to a long room with a long table, where nineteen lists of indictments and nineteen pieces of blotting paper were set alongside nineteen pens. We did not, I recollect, speak much to one another, but sat down, and studied those nineteen lists. We had eighty-seven cases on which to pronounce whether the bill was true or no; and the clerk assured us we should get through them in two days at most. Over the top of these indictments I regarded my eighteen fellows. There was in me a hunger of inquiry, as to what they thought about this business; and a sort of sorrowful affection for them, as if we were all a ship's company bound on some strange and awkward expedition. I wondered, till I thought my wonder must be coming through my eyes, whether they had the same curious sensation that I was feeling, of doing something illegitimate, which I had not been born to do, together with a sense of self-importance, a sort of unholy interest in thus dealing with the lives of my fellow men. And slowly, watching them, I came to the conclusion that I need not wonder. All with the exception perhaps of two, a painter and a Jew looked such good citizens. I became gradually sure that they were not troubled with the lap and wash of speculation; unclogged by any devastating sense of unity; pure of doubt, and undefiled by an uneasy conscience.

But now they began to bring us in the evidence. They brought it quickly. And at first we looked at it, whatever it was, with a sort of solemn excitement. Were we not arbiters of men's fates, purifiers of Society, more important by far than Judge or Common Jury? For if we did not bring in a true bill there was an end; the accused would be discharged.

We set to work, slowly at first, then faster and still faster, bringing in true bills; and after every one making a mark in our lists so that we might know where we were. We brought in true bills for burglary, and false pretences, larceny, and fraud; we brought them in for manslaughter, rape, and arson. When we had ten or so, two of us would get up and bear them away down to the Court below and lay them before the Judge. "Thank you, gentlemen!" he would say, or words to that effect; and we would go up again, and go on bringing in true bills. I noticed that at the evidence of each fresh bill we looked with a little less excitement, and a little less solemnity, making every time a shorter tick and a shorter note in the margin of our lists. All the bills we had—fifty-seven—we brought in true. And the morning and the afternoon made that day, till we rested and went to our homes.

Next day we were all back in our places at the appointed hour, and, not greeting each other much, at once began to bring in bills. We brought them in, not quite so fast, as though some lurking megrim, some microbe of dissatisfaction with ourselves was at work within us. It was as if we wanted to throw one out, as if we felt our work too perfect. And presently it came. A case of defrauding one Sophie Liebermann, or Laubermann, or some such foreign name, by giving her one of those five-pound Christmas-card banknotes just then in fashion, and receiving from her, as she alleged, three real sovereigns change. There was a certain piquancy about the matter, and I well remember noticing how we sat a little forward and turned in our seats when they brought in the prosecutrix to give evidence. Pale, self-possessed, dressed in black, and rather comely, neither brazen nor furtive, speaking but poor English, her broad, matter-of-fact face, with its wide-set grey eyes and thickish nose and lips, made on me, I recollect, an impression of rather stupid honesty. I do not think they had told us in so many words what her calling was, nor do I remember whether she actually disclosed it, but by our demeanour I could tell that we had all realized what was the nature of the service rendered to the accused, in return for which he had given her this worthless note. In her rather guttural but pleasant voice she answered all our questions—not very far from tears, I think, but saved by native stolidity, and perhaps a little by the fear that purifiers of Society might not be the proper audience for emotion. When she had left us we recalled the detective, and still, as it were, touching the delicate matter with the tips of our tongues, so as not, being men of the world, to seem biassed against anything, we definitely elicited from him her profession and these words: "If she's speaking the truth, gentlemen; but, as you know, these women, they don't always, specially the foreign ones!" When he, too, had gone, we looked at each other in un wonted silence. None of us quite liked, it seemed, to be first to speak. Then our foreman said: "There's no doubt, I think, that he gave her the note—mean trick, of course, but we can't have him on that alone—bit too irregular—no consideration in law, I take it."

He smiled a little at our smiles, and then went on: "The question, gentlemen, really seems to be, are we to take her word that she actually gave him change?" Again, for quite half a minute; we were silent, and then, the fattest one of us said, suddenly: "Very dangerous—goin' on the word of these women."

And at once, as if he had released something in our souls, we all (save two or three) broke out. It wouldn't do! It wasn't safe! Seeing what these women were! It was exactly as if, without word said, we had each been swearing the other to some secret compact to protect Society. As if we had been whispering to each other something like this: "These women—of course, we need them, but for all that we can't possibly recognise them as within the Law; we can't do that without endangering the safety of every one of us. In this matter we are trustees for all men—indeed, even for ourselves, for who knows at what moment we might not ourselves require their services, and it would be exceedingly awkward if their word were considered the equal of our own!" Not one of us, certainly said anything so crude as this; none the less did many of us feel it. Then the foreman, looking slowly round the table, said: "Well, gentlemen, I think we are all agreed to throw out this bill"; and all, except the painter, the Jew, and one other, murmured: "Yes." And, as though, in throwing out this bill we had cast some trouble off our minds, we went on with the greater speed, bringing in true bills. About two o'clock we finished, and trooped down to the Court to be released. On the stairway the Jew came close, and, having examined me a little sharply with his velvety slits of eyes, as if to see that he was not making a mistake, said: "Ith fonny—we bring in eighty thix bills true, and one we throw out, and the one we throw out we know it to be true, and the dirtieth job of the whole lot. Ith fonny!" "Yes," I answered him, "our sense of respectability does seem excessive." But just then we reached the Court, where, in his red robe and grey wig, with his clear-cut, handsome face, the judge seemed to shine and radiate, like sun through gloom. "I thank you, gentlemen," he said, in a voice courteous and a little mocking, as though he had somewhere seen us before: "I thank you for the way in which you have performed your duties. I have not the pleasure of assigning to you anything for your services except the privilege of going over a prison, where you will be able to see what sort of existence awaits many of those to whose cases you have devoted so much of your valuable time. You are released, gentlemen."

Looking at each, other a little hurriedly, and not taking too much farewell, for fear of having to meet again, we separated.

I was, then, free—free of the injunction of that piece of paper reposing in my pocket. Yet its influence was still upon me. I did not hurry away, but lingered in the courts, fascinated by the notion that the fate of each prisoner had first passed through my hands. At last I made an effort, and went out into the corridor. There I passed a woman whose figure seemed familiar. She was sitting with her hands in her lap looking straight before her, pale-faced and not uncomely, with thickish mouth and nose—the woman whose bill we had thrown out. Why was she sitting there? Had she not then realised that we had quashed her claim; or was she, like myself, kept here by mere attraction of the Law? Following I know not what impulse, I said: "Your case was dismissed, wasn't it?" She looked up at me stolidly, and a tear, which had evidently been long gathering, dropped at the movement. "I do nod know; I waid to see," she said in her thick voice; "I tink there has been mistake." My face, no doubt, betrayed something of my sentiments about her case, for the thick tears began rolling fast down her pasty cheeks, and her pent-up feeling suddenly flowed forth in words: "I work 'ard; Gott! how I work hard! And there gomes dis liddle beastly man, and rob me. And they say: 'Ah! yes; but you are a bad woman, we don' trust you—you speak lie.' But I speak druth, I am nod a bad woman—I come from Hamburg." "Yes, yes," I murmured; "yes, yes." "I do not know this country well, sir. I speak bad English. Is that why they do not drust my word?" She was silent for a moment, searching my face, then broke out again: "It is all 'ard work in my profession, I make very liddle, I cannot afford to be rob. Without the men I cannod make my living, I must drust them—and they rob me like this, it is too 'ard." And the slow tears rolled faster and faster from her eyes on to her hands and her black lap. Then quietly, and looking for a moment singularly like a big, unhappy child, she asked: "Will you blease dell me, sir, why they will not give me the law of that dirty little man?"

I knew—and too well; but I could not tell her.

"You see," I said, "it's just a case of your word against his." "Oh! no; but," she said eagerly, "he give me the note—I would not have taken it if I 'ad not thought it good, would I? That is sure, isn't it? But five pounds it is not my price. It must that I give 'im change! Those gentlemen that heard my case, they are men of business, they must know that it is not my price. If I could tell the judge—I think he is a man of business too he would know that too, for sure. I am not so young. I am not so verree beautiful as all that; he must see, mustn't he, sir?"

At my wits' end how to answer that most strange question, I stammered out: "But, you know, your profession is outside the law."

At that a slow anger dyed her face. She looked down; then, suddenly lifting one of her dirty, ungloved hands, she laid it on her breast with the gesture of one baring to me the truth in her heart. "I am not a bad woman," she said: "Dat beastly little man, he do the same as me—I am free-woman, I am not a slave bound to do the same to-morrow night, no more than he. Such like him make me what I am; he have all the pleasure, I have all the work. He give me noding—he rob my poor money, and he make me

seem to strangers a bad woman. Oh, dear! I am not happy!"

The impulse I had been having to press on her the money, died within me; I felt suddenly it would be another insult. From the movement of her fingers about her heart I could not but see that this grief of hers was not about the money. It was the inarticulate outburst of a bitter sense of deep injustice; of all the dumb wondering at her own fate that went about with her behind that broad stolid face and bosom. This loss of the money was but a symbol of the furtive, hopeless insecurity she lived with day and night, now forced into the light, for herself and all the world to see. She felt it suddenly a bitter, unfair thing. This beastly little man did not share her insecurity. None of us shared it—none of us, who had brought her down to this. And, quite unable to explain to her how natural and proper it all was, I only murmured: "I am sorry, awfully sorry," and fled away.

PANEL II

It was just a week later when, having for passport my Grand Jury summons, I presented myself at that prison where we had the privilege of seeing the existence to which we had assisted so many of the eighty-six.

"I'm afraid," I said to the guardian of the gate, "that I am rather late in availing myself—the others, no doubt—?"

"Not at all, sir," he said, smiling. "You're the first, and if you'll excuse me, I think you'll be the last. Will you wait in here while I send for the chief warder to take you over?"

He showed me then to what he called the Warder's Library—an iron-barred room, more bare and brown than any I had seen since I left school. While I stood there waiting and staring out into the prison court-yard, there came, rolling and rumbling in, a Black Maria. It drew up with a clatter, and I saw through the barred door the single prisoner—a young girl of perhaps eighteen—dressed in rusty black. She was resting her forehead against a bar and looking out, her quick, narrow dark eyes taking in her new surroundings with a sort of sharp, restless indifference; and her pale, thin-upped, oval face quite expressionless. Behind those bars she seemed to me for all the world like a little animal of the cat tribe being brought in to her Zoo. Me she did not see, but if she had I felt she would not shrink—only give me the same sharp, indifferent look she was giving all else. The policeman on the step behind had disappeared at once, and the driver now got down from his perch and, coming round, began to gossip with her. I saw her slink her eyes and smile at him, and he smiled back; a large man; not unkindly. Then he returned to his horses, and she stayed as before, with her forehead against the bars, just staring out. Watching her like that, unseen, I seemed to be able to see right through that tight-lipped, lynx-eyed mask. I seemed to know that little creature through and through, as one knows anything that one surprises off its guard, sunk in its most private moods. I seemed to see her little restless, furtive, utterly unmoral soul, so stripped of all defence, as if she had taken it from her heart and handed it out to me. I saw that she was one of those whose hands slip as indifferently into others' pockets as into their own; incapable of fidelity, and incapable of trusting; quick as cats, and as devoid of application; ready to scratch, ready to purr, ready to scratch again; quick to change, and secretly as unchangeable as a little pebble. And I thought: "Here we are, taking her to the Zoo (by no means for the first time, if demeanour be any guide), and we shall put her in a cage, and make her sew, and give her good books which she will not read; and she will sew, and walk up and down, until we let her out; then she will return to her old haunts, and at once go prowling and do exactly the same again, what ever it was, until we catch her and lock her up once more. And in this way we shall go on purifying Society until she dies." And I thought: If indeed she had been created cat in body as well as in soul, we should not have treated her thus, but should have said: 'Go on, little cat, you scratch us sometimes, you steal often, you are as sensual as the night. All this we cannot help. It is your nature. So were you made—we know you cannot change—you amuse us! Go on, little cat!' Would it not then be better, and less savoury of humbug if we said the same to her whose cat-soul has chanced into this human shape? For assuredly she will but pilfer, and scratch a little, and be mildly vicious, in her little life, and do no desperate harm, having but poor capacity for evil behind that petty, thin-upped mask. What is the good of all this padlock business for such as she; are we not making mountains out of her mole hills? Where is our sense of proportion, and our sense of humour? Why try to alter the make and shape of Nature with our petty chisels? Or, if we must take care of her, to save ourselves, in the name of Heaven let us do it in a better way than this! And suddenly I remembered that I was a Grand Jurymen, a purifier of Society, who had brought her bill in true; and, that I might not think these thoughts unworthy of a good citizen, I turned my eyes away from her and took up my list of indictments. Yes, there she was, at least so I decided: Number 42, "Pilson, Jenny: Larceny, pocket-picking." And I turned my memory back to the evidence about her case, but I could not remember a single word. In the margin I had noted: "Incorrigible from a child up; bad surroundings." And a mad impulse came over me to go back to my window and call through the bars to her: "Jenny Pilson! Jenny Pilson! It was I who bred you and

surrounded you with evil! It was I who caught you for being what I made you! I brought your bill in true! I judged you, and I caged you! Jenny Pilson! Jenny Pilson!" But just as I reached the window, the door of my waiting-room was fortunately opened, and a voice said: "Now, sir; at your service!"...

I sat again in that scoop of the shore by the long rolling seas, burying in the sand the piece of paper which had summoned me away to my Grand Jury; and the same thoughts came to me with the breaking of the waves that had come to me before: How, in every wave was a particle that had known the shore of every land; and in each sparkle of the hot sunlight stealing up that bright water into the sky, the microcosm of all change and of all unity! 1912.

GONE

Not possible to conceive of rarer beauty than that which clung about the summer day three years ago when first we had the news of the poor Herds. Loveliness was a net of golden filaments in which the world was caught. It was gravity itself, so tranquil; and it was a sort of intoxicating laughter. From the top field that we crossed to go down to their cottage, all the far sweep of those outstretched wings of beauty could be seen. Very wonderful was the poise of the sacred bird, that moved nowhere but in our hearts. The lime-tree scent was just stealing out into air for some days already bereft of the scent of hay; and the sun was falling to his evening home behind our pines and beeches. It was no more than radiant warm. And, as we went, we wondered why we had not been told before that Mrs. Herd was so very ill. It was foolish to wonder—these people do not speak of suffering till it is late. To speak, when it means what this meant loss of wife and mother—was to flatter reality too much. To be healthy, or—die! That is their creed. To go on till they drop—then very soon pass away! What room for states between—on their poor wage, in their poor cottages?

We crossed the mill-stream in the hollow—to their white, thatched dwelling; silent, already awed, almost resentful of this so-varying Scheme of Things. At the gateway Herd himself was standing, just in from his work. For work in the country does not wait on illness—even death claims from its onlookers but a few hours, birth none at all, and it is as well; for what must be must, and in work alone man rests from grief. Sorrow and anxiety had made strange alteration already in Herd's face. Through every crevice of the rough, stolid mask the spirit was peeping, a sort of quivering suppliant, that seemed to ask all the time: "Is it true?" A regular cottager's figure, this of Herd's—a labourer of these parts—strong, slow, but active, with just a touch of the untamed somewhere, about the swing and carriage of him, about the strong jaw, and wide thick-lipped mouth; just that something independent, which, in great variety, clings to the natives of these still remote, half-pagan valleys by the moor.

We all moved silently to the lee of the outer wall, so that our voices might not carry up to the sick woman lying there under the eaves, almost within hand reach. "Yes, sir." "No, sir." "Yes, ma'am." This, and the constant, unforgettable supplication of his eyes, was all that came from him; yet he seemed loath to let us go, as though he thought we had some mysterious power to help him—the magic, perhaps, of money, to those who have none. Grateful at our promise of another doctor, a specialist, he yet seemed with his eyes to say that he knew that such were only embroideries of Fate. And when we had wrung his hand and gone, we heard him coming after us: His wife had said she would like to see us, please. Would we come up?

An old woman and Mrs. Herd's sister were in the sitting-room; they showed us to the crazy, narrow stairway. Though we lived distant but four hundred yards of a crow's flight, we had never seen Mrs. Herd before, for that is the way of things in this land of minding one's own business—a slight, dark, girlish-looking woman, almost quite refined away, and with those eyes of the dying, where the spirit is coming through, as it only does when it knows that all is over except just the passing. She lay in a double bed, with clean white sheets. A white-washed room, so low that the ceiling almost touched our heads, some flowers in a bowl, the small lattice window open. Though it was hot in there, it was better far than the rooms of most families in towns, living on a wage of twice as much; for here was no sign of defeat in decency or cleanliness. In her face, as in poor Herd's, was that same strange mingling of resigned despair and almost eager appeal, so terrible to disappoint. Yet, trying not to disappoint it, one felt guilty of treachery: What was the good, the kindness, in making this poor bird flutter still with hope against the bars, when fast prison had so surely closed in round her? But what else could we do? We could not give her those glib assurances that naive souls make so easily to others concerning their after state.

Secretly, I think, we knew that her philosophy of calm reality, that queer and unbidden growing

tranquillity which precedes death, was nearer to our own belief, than would be any gilt-edged orthodoxy; but nevertheless (such is the strength of what is expected), we felt it dreadful that we could not console her with the ordinary presumptions.

"You mustn't give up hope," we kept on saying: "The new doctor will do a lot for you; he's a specialist—a very clever man."

And she kept on answering: "Yes, sir." "Yes, ma'am." But still her eyes went on asking, as if there were something else she wanted. And then to one of us came an inspiration:

"You mustn't let your husband worry about expense. That will be all right."

She smiled then, as if the chief cloud on her soul had been the thought of the arrears her illness and death would leave weighing on him with whom she had shared this bed ten years and more. And with that smile warming the memory of those spirit-haunted eyes, we crept down-stairs again, and out into the fields.

It was more beautiful than ever, just touched already with evening mystery—it was better than ever to be alive. And the immortal wonder that has haunted man since first he became man, and haunts, I think, even the animals—the unanswerable question,—why joy and beauty must ever be walking hand in hand with ugliness and pain haunted us across those fields of life and loveliness. It was all right, no doubt, even reasonable, since without dark there is no light. It was part of that unending sum whose answer is not given; the merest little swing of the great pendulum! And yet—! To accept this violent contrast without a sigh of revolt, without a question! No sirs, it was not so jolly as all that! That she should be dying there at thirty, of a creeping malady which she might have checked, perhaps, if she had not had too many things to do for the children and husband, to do anything for herself—if she had not been forced to hold the creed: Be healthy, or die! This was no doubt perfectly explicable and in accordance with the Supreme Equation; yet we, enjoying life, and health, and ease of money, felt horror and revolt on, this evening of such beauty. Nor at the moment did we derive great comfort from the thought that life slips in and out of sheath, like sun-sparks on water, and that of all the cloud of summer midges dancing in the last gleam, not one would be alive to-morrow.

It was three evenings later that we heard uncertain footfalls on the flagstones of the verandah, then a sort of brushing sound against the wood of the long, open window. Drawing aside the curtain, one of us looked out. Herd was standing there in the bright moonlight, bareheaded, with roughened hair. He came in, and seeming not to know quite where he went, took stand by the hearth, and putting up his dark hand, gripped the mantelshelf. Then, as if recollecting himself, he said: "Gude evenin', sir; beg pardon, M'm." No more for a full minute; but his hand, taking some little china thing, turned it over and over without ceasing, and down his broken face tears ran. Then, very suddenly, he said: "She's gone." And his hand turned over and over that little china thing, and the tears went on rolling down. Then, stumbling, and swaying like a man in drink, he made his way out again into the moonlight. We watched him across the lawn and path, and through the gate, till his footfalls died out there in the field, and his figure was lost in the black shadow of the holly hedge.

And the night was so beautiful, so utterly, glamourously beautiful, with its star-flowers, and its silence, and its trees clothed in moonlight. All was tranquil as a dream of sleep. But it was long before our hearts, wandering with poor Herd, would let us remember that she had slipped away into so beautiful a dream.

The dead do not suffer from their rest in beauty. But the living—! 1911.

THRESHING

When the drone of the thresher breaks through the autumn sighing of trees and wind, or through that stillness of the first frost, I get restless and more restless, till, throwing down my pen, I have gone out to see. For there is nothing like the sight of threshing for making one feel good—not in the sense of comfort, but at heart. There, under the pines and the already leafless elms and beech-trees, close to the great stacks, is the big, busy creature, with its small black puffing engine astern; and there, all around it, is that conglomeration of unsentimental labour which invests all the crises of farm work with such fascination. The crew of the farm is only five all told, but to-day they are fifteen, and none strangers, save the owners of the travelling thresher.

They are working without respite and with little speech, not at all as if they had been brought together for the benefit of some one else's corn, but as though they, one and all, had a private grudge against Time and a personal pleasure in finishing this job, which, while it lasts, is bringing them extra pay and most excellent free feeding. Just as after a dilatory voyage a crew will brace themselves for the run in, recording with sudden energy their consciousness of triumph over the elements, so on a farm the harvests of hay and corn, sheep-shearing, and threshing will bring out in all a common sentiment, a kind of sporting energy, a defiant spurt, as it were, to score off Nature; for it is only a philosopher here and there among them, I think, who sees that Nature is eager to be scored off in this fashion, being anxious that some one should eat her kindly fruits.

With ceremonial as grave as that which is at work within the thresher itself, the tasks have been divided. At the root of all things, pitchforking from the stack, stands—the farmer, moustached, and always upright was he not in the Yeomanry?—dignified in a hard black hat, no waistcoat, and his working coat so ragged that it would never cling to him but for pure affection. Between him and the body of the machine are five more pitch forks, directing the pale flood of raw material. There, amongst them, is poor Herd, still so sad from his summer loss, plodding doggedly away. To watch him even now makes one feel how terrible is that dumb grief which has never learned to moan. And there is George Yeoford, almost too sober; and Murdon plying his pitchfork with a supernatural regularity that cannot quite dim his queer brigand's face of dark, soft gloom shot with sudden humours, his soft, dark corduroys and battered hat. Occasionally he stops, and taking off that hat, wipes his corrugated brow under black hair, and seems to brood over his own regularity.

Down here, too, where I stand, each separate function of the thresher has its appointed slave. Here Cedric rakes the chaff pouring from the side down into the chaff-shed. Carting the straw that streams from the thresher bows, are Michelmores and Neck—the little man who cannot read, but can milk and whistle the hearts out of his cows till they follow him like dogs. At the thresher's stern is Morris, the driver, selected because of that utter reliability which radiates from his broad, handsome face. His part is to attend the sacking of the three kinds of grain for ever sieving out. He murmurs: "Busy work, sir!" and opens a little door to show me how "the machinery does it all," holding a sack between his knees and some string in his white teeth. Then away goes the sack—four bushels, one hundred and sixty pounds of "genuines, seconds, or seed"—wheeled by Cedric on a little trolley thing, to where George-the-Gaul or Jim-the-Early-Saxon is waiting to bear it on his back up the stone steps into the corn-chamber.

It has been raining in the night; the ground is a churn of straw and mud, and the trees still drip; but now there is sunlight, a sweet air, and clear sky, wine-coloured through the red, naked, beechtwigs tipped with white untimely buds. Nothing can be more lovely than this late autumn day, so still, save for the droning of the thresher and the constant tinny chuckle of the grey, thin-headed Guinea-fowl, driven by this business away from their usual haunts.

And soon the, feeling that I knew would come begins creeping over me, the sense of an extraordinary sanity in this never-ceasing harmonious labour pursued in the autumn air faintly perfumed with wood-smoke, with the scent of chaff, and whiffs from that black puffing-Billy; the sense that there is nothing between this clean toil—not too hard but hard enough—and the clean consumption of its clean results; the sense that nobody except myself is in the least conscious of how sane it all is. The brains of these sane ones are all too busy with the real affairs of life, the disposition of their wages, anticipation of dinner, some girl, some junketing, some wager, the last rifle match, and, more than all, with that pleasant rhythmic nothingness, companion of the busy swing and play of muscles, which of all states is secretly most akin to the deep unconsciousness of life itself. Thus to work in the free air for the good of all and the hurt of none, without worry or the breath of acrimony—surely no phase of human life so nears the life of the truly civilised community—the life of a hive of bees. Not one of these working so sanely—unless it be Morris, who will spend his Sunday afternoon on some high rock just watching sunlight and shadow drifting on the moors—not one, I think, is distraught by perception of his own sanity, by knowledge of how near he is to Harmony, not even by appreciation of the still radiance of this day, or its innumerable fine shades of colour. It is all work, and no moody consciousness—all work, and will end in sleep.

I leave them soon, and make my way up the stone steps to the "corn chamber," where tranquillity is crowned. In the whitewashed room the corn lies in drifts and ridges, three to four feet deep, all silvery-dun, like some remote sand desert, lifeless beneath the moon. Here it lies, and into it, staggering under the sacks, George-the-Gaul and Jim-the-Early Saxon tramp up to their knees, spill the sacks over their heads, and out again; and above where their feet have plunged the patient surface closes again, smooth. And as I stand there in the doorway, looking at that silvery corn drift, I think of the whole process, from seed sown to the last sieving into this tranquil resting-place. I think of the slow, dogged ploughman, with the crows above him on the wind; of the swing of the sower's arm, dark up against grey sky on the steep field. I think of the seed snug-burrowing for safety, and its mysterious ferment

under the warm Spring rain, of the soft green shoots tapering up so shyly toward the first sun, and hardening in air to thin wiry stalk. I think of the unnumerable tiny beasts that have jangled in that pale forest; of the winged blue jewels of butterfly risen from it to hover on the wild-rustling blades; of that continual music played there by the wind; of the chicory and poppy flowers that have been its lights-o' love, as it grew tawny and full of life, before the appointed date when it should return to its captivity. I think of that slow-travelling hum and swish which laid it low, of the gathering to stack, and the long waiting under the rustle and drip of the sheltering trees, until yesterday the hoot of the thresher blew, and there began the falling into this dun silvery peace. Here it will lie with the pale sun narrowly filtering in on it, and by night the pale moon, till slowly, week by week, it is stolen away, and its ridges and drifts sink and sink, and the beasts have eaten it all....

When the dusk is falling, I go out to them again. They have nearly finished now; the chaff in the chaff-shed is mounting hillock-high; only the little barley stack remains unthreshed. Mrs. George-the-Gaul is standing with a jug to give drink to the tired ones. Some stars are already netted in the branches of the pines; the Guinea-fowl are silent. But still the harmonious thresher hums and showers from three sides the straw, the chaff, the corn; and the men fork, and rake, and cart, and carry, sleep growing in their muscles, silence on their tongues, and the tranquillity of the long day nearly ended in their souls. They will go on till it is quite dark. 1911.

THAT OLD-TIME PLACE

"Yes, suh—here we are at that old-time place!" And our dark driver drew up his little victoria gently.

Through the open doorway, into a dim, cavernous, ruined house of New Orleans we passed. The mildew and dirt, the dark denuded dankness of that old hostel, rotting down with damp and time!

And our guide, the tall, thin, grey-haired dame, who came forward with such native ease and moved before us, touching this fungused wall, that rusting stairway, and telling, as it were, no one in her soft, slow speech, things that any one could see—what a strange and fitting figure!

Before the smell of the deserted, oozing rooms, before that old creature leading us on and on, negligent of all our questions, and talking to the air, as though we were not, we felt such discomfort that we soon made to go out again into such freshness as there was on that day of dismal heat. Then realising, it seemed, that she was losing us, our old guide turned; for the first time looking in our faces, she smiled, and said in her sweet, weak voice, like the sound from the strings of a spinet long unplayed on: "Don' you wahnd to see the dome-room: an' all the other rooms right here, of this old-time place?"

Again those words! We had not the hearts to disappoint her. And as we followed on and on, along the mouldering corridors and rooms where the black peeling papers hung like stalactites, the dominance of our senses gradually dropped from us, and with our souls we saw its soul—the soul of this old-time place; this mustering house of the old South, bereft of all but ghosts and the grey pigeons niched in the rotting gallery round a narrow courtyard open to the sky.

"This is the dome-room, suh and lady; right over the slave-market it is. Here they did the business of the State—sure; old-time heroes up therein the roof—Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson, Davis, Lee—there they are! All gone—now! Yes, suh!"

A fine—yea, even a splendid room, of great height, and carved grandeur, with hand-wrought bronze sconces and a band of metal bordering, all blackened with oblivion. And the faces of those old heroes encircling that domed ceiling were blackened too, and scarred with damp, beyond recognition. Here, beneath their gaze, men had banqueted and danced and ruled. The pride and might and vivid strength of things still fluttered their uneasy flags of spirit, moved disherited wings! Those old-time feasts and grave discussions—we seemed to see them printed on the thick air, imprisoned in this great chamber built above their dark foundations. The pride and the might and the vivid strength of things—gone, all gone!

We became conscious again of that soft, weak voice.

"Not hearing very well, suh, I have it all printed, lady—beautifully told here—yes, indeed!"

She was putting cards into our hands; then, impassive, maintaining ever her impersonal chant, the

guardian of past glory led us on.

"Now we shall see the slave-market—downstairs, underneath! It's wet for the lady the water comes in now yes, suh!"

On the crumbling black and white marble floorings the water indeed was trickling into pools. And down in the halls there came to us wandering—strangest thing that ever strayed through deserted grandeur—a brown, broken horse, lean, with a sore flank and a head of tremendous age. It stopped and gazed at us, as though we might be going to give it things to eat, then passed on, stumbling over the ruined marbles. For a moment we had thought him ghost—one of the many. But he was not, since his hoofs sounded. The scrambling clatter of them had died out into silence before we came to that dark, crypt-like chamber whose marble columns were ringed in iron, veritable pillars of foundation. And then we saw that our old guide's hands were full of newspapers. She struck a match; they caught fire and blazed. Holding high that torch, she said: "See! Up there's his name, above where he stood. The auctioneer. Oh yes, indeed! Here's where they sold them!"

Below that name, decaying on the wall, we had the slow, uncanny feeling of some one standing there in the gleam and flicker from that paper torch. For a moment the whole shadowy room seemed full of forms and faces. Then the torch lied out, and our old guide, pointing through an archway with the blackened stump of it, said:

"'Twas here they kept them indeed, yes!"

We saw before us a sort of vault, stone-built, and low, and long. The light there was too dim for us to make out anything but walls and heaps of rusting scrap-iron cast away there and mouldering own. But trying to pierce that darkness we became conscious, as it seemed, of innumerable eyes gazing, not at us, but through the archway where we stood; innumerable white eyeballs gleaming out of blackness. From behind us came a little laugh. It floated past through the archway, toward those eyes. Who was that? Who laughed in there? The old South itself—that incredible, fine, lost soul! That "old-time" thing of old ideals, blindfolded by its own history! That queer proud blend of simple chivalry and tyranny, of piety and the abhorrent thing! Who was it laughed there in the old slave-market—laughed at these white eyeballs glaring from out of the blackness of their dark cattle-pen? What poor departed soul in this House of Melancholy? But there was no ghost when we turned to look—only our old guide with her sweet smile.

"Yes, suh. Here they all came—'twas the finest hotel—before the war-time; old Southern families—buyin' an' sellin' their property. Yes, ma'am, very interesting! This way! And here were the bells to all the rooms. Broken, you see—all broken!"

And rather quickly we passed away, out of that "old-time place"; where something had laughed, and the drip, drip, drip of water down the walls was as the sound of a spirit grieving. 1912.

ROMANCE—THREE GLEAMS

On that New Year's morning when I drew up the blind it was still nearly dark, but for the faintest pink flush glancing out there on the horizon of black water. The far shore of the river's mouth was just soft dusk; and the dim trees below me were in perfect stillness. There was no lap of water. And then—I saw her, drifting in on the tide—the little ship, passaging below me, a happy ghost. Like no thing of this world she came, ending her flight, with sail-wings closing and her glowing lantern eyes. There was I know not what of stealthy joy about her thus creeping in to the unexpecting land. And I wished she would never pass, but go on gliding by down there for ever with her dark ropes, and her bright lanterns, and her mysterious felicity, so that I might have for ever in my heart the blessed feeling she brought me, coming like this out of that great mystery the sea. If only she need not change to solidity, but ever be this visitor from the unknown, this sacred bird, telling with her half-seen, trailing-down plume—sails the story of uncharted wonder. If only I might go on trembling, as I was, with the rapture of all I did not know and could not see, yet felt pressing against me and touching my face with its lips! To think of her at anchor in cold light was like flinging-to a door in the face of happiness. And just then she struck her bell; the faint silvery far-down sound fled away before her, and to every side, out into the utter hush, to discover echo. But nothing answered, as if fearing to break the spell of her coming, to brush with reality the dark sea dew from her sail-wings. But within me, in response, there began the song of all unknown things; the song so tenuous, so ecstatic, that seems to sweep and quiver across

such thin golden strings, and like an eager dream dies too soon. The song of the secret-knowing wind that has peered through so great forests and over such wild sea; blown on so many faces, and in the jungles of the grass the song of all that the wind has seen and felt. The song of lives that I should never live; of the loves that I should never love singing to me as though I should! And suddenly I felt that I could not bear my little ship of dreams to grow hard and grey, her bright lanterns drowned in the cold light, her dark ropes spidery and taut, her sea-wan sails all furled, and she no more enchanted; and turning away I let fall the curtain. II

Then what happens to the moon? She, who, shy and veiled, slips out before dusk to take the air of heaven, wandering timidly among the columned clouds, and fugitive from the staring of the sun; she, who, when dusk has come, rules the sentient night with such chaste and icy spell—whither and how does she retreat?

I came on her one morning—I surprised her. She was stealing into a dark wintry wood, and five little stars were chasing her. She was orange-hooded, a light-o'-love dismissed—unashamed and unfatigued, having taken—all. And she was looking back with her almond eyes, across her dark-ivory shoulder, at Night where he still lay drowned in the sleep she had brought him. What a strange, slow, mocking look! So might Aphrodite herself have looked back at some weary lover, remembering the fire of his first embrace. Insatiate, smiling creature, slipping down to the rim of the world to her bath in the sweet waters of dawn, whence emerging, pure as a water lily, she would float in the cool sky till evening came again! And just then she saw me looking, and hid behind a holm-oak tree; but I could still see the gleam of one shoulder and her long narrow eyes pursuing me. I went up to the tree and parted its dark boughs to take her; but she had slipped behind another. I called to her to stand, if only for one moment. But she smiled and went slipping on, and I ran thrusting through the wet bushes, leaping the fallen trunks. The scent of rotting leaves disturbed by my feet leaped out into the darkness, and birds, surprised, fluttered away. And still I ran—she slipping ever further into the grove, and ever looking back at me. And I thought: But I will catch you yet, you nymph of perdition! The wood will soon be passed, you will have no cover then! And from her eyes, and the scanty gleam of her flying limbs, I never looked away, not even when I stumbled or ran against tree trunks in my blind haste. And at every clearing I flew more furiously, thinking to seize all of her with my gaze before she could cross the glade; but ever she found some little low tree, some bush of birch ungrown, or the far top branches of the next grove to screen her flying body and preserve allurements. And all the time she was dipping, dipping to the rim of the world. And then I tripped; but, as I rose, I saw that she had lingered for me; her long sliding eyes were full, it seemed to me, of pity, as if she would have liked for me to have enjoyed the sight of her. I stood still, breathless, thinking that at last she would consent; but flinging back, up into the air, one dark-ivory arm, she sighed and vanished. And the breath of her sigh stirred all the birch-tree twigs just coloured with the dawn. Long I stood in that thicket gazing at the spot where she had leapt from me over the edge of the world—my heart quivering. III

We embarked on the estuary steamer that winter morning just as daylight came full. The sun was on the wing scattering little white clouds, as an eagle might scatter doves. They scurried up before him with their broken feathers tipped and tinged with gold. In the air was a touch of frost, and a smoky mist-drift clung here and there above the reeds, blurring the shores of the lagoon so that we seemed to be steaming across boundless water, till some clump of trees would fling its top out of the fog, then fall back into whiteness.

And then, in that thick vapour, rounding I suppose some curve, we came suddenly into we knew not what—all white and moving it was, as if the mist were crazed; murmuring, too, with a sort of restless beating. We seemed to be passing through a ghost—the ghost of all the life that had sprung from this water and its shores; we seemed to have left reality, to be travelling through live wonder.

And the fantastic thought sprang into my mind: I have died. This is the voyage of my soul in the wild. I am in the final wilderness of spirits—lost in the ghost robe that wraps the earth. There seemed in all this white murmur to be millions of tiny hands stretching out to me, millions of whispering voices, of wistful eyes. I had no fear, but a curious baked eagerness, the strangest feeling of having lost myself and become part of this around me; exactly as if my own hands and voice and eyes had left me and were groping, and whispering, and gazing out there in the eeriness. I was no longer a man on an estuary steamer, but part of sentient ghostliness. Nor did I feel unhappy; it seemed as though I had never been anything but this Bedouin spirit wandering.

We passed through again into the stillness of plain mist, and all those eerie sensations went, leaving nothing but curiosity to know what this was that we had traversed. Then suddenly the sun came flaring out, and we saw behind us thousands and thousands of white gulls dipping, wheeling, brushing the water with their wings, bewitched with sun and mist. That was all. And yet that white-winged legion through whom we had ploughed our way were not, could never be, to me just gulls—there was more than mere sun-glamour gilding their misty plumes; there was the wizardry of my past wonder, the

MEMORIES

We set out to meet him at Waterloo Station on a dull day of February—I, who had owned his impetuous mother, knowing a little what to expect, while to my companion he would be all original. We stood there waiting (for the Salisbury train was late), and wondering with a warm, half-fearful eagerness what sort of new thread Life was going to twine into our skein. I think our chief dread was that he might have light eyes—those yellow Chinese eyes of the common, parti-coloured spaniel. And each new minute of the train's tardiness increased our anxious compassion: His first journey; his first separation from his mother; this black two-months' baby! Then the train ran in, and we hastened to look for him. "Have you a dog for us?"

"A dog! Not in this van. Ask the rearguard."

"Have you a dog for us?"

"That's right. From Salisbury. Here's your wild beast, Sir!"

From behind a wooden crate we saw a long black muzzled nose poking round at us, and heard a faint hoarse whimpering.

I remember my first thought:

"Isn't his nose too long?"

But to my companion's heart it went at once, because it was swollen from crying and being pressed against things that he could not see through. We took him out—soft, wobbly, tearful; set him down on his four, as yet not quite simultaneous legs, and regarded him. Or, rather, my companion did, having her head on one side, and a quavering smile; and I regarded her, knowing that I should thereby get a truer impression of him.

He wandered a little round our legs, neither wagging his tail nor licking at our hands; then he looked up, and my companion said: "He's an angel!"

I was not so certain. He seemed hammer-headed, with no eyes at all, and little connection between his head, his body, and his legs. His ears were very long, as long as his poor nose; and gleaming down in the blackness of him I could see the same white star that disgraced his mother's chest.

Picking him up, we carried him to a four-wheeled cab, and took his muzzle off. His little dark-brown eyes were resolutely fixed on distance, and by his refusal to even smell the biscuits we had brought to make him happy, we knew that the human being had not yet come into a life that had contained so far only a mother, a wood-shed, and four other soft, wobbly, black, hammer-headed angels, smelling of themselves, and warmth, and wood shavings. It was pleasant to feel that to us he would surrender an untouched love, that is, if he would surrender anything. Suppose he did not take to us!

And just then something must have stirred in him, for he turned up his swollen nose and stared at my companion, and a little later rubbed the dry pinkness of his tongue against my thumb. In that look, and that unconscious restless lick; he was trying hard to leave unhappiness behind, trying hard to feel that these new creatures with stroking paws and queer scents, were his mother; yet all the time he knew, I am sure, that they were something bigger, more permanently, desperately, his. The first sense of being owned, perhaps (who knows) of owning, had stirred in him. He would never again be quite the same unconscious creature.

A little way from the end of our journey we got out and dismissed the cab. He could not too soon know the scents and pavements of this London where the chief of his life must pass. I can see now his first bumble down that wide, back-water of a street, how continually and suddenly he sat down to make sure of his own legs, how continually he lost our heels. He showed us then in full perfection what was afterwards to be an inconvenient—if endearing—characteristic: At any call or whistle he would look in precisely the opposite direction. How many times all through his life have I not seen him, at my whistle, start violently and turn his tail to me, then, with nose thrown searchingly from side to side, begin to canter toward the horizon.

In that first walk, we met, fortunately, but one vehicle, a brewer's dray; he chose that moment to attend to the more serious affairs of life, sitting quietly before the horses' feet and requiring to be moved by hand. From the beginning he had his dignity, and was extremely difficult to lift, owing to the length of his middle distance.

What strange feelings must have stirred in his little white soul when he first smelled carpet! But it was all so strange to him that day—I doubt if he felt more than I did when I first travelled to my private school, reading "Tales of a Grandfather," and plied with tracts and sherry by my 'father's man of business.

That night, indeed, for several nights, he slept with me, keeping me too warm down my back, and waking me now and then with quaint sleepy whimperings. Indeed, all through his life he flew a good deal in his sleep, fighting dogs and seeing ghosts, running after rabbits and thrown sticks; and to the last one never quite knew whether or no to rouse him when his four black feet began to jerk and quiver. His dreams were like our dreams, both good and bad; happy sometimes, sometimes tragic to weeping point.

He ceased to sleep with me the day we discovered that he was a perfect little colony, whose settlers were of an active species which I have never seen again. After that he had many beds, for circumstance ordained that his life should be nomadic, and it is to this I trace that philosophic indifference to place or property, which marked him out from most of his own kind. He learned early that for a black dog with long silky ears, a feathered tail, and head of great dignity, there was no home whatsoever, away from those creatures with special scents, who took liberties with his name, and alone of all created things were privileged to smack him with a slipper. He would sleep anywhere, so long as it was in their room, or so close outside it as to make no matter, for it was with him a principle that what he did not smell did not exist. I would I could hear again those long rubber-lipped snufflings of recognition underneath the door, with which each morning he would regale and reassure a spirit that grew with age more and more nervous and delicate about this matter of propinquity! For he was a dog of fixed ideas, things stamped on his mind were indelible; as, for example, his duty toward cats, for whom he had really a perverse affection, which had led to that first disastrous moment of his life, when he was brought up, poor bewildered puppy, from a brief excursion to the kitchen, with one eye closed and his cheek torn! He bore to his grave that jagged scratch across the eye. It was in dread of a repetition of this tragedy that he was instructed at the word "Cats" to rush forward with a special "tow-row-rowing," which he never used toward any other form of creature. To the end he cherished a hope that he would reach the cat; but never did; and if he had, we knew he would only have stood and wagged his tail; but I well remember once, when he returned, important, from some such sally, how dreadfully my companion startled a cat-loving friend by murmuring in her most honeyed voice: "Well, my darling, have you been killing pussies in the garden?"

His eye and nose were impeccable in their sense of form; indeed, he was very English in that matter: People must be just so; things smell properly; and affairs go on in the one right way. He could tolerate neither creatures in ragged clothes, nor children on their hands and knees, nor postmen, because, with their bags, they swelled-up on one side, and carried lanterns on their stomachs. He would never let the harmless creatures pass without religious barks. Naturally a believer in authority and routine, and distrusting spiritual adventure, he yet had curious fads that seemed to have nested in him, quite outside of all principle. He would, for instance, follow neither carriages nor horses, and if we tried to make him, at once left for home, where he would sit with nose raised to Heaven, emitting through it a most lugubrious, shrill noise. Then again, one must not place a stick, a slipper, a glove, or anything with which he could play, upon one's head—since such an action reduced him at once to frenzy. For so conservative a dog, his environment was sadly anarchistic. He never complained in words of our shifting habits, but curled his head round over his left paw and pressed his chin very hard against the ground whenever he smelled packing. What necessity, he seemed continually to be saying, what real necessity is there for change of any kind whatever? Here we were all together, and one day was like another, so that I knew where I was—and now you only know what will happen next; and I—I can't tell you whether I shall be with you when it happens! What strange, grieving minutes a dog passes at such times in the underground of his subconsciousness, refusing realisation, yet all the time only too well divining. Some careless word, some unmuted compassion in voice, the stealthy wrapping of a pair of boots, the unaccustomed shutting of a door that ought to be open, the removal from a down-stair room of an object always there—one tiny thing, and he knows for certain that he is not going too. He fights against the knowledge just as we do against what we cannot bear; he gives up hope, but not effort, protesting in the only way he knows of, and now and then heaving a great sigh. Those sighs of a dog! They go to the heart so much more deeply than the sighs of our own kind, because they are utterly unintended, regardless of effect, emerging from one who, heaving them, knows not that they have escaped him!

The words: "Yes—going too!" spoken in a certain tone, would call up in his eyes a still-questioning

half-happiness, and from his tail a quiet flutter, but did not quite serve to put to rest either his doubt or his feeling that it was all unnecessary—until the cab arrived. Then he would pour himself out of door or window, and be found in the bottom of the vehicle, looking severely away from an admiring cabman. Once settled on our feet he travelled with philosophy, but no digestion.

I think no dog was ever more indifferent to an outside world of human creatures; yet few dogs have made more conquests—especially among strange women, through whom, however, he had a habit of looking—very discouraging. He had, nathless, one or two particular friends, such as him to whom this book is dedicated, and a few persons whom he knew he had seen before, but, broadly speaking, there were in his world of men, only his mistress, and—the almighty.

Each August, till he was six, he was sent for health, and the assuagement of his hereditary instincts, up to a Scotch shooting, where he carried many birds in a very tender manner. Once he was compelled by Fate to remain there nearly a year; and we went up ourselves to fetch him home. Down the long avenue toward the keeper's cottage we walked: It was high autumn; there had been frost already, for the ground was fine with red and yellow leaves; and presently we saw himself coming; professionally questing among those leaves, and preceding his dear keeper with the businesslike self-containment of a sportsman; not too fat, glossy as a raven's wing, swinging his ears and sporran like a little Highlander. We approached him silently. Suddenly his nose went up from its imagined trail, and he came rushing at our legs. From him, as a garment drops from a man, dropped all his strange soberness; he became in a single instant one fluttering eagerness. He leaped from life to life in one bound, without hesitation, without regret. Not one sigh, not one look back, not the faintest token of gratitude or regret at leaving those good people who had tended him for a whole year, buttered oat-cake for him, allowed him to choose each night exactly where he would sleep. No, he just marched out beside us, as close as ever he could get, drawing us on in spirit, and not even attending to the scents, until the lodge gates were passed.

It was strictly in accordance with the perversity of things, and something in the nature of calamity that he had not been ours one year, when there came over me a dreadful but overmastering aversion from killing those birds and creatures of which he was so fond as soon as they were dead. And so I never knew him as a sportsman; for during that first year he was only an unbroken puppy, tied to my waist for fear of accidents, and carefully pulling me off every shot. They tell me he developed a lovely nose and perfect mouth, large enough to hold gingerly the biggest hare. I well believe it, remembering the qualities of his mother, whose character, however, in stability he far surpassed. But, as he grew every year more devoted to dead grouse and birds and rabbits, I liked them more and more alive; it was the only real breach between us, and we kept it out of sight. Ah! well; it is consoling to reflect that I should infallibly have ruined his sporting qualities, lacking that peculiar habit of meaning what one says, so necessary to keep dogs virtuous. But surely to have had him with me, quivering and alert, with his solemn, eager face, would have given a new joy to those crisp mornings when the hope of wings coming to the gun makes poignant in the sports man as nothing else will, an almost sensual love of Nature, a fierce delight in the soft glow of leaves, in the white birch stems and tracery of sparse twigs against blue sky, in the scents of sap and grass and gum and heather flowers; stivers the hair of him with keenness for interpreting each sound, and fills the very fern or moss he kneels on, the very trunk he leans against, with strange vibration.

Slowly Fate prepares for each of us the religion that lies coiled in our most secret nerves; with such we cannot trifle, we do not even try! But how shall a man grudge any one sensations he has so keenly felt? Let such as have never known those curious delights, uphold the hand of horror—for me there can be no such luxury. If I could, I would still perhaps be knowing them; but when once the joy of life in those winged and furry things has knocked at the very portals of one's spirit, the thought that by pressing a little iron twig one will rive that joy out of their vitals, is too hard to bear. Call it aestheticism, squeamishness, namby-pamby sentimentalism, what you will it is stronger than oneself!

Yes, after one had once watched with an eye that did not merely see, the thirsty gaping of a slowly dying bird, or a rabbit dragging a broken leg to a hole where he would lie for hours thinking of the fern to which he should never more come forth—after that, there was always the following little matter of arithmetic: Given, that all those who had been shooting were "good-fair" shots—which, Heaven knew, they never were—they yet missed one at least in four, and did not miss it very much; so that if seventy-five things were slain, there were also twenty-five that had been fired at, and, of those twenty-five, twelve and a half had "gotten it" somewhere in their bodies, and would "likely" die at their great leisure.

This was the sum that brought about the only cleavage in our lives; and so, as he grew older, and trying to part from each other we no longer could, he ceased going to Scotland. But after that I often felt, and especially when we heard guns, how the best and most secret instincts of him were being stifled. But what was to be done? In that which was left of a clay pigeon he would take not the faintest

interest—the scent of it was paltry. Yet always, even in his most cosseted and idle days, he managed to preserve the grave preoccupation of one professionally concerned with retrieving things that smell; and consoled himself with pastimes such as cricket, which he played in a manner highly specialised, following the ball up the moment it left the bowler's hand, and sometimes retrieving it before it reached the batsman. When remonstrated with, he would consider a little, hanging out a pink tongue and looking rather too eagerly at the ball, then canter slowly out to a sort of forward short leg. Why he always chose that particular position it is difficult to say; possibly he could lurk there better than anywhere else, the batsman's eye not being on him, and the bowler's not too much. As a fieldsman he was perfect, but for an occasional belief that he was not merely short leg, but slip, point, midoff, and wicket-keep; and perhaps a tendency to make the ball a little "jubey." But he worked tremendously, watching every movement; for he knew the game thoroughly, and seldom delayed it more than three minutes when he secured the ball. And if that ball were really lost, then indeed he took over the proceedings with an intensity and quiet vigour that destroyed many shrubs, and the solemn satisfaction which comes from being in the very centre of the stage.

But his most passionate delight was swimming in anything except the sea, for which, with its unpleasant noise and habit of tasting salt, he had little affection. I see him now, cleaving the Serpentine, with his air of "the world well lost," striving to reach my stick before it had touched water. Being only a large spaniel, too small for mere heroism, he saved no lives in the water but his own—and that, on one occasion, before our very eyes, from a dark trout stream, which was trying to wash him down into a black hole among the boulders.

The call of the wild-Spring running—whatever it is—that besets men and dogs, seldom attained full mastery over him; but one could often see it struggling against his devotion to the scent of us, and, watching that dumb contest, I have time and again wondered how far this civilisation of ours was justifiably imposed on him; how far the love for us that we had so carefully implanted could ever replace in him the satisfaction of his primitive wild yearnings: He was like a man, naturally polygamous, married to one loved woman.

It was surely not for nothing that Rover is dog's most common name, and would be ours, but for our too tenacious fear of losing something, to admit, even to ourselves, that we are hankering. There was a man who said: Strange that two such queerly opposite qualities as courage and hypocrisy are the leading characteristics of the Anglo-Saxon! But is not hypocrisy just a product of tenacity, which is again the lower part of courage? Is not hypocrisy but an active sense of property in one's good name, the clutching close of respectability at any price, the feeling that one must not part, even at the cost of truth, with what he has sweated so to gain? And so we Anglo-Saxons will not answer to the name of Rover, and treat our dogs so that they, too, hardly know their natures.

The history of his one wandering, for which no respectable reason can be assigned, will never, of course, be known. It was in London, of an October evening, when we were told he had slipped out and was not anywhere. Then began those four distressful hours of searching for that black needle in that blacker bundle of hay. Hours of real dismay and suffering for it is suffering, indeed, to feel a loved thing swallowed up in that hopeless haze of London streets. Stolen or run over? Which was worst? The neighbouring police stations visited, the Dog's Home notified, an order of five hundred "Lost Dog" bills placed in the printer's hands, the streets patrolled! And then, in a lull snatched for food, and still endeavouring to preserve some aspect of assurance, we heard the bark which meant: "Here is a door I cannot open!" We hurried forth, and there he was on the top doorstep—busy, unashamed, giving no explanations, asking for his supper; and very shortly after him came his five hundred "Lost Dog" bills. Long I sat looking at him that night after my companion had gone up, thinking of the evening, some years before, when there followed as that shadow of a spaniel who had been lost for eleven days. And my heart turned over within me. But he! He was asleep, for he knew not remorse.

Ah! and there was that other time, when it was reported to me, returning home at night, that he had gone out to find me; and I went forth again, disturbed, and whistling his special call to the empty fields. Suddenly out of the darkness I heard a rushing, and he came furiously dashing against my heels from he alone knew where he had been lurking and saying to himself: I will not go in till he comes! I could not scold, there was something too lyrical in the return of that live, lonely, rushing piece of blackness through the blacker night. After all, the vagary was but a variation in his practice when one was away at bed-time, of passionately scratching up his bed in protest, till it resembled nothing; for, in spite of his long and solemn face and the silkiness of his ears, there was much in him yet of the cave bear—he dug graves on the smallest provocations, in which he never buried anything. He was not a "clever" dog; and guiltless of all tricks. Nor was he ever "shown." We did not even dream of subjecting him to this indignity. Was our dog a clown, a hobby, a fad, a fashion, a feather in our caps that we should subject him to periodic pennings in stuffy halls, that we should harry his faithful soul with such tomfoolery? He never even heard us talk about his lineage, deplore the length of his nose, or call him "clever-looking." We should have been ashamed to let him smell about us the tar-brush of a sense of property, to let him

think we looked on him as an asset to earn us self or glory. We wished that there should be between us the spirit that was between the sheep dog and that farmer, who, when asked his dog's age, touched the old creature's head, and answered thus: "Teresa" (his daughter) "was born in November, and this one in August." That sheep dog had seen eighteen years when the great white day came for him, and his spirit passed away up, to cling with the wood-smoke round the dark rafters of the kitchen where he had lain so vast a time beside his master's boots. No, no! If a man does not soon pass beyond the thought "By what shall this dog profit me?" into the large state of simple gladness to be with dog, he shall never know the very essence of that companionship which depends not on the points of dog, but on some strange and subtle mingling of mute spirits. For it is by muteness that a dog becomes for one so utterly beyond value; with him one is at peace, where words play no torturing tricks. When he just sits, loving, and knows that he is being loved, those are the moments that I think are precious to a dog; when, with his adoring soul coming through his eyes, he feels that you are really thinking of him. But he is touchingly tolerant of one's other occupations. The subject of these memories always knew when one was too absorbed in work to be so close to him as he thought proper; yet he never tried to hinder or distract, or asked for attention. It dinged his mood, of course, so that the red under his eyes and the folds of his crumpled cheeks—which seemed to speak of a touch of bloodhound introduced a long way back into his breeding—drew deeper and more manifest. If he could have spoken at such times, he would have said: "I have been a long time alone, and I cannot always be asleep; but you know best, and I must not criticise."

He did not at all mind one's being absorbed in other humans; he seemed to enjoy the sounds of conversation lifting round him, and to know when they were sensible. He could not, for instance, stand actors or actresses giving readings of their parts, perceiving at once that the same had no connection with the minds and real feelings of the speakers; and, having wandered a little to show his disapproval, he would go to the door and stare at it till it opened and let him out. Once or twice, it is true, when an actor of large voice was declaiming an emotional passage, he so far relented as to go up to him and pant in his face. Music, too, made him restless, inclined to sigh, and to ask questions. Sometimes, at its first sound, he would cross to the window and remain there looking for Her. At others, he would simply go and lie on the loud pedal, and we never could tell whether it was from sentiment, or because he thought that in this way he heard less. At one special Nocturne of Chopin's he always whimpered. He was, indeed, of rather Polish temperament—very gay when he was gay, dark and brooding when he was not.

On the whole, perhaps his life was uneventful for so far-travelling a dog, though it held its moments of eccentricity, as when he leaped through the window of a four-wheeler into Kensington, or sat on a Dartmoor adder. But that was fortunately of a Sunday afternoon—when adder and all were torpid, so nothing happened, till a friend, who was following, lifted him off the creature with his large boot.

If only one could have known more of his private life—more of his relations with his own kind! I fancy he was always rather a dark dog to them, having so many thoughts about us that he could not share with any one, and being naturally fastidious, except with ladies, for whom he had a chivalrous and catholic taste, so that they often turned and snapped at him. He had, however, but one lasting love affair, for a liver-coloured lass of our village, not quite of his own caste, but a wholesome if somewhat elderly girl, with loving and sphinx-like eyes. Their children, alas, were not for this world, and soon departed.

Nor was he a fighting dog; but once attacked, he lacked a sense of values, being unable to distinguish between dogs that he could beat and dogs with whom he had "no earthly." It was, in fact, as well to interfere at once, especially in the matter of retrievers, for he never forgot having in his youth been attacked by a retriever from behind. No, he never forgot, and never forgave, an enemy. Only a month before that day of which I cannot speak, being very old and ill, he engaged an Irish terrier on whose impudence he had long had his eye, and routed him. And how a battle cheered his spirit! He was certainly no Christian; but, allowing for essential dog, he was very much a gentleman. And I do think that most of us who live on this earth these days would rather leave it with that label on us than the other. For to be a Christian, as Tolstoy understood the word—and no one else in our time has had logic and love of truth enough to give it coherent meaning—is (to be quite sincere) not suited to men of Western blood. Whereas—to be a gentleman! It is a far cry, but perhaps it can be done. In him, at all events, there was no pettiness, no meanness, and no cruelty, and though he fell below his ideal at times, this never altered the true look of his eyes, nor the simple loyalty in his soul.

But what a crowd of memories come back, bringing with them the perfume of fallen days! What delights and glamour, what long hours of effort, discouragements, and secret fears did he not watch over—our black familiar; and with the sight and scent and touch of him, deepen or assuage! How many thousand walks did we not go together, so that we still turn to see if he is following at his padding gait, attentive to the invisible trails. Not the least hard thing to bear when they go from us, these quiet friends, is that they carry away with them so many years of our own lives. Yet, if they find warmth

therein, who would grudge them those years that they have so guarded? Nothing else of us can they take to lie upon with outstretched paws and chin pressed to the ground; and, whatever they take, be sure they have deserved.

Do they know, as we do, that their time must come? Yes, they know, at rare moments. No other way can I interpret those pauses of his latter life, when, propped on his forefeet, he would sit for long minutes quite motionless—his head drooped, utterly withdrawn; then turn those eyes of his and look at me. That look said more plainly than all words could: "Yes, I know that I must go!" If we have spirits that persist—they have. If we know after our departure, who we were they do. No one, I think, who really longs for truth, can ever glibly say which it will be for dog and man persistence or extinction of our consciousness. There is but one thing certain—the childishness of fretting over that eternal question. Whichever it be, it must be right, the only possible thing. He felt that too, I know; but then, like his master, he was what is called a pessimist.

My companion tells me that, since he left us, he has once come back. It was Old Year's Night, and she was sad, when he came to her in visible shape of his black body, passing round the dining-table from the window-end, to his proper place beneath the table, at her feet. She saw him quite clearly; she heard the padding tap-tap of his paws and very toe-nails; she felt his warmth brushing hard against the front of her skirt. She thought then that he would settle down upon her feet, but something disturbed him, and he stood pausing, pressed against her, then moved out toward where I generally sit, but was not sitting that night.

She saw him stand there, as if considering; then at some sound or laugh, she became self-conscious, and slowly, very slowly, he was no longer there. Had he some message, some counsel to give, something he would say, that last night of the last year of all those he had watched over us? Will he come back again?

No stone stands over where he lies. It is on our hearts that his life is engraved. 1912.

FELICITY

When God is so good to the fields, of what use are words—those poor husks of sentiment! There is no painting Felicity on the wing! No way of bringing on to the canvas the flying glory of things! A single buttercup of the twenty million in one field is worth all these dry symbols—that can never body forth the very spirit of that froth of May breaking over the hedges, the choir of birds and bees, the lost-travelling down of the wind flowers, the white-throated swallows in their Odysseys. Just here there are no skylarks, but what joy of song and leaf; of lanes lighted with bright trees, the few oaks still golden brown, and the ashes still spiritual! Only the blackbirds and thrushes can sing-up this day, and cuckoos over the hill. The year has flown so fast that the apple-trees have dropped nearly all their bloom, and in "long meadow" the "daggers" are out early, beside the narrow bright streams. Orpheus sits there on a stone, when nobody is by, and pipes to the ponies; and Pan can often be seen dancing with his nymphs in the raised beech-grove where it is always twilight, if you lie still enough against the far bank.

Who can believe in growing old, so long as we are wrapped in this cloak of colour and wings and song; so long as this unimaginable vision is here for us to gaze at—the soft-faced sheep about us, and the wool-bags drying out along the fence, and great numbers of tiny ducks, so trustful that the crows have taken several.

Blue is the colour of youth, and all the blue flowers have a "fey" look. Everything seems young too young to work. There is but one thing busy, a starling, fetching grubs for its little family, above my head—it must take that flight at least two hundred times a day. The children should be very fat.

When the sky is so happy, and the flowers so luminous, it does not seem possible that the bright angels of this day shall pass into dark night, that slowly these wings shall close, and the cuckoo praise himself to sleep, mad midges dance-in the evening; the grass shiver with dew, wind die, and no bird sing

Yet so it is. Day has gone—the song and glamour and swoop of wings. Slowly, has passed the daily miracle. It is night. But Felicity has not withdrawn; she has but changed her robe for silence, velvet, and the pearl fan of the moon. Everything is sleeping, save only a single star, and the pansies. Why they should be more wakeful than the other flowers, I do not know. The expressions of their faces, if one bends down into the dusk, are sweeter and more cunning than ever. They have some compact, no

doubt, in hand.

What a number of voices have given up the ghost to this night of but one voice—the murmur of the stream out there in darkness!

With what religion all has been done! Not one buttercup open; the yew-trees already with shadows flung down! No moths are abroad yet; it is too early in the year for nightjars; and the owls are quiet. But who shall say that in this silence, in this hovering wan light, in this air bereft of wings, and of all scent save freshness, there is less of the ineffable, less of that before which words are dumb?

It is strange how this tranquillity of night, that seems so final, is inhabited, if one keeps still enough. A lamb is bleating out there on the dim moor; a bird somewhere, a little one, about three fields away, makes the sweetest kind of chirruping; some cows are still cropping. There is a scent, too, underneath the freshness-sweet-brier, I think, and our Dutch honeysuckle; nothing else could so delicately twine itself with air. And even in this darkness the roses have colour, more beautiful perhaps than ever. If colour be, as they say, but the effect of light on various fibre, one may think of it as a tune, the song of thanksgiving that each form puts forth, to sun and moon and stars and fire. These moon-coloured roses are singing a most quiet song. I see all of a sudden that there are many more stars beside that one so red and watchful. The flown kite is there with its seven pale worlds; it has adventured very high and far to-night-with a company of others remoter still. . . .

This serenity of night! What could seem less likely ever more to move, and change again to day? Surely now the world has found its long sleep; and the pearly glimmer from the moon will last, and the precious silence never again yield to clamour; the grape-bloom of this mystery never more pale out into gold

And yet it is not so. The nightly miracle has passed. It is dawn. Faint light has come. I am waiting for the first sound. The sky as yet is like nothing but grey paper, with the shadows of wild geese passing. The trees are phantoms. And then it comes—that first call of a bird, startled at discovering day! Just one call—and now, here, there, on all the trees, the sudden answers swelling, of that most sweet and careless choir. Was irresponsibility ever so divine as this, of birds waking? Then—saffron into the sky, and once more silence! What is it birds do after the first Chorale? Think of their sins and business? Or just sleep again? The trees are fast dropping unreality, and the cuckoos begin calling. Colour is burning up in the flowers already; the dew smells of them.

The miracle is ended, for the starling has begun its job; and the sun is fretting those dark, busy wings with gold. Full day has come again. But the face of it is a little strange, it is not like yesterday. Queer-to think, no day is like to a day that's past and no night like a night that's coming! Why, then, fear death, which is but night? Why care, if next day have different face and spirit? The sun has lighted buttercup-field now, the wind touches the lime-tree. Something passes over me away up there.

It is Felicity on her wings! 1912.

STUDIES AND ESSAYS

By John Galsworthy

"Je vous dirai que l'exces est toujours un mal."
—ANATOLE FRANCE

CONCERNING LETTERS

TABLE OF CONTENTS: A NOVELIST'S ALLEGORY SOME PLATITUDES CONCERNING DRAMA MEDITATION ON FINALITY WANTED—SCHOOLING ON OUR DISLIKE OF THINGS AS THEY ARE THE WINDLESTRAW

A NOVELIST'S ALLEGORY

Once upon a time the Prince of Felicitas had occasion to set forth on a journey. It was a late autumn evening with few pale stars and a moon no larger than the paring of a finger-nail. And as he rode through the purlieu of his city, the white mane of his amber-coloured steed was all that he could clearly see in the dusk of the high streets. His way led through a quarter but little known to him, and he was surprised to find that his horse, instead of ambling forward with his customary gentle vigour, stepped carefully from side to side, stopping now and then to curve his neck and prick his ears—as though at some thing of fear unseen in the darkness; while on either hand creatures could be heard rustling and scuttling, and little cold draughts as of wings fanned the rider's cheeks.

The Prince at last turned in his saddle, but so great was the darkness that he could not even see his escort.

"What is the name of this street?" he said.

"Sire, it is called the Vita Publica."

"It is very dark." Even as he spoke his horse staggered, but, recovering its foothold with an effort, stood trembling violently. Nor could all the incitements of its master induce the beast again to move forward.

"Is there no one with a lanthorn in this street?" asked the Prince.

His attendants began forthwith to call out loudly for any one who had a lanthorn. Now, it chanced that an old man sleeping in a hovel on a pallet of straw was, awakened by these cries. When he heard that it was the Prince of Felicitas himself, he came hastily, carrying his lanthorn, and stood trembling beside the Prince's horse. It was so dark that the Prince could not see him.

"Light your lanthorn, old man," he said.

The old man laboriously lit his lanthorn. Its pale rays fled out on either hand; beautiful but grim was the vision they disclosed. Tall houses, fair court-yards, and a palm grown garden; in front of the Prince's horse a deep cesspool, on whose jagged edges the good beast's hoofs were planted; and, as far as the glimmer of the lanthorn stretched, both ways down the rutted street, paving stones displaced, and smooth tessellated marble; pools of mud, the hanging fruit of an orange tree, and dark, scurrying shapes of monstrous rats bolting across from house to house. The old man held the lanthorn higher; and instantly bats flying against it would have beaten out the light but for the thin protection of its horn sides.

The Prince sat still upon his horse, looking first at the rutted space that he had traversed and then at the rutted space before him.

"Without a light," he said, "this thoroughfare is dangerous. What is your name, old man?"

"My name is Cethru," replied the aged churl.

"Cethru!" said the Prince. "Let it be your duty henceforth to walk with your lanthorn up and down this street all night and every night,"—and he looked at Cethru: "Do you understand, old man, what it is you have to do?"

The old man answered in a voice that trembled like a rusty flute:

"Aye, aye!—to walk up and down and hold my lanthorn so that folk can see where they be going."

The Prince gathered up his reins; but the old man, lurching forward, touched his stirrup.

"How long be I to go on wi' thickey job?"

"Until you die!"

Cethru held up his lanthorn, and they could see his long, thin face, like a sandwich of dried leather, jerk and quiver, and his thin grey hairs flutter in the draught of the bats' wings circling round the light.

"'Twill be main hard!" he groaned; "an' my lanthorn's nowt but a poor thing."

With a high look, the Prince of Felicitas bent and touched the old man's forehead.

"Until you die, old man," he repeated; and bidding his followers to light torches from Cethru's lanthorn, he rode on down the twisting street. The clatter of the horses' hoofs died out in the night, and the scuttling and the rustling of the rats and the whispers of the bats' wings were heard again.

Cethru, left alone in the dark thoroughfare, sighed heavily; then, spitting on his hands, he tightened the old girdle round his loins, and slinging the lanthorn on his staff, held it up to the level of his waist, and began to make his way along the street. His progress was but slow, for he had many times to stop and rekindle the flame within his lanthorn, which the bats' wings, his own stumbles, and the jostlings of footpads or of revellers returning home, were for ever extinguishing. In traversing that long street he spent half the night, and half the night in traversing it back again. The saffron swan of dawn, slow swimming up the sky-river between the high roof-banks, bent her neck down through the dark air-water to look at him staggering below her, with his still smoking wick. No sooner did Cethru see that sunlit bird, than with a great sigh of joy he sat him down, and at once fell asleep.

Now when the dwellers in the houses of the Vita Publica first gained knowledge that this old man passed every night with his lanthorn up and down their street, and when they marked those pallid gleams gliding over the motley prospect of cesspools and garden gates, over the sightless hovels and the rich-carved frontages of their palaces; or saw them stay their journey and remain suspended like a handful of daffodils held up against the black stuffs of secrecy—they said:

"It is good that the old man should pass like this—we shall see better where we're going; and if the Watch have any job on hand, or want to put the pavements in order, his lanthorn will serve their purpose well enough." And they would call out of their doors and windows to him passing:

"Hola! old man Cethru! All's well with our house, and with the street before it?"

But, for answer, the old man only held his lanthorn up, so that in the ring of its pale light they saw some sight or other in the street. And his silence troubled them, one by one, for each had expected that he would reply:

"Aye, aye! All's well with your house, Sirs, and with the street before it!"

Thus they grew irritated with this old man who did not seem able to do anything but just hold his lanthorn up. And gradually they began to dislike his passing by their doors with his pale light, by which they could not fail to see, not only the rich-carved frontages and scrolled gates of courtyards and fair gardens, but things that were not pleasing to the eye. And they murmured amongst themselves: "What is the good of this old man and his silly lanthorn? We can see all we want to see without him; in fact, we got on very well before he came."

So, as he passed, rich folk who were supping would pelt him with orange-peel and empty the dregs of their wine over his head; and poor folk, sleeping in their hutches, turned over, as the rays of the lanthorn fell on them, and cursed him for that disturbance. Nor did revellers or footpads treat the old man, civilly, but tied him to the wall, where he was constrained to stay till a kind passerby released him. And ever the bats darkened his lanthorn with their wings and tried to beat the flame out. And the old man thought: "This be a terrible hard job; I don't seem to please nobody." But because the Prince of Felicitas had so commanded him, he continued nightly to pass with his lanthorn up and down the street; and every morning as the saffron swan came swimming overhead, to fall asleep. But his sleep did not last long, for he was compelled to pass many hours each day in gathering rushes and melting down tallow for his lanthorn; so that his lean face grew more than ever like a sandwich of dried leather.

Now it came to pass that the Town Watch having had certain complaints made to them that persons had been bitten in the Vita Publica by rats, doubted of their duty to destroy these ferocious creatures; and they held investigation, summoning the persons bitten and inquiring of them how it was that in so dark a street they could tell that the animals which had bitten them were indeed rats. Howbeit for some time no one could be found who could say more than what he had been told, and since this was not evidence, the Town Watch had good hopes that they would not after all be forced to undertake this tedious enterprise. But presently there came before them one who said that he had himself seen the rat which had bitten him, by the light of an old man's lanthorn. When the Town Watch heard this they were vexed, for they knew that if this were true they would now be forced to prosecute the arduous undertaking, and they said:

"Bring in this old man!"

Cethru was brought before them trembling.

"What is this we hear, old man, about your lanthorn and the rat? And in the first place, what were you doing in the Vita Publica at that time of night?"

Cethru answered: "I were just passin' with my lanthorn!"

"Tell us—did you see the rat?"

Cethru shook his head: "My lanthorn seed the rat, maybe!" he muttered.

"Old owl!" said the Captain of the Watch: "Be careful what you say! If you saw the rat, why did you then not aid this unhappy citizen who was bitten by it—first, to avoid that rodent, and subsequently to slay it, thereby relieving the public of a pestilential danger?"

Cethru looked at him, and for some seconds did not reply; then he said slowly: "I were just passin' with my lanthorn."

"That you have already told us," said the Captain of the Watch; "it is no answer."

Cethru's leathern cheeks became wine-coloured, so desirous was he to speak, and so unable. And the Watch sneered and laughed, saying:

"This is a fine witness."

But of a sudden Cethru spoke:

"What would I be duin'—killin' rats; tidden my business to kill rats."

The Captain of the Watch caressed his beard, and looking at the old man with contempt, said:

"It seems to me, brothers, that this is an idle old vagabond, who does no good to any one. We should be well advised, I think, to prosecute him for vagrancy. But that is not at this moment the matter in hand. Owing to the accident—scarcely fortunate—of this old man's passing with his lanthorn, it would certainly appear that citizens have been bitten by rodents. It is then, I fear, our duty to institute proceedings against those poisonous and violent animals."

And amidst the sighing of the Watch, it was so resolved.

Cethru was glad to shuffle away, unnoticed, from the Court, and sitting down under a camel-date tree outside the City Wall, he thus reflected:

"They were rough with me! I done nothin', so far's I can see!"

And a long time he sat there with the bunches of the camel-dates above him, golden as the sunlight. Then, as the scent of the lyric-flowers, released by evening, warned him of the night dropping like a flight of dark birds on the plain, he rose stiffly, and made his way as usual toward the Vita Publica.

He had traversed but little of that black thoroughfare, holding his lanthorn at the level of his breast, when the sound of a splash and cries for help smote his long, thin ears. Remembering how the Captain of the Watch had admonished him, he stopped and peered about, but owing to his proximity to the light of his own lanthorn he saw nothing. Presently he heard another splash and the sound of blowings and of puffings, but still unable to see clearly whence they came, he was forced in bewilderment to resume his march. But he had no sooner entered the next bend of that obscure and winding avenue than the most lamentable, lusty cries assailed him. Again he stood still, blinded by his own light. Somewhere at hand a citizen was being beaten, for vague, quick-moving forms emerged into the radiance of his lanthorn out of the deep violet of the night air. The cries swelled, and died away, and swelled; and the mazed Cethru moved forward on his way. But very near the end of his first traversage, the sound of a long, deep sighing, as of a fat man in spiritual pain, once more arrested him.

"Drat me!" he thought, "this time I will see what 'tis," and he spun round and round, holding his lanthorn now high, now low, and to both sides. "The devil an' all's in it to-night," he murmured to himself; "there's some'at here fetchin' of its breath awful loud." But for his life he could see nothing, only that the higher he held his lanthorn the more painful grew the sound of the fat but spiritual sighing. And desperately, he at last resumed his progress.

On the morrow, while he still slept stretched on his straw pallet, there came to him a member of the Watch.

"Old man, you are wanted at the Court House; rouse up, and bring your lanthorn."

Stiffly Cethru rose.

"What be they wantin' me fur now, mester?"

"Ah!" replied the Watchman, "they are about to see if they can't put an end to your goings-on."

Cethru shivered, and was silent.

Now when they reached the Court House it was patent that a great affair was forward; for the Judges were in their robes, and a crowd of advocates, burgesses, and common folk thronged the careen, lofty hall of justice.

When Cethru saw that all eyes were turned on him, he shivered still more violently, fixing his fascinated gaze on the three Judges in their emerald robes.

"This then is the prisoner," said the oldest of the Judges; "proceed with the indictment!"

A little advocate in snuff-coloured clothes rose on little legs, and commenced to read:

"Forasmuch as on the seventeenth night of August fifteen hundred years since the Messiah's death, one Celestine, a maiden of this city, fell into a cesspool in the Vita Publica, and while being quietly drowned, was espied of the burgess Pardonix by the light of a lanthorn held by the old man Cethru; and, forasmuch as, plunging in, the said Pardonix rescued her, not without grave risk of life and the ruin, of his clothes, and to-day lies ill of fever; and forasmuch as the old man Cethru was the cause of these misfortunes to the burgess Pardonix, by reason of his wandering lanthorn's showing the drowning maiden, the Watch do hereby indict, accuse, and otherwise place charge upon this Cethru of 'Vagabondage without serious occupation.'

"And, forasmuch as on this same night the Watchman Filepo, made aware, by the light of this said Cethru's lanthorn, of three sturdy footpads, went to arrest them, and was set on by the rogues and well-nigh slain, the Watch do hereby indict, accuse, and otherwise charge upon Cethru complicity in this assault, by reasons, namely, first, that he discovered the footpads to the Watchman and the Watchman to the footpads by the light of his lanthorn; and, second, that, having thus discovered them, he stood idly by and gave no assistance to the law.

"And, forasmuch as on this same night the wealthy burgess Pranzo, who, having prepared a banquet, was standing in his doorway awaiting the arrival of his guests, did see, by the light of the said Cethru's lanthorn, a beggar woman and her children grovelling in the gutter for garbage, whereby his appetite was lost completely; and, forasmuch as he, Pranzo, has lodged a complaint against the Constitution for permitting women and children to go starved, the Watch do hereby indict, accuse, and otherwise make charge on Cethru of rebellion and of anarchy, in that wilfully he doth disturb good citizens by showing to them without provocation disagreeable sights, and doth moreover endanger the laws by causing persons to desire to change them.

"These be the charges, reverend Judges, so please you!"

And having thus spoken, the little advocate resumed his seat.

Then said the oldest of the Judges:

"Cethru, you have heard; what answer do you make?"

But no word, only the chattering of teeth, came from Cethru.

"Have you no defence?" said the Judge: "these are grave accusations!"

Then Cethru spoke:

"So please your Highnesses," he said, "can I help what my lanthorn sees?"

And having spoken these words, to all further questions he remained more silent than a headless man.

The Judges took counsel of each other, and the oldest of them thus addressed himself to Cethru:

"If you have no defence, old man, and there is no one will say a word for you, we can but proceed to judgment."

Then in the main aisle of the Court there rose a youthful advocate.

"Most reverend Judges," he said in a mellifluous voice, clearer than the fluting of a bell-bird, "it is useless to look for words from this old man, for it is manifest that he himself is nothing, and that his lanthorn is alone concerned in this affair. But, reverend Judges, bethink you well: Would you have a lanthorn ply a trade or be concerned with a profession, or do aught indeed but pervade the streets at night, shedding its light, which, if you will, is vagabondage? And, Sirs, upon the second count of this indictment: Would you have a lanthorn dive into cesspools to rescue maidens? Would you have a lanthorn to beat footpads? Or, indeed, to be any sort of partisan either of the Law or of them that break the Law? Sure, Sirs, I think not. And as to this third charge of fostering anarchy let me but describe the

trick of this lantern's flame. It is distilled, most reverend Judges, of oil and wick, together with that sweet secret heat of whose birth no words of mine can tell. And when, Sirs, this pale flame has sprung into the air swaying to every wind, it brings vision to the human eye. And, if it be charged on this old man Cethru that he and his lantern by reason of their showing not only the good but the evil bring no pleasure into the world, I ask, Sirs, what in the world is so dear as this power to see whether it be the beautiful or the foul that is disclosed? Need I, indeed, tell you of the way this flame spreads its feelers, and delicately darts and hovers in the darkness, conjuring things from nothing? This mechanical summoning, Sirs, of visions out of blackness is benign, by no means of malevolent intent; no more than if a man, passing two donkeys in the road, one lean and the other fat, could justly be arraigned for malignancy because they were not both fat. This, reverend Judges, is the essence of the matter concerning the rich burgher, Pranzo, who, on account of the sight he saw by Cethru's lantern, has lost the equilibrium of his stomach. For, Sirs, the lantern did but show that which was there, both fair and foul, no more, no less; and though it is indeed true that Pranzo is upset, it was not because the lantern maliciously produced distorted images, but merely caused to be seen, in due proportions, things which Pranzo had not seen before. And surely, reverend Judges, being just men, you would not have this lantern turn its light away from what is ragged and ugly because there are also fair things on which its light may fall; how, indeed, being a lantern, could it, if it would? And I would have you note this, Sirs, that by this impartial discovery of the proportions of one thing to another, this lantern must indeed perpetually seem to cloud and sadden those things which are fair, because of the deep instincts of harmony and justice planted in the human breast. However unfair and cruel, then, this lantern may seem to those who, deficient in these instincts, desire all their lives to see naught but what is pleasant, lest they, like Pranzo, should lose their appetites—it is not consonant with equity that this lantern should, even if it could, be prevented from thus mechanically buffeting the holiday cheek of life. I would think, Sirs, that you should rather blame the queazy state of Pranzo's stomach. The old man has said that he cannot help what his lantern sees. This is a just saying. But if, reverend Judges, you deem this equipoised, indifferent lantern to be indeed blameworthy for having shown in the same moment, side by side, the skull and the fair face, the burdock and the tiger-lily, the butterfly and toad, then, most reverend Judges, punish it, but do not punish this old man, for he himself is but a flume of smoke, thistle down dispersed—nothing!"

So saying, the young advocate ceased.

Again the three Judges took counsel of each other, and after much talk had passed between them, the oldest spoke:

"What this young advocate has said seems to us to be the truth. We cannot punish a lantern. Let the old man go!"

And Cethru went out into the sunshine

Now it came to pass that the Prince of Felicitas, returning from his journey, rode once more on his amber-coloured steed down the Vita Publica.

The night was dark as a rook's wing, but far away down the street burned a little light, like a red star truant from heaven. The Prince riding by descried it for a lantern, with an old man sleeping beside it.

"How is this, Friend?" said the Prince. "You are not walking as I bade you, carrying your lantern."

But Cethru neither moved nor answered:

"Lift him up!" said the Prince.

They lifted up his head and held the lantern to his closed eyes. So lean was that brown face that the beams from the lantern would not rest on it, but slipped past on either side into the night. His eyes did not open. He was dead.

And the Prince touched him, saying: "Farewell, old man! The lantern is still alight. Go, fetch me another one, and let him carry it!" 1909.

SOME PLATITUDES CONCERNING DRAMA

A drama must be shaped so as to have a spire of meaning. Every grouping of life and character has its

inherent moral; and the business of the dramatist is so to pose the group as to bring that moral poignantly to the light of day. Such is the moral that exhales from plays like 'Lear', 'Hamlet', and 'Macbeth'. But such is not the moral to be found in the great bulk of contemporary Drama. The moral of the average play is now, and probably has always been, the triumph at all costs of a supposed immediate ethical good over a supposed immediate ethical evil.

The vice of drawing these distorted morals has permeated the Drama to its spine; discoloured its art, humanity, and significance; infected its creators, actors, audience, critics; too often turned it from a picture into a caricature. A Drama which lives under the shadow of the distorted moral forgets how to be free, fair, and fine—forgets so completely that it often prides itself on having forgotten.

Now, in writing plays, there are, in this matter of the moral, three courses open to the serious dramatist. The first is: To definitely set before the public that which it wishes to have set before it, the views and codes of life by which the public lives and in which it believes. This way is the most common, successful, and popular. It makes the dramatist's position sure, and not too obviously authoritative.

The second course is: To definitely set before the public those views and codes of life by which the dramatist himself lives, those theories in which he himself believes, the more effectively if they are the opposite of what the public wishes to have placed before it, presenting them so that the audience may swallow them like powder in a spoonful of jam.

There is a third course: To set before the public no cut-and-dried codes, but the phenomena of life and character, selected and combined, but not distorted, by the dramatist's outlook, set down without fear, favour, or prejudice, leaving the public to draw such poor moral as nature may afford. This third method requires a certain detachment; it requires a sympathy with, a love of, and a curiosity as to, things for their own sake; it requires a far view, together with patient industry, for no immediately practical result.

It was once said of Shakespeare that he had never done any good to any one, and never would. This, unfortunately, could not, in the sense in which the word "good" was then meant, be said of most modern dramatists. In truth, the good that Shakespeare did to humanity was of a remote, and, shall we say, eternal nature; something of the good that men get from having the sky and the sea to look at. And this partly because he was, in his greater plays at all events, free from the habit of drawing a distorted moral. Now, the playwright who supplies to the public the facts of life distorted by the moral which it expects, does so that he may do the public what he considers an immediate good, by fortifying its prejudices; and the dramatist who supplies to the public facts distorted by his own advanced morality, does so because he considers that he will at once benefit the public by substituting for its worn-out ethics, his own. In both cases the advantage the dramatist hopes to confer on the public is immediate and practical.

But matters change, and morals change; men remain—and to set men, and the facts about them, down faithfully, so that they draw for us the moral of their natural actions, may also possibly be of benefit to the community. It is, at all events, harder than to set men and facts down, as they ought, or ought not to be. This, however, is not to say that a dramatist should, or indeed can, keep himself and his temperamental philosophy out of his work. As a man lives and thinks, so will he write. But it is certain, that to the making of good drama, as to the practice of every other art, there must be brought an almost passionate love of discipline, a white-heat of self-respect, a desire to make the truest, fairest, best thing in one's power; and that to these must be added an eye that does not flinch. Such qualities alone will bring to a drama the selfless character which soaks it with inevitability.

The word "pessimist" is frequently applied to the few dramatists who have been content to work in this way. It has been applied, among others, to Euripides, to Shakespeare, to Ibsen; it will be applied to many in the future. Nothing, however, is more dubious than the way in which these two words "pessimist" and "optimist" are used; for the optimist appears to be he who cannot bear the world as it is, and is forced by his nature to picture it as it ought to be, and the pessimist one who cannot only bear the world as it is, but loves it well enough to draw it faithfully. The true lover of the human race is surely he who can put up with it in all its forms, in vice as well as in virtue, in defeat no less than in victory; the true seer he who sees not only joy but sorrow, the true painter of human life one who blinks nothing. It may be that he is also, incidentally, its true benefactor.

In the whole range of the social fabric there are only two impartial persons, the scientist and the artist, and under the latter heading such dramatists as desire to write not only for to-day, but for to-morrow, must strive to come.

But dramatists being as they are made—past remedy it is perhaps more profitable to examine the various points at which their qualities and defects are shown.

The plot! A good plot is that sure edifice which slowly rises out of the interplay of circumstance on temperament, and temperament on circumstance, within the enclosing atmosphere of an idea. A human being is the best plot there is; it may be impossible to see why he is a good plot, because the idea within which he was brought forth cannot be fully grasped; but it is plain that he is a good plot. He is organic. And so it must be with a good play. Reason alone produces no good plots; they come by original sin, sure conception, and instinctive after-power of selecting what benefits the germ. A bad plot, on the other hand, is simply a row of stakes, with a character impaled on each—characters who would have liked to live, but came to untimely grief; who started bravely, but fell on these stakes, placed beforehand in a row, and were transfixed one by one, while their ghosts stride on, squeaking and gibbering, through the play. Whether these stakes are made of facts or of ideas, according to the nature of the dramatist who planted them, their effect on the unfortunate characters is the same; the creatures were begotten to be staked, and staked they are! The demand for a good plot, not unfrequently heard, commonly signifies: "Tickle my sensations by stuffing the play with arbitrary adventures, so that I need not be troubled to take the characters seriously. Set the persons of the play to action, regardless of time, sequence, atmosphere, and probability!"

Now, true dramatic action is what characters do, at once contrary, as it were, to expectation, and yet because they have already done other things. No dramatist should let his audience know what is coming; but neither should he suffer his characters to, act without making his audience feel that those actions are in harmony with temperament, and arise from previous known actions, together with the temperaments and previous known actions of the other characters in the play. The dramatist who hangs his characters to his plot, instead of hanging his plot to his characters, is guilty of cardinal sin.

The dialogue! Good dialogue again is character, marshalled so as continually to stimulate interest or excitement. The reason good dialogue is seldom found in plays is merely that it is hard to write, for it requires not only a knowledge of what interests or excites, but such a feeling for character as brings misery to the dramatist's heart when his creations speak as they should not speak—ashes to his mouth when they say things for the sake of saying them—disgust when they are "smart."

The art of writing true dramatic dialogue is an austere art, denying itself all license, grudging every sentence devoted to the mere machinery of the play, suppressing all jokes and epigrams severed from character, relying for fun and pathos on the fun and tears of life. From start to finish good dialogue is hand-made, like good lace; clear, of fine texture, furthering with each thread the harmony and strength of a design to which all must be subordinated.

But good dialogue is also spiritual action. In so far as the dramatist divorces his dialogue from spiritual action—that is to say, from progress of events, or toward events which are significant of character—he is stultifying the thing done; he may make pleasing disquisitions, he is not making drama. And in so far as he twists character to suit his moral or his plot, he is neglecting a first principle, that truth to Nature which alone invests art with handmade quality.

The dramatist's license, in fact, ends with his design. In conception alone he is free. He may take what character or group of characters he chooses, see them with what eyes, knit them with what idea, within the limits of his temperament; but once taken, seen, and knitted, he is bound to treat them like a gentleman, with the tenderest consideration of their mainsprings. Take care of character; action and dialogue will take care of themselves! The true dramatist gives full rein to his temperament in the scope and nature of his subject; having once selected subject and characters, he is just, gentle, restrained, neither gratifying his lust for praise at the expense of his offspring, nor using them as puppets to flout his audience. Being himself the nature that brought them forth, he guides them in the course predestined at their conception. So only have they a chance of defying Time, which is always lying in wait to destroy the false, topical, or fashionable, all—in a word—that is not based on the permanent elements of human nature. The perfect dramatist rounds up his characters and facts within the ring-fence of a dominant idea which fulfils the craving of his spirit; having got them there, he suffers them to live their own lives.

Plot, action, character, dialogue! But there is yet another subject for a platitude. Flavour! An impalpable quality, less easily captured than the scent of a flower, the peculiar and most essential attribute of any work of art! It is the thin, poignant spirit which hovers up out of a play, and is as much its differentiating essence as is caffeine of coffee. Flavour, in fine, is the spirit of the dramatist projected into his work in a state of volatility, so that no one can exactly lay hands on it, here, there, or anywhere. This distinctive essence of a play, marking its brand, is the one thing at which the dramatist cannot work, for it is outside his consciousness. A man may have many moods, he has but one spirit; and this spirit he communicates in some subtle, unconscious way to all his work. It waxes and wanes with the currents of his vitality, but no more alters than a chestnut changes into an oak.

For, in truth, dramas are very like unto trees, springing from seedlings, shaping themselves

inevitably in accordance with the laws fast hidden within themselves, drinking sustenance from the earth and air, and in conflict with the natural forces round them. So they slowly come to full growth, until warped, stunted, or risen to fair and gracious height, they stand open to all the winds. And the trees that spring from each dramatist are of different race; he is the spirit of his own sacred grove, into which no stray tree can by any chance enter.

One more platitude. It is not unfashionable to pit one form of drama against another—holding up the naturalistic to the disadvantage of the epic; the epic to the belittlement of the fantastic; the fantastic to the detriment of the naturalistic. Little purpose is thus served. The essential meaning, truth, beauty, and irony of things may be revealed under all these forms. Vision over life and human nature can be as keen and just, the revelation as true, inspiring, delight-giving, and thought-provoking, whatever fashion be employed—it is simply a question of doing it well enough to uncover the kernel of the nut. Whether the violet come from Russia, from Parma, or from England, matters little. Close by the Greek temples at Paestum there are violets that seem redder, and sweeter, than any ever seen—as though they have sprung up out of the footprints of some old pagan goddess; but under the April sun, in a Devonshire lane, the little blue scentless violets capture every bit as much of the spring. And so it is with drama—no matter what its form it need only be the "real thing," need only have caught some of the precious fluids, revelation, or delight, and imprisoned them within a chalice to which we may put our lips and continually drink.

And yet, starting from this last platitude, one may perhaps be suffered to speculate as to the particular forms that our renascent drama is likely to assume. For our drama is renascent, and nothing will stop its growth. It is not renascent because this or that man is writing, but because of a new spirit. A spirit that is no doubt in part the gradual outcome of the impact on our home-grown art, of Russian, French, and Scandinavian influences, but which in the main rises from an awakened humanity in the conscience of our time.

What, then, are to be the main channels down which the renascent English drama will float in the coming years? It is more than possible that these main channels will come to be two in number and situate far apart.

The one will be the broad and clear-cut channel of naturalism, down which will course a drama poignantly shaped, and inspired with high intention, but faithful to the seething and multiple life around us, drama such as some are inclined to term photographic, deceived by a seeming simplicity into forgetfulness of the old proverb, "Ars est celare artem," and oblivious of the fact that, to be vital, to grip, such drama is in every respect as dependent on imagination, construction, selection, and elimination—the main laws of artistry—as ever was the romantic or rhapsodic play: The question of naturalistic technique will bear, indeed, much more study than has yet been given to it. The aim of the dramatist employing it is obviously to create such an illusion of actual life passing on the stage as to compel the spectator to pass through an experience of his own, to think, and talk, and move with the people he sees thinking, talking, and moving in front of him. A false phrase, a single word out of tune or time, will destroy that illusion and spoil the surface as surely as a stone heaved into a still pool shatters the image seen there. But this is only the beginning of the reason why the naturalistic is the most exacting and difficult of all techniques. It is easy enough to reproduce the exact conversation and movements of persons in a room; it is desperately hard to produce the perfectly natural conversation and movements of those persons, when each natural phrase spoken and each natural movement made has not only to contribute toward the growth and perfection of a drama's soul, but also to be a revelation, phrase by phrase, movement by movement, of essential traits of character. To put it another way, naturalistic art, when alive, indeed to be alive at all, is simply the art of manipulating a procession of most delicate symbols. Its service is the swaying and focussing of men's feelings and thoughts in the various departments of human life. It will be like a steady lamp, held up from time to time, in whose light things will be seen for a space clearly and in due proportion, freed from the mists of prejudice and partisanship. And the other of these two main channels will, I think, be a twisting and delicious stream, which will bear on its breast new barques of poetry, shaped, it may be, like prose, but a prose incarnating through its fantasy and symbolism all the deeper aspirations, yearning, doubts, and mysterious stirrings of the human spirit; a poetic prose-drama, emotionalising us by its diversity and purity of form and invention, and whose province will be to disclose the elemental soul of man and the forces of Nature, not perhaps as the old tragedies disclosed them, not necessarily in the epic mood, but always with beauty and in the spirit of discovery.

Such will, I think, be the two vital forms of our drama in the coming generation. And between these two forms there must be no crude unions; they are too far apart, the cross is too violent. For, where there is a seeming blend of lyricism and naturalism, it will on examination be found, I think, to exist only in plays whose subjects or settings—as in Synge's "Playboy of the Western World," or in Mr. Masefield's "Nan"—are so removed from our ken that we cannot really tell, and therefore do not care, whether an absolute illusion is maintained. The poetry which may and should exist in naturalistic

drama, can only be that of perfect rightness of proportion, rhythm, shape—the poetry, in fact, that lies in all vital things. It is the ill-mating of forms that has killed a thousand plays. We want no more bastard drama; no more attempts to dress out the simple dignity of everyday life in the peacock's feathers of false lyricism; no more straw-stuffed heroes or heroines; no more rabbits and goldfish from the conjurer's pockets, nor any limelight. Let us have starlight, moonlight, sunlight, and the light of our own self-respects. 1909.

MEDITATION ON FINALITY

In the Grand Canyon of Arizona, that most exhilarating of all natural phenomena, Nature has for once so focussed her effects, that the result is a framed and final work of Art. For there, between two high lines of plateau, level as the sea, are sunk the wrought thrones of the innumerable gods, couchant, and for ever revering, in their million moods of light and colour, the Master Mystery.

Having seen this culmination, I realize why many people either recoil before it, and take the first train home, or speak of it as a "remarkable formation." For, though mankind at large craves finality, it does not crave the sort that bends the knee to Mystery. In Nature, in Religion, in Art, in Life, the common cry is: "Tell me precisely where I am, what doing, and where going! Let me be free of this fearful untidiness of not knowing all about it!" The favoured religions are always those whose message is most finite. The fashionable professions—they that end us in assured positions. The most popular works of fiction, such as leave nothing to our imagination. And to this craving after prose, who would not be lenient, that has at all known life, with its usual predominance of our lower and less courageous selves, our constant hankering after the cosey closed door and line of least resistance? We are continually begging to be allowed to know for certain; though, if our prayer were granted, and Mystery no longer hovered, made blue the hills, and turned day into night, we should, as surely, wail at once to be delivered of that ghastliness of knowing things for certain!

Now, in Art, I would never quarrel with a certain living writer who demands of it the kind of finality implied in what he calls a "moral discovery"—using, no doubt, the words in their widest sense. I would maintain, however, that such finality is not confined to positively discovering the true conclusion of premises laid down; but that it may also distil gradually, negatively from the whole work, in a moral discovery, as it were, of Author. In other words, that, permeation by an essential point of view, by emanation of author, may so unify and vitalize a work, as to give it all the finality that need be required of Art. For the finality that is requisite to Art, be it positive or negative, is not the finality of dogma, nor the finality of fact, it is ever the finality of feeling—of a spiritual light, subtly gleaned by the spectator out of that queer luminous haze which one man's nature must ever be to others. And herein, incidentally, it is that Art acquires also that quality of mystery, more needful to it even than finality, for the mystery that wraps a work of Art is the mystery of its maker, and the mystery of its maker is the difference between that maker's soul and every other soul.

But let me take an illustration of what I mean by these two kinds of finality that Art may have, and show that in essence they are but two halves of the same thing. The term "a work of Art" will not be denied, I think, to that early novel of M. Anatole France, "Le Lys Rouge." Now, that novel has positive finality, since the spiritual conclusion from its premises strikes one as true. But neither will the term "a work of Art" be denied to the same writer's four "Bergeret" volumes, whose negative finality consists only in the temperamental atmosphere wherein they are soaked. Now, if the theme of "Le Lys Rouge" had been treated by Tolstoy, Meredith, or Turgenev, we should have had spiritual conclusions from the same factual premises so different from M. France's as prunes from prisms, and yet, being the work of equally great artists, they would, doubtless, have struck us as equally true. Is not, then, the positive finality of "Le Lys Rouge," though expressed in terms of a different craftsmanship, the same, in essence, as the negative finality of the "Bergeret" volumes? Are not both, in fact, merely flower of author true to himself? So long as the scent, colour, form of that flower is strong and fine enough to affect the senses of our spirit, then all the rest, surely, is academic—I would say, immaterial.

But here, in regard to Art, is where mankind at large comes on the field. "Flower of author," it says, "Senses of the spirit! Phew! Give me something I can understand! Let me know where I am getting to!" In a word, it wants a finality different from that which Art can give. It will ask the artist, with irritation, what his solution, or his lesson, or his meaning, really is, having omitted to notice that the poor creature has been giving all the meaning that he can, in every sentence. It will demand to know why it was not told definitely what became of Charles or Mary in whom it had grown so interested; and will be almost frightened to learn that the artist knows no more than itself. And if by any chance it be

required to dip its mind into a philosophy that does not promise it a defined position both in this world and the next, it will assuredly recoil, and with a certain contempt say: "No, sir! This means nothing to me; and if it means anything to you—which I very much doubt—I am sorry for you!"

It must have facts, and again facts, not only in the present and the past, but in the future. And it demands facts of that, which alone cannot glibly give it facts. It goes on asking facts of Art, or, rather, such facts as Art cannot give—for, after all, even "flower of author" is fact in a sort of way.

Consider, for instance, Synge's masterpiece, "The Playboy of the Western World!" There is flower of author! What is it for mankind at large? An attack on the Irish character! A pretty piece of writing! An amusing farce! Enigmatic cynicism leading nowhere! A puzzling fellow wrote it! Mankind at large has little patience with puzzling fellows.

Few, in fact, want flower of author. Moreover, it is a quality that may well be looked for where it does not exist. To say that the finality which Art requires is merely an enwrapping mood, or flower of author, is not by any means to say that any robust fellow, slamming his notions down in ink, can give us these. Indeed, no! So long as we see the author's proper person in his work, we do not see the flower of him. Let him retreat himself, if he pretend to be an artist. There is no less of subtle skill, no less impersonality, in the "Bergeret" volumes than in "Le Lys Rouge." No less labour and mental torturing went to their making, page by page, in order that they might exhale their perfume of mysterious finality, their withdrawn but implicit judgment. Flower of author is not quite so common as the buttercup, the Californian poppy, or the gay Texan gaillardia, and for that very reason the finality it gives off will never be robust enough for a mankind at large that would have things cut and dried, and labelled in thick letters. For, consider—to take one phase alone of this demand for factual finality—how continual and insistent is the cry for characters that can be worshipped; how intense and persistent the desire to be told that Charles was a real hero; and how bitter the regret that Mary was no better than she should be! Mankind at large wants heroes that are heroes, and heroines that are heroines—and nothing so inappropriate to them as unhappy endings.

Travelling away, I remember, from that Grand Canyon of Arizona were a young man and a young woman, evidently in love. He was sitting very close to her, and reading aloud for her pleasure, from a paper-covered novel, heroically oblivious of us all:

"'Sir Robert,' she murmured, lifting her beauteous eyes, 'I may not tempt you, for you are too dear to me!' Sir Robert held her lovely face between his two strong hands. 'Farewell!' he said, and went out into the night. But something told them both that, when he had fulfilled his duty, Sir Robert would return" He had not returned before we reached the Junction, but there was finality about that baronet, and we well knew that he ultimately would. And, long after the sound of that young man's faithful reading had died out of our ears, we meditated on Sir Robert, and compared him with the famous characters of fiction, slowly perceiving that they were none of them so final in their heroism as he. No, none of them reached that apex. For Hamlet was a most unfinished fellow, and Lear extremely violent. Pickwick addicted to punch, and Sam Weller to lying; Bazarof actually a Nihilist, and Irina—! Levin and Anna, Pierre and Natasha, all of them stormy and unsatisfactory at times. "Un Coeur Simple" nothing but a servant, and an old maid at that; "Saint Julien l'Hospitalier" a sheer fanatic. Colonel Newcome too irritable and too simple altogether. Don Quixote certified insane. Hilda Wangel, Nora, Hedda—Sir Robert would never even have spoken to such baggages! Mon sieur Bergeret—an amiable weak thing! D'Artagnan—a true swashbuckler! Tom Jones, Faust, Don Juan—we might not even think of them: And those poor Greeks: Prometheus—shocking rebel. OEdipus for a long time banished by the Censor. Phaedra and Elektra, not even so virtuous as Mary, who failed of being what she should be! And coming to more familiar persons Joseph and Moses, David and Elijah, all of them lacked his finality of true heroism—none could quite pass muster beside Sir Robert Long we meditated, and, reflecting that an author must ever be superior to the creatures of his brain, were refreshed to think that there were so many living authors capable of giving birth to Sir Robert; for indeed, Sir Robert and finality like his—no doubtful heroes, no flower of author, and no mystery is what mankind at large has always wanted from Letters, and will always want.

As truly as that oil and water do not mix, there are two kinds of men. The main cleavage in the whole tale of life is this subtle, all pervading division of mankind into the man of facts and the man of feeling. And not by what they are or do can they be told one from the other, but just by their attitude toward finality. Fortunately most of us are neither quite the one nor quite the other. But between the pure-blooded of each kind there is real antipathy, far deeper than the antipathies of race, politics, or religion—an antipathy that not circumstance, love, goodwill, or necessity will ever quite get rid of. Sooner shall the panther agree with the bull than that other one with the man of facts. There is no bridging the gorge that divides these worlds.

Nor is it so easy to tell, of each, to which world he belongs, as it was to place the lady, who held out

her finger over that gorge called Grand Canyon, and said:

"It doesn't look thirteen miles; but they measured it just there! Excuse my pointing!" 1912.

WANTED-SCHOOLING

"Et nous jongleurs inutiles, frivoles joueurs de luth!". . . Useless jugglers, frivolous players on the lute! Must we so describe ourselves, we, the producers, season by season, of so many hundreds of "remarkable" works of fiction?—for though, when we take up the remarkable works of our fellows, we "really cannot read them!" the Press and the advertisements of our publishers tell us that they are "remarkable."

A story goes that once in the twilight undergrowth of a forest of nut-bearing trees a number of little purblind creatures wandered, singing for nuts. On some of these purblind creatures the nuts fell heavy and full, extremely indigestible, and were quickly swallowed; on others they fell light, and contained nothing, because the kernel had already been eaten up above, and these light and kernel-less nuts were accompanied by sibilations or laughter. On others again no nuts at all, empty or full, came down. But nuts or no nuts, full nuts or empty nuts, the purblind creatures below went on wandering and singing. A traveller one day stopped one of these creatures whose voice was peculiarly disagreeable, and asked "Why do you sing like this? Is it for pleasure that you do it, or for pain? What do you get out of it? Is it for the sake of those up there? Is it for your own sake—for the sake of your family—for whose sake? Do you think your songs worth listening to? Answer!"

The creature scratched itself, and sang the louder.

"Ah! Cacoethes! I pity, but do not blame you," said the traveller.

He left the creature, and presently came to another which sang a squeaky treble song. It wandered round in a ring under a grove of stunted trees, and the traveller noticed that it never went out of that grove.

"Is it really necessary," he said, "for you to express yourself thus?"

And as he spoke showers of tiny hard nuts came down on the little creature, who ate them greedily. The traveller opened one; it was extremely small and tasted of dry rot.

"Why, at all events," he said, "need you stay under these trees? the nuts are not good here."

But for answer the little creature ran round and round, and round and round.

"I suppose," said the traveller, "small bad nuts are better than no bread; if you went out of this grove you would starve?"

The purblind little creature shrieked. The traveller took the sound for affirmation, and passed on. He came to a third little creature who, under a tall tree, was singing very loudly indeed, while all around was a great silence, broken only by sounds like the snuffling of small noses. The creature stopped singing as the traveller came up, and at once a storm of huge nuts came down; the traveller found them sweetish and very oily.

"Why," he said to the creature, "did you sing so loud? You cannot eat all these nuts. You really do sing louder than seems necessary; come, answer me!"

But the purblind little creature began to sing again at the top of its voice, and the noise of the snuffling of small noses became so great that the traveller hastened away. He passed many other purblind little creatures in the twilight of this forest, till at last he came to one that looked even blinder than the rest, but whose song was sweet and low and clear, breaking a perfect stillness; and the traveller sat down to listen. For a long time he listened to that song without noticing that not a nut was falling. But suddenly he heard a faint rustle and three little oval nuts lay on the ground.

The traveller cracked one of them. It was of delicate flavour. He looked at the little creature standing with its face raised, and said:

"Tell me, little blind creature, whose song is so charming, where did you learn to sing?"

The little creature turned its head a trifle to one side as though listening for the fall of nuts.

"Ah, indeed!" said the traveller: "You, whose voice is so clear, is this all you get to eat?"

The little blind creature smiled

It is a twilight forest in which we writers of fiction wander, and once in a way, though all this has been said before, we may as well remind ourselves and others why the light is so dim; why there is so much bad and false fiction; why the demand for it is so great. Living in a world where demand creates supply, we writers of fiction furnish the exception to this rule. For, consider how, as a class, we come into existence. Unlike the followers of any other occupation, nothing whatever compels any one of us to serve an apprenticeship. We go to no school, have to pass no examination, attain no standard, receive no diploma. We need not study that which should be studied; we are at liberty to flood our minds with all that should not be studied. Like mushrooms, in a single sight we spring up—a pen in our hands, very little in our brains, and who-knows-what in our hearts!

Few of us sit down in cold blood to write our first stories; we have something in us that we feel we must express. This is the beginning of the vicious circle. Our first books often have some thing in them. We are sincere in trying to express that something. It is true we cannot express it, not having learnt how, but its ghost haunts the pages the ghost of real experience and real life—just enough to attract the untrained intelligence, just enough to make a generous Press remark: "This shows promise." We have tasted blood, we pant for more. Those of us who had a carking occupation hasten to throw it aside, those who had no occupation have now found one; some few of us keep both the old occupation and the new. Whichever of these courses we pursue, the hurry with which we pursue it undoes us. For, often we have only that one book in us, which we did not know how to write, and having expressed that which we have felt, we are driven in our second, our third, our fourth, to warm up variations, like those dressed remains of last night's dinner which are served for lunch; or to spin from our usually commonplace imaginations thin extravagances which those who do not try to think for themselves are ever ready to accept as full of inspiration and vitality. Anything for a book, we say—anything for a book!

From time immemorial we have acted in this immoral manner, till we have accustomed the Press and Public to expect it. From time immemorial we have allowed ourselves to be driven by those powerful drivers, Bread, and Praise, and cared little for the quality of either. Sensibly, or insensibly, we tune our songs to earn the nuts of our twilight forest. We tune them, not to the key of: "Is it good?" but to the key of: "Will it pay?" and at each tuning the nuts fall fast! It is all so natural. How can we help it, seeing that we are undisciplined and standardless, seeing that we started without the backbone that schooling gives? Here and there among us is a genius, here and there a man of exceptional stability who trains himself in spite of all the forces working for his destruction. But those who do not publish until they can express, and do not express until they have something worth expressing, are so rare that they can be counted on the fingers of three or perhaps four hands; mercifully, we all—or nearly all believe ourselves of that company.

It is the fashion to say that the public will have what it wants. Certainly the Public will have what it wants if what it wants is given to the Public. If what it now wants were suddenly withdrawn, the Public, the big Public, would by an obvious natural law take the lowest of what remained; if that again were withdrawn, it would take the next lowest, until by degrees it took a relatively good article. The Public, the big Public, is a mechanical and helpless consumer at the mercy of what is supplied to it, and this must ever be so. The Public then is not to blame for the supply of bad, false fiction. The Press is not to blame, for the Press, like the Public, must take what is set before it; their Critics, for the most part, like ourselves have been to no school, passed no test of fitness, received no certificate; they cannot lead us, it is we who lead them, for without the Critics we could live but without us the Critics would die. We cannot, therefore, blame the Press. Nor is the Publisher to blame; for the Publisher will publish what is set before him. It is true that if he published no books on commission he would deserve the praise of the State, but it is quite unreasonable for us to expect him to deserve the praise of the State, since it is we who supply him with these books and incite him to publish them. We cannot, therefore, lay the blame on the Publisher.

We must lay the blame where it clearly should be laid, on ourselves. We ourselves create the demand for bad and false fiction. Very many of us have private means; for such there is no excuse. Very many of us have none; for such, once started on this journey of fiction, there is much, often tragic, excuse—the less reason then for not having trained ourselves before setting out on our way. There is no getting out of it; the fault is ours. If we will not put ourselves to school when we are young; if we must rush into print before we can spell; if we will not repress our natural desires and walk before we run; if we will not learn at least what not to do—we shall go on wandering through the forest, singing our foolish songs.

And since we cannot train ourselves except by writing, let us write, and burn what we write; then

shall we soon stop writing, or produce what we need not burn!

For, as things are now, without compass, without map, we set out into the twilight forest of fiction; without path, without track—and we never emerge.

Yes, with the French writer, we must say:

"Et nous jongleurs inutiles, frivoles joueurs de luth!" . . . 1906.

REFLECTIONS ON OUR DISLIKE OF THINGS AS THEY ARE

Yes! Why is this the chief characteristic of our art? What secret instincts are responsible for this inveterate distaste? But, first, is it true that we have it?

To stand still and look at a thing for the joy of looking, without reference to any material advantage, and personal benefit, either to ourselves or our neighbours, just simply to indulge our curiosity! Is that a British habit? I think not.

If, on some November afternoon, we walk into Kensington Gardens, where they join the Park on the Bayswater side, and, crossing in front of the ornamental fountain, glance at the semicircular seat let into a dismal little Temple of the Sun, we shall see a half-moon of apathetic figures. There, enjoying a moment of lugubrious idleness, may be sitting an old countrywoman with steady eyes in a lean, dusty-black dress and an old poke-bonnet; by her side, some gin-faced creature of the town, all blousy and draggled; a hollow-eyed foreigner, far gone in consumption; a bronzed young navvy, asleep, with his muddy boots jutting straight out; a bearded, dreary being, chin on chest; and more consumptives, and more vagabonds, and more people dead-tired, speechless, and staring before them from that crescent-shaped haven where there is no draught at their backs, and the sun occasionally shines. And as we look at them, according to the state of our temper, we think: Poor creatures, I wish I could do something for them! or: Revolting! They oughtn't to allow it! But do we feel any pleasure in just watching them; any of that intimate sensation a cat entertains when its back is being rubbed; are we curiously enjoying the sight of these people, simply as manifestations of life, as objects fashioned by the ebb and flow of its tides? Again, I think, not. And why? Either, because we have instantly felt that we ought to do something; that here is a danger in our midst, which one day might affect our own security; and at all events, a sight revolting to us who came out to look at this remarkably fine fountain. Or, because we are too humane! Though very possibly that frequent murmuring of ours: Ah! It's too sad! is but another way of putting the words: Stand aside, please, you're too depressing! Or, again, is it that we avoid the sight of things as they are, avoid the unedifying, because of what may be called "the uncreative instinct," that safeguard and concomitant of a civilisation which demands of us complete efficiency, practical and thorough employment of every second of our time and every inch of our space? We know, of course, that out of nothing nothing can be made, that to "create" anything a man must first receive impressions, and that to receive impressions requires an apparatus of nerves and feelers, exposed and quivering to every vibration round it, an apparatus so entirely opposed to our national spirit and traditions that the bare thought of it causes us to blush. A robust recognition of this, a steadfast resolve not to be forced out of the current of strenuous civilisation into the sleepy backwater of pure impressionism, makes us distrustful of attempts to foster in ourselves that receptivity and subsequent creativeness, the microbes of which exist in every man: To watch a thing simply because it is a thing, entirely without considering how it can affect us, and without even seeing at the moment how we are to get anything out of it, jars our consciences, jars that inner feeling which keeps secure and makes harmonious the whole concert of our lives, for we feel it to be a waste of time, dangerous to the community, contributing neither to our meat and drink, our clothes and comfort, nor to the stability and order of our lives.

Of these three possible reasons for our dislike of things as they are, the first two are perhaps contained within the third. But, to whatever our dislike is due, we have it—Oh! we have it! With the possible exception of Hogarth in his non-preaching pictures, and Constable in his sketches of the sky,—I speak of dead men only,—have we produced any painter of reality like Manet or Millet, any writer like Flaubert or Maupassant, like Turgenev, or Tchekov. We are, I think, too deeply civilised, so deeply civilised that we have come to look on Nature as indecent. The acts and emotions of life undraped with ethics seem to us anathema. It has long been, and still is, the fashion among the intellectuals of the Continent to regard us as barbarians in most aesthetic matters. Ah! If they only knew how infinitely barbarous they seem to us in their naive contempt of our barbarism, and in what we regard as their

infantine concern with things as they are. How far have we not gone past all that—we of the oldest settled Western country, who have so veneered our lives that we no longer know of what wood they are made! Whom generations have so soaked with the preserve "good form" that we are impervious to the claims and clamour of that ill-bred creature—life! Who think it either dreadful, or 'vieux jeu', that such things as the crude emotions and the raw struggles of Fate should be even mentioned, much less presented in terms of art! For whom an artist is 'suspect' if he is not, in his work, a sportsman and a gentleman? Who shake a solemn head over writers who will treat of sex; and, with the remark: "Worst of it is, there's so much truth in those fellows!" close the book.

Ah! well! I suppose we have been too long familiar with the unprofitableness of speculation, have surrendered too definitely to action—to the material side of things, retaining for what relaxation our spirits may require, a habit of sentimental aspiration, carefully divorced from things as they are. We seem to have decided that things are not, or, if they are, ought not to be—and what is the good of thinking of things like that? In fact, our national ideal has become the Will to Health, to Material Efficiency, and to it we have sacrificed the Will to Sensibility. It is a point of view. And yet—to the philosophy that craves Perfection, to the spirit that desires the golden mean, and hankers for the serene and balanced seat in the centre of the see-saw, it seems a little pitiful, and constricted; a confession of defeat, a hedging and limitation of the soul. Need we put up with this, must we for ever turn our eyes away from things as they are, stifle our imaginations and our sensibilities, for fear that they should become our masters, and destroy our sanity? This is the eternal question that confronts the artist and the thinker. Because of the inevitable decline after full flowering-point is reached, the inevitable fading of the fire that follows the full flame and glow, are we to recoil from striving to reach the perfect and harmonious climacteric? Better to have loved and lost, I think, than never to have loved at all; better to reach out and grasp the fullest expression of the individual and the national soul, than to keep for ever under the shelter of the wall. I would even think it possible to be sensitive without neurasthenia, to be sympathetic without insanity, to be alive to all the winds that blow without getting influenza. God forbid that our Letters and our Arts should decade into Beardslayism; but between that and their present "health" there lies full flowering-point, not yet, by a long way, reached.

To flower like that, I suspect, we must see things just a little more—as they are! 1905-1912.

THE WINDLESTRAW

A certain writer, returning one afternoon from rehearsal of his play, sat down in the hall of the hotel where he was staying. "No," he reflected, "this play of mine will not please the Public; it is gloomy, almost terrible. This very day I read these words in my morning paper: 'No artist can afford to despise his Public, for, whether he confesses it or not, the artist exists to give the Public what it wants.' I have, then, not only done what I cannot afford to do, but I have been false to the reason of my existence."

The hall was full of people, for it was the hour of tea; and looking round him, the writer thought "And this is the Public—the Public that my play is destined not to please!" And for several minutes he looked at them as if he had been hypnotised. Presently, between two tables he noticed a waiter standing, lost in his thoughts. The mask of the man's professional civility had come awry, and the expression of his face and figure was curiously remote from the faces and forms of those from whom he had been taking orders; he seemed like a bird discovered in its own haunts, all unconscious as yet of human eyes. And the writer thought: "But if those people at the tables are the Public, what is that waiter? How if I was mistaken, and not they, but he were the real Public?" And testing this thought, his mind began at once to range over all the people he had lately seen. He thought of the Founder's Day dinner of a great School, which he had attended the night before. "No," he mused, "I see very little resemblance between the men at that dinner and the men in this hall; still less between them and the waiter. How if they were the real Public, and neither the waiter, nor these people here!" But no sooner had he made this reflection, than he bethought him of a gathering of workers whom he had watched two days ago. "Again," he mused, "I do not recollect any resemblance at all between those workers and the men at the dinner, and certainly they are not like any one here. What if those workers are the real Public, not the men at the dinner, nor the waiter, nor the people in this hall!" And thereupon his mind flew off again, and this time rested on the figures of his own immediate circle of friends. They seemed very different from the four real Publics whom he had as yet discovered. "Yes," he considered, "when I come to think of it, my associates painters, and writers, and critics, and all that kind of person—do not seem to have anything to speak of in common with any of these people. Perhaps my own associates, then, are the real Public, and not these others!" Perceiving that this would be the fifth real Public, he felt discouraged.

But presently he began to think: "The past is the past and cannot be undone, and with this play of mine I shall not please the Public; but there is always the future! Now, I do not wish to do what the artist cannot afford to do, I earnestly desire to be true to the reason of my existence; and since the reason of that existence is to give the Public what it wants, it is really vital to discover who and what the Public is!" And he began to look very closely at the faces around him, hoping to find out from types what he had failed to ascertain from classes. Two men were sitting near, one on each side of a woman. The first, who was all crumpled in his arm-chair, had curly lips and wrinkles round the eyes, cheeks at once rather fat and rather shadowy, and a dimple in his chin. It seemed certain that he was humourous, and kind, sympathetic, rather diffident, speculative, moderately intelligent, with the rudiments perhaps of an imagination. And he looked at the second man, who was sitting very upright, as if he had a particularly fine backbone, of which he was not a little proud. He was extremely big and handsome, with pronounced and regular nose and chin, firm, well-cut lips beneath a smooth moustache, direct and rather insolent eyes, a some what receding forehead, and an air of mastery over all around. It was obvious that he possessed a complete knowledge of his own mind, some brutality, much practical intelligence, great resolution, no imagination, and plenty of conceit. And he looked at the woman. She was pretty, but her face was vapid, and seemed to have no character at all. And from one to the other he looked, and the more he looked the less resemblance he saw between them, till the objects of his scrutiny grew restive.... Then, ceasing to examine them, an idea came to him. "No! The Public is not this or that class, this or that type; the Public is an hypothetical average human being, endowed with average human qualities—a distillation, in fact, of all the people in this hall, the people in the street outside, the people of this country everywhere." And for a moment he was pleased; but soon he began again to feel uneasy. "Since," he reflected, "it is necessary for me to supply this hypothetical average human being with what he wants, I shall have to find out how to distil him from all the ingredients around me. Now how am I to do that? It will certainly take me more than all my life to collect and boil the souls of all of them, which is necessary if I am to extract the genuine article, and I should then apparently have no time left to supply the precipitated spirit, when I had obtained it, with what it wanted! Yet this hypothetical average human being must be found, or I must stay for ever haunted by the thought that I am not supplying him with what he wants!" And the writer became more and more discouraged, for to arrogate to himself knowledge of all the heights and depths, and even of all the virtues and vices, tastes and dislikes of all the people of the country, without having first obtained it, seemed to him to savour of insolence. And still more did it appear impertinent, having taken this mass of knowledge which he had not got, to extract from it a golden mean man, in order to supply him with what he wanted. And yet this was what every artist did who justified his existence—or it would not have been so stated in a newspaper. And he gaped up at the lofty ceiling, as if he might perchance see the Public flying up there in the faint bluish mist of smoke. And suddenly he thought: "Suppose, by some miracle, my golden-mean bird came flying to me with its beak open for the food with which it is my duty to supply it—would it after all be such a very strange-looking creature; would it not be extremely like my normal self? Am I not, in fact, myself the Public? For, without the strongest and most reprehensible conceit, can I claim for my normal self a single attribute or quality not possessed by an hypothetical average human being? Yes, I am myself the Public; or at all events all that my consciousness can ever know of it for certain." And he began to consider deeply. For sitting there in cold blood, with his nerves at rest, and his brain and senses normal, the play he had written did seem to him to put an unnecessary strain upon the faculties. "Ah!" he thought, "in future I must take good care never to write anything except in cold blood, with my nerves well clothed, and my brain and senses quiet. I ought only to write when I feel as normal as I do now." And for some minutes he remained motionless, looking at his boots. Then there crept into his mind an uncomfortable thought. "But have I ever written anything without feeling a little-abnormal, at the time? Have I ever even felt inclined to write anything, until my emotions had been unduly excited, my brain immoderately stirred, my senses unusually quickened, or my spirit extravagantly roused? Never! Alas, never! I am then a miserable renegade, false to the whole purpose of my being—nor do I see the slightest hope of becoming a better man, a less unworthy artist! For I literally cannot write without the stimulus of some feeling exaggerated at the expense of other feelings. What has been in the past will be in the future: I shall never be taking up my pen when I feel my comfortable and normal self never be satisfying that self which is the Public!" And he thought: "I am lost. For, to satisfy that normal self, to give the Public what it wants, is, I am told, and therefore must believe, what all artists exist for. AEschylus in his 'Choephorae' and his 'Prometheus'; Sophocles in his 'Oedipus Tyrannus'; Euripides when he wrote 'The Trojan Women,' 'Medea,'—and 'Hippolytus'; Shakespeare in his 'Leer'; Goethe in his 'Faust'; Ibsen in his 'Ghosts' and his 'Peer Gynt'; Tolstoy in 'The Powers of Darkness'; all—all in those great works, must have satisfied their most comfortable and normal selves; all—all must have given to the average human being, to the Public, what it wants; for to do that, we know, was the reason of their existence, and who shall say those noble artists were not true to it? That is surely unthinkable. And yet—and yet—we are assured, and, indeed, it is true, that there is no real Public in this country for just those plays! Therefore AEschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Shakespeare, Goethe, Ibsen, Tolstoy, in their greatest works did not give the Public what it wants, did not satisfy the average human being, their more comfortable and normal selves, and as artists were not

true to the reason of their existence. Therefore they were not artists, which is unthinkable; therefore I have not yet found the Public!"

And perceiving that in this impasse his last hope of discovery had foundered, the writer let his head fall on his chest.

But even as he did so a gleam of light, like a faint moonbeam, stole out into the garden of his despair. "Is it possible," he thought, "that, by a writer, until his play has been performed (when, alas! it is too late), 'the Public' is inconceivable—in fact that for him there is no such thing? But if there be no such thing, I cannot exist to give it what it wants. What then is the reason of my existence? Am I but a windlestraw?" And wearied out with his perplexity, he fell into a doze. And while he dozed he dreamed that he saw the figure of a woman standing in darkness, from whose face and form came a misty refulgence, such as steals out into the dusk from white campion flowers along summer hedgerows. She was holding her pale hands before her, wide apart, with the palms turned down, quivering as might doves about to settle; and for all it was so dark, her grey eyes were visible—full of light, with black rims round the irises. To gaze at those eyes was almost painful; for though they were beautiful, they seemed to see right through his soul, to pass him by, as though on a far discovering voyage, and forbidden to rest.

The dreamer spoke to her: "Who are you, standing there in the darkness with those eyes that I can hardly bear to look at? Who are you?"

And the woman answered: "Friend, I am your Conscience; I am the Truth as best it may be seen by you. I am she whom you exist to serve." With those words she vanished, and the writer woke. A boy was standing before him with the evening papers.

To cover his confusion at being caught asleep he purchased one and began to read a leading article. It commenced with these words: "There are certain playwrights taking themselves very seriously; might we suggest to them that they are in danger of becoming ridiculous"

The writer let fall his hand, and the paper fluttered to the ground. "The Public," he thought, "I am not able to take seriously, because I cannot conceive what it may be; myself, my conscience, I am told I must not take seriously, or I become ridiculous. Yes, I am indeed lost!"

And with a feeling of elation, as of a straw blown on every wind, he arose. 1910.

STUDIES AND ESSAYS

By John Galsworthy

"Je vous dirai que l'exces est toujours un mal."
—ANATOLE FRANCE

TABLE OF CONTENTS: ABOUT CENSORSHIP VAGUE THOUGHTS ON ART

ABOUT CENSORSHIP

Since, time and again, it has been proved, in this country of free institutions, that the great majority of our fellow-countrymen consider the only Censorship that now obtains amongst us, namely the Censorship of Plays, a bulwark for the preservation of their comfort and sensibility against the spiritual researches and speculations of bolder and too active spirits—it has become time to consider whether we should not seriously extend a principle, so grateful to the majority, to all our institutions.

For no one can deny that in practice the Censorship of Drama works with a smooth swiftness—a lack of delay and friction unexampled in any public office. No troublesome publicity and tedious postponement for the purpose of appeal mar its efficiency. It is neither hampered by the Law nor by the slow process of popular election. Welcomed by the overwhelming majority of the public; objected to

only by such persons as suffer from it, and a negligible faction, who, wedded pedantically to liberty of the subject, are resentful of summary powers vested in a single person responsible only to his own 'conscience'—it is amazingly, triumphantly, successful.

Why, then, in a democratic State, is so valuable a protector of the will, the interests, and pleasure of the majority not bestowed on other branches of the public being? Opponents of the Censorship of Plays have been led by the absence of such other Censorships to conclude that this Office is an archaic survival, persisting into times that have outgrown it. They have been known to allege that the reason of its survival is simply the fact that Dramatic Authors, whose reputation and means of livelihood it threatens, have ever been few in number and poorly organised—that the reason, in short, is the helplessness and weakness of the interests concerned. We must all combat with force such an aspersion on our Legislature. Can it even for a second be supposed that a State which gives trial by Jury to the meanest, poorest, most helpless of its citizens, and concedes to the greatest criminals the right of appeal, could have debarred a body of reputable men from the ordinary rights of citizenship for so cynical a reason as that their numbers were small, their interests unjoined, their protests feeble? Such a supposition were intolerable! We do not in this country deprive a class of citizens of their ordinary rights, we do not place their produce under the irresponsible control of one not amenable to Law, by any sort of political accident! That would indeed be to laugh at Justice in this Kingdom! That would indeed be cynical and unsound! We must never admit that there is no basic Justice controlling the edifice of our Civic Rights. We do, we must, conclude that a just and well-considered principle underlies this despotic Institution; for surely, else, it would not be suffered to survive for a single moment! Pom! Pom!

If, then, the Censorship of Plays be just, beneficent, and based on a well-considered principle, we must rightly inquire what good and logical reason there is for the absence of Censorship in other departments of the national life. If Censorship of the Drama be in the real interests of the people, or at all events in what the Censor for the time being conceives to be their interest—then Censorships of Art, Literature, Religion, Science, and Politics are in the interests of the people, unless it can be proved that there exists essential difference between the Drama and these other branches of the public being. Let us consider whether there is any such essential difference.

It is fact, beyond dispute, that every year numbers of books appear which strain the average reader's intelligence and sensibilities to an unendurable extent; books whose speculations are totally unsuited to normal thinking powers; books which contain views of morality divergent from the customary, and discussions of themes unsuited to the young person; books which, in fine, provide the greater Public with no pleasure whatsoever, and, either by harrowing their feelings or offending their good taste, cause them real pain.

It is true that, precisely as in the case of Plays, the Public are protected by a vigilant and critical Press from works of this description; that, further, they are protected by the commercial instinct of the Libraries, who will not stock an article which may offend their customers—just as, in the case of Plays, the Public are protected by the common-sense of theatrical Managers; that, finally, they are protected by the Police and the Common Law of the land. But despite all these protections, it is no uncommon thing for an average citizen to purchase one of these disturbing or dubious books. Has he, on discovering its true nature, the right to call on the bookseller to refund its value? He has not. And thus he runs a danger obviated in the case of the Drama which has the protection of a prudential Censorship. For this reason alone, how much better, then, that there should exist a paternal authority (some, no doubt, will call it grand-maternal—but sneers must not be confounded with argument) to suppress these books before appearance, and safeguard us from the danger of buying and possibly reading undesirable or painful literature!

A specious reason, however, is advanced for exempting Literature from the Censorship accorded to Plays. He—it is said—who attends the performance of a play, attends it in public, where his feelings may be harrowed and his taste offended, cheek by jowl with boys, or women of all ages; it may even chance that he has taken to this entertainment his wife, or the young persons of his household. He—on the other hand—who reads a book, reads it in privacy. True; but the wielder of this argument has clasped his fingers round a two-edged blade. The very fact that the book has no mixed audience removes from Literature an element which is ever the greatest check on licentiousness in Drama. No manager of a theatre,—a man of the world engaged in the acquisition of his livelihood, unless guaranteed by the license of the Censor, dare risk the presentment before a mixed audience of that which might cause an 'emeute' among his clients. It has, indeed, always been observed that the theatrical manager, almost without exception, thoughtfully recoils from the responsibility that would be thrust on him by the abolition of the Censorship. The fear of the mixed audience is ever suspended above his head. No such fear threatens the publisher, who displays his wares to one man at a time. And for this very reason of the mixed audience; perpetually and perversely cited to the contrary by such as have no firm grasp of this matter, there is a greater necessity for a Censorship on Literature than for

one on Plays.

Further, if there were but a Censorship of Literature, no matter how dubious the books that were allowed to pass, the conscience of no reader need ever be troubled. For, that the perfect rest of the public conscience is the first result of Censorship, is proved to certainty by the protected Drama, since many dubious plays are yearly put before the play-going Public without tending in any way to disturb a complacency engendered by the security from harm guaranteed by this beneficent, if despotic, Institution. Pundits who, to the discomfort of the populace, foster this exemption of Literature from discipline, cling to the old-fashioned notion that ulcers should be encouraged to discharge themselves upon the surface, instead of being quietly and decently driven into the system and allowed to fester there.

The remaining plea for exempting Literature from Censorship, put forward by unreflecting persons: That it would require too many Censors—besides being unworthy, is, on the face of it, erroneous. Special tests have never been thought necessary in appointing Examiners of Plays. They would, indeed, not only be unnecessary, but positively dangerous, seeing that the essential function of Censorship is protection of the ordinary prejudices and forms of thought. There would, then, be no difficulty in securing tomorrow as many Censors of Literature as might be necessary (say twenty or thirty); since all that would be required of each one of them would be that he should secretly exercise, in his uncontrolled discretion, his individual taste. In a word, this Free Literature of ours protects advancing thought and speculation; and those who believe in civic freedom subject only to Common Law, and espouse the cause of free literature, are championing a system which is essentially undemocratic, essentially inimical to the will of the majority, who have certainly no desire for any such things as advancing thought and speculation. Such persons, indeed, merely hold the faith that the People, as a whole, unprotected by the despotic judgments of single persons, have enough strength and wisdom to know what is and what is not harmful to themselves. They put their trust in a Public Press and a Common Law, which deriving from the Conscience of the Country, is openly administered and within the reach of all. How absurd, how inadequate this all is we see from the existence of the Censorship on Drama.

Having observed that there is no reason whatever for the exemption of Literature, let us now turn to the case of Art. Every picture hung in a gallery, every statue placed on a pedestal, is exposed to the public stare of a mixed company. Why, then, have we no Censorship to protect us from the possibility of encountering works that bring blushes to the cheek of the young person? The reason cannot be that the proprietors of Galleries are more worthy of trust than the managers of Theatres; this would be to make an odious distinction which those very Managers who uphold the Censorship of Plays would be the first to resent. It is true that Societies of artists and the proprietors of Galleries are subject to the prosecution of the Law if they offend against the ordinary standards of public decency; but precisely the same liability attaches to theatrical managers and proprietors of Theatres, in whose case it has been found necessary and beneficial to add the Censorship. And in this connection let it once more be noted how much more easily the ordinary standards of public decency can be assessed by a single person responsible to no one, than by the clumsy (if more open) process of public protest. What, then, in the light of the proved justice and efficiency of the Censorship of Drama, is the reason for the absence of the Censorship of Art? The more closely the matter is regarded, the more plain it is, that there is none! At any moment we may have to look upon some painting, or contemplate some statue, as tragic, heart-rending, and dubiously delicate in theme as that censured play "The Cenci," by one Shelley; as dangerous to prejudice, and suggestive of new thought as the censured "Ghosts," by one Ibsen. Let us protest against this peril suspended over our heads, and demand the immediate appointment of a single person not selected for any pretentiously artistic feelings, but endowed with summary powers of prohibiting the exhibition, in public galleries or places, of such works as he shall deem, in his uncontrolled discretion, unsuited to average intelligence or sensibility. Let us demand it in the interest, not only of the young person, but of those whole sections of the community which cannot be expected to take an interest in Art, and to whom the purpose, speculations, and achievements of great artists, working not only for to-day but for to-morrow, must naturally be dark riddles. Let us even require that this official should be empowered to order the destruction of the works which he has deemed unsuited to average intelligence and sensibility, lest their creators should, by private sale, make a profit out of them, such as, in the nature of the case, Dramatic Authors are debarred from making out of plays which, having been censured, cannot be played for money. Let us ask this with confidence; for it is not compatible with common justice that there should be any favouring of Painter over Playwright. They are both artists—let them both be measured by the same last!

But let us now consider the case of Science. It will not, indeed cannot, be contended that the investigations of scientific men, whether committed to writing or to speech, are always suited to the taste and capacities of our general public. There was, for example, the well-known doctrine of Evolution, the teachings of Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, who gathered up certain facts,

hitherto but vaguely known, into presentments, irreverent and startling, which, at the time, profoundly disturbed every normal mind. Not only did religion, as then accepted, suffer in this cataclysm, but our taste and feeling were inexpressibly shocked by the discovery, so emphasised by Thomas Henry Huxley, of Man's descent from Apes. It was felt, and is felt by many to this day, that the advancement of that theory grossly and dangerously violated every canon of decency. What pain, then, might have been averted, what far-reaching consequences and incalculable subversion of primitive faiths checked, if some judicious Censor of scientific thought had existed in those days to demand, in accordance with his private estimate of the will and temper of the majority, the suppression of the doctrine of Evolution.

Innumerable investigations of scientists on subjects such as the date of the world's creation, have from time to time been summarised and inconsiderately sprung on a Public shocked and startled by the revelation that facts which they were accustomed to revere were conspicuously at fault. So, too, in the range of medicine, it would be difficult to cite any radical discovery (such as the preventive power of vaccination), whose unchecked publication has not violated the prejudices and disturbed the immediate comfort of the common mind. Had these discoveries been judiciously suppressed, or pared away to suit what a Censorship conceived to be the popular palate of the time, all this disturbance and discomfort might have been avoided.

It will doubtless be contended (for there are no such violent opponents of Censorship as those who are threatened with the same) that to compare a momentous disclosure, such as the doctrine of Evolution, to a mere drama, were unprofitable. The answer to this ungenerous contention is fortunately plain. Had a judicious Censorship existed over our scientific matters, such as for two hundred years has existed over our Drama, scientific discoveries would have been no more disturbing and momentous than those which we are accustomed to see made on our nicely pruned and tutored stage. For not only would the more dangerous and penetrating scientific truths have been carefully destroyed at birth, but scientists, aware that the results of investigations offensive to accepted notions would be suppressed, would long have ceased to waste their time in search of a knowledge repugnant to average intelligence, and thus foredoomed, and have occupied themselves with services more agreeable to the public taste, such as the rediscovery of truths already known and published.

Indissolubly connected with the desirability of a Censorship of Science, is the need for Religious Censorship. For in this, assuredly not the least important department of the nation's life, we are witnessing week by week and year by year, what in the light of the security guaranteed by the Censorship of Drama, we are justified in terming an alarming spectacle. Thousands of men are licensed to proclaim from their pulpits, Sunday after Sunday, their individual beliefs, quite regardless of the settled convictions of the masses of their congregations. It is true, indeed, that the vast majority of sermons (like the vast majority of plays) are, and will always be, harmonious with the feelings—of the average citizen; for neither priest nor playwright have customarily any such peculiar gift of spiritual daring as might render them unsafe mentors of their fellows; and there is not wanting the deterrent of common-sense to keep them in bounds. Yet it can hardly be denied that there spring up at times men—like John Wesley or General Booth—of such incurable temperament as to be capable of abusing their freedom by the promulgation of doctrine or procedure, divergent from the current traditions of religion. Nor must it be forgotten that sermons, like plays, are addressed to a mixed audience of families, and that the spiritual teachings of a lifetime may be destroyed by ten minutes of uncensored pronouncement from a pulpit, the while parents are sitting, not, as in a theatre vested with the right of protest, but dumb and excoriated to the soul, watching their children, perhaps of tender age, eagerly drinking in words at variance with that which they themselves have been at such pains to instil.

If a set of Censors—for it would, as in the case of Literature, indubitably require more than one (perhaps one hundred and eighty, but, for reasons already given, there should be no difficulty whatever in procuring them) endowed with the swift powers conferred by freedom from the dull tedium of responsibility, and not remarkable for religious temperament, were appointed, to whom all sermons and public addresses on religious subjects must be submitted before delivery, and whose duty after perusal should be to excise all portions not conformable to their private ideas of what was at the moment suitable to the Public's ears, we should be far on the road toward that proper preservation of the status quo so desirable if the faiths and ethical standards of the less exuberantly spiritual masses are to be maintained in their full bloom. As things now stand, the nation has absolutely nothing to safeguard it against religious progress.

We have seen, then, that Censorship is at least as necessary over Literature, Art, Science, and Religion as it is over our Drama. We have now to call attention to the crowning need—the want of a Censorship in Politics.

If Censorship be based on justice, if it be proved to serve the Public and to be successful in its lonely vigil over Drama, it should, and logically must be, extended to all parallel cases; it cannot, it dare not,

stop short at—Politics. For, precisely in this supreme branch of the public life are we most menaced by the rule and license of the leading spirit. To appreciate this fact, we need only examine the Constitution of the House of Commons. Six hundred and seventy persons chosen from a population numbering four and forty millions, must necessarily, whatever their individual defects, be citizens of more than average enterprise, resource, and resolution. They are elected for a period that may last five years. Many of them are ambitious; some uncompromising; not a few enthusiastically eager to do something for their country; filled with designs and aspirations for national or social betterment, with which the masses, sunk in the immediate pursuits of life, can in the nature of things have little sympathy. And yet we find these men licensed to pour forth at pleasure, before mixed audiences, checked only by Common Law and Common Sense political utterances which may have the gravest, the most terrific consequences; utterances which may at any moment let loose revolution, or plunge the country into war; which often, as a fact, excite an utter detestation, terror, and mistrust; or shock the most sacred domestic and proprietary convictions in the breasts of vast majorities of their fellow-countrymen! And we incur this appalling risk for the want of a single, or at the most, a handful of Censors, invested with a simple but limitless discretion to excise or to suppress entirely such political utterances as may seem to their private judgments calculated to cause pain or moral disturbance in the average man. The masses, it is true, have their protection and remedy against injudicious or inflammatory politicians in the Law and the so-called democratic process of election; but we have seen that theatre audiences have also the protection of the Law, and the remedy of boycott, and that in their case, this protection and this remedy are not deemed enough. What, then, shall we say of the case of Politics, where the dangers attending inflammatory or subversive utterance are greater a million fold, and the remedy a thousand times less expeditious?

Our Legislators have laid down Censorship as the basic principle of Justice underlying the civic rights of dramatists. Then, let "Censorship for all" be their motto, and this country no longer be ridden and destroyed by free Institutions! Let them not only establish forthwith Censorships of Literature, Art, Science, and Religion, but also place themselves beneath the regimen with which they have calmly fettered Dramatic Authors. They cannot deem it becoming to their regard for justice, to their honour; to their sense of humour, to recoil from a restriction which, in a parallel case they have imposed on others. It is an old and homely saying that good officers never place their men in positions they would not themselves be willing to fill. And we are not entitled to believe that our Legislators, having set Dramatic Authors where they have been set, will—now that their duty is made plain—for a moment hesitate to step down and stand alongside.

But if by any chance they should recoil, and thus make answer: "We are ready at all times to submit to the Law and the People's will, and to bow to their demands, but we cannot and must not be asked to place our calling, our duty, and our honour beneath the irresponsible rule of an arbitrary autocrat, however sympathetic with the generality he may chance to be!" Then, we would ask: "Sirs, did you ever hear of that great saying: 'Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you!'" For it is but fair presumption that the Dramatists, whom our Legislators have placed in bondage to a despot, are, no less than those Legislators, proud of their calling, conscious of their duty, and jealous of their honour. 1909.

VAGUE THOUGHTS ON ART

It was on a day of rare beauty that I went out into the fields to try and gather these few thoughts. So golden and sweetly hot it was, that they came lazily, and with a flight no more coherent or responsible than the swoop of the very swallows; and, as in a play or poem, the result is conditioned by the conceiving mood, so I knew would be the nature of my diving, dipping, pale-throated, fork-tailed words. But, after all—I thought, sitting there—I need not take my critical pronouncements seriously. I have not the firm soul of the critic. It is not my profession to know 'things for certain, and to make others feel that certainty. On the contrary, I am often wrong—a luxury no critic can afford. And so, invading as I was the realm of others, I advanced with a light pen, feeling that none, and least of all myself, need expect me to be right.

What then—I thought—is Art? For I perceived that to think about it I must first define it; and I almost stopped thinking at all before the fearsome nature of that task. Then slowly in my mind gathered this group of words:

Art is that imaginative expression of human energy, which, through technical concretion of feeling and perception, tends to reconcile the individual with the universal, by exciting in him impersonal

emotion. And the greatest Art is that which excites the greatest impersonal emotion in an hypothecated perfect human being.

Impersonal emotion! And what—I thought do I mean by that? Surely I mean: That is not Art, which, while I, am contemplating it, inspires me with any active or directive impulse; that is Art, when, for however brief a moment, it replaces within me interest in myself by interest in itself. For, let me suppose myself in the presence of a carved marble bath. If my thoughts be "What could I buy that for?" Impulse of acquisition; or: "From what quarry did it come?" Impulse of inquiry; or: "Which would be the right end for my head?" Mixed impulse of inquiry and acquisition—I am at that moment insensible to it as a work of Art. But, if I stand before it vibrating at sight of its colour and forms, if ever so little and for ever so short a time, unhaunted by any definite practical thought or impulse—to that extent and for that moment it has stolen me away out of myself and put itself there instead; has linked me to the universal by making me forget the individual in me. And for that moment, and only while that moment lasts, it is to me a work of Art. The word "impersonal," then, is but used in this my definition to signify momentary forgetfulness of one's own personality and its active wants.

So Art—I thought—is that which, heard, read, or looked on, while producing no directive impulse, warms one with unconscious vibration. Nor can I imagine any means of defining what is the greatest Art, without hypothecating a perfect human being. But since we shall never see, or know if we do see, that desirable creature—dogmatism is banished, "Academy" is dead to the discussion, deader than even Tolstoy left it after his famous treatise "What is Art?" For, having destroyed all the old Judges and Academies, Tolstoy, by saying that the greatest Art was that which appealed to the greatest number of living human beings, raised up the masses of mankind to be a definite new Judge or Academy, as tyrannical and narrow as ever were those whom he had destroyed.

This, at all events—I thought is as far as I dare go in defining what Art is. But let me try to make plain to myself what is the essential quality that gives to Art the power of exciting this unconscious vibration, this impersonal emotion. It has been called Beauty! An awkward word—a perpetual begging of the question; too current in use, too ambiguous altogether; now too narrow, now too wide—a word, in fact, too glib to know at all what it means. And how dangerous a word—often misleading us into slabbing with extraneous floridities what would otherwise, on its own plane, be Art! To be decorative where decoration is not suitable, to be lyrical where lyricism is out of place, is assuredly to spoil Art, not to achieve it. But this essential quality of Art has also, and more happily, been called Rhythm. And, what is Rhythm if not that mysterious harmony between part and part, and part and whole, which gives what is called life; that exact proportion, the mystery of which is best grasped in observing how life leaves an animate creature when the essential relation of part to whole has been sufficiently disturbed. And I agree that this rhythmic relation of part to part, and part to whole—in short, vitality—is the one quality inseparable from a work of Art. For nothing which does not seem to a man possessed of this rhythmic vitality, can ever steal him out of himself.

And having got thus far in my thoughts, I paused, watching the swallows; for they seemed to me the symbol, in their swift, sure curvetting, all daring and balance and surprise, of the delicate poise and motion of Art, that visits no two men alike, in a world where no two things of all the things there be, are quite the same.

Yes—I thought—and this Art is the one form of human energy in the whole world, which really works for union, and destroys the barriers between man and man. It is the continual, unconscious replacement, however fleeting, of oneself by another; the real cement of human life; the everlasting refreshment and renewal. For, what is grievous, dompting, grim, about our lives is that we are shut up within ourselves, with an itch to get outside ourselves. And to be stolen away from ourselves by Art is a momentary relaxation from that itching, a minute's profound, and as it were secret, enfranchisement. The active amusements and relaxations of life can only rest certain of our faculties, by indulging others; the whole self is never rested save through that unconsciousness of self, which comes through rapt contemplation of Nature or of Art.

And suddenly I remembered that some believe that Art does not produce unconsciousness of self, but rather very vivid self-realisation.

Ah! but—I thought—that is not the first and instant effect of Art; the new impetus is the after effect of that momentary replacement of oneself by the self of the work before us; it is surely the result of that brief span of enlargement, enfranchisement, and rest.

Yes, Art is the great and universal refreshment. For Art is never dogmatic; holds no brief for itself you may take it or you may leave it. It does not force itself rudely where it is not wanted. It is reverent to all tempers, to all points of view. But it is wilful—the very wind in the comings and goings of its influence, an uncapturable fugitive, visiting our hearts at vagrant, sweet moments; since we often stand even before the greatest works of Art without being able quite to lose ourselves! That restful oblivion comes,

we never quite know when—and it is gone! But when it comes, it is a spirit hovering with cool wings, blessing us from least to greatest, according to our powers; a spirit deathless and varied as human life itself.

And in what sort of age—I thought—are artists living now? Are conditions favourable? Life is very multiple; full of "movements," "facts," and "news"; with the limelight terribly turned on—and all this is adverse to the artist. Yet, leisure is abundant; the facilities for study great; Liberty is respected—more or less. But, there is one great reason why, in this age of ours, Art, it seems, must flourish. For, just as cross-breeding in Nature—if it be not too violent—often gives an extra vitality to the offspring, so does cross-breeding of philosophies make for vitality in Art. I cannot help thinking that historians, looking back from the far future, will record this age as the Third Renaissance. We who are lost in it, working or looking on, can neither tell what we are doing, nor where standing; but we cannot help observing, that, just as in the Greek Renaissance, worn-out Pagan orthodoxy was penetrated by new philosophy; just as in the Italian Renaissance, Pagan philosophy, reasserting itself, fertilised again an already too inbred Christian creed; so now Orthodoxy fertilised by Science is producing a fresh and fuller conception of life—a, love of Perfection, not for hope of reward, not for fear of punishment, but for Perfection's sake. Slowly, under our feet, beneath our consciousness, is forming that new philosophy, and it is in times of new philosophies that Art, itself in essence always a discovery, must flourish. Those whose sacred suns and moons are ever in the past, tell us that our Art is going to the dogs; and it is, indeed, true that we are in confusion! The waters are broken, and every nerve and sinew of the artist is strained to discover his own safety. It is an age of stir and change, a season of new wine and old bottles. Yet, assuredly, in spite of breakages and waste, a wine worth the drinking is all the time being made.

I ceased again to think, for the sun had dipped low, and the midges were biting me; and the sounds of evening had begun, those innumerable far-travelling sounds of man and bird and beast—so clear and intimate—of remote countrysides at sunset. And for long I listened, too vague to move my pen.

New philosophy—a vigorous Art! Are there not all the signs of it? In music, sculpture, painting; in fiction—and drama; in dancing; in criticism itself, if criticism be an Art. Yes, we are reaching out to a new faith not yet crystallised, to a new Art not yet perfected; the forms still to find—the flowers still to fashion!

And how has it come, this slowly growing faith in Perfection for Perfection's sake? Surely like this: The Western world awoke one day to find that it no longer believed corporately and for certain in future life for the individual consciousness. It began to feel: I cannot say more than that there may be—Death may be the end of man, or Death may be nothing. And it began to ask itself in this uncertainty: Do I then desire to go on living? Now, since it found that it desired to go on living at least as earnestly as ever it did before, it began to inquire why. And slowly it perceived that there was, inborn within it, a passionate instinct of which it had hardly till then been conscious—a sacred instinct to perfect itself, now, as well as in a possible hereafter; to perfect itself because Perfection was desirable, a vision to be adored, and striven for; a dream motive fastened within the Universe; the very essential Cause of everything. And it began to see that this Perfection, cosmically, was nothing but perfect Equanimity and Harmony; and in human relations, nothing but perfect Love and Justice. And Perfection began to glow before the eyes of the Western world like a new star, whose light touched with glamour all things as they came forth from Mystery, till to Mystery they were ready to return.

This—I thought is surely what the Western world has dimly been rediscovering. There has crept into our minds once more the feeling that the Universe is all of a piece, Equipose supreme; and all things equally wonderful, and mysterious, and valuable. We have begun, in fact, to have a glimmering of the artist's creed, that nothing may we despise or neglect—that everything is worth the doing well, the making fair—that our God, Perfection, is implicit everywhere, and the revelation of Him the business of our Art.

And as I jotted down these words I noticed that some real stars had crept up into the sky, so gradually darkening above the pollard lime-trees; cuckoos, who had been calling on the thorn-trees all the afternoon, were silent; the swallows no longer flirted past, but a bat was already in career over the holly hedge; and round me the buttercups were closing. The whole form and feeling of the world had changed, so that I seemed to have before me a new picture hanging.

Ah! I thought Art must indeed be priest of this new faith in Perfection, whose motto is: "Harmony, Proportion, Balance." For by Art alone can true harmony in human affairs be fostered, true Proportion revealed, and true Equipose preserved. Is not the training of an artist a training in the due relation of one thing with another, and in the faculty of expressing that relation clearly; and, even more, a training in the faculty of disengaging from self the very essence of self—and passing that essence into other selves by so delicate means that none shall see how it is done, yet be insensibly unified? Is not the

artist, of all men, foe and nullifier of partisanship and parochialism, of distortions and extravagance, the discoverer of that jack-o'-lantern—Truth; for, if Truth be not Spiritual Proportion I know not what it is. Truth it seems to me—is no absolute thing, but always relative, the essential symmetry in the varying relationships of life; and the most perfect truth is but the concrete expression of the most penetrating vision. Life seen throughout as a countless show of the finest works of Art; Life shaped, and purged of the irrelevant, the gross, and the extravagant; Life, as it were, spiritually selected—that is Truth; a thing as multiple, and changing, as subtle, and strange, as Life itself, and as little to be bound by dogma. Truth admits but the one rule: No deficiency, and no excess! Disobedient to that rule—nothing attains full vitality. And secretly fettered by that rule is Art, whose business is the creation of vital things.

That aesthete, to be sure, was right, when he said: "It is Style that makes one believe in a thing; nothing but Style." For, what is Style in its true and broadest sense save fidelity to idea and mood, and perfect balance in the clothing of them? And I thought: Can one believe in the decadence of Art in an age which, however unconsciously as yet, is beginning to worship that which Art worships—Perfection-Style?

The faults of our Arts to-day are the faults of zeal and of adventure, the faults and crudities of pioneers, the errors and mishaps of the explorer. They must pass through many fevers, and many times lose their way; but at all events they shall not go dying in their beds, and be buried at Kensal Green. And, here and there, amid the disasters and wreckage of their voyages of discovery, they will find something new, some fresh way of embellishing life, or of revealing the heart of things. That characteristic of to-day's Art—the striving of each branch of Art to burst its own boundaries—which to many spells destruction, is surely of happy omen. The novel straining to become the play, the play the novel, both trying to paint; music striving to become story; poetry gasping to be music; painting panting to be philosophy; forms, canons, rules, all melting in the pot; stagnation broken up! In all this havoc there is much to shock and jar even the most eager and adventurous. We cannot stand these new-fangled fellows! They have no form! They rush in where angels fear to tread. They have lost all the good of the old, and given us nothing in its place! And yet—only out of stir and change is born new salvation. To deny that is to deny belief in man, to turn our backs on courage! It is well, indeed, that some should live in closed studies with the paintings and the books of yesterday—such devoted students serve Art in their own way. But the fresh-air world will ever want new forms. We shall not get them without faith enough to risk the old! The good will live, the bad will die; and tomorrow only can tell us which is which!

Yes—I thought—we naturally take a too impatient view of the Art of our own time, since we can neither see the ends toward which it is almost blindly groping, nor the few perfected creations that will be left standing amidst the rubble of abortive effort. An age must always decry itself and extol its forbears. The unwritten history of every Art will show us that. Consider the novel—that most recent form of Art! Did not the age which followed Fielding lament the treachery of authors to the Picaresque tradition, complaining that they were not as Fielding and Smollett were? Be sure they did. Very slowly and in spite of opposition did the novel attain in this country the fulness of that biographical form achieved under Thackeray. Very slowly, and in face of condemnation, it has been losing that form in favour of a greater vividness which places before the reader's brain, not historical statements, as it were, of motives and of facts, but word-paintings of things and persons, so chosen and arranged that the reader may see, as if at first hand, the spirit of Life at work before him. The new novel has as many bemoaners as the old novel had when it was new. It is no question of better or worse, but of differing forms—of change dictated by gradual suitability to the changing conditions of our social life, and to the ever fresh discoveries of craftsmen, in the intoxication of which, old and equally worthy craftsmanship is—by the way—too often for the moment mislaid. The vested interests of life favour the line of least resistance—disliking and revolting against disturbance; but one must always remember that a spurious glamour is inclined to gather around what is new. And, because of these two deflecting factors, those who break through old forms must well expect to be dead before the new forms they have unconsciously created have found their true level, high or low, in the world of Art. When a thing is new how shall it be judged? In the fluster of meeting novelty, we have even seen coherence attempting to bind together two personalities so fundamentally opposed as those of Ibsen and Bernard Shaw dramatists with hardly a quality in common; no identity of tradition, or belief; not the faintest resemblance in methods of construction or technique. Yet contemporary; estimate talks of them often in the same breath. They are new! It is enough. And others, as utterly unlike them both. They too are new. They have as yet no label of their own then put on some one else's!

And so—I thought it must always be; for Time is essential to the proper placing and estimate of all Art. And is it not this feeling, that contemporary judgments are apt to turn out a little ludicrous, which has converted much criticism of late from judgment pronounced into impression recorded—recreative statement—a kind, in fact, of expression of the critic's self, elicited through contemplation of a book, a

play, a symphony, a picture? For this kind of criticism there has even recently been claimed an actual identity with creation. Esthetic judgment and creative power identical! That is a hard saying. For, however sympathetic one may feel toward this new criticism, however one may recognise that the recording of impression has a wider, more elastic, and more lasting value than the delivery of arbitrary judgment based on rigid laws of taste; however one may admit that it approaches the creative gift in so far as it demands the qualities of receptivity and reproduction—is there not still lacking to this "new" critic something of that thirsting spirit of discovery, which precedes the creation—hitherto so-called—of anything? Criticism, taste, aesthetic judgment, by the very nature of their task, wait till life has been focussed by the artists before they attempt to reproduce the image which that imprisoned fragment of life makes on the mirror of their minds. But a thing created springs from a germ unconsciously implanted by the direct impact of unfettered life on the whole range, of the creator's temperament; and round the germ thus engendered, the creative artist—ever penetrating, discovering, selecting—goes on building cell on cell, gathered from a million little fresh impacts and visions. And to say that this is also exactly what the recreative critic does, is to say that the interpretative musician is creator in the same sense as is the composer of the music that he interprets. If, indeed, these processes be the same in kind, they are in degree so far apart that one would think the word creative unfortunately used of both....

But this speculation—I thought—is going beyond the bounds of vagueness. Let there be some thread of coherence in your thoughts, as there is in the progress of this evening, fast fading into night. Return to the consideration of the nature and purposes of Art! And recognize that much of what you have thought will seem on the face of it heresy to the school whose doctrine was incarnated by Oscar Wilde in that admirable apotheosis of half-truths: "The Decay of the Art of Lying." For therein he said: "No great artist ever sees things as they really are." Yet, that half-truth might also be put thus: The seeing of things as they really are—the seeing of a proportion veiled from other eyes (together with the power of expression), is what makes a man an artist. What makes him a great artist is a high fervour of spirit, which produces a superlative, instead of a comparative, clarity of vision.

Close to my house there is a group of pines with gnarled red limbs flanked by beech-trees. And there is often a very deep blue sky behind. Generally, that is all I see. But, once in a way, in those trees against that sky I seem to see all the passionate life and glow that Titian painted into his pagan pictures. I have a vision of mysterious meaning, of a mysterious relation between that sky and those trees with their gnarled red limbs and Life as I know it. And when I have had that vision I always feel, this is reality, and all those other times, when I have no such vision, simple unreality. If I were a painter, it is for such fervent vision I should wait, before moving brush: This, so intimate, inner vision of reality, indeed, seems in duller moments well-nigh grotesque; and hence that other glib half-truth: "Art is greater than Life itself." Art is, indeed, greater than Life in the sense that the power of Art is the disengagement from Life of its real spirit and significance. But in any other sense, to say that Art is greater than Life from which it emerges, and into which it must remerge, can but suspend the artist over Life, with his feet in the air and his head in the clouds—Prig masquerading as Demi-god. "Nature is no great Mother who has borne us. She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life." Such is the highest hyperbole of the aesthetic creed. But what is creative instinct, if not an incessant living sympathy with Nature, a constant craving like that of Nature's own, to fashion something new out of all that comes within the grasp of those faculties with which Nature has endowed us? The qualities of vision, of fancy, and of imaginative power, are no more divorced from Nature, than are the qualities of common-sense and courage. They are rarer, that is all. But in truth, no one holds such views. Not even those who utter them. They are the rhetoric, the over-statement of half-truths, by such as wish to condemn what they call "Realism," without being temperamentally capable of understanding what "Realism" really is.

And what—I thought—is Realism? What is the meaning of that word so wildly used? Is it descriptive of technique, or descriptive of the spirit of the artist; or both, or neither? Was Turgenev a realist? No greater poet ever wrote in prose, nor any one who more closely brought the actual shapes of men and things before us. No more fervent idealists than Ibsen and Tolstoy ever lived; and none more careful to make their people real. Were they realists? No more deeply fantastic writer can I conceive than Dostoevsky, nor any who has described actual situations more vividly. Was he a realist? The late Stephen Crane was called a realist. Than whom no more impressionistic writer ever painted with words. What then is the heart of this term still often used as an expression almost of abuse? To me, at all events—I thought—the words realism, realistic, have no longer reference to technique, for which the words naturalism, naturalistic, serve far better. Nor have they to do with the question of imaginative power—as much demanded by realism as by romanticism. For me, a realist is by no means tied to naturalistic technique—he may be poetic, idealistic, fantastic, impressionistic, anything but—romantic; that, in so far as he is a realist, he cannot be. The word, in fact, characterises that artist whose temperamental preoccupation is with revelation of the actual inter-relating spirit of life, character, and thought, with a view to enlighten himself and others; as distinguished from that artist whom I call

romantic—whose temperamental purpose is invention of tale or design with a view to delight himself and others. It is a question of temperamental antecedent motive in the artist, and nothing more.

Realist—Romanticist! Enlightenment—Delight! That is the true apposition. To make a revelation—to tell a fairy-tale! And either of these artists may use what form he likes—naturalistic, fantastic, poetic, impressionistic. For it is not by the form, but by the purpose and mood of his art that he shall be known, as one or as the other. Realists indeed—including the half of Shakespeare that was realist not being primarily concerned to amuse their audience, are still comparatively unpopular in a world made up for the greater part of men of action, who instinctively reject all art that does not distract them without causing them to think. For thought makes demands on an energy already in full use; thought causes introspection; and introspection causes discomfort, and disturbs the grooves of action. To say that the object of the realist is to enlighten rather than to delight, is not to say that in his art the realist is not amusing himself as much as ever is the teller of a fairy-tale, though he does not deliberately start out to do so; he is amusing, too, a large part of mankind. For, admitted that the object, and the test of Art, is always the awakening of vibration, of impersonal emotion, it is still usually forgotten that men fall, roughly speaking, into two flocks: Those whose intelligence is uninquiring in the face of Art, and does not demand to be appeased before their emotions can be stirred; and those who, having a speculative bent of mind, must first be satisfied by an enlightening quality in a work of Art, before that work of Art can awaken in them feeling. The audience of the realist is drawn from this latter type of man; the much larger audience of the romantic artist from the former; together with, in both cases, those fastidious few for whom all Art is style and only style, and who welcome either kind, so long as it is good enough.

To me, then—I thought—this division into Realism and Romance, so understood, is the main cleavage in all the Arts; but it is hard to find pure examples of either kind. For even the most determined realist has more than a streak in him of the romanticist, and the most resolute romanticist finds it impossible at times to be quite unreal. Guido Reni, Watteau, Leighton were they not perhaps somewhat pure romanticists; Rembrandt, Hogarth, Manet mainly realists; Botticelli, Titian, Raphael, a blend. Dumas pere, and Scott, surely romantic; Flaubert and Tolstoy as surely realists; Dickens and Cervantes, blended. Keats and Swinburne romantic; Browning and Whitman—realistic; Shakespeare and Goethe, both. The Greek dramatists—realists. The Arabian Nights and Malory romantic. The Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Old Testament, both realism and romance. And if in the vagueness of my thoughts I were to seek for illustration less general and vague to show the essence of this temperamental cleavage in all Art, I would take the two novelists Turgenev and Stevenson. For Turgenev expressed himself in stories that must be called romances, and Stevenson employed almost always a naturalistic technique. Yet no one would ever call Turgenev a romanticist, or Stevenson a realist. The spirit of the first brooded over life, found in it a perpetual voyage of spiritual adventure, was set on discovering and making clear to himself and all, the varying traits and emotions of human character—the varying moods of Nature; and though he couched all this discovery in caskets of engaging story, it was always clear as day what mood it was that drove him to dip pen in ink. The spirit of the second, I think, almost dreaded to discover; he felt life, I believe, too keenly to want to probe into it; he spun his gossamer to lure himself and all away from life. That was his driving mood; but the craftsman in him, longing to be clear and poignant, made him more natural, more actual than most realists.

So, how thin often is the hedge! And how poor a business the partisan abuse of either kind of art in a world where each sort of mind has full right to its own due expression, and grumbling lawful only when due expression is not attained. One may not care for a Rembrandt portrait of a plain old woman; a graceful Watteau decoration may leave another cold but foolish will he be who denies that both are faithful to their conceiving moods, and so proportioned part to part, and part to whole, as to have, each in its own way, that inherent rhythm or vitality which is the hall-mark of Art. He is but a poor philosopher who holds a view so narrow as to exclude forms not to his personal taste. No realist can love romantic Art so much as he loves his own, but when that Art fulfils the laws of its peculiar being, if he would be no blind partisan, he must admit it. The romanticist will never be amused by realism, but let him not for that reason be so parochial as to think that realism, when it achieves vitality, is not Art. For what is Art but the perfected expression of self in contact with the world; and whether that self be of enlightening, or of fairy-telling temperament, is of no moment whatsoever. The tossing of abuse from realist to romanticist and back is but the sword-play of two one-eyed men with their blind side turned toward each other. Shall not each attempt be judged on its own merits? If found not shoddy, faked, or forced, but true to itself, true to its conceiving mood, and fair-proportioned part to whole; so that it lives—then, realistic or romantic, in the name of Fairness let it pass! Of all kinds of human energy, Art is surely the most free, the least parochial; and demands of us an essential tolerance of all its forms. Shall we waste breath and ink in condemnation of artists, because their temperaments are not our own?

But the shapes and colours of the day were now all blurred; every tree and stone entangled in the

dusk. How different the world seemed from that in which I had first sat down, with the swallows flirting past. And my mood was different; for each of those worlds had brought to my heart its proper feeling—painted on my eyes the just picture. And Night, that was coming, would bring me yet another mood that would frame itself with consciousness at its own fair moment, and hang before me. A quiet owl stole by in the geld below, and vanished into the heart of a tree. And suddenly above the moor-line I saw the large moon rising. Cinnamon-coloured, it made all things swim, made me uncertain of my thoughts, vague with mazy feeling. Shapes seemed but drifts of moon-dust, and true reality nothing save a sort of still listening to the wind. And for long I sat, just watching the moon creep up, and hearing the thin, dry rustle of the leaves along the holly hedge. And there came to me this thought: What is this Universe—that never had beginning and will never have an end—but a myriad striving to perfect pictures never the same, so blending and fading one into another, that all form one great perfected picture? And what are we—ripples on the tides of a birthless, deathless, equipoised Creative-Purpose—but little works of Art?

Trying to record that thought, I noticed that my note-book was damp with dew. The cattle were lying down. It was too dark to see. 1911

THE END.

THE COMPLETE PLAYS OF JOHN GALSWORTHY

CONTENTS:

First Series:

The Silver Box
Joy
Strife

Second Series:

The Eldest Son
The Little Dream
Justice

Third Series:

The Fugitive
The Pigeon
The Mob

Fourth Series:

A Bit O' Love
The Foundations
The Skin Game

Six Short Plays:

The First and The Last
The Little Man
Hall-marked
Defeat
The Sun
Punch and Go

Fifth Series:

A Family Man

FIRST SERIES:

THE SILVER BOX JOY STRIFE

THE SILVER BOX

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JOHN BARTHWICK, M.P., a wealthy Liberal

MRS. BARTHWICK, his wife

JACK BARTHWICK, their son

ROPER, their solicitor

MRS. JONES, their charwoman

MARLOW, their manservant

WHEELER, their maidservant

JONES, the stranger within their gates

MRS. SEDDON, a landlady

SNOW, a detective

A POLICE MAGISTRATE

AN UNKNOWN LADY, from beyond

TWO LITTLE GIRLS, homeless

LIVENS, their father

A RELIEVING OFFICER

A MAGISTRATE'S CLERK

AN USHER

POLICEMEN, CLERKS, AND OTHERS

TIME: The present. The action of the first two Acts takes place on Easter Tuesday; the action of the third on Easter Wednesday week.

ACT I. SCENE I. Rockingham Gate. John Barthwick's dining-room. SCENE II. The same. SCENE III. The same.

ACT II. SCENE I. The Jones's lodgings, Merthyr Street. SCENE II. John Barthwick's dining-room.

ACT III. A London police court.

ACT I

SCENE I

The curtain rises on the BARTHWICK'S dining-room, large, modern, and well furnished; the window curtains drawn. Electric light is burning. On the large round dining-table is set out a tray with whisky, a syphon, and a silver cigarette-box. It is past midnight.

A fumbling is heard outside the door. It is opened suddenly; JACK BARTHWICK seems to fall into the room. He stands holding by the door knob, staring before him, with a beatific smile. He is in evening dress and opera hat, and carries in his hand a sky-blue velvet lady's reticule. His boyish face is freshly coloured and clean-shaven. An overcoat is hanging on his arm.

JACK. Hello! I've got home all ri—[Defiantly.] Who says I sh'd never 've opened th' door without 'sistance. [He staggers in, fumbling with the reticule. A lady's handkerchief and purse of crimson silk fall out.] Serve her joll' well right—everything droppin' out. Th' cat. I 've scored her off—I 've got her bag. [He swings the reticule.] Serves her joly' well right. [He takes a cigarette out of the silver box and puts it in his mouth.] Never gave tha' fellow anything! [He hunts through all his pockets and pulls a shilling out; it drops and rolls away. He looks for it.] Beastly shilling! [He looks again.] Base ingratitude! Absolutely nothing. [He laughs.] Mus' tell him I've got absolutely nothing.

[He lurches through the door and down a corridor, and presently returns, followed by JONES, who is advanced in liquor. JONES, about thirty years of age, has hollow cheeks, black circles round his eyes, and rusty clothes: He looks as though he might be unemployed, and enters in a hang-dog manner.]

JACK. Sh! sh! sh! Don't you make a noise, whatever you do. Shu' the door, an' have a drink. [Very solemnly.] You helped me to open the door—I 've got nothin, for you. This is my house. My father's name's Barthwick; he's Member of Parliament—Liberal Member of Parliament: I've told you that before. Have a drink! [He pours out whisky and drinks it up.] I'm not drunk [Subsiding on a sofa.] Tha's all right. Wha's your name? My name's Barthwick, so's my father's; I'm a Liberal too—wha're you?

JONES. [In a thick, sardonic voice.] I'm a bloomin' Conservative. My name's Jones! My wife works 'ere; she's the char; she works 'ere.

JACK. Jones? [He laughs.] There's 'nother Jones at College with me. I'm not a Socialist myself; I'm a Liberal—there's ve—lill difference, because of the principles of the Lib—Liberal Party. We're all equal before the law—tha's rot, tha's silly. [Laughs.] Wha' was I about to say? Give me some whisky.

[JONES gives him the whisky he desires, together with a squirt of syphon.]

Wha' I was goin' tell you was—I 've had a row with her. [He waves the reticule.] Have a drink, Jonessh 'd never have got in without you—tha 's why I 'm giving you a drink. Don' care who knows I've scored her off. Th' cat! [He throws his feet up on the sofa.] Don' you make a noise, whatever you do. You pour out a drink—you make yourself good long, long drink—you take cigarette—you take anything you like. Sh'd never have got in without you. [Closing his eyes.] You're a Tory—you're a Tory Socialist. I'm Liberal myself—have a drink—I 'm an excel'nt chap.

[His head drops back. He, smiling, falls asleep, and JONES stands looking at him; then, snatching up JACK's glass, he drinks it off. He picks the reticule from off JACK'S shirt-front, holds it to the light, and smells at it.]

JONES. Been on the tiles and brought 'ome some of yer cat's fur.
[He stuffs it into JACK's breast pocket.]

JACK. [Murmuring.] I 've scored you off! You cat!

[JONES looks around him furtively; he pours out whisky and drinks it. From the silver box he takes a cigarette, puffs at it, and drinks more whisky. There is no sobriety left in him.]

JONES. Fat lot o' things they've got 'ere! [He sees the crimson purse lying on the floor.] More cat's fur. Puss, puss! [He fingers it, drops it on the tray, and looks at JACK.] Calf! Fat calf! [He sees his own presentment in a mirror. Lifting his hands, with fingers spread, he stares at it; then looks again at JACK, clenching his fist as if to batter in his sleeping, smiling face. Suddenly he tilts the rest o f the whisky into the glass and drinks it. With cunning glee he takes the silver box and purse and pockets them.] I 'll score you off too, that 's wot I 'll do!

[He gives a little snarling laugh and lurches to the door. His shoulder rubs against the switch; the light goes out. There is a sound as of a closing outer door.]

The curtain falls.

The curtain rises again at once.

SCENE II

In the BARTHWICK'S dining-room. JACK is still asleep; the morning light is coming through the curtains. The time is half-past eight. WHEELER, brisk person enters with a dust-pan, and MRS. JONES more slowly with a scuttle.

WHEELER. [Drawing the curtains.] That precious husband of yours was round for you after you'd gone yesterday, Mrs. Jones. Wanted your money for drink, I suppose. He hangs about the corner here half the time. I saw him outside the "Goat and Bells" when I went to the post last night. If I were you I would n't live with him. I would n't live with a man that raised his hand to me. I wouldn't put up with it. Why don't you take your children and leave him? If you put up with 'im it'll only make him worse. I never can see why, because a man's married you, he should knock you about.

MRS. JONES. [Slim, dark-eyed, and dark-haired; oval-faced, and with a smooth, soft, even voice; her manner patient, her way of talking quite impersonal; she wears a blue linen dress, and boots with holes.] It was nearly two last night before he come home, and he wasn't himself. He made me get up, and he knocked me about; he didn't seem to know what he was saying or doing. Of course I would leave him, but I'm really afraid of what he'd do to me. He 's such a violent man when he's not himself.

WHEELER. Why don't you get him locked up? You'll never have any peace until you get him locked up. If I were you I'd go to the police court tomorrow. That's what I would do.

MRS. JONES. Of course I ought to go, because he does treat me so badly when he's not himself. But you see, Bettina, he has a very hard time—he 's been out of work two months, and it preys upon his mind. When he's in work he behaves himself much better. It's when he's out of work that he's so violent.

WHEELER. Well, if you won't take any steps you 'll never get rid of him.

MRS. JONES. Of course it's very wearing to me; I don't get my sleep at nights. And it 's not as if I were getting help from him, because I have to do for the children and all of us. And he throws such dreadful things up at me, talks of my having men to follow me about. Such a thing never happens; no man ever speaks to me. And of course, it's just the other way. It's what he does that's wrong and makes me so unhappy. And then he 's always threatenin' to cut my throat if I leave him. It's all the drink, and things preying on his mind; he 's not a bad man really. Sometimes he'll speak quite kind to me, but I've stood so much from him, I don't feel it in me to speak kind back, but just keep myself to myself. And he's all right with the children too, except when he's not himself.

WHEELER. You mean when he's drunk, the beauty.

MRS. JONES. Yes. [Without change of voice] There's the young gentleman asleep on the sofa.

[They both look silently at Jack.]

MRS. JONES. [At last, in her soft voice.] He does n't look quite himself.

WHEELER. He's a young limb, that's what he is. It 's my belief he was tipsy last night, like your husband. It 's another kind of bein' out of work that sets him to drink. I 'll go and tell Marlow. This is his job.

[She goes.]

[Mrs. Jones, upon her knees, begins a gentle sweeping.]

JACK. [Waking.] Who's there? What is it?

MRS. JONES. It's me, sir, Mrs. Jones.

JACK. [Sitting up and looking round.] Where is it—what—what time is it?

MRS. JONES. It's getting on for nine o'clock, sir.

JACK. For nine! Why—what! [Rising, and loosening his tongue; putting hands to his head, and staring hard at Mrs. Jones.] Look here, you, Mrs.—Mrs. Jones—don't you say you caught me asleep here.

MRS. JONES. No, sir, of course I won't sir.

JACK. It's quite an accident; I don't know how it happened. I must have forgotten to go to bed. It's a

queer thing. I 've got a most beastly headache. Mind you don't say anything, Mrs. Jones.

[Goes out and passes MARLOW in the doorway. MARLOW is young and quiet; he is cleanshaven, and his hair is brushed high from his forehead in a coxcomb. Incidentally a butler, he is first a man. He looks at MRS. JONES, and smiles a private smile.]

MARLOW. Not the first time, and won't be the last. Looked a bit dicky, eh, Mrs. Jones?

MRS. JONES. He did n't look quite himself. Of course I did n't take notice.

MARLOW. You're used to them. How's your old man?

MRS. JONES. [Softly as throughout.] Well, he was very bad last night; he did n't seem to know what he was about. He was very late, and he was most abusive. But now, of course, he's asleep.

MARLOW. That's his way of finding a job, eh?

MRS. JONES. As a rule, Mr. Marlow, he goes out early every morning looking for work, and sometimes he comes in fit to drop—and of course I can't say he does n't try to get it, because he does. Trade's very bad. [She stands quite still, her fan and brush before her, at the beginning and the end of long vistas of experience, traversing them with her impersonal eye.] But he's not a good husband to me—last night he hit me, and he was so dreadfully abusive.

MARLOW. Bank 'oliday, eh! He 's too fond of the "Goat and Bells," that's what's the matter with him. I see him at the corner late every night. He hangs about.

MRS. JONES. He gets to feeling very low walking about all day after work, and being refused so often, and then when he gets a drop in him it goes to his head. But he shouldn't treat his wife as he treats me. Sometimes I 've had to go and walk about at night, when he wouldn't let me stay in the room; but he's sorry for it afterwards. And he hangs about after me, he waits for me in the street; and I don't think he ought to, because I 've always been a good wife to him. And I tell him Mrs. Barthwick wouldn't like him coming about the place. But that only makes him angry, and he says dreadful things about the gentry. Of course it was through me that he first lost his place, through his not treating me right; and that's made him bitter against the gentry. He had a very good place as groom in the country; but it made such a stir, because of course he did n't treat me right.

MARLOW. Got the sack?

MRS. JONES. Yes; his employer said he couldn't keep him, because there was a great deal of talk; and he said it was such a bad example. But it's very important for me to keep my work here; I have the three children, and I don't want him to come about after me in the streets, and make a disturbance as he sometimes does.

MARLOW. [Holding up the empty decanter.] Not a drain! Next time he hits you get a witness and go down to the court—

MRS. JONES. Yes, I think I 've made up my mind. I think I ought to.

MARLOW. That's right. Where's the ciga—?

[He searches for the silver box; he looks at MRS. JONES, who is sweeping on her hands and knees; he checks himself and stands reflecting. From the tray he picks two half-smoked cigarettes, and reads the name on them.]

Nestor—where the deuce—?

[With a meditative air he looks again at MRS. JONES, and, taking up JACK'S overcoat, he searches in the pockets. WHEELER, with a tray of breakfast things, comes in.]

MARLOW. [Aside to WHEELER.] Have you seen the cigarette-box?

WHEELER. No.

MARLOW. Well, it's gone. I put it on the tray last night. And he's been smoking. [Showing her the ends of cigarettes.] It's not in these pockets. He can't have taken it upstairs this morning! Have a good look in his room when he comes down. Who's been in here?

WHEELER. Only me and Mrs. Jones.

MRS. JONES. I 've finished here; shall I do the drawing-room now?

WHEELER. [Looking at her doubtfully.] Have you seen——Better do the boudwower first.

[MRS. JONES goes out with pan and brush. MARLOW and WHEELER look each other in the face.]

MARLOW. It'll turn up.

WHEELER. [Hesitating.] You don't think she——
[Nodding at the door.]

MARLOW. [Stoutly.] I don't——I never believes anything of anybody.

WHEELER. But the master'll have to be told.

MARLOW. You wait a bit, and see if it don't turn up. Suspicion's no business of ours. I set my mind against it.

The curtain falls.

The curtain rises again at once.

SCENE III

BARTHWICK and MRS. BARTHWICK are seated at the breakfast table. He is a man between fifty and sixty; quietly important, with a bald forehead, and pince-nez, and the "Times" in his hand. She is a lady of nearly fifty, well dressed, with greyish hair, good features, and a decided manner. They face each other.

BARTHWICK. [From behind his paper.] The Labour man has got in at the by-election for Barnside, my dear.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Another Labour? I can't think what on earth the country is about.

BARTHWICK. I predicted it. It's not a matter of vast importance.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Not? How can you take it so calmly, John? To me it's simply outrageous. And there you sit, you Liberals, and pretend to encourage these people!

BARTHWICK. [Frowning.] The representation of all parties is necessary for any proper reform, for any proper social policy.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I've no patience with your talk of reform—all that nonsense about social policy. We know perfectly well what it is they want; they want things for themselves. Those Socialists and Labour men are an absolutely selfish set of people. They have no sense of patriotism, like the upper classes; they simply want what we've got.

BARTHWICK. Want what we've got! [He stares into space.] My dear, what are you talking about? [With a contortion.] I 'm no alarmist.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Cream? Quite uneducated men! Wait until they begin to tax our investments. I 'm convinced that when they once get a chance they will tax everything—they 've no feeling for the country. You Liberals and Conservatives, you 're all alike; you don't see an inch before your noses. You've no imagination, not a scrap of imagination between you. You ought to join hands and nip it in the bud.

BARTHWICK. You 're talking nonsense! How is it possible for Liberals and Conservatives to join hands, as you call it? That shows how absurd it is for women——Why, the very essence of a Liberal is to trust in the people!

MRS. BARTHWICK. Now, John, eat your breakfast. As if there were any real difference between you and the Conservatives. All the upper classes have the same interests to protect, and the same principles. [Calmly.] Oh! you're sitting upon a volcano, John.

BARTHWICK. What!

MRS. BARTHWICK. I read a letter in the paper yesterday. I forget the man's name, but it made the whole thing perfectly clear. You don't look things in the face.

BARTHWICK. Indeed! [Heavily.] I am a Liberal! Drop the subject, please!

MRS. BARTHWICK. Toast? I quite agree with what this man says: Education is simply ruining the lower classes. It unsettles them, and that's the worst thing for us all. I see an enormous difference in the manner of servants.

BARTHWICK, [With suspicious emphasis.] I welcome any change that will lead to something better. [He opens a letter.] H'm! This is that affair of Master Jack's again. "High Street, Oxford. Sir, We have received Mr. John Barthwick, Senior's, draft for forty pounds!" Oh! the letter's to him! "We now enclose the cheque you cashed with us, which, as we stated in our previous letter, was not met on presentation at your bank. We are, Sir, yours obediently, Moss and Sons, Tailors." H 'm! [Staring at the cheque.] A pretty business altogether! The boy might have been prosecuted.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Come, John, you know Jack did n't mean anything; he only thought he was overdrawing. I still think his bank ought to have cashed that cheque. They must know your position.

BARTHWICK. [Replacing in the envelope the letter and the cheque.]
Much good that would have done him in a court of law.

[He stops as JACK comes in, fastening his waistcoat and
staunching a razor cut upon his chin.]

JACK. [Sitting down between them, and speaking with an artificial joviality.] Sorry I 'm late. [He looks lugubriously at the dishes.] Tea, please, mother. Any letters for me? [BARTHWICK hands the letter to him.] But look here, I say, this has been opened! I do wish you would n't—

BARTHWICK. [Touching the envelope.] I suppose I 'm entitled to this name.

JACK. [Sulkily.] Well, I can't help having your name, father! [He reads the letter, and mutters.] Brutes!

BARTHWICK. [Eyeing him.] You don't deserve to be so well out of that.

JACK. Haven't you ragged me enough, dad?

MRS. BARTHWICK. Yes, John, let Jack have his breakfast.

BARTHWICK. If you hadn't had me to come to, where would you have been? It's the merest accident—suppose you had been the son of a poor man or a clerk. Obtaining money with a cheque you knew your bank could not meet. It might have ruined you for life. I can't see what's to become of you if these are your principles. I never did anything of the sort myself.

JACK. I expect you always had lots of money. If you've got plenty of money, of course—

BARTHWICK. On the contrary, I had not your advantages. My father kept me very short of money.

JACK. How much had you, dad?

BARTHWICK. It's not material. The question is, do you feel the gravity of what you did?

JACK. I don't know about the gravity. Of course, I 'm very sorry if you think it was wrong. Have n't I said so! I should never have done it at all if I had n't been so jolly hard up.

BARTHWICK. How much of that forty pounds have you got left, Jack?

JACK. [Hesitating.] I don't know—not much.

BARTHWICK. How much?

JACK. [Desperately.] I have n't got any.

BARTHWICK. What?

JACK. I know I 've got the most beastly headache.

[He leans his head on his hand.]

MRS. BARTHWICK. Headache? My dear boy! Can't you eat any breakfast?

JACK. [Drawing in his breath.] Too jolly bad!

MRS. BARTHWICK. I'm so sorry. Come with me; dear; I'll give you something that will take it away at once.

[They leave the room; and BARTHWICK, tearing up the letter, goes to the fireplace and puts the pieces in the fire. While he is doing this MARLOW comes in, and looking round him, is about quietly to withdraw.]

BARTHWICK. What's that? What d 'you want?

MARLOW. I was looking for Mr. John, sir.

BARTHWICK. What d' you want Mr. John for?

MARLOW. [With hesitation.] I thought I should find him here, sir.

BARTHWICK. [Suspiciously.] Yes, but what do you want him for?

MARLOW. [Offhandedly.] There's a lady called—asked to speak to him for a minute, sir.

BARTHWICK. A lady, at this time in the morning. What sort of a lady?

MARLOW. [Without expression in his voice.] I can't tell, sir; no particular sort. She might be after charity. She might be a Sister of Mercy, I should think, sir.

BARTHWICK. Is she dressed like one?

MARLOW. No, sir, she's in plain clothes, sir.

BARTHWICK. Did n't she say what she wanted?

MARLOW. No sir.

BARTHWICK. Where did you leave her?

MARLOW. In the hall, sir.

BARTHWICK. In the hall? How do you know she's not a thief—not got designs on the house?

MARLOW. No, sir, I don't fancy so, sir.

BARTHWICK. Well, show her in here; I'll see her myself.

[MARLOW goes out with a private gesture of dismay. He soon returns, ushering in a young pale lady with dark eyes and pretty figure, in a modish, black, but rather shabby dress, a black and white trimmed hat with a bunch of Parma violets wrongly placed, and fuzzy-spotted veil. At the Sight of MR. BARTHWICK she exhibits every sign of nervousness. MARLOW goes out.]

UNKNOWN LADY. Oh! but—I beg pardon there's some mistake—I [She turns to fly.]

BARTHWICK. Whom did you want to see, madam?

UNKNOWN. [Stopping and looking back.] It was Mr. John Barthwick I wanted to see.

BARTHWICK. I am John Barthwick, madam. What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?

UNKNOWN. Oh! I—I don't [She drops her eyes. BARTHWICK scrutinises her, and purses his lips.]

BARTHWICK. It was my son, perhaps, you wished to see?

UNKNOWN. [Quickly.] Yes, of course, it's your son.

BARTHWICK. May I ask whom I have the pleasure of speaking to?

UNKNOWN. [Appeal and hardness upon her face.] My name is—oh! it does n't matter—I don't want to make any fuss. I just want to see your son for a minute. [Boldly.] In fact, I must see him.

BARTHWICK. [Controlling his uneasiness.] My son is not very well. If necessary, no doubt I could attend to the matter; be so kind as to let me know—

UNKNOWN. Oh! but I must see him—I 've come on purpose—[She bursts out nervously.] I don't want

to make any fuss, but the fact is, last—last night your son took away—he took away my [She stops.]

BARTHWICK. [Severely.] Yes, madam, what?

UNKNOWN. He took away my—my reticule.

BARTHWICK. Your reti—?

UNKNOWN. I don't care about the reticule; it's not that I want—I 'm sure I don't want to make any fuss—[her face is quivering]—but —but—all my money was in it!

BARTHWICK. In what—in what?

UNKNOWN. In my purse, in the reticule. It was a crimson silk purse. Really, I wouldn't have come—I don't want to make any fuss. But I must get my money back—mustn't I?

BARTHWICK. Do you tell me that my son—?

UNKNOWN. Oh! well, you see, he was n't quite I mean he was

[She smiles mesmerically.]

BARTHWICK. I beg your pardon.

UNKNOWN. [Stamping her foot.] Oh! don't you see—tipsy! We had a quarrel.

BARTHWICK. [Scandalised.] How? Where?

UNKNOWN. [Defiantly.] At my place. We'd had supper at the—and your son—

BARTHWICK. [Pressing the bell.] May I ask how you knew this house? Did he give you his name and address?

UNKNOWN. [Glancing sidelong.] I got it out of his overcoat.

BARTHWICK. [Sardonically.] Oh! you got it out of his overcoat. And may I ask if my son will know you by daylight?

UNKNOWN. Know me? I should jolly—I mean, of course he will!
[MARLOW comes in.]

BARTHWICK. Ask Mr. John to come down.

[MARLOW goes out, and BARTHWICK walks uneasily about.]

And how long have you enjoyed his acquaintanceship?

UNKNOWN. Only since—only since Good Friday.

BARTHWICK. I am at a loss—I repeat I am at a—

[He glances at this unknown lady, who stands with eyes cast down, twisting her hands
And suddenly Jack appears. He stops on seeing who is here, and the unknown lady
hysterically giggles. There is a silence.]

BARTHWICK. [Portentously.] This young—er—lady says that last night—I think you said last night madam—you took away—

UNKNOWN. [Impulsively.] My reticule, and all my money was in a crimson silk purse.

JACK. Reticule. [Looking round for any chance to get away.] I don't know anything about it.

BARTHWICK. [Sharply.] Come, do you deny seeing this young lady last night?

JACK. Deny? No, of course. [Whispering.] Why did you give me away like this? What on earth did you come here for?

UNKNOWN. [Tearfully.] I'm sure I didn't want to—it's not likely, is it? You snatched it out of my hand—you know you did—and the purse had all my money in it. I did n't follow you last night because I did n't want to make a fuss and it was so late, and you were so—

BARTHWICK. Come, sir, don't turn your back on me—explain!

JACK. [Desperately.] I don't remember anything about it. [In a low voice to his friend.] Why on earth could n't you have written?

UNKNOWN. [Sullenly.] I want it now; I must have, it—I 've got to pay my rent to-day. [She looks at BARTHWICK.] They're only too glad to jump on people who are not—not well off.

JACK. I don't remember anything about it, really. I don't remember anything about last night at all. [He puts his hand up to his head.] It's all—cloudy, and I 've got such a beastly headache.

UNKNOWN. But you took it; you know you did. You said you'd score me off.

JACK. Well, then, it must be here. I remember now—I remember something. Why did I take the beastly thing?

BARTHWICK. Yes, why did you take the beastly—[He turns abruptly to the window.]

UNKNOWN. [With her mesmeric smile.] You were n't quite were you?

JACK. [Smiling pallidly.] I'm awfully sorry. If there's anything I can do—

BARTHWICK. Do? You can restore this property, I suppose.

JACK. I'll go and have a look, but I really don't think I 've got it.

[He goes out hurriedly. And BARTHWICK, placing a chair, motions to the visitor to sit; then, with pursed lips, he stands and eyes her fixedly. She sits, and steals a look at him; then turns away, and, drawing up her veil, stealthily wipes her eyes. And Jack comes back.]

JACK. [Ruefully holding out the empty reticule.] Is that the thing? I 've looked all over—I can't find the purse anywhere. Are you sure it was there?

UNKNOWN. [Tearfully.] Sure? Of course I'm sure. A crimson silk purse. It was all the money I had.

JACK. I really am awfully sorry—my head's so jolly bad. I 've asked the butler, but he has n't seen it.

UNKNOWN. I must have my money—

JACK. Oh! Of course—that'll be all right; I'll see that that's all right. How much?

UNKNOWN. [Sullenly.] Seven pounds-twelve—it's all I 've got in the world.

JACK. That'll be all right; I'll—send you a cheque.

UNKNOWN. [Eagerly.] No; now, please. Give me what was in my purse; I've got to pay my rent this morning. They won't give me another day; I'm a fortnight behind already.

JACK. [Blankly.] I'm awfully sorry; I really have n't a penny in my pocket.

[He glances stealthily at BARTHWICK.]

UNKNOWN. [Excitedly.] Come I say you must—it's my money, and you took it. I 'm not going away without it. They 'll turn me out of my place.

JACK. [Clasping his head.] But I can't give you what I have n't got. Don't I tell you I have n't a beastly cent.

UNKNOWN. [Tearing at her handkerchief.] Oh! do give it me! [She puts her hands together in appeal; then, with sudden fierceness.] If you don't I'll summons you. It's stealing, that's what it is!

BARTHWICK. [Uneasily.] One moment, please. As a matter of—er —principle, I shall settle this claim. [He produces money.] Here is eight pounds; the extra will cover the value of the purse and your cab fares. I need make no comment—no thanks are necessary.

[Touching the bell, he holds the door ajar in silence. The unknown lady stores the money in her reticule, she looks from JACK to BARTHWICK, and her face is quivering faintly with a smile. She hides it with her hand, and steals away. Behind her BARTHWICK shuts the door.]

BARTHWICK. [With solemnity.] H'm! This is nice thing to happen!

JACK. [Impersonally.] What awful luck!

BARTHWICK. So this is the way that forty pounds has gone! One thing after another! Once more I should like to know where you 'd have been if it had n't been for me! You don't seem to have any principles. You—you're one of those who are a nuisance to society; you—you're dangerous! What your mother would say I don't know. Your conduct, as far as I can see, is absolutely unjustifiable. It's—it's criminal. Why, a poor man who behaved as you've done —d' you think he'd have any mercy shown him? What you want is a good lesson. You and your sort are—[he speaks with feeling]—a nuisance to the community. Don't ask me to help you next time. You're not fit to be helped.

JACK. [Turning upon his sire, with unexpected fierceness.] All right, I won't then, and see how you like it. You would n't have helped me this time, I know, if you had n't been scared the thing would get into the papers. Where are the cigarettes?

BARTHWICK. [Regarding him uneasily.] Well I 'll say no more about it. [He rings the bell.] I 'll pass it over for this once, but— [MARLOW Comes in.] You can clear away.

[He hides his face behind the "Times."]

JACK. [Brightening.] I say, Marlow, where are the cigarettes?

MARLOW. I put the box out with the whisky last night, sir, but this morning I can't find it anywhere.

JACK. Did you look in my room?

MARLOW. Yes, sir; I've looked all over the house. I found two Nestor ends in the tray this morning, so you must have been smokin' last night, sir. [Hesitating.] I 'm really afraid some one's purloined the box.

JACK. [Uneasily.] Stolen it!

BARTHWICK. What's that? The cigarette-box! Is anything else missing?

MARLOW. No, sir; I 've been through the plate.

BARTHWICK. Was the house all right this morning? None of the windows open?

MARLOW. No, sir. [Quietly to JACK.] You left your latch-key in the door last night, sir.

[He hands it back, unseen by BARTHWICK]

JACK. Tst!

BARTHWICK. Who's been in the room this morning?

MARLOW. Me and Wheeler, and Mrs. Jones is all, sir, as far as I know.

BARTHWICK. Have you asked Mrs. Barthwick?

[To JACK.] Go and ask your mother if she's had it; ask her to look and see if she's missed anything else.

[JACK goes upon this mission.]

Nothing is more disquieting than losing things like this.

MARLOW. No, sir.

BARTHWICK. Have you any suspicions?

MARLOW, No, sir.

BARTHWICK. This Mrs. Jones—how long has she been working here?

MARLOW. Only this last month, sir.

BARTHWICK. What sort of person?

MARLOW. I don't know much about her, sir; seems a very quiet, respectable woman.

BARTHWICK. Who did the room this morning?

MARLOW. Wheeler and Mrs. Jones, Sir.

BARTHWICK. [With his forefinger upraised.] Now, was this Mrs. Jones in the room alone at any time?

MARLOW. [Expressionless.] Yes, Sir.

BARTHWICK. How do you know that?

MARLOW. [Reluctantly.] I found her here, sir.

BARTHWICK. And has Wheeler been in the room alone?

MARLOW. No, sir, she's not, sir. I should say, sir, that Mrs. Jones seems a very honest—

BARTHWICK. [Holding up his hand.] I want to know this: Has this Mrs. Jones been here the whole morning?

MARLOW. Yes, sir—no, sir—she stepped over to the greengrocer's for cook.

BARTHWICK. H'm! Is she in the house now?

MARLOW. Yes, Sir.

BARTHWICK. Very good. I shall make a point of clearing this up. On principle I shall make a point of fixing the responsibility; it goes to the foundations of security. In all your interests—

MARLOW. Yes, Sir.

BARTHWICK. What sort of circumstances is this Mrs. Jones in? Is her husband in work?

MARLOW. I believe not, sir.

BARTHWICK. Very well. Say nothing about it to any one. Tell Wheeler not to speak of it, and ask Mrs. Jones to step up here.

MARLOW. Very good, sir.

[MARLOW goes out, his face concerned; and BARTHWICK stays, his face judicial and a little pleased, as befits a man conducting an inquiry. MRS. BARTHWICK and her son come in.]

BARTHWICK. Well, my dear, you've not seen it, I suppose?

MRS. BARTHWICK. No. But what an extraordinary thing, John! Marlow, of course, is out of the question. I 'm certain none of the maids as for cook!

BARTHWICK. Oh, cook!

MRS. BARTHWICK. Of course! It's perfectly detestable to me to suspect anybody.

BARTHWICK. It is not a question of one's feelings. It's a question of justice. On principle—

MRS. BARTHWICK. I should n't be a bit surprised if the charwoman knew something about it. It was Laura who recommended her.

BARTHWICK. [Judicially.] I am going to have Mrs. Jones up. Leave it to me; and—er—remember that nobody is guilty until they're proved so. I shall be careful. I have no intention of frightening her; I shall give her every chance. I hear she's in poor circumstances. If we are not able to do much for them we are bound to have the greatest sympathy with the poor. [MRS. JONES comes in.] [Pleasantly.] Oh! good morning, Mrs. Jones.

MRS. JONES. [Soft, and even, unemphatic.] Good morning, sir! Good morning, ma'am!

BARTHWICK. About your husband—he's not in work, I hear?

MRS. JONES. No, sir; of course he's not in work just now.

BARTHWICK. Then I suppose he's earning nothing.

MRS. JONES. No, sir, he's not earning anything just now, sir.

BARTHWICK. And how many children have you?

MRS. JONES. Three children; but of course they don't eat very much sir. [A little silence.]

BARTHWICK. And how old is the eldest?

MRS. JONES. Nine years old, sir.

BARTHWICK. Do they go to school?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, they all three go to school every day.

BARTHWICK. [Severely.] And what about their food when you're out at work?

MRS. JONES. Well, Sir, I have to give them their dinner to take with them. Of course I 'm not always able to give them anything; sometimes I have to send them without; but my husband is very good about the children when he's in work. But when he's not in work of course he's a very difficult man.

BARTHWICK. He drinks, I suppose?

MRS. JONES. Yes, Sir. Of course I can't say he does n't drink, because he does.

BARTHWICK. And I suppose he takes all your money?

MRS. JONES. No, sir, he's very good about my money, except when he's not himself, and then, of course, he treats me very badly.

BARTHWICK. Now what is he—your husband?

MRS. JONES. By profession, sir, of course he's a groom.

BARTHWICK. A groom! How came he to lose his place?

MRS. JONES. He lost his place a long time ago, sir, and he's never had a very long job since; and now, of course, the motor-cars are against him.

BARTHWICK. When were you married to him, Mrs. Jones?

MRS. JONES. Eight years ago, sir that was in---

MRS. BARTHWICK. [Sharply.] Eight? You said the eldest child was nine.

MRS. JONES. Yes, ma'am; of course that was why he lost his place. He did n't treat me rightly, and of course his employer said he couldn't keep him because of the example.

BARTHWICK. You mean he—ahem---

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir; and of course after he lost his place he married me.

MRS. BARTHWICK. You actually mean to say you—you were---

BARTHWICK. My dear---

MRS. BARTHWICK. [Indignantly.] How disgraceful!

BARTHWICK. [Hurriedly.] And where are you living now, Mrs. Jones?

MRS. JONES. We've not got a home, sir. Of course we've been obliged to put away most of our things.

BARTHWICK. Put your things away! You mean to—to—er—to pawn them?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, to put them away. We're living in Merthyr Street—that is close by here, sir—at No. 34. We just have the one room.

BARTHWICK. And what do you pay a week?

MRS. JONES. We pay six shillings a week, sir, for a furnished room.

BARTHWICK. And I suppose you're behind in the rent?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, we're a little behind in the rent.

BARTHWICK. But you're in good work, aren't you?

MRS. JONES. Well, Sir, I have a day in Stamford Place Thursdays. And Mondays and Wednesdays and Fridays I come here. But to-day, of course, is a half-day, because of yesterday's Bank Holiday.

BARTHWICK. I see; four days a week, and you get half a crown a day, is that it?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, and my dinner; but sometimes it's only half a day, and that's eighteen pence.

BARTHWICK. And when your husband earns anything he spends it in drink, I suppose?

MRS. JONES. Sometimes he does, sir, and sometimes he gives it to me for the children. Of course he would work if he could get it, sir, but it seems there are a great many people out of work.

BARTHWICK. Ah! Yes. We—er—won't go into that. [Sympathetically.] And how about your work here? Do you find it hard?

MRS. JONES. Oh! no, sir, not very hard, sir; except of course, when I don't get my sleep at night.

BARTHWICK. Ah! And you help do all the rooms? And sometimes, I suppose, you go out for cook?

MRS. JONES. Yes, Sir.

BARTHWICK. And you 've been out this morning?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, of course I had to go to the greengrocer's.

BARTHWICK. Exactly. So your husband earns nothing? And he's a bad character.

MRS. JONES. No, Sir, I don't say that, sir. I think there's a great deal of good in him; though he does treat me very bad sometimes. And of course I don't like to leave him, but I think I ought to, because really I hardly know how to stay with him. He often raises his hand to me. Not long ago he gave me a blow here [touches her breast] and I can feel it now. So I think I ought to leave him, don't you, sir?

BARTHWICK. Ah! I can't help you there. It's a very serious thing to leave your husband. Very serious thing.

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, of course I 'm afraid of what he might do to me if I were to leave him; he can be so very violent.

BARTHWICK. H'm! Well, that I can't pretend to say anything about. It's the bad principle I'm speaking of—

MRS. JONES. Yes, Sir; I know nobody can help me. I know I must decide for myself, and of course I know that he has a very hard life. And he's fond of the children, and it's very hard for him to see them going without food.

BARTHWICK. [Hastily.] Well—er—thank you, I just wanted to hear about you. I don't think I need detain you any longer, Mrs. Jones.

MRS. JONES. No, sir, thank you, sir.

BARTHWICK. Good morning, then.

MRS. JONES. Good morning, sir; good morning, ma'am.

BARTHWICK. [Exchanging glances with his wife.] By the way, Mrs. Jones—I think it is only fair to tell you, a silver cigarette-box —er—is missing.

MRS. JONES. [Looking from one face to the other.] I am very sorry, sir.

BARTHWICK. Yes; you have not seen it, I suppose?

MRS. JONES. [Realising that suspicion is upon her; with an uneasy movement.] Where was it, sir; if you please, sir?

BARTHWICK. [Evasively.] Where did Marlow say? Er—in this room, yes, in this room.

MRS. JONES. No, Sir, I have n't seen it—of course if I 'd seen it I should have noticed it.

BARTHWICK. [Giving her a rapid glance.] You—you are sure of that?

MRS. JONES. [Impassively.] Yes, Sir. [With a slow nodding of her head.] I have not seen it, and of course I don't know where it is.

[She turns and goes quietly out.]

BARTHWICK. H'm!

[The three BARTHWICKS avoid each other's glances.]

The curtain falls.

ACT II

SCENE I

The JONES's lodgings, Merthyr Street, at half-past two o'clock.

The bare room, with tattered oilcloth and damp, distempered walls, has an air of tidy wretchedness. On the bed lies JONES, half-dressed; his coat is thrown across his feet, and muddy boots are lying on the floor close by. He is asleep. The door is opened and MRS. JONES comes in, dressed in a pinched black jacket and old black sailor hat; she carries a parcel wrapped up in the "Times." She puts her parcel down, unwraps an apron, half a loaf, two onions, three potatoes, and a tiny piece of bacon. Taking a teapot from the cupboard, she rinses it, shakes into it some powdered tea out of a screw of paper, puts it on the hearth, and sitting in a wooden chair quietly begins to cry.

JONES. [Stirring and yawning.] That you? What's the time?

MRS. JONES. [Drying her eyes, and in her usual voice.] Half-past two.

JONES. What you back so soon for?

MRS. JONES. I only had the half day to-day, Jem.

JONES. [On his back, and in a drowsy voice.] Got anything for dinner?

MRS. JONES. Mrs. BARTHWICK's cook gave me a little bit of bacon. I'm going to make a stew. [She prepares for cooking.] There's fourteen shillings owing for rent, James, and of course I 've only got two and fourpence. They'll be coming for it to-day.

JONES. [Turning towards her on his elbow.] Let 'em come and find my surprise packet. I've had enough o' this tryin' for work. Why should I go round and round after a job like a bloomin' squirrel in a cage. "Give us a job, sir"—"Take a man on"—"Got a wife and three children." Sick of it I am! I 'd sooner lie here and rot. "Jones, you come and join the demonstration; come and 'old a flag, and listen to the ruddy orators, and go 'ome as empty as you came." There's some that seems to like that—the sheep! When I go seekin' for a job now, and see the brutes lookin' me up an' down, it's like a thousand serpents in me. I 'm not arskin' for any treat. A man wants to sweat hisself silly and not allowed that's a rum start, ain't it? A man wants to sweat his soul out to keep the breath in him and ain't allowed—that's justice that's freedom and all the rest of it! [He turns his face towards the wall.] You're so milky mild; you don't know what goes on inside o' me. I'm done with the silly game. If they want me, let 'em come for me!

[MRS. JONES stops cooking and stands unmoving at the table.]

I've tried and done with it, I tell you. I've never been afraid of what 's before me. You mark my words—if you think they've broke my spirit, you're mistook. I 'll lie and rot sooner than arsk 'em again. What makes you stand like that—you long-sufferin', Gawd-forsaken image—that's why I can't keep my hands off you. So now you know. Work! You can work, but you have n't the spirit of a louse!

MRS. JONES. [Quietly.] You talk more wild sometimes when you're yourself, James, than when you 're not. If you don't get work, how are we to go on? They won't let us stay here; they're looking to their money to-day, I know.

JONES. I see this BARTHWICK o' yours every day goin' down to Pawlyment snug and comfortable to talk his silly soul out; an' I see that young calf, his son, swellin' it about, and goin' on the razzle-dazzle. Wot 'ave they done that makes 'em any better than wot I am? They never did a day's work in their lives. I see 'em day after day.

MRS. JONES. And I wish you wouldn't come after me like that, and hang about the house. You don't seem able to keep away at all, and whatever you do it for I can't think, because of course they notice it.

JONES. I suppose I may go where I like. Where may I go? The other day I went to a place in the Edgware Road. "Gov'nor," I says to the boss, "take me on," I says. "I 'aven't done a stroke o' work not these two months; it takes the heart out of a man," I says; "I 'm one to work; I 'm not afraid of anything you can give me!" "My good man," 'e says, "I 've had thirty of you here this morning. I took the first two," he says, "and that's all I want." "Thank you, then rot the world!" I says. "Blaspheming," he says, "is not the way to get a job. Out you go, my lad!" [He laughs sardonically.] Don't you raise your voice because you're starvin'; don't yer even think of it; take it lyin' down! Take it like a sensible man, carn't you? And a little way down the street a lady says to me: [Pinching his voice] "D' you want to earn a few pence, my man?" and gives me her dog to 'old outside a shop-fat as a butler 'e was—tons o' meat had gone to the makin' of him. It did 'er good, it did, made 'er feel 'erself that charitable, but I see 'er lookin' at the copper standin' alongside o' me, for fear I should make off with 'er bloomin' fat dog. [He sits on the edge of the bed and puts a boot on. Then looking up.] What's in that head o' yours? [Almost pathetically.] Carn't you speak for once?

[There is a knock, and MRS. SEDDON, the landlady, appears, an anxious, harassed, shabby woman in working clothes.]

MRS. SEDDON. I thought I 'eard you come in, Mrs. Jones. I 've spoke to my 'usband, but he says he really can't afford to wait another day.

JONES. [With scowling jocularly.] Never you mind what your 'usband says, you go your own way like a proper independent woman. Here, jenny, chuck her that.

[Producing a sovereign from his trousers pocket, he throws it to his wife, who catches it in her apron with a gasp. JONES resumes the lacing of his boots.]

MRS. JONES. [Rubbing the sovereign stealthily.] I'm very sorry we're so late with it, and of course it's fourteen shillings, so if you've got six that will be right.

[MRS. SEDDON takes the sovereign and fumbles for the change.]

JONES. [With his eyes fixed on his boots.] Bit of a surprise for yer, ain't it?

MRS. SEDDON. Thank you, and I'm sure I'm very much obliged. [She does indeed appear surprised.] I 'll bring you the change.

JONES. [Mockingly.] Don't mention it.

MRS. SEDDON. Thank you, and I'm sure I'm very much obliged. [She slides away.]

[MRS. JONES gazes at JONES who is still lacing up his boots.]

JONES. I 've had a bit of luck. [Pulling out the crimson purse and some loose coins.] Picked up a purse—seven pound and more.

MRS. JONES. Oh, James!

JONES. Oh, James! What about Oh, James! I picked it up I tell you. This is lost property, this is!

MRS. JONES. But is n't there a name in it, or something?

JONES. Name? No, there ain't no name. This don't belong to such as 'ave visitin' cards. This belongs to a perfec' lidy. Tike an' smell it. [He pitches her the purse, which she puts gently to her nose.] Now, you tell me what I ought to have done. You tell me that. You can always tell me what I ought to ha' done, can't yer?

MRS. JONES. [Laying down the purse.] I can't say what you ought to have done, James. Of course the money was n't yours; you've taken somebody else's money.

JONES. Finding's keeping. I 'll take it as wages for the time I 've gone about the streets asking for what's my rights. I'll take it for what's overdue, d' ye hear? [With strange triumph.] I've got money in my pocket, my girl.

[MRS. JONES goes on again with the preparation of the meal, JONES looking at her furtively.]

Money in my pocket! And I 'm not goin' to waste it. With this 'ere money I'm goin' to Canada. I'll let you have a pound.

[A silence.]

You've often talked of leavin' me. You 've often told me I treat you badly—well I 'ope you 'll be glad when I 'm gone.

MRS. JONES. [Impassively.] You have, treated me very badly, James, and of course I can't prevent your going; but I can't tell whether I shall be glad when you're gone.

JONES. It'll change my luck. I 've 'ad nothing but bad luck since I first took up with you. [More softly.] And you've 'ad no bloomin' picnic.

MRS. JONES. Of course it would have been better for us if we had never met. We were n't meant for each other. But you're set against me, that's what you are, and you have been for a long time. And you treat me so badly, James, going after that Rosie and all. You don't ever seem to think of the children that I 've had to bring into the world, and of all the trouble I 've had to keep them, and what 'll become of them when you're gone.

JONES. [Crossing the room gloomily.] If you think I want to leave the little beggars you're bloomin' well mistaken.

MRS. JONES. Of course I know you're fond of them.

JONES. [Fingering the purse, half angrily.] Well, then, you stow it, old girl. The kids 'll get along better with you than when I 'm here. If I 'd ha' known as much as I do now, I 'd never ha' had one o' them. What's the use o' bringin' 'em into a state o' things like this? It's a crime, that's what it is; but you find it out too late; that's what's the matter with this 'ere world.

[He puts the purse back in his pocket.]

MRS. JONES. Of course it would have been better for them, poor little things; but they're your own children, and I wonder at you talkin' like that. I should miss them dreadfully if I was to lose them.

JONES. [Sullenly.] An' you ain't the only one. If I make money out there—[Looking up, he sees her shaking out his coat—in a changed voice.] Leave that coat alone!

[The silver box drops from the pocket, scattering the cigarettes upon the bed. Taking up the box she stares at it; he rushes at her and snatches the box away.]

MRS. JONES. [Cowering back against the bed.] Oh, Jem! oh, Jem!

JONES. [Dropping the box onto the table.] You mind what you're sayin'! When I go out I 'll take and chuck it in the water along with that there purse. I 'ad it when I was in liquor, and for what you do when you 're in liquor you're not responsible—and that's Gawd's truth as you ought to know. I don't want the thing—I won't have it. I took it out o' spite. I 'm no thief, I tell you; and don't you call me one, or it'll be the worse for you.

MRS. JONES. [Twisting her apron strings.] It's Mr. Barthwick's! You've taken away my reputation. Oh, Jem, whatever made you?

JONES. What d' you mean?

MRS. JONES. It's been missed; they think it's me. Oh! whatever made you do it, Jem?

JONES. I tell you I was in liquor. I don't want it; what's the good of it to me? If I were to pawn it they'd only nab me. I 'm no thief. I 'm no worse than wot that young Barthwick is; he brought 'ome that purse that I picked up—a lady's purse—'ad it off 'er in a row, kept sayin' 'e 'd scored 'er off. Well, I scored 'im off. Tight as an owl 'e was! And d' you think anything'll happen to him?

MRS. JONES. [As though speaking to herself.] Oh, Jem! it's the bread out of our mouths!

JONES. Is it then? I'll make it hot for 'em yet. What about that purse? What about young BARTHWICK?

[MRS. JONES comes forward to the table and tries to take the box; JONES prevents her.] What do you want with that? You drop it, I say!

MRS. JONES. I 'll take it back and tell them all about it. [She attempts to wrest the box from him.]

JONES. Ah, would yer?

[He drops the box, and rushes on her with a snarl. She slips back past the bed. He follows; a chair is overturned. The door is opened; Snow comes in, a detective in plain clothes and bowler hat, with clipped moustaches. JONES drops his arms, MRS. JONES stands by the window gasping; SNOW, advancing swiftly to the table, puts his hand on the silver box.]

SNOW. Doin' a bit o' skylarkin'? Fancy this is what I 'm after.

J. B., the very same. [He gets back to the door, scrutinising the crest and cypher on the box. To MRS. JONES.] I'm a police officer. Are you Mrs. Jones?

MRS. JONES. Yes, Sir.

SNOW. My instructions are to take you on a charge of stealing this box from J. BARTHWICK, Esquire, M.P., of 6, Rockingham Gate. Anything you say may be used against you. Well, Missis?

MRS. JONES. [In her quiet voice, still out of breath, her hand upon her breast.] Of course I did not take it, sir. I never have taken anything that did n't belong to me; and of course I know nothing about it.

SNOW. You were at the house this morning; you did the room in which the box was left; you were alone in the room. I find the box 'ere. You say you did n't take it?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, of course I say I did not take it, because I did not.

SNOW. Then how does the box come to be here?

MRS. JONES. I would rather not say anything about it.

SNOW. Is this your husband?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, this is my husband, sir.

SNOW. Do you wish to say anything before I take her?

[JONES remains silent, with his head bend down.]

Well then, Missis. I 'll just trouble you to come along with me quietly.

MRS. JONES. [Twisting her hands.] Of course I would n't say I had n't taken it if I had—and I did n't take it, indeed I did n't. Of course I know appearances are against me, and I can't tell you what really happened: But my children are at school, and they'll be coming home—and I don't know what they'll do without me.

SNOW. Your 'usband'll see to them, don't you worry. [He takes the woman gently by the arm.]

JONES. You drop it—she's all right! [Sullenly.] I took the thing myself.

SNOW. [Eyeing him] There, there, it does you credit. Come along, Missis.

JONES. [Passionately.] Drop it, I say, you blooming teck. She's my wife; she 's a respectable woman. Take her if you dare!

SNOW. Now, now. What's the good of this? Keep a civil tongue, and it'll be the better for all of us.

[He puts his whistle in his mouth and draws the woman to the door.]

JONES. [With a rush.] Drop her, and put up your 'ands, or I 'll soon make yer. You leave her alone, will yer! Don't I tell yer, I took the thing myself.

SNOW. [Blowing his whistle.] Drop your hands, or I 'll take you too. Ah, would you?

[JONES, closing, deals him a blow. A Policeman in uniform appears; there is a short struggle and JONES is overpowered. MRS. JONES raises her hands avid drops her face on them.]

The curtain falls.

SCENE II

The BARTHWICKS' dining-room the same evening. The BARTHWICKS are seated at dessert.

MRS. BARTHWICK. John! [A silence broken by the cracking of nuts.]
John!

BARTHWICK. I wish you'd speak about the nuts they're uneatable.
[He puts one in his mouth.]

MRS. BARTHWICK. It's not the season for them. I called on the Holyroods.

[BARTHWICK fills his glass with port.]

JACK. Crackers, please, Dad.

[BARTHWICK passes the crackers. His demeanour is reflective.]

MRS. BARTHWICK. Lady Holyrood has got very stout. I 've noticed it coming for a long time.

BARTHWICK. [Gloomily.] Stout? [He takes up the crackers—with transparent airiness.] The Holyroods had some trouble with their servants, had n't they?

JACK. Crackers, please, Dad.

BARTHWICK. [Passing the crackers.] It got into the papers. The cook, was n't it?

MRS. BARTHWICK. No, the lady's maid. I was talking it over with Lady Holyrood. The girl used to have her young man to see her.

BARTHWICK. [Uneasily.] I'm not sure they were wise——

MRS. BARTHWICK. My dear John, what are you talking about? How could there be any alternative? Think of the effect on the other servants!

BARTHWICK. Of course in principle—I wasn't thinking of that.

JACK. [Maliciously.] Crackers, please, Dad.

[BARTHWICK is compelled to pass the crackers.]

MRS. BARTHWICK. Lady Holyrood told me: "I had her up," she said; "I said to her, 'You'll leave my house at once; I think your conduct disgraceful. I can't tell, I don't know, and I don't wish to know, what you were doing. I send you away on principle; you need not come to me for a character.' And the girl said: 'If you don't give me my notice, my lady, I want a month's wages. I'm perfectly respectable. I've done nothing.'"—Done nothing!

BARTHWICK. H'm!

MRS. BARTHWICK. Servants have too much license. They hang together so terribly you never can tell what they're really thinking; it's as if they were all in a conspiracy to keep you in the dark. Even with Marlow, you feel that he never lets you know what's really in his mind. I hate that secretiveness; it destroys all confidence. I feel sometimes I should like to shake him.

JACK. Marlow's a most decent chap. It's simply beastly every one knowing your affairs.

BARTHWICK. The less you say about that the better!

MRS. BARTHWICK. It goes all through the lower classes. You can not tell when they are speaking the truth. To-day when I was shopping after leaving the Holyroods, one of these unemployed came up and spoke to me. I suppose I only had twenty yards or so to walk to the carnage, but he seemed to spring up in the street.

BARTHWICK. Ah! You must be very careful whom you speak to in these days.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I did n't answer him, of course. But I could see at once that he wasn't telling the truth.

BARTHWICK. [Cracking a nut.] There's one very good rule—look at their eyes.

JACK. Crackers, please, Dad.

BARTHWICK. [Passing the crackers.] If their eyes are straight-forward I sometimes give them sixpence. It 's against my principles, but it's most difficult to refuse. If you see that they're desperate, and dull, and shifty-looking, as so many of them are, it's certain to mean drink, or crime, or something unsatisfactory.

MRS. BARTHWICK. This man had dreadful eyes. He looked as if he could commit a murder. "I 've 'ad nothing to eat to-day," he said. Just like that.

BARTHWICK. What was William about? He ought to have been waiting.

JACK. [Raising his wine-glass to his nose.] Is this the '63, Dad?

[BARTHWICK, holding his wine-glass to his eye, lowers it and passes it before his nose.]

MRS. BARTHWICK. I hate people that can't speak the truth. [Father and son exchange a look behind their port.] It 's just as easy to speak the truth as not. I've always found it easy enough. It makes it impossible to tell what is genuine; one feels as if one were continually being taken in.

BARTHWICK. [Sententiously.] The lower classes are their own enemies. If they would only trust us, they would get on so much better.

MRS. BARTHWICK. But even then it's so often their own fault. Look at that Mrs. Jones this morning.

BARTHWICK. I only want to do what's right in that matter. I had occasion to see Roper this afternoon. I mentioned it to him. He's coming in this evening. It all depends on what the detective says. I've had my doubts. I've been thinking it over.

MRS. BARTHWICK. The woman impressed me most unfavourably. She seemed to have no shame. That affair she was talking about—she and the man when they were young, so immoral! And before you and Jack! I could have put her out of the room!

BARTHWICK. Oh! I don't want to excuse them, but in looking at these matters one must consider—

MRS. BARTHWICK. Perhaps you'll say the man's employer was wrong in dismissing him?

BARTHWICK. Of course not. It's not there that I feel doubt. What I ask myself is—

JACK. Port, please, Dad.

BARTHWICK. [Circulating the decanter in religious imitation of the rising and setting of the sun.] I ask myself whether we are sufficiently careful in making inquiries about people before we engage them, especially as regards moral conduct.

JACK. Pass the-port, please, Mother!

MRS. BARTHWICK. [Passing it.] My dear boy, are n't you drinking too much?

[JACK fills his glass.]

MARLOW. [Entering.] Detective Snow to see you, Sir.

BARTHWICK. [Uneasily.] Ah! say I'll be with him in a minute.

MRS. BARTHWICK. [Without turning.] Let him come in here, Marlow.

[SNOW enters in an overcoat, his bowler hat in hand.]

BARTHWICK. [Half-rising.] Oh! Good evening!

SNOW. Good evening, sir; good evening, ma'am. I 've called round to report what I 've done, rather late, I 'm afraid—another case took me away. [He takes the silver box out o f his pocket, causing a sensation in the BARTHWICK family.] This is the identical article, I believe.

BARTHWICK. Certainly, certainly.

SNOW. Havin' your crest and cypher, as you described to me, sir, I 'd no hesitation in the matter.

BARTHWICK. Excellent. Will you have a glass of [he glances at the waning port]—er—sherry-[pours out sherry]. Jack, just give Mr. Snow this.

[JACK rises and gives the glass to SNOW; then, lolling in his chair, regards him indolently.]

SNOW. [Drinking off wine and putting down the glass.] After seeing you I went round to this woman's lodgings, sir. It's a low neighborhood, and I thought it as well to place a constable below—and not without 'e was wanted, as things turned out.

BARTHWICK. Indeed!

SNOW. Yes, Sir, I 'ad some trouble. I asked her to account for the presence of the article. She could give me no answer, except to deny the theft; so I took her into custody; then her husband came for me, so I was obliged to take him, too, for assault. He was very violent on the way to the station—very violent—threatened you and your son, and altogether he was a handful, I can tell you.

MRS. BARTHWICK. What a ruffian he must be!

SNOW. Yes, ma'am, a rough customer.

JACK. [Sipping his mine, bemused.] Punch the beggar's head.

SNOW. Given to drink, as I understand, sir.

MRS. BARTHWICK. It's to be hoped he will get a severe punishment.

SNOW. The odd thing is, sir, that he persists in sayin' he took the box himself.

BARTHWICK. Took the box himself! [He smiles.] What does he think to gain by that?

SNOW. He says the young gentleman was intoxicated last night

[JACK stops the cracking of a nut, and looks at SNOW.]

[BARTHWICK, losing his smile, has put his wine-glass down; there is a silence—SNOW, looking from face to face, remarks]

—took him into the house and gave him whisky; and under the influence of an empty stomach the man says he took the box.

MRS. BARTHWICK. The impudent wretch!

BARTHWICK. D' you mean that he—er—intends to put this forward to-morrow?

SNOW. That'll be his line, sir; but whether he's endeavouring to shield his wife, or whether [he looks at JACK] there's something in it, will be for the magistrate to say.

MRS. BARTHWICK. [Haughtily.] Something in what? I don't understand you. As if my son would bring a man like that into the house!

BARTHWICK. [From the fireplace, with an effort to be calm.] My son can speak for himself, no doubt. Well, Jack, what do you say?

MRS. BARTHWICK. [Sharply.] What does he say? Why, of course, he says the whole story's stuff!

JACK. [Embarrassed.] Well, of course, I—of course, I don't know anything about it.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I should think not, indeed! [To Snow.] The man is an audacious ruffian!

BARTHWICK. [Suppressing jumps.] But in view of my son's saying there's nothing in this—this fable—will it be necessary to proceed against the man under the circumstances?

SNOW. We shall have to charge him with the assault, sir. It would be as well for your son to come down to the Court. There'll be a remand, no doubt. The queer thing is there was quite a sum of money found on him, and a crimson silk purse.

[BARTHWICK starts; JACK rises and sits down again.]

I suppose the lady has n't missed her purse?

BARTHWICK. [Hastily.] Oh, no! Oh! No!

JACK. No!

MRS. BARTHWICK. [Dreamily.] No! [To SNOW.] I 've been inquiring of the servants. This man does hang about the house. I shall feel much safer if he gets a good long sentence; I do think we ought to be protected against such ruffians.

BARTHWICK. Yes, yes, of course, on principle but in this case we have a number of things to think of. [To SNOW.] I suppose, as you say, the man must be charged, eh?

SNOW. No question about that, sir.

BARTHWICK. [Staring gloomily at JACK.] This prosecution goes very much against the grain with me. I have great sympathy with the poor. In my position I 'm bound to recognise the distress there is amongst them. The condition of the people leaves much to be desired. D' you follow me? I wish I could see my way to drop it.

MRS. BARTHWICK. [Sharply.] John! it's simply not fair to other people. It's putting property at the mercy of any one who likes to take it.

BARTHWICK. [Trying to make signs to her aside.] I 'm not defending him, not at all. I'm trying to look at the matter broadly.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Nonsense, John, there's a time for everything.

SNOW. [Rather sardonically.] I might point out, sir, that to withdraw the charge of stealing would not make much difference, because the facts must come out [he looks significantly at JACK] in reference to the assault; and as I said that charge will have to go forward.

BARTHWICK. [Hastily.] Yes, oh! exactly! It's entirely on the woman's account—entirely a matter of my own private feelings.

SNOW. If I were you, sir, I should let things take their course. It's not likely there'll be much difficulty. These things are very quick settled.

BARTHWICK. [Doubtfully.] You think so—you think so?

JACK. [Rousing himself.] I say, what shall I have to swear to?

SNOW. That's best known to yourself, sir. [Retreating to the door.] Better employ a solicitor, sir, in case anything should arise. We shall have the butler to prove the loss of the article. You'll excuse me going, I 'm rather pressed to-night. The case may come on any time after eleven. Good evening, sir; good evening, ma'am. I shall have to produce the box in court to-morrow, so if you'll excuse me, sir, I may as well take it with me.

[He takes the silver box and leaves them with a little bow.]

[BARTHWICK makes a move to follow him, then dashing his hands beneath his coat tails, speaks with desperation.]

BARTHWICK. I do wish you'd leave me to manage things myself. You will put your nose into matters you know nothing of. A pretty mess you've made of this!

MRS. BARTHWICK. [Coldly.] I don't in the least know what you're talking about. If you can't stand up for your rights, I can. I 've no patience with your principles, it's such nonsense.

BARTHWICK. Principles! Good Heavens! What have principles to do with it for goodness sake? Don't you know that Jack was drunk last night!

JACK. Dad!

MRS. BARTHWICK. [In horror rising.] Jack!

JACK. Look here, Mother—I had supper. Everybody does. I mean to say—you know what I mean—it's absurd to call it being drunk. At Oxford everybody gets a bit "on" sometimes—

MRS. BARTHWICK. Well, I think it's most dreadful! If that is really what you do at Oxford?

JACK. [Angrily.] Well, why did you send me there? One must do as other fellows do. It's such nonsense, I mean, to call it being drunk. Of course I 'm awfully sorry. I 've had such a beastly headache all day.

BARTHWICK. Tcha! If you'd only had the common decency to remember what happened when you came in. Then we should know what truth there was in what this fellow says—as it is, it's all the most confounded darkness.

JACK. [Staring as though at half-formed visions.] I just get a— and then—it 's gone—

MRS. BARTHWICK. Oh, Jack! do you mean to say you were so tipsy you can't even remember—

JACK. Look here, Mother! Of course I remember I came—I must have come—

BARTHWICK. [Unguardedly, and walking up and down.] Tcha!—and that infernal purse! Good Heavens! It'll get into the papers. Who on earth could have foreseen a thing like this? Better to have lost a dozen cigarette-boxes, and said nothing about it. [To his wife.] It's all your doing. I told you so from the first. I wish to goodness Roper would come!

MRS. BARTHWICK. [Sharply.] I don't know what you're talking about, John.

BARTHWICK. [Turning on her.] No, you—you—you don't know anything! [Sharply.] Where the devil is Roper? If he can see a way out of this he's a better man than I take him for. I defy any one to see a way out of it. I can't.

JACK. Look here, don't excite Dad—I can simply say I was too beastly tired, and don't remember anything except that I came in and [in a dying voice] went to bed the same as usual.

BARTHWICK. Went to bed? Who knows where you went—I 've lost all confidence. For all I know you slept on the floor.

JACK. [Indignantly.] I did n't, I slept on the—

BARTHWICK. [Sitting on the sofa.] Who cares where you slept; what does it matter if he mentions the—the—a perfect disgrace?

MRS. BARTHWICK. What? [A silence.] I insist on knowing.

JACK. Oh! nothing.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Nothing? What do you mean by nothing, Jack? There's your father in such a state about it!

JACK. It's only my purse.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Your purse! You know perfectly well you have n't got one.

JACK. Well, it was somebody else's—it was all a joke—I did n't want the beastly thing.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Do you mean that you had another person's purse, and that this man took it too?

BARTHWICK. Tcha! Of course he took it too! A man like that Jones will make the most of it. It'll get into the papers.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I don't understand. What on earth is all the fuss about? [Bending over JACK, and softly.] Jack now, tell me dear! Don't be afraid. What is it? Come!

JACK. Oh, don't Mother!

MRS. BARTHWICK. But don't what, dear?

JACK. It was pure sport. I don't know how I got the thing. Of course I 'd had a bit of a row—I did n't know what I was doing—I was—I Was—well, you know—I suppose I must have pulled the bag out of her hand.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Out of her hand? Whose hand? What bag—whose bag?

JACK. Oh! I don't know—her bag—it belonged to—[in a desperate and rising voice] a woman.

MRS. BARTHWICK. A woman? Oh! Jack! No!

JACK. [Jumping up.] You would have it. I did n't want to tell you. It's not my fault.

[The door opens and MARLOW ushers in a man of middle age, inclined to corpulence, in evening dress. He has a ruddy, thin moustache, and dark, quick-moving little eyes. His

eyebrows aye Chinese.]

MARLOW. Mr. Roper, Sir. [He leaves the room.]

ROPER. [With a quick look round.] How do you do?

[But neither JACK nor MRS. BARTHWICK make a sign.]

BARTHWICK. [Hurrying.] Thank goodness you've come, Roper. You remember what I told you this afternoon; we've just had the detective here.

ROPER. Got the box?

BARTHWICK. Yes, yes, but look here—it was n't the charwoman at all; her drunken loafer of a husband took the things—he says that fellow there [he waves his hand at JACK, who with his shoulder raised, seems trying to ward off a blow] let him into the house last night. Can you imagine such a thing.

[Roper laughs.]

BARTHWICK. [With excited emphasis.]. It's no laughing matter, Roper. I told you about that business of Jack's too—don't you see the brute took both the things—took that infernal purse. It'll get into the papers.

ROPER. [Raising his eyebrows.] H'm! The purse! Depravity in high life! What does your son say?

BARTHWICK. He remembers nothing. D—n! Did you ever see such a mess? It 'll get into the papers.

MRS. BARTHWICK. [With her hand across her eyes.] Oh! it's not that—

[BARTHWICK and ROPER turn and look at her.]

BARTHWICK. It's the idea of that woman—she's just heard—

[ROPER nods. And MRS. BARTHWICK, setting her lips, gives a slow look at JACK, and sits down at the table.]

What on earth's to be done, Roper? A ruffian like this Jones will make all the capital he can out of that purse.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I don't believe that Jack took that purse.

BARTHWICK. What—when the woman came here for it this morning?

MRS. BARTHWICK. Here? She had the impudence? Why was n't I told?

[She looks round from face to face—no one answers her, there is a pause.]

BARTHWICK. [Suddenly.] What's to be done, Roper?

ROPER. [Quietly to JACK.] I suppose you did n't leave your latch-key in the door?

JACK. [Sullenly.] Yes, I did.

BARTHWICK. Good heavens! What next?

MRS. BARTHWICK. I 'm certain you never let that man into the house, Jack, it's a wild invention. I'm sure there's not a word of truth in it, Mr. Roper.

ROPER. [Very suddenly.] Where did you sleep last night?

JACK. [Promptly.] On the sofa, there—[hesitating]—that is—I—

BARTHWICK. On the sofa? D' you mean to say you did n't go to bed?

JACK.[Sullenly.] No.

BARTHWICK. If you don't remember anything, how can you remember that?

JACK. Because I woke up there in the morning.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Oh, Jack!

BARTHWICK. Good Gracious!

JACK. And Mrs. Jones saw me. I wish you would n't bait me so.

ROPER. Do you remember giving any one a drink?

JACK. By Jove, I do seem to remember a fellow with—a fellow with
[He looks at Roper.] I say, d' you want me—?

ROPER. [Quick as lightning.] With a dirty face?

JACK. [With illumination.] I do—I distinctly remember his—

[BARTHWICK moves abruptly; MRS. BARTHWICK looks at ROPER
angrily, and touches her son's arm.]

MRS. BARTHWICK. You don't remember, it's ridiculous! I don't believe the man was ever here at all.

BARTHWICK. You must speak the truth, if it is the truth. But if you do remember such a dirty
business, I shall wash my hands of you altogether.

JACK. [Glaring at them.] Well, what the devil—

MRS. BARTHWICK. Jack!

JACK. Well, Mother, I—I don't know what you do want.

MRS. BARTHWICK. We want you to speak the truth and say you never let this low man into the
house.

BARTHWICK. Of course if you think that you really gave this man whisky in that disgraceful way, and
let him see what you'd been doing, and were in such a disgusting condition that you don't remember a
word of it—

ROPER. [Quick.] I've no memory myself—never had.

BARTHWICK. [Desperately.] I don't know what you're to say.

ROPER. [To JACK.] Say nothing at all! Don't put yourself in a false position. The man stole the things
or the woman stole the things, you had nothing to do with it. You were asleep on the sofa.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Your leaving the latch-key in the door was quite bad enough, there's no need to
mention anything else. [Touching his forehead softly.] My dear, how hot your head is!

JACK. But I want to know what I 'm to do. [Passionately.] I won't be badgered like this.

[MRS. BARTHWICK recoils from him.]

ROPER. [Very quickly.] You forget all about it. You were asleep.

JACK. Must I go down to the Court to-morrow?

ROPER. [Shaking his head.] No.

BARTHWICK. [In a relieved voice.] Is that so?

ROPER. Yes.

BARTHWICK. But you'll go, Roper.

ROPER. Yes.

JACK. [With wan cheerfulness.] Thanks, awfully! So long as I don't have to go. [Putting his hand up to
his head.] I think if you'll excuse me—I've had a most beastly day. [He looks from his father to his
mother.]

MRS. BARTHWICK. [Turning quickly.] Goodnight, my boy.

JACK. Good-night, Mother.

[He goes out. MRS. BARTHWICK heaves a sigh. There is a
silence.]

BARTHWICK. He gets off too easily. But for my money that woman would have prosecuted him.

ROPER. You find money useful.

BARTHWICK. I've my doubts whether we ought to hide the truth—

ROPER. There'll be a remand.

BARTHWICK. What! D' you mean he'll have to appear on the remand.

ROPER. Yes.

BARTHWICK. H'm, I thought you'd be able to—Look here, Roper, you must keep that purse out of the papers.

[ROPER fixes his little eyes on him and nods.]

MRS. BARTHWICK. Mr. Roper, don't you think the magistrate ought to be told what sort of people these Jones's are; I mean about their immorality before they were married. I don't know if John told you.

ROPER. Afraid it's not material.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Not material?

ROPER. Purely private life! May have happened to the magistrate.

BARTHWICK. [With a movement as if to shift a burden.] Then you'll take the thing into your hands?

ROPER. If the gods are kind. [He holds his hand out.]

BARTHWICK. [Shaking it dubiously.] Kind eh? What? You going?

ROPER. Yes. I've another case, something like yours—most unexpected.

[He bows to MRS. BARTHWICK, and goes out, followed by BARTHWICK, talking to the last. MRS. BARTHWICK at the table bursts into smothered sobs. BARTHWICK returns.]

BARTHWICK. [To himself.] There'll be a scandal!

MRS. BARTHWICK. [Disguising her grief at once.] I simply can't imagine what Roper means by making a joke of a thing like that!

BARTHWICK. [Staring strangely.] You! You can't imagine anything!
You've no more imagination than a fly!

MRS. BARTHWICK. [Angrily.] You dare to tell me that I have no imagination.

BARTHWICK. [Flustered.] I—I 'm upset. From beginning to end, the whole thing has been utterly against my principles.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Rubbish! You have n't any! Your principles are nothing in the world but sheer fright!

BARTHWICK. [Walking to the window.] I've never been frightened in my life. You heard what Roper said. It's enough to upset one when a thing like this happens. Everything one says and does seems to turn in one's mouth—it's—it's uncanny. It's not the sort of thing I've been accustomed to. [As though stifling, he throws the window open. The faint sobbing of a child comes in.] What's that?

[They listen.]

MRS. BARTHWICK. [Sharply.] I can't stand that crying. I must send Marlow to stop it. My nerves are all on edge. [She rings the bell.]

BARTHWICK. I'll shut the window; you'll hear nothing. [He shuts the window. There is silence.]

MRS. BARTHWICK. [Sharply.] That's no good! It's on my nerves.
Nothing upsets me like a child's crying.

[MARLOW comes in.]

What's that noise of crying, Marlow? It sounds like a child.

BARTHWICK. It is a child. I can see it against the railings.

MARLOW. [Opening the window, and looking out quietly.] It's Mrs. Jones's little boy, ma'am; he came here after his mother.

MRS. BARTHWICK. [Moving quickly to the window.] Poor little chap! John, we ought n't to go on with this!

BARTHWICK. [Sitting heavily in a chair.] Ah! but it's out of our hands!

[MRS. BARTHWICK turns her back to the window. There is an expression of distress on her face. She stands motionless, compressing her lips. The crying begins again. BARTHWICK covers his ears with his hands, and MARLOW shuts the window. The crying ceases.]

The curtain falls.

ACT III

Eight days have passed, and the scene is a London Police Court at one o'clock. A canopied seat of Justice is surmounted by the lion and unicorn. Before the fire a worn-looking MAGISTRATE is warming his coat-tails, and staring at two little girls in faded blue and orange rags, who are placed before the dock. Close to the witness-box is a RELIEVING OFFICER in an overcoat, and a short brown beard. Beside the little girls stands a bald POLICE CONSTABLE. On the front bench are sitting BARTHWICK and ROPER, and behind them JACK. In the railed enclosure are seedy-looking men and women. Some prosperous constables sit or stand about.

MAGISTRATE. [In his paternal and ferocious voice, hissing his s's.] Now let us dispose of these young ladies.

USHER. Theresa Livens, Maud Livens.

[The bald CONSTABLE indicates the little girls, who remain silent, disillusioned, inattentive.]

Relieving Officer!

[The RELIEVING OFFICER Steps into the witness-box.]

USHER. The evidence you give to the Court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God! Kiss the book!

[The book is kissed.]

RELIEVING OFFICER. [In a monotone, pausing slightly at each sentence end, that his evidence may be inscribed.] About ten o'clock this morning, your Worship, I found these two little girls in Blue Street, Fulham, crying outside a public-house. Asked where their home was, they said they had no home. Mother had gone away. Asked about their father. Their father had no work. Asked where they slept last night. At their aunt's. I've made inquiries, your Worship. The wife has broken up the home and gone on the streets. The husband is out of work and living in common lodging-houses. The husband's sister has eight children of her own, and says she can't afford to keep these little girls any longer.

MAGISTRATE. [Returning to his seat beneath the canopy of justice.] Now, let me see. You say the mother is on the streets; what evidence have you of that?

RELIEVING OFFICER. I have the husband here, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. Very well; then let us see him.

[There are cries of "LIVENS." The MAGISTRATE leans forward, and stares with hard compassion at the little girls. LIVENS comes in. He is quiet, with grizzled hair, and a muffler for a collar. He stands beside the witness-box.]

And you, are their father? Now, why don't you keep your little girls at home. How is it you leave them

to wander about the streets like this?

LIVENS. I've got no home, your Worship. I'm living from 'and to mouth. I 've got no work; and nothin' to keep them on.

MAGISTRATE. How is that?

LIVENS. [Ashamedly.] My wife, she broke my 'ome up, and pawned the things.

MAGISTRATE. But what made you let her?

LEVINS. Your Worship, I'd no chance to stop 'er, she did it when I was out lookin' for work.

MAGISTRATE. Did you ill-treat her?

LIVENS. [Emphatically.] I never raised my 'and to her in my life, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. Then what was it—did she drink?

LIVENS. Yes, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. Was she loose in her behaviour?

LIVENS. [In a low voice.] Yes, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. And where is she now?

LIVENS. I don't know your Worship. She went off with a man, and after that I—

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes. Who knows anything of her? [To the bald CONSTABLE.] Is she known here?

RELIEVING OFFICER. Not in this district, your Worship; but I have ascertained that she is well known—

MAGISTRATE. Yes—yes; we'll stop at that. Now [To the Father] you say that she has broken up your home, and left these little girls. What provision can you make for them? You look a strong man.

LIVENS. So I am, your Worship. I'm willin' enough to work, but for the life of me I can't get anything to do.

MAGISTRATE. But have you tried?

LIVENS. I've tried everything, your Worship—I 've tried my 'ardest.

MAGISTRATE. Well, well— [There is a silence.]

RELIEVING OFFICER. If your Worship thinks it's a case, my people are willing to take them.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes, I know; but I've no evidence that this man is not the proper guardian for his children.

[He rises oval goes back to the fire.]

RELIEVING OFFICER. The mother, your Worship, is able to get access to them.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes; the mother, of course, is an improper person to have anything to do with them. [To the Father.] Well, now what do you say?

LIVENS. Your Worship, I can only say that if I could get work I should be only too willing to provide for them. But what can I do, your Worship? Here I am obliged to live from 'and to mouth in these 'ere common lodging-houses. I 'm a strong man—I'm willing to work—I'm half as alive again as some of 'em—but you see, your Worship, my 'airs' turned a bit, owing to the fever—[Touches his hair]—and that's against me; and I don't seem to get a chance anyhow.

MAGISTRATE. Yes-yes. [Slowly.] Well, I think it 's a case. [Staring his hardest at the little girls.] Now, are you willing that these little girls should be sent to a home.

LIVENS. Yes, your Worship, I should be very willing.

MAGISTRATE. Well, I'll remand them for a week. Bring them again to-day week; if I see no reason against it then, I 'll make an order.

RELIEVING OFFICER. To-day week, your Worship.

[The bald CONSTABLE takes the little girls out by the shoulders. The father follows them. The MAGISTRATE, returning to his seat, bends over and talks to his CLERK inaudibly.]

BARTHWICK. [Speaking behind his hand.] A painful case, Roper; very distressing state of things.

ROPER. Hundreds like this in the Police Courts.

BARTHWICK. Most distressing! The more I see of it, the more important this question of the condition of the people seems to become. I shall certainly make a point of taking up the cudgels in the House. I shall move——

[The MAGISTRATE ceases talking to his CLERK.]

CLERK. Remands!

[BARTHWICK stops abruptly. There is a stir and MRS. JONES comes in by the public door; JONES, ushered by policemen, comes from the prisoner's door. They file into the dock.]

CLERK. James Jones, Jane Jones.

USHER. Jane Jones!

BARTHWICK. [In a whisper.] The purse—the purse must be kept out of it, Roper. Whatever happens you must keep that out of the papers.

[ROPER nods.]

BALD CONSTABLE. Hush!

[MRS. JONES, dressed in hey thin, black, wispy dress, and black straw hat, stands motionless with hands crossed on the front rail of the dock. JONES leans against the back rail of the dock, and keeps half turning, glancing defiantly about him. He is haggard and unshaven.]

CLERK. [Consulting with his papers.] This is the case remanded from last Wednesday, Sir. Theft of a silver cigarette-box and assault on the police; the two charges were taken together. Jane Jones! James Jones!

MAGISTRATE. [Staring.] Yes, yes; I remember.

CLERK. Jane Jones.

MRS. JONES. Yes, Sir.

CLERK. Do you admit stealing a silver cigarette-box valued at five pounds, ten shillings, from the house of John BARTHWICK, M.P., between the hours of 11 p.m. on Easter Monday and 8.45 a.m. on Easter Tuesday last? Yes, or no?

MRS. JONES. [In a logy voice.] No, Sir, I do not, sir.

CLERK. James Jones? Do you admit stealing a silver cigarette-box valued at five pounds, ten shillings, from the house of John BARTHWICK, M.P., between the hours of 11 p.m. on Easter Monday and 8.45 A.M. on Easter Tuesday last. And further making an assault on the police when in the execution of their duty at 3 p.m. on Easter Tuesday? Yes or no?

JONES. [Sullenly.] Yes, but I've got a lot to say about it.

MAGISTRATE. [To the CLERK.] Yes—yes. But how comes it that these two people are charged with the same offence? Are they husband and wife?

CLERK. Yes, Sir. You remember you ordered a remand for further evidence as to the story of the male prisoner.

MAGISTRATE. Have they been in custody since?

CLERK. You released the woman on her own recognisances, sir.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes, this is the case of the silver box; I remember now. Well?

CLERK. Thomas Marlow.

[The cry of "THOMAS MARLOW" is repeated MARLOW comes in, and steps into the witness-box.]

USHER. The evidence you give to the court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God. Kiss the book.

[The book is kissed. The silver box is handed up, and placed on the rail.]

CLERK. [Reading from his papers.] Your name is Thomas Marlow? Are you, butler to John BARTHWICK, M.P., of 6, Rockingham Gate?

MARLOW. Yes, Sir.

CLERK. Is that the box?

MARLOW. Yes Sir.

CLERK. And did you miss the same at 8.45 on the following morning, on going to remove the tray?

MARLOW. Yes, Sir.

CLERK. Is the female prisoner known to you?

[MARLOW nods.]

Is she the charwoman employed at 6, Rockingham Gate?

[Again MARLOW nods.]

Did you at the time of your missing the box find her in the room alone?

MARLOW. Yes, Sir.

CLERK. Did you afterwards communicate the loss to your employer, and did he send you to the police station?

MARLOW. Yes, Sir.

CLERK. [To MRS. JONES.] Have you anything to ask him?

MRS. JONES. No, sir, nothing, thank you, sir.

CLERK. [To JONES.] James Jones, have you anything to ask this witness?

JONES. I don't know 'im.

MAGISTRATE. Are you sure you put the box in the place you say at the time you say?

MARLOW. Yes, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. Very well; then now let us have the officer.

[MARLOW leaves the box, and Snow goes into it.]

USHER. The evidence you give to the court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God. [The book is kissed.]

CLERK. [Reading from his papers.] Your name is Robert Allow? You are a detective in the X. B. division of the Metropolitan police force? According to instructions received did you on Easter Tuesday last proceed to the prisoner's lodgings at 34, Merthyr Street, St. Soames's? And did you on entering see the box produced, lying on the table?

SNOW. Yes, Sir.

CLERK. Is that the box?

Snow. [Fingering the box.] Yes, Sir.

CLERK. And did you thereupon take possession of it, and charge the female prisoner with theft of the box from 6, Rockingham Gate? And did she deny the same?

SNOW. Yes, Sir.

CLERK. Did you take her into custody?

Snow. Yes, Sir.

MAGISTRATE. What was her behaviour?

SNOW. Perfectly quiet, your Worship. She persisted in the denial. That's all.

MAGISTRATE. DO you know her?

SNOW. No, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. Is she known here?

BALD CONSTABLE. No, your Worship, they're neither of them known, we 've nothing against them at all.

CLERK. [To MRS. JONES.] Have you anything to ask the officer?

MRS. JONES. No, sir, thank you, I 've nothing to ask him.

MAGISTRATE. Very well then—go on.

CLERK. [Reading from his papers.] And while you were taking the female prisoner did the male prisoner interpose, and endeavour to hinder you in the execution of your duty, and did he strike you a blow?

SNOW. Yes, Sir.

CLERK. And did he say, "You, let her go, I took the box myself"?

SNOW. He did.

CLERK. And did you blow your whistle and obtain the assistance of another constable, and take him into custody?

SNOW. I did.

CLERK. Was he violent on the way to the station, and did he use bad language, and did he several times repeat that he had taken the box himself?

[Snow nods.]

Did you thereupon ask him in what manner he had stolen the box? And did you understand him to say he had entered the house at the invitation of young Mr. BARTHWICK

[BARTHWICK, turning in his seat, frowns at ROPER.]

after midnight on Easter Monday, and partaken of whisky, and that under the influence of the whisky he had taken the box?

SNOW. I did, sir.

CLERK. And was his demeanour throughout very violent?

SNOW. It was very violent.

JONES. [Breaking in.] Violent—of course it was! You put your 'ands on my wife when I kept tellin' you I took the thing myself.

MAGISTRATE. [Hissing, with protruded neck.] Now—you will have your chance of saying what you want to say presently. Have you anything to ask the officer?

JONES. [Sullenly.] No.

MAGISTRATE. Very well then. Now let us hear what the female prisoner has to say first.

MRS. JONES. Well, your Worship, of course I can only say what I 've said all along, that I did n't take the box.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, but did you know that it was taken?

MRS. JONES. No, your Worship. And, of course, to what my husband says, your Worship, I can't speak of my own knowledge. Of course, I know that he came home very late on the Monday night. It was past one o'clock when he came in, and he was not himself at all.

MAGISTRATE. Had he been drinking?

MRS. JONES. Yes, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. And was he drunk?

MRS. JONES. Yes, your Worship, he was almost quite drunk.

MAGISTRATE. And did he say anything to you?

MRS. JONES. No, your Worship, only to call me names. And of course in the morning when I got up and went to work he was asleep. And I don't know anything more about it until I came home again. Except that Mr. BARTHWICK—that 's my employer, your Worship—told me the box was missing.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes.

MRS. JONES. But of course when I was shaking out my husband's coat the cigarette-box fell out and all the cigarettes were scattered on the bed.

MAGISTRATE. You say all the cigarettes were scattered on the bed?
[To SNOW.] Did you see the cigarettes scattered on the bed?

SNOW. No, your Worship, I did not.

MAGISTRATE. You see he says he did n't see them.

JONES. Well, they were there for all that.

SNOW. I can't say, your Worship, that I had the opportunity of going round the room; I had all my work cut out with the male prisoner.

MAGISTRATE. [To MRS. JONES.] Well, what more have you to say?

MRS. JONES. Of course when I saw the box, your Worship, I was dreadfully upset, and I could n't think why he had done such a thing; when the officer came we were having words about it, because it is ruin to me, your Worship, in my profession, and I have three little children dependent on me.

MAGISTRATE. [Protruding his neck]. Yes—yes—but what did he say to you?

MRS. JONES. I asked him whatever came over him to do such a thing —and he said it was the drink. He said he had had too much to drink, and something came over him. And of course, your Worship, he had had very little to eat all day, and the drink does go to the head when you have not had enough to eat. Your Worship may not know, but it is the truth. And I would like to say that all through his married life, I have never known him to do such a thing before, though we have passed through great hardships and [speaking with soft emphasis] I am quite sure he would not have done it if he had been himself at the time.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes. But don't you know that that is no excuse?

MRS. JONES. Yes, your Worship. I know that it is no excuse.

[The MAGISTRATE leans over and parleys with his CLERK.]

JACK. [Leaning over from his seat behind.] I say, Dad—

BARTHWICK. Tsst! [Sheltering his mouth he speaks to ROPER.] Roper, you had better get up now and say that considering the circumstances and the poverty of the prisoners, we have no wish to proceed any further, and if the magistrate would deal with the case as one of disorder only on the part of—

BALD CONSTABLE. HSSShh!

[ROPER shakes his head.]

MAGISTRATE. Now, supposing what you say and what your husband says is true, what I have to consider is—how did he obtain access to this house, and were you in any way a party to his obtaining access? You are the charwoman employed at the house?

MRS. JONES. Yes, your Worship, and of course if I had let him into the house it would have been very wrong of me; and I have never done such a thing in any of the houses where I have been employed.

MAGISTRATE. Well—so you say. Now let us hear what story the male prisoner makes of it.

JONES. [Who leans with his arms on the dock behind, speaks in a slow, sullen voice.] Wot I say is wot my wife says. I 've never been 'ad up in a police court before, an' I can prove I took it when in liquor. I told her, and she can tell you the same, that I was goin' to throw the thing into the water sooner then 'ave it on my mind.

MAGISTRATE. But how did you get into the HOUSE?

JONES. I was passin'. I was goin' 'ome from the "Goat and Bells."

MAGISTRATE. The "Goat and Bells,"—what is that? A public-house?

JONES. Yes, at the corner. It was Bank 'oliday, an' I'd 'ad a drop to drink. I see this young Mr. BARTHWICK tryin' to find the keyhole on the wrong side of the door.

MAGISTRATE. Well?

JONES. [Slowly and with many pauses.] Well—I 'elped 'im to find it—drunk as a lord 'e was. He goes on, an' comes back again, and says, I 've got nothin' for you, 'e says, but come in an' 'ave a drink. So I went in just as you might 'ave done yourself. We 'ad a drink o' whisky just as you might have 'ad, 'nd young Mr. BARTHWICK says to me, "Take a drink 'nd a smoke. Take anything you like, 'e says." And then he went to sleep on the sofa. I 'ad some more whisky—an' I 'ad a smoke—and I 'ad some more whisky—an' I can't tell yer what 'appened after that.

MAGISTRATE. Do you mean to say that you were so drunk that you can remember nothing?

JACK. [Softly to his father.] I say, that's exactly what—

BARTHWICK. TSSh!

JONES. That's what I do mean.

MAGISTRATE. And yet you say you stole the box?

JONES. I never stole the box. I took it.

MAGISTRATE. [Hissing with protruded neck.] You did not steal it— you took it. Did it belong to you— what is that but stealing?

JONES. I took it.

MAGISTRATE. You took it—you took it away from their house and you took it to your house—

JONES. [Sullenly breaking in.] I ain't got a house.

MAGISTRATE. Very well, let us hear what this young man Mr.—Mr. BARTHWICK has to say to your story.

[SNOW leaves the witness-box. The BALD CONSTABLE beckons JACK, who, clutching his hat, goes into the witness-box. ROPER moves to the table set apart for his profession.]

SWEARING CLERK. The evidence you give to the court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God. Kiss the book.

[The book is kissed.]

ROPER. [Examining.] What is your name?

JACK. [In a low voice.] John BARTHWICK, Junior.

[The CLERK writes it down.]

ROPER. Where do you live?

JACK. At 6, Rockingham Gate.

[All his answers are recorded by the Clerk.]

ROPER. You are the son of the owner?

JACK. [In a very low voice.] Yes.

ROPER. Speak up, please. Do you know the prisoners?

JACK. [Looking at the JONESES, in a low voice.] I 've seen Mrs. Jones. I [in a loud voice] don't know the man.

JONES. Well, I know you!

BALD CONSTABLE. HSSh!

ROPER. Now, did you come in late on the night of Easter Monday?

JACK. Yes.

ROPER. And did you by mistake leave your latch key in the door?

JACK. Yes.

MAGISTRATE. Oh! You left your latch-key in the door?

ROPER. And is that all you can remember about your coming in?

JACK. [In a loud voice.] Yes, it is.

MAGISTRATE. Now, you have heard the male prisoner's story, what do you say to that?

JACK. [Turning to the MAGISTRATE, speaks suddenly in a confident, straight-forward voice.] The fact of the matter is, sir, that I 'd been out to the theatre that night, and had supper afterwards, and I came in late.

MAGISTRATE. Do you remember this man being outside when you came in?

JACK. No, Sir. [He hesitates.] I don't think I do.

MAGISTRATE. [Somewhat puzzled.] Well, did he help you to open the door, as he says? Did any one help you to open the door?

JACK. No, sir—I don't think so, sir—I don't know.

MAGISTRATE. You don't know? But you must know. It is n't a usual thing for you to have the door opened for you, is it?

JACK. [With a shamefaced smile.] No.

MAGISTRATE. Very well, then——

JACK. [Desperately.] The fact of the matter is, sir, I'm afraid I'd had too much champagne that night.

MAGISTRATE. [Smiling.] Oh! you'd had too much champagne?

JONES. May I ask the gentleman a question?

MAGISTRATE. Yes—yes—you may ask him what questions you like.

JONES. Don't you remember you said you was a Liberal, same as your father, and you asked me wot I was?

JACK. [With his hand against his brow.] I seem to remember——

JONES. And I said to you, "I'm a bloomin' Conservative," I said; an' you said to me, "You look more like one of these 'ere Socialists. Take wotever you like," you said.

JACK. [With sudden resolution.] No, I don't. I don't remember anything of the sort.

JONES. Well, I do, an' my word's as good as yours. I 've never been had up in a police court before. Look 'ere, don't you remember you had a sky-blue bag in your 'and [BARTHWICK jumps.]

ROPER. I submit to your worship that these questions are hardly to the point, the prisoner having admitted that he himself does not remember anything. [There is a smile on the face of Justice.] It is a case of the blind leading the blind.

JONES. [Violently.] I've done no more than wot he 'as. I'm a poor man; I've got no money an' no friends—he 's a toff—he can do wot I can't.

MAGISTRATE: Now, now? All this won't help you—you must be quiet. You say you took this box? Now, what made you take it? Were you pressed for money?

JONES. I'm always pressed for money.

MAGISTRATE. Was that the reason you took it?

JONES. No.

MAGISTRATE. [To SNOW.] Was anything found on him?

SNOW. Yes, your worship. There was six pounds twelve shillin's found on him, and this purse.

[The red silk purse is handed to the MAGISTRATE. BARTHWICK rises his seat, but hastily sits down again.]

MAGISTRATE. [Staring at the purse.] Yes, yes—let me see [There is a silence.] No, no, I 've nothing before me as to the purse. How did you come by all that money?

JONES. [After a long pause, suddenly.] I declines to say.

MAGISTRATE. But if you had all that money, what made you take this box?

JONES. I took it out of spite.

MAGISTRATE. [Hissing, with protruded neck.] You took it out of spite? Well now, that's something! But do you imagine you can go about the town taking things out of spite?

JONES. If you had my life, if you'd been out of work—

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes; I know—because you're out of work you think it's an excuse for everything.

JONES. [Pointing at JACK.] You ask 'im wot made 'im take the—

ROPER. [Quietly.] Does your Worship require this witness in the box any longer?

MAGISTRATE. [Ironically.] I think not; he is hardly profitable.

[JACK leaves the witness-box, and hanging his head, resumes his seat.]

JONES. You ask 'im wot made 'im take the lady's—

[But the BALD CONSTABLE catches him by the sleeve.]

BALD CONSTABLE. SSSh!

MAGISTRATE. [Emphatically.] Now listen to me.

I 've nothing to do with what he may or may not have taken. Why did you resist the police in the execution of their duty?

JONES. It war n't their duty to take my wife, a respectable woman, that 'ad n't done nothing.

MAGISTRATE. But I say it was. What made you strike the officer a blow?

JONES. Any man would a struck 'im a blow. I'd strike 'im again, I would.

MAGISTRATE. You are not making your case any better by violence. How do you suppose we could get on if everybody behaved like you?

JONES. [Leaning forward, earnestly.] Well, wot, about 'er; who's to make up to 'er for this? Who's to give 'er back 'er good name?

MRS. JONES. Your Worship, it's the children that's preying on his mind, because of course I 've lost my work. And I've had to find another room owing to the scandal.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes, I know—but if he had n't acted like this nobody would have suffered.

JONES. [Glaring round at JACK.] I 've done no worse than wot 'e 'as. Wot I want to know is wot 's goin' to be done to 'im.

[The BALD CONSTABLE again says "HSSh"]

ROPER. Mr. BARTHWICK wishes it known, your Worship, that considering the poverty of the prisoners, he does not press the charge as to the box. Perhaps your Worship would deal with the case as one of disorder.

JONES. I don't want it smothered up, I want it all dealt with fair—
—I want my rights—

MAGISTRATE. [Rapping his desk.] Now you have said all you have to say, and you will be quiet.

[There is a silence; the MAGISTRATE bends over and parleys with his CLERK.]

Yes, I think I may discharge the woman. [In a kindly voice he addresses MRS. JONES, who stands unmoving with her hands crossed on the rail.] It is very unfortunate for you that this man has behaved as he has. It is not the consequences to him but the consequences to you. You have been brought here twice, you have lost your work— [He glares at JONES]—and this is what always happens. Now you may go away, and I am very sorry it was necessary to bring you here at all.

MRS. JONES. [Softly.] Thank you very much, your Worship.

[She leaves the dock, and looking back at JONES, twists her fingers and is still.]

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes, but I can't pass it over. Go away, there's a good woman.

[MRS. JONES stands back. The MAGISTRATE leans his head on his hand; then raising it he speaks to JONES.]

Now, listen to me. Do you wish the case to be settled here, or do you wish it to go before a jury?

JONES. [Muttering.] I don't want no jury.

MAGISTRATE. Very well then, I will deal with it here. [After a pause.] You have pleaded guilty to stealing this box—

JONES. Not to stealin'—

BALD CONSTABLE. HSSShh!

MAGISTRATE. And to assaulting the police—

JONES. Any man as was a man—

MAGISTRATE. Your conduct here has been most improper. You give the excuse that you were drunk when you stole the box. I tell you that is no excuse. If you choose to get drunk and break the law afterwards you must take the consequences. And let me tell you that men like you, who get drunk and give way to your spite or whatever it is that's in you, are—are—a nuisance to the community.

JACK. [Leaning from his seat.] Dad! that's what you said to me!

BARTHWICK. TSSst!

[There is a silence, while the MAGISTRATE consults his CLERK; JONES leans forward waiting.]

MAGISTRATE. This is your first offence, and I am going to give you a light sentence. [Speaking sharply, but without expression.] One month with hard labour.

[He bends, and parleys with his CLERK. The BALD CONSTABLE and another help JONES from the dock.]

JONES. [Stopping and twisting round.] Call this justice? What about 'im? 'E got drunk! 'E took the purse—'e took the purse but [in a muffled shout] it's 'is money got 'im off—JUSTICE!

[The prisoner's door is shut on JONES, and from the seedy-looking men and women comes a hoarse and whispering groan.]

MAGISTRATE. We will now adjourn for lunch! [He rises from his seat.]

[The Court is in a stir. ROPER gets up and speaks to the reporter. JACK, throwing up his head, walks with a swagger to the corridor; BARTHWICK follows.]

MRS. JONES. [Turning to him with a humble gesture.] Oh! sir!

[BARTHWICK hesitates, then yielding to his nerves, he makes a shame-faced gesture of refusal, and hurries out of court. MRS. JONES stands looking after him.]

The curtain falls.

JOY

A PLAY ON THE LETTER "I"

IN THREE ACTS

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

COLONEL HOPE, R.A., retired
MRS. HOPE, his wife
MISS BEECH, their old governess
LETTY, their daughter
ERNEST BLUNT, her husband
MRS. GWYN, their niece
JOY, her daughter
DICK MERTON, their young friend
HON. MAURICE LEVER, their guest
ROSE, their parlour-maid

TIME: The present. The action passes throughout midsummer day on the lawn of Colonel Hope's house, near the Thames above Oxford.

ACT I

The time is morning, and the scene a level lawn, beyond which the river is running amongst fields. A huge old beech tree overshadows everything, in the darkness of whose hollow many things are hidden. A rustic seat encircles it. A low wall clothed in creepers, with two openings, divides this lawn from the flowery approaches to the house. Close to the wall there is a swing. The sky is clear and sunny. COLONEL HOPE is seated in a garden-chair, reading a newspaper through pince-nez. He is fifty-five and bald, with drooping grey moustaches and a weather-darkened face. He wears a flannel suit and a hat from Panama; a tennis racquet leans against his chair. MRS. HOPE comes quickly through the opening of the wall, with roses in her hands. She is going grey; she wears tan

gauntlets, and no hat. Her manner is decided, her voice emphatic, as though aware that there is no nonsense in its owner's composition. Screened from sight, MISS BEECH is seated behind the hollow tree; and JOY is perched on a lower branch hidden by foliage.

MRS. HOPE. I told Molly in my letter that she'd have to walk up, Tom.

COLONEL. Walk up in this heat? My dear, why didn't you order Benson's fly?

MRS. HOPE. Expense for nothing! Bob can bring up her things in the barrow. I've told Joy I won't have her going down to meet the train. She's so excited about her mother's coming there's no doing anything with her.

COLONEL. No wonder, after two months.

MRS. HOPE. Well, she's going home to-morrow; she must just keep herself fresh for the dancing tonight. I'm not going to get people in to dance, and have Joy worn out before they begin.

COLONEL. [Dropping his paper.] I don't like Molly's walking up.

MRS. HOPE. A great strong woman like Molly Gwyn! It isn't half a mile.

COLONEL. I don't like it, Nell; it's not hospitable.

MRS. HOPE. Rubbish! If you want to throw away money, you must just find some better investment than those wretched 3 per cents. of yours. The greenflies are in my roses already! Did you ever see anything so disgusting? [They bend over the roses they have grown, and lose all sense of everything.] Where's the syringe? I saw you mooning about with it last night, Tom.

COLONEL. [Uneasily.] Mooning!

[He retires behind his paper. MRS. HOPE enters the hollow of the tree.]

There's an account of that West Australian swindle. Set of ruffians! Listen to this, Nell! "It is understood that amongst the share-holders are large numbers of women, clergymen, and Army officers." How people can be such fools!

[Becoming aware that his absorption is unobserved, he drops his glasses, and reverses his chair towards the tree.]

MRS. HOPE. [Reappearing with a garden syringe.] I simply won't have Dick keep his fishing things in the tree; there's a whole potful of disgusting worms. I can't touch them. You must go and take 'em out, Tom.

[In his turn the COLONEL enters the hollow of the tree.]

MRS. HOPE. [Personally.] What on earth's the pleasure of it? I can't see! He never catches anything worth eating.

[The COLONEL reappears with a paint pot full of worms; he holds them out abstractedly.]

MRS. HOPE. [Jumping.] Don't put them near me!

MISS BEECH. [From behind the tree.] Don't hurt the poor creatures.

COLONEL. [Turning.] Hallo, Peachey? What are you doing round there?

[He puts the worms down on the seat.]

MRS. HOPE. Tom, take the worms off that seat at once!

COLONEL. [Somewhat flurried.] Good gad! I don't know what to do with the beastly worms!

MRS. HOPE. It's not my business to look after Dick's worms. Don't put them on the ground. I won't have them anywhere where they can crawl about. [She flicks some greenflies off her roses.]

COLONEL. [Looking into the pot as though the worms could tell him where to put them.] Dash!

MISS BEECH. Give them to me.

MRS. HOPE. [Relieved.] Yes, give them to Peachey.

[There comes from round the tree Miss BEECH, old-fashioned, barrel-shaped, balloony in the skirts. She takes the paint pot, and sits beside it on the rustic seat.]

MISS BEECH. Poor creatures!

MRS. HOPE. Well, it's beyond me how you can make pets of worms- wriggling, crawling, horrible things!

[ROSE, who is young and comely, in a pale print frock, comes from the house and places letters before her on a silver salver.]

[Taking the letters.]

What about Miss Joy's frock, Rose?

ROSE. Please, 'm, I can't get on with the back without Miss Joy.

MRS. HOPE. Well, then you must just find her. I don't know where she is.

ROSE. [In a slow, sidelong manner.] If you please, Mum, I think Miss Joy's up in the—

[She stops, seeing Miss BEECH signing to her with both hands.]

MRS. HOPE. [Sharply.] What is it, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. [Selecting a finger.] Pricked meself!

MRS. HOPE. Let's look!

[She bends to look, but Miss BEECH places the finger in her mouth.]

ROSE. [Glancing askance at the COLONEL.] If you please, Mum, it's below the waist; I think I can manage with the dummy.

MRS. HOPE. Well, you can try. [Opening her letter as ROSE retires.] Here's Molly about her train.

MISS BEECH. Is there a letter for me?

MRS. HOPE. No, Peachey.

MISS BEECH. There never is.

COLONEL. What's that? You got four by the first post.

MISS BEECH. Exceptions!

COLONEL. [Looking over his glasses.] Why! You know, you get 'em every day!

MRS. HOPE. Molly says she'll be down by the eleven thirty. [In an injured voice.] She'll be here in half an hour! [Reading with disapproval from the letter.] "MAURICE LEVER is coming down by the same train to see Mr. Henty about the Tocopala Gold Mine. Could you give him a bed for the night?"

[Silence, slight but ominous.]

COLONEL. [Calling into his aid his sacred hospitality.] Of course we must give him a bed!

MRS. HOPE. Just like a man! What room I should like to know!

COLONEL. Pink.

MRS. HOPE. As if Molly wouldn't have the pink!

COLONEL. [Ruefully.] I thought she'd have the blue!

MRS. HOPE. You know perfectly well it's full of earwigs, Tom. I killed ten there yesterday morning.

MISS BEECH. Poor creatures!

MRS. HOPE. I don't know that I approve of this Mr. Lever's dancing attendance. Molly's only thirty-six.

COLONEL. [In a high voice.] You can't refuse him a bed; I never heard of such a thing.

MRS. HOPE. [Reading from the letter.] "This gold mine seems to be a splendid chance. [She glances at the COLONEL.] I've put all my spare cash into it. They're issuing some Preference shares now; if Uncle Tom wants an investment"—[She pauses, then in a changed, decided voice]—Well, I suppose I shall have to screw him in somehow.

COLONEL. What's that about gold mines? Gambling nonsense! Molly ought to know my views.

MRS. HOPE. [Folding the letter away out of her consciousness.] Oh! your views! This may be a specially good chance.

MISS BEECH. Ahem! Special case!

MRS. HOPE. [Paying no attention.] I 'm sick of these 3 per cent. dividends. When you've only got so little money, to put it all into that India Stock, when it might be earning 6 per cent. at least, quite safely! There are ever so many things I want.

COLONEL. There you go!

MRS. HOPE. As to Molly, I think it's high time her husband came home to look after her, instead of sticking out there in that hot place. In fact

[Miss BEECH looks up at the tree and exhibits cerebral excitement]

I don't know what Geoff's about; why doesn't he find something in England, where they could live together.

COLONEL. Don't say anything against Molly, Nell!

MRS. HOPE. Well, I don't believe in husband and wife being separated. That's not my idea of married life.

[The COLONEL whistles quizzically.]

Ah, yes, she's your niece, not mine! Molly's very——

MISS BEECH. Ouch! [She sucks her finger.]

MRS. HOPE. Well, if I couldn't sew at your age, Peachey, without pricking my fingers! Tom, if I have Mr. Lever here, you'll just attend to what I say and look into that mine!

COLONEL. Look into your grandmother! I have n't made a study of geology for nothing. For every ounce you take out of a gold mine, you put an ounce and a half in. Any fool knows that, eh, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. I hate your horrid mines, with all the poor creatures underground.

MRS. HOPE. Nonsense, Peachey! As if they'd go there if they did n't want to!

COLONEL. Why don't you read your paper, then you'd see what a lot of wild-cat things there are about.

MRS. HOPE. [Abstractedly.] I can't put Ernest and Letty in the blue room, there's only the single bed. Suppose I put Mr. Lever there, and say nothing about the earwigs. I daresay he'll never notice.

COLONEL. Treat a guest like that!

MRS. HOPE. Then where am I to put him for goodness sake?

COLONEL. Put him in my dressing-room, I'll turn out.

MRS. HOPE. Rubbish, Tom, I won't have you turned out, that's flat. He can have Joy's room, and she can sleep with the earwigs.

JOY. [From her hiding-place upon a lower branch of the hollow tree.]
I won't.

[MRS. HOPE and the COLONEL jump.]

COLONEL. God bless my soul!

MRS. HOPE. You wretched girl! I told you never to climb that tree again. Did you know, Peachey?
[Miss BEECH smiles.] She's always up there, spoiling all her frocks. Come down now, Joy; there's a good child!

JOY. I don't want to sleep with earwigs, Aunt Nell.

MISS BEECH. I'll sleep with the poor creatures.

MRS. HOPE, [After a pause.] Well, it would be a mercy if you would for once, Peachey.

COLONEL. Nonsense, I won't have Peachey—

MRS. HOPE. Well, who is to sleep there then?

JOY. [Coaxingly.] Let me sleep with Mother, Aunt Nell, do!

MRS. HOPE. Litter her up with a great girl like you, as if we'd only one spare room! Tom, see that she comes down—I can't stay here, I must manage something. [She goes away towards the house.]

COLONEL. [Moving to the tree, and looking up.] You heard what your aunt said?

JOY. [Softly.] Oh, Uncle Tom!

COLONEL. I shall have to come up after you.

JOY. Oh, do, and Peachey too!

COLONEL. [Trying to restrain a smile.] Peachey, you talk to her. [Without waiting for MISS BEECH, however, he proceeds.] What'll your aunt say to me if I don't get you down?

MISS BEECH. Poor creature!

JOY. I don't want to be worried about my frock.

COLONEL. [Scratching his bald head.] Well, I shall catch it.

JOY. Oh, Uncle Tom, your head is so beautiful from here! [Leaning over, she fans it with a leafy twig.]

MISS BEECH. Disrespectful little toad!

COLONEL. [Quickly putting on his hat.] You'll fall out, and a pretty mess that'll make on—[he looks uneasily at the ground]—my lawn!

[A voice is heard calling "Colonel! Colonel!"]

JOY. There's Dick calling you, Uncle Tom.

[She disappears.]

DICK. [Appearing in the opening of the wall.] Ernie's waiting to play you that single, Colonel!

[He disappears.]

JOY. Quick, Uncle Tom! Oh! do go, before he finds I 'm up here.

MISS. BEECH. Secret little creature!

[The COLONEL picks up his racquet, shakes his fist, and goes away.]

JOY. [Calmly.] I'm coming down now, Peachey.

[Climbing down.]

Look out! I'm dropping on your head.

MISS BEECH. [Unmoved.] Don't hurt yourself!

[Joy drops on the rustic seat and rubs her shin. Told you so!]

[She hunts in a little bag for plaster.]

Let's see!

JOY. [Seeing the worms.] Ugh!

MISS BEECH. What's the matter with the poor creatures?

JOY. They're so wriggly!

[She backs away and sits down in the swing. She is just seventeen, light and slim, brown-haired, fresh-coloured, and grey-eyed; her white frock reaches to her ankles, she wears a sunbonnet.] Peachey, how long were you Mother's governess.

MISS BEECH. Five years.

JOY. Was she as bad to teach as me?

MISS BEECH. Worse!

[Joy claps her hands.]

She was the worst girl I ever taught.

JOY. Then you weren't fond of her?

MISS BEECH. Oh! yes, I was.

JOY. Fonder than of me?

MISS BEECH. Don't you ask such a lot of questions.

JOY. Peachey, ducky, what was Mother's worst fault?

MISS BEECH. Doing what she knew she oughtn't.

JOY. Was she ever sorry?

MISS BEECH. Yes, but she always went on doin' it.

JOY. I think being sorry 's stupid!

MISS BEECH. Oh, do you?

JOY. It isn't any good. Was Mother revengeful, like me?

MISS BEECH. Ah! Wasn't she?

JOY. And jealous?

MISS BEECH. The most jealous girl I ever saw.

JOY. [Nodding.] I like to be like her.

MISS BEECH. [Regarding her intently.] Yes! you've got all your troubles before you.

JOY. Mother was married at eighteen, wasn't she, Peachey? Was she— was she much in love with Father then?

MISS BEECH. [With a sniff.] About as much as usual. [She takes the paint pot, and walking round begins to release the worms.]

JOY. [Indifferently.] They don't get on now, you know.

MISS BEECH. What d'you mean by that, disrespectful little creature?

JOY. [In a hard voice.] They haven't ever since I've known them. MISS BEECH. [Looks at her, and turns away again.] Don't talk about such things.

JOY. I suppose you don't know Mr. Lever? [Bitterly.] He's such a cool beast. He never loses his temper.

MISS BEECH. Is that why you don't like him?

JOY. [Frowning.] No—yes—I don't know.

MISS BEECH. Oh! perhaps you do like him?

JOY. I don't; I hate him.

MISS BEECH. [Standing still.] Fie! Naughty Temper!

JOY. Well, so would you! He takes up all Mother's time.

MISS BEECH. [In a peculiar voice.] Oh! does he?

JOY. When he comes I might just as well go to bed. [Passionately.] And now he's chosen to-day to come down here, when I haven't seen her for two months! Why couldn't he come when Mother and I'd gone home. It's simply brutal!

MISS BEECH. But your mother likes him?

JOY. [Sullenly.] I don't want her to like him.

MISS BEECH. [With a long look at Joy.] I see!

JOY. What are you doing, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. [Releasing a worm.] Letting the poor creatures go.

JOY. If I tell Dick he'll never forgive you.

MISS BEECH. [Sidling behind the swing and plucking off Joy's sunbonnet. With devilry.] Ah-h-h! You've done your hair up; so that's why you wouldn't come down!

JOY. [Springing up, anal pouting.] I didn't want any one to see before Mother. You are a pig, Peachey!

MISS BEECH. I thought there was something!

JOY. [Twisting round.] How does it look?

MISS BEECH. I've seen better.

JOY. You tell any one before Mother comes, and see what I do!

MISS BEECH. Well, don't you tell about my worms, then!

JOY. Give me my hat! [Backing hastily towards the tree, and putting her finger to her lips.] Look out! Dick!

MISS BEECH. Oh! dear!

[She sits down on the swing, concealing the paint pot with her feet and skirts.]

JOY. [On the rustic seat, and in a violent whisper.] I hope the worms will crawl up your legs!

[DICK, in flannels and a hard straw hat comes in. He is a quiet and cheerful boy of twenty. His eyes are always fixed on joy.]

DICK. [Grimacing.] The Colonel's getting licked. Hallo! Peachey, in the swing?

JOY. [Chuckling.] Swing her, Dick!

MISS BEECH. [Quivering with emotion.] Little creature!

JOY. Swing her!

[DICK takes the ropes.]

MISS BEECH. [Quietly.] It makes me sick, young man.

DICK. [Patting her gently on the back.] All right, Peachey.

MISS BEECH. [Maliciously.] Could you get me my sewing from the seat? Just behind Joy.

JOY. [Leaning her head against the tree.] If you do, I won't dance with you to-night.

[DICK stands paralysed. Miss BEECH gets off the swing, picks up the paint pot, and stands concealing it behind her.]

JOY. Look what she's got behind her, sly old thing!

MISS BEECH. Oh! dear!

JOY. Dance with her, Dick!

MISS BEECH. If he dare!

JOY. Dance with her, or I won't dance with you to-night.
[She whistles a waltz.]

DICK. [Desperately.] Come on then, Peachey. We must.

JOY. Dance, dance!

[DICK seizes Miss BEECH by the waist. She drops the paint pot. They revolve.] [Convulsed.]

Oh, Peachey, Oh!

[Miss BEECH is dropped upon the rustic seat. DICK seizes joy's hands and drags her up.]

No, no! I won't!

MISS BEECH. [Panting.] Dance, dance with the poor young man! [She moves her hands.] La la-la-la la-la la la!

[DICK and JOY dance.]

DICK. By Jove, Joy! You've done your hair up. I say, how jolly!
You do look—

JOY. [Throwing her hands up to her hair.] I did n't mean you to see!

DICK. [In a hurt voice.] Oh! didn't you? I'm awfully sorry!

JOY. [Flashing round.] Oh, you old Peachey!

[She looks at the ground, and then again at DICK.]

MISS BEECH. [Sidling round the tree.] Oh! dear!

JOY. [Whispering.] She's been letting out your worms.
[Miss BEECH disappears from view.]
Look!

DICK. [Quickly.] Hang the worms! Joy, promise me the second and fourth and sixth and eighth and tenth and supper, to-night. Promise! Do!

[Joy shakes her head.]

It's not much to ask.

JOY. I won't promise anything.

DICK. Why not?

JOY. Because Mother's coming. I won't make any arrangements.

DICK. [Tragically.] It's our last night.

JOY. [Scornfully.] You don't understand! [Dancing and clasping her hands.] Mother's coming, Mother's coming!

DICK. [Violently.] I wish—Promise, Joy!

JOY. [Looking over her shoulder.] Sly old thing! If you'll pay Peachey out, I'll promise you supper!

MISS BEECH. [From behind the tree.] I hear you.

JOY. [Whispering.] Pay her out, pay her out! She's let out all your worms!

DICK. [Looking moodily at the paint pot.] I say, is it true that Maurice Lever's coming with your mother? I've met him playing cricket, he's rather a good sort.

JOY. [Flashing out.] I hate him.

DICK. [Troubled.] Do you? Why? I thought—I didn't know—if I'd known of course, I'd have——

[He is going to say "hated him too!" But the voices of ERNEST BLUNT and the COLONEL are heard approaching, in dispute.]

JOY. Oh! Dick, hide me, I don't want my hair seen till Mother comes.

[She springs into the hollow tree. The COLONEL and ERNEST appear in the opening of the wall.]

ERNEST. The ball was out, Colonel.

COLONEL. Nothing of the sort.

ERNEST. A good foot out.

COLONEL. It was not, sir. I saw the chalk fly.

[ERNEST is twenty-eight, with a little moustache, and the positive cool voice of a young man who knows that he knows everything. He is perfectly calm.]

ERNEST. I was nearer to it than you.

COLONEL. [In a high, hot voice.] I don't care where you were, I hate a fellow who can't keep cool.

MISS BEECH. [From behind the hollow tree.] Fie! Fie!

ERNEST. We're two to one, Letty says the ball was out.

COLONEL. Letty's your wife, she'd say anything.

ERNEST. Well, look here, Colonel, I'll show you the very place it pitched.

COLONEL. Gammon! You've lost your temper, you don't know what you're talking about.

ERNEST. [coolly.] I suppose you'll admit the rule that one umpires one's own court.

COLONEL. [Hotly.] Certainly not, in this case!

MISS BEECH. [From behind the hollow tree.] Special case!

ERNEST. [Moving chin in collar—very coolly.] Well, of course if you won't play the game!

COLONEL. [In a towering passion.] If you lose your temper like this, I 'll never play with you again.

[To LETTY, a pretty soul in a linen suit, approaching through the wall.]

Do you mean to say that ball was out, Letty?

LETTY. Of course it was, Father.

COLONEL. You say that because he's your husband. [He sits on the rustic seat.] If your mother'd been there she'd have backed me up!

LETTY. Mother wants Joy, Dick, about her frock.

DICK. I—I don't know where she is.

MISS BEECH. [From behind the hollow tree.] Ahem!

LETTY. What's the matter, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. Swallowed a fly. Poor creature!

ERNEST. [Returning to his point.] Why I know the ball was out, Colonel, was because it pitched in a line with that arbutus tree.

COLONEL. [Rising.] Arbutus tree! [To his daughter.] Where's your mother?

LETTY. In the blue room, Father.

ERNEST. The ball was a good foot out; at the height it was coming when it passed me.

COLONEL. [Staring at him.] You're a—you're aa theorist! From where you were you could n't see the ball at all. [To LETTY.] Where's your mother?

LETTY. [Emphatically.] In the blue room, Father!

[The COLONEL glares confusedly, and goes away towards the blue room.]

ERNEST. [In the swing, and with a smile.] Your old Dad'll never be a sportsman!

LETTY. [Indignantly.] I wish you wouldn't call Father old, Ernie! What time's Molly coming, Peachey?

[ROSE has come from the house, and stands waiting for a chance to speak.]

ERNEST. [Breaking in.] Your old Dad's only got one fault: he can't take an impersonal view of things.

MISS BEECH. Can you find me any one who can?

ERNEST. [With a smile.] Well, Peachey!

MISS BEECH. [Ironically.] Oh! of course, there's you!

ERNEST. I don't know about that! But——

ROSE. [To LETTY,] Please, Miss, the Missis says will you and Mr. Ernest please to move your things into Miss Peachey's room.

ERNEST. [Vexed.] Deuce of a nuisance havin' to turn out for this fellow Lever. What did Molly want to bring him for?

MISS BEECH. Course you've no personal feeling in the matter!

ROSE. [Speaking to Miss BEECH.] The Missis says you're to please move your things into the blue room, please Miss.

LETTY. Aha, Peachey! That settles you! Come on, Ernie!

[She goes towards the house. ERNEST, rising from the swing, turns to Miss BEECH, who follows.]

ERNEST. [Smiling, faintly superior.] Personal, not a bit! I only think while Molly 's out at grass, she oughtn't to——

MISS BEECH. [Sharply.] Oh! do you?

[She hustles ERNEST out through the wall, but his voice is heard faintly from the distance: "I think it's jolly thin."]

ROSE. [To DICK.] The Missis says you're to take all your worms and things, Sir, and put them where they won't be seen.

DICK. [Shortly.] Have n't got any!

ROSE. The Missis says she'll be very angry if you don't put your worms away; and would you come and help kill earwigs in the blue——?

DICK. Hang! [He goes, and ROSE is left alone.]

ROSE. [Looking straight before her.] Please, Miss Joy, the Missis says will you go to her about your frock.

[There is a little pause, then from the hollow tree joy's voice is heard.]

JOY. No-o!

ROSE. If you did n't come, I was to tell you she was going to put you in the blue.

[Joy looks out of the tree.]

[Immovable, but smiling.]

Oh, Miss joy, you've done your hair up! [Joy retires into the tree.] Please, Miss, what shall I tell the Missis?

JOY. [Joy's voice is heard.] Anything you like.

ROSE. [Over her shoulder.] I shall be drove to tell her a story, Miss.

JOY. All right! Tell it.

[ROSE goes away, and JOY comes out. She sits on the rustic seat and waits. DICK, coming softly from the house, approaches her.]

DICK. [Looking at her intently.] Joy! I wanted to say something

[Joy does not look at him, but twists her fingers.]

I shan't see you again you know after to-morrow till I come up for the 'Varsity match.

JOY. [Smiling.] But that's next week.

DICK. Must you go home to-morrow?

[Joy nods three times.]

[Coming closer.]

I shall miss you so awfully. You don't know how I—

[Joy shakes her head.]

Do look at me! [JOY steals a look.] Oh! Joy!

[Again joy shakes her head.]

JOY. [Suddenly.] Don't!

DICK. [Seizing her hand.] Oh, Joy! Can't you—

JOY. [Drawing the hand away.] Oh! don't.

DICK. [Bending his head.] It's—it's—so—

JOY. [Quietly.] Don't, Dick!

DICK. But I can't help it! It's too much for me, Joy, I must tell you—

[MRS. GWYN is seen approaching towards the house.]

JOY. [Spinning round.] It's Mother—oh, Mother!
[She rushes at her.]

[MRS. GWYN is a handsome creature of thirty-six, dressed in a muslin frock. She twists her daughter round, and kisses her.]

MRS. GWYN. How sweet you look with your hair up, Joy! Who 's this?
[Glancing with a smile at DICK.]

JOY. Dick Merton—in my letters you know.

[She looks at DICK as though she wished him gone.]

MRS. GWYN. How do you do?

DICK. [Shaking hands.] How d 'you do? I think if you'll excuse me—I'll go in.

[He goes uncertainly.]

MRS. GWYN. What's the matter with him?

JOY. Oh, nothing! [Hugging her.] Mother! You do look such a duck. Why did you come by the towing-path, was n't it cooking?

MRS. GWYN. [Avoiding her eyes.] Mr. Lever wanted to go into Mr. Henty's.

[Her manner is rather artificially composed.]

JOY. [Dully.] Oh! Is he-is he really coming here, Mother?

MRS. GWYN. [Whose voice has hardened just a little.] If Aunt Nell's got a room for him—of course—why not?

JOY. [Digging her chin into her mother's shoulder.]

[Why couldn't he choose some day when we'd gone? I wanted you all to myself.]

MRS. GWYN. You are a quaint child—when I was your age—

JOY. [Suddenly looking up.] Oh! Mother, you must have been a chook!

MRS. GWYN. Well, I was about twice as old as you, I know that.

JOY. Had you any—any other offers before you were married, Mother?

MRS. GWYN. [Smilingly.] Heaps!

JOY. [Reflectively.] Oh!

MRS. GWYN. Why? Have you been having any?

JOY. [Glancing at MRS. GWYN, and then down.] N-o, of course not!

MRS. GWYN. Where are they all? Where's Peachey?

JOY. Fussing about somewhere; don't let's hurry! Oh! you duckie— duckie! Aren't there any letters from Dad?

MRS. GWYN. [In a harder voice.] Yes, one or two.

JOY. [Hesitating.] Can't I see?

MRS. GWYN. I didn't bring them. [Changing the subject obviously.] Help me to tidy—I'm so hot I don't know what to do.

[She takes out a powder-puff bag, with a tiny looking-glass.]

JOY. How lovely it'll be to-morrow-going home!

MRS. GWYN. [With an uneasy look.] London's dreadfully stuffy, Joy. You 'll only get knocked up again.

JOY. [With consternation.] Oh! but Mother, I must come.

MRS. GWYN. (Forcing a smile.) Oh, well, if you must, you must!

[Joy makes a dash at her.]

Don't rumple me again. Here's Uncle Tom.

JOY. [Quickly.] Mother, we're going to dance tonight; promise to dance with me—there are three more girls than men, at least—and don't dance too much with—with—you know—because I'm—

[dropping her voice and very still]—jealous.

MRS. GWYN. [Forcing a laugh.] You are funny!

JOY. [Very quickly.] I haven't made any engagements because of you.

[The COLONEL approaches through the wall.]

MRS. GWYN. Well, Uncle Tom?

COLONEL. [Genially.] Why, Molly! [He kisses her.] What made you come by the towing-path?

JOY. Because it's so much cooler, of course.

COLONEL. Hallo! What's the matter with you? Phew! you've got your hair up! Go and tell your aunt your mother's on the lawn. Cut along!

[Joy goes, blowing a kiss.]

Cracked about you, Molly! Simply cracked! We shall miss her when you take her off to-morrow. [He places a chair for her.] Sit down, sit down, you must be tired in this heat. I 've sent Bob for your things with the wheelbarrow; what have you got?—only a bag, I suppose.

MRS. GWYN. [Sitting, with a smile.] That's all, Uncle Tom, except— my trunk and hat-box.

COLONEL. Phew! And what's-his-name brought a bag, I suppose?

MRS. GWYN. They're all together. I hope it's not too much, Uncle Tom.

COLONEL. [Dubiously.] Oh! Bob'll manage! I suppose you see a good deal of—of—Lever. That's his brother in the Guards, isn't it?

MRS. GWYN. Yes.

COLONEL. Now what does this chap do?

MRS. GWYN. What should he do, Uncle Tom? He's a Director.

COLONEL. Guinea-pig! [Dubiously.] Your bringing him down was a good idea.

[MRS. GWYN, looking at him sidelong, bites her lips.]

I should like to have a look at him. But, I say, you know, Molly— mines, mines! There are a lot of these chaps about, whose business is to cook their own dinners. Your aunt thinks—

MRS. GWYN. Oh! Uncle Tom, don't tell me what Aunt Nell thinks!

COLONEL. Well-well! Look here, old girl! It's my experience never to—what I mean is—never to trust too much to a man who has to do with mining. I've always refused to have anything to do with mines. If your husband were in England, of course, I'd say nothing.

MRS. GWYN. [Very still.] We'd better keep him out of the question, had n't we?

COLONEL. Of course, if you wish it, my dear.

MRS. GWYN. Unfortunately, I do.

COLONEL. [Nervously.] Ah! yes, I know; but look here, Molly, your aunt thinks you're in a very delicate position—in fact, she thinks you see too much of young Lever.

MRS. GWYN. [Stretching herself like an angry cat.] Does she? And what do you think?

COLONEL. I? I make a point of not thinking. I only know that here he is, and I don't want you to go burning your fingers, eh?

[MRS. GWYN sits with a vindictive smile.]

A gold mine's a gold mine. I don't mean he deliberately—but they take in women and parsons, and—and all sorts of fools. [Looking down.] And then, you know, I can't tell your feelings, my dear, and I don't want to; but a man about town 'll compromise a woman as soon as he'll look at her, and [softly shaking his head] I don't like that, Molly! It 's not the thing!

[MRS. GWYN sits unmoved, smiling the same smile, and the COLONEL gives her a nervous look.]

If—if you were any other woman I should n't care—and if—if you were a plain woman, damme, you might do what you liked! I know you and Geoff don't get on; but here's this child of yours, devoted to you, and—and don't you see, old girl? Eh?

MRS. GWYN. [With a little hard laugh.] Thanks! Perfectly! I suppose as you don't think, Uncle Tom, it never occurred to you that I have rather a lonely time of it.

COLONEL. [With compunction.] Oh! my dear, yes, of course I know it must be beastly.

MRS. GWYN. [Stonily.] It is.

COLONEL. Yes, yes! [Speaking in a surprised voice.] I don't know what I 'm talking like this for! It's your aunt! She goes on at me till she gets on my nerves. What d' you think she wants me to do now? Put money into this gold mine! Did you ever hear such folly?

MRS. GWYN. [Breaking into laughter.] Oh! Uncle Tom!

COLONEL. All very well for you to laugh, Molly!

MRS. GWYN. [Calmly.] And how much are you going to put in?

COLONEL. Not a farthing! Why, I've got nothing but my pension and three thousand India stock!

MRS. GWYN. Only ninety pounds a year, besides your pension! D' you mean to say that's all you've got, Uncle Tom? I never knew that before. What a shame!

COLONEL. [Feelingly.] It is a, d—d shame! I don't suppose there's another case in the army of a man being treated as I've been.

MRS. GWYN. But how on earth do you manage here on so little?

COLONEL. [Brooding.] Your aunt's very funny. She's a born manager. She 'd manage the hind leg off a donkey; but if I want five shillings for a charity or what not, I have to whistle for it. And then all of a sudden, Molly, she'll take it into her head to spend goodness knows what on some trumpery or other and come to me for the money. If I have n't got it to give her, out she flies about 3 per cent., and worries me to invest in some wild-cat or other, like your friend's thing, the Jaco what is it? I don't pay the slightest attention to her.

MRS. HOPE. [From the direction of the house.] Tom!

COLONEL. [Rising.] Yes, dear! [Then dropping his voice.] I say, Molly, don't you mind what I said about young Lever. I don't want you to imagine that I think harm of people—you know I don't—but so many women come to grief, and—[hotly]—I can't stand men about town; not that he of course—

MRS. HOPE, [Peremptorily.] Tom!

COLONEL. [In hasty confidence.] I find it best to let your aunt run on. If she says anything—

MRS. HOPE. To-om!

COLONEL. Yes, dear!

[He goes hastily. MRS. GWYN sits drawing circles on the ground with her charming parasol. Suddenly she springs to her feet, and stands waiting like an animal at bay. The COLONEL and MRS. HOPE approach her talking.]

MRS. HOPE. Well, how was I to know?

COLONEL. Did n't Joy come and tell you?

MRS. HOPE. I don't know what's the matter with that child? Well, Molly, so here you are. You're before your time—that train's always late.

MRS. GWYN. [With faint irony.] I'm sorry, Aunt Nell!

[They bob, seem to take fright, and kiss each other gingerly.]

MRS. HOPE. What have you done with Mr. Lever? I shall have to put him in Peachey's room. Tom's

got no champagne.

COLONEL. They've a very decent brand down at the George, Molly, I'll send Bob over—

MRS. HOPE. Rubbish, Tom! He'll just have to put up with what he can get!

MRS. GWYN. Of course! He's not a snob! For goodness sake, Aunt Nell, don't put yourself out! I'm sorry I suggested his coming.

COLONEL. My dear, we ought to have champagne in the house—in case of accident.

MRS. GWYN. [Shaking him gently by the coat.] No, please, Uncle Tom!

MRS. HOPE. [Suddenly.] Now, I've told your uncle, Molly, that he's not to go in for this gold mine without making certain it's a good thing. Mind, I think you've been very rash. I'm going to give you a good talking to; and that's not all—you ought n't to go about like this with a young man; he's not at all bad looking. I remember him perfectly well at the Fleming's dance.

[On MRS. GWYN's lips there comes a little mocking smile.]

COLONEL. [Pulling his wife's sleeve.] Nell!

MRS. HOPE. No, Tom, I'm going to talk to Molly; she's old enough to know better.

MRS. GWYN. Yes?

MRS. HOPE. Yes, and you'll get yourself into a mess; I don't approve of it, and when I see a thing I don't approve of—

COLONEL. [Walking about, and pulling his moustache.] Nell, I won't have it, I simply won't have it.

MRS. HOPE. What rate of interest are these Preference shares to pay?

MRS. GWYN. [Still smiling.] Ten per cent.

MRS. HOPE. What did I tell you, Tom? And are they safe?

MRS. GWYN. You'd better ask Maurice.

MRS. HOPE. There, you see, you call him Maurice! Now supposing your uncle went in for some of them—

COLONEL. [Taking off his hat—in a high, hot voice] I'm not going in for anything of the sort.

MRS. HOPE. Don't swing your hat by the brim! Go and look if you can see him coming!

[The COLONEL goes.]

[In a lower voice.] Your uncle's getting very bald. I 've only shoulder of lamb for lunch, and a salad. It's lucky it's too hot to eat.

[MISS BEECH has appeared while she is speaking.]

Here she is, Peachey!

MISS BEECH. I see her. [She kisses MRS. GWYN, and looks at her intently.]

MRS. GWYN. [Shrugging her shoulders.] Well, Peachey! What d 'you make of me?

COLONEL. [Returning from his search.] There's a white hat crossing the second stile. Is that your friend, Molly?

[MRS. GWYN nods.]

MRS. HOPE. Oh! before I forget, Peachey—Letty and Ernest can move their things back again. I'm going to put Mr. Lever in your room. [Catching sight of the paint pot on the ground.] There's that disgusting paint pot! Take it up at once, Tom, and put it in the tree.

[The COLONEL picks up the pot and bears it to the hollow tree followed by MRS. HOPE; he enters.]

MRS. HOPE. [Speaking into the tree.] Not there!

COLONEL. [From within.] Well, where then?

MRS. HOPE. Why—up—oh! gracious!

[MRS. GWYN, standing alone, is smiling. LEVER approaches from the towing-path. He is a man like a fencer's wrist, supple and steely. A man whose age is difficult to tell, with a quick, good-looking face, and a line between his brows; his darkish hair is flecked with grey. He gives the feeling that he has always had to spurt to keep pace with his own life.]

MRS. HOPE. [Also entering the hollow tree.] No-oh!

COLONEL. [From the depths, in a high voice.] Well, dash it then!
What do you want?

MRS. GWYN. Peachey, may I introduce Mr. Lever to you? Miss Beech, my old governess.

[They shake each other by the hand.]

LEVER. How do you do? [His voice is pleasant, his manner easy.]

MISS BEECH. Pleased to meet you.

[Her manner is that of one who is not pleased. She watches.]

MRS. GWYN. [Pointing to the tree-maliciously.] This is my uncle and my aunt. They're taking exercise, I think.

[The COLONEL and MRS. HOPE emerge convulsively. They are very hot. LEVER and MRS. GWYN are very cool.]

MRS. HOPE. [Shaking hands with him.] So you 've got here! Are n't you very hot?—Tom!

COLONEL. Brought a splendid day with you! Splendid!

[As he speaks, Joy comes running with a bunch of roses; seeing LEVER, she stops and stands quite rigid.]

MISS BEECH. [Sitting in the swing.] Thunder!

COLONEL. Thunder? Nonsense, Peachey, you're always imagining something. Look at the sky!

MISS BEECH. Thunder!

[MRS. GWYN's smile has faded.]

MRS. HOPE. [Turning.] Joy, don't you see Mr. Lever?

[Joy, turning to her mother, gives her the roses. With a forced smile, LEVER advances, holding out his hand.]

LEVER. How are you, Joy? Have n't seen you for an age!

JOY. [Without expression.] I am very well, thank you.

[She raises her hand, and just touches his. MRS. GWYN'S eyes are fixed on her daughter. Miss BEECH is watching them intently. MRS. HOPE is buttoning the COLONEL'S coat.]

The curtain falls.

ACT II

It is afternoon, and at a garden-table placed beneath the hollow tree, the COLONEL is

poring over plans. Astride of a garden-chair, LEVER is smoking cigarettes. DICK is hanging Chinese lanterns to the hollow tree.

LEVER. Of course, if this level [pointing with his cigarette] peters out to the West we shall be in a tightish place; you know what a mine is at this stage, Colonel Hope.

COLONEL. [Absently.] Yes, yes. [Tracing a line.] What is there to prevent its running out here to the East?

LEVER. Well, nothing, except that as a matter of fact it doesn't.

COLONEL. [With some excitement.] I'm very glad you showed me these papers, very glad! I say that it's a most astonishing thing if the ore suddenly stops there. [A gleam of humour visits LEVER'S face.] I'm not an expert, but you ought to prove that ground to the East more thoroughly.

LEVER. [Quizzically.] Of course, sir, if you advise that—

COLONEL. If it were mine, I'd no more sit down under the belief that the ore stopped there than I 'd—There's a harmony in these things.

NEVER. I can only tell you what our experts say.

COLONEL. Ah! Experts! No faith in them—never had! Miners, lawyers, theologians, cowardly lot—pays them to be cowardly. When they have n't their own axes to grind, they've got their theories; a theory's a dangerous thing. [He loses himself in contemplation of the papers.] Now my theory is, you 're in strata here of what we call the Triassic Age.

LEVER. [Smiling faintly.] Ah!

COLONEL. You've struck a fault, that's what's happened. The ore may be as much as thirty or forty yards out; but it 's there, depend on it.

LEVER. Would you back that opinion, sir?

COLONEL. [With dignity.] I never give an opinion that I'm not prepared to back. I want to get to the bottom of this. What's to prevent the gold going down indefinitely?

LEVER. Nothing, so far as I know.

COLONEL. [With suspicion.] Eh!

LEVER. All I can tell you is: This is as far as we've got, and we want more money before we can get any farther.

COLONEL. [Absently.] Yes, yes; that's very usual.

LEVER. If you ask my personal opinion I think it's very doubtful that the gold does go down.

COLONEL. [Smiling.] Oh! a personal opinion a matter of this sort!

LEVER. [As though about to take the papers.] Perhaps we'd better close the sitting, sir; sorry to have bored you.

COLONEL. Now, now! Don't be so touchy! If I'm to put money in, I'm bound to look at it all round.

LEVER. [With lifted brows.] Please don't imagine that I want you to put money in.

COLONEL. Confound it, sir! D 'you suppose I take you for a Company promoter?

LEVER. Thank you!

COLONEL. [Looking at him doubtfully.] You've got Irish blood in you—um? You're so hasty!

LEVER. If you 're really thinking of taking shares—my advice to you is, don't!

COLONEL. [Regretfully.] If this were an ordinary gold mine, I wouldn't dream of looking at it, I want you to understand that. Nobody has a greater objection to gold mines than I.

LEVER. [Looks down at his host with half-closed eyes.] But it is a gold mine, Colonel Hope.

COLONEL. I know, I know; but I 've been into it for myself; I've formed my opinion personally. Now, what 's the reason you don't want me to invest?

LEVER. Well, if it doesn't turn out as you expect, you'll say it's my doing. I know what investors are.

COLONEL. [Dubiously.] If it were a Westralian or a Kaffir I would n't touch it with a pair of tongs! It 's not as if I were going to put much in! [He suddenly bends above the papers as though magnetically attracted.] I like these Triassic formations!

[DICK, who has hung the last lantern, moodily departs.]

LEVER. [Looking after him.] That young man seems depressed.

COLONEL. [As though remembering his principles.] I don't like mines, never have! [Suddenly absorbed again.] I tell you what, Lever—this thing's got tremendous possibilities. You don't seem to believe in it enough. No mine's any good without faith; until I see for myself, however, I shan't commit myself beyond a thousand.

LEVER. Are you serious, sir?

COLONEL. Certainly! I've been thinking it over ever since you told me Henty had fought shy. I 've a poor opinion of Henty. He's one of those fellows that says one thing and does another. An opportunist!

LEVER. [Slowly.] I'm afraid we're all that, more or less. [He sits beneath the hollow tree.]

COLONEL. A man never knows what he is himself. There 's my wife. She thinks she 's—By the way, don't say anything to her about this, please. And, Lever [nervously], I don't think, you know, this is quite the sort of thing for my niece.

LEVER. [Quietly.] I agree. I mean to get her out of it.

COLONEL. [A little taken aback.] Ah! You know, she—she's in a very delicate position, living by herself in London. [LEVER looks at him ironically.] You [very nervously] see a good deal of her? If it had n't been for Joy growing so fast, we shouldn't have had the child down here. Her mother ought to have her with her. Eh! Don't you think so?

LEVER. [Forcing a smile.] Mrs. Gwyn always seems to me to get on all right.

COLONEL. [As though making a discovery.] You know, I've found that when a woman's living alone and unprotected, the very least thing will set a lot of hags and jackanapes talking. [Hotly.] The more unprotected and helpless a woman is, the more they revel in it. If there's anything I hate in this world, it's those wretched creatures who babble about their neighbours' affairs.

LEVER. I agree with you.

COLONEL. One ought to be very careful not to give them—that is— [checks himself confused; then hurrying on]—I suppose you and Joy get on all right?

LEVER. [Coolly.] Pretty well, thanks. I'm not exactly in Joy's line; have n't seen very much of her, in fact.

[Miss BEECH and JOY have been approaching from the house. But seeing LEVER, JOY turns abruptly, hesitates a moment, and with an angry gesture goes away.]

COLONEL [Unconscious.] Wonderfully affectionate little thing! Well, she'll be going home to-morrow!

MISS BEECH. [Who has been gazing after JOY.] Talkin' business, poor creatures?

LEVER. Oh, no! If you'll excuse me, I'll wash my hands before tea.

[He glances at the COLONEL poring over papers, and, shrugging his shoulders, strolls away.]

MISS BEECH. [Sitting in the swing.] I see your horrid papers.

COLONEL. Be quiet, Peachey!

MISS BEECH. On a beautiful summer's day, too.

COLONEL. That'll do now.

MISS BEECH. [Unmoved.] For every ounce you take out of a gold mine you put two in.

COLONEL. Who told you that rubbish?

MISS BEECH. [With devilry.] You did!

COLONEL. This is n't an ordinary gold mine.

MISS BEECH. Oh! quite a special thing.

[COLONEL stares at her, but subsiding at her impassivity, he pores again over the papers.]

[Rosy has approached with a tea cloth.]

ROSE. If you please, sir, the Missis told me to lay the tea.

COLONEL. Go away! Ten fives fifty. Ten 5 16ths, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. I hate your nasty sums!

[ROSE goes away. The COLONEL Writes. MRS. HOPE'S voice is heard, "Now then, bring those chairs, you two. Not that one, Ernest." ERNEST and LETTY appear through the openings of the wall, each with a chair.]

COLONEL. [With dull exasperation.] What do you want?

LETTY. Tea, Father.

[She places her chair and goes away.]

ERNEST. That Johnny-bird Lever is too cocksure for me, Colonel. Those South American things are no good at all. I know all about them from young Scotton. There's not one that's worth a red cent. If you want a flutter—

COLONEL. [Explosively.] Flutter! I'm not a gambler, sir!

ERNEST. Well, Colonel [with a smile], I only don't want you to chuck your money away on a stiff 'un. If you want anything good you should go to Mexico.

COLONEL. [Jumping up and holding out the map.] Go to [He stops in time.] What d'you call that, eh? M-E-X—

ERNEST. [Not to be embarrassed.] It all depend on what part.

COLONEL. You think you know everything—you think nothing's right unless it's your own idea! Be good enough to keep your advice to yourself.

ERNEST. [Moving with his chair, and stopping with a smile.] If you ask me, I should say it wasn't playing the game to put Molly into a thing like that.

COLONEL. What do you mean, sir?

ERNEST. Any Juggins can see that she's a bit gone on our friend.

COLONEL. [Freezingly.] Indeed!

ERNEST. He's not at all the sort of Johnny that appeals to me.

COLONEL. Really?

ERNEST. [Unmoved.] If I were you, Colonel, I should tip her the wink. He was hanging about her at Ascot all the time. It 's a bit thick!

[MRS. HOPE followed by ROSE appears from the house.]

COLONEL. [Stammering with passion.] Jackanapes!

MRS. HOPE. Don't stand there, Tom; clear those papers, and let Rose lay the table. Now, Ernest, go and get another chair.

[The COLONEL looks wildly round and sits beneath the hollow tree, with his head held in his hands. ROSE lays the cloth.]

MRS. BEECH. [Sitting beside the COLONEL.] Poor creature!

ERNEST. [Carrying his chair about with him.] Ask any Johnny in the City, he 'll tell you Mexico's a very tricky country—the people are awful rotters

MRS. HOPE. Put that chair down, Ernest.

[ERNEST looks at the chair, puts it down, opens his mouth, and goes away. ROSE follows him.]

What's he been talking about? You oughtn't to get so excited, Tom; is your head bad, old man? Here, take these papers! [She hands the papers to the COLONEL.] Peachey, go in and tell them tea 'll be ready in a minute, there 's a good soul? Oh! and on my dressing table you'll find a bottle of Eau de Cologne.

MRS. BEECH. Don't let him get in a temper again. That 's three times to-day!

[She goes towards the house.]

COLONEL. Never met such a fellow in my life, the most opinionated, narrow-minded—thinks he knows everything. Whatever Letty could see in him I can't think. Pragmatical beggar!

MRS. HOPE. Now Tom! What have you been up to, to get into a state like this?

COLONEL. [Avoiding her eyes.] I shall lose my temper with him one of these days. He's got that confounded habit of thinking nobody can be right but himself.

MRS. HOPE. That's enough! I want to talk to you seriously! Dick's in love. I'm perfectly certain of it.

COLONEL. Love! Who's he in love with—Peachey?

MRS. HOPE. You can see it all over him. If I saw any signs of Joy's breaking out, I'd send them both away. I simply won't have it.

COLONEL. Why, she's a child!

MRS. HOPE. [Pursuing her own thoughts.] But she isn't—not yet. I've been watching her very carefully. She's more in love with her Mother than any one, follows her about like a dog! She's been quite rude to Mr. Lever.

COLONEL. [Pursuing his own thoughts.] I don't believe a word of it.

[He rises and walks about]

MRS. HOPE. Don't believe a word of what?

[The COLONEL is Silent.]

[Pursuing his thoughts with her own.]

If I thought there was anything between Molly and Mr. Lever, d 'you suppose I'd have him in the house?

[The COLONEL stops, and gives a sort of grunt.]

He's a very nice fellow; and I want you to pump him well, Tom, and see what there is in this mine.

COLONEL. [Uneasily.] Pump!

MRS. HOPE. [Looking at him curiously.] Yes, you 've been up to something! Now what is it?

COLONEL. Pump my own guest! I never heard of such a thing!

MRS. HOPE. There you are on your high horse! I do wish you had a little common-sense, Tom!

COLONEL. I'd as soon you asked me to sneak about eavesdropping!
Pump!

MRS. HOPE. Well, what were you looking at these papers for? It does drive me so wild the way you throw away all the chances you have of making a little money. I've got you this opportunity, and you do nothing but rave up and down, and talk nonsense!

COLONEL. [In a high voice] Much you know about it! I 've taken a thousand shares in this mine

[He stops dead. There is a silence.]

MRS. HOPE. You 've—WHAT? Without consulting me? Well, then, you 'll just go and take them out again!

COLONEL. You want me to—?

MRS. HOPE. The idea! As if you could trust your judgment in a thing like that! You 'll just go at once and say there was a mistake; then we 'll talk it over calmly.

COLONEL. [Drawing himself up.] Go back on what I 've said? Not if I lose every penny! First you worry me to take the shares, and then you worry me not—I won't have it, Nell, I won't have it!

MRS. HOPE. Well, if I'd thought you'd have forgotten what you said this morning and turned about like this, d'you suppose I'd have spoken to you at all? Now, do you?

COLONEL. Rubbish! If you can't see that this is a special opportunity!

[He walks away followed by MRS. HOPE, who endeavors to make him see her point of view. ERNEST and LETTY are now returning from the house armed with a third chair.]

LETTY. What's the matter with everybody? Is it the heat?

ERNEST. [Preoccupied and sitting in the swing.] That sportsman, Lever, you know, ought to be warned off.

LETTY. [Signing to ERNEST.] Where's Miss Joy, Rose?

ROSE. Don't know, Miss.

[Putting down the tray, she goes.]

[ROSE, has followed with the tea tray.]

LETTY. Ernie, be careful, you never know where Joy is.

ERNEST. [Preoccupied with his reflections.] Your old Dad 's as mad as a hatter with me.

LETTY. Why?

ERNEST. Well, I merely said what I thought, that Molly ought to look out what's she's doing, and he dropped on me like a cartload of bricks.

LETTY. The Dad's very fond of Molly.

ERNEST. But look here, d'you mean to tell me that she and Lever are n't—

LETTY. Don't! Suppose they are! If joy were to hear it'd be simply awful. I like Molly. I 'm not going to believe anything against her. I don't see the use of it. If it is, it is, and if it is n't, it is n't.

ERNEST. Well, all I know is that when I told her the mine was probably a frost she went for me like steam.

LETTY. Well, so should I. She was only sticking up for her friends.

ERNEST. Ask the old Peachey-bird. She knows a thing or two. Look here, I don't mind a man's being a bit of a sportsman, but I think Molly's bringin' him down here is too thick. Your old Dad's got one of his notions that because this Jossier's his guest, he must keep him in a glass case, and take shares in his mine, and all the rest of it.

LETTY. I do think people are horrible, always thinking things. It's not as if Molly were a stranger. She's my own cousin. I 'm not going to believe anything about my own cousin. I simply won't.

ERNEST. [Reluctantly realising the difference that this makes.] I suppose it does make a difference, her bein' your cousin.

LETTY. Of course it does! I only hope to goodness no one will make Joy suspect—

[She stops and butts her finger to her lips, for JOY is coming towards them, as the tea-bell sounds. She is followed by DICK and MISS BEECH with the Eau de Cologne. The

COLONEL and MRS. HOPE are also coming back, discussing still each other's point of view.]

JOY. Where 's Mother? Isn't she here?

MRS. HOPE. Now Joy, come and sit down; your mother's been told tea's ready; if she lets it get cold it's her lookout.

DICK. [Producing a rug, and spreading it beneath the tree.] Plenty of room, Joy.

JOY. I don't believe Mother knows, Aunt Nell.

[MRS. GWYN and LEVER appear in the opening of the wall.]

LETTY. [Touching ERNEST's arm.] Look, Ernie! Four couples and Peachey—

ERNEST. [Preoccupied.] What couples?

JOY. Oh! Mums, here you are!

[Seizing her, she turns her back on LEVER. They sit in various seats, and MRS. HOPE pours out the tea.]

MRS. HOPE. Hand the sandwiches to Mr. Lever, Peachey. It's our own jam, Mr. Lever.

LEVER. Thanks. [He takes a bite.] It's splendid!

MRS. GWYN. [With forced gaiety.] It's the first time I've ever seen you eat jam.

LEVER. [Smiling a forced smile.] Really! But I love it.

MRS. GWYN. [With a little bow.] You always refuse mine.

JOY. [Who has been staring at her enemy, suddenly.] I'm all burnt up! Are n't you simply boiled, Mother?

[She touches her Mother's forehead.]

MRS. GWYN. Ugh! You're quite clammy, Joy.

JOY. It's enough to make any one clammy.

[Her eyes go back to LEVER'S face as though to stab him.]

ERNEST. [From the swing.] I say, you know, the glass is going down.

LEVER. [Suavely.] The glass in the hall's steady enough.

ERNEST. Oh, I never go by that; that's a rotten old glass.

COLONEL. Oh! is it?

ERNEST. [Paying no attention.] I've got a little ripper—never puts you in the cart. Bet you what you like we have thunder before tomorrow night.

MISS BEECH. [Removing her gaze from JOY to LEVER.] You don't think we shall have it before to-night, do you?

LEVER. [Suavely.] I beg your pardon; did you speak to me?

MISS BEECH. I said, you don't think we shall have the thunder before to-night, do you?

[She resumes her watch on joy.]

LEVER. [Blandly.] Really, I don't see any signs of it.

[Joy, crossing to the rug, flings herself down. And DICK sits cross-legged, with his eyes fast fixed on her.]

MISS BEECH. [Eating.] People don't often see what they don't want to, do they?

[LEVER only lifts his brows.]

MRS. GWYN. [Quickly breaking ivy.] What are you talking about? The weather's perfect.

MISS BEECH. Isn't it?

MRS. HOPE. You'd better make a good tea, Peachey; nobody'll get anything till eight, and then only cold shoulder. You must just put up with no hot dinner, Mr. Lever.

LEVER. [Bowing.] Whatever is good enough for Miss Beech is good enough for me.

MISS BEECH. [Sardonically-taking another sandwich.] So you think!

MRS. GWYN. [With forced gaiety.] Don't be so absurd, Peachey.

[MISS BEECH, grunts slightly.]

COLONEL. [Once more busy with his papers.] I see the name of your engineer is Rodriguez—Italian, eh?

LEVER. Portuguese.

COLONEL. Don't like that!

LEVER. I believe he was born in England.

COLONEL. [Reassured.] Oh, was he? Ah!

ERNEST. Awful rotters, those Portuguese!

COLONEL. There you go!

LETTY. Well, Father, Ernie only said what you said.

MRS. HOPE. Now I want to ask you, Mr. Lever, is this gold mine safe? If it isn't—I simply won't allow Tom to take these shares; he can't afford it.

LEVER. It rather depends on what you call safe, Mrs. Hope.

MRS. HOPE. I don't want anything extravagant, of course; if they're going to pay their 10 per cent, regularly, and Tom can have his money out at any time—[There is a faint whistle from the swing.] I only want to know that it's a thoroughly genuine thing.

MRS. GWYN. [Indignantly.] As if Maurice would be a Director if it was n't?

MRS. HOPE. Now Molly, I'm simply asking—

MRS. GWYN. Yes, you are!

COLONEL. [Rising.] I'll take two thousand of those shares, Lever. To have my wife talk like that—I 'm quite ashamed.

LEVER. Oh, come, sir, Mrs. Hope only meant—

[MRS. GWYN looks eagerly at LEVER.]

DICK. [Quietly.] Let's go on the river, Joy.

[JOY rises, and goes to her Mother's chair.]

MRS. HOPE. Of course! What rubbish, Tom! As if any one ever invested money without making sure!

LEVER. [Ironically.] It seems a little difficult to make sure in this case. There isn't the smallest necessity for Colonel Hope to take any shares, and it looks to me as if he'd better not.

[He lights a cigarette.]

MRS. HOPE. Now, Mr. Lever, don't be offended! I'm very anxious for Tom to take the shares if you say the thing's so good.

LEVER. I 'm afraid I must ask to be left out, please.

JOY. [Whispering.] Mother, if you've finished, do come, I want to show you my room.

MRS. HOPE. I would n't say a word, only Tom's so easily taken in.

MRS. GWYN. [Fiercely.] Aunt Nell, how can't you? [Joy gives a little savage laugh.]

LETTY. [Hastily.] Ernie, will you play Dick and me? Come on, Dick!

[All three go out towards the lawn.]

MRS. HOPE. You ought to know your Uncle by this time, Molly. He's just like a child. He'd be a pauper to-morrow if I did n't see to things.

COLONEL. Understand once for all that I shall take two thousand shares in this mine. I 'm—I 'm humiliated. [He turns and goes towards the house.]

MRS. HOPE. Well, what on earth have I said?

[She hurries after him.]

MRS. GWYN. [In a low voice as she passes.] You need n't insult my friends!

[LEVER, shrugging his shoulders, has strolled aside. JOY, with a passionate movement seen only by Miss BEECH, goes off towards the house. MISS BEECH and MRS. GWYN aye left alone beside the remnants of the feast.]

MISS BEECH. Molly!

[MRS. GWYN looks up startled.]

Take care, Molly, take care! The child! Can't you see?
[Apostrophising LEVER.] Take care, Molly, take care!

LEVER. [Coming back.] Awfully hot, is n't it?

MISS BEECH. Ah! and it'll be hotter if we don't mind.

LEVER. [Suavely.] Do we control these things?

[MISS BEECH looking from face to face, nods her head repeatedly; then gathering her skirts she walks towards the house. MRS. GWYN sits motionless, staying before her.]

Extraordinary old lady! [He pitches away his cigarette.] What's the matter with her, Molly?

MRS. GWYN, [With an effort.] Oh! Peachey's a character!

LEVER. [Frowning.] So I see! [There is a silence.]

MRS. GWYN. Maurice!

LEVER. Yes.

MRS. GWYN. Aunt Nell's hopeless, you mustn't mind her.

LEVER. [In a dubious and ironic voice.] My dear girl, I 've too much to bother me to mind trifles like that.

MRS. GWYN. [Going to him suddenly.] Tell me, won't you?

[LEVER shrugs his shoulders.]

A month ago you'd have told me soon enough!

LEVER. Now, Molly!

MRS. GWYN. Ah! [With a bitter smile.] The Spring's soon over.

LEVER. It 's always Spring between us.

MRS. GWYN. Is it?

LEVER. You did n't tell me what you were thinking about just now when you sat there like stone.

MRS. GWYN. It does n't do for a woman to say too much.

LEVER. Have I been so bad to you that you need feel like that, Molly?

MRS. GWYN. [With a little warm squeeze of his arm.] Oh! my dear, it's only that I'm so—

[She stops.]

LEVER. [Gently]. So what?

MRS. GWYN. [In a low voice.] It's hateful here.

LEVER. I didn't want to come. I don't understand why you suggested it. [MRS. GWYN is silent.] It's been a mistake.

MRS. GWYN. [Her eyes fixed on the ground.] Joy comes home to-morrow. I thought if I brought you here—I should know—

LEVER. [Vexedly.] Um!

MRS. GWYN. [Losing her control.] Can't you SEE? It haunts me? How are we to go on? I must know—I must know!

LEVER. I don't see that my coming—

MRS. GWYN. I thought I should have more confidence; I thought I should be able to face it better in London, if you came down here openly—and now—I feel I must n't speak or look at you.

LEVER. You don't think your Aunt—

MRS. GWYN. [Scornfully.] She! It's only Joy I care about.

LEVER. [Frowning.] We must be more careful, that's all. We mustn't give ourselves away again, as we were doing just now.

MRS. GWYN. When any one says anything horrid to you, I can't help it.

[She puts her hand on the label of his coat.]

LEVER. My dear child, take care!

[MRS. GWYN drops her hand. She throws her head back, and her throat is seen to work as though she were gulping down a bitter draught. She moves away.]

[Following hastily.] Don't dear, don't! I only meant—Come, Molly, let's be sensible. I want to tell you something about the mine.

MRS. GWYN. [With a quavering smile.] Yes—let 's talk sensibly, and walk properly in this sensible, proper place.

[LEVER is seen trying to soothe her, and yet to walk properly. As they disappear, they are viewed by JOY, who, like the shadow parted from its figure, has come to join it again. She stands now, foiled, a carnation in her hand; then flings herself on a chair, and leans her elbows on the table.]

JOY. I hate him! Pig!

ROSE. [Who has come to clear the tea things.] Did you call, Miss?

JOY. Not you!

ROSE. [Motionless.] No, Miss!

JOY. [Leaning back and tearing the flower.] Oh! do hurry up, Rose!

ROSE. [Collects the tea things.] Mr. Dick's coming down the path! Aren't I going to get you to do your frock, Miss Joy?

JOY. No.

ROSE. What will the Missis say?

JOY. Oh, don't be so stuck, Rose!

[ROSE goes, but DICK has come.]

DICK. Come on the river, Joy, just for half an hour, as far as the kingfishers—do! [Joy shakes her

head.] Why not? It 'll be so jolly and cool. I'm most awfully sorry if I worried you this morning. I didn't mean to. I won't again, I promise. [Joy slides a look at him, and from that look he gains a little courage.] Do come! It'll be the last time. I feel it awfully, Joy.

JOY. There's nothing to hurt you!

DICK. [Gloomily.] Isn't there—when you're like this?

JOY. [In a hard voice.] If you don't like me, why do you follow me about?

DICK. What is the matter?

JOY. [Looking up, as if for want of air.] Oh! Don't!

DICK. Oh, Joy, what is the matter? Is it the heat?

JOY. [With a little laugh.] Yes.

DICK. Have some Eau de Cologne. I 'll make you a bandage. [He takes the Eau de Cologne, and makes a bandage with his handkerchief.] It's quite clean.

JOY. Oh, Dick, you are so funny!

DICK. [Bandaging her forehead.] I can't bear you to feel bad; it puts me off completely. I mean I don't generally make a fuss about people, but when it 's you—

JOY. [Suddenly.] I'm all right.

DICK. Is that comfy?

JOY. [With her chin up, and her eyes fast closed.] Quite.

DICK. I'm not going to stay and worry you. You ought to rest. Only, Joy! Look here! If you want me to do anything for you, any time—

JOY. [Half opening her eyes.] Only to go away.

[DICK bites his lips and walks away.]

Dick—[softly]—Dick!

[DICK stops.]

I didn't mean that; will you get me some water-irises for this evening?

DICK. Won't I? [He goes to the hollow tree and from its darkness takes a bucket and a boat-hook.] I know where there are some rippers!

[JOY stays unmoving with her eyes half closed.]

Are you sure you 're all right, Joy? You 'll just rest here in the shade, won't you, till I come back?—it 'll do you no end of good. I shan't be twenty minutes.

[He goes, but cannot help returning softly, to make sure.]

You're quite sure you 're all right?

[JOY nods. He goes away towards the river. But there is no rest for JOY. The voices of MRS. GWYN and LEVER are heard returning.]

JOY. [With a gesture of anger.] Hateful! Hateful!

[She runs away.]

[MRS. GWYN and LEVER are seen approaching; they pass the tree, in conversation.]

MRS. GWYN. But I don't see why, Maurice.

LEVER. We mean to sell the mine; we must do some more work on it, and for that we must have money.

MRS. GWYN. If you only want a little, I should have thought you could have got it in a minute in the City.

LEVER. [Shaking his head.] No, no; we must get it privately.

MRS. GWYN. [Doubtfully.] Oh! [She slowly adds.] Then it isn't such a good thing!

[And she does not look at him.]

LEVER. Well, we mean to sell it.

MRS. GWYN. What about the people who buy?

LEVER. [Dubiously regarding her.] My dear girl, they've just as much chance as we had. It 's not my business to think of them. There's YOUR thousand pounds——

MRS. GWYN. [Softly.] Don't bother about my money, Maurice. I don't want you to do anything not quite——

LEVER. [Evasively.] Oh! There's my brother's and my sister's too. I 'm not going to let any of you run any risk. When we all went in for it the thing looked splendid; it 's only the last month that we 've had doubts. What bothers me now is your Uncle. I don't want him to take these shares. It looks as if I'd come here on purpose.

MRS. GWYN. Oh! he mustn't take them!

LEVER. That 's all very well; but it 's not so simple.

MRS. GWYN. [Shyly.] But, Maurice, have you told him about the selling?

LEVER. [Gloomily, under the hollow tree.] It 's a Board secret. I'd no business to tell even you.

MRS. GWYN. But he thinks he's taking shares in a good—a permanent thing.

LEVER. You can't go into a mining venture without some risk.

MRS. GWYN. Oh yes, I know—but—but Uncle Tom is such a dear!

LEVER. [Stubbornly.] I can't help his being the sort of man he is. I did n't want him to take these shares; I told him so in so many words. Put yourself in my place, Molly: how can I go to him and say, "This thing may turn out rotten," when he knows I got you to put your money into it?

[But JOY, the lost shadow, has come back. She moves forward resolutely. They are divided from her by the hollow tree; she is unseen. She stops.]

MRS. GWYN. I think he ought to be told about the selling; it 's not fair.

LEVER. What on earth made him rush at the thing like that? I don't understand that kind of man.

MRS. GWYN. [Impulsively.] I must tell him, Maurice; I can't let him take the shares without——

[She puts her hand on his arm.]

[Joy turns, as if to go back whence she came, but stops once more.]

LEVER. [Slowly and very quietly.] I did n't think you'd give me away, Molly.

MRS. GWYN. I don't think I quite understand.

LEVER. If you tell the Colonel about this sale the poor old chap will think me a man that you ought to have nothing to do with. Do you want that?

[MRS. GWYN, giving her lover a long look, touches his sleeve.

JOY, slipping behind the hollow tree, has gone.]

You can't act in a case like this as if you 'd only a principle to consider. It 's the—the special circumstances.

MRS. GWYN. [With a faint smile.] But you'll be glad to get the money won't you?

LEVER. By George! if you're going to take it like this, Molly

MRS. GWYN. Don't!

LEVER. We may not sell after all, dear, we may find it turn out trumps.

MRS. GWYN. [With a shiver.] I don't want to hear any more. I know women don't understand. [Impulsively.] It's only that I can't bear any one should think that you—

LEVER. [Distressed.] For goodness sake don't look like that, Molly! Of course, I'll speak to your Uncle. I'll stop him somehow, even if I have to make a fool of myself. I'll do anything you want—

MRS. GWYN. I feel as if I were being smothered here.

LEVER. It 's only for one day.

MRS. GWYN. [With sudden tenderness.] It's not your fault, dear. I ought to have known how it would be. Well, let's go in!

[She sets her lips, and walks towards the house with LEVER following. But no sooner has she disappeared than JOY comes running after; she stops, as though throwing down a challenge. Her cheeks and ears are burning.]

JOY. Mother!

[After a moment MRS. GWYN reappears in the opening of the wall.]

MRS. GWYN. Oh! here you are!

JOY. [Breathlessly.] Yes.

MRS. GWYN. [Uncertainly.] Where—have you been? You look dreadfully hot; have you been running?

JOY. Yes—no.

MRS. GWYN. [Looking at her fixedly.] What's the matter—you 're trembling! [Softly.] Are n't you well, dear?

JOY. Yes—I don't know.

MRS. GWYN. What is it, darling?

JOY. [Suddenly clinging to her.] Oh! Mother!

MRS. GWYN. I don't understand.

JOY. [Breathlessly.] Oh, Mother, let me go back home with you now at once—

MRS. GWYN. [Her face hardening.] Why? What on earth—

JOY. I can't stay here.

MRS. GWYN. But why?

JOY. I want to be with you—Oh! Mother, don't you love me?

MRS. GWYN. [With a faint smile.] Of course I love you, Joy.

JOY. Ah! but you love him more.

MRS. GWYN. Love him—whom?

JOY. Oh! Mother, I did n't—[She tries to take her Mother's hand, but fails.] Oh! don't.

MRS. GWYN. You'd better explain what you mean, I think.

JOY. I want to get you to—he—he 's—he 'snot—!

MRS. GWYN. [Frigidly.] Really, Joy!

JOY. [Passionately.] I'll fight against him, and I know there's something wrong about—

[She stops.]

MRS. GWYN. About what?

JOY. Let's tell Uncle Tom, Mother, and go away.

MRS. GWYN. Tell Uncle—Tom—what?

JOY. [Looking down and almost whispering.] About—about—the mine.

MRS. GWYN. What about the mine? What do you mean? [Fiercely.]
Have you been spying on me?

JOY. [Shrinking.] No! oh, no!

MRS. GWYN. Where were you?

JOY. [Just above her breath.] I—I heard something.

MRS. GWYN. [Bitterly.] But you were not spying?

JOY. I was n't—I wasn't! I didn't want—to hear. I only heard a little. I couldn't help listening, Mother.

MRS. GWYN. [With a little laugh.] Couldn't help listening?

JOY. [Through her teeth.] I hate him. I didn't mean to listen, but
I hate him.

MRS. GWYN. I see. Why do you hate him?

[There is a silence.]

JOY. He—he—[She stops.]

MRS. GWYN. Yes?

JOY. [With a sort of despair.] I don't know. Oh! I don't know!
But I feel—

MRS. GWYN. I can't reason with you. As to what you heard, it 's— ridiculous.

JOY. It 's not that. It 's—it 's you!

MRS. GWYN. [Stonily.] I don't know what you mean.

JOY. [Passionately.] I wish Dad were here!

MRS. GWYN. Do you love your Father as much as me?

JOY. Oh! Mother, no—you know I don't.

MRS. GWYN. [Resentfully.] Then why do you want him?

JOY. [Almost under her breath.] Because of that man.

MRS. GWYN. Indeed!

JOY. I will never—never make friends with him.

MRS. GWYN. [Cuttingly.] I have not asked you to.

JOY. [With a blind movement of her hand.] Oh, Mother!

[MRS. GWYN half turns away.]

Mother—won't you? Let's tell Uncle Tom and go away from him?

MRS. GWYN. If you were not, a child, Joy, you wouldn't say such things.

JOY. [Eagerly.] I'm not a child, I'm—I'm a woman. I am.

MRS. GWYN. No! You—are—not a woman, Joy.

[She sees joy throw up her arms as though warding off a blow, and turning finds that
LEVER is standing in the opening of the wall.]

LEVER. [Looking from face to face.] What's the matter? [There is no answer.] What is it, Joy?

JOY. [Passionately.] I heard you, I don't care who knows. I'd listen again.

LEVER. [Impassively.] Ah! and what did I say that was so very dreadful?

JOY. You're a—a—you 're a—coward!

MRS. GWYN. [With a sort of groan.] Joy!

LEVER. [Stepping up to JOY, and standing with his hands behind him— in a low voice.] Now hit me in the face—hit me—hit me as hard as you can. Go on, Joy, it'll do you good.

[Joy raises her clenched hand, but drops it, and hides her face.]

Why don't you? I'm not pretending!

[Joy makes no sign.]

Come, joy; you'll make yourself ill, and that won't help, will it?

[But joy still makes no sign.]

[With determination.] What's the matter? now come—tell me!

JOY. [In a stifled, sullen voice.] Will you leave my mother alone?

MRS. GWYN. Oh! my dear Joy, don't be silly!

JOY. [Winching; then with sudden passion.] I defy you—I defy you!
[She rushes from their sight.]

MRS. GWYN. [With a movement of distress.] Oh!

LEVER. [Turning to MRS. GWYN with a protecting gesture.] Never mind, dear! It'll be—it'll be all right!

[But the expression of his face is not the expression of his words.]

The curtain falls.

ACT III

It is evening; a full yellow moon is shining through the branches of the hollow tree. The Chinese lanterns are alight. There is dancing in the house; the music sounds now loud, now soft. MISS BEECH is sitting on the rustic seat in a black bunchy evening dress, whose inconspicuous opening is inlaid with white. She slowly fans herself.

DICK comes from the house in evening dress. He does not see Miss BEECH.

DICK. Curse! [A short silence.] Curse!

MISS BEECH. Poor young man!

DICK. [With a start.] Well, Peachey, I can't help it
[He fumbles off his gloves.]

MISS BEECH. Did you ever know any one that could?

DICK. [Earnestly.] It's such awfully hard lines on Joy. I can't get her out of my head, lying there with that beastly headache while everybody's jigging round.

MISS BEECH. Oh! you don't mind about yourself—noble young man!

DICK. I should be a brute if I did n't mind more for her.

MISS BEECH. So you think it's a headache, do you?

DICK. Did n't you hear what Mrs. Gwyn said at dinner about the sun? [With inspiration.] I say, Peachey, could n't you—could n't you just go up and give her a message from me, and find out if there 's anything she wants, and say how brutal it is that she 's seedy; it would be most awfully decent of you. And tell her the dancing's no good without her. Do, Peachey, now do! Ah! and look here!

[He dives into the hollow of the tree, and brings from out of it a pail of water in which are placed two bottles of champagne, and some yellow irises—he takes the irises.]

You might give her these. I got them specially for her, and I have n't had a chance.

MISS BEECH. [Lifting a bottle.] What 's this?

DICK. Fizz. The Colonel brought it from the George. It 's for supper; he put it in here because of— [Smiling faintly]—Mrs. Hope, I think. Peachey, do take her those irises.

MISS. BEECH. D' you think they'll do her any good?

DICK. [Crestfallen.] I thought she'd like—I don't want to worry her—you might try.

[MISS BEECH shakes her head.]

Why not?

MISS BEECH. The poor little creature won't let me in.

DICK. You've been up then!

MISS BEECH. [Sharply.] Of course I've been up. I've not got a stone for my heart, young man!

DICK. All right! I suppose I shall just have to get along somehow.

MISS BEECH. [With devilry.] That's what we've all got to do.

DICK. [Gloomily.] But this is too brutal for anything!

MISS BEECH. Worse than ever happened to any one!

DICK. I swear I'm not thinking of myself.

MISS BEECH. Did y' ever know anybody that swore they were?

DICK. Oh! shut up!

MISS BEECH. You'd better go in and get yourself a partner.

DICK. [With pale desperation.] Look here, Peachey, I simply loathe all those girls.

MISS BEECH. Ah-h! [Ironically.] Poor lot, are n't they?

DICK. All right; chaff away, it's good fun, isn't it? It makes me sick to dance when Joy's lying there. Her last night, too!

MISS BEECH. [Sidling to him.] You're a good young man, and you 've got a good heart.

[She takes his hand, and puts it to her cheek.]

DICK. Peachey—I say, Peachey d' you think there 's—I mean d' you think there'll ever be any chance for me?

MISS BEECH. I thought that was coming! I don't approve of your making love at your time of life; don't you think I 'm going to encourage you.

DICK. But I shall be of age in a year; my money's my own, it's not as if I had to ask any one's leave; and I mean, I do know my own mind.

MISS BEECH. Of course you do. Nobody else would at your age, but you do.

DICK. I would n't ask her to promise, it would n't be fair when she 's so young, but I do want her to know that I shall never change.

MISS BEECH. And suppose—only suppose—she's fond of you, and says she'll never change.

DICK. Oh! Peachey! D' you think there's a chance of that—do you?

MISS BEECH. A-h-h!

DICK. I wouldn't let her bind herself, I swear I wouldn't.
[Solemnly.] I'm not such a selfish brute as you seem to think.

MISS BEECH. [Sidling close to him and in a violent whisper.] Well— have a go!

DICK. Really? You are a brick, Peachey!

[He kisses her.]

MISS BEACH. [Yielding pleasurably; then remembering her principles.]
Don't you ever say I said so! You're too young, both of you.

DICK. But it is exceptional—I mean in my case, is n't it?

[The COLONEL and MRS. GWYN are coming down the lawn.]

MISS BEECH. Oh! very!

[She sits beneath the tree and fans herself.]

COLONEL. The girls are all sitting out, Dick! I've been obliged to dance myself. Phew!

[He mops his brow.]

[DICK swinging round goes rushing off towards the house.]

[Looking after him.] Hallo! What's the matter with him? Cooling your heels, Peachey? By George! it's hot. Fancy the poor devils in London on a night like this, what? [He sees the moon.] It's a full moon. You're lucky to be down here, Molly.

MRS. GWYN. [In a low voice.] Very!

MISS BEECH. Oh! so you think she's lucky, do you?

COLONEL. [Expanding his nostrils.] Delicious scent to-night! Hay and roses—delicious.

[He seats himself between them.]

A shame that poor child has knocked up like this. Don't think it was the sun myself—more likely neuralgic—she 's subject to neuralgia, Molly.

MRS. GWYN. [Motionless.] I know.

COLONEL. Got too excited about your coming. I told Nell not to keep worrying her about her frock, and this is the result. But your Aunt —you know—she can't let a thing alone!

MISS BEECH. Ah! 't isn't neuralgia.

[MRS. GWYN looks at her quickly and averts her eyes.]

COLONEL. Excitable little thing. You don't understand her, Peachey.

MISS BEECH. Don't I?

COLONEL. She's all affection. Eh, Molly? I remember what I was like at her age, a poor affectionate little rat, and now look at me!

MISS BEECH. [Fanning herself.] I see you.

COLONEL. [A little sadly.] We forget what we were like when we were young. She's been looking forward to to-night ever since you wrote; and now to have to go to bed and miss the, dancing. Too bad!

MRS. GWYN. Don't, Uncle Tom!

COLONEL. [Patting her hand.] There, there, old girl, don't think about it. She'll be all right tomorrow.

MISS BEECH. If I were her mother I'd soon have her up.

COLONEL. Have her up with that headache! What are you talking about, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. I know a remedy.

COLONEL. Well, out with it.

MISS BEECH. Oh! Molly knows it too!

MRS. GWYN. [Staring at the ground.] It's easy to advise.

COLONEL. [Fidgetting.] Well, if you're thinking of morphia for her, don't have anything to do with it. I've always set my face against morphia; the only time I took it was in Burmah. I'd raging neuralgia for two days. I went to our old doctor, and I made him give me some. "Look here, doctor," I said, "I hate the idea of morphia, I 've never taken it, and I never want to."

MISS BEECH. [Looking at MRS. GWYN.] When a tooth hurts, you should have it out. It 's only puttin' off the evil day.

COLONEL. You say that because it was n't your own.

MISS BEECH. Well, it was hollow, and you broke your principles!

COLONEL. Hollow yourself, Peachey; you're as bad as any one!

MISS BEECH [With devilry.] Well, I know that! [She turns to MRS. GWYN.] He should have had it out! Shouldn't he, Molly?

MRS. GWYN. I—don't—judge for other people.

[She gets up suddenly, as though deprived of air.]

COLONEL. [Alarmed.] Hallo, Molly! Are n't you feeling the thing, old girl?

MISS BEECH. Let her get some air, poor creature!

COLONEL. [Who follows anxiously.] Your Aunt's got some first-rate sal volatile.

MRS. GWYN. It's all right, Uncle Tom. I felt giddy, it's nothing, now.

COLONEL. That's the dancing. [He taps his forehead.] I know what it is when you're not used to it.

MRS. GWYN. [With a sudden bitter outburst.] I suppose you think I 'm a very bad mother to be amusing myself while joy's suffering.

COLONEL. My dear girl, whatever put such a thought into your head? We all know if there were anything you could do, you'd do it at once, would n't she, Peachey?

[MISS BEECH turns a slow look on MRS. GWYN.]

MRS. GWYN. Ah! you see, Peachey knows me better.

COLONEL. [Following up his thoughts.] I always think women are wonderful. There's your Aunt, she's very funny, but if there's anything the matter with me, she'll sit up all night; but when she's ill herself, and you try to do anything for her, out she raps at once.

MRS. GWYN. [In a low voice.] There's always one that a woman will do anything for.

COLONEL. Exactly what I say. With your Aunt it's me, and by George! Molly, sometimes I wish it was n't.

MISS BEECH, [With meaning.] But is it ever for another woman!

COLONEL. You old cynic! D' you mean to say Joy wouldn't do anything on earth for her Mother, or Molly for Joy? You don't know human nature. What a wonderful night! Have n't seen such a moon for years, she's like a great, great lamp!

[MRS. GWYN hiding from Miss BEECH's eyes, rises and slips her arm through his; they stand together looking at the moon.]

Don't like these Chinese lanterns, with that moon-tawdry! eh! By Jove, Molly, I sometimes think we humans are a rubbishy lot—each of us talking and thinking of nothing but our own petty little affairs; and when you see a great thing like that up there—[Sighs.] But there's your Aunt, if I were to say a thing like that to her she 'd— she'd think me a lunatic; and yet, you know, she 's a very good woman.

MRS. GWYN. [Half clinging to him.] Do you think me very selfish, Uncle Tom?

COLONEL. My dear—what a fancy! Think you selfish—of course I don't; why should I?

MRS. GWYN. [Dully.] I don't know.

COLONEL. [Changing the subject nervously.] I like your friend, Lever, Molly. He came to me before dinner quite distressed about your Aunt, beggin' me not to take those shares. She 'll be the first to worry me, but he made such a point of it, poor chap—in the end I was obliged to say I wouldn't. I thought it showed very' nice feeling. [Ruefully.] It's a pretty tight fit to make two ends meet on my income—I've missed a good thing, all owing to your Aunt. [Dropping his voice.] I don't mind telling you, Molly, I think they've got a much finer mine there than they've any idea of.

[MRS. GWYN gives way to laughter that is very near to sobs.]

[With dignity.] I can't see what there is to laugh at.

MRS. GWYN. I don't know what's the matter with me this evening.

MISS BEECH. [In a low voice.] I do.

COLONEL. There, there! Give me a kiss, old girl! [He kisses her on the brow.] Why, your forehead's as hot as fire. I know—I know—you 're fretting about Joy. Never mind—come! [He draws her hand beneath his arm.] Let's go and have a look at the moon on the river. We all get upset at times; eh! [Lifting his hand as if he had been stung.] Why, you 're not crying, Molly! I say! Don't do that, old girl, it makes me wretched. Look here, Peachey. [Holding out the hand on which the tear has dropped.] This is dreadful!

MRS. GWYN. [With a violent effort.] It's all right, Uncle Tom!

[MISS BEECH wipes her own eyes stealthily. From the house is heard the voice of MRS. HOPE, calling "Tom."]

MISS BEECH. Some one calling you.

COLONEL. There, there, my dear, you just stay here, and cool yourself—I 'll come back—shan't be a minute. [He turns to go.]

[MRS. HOPE'S voice sounds nearer.]

[Turning back.] And Molly, old girl, don't you mind anything I said. I don't remember what it was—it must have been something, I suppose.

[He hastily retreats.]

MRS. GWYN. [In a fierce low voice.] Why do you torture me?

MISS BEECH. [Sadly.] I don't want to torture you.

MRS. GWYN, But you do. D' you think I haven't seen this coming—all these weeks. I knew she must find out some time! But even a day counts—

MISS BEECH. I don't understand why you brought him down here.

MRS. GWYN. [After staring at her, bitterly.] When day after day and night after night you've thought of nothing but how to keep them both, you might a little want to prove that it was possible, mightn't you? But you don't understand—how should you? You've never been a mother! [And fiercely.] You've never had a lov—

[MISS BEECH raises her face—it is all puckered.]

[Impulsively.] Oh, I did n't mean that, Peachey!

MISS BEECH. All right, my dear.

MRS. GWYN. I'm so dragged in two! [She sinks into a chair.] I knew it must come.

MISS BEECH. Does she know everything, Molly?

MRS. GWYN. She guesses.

MISS BEECH. [Mournfully.] It's either him or her then, my dear; one or the other you 'll have to give up.

MRS. GWYN. [Motionless.] Life's very hard on women!

MISS BEECH. Life's only just beginning for that child, Molly.

MRS. GWYN. You don't care if it ends for me!

MISS BEECH. Is it as bad as that?

MRS. GWYN. Yes.

MISS BEECH. [Rocking hey body.] Poor things! Poor things!

MRS. GWYN. Are you still fond of me?

MISS BEECH. Yes, yes, my dear, of course I am.

MRS. GWYN. In spite of my-wickedness?

[She laughs.]

MISS BEECH. Who am I to tell what's wicked and what is n't? God knows you're both like daughters to me!

MRS. GWYN. [Abruptly.] I can't.

MISS BEECH. Molly.

MRS. GWYN. You don't know what you're asking.

MISS BEECH. If I could save you suffering, my dear, I would. I hate suffering, if it 's only a fly, I hate it.

MRS. GWYN. [Turning away from her.] Life is n't fair. Peachey, go in and leave me alone.

[She leans back motionless.]

[Miss BEECH gets off her seat, and stroking MRS. GWYN's arm in passing goes silently away. In the opening of the wall she meets LEVER who is looking for his partner. They make way for each other.]

LEVER. [Going up to MRS. GWYN—gravely.] The next is our dance, Molly.

MRS. GWYN. [Unmoving.] Let's sit it out here, then.

[LEVER sits down.]

LEVER. I've made it all right with your Uncle.

MRS. GWYN. [Dully.] Oh?

LEVER. I spoke to him about the shares before dinner.

MRS. GWYN. Yes, he told me, thank you.

LEVER. There 's nothing to worry over, dear.

MRS. GWYN. [Passionately.] What does it matter about the wretched shares now? I 'm stifling.

[She throws her scarf off.]

LEVER. I don't understand what you mean by "now."

MRS. GWYN. Don't you?

LEVER. We were n't—Joy can't know—why should she? I don't believe for a minute—

MRS. GWYN. Because you don't want to.

LEVER. Do you mean she does?

MRS. GWYN. Her heart knows.

[LEVER makes a movement of discomfiture; suddenly MRS. GWYN looks at him as though to read his soul.]

I seem to bring you nothing but worry, Maurice. Are you tired of me?

LEVER. [Meeting her eyes.] No, I am not.

MRS. GWYN. Ah, but would you tell me if you were?

LEVER. [Softly.] Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

[MRS. GWYN struggles to look at him, then covers her face with her hands.]

MRS. GWYN. If I were to give you up, you'd forget me in a month.

LEVER. Why do you say such things?

MRS. GWYN. If only I could believe I was necessary to you!

LEVER. [Forcing the fervour of his voice.] But you are!

MRS. GWYN. Am I? [With the ghost of a smile.] Midsummer day!

[She gives a laugh that breaks into a sob.]

[The music of a waltz sounds from the house.]

LEVER. For God's sake, don't, Molly—I don't believe in going to meet trouble.

MRS. GWYN. It's staring me in the face.

LEVER. Let the future take care of itself!

[MRS. GWYN has turned away her face, covering it with her hands.]

Don't, Molly! [Trying to pull her hands away.] Don't!

MRS. GWYN. Oh! what shall I do?

[There is a silence; the music of the waltz sounds louder from the house.]

[Starting up.] Listen! One can't sit it out and dance it too. Which is it to be, Maurice, dancing—or sitting out? It must be one or the other, must n't it?

LEVER. Molly! Molly!

MRS. GWYN. Ah, my dear! [Standing away from him as though to show herself.] How long shall I keep you? This is all that 's left of me. It 's time I joined the wallflowers. [Smiling faintly.] It's time I played the mother, is n't it? [In a whisper.] It'll be all sitting out then.

LEVER. Don't! Let's go and dance, it'll do you good.

[He puts his hands on her arms, and in a gust of passion kisses her lips and throat.]

MRS. GWYN. I can't give you up—I can't. Love me, oh! love me!

[For a moment they stand so; then, with sudden remembrance of where they are, they move apart.]

LEVER. Are you all right now, darling?

MRS. GWYN. [Trying to smile.] Yes, dear—quite.

LEVER. Then let 's go, and dance. [They go.]

[For a few seconds the hollow tree stands alone; then from the house ROSE comes and enters it. She

takes out a bottle of champagne, wipes it, and carries it away; but seeing MRS. GWYN's scarf lying across the chair, she fingers it, and stops, listening to the waltz. Suddenly draping it round her shoulders, she seizes the bottle of champagne, and waltzes with abandon to the music, as though avenging a long starvation of her instincts. Thus dancing, she is surprised by DICK, who has come to smoke a cigarette and think, at the spot where he was told to "have a go." ROSE, startled, stops and hugs the bottle.]

DICK. It's not claret, Rose, I should n't warm it.

[ROSE, taking off the scarf, replaces it on the chair; then with the half-warmed bottle, she retreats. DICK, in the swing, sits thinking of his fate. Suddenly from behind the hollow tree he sees Joy darting forward in her day dress with her hair about her neck, and her skirt all torn. As he springs towards her, she turns at bay.]

DICK. Joy!

JOY. I want Uncle Tom.

DICK. [In consternation.] But ought you to have got up—I thought you were ill in bed; oughtn't you to be lying down?

JOY. If have n't been in bed. Where's Uncle Tom?

DICK. But where have you been?-your dress is all torn. Look! [He touches the torn skirt.]

JOY. [Tearing it away.] In the fields. Where's Uncle Tom?

DICK. Are n't you really ill then?

[Joy shakes her head.]

DICK, [showing her the irises.] Look at these. They were the best I could get.

JOY. Don't! I want Uncle Tom!

DICK. Won't you take them?

JOY. I 've got something else to do.

DICK. [With sudden resolution.] What do you want the Colonel for?

JOY. I want him.

DICK. Alone?

JOY. Yes.

DICK. Joy, what is the matter?

JOY. I 've got something to tell him.

DICK. What? [With sudden inspiration.] Is it about Lever?

JOY. [In a low voice.] The mine.

DICK. The mine?

JOY. It 's not—not a proper one.

DICK. How do you mean, Joy?

JOY. I overheard. I don't care, I listened. I would n't if it had been anybody else, but I hate him.

DICK. [Gravely.] What did you hear?

JOY. He 's keeping back something Uncle Tom ought to know.

DICK. Are you sure?

[Joy makes a rush to pass him.]

[Barring the way.] No, wait a minute—you must! Was it something that really matters?—I don't want to know what.

JOY. Yes, it was.

DICK. What a beastly thing—are you quite certain, Joy?

JOY. [Between her teeth.] Yes.

DICK. Then you must tell him, of course, even if you did overhear. You can't stand by and see the Colonel swindled. Whom was he talking to?

JOY. I won't tell you.

DICK. [Taking her wrist.] Was it was it your Mother?

[Joy bends her head.]

But if it was your Mother, why does n't she—

JOY. Let me go!

DICK. [Still holding her.] I mean I can't see what—

JOY. [Passionately.] Let me go!

DICK. [Releasing her.] I'm thinking of your Mother, Joy. She would never—

JOY. [Covering her face.] That man!

DICK. But joy, just think! There must be some mistake. It 's so queer—it 's quite impossible!

JOY. He won't let her.

DICK. Won't let her—won't let her? But [Stopping dead, and in a very different voice.] Oh!

JOY. [Passionately.] Why d' you look at me like that? Why can't you speak?

[She waits for him to speak, but he does not.]

I'm going to show what he is, so that Mother shan't speak to him again. I can—can't I—if I tell Uncle Tom?—can't I—?

DICK. But Joy—if your Mother knows a thing like—that—

JOY. She wanted to tell—she begged him—and he would n't.

DICK. But, joy, dear, it means—

JOY. I hate him, I want to make her hate him, and I will.

DICK. But, Joy, dear, don't you see—if your Mother knows a thing like that, and does n't speak of it, it means that she—it means that you can't make her hate him—it means—If it were anybody else— but, well, you can't give your own Mother away!

JOY. How dare you! How dare you! [Turning to the hollow tree.] It is n't true—Oh! it is n't true!

DICK. [In deep distress.] Joy, dear, I never meant, I didn't really!

[He tries to pull her hands down from her face.]

JOY. [Suddenly.] Oh! go away, go away!

[MRS. GWYN is seen coming back. JOY springs into the tree.

DICK quickly steals away. MRS. GWYN goes up to the chair and takes the scarf that she has come for, and is going again when JOY steals out to her.]

Mother!

[MRS. GWYN stands looking at her with her teeth set on her lower lip.]

Oh! Mother, it is n't true?

MRS. GWYN. [Very still.] What is n't true?

JOY. That you and he are——

[Searching her Mother's face, which is deadly still. In a whisper.]

Then it is true. Oh!

MRS. GWYN. That's enough, Joy! What I am is my affair—not yours— do you understand?

JOY. [Low and fierce.] Yes, I do.

MRS. GWYN. You don't. You're only a child.

JOY. [Passionately.] I understand that you've hurt [She stops.]

MRS. GWYN. Do you mean your Father?

JOY. [Bowing her head.] Yes, and—and me. [She covers her face.]
I'm—I'm ashamed.

MRS. GWYN. I brought you into the world, and you say that to me?
Have I been a bad mother to you?

JOY. [In a smothered voice.] Oh! Mother!

MRS. GWYN. Ashamed? Am I to live all my life like a dead woman because you're ashamed? Am I to live like the dead because you 're a child that knows nothing of life? Listen, Joy, you 'd better understand this once for all. Your Father has no right over me and he knows it. We 've been hateful to each other for years. Can you understand that? Don't cover your face like a child—look at me.

[Joy drops her hands, and lifts her face. MRS. GWYN looks back at her, her lips are quivering; she goes on speaking with stammering rapidity.]

D' you think—because I suffered when you were born and because I 've suffered since with every ache you ever had, that that gives you the right to dictate to me now? [In a dead voice.] I've been unhappy enough and I shall be unhappy enough in the time to come. [Meeting the hard wonder in Joy's face.] Oh! you untouched things, you're as hard and cold as iron!

JOY. I would do anything for you, Mother.

MRS. GWYN. Except—let me live, Joy. That's the only thing you won't do for me, I quite understand.

JOY. Oh! Mother, you don't understand—I want you so; and I seem to be nothing to you now.

MRS. GWYN. Nothing to me? [She smiles.]

JOY. Mother, darling, if you're so unhappy let's forget it all, let's go away and I 'll be everything to you, I promise.

MRS. GWYN. [With the ghost of a laugh.] Ah, Joy!

JOY. I would try so hard.

MRS. GWYN. [With the same quivering smile.] My darling, I know you would, until you fell in love yourself.

JOY. Oh, Mother, I wouldn't, I never would, I swear it.

MRS. GWYN. There has never been a woman, joy, that did not fall in love.

JOY. [In a despairing whisper.] But it 's wrong of you it's wicked!

MRS. GWYN. If it's wicked, I shall pay for it, not you!

JOY. But I want to save you, Mother!

MRS. GWYN. Save me? [Breaking into laughter.]

JOY. I can't bear it that you—if you 'll only—I'll never leave you. You think I don't know what I 'm saying, but I do, because even now I—I half love somebody. Oh, Mother! [Pressing her breast.] I feel—I feel so awful—as if everybody knew.

MRS. GWYN. You think I'm a monster to hurt you. Ah! yes! You'll understand better some day.

JOY. [In a sudden outburst of excited fear.] I won't believe it—
I—I—can't—you're deserting me, Mother.

MRS. GWYN. Oh, you untouched things! You—

[Joy' looks up suddenly, sees her face, and sinks down on her knees.]

JOY. Mother—it 's for me!

GWYN. Ask for my life, JOY—don't be afraid.

[Joy turns her face away. MRS. GWYN bends suddenly and touches her daughter's hair; JOY shrinks from that touch.]

[Recoiling as though she had been stung.] I forgot—I 'm deserting you.

[And swiftly without looking back she goes away. Joy, left alone under the hollow tree, crouches lower, and her shoulders shake. Here DICK finds her, when he hears no longer any sound o f voices. He falls on his knees beside her.]

DICK. Oh! Joy; dear, don't cry. It's so dreadful to see you! I 'd do anything not to see you cry! Say something.

[Joy is still for a moment, then the shaking of the shoulders begins again.]

Joy, darling! It's so awful, you 'll make yourself ill, and it is n't worth it, really. I 'd do anything to save you pain—won't you stop just for a minute?

[Joy is still again.]

Nothing in the world 's worth your crying, Joy. Give me just a little look!

JOY. [Looking; in a smothered voice.] Don't!

DICK. You do look so sweet! Oh, Joy, I'll comfort you, I'll take it all on myself. I know all about it.

[Joy gives a sobbing laugh]

I do. I 've had trouble too, I swear I have. It gets better, it does really.

JOY. You don't know—it's—it's—

DICK. Don't think about it! No, no, no! I know exactly what it's like. [He strokes her arm.]

JOY. [Shrinking, in a whisper.] You mustn't.

[The music of a waltz is heard again.]

DICK. Look here, joy! It's no good, we must talk it over calmly.

JOY. You don't see! It's the—it 's the disgrace—

DICK. Oh! as to disgrace—she's your Mother, whatever she does; I'd like to see anybody say anything about her—[viciously]—I'd punch his head.

JOY. [Gulping her tears.] That does n't help.

DICK. But if she doesn't love your Father—

JOY. But she's married to him!

DICK. [Hastily.] Yes, of course, I know, marriage is awfully important; but a man understands these things.

[Joy looks at him. Seeing the impression he has made, he tries again.]

I mean, he understands better than a woman. I've often argued about moral questions with men up at Oxford.

JOY. [Catching at a straw.] But there's nothing to argue about.

DICK. [Hastily.] Of course, I believe in morals.

[They stare solemnly at each other.]

Some men don't. But I can't help seeing marriage is awfully important.

JOY. [Solemnly.] It's sacred.

DICK. Yes, I know, but there must be exceptions, Joy.

Joy. [Losing herself a little in the stress of this discussion.]
How can there be exceptions if a thing 's sacred?

DICK. [Earnestly.] All rules have exceptions; that's true, you know; it's a proverb.

JOY. It can't be true about marriage—how can it when—?

DICK. [With intense earnestness.] But look here, Joy, I know a really clever man—an author. He says that if marriage is a failure people ought to be perfectly free; it isn't everybody who believes that marriage is everything. Of course, I believe it 's sacred, but if it's a failure, I do think it seems awful—don't you?

JOY. I don't know—yes—if—[Suddenly] But it's my own Mother!

DICK. [Gravely.] I know, of course. I can't expect you to see it in your own case like this. [With desperation.] But look here, Joy, this'll show you! If a person loves a person, they have to decide, have n't they? Well, then, you see, that 's what your Mother's done.

JOY. But that does n't show me anything!

DICK. But it does. The thing is to look at it as if it was n't yourself. If it had been you and me in love, Joy, and it was wrong, like them, of course [ruefully] I know you'd have decided right. [Fiercely.] But I swear I should have decided wrong. [Triumphantly.] That 's why I feel I understand your Mother.

JOY. [Brushing her sleeve across her eyes.] Oh, Dick, you are so sweet—and—and—funny!

DICK. [Sliding his arm about her.] I love you, Joy, that 's why, and I 'll love you till you don't feel it any more. I will. I'll love you all day and every day; you shan't miss anything, I swear it. It 's such a beautiful night—it 's on purpose. Look' [JOY looks; he looks at her.] But it 's not so beautiful as you.

JOY. [Bending her head.] You mustn't. I don't know—what's coming?

DICK. [Sidling closer.] Are n't your knees tired, darling? I—I can't get near you properly.

JOY. [With a sob.] Oh! Dick, you are a funny—comfort!

DICK. We'll stick together, Joy, always; nothing'll matter then.

[They struggle to their feet—the waltz sounds louder.]

You're missing it all! I can't bear you to miss the dancing. It seems so queer! Couldn't we? Just a little turn?

JOY. No, no?

DICK. Oh! try!

[He takes her gently by the waist, she shrinks back.]

JOY. [Brokenly.] No-no! Oh! Dick-to-morrow 'll be so awful.

DICK. To-morrow shan't hurt you, Joy; nothing shall ever hurt you again.

[She looks at him, and her face changes; suddenly she buries it against his shoulder.]

[They stand so just a moment in the moon light; then turning to the river move slowly out of sight. Again the hollow tree is left alone. The music of the waltz has stopped. The voices of MISS BEECH and the COLONEL are heard approaching from the house. They appear in the opening of the wall. The COLONEL carries a pair of field glasses with which to look at the Moon.]

COLONEL. Charming to see Molly dance with Lever, their steps go so well together! I can always tell

when a woman's enjoying herself, Peachey.

MISS BEECH. [Sharply.] Can you? You're very clever.

COLONEL. Wonderful, that moon! I'm going to have a look at her! Splendid glasses these, Peachy [he screws them out], not a better pair in England. I remember in Burmah with these glasses I used to be able to tell a man from a woman at two miles and a quarter. And that's no joke, I can tell you. [But on his way to the moon, he has taken a survey of the earth to the right along the river. In a low but excited voice] I say, I say—is it one of the maids—the baggage! Why! It's Dick! By George, she's got her hair down, Peachey! It's Joy!

[MISS BEECH goes to look. He makes as though to hand the glasses to her, but puts them to his own eyes instead— excitedly.]

It is! What about her headache? By George, they're kissing. I say, Peachey! I shall have to tell Nell!

MISS BEECH. Are you sure they're kissing? Well, that's some comfort.

COLONEL. They're at the stile now. Oughtn't I to stop them, eh? [He stands on tiptoe.] We must n't spy on them, dash it all. [He drops the glasses.] They're out of sight now.

MISS BEECH. [To herself.] He said he wouldn't let her.

COLONEL. What! have you been encouraging them!

MISS BEECH. Don't be in such a hurry!

[She moves towards the hollow tree.]

COLONEL. [Abstractedly.] By George, Peachey, to think that Nell and I were once—Poor Nell! I remember just such a night as this

[He stops, and stares before him, sighing.]

MISS BEECH, [Impressively.] It's a comfort she's got that good young man. She's found out that her mother and this Mr. Lever are—you know.

COLONEL. [Losing all traces of his fussiness, and drawing himself up as though he were on parade.] You tell me that my niece?

MISS BEECH. Out of her own mouth!

COLONEL. [Bowing his head.] I never would have believed she'd have forgotten herself.

MISS BEECH. [Very solemnly.] Ah, my dear! We're all the same; we're all as hollow as that tree! When it's ourselves it's always a special case!

[The COLONEL makes a movement of distress, and Miss BEECH goes to him.]

Don't you take it so to heart, my dear!

[A silence.]

COLONEL. [Shaking his head.] I couldn't have believed Molly would forget that child.

MISS BEECH. [Sadly.] They must go their own ways, poor things! She can't put herself in the child's place, and the child can't put herself in Molly's. A woman and a girl—there's the tree of life between them!

COLONEL. [Staring into the tree to see indeed if that were the tree alluded to.] It's a grief to me, Peachey, it's a grief! [He sinks into a chair, stroking his long moustaches. Then to avenge his hurt.] Shan't tell Nell—dashed if I do anything to make the trouble worse!

MISS BEECH. [Nodding.] There's suffering enough, without adding to it with our trumpery judgments! If only things would last between them!

COLONEL. [Fiercely.] Last! By George, they'd better—

[He stops, and looking up with a queer sorry look.]

I say, Peachey Life's very funny!

MISS BEECH. Men and women are! [Touching his forehead tenderly.] There, there—take care of your poor, dear head! Tsst! The blessed innocents!

[She pulls the COLONEL'S sleeve. They slip away towards the house, as JOY and DICK come back. They are still linked together, and stop by the hollow tree.]

JOY. [In a whisper.] Dick, is love always like this?

DICK. [Putting his arms around her, with conviction.] It's never been like this before. It's you and me!

[He kisses her on the lips.]

The curtain falls.

STRIFE

A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JOHN ANTHONY, Chairman of the Trenartha Tin Plate Works
EDGAR ANTHONY, his Son

FREDERIC H. WILDER, |
WILLIAM SCANTLEBURY, | Directors Of the same
OLIVER WANKLIN, |

HENRY TENCH, Secretary of the same
FRANCIS UNDERWOOD, C.E., Manager of the same
SIMON HARNESS, a Trades Union official

DAVID ROBERTS, |
JAMES GREEN, |
JOHN BULGIN, | the workmen's committee
HENRY THOMAS, |
GEORGE ROUS, |

HENRY ROUS, |
LEWIS, |
JAGO, |
EVANS, | workman at the Trenartha Tin Plate Works
A BLACKSMITH, |
DAVIES, |
A RED-HAIRED YOUTH. |
BROWN |

FROST, valet to John Anthony
ENID UNDERWOOD, Wife of Francis Underwood, daughter of John Anthony
ANNIE ROBERTS, wife of David Roberts
MADGE THOMAS, daughter of Henry Thomas
MRS. ROUS, mother of George and Henry Rous
MRS. BULGIN, wife of John Bulgin

MRS. YEO, wife of a workman
A PARLOURMAID to the Underwoods
JAN, Madge's brother, a boy of ten
A CROWD OF MEN ON STRIKE

ACT I. The dining-room of the Manager's house.

ACT II, SCENE I. The kitchen of the Roberts's cottage near the works. SCENE II. A space outside the works.

ACT III. The drawing-room of the Manager's house.

The action takes place on February 7th between the hours of noon and six in the afternoon, close to the Trenartha Tin Plate Works, on the borders of England and Wales, where a strike has been in progress throughout the winter.

ACT I

It is noon. In the Underwoods' dining-room a bright fire is burning. On one side of the fireplace are double-doors leading to the drawing-room, on the other side a door leading to the hall. In the centre of the room a long dining-table without a cloth is set out as a Board table. At the head of it, in the Chairman's seat, sits JOHN ANTHONY, an old man, big, clean-shaven, and high-coloured, with thick white hair, and thick dark eyebrows. His movements are rather slow and feeble, but his eyes are very much alive. There is a glass of water by his side. On his right sits his son EDGAR, an earnest-looking man of thirty, reading a newspaper. Next him WANKLIN, a man with jutting eyebrows, and silver-streaked light hair, is bending over transfer papers. TENCH, the Secretary, a short and rather humble, nervous man, with side whiskers, stands helping him. On WANKLIN'S right sits UNDERWOOD, the Manager, a quiet man, with a long, stiff jaw, and steady eyes. Back to the fire is SCANTLEBURY, a very large, pale, sleepy man, with grey hair, rather bald. Between him and the Chairman are two empty chairs.

WILDER. [Who is lean, cadaverous, and complaining, with drooping grey moustaches, stands before the fire.] I say, this fire's the devil! Can I have a screen, Tench?

SCANTLEBURY. A screen, ah!

TENCH. Certainly, Mr. Wilder. [He looks at UNDERWOOD.] That is— perhaps the Manager—perhaps Mr. Underwood—

SCANTLEBURY. These fireplaces of yours, Underwood—

UNDERWOOD. [Roused from studying some papers.] A screen? Rather! I'm sorry. [He goes to the door with a little smile.] We're not accustomed to complaints of too much fire down here just now.

[He speaks as though he holds a pipe between his teeth, slowly, ironically.]

WILDER. [In an injured voice.] You mean the men. H'm!

[UNDERWOOD goes out.]

SCANTLEBURY. Poor devils!

WILDER. It's their own fault, Scantlebury.

EDGAR. [Holding out his paper.] There's great distress among them, according to the Trenartha News.

WILDER. Oh, that rag! Give it to Wanklin. Suit his Radical views. They call us monsters, I suppose. The editor of that rubbish ought to be shot.

EDGAR. [Reading.] "If the Board of worthy gentlemen who control the Trenartha Tin Plate Works from their arm-chairs in London would condescend to come and see for themselves the conditions prevailing amongst their work-people during this strike——"

WILDER. Well, we have come.

EDGAR. [Continuing.] "We cannot believe that even their leg-of-mutton hearts would remain untouched."

[WANKLIN takes the paper from him.]

WILDER. Ruffian! I remember that fellow when he had n't a penny to his name; little snivel of a chap that's made his way by black-guarding everybody who takes a different view to himself.

[ANTHONY says something that is not heard.]

WILDER. What does your father say?

EDGAR. He says "The kettle and the pot."

WILDER. H'm!

[He sits down next to SCANTLEBURY.]

SCANTLEBURY. [Blowing out his cheeks.] I shall boil if I don't get that screen.

[UNDERWOOD and ENID enter with a screen, which they place before the fire. ENID is tall; she has a small, decided face, and is twenty-eight years old.]

ENID. Put it closer, Frank. Will that do, Mr. Wilder? It's the highest we've got.

WILDER. Thanks, capitally.

SCANTLEBURY. [Turning, with a sigh of pleasure.] Ah! Merci, Madame!

ENID. Is there anything else you want, Father? [ANTHONY shakes his head.] Edgar—anything?

EDGAR. You might give me a "J" nib, old girl.

ENID. There are some down there by Mr. Scantlebury.

SCANTLEBURY. [Handing a little box of nibs.] Ah! your brother uses "J's." What does the manager use? [With expansive politeness.] What does your husband use, Mrs. Underwood?

UNDERWOOD. A quill!

SCANTLEBURY. The homely product of the goose. [He holds out quills.]

UNDERWOOD. [Drily.] Thanks, if you can spare me one. [He takes a quill.] What about lunch, Enid?

ENID. [Stopping at the double-doors and looking back.] We're going to have lunch here, in the drawing-room, so you need n't hurry with your meeting.

[WANKLIN and WILDER bow, and she goes out.]

SCANTLEBURY. [Rousing himself, suddenly.] Ah! Lunch! That hotel—Dreadful! Did you try the whitebait last night? Fried fat!

WILDER. Past twelve! Are n't you going to read the minutes, Tench?

TENCH. [Looking for the CHAIRMAN'S assent, reads in a rapid and monotonous voice.] "At a Board

Meeting held the 31st of January at the Company's Offices, 512, Cannon Street, E.C. Present—Mr. Anthony in the chair, Messrs. F. H. Wilder, William Scantlebury, Oliver Wanklin, and Edgar Anthony. Read letters from the Manager dated January 20th, 23d, 25th, 28th, relative to the strike at the Company's Works. Read letters to the Manager of January 21st, 24th, 26th, 29th. Read letter from Mr. Simon Harness, of the Central Union, asking for an interview with the Board. Read letter from the Men's Committee, signed David Roberts, James Green, John Bulgin, Henry Thomas, George Rous, desiring conference with the Board; and it was resolved that a special Board Meeting be called for February 7th at the house of the Manager, for the purpose of discussing the situation with Mr. Simon Harness and the Men's Committee on the spot. Passed twelve transfers, signed and sealed nine certificates and one balance certificate."

[He pushes the book over to the CHAIRMAN.]

ANTHONY. [With a heavy sigh.] If it's your pleasure, sign the same.

[He signs, moving the pen with difficulty.]

WANKLIN. What's the Union's game, Tench? They have n't made up their split with the men. What does Harness want this interview for?

TENCH. Hoping we shall come to a compromise, I think, sir; he's having a meeting with the men this afternoon.

WILDER. Harness! Ah! He's one of those cold-blooded, cool-headed chaps. I distrust them. I don't know that we didn't make a mistake to come down. What time'll the men be here?

UNDERWOOD. Any time now.

WILDER. Well, if we're not ready, they'll have to wait—won't do them any harm to cool their heels a bit.

SCANTLEBURY. [Slowly.] Poor devils! It's snowing. What weather!

UNDERWOOD. [With meaning slowness.] This house'll be the warmest place they've been in this winter.

WILDER. Well, I hope we're going to settle this business in time for me to catch the 6.30. I've got to take my wife to Spain to-morrow. [Chattily.] My old father had a strike at his works in '69; just such a February as this. They wanted to shoot him.

WANKLIN. What! In the close season?

WILDER. By George, there was no close season for employers then! He used to go down to his office with a pistol in his pocket.

SCANTLEBURY. [Faintly alarmed.] Not seriously?

WILDER. [With finality.] Ended in his shootin' one of 'em in the legs.

SCANTLEBURY. [Unavoidably feeling his thigh.] No? Which?

ANTHONY. [Lifting the agenda paper.] To consider the policy of the Board in relation to the strike. [There is a silence.]

WILDER. It's this infernal three-cornered duel—the Union, the men, and ourselves.

WANKLIN. We need n't consider the Union.

WILDER. It's my experience that you've always got to, consider the Union, confound them! If the Union were going to withdraw their support from the men, as they've done, why did they ever allow them to strike at all?

EDGAR. We've had that over a dozen times.

WILDER. Well, I've never understood it! It's beyond me. They talk of the engineers' and furnacemen's demands being excessive—so they are—but that's not enough to make the Union withdraw their support. What's behind it?

UNDERWOOD. Fear of strikes at Harper's and Tinewell's.

WILDER. [With triumph.] Afraid of other strikes—now, that's a reason! Why could n't we have been

told that before?

UNDERWOOD. You were.

TENCH. You were absent from the Board that day, sir.

SCANTLEBURY. The men must have seen they had no chance when the Union gave them up. It's madness.

UNDERWOOD. It's Roberts!

WILDER. Just our luck, the men finding a fanatical firebrand like Roberts for leader. [A pause.]

WANKLIN. [Looking at ANTHONY.] Well?

WILDER. [Breaking in fustily.] It's a regular mess. I don't like the position we're in; I don't like it; I've said so for a long time. [Looking at WANKLIN.] When Wanklin and I came down here before Christmas it looked as if the men must collapse. You thought so too, Underwood.

UNDERWOOD. Yes.

WILDER. Well, they haven't! Here we are, going from bad to worse losing our customers—shares going down!

SCANTLEBURY. [Shaking his head.] M'm! M'm!

WANKLIN. What loss have we made by this strike, Tench?

TENCH. Over fifty thousand, sir!

SCANTLEBURY, [Pained.] You don't say!

WILDER. We shall never get it back.

TENCH. No, sir.

WILDER. Who'd have supposed the men were going to stick out like this—nobody suggested that. [Looking angrily at TENCH.]

SCANTLEBURY. [Shaking his head.] I've never liked a fight—never shall.

ANTHONY. No surrender! [All look at him.]

WILDER. Who wants to surrender? [ANTHONY looks at him.] I—I want to act reasonably. When the men sent Roberts up to the Board in December—then was the time. We ought to have humoured him; instead of that the Chairman—[Dropping his eyes before ANTHONY'S]—er—we snapped his head off. We could have got them in then by a little tact.

ANTHONY. No compromise!

WILDER. There we are! This strike's been going on now since October, and as far as I can see it may last another six months. Pretty mess we shall be in by then. The only comfort is, the men'll be in a worse!

EDGAR. [To UNDERWOOD.] What sort of state are they really in, Frank?

UNDERWOOD. [Without expression.] Damnable!

WILDER. Well, who on earth would have thought they'd have held on like this without support!

UNDERWOOD. Those who know them.

WILDER. I defy any one to know them! And what about tin? Price going up daily. When we do get started we shall have to work off our contracts at the top of the market.

WANKLIN. What do you say to that, Chairman?

ANTHONY. Can't be helped!

WILDER. Shan't pay a dividend till goodness knows when!

SCANTLEBURY. [With emphasis.] We ought to think of the shareholders. [Turning heavily.] Chairman, I say we ought to think of the shareholders. [ANTHONY mutters.]

SCANTLEBURY. What's that?

TENCH. The Chairman says he is thinking of you, sir.

SCANTLEBURY. [Sinking back into torpor.] Cynic!

WILDER. It's past a joke. I don't want to go without a dividend for years if the Chairman does. We can't go on playing ducks and drakes with the Company's prosperity.

EDGAR. [Rather ashamedly.] I think we ought to consider the men.

[All but ANTHONY fidget in their seats.]

SCANTLEBURY. [With a sigh.] We must n't think of our private feelings, young man. That'll never do.

EDGAR. [Ironically.] I'm not thinking of our feelings. I'm thinking of the men's.

WILDER. As to that—we're men of business.

WANKLIN. That is the little trouble.

EDGAR. There's no necessity for pushing things so far in the face of all this suffering—it's—it's cruel.

[No one speaks, as though EDGAR had uncovered something whose existence no man prizing his self-respect could afford to recognise.]

WANKLIN. [With an ironical smile.] I'm afraid we must n't base our policy on luxuries like sentiment.

EDGAR. I detest this state of things.

ANTHONY. We did n't seek the quarrel.

EDGAR. I know that sir, but surely we've gone far enough.

ANTHONY. No. [All look at one another.]

WANKLIN. Luxuries apart, Chairman, we must look out what we're doing.

ANTHONY. Give way to the men once and there'll be no end to it.

WANKLIN. I quite agree, but——

[ANTHONY Shakes his head]

You make it a question of bedrock principle?

[ANTHONY nods.]

Luxuries again, Chairman! The shares are below par.

WILDER. Yes, and they'll drop to a half when we pass the next dividend.

SCANTLEBURY. [With alarm.] Come, come! Not so bad as that.

WILDER. [Grimly.] You'll see! [Craning forward to catch ANTHONY'S speech.] I didn't catch——

TENCH. [Hesitating.] The Chairman says, sir, "Fais que—que—devra."

EDGAR. [Sharply.] My father says: "Do what we ought—and let things rip."

WILDER. Tcha!

SCANTLEBURY. [Throwing up his hands.] The Chairman's a Stoic—I always said the Chairman was a Stoic.

WILDER. Much good that'll do us.

WANKLIN. [Suavely.] Seriously, Chairman, are you going to let the ship sink under you, for the sake of—a principle?

ANTHONY. She won't sink.

SCANTLEBURY. [With alarm.] Not while I'm on the Board I hope.

ANTHONY. [With a twinkle.] Better rat, Scantlebury.

SCANTLEBURY. What a man!

ANTHONY. I've always fought them; I've never been beaten yet.

WANKLIN. We're with you in theory, Chairman. But we're not all made of cast-iron.

ANTHONY. We've only to hold on.

WILDER. [Rising and going to the fire.] And go to the devil as fast as we can!

ANTHONY. Better go to the devil than give in!

WILDER. [Fretfully.] That may suit you, sir, but it does n't suit me, or any one else I should think.

[ANTHONY looks him in the face—a silence.]

EDGAR. I don't see how we can get over it that to go on like this means starvation to the men's wives and families.

[WILDER turns abruptly to the fire, and SCANTLEBURY puts out a hand to push the idea away.]

WANKLIN. I'm afraid again that sounds a little sentimental.

EDGAR. Men of business are excused from decency, you think?

WILDER. Nobody's more sorry for the men than I am, but if they [lashing himself] choose to be such a pig-headed lot, it's nothing to do with us; we've quite enough on our hands to think of ourselves and the shareholders.

EDGAR. [Irritably.] It won't kill the shareholders to miss a dividend or two; I don't see that that's reason enough for knuckling under.

SCANTLEBURY. [With grave discomfort.] You talk very lightly of your dividends, young man; I don't know where we are.

WILDER. There's only one sound way of looking at it. We can't go on ruining ourselves with this strike.

ANTHONY. No caving in!

SCANTLEBURY. [With a gesture of despair.] Look at him!

[ANTHONY'S leaning back in his chair. They do look at him.]

WILDER. [Returning to his seat.] Well, all I can say is, if that's the Chairman's view, I don't know what we've come down here for.

ANTHONY. To tell the men that we've got nothing for them—
[Grimly.] They won't believe it till they hear it spoken in plain English.

WILDER. H'm! Shouldn't be a bit surprised if that brute Roberts had n't got us down here with the very same idea. I hate a man with a grievance.

EDGAR. [Resentfully.] We didn't pay him enough for his discovery. I always said that at the time.

WILDER. We paid him five hundred and a bonus of two hundred three years later. If that's not enough! What does he want, for goodness' sake?

TENCH. [Complainingly.] Company made a hundred thousand out of his brains, and paid him seven hundred—that's the way he goes on, sir.

WILDER. The man's a rank agitator! Look here, I hate the Unions. But now we've got Harness here let's get him to settle the whole thing.

ANTHONY. No! [Again they look at him.]

UNDERWOOD. Roberts won't let the men assent to that.

SCANTLEBURY. Fanatic! Fanatic!

WILDER. [Looking at ANTHONY.] And not the only one! [FROST enters from the hall.]

FROST. [To ANTHONY.] Mr. Harness from the Union, waiting, sir. The men are here too, sir.

[ANTHONY nods. UNDERWOOD goes to the door, returning with HARNESS, a pale, clean-shaven man with hollow cheeks, quick eyes, and lantern jaw—FROST has retired.]

UNDERWOOD. [Pointing to TENCH'S chair.] Sit there next the Chairman, Harness, won't you?

[At HARNESS'S appearance, the Board have drawn together, as it were, and turned a little to him, like cattle at a dog.]

HARNESS. [With a sharp look round, and a bow.] Thanks! [He sits— his accent is slightly nasal.] Well, gentlemen, we're going to do business at last, I hope.

WILDER. Depends on what you call business, Harness. Why don't you make the men come in?

HARNESS. [Sardonically.] The men are far more in the right than you are. The question with us is whether we shan't begin to support them again.

[He ignores them all, except ANTHONY, to whom he turns in speaking.]

ANTHONY. Support them if you like; we'll put in free labour and have done with it.

HARNESS. That won't do, Mr. Anthony. You can't get free labour, and you know it.

ANTHONY. We shall see that.

HARNESS. I'm quite frank with you. We were forced to withhold our support from your men because some of their demands are in excess of current rates. I expect to make them withdraw those demands to-day: if they do, take it straight from me, gentlemen, we shall back them again at once. Now, I want to see something fixed upon before I go back to-night. Can't we have done with this old-fashioned tug-of-war business? What good's it doing you? Why don't you recognise once for all that these people are men like yourselves, and want what's good for them just as you want what's good for you [Bitterly.] Your motor-cars, and champagne, and eight-course dinners.

ANTHONY. If the men will come in, we'll do something for them.

HARNESS. [Ironically.] Is that your opinion too, sir—and yours— and yours? [The Directors do not answer.] Well, all I can say is: It's a kind of high and mighty aristocratic tone I thought we'd grown out of—seems I was mistaken.

ANTHONY. It's the tone the men use. Remains to be seen which can hold out longest—they without us, or we without them.

HARNESS. As business men, I wonder you're not ashamed of this waste of force, gentlemen. You know what it'll all end in.

ANTHONY. What?

HARNESS. Compromise—it always does.

SCANTLEBURY. Can't you persuade the men that their interests are the same as ours?

HARNESS. [Turning, ironically.] I could persuade them of that, sir, if they were.

WILDER. Come, Harness, you're a clever man, you don't believe all the Socialistic claptrap that's talked nowadays. There 's no real difference between their interests and ours.

HARNESS. There's just one very simple question I'd like to put to you. Will you pay your men one penny more than they force you to pay them?

[WILDER is silent.]

WANKLIN. [Chiming in.] I humbly thought that not to pay more than was necessary was the A B C of commerce.

HARNESS. [With irony.] Yes, that seems to be the A B C of commerce, sir; and the A B C of commerce is between your interests and the men's.

SCANTLEBURY. [Whispering.] We ought to arrange something.

HARNESS. [Drily.] Am I to understand then, gentlemen, that your Board is going to make no concessions?

[WANKLIN and WILDER bend forward as if to speak, but stop.]

ANTHONY. [Nodding.] None.

[WANKLIN and WILDER again bend forward, and SCANTLEBURY gives an unexpected grunt.]

HARNESS. You were about to say something, I believe?

[But SCANTLEBURY says nothing.]

EDGAR. [Looking up suddenly.] We're sorry for the state of the men.

HARNESS. [Icily.] The men have no use for your pity, sir. What they want is justice.

ANTHONY. Then let them be just.

HARNESS. For that word "just" read "humble," Mr. Anthony. Why should they be humble? Barring the accident of money, are n't they as good men as you?

ANTHONY. Cant!

HARNESS. Well, I've been five years in America. It colours a man's notions.

SCANTLEBURY. [Suddenly, as though avenging his uncompleted grunt.] Let's have the men in and hear what they've got to say!

[ANTHONY nods, and UNDERWOOD goes out by the single door.]

HARNESS. [Drily.] As I'm to have an interview with them this afternoon, gentlemen, I 'll ask you to postpone your final decision till that's over.

[Again ANTHONY nods, and taking up his glass drinks.]

[UNDERWOOD comes in again, followed by ROBERTS, GREEN, BULGIN, THOMAS, ROUS. They file in, hat in hand, and stand silent in a row. ROBERTS is lean, of middle height, with a slight stoop. He has a little rat-gnawn, brown-grey beard, moustaches, high cheek-bones, hollow cheeks, small fiery eyes. He wears an old and grease-stained blue serge suit, and carries an old bowler hat. He stands nearest the Chairman. GREEN, next to him, has a clean, worn face, with a small grey goatee beard and drooping moustaches, iron spectacles, and mild, straightforward eyes. He wears an overcoat, green with age, and a linen collar. Next to him is BULGIN, a tall, strong man, with a dark moustache, and fighting jaw, wearing a red muffler, who keeps changing his cap from one hand to the other. Next to him is THOMAS, an old man with a grey moustache, full beard, and weatherbeaten, bony face, whose overcoat discloses a lean, plucked-looking neck. On his right, ROUS, the youngest of the five, looks like a soldier; he has a glitter in his eyes.]

UNDERWOOD. [Pointing.] There are some chairs there against the wall, Roberts; won't you draw them up and sit down?

ROBERTS. Thank you, Mr. Underwood—we'll stand in the presence of the Board. [He speaks in a biting and staccato voice, rolling his r's, pronouncing his a's like an Italian a, and his consonants short and crisp.] How are you, Mr. Harness? Did n't expect t' have the pleasure of seeing you till this afternoon.

HARNESS. [Steadily.] We shall meet again then, Roberts.

ROBERTS. Glad to hear that; we shall have some news for you to take to your people.

ANTHONY. What do the men want?

ROBERTS. [Acidly.] Beg pardon, I don't quite catch the Chairman's remark.

TENCH. [From behind the Chairman's chair.] The Chairman wishes to know what the men have to say.

ROBERTS. It's what the Board has to say we've come to hear. It's for the Board to speak first.

ANTHONY. The Board has nothing to say.

ROBERTS. [Looking along the line of men.] In that case we're wasting the Directors' time. We'll be taking our feet off this pretty carpet.

[He turns, the men move slowly, as though hypnotically influenced.]

WANKLIN: [Suavely.] Come, Roberts, you did n't give us this long cold journey for the pleasure of saying that.

THOMAS. [A pure Welshman.] No, sir, an' what I say iss——

ROBERTS. [Bitingly.] Go on, Henry Thomas, go on. You 're better able to speak to the—Directors than me. [THOMAS is silent.]

TENCH. The Chairman means, Roberts, that it was the men who asked for the conference, the Board wish to hear what they have to say.

ROBERTS. Gad! If I was to begin to tell ye all they have to say, I wouldn't be finished to-day. And there'd be some that'd wish they'd never left their London palaces.

HARNESS. What's your proposition, man? Be reasonable.

ROBERTS. You want reason Mr. Harness? Take a look round this afternoon before the meeting. [He looks at the men; no sound escapes them.] You'll see some very pretty scenery.

HARNESS. All right my friend; you won't put me off.

ROBERTS. [To the men.] We shan't put Mr. Harness off. Have some champagne with your lunch, Mr. Harness; you'll want it, sir.

HARNESS. Come, get to business, man!

THOMAS. What we're asking, look you, is just simple justice.

ROBERTS. [Venomously.] Justice from London? What are you talking about, Henry Thomas? Have you gone silly? [THOMAS is silent.] We know very well what we are—discontented dogs—never satisfied. What did the Chairman tell me up in London? That I did n't know what I was talking about. I was a foolish, uneducated man, that knew nothing of the wants of the men I spoke for,

EDGAR. Do please keep to the point.

ANTHONY. [Holding up his hand.] There can only be one master, Roberts.

ROBERTS. Then, be Gad, it'll be us.

[There is a silence; ANTHONY and ROBERTS stare at one another.]

UNDERWOOD. If you've nothing to say to the Directors, Roberts, perhaps you 'll let Green or Thomas speak for the men.

[GREEN and THOMAS look anxiously at ROBERTS, at each other, and the other men.]

GREEN. [An Englishman.] If I'd been listened to, gentlemen——

THOMAS. What I'fe got to say iss what we'fe all got to say——

ROBERTS. Speak for yourself, Henry Thomas.

SCANTLEBURY. [With a gesture of deep spiritual discomfort.] Let the poor men call their souls their own!

ROBERTS. Aye, they shall keep their souls, for it's not much body that you've left them, Mr. [with biting emphasis, as though the word were an offence] Scantlebury! [To the men.] Well, will you speak, or shall I speak for you?

ROUS. [Suddenly.] Speak out, Roberts, or leave it to others.

ROBERTS. [Ironically.] Thank you, George Rous. [Addressing himself to ANTHONY.] The Chairman and Board of Directors have honoured us by leaving London and coming all this way to hear what we've got to say; it would not be polite to keep them any longer waiting.

WILDER. Well, thank God for that!

ROBERTS. Ye will not dare to thank Him when I have done, Mr. Wilder, for all your piety. May be your God up in London has no time to listen to the working man. I'm told He is a wealthy God; but if he listens to what I tell Him, He will know more than ever He learned in Kensington.

HARNESS. Come, Roberts, you have your own God. Respect the God of other men.

ROBERTS. That's right, sir. We have another God down here; I doubt He is rather different to Mr. Wilder's. Ask Henry Thomas; he will tell you whether his God and Mr. Wilder's are the same.

[THOMAS lifts his hand, and cranes his head as though to prophesy.]

WANKLIN. For goodness' sake, let 's keep to the point, Roberts.

ROBERTS. I rather think it is the point, Mr. Wanklin. If you can get the God of Capital to walk through the streets of Labour, and pay attention to what he sees, you're a brighter man than I take you for, for all that you're a Radical.

ANTHONY. Attend to me, Roberts! [Roberts is silent.] You are here to speak for the men, as I am here to speak for the Board.

[He looks slowly round.]

[WILDER, WANKLIN, and SCANTLEBURY make movements of uneasiness, and EDGAR gazes at the floor. A faint smile comes on HARNESS'S face.]

Now then, what is it?

ROBERTS. Right, Sir!

[Throughout all that follows, he and ANTHONY look fixedly upon each other. Men and Directors show in their various ways suppressed uneasiness, as though listening to words that they themselves would not have spoken.]

The men can't afford to travel up to London; and they don't trust you to believe what they say in black and white. They know what the post is [he darts a look at UNDERWOOD and TENCH], and what Directors' meetings are: "Refer it to the manager—let the manager advise us on the men's condition. Can we squeeze them a little more?"

UNDERWOOD. [In a low voice.] Don't hit below the belt, Roberts!

ROBERTS. Is it below the belt, Mr. Underwood? The men know. When I came up to London, I told you the position straight. An' what came of it? I was told I did n't know what I was talkin' about. I can't afford to travel up to London to be told that again.

ANTHONY. What have you to say for the men?

ROBERTS. I have this to say—and first as to their condition. Ye shall 'ave no need to go and ask your manager. Ye can't squeeze them any more. Every man of us is well-nigh starving. [A surprised murmur rises from the men. ROBERTS looks round.] Ye wonder why I tell ye that? Every man of us is going short. We can't be no worse off than we've been these weeks past. Ye need n't think that by waiting yell drive us to come in. We'll die first, the whole lot of us. The men have sent for ye to know, once and for all, whether ye are going to grant them their demands. I see the sheet of paper in the Secretary's hand. [TENCH moves nervously.] That's it, I think, Mr. Tench. It's not very large.

TENCH. [Nodding.] Yes.

ROBERTS. There's not one sentence of writing on that paper that we can do without.

[A movement amongst the men. ROBERTS turns on them sharply.]

Isn't that so?

[The men assent reluctantly. ANTHONY takes from TENCH the paper and peruses it.]

Not one single sentence. All those demands are fair. We have not asked anything that we are not entitled to ask. What I said up in London, I say again now: there is not anything on that piece of paper that a just man should not ask, and a just man give.

[A pause.]

ANTHONY. There is not one single demand on this paper that we will grant.

[In the stir that follows on these words, ROBERTS watches the Directors and ANTHONY the men. WILDER gets up abruptly and goes over to the fire.]

ROBERTS. D' ye mean that?

ANTHONY. I do.

[WILDER at the fire makes an emphatic movement of disgust.]

ROBERTS. [Noting it, with dry intensity.] Ye best know whether the condition of the Company is any better than the condition of the men. [Scanning the Directors' faces.] Ye best know whether ye can afford your tyranny—but this I tell ye: If ye think the men will give way the least part of an inch, ye're making the worst mistake ye ever made. [He fixes his eyes on SCANTLEBURY.] Ye think because the Union is not supporting us—more shame to it!—that we'll be coming on our knees to you one fine morning. Ye think because the men have got their wives an' families to think of—that it's just a question of a week or two—

ANTHONY. It would be better if you did not speculate so much on what we think.

ROBERTS. Aye! It's not much profit to us! I will say this for you, Mr. Anthony—ye know your own mind! [Staying at ANTHONY.] I can reckon on ye!

ANTHONY. [Ironically.] I am obliged to you!

ROBERTS. And I know mine. I tell ye this: The men will send their wives and families where the country will have to keep them; an' they will starve sooner than give way. I advise ye, Mr. Anthony, to prepare yourself for the worst that can happen to your Company. We are not so ignorant as you might suppose. We know the way the cat is jumping. Your position is not all that it might be—not exactly!

ANTHONY. Be good enough to allow us to judge of our position for ourselves. Go back, and reconsider your own.

ROBERTS. [Stepping forward.] Mr. Anthony, you are not a young man now; from the time I remember anything ye have been an enemy to every man that has come into your works. I don't say that ye're a mean man, or a cruel man, but ye've grudged them the say of any word in their own fate. Ye've fought them down four times. I've heard ye say ye love a fight—mark my words—ye're fighting the last fight ye'll ever fight!

[TENCH touches ROBERTS'S sleeve.]

UNDERWOOD. Roberts! Roberts!

ROBERTS. Roberts! Roberts! I must n't speak my mind to the Chairman, but the Chairman may speak his mind to me!

WILDER. What are things coming to?

ANTHONY, [With a grim smile at WILDER.] Go on, Roberts; say what you like!

ROBERTS. [After a pause.] I have no more to say.

ANTHONY. The meeting stands adjourned to five o'clock.

WANKLIN. [In a low voice to UNDERWOOD.] We shall never settle anything like this.

ROBERTS. [Bitingly.] We thank the Chairman and Board of Directors for their gracious hearing.

[He moves towards the door; the men cluster together stupefied; then ROUS, throwing up his head, passes ROBERTS and goes out. The others follow.]

ROBERTS. [With his hand on the door—maliciously.] Good day, gentlemen! [He goes out.]

HARNESS. [Ironically.] I congratulate you on the conciliatory spirit that's been displayed. With your permission, gentlemen, I'll be with you again at half-past five. Good morning!

[He bows slightly, rests his eyes on ANTHONY, who returns his stare unmoved, and, followed by UNDERWOOD, goes out. There is a moment of uneasy silence. UNDERWOOD reappears in the doorway.]

WILDER. [With emphatic disgust.] Well!

[The double-doors are opened.]

ENID. [Standing in the doorway.] Lunch is ready.

[EDGAR, getting up abruptly, walks out past his sister.]

WILDER. Coming to lunch, Scantlebury?

SCANTLEBURY. [Rising heavily.] I suppose so, I suppose so. It's the only thing we can do.

[They go out through the double-doors.]

WANKLIN. [In a low voice.] Do you really mean to fight to a finish, Chairman?

[ANTHONY nods.]

WANKLIN. Take care! The essence of things is to know when to stop.

[ANTHONY does not answer.]

WANKLIN. [Very gravely.] This way disaster lies. The ancient Trojans were fools to your father, Mrs. Underwood. [He goes out through the double-doors.]

ENID. I want to speak to father, Frank.

[UNDERWOOD follows WANKLIN Out. TENCH, passing round the table, is restoring order to the scattered pens and papers.]

ENID. Are n't you coming, Dad?

[ANTHONY Shakes his head. ENID looks meaningly at TENCH.]

ENID. Won't you go and have some lunch, Mr. Tench?

TENCH. [With papers in his hand.] Thank you, ma'am, thank you! [He goes slowly, looking back.]

ENID. [Shutting the doors.] I do hope it's settled, Father!

ANTHONY. No!

ENID. [Very disappointed.] Oh! Have n't you done anything!

[ANTHONY shakes his head.]

ENID. Frank says they all want to come to a compromise, really, except that man Roberts.

ANTHONY. I don't.

ENID. It's such a horrid position for us. If you were the wife of the manager, and lived down here, and saw it all. You can't realise, Dad!

ANTHONY. Indeed?

ENID. We see all the distress. You remember my maid Annie, who married Roberts? [ANTHONY nods.] It's so wretched, her heart's weak; since the strike began, she has n't even been getting proper

food. I know it for a fact, Father.

ANTHONY. Give her what she wants, poor woman!

ENID. Roberts won't let her take anything from us.

ANTHONY. [Staring before him.] I can't be answerable for the men's obstinacy.

ENID. They're all suffering. Father! Do stop it, for my sake!

ANTHONY. [With a keen look at her.] You don't understand, my dear.

ENID. If I were on the Board, I'd do something.

ANTHONY. What would you do?

ENID. It's because you can't bear to give way. It's so——

ANTHONY. Well?

ENID. So unnecessary.

ANTHONY. What do you know about necessity? Read your novels, play your music, talk your talk, but don't try and tell me what's at the bottom of a struggle like this.

ENID. I live down here, and see it.

ANTHONY. What d' you imagine stands between you and your class and these men that you're so sorry for?

ENID. [Coldly.] I don't know what you mean, Father.

ANTHONY. In a few years you and your children would be down in the condition they're in, but for those who have the eyes to see things as they are and the backbone to stand up for themselves.

ENID. You don't know the state the men are in.

ANTHONY. I know it well enough.

ENID. You don't, Father; if you did, you would n't

ANTHONY. It's you who don't know the simple facts of the position. What sort of mercy do you suppose you'd get if no one stood between you and the continual demands of labour? This sort of mercy — [He puts his hand up to his throat and squeezes it.] First would go your sentiments, my dear; then your culture, and your comforts would be going all the time!

ENID. I don't believe in barriers between classes.

ANTHONY. You—don't—believe—in—barriers—between the classes?

ENID. [Coldly.] And I don't know what that has to do with this question.

ANTHONY. It will take a generation or two for you to understand.

ENID. It's only you and Roberts, Father, and you know it!

[ANTHONY thrusts out his lower lip.]

It'll ruin the Company.

ANTHONY. Allow me to judge of that.

ENID. [Resentfully.] I won't stand by and let poor Annie Roberts suffer like this! And think of the children, Father! I warn you.

ANTHONY. [With a grim smile.] What do you propose to do?

ENID. That's my affair.

[ANTHONY only looks at her.]

ENID. [In a changed voice, stroking his sleeve.] Father, you know you oughtn't to have this strain on you—you know what Dr. Fisher said!

ANTHONY. No old man can afford to listen to old women.

ENID. But you have done enough, even if it really is such a matter of principle with you.

ANTHONY. You think so?

ENID. Don't Dad! [Her face works.] You—you might think of us!

ANTHONY. I am.

ENID. It'll break you down.

ANTHONY. [Slowly.] My dear, I am not going to funk; on that you may rely.

[Re-enter TENCH with papers; he glances at them, then plucking up courage.]

TENCH. Beg pardon, Madam, I think I'd rather see these papers were disposed of before I get my lunch.

[ENID, after an impatient glance at him, looks at her father, turns suddenly, and goes into the drawing-room.]

TENCH. [Holding the papers and a pen to ANTHONY, very nervously.] Would you sign these for me, please sir?

[ANTHONY takes the pen and signs.]

TENCH. [Standing with a sheet of blotting-paper behind EDGAR'S chair, begins speaking nervously.] I owe my position to you, sir.

ANTHONY. Well?

TENCH. I'm obliged to see everything that's going on, sir; I—I depend upon the Company entirely. If anything were to happen to it, it'd be disastrous for me. [ANTHONY nods.] And, of course, my wife's just had another; and so it makes me doubly anxious just now. And the rates are really terrible down our way.

ANTHONY. [With grim amusement.] Not more terrible than they are up mine.

TENCH. No, Sir? [Very nervously.] I know the Company means a great deal to you, sir.

ANTHONY. It does; I founded it.

TENCH. Yes, Sir. If the strike goes on it'll be very serious. I think the Directors are beginning to realise that, sir.

ANTHONY. [Ironically.] Indeed?

TENCH. I know you hold very strong views, sir, and it's always your habit to look things in the face; but I don't think the Directors— like it, sir, now they—they see it.

ANTHONY. [Grimly.] Nor you, it seems.

TENCH. [With the ghost of a smile.] No, sir; of course I've got my children, and my wife's delicate; in my position I have to think of these things.

[ANTHONY nods.]

It was n't that I was going to say, sir, if you'll excuse me—— [hesitates]

ANTHONY. Out with it, then!

TENCH. I know—from my own father, sir, that when you get on in life you do feel things dreadfully ——

ANTHONY. [Almost paternally.] Come, out with it, Trench!

TENCH. I don't like to say it, sir.

ANTHONY. [Stonily.] You Must.

TENCH. [After a pause, desperately bolting it out.] I think the

Directors are going to throw you over, sir.

ANTHONY. [Sits in silence.] Ring the bell!

[TENCH nervously rings the bell and stands by the fire.]

TENCH. Excuse me for saying such a thing. I was only thinking of you, sir.

[FROST enters from the hall, he comes to the foot of the table, and looks at ANTHONY; TENCH conveys his nervousness by arranging papers.]

ANTHONY. Bring me a whiskey and soda.

FROST. Anything to eat, sir?

[ANTHONY shakes his head. FROST goes to the sideboard, and prepares the drink.]

TENCH. [In a low voice, almost supplicating.] If you could see your way, sir, it would be a great relief to my mind, it would indeed. [He looks up at ANTHONY, who has not moved.] It does make me so very anxious. I haven't slept properly for weeks, sir, and that's a fact.

[ANTHONY looks in his face, then slowly shakes his head.]

[Disheartened.] No, Sir? [He goes on arranging papers.]

[FROST places the whiskey and salver and puts it down by ANTHONY'S right hand. He stands away, looking gravely at ANTHONY.]

FROST. Nothing I can get you, sir?

[ANTHONY shakes his head.]

You're aware, sir, of what the doctor said, sir?

ANTHONY. I am.

[A pause. FROST suddenly moves closer to him, and speaks in a low voice.]

FROST. This strike, sir; puttin' all this strain on you. Excuse me, sir, is it—is it worth it, sir?

[ANTHONY mutters some words that are inaudible.]

Very good, sir!

[He turns and goes out into the hall. TENCH makes two attempts to speak; but meeting his Chairman's gaze he drops his eyes, and, turning dismally, he too goes out. ANTHONY is left alone. He grips the glass, tilts it, and drinks deeply; then sets it down with a deep and rumbling sigh, and leans back in his chair.]

The curtain falls.

ACT II

SCENE I

It is half-past three. In the kitchen of Roberts's cottage a meagre little fire is burning. The room is clean and tidy, very barely furnished, with a brick floor and white-washed walls, much stained with smoke. There is a kettle on the fire. A door opposite the fireplace opens inward from a snowy street. On the wooden table are a cup and saucer, a teapot, knife, and plate of bread and cheese. Close to the fireplace in an old arm-chair, wrapped in

a rug, sits MRS. ROBERTS, a thin and dark-haired woman about thirty-five, with patient eyes. Her hair is not done up, but tied back with a piece of ribbon. By the fire, too, is MRS. YEO; a red-haired, broad-faced person. Sitting near the table is MRS. ROUS, an old lady, ashen-white, with silver hair; by the door, standing, as if about to go, is MRS. BULGIN, a little pale, pinched-up woman. In a chair, with her elbows resting on the table, avid her face resting in her hands, sits MADGE THOMAS, a good-looking girl, of twenty-two, with high cheekbones, deep-set eyes, and dark untidy hair. She is listening to the talk, but she neither speaks nor moves.

MRS. YEO. So he give me a sixpence, and that's the first bit o' money I seen this week. There an't much 'eat to this fire. Come and warm yerself Mrs. Rous, you're lookin' as white as the snow, you are.

MRS. ROUS. [Shivering—placidly.] Ah! but the winter my old man was took was the proper winter. Seventy-nine that was, when none of you was hardly born—not Madge Thomas, nor Sue Bulgin. [Looking at them in turn.] Annie Roberts, 'ow old were you, dear?

MRS ROBERTS. Seven, Mrs. Rous.

MRS. ROUS. Seven—well, there! A tiny little thing!

MRS. YEO. [Aggressively.] Well, I was ten myself, I remembers it.

MRS. Rous. [Placidly.] The Company hadn't been started three years. Father was workin' on the acid, that's 'ow he got 'is pisoned-leg. I kep' sayin' to 'im, "Father, you've got a pisoned leg." "Well," 'e said, "Mother, pison or no pison, I can't afford to go a-layin' up." An' two days after, he was on 'is back, and never got up again. It was Providence! There was n't none o' these Compensation Acts then.

MRS. YEO. Ye had n't no strike that winter! [With grim humour.] This winter's 'ard enough for me. Mrs. Roberts, you don't want no 'arder winter, do you? Wouldn't seem natural to 'ave a dinner, would it, Mrs. Bulgin?

MRS. BULGIN. We've had bread and tea last four days.

MRS. YEO. You got that Friday's laundry job?

MRS. BULGIN. [Dispiritedly.] They said they'd give it me, but when I went last Friday, they were full up. I got to go again next week.

MRS. YEO. Ah! There's too many after that. I send Yeo out on the ice to put on the gentry's skates an' pick up what 'e can. Stops 'im from broodin' about the 'ouse.

MRS. BULGIN. [In a desolate, matter-of-fact voice.] Leavin' out the men—it's bad enough with the children. I keep 'em in bed, they don't get so hungry when they're not running about; but they're that restless in bed they worry your life out.

MRS. YEO. You're lucky they're all so small. It 's the goin' to school that makes 'em 'ungry. Don't Bulgin give you anythin'?

MRS. BULGIN. [Shakes her head, then, as though by afterthought.] Would if he could, I s'pose.

MRS. YEO. [Sardonically.] What! 'Ave n't 'e got no shares in the Company?

MRS. ROUS. [Rising with tremulous cheerfulness.] Well, good-bye, Annie Roberts, I'm going along home.

MRS. ROBERTS. Stay an' have a cup of tea, Mrs. Rous?

MRS. ROUS. [With the faintest smile.] Roberts 'll want 'is tea when he comes in. I'll just go an' get to bed; it's warmer there than anywhere.

[She moves very shakily towards the door.]

MRS. YEO. [Rising and giving her an arm.] Come on, Mother, take my arm; we're all going' the same way.

MRS. ROUS. [Taking the arm.] Thank you, my dearies!

[THEY go out, followed by MRS. BULGIN.]

MADGE. [Moving for the first time.] There, Annie, you see that! I told George Rous, "Don't think to have my company till you've made an end of all this trouble. You ought to be ashamed," I said, "with your own mother looking like a ghost, and not a stick to put on the fire. So long as you're able to fill your pipes, you'll let us starve." "I 'll take my oath, Madge," he said, "I 've not had smoke nor drink these three weeks!" "Well, then, why do you go on with it?" "I can't go back on Roberts!" . . . That's it! Roberts, always Roberts! They'd all drop it but for him. When he talks it's the devil that comes into them.

[A silence. MRS. ROBERTS makes a movement of pain.]

Ah! You don't want him beaten! He's your man. With everybody like their own shadows! [She makes a gesture towards MRS. ROBERTS.] If ROUS wants me he must give up Roberts. If he gave him up—they all would. They're only waiting for a lead. Father's against him— they're all against him in their hearts.

MRS. ROBERTS. You won't beat Roberts!

[They look silently at each other.]

MADGE. Won't I? The cowards—when their own mothers and their own children don't know where to turn.

MRS. ROBERTS. Madge!

MADGE. [Looking searchingly at MRS. ROBERTS.] I wonder he can look you in the face. [She squats before the fire, with her hands out to the flame.] Harness is here again. They'll have to make up their minds to-day.

MRS. ROBERTS. [In a soft, slow voice, with a slight West-country burr.] Roberts will never give up the furnace-men and engineers. 'T wouldn't be right.

MADGE. You can't deceive me. It's just his pride.

[A tapping at the door is heard, the women turn as ENID enters. She wears a round fur cap, and a jacket of squirrel's fur. She closes the door behind her.]

ENID. Can I come in, Annie?

MRS. ROBERTS. [Flinching.] Miss Enid! Give Mrs. Underwood a chair, Madge!

[MADGE gives ENID the chair she has been sitting on.]

ENID. Thank you!

ENID. Are you any better?

MRS. ROBERTS. Yes, M'm; thank you, M'm.

ENID. [Looking at the sullen MADGE as though requesting her departure.] Why did you send back the jelly? I call that really wicked of you!

MRS. ROBERTS. Thank you, M'm, I'd no need for it.

ENID. Of course! It was Roberts's doing, wasn't it? How can he let all this suffering go on amongst you?

MADGE. [Suddenly.] What suffering?

ENID. [Surprised.] I beg your pardon!

MADGE. Who said there was suffering?

MRS. ROBERTS. Madge!

MADGE. [Throwing her shawl over her head.] Please to let us keep ourselves to ourselves. We don't want you coming here and spying on us.

ENID. [Confronting her, but without rising.] I did n't speak to you.

MADGE. [In a low, fierce voice.] Keep your kind feelings to yourself. You think you can come amongst us, but you're mistaken. Go back and tell the Manager that.

ENID. [Stonily.] This is not your house.

MADGE. [Turning to the door.] No, it is not my house; keep clear of my house, Mrs. Underwood.

[She goes out. ENID taps her fingers on the table.]

MRS. ROBERTS. Please to forgive Madge Thomas, M'm; she's a bit upset to-day.

[A pause.]

ENID. [Looking at her.] Oh, I think they're so stupid, all of them.

MRS. ROBERTS. [With a faint smile]. Yes, M'm.

ENID. Is Roberts out?

MRS. ROBERTS. Yes, M'm.

ENID. It is his doing, that they don't come to an agreement. Now is n't it, Annie?

MRS. ROBERTS. [Softly, with her eyes on ENID, and moving the fingers of one hand continually on her breast.] They do say that your father, M'm—

ENID. My father's getting an old man, and you know what old men are.

MRS. ROBERTS. I am sorry, M'm.

ENID. [More softly.] I don't expect you to feel sorry, Annie. I know it's his fault as well as Roberts's.

MRS. ROBERTS. I'm sorry for any one that gets old, M'm; it 's dreadful to get old, and Mr. Anthony was such a fine old man, I always used to think.

ENID. [Impulsively.] He always liked you, don't you remember? Look here, Annie, what can I do? I do so want to know. You don't get what you ought to have. [Going to the fire, she takes the kettle off, and looks for coals.] And you're so naughty sending back the soup and things.

MRS. ROBERTS. [With a faint smile.] Yes, M'm?

ENID. [Resentfully.] Why, you have n't even got coals?

MRS. ROBERTS. If you please, M'm, to put the kettle on again; Roberts won't have long for his tea when he comes in. He's got to meet the men at four.

ENID. [Putting the kettle on.] That means he'll lash them into a fury again. Can't you stop his going, Annie?

[MRS. ROBERTS smiles ironically.]

Have you tried?

[A silence.]

Does he know how ill you are?

MRS. ROBERTS. It's only my weak 'eard, M'm.

ENID. You used to be so well when you were with us.

MRS. ROBERTS. [Stiffening.] Roberts is always good to me.

ENID. But you ought to have everything you want, and you have nothing!

MRS. ROBERTS. [Appealingly.] They tell me I don't look like a dyin' woman?

ENID. Of course you don't; if you could only have proper— Will you see my doctor if I send him to you? I'm sure he'd do you good.

MRS. ROBERTS. [With faint questioning.] Yes, M'm.

ENID. Madge Thomas ought n't to come here; she only excites you. As if I did n't know what suffering there is amongst the men! I do feel for them dreadfully, but you know they have gone too far.

MRS. ROBERTS. [Continually moving her fingers.] They say there's no other way to get better wages,

M'm.

ENID. [Earnestly.] But, Annie, that's why the Union won't help them. My husband's very sympathetic with the men, but he says they are not underpaid.

MRS. ROBERTS. No, M'm?

ENID. They never think how the Company could go on if we paid the wages they want.

MRS. ROBERTS. [With an effort.] But the dividends having been so big, M'm.

ENID. [Takes aback.] You all seem to think the shareholders are rich men, but they're not—most of them are really no better off than working men.

[MRS. ROBERTS smiles.]

They have to keep up appearances.

MRS. ROBERTS. Yes, M'm?

ENID. You don't have to pay rates and taxes, and a hundred other things that they do. If the men didn't spend such a lot in drink and betting they'd be quite well off!

MRS. ROBERTS. They say, workin' so hard, they must have some pleasure.

ENID. But surely not low pleasure like that.

MRS. ROBERTS. [A little resentfully.] Roberts never touches a drop; and he's never had a bet in his life.

ENID. Oh! but he's not a com—I mean he's an engineer—a superior man.

MRS. ROBERTS. Yes, M'm. Roberts says they've no chance of other pleasures.

ENID. [Musing.] Of course, I know it's hard.

MRS. ROBERTS. [With a spice of malice.] And they say gentlefolk's just as bad.

ENID. [With a smile.] I go as far as most people, Annie, but you know, yourself, that's nonsense.

MRS. ROBERTS. [With painful effort.] A lot 'o the men never go near the Public; but even they don't save but very little, and that goes if there's illness.

ENID. But they've got their clubs, have n't they?

MRS. ROBERTS. The clubs only give up to eighteen shillin's a week, M'm, and it's not much amongst a family. Roberts says workin' folk have always lived from hand to mouth. Sixpence to-day is worth more than a shillin' to-morrow, that's what they say.

ENID. But that's the spirit of gambling.

MRS. ROBERTS. [With a sort of excitement.] Roberts says a working man's life is all a gamble, from the time 'e 's born to the time 'e dies.

[ENID leans forward, interested. MRS. ROBERTS goes on with a growing excitement that culminates in the personal feeling of the last words.]

He says, M'm, that when a working man's baby is born, it's a toss-up from breath to breath whether it ever draws another, and so on all 'is life; an' when he comes to be old, it's the workhouse or the grave. He says that without a man is very near, and pinches and stints 'imself and 'is children to save, there can't be neither surplus nor security. That's why he wouldn't have no children [she sinks back], not though I wanted them.

ENID. Yes, yes, I know!

MRS. ROBERTS. No you don't, M'm. You've got your children, and you'll never need to trouble for them.

ENID. [Gently.] You oughtn't to be talking so much, Annie. [Then, in spite of herself.] But Roberts was paid a lot of money, was n't he, for discovering that process?

MRS. ROBERTS. [On the defensive.] All Roberts's savin's have gone. He 's always looked forward to

this strike. He says he's no right to a farthing when the others are suffering. 'T is n't so with all o' them! Some don't seem to care no more than that—so long as they get their own.

ENID. I don't see how they can be expected to when they 're suffering like this. [In a changed voice.] But Roberts ought to think of you! It's all terrible—! The kettle's boiling. Shall I make the tea? [She takes the teapot and, seeing tea there, pours water into it.] Won't you have a cup?

MRS. ROBERTS. No, thank you, M'm. [She is listening, as though for footsteps.] I'd—sooner you did n't see Roberts, M'm, he gets so wild.

ENID. Oh! but I must, Annie; I'll be quite calm, I promise.

MRS. ROBERTS. It's life an' death to him, M'm.

ENID. [Very gently.] I'll get him to talk to me outside, we won't excite you.

MRS. ROBERTS. [Faintly.] No, M'm.

[She gives a violent start. ROBERTS has come in, unseen.]

ROBERTS. [Removing his hat—with subtle mockery.] Beg pardon for coming in; you're engaged with a lady, I see.

ENID. Can I speak to you, Mr. Roberts?

ROBERTS. Whom have I the pleasure of addressing, Ma'am?

ENID. But surely you know me! I 'm Mrs. Underwood.

ROBERTS. [With a bow of malice.] The daughter of our Chairman.

ENID. [Earnestly.] I've come on purpose to speak to you; will you come outside a minute?

[She looks at MRS. ROBERTS.]

ROBERTS. [Hanging up his hat.] I have nothing to say, Ma'am.

ENID. But I must speak to you, please.

[She moves towards the door.]

ROBERTS. [With sudden venom.] I have not the time to listen!

MRS. ROBERTS. David!

ENID. Mr. Roberts, please!

ROBERTS. [Taking off his overcoat.] I am sorry to disoblige a lady—Mr. Anthony's daughter.

ENID. [Wavering, then with sudden decision.] Mr. Roberts, I know you've another meeting of the men.

[ROBERTS bows.]

I came to appeal to you. Please, please, try to come to some compromise; give way a little, if it's only for your own sakes!

ROBERTS. [Speaking to himself.] The daughter of Mr. Anthony begs me to give way a little, if it's only for our own sakes!

ENID. For everybody's sake; for your wife's sake.

ROBERTS. For my wife's sake, for everybody's sake—for the sake of Mr. Anthony.

ENID. Why are you so bitter against my father? He has never done anything to you.

ROBERTS. Has he not?

ENID. He can't help his views, any more than you can help yours.

ROBERTS. I really did n't know that I had a right to views!

ENID. He's an old man, and you—

[Seeing his eyes fixed on her, she stops.]

ROBERTS. [Without raising his voice.] If I saw Mr. Anthony going to die, and I could save him by lifting my hand, I would not lift the little finger of it.

ENID. You—you—[She stops again, biting her lips.]

ROBERTS. I would not, and that's flat!

ENID. [Coldly.] You don't mean what you say, and you know it!

ROBERTS. I mean every word of it.

ENID. But why?

ROBERTS. [With a flash.] Mr. Anthony stands for tyranny! That's why!

ENID. Nonsense!

[MRS. ROBERTS makes a movement as if to rise, but sinks back in her chair.]

ENID. [With an impetuous movement.] Annie!

ROBERTS. Please not to touch my wife!

ENID. [Recoiling with a sort of horror.] I believe—you are mad.

ROBERTS. The house of a madman then is not the fit place for a lady.

ENID. I 'm not afraid of you.

ROBERTS. [Bowing.] I would not expect the daughter of Mr. Anthony to be afraid. Mr. Anthony is not a coward like the rest of them.

ENID. [Suddenly.] I suppose you think it brave, then, to go on with the struggle.

ROBERTS. Does Mr. Anthony think it brave to fight against women and children? Mr. Anthony is a rich man, I believe; does he think it brave to fight against those who have n't a penny? Does he think it brave to set children crying with hunger, an' women shivering with cold?

ENID. [Putting up her hand, as though warding off a blow.] My father is acting on his principles, and you know it!

ROBERTS. And so am I!

ENID. You hate us; and you can't bear to be beaten!

ROBERTS. Neither can Mr. Anthony, for all that he may say.

ENID. At any rate you might have pity on your wife.

[MRS. ROBERTS who has her hand pressed to her heart, takes it away, and tries to calm her breathing.]

ROBERTS. Madam, I have no more to say.

[He takes up the loaf. There is a knock at the door, and UNDERWOOD comes in. He stands looking at them, ENID turns to him, then seems undecided.]

UNDERWOOD. Enid!

ROBERTS. [Ironically.] Ye were not needing to come for your wife, Mr. Underwood. We are not rowdies.

UNDERWOOD. I know that, Roberts. I hope Mrs. Roberts is better.

[ROBERTS turns away without answering. Come, Enid!]

ENID. I make one more appeal to you, Mr. Roberts, for the sake of your wife.

ROBERTS. [With polite malice.] If I might advise ye, Ma'am—make it for the sake of your husband

and your father.

[ENID, suppressing a retort, goes out. UNDERWOOD opens the door for her and follows. ROBERTS, going to the fire, holds out his hands to the dying glow.]

ROBERTS. How goes it, my girl? Feeling better, are you?

[MRS. ROBERTS smiles faintly. He brings his overcoat and wraps it round her.]

[Looking at his watch.] Ten minutes to four! [As though inspired.] I've seen their faces, there's no fight in them, except for that one old robber.

MRS. ROBERTS. Won't you stop and eat, David? You've 'ad nothing all day!

ROBERTS. [Putting his hand to his throat.] Can't swallow till those old sharks are out o' the town: [He walks up and down.] I shall have a bother with the men—there's no heart in them, the cowards. Blind as bats, they are—can't see a day before their noses.

MRS. ROBERTS. It's the women, David.

ROBERTS. Ah! So they say! They can remember the women when their own bellies speak! The women never stop them from the drink; but from a little suffering to themselves in a sacred cause, the women stop them fast enough.

MRS. ROBERTS. But think o' the children, David.

ROBERTS. Ah! If they will go breeding themselves for slaves, without a thought o' the future o' them they breed—

MRS. ROBERTS. [Gasping.] That's enough, David; don't begin to talk of that—I won't—I can't—

ROBERTS. [Staring at her.] Now, now, my girl!

MRS. ROBERTS. [Breathlessly.] No, no, David—I won't!

ROBERTS. There, there! Come, come! That's right! [Bitterly.] Not one penny will they put by for a day like this. Not they! Hand to mouth—Gad!—I know them! They've broke my heart. There was no holdin' them at the start, but now the pinch 'as come.

MRS. ROBERTS. How can you expect it, David? They're not made of iron.

ROBERTS. Expect it? Wouldn't I expect what I would do meself? Wouldn't I starve an' rot rather than give in? What one man can do, another can.

MRS. ROBERTS. And the women?

ROBERTS. This is not women's work.

MRS. ROBERTS. [With a flash of malice.] No, the women may die for all you care. That's their work.

ROBERTS. [Averting his eyes.] Who talks of dying? No one will die till we have beaten these—

[He meets her eyes again, and again turns his away. Excitedly.]

This is what I've been waiting for all these months. To get the old robbers down, and send them home again without a farthin's worth o' change. I 've seen their faces, I tell you, in the valley of the shadow of defeat.

[He goes to the peg and takes down his hat.]

MRS. ROBERTS. [Following with her eyes-softly.] Take your overcoat, David; it must be bitter cold.

ROBERTS. [Coming up to her-his eyes are furtive.] No, no! There, there, stay quiet and warm. I won't be long, my girl.

MRS. ROBERTS. [With soft bitterness.] You'd better take it.

[She lifts the coat. But ROBERTS puts it back, and wraps it round her. He tries to meet her eyes, but cannot. MRS. ROBERTS stays huddled in the coat, her eyes, that follow him about, are half malicious, half yearning. He looks at his watch again, and turns to go. In the doorway he meets JAN THOMAS, a boy of ten in clothes too big for him, carrying a penny

whistle.]

ROBERTS. Hallo, boy!

[He goes. JAN stops within a yard of MRS. ROBERTS, and stares at her without a word.]

MRS. ROBERTS. Well, Jan!

JAN. Father 's coming; sister Madge is coming.

[He sits at the table, and fidgets with his whistle; he blows three vague notes; then imitates a cuckoo.]

[There is a tap on the door. Old THOMAS comes in.]

THOMAS. A very coot tay to you, Ma'am. It is petter that you are.

MRS. ROBERTS. Thank you, Mr. Thomas.

THOMAS. [Nervously.] Roberts in?

MRS. ROBERTS. Just gone on to the meeting, Mr. Thomas.

THOMAS. [With relief, becoming talkative.] This is fery unfortunate, look you! I came to tell him that we must make terms with London. It is a fery great pity he is gone to the meeting. He will be kicking against the pricks, I am thinking.

MRS. ROBERTS. [Half rising.] He'll never give in, Mr. Thomas.

THOMAS. You must not be fretting, that is very pat for you. Look you, there iss hartly any mans for supporting him now, but the engineers and George Rous. [Solemnly.] This strike is no longer Going with Chapel, look you! I have listened carefully, an' I have talked with her.

[JAN blows.]

Sst! I don't care what th' others say, I say that Chapel means us to be stopping the trouple, that is what I make of her; and it is my opinion that this is the fery best thing for all of us. If it was n't my opinion, I ton't say but it is my opinion, look you.

MRS. ROBERTS. [Trying to suppress her excitement.] I don't know what'll come to Roberts, if you give in.

THOMAS. It iss no disgrace whateffer! All that a mortal man coult do he hass tone. It iss against Human Nature he hass gone; fery natural any man may do that; but Chapel has spoken and he must not go against her.

[JAN imitates the cuckoo.]

Ton't make that squeaking! [Going to the door.] Here iss my daughter come to sit with you. A fery goot day, Ma'am—no fretting —rememper!

[MADGE comes in and stands at the open door, watching the street.]

MADGE. You'll be late, Father; they're beginning. [She catches him by the sleeve.] For the love of God, stand up to him, Father—this time!

THOMAS. [Detaching his sleeve with dignity.] Leave me to do what's proper, girl!

[He goes out. MADGE, in the centre of the open doorway, slowly moves in, as though before the approach of some one.]

ROUS. [Appearing in the doorway.] Madge!

[MADGE stands with her back to MRS. ROBERTS, staring at him with her head up and her hands behind her.]

ROUS. [Who has a fierce distracted look.] Madge! I'm going to the meeting.

[MADGE, without moving, smiles contemptuously.]

D' ye hear me?

[They speak in quick low voices.]

MADGE. I hear! Go, and kill your own mother, if you must.

[ROUS seizes her by both her arms. She stands rigid, with her head bent back. He releases her, and he too stands motionless.]

ROUS. I swore to stand by Roberts. I swore that! Ye want me to go back on what I've sworn.

MADGE. [With slow soft mockery.] You are a pretty lover!

ROUS. Madge!

MADGE. [Smiling.] I've heard that lovers do what their girls ask them—

[JAN sounds the cuckoo's notes]

—but that's not true, it seems!

ROUS. You'd make a blackleg of me!

MADGE. [With her eyes half-closed.] Do it for me!

ROUS. [Dashing his hand across his brow.] Damn! I can't!

MADGE. [Swiftly.] Do it for me!

ROUS. [Through his teeth.] Don't play the wanton with me!

MADGE. [With a movement of her hand towards JAN—quick and low.]
I would be that for the children's sake!

ROUS. [In a fierce whisper.] Madge! Oh, Madge!

MADGE. [With soft mockery.] But you can't break your word for me!

ROUS. [With a choke.] Then, Begod, I can!

[He turns and rushes off.]

[MADGE Stands, with a faint smile on her face, looking after him. She turns to MRS.
ROBERTS.]

MADGE. I have done for Roberts!

MRS. ROBERTS. [Scornfully.] Done for my man, with that—! [She sinks back.]

MADGE. [Running to her, and feeling her hands.] You're as cold as a stone! You want a drop of brandy. Jan, run to the "Lion"; say, I sent you for Mrs. Roberts.

MRS. ROBERTS. [With a feeble movement.] I'll just sit quiet, Madge. Give Jan—his—tea.

MADGE. [Giving JAN a slice of bread.] There, ye little rascal. Hold your piping. [Going to the fire, she kneels.] It's going out.

MRS. ROBERTS. [With a faint smile.] 'T is all the same!

[JAN begins to blow his whistle.]

MADGE. Tsht! Tsht!—you

[JAN Stops.]

MRS. ROBERTS. [Smiling.] Let 'im play, Madge.

MADGE. [On her knees at the fire, listening.] Waiting an' waiting. I've no patience with it; waiting an' waiting—that's what a woman has to do! Can you hear them at it—I can!

[JAN begins again to play his whistle; MADGE gets up; half tenderly she ruffles his hair; then, sitting, leans her elbows on the table, and her chin on her hands. Behind her, on MRS. ROBERTS'S face the smile has changed to horrified surprise. She makes a sudden

movement, sitting forward, pressing her hands against her breast. Then slowly she sinks' back; slowly her face loses the look of pain, the smile returns. She fixes her eyes again on JAN, and moves her lips and finger to the tune.]

The curtain falls.

SCENE II

It is past four. In a grey, failing light, an open muddy space is crowded with workmen. Beyond, divided from it by a barbed-wire fence, is the raised towing-path of a canal, on which is moored a barge. In the distance are marshes and snow-covered hills. The "Works" high wall runs from the canal across the open space, and ivy the angle of this wall is a rude platform of barrels and boards. On it, HARNNESS is standing. ROBERTS, a little apart from the crowd, leans his back against the wall. On the raised towing-path two bargemen lounge and smoke indifferently.

HARNNESS. [Holding out his hand.] Well, I've spoken to you straight. If I speak till to-morrow I can't say more.

JAGO. [A dark, sallow, Spanish-looking man with a short, thin beard.] Mister, want to ask you! Can they get blacklegs?

BULGIN. [Menacing.] Let 'em try.

[There are savage murmurs from the crowd.]

BROWN. [A round-faced man.] Where could they get 'em then?

EVANS. [A small, restless, harassed man, with a fighting face.] There's always blacklegs; it's the nature of 'em. There's always men that'll save their own skins.

[Another savage murmur. There is a movement, and old THOMAS, joining the crowd, takes his stand in front.]

HARNNESS. [Holding up his hand.] They can't get them. But that won't help you. Now men, be reasonable. Your demands would have brought on us the burden of a dozen strikes at a time when we were not prepared for them. The Unions live by justice, not to one, but all. Any fair man will tell you—you were ill-advised! I don't say you go too far for that which you're entitled to, but you're going too far for the moment; you've dug a pit for yourselves. Are you to stay there, or are you to climb out? Come!

LEWIS. [A clean-cut Welshman with a dark moustache.] You've hit it, Mister! Which is it to be?

[Another movement in the crowd, and ROUS, coming quickly, takes his stand next THOMAS.]

HARNNESS. Cut your demands to the right pattern, and we 'll see you through; refuse, and don't expect me to waste my time coming down here again. I 'm not the sort that speaks at random, as you ought to know by this time. If you're the sound men I take you for—no matter who advises you against it—[he fixes his eyes on ROBERTS] you 'll make up your minds to come in, and trust to us to get your terms. Which is it to be? Hands together, and victory—or—the starvation you've got now?

[A prolonged murmur from the crowd.]

JAGO. [Sullenly.] Talk about what you know.

HARNNESS. [Lifting his voice above the murmur.] Know? [With cold passion.] All that you've been through, my friend, I 've been through—I was through it when I was no bigger than [pointing to a youth] that shaver there; the Unions then were n't what they are now. What's made them strong? It's hands together that 's made them strong. I 've been through it all, I tell you, the brand's on my soul yet. I know what you 've suffered—there's nothing you can tell me that I don't know; but the whole is greater than the part, and you are only the part. Stand by us, and we will stand by you.

[Quartering them with his eyes, he waits. The murmuring swells; the men form little groups. GREEN, BULGIN, and LEWIS talk together.]

LEWIS. Speaks very sensible, the Union chap.

GREEN. [Quietly.] Ah! if I 'd a been listened to, you'd 'ave 'eard sense these two months past.

[The bargemen are seen laughing.]

LEWIS. [Pointing.] Look at those two blanks over the fence there!

BULGIN. [With gloomy violence.] They'd best stop their cackle, or I 'll break their jaws.

JAGO. [Suddenly.] You say the furnace men's paid enough?

HARNESS. I did not say they were paid enough; I said they were paid as much as the furnace men in similar works elsewhere.

EVANS. That's a lie! [Hubbub.] What about Harper's?

HARNESS. [With cold irony.] You may look at home for lies, my man. Harper's shifts are longer, the pay works out the same.

HENRY ROUS. [A dark edition of his brother George.] Will ye support us in double pay overtime Saturdays?

HARNESS. Yes, we will.

JAGO. What have ye done with our subscriptions?

HARNESS. [Coldly.] I have told you what we will do with them.

EVANS. Ah! will, it's always will! Ye'd have our mates desert us. [Hubbub.]

BULGIN. [Shouting.] Hold your row!

[EVANS looks round angrily.]

HARNESS. [Lifting his voice.] Those who know their right hands from their lefts know that the Unions are neither thieves nor traitors. I 've said my say. Figure it out, my lads; when you want me you know where I shall be.

[He jumps down, the crowd gives way, he passes through them, and goes away. A BARGEMAN looks after him jerking his pipe with a derisive gesture. The men close up in groups, and many looks are cast at ROBERTS, who stands alone against the wall.]

EVANS. He wants ye to turn blacklegs, that's what he wants. He wants ye to go back on us. Sooner than turn blackleg—I 'd starve, I would.

BULGIN. Who's talkin' o' blacklegs—mind what you're saying, will you?

BLACKSMITH. [A youth with yellow hair and huge arms.] What about the women?

EVANS. They can stand what we can stand, I suppose, can't they?

BLACKSMITH. Ye've no wife?

EVANS. An' don't want one!

THOMAS. [Raising his voice.] Aye! Give us the power to come to terms with London, lads.

DAVIES. [A dark, slow-fly, gloomy man.] Go up the platform, if you got anything to say, go up an' say it.

[There are cries of "Thomas!" He is pushed towards the platform; he ascends it with difficulty, and bares his head, waiting for silence. A hush.]

RED-HAIRED YOUTH. [suddenly.] Coot old Thomas!

[A hoarse laugh; the bargemen exchange remarks; a hush again, and THOMAS begins speaking.]

THOMAS. We are all in the teph together, and it iss Nature that has put us there.

HENRY ROUS. It's London put us there!

EVANS. It's the Union.

THOMAS. It iss not Lonton; nor it iss not the Union—it iss Nature. It iss no disgrace whateffer to a potty to give in to Nature. For this Nature iss a fery pig thing; it is pigger than what a man is. There iss more years to my hett than to the hett of any one here. It is fery pat, look you, this Going against Nature. It is pat to make other potties suffer, when there is nothing to pe cot py it.

[A laugh. THOMAS angrily goes on.]

What are ye laughing at? It is pat, I say! We are fighting for a principle; there is no potty that shall say I am not a peliever in principle. Putt when Nature says "No further," then it is no coot snapping your fingers in her face.

[A laugh from ROBERTS, and murmurs of approval.]

This Nature must pe humort. It is a man's pisiness to pe pure, honest, just, and merciful. That's what Chapel tells you. [To ROBERTS, angrily.] And, look you, David Roberts, Chapel tells you ye can do that without Going against Nature.

JAGO. What about the Union?

THOMAS. I ton't trust the Union; they haf treated us like tirt. "Do what we tell you," said they. I haf been captain of the furnace-men twenty years, and I say to the Union—[excitedly]—"Can you tell me then, as well as I can tell you, what iss the right wages for the work that these men do?" For fife and twenty years I haf paid my moneys to the Union and—[with great excitement]—for nothings! What iss that but roguery, for all that this Mr. Harness says!

EVANS. Hear, hear.

HENRY ROUS. Get on with you! Cut on with it then!

THOMAS. Look you, if a man toes not trust me, am I going to trust him?

JAGO. That's right.

THOMAS. Let them alone for rogues, and act for ourselves.

[Murmurs.]

BLACKSMITH. That's what we been doin', haven't we?

THOMAS. [With increased excitement.] I was brought up to do for meself. I was brought up to go without a thing, if I hat not moneys to puy it. There iss too much, look you, of doing things with other people's moneys. We haf fought fair, and if we haf been beaten, it iss no fault of ours. Gif us the power to make terms with London for ourself; if we ton't succeed, I say it iss petter to take our peating like men, than to tie like togs, or hang on to others' coat-tails to make them do our pisiness for us!

EVANS. [Muttering.] Who wants to?

THOMAS. [Craning.] What's that? If I stand up to a potty, and he knocks me town, I am not to go hollering to other potties to help me; I am to stand up again; and if he knocks me town properly, I am to stay there, is n't that right?

[Laughter.]

JAGO. No Union!

HENRY ROUS. Union!

[Murmurs.]

[Others take up the shout.]

EVANS. Blacklegs!

[BULGIN and the BLACKSMITH shake their fists at EVANS.]

THOMAS. [With a gesture.] I am an olt man, look you.

[A sudden silence, then murmurs again.]

LEWIS. Olt fool, with his "No Union!"

BULGIN. Them furnace chaps! For twopence I 'd smash the faces o' the lot of them.

GREEN. If I'd a been listened to at the first!

THOMAS. [Wiping his brow.] I'm comin' now to what I was going to say—

DAVIES. [Muttering.] An' time too!

THOMAS. [Solemnly.] Chapel says: Ton't carry on this strife! Put an end to it!

JAGO. That's a lie! Chapel says go on!

THOMAS. [Scornfully.] Inteet! I haf ears to my head.

RED-HAIRED YOUTH. Ah! long ones!

[A laugh.]

JAGO. Your ears have misbeled you then.

THOMAS. [Excitedly.] Ye cannot be right if I am, ye cannot haf it both ways.

RED-HAIRED YOUTH. Chapel can though!

["The Shaver" laughs; there are murmurs from the crowd.]

THOMAS. [Fixing his eyes on "The Shaver."] Ah! ye 're Going the roat to tamnation. An' so I say to all of you. If ye co against Chapel I will not pe with you, nor will any other Got-fearing man.

[He steps down from the platform. JAGO makes his way towards it. There are cries of "Don't let 'im go up!"]

JAGO. Don't let him go up? That's free speech, that is. [He goes up.] I ain't got much to say to you. Look at the matter plain; ye 've come the road this far, and now you want to chuck the journey. We've all been in one boat; and now you want to pull in two. We engineers have stood by you; ye 're ready now, are ye, to give us the go-by? If we'd aknownd that before, we'd not a-started out with you so early one bright morning! That's all I 've got to say. Old man Thomas a'n't got his Bible lesson right. If you give up to London, or to Harness, now, it's givin' us the chuck—to save your skins—you won't get over that, my boys; it's a dirty thing to do.

[He gets down; during his little speech, which is ironically spoken, there is a restless discomfort in the crowd. ROUS, stepping forward, jumps on the platform. He has an air of fierce distraction. Sullen murmurs of disapproval from the crowd.]

ROUS. [Speaking with great excitement.] I'm no blanky orator, mates, but wot I say is drove from me. What I say is yuman nature. Can a man set an' see 'is mother starve? Can 'e now?

ROBERTS. [Starting forward.] Rous!

ROUS. [Staring at him fiercely.] Sim 'Arness said fair! I've changed my mind!

ROBERTS. Ah! Turned your coat you mean!

[The crowd manifests a great surprise.]

LEWIS. [Apostrophising Rous.] Hallo! What's turned him round?

ROUS. [Speaking with intense excitement.] 'E said fair. "Stand by us," 'e said, "and we'll stand by you." That's where we've been makin' our mistake this long time past; and who's to blame fort? [He points at ROBERTS] That man there! "No," 'e said, "fight the robbers," 'e said, "squeeze the breath out o' them!" But it's not the breath out o' them that's being squeezed; it's the breath out of us and ours, and that's the book of truth. I'm no orator, mates, it's the flesh and blood in me that's speakin', it's the heart o' me. [With a menacing, yet half-ashamed movement towards ROBERTS.] He'll speak to you again, mark my words, but don't ye listen. [The crowd groans.] It's hell fire that's on that man's tongue. [ROBERTS is seen laughing.] Sim 'Arness is right. What are we without the Union—handful o' parched

leaves—a puff o' smoke. I'm no orator, but I say: Chuck it up! Chuck it up! Sooner than go on starving the women and the children.

[The murmurs of acquiescence almost drown the murmurs of dissent.]

EVANS. What's turned you to blacklegging?

ROUS. [With a furious look.] Sim 'Arness knows what he's talking about. Give us power to come to terms with London; I'm no orator, but I say—have done wi' this black misery!

[He gives his muter a twist, jerks his head back, and jumps off the platform. The crowd applauds and surges forward. Amid cries of "That's enough!" "Up Union!" "Up Harness!" ROBERTS quietly ascends the platform. There is a moment of silence.]

BLACKSMITH. We don't want to hear you. Shut it!

HENRY Rous. Get down!

[Amid such cries they surge towards the platform.]

EVANS. [Fiercely.] Let 'im speak! Roberts! Roberts!

BULGIN. [Muttering.] He'd better look out that I don't crack his skull.

[ROBERTS faces the crowd, probing them with his eyes till they gradually become silent. He begins speaking. One of the bargemen rises and stands.]

ROBERTS. You don't want to hear me, then? You'll listen to Rous and to that old man, but not to me. You'll listen to Sim Harness of the Union that's treated you so fair; maybe you'll listen to those men from London? Ah! You groan! What for? You love their feet on your necks, don't you? [Then as BULGIN elbows his way towards the platform, with calm bathos.] You'd like to break my jaw, John Bulgin. Let me speak, then do your smashing, if it gives you pleasure. [BULGIN Stands motionless and sullen.] Am I a liar, a coward, a traitor? If only I were, ye'd listen to me, I'm sure. [The murmurings cease, and there is now dead silence.] Is there a man of you here that has less to gain by striking? Is there a man of you that had more to lose? Is there a man of you that has given up eight hundred pounds since this trouble here began? Come now, is there? How much has Thomas given up—ten pounds or five, or what? You listened to him, and what had he to say? "None can pretend," he said, "that I'm not a believer in principle—[with biting irony]—but when Nature says: 'No further, 't es going agenst Nature.'" I tell you if a man cannot say to Nature: "Budge me from this if ye can!"— [with a sort of exaltation] his principles are but his belly. "Oh, but," Thomas says, "a man can be pure and honest, just and merciful, and take off his hat to Nature!" I tell you Nature's neither pure nor honest, just nor merciful. You chaps that live over the hill, an' go home dead beat in the dark on a snowy night—don't ye fight your way every inch of it? Do ye go lyin' down an' trustin' to the tender mercies of this merciful Nature? Try it and you'll soon know with what ye've got to deal. 'T es only by that—[he strikes a blow with his clenched fist]—in Nature's face that a man can be a man. "Give in," says Thomas, "go down on your knees; throw up your foolish fight, an' perhaps," he said, "perhaps your enemy will chuck you down a crust."

JAGO. Never!

EVANS. Curse them!

THOMAS. I nefer said that.

ROBERTS. [Bitingly.] If ye did not say it, man, ye meant it. An' what did ye say about Chapel? "Chapel's against it," ye said. "She 's against it!" Well, if Chapel and Nature go hand in hand, it's the first I've ever heard of it. That young man there— [pointing to ROUS]—said I 'ad 'ell fire on my tongue. If I had I would use it all to scorch and wither this talking of surrender. Surrendering 's the work of cowards and traitors.

HENRY ROUS. [As GEORGE ROUS moves forward.] Go for him, George— don't stand his lip!

ROBERTS. [Flinging out his finger.] Stop there, George Rous, it's no time this to settle personal matters. [ROUS stops.] But there was one other spoke to you—Mr. Simon Harness. We have not much to thank Mr. Harness and the Union for. They said to us "Desert your mates, or we'll desert you." An' they did desert us.

EVANS. They did.

ROBERTS. Mr. Simon Harness is a clever man, but he has come too late. [With intense conviction.]

For all that Mr. Simon Harness says, for all that Thomas, Rous, for all that any man present here can say—We've won the fight!

[The crowd sags nearer, looking eagerly up.]

[With withering scorn.] You've felt the pinch o't in your bellies. You've forgotten what that fight 'as been; many times I have told you; I will tell you now this once again. The fight o' the country's body and blood against a blood-sucker. The fight of those that spend themselves with every blow they strike and every breath they draw, against a thing that fattens on them, and grows and grows by the law of merciful Nature. That thing is Capital! A thing that buys the sweat o' men's brows, and the tortures o' their brains, at its own price. Don't I know that? Wasn't the work o' my brains bought for seven hundred pounds, and has n't one hundred thousand pounds been gained them by that seven hundred without the stirring of a finger. It is a thing that will take as much and give you as little as it can. That's Capital! A thing that will say—"I'm very sorry for you, poor fellows—you have a cruel time of it, I know," but will not give one sixpence of its dividends to help you have a better time. That's Capital! Tell me, for all their talk, is there one of them that will consent to another penny on the Income Tax to help the poor? That's Capital! A white-faced, stony-hearted monster! Ye have got it on its knees; are ye to give up at the last minute to save your miserable bodies pain? When I went this morning to those old men from London, I looked into their very 'earts. One of them was sitting there—Mr. Scantlebury, a mass of flesh nourished on us: sittin' there for all the world like the shareholders in this Company, that sit not moving tongue nor finger, takin' dividends a great dumb ox that can only be roused when its food is threatened. I looked into his eyes and I saw he was afraid—afraid for himself and his dividends; afraid for his fees, afraid of the very shareholders he stands for; and all but one of them's afraid—like children that get into a wood at night, and start at every rustle of the leaves. I ask you, men—[he pauses, holding out his hand till there is utter silence]—give me a free hand to tell them: "Go you back to London. The men have nothing for you!" [A murmuring.] Give me that, an' I swear to you, within a week you shall have from London all you want.

EVANS, JAGO, and OTHERS. A free hand! Give him a free hand! Bravo —bravo!

ROBERTS. 'T is not for this little moment of time we're fighting [the murmuring dies], not for ourselves, our own little bodies, and their wants, 't is for all those that come after throughout all time. [With intense sadness.] Oh! men—for the love o' them, don't roll up another stone upon their heads, don't help to blacken the sky, an' let the bitter sea in over them. They're welcome to the worst that can happen to me, to the worst that can happen to us all, are n't they—are n't they? If we can shake [passionately] that white-faced monster with the bloody lips, that has sucked the life out of ourselves, our wives, and children, since the world began. [Dropping the note of passion but with the utmost weight and intensity.] If we have not the hearts of men to stand against it breast to breast, and eye to eye, and force it backward till it cry for mercy, it will go on sucking life; and we shall stay forever what we are [in almost a whisper], less than the very dogs.

[An utter stillness, and ROBERTS stands rocking his body slightly, with his eyes burning the faces of the crowd.]

EVANS and JAGO. [Suddenly.] Roberts! [The shout is taken up.]

[There is a slight movement in the crowd, and MADGE passing below the towing-path, stops by the platform, looking up at ROBERTS. A sudden doubting silence.]

ROBERTS. "Nature," says that old man, "give in to Nature." I tell you, strike your blow in Nature's face—an' let it do its worst!

[He catches sight of MADGE, his brows contract, he looks away.]

MADGE. [In a low voice-close to the platform.] Your wife's dying!

[ROBERTS glares at her as if torn from some pinnacle of exaltation.]

ROBERTS. [Trying to stammer on.] I say to you—answer them—answer them—

[He is drowned by the murmur in the crowd.]

THOMAS. [Stepping forward.] Ton't you hear her, then?

ROBERTS. What is it? [A dead silence.]

THOMAS. Your wife, man!

[ROBERTS hesitates, then with a gesture, he leaps down, and goes away below the towing-path, the men making way for him. The standing bargeman opens and prepares to light a lantern. Daylight is fast failing.]

MADGE. He need n't have hurried! Annie Roberts is dead. [Then in the silence, passionately.] You pack of blinded hounds! How many more women are you going to let to die?

[The crowd shrinks back from her, and breaks up in groups, with a confused, uneasy movement. MADGE goes quickly away below the towing-path. There is a hush as they look after her.]

LEWIS. There's a spitfire, for ye!

BULGIN. [Growling.] I'll smash 'er jaw.

GREEN. If I'd a-been listened to, that poor woman—

THOMAS. It's a judgment on him for going against Chapel. I tolt him how 't would be!

EVANS. All the more reason for sticking by 'im. [A cheer.] Are you goin' to desert him now 'e 's down? Are you going to chuck him over, now 'e 's lost 'is wife?

[The crowd is murmuring and cheering all at once.]

ROUS. [Stepping in front of platform.] Lost his wife! Aye! Can't ye see? Look at home, look at your own wives! What's to save them? Ye'll have the same in all your houses before long!

LEWIS. Aye, aye!

HENRY ROUS. Right! George, right!

[There are murmurs of assent.]

ROUS. It's not us that's blind, it's Roberts. How long will ye put up with 'im!

HENRY, ROUS, BULGIN, DAVIES. Give 'im the chuck!

[The cry is taken up.]

EVANS. [Fiercely.] Kick a man that's down? Down?

HENRY ROUS. Stop his jaw there!

[EVANS throws up his arm at a threat from BULGIN. The bargeman, who has lighted the lantern, holds it high above his head.]

ROUS. [Springing on to the platform.] What brought him down then, but 'is own black obstinacy? Are ye goin' to follow a man that can't see better than that where he's goin'?

EVANS. He's lost 'is wife.

ROUS. An' who's fault's that but his own. 'Ave done with 'im, I say, before he's killed your own wives and mothers.

DAVIES. Down 'im!

HENRY ROUS. He's finished!

BROWN. We've had enough of 'im!

BLACKSMITH. Too much!

[The crowd takes up these cries, excepting only EVANS, JAGO, and GREEN, who is seen to argue mildly with the BLACKSMITH.]

ROUS. [Above the hubbub.] We'll make terms with the Union, lads.

[Cheers.]

EVANS. [Fiercely.] Ye blacklegs!

BULGIN. [Savagely-squaring up to him.] Who are ye callin' blacklegs, Rat?

[EVANS throws up his fists, parries the blow, and returns it. They fight. The bargemen are seen holding up the lantern and enjoying the sight. Old THOMAS steps forward and holds out his hands.]

THOMAS. Shame on your strife!

[The BLACKSMITH, BROWN, LEWIS, and the RED-HAIRED YOUTH pull EVANS and BULGIN apart. The stage is almost dark.]

The curtain falls.

ACT III

It is five o'clock. In the UNDERWOODS' drawing-room, which is artistically furnished, ENID is sitting on the sofa working at a baby's frock. EDGAR, by a little spindle-legged table in the centre of the room, is fingering a china-box. His eyes are fixed on the double-doors that lead into the dining-room.

EDGAR. [Putting down the china-box, and glancing at his watch.] Just on five, they're all in there waiting, except Frank. Where's he?

ENID. He's had to go down to Gasgoyne's about a contract. Will you want him?

EDGAR. He can't help us. This is a director's job. [Motioning towards a single door half hidden by a curtain.] Father in his room?

ENID. Yes.

EDGAR. I wish he'd stay there, Enid.

[ENID looks up at him. This is a beastly business, old girl?]

[He takes up the little box again and turns it over and over.]

ENID. I went to the Roberts's this afternoon, Ted.

EDGAR. That was n't very wise.

ENID. He's simply killing his wife.

EDGAR. We are you mean.

ENID. [Suddenly.] Roberts ought to give way!

EDGAR. There's a lot to be said on the men's side.

ENID. I don't feel half so sympathetic with them as I did before I went. They just set up class feeling against you. Poor Annie was looking dreadfully bad—fire going out, and nothing fit for her to eat.

[EDGAR walks to and fro.]

But she would stand up for Roberts. When you see all this wretchedness going on and feel you can do nothing, you have to shut your eyes to the whole thing.

EDGAR. If you can.

ENID. When I went I was all on their side, but as soon as I got there I began to feel quite different at once. People talk about sympathy with the working classes, they don't know what it means to try and put it into practice. It seems hopeless.

EDGAR. Ah! well.

ENID. It's dreadful going on with the men in this state. I do hope the Dad will make concessions.

EDGAR. He won't. [Gloomily.] It's a sort of religion with him.

Curse it! I know what's coming! He'll be voted down.

ENID. They would n't dare!

EDGAR. They will—they're in a funk.

ENID. [Indignantly.] He'd never stand it!

EDGAR. [With a shrug.] My dear girl, if you're beaten in a vote, you've got to stand it.

ENID. Oh! [She gets up in alarm.] But would he resign?

EDGAR. Of course! It goes to the roots of his beliefs.

ENID. But he's so wrapped up in this company, Ted! There'd be nothing left for him! It'd be dreadful!

[EDGAR shrugs his shoulders.]

Oh, Ted, he's so old now! You must n't let them!

EDGAR. [Hiding his feelings in an outburst.] My sympathies in this strike are all on the side of the men.

ENID. He's been Chairman for more than thirty years! He made the whole thing! And think of the bad times they've had; it's always been he who pulled them through. Oh, Ted, you must!

EDGAR. What is it you want? You said just now you hoped he'd make concessions. Now you want me to back him in not making them. This is n't a game, Enid!

ENID. [Hotly.] It is n't a game to me that the Dad's in danger of losing all he cares about in life. If he won't give way, and he's beaten, it'll simply break him down!

EDGAR. Did n't you say it was dreadful going on with the men in this state?

ENID. But can't you see, Ted, Father'll never get over it! You must stop them somehow. The others are afraid of him. If you back him up——

EDGAR. [Putting his hand to his head.] Against my convictions— against yours! The moment it begins to pinch one personally——

ENID. It is n't personal, it's the Dad!

EDGAR. Your family or yourself, and over goes the show!

ENID. [Resentfully.] If you don't take it seriously, I do.

EDGAR. I am as fond of him as you are; that's nothing to do with it.

ENID. We can't tell about the men; it's all guess-work. But we know the Dad might have a stroke any day. D' you mean to say that he isn't more to you than——

EDGAR. Of course he is.

ENID. I don't understand you then.

EDGAR. H'm!

ENID. If it were for oneself it would be different, but for our own Father! You don't seem to realise.

EDGAR. I realise perfectly.

ENID. It's your first duty to save him.

EDGAR. I wonder.

ENID. [Imploring.] Oh, Ted? It's the only interest he's got left; it'll be like a death-blow to him!

EDGAR. [Restraining his emotion.] I know.

ENID. Promise!

EDGAR. I'll do what I can.

[He turns to the double-doors.]

[The curtained door is opened, and ANTHONY appears. EDGAR opens the double-doors, and passes through.]

[SCANTLEBURY'S voice is faintly heard: "Past five; we shall never get through—have to eat another dinner at that hotel!" The doors are shut. ANTHONY walks forward.]

ANTHONY. You've been seeing Roberts, I hear.

ENID. Yes.

ANTHONY. Do you know what trying to bridge such a gulf as this is like?

[ENID puts her work on the little table, and faces him.]

Filling a sieve with sand!

ENID. Don't!

ANTHONY. You think with your gloved hands you can cure the trouble of the century.

[He passes on.]

ENID. Father!

[ANTHONY Stops at the double doors.]

I'm only thinking of you!

ANTHONY. [More softly.] I can take care of myself, my dear.

ENID. Have you thought what'll happen if you're beaten— [she points]—in there?

ANTHONY. I don't mean to be.

ENID. Oh! Father, don't give them a chance. You're not well; need you go to the meeting at all?

ANTHONY. [With a grim smile.] Cut and run?

ENID. But they'll out-vote you!

ANTHONY. [Putting his hand on the doors.] We shall see!

ENID. I beg you, Dad! Won't you?

[ANTHONY looks at her softly.]

[ANTHONY shakes his head. He opens the doors. A buzz of voices comes in.]

SCANTLEBURY. Can one get dinner on that 6.30 train up?

TENCH. No, Sir, I believe not, sir.

WILDER. Well, I shall speak out; I've had enough of this.

EDGAR. [Sharply.] What?

[It ceases instantly. ANTHONY passes through, closing the doors behind him. ENID springs to them with a gesture of dismay. She puts her hand on the knob, and begins turning it; then goes to the fireplace, and taps her foot on the fender. Suddenly she rings the bell. FROST comes in by the door that leads into the hall.]

FROST. Yes, M'm?

ENID. When the men come, Frost, please show them in here; the hall 's cold.

FROST. I could put them in the pantry, M'm.

ENID. No. I don't want to—to offend them; they're so touchy.

FROST. Yes, M'm. [Pause.] Excuse me, Mr. Anthony's 'ad nothing to eat all day.

ENID. I know Frost.

FROST. Nothin' but two whiskies and sodas, M'm.

ENID. Oh! you oughtn't to have let him have those.

FROST. [Gravely.] Mr. Anthony is a little difficult, M'm. It's not as if he were a younger man, an' knew what was good for 'im; he will have his own way.

ENID. I suppose we all want that.

FROST. Yes, M'm. [Quietly.] Excuse me speakin' about the strike. I'm sure if the other gentlemen were to give up to Mr. Anthony, and quietly let the men 'ave what they want, afterwards, that'd be the best way. I find that very useful with him at times, M'm.

[ENID shakes hey head.]

If he's crossed, it makes him violent. [with an air of discovery], and I've noticed in my own case, when I'm violent I'm always sorry for it afterwards.

ENID. [With a smile.] Are you ever violent, Frost?

FROST. Yes, M'm; oh! sometimes very violent.

ENID. I've never seen you.

FROST. [Impersonally.] No, M'm; that is so.

[ENID fidgets towards the back of the door.]

[With feeling.] Bein' with Mr. Anthony, as you know, M'm, ever since I was fifteen, it worries me to see him crossed like this at his age. I've taken the liberty to speak to Mr. Wanklin [dropping his voice]—seems to be the most sensible of the gentlemen—but 'e said to me: "That's all very well, Frost, but this strike's a very serious thing," 'e said. "Serious for all parties, no doubt," I said, "but yumour 'im, sir," I said, "yumour 'im. It's like this, if a man comes to a stone wall, 'e does n't drive 'is 'ead against it, 'e gets over it." "Yes," 'e said, "you'd better tell your master that." [FROST looks at his nails.] That's where it is, M'm. I said to Mr. Anthony this morning: "Is it worth it, sir?" "Damn it," he said to me, "Frost! Mind your own business, or take a month's notice!" Beg pardon, M'm, for using such a word.

ENID. [Moving to the double-doors, and listening.] Do you know that man Roberts, Frost?

FROST. Yes, M'm; that's to say, not to speak to. But to look at 'im you can tell what he's like.

ENID. [Stopping.] Yes?

FROST. He's not one of these 'ere ordinary 'armless Socialists. 'E's violent; got a fire inside 'im. What I call "personal." A man may 'ave what opinions 'e likes, so long as 'e 's not personal; when 'e 's that 'e 's not safe.

ENID. I think that's what my father feels about Roberts.

FROST. No doubt, M'm, Mr. Anthony has a feeling against him.

[ENID glances at him sharply, but finding him in perfect earnest, stands biting her lips, and looking at the double-doors.]

It 's, a regular right down struggle between the two. I've no patience with this Roberts, from what I 'ear he's just an ordinary workin' man like the rest of 'em. If he did invent a thing he's no worse off than 'undreds of others. My brother invented a new kind o' dumb-waiter—nobody gave him anything for it, an' there it is, bein' used all over the place.

[ENID moves closer to the double-doors.]

There's a kind o' man that never forgives the world, because 'e wasn't born a gentleman. What I say is—no man that's a gentleman looks down on another because 'e 'appens to be a class or two above 'im, no more than if 'e 'appens to be a class or two below.

ENID. [With slight impatience.] Yes, I know, Frost, of course. Will you please go in and ask if they'll have some tea; say I sent you.

FROST. Yes, M'm.

[He opens the doors gently and goes in. There is a momentary sound of earnest, gather

angry talk.]

WILDER. I don't agree with you.

WANKLIN. We've had this over a dozen times.

EDGAR. [Impatiently.] Well, what's the proposition?

SCANTLEBURY. Yes, what does your father say? Tea? Not for me, not for me!

WANKLIN. What I understand the Chairman to say is this——

[FROST re-enters closing the door behind him.]

ENID. [Moving from the door.] Won't they have any tea, Frost?

[She goes to the little table, and remains motionless, looking at the baby's frock.]

[A parlourmaid enters from the hall.]

PARLOURMAID. A Miss Thomas, M'm

ENID. [Raising her head.] Thomas? What Miss Thomas—d' you mean a——?

PARLOURMAID. Yes, M'm.

ENID. [Blankly.] Oh! Where is she?

PARLOURMAID. In the porch.

ENID. I don't want——[She hesitates.]

FROST. Shall I dispose of her, M'm?

ENID. I 'll come out. No, show her in here, Ellen.

[The PARLOUR MAID and FROST go out. ENID pursing her lips, sits at the little table, taking up the baby's frock. The PARLOURMAID ushers in MADGE THOMAS and goes out; MADGE stands by the door.]

ENID. Come in. What is it. What have you come for, please?

MADGE. Brought a message from Mrs. Roberts.

ENID. A message? Yes.

MADGE. She asks you to look after her mother.

ENID. I don't understand.

MADGE. [Sullenly.] That's the message.

ENID. But—what—why?

MADGE. Annie Roberts is dead.

[There is a silence.]

ENID. [Horrorified.] But it's only a little more than an hour since I saw her.

MADGE. Of cold and hunger.

ENID. [Rising.] Oh! that's not true! the poor thing's heart——
What makes you look at me like that? I tried to help her.

MADGE. [With suppressed savagery.] I thought you'd like to know.

ENID. [Passionately.] It's so unjust! Can't you see that I want to help you all?

MADGE. I never harmed any one that had n't harmed me first.

ENID. [Coldly.] What harm have I done you? Why do you speak to me like that?

MADGE. [With the bitterest intensity.] You come out of your comfort to spy on us! A week of hunger,

that's what you want!

ENID. [Standing her ground.] Don't talk nonsense!

MADGE. I saw her die; her hands were blue with the cold.

ENID. [With a movement of grief.] Oh! why wouldn't she let me help her? It's such senseless pride!

MADGE. Pride's better than nothing to keep your body warm.

ENID. [Passionately.] I won't talk to you! How can you tell what I feel? It's not my fault that I was born better off than you.

MADGE. We don't want your money.

ENID. You don't understand, and you don't want to; please to go away!

MADGE. [Balefully.] You've killed her, for all your soft words, you and your father!

ENID. [With rage and emotion.] That's wicked! My father is suffering himself through this wretched strike.

MADGE. [With sombre triumph.] Then tell him Mrs. Roberts is dead!
That 'll make him better.

ENID. Go away!

MADGE. When a person hurts us we get it back on them.

[She makes a sudden and swift movement towards ENID, fixing her eyes on the child's frock lying across the little table. ENID snatches the frock up, as though it were the child itself. They stand a yard apart, crossing glances.]

MADGE. [Pointing to the frock with a little smile.] Ah! You felt that! Lucky it's her mother—not her children—you've to look after, is n't it. She won't trouble you long!

ENID. Go away!

MADGE. I've given you the message.

[She turns and goes out into the hall. ENID, motionless till she has gone, sinks down at the table, bending her head over the frock, which she is still clutching to her. The double-doors are opened, and ANTHONY comes slowly in; he passes his daughter, and lowers himself into an arm-chair. He is very flushed.]

ENID. [Hiding her emotion-anxiously.] What is it, Dad?

[ANTHONY makes a gesture, but does not speak.]

Who was it?

[ANTHONY does not answer. ENID going to the double-doors meets EDGAR Coming in. They speak together in low tones.]

What is it, Ted?

EDGAR. That fellow Wilder! Taken to personalities! He was downright insulting.

ENID. What did he say?

EDGAR. Said, Father was too old and feeble to know what he was doing! The Dad's worth six of him!

ENID. Of course he is.

[They look at ANTHONY.]

[The doors open wider, WANKLIN appears With SCANTLEBURY.]

SCANTLEBURY. [Sotto voce.] I don't like the look of this!

WANKLIN. [Going forward.] Come, Chairman! Wilder sends you his apologies. A man can't do more.

[WILDER, followed by TENCH, comes in, and goes to ANTHONY.]

WILDER. [Glumly.] I withdraw my words, sir. I'm sorry.

[ANTHONY nods to him.]

ENID. You have n't come to a decision, Mr. Wanklin?

[WANKLIN shakes his head.]

WANKLIN. We're all here, Chairman; what do you say? Shall we get on with the business, or shall we go back to the other room?

SCANTLEBURY. Yes, yes; let's get on. We must settle something.

[He turns from a small chair, and settles himself suddenly in the largest chair with a sigh of comfort.]

[WILDER and WANKLIN also sit; and TENCH, drawing up a straight-backed chair close to his Chairman, sits on the edge of it with the minute-book and a stylographic pen.]

ENID. [Whispering.] I want to speak to you a minute, Ted.

[They go out through the double-doors.]

WANKLIN. Really, Chairman, it's no use soothing ourselves with a sense of false security. If this strike's not brought to an end before the General Meeting, the shareholders will certainly haul us over the coals.

SCANTLEBURY. [Stirring.] What—what's that?

WANKLIN. I know it for a fact.

ANTHONY. Let them!

WILDER. And get turned out?

WANKLIN. [To ANTHONY.] I don't mind martyrdom for a policy in which I believe, but I object to being burnt for some one else's principles.

SCANTLEBURY. Very reasonable—you must see that, Chairman.

ANTHONY. We owe it to other employers to stand firm.

WANKLIN. There's a limit to that.

ANTHONY. You were all full of fight at the start.

SCANTLEBURY. [With a sort of groan.] We thought the men would give in, but they-have n't!

ANTHONY. They will!

WILDER. [Rising and pacing up and down.] I can't have my reputation as a man of business destroyed for the satisfaction of starving the men out. [Almost in tears.] I can't have it! How can we meet the shareholders with things in the state they are?

SCANTLEBURY. Hear, hear—hear, hear!

WILDER. [Lashing himself.] If any one expects me to say to them I've lost you fifty thousand pounds and sooner than put my pride in my pocket I'll lose you another. [Glancing at ANTHONY.] It's—it's unnatural! I don't want to go against you, sir.

WANKLIN. [Persuasively.] Come Chairman, we 're not free agents. We're part of a machine. Our only business is to see the Company earns as much profit as it safely can. If you blame me for want of principle: I say that we're Trustees. Reason tells us we shall never get back in the saving of wages what we shall lose if we continue this struggle—really, Chairman, we must bring it to an end, on the best terms we can make.

ANTHONY. No.

[There is a pause of general dismay.]

WILDER. It's a deadlock then. [Letting his hands drop with a sort of despair.] Now I shall never get off to Spain!

WANKLIN. [Retaining a trace of irony.] You hear the consequences of your victory, Chairman?

WILDER. [With a burst of feeling.] My wife's ill!

SCANTLEBURY. Dear, dear! You don't say so.

WILDER. If I don't get her out of this cold, I won't answer for the consequences.

[Through the double-doors EDGAR comes in looking very grave.]

EDGAR. [To his Father.] Have you heard this, sir? Mrs. Roberts is dead!

[Every one stares at him, as if trying to gauge the importance of this news.]

Enid saw her this afternoon, she had no coals, or food, or anything. It's enough!

[There is a silence, every one avoiding the other's eyes, except ANTHONY, who stares hard at his son.]

SCANTLEBURY. You don't suggest that we could have helped the poor thing?

WILDER. [Flustered.] The woman was in bad health. Nobody can say there's any responsibility on us. At least—not on me.

EDGAR. [Hotly.] I say that we are responsible.

ANTHONY. War is war!

EDGAR. Not on women!

WANKLIN. It not infrequently happens that women are the greatest sufferers.

EDGAR. If we knew that, all the more responsibility rests on us.

ANTHONY. This is no matter for amateurs.

EDGAR. Call me what you like, sir. It's sickened me. We had no right to carry things to such a length.

WILDER. I don't like this business a bit—that Radical rag will twist it to their own ends; see if they don't! They'll get up some cock and bull story about the poor woman's dying from starvation. I wash my hands of it.

EDGAR. You can't. None of us can.

SCANTLEBURY. [Striking his fist on the arm of his chair.] But I protest against this!

EDGAR. Protest as you like, Mr. Scantlebury, it won't alter facts.

ANTHONY. That's enough.

EDGAR. [Facing him angrily.] No, sir. I tell you exactly what I think. If we pretend the men are not suffering, it's humbug; and if they're suffering, we know enough of human nature to know the women are suffering more, and as to the children—well—it's damnable!

[SCANTLEBURY rises from his chair.]

I don't say that we meant to be cruel, I don't say anything of the sort; but I do say it's criminal to shut our eyes to the facts. We employ these men, and we can't get out of it. I don't care so much about the men, but I'd sooner resign my position on the Board than go on starving women in this way.

[All except ANTHONY are now upon their feet, ANTHONY sits grasping the arms of his chair and staring at his son.]

SCANTLEBURY. I don't—I don't like the way you're putting it, young sir.

WANKLIN. You're rather overshooting the mark.

WILDER. I should think so indeed!

EDGAR. [Losing control.] It's no use blinking things! If you want to have the death of women on your hands—I don't!

SCANTLEBURY. Now, now, young man!

WILDER. On our hands? Not on mine, I won't have it!

EDGAR. We are five members of this Board; if we were four against it, why did we let it drift till it came to this? You know perfectly well why—because we hoped we should starve the men out. Well, all we've done is to starve one woman out!

SCANTLEBURY. [Almost hysterically.] I protest, I protest! I'm a humane man—we're all humane men!

EDGAR. [Scornfully.] There's nothing wrong with our humanity. It's our imaginations, Mr. Scantlebury.

WILDER. Nonsense! My imagination's as good as yours.

EDGAR. If so, it is n't good enough.

WILDER. I foresaw this!

EDGAR. Then why didn't you put your foot down!

WILDER. Much good that would have done.

[He looks at ANTHONY.]

EDGAR. If you, and I, and each one of us here who say that our imaginations are so good—

SCANTLEBURY. [Flurried.] I never said so.

EDGAR. [Paying no attention.]—had put our feet down, the thing would have been ended long ago, and this poor woman's life wouldn't have been crushed out of her like this. For all we can tell there may be a dozen other starving women.

SCANTLEBURY. For God's sake, sir, don't use that word at a—at a Board meeting; it's—it's monstrous.

EDGAR. I will use it, Mr. Scantlebury.

SCANTLEBURY. Then I shall not listen to you. I shall not listen! It's painful to me.

[He covers his ears.]

WANKLIN. None of us are opposed to a settlement, except your Father.

EDGAR. I'm certain that if the shareholders knew——

WANKLIN. I don't think you'll find their imaginations are any better than ours. Because a woman happens to have a weak heart——

EDGAR. A struggle like this finds out the weak spots in everybody. Any child knows that. If it hadn't been for this cut-throat policy, she need n't have died like this; and there would n't be all this misery that any one who is n't a fool can see is going on.

[Throughout the foregoing ANTHONY has eyed his son; he now moves as though to rise, but stops as EDGAR speaks again.]

I don't defend the men, or myself, or anybody.

WANKLIN. You may have to! A coroner's jury of disinterested sympathisers may say some very nasty things. We mustn't lose sight of our position.

SCANTLEBURY. [Without uncovering his ears.] Coroner's jury! No, no, it's not a case for that!

EDGAR. I 've had enough of cowardice.

WANKLIN. Cowardice is an unpleasant word, Mr. Edgar Anthony. It will look very like cowardice if we suddenly concede the men's demands when a thing like this happens; we must be careful!

WILDER. Of course we must. We've no knowledge of this matter, except a rumour. The proper course is to put the whole thing into the hands of Harness to settle for us; that's natural, that's what we should

have come to any way.

SCANTLEBURY. [With dignity.] Exactly! [Turning to EDGAR.] And as to you, young sir, I can't sufficiently express my—my distaste for the way you've treated the whole matter. You ought to withdraw! Talking of starvation, talking of cowardice! Considering what our views are! Except your own is—is one of goodwill—it's most irregular, it's most improper, and all I can say is it's—it's given me pain—

[He places his hand over his heart.]

EDGAR. [Stubbornly.] I withdraw nothing.

[He is about to say more when SCANTLEBURY once more covers up his ears. TENCH suddenly makes a demonstration with the minute-book. A sense of having been engaged in the unusual comes over all of them, and one by one they resume their seats. EDGAR alone remains on his feet.]

WILDER. [With an air of trying to wipe something out.] I pay no attention to what young Mr. Anthony has said. Coroner's jury! The idea's preposterous. I—I move this amendment to the Chairman's Motion: That the dispute be placed at once in the hands of Mr. Simon Harness for settlement, on the lines indicated by him this morning. Any one second that?

[TENCH writes in his book.]

WANKLIN. I do.

WILDER. Very well, then; I ask the Chairman to put it to the Board.

ANTHONY. [With a great sigh-slowly.] We have been made the subject of an attack. [Looking round at WILDER and SCANTLEBURY with ironical contempt.] I take it on my shoulders. I am seventy-six years old. I have been Chairman of this Company since its inception two-and-thirty years ago. I have seen it pass through good and evil report. My connection with it began in the year that this young man was born.

[EDGAR bows his head. ANTHONY, gripping his chair, goes on.]

I have had do to with "men" for fifty years; I've always stood up to them; I have never been beaten yet. I have fought the men of this Company four times, and four times I have beaten them. It has been said that I am not the man I was. [He looks at Wilder.] However that may be, I am man enough to stand to my guns.

[His voice grows stronger. The double-doors are opened. ENID slips in, followed by UNDERWOOD, who restrains her.]

The men have been treated justly, they have had fair wages, we have always been ready to listen to complaints. It has been said that times have changed; if they have, I have not changed with them. Neither will I. It has been said that masters and men are equal! Cant! There can only be one master in a house! Where two men meet the better man will rule. It has been said that Capital and Labour have the same interests. Cant! Their interests are as wide asunder as the poles. It has been said that the Board is only part of a machine. Cant! We are the machine; its brains and sinews; it is for us to lead and to determine what is to be done, and to do it without fear or favour. Fear of the men! Fear of the shareholders! Fear of our own shadows! Before I am like that, I hope to die.

[He pauses, and meeting his son's eyes, goes on.]

There is only one way of treating "men"—with the iron hand. This half and half business, the half and half manners of this generation, has brought all this upon us. Sentiment and softness, and what this young man, no doubt, would call his social policy. You can't eat cake and have it! This middle-class sentiment, or socialism, or whatever it may be, is rotten. Masters are masters, men are men! Yield one demand, and they will make it six. They are [he smiles grimly] like Oliver Twist, asking for more. If I were in their place I should be the same. But I am not in their place. Mark my words: one fine morning, when you have given way here, and given way there—you will find you have parted with the ground beneath your feet, and are deep in the bog of bankruptcy; and with you, floundering in that bog, will be the very men you have given way to. I have been accused of being a domineering tyrant, thinking only of my pride—I am thinking of the future of this country, threatened with the black waters of confusion, threatened with mob government, threatened with what I cannot see. If by any conduct of mine I help to bring this on us, I shall be ashamed to look my fellows in the face.

[ANTHONY stares before him, at what he cannot see, and there is perfect stillness.]

FROST comes in from the hall, and all but ANTHONY look round at him uneasily.]

FROST. [To his master.] The men are here, sir. [ANTHONY makes a gesture of dismissal.] Shall I bring them in, sir?

ANTHONY. Wait!

[FROST goes out, ANTHONY turns to face his son.]

I come to the attack that has been made upon me.

[EDGAR, with a gesture of deprecation, remains motionless with his head a little bowed.]

A woman has died. I am told that her blood is on my hands; I am told that on my hands is the starvation and the suffering of other women and of children.

EDGAR. I said "on our hands," sir.

ANTHONY. It is the same. [His voice grows stronger and stronger, his feeling is more and more made manifest.] I am not aware that if my adversary suffer in a fair fight not sought by me, it is my fault. If I fall under his feet—as fall I may—I shall not complain. That will be my look-out—and this is—his. I cannot separate, as I would, these men from their women and children. A fair fight is a fair fight! Let them learn to think before they pick a quarrel!

EDGAR. [In a low voice.] But is it a fair fight, Father? Look at them, and look at us! They've only this one weapon!

ANTHONY. [Grimly.] And you're weak-kneed enough to teach them how to use it! It seems the fashion nowadays for men to take their enemy's side. I have not learnt that art. Is it my fault that they quarrelled with their Union too?

EDGAR. There is such a thing as Mercy.

ANTHONY. And justice comes before it.

EDGAR. What seems just to one man, sir, is injustice to another.

ANTHONY. [With suppressed passion.] You accuse me of injustice—of what amounts to inhumanity—of cruelty?

[EDGAR makes a gesture of horror—a general frightened movement.]

WANKLIN. Come, come, Chairman.

ANTHONY. [In a grim voice.] These are the words of my own son. They are the words of a generation that I don't understand; the words of a soft breed.

[A general murmur. With a violent effort ANTHONY recovers his control.]

EDGAR. [Quietly.] I said it of myself, too, Father.

[A long look is exchanged between them, and ANTHONY puts out his hand with a gesture as if to sweep the personalities away; then places it against his brow, swaying as though from giddiness. There is a movement towards him. He moves them back.]

ANTHONY. Before I put this amendment to the Board, I have one more word to say. [He looks from face to face.] If it is carried, it means that we shall fail in what we set ourselves to do. It means that we shall fail in the duty that we owe to all Capital. It means that we shall fail in the duty that we owe ourselves. It means that we shall be open to constant attack to which we as constantly shall have to yield. Be under no misapprehension—run this time, and you will never make a stand again! You will have to fly like curs before the whips of your own men. If that is the lot you wish for, you will vote for this amendment.

[He looks again, from face to face, finally resting his gaze on EDGAR; all sit with their eyes on the ground. ANTHONY makes a gesture, and TENCH hands him the book. He reads.]

"Moved by Mr. Wilder, and seconded by Mr. Wanklin: 'That the men's demands be placed at once in the hands of Mr. Simon Harness for settlement on the lines indicated by him this morning.'" [With sudden vigour.] Those in favour: Signify the same in the usual way!

[For a minute no one moves; then hastily, just as ANTHONY is about to speak, WILDER's hand and WANKLIN'S are held up, then SCANTLEBURY'S, and last EDGAR'S who does not lift his head.]

[ANTHONY lifts his own hand.]

[In a clear voice.] The amendment is carried. I resign my position on this Board.

[ENID gasps, and there is dead silence. ANTHONY sits motionless, his head slowly drooping; suddenly he heaves as though the whole of his life had risen up within him.]

Contrary?

Fifty years! You have disgraced me, gentlemen. Bring in the men!

[He sits motionless, staring before him. The Board draws hurriedly together, and forms a group. TENCH in a frightened manner speaks into the hall. UNDERWOOD almost forces ENID from the room.]

WILDER. [Hurriedly.] What's to be said to them? Why isn't Harness here? Ought we to see the men before he comes? I don't—

TENCH. Will you come in, please?

[Enter THOMAS, GREEN, BULGIN, and ROUS, who file up in a row past the little table. TENCH sits down and writes. All eyes are fixed on ANTHONY, who makes no sign.]

WANKLIN. [Stepping up to the little table, with nervous cordiality.] Well, Thomas, how's it to be? What's the result of your meeting?

ROUS. Sim Harness has our answer. He'll tell you what it is. We're waiting for him. He'll speak for us.

WANKLIN. Is that so, Thomas?

THOMAS. [Sullenly.] Yes. Roberts will not be coming, his wife is dead.

SCANTLEBURY. Yes, yes! Poor woman! Yes! Yes!

FROST. [Entering from the hall.] Mr. Harness, Sir!

[As HARNESS enters he retires.]

[HARNESS has a piece of paper in his hand, he bows to the Directors, nods towards the men, and takes his stand behind the little table in the very centre of the room.]

HARNESS. Good evening, gentlemen.

[TENCH, with the paper he has been writing, joins him, they speak together in low tones.]

WILDER. We've been waiting for you, Harness. Hope we shall come to some—

FROST. [Entering from the hall.] Roberts!

[He goes.]

[ROBERTS comes hastily in, and stands staring at ANTHONY. His face is drawn and old.]

ROBERTS. Mr. Anthony, I am afraid I am a little late, I would have been here in time but for something that—has happened. [To the men.] Has anything been said?

THOMAS. No! But, man, what made ye come?

ROBERTS. Ye told us this morning, gentlemen, to go away and reconsider our position. We have reconsidered it; we are here to bring you the men's answer. [To ANTHONY.] Go ye back to London. We have nothing for you. By no jot or tittle do we abate our demands, nor will we until the whole of those demands are yielded.

[ANTHONY looks at him but does not speak. There is a movement amongst the men as though they were bewildered.]

HARNESS. Roberts!

ROBERTS. [Glancing fiercely at him, and back to ANTHONY.] Is that clear enough for ye? Is it short enough and to the point? Ye made a mistake to think that we would come to heel. Ye may break the body, but ye cannot break the spirit. Get back to London, the men have nothing for ye?

[Pausing uneasily he takes a step towards the unmoving ANTHONY.]

EDGAR. We're all sorry for you, Roberts, but—

ROBERTS. Keep your sorrow, young man. Let your father speak!

HARNESS. [With the sheet of paper in his hand, speaking from behind the little table.] Roberts!

ROBERT. [TO ANTHONY, with passionate intensity.] Why don't ye answer?

HARNESS. Roberts!

ROBERTS. [Turning sharply.] What is it?

HARNESS. [Gravely.] You're talking without the book; things have travelled past you.

[He makes a sign to TENCH, who beckons the Directors. They quickly sign his copy of the terms.]

Look at this, man! [Holding up his sheet of paper.] "Demands conceded, with the exception of those relating to the engineers and furnace-men. Double wages for Saturday's overtime. Night-shifts as they are." These terms have been agreed. The men go back to work again to-morrow. The strike is at an end.

ROBERTS. [Reading the paper, and turning on the men. They shrink back from him, all but ROUS, who stands his ground. With deadly stillness.] Ye have gone back on me? I stood by ye to the death; ye waited for that to throw me over!

[The men answer, all speaking together.]

ROUS. It's a lie!

THOMAS. Ye were past endurance, man.

GREEN. If ye'd listen to me!

BULGIN. (Under his breath.) Hold your jaw!

ROBERTS. Ye waited for that!

HARNESS. [Taking the Director's copy of the terms, and handing his own to TENCH.] That's enough, men. You had better go.

[The men shuffle slowly, awkwardly away.]

WILDER. [In a low, nervous voice.] There's nothing to stay for now, I suppose. [He follows to the door.] I shall have a try for that train! Coming, Scantlebury?

SCANTLEBURY. [Following with WANKLIN.] Yes, yes; wait for me. [He stops as ROBERTS speaks.]

ROBERTS. [To ANTHONY.] But ye have not signed them terms! They can't make terms without their Chairman! Ye would never sign them terms! [ANTHONY looks at him without speaking.] Don't tell me ye have! for the love o' God! [With passionate appeal.] I reckoned on ye!

HARNESS. [Holding out the Director's copy of the terms.] The Board has signed!

[ROBERTS looks dully at the signatures—dashes the paper from him, and covers up his eyes.]

SCANTLEBURY. [Behind his hand to TENCH.] Look after the Chairman! He's not well; he's not well—he had no lunch. If there's any fund started for the women and children, put me down for—for twenty pounds.

[He goes out into the hall, in cumbrous haste; and WANKLIN, who has been staring at ROBERTS and ANTHONY With twitchings of his face, follows. EDGAR remains seated on the sofa, looking at the ground; TENCH, returning to the bureau, writes in his minute—book. HARNESS stands by the little table, gravely watching ROBERTS.]

ROBERTS. Then you're no longer Chairman of this Company! [Breaking into half-mad laughter.] Ah!

ha-ah, ha, ha! They've thrown ye over thrown over their Chairman: Ah-ha-ha! [With a sudden dreadful calm.] So—they've done us both down, Mr. Anthony?

[ENID, hurrying through the double-doors, comes quickly to her father.]

ANTHONY. Both broken men, my friend Roberts!

HARNESS. [Coming down and laying his hands on ROBERTS'S sleeve.]
For shame, Roberts! Go home quietly, man; go home!

ROBERTS. [Tearing his arm away.] Home? [Shrinking together—in a whisper.] Home!

ENID. [Quietly to her father.] Come away, dear! Come to your room

[ANTHONY rises with an effort. He turns to ROBERTS who looks at him. They stand several seconds, gazing at each other fixedly; ANTHONY lifts his hand, as though to salute, but lets it fall. The expression of ROBERTS'S face changes from hostility to wonder. They bend their heads in token of respect. ANTHONY turns, and slowly walks towards the curtained door. Suddenly he sways as though about to fall, recovers himself, and is assisted out by EDGAR and ENID; UNDERWOOD follows, but stops at the door. ROBERTS remains motionless for several seconds, staring intently after ANTHONY, then goes out into the hall.]

TENCH. [Approaching HARNESS.] It's a great weight off my mind, Mr. Harness! But what a painful scene, sir! [He wipes his brow.]

[HARNESS, pale and resolute, regards with a grim half-smile the quavering.]

TENCH. It's all been so violent! What did he mean by: "Done us both down?" If he has lost his wife, poor fellow, he oughtn't to have spoken to the Chairman like that!

HARNESS. A woman dead; and the two best men both broken!

TENCH. [Staring at him—suddenly excited.] D'you know, sir—these terms, they're the very same we drew up together, you and I, and put to both sides before the fight began? All this—all this—and—and what for?

HARNESS. [In a slow grim voice.] That's where the fun comes in!

[UNDERWOOD without turning from the door makes a gesture of assent.]

The curtain falls.

THE END

GALSWORTHY PLAYS—SECOND SERIES—NO. 1

Contents:

The Eldest Son

The Little Dream

Justice

THE ELDEST SON

BY JOHN GALSWORTHY

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

SIR WILLIAM CHESHIRE, a baronet
LADY CHESHIRE, his wife
BILL, their eldest son
HAROLD, their second son
RONALD KEITH (in the Lancers), their son-in-law
CHRISTINE (his wife), their eldest daughter
DOT, their second daughter
JOAN, their third daughter
MABEL LANFARNE, their guest
THE REVEREND JOHN LATTER, engaged to Joan
OLD STUDDENHAM, the head-keeper
FREDA STUDDENHAM, the lady's-maid
YOUNG DUNNING, the under-keeper
ROSE TAYLOR, a village girl
JACKSON, the butler
CHARLES, a footman

TIME: The present. The action passes on December 7 and 8 at the Cheshires' country house, in one of the shires.

ACT I SCENE I. The hall; before dinner. SCENE II. The hall; after dinner.

ACT II. Lady Cheshire's morning room; after breakfast.

ACT III. The smoking-room; tea-time.

A night elapses between Acts I. and II.

ACT I

SCENE I

The scene is a well-lighted, and large, oak-panelled hall, with an air of being lived in, and a broad, oak staircase. The dining-room, drawing-room, billiard-room, all open into it; and under the staircase a door leads to the servants' quarters. In a huge fireplace a log fire is burning. There are tiger-skins on the floor, horns on the walls; and a writing-table against the wall opposite the fireplace. FREDA STUDDENHAM, a pretty, pale girl with dark eyes, in the black dress of a lady's-maid, is standing at the foot of the staircase with a bunch of white roses in one hand, and a bunch of yellow roses in the other. A door closes above, and SIR WILLIAM CHESHIRE, in evening dress, comes downstairs. He is perhaps fifty-eight, of strong build, rather bull-necked, with grey eyes, and a well-coloured face, whose choleric autocracy is veiled by a thin urbanity. He speaks before he reaches the bottom.

SIR WILLIAM. Well, Freda! Nice roses. Who are they for?

FREDA. My lady told me to give the yellow to Mrs. Keith, Sir

William, and the white to Miss Lanfarne, for their first evening.

SIR WILLIAM. Capital. [Passing on towards the drawing-room] Your father coming up to-night?

FREDA. Yes.

SIR WILLIAM. Be good enough to tell him I specially want to see him here after dinner, will you?

FREDA. Yes, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM. By the way, just ask him to bring the game-book in, if he's got it.

He goes out into the drawing-room; and FREDA stands restlessly tapping her foot against the bottom stair. With a flutter of skirts CHRISTINE KEITH comes rapidly down. She is a nice-looking, fresh-coloured young woman in a low-necked dress.

CHRISTINE. Hullo, Freda! How are YOU?

FREDA. Quite well, thank you, Miss Christine—Mrs. Keith, I mean. My lady told me to give you these.

CHRISTINE. [Taking the roses] Oh! Thanks! How sweet of mother!

FREDA. [In a quick, toneless voice] The others are for Miss Lanfarne. My lady thought white would suit her better.

CHRISTINE. They suit you in that black dress.

[FREDA lowers the roses quickly.]

What do you think of Joan's engagement?

FREDA. It's very nice for her.

CHRISTINE. I say, Freda, have they been going hard at rehearsals?

FREDA. Every day. Miss Dot gets very cross, stage-managing.

CHRISTINE. I do hate learning a part. Thanks awfully for unpacking. Any news?

FREDA. [In the same quick, dull voice] The under-keeper, Dunning, won't marry Rose Taylor, after all.

CHRISTINE. What a shame! But I say that's serious. I thought there was—she was—I mean—

FREDA. He's taken up with another girl, they say.

CHRISTINE. Too bad! [Pinning the roses] D'you know if Mr. Bill's come?

FREDA. [With a swift upward look] Yes, by the six-forty.

RONALD KEITH comes slowly down, a weathered firm-lipped man, in evening dress, with eyelids half drawn over his keen eyes, and the air of a horseman.

KEITH. Hallo! Roses in December. I say, Freda, your father missed a wiggling this morning when they drew blank at Warnham's spinney. Where's that litter of little foxes?

FREDA. [Smiling faintly] I expect father knows, Captain Keith.

KEITH. You bet he does. Emigration? Or thin air? What?

CHRISTINE. Studdenham'd never shoot a fox, Ronny. He's been here since the flood.

KEITH. There's more ways of killing a cat—eh, Freda?

CHRISTINE. [Moving with her husband towards the drawing-room] Young Dunning won't marry that girl, Ronny.

KEITH. Phew! Wouldn't be in his shoes, then! Sir William'll never keep a servant who's made a scandal in the village, old girl. Bill come?

As they disappear from the hall, JOHN LATTER in a clergyman's evening dress, comes

sedately downstairs, a tall, rather pale young man, with something in him, as it were, both of heaven, and a drawing-room. He passes FREDa with a formal little nod. HAROLD, a fresh-cheeked, cheery-looking youth, comes down, three steps at a time.

HAROLD. Hallo, Freda! Patience on the monument. Let's have a sniff! For Miss Lanfarne? Bill come down yet?

FREDA. No, Mr. Harold.

HAROLD crosses the hall, whistling, and follows LATTER into the drawing-room. There is the sound of a scuffle above, and a voice crying: "Shut up, Dot!" And JOAN comes down screwing her head back. She is pretty and small, with large clinging eyes.

JOAN. Am I all right behind, Freda? That beast, Dot!

FREDA. Quite, Miss Joan.

DOT's face, like a full moon, appears over the upper banisters. She too comes running down, a frank figure, with the face of a rebel.

DOT. You little being!

JOAN. [Flying towards the drawing-room, is overtaken at the door]
Oh! Dot! You're pinching!

As they disappear into the drawing-room, MABEL LANFARNE, a tall girl with a rather charming Irish face, comes slowly down. And at sight of her FREDa's whole figure becomes set and meaningful.

FREDA. For you, Miss Lanfarne, from my lady.

MABEL. [In whose speech is a touch of wilful Irishry] How sweet!
[Fastening the roses] And how are you, Freda?

FREDA. Very well, thank you.

MABEL. And your father? Hope he's going to let me come out with the guns again.

FREDA. [Stolidly] He'll be delighted, I'm sure.

MABEL. Ye-es! I haven't forgotten his face-last time.

FREDA. You stood with Mr. Bill. He's better to stand with than Mr. Harold, or Captain Keith?

MABEL. He didn't touch a feather, that day.

FREDA. People don't when they're anxious to do their best.

A gong sounds. And MABEL LANFARNE, giving FREDa a rather inquisitive stare, moves on to the drawing-room. Left alone without the roses, FREDa still lingers. At the slamming of a door above, and hasty footsteps, she shrinks back against the stairs. BILL runs down, and comes on her suddenly. He is a tall, good-looking edition of his father, with the same stubborn look of veiled choler.

BILL. Freda! [And as she shrinks still further back] what's the matter? [Then at some sound he looks round uneasily and draws away from her] Aren't you glad to see me?

FREDA. I've something to say to you, Mr. Bill. After dinner.

BILL. Mister—?

She passes him, and rushes away upstairs. And BILL, who stands frowning and looking after her, recovers himself sharply as the drawing-room door is opened, and SIR WILLIAM and MISS LANFARNE come forth, followed by KEITH, DOT, HAROLD, CHRISTINE, LATTER, and JOAN, all leaning across each other, and talking. By herself, behind them, comes LADY CHESHIRE, a refined-looking woman of fifty, with silvery dark hair, and an expression at once gentle, and ironic. They move across the hall towards the dining-room.

SIR WILLIAM. Ah! Bill.

MABEL. How do you do?

KEITH. How are you, old chap?

DOT. [gloomily] Do you know your part?

HAROLD. Hallo, old man!

CHRISTINE gives her brother a flying kiss. JOAN and LATTER pause and look at him shyly without speech.

BILL. [Putting his hand on JOAN's shoulder] Good luck, you two!
Well mother?

LADY CHESHIRE. Well, my dear boy! Nice to see you at last. What a long time!

She draws his arm through hers, and they move towards the dining-room.

The curtain falls.

The curtain rises again at once.

SCENE II

CHRISTINE, LADY CHESHIRE, DOT, MABEL LANFARNE,
and JOAN, are returning to the hall after dinner.

CHRISTINE. [in a low voice] Mother, is it true about young Dunning and Rose Taylor?

LADY CHESHIRE. I'm afraid so, dear.

CHRISTINE. But can't they be—

DOT. Ah! ah-h! [CHRISTINE and her mother are silent.] My child, I'm not the young person.

CHRISTINE. No, of course not—only—[nodding towards JOAN and Mable].

DOT. Look here! This is just an instance of what I hate.

LADY CHESHIRE. My dear? Another one?

DOT. Yes, mother, and don't you pretend you don't understand, because you know you do.

CHRISTINE. Instance? Of what?

JOAN and MABEL have ceased talking, and listen, still at the fire.

DOT. Humbug, of course. Why should you want them to marry, if he's tired of her?

CHRISTINE. [Ironically] Well! If your imagination doesn't carry you as far as that!

DOT. When people marry, do you believe they ought to be in love with each other?

CHRISTINE. [With a shrug] That's not the point.

DOT. Oh? Were you in love with Ronny?

CHRISTINE. Don't be idiotic!

DOT. Would you have married him if you hadn't been?

CHRISTINE. Of course not!

JOAN. Dot! You are!—

DOT. Hallo! my little snipe!

LADY CHESHIRE. Dot, dear!

DOT. Don't shut me up, mother! [To JOAN.] Are you in love with John? [JOAN turns hurriedly to the fire.] Would you be going to marry him if you were not?

CHRISTINE. You are a brute, Dot.

DOT. Is Mabel in love with—whichever she is in love with?

MABEL. And I wonder who that is.

DOT. Well, would you marry him if you weren't?

MABEL. No, I would not.

DOT. Now, mother; did you love father?

CHRISTINE. Dot, you really are awful.

DOT. [Rueful and detached] Well, it is a bit too thick, perhaps.

JOAN. Dot!

DOT. Well, mother, did you—I mean quite calmly?

LADY CHESHIRE. Yes, dear, quite calmly.

DOT. Would you have married him if you hadn't? [LADY CHESHIRE shakes her head] Then we're all agreed!

MABEL. Except yourself.

DOT. [Grimly] Even if I loved him, he might think himself lucky if I married him.

MABEL. Indeed, and I'm not so sure.

DOT. [Making a face at her] What I was going to——

LADY CHESHIRE. But don't you think, dear, you'd better not?

DOT. Well, I won't say what I was going to say, but what I do say is—Why the devil——

LADY CHESHIRE. Quite so, Dot!

DOT. [A little disconcerted.] If they're tired of each other, they ought not to marry, and if father's going to make them——

CHRISTINE. You don't understand in the least. It's for the sake of the——

DOT. Out with it, Old Sweetness! The approaching infant! God bless it!

There is a sudden silence, for KEITH and LATTER are seen coming from the dining-room.

LATTER. That must be so, Ronny.

KEITH. No, John; not a bit of it!

LATTER. You don't think!

KEITH. Good Gad, who wants to think after dinner!

DOT. Come on! Let's play pool. [She turns at the billiard-room door.] Look here! Rehearsal to-morrow is directly after breakfast; from "Eccles enters breathless" to the end.

MABEL. Whatever made you choose "Caste," DOT? You know it's awfully difficult.

DOT. Because it's the only play that's not too advanced. [The girls all go into the billiard-room.]

LADY CHESHIRE. Where's Bill, Ronny?

KEITH. [With a grimace] I rather think Sir William and he are in

LADY CHESHIRE. Oh!

She looks uneasily at the dining-room; then follows the girls out.

LATTER. [In the tone of one resuming an argument] There can't be two opinions about it, Ronny. Young Dunning's refusal is simply indefensible.

KEITH. I don't agree a bit, John.

LATTER. Of course, if you won't listen.

KEITH. [Clipping a cigar] Draw it mild, my dear chap. We've had the whole thing over twice at least.

LATTER. My point is this—

KEITH. [Regarding LATTER quizzically with his halfclosed eyes] I know—I know—but the point is, how far your point is simply professional.

LATTER. If a man wrongs a woman, he ought to right her again. There's no answer to that.

KEITH. It all depends.

LATTER. That's rank opportunism.

KEITH. Rats! Look here—Oh! hang it, John, one can't argue this out with a parson.

LATTER. [Frigidly] Why not?

HAROLD. [Who has entered from the dining-room] Pull devil, pull baker!

KEITH. Shut up, Harold!

LATTER. "To play the game" is the religion even of the Army.

KEITH. Exactly, but what is the game?

LATTER. What else can it be in this case?

KEITH. You're too puritanical, young John. You can't help it—line of country laid down for you. All drag-huntin'! What!

LATTER. [With concentration] Look here!

HAROLD. [Imitating the action of a man pulling at a horse's head] 'Come hup, I say, you hugely beast!'

KEITH. [To LATTER] You're not going to draw me, old chap. You don't see where you'd land us all. [He smokes calmly]

LATTER. How do you imagine vice takes its rise? From precisely this sort of thing of young Dunning's.

KEITH. From human nature, I should have thought, John. I admit that I don't like a fellow's leavin' a girl in the lurch; but I don't see the use in drawin' hard and fast rules. You only have to break 'em. Sir William and you would just tie Dunning and the girl up together, willy-nilly, to save appearances, and ten to one but there'll be the deuce to pay in a year's time. You can take a horse to the water, you can't make him drink.

LATTER. I entirely and absolutely disagree with you.

HAROLD. Good old John!

LATTER. At all events we know where your principles take you.

KEITH. [Rather dangerously] Where, please? [HAROLD turns up his eyes, and points downwards] Dry up, Harold!

LATTER. Did you ever hear the story of Faust?

KEITH. Now look here, John; with all due respect to your cloth, and all the politeness in the world,

you may go to-blazes.

LATTER. Well, I must say, Ronny—of all the rude boors—[He turns towards the billiard-room.]

KEITH. Sorry I smashed the glass, old chap.

LATTER passes out. There comes a mingled sound through the opened door, of female voices, laughter, and the click of billiard balls, dipped of by the sudden closing of the door.

KEITH. [Impersonally] Deuced odd, the way a parson puts one's back up! Because you know I agree with him really; young Dunning ought to play the game; and I hope Sir William'll make him.

The butler JACKSON has entered from the door under the stairs followed by the keeper STUDDENHAM, a man between fifty and sixty, in a full-skirted coat with big pockets, cord breeches, and gaiters; he has a steady self respecting weathered face, with blue eyes and a short grey beard, which has obviously once been red.

KEITH. Hullo! Studdenham!

STUDDENHAM. [Touching his forehead] Evenin', Captain Keith.

JACKSON. Sir William still in the dining-room with Mr. Bill, sir?

HAROLD. [With a grimace] He is, Jackson.

JACKSON goes out to the dining-room.

KEITH. You've shot no pheasants yet, Studdenham?

STUDDENHAM. No, Sir. Only birds. We'll be doin' the spinneys and the home covert while you're down.

KEITH. I say, talkin' of spinneys—

He breaks off sharply, and goes out with HAROLD into the billiard-room. SIR WILLIAM enters from the dining-room, applying a gold toothpick to his front teeth.

SIR WILLIAM. Ah! Studdenham. Bad business this, about young Dunning!

STUDDENHAM. Yes, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM. He definitely refuses to marry her?

STUDDENHAM. He does that.

SIR WILLIAM. That won't do, you know. What reason does he give?

STUDDENHAM. Won't say other than that he don't want no more to do with her.

SIR WILLIAM. God bless me! That's not a reason. I can't have a keeper of mine playing fast and loose in the village like this.
[Turning to LADY CHESHIRE, who has come in from the billiard-room]
That affair of young Dunning's, my dear.

LADY CHESHIRE. Oh! Yes! I'm so sorry, Studdenham. The poor girl!

STUDDENHAM. [Respectfully] Fancy he's got a feeling she's not his equal, now, my lady.

LADY CHESHIRE. [To herself] Yes, I suppose he has made her his superior.

SIR WILLIAM. What? Eh! Quite! Quite! I was just telling Studdenham the fellow must set the matter straight. We can't have open scandals in the village. If he wants to keep his place he must marry her at once.

LADY CHESHIRE. [To her husband in a low voice] Is it right to force them? Do you know what the girl wishes, Studdenham?

STUDDENHAM. Shows a spirit, my lady—says she'll have him—willin' or not.

LADY CHESHIRE. A spirit? I see. If they marry like that they're sure to be miserable.

SIR WILLIAM. What! Doesn't follow at all. Besides, my dear, you ought to know by this time, there's an unwritten law in these matters. They're perfectly well aware that when there are consequences, they have to take them.

STUDDENHAM. Some o' these young people, my lady, they don't put two and two together no more than an old cock pheasant.

SIR WILLIAM. I'll give him till to-morrow. If he remains obstinate, he'll have to go; he'll get no character, Studdenham. Let him know what I've said. I like the fellow, he's a good keeper. I don't want to lose him. But this sort of thing I won't have. He must toe the mark or take himself off. Is he up here to-night?

STUDDENHAM. Hangin' partridges, Sir William. Will you have him in?

SIR WILLIAM. [Hesitating] Yes—yes. I'll see him.

STUDDENHAM. Good-night to you, my lady.

LADY CHESHIRE. Freda's not looking well, Studdenham.

STUDDENHAM. She's a bit pernickitty with her food, that's where it is.

LADY CHESHIRE. I must try and make her eat.

SIR WILLIAM. Oh! Studdenham. We'll shoot the home covert first. What did we get last year?

STUDDENHAM. [Producing the game-book; but without reference to it] Two hundred and fifty-three pheasants, eleven hares, fifty-two rabbits, three woodcock, sundry.

SIR WILLIAM. Sundry? Didn't include a fox did it? [Gravely] I was seriously upset this morning at Warnham's spinney—

STUDDENHAM. [Very gravely] You don't say, Sir William; that four-year-old he du look a handful!

SIR WILLIAM. [With a sharp look] You know well enough what I mean.

STUDDENHAM. [Unmoved] Shall I send young Dunning, Sir William?

SIR WILLIAM gives a short, sharp nod, and STUDDENHAM retires by the door under the stairs.

SIR WILLIAM. Old fox!

LADY CHESHIRE. Don't be too hard on Dunning. He's very young.

SIR WILLIAM. [Patting her arm] My dear, you don't understand young fellows, how should you?

LADY CHESHIRE. [With her faint irony] A husband and two sons not counting. [Then as the door under the stairs is opened] Bill, now do—

SIR WILLIAM. I'll be gentle with him. [Sharply] Come in!

LADY CHESHIRE retires to the billiard-room. She gives a look back and a half smile at young DUNNING, a fair young man dressed in broom cords and leggings, and holding his cap in his hand; then goes out.

SIR WILLIAM. Evenin', Dunning.

DUNNING. [Twisting his cap] Evenin', Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM. Studdenham's told you what I want to see you about?

DUNNING. Yes, Sir.

SIR WILLIAM. The thing's in your hands. Take it or leave it. I don't put pressure on you. I simply won't have this sort of thing on my estate.

DUNNING. I'd like to say, Sir William, that she [He stops].

SIR WILLIAM. Yes, I daresay-Six of one and half a dozen of the other. Can't go into that.

DUNNING. No, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM. I'm quite mild with you. This is your first place. If you leave here you'll get no character.

DUNNING. I never meant any harm, sir.

SIR WILLIAM. My good fellow, you know the custom of the country.

DUNNING. Yes, Sir William, but—

SIR WILLIAM. You should have looked before you leaped. I'm not forcing you. If you refuse you must go, that's all.

DUNNING. Yes. Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM. Well, now go along and take a day to think it over.

BILL, who has sauntered moody from the diningroom, stands by the stairs listening. Catching sight of him, DUNNING raises his hand to his forelock.

DUNNING. Very good, Sir William. [He turns, fumbles, and turns again] My old mother's dependent on me—

SIR WILLIAM. Now, Dunning, I've no more to say.

[Dunning goes sadly away under the stairs.]

SIR WILLIAM. [Following] And look here! Just understand this
[He too goes out....]

BILL, lighting a cigarette, has approached the writing-table. He looks very glum. The billiard-room door is flung open. MABEL LANFARNE appears, and makes him a little curtsy.

MABEL. Against my will I am bidden to bring you in to pool.

BILL. Sorry! I've got letters.

MABEL. You seem to have become very conscientious.

BILL. Oh! I don't know.

MABEL. Do you remember the last day of the covert shooting?

BITS. I do.

MABEL. [Suddenly] What a pretty girl Freda Studdenham's grown!

BILL. Has she?

MABEL. "She walks in beauty."

BILL. Really? Hadn't noticed.

MABEL. Have you been taking lessons in conversation?

BILL. Don't think so.

MABEL. Oh! [There is a silence] Mr. Cheshire!

BILL. Miss Lanfarne!

MABEL. What's the matter with you? Aren't you rather queer, considering that I don't bite, and was rather a pal!

BILL. [Stolidly] I'm sorry.

Then seeing that his mother has come in from the billiard-room, he sits down at the writing-table.

LADY CHESHIRE. Mabel, dear, do take my cue. Won't you play too, Bill, and try and stop Ronny, he's too terrible?

BILL. Thanks. I've got these letters.

MABEL taking the cue passes back into the billiard-room, whence comes out the sound of talk and laughter.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Going over and standing behind her son's chair]
Anything wrong, darling?

BILL. Nothing, thanks. [Suddenly] I say, I wish you hadn't asked that girl here.

LADY CHESHIRE. Mabel! Why? She's wanted for rehearsals. I thought you got on so well with her last Christmas.

BILL. [With a sort of sullen exasperation.] A year ago.

LADY CHESHIRE. The girls like her, so does your father; personally I must say I think she's rather nice and Irish.

BILL. She's all right, I daresay.

He looks round as if to show his mother that he wishes to be left alone. But LADY CHESHIRE, having seen that he is about to look at her, is not looking at him.

LADY CHESHIRE. I'm afraid your father's been talking to you, Bill.

BILL. He has.

LADY CHESHIRE. Debts? Do try and make allowances. [With a faint smile] Of course he is a little—

BILL. He is.

LADY CHESHIRE. I wish I could—

BILL. Oh, Lord! Don't you get mixed up in it!

LADY CHESHIRE. It seems almost a pity that you told him.

BILL. He wrote and asked me point blank what I owed.

LADY CHESHIRE. Oh! [Forcing herself to speak in a casual voice] I happen to have a little money, Bill—I think it would be simpler if—

BILL. Now look here, mother, you've tried that before. I can't help spending money, I never shall be able, unless I go to the Colonies, or something of the kind.

LADY CHESHIRE. Don't talk like that, dear!

BILL. I would, for two straws!

LADY CHESHIRE. It's only because your father thinks such a lot of the place, and the name, and your career. The Cheshires are all like that. They've been here so long; they're all—root.

BILL. Deuced funny business my career will be, I expect!

LADY CHESHIRE. [Fluttering, but restraining herself lest he should see] But, Bill, why must you spend more than your allowance?

BILL. Why—anything? I didn't make myself.

LADY CHESHIRE. I'm afraid we did that. It was inconsiderate, perhaps.

BILL. Yes, you'd better have left me out.

LADY CHESHIRE. But why are you so—Only a little fuss about money!

BILL. Ye-es.

LADY CHESHIRE. You're not keeping anything from me, are you?

BILL. [Facing her] No. [He then turns very deliberately to the writing things, and takes up a pen] I must write these letters, please.

LADY CHESHIRE. Bill, if there's any real trouble, you will tell me, won't you?

BILL. There's nothing whatever.

He suddenly gets up and walks about. LADY CHESHIRE, too, moves over to the fireplace, and after an uneasy look at him, turns to the fire. Then, as if trying to switch of his mood, she changes the subject abruptly.

LADY CHESHIRE. Isn't it a pity about young Dunning? I'm so sorry for Rose Taylor.

There is a silence. Stealthily under the staircase FREDA has entered, and seeing only BILL, advances to speak to him.

BILL. [Suddenly] Oh! well,—you can't help these things in the country.

As he speaks, FREDA stops dead, perceiving that he is not alone; BILL, too, catching sight of her, starts.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Still speaking to the fire] It seems dreadful to force him. I do so believe in people doing things of their own accord. [Then seeing FREDA standing so uncertainly by the stairs] Do you want me, Freda?

FREDA. Only your cloak, my lady. Shall I—begin it?

At this moment SIR WILLIAM enters from the drawing-room.

LADY CHESHIRE. Yes, yes.

SIR WILLIAM. [Genially] Can you give me another five minutes, Bill? [Pointing to the billiard-room] We'll come directly, my dear.

FREDA, with a look at BILL, has gone back whence she came; and LADY CHESHIRE goes reluctantly away into the billiard-room.

SIR WILLIAM. I shall give young Dunning short shrift. [He moves over to the fireplace and divides hip coat-tails] Now, about you, Bill! I don't want to bully you the moment you come down, but you know, this can't go on. I've paid your debts twice. Shan't pay them this time unless I see a disposition to change your mode of life. [A pause] You get your extravagance from your mother. She's very queer—[A pause]—All the Winterleighs are like that about money....

BILL. Mother's particularly generous, if that's what you mean.

SIR WILLIAM. [Drily] We will put it that way. [A pause] At the present moment you owe, as I understand it, eleven hundred pounds.

BILL. About that.

SIR WILLIAM. Mere flea-bite. [A pause] I've a proposition to make.

BILL. Won't it do to-morrow, sir?

SIR WILLIAM. "To-morrow" appears to be your motto in life.

BILL. Thanks!

SIR WILLIAM. I'm anxious to change it to-day. [BILL looks at him in silence] It's time you took your position seriously, instead of hanging about town, racing, and playing polo, and what not.

BILL. Go ahead!

At something dangerous in his voice, SIR WILLIAM modifies his attitude.

SIR WILLIAM. The proposition's very simple. I can't suppose anything so rational and to your advantage will appeal to you, but [drily] I mention it. Marry a nice girl, settle down, and stand for the division; you can have the Dower House and fifteen hundred a year, and I'll pay your debts into the bargain. If you're elected I'll make it two thousand. Plenty of time to work up the constituency before we kick out these infernal Rads. Carpetbagger against you; if you go hard at it in the summer, it'll be odd if you don't manage to get in your three days a week, next season. You can take Rocketeer and that four-year-old—he's well up to your weight, fully eight and a half inches of bone. You'll only want one other. And if Miss—if your wife means to hunt—

BILL. You've chosen my wife, then?

SIR WILLIAM. [With a quick look] I imagine, you've some girl in your mind.

BILL. Ah!

SIR WILLIAM: Used not to be unnatural at your age. I married your mother at twenty-eight. Here you are, eldest son of a family that stands for something. The more I see of the times the more I'm convinced that everybody who is anybody has got to buckle to, and save the landmarks left. Unless we're true to our caste, and prepared to work for it, the landed classes are going to go under to this infernal democratic spirit in the air. The outlook's very serious. We're threatened in a hundred ways. If you mean business, you'll want a wife. When I came into the property I should have been lost without your mother.

BILL. I thought this was coming.

SIR WILLIAM. [With a certain geniality] My dear fellow, I don't want to put a pistol to your head. You've had a slack rein so far. I've never objected to your sowing a few wild oats—so long as you —er— [Unseen by SIR WILLIAM, BILL makes a sudden movement] Short of that—at all events, I've not inquired into your affairs. I can only judge by the—er—pecuniary evidence you've been good enough to afford me from time to time. I imagine you've lived like a good many young men in your position—I'm not blaming you, but there's a time for all things.

BILL. Why don't you say outright that you want me to marry Mabel Lanfarne?

SIR WILLIAM. Well, I do. Girl's a nice one. Good family—got a little money—rides well. Isn't she good-looking enough for you, or what?

BILL. Quite, thanks.

SIR WILLIAM. I understood from your mother that you and she were on good terms.

BILL. Please don't drag mother into it.

SIR WILLIAM. [With dangerous politeness] Perhaps you'll be good enough to state your objections.

BILL. Must we go on with this?

SIR WILLIAM. I've never asked you to do anything for me before; I expect you to pay attention now. I've no wish to drag you into this particular marriage. If you don't care for Miss Lanfarne, marry a girl you're fond of.

BILL. I refuse.

SIR WILLIAM. In that case you know what to look out for. [With a sudden rush of choler] You young.... [He checks himself and stands glaring at BILL, who glares back at him] This means, I suppose, that you've got some entanglement or other.

BILL. Suppose what you like, sir.

SIR WILLIAM. I warn you, if you play the blackguard—

BILL. You can't force me like young Dunning.

Hearing the raised voices LADY CHESHIRE has come back from the billiard-room.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Closing the door] What is it?

SIR WILLIAM. You deliberately refuse! Go away, Dorothy.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Resolutely] I haven't seen Bill for two months.

SIR WILLIAM. What! [Hesitating] Well—we must talk it over again.

LADY CHESHIRE. Come to the billiard-room, both of you! Bill, do finish those letters!

With a deft movement she draws SIR WILLIAM toward the billiard-room, and glances back at BILL before going out, but he has turned to the writing-table. When the door is closed, BILL looks into the drawing-room, then opens the door under the stairs; and backing away towards the writing-table, sits down there, and takes up a pen. FREDa who has evidently been waiting, comes in and stands by the table.

BILL. I say, this is dangerous, you know.

FREDA. Yes—but I must.

BILL. Well, then—[With natural recklessness] Aren't you going to kiss me?

Without moving she looks at him with a sort of miserable inquiry.

BILL. Do you know you haven't seen me for eight weeks?

FREDA. Quite—long enough—for you to have forgotten.

BILL. Forgotten! I don't forget people so soon.

FREDA. No?

BILL. What's the matter with you, Freda?

FREDA. [After a long look] It'll never be as it was.

BILL. [Jumping up] How d'you mean?

FREDA. I've got something for you. [She takes a diamond ring out of her dress and holds it out to him] I've not worn it since Cromer.

BILL. Now, look here

FREDA. I've had my holiday; I shan't get another in a hurry.

BILL. Freda!

FREDA. You'll be glad to be free. That fortnight's all you really loved me in.

BILL. [Putting his hands on her arms] I swear—

FREDA. [Between her teeth] Miss Lanfarne need never know about me.

BILL. So that's it! I've told you a dozen times—nothing's changed.

[FREDA looks at him and smiles.]

BILL. Oh! very well! If you will make yourself miserable.

FREDA. Everybody will be pleased.

BILL. At what?

FREDA. When you marry her.

BILL. This is too bad.

FREDA. It's what always happens—even when it's not a—gentleman.

BILL. That's enough.

FREDA. But I'm not like that girl down in the village. You needn't be afraid I'll say anything when—it comes. That's what I had to tell you.

BILL. What!

FREDA. I can keep a secret.

BILL. Do you mean this? [She bows her head.]

BILL. Good God!

FREDA. Father brought me up not to whine. Like the puppies when they hold them up by their tails. [With a sudden break in her voice] Oh! Bill!

BILL. [With his head down, seizing her hands] Freda! [He breaks away from her towards the fire] Good God!

She stands looking at him, then quietly slips away by the door under the staircase. BILL turns to speak to her, and sees that she has gone. He walks up to the fireplace, and grips

the mantelpiece.

BILL. By Jove! This is——!

The curtain falls.

ACT II

The scene is LADY CHESHIRE's morning room, at ten o'clock on the following day. It is a pretty room, with white panelled walls; and chrysanthemums and carmine lilies in bowls. A large bow window overlooks the park under a sou'-westerly sky. A piano stands open; a fire is burning; and the morning's correspondence is scattered on a writing-table. Doors opposite each other lead to the maid's workroom, and to a corridor. LADY CHESHIRE is standing in the middle of the room, looking at an opera cloak, which FREDA is holding out.

LADY CHESHIRE. Well, Freda, suppose you just give it up!

FREDA. I don't like to be beaten.

LADY CHESHIRE. You're not to worry over your work. And by the way, I promised your father to make you eat more. [FREDA smiles.]

LADY CHESHIRE. It's all very well to smile. You want bracing up. Now don't be naughty. I shall give you a tonic. And I think you had better put that cloak away.

FREDA. I'd rather have one more try, my lady.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Sitting down at her writing-table] Very well.

FREDA goes out into her workroom, as JACKSON comes in from the corridor.

JACKSON. Excuse me, my lady. There's a young woman from the village, says you wanted to see her.

LADY CHESHIRE. Rose Taylor? Ask her to come in. Oh! and Jackson the car for the meet please at half-past ten.

JACKSON having bowed and withdrawn, LADY CHESHIRE rises with worked signs of nervousness, which she has only just suppressed, when ROSE TAYLOR, a stolid country girl, comes in and stands waiting by the door.

LADY CHESHIRE. Well, Rose. Do come in!
[ROSE advances perhaps a couple of steps.]

LADY CHESHIRE. I just wondered whether you'd like to ask my advice. Your engagement with Dunning's broken off, isn't it?

ROSE. Yes—but I've told him he's got to marry me.

LADY CHESHIRE. I see! And you think that'll be the wisest thing?

ROSE. [Stolidly] I don't know, my lady. He's got to.

LADY CHESHIRE. I do hope you're a little fond of him still.

ROSE. I'm not. He don't deserve it.

LADY CHESHIRE: And—do you think he's quite lost his affection for you?

ROSE. I suppose so, else he wouldn't treat me as he's done. He's after that—that—He didn't ought to treat me as if I was dead.

LADY CHESHIRE. No, no—of course. But you will think it all well over, won't you?

ROSE. I've a—got nothing to think over, except what I know of.

LADY CHESHIRE. But for you both to marry in that spirit! You know it's for life, Rose. [Looking into her face] I'm always ready to help you.

ROSE. [Dropping a very slight curtsey] Thank you, my lady, but I think he ought to marry me. I've told him he ought.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Sighing] Well, that's all I wanted to say. It's a question of your self-respect; I can't give you any real advice. But just remember that if you want a friend—

ROSE. [With a gulp] I'm not so 'ard, really. I only want him to do what's right by me.

LADY CHESHIRE. [With a little lift of her eyebrow—gently] Yes, yes—I see.

ROSE. [Glancing back at the door] I don't like meeting the servants.

LADY CHESHIRE. Come along, I'll take you out another way. [As they reach the door, DOT comes in.]

DOT. [With a glance at ROSE] Can we have this room for the mouldy rehearsal, Mother?

LADY CHESHIRE. Yes, dear, you can air it here.

Holding the door open for ROSE she follows her out. And DOT, with a book of "Caste" in her hand, arranges the room according to a diagram.

DOT. Chair—chair—table—chair—Dash! Table—piano—fire—window! [Producing a pocket comb] Comb for Eccles. Cradle?—Cradle—[She viciously dumps a waste-paper basket down, and drops a footstool into it] Brat! [Then reading from the book gloomily] "Enter Eccles breathless. Esther and Polly rise—Esther puts on lid of bandbox." Bandbox!

Searching for something to represent a bandbox, she opens the workroom door.

DOT. Freda?

FREDA comes in.

DOT. I say, Freda. Anything the matter? You seem awfully down.
[FREDA does not answer.]

DOT. You haven't looked anything of a lollipop lately.

FREDA. I'm quite all right, thank you, Miss Dot.

DOT. Has Mother been givin' you a tonic?

FREDA. [Smiling a little] Not yet.

DOT. That doesn't account for it then. [With a sudden warm impulse]
What is it, Freda?

FREDA. Nothing.

DOT. [Switching of on a different line of thought] Are you very busy this morning?

FREDA. Only this cloak for my lady.

DOT. Oh! that can wait. I may have to get you in to prompt, if I can't keep 'em straight. [Gloomily] They stray so. Would you mind?

FREDA. [Stolidly] I shall be very glad, Miss Dot.

DOT. [Eyeing her dubiously] All right. Let's see—what did I want?

JOAN has come in.

JOAN. Look here, Dot; about the baby in this scene. I'm sure I ought to make more of it.

DOT. Romantic little beast! [She plucks the footstool out by one ear, and holds it forth] Let's see you try!

JOAN. [Recoiling] But, Dot, what are we really going to have for the baby? I can't rehearse with that thing. Can't you suggest something, Freda?

FREDA. Borrow a real one, Miss Joan. There are some that don't count much.

JOAN. Freda, how horrible!

DOT. [Dropping the footstool back into the basket] You'll just put up with what you're given.

Then as CHRISTINE and MABEL LANFARNE Come in, FREDA turns abruptly and goes out.

DOT. Buck up! Where are Bill and Harold? [To JOAN] Go and find them, mouse-cat.

But BILL and HAROLD, followed by LATTER, are already in the doorway. They come in, and LATTER, stumbling over the waste-paper basket, takes it up to improve its position.

DOT. Drop that cradle, John! [As he picks the footstool out of it] Leave the baby in! Now then! Bill, you enter there! [She points to the workroom door where BILL and MABEL range themselves close to the piano; while HAROLD goes to the window] John! get off the stage! Now then, "Eccles enters breathless, Esther and Polly rise." Wait a minute. I know now. [She opens the workroom door] Freda, I wanted a bandbox.

HAROLD. [Cheerfully] I hate beginning to rehearse, you know, you feel such a fool.

DOT. [With her bandbox-gloomily] You'll feel more of a fool when you have begun. [To BILL, who is staring into the workroom] Shut the door. Now. [BILL shuts the door.]

LATTER. [Advancing] Look here! I want to clear up a point of psychology before we start.

DOT. Good Lord!

LATTER. When I bring in the milk—ought I to bring it in seriously— as if I were accustomed—I mean, I maintain that if I'm—

JOAN. Oh! John, but I don't think it's meant that you should—

DOT. Shut up! Go back, John! Blow the milk! Begin, begin, begin!
Bill!

LATTER. [Turning round and again advancing] But I think you underrate the importance of my entrance altogether.

MABEL. Oh! no, Mr. Latter!

LATTER. I don't in the least want to destroy the balance of the scene, but I do want to be clear about the spirit. What is the spirit?

DOT. [With gloom] Rollicking!

LATTER. Well, I don't think so. We shall run a great risk, with this play, if we rollick.

DOT. Shall we? Now look here—!

MABEL. [Softly to BILL] Mr. Cheshire!

BILL. [Desperately] Let's get on!

DOT. [Waving LATTER back] Begin, begin! At last!
[But JACKSON has come in.]

JACKSON. [To CHRISTINE] Studdenham says, Mm, if the young ladies want to see the spaniel pups, he's brought 'em round.

JOAN. [Starting up] Oh! come 'on, John!
[She flies towards the door, followed by LATTER.]

DOT. [Gesticulating with her book] Stop! You—
[CHRISTINE and HAROLD also rush past.]

DOT. [Despairingly] First pick! [Tearing her hair] Pigs! Devils!
[She rushes after them. BILL and MABEL are left alone.]

MABEL. [Mockingly] And don't you want one of the spaniel pups?

BILL. [Painfully reserved and sullen, and conscious of the workroom door] Can't keep a dog in town. You can have one, if you like. The breeding's all right.

MABEL. Sixth Pick?

BILL. The girls'll give you one of theirs. They only fancy they want 'em.

Mann. [Moving nearer to him, with her hands clasped behind her] You know, you remind me awfully of your father. Except that you're not nearly so polite. I don't understand you English-lords of the soil. The way you have of disposing of your females. [With a sudden change of voice] What was the matter with you last night? [Softly] Won't you tell me?

BILL. Nothing to tell.

MABEL. Ah! no, Mr. Bill.

BILL. [Almost succumbing to her voice—then sullenly] Worried, I suppose.

MABEL. [Returning to her mocking] Quite got over it?

BILL. Don't chaff me, please.

MABEL. You really are rather formidable.

BILL. Thanks.

MABEL. But, you know, I love to cross a field where there's a bull.

BILL. Really! Very interesting.

MABEL. The way of their only seeing one thing at a time. [She moves back as he advances] And overturning people on the journey.

BILL. Hadn't you better be a little careful?

MABEL. And never to see the hedge until they're stuck in it. And then straight from that hedge into the opposite one.

BILL. [Savagely] What makes you bait me this morning of all mornings?

MABEL. The beautiful morning! [Suddenly] It must be dull for poor Freda working in there with all this fun going on?

BILL. [Glancing at the door] Fun you call it?

MABEL. To go back to you,—now—Mr. Cheshire.

BILL. No.

MABEL. You always make me feel so Irish. Is it because you're so English, d'you think? Ah! I can see him moving his ears. Now he's pawing the ground—He's started!

BILL. Miss Lanfarne!

MABEL. [Still backing away from him, and drawing him on with her eyes and smile] You can't help coming after me! [Then with a sudden change to a sort of sierra gravity] Can you? You'll feel that when I've gone.

They stand quite still, looking into each other's eyes and
FREDA, who has opened the door of the workroom stares at them.

MABEL. [Seeing her] Here's the stile. Adieu, Monsieur le taureau!

She puts her hand behind her, opens the door, and slips through, leaving BILL to turn, following the direction of her eyes, and see FREDA with the cloak still in her hand.

BILL. [Slowly walking towards her] I haven't slept all night.

FREDA. No?

BILL. Have you been thinking it over?

[FREDA gives a bitter little laugh.]

BILL. Don't! We must make a plan. I'll get you away. I won't let you suffer. I swear I won't.

FREDA. That will be clever.

BILL. I wish to Heaven my affairs weren't in such a mess.

FREDA. I shall be—all—right, thank you.

BILL. You must think me a blackguard. [She shakes her head] Abuse me—say something! Don't look like that!

FREDA. Were you ever really fond of me?

BILL. Of course I was, I am now. Give me your hands.

She looks at him, then drags her hands from his, and covers her face.

BILL. [Clenching his fists] Look here! I'll prove it. [Then as she suddenly flings her arms round his neck and clings to him] There, there!

There is a click of a door handle. They start away from each other, and see LADY CHESHIRE regarding them.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Without irony] I beg your pardon.

She makes as if to withdraw from an unwarranted intrusion, but suddenly turning, stands, with lips pressed together, waiting.

LADY CHESHIRE. Yes?

FREDA has muffled her face. But BILL turns and confronts his mother.

BILL. Don't say anything against her!

LADY CHESHIRE. [Tries to speak to him and fails—then to FREDA] Please-go!

BILL. [Taking FREDA's arm] No.

LADY CHESHIRE, after a moment's hesitation, herself moves towards the door.

BILL. Stop, mother!

LADY CHESHIRE. I think perhaps not.

BILL. [Looking at FREDA, who is cowering as though from a blow] It's a d—d shame!

LADY CHESHIRE. It is.

BILL. [With sudden resolution] It's not as you think. I'm engaged to be married to her.

[FREDA gives him a wild stare, and turns away.]

LADY CHESHIRE. [Looking from one to the other] I don't think I—quite—understand.

BILL. [With the brutality of his mortification] What I said was plain enough.

LADY CHESHIRE. Bill!

BILL. I tell you I am going to marry her.

LADY CHESHIRE. [To FREDA] Is that true?

[FREDA gulps and remains silent.]

BILL. If you want to say anything, say it to me, mother.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Gripping the edge of a little table] Give me a chair, please. [BILL gives her a chair.]

LADY CHESHIRE. [To FREDa] Please sit down too.

FREDA sits on the piano stool, still turning her face away.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Fixing her eyes on FREDA] Now!

BILL. I fell in love with her. And she with me.

LADY CHESHIRE. When?

BILL. In the summer.

LADY CHESHIRE. Ah!

BILL. It wasn't her fault.

LADY CHESHIRE. No?

BILL. [With a sort of menace] Mother!

LADY CHESHIRE. Forgive me, I am not quite used to the idea. You say that you—are engaged?

BILL. Yes.

LADY CHESHIRE. The reasons against such an engagement have occurred to you, I suppose? [With a sudden change of tone] Bill! what does it mean?

BILL. If you think she's trapped me into this—

LADY CHESHIRE. I do not. Neither do I think she has been trapped. I think nothing. I understand nothing.

BILL. [Grimly] Good!

LADY CHESHIRE. How long has this-engagement lasted?

BILL. [After a silence] Two months.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Suddenly] This is-this is quite impossible.

BILL. You'll find it isn't.

LADY CHESHIRE. It's simple misery.

BILL. [Pointing to the workroom] Go and wait in there, Freda.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Quickly] And are you still in love with her?

FREDA, moving towards the workroom, smothers a sob.

BILL. Of course I am.

FREDA has gone, and as she goes, LADY CHESHIRE rises suddenly, forced by the intense feeling she has been keeping in hand.

LADY CHESHIRE. Bill! Oh, Bill! What does it all mean? [BILL, looking from side to side, only shrugs his shoulders] You are not in love with her now. It's no good telling me you are.

BILL. I am.

LADY CHESHIRE. That's not exactly how you would speak if you were.

BILL. She's in love with me.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Bitterly] I suppose so.

BILL. I mean to see that nobody runs her down.

LADY CHESHIRE. [With difficulty] Bill! Am I a hard, or mean woman?

BILL. Mother!

LADY CHESHIRE. It's all your life—and—your father's—and—all of us. I want to understand—I must understand. Have you realised what an awful things this would be for us all? It's quite impossible that it

should go on.

BILL. I'm always in hot water with the Governor, as it is. She and I'll take good care not to be in the way.

LADY CHESHIRE. Tell me everything!

BILL. I have.

LADY CHESHIRE. I'm your mother, Bill.

BILL. What's the good of these questions?

LADY CHESHIRE. You won't give her away—I see!

BILL. I've told you all there is to tell. We're engaged, we shall be married quietly, and—and—go to Canada.

LADY CHESHIRE. If there weren't more than that to tell you'd be in love with her now.

BILL. I've told you that I am.

LADY CHESHIRE. You are not. [Almost fiercely] I know—I know there's more behind.

BILL. There—is—nothing.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Baffled, but unconvinced] Do you mean that your love for her has been just what it might have been for a lady?

BILL. [Bitterly] Why not?

LADY CHESHIRE. [With painful irony] It is not so as a rule.

BILL. Up to now I've never heard you or the girls say a word against Freda. This isn't the moment to begin, please.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Solemnly] All such marriages end in wretchedness. You haven't a taste or tradition in common. You don't know what marriage is. Day after day, year after year. It's no use being sentimental—for people brought up as we are to have different manners is worse than to have different souls. Besides, it's poverty. Your father will never forgive you, and I've practically nothing. What can you do? You have no profession. How are you going to stand it; with a woman who—? It's the little things.

BILL. I know all that, thanks.

LADY CHESHIRE. Nobody does till they've been through it. Marriage is hard enough when people are of the same class. [With a sudden movement towards him] Oh! my dear-before it's too late!

BILL. [After a struggle] It's no good.

LADY CHESHIRE. It's not fair to her. It can only end in her misery.

BILL. Leave that to me, please.

LADY CHESHIRE. [With an almost angry vehemence] Only the very finest can do such things. And you don't even know what trouble's like.

BILL. Drop it, please, mother.

LADY CHESHIRE. Bill, on your word of honour, are you acting of your own free will?

BILL. [Breaking away from her] I can't stand any more.
[He goes out into the workroom.]

LADY CHESHIRE. What in God's name shall I do?

In her distress she walks up and down the room, then goes to the workroom door, and opens it.

LADY CHESHIRE. Come in here, please, Freda.

After a seconds pause, FRED A, white and trembling, appears in the doorway, followed by

BILL.

LADY CHESHIRE. No, Bill. I want to speak to her alone.

BILL, does not move.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Icily] I must ask you to leave us.

BILL hesitates; then shrugging his shoulders, he touches FREDA's arms, and goes back into the workroom, closing the door. There is silence.

LADY CHESHIRE. How did it come about?

FREDA. I don't know, my lady.

LADY CHESHIRE. For heaven's sake, child, don't call me that again, whatever happens. [She walks to the window, and speaks from there] I know well enough how love comes. I don't blame you. Don't cry. But, you see, it's my eldest son. [FREDA puts her hand to her breast] Yes, I know. Women always get the worst of these things. That's natural. But it's not only you is it? Does any one guess?

FREDA. No.

LADY CHESHIRE. Not even your father? [FREDA shakes her head] There's nothing more dreadful than for a woman to hang like a stone round a man's neck. How far has it gone? Tell me!

FREDA. I can't.

LADY CHESHIRE. Come!

FREDA. I—won't.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Smiling painfully]. Won't give him away? Both of you the same. What's the use of that with me? Look at me! Wasn't he with you when you went for your holiday this summer?

FREDA. He's—always—behaved—like—a—gentleman.

LADY CHESHIRE. Like a man you mean!

FREDA. It hasn't been his fault! I love him so.

LADY CHESHIRE turns abruptly, and begins to walk up and down the room. Then stopping, she looks intently at FREDA.

LADY CHESHIRE. I don't know what to say to you. It's simple madness! It can't, and shan't go on.

FREDA. [Sullenly] I know I'm not his equal, but I am—somebody.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Answering this first assertion of rights with a sudden steeliness] Does he love you now?

FREDA. That's not fair—it's not fair.

LADY CHESHIRE. If men are like gunpowder, Freda, women are not. If you've lost him it's been your own fault.

FREDA. But he does love me, he must. It's only four months.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Looking down, and speaking rapidly] Listen to me. I love my son, but I know him—I know all his kind of man. I've lived with one for thirty years. I know the way their senses work. When they want a thing they must have it, and then—they're sorry.

FREDA. [Sullenly] He's not sorry.

LADY CHESHIRE. Is his love big enough to carry you both over everything?... You know it isn't.

FREDA. If I were a lady, you wouldn't talk like that.

LADY CHESHIRE. If you were a lady there'd be no trouble before either of you. You'll make him hate you.

FREDA. I won't believe it. I could make him happy—out there.

LADY CHESHIRE. I don't want to be so odious as to say all the things you must know. I only ask you to try and put yourself in our position.

FREDA. Ah, yes!

LADY CHESHIRE. You ought to know me better than to think I'm purely selfish.

FREDA. Would you like to put yourself in my position?

LADY CHESHIRE. What!

FREDA. Yes. Just like Rose.

LADY CHESHIRE. [In a low, horror-stricken voice] Oh!

There is a dead silence, then going swiftly up to her, she looks straight into FREDA's eyes.

FREDA. [Meeting her gaze] Oh! Yes—it's the truth. [Then to Bill who has come in from the workroom, she gasps out] I never meant to tell.

BILL. Well, are you satisfied?

LADY CHESHIRE. [Below her breath] This is terrible!

BILL. The Governor had better know.

LADY CHESHIRE. Oh! no; not yet!

BILL. Waiting won't cure it!

The door from the corridor is thrown open; CHRISTINE and DOT run in with their copies of the play in their hands; seeing that something is wrong, they stand still. After a look at his mother, BILL turns abruptly, and goes back into the workroom. LADY CHESHIRE moves towards the window.

JOAN. [Following her sisters] The car's round. What's the matter?

DOT. Shut up!

SIR WILLIAM'S voice is heard from the corridor calling "Dorothy!" As LADY CHESHIRE, passing her handkerchief over her face, turns round, he enters. He is in full hunting dress: well-weathered pink, buckskins, and mahogany tops.

SIR WILLIAM. Just off, my dear. [To his daughters, genially] Rehearsin'? What! [He goes up to FREDA holding out his gloved right hand] Button that for me, Freda, would you? It's a bit stiff!

FREDA buttons the glove: LADY CHESHIRE and the girls watching in hypnotic silence.

SIR WILLIAM. Thank you! "Balmy as May"; scent ought to be first-rate. [To LADY CHESHIRE] Good-bye, my dear! Sampson's Gorse—best day of the whole year. [He pats JOAN on the shoulder] Wish you were cumin' out, Joan.

He goes out, leaving the door open, and as his footsteps and the chink of his spurs die away, FREDA turns and rushes into the workroom.

CHRISTINE. Mother! What—?—?

But LADY CHESHIRE waves the question aside, passes her daughter, and goes out into the corridor. The sound of a motor car is heard.

JOAN. [Running to the window] They've started—! Chris! What is it? Dot?

DOT. Bill, and her!

JOAN. But what?

DOT. [Gloomily] Heaven knows! Go away, you're not fit for this.

JOAN. [Aghast] I am fit.

DOT. I think not.

JOAN. Chris?

CHRISTINE. [In a hard voice] Mother ought to have told us.

JOAN. It can't be very awful. Freda's so good.

DOT. Call yourself in love, you milk-and-water-kitten!

CHRISTINE. It's horrible, not knowing anything! I wish Runny hadn't gone.

JOAN. Shall I fetch John?

DOT. John!

CHRISTINE. Perhaps Harold knows.

JOAN. He went out with Studdenham.

DOT. It's always like this, women kept in blinkers. Rose-leaves and humbug! That awful old man!

JOAN. Dot!

CHRISTINE. Don't talk of father like that!

DOT. Well, he is! And Bill will be just like him at fifty! Heaven help Freda, whatever she's done! I'd sooner be a private in a German regiment than a woman.

JOAN. Dot, you're awful.

DOT. You-mouse-hearted-linnet!

CHRISTINE. Don't talk that nonsense about women!

DOT. You're married and out of it; and Ronny's not one of these terrific John Bulls. [To JOAN who has opened the door] Looking for John? No good, my dear; lath and plaster.

JOAN. [From the door, in a frightened whisper] Here's Mabel!

DOT. Heavens, and the waters under the earth!

CHRISTINE. If we only knew!

MABEL comes in, the three girls are silent, with their eyes fixed on their books.

MABEL. The silent company.

DOT. [Looking straight at her] We're chucking it for to-day.

MABEL. What's the matter?

CHRISTINE. Oh! nothing.

DOT. Something's happened.

MABEL. Really! I am sorry. [Hesitating] Is it bad enough for me to go?

CHRISTINE. Oh! no, Mabel!

DOT. [Sardonically] I should think very likely.

While she is looking from face to face, BILL comes in from the workroom. He starts to walk across the room, but stops, and looks stolidly at the four girls.

BILL. Exactly! Fact of the matter is, Miss Lanfarne, I'm engaged to my mother's maid.

No one moves or speaks. Suddenly MABEL LANFARNE goes towards him, holding out her hand. BILL does not take her hand, but bows. Then after a swift glance at the girls' faces MABEL goes out into the corridor, and the three girls are left staring at their brother.

BILL. [Coolly] Thought you might like to know.

[He, too, goes out into the corridor.]

CHRISTINE. Great heavens!

JOAN. How awful!

CHRISTINE. I never thought of anything as bad as that.

JOAN. Oh! Chris! Something must be done!

DOT. [Suddenly to herself] Ha! When Father went up to have his glove buttoned!

There is a sound, JACKSON has come in from the corridor.

JACKSON. [To Dot] If you please, Miss, Studdenham's brought up the other two pups. He's just outside. Will you kindly take a look at them, he says?

There is silence.

DOT. [Suddenly] We can't.

CHRISTINE. Not just now, Jackson.

JACKSON. Is Studdenham and the pups to wait, Mm?

DOT shakes her head violently. But STUDDENHAM is seen already standing in the doorway, with a spaniel puppy in either side-pocket. He comes in, and JACKSON stands waiting behind him.

STUDDENHAM. This fellow's the best, Miss DOT. [He protrudes the right-hand pocket] I was keeping him for my girl—a, proper greedy one—takes after his father.

The girls stare at him in silence.

DOT. [Hastily] Thanks, Studdenham, I see.

STUDDENHAM. I won't take 'em out in here. They're rather bold yet.

CHRISTINE. [Desperately] No, no, of course.

STUDDENHAM. Then you think you'd like him, Miss DOT? The other's got a white chest; she's a lady.

[He protrudes the left-hand pocket.]

DOT. Oh, yes! Studdenham; thanks, thanks awfully.

STUDDENHAM. Wonderful faithful creatures; follow you like a woman. You can't shake 'em off anyhow. [He protrudes the right-hand pocket] My girl, she'd set her heart on him, but she'll just have to do without.

DOT. [As though galvanised] Oh! no, I can't take it away from her.

STUDDENHAM. Bless you, she won't mind! That's settled, then. [He turns to the door. To the PUPPY] Ah! would you! Tryin' to wriggle out of it! Regular young limb! [He goes out, followed by JACKSON.]

CHRISTINE. How ghastly!

DOT. [Suddenly catching sight of the book in her hand] "Caste!"
[She gives vent to a short sharp laugh.]

The curtain falls.

ACT III

It is five o'clock of the same day. The scene is the smoking-room, with walls of Leander red, covered by old steeplechase and hunting prints. Armchairs encircle a high feruled hearth, in which a fire is burning. The curtains are not yet drawn across mullioned windows, but electric light is burning. There are two doors, leading, the one to the billiard-room, the other to a corridor. BILL is pacing up and down; HAROLD, at the fireplace, stands looking at him with commiseration.

BILL. What's the time?

HAROLD. Nearly five. They won't be in yet, if that's any consolation. Always a tough meet—[softly] as the tiger said when he ate the man.

BILL. By Jove! You're the only person I can stand within a mile of me, Harold.

HAROLD. Old boy! Do you seriously think you're going to make it any better by marrying her?

[Bill shrugs his shoulders, still pacing the room.]

BILL. Look here! I'm not the sort that finds it easy to say things.

HAROLD. No, old man.

BILL. But I've got a kind of self-respect though you wouldn't think it!

HAROLD. My dear old chap!

BILL. This is about as low-down a thing as one could have done, I suppose—one's own mother's maid; we've known her since she was so high. I see it now that—I've got over the attack.

HAROLD. But, heavens! if you're no longer keen on her, Bill! Do apply your reason, old boy.

There is silence; while BILL again paces up and down.

BILL. If you think I care two straws about the morality of the thing.

HAROLD. Oh! my dear old man! Of course not!

BILL. It's simply that I shall feel such a d—d skunk, if I leave her in the lurch, with everybody knowing. Try it yourself; you'd soon see!

HAROLD. Poor old chap!

BILL. It's not as if she'd tried to force me into it. And she's a soft little thing. Why I ever made such a sickening ass of myself, I can't think. I never meant—

HAROLD. No, I know! But, don't do anything rash, Bill; keep your head, old man!

BILL. I don't see what loss I should be, if I did clear out of the country. [The sound of cannoning billiard balls is heard] Who's that knocking the balls about?

HAROLD. John, I expect. [The sound ceases.]

BILL. He's coming in here. Can't stand that!

As LATTER appears from the billiard-room, he goes hurriedly out.

LATTER. Was that Bill?

HAROLD. Yes.

LATTER. Well?

HAROLD. [Pacing up and down in his turn] Rat in a cage is a fool to him. This is the sort of thing you read of in books, John! What price your argument with Runny now? Well, it's not too late for you luckily.

LATTER. What do you mean?

HAROLD. You needn't connect yourself with this eccentric family!

LATTER. I'm not a bounder, Harold.

HAROLD. Good!

LATTER. It's terrible for your sisters.

HAROLD. Deuced lucky we haven't a lot of people staying here! Poor mother! John, I feel awfully bad about this. If something isn't done, pretty mess I shall be in.

LATTER. How?

HAROLD. There's no entail. If the Governor cuts Bill off, it'll all come to me.

LATTER. Oh!

HAROLD. Poor old Bill! I say, the play! Nemesis! What? Moral! Caste don't matter. Got us fairly on the hop.

LATTER. It's too bad of Bill. It really is. He's behaved disgracefully.

HAROLD. [Warningly] Well! There are thousands of fellows who'd never dream of sticking to the girl, considering what it means.

LATTER. Perfectly disgusting!

HAROLD. Hang you, John! Haven't you any human sympathy? Don't you know how these things come about? It's like a spark in a straw-yard.

LATTER. One doesn't take lighted pipes into strawyards unless one's an idiot, or worse.

HAROLD. H'm! [With a grin] You're not allowed tobacco. In the good old days no one would have thought anything of this. My great-grandfather—

LATTER. Spare me your great-grandfather.

HAROLD. I could tell you of at least a dozen men I know who've been through this same business, and got off scot-free; and now because Bill's going to play the game, it'll smash him up.

LATTER. Why didn't he play the game at the beginning?

HAROLD. I can't stand your sort, John. When a thing like this happens, all you can do is to cry out: Why didn't he—? Why didn't she—? What's to be done—that's the point!

LATTER. Of course he'll have to—.

HAROLD. Ha!

LATTER. What do you mean by—that?

HAROLD. Look here, John! You feel in your bones that a marriage'll be hopeless, just as I do, knowing Bill and the girl and everything! Now don't you?

LATTER. The whole thing is—is most unfortunate.

HAROLD. By Jove! I should think it was!

As he speaks CHRISTINE and KEITH Come in from the billiard-room. He is still in splashed hunting clothes, and looks exceptionally weathered, thin-lipped, reticent. He lights a cigarette and sinks into an armchair. Behind them DOT and JOAN have come stealing in.

CHRISTINE. I've told Ronny.

JOAN. This waiting for father to be told is awful.

HAROLD. [To KEITH] Where did you leave the old man?

KEITH. Clackenhamp. He'll be home in ten minutes.

DOT. Mabel's going. [They all stir, as if at fresh consciousness of discomfiture]. She walked into Gracely and sent herself a telegram.

HAROLD. Phew!

DOT. And we shall say good-bye, as if nothing had happened.

HAROLD. It's up to you, Ronny.

KEITH, looking at JOAN, slowly emits smoke; and LATTER passing his arm through JOAN'S, draws her away with him into the billiard-room.

KEITH. Dot?

DOT. I'm not a squeamy squirrel.

KEITH. Anybody seen the girl since?

DOT. Yes.

HAROLD. Well?

DOT. She's just sitting there.

CHRISTINE. [In a hard voice] As we're all doing.

DOT. She's so soft, that's what's so horrible. If one could only feel—!

KEITH. She's got to face the music like the rest of us.

DOT. Music! Squeaks! Ugh! The whole thing's like a concertina, and some one jiggling it!

They all turn as the door opens, and a FOOTMAN enters with a tray of whiskey, gin, lemons, and soda water. In dead silence the FOOTMAN puts the tray down.

HAROLD. [Forcing his voice] Did you get a run, Ronny? [As KEITH nods] What point?

KEITH. Eight mile.

FOOTMAN. Will you take tea, sir?

KEITH. No, thanks, Charles!

In dead silence again the FOOTMAN goes out, and they all look after him.

HAROLD. [Below his breath] Good Gad! That's a squeeze of it!

KEITH. What's our line of country to be?

CHRISTINE. All depends on father.

KEITH. Sir William's between the devil and the deep sea, as it strikes me.

CHRISTINE. He'll simply forbid it utterly, of course.

KEITH. H'm! Hard case! Man who reads family prayers, and lessons on Sunday forbids son to—

CHRISTINE, Ronny!

KEITH. Great Scott! I'm not saying Bill ought to marry her. She's got to stand the racket. But your Dad will have a tough job to take up that position.

DOT. Awfully funny!

CHRISTINE. What on earth d'you mean, Dot?

DOT. Morality in one eye, and your title in the other!

CHRISTINE. Rubbish!

HAROLD. You're all reckoning without your Bill.

KEITH. Ye-es. Sir William can cut him off; no mortal power can help the title going down, if Bill chooses to be such a— [He draws in his breath with a sharp hiss.]

HAROLD. I won't take what Bill ought to have; nor would any of you girls, I should think.

CHRISTINE and DOT. Of course not!

KEITH. [Patting his wife's arm] Hardly the point, is it?

DOT. If it wasn't for mother! Freda's just as much of a lady as most girls. Why shouldn't he marry her, and go to Canada? It's what he's really fit for.

HAROLD. Steady on, Dot!

DOT. Well, imagine him in Parliament! That's what he'll come to, if he stays here—jolly for the country!

CHRISTINE. Don't be cynical! We must find a way of stopping Bill.

DOT. Me cynical!

CHRISTINE. Let's go and beg him, Ronny!

KEITH. No earthly! The only hope is in the girl.

DOT. She hasn't the stuff in her!

HAROLD. I say! What price young Dunning! Right about face! Poor old Dad!

CHRISTINE. It's past joking, Harold!

DOT. [Gloomily] Old Studdenham's better than most relations by marriage!

KEITH. Thanks!

CHRISTINE. It's ridiculous—monstrous! It's fantastic!

HAROLD. [Holding up his hand] There's his horse going round. He's in!

They turn from listening to the sound, to see LADY CHESHIRE coming from the billiard-room. She is very pale. They all rise and DOT puts an arm round her; while KEITH pushes forward his chair. JOAN and LATTER too have come stealing back.

LADY CHESHIRE. Thank you, Ronny!

[She sits down.]

DOT. Mother, you're shivering! Shall I get you a fur?

LADY CHESHIRE. No, thanks, dear!

DOT. [In a low voice] Play up, mother darling!

LADY CHESHIRE. [Straightening herself] What sort of a run, Ronny?

KEITH. Quite fair, M'm. Brazier's to Caffyn's Dyke, good straight line.

LADY CHESHIRE. And the young horse?

KEITH. Carries his ears in your mouth a bit, that's all. [Putting his hand on her shoulder] Cheer up, Mem-Sahib!

CHRISTINE. Mother, must anything be said to father? Ronny thinks it all depends on her. Can't you use your influence? [LADY CHESHIRE shakes her head.]

CHRISTINE. But, mother, it's desperate.

DOT. Shut up, Chris! Of course mother can't. We simply couldn't beg her to let us off!

CHRISTINE. There must be some way. What do you think in your heart, mother?

DOT. Leave mother alone!

CHRISTINE. It must be faced, now or never.

DOT. [In a low voice] Haven't you any self-respect?

CHRISTINE. We shall be the laughing-stock of the whole county. Oh! mother do speak to her! You know it'll be misery for both of them. [LADY CHESHIRE bows her head] Well, then? [LADY CHESHIRE shakes her head.]

CHRISTINE. Not even for Bill's sake?

DOT. Chris!

CHRISTINE. Well, for heaven's sake, speak to Bill again, mother! We ought all to go on our knees to him.

LADY CHESHIRE. He's with your father now.

HAROLD. Poor old Bill!

CHRISTINE. [Passionately] He didn't think of us! That wretched girl!

LADY CHESHIRE. Chris!

CHRISTINE. There are limits!

LADY CHESHIRE. Not to self-control.

CHRISTINE. No, mother! I can't I never shall—Something must be done! You know what Bill is. He rushes at things so, when he gets his head down. Oh! do try! It's only fair to her, and all of us!

LADY CHESHIRE. [Painfully] There are things one can't do.

CHRISTINE. But it's Bill! I know you can make her give him up, if you'll only say all you can. And, after all, what's coming won't affect her as if she'd been a lady. Only you can do it, mother: Do back me up, all of you! It's the only way!

Hypnotised by their private longing for what CHRISTINE has been urging they have all fixed their eyes on LADY CHESHIRE, who looks from, face to face, and moves her hands as if in physical pain.

CHRISTINE. [Softly] Mother!

LADY CHESHIRE suddenly rises, looking towards the billiard-room door, listening. They all follow her eyes. She sits down again, passing her hand over her lips, as SIR WILLIAM enters. His hunting clothes are splashed; his face very grim and set. He walks to the fore without a glance at any one, and stands looking down into it. Very quietly, every one but LADY CHESHIRE steals away.

LADY CHESHIRE. What have you done?

SIR WILLIAM. You there!

LADY CHESHIRE. Don't keep me in suspense!

SIR WILLIAM. The fool! My God! Dorothy! I didn't think I had a blackguard for a son, who was a fool into the bargain.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Rising] If he were a blackguard he would not be what you call a fool.

SIR WILLIAM. [After staring angrily, makes her a slight bow] Very well!

LADY CHESHIRE. [In a low voice] Bill, don't be harsh. It's all too terrible.

SIR WILLIAM. Sit down, my dear.

[She resumes her seat, and he turns back to the fire.]

SIR WILLIAM. In all my life I've never been face to face with a thing like this. [Gripping the mantelpiece so hard that his hands and arms are seen shaking] You ask me to be calm. I am trying to be. Be good enough in turn not to take his part against me.

LADY CHESHIRE. Bill!

SIR WILLIAM. I am trying to think. I understand that you've known this—piece of news since this morning. I've known it ten minutes. Give me a little time, please. [Then, after a silence] Where's the girl?

LADY CHESHIRE. In the workroom.

SIR WILLIAM. [Raising his clenched fist] What in God's name is he about?

LADY CHESHIRE. What have you said to him?

SIR WILLIAM. Nothing-by a miracle. [He breaks away from the fire and walks up and down] My family goes back to the thirteenth century. Nowadays they laugh at that! I don't! Nowadays they laugh at everything—they even laugh at the word lady. I married you, and I don't Married his mother's maid! By George! Dorothy! I don't know what we've done to deserve this; it's a death blow! I'm not prepared to sit down and wait for it. By Gad! I am not. [With sudden fierceness] There are plenty in these days who'll be glad enough for this to happen; plenty of these d—d Socialists and Radicals, who'll laugh their souls out over what they haven't the bowels to sees a—tragedy. I say it would be a tragedy; for you, and me, and all of us. You and I were brought up, and we've brought the children up, with certain beliefs, and wants, and habits. A man's past—his traditions—he can't get rid of them. They're—they're himself! [Suddenly] It shan't go on.

LADY CHESHIRE. What's to prevent it?

SIR WILLIAM. I utterly forbid this piece of madness. I'll stop it.

LADY CHESHIRE. But the thing we can't stop.

SIR WILLIAM. Provision must be made.

LADY CHESHIRE. The unwritten law!

SIR WILLIAM. What! [Suddenly perceiving what she is alluding to] You're thinking of young—young—[Shortly] I don't see the connection.

LADY CHESHIRE. What's so awful, is that the boy's trying to do what's loyal—and we—his father and mother—!

SIR WILLIAM. I'm not going to see my eldest son ruin his life. I must think this out.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Beneath her breath] I've tried that—it doesn't help.

SIR WILLIAM. This girl, who was born on the estate, had the run of the house—brought up with money earned from me—nothing but kindness from all of us; she's broken the common rules of gratitude and decency—she lured him on, I haven't a doubt!

LADY CHESHIRE. [To herself] In a way, I suppose.

SIR WILLIAM. What! It's ruin. We've always been here. Who the deuce are we if we leave this place? D'you think we could stay? Go out and meet everybody just as if nothing had happened? Good-bye to any prestige, political, social, or anything! This is the sort of business nothing can get over. I've seen it before. As to that other matter—it's soon forgotten—constantly happening—Why, my own grandfather—!

LADY CHESHIRE. Does he help?

SIR WILLIAM. [Stares before him in silence-suddenly] You must go to the girl. She's soft. She'll never hold out against you.

LADY CHESHIRE. I did before I knew what was in front of her—I said all I could. I can't go again now. I can't do it, Bill.

SIR WILLIAM. What are you going to do, then—fold your hands? [Then as LADY CHESHIRE makes a move of distress.] If he marries her, I've done with him. As far as I'm concerned he'll cease to exist. The title—I can't help. My God! Does that meet your wishes?

LADY CHESHIRE. [With sudden fire] You've no right to put such an alternative to me. I'd give ten years of my life to prevent this marriage. I'll go to Bill. I'll beg him on my knees.

SIR WILLIAM. Then why can't you go to the girl? She deserves no consideration. It's not a question of morality: Morality be d—d!

LADY CHESHIRE. But not self-respect....

SIR WILLIAM. What! You're his mother!

LADY CHESHIRE. I've tried; I [putting her hand to her throat] can't get it out.

SIR WILLIAM. [Staring at her] You won't go to her? It's the only chance. [LADY CHESHIRE turns away.]

SIR WILLIAM. In the whole course of our married life, Dorothy, I've never known you set yourself up

against me. I resent this, I warn you—I resent it. Send the girl to me. I'll do it myself.

With a look back at him LADY CHESHIRE goes out into the corridor.

SIR WILLIAM. This is a nice end to my day!

He takes a small china cup from of the mantel-piece; it breaks with the pressure of his hand, and falls into the fireplace. While he stands looking at it blankly, there is a knock.

SIR WILLIAM. Come in!

FREDA enters from the corridor.

SIR WILLIAM. I've asked you to be good enough to come, in order that—[pointing to chair]—You may sit down.

But though she advances two or three steps, she does not sit down.

SIR WILLIAM. This is a sad business.

FREDA. [Below her breath] Yes, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM. [Becoming conscious of the depths of feeling before him] I—er—are you attached to my son?

FREDA. [In a whisper] Yes.

SIR WILLIAM. It's very painful to me to have to do this. [He turns away from her and speaks to the fire.] I sent for you—to—ask— [quickly] How old are you?

FREDA. Twenty-two.

SIR WILLIAM. [More resolutely] Do you expect me to sanction such a mad idea as a marriage?

FREDA. I don't expect anything.

SIR WILLIAM. You know—you haven't earned the right to be considered.

FREDA. Not yet!

SIR WILLIAM. What! That oughtn't to help you! On the contrary. Now brace yourself up, and listen to me!

She stands waiting to hear her sentence. SIR WILLIAM looks at her; and his glance gradually wavers.

SIR WILLIAM. I've not a word to say for my son. He's behaved like a scamp.

FREDA. Oh! no!

SIR WILLIAM. [With a silencing gesture] At the same, time—What made you forget yourself? You've no excuse, you know.

FREDA. No.

SIR WILLIAM. You'll deserve all you'll get. Confound it! To expect me to—It's intolerable! Do you know where my son is?

FREDA. [Faintly] I think he's in the billiard-room with my lady.

SIR WILLIAM. [With renewed resolution] I wanted to—to put it to you—as a—as a—what! [Seeing her stand so absolutely motionless, looking at him, he turns abruptly, and opens the billiard-room door] I'll speak to him first. Come in here, please! [To FREDA] Go in, and wait!

LADY CHESHIRE and BILL Come in, and FREDA passing them, goes into the billiard-room to wait.

SIR WILLIAM. [Speaking with a pause between each sentence] Your mother and I have spoken of this—calamity. I imagine that even you have some dim perception of the monstrous nature of it. I must tell you this: If you do this mad thing, you fend for yourself. You'll receive nothing from me now or hereafter. I consider that only due to the position our family has always held here. Your brother will

take your place. We shall—get on as best we can without you. [There is a dead silence till he adds sharply] Well!

BILL. I shall marry her.

LADY CHESHIRE. Oh! Bill! Without love—without anything!

BILL. All right, mother! [To SIR WILLIAM] you've mistaken your man, sir. Because I'm a rotter in one way, I'm not necessarily a rotter in all. You put the butt end of the pistol to Dunning's head yesterday, you put the other end to mine to-day. Well! [He turns round to go out] Let the d—d thing off!

LADY CHESHIRE. Bill!

BILL. [Turning to her] I'm not going to leave her in the lurch.

SIR WILLIAM. Do me the justice to admit that I have not attempted to persuade you to.

BILL. No! you've chucked me out. I don't see what else you could have done under the circumstances. It's quite all right. But if you wanted me to throw her over, father, you went the wrong way to work, that's all; neither you nor I are very good at seeing consequences.

SIR WILLIAM. Do you realise your position?

BILL. [Grimly] I've a fair notion of it.

SIR WILLIAM. [With a sudden outburst] You have none—not the faintest, brought up as you've been.

BILL. I didn't bring myself up.

SIR WILLIAM. [With a movement of uncontrolled anger, to which his son responds] You—ungrateful young dog!

LADY CHESHIRE. How can you—both?
[They drop their eyes, and stand silent.]

SIR WILLIAM. [With grimly suppressed emotion] I am speaking under the stress of very great pain—some consideration is due to me. This is a disaster which I never expected to have to face. It is a matter which I naturally can never hope to forget. I shall carry this down to my death. We shall all of us do that. I have had the misfortune all my life to believe in our position here—to believe that we counted for something—that the country wanted us. I have tried to do my duty by that position. I find in one moment that it is gone—gone—gone. My philosophy is not equal to that. To countenance this marriage would be unnatural.

BILL. I know. I'm sorry. I've got her into this—I don't see any other way out. It's a bad business for me, father, as well as for you—

He stops, seeing that JACKSON has come in, and is standing there waiting.

JACKSON. Will you speak to Studdenham, Sir William? It's about young Dunning.

After a moment of dead silence, SIR WILLIAM nods, and the butler withdraws.

BILL. [Stolidly] He'd better be told.

SIR WILLIAM. He shall be.

STUDDENHAM enters, and touches his forehead to them all with a comprehensive gesture.

STUDDENHAM. Good evenin', my lady! Evenin', Sir William!

STUDDENHAM. Glad to be able to tell you, the young man's to do the proper thing. Asked me to let you know, Sir William. Banns'll be up next Sunday. [Struck by the silence, he looks round at all three in turn, and suddenly seeing that LADY CHESHIRE is shivering] Beg pardon, my lady, you're shakin' like a leaf!

BILL. [Blurting it out] I've a painful piece of news for you, Studdenham; I'm engaged to your daughter. We're to be married at once.

STUDDENHAM. I—don't—understand you—sir.

BILL. The fact is, I've behaved badly; but I mean to put it straight.

STUDDENHAM. I'm a little deaf. Did you say—my daughter?

SIR WILLIAM. There's no use mincing matters, Studdenham. It's a thunderbolt—young Dunning's case over again.

STUDDENHAM. I don't rightly follow. She's—You've—! I must see my daughter. Have the goodness to send for her, m'lady.

LADY CHESHIRE goes to the billiard-room, and calls: "FREDA, come here, please."

STUDDENHAM. [TO SIR WILLIAM] YOU tell me that my daughter's in the position of that girl owing to your son? Men ha' been shot for less.

BILL. If you like to have a pot at me, Studdenham you're welcome.

STUDDENHAM. [Averting his eyes from BILL at the sheer idiocy of this sequel to his words] I've been in your service five and twenty years, Sir William; but this is man to man—this is!

SIR WILLIAM. I don't deny that, Studdenham.

STUDDENHAM. [With eyes shifting in sheer anger] No—'twouldn't be very easy. Did I understand him to say that he offers her marriage?

SIR WILLIAM. You did.

STUDDENHAM. [Into his beard] Well—that's something! [Moving his hands as if wringing the neck of a bird] I'm tryin' to see the rights o' this.

SIR WILLIAM. [Bitterly] You've all your work cut out for you, Studdenham.

Again STUDDENHAM makes the unconscious wringing movement with his hands.

LADY CHESHIRE. [Turning from it with a sort of horror] Don't, Studdenham! Please!

STUDDENHAM. What's that, m'lady?

LADY CHESHIRE. [Under her breath] Your—your—hands.

While STUDDENHAM is still staring at her, FREDA is seen standing in the doorway, like a black ghost.

STUDDENHAM. Come here! You! [FREDA moves a few steps towards her father] When did you start this?

FREDA. [Almost inaudibly] In the summer, father.

LADY CHESHIRE. Don't be harsh to her!

STUDDENHAM. Harsh! [His eyes again move from side to side as if pain and anger had bewildered them. Then looking sideways at FREDA, but in a gentler voice] And when did you tell him about—what's come to you?

FREDA. Last night.

STUDDENHAM. Oh! [With sudden menace] You young—! [He makes a convulsive movement of one hand; then, in the silence, seems to lose grip of his thoughts, and pits his hand up to his head] I want to clear me mind a bit—I don't see it plain at all. [Without looking at BILL] 'Tis said there's been an offer of marriage?

BILL. I've made it, I stick to it.

STUDDENHAM. Oh! [With slow, puzzled anger] I want time to get the pith o' this. You don't say anything, Sir William?

SIR WILLIAM. The facts are all before you.

STUDDENHAM. [Scarcely moving his lips] M'lady?

LADY CHESHIRE is silent.

STUDDENHAM. [Stammering] My girl was—was good enough for any man. It's not for him that's—that's to look down on her. [To FREDa] You hear the handsome offer that's been made you? Well? [FREDa moistens her lips and tries to speak, but cannot] If nobody's to speak a word, we won't get much forrarder. I'd like for you to say what's in your mind, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM. I—If my son marries her he'll have to make his own way.

STUDDENHAM. [Savagely] I'm not puttin' thought to that.

SIR WILLIAM. I didn't suppose you were, Studdenham. It appears to rest with your daughter. [He suddenly takes out his handkerchief, and puts it to his forehead] Infernal fires they make up here!

LADY CHESHIRE, who is again shivering desperately, as if with intense cold, makes a violent attempt to control her shuddering.

STUDDENHAM. [Suddenly] There's luxuries that's got to be paid for. [To FREDa] Speak up, now.

FREDa turns slowly and looks up at SIR WILLIAM; he involuntarily raises his hand to his mouth. Her eyes travel on to LADY CHESHIRE, who faces her, but so deadly pale that she looks as if she were going to faint. The girl's gaze passes on to BILL, standing rigid, with his jaw set.

FREDa. I want—[Then flinging her arm up over her eyes, she turns from him] No!

SIR WILLIAM. Ah!

At that sound of profound relief, STUDDENHAM, whose eyes have been following his daughter's, moves towards SIR WILLIAM, all his emotion turned into sheer angry pride.

STUDDENHAM. Don't be afraid, Sir William! We want none of you! She'll not force herself where she's not welcome. She may ha' slipped her good name, but she'll keep her proper pride. I'll have no charity marriage in my family.

SIR WILLIAM. Steady, Studdenham!

STUDDENHAM. If the young gentleman has tired of her in three months, as a blind man can see by the looks of him—she's not for him!

BILL. [Stepping forward] I'm ready to make it up to her.

STUDDENHAM. Keep back, there? [He takes hold of FREDa, and looks around him] Well! She's not the first this has happened to since the world began, an' she won't be the last. Come away, now, come away!

Taking FREDa by the shoulders, he guides her towards the door.

SIR WILLIAM. D—n 'it, Studdenham! Give us credit for something!

STUDDENHAM. [Turning his face and eyes lighted up by a sort of smiling snarl] Ah! I do that, Sir William. But there's things that can't be undone!

He follows FREDa Out. As the door closes, SIR WILLIAM'S Calm gives way. He staggers past his wife, and sinks heavily, as though exhausted, into a chair by the fire. BILL, following FREDa and STUDDENHAM, has stopped at the shut door. LADY CHESHIRE moves swiftly close to him. The door of the billiard-room is opened, and DOT appears. With a glance round, she crosses quickly to her mother.

DOT. [In a low voice] Mabel's just going, mother! [Almost whispering] Where's Freda? Is it—Has she really had the pluck?

LADY CHESHIRE bending her head for "Yes," goes out into the billiard-room. DOT clasps her hands together, and standing there in the middle of the room, looks from her brother to her father, from her father to her brother. A quaint little pitying smile comes on her lips. She gives a faint shrug of her shoulders.

The curtain falls.

THE LITTLE DREAM

An Allegory in six scenes

CHARACTERS

SEELCHEN, a mountain girl

LAMOND, a climber

FELSMAN, a glide

CHARACTERS IN THE DREAM

THE GREAT HORN |

THE COW HORN | mountains

THE WINE HORN |

THE EDELWEISS |

THE ALPENROSE | flowers

THE GENTIAN |

THE MOUNTAIN DANDELION |

VOICES AND FIGURES IN THE DREAM

**COWBELLS MOUNTAIN AIR FAR VIEW OF ITALY DISTANT FLUME OF STEAM THINGS IN BOOKS MOTH
CHILDREN THREE DANCING YOUTHS THREE DANCING GIRLS THE FORMS OF WORKERS THE FORMS OF WHAT
IS MADE BY WORK DEATH BY SLUMBER DEATH BY DROWNING FLOWER CHILDREN GOATHERD GOAT BOYS
GOAT GOD THE FORMS OF SLEEP**

SCENE I

It is just after sunset of an August evening. The scene is a room in a mountain hut, furnished only with a table, benches, and a low broad window seat. Through this window three rocky peaks are seen by the light of a moon which is slowly whitening the last hues of sunset. An oil lamp is burning. SEELCHEN, a mountain girl, eighteen years old, is humming a folk-song, and putting away in a cupboard freshly washed soup-bowls and glasses. She is dressed in a tight-fitting black velvet bodice, square-cut at the neck and partly filled in with a gay handkerchief, coloured rose-pink, blue, and golden, like the alpen-rose, the gentian, and the mountain dandelion; alabaster beads, pale as edelweiss, are round her throat; her stiffened, white linen sleeves finish at the elbow; and her full well-worn skirt is of gentian blue. The two thick plaits of her hair are crossed, and turned round her head. As she puts away the last bowl, there is a knock; and LAMOND opens the outer door. He is young, tanned, and good-looking, dressed like a climber, and carries a plaid, a ruck-sack, and an ice-axe.

LAMOND. Good evening!

SEELCHEN. Good evening, gentle Sir!

LAMOND. My name is Lamond. I'm very late I fear.

SEELCHEN. Do you wish to sleep here?

LAMOND. Please.

SEELCHEN. All the beds are full—it is a pity. I will call Mother.

LAMOND. I've come to go up the Great Horn at sunrise.

SEELCHEN. [Awed] The Great Horn! But he is impossible.

LAMOND. I am going to try that.

SEELCHEN. There is the Wine Horn, and the Cow Horn.

LAMOND. I have climbed them.

SEELCHEN. But he is so dangerous—it is perhaps—death.

LAMOND. Oh! that's all right! One must take one's chance.

SEELCHEN. And father has hurt his foot. For guide, there is only Mans Felsman.

LAMOND. The celebrated Felsman?

SEELCHEN. [Nodding; then looking at him with admiration] Are you that Herr Lamond who has climbed all our little mountains this year?

LAMOND. All but that big fellow.

SEELCHEN. We have heard of you. Will you not wait a day for father's foot?

LAMOND. Ah! no. I must go back home to-morrow.

SEELCHEN. The gracious Sir is in a hurry.

LAMOND. [Looking at her intently] Alas!

SEELCHEN. Are you from London? Is it very big?

LAMOND. Six million souls.

SEELCHEN. Oh! [After a little pause] I have seen Cortina twice.

LAMOND. Do you live here all the year?

SEELCHEN. In winter in the valley.

LAMOND. And don't you want to see the world?

SEELCHEN. Sometimes. [Going to a door, she calls softly] Hans! [Then pointing to another door] There are seven German gentlemen asleep in there!

LAMOND. Oh God!

SEELCHEN. Please? They are here to see the sunrise. [She picks up a little book that has dropped from LAMOND'S pocket] I have read several books.

LAMOND. This is by the great English poet. Do you never make poetry here, and dream dreams, among your mountains?

SEELCHEN. [Slowly shaking her head] See! It is the full moon.

While they stand at the window looking at the moon, there enters a lean, well-built, taciturn young man dressed in Loden.

SEELCHEN. Hans!

FELSMAN. [In a deep voice] The gentleman wishes me?

SEELCHEN. [Awed] The Great Horn for to-morrow! [Whispering to him]
It is the celebrated London one.

FELSMAN. The Great Horn is not possible.

LAMOND. You say that? And you're the famous Felsman?

FELSMAN. [Grimly] We start at dawn.

SEELCHEN. It is the first time for years!

LAMOND. [Placing his plaid and rucksack on the window bench] Can I sleep here?

SEELCHEN. I will see; perhaps—

[She runs out up some stairs]

FELSMAN. [Taking blankets from the cupboard and spreading them on the window seat] So!

As he goes out into the air. SEELCHEN comes slipping in again
with a lighted candle.

SEELCHEN. There is still one bed. This is too hard for you.

LAMOND. Oh! thanks; but that's all right.

SEELCHEN. To please me!

LAMOND. May I ask your name?

SEELCHEN. Seelchen.

LAMOND. Little soul, that means—doesn't it? To please you I would sleep with seven German gentlemen.

SEELCHEN. Oh! no; it is not necessary.

LAMOND. [With a grave bow] At your service, then.
[He prepares to go]

SEELCHEN. Is it very nice in towns, in the World, where you come from?

LAMOND. When I'm there I would be here; but when I'm here I would be there.

SEELCHEN. [Clasping her hands] That is like me but I am always here.

LAMOND. Ah! yes; there is no one like you in towns.

SEELCHEN. In two places one cannot be. [Suddenly] In the towns there are theatres, and there is beautiful fine work, and—dancing, and—churches—and trains—and all the things in books—and—

LAMOND. Misery.

SEELCHEN. But there is life.

LAMOND. And there is death.

SEELCHEN. To-morrow, when you have climbed—will you not come back?

LAMOND. No.

SEELCHEN. You have all the world; and I have nothing.

LAMOND. Except Felsman, and the mountains.

SEELCHEN. It is not good to eat only bread.

LAMOND. [Looking at her hard] I would like to eat you!

SEELCHEN. But I am not nice; I am full of big wants—like the cheese with holes.

LAMOND. I shall come again.

SEELCHEN. There will be no more hard mountains left to climb. And if it is not exciting, you do not

care.

LAMOND. O wise little soul!

SEELCHEN. No. I am not wise. In here it is always aching.

LAMOND. For the moon?

SEELCHEN. Yes. [Then suddenly] From the big world you will remember?

LAMOND. [Taking her hand] There is nothing in the big world so sweet as this.

SEELCHEN. [Wisely] But there is the big world itself.

LAMOND. May I kiss you, for good-night?

She puts her face forward; and he kisses her cheek, and, suddenly, her lips. Then as she draws away.

LAMOND. I am sorry, little soul.

SEELCHEN. That's all right!

LAMOND. [Taking the candle] Dream well! Goodnight!

SEELCHEN. [Softly] Good-night!

FELSMAN. [Coming in from the air, and eyeing them] It is cold—it will be fine.

LAMOND still looking back goes up the stairs; and FELSMAN waits for him to pass.

SEELCHEN. [From the window seat] It was hard for him here. I thought.

He goes up to her, stays a moment looking down then bends and kisses her hungrily.

SEELCHEN. Art thou angry?

He does not answer, but turning out the lamp, goes into an inner room.

SEELCHEN sits gazing through the window at the peaks bathed in full moonlight. Then, drawing the blankets about her, she snuggles down on the window seat.

SEELCHEN. [In a sleepy voice] They kissed me—both. [She sleeps]

The scene falls quite dark

SCENE II

The scene is slowly illumined as by dawn. SEELCHEN is still lying on the window seat. She sits up, freeing her face and hands from the blankets, changing the swathings of deep sleep for the filmy coverings of a dream. The wall of the hut has vanished; there is nothing between her and the three mountains veiled in mist, save a through of darkness. There, as the peaks of the mountains brighten, they are seen to have great faces.

SEELCHEN. Oh! They have faces!

The face of THE WINE HORN is the profile of a beardless youth. The face of THE COW HORN is that of a mountain shepherd, solemn, and broom, with fierce black eyes, and a black beard. Between them THE GREAT HORN, whose hair is of snow, has a high, beardless visage, as of carved bronze, like a male sphinx, serene, without cruelty. Far down below the faces of the peaks, above the trough of darkness, are peeping out the four little heads of the flowers of EDELWEISS, and GENTIAN, MOUNTAIN DANDELION, and ALPENROSE; on their heads are crowns made of their several flowers, all powdered with dewdrops; and when THE FLOWERS lift their child-faces little tinkling bells ring.

All around the peaks there is nothing but blue sky.

EDELWEISS. [In a tiny voice] Would you? Would you? Would you?
Ah! ha!

GENTIAN, M. DANDELION, ALPENROSE [With their bells ranging enviously] Oo-oo-oo!

From behind the Cow HORN are heard the voices of COWBELLS
and MOUNTAIN AIR:

"Clinkel-clink! Clinkel-clink!"
"Mountain air! Mountain air!"

From behind THE WINE HORN rise the rival voices Of VIEW OF
ITALY, FLUME OF STEAM, and THINGS IN BOOKS:

"I am Italy! Italy!"

"See me—steam in the distance!"

"O remember the things in books!"

And all call out together, very softly, with THE FLOWERS ringing their
bells. Then far away like an echo comes a sighing:

"Mountain air! Mountain air!"

And suddenly the Peak of THE COW HORN speaks in a voice as of one
unaccustomed.

THE COW HORN. Amongst kine and my black-brown sheep I Live; I am silence, and monotony; I am
the solemn hills. I am fierceness, and the mountain wind; clean pasture, and wild rest. Look in my eyes.
love me alone!

SEELCHEN. [Breathless] The Cow Horn! He is speaking for Felsman and the mountains. It is the half
of my heart!

THE FLOWERS laugh happily.

THE COW HORN. I stalk the eternal hills—I drink the mountain snows. My eyes are the colour of
burned wine; in them lives melancholy. The lowing of the kine, the wind, the sound of falling rocks, the
running of the torrents; no other talk know I. Thoughts simple, and blood hot, strength huge—the cloak
of gravity.

SEELCHEN. Yes. yes! I want him. He is strong!

The voices of COWBELLS and MOUNTAIN AIR cry out together:

"Clinkel-clink! Clinkel-clink!"

"Mountain air! Mountain air!"

THE COW HORN. Little soul! Hold to me! Love me! Live with me under the stars!

SEELCHEN. [Below her breath] I am afraid.

And suddenly the Peak of THE WINE HORN speaks in a youth's voice.

THE WINE HORN. I am the will o' the wisp that dances thro' the streets; I am the cooing dove of
Towns, from the plane trees and the chestnuts' shade. From day to day all changes, where I burn my
incense to my thousand little gods. In white palaces I dwell, and passionate dark alleys. The life of men
in crowds is mine—of lamplight in the streets at dawn. [Softly] I have a thousand loves. and never one
too long; for I am nimbler than your heifers playing in the sunshine.

THE FLOWERS, ringing in alarm, cry:

"We know them!"

THE WINE HORN. I hear the rustlings of the birth and death of pleasure; and the rattling of swift
wheels. I hear the hungry oaths of men; and love kisses in the airless night. Without me, little soul, you
starve and die,

SEELCHEN. He is speaking for the gentle Sir, and the big world of the Town. It pulls my heart.

THE WINE HORN. My thoughts surpass in number the flowers in your meadows; they fly more swiftly than your eagles on the wind. I drink the wine of aspiration, and the drug of disillusion. Thus am I never dull!

The voices of VIEW OF ITALY, FLUME OF STEAM, and THINGS IN BOOKS are heard calling out together:

"I am Italy, Italy!"

"See me—steam in the distance!"

"O remember, remember!"

THE WINE HORN. Love me, little soul! I paint life fifty colours. I make a thousand pretty things! I twine about your heart!

SEELCHEN. He is honey!

THE FLOWERS ring their bells jealously and cry:

"Bitter! Bitter!"

THE COW HORN. Stay with me, Seelchen! I wake thee with the crystal air.

The voices of COWBELLS and MOUNTAIN AIR tiny out far away:

"Clinkel-clink! Clinkel-clink!"

"Mountain air! Mountain air!"

And THE FLOWERS laugh happily.

THE WINE HORN. Come with me, Seelchen! My fan, Variety, shall wake you!

The voices of VIEW OF ITALY, FLUME OF STEAM and THINGS IN BOOKS chant softly:

"I am Italy! Italy!"

"See me—steam in the distance!"

"O remember, remember!"

And THE FLOWERS moan.

SEELCHEN. [In grief] My heart! It is torn!

THE WINE HORN. With me, little soul, you shall race in the streets. and peep at all secrets. We will hold hands, and fly like the thistle-down.

M. DANDELION. My puff-balls fly faster!

THE WINE HORN. I will show you the sea.

GENTIAN. My blue is deeper!

THE WINE HORN. I will shower on you blushes.

ALPENROSE. I can blush redder!

THE WINE HORN. Little soul, listen! My Jewels! Silk! Velvet!

EDELWEISS. I am softer than velvet!

THE WINE HORN. [Proudly] My wonderful rags!

THE FLOWERS. [Moaning] Of those we have none.

SEELCHEN. He has all things.

THE COW HORN. Mine are the clouds with the dark silvered wings; mine are the rocks on fire with

the sun; and the dewdrops cooler than pearls. Away from my breath of snow and sweet grass, thou wilt droop, little soul.

THE WINE HORN. The dark Clove is my fragrance!

THE FLOWERS ring eagerly, and turning up their faces, cry:

"We too, smell sweet."

But the voices of VIEW OF ITALY, FLUME OF STEAM, and THINGS
IN BOOKS cry out:

"I am Italy! Italy!"

"See me—steam in the distance!"

"O remember! remember!"

SEELCHEN. [Distracted] Oh! it is hard!

THE COW HORN. I will never desert thee.

THE WINE HORN. A hundred times I will desert you, a hundred times come back, and kiss you.

SEELCHEN. [Whispering] Peace for my heart!

THE COW HORN. With me thou shalt lie on the warm wild thyme.

THE FLOWERS laugh happily.

THE WINE HORN. With me you shall lie on a bed of dove's feathers.

THE FLOWERS moan.

THE WINE HORN. I will give you old wine.

THE COW HORN. I will give thee new milk.

THE WINE HORN. Hear my song!

From far away comes the sound as of mandolins.

SEELCHEN. [Clasping her breast] My heart—it is leaving me!

THE COW HORN. Hear my song!

From the distance floats the piping of a Shepherd's reed.

SEELCHEN. [Curving her hand at her ears] The piping! Ah!

THE COW HORN. Stay with me, Seelchen!

THE WINE HORN. Come with me, Seelchen!

THE COW HORN. I give thee certainty!

THE WINE HORN. I give you chance!

THE COW HORN. I give thee peace.

THE WINE HORN. I give you change.

THE COW HORN. I give thee stillness.

THE WINE HORN. I give you voice.

THE COW HORN. I give thee one love.

THE WINE HORN. I give you many.

SEELCHEN. [As if the words were torn from her heart] Both, both—I will love!

And suddenly the Peak of THE GREAT HORN speaks.

THE GREAT HORN. And both thou shalt love, little soul! Thou shalt lie on the hills with Silence; and dance in the cities with Knowledge. Both shall possess thee! The sun and the moon on the mountains shall burn thee; the lamps of the town singe thy wings. small Moth! Each shall seem all the world to thee, each shall seem as thy grave! Thy heart is a feather blown from one mouth to the other. But be not afraid! For the life of a man is for all loves in turn. 'Tis a little raft moored, then sailing out into the blue; a tune caught in a hush, then whispering on; a new-born babe, half courage and half sleep. There is a hidden rhythm. Change. Quietude. Chance. Certainty. The One. The Many. Burn on—thou pretty flame, trying to eat the world! Thou shalt come to me at last, my little soul!

THE VOICES and THE FLOWER-BELLS peal out.

SEELCHEN, enraptured, stretches her arms to embrace the sight and sound, but all fades slowly into dark sleep.

SCENE III

The dark scene again becomes glamorous. SEELCHEN is seen with her hand stretched out towards the Piazza of a little town, with a plane tree on one side, a wall on the other, and from the open doorway of an Inn a pale path of light. Over the Inn hangs a full golden moon. Against the wall, under the glimmer of a lamp, leans a youth with the face of THE WINE HORN, in a crimson dock, thrumming a mandolin, and singing:

"Little star soul
Through the frost fields of night
Roaming alone, disconsolate—
From out the cold
I call thee in
Striking my dark mandolin
Beneath this moon of gold."

From the Inn comes a burst of laughter, and the sound of dancing.

SEELCHEN: [Whispering] It is the big world!

The Youth of THE WINE HORN sings On:

"Pretty grey moth,
Where the strange candles shine,
Seeking for warmth, so desperate—
Ah! fluttering dove
I bid thee win
Striking my dark mandolin
The crimson flame of love."

SEELCHEN. [Gazing enraptured at the Inn] They are dancing!

As SHE speaks, from either side come moth-children, meeting and fluttering up the path of light to the Inn doorway; then wheeling aside, they form again, and again flutter forward.

SEELCHEN. [Holding out her hands] They are real! Their wings are windy.

The Youth of THE WINE HORN sings on;

"Lips of my song,
To the white maiden's heart
Go ye, and whisper, passionate.
These words that burn
'O listening one!
Love that flieth past is gone
Nor ever may return!"

SEELCHEN runs towards him—but the light above him fades; he has become shadow. She turns bewildered to the dancing moth-children —but they vanish before her. At the door of the Inn stands LAMOND in a dark cloak.

SEELCHEN. It is you!

LAMOND. Without my little soul I am cold. Come! [He holds out his arms to her]

SEELCHEN. Shall I be safe?

LAMOND. What is safety? Are you safe in your mountains?

SEELCHEN. Where am I, here?

LAMOND. The Town.

Smiling, he points to the doorway. And silent as shadows there come dancing out, two by two, two girls and two youths. The first girl is dressed in white satin and jewels; and the first youth in black velvet. The second girl is in rags, and a shawl; and the second youth in shirt and corduroys. They dance gravely, each couple as if in a world apart.

SEELCHEN. [Whispering] In the mountains all dance together. Do they never change partners?

LAMOND. How could they, little one? Those are rich, these poor.
But see!

A CORYBANTIC COUPLE come dancing forth. The girl has bare limbs, a flame-coloured shift, and hair bound with red flowers; the youth wears a panther-skin. They pursue not only each other, but the other girls and youths. For a moment all is a furious medley. Then the Corybantic Couple vanish into the Inn, and the first two couples are left, slowly, solemnly dancing, apart from each other as before.

SEELCHEN. [Shuddering] Shall I one day dance like that?

The Youth of THE WINE HORN appears again beneath the lamp. He strikes a loud chord; then as SEELCHEN moves towards that sound the lamp goes out; there is again only blue shadow; but the couples have disappeared into the Inn, and the doorway has grown dark.

SEELCHEN. Ah! What I do not like, he will not let me see.

LAMOND. Will you not come, then, little soul?

SEELCHEN. Always to dance?

LAMOND: Not so!

THE SHUTTERS of the houses are suddenly thrown wide. In a lighted room on one aide of the Inn are seen two pale men and a woman, amongst many clicking machines. On the other side of the Inn, in a forge, are visible two women and a man, but half clothed, making chains.

SEELCHEN. [Recoiling from both sights, in turn] How sad they look —all! What are they making?

In the dark doorway of the Inn a light shines out, and in it is seen a figure, visible only from the waist up, clad in gold-cloth studded with jewels, with a flushed complacent face, holding in one hand a glass of golden wine.

SEELCHEN. It is beautiful. What is it?

LAMOND. Luxury.

SEELCHEN. What is it standing on? I cannot see.

Unseen, THE WINE HORN'S mandolin twangs out.

LAMOND. For that do not look, little soul.

SEELCHEN. Can it not walk? [He shakes his head] Is that all they make here with their sadness?

But again the mandolin twangs out; the shutters fall over the houses; the door of the Inn grows dark.

LAMOND. What is it, then, you would have? Is it learning? There are books here, that, piled on each other, would reach to the stars! [But SEELCHEN shakes her head] There is religion so deep that no man knows what it means. [But SEELCHEN shakes her head] There is religion so shallow, you may have it by turning a handle. We have everything.

SEELCHEN. Is God here?

LAMOND. Who knows? Is God with your goats? [But SEELCHEN shakes her head] What then do you want?

SEELCHEN. Life.

The mandolin twangs out.

LAMOND. [Pointing to his breast] There is but one road to life.

SEELCHEN. Ah! but I do not love.

LAMOND. When a feather dies, is it not loving the wind—the unknown? When the day brings not new things, we are children of sorrow. If darkness and light did not change, could we breathe? Child! To live is to love, to love is to live-seeking for wonder. [And as she draws nearer] See! To love is to peer over the edge, and, spying the little grey flower, to climb down! It has wings; it has flown—again you must climb; it shivers, 'tis but air in your hand—you must crawl, you must cling, you must leap, and still it is there and not there—for the grey flower flits like a moth, and the wind of its wings is all you shall catch. But your eyes shall be shining, your cheeks shall be burning, your breast shall be panting—Ah! little heart! [The scene falls darker] And when the night comes—there it is still, thistledown blown on the dark, and your white hands will reach for it, and your honey breath waft it, and never, never, shall you grasp that wanton thing—but life shall be lovely. [His voice dies to a whisper. He stretches out his arms]

SEELCHEN. [Touching his breast] I will come.

LAMOND. [Drawing her to the dark doorway] Love me!

SEELCHEN. I love!

The mandolin twangs out, the doorway for a moment is all glamorous; and they pass through. Illumined by the glimmer of the lamp the Youth of THE WINE Hour is seen again. And slowly to the chords of his mandolin he begins to sing:

"The windy hours through darkness fly
Canst hear them little heart?
New loves are born, and old loves die,
And kissing lips must part.

"The dusky bees of passing years
Canst see them, soul of mine—
From flower and flower supping tears,
And pale sweet honey wine?

[His voice grown strange and passionate]

"O flame that treads the marsh of time.
Flitting for ever low.
Where, through the black enchanted slime.
We, desperate, following go
Untimely fire, we bid thee stay!
Into dark air above.
The golden gipsy thins away—
So has it been with love!"

While he is singing, the moon grows pale, and dies. It falls dark, save for the glimmer of the lamp beneath which he stands. But as his song ends, the dawn breaks over the houses, the lamp goes out—THE WINE HORN becomes shadow. Then from the doorway of the Inn, in the shrill grey light SEELCHEN comes forth. She is pale, as if wan with living; her eyes like pitch against the powdery whiteness of her face.

SEELCHEN. My heart is old.

But as she speaks, from far away is heard a faint chiming of COWBELLS; and while she stands listening, LAMOND appears in the doorway of the Inn.

LAMOND. Little soul!

SEELCHEN. You! Always you!

LAMOND. I have new wonders.

SEELCHEN. [Mournfully] No.

LAMOND. I swear it! You have not tired of me, that am never the same? It cannot be.

SEELCHEN. Listen!

The chime of THE COWBELLS is heard again.

LAMOND. [Jealously] The music' of dull sleep! Has life, then, with me been sorrow?

SEELCHEN. I do not regret.

LAMOND. Come!

SEELCHEN. [Pointing-to her breast] The bird is tired with flying.
[Touching her lips] The flowers have no dew.

LAMOND. Would you leave me?

SEELCHEN. See!

There, in a streak of the dawn, against the plane tree is seen the Shepherd of THE COW HORN, standing wrapped in his mountain cloak.

LAMOND. What is it?

SEELCHEN. He!

LAMOND. There is nothing. [He holds her fast] I have shown you the marvels of my town—the gay, the bitter wonders. We have known life. If with you I may no longer live, then let us die! See! Here are sweet Deaths by Slumber and by Drowning!

The mandolin twangs out, and from the dim doorway of the Inn come forth the shadowy forms. DEATH BY SLUMBER, and DEATH BY DROWNING. who to a ghostly twanging of mandolins dance slowly towards SEELCHEN. stand smiling at her, and as slowly dance away.

SEELCHEN. [Following] Yes. They are good and sweet.

While she moves towards the Inn. LAMOND'S face becomes transfigured with joy. But just as she reaches the doorway. there is a distant chiming of bells and blowing of pipes, and the Shepherd of THE COW HORN sings:

"To the wild grass come, and the dull far roar
Of the falling rock; to the flowery meads
Of thy mountain home, where the eagles soar,
And the grizzled flock in the sunshine feeds.
To the Alp, where I, in the pale light crowned
With the moon's thin horns, to my pasture roam;
To the silent sky, and the wistful sound
Of the rosy dawns—my daughter, come!"

While HE sings, the sun has risen; and SEELCHEN has turned. with parted lips, and hands stretched out; and the forms of death have vanished.

SEELCHEN. I come.

LAMOND. [Clasping her knees] Little soul! Must I then die, like a gnat when the sun goes down? Without you I am nothing.

SEELCHEN. [Releasing herself] Poor heart—I am gone!

LAMOND. It is dark. [He covers his face with his cloak].

Then as SEELCHEN reaches the Shepherd of THE COW HORN, there is blown a long note of a pipe; the scene falls back; and there rises a far, continual, mingled sound of Cowbells, and Flower Bells, and Pipes.

SCENE IV

The scene slowly brightens with the misty flush of dawn. SEELCHEN stands on a green alp, with all around, nothing but blue sky. A slip of a crescent moon is lying on her back. On a low rock sits a brown faced GOATHERD blowing on a pipe, and the four Flower-children are dancing in their shifts of grey white. and blue, rose-pink, and burnt-gold. Their bells are ringing. as they pelt each other with flowers of their own colours; and each in turn, wheeling, flings one flower at SEELCHEN, who puts them to her lips and eyes.

SEELCHEN. The dew! [She moves towards the rock] Goatherd!

But THE FLOWERS encircle him; and when they wheel away he has vanished. She turns to THE FLOWERS, but they too vanish. The veils of mist are rising.

SEELCHEN. Gone! [She rubs her eyes; then turning once more to the rock, sees FELSMAN standing there, with his arms folded] Thou!

FELSMAN. So thou hast come—like a sick heifer to be healed. Was it good in the Town—that kept thee so long?

SEELCHEN. I do not regret.

FELSMAN. Why then return?

SEELCHEN. I was tired.

FELSMAN. Never again shalt thou go from me!

SEELCHEN. [Mocking] With what wilt thou keep me?

FELSMAN. [Grasping her] Thus.

SEELCHEN. I have known Change—I am no timid maid.

FELSMAN. [Moodily] Aye, thou art different. Thine eyes are hollow —thou art white-faced.

SEELCHEN. [Still mocking] Then what hast thou here that shall keep me?

FELSMAN. The sun.

SEELCHEN. To burn me.

FELSMAN. The air.

There is a faint wailing of wind.

SEELCHEN. To freeze me.

FELSMAN. The silence.

The noise of the wind dies away.

SEELCHEN. Yes, it is lonely.

FELSMAN. Wait! And the flowers shall dance to thee.

And to a ringing of their bells. THE FLOWERS come dancing; till, one by one, they cease, and sink down, nodding, falling asleep.

SEELCHEN. See! Even they grow sleepy here!

FELSMAN. I will call the goats to wake them.

THE GOATHERD is seen again sitting upright on his rock and piping. And there come four little brown, wild-eyed, naked Boys, with Goat's legs and feet, who dance gravely in and out of The Sleeping Flowers; and THE FLOWERS wake, spring up, and fly. Till each Goat, catching his flower has vanished, and THE GOATHERD has ceased to pipe, and lies motionless again on his rock.

FELSMAN. Love me!

SEELCHEN. Thou art rude!

FELSMAN. Love me!

SEELCHEN. Thou art grim!

FELSMAN. Aye. I have no silver tongue. Listen! This is my voice. [Sweeping his arm round all the still alp] It is quiet. From dawn to the first star all is fast. [Laying his hand on her heart] And the wings of the birds shall be still.

SEELCHEN. [Touching his eyes] Thine eyes are fierce. In them I see the wild beasts crouching. In them I see the distance. Are they always fierce?

FELSMAN. Never—to look on thee, my flower.

SEELCHEN. [Touching his hands] Thy hands are rough to pluck flowers. [She breaks away from him to the rock where THE GOATHERD is lying] See! Nothing moves! The very day stands still. Boy! [But THE GOATHERD neither stirs nor answers] He is lost in the blue. [Passionately] Boy! He will not answer me. No one will answer me here.

FELSMAN. [With fierce longing] Am I then no one?

SEELCHEN. Thou?

[The scene darkens with evening]

See! Sleep has stolen the day! It is night already.

There come the female shadow forms of SLEEP, in grey cobweb garments, waving their arms drowsily, wheeling round her.

SEELCHEN. Are you Sleep? Dear Sleep!

Smiling, she holds out her arms to FELSMAN. He takes her swaying form. They vanish, encircled by the forms of SLEEP. It is dark, save for the light of the thin horned moon suddenly grown bright. Then on his rock, to a faint gaping THE GOATHERD sings:

"My goat, my little speckled one.
My yellow-eyed, sweet-smelling.
Let moon and wind and golden sun
And stars beyond all telling
Make, every day, a sweeter grass.
And multiply thy leaping!
And may the mountain foxes pass
And never scent thee sleeping!
Oh! Let my pipe be clear and far.
And let me find sweet water!
No hawk nor udder-seeking jar
Come near thee, little daughter!
May fiery rocks defend, at noon,
Thy tender feet from slipping!
Oh! hear my prayer beneath the moon—
Great Master, Goat-God—skipping!"

There passes in the thin moonlight the Goat-Good Pan; and with a long wail of the pipe THE GOATHERD BOY is silent. Then the moon fades, and all is black; till, in the faint grisly light of the false dawn creeping up, SEELCHEN is seen rising from the side of the sleeping FELSMAN. THE GOATHERD BOY has gone; but by the rock stands the Shepherd of THE COW HORN in his dock.

SEELCHEN. Years, years I have slept. My spirit is hungry. [Then as she sees the Shepherd of THE COW HORN standing there] I know thee now—Life of the earth—the smell of thee, the sight of thee, the taste of thee, and all thy music. I have passed thee and gone by. [She moves away]

FELSMAN. [Waking] Where wouldst thou go?

SEELCHEN. To the edge of the world.

FELSMAN. [Rising and trying to stay her] Thou shalt not leave me!

[But against her smiling gesture he struggles as though against solidity]

SEELCHEN. Friend! The time is on me.

FELSMAN. Were my kisses, then, too rude? Was I too dull?

SEELCHEN. I do not regret.

The Youth of THE WINE HORN is seen suddenly standing opposite the motionless Shepherd of THE COW HORN; and his mandolin twangs out.

FELSMAN. The cursed music of the Town! Is it back to him thou wilt go? [Groping for sight of the hated figure] I cannot see.

SEELCHEN. Fear not! I go ever onward.

FELSMAN. Do not leave me to the wind in the rocks! Without thee love is dead, and I must die.

SEELCHEN. Poor heart! I am gone.

FELSMAN. [Crouching against the rock] It is cold.

At the blowing of the Shepherd's pipe, THE COW HORN stretches forth his hand to her. The mandolin twangs out, and THE WINE HORN holds out his hand. She stands unmoving.

SEELCHEN. Companions. I must go. In a moment it will be dawn.

In Silence THE COW HORN and THE WINE HORN, cover their faces. The false dawn dies. It falls quite dark.

SCENE V

Then a faint glow stealing up, lights the snowy head of THE GREAT HORN, and streams forth on SEELCHEN. To either aide of that path of light, like shadows. THE COW HORN and THE WINE HORN stand with cloaked heads.

SEELCHEN. Great One! I come!

The Peak of THE GREAT HORN speaks in a far-away voice, growing, with the light, clearer and stronger.

Wandering flame, thou restless fever
Burning all things, regretting none;
The winds of fate are stilled for ever—
Thy little generous life is done.
And all its wistful wonderings cease!
Thou traveller to the tideless sea,
Where light and dark, and change and peace,
Are One—Come, little soul, to MYSTERY!

SEELCHEN falling on her knees, bows her head to the ground. The glow slowly fades till the scene is black.

SCENE VI

Then as the blackness lifts, in the dim light of the false dawn filtering through the window of the mountain hut. LAMOND and FELSMAN are seen standing beside SEELCHEN looking down at her asleep on the window seat.

FELSMAN. [Putting out his hand to wake her] In a moment it will be dawn.

She stirs, and her lips move, murmuring.

LAMOND. Let her sleep. She's dreaming.

FELSMAN raises a lantern, till its light falls on her face.
Then the two men move stealthily towards the door, and, as she speaks, pass out.

SEELCHEN. [Rising to her knees, and stretching out her hands with ecstasy] Great One. I come!
[Waking, she looks around, and struggles to her feet] My little dream!

Through the open door, the first flush of dawn shows in the sky.
There is a sound of goat-bells passing.

The curtain falls.

JUSTICE

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JAMES HOW, solicitor
WALTER HOW, solicitor
ROBERT COKESON, their managing clerk
WILLIAM FALDER, their junior clerk
SWEEDLE, their office-boy
WISTER, a detective
COWLEY, a cashier
MR. JUSTICE FLOYD, a judge
HAROLD CLEAVER, an old advocate
HECTOR FROME, a young advocate
CAPTAIN DANSON, V.C., a prison governor
THE REV. HUGH MILLER, a prison chaplain
EDWARD CLEMENT, a prison doctor
WOODER, a chief warder
MOANEY, convict
CLIFTON, convict
O'CLEARY, convict
RUTH HONEYWILL, a woman
A NUMBER OF BARRISTERS, SOLICITERS, SPECTATORS, USHERS, REPORTERS,
JURYMEN, WARDERS, AND PRISONERS

TIME: The Present.

ACT I. The office of James and Walter How. Morning. July.

ACT II. Assizes. Afternoon. October.

ACT III. A prison. December. SCENE I. The Governor's office. SCENE II. A corridor. SCENE III. A cell.

ACT IV. The office of James and Walter How. Morning. March, two years later.

CAST OF THE FIRST PRODUCTION

AT THE DUKE OF YORK'S THEATRE, FEBRUARY 21, 1910

James How MR. SYDNEY VALENTINE
Walter How MR. CHARLES MAUDE
Cokeson MR. EDMUND GWENN
Falder MR. DENNIS EADIE
The Office-boy MR. GEORGE HERSEE
The Detective MR. LESLIE CARTER
The Cashier MR. C. E. VERNON
The Judge MR. DION BOUCICAULT
The Old Advocate MR. OSCAR ADYE
The Young Advocate MR. CHARLES BRYANT
The Prison Governor MR. GRENDON BENTLEY
The Prison Chaplain MR. HUBERT HARBEN
The Prison Doctor MR. LEWIS CASSON
Wooder MR. FREDERICK LLOYD
Moaney MR. ROBERT PATEMAN
Clipton MR. O. P. HEGGIE
O'Cleary MR. WHITFORD KANE
Ruth Honeywill Miss EDYTH OLIVE

ACT I

The scene is the managing clerk's room, at the offices of James and Walter How, on a July morning. The room is old fashioned, furnished with well-worn mahogany and leather, and lined with tin boxes and estate plans. It has three doors. Two of them are close together in the centre of a wall. One of these two doors leads to the outer office, which is only divided from the managing clerk's room by a partition of wood and clear glass; and when the door into this outer office is opened there can be seen the wide outer door leading out on to the stone stairway of the building. The other of these two centre doors leads to the junior clerk's room. The third door is that leading to the partners' room.

The managing clerk, COKESON, is sitting at his table adding up figures in a pass-book, and murmuring their numbers to himself. He is a man of sixty, wearing spectacles; rather short, with a bald head, and an honest, pugdog face. He is dressed in a well-worn black frock-coat and pepper-and-salt trousers.

COKESON. And five's twelve, and three—fifteen, nineteen, twenty-three, thirty-two, forty-one-and carry four. [He ticks the page, and goes on murmuring] Five, seven, twelve, seventeen, twenty-four and nine, thirty-three, thirteen and carry one.

He again makes a tick. The outer office door is opened, and SWEEDLE, the office-boy, appears, closing the door behind him. He is a pale youth of sixteen, with spiky hair.

COKESON. [With grumpy expectation] And carry one.

SWEEDLE. There's a party wants to see Falder, Mr. Cokeson.

COKESON. Five, nine, sixteen, twenty-one, twenty-nine—and carry two. Send him to Morris's. What name?

SWEEDLE. Honeywill.

COKESON. What's his business?

SWEEDLE. It's a woman.

COKESON. A lady?

SWEEDLE. No, a person.

COKESON. Ask her in. Take this pass-book to Mr. James. [He closes the pass-book.]

SWEEDLE. [Reopening the door] Will you come in, please?

RUTH HONEYWILL comes in. She is a tall woman, twenty-six years old, unpretentiously dressed, with black hair and eyes, and an ivory-white, clear-cut face. She stands very still, having a natural dignity of pose and gesture.

SWEEDLE goes out into the partners' room with the pass-book.

COKESON. [Looking round at RUTH] The young man's out.
[Suspiciously] State your business, please.

RUTH. [Who speaks in a matter-of-fact voice, and with a slight West-Country accent] It's a personal matter, sir.

COKESON. We don't allow private callers here. Will you leave a message?

RUTH. I'd rather see him, please.

She narrows her dark eyes and gives him a honeyed look.

COKESON. [Expanding] It's all against the rules. Suppose I had my friends here to see me! It'd never do!

RUTH. No, sir.

COKESON. [A little taken aback] Exactly! And here you are wanting to see a junior clerk!

RUTH. Yes, sir; I must see him.

COKESON. [Turning full round to her with a sort of outraged interest] But this is a lawyer's office. Go to his private address.

RUTH. He's not there.

COKESON. [Uneasy] Are you related to the party?

RUTH. No, sir.

COKESON. [In real embarrassment] I don't know what to say. It's no affair of the office.

RUTH. But what am I to do?

COKESON. Dear me! I can't tell you that.

SWEEDLE comes back. He crosses to the outer office and passes through into it, with a quizzical look at Cokeson, carefully leaving the door an inch or two open.

COKESON. [Fortified by this look] This won't do, you know, this won't do at all. Suppose one of the partners came in!

An incoherent knocking and chuckling is heard from the outer door of the outer office.

SWEEDLE. [Putting his head in] There's some children outside here.

RUTH. They're mine, please.

SWEEDLE. Shall I hold them in check?

RUTH. They're quite small, sir. [She takes a step towards COKESON]

COKESON. You mustn't take up his time in office hours; we're a clerk short as it is.

RUTH. It's a matter of life and death.

COKESON. [Again outraged] Life and death!

SWEEDLE. Here is Falder.

FALDER has entered through the outer office. He is a pale, good-looking young man, with quick, rather scared eyes. He moves towards the door of the clerks' office, and stands there irresolute.

COKESON. Well, I'll give you a minute. It's not regular.

Taking up a bundle of papers, he goes out into the partners' room.

RUTH. [In a low, hurried voice] He's on the drink again, Will. He tried to cut my throat last night. I came out with the children before he was awake. I went round to you.

FALDER. I've changed my digs.

RUTH. Is it all ready for to-night?

FALDER. I've got the tickets. Meet me 11.45 at the booking office. For God's sake don't forget we're man and wife! [Looking at her with tragic intensity] Ruth!

RUTH. You're not afraid of going, are you?

FALDER. Have you got your things, and the children's?

RUTH. Had to leave them, for fear of waking Honeywill, all but one bag. I can't go near home again.

FALDER. [Wincing] All that money gone for nothing. How much must you have?

RUTH. Six pounds—I could do with that, I think.

FALDER. Don't give away where we're going. [As if to himself] When I get out there I mean to forget it all.

RUTH. If you're sorry, say so. I'd sooner he killed me than take you against your will.

FALDER. [With a queer smile] We've got to go. I don't care; I'll have you.

RUTH. You've just to say; it's not too late.

FALDER. It is too late. Here's seven pounds. Booking office 11.45 to-night. If you weren't what you are to me, Ruth——!

RUTH. Kiss me!

They cling together passionately, then fly apart just as COKESON re-enters the room. RUTH turns and goes out through the outer office. COKESON advances deliberately to his chair and seats himself.

COKESON. This isn't right, Falder.

FALDER. It shan't occur again, sir.

COKESON. It's an improper use of these premises.

FALDER. Yes, sir.

COKESON. You quite understand—the party was in some distress; and, having children with her, I allowed my feelings——[He opens a drawer and produces from it a tract] Just take this! "Purity in the Home." It's a well-written thing.

FALDER. [Taking it, with a peculiar expression] Thank you, sir.

COKESON. And look here, Falder, before Mr. Walter comes, have you finished up that cataloguing Davis had in hand before he left?

FALDER. I shall have done with it to-morrow, sir—for good.

COKESON. It's over a week since Davis went. Now it won't do, Falder. You're neglecting your work for private life. I shan't mention about the party having called, but—

FALDER. [Passing into his room] Thank you, sir.

COKESON stares at the door through which FALDER has gone out; then shakes his head, and is just settling down to write, when WALTER How comes in through the outer Office. He is a rather refined-looking man of thirty-five, with a pleasant, almost apologetic voice.

WALTER. Good-morning, Cokeson.

COKESON. Morning, Mr. Walter.

WALTER. My father here?

COKESON. [Always with a certain patronage as to a young man who might be doing better] Mr. James has been here since eleven o'clock.

WALTER. I've been in to see the pictures, at the Guildhall.

COKESON. [Looking at him as though this were exactly what was to be expected] Have you now—yes. This lease of Boulter's—am I to send it to counsel?

WALTER. What does my father say?

COKESON. 'Aven't bothered him.

WALTER. Well, we can't be too careful.

COKESON. It's such a little thing—hardly worth the fees. I thought you'd do it yourself.

WALTER. Send it, please. I don't want the responsibility.

COKESON. [With an indescribable air of compassion] Just as you like. This "right-of-way" case—we've got 'em on the deeds.

WALTER. I know; but the intention was obviously to exclude that bit of common ground.

COKESON. We needn't worry about that. We're the right side of the law.

WALTER. I don't like it,

COKESON. [With an indulgent smile] We shan't want to set ourselves up against the law. Your father wouldn't waste his time doing that.

As he speaks JAMES How comes in from the partners' room. He is a shortish man, with white side-whiskers, plentiful grey hair, shrewd eyes, and gold pince-nez.

JAMES. Morning, Walter.

WALTER. How are you, father?

COKESON. [Looking down his nose at the papers in his hand as though deprecating their size] I'll just take Boulter's lease in to young Falder to draft the instructions. [He goes out into FALDER'S room.]

WALTER. About that right-of-way case?

JAMES. Oh, well, we must go forward there. I thought you told me yesterday the firm's balance was over four hundred.

WALTER. So it is.

JAMES. [Holding out the pass-book to his son] Three—five—one, no recent cheques. Just get me out the cheque-book.

WALTER goes to a cupboard, unlocks a drawer and produces a

cheque-book.

JAMES. Tick the pounds in the counterfoils. Five, fifty-four, seven, five, twenty-eight, twenty, ninety, eleven, fifty-two, seventy-one. Tally?

WALTER. [Nodding] Can't understand. Made sure it was over four hundred.

JAMES. Give me the cheque-book. [He takes the check-book and cons the counterfoils] What's this ninety?

WALTER. Who drew it?

JAMES. You.

WALTER. [Taking the cheque-book] July 7th? That's the day I went down to look over the Trenton Estate—last Friday week; I came back on the Tuesday, you remember. But look here, father, it was nine I drew a cheque for. Five guineas to Smithers and my expenses. It just covered all but half a crown.

JAMES. [Gravely] Let's look at that ninety cheque. [He sorts the cheque out from the bundle in the pocket of the pass-book] Seems all right. There's no nine here. This is bad. Who cashed that nine-pound cheque?

WALTER. [Puzzled and pained] Let's see! I was finishing Mrs. Reddy's will—only just had time; yes—I gave it to Cokeson.

JAMES. Look at that 't' 'y': that yours?

WALTER. [After consideration] My y's curl back a little; this doesn't.

JAMES. [As COKESON re-enters from FALDER'S room] We must ask him. Just come here and carry your mind back a bit, Cokeson. D'you remember cashing a cheque for Mr. Walter last Friday week—the day he went to Trenton?

COKESON. Ye-es. Nine pounds.

JAMES. Look at this. [Handing him the cheque.]

COKESON. No! Nine pounds. My lunch was just coming in; and of course I like it hot; I gave the cheque to Davis to run round to the bank. He brought it back, all gold—you remember, Mr. Walter, you wanted some silver to pay your cab. [With a certain contemptuous compassion] Here, let me see. You've got the wrong cheque.

He takes cheque-book and pass-book from WALTER.

WALTER. Afraid not.

COKESON. [Having seen for himself] It's funny.

JAMES. You gave it to Davis, and Davis sailed for Australia on Monday. Looks black, Cokeson.

COKESON. [Puzzled and upset] why this'd be a felony! No, no! there's some mistake.

JAMES. I hope so.

COKESON. There's never been anything of that sort in the office the twenty-nine years I've been here.

JAMES. [Looking at cheque and counterfoil] This is a very clever bit of work; a warning to you not to leave space after your figures, Walter.

WALTER. [Vexed] Yes, I know—I was in such a tearing hurry that afternoon.

COKESON. [Suddenly] This has upset me.

JAMES. The counterfoil altered too—very deliberate piece of swindling. What was Davis's ship?

WALTER. 'City of Rangoon'.

JAMES. We ought to wire and have him arrested at Naples; he can't be there yet.

COKESON. His poor young wife. I liked the young man. Dear, oh dear! In this office!

WALTER. Shall I go to the bank and ask the cashier?

JAMES. [Grimly] Bring him round here. And ring up Scotland Yard.

WALTER. Really?

He goes out through the outer office. JAMES paces the room. He stops and looks at COKESON, who is disconsolately rubbing the knees of his trousers.

JAMES. Well, Cokeson! There's something in character, isn't there?

COKESON. [Looking at him over his spectacles] I don't quite take you, sir.

JAMES. Your story, would sound d—d thin to any one who didn't know you.

COKESON. Ye-es! [He laughs. Then with a sudden gravity] I'm sorry for that young man. I feel it as if it was my own son, Mr. James.

JAMES. A nasty business!

COKESON. It unsettles you. All goes on regular, and then a thing like this happens. Shan't relish my lunch to-day.

JAMES. As bad as that, Cokeson?

COKESON. It makes you think. [Confidentially] He must have had temptation.

JAMES. Not so fast. We haven't convicted him yet.

COKESON. I'd sooner have lost a month's salary than had this happen.
[He broods.]

JAMES. I hope that fellow will hurry up.

COKESON. [Keeping things pleasant for the cashier] It isn't fifty yards, Mr. James. He won't be a minute.

JAMES. The idea of dishonesty about this office it hits me hard, Cokeson.

He goes towards the door of the partners' room.

SWEEDLE. [Entering quietly, to COKESON in a low voice] She's popped up again, sir—something she forgot to say to Falder.

COKESON. [Roused from his abstraction] Eh? Impossible. Send her away!

JAMES. What's that?

COKESON. Nothing, Mr. James. A private matter. Here, I'll come myself. [He goes into the outer office as JAMES passes into the partners' room] Now, you really mustn't—we can't have anybody just now.

RUTH. Not for a minute, sir?

COKESON. Reely! Reely! I can't have it. If you want him, wait about; he'll be going out for his lunch directly.

RUTH. Yes, sir.

WALTER, entering with the cashier, passes RUTH as she leaves the outer office.

COKESON. [To the cashier, who resembles a sedentary dragoon] Good-morning. [To WALTER] Your father's in there.

WALTER crosses and goes into the partners' room.

COKESON. It's a nahsty, unpleasant little matter, Mr. Cowley. I'm quite ashamed to have to trouble you.

COWLEY. I remember the cheque quite well. [As if it were a liver]

Seemed in perfect order.

COKESON. Sit down, won't you? I'm not a sensitive man, but a thing like this about the place—it's not nice. I like people to be open and jolly together.

COWLEY. Quite so.

COKESON. [Buttonholing him, and glancing toward the partners' room] Of course he's a young man. I've told him about it before now— leaving space after his figures, but he will do it.

COWLEY. I should remember the person's face—quite a youth.

COKESON. I don't think we shall be able to show him to you, as a matter of fact.

JAMES and WALTER have come back from the partners' room.

JAMES. Good-morning, Mr. Cowley. You've seen my son and myself, you've seen Mr. Cokeson, and you've seen Sweedle, my office-boy. It was none of us, I take it.

The cashier shakes his head with a smile.

JAMES. Be so good as to sit there. Cokeson, engage Mr. Cowley in conversation, will you?

He goes toward FALDER'S room.

COKESON. Just a word, Mr. James.

JAMES. Well?

COKESON. You don't want to upset the young man in there, do you? He's a nervous young feller.

JAMES. This must be thoroughly cleared up, Cokeson, for the sake of Falder's name, to say nothing of yours.

COKESON. [With Some dignity] That'll look after itself, sir. He's been upset once this morning; I don't want him startled again.

JAMES. It's a matter of form; but I can't stand upon niceness over a thing like this—too serious. Just talk to Mr. Cowley.

He opens the door of FALDER'S room.

JAMES. Bring in the papers in Boulter's lease, will you, Falder?

COKESON. [Bursting into voice] Do you keep dogs?

The cashier, with his eyes fixed on the door, does not answer.

COKESON. You haven't such a thing as a bulldog pup you could spare me, I suppose?

At the look on the cashier's face his jaw drops, and he turns to see FALDER standing in the doorway, with his eyes fixed on COWLEY, like the eyes of a rabbit fastened on a snake.

FALDER. [Advancing with the papers] Here they are, sir!

JAMES. [Taking them] Thank you.

FALDER. Do you want me, sir?

JAMES. No, thanks!

FALDER turns and goes back into his own room. As he shuts the door JAMES gives the cashier an interrogative look, and the cashier nods.

JAMES. Sure? This isn't as we suspected.

COWLEY. Quite. He knew me. I suppose he can't slip out of that room?

COKESON. [Gloomily] There's only the window—a whole floor and a basement.

The door of FALDER'S room is quietly opened, and FALDER, with his hat in his hand, moves towards the door of the outer office.

JAMES. [Quietly] Where are you going, Falder?

FALDER. To have my lunch, sir.

JAMES. Wait a few minutes, would you? I want to speak to you about this lease.

FALDER. Yes, sir. [He goes back into his room.]

COWLEY. If I'm wanted, I can swear that's the young man who cashed the cheque. It was the last cheque I handled that morning before my lunch. These are the numbers of the notes he had. [He puts a slip of paper on the table; then, brushing his hat round] Good-morning!

JAMES. Good-morning, Mr. Cowley!

COWLEY. [To COKESON] Good-morning.

COKESON. [With Stupefaction] Good-morning.

The cashier goes out through the outer office. COKESON sits down in his chair, as though it were the only place left in the morass of his feelings.

WALTER. What are you going to do?

JAMES. Have him in. Give me the cheque and the counterfoil.

COKESON. I don't understand. I thought young Davis——

JAMES. We shall see.

WALTER. One moment, father: have you thought it out?

JAMES. Call him in!

COKESON. [Rising with difficulty and opening FALDER'S door; hoarsely] Step in here a minute.

FALDER. [Impassively] Yes, sir?

JAMES. [Turning to him suddenly with the cheque held out] You know this cheque, Falder?

FALDER. No, sir.

JAMES. Look at it. You cashed it last Friday week.

FALDER. Oh! yes, sir; that one—Davis gave it me.

JAMES. I know. And you gave Davis the cash?

FALDER. Yes, sir.

JAMES. When Davis gave you the cheque was it exactly like this?

FALDER. Yes, I think so, sir.

JAMES. You know that Mr. Walter drew that cheque for nine pounds?

FALDER. No, sir—ninety.

JAMES. Nine, Falder.

FALDER. [Faintly] I don't understand, sir.

JAMES. The suggestion, of course, is that the cheque was altered; whether by you or Davis is the question.

FALDER. I—I

COKESON. Take your time, take your time.

FALDER. [Regaining his impassivity] Not by me, sir.

JAMES. The cheque was handed to—Cokeson by Mr. Walter at one o'clock; we know that because Mr. Cokeson's lunch had just arrived.

COKESON. I couldn't leave it.

JAMES. Exactly; he therefore gave the cheque to Davis. It was cashed by you at 1.15. We know that because the cashier recollects it for the last cheque he handled before his lunch.

FALDER. Yes, sir, Davis gave it to me because some friends were giving him a farewell luncheon.

JAMES. [Puzzled] You accuse Davis, then?

FALDER. I don't know, sir—it's very funny.

WALTER, who has come close to his father, says something to him in a low voice.

JAMES. Davis was not here again after that Saturday, was he?

COKESON. [Anxious to be of assistance to the young man, and seeing faint signs of their all being jolly once more] No, he sailed on the Monday.

JAMES. Was he, Falder?

FALDER. [Very faintly] No, sir.

JAMES. Very well, then, how do you account for the fact that this nought was added to the nine in the counterfoil on or after Tuesday?

COKESON. [Surprised] How's that?

FALDER gives a sort of lurch; he tries to pull himself together, but he has gone all to pieces.

JAMES. [Very grimly] Out, I'm afraid, Cokeson. The cheque-book remained in Mr. Walter's pocket till he came back from Trenton on Tuesday morning. In the face of this, Falder, do you still deny that you altered both cheque and counterfoil?

FALDER. No, sir—no, Mr. How. I did it, sir; I did it.

COKESON. [Succumbing to his feelings] Dear, dear! what a thing to do!

FALDER. I wanted the money so badly, sir. I didn't know what I was doing.

COKESON. However such a thing could have come into your head!

FALDER. [Grasping at the words] I can't think, sir, really! It was just a minute of madness.

JAMES. A long minute, Falder. [Tapping the counterfoil] Four days at least.

FALDER. Sir, I swear I didn't know what I'd done till afterwards, and then I hadn't the pluck. Oh! Sir, look over it! I'll pay the money back—I will, I promise.

JAMES. Go into your room.

FALDER, with a swift imploring look, goes back into his room.
There is silence.

JAMES. About as bad a case as there could be.

COKESON. To break the law like that—in here!

WALTER. What's to be done?

JAMES. Nothing for it. Prosecute.

WALTER. It's his first offence.

JAMES. [Shaking his head] I've grave doubts of that. Too neat a piece of swindling altogether.

COKESON. I shouldn't be surprised if he was tempted.

JAMES. Life's one long temptation, Cokeson.

COKESON. Ye-es, but I'm speaking of the flesh and the devil, Mr. James. There was a woman come to see him this morning.

WALTER. The woman we passed as we came in just now. Is it his wife?

COKESON. No, no relation. [Restraining what in jollier circumstances would have been a wink] A married person, though.

WALTER. How do you know?

COKESON. Brought her children. [Scandalised] There they were outside the office.

JAMES. A real bad egg.

WALTER. I should like to give him a chance.

JAMES. I can't forgive him for the sneaky way he went to work— counting on our suspecting young Davis if the matter came to light. It was the merest accident the cheque-book stayed in your pocket.

WALTER. It must have been the temptation of a moment. He hadn't time.

JAMES. A man doesn't succumb like that in a moment, if he's a clean mind and habits. He's rotten; got the eyes of a man who can't keep his hands off when there's money about.

WALTER. [Dryly] We hadn't noticed that before.

JAMES. [Brushing the remark aside] I've seen lots of those fellows in my time. No doing anything with them except to keep 'em out of harm's way. They've got a blind spat.

WALTER. It's penal servitude.

COKESON. They're nahsty places-prisons.

JAMES. [Hesitating] I don't see how it's possible to spare him. Out of the question to keep him in this office—honesty's the 'sine qua non'.

COKESON. [Hypnotised] Of course it is.

JAMES. Equally out of the question to send him out amongst people who've no knowledge of his character. One must think of society.

WALTER. But to brand him like this?

JAMES. If it had been a straightforward case I'd give him another chance. It's far from that. He has dissolute habits.

COKESON. I didn't say that—extenuating circumstances.

JAMES. Same thing. He's gone to work in the most cold-blooded way to defraud his employers, and cast the blame on an innocent man. If that's not a case for the law to take its course, I don't know what is.

WALTER. For the sake of his future, though.

JAMES. [Sarcastically] According to you, no one would ever prosecute.

WALTER. [Nettled] I hate the idea of it.

COKESON. That's rather 'ex parte', Mr. Walter! We must have protection.

JAMES. This is degenerating into talk.

He moves towards the partners' room.

WALTER. Put yourself in his place, father.

JAMES. You ask too much of me.

WALTER. We can't possibly tell the pressure there was on him.

JAMES. You may depend on it, my boy, if a man is going to do this sort of thing he'll do it, pressure or no pressure; if he isn't nothing'll make him.

WALTER. He'll never do it again.

COKESON. [Fatuously] S'pose I were to have a talk with him. We don't want to be hard on the young

man.

JAMES. That'll do, Cokeson. I've made up my mind. [He passes into the partners' room.]

COKESON. [After a doubtful moment] We must excuse your father. I don't want to go against your father; if he thinks it right.

WALTER. Confound it, Cokeson! why don't you back me up? You know you feel——

COKESON. [On his dignity] I really can't say what I feel.

WALTER. We shall regret it.

COKESON. He must have known what he was doing.

WALTER. [Bitterly] "The quality of mercy is not strained."

COKESON. [Looking at him askance] Come, come, Mr. Walter. We must try and see it sensible.

SWEEDLE. [Entering with a tray] Your lunch, sir.

COKESON. Put it down!

While SWEEDLE is putting it down on COKESON's table, the detective, WISTER, enters the outer office, and, finding no one there, comes to the inner doorway. He is a square, medium-sized man, clean-shaved, in a serviceable blue serge suit and strong boots.

COKESON. [Hoarsely] Here! Here! What are we doing?

WISTER. [To WALTER] From Scotland Yard, sir. Detective-Sergeant Blister.

WALTER. [Askance] Very well! I'll speak to my father.

He goes into the partners' room. JAMES enters.

JAMES. Morning! [In answer to an appealing gesture from COKESON] I'm sorry; I'd stop short of this if I felt I could. Open that door. [SWEEDLE, wondering and scared, opens it] Come here, Mr. Falder.

As FALDER comes shrinkingly out, the detective in obedience to a sign from JAMES, slips his hand out and grasps his arm.

FALDER. [Recoiling] Oh! no,—oh! no!

WALTER. Come, come, there's a good lad.

JAMES. I charge him with felony.

FALTER. Oh, sir! There's some one—I did it for her. Let me be till to-morrow.

JAMES motions with his hand. At that sign of hardness, FALDER becomes rigid. Then, turning, he goes out quietly in the detective's grip. JAMES follows, stiff and erect. SWEEDLE, rushing to the door with open mouth, pursues them through the outer office into the corridor. When they have all disappeared COKESON spins completely round and makes a rush for the outer office.

COKESON: [Hoarsely] Here! What are we doing?

There is silence. He takes out his handkerchief and mops the sweat from his face. Going back blindly to his table, sits down, and stares blankly at his lunch.

The curtain falls.

ACT II

A Court of Justice, on a foggy October afternoon crowded with barristers, solicitors, reporters, ushers, and jurymen. Sitting in the large, solid dock is FALDER, with a warder on either side of him, placed there for his safe custody, but seemingly indifferent to and unconscious of his presence. FALDER is sitting exactly opposite to the JUDGE, who, raised above the clamour of the court, also seems unconscious of and indifferent to everything. HAROLD CLEAVER, the counsel for the Crown, is a dried, yellowish man, of more than middle age, in a wig worn almost to the colour of his face. HECTOR FROME, the counsel for the defence, is a young, tall man, clean shaved, in a very white wig. Among the spectators, having already given their evidence, are JAMES and WALTER HOW, and COWLEY, the cashier. WISTER, the detective, is just leaving the witness-box.

CLEAVER. That is the case for the Crown, me lud!

Gathering his robes together, he sits down.

FROME. [Rising and bowing to the JUDGE] If it please your lordship and gentlemen of the jury. I am not going to dispute the fact that the prisoner altered this cheque, but I am going to put before you evidence as to the condition of his mind, and to submit that you would not be justified in finding that he was responsible for his actions at the time. I am going to show you, in fact, that he did this in a moment of aberration, amounting to temporary insanity, caused by the violent distress under which he was labouring. Gentlemen, the prisoner is only twenty-three years old. I shall call before you a woman from whom you will learn the events that led up to this act. You will hear from her own lips the tragic circumstances of her life, the still more tragic infatuation with which she has inspired the prisoner. This woman, gentlemen, has been leading a miserable existence with a husband who habitually ill-uses her, from whom she actually goes in terror of her life. I am not, of course, saying that it's either right or desirable for a young man to fall in love with a married woman, or that it's his business to rescue her from an ogre-like husband. I'm not saying anything of the sort. But we all know the power of the passion of love; and I would ask you to remember, gentlemen, in listening to her evidence, that, married to a drunken and violent husband, she has no power to get rid of him; for, as you know, another offence besides violence is necessary to enable a woman to obtain a divorce; and of this offence it does not appear that her husband is guilty.

JUDGE. Is this relevant, Mr. Frome?

FROME. My lord, I submit, extremely—I shall be able to show your lordship that directly.

JUDGE. Very well.

FROME. In these circumstances, what alternatives were left to her? She could either go on living with this drunkard, in terror of her life; or she could apply to the Court for a separation order. Well, gentlemen, my experience of such cases assures me that this would have given her very insufficient protection from the violence of such a man; and even if effectual would very likely have reduced her either to the workhouse or the streets—for it's not easy, as she is now finding, for an unskilled woman without means of livelihood to support herself and her children without resorting either to the Poor Law or—to speak quite plainly—to the sale of her body.

JUDGE. You are ranging rather far, Mr. Frome.

FROME. I shall fire point-blank in a minute, my lord.

JUDGE. Let us hope so.

FROME. Now, gentlemen, mark—and this is what I have been leading up to—this woman will tell you, and the prisoner will confirm her, that, confronted with such alternatives, she set her whole hopes on himself, knowing the feeling with which she had inspired him. She saw a way out of her misery by going with him to a new country, where they would both be unknown, and might pass as husband and wife. This was a desperate and, as my friend Mr. Cleaver will no doubt call it, an immoral resolution; but, as a fact, the minds of both of them were constantly turned towards it. One wrong is no excuse for another, and those who are never likely to be faced by such a situation possibly have the right to hold up their hands—as to that I prefer to say nothing. But whatever view you take, gentlemen, of this part of the prisoner's story—whatever opinion you form of the right of these two young people under such circumstances to take the law into their own hands—the fact remains that this young woman in her distress, and this young man, little more than a boy, who was so devotedly attached to her, did conceive this—if you like—reprehensible design of going away together. Now, for that, of course, they required money, and—they had none. As to the actual events of the morning of July 7th, on which this cheque was altered, the events on which I rely to prove the defendant's irresponsibility—I shall allow those

events to speak for themselves, through the lips of my witness. Robert Cokeson. [He turns, looks round, takes up a sheet of paper, and waits.]

COKESON is summoned into court, and goes into the witness-box, holding his hat before him. The oath is administered to him.

FROME. What is your name?

COKESON. Robert Cokeson.

FROME. Are you managing clerk to the firm of solicitors who employ the prisoner?

COKESON. Ye-es.

FROME. How long had the prisoner been in their employ?

COKESON. Two years. No, I'm wrong there—all but seventeen days.

FROME. Had you him under your eye all that time?

COKESON. Except Sundays and holidays.

FROME. Quite so. Let us hear, please, what you have to say about his general character during those two years.

COKESON. [Confidentially to the jury, and as if a little surprised at being asked] He was a nice, pleasant-spoken young man. I'd no fault to find with him—quite the contrary. It was a great surprise to me when he did a thing like that.

FROME. Did he ever give you reason to suspect his honesty?

COKESON. No! To have dishonesty in our office, that'd never do.

FROME. I'm sure the jury fully appreciate that, Mr. Cokeson.

COKESON. Every man of business knows that honesty's 'the sign qua non'.

FROME. Do you give him a good character all round, or do you not?

COKESON. [Turning to the JUDGE] Certainly. We were all very jolly and pleasant together, until this happened. Quite upset me.

FROME. Now, coming to the morning of the 7th of July, the morning on which the cheque was altered. What have you to say about his demeanour that morning?

COKESON. [To the jury] If you ask me, I don't think he was quite compos when he did it.

THE JUDGE. [Sharply] Are you suggesting that he was insane?

COKESON. Not compos.

THE JUDGE. A little more precision, please.

FROME. [Smoothly] Just tell us, Mr. Cokeson.

COKESON. [Somewhat outraged] Well, in my opinion—[looking at the JUDGE]—such as it is—he was jumpy at the time. The jury will understand my meaning.

FROME. Will you tell us how you came to that conclusion?

COKESON. Ye-es, I will. I have my lunch in from the restaurant, a chop and a potato—saves time. That day it happened to come just as Mr. Walter How handed me the cheque. Well, I like it hot; so I went into the clerks' office and I handed the cheque to Davis, the other clerk, and told him to get change. I noticed young Falder walking up and down. I said to him: "This is not the Zoological Gardens, Falder."

FROME. Do you remember what he answered?

COKESON. Ye-es: "I wish to God it were!" Struck me as funny.

FROME. Did you notice anything else peculiar?

COKESON. I did.

FROME. What was that?

COKESON. His collar was unbuttoned. Now, I like a young man to be neat. I said to him: "Your collar's unbuttoned."

FROME. And what did he answer?

COKESON. Stared at me. It wasn't nice.

THE JUDGE. Stared at you? Isn't that a very common practice?

COKESON. Ye-es, but it was the look in his eyes. I can't explain my meaning—it was funny.

FROME. Had you ever seen such a look in his eyes before?

COKESON. No. If I had I should have spoken to the partners. We can't have anything eccentric in our profession.

THE JUDGE. Did you speak to them on that occasion?

COKESON. [Confidentially] Well, I didn't like to trouble them about prime facey evidence.

FROME. But it made a very distinct impression on your mind?

COKESON. Ye-es. The clerk Davis could have told you the same.

FROME. Quite so. It's very unfortunate that we've not got him here. Now can you tell me of the morning on which the discovery of the forgery was made? That would be the 18th. Did anything happen that morning?

COKESON. [With his hand to his ear] I'm a little deaf.

FROME. Was there anything in the course of that morning—I mean before the discovery—that caught your attention?

COKESON. Ye-es—a woman.

THE JUDGE. How is this relevant, Mr. Frome?

FROME. I am trying to establish the state of mind in which the prisoner committed this act, my lord.

THE JUDGE. I quite appreciate that. But this was long after the act.

FROME. Yes, my lord, but it contributes to my contention.

THE JUDGE. Well!

FROME. You say a woman. Do you mean that she came to the office?

COKESON. Ye-es.

FROME. What for?

COKESON. Asked to see young Falder; he was out at the moment.

FROME. Did you see her?

COKESON. I did.

FROME. Did she come alone?

COKESON. [Confidentially] Well, there you put me in a difficulty. I mustn't tell you what the office-boy told me.

FROME. Quite so, Mr. Cokeson, quite so—

COKESON. [Breaking in with an air of "You are young—leave it to me"] But I think we can get round it. In answer to a question put to her by a third party the woman said to me: "They're mine, sir."

THE JUDGE. What are? What were?

COKESON. Her children. They were outside.

THE JUDGE. HOW do you know?

COKESON. Your lordship mustn't ask me that, or I shall have to tell you what I was told—and that'd never do.

THE JUDGE. [Smiling] The office-boy made a statement.

COKESON. Egg-zactly.

FROME. What I want to ask you, Mr. Cokeson, is this. In the course of her appeal to see Falder, did the woman say anything that you specially remember?

COKESON. [Looking at him as if to encourage him to complete the sentence] A leetle more, sir.

FROME. Or did she not?

COKESON. She did. I shouldn't like you to have led me to the answer.

FROME. [With an irritated smile] Will you tell the jury what it was?

COKESON. "It's a matter of life and death."

FOREMAN OF THE JURY. Do you mean the woman said that?

COKESON. [Nodding] It's not the sort of thing you like to have said to you.

FROME. [A little impatiently] Did Falder come in while she was there? [COKESON nods] And she saw him, and went away?

COKESON. Ah! there I can't follow you. I didn't see her go.

FROME. Well, is she there now?

COKESON. [With an indulgent smile] No!

FROME. Thank you, Mr. Cokeson. [He sits down.]

CLEAVER. [Rising] You say that on the morning of the forgery the prisoner was jumpy. Well, now, sir, what precisely do you mean by that word?

COKESON. [Indulgently] I want you to understand. Have you ever seen a dog that's lost its master? He was kind of everywhere at once with his eyes.

CLEAVER. Thank you; I was coming to his eyes. You called them "funny." What are we to understand by that? Strange, or what?

COKESON. Ye-es, funny.

COKESON. [Sharply] Yes, sir, but what may be funny to you may not be funny to me, or to the jury. Did they look frightened, or shy, or fierce, or what?

COKESON. You make it very hard for me. I give you the word, and you want me to give you another.

CLEAVER. [Rapping his desk] Does "funny" mean mad?

CLEAVER. Not mad, fun—

CLEAVER. Very well! Now you say he had his collar unbuttoned? Was it a hot day?

COKESON. Ye-es; I think it was.

CLEAVER. And did he button it when you called his attention to it?

COKESON. Ye-es, I think he did.

CLEAVER. Would you say that that denoted insanity?

He sits down. COKESON, who has opened his mouth to reply, is left gaping.

FROME. [Rising hastily] Have you ever caught him in that dishevelled state before?

COKESON. No! He was always clean and quiet.

FROME. That will do, thank you.

COKESON turns blandly to the JUDGE, as though to rebuke counsel for not remembering that the JUDGE might wish to have a chance; arriving at the conclusion that he is to be asked nothing further, he turns and descends from the box, and sits down next to JAMES and WALTER.

FROME. Ruth Honeywill.

RUTH comes into court, and takes her stand stoically in the witness-box. She is sworn.

FROME. What is your name, please?

RUTH. Ruth Honeywill.

FROME. How old are you?

RUTH. Twenty-six.

FROME. You are a married woman, living with your husband? A little louder.

RUTH. No, sir; not since July.

FROME. Have you any children?

RUTH. Yes, sir, two.

FROME. Are they living with you?

RUTH. Yes, sir.

FROME. You know the prisoner?

RUTH. [Looking at him] Yes.

FROME. What was the nature of your relations with him?

RUTH. We were friends.

THE JUDGE. Friends?

RUTH. [Simply] Lovers, sir.

THE JUDGE. [Sharply] In what sense do you use that word?

RUTH. We love each other.

THE JUDGE. Yes, but——

RUTH. [Shaking her head] No, your lordship—not yet.

THE JUDGE. 'Not yet! H'm! [He looks from RUTH to FALDER] Well!

FROME. What is your husband?

RUTH. Traveller.

FROME. And what was the nature of your married life?

RUTH. [Shaking her head] It don't bear talking about.

FROME. Did he ill-treat you, or what?

RUTH. Ever since my first was born.

FROME. In what way?

RUTH. I'd rather not say. All sorts of ways.

THE JUDGE. I am afraid I must stop this, you know.

RUTH. [Pointing to FALDER] He offered to take me out of it, sir. We were going to South America.

FROME. [Hastily] Yes, quite—and what prevented you?

RUTH. I was outside his office when he was taken away. It nearly broke my heart.

FROME. You knew, then, that he had been arrested?

RUTH. Yes, sir. I called at his office afterwards, and [pointing to COKESON] that gentleman told me all about it.

FROME. Now, do you remember the morning of Friday, July 7th?

RUTH. Yes.

FROME. Why?

RUTH. My husband nearly strangled me that morning.

THE JUDGE. Nearly strangled you!

RUTH. [Bowing her head] Yes, my lord.

FROME. With his hands, or—?

RUTH. Yes, I just managed to get away from him. I went straight to my friend. It was eight o'clock.

THE JUDGE. In the morning? Your husband was not under the influence of liquor then?

RUTH. It wasn't always that.

FROME. In what condition were you?

RUTH. In very bad condition, sir. My dress was torn, and I was half choking.

FROME. Did you tell your friend what had happened?

RUTH. Yes. I wish I never had.

FROME. It upset him?

RUTH. Dreadfully.

FROME. Did he ever speak to you about a cheque?

RUTH. Never.

FROZE. Did he ever give you any money?

RUTH. Yes.

FROME. When was that?

RUTH. On Saturday.

FROME. The 8th?

RUTH. To buy an outfit for me and the children, and get all ready to start.

FROME. Did that surprise you, or not?

RUTH. What, sir?

FROME. That he had money to give you.

Ring. Yes, because on the morning when my husband nearly killed me my friend cried because he hadn't the money to get me away. He told me afterwards he'd come into a windfall.

FROME. And when did you last see him?

RUTH. The day he was taken away, sir. It was the day we were to have started.

FROME. Oh, yes, the morning of the arrest. Well, did you see him at all between the Friday and that morning? [RUTH nods] What was his manner then?

RUTH. Dumb—like—sometimes he didn't seem able to say a word.

FROME. As if something unusual had happened to him?

RUTH. Yes.

FROME. Painful, or pleasant, or what?

RUTH. Like a fate hanging over him.

FROME. [Hesitating] Tell me, did you love the prisoner very much?

RUTH. [Bowing her head] Yes.

FROME. And had he a very great affection for you?

RUTH. [Looking at FALDER] Yes, sir.

FROME. Now, ma'am, do you or do you not think that your danger and unhappiness would seriously affect his balance, his control over his actions?

RUTH. Yes.

FROME. His reason, even?

RUTH. For a moment like, I think it would.

FROME. Was he very much upset that Friday morning, or was he fairly calm?

RUTH. Dreadfully upset. I could hardly bear to let him go from me.

FROME. Do you still love him?

RUTH. [With her eyes on FALDER] He's ruined himself for me.

FROME. Thank you.

He sits down. RUTH remains stoically upright in the witness-box.

CLEAVER. [In a considerate voice] When you left him on the morning of Friday the 7th you would not say that he was out of his mind, I suppose?

RUTH. No, sir.

CLEAVER. Thank you; I've no further questions to ask you.

RUTH. [Bending a little forward to the jury] I would have done the same for him; I would indeed.

THE JUDGE. Please, please! You say your married life is an unhappy one? Faults on both sides?

RUTH. Only that I never bowed down to him. I don't see why I should, sir, not to a man like that.

THE JUDGE. You refused to obey him?

RUTH. [Avoiding the question] I've always studied him to keep things nice.

THE JUDGE. Until you met the prisoner—was that it?

RUTH. No; even after that.

THE JUDGE. I ask, you know, because you seem to me to glory in this affection of yours for the prisoner.

RUTH. [Hesitating] I—I do. It's the only thing in my life now.

THE JUDGE. [Staring at her hard] Well, step down, please.

RUTH looks at FALDER, then passes quietly down and takes her seat among the witnesses.

FROME. I call the prisoner, my lord.

FALDER leaves the dock; goes into the witness-box, and is duly sworn.

FROME. What is your name?

FALDER. William Falder.

FROME. And age?

FALDER. Twenty-three.

FROME. You are not married?

FALDER shakes his head

FROME. How long have you known the last witness?

FALDER. Six months.

FROME. Is her account of the relationship between you a correct one?

FALDER. Yes.

FROME. You became devotedly attached to her, however?

FALDER. Yes.

THE JUDGE. Though you knew she was a married woman?

FALDER. I couldn't help it, your lordship.

THE JUDGE. Couldn't help it?

FALDER. I didn't seem able to.

The JUDGE slightly shrugs his shoulders.

FROME. How did you come to know her?

FALDER. Through my married sister.

FROME. Did you know whether she was happy with her husband?

FALDER. It was trouble all the time.

FROME. You knew her husband?

FALDER. Only through her—he's a brute.

THE JUDGE. I can't allow indiscriminate abuse of a person not present.

FROME. [Bowing] If your lordship pleases. [To FALDER] You admit altering this cheque?

FALDER bows his head.

FROME. Carry your mind, please, to the morning of Friday, July the 7th, and tell the jury what happened.

FALDER. [Turning to the jury] I was having my breakfast when she came. Her dress was all torn, and she was gasping and couldn't seem to get her breath at all; there were the marks of his fingers round her throat; her arm was bruised, and the blood had got into her eyes dreadfully. It frightened me, and then when she told me, I felt—I felt—well—it was too much for me! [Hardening suddenly] If you'd seen it, having the feelings for her that I had, you'd have felt the same, I know.

FROME. Yes?

FALDER. When she left me—because I had to go to the office—I was out of my senses for fear that he'd do it again, and thinking what I could do. I couldn't work—all the morning I was like that—simply couldn't fix my mind on anything. I couldn't think at all. I seemed to have to keep moving. When Davis—the other clerk—gave me the cheque—he said: "It'll do you good, Will, to have a run with this. You seem half off your chump this morning." Then when I had it in my hand—I don't know how it came, but it just flashed across me that if I put the 'ty' and the nought there would be the money to get her away. It just came and went—I never thought of it again. Then Davis went out to his luncheon, and I don't really remember what I did till I'd pushed the cheque through to the cashier under the rail. I remember his saying "Gold or notes?" Then I suppose I knew what I'd done. Anyway, when I got outside I wanted to chuck myself under a bus; I wanted to throw the money away; but it seemed I was in for it, so I thought at any rate I'd save her. Of course the tickets I took for the passage and the little I gave her's been

wasted, and all, except what I was obliged to spend myself, I've restored. I keep thinking over and over however it was I came to do it, and how I can't have it all again to do differently!

FALDER is silent, twisting his hands before him.

FROME. How far is it from your office to the bank?

FALDER. Not more than fifty yards, sir.

FROME. From the time Davis went out to lunch to the time you cashed the cheque, how long do you say it must have been?

FALDER. It couldn't have been four minutes, sir, because I ran all the way.

FROME. During those four minutes you say you remember nothing?

FALDER. No, sir; only that I ran.

FROME. Not even adding the 'ty' and the nought?'

FALDER. No, sir. I don't really.

FROME sits down, and CLEAVER rises.

CLEAVER. But you remember running, do you?

FALDER. I was all out of breath when I got to the bank.

CLEAVER. And you don't remember altering the cheque?

FALDER. [Faintly] No, sir.

CLEAVER. Divested of the romantic glamour which my friend is casting over the case, is this anything but an ordinary forgery? Come.

FALDER. I was half frantic all that morning, sir.

CLEAVER. Now, now! You don't deny that the 'ty' and the nought were so like the rest of the handwriting as to thoroughly deceive the cashier?

FALDER. It was an accident.

CLEAVER. [Cheerfully] Queer sort of accident, wasn't it? On which day did you alter the counterfoil?

FALDER. [Hanging his head] On the Wednesday morning.

CLEAVER. Was that an accident too?

FALDER. [Faintly] No.

CLEAVER. To do that you had to watch your opportunity, I suppose?

FALDER. [Almost inaudibly] Yes.

CLEAVER. You don't suggest that you were suffering under great excitement when you did that?

FALDER. I was haunted.

CLEAVER. With the fear of being found out?

FALDER. [Very low] Yes.

THE JUDGE. Didn't it occur to you that the only thing for you to do was to confess to your employers, and restore the money?

FALDER. I was afraid. [There is silence]

CLEAVER. You desired, too, no doubt, to complete your design of taking this woman away?

FALDER. When I found I'd done a thing like that, to do it for nothing seemed so dreadful. I might just as well have chucked myself into the river.

CLEAVER. You knew that the clerk Davis was about to leave England —didn't it occur to you when

you altered this cheque that suspicion would fall on him?

FALDER. It was all done in a moment. I thought of it afterwards.

CLEAVER. And that didn't lead you to avow what you'd done?

FALDER. [Sullenly] I meant to write when I got out there—I would have repaid the money.

THE JUDGE. But in the meantime your innocent fellow clerk might have been prosecuted.

FALDER. I knew he was a long way off, your lordship. I thought there'd be time. I didn't think they'd find it out so soon.

FROME. I might remind your lordship that as Mr. Walter How had the cheque-book in his pocket till after Davis had sailed, if the discovery had been made only one day later Falder himself would have left, and suspicion would have attached to him, and not to Davis, from the beginning.

THE JUDGE. The question is whether the prisoner knew that suspicion would light on himself, and not on Davis. [To FALDER sharply] Did you know that Mr. Walter How had the cheque-book till after Davis had sailed?

FALDER. I—I—thought—he—

THE JUDGE. Now speak the truth—yes or no!

FALDER. [Very low] No, my lord. I had no means of knowing.

THE JUDGE. That disposes of your point, Mr. Frome.

[FROME bows to the JUDGE]

CLEAVER. Has any aberration of this nature ever attacked you before?

FALDER. [Faintly] No, sir.

CLEAVER. You had recovered sufficiently to go back to your work that afternoon?

FALDER. Yes, I had to take the money back.

CLEAVER. You mean the nine pounds. Your wits were sufficiently keen for you to remember that? And you still persist in saying you don't remember altering this cheque. [He sits down]

FALDER. If I hadn't been mad I should never have had the courage.

FROME. [Rising] Did you have your lunch before going back?

FALDER. I never ate a thing all day; and at night I couldn't sleep.

FROME. Now, as to the four minutes that elapsed between Davis's going out and your cashing the cheque: do you say that you recollect nothing during those four minutes?

FALDER. [After a moment] I remember thinking of Mr. Cokeson's face.

FROME. Of Mr. Cokeson's face! Had that any connection with what you were doing?

FALDER. No, Sir.

FROME. Was that in the office, before you ran out?

FALDER. Yes, and while I was running.

FROME. And that lasted till the cashier said: "Will you have gold or notes?"

FALDER. Yes, and then I seemed to come to myself—and it was too late.

FROME. Thank you. That closes the evidence for the defence, my lord.

The JUDGE nods, and FALDER goes back to his seat in the dock.

FROME. [Gathering up notes] If it please your lordship—Gentlemen of the Jury,—My friend in cross-examination has shown a disposition to sneer at the defence which has been set up in this case, and I am free to admit that nothing I can say will move you, if the evidence has not already convinced you that the prisoner committed this act in a moment when to all practical intents and purposes he was not

responsible for his actions; a moment of such mental and moral vacuity, arising from the violent emotional agitation under which he had been suffering, as to amount to temporary madness. My friend has alluded to the "romantic glamour" with which I have sought to invest this case. Gentlemen, I have done nothing of the kind. I have merely shown you the background of "life"—that palpitating life which, believe me—whatever my friend may say—always lies behind the commission of a crime. Now gentlemen, we live in a highly, civilized age, and the sight of brutal violence disturbs us in a very strange way, even when we have no personal interest in the matter. But when we see it inflicted on a woman whom we love—what then? Just think of what your own feelings would have been, each of you, at the prisoner's age; and then look at him. Well! he is hardly the comfortable, shall we say bucolic, person likely to contemplate with equanimity marks of gross violence on a woman to whom he was devotedly attached. Yes, gentlemen, look at him! He has not a strong face; but neither has he a vicious face. He is just the sort of man who would easily become the prey of his emotions. You have heard the description of his eyes. My friend may laugh at the word "funny"—I think it better describes the peculiar uncanny look of those who are strained to breaking-point than any other word which could have been used. I don't pretend, mind you, that his mental irresponsibility—was more than a flash of darkness, in which all sense of proportion became lost; but to contend, that, just as a man who destroys himself at such a moment may be, and often is, absolved from the stigma attaching to the crime of self-murder, so he may, and frequently does, commit other crimes while in this irresponsible condition, and that he may as justly be acquitted of criminal intent and treated as a patient. I admit that this is a plea which might well be abused. It is a matter for discretion. But here you have a case in which there is every reason to give the benefit of the doubt. You heard me ask the prisoner what he thought of during those four fatal minutes. What was his answer? "I thought of Mr. Cokeson's face!" Gentlemen, no man could invent an answer like that; it is absolutely stamped with truth. You have seen the great affection [legitimate or not] existing between him and this woman, who came here to give evidence for him at the risk of her life. It is impossible for you to doubt his distress on the morning when he committed this act. We well know what terrible havoc such distress can make in weak and highly nervous people. It was all the work of a moment. The rest has followed, as death follows a stab to the heart, or water drops if you hold up a jug to empty it. Believe me, gentlemen, there is nothing more tragic in life than the utter impossibility of changing what you have done. Once this cheque was altered and presented, the work of four minutes—four mad minutes—the rest has been silence. But in those four minutes the boy before you has slipped through a door, hardly opened, into that great cage which never again quite lets a man go—the cage of the Law. His further acts, his failure to confess, the alteration of the counterfoil, his preparations for flight, are all evidence—not of deliberate and guilty intention when he committed the prime act from which these subsequent acts arose; no—they are merely evidence of the weak character which is clearly enough his misfortune. But is a man to be lost because he is bred and born with a weak character? Gentlemen, men like the prisoner are destroyed daily under our law for want of that human insight which sees them as they are, patients, and not criminals. If the prisoner be found guilty, and treated as though he were a criminal type, he will, as all experience shows, in all probability become one. I beg you not to return a verdict that may thrust him back into prison and brand him for ever. Gentlemen, Justice is a machine that, when some one has once given it the starting push, rolls on of itself. Is this young man to be ground to pieces under this machine for an act which at the worst was one of weakness? Is he to become a member of the luckless crews that man those dark, ill-starred ships called prisons? Is that to be his voyage—from which so few return? Or is he to have another chance, to be still looked on as one who has gone a little astray, but who will come back? I urge you, gentlemen, do not ruin this young man! For, as a result of those four minutes, ruin, utter and irretrievable, stares him in the face. He can be saved now. Imprison him as a criminal, and I affirm to you that he will be lost. He has neither the face nor the manner of one who can survive that terrible ordeal. Weigh in the scales his criminality and the suffering he has undergone. The latter is ten times heavier already. He has lain in prison under this charge for more than two months. Is he likely ever to forget that? Imagine the anguish of his mind during that time. He has had his punishment, gentlemen, you may depend. The rolling of the chariot-wheels of Justice over this boy began when it was decided to prosecute him. We are now already at the second stage. If you permit it to go on to the third I would not give—that for him.

He holds up finger and thumb in the form of a circle, drops his hand, and sits dozen.

The jury stir, and consult each other's faces; then they turn towards the counsel for the Crown, who rises, and, fixing his eyes on a spot that seems to give him satisfaction, slides them every now and then towards the jury.

CLEAVER. May it please your lordship—[Rising on his toes] Gentlemen of the Jury,—The facts in this case are not disputed, and the defence, if my friend will allow me to say so, is so thin that I don't propose to waste the time of the Court by taking you over the evidence. The plea is one of temporary insanity. Well, gentlemen, I daresay it is clearer to me than it is to you why this rather—what shall we call it?—bizarre defence has been set up. The alternative would have been to plead guilty. Now,

gentlemen, if the prisoner had pleaded guilty my friend would have had to rely on a simple appeal to his lordship. Instead of that, he has gone into the byways and hedges and found this—er—peculiar plea, which has enabled him to show you the proverbial woman, to put her in the box—to give, in fact, a romantic glow to this affair. I compliment my friend; I think it highly ingenious of him. By these means, he has—to a certain extent—got round the Law. He has brought the whole story of motive and stress out in court, at first hand, in a way that he would not otherwise have been able to do. But when you have once grasped that fact, gentlemen, you have grasped everything. [With good-humoured contempt] For look at this plea of insanity; we can't put it lower than that. You have heard the woman. She has every reason to favour the prisoner, but what did she say? She said that the prisoner was not insane when she left him in the morning. If he were going out of his mind through distress, that was obviously the moment when insanity would have shown itself. You have heard the managing clerk, another witness for the defence. With some difficulty I elicited from him the admission that the prisoner, though jumpy [a word that he seemed to think you would understand, gentlemen, and I'm sure I hope you do], was not mad when the cheque was handed to Davis. I agree with my friend that it's unfortunate that we have not got Davis here, but the prisoner has told you the words with which Davis in turn handed him the cheque; he obviously, therefore, was not mad when he received it, or he would not have remembered those words. The cashier has told you that he was certainly in his senses when he cashed it. We have therefore the plea that a man who is sane at ten minutes past one, and sane at fifteen minutes past, may, for the purposes of avoiding the consequences of a crime, call himself insane between those points of time. Really, gentlemen, this is so peculiar a proposition that I am not disposed to weary you with further argument. You will form your own opinion of its value. My friend has adopted this way of saying a great deal to you—and very eloquently—on the score of youth, temptation, and the like. I might point out, however, that the offence with which the prisoner is charged is one of the most serious known to our law; and there are certain features in this case, such as the suspicion which he allowed to rest on his innocent fellow-clerk, and his relations with this married woman, which will render it difficult for you to attach too much importance to such pleading. I ask you, in short, gentlemen, for that verdict of guilty which, in the circumstances, I regard you as, unfortunately, bound to record.

Letting his eyes travel from the JUDGE and the jury to FROME, he sits down.

THE JUDGE. [Bending a little towards the jury, and speaking in a business-like voice] Gentlemen, you have heard the evidence, and the comments on it. My only business is to make clear to you the issues you have to try. The facts are admitted, so far as the alteration of this cheque and counterfoil by the prisoner. The defence set up is that he was not in a responsible condition when he committed the crime. Well, you have heard the prisoner's story, and the evidence of the other witnesses—so far as it bears on the point of insanity. If you think that what you have heard establishes the fact that the prisoner was insane at the time of the forgery, you will find him guilty, but insane. If, on the other hand, you conclude from what you have seen and heard that the prisoner was sane—and nothing short of insanity will count—you will find him guilty. In reviewing the testimony as to his mental condition you must bear in mind very carefully the evidence as to his demeanour and conduct both before and after the act of forgery—the evidence of the prisoner himself, of the woman, of the witness—er—COKESON, and—er—of the cashier. And in regard to that I especially direct your attention to the prisoner's admission that the idea of adding the 'ty' and the nought did come into his mind at the moment when the cheque was handed to him; and also to the alteration of the counterfoil, and to his subsequent conduct generally. The bearing of all this on the question of premeditation [and premeditation will imply sanity] is very obvious. You must not allow any considerations of age or temptation to weigh with you in the finding of your verdict. Before you can come to a verdict of guilty but insane you must be well and thoroughly convinced that the condition of his mind was such as would have qualified him at the moment for a lunatic asylum. [He pauses, then, seeing that the jury are doubtful whether to retire or no, adds:] You may retire, gentlemen, if you wish to do so.

The jury retire by a door behind the JUDGE. The JUDGE bends over his notes. FALDER, leaning from the dock, speaks excitedly to his solicitor, pointing down at RUTH. The solicitor in turn speaks to FROME.

FROME. [Rising] My lord. The prisoner is very anxious that I should ask you if your lordship would kindly request the reporters not to disclose the name of the woman witness in the Press reports of these proceedings. Your lordship will understand that the consequences might be extremely serious to her.

THE JUDGE. [Pointedly—with the suspicion of a smile] well, Mr. Frome, you deliberately took this course which involved bringing her here.

FROME. [With an ironic bow] If your lordship thinks I could have brought out the full facts in any other way?

THE JUDGE. H'm! Well.

FROME. There is very real danger to her, your lordship.

THE JUDGE. You see, I have to take your word for all that.

FROME. If your lordship would be so kind. I can assure your lordship that I am not exaggerating.

THE JUDGE. It goes very much against the grain with me that the name of a witness should ever be suppressed. [With a glance at FALDER, who is gripping and clasping his hands before him, and then at RUTH, who is sitting perfectly rigid with her eyes fixed on FALDER] I'll consider your application. It must depend. I have to remember that she may have come here to commit perjury on the prisoner's behalf.

FROME. Your lordship, I really——

THE JUDGE. Yes, yes—I don't suggest anything of the sort, Mr. Frome. Leave it at that for the moment.

As he finishes speaking, the jury return, and file back into the box.

CLERK of ASSIZE. Gentlemen, are you agreed on your verdict?

FOREMAN. We are.

CLERK of ASSIZE. Is it Guilty, or Guilty but insane?

FOREMAN. Guilty.

The JUDGE nods; then, gathering up his notes, sits looking at FALDER, who stands motionless.

FROME. [Rising] If your lordship would allow me to address you in mitigation of sentence. I don't know if your lordship thinks I can add anything to what I have said to the jury on the score of the prisoner's youth, and the great stress under which he acted.

THE JUDGE. I don't think you can, Mr. Frome.

FROME. If your lordship says so—I do most earnestly beg your lordship to give the utmost weight to my plea. [He sits down.]

THE JUDGE. [To the CLERK] Call upon him.

THE CLERK. Prisoner at the bar, you stand convicted of felony. Have you anything to say for yourself, why the Court should not give you judgment according to law? [FALDER shakes his head]

THE JUDGE. William Falder, you have been given fair trial and found guilty, in my opinion rightly found guilty, of forgery. [He pauses; then, consulting his notes, goes on] The defence was set up that you were not responsible for your actions at the moment of committing this crime. There is no, doubt, I think, that this was a device to bring out at first hand the nature of the temptation to which you succumbed. For throughout the trial your counsel was in reality making an appeal for mercy. The setting up of this defence of course enabled him to put in some evidence that might weigh in that direction. Whether he was well advised to so is another matter. He claimed that you should be treated rather as a patient than as a criminal. And this plea of his, which in the end amounted to a passionate appeal, he based in effect on an indictment of the march of Justice, which he practically accused of confirming and completing the process of criminality. Now, in considering how far I should allow weight to his appeal; I have a number of factors to take into account. I have to consider on the one hand the grave nature of your offence, the deliberate way in which you subsequently altered the counterfoil, the danger you caused to an innocent man—and that, to my mind, is a very grave point—and finally I have to consider the necessity of deterring others from following your example. On the other hand, I have to bear in mind that you are young, that you have hitherto borne a good character, that you were, if I am to believe your evidence and that of your witnesses, in a state of some emotional excitement when you committed this crime. I have every wish, consistently with my duty—not only to you, but to the community—to treat you with leniency. And this brings me to what are the determining factors in my mind in my consideration of your case. You are a clerk in a lawyer's office—that is a very serious element in this case; there can be no possible excuse made for you on the ground that you were not fully conversant with the nature of the crime you were committing, and the penalties that attach to it. It is said, however, that you were carried away by your emotions. The story has been told here to-day

of your relations with this—er—Mrs. Honeywill; on that story both the defence and the plea for mercy were in effect based. Now what is that story? It is that you, a young man, and she, a young woman, unhappily married, had formed an attachment, which you both say—with what truth I am unable to gauge—had not yet resulted in immoral relations, but which you both admit was about to result in such relationship. Your counsel has made an attempt to palliate this, on the ground that the woman is in what he describes, I think, as "a hopeless position." As to that I can express no opinion. She is a married woman, and the fact is patent that you committed this crime with the view of furthering an immoral design. Now, however I might wish, I am not able to justify to my conscience a plea for mercy which has a basis inimical to morality. It is vitiated 'ab initio', and would, if successful, free you for the completion of this immoral project. Your counsel has made an attempt to trace your offence back to what he seems to suggest is a defect in the marriage law; he has made an attempt also to show that to punish you with further imprisonment would be unjust. I do not follow him in these flights. The Law is what it is—a majestic edifice, sheltering all of us, each stone of which rests on another. I am concerned only with its administration. The crime you have committed is a very serious one. I cannot feel it in accordance with my duty to Society to exercise the powers I have in your favour. You will go to penal servitude for three years.

FALDER, who throughout the JUDGE'S speech has looked at him steadily, lets his head fall forward on his breast. RUTH starts up from her seat as he is taken out by the warders. There is a bustle in court.

THE JUDGE. [Speaking to the reporters] Gentlemen of the Press, I think that the name of the female witness should not be reported.

The reporters bow their acquiescence. THE JUDGE. [To RUTH, who is staring in the direction in which FALDER has disappeared] Do you understand, your name will not be mentioned?

COKESON. [Pulling her sleeve] The judge is speaking to you.

RUTH turns, stares at the JUDGE, and turns away.

THE JUDGE. I shall sit rather late to-day. Call the next case.

CLERK of ASSIZE. [To a warder] Put up John Booley.

To cries of "Witnesses in the case of Booley":

The curtain falls.

ACT III

SCENE I

A prison. A plainly furnished room, with two large barred windows, overlooking the prisoners' exercise yard, where men, in yellow clothes marked with arrows, and yellow brimless caps, are seen in single file at a distance of four yards from each other, walking rapidly on serpentine white lines marked on the concrete floor of the yard. Two warders in blue uniforms, with peaked caps and swords, are stationed amongst them. The room has distempered walls, a bookcase with numerous official-looking books, a cupboard between the windows, a plan of the prison on the wall, a writing-table covered with documents. It is Christmas Eve.

The GOVERNOR, a neat, grave-looking man, with a trim, fair moustache, the eyes of a theorist, and grizzled hair, receding from the temples, is standing close to this writing-table looking at a sort of rough saw made out of a piece of metal. The hand in which he holds it is gloved, for two fingers are missing. The chief warder, WOODER, a tall, thin, military-looking man of sixty, with grey moustache and melancholy, monkey-like eyes, stands very upright two paces from him.

THE GOVERNOR. [With a faint, abstracted smile] Queer-looking affair, Mr. Wooder! Where did you find it?

WOODER. In his mattress, sir. Haven't come across such a thing for two years now.

THE GOVERNOR. [With curiosity] Had he any set plan?

WOODER. He'd sawed his window-bar about that much. [He holds up his thumb and finger a quarter of an inch apart]

THE GOVERNOR. I'll see him this afternoon. What's his name?
Moaney! An old hand, I think?

WOODER. Yes, sir—fourth spell of penal. You'd think an old lag like him would have had more sense by now. [With pitying contempt] Occupied his mind, he said. Breaking in and breaking out—that's all they think about.

THE GOVERNOR. Who's next him?

WOODER. O'Cleary, sir.

THE GOVERNOR. The Irishman.

WOODER. Next him again there's that young fellow, Falder—star class—and next him old Clipton.

THE GOVERNOR. Ah, yes! "The philosopher." I want to see him about his eyes.

WOODER. Curious thing, sir: they seem to know when there's one of these tries at escape going on. It makes them restive—there's a regular wave going through them just now.

THE GOVERNOR. [Meditatively] Odd things—those waves. [Turning to look at the prisoners exercising] Seem quiet enough out here!

WOODER. That Irishman, O'Cleary, began banging on his door this morning. Little thing like that's quite enough to upset the whole lot. They're just like dumb animals at times.

THE GOVERNOR. I've seen it with horses before thunder—it'll run right through cavalry lines.

The prison CHAPLAIN has entered. He is a dark-haired, ascetic man, in clerical undress, with a peculiarly steady, tight-lipped face and slow, cultured speech.

THE GOVERNOR. [Holding up the saw] Seen this, Miller?

THE CHAPLAIN. Useful-looking specimen.

THE GOVERNOR. Do for the Museum, eh! [He goes to the cupboard and opens it, displaying to view a number of quaint ropes, hooks, and metal tools with labels tied on them] That'll do, thanks, Mr. Wooder.

WOODER. [Saluting] Thank you, sir. [He goes out]

THE GOVERNOR. Account for the state of the men last day or two, Miller? Seems going through the whole place.

THE CHAPLAIN. No. I don't know of anything.

THE GOVERNOR. By the way, will you dine with us on Christmas Day?

THE CHAPLAIN. To-morrow. Thanks very much.

THE GOVERNOR. Worries me to feel the men discontented. [Gazing at the saw] Have to punish this poor devil. Can't help liking a man who tries to escape. [He places the saw in his pocket and locks the cupboard again]

THE CHAPLAIN. Extraordinary perverted will-power—some of them.
Nothing to be done till it's broken.

THE GOVERNOR. And not much afterwards, I'm afraid. Ground too hard for golf?

WOODER comes in again.

WOODER. Visitor who's been seeing Q 3007 asks to speak to you, sir.
I told him it wasn't usual.

THE GOVERNOR. What about?

WOODER. Shall I put him off, sir?

THE GOVERNOR. [Resignedly] No, no. Let's see him. Don't go, Miller.

WOODER motions to some one without, and as the visitor comes in withdraws.

The visitor is COKESON, who is attired in a thick overcoat to the knees, woollen gloves, and carries a top hat.

COKESON. I'm sorry to trouble you. I've been talking to the young man.

THE GOVERNOR. We have a good many here.

COKESON. Name of Falder, forgery. [Producing a card, and handing it to the GOVERNOR] Firm of James and Walter How. Well known in the law.

THE GOVERNOR. [Receiving the card-with a faint smile] What do you want to see me about, sir?

COKESON. [Suddenly seeing the prisoners at exercise] Why! what a sight!

THE GOVERNOR. Yes, we have that privilege from here; my office is being done up. [Sitting down at his table] Now, please!

COKESON. [Dragging his eyes with difficulty from the window] I wanted to say a word to you; I shan't keep you long. [Confidentially] Fact is, I oughtn't to be here by rights. His sister came to me—he's got no father and mother—and she was in some distress. "My husband won't let me go and see him," she said; "says he's disgraced the family. And his other sister," she said, "is an invalid." And she asked me to come. Well, I take an interest in him. He was our junior—I go to the same chapel—and I didn't like to refuse. And what I wanted to tell you was, he seems lonely here.

THE GOVERNOR. Not unnaturally.

COKESON. I'm afraid it'll prey on my mind. I see a lot of them about working together.

THE GOVERNOR. Those are local prisoners. The convicts serve their three months here in separate confinement, sir.

COKESON. But we don't want to be unreasonable. He's quite downhearted. I wanted to ask you to let him run about with the others.

THE GOVERNOR. [With faint amusement] Ring the bell—would you, Miller? [To COKESON] You'd like to hear what the doctor says about him, perhaps.

THE CHAPLAIN. [Ringing the bell] You are not accustomed to prisons, it would seem, sir.

COKESON. No. But it's a pitiful sight. He's quite a young fellow. I said to him: "Before a month's up" I said, "you'll be out and about with the others; it'll be a nice change for you." "A month!" he said—like that! "Come!" I said, "we mustn't exaggerate. What's a month? Why, it's nothing!" "A day," he said, "shut up in your cell thinking and brooding as I do, it's longer than a year outside. I can't help it," he said; "I try—but I'm built that way, Mr. COKESON." And, he held his hand up to his face. I could see the tears trickling through his fingers. It wasn't nice.

THE CHAPLAIN. He's a young man with large, rather peculiar eyes, isn't he? Not Church of England, I think?

COKESON. No.

THE CHAPLAIN. I know.

THE GOVERNOR. [To WOODER, who has come in] Ask the doctor to be good enough to come here for a minute. [WOODER salutes, and goes out] Let's see, he's not married?

COKESON. No. [Confidentially] But there's a party he's very much attached to, not altogether com-*il-fa*. It's a sad story.

THE CHAPLAIN. If it wasn't for drink and women, sir, this prison might be closed.

COKESON. [Looking at the CHAPLAIN over his spectacles] Ye-es, but I wanted to tell you about that, special. He had hopes they'd have let her come and see him, but they haven't. Of course he asked me questions. I did my best, but I couldn't tell the poor young fellow a lie, with him in here—seemed like

hitting him. But I'm afraid it's made him worse.

THE GOVERNOR. What was this news then?

COKESON. Like this. The woman had a nahsty, spiteful feller for a husband, and she'd left him. Fact is, she was going away with our young friend. It's not nice—but I've looked over it. Well, when he was put in here she said she'd earn her living apart, and wait for him to come out. That was a great consolation to him. But after a month she came to me—I don't know her personally—and she said: "I can't earn the children's living, let alone my own—I've got no friends. I'm obliged to keep out of everybody's way, else my husband'd get to know where I was. I'm very much reduced," she said. And she has lost flesh. "I'll have to go in the workhouse!" It's a painful story. I said to her: "No," I said, "not that! I've got a wife an' family, but sooner than you should do that I'll spare you a little myself." "Really," she said—she's a nice creature—"I don't like to take it from you. I think I'd better go back to my husband." Well, I know he's a nahsty, spiteful feller—drinks—but I didn't like to persuade her not to.

THE CHAPLAIN. Surely, no.

COKESON. Ye-es, but I'm sorry now; it's upset the poor young fellow dreadfully. And what I wanted to say was: He's got his three years to serve. I want things to be pleasant for him.

THE CHAPLAIN. [With a touch of impatience] The Law hardly shares your view, I'm afraid.

COKESON. But I can't help thinking that to shut him up there by himself'll turn him silly. And nobody wants that, I s'pose. I don't like to see a man cry.

THE CHAPLAIN. It's a very rare thing for them to give way like that.

COKESON. [Looking at him—in a tone of sudden dogged hostility]
I keep dogs.

THE CHAPLAIN. Indeed?

COKESON. Ye-es. And I say this: I wouldn't shut one of them up all by himself, month after month, not if he'd bit me all over.

THE CHAPLAIN. Unfortunately, the criminal is not a dog; he has a sense of right and wrong.

COKESON. But that's not the way to make him feel it.

THE CHAPLAIN. Ah! there I'm afraid we must differ.

COKESON. It's the same with dogs. If you treat 'em with kindness they'll do anything for you; but to shut 'em up alone, it only makes 'em savage.

THE CHAPLAIN. Surely you should allow those who have had a little more experience than yourself to know what is best for prisoners.

COKESON. [Doggedly] I know this young feller, I've watched him for years. He's eurotic—got no stamina. His father died of consumption. I'm thinking of his future. If he's to be kept there shut up by himself, without a cat to keep him company, it'll do him harm. I said to him: "Where do you feel it?" "I can't tell you, Mr. COKESON," he said, "but sometimes I could beat my head against the wall." It's not nice.

During this speech the DOCTOR has entered. He is a medium-Sized, rather good-looking man, with a quick eye. He stands leaning against the window.

THE GOVERNOR. This gentleman thinks the separate is telling on Q 3007—Falder, young thin fellow, star class. What do you say, Doctor Clements?

THE DOCTOR. He doesn't like it, but it's not doing him any harm.

COKESON. But he's told me.

THE DOCTOR. Of course he'd say so, but we can always tell. He's lost no weight since he's been here.

COKESON. It's his state of mind I'm speaking of.

THE DOCTOR. His mind's all right so far. He's nervous, rather melancholy. I don't see signs of anything more. I'm watching him carefully.

COKESON. [Nonplussed] I'm glad to hear you say that.

THE CHAPLAIN. [More suavely] It's just at this period that we are able to make some impression on them, sir. I am speaking from my special standpoint.

COKESON. [Turning bewildered to the GOVERNOR] I don't want to be unpleasant, but having given him this news, I do feel it's awkward.

THE GOVERNOR. I'll make a point of seeing him to-day.

COKESON. I'm much obliged to you. I thought perhaps seeing him every day you wouldn't notice it.

THE GOVERNOR. [Rather sharply] If any sign of injury to his health shows itself his case will be reported at once. That's fully provided for. [He rises]

COKESON. [Following his own thoughts] Of course, what you don't see doesn't trouble you; but having seen him, I don't want to have him on my mind.

THE GOVERNOR. I think you may safely leave it to us, sir.

COKESON. [Mollified and apologetic] I thought you'd understand me. I'm a plain man—never set myself up against authority. [Expanding to the CHAPLAIN] Nothing personal meant. Good-morning.

As he goes out the three officials do not look at each other, but their faces wear peculiar expressions.

THE CHAPLAIN. Our friend seems to think that prison is a hospital.

COKESON. [Returning suddenly with an apologetic air] There's just one little thing. This woman—I suppose I mustn't ask you to let him see her. It'd be a rare treat for them both. He's thinking about her all the time. Of course she's not his wife. But he's quite safe in here. They're a pitiful couple. You couldn't make an exception?

THE GOVERNOR. [Wearily] As you say, my dear sir, I couldn't make an exception; he won't be allowed another visit of any sort till he goes to a convict prison.

COKESON. I see. [Rather coldly] Sorry to have troubled you.
[He again goes out]

THE CHAPLAIN. [Shrugging his shoulders] The plain man indeed, poor fellow. Come and have some lunch, Clements?

He and the DOCTOR go out talking.

The GOVERNOR, with a sigh, sits down at his table and takes up a pen.

The curtain falls.

SCENE II

Part of the ground corridor of the prison. The walls are coloured with greenish distemper up to a stripe of deeper green about the height of a man's shoulder, and above this line are whitewashed. The floor is of blackened stones. Daylight is filtering through a heavily barred window at the end. The doors of four cells are visible. Each cell door has a little round peep-hole at the level of a man's eye, covered by a little round disc, which, raised upwards, affords a view of the cell. On the wall, close to each cell door, hangs a little square board with the prisoner's name, number, and record.

Overhead can be seen the iron structures of the first-floor and second-floor corridors.

The WARDER INSTRUCTOR, a bearded man in blue uniform, with an apron, and some dangling keys, is just emerging from one of the cells.

INSTRUCTOR. [Speaking from the door into the cell] I'll have another bit for you when that's finished.

O'CLEARY. [Unseen—in an Irish voice] Little doubt o' that, sirr.

INSTRUCTOR. [Gossiping] Well, you'd rather have it than nothing, I s'pose.

O'CLEARY. An' that's the blessed truth.

Sounds are heard of a cell door being closed and locked, and of approaching footsteps.

INSTRUCTOR. [In a sharp, changed voice] Look alive over it!

He shuts the cell door, and stands at attention.

The GOVERNOR comes walking down the corridor, followed by
WOODER.

THE GOVERNOR. Anything to report?

INSTRUCTOR. [Saluting] Q 3007 [he points to a cell] is behind with his work, sir. He'll lose marks to-day.

The GOVERNOR nods and passes on to the end cell. The INSTRUCTOR goes away.

THE GOVERNOR. This is our maker of saws, isn't it?

He takes the saw from his pocket as WOODER throws open the door of the cell. The convict MOANEY is seen lying on his bed, athwart the cell, with his cap on. He springs up and stands in the middle of the cell. He is a raw-boned fellow, about fifty-six years old, with outstanding bat's ears and fierce, staring, steel-coloured eyes.

WOODER. Cap off! [MOANEY removes his cap] Out here! [MOANEY Comes to the door]

THE GOVERNOR. [Beckoning him out into the corridor, and holding up the saw—with the manner of an officer speaking to a private] Anything to say about this, my man? [MOANEY is silent] Come!

MOANEY. It passed the time.

THE GOVERNOR. [Pointing into the cell] Not enough to do, eh?

MOANEY. It don't occupy your mind.

THE GOVERNOR. [Tapping the saw] You might find a better way than this.

MOANEY. [Sullenly] Well! What way? I must keep my hand in against the time I get out. What's the good of anything else to me at my time of life? [With a gradual change to civility, as his tongue warms] Ye know that, sir. I'll be in again within a year or two, after I've done this lot. I don't want to disgrace meself when I'm out. You've got your pride keeping the prison smart; well, I've got mine. [Seeing that the GOVERNOR is listening with interest, he goes on, pointing to the saw] I must be doin' a little o' this. It's no harm to any one. I was five weeks makin' that saw—a, bit of all right it is, too; now I'll get cells, I suppose, or seven days' bread and water. You can't help it, sir, I know that—I quite put meself in your place.

THE GOVERNOR. Now, look here, Moaney, if I pass it over will you give me your word not to try it on again? Think! [He goes into the cell, walks to the end of it, mounts the stool, and tries the window-bars]

THE GOVERNOR. [Returning] Well?

MOANEY. [Who has been reflecting] I've got another six weeks to do in here, alone. I can't do it and think o' nothing. I must have something to interest me. You've made me a sporting offer, sir, but I can't pass my word about it. I shouldn't like to deceive a gentleman. [Pointing into the cell] Another four hours' steady work would have done it.

THE GOVERNOR. Yes, and what then? Caught, brought back, punishment. Five weeks' hard work to make this, and cells at the end of it, while they put anew bar to your window. Is it worth it, Moaney?

MOANEY. [With a sort of fierceness] Yes, it is.

THE GOVERNOR. [Putting his hand to his brow] Oh, well! Two days' cells-bread and water.

MOANEY. Thank 'e, sir.

He turns quickly like an animal and slips into his cell.

The GOVERNOR looks after him and shakes his head as WOODER closes and locks the cell door.

THE GOVERNOR. Open Clipton's cell.

WOODER opens the door of CLIPTON'S cell. CLIPTON is sitting on a stool just inside the door, at work on a pair of trousers. He is a small, thick, oldish man, with an almost shaven head, and smouldering little dark eyes behind smoked spectacles. He gets up and stands motionless in the doorway, peering at his visitors.

THE GOVERNOR. [Beckoning] Come out here a minute, Clipton.

CLIPTON, with a sort of dreadful quietness, comes into the corridor, the needle and thread in his hand. The GOVERNOR signs to WOODER, who goes into the cell and inspects it carefully.

THE GOVERNOR. How are your eyes?

CLIPTON. I don't complain of them. I don't see the sun here. [He makes a stealthy movement, protruding his neck a little] There's just one thing, Mr. Governor, as you're speaking to me. I wish you'd ask the cove next door here to keep a bit quieter.

THE GOVERNOR. What's the matter? I don't want any tales, Clipton.

CLIPTON. He keeps me awake. I don't know who he is. [With contempt] One of this star class, I expect. Oughtn't to be here with us.

THE GOVERNOR. [Quietly] Quite right, Clipton. He'll be moved when there's a cell vacant.

CLIPTON. He knocks about like a wild beast in the early morning. I'm not used to it—stops me getting my sleep out. In the evening too. It's not fair, Mr. Governor, as you're speaking to me. Sleep's the comfort I've got here; I'm entitled to take it out full.

WOODER comes out of the cell, and instantly, as though extinguished, CLIPTON moves with stealthy suddenness back into his cell.

WOODER. All right, sir.

THE GOVERNOR nods. The door is closed and locked.

THE GOVERNOR. Which is the man who banged on his door this morning?

WOODER. [Going towards O'CLEARY'S cell] This one, sir; O'Cleary.

He lifts the disc and glances through the peephole.

THE GOVERNOR. Open.

WOODER throws open the door. O'CLEARY, who is seated at a little table by the door as if listening, springs up and stands at attention just inside the doorway. He is a broad-faced, middle-aged man, with a wide, thin, flexible mouth, and little holes under his high cheekbones.

THE GOVERNOR. Where's the joke, O'Cleary?

O'CLEARY. The joke, your honour? I've not seen one for a long time.

THE GOVERNOR. Banging on your door?

O'CLEARY. Oh! that!

THE GOVERNOR. It's womanish.

O'CLEARY. An' it's that I'm becoming this two months past.

THE GOVERNOR. Anything to complain of?

O'CLEARY. NO, Sirr.

THE GOVERNOR. You're an old hand; you ought to know better.

O'CLEARY. Yes, I've been through it all.

THE GOVERNOR. You've got a youngster next door; you'll upset him.

O'CLEARY. It cam' over me, your honour. I can't always be the same steady man.

THE GOVERNOR. Work all right?

O'CLEARY. [Taking up a rush mat he is making] Oh! I can do it on me head. It's the miserablest stuff—don't take the brains of a mouse. [Working his mouth] It's here I feel it—the want of a little noise—a terrible little wud ease me.

THE GOVERNOR. You know as well as I do that if you were out in the shops you wouldn't be allowed to talk.

O'CLEARY. [With a look of profound meaning] Not with my mouth.

THE GOVERNOR. Well, then?

O'CLEARY. But it's the great conversation I'd have.

THE GOVERNOR. [With a smile] Well, no more conversation on your door.

O'CLEARY. No, sirr, I wud not have the little wit to repeat meself.

THE GOVERNOR. [Turning] Good-night.

O'CLEARY. Good-night, your honour.

He turns into his cell. The GOVERNOR shuts the door.

THE GOVERNOR. [Looking at the record card] Can't help liking the poor blackguard.

WOODER. He's an amiable man, sir.

THE GOVERNOR. [Pointing down the corridor] Ask the doctor to come here, Mr. Wooder.

WOODER salutes and goes away down the corridor.

The GOVERNOR goes to the door of FALDER'S cell. He raises his uninjured hand to uncover the peep-hole; but, without uncovering it, shakes his head and drops his hand; then, after scrutinising the record board, he opens the cell door. FALDER, who is standing against it, lurches forward.

THE GOVERNOR. [Beckoning him out] Now tell me: can't you settle down, Falder?

FALDER. [In a breathless voice] Yes, sir.

THE GOVERNOR. You know what I mean? It's no good running your head against a stone wall, is it?

FALDER. No, sir.

THE GOVERNOR. Well, come.

FALDER. I try, sir.

THE GOVERNOR. Can't you sleep?

FALDER. Very little. Between two o'clock and getting up's the worst time.

THE GOVERNOR. How's that?

FALDER. [His lips twitch with a sort of smile] I don't know, sir. I was always nervous. [Suddenly voluble] Everything seems to get such a size then. I feel I'll never get out as long as I live.

THE GOVERNOR. That's morbid, my lad. Pull yourself together.

FALDER. [With an equally sudden dogged resentment] Yes—I've got to.

THE GOVERNOR. Think of all these other fellows?

FALDER. They're used to it.

THE GOVERNOR. They all had to go through it once for the first time, just as you're doing now.

FALDER. Yes, sir, I shall get to be like them in time, I suppose.

THE GOVERNOR. [Rather taken aback] H'm! Well! That rests with you. Now come. Set your mind to it, like a good fellow. You're still quite young. A man can make himself what he likes.

FALDER. [Wistfully] Yes, sir.

THE GOVERNOR. Take a good hold of yourself. Do you read?

FALDER. I don't take the words in. [Hanging his head] I know it's no good; but I can't help thinking of what's going on outside. In my cell I can't see out at all. It's thick glass, sir.

THE GOVERNOR. You've had a visitor. Bad news?

FALDER. Yes.

THE GOVERNOR. You mustn't think about it.

FALDER. [Looking back at his cell] How can I help it, sir?

He suddenly becomes motionless as WOODER and the DOCTOR approach. The GOVERNOR motions to him to go back into his cell.

FALDER. [Quick and low] I'm quite right in my head, sir. [He goes back into his cell.]

THE GOVERNOR. [To the DOCTOR] Just go in and see him, Clements.

The DOCTOR goes into the cell. The GOVERNOR pushes the door to, nearly closing it, and walks towards the window.

WOODER. [Following] Sorry you should be troubled like this, sir. Very contented lot of men, on the whole.

THE GOVERNOR. [Shortly] You think so?

WOODER. Yes, sir. It's Christmas doing it, in my opinion.

THE GOVERNOR. [To himself] Queer, that!

WOODER. Beg pardon, sir?

THE GOVERNOR. Christmas!

He turns towards the window, leaving WOODER looking at him with a sort of pained anxiety.

WOODER. [Suddenly] Do you think we make show enough, sir? If you'd like us to have more holly?

THE GOVERNOR. Not at all, Mr. Wooder.

WOODER. Very good, sir.

The DOCTOR has come out of FALDER's Cell, and the GOVERNOR beckons to him.

THE GOVERNOR. Well?

THE DOCTOR. I can't make anything much of him. He's nervous, of course.

THE GOVERNOR. Is there any sort of case to report? Quite frankly, Doctor.

THE DOCTOR. Well, I don't think the separates doing him any good; but then I could say the same of a lot of them—they'd get on better in the shops, there's no doubt.

THE GOVERNOR. You mean you'd have to recommend others?

THE DOCTOR. A dozen at least. It's on his nerves. There's nothing tangible. That fellow there [pointing to O'CLEARY'S cell], for instance—feels it just as much, in his way. If I once get away from physical facts—I shan't know where I am. Conscientiously, sir, I don't know how to differentiate him.

He hasn't lost weight. Nothing wrong with his eyes. His pulse is good. Talks all right.

THE GOVERNOR. It doesn't amount to melancholia?

THE DOCTOR. [Shaking his head] I can report on him if you like; but if I do I ought to report on others.

THE GOVERNOR. I see. [Looking towards FALDER'S cell] The poor devil must just stick it then.

As he says thin he looks absently at WOODER.

WOODER. Beg pardon, sir?

For answer the GOVERNOR stares at him, turns on his heel, and walks away. There is a sound as of beating on metal.

THE GOVERNOR. [Stopping] Mr. Wooder?

WOODER. Banging on his door, sir. I thought we should have more of that.

He hurries forward, passing the GOVERNOR, who follows closely.

The curtain falls.

SCENE III

FALDER's cell, a whitewashed space thirteen feet broad by seven deep, and nine feet high, with a rounded ceiling. The floor is of shiny blackened bricks. The barred window of opaque glass, with a ventilator, is high up in the middle of the end wall. In the middle of the opposite end wall is the narrow door. In a corner are the mattress and bedding rolled up [two blankets, two sheets, and a coverlet]. Above them is a quarter-circular wooden shelf, on which is a Bible and several little devotional books, piled in a symmetrical pyramid; there are also a black hair brush, tooth-brush, and a bit of soap. In another corner is the wooden frame of a bed, standing on end. There is a dark ventilator under the window, and another over the door. FALDER'S work [a shirt to which he is putting buttonholes] is hung to a nail on the wall over a small wooden table, on which the novel "Lorna Doone" lies open. Low down in the corner by the door is a thick glass screen, about a foot square, covering the gas-jet let into the wall. There is also a wooden stool, and a pair of shoes beneath it. Three bright round tins are set under the window.

In fast-failing daylight, FALDER, in his stockings, is seen standing motionless, with his head inclined towards the door, listening. He moves a little closer to the door, his stockinged feet making no noise. He stops at the door. He is trying harder and harder to hear something, any little thing that is going on outside. He springs suddenly upright—as if at a sound—and remains perfectly motionless. Then, with a heavy sigh, he moves to his work, and stands looking at it, with his head down; he does a stitch or two, having the air of a man so lost in sadness that each stitch is, as it were, a coming to life. Then turning abruptly, he begins pacing the cell, moving his head, like an animal pacing its cage. He stops again at the door, listens, and, placing the palms of his hands against it with his fingers spread out, leans his forehead against the iron. Turning from it, presently, he moves slowly back towards the window, tracing his way with his finger along the top line of the distemper that runs round the wall. He stops under the window, and, picking up the lid of one of the tins, peers into it. It has grown very nearly dark. Suddenly the lid falls out of his hand with a clatter—the only sound that has broken the silence—and he stands staring intently at the wall where the stuff of the shirt is hanging rather white in the darkness—he seems to be seeing somebody or something there. There is a sharp tap and click; the cell light behind the glass screen has been turned up. The cell is brightly lighted. FALDER is seen gasping for breath.

A sound from far away, as of distant, dull beating on thick metal, is suddenly audible. FALDER shrinks back, not able to bear this sudden clamour. But the sound grows, as though some great tumbril were rolling towards the cell. And gradually it seems to

hypnotise him. He begins creeping inch by inch nearer to the door. The banging sound, travelling from cell to cell, draws closer and closer; FALDER'S hands are seen moving as if his spirit had already joined in this beating, and the sound swells till it seems to have entered the very cell. He suddenly raises his clenched fists. Panting violently, he flings himself at his door, and beats on it.

The curtain falls.

ACT IV

The scene is again COKESON'S room, at a few minutes to ten of a March morning, two years later. The doors are all open. SWEEDLE, now blessed with a sprouting moustache, is getting the offices ready. He arranges papers on COKESON'S table; then goes to a covered washstand, raises the lid, and looks at himself in the mirror. While he is gazing his full RUTH HONEYWILL comes in through the outer office and stands in the doorway. There seems a kind of exultation and excitement behind her habitual impassivity.

SWEEDLE. [Suddenly seeing her, and dropping the lid of the washstand with a bang] Hello! It's you!

RUTH. Yes.

SWEEDLE. There's only me here! They don't waste their time hurrying down in the morning. Why, it must be two years since we had the pleasure of seeing you. [Nervously] What have you been doing with yourself?

RUTH. [Sardonically] Living.

SWEEDLE. [Impressed] If you want to see him [he points to COKESON'S chair], he'll be here directly—never misses—not much. [Delicately] I hope our friend's back from the country. His time's been up these three months, if I remember. [RUTH nods] I was awful sorry about that. The governor made a mistake—if you ask me.

RUTH. He did.

SWEEDLE. He ought to have given him a chanst. And, I say, the judge ought to ha' let him go after that. They've forgot what human nature's like. Whereas we know. [RUTH gives him a honeyed smile]

SWEEDLE. They come down on you like a cartload of bricks, flatten you out, and when you don't swell up again they complain of it. I know 'em—seen a lot of that sort of thing in my time. [He shakes his head in the plenitude of wisdom] Why, only the other day the governor—

But COKESON has come in through the outer office; brisk with east wind, and decidedly greyer.

COKESON. [Drawing off his coat and gloves] Why! it's you! [Then motioning SWEEDLE out, and closing the door] Quite a stranger! Must be two years. D'you want to see me? I can give you a minute. Sit down! Family well?

RUTH. Yes. I'm not living where I was.

COKESON. [Eyeing her askance] I hope things are more comfortable at home.

RUTH. I couldn't stay with Honeywill, after all.

COKESON. You haven't done anything rash, I hope. I should be sorry if you'd done anything rash.

RUTH. I've kept the children with me.

COKESON. [Beginning to feel that things are not so jolly as ha had hoped] Well, I'm glad to have seen you. You've not heard from the young man, I suppose, since he came out?

RUTH. Yes, I ran across him yesterday.

COKESON. I hope he's well.

RUTH. [With sudden fierceness] He can't get anything to do. It's dreadful to see him. He's just skin and bone.

COKESON. [With genuine concern] Dear me! I'm sorry to hear that. [On his guard again] Didn't they find him a place when his time was up?

RUTH. He was only there three weeks. It got out.

COKESON. I'm sure I don't know what I can do for you. I don't like to be snubby.

RUTH. I can't bear his being like that.

COKESON. [Scanning her not unprosperous figure] I know his relations aren't very forthy about him. Perhaps you can do something for him, till he finds his feet.

RUTH. Not now. I could have—but not now.

COKESON. I don't understand.

RUTH. [Proudly] I've seen him again—that's all over.

COKESON. [Staring at her—disturbed] I'm a family man—I don't want to hear anything unpleasant. Excuse me—I'm very busy.

RUTH. I'd have gone home to my people in the country long ago, but they've never got over me marrying Honeywill. I never was waywise, Mr. Cokeson, but I'm proud. I was only a girl, you see, when I married him. I thought the world of him, of course . . . he used to come travelling to our farm.

COKESON. [Regretfully] I did hope you'd have got on better, after you saw me.

RUTH. He used me worse than ever. He couldn't break my nerve, but I lost my health; and then he began knocking the children about. I couldn't stand that. I wouldn't go back now, if he were dying.

COKESON. [Who has risen and is shifting about as though dodging a stream of lava] We mustn't be violent, must we?

RUTH. [Smouldering] A man that can't behave better than that—
[There is silence]

COKESON. [Fascinated in spite of himself] Then there you were! And what did you do then?

RUTH. [With a shrug] Tried the same as when I left him before..., making skirts... cheap things. It was the best I could get, but I never made more than ten shillings a week, buying my own cotton and working all day; I hardly ever got to bed till past twelve. I kept at it for nine months. [Fiercely] Well, I'm not fit for that; I wasn't made for it. I'd rather die.

COKESON. My dear woman! We mustn't talk like that.

RUTH. It was starvation for the children too—after what they'd always had. I soon got not to care. I used to be too tired. [She is silent]

COKESON. [With fearful curiosity] Why, what happened then?

RUTH. [With a laugh] My employer happened then—he's happened ever since.

COKESON. Dear! Oh dear! I never came across a thing like this.

RUTH. [Dully] He's treated me all right. But I've done with that. [Suddenly her lips begin to quiver, and she hides them with the back of her hand] I never thought I'd see him again, you see. It was just a chance I met him by Hyde Park. We went in there and sat down, and he told me all about himself. Oh! Mr. Cokeson, give him another chance.

COKESON. [Greatly disturbed] Then you've both lost your livings!
What a horrible position!

RUTH. If he could only get here—where there's nothing to find out about him!

COKESON. We can't have anything derogative to the firm.

RUTH. I've no one else to go to.

COKESON. I'll speak to the partners, but I don't think they'll take him, under the circumstances. I

don't really.

RUTH. He came with me; he's down there in the street. [She points to the window.]

COKESON. [On his dignity] He shouldn't have done that until he's sent for. [Then softening at the look on her face] We've got a vacancy, as it happens, but I can't promise anything.

RUTH. It would be the saving of him.

COKESON. Well, I'll do what I can, but I'm not sanguine. Now tell him that I don't want him till I see how things are. Leave your address? [Repeating her] 83 Mullingar Street? [He notes it on blotting-paper] Good-morning.

RUTH. Thank you.

She moves towards the door, turns as if to speak, but does not, and goes away.

COKESON. [Wiping his head and forehead with a large white cotton handkerchief] What a business! [Then looking amongst his papers, he sounds his bell. SWEEDLE answers it]

COKESON. Was that young Richards coming here to-day after the clerk's place?

SWEEDLE. Yes.

COKESON. Well, keep him in the air; I don't want to see him yet.

SWEEDLE. What shall I tell him, sir?

COKESON. [With asperity] invent something. Use your brains. Don't stump him off altogether.

SWEEDLE. Shall I tell him that we've got illness, sir?

COKESON. No! Nothing untrue. Say I'm not here to-day.

SWEEDLE. Yes, sir. Keep him hankering?

COKESON. Exactly. And look here. You remember Falder? I may be having him round to see me. Now, treat him like you'd have him treat you in a similar position.

SWEEDLE. I naturally should do.

COKESON. That's right. When a man's down never hit 'im. 'Tisn't necessary. Give him a hand up. That's a metaphor I recommend to you in life. It's sound policy.

SWEEDLE. Do you think the governors will take him on again, sir?

COKESON. Can't say anything about that. [At the sound of some one having entered the outer office] Who's there?

SWEEDLE. [Going to the door and looking] It's Falder, sir.

COKESON. [Vexed] Dear me! That's very naughty of her. Tell him to call again. I don't want—

He breaks off as FALDER comes in. FALDER is thin, pale, older, his eyes have grown more restless. His clothes are very worn and loose.

SWEEDLE, nodding cheerfully, withdraws.

COKESON. Glad to see you. You're rather previous. [Trying to keep things pleasant] Shake hands! She's striking while the iron's hot. [He wipes his forehead] I don't blame her. She's anxious.

FALDER timidly takes COKESON's hand and glances towards the partners' door.

COKESON. No—not yet! Sit down! [FALDER sits in the chair at the aide of COKESON's table, on which he places his cap] Now you are here I'd like you to give me a little account of yourself. [Looking at him over his spectacles] How's your health?

FALDER. I'm alive, Mr. Cokeson.

COKESON. [Preoccupied] I'm glad to hear that. About this matter. I don't like doing anything out of the ordinary; it's not my habit. I'm a plain man, and I want everything smooth and straight. But I promised your friend to speak to the partners, and I always keep my word.

FALDER. I just want a chance, Mr. Cokeson. I've paid for that job a thousand times and more. I have, sir. No one knows. They say I weighed more when I came out than when I went in. They couldn't weigh me here [he touches his head] or here [he touches—his heart, and gives a sort of laugh]. Till last night I'd have thought there was nothing in here at all.

COKESON. [Concerned] You've not got heart disease?

FALDER. Oh! they passed me sound enough.

COKESON. But they got you a place, didn't they?

FALDER. Yes; very good people, knew all about it—very kind to me. I thought I was going to get on first rate. But one day, all of a sudden, the other clerks got wind of it.... I couldn't stick it, Mr. COKESON, I couldn't, sir.

COKESON. Easy, my dear fellow, easy!

FALDER. I had one small job after that, but it didn't last.

COKESON. How was that?

FALDER. It's no good deceiving you, Mr. Cokeson. The fact is, I seem to be struggling against a thing that's all round me. I can't explain it: it's as if I was in a net; as fast as I cut it here, it grows up there. I didn't act as I ought to have, about references; but what are you to do? You must have them. And that made me afraid, and I left. In fact, I'm—I'm afraid all the time now.

He bows his head and leans dejectedly silent over the table.

COKESON. I feel for you—I do really. Aren't your sisters going to do anything for you?

FALDER. One's in consumption. And the other—

COKESON. Ye...es. She told me her husband wasn't quite pleased with you.

FALDER. When I went there—they were at supper—my sister wanted to give me a kiss—I know. But he just looked at her, and said: "What have you come for?" Well, I pocketed my pride and I said: "Aren't you going to give me your hand, Jim? Cis is, I know," I said. "Look here!" he said, "that's all very well, but we'd better come to an understanding. I've been expecting you, and I've made up my mind. I'll give you fifteen pounds to go to Canada with." "I see," I said—"good riddance! No, thanks; keep your fifteen pounds." Friendship's a queer thing when you've been where I have.

COKESON. I understand. Will you take the fifteen pound from me? [Flustered, as FALDER regards him with a queer smile] Quite without prejudice; I meant it kindly.

FALDER. I'm not allowed to leave the country.

COKESON. Oh! ye...es—ticket-of-leave? You aren't looking the thing.

FALDER. I've slept in the Park three nights this week. The dawns aren't all poetry there. But meeting her—I feel a different man this morning. I've often thought the being fond of hers the best thing about me; it's sacred, somehow—and yet it did for me. That's queer, isn't it?

COKESON. I'm sure we're all very sorry for you.

FALDER. That's what I've found, Mr. Cokeson. Awfully sorry for me. [With quiet bitterness] But it doesn't do to associate with criminals!

COKESON. Come, come, it's no use calling yourself names. That never did a man any good. Put a face on it.

FALDER. It's easy enough to put a face on it, sir, when you're independent. Try it when you're down like me. They talk about giving you your deserts. Well, I think I've had just a bit over.

COKESON. [Eyeing him askance over his spectacles] I hope they haven't made a Socialist of you.

FALDER is suddenly still, as if brooding over his past self; he utters a peculiar laugh.

COKESON. You must give them credit for the best intentions. Really you must. Nobody wishes you harm, I'm sure.

FALDER. I believe that, Mr. Cokeson. Nobody wishes you harm, but they down you all the same. This feeling—[He stares round him, as though at something closing in] It's crushing me. [With sudden impersonality] I know it is.

COKESON. [Horribly disturbed] There's nothing there! We must try and take it quiet. I'm sure I've often had you in my prayers. Now leave it to me. I'll use my gumption and take 'em when they're jolly. [As he speaks the two partners come in]

COKESON [Rather disconcerted, but trying to put them all at ease] I didn't expect you quite so soon. I've just been having a talk with this young man. I think you'll remember him.

JAMES. [With a grave, keen look] Quite well. How are you, Falder?

WALTER. [Holding out his hand almost timidly] Very glad to see you again, Falder.

FALDER. [Who has recovered his self-control, takes the hand] Thank you, sir.

COKESON. Just a word, Mr. James. [To FALDER, pointing to the clerks' office] You might go in there a minute. You know your way. Our junior won't be coming this morning. His wife's just had a little family.

FALDER, goes uncertainly out into the clerks' office.

COKESON. [Confidentially] I'm bound to tell you all about it. He's quite penitent. But there's a prejudice against him. And you're not seeing him to advantage this morning; he's under-nourished. It's very trying to go without your dinner.

JAMES. Is that so, COKESON?

COKESON. I wanted to ask you. He's had his lesson. Now we know all about him, and we want a clerk. There is a young fellow applying, but I'm keeping him in the air.

JAMES. A gaol-bird in the office, COKESON? I don't see it.

WALTER. "The rolling of the chariot-wheels of Justice!" I've never got that out of my head.

JAMES. I've nothing to reproach myself with in this affair. What's he been doing since he came out?

COKESON. He's had one or two places, but he hasn't kept them. He's sensitive—quite natural. Seems to fancy everybody's down on him.

JAMES. Bad sign. Don't like the fellow—never did from the first. "Weak character"'s written all over him.

WALTER. I think we owe him a leg up.

JAMES. He brought it all on himself.

WALTER. The doctrine of full responsibility doesn't quite hold in these days.

JAMES. [Rather grimly] You'll find it safer to hold it for all that, my boy.

WALTER. For oneself, yes—not for other people, thanks.

JAMES. Well! I don't want to be hard.

COKESON. I'm glad to hear you say that. He seems to see something [spreading his arms] round him. 'Tisn't healthy.

JAMES. What about that woman he was mixed up with? I saw some one uncommonly like her outside as we came in.

COKESON. That! Well, I can't keep anything from you. He has met her.

JAMES. Is she with her husband?

COKESON. No.

JAMES. Falder living with her, I suppose?

COKESON. [Desperately trying to retain the new-found jollity] I don't know that of my own knowledge. 'Tisn't my business.

JAMES. It's our business, if we're going to engage him, COKESON.

COKESON. [Reluctantly] I ought to tell you, perhaps. I've had the party here this morning.

JAMES. I thought so. [To WALTER] No, my dear boy, it won't do. Too shady altogether!

COKESON. The two things together make it very awkward for you—I see that.

WALTER. [Tentatively] I don't quite know what we have to do with his private life.

JAMES. No, no! He must make a clean sheet of it, or he can't come here.

WALTER. Poor devil!

COKESON. Will you—have him in? [And as JAMES nods] I think I can get him to see reason.

JAMES. [Grimly] You can leave that to me, COKESON.

WALTER. [To JAMES, in a low voice, while COKESON is summoning FALDER] His whole future may depend on what we do, dad.

FALDER comes in. He has pulled himself together, and presents a steady front.

JAMES. Now look here, Falder. My son and I want to give you another chance; but there are two things I must say to you. In the first place: It's no good coming here as a victim. If you've any notion that you've been unjustly treated—get rid of it. You can't play fast and loose with morality and hope to go scot-free. If Society didn't take care of itself, nobody would—the sooner you realise that the better.

FALDER. Yes, sir; but—may I say something?

JAMES. Well?

FALDER. I had a lot of time to think it over in prison. [He stops]

COKESON. [Encouraging him] I'm sure you did.

FALDER. There were all sorts there. And what I mean, sir, is, that if we'd been treated differently the first time, and put under somebody that could look after us a bit, and not put in prison, not a quarter of us would ever have got there.

JAMES. [Shaking his head] I'm afraid I've very grave doubts of that, Falder.

FALDER. [With a gleam of malice] Yes, sir, so I found.

JAMES. My good fellow, don't forget that you began it.

FALDER. I never wanted to do wrong.

JAMES. Perhaps not. But you did.

FALDER. [With all the bitterness of his past suffering] It's knocked me out of time. [Pulling himself up] That is, I mean, I'm not what I was.

JAMES. This isn't encouraging for us, Falder.

COKESON. He's putting it awkwardly, Mr. James.

FALDER. [Throwing over his caution from the intensity of his feeling] I mean it, Mr. Cokeson.

JAMES. Now, lay aside all those thoughts, Falder, and look to the future.

FALDER. [Almost eagerly] Yes, sir, but you don't understand what prison is. It's here it gets you. He grips his chest.

COKESON. [In a whisper to James] I told you he wanted nourishment.

WALTER. Yes, but, my dear fellow, that'll pass away. Time's merciful.

FALDER. [With his face twitching] I hope so, sir.

JAMES. [Much more gently] Now, my boy, what you've got to do is to put all the past behind you and

build yourself up a steady reputation. And that brings me to the second thing. This woman you were mixed up with you must give us your word, you know, to have done with that. There's no chance of your keeping straight if you're going to begin your future with such a relationship.

FALDER. [Looking from one to the other with a hunted expression] But sir . . . but sir . . . it's the one thing I looked forward to all that time. And she too . . . I couldn't find her before last night.

During this and what follows COKESON becomes more and more uneasy.

JAMES. This is painful, Falder. But you must see for yourself that it's impossible for a firm like this to close its eyes to everything. Give us this proof of your resolve to keep straight, and you can come back—not otherwise.

FALDER. [After staring at JAMES, suddenly stiffens himself] I couldn't give her up. I couldn't! Oh, sir! I'm all she's got to look to. And I'm sure she's all I've got.

JAMES. I'm very sorry, Falder, but I must be firm. It's for the benefit of you both in the long run. No good can come of this connection. It was the cause of all your disaster.

FALDER. But sir, it means—having gone through all that—getting broken up—my nerves are in an awful state—for nothing. I did it for her.

JAMES. Come! If she's anything of a woman she'll see it for herself. She won't want to drag you down further. If there were a prospect of your being able to marry her—it might be another thing.

FALDER. It's not my fault, sir, that she couldn't get rid of him—she would have if she could. That's been the whole trouble from the beginning. [Looking suddenly at WALTER] . . . If anybody would help her! It's only money wants now, I'm sure.

COKESON. [Breaking in, as WALTER hesitates, and is about to speak] I don't think we need consider that—it's rather far-fetched.

FALDER. [To WALTER, appealing] He must have given her full cause since; she could prove that he drove her to leave him.

WALTER. I'm inclined to do what you say, Falder, if it can be managed.

FALDER. Oh, sir!

He goes to the window and looks down into the street.

COKESON. [Hurriedly] You don't take me, Mr. Walter. I have my reasons.

FALDER. [From the window] She's down there, sir. Will you see her?
I can beckon to her from here.

WALTER hesitates, and looks from COKESON to JAMES.

JAMES. [With a sharp nod] Yes, let her come.

FALDER beckons from the window.

COKESON. [In a low fluster to JAMES and WALTER] No, Mr. James. She's not been quite what she ought to ha' been, while this young man's been away. She's lost her chance. We can't consult how to swindle the Law.

FALDER has come from the window. The three men look at him in a sort of awed silence.

FALDER. [With instinctive apprehension of some change—looking from one to the other] There's been nothing between us, sir, to prevent it What I said at the trial was true. And last night we only just sat in the Park.

SWEEDLE comes in from the outer office.

COKESON. What is it?

SWEEDLE. Mrs. Honeywill. [There is silence]

JAMES. Show her in.

RUTH comes slowly in, and stands stoically with FALDER on one side and the three men

on the other. No one speaks. COKESON turns to his table, bending over his papers as though the burden of the situation were forcing him back into his accustomed groove.

JAMES. [Sharply] Shut the door there. [SWEEDLE shuts the door] We've asked you to come up because there are certain facts to be faced in this matter. I understand you have only just met Falder again.

RUTH. Yes—only yesterday.

JAMES. He's told us about himself, and we're very sorry for him. I've promised to take him back here if he'll make a fresh start. [Looking steadily at RUTH] This is a matter that requires courage, ma'am.

RUTH, who is looking at FALDER, begins to twist her hands in front of her as though prescient of disaster.

FALDER. Mr. Walter How is good enough to say that he'll help us to get you a divorce.

RUTH flashes a startled glance at JAMES and WALTER.

JAMES. I don't think that's practicable, Falder.

FALDER. But, Sir—!

JAMES. [Steadily] Now, Mrs. Honeywill. You're fond of him.

RUTH. Yes, Sir; I love him.

She looks miserably at FALDER.

JAMES. Then you don't want to stand in his way, do you?

RUTH. [In a faint voice] I could take care of him.

JAMES. The best way you can take care of him will be to give him up.

FALDER. Nothing shall make me give you up. You can get a divorce. There's been nothing between us, has there?

RUTH. [Mournfully shaking her head-without looking at him] No.

FALDER. We'll keep apart till it's over, sir; if you'll only help us—we promise.

JAMES. [To RUTH] You see the thing plainly, don't you? You see what I mean?

RUTH. [Just above a whisper] Yes.

COKESON. [To himself] There's a dear woman.

JAMES. The situation is impossible.

RUTH. Must I, Sir?

JAMES. [Forcing himself to look at her] I put it to you, ma'am. His future is in your hands.

RUTH. [Miserably] I want to do the best for him.

JAMES. [A little huskily] That's right, that's right!

FALDER. I don't understand. You're not going to give me up—after all this? There's something— [Starting forward to JAMES] Sir, I swear solemnly there's been nothing between us.

JAMES. I believe you, Falder. Come, my lad, be as plucky as she is.

FALDER. Just now you were going to help us. [He starts at RUTH, who is standing absolutely still; his face and hands twitch and quiver as the truth dawns on him] What is it? You've not been—

WALTER. Father!

JAMES. [Hurriedly] There, there! That'll do, that'll do! I'll give you your chance, Falder. Don't let me know what you do with yourselves, that's all.

FALDER. [As if he has not heard] Ruth?

RUTH looks at him; and FALDER covers his face with his hands.
There is silence.

COKESON. [Suddenly] There's some one out there. [To RUTH] Go in here. You'll feel better by yourself for a minute.

He points to the clerks' room and moves towards the outer office. FALDER does not move. RUTH puts out her hand timidly. He shrinks back from the touch. She turns and goes miserably into the clerks' room. With a brusque movement he follows, seizing her by the shoulder just inside the doorway. COKESON shuts the door.

JAMES. [Pointing to the outer office] Get rid of that, whoever it is.

SWEEDLE. [Opening the office door, in a scared voice]
Detective-Sergeant blister.

The detective enters, and closes the door behind him.

WISTER. Sorry to disturb you, sir. A clerk you had here, two years and a half ago: I arrested him in, this room.

JAMES. What about him?

WISTER. I thought perhaps I might get his whereabouts from you.
[There is an awkward silence]

COKESON. [Pleasantly, coming to the rescue] We're not responsible for his movements; you know that.

JAMES. What do you want with him?

WISTER. He's failed to report himself this last four weeks.

WALTER. How d'you mean?

WISTER. Ticket-of-leave won't be up for another six months, sir.

WALTER. Has he to keep in touch with the police till then?

WISTER. We're bound to know where he sleeps every night. I dare say we shouldn't interfere, sir, even though he hasn't reported himself. But we've just heard there's a serious matter of obtaining employment with a forged reference. What with the two things together—we must have him.

Again there is silence. WALTER and COKESON steal glances at
JAMES, who stands staring steadily at the detective.

COKESON. [Expansively] We're very busy at the moment. If you could make it convenient to call again we might be able to tell you then.

JAMES. [Decisively] I'm a servant of the Law, but I dislike peaching. In fact, I can't do such a thing. If you want him you must find him without us.

As he speaks his eye falls on FALDER'S cap, still lying on the table, and his face contracts.

WISTER. [Noting the gesture—quietly] Very good, sir. I ought to warn you that, having broken the terms of his licence, he's still a convict, and sheltering a convict.

JAMES. I shelter no one. But you mustn't come here and ask questions which it's not my business to answer.

WISTER. [Dryly] I won't trouble you further then, gentlemen.

COKESON. I'm sorry we couldn't give you the information. You quite understand, don't you? Good-morning!

WISTER turns to go, but instead of going to the door of the outer office he goes to the door of the clerks' room.

COKESON. The other door.... the other door!

WISTER opens the clerks' door. RUTHS's voice is heard: "Oh, do!" and FALDER'S: "I can't!" There is a little pause; then, with sharp fright, RUTH says: "Who's that?"

WISTER has gone in.

The three men look aghast at the door.

WISTER [From within] Keep back, please!

He comes swiftly out with his arm twisted in FALDER'S. The latter gives a white, staring look at the three men.

WALTER. Let him go this time, for God's sake!

WISTER. I couldn't take the responsibility, sir.

FALDER. [With a queer, desperate laugh] Good!

Flinging a look back at RUTH, he throws up his head, and goes out through the outer office, half dragging WISTER after him.

WALTER. [With despair] That finishes him. It'll go on for ever now.

SWEEDLE can be seen staring through the outer door. There are sounds of footsteps descending the stone stairs; suddenly a dull thud, a faint "My God!" in WISTER's voice.

JAMES. What's that?

SWEEDLE dashes forward. The door swings to behind him. There is dead silence.

WALTER. [Starting forward to the inner room] The woman-she's fainting!

He and COKESON support the fainting RUTH from the doorway of the clerks' room.

COKESON. [Distracted] Here, my dear! There, there!

WALTER. Have you any brandy?

COKESON. I've got sherry.

WALTER. Get it, then. Quick!

He places RUTH in a chair—which JAMES has dragged forward.

COKESON. [With sherry] Here! It's good strong sherry. [They try to force the sherry between her lips.]

There is the sound of feet, and they stop to listen.

The outer door is reopened—WISTER and SWEEDLE are seen carrying some burden.

JAMES. [Hurrying forward] What is it?

They lay the burden doom in the outer office, out of sight, and all but RUTH cluster round it, speaking in hushed voices.

WISTER. He jumped—neck's broken.

WALTER. Good God!

WISTER. He must have been mad to think he could give me the slip like that. And what was it—just a few months!

WALTER. [Bitterly] Was that all?

JAMES. What a desperate thing! [Then, in a voice unlike his own] Run for a doctor—you! [SWEEDLE rushes from the outer office] An ambulance!

WISTER goes out. On RUTH's face an expression of fear and horror has been seen

growing, as if she dared not turn towards the voices. She now rises and steals towards them.

WALTER. [Turning suddenly] Look!

The three men shrink back out of her way, one by one, into COKESON'S room. RUTH drops on her knees by the body.

RUTH. [In a whisper] What is it? He's not breathing. [She crouches over him] My dear! My pretty!

In the outer office doorway the figures of men are seen standing.

RUTH. [Leaping to her feet] No, no! No, no! He's dead!

[The figures of the men shrink back]

COKESON. [Stealing forward. In a hoarse voice] There, there, poor dear woman!

At the sound behind her RUTH faces round at him.

COKESON. No one'll touch him now! Never again! He's safe with gentle Jesus!

RUTH stands as though turned to stone in the doorway staring at COKESON, who, bending humbly before her, holds out his hand as one would to a lost dog.

The curtain falls.

GALSWORTHY PLAYS—SERIES 3

Contents:

The Fugitive

The Pigeon

The Mob

THE FUGITIVE

A Play in Four Acts

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

GEORGE DEDMOND, a civilian

CLARE, his wife

GENERAL SIR CHARLES DEDMOND, K.C.B., his father.

LADY DEDMOND, his mother

REGINALD HUNTINGDON, Clare's brother
EDWARD FULLARTON, her friend
DOROTHY FULLARTON, her friend
PAYNTER, a manservant
BURNEY, a maid
TWISDEN, a solicitor
HAYWOOD, a tobacconist
MALISE, a writer
MRS. MILER, his caretaker
THE PORTER at his lodgings
A BOY messenger
ARNAUD, a waiter at "The Gascony"
MR. VARLEY, manager of "The Gascony"
TWO LADIES WITH LARGE HATS, A LADY AND GENTLEMAN, A LANGUID LORD,
HIS COMPANION, A YOUNG MAN, A BLOND GENTLEMAN, A DARK GENTLEMAN.

ACT I. George Dedmond's Flat. Evening.

ACT II. The rooms of Malise. Morning.

ACT III. SCENE I. The rooms of Malice. Late afternoon.

SCENE II. The rooms of Malise. Early Afternoon.

ACT IV. A small supper room at "The Gascony."

Between Acts I and II three nights elapse.

Between Acts II and Act III, Scene I, three months.

Between Act III, Scene I, and Act III, Scene II, three months.

Between Act III, Scene II, and Act IV, six months.

"With a hey-ho chivy
Hark forrard, hark forrard, tantivy!"

ACT I

The SCENE is the pretty drawing-room of a flat. There are two doors, one open into the hall, the other shut and curtained. Through a large bay window, the curtains of which are not yet drawn, the towers of Westminster can be seen darkening in a summer sunset; a grand piano stands across one corner. The man-servant PAYNTER, clean-shaven and discreet, is arranging two tables for Bridge.

BURNEY, the maid, a girl with one of those flowery Botticellian faces only met with in England, comes in through the curtained door, which she leaves open, disclosing the glimpse of a white wall. PAYNTER looks up at her; she shakes her head, with an expression of concern.

PAYNTER. Where's she gone?

BURNEY. Just walks about, I fancy.

PAYNTER. She and the Governor don't hit it! One of these days she'll flit—you'll see. I like her—she's a lady; but these thoroughbred 'uns—it's their skin and their mouths. They'll go till they drop if they like the job, and if they don't, it's nothing but jib—jib—jib. How was it down there before she married him?

BURNEY. Oh! Quiet, of course.

PAYNTER. Country homes—I know 'em. What's her father, the old Rector, like?

BURNEY. Oh! very steady old man. The mother dead long before I took the place.

PAYNTER. Not a penny, I suppose?

BURNEY. [Shaking her head] No; and seven of them.

PAYNTER. [At sound of the hall door] The Governor!

BURNEY withdraws through the curtained door.

GEORGE DEDMOND enters from the hall. He is in evening dress, opera hat, and overcoat; his face is broad, comely, glossily shaved, but with neat moustaches. His eyes, clear, small, and blue-grey, have little speculation. His hair is well brushed.

GEORGE. [Handing PAYNTER his coat and hat] Look here, Paynter! When I send up from the Club for my dress things, always put in a black waistcoat as well.

PAYNTER. I asked the mistress, sir.

GEORGE. In future—see?

PAYNTER. Yes, sir. [Signing towards the window] Shall I leave the sunset, sir?

But GEORGE has crossed to the curtained door; he opens it and says: "Clare!" Receiving no answer, he goes in. PAYNTER switches up the electric light. His face, turned towards the curtained door, is apprehensive.

GEORGE. [Re-entering] Where's Mrs. Dedmond?

PAYNTER. I hardly know, sir.

GEORGE. Dined in?

PAYNTER. She had a mere nothing at seven, sir.

GEORGE. Has she gone out, since?

PAYNTER. Yes, sir—that is, yes. The—er—mistress was not dressed at all. A little matter of fresh air, I think; sir.

GEORGE. What time did my mother say they'd be here for Bridge?

PAYNTER. Sir Charles and Lady Dedmond were coming at half-past nine; and Captain Huntingdon, too—Mr. and Mrs. Fullarton might be a bit late, sir.

GEORGE. It's that now. Your mistress said nothing?

PAYNTER. Not to me, sir.

GEORGE. Send Burney.

PAYNTER. Very good, sir. [He withdraws.]

GEORGE stares gloomily at the card tables. BURNEY comes in front the hall.

GEORGE. Did your mistress say anything before she went out?

BURNEY. Yes, sir.

GEORGE. Well?

BURNEY. I don't think she meant it, sir.

GEORGE. I don't want to know what you don't think, I want the fact.

BURNEY. Yes, sir. The mistress said: "I hope it'll be a pleasant evening, Burney!"

GEORGE. Oh!—Thanks.

BURNEY. I've put out the mistress's things, sir.

GEORGE. Ah!

BURNEY. Thank you, sir. [She withdraws.]

GEORGE. Damn!

He again goes to the curtained door, and passes through. PAYNTER, coming in from the hall, announces: "General Sir Charles and Lady Dedmond." SIR CHARLES is an upright, well-groomed, grey-moustached, red-faced man of sixty-seven, with a keen eye for molehills, and none at all for mountains. LADY DEDMOND has a firm, thin face, full of capability and decision, not without kindness; and faintly weathered, as if she had faced many situations in many parts of the world. She is fifty five.

PAYNTER withdraws.

SIR CHARLES. Hullo! Where are they? H'm!

As he speaks, GEORGE re-enters.

LADY DEDMOND. [Kissing her son] Well, George. Where's Clare?

GEORGE. Afraid she's late.

LADY DEDMOND. Are we early?

GEORGE. As a matter of fact, she's not in.

LADY DEDMOND. Oh?

SIR CHARLES. H'm! Not—not had a rumpus?

GEORGE. Not particularly. [With the first real sign of feeling] What I can't stand is being made a fool of before other people. Ordinary friction one can put up with. But that——

SIR CHARLES. Gone out on purpose? What!

LADY DEDMOND. What was the trouble?

GEORGE. I told her this morning you were coming in to Bridge. Appears she'd asked that fellow Malise, for music.

LADY DEDMOND. Without letting you know?

GEORGE. I believe she did tell me.

LADY DEDMOND. But surely——

GEORGE. I don't want to discuss it. There's never anything in particular. We're all anyhow, as you know.

LADY DEDMOND. I see. [She looks shrewdly at her son] My dear, I should be rather careful about him, I think.

SIR CHARLES. Who's that?

LADY DEDMOND. That Mr. Malise.

SIR CHARLES. Oh! That chap!

GEORGE. Clare isn't that sort.

LADY DEDMOND. I know. But she catches up notions very easily. I think it's a great pity you ever came across him.

SIR CHARLES. Where did you pick him up?

GEORGE. Italy—this Spring—some place or other where they couldn't speak English.

SIR CHARLES. Um! That's the worst of travellin'.

LADY DEDMOND. I think you ought to have dropped him. These literary people—[Quietly] From exchanging ideas to something else, isn't very far, George.

SIR CHARLES. We'll make him play Bridge. Do him good, if he's that sort of fellow.

LADY DEDMOND. Is anyone else coming?

GEORGE. Reggie Huntingdon, and the Fullartons.

LADY DEDMOND. [Softly] You know, my dear boy, I've been meaning to speak to you for a long time. It is such a pity you and Clare—What is it?

GEORGE. God knows! I try, and I believe she does.

SIR CHARLES. It's distressin'—for us, you know, my dear fellow— distressin'.

LADY DEDMOND. I know it's been going on for a long time.

GEORGE. Oh! leave it alone, mother.

LADY DEDMOND. But, George, I'm afraid this man has brought it to a point—put ideas into her head.

GEORGE. You can't dislike him more than I do. But there's nothing one can object to.

LADY DEDMOND. Could Reggie Huntingdon do anything, now he's home?
Brothers sometimes—

GEORGE. I can't bear my affairs being messed about—

LADY DEDMOND. Well! it would be better for you and Clare to be supposed to be out together, than for her to be out alone. Go quietly into the dining-room and wait for her.

SIR CHARLES. Good! Leave your mother to make up something. She'll do it!

LADY DEDMOND. That may be he. Quick!

[A bell sounds.]

GEORGE goes out into the hall, leaving the door open in his haste. LADY DEDMOND, following, calls "Paynter!" PAYNTER enters.

LADY DEDMOND. Don't say anything about your master and mistress being out. I'll explain.

PAYNTER. The master, my lady?

LADY DEDMOND. Yes, I know. But you needn't say so. Do you understand?

PAYNTER. [In polite dudgeon] Just so, my lady.

[He goes out.]

SIR CHARLES. By Jove! That fellow smells a rat!

LADY DEDMOND. Be careful, Charles!

SIR CHARLES. I should think so.

LADY DEDMOND. I shall simply say they're dining out, and that we're not to wait Bridge for them.

SIR CHARLES. [Listening] He's having a palaver with that man of George's.

PAYNTER, reappearing, announces: "Captain Huntingdon." SIR CHARLES and LADY DEDMOND turn to him with relief.

LADY DEDMOND. Ah! It's you, Reginald!

HUNTINGDON. [A tall, fair soldier, of thirty] How d'you do? How are you, sir? What's the matter with their man?

SHE CHARLES. What!

HUNTINGDON. I was going into the dining-room to get rid of my cigar; and he said: "Not in there, sir. The master's there, but my instructions are to the effect that he's not."

SHE CHARLES. I knew that fellow——

LADY DEDMOND. The fact is, Reginald, Clare's out, and George is waiting for her. It's so important people shouldn't——

HUNTINGDON. Rather!

They draw together, as people do, discussing the misfortunes of members of their families.

LADY DEDMOND. It's getting serious, Reginald. I don't know what's to become of them. You don't think the Rector—you don't think your father would speak to Clare?

HUNTINGDON. Afraid the Governor's hardly well enough. He takes anything of that sort to heart so—especially Clare.

SIR CHARLES. Can't you put in a word yourself?

HUNTINGDON. Don't know where the mischief lies.

SIR CHARLES. I'm sure George doesn't gallop her on the road. Very steady-goin' fellow, old George.

HUNTINGDON. Oh, yes; George is all right, sir.

LADY DEDMOND. They ought to have had children.

HUNTINGDON. Expect they're pretty glad now they haven't. I really don't know what to say, ma'am.

SIR CHARLES. Saving your presence, you know, Reginald, I've often noticed parsons' daughters grow up queer. Get too much morality and rice puddin'.

LADY DEDMOND. [With a clear look] Charles!

SIR CHARLES. What was she like when you were kids?

HUNTINGDON. Oh, all right. Could be rather a little devil, of course, when her monkey was up.

SIR CHARLES. I'm fond of her. Nothing she wants that she hasn't got, is there?

HUNTINGDON. Never heard her say so.

SIR CHARLES. [Dimly] I don't know whether old George is a bit too matter of fact for her. H'm?

[A short silence.]

LADY DEDMOND. There's a Mr. Malise coming here to-night. I forget if you know him.

HUNTINGDON. Yes. Rather a thorough-bred mongrel.

LADY DEDMOND. He's literary. [With hesitation] You—you don't think he—puts—er—ideas into her head?

HUNTINGDON. I asked Greyman, the novelist, about him; seems he's a bit of an Ishmaelite, even among those fellows. Can't see Clare——

LADY DEDMOND. No. Only, the great thing is that she shouldn't be encouraged. Listen!—It is her coming in. I can hear their voices. Gone to her room. What a blessing that man isn't here yet! [The door bell rings] Tt! There he is, I expect.

SIR CHARLES. What are we goin' to say?

HUNTINGDON. Say they're dining out, and we're not to wait Bridge for them.

SIR CHARLES. Good!

The door is opened, and PAYNTER announces "Mr. Kenneth Malise." MALISE enters. He is a tall man, about thirty-five, with a strongly marked, dark, irregular, ironic face, and eyes which seem to have needles in their pupils. His thick hair is rather untidy, and his

dress clothes not too new.

LADY DEDMOND. How do you do? My son and daughter-in-law are so very sorry. They'll be here directly.

[MALISE bows with a queer, curly smile.]

SIR CHARLES. [Shaking hands] How d'you do, sir?

HUNTINGDON. We've met, I think.

He gives MALISE that peculiar smiling stare, which seems to warn the person bowed to of the sort of person he is. MALISE'S eyes sparkle.

LADY DEDMOND. Clare will be so grieved. One of those invitations

MALISE. On the spur of the moment.

SIR CHARLES. You play Bridge, sir?

MALISE. Afraid not!

SIR CHARLES. Don't mean that? Then we shall have to wait for 'em.

LADY DEDMOND. I forget, Mr. Malise—you write, don't you?

MALISE. Such is my weakness.

LADY DEDMOND. Delightful profession.

SIR CHARLES. Doesn't tie you! What!

MALISE. Only by the head.

SIR CHARLES. I'm always thinkin' of writin' my experiences.

MALISE. Indeed!

[There is the sound of a door banged.]

SIR CHARLES. [Hastily] You smoke, Mr. MALISE?

MALISE. Too much.

SIR CHARLES. Ah! Must smoke when you think a lot.

MALISE. Or think when you smoke a lot.

SIR CHARLES. [Genially] Don't know that I find that.

LADY DEDMOND. [With her clear look at him] Charles!

The door is opened. CLARE DEDMOND in a cream-coloured evening frock comes in from the hall, followed by GEORGE. She is rather pale, of middle height, with a beautiful figure, wavy brown hair, full, smiling lips, and large grey mesmeric eyes, one of those women all vibration, iced over with a trained stoicism of voice and manner.

LADY DEDMOND. Well, my dear!

SIR CHARLES. Ah! George. Good dinner?

GEORGE. [Giving his hand to MALISE] How are you? Clare! Mr. MALISE!

CLARE. [Smiling-in a clear voice with the faintest possible lisp] Yes, we met on the door-mat. [Pause.]

SIR CHARLES. Deuce you did! [An awkward pause.]

LADY DEDMOND. [Acidly] Mr. Malise doesn't play Bridge, it appears. Afraid we shall be rather in the way of music.

SIR CHARLES. What! Aren't we goin' to get a game? [PAYNTER has entered with a tray.]

GEORGE. Paynter! Take that table into the dining room.

PAYNTER. [Putting down the tray on a table behind the door] Yes, sir.

MALISE. Let me give you a hand.

PAYNTER and MALISE carry one of the Bridge tables out, GEORGE making a half-hearted attempt to relieve MALISE.

SIR CHARLES. Very fine sunset!

Quite softly CLARE begins to laugh. All look at her first with surprise, then with offence, then almost with horror. GEORGE is about to go up to her, but HUNTINGDON heads him off.

HUNTINGDON. Bring the tray along, old man.

GEORGE takes up the tray, stops to look at CLARE, then allows HUNTINGDON to shepherd him out.

LADY DEDMOND. [Without looking at CLARE] Well, if we're going to play, Charles? [She jerks his sleeve.]

SIR CHARLES. What? [He marches out.]

LADY DEDMOND. [Meeting MALISE in the doorway] Now you will be able to have your music.

[She follows the GENERAL out]

[CLARE stands perfectly still, with her eyes closed.]

MALISE. Delicious!

CLARE. [In her level, clipped voice] Perfectly beastly of me! I'm so sorry. I simply can't help running amok to-night.

MALISE. Never apologize for being fey. It's much too rare.

CLARE. On the door-mat! And they'd whitewashed me so beautifully! Poor dears! I wonder if I ought—[She looks towards the door.]

MALISE. Don't spoil it!

CLARE. I'd been walking up and down the Embankment for about three hours. One does get desperate sometimes.

MALISE. Thank God for that!

CLARE. Only makes it worse afterwards. It seems so frightful to them, too.

MALISE. [Softly and suddenly, but with a difficulty in finding the right words] Blessed be the respectable! May they dream of—me! And blessed be all men of the world! May they perish of a surfeit of—good form!

CLARE. I like that. Oh, won't there be a row! [With a faint movement of her shoulders] And the usual reconciliation.

MALISE. Mrs. Dedmond, there's a whole world outside yours. Why don't you spread your wings?

CLARE. My dear father's a saint, and he's getting old and frail; and I've got a sister engaged; and three little sisters to whom I'm supposed to set a good example. Then, I've no money, and I can't do anything for a living, except serve in a shop. I shouldn't be free, either; so what's the good? Besides, I oughtn't to have married if I wasn't going to be happy. You see, I'm not a bit misunderstood or ill-treated. It's only—

MALISE. Prison. Break out!

CLARE. [Turning to the window] Did you see the sunset? That white cloud trying to fly up?

[She holds up her bare arms, with a motion of flight.]

MALISE. [Admiring her] Ah-h-h! [Then, as she drops her arms suddenly] Play me something.

CLARE. [Going to the piano] I'm awfully grateful to you. You don't make me feel just an attractive female. I wanted somebody like that. [Letting her hands rest on the notes] All the same, I'm glad not to be ugly.

MALISE. Thank God for beauty!

PAYNTER. [Opening the door] Mr. and Mrs. Fullarton.

MALISE. Who are they?

CLARE. [Rising] She's my chief pal. He was in the Navy.

She goes forward. MRS. FULLERTON is a rather tall woman, with dark hair and a quick eye. He, one of those clean-shaven naval men of good presence who have retired from the sea, but not from their susceptibility.

MRS. FULLARTON. [Kissing CLARE, and taking in both MALISE and her husband's look at CLARE] We've only come for a minute.

CLARE. They're playing Bridge in the dining-room. Mr. Malise doesn't play. Mr. Malise—Mrs. Fullarton, Mr. Fullarton.

[They greet.]

FULLARTON. Most awfully jolly dress, Mrs. Dedmond.

MRS. FULLARTON. Yes, lovely, Clare. [FULLARTON abases eyes which mechanically readjust themselves] We can't stay for Bridge, my dear; I just wanted to see you a minute, that's all. [Seeing HUNTINGDON coming in she speaks in a low voice to her husband] Edward, I want to speak to Clare. How d'you do, Captain Huntingdon?

MALISE. I'll say good-night.

He shakes hands with CLARE, bows to MRS. FULLARTON, and makes his way out. HUNTINGDON and FULLERTON foregather in the doorway.

MRS. FULLARTON. How are things, Clare? [CLARE just moves her shoulders] Have you done what I suggested? Your room?

CLARE. No.

MRS. FULLARTON. Why not?

CLARE. I don't want to torture him. If I strike—I'll go clean. I expect I shall strike.

MRS. FULLARTON. My dear! You'll have the whole world against you.

CLARE. Even you won't back me, Dolly?

MRS. FULLARTON. Of course I'll back you, all that's possible, but I can't invent things.

CLARE. You wouldn't let me come to you for a bit, till I could find my feet?

MRS. FULLARTON, taken aback, cannot refrain from her glance at FULLARTON automatically gazing at CLARE while he talks with HUNTINGDON.

MRS. FULLARTON. Of course—the only thing is that—

CLARE. [With a faint smile] It's all right, Dolly. I'm not coming.

MRS. FULLARTON. Oh! don't do anything desperate, Clare—you are so desperate sometimes. You ought to make terms—not tracks.

CLARE. Haggle? [She shakes her head] What have I got to make terms with? What he still wants is just what I hate giving.

MRS. FULLARTON. But, Clare—

CLARE. No, Dolly; even you don't understand. All day and every day —just as far apart as we can be—and still—Jolly, isn't it? If you've got a soul at all.

MRS. FULLARTON. It's awful, really.

CLARE. I suppose there are lots of women who feel as I do, and go on with it; only, you see, I happen to have something in me that—comes to an end. Can't endure beyond a certain time, ever.

She has taken a flower from her dress, and suddenly tears it to bits. It is the only sign of emotion she has given.

MRS. FULLARTON. [Watching] Look here, my child; this won't do. You must get a rest. Can't Reggie take you with him to India for a bit?

CLARE. [Shaking her head] Reggie lives on his pay.

MRS. FULLARTON. [With one of her quick looks] That was Mr. Malise, then?

FULLARTON. [Coming towards them] I say, Mrs. Dedmond, you wouldn't sing me that little song you sang the other night, [He hums] "If I might be the falling bee and kiss thee all the day"? Remember?

MRS. FULLARTON. "The falling dew," Edward. We simply must go, Clare. Good-night. [She kisses her.]

FULLARTON. [Taking half-cover between his wife and CLARE] It suits you down to the ground—that dress.

CLARE. Good-night.

HUNTINGDON sees them out. Left alone CLARE clenches her hands, moves swiftly across to the window, and stands looking out.

HUNTINGDON. [Returning] Look here, Clare!

CLARE. Well, Reggie?

HUNTINGDON. This is working up for a mess, old girl. You can't do this kind of thing with impunity. No man'll put up with it. If you've got anything against George, better tell me. [CLARE shakes her head] You ought to know I should stick by you. What is it? Come?

CLARE. Get married, and find out after a year that she's the wrong person; so wrong that you can't exchange a single real thought; that your blood runs cold when she kisses you—then you'll know.

HUNTINGDON. My dear old girl, I don't want to be a brute; but it's a bit difficult to believe in that, except in novels.

CLARE. Yes, incredible, when you haven't tried.

HUNTINGDON. I mean, you—you chose him yourself. No one forced you to marry him.

CLARE. It does seem monstrous, doesn't it?

HUNTINGDON. My dear child, do give us a reason.

CLARE. Look! [She points out at the night and the darkening towers] If George saw that for the first time he'd just say, "Ah, Westminster! Clock Tower! Can you see the time by it?" As if one cared where or what it was—beautiful like that! Apply that to every—every—everything.

HUNTINGDON. [Staring] George may be a bit prosaic. But, my dear old girl, if that's all—

CLARE. It's not all—it's nothing. I can't explain, Reggie—it's not reason, at all; it's—it's like being underground in a damp cell; it's like knowing you'll never get out. Nothing coming—never anything coming again—never anything.

HUNTINGDON. [Moved and puzzled] My dear old thing; you mustn't get into fantods like this. If it's like that, don't think about it.

CLARE. When every day and every night!—Oh! I know it's my fault for having married him, but that doesn't help.

HUNTINGDON. Look here! It's not as if George wasn't quite a decent chap. And it's no use blinking things; you are absolutely dependent on him. At home they've got every bit as much as they can do to keep going.

CLARE. I know.

HUNTINGDON. And you've got to think of the girls. Any trouble would be very beastly for them. And the poor old Governor would feel it awfully.

CLARE. If I didn't know all that, Reggie, I should have gone home long ago.

HUNTINGDON. Well, what's to be done? If my pay would run to it—but it simply won't.

CLARE. Thanks, old boy, of course not.

HUNTINGDON. Can't you try to see George's side of it a bit?

CLARE. I do. Oh! don't let's talk about it.

HUNTINGDON. Well, my child, there's just one thing you won't go sailing near the wind, will you? I mean, there are fellows always on the lookout.

CLARE. "That chap, Malise, you'd better avoid him!" Why?

HUNTINGDON. Well! I don't know him. He may be all right, but he's not our sort. And you're too pretty to go on the tack of the New Woman and that kind of thing—haven't been brought up to it.

CLARE. British home-made summer goods, light and attractive—don't wear long. [At the sound of voices in the hall] They seem 'to be going, Reggie.

[HUNTINGDON looks at her, vexed, unhappy.]

HUNTINGDON. Don't head for trouble, old girl. Take a pull. Bless you! Good-night.

CLARE kisses him, and when he has gone turns away from the door, holding herself in, refusing to give rein to some outburst of emotion. Suddenly she sits down at the untouched Bridge table, leaning her bare elbows on it and her chin on her hands, quite calm. GEORGE is coming in. PAYNTER follows him.

CLARE. Nothing more wanted, thank you, Paynter. You can go home, and the maids can go to bed.

PAYNTER. We are much obliged, ma'am.

CLARE. I ran over a dog, and had to get it seen to.

PAYNTER. Naturally, ma'am!

CLARE. Good-night.

PAYNTER. I couldn't get you a little anything, ma'am?

CLARE. No, thank you.

PAYNTER. No, ma'am. Good-night, ma'am.

[He withdraws.]

GEORGE. You needn't have gone out of your way to tell a lie that wouldn't deceive a guinea-pig. [Going up to her] Pleased with yourself to-night? [CLARE shakes her head] Before that fellow MALISE; as if our own people weren't enough!

CLARE. Is it worth while to rag me? I know I've behaved badly, but I couldn't help it, really!

GEORGE. Couldn't help behaving like a shop-girl? My God! You were brought up as well as I was.

CLARE. Alas!

GEORGE. To let everybody see that we don't get on—there's only one word for it—Disgusting!

CLARE. I know.

GEORGE. Then why do you do it? I've always kept my end up. Why in heaven's name do you behave in this crazy way?

CLARE. I'm sorry.

GEORGE. [With intense feeling] You like making a fool of me!

CLARE. No—Really! Only—I must break out sometimes.

GEORGE. There are things one does not do.

CLARE. I came in because I was sorry.

GEORGE. And at once began to do it again! It seems to me you delight in rows.

CLARE. You'd miss your—reconciliations.

GEORGE. For God's sake, Clare, drop cynicism!

CLARE. And truth?

GEORGE. You are my wife, I suppose.

CLARE. And they twain shall be one—spirit.

GEORGE. Don't talk wild nonsense!

[There is silence.]

CLARE. [Softly] I don't give satisfaction. Please give me notice!

GEORGE. Pish!

CLARE. Five years, and four of them like this! I'm sure we've served our time. Don't you really think we might get on better together—if I went away?

GEORGE. I've told you I won't stand a separation for no real reason, and have your name bandied about all over London. I have some primitive sense of honour.

CLARE. You mean your name, don't you?

GEORGE. Look here. Did that fellow Malise put all this into your head?

CLARE. No; my own evil nature.

GEORGE. I wish the deuce we'd never met him. Comes of picking up people you know nothing of. I distrust him—and his looks—and his infernal satiric way. He can't even 'dress decently. He's not—good form.

CLARE. [With a touch of rapture] Ah-h!

GEORGE. Why do you let him come? What d'you find interesting in him?

CLARE. A mind.

GEORGE. Deuced funny one! To have a mind—as you call it—it's not necessary to talk about Art and Literature.

CLARE. We don't.

GEORGE. Then what do you talk about—your minds? [CLARE looks at him] Will you answer a straight question? Is he falling in love with you?

CLARE. You had better ask him.

GEORGE. I tell you plainly, as a man of the world, I don't believe in the guide, philosopher and friend business.

CLARE. Thank you.

A silence. CLARE suddenly clasps her hands behind her head.

CLARE. Let me go! You'd be much happier with any other woman.

GEORGE. Clare!

CLARE. I believe—I'm sure I could earn my living. Quite serious.

GEORGE. Are you mad?

CLARE. It has been done.

GEORGE. It will never be done by you—understand that!

CLARE. It really is time we parted. I'd go clean out of your life. I don't want your support unless I'm giving you something for your money.

GEORGE. Once for all, I don't mean to allow you to make fools of us both.

CLARE. But if we are already! Look at us. We go on, and on. We're a spectacle!

GEORGE. That's not my opinion; nor the opinion of anyone, so long as you behave yourself.

CLARE. That is—behave as you think right.

GEORGE. Clare, you're pretty riling.

CLARE. I don't want to be horrid. But I am in earnest this time.

GEORGE. So am I.

[CLARE turns to the curtained door.]

GEORGE. Look here! I'm sorry. God knows I don't want to be a brute. I know you're not happy.

CLARE. And you—are you happy?

GEORGE. I don't say I am. But why can't we be?

CLARE. I see no reason, except that you are you, and I am I.

GEORGE. We can try.

CLARE. I HAVE—haven't you?

GEORGE. We used—

CLARE. I wonder!

GEORGE. You know we did.

CLARE. Too long ago—if ever.

GEORGE [Coming closer] I—still—

CLARE. [Making a barrier of her hand] You know that's only cupboard love.

GEORGE. We've got to face the facts.

CLARE. I thought I was.

GEORGE. The facts are that we're married—for better or worse, and certain things are expected of us. It's suicide for you, and folly for me, in my position, to ignore that. You have all you can reasonably want; and I don't—don't wish for any change. If you could bring anything against me—if I drank, or knocked about town, or expected too much of you. I'm not unreasonable in any way, that I can see.

CLARE. Well, I think we've talked enough.

[She again moves towards the curtained door.]

GEORGE. Look here, Clare; you don't mean you're expecting me to put up with the position of a man who's neither married nor unmarried? That's simple purgatory. You ought to know.

CLARE. Yes. I haven't yet, have I?

GEORGE. Don't go like that! Do you suppose we're the only couple who've found things aren't what they thought, and have to put up with each other and make the best of it.

CLARE. Not by thousands.

GEORGE. Well, why do you imagine they do it?

CLARE. I don't know.

GEORGE. From a common sense of decency.

CLARE. Very!

GEORGE. By Jove! You can be the most maddening thing in all the world! [Taking up a pack of cards, he lets them fall with a long slithering flutter] After behaving as you have this evening, you might try to make some amends, I should think.

CLARE moves her head from side to side, as if in sight of something she could not avoid.
He puts his hand on her arm.

CLARE. No, no—no!

GEORGE. [Dropping his hand] Can't you make it up?

CLARE. I don't feel very Christian.

She opens the door, passes through, and closes it behind her. GEORGE steps quickly towards it, stops, and turns back into the room. He goes to the window and stands looking out; shuts it with a bang, and again contemplates the door. Moving forward, he rests his hand on the deserted card table, clutching its edge, and muttering. Then he crosses to the door into the hall and switches off the light. He opens the door to go out, then stands again irresolute in the darkness and heaves a heavy sigh. Suddenly he mutters: "No!" Crosses resolutely back to the curtained door, and opens it. In the gleam of light CLARE is standing, unhooking a necklet.

He goes in, shutting the door behind him with a thud.

CURTAIN.

ACT II

The scene is a large, whitewashed, disordered room, whose outer door opens on to a corridor and stairway. Doors on either side lead to other rooms. On the walls are unframed reproductions of fine pictures, secured with tintacks. An old wine-coloured armchair of low and comfortable appearance, near the centre of the room, is surrounded by a litter of manuscripts, books, ink, pens and newspapers, as though some one had already been up to his neck in labour, though by a grandfather's clock it is only eleven. On a smallish table close by, are sheets of paper, cigarette ends, and two claret bottles. There are many books on shelves, and on the floor, an overflowing pile, whereon rests a soft hat, and a black knobby stick. MALISE sits in his armchair, garbed in trousers, dressing-gown, and slippers, unshaved and uncollared, writing. He pauses, smiles, lights a cigarette, and tries the rhythm of the last sentence, holding up a sheet of quarto MS.

MALISE. "Not a word, not a whisper of Liberty from all those excellent frock-coated gentlemen—not a sign, not a grimace. Only the monumental silence of their profound deference before triumphant Tyranny."

While he speaks, a substantial woman, a little over middle-age, in old dark clothes and a black straw hat, enters from the corridor. She goes to a cupboard, brings out from it an apron and a Bissell broom. Her movements are slow and imperturbable, as if she had much time before her. Her face is broad and dark, with Chinese eyebrows.

MALISE. Wait, Mrs. Miller!

MRS. MILER. I'm gettin' be'ind'and, sir.

She comes and stands before him. MALISE writes.

MRS. MILER. There's a man 'angin' about below.

MALISE looks up; seeing that she has roused his attention, she stops. But as soon as he is about to write again, goes on.

MRS. MILER. I see him first yesterday afternoon. I'd just been out to get meself a pennyworth o' soda, an' as I come in I passed 'im on the second floor, lookin' at me with an air of suspicion. I thought to meself at the time, I thought: You're a'andy sort of 'ang-dog man.

MALISE. Well?

MRS. MILER. Well-peekin' down through the balusters, I see 'im lookin' at a photograff. That's a funny place, I thinks, to look at pictures—it's so dark there, ye 'ave to use yer eyesight. So I giv' a scrape with me 'eel [She illustrates] an' he pops it in his pocket, and puts up 'is 'and to knock at number three. I goes down an' I says: "You know there's no one lives there, don't yer?" "Ah!" 'e says with an air of innercence, "I wants the name of Smithers." "Oh!" I says, "try round the corner, number ten." "Ah!" 'e says tactful, "much obliged." "Yes," I says, "you'll find 'im in at this time o' day. Good evenin'!" And I thinks to meself [She closes one eye] Rats! There's a good many corners hereabouts.

MALISE. [With detached appreciation] Very good, Mrs. Miler.

MRS. MILER. So this mornin', there e' was again on the first floor with 'is 'and raised, pretendin' to knock at number two. "Oh! you're still lookin' for 'im?" I says, lettin' him see I was 'is grandmother. "Ah!" 'e says, affable, "you misdirected me; it's here I've got my business." "That's lucky," I says, "cos nobody lives there neither. Good mornin'!" And I come straight up. If you want to see 'im at work you've only to go downstairs, 'e'll be on the ground floor by now, pretendin' to knock at number one. Wonderful resource!

MALISE. What's he like, this gentleman?

MRS. MILER. Just like the men you see on the front page o' the daily papers. Nasty, smooth-lookin' feller, with one o' them billycock hats you can't abide.

MALISE. Isn't he a dun?

MRS. MILER. They don't be'ave like that; you ought to know, sir. He's after no good. [Then, after a little pause] Ain't he to be put a stop to? If I took me time I could get 'im, innercent-like, with a jug o' water.

[MALISE, smiling, shakes his head.]

MALISE. You can get on now; I'm going to shave.

He looks at the clock, and passes out into the inner room. MRS. MILER, gazes round her, pins up her skirt, sits down in the armchair, takes off her hat and puts it on the table, and slowly rolls up her sleeves; then with her hands on her knees she rests. There is a soft knock on the door. She gets up leisurely and moves flat-footed towards it. The door being opened CLARE is revealed.

CLARE. Is Mr. Malise in?

MRS. MILER. Yes. But 'e's dressin'.

CLARE. Oh.

MRS. MILER. Won't take 'im long. What name?

CLARE. Would you say—a lady.

MRS. MILER. It's against the rules. But if you'll sit down a moment I'll see what I can do. [She brings forward a chair and rubs it with her apron. Then goes to the door of the inner room and speaks through it] A lady to see you. [Returning she removes some cigarette ends] This is my hour. I shan't make much dust. [Noting CLARE's eyebrows raised at the debris round the armchair] I'm particular about not disturbin' things.

CLARE. I'm sure you are.

MRS. MILER. He likes 'is 'abits regular.

Making a perfunctory pass with the Bissell broom, she runs it to the cupboard, comes

back to the table, takes up a bottle and holds it to the light; finding it empty, she turns it upside down and drops it into the wastepaper basket; then, holding up the other bottle, and finding it not empty, she corks it and drops it into the fold of her skirt.

MRS. MILER. He takes his claret fresh-opened—not like these 'ere bawgwars.

CLARE. [Rising] I think I'll come back later.

MRS. MILER. Mr. Malise is not in my confidence. We keep each other to ourselves. Perhaps you'd like to read the paper; he has it fresh every mornin'—the Westminster.

She plucks that journal from out of the armchair and hands it to CLARE, who sits doom again unhappily to brood. MRS. MILER makes a pass or two with a very dirty duster, then stands still. No longer hearing sounds, CLARE looks up.

MRS. MILER. I wouldn't interrupt yer with my workin,' but 'e likes things clean. [At a sound from the inner room] That's 'im; 'e's cut 'isself! I'll just take 'im the tobaccer!

She lifts a green paper screw of tobacco from the debris round the armchair and taps on the door. It opens. CLARE moves restlessly across the room.

MRS. MILER. [Speaking into the room] The tobaccer. The lady's waitin'.

CLARE has stopped before a reproduction of Titian's picture "Sacred and Profane Love." MRS. MILER stands regarding her with a Chinese smile. MALISE enters, a thread of tobacco still hanging to his cheek.

MALISE. [Taking MRS. MILER's hat off the table and handing it to her] Do the other room.

[Enigmatically she goes.]

MALISE. Jolly of you to come. Can I do anything?

CLARE. I want advice-badly.

MALISE. What! Spreading your wings?

CLARE. Yes.

MALISE. Ah! Proud to have given you that advice. When?

CLARE. The morning after you gave it me . . .

MALISE. Well?

CLARE. I went down to my people. I knew it would hurt my Dad frightfully, but somehow I thought I could make him see. No good. He was awfully sweet, only—he couldn't.

MALISE. [Softly] We English love liberty in those who don't belong to us. Yes.

CLARE. It was horrible. There were the children—and my old nurse. I could never live at home now. They'd think I was—. Impossible—utterly! I'd made up my mind to go back to my owner—And then—he came down himself. I couldn't d it. To be hauled back and begin all over again; I simply couldn't. I watched for a chance; and ran to the station, and came up to an hotel.

MALISE. Bravo!

CLARE. I don't know—no pluck this morning! You see, I've got to earn my living—no money; only a few things I can sell. All yesterday I was walking about, looking at the women. How does anyone ever get a chance?

MALISE. Sooner than you should hurt his dignity by working, your husband would pension you off.

CLARE. If I don't go back to him I couldn't take it.

MALISE. Good!

CLARE. I've thought of nursing, but it's a long training, and I do so hate watching pain. The fact is, I'm pretty hopeless; can't even do art work. I came to ask you about the stage.

MALISE. Have you ever acted? [CLARE shakes her head] You mightn't think so, but I've heard there's a prejudice in favour of training. There's Chorus—I don't recommend it. How about your brother?

CLARE. My brother's got nothing to spare, and he wants to get married; and he's going back to India in September. The only friend I should care to bother is Mrs. Fullarton, and she's—got a husband.

MALISE. I remember the gentleman.

CLARE. Besides, I should be besieged day and night to go back. I must lie doggo somehow.

MALISE. It makes my blood boil to think of women like you. God help all ladies without money.

CLARE. I expect I shall have to go back.

MALISE. No, no! We shall find something. Keep your soul alive at all costs. What! let him hang on to you till you're nothing but—emptiness and ache, till you lose even the power to ache. Sit in his drawing-room, pay calls, play Bridge, go out with him to dinners, return to—duty; and feel less and less, and be less and less, and so grow old and—die!

[The bell rings.]

MALISE. [Looking at the door in doubt] By the way he'd no means of tracing you?

[She shakes her head.]

[The bell rings again.]

MALISE. Was there a man on the stairs as you came up?

CLARE. Yes. Why?

MALISE. He's begun to haunt them, I'm told.

CLARE. Oh! But that would mean they thought I—oh! no!

MALISE. Confidence in me is not excessive.

CLARE. Spying!

MALISE. Will you go in there for a minute? Or shall we let them ring—or—what? It may not be anything, of course.

CLARE. I'm not going to hide.

[The bell rings a third time.]

MALISE. [Opening the door of the inner room] Mrs. Miler, just see who it is; and then go, for the present.

MRS. MILER comes out with her hat on, passes enigmatically to the door, and opens it. A man's voice says: "Mr. Malise? Would you give him these cards?"

MRS. MILER. [Re-entering] The cards.

MALISE. Mr. Robert Twisden. Sir Charles and Lady Dedmond. [He looks at CLARE.]

CLARE. [Her face scornful and unmoved] Let them come.

MALISE. [TO MRS. MILER] Show them in!

TWISDEN enters—a clean-shaved, shrewd-looking man, with a fighting underlip, followed by SIR CHARLES and LADY DEDMOND. MRS. MILER goes. There are no greetings.

TWISDEN. Mr. Malise? How do you do, Mrs. Dedmond? Had the pleasure of meeting you at your wedding. [CLARE inclines her head] I am Mr. George Dedmond's solicitor, sir. I wonder if you would be so very kind as to let us have a few words with Mrs. Dedmond alone?

At a nod from CLARE, MALISE passes into the inner room, and shuts the door. A silence.

SIR CHARLES. [Suddenly] What!

LADY DEDMOND. Mr. Twisden, will you—?

TWISDEN. [Uneasy] Mrs. Dedmond I must apologize, but you—you hardly gave us an alternative, did you? [He pauses for an answer, and, not getting one, goes on] Your disappearance has given your husband great anxiety. Really, my dear madam, you must forgive us for this—attempt to get into

communication.

CLARE. Why did you spy, HERE?

SIR CHARLES. No, no! Nobody's spied on you. What!

TWISDEN. I'm afraid the answer is that we appear to have been justified. [At the expression on CLARE'S face he goes on hastily] Now, Mrs. Dedmond, I'm a lawyer and I know that appearances are misleading. Don't think I'm unfriendly; I wish you well. [CLARE raises her eyes. Moved by that look, which is exactly as if she had said: "I have no friends," he hurries on] What we want to say to you is this: Don't let this split go on! Don't commit yourself to what you'll bitterly regret. Just tell us what's the matter. I'm sure it can be put straight.

CLARE. I have nothing against my husband—it was quite unreasonable to leave him.

TWISDEN. Come, that's good.

CLARE. Unfortunately, there's something stronger than reason.

TWISDEN. I don't know it, Mrs. Dedmond.

CLARE. No?

TWISDEN. [Disconcerted] Are you—you oughtn't to take a step without advice, in your position.

CLARE. Nor with it?

TWISDEN. [Approaching her] Come, now; isn't there anything you feel you'd like to say—that might help to put matters straight?

CLARE. I don't think so, thank you.

LADY DEDMOND. You must see, Clare, that—

TWISDEN. In your position, Mrs. Dedmond—a beautiful young woman without money. I'm quite blunt. This is a hard world. Should be awfully sorry if anything goes wrong.

CLARE. And if I go back?

TWISDEN. Of two evils, if it be so—choose the least!

CLARE. I am twenty-six; he is thirty-two. We can't reasonably expect to die for fifty years.

LADY DESMOND. That's morbid, Clare.

TWISDEN. What's open to you if you don't go back? Come, what's your position? Neither fish, flesh, nor fowl; fair game for everybody. Believe me, Mrs. Dedmond, for a pretty woman to strike, as it appears you're doing, simply because the spirit of her marriage has taken flight, is madness. You must know that no one pays attention to anything but facts. If now—excuse me—you—you had a lover, [His eyes travel round the room and again rest on her] you would, at all events, have some ground under your feet, some sort of protection, but [He pauses] as you have not—you've none.

CLARE. Except what I make myself.

SIR CHARLES. Good God!

TWISDEN. Yes! Mrs. Dedmond! There's the bedrock difficulty. As you haven't money, you should never have been pretty. You're up against the world, and you'll get no mercy from it. We lawyers see too much of that. I'm putting it brutally, as a man of the world.

CLARE. Thank you. Do you think you quite grasp the alternative?

TWISDEN. [Taken aback] But, my dear young lady, there are two sides to every contract. After all, your husband's fulfilled his.

CLARE. So have I up till now. I shan't ask anything from him— nothing—do you understand?

LADY DEDMOND. But, my dear, you must live.

TWISDEN. Have you ever done any sort of work?

CLARE. Not yet.

TWISDEN. Any conception of the competition nowadays?

CLARE. I can try.

[TWISDEN, looking at her, shrugs his shoulders]

CLARE. [Her composure a little broken by that look] It's real to me—this—you see!

SIR CHARLES. But, my dear girl, what the devil's to become of George?

CLARE. He can do what he likes—it's nothing to me.

TWISDEN. Mrs. Dedmond, I say without hesitation you've no notion of what you're faced with, brought up to a sheltered life as you've been. Do realize that you stand at the parting of the ways, and one leads into the wilderness.

CLARE. Which?

TWISDEN. [Glancing at the door through which MALISE has gone] Of course, if you want to play at wild asses there are plenty who will help you.

SIR CHARLES. By Gad! Yes!

CLARE. I only want to breathe.

TWISDEN. Mrs. Dedmond, go back! You can now. It will be too late soon. There are lots of wolves about. [Again he looks at the door]

CLARE. But not where you think. You say I need advice. I came here for it.

TWISDEN. [With a curiously expressive shrug] In that case I don't know that I can usefully stay.

[He goes to the outer door.]

CLARE. Please don't have me followed when I leave here. Please!

LADY DEDMOND. George is outside, Clare.

CLARE. I don't wish to see him. By what right have you come here? [She goes to the door through which MALISE has passed, opens it, and says] Please come in, Mr. Malise.

[MALISE enters.]

TWISDEN. I am sorry. [Glancing at MALISE, he inclines his head] I am sorry. Good morning. [He goes]

LADY DEDMOND. Mr. Malise, I'm sure, will see——

CLARE. Mr. Malise will stay here, please, in his own room.

[MALISE bows]

SIR CHARLES. My dear girl, 'pon my soul, you know, I can't grasp your line of thought at all!

CLARE. No?

LADY DEDMOND. George is most willing to take up things just as they were before you left.

CLARE. Ah!

LADY DEDMOND. Quite frankly—what is it you want?

CLARE. To be left alone. Quite frankly, he made a mistake to have me spied on.

LADY DEDMOND. But, my good girl, if you'd let us know where you were, like a reasonable being. You can't possibly be left to yourself without money or position of any kind. Heaven knows what you'd be driven to!

MALISE. [Softly] Delicious!

SIR CHARLES. You will be good enough to repeat that out loud, sir.

LADY DEDMOND. Charles! Clare, you must know this is all a fit of spleen; your duty and your interest—marriage is sacred, Clare.

CLARE. Marriage! My marriage has become the—the reconciliation—of two animals—one of them unwilling. That's all the sanctity there is about it.

SIR CHARLES. What!

[She looks at MALISE]

LADY DEDMOND. You ought to be horribly ashamed. CLARE. Of the fact-I am.

LADY DEDMOND. [Darting a glance at MALISE] If we are to talk this out, it must be in private.

MALISE. [To CLARE] Do you wish me to go?

CLARE. No.

LADY DEDMOND. [At MALISE] I should have thought ordinary decent feeling—Good heavens, girl! Can't you see that you're being played with?

CLARE. If you insinuate anything against Mr. Malise, you lie.

LADY DEDMOND. If you will do these things—come to a man's rooms—

CLARE. I came to Mr. Malise because he's the only person I know with imagination enough to see what my position is; I came to him a quarter of an hour ago, for the first time, for definite advice, and you instantly suspect him. That is disgusting.

LADY DEDMOND. [Frigidly] Is this the natural place for me to find my son's wife?

CLARE. His woman.

LADY DEDMOND. Will you listen to Reginald?

CLARE. I have.

LADY DEDMOND. Haven't you any religious sense at all, Clare?

CLARE. None, if it's religion to live as we do.

LADY DEDMOND. It's terrible—this state of mind! It's really terrible!

CLARE breaks into the soft laugh of the other evening. As if galvanized by the sound, SIR CHARLES comes to life out of the transfixed bewilderment with which he has been listening.

SIR CHARLES. For God's sake don't laugh like that!

[CLARE Stops]

LADY DEDMOND. [With real feeling] For the sake of the simple right, Clare!

CLARE. Right? Whatever else is right—our life is not. [She puts her hand on her heart] I swear before God that I've tried and tried. I swear before God, that if I believed we could ever again love each other only a little tiny bit, I'd go back. I swear before God that I don't want to hurt anybody.

LADY DEDMOND. But you are hurting everybody. Do—do be reasonable!

CLARE. [Losing control] Can't you see that I'm fighting for all my life to come—not to be buried alive—not to be slowly smothered. Look at me! I'm not wax—I'm flesh and blood. And you want to prison me for ever—body and soul.

[They stare at her]

SIR CHARLES. [Suddenly] By Jove! I don't know, I don't know! What!

LADY DEDMOND. [To MALISE] If you have any decency left, sir, you will allow my son, at all events, to speak to his wife alone. [Beckoning to her husband] We'll wait below.

SIR CHARLES. I—I want to speak. [To CLARE] My dear, if you feel like this, I can only say—as a—as a gentleman—

LADY DEDMOND. Charles!

SIR CHARLES. Let me alone! I can only say that—damme, I don't know that I can say anything!

He looks at her very grieved, then turns and marches out, followed by LADY DEDMOND, whose voice is heard without, answered by his: "What!" In the doorway, as they pass, GEORGE is standing; he comes in.

GEORGE. [Going up to CLARE, who has recovered all her self-control]
Will you come outside and speak to me?

CLARE. No.

GEORGE glances at MALISE, who is leaning against the wall with folded arms.

GEORGE. [In a low voice] Clare!

CLARE. Well!

GEORGE. You try me pretty high, don't you, forcing me to come here, and speak before this fellow? Most men would think the worst, finding you like this.

CLARE. You need not have come—or thought at all.

GEORGE. Did you imagine I was going to let you vanish without an effort—

CLARE. To save me?

GEORGE. For God's sake be just! I've come here to say certain things. If you force me to say them before him—on your head be it! Will you appoint somewhere else?

CLARE. No.

GEORGE. Why not?

CLARE. I know all those "certain things." "You must come back. It is your duty. You have no money. Your friends won't help you. You can't earn your living. You are making a scandal." You might even say for the moment: "Your room shall be respected."

GEORGE. Well, it's true and you've no answer.

CLARE. Oh! [Suddenly] Our life's a lie. It's stupid; it's disgusting. I'm tired of it! Please leave me alone!

GEORGE. You rather miss the point, I'm afraid. I didn't come here to tell you what you know perfectly well when you're sane. I came here to say this: Anyone in her senses could see the game your friend here is playing. It wouldn't take a baby in. If you think that a gentleman like that [His stare travels round the dishevelled room till it rests on MALISE] champions a pretty woman for nothing, you make a fairly bad mistake.

CLARE. Take care.

But MALISE, after one convulsive movement of his hands, has again become rigid.

GEORGE. I don't pretend to be subtle or that kind of thing; but I have ordinary common sense. I don't attempt to be superior to plain facts—

CLARE. [Under her breath] Facts!

GEORGE. Oh! for goodness' sake drop that hifalutin' tone. It doesn't suit you. Look here! If you like to go abroad with one of your young sisters until the autumn, I'll let the flat and go to the Club.

CLARE. Put the fire out with a penny hose. [Slowly] I am not coming back to you, George. The farce is over.

GEORGE. [Taken aback for a moment by the finality of her tone, suddenly fronts MALISE] Then there is something between you and this fellow.

MALISE. [Dangerously, but without moving] I beg your pardon!

CLARE. There—is—nothing.

GEORGE. [Looking from one to the other] At all events, I won't—I won't see a woman who once— [CLARE makes a sudden effacing movement with her hands] I won't see her go to certain ruin without lifting a finger.

CLARE. That is noble.

GEORGE. [With intensity] I don't know that you deserve anything of me. But on my honour, as a gentleman, I came here this morning for your sake, to warn you of what you're doing. [He turns suddenly on MALISE] And I tell this precious friend of yours plainly what I think of him, and that I'm not going to play into his hands.

[MALISE, without stirring from the wall, looks at CLARE, and his lips move.]

CLARE. [Shakes her head at him—then to GEORGE] Will you go, please?

GEORGE. I will go when you do.

MALISE. A man of the world should know better than that.

GEORGE. Are you coming?

MALISE. That is inconceivable.

GEORGE. I'm not speaking to you, sir.

MALISE. You are right. Your words and mine will never kiss each other.

GEORGE. Will you come? [CLARE shakes her head]

GEORGE. [With fury] D'you mean to stay in this pigsty with that rhapsodical swine?

MALISE. [Transformed] By God, if you don't go, I'll kill you.

GEORGE. [As suddenly calm] That remains to be seen.

MALISE. [With most deadly quietness] Yes, I will kill you.

He goes stealthily along the wall, takes up from where it lies on the pile of books the great black knobby stick, and stealthily approaches GEORGE, his face quite fiendish.

CLARE. [With a swift movement, grasping the stick] Please.

MALISE resigns the stick, and the two men, perfectly still, glare at each other. CLARE, letting the stick fall, puts her foot on it. Then slowly she takes off her hat and lays it on the table.

CLARE. Now will you go! [There is silence]

GEORGE. [Staring at her hat] You mad little fool! Understand this; if you've not returned home by three o'clock I'll divorce you, and you may roll in the gutter with this high-souled friend of yours. And mind this, you sir—I won't spare you—by God! Your pocket shall suffer. That's the only thing that touches fellows like you.

Turning, he goes out, and slams the door. CLARE and MALISE remain face to face. Her lips have begun to quiver.

CLARE. Horrible!

She turns away, shuddering, and sits down on the edge of the armchair, covering her eyes with the backs of her hands. MALISE picks up the stick, and fingers it lovingly. Then putting it down, he moves so that he can see her face. She is sitting quite still, staring straight before her.

MALISE. Nothing could be better.

CLARE. I don't know what to do! I don't know what to do!

MALISE. Thank the stars for your good fortune.

CLARE. He means to have revenge on you! And it's all my fault.

MALISE. Let him. Let him go for his divorce. Get rid of him. Have done with him—somehow.

She gets up and stands with face averted. Then swiftly turning to him.

CLARE. If I must bring you harm—let me pay you back! I can't bear it otherwise! Make some use of me, if you don't mind!

MALISE. My God!

[She puts up her face to be kissed, shutting her eyes.]

MALISE. You poor—

He clasps and kisses her, then, drawing back, looks in her face. She has not moved, her eyes are still closed; but she is shivering; her lips are tightly pressed together; her hands twitching.

MALISE. [Very quietly] No, no! This is not the house of a "gentleman."

CLARE. [Letting her head fall, and almost in a whisper] I'm sorry.

MALISE. I understand.

CLARE. I don't feel. And without—I can't, can't.

MALISE. [Bitterly] Quite right. You've had enough of that.

There is a long silence. Without looking at him she takes up her hat, and puts it on.

MALISE. Not going?

[CLARE nods]

MALISE. You don't trust me?

CLARE. I do! But I can't take when I'm not giving.

MALISE. I beg—I beg you! What does it matter? Use me! Get free somehow.

CLARE. Mr. Malise, I know what I ought to be to you, if I let you in for all this. I know what you want—or will want. Of course—why not?

MALISE. I give you my solemn word—

CLARE. No! if I can't be that to you—it's not real. And I can't. It isn't to be manufactured, is it?

MALISE. It is not.

CLARE. To make use of you in such a way! No.

[She moves towards the door]

MALISE. Where are you going?

CLARE does not answer. She is breathing rapidly. There is a change in her, a sort of excitement beneath her calmness.

MALISE. Not back to him? [CLARE shakes her head] Thank God! But where? To your people again?

CLARE. No.

MALISE. Nothing—desperate?

CLARE. Oh! no.

MALISE. Then what—tell me—come!

CLARE. I don't know. Women manage somehow.

MALISE. But you—poor dainty thing!

CLARE. It's all right! Don't be unhappy! Please!

MALISE. [Seizing her arm] D'you imagine they'll let you off, out there—you with your face? Come, trust me trust me! You must!

CLARE. [Holding out her hand] Good-bye!

MALISE. [Not taking that hand] This great damned world, and—you! Listen! [The sound of the traffic far down below is audible in the stillness] Into that! alone—helpless—without money. The men who work with you; the men you make friends of—d'you think they'll let you be? The men in the streets, staring at you, stopping you—pudgy, bull-necked brutes; devils with hard eyes; senile swine; and the "chivalrous" men, like me, who don't mean you harm, but can't help seeing you're made for love! Or suppose you don't take covert but struggle on in the open. Society! The respectable! The pious! Even those who love you! Will they let you be? Hue and cry! The hunt was joined the moment you broke away! It will never let up! Covert to covert—till they've run you down, and you're back in the cart, and God pity you!

CLARE. Well, I'll die running!

MALISE. No, no! Let me shelter you! Let me!

CLARE. [Shaking her head and smiling] I'm going to seek my fortune. Wish me luck!

MALISE. I can't let you go.

CLARE. You must.

He looks into her face; then, realizing that she means it, suddenly bends down to her fingers, and puts his lips to them.

MALISE. Good luck, then! Good luck!

He releases her hand. Just touching his bent head with her other hand, CLARE turns and goes. MALISE remains with bowed head, listening to the sound of her receding footsteps. They die away. He raises himself, and strikes out into the air with his clenched fist.

CURTAIN.

ACT III

MALISE'S sitting-room. An afternoon, three months later. On the table are an open bottle of claret, his hat, and some tea-things. Down in the hearth is a kettle on a lighted spirit-stand. Near the door stands HAYWOOD, a short, round-faced man, with a tobacco-coloured moustache; MALISE, by the table, is contemplating a piece of blue paper.

HAYWOOD. Sorry to press an old customer, sir, but a year and an 'alf without any return on your money—

MALISE. Your tobacco is too good, Mr. Haywood. I wish I could see my way to smoking another.

HAYWOOD. Well, sir—that's a funny remedy.

With a knock on the half-opened door, a Boy appears.

MALISE. Yes. What is it?

BOY. Your copy for "The Watchfire," please, sir.

MALISE. [Motioning him out] Yes. Wait!

The Boy withdraws. MALISE goes up to the pile of books, turns them over, and takes up some volumes.

MALISE. This is a very fine unexpurgated translation of Boccaccio's "Decameron," Mr. Haywood illustrated. I should say you would get more than the amount of your bill for them.

HAYWOOD. [Shaking his head] Them books worth three pound seven!

MALISE. It's scarce, and highly improper. Will you take them in discharge?

HAYWOOD. [Torn between emotions] Well, I 'ardly know what to say—
No, Sir, I don't think I'd like to 'ave to do with that.

MALISE. You could read them first, you know?

HAYWOOD. [Dubiously] I've got my wife at 'ome.

MALISE. You could both read them.

HAYWOOD. [Brought to his bearings] No, Sir, I couldn't.

MALISE. Very well; I'll sell them myself, and you shall have the result.

HAYWOOD. Well, thank you, sir. I'm sure I didn't want to trouble you.

MALISE. Not at all, Mr. Haywood. It's for me to apologize.

HAYWOOD. So long as I give satisfaction.

MALISE. [Holding the door for him] Certainly. Good evening.

HAYWOOD. Good evenin', sir; no offence, I hope.

MALISE. On the contrary.

Doubtfully HAYWOOD goes. And MALISE stands scratching his head; then slipping the bill into one of the volumes to remind him, he replaces them at the top of the pile. The Boy again advances into the doorway.

MALISE. Yes, now for you.

He goes to the table and takes some sheets of MS. from an old portfolio. But the door is again timidly pushed open, and HAYWOOD reappears.

MALISE. Yes, Mr. Haywood?

HAYWOOD. About that little matter, sir. If—if it's any convenience to you—I've—thought of a place where I could—

MALISE. Read them? You'll enjoy them thoroughly.

HAYWOOD. No, sir, no! Where I can dispose of them.

MALISE. [Holding out the volumes] It might be as well. [HAYWOOD takes the books gingerly] I congratulate you, Mr. Haywood; it's a classic.

HAYWOOD. Oh, indeed—yes, sir. In the event of there being any—

MALISE. Anything over? Carry it to my credit. Your bill—[He hands over the blue paper] Send me the receipt. Good evening!

HAYWOOD, nonplussed, and trying to hide the books in an evening paper, fumbles out. "Good evenin', sir!" and departs. MALISE again takes up the sheets of MS. and cons a sentence over to himself, gazing blankly at the stolid BOY.

MALISE. "Man of the world—good form your god! Poor buttoned-up philosopher" [the Boy shifts his feet] "inbred to the point of cretinism, and founded to the bone on fear of ridicule [the Boy breathes heavily]—you are the slave of facts!"

[There is a knock on the door]

MALISE. Who is it?

The door is pushed open, and REGINALD HUNTINGDON stands there.

HUNTINGDON. I apologize, sir; can I come in a minute?

[MALISE bows with ironical hostility]

HUNTINGDON. I don't know if you remember me—Clare Dedmond's brother.

MALISE. I remember you.

[He motions to the stolid Boy to go outside again]

HUNTINGDON. I've come to you, sir, as a gentleman—

MALISE. Some mistake. There is one, I believe, on the first floor.

HUNTINGDON. It's about my sister.

MALISE. D—n you! Don't you know that I've been shadowed these last three months? Ask your detectives for any information you want.

HUNTINGDON. We know that you haven't seen her, or even known where she is.

MALISE. Indeed! You've found that out? Brilliant!

HUNTINGDON. We know it from my sister.

MALISE. Oh! So you've tracked her down?

HUNTINGDON. Mrs. Fullarton came across her yesterday in one of those big shops—selling gloves.

MALISE. Mrs. Fullarton the lady with the husband. Well! you've got her. Clap her back into prison.

HUNTINGDON. We have not got her. She left at once, and we don't know where she's gone.

MALISE. Bravo!

HUNTINGDON. [Taking hold of his bit] Look here, Mr. Malise, in a way I share your feeling, but I'm fond of my sister, and it's damnable to have to go back to India knowing she must be all adrift, without protection, going through God knows what! Mrs. Fullarton says she's looking awfully pale and down.

MALISE. [Struggling between resentment and sympathy] Why do you come to me?

HUNTINGDON. We thought—

MALISE. Who?

HUNTINGDON. My—my father and myself.

MALISE. Go on.

HUNTINGDON. We thought there was just a chance that, having lost that job, she might come to you again for advice. If she does, it would be really generous of you if you'd put my father in touch with her. He's getting old, and he feels this very much. [He hands MALISE a card] This is his address.

MALISE. [Twisting the card] Let there be no mistake, sir; I do nothing that will help give her back to her husband. She's out to save her soul alive, and I don't join the hue and cry that's after her. On the contrary—if I had the power. If your father wants to shelter her, that's another matter. But she'd her own ideas about that.

HUNTINGDON. Perhaps you don't realize how unfit my sister is for rough and tumble. She's not one of this new sort of woman. She's always been looked after, and had things done for her. Pluck she's got, but that's all, and she's bound to come to grief.

MALISE. Very likely—the first birds do. But if she drops half-way it's better than if she'd never flown. Your sister, sir, is trying the wings of her spirit, out of the old slave market. For women as for men, there's more than one kind of dishonour, Captain Huntingdon, and worse things than being dead, as you may know in your profession.

HUNTINGDON. Admitted—but—

MALISE. We each have our own views as to what they are. But they all come to—death of our spirits,

for the sake of our carcasses. Anything more?

HUNTINGDON. My leave's up. I sail to-morrow. If you do see my sister I trust you to give her my love and say I begged she would see my father.

MALISE. If I have the chance—yes.

He makes a gesture of salute, to which HUNTINGDON responds.
Then the latter turns and goes out.

MALISE. Poor fugitive! Where are you running now?

He stands at the window, through which the evening sunlight is powdering the room with smoky gold. The stolid Boy has again come in. MALISE stares at him, then goes back to the table, takes up the MS., and booms it at him; he receives the charge, breathing hard.

MALISE. "Man of the world—product of a material age; incapable of perceiving reality in motions of the spirit; having 'no use,' as you would say, for 'sentimental nonsense'; accustomed to believe yourself the national spine—your position is unassailable. You will remain the idol of the country—arbiter of law, parson in mufti, darling of the playwright and the novelist—God bless you!—while waters lap these shores."

He places the sheets of MS. in an envelope, and hands them to the Boy.

MALISE. You're going straight back to "The Watchfire"?

BOY. [Stolidly] Yes, sir.

MALISE. [Staring at him] You're a masterpiece. D'you know that?

BOY. No, sir.

MALISE. Get out, then.

He lifts the portfolio from the table, and takes it into the inner room. The Boy, putting his thumb stolidly to his nose, turns to go. In the doorway he shies violently at the figure of CLARE, standing there in a dark-coloured dress, skids past her and goes. CLARE comes into the gleam of sunlight, her white face alive with emotion or excitement. She looks round her, smiles, sighs; goes swiftly to the door, closes it, and comes back to the table. There she stands, fingering the papers on the table, smoothing MALISE's hat wistfully, eagerly, waiting.

MALISE. [Returning] You!

CLARE. [With a faint smile] Not very glorious, is it?

He goes towards her, and checks himself, then slews the armchair round.

MALISE. Come! Sit down, sit down! [CLARE, heaving a long sigh, sinks down into the chair] Tea's nearly ready.

He places a cushion for her, and prepares tea; she looks up at him softly, but as he finishes and turns to her, she drops that glance.

CLARE. Do you think me an awful coward for coming? [She has taken a little plain cigarette case from her dress] Would you mind if I smoked?

MALISE shakes his head, then draws back from her again, as if afraid to be too close. And again, unseen, she looks at him.

MALISE. So you've lost your job?

CLARE. How did you—?

MALISE. Your brother. You only just missed him. [CLARE starts up] They had an idea you'd come. He's sailing to-morrow—he wants you to see your father.

CLARE. Is father ill?

MALISE. Anxious about you.

CLARE. I've written to him every week. [Excited] They're still hunting me!

MALISE. [Touching her shoulder gently] It's all right—all right.

She sinks again into the chair, and again he withdraws. And once more she gives him that soft eager look, and once more averts it as he turns to her.

CLARE. My nerves have gone funny lately. It's being always on one's guard, and stuffy air, and feeling people look and talk about you, and dislike your being there.

MALISE. Yes; that wants pluck.

CLARE. [Shaking her head] I curl up all the time. The only thing I know for certain is, that I shall never go back to him. The more I've hated what I've been doing, the more sure I've been. I might come to anything—but not that.

MALISE. Had a very bad time?

CLARE. [Nodding] I'm spoilt. It's a curse to be a lady when you have to earn your living. It's not really been so hard, I suppose; I've been selling things, and living about twice as well as most shop girls.

MALISE. Were they decent to you?

CLARE. Lots of the girls are really nice. But somehow they don't want me, can't help thinking I've got airs or something; and in here [She touches her breast] I don't want them!

MALISE. I know.

CLARE. Mrs. Fullarton and I used to belong to a society for helping reduced gentlewomen to get work. I know now what they want: enough money not to work—that's all! [Suddenly looking up at him] Don't think me worse than I am—please! It's working under people; it's having to do it, being driven. I have tried, I've not been altogether a coward, really! But every morning getting there the same time; every day the same stale "dinner," as they call it; every evening the same "Good evening, Miss Clare," "Good evening, Miss Simpson," "Good evening, Miss Hart," "Good evening, Miss Clare." And the same walk home, or the same 'bus; and the same men that you mustn't look at, for fear they'll follow you. [She rises] Oh! and the feeling—always, always—that there's no sun, or life, or hope, or anything. It was just like being ill, the way I've wanted to ride and dance and get out into the country. [Her excitement dies away into the old clipped composure, and she sits down again] Don't think too badly of me—it really is pretty ghastly!

MALISE. [Gruffly] H'm! Why a shop?

CLARE. References. I didn't want to tell more lies than I could help; a married woman on strike can't tell the truth, you know. And I can't typewrite or do shorthand yet. And chorus—I thought—you wouldn't like.

MALISE. I? What have I—? [He checks himself] Have men been brutes?

CLARE. [Stealing a look at him] One followed me a lot. He caught hold of my arm one evening. I just took this out [She draws out her hatpin and holds it like a dagger, her lip drawn back as the lips of a dog going to bite] and said: "Will you leave me alone, please?" And he did. It was rather nice. And there was one quite decent little man in the shop—I was sorry for him—such a humble little man!

MALISE. Poor devil—it's hard not to wish for the moon.

At the tone of his voice CLARE looks up at him; his face is turned away.

CLARE. [Softly] How have you been? Working very hard?

MALISE. As hard as God will let me.

CLARE. [Stealing another look] Have you any typewriting I could do? I could learn, and I've still got a brooch I could sell. Which is the best kind?

MALISE. I had a catalogue of them somewhere.

He goes into the inner room. The moment he is gone, CLARE stands up, her hands pressed to her cheeks as if she felt them flaming. Then, with hands clasped, she stands waiting. He comes back with the old portfolio.

MALISE. Can you typewrite where you are?

CLARE. I have to find a new room anyway. I'm changing—to be safe. [She takes a luggage ticket from her glove] I took my things to Charing Cross—only a bag and one trunk. [Then, with that queer expression on her face which prefaces her desperations] You don't want me now, I suppose.

MALISE. What?

CLARE. [Hardly above a whisper] Because—if you still wanted me—I do—now.

[Etext editors note: In the 1924 revision, 11 years after this 1913 edition: "I do—now" is changed to "I could—now"—a significant change in meaning. D.W.]

MALISE. [Staring hard into her face that is quivering and smiling] You mean it? You do? You care—?

CLARE. I've thought of you—so much! But only—if you're sure.

He clasps her and kisses her closed eyes; and so they stand for a moment, till the sound of a latchkey in the door sends them apart.

MALISE. It's the housekeeper. Give me that ticket; I'll send for your things.

Obediently she gives him the ticket, smiles, and goes quietly into the inner room. MRS. MILER has entered; her face, more Chinese than ever, shows no sign of having seen.

MALISE. That lady will stay here, Mrs. Miler. Kindly go with this ticket to the cloak-room at Charing Cross station, and bring back her luggage in a cab. Have you money?

MRS. MILER. 'Arf a crown. [She takes the ticket—then impassively] In case you don't know—there's two o' them men about the stairs now.

The moment she is gone MALISE makes a gesture of maniacal fury. He steals on tiptoe to the outer door, and listens. Then, placing his hand on the knob, he turns it without noise, and wrenches back the door. Transfigured in the last sunlight streaming down the corridor are two men, close together, listening and consulting secretly. They start back.

MALISE. [With strange, almost noiseless ferocity] You've run her to earth; your job's done. Kennel up, hounds! [And in their faces he slams the door]

CURTAIN.

SCENE II

SCENE II—The same, early on a winter afternoon, three months later. The room has now a certain daintiness. There are curtains over the doors, a couch, under the window, all the books are arranged on shelves. In small vases, over the fireplace, are a few violets and chrysanthemums. MALISE sits huddled in his armchair drawn close to the fore, paper on knee, pen in hand. He looks rather grey and drawn, and round his chair is the usual litter. At the table, now nearer to the window, CLARE sits working a typewriter. She finishes a line, puts sheets of paper together, makes a note on a card—adds some figures, and marks the total.

CLARE. Kenneth, when this is paid, I shall have made two pound seventeen in the three months, and saved you about three pounds. One hundred and seventeen shillings at tenpence a thousand is one hundred and forty thousand words at fourteen hundred words an hour. It's only just over an hour a day. Can't you get me more?

MALISE lifts the hand that holds his pen and lets it fall again.

CLARE puts the cover on the typewriter, and straps it.

CLARE. I'm quite packed. Shall I pack for you? [He nods] Can't we have more than three days at the sea? [He shakes his head. Going up to him] You did sleep last night.

MALISE. Yes, I slept.

CLARE. Bad head? [MALISE nods] By this time the day after to-morrow the case will be heard and done with. You're not worrying for me? Except for my poor old Dad, I don't care a bit.

MALISE heaves himself out of the chair, and begins pacing up and down.

CLARE. Kenneth, do you understand why he doesn't claim damages, after what he said that day-here? [Looking suddenly at him] It is true that he doesn't?

MALISE. It is not.

CLARE. But you told me yourself

MALISE. I lied.

CLARE. Why?

MALISE. [Shrugging] No use lying any longer—you'd know it tomorrow.

CLARE. How much am I valued at?

MALISE. Two thousand. [Grimly] He'll settle it on you. [He laughs] Masterly! By one stroke, destroys his enemy, avenges his "honour," and gilds his name with generosity!

CLARE. Will you have to pay?

MALISE. Stones yield no blood.

CLARE. Can't you borrow?

MALISE. I couldn't even get the costs.

CLARE. Will they make you bankrupt, then? [MALISE nods] But that doesn't mean that you won't have your income, does it? [MALISE laughs] What is your income, Kenneth? [He is silent] A hundred and fifty from "The Watchfire," I know. What else?

MALISE. Out of five books I have made the sum of forty pounds.

CLARE. What else? Tell me.

MALISE. Fifty to a hundred pounds a year. Leave me to gnaw my way out, child.

CLARE stands looking at him in distress, then goes quickly into the room behind her.

MALISE takes up his paper and pen. The paper is quite blank.

MALISE. [Feeling his head] Full of smoke.

He drops paper and pen, and crossing to the room on the left goes in. CLARE re-enters with a small leather box. She puts it down on her typing table as MALISE returns followed by MRS. MILER, wearing her hat, and carrying His overcoat.

MRS. MILER. Put your coat on. It's a bitter wind.

[He puts on the coat]

CLARE. Where are you going?

MALISE. To "The Watchfire."

The door closes behind him, and MRS. MILER goes up to CLARE holding out a little blue bottle with a red label, nearly full.

MRS. MILER. You know he's takin' this [She makes a little motion towards her mouth] to make 'im sleep?

CLARE. [Reading the label] Where was it?

MRS. MILER. In the bathroom chest o' drawers, where 'e keeps 'is odds and ends. I was lookin' for 'is garters.

CLARE. Give it to me!

MRS. MILER. He took it once before. He must get his sleep.

CLARE. Give it to me!

MRS. MILER resigns it, CLARE takes the cork out, smells, then tastes it from her finger.
MRS. MILER, twisting her apron in her hands, speaks.

MRS. MILER. I've 'ad it on my mind a long time to speak to yer.
Your comin' 'ere's not done 'im a bit o' good.

CLARE. Don't!

MRS. MILER. I don't want to, but what with the worry o' this 'ere divorce suit, an' you bein' a lady an' 'im havin' to be so careful of yer, and tryin' to save, not smokin' all day like 'e used, an' not gettin' 'is two bottles of claret regular; an' losin' his sleep, an' takin' that stuff for it; and now this 'ere last business. I've seen 'im sometimes holdin' 'is 'ead as if it was comin' off. [Seeing CLARE wince, she goes on with a sort of compassion in her Chinese face] I can see yer fond of him; an' I've nothin' against yer you don't trouble me a bit; but I've been with 'im eight years—we're used to each other, and I can't bear to see 'im not 'imself, really I can't.

She gives a sudden sniff. Then her emotion passes, leaving her as Chinese as ever.

CLARE. This last business—what do you mean by that?

MRS. MILER. If 'e a'n't told yer, I don't know that I've any call to.

CLARE. Please.

MRS. MILER. [Her hands twisting very fast] Well, it's to do with this 'ere "Watchfire." One of the men that sees to the writin' of it 'e's an old friend of Mr. Malise, 'e come 'ere this mornin' when you was out. I was doin' my work in there [She points to the room on the right] an' the door open, so I 'earl 'em. Now you've 'ung them curtains, you can't 'elp it.

CLARE. Yes?

MRS. MILER. It's about your divorce case. This 'ere "Watchfire," ye see, belongs to some fellers that won't 'ave their men gettin' into the papers. So this 'ere friend of Mr. Malise—very nice 'e spoke about it: "If it comes into Court," 'e says, "you'll 'ave to go," 'e says. "These beggars, these dogs, these dogs," 'e says, "they'll 'oof you out," 'e says. An' I could tell by the sound of his voice, 'e meant it—proper upset 'e was. So that's that!

CLARE. It's inhuman!

MRS. MILER. That's what I thinks; but it don't 'elp, do it?
"Tain't the circulation," 'e says, "it's the principle," 'e says;
and then 'e starts in swearin' horrible. 'E's a very nice man. And
Mr. Malise, 'e says: "Well, that about does for me!" 'e says.

CLARE. Thank you, Mrs. Miler—I'm glad to know.

MRS. MILER. Yes; I don't know as I ought to 'ave told you. [Desperately uncomfortable] You see, I don't take notice of Mr. MALISE, but I know 'im very well. 'E's a good 'arted gentleman, very funny, that'll do things to help others, and what's more, keep on doin' 'em, when they hurt 'im; very obstinate 'e is. Now, when you first come 'ere, three months ago, I says to meself: "He'll enjoy this 'ere for a bit, but she's too much of a lady for 'im." What 'e wants about 'im permanent is a woman that thinks an' talks about all them things he talks about. And sometimes I fancy 'e don't want nothin' permanent about 'im at all.

CLARE. Don't!

MRS. MILER. [With another sudden sniff] Gawd knows I don't want to upset ye. You're situated very hard; an' women's got no business to 'urt one another—that's what I thinks.

CLARE. Will you go out and do something for me? [MRS. MILER nods]

[CLARE takes up the sheaf of papers and from the leather box a note and an emerald pendant]

Take this with the note to that address—it's quite close. He'll give you thirty pounds for it. Please pay these bills and bring me back the receipts, and what's over.

MRS. MILER. [Taking the pendant and note] It's a pretty thing.

CLARE. Yes. It was my mother's.

MRS. MILER. It's a pity to part with it; ain't you got another?

CLARE. Nothing more, Mrs. Miler, not even a wedding ring.

MRS. MILER. [Without expression] You make my 'eart ache sometimes.

[She wraps pendant and note into her handkerchief and goes out to the door.]

MRS. MILER. [From the door] There's a lady and gentleman out here. Mrs. Fuller—wants you, not Mr. Malise.

CLARE. Mrs. Fullarton? [MRS. MILER nods] Ask them to come in.

MRS. MILER opens the door wide, says "Come in," and goes. MRS. FULLARTON is accompanied not by FULLARTON, but by the lawyer, TWISDON. They come in.

MRS. FULLARTON. Clare! My dear! How are you after all this time?

CLARE. [Her eyes fixed on TWISDEN] Yes?

MRS. FULLARTON. [Disconcerted by the strange greeting] I brought Mr. Twisden to tell you something. May I stay?

CLARE. Yes. [She points to the chair at the same table: MRS. FULLARTON sits down] Now!

[TWISDEN comes forward]

TWISDEN. As you're not defending this case, Mrs. Dedmond, there is nobody but yourself for me to apply to.

CLARE. Please tell me quickly, what you've come for.

TWISDEN. [Bowing slightly] I am instructed by Mr. Dedmond to say that if you will leave your present companion and undertake not to see him again, he will withdraw the suit and settle three hundred a year on you. [At CLARE's movement of abhorrence] Don't misunderstand me, please—it is not—it could hardly be, a request that you should go back. Mr. Dedmond is not prepared to receive you again. The proposal—forgive my saying so—remarkably Quixotic—is made to save the scandal to his family and your own. It binds you to nothing but the abandonment of your present companion, with certain conditions of the same nature as to the future. In other words, it assures you a position—so long as you live quietly by yourself.

CLARE. I see. Will you please thank Mr. Dedmond, and say that I refuse?

MRS. FULLARTON. Clare, Clare! For God's sake don't be desperate.

[CLARE, deathly still, just looks at her]

TWISDEN. Mrs. Dedmond, I am bound to put the position to you in its naked brutality. You know there's a claim for damages?

CLARE. I have just learnt it.

TWISDEN. You realize what the result of this suit must be: You will be left dependent on an undischarged bankrupt. To put it another way, you'll be a stone round the neck of a drowning man.

CLARE. You are cowards.

MRS. FULLARTON. Clare, Clare! [To TWISDEN] She doesn't mean it; please be patient.

CLARE. I do mean it. You ruin him because of me. You get him down, and kick him to intimidate me.

MRS. FULLARTON. My dear girl! Mr. Twisden is not personally concerned. How can you?

CLARE. If I were dying, and it would save me, I wouldn't take a penny from my husband.

TWISDEN. Nothing could be more bitter than those words. Do you really wish me to take them back to him?

CLARE. Yes. [She turns from them to the fire]

MRS. FULLARTON. [In a low voice to TWISDEN] Please leave me alone with her, don't say anything to Mr. Dedmond yet.

TWISDEN. Mrs. Dedmond, I told you once that I wished you well. Though you have called me a coward, I still do that. For God's sake, think—before it's too late.

CLARE. [Putting out her hand blindly] I'm sorry I called you a coward. It's the whole thing, I meant.

TWISDEN. Never mind that. Think!

With the curious little movement of one who sees something he does not like to see, he goes. CLARE is leaning her forehead against the mantel-shelf, seemingly unconscious that she is not alone. MRS. FULLARTON approaches quietly till she can see CLARE'S face.

MRS. FULLARTON. My dear sweet thing, don't be cross with met [CLARE turns from her. It is all the time as if she were trying to get away from words and people to something going on within herself] How can I help wanting to see you saved from all this ghastliness?

CLARE. Please don't, Dolly! Let me be!

MRS. FULLARTON. I must speak, Clare! I do think you're hard on George. It's generous of him to offer to withdraw the suit— considering. You do owe it to us to try and spare your father and your sisters and—and all of us who care for you.

CLARE. [Facing her] You say George is generous! If he wanted to be that he'd never have claimed these damages. It's revenge he wants—I heard him here. You think I've done him an injury. So I did—when I married him. I don't know what I shall come to, Dolly, but I shan't fall so low as to take money from him. That's as certain as that I shall die.

MRS. FULLARTON. Do you know, Clare, I think it's awful about you! You're too fine, and not fine enough, to put up with things; you're too sensitive to take help, and you're not strong enough to do without it. It's simply tragic. At any rate, you might go home to your people.

CLARE. After this!

MRS. FULLARTON. To us, then?

CLARE. "If I could be the falling bee, and kiss thee all the day!"
No, Dolly!

MRS. FULLARTON turns from her ashamed and baffled, but her quick eyes take in the room, trying to seize on some new point of attack.

MRS. FULLARTON. You can't be—you aren't-happy, here?

CLARE. Aren't I?

MRS. FULLARTON. Oh! Clare! Save yourself—and all of us!

CLARE. [Very still] You see, I love him.

MRS. FULLARTON. You used to say you'd never love; did not want it— would never want it.

CLARE. Did I? How funny!

MRS. FULLARTON. Oh! my dear! Don't look like that, or you'll make me cry.

CLARE. One doesn't always know the future, does one? [Desperately]
I love him! I love him!

MRS. FULLARTON. [Suddenly] If you love him, what will it be like for you, knowing you've ruined him?

CLARE. Go away! Go away!

MRS. FULLARTON. Love!—you said!

CLARE. [Quivering at that stab-suddenly] I must—I will keep him.
He's all I've got.

MRS. FULLARTON. Can you—can you keep him?

CLARE. Go!

MRS. FULLARTON. I'm going. But, men are hard to keep, even when you've not been the ruin of them. You know whether the love this man gives you is really love. If not—God help you! [She turns at the door, and says mournfully] Good-bye, my child! If you can—

Then goes. CLARE, almost in a whisper, repeats the words: "Love! you said!" At the sound of a latchkey she runs as if to escape into the bedroom, but changes her mind and stands blotted against the curtain of the door. MALISE enters. For a moment he does not see her standing there against the curtain that is much the same colour as her dress. His face is that of a man in the grip of a rage that he feels to be impotent. Then, seeing her, he pulls himself together, walks to his armchair, and sits down there in his hat and coat.

CLARE. Well? "The Watchfire?" You may as well tell me.

MALISE. Nothing to tell you, child.

At that touch of tenderness she goes up to his chair and kneels down beside it. Mechanically MALISE takes off his hat.

CLARE. Then you are to lose that, too? [MALISE stares at her] I know about it—never mind how.

MALISE. Sanctimonious dogs!

CLARE. [Very low] There are other things to be got, aren't there?

MALISE. Thick as blackberries. I just go out and cry, "MALISE, unsuccessful author, too honest journalist, freethinker, co-respondent, bankrupt," and they tumble!

CLARE. [Quietly] Kenneth, do you care for me? [MALISE stares at her] Am I anything to you but just prettiness?

MALISE. Now, now! This isn't the time to brood! Rouse up and fight.

CLARE. Yes.

MALISE. We're not going to let them down us, are we? [She rubs her cheek against his hand, that still rests on her shoulder] Life on sufferance, breath at the pleasure of the enemy! And some day in the fullness of his mercy to be made a present of the right to eat and drink and breathe again. [His gesture sums up the rage within him] Fine! [He puts his hat on and rises] That's the last groan they get from me.

CLASS. Are you going out again? [He nods] Where?

MALISE. Blackberrying! Our train's not till six.

He goes into the bedroom. CLARE gets up and stands by the fire, looking round in a dazed way. She puts her hand up and mechanically gathers together the violets in the little vase. Suddenly she twists them to a buttonhole, and sinks down into the armchair, which he must pass. There she sits, the violets in her hand. MALISE comes out and crosses towards the outer door. She puts the violets up to him. He stares at them, shrugs his shoulders, and passes on. For just a moment CLARE sits motionless.

CLARE. [Quietly] Give me a kiss!

He turns and kisses her. But his lips, after that kiss, have the furtive bitterness one sees on the lips of those who have done what does not suit their mood. He goes out. She is left motionless by the armchair, her throat working. Then, feverishly, she goes to the little table, seizes a sheet of paper, and writes. Looking up suddenly she sees that MRS. MILER has let herself in with her latchkey.

MRS. MILER. I've settled the baker, the milk, the washin' an' the groceries—this 'ere's what's left.

She counts down a five-pound note, four sovereigns, and two shillings on to the little table. CLARE folds the letter into an envelope, then takes up the five-pound note and puts

it into her dress.

CLARE. [Pointing to the money on the table] Take your wages; and give him this when he comes in. I'm going away.

MRS. MILER. Without him? When'll you be comin' back?

CLARE. [Rising] I shan't be coming back. [Gazing at MRS. MILER'S hands, which are plaiting at her dress] I'm leaving Mr. Malise, and shan't see him again. And the suit against us will be withdrawn—the divorce suit—you understand?

MRS. MILER. [Her face all broken up] I never meant to say anything to yer.

CLARE. It's not you. I can see for myself. Don't make it harder; help me. Get a cab.

MRS. MILER. [Disturbed to the heart] The porter's outside, cleanin' the landin' winder.

CLARE. Tell him to come for my trunk. It is packed. [She goes into the bedroom]

MRS. MILER. [Opening the door-desolately] Come 'ere!

[The PORTER appears in shirt-sleeves at the door]

MRS. MILER. The lady wants a cab. Wait and carry 'er trunk down.

CLARE comes from the bedroom in her hat and coat.

MRS. MILER. [TO the PORTER] Now.

They go into the bedroom to get the trunk. CLARE picks up from the floor the bunch of violets, her fingers play with it as if they did not quite know what it was; and she stands by the armchair very still, while MRS. MILER and the PORTER pass her with trunk and bag. And even after the PORTER has shouldered the trunk outside, and marched away, and MRS. MILER has come back into the room, CLARE still stands there.

MRS. MILER. [Pointing to the typewriter] D'you want this 'ere, too?

CLARE. Yes.

MRS. MILER carries it out. Then, from the doorway, gazing at CLARE taking her last look, she sobs, suddenly. At sound of that sob CLARE throws up her head.

CLARE. Don't! It's all right. Good-bye!

She walks out and away, not looking back. MRS. MILER chokes her sobbing into the black stuff of her thick old jacket.

CURTAIN

ACT IV

Supper-time in a small room at "The Gascony" on Derby Day. Through the windows of a broad corridor, out of which the door opens, is seen the dark blue of a summer night. The walls are of apricot-gold; the carpets, curtains, lamp-shades, and gilded chairs, of red; the wood-work and screens white; the palms in gilded tubs. A doorway that has no door leads to another small room. One little table behind a screen, and one little table in the open, are set for two persons each. On a service-table, above which hangs a speaking-tube, are some dishes of hors d'ouvres, a basket of peaches, two bottles of champagne in ice-pails, and a small barrel of oysters in a gilded tub. ARNAUD, the waiter, slim, dark, quick, his face seamed with a quiet, soft irony, is opening oysters and listening to the robust joy of a distant supper-party, where a man is playing the last bars of: "Do ye ken John Peel" on a horn. As the sound dies away, he murmurs: "Tres Joli!" and opens another oyster. Two Ladies with bare shoulders and large hats pass down the corridor. Their talk is faintly wafted in: "Well, I never like Derby night! The boys do get so bobbish!" "That horn—vulgar,

I call it!"

ARNAUD'S eyebrows rise, the corners of his mouth droop. A Lady with bare shoulders, and crimson roses in her hair, comes along the corridor, and stops for a second at the window, for a man to join her. They come through into the room. ARNAUD has sprung to attention, but with: "Let's go in here, shall we?" they pass through into the further room. The MANAGER, a gentleman with neat moustaches, and buttoned into a frock-coat, has appeared, brisk, noiseless, his eyes everywhere; he inspects the peaches.

MANAGER. Four shillin' apiece to-night, see?

ARNAUD. Yes, Sare.

From the inner room a young man and his partner have come in. She is dark, almost Spanish-looking; he fair, languid, pale, clean-shaved, slackly smiling, with half-closed eyes—one of those who are bred and dissipated to the point of having lost all save the capacity for hiding their emotions. He speaks in a—

LANGUID VOICE. Awful row they're kickin' up in there, Mr. Varley.
A fellow with a horn.

MANAGER. [Blandly] Gaddesdon Hunt, my lord—always have their supper with us, Derby night. Quiet corner here, my lord. Arnaud!

ARNAUD is already at the table, between screen and palm. And, there ensconced, the couple take their seats. Seeing them safely landed, the MANAGER, brisk and noiseless, moves away. In the corridor a lady in black, with a cloak falling open, seems uncertain whether to come in. She advances into the doorway. It is CLARE.

ARNAUD. [Pointing to the other table as he flies with dishes] Nice table, Madame.

CLARE moves to the corner of it. An artist in observation of his clients, ARNAUD takes in her face—very pale under her wavy, simply-dressed hair; shadowy beneath the eyes; not powdered; her lips not reddened; without a single ornament; takes in her black dress, finely cut, her arms and neck beautifully white, and at her breast three gardenias. And as he nears her, she lifts her eyes. It is very much the look of something lost, appealing for guidance.

ARNAUD. Madame is waiting for some one? [She shakes her head] Then Madame will be verree well here—verree well. I take Madame's cloak?

He takes the cloak gently and lays it on the back of the chair fronting the room, that she may put it round her when she wishes. She sits down.

LANGUID VOICE. [From the corner] Waiter!

ARNAUD. Milord!

LANGUID VOICE. The Roederer.

ARNAUD. At once, Milord.

CLARE sits tracing a pattern with her finger on the cloth, her eyes lowered. Once she raises them, and follows ARNAUD's dark rapid figure.

ARNAUD. [Returning] Madame feels the 'eat? [He scans her with increased curiosity] You wish something, Madame?

CLARE. [Again giving him that look] Must I order?

ARNAUD. Non, Madame, it is not necessary. A glass of water. [He pours it out] I have not the pleasure of knowing Madame's face.

CLARE. [Faintly smiling] No.

ARNAUD. Madame will find it verree good 'ere, verree quiet.

LANGUID VOICE. Waiter!

ARNAUD. Pardon! [He goes]

The bare-necked ladies with large hats again pass down the corridor outside, and again their voices are wafted in: "Tottie! Not she! Oh! my goodness, she has got a pride on her!" "Bobbie'll never stick it!" "Look here, dear——" Galvanized by those sounds, CLARE has caught her cloak and half-risen; they die away and she subsides.

ARNAUD. [Back at her table, with a quaint shrug towards the corridor] It is not rowdy here, Madame, as a rule—not as in some places. To-night a little noise. Madame is fond of flowers? [He whisks out, and returns almost at once with a bowl of carnations from some table in the next room] These smell good!

CLARE. You are very kind.

ARNAUD. [With courtesy] Not at all, Madame; a pleasure. [He bows]

A young man, tall, thin, hard, straight, with close-cropped, sandyish hair and moustache, a face tanned very red, and one of those small, long, lean heads that only grow in Britain; clad in a thin dark overcoat thrown open, an opera hat pushed back, a white waistcoat round his lean middle, he comes in from the corridor. He looks round, glances at CLARE, passes her table towards the further room, stops in the doorway, and looks back at her. Her eyes have just been lifted, and are at once cast down again. The young man wavers, catches ARNAUD's eye, jerks his head to summon him, and passes into the further room. ARNAUD takes up the vase that has been superseded, and follows him out. And CLARE sits alone in silence, broken by the murmurs of the languid lord and his partner, behind the screen. She is breathing as if she had been running hard. She lifts her eyes. The tall young man, divested of hat and coat, is standing by her table, holding out his hand with a sort of bashful hardness.

YOUNG MAN. How d'you do? Didn't recognize you at first. So sorry —awfully rude of me.

CLARE'S eyes seem to fly from him, to appeal to him, to resign herself all at once. Something in the YOUNG MAN responds. He drops his hand.

CLARE. [Faintly] How d'you do?

YOUNG MAN. [Stammering] You—you been down there to-day?

CLARE. Where?

YOUNG MAN. [With a smile] The Derby. What? Don't you generally go down? [He touches the other chair] May I?

CLARE. [Almost in a whisper] Yes.

As he sits down, ARNAUD returns and stands before them.

ARNAUD. The plovers' eggs verree good to-night, Sare. Verree good, Madame. A peach or two, after. Verree good peaches. The Roederer, Sare—not bad at all. Madame likes it frappe, but not too cold—yes?

[He is away again to his service-table.]

YOUNG MAN. [Burying his face in the carnations] I say—these are jolly, aren't they? They do you pretty well here.

CLARE. Do they?

YOUNG MAN. You've never been here? [CLARE shakes her head] By Jove! I thought I didn't know your face. [CLARE looks full at him. Again something moves in the YOUNG MAN, and he stammers] I mean—not——

CLARE. It doesn't matter.

YOUNG MAN. [Respectfully] Of course, if I—if you were waiting for anybody, or anything—I——

[He half rises]

CLARE. It's all right, thank you.

The YOUNG MAN sits down again, uncomfortable, nonplussed. There is silence, broken by the inaudible words of the languid lord, and the distant merriment of the supper-party. ARNAUD brings the plovers' eggs.

YOUNG MAN. The wine, quick.

ARNAUD. At once, Sare.

YOUNG MAN. [Abruptly] Don't you ever go racing, then?

CLARE. No.

[ARNAUD pours out champagne]

YOUNG MAN. I remember awfully well my first day. It was pretty thick—lost every blessed bob, and my watch and chain, playin' three cards on the way home.

CLARE. Everything has a beginning, hasn't it?

[She drinks. The YOUNG MAN stares at her]

YOUNG MAN. [Floundering in these waters deeper than he had bargained for] I say—about things having beginnings—did you mean anything?

[CLARE nods]

YOUNG MAN. What! D'you mean it's really the first—?

CLARE nods. The champagne has flicked her courage.

YOUNG MAN. By George! [He leans back] I've often wondered.

ARNAUD. [Again filling the glasses] Monsieur finds—

YOUNG MAN. [Abruptly] It's all right.

He drains his glass, then sits bolt upright. Chivalry and the camaraderie of class have begun to stir in him.

YOUNG MAN. Of course I can see that you're not—I mean, that you're a—a lady. [CLARE smiles] And I say, you know—if you have to— because you're in a hole—I should feel a cad. Let me lend you—?

CLARE. [Holding up her glass] 'Le vin est tire, il faut le boire'!

She drinks. The French words, which he does not too well understand, completing his conviction that she is a lady, he remains quite silent, frowning. As CLARE held up her glass, two gentlemen have entered. The first is blond, of good height and a comely insolence. His crisp, fair hair, and fair brushed-up moustache are just going grey; an eyeglass is fixed in one of two eyes that lord it over every woman they see; his face is broad, and coloured with air and wine. His companion is a tall, thin, dark bird of the night, with sly, roving eyes, and hollow cheeks. They stand looking round, then pass into the further room; but in passing, they have stared unreservedly at CLARE.

YOUNG MAN. [Seeing her wince] Look here! I'm afraid you must feel me rather a brute, you know.

CLARE. No, I don't; really.

YOUNG MAN. Are you absolute stoney? [CLARE nods] But [Looking at her frock and cloak] you're so awfully well—

CLARE. I had the sense to keep them.

YOUNG MAN. [More and more disturbed] I say, you know—I wish you'd let me lend you something. I had quite a good day down there.

CLARE. [Again tracing her pattern on the cloth—then looking up at him full] I can't take, for nothing.

YOUNG MAN. By Jove! I don't know-really, I don't—this makes me feel pretty rotten. I mean, it's your being a lady.

CLARE. [Smiling] That's not your fault, is it? You see, I've been beaten all along the line. And I really don't care what happens to me. [She has that peculiar fey look on her face now] I really don't; except that I don't take charity. It's lucky for me it's you, and not some—

The supper-party is getting still more boisterous, and there comes a long view holloa, and a blast of the horn.

YOUNG MAN. But I say, what about your people? You must have people of some sort.

He is fast becoming fascinated, for her cheeks have begun to flush and her eyes to shine.

CLARE. Oh, yes; I've had people, and a husband, and—everything— And here I am! Queer, isn't it? [She touches her glass] This is going to my head! Do you mind? I sha'n't sing songs and get up and dance, and I won't cry, I promise you!

YOUNG MAN. [Between fascination and chivalry] By George! One simply can't believe in this happening to a lady.

CLARE. Have you got sisters? [Breaking into her soft laughter] My brother's in India. I sha'n't meet him, anyway.

YOUNG MAN. No, but—I say—are you really quite cut off from everybody? [CLARE nods] Something rather awful must have happened?

She smiles. The two gentlemen have returned. The blond one is again staring fixedly at CLARE. This time she looks back at him, flaming; and, with a little laugh, he passes with his friend into the corridor.

CLARE. Who are those two?

YOUNG MAN. Don't know—not been much about town yet. I'm just back from India myself. You said your brother was there; what's his regiment?

CLARE. [Shaking her head] You're not going to find out my name. I haven't got one—nothing.

She leans her bare elbows on the table, and her face on her hands.

CLARE. First of June! This day last year I broke covert—I've been running ever since.

YOUNG MAN. I don't understand a bit. You—must have had a—a—some one—

But there is such a change in her face, such rigidity of her whole body, that he stops and averts his eyes. When he looks again she is drinking. She puts the glass down, and gives a little laugh.

YOUNG MAN. [With a sort of awe] Anyway it must have been like riding at a pretty stiff fence, for you to come here to-night.

CLARE. Yes. What's the other side?

The YOUNG MAN puts out his hand and touches her arm. It is meant for sympathy, but she takes it for attraction.

CLARE. [Shaking her head] Not yet please! I'm enjoying this. May I have a cigarette?

[He takes out his case, and gives her one]

CLARE. [Letting the smoke slowly forth] Yes, I'm enjoying it. Had a pretty poor time lately; not enough to eat, sometimes.

YOUNG MAN. Not really! How damnable! I say—do have something more substantial.

CLARE gives a sudden gasp, as if going off into hysterical laughter, but she stifles it, and shakes her head.

YOUNG MAN. A peach?

[ARNAUD brings peaches to the table]

CLARE. [Smiling] Thank you.

[He fills their glasses and retreats]

CLARE. [Raising her glass] Eat and drink, for tomorrow we—Listen!

From the supper-party comes the sound of an abortive chorus:

"With a hey ho, chivy, hark farrard, hark farrard, tantivy!"
Jarring out into a discordant whoop, it sinks.

CLARE. "This day a stag must die." Jolly old song!

YOUNG MAN. Rowdy lot! [Suddenly] I say—I admire your pluck.

CLARE. [Shaking her head] Haven't kept my end up. Lots of women do! You see: I'm too fine, and not fine enough! My best friend said that. Too fine, and not fine enough. [She laughs] I couldn't be a saint and martyr, and I wouldn't be a soulless doll. Neither one thing nor the other—that's the tragedy.

YOUNG MAN. You must have had awful luck!

CLARE. I did try. [Fiercely] But what's the good—when there's nothing before you?—Do I look ill?

YOUNG MAN. No; simply awfully pretty.

CLARE. [With a laugh] A man once said to me: "As you haven't money, you should never have been pretty!" But, you see, it is some good. If I hadn't been, I couldn't have risked coming here, could I? Don't you think it was rather sporting of me to buy these [She touches the gardenias] with the last shilling over from my cab fare?

YOUNG MAN. Did you really? D—d sporting!

CLARE. It's no use doing things by halves, is it? I'm—in for it— wish me luck! [She drinks, and puts her glass down with a smile] In for it—deep! [She flings up her hands above her smiling face] Down, down, till they're just above water, and then—down, down, down, and —all over! Are you sorry now you came and spoke to me?

YOUNG MAN. By Jove, no! It may be caddish, but I'm not.

CLARE. Thank God for beauty! I hope I shall die pretty! Do you think I shall do well?

YOUNG MAN. I say—don't talk like that!

CLARE. I want to know. Do you?

YOUNG MAN. Well, then—yes, I do.

CLARE. That's splendid. Those poor women in the streets would give their eyes, wouldn't they?—that have to go up and down, up and down! Do you think I—shall—

The YOUNG MAN, half-rising, puts his hand on her arm.

YOUNG MAN. I think you're getting much too excited. You look all— Won't you eat your peach? [She shakes her head] Do! Have something else, then—some grapes, or something?

CLARE. No, thanks.

[She has become quite calm again]

YOUNG MAN. Well, then, what d'you think? It's awfully hot in here, isn't it? Wouldn't it be jollier drivin'? Shall we—shall we make a move?

CLARE. Yes.

The YOUNG MAN turns to look for the waiter, but ARNAUD is not in the room. He gets up.

YOUNG MAN. [Feverishly] D—n that waiter! Wait half a minute, if you don't mind, while I pay the bill.

As he goes out into the corridor, the two gentlemen re-appear.

CLARE is sitting motionless, looking straight before her.

DARK ONE. A fiver you don't get her to!

BLOND ONE. Done!

He advances to her table with his inimitable insolence, and taking the cigar from his mouth, bends his stare on her, and says: "Charmed to see you lookin' so well! Will you have supper with me here to-morrow night?" Startled out of her reverie, CLARE looks up. She

sees those eyes, she sees beyond him the eyes of his companion—sly, malevolent, amused-watching; and she just sits gazing, without a word. At that regard, so clear, the BLOND ONE does not wince. But rather suddenly he says: "That's arranged then. Half-past eleven. So good of you. Good-night!" He replaces his cigar and strolls back to his companion, and in a low voice says: "Pay up!" Then at a languid "Hullo, Charles!" they turn to greet the two in their nook behind the screen. CLARE has not moved, nor changed the direction of her gaze. Suddenly she thrusts her hand into the pocket of the cloak that hangs behind her, and brings out the little blue bottle which, six months ago, she took from MALISE. She pulls out the cork and pours the whole contents into her champagne. She lifts the glass, holds it before her—smiling, as if to call a toast, then puts it to her lips and drinks. Still smiling, she sets the empty glass down, and lays the gardenia flowers against her face. Slowly she droops back in her chair, the drowsy smile still on her lips; the gardenias drop into her lap; her arms relax, her head falls forward on her breast. And the voices behind the screen talk on, and the sounds of joy from the supper-party wax and wane.

The waiter, ARNAUD, returning from the corridor, passes to his service-table with a tall, beribboned basket of fruit. Putting it down, he goes towards the table behind the screen, and sees. He runs up to CLARE.

ARNAUD. Madame! Madame! [He listens for her breathing; then suddenly catching sight of the little bottle, smells at it] Bon Dieu!

[At that queer sound they come from behind the screen—all four, and look. The dark night bird says: "Hallo; fainted!" ARNAUD holds out the bottle.]

LANGUID LORD. [Taking it, and smelling] Good God! [The woman bends over CLARE, and lifts her hands; ARNAUD rushes to his service-table, and speaks into his tube]

ARNAUD. The boss. Quick! [Looking up he sees the YOUNG MAN, returning] 'Monsieur, elle a fui! Elle est morte'!

LANGUID LORD. [To the YOUNG MAN standing there aghast] What's this? Friend of yours?

YOUNG MAN. My God! She was a lady. That's all I know about her.

LANGUID LORD. A lady!

[The blond and dark gentlemen have slipped from the room; and out of the supper-party's distant laughter comes suddenly a long, shrill: "Gone away!" And the sound of the horn playing the seven last notes of the old song: "This day a stag must die!" From the last note of all the sound flies up to an octave higher, sweet and thin, like a spirit passing, till it is drowned once more in laughter. The YOUNG MAN has covered his eyes with his hands; ARNAUD is crossing himself fervently; the LANGUID LORD stands gazing, with one of the dropped gardenias twisted in his fingers; and the woman, bending over CLARE, kisses her forehead.]

CURTAIN.

THE PIGEON

A Fantasy in Three Acts

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

CHRISTOPHER WELLWYN, an artist

ANN, his daughter
GUINEVERE MEGAN, a flower-seller
RORY MEGAN, her husband
FERRAND, an alien
TIMSON, once a cabman
EDWARD BERTLEY, a Canon
ALFRED CALWAY, a Professor
SIR THOMAS HOXTON, a Justice of the Peace
Also a police constable, three humble-men, and some curious persons

The action passes in Wellwyn's Studio, and the street outside.

ACT I. Christmas Eve.

ACT II. New Year's Day.

ACT III. The First of April.

ACT I

It is the night of Christmas Eve, the SCENE is a Studio, flush with the street, having a skylight darkened by a fall of snow. There is no one in the room, the walls of which are whitewashed, above a floor of bare dark boards. A fire is cheerfully burning. On a model's platform stands an easel and canvas. There are busts and pictures; a screen, a little stool, two arm. chairs, and a long old-fashioned settle under the window. A door in one wall leads to the house, a door in the opposite wall to the model's dressing-room, and the street door is in the centre of the wall between. On a low table a Russian samovar is hissing, and beside it on a tray stands a teapot, with glasses, lemon, sugar, and a decanter of rum. Through a huge uncurtained window close to the street door the snowy lamplit street can be seen, and beyond it the river and a night of stars.

The sound of a latchkey turned in the lock of the street door, and ANN WELLWYN enters, a girl of seventeen, with hair tied in a ribbon and covered by a scarf. Leaving the door open, she turns up the electric light and goes to the fire. She throws off her scarf and long red cloak. She is dressed in a high evening frock of some soft white material. Her movements are quick and substantial. Her face, full of no nonsense, is decided and sincere, with deep-set eyes, and a capable, well-shaped forehead. Shredding of her gloves she warms her hands.

In the doorway appear the figures of two men. The first is rather short and slight, with a soft short beard, bright soft eyes, and a crumpled face. Under his squash hat his hair is rather plentiful and rather grey. He wears an old brown ulster and woollen gloves, and is puffing at a hand-made cigarette. He is ANN'S father, WELLWYN, the artist. His companion is a well-wrapped clergyman of medium height and stoutish build, with a pleasant, rosy face, rather shining eyes, and rather chubby clean-shaped lips; in appearance, indeed, a grown-up boy. He is the Vicar of the parish—CANON BERTLEY.

BERTLEY. My dear Wellwyn, the whole question of reform is full of difficulty. When you have two men like Professor Calway and Sir Thomas Hoxton taking diametrically opposite points of view, as we've seen to-night, I confess, I—

WELLWYN. Come in, Vicar, and have some grog.

BERTLEY. Not to-night, thanks! Christmas tomorrow! Great temptation, though, this room! Goodnight, Wellwyn; good-night, Ann!

ANN. [Coming from the fire towards the tea-table.] Good-night, Canon Bertley.

[He goes out, and WELLWYN, shutting the door after him, approaches the fire.]

ANN. [Sitting on the little stool, with her back to the fire, and making tea.] Daddy!

WELLWYN. My dear?

ANN. You say you liked Professor Calway's lecture. Is it going to do you any good, that's the question?

WELLWYN. I—I hope so, Ann.

ANN. I took you on purpose. Your charity's getting simply awful. Those two this morning cleared out all my housekeeping money.

WELLWYN. Um! Um! I quite understand your feeling.

ANN. They both had your card, so I couldn't refuse—didn't know what you'd said to them. Why don't you make it a rule never to give your card to anyone except really decent people, and—picture dealers, of course.

WELLWYN. My dear, I have—often.

ANN. Then why don't you keep it? It's a frightful habit. You are naughty, Daddy. One of these days you'll get yourself into most fearful complications.

WELLWYN. My dear, when they—when they look at you?

ANN. You know the house wants all sorts of things. Why do you speak to them at all?

WELLWYN. I don't—they speak to me.

[He takes off his ulster and hangs it over the back of an arm-chair.]

ANN. They see you coming. Anybody can see you coming, Daddy. That's why you ought to be so careful. I shall make you wear a hard hat. Those squashy hats of yours are hopelessly inefficient.

WELLWYN. [Gazing at his hat.] Calway wears one.

ANN. As if anyone would beg of Professor Calway.

WELLWYN. Well-perhaps not. You know, Ann, I admire that fellow. Wonderful power of-of-theory! How a man can be so absolutely tidy in his mind! It's most exciting.

ANN. Has any one begged of you to-day?

WELLWYN. [Doubtfully.] No—no.

ANN. [After a long, severe look.] Will you have rum in your tea?

WELLWYN. [Crestfallen.] Yes, my dear—a good deal.

ANN. [Pouring out the rum, and handing him the glass.] Well, who was it?

WELLWYN. He didn't beg of me. [Losing himself in recollection.] Interesting old creature, Ann—real type. Old cabman.

ANN. Where?

WELLWYN. Just on the Embankment.

ANN. Of course! Daddy, you know the Embankment ones are always rotters.

WELLWYN. Yes, my dear; but this wasn't.

ANN. Did you give him your card?

WELLWYN. I—I—don't

ANN. Did you, Daddy?

WELLWYN. I'm rather afraid I may have!

ANN. May have! It's simply immoral.

WELLWYN. Well, the old fellow was so awfully human, Ann. Besides, I didn't give him any money—hadn't got any.

ANN. Look here, Daddy! Did you ever ask anybody for anything? You know you never did, you'd starve first. So would anybody decent. Then, why won't you see that people who beg are rotters?

WELLWYN. But, my dear, we're not all the same. They wouldn't do it if it wasn't natural to them. One likes to be friendly. What's the use of being alive if one isn't?

ANN. Daddy, you're hopeless.

WELLWYN. But, look here, Ann, the whole thing's so jolly complicated. According to Calway, we're to give the State all we can spare, to make the undeserving deserving. He's a Professor; he ought to know. But old Hoxton's always dinning it into me that we ought to support private organisations for helping the deserving, and damn the undeserving. Well, that's just the opposite. And he's a J.P. Tremendous experience. And the Vicar seems to be for a little bit of both. Well, what the devil—? My trouble is, whichever I'm with, he always converts me. [Ruefully.] And there's no fun in any of them.

ANN. [Rising.] Oh! Daddy, you are so—don't you know that you're the despair of all social reformers? [She envelops him.] There's a tear in the left knee of your trousers. You're not to wear them again.

WELLWYN. Am I likely to?

ANN. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if it isn't your only pair.
D'you know what I live in terror of?

[WELLWYN gives her a queer and apprehensive look.]

ANN. That you'll take them off some day, and give them away in the street. Have you got any money? [She feels in his coat, and he his trousers—they find nothing.] Do you know that your pockets are one enormous hole?

WELLWYN. No!

ANN. Spiritually.

WELLWYN. Oh! Ah! H'm!

ANN. [Severely.] Now, look here, Daddy! [She takes him by his lapels.] Don't imagine that it isn't the most disgusting luxury on your part to go on giving away things as you do! You know what you really are, I suppose—a sickly sentimentalist!

WELLWYN. [Breaking away from her, disturbed.] It isn't sentiment. It's simply that they seem to me so—so—jolly. If I'm to give up feeling sort of—nice in here [he touches his chest] about people—it doesn't matter who they are—then I don't know what I'm to do. I shall have to sit with my head in a bag.

ANN. I think you ought to.

WELLWYN. I suppose they see I like them—then they tell me things.
After that, of course you can't help doing what you can.

ANN. Well, if you will love them up!

WELLWYN. My dear, I don't want to. It isn't them especially—why, I feel it even with old Calway sometimes. It's only Providence that he doesn't want anything of me—except to make me like himself—confound him!

ANN. [Moving towards the door into the house—impressively.] What you don't see is that other people aren't a bit like you.

WELLWYN. Well, thank God!

ANN. It's so old-fashioned too! I'm going to bed—I just leave you to your conscience.

WELLWYN. Oh!

ANN. [Opening the door-severely.] Good-night—[with a certain weakening] you old—Daddy!

[She jumps at him, gives him a hug, and goes out.]

[WELLWYN stands perfectly still. He first gazes up at the skylight, then down at the floor. Slowly he begins to shake his head, and mutter, as he moves towards the fire.]

WELLWYN. Bad lot. . . . Low type—no backbone, no stability!

[There comes a fluttering knock on the outer door. As the sound slowly enters his consciousness, he begins to wince, as though he knew, but would not admit its significance. Then he sits down, covering his ears. The knocking does not cease. WELLWYN drops first one, then both hands, rises, and begins to sidle towards the door. The knocking becomes louder.]

WELLWYN. Ah dear! Tt! Tt! Tt!

[After a look in the direction of ANN's disappearance, he opens the street door a very little way. By the light of the lamp there can be seen a young girl in dark clothes, huddled in a shawl to which the snow is clinging. She has on her arm a basket covered with a bit of sacking.]

WELLWYN. I can't, you know; it's impossible.

[The girl says nothing, but looks at him with dark eyes.]

WELLWYN. [Wincing.] Let's see—I don't know you—do I?

[The girl, speaking in a soft, hoarse voice, with a faint accent of reproach: "Mrs. Megan—you give me this—" She holds out a dirty visiting card.]

WELLWYN. [Recoiling from the card.] Oh! Did I? Ah! When?

MRS. MEGAN. You 'ad some vi'lets off of me larst spring. You give me 'arf a crown.

[A smile tries to visit her face.]

WELLWYN. [Looking stealthily round.] Ah! Well, come in—just for a minute—it's very cold—and tell us what it is.

[She comes in stolidly, a Sphinx-like figure, with her pretty tragic little face.]

WELLWYN. I don't remember you. [Looking closer.] Yes, I do. Only— you weren't the same-were you?

MRS. MEGAN. [Dully.] I seen trouble since.

WELLWYN. Trouble! Have some tea?

[He looks anxiously at the door into the house, then goes quickly to the table, and pours out a glass of tea, putting rum into it.]

WELLWYN. [Handing her the tea.] Keeps the cold out! Drink it off!

[MRS. MEGAN drinks it of, chokes a little, and almost immediately seems to get a size larger. WELLWYN watches her with his head held on one side, and a smile broadening on his face.]

WELLWYN. Cure for all evils, um?

MRS. MEGAN. It warms you. [She smiles.]

WELLWYN. [Smiling back, and catching himself out.] Well! You know, I oughtn't.

MRS. MEGAN. [Conscious of the disruption of his personality, and withdrawing into her tragic abyss.] I wouldn't 'a come, but you told me if I wanted an 'and—

WELLWYN. [Gradually losing himself in his own nature.] Let me see—corner of Flight Street, wasn't it?

MRS. MEGAN. [With faint eagerness.] Yes, sir, an' I told you about me vi'lets—it was a luvly spring-day.

WELLWYN. Beautiful! Beautiful! Birds singing, and the trees, &c.!
We had quite a talk. You had a baby with you.

MRS. MEGAN. Yes. I got married since then.

WELLWYN. Oh! Ah! Yes! [Cheerfully.] And how's the baby?

MRS. MEGAN. [Turning to stone.] I lost her.

WELLWYN. Oh! poor— Um!

MRS. MEGAN. [Impassive.] You said something abaht makin' a picture of me. [With faint eagerness.] So I thought I might come, in case you'd forgotten.

WELLWYN. [Looking at, her intently.] Things going badly?

MRS. MEGAN. [Stripping the sacking off her basket.] I keep 'em covered up, but the cold gets to 'em. Thruppence—that's all I've took.

WELLWYN. Ho! Tt! Tt! [He looks into the basket.] Christmas, too!

MRS. MEGAN. They're dead.

WELLWYN. [Drawing in his breath.] Got a good husband?

MRS. MEGAN. He plays cards.

WELLWYN. Oh, Lord! And what are you doing out—with a cold like that? [He taps his chest.]

MRS. MEGAN. We was sold up this morning—he's gone off with 'is mates. Haven't took enough yet for a night's lodgin'.

WELLWYN. [Correcting a spasmodic dive into his pockets.] But who buys flowers at this time of night?

[MRS. MEGAN looks at him, and faintly smiles.]

WELLWYN. [Rumpling his hair.] Saints above us! Here! Come to the fire!

[She follows him to the fire. He shuts the street door.]

WELLWYN. Are your feet wet? [She nods.] Well, sit down here, and take them off. That's right.

[She sits on the stool. And after a slow look up at him, which has in it a deeper knowledge than belongs of right to her years, begins taking off her shoes and stockings. WELLWYN goes to the door into the house, opens it, and listens with a sort of stealthy casualness. He returns whistling, but not out loud. The girl has finished taking off her stockings, and turned her bare toes to the flames. She shuffles them back under her skirt.]

WELLWYN. How old are you, my child?

MRS. MEGAN. Nineteen, come Candlemas.

WELLWYN. And what's your name?

MRS. MEGAN. Guinevere.

WELLWYN. What? Welsh?

MRS. MEGAN. Yes—from Battersea.

WELLWYN. And your husband?

MRS. MEGAN. No. Irish, 'e is. Notting Dale, 'e comes from.

WELLWYN. Roman Catholic?

MRS. MEGAN. Yes. My 'usband's an atheist as well.

WELLWYN. I see. [Abstractedly.] How jolly! And how old is he—this young man of yours?

MRS. MEGAN. 'E'll be twenty soon.

WELLWYN. Babes in the wood! Does he treat you badly?

MRS. MEGAN. No.

WELLWYN. Nor drink?

MRS. MEGAN. No. He's not a bad one. Only he gets playin' cards then 'e'll fly the kite.

WELLWYN. I see. And when he's not flying it, what does he do?

MRS. MEGAN. [Touching her basket.] Same as me. Other jobs tires 'im.

WELLWYN. That's very nice! [He checks himself.] Well, what am I to do with you?

MRS. MEGAN. Of course, I could get me night's lodging if I like to do—the same as some of them.

WELLWYN. No! no! Never, my child! Never!

MRS. MEGAN. It's easy that way.

WELLWYN. Heavens! But your husband! Um?

MRS. MEGAN. [With stoical vindictiveness.] He's after one I know of.

WELLWYN. Tt! What a pickle!

MRS. MEGAN. I'll 'ave to walk about the streets.

WELLWYN. [To himself.] Now how can I?

[MRS. MEGAN looks up and smiles at him, as if she had already discovered that he is peculiar.]

WELLWYN. You see, the fact is, I mustn't give you anything—because —well, for one thing I haven't got it. There are other reasons, but that's the—real one. But, now, there's a little room where my models dress. I wonder if you could sleep there. Come, and see.

[The Girl gets up lingeringly, loth to leave the warmth. She takes up her wet stockings.]

MRS. MEGAN. Shall I put them on again?

WELLWYN. No, no; there's a nice warm pair of slippers. [Seeing the steam rising from her.] Why, you're wet all over. Here, wait a little!

[He crosses to the door into the house, and after stealthy listening, steps through. The Girl, like a cat, steals back to the warmth of the fire. WELLWYN returns with a candle, a canary-coloured bath gown, and two blankets.]

WELLWYN. Now then! [He precedes her towards the door of the model's room.] Hsssh! [He opens the door and holds up the candle to show her the room.] Will it do? There's a couch. You'll find some washing things. Make yourself quite at home. See!

[The Girl, perfectly dumb, passes through with her basket—and her shoes and stockings. WELLWYN hands her the candle, blankets, and bath gown.]

WELLWYN. Have a good sleep, child! Forget that you're alive! [He closes the door, mournfully.] Done it again! [He goes to the table, cuts a large slice of cake, knocks on the door, and hands it in.] Chow-chow! [Then, as he walks away, he sights the opposite door.] Well—damn it, what could I have done? Not a farthing on me! [He goes to the street door to shut it, but first opens it wide to confirm himself in his hospitality.] Night like this!

[A sputter of snow is blown in his face. A voice says: "Monsieur, pardon!" WELLWYN recoils spasmodically. A figure moves from the lamp-post to the doorway. He is seen to be young and to have ragged clothes. He speaks again: "You do not remember me, Monsieur? My name is Ferrand—it was in Paris, in the Champs-Elysees—by the fountain When you came to the door, Monsieur—I am not made of iron Tenez, here is your card I have never lost it." He holds out to WELLWYN an old and dirty wing card. As inch by inch he has advanced into the doorway, the light from within falls on him, a tall gaunt young pagan with fair hair and reddish golden stubble of beard, a long ironical nose a little to one side, and large, grey, rather prominent eyes. There is a certain grace in his figure and movements; his clothes are nearly dropping off him.]

WELLWYN. [Yielding to a pleasant memory.] Ah! yes. By the fountain. I was sitting there, and you came and ate a roll, and drank the water.

FERRAND. [With faint eagerness.] My breakfast. I was in poverty— verree bad off. You gave me ten francs. I thought I had a little the right [WELLWYN makes a movement of disconcertion] seeing you said that if I came to England—

WELLWYN. Um! And so you've come?

FERRAND. It was time that I consolidated my fortunes, Monsieur.

WELLWYN. And you—have—

[He stops embarrassed.]

FERRAND. [Shrugging his ragged shoulders.] One is not yet Rothschild.

WELLWYN. [Sympathetically.] No. [Yielding to memory.] We talked philosophy.

FERRAND. I have not yet changed my opinion. We other vagabonds, we are exploited by the bourgeois. This is always my idea, Monsieur.

WELLWYN. Yes—not quite the general view, perhaps! Well—
[Heartily.] Come in! Very glad to see you again.

FERRAND. [Brushing his arms over his eyes.] Pardon, Monsieur—your goodness—I am a little weak. [He opens his coat, and shows a belt drawn very tight over his ragged shirt.] I tighten him one hole for each meal, during two days now. That gives you courage.

WELLWYN. [With cooing sounds, pouring out tea, and adding rum.] Have some of this. It'll buck you up. [He watches the young man drink.]

FERRAND. [Becoming a size larger.] Sometimes I think that I will never succeed to dominate my life, Monsieur—though I have no vices, except that I guard always the aspiration to achieve success. But I will not roll myself under the machine of existence to gain a nothing every day. I must find with what to fly a little.

WELLWYN. [Delicately.] Yes; yes—I remember, you found it difficult to stay long in any particular—yes.

FERRAND. [Proudly.] In one little corner? No—Monsieur—never! That is not in my character. I must see life.

WELLWYN. Quite, quite! Have some cake?

[He cuts cake.]

FERRAND. In your country they say you cannot eat the cake and have it. But one must always try, Monsieur; one must never be content. [Refusing the cake.] 'Grand merci', but for the moment I have no stomach—I have lost my stomach now for two days. If I could smoke, Monsieur! [He makes the gesture of smoking.]

WELLWYN. Rather! [Handing his tobacco pouch.] Roll yourself one.

FERRAND. [Rapidly rolling a cigarette.] If I had not found you, Monsieur—I would have been a little hole in the river to-night— I was so discouraged. [He inhales and puffs a long luxurious whif of smoke. Very bitterly.] Life! [He disperses the puff of smoke with his finger, and stares before him.] And to think that in a few minutes HE will be born! Monsieur! [He gazes intently at WELLWYN.] The world would reproach you for your goodness to me.

WELLWYN. [Looking uneasily at the door into the house.] You think so? Ah!

FERRAND. Monsieur, if HE himself were on earth now, there would be a little heap of gentlemen writing to the journals every day to call Him sloppee sentimentalist! And what is verree funny, these gentlemen they would all be most strong Christians. [He regards WELLWYN deeply.] But that will not trouble you, Monsieur; I saw well from the first that you are no Christian. You have so kind a face.

WELLWYN. Oh! Indeed!

FERRAND. You have not enough the Pharisee in your character. You do not judge, and you are judged.

[He stretches his limbs as if in pain.]

WELLWYN. Are you in pain?

FERRAND. I 'ave a little the rheumatism.

WELLWYN. Wet through, of course! [Glancing towards the house.] Wait a bit! I wonder if you'd like these trousers; they've—er—they're not quite—

[He passes through the door into the house. FERRAND stands at the fire, with his limbs spread as it were to embrace it, smoking with abandonment. WELLWYN returns stealthily, dressed in a Jaeger dressing-gown, and bearing a pair of drawers, his trousers, a pair of slippers, and a sweater.]

WELLWYN. [Speaking in a low voice, for the door is still open.] Can you make these do for the moment?

FERRAND. 'Je vous remercie', Monsieur. [Pointing to the screen.] May I retire?

WELLWYN. Yes, yes.

[FERRAND goes behind the screen. WELLWYN closes the door into the house, then goes to the window to draw the curtains. He suddenly recoils and stands petrified with doubt.]

WELLWYN. Good Lord!

[There is the sound of tapping on glass. Against the window-pane is pressed the face of a man. WELLWYN motions to him to go away. He does not go, but continues tapping. WELLWYN opens the door. There enters a square old man, with a red, pendulous jawed, shaking face under a snow besprinkled bowler hat. He is holding out a visiting card with tremulous hand.]

WELLWYN. Who's that? Who are you?

TIMSON. [In a thick, hoarse, shaking voice.] 'Appy to see you, sir; we 'ad a talk this morning. Timson—I give you me name. You invited of me, if ye remember.

WELLWYN. It's a little late, really.

TIMSON. Well, ye see, I never expected to 'ave to call on yer. I was 'itched up all right when I spoke to yer this mornin', but bein' Christmas, things 'ave took a turn with me to-day. [He speaks with increasing thickness.] I'm reg'lar disgusted—not got the price of a bed abaht me. Thought you wouldn't like me to be delicate—not at my age.

WELLWYN. [With a mechanical and distracted dive of his hands into his pockets.] The fact is, it so happens I haven't a copper on me.

TIMSON. [Evidently taking this for professional refusal.] Wouldn't arsk you if I could 'elp it. 'Ad to do with 'orses all me life. It's this 'ere cold I'm frightened of. I'm afraid I'll go to sleep.

WELLWYN. Well, really, I—

TIMSON. To be froze to death—I mean—it's awkward.

WELLWYN. [Puzzled and unhappy.] Well—come in a moment, and let's— think it out. Have some tea!

[He pours out the remains of the tea, and finding there is not very much, adds rum rather liberally. TIMSON, who walks a little wide at the knees, steadying his gait, has followed.]

TIMSON. [Receiving the drink.] Yer 'ealth. 'Ere's—soberiety! [He applies the drink to his lips with shaking hand. Agreeably surprised.] Blimey! Thish yer tea's foreign, ain't it?

FERRAND. [Reappearing from behind the screen in his new clothes of which the trousers stop too soon.] With a needle, Monsieur, I would soon have with what to make face against the world.

WELLWYN. Too short! Ah!

[He goes to the dais on which stands ANN's workbasket, and takes from it a needle and cotton.]

[While he is so engaged FERRAND is sizing up old TIMSON, as one dog will another. The old man, glass in hand, seems to have lapsed into coma.]

FERRAND. [Indicating TIMSON] Monsieur!

[He makes the gesture of one drinking, and shakes his head.]

WELLWYN. [Handing him the needle and cotton.] Um! Afraid so!

[They approach TIMSON, who takes no notice.]

FERRAND. [Gently.] It is an old cabby, is it not, Monsieur? 'Ceux sont tous des buveurs'.

WELLWYN. [Concerned at the old man's stupefaction.] Now, my old friend, sit down a moment. [They manoeuvre TIMSON to the settle.] Will you smoke?

TIMSON. [In a drowsy voice.] Thank 'ee-smoke pipe of 'baccer. Old 'orse—standin' abaht in th' cold.

[He relapses into coma.]

FERRAND. [With a click of his tongue.] 'Il est parti'.

WELLWYN. [Doubtfully.] He hasn't really left a horse outside, do you think?

FERRAND. Non, non, Monsieur—no 'orse. He is dreaming. I know very well that state of him—that catches you sometimes. It is the warmth sudden on the stomach. He will speak no more sense to-night. At the most, drink, and fly a little in his past.

WELLWYN. Poor old buffer!

FERRAND. Touching, is it not, Monsieur? There are many brave gents among the old cabbies—they have philosophy—that comes from 'orses, and from sitting still.

WELLWYN. [Touching TIMSON's shoulder.] Drenched!

FERRAND. That will do 'im no 'arm, Monsieur—no 'arm at all. He is well wet inside, remember—it is Christmas to-morrow. Put him a rug, if you will, he will soon steam.

[WELLWYN takes up ANN's long red cloak, and wraps it round the old man.]

TIMSON. [Faintly roused.] Tha's right. Put—the rug on th' old 'orse.

[He makes a strange noise, and works his head and tongue.]

WELLWYN. [Alarmed.] What's the matter with him?

FERRAND. It is nothing, Monsieur; for the moment he thinks 'imself a 'orse. 'Il joue "cache-cache," 'ide and seek, with what you call— 'is bitt.

WELLWYN. But what's to be done with him? One can't turn him out in this state.

FERRAND. If you wish to leave him 'ere, Monsieur, have no fear. I charge myself with him.

WELLWYN. Oh! [Dubiously.] You—er—I really don't know, I—hadn't contemplated—You think you could manage if I—if I went to bed?

FERRAND. But certainly, Monsieur.

WELLWYN. [Still dubiously.] You—you're sure you've everything you want?

FERRAND. [Bowing.] 'Mais oui, Monsieur'.

WELLWYN. I don't know what I can do by staying.

FERRAND. There is nothing you can do, Monsieur. Have confidence in me.

WELLWYN. Well—keep the fire up quietly—very quietly. You'd better take this coat of mine, too. You'll find it precious cold, I expect, about three o'clock. [He hands FERRAND his Ulster.]

FERRAND. [Taking it.] I shall sleep in praying for you, Monsieur.

WELLWYN. Ah! Yes! Thanks! Well—good-night! By the way, I shall be down rather early. Have to think

of my household a bit, you know.

FERRAND. 'Tres bien, Monsieur'. I comprehend. One must well be regular in this life.

WELLWYN. [With a start.] Lord! [He looks at the door of the model's room.] I'd forgotten—

FERRAND. Can I undertake anything, Monsieur?

WELLWYN. No, no! [He goes to the electric light switch by the outer door.] You won't want this, will you?

FERRAND. 'Merci, Monsieur'.

[WELLWYN switches off the light.]

FERRAND. 'Bon soir, Monsieur'!

WELLWYN. The devil! Er—good-night!

[He hesitates, rumples his hair, and passes rather suddenly away.]

FERRAND. [To himself.] Poor pigeon! [Looking long at old TIMSON] 'Espece de type anglais!'

[He sits down in the firelight, curls up a foot on his knee, and taking out a knife, rips the stitching of a turned-up end of trouser, pinches the cloth double, and puts in the preliminary stitch of a new hem—all with the swiftness of one well-accustomed. Then, as if hearing a sound behind him, he gets up quickly and slips behind the screen. MRS. MEGAN, attracted by the cessation of voices, has opened the door, and is creeping from the model's room towards the fire. She has almost reached it before she takes in the torpid crimson figure of old TIMSON. She halts and puts her hand to her chest—a queer figure in the firelight, garbed in the canary-coloured bath gown and rabbit's-wool slippers, her black matted hair straggling down on her neck. Having quite digested the fact that the old man is in a sort of stupor, MRS. MEGAN goes close to the fire, and sits on the little stool, smiling sideways at old TIMSON. FERRAND, coming quietly up behind, examines her from above, drooping his long nose as if enquiring with it as to her condition in life; then he steps back a yard or two.]

FERRAND. [Gently.] 'Pardon, Ma'moiselle'.

MRS. MEGAN. [Springing to her feet.] Oh!

FERRAND. All right, all right! We are brave gents!

TIMSON. [Faintly roused.] 'Old up, there!

FERRAND. Trust in me, Ma'moiselle!

[MRS. MEGAN responds by drawing away.]

FERRAND. [Gently.] We must be good comrades. This asylum—it is better than a doss-'ouse.

[He pushes the stool over towards her, and seats himself.
Somewhat reassured, MRS. MEGAN again sits down.]

MRS. MEGAN. You frightened me.

TIMSON. [Unexpectedly-in a drowsy tone.] Purple foreigners!

FERRAND. Pay no attention, Ma'moiselle. He is a philosopher.

MRS. MEGAN. Oh! I thought 'e was boozed.

[They both look at TIMSON]

FERRAND. It is the same-veree 'armless.

MRS. MEGAN. What's that he's got on 'im?

FERRAND. It is a coronation robe. Have no fear, Ma'moiselle. Veree docile potentate.

MRS. MEGAN. I wouldn't be afraid of him. [Challenging FERRAND.] I'm afraid o' you.

FERRAND. It is because you do not know me, Ma'moiselle. You are wrong, it is always the unknown you should love.

MRS. MEGAN. I don't like the way you-speaks to me.

FERRAND. Ah! You are a Princess in disguise?

MRS. MEGAN. No fear!

FERRAND. No? What is it then you do to make face against the necessities of life? A living?

MRS. MEGAN. Sells flowers.

FERRAND. [Rolling his eyes.] It is not a career.

MRS. MEGAN. [With a touch of devilry.] You don't know what I do.

FERRAND. Ma'moiselle, whatever you do is charming.

[MRS. MEGAN looks at him, and slowly smiles.]

MRS. MEGAN. You're a foreigner.

FERRAND. It is true.

MRS. MEGAN. What do you do for a livin'?

FERRAND. I am an interpreter.

MRS. MEGAN. You ain't very busy, are you?

FERRAND. [With dignity.] At present I am resting.

MRS. MEGAN. [Looking at him and smiling.] How did you and 'im come here?

FERRAND. Ma'moiselle, we would ask you the same question.

MRS. MEGAN. The gentleman let me. 'E's funny.

FERRAND. 'C'est un ange' [At MRS. MEGAN's blank stare he interprets.] An angel!

MRS. MEGAN. Me luck's out-that's why I come.

FERRAND. [Rising.] Ah! Ma'moiselle! Luck! There is the little God who dominates us all. Look at this old! [He points to TIMSON.] He is finished. In his day that old would be doing good business. He could afford himself—[He maker a sign of drinking.]—Then come the motor cars. All goes—he has nothing left, only 'is 'abits of a 'cocher'! Luck!

TIMSON. [With a vague gesture—drowsily.] Kick the foreign beggars out.

FERRAND. A real Englishman And look at me! My father was merchant of ostrich feathers in Brussels. If I had been content to go in his business, I would 'ave been rich. But I was born to roll—"rolling stone"to voyage is stronger than myself. Luck! . . . And you, Ma'moiselle, shall I tell your fortune? [He looks in her face.] You were born for 'la joie de vivre'—to drink the wines of life. 'Et vous voila'! Luck!

[Though she does not in the least understand what he has said, her expression changes to a sort of glee.]

FERRAND. Yes. You were born loving pleasure. Is it not? You see, you cannot say, No. All of us, we have our fates. Give me your hand. [He kneels down and takes her hand.] In each of us there is that against which we cannot struggle. Yes, yes!

[He holds her hand, and turns it over between his own.

MRS. MEGAN remains stolid, half fascinated, half-reluctant.]

TIMSON. [Flickering into consciousness.] Be've yourselves! Yer crimson canary birds!

[MRS. MEGAN would withdraw her hand, but cannot.]

FERRAND. Pay no attention, Ma'moiselle. He is a Puritan.

[TIMSON relapses into comatosity, upsetting his glass, which falls with a crash.]

MRS. MEGAN. Let go my hand, please!

FERRAND. [Relinquishing it, and staring into the fore gravely.] There is one thing I have never done—'urt a woman—that is hardly in my character. [Then, drawing a little closer, he looks into her face.] Tell me, Ma'moiselle, what is it you think of all day long?

MRS. MEGAN. I dunno—lots, I thinks of.

FERRAND. Shall I tell you? [Her eyes remain fixed on his, the strangeness of him preventing her from telling him to "get along." He goes on in his ironic voice.] It is of the streets—the lights—the faces—it is of all which moves, and is warm—it is of colour—it is [he brings his face quite close to hers] of Love. That is for you what the road is for me. That is for you what the rum is for that old—[He jerks his thumb back at TIMSON. Then bending swiftly forward to the girl.] See! I kiss you—Ah!

[He draws her forward off the stool. There is a little struggle, then she resigns her lips. The little stool, overturned, falls with a clatter. They spring up, and move apart. The door opens and ANN enters from the house in a blue dressing-gown, with her hair loose, and a candle held high above her head. Taking in the strange half-circle round the stove, she recoils. Then, standing her ground, calls in a voice sharpened by fright: "Daddy—Daddy!"]

TIMSON. [Stirring uneasily, and struggling to his feet.] All right!
I'm comin'!

FERRAND. Have no fear, Madame!

[In the silence that follows, a clock begins loudly striking twelve. ANN remains, as if carved in atone, her eyes fastened on the strangers. There is the sound of someone falling downstairs, and WELLWYN appears, also holding a candle above his head.]

ANN. Look!

WELLWYN. Yes, yes, my dear! It—it happened.

ANN. [With a sort of groan.] Oh! Daddy!

[In the renewed silence, the church clock ceases to chime.]

FERRAND. [Softly, in his ironic voice.] HE is come, Monsieur! 'Appy Christmas! Bon Noel!

[There is a sudden chime of bells. The Stage is blotted dark.]

Curtain.

ACT II

It is four o'clock in the afternoon of New Year's Day. On the raised dais MRS. MEGAN is standing, in her rags; with bare feet and ankles, her dark hair as if blown about, her lips parted, holding out a dishevelled bunch of violets. Before his easel, WELLWYN is painting her. Behind him, at a table between the cupboard and the door to the model's room, TIMSON is washing brushes, with the movements of one employed upon relief works. The samovar is hissing on the table by the stove, the tea things are set out.

WELLWYN. Open your mouth.

[MRS. MEGAN opens her mouth.]

ANN. [In hat and coat, entering from the house.] Daddy!

[WELLWYN goes to her; and, released from restraint, MRS. MEGAN looks round at TIMSON and grimaces.]

WELLWYN. Well, my dear?

[They speak in low voices.]

ANN. [Holding out a note.] This note from Canon Bentley. He's going to bring her husband here this afternoon. [She looks at MRS. MEGAN.]

WELLWYN. Oh! [He also looks at MRS. MEGAN.]

ANN. And I met Sir Thomas Hoxton at church this morning, and spoke to him about Timson.

WELLWYN. Um!

[They look at TIMSON. Then ANN goes back to the door, and WELLWYN follows her.]

ANN. [Turning.] I'm going round now, Daddy, to ask Professor Calway what we're to do with that Ferrand.

WELLWYN. Oh! One each! I wonder if they'll like it.

ANN. They'll have to lump it.

[She goes out into the house.]

WELLWYN. [Back at his easel.] You can shut your mouth now.

[MRS. MEGAN shuts her mouth, but opens it immediately to smile.]

WELLWYN. [Spasmodically.] Ah! Now that's what I want. [He dabs furiously at the canvas. Then standing back, runs his hands through his hair and turns a painter's glance towards the skylight.] Dash! Light's gone! Off you get, child—don't tempt me!

[MRS. MEGAN descends. Passing towards the door of the model's room she stops, and stealthily looks at the picture.]

TIMSON. Ah! Would yer!

WELLWYN. [Wheeling round.] Want to have a look? Well—come on!

[He takes her by the arm, and they stand before the canvas. After a stolid moment, she giggles.]

WELLWYN. Oh! You think so?

MRS. MEGAN. [Who has lost her hoarseness.] It's not like my picture that I had on the pier.

WELLWYN. No-it wouldn't be.

MRS. MEGAN. [Timidly.] If I had an 'at on, I'd look better.

WELLWYN. With feathers?

MRS. MEGAN. Yes.

WELLWYN. Well, you can't! I don't like hats, and I don't like feathers.

[MRS. MEGAN timidly tugs his sleeve. TIMSON, screened as he thinks by the picture, has drawn from his bulky pocket a bottle and is taking a stealthy swig.]

WELLWYN. [To MRS. MEGAN, affecting not to notice.] How much do I owe you?

MRS. MEGAN. [A little surprised.] You paid me for to-day-all 'cept a penny.

WELLWYN. Well! Here it is. [He gives her a coin.] Go and get your feet on!

MRS. MEGAN. You've give me 'arf a crown.

WELLWYN. Cut away now!

[MRS. MEGAN, smiling at the coin, goes towards the model's room. She looks back at WELLWYN, as if to draw his eyes to her, but he is gazing at the picture; then, catching old TIMSON'S sour glance, she grimaces at him, kicking up her feet with a little squeal. But

when WELLWYN turns to the sound, she is demurely passing through the doorway.]

TIMSON. [In his voice of dubious sobriety.] I've finished these yer brushes, sir. It's not a man's work. I've been thinkin' if you'd keep an 'orse, I could give yer satisfaction.

WELLWYN. Would the horse, Timson?

TIMSON. [Looking him up and down.] I knows of one that would just suit yer. Reel 'orse, you'd like 'im.

WELLWYN. [Shaking his head.] Afraid not, Timson! Awfully sorry, though, to have nothing better for you than this, at present.

TIMSON. [Faintly waving the brushes.] Of course, if you can't afford it, I don't press you—it's only that I feel I'm not doing meself justice. [Confidentially.] There's just one thing, sir; I can't bear to see a gen'leman imposed on. That foreigner—'e's not the sort to 'ave about the place. Talk? Oh! ah! But 'e'll never do any good with 'imself. He's a alien.

WELLWYN. Terrible misfortune to a fellow, Timson.

TIMSON. Don't you believe it, sir; it's his fault I says to the young lady yesterday: Miss Ann, your father's a gen'leman [with a sudden accent of hoarse sincerity], and so you are—I don't mind sayin' it—but, I said, he's too easy-goin'.

WELLWYN. Indeed!

TIMSON. Well, see that girl now! [He shakes his head.] I never did believe in goin' behind a person's back—I'm an Englishman—but [lowering his voice] she's a bad hat, sir. Why, look at the street she comes from!

WELLWYN. Oh! you know it.

TIMSON. Lived there meself larst three years. See the difference a few days' corn's made in her. She's that saucy you can't touch 'er head.

WELLWYN. Is there any necessity, Timson?

TIMSON. Artful too. Full o' vice, I call'er. Where's 'er 'usband?

WELLWYN. [Gravely.] Come, Timson! You wouldn't like her to—

TIMSON. [With dignity, so that the bottle in his pocket is plainly visible.] I'm a man as always beared inspection.

WELLWYN. [With a well-directed smile.] So I see.

TIMSON. [Curving himself round the bottle.] It's not for me to say nothing—but I can tell a gen'leman as quick as ever I can tell an 'orse.

WELLWYN. [Painting.] I find it safest to assume that every man is a gentleman, and every woman a lady. Saves no end of self-contempt. Give me the little brush.

TIMSON. [Handing him the brush—after a considerable introspective pause.] Would yer like me to stay and wash it for yer again? [With great resolution.] I will—I'll do it for you—never grudged workin' for a gen'leman.

WELLWYN. [With sincerity.] Thank you, Timson—very good of you, I'm sure. [He hands him back the brush.] Just lend us a hand with this. [Assisted by TIMSON he pushes back the dais.] Let's see! What do I owe you?

TIMSON. [Reluctantly.] It so 'appens, you advanced me to-day's yesterday.

WELLWYN. Then I suppose you want to-morrow's?

TIMSON. Well, I 'ad to spend it, lookin' for a permanent job. When you've got to do with 'orses, you can't neglect the publics, or you might as well be dead.

WELLWYN. Quite so!

TIMSON. It mounts up in the course o' the year.

WELLWYN. It would. [Passing him a coin.] This is for an exceptional purpose—Timson—see. Not—

TIMSON. [Touching his forehead.] Certainly, sir. I quite understand. I'm not that sort, as I think I've proved to yer, comin' here regular day after day, all the week. There's one thing, I ought to warn you perhaps—I might 'ave to give this job up any day.

[He makes a faint demonstration with the little brush, then puts it, absent-mindedly, into his pocket.]

WELLWYN. [Gravely.] I'd never stand in the way of your bettering yourself, Timson. And, by the way, my daughter spoke to a friend about you to-day. I think something may come of it.

TIMSON. Oh! Oh! She did! Well, it might do me a bit o' good. [He makes for the outer door, but stops.] That foreigner! 'E sticks in my gizzard. It's not as if there wasn't plenty o' pigeons for 'im to pluck in 'is own Gawd-forsaken country. Reg-lar jay, that's what I calls 'im. I could tell yer something

[He has opened the door, and suddenly sees that FERRAND himself is standing there. Sticking out his lower lip, TIMSON gives a roll of his jaw and lurches forth into the street. Owing to a slight miscalculation, his face and raised arms are plainly visible through the window, as he fortifies himself from his battle against the cold. FERRAND, having closed the door, stands with his thumb acting as pointer towards this spectacle. He is now remarkably dressed in an artist's squashy green hat, a frock coat too small for him, a bright blue tie of knitted silk, the grey trousers that were torn, well-worn brown boots, and a tan waistcoat.]

WELLWYN. What luck to-day?

FERRAND. [With a shrug.] Again I have beaten all London, Monsieur —not one bite. [Contemplating himself.] I think perhaps, that, for the bourgeoisie, there is a little too much colour in my costume.

WELLWYN. [Contemplating him.] Let's see—I believe I've an old top hat somewhere.

FERRAND. Ah! Monsieur, 'merci', but that I could not. It is scarcely in my character.

WELLWYN. True!

FERRAND. I have been to merchants of wine, of tabac, to hotels, to Leicester Square. I have been to a Society for spreading Christian knowledge—I thought there I would have a chance perhaps as interpreter. 'Toujours meme chose', we regret, we have no situation for you—same thing everywhere. It seems there is nothing doing in this town.

WELLWYN. I've noticed, there never is.

FERRAND. I was thinking, Monsieur, that in aviation there might be a career for me—but it seems one must be trained.

WELLWYN. Afraid so, Ferrand.

FERRAND. [Approaching the picture.] Ah! You are always working at this. You will have something of very good there, Monsieur. You wish to fix the type of wild savage existing ever amongst our high civilisation. 'C'est tres chic ca!' [WELLWYN manifests the quiet delight of an English artist actually understood.] In the figures of these good citizens, to whom she offers her flower, you would give the idea of all the cage doors open to catch and make tame the wild bird, that will surely die within. 'Tres gentil!' Believe me, Monsieur, you have there the greatest comedy of life! How anxious are the tame birds to do the wild birds good. [His voice changes.] For the wild birds it is not funny. There is in some human souls, Monsieur, what cannot be made tame.

WELLWYN. I believe you, Ferrand.

[The face of a young man appears at the window, unseen.
Suddenly ANN opens the door leading to the house.]

ANN. Daddy—I want you.

WELLWYN. [To FERRAND.] Excuse me a minute!

[He goes to his daughter, and they pass out. FERRAND remains at the picture. MRS. MEGAN dressed in some of ANN's discarded garments, has come out of the model's room. She steals up behind FERRAND like a cat, reaches an arm up, and curls it round his

mouth. He turns, and tries to seize her; she disingenuously slips away. He follows. The chase circles the tea table. He catches her, lifts her up, swings round with her, so that her feet fly out; kisses her bent-back face, and sets her down. She stands there smiling. The face at the window darkens.]

FERRAND. La Valse!

[He takes her with both hands by the waist, she puts her hands against his shoulders to push him of—and suddenly they are whirling. As they whirl, they bob together once or twice, and kiss. Then, with a warning motion towards the door, she wrenches herself free, and stops beside the picture, trying desperately to appear demure. WELLWYN and ANN have entered. The face has vanished.]

FERRAND. [Pointing to the picture.] One does not comprehend all this, Monsieur, without well studying. I was in train to interpret for Ma'moiselle the chiaroscuro.

WELLWYN. [With a queer look.] Don't take it too seriously, Ferrand.

FERRAND. It is a masterpiece.

WELLWYN. My daughter's just spoken to a friend, Professor Calway. He'd like to meet you. Could you come back a little later?

FERRAND. Certainly, Ma'moiselle. That will be an opening for me, I trust. [He goes to the street door.]

ANN. [Paying no attention to him.] Mrs. Megan, will you too come back in half an hour?

FERRAND. 'Tres bien, Ma'moiselle!' I will see that she does. We will take a little promenade together. That will do us good.

[He motions towards the door; MRS. MEGAN, all eyes, follows him out.]

ANN. Oh! Daddy, they are rotters. Couldn't you see they were having the most high jinks?

WELLWYN. [At his picture.] I seemed to have noticed something.

ANN. [Preparing for tea.] They were kissing.

WELLWYN. Tt! Tt!

ANN. They're hopeless, all three—especially her. Wish I hadn't given her my clothes now.

WELLWYN. [Absorbed.] Something of wild-savage.

ANN. Thank goodness it's the Vicar's business to see that married people live together in his parish.

WELLWYN. Oh! [Dubiously.] The Megans are Roman Catholic-Atheists, Ann.

ANN. [With heat.] Then they're all the more bound. [WELLWYN gives a sudden and alarmed whistle.]

ANN. What's the matter?

WELLWYN. Didn't you say you spoke to Sir Thomas, too. Suppose he comes in while the Professor's here. They're cat and dog.

ANN. [Blankly.] Oh! [As WELLWYN strikes a match.] The samovar is lighted. [Taking up the nearly empty decanter of rum and going to the cupboard.] It's all right. He won't.

WELLWYN. We'll hope not.

[He turns back to his picture.]

ANN. [At the cupboard.] Daddy!

WELLWYN. Hi!

ANN. There were three bottles.

WELLWYN. Oh!

ANN. Well! Now there aren't any.

WELLWYN. [Abstracted.] That'll be Timson.

ANN. [With real horror.] But it's awful!

WELLWYN. It is, my dear.

ANN. In seven days. To say nothing of the stealing.

WELLWYN. [Vexed.] I blame myself-very much. Ought to have kept it locked up.

ANN. You ought to keep him locked up!

[There is heard a mild but authoritative knock.]

WELLWYN. Here's the Vicar!

ANN. What are you going to do about the rum?

WELLWYN. [Opening the door to CANON BERTLEY.] Come in, Vicar!
Happy New Year!

BERTLEY. Same to you! Ah! Ann! I've got into touch with her young husband—he's coming round.

ANN. [Still a little out of her plate.] Thank Go—Moses!

BERTLEY. [Faintly surprised.] From what I hear he's not really a bad youth. Afraid he bets on horses. The great thing, WELLWYN, with those poor fellows is to put your finger on the weak spot.

ANN. [To herself-gloomily.] That's not difficult. What would you do, Canon Bertley, with a man who's been drinking father's rum?

BERTLEY. Remove the temptation, of course.

WELLWYN. He's done that.

BERTLEY. Ah! Then—[WELLWYN and ANN hang on his words] then I should—er—

ANN. [Abruptly.] Remove him.

BERTLEY. Before I say that, Ann, I must certainly see the individual.

WELLWYN. [Pointing to the window.] There he is!

[In the failing light TIMSON'S face is indeed to be seen pressed against the window pane.]

ANN. Daddy, I do wish you'd have thick glass put in. It's so disgusting to be spied at! [WELLWYN going quickly to the door, has opened it.] What do you want? [TIMSON enters with dignity. He is fuddled.]

TIMSON. [Slowly.] Arskin' yer pardon-thought it me duty to come back-found thish yer little brishel on me. [He produces the little paint brush.]

ANN. [In a deadly voice.] Nothing else?

[TIMSON accords her a glassy stare.]

WELLWYN. [Taking the brush hastily.] That'll do, Timson, thanks!

TIMSON. As I am 'ere, can I do anything for yer?

ANN. Yes, you can sweep out that little room. [She points to the model's room.] There's a broom in there.

TIMSON. [Disagreeably surprised.] Certainly; never make bones about a little extra—never 'ave in all me life. Do it at onsh, I will. [He moves across to the model's room at that peculiar broad gait so perfectly adjusted to his habits.] You quite understand me —couldn't bear to 'ave anything on me that wasn't mine.

[He passes out.]

ANN. Old fraud!

WELLWYN. "In" and "on." Mark my words, he'll restore the—bottles.

BERTLEY. But, my dear WELLWYN, that is stealing.

WELLWYN. We all have our discrepancies, Vicar.

ANN. Daddy! Discrepancies!

WELLWYN. Well, Ann, my theory is that as regards solids Timson's an Individualist, but as regards liquids he's a Socialist . . . or 'vice versa', according to taste.

BERTLEY. No, no, we mustn't joke about it. [Gravely.] I do think he should be spoken to.

WELLWYN. Yes, but not by me.

BERTLEY. Surely you're the proper person.

WELLWYN. [Shaking his head.] It was my rum, Vicar. Look so personal.

[There sound a number of little tat-tat knocks.]

WELLWYN. Isn't that the Professor's knock?

[While Ann sits down to make tea, he goes to the door and opens it. There, dressed in an ulster, stands a thin, clean-shaved man, with a little hollow sucked into either cheek, who, taking off a grey squash hat, discloses a majestically bald forehead, which completely dominates all that comes below it.]

WELLWYN. Come in, Professor! So awfully good of you! You know Canon Bentley, I think?

CALWAY. Ah! How d'you do?

WELLWYN. Your opinion will be invaluable, Professor.

ANN. Tea, Professor Calway?

[They have assembled round the tea table.]

CALWAY. Thank you; no tea; milk.

WELLWYN. Rum?

[He pours rum into CALWAY's milk.]

CALWAY. A little-thanks! [Turning to ANN.] You were going to show me some one you're trying to rescue, or something, I think.

ANN. Oh! Yes. He'll be here directly—simply perfect rotter.

CALWAY. [Smiling.] Really! Ah! I think you said he was a congenital?

WELLWYN. [With great interest.] What!

ANN. [Low.] Daddy! [To CALWAY.] Yes; I—I think that's what you call him.

CALWAY. Not old?

ANN. No; and quite healthy—a vagabond.

CALWAY. [Sipping.] I see! Yes. Is it, do you think chronic unemployment with a vagrant tendency? Or would it be nearer the mark to say: Vagrancy—

WELLWYN. Pure! Oh! pure! Professor. Awfully human.

CALWAY. [With a smile of knowledge.] Quite! And—er—

ANN. [Breaking in.] Before he comes, there's another—

BERTLEY. [Blandly.] Yes, when you came in, we were discussing what should be done with a man who drinks rum—[CALWAY pauses in the act of drinking]—that doesn't belong to him.

CALWAY. Really! Dipsomaniac?

BERTLEY. Well—perhaps you could tell us—drink certainly changing thine to mine. The Professor could see him, WELLWYN?

ANN. [Rising.] Yes, do come and look at him, Professor CALWAY. He's in there.

[She points towards the model's room. CALWAY smiles deprecatingly.]

ANN. No, really; we needn't open the door. You can see him through the glass. He's more than half —

CALWAY. Well, I hardly—

ANN. Oh! Do! Come on, Professor CALWAY! We must know what to do with him. [CALWAY rises.] You can stand on a chair. It's all science.

[She draws CALWAY to the model's room, which is lighted by a glass panel in the top of the high door. CANON BERTLEY also rises and stands watching. WELLWYN hovers, torn between respect for science and dislike of espionage.]

ANN. [Drawing up a chair.] Come on!

CALWAY. Do you seriously wish me to?

ANN. Rather! It's quite safe; he can't see you.

CALWAY. But he might come out.

[ANN puts her back against the door. CALWAY mounts the chair dubiously, and raises his head cautiously, bending it more and more downwards.]

ANN. Well?

CALWAY. He appears to be—sitting on the floor.

WELLWYN. Yes, that's all right!

[BERTLEY covers his lips.]

CALWAY. [To ANN—descending.] By the look of his face, as far as one can see it, I should say there was a leaning towards mania. I know the treatment.

[There come three loud knocks on the door. WELLWYN and ANN exchange a glance of consternation.]

ANN. Who's that?

WELLWYN. It sounds like Sir Thomas.

CALWAY. Sir Thomas Hoxton?

WELLWYN. [Nodding.] Awfully sorry, Professor. You see, we—

CALWAY. Not at all. Only, I must decline to be involved in argument with him, please.

BERTLEY. He has experience. We might get his opinion, don't you think?

CALWAY. On a point of reform? A J.P.!

BERTLEY. [Deprecating.] My dear Sir—we needn't take it.

[The three knocks resound with extraordinary fury.]

ANN. You'd better open the door, Daddy.

[WELLWYN opens the door. SIR, THOMAS HOXTON is disclosed in a fur overcoat and top hat. His square, well-coloured face is remarkable for a massive jaw, dominating all that

comes above it. His Voice is resolute.]

HOXTON. Afraid I didn't make myself heard.

WELLWYN. So good of you to come, Sir Thomas. Canon Bertley! [They greet.] Professor CALWAY you know, I think.

HOXTON. [Ominously.] I do.

[They almost greet. An awkward pause.]

ANN. [Blurring it out.] That old cabman I told you of's been drinking father's rum.

BERTLEY. We were just discussing what's to be done with him, Sir Thomas. One wants to do the very best, of course. The question of reform is always delicate.

CALWAY. I beg your pardon. There is no question here.

HOXTON. [Abruptly.] Oh! Is he in the house?

ANN. In there.

HOXTON. Works for you, eh?

WELLWYN. Er—yes.

HOXTON. Let's have a look at him!

[An embarrassed pause.]

BERTLEY. Well—the fact is, Sir Thomas—

CALWAY. When last under observation—

ANN. He was sitting on the floor.

WELLWYN. I don't want the old fellow to feel he's being made a show of. Disgusting to be spied at, Ann.

ANN. You can't, Daddy! He's drunk.

HOXTON. Never mind, Miss WELLWYN. Hundreds of these fellows before me in my time. [At CALWAY.] The only thing is a sharp lesson!

CALWAY. I disagree. I've seen the man; what he requires is steady control, and the bobbins treatment.

[WELLWYN approaches them with fearful interest.]

HOXTON. Not a bit of it! He wants one for his knob! Brace 'em up! It's the only thing.

BERTLEY. Personally, I think that if he were spoken to seriously

CALWAY. I cannot walk arm in arm with a crab!

HOXTON. [Approaching CALWAY.] I beg your pardon?

CALWAY. [Moving back a little.] You're moving backwards, Sir Thomas. I've told you before, convinced reactionaryism, in these days—

[There comes a single knock on the street door.]

BERTLEY. [Looking at his watch.] D'you know, I'm rather afraid this may be our young husband, WELLWYN. I told him half-past four.

WELLWYN. Oh! Ah! Yes. [Going towards the two reformers.] Shall we go into the house, Professor, and settle the question quietly while the Vicar sees a young man?

CALWAY. [Pale with uncompleted statement, and gravitating insensibly in the direction indicated.] The merest sense of continuity—a simple instinct for order—

HOXTON. [Following.] The only way to get order, sir, is to bring the disorderly up with a round turn.

[CALWAY turns to him in the doorway.] You people without practical experience——

CALWAY. If you'll listen to me a minute.

HOXTON. I can show you in a mo——

[They vanish through the door.]

WELLWYN. I was afraid of it.

BERTLEY. The two points of view. Pleasant to see such keenness.
I may want you, WELLWYN. And Ann perhaps had better not be present.

WELLWYN. [Relieved.] Quite so! My dear!

[ANN goes reluctantly. WELLWYN opens the street door. The lamp outside has just been lighted, and, by its gleam, is seen the figure of RORY MEGAN, thin, pale, youthful. ANN turning at the door into the house gives him a long, inquisitive look, then goes.]

WELLWYN. Is that Megan?

MEGAN. Yus.

WELLWYN. Come in.

[MEGAN comes in. There follows an awkward silence, during which WELLWYN turns up the light, then goes to the tea table and pours out a glass of tea and rum.]

BERTLEY. [Kindly.] Now, my boy, how is it that you and your wife are living apart like this?

MEGAN. I dunno.

BERTLEY. Well, if you don't, none of us are very likely to, are we?

MEGAN. That's what I thought, as I was comin' along.

WELLWYN. [Twinkling.] Have some tea, Megan? [Handing him the glass.] What d'you think of her picture? 'Tisn't quite finished.

MEGAN. [After scrutiny.] I seen her look like it—once.

WELLWYN. Good! When was that?

MEGAN. [Stoically.] When she 'ad the measles.

[He drinks.]

WELLWYN. [Ruminating.] I see—yes. I quite see feverish!

BERTLEY. My dear WELLWYN, let me—[To, MEGAN.] Now, I hope you're willing to come together again, and to maintain her?

MEGAN. If she'll maintain me.

BERTLEY. Oh! but—I see, you mean you're in the same line of business?

MEGAN. Yus.

BERTLEY. And lean on each other. Quite so!

MEGAN. I leans on 'er mostly—with 'er looks.

BERTLEY. Indeed! Very interesting—that!

MEGAN. Yus. Sometimes she'll take 'arf a crown off of a toff. [He looks at WELLWYN.]

WELLWYN. [Twinkling.] I apologise to you, Megan.

MEGAN. [With a faint smile.] I could do with a bit more of it.

BERTLEY. [Dubiously.] Yes! Yes! Now, my boy, I've heard you bet on horses.

MEGAN. No, I don't.

BERTLEY. Play cards, then? Come! Don't be afraid to acknowledge it.

MEGAN. When I'm 'ard up—yus.

BERTLEY. But don't you know that's ruination?

MEGAN. Depends. Sometimes I wins a lot.

BERTLEY. You know that's not at all what I mean. Come, promise me to give it up.

MEGAN. I dunno abaht that.

BERTLEY. Now, there's a good fellow. Make a big effort and throw the habit off!

MEGAN. Comes over me—same as it might over you.

BERTLEY. Over me! How do you mean, my boy?

MEGAN. [With a look up.] To tork!

[WELLWYN, turning to the picture, makes a funny little noise.]

BERTLEY. [Maintaining his good humour.] A hit! But you forget, you know, to talk's my business. It's not yours to gamble.

MEGAN. You try sellin' flowers. If that ain't a—gamble

BERTLEY. I'm afraid we're wandering a little from the point. Husband and wife should be together. You were brought up to that. Your father and mother—

MEGAN. Never was.

WELLWYN. [Turning from the picture.] The question is, Megan: Will you take your wife home? She's a good little soul.

MEGAN. She never let me know it.

[There is a feeble knock on the door.]

WELLWYN. Well, now come. Here she is!

[He points to the door, and stands regarding MEGAN with his friendly smile.]

MEGAN. [With a gleam of responsiveness.] I might, perhaps, to please you, sir.

BERTLEY. [Appropriating the gesture.] Capital, I thought we should get on in time.

MEGAN. Yus.

[WELLWYN opens the door. MRS. MEGAN and FERRAND are revealed. They are about to enter, but catching sight of MEGAN, hesitate.]

BERTLEY. Come in! Come in!

[MRS. MEGAN enters stolidly. FERRAND, following, stands apart with an air of extreme detachment. MEGAN, after a quick glance at them both, remains unmoved. No one has noticed that the door of the model's room has been opened, and that the unsteady figure of old TIMSON is standing there.]

BERTLEY. [A little awkward in the presence of FERRAND—to the MEGANS.] This begins a new chapter. We won't improve the occasion. No need.

[MEGAN, turning towards his wife, makes her a gesture as if to say: "Here! let's get out of this!"]

BENTLEY. Yes, yes, you'll like to get home at once—I know. [He holds up his hand mechanically.]

TIMSON. I forbids the banns.

BERTLEY, [Startled.] Gracious!

TIMSON. [Extremely unsteady.] Just cause and imejiment. There 'e stands. [He points to FERRAND.] The crimson foreigner! The mockin' jay!

WELLWYN. Timson!

TIMSON. You're a gen'leman—I'm aweer o' that but I must speak the truth—[he waves his hand] an' shame the devil!

BERTLEY. Is this the rum—?

TIMSON. [Struck by the word.] I'm a teetotaler.

WELLWYN. Timson, Timson!

TIMSON. Seein' as there's ladies present, I won't be conspicuous. [Moving away, and making for the door, he strikes against the dais, and mounts upon it.] But what I do say, is: He's no better than 'er and she's worse.

BERTLEY. This is distressing.

FERRAND. [Calmly.] On my honour, Monsieur!

[TIMSON growls.]

WELLWYN. Now, now, Timson!

TIMSON. That's all right. You're a gen'leman, an' I'm a gen'leman, but he ain't an' she ain't.

WELLWYN. We shall not believe you.

BERTLEY. No, no; we shall not believe you.

TIMSON. [Heavily.] Very well, you doubts my word. Will it make any difference, Guv'nor, if I speaks the truth?

BERTLEY. No, certainly not—that is—of course, it will.

TIMSON. Well, then, I see 'em plainer than I see [pointing at BERTLEY] the two of you.

WELLWYN. Be quiet, Timson!

BERTLEY. Not even her husband believes you.

MEGAN. [Suddenly.] Don't I!

WELLWYN. Come, Megan, you can see the old fellow's in Paradise.

BERTLEY. Do you credit such a—such an object?

[He points at TIMSON, who seems falling asleep.]

MEGAN. Naow!

[Unseen by anybody, ANN has returned.]

BERTLEY. Well, then, my boy?

MEGAN. I seen 'em meself.

BERTLEY. Gracious! But just now you were will—

MEGAN. [Sardonically.] There wasn't nothing against me honour, then. Now you've took it away between you, cumin' aht with it like this. I don't want no more of 'er, and I'll want a good deal more of 'im; as 'e'll soon find.

[He jerks his chin at FERRAND, turns slowly on his heel, and goes out into the street.]

[There follows a profound silence.]

ANN. What did I say, Daddy? Utter! All three.

[Suddenly alive to her presence, they all turn.]

TIMSON. [Waking up and looking round him.] Well, p'raps I'd better go.

[Assisted by WELLWYN he lurches gingerly off the dais towards the door, which WELLWYN holds open for him.]

TIMSON. [Mechanically.] Where to, sir?

[Receiving no answer he passes out, touching his hat; and the door is closed.]

WELLWYN. Ann!

[ANN goes back whence she came.]

[BERTLEY, steadily regarding MRS. MEGAN, who has put her arm up in front of her face, beckons to FERRAND, and the young man comes gravely forward.]

BERTLEY. Young people, this is very dreadful. [MRS. MEGAN lowers her arm a little, and looks at him over it.] Very sad!

MRS. MEGAN. [Dropping her arm.] Megan's no better than what I am.

BERTLEY. Come, come! Here's your home broken up! [MRS. MEGAN Smiles. Shaking his head gravely.] Surely-surely-you mustn't smile. [MRS. MEGAN becomes tragic.] That's better. Now, what is to be done?

FERRAND. Believe me, Monsieur, I greatly regret.

BERTLEY. I'm glad to hear it.

FERRAND. If I had foreseen this disaster.

BERTLEY. Is that your only reason for regret?

FERRAND. [With a little bow.] Any reason that you wish, Monsieur. I will do my possible.

MRS. MEGAN. I could get an unfurnished room if [she slides her eyes round at WELLWYN] I 'ad the money to furnish it.

BERTLEY. But suppose I can induce your husband to forgive you, and take you back?

MRS. MEGAN. [Shaking her head.] 'E'd 'it me.

BERTLEY. I said to forgive.

MRS. MEGAN. That wouldn't make no difference. [With a flash at BERTLEY.] An' I ain't forgiven him!

BERTLEY. That is sinful.

MRS. MEGAN. I'm a Catholic.

BERTLEY. My good child, what difference does that make?

FERRAND. Monsieur, if I might interpret for her.

[BERTLEY silences him with a gesture.]

MRS. MEGAN. [Sliding her eyes towards WELLWYN.] If I 'ad the money to buy some fresh stock.

BERTLEY. Yes; yes; never mind the money. What I want to find in you both, is repentance.

MRS. MEGAN. [With a flash up at him.] I can't get me livin' off of repentin'.

BERTLEY. Now, now! Never say what you know to be wrong.

FERRAND. Monsieur, her soul is very simple.

BERTLEY. [Severely.] I do not know, sir, that we shall get any great assistance from your views. In fact, one thing is clear to me, she must discontinue your acquaintanceship at once.

FERRAND. Certainly, Monsieur. We have no serious intentions.

BERTLEY. All the more shame to you, then!

FERRAND. Monsieur, I see perfectly your point of view. It is very natural. [He bows and is silent.]

MRS. MEGAN. I don't want'im hurt'cos o' me. Megan'll get his mates to belt him—bein' foreign like he is.

BERTLEY. Yes, never mind that. It's you I'm thinking of.

MRS. MEGAN. I'd sooner they'd hit me.

WELLWYN. [Suddenly.] Well said, my child!

MRS. MEGAN. 'Twasn't his fault.

FERRAND. [Without irony—to WELLWYN.] I cannot accept that Monsieur. The blame—it is all mine.

ANN. [Entering suddenly from the house.] Daddy, they're having an awful—!

[The voices of PROFESSOR CALWAY and SIR THOMAS HOXTON are distinctly heard.]

CALWAY. The question is a much wider one, Sir Thomas.

HOXTON. As wide as you like, you'll never—

[WELLWYN pushes ANN back into the house and closes the door behind her. The voices are still faintly heard arguing on the threshold.]

BERTLEY. Let me go in here a minute, Wellyn. I must finish speaking to her. [He motions MRS. MEGAN towards the model's room.] We can't leave the matter thus.

FERRAND. [Suavely.] Do you desire my company, Monsieur?

[BERTLEY, with a prohibitive gesture of his hand, shepherds the reluctant MRS. MEGAN into the model's room.]

WELLWYN. [Sorrowfully.] You shouldn't have done this, Ferrand. It wasn't the square thing.

FERRAND. [With dignity.] Monsieur, I feel that I am in the wrong. It was stronger than me.

[As he speaks, SIR THOMAS HOXTON and PROFESSOR CALWAY enter from the house. In the dim light, and the full cry of argument, they do not notice the figures at the fire. SIR THOMAS HOXTON leads towards the street door.]

HOXTON. No, Sir, I repeat, if the country once commits itself to your views of reform, it's as good as doomed.

CALWAY. I seem to have heard that before, Sir Thomas. And let me say at once that your hitty-missy cart-load of bricks regime—

HOXTON. Is a deuced sight better, sir, than your grand-motherly methods. What the old fellow wants is a shock! With all this socialistic molly-coddling, you're losing sight of the individual.

CALWAY. [Swiftly.] You, sir, with your "devil take the hindmost," have never even seen him.

[SIR THOMAS HOXTON, throwing back a gesture of disgust, steps out into the night, and falls heavily PROFESSOR CALWAY, hastening to his rescue, falls more heavily still.]

[TIMSON, momentarily roused from slumber on the doorstep, sits up.]

HOXTON. [Struggling to his knees.] Damnation!

CALWAY. [Sitting.] How simultaneous!

[WELLWYN and FERRAND approach hastily.]

FERRAND. [Pointing to TIMSON.] Monsieur, it was true, it seems.

They had lost sight of the individual.

[A Policeman has appeared under the street lamp. He picks up HOXTON'S hat.]

CONSTABLE. Anything wrong, sir?

HOXTON. [Recovering his feet.] Wrong? Great Scott! Constable! Why do you let things lie about in the street like this? Look here, Wellyn!

[They all scrutinize TIMSON.]

WELLWYN. It's only the old fellow whose reform you were discussing.

HOXTON. How did he come here?

CONSTABLE. Drunk, sir. [Ascertaining TIMSON to be in the street.] Just off the premises, by good luck. Come along, father.

TIMSON. [Assisted to his feet-drowsily.] Cert'nly, by no means; take my arm.

[They move from the doorway. HOXTON and CALWAY re-enter, and go towards the fire.]

ANN. [Entering from the house.] What's happened?

CALWAY. Might we have a brush?

HOXTON. [Testily.] Let it dry!

[He moves to the fire and stands before it. PROFESSOR CALWAY following stands a little behind him. ANN returning begins to brush the PROFESSOR'S sleeve.]

WELLWYN. [Turning from the door, where he has stood looking after the receding TIMSON.] Poor old Timson!

FERRAND. [Softly.] Must be philosopher, Monsieur! They will but run him in a little.

[From the model's room MRS. MEGAN has come out, shepherded by CANON BERTLEY.]

BERTLEY. Let's see, your Christian name is—.

MRS. MEGAN. Guinevere.

BERTLEY. Oh! Ah! Ah! Ann, take Gui—take our little friend into the study a minute: I am going to put her into service. We shall make a new woman of her, yet.

ANN. [Handing CANON BERTLEY the brush, and turning to MRS. MEGAN.] Come on!

[She leads into the house, and MRS. MEGAN follows Stolidly.]

BERTLEY. [Brushing CALWAY'S back.] Have you fallen?

CALWAY. Yes.

BERTLEY. Dear me! How was that?

HOXTON. That old ruffian drunk on the doorstep. Hope they'll give him a sharp dose! These rag-tags!

[He looks round, and his angry eyes light by chance on FERRAND.]

FERRAND. [With his eyes on HOXTON—softly.] Monsieur, something tells me it is time I took the road again.

WELLWYN. [Fumbling out a sovereign.] Take this, then!

FERRAND. [Refusing the coin.] Non, Monsieur. To abuse 'ospitality is not in my character.

BERTLEY. We must not despair of anyone.

HOXTON. Who talked of despairing? Treat him, as I say, and you'll see!

CALWAY. The interest of the State—

HOXTON. The interest of the individual citizen sir—

BERTLEY. Come! A little of both, a little of both!

[They resume their brushing.]

FERRAND. You are now debarrassed of us three, Monsieur. I leave you instead—these sirs. [He points.] 'Au revoir, Monsieur!' [Motioning towards the fire.] 'Appy New Year!

[He slips quietly out. WELLWYN, turning, contemplates the three reformers. They are all now brushing away, scratching each other's backs, and gravely hissing. As he approaches them, they speak with a certain unanimity.]

HOXTON. My theory—!

CALWAY. My theory—!

BERTLEY. My theory—!

[They stop surprised. WELLWYN makes a gesture of discomfort, as they speak again with still more unanimity.]

HOXTON. My—! CALWAY. My—! BERTLEY. My—!

[They stop in greater surprise. The stage is blotted dark.]

Curtain.

ACT III

It is the first of April—a white spring day of gleams and driving showers. The street door of WELLWYN's studio stands wide open, and, past it, in the street, the wind is whirling bits of straw and paper bags. Through the door can be seen the butt end of a stationary furniture van with its flap let down. To this van three humble-men in shirt sleeves and aprons, are carrying out the contents of the studio. The hissing samovar, the tea-pot, the sugar, and the nearly empty decanter of rum stand on the low round table in the fast-being-gutted room. WELLWYN in his ulster and soft hat, is squatting on the little stool in front of the blazing fire, staring into it, and smoking a hand-made cigarette. He has a moulting air. Behind him the humble-men pass, embracing busts and other articles of vertu.

CHIEF H'MAN. [Stopping, and standing in the attitude of expectation.] We've about pinched this little lot, sir. Shall we take the—reservoir?

[He indicates the samovar.]

WELLWYN. Ah! [Abstractedly feeling in his pockets, and finding coins.] Thanks—thanks—heavy work, I'm afraid.

H'MAN. [Receiving the coins—a little surprised and a good deal pleased.] Thank'ee, sir. Much obliged, I'm sure. We'll 'ave to come back for this. [He gives the dais a vigorous push with his foot.] Not a fixture, as I understand. Perhaps you'd like us to leave these 'ere for a bit. [He indicates the tea things.]

WELLWYN. Ah! do.

[The humble-men go out. There is the sound of horses being started, and the butt end of the van disappears. WELLWYN stays on his stool, smoking and brooding over the fare. The open doorway is darkened by a figure. CANON BERTLEY is standing there.]

BERTLEY. WELLWYN! [WELLWYN turns and rises.] It's ages since I saw you. No idea you were moving. This is very dreadful.

WELLWYN. Yes, Ann found this—too exposed. That tall house in Flight Street—we're going there. Seventh floor.

BERTLEY. Lift?

[WELLWYN shakes his head.]

BERTLEY. Dear me! No lift? Fine view, no doubt. [WELLWYN nods.] You'll be greatly missed.

WELLWYN. So Ann thinks. Vicar, what's become of that little flower-seller I was painting at Christmas? You took her into service.

BERTLEY. Not we—exactly! Some dear friends of ours. Painful subject!

WELLWYN. Oh!

BERTLEY. Yes. She got the footman into trouble.

WELLWYN. Did she, now?

BERTLEY. Disappointing. I consulted with CALWAY, and he advised me to try a certain institution. We got her safely in—excellent place; but, d'you know, she broke out three weeks ago. And since— I've heard [he holds his hands up] hopeless, I'm afraid—quite!

WELLWYN. I thought I saw her last night. You can't tell me her address, I suppose?

BERTLEY. [Shaking his head.] The husband too has quite passed out of my ken. He betted on horses, you remember. I'm sometimes tempted to believe there's nothing for some of these poor folk but to pray for death.

[ANN has entered from the house. Her hair hangs from under a knitted cap. She wears a white wool jersey, and a loose silk scarf.]

BERTLEY. Ah! Ann. I was telling your father of that poor little Mrs. Megan.

ANN. Is she dead?

BERTLEY. Worse I fear. By the way—what became of her accomplice?

ANN. We haven't seen him since. [She looks searchingly at WELLWYN.] At least—have you—Daddy?

WELLWYN. [Rather hurt.] No, my dear; I have not.

BERTLEY. And the—old gentleman who drank the rum?

ANN. He got fourteen days. It was the fifth time.

BERTLEY. Dear me!

ANN. When he came out he got more drunk than ever. Rather a score for Professor Calway, wasn't it?

BERTLEY. I remember. He and Sir Thomas took a kindly interest in the old fellow.

ANN. Yes, they fell over him. The Professor got him into an Institution.

BERTLEY. Indeed!

ANN. He was perfectly sober all the time he was there.

WELLWYN. My dear, they only allow them milk.

ANN. Well, anyway, he was reformed.

WELLWYN. Ye-yes!

ANN. [Terribly.] Daddy! You've been seeing him!

WELLWYN. [With dignity.] My dear, I have not.

ANN. How do you know, then?

WELLWYN. Came across Sir Thomas on the Embankment yesterday; told me old Timso—had been had up again for sitting down in front of a brewer's dray.

ANN. Why?

WELLWYN. Well, you see, as soon as he came out of the what d'you call 'em, he got drunk for a week, and it left him in low spirits.

BERTLEY. Do you mean he deliberately sat down, with the intention—of—er?

WELLWYN. Said he was tired of life, but they didn't believe him.

ANN. Rather a score for Sir Thomas! I suppose he'd told the Professor? What did he say?

WELLWYN. Well, the Professor said [with a quick glance at BERTLEY] he felt there was nothing for some of these poor devils but a lethal chamber.

BERTLEY. [Shocked.] Did he really!

[He has not yet caught WELLWYN' s glance.]

WELLWYN. And Sir Thomas agreed. Historic occasion. And you, Vicar H'm!

[BERTLEY winces.]

ANN. [To herself.] Well, there isn't.

BERTLEY. And yet! Some good in the old fellow, no doubt, if one could put one's finger on it. [Preparing to go.] You'll let us know, then, when you're settled. What was the address? [WELLWYN takes out and hands him a card.] Ah! yes. Good-bye, Ann. Good-bye, Wellyn. [The wind blows his hat along the street.] What a wind! [He goes, pursuing.]

ANN. [Who has eyed the card askance.] Daddy, have you told those other two where we're going?

WELLWYN. Which other two, my dear?

ANN. The Professor and Sir Thomas.

WELLWYN. Well, Ann, naturally I—

ANN. [Jumping on to the dais with disgust.] Oh, dear! When I'm trying to get you away from all this atmosphere. I don't so much mind the Vicar knowing, because he's got a weak heart—

[She jumps off again.]

WELLWYN. [To himself.] Seventh floor! I felt there was something.

ANN. [Preparing to go.] I'm going round now. But you must stay here till the van comes back. And don't forget you tipped the men after the first load.

WELLWYN. Oh! Yes, yes. [Uneasily.] Good sorts they look, those fellows!

ANN. [Scrutinising him.] What have you done?

WELLWYN. Nothing, my dear, really—

ANN. What?

WELLWYN. I—I rather think I may have tipped them twice.

ANN. [Drily.] Daddy! If it is the first of April, it's not necessary to make a fool of oneself. That's the last time you ever do these ridiculous things. [WELLWYN eyes her askance.] I'm going to see that you spend your money on yourself. You needn't look at me like that! I mean to. As soon as I've got you away from here, and all—these—

WELLWYN. Don't rub it in, Ann!

ANN. [Giving him a sudden hug—then going to the door—with a sort of triumph.] Deeds, not words,

Daddy!

[She goes out, and the wind catching her scarf blows it out beneath her firm young chin. WELLWYN returning to the fire, stands brooding, and gazing at his extinct cigarette.]

WELLWYN. [To himself.] Bad lot—low type! No method! No theory!

[In the open doorway appear FERRAND and MRS. MEGAN. They stand, unseen, looking at him. FERRAND is more ragged, if possible, than on Christmas Eve. His chin and cheeks are clothed in a reddish golden beard. MRS. MEGAN's dress is not so woe-begone, but her face is white, her eyes dark-circled. They whisper. She slips back into the shadow of the doorway. WELLWYN turns at the sound, and stares at FERRAND in amazement.]

FERRAND. [Advancing.] Enchanted to see you, Monsieur. [He looks round the empty room.] You are leaving?

WELLWYN. [Nodding—then taking the young man's hand.] How goes it?

FERRAND. [Displaying himself, simply.] As you see, Monsieur. I have done of my best. It still flies from me.

WELLWYN. [Sadly—as if against his will.] Ferrand, it will always fly.

[The young foreigner shivers suddenly from head to foot; then controls himself with a great effort.]

FERRAND. Don't say that, Monsieur! It is too much the echo of my heart.

WELLWYN. Forgive me! I didn't mean to pain you.

FERRAND. [Drawing nearer the fire.] That old cabby, Monsieur, you remember—they tell me, he nearly succeeded to gain happiness the other day.

[WELLWYN nods.]

FERRAND. And those Sirs, so interested in him, with their theories? He has worn them out? [WELLWYN nods.] That goes without saying. And now they wish for him the lethal chamber.

WELLWYN. [Startled.] How did you know that?

[There is silence.]

FERRAND. [Staring into the fire.] Monsieur, while I was on the road this time I fell ill of a fever. It seemed to me in my illness that I saw the truth—how I was wasting in this world—I would never be good for any one—nor any one for me—all would go by, and I never of it—fame, and fortune, and peace, even the necessities of life, ever mocking me.

[He draws closer to the fire, spreading his fingers to the flame. And while he is speaking, through the doorway MRS. MEGAN creeps in to listen.]

FERRAND. [Speaking on into the fire.] And I saw, Monsieur, so plain, that I should be vagabond all my days, and my days short, I dying in the end the death of a dog. I saw it all in my fever—clear as that flame—there was nothing for us others, but the herb of death. [WELLWYN takes his arm and presses it.] And so, Monsieur, I wished to die. I told no one of my fever. I lay out on the ground—it was verree cold. But they would not let me die on the roads of their parishes—they took me to an Institution, Monsieur, I looked in their eyes while I lay there, and I saw more clear than the blue heaven that they thought it best that I should die, although they would not let me. Then Monsieur, naturally my spirit rose, and I said: "So much the worse for you. I will live a little more." One is made like that! Life is sweet, Monsieur.

WELLWYN. Yes, Ferrand; Life is sweet.

FERRAND. That little girl you had here, Monsieur [WELLWYN nods.] in her too there is something of wild-savage. She must have joy of life. I have seen her since I came back. She has embraced the life of joy. It is not quite the same thing. [He lowers his voice.] She is lost, Monsieur, as a stone that sinks in water. I can see, if she cannot. [As WELLWYN makes a movement of distress.] Oh! I am not to blame for that, Monsieur. It had well begun before I knew her.

WELLWYN. Yes, yes—I was afraid of it, at the time.

[MRS. MEGAN turns silently, and slips away.]

FERRAND. I do my best for her, Monsieur, but look at me! Besides, I am not good for her—it is not good for simple souls to be with those who see things clear. For the great part of mankind, to see anything—is fatal.

WELLWYN. Even for you, it seems.

FERRAND. No, Monsieur. To be so near to death has done me good; I shall not lack courage any more till the wind blows on my grave. Since I saw you, Monsieur, I have been in three Institutions. They are palaces. One may eat upon the floor—though it is true—for Kings—they eat too much of skilly there. One little thing they lack—those palaces. It is understanding of the 'uman heart. In them tame birds pluck wild birds naked.

WELLWYN. They mean well.

FERRAND. Ah! Monsieur, I am loafer, waster—what you like—for all that [bitterly] poverty is my only crime. If I were rich, should I not be simply verree original, 'ighly respected, with soul above commerce, travelling to see the world? And that young girl, would she not be "that charming ladee," "verree chic, you know!" And the old Tims—good old-fashioned gentleman—drinking his liquor well. Eh! bien—what are we now? Dark beasts, despised by all. That is life, Monsieur. [He stares into the fire.]

WELLWYN. We're our own enemies, Ferrand. I can afford it—you can't. Quite true!

FERRAND. [Earnestly.] Monsieur, do you know this? You are the sole being that can do us good—we hopeless ones.

WELLWYN. [Shaking his head.] Not a bit of it; I'm hopeless too.

FERRAND. [Eagerly.] Monsieur, it is just that. You understand. When we are with you we feel something—here—[he touches his heart.] If I had one prayer to make, it would be, Good God, give me to understand! Those sirs, with their theories, they can clean our skins and chain our 'abits—that soothes for them the aesthetic sense; it gives them too their good little importance. But our spirits they cannot touch, for they nevere understand. Without that, Monsieur, all is dry as a parched skin of orange.

WELLWYN. Don't be so bitter. Think of all the work they do!

FERRAND. Monsieur, of their industry I say nothing. They do a good work while they attend with their theories to the sick and the tame old, and the good unfortunate deserving. Above all to the little children. But, Monsieur, when all is done, there are always us hopeless ones. What can they do with me, Monsieur, with that girl, or with that old man? Ah! Monsieur, we, too, 'ave our qualities, we others—it wants you courage to undertake a career like mine, or like that young girl's. We wild ones—we know a thousand times more of life than ever will those sirs. They waste their time trying to make rooks white. Be kind to us if you will, or let us alone like Mees Ann, but do not try to change our skins. Leave us to live, or leave us to die when we like in the free air. If you do not wish of us, you have but to shut your pockets and—your doors—we shall die the faster.

WELLWYN. [With agitation.] But that, you know—we can't do—now can we?

FERRAND. If you cannot, how is it our fault? The harm we do to others—is it so much? If I am criminal, dangerous—shut me up! I would not pity myself—nevere. But we in whom something moves—like that flame, Monsieur, that cannot keep still—we others—we are not many—that must have motion in our lives, do not let them make us prisoners, with their theories, because we are not like them—it is life itself they would enclose! [He draws up his tattered figure, then bending over the fire again.] I ask your pardon; I am talking. If I could smoke, Monsieur!

[WELLWYN hands him a tobacco pouch; and he rolls a cigarette with his yellow-Stained fingers.]

FERRAND. The good God made me so that I would rather walk a whole month of nights, hungry, with the stars, than sit one single day making round business on an office stool! It is not to my advantage. I cannot help it that I am a vagabond. What would you have? It is stronger than me. [He looks suddenly at WELLWYN.] Monsieur, I say to you things I have never said.

WELLWYN. [Quietly.] Go on, go on. [There is silence.]

FERRAND. [Suddenly.] Monsieur! Are you really English? The English are so civilised.

WELLWYN. And am I not?

FERRAND. You treat me like a brother.

[WELLWYN has turned towards the street door at a sound of feet, and the clamour of voices.]

TIMSON. [From the street.] Take her in 'ere. I knows 'im.

[Through the open doorway come a POLICE CONSTABLE and a LOAFER, bearing between them the limp white faced form of MRS. MEGAN, hatless and with drowned hair, enveloped in the policeman's waterproof. Some curious persons bring up the rear, jostling in the doorway, among whom is TIMSON carrying in his hands the policeman's dripping waterproof leg pieces.]

FERRAND. [Starting forward.] Monsieur, it is that little girl!

WELLWYN. What's happened? Constable! What's happened!

[The CONSTABLE and LOAFER have laid the body down on the dais; with WELLWYN and FERRAND they stand bending over her.]

CONSTABLE. 'Tempted sooicide, sir; but she hadn't been in the water 'arf a minute when I got hold of her. [He bends lower.] Can't understand her collapsin' like this.

WELLWYN. [Feeling her heart.] I don't feel anything.

FERRAND. [In a voice sharpened by emotion.] Let me try, Monsieur.

CONSTABLE. [Touching his arm.] You keep off, my lad.

WELLWYN. No, constable—let him. He's her friend.

CONSTABLE. [Releasing FERRAND—to the LOAFER.] Here you! Cut off for a doctor-sharp now! [He pushes back the curious persons.] Now then, stand away there, please—we can't have you round the body. Keep back—Clear out, now!

[He slowly moves them back, and at last shepherds them through the door and shuts it on them, TIMSON being last.]

FERRAND. The rum!

[WELLWYN fetches the decanter. With the little there is left FERRAND chafes the girl's hands and forehead, and pours some between her lips. But there is no response from the inert body.]

FERRAND. Her soul is still away, Monsieur!

[WELLWYN, seizing the decanter, pours into it tea and boiling water.]

CONSTABLE. It's never drownin', sir—her head was hardly under; I was on to her like knife.

FERRAND. [Rubbing her feet.] She has not yet her philosophy, Monsieur; at the beginning they often try. If she is dead! [In a voice of awed rapture.] What fortune!

CONSTABLE. [With puzzled sadness.] True enough, sir—that! We'd just begun to know 'er. If she 'as been taken—her best friends couldn't wish 'er better.

WELLWYN. [Applying the decanter to her dips.] Poor little thing! I'll try this hot tea.

FERRAND. [Whispering.] 'La mort—le grand ami!'

WELLWYN. Look! Look at her! She's coming round!

[A faint tremor passes over MRS. MEGAN's body. He again applies the hot drink to her mouth. She stirs and gulps.]

CONSTABLE. [With intense relief.] That's brave! Good lass! She'll pick up now, sir.

[Then, seeing that TIMSON and the curious persons have again opened the door, he drives them out, and stands with his back against it. MRS. MEGAN comes to herself.]

WELLWYN. [Sitting on the dais and supporting her—as if to a child.] There you are, my dear. There, there—better now! That's right. Drink a little more of this tea.

[MRS. MEGAN drinks from the decanter.]

FERRAND. [Rising.] Bring her to the fire, Monsieur.

[They take her to the fire and seat her on the little stool. From the moment of her restored animation FERRAND has resumed his air of cynical detachment, and now stands apart with arms folded, watching.]

WELLWYN. Feeling better, my child?

MRS. MEGAN. Yes.

WELLWYN. That's good. That's good. Now, how was it? Um?

MRS. MEGAN. I dunno. [She shivers.] I was standin' here just now when you was talkin', and when I heard 'im, it cam' over me to do it—like.

WELLWYN. Ah, yes I know.

MRS. MEGAN. I didn't seem no good to meself nor any one. But when I got in the water, I didn't want to any more. It was cold in there.

WELLWYN. Have you been having such a bad time of it?

MRS. MEGAN. Yes. And listenin' to him upset me. [She signs with her head at FERRAND.] I feel better now I've been in the water. [She smiles and shivers.]

WELLWYN. There, there! Shivery? Like to walk up and down a little?

[They begin walking together up and down.]

WELLWYN. Beastly when your head goes under?

MRS. MEGAN. Yes. It frightened me. I thought I wouldn't come up again.

WELLWYN. I know—sort of world without end, wasn't it? What did you think of, um?

MRS. MEGAN. I wished I 'adn't jumped—an' I thought of my baby—that died—and—[in a rather surprised voice] and I thought of d-dancin'.

[Her mouth quivers, her face puckers, she gives a choke and a little sob.]

WELLWYN. [Stopping and stroking her.] There, there—there!

[For a moment her face is buried in his sleeve, then she recovers herself.]

MRS. MEGAN. Then 'e got hold o' me, an' pulled me out.

WELLWYN. Ah! what a comfort—um?

MRS. MEGAN. Yes. The water got into me mouth.

[They walk again.] I wouldn't have gone to do it but for him. [She looks towards FERRAND.] His talk made me feel all funny, as if people wanted me to.

WELLWYN. My dear child! Don't think such things! As if anyone would—!

MRS. MEGAN. [Stolidly.] I thought they did. They used to look at me so sometimes, where I was before I ran away—I couldn't stop there, you know.

WELLWYN. Too cooped-up?

MRS. MEGAN. Yes. No life at all, it wasn't—not after sellin' flowers, I'd rather be doin' what I am.

WELLWYN. Ah! Well-it's all over, now! How d'you feel—eh?
Better?

MRS. MEGAN. Yes. I feels all right now.

[She sits up again on the little stool before the fire.]

WELLWYN. No shivers, and no aches; quite comfy?

MRS. MEGAN. Yes.

WELLWYN. That's a blessing. All well, now, Constable—thank you!

CONSTABLE. [Who has remained discreetly apart at the door-cordially.] First rate, sir! That's capital! [He approaches and scrutinises MRS. MEGAN.] Right as rain, eh, my girl?

MRS. MEGAN. [Shrinking a little.] Yes.

CONSTABLE. That's fine. Then I think perhaps, for 'er sake, sir, the sooner we move on and get her a change o' clothin', the better.

WELLWYN. Oh! don't bother about that—I'll send round for my daughter—we'll manage for her here.

CONSTABLE. Very kind of you, I'm sure, sir. But [with embarrassment] she seems all right. She'll get every attention at the station.

WELLWYN. But I assure you, we don't mind at all; we'll take the greatest care of her.

CONSTABLE. [Still more embarrassed.] Well, sir, of course, I'm thinkin' of—I'm afraid I can't depart from the usual course.

WELLWYN. [Sharply.] What! But-oh! No! No! That'll be all right, Constable! That'll be all right! I assure you.

CONSTABLE. [With more decision.] I'll have to charge her, sir.

WELLWYN. Good God! You don't mean to say the poor little thing has got to be—

CONSTABLE. [Consulting with him.] Well, sir, we can't get over the facts, can we? There it is! You know what soocide amounts to— it's an awkward job.

WELLWYN. [Calming himself with an effort.] But look here, Constable, as a reasonable man—This poor wretched little girl—you know what that life means better than anyone! Why! It's to her credit to try and jump out of it!

[The CONSTABLE shakes his head.]

WELLWYN. You said yourself her best friends couldn't wish her better! [Dropping his voice still more.] Everybody feels it! The Vicar was here a few minutes ago saying the very same thing—the Vicar, Constable! [The CONSTABLE shakes his head.] Ah! now, look here, I know something of her. Nothing can be done with her. We all admit it. Don't you see? Well, then hang it—you needn't go and make fools of us all by—

FERRAND. Monsieur, it is the first of April.

CONSTABLE. [With a sharp glance at him.] Can't neglect me duty, sir; that's impossible.

WELLWYN. Look here! She—slipped. She's been telling me. Come, Constable, there's a good fellow. May be the making of her, this.

CONSTABLE. I quite appreciate your good 'eart, sir, an' you make it very 'ard for me—but, come now! I put it to you as a gentleman, would you go back on yer duty if you was me?

[WELLWYN raises his hat, and plunges his fingers through and through his hair.]

WELLWYN. Well! God in heaven! Of all the d—d topsy—turvy—! Not a soul in the world wants her alive—and now she's to be prosecuted for trying to be where everyone wishes her.

CONSTABLE. Come, sir, come! Be a man!

[Throughout all this MRS. MEGAN has sat stolidly before the fire, but as FERRAND suddenly steps forward she looks up at him.]

FERRAND. Do not grieve, Monsieur! This will give her courage. There is nothing that gives more

courage than to see the irony of things. [He touches MRS. MEGAN'S shoulder.] Go, my child; it will do you good.

[MRS. MEGAN rises, and looks at him dazedly.]

CONSTABLE. [Coming forward, and taking her by the hand.] That's my good lass. Come along! We won't hurt you.

MRS. MEGAN. I don't want to go. They'll stare at me.

CONSTABLE. [Comforting.] Not they! I'll see to that.

WELLWYN. [Very upset.] Take her in a cab, Constable, if you must—for God's sake! [He pulls out a shilling.] Here!

CONSTABLE. [Taking the shilling.] I will, sir, certainly. Don't think I want to—

WELLWYN. No, no, I know. You're a good sort.

CONSTABLE. [Comfortable.] Don't you take on, sir. It's her first try; they won't be hard on 'er. Like as not only bind 'er over in her own recogs. not to do it again. Come, my dear.

MRS. MEGAN. [Trying to free herself from the policeman's cloak.] I want to take this off. It looks so funny.

[As she speaks the door is opened by ANN; behind whom is dimly seen the form of old TIMSON, still heading the curious persons.]

ANN. [Looking from one to the other in amazement.] What is it? What's happened? Daddy!

FERRAND. [Out of the silence.] It is nothing, Ma'moiselle! She has failed to drown herself. They run her in a little.

WELLWYN. Lend her your jacket, my dear; she'll catch her death.

[ANN, feeling MRS. MEGAN's arm, strips of her jacket, and helps her into it without a word.]

CONSTABLE. [Donning his cloak.] Thank you. Miss—very good of you, I'm sure.

MRS. MEGAN. [Mazed.] It's warm!

[She gives them all a last half-smiling look, and Passes with the CONSTABLE through the doorway.]

FERRAND. That makes the third of us, Monsieur. We are not in luck. To wish us dead, it seems, is easier than to let us die.

[He looks at ANN, who is standing with her eyes fixed on her father. WELLWYN has taken from his pocket a visiting card.]

WELLWYN. [To FERRAND.] Here quick; take this, run after her! When they've done with her tell her to come to us.

FERRAND. [Taking the card, and reading the address.] "No. 7, Haven House, Flight Street!" Rely on me, Monsieur—I will bring her myself to call on you. 'Au revoir, mon bon Monsieur'!

[He bends over WELLWYN's hand; then, with a bow to ANN goes out; his tattered figure can be seen through the window, passing in the wind. WELLWYN turns back to the fire. The figure of TIMSON advances into the doorway, no longer holding in either hand a waterproof leg-piece.]

TIMSON. [In a croaky voice.] Sir!

WELLWYN. What—you, Timson?

TIMSON. On me larst legs, sir. 'Ere! You can see 'em for yerself! Shawn't trouble yer long....

WELLWYN. [After a long and desperate stare.] Not now—TIMSON not now! Take this! [He takes out

another card, and hands it to TIMSON] Some other time.

TIMSON. [Taking the card.] Yer new address! You are a gen'leman.
[He lurches slowly away.]

[ANN shuts the street door and sets her back against it. The
rumble of the approaching van is heard outside. It ceases.]

ANN. [In a fateful voice.] Daddy! [They stare at each other.] Do you know what you've done? Given
your card to those six rotters.

WELLWYN. [With a blank stare.] Six?

ANN. [Staring round the naked room.] What was the good of this?

WELLWYN. [Following her eyes—very gravely.] Ann! It is stronger than me.

[Without a word ANN opens the door, and walks straight out. With a heavy sigh,
WELLWYN sinks down on the little stool before the fire. The three humble-men come in.]

CHIEF HUMBLE-MAN. [In an attitude of expectation.] This is the larst of it, sir.

WELLWYN. Oh! Ah! yes!

[He gives them money; then something seems to strike him, and he exhibits certain signs
of vexation. Suddenly he recovers, looks from one to the other, and then at the tea things.
A faint smile comes on his face.]

WELLWYN. You can finish the decanter.

[He goes out in haste.]

CHIEF HUMBLE-MAN. [Clinking the coins.] Third time of arskin'!
April fool! Not 'arf! Good old pigeon!

SECOND HUMBLE-MAN. 'Uman being, I call 'im.

CHIEF HUMBLE-MAN. [Taking the three glasses from the last packing-case, and pouring very
equally into them.] That's right. Tell you wot, I'd never 'a touched this unless 'e'd told me to, I wouldn't
—not with 'im.

SECOND HUMBLE-MAN. Ditto to that! This is a bit of orl right!
[Raising his glass.] Good luck!

THIRD HUMBLE-MAN. Same 'ere!

[Simultaneously they place their lips smartly against the liquor, and at once let fall their faces and
their glasses.]

CHIEF HUMBLE-MAN. [With great solemnity.] Crikey! Bill! Tea!
.....'E's got us!

[The stage is blotted dark.]

Curtain.

THE END

THE MOB

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

STEPHEN MORE, Member of Parliament
KATHERINE, his wife
OLIVE, their little daughter
THE DEAN OF STOUR, Katherine's uncle
GENERAL SIR JOHN JULIAN, her father
CAPTAIN HUBERT JULIAN, her brother
HELEN, his wife
EDWARD MENDIP, editor of "The Parthenon"
ALAN STEEL, More's secretary
JAMES HOME, architect |
CHARLES SHELDER, Solicitor |A deputation of More's
MARK WACE, bookseller |constituents
WILLIAM BANNING, manufacturer |
NURSE WREFORD
WREFORD (her son), Hubert's orderly
HIS SWEETHEART
THE FOOTMAN HENRY
A DOORKEEPER
SOME BLACK-COATED GENTLEMEN
A STUDENT
A GIRL

A MOB

ACT I. The dining-room of More's town house, evening.

ACT II. The same, morning.

ACT III. SCENE I. An alley at the back of a suburban theatre. SCENE II. Katherine's bedroom.

ACT IV. The dining-room of More's house, late afternoon.

AFTERMATH. The corner of a square, at dawn.

Between ACTS I and II some days elapse.

Between ACTS II and III three months.

Between ACT III SCENE I and ACT III SCENE II no time.

Between ACTS III and IV a few hours.

Between ACTS IV and AFTERMATH an indefinite period.

ACT I

It is half-past nine of a July evening. In a dining-room lighted by sconces, and appalled in wall-paper, carpet, and curtains of deep vivid blue, the large French windows between two columns are open on to a wide terrace, beyond which are seen trees in darkness, and distant shapes of lighted houses. On one side is a bay window, over which curtains are partly drawn. Opposite to this window is a door leading into the hall. At an oval rosewood table, set with silver, flowers, fruit, and wine, six people are seated after dinner. Back to the bay window is STEPHEN MORE, the host, a man of forty, with a fine-cut face, a rather

charming smile, and the eyes of an idealist; to his right, SIR, JOHN JULIAN, an old soldier, with thin brown features, and grey moustaches; to SIR JOHN's right, his brother, the DEAN OF STOUR, a tall, dark, ascetic-looking Churchman: to his right KATHERINE is leaning forward, her elbows on the table, and her chin on her hands, staring across at her husband; to her right sits EDWARD MENDIP, a pale man of forty-five, very bald, with a fine forehead, and on his clear-cut lips a smile that shows his teeth; between him and MORE is HELEN JULIAN, a pretty dark-haired young woman, absorbed in thoughts of her own. The voices are tuned to the pitch of heated discussion, as the curtain rises.

THE DEAN. I disagree with you, Stephen; absolutely, entirely disagree.

MORE. I can't help it.

MENDIP. Remember a certain war, Stephen! Were your chivalrous notions any good, then? And, what was winked at in an obscure young Member is anathema for an Under Secretary of State. You can't afford—

MORE. To follow my conscience? That's new, Mendip.

MENDIP. Idealism can be out of place, my friend.

THE DEAN. The Government is dealing here with a wild lawless race, on whom I must say I think sentiment is rather wasted.

MORE. God made them, Dean.

MENDIP. I have my doubts.

THE DEAN. They have proved themselves faithless. We have the right to chastise.

MORE. If I hit a little man in the eye, and he hits me back, have I the right to chastise him?

SIR JOHN. We didn't begin this business.

MORE. What! With our missionaries and our trading?

THE DEAN. It is news indeed that the work of civilization may be justifiably met by murder. Have you forgotten Glaive and Morlinson?

SIR JOHN. Yes. And that poor fellow Groome and his wife?

MORE. They went into a wild country, against the feeling of the tribes, on their own business. What has the nation to do with the mishaps of gamblers?

SIR JOHN. We can't stand by and see our own flesh and blood ill-treated!

THE DEAN. Does our rule bring blessing—or does it not, Stephen?

MORE. Sometimes; but with all my soul I deny the fantastic superstition that our rule can benefit a people like this, a nation of one race, as different from ourselves as dark from light—in colour, religion, every mortal thing. We can only pervert their natural instincts.

THE DEAN. That to me is an unintelligible point of view.

MENDIP. Go into that philosophy of yours a little deeper, Stephen— it spells stagnation. There are no fixed stars on this earth. Nations can't let each other alone.

MORE. Big ones could let little ones alone.

MENDIP. If they could there'd be no big ones. My dear fellow, we know little nations are your hobby, but surely office should have toned you down.

SIR JOHN. I've served my country fifty years, and I say she is not in the wrong.

MORE. I hope to serve her fifty, Sir John, and I say she is.

MENDIP. There are moments when such things can't be said, More.

MORE. They'll be said by me to-night, Mendip.

MENDIP. In the House?

[MORE nods.]

KATHERINE. Stephen!

MENDIP. Mrs. More, you mustn't let him. It's madness.

MORE. [Rising] You can tell people that to-morrow, Mendip. Give it a leader in 'The Parthenon'.

MENDIP. Political lunacy! No man in your position has a right to fly out like this at the eleventh hour.

MORE. I've made no secret of my feelings all along. I'm against this war, and against the annexation we all know it will lead to.

MENDIP. My dear fellow! Don't be so Quixotic! We shall have war within the next twenty-four hours, and nothing you can do will stop it.

HELEN. Oh! No!

MENDIP. I'm afraid so, Mrs. Hubert.

SIR JOHN. Not a doubt of it, Helen.

MENDIP. [TO MORE] And you mean to charge the windmill?

[MORE nods.]

MENDIP. 'C'est magnifique'!

MORE. I'm not out for advertisement.

MENDIP. You will get it!

MORE. Must speak the truth sometimes, even at that risk.

SIR JOHN. It is not the truth.

MENDIP. The greater the truth the greater the libel, and the greater the resentment of the person libelled.

THE DEAN. [Trying to bring matters to a blander level] My dear Stephen, even if you were right—which I deny—about the initial merits, there surely comes a point where the individual conscience must resign it self to the country's feeling. This has become a question of national honour.

SIR JOHN. Well said, James!

MORE. Nations are bad judges of their honour, Dean.

THE DEAN. I shall not follow you there.

MORE. No. It's an awkward word.

KATHERINE. [Stopping THE DEAN] Uncle James! Please!

[MORE looks at her intently.]

SIR JOHN. So you're going to put yourself at the head of the cranks, ruin your career, and make me ashamed that you're my son-in-law?

MORE. Is a man only to hold beliefs when they're popular? You've stood up to be shot at often enough, Sir John.

SIR JOHN. Never by my country! Your speech will be in all the foreign press-trust 'em for seizing on anything against us. A show-up before other countries—!

MORE. You admit the show-up?

SIR JOHN. I do not, sir.

THE DEAN. The position has become impossible. The state of things out there must be put an end to once for all! Come, Katherine, back us up!

MORE. My country, right or wrong! Guilty—still my country!

MENDIP. That begs the question.

[KATHERINE rises. THE DEAN, too, stands up.]

THE DEAN. [In a low voice] 'Quem Deus volt perdere'—!

SIR JOHN. Unpatriotic!

MORE. I'll have no truck with tyranny.

KATHERINE. Father doesn't admit tyranny. Nor do any of us, Stephen.

HUBERT JULIAN, a tall Soldier-like man, has come in.

HELEN. Hubert!

[She gets up and goes to him, and they talk together near the door.]

SIR JOHN. What in God's name is your idea? We've forborne long enough, in all conscience.

MORE. Sir John, we great Powers have got to change our ways in dealing with weaker nations. The very dogs can give us lessons— watch a big dog with a little one.

MENDIP. No, no, these things are not so simple as all that.

MORE. There's no reason in the world, Mendip, why the rules of chivalry should not apply to nations at least as well as to—dogs.

MENDIP. My dear friend, are you to become that hapless kind of outcast, a champion of lost causes?

MORE. This cause is not lost.

MENDIP. Right or wrong, as lost as ever was cause in all this world. There was never a time when the word "patriotism" stirred mob sentiment as it does now. 'Ware "Mob," Stephen—'ware "Mob"!

MORE. Because general sentiment's against me, I—a public man—am to deny my faith? The point is not whether I'm right or wrong, Mendip, but whether I'm to sneak out of my conviction because it's unpopular.

THE DEAN. I'm afraid I must go. [To KATHERINE] Good-night, my dear! Ah! Hubert! [He greets HUBERT] Mr. Mendip, I go your way. Can I drop you?

MENDIP. Thank you. Good-night, Mrs. More. Stop him! It's perdition.

[He and THE DEAN go out. KATHERINE puts her arm in HELEN'S, and takes her out of the room. HUBERT remains standing by the door]

SIR JOHN. I knew your views were extreme in many ways, Stephen, but I never thought the husband of my daughter would be a Peace-at-any- price man!

MORE. I am not! But I prefer to fight some one my own size.

SIR JOHN. Well! I can only hope to God you'll come to your senses before you commit the folly of this speech. I must get back to the War Office. Good-night, Hubert.

HUBERT. Good-night, Father.

[SIR JOHN goes out. HUBERT stands motionless, dejected.]

HUBERT. We've got our orders.

MORE. What? When d'you sail?

HUBERT. At once.

MORE. Poor Helen!

HUBERT. Not married a year; pretty bad luck! [MORE touches his arm in sympathy] Well! We've got to put feelings in our pockets. Look here, Stephen—don't make that speech! Think of Katherine—with the Dad at the War Office, and me going out, and Ralph and old George out there already! You can't trust your tongue when you're hot about a thing.

MORE. I must speak, Hubert.

HUBERT. No, no! Bottle yourself up for to-night. The next few hours 'll see it begin. [MORE turns from him] If you don't care whether you mess up your own career—don't tear Katherine in two!

MORE. You're not shirking your duty because of your wife.

HUBERT. Well! You're riding for a fall, and a godless mucker it'll be. This'll be no picnic. We shall get some nasty knocks out there. Wait and see the feeling here when we've had a force or two cut up in those mountains. It's awful country. Those fellows have got modern arms, and are jolly good fighters. Do drop it, Stephen!

MORE. Must risk something, sometimes, Hubert—even in my profession!

[As he speaks, KATHERINE comes in.]

HUBERT. But it's hopeless, my dear chap—absolutely.

[MORE turns to the window, HUBERT to his sister—then with a gesture towards MORE, as though to leave the matter to her, he goes out.]

KATHERINE. Stephen! Are you really going to speak? [He nods] I ask you not.

MORE. You know my feeling.

KATHERINE. But it's our own country. We can't stand apart from it. You won't stop anything—only make people hate you. I can't bear that.

MORE. I tell you, Kit, some one must raise a voice. Two or three reverses—certain to come—and the whole country will go wild. And one more little nation will cease to live.

KATHERINE. If you believe in your country, you must believe that the more land and power she has, the better for the world.

MORE. Is that your faith?

KATHERINE. Yes.

MORE. I respect it; I even understand it; but—I can't hold it.

KATHERINE. But, Stephen, your speech will be a rallying cry to all the cranks, and every one who has a spite against the country. They'll make you their figurehead. [MORE smiles] They will. Your chance of the Cabinet will go—you may even have to resign your seat.

MORE. Dogs will bark. These things soon blow over.

KATHERINE. No, no! If you once begin a thing, you always go on; and what earthly good?

MORE. History won't say: "And this they did without a single protest from their public men!"

KATHERINE. There are plenty who—

MORE. Poets?

KATHERINE. Do you remember that day on our honeymoon, going up Ben Lawers? You were lying on your face in the heather; you said it was like kissing a loved woman. There was a lark singing—you said that was the voice of one's worship. The hills were very blue; that's why we had blue here, because it was the best dress of our country. You do love her.

MORE. Love her!

KATHERINE. You'd have done this for me—then.

MORE. Would you have asked me—then, Kit?

KATHERINE. Yes. The country's our country! Oh! Stephen, think what it'll be like for me—with Hubert and the other boys out there. And poor Helen, and Father! I beg you not to make this speech.

MORE. Kit! This isn't fair. Do you want me to feel myself a cur?

KATHERINE. [Breathless] I—I—almost feel you'll be a cur to do it [She looks at him, frightened by her own words. Then, as the footman

HENRY has come in to clear the table—very low] I ask you not!

[He does not answer, and she goes out.]

MORE [To the servant] Later, please, Henry, later!

The servant retires. MORE still stands looking down at the dining-table; then putting his hand to his throat, as if to free it from the grip of his collar, he pours out a glass of water, and drinks it of. In the street, outside the bay window, two street musicians, a harp and a violin, have taken up their stand, and after some twangs and scrapes, break into music. MORE goes towards the sound, and draws aside one curtain. After a moment, he returns to the table, and takes up the notes of the speech. He is in an agony of indecision.

MORE. A cur!

He seems about to tear his notes across. Then, changing his mind, turns them over and over, muttering. His voice gradually grows louder, till he is declaiming to the empty room the peroration of his speech.

MORE. . . . We have arrogated to our land the title Champion of Freedom, Foe of Oppression. Is that indeed a bygone glory? Is it not worth some sacrifice of our pettier dignity, to avoid laying another stone upon its grave; to avoid placing before the searchlight eyes of History the spectacle of yet one more piece of national cynicism? We are about to force our will and our dominion on a race that has always been free, that loves its country, and its independence, as much as ever we love ours. I cannot sit silent to-night and see this begin. As we are tender of our own land, so we should be of the lands of others. I love my country. It is because I love my country that I raise my voice. Warlike in spirit these people may be—but they have no chance against ourselves. And war on such, however agreeable to the blind moment, is odious to the future. The great heart of mankind ever beats in sense and sympathy with the weaker. It is against this great heart of mankind that we are going. In the name of Justice and Civilization we pursue this policy; but by Justice we shall hereafter be judged, and by Civilization—condemned.

While he is speaking, a little figure has flown along the terrace outside, in the direction of the music, but has stopped at the sound of his voice, and stands in the open window, listening—a dark-haired, dark-eyed child, in a blue dressing-gown caught up in her hand. The street musicians, having reached the end of a tune, are silent.

In the intensity of MORES feeling, a wine-glass, gripped too strongly, breaks and falls in pieces onto a finger-bowl. The child starts forward into the room.

MORE. Olive!

OLIVE. Who were you speaking to, Daddy?

MORE. [Staring at her] The wind, sweetheart!

OLIVE. There isn't any!

MORE. What blew you down, then?

OLIVE. [Mysteriously] The music. Did the wind break the wine-glass, or did it come in two in your hand?

MORE. Now my sprite! Upstairs again, before Nurse catches you. Fly! Fly!

OLIVE. Oh! no, Daddy! [With confidential fervour] It feels like things to-night!

MORE. You're right there!

OLIVE. [Pulling him down to her, and whispering] I must get back again in secret. H'sh!

She suddenly runs and wraps herself into one of the curtains of the bay window. A young man enters, with a note in his hand.

MORE. Hello, Steel!

[The street musicians have again begun to play.]

STEEL. From Sir John—by special messenger from the War Office.

MORE. [Reading the note] "The ball is opened."

He stands brooding over the note, and STEEL looks at him anxiously. He is a dark, sallow, thin-faced young man, with the eyes of one who can attach himself to people, and suffer with them.

STEEL. I'm glad it's begun, sir. It would have been an awful pity to have made that speech.

MORE. You too, Steel!

STEEL. I mean, if it's actually started—

MORE. [Tearing tie note across] Yes. Keep that to yourself.

STEEL. Do you want me any more?

MORE takes from his breast pocket some papers, and pitches them down on the bureau.

MORE. Answer these.

STEEL. [Going to the bureau] Fetherby was simply sickening. [He begins to write. Struggle has begun again in MORE] Not the faintest recognition that there are two sides to it.

MORE gives him a quick look, goes quietly to the dining-table and picks up his sheaf of notes. Hiding them with his sleeve, he goes back to the window, where he again stands hesitating.

STEEL. Chief gem: [Imitating] "We must show Impudence at last that Dignity is not asleep!"

MORE. [Moving out on to the terrace] Nice quiet night!

STEEL. This to the Cottage Hospital—shall I say you will preside?

MORE. No.

STEEL writes; then looking up and seeing that MORE is no longer there, he goes to the window, looks to right and left, returns to the bureau, and is about to sit down again when a thought seems to strike him with consternation. He goes again to the window. Then snatching up his hat, he passes hurriedly out along the terrace. As he vanishes, KATHERINE comes in from the hall. After looking out on to the terrace she goes to the bay window; stands there listening; then comes restlessly back into the room. OLIVE, creeping quietly from behind the curtain, clasps her round the waist.

KATHERINE. O my darling! How you startled me! What are you doing down here, you wicked little sinner!

OLIVE. I explained all that to Daddy. We needn't go into it again, need we?

KATHERINE. Where is Daddy?

OLIVE. Gone.

KATHERINE. When?

OLIVE. Oh! only just, and Mr. Steel went after him like a rabbit. [The music stops] They haven't been paid, you know.

KATHERINE. Now, go up at once. I can't think how you got down here.

OLIVE. I can. [Wheedling] If you pay them, Mummy, they're sure to play another.

KATHERINE. Well, give them that! One more only.

She gives OLIVE a coin, who runs with it to the bay window, opens the aide casement, and calls to the musicians.

OLIVE. Catch, please! And would you play just one more?

She returns from the window, and seeing her mother lost in thought, rubs herself against her.

OLIVE. Have you got an ache?

KATHARINE. Right through me, darling!

OLIVE. Oh!

[The musicians strike up a dance.]

OLIVE. Oh! Mummy! I must just dance!

She kicks off her lisle blue shoes, and begins dancing. While she is capering HUBERT comes in from the hall. He stands watching his little niece for a minute, and KATHERINE looks at him.

HUBERT. Stephen gone!

KATHERINE. Yes—stop, Olive!

OLIVE. Are you good at my sort of dancing, Uncle?

HUBERT. Yes, chick—awfully!

KATHERINE. Now, Olive!

The musicians have suddenly broken off in the middle of a bar. From the street comes the noise of distant shouting.

OLIVE. Listen, Uncle! Isn't it a particular noise?

HUBERT and KATHERINE listen with all their might, and OLIVE stares at their faces. HUBERT goes to the window. The sound comes nearer. The shouted words are faintly heard: "Pyper— war—our force crosses frontier—sharp fightin'—pyper."

KATHERINE. [Breathless] Yes! It is.

The street cry is heard again in two distant voices coming from different directions: "War—pyper—sharp fightin' on the frontier—pyper."

KATHERINE. Shut out those ghouls!

As HUBERT closes the window, NURSE WREFORD comes in from the hall. She is an elderly woman endowed with a motherly grimness. She fixes OLIVE with her eye, then suddenly becomes conscious of the street cry.

NURSE. Oh! don't say it's begun.

[HUBERT comes from the window.]

NURSE. Is the regiment to go, Mr. Hubert?

HUBERT. Yes, Nanny.

NURSE. Oh, dear! My boy!

KATHERINE. [Signing to where OLIVE stands with wide eyes] Nurse!

HUBERT. I'll look after him, Nurse.

NURSE. And him keepin' company. And you not married a year. Ah! Mr. Hubert, now do 'ee take care; you and him's both so rash.

HUBERT. Not I, Nurse!

NURSE looks long into his face, then lifts her finger, and beckons OLIVE.

OLIVE. [Perceiving new sensations before her, goes quietly] Good-night, Uncle! Nanny, d'you know why I was obliged to come down? [In a fervent whisper] It's a secret!

[As she passes with NURSE out into the hall, her voice is heard saying, "Do tell me all about the war."]

HUBERT. [Smothering emotion under a blunt manner] We sail on Friday, Kit. Be good to Helen, old girl.

KATHERINE. Oh! I wish—! Why—can't—women—fight?

HUBERT. Yes, it's bad for you, with Stephen taking it like this. But he'll come round now it's once begun.

KATHERINE shakes her head, then goes suddenly up to him, and throws her arms round his neck. It is as if all the feeling pent up in her were finding vent in this hug.

The door from the hall is opened, and SIR JOHN'S voice is heard outside: "All right, I'll find her."

KATHERINE. Father!

[SIR JOHN comes in.]

SIR JOHN. Stephen get my note? I sent it over the moment I got to the War Office.

KATHERINE. I expect so. [Seeing the torn note on the table] Yes.

SIR JOHN. They're shouting the news now. Thank God, I stopped that crazy speech of his in time.

KATHERINE. Have you stopped it?

SIR JOHN. What! He wouldn't be such a sublime donkey?

KATHERINE. I think that is just what he might be. [Going to the window] We shall know soon.

[SIR JOHN, after staring at her, goes up to HUBERT.]

SIR JOHN. Keep a good heart, my boy. The country's first. [They exchange a hand-squeeze.]

KATHERINE backs away from the window. STEEL has appeared there from the terrace, breathless from running.

STEEL. Mr. More back?

KATHERINE. No. Has he spoken?

STEEL. Yes.

KATHERINE. Against?

STEEL. Yes.

SIR JOHN. What? After!

SIR JOHN stands rigid, then turns and marches straight out into the hall. At a sign from KATHERINE, HUBERT follows him.

KATHERINE. Yes, Mr. Steel?

STEEL. [Still breathless and agitated] We were here—he slipped away from me somehow. He must have gone straight down to the House. I ran over, but when I got in under the Gallery he was speaking already. They expected something—I never heard it so still there. He gripped them from the first word—deadly—every syllable. It got some of those fellows. But all the time, under the silence you could feel a—sort of—of—current going round. And then Sherratt—I think it was—began it, and you saw the anger rising in them; but he kept them down—his quietness! The feeling! I've never seen anything like it there.

Then there was a whisper all over the House that fighting had begun. And the whole thing broke out—regular riot—as if they could have killed him. Some one tried to drag him down by the coat-tails, but he shook him off, and went on. Then he stopped dead and walked out, and the noise dropped like a stone. The whole thing didn't last five minutes. It was fine, Mrs. More; like—like lava; he was the only cool person there. I wouldn't have missed it for anything—it was grand!

MORE has appeared on the terrace, behind STEEL.

KATHERINE. Good-night, Mr. Steel.

STEEL. [Startled] Oh!—Good-night!

He goes out into the hall. KATHERINE picks up OLIVE'S shoes, and stands clasping them to her breast. MORE comes in.

KATHERINE. You've cleared your conscience, then! I didn't think you'd hurt me so.

MORE does not answer, still living in the scene he has gone through, and KATHERINE goes a little nearer to him.

KATHERINE. I'm with the country, heart and soul, Stephen. I warn you.

While they stand in silence, facing each other, the footman, HENRY, enters from the hall.

FOOTMAN. These notes, sir, from the House of Commons.

KATHERINE. [Taking them] You can have the room directly.

[The FOOTMAN goes out.]

MORE. Open them!

KATHERINE opens one after the other, and lets them fall on the table.

MORE. Well?

KATHERINE. What you might expect. Three of your best friends. It's begun.

MORE. 'Ware Mob! [He gives a laugh] I must write to the Chief.

KATHERINE makes an impulsive movement towards him; then quietly goes to the bureau, sits down and takes up a pen.

KATHERINE. Let me make the rough draft. [She waits] Yes?

MORE. [Dictating]

"July 15th.

"DEAR SIR CHARLES, After my speech to-night, embodying my most unalterable convictions [KATHERINE turns and looks up at him, but he is staring straight before him, and with a little movement of despair she goes on writing] I have no alternative but to place the resignation of my Under-Secretaryship in your hands. My view, my faith in this matter may be wrong—but I am surely right to keep the flag of my faith flying. I imagine I need not enlarge on the reasons——"

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT. II

Before noon a few days later. The open windows of the dining-room let in the sunlight. On the table a number of newspapers are littered. HELEN is sitting there, staring straight before her. A newspaper boy runs by outside calling out his wares. At the sound she gets up and goes out to the terrace. HUBERT enters from the hall. He goes at once to the terrace, and draws HELEN into the room.

HELEN. Is it true—what they're shouting?

HUBERT. Yes. Worse than we thought. They got our men all crumpled up in the Pass—guns helpless. Ghastly beginning.

HELEN. Oh, Hubert!

HUBERT. My dearest girl!

HELEN puts her face up to his. He kisses her. Then she turns quickly into the bay window. The door from the hall has been opened, and the footman, HENRY, comes in, preceding WREFORD and his sweetheart.

HENRY. Just wait here, will you, while I let Mrs. More know.
[Catching sight of HUBERT] Beg pardon, sir!

HUBERT. All right, Henry. [Off-hand] Ah! Wreford! [The FOOTMAN withdraws] So you've brought her round. That's good! My sister'll look after her—don't you worry! Got everything packed? Three o'clock sharp.

WREFORD. [A broad faced soldier, dressed in khaki with a certain look of dry humour, now dimmed-speaking with a West Country burr] That's right, zurr; all's ready.

HELEN has come out of the window, and is quietly looking at WREFORD and the girl standing there so awkwardly.

HELEN. [Quietly] Take care of him, Wreford.

HUBERT. We'll take care of each other, won't we, Wreford?

HELEN. How long have you been engaged?

THE GIRL. [A pretty, indeterminate young woman] Six months. [She sobs suddenly.]

HELEN. Ah! He'll soon be safe back.

WREFORD. I'll owe 'em for this. [In a lacy voice to her] Don't 'ee now! Don't 'ee!

HELEN. No! Don't cry, please!

She stands struggling with her own lips, then goes out on to the terrace, HUBERT following. WREFORD and his girl remain where they were, strange and awkward, she muffling her sobs.

WREFORD. Don't 'ee go on like that, Nance; I'll 'ave to take you 'ome. That's silly, now we've a-come. I might be dead and buried by the fuss you're makin'. You've a-drove the lady away. See!

She regains control of herself as the door is opened and KATHERINE appears, accompanied by OLIVE, who regards WREFORD with awe and curiosity, and by NURSE, whose eyes are red, but whose manner is composed.

KATHERINE. My brother told me; so glad you've brought her.

WREFORD. Ye—as, M'. She feels me goin', a bit.

KATHERINE. Yes, yes! Still, it's for the country, isn't it?

THE GIRL. That's what Wreford keeps tellin' me. He've got to go—so it's no use upsettin' 'im. And of course I keep tellin' him I shall be all right.

NURSE. [Whose eyes never leave her son's face] And so you will.

THE GIRL. Wreford thought it'd comfort him to know you were interested in me. 'E's so 'ot-headed I'm sure somethin'll come to 'im.

KATHERINE. We've all got some one going. Are you coming to the docks? We must send them off in good spirits, you know.

OLIVE. Perhaps he'll get a medal.

KATHERINE. Olive!

NURSE. You wouldn't like for him to be hanging back, one of them anti-patriot, stop-the-war ones.

KATHERINE. [Quickly] Let me see—I have your address. [Holding out her hand to WREFORD] We'll look after her.

OLIVE. [In a loud whisper] Shall I lend him my toffee?

KATHERINE. If you like, dear. [To WREFORD] Now take care of my brother and yourself, and we'll take care of her.

WREFORD. Ye—as, M'.

He then looks rather wretchedly at his girl, as if the interview had not done so much for him as he had hoped. She drops a little curtsey. WREFORD salutes.

OLIVE. [Who has taken from the bureau a packet, places it in his hand] It's very nourishing!

WREFORD. Thank you, miss.

Then, nudging each other, and entangled in their feelings and the conventions, they pass out, shepherded by NURSE.

KATHERINE. Poor things!

OLIVE. What is an anti-patriot, stop-the-war one, Mummy?

KATHERINE. [Taking up a newspaper] Just a stupid name, dear—don't chatter!

OLIVE. But tell me just one weeny thing!

KATHERINE. Well?

OLIVE. Is Daddy one?

KATHERINE. Olive! How much do you know about this war?

OLIVE. They won't obey us properly. So we have to beat them, and take away their country. We shall shan't we?

KATHERINE. Yes. But Daddy doesn't want us to; he doesn't think it fair, and he's been saying so. People are very angry with him.

OLIVE. Why isn't it fair? I suppose we're littler than them.

KATHERINE. No.

OLIVE. Oh! in history we always are. And we always win. That's why I like history. Which are you for, Mummy—us or them?

KATHERINE. Us.

OLIVE. Then I shall have to be. It's a pity we're not on the same side as Daddy. [KATHERINE shudders] Will they hurt him for not taking our side?

KATHERINE. I expect they will, Olive.

OLIVE. Then we shall have to be extra nice to him.

KATHERINE. If we can.

OLIVE. I can; I feel like it.

HELEN and HUBERT have returned along the terrace. Seeing KATHERINE and the child, HELEN passes on, but HUBERT comes in at the French window.

OLIVE. [Catching sight of him-softly] Is Uncle Hubert going to the front to-day? [KATHERINE nods] But not grandfather?

KATHERINE. No, dear.

OLIVE. That's lucky for them, isn't it?

HUBERT comes in. The presence of the child give him self-control.

HUBERT. Well, old girl, it's good-bye. [To OLIVE] What shall I bring you back, chick?

OLIVE. Are there shops at the front? I thought it was dangerous.

HUBERT. Not a bit.

OLIVE. [Disillusioned] Oh!

KATHERINE. Now, darling, give Uncle a good hug.

[Under cover of OLIVE's hug, KATHERINE repairs her courage.]

KATHERINE. The Dad and I'll be with you all in spirit. Good-bye, old boy!

They do not dare to kiss, and HUBERT goes out very stiff and straight, in the doorway passing STEEL, of whom he takes no notice. STEEL hesitates, and would go away.

KATHERINE. Come in, Mr. Steel.

STEEL. The deputation from Toulmin ought to be here, Mrs. More. It's twelve.

OLIVE. [Having made a little ball of newspaper-slyly] Mr. Steel, catch!

[She throws, and STEEL catches it in silence.]

KATHERINE. Go upstairs, won't you, darling?

OLIVE. Mayn't I read in the window, Mummy? Then I shall see if any soldiers pass.

KATHERINE. No. You can go out on the terrace a little, and then you must go up.

[OLIVE goes reluctantly out on to the terrace.]

STEEL. Awful news this morning of that Pass! And have you seen these? [Reading from the newspaper] "We will have no truck with the jargon of the degenerate who vilifies his country at such a moment. The Member for Toulmin has earned for himself the contempt of all virile patriots." [He takes up a second journal] "There is a certain type of public man who, even at his own expense, cannot resist the itch to advertise himself. We would, at moments of national crisis, muzzle such persons, as we muzzle dogs that we suspect of incipient rabies . . ." They're in full cry after him!

KATHERINE. I mind much more all the creatures who are always flinging mud at the country making him their hero suddenly! You know what's in his mind?

STEEL. Oh! We must get him to give up that idea of lecturing everywhere against the war, Mrs. More; we simply must.

KATHERINE. [Listening] The deputation's come. Go and fetch him, Mr. Steel. He'll be in his room, at the House.

[STEEL goes out, and KATHERINE stands at bay. In a moment he opens the door again, to usher in the deputation; then retires. The four gentlemen have entered as if conscious of grave issues. The first and most picturesque is JAMES HOME, a thin, tall, grey-bearded man, with plentiful hair, contradictory eyebrows, and the half-shy, half-bold manners, alternately rude and over polite, of one not accustomed to Society, yet secretly much taken with himself. He is dressed in rough tweeds, with a red silk tie slung through a ring, and is closely followed by MARK WACE, a waxy, round-faced man of middle-age, with sleek dark hair, traces of whisker, and a smooth way of continually rubbing his hands together, as if selling something to an esteemed customer. He is rather stout, wears dark clothes, with a large gold chain. Following him comes CHARLES SHELDON, a lawyer of fifty, with a bald egg-shaped head, and gold pince-nez. He has little side whiskers, a leathery, yellowish skin, a rather kind but watchful and dubious face, and when he speaks seems to have a plum in his mouth, which arises from the preponderance of his shaven upper lip. Last of the deputation comes WILLIAM BANNING, an energetic-looking, square-shouldered, self-made country-man, between fifty and sixty, with grey moustaches, ruddy face, and lively brown eyes.]

KATHERINE. How do you do, Mr. Home?

HOME. [Bowing rather extravagantly over her hand, as if to show his independence of women's influence] Mrs. More! We hardly expected— This is an honour.

WACE. How do you do, Ma'am?

KATHERINE. And you, Mr. Wace?

WACE. Thank you, Ma'am, well indeed!

SHELDER. How d'you do, Mrs. More?

KATHERINE. Very well, thank you, Mr. Shelder.

BANNING. [Speaking with a rather broad country accent] This is but a poor occasion, Ma'am.

KATHERINE. Yes, Mr. Banning. Do sit down, gentlemen.

Seeing that they will not settle down while she is standing, she sits at the table. They gradually take their seats. Each member of the deputation in his own way is severely hanging back from any mention of the subject in hand; and KATHERINE as intent on drawing them to it.

KATHERINE. My husband will be here in two minutes. He's only over at the House.

SHELDER. [Who is of higher standing and education than the others] Charming position—this, Mrs. More! So near the—er—Centre of—Gravity um?

KATHERINE. I read the account of your second meeting at Toulmin.

BANNING. It's bad, Mrs. More—bad. There's no disguising it. That speech was moon-summer madness—Ah! it was! Take a lot of explaining away. Why did you let him, now? Why did you? Not your views, I'm sure!

[He looks at her, but for answer she only compresses her lips.]

BANNING. I tell you what hit me—what's hit the whole constituency— and that's his knowing we were over the frontier, fighting already, when he made it.

KATHERINE. What difference does it make if he did know?

HOME. Hitting below the belt—I should have thought—you'll pardon me!

BANNING. Till war's begun, Mrs. More, you're entitled to say what you like, no doubt—but after! That's going against your country. Ah! his speech was strong, you know—his speech was strong.

KATHERINE. He had made up his mind to speak. It was just an accident the news coming then.

[A silence.]

BANNING. Well, that's true, I suppose. What we really want is to make sure he won't break out again.

HOME. Very high-minded, his views of course—but, some consideration for the common herd. You'll pardon me!

SHELDER. We've come with the friendliest feelings, Mrs. More—but, you know, it won't do, this sort of thing!

WACE. We shall be able to smooth him down. Oh! surely.

BANNING. We'd be best perhaps not to mention about his knowing that fighting had begun.

[As he speaks, MORE enters through the French windows. They all rise.]

MORE. Good-morning, gentlemen.

[He comes down to the table, but does not offer to shake hands.]

BANNING. Well, Mr. More? You've made a woeful mistake, sir; I tell you to your face.

MORE. As everybody else does, Banning. Sit down again, please.

[They gradually resume their seats, and MORE sits in KATHERINE's chair. She alone remains standing leaning against the corner of the bay window, watching their faces.]

BANNING. You've seen the morning's telegrams? I tell you, Mr. More—another reverse like that, and the flood will sweep you clean away. And I'll not blame it. It's only flesh and blood.

MORE, Allow for the flesh and blood in me, too, please. When I spoke the other night it was not without a certain feeling here. [He touches his heart.]

BANNING. But your attitude's so sudden—you'd not been going that length when you were down with us in May.

MORE. Do me the justice to remember that even then I was against our policy. It cost me three weeks' hard struggle to make up my mind to that speech. One comes slowly to these things, Banning.

SHELDER. Case of conscience?

MORE. Such things have happened, Shelder, even in politics.

SHELDER. You see, our ideals are naturally low—how different from yours!

[MORE smiles.]

KATHERINE, who has drawn near her husband, moves back again, as if relieved at this gleam of geniality. WACE rubs his hands.

BANNING. There's one thing you forget, sir. We send you to Parliament, representing us; but you couldn't find six men in the whole constituency that would have bidden you to make that speech.

MORE. I'm sorry; but I can't help my convictions, Banning.

SHELDER. What was it the prophet was without in his own country?

BANNING. Ah! but we're not funning, Mr. More. I've never known feeling run so high. The sentiment of both meetings was dead against you. We've had showers of letters to headquarters. Some from very good men—very warm friends of yours.

SHELDER. Come now! It's not too late. Let's go back and tell them you won't do it again.

MORE. Muzzling order?

BANNING. [Bluntly] That's about it.

MORE. Give up my principles to save my Parliamentary skin. Then, indeed, they might call me a degenerate! [He touches the newspapers on the table.]

KATHERINE makes an abrupt and painful movement, then remains as still as before, leaning against the corner of the window-seat.

BANNING. Well, Well! I know. But we don't ask you to take your words back—we only want discretion in the future.

MORE. Conspiracy of silence! And have it said that a mob of newspapers have hounded me to it.

BANNING. They won't say that of you.

SHELDER. My dear More, aren't you rather dropping to our level? With your principles you ought not to care two straws what people say.

MORE. But I do. I can't betray the dignity and courage of public men. If popular opinion is to control the utterances of her politicians, then good-bye indeed to this country!

BANNING. Come now! I won't say that your views weren't sound enough before the fighting began. I've never liked our policy out there. But our blood's being spilled; and that makes all the difference. I don't suppose they'd want me exactly, but I'd be ready to go myself. We'd all of us be ready. And we can't have the man that represents us talking wild, until we've licked these fellows. That's it in a nutshell.

MORE. I understand your feeling, Banning. I tender you my resignation. I can't and won't hold on where I'm not wanted.

BANNING. No, no, no! Don't do that! [His accent broader and broader] You've 'ad your say, and there it is. Coom now! You've been our Member nine years, in rain and shine.

SHELDER. We want to keep you, More. Come! Give us your promise—that's a good man!

MORE. I don't make cheap promises. You ask too much.

[There is silence, and they all look at MORE.]

SHELDER. There are very excellent reasons for the Government's policy.

MORE. There are always excellent reasons for having your way with the weak.

SHELDER. My dear More, how can you get up any enthusiasm for those cattle-lifting ruffians?

MORE. Better lift cattle than lift freedom.

SHELDER. Well, all we'll ask is that you shouldn't go about the country, saying so.

MORE. But that is just what I must do.

[Again they all look at MORE in consternation.]

HOME. Not down our way, you'll pardon me.

WACE. Really—really, sir—

SHELDER. The time of crusades is past, More.

MORE. Is it?

BANNING. Ah! no, but we don't want to part with you, Mr. More. It's a bitter thing, this, after three elections. Look at the 'uman side of it! To speak ill of your country when there's been a disaster like this terrible business in the Pass. There's your own wife. I see her brother's regiment's to start this very afternoon. Come now—how must she feel?

MORE breaks away to the bay window. The DEPUTATION exchange glances.

MORE. [Turning] To try to muzzle me like this—is going too far.

BANNING. We just want to put you out of temptation.

MORE. I've held my seat with you in all weathers for nine years. You've all been bricks to me. My heart's in my work, Banning; I'm not eager to undergo political eclipse at forty.

SHELDER. Just so—we don't want to see you in that quandary.

BANNING. It'd be no friendliness to give you a wrong impression of the state of feeling. Silence—till the bitterness is overpast; there's naught else for it, Mr. More, while you feel as you do. That tongue of yours! Come! You owe us something. You're a big man; it's the big view you ought to take.

MORE. I am trying to.

HOME. And what precisely is your view—you'll pardon my asking?

MORE. [Turning on him] Mr. Home a great country such as ours—is trustee for the highest sentiments of mankind. Do these few outrages justify us in stealing the freedom of this little people?

BANNING. Steal—their freedom! That's rather running before the hounds.

MORE. Ah, Banning! now we come to it. In your hearts you're none of you for that—neither by force nor fraud. And yet you all know that we've gone in there to stay, as we've gone into other lands—as all we big Powers go into other lands, when they're little and weak. The Prime Minister's words the other night were these: "If we are forced to spend this blood and money now, we must never again be forced." What does that mean but swallowing this country?

SHELDER. Well, and quite frankly, it'd be no bad thing.

HOME. We don't want their wretched country—we're forced.

MORE. We are not forced.

SHELDER. My dear More, what is civilization but the logical, inevitable swallowing up of the lower by the higher types of man? And what else will it be here?

MORE. We shall not agree there, Shelder; and we might argue it all day. But the point is, not whether you or I are right—the point is: What is a man who holds a faith with all his heart to do? Please tell me.

[There is a silence.]

BANNING. [Simply] I was just thinkin' of those poor fellows in the Pass.

MORE. I can see them, as well as you, Banning. But, imagine! Up in our own country—the Black Valley—twelve hundred foreign devils dead and dying—the crows busy over them—in our own country, our own valley—ours—ours—violated. Would you care about "the poor fellows" in that Pass?—Invading, stealing dogs! Kill them—kill them! You would, and I would, too!

The passion of those words touches and grips as no arguments could; and they are silent.

MORE. Well! What's the difference out there? I'm not so inhuman as not to want to see this disaster in the Pass wiped out. But once that's done, in spite of my affection for you; my ambitions, and they're not few; [Very low] in spite of my own wife's feeling, I must be free to raise my voice against this war.

BANNING. [Speaking slowly, consulting the others, as it were, with his eyes] Mr. More, there's no man I respect more than yourself. I can't tell what they'll say down there when we go back; but I, for one, don't feel it in me to take a hand in pressing you farther against your faith.

SHELDER. We don't deny that—that you have a case of sorts.

WACE. No—surely.

SHELDER. A—man should be free, I suppose, to hold his own opinions.

MORE. Thank you, Shelder.

BANNING. Well! well! We must take you as you are; but it's a rare pity; there'll be a lot of trouble——

His eyes light on Honk who is leaning forward with hand raised to his ear, listening. Very faint, from far in the distance, there is heard a skirling sound. All become conscious of it, all listen.

HOME. [Suddenly] Bagpipes!

The figure of OLIVE flies past the window, out on the terrace.

KATHERINE turns, as if to follow her.

SHELDER. Highlanders!

[He rises. KATHERINE goes quickly out on to the terrace. One by one they all follow to the window. One by one go out on to the terrace, till MORE is left alone. He turns to the bay window. The music is swelling, coming nearer. MORE leaves the window—his face distorted by the strafe of his emotions. He paces the room, taking, in some sort, the rhythm of the march.]

[Slowly the music dies away in the distance to a drum-tap and the tramp of a company. MORE stops at the table, covering his eyes with his hands.]

[The DEPUTATION troop back across the terrace, and come in at the French windows. Their faces and manners have quite changed. KATHERINE follows them as far as the window.]

HOME. [In a strange, almost threatening voice] It won't do, Mr. More. Give us your word, to hold your peace!

SHELDER. Come! More.

WACE. Yes, indeed—indeed!

BANNING. We must have it.

MORE. [Without lifting his head] I—I——

The drum-tap of a regiment marching is heard.

BANNING. Can you hear that go by, man—when your country's just been struck?

Now comes the scale and mutter of a following crowd.

MORE. I give you——

Then, sharp and clear above all other sounds, the words: "Give the beggars hell, boys!" "Wipe your feet on their dirty country!" "Don't leave 'em a gory acre!" And a burst of hoarse cheering.

MORE. [Flinging up his head] That's reality! By Heaven! No!

KATHERINE. Oh!

SHELDER. In that case, we'll go.

BANNING. You mean it? You lose us, then!

[MORE bows.]

HOME. Good riddance! [Venomously—his eyes darting between MORE and KATHERINE] Go and stomp the country! Find out what they think of you! You'll pardon me!

One by one, without a word, only BANNING looking back, they pass out into the hall. MORE sits down at the table before the pile of newspapers. KATHERINE, in the window, never moves. OLIVE comes along the terrace to her mother.

OLIVE. They were nice ones! Such a lot of dirty people following, and some quite clean, Mummy. [Conscious from her mother's face that something is very wrong, she looks at her father, and then steals up to his side] Uncle Hubert's gone, Daddy; and Auntie Helen's crying. And—look at Mummy!

[MORE raises his head and looks.]

OLIVE. Do be on our side! Do!

She rubs her cheek against his. Feeling that he does not rub his cheek against hers, OLIVE stands away, and looks from him to her mother in wonder.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

SCENE I

A cobble-stoned alley, without pavement, behind a suburban theatre. The tall, blind, dingy-yellowish wall of the building is plastered with the tattered remnants of old entertainment bills, and the words: "To Let," and with several torn, and one still virgin placard, containing this announcement: "Stop-the- War Meeting, October 1st. Addresses by STEPHEN MORE, Esq., and others." The alley is plentifully strewn with refuse and scraps of paper. Three stone steps, inset, lead to the stage door. It is a dark night, and a street lamp close to the wall throws all the light there is. A faint, confused murmur, as of distant hooting is heard. Suddenly a boy comes running, then two rough girls hurry past in the direction of the sound; and the alley is again deserted. The stage door opens, and a doorkeeper, poking his head out, looks up and down. He withdraws, but in a second reappears, preceding three black-coated gentlemen.

DOORKEEPER. It's all clear. You can get away down here, gentlemen. Keep to the left, then sharp to the right, round the corner.

THE THREE. [Dusting themselves, and settling their ties] Thanks, very much! Thanks!

FIRST BLACK-COATED GENTLEMAN. Where's More? Isn't he coming?

They are joined by a fourth black-coated GENTLEMAN.

FOURTH BLACK-COATED GENTLEMAN. Just behind. [TO the DOORKEEPER] Thanks.

They hurry away. The DOORKEEPER retires. Another boy runs past. Then the door opens again. STEEL and MORE come out.

MORE stands hesitating on the steps; then turns as if to go back.

STEEL. Come along, sir, come!

MORE. It sticks in my gizzard, Steel.

STEEL. [Running his arm through MORE'S, and almost dragging him down the steps] You owe it to the theatre people. [MORE still hesitates] We might be penned in there another hour; you told Mrs. More half-past ten; it'll only make her anxious. And she hasn't seen you for six weeks.

MORE. All right; don't dislocate my arm.

They move down the steps, and away to the left, as a boy comes running down the alley. Sighting MORE, he stops dead, spins round, and crying shrilly: "'Ere 'e is! That's 'im! 'Ere 'e is!" he bolts back in the direction whence he came.

STEEL. Quick, Sir, quick!

MORE. That is the end of the limit, as the foreign ambassador remarked.

STEEL. [Pulling him back towards the door] Well! come inside again, anyway!

A number of men and boys, and a few young girls, are trooping quickly from the left. A motley crew, out for excitement; loafers, artisans, navvies; girls, rough or dubious. All in the mood of hunters, and having tasted blood. They gather round the steps displaying the momentary irresolution and curiosity that follows on a new development of any chase. MORE, on the bottom step, turns and eyes them.

A GIRL. [At the edge] Which is 'im! The old 'un or the young?

[MORE turns, and mounts the remaining steps.]

TALL YOUTH. [With lank black hair under a bowler hat] You blasted traitor!

MORE faces round at the volley of jeering that follows; the chorus of booing swells, then gradually dies, as if they realized that they were spoiling their own sport.

A ROUGH GIRL. Don't frighten the poor feller!

[A girl beside her utters a shrill laugh.]

STEEL. [Tugging at MORE's arm] Come along, sir.

MORE. [Shaking his arm free—to the crowd] Well, what do you want?

A VOICE. Speech.

MORE. Indeed! That's new.

ROUGH VOICE. [At the back of the crowd] Look at his white liver. You can see it in his face.

A BIG NAVY. [In front] Shut it! Give 'im a chanst!

TALL YOUTH. Silence for the blasted traitor?

A youth plays the concertina; there is laughter, then an abrupt silence.

MORE. You shall have it in a nutshell!

A SHOPBOY. [Flinging a walnut-shell which strikes MORE on the shoulder] Here y'are!

MORE. Go home, and think! If foreigners invaded us, wouldn't you be fighting tooth and nail like those tribesmen, out there?

TALL YOUTH. Treacherous dogs! Why don't they come out in the open?

MORE. They fight the best way they can.

[A burst of hooting is led by a soldier in khaki on the outskirt.]

MORE. My friend there in khaki led that hooting. I've never said a word against our soldiers. It's the Government I condemn for putting them to this, and the Press for hounding on the Government, and all of you for being led by the nose to do what none of you would do, left to yourselves.

The TALL YOUTH leads a somewhat unspontaneous burst of execration.

MORE. I say not one of you would go for a weaker man.

VOICES IN THE CROWD.

ROUGH VOICE. Tork sense!

GIRL'S VOICE. He's gittin' at you!

TALL YOUTH'S VOICE. Shiny skunk!

A NAVVY. [Suddenly shouldering forward] Look 'ere, Mister! Don't you come gaflin' to those who've got mates out there, or it'll be the worse for you-you go 'ome!

COCKNEY VOICE. And git your wife to put cottonwool in yer ears.

[A spurt of laughter.]

A FRIENDLY VOICE. [From the outskirts] Shame! there! Bravo, More! Keep it up!

[A scuffle drowns this cry.]

MORE. [With vehemence] Stop that! Stop that! You—!

TALL YOUTH. Traitor!

AN ARTISAN. Who black-legged?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Ought to be shot-backin' his country's enemies!

MORE. Those tribesmen are defending their homes.

TWO VOICES. Hear! hear!

[They are hustled into silence.]

TALL YOUTH. Wind-bag!

MORE. [With sudden passion] Defending their homes! Not mobbing unarmed men!

[STEEL again pulls at his arm.]

ROUGH. Shut it, or we'll do you in!

MORE. [Recovering his coolness] Ah! Do me in by all means! You'd deal such a blow at cowardly mobs as wouldn't be forgotten in your time.

STEEL. For God's sake, sir!

MORE. [Shaking off his touch] Well!

There is an ugly rush, checked by the fall of the foremost figures, thrown too suddenly against the bottom step. The crowd recoils.

There is a momentary lull, and MORE stares steadily down at them.

COCKNEY VOICE. Don't 'e speak well! What eloquence!

Two or three nutshells and a piece of orange-peel strike MORE across the face. He takes no notice.

ROUGH VOICE. That's it! Give 'im some encouragement.

The jeering laughter is changed to anger by the contemptuous smile on MORE'S face.

A TALL YOUTH. Traitor!

A VOICE. Don't stand there like a stuck pig.

A ROUGH. Let's 'ave 'im dahn off that!

Under cover of the applause that greets this, he strikes MORE across the legs with a belt. STEEL starts forward. MORE, flinging out his arm, turns him back, and resumes his tranquil staring at the crowd, in whom the sense of being foiled by this silence is fast turning to rage.

THE CROWD. Speak up, or get down! Get off! Get away, there—or we'll make you! Go on!

[MORE remains immovable.]

A YOUTH. [In a lull of disconcertion] I'll make 'im speak! See!

He darts forward and spits, defiling MORES hand. MORE jerks it up as if it had been stung, then stands as still as ever. A spurt of laughter dies into a shiver of repugnance at the action. The shame is fanned again to fury by the sight of MORES scornful face.

TALL YOUTH. [Out of murmuring] Shift! or you'll get it!

A VOICE. Enough of your ugly mug!

A ROUGH. Give 'im one!

Two flung stones strike MORE. He staggers and nearly falls, then rights himself.

A GIRL'S VOICE. Shame!

FRIENDLY VOICE. Bravo, More! Stick to it!

A ROUGH. Give 'im another!

A VOICE. No!

A GIRL'S VOICE. Let 'im alone! Come on, Billy, this ain't no fun!

Still looking up at MORE, the whole crowd falls into an uneasy silence, broken only by the shuffling of feet. Then the BIG NAVVY in the front rank turns and elbows his way out to the edge of the crowd.

THE NAVVY. Let 'im be!

With half-sullen and half-shamefaced acquiescence the crowd breaks up and drifts back whence it came, till the alley is nearly empty.

MORE. [As if coming to, out of a trance-wiping his hand and dusting his coat] Well, Steel!

And followed by STEEL, he descends the steps and moves away. Two policemen pass glancing up at the broken glass. One of them stops and makes a note.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

SCENE II

The window-end of KATHERINE'S bedroom, panelled in cream-coloured wood. The light from four candles is falling on KATHERINE, who is sitting before the silver mirror of an old oak dressing-table, brushing her hair. A door, on the left, stands ajar. An oak chair against the wall close to a recessed window is all the other furniture. Through this window the blue night is seen, where a mist is rolled out flat amongst trees, so that only dark clumps of boughs show here and there, beneath a moonlit sky. As the curtain rises, KATHERINE, with brush arrested, is listening. She begins again brushing her hair, then stops, and taking a packet of letters from a drawer of her dressing-table, reads. Through the just open door behind her comes the voice of OLIVE.

OLIVE. Mummy! I'm awake!

But KATHERINE goes on reading; and OLIVE steals into the room in her nightgown.

OLIVE. [At KATHERINE'S elbow—examining her watch on its stand] It's fourteen minutes to eleven.

KATHERINE. Olive, Olive!

OLIVE. I just wanted to see the time. I never can go to sleep if I try—it's quite helpless, you know. Is there a victory yet? [KATHERINE, shakes her head] Oh! I prayed extra special for one in the evening papers. [Straying round her mother] Hasn't Daddy come?

KATHERINE. Not yet.

OLIVE. Are you waiting for him? [Burying her face in her mother's hair] Your hair is nice, Mummy. It's particular to-night.

KATHERINE lets fall her brush, and looks at her almost in alarm.

OLIVE. How long has Daddy been away?

KATHERINE. Six weeks.

OLIVE. It seems about a hundred years, doesn't it? Has he been making speeches all the time?

KATHERINE. Yes.

OLIVE. To-night, too?

KATHERINE. Yes.

OLIVE. The night that man was here whose head's too bald for anything—oh! Mummy, you know—the one who cleans his teeth so tremendously—I heard Daddy making a speech to the wind. It broke a wine-glass. His speeches must be good ones, mustn't they!

KATHERINE. Very.

OLIVE. It felt funny; you couldn't see any wind, you know.

KATHERINE. Talking to the wind is an expression, Olive.

OLIVE. Does Daddy often?

KATHERINE. Yes, nowadays.

OLIVE. What does it mean?

KATHERINE. Speaking to people who won't listen.

OLIVE. What do they do, then?

KATHERINE. Just a few people go to hear him, and then a great crowd comes and breaks in; or they wait for him outside, and throw things, and hoot.

OLIVE. Poor Daddy! Is it people on our side who throw things?

KATHERINE. Yes, but only rough people.

OLIVE. Why does he go on doing it? I shouldn't.

KATHERINE. He thinks it is his duty.

OLIVE. To your neighbour, or only to God?

KATHERINE. To both.

OLIVE. Oh! Are those his letters?

KATHERINE. Yes.

OLIVE. [Reading from the letter] "My dear Heart." Does he always call you his dear heart, Mummy? It's rather jolly, isn't it? "I shall be home about half-past ten to-morrow night. For a few hours the fires

of p-u-r-g-a-t-o-r-y will cease to burn—" What are the fires of p-u-r-g-a-t-o-r-y?

KATHERINE. [Putting away the letters] Come, Olive!

OLIVE. But what are they?

KATHERINE. Daddy means that he's been very unhappy.

OLIVE. Have you, too?

KATHERINE. Yes.

OLIVE. [Cheerfully] So have I. May I open the window?

KATHERINE. No; you'll let the mist in.

OLIVE. Isn't it a funny mist—all flat!

KATHERINE. Now, come along, frog!

OLIVE. [Making time] Mummy, when is Uncle Hubert coming back?

KATHERINE. We don't know, dear.

OLIVE. I suppose Auntie Helen'll stay with us till he does.

KATHERINE. Yes.

OLIVE. That's something, isn't it?

KATHERINE. [Picking her up] Now then!

OLIVE. [Deliciously limp] Had I better put in the duty to your neighbour if there isn't a victory soon? [As they pass through the door] You're tickling under my knee! [Little gurgles of pleasure follow. Then silence. Then a drowsy voice] I must keep awake for Daddy.

KATHERINE comes back. She is about to leave the door a little open, when she hears a knock on the other door. It is opened a few inches, and NURSE'S voice says: "Can I come in, Ma'am?" The NURSE comes in.

KATHERINE. [Shutting OLIVE'S door, and going up to her] What is it, Nurse?

NURSE. [Speaking in a low voice] I've been meaning to—I'll never do it in the daytime. I'm giving you notice.

KATHERINE. Nurse! You too!

She looks towards OLIVE'S room with dismay. The NURSE smudges a slow tear away from her cheek.

NURSE. I want to go right away at once.

KATHERINE. Leave Olive! That is the sins of the fathers with a vengeance.

NURSE. I've had another letter from my son. No, Miss Katherine, while the master goes on upholdin' these murderin' outlandish creatures, I can't live in this house, not now he's coming back.

KATHERINE. But, Nurse—!

NURSE. It's not like them [With an ineffable gesture] downstairs, because I'm frightened of the mob, or of the window's bein' broke again, or mind what the boys in the street say. I should think not—no! It's my heart. I'm sore night and day thinkin' of my son, and him lying out there at night without a rag of dry clothing, and water that the bullocks won't drink, and maggots in the meat; and every day one of his friends laid out stark and cold, and one day—'imself perhaps. If anything were to 'appen to him. I'd never forgive meself—here. Ah! Miss Katherine, I wonder how you bear it—bad news comin' every day—And Sir John's face so sad—And all the time the master speaking against us, as it might be Jonah 'imself.

KATHERINE. But, Nurse, how can you leave us, you?

NURSE. [Smudging at her cheeks] There's that tells me it's encouragin' something to happen, if I stay

here; and Mr. More coming back to-night. You can't serve God and Mammon, the Bible says.

KATHERINE. Don't you know what it's costing him?

NURSE. Ah! Cost him his seat, and his reputation; and more than that it'll cost him, to go against the country.

KATHERINE. He's following his conscience.

NURSE. And others must follow theirs, too. No, Miss Katherine, for you to let him—you, with your three brothers out there, and your father fair wasting away with grief. Sufferin' too as you've been these three months past. What'll you feel if anything happens to my three young gentlemen out there, to my dear Mr. Hubert that I nursed myself, when your precious mother couldn't? What would she have said—with you in the camp of his enemies?

KATHERINE. Nurse, Nurse!

NURSE. In my paper they say he's encouraging these heathens and makin' the foreigners talk about us; and every day longer the war lasts, there's our blood on this house.

KATHERINE. [Turning away] Nurse, I can't—I won't listen.

NURSE. [Looking at her intently] Ah! You'll move him to leave off! I see your heart, my dear. But if you don't, then go I must!

She nods her head gravely, goes to the door of OLIVE'S room, opens it gently, stands looking for a-moment, then with the words "My Lamb!" she goes in noiselessly and closes the door.

KATHERINE turns back to her glass, puts back her hair, and smooths her lips and eyes. The door from the corridor is opened, and HELEN's voice says: "Kit! You're not in bed?"

KATHERINE. No.

HELEN too is in a wrapper, with a piece of lace thrown over her head. Her face is scared and miserable, and she runs into KATHERINE's arms.

KATHERINE. My dear, what is it?

HELEN. I've seen—a vision!

KATHERINE. Hssh! You'll wake Olive!

HELEN. [Staring before her] I'd just fallen asleep, and I saw a plain that seemed to run into the sky—like—that fog. And on it there were—dark things. One grew into a body without a head, and a gun by its side. And one was a man sitting huddled up, nursing a wounded leg. He had the face of Hubert's servant, Wreford. And then I saw—Hubert. His face was all dark and thin; and he had—a wound, an awful wound here [She touches her breast]. The blood was running from it, and he kept trying to stop it—oh! Kit—by kissing it [She pauses, stifled by emotion]. Then I heard Wreford laugh, and say vultures didn't touch live bodies. And there came a voice, from somewhere, calling out: "Oh! God! I'm dying!" And Wreford began to swear at it, and I heard Hubert say: "Don't, Wreford; let the poor fellow be!" But the voice went on and on, moaning and crying out: "I'll lie here all night dying—and then I'll die!" And Wreford dragged himself along the ground; his face all devilish, like a man who's going to kill.

KATHERINE. My dear! HOW ghastly!

HELEN. Still that voice went on, and I saw Wreford take up the dead man's gun. Then Hubert got upon his feet, and went tottering along, so feebly, so dreadfully—but before he could reach and stop him, Wreford fired at the man who was crying. And Hubert called out: "You brute!" and fell right down. And when Wreford saw him lying there, he began to moan and sob, but Hubert never stirred. Then it all got black again—and I could see a dark woman—thing creeping, first to the man without a head; then to Wreford; then to Hubert, and it touched him, and sprang away. And it cried out: "A-ai-ah!" [Pointing out at the mist] Look! Out there! The dark things!

KATHERINE. [Putting her arms round her] Yes, dear, yes! You must have been looking at the mist.

HELEN. [Strangely calm] He's dead!

KATHERINE. It was only a dream.

HELEN. You didn't hear that cry. [She listens] That's Stephen. Forgive me, Kit; I oughtn't to have upset you, but I couldn't help coming.

She goes out, KATHERINE, into whom her emotion seems to have passed, turns feverishly to the window, throws it open and leans out. MORE comes in.

MORE. Kit!

Catching sight of her figure in the window, he goes quickly to her.

KATHERINE. Ah! [She has mastered her emotion.]

MORE. Let me look at you!

He draws her from the window to the candle-light, and looks long at her.

MORE. What have you done to your hair?

KATHERINE. Nothing.

MORE. It's wonderful to-night.

[He takes it greedily and buries his face in it.]

KATHERINE. [Drawing her hair away] Well?

MORE. At last!

KATHERINE. [Pointing to OLIVE's room] Hssh!

MORE. How is she?

KATHERINE. All right.

MORE. And you?

[KATHERINE shrugs her shoulders.]

MORE. Six weeks!

KATHERINE. Why have you come?

MORE. Why!

KATHERINE. You begin again the day after tomorrow. Was it worth while?

MORE. Kit!

KATHERINE. It makes it harder for me, that's all.

MORE. [Staring at her] What's come to you?

KATHERINE. Six weeks is a long time to sit and read about your meetings.

MORE. Put that away to-night. [He touches her] This is what travellers feel when they come out of the desert to-water.

KATHERINE. [Suddenly noticing the cut on his forehead] Your forehead! It's cut.

MORE. It's nothing.

KATHERINE. Oh! Let me bathe it!

MORE. No, dear! It's all right.

KATHERINE. [Turning away] Helen has just been telling me a dream she's had of Hubert's death.

MORE. Poor child!

KATHERINE. Dream bad dreams, and wait, and hide oneself—there's been nothing else to do. Nothing, Stephen—nothing!

MORE. Hide? Because of me?

[KATHERINE nods.]

MORE. [With a movement of distress] I see. I thought from your letters you were coming to feel— Kit! You look so lovely!

[Suddenly he sees that she is crying, and goes quickly to her.]

MORE. My dear, don't cry! God knows I don't want to make things worse for you. I'll go away.

She draws away from him a little, and after looking long at her, he sits down at the dressing-table and begins turning over the brushes and articles of toilet, trying to find words.

MORE. Never look forward. After the time I've had—I thought— tonight—it would be summer—I thought it would be you—and everything!

While he is speaking KATHERINE has stolen closer. She suddenly drops on her knees by his side and wraps his hand in her hair. He turns and clasps her.

MORE. Kit!

KATHERINE. Ah! yes! But-to-morrow it begins again. Oh! Stephen! How long—how long am I to be torn in two? [Drawing back in his arms] I can't—can't bear it.

MORE. My darling!

KATHERINE. Give it up! For my sake! Give it up! [Pressing closer to him] It shall be me—and everything—

MORE. God!

KATHERINE. It shall be—if—if—

MORE. [Aghast] You're not making terms? Bargaining? For God's sake, Kit!

KATHERINE. For God's sake, Stephen!

MORE. You!—of all people—you!

KATHERINE. Stephen!

[For a moment MORE yields utterly, then shrinks back.]

MORE. A bargain! It's selling my soul!

He struggles out of her arms, gets up, and stands without speaking, staring at her, and wiping the sweat from his forehead. KATHERINE remains some seconds on her knees, gazing up at him, not realizing. Then her head droops; she too gets up and stands apart, with her wrapper drawn close round her. It is as if a cold and deadly shame had come to them both. Quite suddenly MORE turns, and, without looking back, feebly makes his way out of the room. When he is gone KATHERINE drops on her knees and remains there motionless, huddled in her hair.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT IV

It is between lights, the following day, in the dining-room of MORE's house. The windows are closed, but curtains are not drawn. STEEL is seated at the bureau, writing a letter from MORE's dictation.

STEEL. [Reading over the letter] "No doubt we shall have trouble. But, if the town authorities at the last minute forbid the use of the hall, we'll hold the meeting in the open. Let bills be got out, and an audience will collect in any case."

MORE. They will.

STEEL. "Yours truly"; I've signed for you.

[MORE nods.]

STEEL. [Blotting and enveloping the letter] You know the servants have all given notice—except Henry.

MORE. Poor Henry!

STEEL. It's partly nerves, of course—the windows have been broken twice—but it's partly—

MORE. Patriotism. Quite! they'll do the next smashing themselves. That reminds me—to-morrow you begin holiday, Steel.

STEEL. Oh, no!

MORE. My dear fellow—yes. Last night ended your sulphur cure. Truly sorry ever to have let you in for it.

STEEL. Some one must do the work. You're half dead as it is.

MORE. There's lots of kick in me.

STEEL. Give it up, sir. The odds are too great. It isn't worth it.

MORE. To fight to a finish; knowing you must be beaten—is anything better worth it?

STEEL. Well, then, I'm not going.

MORE. This is my private hell, Steel; you don't roast in it any longer. Believe me, it's a great comfort to hurt no one but yourself.

STEEL. I can't leave you, sir.

MORE. My dear boy, you're a brick—but we've got off by a miracle so far, and I can't have the responsibility of you any longer. Hand me over that correspondence about to-morrow's meeting.

STEEL takes some papers from his pocket, but does not hand them.

MORE. Come! [He stretches out his hand for the papers. As STEEL still draws back, he says more sharply] Give them to me, Steel! [STEEL hands them over] Now, that ends it, d'you see?

They stand looking at each other; then STEEL, very much upset, turns and goes out of the room. MORE, who has watched him with a sorry smile, puts the papers into a dispatch-case. As he is closing the bureau, the footman HENRY enters, announcing: "Mr. Mendip, sir." MENDIP comes in, and the FOOTMAN withdraws. MORE turns to his visitor, but does not hold out his hand.

MENDIP. [Taking MORE'S hand] Give me credit for a little philosophy, my friend. Mrs. More told me you'd be back to-day. Have you heard?

MORE. What?

MENDIP. There's been a victory.

MORE. Thank God!

MENDIP. Ah! So you actually are flesh and blood.

MORE. Yes!

MENDIP. Take off the martyr's shirt, Stephen. You're only flouting human nature.

MORE. So—even you defend the mob!

MENDIP. My dear fellow, you're up against the strongest common instinct in the world. What do you

expect? That the man in the street should be a Quixote? That his love of country should express itself in philosophic altruism? What on earth do you expect? Men are very simple creatures; and Mob is just conglomerate essence of simple men.

MORE. Conglomerate excrescence. Mud of street and market-place gathered in a torrent—This blind howling "patriotism"—what each man feels in here? [He touches his breast] No!

MENDIP. You think men go beyond instinct—they don't. All they know is that something's hurting that image of themselves that they call country. They just feel something big and religious, and go it blind.

MORE. This used to be the country of free speech. It used to be the country where a man was expected to hold to his faith.

MENDIP. There are limits to human nature, Stephen.

MORE. Let no man stand to his guns in face of popular attack. Still your advice, is it?

MENDIP. My advice is: Get out of town at once. The torrent you speak of will be let loose the moment this news is out. Come, my dear fellow, don't stay here!

MORE. Thanks! I'll see that Katherine and Olive go.

MENDIP. Go with them! If your cause is lost, that's no reason why you should be.

MORE. There's the comfort of not running away. And—I want comfort.

MENDIP. This is bad, Stephen; bad, foolish—foolish. Well! I'm going to the House. This way?

MORE. Down the steps, and through the gate. Good-bye?

KATHERINE has come in followed by NURSE, hatted and cloaked, with a small bag in her hand. KATHERINE takes from the bureau a cheque which she hands to the NURSE. MORE comes in from the terrace.

MORE. You're wise to go, Nurse.

NURSE. You've treated my poor dear badly, sir. Where's your heart?

MORE. In full use.

NURSE. On those heathens. Don't your own hearth and home come first? Your wife, that was born in time of war, with her own father fighting, and her grandfather killed for his country. A bitter thing, to have the windows of her house broken, and be pointed at by the boys in the street.

[MORE stands silent under this attack, looking at his wife.]

KATHERINE. Nurse!

NURSE. It's unnatural, sir—what you're doing! To think more of those savages than of your own wife! Look at her! Did you ever see her look like that? Take care, sir, before it's too late!

MORE. Enough, please!

NURSE stands for a moment doubtful; looks long at KATHERINE; then goes.

MORE. [Quietly] There has been a victory.

[He goes out. KATHERINE is breathing fast, listening to the distant hum and stir rising in the street. She runs to the window as the footman, HENRY, entering, says: "Sir John Julian, Ma'am!" SIR JOHN comes in, a newspaper in his hand.]

KATHERINE. At last! A victory!

SIR JOHN. Thank God! [He hands her the paper.]

KATHERINE. Oh, Dad!

[She tears the paper open, and feverishly reads.]

KATHERINE. At last!

The distant hum in the street is rising steadily. But SIR JOHN, after the one exultant moment when he handed her the paper, stares dumbly at the floor.

KATHERINE. [Suddenly conscious of his gravity] Father!

SIR JOHN. There is other news.

KATHERINE. One of the boys? Hubert?

[SIR JOHN bows his head.]

KATHERINE. Killed?

[SIR JOHN again bows his head.]

KATHERINE. The dream! [She covers her face] Poor Helen!

They stand for a few seconds silent, then SIR JOHN raises his head, and putting up a hand, touches her wet cheek.

SIR JOHN. [Huskily] Whom the gods love——

KATHERINE. Hubert!

SIR JOHN. And hulks like me go on living!

KATHERINE. Dear Dad!

SIR JOHN. But we shall drive the ruffians now! We shall break them. Stephen back?

KATHERINE. Last night.

SIR JOHN. Has he finished his blasphemous speech-making at last?
[KATHERINE shakes her head] Not?

[Then, seeing that KATHERINE is quivering with emotion, he strokes her hand.]

SIR JOHN. My dear! Death is in many houses!

KATHERINE. I must go to Helen. Tell Stephen, Father. I can't.

SIR JOHN. If you wish, child.

[She goes out, leaving SIR JOHN to his grave, puzzled grief, and in a few seconds MORE comes in.]

MORE. Yes, Sir John. You wanted me?

SIR JOHN. Hubert is killed.

MORE. Hubert!

SIR JOHN. By these—whom you uphold. Katherine asked me to let you know. She's gone to Helen. I understand you only came back last night from your——No word I can use would give what I feel about that. I don't know how things stand now between you and Katherine; but I tell you this, Stephen: you've tried her these last two months beyond what any woman ought to bear!

[MORE makes a gesture of pain.]

SIR JOHN. When you chose your course——

MORE. Chose!

SIR JOHN. You placed yourself in opposition to every feeling in her. You knew this might come. It may come again with another of my sons.

MORE. I would willingly change places with any one of them.

SIR JOHN. Yes—I can believe in your unhappiness. I cannot conceive of greater misery than to be arrayed against your country. If I could have Hubert back, I would not have him at such a price—no, nor all my sons. 'Pro patri mori'—My boy, at all events, is happy!

MORE. Yes!

SIR JOHN. Yet you can go on doing what you are! What devil of pride has got into you, Stephen?

MORE. Do you imagine I think myself better than the humblest private fighting out there? Not for a minute.

SIR JOHN. I don't understand you. I always thought you devoted to Katherine.

MORE. Sir John, you believe that country comes before wife and child?

SIR JOHN. I do.

MORE. So do I.

SIR JOHN. [Bewildered] Whatever my country does or leaves undone, I no more presume to judge her than I presume to judge my God. [With all the exaltation of the suffering he has undergone for her] My country!

MORE. I would give all I have—for that creed.

SIR JOHN. [Puzzled] Stephen, I've never looked on you as a crank; I always believed you sane and honest. But this is—visionary mania.

MORE. Vision of what might be.

SIR JOHN. Why can't you be content with what the grandest nation—the grandest men on earth—have found good enough for them? I've known them, I've seen what they could suffer, for our country.

MORE. Sir John, imagine what the last two months have been to me! To see people turn away in the street—old friends pass me as if I were a wall! To dread the post! To go to bed every night with the sound of hooting in my ears! To know that my name is never referred to without contempt—

SIR JOHN. You have your new friends. Plenty of them, I understand.

MORE. Does that make up for being spat at as I was last night? Your battles are fool's play to it.

The stir and rustle of the crowd in the street grows louder.

SIR JOHN turns his head towards it.

SIR JOHN. You've heard there's been a victory. Do you carry your unnatural feeling so far as to be sorry for that? [MORE shakes his head] That's something! For God's sake, Stephen, stop before it's gone past mending. Don't ruin your life with Katherine. Hubert was her favourite brother; you are backing those who killed him. Think what that means to her! Drop this—mad Quixotism—idealism—whatever you call it. Take Katherine away. Leave the country till the thing's over—this country of yours that you're opposing, and—and— traducing. Take her away! Come! What good are you doing? What earthly good? Come, my boy! Before you're utterly undone.

MORE. Sir John! Our men are dying out there for, the faith that's in them! I believe my faith the higher, the better for mankind—Am I to slink away? Since I began this campaign I've found hundreds who've thanked me for taking this stand. They look on me now as their leader. Am I to desert them? When you led your forlorn hope— did you ask yourself what good you were doing, or, whether you'd come through alive? It's my forlorn hope not to betray those who are following me; and not to help let die a fire—a fire that's sacred— not only now in this country, but in all countries, for all time.

SIR JOHN. [After a long stare] I give you credit for believing what you say. But let me tell you whatever that fire you talk of—I'm too old-fashioned to grasp—one fire you are letting die—your wife's love. By God! This crew of your new friends, this crew of cranks and jays, if they can make up to you for the loss of her love—of your career, of all those who used to like and respect you—so much the better for you. But if you find yourself bankrupt of affection— alone as the last man on earth; if this business ends in your utter ruin and destruction—as it must—I shall not pity—I cannot pity you. Good-night!

He marches to the door, opens it, and goes out. MORE is left standing perfectly still. The stir and murmur of the street is growing all the time, and slowly forces itself on his consciousness. He goes to the bay window and looks out; then rings the bell. It is not answered, and, after turning up the lights, he rings again. KATHERINE comes in. She is wearing a black hat, and black outdoor coat. She speaks coldly without looking up.

KATHERINE. You rang!

MORE. For them to shut this room up.

KATHERINE. The servants have gone out. They're afraid of the house being set on fire.

MORE. I see.

KATHERINE. They have not your ideals to sustain them. [MORE winces]
I am going with Helen and Olive to Father's.

MORE. [Trying to take in the exact sense of her words] Good! You prefer that to an hotel?
[KATHERINE nods. Gently] Will you let me say, Kit, how terribly I feel for you—Hubert's—

KATHERINE. Don't. I ought to have made what I meant plainer. I am not coming back.

MORE. Not? Not while the house—

KATHERINE. Not—at all.

MORE. Kit!

KATHERINE. I warned you from the first. You've gone too far!

MORE. [Terribly moved] Do you understand what this means? After ten years—and all—our love!

KATHERINE. Was it love? How could you ever have loved one so unheroic as myself!

MORE. This is madness, Kit—Kit!

KATHERINE. Last night I was ready. You couldn't. If you couldn't then, you never can. You are very exalted, Stephen. I don't like living—I won't live, with one whose equal I am not. This has been coming ever since you made that speech. I told you that night what the end would be.

MORE. [Trying to put his arms round her] Don't be so terribly cruel!

KATHERINE. No! Let's have the truth! People so wide apart don't love! Let me go!

MORE. In God's name, how can I help the difference in our faiths?

KATHERINE. Last night you used the word—bargain. Quite right. I meant to buy you. I meant to kill your faith. You showed me what I was doing. I don't like to be shown up as a driver of bargains, Stephen.

MORE. God knows—I never meant—

KATHERINE. If I'm not yours in spirit—I don't choose to be your— mistress.

MORE, as if lashed by a whip, has thrown up his hands in an attitude of defence.

KATHERINE. Yes, that's cruel! It shows the heights you live on. I won't drag you down.

MORE. For God's sake, put your pride away, and see! I'm fighting for the faith that's in me. What else can a man do? What else? Ah! Kit! Do see!

KATHERINE. I'm strangled here! Doing nothing—sitting silent—when my brothers are fighting, and being killed. I shall try to go out nursing. Helen will come with me. I have my faith, too; my poor common love of country. I can't stay here with you. I spent last night on the floor—thinking—and I know!

MORE. And Olive?

KATHERINE. I shall leave her at Father's, with Nurse; unless you forbid me to take her. You can.

MORE. [Icily] That I shall not do—you know very well. You are free to go, and to take her.

KATHERINE. [Very low] Thank you! [Suddenly she turns to him, and draws his eyes on her. Without a sound, she puts her whole strength into that look] Stephen! Give it up! Come down to me!

The festive sounds from the street grow louder. There can be heard the blowing of whistles, and bladders, and all the sounds of joy.

MORE. And drown in—that?

KATHERINE turns swiftly to the door. There she stands and again looks at him. Her face is mysterious, from the conflicting currents of her emotions.

MORE. So—you're going?

KATHERINE. [In a whisper] Yes.

She bends her head, opens the door, and goes. MORE starts forward as if to follow her, but OLIVE has appeared in the doorway. She has on a straight little white coat and a round white cap.

OLIVE. Aren't you coming with us, Daddy?

[MORE shakes his head.]

OLIVE. Why not?

MORE. Never mind, my dicky bird.

OLIVE. The motor'll have to go very slow. There are such a lot of people in the street. Are you staying to stop them setting the house on fire? [MORE nods] May I stay a little, too? [MORE shakes his head] Why?

MORE. [Putting his hand on her head] Go along, my pretty!

OLIVE. Oh! love me up, Daddy!

[MORE takes and loves her up]

OLIVE. Oo-o!

MORE. Trot, my soul!

[She goes, looks back at him, turns suddenly, and vanishes.]

MORE follows her to the door, but stops there. Then, as full realization begins to dawn on him, he runs to the bay window, craning his head to catch sight of the front door. There is the sound of a vehicle starting, and the continual hooting of its horn as it makes its way among the crowd. He turns from the window.

MORE. Alone as the last man on earth!

[Suddenly a voice rises clear out of the hurly-burly in the street.]

VOICE. There 'e is! That's 'im! More! Traitor! More!

A shower of nutshells, orange-peel, and harmless missiles begins to rattle against the glass of the window. Many voices take up the groaning: "More! Traitor! Black-leg! More!" And through the window can be seen waving flags and lighted Chinese lanterns, swinging high on long bamboos. The din of execration swells. MORE stands unheeding, still gazing after the cab. Then, with a sharp crack, a flung stone crashes through one of the panes. It is followed by a hoarse shout of laughter, and a hearty groan. A second stone crashes through the glass. MORE turns for a moment, with a contemptuous look, towards the street, and the flare of the Chinese lanterns lights up his face. Then, as if forgetting all about the din outside, he moves back into the room, looks round him, and lets his head droop. The din rises louder and louder; a third stone crashes through. MORE raises his head again, and, clasping his hands, looks straight before him. The footman, HENRY, entering, hastens to the French windows.

MORE. Ah! Henry, I thought you'd gone.

FOOTMAN. I came back, sir.

MORE. Good fellow!

FOOTMAN. They're trying to force the terrace gate, sir. They've no business coming on to private property—no matter what!

In the surging entrance of the mob the footman, HENRY, who shows fight, is

overwhelmed, hustled out into the crowd on the terrace, and no more seen. The MOB is a mixed crowd of revellers of both sexes, medical students, clerks, shop men and girls, and a Boy Scout or two. Many have exchanged hats—Some wear masks, or false noses, some carry feathers or tin whistles. Some, with bamboos and Chinese lanterns, swing them up outside on the terrace. The medley of noises is very great. Such ringleaders as exist in the confusion are a GROUP OF STUDENTS, the chief of whom, conspicuous because unadorned, is an athletic, hatless young man with a projecting underjaw, and heavy coal-black moustache, who seems with the swing of his huge arms and shoulders to sway the currents of motion. When the first surge of noise and movement subsides, he calls out: "To him, boys! Chair the hero!" THE STUDENTS rush at the impassive MORE, swing him roughly on to their shoulders and bear him round the room. When they have twice circled the table to the music of their confused singing, groans and whistling, THE CHIEF OF THE STUDENTS calls out: "Put him down!" Obediently they set him down on the table which has been forced into the bay window, and stand gaping up at him.

CHIEF STUDENT. Speech! Speech!

[The noise ebbs, and MORE looks round him.]

CHIEF STUDENT. Now then, you, sir.

MORE. [In a quiet voice] Very well. You are here by the law that governs the action of all mobs—the law of Force. By that law, you can do what you like to this body of mine.

A VOICE. And we will, too.

MORE. I don't doubt it. But before that, I've a word to say.

A VOICE. You've always that.

[ANOTHER VOICE raises a donkey's braying.]

MORE. You—Mob—are the most contemptible thing under the sun. When you walk the street—God goes in.

CHIEF STUDENT. Be careful, you—sir.

VOICES. Down him! Down with the beggar!

MORE. [Above the murmurs] My fine friends, I'm not afraid of you. You've forced your way into my house, and you've asked me to speak. Put up with the truth for once! [His words rush out] You are the thing that pelts the weak; kicks women; howls down free speech. This to-day, and that to-morrow. Brain—you have none. Spirit—not the ghost of it! If you're not meanness, there's no such thing. If you're not cowardice, there is no cowardice [Above the growing fierceness of the hubbub] Patriotism—there are two kinds—that of our soldiers, and this of mine. You have neither!

CHIEF STUDENT. [Checking a dangerous rush] Hold on! Hold on! [To MORE] Swear to utter no more blasphemy against your country: Swear it!

CROWD. Ah! Ay! Ah!

MORE. My country is not yours. Mine is that great country which shall never take toll from the weakness of others. [Above the groaning] Ah! you can break my head and my windows; but don't think that you can break my faith. You could never break or shake it, if you were a million to one.

A girl with dark eyes and hair all wild, leaps out from the crowd and shakes her fist at him.

GIRL. You're friends with them that killed my lad! [MORE smiles down at her, and she swiftly plucks the knife from the belt of a Boy Scout beside her] Smile, you—cur!

A violent rush and heave from behind flings MORE forward on to the steel. He reels, staggers back, and falls down amongst the crowd. A scream, a sway, a rush, a hubbub of cries. The CHIEF STUDENT shouts above the riot: "Steady!" Another: "My God! He's got it!"

CHIEF STUDENT. Give him air!

The crowd falls back, and two STUDENTS, bending over MORE, lift his arms and head, but they fall like lead. Desperately they test him for life.

CHIEF STUDENT. By the Lord, it's over!

Then begins a scared swaying out towards the window. Some one turns out the lights, and in the darkness the crowd fast melts away. The body of MORE lies in the gleam from a single Chinese lantern. Muttering the words: "Poor devil! He kept his end up anyway!" the CHIEF STUDENT picks from the floor a little abandoned Union Jack and lays it on MORE's breast. Then he, too, turns, and rushes out.

And the body of MORE lies in the streak of light; and flee noises in the street continue to rise.

THE CURTAIN FALLS, BUT RISES AGAIN ALMOST AT ONCE.

AFTERMATH

A late Spring dawn is just breaking. Against trees in leaf and blossom, with the houses of a London Square beyond, suffused by the spreading glow, is seen a dark life-size statue on a granite pedestal. In front is the broad, dust-dim pavement. The light grows till the central words around the pedestal can be clearly read:

ERECTED
To the Memory
of
STEPHEN MORE
"Faithful to his ideal"

High above, the face of MORE looks straight before him with a faint smile. On one shoulder and on his bare head two sparrows have perched, and from the gardens, behind, comes the twittering and singing of birds.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

The End

PLAYS in the FOURTH SERIES

Contents:

A BIT O' LOVE THE FOUNDATIONS THE SKIN GAME

A BIT O' LOVE

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

**MICHAEL STRANGWAY BEATRICE STRANGWAY MRS. BRADMERE JIM BERE JACK CREMER MRS. BURLACOMBE
BURLACOMBE TRUSTAFORD JARLAND CLYST FREMAN GODLEIGH SOL POTTER MORSE, AND OTHERS IVY
BURLACOMBE CONNIE TRUSTAFORD GLADYS FREMAN MERCY JARLAND TIBBY JARLAND BOBBIE JARLAND**

SCENE: A VILLAGE OF THE WEST

The Action passes on Ascension Day.

ACT I. STRANGWAY'S rooms at BURLACOMBE'S. Morning.

ACT II. Evening

SCENE I. The Village Inn. SCENE II. The same. SCENE III. Outside the church.

ACT III. Evening

SCENE I. STRANGWAY'S rooms. SCENE II. BURLACOMBE'S barn.

A BIT O' LOVE

ACT I

It is Ascension Day in a village of the West. In the low panelled hall-sittingroom of the BURLACOMBE'S farmhouse on the village green, MICHAEL STRANGWAY, a clerical collar round his throat and a dark Norfolk jacket on his back, is playing the flute before a very large framed photograph of a woman, which is the only picture on the walls. His age is about thirty-five his figure thin and very upright and his clean-shorn face thin, upright, narrow, with long and rather pointed ears; his dark hair is brushed in a coxcomb off his forehead. A faint smile hovers about his lips that Nature has made rather full and he has made thin, as though keeping a hard secret; but his bright grey eyes, dark round the rim, look out and upwards almost as if he were being crucified. There is something about the whole of him that makes him seem not quite present. A gentle creature, burnt within.

A low broad window above a window-seat forms the background to his figure; and through its lattice panes are seen the outer gate and yew-trees of a churchyard and the porch of a church, bathed in May sunlight. The front door at right angles to the window-seat, leads to the village green, and a door on the left into the house.

It is the third movement of Veracini's violin sonata that STRANGWAY plays. His back is turned to the door into the house, and he does not hear when it is opened, and IVY BURLACOMBE, the farmer's daughter, a girl of fourteen, small and quiet as a mouse, comes in, a prayer-book in one hand, and in the other a gloss of water, with wild orchis and a bit of deep pink hawthorn. She sits down on the window-seat, and having opened her book, sniffs at the flowers. Coming to the end of the movement STRANGWAY stops, and looking up at the face on the wall, heaves a long sigh.

IVY. [From the seat] I picked these for yu, Mr. Strangway.

STRANGWAY. [Turning with a start] Ah! Ivy. Thank you. [He puts his flute down on a chair against the far wall] Where are the others?

As he speaks, GLADYS FREMAN, a dark gipsyish girl, and CONNIE TRUSTAFORD, a fair, stolid, blue-eyed Saxon, both about sixteen, come in through the front door, behind which they have evidently been listening. They too have prayer-books in their hands. They sidle past Ivy, and also sit down under the window.

GLADYS. Mercy's comin', Mr. Strangway.

STRANGWAY. Good morning, Gladys; good morning, Connie.

He turns to a book-case on a table against the far wall, and taking out a book, finds his place in it. While he stands thus with his back to the girls, MERCY JARLAND comes in from the green. She also is about sixteen, with fair hair and china-blue eyes. She glides in quickly, hiding something behind her, and sits down on the seat next the door. And at once there is a whispering.

STRANGWAY. [Turning to them] Good morning, Mercy.

MERCY. Good morning, Mr. Strangway.

STRANGWAY. Now, yesterday I was telling you what our Lord's coming meant to the world. I want you to understand that before He came there wasn't really love, as we know it. I don't mean to say that there weren't many good people; but there wasn't love for the sake of loving. D'you think you understand what I mean?

MERCY fidgets. GLADYS'S eyes are following a fly.

IVY. Yes, Mr. Strangway.

STRANGWAY. It isn't enough to love people because they're good to you, or because in some way or other you're going to get something by it. We have to love because we love loving. That's the great thing—without that we're nothing but Pagans.

GLADYS. Please, what is Pagans?

STRANGWAY. That's what the first Christians called the people who lived in the villages and were not yet Christians, Gladys.

MERCY. We live in a village, but we're Christians.

STRANGWAY. [With a smile] Yes, Mercy; and what is a Christian?

MERCY kicks afoot, sideways against her neighbour, frowns over her china-blare eyes, is silent; then, as his question passes on, makes a quick little face, wriggles, and looks behind her.

STRANGWAY. Ivy?

IVY. 'Tis a man—whu—whu—

STRANGWAY. Yes?—Connie?

CONNIE. [Who speaks rather thickly, as if she had a permanent slight cold] Please, Mr. Strangway, 'tis a man what goes to church.

GLADYS. He 'as to be baptised—and confirmed; and—and—buried.

IVY. 'Tis a man whu—whu's gude and—

GLADYS. He don't drink, an' he don't beat his horses, an' he don't hit back.

MERCY. [Whispering] 'Tisn't your turn. [To STRANGWAY] 'Tis a man like us.

IVY. I know what Mrs. Strangway said it was, 'cause I asked her once, before she went away.

STRANGWAY. [Startled] Yes?

IVY. She said it was a man whu forgave everything.

STRANGWAY. Ah!

The note of a cuckoo comes travelling. The girls are gazing at STRANGWAY, who seems to have gone of into a dream. They begin to fidget and whisper.

CONNIE. Please, Mr. Strangway, father says if yu hit a man and he don't hit yu back, he's no gude at all.

MERCY. When Tommy Morse wouldn't fight, us pinched him—he did squeal! [She giggles] Made me laugh!

STRANGWAY. Did I ever tell you about St. Francis of Assisi?

IVY. [Clasping her hands] No.

STRANGWAY. Well, he was the best Christian, I think, that ever lived—simply full of love and joy.

IVY. I expect he's dead.

STRANGWAY. About seven hundred years, Ivy.

IVY. [Softly] Oh!

STRANGWAY. Everything to him was brother or sister—the sun and the moon, and all that was poor

and weak and sad, and animals and birds, so that they even used to follow him about.

MERCY. I know! He had crumbs in his pocket.

STRANGWAY. No; he had love in his eyes.

IVY. 'Tis like about Orpheus, that yu told us.

STRANGWAY. Ah! But St. Francis was a Christian, and Orpheus was a Pagan.

IVY. Oh!

STRANGWAY. Orpheus drew everything after him with music; St. Francis by love.

IVY. Perhaps it was the same, really.

STRANGWAY. [looking at his flute] Perhaps it was, Ivy.

GLADYS. Did 'e 'ave a flute like yu?

IVY. The flowers smell sweeter when they 'ear music; they du.

[She holds up the glass of flowers.]

STRANGWAY. [Touching one of the orchis] What's the name of this one?

[The girls cluster; save MERCY, who is taking a stealthy interest in what she has behind her.]

CONNIE. We call it a cuckoo, Mr. Strangway.

GLADYS. 'Tis awful common down by the streams. We've got one medder where 'tis so thick almost as the goldie cups.

STRANGWAY. Odd! I've never noticed it.

IVY. Please, Mr. Strangway, yu don't notice when yu're walkin'; yu go along like this.

[She holds up her face as one looking at the sky.]

STRANGWAY. Bad as that, Ivy?

IVY. Mrs. Strangway often used to pick it last spring.

STRANGWAY. Did she? Did she?

[He has gone off again into a kind of dream.]

MERCY. I like being confirmed.

STRANGWAY. Ah! Yes. Now—What's that behind you, Mercy?

MERCY. [Engagingly producing a cage a little bigger than a mouse-trap, containing a skylark] My skylark.

STRANGWAY. What!

MERCY. It can fly; but we're goin' to clip its wings. Bobbie caught it.

STRANGWAY. How long ago?

MERCY. [Conscious of impending disaster] Yesterday.

STRANGWAY. [White hot] Give me the cage!

MERCY. [Puckering] I want my skylark. [As he steps up to her and takes the cage—thoroughly alarmed] I gave Bobbie thrippence for it!

STRANGWAY. [Producing a sixpence] There!

MERCY. [Throwing it down-passionately] I want my skylark!

STRANGWAY. God made this poor bird for the sky and the grass. And you put it in that! Never cage any wild thing! Never!

MERCY. [Faint and sullen] I want my skylark.

STRANGWAY. [Taking the cage to the door] No! [He holds up the cage and opens it] Off you go, poor thing!

[The bird flies out and away. The girls watch with round eyes the fling up of his arm, and the freed bird flying away.]

IVY. I'm glad!

[MERCY kicks her viciously and sobs. STRANGWAY comes from the door, looks at MERCY sobbing, and suddenly clasps his head. The girls watch him with a queer mixture of wonder, alarm, and disapproval.]

GLADYS. [Whispering] Don't cry, Mercy. Bobbie'll soon catch yu another.

[STRANGWAY has dropped his hands, and is looking again at MERCY. IVY sits with hands clasped, gazing at STRANGWAY. MERCY continues her artificial sobbing.]

STRANGWAY. [Quietly] The class is over for to-day.

[He goes up to MERCY, and holds out his hand. She does not take it, and runs out knocking her eyes. STRANGWAY turns on his heel and goes into the house.]

CONNIE. 'Twasn't his bird.

IVY. Skylarks belong to the sky. Mr. Strangway said so.

GLADYS. Not when they'm caught, they don't.

IVY. They du.

CONNIE. 'Twas her bird.

IVY. He gave her sixpence for it.

GLADYS. She didn't take it.

CONNIE. There it is on the ground.

IVY. She might have.

GLADYS. He'll p'raps take my squirrel, tu.

IVY. The bird sang—I 'eard it! Right up in the sky. It wouldn't have sanged if it weren't glad.

GLADYS. Well, Mercy cried.

IVY. I don't care.

GLADYS. 'Tis a shame! And I know something. Mrs. Strangway's at Durford.

CONNIE. She's—never!

GLADYS. I saw her yesterday. An' if she's there she ought to be here. I told mother, an' she said: "Yu mind yer business." An' when she goes in to market to-morrow she'm goin' to see. An' if she's really there, mother says, 'tis a fine tu-du an' a praaper scandal. So I know a lot more'n yu du.

[Ivy stares at her.]

CONNIE. Mrs. Strangway told mother she was goin' to France for the winter because her mother was ill.

GLADYS. 'Tisn't, winter now—Ascension Day. I saw her cumin' out o' Dr. Desert's house. I know 'twas her because she had on a blue dress an' a proud luke. Mother says the doctor come over here tu often before Mrs. Strangway went away, just afore Christmas. They was old sweethearts before she married Mr. Strangway. [To Ivy] 'Twas yure mother told mother that.

[Ivy gazes at them more and more wide-eyed.]

CONNIE. Father says if Mrs. Bradmere an' the old Rector knew about the doctor, they wouldn't 'ave Mr. Strangway 'ere for curate any longer; because mother says it takes more'n a year for a gude wife to leave her 'usband, an' 'e so fond of her. But 't isn't no business of ours, father says.

GLADYS. Mother says so tu. She's praaper set against gossip. She'll know all about it to-morrow after market.

IVY. [Stamping her foot] I don't want to 'ear nothin' at all; I don't, an' I won't.

[A rather shame faced silence falls on the girls.]

GLADYS. [In a quick whisper] 'Ere's Mrs. Burlacombe.

[There enters fawn the house a stout motherly woman with a round grey eye and very red cheeks.]

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Ivy, take Mr. Strangway his ink, or we'll never 'eve no sermon to-night. He'm in his thinkin' box, but 'tis not a bit o' yuse 'im thinkin' without 'is ink. [She hands her daughter an inkpot and blotting-pad. Ivy Takes them and goes out] What ever's this? [She picks up the little bird-cage.]

GLADYS. 'Tis Mercy Jarland's. Mr. Strangway let her skylark go.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Aw! Did 'e now? Serve 'er right, bringin' an 'eathen bird to confirmation class.

CONNIE. I'll take it to her.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. No. Yu leave it there, an' let Mr. Strangway du what 'e likes with it. Bringin' a bird like that! Well 'I never!

[The girls, perceiving that they have lighted on stony soil, look at each other and slide towards the door.]

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Yes, yu just be off, an' think on what yu've been told in class, an' be'ave like Christians, that's gude maids. An' don't yu come no more in the 'avenin's dancin' them 'eathen dances in my barn, naighthther, till after yu'm confirmed—'t isn't right. I've told Ivy I won't 'ave it.

CONNIE. Mr. Strangway don't mind—he likes us to; 'twas Mrs. Strangway began teachin' us. He's goin' to give a prize.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Yu just du what I tell yu an' never mind Mr. Strangway—he'm tu kind to everyone. D'yu think I don't know how gells oughter be'ave before confirmation? Yu be'ave like I did! Now, goo ahn! Shoo!

[She hustles them out, rather as she might hustle her chickens, and begins tidying the room. There comes a wandering figure to the open window. It is that of a man of about thirty-five, of feeble gait, leaning the weight of all one side of him on a stick. His dark face, with black hair, one lock of which has gone white, was evidently once that of an ardent man. Now it is slack, weakly smiling, and the brown eyes are lost, and seem always to be asking something to which there is no answer.]

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [With that forced cheerfulness always assumed in the face of too great misfortune] Well, Jim! better? [At the faint brightening of the smile] That's right! Yu'm gettin' on bravely. Want Parson?

JIM. [Nodding and smiling, and speaking slowly] I want to tell 'un about my cat.

[His face loses its smile.]

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Why! what's she been duin' then? Mr. Strangway's busy. Won't I du?

JIM. [Shaking his head] No. I want to tell him.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Whatever she been duin'? Havin' kittens?

JIM. No. She'm lost.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Dearie me! Aw! she'm not lost. Cats be like maids; they must get out a bit.

JIM. She'm lost. Maybe he'll know where she'll be.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Well, well. I'll go an' find 'im.

JIM. He's a gude man. He's very gude.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. That's certain zure.

STRANGWAY. [Entering from the house] Mrs. Burlacombe, I can't think where I've put my book on St. Francis—the large, squarish pale-blue one?

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Aw! there now! I knu there was somethin' on me mind. Miss Willis she came in yesterday afternune when yu was out, to borrow it. Oh! yes—I said—I'm zure Mr. Strangway'll lend it 'ee. Now think o' that!

STRANGWAY. Of course, Mrs. Burlacombe; very glad she's got it.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Aw! but that's not all. When I tuk it up there come out a whole flutter o' little bits o' paper wi' little rhymes on 'em, same as I see yu writin'. Aw! my gudeness! I says to meself, Mr. Strangway widn' want no one seein' them.

STRANGWAY. Dear me! No; certainly not!

MRS. BURLACOMBE. An' so I putt 'em in your secretary.

STRANGWAY. My-ah! Yes. Thank you; yes.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. But I'll goo over an' get the buke for yu. 'T won't take me 'alf a minit.

[She goes out on to the green. JIM BERE has come in.]

STRANGWAY. [Gently] Well, Jim?

JIM. My cat's lost.

STRANGWAY. Lost?

JIM. Day before yesterday. She'm not come back. They've shot 'er, I think; or she'm caught in one o' they rabbit-traps.

STRANGWAY. Oh! no; my dear fellow, she'll come back. I'll speak to Sir Herbert's keepers.

JIM. Yes, zurr. I feel lonesome without 'er.

STRANGWAY. [With a faint smile—more to himself than to Jim] Lonesome! Yes! That's bad, Jim! That's bad!

JIM. I miss 'er when I sits than in the avenin'.

STRANGWAY. The evenings—They're the worst—and when the blackbirds sing in the morning.

JIM. She used to lie on my bed, ye know, zurr.

[STRANGWAY turns his face away, contracted with pain]

She'm like a Christian.

STRANGWAY. The beasts are.

JIM. There's plenty folk ain't 'alf as Christian as 'er be.

STRANGWAY. Well, dear Jim, I'll do my very best. And any time you're lonely, come up, and I'll play the flute to you.

JIM. [Wriggling slightly] No, zurr. Thank 'ee, zurr.

STRANGWAY. What—don't you like music?

JIM. Ye-es, zurr. [A figure passes the window. Seeing it he says with his slow smile] "'Ere's Mrs. Bradmere, comin' from the Rectory." [With queer malice] She don't like cats. But she'm a cat 'erself, I think.

STRANGWAY. [With his smile] Jim!

JIM. She'm always tellin' me I'm lukin' better. I'm not better, zurr.

STRANGWAY. That's her kindness.

JIM. I don't think it is. 'Tis laziness, an' 'avin' 'er own way. She'm very fond of 'er own way.

[A knock on the door cuts off his speech. Following closely on the knock, as though no doors were licensed to be closed against her, a grey-haired lady enters; a capable, broad-faced woman of seventy, whose every tone and movement exhales authority. With a nod and a "good morning" to STRANGWAY she turns at face to JIM BERE.]

MRS. BRADMERE Ah! Jim; you're looking better.

[JIM BERE shakes his head. MRS. BRADMERE. Oh! yes, you are. Getting on splendidly. And now, I just want to speak to Mr. Strangway.]

[JIM BERE touches his forelock, and slowly, leaning on his stick, goes out.]

MRS. BRADMERE. [Waiting for the door to close] You know how that came on him? Caught the girl he was engaged to, one night, with another man, the rage broke something here. [She touches her forehead] Four years ago.

STRANGWAY. Poor fellow!

MRS. BRADMERE. [Looking at him sharply] Is your wife back?

STRANGWAY. [Starting] No.

MRS. BRADMERE. By the way, poor Mrs. Cremer—is she any better?

STRANGWAY. No; going fast: Wonderful—so patient.

MRS. BRADMERE. [With gruff sympathy] Um! Yes. They know how to die! [Wide another sharp look at him] D'you expect your wife soon?

STRANGWAY. I I—hope so.

MRS. BRADMERE: So do I. The sooner the better.

STRANGWAY. [Shrinking] I trust the Rector's not suffering so much this morning?

MRS. BRADMERE. Thank you! His foot's very bad.

[As she speaks Mrs. BURLACOMBE returns with a large pale-blue book in her bared.]

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Good day, M'm! [Taking the book across to STRANGWAY] Miss Willie, she says she'm very sorry, zurr.

STRANGWAY. She was very welcome, Mrs. Burlacombe. [To MRS. BURLACOMBE] Forgive me—my sermon.

[He goes into the house. The two women graze after him. Then, at once, as it were, draw into themselves, as if preparing for an encounter, and yet seem to expand as if losing the need for restraint.]

MRS. BRADMERE. [Abruptly] He misses his wife very much, I'm afraid.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Ah! Don't he? Poor dear man; he keeps a terrible tight 'and over 'imself, but 'tis suthin' cruel the way he walks about at night. He'm just like a cow when its calf's weaned. 'T'as gone to me 'eart truly to see 'im these months past. T'other day when I went up to du his rume, I yeard a noise like this [she sniffs]; an' ther' 'e was at the wardrobe, snuffin' at 'er things. I did never think a man cud care for a woman so much as that.

MRS. BRADMERE. H'm!

MRS. BURLACOMBE. 'Tis funny rest an' 'e comin' 'ere for quiet after that tearin' great London parish! 'E'm terrible absent-minded tu —don't take no interest in 'is fude. Yesterday, goin' on for one o'clock, 'e says to me, "I expect 'tis nearly breakfast-time, Mrs. Burlacombe!" 'E'd 'ad it twice already!

MRS. BRADMERE. Twice! Nonsense!

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Zurely! I give 'im a nummit afore 'e gets up; an' 'e 'as 'is brekjus reg'lar at nine. Must feed un up. He'm on 'is feet all day, gain' to zee folk that widden want to zee an angel, they're that busy; an' when 'e comes in 'e'll play 'is flute there. Hem wastin' away for want of 'is wife. That's what 'tis. An' 'im so sweet-spoken, tu, 'tes a pleasure to year 'im—Never says a word!

MRS. BRADMERE. Yes, that's the kind of man who gets treated badly. I'm afraid she's not worthy of him, Mrs. Burlacombe.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [Plaiting her apron] 'Tesn't for me to zay that. She'm a very pleasant lady.

MRS. BRADMERE. Too pleasant. What's this story about her being seen in Durford?

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Aw! I du never year no gossip, m'm.

MRS. BRADMERE. [Drily] Of course not! But you see the Rector wishes to know.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [Flustered] Well—folk will talk! But, as I says to Burlacombe—"Tes paltry," I says; and they only married eighteen months, and Mr. Strangway so devoted-like. 'Tes nothing but love, with 'im.

MRS. BRADMERE. Come!

MRS. BURLACOMBE. There's puzzivantin' folk as'll set an' gossip the feathers off an angel. But I du never listen.

MRS. BRADMERE. Now then, Mrs. Burlacombe?

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Well, they du say as how Dr. Desart over to Durford and Mrs. Strangway was sweethearts afore she wer' married.

MRS. BRADMERE. I knew that. Who was it saw her coming out of Dr. Desart's house yesterday?

MRS. BURLACOMBE. In a manner of spakin' 'tes Mrs. Freman that says 'er Gladys seen her.

MRS. BRADMERE. That child's got an eye like a hawk.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. 'Tes wonderful how things du spread. 'Tesn't as if us gossiped. Du seem to grow-like in the naight.

MRS. BRADMERE [To herself] I never lied her. That Riviera excuse, Mrs. Burlacombe—Very convenient things, sick mothers. Mr. Strangway doesn't know?

MRS. BURLACOMBE. The Lord forbid! 'Twid send un crazy, I think. For all he'm so moony an' gentlelike, I think he'm a terrible passionate man inside. He've a-got a saint in 'im, for zure; but 'tes only 'alf-baked, in a manner of spakin'.

MRS. BRADMERE. I shall go and see Mrs. Freman. There's been too much of this gossip all the winter.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. 'Tes unfortunate-like 'tes the Fremans. Freman he'm a gipsy sort of a feller; and he've never forgiven Mr. Strangway for spakin' to 'im about the way he trates 'is 'orses.

MRS. BRADMERE. Ah! I'm afraid Mr. Strangway's not too discreet when his feelings are touched.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. 'E've a-got an 'eart so big as the full mune. But 'tes no yuse espectin' tu much o' this world. 'Tes a funny place, after that.

MRS. BRADMERE. Yes, Mrs. Burlacombe; and I shall give some of these good people a rare rap over the knuckles for their want of charity. For all they look as if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths, they're an un-Christian lot. [Looking very directly at Mrs. BURLACOMBE] It's lucky we've some hold over the village. I'm not going to have scandal. I shall speak to Sir Herbert, and he and the Rector will take steps.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [With covert malice] Aw! I du hope 'twon't upset the Rector, an' 'is fute so poptions!

MRS. BRADMERE. [Grimly] His foot'll be sound enough to come down sharp. By the way, will you send me a duck up to the Rectory?

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [Glad to get away] Zurely, m'm; at once. I've some luv'ly fat birds.

[She goes into the house.]

MRS. BRADMERE. Old puss-cat!

[She turns to go, and in the doorway encounters a very little, red-cheeked girl in a peacock-blue cap, and pink frock, who curtsies stolidly.]

MRS. BRADMERE. Well, Tibby Jarland, what do you want here? Always sucking something, aren't you?

[Getting no reply from Tibby JARLAND, she passes out. Tibby comes in, looks round, takes a large sweet out of her mouth, contemplates it, and puts it back again. Then, in a perfunctory and very stolid fashion, she looks about the floor, as if she had been told to find something. While she is finding nothing and sucking her sweet, her sister MERCY comes in furtively, still frowning and vindictive.]

MERCY. What! Haven't you found it, Tibby? Get along with 'ee, then!

[She accelerates the stolid Tissy's departure with a smack, searches under the seat, finds and picks up the deserted sixpence. Then very quickly she goes to the door: But it is opened before she reaches it, and, finding herself caught, she slips behind the chintz window-curtain. A woman has entered, who is clearly the original of the large photograph. She is not strictly pretty, but there is charm in her pale, resolute face, with its mocking lips, flexible brows, and greenish eyes, whose lids, square above them, have short, dark lashes. She is dressed in blue, and her fair hair is coiled up under a cap and motor-veil. She comes in swiftly, and closes the door behind her; becomes irresolute; then, suddenly deciding, moves towards the door into the house. MERCY slips from behind her curtain to make off, but at that moment the door into the house is opened, and she has at once to slip back again into covert. It is Ivy who has appeared.]

IVY. [Amazed] Oh! Mrs. Strangway!

[Evidently disconcerted by this appearance, BEATRICE STRANGWAY pulls herself together and confronts the child with a smile.]

BEATRICE. Well, Ivy—you've grown! You didn't expect me, did you?

IVY. No, Mrs. Strangway; but I hoped yu'd be comin' soon.

BEATRICE. Ah! Yes. Is Mr. Strangway in?

IVY. [Hypnotized by those faintly smiling lips] Yes—oh, yes! He's writin' his sermon in the little room. He will be glad!

BEATRICE. [Going a little closer, and never taking her eyes off the child] Yes. Now, Ivy; will you do something for me?

IVY. [Fluttering] Oh, yes, Mrs. Strangway.

BEATRICE. Quite sure?

IVY. Oh, yes!

BEATRICE. Are you old enough to keep a secret?

IVY. [Nodding] I'm fourteen now.

BEATRICE. Well, then—, I don't want anybody but Mr. Strangway to know I've been here; nobody, not even your mother. D'you understand?

IVY. [Troubled] No. Only, I can keep a secret.

BEATRICE. Mind, if anybody hears, it will hurt Mr. Strangway.

IVY. Oh! I wouldn't—hurt—him. Must you go away again? [Trembling towards her] I wish you were going to stay. And perhaps some one has seen you—They—

BEATRICE. [Hastily] No, no one. I came motoring; like this. [She moves her veil to show how it can conceal her face] And I came straight down the little lane, and through the barn, across the yard.

IVY. [Timidly] People do see a lot.

BEATRICE. [Still with that hovering smile] I know, but—Now go and tell him quickly and quietly.

IVY. [Stopping at the door] Mother's pluckin' a duck. Only, please, Mrs. Strangway, if she comes in even after you've gone, she'll know, because—because you always have that particular nice scent.

BEATRICE. Thank you, my child. I'll see to that.

[Ivy looks at her as if she would speak again, then turns suddenly, and goes out. BEATRICE'S face darkens; she shivers. Taking out a little cigarette case, she lights a cigarette, and watches the puff's of smoke wreath about her and die away. The frightened MERCY peers out, spying for a chance, to escape. Then from the house STRANGWAY comes in. All his dreaminess is gone.]

STRANGWAY. Thank God! [He stops at the look on her face] I don't understand, though. I thought you were still out there.

BEATRICE. [Letting her cigarette fall, and putting her foot on it] No.

STRANGWAY: You're staying? Oh! Beatrice; come! We'll get away from here at once—as far, as far—anywhere you like. Oh! my darling—only come! If you knew—

BEATRICE. It's no good, Michael; I've tried and tried.

STRANGWAY. Not! Then, why—? Beatrice! You said, when you were right away—I've waited—

BEATRICE. I know. It's cruel—it's horrible. But I told you not to hope, Michael. I've done my best. All these months at Mentone, I've been wondering why I ever let you marry me—when that feeling wasn't dead!

STRANGWAY. You can't have come back just to leave me again?

BEATRICE. When you let me go out there with mother I thought—I did think I would be able; and I had begun—and then—spring came!

STRANGWAY. Spring came here too! Never so—aching! Beatrice, can't you?

BEATRICE. I've something to say.

STRANGWAY. No! No! No!

BEATRICE. You see—I've—fallen.

STRANGWAY. Ah! [In a twice sharpened by pain] Why, in the name of mercy, come here to tell me that? Was he out there, then?

BEATRICE. I came straight back to him.

STRANGWAY. To Durford?

BEATRICE. To the Crossway Hotel, miles out—in my own name. They don't know me there. I told you not to hope, Michael. I've done my best; I swear it.

STRANGWAY. My God!

BEATRICE. It was your God that brought us to live near him!

STRANGWAY. Why have you come to me like this?

BEATRICE. To know what you're going to do. Are you going to divorce me? We're in your power. Don't divorce me—Doctor and patient—you must know—it ruins him. He'll lose everything. He'd be disqualified, and he hasn't a penny without his work.

STRANGWAY. Why should I spare him?

BEATRICE. Michael; I came to beg. It's hard.

STRANGWAY. No; don't beg! I can't stand it.

[She shakes her head.]

BEATRICE. [Recovering her pride] What are you going to do, then? Keep us apart by the threat of a divorce? Starve us and prison us? Cage me up here with you? I'm not brute enough to ruin him.

STRANGWAY. Heaven!

BEATRICE. I never really stopped loving him. I never—loved you, Michael.

STRANGWAY. [Stunned] Is that true? [BEATRICE bends her head] Never loved me? Not—that night—on the river—not—?

BEATRICE. [Under her breath] No.

STRANGWAY. Were you lying to me, then? Kissing me, and—hating me?

BEATRICE. One doesn't hate men like you; but it wasn't love.

STRANGWAY. Why did you tell me it was?

BEATRICE. Yes. That was the worst thing I've ever done.

STRANGWAY. Do you think I would have married you? I would have burned first! I never dreamed you didn't. I swear it!

BEATRICE. [Very low] Forget it!

STRANGWAY. Did he try to get you away from me? [BEATRICE gives him a swift look] Tell me the truth!

BEATRICE. No. It was—I—alone. But—he loves me.

STRANGWAY. One does not easily know love, it seems.

[But her smile, faint, mysterious, pitying, is enough, and he turns away from her.]

BEATRICE. It was cruel to come, I know. For me, too. But I couldn't write. I had to know.

STRANGWAY. Never loved me? Never loved me? That night at Tregaron? [At the look on her face] You might have told me before you went away! Why keep me all these—

BEATRICE. I meant to forget him again. I did mean to. I thought I could get back to what I was, when I married you; but, you see, what a girl can do, a woman that's been married—can't.

STRANGWAY. Then it was I—my kisses that—! [He laughs] How did you stand them? [His eyes dart at her face] Imagination helped you, perhaps!

BEATRICE. Michael, don't, don't! And—oh! don't make a public thing of it! You needn't be afraid I shall have too good a time!

[He stays quite still and silent, and that which is writhing in him makes his face so strange that BEATRICE stands aghast. At last she goes stumbling on in speech]

If ever you want to marry some one else—then, of course—that's only fair, ruin or not. But till then—till then—He's leaving Durford, going to Brighton. No one need know. And you—this isn't the only parish in the world.

STRANGWAY. [Quietly] You ask me to help you live in secret with another man?

BEATRICE. I ask for mercy.

STRANGWAY. [As to himself] What am I to do?

BEATRICE. What you feel in the bottom of your heart.

STRANGWAY. You ask me to help you live in sin?

BEATRICE. To let me go out of your life. You've only to do— nothing. [He goes, slowly, close to her.]

STRANGWAY. I want you. Come back to me! Beatrice, come back!

BEATRICE. It would be torture, now.

STRANGWAY. [Writhing] Oh!

BEATRICE. Whatever's in your heart—do!

STRANGWAY. You'd come back to me sooner than ruin him? Would you?

BEATRICE. I can't bring him harm.

STRANGWAY. [Turning away] God!—if there be one help me! [He stands leaning his forehead against the window. Suddenly his glance falls on the little bird cage, still lying on the window-seat] Never cage any wild thing! [He gives a laugh that is half a sob; then, turning to the door, says in a low voice] Go! Go please, quickly! Do what you will. I won't hurt you—can't—But—go! [He opens the door.]

BEATRICE. [Greatly moved] Thank you!

[She passes him with her head down, and goes out quickly. STRANGWAY stands unconsciously tearing at the little bird-cage. And while he tears at it he utters a moaning sound. The terrified MERCY, peering from behind the curtain, and watching her chance, slips to the still open door; but in her haste and fright she knocks against it, and STRANGWAY sees her. Before he can stop her she has fled out on to the green and away.]

[While he stands there, paralysed, the door from the house is opened, and MRS. BURLACOMBE approaches him in a queer, hushed way.]

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [Her eyes mechanically fixed on the twisted bird-cage in his hands] 'Tis poor Sue Cremer, zurr, I didn't 'ardly think she'd last thru the mornin'. An' zure enough she'm passed away! [Seeing that he has not taken in her words] Mr. Strangway— yu'm feelin' giddy?

STRANGWAY. No, no! What was it? You said—

MRS. BURLACOMBE. 'Tis Jack Cremer. His wife's gone. 'E'm in a terrible way. 'Tis only yu, 'e ses, can du 'im any gude. He'm in the kitchen.

STRANGWAY. Cremer? Yes! Of course. Let him—

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [Still staring at the twisted cage] Yu ain't wantin' that—'tis all twizzled. [She takes it from him] Sure yu'm not feelin' yer 'ead?

STRANGWAY. [With a resolute effort] No!

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [Doubtfully] I'll send 'im in, then. [She goes. When she is gone, Strangway passes his handkerchief across his forehead, and his lips move fast. He is standing motionless when CREMER, a big man in labourer's clothes, with a thick, broad face, and tragic, faithful eyes, comes in, and stands a little in from the closed door, quite dumb.]

STRANGWAY. [After a moment's silence—going up to him and laying a hand on his shoulder] Jack! Don't give way. If we give way—we're done.

CREMER. Yes, zurr. [A quiver passes over his face.]

STRANGWAY. She didn't. Your wife was a brave woman. A dear woman.

CREMER. I never thought to luse 'er. She never told me 'ow bad she was, afore she tuk to 'er bed. 'Tis a dreadful thing to luse a wife, zurr.

STRANGWAY. [Tightening his lips, that tremble] Yes. But don't give way! Bear up, Jack!

CREMER. Seems funny 'er goin' blue-bell time, an' the sun shinin' so warm. I picked up an 'orse-shu yesterday. I can't never 'ave 'er back, zurr.

[His face quivers again.]

STRANGWAY. Some day you'll join her. Think! Some lose their wives for ever.

CREMER. I don't believe as there's a future life, zurr. I think we goo to sleep like the beasts.

STRANGWAY. We're told otherwise. But come here! [Drawing him to the window] Look! Listen! To sleep in that! Even if we do, it won't be so bad, Jack, will it?

CREMER. She wer' a gude wife to me—no man didn't 'ave no better wife.

STRANGWAY. [Putting his hand out] Take hold—hard—harder! I want yours as much as you want mine. Pray for me, Jack, and I'll pray for you. And we won't give way, will we?

CREMER. [To whom the strangeness of these words has given some relief] No, zurr; thank 'ee, zurr. 'Tes no gude, I expect. Only, I'll miss 'er. Thank 'ee, zurr; kindly.

[He lifts his hand to his head, turns, and uncertainly goes out to the kitchen. And STRANGWAY stays where he is, not knowing what to do. They blindly he takes up his flute, and hatless, hurries out into the air.]

ACT II

SCENE I

About seven o'clock in the taproom of the village inn. The bar, with the appurtenances thereof, stretches across one end, and opposite is the porch door on to the green. The wall between is nearly all window, with leaded panes, one wide-open casement whereof lets in the last of the sunlight. A narrow bench runs under this broad window. And this is all the furniture, save three spittoons:

GODLEIGH, the innkeeper, a smallish man with thick ruffled hair, a loquacious nose, and apple-red cheeks above a reddish-brown moustache; is reading the paper. To him enters TIBBY JARLAND with a shilling in her mouth.

GODLEIGH. Well, TIBBY JARLAND, what've yu come for, then? Glass o' beer?

[TIBBY takes the shilling from her mouth and smiles stolidly.]

GODLEIGH. [Twinkling] I shid zay glass o' 'arf an' 'arf's about yure form. [TIBBY smiles more broadly] Yu'm a praaper masterpiece. Well! 'Ave sister Mercy borrowed yure tongue? [TIBBY shakes her head] Aw, she 'aven't. Well, maid?

TIBBY. Father wants six clay pipes, please.

GODLEIGH. 'E du, du 'ee? Yu tell yure father 'e can't 'ave more'n one, not this avenin'. And 'ere 'tis. Hand up yure shillin'.

[TIBBY reaches up her hand, parts with the shilling, and receives a long clay pipe and eleven pennies. In order to secure the coins in her pinafore she places the clay pipe in her mouth. While she is still thus engaged, MRS. BRADMERE enters the porch and comes in. TIBBY curtsies stolidly.]

MRS. BRADMERE. Gracious, child! What are you doing here? And what have you got in your mouth? Who is it? Tibby Jarland? [TIBBY curtsies again] Take that thing out. And tell your father from me that if I ever see you at the inn again I shall tread on his toes hard. Godleigh, you know the law about children?

GODLEIGH. [Cocking his eye, and not at all abashed] Surely, m'm. But she will come. Go away, my dear.

[TIBBY, never taking her eyes off MRS. BRADMERE, or the pipe from her mouth, has backed stolidly to the door, and vanished.]

MRS. BRADMERE. [Eyeing GODLEIGH] Now, Godleigh, I've come to talk to you. Half the scandal

that goes about the village begins here. [She holds up her finger to check expostulation] No, no—its no good. You know the value of scandal to your business far too well.

GODLEIGH. Wi' all respect, m'm, I knows the vally of it to yourn, tu.

MRS. BRADMERE. What do you mean by that?

GODLEIGH. If there weren't no Rector's lady there widden' be no notice taken o' scandal; an' if there weren't no notice taken, twidden be scandal, to my thinkin'.

MRS. BRADMERE. [Winking out a grim little smile] Very well! You've given me your views. Now for mine. There's a piece of scandal going about that's got to be stopped, Godleigh. You turn the tap of it off here, or we'll turn your tap off. You know me. See?

GODLEIGH. I shouldn' never presume, m'm, to know a lady.

MRS. BRADMERE. The Rector's quite determined, so is Sir Herbert. Ordinary scandal's bad enough, but this touches the Church. While Mr. Strangway remains curate here, there must be no talk about him and his affairs.

GODLEIGH. [Cocking his eye] I was just thinkin' how to du it, m'm. 'Twid be a brave notion to putt the men in chokey, and slit the women's tongues-like, same as they du in outlandish places, as I'm told.

MRS. BRADMERE. Don't talk nonsense, Godleigh; and mind what I say, because I mean it.

GODLEIGH. Make yure mind aisy, m'm there'll be no scandal-monkeyin' here wi' my permission.

[MRS. BRADMERE gives him a keen stare, but seeing him perfectly grave, nods her head with approval.]

MRS. BRADMERE. Good! You know what's being said, of course?

GODLEIGH. [With respectful gravity] Yu'll pardon me, m'm, but ef an' in case yu was goin' to tell me, there's a rule in this 'ouse: "No scandal 'ere!"

MRS. BRADMERE. [Twinkling grimly] You're too smart by half, my man.

GODLEIGH. Aw fegs, no, m'm—child in yure 'ands.

MRS. BRADMERE. I wouldn't trust you a yard. Once more, Godleigh! This is a Christian village, and we mean it to remain so. You look out for yourself.

[The door opens to admit the farmers TRUSTAFORD and BURLACOMBE. They doff their hats to MRS. BRADMERE, who, after one more sharp look at GODLEIGH, moves towards the door.]

MRS. BRADMERE. Evening, Mr. Trustaford. [To BURLACOMBE] Burlacombe, tell your wife that duck she sent up was in hard training.

[With one of her grim winks, and a nod, she goes.]

TRUSTAFORD. [Replacing a hat which is black, hard, and not very new, on his long head, above a long face, clean-shaved but for little whiskers] What's the old grey mare want, then? [With a horse-laugh] 'Er's lukin' awful wise!

GODLEIGH. [Enigmatically] Ah!

TRUSTAFORD. [Sitting on the bench dose to the bar] Drop o' whisky, an' potash.

BURLACOMBE. [A taciturn, alien, yellowish man, in a worn soft hat] What's wise, Godleigh? Drop o' cider.

GODLEIGH. Nuse? There's never no nuse in this 'ouse. Aw, no! Not wi' my permission. [In imitation] This is a Christian village.

TRUSTAFORD. Thought the old grey mare seemed mighty busy. [To BURLACOMBE] 'Tes rather quare about the curate's wife a-cumin' motorin' this mornin'. Passed me wi' her face all smothered up in a veil, goggles an' all. Haw, haw!

BURLACOMBE. Aye!

TRUSTAFORD. Off again she was in 'alf an hour. 'Er didn't give poor old curate much of a chance, after six months.

GODLEIGH. Havin' an engagement elsewhere—No scandal, please, gentlemen.

BURLACOMBE. [Acidly] Never asked to see my missis. Passed me in the yard like a stone.

TRUSTAFORD. 'T'es a little bit rumoursome lately about 'er doctor.

GODLEIGH. Ah! he's the favourite. But 'tes a dead secret; Mr. Trustaford. Don't yu never repate it—there's not a cat don't know it already!

BURLACOMBE frowns, and TRUSTAFORD utters his laugh. The door is opened and FREMAN, a dark gipsyish man in the dress of a farmer, comes in.

GODLEIGH. Don't yu never tell Will Freman what 'e told me!

FREMAN. Avenin'!

TRUSTAFORD. Avenin', Will; what's yure glass o' trouble?

FREMAN. Drop o' eider, clove, an' dash o' gin. There's blood in the sky to-night.

BURLACOMBE. Ah! We'll 'ave fine weather now, with the full o' the mune.

FREMAN. Dust o' wind an' a drop or tu, virst, I reckon. 'Earl t' nuse about curate an' 'is wife?

GODLEIGH. No, indeed; an' don't yu tell us. We'm Christians 'ere in this village.

FREMAN. 'Tain't no very Christian nuse, neither. He's sent 'er off to th' doctor. "Go an' live with un," 'e says; "my blessin' on ye." If 'er'd a-been mine, I'd 'a tuk the whip to 'er. Tam Jarland's maid, she year'd it all. Christian, indeed! That's brave Christianity! "Goo an' live with un!" 'e told 'er.

BURLACOMBE. No, no; that's, not sense—a man to say that. I'll not 'ear that against a man that bides in my 'ouse.

FREMAN. 'T'es sure, I tell 'ee. The maid was hid-up, scared-like, behind the curtain. At it they went, and parson 'e says: "Go," 'e says, "I won't kape 'ee from 'im," 'e says, "an' I won't divorce 'ee, as yu don't wish it!" They was 'is words, same as Jarland's maid told my maid, an' my maid told my missis. If that's parson's talk, 'tes funny work goin' to church.

TRUSTAFORD. [Brooding] 'T'es wonderful quare, zurely.

FREMAN. Tam Jarland's fair mad wi' curate for makin' free wi' his maid's skylark. Parson or no parson, 'e've no call to meddle wi' other people's praperty. He cam' pokin' 'is nose into my affairs. I told un I knew a sight more 'bout 'orses than 'e ever would!

TRUSTAFORD. He'm a bit crazy 'bout bastes an' birds.

[They have been so absorbed that they bane not noticed the entrance of CLYST, a youth with tousled hair, and a bright, quick, Celtic eye, who stands listening, with a bit of paper in his hand.]

CLYST. Ah! he'm that zurely, Mr. Trustaford.

[He chuckles.]

GODLEIGH. Now, Tim Clyst, if an' in case yu've a-got some scandal on yer tongue, don't yu never unship it here. Yu go up to Rectory where 'twill be more relished-like.

CLYST. [Waving the paper] Will y' give me a drink for this, Mr. Godleigh? 'T'es rale funny. Aw! 'tes somethin' swats. Butiful readin'. Poetry. Rale spice. Yu've a luv'ly voice for readin', Mr. Godleigh.

GODLEIGH. [All ears and twinkle] Aw, what is it then?

CLYST. Ah! Yu want t'know tu much.

[Putting the paper in his pocket.]

[While he is speaking, JIM BERE has entered quietly, with his feeble step and smile, and

sits down.]

CLYST. [Kindly] Hello, Jim! Cat come 'ome?

JIM BERE. No.

[All nod, and speak to him kindly. And JIM BERE smiles at them, and his eyes ask of them the question, to which there is no answer. And after that he sits motionless and silent, and they talk as if he were not there.]

GODLEIGH. What's all this, now—no scandal in my 'ouse!

CLYST. 'Tes awful peculiar—like a drame. Mr. Burlacombe 'e don't like to hear tell about drames. A guess a won't tell 'ee, arter that.

FREMAN. Out wi' it, Tim.

CLYST. 'Tes powerful thirsty to-day, Mr. Godleigh.

GODLEIGH. [Drawing him some cider] Yu're all wild cat's talk, Tim; yu've a-got no tale at all.

CLYST. [Moving for the cider] Aw, indade!

GODLEIGH. No tale, no cider!

CLYST. Did ye ever year tell of Orphus?

TRUSTAFORD. What? The old vet. up to Drayleigh?

CLYST. Fegs, no; Orphus that lived in th' old time, an' drewed the bastes after un wi' his music, same as curate was tellin' the maids.

FREMAN. I've 'eard as a gipsy over to Vellacott could du that wi' 'is viddle.

CLYST. 'Twas no gipsy I see'd this arternune; 'twee Orphus, down to Mr. Burlacombe's long medder; settin' there all dark on a stone among the dimsy-white flowers an' the cowflops, wi' a bird upon 'is 'ead, playin' his whistle to the ponies.

FREMAN. [Excitedly] Yu did never zee a man wi' a bird on 'is 'ead.

CLYST. Didn' I?

FREMAN. What sort o' bird, then? Yu tell me that.

TRUSTAFORD. Praaper old barndoor cock. Haw, haw!

GODLEIGH. [Soothingly] 'Tes a vairy-tale; us mustn't be tu partic'lar.

BURLACOMBE: In my long medder? Where were yu, then, Tim Clyst?

CLYST. Passin' down the lane on my bike. Wonderful sorrowful-fine music 'e played. The ponies they did come round 'e—yu cud zee the tears rennin' down their chakes; 'twas powerful sad. 'E 'adn't no 'at on.

FREMAN. [Jeering] No; 'e 'ad a bird on 'is 'ead.

CLYST. [With a silencing grin] He went on playin' an' playin'. The ponies they never muved. An' all the dimsy-white flowers they waved and waved, an' the wind it went over 'em. Gav' me a funny feelin'.

GODLEIGH. Clyst, yu take the cherry bun!

CLYST. Where's that cider, Mr. Godleigh?

GODLEIGH. [Bending over the cider] Yu've a— 'ad tu much already, Tim.

[The door is opened, and TAM JARLAND appears. He walks rather unsteadily; a man with a hearty jowl, and sullen, strange; epileptic-looking eyes.]

CLYST. [Pointing to JARLAND] 'Tis Tam Jarland there 'as the cargo aboard.

JARLAND. Avenin', all! [To GODLEIGH] Pinto' beer. [To JIM BERE] Avenin', Jim.

[JIM BERE looks at him and smiles.]

GODLEIGH. [Serving him after a moment's hesitation] 'Ere y'are, Tam. [To CLYST, who has taken out his paper again] Where'd yu get thiccy paper?

CLYST. [Putting down his cider-mug empty] Yure tongue du watter, don't it, Mr. Godleigh? [Holding out his mug] No zider, no poetry. 'Tis amazin' sorrowful; Shakespeare over again. "The boy stude on the burnin' deck."

FREMAN. Yu and yer yap!

CLYST. Ah! Yu wait a bit. When I come back down t'lane again, Orphus 'e was vanished away; there was naught in the field but the ponies, an' a praaper old magpie, a-top o' the hedge. I zee somethin' white in the beak o' the fowl, so I giv' a "Whisht," an' 'e drops it smart, an' off 'e go. I gets over bank an' picks un up, and here't be.

[He holds out his mug.]

BURLACOMBE. [Tartly] Here, give 'im 'is cider. Rade it yureself, ye young teasewings.

[CLYST, having secured his cider, drinks it o\$. Holding up the paper to the light, he makes as if to begin, then slides his eye round, tantalizing.]

CLYST. 'Tes a pity I bain't dressed in a white gown, an' flowers in me 'air.

FREMAN. Read it, or we'll 'aye yu out o' this.

CLYST. Aw, don't 'ee shake my nerve, now!

[He begins reading with mock heroism, in his soft, high, burring voice. Thus, in his rustic accent, go the lines]

God lighted the zun in 'eaven far.
Lighted the virefly an' the star.
My 'eart 'E lighted not!

God lighted the vields fur lambs to play,
Lighted the bright strames, 'an the may.
My 'eart 'E lighted not!

God lighted the mune, the Arab's way,
He lights to-morrer, an' to-day.
My 'eart 'E 'ath vorgot!

[When he has finished, there is silence. Then TRUSTAFORD, scratching his head, speaks:]

TAUSTAFORD. 'Tes amazin' funny stuff.

FREMAN. [Looking over CLYST'S shoulder] Be danged! 'Tes the curate's 'andwritin'. 'Twas curate wi' the ponies, after that.

CLYST. Fancy, now! Aw, Will Freman, an't yu bright!

FREMAN. But 'e 'adn't no bird on 'is 'ead.

CLYST. Ya-as, 'e 'ad.

JARLAND. [In a dull, threatening voice] 'E 'ad my maid's bird, this arternune. 'Ead or no, and parson or no, I'll gie 'im one for that.

FREMAN. Ah! And 'e meddled wi' my 'orses.

TRUSTAFORD. I'm thinkin' 'twas an old cuckoo bird 'e 'ad on 'is 'ead. Haw, haw!

GODLEIGH. "His 'eart She 'ath Vorgot!"

FREMAN. 'E's a fine one to be tachin' our maids convirmation.

GODLEIGH. Would ye 'ave it the old Rector then? Wi' 'is gouty shoe? Rackon the maids wid rather 'twas curate; eh, Mr. Burlacombe?

BURLACOMBE. [Abruptly] Curate's a gude man.

JARLAND. [With the comatose ferocity of drink] I'll be even wi' un.

FREMAN. [Excitedly] Tell 'ee one thing—'tes not a proper man o' God to 'ave about, wi' 'is luse goin's on. Out vrom 'ere he oughter go.

BURLACOMBE. You med go further an' fare worse.

FREMAN. What's 'e duin', then, lettin' 'is wife runoff?

TRUSTAFORD. [Scratching his head] If an' in case 'e can't kape 'er, 'tes a funny way o' duin' things not to divorce 'er, after that. If a parson's not to du the Christian thing, whu is, then?

BURLACOMBE. 'Tes a bit immoral-like to pass over a thing like that. Tes funny if women's gain's on's to be encouraged.

FREMAN. Act of a coward, I zay.

BURLACOMBE. The curate ain't no coward.

FREMAN. He bides in yure house; 'tes natural for yu to stand up for un; I'll wager Mrs. Burlacombe don't, though. My missis was fair shocked. "Will," she says, "if yu ever make vur to let me go like that, I widden never stay wi' yu," she says.

TRUSTAFORD. 'Tes settin' a bad example, for zure.

BURLACOMBE. 'Tes all very airy talkin'; what shude 'e du, then?

FREMAN. [Excitedly] Go over to Durford and say to that doctor: "Yu come about my missis, an' zee what I'll du to 'ee." An' take 'er 'ome an' zee she don't misbe'ave again.

CLYST. 'E can't take 'er ef 'er don' want t' come—I've 'eard lawyer, that lodged wi' us, say that.

FREMAN. All right then, 'e ought to 'ave the law of 'er and 'er doctor; an' zee 'er goin's on don't prosper; 'e'd get damages, tu. But this way 'tes a nice example he'm settin' folks. Parson indade! My missis an' the maids they won't goo near the church to-night, an' I wager no one else won't, neither.

JARLAND. [Lurching with his pewter up to GODLEIGH] The beggar! I'll be even wi' un.

GODLEIGH. [Looking at him in doubt] 'Tes the last, then, Tam.

[Having received his beer, JARLAND stands, leaning against the bar, drinking.]

BURLACOMBE. [Suddenly] I don' goo with what curate's duin—'tes tiff soft 'earted; he'm a muneey kind o' man altogether, wi' 'is flute an' 'is poetry; but he've a-lodged in my 'ouse this year an' mare, and always 'ad an 'elpin' 'and for every one. I've got a likin' for him an' there's an end of it.

JARLAND. The coward!

TRUSTAFORD. I don' trouble nothin' about that, Tam Jarland. [Turning to BURLACOMBE] What gits me is 'e don't seem to 'ave no zense o' what's his own praperty.

JARLAND. Take other folk's property fast enough!

[He saws the air with his empty. The others have all turned to him, drawn by the fascination that a man in liquor has for his fellow-men. The bell for church has begun to rang, the sun is down, and it is getting dusk.]

He wants one on his crop, an' one in 'is belly; 'e wants a man to take an' gie un a gude hidin zame as he oughter give 'is fly-be-night of a wife.

[STRANGWAY in his dark clothes has entered, and stands by the door, his lips compressed to a colourless line, his thin, darkish face grey-white]

Zame as a man wid ha' gi'en the doctor, for takin' what isn't his'n.

All but JARLAND have seen STRANGWAY. He steps forward, JARLAND sees him now; his jaw drops a little, and he is silent.

STRANGWAY. I came for a little brandy, Mr. Godleigh—feeling rather faint. Afraid I mightn't get through the service.

GODLEIGH. [With professional composure] Marteil's Three Star, zurr, or 'Ennessy's?

STRANGWAY. [Looking at JARLAND] Thank you; I believe I can do without, now. [He turns to go.]

[In the deadly silence, GODLEIGH touches the arm of JARLAND, who, leaning against the bar with the pewter in his hand, is staring with his strange lowering eyes straight at STRANGWAY.]

JARLAND. [Galvanized by the touch into drunken rage] Lave me be —I'll talk to un-parson or no. I'll tache un to meddle wi' my maid's bird. I'll tache un to kape 'is thievin' 'ands to 'imself.

[STRANGWAY turns again.]

CLYST. Be quiet, Tam.

JARLAND. [Never loosing STRANGWAY with his eyes—like a bull-dog who sees red] That's for one chake; zee un turn t'other, the white-livered buty! Whu lets another man 'ave 'is wife, an' never the sperit to go vor un!

BURLACOMBE. Shame, Jarland; quiet, man!

[They are all looking at STRANGWAY, who, under JARLAND'S drunken insults is standing rigid, with his eyes closed, and his hands hard clenched. The church bell has stopped slow ringing, and begun its five minutes' hurrying note.]

TRUSTAFORD. [Rising, and trying to hook his arm into JARLAND'S] Come away, Tam; yu've a-'ad to much, man.

JARLAND. [Shaking him off] Zee, 'e darsen't touch me; I might 'it un in the vase an' 'e darsen't; 'e's afraid—like 'e was o' the doctor.

[He raises the pewter as though to fling it, but it is seized by GODLEIGH from behind, and falls clattering to the floor. STRANGWAY has not moved.]

JARLAND. [Shaking his fist almost in his face] Luke at un, Luke at un! A man wi' a slut for a wife—

[As he utters the word "wife" STRANGWAY seizes the outstretched fist, and with a jujitsu movement, draws him into his clutch, helpless. And as they sway and struggle in the open window, with the false strength of fury he forces JARLAND through. There is a crash of broken glass from outside. At the sound STRANGWAY comes to himself. A look of agony passes over his face. His eyes light on JIM BERE, who has suddenly risen, and stands feebly clapping his hands. STRANGWAY rushes out.]

[Excitedly gathering at the window, they all speak at once.]

CLYST. Tam's hatchin' of yure cucumbers, Mr. Godleigh.

TRUSTAFORD. 'E did crash; haw, haw!

FREMAN. 'Twas a brave throw, zurely. Whu wid a' thought it?

CLYST. Tam's crawlin' out. [Leaning through window] Hello, Tam— 'ow's t' base, old man?

FREMAN. [Excitedly] They'm all comin' up from churchyard to zee.

TRUSTAFORD. Tam du luke wonderful aztonished; haw, haw! Poor old Tam!

CLYST. Can yu zee curate? Reckon 'e'm gone into church. Aw, yes; gettin' a bit dimsy-service time. [A moment's hush.]

TRUSTAFORD. Well, I'm jiggered. In 'alf an hour he'm got to prache.

GODLEIGH. 'Tes a Christian village, boys.

[Feebly, quietly, JIM BERE laughs. There is silence; but the bell is heard still ranging.]

CURTAIN.

SCENE II

The same—in daylight dying fast. A lamp is burning on the bar. A chair has been placed in the centre of the room, facing the bench under the window, on which are seated from right to left, GODLEIGH, SOL POTTER the village shopman, TRUSTAFORD, BURLACOMBE, FREMAN, JIM BERE, and MORSE the blacksmith. CLYST is squatting on a stool by the bar, and at the other end JARLAND, sobered and lowering, leans against the lintel of the porch leading to the door, round which are gathered five or six sturdy fellows, dumb as fishes. No one sits in the chair. In the unnatural silence that reigns, the distant sound of the wheezy church organ and voices singing can be heard.

TAUSTAFORD. [After a prolonged clearing of his throat] What I mean to zay is that 'tes no yuse, not a bit o' yuse in the world, not duin' of things properly. If an' in case we'm to carry a resolution disapprovin' o' curate, it must all be done so as no one can't, zay nothin'.

SOL POTTER. That's what I zay, Mr. Trustaford; ef so be as 'tis to be a village meetin', then it must be all done proper.

FREMAN. That's right, Sot Potter. I purpose Mr. Sot Potter into the chair. Whu seconds that?

[A silence. Voices from among the dumb-as-fishes: "I du."]

CLYST. [Excitedly] Yu can't putt that to the meetin'. Only a chairman can putt it to the meetin'. I purpose that Mr. Burlacombe— bein as how he's chairman o' the Parish Council—take the chair.

FREMAN. Ef so be as I can't putt it, yu can't putt that neither.

TRUSTAFORD. 'Tes not a bit o' yuse; us can't 'ave no meetin' without a chairman.

GODLEIGH. Us can't 'ave no chairman without a meetin' to elect un, that's zure. [A silence.]

MORSE. [Heavily] To my way o' thinkin', Mr. Godleigh speaks zense; us must 'ave a meetin' before us can 'ave a chairman.

CLYST. Then what we got to du's to elect a meetin'.

BURLACOMBE. [Sourly] Yu'll not find no procedure far that.

[Voices from among the dumb-as fishes: "Mr. Burlacombe 'e oughter know."]

SOL POTTER. [Scratching his head—with heavy solemnity] 'Tes my belief there's no other way to du, but to elect a chairman to call a meetin'; an' then for that meetin' to elect a chairman.

CLYST. I purpose Mr. Burlacombe as chairman to call a meetin'.

FREMAN. I purpose Sol Potter.

GODLEIGH. Can't 'ave tu propositions together before a meetin'; that's apple-pie zure vur zurtain.

[Voice from among the dumb-as fishes: "There ain't no meetin' yet, Sol Potter zays."]

TRUSTAFORD. Us must get the rights of it zettled some'ow. 'Tes like the darned old chicken an' the egg—meetin' or chairman—which come virst?

SOL POTTER. [Conciliating] To my thinkin' there shid be another way o' duin' it, to get round it like with a circumbendibus. 'T'all comes from takin' different vuse, in a manner o' spakin'.

FREMAN. Vu goo an' zet in that chair.

SOL POTTER. [With a glance at BURLACOMBE modestly] I shid'n never like fur to du that, with Mr. Burlacombe zettin' there.

BURLACOMBE. [Rising] 'Tes all darned fulishness.

[Amidst an uneasy shufflement of feet he moves to the door, and goes out into the darkness.]

CLYST. [Seeing his candidate thus depart] Rackon curate's pretty well thru by now, I'm goin' to zee. [As he passes JARLAND] 'Ow's to base, old man?

[He goes out. One of the dumb-as-fishes moves from the door and fills the apace left on the bench by BURLACOMBE'S departure.]

JARLAND. Darn all this puzzivantin'! [To SOL POTTER] Got an' zet in that chair.

SOL POTTER. [Rising and going to the chair; there he stands, changing from one to the other of his short broad feet and sweating from modesty and worth] 'Tes my duty now, gentlemen, to call a meetin' of the parishioners of this parish. I beg therefore to declare that this is a meetin' in accordance with my duty as chairman of this meetin' which elected me chairman to call this meetin'. And I purceed to vacate the chair so that this meetin' may now purceed to elect a chairman.

[He gets up from the chair, and wiping the sweat from his brow, goes back to his seat.]

FREMAN. Mr. Chairman, I rise on a point of order.

GODLEIGH. There ain't no chairman.

FREMAN. I don't give a darn for that. I rise on a point of order.

GODLEIGH. 'Tes a chairman that decides points of order. 'Tes certain yu can't rise on no points whatever till there's a chairman.

TRUSTAFORD. 'Tes no yuse yure risin', not the least bit in the world, till there's some one to set yu down again. Haw, haw!

[Voice from the dumb-as-etches: "Mr. Trustaford 'e's right."]

FREMAN. What I zay is the chairman ought never to 'ave vacated the chair till I'd risen on my point of order. I purpose that he goo and zet down again.

GODLEIGH. Yu can't purpose that to this meetin'; yu can only purpose that to the old meetin' that's not zettin' any longer.

FREMAN. [Excitedly] I didn' care what old meetin' 'tis that's zettin'. I purpose that Sol Potter goo an' zet in that chair again, while I rise on my point of order.

TRUSTAFORD. [Scratching his head] 'Tesn't regular but I guess yu've got to goo, Sol, or us shan't 'ave no peace.

[SOL POTTER, still wiping his brow, goes back to the chair.]

MORSE. [Stolidly-to FREMAN] Zet down, Will Freman. [He pulls at him with a blacksmith's arm.]

FREMAN. [Remaining erect with an effort] I'm not a-goin' to zet down till I've arisen.

JARLAND. Now then, there 'e is in the chair. What's yore point of order?

FREMAN. [Darting his eyes here and there, and flinging his hand up to his gipsy-like head] 'Twas—'twas—Darned ef y' 'aven't putt it clean out o' my 'ead.

JARLAND. We can't wait for yore points of order. Come out o' that chair. Sol Potter.

[SOL POTTER rises and is about to vacate the chair.]

FREMAN. I know! There ought to 'a been minutes taken. Yu can't 'ave no meetin' without minutes. When us comes to electin' a chairman o' the next meetin', 'e won't 'ave no minutes to read.

SOL POTTER. 'Twas only to putt down that I was elected chairman to elect a meetin' to elect a chairman to preside over a meetin' to pass a resolution dalin' wi' the curate. That's aisy set down, that is.

FREMAN. [Mollified] We'll 'ave that zet down, then, while we're electin' the chairman o' the next meetin'.

[A silence.]

TRUSTAFORD. Well then, seein' this is the praaper old meetin' for carryin' the resolution about the curate, I purpose Mr. Sol Potter take the chair.

FREMAN. I purpose Mr. Trustaford. I 'aven't a-got nothin' against Sol Potter, but seein' that he elected the meetin' that's to elect 'im, it might be said that 'e was electin' of himzelf in a manner of spakin'. Us don't want that said.

MORSE. [Amid meditative grunts from the dumb-as-fishes] There's some-at in that. One o' they tu purposals must be putt to the meetin'.

FREMAN. Second must be putt virst, fur zure.

TRUSTAFORD. I dunno as I wants to zet in that chair. To hiss the curate, 'tis a ticklish sort of a job after that. Vurst comes afore second, Will Freeman.

FREMAN. Second is amendment to virst. 'Tes the amendments is putt virst.

TRUSTAFORD. 'Ow's that, Mr. Godleigh? I'm not particular eggzac'ly to a dilly zort of a point like that.

SOL POTTER. [Scratching his, head] 'Tes a very nice point, for zure.

GODLEIGH. 'Tes undoubtedly for the chairman to decide.

[Voice from the dumb-as fishes: "But there ain't no chairman yet."]

JARLAND. Sol Potter's chairman.

FREMAN. No, 'e ain't.

MORSE. Yes, 'e is—'e's chairman till this second old meetin' gets on the go.

FREMAN. I deny that. What du yu say, Mr. Trustaford?

TRUSTAFORD. I can't 'ardly tell. It du zeem a darned long-sufferin' sort of a business altogether.

[A silence.]

MORSE. [Slowly] Tell 'ee what 'tis, us shan't du no gude like this.

GODLEIGH. 'Tes for Mr. Freman or Mr. Trustaford, one or t'other to withdraw their motions.

TRUSTAFORD. [After a pause, with cautious generosity] I've no objections to withdrawin' mine, if Will Freman'll withdraw his'n.

FREMAN. I won't never be be'indhand. If Mr. Trustaford withdraws, I withdraws mine.

MORSE. [With relief] That's zensible. Putt the motion to the meetin'.

SOL POTTER. There ain't no motion left to putt.

[Silence of consternation.]

[In the confusion Jim BERE is seen to stand up.]

GODLEIGH. Jim Bere to spike. Silence for Jim!

VOICES. Aye! Silence for Jim!

SOL POTTER. Well, Jim?

JIM. [Smiling and slow] Nothin' duin'.

TRUSTAFORD. Bravo, Jim! Yu'm right. Best zense yet!

[Applause from the dumb-as-fishes.]

[With his smile brightening, JIM resumes his seat.]

SOL POTTER. [Wiping his brow] Du seem to me, gentlemen, seem' as we'm got into a bit of a tangle in a manner of spakin', 'twid be the most zimplest and vairest way to begin all over vrom the beginnin', so's t'ave it all vair an' square for every one.

[In the uproar Of "Aye" and "No," it is noticed that TIBBY JARLAND is standing in front of her father with her finger, for want of something better, in her mouth.]

TIBBY. [In her stolid voice] Please, sister Mercy says, curate 'ave got to "Lastly." [JARLAND picks her up, and there is silence.] An' please to come quick.

JARLAND. Come on, mates; quietly now!

[He goes out, and all begin to follow him.]

MORSE. [Slowest, save for SOL POTTER] 'Tes rare lucky us was all agreed to hiss the curate afore us began the botherin' old meetin', or us widn' 'ardly 'ave 'ad time to settle what to do.

SOL POTTER. [Scratching his head] Aye, 'tes rare lucky; but I dunno if 'tes altogether reg'lar.

CURTAIN.

SCENE III

The village green before the churchyard and the yew-trees at the gate. Into the pitch dark under the yews, light comes out through the half-open church door. Figures are lurking, or moving stealthily—people waiting and listening to the sound of a voice speaking in the church words that are inaudible. Excited whispering and faint giggles come from the deepest yew-tree shade, made ghostly by the white faces and the frocks of young girls continually flitting up and back in the blackness. A girl's figure comes flying out from the porch, down the path of light, and joins the stealthy group.

WHISPERING VOICE of MERCY. Where's 'e got to now, Gladys?

WHISPERING VOICE OF GLADYS. 'E've just finished.

VOICE OF CONNIE. Whu pushed t'door open?

VOICE OF GLADYS. Tim Clyst I giv' it a little push, meself.

VOICE OF CONNIE. Oh!

VOICE of GLADYS. Tim Clyst's gone in!

ANOTHER VOICE. O-o-o-h!

VOICE of MERCY. Whu else is there, tu?

VOICE OF GLADYS. Ivy's there, an' Old Mrs. Potter, an' tu o' the maids from th'Hall; that's all as ever.

VOICE of CONNIE. Not the old grey mare?

VOICE of GLADYS. No. She ain't ther'. 'Twill just be th'ymn now, an' the Blessin'. Tibby gone for 'em?

VOICE OF MERCY. Yes.

VOICE of CONNIE. Mr. Burlacombe's gone in home, I saw 'im pass by just now—'e don' like it. Father don't like it neither.

VOICE of MERCY. Mr. Strangway shoudn' 'ave taken my skylark, an' thrown father out o' winder. 'Tis goin' to be awful fun! Oh!

[She jumps up and dawn in the darkness. And a voice from far in the shadow says: "Hsssh! Quiet, yu maids!" The voice has ceased speaking in the church. There is a moment's dead silence. The voice speaks again; then from the wheezy little organ come the first faint chords of a hymn.]

GLADYS. "Nearer, my God, to Thee!"

VOICE of MERCY. 'Twill be funny, with no one 'ardly singin'.

[The sound of the old hymn sung by just six voices comes out to

them rather sweet and clear.]

GLADYS. [Softly] 'Tis pretty, tu. Why! They're only singin' one verse!

[A moment's silence, and the voice speaks, uplifted, pronouncing the Blessing: "The peace of God—" As the last words die away, dark figures from the inn approach over the grass, till quite a crowd seems standing there without a word spoken. Then from out of the church porch come the congregation. TIM CLYST first, hastily lost among the waiting figures in the dark; old Mrs. Potter, a half blind old lady groping her way and perceiving nothing out of the ordinary; the two maids from the Hall, self-conscious and scared, scuttling along. Last, IVY BURLACOMBE quickly, and starting back at the dim, half-hidden crowd.]

VOICE of GLADYS. [Whispering] Ivy! Here, quick!

[Ivy sways, darts off towards the voice, and is lost in the shadow.]

VOICE OF FREMAN. [Low] Wait, boys, till I give signal.

[Two or three squirks and giggles; Tim CLYST'S voice: "Ya-as! Don't 'ee tread on my toe!" A soft, frightened "O-o-h!" from a girl. Some quick, excited whisperings: "Luke!" "Zee there!" "He's comin'!" And then a perfectly dead silence. The figure of STRANGWAY is seen in his dark clothes, passing from the vestry to the church porch. He stands plainly visible in the lighted porch, locking the door, then steps forward. Just as he reaches the edge of the porch, a low hiss breaks the silence. It swells very gradually into a long, hissing groan. STRANGWAY stands motionless, his hand over his eyes, staring into the darkness. A girl's figure can be seen to break out of the darkness and rush away. When at last the groaning has died into sheer expectancy, STRANGWAY drops his hand.]

STRANGWAY. [In a loco voice] Yes! I'm glad. Is Jarland there?

FREMAN. He's 'ere-no thanks to yu! Hsss!

[The hiss breaks out again, then dies away.]

JARLAND'S VOICE. [Threatening] Try if yu can du it again.

STRANGWAY. No, Jarland, no! I ask you to forgive me. Humbly!

[A hesitating silence, broken by muttering.]

CLYST'S VOICE. Bravo!

A VOICE. That's vair.

A VOICE. 'E's afraid o' the sack—that's what 'tis.

A VOICE. [Groaning] 'E's a praaper coward.

A VOICE. Whu funk'd the doctor?

CLYST'S VOICE. Shame on 'ee, therr!

STRANGWAY. You're right—all of you! I'm not fit! An uneasy and excited mustering and whispering dies away into renewed silence.

STRANGWAY. What I did to Tam Jarland is not the real cause of what you're doing, is it? I understand. But don't be troubled. It's all over. I'm going—you'll get some one better. Forgive me, Jarland. I can't see your face—it's very dark.

FREMAN'S Voice. [Mocking] Wait for the full mune.

GODLEIGH. [Very low] "My 'eart 'E lighted not!"

STRANGWAY. [starting at the sound of his own words thus mysteriously given him out of the darkness] Whoever found that, please tear it up! [After a moment's silence] Many of you have been very kind to me. You won't see me again—Good-bye, all!

[He stands for a second motionless, then moves resolutely down into the darkness so peopled with shadows.]

UNCERTAIN VOICES AS HE PASSES. Good-bye, zurr!
Good luck, zurr! [He has gone.]

CLYST'S VOICE. Three cheers for Mr. Strangway!

[And a queer, strangled cheer, with groans still threading it, arises.]

CURTAIN.

ACT III

SCENE I

In the BURLACOMBES' hall-sitting-room the curtains are drawn, a lamp burns, and the door stands open. BURLACOMBE and his wife are hovering there, listening to the sound of mingled cheers and groaning.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Aw! my gudeness—what a thing t'appen! I'd saner 'a lost all me ducks. [She makes towards the inner door] I can't never face 'im.

BURLACOMBE. 'E can't expect nothin' else, if 'e act like that.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. 'T'es only duin' as 'e'd be done by.

BURLACOMBE. Aw! Yu can't go on forgivin' 'ere, an' forgivin' there.
'T'esn't nat'ral.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. 'T'es the mischief 'e'm a parson. 'T'es 'im bein' a lamb o' God—or 'twidden be so quare for 'im to be forgivin'.

BURLACOMBE. Yu goo an' make un a gude 'ot drink.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Poor soul! What'll 'e du now, I wonder? [Under her breath] 'E's cumin'!

[She goes hurriedly. BURLACOMBE, with a startled look back, wavers and makes to follow her, but stops undecided in the inner doorway. STRANGWAY comes in from the darkness. He turns to the window and drops overcoat and hat and the church key on the windowseat, looking about him as men do when too hard driven, and never fixing his eyes long enough on anything to see it. BURLACOMBE, closing the door into the house, advances a step. At the sound STRANGWAY faces round.]

BURLACOMBE. I wanted for yu to know, zurr, that me an' mine 'adn't nothin' to du wi' that darned fulishness, just now.

STRANGWAY. [With a ghost of a smile] Thank you, Burlacombe. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter a bit.

BURLACOMBE. I 'ope yu won't take no notice of it. Like a lot o' silly bees they get. [After an uneasy pause] Yu'll excuse me spakin' of this mornin', an' what 'appened. 'T'es a brave pity it cam' on yu so sudden-like before yu 'ad time to think. 'T'es a sort o' thing a man shude zet an' chew upon. Certainly 'tes not a bit o' yuse goin' against human nature. Ef yu don't stand up for yureself there's no one else not goin' to. 'T'es yure not 'avin' done that 'as made 'em so rampageous. [Stealing another look at STRANGWAY] Yu'll excuse me, zurr, spakin' of it, but 'tes amazin' sad to zee a man let go his own, without a word o' darin'. 'Tea as ef 'e 'ad no passions like.

STRANGWAY. Look at me, Burlacombe.

[BURLACOMBE looks up, trying hard to keep his eyes on STRANGWAY'S, that seem to burn in his thin face.]

STRANGWAY. Do I look like that? Please, please! [He touches his breast] I've too much here. Please!

BURLACOMBE. [With a sort of startled respect] Well, zurr, 'tes not for me to zay nothin', certainly.

[He turns and after a slow look back at STRANGWAY goes out.]

STRANGWAY. [To himself] Passions! No passions! Ha!

[The outer door is opened and IVY BURLACOMBE appears, and, seeing him, stops. Then, coming softly towards him, she speaks timidly.]

IVY. Oh! Mr. Strangway, Mrs. Bradmere's cumin' from the Rectory. I ran an' told 'em. Oh! 'twas awful.

[STRANGWAY starts, stares at her, and turning on his heel, goes into the house. Ivy's face is all puckered, as if she were on the point of tears. There is a gentle scratching at the door, which has not been quite closed.]

VOICE OF GLADYS. [Whispering] Ivy! Come on Ivy. I won't.

VOICE OF MERCY. Yu must. Us can't du without Yu.

Ivy. [Going to the door] I don't want to.

VOICE OF GLADYS. "Naughty maid, she won't come out," Ah! du 'ee!

VOICE OF CREMER. Tim Clyst an' Bobbie's cumin'; us'll only be six anyway. Us can't dance "figure of eight" without yu.

Ivy. [Stamping her foot] I don't want to dance at all! I don't.

MERCY. Aw! She's temper. Yu can bang on tambourine, then!

GLADYS. [Running in] Quick, Ivy! Here's the old grey mare cumin' down the green. Quick.

[With whispering and scuffling; gurgling and squeaking, the reluctant Ivy's hand is caught and she is jerked away. In their haste they have left the door open behind them.]

VOICE OF MRS. BRADMERE. [Outside] Who's that?

[She knocks loudly, and rings a bell; then, without waiting, comes in through the open door.]

[Noting the overcoat and hat on the window-sill she moves across to ring the bell. But as she does so, MRS. BURLACOMBE, followed by BURLACOMBE, comes in from the house.]

MRS. BRADMERE This disgraceful business! Where's Mr. Strangway? I see he's in.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Yes, m'm, he'm in—but—but Burlacombe du zay he'm terrible upset.

MRS. BRADMERE. I should think so. I must see him—at once.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. I doubt bed's the best place for 'un, an' gude 'ot drink. Burlacombe zays he'm like a man standin' on the edge of a cliff; and the lasts tipsy o' wind might throw un over.

MRS. BRADMERE. [To BURLACOMBE] You've seen him, then?

BURLACOMBE. Yeas; an' I don't like the luke of un—not a little bit, I don't.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [Almost to herself] Poor soul; 'e've a-'ad to much to try un this yer long time past. I've a-seen 'tis sperrit cumin' thru 'is body, as yu might zay. He's torn to bits, that's what 'tis.

BURLACOMBE. 'Twas a praaper cowardly thing to hiss a man when he's down. But 'twas natural tu, in a manner of spakin'. But 'tesn't that troublin' 'im. 'Tes in here [touching his forehead], along of his wife, to my thinkin'. They zay 'e've a-known about 'er a-fore she went away. Think of what 'e've 'ad to kape in all this time. 'Tes enough to drive a man silly after that. I've a-locked my gun up. I see a man like—like that once before—an' sure enough 'e was dead in the mornin'!

MRS. BRADMERE. Nonsense, Burlacombe! [To MRS. BURLACOMBE] Go and tell him I want to see him—must see him. [MRS. BURLACOMBE goes into the house] And look here, Burlacombe; if we catch any one, man or woman, talking of this outside the village, it'll be the end of their tenancy, whoever they may be. Let them all know that. I'm glad he threw that drunken fellow out of the window, though it

was a little——

BURLACOMBE. Aye! The nuspapers would be praaper glad of that, for a tiddy bit o' nuse.

MRS. BRADMERE. My goodness! Yes! The men are all up at the inn. Go and tell them what I said—it's not to get about. Go at once, Burlacombe.

BURLACOMBE. Must be a turrable job for 'im, every one's knowin' about 'is wife like this. He'm a proud man tu, I think. 'Tes a funny business altogether!

MRS. BRADMERE. Horrible! Poor fellow! Now, come! Do your best, Burlacombe!

[BURLACOMBE touches his forelock and goes. MRS. BRADMERE stands quite still, thinking. Then going to the photograph, she stares up at it.]

MRS. BRADMERE. You baggage!

[STRANGWAY has come in noiselessly, and is standing just behind her. She turns, and sees him. There is something so still, so startlingly still in his figure and white face, that she cannot for the moment fond her voice.]

MRS. BRADMERE. [At last] This is most distressing. I'm deeply sorry. [Then, as he does not answer, she goes a step closer] I'm an old woman; and old women must take liberties, you know, or they couldn't get on at all. Come now! Let's try and talk it over calmly and see if we can't put things right.

STRANGWAY. You were very good to come; but I would rather not.

MRS. BRADMERE. I know you're in as grievous trouble as a man can be.

STRANGWAY. Yes.

MRS. BRADMERE. [With a little sound of sympathy] What are you— thirty-five? I'm sixty-eight if I'm a day—old enough to be your mother. I can feel what you must have been through all these months, I can indeed. But you know you've gone the wrong way to work. We aren't angels down here below! And a son of the Church can't act as if for himself alone. The eyes of every one are on him.

STRANGWAY. [Taking the church key from the window.] Take this, please.

MRS. BRADMERE. No, no, no! Jarland deserved all he got. You had great provocation.

STRANGWAY. It's not Jarland. [Holding out the key] Please take it to the Rector. I beg his forgiveness. [Touching his breast] There's too much I can't speak of—can't make plain. Take it to him, please.

MRS. BRADMERE. Mr. Strangway—I don't accept this. I am sure my husband—the Church—will never accept——

STRANGWAY. Take it!

MRS. BRADMERE. [Almost unconsciously taking it] Mind! We don't accept it. You must come and talk to the Rector to-morrow. You're overwrought. You'll see it all in another light, then.

STRANGWAY. [With a strange smile] Perhaps. [Lifting the blind] Beautiful night! Couldn't be more beautiful!

MRS. BRADMERE. [Startled-softly] Don't turn sway from these who want to help you! I'm a grumpy old woman, but I can feel for you. Don't try and keep it all back, like this! A woman would cry, and it would all seem clearer at once. Now won't you let me——?

STRANGWAY. No one can help, thank you.

MRS. BRADMERE. Come! Things haven't gone beyond mending, really, if you'll face them. [Pointing to the photograph] You know what I mean. We dare not foster immorality.

STRANGWAY. [Quivering as at a jabbed nerve] Don't speak of that!

MRS. BRADMERE. But think what you've done, Mr. Strangway! If you can't take your wife back, surely you must divorce her. You can never help her to go on like this in secret sin.

STRANGWAY. Torture her—one way or the other?

MRS. BRADMERE. No, no; I want you to do as the Church—as all Christian society would wish. Come! You can't let this go on. My dear man, do your duty at all costs!

STRANGWAY. Break her heart?

MRS. BRADMERE. Then you love that woman—more than God!

STRANGWAY. [His face quivering] Love!

MRS. BRADMERE. They told me—Yes, and I can see you're in a bad way. Come, pull yourself together! You can't defend what you're doing.

STRANGWAY. I do not try.

MRS. BRADMERE. I must get you to see! My father was a clergyman; I'm married to one; I've two sons in the Church. I know what I'm talking about. It's a priest's business to guide the people's lives.

STRANGWAY. [Very low] But not mine! No more!

MRS. BRADMERE. [Looking at him shrewdly] There's something very queer about you to-night. You ought to see doctor.

STRANGWAY. [A smileawning and going on his lips] If I am not better soon—

MRS. BRADMERE. I know it must be terrible to feel that everybody—

[A convulsive shiver passes over STRANGWAY, and he shrinks against the door]

But come! Live it down!

[With anger growing at his silence]

Live it down, man! You can't desert your post—and let these villagers do what they like with us? Do you realize that you're letting a woman, who has treated you abominably;—yes, abominably—go scot-free, to live comfortably with another man? What an example!

STRANGWAY. Will you, please, not speak of that!

MRS. BRADMERE. I must! This great Church of ours is based on the rightful condemnation of wrongdoing. There are times when forgiveness is a sin, Michael Strangway. You must keep the whip hand. You must fight!

STRANGWAY. Fight! [Touching his heart] My fight is here. Have you ever been in hell? For months and months—burned and longed; hoped against hope; killed a man in thought day by day? Never rested, for love and hate? I—condemn! I—judge! No! It's rest I have to find—somewhere—somehow—rest! And how—how can I find rest?

MRS. BRADMERE. [Who has listened to his outburst in a soft of coma] You are a strange man! One of these days you'll go off your head if you don't take care.

STRANGWAY. [Smiling] One of these days the flowers will grow out of me; and I shall sleep.

[MRS. BRADMERE stares at his smiling face a long moment in silence, then with a little sound, half sniff, half snort, she goes to the door. There she halts.]

MRS. BRADMERE. And you mean to let all this go on—Your wife—

STRANGWAY. Go! Please go!

MRS. BRADMERE. Men like you have been buried at cross-roads before now! Take care! God punishes!

STRANGWAY. Is there a God?

MRS. BRADMERE. Ah! [With finality] You must see a doctor.

[Seeing that the look on his face does not change, she opens the door, and hurries away into the moonlight.]

[STRANGWAY crosses the room to where his wife's picture hangs, and stands before it,

his hands grasping the frame. Then he takes it from the wall, and lays it face upwards on the window seat.]

STRANGWAY. [To himself] Gone! What is there, now?

[The sound of an owl's hooting is floating in, and of voices from the green outside the inn.]

STRANGWAY. [To himself] Gone! Taken faith—hope—life!

[JIM BERE comes wandering into the open doorway.]

JIM BERE. Gude avenin', zurr.

[At his slow gait, with his feeble smile, he comes in, and standing by the window-seat beside the long dark coat that still lies there, he looks down at STRANGWAY with his lost eyes.]

JIM. Yu threw un out of winder. I cud 'ave, once, I cud.

[STRANGWAY neither moves nor speaks; and JIM BERE goes on with his unimaginably slow speech]

They'm laughin' at yu, zurr. An' so I come to tell 'ee how to du. 'Twas full mune—when I caught 'em, him an' my girl. I caught 'em. [With a strange and awful flash of fire] I did; an' I tuk un [He taken up STRANGWAY'S coat and grips it with his trembling hands, as a man grips another's neck] like that—I tuk un. As the coat falls, like a body out of which the breath has been squeezed, STRANGWAY, rising, catches it.

STRANGWAY. [Gripping the coat] And he fell!

[He lets the coat fall on the floor, and puts his foot on it. Then, staggering back, he leans against the window.]

JIM. Yu see, I loved 'er—I did. [The lost look comes back to his eyes] Then somethin'—I dunno—and—and—[He lifts his hand and passes it up and down his side] 'Twas like this for ever.

[They gaze at each other in silence.]

JIM. [At last] I come to tell yu. They'm all laughin' at yu. But yu'm strong—yu go over to Durford to that doctor man, an' take un like I did. [He tries again to make the sign of squeezing a man's neck] They can't laugh at yu no more, then. Tha's what I come to tell yu. Tha's the way for a Christian man to du. Gude naight, zurr. I come to tell yee.

[STRANGWAY motions to him in silence. And, very slowly, JIM BERE passes out.]

[The voices of men coming down the green are heard.]

VOICES. Gude night, Tam. Glide naight, old Jim!

VOICES. Gude might, Mr. Trustaford. 'T'es a wonderful fine mune.

VOICE OF TRUSTAFORD. Ah! 'T'es a brave mune for th' poor old curate!

VOICE. "My 'eart 'E lighted not!"

[TRUSTAFORD'S laugh, and the rattling, fainter and fainter, of wheels. A spasm seizes on STRANGWAY'S face, as he stands there by the open door, his hand grips his throat; he looks from side to side, as if seeking a way of escape.]

CURTAIN.

SCENE II

The BURLACOMBES' high and nearly empty barn. A lantern is hung by a rope that lifts the bales of straw, to a long ladder leaning against a rafter. This gives all the light there is, save for a slender track of moonlight, slanting in from the end, where the two great doors

are not quite closed. On a rude bench in front of a few remaining, stacked, square-cut bundles of last year's hay, sits TIBBY JARLAND, a bit of apple in her mouth, sleepily beating on a tambourine. With stockinged feet GLADYS, IVY, CONNIE, and MERCY, TIM CLYST, and BOBBIE JARLAND, a boy of fifteen, are dancing a truncated "Figure of Eight"; and their shadow are dancing alongside on the walls. Shoes and some apples have been thrown down close to the side door through which they have come in. Now and then IVY, the smallest and best of the dancers, ejaculates words of direction, and one of the youths grunts or breathes loudly out of the confusion of his mind. Save for this and the dumb beat and jingle of the sleepy tambourine, there is no sound. The dance comes to its end, but the drowsy TIBBY goes on beating.

MERCY. That'll du, Tibby; we're finished. Ate yore apple. [The stolid TIBBY eats her apple.]

CLYST. [In his teasing, excitable voice] Yu maids don't dance 'elf's well as us du. Bobbie 'e's a great dancer. 'E dance vine. I'm a gude dancer, meself.

GLADYS. A'n't yu conceited just?

CLYST. Aw! Ah! Yu'll give me kiss for that. [He chases, but cannot catch that slippery white figure] Can't she glimmer!

MERCY. Gladys! Up ladder!

CLYST. Yu go up ladder; I'll catch 'ee then. Naw, yu maids, don't yu give her succour. That's not vair [Catching hold of MERCY, who gives a little squeal.]

CONNIE. Mercy, don't! Mrs. Burlacombe'll hear. Ivy, go an' peek.

[Ivy goes to flee side door and peers through.]

CLYST. [Abandoning the chase and picking up an apple—they all have the joyous irresponsibility that attends forbidden doings] Ya-as, this is a gude apple. Luke at Tibby!

[TIBBY, overcome by drowsiness, has fallen back into the hay, asleep. GLADYS, leaning against the hay breaks into humming:]

"There cam' three dukes a-ridin', a-ridin', a-ridin',
There cam' three dukes a ridin'
With a ransy-tansy tay!"

CLYST. Us 'as got on vine; us'll get prize for our dancin'.

CONNIE. There won't be no prize if Mr. Strangway goes away. 'T'es funny 'twas Mrs. Strangway start us.

IVY. [From the door] 'Twas wicked to hiss him.

[A moment's hush.]

CLYST. Twasn't I.

BOBBIE. I never did.

GLADYS. Oh! Bobbie, yu did! Yu blew in my ear.

CLYST. 'Twas the praaper old wind in the trees. Did make a brave noise, zurely.

MERCY. 'E shuld'n' 'a let my skylark go.

CLYST. [Out of sheer contradictoriness] Ya-as, 'e shude, then. What du yu want with th' birds of the air? They'm no gude to yu.

IVY. [Mournfully] And now he's goin' away.

CLYST. Ya-as; 'tes a pity. He's the best man I ever seen since I was comin' from my mother. He's a gude man. He'em got a zad face, sure enough, though.

IVY. Gude folk always 'ave zad faces.

CLYST. I knu a gude man—'e sold pigs—very gude man: 'e 'ad a budiful bright vase like the mane. [Touching his stomach] I was sad, meself, once. 'Twas a funny scrabblin'—like feelin'.

GLADYS. If 'e go away, whu's goin' to finish us for confirmation?

CONNIE. The Rector and the old grey mare.

MERCY. I don' want no more finishin'; I'm confirmed enough.

CLYST. Ya-as; yu'm a buty.

GLADYS. Suppose we all went an' asked 'im not to go?

IVY. 'Twouldn't be no gude.

CONNIE. Where's 'e goin'?

MERCY. He'll go to London, of course.

IVY. He's so gentle; I think 'e'll go to an island, where there's nothin' but birds and beasts and flowers.

CLYST. Aye! He'm awful fond o' the dumb things.

IVY. They're kind and peaceful; that's why.

CLYST. Aw! Yu see tu praaper old tom cats; they'm not to peaceful, after that, nor kind naighther.

BOBBIE. [Surprisingly] If 'e's sad, per'aps 'e'll go to 'Eaven.

IVY. Oh! not yet, Bobbie. He's tu young.

CLYST. [Following his own thoughts] Ya-as. 'Tes a funny place, tu, nowadays, judgin' from the papers.

GLADYS. Wonder if there's dancin' in 'Eaven?

IVY. There's beasts, and flowers, and waters, and 'e told us.

CLYST. Naw! There's no dumb things in 'Eaven. Jim Bere 'e says there is! 'E thinks 'is old cat's there.

IVY. Yes. [Dreamily] There's stars, an' owls, an' a man playin' on the flute. Where 'tes gude, there must be music.

CLYST. Old brass band, shuldn' wonder, like th' Salvation Army.

IVY. [Putting up her hands to an imaginary pipe] No; 'tis a boy that goes so; an' all the dumb things an' all the people goo after 'im—like this.

[She marches slowly, playing her imaginary pipe, and one by one they all fall in behind her, padding round the barn in their stockinged feet. Passing the big doors, IVY throws them open.]

An' 'tes all like that in 'Eaven.

[She stands there gazing out, still playing on her imaginary pipe. And they all stand a moment silent, staring into the moonlight.]

CLYST. 'Tes a glory-be full mune to-night!

IVY. A goldie-cup—a big one. An' millions o' little goldie-cups on the floor of 'Eaven.

MERCY. Oh! Bother 'Eaven! Let's dance "Clapperclaws"! Wake up, Tibby!

GLADYS. Clapperelaws, clapperclaws! Come on, Bobbie—make circle!

CLYST. Clapperclaws! I dance that one fine.

IVY. [Taking the tambourine] See, Tibby; like this. She hums and beats gently, then restores the tambourine to the sleepy TIBBY, who, waking, has placed a piece of apple in her mouth.

CONNIE. 'Tes awful difficult, this one.

IVY. [Illustrating] No; yu just jump, an' clap yore 'ands. Lovely, lovely!

CLYST. Like ringin' bells! Come ahn!

[TIBBY begins her drowsy beating, IVY hums the tune; they dance, and their shadows dance again upon the walls. When she has beaten but a few moments on the tambourine, TIBBY is overcome once more by sleep and falls back again into her nest of hay, with her little shod feet just visible over the edge of the bench. Ivy catches up the tambourine, and to her beating and humming the dancers dance on.]

[Suddenly GLADYS stops like a wild animal surprised, and cranes her neck towards the aide door.]

CONNIE. [Whispering] What is it?

GLADYS. [Whispering] I hear—some one comin' across the yard.

[She leads a noiseless scamper towards the shoes. BOBBIE JARLAND shins up the ladder and seizes the lantern. Ivy drops the tambourine. They all fly to the big doors, and vanish into the moonlight, pulling the door nearly to again after them.]

[There is the sound of scrabbling at the hitch of the side door, and STRANGWAY comes into the nearly dark barn. Out in the night the owl is still hooting. He closes the door, and that sound is lost. Like a man walking in his sleep, he goes up to the ladder, takes the rope in his hand, and makes a noose. He can be heard breathing, and in the darkness the motions of his hands are dimly seen, freeing his throat and putting the noose round his neck. He stands swaying to and fro at the foot of the ladder; then, with a sigh, sets his foot on it to mount. One of the big doors creaks and opens in the wind, letting in a broad path of moonlight.]

[STRANGWAY stops; freeing his neck from the noose, he walks quickly up the track of moonlight, whitened from head to foot, to close the doors.]

[The sound of his boots on the bare floor has awakened TIBBY JARLAND. Struggling out of her hay nest she stands staring at his whitened figure, and bursts suddenly into a wail.]

TIBBY. O-oh! Mercy! Where are yu? I'm frightened! I'm frightened! O-oooo!

STRANGWAY. [Turning—startled] Who's that? Who is it?

TIBBY. O-oh! A ghosty! Oo-ooo!

STRANGWAY. [Going to her quickly] It's me, Tibby—Tib only me!

TIBBY. I seed a ghosty.

STRANGWAY. [Taking her up] No, no, my bird, you didn't! It was me.

TIBBY. [Burying her face against him] I'm frighted. It was a big one. [She gives tongue again] O-o-oh!

STRANGWAY. There, there! It's nothing but me. Look!

TIBBY. No. [She peeps out all the same.]

STRANGWAY. See! It's the moonlight made me all white. See! You're a brave girl now?

TIBBY. [Cautiously] I want my apple.

[She points towards her nest. STRANGWAY carries her there, picks up an apple, and gives it her. TIBBY takes a bite.]

TIBBY. I want any tambourine.

STRANGWAY. [Giving her the tambourine, and carrying her back into the track of moonlight] Now we're both ghosties! Isn't it funny?

TABBY. [Doubtfully] Yes.

STRANGWAY. See! The moon's laughing at us! See? Laugh then!

[TABBY, tambourine in one hand and apple in the other, smiles stolidly. He sets her down on the ladder, and stands, holding her level With him.]

TABBY. [Solemnly] I'se still frightened.

STRANGWAY. No! Full moon, Tibby! Shall we wish for it?

TABBY. Full mune.

STRANGWAY. Moon! We're wishing for you. Moon, moon!

TIBBY. Mune, we're wishin' for yu!

STRANGWAY. What do, you wish it to be?

TIBBY. Bright new shillin'!

STRANGWAY. A face.

TIBBY. Shillin', a shillin'!

STRANGWAY. [Taking out a shilling and spinning it so that it falls into her pinafore] See! Your wish comes true.

TIBBY. Oh! [Putting the shilling in her mouth] Mune's still there!

STRANGWAY. Wish for me, Tibby!

TIBBY. Mune. I'm wishin' for yu!

STRANGWAY. Not yet!

TIBBY. Shall I shake my tambouline?

STRANGWAY. Yes, shake your tambouline.

TIBBY. [Shaking her tambourine] Mune, I'm shaken' at yu.

[STRANGWAY lays his hand suddenly on the rope, and swings it up on to the beam.]

TIBBY. What d'yu du that for?

STRANGWAY. To put it out of reach. It's better——

TIBBY. Why is it better? [She stares up at him.]

STRANGWAY. Come along, Tibby! [He carries her to the big doors, and sets her down] See! All asleep! The birds, and the fields, and the moon!

TIBBY. Mune, mune, we're wishing for yu!

STRANGWAY. Send her your love, and say good-night.

TIBBY. [Blowing a kiss] Good-night, mune!

[From the barn roof a little white dove's feather comes floating down in the wind. TIBBY follows it with her hand, catches it, and holds it up to him.]

TIBBY. [Chuckling] Luke. The mune's sent a bit o' love!

STRANGWAY. [Taking the feather] Thank you, Tibby! I want that bit o' love. [Very faint, comes the sound of music] Listen!

TIBBY. It's Miss Willis, playin' on the pianny!

STRANGWAY. No; it's Love; walking and talking in the world.

TIBBY. [Dubiously] Is it?

STRANGWAY. [Pointing] See! Everything coming out to listen! See them, Tibby! All the little things with pointed ears, children, and birds, and flowers, and bunnies; and the bright rocks, and—men! Hear their hearts beating! And the wind listening!

TIBBY. I can't hear—nor I can't see!

STRANGWAY. Beyond——[To himself] They are—they must be; I swear they are! [Then, catching sight of TIBBY'S amazed eyes] And now say good-bye to me.

TIBBY. Where yu goin'?

STRANGWAY. I don't know, Tibby.

VOICE OF MERCY. [Distant and cautious] Tibby! Tibby! Where are yu?

STRANGWAY. Mercy calling; run to her!

[TIBBY starts off, turns back and lifts her face. He bends to kiss her, and flinging her arms round his neck, she gives him a good hug. Then, knuckling the sleep out of her eyes, she runs.]

[STRANGWAY stands, uncertain. There is a sound of heavy footsteps; a man clears his throat, close by.]

STRANGWAY. Who's that?

CREMER. Jack Cremer. [The big man's figure appears out of the shadow of the barn] That yu, zurr?

STRANGWAY. Yes, Jack. How goes it?

CREMER. 'Tes empty, zurr. But I'll get on some'ow.

STRANGWAY. You put me to shame.

CREMER. No, zurr. I'd be killin' meself, if I didn' feel I must stick it, like yu zaid.

[They stand gazing at each other in the moonlight.]

STRANGWAY. [Very low] I honour you.

CREMER. What's that? [Then, as STRANGWAY does not answer] I'll just be walkin'—I won' be gain' 'ome to-night. 'Tes the full mune— lucky.

STRANGWAY. [Suddenly] Wait for me at the crossroads, Jack. I'll come with you. Will you have me, brother?

CREMER. Sure!

STRANGWAY. Wait, then.

CREMER. Aye, zurr.

[With his heavy tread CREMER passes on. And STRANGWAY leans against the lintel of the door, looking at the moon, that, quite full and golden, hangs not far above the straight horizon, where the trees stand small, in a row.]

STRANGWAY. [Lifting his hand in the gesture of prayer] God, of the moon and the sun; of joy and beauty, of loneliness and sorrow—give me strength to go on, till I love every living thing!

[He moves away, following JACK CREMER. The full moon shines; the owl hoots; and some one is shaking TIBBY'S tambourine.]

THE FOUNDATIONS

(AN EXTRAVAGANT PLAY)

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

LORD WILLIAM DROMONDY, M.P. LADY WILLIAM DROMONDY LITTLE ANNE MISS STOKES MR. POULDER
JAMES HENRY THOMAS CHARLES THE PRESS LEMMY OLD MRS. LEMMY LITTLE AIDA THE DUKE OF EXETER

SCENES

SCENE I. The cellar at LORD WILLIAM DROMONDY'S in Park Lane.

SCENE II. The room of old MRS. LEMMY in Bethnal Green.

SCENE III. Ante-room of the hall at LORD WILLIAM DROMONDY'S

The Action passes continuously between 8 and 10.30 of a summer evening, some years after the Great War.

ACT I

LORD WILLIAM DROMONDY'S mansion in Park Lane. Eight o'clock of the evening. LITTLE ANNE DROMONDY and the large footman, JAMES, gaunt and grin, discovered in the wine cellar, by light of gas. JAMES, in plush breeches, is selecting wine.

L. ANNE: James, are you really James?

JAMES. No, my proper name's John.

L. ANNE. Oh! [A pause] And is Charles's an improper name too?

JAMES. His proper name's Mark.

L. ANNE. Then is Thomas Matthew?

JAMES. Miss Anne, stand clear o' that bin. You'll put your foot through one o' those 'ock bottles.

L. ANNE. No, but James—Henry might be Luke, really?

JAMES. Now shut it, Miss Anne!

L. ANNE. Who gave you those names? Not your godfathers and godmothers?

JAMES. Poulдер. Butlers think they're the Almighty. [Gloomily]
But his name's Bartholomew.

L. ANNE. Bartholomew Poulдер? It's rather jolly.

JAMES. It's hidjeous.

L. ANNE. Which do you like to be called—John or James?

JAMES. I don't give a darn.

L. ANNE. What is a darn?

JAMES. 'Tain't in the dictionary.

L. ANNE. Do you like my name? Anne Dromondy? It's old, you know.
But it's funny, isn't it?

JAMES. [Indifferently] It'll pass.

L. ANNE. How many bottles have you got to pick out?

JAMES. Thirty-four.

L. ANNE. Are they all for the dinner, or for the people who come in to the Anti-Sweating Meeting afterwards?

JAMES. All for the dinner. They give the Sweated—tea.

L. ANNE. All for the dinner? They'll drink too much, won't they?

JAMES. We've got to be on the safe side.

L. ANNE. Will it be safer if they drink too much?

[JAMES pauses in the act of dusting a bottle to look at her, as if suspecting irony.]

[Sniffing] Isn't the smell delicious here—like the taste of cherries when they've gone bad—[She sniffs again] and mushrooms; and boot blacking.

JAMES. That's the escape of gas.

L. ANNE. Has the plumber's man been?

JAMES. Yes.

L. ANNE. Which one?

JAMES. Little blighter I've never seen before.

L. ANNE. What is a little blighter? Can I see?

JAMES. He's just gone.

L. ANNE. [Straying] Oh! . . . James, are these really the foundations?

JAMES. You might 'arf say so. There's a lot under a woppin' big house like this; you can't hardly get to the bottom of it.

L. ANNE. Everything's built on something, isn't it? And what's THAT built on?

JAMES. Ask another.

L. ANNE. If you wanted to blow it up, though, you'd have to begin from here, wouldn't you?

JAMES. Who'd want to blow it up?

L. ANNE. It would make a mess in Park Lane.

JAMES. I've seen a lot bigger messes than this'd make, out in the war.

L. ANNE. Oh! but that's years ago! Was it like this in the trenches, James?

JAMES. [Grimly] Ah! 'Cept that you couldn't lay your 'and on a bottle o' port when you wanted one.

L. ANNE. Do you, when you want it, here?

JAMES. [On guard] I only suggest it's possible.

L. ANNE. Perhaps Poulder does.

JAMES. [Icily] I say nothin' about that.

L. ANNE. Oh! Do say something!

JAMES. I'm ashamed of you, Miss Anne, pumpin' me!

L. ANNE. [Reproachfully] I'm not pumpin'! I only want to make Poulder jump when I ask him.

JAMES. [Grinning] Try it on your own responsibility, then; don't bring me in!

L. ANNE. [Switching off] James, do you think there's going to be a bloody revolution?

JAMES. [Shocked] I shouldn't use that word, at your age.

L. ANNE. Why not? Daddy used it this morning to Mother. [Imitating] "The country's in an awful state, darling; there's going to be a bloody revolution, and we shall all be blown sky-high." Do you like

Daddy?

JAMES. [Taken aback] Like Lord William? What do you think? We chaps would ha' done anything for him out there in the war.

L. ANNE. He never says that he always says he'd have done anything for you!

JAMES. Well—that's the same thing.

L. ANNE. It isn't—it's the opposite. What is class hatred, James?

JAMES. [Wisely] Ah! A lot o' people thought when the war was over there'd be no more o' that. [He sniggers] Used to amuse me to read in the papers about the wonderful unity that was comin'. I could ha' told 'em different.

L. ANNE. Why should people hate? I like everybody.

JAMES. You know such a lot o' people, don't you?

L. ANNE. Well, Daddy likes everybody, and Mother likes everybody, except the people who don't like Daddy. I bar Miss Stokes, of course; but then, who wouldn't?

JAMES. [With a touch of philosophy] That's right—we all bars them that tries to get something out of us.

L. ANNE. Who do you bar, James?

JAMES. Well—[Enjoying the luxury of thought]—Speaking generally, I bar everybody that looks down their noses at me. Out there in the trenches, there'd come a shell, and orf'd go some orficer's head, an' I'd think: That might ha' been me—we're all equal in the sight o' the stars. But when I got home again among the torfs, I says to meself: Out there, ye know, you filled a hole as well as me; but here you've put it on again, with mufti.

L. ANNE. James, are your breeches made of mufti?

JAMES. [Contemplating his legs with a certain contempt] Ah! Footmen were to ha' been off; but Lord William was scared we wouldn't get jobs in the rush. We're on his conscience, and it's on my conscience that I've been on his long enough—so, now I've saved a bit, I'm goin' to take meself orf it.

L. ANNE. Oh! Are you going? Where?

JAMES. [Assembling the last bottles] Out o' Blighty!

L. ANNE. Is a little blighter a little Englishman?

JAMES. [Embarrassed] Well-'e can be.

L. ANNE [Mining] James—we're quite safe down here, aren't we, in a revolution? Only, we wouldn't have fun. Which would you rather—be safe, or have fun?

JAMES. [Grimly] Well, I had my bit o' fun in the war.

L. ANNE. I like fun that happens when you're not looking.

JAMES. Do you? You'd ha' been just suited.

L. ANNE. James, is there a future life? Miss Stokes says so.

JAMES. It's a belief, in the middle classes.

L. ANNE. What are the middle classes?

JAMES. Anything from two 'undred a year to supertax.

L. ANNE. Mother says they're terrible. Is Miss Stokes middle class?

JAMES. Yes.

L. ANNE. Then I expect they are terrible. She's awfully virtuous, though, isn't she?

JAMES. 'Tisn't so much the bein' virtuous, as the lookin' it, that's awful.

L. ANNE. Are all the middle classes virtuous? Is Poulder?

JAMES. [Dubiously] Well. Ask him!

L. ANNE. Yes, I will. Look!

[From an empty bin on the ground level she picks up a lighted taper,—burnt almost to the end.]

JAMES. [Contemplating it] Careless!

L. Ate. Oh! And look! [She points to a rounded metal object lying in the bin, close to where the taper was] It's a bomb!

She is about to pick it up when JAMES takes her by the waist and puts her aside.

JAMES. [Sternly] You stand back, there! I don't like the look o' that!

L. ANNE. [With intense interest] Is it really a bomb? What fun!

JAMES. Go and fetch Poulder while I keep an eye on it.

L. ANNE. [On tiptoe of excitement] If only I can make him jump!
Oh, James! we needn't put the light out, need we?

JAMES. No. Clear off and get him, and don't you come back.

L. ANNE. Oh! but I must! I found it!

JAMES. Cut along.

L. ANNE. Shall we bring a bucket?

JAMES. Yes. [ANNE flies off.]

[Gazing at the object] Near go! Thought I'd seen enough o'them to last my time. That little gas blighter! He looked a rum 'un, too—one o' these 'ere Bolshies.

[In the presence of this grim object the habits of the past are too much for him. He sits on the ground, leaning against one of the bottle baskets, keeping his eyes on the bomb, his large, lean, gorgeous body spread, one elbow on his plush knee. Taking out an empty pipe, he places it mechanically, bowl down, between his dips. There enter, behind him, as from a communication trench, POULDER, in swallow-tails, with LITTLE ANNE behind him.]

L. ANNE. [Peering round him—ecstatic] Hurrah! Not gone off yet!
It can't—can it—while James is sitting on it?

POULDER. [Very broad and stout, with square shoulders,—a large ruddy face, and a small mouth] No noise, Miss.—James.

JAMES. Hallo!

POULDER. What's all this?

JAMES. Bomb!

POULDER. Miss Anne, off you go, and don't you—

L. ANNE. Come back again! I know! [She flies.]

JAMES. [Extending his hand with the pipe in it] See!

POULDER. [Severely] You've been at it again! Look here, you're not in the trenches now. Get up! What are your breeches goin' to be like? You might break a bottle any moment!

JAMES. [Rising with a jerk to a sort of "Attention!"] Look here, you starched antiquity, you and I and that bomb are here in the sight of the stars. If you don't look out I'll stamp on it and blow us all to glory! Drop your civilian swank!

POULDER. [Seeing red] Ho! Because you had the privilege of fightin' for your country you still think you can put it on, do you? Take up your wine! 'Pon my word, you fellers have got no nerve left!

[JAMES makes a sudden swoop, lifts the bomb and poises it in both hands. POULDER

recoils against a bin and gazes, at the object.]

JAMES. Put up your hands!

POULDER. I defy you to make me ridiculous.

JAMES. [Fiercely] Up with 'em!

[POULDER'S hands go up in an uncontrollable spasm, which he subdues almost instantly, pulling them down again.]

JAMES. Very good. [He lowers the bomb.]

POULDER. [Surprised] I never lifted 'em.

JAMES. You'd have made a first-class Boche, Poulder. Take the bomb yourself; you're in charge of this section.

POULDER. [Pouting] It's no part of my duty to carry menial objects; if you're afraid of it I'll send 'Enry.

JAMES. Afraid! You 'Op o' me thumb!

[From the "communication trench" appears LITTLE ANNE, followed by a thin, sharp, sallow-faced man of thirty-five or so, and another FOOTMAN, carrying a wine-cooler.]

L. ANNE. I've brought the bucket, and the Press.

PRESS. [In front of POULDER'S round eyes and mouth] Ah, major domo, I was just taking the names of the Anti-Sweating dinner. [He catches sight of the bomb in JAMES'S hand] By George! What A.1. irony! [He brings out a note-book and writes] "Highest class dining to relieve distress of lowest class-bombed by same!" Tipping! [He rubs his hands].

POULDER. [Drawing himself up] Sir? This is present! [He indicates ANNE with the flat of his hand.]

L. ANNE. I found the bomb.

PRESS. [Absorbed] By Jove! This is a piece of luck! [He writes.]

POULDER. [Observing him] This won't do—it won't do at all!

PRESS. [Writing-absorbed] "Beginning of the British Revolution!"

POULDER. [To JAMES] Put it in the cooler. 'Enry, 'old up the cooler. Gently! Miss Anne, get be'ind the Press.

JAMES. [Grimly—holding the bomb above the cooler] It won't be the Press that'll stop Miss Anne's goin' to 'Eaven if one o' this sort goes off. Look out! I'm goin' to drop it.

[ALL recoil. HENRY puts the cooler down and backs away.]

L. ANNE. [Dancing forward] Oh! Let me see! I missed all the war, you know!

[JAMES lowers the bomb into the cooler.]

POULDER. [Regaining courage—to THE PRESS, who is scribbling in his note-book] If you mention this before the police lay their hands on it, it'll be contempt o' Court.

PRESS. [Struck] I say, major domo, don't call in the police! That's the last resort. Let me do the Sherlocking for you. Who's been down here?

L. ANNE. The plumber's man about the gas—a little blighter we'd never seen before.

JAMES. Lives close by, in Royal Court Mews—No. 3. I had a word with him before he came down. Lemmy his name is.

PRESS. "Lemmy!" [Noting the address] Right-o!

L. ANNE. Oh! Do let me come with you!

POULDER. [Barring the way] I've got to lay it all before Lord

William.

PRESS. Ah! What's he like?

POULDER. [With dignity] A gentleman, sir.

PRESS. Then he won't want the police in.

POULDER. Nor the Press, if I may go so far, as to say so.

PRESS. One to you! But I defy you to keep this from the Press, major domo: This is the most significant thing that has happened in our time. Guy Fawkes is nothing to it. The foundations of Society reeling! By George, it's a second Bethlehem!

[He writes.]

POULDER. [To JAMES] Take up your wine and follow me. 'Enry, bring the cooler. Miss Anne, precede us. [To THE PRESS] You defy me? Very well; I'm goin' to lock you up here.

PRESS. [Uneasy] I say this is medieval.

[He attempts to pass.]

POULDER. [Barring the way] Not so! James, put him up in that empty 'ock bin. We can't have dinner disturbed in any way.

JAMES. [Putting his hands on THE PRESS'S shoulders] Look here—go quiet! I've had a grudge against you yellow newspaper boys ever since the war—frothin' up your daily hate, an' makin' the Huns desperate. You nearly took my life five hundred times out there. If you squeal, I'm gain' to take yours once—and that'll be enough.

PRESS. That's awfully unjust. Im not yellow!

JAMES. Well, you look it. Hup.

PRESS. Little Lady-Anne, haven't you any authority with these fellows?

L. ANNE. [Resisting Poulard's pressure] I won't go! I simply must see James put him up!

PRESS. Now, I warn you all plainly—there'll be a leader on this.

[He tries to bolt but is seized by JAMES.]

JAMES. [Ironically] Ho!

PRESS. My paper has the biggest influence

JAMES. That's the one! Git up in that 'ock bin, and mind your feet among the claret.

PRESS. This is an outrage on the Press.

JAMES. Then it'll wipe out one by the Press on the Public—an' leave just a million over! Hup!

POULDER. 'Enry, give 'im an 'and.

[THE PRESS mounts, assisted by JAMES and HENRY.]

L. ANNE. [Ecstatic] It's lovely!

POULDER. [Nervously] Mind the '87! Mind!

JAMES. Mind your feet in Mr. Poulder's favourite wine!

[A WOMAN'S voice is heard, as from the depths of a cave, calling "Anne! Anne!"]

L. ANNE. [Aghast] Miss Stokes—I must hide!

[She gets behind POULDER. The three Servants achieve dignified positions in front of the bins. The voice comes nearer. THE PRESS sits dangling his feet, grinning. MISS STOKES appears. She is woman of forty-five and terribly good manners. Her greyish hair is rolled back off her forehead. She is in a high evening dress, and in the dim light radiates a startled composure.]

MISS STOKES. Poulder, where is Miss Anne?

[ANNE lays hold of the backs of his legs.]

POULDER. [Wincing] I am not in a position to inform you, Miss.

MISS S. They told me she was down here. And what is all this about a bomb?

POULDER. [Lifting his hand in a calming manner] The crisis is past; we have it in ice, Miss. 'Enry, show Miss Stokes! [HENRY indicates the cooler.]

MISS S. Good gracious! Does Lord William know?

POULDER. Not at present, Miss.

MISS S. But he ought to, at once.

POULDER. We 'ave 'ad complications.

MISS S. [Catching sight of the legs of THE PRESS] Dear me! What are those?

JAMES. [Gloomily] The complications.

[MISS STOKES pins up her glasses and stares at them.]

PRESS. [Cheerfully] Miss Stokes, would you kindly tell Lord William I'm here from the Press, and would like to speak to him?

MISS S. But—er—why are you up there?

JAMES. 'E got up out o' remorse, Miss.

MISS S. What do you mean, James?

PRESS. [Warmly] Miss Stokes, I appeal to you. Is it fair to attribute responsibility to an unsigned journalist—for what he has to say?

JAMES. [Sepulchrally] Yes, when you've got 'im in a nice dark place.

MISS. S. James, be more respectful! We owe the Press a very great debt.

JAMES. I'm goin' to pay it, Miss.

MISS S. [At a loss] Poulder, this is really most—

POULDER. I'm bound to keep the Press out of temptation, miss, till I've laid it all before Lord William. 'Enry, take up the cooler. James, watch 'im till we get clear, then bring on the rest of the wine and lock up. Now, Miss.

MISS S. But where is Anne?

PRESS. Miss Stokes, as a lady—!

MISS S. I shall go and fetch Lord William!

POULDER. We will all go, Miss.

L. ANNE. [Rushing out from behind his legs] No—me!

[She eludes MISS STOKES and vanishes, followed by that distracted but still well-mannered lady.]

POULDER. [Looking at his watch] 'Enry, leave the cooler, and take up the wine; tell Thomas to lay it out; get the champagne into ice, and 'ave Charles 'andy in the 'all in case some literary bounder comes punctual.

[HENRY takes up the wine and goes.]

PRESS. [Above his head] I say, let me down. This is a bit undignified, you know. My paper's a great organ.

POULDER. [After a moment's hesitation] Well—take 'im down, James; he'll do some mischief among the bottles.

JAMES. 'Op off your base, and trust to me.

[THE PRESS slides off the bin's edge, is received by JAMES, and not landed gently.]

POULDER. [Contemplating him] The incident's closed; no ill-feeling, I hope?

PRESS. No-o.

POULDER. That's right. [Clearing his throat] While we're waitin' for Lord William—if you're interested in wine—[Philosophically] you can read the history of the times in this cellar. Take 'ock: [He points to a bin] Not a bottle gone. German product, of course. Now, that 'ock is 'sa 'avin' the time of its life—maturin' grandly; got a wonderful chance. About the time we're bringin' ourselves to drink it, we shall be havin' the next great war. With luck that 'ock may lie there another quarter of a century, and a sweet pretty wine it'll be. I only hope I may be here to drink it. Ah! [He shakes his head]—but look at claret! Times are hard on claret. We're givin' it an awful doin'. Now, there's a Ponty Canny [He points to a bin]- if we weren't so 'opelessly allied with France, that wine would have a reasonable future. As it is—none! We drink it up and up; not more than sixty dozen left. And where's its equal to come from for a dinner wine—ah! I ask you? On the other hand, port is steady; made in a little country, all but the cobwebs and the old boot flavour; guaranteed by the British Nary; we may 'ope for the best with port. Do you drink it?

PRESS. When I get the chance.

POULDER. Ah! [Clears his throat] I've often wanted to ask: What do they pay you—if it's not indelicate?

[THE PRESS shrugs his shoulders.]

Can you do it at the money?

[THE PRESS shakes his head.] Still—it's an easy life! I've regretted sometimes that I didn't have a shot at it myself; influencin' other people without disclosin' your identity—something very attractive about that. [Lowering his voice] Between man and man, now-what do you think of the situation of the country—these processions of the unemployed—the Red Flag an' the Marsillaisy in the streets—all this talk about an upheaval?

PRESS. Well, speaking as a Socialist—

POULDER. [Astounded] Why; I thought your paper was Tory!

PRESS. So it is. That's nothing!

POULDER. [Open-mouthed] Dear me! [Pointing to the bomb] Do you really think there's something in this?

JAMES. [Sepulchrally] 'Igh explosive.

PRESS. [Taking out his note-book] Too much, anyway, to let it drop.

[A pleasant voice calls "Poulder! Hallo!".]

POULDER. [Forming a trumpet with his hand] Me Lord!

[As LORD WILLIAM appears, JAMES, overcome by reminiscences; salutes, and is mechanically answered. LORD WILLIAM has "charm." His hair and moustache are crisp and just beginning to grizzle. His bearing is free, easy, and only faintly armoured. He will go far to meet you any day. He is in full evening dress.]

LORD W. [Cheerfully] I say, Poulder, what have you and James been doing to the Press? Liberty of the Press—it isn't what it was, but there is a limit. Where is he?

[He turns to Jams between whom and himself there is still the freemasonry of the trenches.]

JAMES. [Pointing to POULDER] Be'ind the parapet, me Lord.

[THE PRESS mopes out from where he has involuntarily been. screened by POULDER, who looks at JAMES severely. LORD WILLIAM hides a smile.]

PRESS. Very glad to meet you, Lord William. My presence down here is quite involuntary.

LORD W. [With a charming smile] I know. The Press has to put its— er—to go to the bottom of everything. Where's this bomb, Poulder? Ah!

[He looks into the wine cooler.]

PRESS. [Taking out his note-book] Could I have a word with you on the crisis, before dinner, Lord William?

LORD W. It's time you and James were up, Poulder. [Indicating the cooler] Look after this; tell Lady William I'll be there in a minute.

POULDER. Very good, me Lord.

[He goes, followed by JAMES carrying the cooler.]

[As THE PRESS turns to look after them, LORD WILLIAM catches sight of his back.]

LORD W. I must apologise, sir. Can I brush you?

PRESS. [Dusting himself] Thanks; it's only behind. [He opens his note-book] Now, Lord William, if you'd kindly outline your views on the national situation; after such a narrow escape from death, I feel they might have a moral effect. My paper, as you know, is concerned with—the deeper aspect of things. By the way, what do you value your house and collection at?

LORD W. [Twisting his little mustache] Really: I can't! Really!

PRESS. Might I say a quarter of a million-lifted in two seconds and a half-hundred thousand to the second. It brings it home, you know.

LORD W. No, no; dash it! No!

PRESS. [Disappointed] I see—not draw attention to your property in the present excited state of public feeling? Well, suppose we approach it from the viewpoint of the Anti-Sweating dinner. I have the list of guests—very weighty!

LORD W. Taken some lifting-wouldn't they?

PRESS. [Seriously] May I say that you designed the dinner to soften the tension, at this crisis? You saw that case, I suppose, this morning, of the woman dying of starvation in Bethnal Green?

LORD W. [Desperately] Yes-yes! I've been horribly affected. I always knew this slump would come after the war, sooner or later.

PRESS. [Writing] ". . . had predicted slump."

LORD W. You see, I've been an Anti-Sweating man for years, and I thought if only we could come together now

PRESS. [Nodding] I see—I see! Get Society interested in the Sweated, through the dinner. I have the menu here. [He produces it.]

LORD W. Good God, man—more than that! I want to show the people that we stand side by side with them, as we did in the trenches. The whole thing's too jolly awful. I lie awake over it.

[He walks up and down.]

PRESS. [Scribbling] One moment, please. I'll just get that down—"Too jolly awful—lies awake over it. Was wearing a white waistcoat with pearl buttons." [At a sign of resentment from his victim.] I want the human touch, Lord William—it's everything in my paper. What do you say about this attempt to bomb you?

LORD W. Well, in a way I think it's d—d natural

PRESS. [Scribbling] "Lord William thought it d—d natural."

LORD W. [Overhearing] No, no; don't put that down. What I mean is, I should like to get hold of those fellows that are singing the Marseillaise about the streets—fellows that have been in the war— real sports they are, you know—thorough good chaps at bottom—and say to them: "Have a feeling heart, boys; put yourself in my position." I don't believe a bit they'd want to bomb me then.

[He walks up and down.]

PRESS. [Scribbling and muttering] "The idea, of brotherhood—" D'you mind my saying that? Word brotherhood—always effective—always—

[He writes.]

LORD E. [Bewildered] "Brotherhood!" Well, it's pure accident that I'm here and they're there. All the same, I can't pretend to be starving. Can't go out into Hyde Park and stand on a tub, can I? But if I could only show them what I feel—they're such good chaps— poor devils.

PRESS. I quite appreciate! [He writes] "Camel and needle's eye." You were at Eton and Oxford? Your constituency I know. Clubs? But I can get all that. Is it your view that Christianity is on the up-grade, Lord William?

LORD W. [Dubious] What d'you mean by Christianity—loving—kindness and that? Of course I think that dogma's got the knock.

[He walks.]

PRESS. [Writing] "Lord William thought dogma had got the knock." I should like you just to develop your definition of Christianity. "Loving—kindness" strikes rather a new note.

LORD W. New? What about the Sermon on the Mount?

PRESS. [Writing] "Refers to Sermon on Mount." I take it you don't belong to any Church, Lord William?

LORD W. [Exasperated] Well, really—I've been baptised and that sort of thing. But look here—

PRESS. Oh! you can trust me—I shan't say anything that you'll regret. Now, do you consider that a religious revival would help to quiet the country?

LORD W. Well, I think it would be a deuced, good thing if everybody were a bit more kind.

PRESS. Ah! [Musing] I feel that your views are strikingly original, Lord William. If you could just open out on them a little more? How far would you apply kindness in practice?

LORD W. Can you apply it in theory?

PRESS. I believe it is done. But would you allow yourself to be blown up with impunity?

LORD W. Well, that's a bit extreme. But I quite sympathise with this chap. Imagine yourself in his shoes. He sees a huge house, all these bottles; us swilling them down; perhaps he's got a starving wife, or consumptive kids.

PRESS. [Writing and murmuring] Um-m! "Kids."

LORD W. He thinks: "But for the grace of God, there swill I. Why should that blighter have everything and I nothing?" and all that.

PRESS. [Writing] "And all that." [Eagerly] Yes?

LORD W. And gradually—you see—this contrast—becomes an obsession with him. "There's got to be an example made," he thinks; and—er— he makes it, don't you know?

PRESS. [Writing] Ye-es? And—when you're the example?

LORD W. Well, you feel a bit blue, of course. But my point is that you quite see it.

PRESS. From the other world. Do you believe in a future life, Lord William? The public took a lot of interest in the question, if you remember, at the time of the war. It might revive at any moment, if there's to be a revolution.

LORD W. The wish is always father to the thought, isn't it?

PRESS. Yes! But—er—doesn't the question of a future life rather bear on your point about kindness? If there isn't one—why be kind?

LORD W. Well, I should say one oughtn't to be kind for any motive— that's self-interest; but just because one feels it, don't you know.

PRESS. [Writing vigorously] That's very new—very new!

LORD W. [Simply] You chaps are wonderful.

PRESS. [Doubtfully] You mean we're—we're—

LORD W. No, really. You have such a d—d hard time. It must be perfectly beastly to interview fellows like me.

PRESS. Oh! Not at all, Lord William. Not at all. I assure you compared with a literary man, it's—it's almost heavenly.

LORD W. You must have a wonderful knowledge of things.

PRESS. [Bridling a little] Well—I shouldn't say that.

LORD W. I don't see how you can avoid it. You turn your hands to everything.

PRESS. [Modestly] Well—yes, Yes.

LORD W. I say: Is there really going to be a revolution, or are you making it up, you Press?

PRESS. We don't know. We never know whether we come before the event, or it comes before us.

LORD W. That's—very deep—very dip. D'you mind lending me your note-book a moment. I'd like to stick that down. All right, I'll use the other end. [THE PRESS hands it hypnotically.]

LORD W. [Jotting] Thanks awfully. Now what's your real opinion of the situation?

PRESS. As a man or a Press man?

LORD W. Is there any difference?

PRESS. Is there any connection?

LORD W. Well, as a man.

PRESS. As a man, I think it's rotten.

LORD W. [Jotting] "Rotten." And as a pressman?

PRESS. [Smiling] Prime.

LORD W. What! Like a Stilton cheese. Ha, ha!

[He is about to write.]

PRESS. My stunt, Lord William. You said that.

[He jots it on his cuff.]

LORD W. But look here! Would you say that a strong press movement would help to quiet the country?

PRESS. Well, as you ask me, Lord William, I'll tell you. No newspapers for a month would do the trick.

LORD W. [Jotting] By Jove! That's brilliant.

PRESS. Yes, but I should starve. [He suddenly looks up, and his eyes, like gimlets, bore their way into LORD WILLIAM'S pleasant, troubled face] Lord William, you could do me a real kindness. Authorise me to go and interview the fellow who left the bomb here; I've got his address. I promise you to do it most discreetly. Fact is—well—I'm in low water. Since the war we simply can't get sensation enough for the new taste. Now, if I could have an article headed: "Bombed and Bomber"—sort of double interview, you know, it'd very likely set me on my legs again. [Very earnestly] Look! [He holds out his frayed

wristbands.]

LORD W. [Grasping his hand] My dear chap, certainly. Go and interview this blighter, and then bring him round here. You can do that for one. I'd very much like to see him, as a matter of fact.

PRESS. Thanks awfully; I shall never forget it. Oh! might I have my note-book?

[LORD WILLIAM hands it back.]

LORD W. And look here, if there's anything—when a fellow's fortunate and another's not—

[He puts his hand into his breast pocket.]

PRESS. Oh, thank you! But you see, I shall have to write you up a bit, Lord William. The old aristocracy—you know what the public still expects; if you were to lend me money, you might feel—

LORD W. By Jove! Never should have dreamt—

PRESS. No! But it wouldn't do. Have you a photograph of yourself.

LORD W. Not on me.

PRESS. Pity! By the way, has it occurred to you that there may be another bomb on the premises?

LORD W. Phew! I'll have a look.

[He looks at his watch, and begins hurriedly searching the bins, bending down and going on his knees. THE PRESS reverses the notebook again and sketches him.]

PRESS. [To himself] Ah! That'll do. "Lord William examines the foundations of his house."

[A voice calls "Bill!" THE PRESS snaps the note-book to, and looks up. There, where the "communication trench" runs in, stands a tall and elegant woman in the extreme of evening dress.]

[With presence of mind] Lady William? You'll find Lord William—Oh! Have you a photograph of him?

LADY W. Not on me.

PRESS. [Eyeing her] Er—no—I suppose not—no. Excuse me! [He sidles past her and is gone.]

LADY W. [With lifted eyebrows] Bill!

LORD W. [Emerging, dusting his knees] Hallo, Nell! I was just making sure there wasn't another bomb.

LADY W. Yes; that's why I came down: Who was that person?

LORD W. Press.

LADY W. He looked awfully yellow. I hope you haven't been giving yourself away.

LORD W. [Dubiously] Well, I don't know. They're like corkscrews.

LADY W. What did he ask you?

LORD W. What didn't he?

LADY W. Well, what did you tell him?

LORD W. That I'd been baptised—but he promised not to put it down.

LADY W. Bill, you are absurd.

[She gives a light tittle laugh.]

LORD W. I don't remember anything else, except that it was quite natural we should be bombed, don't you know.

LADY W. Why, what harm have we done?

LORD W. Been born, my dear. [Suddenly serious] I say, Nell, how am

I to tell what this fellow felt when he left that bomb here?

LADY W. Why do you want to?

LORD W. Out there one used to know what one's men felt.

LADY W. [Staring] My dear boy, I really don't think you ought to see the Press; it always upsets you.

LORD W. Well! Why should you and I be going to eat ourselves silly to improve the condition of the sweated, when——

LADY W. [Calmly] When they're going to "improve" ours, if we don't look out. We've got to get in first, Bill.

LORD W. [Gloomily] I know. It's all fear. That's it! Here we are, and here we shall stay—as if there'd never been a war.

LADY W. Well, thank heaven there's no "front" to a revolution. You and I can go to glory together this time. Compact! Anything that's on, I'm to abate in.

LORD W. Well, in reason.

LADY W. No, in rhyme, too.

LORD W. I say, your dress!

LADY W. Yes, Poulder tried to stop me, but I wasn't going to have you blown up without me.

LORD W. You duck. You do look stunning. Give us a kiss!

LADY W. [Starting back] Oh, Bill! Don't touch me—your hands!

LORD W. Never mind, my mouth's clean.

They stand about a yard apart, and banding their faces towards each other, kiss on the lips.

L. ANNE. [Appearing suddenly from the "communication trench," and tip-toeing silently between them] Oh, Mum! You and Daddy ARE wasting time! Dinner's ready, you know!

CURTAIN

ACT II

The single room of old MRS. LEMMY, in a small grey house in Bethnal Green, the room of one cumbered by little save age, and the crockery debris of the past. A bed, a cupboard, a coloured portrait of Queen Victoria, and—of all things—a fiddle, hanging on the wall. By the side of old MRS. LEMMY in her chair is a pile of corduroy trousers, her day's sweated sewing, and a small table. She sits with her back to the window, through which, in the last of the light, the opposite side of the little grey street is visible under the evening sky, where hangs one white cloud shaped like a horned beast. She is still sewing, and her lips move. Being old, and lonely, she has that habit of talking to herself, distressing to those who cannot overhear. From the smack of her tongue she was once a West Country cottage woman; from the look of her creased, parchmenty face, she was once a pretty girl with black eyes, in which there is still much vitality. The door is opened with difficulty and a little girl enters, carrying a pile of unfinished corduroy trousers nearly as large as herself. She puts them down against the wall, and advances. She is eleven or twelve years old; large-eyed, dark haired, and sallow. Half a woman of this and half of another world, except when as now, she is as irresponsible a bit of life as a little flowering weed growing out of a wall. She stands looking at MRS. LEMMY with dancing eyes.

L. AIDA. I've brought yer to-morrer's trahsers. Y'nt yer finished wiv to-dy's? I want to tyke 'em.

MRS. L. No, me dear. Drat this last one—me old fengers!

L. AIDA. I learnt some poytry to-dy—I did.

MRS. L. Well, I never!

L. AIDA. [Reciting with unction]

"Little lamb who myde thee?
Dost thou know who myde thee,
Gyve thee life and byde thee feed
By the stream and oer the mead;
Gyve the clothing of delight,
Softest clothing, woolly, bright;
Gyve thee such a tender voice,
Myking all the vyles rejoice.
Little lamb who myde thee?
Dost thou know who myde thee?"

MRS. L. 'Tes wonderful what things they tache ya nowadays.

L. AIDA. When I grow up I'm goin' to 'ave a revolver an' shoot the people that steals my jools.

MRS. L. Deary-me, wherever du yu get yore notions?

L. AIDA. An' I'm goin' to ride on as 'orse be'ind a man; an' I'm goin' to ryce trynes in my motor car.

MRS. L. [Dryly] Ah!—Yu'um gwine to be very busy, that's sartin.
Can you sew?

L. AIDA. [With a Smile] Nao.

MRS. L. Don' they tache Yu that, there?

L. AIDA. [Blending contempt and a lingering curiosity] Nao.

MRS. L. 'Tes wonderful genteel.

L. AIDA. I can sing, though.

MRS. L. Let's 'ear yu, then.

L. AIDA. [Shaking her head] I can ply the pianner. I can ply a tune.

MRS. L. Whose pianner?

L. AIDA. Mrs. Brahn's when she's gone aht.

MRS. L. Well, yu are gettin' edjucation! Du they tache yu to love yore neighbours?

L. AIDA. [Ineffably] Nao. [Straying to the window] Mrs. Lemmy, what's the moon?

MRS. L. The mune? Us used to zay 'twas made o' crame cheese.

L. AIDA. I can see it.

MRS. L. Ah! Don' yu never go wishin' for it, me dear.

L. AIDA. I daon't.

MRS. L. Folks as wish for the mune never du no gude.

L. AIDA. [Craning out, brilliant] I'm goin' dahn in the street.
I'll come back for yer trahsers.

MRS. L. Well; go yu, then, and get a breath o' fresh air in yore chakes. I'll sune 'a feneshed.

L. AIDA. [Solemnly] I'm goin' to be a dancer, I am.

She rushes suddenly to the door, pulls it open, and is gone.

MRS. L. [Looking after her, and talking to herself.] Ah! 'Er've a-got all 'er troubles before 'er! "Little lamb, a made'ee?" [Cackling] 'Tes a funny world, tu! [She sings to herself.]

"There is a green 'ill far away

Without a city wall,
Where our dear-Lord was crucified,
'U died to save us all."

The door is opened, and LEMMY comes in; a little man with a stubble of dark moustache and spiky dark hair; large, peculiar eyes he has, and a look of laying his ears back, a look of doubting, of perversity with laughter up the sleeve, that grows on those who have to do with gas and water. He shuts the door.

MRS. L. Well, Bob, I 'aven't a-seen yu this tu weeks.

LEMMY comes up to his mother, and sits down on a stool, sets a tool-bag between his knees, and speaks in a cockney voice.

LEMMY. Well, old lydy o' leisure! Wot would y' 'ave for supper, if yer could choose—salmon wivaht the tin, an' tipsy cyke?

MRS. L. [Shaking her head and smiling blandly] That's showy. Toad in the 'ole I'd 'ave—and a glass o' port wine.

LEMMY. Providential. [He opens a tool-bag] Wot dyer think I've got yer?

MRS. L. I 'ope yu've a-got yureself a job, my son!

LEMMY. [With his peculiar smile] Yus, or I couldn't 'ave afforded yer this. [He takes out a bottle] Not 'arf! This'll put the blood into yer. Pork wine—once in the cellars of the gryte. We'll drink the ryyal family in this.

[He apostrophises the portrait of Queen Victoria.]

MRS. L. Ah! She was a praaper gude queen. I see 'er once, when 'er was bein' burried.

LEMMY. Ryalties—I got nothin' to sy agynst 'em in this country. But the STYTE 'as got to 'ave its pipes seen to. The 'ole show's goin' up pop. Yer'll wyke up one o' these dyes, old lydy, and find yerself on the roof, wiv nuffin' between yer an' the grahnd.

MRS. L. I can't tell what yu'm talkin' about.

LEMMY. We're goin' to 'ave a triumpherat in this country Liberty, Equality, Fraternity; an' if yer arsk me, they won't be in power six months before they've cut each other's throats. But I don't care—I want to see the blood flow! (Dispassionately) I don' care 'oose blood it is. I want to see it flow!

MRS. L. [Indulgently] Yu'm a funny boy, that's sartin.

LEMMY. [Carving at the cork with a knife] This 'ere cork is like Sasiety—rotten; it's old—old an' moulderin'. [He holds up a bit of cork on the point of the knife] Crumblin' under the wax, it is. In goes the screw an' out comes the cork. [With unction]—an' the blood flows. [Tipping the bottle, he lets a drop fall into the middle of his hand, and licks it up. Gazing with queer and doubting commiseration at has mother] Well, old dear, wot shall we 'ave it aht of—the gold loving-cup, or—what? 'Ave yer supper fust, though, or it'll go to yer 'ead! [He goes to the cupboard and taken out a disk in which a little bread is sopped in a little' milk] Cold pap! 'Ow can yer? 'Yn't yer got a kipper in the 'ouse?

MRS. L. [Admiring the bottle] Port wine! 'Tis a brave treat! I'll 'ave it out of the "Present from Margitt," Bob. I tuk 'ee therr by excursion when yu was six months. Yu 'ad a shrimp an' it choked yu praaperly. Yu was always a squeamy little feller. I can't never think 'ow yu managed in the war-time, makin' they shells.

LEMMY, who has brought to the table two mugs and blown the duet out of; them, fills them with port, and hands one to his mother, who is eating her bread and milk.

LEMMY. Ah! Nothin' worried me, 'cept the want o' soap.

MRS. L. [Cackling gently] So it du still, then! Luke at yore face. Yu never was a clean boy, like Jim.

[She puts out a thin finger and touches his cheek, whereon is a black smudge.]

LEMMY. [Scrubbing his cheek with his sleeve.] All right! Y'see, I come stryte 'ere, to get rid o' this.

[He drinks.]

MRS. L. [Eating her bread and milk] Tes a pity yu'm not got a wife to see't yu wash yureself.

LEMMY. [Goggling] Wife! Not me—I daon't want ter myke no food for pahder. Wot oh!—they said, time o' the war—ye're fightin' for yer children's 'eritage. Well; wot's the 'eritage like, now we've got it? Empty as a shell before yer put the 'igh explosive in. Wot's it like? [Warming to his theme] Like a prophecy in the pypers—not a bit more substantial.

MRS. L. [Slightly hypnotised] How 'e du talk! The gas goes to yore 'ead, I think!

LEMMY. I did the gas to-dy in the cellars of an 'ouse where the wine was mountains 'igh. A regiment couldn't 'a drunk it. Marble pillars in the 'all, butler broad as an observytion balloon, an' four conscientious khaki footmen. When the guns was roarin' the talk was all for no more o' them glorious weeds-style an' luxury was orf. See wot it is naow. You've got a bare crust in the cupboard 'ere, I works from 'and to mouth in a glutted market—an' there they stand abaht agyne in their britches in the 'oases o' the gryte. I was reg'lar overcome by it. I left a thing in that cellar—I left a thing . . . It'll be a bit ork'ard for me to-mower. [Drinks from his mug.]

MRS. L. [Placidly, feeling the warmth of the little she has drunk] What thing?

LEMMY. Wot thing? Old lydy, ye're like a winkle afore yer opens 'er—I never see anything so peaceful. 'Ow dyer manage it?

MRS. L. Settin' 'ere and thenkin'.

LEA. Wot abaht?

MRS. L. We-el—Money, an' the works o' God.

LEMMY. Ah! So yer give me a thought sometimes.

MRS. L. [Lofting her mug] Yu ought never to ha' spent yore money on this, Bob!

LEMMY. I thought that meself.

MRS. L. Last time I 'ad a glass o' port wine was the day yore brother Jim went to Ameriky. [Smacking her lips] For a teetotal drink, it du warm 'ee!

LEMMY. [Raising his mug] Well, 'ere's to the British revolution! 'Ere's to the conflygrytion in the sky!

MRS. L. [Comfortably] So as to kape up therr, 'twon't du no 'arm.

LEMMY goes to the window and unhooks his fiddle; he stands with it halfway to his shoulder. Suddenly he opens the window and leans out. A confused murmur of voices is heard; and a snatch of the Marseillaise, sung by a girl. Then the shuffling tramp of feet, and figures are passing in the street.

LEMMY. [Turning—excited] Wot'd I tell yer, old lydy? There it is —there it is!

MRS. L. [Placidly] What is?

LEMMY. The revolution. [He cranes out] They've got it on a barrer. Cheerio!

VOICE. [Answering] Cheerio!

LEMMY. [Leaning out] I sy—you 'yn't tykin' the body, are yer?

VOICE. Nao.

LEMMY. Did she die o' starvytion O.K.?

VOICE. She bloomin' well did; I know 'er brother.

LEMMY. Ah! That'll do us a bit o' good!

VOICE. Cheerio!

LEMMY. So long!

VOICE. So long!

[The girl's voice is heard again in the distance singing the Marseillaise. The door is flung open and LITTLE AIDA comes running in again.]

LEMMY. 'Allo, little Aida!

L. AIDA. 'Allo, I been follerin' the corfin. It's better than an 'orse dahn!

MRS. L. What coffin?

L. AIDA. Why, 'er's wot died o' starvytion up the street. They're goin' to tyke it to 'Yde Pawk, and 'oller.

MRS. L. Well, never yu mind wot they'm goin' to du: Yu wait an' take my trousers like a gude gell.

[She puts her mug aside and takes up her unfinished pair of trousers. But the wine has entered her fingers, and strength to push the needle through is lacking.]

LEMMY. [Tuning his fiddle] Wot'll yer 'ave, little Aida? "Dead March in Saul" or "When the fields was white wiv dysies"?

L. AIDA. [With a hop and a brilliant smile] Aoh yus! "When the fields"—

MRS. L. [With a gesture of despair] Deary me! I 'aven't a-got the strength!

LEMMY. Leave 'em alone, old dear! No one'll be goin' aht wivaht trahsers to-night 'cos yer leaves that one undone. Little Aida, fold 'em up!

[LITTLE AIDA methodically folds the five finished pairs of trousers into a pile. LEMMY begins playing. A smile comes on the face of MRS. L, who is rubbing her fingers. LITTLE AIDA, trousers over arm, goes and stares at LEMMY playing.]

LEMMY. [Stopping] Little Aida, one o' vese dyes yer'll myke an actress. I can see it in yer fyce!

[LITTLE AIDA looks at him wide-eyed.]

MRS. L. Don't 'ee putt things into 'er 'ead, Bob!

LEMMY. 'Tyn't 'er 'ead, old lydy—it's lower. She wants feedin'— feed 'er an' she'll rise. [He strikes into the "Machichi"] Look at 'er naow. I tell yer there's a fortune in 'er.

[LITTLE AIDA has put out her tongue.]

MRS. L. I'd saner there was a gude 'eart in 'er than any fortune.

L. AIDA. [Hugging her pile of trousers] It's thirteen pence three farthin's I've got to bring yer, an' a penny aht for me, mykes twelve three farthin's: [With the same little hop and sudden smile] I'm goin' to ride back on a bus, I am.

LEMMY. Well, you myke the most of it up there; it's the nearest you'll ever git to 'eaven.

MRS. L. Don' yu discourage 'er, Bob; she'm a gude little thing, an't yu, dear?

L. AIDA. [Simply] Yus.

LEMMY. Not 'arf. Wot c'her do wiv yesterdy's penny?

L. AIDA. Movies.

LEMMY. An' the dy before?

L. AIDA. Movies.

LEMMY. Wot'd I tell yer, old lydy—she's got vicious tystes, she'll finish in the theayter yep Tyke my tip, little Aida; you put every penny into yer foundytions, yer'll get on the boards quicker that wy.

MRS. L. Don' yu pay no 'eed to his talk.

L. AIDA. I daon't.

Ice. Would yer like a sip aht o' my mug?

L. AIDA. [Brilliant] Yus.

MRS. L. Not at yore age, me dear, though it is teetotal.

[LITTLE AIDA puts her head on one side, like a dog trying to understand.]

LEMMY. Well, 'ave one o' my gum-drops.

[Holds out a paper.]

[LITTLE AIDA brilliant, takes a flat, dark substance from it, and puts it in her mouth.]

Give me a kiss, an' I'll give yer a penny.

[LITTLE AIDA shakes her head, and leans out of window.]

Movver, she daon't know the valyer of money.

MRS. L. Never mind 'im, me dear.

L. AIDA. [Sucking the gum-drop—with difficulty] There's a taxi-cab at the corner.

[LITTLE AIDA runs to the door. A figure stands in the doorway; she skids round him and out. THE PRESS comes in.]

LEMMY. [Dubiously] Wat-oh!

PRESS. Mr. Lemmy?

LEMMY. The syme.

PRESS. I'm from the Press.

LEMMY. Blimy.

PRESS. They told me at your place you wens very likely here.

LEMMY. Yus I left Downin' Street a bit early to-dy! [He twangs the fiddle-strings pompously.]

PRESS. [Taking out his note-book and writing] "Fiddles while Rome is burning!" Mr. Lemmy, it's my business at this very critical time to find out what the nation's thinking. Now, as a representative working man—

LEMMY. That's me.

PRESS. You can help me. What are your views?

LEMMY. [Putting down fiddle] Voos? Sit dahn!

[THE PRESS sits on the stool which LEMMY has vacated.]

The Press—my Muvver. Seventy-seven. She's a wonder; 'yn't yer, old dear?

PRESS. Very happy to make your acquaintance, Ma'am. [He writes] "Mrs. Lemmy, one of the veterans of industry——" By the way, I've jest passed a lot of people following a coffin.

LEMMY. Centre o' the cyclone—cyse o' starvytion; you 'ad 'er in the pyper this mornin'.

PRESS. Ah! yes! Tragic occurrence. [Looking at the trousers.] Hub of the Sweated Industries just here. I especially want to get at the heart——

MRS. L. 'Twasn't the 'eart, 'twas the stomach.

PRESS. [Writing] "Mrs. Lemmy goes straight to the point."

LEMMY. Mister, is it my voos or Muvver's yer want?

PRESS. Both.

LEMMY. 'Cos if yer get Muvver's, yer won't 'ave time for mine. I tell yer strytle [Confidentially] she's get a glawss a' port wine in 'er. Naow, mind yer, I'm not anxious to be intervooed. On the other 'and, anyfink I might 'eve to sy of valyer——There is a clawss o' politician that 'as nuffn to sy—Aoh! an' daon't

'e sy it just! I dunno wot pyper yer represent.

PRESS. [Smiling] Well, Mr. Lemmy, it has the biggest influ—

LEMMY. They all 'as that; dylies, weeklies, evenin's, Sundyes; but it's of no consequence—my voos are open and aboveboard. Naow, wot shall we begin abaht?

PRESS. Yourself, if you please. And I'd like you to know at once that my paper wants the human note, the real heart-beat of things.

LEMMY. I see; sensytion! Well; 'ere am I—a fustclawss plumber's. assistant—in a job to-dy an' out tomorrer. There's a 'eart-beat in that, I tell yer. 'Oo knows wot the mower 'as for me!

PRESS. [Writing]. "The great human issue—Mr. Lemmy touches it at once."

LEMMY. I sy keep my nyme aht o' this; I don' go in fer self-advertisement.

PRESS. [Writing] "True working-man—modest as usual."

LEMMY. I daon't want to embarrass the Gover'nment. They're so ticklish ever since they got the 'abit, war-time, o' mindin' wot people said.

PRESS. Right-o!

LEMMY. For instance, suppose there's goin' to be a revolution— [THE PRESS writes with energy.] 'Ow does it touch me? Like this: I my go up—I cawn't come dahn; no more can Muvver.

MRS. L. [Surprisingly] Us all goes down into the grave.

PRESS. "Mrs. Lemmy interjects the deeper note."

LEMMY. Naow, the gryte—they can come dahn, but they cawn't go up! See! Put two an' two together, an' that's 'ow it touches me. [He utters a throaty laugh] 'Ave yer got that?

PRESS. [Quizzical] Not go up? What about bombs, Mr. Lemmy?

LEMMY. [Dubious] Wot abaht 'em? I s'pose ye're on the comic pypers? 'Ave yer noticed wot a weakness they 'ave for the 'orrible?

PRESS. [Writing] "A grim humour peeped out here and there through the earnestness of his talk."

[He sketches LEMMY'S profile.]

LEMMY. We 'ad an explosion in my factory time o' the war, that would just ha' done for you comics. [He meditates] Lord! They was after it too,—they an' the Sundyes; but the Censor did 'em. Strike me, I could tell yer things!

PRESS. That's what I want, Mr. Lemmy; tell me things!

LEMMY. [Musing] It's a funny world, 'yn't it? 'Ow we did blow each other up! [Getting up to admire] I sy, I shall be syfe there. That won't betry me anonymiety. Why! I looks like the Prime Minister!

PRESS. [Rather hurt] You were going to tell me things.

LEMMY. Yus, an' they'll be the troof, too.

PRESS. I hope so; we don't—

LEMMY. Wot oh!

PRESS. [A little confused.] We always try to verify—

LEMMY. Yer leave it at tryin', daon't yer? Never, mind, ye're a gryte institootion. Blimy, yer do have jokes, wiv it, spinnin' rahnd on yer own tyles, denyin' to-dy wot ye're goin' to print to-morrer. Ah, well! Ye're like all of us below the line o' comfort—live dyngerously—ever' dy yer last. That's wy I'm interested in the future.

PRESS. Well now—the future. [Writing] "He prophesies."

LEMMY. It's syfer, 'yn't it? [He winks] No one never looks back on prophecies. I remembers an editor spring o' 1916 stykin' his reputyion the war'd be over in the follerin' October. Increased 'is circulytion abaht 'arf a million by it. 1917 an' war still on—'ad 'is readers gone back on 'im? Nao! They was

increasin' like rabbits. Prophesy wot people want to believe, an' ye're syfe. Naow, I'll styke my reputation on somethin', you tyke it dahn word for word. This country's goin' to the dawgs—Naow, 'ere's the sensytion—unless we gets a new religion.

PRESS. Ah! Now for it—yes?

LEMMY. In one word: "Kindness." Daon't mistyke me, nao sickly sentiment and nao patronizin'. Me as kind to the millionaire as 'im to me. [Fills his mug and drinks.]

PRESS. [Struck] That's queer! Kindness! [Writing] "Extremes meet. Bombed and bomber breathing the same music."

LEMMY. But 'ere's the interestin' pynt. Can it be done wivaht blood?

PRESS. [Writing] "He doubts."

LEMMY. No dabt wotever. It cawn't! Blood-and-kindness! Spill the blood o' them that aren't kind—an' there ye are!

PRESS. But pardon me, how are you to tell?

LEMMY. Blimy, they leaps to the heye!

PRESS. [Laying down-his note-book] I say, let me talk to you as man to man for a moment.

LEMMY. Orl right. Give it a rest!

PRESS. Your sentiments are familiar to me. I've got a friend on the Press who's very keen on Christ and kindness; and wants to strangle the last king with the—hamstrings of the last priest.

LEMMY. [Greatly intrigued] Not 'arf! Does 'e?

PRESS. Yes. But have you thought it out? Because he hasn't.

LEMMY. The difficulty is—where to stop.

PRESS. Where to begin.

LEMMY. Lawd! I could begin almost anywhere. Why, every month abaht, there's a cove turns me aht of a job 'cos I daon't do just wot 'e likes. They'd 'ave to go. I tell yer strytle—the Temple wants cleanin' up.

PRESS. Ye-es. If I wrote what I thought, I should get the sack as quick as you. D'you say that justifies me in shedding the blood of my boss?

LEMMY. The yaller Press 'as got no blood—'as it? You shed their ile an' vinegar—that's wot you've got to do. Strytle—do yer believe in the noble mission o' the Press?

PRESS. [Enigmatically] Mr. Lemmy, I'm a Pressman.

LEMMY. [Goggling] I see. Not much! [Gently jogging his mother's elbow] Wyke up, old lydy!

[For Mrs. LEMMY who has been sipping placidly at her port, is nodding. The evening has drawn in. LEMMY strikes a match on his trousers and lights a candle.]

Blood an' kindness—that's what's wanted—'specially blood! The 'istory o' me an' my family'll show yer that. Tyke my bruver Fred —crushed by burycrats. Tyke Muvver 'erself. Talk o' the wrongs o' the people! I tell yer the foundytions is rotten. [He empties the bottle into his mother's mug] Daon't mind the mud at the bottom, old lydy—it's all strengthenin'! You tell the Press, Muvver. She can talk abaht the pawst.

PRESS. [Taking up his note-book, and becoming, again his professional self] Yes, Mrs. Lemmy? "Age and Youth—Past and Present—"

MRS. L. Were yu talkin' about Fred? [The port has warmed her veins, the colour in her eyes and cheeks has deepened] My son Fred was always a gude boy—never did nothin' before 'e married. I can see Fred [She bends forward a little in her chair, looking straight before her] acomin' in wi' a pheasant 'e'd found—terrible 'e was at findin' pheasants. When father died, an' yu was cumin', Bob, Fred 'e said to me: "Don't yu never cry, Mother, I'll look after 'ee." An' so 'e did, till 'e married that day six months an' take to the drink in sower. 'E wasn't never 'the same boy again—not Fred. An' now 'e's in That. I can see poor Fred—

[She slowly wipes a tear out of the corner of an eye with the back of her finger.]

PRESS. [Puzzled] In—That?

LEMMY. [Sotto voce] Come orf it! Prison! 'S wot she calls it.

MRS. L. [Cheerful] They say life's a vale o' sorrows. Well, so 'tes, but don' du to let yureself thenk so.

PRESS. And so you came to London, Mrs. Lemmy?

MRS. L. Same year as father died. With the four o' them—that's my son Fred, an' my son Jim, an' my son Tom, an' Alice. Bob there, 'e was born in London—an' a praaper time I 'ad of et.

PRESS. [Writing] "Her heroic struggles with poverty—"

MRS. L. Worked in a laundry, I ded, at fifteen shellin's a week, an' brought 'em all up on et till Alice 'ad the gallopin' consumption. I can see poor Alice wi' the little red spots is 'er cheeks—an' I not knowin' wot to do wi' 'her—but I always kept up their buryin' money. Funerals is very dear; Mr. Lemmy was six pound, ten.

PRESS. "High price of Mr. Lemmy."

MRS. L. I've a-got the money for when my time come; never touch et, no matter 'ow things are. Better a little goin' short here below, an' enter the kingdom of 'eaven independent:

PRESS. [Writing] "Death before dishonour—heroine of the slums. Dickens—Betty Higden."

MRS. L. No, sir. Mary Lemmy. I've seen a-many die, I 'ave; an' not one grievin'. I often says to meself: [With a little laugh] "Me dear, when yu go, yu go 'appy. Don' yu never fret about that," I says. An' so I will; I'll go 'appy.

[She stays quite still a moment, and behind her LEMMY draws one finger across his face.]

[Smiling] "Yore old fengers'll 'ave a rest. Think o' that!" I says. "'Twill be a brave change." I can see myself lyin' there an' duin' nothin'.

[Again a pause, while MRS. LEMMY sees herself doing nothing.]

LEMMY. Tell abaht Jim; old lydy.

MRS. L. My son Jim 'ad a family o' seven in six years. "I don' know 'ow 'tes, Mother," 'e used to say to me; "they just sim to come!" That was Jim—never knu from day to day what was cumin'. "Therr's another of 'em dead," 'e used to say, "'tes funny, tu" "Well," I used to say to 'im; "no wonder, poor little things, livin' in they model dwellin's. Therr's no air for 'em," I used to say. "Well," 'e used to say, "what can I du, Mother? Can't afford to live in Park Lane:" An' 'e take an' went to Ameriky. [Her voice for the first time is truly doleful] An' never came back. Fine feller. So that's my four sons—One's dead, an' one's in—That, an' one's in Ameriky, an' Bob 'ere, poor boy, 'e always was a talker.

[LEMMY, who has re-seated himself in the window and taken up his fiddle, twangs the strings.]

PRESS. And now a few words about your work, Mrs. Lemmy?

MRS. L. Well, I sews.

PRESS. [Writing] "Sews." Yes?

MRS. L. [Holding up her unfinished pair of trousers] I putt in the button'oles, I stretches the flies, I lines the crutch, I putt on this bindin', [She holds up the calico that binds the top] I sews on the buttons, I press the seams—Tuppence three farthin's the pair.

PRESS. Twopence three farthings a pair! Worse than a penny a line!

MRS. L. In a gude day I gets thru four pairs, but they'm gettin' plaguey 'ard for my old fengers.

PRESS. [Writing] "A monumental figure, on whose labour is built the mighty edifice of our industrialism."

LEMMY. I sy—that's good. Yer'll keep that, won't yet?

MRS. L. I finds me own cotton, tuppence three farthin's, and other expension is a penny three farthin's.

PRESS. And are you an exception, Mrs. Lemmy?

MRS. L. What's that?

LEMMY. Wot price the uvvers, old lydy? Is there a lot of yer sewin' yer fingers orf at tuppence 'ypenny the pair?

MRS. L. I can't tell yu that. I never sees nothin' in 'ere. I pays a penny to that little gell to bring me a dozen pair an' fetch 'em back. Poor little thing, she'm 'ardly strong enough to carry 'em. Feel! They'm very 'eavy!

PRESS. On the conscience of Society!

LEMMY. I sy put that dahn, won't yer?

PRESS. Have things changed much since the war, Mrs. Lemmy?

MRS. L. Cotton's a lot dearer.

PRESS. All round, I mean.

MRS. L. Aw! Yu don' never get no change, not in my profession. [She oscillates the trousers] I've a-been in trousers fifteen year; ever since I got to old for laundry.

PRESS. [Writing] "For fifteen years sewn trousers." What would a good week be, Mrs. Lemmy?

MRS. L. 'Tes a very gude week, five shellin's.

LEMMY. [From the window] Bloomin' millionairess, Muvver. She's lookin' forward to 'eaven, where vey don't wear no trahsers.

MRS. L. [With spirit] 'Tidn for me to zay whether they du. An' 'tes on'y when I'm a bit low-sperrity-like as I wants to go therr. What I am a-lukin' forward to, though, 'tes a day in the country. I've not a-had one since before the war. A kind lady brought me in that bit of 'eather; 'tes wonderful sweet stuff when the 'oney's in et. When I was a little gell I used to zet in the 'eather gatherin' the whorts, an' me little mouth all black wi' eatin' them. 'Twas in the 'eather I used to zet, Sundays, courtin'. All flesh is grass—an' 'tesn't no bad thing—grass.

PRESS. [Writing] "The old paganism of the country." What is your view of life, Mrs. Lemmy?

LEMMY. [Suddenly] Wot is 'er voo of life? Shall I tell yer mine? Life's a disease—a blinkin' oak-apple! Daon't myke no mistyke. An' 'umen life's a yumourous disease; that's all the difference. Why— wot else can it be? See the bloomin' promise an' the blighted performance—different as a 'eadline to the noos inside. But yer couldn't myke Muvver see vat—not if yer talked to 'er for a wok. Muvver still believes in fings. She's a country gell; at a 'undred and fifty she'll be a country gell, won't yer, old lydy?

MRS. L. Well, 'tesn't never been 'ome to me in London. I lived in the country forty year—I did my lovin' there; I burried father therr. Therr bain't nothin' in life, yu know, but a bit o' lovin'— all said an' done; bit o' lovin', with the wind, an' the stars out.

LEMMY. [In a loud apologetic whisper] She 'yn't often like this. I told yer she'd got a glawss o' port in 'er.

MRS. L. 'Tes a brave pleasure, is lovin'. I likes to zee et in young folk. I likes to zee 'em kissin'; shows the 'eart in 'em. 'Tes the 'eart makes the world go round; 'tesn't nothin' else, in my opinion.

PRESS. [Writing] "—sings the swan song of the heart."—

MRS. L. [Overhearing] No, I never yeard a swan sing—never! But I tell 'ee what I 'eve 'eard; the Bells singin' in th' orchard 'angin' up the clothes to dry, an' the cuckoos callin' back to 'em. [Smiling] There's a-many songs in the country—the 'eart is freelike in th' country!

LEMMY. [Soto voce] Gi' me the Strand at ar' past nine.

PRESS. [Writing] "Town and country—"

MRS. L. 'Tidn't like that in London; one day's jest like another. Not but what therr's a 'eap o' kind'eartedness 'ere.

LEMMY. [Gloomily] Kind-'eartedness! I daon't fink "Boys an' Gells come out to play."

[He plays the old tune on his fiddle.]

MRS. L. [Singing] "Boys an' Gells come out to play. The mune is shinin' bright as day." [She laughs] I used to sing like a lark when I was a gell.

[LITTLE AIDA enters.]

L. AIDA. There's 'undreds follerin' the corfin. 'Yn't you goin', Mr. Lemmy—it's dahn your wy!

LEMMY. [Dubiously] Well yus—I s'pose they'll miss me.

L. AIDA. Aoh! Tyke me!

PRESS. What's this?

LEMMY. The revolution in 'Yde Pawk.

PRESS. [Struck] In Hyde Park? The very thing. I'll take you down. My taxi's waiting.

L. AIDA. Yus; it's breathin' 'ard, at the corner.

PRESS. [Looking at his watch] Ah! and Mrs. Lemmy. There's an Anti-Sweating Meeting going on at a house in Park Lane. We can get there in twenty minutes if we shove along. I want you to tell them about the trouser-making. You'll be a sensation!

LEMMY. [To himself] Sensytion! 'E cawn't keep orf it!

MRS. L. Anti-Sweat. Poor fellers! I 'ad one come to see we before the war, an' they'm still goin' on? Wonderful, an't it?

PRESS. Come, Mrs. Lemmy; drive in a taxi, beautiful moonlit night; and they'll give you a splendid cup of tea.

MRS. L. [Unmoved] Ah! I cudn't never du without my tea. There's not an avenin' but I thinks to meself: Now, me dear, yu've a-got one more to fennish, an' then yu'll 'eve yore cup o' tea. Thank you for callin', all the same.

LEMMY. Better siccumb to the temptytion, old lydy; joyride wiv the Press; marble floors, pillars o' gold; conscientious footmen; lovely lydies; scuppers runnin' tea! An' the revolution goin' on across the wy. 'Eaven's nuffink to Pawk Lyne.

PRESS. Come along, Mrs. Lemmy!

MRS. L. [Seraphically] Thank yu,—I'm a-feelin' very comfortable. 'Tes wonderful what a drop o' wine'll du for the stomach.

PRESS. A taxi-ride!

MRS. L. [Placidly] Ah! I know'em. They'm very busy things.

LEMMY. Muvver shuns notority. [Sotto voce to THE PRESS] But you watch me! I'll rouse 'er.

[He takes up his fiddle and sits on the window seat. Above the little houses on the opposite side of the street, the moon has risen in the dark blue sky, so that the cloud shaped like a beast seems leaping over it. LEMMY plays the first notes of the Marseillaise. A black cat on the window-sill outside looks in, hunching its back. LITTLE AIDA barks at her. MRS. LEMMY struggles to her feet, sweeping the empty dish and spoon to the floor in the effort.]

The dish ran awy wiv the spoon! That's right, old lydy! [He stops playing.]

MRS. L. [Smiling, and moving her hands] I like a bit o' music. It du that move 'ee.

PRESS. Bravo, Mrs. Lemmy. Come on!

LEMMY. Come on, old dear! We'll be in time for the revolution yet.

MRS. L. 'Tes 'earin' the Old 'Undred again!

LEMMY. [To THE PRESS] She 'yn't been aht these two years. [To his mother, who has put up her hands to her head] Nao, never mind yer 'at. [To THE PRESS] She 'yn't got none! [Aloud] No West-End lydy wears anyfink at all in the evenin'!

MRS. L. 'Ow'm I lukin', Bob?

LEMMY. First-clawss; yer've got a colour fit to toast by. We'll show 'em yer've got a kick in yer. [He takes her arm] Little Aida, ketch 'old o' the sensytions.

[He indicates the trousers THE PRESS takes MRS. LEMMY'S other arm.]

MRS. L. [With an excited little laugh] Quite like a gell!

And, smiling between her son and THE PRESS, she passes out; LITTLE AIDA, with a fling of her heels and a wave of the trousers, follows.

CURTAIN

ACT III

An octagon ante-room of the hall at LORD WILLIAM DROMONDY'S. A shining room lighted by gold candelabra, with gold-curtained pillars, through which the shining hall and a little of the grand stairway are visible. A small table with a gold-coloured cloth occupies the very centre of the room, which has a polished parquet floor and high white walls. Gold-coloured doors on the left. Opposite these doors a window with gold-coloured curtains looks out on Park Lane. LADY WILLIAM standing restlessly between the double doors and the arch which leads to the hall. JAMES is stationary by the double doors, from behind which come sounds of speech and applause.

POULDER. [Entering from the hall] His Grace the Duke of Exeter, my lady.

[His GRACE enters. He is old, and youthful, with a high colour and a short rough white beard. LADY WILLIAM advances to meet him. POULDER stands by.]

LADY W. Oh! Father, you ARE late.

HIS G. Awful crowd in the streets, Nell. They've got a coffin— couldn't get by.

LADY W. Coin? Whose?

HIS G. The Government's I should think—no flowers, by request. I say, have I got to speak?

LADY W. Oh! no, dear.

HIS G. H'm! That's unlucky. I've got it here. [He looks down his cuff] Found something I said in 1914—just have done.

LADY W. Oh! If you've got it—James, ask Lord William to come to me for a moment. [JAMES vanishes through the door. To THE DUKE] Go in, Grand-dad; they'll be so awfully pleased to see you. I'll tell Bill.

HIS G. Where's Anne?

LADY W. In bed, of course.

HIS G. I got her this—rather nice?

[He has taken from his breast-pocket one of those street toy-men that jump head over heels on your hand; he puts it through its paces.]

LADY W. [Much interested] Oh! no, but how sweet! She'll simply love it.

POULDER. If I might suggest to Your Grace to take it in and operate it. It's sweated, Your Grace. They-er-make them in those places.

HIS G. By Jove! D'you know the price, Poulder?

POULDER. [Interrogatively] A penny, is it? Something paltry, Your Grace!

HIS G. Where's that woman who knows everything; Miss Munday?

LADY W. Oh! She'll be in there, somewhere.

[His GRACE moves on, and passes through the doors. The sound of applause is heard.]

POULDER. [Discreetly] would you care to see the bomb, my lady?

LADY W. Of course—first quiet moment.

POULDER. I'll bring it up, and have a watch put on it here, my lady.

[LORD WILLIAM comes through the double door followed by JAMES.
POULDER retires.]

LORD W. Can't you come, Nell?

LADY W. Oh! Bill, your Dad wants to speak.

LORD W. The deuce he does—that's bad.

LADY W. Yes, of course, but you must let him; he's found something he said in 1914.

LORD W. I knew it. That's what they'll say. Standing stock still, while hell's on the jump around us.

LADY W. Never mind that; it'll please him; and he's got a lovely little sweated toy that turns head over heels at one penny.

LORD W. H'm! Well, come on.

LADY W. No, I must wait for stragglers. There's sure to be an editor in a hurry.

POULDER. [Announcing] Mis-ter Gold-rum!

LADY W. [Sotto voce] And there he is! [She advances to meet a thin, straggling man in eyeglasses, who is smiling absently] How good of you!

MR. G. Thanks awfully. I just er—and then I'm afraid I must—er—
Things look very—Thanks—Thanks so much.

[He straggles through the doors, and is enclosed by JAMES.]

POULDER. Miss Mun-day.

LORD W. There! I thought she was in—She really is the most unexpected woman! How do you do? How awfully sweet of you!

MISS M. [An elderly female schoolboy] How do you do? There's a spiffing crowd. I believe things are really going Bolshy. How do you do, Lord William? Have you got any of our people to show? I told one or two, in case—they do so simply love an outing.

JAMES. There are three old chips in the lobby, my Lord.

LORD W. What? Oh! I say! Bring them in at once. Why—they're the hub of the whole thing.

JAMES. [Going] Very good, my Lord.

LADY W. I am sorry. I'd no notion; and they're such dears always.

MISS M. I must tell you what one of them said to me. I'd told him not to use such bad language to his wife. "Don't you worry, Ma!" he said, "I expert you can do a bit of that yourself!"

LADY W. How awfully nice! It's SO like them.

MISS M. Yes. They're wonderful.

LORD W. I say, why do we always call them they?

LADY W. [Puzzled] Well, why not?

LORD W. THEY!

MISS M. [Struck] Quite right, Lord William! Quite right! Another species. They! I must remember

that. THEY! [She passes on.]

LADY W. [About to follow] Well, I don't see; aren't they?

LORD W. Never mind, old girl; follow on. They'll come in with me.

[MISS MUNDAY and LADY WILLIAM pass through the double doors.]

POULDER. [Announcing] Some sweated workers, my Lord.

[There enter a tall, thin, oldish woman; a short, thin, very lame man, her husband; and a stoutish middle-aged woman with a rolling eye and gait, all very poorly dressed, with lined and heated faces.]

LORD W. [Shaking hands] How d'you do! Delighted to see you all. It's awfully good of you to have come.

LAME M. Mr. and Mrs. Tomson. We 'ad some trouble to find it. You see, I've never been in these parts. We 'ad to come in the oven; and the bus-bloke put us dahn wrong. Are you the proprietor?

LORD W. [Modestly] Yes, I—er—

LAME M. You've got a nice plyce. I says to the missis, I says: "E's got a nice plyce 'ere," I says; "there's room to turn rahnd."

LORD W. Yes—shall we—?

LAME M. An' Mrs. Annaway she says: "Shouldn't mind livin 'ere meself," she says; "but it must cost'im a tidy penny," she says.

LORD W. It does—it does; much too tidy. Shall we—?

MRS. ANN. [Rolling her eye] I'm very pleased to 'ave come. I've often said to 'em: "Any time you want me," I've said, "I'd be pleased to come."

LORD W. Not so pleased as we are to see you.

MRS. ANN. I'm sure you're very kind.

JAMES. [From the double doors, through which he has received a message] Wanted for your speech, my Lord.

LORD W. Oh! God! Poulder, bring these ladies and gentleman in, and put them where everybody can—where they can see everybody, don't you know.

[He goes out hurriedly through the double doors.]

LAME M. Is 'e a lord?

POULDER. He is. Follow me.

[He moves towards the doors, the three workers follow.]

MRS. ANN. [Stopping before JAMES] You 'yn't one, I suppose?
[JAMES stirs no muscle.]

POULDER. Now please. [He opens the doors. The Voice of LORD WILLIAM speaking is heard] Pass in.

[THE THREE WORKERS pass in, POULDER and JAMES follow them. The doors are not closed, and through this aperture comes the voice of LORD WILLIAM, punctuated and supported by decorous applause.]

[LITTLE ANNE runs in, and listens at the window to the confused and distant murmurs of a crowd.]

VOICE OF LORD W. We propose to move for a further advance in the chain-making and—er—er—match-box industries. [Applause.]

[LITTLE ANNE runs across to the door, to listen.]

[On rising voice] I would conclude with some general remarks. Ladies and gentlemen, the great

natural, but—er—artificial expansion which trade experienced the first years after the war has— er— collapsed. These are hard times. We who are fortunate feel more than ever—er—responsible—[He stammers, loses the thread of his thoughts.]—[Applause]—er—responsible—[The thread still eludes him]—er—

L. ANNE. [Poignantly] Oh, Daddy!

LORD W. [Desperately] In fact—er—you know how—er—responsible we feel.

L. ANNE. Hooray! [Applause.]

[There float in through the windows the hoarse and distant sounds of the Marseillaise, as sung by London voices.]

LORD W. There is a feeling in the air—that I for one should say deliberately was—er—a feeling in the air—er—a feeling in the air—

L. ANNE. [Agonised] Oh, Daddy! Stop!

[Jane enters, and closes the door behind him. JAMES. Look here! 'Ave I got to report you to Miss Stokes?]

L. ANNE. No-o-o!

JAMES. Well, I'm goin' to.

L. ANNE. Oh, James, be a friend to me! I've seen nothing yet.

JAMES. No; but you've eaten a good bit, on the stairs. What price that Peach Melba?

L. ANNE. I can't go to bed till I've digested it can I? There's such a lovely crowd in the street!

JAMES. Lovely? Ho!

L. ANNE. [Wheedling] James, you couldn't tell Miss Stokes! It isn't in you, is it?

JAMES. [Grinning] That's right.

L. ANNE. So-I'll just get under here. [She gets under the table] Do I show?

JAMES. [Stooping] Not 'arf!

[POULDER enters from the hall.]

POULDER. What are you doin' there?

JAMES. [Between him and the table—raising himself] Thinkin'.

[POULDER purses his mouth to repress his feedings.]

POULDER. My orders are to fetch the bomb up here for Lady William to inspect. Take care no more writers stray in.

JAMES. How shall I know 'em?

POULDER. Well—either very bald or very hairy.

JAMES. Right-o! [He goes.]

[POULDER, with his back to the table, busies himself with the set of his collar.]

POULDER. [Addressing an imaginary audience—in a low but important voice] The—ah—situation is seerious. It is up to us of the—ah— leisured classes—

[The face of LITTLE ANNE is poked out close to his legs, and tilts upwards in wonder towards the bow of his waistcoat.]

to—ah—keep the people down. The olla polloi are clamourin'—

[Miss STOKES appears from the hall, between the pillars.]

Miss S. Poulder!

POULDER. [Making a volte face towards the table] Miss?

MISS S. Where is Anne?

POULDER. [Vexed at the disturbance of his speech] Excuse me, Miss— to keep track of Miss Anne is fortunately no part of my dooties.

[Miss S. She really is naughty.]

POULDER. She is. If she was mine, I'd spank her.

[The smiling face of LITTLE ANNE becomes visible again close to his legs.]

MISS S. Not a nice word.

POULDER. No; but a pleasant haction. Miss Anne's the limit. In fact, Lord and Lady William are much too kind 'earted all round. Take these sweated workers; that class o' people are quite 'opeless. Treatin' them as your equals, shakin' 'ands with 'em, givin' 'em tea— it only puffs 'em out. Leave it to the Church, I say.

MISS S. The Church is too busy, Poulder.

POULDER. Ah! That "Purity an' Future o' the Race Campaign." I'll tell you what I thinks the danger o' that, Miss. So much purity that there won't be a future race. [Expanding] Purity of 'eart's an excellent thing, no doubt, but there's a want of nature about it. Same with this Anti-Sweating. Unless you're anxious to come down, you must not put the lower classes up.

MISS S. I don't agree with you at all, Poulder.

POULDER. Ah! You want it both ways, Miss. I should imagine you're a Liberal.

MISS S. [Horried] Oh, no! I certainly am not.

POULDER. Well, I judged from your takin' cocoa. Funny thing that, about cocoa-how it still runs through the Liberal Party! It's virtuous, I suppose. Wine, beer, tea, coffee—all of 'em vices. But cocoa you might drink a gallon a day and annoy no one but yourself! There's a lot o' deep things in life, Miss!

Miss S. Quite so. But I must find Anne.

[She recedes.]

POULDER. [Suavely] Well, I wish you every success; and I hope you'll spank her. This modern education—there's no fruitiness in it.

L. ANNE. [From under the table] Poulder, are you virtuous?

POULDER. [Jumping] Good Ged!

L. ANNE. D'you mind my asking? I promised James I would.

POULDER. Miss Anne, come out!

[The four footmen appear in the hall, HENRY carrying the wine cooler.]

JAMES. Form fours-by your right-quick march!

[They enter, marching down right of table.]

Right incline—Mark time! Left turn! 'Alt! 'Enry, set the bomb!
Stand easy!

[HENRY places the wine cooler on the table and covers it with a blue embroidered Chinese mat, which has occupied the centre of the tablecloth.]

POULDER. Ah! You will 'ave your game! Thomas, take the door there! James, the 'all! Admit titles an' bishops. No literary or Labour people. Charles and 'Enry, 'op it and 'ang about!

[CHARLES and HENRY go out, the other too move to their stations.]

[POULDER, stands by the table looking at the covered bomb. The hoarse and distant sounds of the Marseillaise float in again from Park Lane.]

[Moved by some deep feeling] And this house an 'orspital in the war! I ask you—what was the good of all our sacrifices for the country? No town 'ouse for four seasons—rustygettin' in the shires, not a soul but two boys under me. Lord William at the front, Lady William at the back. And all for this! [He points sadly at the cooler] It comes of meddlin' on the Continent. I had my prognostications at the time. [To JAMES] You remember my sayin' to you just before you joined up: "Mark my words—we shall see eight per cent. for our money before this is over!"

JAMES. [Sepulchrally] I see the eight per cent., but not the money.

POULDER. Hark at that!

[The sounds of the Marseillaise grow louder. He shakes his head.]

I'd read the Riot Act. They'll be lootin' this house next!

JAMES. We'll put up a fight over your body: "Bartholomew Poulder, faithful unto death!" Have you insured your life?

POULDER. Against a revolution?

JAMES. Act o' God! Why not?

POULDER. It's not an act o' God.

JAMES. It is; and I sympathise with it.

POULDER. You—what?

JAMES. I do—only—hands off the gov'nor.

POULDER. Oh! Really! Well, that's something. I'm glad to see you stand behind him, at all events.

JAMES. I stand in front of 'im when the scrap begins!

POULDER. Do you insinuate that my heart's not in the right place?

JAMES. Well, look at it! It's been creepin' down ever since I knew you. Talk of your sacrifices in the war—they put you on your honour, and you got stout on it. Rations—not 'arf.

POULDER. [Staring at him] For independence, I've never seen your equal, James. You might be an Australian.

JAMES. [Suavely] Keep a civil tongue, or I'll throw you to the crowd! [He comes forward to the table] Shall I tell you why I favour the gov'nor? Because, with all his pomp, he's a gentleman, as much as I am. Never asks you to do what he wouldn't do himself. What's more, he never comes it over you. If you get drunk, or—well, you understand me, Poulder—he'll just say: "Yes, yes; I know, James!" till he makes you feel he's done it himself. [Sinking his voice mysteriously] I've had experience with him, in the war and out. Why he didn't even hate the Huns, not as he ought. I tell you he's no Christian.

POULDER. Well, for irreverence—!

JAMES. [Obstinately] And he'll never be. He's got too soft a heart.

L. ANNE. [Beneath the table-shrilly] Hurrah!

POULDER. [Jumping] Come out, Miss Anne!

JAMES. Let 'er alone!

POULDER. In there, under the bomb?

JAMES. [Contemptuously] Silly ass! You should take 'em lying down!

POULDER. Look here, James! I can't go on in this revolutionary spirit; either you or I resign.

JAMES. Crisis in the Cabinet!

POULDER. I give you your marchin' orders.

JAMES. [Ineffably] What's that you give me?

POULDER. Thomas, remove James!

[THOMAS grins.]

L. ANNE. [Who, with open mouth, has crept out to see the fun] Oh!
Do remove James, Thomas!

POULDER. Go on, Thomas.

[THOMAS takes one step towards JAMES, who lays a hand on the Chinese mat covering the bomb.]

JAMES. [Grimly] If I lose control of meself.

L. ANNE. [Clapping her hands] Oh! James! Do lose control! Then I shall see it go off!

JAMES. [To POULDER] Well, I'll merely empty the pail over you!

POULDER. This is not becomin'!

[He walks out into the hall.]

JAMES. Another strategic victory! What a Boche he'd have made. As you were, Tommy!

[THOMAS returns to the door. The sound of prolonged applause cornea from within.]

That's a bishop.

L. ANNE. Why?

JAMES. By the way he's drawin'. It's the fine fightin' spirit in 'em. They were the backbone o' the war. I see there's a bit o' the old stuff left in you, Tommy.

L. ANNE. [Scrutinizing the widely—grinning THOM] Where? Is it in his mouth?

JAMES. You've still got a sense of your superiors. Didn't you notice how you moved to Poulder's orders, me boy; an' when he was gone, to mine?

L. ANNE. [To THOMAS] March!

[The grinning THOMAS remains immovable.]

He doesn't, James!

JAMES. Look here, Miss Anne—your lights ought to be out before ten.
Close in, Tommy!

[He and THOMAS move towards her.]

L. ANNE. [Dodging] Oh, no! Oh, no! Look!

[The footmen stop and turn. There between the pillars, stands LITTLE AIDA with the trousers, her face brilliant With surprise.]

JAMES. Good Lord! What's this?

[Seeing L. ANNE, LITTLE AIDA approaches, fascinated, and the two children sniff at each other as it were like two little dogs walking round and round.]

L. ANNE. [Suddenly] My name's Anne; what's yours?

L. AIDA. Aida.

L. ANNE. Are you lost?

L. AIDA. Nao.

L. ANNE. Are those trousers?

L. AIDA. Yus.

L. Arms. Whose?

L. AIDA. Mrs. Lemmy's.

L. ANNE. Does she wear them?

[LITTLE AIDA smiles brilliantly.]

L. AIDA. Nao. She sews 'em.

L. ANNE. [Touching the trousers] They are hard. James's are much softer; aren't they, James?
[JAMES deigns no reply] What shall we do? Would you like to see my bedroom?

L. AIDA. [With a hop] Aoh, yus!

JAMES. No.

L. ANNE. Why not?

JAMES. Have some sense of what's fittin'.

L. ANNE. Why isn't it fittin'? [To LITTLE AIDA] Do you like me?

L. AIDA. Yus-s.

L. ANNE. So do I. Come on!

[She takes LITTLE AIDA'S hand.]

JAMES. [Between the pillars] Tommy, ketch 'em!

[THOMAS retains them by the skirts.]

L. ANNE. [Feigning indifference] All right, then! [To LITTLE AIDA]
Have you ever seen a bomb?

L. AIDA. Nao.

L. ANNE. [Going to the table and lifting a corner of the cover]
Look!

L. AIDA. [Looking] What's it for?

L. ANNE. To blow up this house.

L. AIDA. I daon't fink!

L. ANNE. Why not?

L. AIDA. It's a beautiful big 'Ouse.

L. ANNE. That's why. Isn't it, James?

L. AIDA. You give the fing to me; I'll blow up our 'ouse—it's an ugly little 'ouse.

L. ANNE [Struck] Let's all blow up our own; then we can start fair.
Daddy would like that.

L. AIDA. Yus. [Suddenly brilliant] I've 'ad a ride in a taxi, an' we're goin' 'ome in it agyne!

L. ANNE. Were you sick?

LITTLE AIDA. [Brilliant] Nao.

L. ANNE I was; when I first went in one, but I was quite young then.
James, could you get her a Peche Melba? There was one.

JAMES. No.

L. ANNE. Have you seen the revolution?

L. AIDA. Wot's that?

L. ANNE. It's made of people.

L. AIDA. I've seen the corfin, it's myde o' wood.

L. ANNE. Do you hate the rich?

L. AIDA. [Ineffably] Nao. I hates the poor.

L. ANNE. Why?

L. AIDA. 'Cos they 'yn't got nuffin'.

L. ANNE. I love the poor. They're such dears.

L. AIDA. [Shaking her head with a broad smile] Nao.

L. ANNE. Why not?

L. AIDA. I'd tyke and lose the lot, I would.

L. ANNE. Where?

L. AIDA. In the water.

L. ANNE. Like puppies?

L. AIDA. Yus.

L. ANNE. Why?

L. AIDA. Then I'd be shut of 'em.

L. ANNE. [Puzzled] Oh!

[The voice of THE PRESS is heard in the hall. "Where's the little girl?"]

JAMES. That's you. Come 'ere!

[He puts a hand behind LITTLE AIDA'S back and propels her towards the hall. THE PRESS enters with old MRS. LEMMY.]

PRESS. Oh! Here she is, major domo. I'm going to take this old lady to the meeting; they want her on the platform. Look after our friend, Mr. Lemmy here; Lord William wants to see him presently.

L. ANNE. [In an awed whisper] James, it's the little blighter!

[She dives again under the table. LEMMY enters.]

LEMMY. 'Ere! 'Arf a mo'! Yer said yer'd drop me at my plyce. Well, I tell yer candid—this 'yn't my plyce.

PRESS. That's all right, Mr. Lemmy. [He grins] They'll make you wonderfully comfortable, won't you, major domo?

[He passes on through the room, to the door, ushering old MRS. LEMMY and LITTLE AIDA.]

[POULDER blocks LEMMY'S way, with CHARLES and HENRY behind him.]

POULDER. James, watch it; I'll report.

[He moves away, following THE PRESS through the door. JAMES between table and window. THOMAS has gone to the door. HENRY and CHARLES remain at the entrances to the hall. LEMMY looks dubiously around, his cockney assurance gradually returns.]

LEMMY. I think I knows the gas 'ere. This is where I came to-dy, 'yn't it? Excuse my hesitytion—these little 'ouses IS so much the syme.

JAMES. [Gloomily] They are!

LEMMY. [Looking at the four immovable footmen, till he concentrates on JAMES] Ah! I 'ad a word wiv you, 'adn't I? You're the four conscientious ones wot's wyin' on your gov'nor's chest. 'Twas you I spoke to, wasn't it? [His eyes travel over them again] Ye're so monotonous. Well, ye're busy now, I see. I won't wyste yer time.

[He turns towards the hall, but CHARLES and HENRY bar the way in silence.]

[Skidding a little, and regarding the four immovables once more]

I never see such pytient men? Compared wiv yer, mountains is restless.

[He goes to the table. JAMES watches him. ANNE barks from underneath.]

[Skidding again] Why! There's a dawg under there. [Noting the grin on THOMAS'S face] Glad it amoooses yer. Yer want it, daon't yer, wiv a fyce like that? Is this a ply wivaht words? 'Ave I got into the movies by mistyke? Turn aht, an' let's 'ave six penn'orth o' darkness.

L. ANNE. [From beneath the cable] No, no! Not dark!

LEMMY. [Musingly] The dawg talks anywy. Come aht, Fido!

[LITTLE ANNE emerges, and regards him with burning curiosity.]

I sy: Is this the lytest fashion o' receivin' guests?

L. ANNE. Mother always wants people to feel at home. What shall we do? Would you like to hear the speeches? Thomas, open the door a little, do!

JAMES. 'Umour 'er a couple o' inches, Tommy!

[THOMAS draws the door back stealthily an inch or so.]

L. ANNE. [After applying her eye-in a loud whisper] There's the old lady. Daddy's looking at her trousers. Listen!

[For MRS. LEMMY'S voice is floating faintly through: "I putt in the buttonholes, I stretches the flies; I 'ems the bottoms; I lines the crutch; I putt on this bindin'; I sews on the buttons; I presses the seams—Tuppence three farthin's the pair."]

LEMMY. [In a hoarse whisper] That's it, old lydy: give it 'em!

L. ANNE. Listen!

VOICE OF LORD W. We are indebted to our friends the Press for giving us the pleasure—er—pleasure of hearing from her own lips—the pleasure—

L. ANNE. Oh! Daddy!

[THOMAS abruptly closes the doors.]

LEMMY. [To ANNE] Now yer've done it. See wot comes o' bein' impytient. We was just gettin' to the marrer.

L. ANNE. What can we do for you now?

LEMMY. [Pointing to ANNE, and addressing JAMES] Wot is this one, anywy?

JAMES. [Sepulchrally] Daughter o' the house.

LEMMY. Is she insured agynst 'er own curiosity?

L. ANNE. Why?

LEMMY. As I daon't believe in a life beyond the gryve, I might be tempted to send yer there.

L. ANNE. What is the gryve?

LEMMY. Where little gells goes to.

L. ANNE. Oh, when?

LEMMY. [Pretending to look at a match, which is not there] Well, I dunno if I've got time to finish yer this minute. Sy to-mower at. 'arf past.

L. ANNE. Half past what?

LEMMY. [Despairingly] 'Arf past wot!

[The sound of applause is heard.]

JAMES. That's 'is Grace. 'E's gettin' wickets, too.

[POULDER entering from the door.]

POULDER. Lord William is slippin' in.

[He makes a cabalistic sign with his head. Jeers crosses to the door. LEMMY looks dubiously at POULDER.]

LEMMY. [Suddenly—as to himself] Wot oh! I am the portly one!

POULDER. [Severely] Any such allusion aggeravates your offence.

LEMMY. Oh, ah! Look 'ere, it was a corked bottle. Now, tyke care, tyke care, 'aughty! Daon't curl yer lip! I shall myke a clean breast o' my betryal when the time comes!

[There is a alight movement of the door. ANNE makes a dive towards the table but is arrested by POULDER grasping her waistband. LORD WILLIAM slips in, followed by THE PRESS, on whom JAMES and THOMAS close the door too soon.]

HALF OF THE PRESS. [Indignantly] Look out!

JAMES. Do you want him in or out, me Lord?

LEMMY. I sy, you've divided the Press; 'e was unanimous.

[The FOOTMEN let THE PRESS through.]

LORD W. [To THE PRESS] I'm so sorry.

LEMMY. Would yer like me to see to 'is gas?

LORD W. So you're my friend of the cellars?

LEMMY. [Uneasy] I daon't deny it.

[POULDER begins removing LITTLE ANNE.]

L. ANNE. Let me stay, Daddy; I haven't seen anything yet! If I go, I shall only have to come down again when they loot the house. Listen!

[The hoarse strains of the Marseillaise are again heard from the distance.]

LORD W. [Blandly] Take her up, Poulder!

L. ANNE. Well, I'm coming down again—and next time I shan't have any clothes on, you know.

[They vanish between the pillars. LORD WILLIAM makes a sign of dismissal. The FOOTMAN file out.]

LEMMY. [Admiringly] Luv'ly pyces!

LORD W. [Pleasantly] Now then; let's have our talk, Mr.—

LEMMY. Lemmy.

PRESS. [Who has slipped his note-book out] "Bombed and Bomber face to face——"

LEMMY. [Uneasy] I didn't come 'ere agyne on me own, yer know. The Press betryed me.

LORD W. Is that old lady your mother?

LEMMY. The syeme. I tell yer stryete, it was for 'er I took that old bottle o' port. It was orful old.

LORD W. Ah! Port? Probably the '83. Hope you both enjoyed it.

LEMMY. So far-yus. Muvver'll suffer a bit tomower, I expect.

LORD W. I should like to do something for your mother, if you'll allow me.

LEMMY. Oh! I'll allow yer. But I dunno wot she'll sy.

LORD W. I can see she's a fine independent old lady! But suppose you were to pay her ten bob a week, and keep my name out of it?

LEMMY. Well, that's one wy o' YOU doin' somefink, 'yn't it?

LORD W. I giving you the money, of course.

PRESS. [Writing] "Lord William, with kingly generosity——"

LEMMY. [Drawing attention to THE PRESS with his thumb] I sy—
I daon't mind, meself—if you daon't——

LORD W. He won't write anything to annoy me.

PRESS. This is the big thing, Lord William; it'll get the public bang in the throat.

LEMMY. [Confidentially] Bit dyngerous, 'yn't it? trustin' the Press? Their right 'ands never knows wot their left 'ands is writin'. [To THE PRESS] 'Yn't that true, speakin' as a man?

PRESS. Mr. Lemmy, even the Press is capable of gratitude.

LEMMY. Is it? I should ha' thought it was too important for a little thing like that. [To LORD WILLIAM] But ye're quite right; we couldn't do wivaht the Press—there wouldn't be no distress, no coffin, no revolution—'cos nobody'd know nuffin' abaht it. Why! There wouldn't be no life at all on Earf in these dyes, wivaht the Press! It's them wot says: "Let there be Light—an' there is Light."

LORD W. Umm! That's rather a new thought to me. [Writes on his cuff.]

LEMMY. But abaht Muvver, I'll tell yer 'ow we can arryng. You send 'er the ten bob a week wivaht syin' anyfink, an' she'll fink it comes from Gawd or the Gover'ment yer cawn't tell one from t'other in Befnal Green.

LORD W. All right; we'll do that.

LEMMY. Will yer reely? I'd like to shyke yer 'and.

[LORD WILLIAM puts out his hand, which LEMMY grasps.]

PRESS. [Writing] "The heartbeat of humanity was in that grasp between the son of toil and the son of leisure."

LEMMY. [Already ashamed of his emotion] 'Ere, 'arf a mo'! Which is which? Daon't forget I'm aht o' wori; Lord William, if that's 'is nyme, is workin' 'ard at 'is Anti-Sweats! Wish I could get a job like vat—jist suit me!

LORD W. That hits hard, Mr. Lemmy.

LEMMY. Daon't worry! Yer cawn't 'elp bein' born in the purple!

LORD W. Ah! Tell me, what would you do in my place?

LEMMY. Why—as the nobleman said in 'is well-known wy: "Sit in me Club winder an' watch it ryne on the dam people!" That's if I was a average nobleman! If I was a bit more noble, I might be tempted to come the kind'earted on twenty thou' a year. Some prefers yachts, or ryce 'orses. But philanthropy on the 'ole is syfer, in these dyes.

LORD W. So you think one takes to it as a sort of insurance, Mr. Lemmy? Is that quite fair?

LEMMY. Well, we've all got a weakness towards bein' kind, somewhere abaht us. But the moment wealf comes in, we 'yn't wot I call single-'earted. If yer went into the foundytions of your wealf—would yer feel like 'avin' any? It all comes from uvver people's 'ard, unpleasant lybour—it's all built on Muvver as yer might sy. An' if yer daon't get rid o' some of it in bein' kind—yer daon't feel syfe nor comfy.

LORD W. [Twisting his moustache] Your philosophy is very pessimistic.

LEMMY. Well, I calls meself an optimist; I sees the worst of everyfink. Never disappynted, can afford to 'ave me smile under the blackest sky. When deaf is squeezin' of me windpipe, I shall 'ave a laugh in it! Fact is, if yer've 'ad to do wiv gas an' water pipes, yer can fyce anyfing. [The distant Marseillaise blares up] 'Ark at the revolution!

LORD W. [Rather desperately] I know—hunger and all the rest of it!
And here am I, a rich man, and don't know what the deuce to do.

LEMMY. Well, I'll tell yer. Throw yer cellars open, an' while the populyce is gettin' drunk, sell all yer 'ave an' go an' live in Ireland; they've got the millennium chronic over there.

[LORD WILLIAM utters a short, vexed laugh, and begins to walk about.]

That's speakin' as a practical man. Speakin' as a synt "Bruvvers, all I 'ave is yours. To-morrer I'm goin' dahn to the Lybour Exchyng to git put on the wytin' list, syme as you!"

LORD W. But, d—it, man, there we should be, all together! Would that help?

LEMMY. Nao; but it'd syve a lot o' blood.

[LORD WILLIAM stops abruptly, and looks first at LEMMY, then at the cooler, still cohered with the Chinese mat.]

Yer thought the Englishman could be taught to shed blood wiv syfety. Not 'im! Once yer git 'im into an 'abit, yer cawn't git 'im out of it agyne. 'E'll go on sheddin' blood mechanical—Conservative by nyture. An' 'e won't myke nuffin' o' yours. Not even the Press wiv 'is 'oneyed words'll sty 'is 'and.

LORD W. And what do you suggest we could have done, to avoid trouble?

LEMMY. [Warming to his theme] I'll tell yer. If all you wealfy nobbs wiv kepitel 'ad come it kind from the start after the war yer'd never 'a been 'earin' the Marseillaisy naow. Lord! 'Ow you did talk abaht Unity and a noo spirit in the Country. Noo spirit! Why, soon as ever there was no dynger from outside, yer stawted to myke it inside, wiv an iron'and. Naow, you've been in the war an' it's given yer a feelin' 'eart; but most of the nobbs wiv kepitel was too old or too important to fight. They weren't born agyne. So naow that bad times is come, we're 'owlin' for their blood.

LORD W. I quite agree; I quite agree. I've often said much the same thing.

LEMMY. Voice cryin' in the wilderness—I daon't sy we was yngels— there was faults on bofe sides. [He looks at THE PRESS] The Press could ha' helped yer a lot. Shall I tell yer wot the Press did? "It's vital," said the Press, "that the country should be united, or it will never recover." Nao strikes, nao 'omen nature, nao nuffink. Kepitel an' Lybour like the Siamese twins. And, fust dispute that come along, the Press orfs wiv its coat an' goes at it bald'eaded. An' wot abaht since? Sich a riot o' nymes called, in Press—and Pawlyement. Unpatriotic an' outrygeous demands o' lybour. Blood-suckin' tyranny o' Kepitel; thieves an' dawgs an 'owlin Jackybines—gents throwin' books at each other; all the resources of edjucyction exhausted! If I'd bin Prime Minister I'd 'ave 'ad the Press's gas cut 'orf at the meter. Puffect liberty, of course, nao Censorship; just sy wot yer like—an' never be 'eard of no more.

[Turning suddenly to THE PRESS, who has been scribbling in pace with this harangue, and now has developed a touch of writer's cramp.]

Why! 'Is 'end's out o' breath! Fink o' vet!

LORD W. Great tribute to your eloquence, Mr. Lemmy!

[A sudden stir of applause and scraping of chairs is heard; the meeting is evidently breaking up. LADY WILLIAM comes in, followed by MRS. LEMMY with her trousers, and LITTLE AIDA. LEMMY stares fixedly at this sudden, radiant apparition. His gaze becomes as that of a rabbit regarding a snake. And suddenly he puts up his hand and wipes his brow.]

[LADY WILLIAM, going to the table, lifts one end of the Chinese mat, and looks at LEMMY. Then she turns to LORD WILLIAM.]

LADY W. Bill!

LEMMY. [To his mother—in a hoarse whisper] She calls 'im Bill.
'Ow! 'Yn't she IT?

LADY W. [Apart] Have you—spoken to him?

[LORD WILLIAM shakes his head.]

Not? What have you been saying, then?

LORD W. Nothing, he's talked all the time.

LADY W. [Very low] What a little caution!

LORD W. Steady, old girl! He's got his eye on you!

[LADY WILLIAM looks at LEMMY, whose eyes are still fixed on her.]

LADY W. [With resolution] Well, I'm going to tackle him.

[She moves towards LEMMY, who again wipes his brow, and wrings out his hand.]

MRS. LEMMY. Don't 'ee du that, Bob. Yu must forgive'im, Ma'am; it's 'is admiration. 'E was always one for the ladies, and he'm not used to seein' so much of 'em.

LADY W. Don't you think you owe us an explanation?

MRS. LEMMY. Speak up, Bob.

[But LEMMY only shifts his feet.]

My gudeness! 'E've a-lost 'is tongue. I never knu that 'appen to 'e before.

LORD W. [Trying to break the embarrassment] No ill-feeling, you know, Lemmy.

[But LEMMY still only rolls his eyes.]

LADY W. Don't you think it was rather—inconsiderate of you?

LEMMY. Muvver, tyke me aht, I'm feelin' fynte!

[Spurts of the Marseillaise and the mutter of the crowd have been coming nearer; and suddenly a knocking is heard. POULDER and JAMES appear between the pillars.]

POULDER. The populace, me Lord!

LADY W. What!

LORD W. Where've you put 'em, Poulder?

POULDER. They've put theirselves in the portico, me Lord.

LORD W. [Suddenly wiping his brow] Phew! I say, this is awful, Nell! Two speeches in one evening. Nothing else for it, I suppose. Open the window, Poulder!

POULDER. [Crossing to the window] We are prepared for any sacrifice, me Lord.

[He opens the window.]

PRESS. [Writing furiously] "Lady William stood like a statue at bay."

LORD W. Got one of those lozenges on you, Nell?

[But LADY WILLIAM has almost nothing on her.]

LEMMY. [Producing a paper from his pocket] 'Ave one o' my gum drops?

[He passes it to LORD WILLIAM.]

LORD W. [Unable to refuse, takes a large, flat gum drop from the paper, and looks at it in embarrassment.] Ah! thanks! Thanks awfully!

[LEMMY turns to LITTLE AIDA, and puts a gum drop in her mouth.
A burst of murmurs from the crowd.]

JAMES. [Towering above the wine cooler] If they get saucy, me Lord, I can always give 'em their own back.

LORD W. Steady, James; steady!

[He puts the gum drop absently in his mouth, and turns up to the open window.]

VOICE. [Outside] 'Ere they are—the bally plutocrats.

[Voices in chorus: "Bread! Bread!"]

LORD W. Poulder, go and tell the chef to send out anything there is in the house—nicely, as if it came from nowhere in particular.

POULDER. Very good, me Lord. [Sotto voce] Any wine? If I might suggest—German—'ock?

LORD W. What you like.

POULDER. Very good, me Lord. [He goes.]

LORD W. I say, dash it, Nell, my teeth are stuck! [He works his finger in his mouth.]

LADY W. Take it out, darling.

LORD W. [Taking out the gum drop and looking at it] What the deuce did I put it in for?

PRESS. [Writing] "With inimitable coolness Lord William prepared to address the crowd."

[Voices in chorea: "Bread! Bread!"]

LORD W. Stand by to prompt, old girl. Now for it. This ghastly gum drop!

[LORD WILLIAM takes it from his agitated hand, and flips it through the window.]

VOICE. Dahn with the aristo—[Chokes.]

LADY W. Oh! Bill—oh! It's gone into a mouth!

LORD W. Good God!

VOICE. Wet's this? Throwin' things? Mind aht, or we'll smash yer winders!

[As the voices in chorus chant: "Bread! Bread!" LITTLE ANNE, night-gowned, darts in from the hall. She is followed by MISS STOKES. They stand listening.]

LORD W. [To the Crowd] My friends, you've come to the wrong shop. There's nobody in London more sympathetic with you. [The crowd laughs hoarsely.] [Whispering] Look out, old girl; they can see your shoulders. [LORD WILLIAM moves back a step.] If I were a speaker, I could make you feel—

VOICE. Look at his white weskit! Blood-suckers—fattened on the people!

[JAMES dives his hand at the wine cooler.]

LORD W. I've always said the Government ought to take immediate steps—

VOICE. To shoot us dahn.

LORD W. Not a bit. To relieve the—er—

LADY W. [Prompting] Distress.

LADY W. Distress, and ensure—er—ensure

LADY W. [Prompting] Quiet.

LORD W. [To her] No, no. To ensure—ensure—

L. ANNE. [Agonized] Oh, Daddy!

VOICE. 'E wants to syve 'is dirty great 'ouse.

LORD W. [Roused] D—if I do!

[Rude and hoarse laughter from the crowd.]

JAMES. [With fury] Me Lord, let me blow 'em to glory!

[He raises the cooler and advances towards the window.]

LORD W. [Turning sharply on him] Drop it, James; drop it!

PRESS. [Jumping] No, no; don't drop it!

[JAMES retires crestfallen to the table, where he replaces the cooler.]

LORD W. [Catching hold of his bit] Look here, I must have fought alongside some of you fellows in the war. Weren't we jolly well like brothers?

A VOICE. Not so much bloomin' "Kamerad"; hand over yer 'Ouse.

LORD W. I was born with this beastly great house, and money, and goodness knows what other entanglements—a wife and family—

VOICE. Born with a wife and family!

[Jeers and laughter.]

LORD W. I feel we're all in the same boat, and I want to pull my weight. If you can show me the way, I'll take it fast enough.

A DEEP VOICE. Step dahn then, an' we'll step up.

ANOTHER VOICE. 'Ear, 'Ear!

[A fierce little cheer.]

LORD W. [To LADY WILLIAM—in despair] By George! I can't get in anywhere!

LADY W. [Calmly] Then shut the window, Bill.

LEMMY. [Who has been moving towards them slowly] Lemme sy a word to 'em.

[All stare at him. LEMMY approaches the window, followed by LITTLE AIDA. POULDER re-enters with the three other footmen.]

[At the window] Cheerio! Cockies!

[The silence of surprise falls on the crowd.]

I'm one of yer. Gas an' water I am. Got more grievances an' out of employment than any of yer. I want to see their blood flow, syme as you.

PRESS. [writing] "Born orator—ready cockney wit—saves situation."

LEMMY. Wot I sy is: Dahn wiv the country, dahn wiv everyfing. Begin agyne from the foundytions. [Nodding his head back at the room] But we've got to keep one or two o' these 'ere under glawss, to show our future generytions. An' this one is 'armless. His pipes is sahnd, 'is 'eart is good; 'is 'ead is not strong. Is 'ouse will myke a charmin' palace o' varieties where our children can come an' see 'ow they did it in the good old dyes. Yer never see rich waxworks as 'is butler and 'is four conscientious khaki footmen. Why—wot dyer think 'e 'as 'em for—fear they might be out o'-works like you an' me. Nao! Keep this one; 'e's a Flower. 'Arf a mo'! I'll show yer my Muvver. Come 'ere, old lydy; and bring yer trahsers. [MRS. LEMMY comes forward to the window] Tell abaht yer speech to the meetin'.

MRS. LEMMY. [Bridling] Oh dear! Well, I cam' in with me trousers, an' they putt me up on the pedestory at once, so I tole 'em. [Holding up the trousers] "I putt in the button'oles, I stretches the flies; I lines the crutch; I putt on this bindin', I presses the seams—Tuppence three farthin's a pair."

[A groan from tote crowd,]

LEMMY. [Showing her off] Seventy-seven! Wot's 'er income? Twelve bob a week; seven from the Gover'ment an' five from the sweat of 'er brow. Look at 'er! 'Yn't she a tight old dear to keep it goin'! No workus for 'er, nao fear! The gryve rather!

[Murmurs from the crowd, at Whom MRS. LEMMY is blandly smiling.]

You cawn't git below 'er—impossible! She's the foundytions of the country—an' rocky 'yn't the word for 'em. Worked 'ard all 'er life, brought up a family and buried 'em on it. Twelve bob a week, an' given when 'er fingers goes, which is very near. Well, naow, this torf 'ere comes to me an' says: "I'd like to do somefin' for yer muvver. 'Ow's ten bob a week?" 'e says. Naobody arst 'im—quite on 'is own. That's the sort 'e is. [Sinking his voice confidentially] Sorft. You bring yer muvvers 'ere, 'e'll do the syme for them. I giv yer the 'int.

VOICE. [From the crowd] What's 'is nyme?

LEMMY. They calls 'im Bill.

VOICE. Bill What?

L. ANNE. Dromondy.

LADY W. Anne!

LEMMY. Dromedary 'is nyme is.

VOICE. [From the crowd] Three cheers for Bill Dromedary.

LEMMY. I sy, there's veal an' 'am, an' pork wine at the back for them as wants it; I 'eard the word passed. An' look 'ere, if yer want a flag for the revolution, tyke muvver's trahsers an' tie 'em to the corfin. Yer cawn't 'ave no more inspirin' banner. Ketch! [He throws the trousers out] Give Bill a double-barrel fast, to show there's no ill-feelin'. Ip, 'ip!

[The crowd cheers, then slowly passes away, singing at a hoarse version of the Marseillaise, till all that is heard is a faint murmuring and a distant barrel-organ playing the same tune.]

PRESS. [Writing] "And far up in the clear summer air the larks were singing."

LORD W. [Passing his hand over his hair, and blinking his eyes]
James! Ready?

JAMES. Me Lord!

L. ANNE. Daddy!

LADY W. [Taking his arm] Bill! It's all right, old man—all right!

LORD W. [Blinking] Those infernal larks! Thought we were on the Somme again! Ah! Mr. Lemmy, [Still rather dreamy] no end obliged to you; you're so decent. Now, why did you want to blow us up before dinner?

LEMMY. Blow yer up? [Passing his hand over his hair in travesty]
"Is it a dream? Then wykin' would be pyne."

MRS. LEMMY. Bo-ob! Not so saucy, my boy!

LEMMY. Blow yet up? Wot abaht it?

LADY W. [Indicating the bomb] This, Mr. Lemmy!

[LEMMY looks at it, and his eyes roll and goggle.]

LORD W. Come, all's forgiven! But why did you?

LEMMY. Orl right! I'm goin' to tyke it awy; it'd a-been a bit ork'ard for me. I'll want it to-mower.

LORD W. What! To leave somewhere else?

LEMMY. 'Yus, of course!

LORD W. No, no; dash it! Tell us what's it filled with?

LEMMY. Filled wiv? Nuffin'. Wot did yet expect? Toof-pahder?
It's got a bit o' my lead soldered on to it. That's why it's 'eavy!

LORD W. But what is it?

LEMMY. Wot is it? [His eyes are fearfully fixed on LADY WILLIAM] I fought everybody knew 'em.

LADY W. Mr. Lemmy, you must clear this up, please.

LEMMY. [TO LORD WILLIAM, With his eyes still held On LADY WILLIAM— mysteriously] Wiv lydies present? 'Adn't I better tell the Press?

LORD W. All right; tell someone—anyone!

[LEMMY goes down to THE PRESS, who is reading over his last note. Everyone watches and listens with the utmost discretion, while he whispers into the ear of THE PRESS; who shakes his head violently.]

PRESS. No, no; it's too horrible. It destroys my whole—

LEMMY. Well, I tell yer it is.

[Whispers again violently.]

PRESS. No, no; I can't have it. All my article! All my article!
It can't be—no—

LEMMY. I never see sick an obstinate thick-head! Yer 'yn't worvy of yet tryde.

[He whispers still more violently and makes cabalistic signs.]

[LADY WILLIAM lifts the bomb from the cooler into the sight of all. LORD WILLIAM, seeing it for the first time in full light, bends double in silent laughter, and whispers to his wife. LADY WILLIAM drops the bomb and gives way too. Hearing the sound, LEMMY turns, and his goggling eyes pan them all in review. LORD and LADY WILLIAM in fits of laughter, LITTLE ANNE stamping her feet, for MISS STOKES, red, but composed, has her hands placed firmly over her pupil's eyes and ears; LITTLE AIDA smiling brilliantly, MRS. LEMMY blandly in sympathy, neither knowing why; the FOUR FOOTMAN in a row, smothering little explosions. POULDER, extremely grave and red, THE PRESS perfectly haggard, gnawing at his nails.]

LEMMY. [Turning to THE PRESS] Blimy! It amoooses 'em, all but the genteel ones. Cheer oh! Press! Yer can always myke somefin' out o' nufun'? It's not the fust thing as 'as existed in yer imaginytion only.

PRESS. No, d—it; I'll keep it a bomb!

LEMMY. [Soothingly] Ah! Keep the sensytion. Wot's the troof compared wiv that? Come on, Muvver! Come on, Little Aida! Time we was goin' dahn to 'Earf.

[He goes up to the table, and still skidding a little at LADY WILLIAM, takes the late bomb from the cooler, placing it under his arm.]

MRS. LEMMY. Gude naight, sir; gude naight, ma'am; thank yu for my cup o' tea, an' all yore kindness.

[She shakes hands with LORD and LADY WILLIAM, drops the curtsey of her youth before Mr. POULDER, and goes out followed by LITTLE AIDA, who is looking back at LITTLE ANNE.]

LEMMY. [Turning suddenly] Aoh! An' jist one frog! Next time yer build an 'ouse, daon't forget—it's the foundytions as bears the wyte.

[With a wink that gives way, to a last fascinated look at LADY WILLIAM, he passes out. All gaze after them, except THE PRESS, who is tragically consulting his spiflicated notes.]

L. ANNE. [Breaking away from Miss STOKES and rushing forward] Oh! Mum! what was it?

CURTAIN

THE SKIN GAME

(A TRAGI-COMEDY)

"Who touches pitch shall be defiled"

CHARACTERS

HILLCRISTA Country Gentleman
AMYHis Wife
JILLHis Daughter
DAWKERHis Agent
HORNBLOWERA Man Newly-Rich
CHARLESHis Elder Son
CHLOEWife to Charles
ROLFHis Younger Son
FELLOWSHillcris't's Butler
ANNAChloe's Maid
THE JACKMANSMan and Wife

AN AUCTIONEER A SOLICITOR TWO STRANGERS

ACT I. HILLCRIST'S Study

ACT II. SCENE I. A month later. An Auction Room. SCENE II. The same evening. CHLOE'S Boudoir.

ACT III

SCENE I. The following day. HILLCRIST'S Study. Morning. SCENE II. The Same. Evening.

ACT I

HILLCRIST'S study. A pleasant room, with books in calf bindings, and signs that the HILLCRIST'S have travelled, such as a large photograph of the Taj Mahal, of Table Mountain, and the Pyramids of Egypt. A large bureau [stage Right], devoted to the business of a country estate. Two foxes' masks. Flowers in bowls. Deep armchairs. A large French window open [at Back], with a lovely view of a slight rise of fields and trees in August sunlight. A fine stone fireplace [stage Left]. A door [Left]. A door opposite [Right]. General colour effect—stone, and cigar-leaf brown, with spots of bright colour.

[HILLCRIST sits in a swivel chair at the bureau, busy with papers. He has gout, and his left foot is encased accord: He is a thin, dried-up man of about fifty-five, with a rather refined, rather kindly, and rather cranky countenance. Close to him stands his very upstanding nineteen-year-old daughter JILL, with clubbed hair round a pretty, manly face.]

JILL. You know, Dodo, it's all pretty good rot in these days.

HILLCRIST. Cads are cads, Jill, even in these days.

JILL. What is a cad?

HILLCRIST. A self-assertive fellow, without a sense of other people.

JILL. Well, Old Hornblower I'll give you.

HILLCRIST. I wouldn't take him.

JILL. Well, you've got him. Now, Charlie—Chearlie—I say—the importance of not being Charlie—

HILLCRIST. Good heavens! do you know their Christian names?

JILL. My dear father, they've been here seven years.

HILLCRIST. In old days we only knew their Christian names from their tombstones.

JILL. Charlie Hornblower isn't really half a bad sport.

HILLCRIST. About a quarter of a bad sport I've always thought out hunting.

JILL. [Pulling his hair] Now, his wife—Chloe—

HILLCRIST. [Whimsical] Gad! your mother'd have a fit if she knew you called her Chloe.

JILL. It's a ripping name.

HILLCRIST. Chloe! H'm! I had a spaniel once—

JILL. Dodo, you're narrow. Buck up, old darling, it won't do. Chloe has seen life, I'm pretty sure; THAT'S attractive, anyway. No, mother's not in the room; don't turn your uneasy eyes.

HILLCRIST. Really, my dear, you are getting—

JILL. The limit. Now, Rolf—

HILLCRIST. What's Rolf? Another dog?

JILL. Rolf Hornblower's a topper; he really is a nice boy.

HILLCRIST. [With a sharp look] Oh! He's a nice boy?

JILL. Yes, darling. You know what a nice boy is, don't you?

HILLCRIST. Not in these days.

JILL. Well, I'll tell you. In the first place, he's not amorous.

HILLCRIST. What! Well, that's some comfort.

JILL. Just a jolly good companion.

HILLCRIST. To whom?

JILL. Well, to anyone—me.

HILLCRIST. Where?

JILL. Anywhere. You don't suppose I confine myself to the home paddocks, do you? I'm naturally rangey, Father.

HILLCRIST. [Ironically] You don't say so!

JILL. In the second place, he doesn't like discipline.

HILLCRIST. Jupiter! He does seem attractive.

JILL. In the third place, he bars his father.

HILLCRIST. Is that essential to nice girls too?

JILL. [With a twirl of his hair] Fish not! Fourthly, he's got ideas.

HILLCRIST. I knew it!

JILL. For instance, he thinks—as I do—

HILLCRIST. Ah! Good ideas.

JILL. [Pulling gently] Careful! He thinks old people run the show too much. He says they oughtn't to, because they're so damtouchy. Are you damtouchy, darling?

HILLCRIST. Well, I'm—! I don't know about touchy.

JILL. He says there'll be no world fit to live in till we get rid of the old. We must make them climb a tall tree, and shake them off it.

HILLCRIST. [Drily] Oh! he says that!

JILL. Otherwise, with the way they stand on each other's rights, they'll spoil the garden for the young.

HILLCRIST. Does his father agree?

JILL. Oh! Rolf doesn't talk to him, his mouth's too large. Have you ever seen it, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Of course.

JILL. It's considerable, isn't it? Now yours is—reticent, darling. [Rumpling his hair.]

HILLCRIST. It won't be in a minute. Do you realise that I've got gout?

JILL. Poor ducky! How long have we been here, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Since Elizabeth, anyway.

JILL. [Looking at his foot] It has its drawbacks. D'you think Hornblower had a father? I believe he was spontaneous. But, Dodo, why all this—this attitude to the Hornblowers?

[She purses her lips and makes a gesture as of pushing persons away.]

HILLCRIST. Because they're pushing.

JILL. That's only because we are, as mother would say, and they're not—yet. But why not let them be?

HILLCRIST. You can't.

JILL. Why?

HILLCRIST. It takes generations to learn to live and let live,
Jill. People like that take an ell when you give them an inch.

JILL. But if you gave them the ell, they wouldn't want the inch.
Why should it all be such a skin game?

HILLCRIST. Skin game? Where do you get your lingo?

JILL. Keep to the point, Dodo.

HILLCRIST. Well, Jill, all life's a struggle between people at different stages of development, in different positions, with different amounts of social influence and property. And the only thing is to have rules of the game and keep them. New people like the Hornblowers haven't learnt those rules; their only rule is to get all they can.

JILL. Darling, don't prose. They're not half as bad as you think.

HILLCRIST. Well, when I sold Hornblower Longmeadow and the cottages, I certainly found him all right. All the same, he's got the cloven hoof. [Warming up] His influence in Deepwater is thoroughly bad; those potteries of his are demoralising—the whole atmosphere of the place is changing. It was a thousand pities he ever came here and discovered that clay. He's brought in the modern cutthroat spirit.

JILL. Cut our throat spirit, you mean. What's your definition of a gentleman, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. [Uneasily] Can't describe—only feel it.

JILL. Oh! Try!

HILLCRIST. Well—er—I suppose you might say—a man who keeps his form and doesn't let life scupper him out of his standards.

JILL. But suppose his standards are low?

HILLCRIST. [With some earnestness] I assume, of course, that he's honest and tolerant, gentle to the weak, and not self-seeking.

JILL. Ah! self-seeking? But aren't we all, Dodo? I am.

HILLCRIST. [With a smile] You!

JILL. [Scornfully] Oh! yes—too young to know.

HILLCRIST. Nobody knows till they're under pretty heavy fire, Jill.

JILL. Except, of course, mother.

HILLCRIST. How do you mean—mother?

JILL. Mother reminds me of England according to herself—always right whatever she does.

HILLCRIST. Ye-es. Your mother it perhaps—the perfect woman.

JILL. That's what I was saying. Now, no one could call you perfect, Dodo. Besides, you've got gout.

HILLCRIST. Yes; and I want Fellows. Ring that bell.

JILL. [Crossing to the bell] Shall I tell you my definition of a gentleman? A man who gives the Hornblower his due. [She rings the bell] And I think mother ought to call on them. Rolf says old Hornblower resents it fearfully that she's never made a sign to Chloe the three years she's been here.

HILLCRIST. I don't interfere with your mother in such matters. She may go and call on the devil himself if she likes.

JILL. I know you're ever so much better than she is.

HILLCRIST. That's respectful.

JILL. You do keep your prejudices out of your phiz. But mother literally looks down her nose. And she never forgives an "h." They'd get the "hell" from her if they took the "hinch."

HILLCRIST. Jill-your language!

JILL. Don't slime out of it, Dodo. I say, mother ought to call on the Hornblowers. [No answer.] Well?

HILLCRIST. My dear, I always let people have the last word. It makes them—feel funny. Ugh! My foot! [Enter FELLOWS, Left.] Fellows, send into the village and get another bottle of this stuff.

JILL. I'll go, darling.

[She blow him a kiss, and goes out at the window.]

HILLCRIST. And tell cook I've got to go on slops. This foot's worse.

FELLOWS. [Sympathetic] Indeed, sir.

HILLCRIST. My third go this year, Fellows.

FELLOWS. Very annoying, sir.

HILLCRIST. Ye-es. Ever had it?

FELLOWS. I fancy I have had a twinge, sir.

HILLCRIST. [Brightening] Have you? Where?

FELLOWS. In my cork wrist, sir.

HILLCRIST. Your what?

FELLOWS. The wrist I draw corks with.

HILLCRIST. [With a cackle] You'd have had more than a twinge if you'd lived with my father. H'm!

FELLOWS. Excuse me, sir—Vichy water corks, in my experience, are worse than any wine.

HILLCRIST. [Ironically] Ah! The country's not what it was, is it, Fellows?

FELLOWS. Getting very new, sir.

HILLCRIST. [Feelingly] You're right. Has Dawker come?

FELLOWS. Not yet, sir. The Jackmans would like to see you, sir.

HILLCRIST. What about?

FELLOWS. I don't know, sir.

HILLCRIST. Well, show them in.

FELLOWS. [Going] Yes, sir.

[HILLCRIST turns his swivel chair round. The JACKMANS come in. He, a big fellow about fifty, in a labourer's dress, with eyes which have more in them than his tongue can express; she, a little woman with a worn face, a bright, quick glance, and a tongue to match.]

HILLCRIST. Good morning, Mrs. Jackman! Morning, Jackman! Haven't seen you for a long time. What can I do?

[He draws in foot, and breath, with a sharp hiss.]

HILLCRIST. [In a down-hearted voice] We've had notice to quit, sir.

HILLCRIST. [With emphasis] What!

JACKMAN. Got to be out this week.

MRS. J. Yes, sir, indeed.

HILLCRIST. Well, but when I sold Longmeadow and the cottages, it was on the express understanding that there was to be no disturbance of tenancies:

MRS. J. Yes, sir; but we've all got to go. Mrs. 'Arvey, and the Drews, an' us, and there isn't another cottage to be had anywhere in Deepwater.

HILLCRIST. I know; I want one for my cowman. This won't do at all. Where do you get it from?

JACKMAN. Mr. 'Ornblower, 'imself, air. Just an hour ago. He come round and said: "I'm sorry; I want the cottages, and you've got to clear."

MRS. J. [Bitterly] He's no gentleman, sir; he put it so brisk. We been there thirty years, and now we don't know what to do. So I hope you'll excuse us coming round, sir.

HILLCRIST. I should think so, indeed! H'm! [He rises and limps across to the fireplace on his stick. To himself] The cloven hoof. By George! this is a breach of faith. I'll write to him, Jackman. Confound it! I'd certainly never have sold if I'd known he was going to do this.

MRS. J. No, sir, I'm sure, sir. They do say it's to do with the potteries. He wants the cottages for his workmen.

HILLCRIST. [Sharply] That's all very well, but he shouldn't have led me to suppose that he would make no change.

JACKMAN. [Heavily] They talk about his havin' bought the Centry to gut up more chimneys there, and that's why he wants the cottages.

HINT. The Centry! Impossible!

[Mrs. J. Yes, air; it's such a pretty spot—looks beautiful from here. [She looks out through the window] Loveliest spot in all Deepwater, I always say. And your father owned it, and his father before 'im. It's a pity they ever sold it, sir, beggin' your pardon.]

HILLCRIST. The Centry! [He rings the bell.]

Mrs. J. [Who has brightened up] I'm glad you're goin' to stop it, sir. It does put us about. We don't know where to go. I said to Mr. Hornblower, I said, "I'm sure Mr. Hillcrist would never 'eve turned us out." An' 'e said: "Mr. Hillcrist be——" beggin' your pardon, sir. "Make no mistake," 'e said, "you must go, missis." He don't even know our name; an' to come it like this over us! He's a dreadful new man, I think, with his overridin notions. And sich a heavyfooted man, to look at. [With a sort of indulgent contempt] But he's from the North, they say.

[FELLOWS has entered, Left.]

HILLCRIST. Ask Mrs. Hillcrist if she'll come.

FELLOWS. Very good, sir.

HILLCRIST. Is Dawker here?

FELLOWS. Not yet, sir.

HILLCRIST. I want to see him at once.

[FELLOWS retires.]

JACKMAN. Mr. Hornblower said he was comin' on to see you, sir. So we thought we'd step along first.

HILLCRIST. Quite right, Jackman.

MRS. J. I said to Jackman: "Mr. Hillcrist'll stand up for us, I know. He's a gentleman," I said. "This man," I said, "don't care for the neighbourhood, or the people; he don't care for anything so long as he makes his money, and has his importance. You can't expect it, I suppose," I said; [Bitterly] "havin' got rich so sudden." The gentry don't do things like that.

HILLCRIST. [Abstracted] Quite, Mrs. Jackman, quite!
[To himself] The Centry! No!

[MRS. HILLCRIST enters. A well-dressed woman, with a firm, clear-cut face.]

Oh! Amy! Mr. and Mrs. Jackman turned out of their cottage, and Mrs. Harvey, and the Drews. When I sold to Hornblower, I stipulated that they shouldn't be.

MRS. J. Our week's up on Saturday, ma'am, and I'm sure I don't know where we shall turn, because of course Jackman must be near his work, and I shall lose me washin' if we have to go far.

HILLCRIST. [With decision] You leave it to me, Mrs. Jackman. Good morning! Morning, Jackman! Sorry I can't move with this gout.

MRS. J. [For them both] I'm sure we're very sorry, sir. Good morning, sir. Good morning, ma'am; and thank you kindly. [They go out.]

HILLCRIST. Turning people out that have been there thirty years. I won't have it. It's a breach of faith.

MRS. H. Do you suppose this Hornblower will care two straws about that Jack?

HILLCRIST. He must, when it's put to him, if he's got any decent feeling.

MRS. H. He hasn't.

HILLCRIST. [Suddenly] The Jackmans talk of his having bought the Centry to put up more chimneys.

MRS. H. Never! [At the window, looking out] Impossible! It would ruin the place utterly; besides cutting us off from the Duke's. Oh, no! Miss Mullins would never sell behind our backs.

HILLCRIST. Anyway I must stop his turning these people out.

Mrs. H. [With a little smile, almost contemptuous] You might have known he'd do something of the sort. You will imagine people are like yourself, Jack. You always ought to make Dawker have things in black and white.

HILLCRIST. I said quite distinctly: "Of course you won't want to disturb the tenancies; there's a great shortage of cottages." Hornblower told me as distinctly that he wouldn't. What more do you want?

Mrs. H. A man like that thinks of nothing but the short cut to his own way. [Looking out of the window towards the rise] If he buys the Centry and puts up chimneys, we simply couldn't stop here.

HILLCRIST. My father would turn in his grave.

MRS. H. It would have been more useful if he'd not dipped the estate, and sold the Centry. This Hornblower hates us; he thinks we turn up our noses at him.

HILLCRIST. As we do, Amy.

MRS. H. Who wouldn't? A man without traditions, who believes in nothing but money and push.

HILLCRIST. Suppose he won't budge, can we do anything for the

Jackmans?

MRS. H. There are the two rooms Beaver used to have, over the stables.

FELLOWS. Mr. Dawker, sir.

[DAWKERS is a short, square, rather red-faced terrier of a man, in riding clothes and gaiters.]

HILLCRIST. Ah! Dawker, I've got gout again.

DAWKER. Very sorry, sir. How de do, ma'am?

HILLCRIST. Did you meet the Jackmans?

DAWKERS. Yeh.

[He hardly ever quite finishes a word, seeming to snap of their tails.]

HILLCRIST. Then you heard?

DAWKER. [Nodding] Smart man, Hornblower; never lets grass grow.

HILLCRIST. Smart?

DAWKER. [Grinning] Don't do to underrate your neighbours.

MRS. H. A cad—I call him.

DAWKER. That's it, ma'am-got all the advantage.

HILLCRIST. Heard anything about the Centry, Dawker?

DAWKER. Hornblower wants to buy.

HILLCRIST. Miss Mullins would never sell, would she?

DAWKER. She wants to.

HILLCRIST. The deuce she does!

DAWKER. He won't stick at the price either.

MRS. H. What's it worth, Dawker?

DAWKER. Depends on what you want it for.

MRS. H. He wants it for spite; we want it for sentiment.

DAWKER. [Grinning] Worth what you like to give, then; but he's a rich man.

MRS. H. Intolerable!

DAWKER. [To HILLCRIST] Give me your figure, sir. I'll try the old lady before he gets at her.

HILLCRIST. [Pondering] I don't want to buy, unless there's nothing else for it. I should have to raise the money on the estate; it won't stand much more. I can't believe the fellow would be such a barbarian. Chimneys within three hundred yards, right in front of this house! It's a nightmare.

MRS. H. You'd much better let Dawker make sure, Jack.

HILLCRIST. [Uncomfortable] Jackman says Hornblower's coming round to see me. I shall put it to him.

DAWKER. Make him keener than ever. Better get in first.

HILLCRIST. Ape his methods!—Ugh! Confound this gout! [He gets back to his chair with difficulty] Look here, Dawker, I wanted to see you about gates—

FELLOWS. [Entering] Mr. Hornblower.

[HORNBLOWER enters—a man of medium, height, thoroughly broadened, blown out, as it were, by success. He has thick, coarse, dark hair, just grizzled, wry bushy eyebrow, a wide

mouth. He wears quite ordinary clothes, as if that department were in charge of someone who knew about such, things. He has a small rose in his buttonhole, and carries a Homburg hat, which one suspects will look too small on his head.]

HORNBLOWER. Good morning! good morning! How are ye, Dawker? Fine morning! Lovely weather!

[His voice has a curious blend in its tone of brass and oil, and an accent not quite Scotch nor quite North country.]

Haven't seen ye for a long time, Hillcrist.

HILLCRIST. [Who has risen] Not since I sold you Longmeadow and those cottages, I believe.

HORNBLOWER. Dear me, now! that's what I came about.

HILLCRIST. [Subsiding again into his chair] Forgive me! Won't you sit down?

HORNBLOWER. [Not sitting] Have ye got gout? That's unfortunate. I never get it. I've no disposition that way. Had no ancestors, you see. Just me own drinkin' to answer for.

HILLCRIST. You're lucky.

HORNBLOWER. I wonder if Mrs. Hillcrist thinks that! Am I lucky to have no past, ma'am? Just the future?

MRS. H. You're sure you have the future, Mr. Hornblower?

HORNBLOWER. [With a laugh] That's your aristocratic rapier thrust. You aristocrats are very hard people underneath your manners. Ye love to lay a body out. But I've got the future all right.

HILLCRIST. [Meaningly] I've had the Dackmans here, Mr. Hornblower.

HORNBLOWER. Who are they—man with the little spitfire wife?

HILLCRIST. They're very excellent, good people, and they've been in that cottage quietly thirty years.

HORNBLOWER. [Throwing out his forefinger—a favourite gesture] Ah! ye've wanted me to stir ye up a bit. Deepwater needs a bit o' go put into it. There's generally some go where I am. I daresay you wish there'd been no "come." [He laughs].

MRS. H. We certainly like people to keep their word, Mr. Hornblower.

HILLCRIST. Amy!

HORNBLOWER. Never mind, Hillcrist; takes more than that to upset me.

[MRS. HILLCRIST exchanges a look with DAWKER who slips out unobserved.]

HILLCRIST. You promised me, you know, not to change the tenancies.

HORNBLOWER. Well, I've come to tell ye that I have. I wasn't expecting to have the need when I bought. Thought the Duke would sell me a bit down there; but devil a bit he will; and now I must have those cottages for my workmen. I've got important works, ye know.

HILLCRIST. [Getting heated] The Jackmans have their importance too, sir. Their heart's in that cottage.

HORNBLOWER. Have a sense of proportion, man. My works supply thousands of people, and my heart's in them. What's more, they make my fortune. I've got ambitions—I'm a serious man. Suppose I were to consider this and that, and every little potty objection— where should I get to?—nowhere!

HILLCRIST. All the same, this sort of thing isn't done, you know.

HORNBLOWER. Not by you because ye've got no need to do it. Here ye are, quite content on what your fathers made for ye. Ye've no ambitions; and ye want other people to have none. How d'ye think your fathers got your land?

HILLCRIST. [Who has risen] Not by breaking their word.

HORNBLOWER. [Throwing out his, finger] Don't ye believe it. They got it by breaking their word and

turnin' out Jackmans, if that's their name, all over the place.

MRS. H. That's an insult, Mr. Hornblower.

HORNBLOWER. No; it's a repartee. If ye think so much of these Jackmans, build them a cottage yourselves; ye've got the space.

HILLCRIST. That's beside the point. You promised me, and I sold on that understanding.

HORNBLOWER. And I bought on the understandin' that I'd get some more land from the Duke.

HILLCRIST. That's nothing to do with me.

HORNBLOWER. Ye'll find it has; because I'm going to have those cottages.

HILLCRIST. Well, I call it simply——

[He checks himself.]

HORNBLOWER. Look here, Hillcrist, ye've not had occasion to understand men like me. I've got the guts, and I've got the money; and I don't sit still on it. I'm going ahead because I believe in meself. I've no use for sentiment and that sort of thing. Forty of your Jackmans aren't worth me little finger.

HILLCRIST. [Angry] Of all the blatant things I ever heard said!

HORNBLOWER. Well, as we're speaking plainly, I've been thinkin'. Ye want the village run your oldfashioned way, and I want it run mine. I fancy there's not room for the two of us here.

MRS. H. When are you going?

HORNBLOWER. Never fear, I'm not going.

HILLCRIST. Look here, Mr. Hornblower—this infernal gout makes me irritable—puts me at a disadvantage. But I should be glad if you'd kindly explain yourself.

HORNBLOWER. [With a great smile] Ca' canny; I'm fra' the North.

HILLCRIST. I'm told you wish to buy the Centry and put more of your chimneys up there, regardless of the fact [He Points through the window] that it would utterly ruin the house we've had for generations, and all our pleasure here.

HORNBLOWER. How the man talks! Why! Ye'd think he owned the sky, because his fathers built him a house with a pretty view, where he's nothing to do but live. It's sheer want of something to do that gives ye your fine sentiments, Hillcrist.

HILLCRIST. Have the goodness not to charge me with idleness. Dawker—where is he?—[He shows the bureau] When you do the drudgery of your works as thoroughly as I do that of my estate—— Is it true about the Centry?

HORNBLOWER. Gospel true. If ye want to know, my son Chearlie is buyin' it this very minute.

MRS. H. [Turning with a start] What do you say?

HORNBLOWER. Ay, he's with the old lady she wants to sell, an' she'll get her price, whatever it is.

HILLCRIST. [With deep anger] If that isn't a skin game, Mr. Hornblower, I don't know what is.

HORNBLOWER. Ah! Ye've got a very nice expression there. "Skin game!" Well, bad words break no bones, an' they're wonderful for hardenin' the heart. If it wasn't for a lady's presence, I could give ye a specimen or two.

MRS. H. Oh! Mr. Hornblower, that need not stop you, I'm sure.

HORNBLOWER. Well, and I don't know that it need. Ye're an obstruction—the like of you—ye're in my path. And anyone in my path doesn't stay there long; or, if he does, he stays there on my terms. And my terms are chimneys in the Centry where I need 'em. It'll do ye a power of good, too, to know that ye're not almighty.

HILLCRIST. And that's being neighbourly!

HORNBLOWER. And how have ye tried bein' neighbourly to me? If I haven't a wife, I've got a daughter-in-law. Have Ye celled on her, ma'am? I'm new, and ye're an old family. Ye don't like me, ye think I'm a pushin' man. I go to chapel, an' ye don't like that. I make things and I sell them, and ye don't like that. I buy land, and ye don't like that. It threatens the view from your windies. Well, I don't lie you, and I'm not goin' to put up with your attitude. Ye've had things your own way too long, and now ye're not going to have them any longer.

HILLCRIST. Will you hold to your word over those cottages?

HORNBLOWER. I'm goin' to have the cottages. I need them, and more besides, now I'm to put up me new works.

HILLCRIST. That's a declaration of war.

HORNBLOWER. Ye never said a truer word. It's one or the other of us, and I rather think it's goin' to be me. I'm the risin' and you're the settin' sun, as the poet says.

HILLCRIST. [Touching the bell] We shall see if you can ride rough-shod like this. We used to have decent ways of going about things here. You want to change all that. Well, we shall do our damnedest to stop you. [To FELLOWS at the door] Are the Jackmans still in the house? Ask them to be good enough to come in.

HORNBLOWER. [With the first sign of uneasiness] I've seen these people. I've nothing more to say to them. I told 'em I'd give 'em five pounds to cover their moving.

HILLCRIST. It doesn't occur to you that people, however humble, like to have some say in their own fate?

HORNBLOWER. I never had any say in mine till I had the brass, and nobody ever will. It's all hypocrisy. You county folk are fair awful hypocrites. Ye talk about good form and all that sort o' thing. It's just the comfortable doctrine of the man in the saddle; sentimental varnish. Ye're every bit as hard as I am, underneath.

MRS. H. [Who had been standing very still all this time] You flatter us.

HORNBLOWER. Not at all. God helps those who 'elp themselves— that's at the bottom of all religion. I'm goin' to help meself, and God's going to help me.

MRS. H. I admire your knowledge.

HILLCRIST. We are in the right, and God helps—

HORNBLOWER. Don't ye believe it; ye 'aven't got the energy.

MRS. H. Nor perhaps the conceit.

HORNBLOWER. [Throwing out his forefinger] No, no; 't isn't conceit to believe in yourself when ye've got reason to. [The JACKMAN'S have entered.]

HILLCRIST. I'm very sorry, Mrs. Jackman, but I just wanted you to realise that I've done my best with this gentleman.

MRS. J. [Doubtfully] Yes, sir. I thought if you spoke for us, he'd feel different-like.

HORNBLOWER. One cottage is the same as another, missis. I made ye a fair offer of five pounds for the moving.

JACKMAN. [Slowly] We wouldn't take fifty to go out of that 'ouse. We brought up three children there, an' buried two from it.

MRS. J. [To MRS. HILLCRIST] We're attached to it like, ma'am.

HILLCRIST. [To HORNBLOWER.] How would you like being turned out of a place you were fond of?

HORNBLOWER. Not a bit. But little considerations have to give way to big ones. Now, missis, I'll make it ten pounds, and I'll send a wagon to shift your things. If that isn't fair—! Ye'd better accept, I shan't keep it open.

[The JACKMANS look at each other; their faces show deep anger— and the question they ask each other is which will speak.]

MRS. J. We won't take it; eh, George?

JACKMAN. Not a farden. We come there when we was married.

HORNBLOWER. [Throwing out his finger] Ye're very improvident folk.

HILLCRIST. Don't lecture them, Mr. Hornblower; they come out of this miles above you.

HORNBLOWER. [Angry] Well, I was going to give ye another week, but ye'll go out next Saturday; and take care ye're not late, or your things'll be put out in the rain.

MRS. H. [To MRS. JACKMAN] We'll send down for your things, and you can come to us for the time being.

[MRS. JACKMAN drops a curtsey; her eyes stab HORNBLOWERS.]

JACKMAN. [Heavily, clenching his fists] You're no gentleman! Don't put temptation in my way, that's all,

HILLCRIST. [In a low voice] Jackman!

HORNBLOWER. [Triumphantly] Ye hear that? That's your protegee! Keep out o' my way, me man, or I'll put the police on to ye for utterin' threats.

HILLCRIST. You'd better go now, Jackman.

[The JACKMANS move to the door.]

MRS. J. [Turning] Maybe you'll repent it some day, sir.

[They go out, MRS. HILLCRIST following.]

HORNBLOWER. We-ell, I'm sorry they're such unreasonable folk. I never met people with less notion of which side their bread was buttered.

HILLCRIST. And I never met anyone so pachydermatous.

HORNBLOWER. What's that, in Heaven's name? Ye needn' wrap it up in long words now your good lady's gone.

HILLCRIST. [With dignity] I'm not going in for a slanging match. I resent your conduct much too deeply.

HORNBLOWER. Look here, Hillcrist, I don't object to you personally; ye seem to me a poor creature that's bound to get left with your gout and your dignity; but of course ye can make yourself very disagreeable before ye're done. Now I want to be the movin' spirit here. I'm full of plans. I'm goin' to stand for Parliament; I'm goin' to make this a prosperous place. I'm a good-matured man if you'll treat me as such. Now, you take me on as a neighbour and all that, and I'll manage without chimneys on the Centry. Is it a bargain? [He holds out his hand.]

HILLCRIST. [Ignoring it] I thought you said you didn't keep your word when it suited you to break it?

HORNBLOWER. Now, don't get on the high horse. You and me could be very good friends; but I can be a very nasty enemy. The chimneys will not look nice from that windie, ye know.

HILLCRIST. [Deeply angry] Mr. Hornblower, if you think I'll take your hand after this Jackman business, you're greatly mistaken. You are proposing that I shall stand in with you while you tyrannise over the neighbourhood. Please realise that unless you leave those tenancies undisturbed as you said you would, we don't know each other.

HORNBLOWER. Well, that won't trouble me much. Now, ye'd better think it over; ye've got gout and that makes ye hasty. I tell ye again: I'm not the man to make an enemy of. Unless ye're friendly, sure as I stand here I'll ruin the look of your place.

[The toot of a car is heard.]

There's my car. I sent Chearlie and his wife in it to buy the Centry. And make no mistake—he's got it in his packet. It's your last chance, Hillcrist. I'm not averse to you as a man; I think ye're the best of the fossils round here; at least, I think ye can do me the most harm socially. Come now!

[He holds out his hand again.]

HILLCRIST. Not if you'd bought the Centry ten times over. Your ways are not mine, and I'll have nothing to do with you.

HORNBLOWER. [Very angry] Really! Is that so? Very well. Now ye're goin' to learn something, an' it's time ye did. D'ye realise that I'm 'very nearly round ye? [He draws a circle slowly in the air] I'm at Uphill, the works are here, here's Longmeadow, here's the Centry that I've just bought, there's only the Common left to give ye touch with the world. Now between you and the Common there's the high road.

I come out on the high road here to your north, and I shall come out on it there to your west. When I've got me new works up on the Centry, I shall be makin' a trolley track between the works up to the road at both ends, so any goods will be running right round ye. How'll ye like that for a country place?

[For answer HILLCRIST, who is angry beyond the power of speech, walks, forgetting to use his stick, up to the French window. While he stands there, with his back to HORNBLOWER, the door L. is flung open, and Jim enters, preceding CHARLES, his wife CHLOE, and ROLF. CHARLES is a goodish-looking, moustached young man of about twenty-eight, with a white rim to the collar of his waistcoat, and spats. He has his hand behind CHLOE'S back, as if to prevent her turning tail. She is rather a handsome young woman, with dark eyes, full red lips, and a suspicion of powder, a little under-dressed for the country. ROLF, mho brings up the rear, is about twenty, with an open face and stiffish butter-coloured hair. JILL runs over to her father at the window. She has a bottle.]

JILL. [Sotto voce] Look, Dodo, I've brought the lot! Isn't it a treat, dear Papa? And here's the stuff. Hallo!

[The exclamation is induced by the apprehension that there has been a row. HILLCRIST gives a stiff little bow, remaining where he is in the window. JILL, stays close to him, staring from one to the other, then blocks him off and engages him in conversation. CHARLES has gone up to his father, who has remained maliciously still, where he delivered his last speech. CHLOE and ROLF stand awkwardly waiting between the fireplace and the door.]

HORNBLOWER. Well, Chearlie?

CHARLES. Not got it.

HORNBLOWER. Not!

CHARLES. I'd practically got her to say she'd sell at three thousand five hundred, when that fellow Dawker turned up.

HORNBLOWER. That bull-terrier of a chap! Why, he was here a while ago. Oh—ho! So that's it!

CHARLES. I heard him gallop up. He came straight for the old lady, and got her away. What he said I don't know; but she came back looking wiser than an owl; said she'd think it over, thought she had other views.

HORNBLOWER. Did ye tell her she might have her price?

CHARLES. Practically I did.

HORNBLOWER. Well?

CHARLES. She thought it would be fairer to put it up to auction. There were other enquiries. Oh! She's a leery old bird—reminds me of one of those pictures of Fate, don't you know.

HORNBLOWER. Auction! Well, if it's not gone we'll get it yet. That damned little Dawker! I've had a row with Hillcrist.

CHARLES. I thought so.

[They are turning cautiously to look at HILLCRIST, when JILL steps forward.]

JILL. [Flushed and determined] That's not a bit sporting of you, Mr. Hornblower.

[At her words ROLE comes forward too.]

HORNBLOWER. Ye should hear both sides before ye say that, missy.

JILL. There isn't another side to turning out the Jackmans after you'd promised.

HORNBLOWER. Oh! dear me, yes. They don't matter a row of gingerbread to the schemes I've got for betterin' this neighbourhood.

JILL. I had been standing up for you; now I won't.

HOUNBLOWER. Dear, dear! What'll become of me?

JILL. I won't say anything about the other thing because I think it's beneath, dignity to notice it. But to turn poor people out of their cottages is a shame.

HORNBLOWER. Hoity me!

ROLF. [Suddenly] You haven't been doing that, father?

CHARLES. Shut up, Rolf!

HORNBLOWER. [Turning on ROLF] Ha! Here's a league o' Youth! My young whipper-snapper, keep your mouth shut and leave it to your elders to know what's right.

[Under the weight of this rejoinder ROLF stands biting his lips. Then he throws his head up.]

ROLF. I hate it!

HORNBLOWER. [With real venom] Oh! Ye hate it? Ye can get out of my house, then.

JILL. Free speech, Mr. Hornblower; don't be violent.

HORNBLOWER. Ye're right, young lady. Ye can stay in my house, Rolf, and learn manners. Come, Chearlie!

JILL. [Quite softly] Mr. Hornblower!

HILLCRIST. [From the window] Jill!

JILL. [Impatiently] Well, what's the good of it? Life's too short for rows, and too jolly!

ROLF. Bravo!

HORNBLOWER. [Who has shown a sign of weakening] Now, look here! I will not have revolt in my family. Ye'll just have to learn that a man who's worked as I have, who's risen as I have, and who knows the world, is the proper judge of what's right and wrong. I'll answer to God for me actions, and not to you young people.

JILL. Poor God!

HORNBLOWER. [Genuinely shocked] Ye blasphemous young thing! [To ROLF] And ye're just as bad, ye young freethinker. I won't have it.

HILLCRIST. [Who has come down, Right] Jill, I wish you would kindly not talk.

JILL. I can't help it.

CHARLES. [Putting his arm through HORNBLOWER'S] Come along, father! Deeds, not words.

HORNBLOWER. Ay! Deeds!

[MRS. HILLCRIST and DAWKERS have entered by the French window.]

MRS. H. Quite right!

[They all turn and look at her.]

HORNBLOWER. Ah! So ye put your dog on to it. [He throws out his finger at DAWKERS] Very smart, that—I give ye credit.

MRS. H. [Pointing to CHLOE, who has stood by herself, forgotten and uncomfortable throughout the scene] May I ask who this lady is?

[CHLOE turns round startled, and her vanity bag slips down her dress to the floor.]

HORNBLOWER. No, ma'am, ye may not, for ye know perfectly well.

JILL. I brought her in, mother [She moves to CHLOE's side.]

MRS. H. Will you take her out again, then.

HILLCRIST. Amy, have the goodness to remember—

MRS. H. That this is my house so far as ladies are concerned.

JILL. Mother!

[She looks astonished at CHLOE, who, about to speak, does not, passing her eyes, with a queer, half-scarred expression, from MRS. HILLCRIST to DAWKER.]

[To CHLOE] I'm awfully sorry. Come on!

[They go out, Left. ROLF hurries after them.]

CHARLES. You've insulted my wife. Why? What do you mean by it?

[MRS. HILLCRIST simply smiles.]

HILLCRIST. I apologise. I regret extremely. There is no reason why the ladies of your family or of mine should be involved in our quarrel. For Heaven's sake, let's fight like gentlemen.

HORNBLOWER. Catchwords—sneers! No; we'll play what ye call a skin game, Hillcrist, without gloves on; we won't spare each other. Ye look out for yourselves, for, begod, after this morning I mean business. And as for you, Dawker, ye sly dog, ye think yourself very clever; but I'll have the Centry yet. Come, Chearlie!

[They go out, passing JILL, who is coming in again, in the doorway.]

HILLCRIST. Well, Dawker?

DAWKER. [Grinning] Safe for the moment. The old lady'll put it up to auction. Couldn't get her to budge from that. Says she don't want to be unneighbourly to either. But, if you ask me, it's money she smells!

JILL. [Advancing] Now, mother

MRS. H. Well?

JILL. Why did you insult her?

MRS. H. I think I only asked you to take her out.

JILL. Why? Even if she is Old Combustion's daughter-in-law?

MRS. H. My dear Jill, allow me to judge the sort of acquaintances I wish to make. [She looks at DAWKER.]

JILL. She's all right. Lots of women powder and touch up their lips nowadays. I think she's rather a good sort; she was awfully upset.

MRS. H. Too upset.

JILL. Oh! don't be so mysterious, mother. If you know something, do spit it out!

MRS. H. Do you wish me to—er—"spit it out," Jack?

HILLCRIST. Dawker, if you don't mind—

[DAWKER, with a nod, passes away out of the French window.]

Jill, be respectful, and don't talk like a bargee.

JILL. It's no good, Dodo. It made me ashamed. It's just as—as caddish to insult people who haven't said a word, in your own house, as it is to be—old Hornblower.

MRS. H. You don't know what you're talking about.

HILLCRIST. What's the matter with young Mrs. Hornblower?

MRS. H. Excuse me, I shall keep my thoughts to myself at present.

[She looks coldly at JILL, and goes out through the French window.]

HILLCRIST. You've thoroughly upset your mother, Jill.

JILL. It's something Dawker's told her; I saw them. I don't like Dawker, father, he's so common.

HILLCRIST. My dear, we can't all be uncommon. He's got lots of go, You must apologise to your mother.

JILL. [Shaking-her clubbed hair] They'll make you do things you don't approve of, Dodo, if you don't look out. Mother's fearfully bitter when she gets her knife in. If old Hornblower's disgusting, it's no reason we should be.

HILLCRIST. So you think I'm capable—that's nice, Jill!

JILL. No, no, darling! I only want to warn you solemnly that mother'll tell you you're fighting fair, no matter what she and Dawker do.

HILLCRIST. [Smiling] Jill, I don't think I ever saw you so serious.

JILL. No. Because—[She swallows a lump in her throat] Well—I was just beginning to enjoy, myself; and now—everything's going to be bitter and beastly, with mother in that mood. That horrible old man! Oh, Dodo! Don't let them make you horrid! You're such a darling. How's your gout, ducky?

HILLCRIST. Better; lot better.

JILL. There, you see! That shows! It's going to be half-interesting for you, but not for—us.

HILLCRIST. Look here, Jill—is there anything between you and young what's-his-name—Rolf?

JILL. [Biting her lip] No. But—now it's all spoiled.

HILLCRIST. You can't expect me to regret that.

JILL. I don't mean any tosh about love's young dream; but I do like being friends. I want to enjoy things, Dodo, and you can't do that when everybody's on the hate. You're going to wallow in it, and so shall I—oh! I know I shall!—we shall all wallow, and think of nothing but "one for his nob."

HILLCRIST. Aren't you fond of your home?

JILL. Of course. I love it.

HILLCRIST. Well, you won't be able to live in it unless we stop that ruffian. Chimneys and smoke, the trees cut down, piles of pots. Every kind of abomination. There! [He points] Imagine! [He points through the French window, as if he could see those chimneys rising and marring the beauty of the fields] I was born here, and my father, and his, and his, and his. They loved those fields, and those old trees. And this barbarian, with his "improvement" schemes, forsooth! I learned to ride in the Centry meadows—prettiest spring meadows in the world; I've climbed every tree there. Why my father ever sold—! But who could have imagined this? And come at a bad moment, when money's scarce.

JILL. [Cuddling his arm] Dodo!

HILLCRIST. Yes. But you don't love the place as I do, Jill. You youngsters don't love anything, I sometimes think.

JILL. I do, Dodo, I do!

HILLCRIST. You've got it all before you. But you may live your life and never find anything so good and so beautiful as this old home. I'm not going to have it spoiled without a fight.

[Conscious of having betrayed Sentiment, he walks out at the French window, passing away to the right. JILL following to the window, looks. Then throwing back her head, she clasps her hands behind it.]

JILL. Oh—oh-oh!

[A voice behind her says, "JILL!" She turns and starts back, leaning against the right lintel of the window. ROLF appears outside the window from Left.]

Who goes there?

ROLE. [Buttressed against the Left lintel] Enemy—after Chloe's bag.

JILL. Pass, enemy! And all's ill!

[ROLF passes through the window, and retrieves the vanity bag from the floor where CHLOE dropped it, then again takes his stand against the Left lintel of the French window.]

ROLF. It's not going to make any difference, is it?

JILL. You know it is.

ROLF. Sins of the fathers.

JILL. Unto the third and fourth generations. What sin has my father committed?

ROLF. None, in a way; only, I've often told you I don't see why you should treat us as outsiders. We don't like it.

JILL. Well, you shouldn't be, then; I mean, he shouldn't be.

ROLF. Father's just as human as your father; he's wrapped up in us, and all his "getting on" is for us. Would you like to be treated as your mother treated Chloe? Your mother's set the stroke for the other big-wigs about here; nobody calls on Chloe. And why not? Why not? I think it's contemptible to bar people just because they're new, as you call it, and have to make their position instead of having it left them.

JILL. It's not because they're new, it's because—if your father behaved like a gentleman, he'd be treated like one.

ROLF. Would he? I don't believe it. My father's a very able man; he thinks he's entitled to have influence here. Well, everybody tries to keep him down. Oh! yes, they do. That makes him mad and more determined than ever to get his way. You ought to be just, Jill.

JILL. I am just.

ROLF. No, you're not. Besides, what's it got to do with Charlie and Chloe? Chloe's particularly harmless. It's pretty sickening for her. Father didn't expect people to call until Charlie married, but since—

JILL. I think it's all very petty.

ROLF. It is—a dog-in-the-manger business; I did think you were above it.

JILL. How would you like to have your home spoiled?

ROLE. I'm not going to argue. Only things don't stand still. Homes aren't any more proof against change than anything else.

JILL. All right! You come and try and take ours.

ROLF. We don't want to take your home.

JILL. Like the Jackmans'?

ROLF. All right. I see you're hopelessly prejudiced.

[He turns to go.]

JILL. [Just as he is vanishing—softly] Enemy?

ROLF. [Turning] Yes, enemy.

JILL. Before the battle—let's shake hands.

[They move from the lintels and grasp each other's hands in the centre of the French window.]

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I

A billiard room in a provincial hotel, where things are bought and sold. The scene is set well forward, and is not very broad; it represents the auctioneer's end of the room, having, rather to stage Left, a narrow table with two chairs facing the audience, where the auctioneer will sit and stand. The table, which is set forward to the footlights, is littered with green-covered particulars of sale. The audience are in effect public and bidders. There is a door on the Left, level with the table. Along the back wall, behind the table, are two raised benches with two steps up to them, such as billiard rooms often have, divided by a door in the middle of a wall, which is panelled in oak. Late September sunlight is coming from a skylight (not visible) on to these seats. The stage is empty when the curtain goes up, but DAWKERS, and MRS. HILLCRIST are just entering through the door at the back.

DAWKER. Be out of their way here, ma'am. See old Hornblower with Chearlie?

[He points down to the audience.]

MRS. H. It begins at three, doesn't it?

DAWKER. They won't be over-punctual; there's only the Centry selling. There's young Mrs. Hornblower with the other boy— [Pointing] over at the entrance. I've got that chap I told you of down from town.

MRS. H. Ah! make sure quite of her, Dawker. Any mistake would be fatal.

DAWKER. [Nodding] That's right, ma'am. Lot of peopled—always spare time to watch an auction—ever remark that? The Duke's agent's here; shouldn't be surprised if he chipped in.

MRS. H. Where did you leave my husband?

DAWKER. With Miss Jill, in the courtyard. He's coming to you. In case I miss him; tell him when I reach his limit to blow his nose if he wants me to go on; when he blows it a second time, I'll stop for good. Hope we shan't get to that. Old Hornblower doesn't throw his money away.

MRS. H. What limit did you settle?

DAWKER. Six thousand!

MRS. H. That's a fearful price. Well, good luck to you, Dawker!

DAWKER. Good luck, ma'am. I'll go and see to that little matter of Mrs. Chloe. Never fear, we'll do them is somehow.

[He winks, lays his finger on the side of his nose, and goes out at the door.]

[MRS. HILLCRIST mounts the two steps, sits down Right of the door, and puts up a pair of long-handled glasses. Through the door behind her come CHLOE and ROLF. She makes a sign for him to go, and shuts the door.]

CHLOE. [At the foot of the steps in the gangway—with a slightly common accent] Mrs. Hillcrist!

MRS. H. [Not quite starting] I beg your pardon?

CHLOE. [Again] Mrs. Hillcrist—

MRS. H. Well?

CHLOE. I never did you any harm.

MRS. H. Did I ever say you did?

CHLOE. No; but you act as if I had.

MRS. H. I'm not aware that I've acted at all—as yet. You are nothing to me, except as one of your

family.

CHLOE. 'Tisn't I that wants to spoil your home.

MRS. H. Stop them then. I see your husband down there with his father.

CHLOE. I—I have tried.

MRS. H. [Looking at her] Oh! I suppose such men don't pay attention to what women ask them.

CHLOE. [With a flash of spirit] I'm fond of my husband. I—

MRS. H. [Looking at her steadily] I don't quite know why you spoke to me.

CHLOE. [With a sort of pathetic sullenness] I only thought perhaps you'd like to treat me as a human being.

MRS. H. Really, if you don't mind, I should like to be left alone just now.

CHLOE. [Unhappily acquiescent] Certainly! I'll go to the other end.

[She moves to the Left, mounts the steps and sits down.]

[ROLF, looking in through the door, and seeing where she is, joins her. MRS. HILLCRIST resettles herself a little further in on the Right.]

ROLF. [Bending over to CHLOE, after a glance at MRS. HILLCRIST.]
Are you all right?

CHLOE. It's awfully hot.

[She fans herself with the particulars of sale.]

ROLF. There's Dawker. I hate that chap!

CHLOE. Where?

ROLF. Down there; see?

[He points down to stage Right of the room.]

CHLOE. [Drawing back in her seat with a little gasp] Oh!

ROLF. [Not noticing] Who's that next him, looking up here?

CHLOE. I don't know.

[She has raised her auction programme suddenly, and sits fanning herself, carefully screening her face.]

ROLE. [Looking at her] Don't you feel well? Shall I get you some water? [He gets up at her nod.]

[As he reaches the door, HILLCRIST and JILL come in. HILLCRIST passes him abstractedly with a nod, and sits down beside his wife.]

JILL. [To ROLF] Come to see us turned out?

ROLF. [Emphatically] No. I'm looking after Chloe; she's not well.

JILL. [Glancing at her] Sorry. She needn't have come, I suppose?
[RALF deigns no answer, and goes out.]

[JILL glances at CHLOE, then at her parents talking in low voices, and sits down next her father, who makes room for her.]

MRS. H. Can Dawker see you there, Jack?

[HILLCRIST nods.]

What's the time?

HILLCRIST. Three minutes to three.

JILL. Don't you feel beastly all down the backs of your legs.
Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Yes.

JILL. Do you, mother?

MRS. H. No.

JILL. A wagon of old Hornblower's pots passed while we were in the yard. It's an omen.

MRS. H. Don't be foolish, Jill.

JILL. Look at the old brute! Dodo, hold my hand.

MRS. H. Make sure you've got a handkerchief, Jack.

HILLCRIST. I can't go beyond the six thousand; I shall have to raise every penny on mortgage as it is.
The estate simply won't stand more, Amy.

[He feels in his breast pocket, and pulls up the edge of his
handkerchief.]

JILL. Oh! Look! There's Miss Mullins, at the back; just come in.
Isn't she a spidery old chip?

MRS. H. Come to gloat. Really, I think her not accepting your offer is disgusting. Her impartiality is
all humbug.

HILLCRIST. Can't blame her for getting what she can—it's human nature. Phew! I used to feel like
this before a 'viva voce'. Who's that next to Dawker?

JILL. What a fish!

MRS. H. [To herself] Ah! yes.

[Her eyes slide round at CHLOE, silting motionless and rather sunk in her seat, slowly
fanning herself with they particulars of the sale. Jack, go and offer her my smelling salts.]

HILLCRIST. [Taking the salts] Thank God for a human touch!

MRS. H. [Taken aback] Oh!

JILL. [With a quick look at her mother, snatching the salts] I will. [She goes over to CHLOE with the
salts] Have a sniff; you look awfully white.

CHLOE. [Looking up, startled] Oh! no thanks. I'm all right.

JILL. No, do! You must. [CHLOE takes them.]

JILL. D'you mind letting me see that a minute?

[She takes the particulars of the sale and studies it, but CHLOE has buried the lower
part of her face in her hand and the smelling salts bottle.]

Beastly hot, isn't it? You'd better keep that.

CHLOE. [Her dark eyes wandering and uneasy] Rolf's getting me some water.

JILL. Why do you stay? You didn't want to come, did you?

[CHLOE shakes her head.]

All right! Here's your water.

[She hands back the particulars and slides over to her seat, passing ROLF in the
gangway, with her chin well up.]

[MRS. HILLCRIST, who has watched CHLOE and JILL and DAWKER, and his friend,
makes an enquiring movement with her hand, but gets a disappointing answer.]

JILL. What's the time, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. [Looking at his watch] Three minutes past.

JILL. [Sighing] Oh, hell!

HILLCRIST. Jill!

JILL. Sorry, Dodo. I was only thinking. Look! Here he is!
Phew!—isn't he—?

MRS. H. 'Sh!

The AUCTIONEER comes in Left and goes to the table. He is a square, short, brown-faced, common looking man, with clipped grey hair fitting him like a cap, and a clipped grey moustache. His lids come down over his quick eyes, till he can see you very sharply, and you can hardly see that he can see you. He can break into a smile at any moment, which has no connection with him, as it were. By a certain hurt look, however, when bidding is slow, he discloses that he is not merely an auctioneer, but has in him elements of the human being. He can wink with anyone, and is dressed in a snug-brown suit, with a perfectly unbuttoned waistcoat, a low, turned down collar, and small black and white sailor knot tie. While he is settling his papers, the HILLCRISTS settle themselves tensely. CHLOE has drunk her water and leaned back again, with the smelling salts to her nose. ROLF leans forward in the seat beside her, looking sideways at JILL. A SOLICITOR, with a grey beard, has joined the AUCTIONEER, at his table.

AUCTIONEER. [Tapping the table] Sorry to disappoint you, gentlemen, but I've only one property to offer you to-day, No. 1, The Centry, Deepwater. The second on the particulars has been withdrawn. The third that's Bidcot, desirable freehold mansion and farmlands in the Parish of Kenway—we shall have to deal with next week. I shall be happy to sell it you then with out reservation. [He looks again through the particulars in his hand, giving the audience time to readjust themselves to his statements] Now, gen'lemen, as I say, I've only the one property to sell. Freehold No. 1—all that very desirable corn and stock-rearing and parklike residential land known as the Centry, Deepwater, unique property an A.1. chance to an A.1. audience. [With his smile] Ought to make the price of the three we thought we had. Now you won't mind listening to the conditions of sale; Mr. Blinkard'll read 'em, and they won't worry you, they're very short.

[He sits down and gives two little tape on the table.]

[The SOLICITOR rises and reads the conditions of sale in a voice which no one practically can hear. Just as he begins to read these conditions of sale, CHARLES HORNBLOWER enters at back. He stands a moment, glancing round at the HILLCRIST and twirling his moustache, then moves along to his wife and touches her.]

CHARLES. Chloe, aren't you well?

[In the start which she gives, her face is fully revealed to the audience.]

CHARLES. Come along, out of the way of these people.

[He jerks his head towards the HILLCRISTS. CHLOE gives a swift look down to the stage Right of the audience.]

CHLOE. No; I'm all right; it's hotter there.

CHARLES. [To ROLF] Well, look after her—I must go back.

[ROLF nods. CHARLES, slides bank to the door, with a glance at the HILLCRISTS, of whom MRS. HILLCRIST has been watching like a lynx. He goes out, just as the SOLICITOR, finishing, sits down.]

AUCTIONEER. [Rising and tapping] Now, gen'lemen, it's not often a piece of land like this comes into the market. What's that? [To a friend in front of him] No better land in Deepwater—that's right, Mr. Spicer. I know the village well, and a charming place it is; perfect locality, to be sure. Now I don't want to worry you by singing the praises of this property; there it is—well-watered, nicely timbered—no reservation of the timber, gen'lemen—no tenancy to hold you up; free to do what you like with it tomorrow. You've got a jewel of a site there, too; perfect position for a house. It lies between the Duke's and Squire Hillcrist's—an emerald isle. [With his smile] No allusion to Ireland, gen'lemen—perfect peace in the Centry. Nothing like it in the county—a gen'leman's site, and you don't get that offered you every day. [He looks down towards HORNBLOWER, stage Left] Carries the mineral rights, and as you know, perhaps, there's the very valuable Deepwater clay there. What am I to start it at? Can I say three

thousand? Well, anything you like to give me. I'm not particular. Come now, you've got more time than me, I expect. Two hundred acres of first-rate grazin' and cornland, with a site for a residence unequalled in the county; and all the possibilities! Well, what shall I say?

[Bid from SPICER.]

Two thousand? [With his smile] That won't hurt you, Mr. Spicer. Why, it's worth that to overlook the Duke. For two thousand?

[Bid from HORNBLOWER, stage Left.]

And five. Thank you, sir. Two thousand five hundred bid.

[To a friend just below him.]

Come, Mr. Sandy, don't scratch your head over it.

[Bid from DAWKER, Stage Right.]

And five. Three thousand bid for this desirable property. Why, you'd think it wasn't desirable. Come along, gen'lemen. A little spirit.

[A slight pause.]

JILL. Why can't I see the bids, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. The last was Dawker's.

AUCTIONEER. For three thousand. [HORNBLOWER] Three thousand five hundred? May I say—four? [A bid from the centre] No, I'm not particular; I'll take hundreds. Three thousand six hundred bid. [HORNBLOWER] And seven. Three thousand seven hundred, and—

[He pauses, quartering the audience.]

JILL. Who was that, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Hornblower. It's the Duke in the centre.

AUCTIONEER. Come, gen'lemen, don't keep me all day. Four thousand may I say? [DAWKER] Thank you. We're beginning. And one? [A bid from the centre] Four thousand one hundred. [HORNBLOWER] Four thousand two hundred. May I have yours, sir? [To DAWKER] And three. Four thousand three hundred bid. No such site in the county, gen'lemen. I'm going to sell this land for what it's worth. You can't bid too much for me. [He smiles] [HORNBLOWER] Four thousand five hundred bid. [Bid from the centre] And six. [DAWKER] And seven. [HORNBLOWER] And eight. Nine, may I say? [But the centre has dried up] [DAWKER] And nine. [HORNBLOWER] Five thousand. Five thousand bid. That's better; there's some spirit in it. For five thousand.

[He pauses while he speaks to the SOLICITOR]

HILLCRIST. It's a duel now.

AUCTIONEER. Now, gen'lemen, I'm not going to give this property away. Five thousand bid. [DAWKER] And one. [HORNBLOWER] And two. [DAWKER] And three. Five thousand three hundred bid. And five, did you say, sir? [HORNBLOWER] Five thousand five hundred bid.

[He looks at his particulars.]

JILL. [Rather agonised] Enemy, Dodo.

AUCTIONEER. This chance may never come again.

"How you'll regret it
If you don't get it,"

as the poet says. May I say five thousand six hundred, sir? [DAWKER] Five thousand six hundred bid. [HORNBLOWER] And seven. [DAWKER] And eight. For five thousand eight hundred pounds. We're gettin' on, but we haven't got the value yet.

[A slight pause, while he wipes his brow at the success of his own efforts.]

JILL. Us, Dodo?

[HILLCRIST nods. JILL looks over at ROLF, whose face is grimly set. CHLOE has never moved. MRS. HILLCRIST whispers to her husband.]

AUCTIONEER. Five thousand eight hundred bid. For five thousand eight hundred. Come along, gen'lemen, come along. We're not beaten. Thank you, sir. [HORNBLOWER] Five thousand nine hundred. And—? [DAWKER] Six thousand. Six thousand bid. Six thousand bid. For six thousand! The Centry—most desirable spot in the county—going for the low price of six thousand.

HILLCRIST. [Muttering] Low! Heavens!

AUCTIONEER. Any advance on six thousand? Come, gen'lemen, we haven't dried up? A little spirit. Six thousand? For six thousand? For six thousand pounds? Very well, I'm selling. For six thousand once—[He taps] For six thousand twice—[He taps].

JILL. [Low] Oh! we've got it!

AUCTIONEER. And one, sir? [HORNBLOWER] Six thousand one hundred bid.

[The SOLICITOR touches his arm and says something, to which the AUCTIONEER responds with a nod.]

MRS. H. Blow your nose, Jack.

[HILLCRIST blows his nose.]

AUCTIONEER. For six thousand one hundred. [DAWKER] And two. Thank you. [HORNBLOWER] And three. For six thousand three hundred. [DAWKER] And four. For six thousand four hundred pounds. This coveted property. For six thousand four hundred pounds. Why, it's giving it away, gen'lemen. [A pause.]

MRS. H. Giving!

AUCTIONEER. Six thousand four hundred bid. [HORNBLOWER] And five. [DAWKER] And six. [HORNBLOWER] And seven. [DAWKER] And eight.

[A pause, during which, through the door Left, someone beckons to the SOLICITOR, who rises and confers.]

HILLCRIST. [Muttering] I've done if that doesn't get it.

AUCTIONEER. For six thousand eight hundred. For six thousand eight hundred-once—[He taps] twice—[He taps] For the last time. This dominating site. [HORNBLOWER] And nine. Thank you. For six thousand nine hundred.

[HILLCRIST has taken out his handkerchief.]

JILL. Oh! Dodo!

MRS. H. [Quivering] Don't give in!

AUCTIONEER. Seven thousand may I say? [DAWKER] Seven thousand.

MRS. H. [Whispers] Keep it down; don't show him.

AUCTIONEER. For seven-thousand—going for seven thousand—once—[Taps] twice [Taps] [HORNBLOWER] And one. Thank you, sir.

[HILLCRIST blows his nose. JILL, with a choke, leans back in her seat and folds her arms tightly on her chest. MRS. HILLCRIST passes her handkerchief over her lips, sitting perfectly still. HILLCRIST, too, is motionless.]

[The AUCTIONEER, has paused, and is talking to the SOLICITOR, who has returned to his seat.]

MRS. H. Oh! Jack.

JILL. Stick it, Dodo; stick it!

AUCTIONEER. Now, gen'lemen, I have a bid of seven thousand one hundred for the Centry. And I'm instructed to sell if I can't get more. It's a fair price, but not a big price. [To his friend MR. SPICER] A thumpin' price? [With his smile] Well, you're a judge of thumpin', I admit. Now, who'll give me seven

thousand two hundred? What, no one? Well, I can't make you, gen'lemen. For seven thousand one hundred. Once—[Taps] Twice—[Taps].

[JILL utters a little groan.]

HILLCRIST. [Suddenly, in a queer voice] Two.

AUCTIONEER. [Turning with surprise and looking up to receive HILLCRIST'S nod] Thank you, sir. And two. Seven thousand two hundred. [He screws himself round so as to command both HILLCRIST and HORNBLOWER] May I have yours, sir? [HORNBLOWER] And three. [HILLCRIST] And four. Seven thousand four hundred. For seven thousand four hundred. [HORNBLOWER] Five. [HILLCRIST] Six. For seven thousand six hundred. [A pause] Well, gen'lemen, this is. better, but a record property shid fetch a record price. The possibilities are enormous. [HORNBLOWER] Eight thousand did you say, sir? Eight thousand. Going for eight thousand pounds. [HILLCRIST] And one. [HORNBLOWER] And two. [HILLCRIST] And three. [HORNBLOWER] And four. [HILLCRIST] And five. For eight thousand five hundred. A wonderful property for eight thousand five hundred.

[He wipes his brow.]

JILL. [Whispering] Oh, Dodo!

MRS. H. That's enough, Jack, we must stop some time.

AUCTIONEER. For eight thousand five hundred. Once—[Taps]—twice— [Taps] [HORNBLOWER] Six hundred. [HILLCRIST] Seven. May I have yours, sir? [HORNBLOWER] Eight.

HILLCRIST. Nine thousand.

[MRS. HILLCRIST looks at him, biting her lips, but he is quite absorbed.]

AUCTIONEER. Nine thousand for this astounding property. Why, the Duke would pay that if he realised he'd be overlooked. Now, Sir? [To HORNBLOWER. No response]. Just a little raise on that. [No response.] For nine thousand. The Centry, Deepwater, for nine thousand. Once—[Taps] Twice— [Taps].

JILL. [Under her breath] Ours!

A VOICE. [From far back in the centre] And five hundred.

AUCTIONEER. [Surprised and throwing out his arms towards the voice] And five hundred. For nine thousand five hundred. May I have yours, sir? [He looks at HORNBLOWER. No response.]

[The SOLICITOR speaks to him. MRS. H. [Whispering] It must be the Duke again.]

HILLCRIST. [Passing his hand over his brow] That's stopped him, anyway.

AUCTIONEER. [Looking at HILLCRIST] For nine thousand five hundred? [HILLCRIST shakes his head.] Once more. The Centry, Deepwater, for nine thousand five hundred. Once—[Taps] Twice—[Taps] [He pauses and looks again at HORNBLOWER and HILLCRIST] For the last time—at nine thousand five hundred. [Taps] [With a look towards the bidder] Mr. Smalley. Well! [With great satisfaction] That's that! No more to-day, gen'lemen.

[The AUCTIONEER and SOLICITOR busy themselves. The room begins to empty.]

MRS. H. Smalley? Smalley? Is that the Duke's agent? Jack!

HILLCRIST. [Coming out of a sort of coma, after the excitement he has been going through] What! What!

JILL. Oh, Dodo! How splendidly you stuck it!

HILLCRIST. Phew! What a squeak! I was clean out of my depth. A mercy the Duke chipped in again.

MRS. H. [Looking at ROLF and CHLOE, who are standing up as if about to go] Take care; they can hear you. Find DAWKER, Jack.

[Below, the AUCTIONEER and SOLICITOR take up their papers, and move out Left.]

[HILLCRIST stretches himself, standing up, as if to throw off

the strain. The door behind is opened, and HORNBLOWER appears.]

HORNBLOWER. Ye ran me up a pretty price. Ye bid very pluckily, Hillcrist. But ye didn't quite get my measure.

HILLCRIST. Oh! It was my nine thousand the Duke capped. Thank God, the Centry's gone to a gentleman!

HORNBLOWER. The Duke? [He laughs] No, the Gentry's not gone to a gentleman, nor to a fool. It's gone to me.

HILLCRIST. What!

HORNBLOWER. I'm sorry for ye; ye're not fit to manage these things. Well, it's a monstrous price, and I've had to pay it because of your obstinacy. I shan't forget that when I come to build.

HILLCRIST. D'you mean to say that bid was for you?

HORNBLOWER. Of course I do. I told ye I was a bad man to be up against. Perhaps ye'll believe me now.

HILLCRIST. A dastardly trick!

HORNBLOWER. [With venom] What did ye call it—a skin game? Remember we're playin' a skin game, Hillcrist.

HILLCRIST. [Clenching his fists] If we were younger men——

HORNBLOWER. Ay! 'Twouldn't Look pretty for us to be at fisticuffs. We'll leave the fightin' to the young ones. [He glances at ROLF and JILL; suddenly throwing out his finger at ROLF] No makin' up to that young woman! I've watched ye. And as for you, missy, you leave my boy alone.

JILL. [With suppressed passion] Dodo, may I spit in his eye or something?

HILLCRIST. Sit down.

[JILL sits down. He stands between her and HORNBLOWER.]

[Yu've won this round, sir, by a foul blow. We shall see whether you can take any advantage of it. I believe the law can stop you ruining my property.]

HORNBLOWER. Make your mind easy; it can't. I've got ye in a noose, and I'm goin' to hang ye.

MRS. H. [Suddenly] Mr. Hornblower, as you fight foul—so shall we.

HILLCRIST. Amy!

MRS. H. [Paying no attention] And it will not be foul play towards you and yours. You are outside the pale.

HORNBLOWER. That's just where I am, outside your pale all round ye. Ye're not long for Deepwater, ma'am. Make your dispositions to go; ye'll be out in six months, I prophesy. And good riddance to the neighbourhood. [They are all down on the level now.]

CHLOE. [Suddenly coming closer to MRS. HILLCRIST] Here are your salts, thank you. Father, can't you——?

HORNBLOWER. [Surprised] Can't I what?

CHLOE. Can't you come to an arrangement?

MRS. H. Just so, Mr. Hornblower. Can't you?

HORNBLOWER. [Looking from one to the other] As we're speakin' out, ma'am, it's your behaviour to my daughter-in-law—who's as good as you—and better, to my thinking—that's more than half the reason why I've bought this property. Ye've fair got my dander up. Now it's no use to bandy words. It's very forgivin' of ye, Chloe, but come along!

MRS. H. Quite seriously, Mr. Hornblower, you had better come to an arrangement.

HORNBLOWER. Mrs. Hillcrist, ladies should keep to their own business.

MRS. H. I will.

HILLCRIST. Amy, do leave it to us men. You young man [He speaks to ROLF] do you support your father's trick this afternoon?

[JILL looks round at ROLF, who tries to speak, when HORNBLOWER breaks in.]

HORNBLOWER. My trick? And what dye call it, to try and put me own son against me?

JILL. [To ROLF] Well?

ROLF. I don't, but—

HORNBLOWER. Trick? Ye young cub, be quiet. Mr. Hillcrist had an agent bid for him—I had an agent bid for me. Only his agent bid at the beginnin', an' mine bid at the end. What's the trick in that?

[He laughs.]

HILLCRIST. Hopeless; we're in different worlds.

HORNBLOWER. I wish to God we were! Come you, Chloe. And you, Rolf, you follow. In six months I'll have those chimneys up, and me lorries runnin' round ye.

MRS. H. Mr. Hornblower, if you build—

HORNBLOWER. [Looking at MRS. HILLCRIST] Ye know—it's laughable. Ye make me pay nine thousand five hundred for a bit o' land not worth four, and ye think I'm not to get back on ye. I'm goin' on with as little consideration as if ye were a family of blackbeetles. Good afternoon!

ROLF. Father!

JILL. Oh, Dodo! He's obscene.

HILLCRIST. Mr. Hornblower, my compliments.

[HORNBLOWER with a stare at HILLCRIST'S half-smiling face, takes CHLOE'S arm, and half drags her towards the door on the Left. But there, in the opened doorway, are standing DAWKER and a STRANGER. They move just out of the way of the exit, looking at CHLOE, who sways and very nearly falls.]

HORNBLOWER. Why! Chloe! What's the matter?

CHLOE. I don't know; I'm not well to-day.

[She pulls herself together with a great, effort.]

MRS. H. [Who has exchanged a nod with DAWKER and the STRANGER] Mr. Hornblower, you build at your peril. I warn you.

HORNBLOWER. [Turning round to speak] Ye think yourself very cool and very smart. But I doubt this is the first time ye've been up against realities. Now, I've been up against them all my life. Don't talk to me, ma'am, about peril and that sort of nonsense; it makes no impression. Your husband called me pachydermatous. I don't know Greek, and Latin, and all that, but I've looked it out in the dictionary, and I find it means thick-skinned. And I'm none the worse for that when I have to deal with folk like you. Good afternoon.

[He draws CHLOE forward, and they pass through the door, followed quickly by ROLF.]

MRS. H. Thank you; Dawker.

[She moves up to DAWKER and the STRANGER, Left, and they talk.]

JILL. Dodo! It's awful!

HILLCRIST. Well, there's nothing for it now but to smile and pay up. Poor old home! It shall be his wash-pot. Over the Centry will he cast his shoe. By Gad, Jill, I could cry!

JILL. [Pointing] Look! Chloe's sitting down. She nearly fainted just now. It's something to do with Dawker, Dodo, and that man with him. Look at mother! Ask them!

HILLCRIST. Dawker!

[DAWKER comes to him, followed by MRS. HILLCRIST.]

What's the mystery about young Mrs. Hornblower?

DAWKER. No mystery.

HILLCRIST. Well, what is it?

MRS. H. You'd better not ask.

HILLCRIST. I wish to know.

MRS. H. Jill, go out and wait for us.

JILL. Nonsense, mother!

MRS. H. It's not for a girl to hear.

JILL. Bosh! I read the papers every day.

DAWKER. It's nothin' worse than you get there, anyway.

MRS. H. Do you wish your daughter—

JILL. It's ridiculous, Dodo; you'd think I was mother at my age.

MRS. H. I was not so proud of my knowledge.

JILL. No, but you had it, dear.

HILLCRIST. What is it—what is it? Come over here, Dawker.

[DAWKER goes to him, Right, and speaks in a low voice.]

What! [Again DAWKER speaks in, a low voice.]

Good God!

MRS. H. Exactly!

JILL. Poor thing—whatever it is!

MRS. H. Poor thing?

JILL. What went before, mother?

MRS. H. It's what's coming after that matters; luckily.

HILLCRIST. How do you know this?

DAWKER. My friend here [He points to the STRANGER] was one of the agents.

HILLCRIST. It's shocking. I'm sorry I heard it.

MRS. H. I told you not to.

HILLCRIST. Ask your friend to come here.

[DAWKER beckons, and the STRANGER joins the group.]

Are you sure of what you've said, sir?

STRANGER. Perfectly. I remember her quite well; her name then was—

HILLCRIST. I don't want to know, thank you. I'm truly sorry. I wouldn't wish the knowledge of that about his womenfolk to my worst enemy. This mustn't be spoken of. [JILL hugs his arm.]

MRS. H. It will not be if Mr. Hornblower is wise. If he is not wise, it must be spoken of.

HILLCRIST. I say no, Amy. I won't have it. It's a dirty weapon. Who touches pitch shall be defiled.

MRS. H. Well, what weapons does he use against us? Don't be quixotic. For all we can tell, they know it quite well already, and if they don't they ought to. Anyway, to know this is our salvation, and we must

use it.

JILL: [Sotto voce] Pitch! Dodo! Pitch!

DAWKER. The threat's enough! J.P.—Chapel—Future member for the constituency—.

HILLCRIST. [A little more doubtfully] To use a piece of knowledge about a woman—it's repugnant. I—I won't do it.

[Mrs. H. If you had a son tricked into marrying such a woman, would you wish to remain ignorant of it?]

HILLCRIST. [Struck] I don't know—I don't know.

MRS. H. At least, you'd like to be in a position to help him, if you thought it necessary?

HILLCRIST. Well—that perhaps.

MRS. H. Then you agree that Mr. Hornblower at least should be told. What he does with the knowledge is not our affair.

HILLCRIST. [Half to the STRANGER and half to DAWKER] Do you realise that an imputation of that kind may be ground for a criminal libel action?

STRANGER. Quite. But there's no shadow of doubt; not the faintest. You saw her just now?

HILLCRIST. I did. [Revolting again] No; I don't like it.

[DAWKER has drawn the STRANGER a step or two away, and they talk together.]

MRS. H. [In a low voice] And the ruin of our home? You're betraying your fathers, Jack.

HILLCRIST. I can't bear bringing a woman into it.

MRS. H. We don't. If anyone brings her in; it will be Hornblower himself.

HILLCRIST. We use her secret as a lever.

MRS. H. I tell you quite plainly: I will only consent to holding my tongue about her, if you agree to Hornblower being told. It's a scandal to have a woman like that in the neighbourhood.

JILL. Mother means that, father.

HILLCRIST. Jill, keep quiet. This is a very bitter position. I can't tell what to do.

MRS. H. You must use this knowledge. You owe it to me—to us all. You'll see that when you've thought it over.

JILL. [Softly] Pitch, Dodo, pitch!

MRS. H. [Furiously] Jill, be quiet!

HILLCRIST. I was brought up never to hurt a woman. I can't do it, Amy—I can't do it. I should never feel like a gentleman again.

MRS. H. [Coldly] Oh! Very well.

HILLCRIST. What d'you mean by that?

MRS. H. I shall use the knowledge in my own way.

HILLCRIST. [Staring at her] You would—against my wishes?

MRS. H. I consider it my duty.

HILLCRIST. If I agree to Hornblower being told—

MRS. H. That's all I want.

HILLCRIST. It's the utmost I'll consent to, Amy; and don't let's have any humbug about its being, morally necessary. We do it to save our skins.

MRS. H. I don't know what you mean by humbug?

JILL. He means humbug; mother.

HILLCRIST. It must stop at old Hornblower. Do you quite understand?

MRS. H. Quite.

JILL. Will it stop?

MRS. H. Jill, if you can't keep your impertinence to yourself—

HILLCRIST. Jill, come with me.

[He turns towards door, Back.]

JILL. I'm sorry, mother. Only it is a skin game, isn't it?

MRS. H. You pride yourself on plain speech, Jill. I pride myself on plain thought. You will thank me afterwards that I can see realities. I know we are better people than these Hornblowers. Here we are going to stay, and they—are not.

JILL. [Looking at her with a sort of unwilling admiration] Mother, you're wonderful!

HILLCRIST. Jill!

JILL. Coming, Dodo.

[She turns and runs to the door. They go out.]

[MRS. HILLCRIST, with a long sigh, draws herself up, fine and proud.]

MRS. H. Dawker! [He comes to her.]

[I shall send him a note to-night, and word it so that he will be bound to come and see us to-morrow morning. Will you be in the study just before eleven o'clock, with this gentleman?]

DAWKER. [Nodding] We're going to wire for his partner. I'll bring him too. Can't make too sure.

[She goes firmly up the steps and out.]

DAWKER. [To the STRANGER, with a wink] The Squire's squeamish—too much of a gentleman. But he don't count. The grey mare's all right. You wire to Henry. I'm off to our solicitors. We'll make that old rhinoceros sell us back the Centry at a decent price. These Hornblowers—[Laying his finger on his nose] We've got 'em!

CURTAIN

SCENE II

CHLOE's boudoir at half-past seven the same evening. A pretty room. No pictures on the walls, but two mirrors. A screen and a luxurious couch on the fireplace side, stage Left. A door rather Right of Centre Back; opening inwards. A French window, Right forward: A writing table, Right Back. Electric light burning.

CHLOE, in a tea-gown, is standing by the forward end of the sofa, very still, and very pale. Her lips are parted, and her large eyes stare straight before them as if seeing ghosts: The door is opened noiselessly and a WOMAN'S face is seen. It peers at CHLOE, vanishes, and the door is closed. CHLOE raises her hands, covers her eyes with them, drops them with a quick gesture, and looks round her. A knock. With a swift movement she slides on to the sofa, and lies prostrate, with eyes closed.

CHLOE. [Feebly] Come in!

[Her Maid enters; a trim, contained figure of uncertain years, in a black dress, with the face which was peering in.]

Yes, Anna?

ANNA. Aren't you going in to dinner, ma'am?

CHLOE. [With closed eyes] No.

ANNA. Will you take anything here, ma'am?

CHLOE. I'd like a biscuit and a glass of champagne.

[The MAID, who is standing between sofa and door, smiles.

CHLOE, with a swift look, catches the smile.]

Why do you smile?

ANNA. Was I, ma'am?

CHLOE. You know you were. [Fiercely] Are you paid to smile at me?

ANNA. [Immovable] No, ma'am, Would you like some eau de Cologne on your forehead?

CHLOE. Yes.—No.—What's the good? [Clasping her forehead] My headache won't go.

ANNA. To keep lying down's the best thing for it.

CHLOE. I have been—hours.

ANNA. [With the smile] Yes, ma'am.

CHLOE. [Gathering herself up on the sofa] Anna! Why do you do it?

ANNA. Do what, ma'am?

CHLOE. Spy on me.

ANNA. I—never! I—!

CHLOE. To spy! You're a fool, too. What is there to spy on?

ANNA. Nothing, ma'am. Of course, if you're not satisfied with me, I must give notice. Only—if I were spying, I should expect to have notice given me. I've been accustomed to ladies who wouldn't stand such a thing for a minute.

CHLOE: [Intently] Well, you'll take a month's wages and go tomorrow. And that's all, now.

[ANNA inclines her head and goes out.]

[CHLOE, with a sort of moan, turns over and buries her face in the cushion.]

CHLOE. [Sitting up] If I could see that man—if only—or Dawker—

[She springs up and goes to the door, but hesitates, and comes back to the head of the sofa, as ROLF comes in. During this scene the door is again opened stealthily, an inch or too.]

ROLF. How's the head?

CHLOE. Beastly, thanks. I'm not going into dinner.

ROLF. Is there anything I can do for you?

CHLOE. No, dear boy. [Suddenly looking at him] You don't want this quarrel with the Hillcrist's to go on, do you, Rolf?

ROLF. No; I hate it.

CHLOE. Well, I think I might be able to stop it. Will you slip round to Dawker's—it's not five minutes—and ask him to come and see me.

ROLF. Father and Charlie wouldn't—

CHLOE. I know. But if he comes to the window here while you're at dinner, I'll let him in, and out, and nobody'd know.

ROLF. [Astonished] Yes, but what I mean how—

CHLOE. Don't ask me. It's worth the shot that's all. [Looking at her wrist-watch] To this window at eight o'clock exactly. First long window on the terrace, tell him.

ROLF. It's nothing Charlie would mind?

CHLOE. No; only I can't tell him—he and father are so mad about it all.

ROLF. If there's a real chance—

CHLOE. [Going to the window and opening it] This way, Rolf. If you don't come back I shall know he's coming. Put your watch by mine. [Looking at his watch] It's a minute fast, see!

ROLF. Look here, Chloe

CHLOE. Don't wait; go on.

[She almost pushes him out through the window, closes it after him, draws the curtains again, stands a minute, thinking hard; goes to the bell and rings it; then, crossing to the writing table, Right Back, she takes out a chemist's prescription.]

[ANNA comes in.]

CHLOE. I don't want that champagne. Take this to the chemist and get him to make up some of these cachets quick, and bring them back yourself.

ANNA. Yes, ma'am; but you have some.

CHLOE. They're too old; I've taken two—the strength's out of them. Quick, please; I can't stand this head.

ANNA. [Taking the prescription—with her smile] Yes, ma'am. It'll take some time—you don't want me?

CHLOE. No; I want the cachets.

[ANNA goes out.]

[CHLOE looks at her wrist-watch, goes to the writing-table, which is old-fashioned, with a secret drawer, looks round her, dives at the secret drawer, takes out a roll of notes and a tissue paper parcel. She counts the notes: "Three hundred." Slips them into her breast and unwraps the little parcel. It contains pears. She slips them, too, into her dress, looks round startled, replaces the drawer, and regains her place on the sofa, lying prostrate as the door opens, and HORNBLOWER comes in. She does not open her eyes, and he stands looking at her a moment before speaking.]

HORNBLOWER. [Almost softly] How are ye feelin'. Chloe?

CHLOE. Awful head!

HORNBLOWER: Can ye attend a moment? I've had a note from that woman.

[CHLOE sits up.]

HORNBLOWER. [Reading] "I have something of the utmost importance to tell you in regard to your daughter-in-law. I shall be waiting to see you at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning. The matter is so utterly vital to the happiness of all your family, that I cannot imagine you will fail to come." Now, what's the meaning of it? Is it sheer impudence, or lunacy, or what?

CHLOE. I don't know.

HORNBLOWER. [Not unkindly] Chloe, if there's anything—ye'd better tell me. Forewarned's forearmed.

CHLOE. There's nothing; unless it's—[With a quick look at him,]—

Unless it's that my father was a—a bankrupt.

HORNBLOWER. Hech! Many a man's been that. Ye've never told us much about your family.

CHLOE. I wasn't very proud of him.

HORNBLOWER. Well, ye're not responsible for your father. If that's all, it's a relief. The bitter snobs! I'll remember it in the account I've got with them.

CHLOE. Father, don't say anything to Charlie; it'll only worry him for nothing.

HORNBLOWER. No, no, I'll not. If I went bankrupt, it'd upset Chearlie, I've not a doubt. [He laugh. Looking at her shrewdly] There's nothing else, before I answer her?

[CHLOE shakes her head.]

Ye're sure?

CHLOE. [With an effort] She may invent things, of course.

HORNBLOWER. [Lost in his feud feeling] Ah! but there's such a thing as the laws o' slander. If they play pranks, I'll have them up for it.

CHLOE. [Timidly] Couldn't you stop this quarrel; father? You said it was on my account. But I don't want to know them. And they do love their old home. I like the girl. You don't really need to build just there, do you? Couldn't you stop it? Do!

HORNBLOWER. Stop it? Now I've bought? Na, no! The snobs defied me, and I'm going to show them. I hate the lot of them, and I hate that little Dawker worst of all.

CHLOE. He's only their agent.

HORNBLOWER. He's a part of the whole dog-in-the-manger system that stands in my way. Ye're a woman, and ye don't understand these things. Ye wouldn't believe the struggle I've had to make my money and get my position. These county folk talk soft sawder, but to get anything from them's like gettin' butter out of a dog's mouth. If they could drive me out of here by fair means or foul, would they hesitate a moment? Not they! See what they've made me pay; and look at this letter. Selfish, mean lot o' hypocrites!

CHLOE. But they didn't begin the quarrel.

HORNBLOWER. Not openly; but underneath they did—that's their way. They began it by thwartin' me here and there and everywhere, just because I've come into me own a bit later than they did. I gave 'em their chance, and they wouldn't take it. Well, I'll show 'em what a man like me can do when he sets his mind to it. I'll not leave much skin on them.

[In the intensity of his feeling he has lost sight of her face, alive with a sort of agony of doubt, whether to plead with him further, or what to do. Then, with a swift glance at her wristwatch, she falls back on the sofa and closes her eyes.]

It'll give me a power of enjoyment seein' me chimneys go up in front of their windies. That was a bonnie thought—that last bid o' mine. He'd got that roused up, I believe, he, never would a' stopped. [Looking at her] I forgot your head. Well, well, ye'll be best tryin' quiet. [The gong sounds.] Shall we send ye something in from dinner?

CHLOE. No; I'll try to sleep. Please tell them I don't want to be disturbed.

HORNBLOWER. All right. I'll just answer this note.

[He sits down at her writing-table.]

[CHLOE starts up from the sofa feverishly, looking at her watch, at the window, at her watch; then softly crosses to the window and opens it.]

HORNBLOWER. [Finishing] Listen! [He turns round towards the sofa] Hallo! Where are ye?

CHLOE. [At the window] It's so hot.

HORNBLOWER. Here's what I've said:

"MADAM,—You can tell me nothing of my daughter-in-law which can affect the happiness of my family. I regard your note as an impertinence, and I shall not be with you at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning.

"Yours truly—"

CHLOE. [With a suffering movement of her head] Oh!—Well!—[The gong is touched a second time.]

HORNBLOWER. [Crossing to the door] Lie ye down, and get a sleep. I'll tell them not to disturb ye; and I hope ye'll be all right to-morrow. Good-night, Chloe.

CHLOE. Good-night. [He goes out.]

[After a feverish turn or two, CHLOE returns to the open window and waits there, half screened by the curtains. The door is opened inch by inch, and ANNA'S head peers round. Seeing where CHLOE is, she slips in and passes behind the screen, Left. Suddenly CHLOE backs in from the window.]

CHLOE. [In a low voice] Come in.

[She darts to the door and locks it.]

[DAWKER has come in through the window and stands regarding her with a half smile.]

DAWKER. Well, young woman, what do you want of me?

[In the presence of this man of her own class, there comes a distinct change in CHLOE'S voice and manner; a sort of frank commonness, adapted to the man she is dealing with, but she keeps her voice low.]

CHLOE. You're making a mistake, you know.

DAWKER. [With a broad grin] No. I've got a memory for faces.

CHLOE. I say you are.

DAWKER. [Turning to go] If that's all, you needn't have troubled me to come.

CHLOE. No. Don't go! [With a faint smile] You are playing a game with me. Aren't you ashamed? What harm have I done you? Do you call this cricket?

DAWKER. No, my girl—business.

CHLOE. [Bitterly] What have I to do with this quarrel? I couldn't help their falling out.

DAWKER. That's your misfortune.

CHLOE. [Clasping her hands] You're a cruel fellow if you can spoil a woman's life who never did you an ounce of harm.

DAWKER. So they don't know about you. That's all right. Now, look here, I serve my employer. But I'm flesh and blood, too, and I always give as good as I get. I hate this family of yours. There's no name too bad for 'em to call me this last month, and no looks too black to give me. I tell you frankly, I hate.

CHLOE. There's good in them same as in you.

DAWKER. [With a grin] There's no good Hornblower but a dead Hornblower.

CHLOE. But—but Im not one.

DAWKER. You'll be the mother of some, I shouldn't wonder.

CHLOE. [Stretching out her hand-pathetically] Oh! leave me alone, do! I'm happy here. Be a sport! Be a sport!

DAWKER. [Disconcerted for a second] You can't get at me, so don't try it on.

CHLOE. I had such a bad time in old days.

[DAWKER shakes his head; his grin has disappeared and his face is like wood.]

CHLOE. [Panting] Ah! do! You might! You've been fond of some woman, I suppose. Think of her!

DAWKER. [Decisively] It won't do, Mrs. Chloe. You're a pawn in the game, and I'm going to use you.

CHLOE. [Despairingly] What is it to you? [With a sudden touch of the tigress] Look here! Don't you make an enemy, of me. I haven't dragged through hell for nothing. Women like me can bite, I tell you.

DAWKER. That's better. I'd rather have a woman threaten than whine, any day. Threaten away! You'll let 'em know that you met me in the Promenade one night. Of course you'll let 'em know that, won't you?—or that—

CHLOE. Be quiet! Oh! Be quiet! [Taking from her bosom the notes and the pearls] Look! There's my savings—there's all I've got! The pearls'll fetch nearly a thousand. [Holding it out to him] Take it, and drop me out—won't you? Won't you?

DAWKER. [Passing his tongue over his lips with a hard little laugh] You mistake your man, missis. I'm a plain dog, if you like, but I'm faithful, and I hold fast. Don't try those games on me.

CHLOE. [Losing control] You're a beast!—a beast! a cruel, cowardly beast! And how dare you bribe that woman here to spy on me? Oh! yes, you do; you know you do. If you drove me mad, you wouldn't care. You beast!

DAWKER. Now, don't carry on! That won't help you.

CHLOE. What d'you call it—to dog a woman down like this, just because you happen to have a quarrel with a man?

DAWKER. Who made the quarrel? Not me, missis. You ought to know that in a row it's the weak and helpless—we won't say the innocent—that get it in the neck. That can't be helped.

CHLOE. [Regarding him intently] I hope your mother or your sister, if you've got any, may go through what I'm going through ever since you got on my track. I hope they'll know what fear means. I hope they'll love and find out that it's hanging on a thread, and—and— Oh! you coward, you persecuting coward! Call yourself a man!

DAWKER. [With his grin] Ah! You look quite pretty like that. By George! you're a handsome woman when you're roused.

[CHLOE'S passion fades out as quickly as it blazed up. She sinks down on the sofa, shudders, looks here and there, and then for a moment up at him.]

CHLOE. Is there anything you'll take, not to spoil my life?
[Clasping her hands on her breast; under her breath] Me?

DAWKER. [Wiping his brow] By God! That's an offer. [He recoils towards the window] You—you touched me there. Look here! I've got to use you and I'm going to use you, but I'll do my best to let you down as easy as I can. No, I don't want anything you can give me—that is—[He wipes his brow again] I'd like it—but I won't take it.

[CHLOE buries her face in her hands.]

There! Keep your pecker up; don't cry. Good-night! [He goes through the window.]

CHLOE. [Springing up] Ugh! Rat in a trap! Rat—!

[She stands listening; flies to the door, unlocks it, and, going back to the sofa, lies down and doses her eyes. CHARLES comes in very quietly and stands over her, looking to see if she is asleep. She opens her eyes.]

CHARLES. Well, Clo! Had a sleep, old girl?

CHLOE. Ye-es.

CHARLES. [Sitting on the arm of the sofa and caressing her] Feel better, dear?

CHLOE. Yes, better, Charlie.

CHARLES. That's right. Would you like some soup?

CHLOE. [With a shudder] No.

CHARLES. I say-what gives you these heads? You've been very on and off all this last month.

CHLOE. I don't know. Except that—except that I am going to have a child, Charlie.

CHARLES. After all! By Jove! Sure?

CHLOE. [Nodding] Are you glad?

CHARLES. Well—I suppose I am. The gov'nor will be mighty pleased, anyway.

CHLOE. Don't tell him—yet.

CHARLES. All right! [Bending over and drawing her to him] My poor girl, I'm so sorry you're seedy. Give us a kiss.

[CHLOE puts up her face and kisses him passionately.]

I say, you're like fire. You're not feverish?

CHLOE. [With a laugh] It's a wonder if I'm not. Charlie, are you happy with me?

CHARLES. What do you think?

CHLOE. [Leaning against him] You wouldn't easily believe things against me, would you?

CHARLES. What! Thinking of those Hillcrists? What the hell that woman means by her attitude towards you—When I saw her there to-day, I had all my work cut out not to go up and give her a bit of my mind.

CHLOE. [Watching him stealthily] It's not good for me, now I'm like this. It's upsetting me, Charlie.

CHARLES. Yes; and we won't forget. We'll make 'em pay for it.

CHLOE. It's wretched in a little place like this. I say, must you go on spoiling their home?

CHARLES. The woman cuts you and insults you. That's enough for me.

CHLOE. [Timidly] Let her. I don't care; I can't bear feeling enemies about, Charlie, I—get nervous—I

CHARLES. My dear girl! What is it?

[He looks at her intently.]

CHLOE. I suppose it's—being like this. [Suddenly] But, Charlie, do stop it for my sake. Do, do!

CHARLES. [Patting her arm] Come, come; I say, Chloe! You're making mountains. See things in proportion. Father's paid nine thousand five hundred to get the better of those people, and you want him to chuck it away to save a woman who's insulted you. That's not sense, and it's not business. Have some pride.

CHLOE. [Breathless] I've got no pride, Charlie. I want to be quiet—that's all.

CHARLES. Well, if the row gets on your nerves, I can take you to the sea. But you ought to enjoy a fight with people like that.

CHLOE. [With calculated bitterness] No, it's nothing, of course— what I want.

CHARLES. Hello! Hello! You are on the jump!

CHLOE. If you want me to be a good wife to you, make father stop it.

CHARLES. [Standing up] Now, look here, Chloe, what's behind this?

CHLOE. [Faintly] Behind?

CHARLES. You're carrying on as if—as if you were really scared! We've got these people: We'll have them out of Deepwater in six months. It's absolute ruination to their beastly old house; we'll put the chimneys on the very edge, not three hundred yards off, and our smoke'll be drifting over them half the time. You won't have this confounded stuck-up woman here much longer. And then we can really go

ahead and take our proper place. So long as she's here, we shall never do that. We've only to drive on now as fast as we can.

CHLOE. [With a gesture] I see.

CHARLES. [Again looking at her] If you go on like this, you know, I shall begin to think there's something you—

CHLOE [softly] Charlie! [He comes to her.] Love me!

CHARLES. [Embracing her] There, old girl! I know women are funny at these times. You want a good night, that's all.

CHLOE. You haven't finished dinner, have you? Go back, and I'll go to bed quite soon. Charlie, don't stop loving me.

CHARLES. Stop? Not much.

[While he is again embracing her, ANNA steals from behind the screen to the door, opens it noiselessly, and passes through, but it clicks as she shuts it.]

CHLOE. [Starting violently] Oh-h!

[He comes to her.]

CHARLES. What is it? What is it? You are nervy, my dear.

CHLOE. [Looking round with a little laugh] I don't know. Go on, Charlie. I'll be all right when this head's gone.

CHARLES. [Stroking her forehead and, looking at her doubtfully] You go to bed; I won't be late coming up.

[He turn, and goes, blowing a kiss from the doorway. When he is gone, CHLOE gets up and stands in precisely the attitude in which she stood at the beginning of the Act, thinking, and thinking. And the door is opened, and the face of the MAID peers round at her.]

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I

HILLCRIST'S study next morning.

JILL coming from Left, looks in at the open French window.

JILL. [Speaking to ROLF, invisible] Come in here. There's no one.

[She goes in. ROLF joins her, coming from the garden.]

ROLF. Jill, I just wanted to say—Need we?

[JILL. nods.]

Seeing you yesterday—it did seem rotten.

JILL. We didn't begin it.

ROLF. No; but you don't understand. If you'd made yourself, as father has—

JILL. I hope I should be sorry.

ROLF. [Reproachfully] That isn't like you. Really he can't help thinking he's a public benefactor.

JILL. And we can't help thinking he's a pig. Sorry!

ROLF. If the survival of the fittest is right—

JILL. He may be fitter, but he's not going to survive.

ROLF. [Distracted] It looks like it, though.

JILL. Is that all you came to say?

ROLF. Suppose we joined, couldn't we stop it?

JILL. I don't feel like joining.

ROLF. We did shake hands.

JILL. One can't fight and not grow bitter.

ROLF. I don't feel bitter.

JILL. Wait; you'll feel it soon enough.

ROLF. Why? [Attentively] About Chloe? I do think your mother's manner to her is—

JILL. Well?

ROLF. Snobbish. [JILL laughs.] She may not be your class; and that's just why it's snobbish.

JILL. I think you'd better shut up.

ROLF. What my father said was true; your mother's rudeness to her that day she came here, has made both him and Charlie ever so much more bitter.

[JILL whistles the Habanera from "Carmen."]

[Staring at her, rather angrily]

Is it a whistling matter?

JILL. No.

ROLF. I suppose you want me to go?

JILL. Yes.

ROLF. All right. Aren't we ever going to be friends again?

JILL. [Looking steadily at him] I don't expect so.

ROLF. That's very-horrible.

JILL. Lots of horrible things in the world.

ROLF. It's our business to make them fewer, Jill.

JILL. [Fiercely] Don't be moral.

ROLF. [Hurt] That's the last thing I want to be.—I only want to be friendly.

JILL. Better be real first.

ROLF. From the big point of view—

JILL. There isn't any. We're all out, for our own. And why not?

ROLF. By jove, you have got—

JILL. Cynical? Your father's motto—"Every man for himself."
That's the winner—hands down. Goodbye!

ROLF. Jill! Jill!

JILL. [Putting her hands behind her back, hums]—
"If auld acquaintance be forgot

And days of auld lang syne"—

ROLF. Don't!

[With a pained gesture he goes out towards Left, through the French window.]

[JILL, who has broken off the song, stands with her hands clenched and her lips quivering.]

[FELLOWS enters Left.]

FELLOWS. Mr. Dawker, Miss, and two gentlemen.

JILL. Let the three gentlemen in, and me out.

[She passes him and goes out Left. And immediately. DAWKER and the two STRANGERS come in.]

FELLOWS. I'll inform Mrs. Hillcrist, sir. The Squire is on his rounds. [He goes out Left.]

[The THREE MEN gather in a discreet knot at the big bureau, having glanced at the two doors and the open French window.]

DAWKER. Now this may come into Court, you know. If there's a screw loose anywhere, better mention it. [To SECOND STRANGE] You knew her personally?

SECOND S. What do you think? I don't, take girls on trust for that sort of job. She came to us highly recommended, too; and did her work very well. It was a double stunt—to make sure—wasn't it, George?

FIRST S. Yes; we paid her for the two visits.

SECOND S. I should know her in a minute; striking looking girl; had something in her face. Daresay she'd seen hard times.

FIRST S. We don't want publicity.

DAWKER. Not Likely. The threat'll do it; but the stakes are heavy—and the man's a slugger; we must be able to push it home. If you can both swear to her, it'll do the trick.

SECOND S. And about—I mean, we're losing time, you know, coming down here.

DAWKER. [With a nod at FIRST STRANGER] George here knows me. That'll be all right. I'll guarantee it well worth your while.

SECOND S. I don't want to do the girl harm, if she's married.

DAWKER. No, no; nobody wants to hurt her. We just want a cinch on this fellow till he squeals.

[They separate a little as MRS. HILLCRIST enters from Right.]

DAWKER. Good morning, ma'am. My friend's partner. Hornblower coming?

MRS. H. At eleven. I had to send up a second note, Dawker.

DAWKER. Squire not in?

MRS. H. I haven't told him.

DAWKER. [Nodding] Our friends might go in here [Pointing Right] and we can use 'em as the want 'em.

MRS. H. [To the STRANGERS] Will you make yourselves comfortable?

[She holds the door open, and they pass her into the room, Right.]

DAWKER. [Showing document] I've had this drawn and engrossed. Pretty sharp work. Conveys the Centry, and Longmeadow; to the Squire at four thousand five hundred: Now, ma'am, suppose Hornblower puts his hand to that, hell have been done in the eye, and six thousand all told out o' pocket.—You'll have a very nasty neighbour here.

MRS. H. But we shall still have the power to disclose that secret at any time.

DAWKER. Yeh! But things might happen here you could never bring home to him. You can't trust a man like that. He isn't goin' to forgive me, I know.

MRS. H. [Regarding him keenly] But if he signs, we couldn't honourably——

DAWKER. No, ma'am, you couldn't; and I'm sure I don't want to do that girl a hurt. I just mention it because, of course, you can't guarantee that it doesn't get out.

MRS. H. Not absolutely, I suppose.

[A look passes between them, which neither of them has quite sanctioned.]

[There's his car. It always seems to make more noise than any other.]

DAWKER. He'll kick and flounder—but you leave him to ask what you want, ma'am; don't mention this [He puts the deed back into his pocket]. The Centry's no mortal good to him if he's not going to put up works; I should say he'd be glad to save what he can.

[MRS. HILLCRIST inclines her head. FELLOWS enters Left.]

FELLOWS. [Apologetically] Mr. Hornblower, ma'am; by appointment, he says.

MRS. H. Quite right, Fellows.

[HORNBLOWER comes in, and FELLOWS goes out.]

HORNBLOWER. [Without salutation] I've come to ask ye point bleak what ye mean by writing me these letters. [He takes out two letters.] And we'll discuss it in the presence of nobody, if ye, please.

MRS. H. Mr. Dawker knows all that I know, and more.

HORNBLOWER. Does he? Very well! Your second note says that my daughter-in-law has lied to me. Well, I've brought her, and what ye've got to say—if it's not just a trick to see me again—ye'll say to her face. [He takes a step towards the window.]

MRS. H. Mr. Hornblower, you had better, decide that after hearing what it is—we shall be quite ready to repeat it in her presence; but we want to do as little harm as possible.

HORNBLOWER. [Stopping] Oh! ye do! Well, what lies have ye been hearin'? Or what have ye made up? You and Mr. Dawker? Of course ye know there's a law of libel and slander. I'm, not the man to stop at that.

MRS. H. [Calmly] Are you familiar with the law of divorce, Mr. Hornblower?

HORNBLOWER. [Taken aback] No, I'm not. That is——.

MRS. H. Well, you know that misconduct is required. And I suppose you've heard that cases are arranged.

HORNBLOWER. I know it's all very shocking—what about it?

MRS. H. When cases are arranged, Mr. Hornblower, the man who is to be divorced often visits an hotel with a strange woman. I am extremely sorry to say that your daughter-in-law, before her marriage, was in the habit of being employed as such a woman.

HORNBLOWER. Ye dreadful creature!

DAWKER. [Quickly] All proved, up to the hilt!

HORNBLOWER. I don't believe a word of it. Ye're lyin' to save your skins. How dare ye tell me such monstrosities? Dawker, I'll have ye in a criminal court.

DAWKER. Rats! You saw a gent with me yesterday? Well, he's employed her.

HORNBLOWER. A put-up job! Conspiracy!

MRS. H. Go and get your daughter-in-law.

HORNBLOWER. [With the first sensation of being in a net] It's a foul shame—a lying slander!

MRS. H. If so, it's easily disproved. Go and fetch her.

HORNBLOWER. [Seeing them unmoved] I will. I don't believe a word of it.

MRS. H. I hope you are right.

[HORNBLOWER goes out by the French window, DAWKER slips to the door Right, opens it, and speaks to those within. MRS. HILLCRIST stands moistening her lips, and passes her handkerchief over them. HORNBLOWER returns, preceding CHLOE, strung up to hardness and defiance.]

HORNBLOWER. Now then, let's have this impudent story torn to rags.

CHLOE. What story?

HORNBLOWER. That you, my dear, were a woman—it's too shockin—I don't know how to tell ye—

CHLOE. Go on!

HORNBLOWER. Were a woman that went with men, to get them their divorce.

CHLOE. Who says that?

HORNBLOWER. That lady [Sneering] there, and her bull-terrier here.

CHLOE. [Facing MRS. HILLCRIST] That's a charitable thing to say, isn't it?

MRS. H. Is it true?

CHLOE. No.

HORNBLOWER. [Furiously] There! I'll have ye both on your knees to her!

DAWKER. [Opening the door, Right] Come in.

[The FIRST STRANGER comes in. CHLOE, with a visible effort, turns to face him.]

FIRST S. How do you do, Mrs. Vane?

CHLOE. I don't know you.

FIRST S. Your memory is bad, ma'am: You knew me yesterday well enough. One day is not a long time, nor are three years.

CHLOE. Who are you?

FIRST S. Come, ma'am, come! The Caster case.

CHLOE. I don't know you, I say. [To MRS. HILLCRIST] How can you be so vile?

FIRST S. Let me refresh your memory, ma'am. [Producing a notebook] Just on three years ago; "Oct. 3. To fee and expenses Mrs. Vane with Mr. C—, Hotel Beaulieu, Twenty pounds. Oct. 10, Do., Twenty pounds." [To HORNBLOWER] Would you like to glance at this book, sir? You'll see they're genuine entries.

[HORNBLOWER makes a motion to do so, but checks himself and looks at CHLOE.]

CHLOE. [Hysterically] It's all lies—lies!

FIRST S. Come, ma'am, we wish you no harm.

CHLOE. Take me away. I won't be treated like this.

MRS. H. [In a low voice] Confess.

CHLOE. Lies!

HORNBLOWER. Were ye ever called Vane?

CHLOE. No, never.

[She makes a movement towards the window, but DAWKER is in the way, and she halts.
FIRST S. [Opening the door, Right] Henry.]

[The SECOND STRANGER comes in quickly. At sight of him CHLOE throws up her hands, gasps, breaks down, stage Left, and stands covering her face with her hands. It is so complete a confession that HORNBLOWER stands staggered; and, taking out a coloured handkerchief, wipes his brow.]

DAWKER. Are you convinced?

HORNBLOWER. Take those men away.

DAWKER. If you're not satisfied, we can get other evidence; plenty.

HORNBLOWER. [Looking at CHLOE] That's enough. Take them out.
Leave me alone with her.

[DAWKER takes them out Right. MRS. HILLCRIST passes HORNBLOWER and goes out at the window. HORNBLOWER moves down a step or two towards CHLOE.]

HORNBLOWER. My God!

CHLOE. [With an outburst] Don't tell Charlie! Don't tell Charlie!

HORNBLOWER. Chearlie! So, that was your manner of life.

[CHLOE utters a moaning sound.]

So that's what ye got out of by marryin' into my family! Shame on ye, ye Godless thing!

CHLOE. Don't tell Charlie!

HORNBLOWER. And that's all ye can say for the wreck ye've wrought.
My family, my works, my future! How dared ye!

CHLOE. If you'd been me!—

HORNBLOWER. An' these Hillcrist. The skin game of it!

CHLOE. [Breathless] Father!

HORNBLOWER. Don't call me that, woman!

CHLOE. [Desperate] I'm going to have a child.

HORNBLOWER. God! Ye are!

CHLOE. Your grandchild. For the sake of it, do what these people want; and don't tell anyone—
DON'T TELL CHARLIE!

HORNBLOWER. [Again wiping his forehead] A secret between us. I don't know that I can keep it. It's horrible. Poor Chearlie!

CHLOE. [Suddenly fierce] You must keep it, you shall! I won't have him told. Don't make me desperate! I can be—I didn't live that life for nothing.

HORNBLOWER. [Staring at her resealed in a new light] Ay; ye look a strange, wild woman, as I see ye. And we thought the world of ye!

CHLOE. I love Charlie; I'm faithful to him. I can't live without him. You'll never forgive me, I know; but Charlie—! [Stretching out her hands.]

[HORNBLOWER makes a bewildered gesture with his large hands.]

HORNBLOWER. I'm all at sea here. Go out to the car and wait for me.

[CHLOE passes him and goes out, Left.]

[Muttering to himself] So I'm down! Me enemies put their heels upon me head! Ah! but we'll see yet!

[He goes up to the window and beckons towards the Right.]

[MRS. HILLCRIST comes in.]

What d'ye want for this secret?

MRS. H. Nothing.

HORNBLOWER. Indeed! Wonderful!—the trouble ye've taken for— nothing.

MRS. H. If you harm us we shall harm you. Any use whatever of the Centry.

HORNBLOWER. For which ye made me pay nine thousand five hundred pounds.

MRS. H. We will buy it from you.

HORNBLOWER. At what price?

MRS. H. The Centry at the price Miss Muffins would have taken at first, and Longmeadow at the price you—gave us—four thousand five hundred altogether.

HORNBLOWER. A fine price, and me six thousand out of pocket. Na, no! I'll keep it and hold it over ye. Ye daren't tell this secret so long as I've got it.

MRS. H. No, Mr. Hornblower. On second thoughts, you must sell. You broke your word over the Jackmans. We can't trust you. We would rather have our place here ruined at once, than leave you the power to ruin it as and when you like. You will sell us the Centry and Longmeadow now, or you know what will happen.

HORNBLOWER. [Writhing] I'll not. It's blackmail.

MRS. H. Very well then! Go your own way and we'll go ours. There is no witness to this conversation.

HORNBLOWER. [Venomously] By heaven, ye're a clever woman. Will ye swear by Almighty God that you and your family, and that agent of yours, won't breathe a word of this shockin' thing to mortal soul.

MRS. H. Yes, if you sell.

HORNBLOWER. Where's Dawker?

MRS. H. [Going to the door, Right] Mr. Dawker

[DAWKER comes in.]

HORNBLOWER. I suppose ye've got your iniquity ready.

[DAWKER grins and produces the document.]

It's mighty near conspiracy, this. Have ye got a Testament?

MRS. H. My word will be enough, Mr. Hornblower.

HORNBLOWER. Ye'll pardon me—I can't make it solemn enough for you.

MRS. H. Very well; here is a Bible.

[She takes a small Bible from the bookshelf.]

DAWKER. [Spreading document on bureau] This is a short conveyance of the Centry and Longmeadow—recites sale to you by Miss Mulling, of the first, John Hillcrist of the second, and whereas you have agreed for the sale to said John Hillcrist, for the sum of four thousand five hundred pounds, in consideration of the said sum, receipt whereof, you hereby acknowledge you do convey all that, etc. Sign here. I'll witness.

HORNBLOWER [To MRS. HILLCRIST] Take that Book in your hand, and swear first. I swear by Almighty God never to breathe a word of what I know concerning Chloe Hornblower to any living soul.

MRS. H. No, Mr. Hornblower; you will please sign first. We are not in the habit of breaking our word.

[HORNBLOWER after a furious look at them, seizes a pen, runs his eye again over the deed, and signs, DAWKER witnessing.]

To that oath, Mr. Hornblower, we shall add the words, "So long as the Hornblower family do us no harm."

HORNBLOWER. [With a snarl] Take it in your hands, both of ye, and together swear.

MRS. H. [Taking the Book] I swear that I will breathe no word of what I know concerning Chloe Hornblower to any living soul, so long as the Hornblower family do us no harm.

DAWKER. I swear that too.

MRS. H. I engage for my husband.

HORNBLOWER. Where are those two fellows?

DAWKER. Gone. It's no business of theirs.

HORNBLOWER. It's no business of any of ye what has happened to a woman in the past. Ye know that. Good-day!

[He gives them a deadly look, and goes out, left, followed by
DAWKER.]

MRS. H. [With her hand on the Deed] Safe!

[HILLCRIST enters at the French window, followed by JILL.]

[Holding up the Deed] Look! He's just gone! I told you it was only necessary to use the threat. He caved in and signed this; we are sworn to say nothing. We've beaten him.

[HILLCRIST studies the Deed.]

JILL. [Awed] We saw Chloe in the car. How did she take it, mother?

MRS. H. Denied, then broke down when she saw our witnesses. I'm glad you were not here, Jack.

JILL. [Suddenly] I shall go and see her.

MRS. H. Jill, you will not; you don't know what she's done.

JILL. I shall. She must be in an awful state.

HILLCRIST. My dear, you can do her no good.

JILL. I think I can, Dodo.

MRS. H. You don't understand human nature. We're enemies for life with those people. You're a little donkey if you think anything else.

JILL. I'm going, all the same.

MRS. H. Jack, forbid her.

HILLCRIST. [Lifting an eyebrow] Jill, be reasonable.

JILL. Suppose I'd taken a knock like that, Dodo, I'd be glad of friendliness from someone.

MRS. H. You never could take a knock like that.

JILL. You don't know what you can do till you try, mother.

HILLCRIST. Let her go, Amy. Im sorry for that young woman.

MRS. H. You'd be sorry for a man who picked your pocket, I believe.

HILLCRIST. I certainly should! Deuced little he'd get out of it, when I've paid for the Centry.

MRS. H. [Bitterly] Much gratitude I get for saving you both our home!

JILL. [Disarmed] Oh! Mother, we are grateful. Dodo, show your gratitude.

HILLCRIST. Well, my dear, it's an intense relief. I'm not good at showing my feelings, as you know. What d'you want me to do? Stand on one leg and crow?

JILL. Yes, Dodo, yes! Mother, hold him while I [Suddenly she stops, and all the fun goes out of her] No! I can't—I can't help thinking of her.

CURTAIN falls for a minute.

SCENE II

When it rises again, the room is empty and dark, same for moonlight coming in through the French window, which is open.

The figure of CHLOE, in a black cloak, appears outside in the moonlight; she peers in, moves past, comes bank, hesitatingly enters. The cloak, fallen back, reveals a white evening dress; and that magpie figure stands poised watchfully in the dim light, then flaps unhappily Left and Right, as if she could not keep still. Suddenly she stands listening.

ROLF'S VOICE. [Outside] Chloe! Chloe!

[He appears]

CHLOE. [Going to the window] What are you doing here?

ROLF. What are you? I only followed you.

CHLOE. Go away.

ROLF. What's the matter? Tell me!

CHLOE. Go away, and don't say anything. Oh! The roses! [She has put her nose into some roses in a bowl on a big stand close to the window] Don't they smell lovely?

ROLF. What did Jill want this afternoon?

CHLOE. I'll tell you nothing. Go away!

ROLF. I don't like leaving you here in this state.

CHLOE. What state? I'm all right. Wait for me down in the drive, if you want to.

[ROLF starts to go, stops, looks at her, and does go. CHLOE, with a little moaning sound, flutters again, magpie-like, up and down, then stands by the window listening. Voices are heard, Left. She darts out of the window and away to the Right, as HILLCRIST and JILL come in. They have turned up the electric light, and come down in front of the fireplace, where HILLCRIST sits in an armchair, and JILL on the arm of it. They are in undress evening attire.]

HILLCRIST. Now, tell me.

JILL. There isn't much, Dodo. I was in an awful funk for fear I should meet any of the others, and of course I did meet Rolf, but I told him some lie, and he took me to her room-boudoir, they call it —isn't boudoir a "dug-out" word?

HILLCRIST. [Meditatively] The sulking room. Well?

JILL. She was sitting like this. [She buries her chin in her hands, wide her elbows on her knees] And she said in a sort of fierce way: "What do you want?" And I said: "I'm awfully sorry, but I thought you might like it."

HILLCRIST. Well?

JILL. She looked at me hard, and said: "I suppose you know all about it." And I Said: "Only vaguely," because of course I don't. And she said: "Well, it was decent of you to come." Dodo, she looks like a lost soul. What has she done?

HILLCRIST. She committed her real crime when she married young Hornblower without telling him. She came out of a certain world to do it.

JILL. Oh! [Staring in front of her] Is it very awful in that world, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. [Uneasy] I don't know, Jill. Some can stand it, I suppose; some can't. I don't know which sort she is.

JILL. One thing I'm sure of: she's awfully fond of Chearlie.

HILLCRIST. That's bad; that's very bad.

JILL. And she's frightened, horribly. I think she's desperate.

HILLCRIST. Women like that are pretty tough, Jill; don't judge her too much by your own feelings.

JILL. No; only—Oh! it was beastly; and of course I dried up.

HILLCRIST. [Feelingly] H'm! One always does. But perhaps it was as well; you'd have been blundering in a dark passage.

JILL. I just said: "Father and I feel awfully sorry; if there's anything we can do——"

HILLCRIST. That was risky, Jill.

JILL. (Disconsolately) I had to say something. I'm glad I went, anyway. I feel more human.

HILLCRIST. We had to fight for our home. I should have felt like a traitor if I hadn't.

JILL. I'm not enjoying home tonight, Dodo.

HILLCRIST. I never could hate proper; it's a confounded nuisance.

JILL. Mother's fearfully' bucked, and Dawker's simply oozing triumph. I don't trust him. Dodo; he's too—not pugilistic—the other one with a pug-naceous.

HILLCRIST. He is rather.

JILL. I'm sure he wouldn't care tuppence if Chloe committed suicide.

HILLCRIST. [Rising uneasily] Nonsense! Nonsense!

JILL. I wonder if mother would.

HILLCRIST. [Turning his face towards the window] What's that? I thought I heard—[Louder]—Is these anybody out there?

[No answer. JILL, springs up and runs to the window.]

JILL. You!

[She dives through to the Right, and returns, holding CHLOE'S hand and drawing her forward]

Come in! It's only us! [To HILLCRIST] Dodo!

HILLCRIST. [Flustered, but making a show of courtesy] Good evening! Won't you sit down?

JILL. Sit down; you're all shaky.

[She makes CHLOE sit down in the armchair, out of which they have risen, then locks the door, and closing the windows, draws the curtains hastily over them.]

HILLCRIST. [Awkward and expectant] Can I do anything for you?

CHLOE. I couldn't bear it he's coming to ask you——

HILLCRIST. Who?

CHLOE. My husband. [She draws in her breath with a long shudder, then seem to seize her courage in her hands] I've got to be quick. He keeps on asking—he knows there's something.

HILLCRIST. Make your mind easy. We shan't tell him.

CHLOE. [Appealing] Oh! that's not enough. Can't you tell him something to put him back to thinking it's all right? I've done him such a wrong. I didn't realise till after—I thought meeting him was just a piece of wonderful good luck, after what I'd been through. I'm not such a bad lot—not really.

[She stops from the over-quivering of her lips. JILL, standing beside the chair, strokes her shoulder. HILLCRIST stands very still, painfully biting at a finger.]

You see, my father went bankrupt, and I was in a shop——

HILLCRIST. [Soothingly, and to prevent disclosures] Yes, yes; Yes, yes!

CHLOE. I never gave a man away or did anything I was ashamed of—at least—I mean, I had to make my living in all sorts of ways, and then I met Charlie.

[Again she stopped from the quivering of her lips.]

JILL. It's all right.

CHLOE. He thought I was respectable, and that was such a relief, you can't think, so—so I let him.

JILL. Dodo! It's awful

HILLCRIST. It is!

CHLOE. And after I married him, you see, I fell in love. If I had before, perhaps I wouldn't have dared only, I don't know—you never know, do you? When there's a straw going, you catch at it.

JILL. Of course you do.

CHLOE. And now, you see, I'm going to have a child.

JILL. [Aghast] Oh! Are you?

HILLCRIST. Good God!

CHLOE. [Dully] I've been on hot bricks all this month, ever since that day here. I knew it was in the wind. What gets in the wind never gets out. [She rises and throws out her arms] Never! It just blows here and there [Desolately] and then—blows home. [Her voice changes to resentment] But I've paid for being a fool— 't isn't fun, that sort of life, I can tell you. I'm not ashamed and repentant, and all that. If it wasn't for him! I'm afraid he'll never forgive me; it's such a disgrace for him—and then, to have his child! Being fond of him, I feel it much worse than anything I ever felt, and that's saying a good bit. It is.

JILL. [Energetically] Look here! He simply mustn't find out.

CHLOE. That's it; but it's started, and he's bound to keep on because he knows there's something. A man isn't going to be satisfied when there's something he suspects about his wife, Charlie wouldn't never. He's clever, and he's jealous; and he's coming here.

[She stops, and looks round wildly, listening.]

JILL. Dodo, what can we say to put him clean off the scent?

HILLCRIST. Anything—in reason.

CHLOE. [Catching at this straw] You will! You see, I don't know what I'll do. I've got soft, being looked after—he does love me. And if he throws me off, I'll go under—that's all.

HILLCRIST. Have you any suggestion?

CHLOE. [Eagerly] The only thing is to tell him something positive, something he'll believe, that's not too bad—like my having been a lady clerk with those people who came here, and having been dismissed on suspicion of taking money. I could get him to believe that wasn't true.

JILL. Yes; and it isn't—that's splendid! You'd be able to put such conviction into it. Don't you think so, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Anything I can. I'm deeply sorry.

CHLOE. Thank you. And don't say I've been here, will you? He's very suspicious. You see, he knows that his father has re-sold that land to you; that's what he can't make out—that, and my coming here this morning; he knows something's being kept from him; and he noticed that man with Dawker yesterday. And my maid's been spying on me. It's in the air. He puts two and two together. But I've told him there's nothing he need worry about; nothing that's true.

HILLCRIST. What a coil!

CHLOE. I'm very honest and careful about money. So he won't believe that about me, and the old man wants to keep it from Charlie, I know.

HILLCRIST. That does seem the best way out.

CHLOE. [With a touch of defiance] I'm a true wife to him.

CHLOE. Of course we know that.

HILLCRIST. It's all unspeakably sad. Deception's horribly against the grain—but—

CHLOE. [Eagerly] When I deceived him, I'd have deceived God Himself—I was so desperate. You've never been right down in the mud. You can't understand what I've been through.

HILLCRIST. Yes, Yes. I daresay I'd have done the same. I should be the last to judge.

[CHLOE covers her eyes with her hands.]

There, there! Cheer up! [He puts his hand on her arm.]

CHLOE. [To herself] Darling Dodo!

CHLOE. [Starting] There's somebody at the door. I must go; I must go.

[She runs to the window and slips through the curtains.]

[The handle of the door is again turned.]

JILL. [Dismayed] Oh! It's locked—I forgot.

[She springs to the door, unlocks and opens it, while HILLCRIST goes to the bureau and sits down.]

It's all right, Fellows; I was only saying something rather important.

FELLOWS. [Coming in a step or two and closing the door behind him] Certainly, Miss. Mr. Charles 'Ornblower is in the hall. Wants to see you, sir, or Mrs. Hillcrist.

JILL. What a bore! Can you see him, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Er—yes. I suppose so. Show him in here, Fellows.

[As FELLOWS goes out, JILL runs to the window, but has no time to do more than adjust the curtains and spring over to stand by her father, before CHARLES comes in. Though in evening clothes, he is white and disheveled for so spruce a young man.]

CHARLES. Is my wife here?

HILLCRIST. No, sir.

CHARLES. Has she been?

HILLCRIST. This morning, I believe, Jill?

JILL. Yes, she came this morning.

CHARLES. [staring at her] I know that—now, I mean?

JILL. No.

[HILLCRIST shakes his head.]

CHARLES. Tell me what was said this morning.

HILLCRIST. I was not here this morning.

CHARLES. Don't try to put me off. I know too much. [To JILL] You.

JILL. Shall I, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. No; I will. Won't you sit down?

CHARLES. No. Go on.

HILLCRIST. [Moistening his lips] It appears, Mr. Hornblower, that my agent, Mr. Dawker—

[CHARLES, who is breathing hard, utters a sound of anger.]

—that my agent happens to know a firm, who in old days employed your wife. I should greatly prefer not to say any more, especially as we don't believe the story.

JILL. No; we don't.

CHARLES. Go on!

HILLCRIST. [Getting up] Come! If I were you, I should refuse to listen to anything against my wife.

CHARLES. Go on, I tell you.

HILLCRIST. You insist? Well, they say there was some question about the accounts, and your wife left them under a cloud. As I told you, we don't believe it.

CHARLES. [Passionately] Liars!

[He makes a rush for the door.]

HILLCRIST. [Starting] What did you say?

JILL. [Catching his arm] Dodo! [Sotto voce] We are, you know.

CHARLES. [Turning back to them] Why do you tell me that lie? When I've just had the truth out of that little scoundrel! My wife's been here; she put you up to it.

[The face of CHLOE is seen transfixed between the curtains, parted by her hands.]

She—she put you up to it. Liar that she is—a living lie. For three years a living lie!

[HILLCRIST whose face alone is turned towards the curtains, sees that listening face. His hand goes up from uncontrollable emotion.]

And hasn't now the pluck to tell me. I've done with her. I won't own a child by such a woman.

[With a little sighing sound CHLOE drops the curtain and vanishes.]

HILLCRIST. For God's sake, man, think of what you're saying. She's in great distress.

CHARLES. And what am I?

JILL. She loves you, you know.

CHARLES. Pretty love! That scoundrel Dawker told me—told me—Horrible! Horrible!

HILLCRIST. I deeply regret that our quarrel should have brought this about.

CHARLES. [With intense bitterness] Yes, you've smashed my life.

[Unseen by them, MRS. HILLCRIST has entered and stands by the door, Left.]

MRS. H. Would you have wished to live on in ignorance? [They all turn to look at her.]

CHARLES. [With a writhing movement] I don't know. But—you—you did it.

MRS. H. You shouldn't have attacked us.

CHARLES. What did we do to you—compared with this?

MRS. H. All you could.

HILLCRIST. Enough, enough! What can we do to help you?

CHARLES. Tell me where my wife is.

[JILL draws the curtains apart—the window is open—JILL looks out. They wait in silence.]

JILL. We don't know.

CHARLES. Then she was here?

HILLCRIST. Yes, sir; and she heard you.

CHARLES. All the better if she did. She knows how I feel.

HILLCRIST. Brace up; be gentle with her.

CHARLES. Gentle? A woman who—who——

HILLCRIST. A most unhappy creature. Come!

CHARLES. Damn your sympathy!

[He goes out into the moonlight, passing away.]

JILL. Dodo, we ought to look for her; I'm awfully afraid.

HILLCRIST. I saw her there—listening. With child! Who knows where things end when they and begin? To the gravel pit, Jill; I'll go to the pond. No, we'll go together. [They go out.]

[MRS. HILLCRIST comes down to the fireplace, rings the bell and stands there, thinking.
FELLOWS enters.]

MRS. H. I want someone to go down to Mr. Dawker's.

FELLOWS. Mr. Dawker is here, ma'am, waitin' to see you.

MRS. H. Ask him to come in. Oh! and Fellows, you can tell the Jackmans that they can go back to their cottage.

FELLOWS. Very good, ma'am. [He goes out.]

[MRS. HILLCRIST searches at the bureau, finds and takes out the deed. DAWKERS comes in; he has the appearance of a man whose temper has been badly ruffled.]

MRS. H. Charles Hornblower—how did it happen?

DAWKER. He came to me. I said I knew nothing. He wouldn't take it; went for me, abused me up hill and down dale; said he knew everything, and then he began to threaten me. Well, I lost my temper, and I told him.

MRS. H. That's very serious, Dawker, after our promise. My husband is most upset.

DAWKER. [Sullenly] It's not my fault, ma'am; he shouldn't have threatened and goaded me on. Besides, it's got out that there's a scandal; common talk in the village—not the facts, but quite enough to cook their goose here. They'll have to go. Better have done with it, anyway, than have enemies at your door.

MRS. H. Perhaps; but—Oh! Dawker, take charge of this. [She hands him the deed] These people are desperate—and—I'm sot sure of my husband when his feelings are worked on.

[The sound of a car stopping.]

DAWKER. [At the window, looking to the Left] Hornblower's, I think. Yes, he's getting out.

MRS. H. [Bracing herself] You'd better wait, then.

DAWKER. He mustn't give me any of his sauce; I've had enough.

[The door is opened and HORNBLOWER enters, pressing so on the heels of FELLOWS that the announcement of his name is lost.]

HORNBLOWER. Give me that deed! Ye got it out of me by false pretences and treachery. Ye swore that nothing should be heard of this. Why! me own servants know.

MRS. H. That has nothing to do with us. Your son came and wrenched the knowledge out of Mr. DAWKER by abuse and threats; that is all. You will kindly behave yourself here, or I shall ask that you be shown out.

HORNBLOWER. Give me that deed, I say! [He suddenly turns on DAWKER] Ye little ruffian, I see it in your pocket.

[The end indeed is projecting from DAWKER'S breast pocket.]

DAWKER. [Seeing red] Now, look 'ere, 'Ornblower, I stood a deal from your son, and I'll stand no more.

HORNBLOWER. [To MRS. HILLCRIST] I'll ruin your place yet! [To DAWKER] Ye give me that deed, or I'll throttle ye.

[He closes on DAWKER, and makes a snatch at the deed. DAWKER, springs at him, and the two stand swaying, trying for a grip at each other's throats. MRS. HILLCRIST tries to cross and reach the bell, but is shut off by their swaying struggle.]

[Suddenly ROLF appears in the window, looks wildly at the struggle, and seizes DAWKER'S hands, which have reached HORNBLOWER'S throat. JILL, who is following, rushes up to him and clutches his arm.]

JILL. Rolf! All of you! Stop! Look!

[DAWKER'S hand relaxes, and he is swung round. HORNBLOWER staggers and recovers himself, gasping for breath. All turn to the window, outside which in the moonlight HILLCRIST and CHARLES HORNBLOWER have CHLOE'S motionless body in their arms.]

In the gravel pit. She's just breathing; that's all.

MRS. H. Bring her in. The brandy, Jill!

HORNBLOWER. No. Take her to the car. Stand back, young woman! I want no help from any of ye. Rolf—Chearlie—take her up.

[They lift and bear her away, Left. JILL follows.]

Hillcrist, ye've got me beaten and disgraced hereabouts, ye've destroyed my son's married life, and ye've killed my grandchild. I'm not staying in this cursed spot, but if ever I can do you or yours a hurt, I will.

DAWKER. [Muttering] That's right. Squeal and threaten. You began it.

HILLCRIST. Dawker, have the goodness! Hornblower, in the presence of what may be death, with all my heart I'm sorry.

HORNBLOWER. Ye hypocrite!

[He passes them with a certain dignity, and goes out at the window, following to his car.]

[HILLCRIST who has stood for a moment stock-still, goes slowly forward and sits in his swivel chair.]

MRS. H. Dawker, please tell Fellows to telephone to Dr. Robinson to go round to the Hornblowers at once.

[DAWKER, fingering the deed, and with a noise that sounds like "The cur!" goes out, Left.]

[At the fireplace]

Jack! Do you blame me?

HILLCRIST. [Motionless] No.

MRS. H. Or Dawker? He's done his best.

HILLCRIST. No.

MRS. H. [Approaching] What is it?

HILLCRIST. Hypocrite!

[JILL comes running in at the window.]

JILL. Dodo, she's moved; she's spoken. It may not be so bad.

HILLCRIST. Thank God for that!

[FELLOWS enters, Left.]

FELLOWS. The Jackmans, ma'am.

HILLCRIST. Who? What's this?

[The JACKMANS have entered, standing close to the door.]

MRS. J. We're so glad we can go back, sir—ma'am, we just wanted to thank you.

[There is a silence. They see that they are not welcome.]

Thank you kindly, sir. Good night, ma'am.

[They shuffle out.]

HILLCRIST. I'd forgotten their existence. [He gets up] What is it that gets loose when you begin a fight, and makes you what you think you're not? What blinding evil! Begin as you may, it ends in this — skin game! Skin game!

JILL. [Rushing to him] It's not you, Dodo; it's not you, beloved Dodo.

HILLCRIST. It is me. For I am, or should be, master in this house!

MRS. H. I don't understand.

HILLCRIST. When we began this fight, we had clean hands—are they clean' now? What's gentility worth if it can't stand fire?

CURTAIN

FROM THE SERIES OF SIX SHORT PLAYS

Contents:

The First and The Last
The Little Man
Hall-marked
Defeat
The Sun
Punch and Go

THE FIRST AND THE LAST

A DRAMA IN THREE SCENES

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

KEITH DARRANT, K.C.

LARRY DARRANT, His Brother.

WANDA.

SCENE I. KEITH'S Study.

SCENE II. WANDA's Room.

SCENE III. The Same.

Between SCENE I. and SCENE II.—Thirty hours.

Between SCENE II. and SCENE III.—Two months.

SCENE I

It is six o'clock of a November evening, in KEITH DARRANT'S study. A large, dark-curtained room where the light from a single reading-lamp falling on Turkey carpet, on books beside a large armchair, on the deep blue-and-gold coffee service, makes a sort of oasis before a log fire. In red Turkish slippers and an old brown velvet coat, KEITH DARRANT sits asleep. He has a dark, clean-cut, clean-shaven face, dark grizzling hair, dark twisting eyebrows.

[The curtained door away out in the dim part of the room behind him is opened so softly that he does not wake. LARRY DARRANT enters and stands half lost in the curtain over the door. A thin figure, with a worn, high cheek-boned face, deep-sunk blue eyes and wavy hair all ruffled—a face which still has a certain beauty. He moves inwards along the wall, stands still again and utters a gasping sigh. KEITH stirs in his chair.]

KEITH. Who's there?

LARRY. [In a stifled voice] Only I—Larry.

KEITH. [Half-waked] Come in! I was asleep. [He does not turn his head, staring sleepily at the fire.]

The sound of LARRY's breathing can be heard.

[Turning his head a little] Well, Larry, what is it?

LARRY comes skirting along the wall, as if craving its support, outside the radius of the light.

[Staring] Are you ill?

LARRY stands still again and heaves a deep sigh.

KEITH. [Rising, with his back to the fire, and staring at his brother] What is it, man? [Then with a brutality born of nerves suddenly ruffled] Have you committed a murder that you stand there like a fish?

LARRY. [In a whisper] Yes, Keith.

KEITH. [With vigorous disgust] By Jove! Drunk again! [In a voice changed by sudden apprehension] What do you mean by coming here in this state? I told you— If you weren't my brother—! Come here, where I can we you! What's the matter with you, Larry?

[With a lurch LARRY leaves the shelter of the wall and sinks into a chair in the circle of light.]

LARRY. It's true.

[KEITH steps quickly forward and stares down into his brother's eyes, where is a horrified wonder, as if they would never again get on terms with his face.]

KEITH. [Angry, bewildered-in a low voice] What in God's name is this nonsense?

[He goes quickly over to the door and draws the curtain aside, to see that it is shut, then comes back to LARRY, who is huddling over the fire.]

Come, Larry! Pull yourself together and drop exaggeration! What on earth do you mean?

LARRY. [In a shrill outburst] It's true, I tell you; I've killed a man.

KEITH. [Bracing himself; coldly] Be quiet!

LARRY lifts his hands and wrings them.

[Utterly taken aback] Why come here and tell me this?

LARRY. Whom should I tell, Keith? I came to ask what I'm to do— give myself up, or what?

KEITH. When—when—what—?

LARRY. Last night.

KEITH. Good God! How? Where? You'd better tell me quietly from the beginning. Here, drink this coffee; it'll clear your head.

He pours out and hands him a cup of coffee. LARRY drinks it off.

LARRY. My head! Yes! It's like this, Keith—there's a girl—

KEITH. Women! Always women, with you! Well?

LARRY. A Polish girl. She—her father died over here when she was sixteen, and left her all alone. There was a mongrel living in the same house who married her—or pretended to. She's very pretty, Keith. He left her with a baby coming. She lost it, and nearly starved. Then another fellow took her on, and she lived with him two years, till that brute turned up again and made her go back to him. He used to beat her black and blue. He'd left her again when—I met her. She was taking anybody then. [He stops, passes his hand over his lips, looks up at KEITH, and goes on defiantly] I never met a sweeter woman, or a truer, that I swear. Woman! She's only twenty now! When I went to her last night, that devil had found her out again. He came for me—a bullying, great, hulking brute. Look! [He touches a dark mark on his forehead] I took his ugly throat, and when I let go—[He stops and his hands drop.]

KEITH. Yes?

LARRY. [In a smothered voice] Dead, Keith. I never knew till afterwards that she was hanging on to him—to h-help me. [Again he wrings his hands.]

KEITH. [In a hard, dry voice] What did you do then?

LARRY. We—we sat by it a long time.

KEITH. Well?

LARRY. Then I carried it on my back down the street, round a corner, to an archway.

KEITH. How far?

LARRY. About fifty yards.

KEITH. Was—did anyone see?

LARRY. No.

KEITH. What time?

LARRY. Three in the morning.

KEITH. And then?

LARRY. Went back to her.

KEITH. Why—in heaven's name?

LARRY. She way lonely and afraid. So was I, Keith.

KEITH. Where is this place?

LARRY. Forty-two Borrow Square, Soho.

KEITH. And the archway?

LARRY. Corner of Glove Lane.

KEITH. Good God! Why, I saw it in the paper this morning. They were talking of it in the Courts! [He snatches the evening paper from his armchair, and runs it over and reads] Here it is again. "Body of a man was found this morning under an archway in Glove Lane. From marks about the throat grave suspicion of foul play are entertained. The body had apparently been robbed." My God! [Suddenly he turns] You saw this in the paper and dreamed it. D'you understand, Larry?—you dreamed it.

LARRY. [Wistfully] If only I had, Keith!

[KEITH makes a movement of his hands almost like his brother's.]

KEITH. Did you take anything from the-body?

LARRY. [Drawing an envelope from his pocket] This dropped out while we were struggling.

KEITH. [Snatching it and reading] "Patrick Walenn"—Was that his name? "Simon's Hotel, Farrier Street, London." [Stooping, he puts it in the fire] No!—that makes me—[He bends to pluck it out, stays his hand, and stamps it suddenly further in with his foot] What in God's name made you come here and tell me? Don't you know I'm—I'm within an ace of a Judgeship?

LARRY. [Simply] Yes. You must know what I ought to do. I didn't, mean to kill him, Keith. I love the girl—I love her. What shall I do?

KEITH. Love!

LARRY. [In a flash] Love!—That swinish brute! A million creatures die every day, and not one of them deserves death as he did. But but I feel it here. [Touching his heart] Such an awful clutch, Keith. Help me if you can, old man. I may be no good, but I've never hurt a fly if I could help it. [He buries his face in his hands.]

KEITH. Steady, Larry! Let's think it out. You weren't seen, you say?

LARRY. It's a dark place, and dead night.

KEITH. When did you leave the girl again?

LARRY. About seven.

KEITH. Where did you go?

LARRY. To my rooms.

KEITH. To Fitzroy Street?

LARRY. Yes.

KEITH. What have you done since?

LARRY. Sat there—thinking.

KEITH. Not been out?

LARRY. No.

KEITH. Not seen the girl?

[LARRY shakes his head.]

Will she give you away?

LARRY. Never.

KEITH. Or herself hysteria?

LARRY. No.

KEITH. Who knows of your relations with her?

LARRY. No one.

KEITH. No one?

LARRY. I don't know who should, Keith.

KEITH. Did anyone see you go in last night, when you first went to her?

LARRY. No. She lives on the ground floor. I've got keys.

KEITH. Give them to me.

LARRY takes two keys from his pocket and hands them to his brother.

LARRY. [Rising] I can't be cut off from her!

KEITH. What! A girl like that?

LARRY. [With a flash] Yes, a girl like that.

KEITH. [Moving his hand to put down old emotion] What else have you that connects you with her?

LARRY. Nothing.

KEITH. In your rooms?

[LARRY shakes his head.]

Photographs? Letters?

LARRY. No.

KEITH. Sure?

LARRY. Nothing.

KEITH. No one saw you going back to her?

[LARRY shakes his head.]

Nor leave in the morning? You can't be certain.

LARRY. I am.

KEITH. You were fortunate. Sit down again, man. I must think.

He turns to the fire and leans his elbows on the mantelpiece and his head on his hands.

LARRY Sits down again obediently.

KEITH. It's all too unlikely. It's monstrous!

LARRY. [Sighing it out] Yes.

KEITH. This Walenn—was it his first reappearance after an absence?

LARRY. Yes.

KEITH. How did he find out where she was?

LARRY. I don't know.

KEITH. [Brutally] How drunk were you?

LARRY. I was not drunk.

KEITH. How much had you drunk, then?

LARRY. A little claret—nothing!

KEITH. You say you didn't mean to kill him.

LARRY. God knows.

KEITH. That's something.

LARRY. He hit me. [He holds up his hands] I didn't know I was so strong.

KEITH. She was hanging on to him, you say?—That's ugly.

LARRY. She was scared for me.

KEITH. D'you mean she—loves you?

LARRY. [Simply] Yes, Keith.

KEITH. [Brutally] Can a woman like that love?

LARRY. [Flashing out] By God, you are a stony devil! Why not?

KEITH. [Dryly] I'm trying to get at truth. If you want me to help, I must know everything. What makes you think she's fond of you?

LARRY. [With a crazy laugh] Oh, you lawyer! Were you never in a woman's arms?

KEITH. I'm talking of love.

LARRY. [Fiercely] So am I. I tell you she's devoted. Did you ever pick up a lost dog? Well, she has the lost dog's love for me. And I for her; we picked each other up. I've never felt for another woman what I feel for her—she's been the saving of me!

KEITH. [With a shrug] What made you choose that archway?

LARRY. It was the first dark place.

KEITH. Did his face look as if he'd been strangled?

LARRY. Don't!

KEITH. Did it?

[LARRY bows his head.]

Very disfigured?

LARRY. Yes.

KEITH. Did you look to see if his clothes were marked?

LARRY. No.

KEITH. Why not?

LARRY. [In an outburst] I'm not made of iron, like you. Why not? If you had done it—!

KEITH. [Holding up his hand] You say he was disfigured. Would he be recognisable?

LARRY. [Wearily] I don't know.

KEITH. When she lived with him last—where was that?

LARRY. In Pimlico, I think.

KEITH. Not Soho?

[LARRY shakes his head.]

How long has she been at this Soho place?

LARRY. Nearly a year.

KEITH. Living this life?

LARRY. Till she met me.

KEITH. Till, she met you? And you believe—?

LARRY. [Starting up] Keith!

KEITH. [Again raising his hand] Always in the same rooms?

LARRY. [Subsiding] Yes.

KEITH. What was he? A professional bully?

[LARRY nods.]

Spending most of his time abroad, I suppose.

LARRY. I think so.

KEITH. Can you say if he was known to the police?

LARRY. I've never heard.

KEITH turns away and walks up and down; then, stopping at LARRY's chair, he speaks.

KEITH. Now listen, Larry. When you leave here, go straight home, and stay there till I give you leave to go out again. Promise.

LARRY. I promise.

KEITH. Is your promise worth anything?

LARRY. [With one of his flashes] "Unstable as water, he shall not excel!"

KEITH. Exactly. But if I'm to help you, you must do as I say. I must have time to think this out. Have you got money?

LARRY. Very little.

KEITH. [Grimly] Half-quarter day—yes, your quarter's always spent by then. If you're to get away—never mind, I can manage the money.

LARRY. [Humbly] You're very good, Keith; you've always been very good to me—I don't know why.

KEITH. [Sardonically] Privilege of A brother. As it happens, I'm thinking of myself and our family. You can't indulge yourself in killing without bringing ruin. My God! I suppose you realise that you've made me an accessory after the fact—me, King's counsel—sworn to the service of the Law, who, in a year or two, will have the trying of cases like yours! By heaven, Larry, you've surpassed yourself!

LARRY. [Bringing out a little box] I'd better have done with it.

KErra. You fool! Give that to me.

LARRY. [With a strange smite] No. [He holds up a tabloid between finger and thumb] White magic, Keith! Just one—and they may do what they like to you, and you won't know it. Snap your fingers at all the tortures. It's a great comfort! Have one to keep by you?

KEITH. Come, Larry! Hand it over.

LARRY. [Replacing the box] Not quite! You've never killed a man, you see. [He gives that crazy laugh.] D'you remember that hammer when we were boys and you riled me, up in the long room? I had luck then. I had luck in Naples once. I nearly killed a driver for beating his poor brute of a horse. But now—! My God! [He covers his face.]

KEITH touched, goes up and lays a hand on his shoulder.

KEITH. Come, Larry! Courage!

LARRY looks up at him.

LARRY. All right, Keith; I'll try.

KEITH. Don't go out. Don't drink. Don't talk. Pull yourself together!

LARRY. [Moving towards the door] Don't keep me longer than you can help, Keith.

KEITH. No, no. Courage!

LARRY reaches the door, turns as if to say something—finds no words, and goes.

[To the fire] Courage! My God! I shall need it!

CURTAIN

SCENE II

At out eleven o'clock the following night an WANDA'S room on the ground floor in Soho. In the light from one close-shaded electric bulb the room is but dimly visible. A dying fire burns on the left. A curtained window in the centre of the back wall. A door on the right. The furniture is plush-covered and commonplace, with a kind of shabby smartness. A couch, without back or arms, stands aslant, between window and fire.

[On this WANDA is sitting, her knees drawn up under her, staring at the embers. She has on only her nightgown and a wrapper over it; her bare feet are thrust into slippers. Her hands are crossed and pressed over her breast. She starts and looks up, listening. Her eyes are candid and startled, her face alabaster pale, and its pale brown hair, short and square-cut, curls towards her bare neck. The startled dark eyes and the faint rose of her lips are like colour-staining on a white mask.]

[Footsteps as of a policeman, very measured, pass on the pavement outside, and die away. She gets up and steals to the window, draws one curtain aside so that a chink of the night is seen. She opens the curtain wider, till the shape of a bare, witch-like tree becomes visible in the open space of the little Square on the far side of the road. The footsteps are heard once more coming nearer. WANDA closes the curtains and cranes back. They pass and die again. She moves away and looking down at the floor between door and couch, as though seeing something there; shudders; covers her eyes; goes back to the couch and down again just as before, to stare at the embers. Again she is startled by noise of the outer door being opened. She springs up, runs and turns the light by a switch close to the door. By the glimmer of the fire she can just be seen standing by the dark window—curtains, listening. There comes the sound of subdued knocking on her door. She stands in breathless terror. The knocking is repeated. The sound of a latchkey in the door is heard. Her terror leaves her. The door opens; a man enters in a dark, fur overcoat.]

WANDA. [In a voice of breathless relief, with a rather foreign accent] Oh! it's you, Larry! Why did you knock? I was so frightened. Come in! [She crosses quickly, and flings her arms round his neck] [Recoiling—in a terror-stricken whisper] Oh! Who is it?

KEITH. [In a smothered voice] A friend of Larry's. Don't be frightened.

She has recoiled again to the window; and when he finds the switch and turns the light up, she is seen standing there holding her dark wrapper up to her throat, so that her face has an uncanny look of being detached from the body.

[Gently] You needn't be afraid. I haven't come to do you harm— quite the contrary. [Holding up the keys] Larry wouldn't have given me these, would he, if he hadn't trusted me?

WANDA does not move, staring like a spirit startled out of the flesh.

[After looking round him] I'm sorry to have startled you.

WANDA. [In a whisper] Who are you, please?

KEITH. Larry's brother.

WANDA, with a sigh of utter relief, steals forward to the couch and sinks down. KEITH goes up to her.

He'd told me.

WANDA. [Clasping her hands round her knees.] Yes?

KEITH. An awful business!

WANDA. Yes; oh, yes! Awful—it is awful!

KEITH. [Staring round him again.] In this room?

WANDA. Just where you are standing. I see him now, always falling.

KEITH. [Moved by the gentle despair in her voice] You—look very young. What's your name?

WANDA. Wanda.

KEITH. Are you fond of Larry?

WANDA. I would die for him!

[A moment's silence.]

KEITH. I—I've come to see what you can do to save him.

WANDA, [Wistfully] You would not deceive me. You are really his brother?

KEITH. I swear it.

WANDA. [Clasping her hands] If I can save him! Won't you sit down?

KEITH. [Drawing up a chair and sitting] This, man, your—your husband, before he came here the night before last—how long since you saw him?

WANDA. Eighteen month.

KEITH. Does anyone about here know you are his wife?

WANDA. No. I came here to live a bad life. Nobody know me. I am quite alone.

KEITH. They've discovered who he was—you know that?

WANDA. No; I have not dared to go out.

KEITH: Well, they have; and they'll look for anyone connected with him, of course.

WANDA. He never let people think I was married to him. I don't know if I was—really. We went to an office and signed our names; but he was a wicked man. He treated many, I think, like me.

KEITH. Did my brother ever see him before?

WANDA. Never! And that man first went for him.

KEITH. Yes. I saw the mark. Have you a servant?

WANDA. No. A woman come at nine in the morning for an hour.

KEITH. Does she know Larry?

WANDA. No. He is always gone.

KEITH. Friends—acquaintances?

WANDA. No; I am verree quiet. Since I know your brother, I see no one, sare.

KEITH. [Sharply] Do you mean that?

WANDA. Oh, yes! I love him. Nobody come here but him for a long time now.

KEITH. How long?

WANDA. Five month.

KEITH. So you have not been out since—?

[WANDA shakes her head.]

What have you been doing?

WANDA. [Simply] Crying. [Pressing her hands to her breast] He is in danger because of me. I am so afraid for him.

KEITH. [Checking her emotion] Look at me.

[She looks at him.]

If the worst comes, and this man is traced to you, can you trust yourself not to give Larry away?

WANDA. [Rising and pointing to the fire] Look! I have burned all the things he have given me—even his picture. Now I have nothing from him.

KEITH. [Who has risen too] Good! One more question. Do the police know you—because—of your life?

[She looks at him intently, and shakes her head.]

You know where Larry lives?

WANDA. Yes.

KEITH. You mustn't go there, and he mustn't come to you.

[She bows her head; then, suddenly comes close to him.]

WANDA. Please do not take him from me altogether. I will be so careful. I will not do anything to hurt him. But if I cannot see him sometimes, I shall die. Please do not take him from me.

[She catches his hand and presses it desperately between her own.]

KEITH. Leave that to me. I'm going to do all I can.

WANDA. [Looking up into his face] But you will be kind?

Suddenly she bends and kisses his hand. KEITH draws his hand away, and she recoils a little humbly, looking up at him again. Suddenly she stands rigid, listening.

[In a whisper] Listen! Someone—out there!

She darts past him and turns out the light. There is a knock on the door. They are now close together between door and window.

[Whispering] Oh! Who is it?

KEITH. [Under his breath] You said no one comes but Larry.

WANDA. Yes, and you have his keys. Oh! if it is Larry! I must open!

KEITH shrinks back against the wall. WANDA goes to the door.

[Opening the door an inch] Yes? Please? Who?

A thin streak of light from a bull's-eye lantern outside plays over the wall. A Policeman's voice says: "All right, Miss. Your outer door's open. You ought to keep it shut after dark, you know."

WANDA. Thank you, sir.

[The sound of retreating footsteps, of the outer door closing.

WANDA shuts the door.]

A policeman!

KEITH. [Moving from the wall] Curse! I must have left that door.

[Suddenly-turning up the light] You told me they didn't know you.

WANDA. [Sighing] I did not think they did, sir. It is so long I was not out in the town; not since I had Larry.

KEITH gives her an intent look, then crosses to the fire. He stands there a moment,

looking down, then turns to the girl, who has crept back to the couch.

KEITH. [Half to himself] After your life, who can believe—? Look here! You drifted together and you'll drift apart, you know. Better for him to get away and make a clean cut of it.

WANDA. [Uttering a little moaning sound] Oh, sir! May I not love, because I have been bad? I was only sixteen when that man spoiled me. If you knew—

KEITH. I'm thinking of Larry. With you, his danger is much greater. There's a good chance as things are going. You may wreck it. And for what? Just a few months more of—well—you know.

WANDA. [Standing at the head of the couch and touching her eyes with her hands] Oh, sir! Look! It is true. He is my life. Don't take him away from me.

KEITH. [Moved and restless] You must know what Larry is. He'll never stick to you.

WANDA. [Simply] He will, sir.

KEITH. [Energetically] The last man on earth to stick to anything! But for the sake of a whim he'll risk his life and the honour of all his family. I know him.

WANDA. No, no, you do not. It is I who know him.

KEITH. Now, now! At any moment they may find out your connection with that man. So long as Larry goes on with you, he's tied to this murder, don't you see?

WANDA. [Coming close to him] But he love me. Oh, sir! he love me!

KEITH. Larry has loved dozens of women.

WANDA. Yes, but—[Her face quivers].

KEITH. [Brusquely] Don't cry! If I give you money, will you disappear, for his sake?

WANDA. [With a moan] It will be in the water, then. There will be no cruel men there.

KEITH. Ah! First Larry, then you! Come now. It's better for you both. A few months, and you'll forget you ever met.

WANDA. [Looking wildly up] I will go if Larry say I must. But not to live. No! [Simply] I could not, sir.

[KEITH, moved, is silent.]

I could not live without Larry. What is left for a girl like me— when she once love? It is finish.

KEITH. I don't want you to go back to that life.

WANDA. No; you do not care what I do. Why should you? I tell you I will go if Larry say I must.

KEITH. That's not enough. You know that. You must take it out of his hands. He will never give up his present for the sake of his future. If you're as fond of him as you say, you'll help to save him.

WANDA. [Below her breath] Yes! Oh, yes! But do not keep him long from me—I beg! [She sinks to the floor and clasps his knees.]

KEITH. Well, well! Get up.

[There is a tap on the window-pane]

Listen!

[A faint, peculiar whistle.]

WANDA. [Springing up] Larry! Oh, thank God!

[She runs to the door, opens it, and goes out to bring him in.

KEITH stands waiting, facing the open doorway.]

[LARRY entering with WANDA just behind him.]

LARRY. Keith!

KEITH. [Grimly] So much for your promise not to go out!

LARRY. I've been waiting in for you all day. I couldn't stand it any longer.

KEITH. Exactly!

LARRY. Well, what's the sentence, brother? Transportation for life and then to be fined forty pounds'?

KEITH. So you can joke, can you?

LARRY. Must.

KEITH. A boat leaves for the Argentine the day after to-morrow; you must go by it.

LARRY. [Putting his arms round WANDA, who is standing motionless with her eyes fixed on him] Together, Keith?

KEITH. You can't go together. I'll send her by the next boat.

LARRY. Swear?

KEITH. Yes. You're lucky they're on a false scent.

LARRY. What?

KEITH. You haven't seen it?

LARRY. I've seen nothing, not even a paper.

KEITH. They've taken up a vagabond who robbed the body. He pawned a snake-shaped ring, and they identified this Walenn by it. I've been down and seen him charged myself.

LARRY. With murder?

WANDA. [Faintly] Larry!

KEITH. He's in no danger. They always get the wrong man first. It'll do him no harm to be locked up a bit—hyena like that. Better in prison, anyway, than sleeping out under archways in this weather.

LARRY. What was he like, Keith?

KEITH. A little yellow, ragged, lame, unshaven scarecrow of a chap. They were fools to think he could have had the strength.

LARRY. What! [In an awed voice] Why, I saw him—after I left you last night.

KEITH. You? Where?

LARRY. By the archway.

KEITH. You went back there?

LARRY. It draws you, Keith.

KEITH. You're mad, I think.

LARRY. I talked to him, and he said, "Thank you for this little chat. It's worth more than money when you're down." Little grey man like a shaggy animal. And a newspaper boy came up and said: "That's right, gov'nors! 'Ere's where they found the body—very spot. They 'yn't got 'im yet."

[He laughs; and the terrified girl presses herself against him.]

An innocent man!

KEITH. He's in no danger, I tell you. He could never have strangled—Why, he hadn't the strength of a kitten. Now, Larry! I'll take your berth to-morrow. Here's money [He brings out a pile of notes and puts them on the couch] You can make a new life of it out there together presently, in the sun.

LARRY. [In a whisper] In the sun! "A cup of wine and thou." [Suddenly] How can I, Keith? I must see how it goes with that poor devil.

KEITH. Bosh! Dismiss it from your mind; there's not nearly enough evidence.

LARRY. Not?

KEITH. No. You've got your chance. Take it like a man.

LARRY. [With a strange smile—to the girl] Shall we, Wanda?

WANDA. Oh, Larry!

LARRY. [Picking the notes up from the couch] Take them back, Keith.

KEITH. What! I tell you no jury would convict; and if they did, no judge would hang. A ghoulish who can rob a dead body, ought to be in prison. He did worse than you.

LARRY. It won't do, Keith. I must see it out.

KEITH. Don't be a fool!

LARRY. I've still got some kind of honour. If I clear out before I know, I shall have none—nor peace. Take them, Keith, or I'll put them in the fire.

KEITH. [Taking back the notes; bitterly] I suppose I may ask you not to be entirely oblivious of our name. Or is that unworthy of your honour?

LARRY. [Hanging his head] I'm awfully sorry, Keith; awfully sorry, old man.

KEITH. [sternly] You owe it to me—to our name—to our dead mother—to do nothing anyway till we see what happens.

LARRY. I know. I'll do nothing without you, Keith.

KEITH. [Taking up his hat] Can I trust you? [He stares hard at his brother.]

LARRY. You can trust me.

KEITH. Swear?

LARRY. I swear.

KEITH. Remember, nothing! Good night!

LARRY. Good night!

KEITH goes. LARRY Sits down on the couch and stares at the fire. The girl steals up and slips her arms about him.

LARRY. An innocent man!

WANDA. Oh, Larry! But so are you. What did we want—to kill that man? Never! Oh! kiss me!

[LARRY turns his face. She kisses his lips.]

I have suffered so—not seen you. Don't leave me again—don't! Stay here. Isn't it good to be together?—Oh! Poor Larry! How tired you look!—Stay with me. I am so frightened all alone. So frightened they will take you from me.

LARRY. Poor child!

WANDA. No, no! Don't look like that!

LARRY. You're shivering.

WANDA. I will make up the fire. Love me, Larry! I want to forget.

LARRY. The poorest little wretch on God's earth—locked up—for me! A little wild animal, locked up. There he goes, up and down, up and down—in his cage—don't you see him?—looking for a place to gnaw his way through—little grey rat. [He gets up and roams about.]

WANDA. No, no! I can't bear it! Don't frighten me more!

[He comes back and takes her in his arms.]

LARRY. There, there! [He kisses her closed eyes.]

WANDA. [Without moving] If we could sleep a little—wouldn't it be nice?

LARRY. Sleep?

WANDA. [Raising herself] Promise to stay with me—to stay here for good, Larry. I will cook for you; I will make you so comfortable. They will find him innocent. And then—Oh, Larry! in the sun-right away—far from this horrible country. How lovely! [Trying to get him to look at her] Larry!

LARRY. [With a movement to free 'himself] To the edge of the world-and—over!

WANDA. No, no! No, no! You don't want me to die, Larry, do you? I shall if you leave me. Let us be happy! Love me!

LARRY. [With a laugh] Ah! Let's be happy and shut out the sight of him. Who cares? Millions suffer for no mortal reason. Let's be strong, like Keith. No! I won't leave you, Wanda. Let's forget everything except ourselves. [Suddenly] There he goes-up and down!

WANDA. [Moaning] No, no! See! I will pray to the Virgin. She will pity us!

She falls on her knees and clasps her hands, praying. Her lips move. LARRY stands motionless, with arms crossed, and on his face are yearning and mockery, love and despair.

LARRY. [Whispering] Pray for us! Bravo! Pray away!

[Suddenly the girl stretches out her arms and lifts her face with a look of ecstasy.]

What?

WANDA. She is smiling! We shall be happy soon.

LARRY. [Bending down over her] Poor child! When we die, Wanda, let's go together. We should keep each other warm out in the dark.

WANDA. [Raising her hands to his face] Yes! oh, yes! If you die I could not—I could not go on living!

CURTAIN

SCENE III.

TWO MONTHS LATER

WANDA'S room. Daylight is just beginning to fail of a January afternoon. The table is laid for supper, with decanters of wine.

WANDA is standing at the window looking out at the wintry trees of the Square beyond the pavement. A newspaper Boy's voice is heard coming nearer.

VOICE. Pyper! Glove Lyne murder! Trial and verdict! [Receding]
Verdict! Pyper!

WANDA throws up the window as if to call to him, checks herself, closes it and runs to the door. She opens it, but recoils into the room. KEITH is standing there. He comes in.

KEITH. Where's Larry?

WANDA. He went to the trial. I could not keep him from it. The trial—Oh! what has happened, sir?

KEITH. [Savagely] Guilty! Sentence of death! Fools!—idiots!

WANDA. Of death! [For a moment she seems about to swoon.]

KEITH. Girl! girl! It may all depend on you. Larry's still living here?

WANDA. Yes.

KEITH. I must wait for him.

WANDA. Will you sit down, please?

KEITH. [Shaking his head] Are you ready to go away at any time?

WANDA. Yes, yes; always I am ready.

KEITH. And he?

WANDA. Yes—but now! What will he do? That poor man!

KEITH. A graveyard thief—a ghoul!

WANDA. Perhaps he was hungry. I have been hungry: you do things then that you would not. Larry has thought of him in prison so much all these weeks. Oh! what shall we do now?

KEITH. Listen! Help me. Don't let Larry out of your sight. I must see how things go. They'll never hang this wretch. [He grips her arms] Now, we must stop Larry from giving himself up. He's fool enough. D'you understand?

WANDA. Yes. But why has he not come in? Oh! If he have, already!

KEITH. [Letting go her arms] My God! If the police come—find me here—[He moves to the door] No, he wouldn't without seeing you first. He's sure to come. Watch him like a lynx. Don't let him go without you.

WANDA. [Clasping her hands on her breast] I will try, sir.

KEITH. Listen!

[A key is heard in the lock.]

It's he!

LARRY enters. He is holding a great bunch of pink lilies and white narcissus. His face tells nothing. KEITH looks from him to the girl, who stands motionless.

LARRY. Keith! So you've seen?

KEITH. The thing can't stand. I'll stop it somehow. But you must give me time, Larry.

LARRY. [Calmly] Still looking after your honour, KEITH!

KEITH. [Grimly] Think my reasons what you like.

WANDA. [Softly] Larry!

[LARRY puts his arm round her.]

LARRY. Sorry, old man.

KEITH. This man can and shall get off. I want your solemn promise that you won't give yourself up, nor even go out till I've seen you again.

LARRY. I give it.

KEITH. [Looking from one to the other] By the memory of our mother, swear that.

LARRY. [With a smile] I swear.

KEITH. I have your oath—both of you—both of you. I'm going at once to see what can be done.

LARRY. [Softly] Good luck, brother.

KEITH goes out.

WANDA. [Putting her hands on LARRY's breast] What does it mean?

LARRY. Supper, child—I've had nothing all day. Put these lilies in water.

[She takes the lilies and obediently puts them into a vase.

LARRY pours wine into a deep-coloured glass and drinks it off.]

We've had a good time, Wanda. Best time I ever had, these last two months; and nothing but the bill to pay.

WANDA. [Clasping him desperately] Oh, Larry! Larry!

LARRY. [Holding her away to look at her.] Take off those things and put on a bridal garment.

WANDA. Promise me—wherever you go, I go too. Promise! Larry, you think I haven't seen, all these weeks. But I have seen everything; all in your heart, always. You cannot hide from me. I knew—I knew! Oh, if we might go away into the sun! Oh! Larry—couldn't we? [She searches his eyes with hers—then shuddering] Well! If it must be dark—I don't care, if I may go in your arms. In prison we could not be together. I am ready. Only love me first. Don't let me cry before I go. Oh! Larry, will there be much pain?

LARRY. [In a choked voice] No pain, my pretty.

WANDA. [With a little sigh] It is a pity.

LARRY. If you had seen him, as I have, all day, being tortured. Wanda,—we shall be out of it. [The wine mounting to his head] We shall be free in the dark; free of their cursed inhumanities. I hate this world—I loathe it! I hate its God-forsaken savagery; its pride and smugness! Keith's world—all righteous will-power and success. We're no good here, you and I—we were cast out at birth—soft, will-less—better dead. No fear, Keith! I'm staying indoors. [He pours wine into two glasses] Drink it up!

[Obediently WANDA drinks, and he also.]

Now go and make yourself beautiful.

WANDA. [Seizing him in her arms] Oh, Larry!

LARRY. [Touching her face and hair] Hanged by the neck until he's dead—for what I did.

[WANDA takes a long look at his face, slips her arms from him, and goes out through the curtains below the fireplace.]

[LARRY feels in his pocket, brings out the little box, opens it, fingers the white tabloids.]

LARRY. Two each—after food. [He laughs and puts back the box] Oh! my girl!

[The sound of a piano playing a faint festive tune is heard afar off. He mutters, staring at the fire.]

[Flames-flame, and flicker-ashes.]

"No more, no more, the moon is dead, And all the people in it."

[He sits on the couch with a piece of paper on his knees, adding a few words with a stylo pen to what is already written.]

[The GIRL, in a silk wrapper, coming back through the curtains, watches him.]

LARRY. [Looking up] It's all here—I've confessed. [Reading]

"Please bury us together."

"LAURENCE DARRANT.

"January 28th, about six p.m."

They'll find us in the morning. Come and have supper, my dear love.

[The girl creeps forward. He rises, puts his arm round her, and with her arm twined round him, smiling into each other's faces, they go to the table and sit down.]

The curtain falls for a few seconds to indicate the passage of three hours. When it rises again, the lovers are lying on the couch, in each other's arms, the lilies stream about them. The girl's bare arm is round LARRY'S neck. Her eyes are closed; his are open and sightless. There is no light but fire-light.

A knocking on the door and the sound of a key turned in the lock. KEITH enters. He stands a moment bewildered by the half-light, then calls sharply: "Larry!" and turns up the light. Seeing the forms on the couch, he recoils a moment. Then, glancing at the table and empty decanters, goes up to the couch.

KEITH. [Muttering] Asleep! Drunk! Ugh!

[Suddenly he bends, touches LARRY, and springs back.]

What! [He bends again, shakes him and calls] Larry! Larry!

[Then, motionless, he stares down at his brother's open, sightless eyes. Suddenly he wets his finger and holds it to the girl's lips, then to LARRY'S.]

[He bends and listens at their hearts; catches sight of the little box lying between them and takes it up.]

My God!

[Then, raising himself, he closes his brother's eyes, and as he does so, catches sight of a paper pinned to the couch; detaches it and reads:]

"I, Lawrence Darrant, about to die by my own hand confess that I——"

[He reads on silently, in horror; finishes, letting the paper drop, and recoils from the couch on to a chair at the dishevelled supper table. Aghast, he sits there. Suddenly he mutters:]

If I leave that there—my name—my whole future!

[He springs up, takes up the paper again, and again reads.]

My God! It's ruin!

[He makes as if to tear it across, stops, and looks down at those two; covers his eyes with his hand; drops the paper and rushes to the door. But he stops there and comes back, magnetised, as it were, by that paper. He takes it up once more and thrusts it into his pocket.]

[The footsteps of a Policeman pass, slow and regular, outside. His face crimps and quivers; he stands listening till they die away. Then he snatches the paper from his pocket, and goes past the foot of the couch to the fore.]

All my——No! Let him hang!

[He thrusts the paper into the fire, stamps it down with his foot, watches it writhe and blacken. Then suddenly clutching his head, he turns to the bodies on the couch. Panting and like a man demented, he recoils past the head of the couch, and rushing to the window, draws the curtains and throws the window up for air. Out in the darkness rises the witch-like skeleton tree, where a dark shape seems hanging. KEITH starts back.]

What's that? What——!

[He shuts the window and draws the dark curtains across it again.]

Fool! Nothing!

[Clenching his fists, he draws himself up, steadying himself with all his might. Then slowly he moves to the door, stands a second like a carved figure, his face hard as stone.]

[Deliberately he turns out the light, opens the door, and goes.]

[The still bodies lie there before the fire which is licking at the last blackened wafer.]

CURTAIN

THE LITTLE MAN

A FARCICAL MORALITY IN THREE SCENES

CHARACTERS

THE LITTLE MAN. THE AMERICAN. THE ENGLISHMAN. THE ENGLISHWOMAN. THE GERMAN. THE DUTCH BOY. THE MOTHER. THE BABY. THE WAITER. THE STATION OFFICIAL. THE POLICEMAN. THE PORTER.

SCENE I

Afternoon, on the departure platform of an Austrian railway station. At several little tables outside the buffet persons are taking refreshment, served by a pale young waiter. On a seat against the wall of the buffet a woman of lowly station is sitting beside two large bundles, on one of which she has placed her baby, swathed in a black shawl.

WAITER. [Approaching a table whereat sit an English traveller and his wife] Two coffee?

ENGLISHMAN. [Paying] Thanks. [To his wife, in an Oxford voice] Sugar?

ENGLISHWOMAN. [In a Cambridge voice] One.

AMERICAN TRAVELLER. [With field-glasses and a pocket camera from another table] Waiter, I'd like to have you get my eggs. I've been sitting here quite a while.

WAITER. Yes, sare.

GERMAN TRAVELLER. 'Kellner, bezahlen!' [His voice is, like his moustache, stiff and brushed up at the ends. His figure also is stiff and his hair a little grey; clearly once, if not now, a colonel.]

WAITER. 'Komm' gleich'!

[The baby on the bundle wails. The mother takes it up to soothe it. A young, red-cheeked Dutchman at the fourth table stops eating and laughs.]

AMERICAN. My eggs! Get a wiggle on you!

WAITER. Yes, sare. [He rapidly recedes.]

[A LITTLE MAN in a soft hat is seen to the right of tables. He stands a moment looking after the hurrying waiter, then seats himself at the fifth table.]

ENGLISHMAN. [Looking at his watch] Ten minutes more.

ENGLISHWOMAN. Bother!

AMERICAN. [Addressing them] 'Pears as if they'd a prejudice against eggs here, anyway.

[The ENGLISH look at him, but do not speak.]

GERMAN. [In creditable English] In these places man can get nothing.

[The WAITER comes flying back with a compote for the DUTCH YOUTH, who pays.]

GERMAN. 'Kellner, bezahlen'!

WAITER. 'Eine Krone sechzig'.

[The GERMAN pays.]

AMERICAN. [Rising, and taking out his watch—blandly] See here. If I don't get my eggs before this

watch ticks twenty, there'll be another waiter in heaven.

WAITER. [Flying] 'Komm' gleich!

AMERICAN. [Seeking sympathy] I'm gettin' kind of mad!

[The ENGLISHMAN halves his newspaper and hands the advertisement half to his wife. The BABY wails. The MOTHER rocks it.]

[The DUTCH YOUTH stops eating and laughs. The GERMAN lights a cigarette. The LITTLE MAN sits motionless, nursing his hat. The WAITER comes flying back with the eggs and places them before the AMERICAN.]

AMERICAN. [Putting away his watch] Good! I don't like trouble.
How much?

[He pays and eats. The WAITER stands a moment at the edge of the platform and passes his hand across his brow. The LITTLE MAN eyes him and speaks gently.]

LITTLE MAN. Herr Ober!

[The WAITER turns.]

Might I have a glass of beer?

WAITER. Yes, sare.

LITTLE MAN. Thank you very much.

[The WAITER goes.]

AMERICAN. [Pausing in the deglutition of his eggs—affably] Pardon me, sir; I'd like to have you tell me why you called that little bit of a feller "Herr Ober." Reckon you would know what that means? Mr. Head Waiter.

LITTLE MAN. Yes, yes.

AMERICAN. I smile.

LITTLE MAN. Oughtn't I to call him that?

GERMAN. [Abruptly] 'Nein—Kellner'.

AMERICAN. Why, yes! Just "waiter."

[The ENGLISHWOMAN looks round her paper for a second. The DUTCH YOUTH stops eating and laughs. The LITTLE MAN gazes from face to face and nurses his hat.]

LITTLE MAN. I didn't want to hurt his feelings.

GERMAN. Gott!

AMERICAN. In my country we're very democratic—but that's quite a proposition.

ENGLISHMAN. [Handling coffee-pot, to his wife] More?

ENGLISHWOMAN. No, thanks.

GERMAN. [Abruptly] These fellows—if you treat them in this manner, at once they take liberties. You see, you will not get your beer.

[As he speaks the WAITER returns, bringing the LITTLE MAN'S beer, then retires.]

AMERICAN. That 'pears to be one up to democracy. [To the LITTLE MAN] I judge you go in for brotherhood?

LITTLE MAN. [Startled] Oh, no!

AMERICAN. I take considerable stock in Leo Tolstoi myself. Grand man—grand-souled apparatus. But I guess you've got to pinch those waiters some to make 'em skip. [To the ENGLISH, who have

carelessly looked his way for a moment] You'll appreciate that, the way he acted about my eggs.

[The ENGLISH make faint motions with their chins and avert their eyes.]

[To the WAITER, who is standing at the door of the buffet]

Waiter! Flash of beer—jump, now!

WAITER. 'Komm' gleich'!

GERMAN. 'Cigarren'!

WAITER. 'Schon'!

[He disappears.]

AMERICAN. [Affably—to the LITTLE MAN] Now, if I don't get that flash of beer quicker'n you got yours, I shall admire.

GERMAN. [Abruptly] Tolstoi is nothing 'nichts'! No good! Ha?

AMERICAN. [Relishing the approach of argument] Well, that is a matter of temperament. Now, I'm all for equality. See that poor woman there—very humble woman—there she sits among us with her baby. Perhaps you'd like to locate her somewhere else?

GERMAN. [Shrugging]. Tolstoi is 'sentimentalisch'. Nietzsche is the true philosopher, the only one.

AMERICAN. Well, that's quite in the prospectus—very stimulating party—old Nietch—virgin mind. But give me Leo! [He turns to the red-cheeked YOUTH] What do you opine, sir? I guess by your labels you'll be Dutch. Do they read Tolstoi in your country?

[The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.]

AMERICAN. That is a very luminous answer.

GERMAN. Tolstoi is nothing. Man should himself express. He must push—he must be strong.

AMERICAN. That is so. In America we believe in virility; we like a man to expand. But we believe in brotherhood too. We draw the line at niggers; but we aspire. Social barriers and distinctions we've not much use for.

ENGLISHMAN. Do you feel a draught?

ENGLISHWOMAN. [With a shiver of her shoulder toward the AMERICAN] I do—rather.

GERMAN. Wait! You are a young people.

AMERICAN. That is so; there are no flies on us. [To the LITTLE MAN, who has been gazing eagerly from face to face] Say! I'd like to have you give us your sentiments in relation to the duty of man.

[The LITTLE MAN, fidgets, and is about to opens his mouth.]

AMERICAN. For example—is it your opinion that we should kill off the weak and diseased, and all that can't jump around?

GERMAN. [Nodding] 'Ja, ja'! That is coming.

LITTLE MAN. [Looking from face to face] They might be me.

[The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.]

AMERICAN. [Reproving him with a look] That's true humility. 'Tisn't grammar. Now, here's a proposition that brings it nearer the bone: Would you step out of your way to help them when it was liable to bring you trouble?

GERMAN. 'Nein, nein'! That is stupid.

LITTLE MAN. [Eager but wistful] I'm afraid not. Of course one wants to—There was St Francis d'Assisi and St Julien L'Hospitalier, and—

AMERICAN. Very lofty dispositions. Guess they died of them. [He rises] Shake hands, sir—my name is —[He hands a card] I am an ice-machine maker. [He shakes the LITTLE MAN's hand] I like your

sentiments—I feel kind of brotherly. [Catching sight of the WAITER appearing in the doorway] Waiter; where to hell is that glass of beer?

GERMAN. Cigarren!

WAITER. 'Komm' gleich'!

ENGLISHMAN. [Consulting watch] Train's late.

ENGLISHWOMAN. Really! Nuisance!

[A station POLICEMAN, very square and uniformed, passes and repasses.]

AMERICAN. [Resuming his seat—to the GERMAN] Now, we don't have so much of that in America. Guess we feel more to trust in human nature.

GERMAN. Ah! ha! you will presently find there is nothing in him but self.

LITTLE MAN. [Wistfully] Don't you believe in human nature?

AMERICAN. Very stimulating question.

[He looks round for opinions. The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.]

ENGLISHMAN. [Holding out his half of the paper to his wife] Swap!

[His wife swaps.]

GERMAN. In human nature I believe so far as I can see him—no more.

AMERICAN. Now that 'pears to me kind o' blasphemy. I believe in heroism. I opine there's not one of us settin' around here that's not a hero—give him the occasion.

LITTLE MAN. Oh! Do you believe that?

AMERICAN. Well! I judge a hero is just a person that'll help another at the expense of himself. Take that poor woman there. Well, now, she's a heroine, I guess. She would die for her baby any old time.

GERMAN. Animals will die for their babies. That is nothing.

AMERICAN. I carry it further. I postulate we would all die for that baby if a locomotive was to trundle up right here and try to handle it. [To the GERMAN] I guess you don't know how good you are. [As the GERMAN is twisting up the ends of his moustache—to the ENGLISHWOMAN] I should like to have you express an opinion, ma'am.

ENGLISHWOMAN. I beg your pardon.

AMERICAN. The English are very humanitarian; they have a very high sense of duty. So have the Germans, so have the Americans. [To the DUTCH YOUTH] I judge even in your little country they have that. This is an epoch of equality and high-toned ideals. [To the LITTLE MAN] What is your nationality, sir?

LITTLE MAN. I'm afraid I'm nothing particular. My father was half-English and half-American, and my mother half-German and half-Dutch.

AMERICAN. My! That's a bit streaky, any old way. [The POLICEMAN passes again] Now, I don't believe we've much use any more for those gentlemen in buttons. We've grown kind of mild—we don't think of self as we used to do.

[The WAITER has appeared in the doorway.]

GERMAN. [In a voice of thunder] 'Cigarren! Donnerwetter'!

AMERICAN. [Shaking his fist at the vanishing WAITER] That flash of beer!

WAITER. 'Komm' gleich'!

AMERICAN. A little more, and he will join George Washington! I was about to remark when he intruded: In this year of grace 1913 the kingdom of Christ is quite a going concern. We are mighty near universal brotherhood. The colonel here [He indicates the GERMAN] is a man of blood and iron, but give him an opportunity to be magnanimous, and he'll be right there. Oh, sir! yep!

[The GERMAN, with a profound mixture of pleasure and cynicism, brushes up the ends of his moustache.]

LITTLE MAN. I wonder. One wants to, but somehow—[He shakes his head.]

AMERICAN. You seem kind of skeery about that. You've had experience, maybe. I'm an optimist—I think we're bound to make the devil hum in the near future. I opine we shall occasion a good deal of trouble to that old party. There's about to be a holocaust of selfish interests. The colonel there with old-man Nietch he won't know himself. There's going to be a very sacred opportunity.

[As he speaks, the voice of a RAILWAY OFFICIAL is heard an the distance calling out in German. It approaches, and the words become audible.]

GERMAN. [Startled] 'Der Teufel!' [He gets up, and seizes the bag beside him.]

[The STATION OFFICIAL has appeared; he stands for a moment casting his commands at the seated group. The DUTCH YOUTH also rises, and takes his coat and hat. The OFFICIAL turns on his heel and retires still issuing directions.]

ENGLISHMAN. What does he say?

GERMAN. Our drain has come in, de oder platform; only one minute we haf.

[All, have risen in a fluster.]

AMERICAN. Now, that's very provoking. I won't get that flash of beer.

[There is a general scurry to gather coats and hats and wraps, during which the lowly WOMAN is seen making desperate attempts to deal with her baby and the two large bundles. Quite defeated, she suddenly puts all down, wrings her hands, and cries out: "Herr Jesu! Hilfe!" The flying procession turn their heads at that strange cry.]

AMERICAN. What's that? Help?

[He continues to run. The LITTLE MAN spins round, rushes back, picks up baby and bundle on which it was seated.]

LITTLE MAN. Come along, good woman, come along!

[The WOMAN picks up the other bundle and they run.]

[The WAITER, appearing in the doorway with the bottle of beer, watches with his tired smile.]

CURTAIN

SCENE II

A second-class compartment of a corridor carriage, in motion. In it are seated the ENGLISHMAN and his WIFE, opposite each other at the corridor end, she with her face to the engine, he with his back. Both are somewhat protected from the rest of the travellers by newspapers. Next to her sits the GERMAN, and opposite him sits the AMERICAN; next the AMERICAN in one window corner is seated the DUTCH YOUTH; the other window corner is taken by the GERMAN'S bag. The silence is only broken by the slight rushing noise of the train's progression and the crackling of the English newspapers.

AMERICAN. [Turning to the DUTCH YOUTH] Guess I'd like that window raised; it's kind of chilly after that old run they gave us.

[The DUTCH YOUTH laughs, and goes through the motions of raising the window. The ENGLISH regard the operation with uneasy irritation. The GERMAN opens his bag, which reposes on the corner seat next him, and takes out a book.]

AMERICAN. The Germans are great readers. Very stimulating practice.

I read most anything myself!

[The GERMAN holds up the book so that the title may be read.]

"Don Quixote"—fine book. We Americans take considerable stock in old man Quixote. Bit of a wild-cat—but we don't laugh at him.

GERMAN. He is dead. Dead as a sheep. A good thing, too.

AMERICAN. In America we have still quite an amount of chivalry.

GERMAN. Chivalry is nothing 'sentimentalisch'. In modern days—no good. A man must push, he must pull.

AMERICAN. So you say. But I judge your form of chivalry is sacrifice to the state. We allow more freedom to the individual soul. Where there's something little and weak, we feel it kind of noble to give up to it. That way we feel elevated.

[As he speaks there is seen in the corridor doorway the LITTLE MAN, with the WOMAN'S BABY still on his arm and the bundle held in the other hand. He peers in anxiously. The ENGLISH, acutely conscious, try to dissociate themselves from his presence with their papers. The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.]

GERMAN. 'Ach'! So!

AMERICAN. Dear me!

LITTLE MAN. Is there room? I can't find a seat.

AMERICAN. Why, yes! There's a seat for one.

LITTLE MAN. [Depositing bundle outside, and heaving BABY] May I?

AMERICAN. Come right in!

[The GERMAN sulkily moves his bag. The LITTLE MAN comes in and seats himself gingerly.]

AMERICAN. Where's the mother?

LITTLE MAN. [Ruefully] Afraid she got left behind.

[The DUTCH YOUTH laughs. The ENGLISH unconsciously emerge from their newspapers.]

AMERICAN. My! That would appear to be quite a domestic incident.

[The ENGLISHMAN suddenly utters a profound "Ha, Ha!" and disappears behind his paper. And that paper and the one opposite are seen to shake, and little squirls and squeaks emerge.]

GERMAN. And you haf got her bundle, and her baby. Ha! [He cackles drily.]

AMERICAN. [Gravely] I smile. I guess Providence has played it pretty low down on you. It's sure acted real mean.

[The BABY wails, and the LITTLE MAN jigs it with a sort of gentle desperation, looking apologetically from face to face. His wistful glance renews the fore of merriment wherever it alights. The AMERICAN alone preserves a gravity which seems incapable of being broken.]

AMERICAN. Maybe you'd better get off right smart and restore that baby. There's nothing can act madder than a mother.

LITTLE MAN. Poor thing, yes! What she must be suffering!

[A gale of laughter shakes the carriage. The ENGLISH for a moment drop their papers, the better to indulge. The LITTLE MAN smiles a wintry smile.]

AMERICAN. [In a lull] How did it eventuate?

LITTLE MAN. We got there just as the train was going to start; and I jumped, thinking I could help

her up. But it moved too quickly, and—and left her.

[The gale of laughter blows up again.]

AMERICAN. Guess I'd have thrown the baby out to her.

LITTLE MAN. I was afraid the poor little thing might break.

[The Baby wails; the LITTLE MAN heaves it; the gale of laughter blows.]

AMERICAN. [Gravely] It's highly entertaining—not for the baby. What kind of an old baby is it, anyway? [He sniff's] I judge it's a bit—niffy.

LITTLE MAN. Afraid I've hardly looked at it yet.

AMERICAN. Which end up is it?

LITTLE MAN. Oh! I think the right end. Yes, yes, it is.

AMERICAN. Well, that's something. Maybe you should hold it out of window a bit. Very excitable things, babies!

ENGLISHWOMAN. [Galvanized] No, no!

ENGLISHMAN. [Touching her knee] My dear!

AMERICAN. You are right, ma'am. I opine there's a draught out there. This baby is precious. We've all of us got stock in this baby in a manner of speaking. This is a little bit of universal brotherhood. Is it a woman baby?

LITTLE MAN. I—I can only see the top of its head.

AMERICAN. You can't always tell from that. It looks kind of over-wrapped up. Maybe it had better be unbound.

GERMAN. 'Nein, nein, nein'!

AMERICAN. I think you are very likely right, colonel. It might be a pity to unbind that baby. I guess the lady should be consulted in this matter.

ENGLISHWOMAN. Yes, yes, of course——!

ENGLISHMAN. [Touching her] Let it be! Little beggar seems all right.

AMERICAN. That would seem only known to Providence at this moment. I judge it might be due to humanity to look at its face.

LITTLE MAN. [Gladly] It's sucking my' finger. There, there—nice little thing—there!

AMERICAN. I would surmise in your leisure moments you have created babies, sir?

LITTLE MAN. Oh! no—indeed, no.

AMERICAN. Dear me!—That is a loss. [Addressing himself to the carriage at large] I think we may esteem ourselves fortunate to have this little stranger right here with us. Demonstrates what a hold the little and weak have upon us nowadays. The colonel here—a man of blood and iron—there he sits quite calm next door to it. [He sniffs] Now, this baby is rather chastening—that is a sign of grace, in the colonel—that is true heroism.

LITTLE MAN. [Faintly] I—I can see its face a little now.

[All bend forward.]

AMERICAN. What sort of a physiognomy has it, anyway?

LITTLE MAN. [Still faintly] I don't see anything but—but spots.

GERMAN. Oh! Ha! Pfui!

[The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.]

AMERICAN. I am told that is not uncommon amongst babies. Perhaps we could have you inform us, ma'am.

ENGLISHWOMAN. Yes, of course—only what sort of—

LITTLE MAN. They seem all over it—[At the slight recoil of everyone] I feel sure it's—it's quite a good baby underneath.

AMERICAN. That will be rather difficult to come at. I'm just a bit sensitive. I've very little use for affections of the epidermis.

GERMAN. Pfui! [He has edged away as far as he can get, and is lighting a big cigar]

[The DUTCH YOUTH draws his legs back.]

AMERICAN. [Also taking out a cigar] I guess it would be well to fumigate this carriage. Does it suffer, do you think?

LITTLE MAN. [Peering] Really, I don't—I'm not sure—I know so little about babies. I think it would have a nice expression—if—if it showed.

AMERICAN. Is it kind of boiled looking?

LITTLE MAN. Yes—yes, it is.

AMERICAN. [Looking gravely round] I judge this baby has the measles.

[The GERMAN screws himself spasmodically against the arm of the ENGLISHWOMAN'S seat.]

ENGLISHWOMAN. Poor little thing! Shall I—?

[She half rises.]

ENGLISHMAN. [Touching her] No, no—Dash it!

AMERICAN. I honour your emotion, ma'am. It does credit to us all. But I sympathize with your husband too. The measles is a very important pestilence in connection with a grown woman.

LITTLE MAN. It likes my finger awfully. Really, it's rather a sweet baby.

AMERICAN. [Sniffing] Well, that would appear to be quite a question. About them spots, now? Are they rosy?

LITTLE MAN. No-o; they're dark, almost black.

GERMAN. Gott! Typhus! [He bounds up on to the arm of the ENGLISHWOMAN'S Seat.]

AMERICAN. Typhus! That's quite an indisposition!

[The DUTCH YOUTH rises suddenly, and bolts out into the corridor. He is followed by the GERMAN, puffing clouds of smoke. The ENGLISH and AMERICAN sit a moment longer without speaking. The ENGLISHWOMAN'S face is turned with a curious expression—half pity, half fear—towards the LITTLE MAN. Then the ENGLISHMAN gets up.]

ENGLISHMAN. Bit stuffy for you here, dear, isn't it?

[He puts his arm through hers, raises her, and almost pushes her through the doorway. She goes, still looking back.]

AMERICAN. [Gravely] There's nothing I admire more'n courage. Guess I'll go and smoke in the corridor.

[As he goes out the LITTLE MAN looks very wistfully after him. Screwing up his mouth and nose, he holds the BABY away from him and wavers; then rising, he puts it on the seat opposite and goes through the motions of letting down the window. Having done so he looks at the BABY, who has begun to wail. Suddenly he raises his hands and clasps them, like a child praying. Since, however, the BABY does not stop wailing, he hovers over it in indecision; then, picking it up, sits down again to dandle it, with his face turned toward the open window. Finding that it still wails, he begins to sing to it in a cracked little voice. It is charmed at once. While he is singing, the AMERICAN appears in the corridor. Letting down the passage window, he stands there in the doorway with the draught blowing his

hair and the smoke of his cigar all about him. The LITTLE MAN stops singing and shifts the shawl higher to protect the BABY'S head from the draught.]

AMERICAN. [Gravely] This is the most sublime spectacle I have ever envisaged. There ought to be a record of this.

[The LITTLE MAN looks at him, wondering. You are typical, sir, of the sentiments of modern Christianity. You illustrate the deepest feelings in the heart of every man.]

[The LITTLE MAN rises with the BABY and a movement of approach.]

Guess I'm wanted in the dining-car.

[He vanishes. The LITTLE MAN sits down again, but back to the engine, away from the draught, and looks out of the window, patiently jogging the BABY On his knee.]

CURTAIN

SCENE III

An arrival platform. The LITTLE MAN, with the BABY and the bundle, is standing disconsolate, while travellers pass and luggage is being carried by. A STATION OFFICIAL, accompanied by a POLICEMAN, appears from a doorway, behind him.

OFFICIAL. [Consulting telegram in his hand] 'Das ist der Herr'.

[They advance to the LITTLE MAN.]

OFFICIAL. 'Sie haben einen Buben gestohlen'?

LITTLE MAN. I only speak English and American.

OFFICIAL. 'Dies ist nicht Ihr Bube'?

[He touches the Baby.]

LITTLE MAN. [Shaking his head] Take care—it's ill.

[The man does not understand.]

Ill—the baby—

OFFICIAL. [Shaking his head] 'Verstehe nicht'. Dis is nod your baby?
No?

LITTLE MAN. [Shaking his head violently] No, it is not. No.

OFFICIAL. [Tapping the telegram] Gut! You are 'rested. [He signs to the POLICEMAN, who takes the LITTLE MAN's arm.]

LITTLE MAN. Why? I don't want the poor baby.

OFFICIAL. [Lifting the bundle] 'Dies ist nicht Ihr Gepack'—pag?

LITTLE Mary. No.

OFFICIAL. Gut! You are 'rested.

LITTLE MAN. I only took it for the poor woman. I'm not a thief—
I'm—I'm—

OFFICIAL. [Shaking head] Verstehe nicht.

[The LITTLE MAN tries to tear his hair. The disturbed BABY wails.]

LITTLE MAN. [Dandling it as best he can] There, there—poor, poor!

OFFICIAL. Halt still! You are 'rested. It is all right.

LITTLE MAN. Where is the mother?

OFFICIAL. She comet by next drain. Das telegram say: 'Halt einen Herren mit schwarzem Buben and schwarzem Gepack'. 'Rest gentleman mit black baby and black—pag.

[The LITTLE MAN turns up his eyes to heaven.]

OFFICIAL. 'Komm mit us'.

[They take the LITTLE MAN toward the door from which they have come. A voice stops them.]

AMERICAN. [Speaking from as far away as may be] Just a moment!

[The OFFICIAL stops; the LITTLE MAN also stops and sits down on a bench against the wall. The POLICEMAN stands stolidly beside him. The AMERICAN approaches a step or two, beckoning; the OFFICIAL goes up to him.]

AMERICAN. Guess you've got an angel from heaven there! What's the gentleman in buttons for?

OFFICIAL. 'Was ist das'?

AMERICAN. Is there anybody here that can understand American?

OFFICIAL. 'Verstehe nicht'.

AMERICAN. Well, just watch my gestures. I was saying [He points to the LITTLE MAN, then makes gestures of flying] you have an angel from heaven there. You have there a man in whom Gawd [He points upward] takes quite an amount of stock. You have no call to arrest him. [He makes the gesture of arrest] No, Sir. Providence has acted pretty mean, loading off that baby on him. [He makes the motion of dandling] The little man has a heart of gold. [He points to his heart, and takes out a gold coin.]

OFFICIAL. [Thinking he is about to be bribed] 'Aber, das ist zu viel'!

AMERICAN. Now, don't rattle me! [Pointing to the LITTLE MAN] Man [Pointing to his heart] 'Herz' [Pointing to the coin] 'von' Gold. This is a flower of the field—he don't want no gentleman in buttons to pluck him up.

[A little crowd is gathering, including the Two ENGLISH, the GERMAN, and the DUTCH YOUTH.]

OFFICIAL. 'Verstehe absolut nichts'. [He taps the telegram] 'Ich muss mein' duty do.

AMERICAN. But I'm telling you. This is a white man. This is probably the whitest man on Gawd's earth.

OFFICIAL. 'Das macht nichts'—gut or no gut, I muss mein duty do. [He turns to go toward the LITTLE MAN.]

AMERICAN. Oh! Very well, arrest him; do your duty. This baby has typhus.

[At the word "typhus" the OFFICIAL stops.]

AMERICAN. [Making gestures] First-class typhus, black typhus, schwarzen typhus. Now you have it. I'm kind o' sorry for you and the gentleman in buttons. Do your duty!

OFFICIAL. Typhus? Der Bub—die baby hat typhus?

AMERICAN. I'm telling you.

OFFICIAL. Gott im Himmel!

AMERICAN. [Spotting the GERMAN in the little throng] here's a gentleman will corroborate me.

OFFICIAL. [Much disturbed, and signing to the POLICEMAN to stand clear] Typhus! 'Aber das ist grasslich'!

AMERICAN. I kind o' thought you'd feel like that.

OFFICIAL. 'Die Sanitatsmaschine! Gleich'!

[A PORTER goes to get it. From either side the broken half-moon of persons stand gazing at the LITTLE MAN, who sits unhappily dandling the BABY in the centre.]

OFFICIAL. [Raising his hands] 'Was zu thun'?

AMERICAN. Guess you'd better isolate the baby.

[A silence, during which the LITTLE MAN is heard faintly whistling and clucking to the BABY.]

OFFICIAL. [Referring once more to his telegram]

"Rest gentleman mit black baby." [Shaking his head] Wir must de gentleman hold. [To the GERMAN] 'Bitte, mein Herr, sagen Sie ihm, den Buben zu niedersetzen'. [He makes the gesture of deposit.]

GERMAN. [To the LITTLE MAN] He say: Put down the baby.

[The LITTLE MAN shakes his head, and continues to dandle the BABY.]

OFFICIAL. You must.

[The LITTLE MAN glowers, in silence.]

ENGLISHMAN. [In background—muttering] Good man!

GERMAN. His spirit ever denies.

OFFICIAL. [Again making his gesture] 'Aber er muss'!

[The LITTLE MAN makes a face at him.]

'Sag' Ihm': Instantly put down baby, and komm' mit us.

[The BABY wails.]

LITTLE MAN. Leave the poor ill baby here alone? Be—be—be d—d to you!

AMERICAN. [Jumping on to a trunk—with enthusiasm] Bully!

[The ENGLISH clap their hands; the DUTCH YOUTH laughs. The OFFICIAL is muttering, greatly incensed.]

AMERICAN. What does that body-snatcher say?

GERMAN. He say this man use the baby to save himself from arrest. Very smart he say.

AMERICAN. I judge you do him an injustice. [Showing off the LITTLE MAN with a sweep of his arm.] This is a white man. He's got a black baby, and he won' leave it in the lurch. Guess we would all act noble that way, give us the chance.

[The LITTLE MAN rises, holding out the BABY, and advances a step or two. The half-moon at once gives, increasing its size; the AMERICAN climbs on to a higher trunk. The LITTLE MAN retires and again sits down.]

AMERICAN. [Addressing the OFFICIAL] Guess you'd better go out of business and wait for the mother.

OFFICIAL. [Stamping his foot] Die Mutter sall 'rested be for taking out baby mit typhus. Ha! [To the LITTLE MAN] Put ze baby down!

[The LITTLE MAN smiles.]

Do you 'ear?

AMERICAN. [Addressing the OFFICIAL] Now, see here. 'Pears to me you don't suspicion just how beautiful this is. Here we have a man giving his life for that old baby that's got no claim on him. This is not a baby of his own making. No, sir, this is a very Christ-like proposition in the gentleman.

OFFICIAL. Put ze baby down, or ich will goumand someone it to do.

AMERICAN. That will be very interesting to watch.

OFFICIAL. [To POLICEMAN] Dake it vrom him.

[The POLICEMAN mutters, but does not.]

AMERICAN. [To the German] Guess I lost that.

GERMAN. He say he is not his officier.

AMERICAN. That just tickles me to death.

OFFICIAL. [Looking round] Vill nobody dake ze Bub'?

ENGLISHWOMAN. [Moving a step faintly] Yes—I—

ENGLISHMAN. [Grasping her arm]. By Jove! Will you!

OFFICIAL. [Gathering himself for a great effort to take the BABY, and advancing two steps] Zen I gommeand you—[He stops and his voice dies away] Zit dere!

AMERICAN. My! That's wonderful. What a man this is! What a sublime sense of duty!

[The DUTCH YOUTH laughs. The OFFICIAL turns on him, but as he does so the MOTHER of the Busy is seen hurrying.]

MOTHER. 'Ach! Ach! Mei' Bubi'!

[Her face is illumined; she is about to rush to the LITTLE MAN.]

OFFICIAL. [To the POLICEMAN] 'Nimm die Frau'!

[The POLICEMAN catches hold of the WOMAN.]

OFFICIAL. [To the frightened WOMAN] 'Warum haben Sie einen Buben mit Typhus mit ausgebracht'?

AMERICAN. [Eagerly, from his perch] What was that? I don't want to miss any.

GERMAN. He say: Why did you a baby with typhus with you bring out?

AMERICAN. Well, that's quite a question.

[He takes out the field-glasses slung around him and adjusts them on the BABY.]

MOTHER. [Bewildered] Mei' Bubi—Typhus—aber Typhus? [She shakes her head violently] 'Nein, nein, nein! Typhus'!

OFFICIAL. Er hat Typhus.

MOTHER. [Shaking her head] 'Nein, nein, nein'!

AMERICAN. [Looking through his glasses] Guess she's kind of right! I judge the typhus is where the baby' slobbered on the shawl, and it's come off on him.

[The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.]

OFFICIAL. [Turning on him furiously] Er hat Typhus.

AMERICAN. Now, that's where you slop over. Come right here.

[The OFFICIAL mounts, and looks through the glasses.]

AMERICAN. [To the LITTLE MAN] Skin out the baby's leg. If we don't locate spots on that, it'll be good enough for me.

[The LITTLE MAN fumbles Out the BABY'S little white foot.]

MOTHER. Mei' Bubi! [She tries to break away.]

AMERICAN. White as a banana. [To the OFFICIAL—affably] Guess you've made kind of a fool of us with your old typhus.

OFFICIAL. Lass die Frau!

[The POLICEMAN lets her go, and she rushes to her BABY.]

MOTHER. Mei' Bubi!

[The BABY, exchanging the warmth of the LITTLE MAN for the momentary chill of its MOTHER, wails.]

OFFICIAL. [Descending and beckoning to the POLICEMAN] 'Sie wollen den Herrn accusiren'?

[The POLICEMAN takes the LITTLE MAN's arm.]

AMERICAN. What's that? They goin' to pitch him after all?

[The MOTHER, still hugging her BABY, who has stopped crying, gazes at the LITTLE MAN, who sits dazedly looking up. Suddenly she drops on her knees, and with her free hand lifts his booted foot and kisses it.]

AMERICAN. [Waving his hat] Ra! Ra! [He descends swiftly, goes up to the LITTLE MAN, whose arm the POLICEMAN has dropped, and takes his hand] Brother; I am proud to know you. This is one of the greatest moments I have ever experienced. [Displaying the LITTLE MAN to the assembled company] I think I sense the situation when I say that we all esteem it an honour to breathe the rather inferior atmosphere of this station here Along with our little friend. I guess we shall all go home and treasure the memory of his face as the whitest thing in our museum of recollections. And perhaps this good woman will also go home and wash the face of our little brother here. I am inspired with a new faith in mankind. Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to present to you a sure-enough saint—only wants a halo, to be transfigured. [To the LITTLE MAN] Stand right up.

[The LITTLE MAN stands up bewildered. They come about him. The OFFICIAL bows to him, the POLICEMAN salutes him. The DUTCH YOUTH shakes his head and laughs. The GERMAN draws himself up very straight, and bows quickly twice. The ENGLISHMAN and his WIFE approach at least two steps, then, thinking better of it, turn to each other and recede. The MOTHER kisses his hand. The PORTER returning with the Sanitatsmaschine, turns it on from behind, and its pinkish shower, goldened by a ray of sunlight, falls around the LITTLE MAN's head, transfiguring it as he stands with eyes upraised to see whence the portent comes.]

AMERICAN. [Rushing forward and dropping on his knees] Hold on just a minute! Guess I'll take a snapshot of the miracle. [He adjusts his pocket camera] This ought to look bully!

CURTAIN

FROM THE SERIES OF SIX SHORT PLAYS

Four of the SIX SHORT PLAYS

CONTENTS:

HALL-MARKED DEFEAT THE SUN PUNCH AND GO

HALL-MARKED

CHARACTERS

HERSELF.

LADY ELLA.

THE SQUIRE.

THE MAID.

MAUD.

THE RECTOR.

THE DOCTOR.

THE CABMAN.

HANNIBAL and EDWARD

HALL-MARKED

The scene is the sitting-room and verandah of HER bungalow.

The room is pleasant, and along the back, where the verandah runs, it seems all window, both French and casement. There is a door right and a door left. The day is bright; the time morning.

[HERSELF, dripping wet, comes running along the verandah, through the French window, with a wet Scotch terrier in her arms. She vanishes through the door left. A little pause, and LADY ELLA comes running, dry, thin, refined, and agitated. She halts where the tracks of water cease at the door left. A little pause, and MAUD comes running, fairly dry, stolid, breathless, and dragging a bull-dog, wet, breathless, and stout, by the crutch end of her 'en-tout-cas'].

LADY ELLA. Don't bring Hannibal in till I know where she's put Edward!

MAUD. [Brutally, to HANNIBAL] Bad dog! Bad dog!

[HANNIBAL snuffles.]

LADY ELLA. Maud, do take him out! Tie him up. Here! [She takes out a lace handkerchief] No—something stronger! Poor darling Edward! [To HANNIBAL] You are a bad dog!

[HANNIBAL snuffles.]

MAUD. Edward began it, Ella. [To HANNIBAL] Bad dog! Bad dog!

[HANNIBAL snuffles.]

LADY ELLA. Tie him up outside. Here, take my scarf. Where is my poor treasure? [She removes her scarf] Catch! His ear's torn; I saw it.

MAUD. [Taking the scarf, to HANNIBAL] Now!

[HANNIBAL snuffles.]

[She ties the scarf to his collar]

He smells horrible. Bad dog—getting into ponds to fight!

LADY ELLA. Tie him up, Maud. I must try in here.

[Their husbands, THE SQUIRE and THE RECTOR, come hastening along the verandah.]

MAUD. [To THE RECTOR] Smell him, Bertie! [To THE SQUIRE] You might have that pond drained, Squire!

[She takes HANNIBAL out, and ties him to the verandah. THE SQUIRE and RECTOR Come in. LADY ELLA is knocking on the door left.]

HER VOICE. All right! I've bound him up!

LADY ELLA. May I come in?

HER VOICE. Just a second! I've got nothing on.

[LADY ELLA recoils. THE SQUIRE and RECTOR make an involuntary movement of approach.]

LADY ELLA. Oh! There you are!

THE RECTOR. [Doubtfully] I was just going to wade in---

LADY ELLA. Hannibal would have killed him, if she hadn't rushed in!

THE SQUIRE. Done him good, little beast!

LADY ELLA. Why didn't you go in, Tommy?

THE SQUIRE. Well, I would—only she---

LADY ELLA. I can't think how she got Edward out of Hannibal's awful mouth!

MAUD. [Without—to HANNIBAL, who is snuffing on the verandah and straining at the scarf] Bad dog!

LADY ELLA. We must simply thank her tremendously! I shall never forget the way she ran in, with her skirts up to her waist!

THE SQUIRE. By Jove! No. It was topping.

LADY ELLA. Her clothes must be ruined. That pond—ugh! [She wrinkles her nose] Tommy, do have it drained.

THE RECTOR. [Dreamily] I don't remember her face in church.

THE SQUIRE. Ah! Yes. Who is she? Pretty woman!

LADY ELLA. I must get the Vet. to Edward. [To THE SQUIRE] Tommy, do exert yourself!

[MAUD re-enters.]

THE SQUIRE. All right! [Exerting himself] Here's a bell!

HER VOICE. [Through the door] The bleeding's stopped. Shall I send him in to you?

LADY ELLA. Oh, please! Poor darling!

[They listen.]

[LADY ELLA, prepares to receive EDWARD. THE SQUIRE and RECTOR stand transfixed. The door opens, and a bare arm gently pushes EDWARD forth. He is bandaged with a smooth towel. There is a snuffle—HANNIBAL has broken the scarf, outside.]

LADY ELLA. [Aghast] Look! Hannibal's loose! Maud—Tommy. [To THE RECTOR] You!

[The THREE rush to prevent HANNIBAL from re-entering.]

LADY ELLA. [To EDWARD] Yes, I know—you'd like to! You SHALL bite him when it's safe. Oh! my darling, you DO---[She sniffs].

[MAUD and THE SQUIRE re-enter.]

Have you tied him properly this time?

MAUD. With Bertie's braces.

LADY ELLA. Oh! but---

MAUD. It's all right; they're almost leather.

[THE RECTOR re-enters, with a slight look of insecurity.]

LADY ELLA. Rector, are you sure it's safe?

THE RECTOR. [Hitching at his trousers] No, indeed, LADY Ella—I—

LADY ELLA. Tommy, do lend a hand!

THE SQUIRE. All right, Ella; all right! He doesn't mean what you mean!

LADY ELLA. [Transferring EDWARD to THE SQUIRE] Hold him, Tommy. He's sure to smell out Hannibal!

THE SQUIRE. [Taking EDWARD by the collar, and holding his own nose] Jove! Clever if he can smell anything but himself. Phew! She ought to have the Victoria Cross for goin' in that pond.

[The door opens, and HERSELF appears; a fine, frank, handsome woman, in a man's orange-coloured motor-coat, hastily thrown on over the substrata of costume.]

SHE. So very sorry—had to have a bath, and change, of course!

LADY ELLA. We're so awfully grateful to you. It was splendid.

MAUD. Quite.

THE RECTOR. [Rather holding himself together] Heroic! I was just myself about to—

THE SQUIRE. [Restraining EDWARD] Little beast will fight—must apologise—you were too quick for me—

[He looks up at her. She is smiling, and regarding the wounded dog, her head benevolently on one side.]

SHE. Poor dears! They thought they were so safe in that nice pond!

LADY ELLA. Is he very badly torn?

SHE. Rather nasty. There ought to be a stitch or two put in his ear.

LADY ELLA. I thought so. Tommy, do—

THE SQUIRE. All right. Am I to let him go?

LADY ELLA. No.

MAUD. The fly's outside. Bertie, run and tell Jarvis to drive in for the Vet.

THE RECTOR. [Gentle and embarrassed] Run? Well, Maud—I—

SHE. The doctor would sew it up. My maid can go round.

[HANNIBAL. appears at the open casement with the broken braces dangling from his collar.]

LADY ELLA. Look! Catch him! Rector!

MAUD. Bertie! Catch him!

[THE RECTOR seizes HANNIBAL, but is seen to be in difficulties with his garments. HERSELF, who has gone out left, returns, with a leather strop in one hand and a pair of braces in the other.]

SHE. Take this strop—he can't break that. And would these be any good to you?

[SHE hands the braces to MAUD and goes out on to the verandah and hastily away. MAUD, transferring the braces to the RECTOR, goes out, draws HANNIBAL from the casement window, and secures him with the strap. THE RECTOR sits suddenly with the braces in his hands. There is a moment's peace.]

LADY ELLA. Splendid, isn't she? I do admire her.

THE SQUIRE. She's all there.

THE RECTOR. [Feelingly] Most kind.

[He looks ruefully at the braces and at LADY ELLA. A silence.

MAUD reappears at the door and stands gazing at the braces.]

THE SQUIRE. [Suddenly] Eh?

MAUD. Yes.

THE SQUIRE. [Looking at his wife] Ah!

LADY ELLA. [Absorbed in EDWARD] Poor darling!

THE SQUIRE. [Bluntly] Ella, the Rector wants to get up!

THE RECTOR. [Gently] Perhaps—just for a moment—

LADY ELLA. Oh! [She turns to the wall.]

[THE RECTOR, screened by his WIFE, retires on to the verandah to adjust his garments.]

THE SQUIRE. [Meditating] So she's married!

LADY ELLA. [Absorbed in EDWARD] Why?

THE SQUIRE. Braces.

LADY ELLA. Oh! Yes. We ought to ask them to dinner, Tommy.

THE SQUIRE. Ah! Yes. Wonder who they are?

[THE RECTOR and MAUD reappear.]

THE RECTOR. Really very good of her to lend her husband's—I was—er—quite—

MAUD. That'll do, Bertie.

[THEY see HER returning along the verandah, followed by a sandy, red-faced gentleman in leather leggings, with a needle and cotton in his hand.]

HERSELF. Caught the doctor just starting, So lucky!

LADY ELLA. Oh! Thank goodness!

DOCTOR. How do, Lady Ella? How do, Squire?—how do, Rector? [To MAUD] How de do? This the beastie? I see. Quite! Who'll hold him for me?

LADY ELLA. Oh! I!

HERSELF. D'you know, I think I'd better. It's so dreadful when it's your own, isn't it? Shall we go in here, doctor? Come along, pretty boy!

[She takes EDWARD, and they pass into the room, left.]

LADY ELLA. I dreaded it. She is splendid!

THE SQUIRE. Dogs take to her. That's a sure sign.

THE RECTOR. Little things—one can always tell.

THE SQUIRE. Something very attractive about her—what! Fine build of woman.

MAUD. I shall get hold of her for parish work.

THE RECTOR. Ah! Excellent—excellent! Do!

THE SQUIRE. Wonder if her husband shoots? She seems quite-er—quite—

LADY ELLA. [Watching the door] Quite! Altogether charming; one of the nicest faces I ever saw.

[THE DOCTOR comes out alone.]

Oh! Doctor—have you? is it—?

DOCTOR. Right as rain! She held him like an angel—he just licked her, and never made a sound.

LADY ELLA. Poor darling! Can I—

[She signs toward the door.]

DOCTOR. Better leave 'em a minute. She's moppin' 'im off. [He wrinkles his nose] Wonderful clever hands!

THE SQUIRE. I say—who is she?

DOCTOR. [Looking from face to face with a dubious and rather quizzical expression] Who? Well—there you have me! All I know is she's a first-rate nurse—been helpin' me with a case in Ditch Lane. Nice woman, too—thorough good sort! Quite an acquisition here. H'm! [Again that quizzical glance] Excuse me hurryin' off—very late. Good-bye, Rector. Good-bye, Lady Ella. Good-bye!

[He goes. A silence.]

THE SQUIRE. H'm! I suppose we ought to be a bit careful.

[JARVIS, flyman of the old school, has appeared on the verandah.]

JARVIS. [To THE RECTOR] Beg pardon, sir. Is the little dog all right?

MAUD. Yes.

JARVIS. [Touching his hat] Seein' you've missed your train, m'm, shall I wait, and take you 'ome again?

MAUD. No.

JARVIS. Cert'nly, m'm. [He touches his hat with a circular gesture, and is about to withdraw.]

LADY ELLA. Oh, Jarvis—what's the name of the people here?

JARVIS. Challenger's the name I've driven 'em in, my lady.

THE SQUIRE. Challenger? Sounds like a hound. What's he like?

JARVIS. [Scratching his head] Wears a soft 'at, sir.

THE SQUIRE. H'm! Ah!

JARVIS. Very nice gentleman, very nice lady. 'Elped me with my old mare when she 'ad the 'ighstria last week—couldn't 'a' been kinder if they'd 'a' been angels from 'eaven. Wonderful fond o' dumb animals, the two of 'em. I don't pay no attention to gossip, meself.

MAUD. Gossip? What gossip?

JARVIS. [Backing] Did I make use of the word, m'm? You'll excuse me, I'm sure. There's always talk where there's newcomers. I takes people as I finds 'em.

THE RECTOR. Yes, yes, Jarvis—quite—quite right!

JARVIS. Yes, sir. I've—I've got a 'abit that way at my time o' life.

MAUD. [Sharply] How long have they been here, Jarvis?

JARVIS. Well—er—a matter of three weeks, m'm.

[A slight involuntary stir.]

[Apologetic] Of course, in my profession I can't afford to take notice of whether there's the trifle of a ring between 'em, as the sayin' is. 'Tisn't 'ardly my business like.

[A silence.]

LADY ELLA. [Suddenly] Er—thank you, Jarvis; you needn't wait.

JARVIS. No, m'lady. Your service, sir—service, m'm.

[He goes. A silence.]

THE SQUIRE. [Drawing a little closer] Three weeks? I say—er— wasn't there a book?

THE RECTOR. [Abstracted] Three weeks—I certainly haven't seen them in church.

MAUD. A trifle of a ring!

LADY ELLA. [Impulsively] Oh, bother! I'm sure she's all right.
And if she isn't, I don't care. She's been much too splendid.

THE SQUIRE. Must think of the village. Didn't quite like the doctor's way of puttin' us off.

LADY ELLA. The poor darling owes his life to her.

THE SQUIRE. H'm! Dash it! Yes! Can't forget the way she ran into that stinkin' pond.

MAUD. Had she a wedding-ring on?

[They look at each other, but no one knows.]

LADY ELLA. Well, I'm not going to be ungrateful.

THE SQUIRE. It'd be dashed awkward—mustn't take a false step, Ella.

THE RECTOR. And I've got his braces! [He puts his hand to his waist.]

MAUD. [Warningly] Bertie!

THE SQUIRE. That's all right, Rector—we're goin' to be perfectly polite, and—and—thank her, and all that.

LADY ELLA. We can see she's a good sort. What does it matter?

MAUD. My dear Ella! "What does it matter!" We've got to know.

THE RECTOR. We do want light.

THE SQUIRE. I'll ring the bell. [He rings.]

[They look at each other aghast.]

LADY ELLA. What did you ring for, Tommy?

THE SQUIRE. [Flabbergasted] God knows!

MAUD. Somebody'll come.

THE SQUIRE. Rector—you—you've got to—

MAUD. Yes, Bertie.

THE RECTOR. Dear me! But—er—what—er—How?

THE SQUIRE. [Deeply-to himself] The whole thing's damn delicate.

[The door right is opened and a MAID appears. She is a determined-looking female. They face her in silence.]

THE RECTOR. Er—er—your master is not in?

THE MAID. No. 'E's gone up to London.

THE RECTOR. Er—Mr Challenger, I think?

THE MAID. Yes.

THE RECTOR. Yes! Er—quite so

THE MAID. [Eyeing them] D'you want—Mrs Challenger?

THE RECTOR. Ah! Not precisely—

THE SQUIRE. [To him in a low, determined voice] Go on.

THE RECTOR. [Desperately] I asked because there was a—a—Mr. Challenger I used to know in the 'nineties, and I thought—you wouldn't happen to know how long they've been married? My friend marr—

THE MAID. Three weeks.

THE RECTOR. Quite so—quite so! I shall hope it will turn out to be—Er—thank you—Ha!

LADY ELLA. Our dog has been fighting with the Rector's, and Mrs Challenger rescued him; she's bathing his ear. We're waiting to thank her. You needn't—

THE MAID. [Eyeing them] No.

[She turns and goes out.]

THE SQUIRE. Phew! What a gorgon! I say, Rector, did you really know a Challenger in the 'nineties?

THE RECTOR. [Wiping his brow] No.

THE SQUIRE. Ha! Jolly good!

LADY ELLA. Well, you see!—it's all right.

THE RECTOR. Yes, indeed. A great relief!

LADY ELLA. [Moving to the door] I must go in now.

THE SQUIRE. Hold on! You goin' to ask 'em to—to—anything?

LADY ELLA. Yes.

MAUD. I shouldn't.

LADY ELLA. Why not? We all like the look of her.

THE RECTOR. I think we should punish ourselves for entertaining that uncharitable thought.

LADY ELLA. Yes. It's horrible not having the courage to take people as they are.

THE SQUIRE. As they are? H'm! How can you till you know?

LADY ELLA. Trust our instincts, of course.

THE SQUIRE. And supposing she'd turned out not married—eh!

LADY ELLA! She'd still be herself, wouldn't she?

MAUD. Ella!

THE SQUIRE. H'm! Don't know about that.

LADY ELLA. Of course she would, Tommy.

THE RECTOR. [His hand stealing to his waist] Well! It's a great weight off my—!

LADY ELLA. There's the poor darling snuffling. I must go in.

[She knocks on the door. It is opened, and EDWARD comes out briskly, with a neat little white pointed ear-cap on one ear.]

LADY ELLA. Precious!

[SHE HERSELF Comes out, now properly dressed in flax-blue linen.]

LADY ELLA. How perfectly sweet of you to make him that!

SHE. He's such a dear. And the other poor dog?

MAUD. Quite safe, thanks to your strop.

[HANNIBAL appears at the window, with the broken strop dangling. Following her gaze, they turn and see him.]

MAUD. Oh! There, he's broken it. Bertie!

SHE. Let me! [She seizes HANNIBAL.]

THE SQUIRE. We're really most tremendously obliged to you. Afraid we've been an awful nuisance.

SHE. Not a bit. I love dogs.

THE SQUIRE. Hope to make the acquaintance of Mr——of your husband.

LADY ELLA. [To EDWARD, who is straining]

[Gently, darling! Tommy, take him.]

[THE SQUIRE does so.]

MAUD. [Approaching HANNIBAL.] Is he behaving?

[She stops short, and her face suddenly shoots forward at HER hands that are holding HANNIBAL'S neck.]

SHE. Oh! yes—he's a love.

MAUD. [Regaining her upright position, and pursing her lips; in a peculiar voice] Bertie, take Hannibal.

THE RECTOR takes him.

LADY ELLA. [Producing a card] I can't be too grateful for all you've done for my poor darling. This is where we live. Do come— and see——

[MAUD, whose eyes have never left those hands, tweaks LADY ELLA's dress.]

LADY ELLA. That is—I'm—I——

[HERSELF looks at LADY ELLA in surprise.]

THE SQUIRE. I don't know if your husband shoots, but if——

[MAUD, catching his eye, taps the third finger of her left hand.]

—er—he—does—er—er——

[HERSELF looks at THE SQUIRE surprised.]

MAUD. [Turning to her husband, repeats the gesture with the low and simple word] Look!

THE RECTOR. [With round eyes, severely] Hannibal! [He lifts him bodily and carries him away.]

MAUD. Don't squeeze him, Bertie!

[She follows through the French window.]

THE SQUIRE. [Abruptly—of the unoffending EDWARD] That dog'll be forgettin' himself in a minute.

[He picks up EDWARD and takes him out.]

[LADY ELLA is left staring.]

LADY ELLA. [At last] You mustn't think, I——You mustn't think, we——Oh! I must just see they—don't let Edward get at Hannibal.

[She skims away.]

[HERSELF is left staring after LADY ELLA, in surprise.]

SHE. What is the matter with them?

[The door is opened.]

THE MAID. [Entering and holding out a wedding-ring—severely] You left this, m'm, in the bathroom.

SHE. [Looking, startled, at her finger] Oh! [Taking it] I hadn't missed it. Thank you, Martha.

[THE MAID goes.]

[A hand, slipping in at the casement window, softly lays a pair of braces on the windowsill. SHE looks at the braces, then at the ring. HER lip curls.]

Sue. [Murmuring deeply] Ah!

CURTAIN

DEFEAT

A TINY DRAMA

CHARACTERS

THE OFFICER. THE GIRL.

DEFEAT

During the Great War. Evening.

An empty room. The curtains drawn and gas turned low. The furniture and walls give a colour-impression as of greens and beetroot. There is a prevalence of plush. A fireplace on the Left, a sofa, a small table; the curtained window is at the back. On the table, in a common pot, stands a little plant of maidenhair fern, fresh and green.

Enter from the door on the Right, a GIRL and a YOUNG OFFICER in khaki. The GIRL wears a discreet dark dress, hat, and veil, and stained yellow gloves. The YOUNG OFFICER is tall, with a fresh open face, and kindly eager blue eyes; he is a little lame. The GIRL, who is evidently at home, moves towards the gas jet to turn it up, then changes her mind, and going to the curtains, draws them apart and throws up the window. Bright moonlight comes flooding in. Outside are seen the trees of a little Square. She stands gazing out, suddenly turns inward with a shiver.

YOUNG OFF. I say; what's the matter? You were crying when I spoke to you.

GIRL. [With a movement of recovery] Oh! nothing. The beautiful evening—that's all.

YOUNG OFF. [Looking at her] Cheer up!

GIRL. [Taking off hat and veil; her hair is yellowish and crinkly]
Cheer up! You are not lonelee, like me.

YOUNG OFF. [Limping to the window—doubtfully] I say, how did you how did you get into this? Isn't it an awfully hopeless sort of life?

GIRL. Yees, it ees. You haf been wounded?

YOUNG OFF. Just out of hospital to-day.

GIRL. The horrible war—all the misery is because of the war. When will it end?

YOUNG OFF. [Leaning against the window-sill, looking at her attentively] I say, what nationality are you?

GIRL. [With a quick look and away] Rooshian.

YOUNG OFF. Really! I never met a Russian girl. [The GIRL gives him another quick look] I say, is it as bad as they make out?

GIRL. [Slipping her hand through his arm] Not when I haf anyone as ni-ice as you; I never haf had, though. [She smiles, and her smile, like her speech, is slow and confining] You stopped because I was sad, others stop because I am gay. I am not fond of men at all. When you know—you are not fond of them.

YOUNG OFF. Well, you hardly know them at their best, do you? You should see them in the trenches. By George! They're simply splendid—officers and men, every blessed soul. There's never been anything like it—just one long bit of jolly fine self-sacrifice; it's perfectly amazing.

GIRL. [Turning her blue-grey eyes on him] I expect you are not the last at that. You see in them what you haf in yourself, I think.

YOUNG OFF. Oh, not a bit; you're quite out! I assure you when we made the attack where I got wounded there wasn't a single man in my regiment who wasn't an absolute hero. The way they went in—never thinking of themselves—it was simply ripping.

GIRL. [In a queer voice] It is the same too, perhaps, with—the enemy.

YOUNG OFF. Oh, yes! I know that.

GIRL. Ah! You are not a mean man. How I hate mean men!

YOUNG OFF. Oh! they're not mean really—they simply don't understand.

GIRL. Oh! You are a babee—a good babee aren't you?

[The YOUNG OFFICER doesn't like this, and frowns. The GIRL looks a little scared.]

GIRL. [Clingingly] But I li-ke you for it. It is so good to find a ni-ice man.

YOUNG OFF. [Abruptly] About being lonely? Haven't you any Russian friends?

GIRL. [Blankly] Rooshian? No. [Quickly] The town is so beeg. Were you at the concert before you spoke to me?

YOUNG OFF. Yes.

GIRL. I too. I lofe music.

YOUNG OFF. I suppose all Russians do.

GIRL. [With another quick look tat him] I go there always when I haf the money.

YOUNG OFF. What! Are you as badly on the rocks as that?

GIRL. Well, I haf just one shilling now!

[She laughs bitterly. The laugh upsets him; he sits on the window-sill, and leans forward towards her.]

YOUNG OFF. I say, what's your name?

GIRL. May. Well, I call myself that. It is no good asking yours.

YOUNG OFF. [With a laugh] You're a distrustful little soul; aren't you?

GIRL. I haf reason to be, don't you think?

YOUNG OFF. Yes. I suppose you're bound to think us all brutes.

GIRL. [Sitting on a chair close to the window where the moonlight falls on one powdered cheek] Well, I haf a lot of reasons to be afraid all my time. I am dreadfully nervous now; I am not trusing anybody. I suppose you haf been killing lots of Germans?

YOUNG OFF. We never know, unless it happens to be hand to hand; I haven't come in for that yet.

GIRL. But you would be very glad if you had killed some.

YOUNG OFF. Oh, glad? I don't think so. We're all in the same boat, so far as that's concerned. We're not glad to kill each other—not most of us. We do our job—that's all.

GIRL. Oh! It is frightful. I expect I haf my brothers killed.

YOUNG OFF. Don't you get any news ever?

GIRL. News? No indeed, no news of anybody in my country. I might not haf a country; all that I ever knew is gone; fader, moder, sisters, broders, all; never any more I shall see them, I suppose, now. The war it breaks and breaks, it breaks hearts. [She gives a little snarl] Do you know what I was thinking when you came up to me? I was thinking of my native town, and the river in the moonlight. If I could see it again I would be glad. Were you ever homeseeck?

YOUNG OFF. Yes, I have been—in the trenches. But one's ashamed with all the others.

GIRL. Ah! Yees! Yees! You are all comrades there. What is it like for me here, do you think, where everybody hates and despises me, and would catch me and put me in prison, perhaps. [Her breast heaves.]

YOUNG OFF. [Leaning forward and patting her knee] Sorry—sorry.

GIRL. [In a smothered voice] You are the first who has been kind to me for so long! I will tell you the truth—I am not Rooshian at all —I am German.

YOUNG OFF. [Staring] My dear girl, who cares. We aren't fighting against women.

GIRL. [Peering at him] Another man said that to me. But he was thinkin' of his fun. You are a veree ni-ice boy; I am so glad I met you. You see the good in people, don't you? That is the first thing in the world—because—there is really not much good in people, you know.

YOUNG OFF. [Smiling] You are a dreadful little cynic! But of course you are!

GIRL. Cyneec? How long do you think I would live if I was not a cyneec? I should drown myself tomorrow. Perhaps there are good people, but, you see, I don't know them.

YOUNG OFF. I know lots.

GIRL. [Leaning towards him] Well now—see, ni-ice boy—you haf never been in a hole, haf you?

YOUNG OFF. I suppose not a real hole.

GIRL. No, I should think not, with your face. Well, suppose I am still a good girl, as I was once, you know; and you took me to your mother and your sisters and you said: "Here is a little German girl that has no work, and no money, and no friends." They will say: "Oh! how sad! A German girl!" And they will go and wash their hands.

[The OFFICER, is silent, staring at her.]

GIRL. You see.

YOUNG OFF. [Muttering] I'm sure there are people.

GIRL. No. They would not take a German, even if she was good. Besides, I don't want to be good any more—I am not a humbug; I have learned to be bad. Aren't you going to kees me, ni-ice boy?

She puts her face close to his. Her eyes trouble him; he draws back.

YOUNG OFF. Don't. I'd rather not, if you don't mind. [She looks at him fixedly, with a curious inquiring stare] It's stupid. I don't know—but you see, out there, and in hospital, life's different. It's—it's—it isn't mean, you know. Don't come too close.

GIRL. Oh! You are fun—[She stops] Eesn't it light. No Zeps to-night. When they burn—what a 'orrible death! And all the people cheer. It is natural. Do you hate us veree much?

YOUNG OFF. [Turning sharply] Hate? I don't know.

GIRL. I don't hate even the English—I despise them. I despise my people too; even more, because they began this war. Oh! I know that. I despise all the peoples. Why haf they made the world so miserable —why haf they killed all our lives—hundreds and thousands and millions of lives—all for

noting? They haf made a bad world— everybody hating, and looking for the worst everywhere. They haf made me bad, I know. I believe no more in anything. What is there to believe in? Is there a God? No! Once I was teaching little English children their prayers— isn't that funnee? I was reading to them about Christ and love. I believed all those things. Now I believe noting at all—no one who is not a fool or a liar can believe. I would like to work in a 'ospital; I would like to go and 'elp poor boys like you. Because I am a German they would throw me out a 'undred times, even if I was good. It is the same in Germany, in France, in Russia, everywhere. But do you think I will believe in Love and Christ and God and all that—Not I! I think we are animals —that's all! Oh, yes! you fancy it is because my life has spoiled me. It is not that at all—that is not the worst thing in life. The men I take are not ni-ice, like you, but it's their nature; and—they help me to live, which is something for me, anyway. No, it is the men who think themselves great and good and make the war with their talk and their hate, killing us all—killing all the boys like you, and keeping poor People in prison, and telling us to go on hating; and all these dreadful cold-blood creatures who write in the papers —the same in my country—just the same; it is because of all of them that I think we are only animals.

[The YOUNG OFFICER gets up, acutely miserable.]

[She follows him with her eyes.]

GIRL. Don't mind me talkin', ni-ice boy. I don't know anyone to talk to. If you don't like it, I can be quiet as a mouse.

YOUNG OFF. Oh, go on! Talk away; I'm not obliged to believe you, and I don't.

[She, too, is on her feet now, leaning against the wall; her dark dress and white face just touched by the slanting moonlight. Her voice comes again, slow and soft and bitter.]

GIRL. Well, look here, ni-ice boy, what sort of world is it, where millions are being tortured, for no fault of theirs, at all? A beautiful world, isn't it? 'Umbog! Silly rot, as you boys call it. You say it is all "Comrades" and braveness out there at the front, and people don't think of themselves. Well, I don't think of myself verree much. What does it matter? I am lost now, anyway. But I think of my people at 'ome; how they suffer and grieve. I think of all the poor people there, and here, how lose those they love, and all the poor prisoners. Am I not to think of them? And if I do, how am I to believe it a beautiful world, ni-ice boy?

[He stands very still, staring at her.]

GIRL. Look here! We haf one life each, and soon it is over. Well, I think that is lucky.

YOUNG OFF. No! There's more than that.

GIRL. [Softly] Ah! You think the war is fought for the future; you are giving your lives for a better world, aren't you?

YOUNG OFF. We must fight till we win.

GIRL. Till you win. My people think that too. All the peoples think that if they win the world will be better. But it will not, you know; it will be much worse, anyway.

[He turns away from her, and catches up his cap. Her voice follows him.]

GIRL. I don't care which win. I don't care if my country is beaten. I despise them all—animals—animals. Ah! Don't go, ni-ice boy; I will be quiet now.

[He has taken some notes from his tunic pocket; he puts them on the table and goes up to her.]

YOUNG OFF. Good-night.

GIRL. [Plaintively] Are you really going? Don't you like me enough?

YOUNG OFF. Yes, I like you.

GIRL. It is because I am German, then?

YOUNG OFF. No.

GIRL. Then why won't you stay?

YOUNG OFF. [With a shrug] If you must know—because you upset me.

GIRL. Won't you kees me once?

[He bends, puts his lips to her forehead. But as he takes them away she throws her head back, presses her mouth to his, and clings to him.]

YOUNG OFF. [Sitting down suddenly] Don't! I don't want to feel a brute.

GIRL. [Laughing] You are a funny boy; but you are verree good. Talk to me a little, then. No one talks to me. Tell me, haf you seen many German prisoners?

YOUNG OFF. [Sighing] A good many.

GIRL. Any from the Rhine?

YOUNG OFF. Yes, I think so.

GIRL. Were they verree sad?

YOUNG OFF. Some were; some were quite glad to be taken.

GIRL. Did you ever see the Rhine? It will be wonderful to-night. The moonlight will be the same there, and in Rooshia too, and France, everywhere; and the trees will look the same as here, and people will meet under them and make love just as here. Oh! isn't it stupid, the war? As if it were not good to be alive!

YOUNG OFF. You can't tell how good it is to be alive till you're facing death. You don't live till then. And when a whole lot of you feel like that—and are ready to give their lives for each other, it's worth all the rest of life put together.

[He stops, ashamed of such, sentiment before this girl, who believes in nothing.]

GIRL. [Softly] How were you wounded, ni-ice boy?

YOUNG OFF. Attacking across open ground: four machine bullets got me at one go off.

GIRL. Weren't you verree frightened when they ordered you to attack?

[He shakes his head and laughs.]

YOUNG OFF. It was great. We did laugh that morning. They got me much too soon, though—a swindle.

GIRL. [Staring at him] You laughed?

YOUNG OFF. Yes. And what do you think was the first thing I was conscious of next morning? My old Colonel bending over me and giving me a squeeze of lemon. If you knew my Colonel you'd still believe in things. There is something, you know, behind all this evil. After all, you can only die once, and, if it's for your country—all the better!

[Her face, in the moonlight, with, intent eyes touched up with black, has a most strange, other-world look.]

GIRL. No; I believe in nothing, not even in my country. My heart is dead.

YOUNG OFF. Yes; you think so, but it isn't, you know, or you wouldn't have 'been crying when I met you.

GIRL. If it were not dead, do you think I could live my life-walking the streets every night, pretending to like strange men; never hearing a kind word; never talking, for fear I will be known for a German? Soon I shall take to drinking; then I shall be "Kaput" verree quick. You see, I am practical; I see things clear. To-night I am a little emotional; the moon is funny, you know. But I live for myself only, now. I don't care for anything or anybody.

YOUNG OFF. All the same; just now you were pitying your folk at home, and prisoners and that.

GIRL. Yees; because they suffer. Those who suffer are like me—I pity myself, that's all; I am different from your English women. I see what I am doing; I do not let my mind become a turnip just because I am no longer moral.

YOUNG OFF. Nor your heart either, for all you say.

GIRL. Ni-ice boy, you are verree obstinate. But all that about love is 'umbog. We love ourselves, noting more.

At that intense soft bitterness in her voice, he gets up, feeling stifled, and stands at the window. A newspaper boy some way off is calling his wares. The GIRL's fingers slip between his own, and stay unmoving. He looks round into her face. In spite of make-up it has a queer, unholy, touching beauty.

YOUNG OFF. [With an outburst] No; we don't only love ourselves; there is more. I can't explain, but there's something great; there's kindness—and—and——

[The shouting of newspaper boys grows louder and their cries, passionately vehement, clash into each other and obscure each word. His head goes up to listen; her hand tightens within his arm—she too is listening. The cries come nearer, hoarser, more shrill and clamorous; the empty moonlight outside seems suddenly crowded with figures, footsteps, voices, and a fierce distant cheering. "Great victory—great victory! Official! British! 'Eavy defeat of the 'Uns! Many thousand prisoners! 'Eavy defeat!" It speeds by, intoxicating, filling him with a fearful joy; he leans far out, waving his cap and cheering like a madman; the night seems to flutter and vibrate and answer. He turns to rush down into the street, strikes against something soft, and recoils. The GIRL stands with hands clenched, and face convulsed, panting. All confused with the desire to do something, he stoops to kiss her hand. She snatches away her fingers, sweeps up the notes he has put down, and holds them out to him.]

GIRL. Take them—I will not haf your English money—take them.

Suddenly she tears them across, twice, thrice, lets the bits. flutter to the floor, and turns her back on him. He stands looking at her leaning against the plush-covered table, her head down, a dark figure in a dark room, with the moonlight sharpening her outline. Hardly a moment he stays, then makes for the door. When he is gone, she still stands there, her chin on her breast, with the sound in her ears of cheering, of hurrying feet, and voices crying: "'Eavy Defeat!" stands, in the centre of a pattern made by the fragments of the torn-up notes, staring out unto the moonlight, seeing not this hated room and the hated Square outside, but a German orchard, and herself, a little girl, plucking apples, a big dog beside her; and a hundred other pictures, such as the drowning see. Then she sinks down on the floor, lays her forehead on the dusty carpet, and presses her body to it. Mechanically, she sweeps together the scattered fragments of notes, assembling them with the dust into a little pile, as of fallen leaves, and dabbling in it with her fingers, while the tears run down her cheeks.

GIRL. Defeat! Der Vaterland! Defeat!. . . One shillin'!

[Then suddenly, in the moonlight, she sits up, and begins to sing with all her might "Die Wacht am Rhein." And outside men pass, singing: "Rule, Britannia!"]

CURTAIN

THE SUN

A SCENE

CHARACTERS

THE GIRL. THE MAN. THE SOLDIER.

THE SUN

A Girl, sits crouched over her knees on a stile close to a river. A MAN with a silver badge stands beside her, clutching the worn top plank. THE GIRL'S level brows are drawn together; her eyes see her memories. THE MAN's eyes see THE GIRL; he has a dark, twisted face. The bright sun shines; the quiet river flows; the Cuckoo is calling; the mayflower is in bloom along the hedge that ends in the stile on the towing-path.

THE GIRL. God knows what 'e'll say, Jim.

THE MAN. Let 'im. 'E's come too late, that's all.

THE GIRL. He couldn't come before. I'm frightened. 'E was fond o' me.

THE MAN. And aren't I fond of you?

THE GIRL. I ought to 'a waited, Jim; with 'im in the fightin'.

THE MAN. [Passionately] And what about me? Aren't I been in the fightin'—earned all I could get?

THE GIRL. [Touching him] Ah!

THE MAN. Did you—? [He cannot speak the words.]

THE GIRL. Not like you, Jim—not like you.

THE MAN. Have a spirit, then.

THE GIRL. I promised him.

THE MAN. One man's luck's another's poison.

THE GIRL. I ought to 'a waited. I never thought he'd come back from the fightin'.

THE MAN. [Grimly] Maybe 'e'd better not 'ave.

THE GIRL. [Looking back along the tow-path] What'll he be like, I wonder?

THE MAN. [Gripping her shoulder] Daisy, don't you never go back on me, or I should kill you, and 'im too.

[THE GIRL looks at him, shivers, and puts her lips to his.]

THE GIRL. I never could.

THE MAN. Will you run for it? 'E'd never find us!

[THE GIRL shakes her head.]

THE MAN [Dully] What's the good o' stayin'? The world's wide.

THE GIRL. I'd rather have it off me mind, with him home.

THE MAN. [Clenching his hands] It's temptin' Providence.

THE GIRL. What's the time, Jim?

THE MAN. [Glancing at the sun] 'Alf past four.

THE GIRL. [Looking along the towing-path] He said four o'clock. Jim, you better go.

THE MAN. Not I. I've not got the wind up. I've seen as much of hell as he has, any day. What like is he?

THE GIRL. [Dully] I dunno, just. I've not seen him these three years. I dunno no more, since I've

known you.

THE MAN. Big or little chap?

THE GIRL. 'Bout your size. Oh! Jim, go along!

THE MAN. No fear! What's a blighter like that to old Fritz's shells? We didn't shift when they was comin'. If you'll go, I'll go; not else.

[Again she shakes her head.]

THE GIRL. Jim, do you love me true?

[For answer THE MAN takes her avidly in his arms.]

I ain't ashamed—I ain't ashamed. If 'e could see me 'eart.

THE MAN. Daisy! If I'd known you out there, I never could 'a stuck it. They'd 'a got me for a deserter. That's how I love you!

THE GIRL. Jim, don't lift your hand to 'im! Promise!

THE MAN. That's according.

THE GIRL. Promise!

THE MAN. If 'e keeps quiet, I won't. But I'm not accountable—not always, I tell you straight—not since I've been through that.

THE GIRL. [With a shiver] Nor p'raps he isn't.

THE MAN. Like as not. It takes the lynch pins out, I tell you.

THE GIRL. God 'elp us!

THE MAN. [Grimly] Ah! We said that a bit too often. What we want we take, now; there's no one else to give it us, and there's no fear'll stop us; we seen the bottom of things.

THE GIRL. P'raps he'll say that too.

THE MAN. Then it'll be 'im or me.

THE GIRL. I'm frightened:

THE MAN. [Tenderly] No, Daisy, no! The river's handy. One more or less. 'E shan't 'arm you; nor me neither. [He takes out a knife.]

THE GIRL. [Seizing his hand] Oh, no! Give it to me, Jim!

THE MAN. [Smiling] No fear! [He puts it away] Shan't 'ave no need for it like as not. All right, little Daisy; you can't be expected to see things like what we do. What's life, anyway? I've seen a thousand lives taken in five minutes. I've seen dead men on the wires like flies on a flypaper. I've been as good as dead meself a hundred times. I've killed a dozen men. It's nothin'. He's safe, if 'e don't get my blood up. If he does, nobody's safe; not 'im, nor anybody else; not even you. I'm speakin' sober.

THE GIRL. [Softly] Jim, you won't go fightin' in the sun, with the birds all callin'?

THE MAN. That depends on 'im. I'm not lookin' for it. Daisy, I love you. I love your hair. I love your eyes. I love you.

THE GIRL. And I love you, Jim. I don't want nothin' more than you in all the world.

THE MAN. Amen to that, my dear. Kiss me close!

The sound of a voice singing breaks in on their embrace. THE GIRL starts from his arms, and looks behind her along the towing-path. THE MAN draws back against the hedge, fingering his side, where the knife is hidden. The song comes nearer.

"I'll be right there to-night,
Where the fields are snowy white;

Banjoes ringing, darkies singing,
All the world seems bright."

THE GIRL. It's him!

THE MAN. Don't get the wind up, Daisy. I'm here!

[The singing stops. A man's voice says "Christ! It's Daisy; it's little Daisy 'erself!" THE GIRL stands rigid. The figure of a soldier appears on the other side of the stile. His cap is tucked into his belt, his hair is bright in the sunshine; he is lean, wasted, brown, and laughing.]

SOLDIER. Daisy! Daisy! Hallo, old pretty girl!

[THE GIRL does not move, barring the way, as it were.]

THE GIRL. Hallo, Jack! [Softly] I got things to tell you!

SOLDIER. What sort o' things, this lovely day? Why, I got things that'd take me years to tell. Have you missed me, Daisy?

THE GIRL. You been so long.

SOLDIER. So I 'ave. My Gawd! It's a way they 'ave in the Army. I said when I got out of it I'd laugh. Like as the sun itself I used to think of you, Daisy, when the trumps was comin' over, and the wind was up. D'you remember that last night in the wood? "Come back and marry me quick, Jack." Well, here I am—got me pass to heaven. No more fightin', no more drillin', no more sleepin' rough. We can get married now, Daisy. We can live soft an' 'appy. Give us a kiss, my dear.

THE GIRL. [Drawing back] No.

SOLDIER. [Blankly] Why not?

[THE MAN, with a swift movement steps along the hedge to THE GIRL'S side.]

THE MAN. That's why, soldier.

SOLDIER. [Leaping over the stile] 'Oo are you, Pompey? The sun don't shine in your inside, do it? 'Oo is he, Daisy?

THE GIRL. My man.

SOLDIER. Your-man! Lummy! "Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief!" Well, mate! So you've been through it, too. I'm laughin' this mornin' as luck will 'ave it. Ah! I can see your knife.

THE MAN. [Who has half drawn his knife] Don't laugh at me, I tell you.

SOLDIER. Not at you, not at you. [He looks from one to the other] I'm laughin' at things in general. Where did you get it, mate?

THE MAN. [Watchfully] Through the lung.

SOLDIER. Think o' that! An' I never was touched. Four years an' never was touched. An' so you've come an' took my girl! Nothin' doin'! Ha! [Again he looks from one to the other-then away] Well! The world's before me! [He laughs] I'll give you Daisy for a lung protector.

THE MAN. [Fiercely] You won't. I've took her.

SOLDIER. That's all right, then. You keep 'er. I've got a laugh in me you can't put out, black as you look! Good-bye, little Daisy!

[THE GIRL makes a movement towards him.]

THE MAN. Don't touch 'im!

[THE GIRL stands hesitating, and suddenly bursts into tears.]

SOLDIER. Look 'ere, mate; shake 'ands! I don't want to see a girl cry, this day of all, with the sun shinin'. I seen too much of sorrer. You and me've been at the back of it. We've 'ad our whack. Shake!

THE MAN. Who are you kiddin'? You never loved 'er!

SOLDIER. [After a long moment's pause] Oh! I thought I did.

THE MAN. I'll fight you for her.

[He drops his knife.]

SOLDIER. [Slowly] Mate, you done your bit, an' I done mine. It's took us two ways, seemin'ly.

THE GIRL. [Pleading] Jim!

THE MAN. [With clenched fists] I don't want 'is charity. I only want what I can take.

SOLDIER. Daisy, which of us will you 'ave?

THE GIRL. [Covering her face] Oh! Him!

SOLDIER. You see, mate! Put your 'ands down. There's nothin' for it but a laugh. You an' me know that. Laugh, mate!

THE MAN. You blarsted—!

[THE GIRL springs to him and stops his mouth.]

SOLDIER. It's no use, mate. I can't do it. I said I'd laugh to-day, and laugh I will. I've come through that, an' all the stink of it; I've come through sorrer. Never again! Cheerio, mate! The sun's a-shinin'! He turns away.

THE GIRL. Jack, don't think too 'ard of me!

SOLDIER. [Looking back] No fear, my dear! Enjoy your fancy! So long! Gawd bless you both!

He sings, and goes along the path, and the song fades away.

"I'll be right there to-night
Where the fields are snowy white;
Banjos ringing, darkies singing
All the world seems bright!"

THE MAN. 'E's mad!

THE GIRL. [Looking down the path with her hands clasped] The sun has touched 'im, Jim!

CURTAIN

PUNCH AND GO

A LITTLE COMEDY

"Orpheus with his lute made trees
And the mountain tope that freeze....."

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JAMES G. FRUSTThe Boss

E. BLEWITT VANEThe Producer
MR. FORESONThe Stage Manager
"ELECTRICS"The Electrician
"PROPS"The Property Man
HERBERTThe Call Boy

OF THE PLAY WITHIN THE PLAY

GUY TOONEThe Professor
VANESSA HELLGROVEThe Wife
GEORGE FLEETWAYOrpheus
MAUDE HOPKINSThe Faun

SCENE: The Stage of a Theatre.

Action continuous, though the curtain is momentarily lowered according to that action.

PUNCH AND GO

The Scene is the stage of the theatre set for the dress rehearsal of the little play: "Orpheus with his Lute." The curtain is up and the audience, though present, is not supposed to be. The set scene represents the end section of a room, with wide French windows, Back Centre, fully opened on to an apple orchard in bloom. The Back Wall with these French windows, is set only about ten feet from the footlights, and the rest of the stage is orchard. What is visible of the room would indicate the study of a writing man of culture. (Note.—If found advantageous for scenic purposes, this section of room can be changed to a broad verandah or porch with pillars supporting its roof.) In the wall, Stage Left, is a curtained opening, across which the curtain is half drawn. Stage Right of the French windows is a large armchair turned rather towards the window, with a book rest attached, on which is a volume of the Encyclopedia Britannica, while on a stool alongside are writing materials such as a man requires when he writes with a pad on his knees. On a little table close by is a reading-lamp with a dark green shade. A crude light from the floats makes the stage stare; the only person on it is MR FORESON, the stage manager, who is standing in the centre looking upwards as if waiting for someone to speak. He is a short, broad man, rather blank, and fatal. From the back of the auditorium, or from an empty box, whichever is most convenient, the producer, MR BLEWITT VANE, a man of about thirty four, with his hair brushed back, speaks.

VANE. Mr Foreson?

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. We'll do that lighting again.

[FORESON walks straight of the Stage into the wings Right.]

[A pause.]

Mr Foreson! [Crescendo] Mr Foreson.

[FORESON walks on again from Right and shades his eyes.]

VANE. For goodness sake, stand by! We'll do that lighting again.
Check your floats.

FORESON. [Speaking up into the prompt wings] Electrics!

VOICE OF ELECTRICS. Hallo!

FORESON. Give it us again. Check your floats.

[The floats go down, and there is a sudden blinding glare of blue lights, in which FORESON looks particularly ghastly.]

VANE. Great Scott! What the blazes! Mr Foreson!

[FORESON walks straight out into the wings Left. Crescendo.]

Mr Foreson!

FORESON. [Re-appearing] Sir?

VANE. Tell Miller to come down.

FORESON. Electrics! Mr Blewitt Vane wants to speak to you. Come down!

VANE. Tell Herbert to sit in that chair.

[FORESON walks straight out into the Right wings.]

Mr Foreson!

FORESON. [Re-appearing] Sir?

VANE. Don't go off the stage. [FORESON mutters.]

[ELECTRICS appears from the wings, Stage Left. He is a dark, thin-faced man with rather spikey hair.]

ELECTRICS. Yes, Mr Vane?

VANE. Look!

ELECTRICS. That's what I'd got marked, Mr Vane.

VANE. Once for all, what I want is the orchard in full moonlight, and the room dark except for the reading lamp. Cut off your front battens.

[ELECTRICS withdraws Left. FORESON walks off the Stage into the Right wings.]

Mr Foreson!

FORESON. [Re-appearing] Sir?

VANE. See this marked right. Now, come on with it! I want to get some beauty into this!

[While he is speaking, HERBERT, the call boy, appears from the wings Right, a mercurial youth of about sixteen with a wide mouth.]

FORESON. [Maliciously] Here you are, then, Mr Vane. Herbert, sit in that chair.

[HERBERT sits an the armchair, with an air of perfect peace.]

VANE. Now! [All the lights go out. In a wail] Great Scott!

[A throaty chuckle from FORESON in the darkness. The light dances up, flickers, shifts, grows steady, falling on the orchard outside. The reading lamp darts alight and a piercing little glare from it strikes into the auditorium away from HERBERT.]

[In a terrible voice] Mr Foreson.

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. Look—at—that—shade!

[FORESON mutters, walks up to it and turns it round so that the light shines on HERBERT'S legs.]

On his face, on his face!

[FORESON turns the light accordingly.]

FORESON. Is that what you want, Mr Vane?

VANE. Yes. Now, mark that!

FORESON. [Up into wings Right] Electrics!

ELECTRICS. Hallo!

FORESON. Mark that!

VANE. My God!

[The blue suddenly becomes amber.]

[The blue returns. All is steady. HERBERT is seen diverting himself with an imaginary cigar.]

Mr Foreson.

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. Ask him if he's got that?

FORESON. Have you got that?

ELECTRICS. Yes.

VANE. Now pass to the change. Take your floats off altogether.

FORESON. [Calling up] Floats out. [They go out.]

VANE. Cut off that lamp. [The lamp goes out] Put a little amber in your back batten. Mark that! Now pass to the end. Mr Foreson!

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. Black out

FORESON. [Calling up] Black out!

[The lights go out.]

VANE. Give us your first lighting-lamp on. And then the two changes. Quick as you can. Put some pep into it. Mr Foreson!

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. Stand for me where Miss Hellgrove comes in. FORESON crosses to the window. No, no!—by the curtain.

[FORESON takes his stand by the curtain; and suddenly the three lighting effects are rendered quickly and with miraculous exactness.]

Good! Leave it at that. We'll begin. Mr Foreson, send up to Mr Frust.

[He moves from the auditorium and ascends on to the Stage, by some steps Stage Right.]

FORESON. Herb! Call the boss, and tell beginners to stand by. Sharp, now!

[HERBERT gets out of the chair, and goes off Right.]

[FORESON is going off Left as VANE mounts the Stage.]

VANE. Mr Foreson.

FORESON. [Re-appearing] Sir?

VANE. I want "Props."

FORESON. [In a stentorian voice] "Props!"

[Another moth-eaten man appears through the French windows.]

VANE. Is that boulder firm?

PROPS. [Going to where, in front of the back-cloth, and apparently among its apple trees, lies the counterfeitment of a mossy boulder; he puts his foot on it] If, you don't put too much weight on it, sir.

VANE. It won't creak?

PROPS. Nao. [He mounts on it, and a dolorous creaking arises.]

VANE. Make that right. Let me see that lute.

[PROPS produces a property lute. While they scrutinize it, a broad man with broad leathery clean-shaven face and small mouth, occupied by the butt end of a cigar, has come on to the stage from Stage Left, and stands waiting to be noticed.]

PROPS. [Attracted by the scent of the cigar] The Boss, Sir.

VANE. [Turning to "PROPS"] That'll do, then.

["PROPS" goes out through the French windows.]

VANE. [To FRUST] Now, sir, we're all ready for rehearsal of "Orpheus with his Lute."

FRUST. [In a cosmopolitan voice] "Orphoos with his loot!" That his loot, Mr Vane? Why didn't he pinch something more precious? Has this high-brow curtain-raiser of yours got any "pep" in it?

VANE. It has charm.

FRUST. I'd thought of "Pop goes the Weasel" with little Miggs. We kind of want a cock-tail before "Louisa loses," Mr Vane.

VANE. Well, sir, you'll see.

FRUST. This your lighting? It's a bit on the spiritool side. I've left my glass. Guess I'll sit in the front row. Ha'f a minute. Who plays this Orphoos?

VANE. George Fleetway.

FRUST. Has he got punch?

VANE. It's a very small part.

FRUST. Who are the others?

VANE. Guy Toone plays the Professor; Vanessa Hellgrove his wife; Maude Hopkins the faun.

FRUST. H'm! Names don't draw.

VANE. They're not expensive, any of them. Miss Hellgrove's a find, I think.

FRUST. Pretty?

VANE. Quite.

FRUST. Arty?

VANE. [Doubtfully] No. [With resolution] Look here, Mr FRUST, it's no use your expecting another "Pop goes the Weasel."

FRUST. We-ell, if it's got punch and go, that'll be enough for me. Let's get to it!

[He extinguishes his cigar and descends the steps and sits in the centre of the front row of the stalls.]

VANE. Mr Foreson?

FORESON. [Appearing through curtain, Right] Sir?

VANE. Beginners. Take your curtain down.

[He descends the steps and seats himself next to FRUST. The curtain goes down.]

[A woman's voice is heard singing very beautifully Sullivan's song: "Orpheus with his lute, with his lute made trees and the mountain tops that freeze'." etc.]

FRUST. Some voice!

The curtain rises. In the armchair the PROFESSOR is yawning, tall, thin, abstracted, and slightly grizzled in the hair. He has a pad of paper over his knee, ink on the stool to his right and the Encyclopedia volume on the stand to his left-barricaded in fact by the article he is writing. He is reading a page over to himself, but the words are drowned in the sound of the song his WIFE is singing in the next room, partly screened off by the curtain. She finishes, and stops. His voice can then be heard conning the words of his article.

PROF. "Orpheus symbolized the voice of Beauty, the call of life, luring us mortals with his song back from the graves we dig for ourselves. Probably the ancients realized this neither more nor less than we moderns. Mankind has not changed. The civilized being still hides the faun and the dryad within its broadcloth and its silk. And yet"—[He stops, with a dried-up air-rather impatiently] Go on, my dear! It helps the atmosphere.

[The voice of his WIFE begins again, gets as far as "made them sing" and stops dead, just as the PROFESSOR's pen is beginning to scratch. And suddenly, drawing the curtain further aside]

[SHE appears. Much younger than the PROFESSOR, pale, very pretty, of a Botticellian type in face, figure, and in her clinging cream-coloured frock. She gazes at her abstracted husband; then swiftly moves to the lintel of the open window, and stands looking out.]

THE WIFE. God! What beauty!

PROF. [Looking Up] Umm?

THE WIFE. I said: God! What beauty!

PROF. Aha!

THE WIFE. [Looking at him] Do you know that I have to repeat everything to you nowadays?

PROF. What?

THE WIFE. That I have to repeat—

PROF. Yes; I heard. I'm sorry. I get absorbed.

THE WIFE. In all but me.

PROF. [Startled] My dear, your song was helping me like anything to get the mood. This paper is the very deuce—to balance between the historical and the natural.

THE WIFE. Who wants the natural?

PROF. [Grumbling] Umm! Wish I thought that! Modern taste! History may go hang; they're all for tuppence-coloured sentiment nowadays.

THE WIFE. [As if to herself] Is the Spring sentiment?

PROF. I beg your pardon, my dear; I didn't catch.

WIFE. [As if against her will—urged by some pent-up force] Beauty, beauty!

PROF. That's what I'm, trying to say here. The Orpheus legend symbolizes to this day the call of Beauty! [He takes up his pen, while she continues to stare out at the moonlight. Yawning] Dash it! I get so sleepy; I wish you'd tell them to make the after-dinner coffee twice as strong.

WIFE. I will.

PROF. How does this strike you? [Conning] "Many Renaissance pictures, especially those of Botticelli,

Francesca and Piero di Cosimo were inspired by such legends as that of Orpheus, and we owe a tiny gem—like Raphael 'Apollo and Marsyas' to the same Pagan inspiration."

WIFE. We owe it more than that—rebellion against the dry-as-dust.

PROF. Quite. I might develop that: "We owe it our revolt against the academic; or our disgust at 'big business,' and all the grossness of commercial success. We owe——". [His voice peters out.]

WIFE. It—love.

PROF. [Abstracted] Eh!

WIFE. I said: We owe it love.

PROF. [Rather startled] Possibly. But—er [With a dry smile]
I mustn't say that here—hardly!

WIFE. [To herself and the moonlight] Orpheus with his lute!

PROF. Most people think a lute is a sort of flute. [Yawning heavily] My dear, if you're not going to sing again, d'you mind sitting down? I want to concentrate.

WIFE. I'm going out.

PROF. Mind the dew!

WIFE. The Christian virtues and the dew.

PROF. [With a little dry laugh] Not bad! Not bad! The Christian virtues and the dew. [His hand takes up his pen, his face droops over his paper, while his wife looks at him with a very strange face] "How far we can trace the modern resurgence against the Christian virtues to the symbolic figures of Orpheus, Pan, Apollo, and Bacchus might be difficult to estimate, but——"

[During those words his WIFE has passed through the window into the moonlight, and her voice rises, singing as she goes: "Orpheus with his lute, with his lute made trees . . ."]

PROF. [Suddenly aware of something] She'll get her throat bad. [He is silent as the voice swells in the distance] Sounds queer at night—H'm! [He is silent—Yawning. The voice dies away. Suddenly his head nods; he fights his drowsiness; writes a word or two, nods again, and in twenty seconds is asleep.]

[The Stage is darkened by a black-out. FRUST's voice is heard speaking.]

FRUST. What's that girl's name?

VANE. Vanessa Hellgrove.

FRUST. Aha!

[The Stage is lighted up again. Moonlight bright on the orchard; the room in darkness where the PROFESSOR'S figure is just visible sleeping in the chair, and screwed a little more round towards the window. From behind the mossy boulder a faun-like figure uncurls itself and peeps over with ears standing up and elbows leaning on the stone, playing a rustic pipe; and there are seen two rabbits and a fox sitting up and listening. A shiver of wind passes, blowing petals from the apple-trees.]

[The FAUN darts his head towards where, from Right, comes slowly the figure of a Greek youth, holding a lute or lyre which his fingers strike, lifting out little wandering strains as of wind whinnying in funnels and odd corners. The FAUN darts down behind the stone, and the youth stands by the boulder playing his lute. Slowly while he plays the whitened trunk of an apple-tree is seen, to dissolve into the body of a girl with bare arms and feet, her dark hair unbound, and the face of the PROFESSOR'S WIFE. Hypnotized, she slowly sways towards him, their eyes fixed on each other, till she is quite close. Her arms go out to him, cling round his neck and, their lips meet. But as they meet there comes a gasp and the PROFESSOR with ruffled hair is seen starting from his chair, his hands thrown up; and at his horrified "Oh!" the Stage is darkened with a black-out.]

[The voice of FRUST is heard speaking.]

FRUST. Gee!

The Stage is lighted up again, as in the opening scene. The PROFESSOR is seen in his

chair, with spilt sheets of paper round him, waking from a dream. He shakes himself, pinches his leg, stares heavily round into the moonlight, rises.

PROF. Phew! Beastly dream! Boof! H'm! [He moves to the window and calls.] Blanche! Blanche! [To himself] Made trees-made trees! [Calling] Blanche!

WIFE's VOICE. Yes.

PROF. Where are you?

WIFE. [Appearing by the stone with her hair down] Here!

PROF. I say—I—I've been asleep—had a dream. Come in. I'll tell you.

[She comes, and they stand in the window.]

PROF. I dreamed I saw a-faun on that boulder blowing on a pipe. [He looks nervously at the stone] With two damned little rabbits and a fox sitting up and listening. And then from out there came our friend Orpheus playing on his confounded lute, till he actually turned that tree there into you. And gradually he-he drew you like a snake till you—er—put your arms round his neck and—er—kissed him. Boof! I woke up. Most unpleasant. Why! Your hair's down!

WIFE. Yes.

PROF. Why?

WIFE. It was no dream. He was bringing me to life.

PROF. What on earth?

WIFE. Do you suppose I am alive? I'm as dead as Euridice.

PROF. Good heavens, Blanche, what's the matter with you to-night?

WIFE. [Pointing to the litter of papers] Why don't we live, instead of writing of it? [She points out unto the moonlight] What do we get out of life? Money, fame, fashion, talk, learning? Yes. And what good are they? I want to live!

PROF. [Helplessly] My dear, I really don't know what you mean.

WIFE. [Pointing out into the moonlight] Look! Orpheus with his lute, and nobody can see him. Beauty, beauty, beauty—we let it go. [With sudden passion] Beauty, love, the spring. They should be in us, and they're all outside.

PROF. My dear, this is—this is—awful. [He tries to embrace her.]

WIFE. [Avoiding him—an a stilly voice] Oh! Go on with your writing!

PROF. I'm—I'm upset. I've never known you so—so—

WIFE. Hysterical? Well! It's over. I'll go and sing.

PROF. [Soothingly] There, there! I'm sorry, darling; I really am. You're kipped—you're kipped. [He gives and she accepts a kiss] Better?

[He gravitates towards his papers.]

All right, now?

WIFE. [Standing still and looking at him] Quite!

PROF. Well, I'll try and finish this to-night; then, to-morrow we might have a jaunt. How about a theatre? There's a thing—they say—called "Chinese Chops," that's been running years.

WIFE. [Softly to herself as he settles down into his chair] Oh! God!

[While he takes up a sheet of paper and adjusts himself, she stands at the window staring with all her might at the boulder, till from behind it the faun's head and shoulders emerge once more.]

PROF. Very queer the power suggestion has over the mind. Very queer! There's nothing really in animism, you know, except the curious shapes rocks, trees and things take in certain lights—effect they have on our imagination. [He looks up] What's the matter now?

WIFE. [Startled] Nothing! Nothing!

[Her eyes waver to him again, and the FAUN vanishes. She turns again to look at the boulder; there is nothing there; a little shiver of wind blows some petals off the trees. She catches one of them, and turning quickly, goes out through the curtain.]

PROF. [Coming to himself and writing] "The Orpheus legend is the— er—apotheosis of animism. Can we accept——" [His voice is lost in the sound of his WIFE'S voice beginning again: "Orpheus with his lute—with his lute made trees——" It dies in a sob. The PROFESSOR looks up startled, as the curtain falls].

FRUST. Fine! Fine!

VANE. Take up the curtain. Mr Foreson?

[The curtain goes up.]

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. Everybody on.

[He and FRUST leave their seats and ascend on to the Stage, on which are collecting the four Players.]

VANE. Give us some light.

FORESON. Electrics! Turn up your floats!

[The footlights go up, and the blue goes out; the light is crude as at the beginning.]

FRUST. I'd like to meet Miss Hellgrove. [She comes forward eagerly and timidly. He grasps her hand] Miss Hellgrove, I want to say I thought that fine—fine. [Her evident emotion and pleasure warm him so that he increases his grasp and commendation] Fine. It quite got my soft spots. Emotional. Fine!

MISS H. Oh! Mr Frust; it means so much to me. Thank you!

FRUST. [A little balder in the eye, and losing warmth] Er—fine!
[His eye wanders] Where's Mr Flatway?

VANE. Fleetway.

[FLEETWAY comes up.]

FRUST. Mr Fleetway, I want to say I thought your Orphoos very remarkable. Fine.

FLEETWAY. Thank you, sir, indeed—so glad you liked it.

FRUST. [A little balder in the eye] There wasn't much to it, but what there was was fine. Mr Toone.

[FLEETWAY melts out and TOONE is precipitated.]

Mr Toone, I was very pleased with your Professor—quite a character-study. [TOONE bows and murmurs] Yes, sir! I thought it fine. [His eye grows bald] Who plays the goat?

MISS HOPK. [Appearing suddenly between the windows] I play the faun, Mr Frost.

FORESON. [Introducing] Miss Maude 'Opkins.

FRUST. Miss Hopkins, I guess your fawn was fine.

MISS HOPK. Oh! Thank you, Mr Frost. How nice of you to say so. I do so enjoy playing him.

FRUST. [His eye growing bald] Mr Foreson, I thought the way you fixed that tree was very cunning; I certainly did. Got a match?

[He takes a match from FORESON, and lighting a very long cigar, walks up Stage through the French windows followed by FORESON, and examines the apple-tree.]

[The two Actors depart, but Miss HELLGROVE runs from where she has been lingering, by the curtain, to VANE, Stage Right.]

MISS H. Oh! Mr Vane—do you think? He seemed quite—Oh! Mr Vane [ecstatically] If only—

VANE. [Pleased and happy] Yes, yes. All right—you were splendid. He liked it. He quite—

MISS H. [Clasping her hand] How wonderful Oh, Mr Vane, thank you!

[She clasps his hands; but suddenly, seeing that FRUST is coming back, fits across into the curtain and vanishes.]

[The Stage, in the crude light, as empty now save for FRUST, who, in the French windows, Centre, is mumbling his cigar; and VANE, Stage Right, who is looking up into the wings, Stage Left.]

VANE. [Calling up] That lighting's just right now, Miller. Got it marked carefully?

ELECTRICS. Yes, Mr Vane.

VANE. Good. [To FRUST who as coming down] Well, sir? So glad—

FRUST. Mr Vane, we got little Miggs on contract?

VANE. Yes.

FRUST. Well, I liked that little pocket piece fine. But I'm blamed if I know what it's all about.

VANE. [A little staggered] Why! Of course it's a little allegory. The tragedy of civilization—all real feeling for Beauty and Nature kept out, or pent up even in the cultured.

FRUST. Ye-ep. [Meditatively] Little Miggs'd be fine in "Pop goes the Weasel."

VANE. Yes, he'd be all right, but—

FRUST. Get him on the 'phone, and put it into rehearsal right now.

VANE. What! But this piece—I—I—!

FRUST. Guess we can't take liberties with our public, Mr Vane. They want pep.

VANE. [Distressed] But it'll break that girl's heart. I—really—I can't—

FRUST. Give her the part of the 'tweeny in "Pop goes".

VANE. Mr Frust, I—I beg. I've taken a lot of trouble with this little play. It's good. It's that girl's chance—and I—

FRUST. We-ell! I certainly thought she was fine. Now, you 'phone up Miggs, and get right along with it. I've only one rule, sir! Give the Public what it wants; and what the Public wants is punch and go. They've got no use for Beauty, Allegory, all that high-brow racket. I know 'em as I know my hand.

[During this speech MISS HELLGROVE is seen listening by the French window, in distress, unnoticed by either of them.]

VANE. Mr Frost, the Public would take this, I'm sure they would; I'm convinced of it. You underrate them.

FRUST. Now, see here, Mr Blewitt Vane, is this my theatre? I tell you, I can't afford luxuries.

VANE. But it—it moved you, sir; I saw it. I was watching.

FRUST. [With unmoved finality] Mr Vane, I judge I'm not the average man. Before "Louisa Loses" the Public'll want a stimulant. "Pop goes the Weasel" will suit us fine. So—get right along with it. I'll go get some lunch.

[As he vanishes into the wings, Left, MISS HELLGROVE covers her face with her hands. A little sob escaping her attracts VANE'S attention. He takes a step towards her, but she flies.]

VANE. [Dashing his hands through his hair till it stands up]
Damnation!

[FORESON walks on from the wings, Right.]

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. "Punch and go!" That superstition!

[FORESON walks straight out into the wings, Left.]

VANE. Mr Foreson!

FORESON. [Re-appearing] Sir?

VANE. This is scrapped. [With savagery] Tell 'em to set the first act of "Louisa Loses," and put some pep into it.

[He goes out through the French windows with the wind still in his hair.]

FORESON. [In the centre of the Stage] Electrics!

ELECTRICS. Hallo!

FORESON. Where's Charlie?

ELECTRICS. Gone to his dinner.

FORESON. Anybody on the curtain?

A VOICE. Yes, Mr Foreson.

FORESON. Put your curtain down.

[He stands in the centre of the Stage with eyes uplifted as the curtain descends.]

THE END

FIFTH SERIES

CONTENTS:

A Family Man
Loyalties
Windows

A FAMILY MAN

From the 5th Series Plays

By John Galsworthy

CHARACTERS

JOHN BUILDER..... of the firm of Builder & Builder
JULIA..... His Wife
ATHENE..... His elder Daughter
MAUD..... His younger Daughter
RALPH BUILDER..... His Brother, and Partner
GUY HERRINGHAME..... A Flying Man
ANNIE..... A Young Person in Blue
CAMILLE..... Mrs Builder's French Maid
TOPPING..... Builder's Manservant
THE MAYOR..... Of Breconridge
HARRIS..... His Secretary
FRANCIS CHANTREY..... J.P.
MOON..... A Constable
MARTIN..... A Police Sergeant
A JOURNALIST..... From The Comet
THE FIGURE OF A POACHER
THE VOICES AND FACES OF SMALL BOYS

The action passes in the town of Breconridge, the Midlands.

ACT I. SCENE I. BUILDER'S Study. After breakfast. SCENE II. A Studio.

ACT II. BUILDER'S Study. Lunchtime.

ACT III. SCENE I. THE MAYOR'S Study. 10am the following day. SCENE II. BUILDER'S Study. The same. Noon.
SCENE III. BUILDER'S Study. The same. Evening.

ACT I

SCENE I

The study of JOHN BUILDER in the provincial town of Breconridge. A panelled room wherein nothing is ever studied, except perhaps BUILDER'S face in the mirror over the fireplace. It is, however, comfortable, and has large leather chairs and a writing table in the centre, on which is a typewriter, and many papers. At the back is a large window with French outside shutters, overlooking the street, for the house is an old one, built in an age when the homes of doctors, lawyers and so forth were part of a provincial town, and not yet suburban. There are two or three fine old prints on the walls, Right and Left; and a fine, old fireplace, Left, with a fender on which one can sit. A door, Left back, leads into the dining-room, and a door, Right forward, into the hall.

JOHN BUILDER is sitting in his after-breakfast chair before the fire with The Times in his hands. He has breakfasted well, and is in that condition of first-pipe serenity in which the affairs of the nation seem almost bearable. He is a tallish, square, personable man of forty-seven, with a well-coloured, jowly, fullish face, marked under the eyes, which have very small pupils and a good deal of light in them. His bearing has force and importance, as of a man accustomed to rising and ownerships, sure in his opinions, and not lacking in geniality when things go his way. Essentially a Midlander. His wife, a woman of forty-one, of ivory tint, with a thin, trim figure and a face so strangely composed as to be almost like a mask (essentially from Jersey) is putting a nib into a pen-holder, and filling an inkpot at the writing-table.

As the curtain rises CAMILLE enters with a rather broken-down cardboard box containing flowers. She is a young woman with a good figure, a pale face, the warm brown eyes and complete poise of a Frenchwoman. She takes the box to MRS BUILDER.

MRS BUILDER. The blue vase, please, Camille.

CAMILLE fetches a vase. MRS BUILDER puts the flowers into the vase.

CAMILLE gathers up the debris; and with a glance at BUILDER goes out.

BUILDER. Glorious October! I ought to have a damned good day's shooting with Chantrey tomorrow.

MRS BUILDER. [Arranging the flowers] Aren't you going to the office this morning?

BUILDER. Well, no, I was going to take a couple of days off. If you feel at the top of your form, take a rest—then you go on feeling at the top. [He looks at her, as if calculating] What do you say to looking up Athene?

MRS BUILDER. [Palpably astonished] Athene? But you said you'd done with her?

BUILDER. [Smiling] Six weeks ago; but, dash it, one can't have done with one's own daughter. That's the weakness of an Englishman; he can't keep up his resentments. In a town like this it doesn't do to have her living by herself. One of these days it'll get out we've had a row. That wouldn't do me any good.

MRS BUILDER. I see.

BUILDER. Besides, I miss her. Maud's so self-absorbed. It makes a big hole in the family, Julia. You've got her address, haven't you?

MRS BUILDER. Yes. [Very still] But do you think it's dignified, John?

BUILDER. [Genially] Oh, hang dignity! I rather pride myself on knowing when to stand on my dignity and when to sit on it. If she's still crazy about Art, she can live at home, and go out to study.

MRS BUILDER. Her craze was for liberty.

BUILDER. A few weeks' discomfort soon cures that. She can't live on her pittance. She'll have found that out by now. Get your things on and come with me at twelve o'clock.

MRS BUILDER. I think you'll regret it. She'll refuse.

BUILDER. Not if I'm nice to her. A child could play with me to-day. Shall I tell you a secret, Julia?

MRS BUILDER. It would be pleasant for a change.

BUILDER. The Mayor's coming round at eleven, and I know perfectly well what he's coming for.

MRS BUILDER. Well?

BUILDER. I'm to be nominated for Mayor next month. Harris tipped me the wink at the last Council meeting. Not so bad at forty-seven—h'm? I can make a thundering good Mayor. I can do things for this town that nobody else can.

MRS BUILDER. Now I understand about Athene.

BUILDER. [Good-humouredly] Well, it's partly that. But [more seriously] it's more the feeling I get that I'm not doing my duty by her. Goodness knows whom she may be picking up with! Artists are a loose lot. And young people in these days are the limit. I quite believe in moving with the times, but one's either born a Conservative, or one isn't. So you be ready at twelve, see. By the way, that French maid of yours, Julia—

MRS BUILDER. What about her?

BUILDER. Is she—er—is she all right? We don't want any trouble with Topping.

MRS BUILDER. There will be none with—Topping.

[She opens the door Left.]

BUILDER. I don't know; she strikes me as—very French.

MRS BUILDER smiles and passes out.

BUILDER fills his second pipe. He is just taking up the paper again when the door from

the hall is opened, and the manservant TOPPING, dried, dark, sub-humorous, in a black cut-away, announces:

TOPPING. The Mayor, Sir, and Mr Harris!

THE MAYOR of Breconridge enters, He is clean-shaven, red-faced, light-eyed, about sixty, shrewd, poll-parrot, naturally jovial, dressed with the indefinable wrongness of a burgher; he is followed by his Secretary HARRIS, a man all eyes and cleverness. TOPPING retires.

BUILDER. [Rising] Hallo, Mayor! What brings you so early? Glad to see you. Morning, Harris!

MAYOR. Morning, Builder, morning.

HARRIS. Good-morning, Sir.

BUILDER. Sit down-sit down! Have a cigar!

The MAYOR takes a cigar HARRIS a cigarette from his own case.

BUILDER. Well, Mayor, what's gone wrong with the works?

He and HARRIS exchange a look.

MAYOR. [With his first puff] After you left the Council the other day, Builder, we came to a decision.

BUILDER. Deuce you did! Shall I agree with it?

MAYOR. We shall see. We want to nominate you for Mayor. You willin' to stand?

BUILDER. [Stolid] That requires consideration.

MAYOR. The only alternative is Chantrey; but he's a light weight, and rather too much County. What's your objection?

BUILDER. It's a bit unexpected, Mayor. [Looks at HARRIS] Am I the right man? Following you, you know. I'm shooting with Chantrey to-morrow. What does he feel about it?

MAYOR. What do you say, 'Arris?

HARRIS. Mr Chantrey's a public school and University man, Sir; he's not what I call ambitious.

BUILDER. Nor am I, Harris.

HARRIS. No, sir; of course you've a high sense of duty. Mr Chantrey's rather dilettante.

MAYOR. We want a solid man.

BUILDER. I'm very busy, you know, Mayor.

MAYOR. But you've got all the qualifications—big business, family man, live in the town, church-goer, experience on the Council and the Bench. Better say "yes," Builder.

BUILDER. It's a lot of extra work. I don't take things up lightly.

MAYOR. Dangerous times, these. Authority questioned all over the place. We want a man that feels his responsibilities, and we think we've got him in you.

BUILDER. Very good of you, Mayor. I don't know, I'm sure. I must think of the good of the town.

HARRIS. I shouldn't worry about that, sir.

MAYOR. The name John Builder carries weight. You're looked up to as a man who can manage his own affairs. Madam and the young ladies well?

BUILDER. First-rate.

MAYOR. [Rises] That's right. Well, if you'd like to talk it over with Chantrey to-morrow. With all this extremism, we want a man of principle and common sense.

HARRIS. We want a man that'll grasp the nettle, sir—and that's you.

BUILDER. Hm! I've got a temper, you know.

MAYOR. [Chuckling] We do—we do! You'll say "yes," I see. No false modesty! Come along, 'Arris, we must go.

BUILDER. Well, Mayor, I'll think it over, and let you have an answer. You know my faults, and you know my qualities, such as they are. I'm just a plain Englishman.

MAYOR. We don't want anything better than that. I always say the great point about an Englishman is that he's got bottom; you may knock him off his pins, but you find him on 'em again before you can say "Jack Robinson." He may have his moments of aberration, but he's a sticker. Morning, Builder, morning! Hope you'll say "yes."

He shakes hands and goes out, followed by HARRIS.

When the door is dosed BUILDER stands a moment quite still with a gratified smile on his face; then turns and scrutinises himself in the glass over the hearth. While he is doing so the door from the dining-room is opened quietly and CAMILLE comes in. BUILDER, suddenly seeing her reflected in the mirror, turns.

BUILDER. What is it, Camille?

CAMILLE. Madame send me for a letter she say you have, Monsieur, from the dyer and cleaner, with a bill.

BUILDER. [Feeling in his pockets] Yes—no. It's on the table.

CAMILLE goes to the writing-table and looks. That blue thing.

CAMILLE. [Taking it up] Non, Monsieur, this is from the gas.

BUILDER. Oh! Ah!

[He moves up to the table and turns over papers. CAMILLE stands motionless close by with her eyes fixed on him.]

Here it is!

[He looks up, sees her looking at him, drops his own gaze, and hands her the letter. Their hands touch. Putting his hands in his pockets]

What made you come to England?

CAMILLE. [Demure] It is better pay, Monsieur, and [With a smile] the English are so amiable.

BUILDER. Deuce they are! They haven't got that reputation.

CAMILLE. Oh! I admire Englishmen. They are so strong and kind.

BUILDER. [Bluffly flattered] H'm! We've no manners.

CAMILLE. The Frenchman is more polite, but not in the 'eart.

BUILDER. Yes. I suppose we're pretty sound at heart.

CAMILLE. And the Englishman have his life in the family—the Frenchman have his life outside.

BUILDER. [With discomfort] H'm!

CAMILLE. [With a look] Too mooch in the family—like a rabbit in a 'utch.

BUILDER. Oh! So that's your view of us! [His eyes rest on her, attracted but resentful].

CAMILLE. Pardon, Monsieur, my tongue run away with me.

BUILDER. [Half conscious of being led on] Are you from Paris?

CAMILLE. [Clasping her hands] Yes. What a town for pleasure—Paris!

BUILDER. I suppose so. Loose place, Paris.

CAMILLE. Loose? What is that, Monsieur?

BUILDER. The opposite of strict.

CAMILLE. Strict! Oh! certainly we like life, we other French. It is not like England. I take this to Madame, Monsieur. [She turns as if to go] Excuse me.

BUILDER. I thought you Frenchwomen all married young.

CAMILLE. I 'ave been married; my 'usband did die—en Afrique.

BUILDER. You wear no ring.

CAMILLE. [Smiling] I prefare to be mademoiselle, Monsieur.

BUILDER. [Dubiously] Well, it's all the same to us. [He takes a letter up from the table] You might take this to Mrs Builder too. [Again their fingers touch, and there is a suspicion of encounter between their eyes.]

CAMILLE goes out.

BUILDER. [Turning to his chair] Don't know about that woman—she's a tantalizer.

He compresses his lips, and is settling back into his chair, when the door from the hall is opened and his daughter MAUD comes in; a pretty girl, rather pale, with fine eyes. Though her face has a determined cast her manner at this moment is by no means decisive. She has a letter in her hand, and advances rather as if she were stalking her father, who, after a "Hallo, Maud!" has begun to read his paper.

MAUD. [Getting as far as the table] Father.

BUILDER. [Not lowering the paper] Well? I know that tone. What do you want—money?

MAUD. I always want money, of course; but—but—

BUILDER. [Pulling out a note-abstractedly] Here's five pounds for you.

MAUD, advancing, takes it, then seems to find what she has come for more on her chest than ever.

BUILDER. [Unconscious] Will you take a letter for me?

MAUD sits down Left of table and prepares to take down the letter.

[Dictating] "Dear Mr Mayor,—Referring to your call this morning, I have —er—given the matter very careful consideration, and though somewhat reluctant—"

MAUD. Are you really reluctant, father?

BUILDER. Go on—"To assume greater responsibilities, I feel it my duty to come forward in accordance with your wish. The—er—honour is one of which I hardly feel myself worthy, but you may rest assured—"

MAUD. Worthy. But you do, you know.

BUILDER. Look here! Are you trying to get a rise out of me?—because you won't succeed this morning.

MAUD. I thought you were trying to get one out of me.

BUILDER. Well, how would you express it?

MAUD. "I know I'm the best man for the place, and so do you—"

BUILDER. The disrespect of you young people is something extraordinary. And that reminds me where do you go every evening now after tea?

MAUD. I—I don't know.

BUILDER. Come now, that won't do—you're never in the house from six to seven.

MAUD. Well! It has to do with my education.

BUILDER. Why, you finished that two years ago!

MAUD. Well, call it a hobby, if you like, then, father.

She takes up the letter she brought in and seems on the point of broaching it.

BUILDER. Hobby? Well, what is it?

MAUD. I don't want to irritate you, father.

BUILDER. You can't irritate me more than by having secrets. See what that led to in your sister's case. And, by the way, I'm going to put an end to that this morning. You'll be glad to have her back, won't you?

MAUD. [Startled] What!

BUILDER. Your mother and I are going round to Athene at twelve o'clock. I shall make it up with her. She must come back here.

MAUD. [Aghast, but hiding it] Oh! It's—it's no good, father. She won't.

BUILDER. We shall see that. I've quite got over my tantrum, and I expect she has.

MAUD. [Earnestly] Father! I do really assure you she won't; it's only wasting your time, and making you eat humble pie.

BUILDER. Well, I can eat a good deal this morning. It's all nonsense! A family's a family.

MAUD. [More and more disturbed, but hiding it] Father, if I were you, I wouldn't-really! It's not-dignified.

BUILDER. You can leave me to judge of that. It's not dignified for the Mayor of this town to have an unmarried daughter as young as Athene living by herself away from home. This idea that she's on a visit won't wash any longer. Now finish that letter—"worthy, but you may rest assured that I shall do my best to sustain the—er—dignity of the office." [MAUD types desperately.] Got that? "And—er—preserve the tradition so worthily—" No— "so staunchly"—er—er—

MAUD. Upheld.

BUILDER. Ah! "—upheld by yourself.—Faithfully yours."

MAUD. [Finishing] Father, you thought Athene went off in a huff. It wasn't that a bit. She always meant to go. She just got you into a rage to make it easier. She hated living at home.

BUILDER. Nonsense! Why on earth should she?

MAUD. Well, she did! And so do— [Checking herself] And so you see it'll only make you ridiculous to go.

BUILDER. [Rises] Now what's behind this, Maud?

MAUD. Behind—Oh! nothing!

BUILDER. The fact is, you girls have been spoiled, and you enjoy twisting my tail; but you can't make me roar this morning. I'm too pleased with things. You'll see, it'll be all right with Athene.

MAUD. [Very suddenly] Father!

BUILDER. [Grimly humorous] Well! Get it off your chest. What's that letter about?

MAUD. [Failing again and crumpling the letter behind her back] Oh! nothing.

BUILDER. Everything's nothing this morning. Do you know what sort of people Athene associates with now—I suppose you see her?

MAUD. Sometimes.

BUILDER. Well?

MAUD. Nobody much. There isn't anybody here to associate with. It's all hopelessly behind the times.

BUILDER. Oh! you think so! That's the inflammatory fiction you pick up. I tell you what, young woman—the sooner you and your sister get rid of your silly notions about not living at home, and making your own way, the sooner you'll both get married and make it. Men don't like the new spirit in

women—they may say they do, but they don't.

MAUD. You don't, father, I know.

BUILDER. Well, I'm very ordinary. If you keep your eyes open, you'll soon see that.

MAUD. Men don't like freedom for anybody but themselves.

BUILDER. That's not the way to put it. [Tapping out his pipe] Women in your class have never had to face realities.

MAUD. No, but we want to.

BUILDER. [Good-humouredly] Well, I'll bet you what you like, Athene's dose of reality will have cured her.

MAUD. And I'll bet you—No, I won't!

BUILDER. You'd better not. Athene will come home, and only too glad to do it. Ring for Topping and order the car at twelve.

As he opens the door to pass out, MAUD starts forward, but checks herself.

MAUD. [Looking at her watch] Half-past eleven! Good heavens!

She goes to the bell and rings. Then goes back to the table, and writes an address on a bit of paper.

TOPPING enters Right.

TOPPING. Did you ring, Miss?

MAUD. [With the paper] Yes. Look here, Topping! Can you manage— on your bicycle—now at once? I want to send a message to Miss Athene —awfully important. It's just this: "Look out! Father is coming." [Holding out the paper] Here's her address. You must get there and away again by twelve. Father and mother want the car then to go there. Order it before you go. It won't take you twenty minutes on your bicycle. It's down by the river near the ferry. But you mustn't be seen by them either going or coming.

TOPPING. If I should fall into their hands, Miss, shall I eat the despatch?

MAUD. Rather! You're a brick, Topping. Hurry up!

TOPPING. Nothing more precise, Miss?

MAUD. M—m—No.

TOPPING. Very good, Miss Maud. [Conning the address] "Briary Studio, River Road. Look out! Father is coming!" I'll go out the back way. Any answer?

MAUD. No.

TOPPING nods his head and goes out.

MAUD. [To herself] Well, it's all I can do.

She stands, considering, as the CURTAIN falls.

SCENE II

The Studio, to which are attached living rooms, might be rented at eighty pounds a year—some painting and gear indeed, but an air of life rather than of work. Things strewn about. Bare walls, a sloping skylight, no windows; no fireplace visible; a bedroom door, stage Right; a kitchen door, stage Left. A door, Centre back, into the street. The door knocker is going.

From the kitchen door, Left, comes the very young person, ANNIE, in blotting-paper blue linen, with a white Dutch cap. She is pretty, her cheeks rosy, and her forehead puckered. She opens the street door. Standing outside is TOPPING. He steps in a pace or two.

TOPPING. Miss Builder live here?

ANNIE. Oh! no, sir; Mrs Herringhame.

TOPPING. Mrs Herringhame? Oh! young lady with dark hair and large expressive eyes?

ANNIE. Oh! yes, sir.

TOPPING. With an "A. B." on her linen? [Moves to table].

ANNIE. Yes, sir.

TOPPING. And "Athene Builder" on her drawings?

ANNIE. [Looking at one] Yes, sir.

TOPPING. Let's see. [He examines the drawing] Mrs Herringhame, you said?

ANNIE. Oh! yes, Sir.

TOPPING. Wot oh!

ANNIE. Did you want anything, sir?

TOPPING. Drop the "sir," my dear; I'm the Builders' man.
Mr Herringhame in?

ANNIE. Oh! no, Sir.

TOPPING. Take a message. I can't wait. From Miss Maud Builder. "Look out! Father is coming." Now, whichever of 'em comes in first—that's the message, and don't you forget it.

ANNIE. Oh! no, Sir.

TOPPING. So they're married?

ANNIE. Oh! I don't know, sir.

TOPPING. I see. Well, it ain't known to Builder, J.P., either. That's why there's a message. See?

ANNIE. Oh! yes, Sir.

TOPPING. Keep your head. I must hop it. From Miss Maud Builder.
"Look out! Father is coming."

He nods, turns and goes, pulling the door to behind him. ANNIE
stands "baff" for a moment.

ANNIE. Ah!

She goes across to the bedroom on the Right, and soon returns with a suit of pyjamas, a toothbrush, a pair of slippers and a case of razors, which she puts on the table, and disappears into the kitchen. She reappears with a bread pan, which she deposits in the centre of the room; then crosses again to the bedroom, and once more reappears with a clothes brush, two hair brushes, and a Norfolk jacket. As she stuffs all these into the bread pan and bears it back into the kitchen, there is the sound of a car driving up and stopping. ANNIE reappears at the kitchen door just as the knocker sounds.

ANNIE. Vexin' and provokin'! [Knocker again. She opens the door] Oh!

MR and MRS BUILDER enter.

BUILDER. Mr and Mrs Builder. My daughter in?

ANNIE. [Confounded] Oh! Sir, no, sir.

BUILDER. My good girl, not "Oh! Sir, no, sir." Simply: No, Sir. See?

ANNIE. Oh! Sir, yes, Sir.

BUILDER. Where is she?

ANNIE. Oh! Sir, I don't know, Sir.

BUILDER. [Fixing her as though he suspected her of banter] Will she be back soon?

ANNIE. No, Sir.

BUILDER. How do you know?

ANNIE. I d—don't, sir.

BUILDER. They why do you say so? [About to mutter "She's an idiot!" he looks at her blushing face and panting figure, pats her on the shoulder and says] Never mind; don't be nervous.

ANNIE. Oh! yes, sir. Is that all, please, sir?

MRS BUILDER. [With a side look at her husband and a faint smile] Yes; you can go.

ANNIE. Thank you, ma'am.

She turns and hurries out into the kitchen, Left. BUILDER gazes after her, and MRS BUILDER gazes at BUILDER with her faint smile.

BUILDER. [After the girl is gone] Quaint and Dutch—pretty little figure! [Staring round] H'm! Extraordinary girls are! Fancy Athene preferring this to home. What?

MRS BUILDER. I didn't say anything.

BUILDER. [Placing a chair for his wife, and sitting down himself] Well, we must wait, I suppose. Confound that Nixon legacy! If Athene hadn't had that potty little legacy left her, she couldn't have done this. Well, I daresay it's all spent by now. I made a mistake to lose my temper with her.

MRS BUILDER. Isn't it always a mistake to lose one's temper?

BUILDER. That's very nice and placid; sort of thing you women who live sheltered lives can say. I often wonder if you women realise the strain on a business man.

MRS BUILDER. [In her softly ironical voice] It seems a shame to add the strain of family life.

BUILDER. You've always been so passive. When I want a thing, I've got to have it.

MRS BUILDER. I've noticed that.

BUILDER. [With a short laugh] Odd if you hadn't, in twenty-three years. [Touching a canvas standing against the chair with his toe] Art! Just a pretext. We shall be having Maud wanting to cut loose next. She's very restive. Still, I oughtn't to have had that scene with Athene. I ought to have put quiet pressure.

MRS BUILDER Smiles.

BUILDER. What are you smiling at?

MRS BUILDER shrugs her shoulders.

Look at this—Cigarettes! [He examines the brand on the box] Strong, very—and not good! [He opens the door] Kitchen! [He shuts it, crosses, and opens the door, Right] Bedroom!

MRS BUILDER. [To his disappearing form] Do you think you ought, John?

He has disappeared, and she ends with an expressive movement of her hands, a long sigh, and a closing of her eyes. BUILDER'S peremptory voice is heard: "Julia!"

What now?

She follows into the bedroom. The maid ANNIE puts her head out of the kitchen door; she comes out a step as if to fly; then, at BUILDER'S voice, shrinks back into the kitchen.

BUILDER, reappearing with a razor stop in one hand and a shaving-brush in the other, is followed by MRS BUILDER.

BUILDER. Explain these! My God! Where's that girl?

MRS BUILDER. John! Don't! [Getting between him and the kitchen door]
It's not dignified.

BUILDER. I don't care a damn.

MRS BUILDER. John, you mustn't. Athene has the tiny beginning of a moustache, you know.

BUILDER. What! I shall stay and clear this up if I have to wait a week. Men who let their daughters—! This age is the limit. [He makes a vicious movement with the strop, as though laying it across someone's back.]

MRS BUILDER. She would never stand that. Even wives object, nowadays.

BUILDER. [Grimly] The war's upset everything. Women are utterly out of hand. Why the deuce doesn't she come?

MRS BUILDER. Suppose you leave me here to see her.

BUILDER. [Ominously] This is my job.

MRS BUILDER. I think it's more mine.

BUILDER. Don't stand there opposing everything I say! I'll go and have another look—[He is going towards the bedroom when the sound of a latchkey in the outer door arrests him. He puts the strop and brush behind his back, and adds in a low voice] Here she is!

MRS BUILDER has approached him, and they have both turned towards the opening door. GUY HERRINGHAME comes in. They are a little out of his line of sight, and he has shut the door before he sees them. When he does, his mouth falls open, and his hand on to the knob of the door. He is a comely young man in Harris tweeds. Moreover, he is smoking. He would speak if he could, but his surprise is too excessive. BUILDER. Well, sir?

GUY. [Recovering a little] I was about to say the same to you, sir.

BUILDER. [Very red from repression] These rooms are not yours, are they?

GUY. Nor yours, sir?

BUILDER. May I ask if you know whose they are?

GUY. My sister's.

BUILDER. Your—you—!

MRS BUILDER. John!

BUILDER. Will you kindly tell me why your sister signs her drawings by the name of my daughter, Athene Builder—and has a photograph of my wife hanging there?

The YOUNG MAN looks at MRS BUILDER and winces, but recovers himself.

GUY. [Boldly] As a matter of fact this is my sister's studio; she's in France—and has a friend staying here.

BUILDER. Oh! And you have a key?

GUY. My sister's.

BUILDER. Does your sister shave?

GUY. I—I don't think so.

BUILDER. No. Then perhaps you'll tell me what these mean? [He takes out the strop and shaving stick].

GUY. Oh! Ah! Those things?

BUILDER. Yes. Now then?

GUY. [Addressing MRS BUILDER] Need we go into this in your presence, ma'am? It seems rather delicate.

BUILDER. What explanation have you got?

GUY. Well, you see—

BUILDER. No lies; out with it!

GUY. [With decision] I prefer to say nothing.

BUILDER. What's your name?

GUY. Guy Herringhame.

BUILDER. Do you live here?

Guy makes no sign.

MRS BUILDER. [To Guy] I think you had better go.

BUILDER. Julia, will you leave me to manage this?

MRS BUILDER. [To Guy] When do you expect my daughter in?

GUY. Now—directly.

MRS BUILDER. [Quietly] Are you married to her?

GUY. Yes. That is—no—o; not altogether, I mean.

BUILDER. What's that? Say that again!

GUY. [Folding his arms] I'm not going to say another word.

BUILDER. I am.

MRS BUILDER. John—please!

BUILDER. Don't put your oar in! I've had wonderful patience so far. [He puts his boot through a drawing] Art! This is what comes of it! Are you an artist?

GUY. No; a flying man. The truth is—

BUILDER. I don't want to hear you speak the truth. I'll wait for my daughter.

GUY. If you do, I hope you'll be so very good as to be gentle. If you get angry I might too, and that would be awfully ugly.

BUILDER. Well, I'm damned!

GUY. I quite understand that, sir. But, as a man of the world, I hope you'll take a pull before she comes, if you mean to stay.

BUILDER. If we mean to stay! That's good!

GUY. Will you have a cigarette?

BUILDER. I—I can't express—

GUY. [Soothingly] Don't try, sir. [He jerks up his chin, listening] I think that's her. [Goes to the door] Yes. Now, please! [He opens the door] Your father and mother, Athene.

ATHENE enters. She is flushed and graceful. Twenty-two, with a short upper lip, a straight nose, dark hair, and glowing eyes. She wears bright colours, and has a slow, musical voice, with a slight lisp.

ATHENE. Oh! How are you, mother dear? This is rather a surprise. Father always keeps his word, so I certainly didn't expect him. [She looks steadfastly at BUILDER, but does not approach].

BUILDER. [Controlling himself with an effort] Now, Athene, what's this?

ATHENE. What's what?

BUILDER. [The strop held out] Are you married to this—this—?

ATHENE. [Quietly] To all intents and purposes.

BUILDER. In law?

ATHENE. No.

BUILDER. My God! You—you—!

ATHENE. Father, don't call names, please.

BUILDER. Why aren't you married to him?

ATHENE. Do you want a lot of reasons, or the real one?

BUILDER. This is maddening! [Goes up stage].

ATHENE. Mother dear, will you go into the other room with Guy? [She points to the door Right].

BUILDER. Why?

ATHENE. Because I would rather she didn't hear the reason.

GUY. [To ATHENE, sotto voce] He's not safe.

ATHENE. Oh! yes; go on.

Guy follows MRS BUILDER, and after hesitation at the door they go out into the bedroom.

BUILDER. Now then!

ATHENE. Well, father, if you want to know the real reason, it's—you.

BUILDER. What on earth do you mean?

ATHENE. Guy wants to marry me. In fact, we—But I had such a stunner of marriage from watching you at home, that I—

BUILDER. Don't be impudent! My patience is at breaking-point, I warn you.

ATHENE. I'm perfectly serious, Father. I tell you, we meant to marry, but so far I haven't been able to bring myself to it. You never noticed how we children have watched you.

BUILDER. Me?

ATHENE. Yes. You and mother, and other things; all sorts of things—

BUILDER. [Taking out a handkerchief and wiping his brow] I really think you're mad.

ATHENE. I'm sure you must, dear.

BUILDER. Don't "dear" me! What have you noticed? D'you mean I'm not a good husband and father?

ATHENE. Look at mother. I suppose you can't, now; you're too used to her.

BUILDER. Of course I'm used to her. What else is marrying for?

ATHENE. That; and the production of such as me. And it isn't good enough, father. You shouldn't have set us such a perfect example.

BUILDER. You're talking the most arrant nonsense I ever heard. [He lifts his hands] I've a good mind to shake it out of you.

ATHENE. Shall I call Guy?

He drops his hands.

Confess that being a good husband and father has tried you terribly. It has us, you know.

BUILDER. [Taking refuge in sarcasm] When you've quite done being funny, perhaps you'll tell me why you've behaved like a common street flapper.

ATHENE. [Simply] I couldn't bear to think of Guy as a family man. That's all—absolutely. It's not his fault; he's been awfully anxious to be one.

BUILDER. You've disgraced us, then; that's what it comes to.

ATHENE. I don't want to be unkind, but you've brought it on yourself.

BUILDER. [Genuinely distracted] I can't even get a glimmer of what you mean. I've never been anything but firm. Impatient, perhaps. I'm not an angel; no ordinary healthy man is. I've never grudged you girls any comfort, or pleasure.

ATHENE. Except wills of our own.

BUILDER. What do you want with wills of your own till you're married?

ATHENE. You forget mother!

BUILDER. What about her?

ATHENE. She's very married. Has she a will of her own?

BUILDER. [Sullenly] She's learnt to know when I'm in the right.

ATHENE. I don't ever mean to learn to know when Guy's in the right. Mother's forty-one, and twenty-three years of that she's been your wife. It's a long time, father. Don't you ever look at her face?

BUILDER. [Troubled in a remote way] Rubbish!

ATHENE. I didn't want my face to get like that.

BUILDER. With such views about marriage, what business had you to go near a man? Come, now!

ATHENE. Because I fell in love.

BUILDER. Love leads to marriage—and to nothing else, but the streets. What an example to your sister!

ATHENE. You don't know Maud any more than you knew me. She's got a will of her own too, I can tell you.

BUILDER. Now, look here, Athene. It's always been my way to face accomplished facts. What's done can't be undone; but it can be remedied. You must marry this young—at once, before it gets out. He's behaved like a ruffian: but, by your own confession, you've behaved worse. You've been bitten by this modern disease, this—this, utter lack of common decency. There's an eternal order in certain things, and marriage is one of them; in fact, it's the chief. Come, now. Give me a promise, and I'll try my utmost to forget the whole thing.

ATHENE. When we quarrelled, father, you said you didn't care what became of me.

BUILDER. I was angry.

ATHENE. So you are now.

BUILDER. Come, Athene, don't be childish! Promise me!

ATHENE. [With a little shudder] No! We were on the edge of it. But now I've seen you again—Poor mother!

BUILDER. [Very angry] This is simply blasphemous. What do you mean by harping on your mother? If you think that—that—she doesn't—that she isn't—

ATHENE. Now, father!

BUILDER. I'm damned if I'll sit down under this injustice. Your mother is—is pretty irritating, I can tell you. She—she—Everything suppressed. And—and no—blood in her!

ATHENE. I knew it!

BUILDER. [Aware that he has confirmed some thought in her that he had no intention of confirming] What's that?

ATHENE. Don't you ever look at your own face, father? When you shave, for instance.

BUILDER. Of course I do.

ATHENE. It isn't satisfied, is it?

BUILDER. I don't know what on earth you mean.

ATHENE. You can't help it, but you'd be ever so much happier if you were a Mohammedan, and two or three, instead of one, had—had learned to know when you were in the right.

BUILDER. 'Pon my soul! This is outrageous!

ATHENE. Truth often is.

BUILDER. Will you be quiet?

ATHENE. I don't ever want to feel sorry for Guy in that way.

BUILDER. I think you're the most immodest—I'm ashamed that you're my daughter. If your another had ever carried on as you are now—

ATHENE. Would you have been firm with her?

BUILDER. [Really sick at heart at this unwonted mockery which meets him at every turn] Be quiet, you—!

ATHENE. Has mother never turned?

BUILDER. You're an unnatural girl! Go your own way to hell!

ATHENE. I am not coming back home, father.

BUILDER. [Wrenching open the door, Right] Julia! Come! We can't stay here.

MRS BUILDER comes forth, followed by GUY.

As for you, sir, if you start by allowing a woman to impose her crazy ideas about marriage on you, all I can say is—I despise you. [He crosses to the outer door, followed by his wife. To ATHENE] I've done with you!

He goes out.

MRS BUILDER, who has so far seemed to accompany him, shuts the door quickly and remains in the studio. She stands there with that faint smile on her face, looking at the two young people.

ATHENE. Awfully sorry, mother; but don't you see what a stunner father's given me?

MRS BUILDER. My dear, all men are not alike.

GUY. I've always told her that, ma'am.

ATHENE. [Softly] Oh! mother, I'm so sorry for you.

The handle of the door is rattled, a fist is beaten on it.

[She stamps, and covers her ears] Disgusting!

GUY. Shall I—?

MRS BUILDER. [Shaking her head] I'm going in a moment. [To ATHENE] You owe it to me, Athene.

ATHENE. Oh! if somebody would give him a lesson!

BUILDER's voice: "Julia!"

Have you ever tried, mother?

MRS BUILDER looks at the YOUNG MAN, who turns away out of hearing.

MRS BUILDER. Athene, you're mistaken. I've always stood up to him in my own way.

ATHENE. Oh! but, mother—listen!

The beating and rattling have recommenced, and the voice: "Are you coming?"

[Passionately] And that's family life! Father was all right before he married, I expect. And now it's like this. How you survive—!

MRS BUILDER. He's only in a passion, my dear.

ATHENE. It's wicked.

MRS BUILDER. It doesn't work otherwise, Athene.

A single loud bang on the door.

ATHENE. If he beats on that door again, I shall scream.

MRS BUILDER smiles, shakes her head, and turns to the door.

MRS BUILDER. Now, my dear, you're going to be sensible, to please me. It's really best. If I say so, it must be. It's all comedy, Athene.

ATHENE. Tragedy!

GUY. [Turning to them] Look here! Shall I shift him?

MRS BUILDER shakes her head and opens the door. BUILDER stands there, a furious figure.

BUILDER. Will you come, and leave that baggage and her cad?

MRS BUILDER steps quickly out and the door is closed. Guy makes an angry movement towards it.

ATHENE. Guy!

GUY. [Turning to her] That puts the top hat on. So persuasive! [He takes out of his pocket a wedding ring, and a marriage licence] Well! What's to be done with these pretty things, now?

ATHENE. Burn them!

GUY. [Slowly] Not quite. You can't imagine I should ever be like that, Athene?

ATHENE. Marriage does wonders.

GUY. Thanks.

ATHENE. Oh! Guy, don't be horrid. I feel awfully bad.

GUY. Well, what do you think I feel? "Cad!"

They turn to see ANNIE in hat and coat, with a suit-case in her hand, coming from the door Left.

ANNIE. Oh! ma'am, please, Miss, I want to go home.

GUY. [Exasperated!] She wants to go home—she wants to go home!

ATHENE. Guy! All right, Annie.

ANNIE. Oh! thank you, Miss. [She moves across in front of them].

ATHENE. [Suddenly] Annie!

ANNIE stops and turns to her.

What are you afraid of?

ANNIE. [With comparative boldness] I—I might catch it, Miss.

ATHENE. From your people?

ANNIE. Oh! no, Miss; from you. You see, I've got a young man that wants to marry me. And if I don't let him, I might get into trouble meself.

ATHENE. What sort of father and mother have you got, Annie?

ANNIE. I never thought, Miss. And of course I don't want to begin.

ATHENE. D'you mean you've never noticed how they treat each other?

ANNIE. I don't think they do, Miss.

ATHENE. Exactly.

ANNIE. They haven't time. Father's an engine driver.

GUY. And what's your young man, Annie?

ANNIE. [Embarrassed] Somethin' like you, sir. But very respectable.

ATHENE. And suppose you marry him, and he treats you like a piece of furniture?

ANNIE. I—I could treat him the same, Miss.

ATHENE. Don't you believe that, Annie!

ANNIE. He's very mild.

ATHENE. That's because he wants you. You wait till he doesn't.

ANNIE looks at GUY.

GUY. Don't you believe her, Annie; if he's decent—

ANNIE. Oh! yes, sir.

ATHENE. [Suppressing a smile] Of course—but the point is, Annie, that marriage makes all the difference.

ANNIE. Yes, Miss; that's what I thought.

ATHENE. You don't see. What I mean is that when once he's sure of you, he may change completely.

ANNIE. [Slowly, looking at her thumb] Oh! I don't—think—he'll hammer me, Miss. Of course, I know you can't tell till you've found out.

ATHENE. Well, I've no right to influence you.

ANNIE. Oh! no, Miss; that's what I've been thinking.

-GUY. You're quite right, Annie—this is no place for you.

ANNIE. You see, we can't be married; sir, till he gets his rise. So it'll be a continual temptation to me.

ATHENE. Well, all right, Annie. I hope you'll never regret it.

ANNIE. Oh! no, Miss.

GUY. I say, Annie, don't go away thinking evil of us; we didn't realise you knew we weren't married.

ATHENE. We certainly did not.

ANNIE. Oh! I didn't think it right to take notice.

GUY. We beg your pardon.

ANNIE. Oh! no, sir. Only, seein' Mr and Mrs Builder so upset, brought it 'ome like. And father can be 'andy with a strap.

ATHENE. There you are! Force majeure!

ANNIE. Oh! yes, Miss.

ATHENE. Well, good-bye, Annie. What are you going to say to your people?

ANNIE. Oh! I shan't say I've been livin' in a family that wasn't a family, Miss. It wouldn't do no good.

ATHENE. Well, here are your wages.

ANNIE. Oh! I'm puttin' you out, Miss. [She takes the money].

ATHENE. Nonsense, Annie. And here's your fare home.

ANNIE. Oh! thank you, Miss. I'm very sorry. Of course if you was to change your mind—[She stops, embarrassed].

ATHENE. I don't think—

GUY. [Abruptly] Good-bye, Annie. Here's five bob for the movies.

ANNIE. Oh! good-bye, sir, and thank you. I was goin' there now with my young man. He's just round the corner.

GUY. Be very careful of him.

ANNIE. Oh! yes, sir, I will. Good-bye, sir. Goodbye, Miss.

She goes.

GUY. So her father has a firm hand too. But it takes her back to the nest. How's that, Athene?

ATHENE. [Playing with a leathern button on his coat] If you'd watched it ever since you could watch anything, seen it kill out all—It's having power that does it. I know Father's got awfully good points.

GUY. Well, they don't stick out.

ATHENE. He works fearfully hard; he's upright, and plucky. He's not stingy. But he's smothered his animal nature—and that's done it. I don't want to see you smother anything, Guy.

GUY. [Gloomily] I suppose one never knows what one's got under the lid. If he hadn't come here to-day—[He spins the wedding ring] He certainly gives one pause. Used he to whack you?

ATHENE. Yes.

GUY. Brute!

ATHENE. With the best intentions. You see, he's a Town Councillor, and a magistrate. I suppose they have to be "firm." Maud and I sneaked in once to listen to him. There was a woman who came for protection from her husband. If he'd known we were there, he'd have had a fit.

GUY. Did he give her the protection?

ATHENE. Yes; he gave her back to the husband. Wasn't it—English?

GUY. [With a grunt] Hang it! We're not all like that.

ATHENE. [Twisting his button] I think it's really a sense of property so deep that they don't know they've got it. Father can talk about freedom like a—politician.

GUY. [Fitting the wedding ring on her finger] Well! Let's see how it looks, anyway.

ATHENE. Don't play with fire, Guy.

GUY. There's something in atavism, darling; there really is. I like it—I do.

A knock on the door.

ATHENE. That sounds like Annie again. Just see.

GUY. [Opening the door] It is. Come in, Annie. What's wrong now?

ANNIE. [Entering in confusion] Oh! sir, please, sir—I've told my young man.

ATHENE. Well, what does he say?

ANNIE. 'E was 'orrified, Miss.

GUY. The deuce he was! At our conduct?

ANNIE. Oh! no, sir—at mine.

ATHENE. But you did your best; you left us.

ANNIE. Oh! yes, Miss; that's why 'e's horrified.

GUY. Good for your young man.

ANNIE. [Flattered] Yes, sir. 'E said I 'ad no strength of mind.

ATHENE. So you want to come back?

ANNIE. Oh! yes, Miss.

ATHENE. All right.

GUY. But what about catching it?

ANNIE. Oh, sir, 'e said there was nothing like Epsom salts.

GUY. He's a wag, your young man.

ANNIE. He was in the Army, sir.

GUY. You said he was respectable.

ANNIE. Oh! yes, sir; but not so respectable as that.

ATHENE. Well, Annie, get your things off, and lay lunch.

ANNIE. Oh! yes, Miss.

She makes a little curtsey and passes through into the kitchen.

GUY. Strength of mind! Have a little, Athene won't you? [He holds out the marriage licence before her].

ATHENE. I don't know—I don't know! If—it turned out—

GUY. It won't. Come on. Must take chances in this life.

ATHENE. [Looking up into his face] Guy, promise me—solemnly that you'll never let me stand in your way, or stand in mine!

GUY. Right! That's a bargain. [They embrace.]

ATHENE quivers towards him. They embrace fervently as ANNIE enters with the bread pan. They spring apart.

ANNIE. Oh!

GUY. It's all right, Annie. There's only one more day's infection before you. We're to be married to-morrow morning.

ANNIE. Oh! yes, sir. Won't Mr Builder be pleased?

GUY. H'm! That's not exactly our reason.

ANNIE. [Right] Oh! no, sir. Of course you can't be a family without, can you?

GUY. What have you got in that thing?

ANNIE is moving across with the bread pan. She halts at the bedroom door.

ANNIE. Oh! please, ma'am, I was to give you a message—very important— from Miss Maud Builder "Lookout! Father is coming!"

She goes out.

The CURTAIN falls.

ACT II

BUILDER'S study. At the table, MAUD has just put a sheet of paper into a typewriter. She sits facing the audience, with her hands stretched over the keys.

MAUD. [To herself] I must get that expression.

Her face assumes a furtive, listening look. Then she gets up, whisks to the mirror over the fireplace, scrutinises the expression in it, and going back to the table, sits down again with hands outstretched above the keys, and an accentuation of the expression. The door up Left is opened, and TOPPING appears. He looks at MAUD, who just turns her eyes.

TOPPING. Lunch has been ready some time, Miss Maud.

MAUD. I don't want any lunch. Did you give it?

TOPPING. Miss Athene was out. I gave the message to a young party. She looked a bit green, Miss. I hope nothing'll go wrong with the works. Shall I keep lunch back?

MAUD. If something's gone wrong, they won't have any appetite, Topping.

TOPPING. If you think I might risk it, Miss, I'd like to slip round to my dentist. [He lays a finger on his cheek].

MAUD. [Smiling] Oh! What race is being run this afternoon, then, Topping?

TOPPING. [Twinkling, and shifting his finger to the side of his nose] Well, I don't suppose you've 'eard of it, Miss; but as a matter of fact it's the Cesarwitch.

MAUD. Got anything on?

TOPPING. Only my shirt, Miss.

MAUD. Is it a good thing, then?

TOPPING. I've seen worse roll up. [With a touch of enthusiasm] Dark horse, Miss Maud, at twenty to one.

MAUD. Put me ten bob on, Topping. I want all the money I can get, just now.

TOPPING. You're not the first, Miss.

MAUD. I say, Topping, do you know anything about the film?

TOPPING. [Nodding] Rather a specialty of mine, Miss.

MAUD. Well, just stand there, and give me your opinion of this.

TOPPING moves down Left. She crouches over the typewriter, lets her hands play on the keys; stops; assumes that listening, furtive look; listens again, and lets her head go slowly round, preceded by her eyes; breaks it off, and says:

What should you say I was?

TOPPING. Guilty, Miss.

MAUD. [With triumph] There! Then you think I've got it?

TOPPING. Well, of course, I couldn't say just what sort of a crime you'd committed, but I should think pretty 'ot stuff.

MAUD. Yes; I've got them here. [She pats her chest].

TOPPING. Really, Miss.

MAUD. Yes. There's just one point, Topping; it's psychological.

TOPPING. Indeed, Miss?

MAUD. Should I naturally put my hand on them; or would there be a reaction quick enough to stop me? You see, I'm alone—and the point is whether the fear of being seen would stop me although I knew I couldn't be seen. It's rather subtle.

TOPPING. I think there's be a rehaaction, Miss.

MAUD. So do I. To touch them [She clasps her chest] is a bit obvious, isn't it?

TOPPING. If the haudience knows you've got 'em there.

MAUD. Oh! yes, it's seen me put them. Look here, I'll show you that too.

She opens an imaginary drawer, takes out some bits of sealing-wax, and with every circumstance of stealth in face and hands, conceals them in her bosom.

All right?

TOPPING. [Nodding] Fine, Miss. You have got a film face. What are they, if I may ask?

MAUD. [Reproducing the sealing-wax] The Fanshawe diamonds. There's just one thing here too, Topping.

In real life, which should I naturally do—put them in here [She touches her chest] or in my bag?

TOPPING. [Touching his waistcoat—earnestly] Well! To put 'em in here, Miss, I should say is more—more pishchological.

MAUD. [Subduing her lips] Yes; but—

TOPPING. You see, then you've got 'em on you.

MAUD. But that's just the point. Shouldn't I naturally think: Safer in my bag; then I can pretend somebody put them there. You see, nobody could put them on me.

TOPPING. Well, I should say that depends on your character. Of course I don't know what your character is.

MAUD. No; that's the beastly part of it—the author doesn't, either. It's all left to me.

TOPPING. In that case, I should please myself, Miss. To put 'em in 'ere's warmer.

MAUD. Yes, I think you're right. It's more human.

TOPPING. I didn't know you 'ad a taste this way, Miss Maud.

MAUD. More than a taste, Topping—a talent.

TOPPING. Well, in my belief, we all have a vice about us somewhere. But if I were you, Miss, I wouldn't touch bettin', not with this other on you. You might get to feel a bit crowded.

MAUD. Well, then, only put the ten bob on if you're sure he's going to win. You can post the money on after me. I'll send you an address, Topping, because I shan't be here.

TOPPING. [Disturbed] What! You're not going, too, Miss Maud?

MAUD. To seek my fortune.

TOPPING. Oh! Hang it all, Miss, think of what you'll leave behind. Miss Athene's leavin' home has made it pretty steep, but this'll touch bottom—this will.

MAUD. Yes; I expect you'll find it rather difficult for a bit when I'm gone. Miss Baldini, you know. I've been studying with her. She's got me this chance with the movie people. I'm going on trial as the guilty typist in "The Heartache of Miranda."

TOPPING. [Surprised out of politeness] Well, I never! That does sound like 'em! Are you goin' to tell the guv'nor, Miss?

MAUD nods. In that case, I think I'll be gettin' off to my dentist before the band plays.

MAUD. All right, Topping; hope you won't lose a tooth.

TOPPING. [With a grin] It's on the knees of the gods, Miss, as they say in the headlines.

He goes. MAUD stretches herself and listens.

MAUD. I believe that's them. Shivery funky.

She runs off up Left.

BUILDER. [Entering from the hall and crossing to the fireplace]
Monstrous! Really monstrous!

CAMILLE enters from the hall. She has a little collecting book in her hand.

BUILDER. Well, Camille?

CAMILLE. A sistare from the Sacred 'Eart, Monsieur—her little book for the orphan children.

BUILDER. I can't be bothered—What is it?

CAMILLE. Orphan, Monsieur.

BUILDER. H'm! Well! [Feeling in his breast pocket] Give her that.

He hands her a five-pound note.

CAMILLE. I am sure she will be verree grateful for the poor little beggars. Madame says she will not be coming to lunch, Monsieur.

BUILDER. I don't want any, either. Tell Topping I'll have some coffee.

CAMILLE. Topping has gone to the dentist, Monsieur; 'e 'as the toothache.

BUILDER. Toothache—poor devil! H'm! I'm expecting my brother, but I don't know that I can see him.

CAMILLE. No, Monsieur?

BUILDER. Ask your mistress to come here.

He looks up, and catching her eye, looks away.

CAMILLE. Yes, Monsieur.

As she turns he looks swiftly at her, sweeping her up and down. She turns her head and catches his glance, which is swiftly dropped. Will Monsieur not 'ave anything to eat?

BUILDER. [Shaking his head-abruptly] No. Bring the coffee!

CAMILLE. Is Monsieur not well?

BUILDER. Yes—quite well.

CAMILLE. [Sweetening her eyes] A cutlet soubise? No?

BUILDER. [With a faint response in his eyes, instantly subdued] Nothing! nothing!

CAMILLE. And Madame nothing too—Tt! Tt! With her hand on the door she looks back, again catches his eyes in an engagement instantly broken off, and goes out.

BUILDER. [Stock-still, and staring at the door] That girl's a continual irritation to me! She's dangerous! What a life! I believe that girl—

The door Left is opened and MRS BUILDER comes in.

BUILDER. There's some coffee coming; do your head good. Look here, Julia. I'm sorry I beat on that door. I apologize. I was in a towering passion. I wish I didn't get into these rages. But—dash it all—! I couldn't walk away and leave you there.

MRS BUILDER. Why not?

BUILDER. You keep everything to yourself, so; I never have any notion what you're thinking. What did you say to her?

MRS BUILDER. Told her it would never work.

BUILDER. Well, that's something. She's crazy. D'you suppose she was telling the truth about that

young blackguard wanting to marry her?

MRS BUILDER. I'm sure of it.

BUILDER. When you think of how she's been brought up. You would have thought that religion alone

MRS BUILDER. The girls haven't wanted to go to church for years. They've always said they didn't see why they should go to keep up your position. I don't know if you remember that you once caned them for running off on a Sunday morning.

BUILDER. Well?

MRS BUILDER. They've never had any religion since.

BUILDER. H'm! [He takes a short turn up the room] What's to be done about Athene?

MRS BUILDER. You said you had done with her.

BUILDER. You know I didn't mean that. I might just as well have said I'd done with you! Apply your wits, Julia! At any moment this thing may come out. In a little town like this you can keep nothing dark. How can I take this nomination for Mayor?

MRS BUILDER. Perhaps Ralph could help.

BUILDER. What? His daughters have never done anything disgraceful, and his wife's a pattern.

MRS BUILDER. Yes; Ralph isn't at all a family man.

BUILDER. [Staring at her] I do wish you wouldn't turn things upside down in that ironical way. It isn't—English.

MRS BUILDER. I can't help having been born in Jersey.

BUILDER. No; I suppose it's in your blood. The French— [He stops short].

MRS BUILDER. Yes?

BUILDER. Very irritating sometimes to a plain Englishman—that's all.

MRS BUILDER. Shall I get rid of Camille?

BUILDER. [Staring at her, then dropping his glance] Camille? What's she got to do with it?

MRS BUILDER. I thought perhaps you found her irritating.

BUILDER. Why should I?

CAMILLE comes in from the dining-room with the coffee.

Put it there. I want some brandy, please.

CAMILLE. I bring it, Monsieur.

She goes back demurely into the dining-room.

BUILDER. Topping's got toothache, poor chap! [Pouring out the coffee] Can't you suggest any way of making Athene see reason? Think of the example! Maud will be kicking over next. I shan't be able to hold my head up here.

MRS BUILDER. I'm afraid I can't do that for you.

BUILDER. [Exasperated] Look here, Julia! That wretched girl said something to me about our life together. What—what's the matter with that?

MRS BUILDER. It is irritating.

BUILDER. Be explicit.

MRS BUILDER. We have lived together twenty-three years, John. No talk will change such things.

BUILDER. Is it a question of money? You can always have more. You know that. [MRS BUILDER

smiles] Oh! don't smile like that; it makes me feel quite sick!

CAMILLE enters with a decanter and little glasses, from the dining-room.

CAMILLE. The brandy, sir. Monsieur Ralph Builder has just come.

MRS BUILDER. Ask him in, Camille.

CAMILLE. Yes, Madame.

She goes through the doorway into the hall. MRS BUILDER, following towards the door, meets RALPH BUILDER, a man rather older than BUILDER and of opposite build and manner. He has a pleasant, whimsical face and grizzled hair.

MRS BUILDER. John wants to consult you, Ralph.

RALPH. That's very gratifying.

She passes him and goes out, leaving the two brothers eyeing one another.

About the Welsh contract?

BUILDER. No. Fact is, Ralph, something very horrible's happened.

RALPH. Athene gone and got married?

BUILDER. No. It's—it's that she's gone and—and not got married.

RALPH utters a sympathetic whistle.

Jolly, isn't it?

RALPH. To whom?

BUILDER. A young flying bounder.

RALPH. And why?

BUILDER. Some crazy rubbish about family life, of all things.

RALPH. Athene's a most interesting girl. All these young people are so queer and delightful.

BUILDER. By George, Ralph, you may thank your stars you haven't got a delightful daughter. Yours are good, decent girls.

RALPH. Athene's tremendously good and decent, John. I'd bet any money she's doing this on the highest principles.

BUILDER. Behaving like a—

RALPH. Don't say what you'll regret, old man! Athene always took things seriously—bless her!

BUILDER. Julia thinks you might help. You never seem to have any domestic troubles.

RALPH. No—o. I don't think we do.

BUILDER. How d'you account for it?

RALPH. I must ask at home.

BUILDER. Dash it! You must know!

RALPH. We're all fond of each other.

BUILDER. Well, I'm fond of my girls too; I suppose I'm not amiable enough. H'm?

RALPH. Well, old man, you do get blood to the head. But what's Athene's point, exactly?

BUILDER. Family life isn't idyllic, so she thinks she and the young man oughtn't to have one.

RALPH. I see. Home experience?

BUILDER. Hang it all, a family's a family! There must be a head.

RALPH. But no tail, old chap.

BUILDER. You don't let your women folk do just as they like?

RALPH. Always.

BUILDER. What happens if one of your girls wants to do an improper thing? [RALPH shrugs his shoulders]. You don't stop her?

RALPH. Do you?

BUILDER. I try to.

RALPH. Exactly. And she does it. I don't and she doesn't.

BUILDER. [With a short laugh] Good Lord! I suppose you'd have me eat humble pie and tell Athene she can go on living in sin and offending society, and have my blessing to round it off.

RALPH. I think if you did she'd probably marry him.

BUILDER. You've never tested your theory, I'll bet.

RALPH. Not yet.

BUILDER. There you are.

RALPH. The 'suaviter in modo' pays, John. The times are not what they were.

BUILDER. Look here! I want to get to the bottom of this. Do you tell me I'm any stricter than nine out of ten men?

RALPH. Only in practice.

BUILDER. [Puzzled] How do you mean?

RALPH. Well, you profess the principles of liberty, but you practise the principles of government.

BUILDER. H'm! [Taking up the decanter] Have some?

RALPH. No, thank you.

BUILDER fills and raises his glass.

CAMILLE. [Entering] Madame left her coffee.

She comes forward, holds out a cup for BUILDER to pour into, takes it and goes out. BUILDER'S glass remains suspended. He drinks the brandy off as she shuts the door.

BUILDER. Life isn't all roses, Ralph.

RALPH. Sorry, old man.

BUILDER. I sometimes think I try myself too high. Well, about that Welsh contract?

RALPH. Let's take it.

BUILDER. If you'll attend to it. Frankly, I'm too upset.

As they go towards the door into the hall, MAUD comes in from the dining-room, in hat and coat.

RALPH. [Catching sight of her] Hallo! All well in your cosmogony, Maud?

MAUD. What is a cosmogony, Uncle?

RALPH. My dear, I—I don't know.

He goes out, followed by BUILDER. MAUD goes quickly to the table, sits down and rests her elbows on it, her chin on her hands, looking at the door.

BUILDER. [Re-entering] Well, Maud! You'd have won your bet!

MAUD. Oh! father, I—I've got some news for you.

BUILDER. [Staring at her] News—what?

MAUD. I'm awfully sorry, but I-I've got a job.

BUILDER. Now, don't go saying you're going in for Art, too, because I won't have it.

MAUD. Art? Oh! no! It's the—[With a jerk]—the Movies.

BUILDER. who has taken up a pipe to fill, puts it down.

BUILDER. [Impressively] I'm not in a joking mood.

MAUD. I'm not joking, father.

BUILDER. Then what are you talking about?

MAUD. You see, I—I've got a film face, and—

BUILDER. You've what? [Going up to his daughter, he takes hold of her chin] Don't talk nonsense! Your sister has just tried me to the limit.

MAUD. [Removing his hand from her chin] Don't oppose it, father, please! I've always wanted to earn my own living.

BUILDER. Living! Living!

MAUD. [Gathering determination] You can't stop me, father, because I shan't need support. I've got quite good terms.

BUILDER. [Almost choking, but mastering himself] Do you mean to say you've gone as far as that?

MAUD. Yes. It's all settled.

BUILDER. Who put you up to this?

MAUD. No one. I've been meaning to, ever so long. I'm twenty-one, you know.

BUILDER. A film face! Good God! Now, look here! I will not have a daughter of mine mixed up with the stage. I've spent goodness knows what on your education—both of you.

MAUD. I don't want to be ungrateful; but I—I can't go on living at home.

BUILDER. You can't—! Why? You've every indulgence.

MAUD. [Clearly and coldly] I can remember occasions when your indulgence hurt, father. [She wriggles her shoulders and back] We never forgot or forgave that.

BUILDER. [Uneasily] That! You were just kids.

MAUD. Perhaps you'd like to begin again?

BUILDER. Don't twist my tail, Maud. I had the most painful scene with Athene this morning. Now come! Give up this silly notion! It's really too childish!

MAUD. [Looking at him curiously] I've heard you say ever so many times that no man was any good who couldn't make his own way, father. Well, women are the same as men, now. It's the law of the country. I only want to make my own way.

BUILDER. [Trying to subdue his anger] Now, Maud, don't be foolish. Consider my position here—a Town Councillor, a Magistrate, and Mayor next year. With one daughter living with a man she isn't married to—

MAUD. [With lively interest] Oh! So you did catch them out?

BUILDER. D'you mean to say you knew?

MAUD. Of course.

BUILDER. My God! I thought we were a Christian family.

MAUD. Oh! father.

BUILDER. Don't sneer at Christianity!

MAUD. There's only one thing wrong with Christians—they aren't!

BUILDER Seizes her by the shoulders and shakes her vigorously. When he drops her shoulders, she gets up, gives him a vicious look, and suddenly stamps her foot on his toe with all her might.

BUILDER. [With a yowl of pain] You little devil!

MAUD. [Who has put the table between them] I won't stand being shaken.

BUILDER. [Staring at her across the table] You've got my temper up and you'll take the consequences. I'll make you toe the line.

MAUD. If you knew what a Prussian expression you've got!

BUILDER passes his hand across his face uneasily, as if to wipe something off.

No! It's too deep!

BUILDER. Are you my daughter or are you not?

MAUD. I certainly never wanted to be. I've always disliked you, father, ever since I was so high. I've seen through you. Do you remember when you used to come into the nursery because Jenny was pretty? You think we didn't notice that, but we did. And in the schoolroom—Miss Tipton. And d'you remember knocking our heads together? No, you don't; but we do. And—

BUILDER. You disrespectful monkey! Will you be quiet?

MAUD. No; you've got to hear things. You don't really love anybody but yourself, father. What's good for you has to be good for everybody. I've often heard you talk about independence, but it's a limited company and you've got all the shares.

BUILDER. Rot; only people who can support themselves have a right to independence.

MAUD. That's why you don't want me to support myself.

BUILDER. You can't! Film, indeed! You'd be in the gutter in a year. Athene's got her pittance, but you—you've got nothing.

MAUD. Except my face.

BUILDER. It's the face that brings women to ruin, my girl.

MAUD. Well, when I'm there I won't come to you to rescue me.

BUILDER. Now, mind—if you leave my house, I've done with you.

MAUD. I'd rather scrub floors now, than stay.

BUILDER. [Almost pathetically] Well, I'm damned! Look here, Maud— all this has been temper. You got my monkey up. I'm sorry I shook you; you've had your revenge on my toes. Now, come! Don't make things worse for me than they are. You've all the liberty you can reasonably want till you marry.

MAUD. He can't see it—he absolutely can't!

BUILDER. See what?

MAUD. That I want to live a life of my own.

He edges nearer to her, and she edges to keep her distance.

BUILDER. I don't know what's bitten you.

MAUD. The microbe of freedom; it's in the air.

BUILDER. Yes, and there it'll stay—that's the first sensible word you've uttered. Now, come! Take your hat off, and let's be friends!

MAUD looks at him and slowly takes off her hat.

BUILDER. [Relaxing his attitude, with a sigh of relief] That's right!
[Crosses to fireplace].

MAUD. [Springing to the door leading to the hall] Good-bye, father!

BUILDER. [Following her] Monkey!

At the sound of a bolt shot, BUILDER goes up to the window. There is a fumbling at the door, and CAMILLE appears.

BUILDER. What's the matter with that door? CAMILLE. It was bolted, Monsieur.

BUILDER. Who bolted it?

CAMILLE. [Shrugging her shoulders] I can't tell, Monsieur.

She collects the cups, and halts close to him. [Softly] Monsieur is not 'appy.

BUILDER. [Surprised] What? No! Who'd be happy in a household like mine?

CAMILLE. But so strong a man—I wish I was a strong man, not a weak woman.

BUILDER. [Regarding her with reluctant admiration] Why, what's the matter with you?

CAMILLE. Will Monsieur have another glass of brandy before I take it?

BUILDER. No! Yes—I will.

She pours it out, and he drinks it, hands her the glass and sits down suddenly in an armchair. CAMILLE puts the glass on a tray, and looks for a box of matches from the mantelshelf.

CAMILLE. A light, Monsieur?

BUILDER. Please.

CAMILLE. [She trips over his feet and sinks on to his knee] Oh! Monsieur!

BUILDER flames up and catches her in his arms

Oh! Monsieur—

BUILDER. You little devil!

She suddenly kisses him, and he returns the kiss. While they are engaged in this entrancing occupation, MRS BUILDER opens the door from the hall, watches unseen for a few seconds, and quietly goes out again.

BUILDER. [Pushing her back from him, whether at the sound of the door or of a still small voice] What am I doing?

CAMILLE. Kissing.

BUILDER. I—I forgot myself.

They rise.

CAMILLE. It was na-ice.

BUILDER. I didn't mean to. You go away—go away!

CAMILLE. Oh! Monsieur, that spoil it.

BUILDER. [Regarding her fixedly] It's my opinion you're a temptation of the devil. You know you sat down on purpose.

CAMILLE. Well, perhaps.

BUILDER. What business had you to? I'm a family man.

CAMILLE. Yes. What a pity! But does it matter?

BUILDER. [Much beset] Look here, you know! This won't do! It won't do! I—I've got my reputation to think of!

CAMILLE. So 'ave I! But there is lots of time to think of it in between.

BUILDER. I knew you were dangerous. I always knew it.

CAMILLE. What a thing to say of a little woman!

BUILDER. We're not in Paris.

CAMILLE. [Clasping her hands] Oh! 'Ow I wish we was!

BUILDER. Look here—I can't stand this; you've got to go. Out with you! I've always kept a firm hand on myself, and I'm not going to—

CAMILLE. But I admire you so!

BUILDER. Suppose my wife had come in?

CAMILLE. Oh! Don't suppose any such a disagreeable thing! If you were not so strict, you would feel much 'appier.

BUILDER. [Staring at her] You're a temptress!

CAMILLE. I lofe pleasure, and I don't get any. And you 'ave such a duty, you don't get any sport. Well, I am 'ere!

She stretches herself, and BUILDER utters a deep sound.

BUILDER. [On the edge of succumbing] It's all against my—I won't do it! It's—it's wrong!

CAMILLE. Oh! La, la!

BUILDER. [Suddenly revolting] No! If you thought it a sin—I—might. But you don't; you're nothing but a—a little heathen.

CAMILLE. Why should it be better if I thought it a sin?

BUILDER. Then—then I should know where I was. As it is—

CAMILLE. The English 'ave no idea of pleasure. They make it all so coarse and virtuous.

BUILDER. Now, out you go before I—! Go on!

He goes over to the door and opens it. His wife is outside in a hat and coat. She comes in.

[Stammering] Oh! Here you are—I wanted you.

CAMILLE, taking up the tray, goes out Left, swinging her hips a very little.

BUILDER. Going out?

MRS BUILDER. Obviously.

BUILDER. Where?

MRS BUILDER. I don't know at present.

BUILDER. I wanted to talk to you about Maud.

MRS BUILDER. It must wait.

BUILDER. She's-she's actually gone and—

MRS BUILDER. I must tell you that I happened to look in a minute ago.

BUILDER. [In absolute dismay] You! You what?

MRS BUILDER. Yes. I will put no obstacle in the way of your pleasures.

BUILDER. [Aghast] Put no obstacle? What do you mean? Julia, how can you say a thing like that? Why, I've only just—

MRS BUILDER. Don't! I saw.

BUILDER. The girl fell on my knees. Julia, she did. She's—she's a little devil. I—I resisted her. I give you my word there's been nothing beyond a kiss, under great provocation. I—I apologise.

MRS BUILDER. [Bows her head] Thank you! I quite understand. But you must forgive my feeling it impossible to remain a wet blanket any longer.

BUILDER. What! Because of a little thing like that—all over in two minutes, and I doing my utmost.

MRS BUILDER. My dear John, the fact that you had to do your utmost is quite enough. I feel continually humiliated in your house, and I want to leave it—quite quietly, without fuss of any kind.

BUILDER. But—my God! Julia, this is awful—it's absurd! How can you? I'm your husband. Really—your saying you don't mind what I do—it's not right; it's immoral!

MRS BUILDER. I'm afraid you don't see what goes on in those who live with you. So, I'll just go. Don't bother!

BUILDER. Now, look here, Julia, you can't mean this seriously. You can't! Think of my position! You've never set yourself up against me before.

MRS BUILDER. But I do now.

BUILDER. [After staring at her] I've given you no real reason. I'll send the girl away. You ought to thank me for resisting a temptation that most men would have yielded to. After twenty-three years of married life, to kick up like this—you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

MRS BUILDER. I'm sure you must think so.

BUILDER. Oh! for heaven's sake don't be sarcastic! You're my wife, and there's an end of it; you've no legal excuse. Don't be absurd!

MRS BUILDER. Good-bye!

BUILDER. D'you realise that you're encouraging me to go wrong? That's a pretty thing for a wife to do. You ought to keep your husband straight.

MRS BUILDER. How beautifully put!

BUILDER. [Almost pathetically] Don't rile me Julia! I've had an awful day. First Athene—then Maud—then that girl—and now you! All at once like this! Like a swarm of bees about one's head. [Pleading] Come, now, Julia, don't be so—so impracticable! You'll make us the laughing-stock of the whole town. A man in my position, and can't keep his own family; it's preposterous!

MRS BUILDER. Your own family have lives and thoughts and feelings of their own.

BUILDER. Oh! This damned Woman's business! I knew how it would be when we gave you the vote. You and I are married, and our daughters are our daughters. Come, Julia. Where's your commonsense? After twenty-three years! You know I can't do without you!

MRS BUILDER. You could—quite easily. You can tell people what you like.

BUILDER. My God! I never heard anything so immoral in all my life from the mother of two grownup girls. No wonder they've turned out as they have! What is it you want, for goodness sake?

MRS BUILDER. We just want to be away from you, that's all. I assure you it's best. When you've shown some consideration for our feelings and some real sign that we exist apart from you—we could be friends again—perhaps—I don't know.

BUILDER. Friends! Good heavens! With one's own wife and daughters! [With great earnestness] Now, look here, Julia, you haven't lived with me all this time without knowing that I'm a man of strong passions; I've been a faithful husband to you—yes, I have. And that means resisting all sorts of temptations you know nothing of. If you withdraw from my society I won't answer for the consequences. In fact, I can't have you withdrawing. I'm not going to see myself going to the devil and losing the good opinion of everybody round me. A bargain's a bargain. And until I've broken my side of it, and I tell you I haven't—you've no business to break yours. That's flat. So now, put all that out of your head.

MRS BUILDER. No.

BUILDER. [Intently] D'you realise that I've supported you in luxury and comfort?

MRS BUILDER. I think I've earned it.

BUILDER. And how do you propose to live? I shan't give you a penny. Come, Julia, don't be such an idiot! Fancy letting a kiss which no man could have helped, upset you like this!

MRS BUILDER. The Camille, and the last straw!

BUILDER. [Sharply] I won't have it. So now you know.

But MRS BUILDER has very swiftly gone.

Julia, I tell you— [The outer door is heard being closed] Damnation!
I will not have it! They're all mad! Here—where's my hat?

He looks distractedly round him, wrenches open the door, and a moment later the street door is heard to shut with a bang.

CURTAIN.

ACT III

SCENE I

Ten o'clock the following morning, in the study of the Mayor of Breconridge, a panelled room with no window visible, a door Left back and a door Right forward. The entire back wall is furnished with books from floor to ceiling; the other walls are panelled and bare. Before the fireplace, Left, are two armchairs, and other chairs are against the walls. On the Right is a writing-bureau at right angles to the footlights, with a chair behind it. At its back corner stands HARRIS, telephoning.

HARRIS. What—[Pause] Well, it's infernally awkward, Sergeant. . . . The Mayor's in a regular stew. . . . [Listens] New constable? I should think so! Young fool! Look here, Martin, the only thing to do is to hear the charge here at once. I've sent for Mr Chantrey; he's on his way. Bring Mr Builder and the witnesses round sharp. See? And, I say, for God's sake keep it dark. Don't let the Press get on to it. Why you didn't let him go home—! Black eye? The constable? Well, serve him right. Blundering young ass! I mean, it's undermining all authority. . . . Well, you oughtn't—at least, I . . . Damn it all!—it's a nine days' wonder if it gets out—! All right! As soon as you can. [He hangs up the receiver, puts a second chair behind the bureau, and other chairs facing it.] [To himself] Here's a mess! Johnny Builder, of all men! What price Mayors!

The telephone rings.

Hallo? . . . Poaching charge? Well, bring him too; only, I say, keep him back till the other's over. By the way, Mr Chantrey's going shooting. He'll want to get off by eleven. What? . . . Righto !

As he hangs up the receiver the MAYOR enters. He looks worried, and is still dressed with the indefinable wrongness of a burgher.

MAYOR. Well, 'Arris?

HARRIS. They'll be over in five minutes, Mr Mayor.

MAYOR. Mr Chantrey?

HARRIS. On his way, sir.

MAYOR. I've had some awkward things to deal with in my time, 'Arris, but this is just about the [Sniffs] limit.

HARRIS. Most uncomfortable, Sir; most uncomfortable!

MAYOR. Put a book on the chair, 'Arris; I like to sit 'igh.

HARRIS puts a volume of Eneyclopaedia on the Mayor's chair behind the bureau.

[Deeply] Our fellow-magistrate! A family man! In my shoes next year. I suppose he won't be, now. You can't keep these things dark.

HARRIS. I've warned Martin, sir, to use the utmost discretion. Here's Mr Chantrey.

By the door Left, a pleasant and comely gentleman has entered, dressed with indefinable rightness in shooting clothes.

MAYOR. Ah, Chantrey!

CHANTREY. How de do, Mr Mayor? [Nodding to HARRIS] This is extraordinarily unpleasant.

The MAYOR nods.

What on earth's he been doing?

HARRIS. Assaulting one of his own daughters with a stick; and resisting the police.

CHANTREY. [With a low whistle] Daughter! Charity begins at home.

HARRIS. There's a black eye.

MAYOR. Whose?

HARRIS. The constable's.

CHANTREY. How did the police come into it?

HARRIS. I don't know, sir. The worst of it is he's been at the police station since four o'clock yesterday. The Superintendent's away, and Martin never will take responsibility.

CHANTREY. By George! he will be mad. John Builder's a choleric fellow.

MAYOR. [Nodding] He is. 'Ot temper, and an 'igh sense of duty.

HARRIS. There's one other charge, Mr Mayor—poaching. I told them to keep that back till after.

CHANTREY. Oh, well, we'll make short work of that. I want to get off by eleven, Harris. I shall be late for the first drive anyway. John Builder! I say, Mayor—but for the grace of God, there go we!

MAYOR. Harris, go out and bring them in yourself; don't let the servants—

HARRIS goes out Left. The MAYOR takes the upper chair behind the bureau, sitting rather higher because of the book than CHANTREY, who takes the lower. Now that they are in the seats of justice, a sort of reticence falls on them, as if they were afraid of giving away their attitudes of mind to some unseen presence.

MAYOR. [Suddenly] H'm!

CHANTREY. Touch of frost. Birds ought to come well to the guns—no wind. I like these October days.

MAYOR. I think I 'ear them. H'm.

CHANTREY drops his eyeglass and puts on a pair of "grandfather" spectacles. The MAYOR clears his throat and takes up a pen. They neither of them look up as the door is opened and a little procession files in. First HARRIS; then RALPH BUILDER, ATHENE, HERRINGHAME, MAUD, MRS BUILDER, SERGEANT MARTIN, carrying a heavy Malacca cane with a silver knob; JOHN BUILDER and the CONSTABLE MOON, a young man with one black eye. No funeral was ever attended by mutes so solemn and dejected. They stand in a sort of row.

MAYOR. [Without looking up] Sit down, ladies; sit down.

HARRIS and HERRINGHAME succeed in placing the three women in chairs. RALPH BUILDER also sits. HERRINGHAME stands behind. JOHN BUILDER remains standing between the two POLICEMEN. His face is unshaved and menacing, but he stands erect staring straight at the MAYOR. HARRIS goes to the side of the bureau, Back, to take down

the evidence.

MAYOR. Charges!

SERGEANT. John Builder, of The Cornerways, Breconridge, Contractor and Justice of the Peace, charged with assaulting his daughter Maud Builder by striking her with a stick in the presence of Constable Moon and two other persons; also with resisting Constable Moon in the execution of his duty, and injuring his eye. Constable Moon!

MOON. [Stepping forward—one, two—like an automaton, and saluting] In River Road yesterday afternoon, Your Worship, about three-thirty p.m., I was attracted by a young woman callin' "Constable" outside a courtyard. On hearing the words "Follow me, quick," I followed her to a painter's studio inside the courtyard, where I found three persons in the act of disagreement. No sooner 'ad I appeared than the defendant, who was engaged in draggin' a woman towards the door, turns to the young woman who accompanied me, with violence. "You dare, father," she says; whereupon he hit her twice with the stick the same which is produced, in the presence of myself and the two other persons, which I'm given to understand is his wife and other daughter.

MAYOR. Yes; never mind what you're given to understand.

MOON. No, sir. The party struck turns to me and says, "Come in. I give this man in charge for assault." I moves accordingly with the words: "I saw you. Come along with me." The defendant turns to me sharp and says: "You stupid lout—I'm a magistrate." "Come off it," I says to the best of my recollection. "You struck this woman in my presence," I says, "and you come along!" We were then at close quarters. The defendant gave me a push with the words: "Get out, you idiot!" "Not at all," I replies, and took 'old of his arm. A struggle ensues, in the course of which I receives the black eye which I herewith produce. [He touches his eye with awful solemnity.]

The MAYOR clears his throat; CHANTREY'S eyes goggle; HARRIS bends over and writes rapidly.

During the struggle, Your Worship, a young man has appeared on the scene, and at the instigation of the young woman, the same who was assaulted, assists me in securing the prisoner, whose language and resistance was violent in the extreme. We placed him in a cab which we found outside, and I conveyed him to the station.

CHANTREY. What was his—er—conduct in the—er—cab?

MOON. He sat quiet.

CHANTREY. That seems—

MOON. Seein' I had his further arm twisted behind him.

MAYOR [Looking at BUILDER] Any questions to ask him?

BUILDER makes not the faintest sign, and the MAYOR drops his glance.

MAYOR. Sergeant?

MOON steps back two paces, and the SERGEANT steps two paces forward.

SERGEANT. At ten minutes to four, Your Worship, yesterday afternoon, Constable Moon brought the defendant to the station in a four-wheeled cab. On his recounting the circumstances of the assault, they were taken down and read over to the defendant with the usual warning. The defendant said nothing. In view of the double assault and the condition of the constable's eye, and in the absence of the Superintendent, I thought it my duty to retain the defendant for the night.

MAYOR. The defendant said nothing?

SERGEANT. He 'as not opened his lips to my knowledge, Your Worship, from that hour to this.

MAYOR. Any questions to ask the Sergeant?

BUILDER continues to stare at the MAYOR without a word.

MAYOR. Very well!

The MAYOR and CHANTREY now consult each other inaudibly, and the Mayor nods.

MAYOR. Miss Maud Builder, will you tell us what you know of this—er— occurrence?

MAUD. [Rising; with eyes turning here and there] Must I?

MAYOR. I'm afraid you must.

MAUD. [After a look at her father, who never turns his eyes from the MAYOR's face] I—I wish to withdraw the charge of striking me, please. I—I never meant to make it. I was in a temper—I saw red.

MAYOR. I see. A—a domestic disagreement. Very well, that charge is withdrawn. You do not appear to have been hurt, and that seems to me quite proper. Now, tell me what you know of the assault on the constable. Is his account correct?

MAUD. [Timidly] Ye-yes. Only—

MAYOR. Yes? Tell us the truth.

MAUD. [Resolutely] Only, I don't think my father hit the constable. I think the stick did that.

MAYOR. Oh, the stick? But—er—the stick was in 'is 'and, wasn't it?

MAUD. Yes; but I mean, my father saw red, and the constable saw red, and the stick flew up between them and hit him in the eye.

CHANTREY. And then he saw black?

MAYOR. [With corrective severity] But did 'e 'it 'im with the stick?

MAUD. No—no. I don't think he did.

MAYOR. Then who supplied the—er—momentum?

MAUD. I think there was a struggle for the cane, and it flew up.

MAYOR. Hand up the cane.

The SERGEANT hands up the cane. The MAYOR and CHANTREY examine it.

MAYOR. Which end—do you suggest—inflicted this injury?

MAUD. Oh! the knob end, sir.

MAYOR. What do you say to that, constable?

MOON. [Stepping the mechanical two paces] I don't deny there was a struggle, Your Worship, but it's my impression I was 'it.

CHANTREY. Of course you were bit; we can see that. But with the cane or with the fist?

MOON. [A little flurried] I—I—with the fist, sir.

MAYOR. Be careful. Will you swear to that?

MOON. [With that sudden uncertainty which comes over the most honest in such circumstances] Not—not so to speak in black and white, Your Worship; but that was my idea at the time.

MAYOR. You won't swear to it?

MOON. I'll swear he called me an idiot and a lout; the words made a deep impression on me.

CHANTREY. [To himself] Mort aux vaches!

MAYOR. Eh? That'll do, constable; stand back. Now, who else saw the struggle? Mrs Builder. You're not obliged to say anything unless you like. That's your privilege as his wife.

While he is speaking the door has been opened, and HARRIS has gone swiftly to it, spoken to someone and returned. He leans forward to the MAYOR.

Eh? Wait a minute. Mrs Builder, do you wish to give evidence?

MRS BUILDER. [Rising] No, Mr Mayor.

MRS BUILDER Sits.

MAYOR. Very good. [To HARRIS] Now then, what is it?

HARRIS says something in a low and concerned voice. The MAYOR'S face lengthens. He leans to his right and consults CHANTREY, who gives a faint and deprecating shrug. A moment's silence.

MAYOR. This is an open Court. The Press have the right to attend if they wish.

HARRIS goes to the door and admits a young man in glasses, of a pleasant appearance, and indicates to him a chair at the back. At this untimely happening BUILDER's eyes have moved from side to side, but now he regains his intent and bull-like stare at his fellow-justices.

MAYOR. [To Maud] You can sit down, Miss Builder.

MAUD resumes her seat.

Miss Athene Builder, you were present, I think?

ATHENE. [Rising] Yes, Sir.

MAYOR. What do you say to this matter?

ATHENE. I didn't see anything very clearly, but I think my sister's account is correct, sir.

MAYOR. Is it your impression that the cane inflicted the injury?

ATHENE. [In a low voice] Yes.

MAYOR. With or without deliberate intent?

ATHENE. Oh! without.

BUILDER looks at her.

MAYOR. But you were not in a position to see very well?

ATHENE. No, Sir.

MAYOR. Your sister having withdrawn her charge, we needn't go into that.
Very good!

He motions her to sit down. ATHENE, turning her eyes on her Father's impassive figure, sits.

MAYOR. Now, there was a young man. [Pointing to HERRINGHAME] Is this the young man?

MOON. Yes, Your Worship.

MAYOR. What's your name?

GUY. Guy Herringhame.

MAYOR. Address?

GUY. Er—the Aerodrome, Sir. MAYOR. Private, I mean?

The moment is one of considerable tension.

GUY. [With an effort] At the moment, sir, I haven't one. I've just left my diggings, and haven't yet got any others.

MAYOR. H'm! The Aerodrome. How did you come to be present?

GUY. I—er

BUILDER's eyes go round and rest on him for a moment.

It's in my sister's studio that Miss Athene Builder is at present working, sir. I just happened to—to turn up.

MAYOR. Did you appear on the scene, as the constable says, during the struggle?

GUY. Yes, sir.

MAYOR. Did he summon you to his aid?

GUY. Yes—No, sir. Miss Maud Builder did that.

MAYOR. What do you say to this blow?

GUY. [Jerking his chin up a little] Oh! I saw that clearly.

MAYOR. Well, let us hear.

GUY. The constable's arm struck the cane violently and it flew up and landed him in the eye.

MAYOR. [With a little grunt] You are sure of that?

GUY. Quite sure, sir.

MAYOR. Did you hear any language?

GUY. Nothing out of the ordinary, sir. One or two damns and blasts.

MAYOR. You call that ordinary?

GUY. Well, he's a—magistrate, sir.

The MAYOR utters a profound grunt. CHANTREY smiles. There is a silence. Then the MAYOR leans over to CHANTREY for a short colloquy.

CHANTREY. Did you witness any particular violence other than a resistance to arrest?

GUY. No, sir.

MAYOR. [With a gesture of dismissal] Very well, That seems to be the evidence. Defendant John Builder—what do you say to all this?

BUILDER. [In a voice different from any we have heard from him] Say! What business had he to touch me, a magistrate? I gave my daughter two taps with a cane in a private house, for interfering with me for taking my wife home—

MAYOR. That charge is not pressed, and we can't go into the circumstances. What do you wish to say about your conduct towards the constable?

BUILDER. [In his throat] Not a damned thing!

MAYOR. [Embarrassed] I—I didn't catch.

CHANTREY. Nothing—nothing, he said, Mr Mayor.

MAYOR. [Clearing his throat] I understand, then, that you do not wish to offer any explanation?

BUILDER. I consider myself abominably treated, and I refuse to say another word.

MAYOR. [Drily] Very good. Miss Maud Builder.

MAUD stands up.

MAYOR. When you spoke of the defendant seeing red, what exactly did you mean?

MAUD. I mean that my father was so angry that he didn't know what he was doing.

CHANTREY. Would you say as angry as he—er—is now?

MAUD. [With a faint smile] Oh! much more angry.

RALPH BUILDER stands up.

RALPH. Would you allow me to say a word, Mr Mayor?

MAYOR. Speaking of your own knowledge, Mr Builder?

RALPH. In regard to the state of my brother's mind—yes, Mr Mayor. He was undoubtedly under great strain yesterday; certain circumstances, domestic and otherwise—

MAYOR. You mean that he might have been, as one might say, beside himself?

RALPH. Exactly, Sir.

MAYOR. Had you seen your brother?

RALPH. I had seen him shortly before this unhappy business.

The MAYOR nods and makes a gesture, so that MAUD and RALPH sit down; then, leaning over, he confers in a low voice with CHANTREY. The rest all sit or stand exactly as if each was the only person in the room, except the JOURNALIST, who is writing busily and rather obviously making a sketch of BUILDER.

MAYOR. Miss Athene Builder.

ATHENE stands up.

This young man, Mr Herringhame, I take it, is a friend of the family's?

A moment of some tension.

ATHENE. N—no, Mr Mayor, not of my father or mother.

CHANTREY. An acquaintance of yours?

ATHENE. Yes.

MAYOR. Very good. [He clears his throat] As the defendant, wrongly, we think, refuses to offer his explanation of this matter, the Bench has to decide on the evidence as given. There seems to be some discrepancy as to the blow which the constable undoubtedly received. In view of this, we incline to take the testimony of Mr—

HARRIS prompts him.

Mr 'Erringhame—as the party least implicated personally in the affair, and most likely to 'ave a cool and impartial view. That evidence is to the effect that the blow was accidental. There is no doubt, however, that the defendant used reprehensible language, and offered some resistance to the constable in the execution of his duty. Evidence 'as been offered that he was in an excited state of mind; and it is possible —I don't say that this is any palliation—but it is possible that he may have thought his position as magistrate made him—er—

CHANTREY. [Prompting] Caesar's wife.

MAYOR. Eh? We think, considering all the circumstances, and the fact that he has spent a night in a cell, that justice will be met by—er— discharging him with a caution.

BUILDER. [With a deeply muttered] The devil you do!

Walks out of the room. The JOURNALIST, grabbing his pad, starts up and follows. The BUILDERS rise and huddle, and, with HERRINGHAME, are ushered out by HARRIS.

MAYOR. [Pulling out a large handkerchief and wiping his forehead]
My Aunt!

CHANTREY. These new constables, Mayor! I say, Builder'll have to go! Damn the Press, how they nose everything out! The Great Unpaid!— We shall get it again! [He suddenly goes off into a fit of laughter] "Come off it," I says, "to the best of my recollection." Oh! Oh! I shan't hit a bird all day! That poor devil Builder! It's no joke for him. You did it well, Mayor; you did it well. British justice is safe in your hands. He blacked the fellow's eye all right. "Which I herewith produce." Oh! my golly! It beats the band!

His uncontrollable laughter and the MAYOR'S rueful appreciation are exchanged with lightning rapidity for a preternatural solemnity, as the door opens, admitting SERGEANT MARTIN and the lugubrious object of their next attentions.

MAYOR. Charges.

SERGEANT steps forward to read the charge as

The CURTAIN falls.

SCENE II

Noon the same day.

BUILDER'S study. TOPPING is standing by the open window, looking up and down the street. A newspaper boy's voice is heard calling the first edition of his wares. It approaches from the Right.

TOPPING. Here!

BOY'S VOICE. Right, guv'nor! Johnny Builder up before the beaks!
[A paper is pushed up].

TOPPING. [Extending a penny] What's that you're sayin'? You take care!

BOY'S VOICE. It's all 'ere. Johnny Builder—beatin' his wife!
Dischawged.

TOPPING. Stop it, you young limb!

BOY'S VOICE. 'Allo! What's the matter wiv you? Why, it's Johnny Builder's house! [Gives a cat-call]
'Ere, buy anuvver! 'E'll want to read about 'isself. [Appealing] Buy anuvver, guv'nor!

TOPPING. Move on!

He retreats from the window, opening the paper.

BOY'S VOICE. [Receding] Payper! First edition! J.P. chawged! Payper!

TOPPING. [To himself as he reads] Crimes! Phew! That accounts for them bein' away all night.

While he is reading, CAMILLE enters from the hall. Here! Have you seen this, Camel—in the Stop Press?

CAMILLE. No.

They read eagerly side by side.

TOPPING. [Finishing aloud] "Tried to prevent her father from forcing her mother to return home with him, and he struck her for so doing. She did not press the charge. The arrested gentleman, who said he acted under great provocation, was discharged with a caution." Well, I'm blowed! He has gone and done it!

CAMILLE. A black eye!

TOPPING. [Gazing at her] Have you had any hand in this? I've seen you making your lovely black eyes at him. You foreigners—you're a loose lot!

CAMILLE. You are drunk!

TOPPING. Not yet, my dear. [Reverting to the paper; philosophically]
Well, this little lot's bust up! The favourites will fall down. Johnny Builder! Who'd have thought it?

CAMILLE. He is an obstinate man.

TOPPING. Ah! He's right up against it now. Comes of not knowin' when to stop bein' firm. If you meet a wall with your 'ead, it's any odds on the wall, Camel. Though, if you listened to some, you wouldn't think it. What'll he do now, I wonder? Any news of the mistress?

CAMILLE. [Shaking her head] I have pack her tr-runks.

TOPPING. Why?

CAMILLE. Because she take her jewels yesterday.

TOPPING. Deuce she did! They generally leave 'em. Take back yer gifts! She throws the baubles at 'is 'ead. [Again staring at her] You're a deep one, you know!

There is the sound of a cab stopping.

Wonder if that's him! [He goes towards the hall. CAMILLE watchfully shifts towards the diningroom door. MAUD enters.]

MAUD. Is my father back, Topping?

TOPPING. Not yet, Miss.

MAUD. I've come for mother's things.

CAMILLE. They are r-ready.

MAUD. [Eyeing her] Topping, get them down, please.

TOPPING, after a look at them both, goes out into the hall.

Very clever of you to have got them ready.

CAMILLE. I am clevere.

MAUD. [Almost to herself] Yes—father may, and he may not.

CAMILLE. Look! If you think I am a designing woman, you are mistook.
I know when things are too 'ot. I am not sorry to go.

MAUD. Oh! you are going?

CAMILLE. Yes, I am going. How can I stay when there is no lady in the 'ouse?

MAUD. Not even if you're asked to?

CAMILLE. Who will ask me?

MAUD. That we shall see.

CAMILLE. Well, you will see I have an opinion of my own.

MAUD. Oh! yes, you're clear-headed enough.

CAMILLE. I am not arguing. Good-morning!

Exits up Left.

MAUD regards her stolidly as she goes out into the dining-room, then takes up the paper and reads.

MAUD. Horrible!

TOPPING re-enters from the hall.

TOPPING. I've got 'em on the cab, Miss. I didn't put your ten bob on yesterday, because the animal finished last. You cant depend on horses.

MAUD. [Touching the newspaper] This is a frightful business, Topping.

TOPPING. Ah! However did it happen, Miss Maud?

MAUD. [Tapping the newspaper] It's all true. He came after my mother to Miss Athene's, and I—I couldn't stand it. I did what it says here; and now I'm sorry. Mother's dreadfully upset. You know father as well as anyone, Topping; what do you think he'll do now?

TOPPING. [Sucking in his cheeks] Well, you see, Miss, it's like this:
Up to now Mr Builder's always had the respect of everybody—

MAUD moves her head impatiently.

outside his own house, of course. Well, now he hasn't got it. Pishchologically that's bound to touch him.

MAUD. Of course; but which way? Will he throw up the sponge, or try and stick it out here?

TOPPING. He won't throw up the sponge, Miss; more likely to squeeze it down the back of their necks.

MAUD. He'll be asked to resign, of course.

The NEWSPAPER BOY'S VOICE is heard again approaching: "First edition! Great sensation! Local magistrate before the Bench! Pay-per!"

Oh, dear! I wish I hadn't! But I couldn't see mother being—

TOPPING. Don't you fret, Miss; he'll come through. His jaw's above his brow, as you might say.

MAUD. What?

TOPPING. [Nodding] Phreenology, Miss. I rather follow that. When the jaw's big and the brow is small, it's a sign of character. I always think the master might have been a Scotchman, except for his fishionomy.

MAUD. A Scotsman?

TOPPING. So down on anything soft, Miss. Haven't you noticed whenever one of these 'Umanitarians writes to the papers, there's always a Scotchman after him next morning. Seems to be a fact of 'uman nature, like introduc'n rabbits into a new country and then weasels to get rid of 'em. And then something to keep down the weasels. But I never can see what could keep down a Scotchman! You seem to reach the hapex there!

MAUD. Miss Athene was married this morning, Topping. We've just come from the Registrar's.

TOPPING. [Immovably] Indeed, Miss. I thought perhaps she was about to be.

MAUD. Oh!

TOPPING. Comin' events. I saw the shadder yesterday.

MAUD. Well, it's all right. She's coming on here with my uncle.

A cab is heard driving up.

That's them, I expect. We all feel awful about father.

TOPPING. Ah! I shouldn't be surprised if he feels awful about you, Miss.

MAUD. [At the window] It is them.

TOPPING goes out into the hall; ATHENE and RALPH enter Right.

MAUD. Where's father, Uncle Ralph?

RALPH. With his solicitor.

ATHENE. We left Guy with mother at the studio. She still thinks she ought to come. She keeps on saying she must, now father's in a hole.

MAUD. I've got her things on the cab; she ought to be perfectly free to choose.

RALPH. You've got freedom on the brain, Maud.

MAUD. So would you, Uncle Ralph, if you had father about.

RALPH. I'm his partner, my dear.

MAUD. Yes; how do you manage him?

RALPH. I've never yet given him in charge.

ATHENE. What do you do, Uncle Ralph?

RALPH. Undermine him when I can.

MAUD. And when you can't?

RALPH. Undermine the other fellow. You can't go to those movie people now, Maud. They'd star you as the celebrated Maud Builder who gave her father into custody. Come to us instead, and have perfect freedom, till all this blows over.

MAUD. Oh! what will father be like now?

ATHENE. It's so queer you and he being brothers, Uncle Ralph.

RALPH. There are two sides to every coin, my dear. John's the head-and I'm the tail. He has the sterling qualities. Now, you girls have got to smooth him down, and make up to him. You've tried him pretty high.

MAUD. [Stubbornly] I never wanted him for a father, Uncle.

RALPH. They do wonderful things nowadays with inherited trouble. Come, are you going to be nice to him, both of you?

ATHENE. We're going to try.

RALPH. Good! I don't even now understand how it happened.

MAUD. When you went out with Guy, it wasn't three minutes before he came. Mother had just told us about—well, about something beastly. Father wanted us to go, and we agreed to go out for five minutes while he talked to mother. We went, and when we came back he told me to get a cab to take mother home. Poor mother stood there looking like a ghost, and he began hunting and hauling her towards the door. I saw red, and instead of a cab I fetched that policeman. Of course father did black his eye. Guy was splendid.

ATHENE. You gave him the lead.

MAUD. I couldn't help it, seeing father standing there all dumb.

ATHENE. It was awful! Uncle, why didn't you come back with Guy?

MAUD. Oh, yes! why didn't you, Uncle?

ATHENE. When Maud had gone for the cab, I warned him not to use force. I told him it was against the law, but he only said: "The law be damned!"

RALPH. Well, it all sounds pretty undignified.

MAUD. Yes; everybody saw red.

They have not seen the door opened from the hall, and BUILDER standing there. He is still unshaven, a little sunken in the face, with a glum, glowering expression. He has a document in his hand. He advances a step or two and they see him.

ATHENE and MAUD. [Aghast] Father!

BUILDER. Ralph, oblige me! See them off the premises!

RALPH. Steady, John!

BUILDER. Go!

MAUD. [Proudly] All right! We thought you might like to know that Athene's married, and that I've given up the movies. Now we'll go.

BUILDER turns his back on them, and, sitting down at his writing-table, writes.

After a moment's whispered conversation with their Uncle, the two girls go out.

RALPH BUILDER stands gazing with whimsical commiseration at his brother's back. As BUILDER finishes writing, he goes up and puts his hand on his brother's shoulder.

RALPH. This is an awful jar, old man!

BUILDER. Here's what I've said to that fellow: "MR MAYOR,—You had the effrontery to-day to discharge me with a caution—forsooth!—your fellow —magistrate. I've consulted my solicitor as to whether an action will lie for false imprisonment. I'm informed that it won't. I take this opportunity of saying that justice in this town is a travesty. I have no wish to be associated further with you or your fellows; but you are vastly mistaken if you imagine that I shall resign my position on the Bench or the Town Council.—Yours, "JOHN BUILDER."

RALPH. I say—keep your sense of humour, old boy.

BUILDER. [Grimly] Humour? I've spent a night in a cell. See this!
[He holds out the document] It disinherits my family.

RALPH. John!

BUILDER. I've done with those two ladies. As to my wife—if she doesn't come back—! When I suffer, I make others suffer.

RALPH. Julia's very upset, my dear fellow; we all are. The girls came here to try and—

BUILDER. [Rising] They may go to hell! If that lousy Mayor thinks I'm done with—he's mistaken! [He rings the bell] I don't want any soft sawder. I'm a fighter.

RALPH. [In a low voice] The enemy stands within the gate, old chap.

BUILDER. What's that?

RALPH. Let's boss our own natures before we boss those of other people.
Have a sleep on it, John, before you do anything.

BUILDER. Sleep? I hadn't a wink last night. If you'd passed the night
I had—

RALPH. I hadn't many myself.

TOPPING enters.

BUILDER. Take this note to the Mayor with my compliments, and don't bring back an answer.
TOPPING. Very good, sir. There's a gentleman from the "Comet" in the hall, sir. Would you see him for a minute, he says.

BUILDER. Tell him to go to—

A voice says, "Mr Builder!" BUILDER turns to see the figure of the
JOURNALIST in the hall doorway. TOPPING goes out.

JOURNALIST. [Advancing with his card] Mr Builder, it's very good of you to see me. I had the pleasure this morning—I mean—I tried to reach you when you left the Mayor's. I thought you would probably have your own side of this unfortunate matter. We shall be glad to give it every prominence.

TOPPING has withdrawn, and RALPH BUILDER, at the window, stands
listening.

BUILDER. [Drily, regarding the JOURNALIST, who has spoken in a pleasant and polite voice] Very good of you!

JOURNALIST. Not at all, sir. We felt that you would almost certainly have good reasons of your own which would put the matter in quite a different light.

BUILDER. Good reasons? I should think so! I tell you—a very little more of this liberty—licence I call it—and there isn't a man who'll be able to call himself head of a family.

JOURNALIST. [Encouragingly] Quite!

BUILDER. If the law thinks it can back up revolt, it's damned well mistaken. I struck my daughter—I was in a passion, as you would have been.

JOURNALIST. [Encouraging] I'm sure—

BUILDER. [Glaring at him] Well, I don't know that you would; you look a soft sort; but any man with any blood in him.

JOURNALIST. Can one ask what she was doing, sir? We couldn't get that point quite clear.

BUILDER. Doing? I just had my arm round my wife, trying to induce her to come home with me after a little family tiff, and this girl came at me. I lost my temper, and tapped her with my cane. And—that policeman brought by my own daughter—a policeman! If the law is going to enter private houses and abrogate domestic authority, where the hell shall we be?

JOURNALIST. [Encouraging] No, I'm sure—I'm sure!

BUILDER. The maudlin sentimentality in these days is absolutely rotting this country. A man can't be master in his own house, can't require his wife to fulfil her duties, can't attempt to control the conduct of his daughters, without coming up against it and incurring odium. A man can't control his employees; he can't put his foot down on rebellion anywhere, without a lot of humanitarians and licence-lovers howling at him.

JOURNALIST. Excellent, Sir; excellent!

BUILDER. Excellent? It's damnable. Here am I—a man who's always tried to do his duty in private life and public—brought up before the Bench— my God! because I was doing that duty; with a little too much zeal, perhaps—I'm not an angel!

JOURNALIST. No! No! of course.

BUILDER. A proper Englishman never is. But there are no proper Englishmen nowadays.

He crosses the room in his fervour.

RALPH. [Suddenly] As I look at faces—

BUILDER. [Absorbed] What! I told this young man I wasn't an angel.

JOURNALIST. [Drawing him on] Yes, Sir; I quite understand.

BUILDER. If the law thinks it can force me to be one of your weak-kneed sentimentalists who let everybody do what they like—

RALPH. There are a good many who stand on their rights left, John.

BUILDER. [Absorbed] What! How can men stand on their rights left?

JOURNALIST. I'm afraid you had a painful experience, sir.

BUILDER. Every kind of humiliation. I spent the night in a stinking cell. I haven't eaten since breakfast yesterday. Did they think I was going to eat the muck they shoved in? And all because in a moment of anger—which I regret, I regret!—I happened to strike my daughter, who was interfering between me and my wife. The thing would be funny if it weren't so disgusting. A man's house used to be sanctuary. What is it now? With all the world poking their noses in?

He stands before the fire with his head bent, excluding as it were his interviewer and all the world.

JOURNALIST. [Preparing to go] Thank you very much, Mr Builder. I'm sure I can do you justice. Would you like to see a proof?

BUILDER. [Half conscious of him] What?

JOURNALIST. Or will you trust me?

BUILDER. I wouldn't trust you a yard.

JOURNALIST. [At the door] Very well, sir; you shall have a proof, I promise. Good afternoon, and thank you.

BUILDER. Here!

But he is gone, and BUILDER is left staring at his brother, on whose face is still that look of whimsical commiseration.

RALPH. Take a pull, old man! Have a hot bath and go to bed.

BUILDER. They've chosen to drive me to extremes, now let them take the consequences. I don't care a kick what anybody thinks.

RALPH. [Sadly] Well, I won't worry you anymore, now.

BUILDER. [With a nasty laugh] No; come again to-morrow!

RALPH. When you've had a sleep. For the sake of the family name, John, don't be hasty.

BUILDER. Shut the stable door? No, my boy, the horse has gone.

RALPH. Well, Well!

With a lingering look at his brother, who has sat down sullenly at the writing table, he goes out into the hall.

BUILDER remains staring in front of him. The dining-room door opens, and CAMILLE's head is thrust in. Seeing him, she draws back, but he catches sight of her.

BUILDER. Here!

CAMILLE comes doubtfully up to the writing table. Her forehead is puckered as if she were thinking hard.

BUILDER. [Looking at her, unsmiling] So you want to be my mistress, do you?

CAMILLE makes a nervous gesture.

Well, you shall. Come here.

CAMILLE. [Not moving] You f—frighten me.

BUILDER. I've paid a pretty price for you. But you'll make up for it; you and others.

CAMILLE. [Starting back] No; I don't like you to-day! No!

BUILDER. Come along! [She is just within reach and he seizes her arm] All my married life I've put a curb on myself for the sake of respectability. I've been a man of principle, my girl, as you saw yesterday. Well, they don't want that! [He draws her close] You can sit on my knee now.

CAMILLE. [Shrinking] No; I don't want to, to-day.

BUILDER. But you shall. They've asked for it!

CAMILLE. [With a supple movement slipping away from him] They? What is all that? I don't want any trouble. No, no; I am not taking any.

She moves back towards the door. BUILDER utters a sardonic laugh.

Oh! you are a dangerous man! No, no! Not for me! Good-bye, sare!

She turns swiftly and goes out. BUILDER again utters his glum laugh. And then, as he sits alone staring before him, perfect silence reigns in the room. Over the window-sill behind him a BOY'S face is seen to rise; it hangs there a moment with a grin spreading on it.

BOY'S VOICE. [Sotto] Johnny Builder!

As BUILDER turns sharply, it vanishes.

'Oo beat 'is wife?

BUILDER rushes to the window.

BOY'S VOICE. [More distant and a little tentative] Johnny Builder!

BUILDER. You little devil! If I catch you, I'll wring your blasted little neck!

BOY'S VOICE. [A little distant] 'Oo blacked the copper's eye?

BUILDER, in an ungovernable passion, seizes a small flower-pot from the sill and dings it with all his force. The sound of a crash.

BOY'S VOICE. [Very distant] Ya-a-ah! Missed!

BUILDER stands leaning out, face injected with blood, shaking his fist.

The CURTAIN falls for a few seconds.

SCENE III

Evening the same day.

BUILDER's study is dim and neglected-looking; the window is still open, though it has become night. A street lamp outside shines in, and the end of its rays fall on BUILDER asleep. He is sitting in a high chair at the fireside end of the writing-table, with his elbows on it, and his cheek resting on his hand. He is still unshaven, and his clothes unchanged. A Boy's head appears above the level of the window-sill, as if beheaded and fastened there.

BOY'S VOICE. [In a forceful whisper] Johnny Builder!

BUILDER stirs uneasily. The Boy's head vanishes. BUILDER, raising his other hand, makes a sweep before his face, as if to brush away a mosquito. He wakes. Takes in remembrance, and sits a moment staring gloomily before him. The door from the hall is opened and TOPPING comes in with a long envelope in his hand.

TOPPING. [Approaching] From the "Comet," sir. Proof of your interview, sir; will you please revise, the messenger says; he wants to take it back at once.

BUILDER. [Taking it] All right. I'll ring.

TOPPING. Shall I close in, sir?

BUILDER. Not now.

TOPPING withdraws. BUILDER turns up a standard lamp on the table, opens the envelope, and begins reading the galley slip. The signs of uneasiness and discomfort grow on him.

BUILDER. Did I say that? Muck! Muck! [He drops the proof, sits a moment moving his head and rubbing one hand uneasily on the surface of the table, then reaches out for the telephone receiver] Town, 245. [Pause] The "Comet"? John Builder. Give me the Editor. [Pause] That you, Mr Editor? John Builder speaking. That interview. I've got the proof. It won't do. Scrap the whole thing, please. I don't want to say anything. [Pause] Yes. I know I said it all; I can't help that. [Pause] No; I've changed my mind. Scrap it, please. [Pause] No, I will not say anything. [Pause] You can say what you dam' well please. [Pause] I mean it; if you put a word into my mouth, I'll sue you for defamation of character. It's undignified muck. I'm tearing it up. Good-night. [He replaces the receiver, and touches a bell; then, taking up the galley slip, he tears it viciously across into many pieces, and rams them into the envelope.]

TOPPING enters.

Here, give this to the messenger-sharp, and tell him to run with it.

TOPPING. [Whose hand can feel the condition of the contents, with a certain surprise] Yes, sir.

He goes, with a look back from the door.

The Mayor is here, sir. I don't know whether you would wish

BUILDER, rising, takes a turn up and down the room.

BUILDER. Nor do I. Yes! I'll see him.

TOPPING goes out, and BUILDER stands over by the fender, with his head a little down.

TOPPING. [Re-entering] The Mayor, sir.

He retires up Left. The MAYOR is overcoated, and carries, of all things, a top hat. He reaches the centre of the room before he speaks.

MAYOR. [Embarrassed] Well, Builder?

BUILDER. Well?

MAYOR. Come! That caution of mine was quite parliamentary. I 'ad to save face, you know.

BUILDER. And what about my face?

MAYOR. Well, you—you made it difficult for me. 'Ang it all! Put yourself into my place!

BUILDER. [Grimly] I'd rather put you into mine, as it was last night.

MAYOR. Yes, yes! I know; but the Bench has got a name to keep up—must stand well in the people's eyes. As it is, I sailed very near the wind. Suppose we had an ordinary person up before us for striking a woman?

BUILDER. I didn't strike a woman—I struck my daughter.

MAYOR. Well, but she's not a child, you know. And you did resist the police, if no worse. Come! You'd have been the first to maintain British justice. Shake 'ands!

BUILDER. Is that what you came for?

MAYOR. [Taken aback] Why—yes; nobody can be more sorry than I—

BUILDER. Eye-wash! You came to beg me to resign.

MAYOR. Well, it's precious awkward, Builder. We all feel—

BUILDER. Save your powder, Mayor. I've slept on it since I wrote you that note. Take my resignations.

MAYOR. [In relieved embarrassment] That's right. We must face your position.

BUILDER. [With a touch of grim humour] I never yet met a man who couldn't face another man's position.

MAYOR. After all, what is it?

BUILDER. Splendid isolation. No wife, no daughters, no Councillorship, no Magistracy, no future—[With a laugh] not even a French maid. And why? Because I tried to exercise a little wholesome family authority. That's the position you're facing, Mayor.

MAYOR. Dear, dear! You're devilish bitter, Builder. It's unfortunate, this publicity. But it'll all blow over; and you'll be back where you were. You've a good sound practical sense underneath your temper. [A pause] Come, now! [A pause] Well, I'll say good-night, then.

BUILDER. You shall have them in writing tomorrow.

MAYOR. [With sincerity] Come! Shake 'ands.

BUILDER, after a long look, holds out his hand. The two men exchange a grip.

The MAYOR, turning abruptly, goes out.

BUILDER remains motionless for a minute, then resumes his seat at the side of the writing table, leaning his head on his hands.

The Boy's head is again seen rising above the level of the window-sill, and another and another follows, till the three, as if decapitated, heads are seen in a row.

BOYS' VOICES. [One after another in a whispered crescendo] Johnny Builder! Johnny Builder! Johnny Builder!

BUILDER rises, turns and stares at them. The THREE HEADS disappear, and a Boy's voice cries shrilly: "Johnny Builder!" BUILDER moves towards the window; voices are now crying in various pitches and keys: "Johnny Builder!" "Beatey Builder!" "Beat 'is wife-er!" "Beatey Builder!"

BUILDER stands quite motionless, staring, with the street lamp lighting up a queer, rather pitiful defiance on his face. The voices swell. There comes a sudden swish and splash of water, and broken yells of dismay.

TOPPING'S VOICE. Scat! you young devils!

The sound of scuffling feet and a long-drawnout and distant "Miaou!"

BUILDER stirs, shuts the window, draws the curtains, goes to the armchair before the fireplace and sits down in it.

TOPPING enters with a little tray on which is a steaming jug of fluid, some biscuits and a glass. He comes stealthily up level with the chair. BUILDER stirs and looks up at him.

TOPPING. Excuse me, sir, you must 'ave digested yesterday morning's breakfast by now—must live to eat, sir.

BUILDER. All right. Put it down.

TOPPING. [Putting the tray down on the table and taking up BUILDER'S pipe] I fair copped those young devils.

BUILDER. You're a good fellow.

TOPPING. [Filling the pipe] You'll excuse me, sir; the Missis—has come back, sir—

BUILDER stares at him and TOPPING stops. He hands BUILDER the filled pipe and a box of matches.

BUILDER. [With a shiver] Light the fire, Topping. I'm chilly.

While TOPPING lights the fire BUILDER puts the pipe in his mouth and applies a match to it. TOPPING, having lighted the fire, turns to go, gets as far as half way, then comes back level with the table and regards the silent brooding figure in the chair.

BUILDER. [Suddenly] Give me that paper on the table. No; the other one—the Will.

TOPPING takes up the Will and gives it to him.

TOPPING. [With much hesitation] Excuse me, sir. It's pluck that get's 'em 'ome, sir—begging your pardon.

BUILDER has resumed his attitude and does not answer.

[In a voice just touched with feeling] Good-night, sir.

BUILDER. [Without turning his head] Good-night.

TOPPING has gone. BUILDER sits drawing at his pipe between the firelight and the light from the standard lamp. He takes the pipe out of his mouth and a quiver passes over his face. With a half angry gesture he rubs the back of his hand across his eyes.

BUILDER. [To himself] Pluck! Pluck! [His lips quiver again. He presses them hard together, puts his pipe back into his mouth, and, taking the Will, thrusts it into the newly-lighted fire and holds it there with a poker.]

While he is doing this the door from the hall is opened quietly, and MRS BUILDER enters without his hearing her. She has a work bag in her hand. She moves slowly to the table, and stands looking at him. Then going up to the curtains she mechanically adjusts them, and still keeping her eyes on BUILDER, comes down to the table and pours out his usual glass of whisky toddy. BUILDER, who has become conscious of her presence, turns in his chair as she hands it to him. He sits a moment motionless, then takes it from her, and squeezes her hand. MRS BUILDER goes silently to her usual chair below the fire, and taking out some knitting begins to knit. BUILDER makes an effort to speak, does not succeed, and sits drawing at his pipe.

The CURTAIN falls.

LOYALTIES

From the 5th Series Plays

By John Galsworthy

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

In the Order of Appearance

CHARLES WINSOR..... Owner of Meldon Court, near Newmarket
LADY ADELA..... His Wife
FERDINAND DE LEVIS..... Young, rich, and new
TREASURE..... Winsor's Butler
GENERAL CANYNGE..... A Racing Oracle
MARGARET ORME..... A Society Girl
CAPTAIN RONALD DANDY, D.S.O..... Retired
MABEL..... His Wife
INSPECTOR DEDE..... Of the County Constabulary
ROBERT..... Winsor's Footman
A CONSTABLE..... Attendant on Dede
AUGUSTUS BOBBING..... A Clubman
LORD ST ERTH..... A Peer of the Realm
A FOOTMAN..... Of the Club
MAJOR COLFORD..... A Brother Officer of Dancy's
EDWARD GRAVITER..... A Solicitor
A YOUNG CLERK..... Of Twisden & Graviter's
GILMAN..... A Large Grocer
JACOB TWISDEN..... Senior Partner of Twisden & Graviter
RICARDOS..... An Italian, in Wine

ACT I. SCENE I. CHARLES WINSOR's dressing-room at Meldon Court, near Newmarket, of a night in early October. **SCENE II.** DE LEVIS'S Bedroom at Meldon Court, a few minutes later.

ACT II. SCENE I. The Card Room of a London Club between four and five in the afternoon, three weeks later. **SCENE II.** The Sitting-room of the DANCYS' Flat, the following morning.

ACT III. SCENE I. OLD MR JACOB TWISDEN'S Room at TWISDEN & GRAVITER'S in Lincoln's Inn Fields, at four in the afternoon, three months later. **SCENE II.** The same, next morning at half-past ten. **SCENE III.** The Sitting-room of the DANCYS' Flat, an hour later.

ACT I

SCENE I

The dressing-room of CHARLES WINSOR, owner of Meldon Court, near Newmarket; about eleven-thirty at night. The room has pale grey walls, unadorned; the curtains are drawn over a window Back Left Centre. A bed lies along the wall, Left. An open door, Right Back, leads into LADY ADELA's bedroom; a door, Right Forward, into a long corridor, on to which abut rooms in a row, the whole length of the house's left wing. WINSOR's dressing-table, with a light over it, is Stage Right of the curtained window. Pyjamas are laid out on the bed, which is turned back. Slippers are handy, and all the usual gear of a well-appointed bed-dressing-room. CHARLES WINSOR, a tall, fair, good-looking man about thirty-eight, is taking off a smoking jacket.

WINSOR. Hallo! Adela!

V. OF LADY A. [From her bedroom] Hallo!

WINSOR. In bed?

V. OF LADY A. No.

She appears in the doorway in under-garment and a wrapper. She, too, is fair, about thirty-five, rather delicious, and suggestive of porcelain.

WINSOR. Win at Bridge?

LADY A. No fear.

WINSOR. Who did?

LADY A. Lord St Erth and Ferdy De Levis.

WINSOR. That young man has too much luck—the young bounder won two races to-day; and he's as rich as Croesus.

LADY A. Oh! Charlie, he did look so exactly as if he'd sold me a carpet when I was paying him.

WINSOR. [Changing into slippers] His father did sell carpets, wholesale, in the City.

LADY A. Really? And you say I haven't intuition! [With a finger on her lips] Morison's in there.

WINSOR. [Motioning towards the door, which she shuts] Ronny Dancy took a tenner off him, anyway, before dinner.

LADY A. No! How?

WINSOR. Standing jump on to a bookcase four feet high. De Levis had to pay up, and sneered at him for making money by parlour tricks. That young Jew gets himself disliked.

LADY A. Aren't you rather prejudiced?

WINSOR. Not a bit. I like Jews. That's not against him—rather the contrary these days. But he pushes himself. The General tells me he's deathly keen to get into the Jockey Club. [Taking off his tie] It's amusing to see him trying to get round old St Erth.

LADY A. If Lord St Erth and General Canynge backed him he'd get in if he did sell carpets!

WINSOR. He's got some pretty good horses. [Taking off his waistcoat] Ronny Dancy's on his bones again, I'm afraid. He had a bad day. When a chap takes to doing parlour stunts for a bet—it's a sure sign. What made him chuck the Army?

LADY A. He says it's too dull, now there's no fighting.

WINSOR. Well, he can't exist on backing losers.

LADY A. Isn't it just like him to get married now? He really is the most reckless person.

WINSOR. Yes. He's a queer chap. I've always liked him, but I've never quite made him out. What do you think of his wife?

LADY A. Nice child; awfully gone on him.

WINSOR. Is he?

LADY A. Quite indecently—both of them. [Nodding towards the wall, Left] They're next door.

WINSOR. Who's beyond them?

LADY A. De Levis; and Margaret Orme at the end. Charlie, do you realise that the bathroom out there has to wash those four?

WINSOR. I know.

LADY A. Your grandfather was crazy when he built this wing; six rooms in a row with balconies like an hotel, and only one bath—if we hadn't put ours in.

WINSOR. [Looking at his watch] Half-past eleven. [Yawns] Newmarket always makes me sleepy.

You're keeping Morison up.

LADY ADELA goes to the door, blowing a kiss. CHARLES goes up to his dressing-table and begins to brush his hair, sprinkling on essence. There is a knock on the corridor door.

Come in.

DE LEVIS enters, clad in pyjamas and flowered dressing-gown. He is a dark, good-looking, rather Eastern young man. His face is long and disturbed.

Hallo! De Levis! Anything I can do for you?

DE LEVIS. [In a voice whose faint exoticism is broken by a vexed excitement] I say, I'm awfully sorry, Winsor, but I thought I'd better tell you at once. I've just had—er—rather a lot of money stolen.

WINSOR. What! [There is something of outrage in his tone and glance, as who should say: "In my house?"] How do you mean stolen?

DE LEVIS. I put it under my pillow and went to have a bath; when I came back it was gone.

WINSOR. Good Lord! How much?

DE LEVIS. Nearly a thousand-nine hundred and seventy, I think.

WINSOR. Phew! [Again the faint tone of outrage, that a man should have so much money about him].

DE LEVIS. I sold my Rosemary filly to-day on the course to Bentman the bookie, and he paid me in notes.

WINSOR. What? That weed Dancy gave you in the Spring?

DE LEVIS. Yes. But I tried her pretty high the other day; and she's in the Cambridgeshire. I was only out of my room a quarter of an hour, and I locked my door.

WINSOR. [Again outraged] You locked—

DE LEVIS. [Not seeing the fine shade] Yes, and had the key here. [He taps his pocket] Look here! [He holds out a pocket-book] It's been stuffed with my shaving papers.

WINSOR. [Between feeling that such things don't happen, and a sense that he will have to clear it up] This is damned awkward, De Levis.

DE LEVIS. [With steel in his voice] Yes. I should like it back.

WINSOR. Have you got the numbers of the notes?

DE LEVIS. No.

WINSOR. What were they?

DE LEVIS. One hundred, three fifties, and the rest tens and fives.

WINSOR. What d'you want me to do?

DE LEVIS. Unless there's anybody you think—

WINSOR. [Eyeing him] Is it likely?

DE Levis. Then I think the police ought to see my room. It's a lot of money.

WINSOR. Good Lord! We're not in Town; there'll be nobody nearer than Newmarket at this time of night—four miles.

The door from the bedroom is suddenly opened and LADY ADELA appears. She has on a lace cap over her finished hair, and the wrapper.

LADY A. [Closing the door] What is it? Are you ill, Mr De Levis?

WINSOR. Worse; he's had a lot of money stolen. Nearly a thousand pounds.

LADY A. Gracious! Where?

DE LEVIS. From under my pillow, Lady Adela—my door was locked—I was in the bath-room.

LADY A. But how fearfully thrilling!

WINSOR. Thrilling! What's to be done? He wants it back.

LADY A. Of course! [With sudden realisation] Oh! But Oh! it's quite too unpleasant!

WINSOR. Yes! What am I to do? Fetch the servants out of their rooms? Search the grounds? It'll make the devil of a scandal.

DE LEVIS. Who's next to me?

LADY A. [Coldly] Oh! Mr De Levis!

WINSOR. Next to you? The Dancys on this side, and Miss Orme on the other. What's that to do with it?

DE LEVIS. They may have heard something.

WINSOR. Let's get them. But Dancy was down stairs when I came up. Get Morison, Adela! No. Look here! When was this exactly? Let's have as many alibis as we can.

DE LEVIS. Within the last twenty minutes, certainly.

WINSOR. How long has Morison been up with you?

LADY A. I came up at eleven, and rang for her at once.

WINSOR. [Looking at his watch] Half an hour. Then she's all right. Send her for Margaret and the Dancys—there's nobody else in this wing. No; send her to bed. We don't want gossip. D'you mind going yourself, Adela?

LADY A. Consult General Canynge, Charlie.

WINSOR. Right. Could you get him too? D'you really want the police, De Levis?

DE LEVIS. [Stung by the faint contempt in his tone of voice] Yes, I do.

WINSOR. Then, look here, dear! Slip into my study and telephone to the police at Newmarket. There'll be somebody there; they're sure to have drunks. I'll have Treisure up, and speak to him. [He rings the bell].

LADY ADELA goes out into her room and closes the door.

WINSOR. Look here, De Levis! This isn't an hotel. It's the sort of thing that doesn't happen in a decent house. Are you sure you're not mistaken, and didn't have them stolen on the course?

DE LEVIS. Absolutely. I counted them just before putting them under my pillow; then I locked the door and had the key here. There's only one door, you know.

WINSOR. How was your window?

DE LEVIS. Open.

WINSOR. [Drawing back the curtains of his own window] You've got a balcony like this. Any sign of a ladder or anything?

DE LEVIS. No.

WINSOR. It must have been done from the window, unless someone had a skeleton key. Who knew you'd got that money? Where did Kentman pay you?

DE LEVIS. Just round the corner in the further paddock.

WINSOR. Anybody about?

DE LEVIS. Oh, yes!

WINSOR. Suspicious?

DE LEVIS. I didn't notice anything.

WINSOR. You must have been marked down and followed here.

DE LEVIS. How would they know my room?

WINSOR. Might have got it somehow. [A knock from the corridor] Come in.

TREISURE, the Butler, appears, a silent, grave man of almost supernatural conformity.

DE LEVIS gives him a quick, hard look, noted and resented by WINSOR.

TREISURE. [To WINSOR] Yes, sir?

WINSOR. Who valets Mr De Levis?

TREISURE. Robert, Sir.

WINSOR. When was he up last?

TREISURE. In the ordinary course of things, about ten o'clock, sir.

WINSOR. When did he go to bed?

TREISURE. I dismissed at eleven.

WINSOR. But did he go?

TREISURE. To the best of my knowledge. Is there anything I can do, sir?

WINSOR. [Disregarding a sign from DE LEVIS] Look here, Treisure, Mr De Levis has had a large sum of money taken from his bedroom within the last half hour.

TREISURE. Indeed, Sir!

WINSOR. Robert's quite all right, isn't he?

TREISURE. He is, sir.

DE LEVIS. How do you know?

TREISURE's eyes rest on DE LEVIS.

TREISURE. I am a pretty good judge of character, sir, if you'll excuse me.

WINSOR. Look here, De Levis, eighty or ninety notes must have been pretty bulky. You didn't have them on you at dinner?

DE LEVIS. No.

WINSOR. Where did you put them?

DE LEVIS. In a boot, and the boot in my suitcase, and locked it.

TREISURE smiles faintly.

WINSOR. [Again slightly outraged by such precautions in his house] And you found it locked—and took them from there to put under your pillow?

DE LEVIS. Yes.

WINSOR. Run your mind over things, Treisure—has any stranger been about?

TREISURE. No, Sir.

WINSOR. This seems to have happened between 11.15 and 11.30. Is that right? [DE LEVIS nods] Any noise—anything outside—anything suspicious anywhere?

TREISURE. [Running his mind—very still] No, sir.

WINSOR. What time did you shut up?

TREISURE. I should say about eleven-fifteen, sir. As soon as Major Colford and Captain Dancy had finished billiards. What was Mr De Levis doing out of his room, if I may ask, sir?

WINSOR. Having a bath; with his room locked and the key in his pocket.

TREISURE. Thank you, sir.

DE LEVIS. [Conscious of indefinable suspicion] Damn it! What do you mean? I WAS!

TREISURE. I beg your pardon, sir.

WINSOR. [Concealing a smile] Look here, Treisure, it's infernally awkward for everybody.

TREISURE. It is, sir.

WINSOR. What do you suggest?

TREISURE. The proper thing, sir, I suppose, would be a cordon and a complete search—in our interests.

WINSOR. I entirely refuse to suspect anybody.

TREISURE. But if Mr De Levis feels otherwise, sir?

DE LEVIS. [Stammering] I? All I know is—the money was there, and it's gone.

WINSOR. [Compunctious] Quite! It's pretty sickening for you. But so it is for anybody else. However, we must do our best to get it back for you.

A knock on the door.

WINSOR. Hallo!

TREISURE opens the door, and GENERAL. CANYNGE enters.

Oh! It's you, General. Come in. Adela's told you?

GENERAL CANYNGE nods. He is a slim man of about sixty, very well preserved, intensely neat and self-contained, and still in evening dress. His eyelids droop slightly, but his eyes are keen and his expression astute.

WINSOR. Well, General, what's the first move?

CANYNGE. [Lifting his eyebrows] Mr De Levis presses the matter?

DE Levis. [Flicked again] Unless you think it's too plebeian of me, General Canynge—a thousand pounds.

CANYNGE. [Drily] Just so! Then we must wait for the police, WINSOR. Lady Adela has got through to them. What height are these rooms from the ground, Treisure?

TREISURE. Twenty-three feet from the terrace, sir.

CANYNGE. Any ladders near?

TREISURE. One in the stables, Sir, very heavy. No others within three hundred yards.

CANYNGE. Just slip down, and see whether that's been moved.

TREISURE. Very good, General. [He goes out.]

DE LEVIS. [Uneasily] Of course, he—I suppose you—

WINSOR. We do.

CANYNGE. You had better leave this in our hands, De Levis.

DE LEVIS. Certainly; only, the way he—

WINSOR. [Curtly] Treisure has been here since he was a boy. I should as soon suspect myself.

DE LEVIS. [Looking from one to the other—with sudden anger] You seem to think—! What was I to do? Take it lying down and let whoever it is get clear off? I suppose it's natural to want my money back?

CANYNGE looks at his nails; WINSOR out of the window.

WINSOR. [Turning] Of course, De Levis!

DE LEVIS. [Sullenly] Well, I'll go to my room. When the police come, perhaps you'll let me know. He goes out.

WINSOR. Phew! Did you ever see such a dressing-gown?

The door is opened. LADY ADELA and MARGARET ORME come in. The latter is a vivid young lady of about twenty-five in a vivid wrapper; she is smoking a cigarette.

LADY A. I've told the Dancys—she was in bed. And I got through to Newmarket, Charles, and Inspector Dede is coming like the wind on a motor cycle.

MARGARET. Did he say "like the wind," Adela? He must have imagination. Isn't this gorgeous? Poor little Ferdy!

WINSOR. [Vexed] You might take it seriously, Margaret; it's pretty beastly for us all. What time did you come up?

MARGARET. I came up with Adela. Am I suspected, Charles? How thrilling!

WINSOR. Did you hear anything?

MARGARET. Only little Ferdy splashing.

WINSOR. And saw nothing?

MARGARET. Not even that, alas!

LADY A. [With a finger held up] Leste! Un peu leste! Oh! Here are the Dancys. Come in, you two!

MABEL and RONALD DANCY enter. She is a pretty young woman with bobbed hair, fortunately, for she has just got out of bed, and is in her nightgown and a wrapper. DANCY is in his smoking jacket. He has a pale, determined face with high cheekbones, small, deep-set dark eyes, reddish crisp hair, and looks like a horseman.

WINSOR. Awfully sorry to disturb you, Mrs Dancy; but I suppose you and Ronny haven't heard anything. De Levis's room is just beyond Ronny's dressing-room, you know.

MABEL. I've been asleep nearly half an hour, and Ronny's only just come up.

CANYNGE. Did you happen to look out of your window, Mrs Dancy?

MABEL. Yes. I stood there quite five minutes.

CANYNGE. When?

MABEL. Just about eleven, I should think. It was raining hard then.

CANYNGE. Yes, it's just stopped. You saw nothing?

MABEL. No.

DANCY. What time does he say the money was taken?

WINSOR. Between the quarter and half past. He'd locked his door and had the key with him.

MARGARET. How quaint! Just like an hotel. Does he put his boots out?

LADY A. Don't be so naughty, Meg.

CANYNGE. When exactly did you come up, Dance?

DANCY. About ten minutes ago. I'd only just got into my dressing-room before Lady Adela came. I've been writing letters in the hall since Colford and I finished billiards.

CANYNGE. You weren't up for anything in between?

DANCY. No.

MARGARET. The mystery of the grey room.

DANCY. Oughtn't the grounds to be searched for footmarks?

CANYNGE. That's for the police.

DANCY. The deuce! Are they coming?

CANYNGE. Directly. [A knock] Yes?

TREISURE enters.

Well?

TREISURE. The ladder has not been moved, General. There isn't a sign.

WINSOR. All right. Get Robert up, but don't say anything to him. By the way, we're expecting the police.

TREISURE. I trust they will not find a mare's nest, sir, if I may say so.

He goes.

WINSOR. De Levis has got wrong with Treisure. [Suddenly] But, I say, what would any of us have done if we'd been in his shoes?

MARGARET. A thousand pounds? I can't even conceive having it.

DANCY. We probably shouldn't have found it out.

LADY A. No—but if we had.

DANCY. Come to you—as he did.

WINSOR. Yes; but there's a way of doing things.

CANYNGE. We shouldn't have wanted the police.

MARGARET. No. That's it. The hotel touch.

LADY A. Poor young man; I think we're rather hard on him.

WINSOR. He sold that weed you gave him, Dancy, to Kentman, the bookie, and these were the proceeds.

DANCY. Oh!

WINSOR. He'd tried her high, he said.

DANCY. [Grimly] He would.

MABEL. Oh! Ronny, what bad luck!

WINSOR. He must have been followed here. [At the window] After rain like that, there ought to be footmarks.

The splutter of a motor cycle is heard.

MARGARET. Here's the wind!

WINSOR. What's the move now, General?

CANYNGE. You and I had better see the Inspector in De Levis's room, WINSOR. [To the others] If you'll all be handy, in case he wants to put questions for himself.

MARGARET. I hope he'll want me; it's just too thrilling.

DANCY. I hope he won't want me; I'm dog-tired. Come on, Mabel. [He puts his arm in his wife's].

CANYNGE. Just a minute, Charles.

He draws dose to WINSOR as the others are departing to their rooms.

WINSOR. Yes, General?

CANYNGE. We must be careful with this Inspector fellow. If he pitches hastily on somebody in the house it'll be very disagreeable.

WINSOR. By Jove! It will.

CANYNGE. We don't want to rouse any ridiculous suspicion.

WINSOR. Quite. [A knock] Come in!

TREISURE enters.

TREISURE. Inspector Dede, Sir.

WINSOR. Show him in.

TREISURE. Robert is in readiness, sir; but I could swear he knows nothing about it.

WINSOR. All right.

TREISURE re-opens the door, and says "Come in, please." The INSPECTOR enters, blue, formal, moustachioed, with a peaked cap in his hand.

WINSOR. Good evening, Inspector. Sorry to have brought you out at this time of night.

INSPECTOR. Good evenin', sir. Mr WINSOR? You're the owner here, I think?

WINSOR. Yes. General Canynge.

INSPECTOR. Good evenin', General. I understand, a large sum of money?

WINSOR. Yes. Shall we go straight to the room it was taken from? One of my guests, Mr De Levis. It's the third room on the left.

CANYNGE. We've not been in there yet, Inspector; in fact, we've done nothing, except to find out that the stable ladder has not been moved. We haven't even searched the grounds.

INSPECTOR. Right, sir; I've brought a man with me.

They go out.

CURTAIN. And interval of a Minute.

SCENE II

[The same set is used for this Scene, with the different arrangement of furniture, as specified.]

The bedroom of DE LEVIS is the same in shape as WINSOR'S dressing-room, except that there is only one door—to the corridor. The furniture, however, is differently arranged; a small four-poster bedstead stands against the wall, Right Back, jutting into the room. A chair, on which DE LEVIS's clothes are thrown, stands at its foot. There is a dressing-table against the wall to the left of the open windows, where the curtains are drawn back and a stone balcony is seen. Against the wall to the right of the window is a chest of drawers, and a washstand is against the wall, Left. On a small table to the right of the bed an electric reading lamp is turned up, and there is a light over the dressing-table. The INSPECTOR is standing plumb centre looking at the bed, and DE LEVIS by the back of the chair at the foot of the bed. WINSOR and CANYNGE are close to the door, Right Forward.

INSPECTOR. [Finishing a note] Now, sir, if this is the room as you left it for your bath, just show us exactly what you did after takin' the pocket-book from the suit case. Where was that, by the way?

DE LEVIS. [Pointing] Where it is now—under the dressing-table.

He comes forward to the front of the chair, opens the pocket-book, goes through the pretence of counting his shaving papers, closes the pocket-book, takes it to the head of the bed and slips it under the pillow. Makes the motion of taking up his pyjamas, crosses below the INSPECTOR to the washstand, takes up a bath sponge, crosses to the door, takes out

the key, opens the door.

INSPECTOR. [Writing]. We now have the room as it was when the theft was committed. Reconstruct accordin' to 'uman nature, gentlemen—assumin' the thief to be in the room, what would he try first?—the clothes, the dressin'-table, the suit case, the chest of drawers, and last the bed.

He moves accordingly, examining the glass on the dressing-table, the surface of the suit cases, and the handles of the drawers, with a spy-glass, for finger-marks.

CANYNGE. [Sotto voce to WINSOR] The order would have been just the other way.

The INSPECTOR goes on hands and knees and examines the carpet between the window and the bed.

DE LEVIS. Can I come in again?

INSPECTOR. [Standing up] Did you open the window, sir, or was it open when you first came in?

DE LEVIS. I opened it.

INSPECTOR. Drawin' the curtains back first?

DE LEVIS. Yes.

INSPECTOR. [Sharply] Are you sure there was nobody in the room already?

DE LEVIS. [Taken aback] I don't know. I never thought. I didn't look under the bed, if you mean that.

INSPECTOR. [Jotting] Did not look under bed. Did you look under it after the theft?

DE LEVIS. No. I didn't.

INSPECTOR. Ah! Now, what did you do after you came back from your bath? Just give us that precisely.

DE LEVIS. Locked the door and left the key in. Put back my sponge, and took off my dressing-gown and put it there. [He points to the footrails of the bed] Then I drew the curtains, again.

INSPECTOR. Shutting the window?

DE LEVIS. No. I got into bed, felt for my watch to see the time. My hand struck the pocket-book, and somehow it felt thinner. I took it out, looked into it, and found the notes gone, and these shaving papers instead.

INSPECTOR. Let me have a look at those, sir. [He applies the spy-glasses] And then?

DE LEVIS. I think I just sat on the bed.

INSPECTOR. Thinkin' and cursin' a bit, I suppose. Ye-es?

DE LEVIS. Then I put on my dressing-gown and went straight to Mr WINSOR.

INSPECTOR. Not lockin' the door?

DE LEVIS. No.

INSPECTOR. Exactly. [With a certain finality] Now, sir, what time did you come up?

DE LEVIS. About eleven.

INSPECTOR. Precise, if you can give it me.

DE LEVIS. Well, I know it was eleven-fifteen when I put my watch under my pillow, before I went to the bath, and I suppose I'd been about a quarter of an hour undressing. I should say after eleven, if anything.

INSPECTOR. Just undressin'? Didn't look over your bettin' book?

DE LEVIS. No.

INSPECTOR. No prayers or anything?

DE LEVIS. No.

INSPECTOR. Pretty slippery with your undressin' as a rule?

DE LEVIS. Yes. Say five past eleven.

INSPECTOR. Mr WINSOR, what time did the gentleman come to you?

WINSOR. Half-past eleven.

INSPECTOR. How do you fix that, sir?

WINSOR. I'd just looked at the time, and told my wife to send her maid off.

INSPECTOR. Then we've got it fixed between 11.15 and 11.30. [Jots] Now, sir, before we go further I'd like to see your butler and the footman that valets this gentleman.

WINSOR. [With distaste] Very well, Inspector; only—my butler has been with us from a boy.

INSPECTOR. Quite so. This is just clearing the ground, sir.

WINSOR. General, d'you mind touching that bell?

CANYNGE rings a bell by the bed.

INSPECTOR. Well, gentlemen, there are four possibilities. Either the thief was here all the time, waiting under the bed, and slipped out after this gentleman had gone to Mr WINSOR. Or he came in with a key that fits the lock; and I'll want to see all the keys in the house. Or he came in with a skeleton key and out by the window, probably droppin' from the balcony. Or he came in by the window with a rope or ladder and out the same way. [Pointing] There's a footmark here from a big boot which has been out of doors since it rained.

CANYNGE. Inspector—you er—walked up to the window when you first came into the room.

INSPECTOR. [Stiffly] I had not overlooked that, General.

CANYNGE. Of course.

A knock on the door relieves a certain tension,

WINSOR. Come in.

The footman ROBERT, a fresh-faced young man, enters, followed by TREISURE.

INSPECTOR. You valet Mr—Mr De Levis, I think?

ROBERT. Yes, sir.

INSPECTOR. At what time did you take his clothes and boots?

ROBERT. Ten o'clock, sir.

INSPECTOR. [With a pounce] Did you happen to look under his bed?

ROBERT. No, sir.

INSPECTOR. Did you come up again, to bring the clothes back?

ROBERT. No, sir; they're still downstairs.

INSPECTOR. Did you come up again for anything?

ROBERT. No, Sir.

INSPECTOR. What time did you go to bed?

ROBERT. Just after eleven, Sir.

INSPECTOR. [Scrutinising him] Now, be careful. Did you go to bed at all?

ROBERT. No, Sir.

INSPECTOR. Then why did you say you did? There's been a theft here, and anything you say may be used against you.

ROBERT. Yes, Sir. I meant, I went to my room.

INSPECTOR. Where is your room?

ROBERT. On the ground floor, at the other end of the right wing, sir.

WINSOR. It's the extreme end of the house from this, Inspector. He's with the other two footmen.

INSPECTOR. Were you there alone?

ROBERT. No, Sir. Thomas and Frederick was there too.

TREISURE. That's right; I've seen them.

INSPECTOR. [Holding up his hand for silence] Were you out of the room again after you went in?

ROBERT. No, Sir.

INSPECTOR. What were you doing, if you didn't go to bed?

ROBERT. [To WINSOR] Beggin' your pardon, Sir, we were playin' Bridge.

INSPECTOR. Very good. You can go. I'll see them later on.

ROBERT. Yes, Sir. They'll say the same as me. He goes out, leaving a smile on the face of all except the INSPECTOR and DE LEVIS.

INSPECTOR. [Sharply] Call him back.

TREISURE calls "Robert," and the FOOTMAN re-enters.

ROBERT. Yes, Sir?

INSPECTOR. Did you notice anything particular about Mr De Levis's clothes?

ROBERT. Only that they were very good, Sir.

INSPECTOR. I mean—anything peculiar?

ROBERT. [After reflection] Yes, Sir.

INSPECTOR. Well?

ROBERT. A pair of his boots this evenin' was reduced to one, sir.

INSPECTOR. What did you make of that?

ROBERT. I thought he might have thrown the other at a cat or something.

INSPECTOR. Did you look for it?

ROBERT. No, Sir; I meant to draw his attention to it in the morning.

INSPECTOR. Very good.

ROBERT. Yes, Sir. [He goes again.]

INSPECTOR. [Looking at DE LEVIS] Well, sir, there's your story corroborated.

DE LEVIS. [Stiffly] I don't know why it should need corroboration, Inspector.

INSPECTOR. In my experience, you can never have too much of that. [To WINSOR] I understand there's a lady in the room on this side [pointing Left] and a gentleman on this [pointing Right] Were they in their rooms?

WINSOR. Miss Orme was; Captain Dancy not.

INSPECTOR. Do they know of the affair?

WINSOR. Yes.

INSPECTOR. Well, I'd just like the keys of their doors for a minute. My man will get them.

He goes to the door, opens it, and speaks to a constable in the corridor.

[To TREISURE] You can go with him.

TREISURE goes Out.

In the meantime I'll just examine the balcony.

He goes out on the balcony, followed by DE LEVIS.

WINSOR. [To CANYNGE] Damn De Levis and his money! It's deuced invidious, all this, General.

CANYNGE. The Inspector's no earthly.

There is a simultaneous re-entry of the INSPECTOR from the balcony and of TREISURE and the CONSTABLE from the corridor.

CONSTABLE. [Handing key] Room on the left, Sir. [Handing key] Room on the right, sir.

The INSPECTOR tries the keys in the door, watched with tension by the others. The keys fail.

INSPECTOR. Put them back.

Hands keys to CONSTABLE, who goes out, followed by TREISURE.

I'll have to try every key in the house, sir.

WINSOR. Inspector, do you really think it necessary to disturb the whole house and knock up all my guests? It's most disagreeable, all this, you know. The loss of the money is not such a great matter. Mr De Levis has a very large income.

CANYNGE. You could get the numbers of the notes from Kentman the bookmaker, Inspector; he'll probably have the big ones, anyway.

INSPECTOR. [Shaking his head] A bookie. I don't suppose he will, sir. It's come and go with them, all the time.

WINSOR. We don't want a Meldon Court scandal, Inspector.

INSPECTOR. Well, Mr WINSOR, I've formed my theory.

As he speaks, DE LEVIS comes in from the balcony.

And I don't say to try the keys is necessary to it; but strictly, I ought to exhaust the possibilities.

WINSOR. What do you say, De Levis? D'you want everybody in the house knocked up so that their keys can be tried?

DE LEVIS. [Whose face, since his return, expresses a curious excitement] No, I don't.

INSPECTOR. Very well, gentlemen. In my opinion the thief walked in before the door was locked, probably during dinner; and was under the bed. He escaped by dropping from the balcony—the creeper at that corner [he points stage Left] has been violently wrenched. I'll go down now, and examine the grounds, and I'll see you again Sir. [He makes another entry in his note-book] Goodnight, then, gentlemen!

CANYNGE. Good-night!

WINSOR. [With relief] I'll come with you, Inspector.

He escorts him to the door, and they go out.

DE LEVIS. [Suddenly] General, I know who took them.

CANYNGE. The deuce you do! Are you following the Inspector's theory?

DE LEVIS. [Contemptuously] That ass! [Pulling the shaving papers out of the case] No! The man who put those there was clever and cool enough to wrench that creeper off the balcony, as a blind. Come and look here, General. [He goes to the window; the GENERAL follows. DE LEVIS points stage Right]

See the rail of my balcony, and the rail of the next? [He holds up the cord of his dressing-gown, stretching his arms out] I've measured it with this. Just over seven feet, that's all! If a man can take a standing jump on to a narrow bookcase four feet high and balance there, he'd make nothing of that. And, look here! [He goes out on the balcony and returns with a bit of broken creeper in his hand, and holds it out into the light] Someone's stood on that—the stalk's crushed—the inner corner too, where he'd naturally stand when he took his jump back.

CANYNGE. [After examining it—stiffly] That other balcony is young Dancy's, Mr De Levis; a soldier and a gentleman. This is an extraordinary insinuation.

DE LEVIS. Accusation.

CANYNGE. What!

DE LEVIS. I have intuitions, General; it's in my blood. I see the whole thing. Dancy came up, watched me into the bathroom, tried my door, slipped back into his dressing-room, saw my window was open, took that jump, sneaked the notes, filled the case up with these, wrenched the creeper there [He points stage Left] for a blind, jumped back, and slipped downstairs again. It didn't take him four minutes altogether.

CANYNGE. [Very gravely] This is outrageous, De Levis. Dancy says he was downstairs all the time. You must either withdraw unreservedly, or I must confront you with him.

DE LEVIS. If he'll return the notes and apologise, I'll do nothing— except cut him in future. He gave me that filly, you know, as a hopeless weed, and he's been pretty sick ever since, that he was such a flat as not to see how good she was. Besides, he's hard up, I know.

CANYNGE. [After a vexed turn up and down the room] It's mad, sir, to jump to conclusions like this.

DE LEVIS. Not so mad as the conclusion Dancy jumped to when he lighted on my balcony.

CANYNGE. Nobody could have taken this money who did not know you had it.

DE LEVIS. How do you know that he didn't?

CANYNGE. Do you know that he did?

DE LEVIS. I haven't the least doubt of it.

CANYNGE. Without any proof. This is very ugly, De Levis. I must tell WINSOR.

DE LEVIS. [Angrily] Tell the whole blooming lot. You think I've no feelers, but I've felt the atmosphere here, I can tell you, General. If I were in Dancy's shoes and he in mine, your tone to me would be very different.

CANYNGE. [Suavely frigid] I'm not aware of using any tone, as you call it. But this is a private house, Mr De Levis, and something is due to our host and to the esprit de corps that exists among gentlemen.

DE LEVIS. Since when is a thief a gentleman? Thick as thieves—a good motto, isn't it?

CANYNGE. That's enough! [He goes to the door, but stops before opening it] Now, look here! I have some knowledge of the world. Once an accusation like this passes beyond these walls no one can foresee the consequences. Captain Dancy is a gallant fellow, with a fine record as a soldier; and only just married. If he's as innocent as—Christ—mud will stick to him, unless the real thief is found. In the old days of swords, either you or he would not have gone out of this room alive. If you persist in this absurd accusation, you will both of you go out of this room dead in the eyes of Society: you for bringing it, he for being the object of it.

DE LEVIS. Society! Do you think I don't know that I'm only tolerated for my money? Society can't add injury to insult and have my money as well, that's all. If the notes are restored I'll keep my mouth shut; if they're not, I shan't. I'm certain I'm right. I ask nothing better than to be confronted with Dancy; but, if you prefer it, deal with him in your own way—for the sake of your esprit de corps.

CANYNGE. 'Pon my soul, Mr De Levis, you go too far.

DE LEVIS. Not so far as I shall go, General Canynge, if those notes aren't given back.

WINSOR comes in.

WINSOR. Well, De Levis, I'm afraid that's all we can do for the present.
So very sorry this should have happened in my house.

CANYNGE. [Alter a silence] There's a development, WINSOR. Mr De Levis accuses one of your guests.

WINSOR. What?

CANYNGE. Of jumping from his balcony to this, taking the notes, and jumping back. I've done my best to dissuade him from indulging the fancy—without success. Dancy must be told.

DE LEVIS. You can deal with Dancy in your own way. All I want is the money back.

CANYNGE. [Drily] Mr De Levis feels that he is only valued for his money, so that it is essential for him to have it back.

WINSOR. Damn it! This is monstrous, De Levis. I've known Ronald Dancy since he was a boy.

CANYNGE. You talk about adding injury to insult, De Levis. What do you call such treatment of a man who gave you the mare out of which you made this thousand pounds?

DE LEVIS. I didn't want the mare; I took her as a favour.

CANYNGE. With an eye to possibilities, I venture to think—the principle guides a good many transactions.

DE LEVIS. [As if flicked on a raw spot] In my race, do you mean?

CANYNGE. [Coldly] I said nothing of the sort.

DE LEVIS. No; you don't say these things, any of you.

CANYNGE. Nor did I think it.

DE LEVIS. Dancy does.

WINSOR. Really, De Levis, if this is the way you repay hospitality—

DE LEVIS. Hospitality that skins my feelings and costs me a thousand pounds!

CANYNGE. Go and get Dancy, WINSOR; but don't say anything to him.

WINSOR goes out.

CANYNGE. Perhaps you will kindly control yourself, and leave this to me.

DE LEVIS turns to the window and lights a cigarette. WINSOR comes back, followed by DANCY.

CANYNGE. For WINSOR's sake, Dancy, we don't want any scandal or fuss about this affair. We've tried to make the police understand that. To my mind the whole thing turns on our finding who knew that De Levis had this money. It's about that we want to consult you.

WINSOR. Kentman paid De Levis round the corner in the further paddock, he says.

DE LEVIS turns round from the window, so that he and DANCY are staring at each other.

CANYNGE. Did you hear anything that throws light, Dancy? As it was your filly originally, we thought perhaps you might.

DANCY. I? No.

CANYNGE. Didn't hear of the sale on the course at all?

DANCY. No.

CANYNGE. Then you can't suggest any one who could have known? Nothing else was taken, you see.

DANCY. De Levis is known to be rolling, as I am known to be stony.

CANYNGE. There are a good many people still rolling, besides Mr De Levis, but not many people with so large a sum in their pocket-books.

DANCY. He won two races.

DE LEVIS. Do you suggest that I bet in ready money?

DANCY. I don't know how you bet, and I don't care.

CANYNGE. You can't help us, then?

DANCY. No. I can't. Anything else? [He looks fixedly at DE LEVIS].

CANYNGE. [Putting his hand on DANCY's arm] Nothing else, thank you, Dancy.

DANCY goes. CANYNGE puts his hand up to his face. A moment's silence.

WINSOR. You see, De Levis? He didn't even know you'd got the money.

DE LEVIS. Very conclusive.

WINSOR. Well! You are—!

There is a knock on the door, and the INSPECTOR enters.

INSPECTOR. I'm just going, gentlemen. The grounds, I'm sorry to say, have yielded nothing. It's a bit of a puzzle.

CANYNGE. You've searched thoroughly?

INSPECTOR. We have, General. I can pick up nothing near the terrace.

WINSOR. [After a look at DE LEVIS, whose face expresses too much] H'm! You'll take it up from the other end, then, Inspector?

INSPECTOR. Well, we'll see what we can do with the bookmakers about the numbers, sir. Before I go, gentlemen—you've had time to think it over— there's no one you suspect in the house, I suppose?

DE LEVIS's face is alive and uncertain. CANYNGE is staring at him very fixedly.

WINSOR. [Emphatically] No.

DE LEVIS turns and goes out on to the balcony.

INSPECTOR. If you're coming in to the racing to-morrow, sir, you might give us a call. I'll have seen Kentman by then.

WINSOR. Right you are, Inspector. Good night, and many thanks.

INSPECTOR. You're welcome, sir. [He goes out.]

WINSOR. Gosh! I thought that chap [With a nod towards the balcony] was going to—! Look here, General, we must stop his tongue. Imagine it going the rounds. They may never find the real thief, you know. It's the very devil for Dancy.

CANYNGE. WINSOR! Dancy's sleeve was damp.

WINSOR. How d'you mean?

CANYNGE. Quite damp. It's been raining.

The two look at each other.

WINSOR. I—I don't follow— [His voice is hesitant and lower, showing that he does].

CANYNGE. It was coming down hard; a minute out in it would have been enough—[He motions with his chin towards the balcony].

WINSOR. [Hastily] He must have been out on his balcony since.

CANYNGE. It stopped before I came up, half an hour ago.

WINSOR. He's been leaning on the wet stone, then.

CANYNGE. With the outside of the upper part of the arm?

WINSOR. Against the wall, perhaps. There may be a dozen explanations. [Very low and with great concentration] I entirely and absolutely refuse to believe anything of the sort against Ronald Dancy in my house. Dash it, General, we must do as we'd be done by. It hits us all—it hits us all. The thing's intolerable.

CANYNGE. I agree. Intolerable. [Raising his voice] Mr De Levis!

DE LEVIS returns into view, in the centre of the open window.

CANYNGE. [With cold decision] Young Dancy was an officer and is a gentleman; this insinuation is pure supposition, and you must not make it. Do you understand me?

DE LEVIS. My tongue is still mine, General, if my money isn't!

CANYNGE. [Unmoved] Must not. You're a member of three Clubs, you want to be member of a fourth. No one who makes such an insinuation against a fellow-guest in a country house, except on absolute proof, can do so without complete ostracism. Have we your word to say nothing?

DE LEVIS. Social blackmail? H'm!

CANYNGE. Not at all—simple warning. If you consider it necessary in your interests to start this scandal—no matter how, we shall consider it necessary in ours to dissociate ourselves completely from one who so recklessly disregards the unwritten code.

DE LEVIS. Do you think your code applies to me? Do you, General?

CANYNGE. To anyone who aspires to be a gentleman, Sir.

DE LEVIS. Ah! But you haven't known me since I was a boy.

CANYNGE. Make up your mind.

A pause.

DE LEVIS. I'm not a fool, General. I know perfectly well that you can get me outed.

CANYNGE. [Icily] Well?

DE LEVIS. [Sullenly] I'll say nothing about it, unless I get more proof.

CANYNGE. Good! We have implicit faith in Dancy.

There is a moment's encounter of eyes; the GENERAL'S steady, shrewd, impassive; WINSOR'S angry and defiant; DE LEVIS's mocking, a little triumphant, malicious. Then CANYNGE and WINSOR go to the door, and pass out.

DE LEVIS. [To himself] Rats!

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I

Afternoon, three weeks later, in the card room of a London Club. A fire is burning, Left. A door, Right, leads to the billiard-room. Rather Left of Centre, at a card table, LORD ST EARTH, an old John Bull, sits facing the audience; to his right is GENERAL CANYNGE, to his left AUGUSTUS BORRING, an essential Clubman, about thirty-five years old, with a very slight and rather becoming stammer or click in his speech. The fourth Bridge player, CHARLES WINSOR, stands with his back to the fire.

BORRING. And the r-rub.

WINSOR. By George! You do hold cards, Borring.

ST EARTH. [Who has lost] Not a patch on the old whist—this game. Don't know why I play it—never did.

CANYNGE. St Erth, shall we raise the flag for whist again?

WINSOR. No go, General. You can't go back on pace. No getting a man to walk when he knows he can fly. The young men won't look at it.

BORRING. Better develop it so that t-two can sit out, General.

ST EARTH. We ought to have stuck to the old game. Wish I'd gone to Newmarket, Canynge, in spite of the weather.

CANYNGE. [Looking at his watch] Let's hear what's won the Cambridgeshire. Ring, won't you, WINSOR? [WINSOR rings.]

ST EARTH. By the way, Canynge, young De Levis was blackballed.

CANYNGE. What!

ST EARTH. I looked in on my way down.

CANYNGE sits very still, and WINSOR utters a disturbed sound.

BORRING. But of c-course he was, General. What did you expect?

A FOOTMAN enters.

FOOTMAN. Yes, my lord?

ST EARTH. What won the Cambridgeshire?

FOOTMAN. Rosemary, my lord. Sherbet second; Barbizon third. Nine to one the winner.

WINSOR. Thank you. That's all.

FOOTMAN goes.

BORRING. Rosemary! And De Levis sold her! But he got a good p-price, I suppose.

The other three look at him.

ST EARTH. Many a slip between price and pocket, young man.

CANYNGE. Cut! [They cut].

BORRING. I say, is that the yarn that's going round about his having had a lot of m-money stolen in a country house? By Jove! He'll be pretty s-sick.

WINSOR. You and I, Borring.

He sits down in CANYNGE'S chair, and the GENERAL takes his place by the fire.

BORRING. Phew! Won't Dancy be mad! He gave that filly away to save her keep. He was rather pleased to find somebody who'd take her. Bentman must have won a p-pot. She was at thirty-threes a fortnight ago.

ST EARTH. All the money goes to fellows who don't know a horse from a haystack.

CANYNGE. [Profoundly] And care less. Yes! We want men racing to whom a horse means something.

BORRING. I thought the horse m-meant the same to everyone, General— chance to get the b-better of one's neighbour.

CANYNGE. [With feeling] The horse is a noble animal, sir, as you'd know if you'd owed your life to them as often as I have.

BORRING. They always try to take mine, General. I shall never belong to the noble f-fellowship of the horse.

ST EARTH. [Drily] Evidently. Deal!

As BORRING begins to deal the door is opened and MAJOR COLFORD appears—a lean and moustached cavalryman.

BORRING. Hallo, C-Colford.

COLFORD. General!

Something in the tone of his voice brings them all to a standstill.

COLFORD. I want your advice. Young De Levis in there [He points to the billiard-room from which he has just come] has started a blasphemous story—

CANYNGE. One moment. Mr Borring, d'you mind—

COLFORD. It makes no odds, General. Four of us in there heard him. He's saying it was Ronald Dancy robbed him down at WINSOR's. The fellow's mad over losing the price of that filly now she's won the Cambridgeshire.

BORRING. [All ears] Dancy! Great S-Scott!

COLFORD. Dancy's in the Club. If he hadn't been I'd have taken it on myself to wring the bounder's neck.

WINSOR and BORRING have risen. ST EARTH alone remains seated.

CANYNGE. [After consulting ST EARTH with a look] Ask De Levis to be good enough to come in here. Borring, you might see that Dancy doesn't leave the Club. We shall want him. Don't say anything to him, and use your tact to keep people off.

BORRING goes out, followed by COLFORD. WINSOR. Result of hearing he was black-balled—pretty slippy.

CANYNGE. St Erth, I told you there was good reason when I asked you to back young De Levis. WINSOR and I knew of this insinuation; I wanted to keep his tongue quiet. It's just wild assertion; to have it bandied about was unfair to Dancy. The duel used to keep people's tongues in order.

ST EARTH. H'm! It never settled anything, except who could shoot straightest.

COLFORD. [Re-appearing] De Levis says he's nothing to add to what he said to you before, on the subject.

CANYNGE. Kindly tell him that if he wishes to remain a member of this Club he must account to the Committee for such a charge against a fellow-member. Four of us are here, and form a quorum.

COLFORD goes out again.

ST EARTH. Did Kentman ever give the police the numbers of those notes, WINSOR?

WINSOR. He only had the numbers of two—the hundred, and one of the fifties.

ST EARTH. And they haven't traced 'em?

WINSOR. Not yet.

As he speaks, DE LEVIS comes in. He is in a highly-coloured, not to say excited state. COLFORD follows him.

DE LEVIS. Well, General Canynge! It's a little too strong all this— a little too strong. [Under emotion his voice is slightly more exotic].

CANYNGE. [Calmly] It is obvious, Mr De Levis, that you and Captain Dancy can't both remain members of this Club. We ask you for an explanation before requesting one resignation or the other.

DE LEVIS. You've let me down.

CANYNGE. What!

DE LEVIS. Well, I shall tell people that you and Lord St Erth backed me up for one Club, and asked me to resign from another.

CANYNGE. It's a matter of indifference to me, sir, what you tell people.

ST EARTH. [Drily] You seem a venomous young man.

DE LEVIS. I'll tell you what seems to me venomous, my lord—chasing a man like a pack of hounds because he isn't your breed.

CANYNGE. You appear to have your breed on the brain, sir. Nobody else does, so far as I know.

DE LEVIS. Suppose I had robbed Dancy, would you chase him out for complaining of it?

COLFORD. My God! If you repeat that—

CANYNGE. Steady, Colford!

WINSOR. You make this accusation that Dancy stole your money in my house on no proof—no proof; and you expect Dancy's friends to treat you as if you were a gentleman! That's too strong, if you like!

DE LEVIS. No proof? Bentman told me at Newmarket yesterday that Dancy did know of the sale. He told Goole, and Goole says that he himself spoke of it to Dancy.

WINSOR. Well—if he did?

DE LEVIS. Dancy told you he didn't know of it in General Canynge's presence, and mine. [To CANYNGE] You can't deny that, if you want to.

CANYNGE. Choose your expressions more nicely, please!

DE LEVIS. Proof! Did they find any footmarks in the grounds below that torn creeper? Not a sign! You saw how he can jump; he won ten pounds from me that same evening betting on what he knew was a certainty. That's your Dancy—a common sharper!

CANYNGE. [Nodding towards the billiard-room] Are those fellows still in there, Colford?

COLFORD. Yes.

CANYNGE. Then bring Dancy up, will you? But don't say anything to him.

COLFORD. [To DE LEVIS] You may think yourself damned lucky if he doesn't break your neck.

He goes out. The three who are left with DE LEVIS avert their eyes from him.

DE LEVIS. [Smouldering] I have a memory, and a sting too. Yes, my lord—since you are good enough to call me venomous. [To CANYNGE] I quite understand—I'm marked for Coventry now, whatever happens. Well, I'll take Dancy with me.

ST EARTH. [To himself] This Club has always had a decent, quiet name.

WINSOR. Are you going to retract, and apologise in front of Dancy and the members who heard you?

DE LEVIS. No fear!

ST EARTH. You must be a very rich man, sir. A jury is likely to take the view that money can hardly compensate for an accusation of that sort.

DE LEVIS stands silent. CANYNGE. Courts of law require proof.

ST EARTH. He can make it a criminal action.

WINSOR. Unless you stop this at once, you may find yourself in prison. If you can stop it, that is.

ST EARTH. If I were young Dancy, nothing should induce me.

DE LEVIS. But you didn't steal my money, Lord St Erth.

ST EARTH. You're deuced positive, sir. So far as I could understand it, there were a dozen ways you could have been robbed. It seems to me you value other men's reputations very lightly.

DE LEVIS. Confront me with Dancy and give me fair play.

WINSOR. [Aside to CANYNGE] Is it fair to Dancy not to let him know?

CANYNGE. Our duty is to the Club now, WINSOR. We must have this cleared up.

COLFORD comes in, followed by BORRING and DANCY.

ST EARTH. Captain Dancy, a serious accusation has been made against you by this gentleman in the presence of several members of the Club.

DANCY. What is it?

ST EARTH. That you robbed him of that money at WINSOR's.

DANCY. [Hard and tense] Indeed! On what grounds is he good enough to say that?

DE LEVIS. [Tense too] You gave me that filly to save yourself her keep, and you've been mad about it ever since; you knew from Goole that I had sold her to Kentman and been paid in cash, yet I heard you myself deny that you knew it. You had the next room to me, and you can jump like a cat, as we saw that evening; I found some creepers crushed by a weight on my balcony on that side. When I went to the bath your door was open, and when I came back it was shut.

CANYNGE. That's the first we have heard about the door.

DE LEVIS. I remembered it afterwards.

ST EARTH. Well, Dancy?

DANCY. [With intense deliberation] I'll settle this matter with any weapons, when and where he likes.

ST EARTH. [Drily] It can't be settled that way—you know very well. You must take it to the Courts, unless he retracts.

DANCY. Will you retract?

DE LEVIS. Why did you tell General Canynge you didn't know Kentman had paid me in cash?

DANCY. Because I didn't.

DE LEVIS. Then Kentman and Goole lied—for no reason?

DANCY. That's nothing to do with me.

DE LEVIS. If you were downstairs all the time, as you say, why was your door first open and then shut?

DANCY. Being downstairs, how should I know? The wind, probably.

DE LEVIS. I should like to hear what your wife says about it.

DANCY. Leave my wife alone, you damned Jew!

ST EARTH. Captain Dancy!

DE LEVIS. [White with rage] Thief!

DANCY. Will you fight?

DE LEVIS. You're very smart—dead men tell no tales. No! Bring your action, and we shall see.

DANCY takes a step towards him, but CANYNGE and WINSOR interpose.

ST EARTH. That'll do, Mr De Levis; we won't keep you. [He looks round] Kindly consider your membership suspended till this matter has been threshed out.

DE LEVIS. [Tremulous with anger] Don't trouble yourselves about my membership. I resign it. [To DANCY] You called me a damned Jew. My race was old when you were all savages. I am proud to be a Jew. Au revoir, in the Courts.

He goes out, and silence follows his departure.

ST EARTH. Well, Captain Dancy?

DANCY. If the brute won't fight, what am I to do, sir?

ST EARTH. We've told you—take action, to clear your name.

DANCY. Colford, you saw me in the hall writing letters after our game.

COLFORD. Certainly I did; you were there when I went to the smoking-room.

CANYNGE. How long after you left the billiard-room?

COLFORD. About five minutes.

DANCY. It's impossible for me to prove that I was there all the time.

CANYNGE. It's for De Levis to prove what he asserts. You heard what he said about Goole?

DANCY. If he told me, I didn't take it in.

ST EARTH. This concerns the honour of the Club. Are you going to take action?

DANCY. [Slowly] That is a very expensive business, Lord St Erth, and I'm hard up. I must think it over. [He looks round from face to face] Am I to take it that there is a doubt in your minds, gentlemen?

COLFORD. [Emphatically] No.

CANYNGE. That's not the question, Dancy. This accusation was overheard by various members, and we represent the Club. If you don't take action, judgment will naturally go by default.

DANCY. I might prefer to look on the whole thing as beneath contempt.

He turns and goes out. When he is gone there is an even longer silence than after DE LEVIS's departure.

ST EARTH. [Abruptly] I don't like it.

WINSOR. I've known him all his life.

COLFORD. You may have my head if he did it, Lord St Erth. He and I have been in too many holes together. By Gad! My toe itches for that fellow's butt end.

BORRING. I'm sorry; but has he t-taken it in quite the right way? I should have thought—hearing it s-suddenly—

COLFORD. Bosh!

WINSOR. It's perfectly damnable for him.

ST EARTH. More damnable if he did it, WINSOR.

BORRING. The Courts are b-beastly distrustful, don't you know.

COLFORD. His word's good enough for me.

CANYNGE. We're as anxious to believe Dancy as you, Colford, for the honour of the Army and the Club.

WINSOR. Of course, he'll bring a case, when he's thought it over.

ST EARTH. What are we to do in the meantime?

COLFORD. If Dancy's asked to resign, you may take my resignation too.

BORRING. I thought his wanting to f-fight him a bit screeny.

COLFORD. Wouldn't you have wanted a shot at the brute? A law court? Pah!

WINSOR. Yes. What'll be his position even if he wins?

BORRING. Damages, and a stain on his c-character.

WINSOR. Quite so, unless they find the real thief. People always believe the worst.

COLFORD. [Glaring at BORRING] They do.

CANYNGE. There is no decent way out of a thing of this sort.

ST EARTH. No. [Rising] It leaves a bad taste. I'm sorry for young Mrs Dancy—poor woman!

BORRING. Are you going to play any more?

ST EARTH. [Abruptly] No, sir. Good night to you. Canynge, can I give you a lift?

He goes out, followed by CANYNGE. BORRING.

[After a slight pause] Well, I shall go and take the t-temperature of the Club.

He goes out.

COLFORD. Damn that effeminate stammering chap! What can we do for Dancy, WINSOR?

WINSOR. Colford! [A slight pause] The General felt his coat sleeve that night, and it was wet.

COLFORD. Well! What proof's that? No, by George! An old school-fellow, a brother officer, and a pal.

WINSOR. If he did do it—

COLFORD. He didn't. But if he did, I'd stick to him, and see him through it, if I could.

WINSOR walks over to the fire, stares into it, turns round and stares at COLFORD, who is standing motionless.

COLFORD. Yes, by God!

CURTAIN.

SCENE II [NOTE.—This should be a small set capable of being set quickly within that of the previous scene.]

Morning of the following day. The DANCYS' flat. In the sitting-room of this small abode MABEL DANCY and MARGARET ORME are sitting full face to the audience, on a couch in the centre of the room, in front of the imaginary window. There is a fireplace, Left, with fire burning; a door below it, Left; and a door on the Right, facing the audience, leads to a corridor and the outer door of the flat, which is visible. Their voices are heard in rapid exchange; then as the curtain rises, so does MABEL.

MABEL. But it's monstrous!

MARGARET. Of course! [She lights a cigarette and hands the case to MABEL, who, however, sees nothing but her own thoughts] De Levis might just as well have pitched on me, except that I can't jump more than six inches in these skirts.

MABEL. It's wicked! Yesterday afternoon at the Club, did you say? Ronny hasn't said a word to me. Why?

MARGARET. [With a long puff of smoke] Doesn't want you bothered.

MABEL. But—Good heavens!—Me!

MARGARET. Haven't you found out, Mabel, that he isn't exactly communicative? No desperate character is.

MABEL. Ronny?

MARGARET. Gracious! Wives are at a disadvantage, especially early on. You've never hunted with him, my dear. I have. He takes more sudden decisions than any man I ever knew. He's taking one now, I'll bet.

MABEL. That beast, De Levis! I was in our room next door all the time.

MARGARET. Was the door into Ronny's dressing-room open?

MABEL. I don't know; I—I think it was.

MARGARET. Well, you can say so in Court any way. Not that it matters.
Wives are liars by law.

MABEL. [Staring down at her] What do you mean—Court?

MARGARET. My dear, he'll have to bring an action for defamation of character, or whatever they call it.

MABEL. Were they talking of this last night at the WINSOR's?

MARGARET. Well, you know a dinner-table, Mabel—Scandal is heaven-sent at this time of year.

MABEL. It's terrible, such a thing—terrible!

MARGARET. [Gloomily] If only Ronny weren't known to be so broke.

MABEL. [With her hands to her forehead] I can't realise—I simply can't.
If there's a case would it be all right afterwards?

MARGARET. Do you remember St Offert—cards? No, you wouldn't—you were in high frocks. Well, St Offert got damages, but he also got the hoof, underneath. He lives in Ireland. There isn't the slightest connection, so far as I can see, Mabel, between innocence and reputation. Look at me!

MABEL. We'll fight it tooth and nail!

MARGARET. Mabel, you're pure wool, right through; everybody's sorry for you.

MABEL. It's for him they ought—

MARGARET. [Again handing the cigarette case] Do smoke, old thing.

MABEL takes a cigarette this time, but does not light it.

It isn't altogether simple. General Canynge was there last night. You don't mind my being beastly frank, do you?

MABEL. No. I want it.

MARGARET. Well, he's all for esprit de corps and that. But he was awfully silent.

MABEL. I hate half-hearted friends. Loyalty comes before everything.

MARGARET. Ye-es; but loyalties cut up against each other sometimes, you know.

MABEL. I must see Ronny. D'you mind if I go and try to get him on the telephone?

MARGARET. Rather not.

MABEL goes out by the door Left.

Poor kid!

She curls herself into a corner of the sofa, as if trying to get away from life. The bell rings. MARGARET stirs, gets up, and goes out into the corridor, where she opens the door to LADY ADELA WINSOR, whom she precedes into the sitting-room.

Enter the second murderer! D'you know that child knew nothing?

LADY A. Where is she?

MARGARET. Telephoning. Adela, if there's going to be an action, we shall be witnesses. I shall wear black georgette with an ecru hat. Have you ever given evidence?

LADY A. Never.

MARGARET. It must be too frightfully thrilling.

LADY A. Oh! Why did I ever ask that wretch De Levis? I used to think him pathetic. Meg did you know—Ronald Dancy's coat was wet? The General happened to feel it.

MARGARET. So that's why he was so silent.

LADY A. Yes; and after the scene in the Club yesterday he went to see those bookmakers, and Goole—what a name!—is sure he told Dancy about the sale.

MARGARET. [Suddenly] I don't care. He's my third cousin. Don't you feel you couldn't, Adela?

LADY A. Couldn't—what?

MARGARET. Stand for De Levis against one of ourselves?

LADY A. That's very narrow, Meg.

MARGARET. Oh! I know lots of splendid Jews, and I rather liked little Ferdy; but when it comes to the point—! They all stick together; why shouldn't we? It's in the blood. Open your jugular, and see if you haven't got it.

LADY A. My dear, my great grandmother was a Jewess. I'm very proud of her.

MARGARET. Inoculated. [Stretching herself] Prejudices, Adela—or are they loyalties—I don't know—cris-cross—we all cut each other's throats from the best of motives.

LADY A. Oh! I shall remember that. Delightful! [Holding up a finger] You got it from Bergson, Meg. Isn't he wonderful?

MARGARET. Yes; have you ever read him?

LADY A. Well—No. [Looking at the bedroom door] That poor child! I quite agree. I shall tell every body it's ridiculous. You don't really think Ronald Dancy—?

MARGARET. I don't know, Adela. There are people who simply can't live without danger. I'm rather like that myself. They're all right when they're getting the D.S.O. or shooting man-eaters; but if there's no excitement going, they'll make it—out of sheer craving. I've seen Ronny Dancy do the maddest things for no mortal reason except the risk. He's had a past, you know.

LADY A. Oh! Do tell!

MARGARET. He did splendidly in the war, of course, because it suited him; but—just before—don't you remember—a very queer bit of riding?

LADY A. No.

MARGARET. Most dare-devil thing—but not quite. You must remember— it was awfully talked about. And then, of course, right up to his marriage—[She lights a cigarette.]

LADY A. Meg, you're very tantalising!

MARGARET. A foreign-looking girl—most plummy. Oh! Ronny's got charm —this Mabel child doesn't know in the least what she's got hold of!

LADY A. But they're so fond of each other!

MARGARET. That's the mistake. The General isn't mentioning the coat, is he?

LADY A. Oh, no! It was only to Charles.

MABEL returns.

MARGARET. Did you get him?

MABEL. No; he's not at Tattersall's, nor at the Club.

LADY ADELA rises and greets her with an air which suggests bereavement.

LADY A. Nobody's going to believe this, my dear.

MABEL. [Looking straight at her] Nobody who does need come here, or trouble to speak to us again.

LADY A. That's what I was afraid of; you're going to be defiant. Now don't! Just be perfectly natural.

MABEL. So easy, isn't it? I could kill anybody who believes such a thing.

MARGARET. You'll want a solicitor, Mabel, Go to old Mr Jacob Twisden.

LADY A. Yes; he's so comforting.

MARGARET. He got my pearls back once—without loss of life. A frightfully good fireside manner. Do get him here, Mabel, and have a heart-to-heart talk, all three of you!

MABEL. [Suddenly] Listen! There's Ronny!

DANCY comes in.

DANCY. [With a smile] Very good of you to have come.

MARGARET. Yes. We're just going. Oh! Ronny, this is quite too—
[But his face dries her up; and sidling past, she goes].

LADY A. Charles sent his-love—[Her voice dwindles on the word, and she, too, goes].

DANCY. [Crossing to his wife] What have they been saying?

MABEL. Ronny! Why didn't you tell me?

DANCY. I wanted to see De Levis again first.

MABEL. That wretch! How dare he? Darling! [She suddenly clasps and kisses him. He does not return the kiss, but remains rigid in her arms, so that she draws away and looks at him] It's hurt you awfully, I know.

DANCY. Look here, Mabel! Apart from that muck—this is a ghastly tame-cat sort of life. Let's cut it and get out to Nairobi. I can scare up the money for that.

MABEL. [Aghast] But how can we? Everybody would say—

RONNY. Let them! We shan't be here.

MABEL. I couldn't bear people to think—

DANCY. I don't care a damn what people think monkeys and cats. I never could stand their rotten menagerie. Besides, what does it matter how I act; if I bring an action and get damages—if I pound him to a jelly— it's all no good! I can't prove it. There'll be plenty of people unconvinced.

MABEL. But they'll find the real thief.

DANCY. [With a queer little smile] Will staying here help them to do that?

MABEL. [In a sort of agony] Oh! I couldn't—it looks like running away. We must stay and fight it!

DANCY. Suppose I didn't get a verdict—you never can tell.

MABEL. But you must—I was there all the time, with the door open.

DANCY. Was it?

MABEL. I'm almost sure.

DANCY. Yes. But you're my wife.

MABEL. [Bewildered] Ronny, I don't understand—suppose I'd been accused of stealing pearls!

DANCY. [Wincing] I can't.

MABEL. But I might—just as easily. What would you think of me if I ran away from it?

DANCY. I see. [A pause] All right! You shall have a run for your money. I'll go and see old Twisden.

MABEL. Let me come! [DANCY shakes his head] Why not? I can't be happy a moment unless I'm fighting this.

DANCY puts out his hand suddenly and grips hers.

DANCY. You are a little brick!

MABEL. [Pressing his hand to her breast and looking into his face]
Do you know what Margaret called you?

RONNY. No.

MABEL. A desperate character.

DANCY. Ha! I'm not a tame cat, any more than she.

The bell rings. MABEL goes out to the door and her voice is heard saying coldly.

MABEL. Will you wait a minute, please? Returning. It's De Levis—to see you. [In a low voice] Let me see him alone first. Just for a minute! Do!

DANCY. [After a moment's silence] Go ahead! He goes out into the bedroom.

MABEL. [Going to the door, Right] Come in.

DE LEVIS comes in, and stands embarrassed.

Yes?

DE LEVIS. [With a slight bow] Your husband, Mrs Dancy?

MABEL. He is in. Why do you want to see him?

DE LEVIS. He came round to my rooms just now, when I was out. He threatened me yesterday. I don't choose him to suppose I'm afraid of him.

MABEL. [With a great and manifest effort at self-control] Mr De Levis, you are robbing my husband of his good name.

DE LEVIS. [Sincerely] I admire your trustfulness, Mrs Dancy.

MABEL. [Staring at him] How can you do it? What do you want? What's your motive? You can't possibly believe that my husband is a thief!

DE LEVIS. Unfortunately.

MABEL. How dare you? How dare you? Don't you know that I was in our bedroom all the time with the door open? Do you accuse me too?

DE LEVIS. No, Mrs Dancy.

MABEL. But you do. I must have seen, I must have heard.

DE LEVIS. A wife's memory is not very good when her husband is in danger.

MABEL. In other words, I'm lying.

DE LEVIS. No. Your wish is mother to your thought, that's all.

MABEL. [After staring again with a sort of horror, turns to get control of herself. Then turning back to him] Mr De Levis, I appeal to you as a gentleman to behave to us as you would we should behave to you. Withdraw this wicked charge, and write an apology that Ronald can show.

DE LEVIS. Mrs Dancy, I am not a gentleman, I am only a—damned Jew. Yesterday I might possibly have withdrawn to spare you. But when my race is insulted I have nothing to say to your husband, but as he wishes to see me, I've come. Please let him know.

MABEL. [Regarding him again with that look of horror—slowly] I think what you are doing is too horrible for words.

DE LEVIS gives her a slight bow, and as he does so DANCY comes quickly in, Left. The two men stand with the length of the sofa between them. MABEL, behind the sofa, turns her eyes on her husband, who has a paper in his right hand.

DE LEVIS. You came to see me.

DANCY. Yes. I want you to sign this.

DE LEVIS. I will sign nothing.

DANCY. Let me read it: "I apologise to Captain Dancy for the reckless and monstrous charge I made against him, and I retract every word of it."

DE LEVIS. Not much!

DANCY. You will sign.

DE LEVIS. I tell you this is useless. I will sign nothing. The charge is true; you wouldn't be playing this game if it weren't. I'm going. You'll hardly try violence in the presence of your wife; and if you try it anywhere else—look out for yourself.

DANCY. Mabel, I want to speak to him alone.

MABEL. No, no!

DE LEVIS. Quite right, Mrs Dancy. Black and tan swashbuckling will only make things worse for him.

DANCY. So you shelter behind a woman, do you, you skulking cur!

DE LEVIS takes a step, with fists clenched and eyes blazing. DANCY, too, stands ready to spring—the moment is cut short by MABEL going quickly to her husband.

MABEL. Don't, Ronny. It's undignified! He isn't worth it.

DANCY suddenly tears the paper in two, and flings it into the fire.

DANCY. Get out of here, you swine!

DE LEVIS stands a moment irresolute, then, turning to the door, he opens it, stands again for a moment with a smile on his face, then goes. MABEL crosses swiftly to the door, and shuts it as the outer door closes. Then she stands quite still, looking at her husband — her face expressing a sort of startled suspense.

DANCY. [Turning and looking at her] Well! Do you agree with him?

MABEL. What do you mean?

DANCY. That I wouldn't be playing this game unless—

MABEL. Don't! You hurt me!

DANCY. Yes. You don't know much of me, Mabel.

MABEL. Ronny!

DANCY. What did you say to that swine?

MABEL. [Her face averted] That he was robbing us. [Turning to him suddenly] Ronny—you—didn't? I'd rather know.

DANCY. Ha! I thought that was coming.

MABEL. [Covering her face] Oh! How horrible of me—how horrible!

DANCY. Not at all. The thing looks bad.

MABEL. [Dropping her hands] If I can't believe in you, who can?
[Going to him, throwing her arms round him, and looking up into his face]
Ronny! If all the world—I'd believe in you. You know I would.

DANCY. That's all right, Mabs! That's all right! [His face, above her head, is contorted for a moment, then hardens into a mask] Well, what shall we do? Let's go to that lawyer—let's go—

MABEL. Oh! at once!

DANCY. All right. Get your hat on.

MABEL passes him, and goes into the bedroom, Left. DANCY, left alone, stands quite still, staring before him. With a sudden shrug of his shoulders he moves quickly to his hat and takes it up just as MABEL returns, ready to go out. He opens the door; and crossing him, she stops in the doorway, looking up with a clear and trustful gaze as

The CURTAIN falls.

ACT III

SCENE I

Three months later. Old MR JACOB TWISDEN's Room, at the offices of Twisden & Graviter, in Lincoln's Inn Fields, is spacious, with two large windows at back, a fine old fireplace, Right, a door below it, and two doors, Left. Between the windows is a large table sideways to the window wall, with a chair in the middle on the right-hand side, a chair against the wall, and a client's chair on the left-hand side.

GRAVITER, TWISDEN'S much younger partner, is standing in front of the right-hand window looking out on to the Fields, where the lamps are being lighted, and a taxi's engine is running down below. He turns his sanguine, shrewd face from the window towards a grandfather dock, between the doors, Left, which is striking "four." The door, Left Forward, is opened.

YOUNG CLERK. [Entering] A Mr Gilman, sir, to see Mr Twisden.

GRAVITER. By appointment?

YOUNG CLERK. No, sir. But important, he says.

GRAVITER. I'll see him.

The CLERK goes. GRAVITER sits right of table. The CLERK returns, ushering in an oldish MAN, who looks what he is, the proprietor of a large modern grocery store. He wears a dark overcoat and carries a pot hat. His gingery-grey moustache and mutton-chop whiskers give him the expression of a cat.

GRAVITER. [Sizing up his social standing] Mr Gilman? Yes.

GILMAN. [Doubtfully] Mr Jacob Twisden?

GRAVITER. [Smiling] His partner. Graviter my name is.

GILMAN. Mr Twisden's not in, then?

GRAVITER. No. He's at the Courts. They're just up; he should be in directly. But he'll be busy.

GILMAN. Old Mr Jacob Twisden—I've heard of him.

GRAVITER. Most people have.

GILMAN. It's this Dancy-De Levis case that's keepin' him at the Courts, I suppose?

GRAVITER nods.

Won't be finished for a day or two?

GRAVITER shakes his head. No.

Astonishin' the interest taken in it.

GRAVITER. As you say.

GILMAN. The Smart Set, eh? This Captain Dancy got the D.S.O., didn't he?

GRAVITER nods.

Sad to have a thing like that said about you. I thought he gave his evidence well; and his wife too. Looks as if this De Levis had got some private spite. Searchy la femme, I said to Mrs Gilman only this morning, before I—

GRAVITER. By the way, sir, what is your business?

GILMAN. Well, my business here—No, if you'll excuse me, I'd rather wait and see old Mr Jacob Twisden. It's delicate, and I'd like his experience.

GRAVITER. [With a shrug] Very well; then, perhaps, you'll go in there.
[He moves towards the door, Left Back].

GILMAN. Thank you. [Following] You see, I've never been mixed up with the law—

GRAVITER. [Opening the door] No?

GILMAN. And I don't want to begin. When you do, you don't know where you'll stop, do you? You see, I've only come from a sense of duty; and —other reasons.

GRAVITER. Not uncommon.

GILMAN. [Producing card] This is my card. Gilman's—several branches, but this is the 'ead.

GRAVITER. [Scrutinising card] Exactly.

GILMAN. Grocery—I daresay you know me; or your wife does. They say old Mr Jacob Twisden refused a knighthood. If it's not a rude question, why was that?

GRAVITER. Ask him, sir; ask him.

GILMAN. I said to my wife at the time, "He's holdin' out for a baronetcy."

GRAVITER Closes the door with an exasperated smile.

YOUNG CLERK. [Opening the door, Left Forward] Mr WINSOR, sir, and Miss Orme.

They enter, and the CLERK withdraws.

GRAVITER. How d'you do, Miss Orme? How do you do, WINSOR?

WINSOR. Twisden not back, Graviter?

GRAVITER. Not yet.

WINSOR. Well, they've got through De Levis's witnesses. Sir Frederick was at the very top of his form. It's looking quite well. But I hear they've just subpoenaed Canyng after all. His evidence is to be taken to-morrow.

GRAVITER. Oho!

WINSOR. I said Dancy ought to have called him.

GRAVITER. We considered it. Sir Frederic decided that he could use him better in cross-examination.

WINSOR. Well! I don't know that. Can I go and see him before he gives evidence to-morrow?

GRAVITER. I should like to hear Mr Jacob on that, WINSOR. He'll be in directly.

WINSOR. They had Kentman, and Goole, the Inspector, the other bobby, my footman, Dancy's banker, and his tailor.

GRAVITER. Did we shake Kentman or Goole?

WINSOR. Very little. Oh! by the way, the numbers of those two notes were given, and I see they're published in the evening papers. I suppose the police wanted that. I tell you what I find, Graviter—a general feeling that there's something behind it all that doesn't come out.

GRAVITER. The public wants it's money's worth—always does in these Society cases; they brew so long beforehand, you see.

WINSOR. They're looking for something lurid.

MARGARET. When I was in the bog, I thought they were looking for me.
[Taking out her cigarette case] I suppose I mustn't smoke, Mr Graviter?

GRAVITER. Do!

MARGARET. Won't Mr Jacob have a fit?

GRAVITER. Yes, but not till you've gone.

MARGARET. Just a whiff. [She lights a cigarette].

WINSOR. [Suddenly] It's becoming a sort of Dreyfus case—people taking sides quite outside the evidence.

MARGARET. There are more of the chosen in Court every day. Mr Graviter, have you noticed the two on the jury?

GRAVITER. [With a smile] No; I can't say—

MARGARET. Oh! but quite distinctly. Don't you think they ought to have been challenged?

GRAVITER. De Levis might have challenged the other ten, Miss Orme.

MARGARET. Dear me, now! I never thought of that.

As she speaks, the door Left Forward is opened and old MR JACOB TWISDEN comes in. He is tallish and narrow, sixty-eight years old, grey, with narrow little whiskers curling round his narrow ears, and a narrow bow-ribbon curling round his collar. He wears a long, narrow-tailed coat, and strapped trousers on his narrow legs. His nose and face are narrow, shrewd, and kindly. He has a way of narrowing his shrewd and kindly eyes. His nose is seen to twitch and snig.

TWISDEN. Ah! How are you, Charles? How do you do, my dear?

MARGARET. Dear Mr Jacob, I'm smoking. Isn't it disgusting? But they don't allow it in Court, you know. Such a pity! The Judge might have a hookah. Oh! wouldn't he look sweet—the darling!

TWISDEN. [With a little, old-fashioned bow] It does not become everybody as it becomes you, Margaret.

MARGARET. Mr Jacob, how charming! [With a slight grimace she puts out her cigarette].

GRAVITER. Man called Gilman waiting in there to see you specially.

TWISDEN. Directly. Turn up the light, would you, Graviter?

GRAVITER. [Turning up the light] Excuse me.

He goes.

WINSOR. Look here, Mr Twisden—

TWISDEN. Sit down; sit down, my dear.

And he himself sits behind the table, as a cup of tea is brought in to him by the YOUNG CLERK, with two Marie biscuits in the saucer.

Will you have some, Margaret?

MARGARET. No, dear Mr Jacob.

TWISDEN. Charles?

WINSOR. No, thanks. The door is closed.

TWISDEN. [Dipping a biscuit in the tea] Now, then?

WINSOR. The General knows something which on the face of it looks rather queer. Now that he's going to be called, oughtn't Dancy to be told of it, so that he may be ready with his explanation, in case it comes out?

TWISDEN. [Pouring some tea into the saucer] Without knowing, I can't tell you.

WINSOR and MARGARET exchange looks, and TWISDEN drinks from the saucer. MARGARET. Tell him, Charles.

WINSOR. Well! It rained that evening at Meldon. The General happened to put his hand on Dancy's

shoulder, and it was damp.

TWISDEN puts the saucer down and replaces the cup in it. They both look intently at him.

TWISDEN. I take it that General Canynge won't say anything he's not compelled to say.

MARGARET. No, of course; but, Mr Jacob, they might ask; they know it rained. And he is such a George Washington.

TWISDEN. [Toying with a pair of tortoise-shell glasses] They didn't ask either of you. Still-no harm in your telling Dancy.

WINSOR. I'd rather you did it, Margaret.

MARGARET. I daresay. [She mechanically takes out her cigarette-case, catches the lift of TWISDEN'S eyebrows, and puts it back].

WINSOR. Well, we'll go together. I don't want Mrs Dancy to hear.

MARGARET. Do tell me, Mr Jacob; is he going to win?

TWISDEN. I think so, Margaret; I think so.

MARGARET. It'll be too—frightful if he doesn't get a verdict, after all this. But I don't know what we shall do when it's over. I've been sitting in that Court all these three days, watching, and it's made me feel there's nothing we like better than seeing people skinned. Well, bye-bye, bless you!

TWISDEN rises and pats her hand.

WINSOR. Half a second, Margaret. Wait for me. She nods and goes out. Mr Twisden, what do you really think?

TWISDEN. I am Dancy's lawyer, my dear Charles, as well as yours.

WINSOR. Well, can I go and see Canynge?

TWISDEN. Better not.

WINSOR. If they get that out of him, and recall me, am I to say he told me of it at the time?

TWISDEN. You didn't feel the coat yourself? And Dancy wasn't present? Then what Canynge told you is not evidence—he'll stop your being asked.

WINSOR. Thank goodness. Good-bye!

WINSOR goes out.

TWISDEN, behind his table, motionless, taps his teeth with the eyeglasses in his narrow, well-kept hand. After a long shake of his head and a shrug of his rather high shoulders he snips, goes to the window and opens it. Then crossing to the door, Left Back, he throws it open and says

TWISDEN. At your service, sir.

GILMAN comes forth, nursing his pot hat.

Be seated.

TWISDEN closes the window behind him, and takes his seat.

GILMAN. [Taking the client's chair, to the left of the table] Mr Twisden, I believe? My name's Gilman, head of Gilman's Department Stores. You have my card.

TWISDEN. [Looking at the card] Yes. What can we do for you?

GILMAN. Well, I've come to you from a sense of duty, sir, and also a feelin' of embarrassment. [He takes from his breast pocket an evening paper] You see, I've been followin' this Dancy case—it's a good deal talked of in Putney—and I read this at half-past two this afternoon. To be precise, at 2.25. [He rises and hands the paper to TWISDEN, and with a thick gloved forefinger indicates a passage] When I read these numbers, I 'appened to remember givin' change for a fifty-pound note—don't often 'ave one in,

you know—so I went to the cash-box out of curiosity, to see that I 'adn't got it. Well, I 'ad; and here it is. [He draws out from his breast pocket and lays before TWISDEN a fifty-pound banknote] It was brought in to change by a customer of mine three days ago, and he got value for it. Now, that's a stolen note, it seems, and you'd like to know what I did. Mind you, that customer of mine I've known 'im—well— eight or nine years; an Italian he is—wine salesman, and so far's I know, a respectable man-foreign-lookin', but nothin' more. Now, this was at 'alf-past two, and I was at my head branch at Putney, where I live. I want you to mark the time, so as you'll see I 'aven't wasted a minute. I took a cab and I drove straight to my customer's private residence in Putney, where he lives with his daughter—Ricardos his name is, Paolio Ricardos. They tell me there that he's at his business shop in the City. So off I go in the cab again, and there I find him. Well, sir, I showed this paper to him and I produced the note. "Here," I said, "you brought this to me and you got value for it." Well, that man was taken aback. If I'm a judge, Mr Twisden, he was taken aback, not to speak in a guilty way, but he was, as you might say, flummoxed. "Now," I said to him, "where did you get it—that's the point?" He took his time to answer, and then he said: "Well, Mr Gilman," he said, "you know me; I am an honourable man. I can't tell you offhand, but I am above the board." He's foreign, you know, in his expressions. "Yes," I said, "that's all very well," I said, "but here I've got a stolen note and you've got the value for it. Now I tell you," I said, "what I'm going to do; I'm going straight with this note to Mr Jacob Twisden, who's got this Dancy-De Levis case in 'and. He's a well-known Society lawyer," I said, "of great experience." "Oh!" he said, "that is what you do?"—funny the way he speaks! "Then I come with you!"—And I've got him in the cab below. I want to tell you everything before he comes up. On the way I tried to get something out of him, but I couldn't—I could not. "This is very awkward," I said at last. "It is, Mr Gilman," was his reply; and he began to talk about his Sicilian claret—a very good wine, mind you; but under the circumstances it seemed to me uncalled for. Have I made it clear to you?

TWISDEN. [Who has listened with extreme attention] Perfectly, Mr Gilman. I'll send down for him. [He touches a hand-bell].

The YOUNG CLERK appears at the door, Left Forward.

A gentleman in a taxi-waiting. Ask him to be so good as to step up. Oh! and send Mr Graviter here again.

The YOUNG CLERK goes out.

GILMAN. As I told you, sir, I've been followin' this case. It's what you might call piquant. And I should be very glad if it came about that this helped Captain Dancy. I take an interest, because, to tell you the truth, [Confidentially] I don't like—well, not to put too fine a point upon it 'Ebrews. They work harder; they're more sober; they're honest; and they're everywhere. I've nothing against them, but the fact is—they get on so.

TWISDEN. [Cocking an eye] A thorn in the flesh, Mr Gilman.

GILMAN. Well, I prefer my own countrymen, and that's the truth of it.

As he speaks, GRAVITER comes in by the door Left Forward.

TWISDEN. [Pointing to the newspaper and the note] Mr Gilman has brought this, of which he is holder for value. His customer, who changed it three days ago, is coming up.

GRAVITER. The fifty-pounder. I see. [His face is long and reflective].

YOUNG CLERK. [Entering] Mr Ricardos, sir.

He goes out. RICARDOS is a personable, Italian-looking man in a frock coat, with a dark moustachioed face and dark hair a little grizzled. He looks anxious, and bows.

TWISDEN. Mr Ricardos? My name is Jacob Twisden. My partner. [Holding up a finger, as RICARDOS would speak] Mr Gilman has told us about this note. You took it to him, he says, three days ago; that is, on Monday, and received cash for it?

RICARDOS. Yes, sare.

TWISDEN. You were not aware that it was stolen?

RICARDOS. [With his hand to his breast] Oh! no, sare.

TWISDEN. You received it from—?

RICARDOS. A minute, sare; I would weesh to explain—[With an expressive shrug] in private.

TWISDEN. [Nodding] Mr Gilman, your conduct has been most prompt. You may safely leave the matter in our hands, now. Kindly let us retain this note; and ask for my cashier as you go out and give him [He writes] this. He will reimburse you. We will take any necessary steps ourselves.

GILMAN. [In slight surprise, with modest pride] Well, sir, I'm in your 'ands. I must be guided by you, with your experience. I'm glad you think I acted rightly.

TWISDEN. Very rightly, Mr Gilman—very rightly. [Rising] Good afternoon!

GILMAN. Good afternoon, sir. Good afternoon, gentlemen! [To TWISDEN] I'm sure I'm very 'appy to have made your acquaintance, sir. It's a well-known name.

TWISDEN. Thank you.

GILMAN retreats, glances at RICARDOS, and turns again.

GILMAN. I suppose there's nothing else I ought to do, in the interests of the law? I'm a careful man.

TWISDEN. If there is, Mr Gilman, we will let you know. We have your address. You may make your mind easy; but don't speak of this. It might interfere with Justice.

GILMAN. Oh! I shouldn't dream of it. I've no wish to be mixed up in anything conspicuous. That's not my principle at all. Good-day, gentlemen.

He goes.

TWISDEN. [Seating himself] Now, sir, will you sit down.

But RICARDOS does not sit; he stands looking uneasily across the table at GRAVITER.

You may speak out.

RICARDOS. Well, Mr Tweesden and sare, this matter is very serious for me, and very delicate—it concairns my honour. I am in a great difficulty.

TWISDEN. When in difficulty—complete frankness, sir.

RICARDOS. It is a family matter, sare, I—

TWISDEN. Let me be frank with you. [Telling his points off on his fingers] We have your admission that you changed this stopped note for value. It will be our duty to inform the Bank of England that it has been traced to you. You will have to account to them for your possession of it. I suggest to you that it will be far better to account frankly to us.

RICARDOS. [Taking out a handkerchief and quite openly wiping his hands and forehead] I received this note, sare, with others, from a gentleman, sare, in settlement of a debt of honour, and I know nothing of where he got them.

TWISDEN. H'm! that is very vague. If that is all you can tell us, I'm afraid—

RICARDOS. Gentlemen, this is very painful for me. It is my daughter's good name—[He again wipes his brow].

TWISDEN. Come, sir, speak out!

RICARDOS. [Desperately] The notes were a settlement to her from this gentleman, of whom she was a great friend.

TWISDEN. [Suddenly] I am afraid we must press you for the name of the gentleman.

RICARDOS. Sare, if I give it to you, and it does 'im 'arm, what will my daughter say? This is a bad matter for me. He behaved well to her; and she is attached to him still; sometimes she is crying yet because she lost him. And now we betray him, perhaps, who knows? This is very unpleasant for me. [Taking up the paper] Here it gives the number of another note—a 'undred-pound note. I 'ave that too. [He takes a note from his breast pocket].

GRAVITER. How much did he give you in all?

RICARDOS. For my daughter's settlement one thousand pounds. I understand he did not wish to give a cheque because of his marriage. So I did not think anything about it being in notes, you see.

TWISDEN. When did he give you this money?

RICARDOS. The middle of Octobare last.

TWISDEN. [Suddenly looking up] Mr Ricardos, was it Captain Dancy?

RICARDOS. [Again wiping his forehead] Gentlemen, I am so fond of my daughter. I have only the one, and no wife.

TWISDEN. [With an effort] Yes, yes; but I must know.

RICARDOS. Sare, if I tell you, will you give me your good word that my daughter shall not hear of it?

TWISDEN. So far as we are able to prevent it—certainly.

RICARDOS. Sare, I trust you.—It was Captain Dancy.

A long pause.

GRAVITER [Suddenly] Were you blackmailing him?

TWISDEN. [Holding up his hand] My partner means, did you press him for this settlement?

RICARDOS. I did think it my duty to my daughter to ask that he make compensation to her.

TWISDEN. With threats that you would tell his wife?

RICARDOS. [With a shrug] Captain Dancy was a man of honour. He said: "Of course I will do this." I trusted him. And a month later I did remind him, and he gave me this money for her. I do not know where he got it—I do not know. Gentlemen, I have invested it all on her—every penny-except this note, for which I had the purpose to buy her a necklace. That is the swearned truth.

TWISDEN. I must keep this note. [He touches the hundred-pound note] You will not speak of this to anyone. I may recognise that you were a holder for value received—others might take a different view. Good-day, sir. Graviter, see Mr Ricardos out, and take his address.

RICARDOS. [Pressing his hands over the breast of his frock coat—with a sigh] Gentlemen, I beg you—remember what I said. [With a roll of his eyes] My daughter—I am not happee. Good-day.

He turns and goes out slowly, Left Forward, followed by GRAVITER.

TWISDEN. [To himself] Young Dancy! [He pins the two notes together and places them in an envelope, then stands motionless except for his eyes and hands, which restlessly express the disturbance within him.]

GRAVITER returns, carefully shuts the door, and going up to him,
hands him RICARDOS' card.

[Looking at the card] Villa Benvenuto. This will have to be verified, but I'm afraid it's true. That man was not acting.

GRAVITER. What's to be done about Dancy?

TWISDEN. Can you understand a gentleman—?

GRAVITER. I don't know, sir. The war loosened "form" all over the place. I saw plenty of that myself. And some men have no moral sense. From the first I've had doubts.

TWISDEN. We can't go on with the case.

GRAVITER. Phew! . . . [A moment's silence] Gosh! It's an awful thing for his wife.

TWISDEN. Yes.

GRAVITER [Touching the envelope] Chance brought this here, sir. That man won't talk—he's too scared.

TWISDEN. Gilman.

GRAVITER. Too respectable. If De Levis got those notes back, and the rest of the money, anonymously?

TWISDEN. But the case, Graviter; the case.

GRAVITER. I don't believe this alters what I've been thinking.

TWISDEN. Thought is one thing—knowledge another. There's duty to our profession. Ours is a fine calling. On the good faith of solicitors a very great deal hangs. [He crosses to the hearth as if warmth would help him].

GRAVITER. It'll let him in for a prosecution. He came to us in confidence.

TWISDEN. Not as against the law.

GRAVITER. No. I suppose not. [A pause] By Jove, I don't like losing this case. I don't like the admission we backed such a wrong 'un.

TWISDEN. Impossible to go on. Apart from ourselves, there's Sir Frederic. We must disclose to him—can't let him go on in the dark. Complete confidence between solicitor and counsel is the essence of professional honour.

GRAVITER. What are you going to do then, sir?

TWISDEN. See Dancy at once. Get him on the phone.

GRAVITER. [Taking up the telephone] Get me Captain Dancy's flat. . . . What? . . . [To TWISDEN] Mrs Dancy is here. That's a propos with a vengeance. Are you going to see her, sir?

TWISDEN. [After a moment's painful hesitation] I must.

GRAVITER. [Telephoning] Bring Mrs Dancy up. [He turns to the window].

MABEL DANDY is shown in, looking very pale. TWISDEN advances from the fire, and takes her hand.

MABEL. Major Colford's taken Ronny off in his car for the night. I thought it would do him good. I said I'd come round in case there was anything you wanted to say before to-morrow.

TWISDEN. [Taken aback] Where have they gone?

MABEL. I don't know, but he'll be home before ten o'clock to-morrow. Is there anything?

TWISDEN. Well, I'd like to see him before the Court sits. Send him on here as soon as he comes.

MABEL. [With her hand to her forehead] Oh! Mr Twisden, when will it be over? My head's getting awful sitting in that Court.

TWISDEN. My dear Mrs Dancy, there's no need at all for you to come down to-morrow; take a rest and nurse your head.

MABEL. Really and truly?

TWISDEN. Yes; it's the very best thing you can do.

GRAVITER turns his head, and looks at them unobserved.

MABEL. How do you think it's going?

TWISDEN. It went very well to-day; very well indeed.

MABEL. You must be awfully fed up with us.

TWISDEN. My dear young lady, that's our business. [He takes her hand].

MABEL's face suddenly quivers. She draws her hand away, and covers her lips with it.

There, there! You want a day off badly.

MABEL. I'm so tired of—! Thank you so much for all you're doing. Good night! Good night, Mr Graviter!

GRAVITER. Good night, Mrs Dancy.

MABEL goes.

GRAVITER. D'you know, I believe she knows.

TWISDEN. No, no! She believes in him implicitly. A staunch little woman. Poor thing!

GRAVITER. Hasn't that shaken you, sir? It has me.

TWISDEN. No, no! I—I can't go on with the case. It's breaking faith.
Get Sir Frederic's chambers.

GRAVITER. [Telephoning, and getting a reply, looks round at TWISDEN]
Yes?

TWISDEN. Ask if I can come round and see him.

GRAVITER. [Telephoning] Can Sir Frederic spare Mr Twisden a few minutes now if he comes round?
[Receiving reply] He's gone down to Brighton for the night.

TWISDEN. H'm! What hotel?

GRAVITER. [Telephoning] What's his address? What . . . ? [To
TWISDEN] The Bedford.

TWISDEN. I'll go down.

GRAVITER. [Telephoning] Thank you. All right. [He rings off].

TWISDEN. Just look out the trains down and up early to-morrow.

GRAVITER takes up an A B C, and TWISDEN takes up the Ricardos card.

TWISDEN. Send to this address in Putney, verify the fact that Ricardos has a daughter, and give me a trunk call to Brighton. Better go yourself, Graviter. If you see her, don't say anything, of course— invent some excuse. [GRAVITER nods] I'll be up in time to see Dancy.

GRAVITER. By George! I feel bad about this.

TWISDEN. Yes. But professional honour comes first. What time is that train? [He bends over the ABC].

CURTAIN.

SCENE II

The same room on the following morning at ten-twenty-five, by the Grandfather clock.

The YOUNG CLERK is ushering in DANCY, whose face is perceptibly harder than it was three months ago, like that of a man who has lived under great restraint.

DANCY. He wanted to see me before the Court sat.

YOUNG CLERK. Yes, sir. Mr Twisden will see you in one minute. He had to go out of town last night.
[He prepares to open the waiting-room door].

DANCY. Were you in the war?

YOUNG CLERK. Yes.

DANCY. How can you stick this?

YOUNG CLERK. [With a smile] My trouble was to stick that, sir.

DANCY. But you get no excitement from year's end to year's end. It'd drive me mad.

YOUNG CLERK. [Shyly] A case like this is pretty exciting. I'd give a lot to see us win it.

DANCY. [Staring at him] Why? What is it to you?

YOUNG CLERK. I don't know, sir. It's—it's like football—you want your side to win. [He opens the waiting-room door. Expanding] You see some rum starts, too, in a lawyer's office in a quiet way.

DANCY enters the waiting-room, and the YOUNG CLERK, shutting the door, meets TWISDEN as he comes in, Left Forward, and takes from him overcoat, top hat, and a small bag.

YOUNG CLERK. Captain Dancy's waiting, sir. [He indicates the waiting-room].

TWISDEN. [Narrowing his lips] Very well. Mr Graviter gone to the Courts?

YOUNG CLERK. Yes, sir.

TWISDEN. Did he leave anything for me?

YOUNG CLERK. On the table, sir.

TWISDEN. [Taking up an envelope] Thank you.

The CLERK goes.

TWISDEN. [Opening the envelope and reading] "All corroborates." H'm! [He puts it in his pocket and takes out of an envelope the two notes, lays them on the table, and covers them with a sheet of blotting-paper; stands a moment preparing himself, then goes to the door of the waiting-room, opens it, and says:] Now, Captain Dancy. Sorry to have kept you waiting.

DANCY. [Entering] WINSOR came to me yesterday about General Canynge's evidence. Is that what you wanted to speak to me about?

TWISDEN. No. It isn't that.

DANCY. [Looking at his wrist watch] By me it's just on the half-hour, sir.

TWISDEN. Yes. I don't want you to go to the Court.

DANCY. Not?

TWISDEN. I have very serious news for you.

DANCY. [Wincing and collecting himself] Oh!

TWISDEN. These two notes. [He uncovers the notes] After the Court rose yesterday we had a man called Ricardos here. [A pause] Is there any need for me to say more?

DANCY. [Unflinching] No. What now?

TWISDEN. Our duty was plain; we could not go on with the case. I have consulted Sir Frederic. He felt—he felt that he must throw up his brief, and he will do that the moment the Court sits. Now I want to talk to you about what you're going to do.

DANCY. That's very good of you, considering.

TWISDEN. I don't pretend to understand, but I imagine you may have done this in a moment of reckless bravado, feeling, perhaps, that as you gave the mare to De Levis, the money was by rights as much yours as his.

Stopping DANCY, who is about to speak, with a gesture.

To satisfy a debt of honour to this—lady; and, no doubt, to save your wife from hearing of it from the man Ricardos. Is that so?

DANCY. To the life.

TWISDEN. It was mad, Captain Dancy, mad! But the question now is: What do you owe to your wife? She doesn't dream—I suppose?

DANCY. [With a twitching face] No.

TWISDEN. We can't tell what the result of this collapse will be. The police have the theft in hand. They may issue a warrant. The money could be refunded, and the costs paid—somehow that can all be managed. But it may not help. In any case, what end is served by your staying in the country? You can't save your honour—that's gone. You can't save your wife's peace of mind. If she sticks to you—do you think she will?

DANCY. Not if she's wise.

TWISDEN. Better go! There's a war in Morocco.

DANCY. [With a bitter smile] Good old Morocco!

TWISDEN. Will you go, then, at once, and leave me to break it to your wife?

DANCY. I don't know yet.

TWISDEN. You must decide quickly, to catch a boat train. Many a man has made good. You're a fine soldier.

DANCY. There are alternatives.

TWISDEN. Now, go straight from this office. You've a passport, I suppose; you won't need a visa for France, and from there you can find means to slip over. Have you got money on you? [Dancy nods]. We will see what we can do to stop or delay proceedings.

DANCY. It's all damned kind of you. [With difficulty] But I must think of my wife. Give me a few minutes.

TWISDEN. Yes, yes; go in there and think it out.

He goes to the door, Right, and opens it. DANCY passes him and goes out. TWISDEN rings a bell and stands waiting.

CLERK. [Entering] Yes, sir?

TWISDEN. Tell them to call a taxi.

CLERK. [Who has a startled look] Yes, sir. Mr Graviter has come in, air, with General Canynge. Are you disengaged?

TWISDEN. Yes.

The CLERK goes out, and almost immediately GRAVITER and CANYNGE enter. Good-morning, General. [To GRAVITER]

Well?

GRAVITER. Sir Frederic got up at once and said that since the publication of the numbers of those notes, information had reached him which forced him to withdraw from the case. Great sensation, of course. I left Bromley in charge. There'll be a formal verdict for the defendant, with costs. Have you told Dancy?

TWISDEN. Yes. He's in there deciding what he'll do.

CANYNGE. [Grave and vexed] This is a dreadful thing, Twisden. I've been afraid of it all along. A soldier! A gallant fellow, too. What on earth got into him?

TWISDEN. There's no end to human nature, General.

GRAVITER. You can see queerer things in the papers, any day.

CANYNGE. That poor young wife of his! WINSOR gave me a message for you, Twisden. If money's wanted quickly to save proceedings, draw on him. Is there anything I can do?

TWISDEN. I've advised him to go straight off to Morocco.

CANYNGE. I don't know that an asylum isn't the place for him. He must be off his head at moments. That jump-crazy! He'd have got a verdict on that alone—if they'd seen those balconies. I was looking at them when I was down there last Sunday. Daring thing, Twisden. Very few men, on a dark night—He risked his life twice. That's a shrewd fellow—young De Levis. He spotted Dancy's nature.

The YOUNG CLERK enters.

CLERK. The taxi's here, sir. Will you see Major Colford and Miss Orme?

TWISDEN. Graviter—No; show them in.

The YOUNG CLERK goes.

CANYNGE. Colford's badly cut up.

MARGARET ORME and COLFORD enter.

COLFORD. [Striding forward] There must be some mistake about this, Mr Twisden.

TWISDEN. Hssh! Dancy's in there. He's admitted it.

Voices are subdued at once.

COLFORD. What? [With emotion] If it were my own brother, I couldn't feel it more. But—damn it! What right had that fellow to chuck up the case—without letting him know, too. I came down with Dancy this morning, and he knew nothing about it.

TWISDEN. [Coldly] That was unfortunately unavoidable.

COLFORD. Guilty or not, you ought to have stuck to him—it's not playing the game, Mr Twisden.

TWISDEN. You must allow me to judge where my duty lay, in a very hard case.

COLFORD. I thought a man was safe with his solicitor.

CANYNGE. Colford, you don't understand professional etiquette.

COLFORD. No, thank God!

TWISDEN. When you have been as long in your profession as I have been in mine, Major Colford, you will know that duty to your calling outweighs duty to friend or client.

COLFORD. But I serve the Country.

TWISDEN. And I serve the Law, sir.

CANYNGE. Graviter, give me a sheet of paper. I'll write a letter for him.

MARGARET. [Going up to TWISDEN] Dear Mr Jacob—pay De Levis. You know my pearls—put them up the spout again. Don't let Ronny be—

TWISDEN. Money isn't the point, Margaret.

MARGARET. It's ghastly! It really is.

COLFORD. I'm going in to shake hands with him. [He starts to cross the room].

TWISDEN. Wait! We want him to go straight off to Morocco. Don't upset him. [To COLFORD and MARGARET] I think you had better go. If, a little later, Margaret, you could go round to Mrs Dancy—

COLFORD. Poor little Mabel Dancy! It's perfect hell for her.

They have not seen that DANCY has opened the door behind them.

DANCY. It is!

They all turn round in consternation.

COLFORD. [With a convulsive movement] Old boy!

DANCY. No good, Colford. [Gazing round at them] Oh! clear out—I can't stand commiseration; and let me have some air.

TWISDEN motions to COLFORD and MARGARET to go; and as he turns to DANCY, they go out. GRAVITER also moves towards the door. The GENERAL sits motionless. GRAVITER goes Out.

TWISDEN. Well?

DANCY. I'm going home, to clear up things with my wife. General Canynge, I don't quite know why I did the damned thing. But I did, and there's an end of it.

CANYNGE. Dancy, for the honour of the Army, avoid further scandal if you can. I've written a letter to a friend of mine in the Spanish War Office. It will get you a job in their war. [CANYNGE closes the envelope].

DANCY. Very good of you. I don't know if I can make use of it.

CANYNGE stretches out the letter, which TWISDEN hands to DANCY, who takes it.
GRAVITER re-opens the door.

TWISDEN. What is it?

GRAVITER. De Levis is here.

TWISDEN. De Levis? Can't see him.

DANCY. Let him in!

After a moment's hesitation TWISDEN nods, and GRAVITER goes out. The three wait in silence with their eyes fixed on the door, the GENERAL sitting at the table, TWISDEN by his chair, DANCY between him and the door Right. DE LEVIS comes in and shuts the door. He is advancing towards TWISDEN when his eyes fall on DANCY, and he stops.

TWISDEN. You wanted to see me?

DE LEVIS. [Moistening his lips] Yes. I came to say that—that I overheard—I am afraid a warrant is to be issued. I wanted you to realise—it's not my doing. I'll give it no support. I'm content. I don't want my money. I don't even want costs. Dancy, do you understand?

DANCY does not answer, but looks at him with nothing alive in his face but his eyes.

TWISDEN. We are obliged to you, Sir. It was good of you to come.

DE LEVIS. [With a sort of darting pride] Don't mistake me. I didn't come because I feel Christian; I am a Jew. I will take no money—not even that which was stolen. Give it to a charity. I'm proved right. And now I'm done with the damned thing. Good-morning!

He makes a little bow to CANYNGE and TWISDEN, and turns to face DANCY, who has never moved. The two stand motionless, looking at each other, then DE LEVIS shrugs his shoulders and walks out. When he is gone there is a silence.

CANYNGE. [Suddenly] You heard what he said, Dancy. You have no time to lose.

But DANCY does not stir.

TWISDEN. Captain Dancy?

Slowly, without turning his head, rather like a man in a dream,
DANCY walks across the room, and goes out.

CURTAIN.

SCENE III

The DANCYS' sitting-room, a few minutes later. MABEL DANCY is sitting alone on the sofa with a newspaper on her lap; she is only just up, and has a bottle of smelling-salts in her hand. Two or three other newspapers are dumped on the arm of the sofa. She topples the one off her lap and takes up another as if she couldn't keep away from them; drops it in turn, and sits staring before her, sniffing at the salts. The door, Right, is opened and DANCY comes in.

MABEL. [Utterly surprised] Ronny! Do they want me in Court?

DANCY. No.

MABEL. What is it, then? Why are you back?

DANCY. Spun.

MABEL. [Blank] Spun? What do you mean? What's spun?

DANCY. The case. They've found out through those notes.

MABEL. Oh! [Staring at his face] Who?

DANCY. Me!

MABEL. [After a moment of horrified stillness] Don't, Ronny! Oh! No! Don't! [She buries her face in the pillows of the sofa].

DANCY stands looking down at her.

DANCY. Pity you wouldn't come to Africa three months ago.

MABEL. Why didn't you tell me then? I would have gone.

DANCY. You wanted this case. Well, it's fallen down.

MABEL. Oh! Why didn't I face it? But I couldn't—I had to believe.

DANCY. And now you can't. It's the end, Mabel.

MABEL. [Looking up at him] No.

DANCY goes suddenly on his knees and seizes her hand.

DANCY. Forgive me!

MABEL. [Putting her hand on his head] Yes; oh, yes! I think I've known a long time, really. Only—why? What made you?

DANCY. [Getting up and speaking in jerks] It was a crazy thing to do; but, damn it, I was only looting a looter. The money was as much mine as his. A decent chap would have offered me half. You didn't see the brute look at me that night at dinner as much as to say: "You blasted fool!" It made me mad. That wasn't a bad jump-twice over. Nothing in the war took quite such nerve. [Grimly] I rather enjoyed that evening.

MABEL. But—money! To keep it!

DANCY. [Sullenly] Yes, but I had a debt to pay.

MABEL. To a woman?

DANCY. A debt of honour—it wouldn't wait.

MABEL. It was—it was to a woman. Ronny, don't lie any more.

DANCY. [Grimly] Well! I wanted to save your knowing. I'd promised a thousand. I had a letter from her father that morning, threatening to tell you. All the same, if that tyke hadn't jeered at me for parlour tricks!—But what's the good of all this now? [Sullenly] Well—it may cure you of loving me. Get over that, Mab; I never was worth it—and I'm done for!

MABEL. The woman—have you—since—?

DANCY. [Energetically] No! You supplanted her. But if you'd known I was leaving a woman for you, you'd never have married me. [He walks over to the hearth].

MABEL too gets up. She presses her hands to her forehead, then walks blindly round to behind the sofa and stands looking straight in front of her.

MABEL. [Coldly] What has happened, exactly?

DANCY. Sir Frederic chucked up the case. I've seen Twisden; they want me to run for it to Morocco.

MABEL. To the war there?

DANCY. Yes. There's to be a warrant out.

MABEL. A prosecution? Prison? Oh, go! Don't wait a minute! Go!

DANCY. Blast them!

MABEL. Oh, Ronny! Please! Please! Think what you'll want. I'll pack. Quick! No! Don't wait to take things. Have you got money?

DANCY. [Nodding] This'll be good-bye, then!

MABEL. [After a moment's struggle] Oh! No! No, no! I'll follow—I'll come out to you there.

DANCY. D'you mean you'll stick to me?

MABEL. Of course I'll stick to you.

DANCY seizes her hand and puts it to his lips. The bell rings.

MABEL. [In terror] Who's that?

The bell rings again. DANCY moves towards the door.

No! Let me!

She passes him and steals out to the outer door of the flat, where she stands listening. The bell rings again. She looks through the slit of the letter-box. While she is gone DANCY stands quite still, till she comes back.

MABEL. Through the letter-bog—I can see—it's—it's police. Oh! God! . . . Ronny! I can't bear it.

DANCY. Heads up, Mab! Don't show the brutes!

MABEL. Whatever happens, I'll go on loving you. If it's prison—I'll wait. Do you understand? I don't care what you did—I don't care! I'm just the same. I will be just the same when you come back to me.

DANCY. [Slowly] That's not in human nature.

MABEL. It is. It's in Me.

DANCY. I've crocked up your life.

MABEL. No, no! Kiss me!

A long kiss, till the bell again startles them apart, and there is a loud knock.

DANCY. They'll break the door in. It's no good—we must open. Hold them in check a little. I want a minute or two.

MABEL. [Clasping him] Ronny! Oh, Ronny! It won't be for long—I'll be waiting! I'll be waiting—I swear it.

DANCY. Steady, Mab! [Putting her back from him] Now!

He opens the bedroom door, Left, and stands waiting for her to go. Summoning up her courage, she goes to open the outer door. A sudden change comes over DANCY'S face; from being stony it grows almost maniacal.

DANCY. [Under his breath] No! No! By God! No! He goes out into the bedroom, closing the door behind him.

MABEL has now opened the outer door, and disclosed INSPECTOR DEDE and the YOUNG CONSTABLE who were summoned to Meldon Court on the night of the theft, and have been witnesses in the case. Their voices are heard.

MABEL. Yes?

INSPECTOR. Captain Dancy in, madam?

MABEL. I am not quite sure—I don't think so.

INSPECTOR. I wish to speak to him a minute. Stay here, Grover. Now, madam!

MABEL. Will you come in while I see?

She comes in, followed by the INSPECTOR.

INSPECTOR. I should think you must be sure, madam. This is not a big place.

MABEL. He was changing his clothes to go out. I think he has gone.

INSPECTOR. What's that door?

MABEL. To our bedroom.

INSPECTOR. [Moving towards it] He'll be in there, then.

MABEL. What do you want, Inspector?

INSPECTOR. [Melting] Well, madam, it's no use disguising it. I'm exceedingly sorry, but I've a warrant for his arrest.

MABEL. Inspector!

INSPECTOR. I'm sure I've every sympathy for you, madam; but I must carry out my instructions.

MABEL. And break my heart?

INSPECTOR. Well, madam, we're—we're not allowed to take that into consideration. The Law's the Law.

MABEL. Are you married?

INSPECTOR. I am.

MABEL. If you—your wife—

The INSPECTOR raises his hand, deprecating.

[Speaking low] Just half an hour! Couldn't you? It's two lives—two whole lives! We've only been married four months. Come back in half an hour. It's such a little thing—nobody will know. Nobody. Won't you?

INSPECTOR. Now, madam—you must know my duty.

MABEL. Inspector, I beseech you—just half an hour.

INSPECTOR. No, no—don't you try to undermine me—I'm sorry for you; but don't you try it! [He tries the handle, then knocks at the door].

DANCY'S VOICE. One minute!

INSPECTOR. It's locked. [Sharply] Is there another door to that room? Come, now—

The bell rings.

[Moving towards the door, Left; to the CONSTABLE] Who's that out there?

CONSTABLE. A lady and gentleman, sir.

INSPECTOR. What lady and— Stand by, Grover!

DANCY'S VOICE. All right! You can come in now.

There is the noise of a lock being turned. And almost immediately the sound of a pistol shot in the bedroom. MABEL rushes to the door, tears it open, and disappears within, followed by the INSPECTOR, just as MARGARET ORME and COLFORD come in from the passage, pursued by the CONSTABLE. They, too, all hurry to the bedroom door and disappear for a moment; then COLFORD and MARGARET reappear, supporting MABEL, who faints as they lay her on the sofa. COLFORD takes from her hand an envelope, and tears it open.

COLFORD. It's addressed to me. [He reads it aloud to MARGARET in a low voice].

"DEAR COLFORD,—This is the only decent thing I can do. It's too damned unfair to her. It's only another jump. A pistol keeps faith. Look after her, Colford—my love to her, and you."

MARGARET gives a sort of choking sob, then, seeing the smelling bottle, she snatches it up, and turns to revive MABEL.

COLFORD. Leave her! The longer she's unconscious, the better.

INSPECTOR. [Re-entering] This is a very serious business, sir.

COLFORD. [Sternly] Yes, Inspector; you've done for my best friend.

INSPECTOR. I, sir? He shot himself.

COLFORD. Hara-kiri.

INSPECTOR. Beg pardon?

COLFORD. [He points with the letter to MABEL] For her sake, and his own.

INSPECTOR. [Putting out his hand] I'll want that, sir.

COLFORD. [Grimly] You shall have it read at the inquest. Till then— it's addressed to me, and I stick to it.

INSPECTOR. Very well, sir. Do you want to have a look at him?

COLFORD passes quickly into the bedroom, followed by the INSPECTOR.
MARGARET remains kneeling beside MABEL.

COLFORD comes quickly back. MARGARET looks up at him. He stands very still.

COLFORD. Neatly—through the heart.

MARGARET [wildly] Keeps faith! We've all done that. It's not enough.

COLFORD. [Looking down at MABEL] All right, old boy!

The CURTAIN falls.

WINDOWS

From the 5th Series of Plays

By John Galsworthy

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

GEOFFREY MARCH..... Freelance in Literature

JOAN MARCH..... His Wife

MARY MARCH..... Their Daughter

JOHNNY MARCH..... Their Son

COOK..... Their Cook

MR BLY..... Their Window Cleaner

FAITH BLY..... His Daughter

BLUNTER..... A Strange Young Man
MR BARNADAS..... In Plain Clothes

The action passes in Geoffrey March's House, Highgate-Spring-time.

ACT I. Thursday morning. The dining-room-after breakfast.

ACT II. Thursday, a fortnight later. The dining-room after lunch.

ACT III. The same day. The dining-room-after dinner.

ACT I

The MARCH'S dining-room opens through French windows on one of those gardens which seem infinite, till they are seen to be coterminous with the side walls of the house, and finite at the far end, because only the thick screen of acacias and sumachs prevents another house from being seen. The French and other windows form practically all the outer wall of that dining-room, and between them and the screen of trees lies the difference between the characters of Mr and Mrs March, with dots and dashes of Mary and Johnny thrown in. For instance, it has been formalised by MRS MARCH but the grass has not been cut by MR MARCH, and daffodils have sprung up there, which MRS MARCH desires for the dining-room, but of which MR MARCH says: "For God's sake, Joan, let them grow." About half therefore are now in a bowl on the breakfast table, and the other half still in the grass, in the compromise essential to lasting domesticity. A hammock under the acacias shows that MARY lies there sometimes with her eyes on the gleam of sunlight that comes through: and a trail in the longish grass, bordered with cigarette ends, proves that JOHNNY tramps there with his eyes on the ground or the stars, according. But all this is by the way, because except for a yard or two of gravel terrace outside the windows, it is all painted on the backcloth. The MARCHES have been at breakfast, and the round table, covered with blue linen, is thick with remains, seven baskets full. The room is gifted with old oak furniture: there is a door, stage Left, Forward; a hearth, where a fire is burning, and a high fender on which one can sit, stage Right, Middle; and in the wall below the fireplace, a service hatch covered with a sliding shutter, for the passage of dishes into the adjoining pantry. Against the wall, stage Left, is an old oak dresser, and a small writing table across the Left Back corner. MRS MARCH still sits behind the coffee pot, making up her daily list on tablets with a little gold pencil fastened to her wrist. She is personable, forty-eight, trim, well-dressed, and more matter-of-fact than seems plausible. MR MARCH is sitting in an armchair, sideways to the windows, smoking his pipe and reading his newspaper, with little explosions to which no one pays any attention, because it is his daily habit. He is a fine-looking man of fifty odd, with red-grey moustaches and hair, both of which stiver partly by nature and partly because his hands often push them up. MARY and JOHNNY are close to the fireplace, stage Right. JOHNNY sits on the fender, smoking a cigarette and warming his back. He is a commonplace looking young man, with a decided jaw, tall, neat, soulful, who has been in the war and writes poetry. MARY is less ordinary; you cannot tell exactly what is the matter with her. She too is tall, a little absent, fair, and well-looking. She has a small china dog in her hand, taken from the mantelpiece, and faces the audience. As the curtain rises she is saying in her soft and pleasant voice: "Well, what is the matter with us all, Johnny?"

JOHNNY. Stuck, as we were in the trenches—like china dogs. [He points to the ornament in her hand.]

MR MARCH. [Into his newspaper] Damn these people!

MARY. If there isn't an ideal left, Johnny, it's no good pretending one.

JOHNNY. That's what I'm saying: Bankrupt!

MARY. What do you want?

MRS MARCH. [To herself] Mutton cutlets. Johnny, will you be in to lunch? [JOHNNY shakes his head]

Mary? [MARY nods] Geof?

MR MARCH. [Into his paper] Swine!

MRS MARCH. That'll be three. [To herself] Spinach.

JOHNNY. If you'd just missed being killed for three blooming years for no spiritual result whatever, you'd want something to bite on, Mary.

MRS MARCH. [Jotting] Soap.

JOHNNY. What price the little and weak, now? Freedom and self-determination, and all that?

MARY. Forty to one—no takers.

JOHNNY. It doesn't seem to worry you.

MARY. Well, what's the good?

JOHNNY. Oh, you're a looker on, Mary.

MR MARCH. [To his newspaper] Of all Godforsaken time-servers!

MARY is moved so far as to turn and look over his shoulder a minute.

JOHNNY. Who?

MARY. Only the Old-Un.

MR MARCH. This is absolutely Prussian!

MRS MARCH. Soup, lobster, chicken salad. Go to Mrs Hunt's.

MR MARCH. And this fellow hasn't the nous to see that if ever there were a moment when it would pay us to take risks, and be generous—My hat! He ought to be—knighted! [Resumes his paper.]

JOHNNY. [Muttering] You see, even Dad can't suggest chivalry without talking of payment for it. That shows how we've sunk.

MARY. [Contemptuously] Chivalry! Pough! Chivalry was "off" even before the war, Johnny. Who wants chivalry?

JOHNNY. Of all shallow-pated humbug—that sneering at chivalry's the worst. Civilisation—such as we've got—is built on it.

MARY. [Airily] Then it's built on sand. [She sits beside him on the fender.]

JOHNNY. Sneering and smartness! Pah!

MARY. [Roused] I'll tell you what, Johnny, it's mucking about with chivalry that makes your poetry rotten. [JOHNNY seizes her arm and twists it] Shut up—that hurts. [JOHNNY twists it more] You brute! [JOHNNY lets her arm go.]

JOHNNY. Ha! So you don't mind taking advantage of the fact that you can cheek me with impunity, because you're weaker. You've given the whole show away, Mary. Abolish chivalry and I'll make you sit up.

MRS MARCH. What are you two quarrelling about? Will you bring home cigarettes, Johnny—not Bogdogunov's Mamelukes—something more Anglo-American.

JOHNNY. All right! D'you want any more illustrations, Mary?

MARY. Pig! [She has risen and stands rubbing her arm and recovering her placidity, which is considerable.]

MRS MARCH. Geof, can you eat preserved peaches?

MR MARCH. Hell! What a policy! Um?

MRS MARCH. Can you eat preserved peaches?

MR MARCH. Yes. [To his paper] Making the country stink in the eyes of the world!

MARY. Nostrils, Dad, nostrils.

MR MARCH wriggles, half hearing.

JOHNNY. [Muttering] Shallow idiots! Thinking we can do without chivalry!

MRS MARCH. I'm doing my best to get a parlourmaid, to-day, Mary, but these breakfast things won't clear themselves.

MARY. I'll clear them, Mother.

MRS MARCH. Good! [She gets up. At the door] Knitting silk.

She goes out.

JOHNNY. Mother hasn't an ounce of idealism. You might make her see stars, but never in the singular.

MR MARCH. [To his paper] If God doesn't open the earth soon—

MARY. Is there anything special, Dad?

MR MARCH. This sulphurous government. [He drops the paper] Give me a match, Mary.

As soon as the paper is out of his hands he becomes a different—an affable man.

MARY. [Giving him a match] D'you mind writing in here this morning, Dad? Your study hasn't been done. There's nobody but Cook.

MR MARCH. [Lighting his pipe] Anywhere.

He slews the armchair towards the fire.

MARY. I'll get your things, then.

She goes out.

JOHNNY. [Still on the fender] What do you say, Dad? Is civilisation built on chivalry or on self-interest?

MR MARCH. The question is considerable, Johnny. I should say it was built on contract, and jerry-built at that.

JOHNNY. Yes; but why do we keep contracts when we can break them with advantage and impunity?

MR MARCH. But do we keep them?

JOHNNY. Well—say we do; otherwise you'll admit there isn't such a thing as civilisation at all. But why do we keep them? For instance, why don't we make Mary and Mother work for us like Kafir women? We could lick them into it. Why did we give women the vote? Why free slaves; why anything decent for the little and weak?

MR MARCH. Well, you might say it was convenient for people living in communities.

JOHNNY. I don't think it's convenient at all. I should like to make Mary sweat. Why not jungle law, if there's nothing in chivalry.

MR MARCH. Chivalry is altruism, Johnny. Of course it's quite a question whether altruism isn't enlightened self-interest!

JOHNNY. Oh! Damn!

The lank and shirt-sleeved figure of MR BLY, with a pail of water and cloths, has entered, and stands near the window, Left.

BLY. Beg pardon, Mr March; d'you mind me cleanin' the winders here?

MR MARCH. Not a bit.

JOHNNY. Bankrupt of ideals. That's it!

MR BLY stares at him, and puts his pail down by the window.

MARY has entered with her father's writing materials which she puts on a stool beside him.

MARY. Here you are, Dad! I've filled up the ink pot. Do be careful! Come on, Johnny!

She looks curiously at MR BLY, who has begun operations at the bottom of the left-hand window, and goes, followed by JOHNNY.

MR MARCH. [Relighting his pipe and preparing his materials] What do you think of things, Mr Bly?

BLY. Not much, sir.

MR MARCH. Ah! [He looks up at MR BLY, struck by his large philosophical eyes and moth-eaten moustache] Nor I.

BLY. I rather thought that, sir, from your writin's.

MR MARCH. Oh! Do you read?

BLY. I was at sea, once—formed the 'abit.

MR MARCH. Read any of my novels?

BLY. Not to say all through—I've read some of your articles in the Sunday papers, though. Make you think!

MR MARCH. I'm at sea now—don't see dry land anywhere, Mr Bly.

BLY. [With a smile] That's right.

MR MARCH. D'you find that the general impression?

BLY. No. People don't think. You 'ave to 'ave some cause for thought.

MR MARCH. Cause enough in the papers.

BLY. It's nearer 'ome with me. I've often thought I'd like a talk with you, sir. But I'm keepin' you. [He prepares to swab the pane.]

MR MARCH. Not at all. I enjoy it. Anything to put off work.

BLY. [Looking at MR MARCH, then giving a wipe at the window] What's drink to one is drought to another. I've seen two men take a drink out of the same can—one die of it and the other get off with a pain in his stomach.

MR MARCH. You've seen a lot, I expect.

BLY. Ah! I've been on the beach in my day. [He sponges at the window] It's given me a way o' lookin' at things that I don't find in other people. Look at the 'Ome Office. They got no philosophy.

MR MARCH. [Pricking his ears] What? Have you had dealings with them?

BLY. Over the reprieve that was got up for my daughter. But I'm keepin' you.

He swabs at the window, but always at the same pane, so that he does not advance at all.

MR MARCH. Reprieve?

BLY. Ah! She was famous at eighteen. The Sunday Mercury was full of her, when she was in prison.

MR MARCH. [Delicately] Dear me! I'd no idea.

BLY. She's out now; been out a fortnight. I always say that fame's ephemereal. But she'll never settle to that weavin'. Her head got turned a bit.

MR MARCH. I'm afraid I'm in the dark, Mr Bly.

BLY. [Pausing—dipping his sponge in the pail and then standing with it in his hand] Why! Don't you remember the Bly case? They sentenced 'er to be 'anged by the neck until she was dead, for smotherin' her baby. She was only eighteen at the time of speakin'.

MR MARCH. Oh! yes! An inhuman business!

BLY. All! The jury recommended 'er to mercy. So they reduced it to Life.

MR MARCH. Life! Sweet Heaven!

BLY. That's what I said; so they give her two years. I don't hold with the Sunday Mercury, but it put that over. It's a misfortune to a girl to be good-lookin'.

MR MARCH. [Rumpling his hair] No, no! Dash it all! Beauty's the only thing left worth living for.

BLY. Well, I like to see green grass and a blue sky; but it's a mistake in a 'uman bein'. Look at any young chap that's good-lookin'—'e's doomed to the screen, or hair-dressin'. Same with the girls. My girl went into an 'airdresser's at seventeen and in six months she was in trouble. When I saw 'er with a rope round her neck, as you might say, I said to meself: "Bly," I said, "you're responsible for this. If she 'adn't been good-lookin'—it'd never 'eve 'appened."

During this speech MARY has come in with a tray, to clear the breakfast, and stands unnoticed at the dining-table, arrested by the curious words of MR BLY.

MR MARCH. Your wife might not have thought that you were wholly the cause, Mr Bly.

BLY. Ah! My wife. She's passed on. But Faith—that's my girl's name—she never was like 'er mother; there's no 'eredit in 'er on that side.

MR MARCH. What sort of girl is she?

BLY. One for colour—likes a bit o' music—likes a dance, and a flower.

MARY. [Interrupting softly] Dad, I was going to clear, but I'll come back later.

MR MARCH. Come here and listen to this! Here's a story to get your blood up! How old was the baby, Mr Bly?

BLY. Two days—'ardly worth mentionin'. They say she 'ad the 'ighstrikes after—an' when she comes to she says: "I've saved my baby's life." An' that's true enough when you come to think what that sort o' baby goes through as a rule; dragged up by somebody else's hand, or took away by the Law. What can a workin' girl do with a baby born under the rose, as they call it? Wonderful the difference money makes when it comes to bein' outside the Law.

MR MARCH. Right you are, Mr Bly. God's on the side of the big battalions.

BLY. Ah! Religion! [His eyes roll philosophically] Did you ever read 'Aigel?

MR MARCH. Hegel, or Haekel?

BLY. Yes; with an aitch. There's a balance abart 'im that I like. There's no doubt the Christian religion went too far. Turn the other cheek! What oh! An' this Anti-Christ, Neesha, what came in with the war—he went too far in the other direction. Neither of 'em practical men. You've got to strike a balance, and foller it.

MR MARCH. Balance! Not much balance about us. We just run about and jump Jim Crow.

BLY. [With a perfunctory wipe] That's right; we 'aven't got a faith these days. But what's the use of tellin' the Englishman to act like an angel. He ain't either an angel or a blond beast. He's between the two, an 'ermumphradite. Take my daughter—If I was a blond beast, I'd turn 'er out to starve; if I was an angel, I'd starve meself to learn her the piano. I don't do either. Why? Becos my instincts tells me not.

MR MARCH. Yes, but my doubt is whether our instincts at this moment of the world's history are leading us up or down.

BLY. What is up and what is down? Can you answer me that? Is it up or down to get so soft that you can't take care of yourself?

MR MARCH. Down.

BLY. Well, is it up or down to get so 'ard that you can't take care of others?

MR MARCH. Down.

BLY. Well, there you are!

MARCH. Then our instincts are taking us down?

BLY. Nao. They're strikin' a balance, unbeknownst, all the time.

MR MARCH. You're a philosopher, Mr Bly.

BLY. [Modestly] Well, I do a bit in that line, too. In my opinion Nature made the individual believe he's goin' to live after'e's dead just to keep 'im livin' while 'es alive—otherwise he'd 'a died out.

MR MARCH. Quite a thought—quite a thought!

BLY. But I go one better than Nature. Follow your instincts is my motto.

MR MARCH. Excuse me, Mr Bly, I think Nature got hold of that before you.

BLY. [Slightly chilled] Well, I'm keepin' you.

MR MARCH. Not at all. You're a believer in conscience, or the little voice within. When my son was very small, his mother asked him once if he didn't hear a little voice within, telling him what was right. [MR MARCH touches his diaphragm] And he said "I often hear little voices in here, but they never say anything." [MR BLY cannot laugh, but he smiles] Mary, Johnny must have been awfully like the Government.

BLY. As a matter of fact, I've got my daughter here—in obedience.

MR MARCH. Where? I didn't catch.

BLY. In the kitchen. Your Cook told me you couldn't get hold of an 'ouse parlour-maid. So I thought it was just a chance—you bein' broadminded.

MR MARCH. Oh! I see. What would your mother say, Mary?

MARY. Mother would say: "Has she had experience?"

BLY. I've told you about her experience.

MR MARCH. Yes, but—as a parlour-maid.

BLY. Well! She can do hair. [Observing the smile exchanged between MR MARCH and MARY] And she's quite handy with a plate.

MR MARCH. [Tentatively] I'm a little afraid my wife would feel—

BLY. You see, in this weavin' shop—all the girls 'ave 'ad to be in trouble, otherwise they wouldn't take 'em. [Apologetically towards MARY] It's a kind of a disorderly 'ouse without the disorders. Excusin' the young lady's presence.

MARY. Oh! You needn't mind me, Mr Bly.

MR MARCH. And so you want her to come here? H'm!

BLY. Well I remember when she was a little bit of a thing—no higher than my knee—[He holds out his hand.]

MR MARCH. [Suddenly moved] My God! yes. They've all been that. [To MARY] Where's your mother?

MARY. Gone to Mrs Hunt's. Suppose she's engaged one, Dad?

MR MARCH. Well, it's only a month's wages.

MARY. [Softly] She won't like it.

MR MARCH. Well, let's see her, Mr Bly; let's see her, if you don't mind.

BLY. Oh, I don't mind, sir, and she won't neither; she's used to bein' inspected by now. Why! she 'ad her bumps gone over just before she came out!

MR MARCH. [Touched on the raw again] H'm! Too bad! Mary, go and fetch her.

MARY, with a doubting smile, goes out. [Rising] You might give me the details of that trial, Mr Bly. I'll see if I can't write something that'll make people sit up. That's the way to send Youth to hell! How can a child who's had a rope round her neck—!

BLY. [Who has been fumbling in his pocket, produces some yellow paper-cuttings clipped together] Here's her references—the whole literature of the case. And here's a letter from the chaplain in one of the prisons sayin' she took a lot of interest in him; a nice young man, I believe. [He suddenly brushes a tear out of his eye with the back of his hand] I never thought I could 'a felt like I did over her bein' in prison. Seemed a crool senseless thing—that pretty girl o' mine. All over a baby that hadn't got used to bein' alive. Tain't as if she'd been follerin' her instincts; why, she missed that baby something crool.

MR MARCH. Of course, human life—even an infant's—

BLY. I know you've got to 'ave a close time for it. But when you come to think how they take 'uman life in Injia and Ireland, and all those other places, it seems 'ard to come down like a cartload o' bricks on a bit of a girl that's been carried away by a moment's abiration.

MR MARCH. [Who is reading the cuttings] H'm! What hypocrites we are!

BLY. Ah! And 'oo can tell 'oo's the father? She never give us his name. I think the better of 'er for that.

MR MARCH. Shake hands, Mr Bly. So do I. [BLY wipes his hand, and MR MARCH shakes it] Loyalty's loyalty—especially when we men benefit by it.

BLY. That's right, sir.

MARY has returned with FAITH BLY, who stands demure and pretty on the far side of the table, her face an embodiment of the pathetic watchful prison faculty of adapting itself to whatever may be best for its owner at the moment. At this moment it is obviously best for her to look at the ground, and yet to take in the faces of MR MARCH and MARY without their taking her face in. A moment, for all, of considerable embarrassment.

MR MARCH. [Suddenly] We'll, here we are!

The remark attracts FAITH; she raises her eyes to his softly with a little smile, and drops them again.

So you want to be our parlour-maid?

FAITH. Yes, please.

MR MARCH. Well, Faith can remove mountains; but—er—I don't know if she can clear tables.

BLY. I've been tellin' Mr March and the young lady what you're capable of. Show 'em what you can do with a plate.

FAITH takes the tray from the sideboard and begins to clear the table, mainly by the light of nature. After a glance, MR MARCH looks out of the window and drums his fingers on the uncleaned pane. MR BLY goes on with his cleaning. MARY, after watching from the hearth, goes up and touches her father's arm.

MARY. [Between him and MR BLY who is bending over his bucket, softly] You're not watching, Dad.

MR MARCH. It's too pointed.

MARY. We've got to satisfy mother.

MR MARCH. I can satisfy her better if I don't look.

MARY. You're right.

FAITH has paused a moment and is watching them. As MARY turns, she resumes her operations. MARY joins, and helps her finish clearing, while the two men converse.

BLY. Fine weather, sir, for the time of year.

MR MARCH. It is. The trees are growing.

BLY. All! I wouldn't be surprised to see a change of Government before long. I've seen 'uge trees in Brazil without any roots—seen 'em come down with a crash.

MR MARCH. Good image, Mr Bly. Hope you're right!

BLY. Well, Governments! They're all the same—Butter when they're out of power, and blood when they're in. And Lord! 'ow they do abuse other Governments for doin' the things they do themselves. Excuse me, I'll want her dosseer back, sir, when you've done with it.

MR MARCH. Yes, yes. [He turns, rubbing his hands at the cleared table] Well, that seems all right! And you can do hair?

FAITH. Oh! Yes, I can do hair. [Again that little soft look, and smile so carefully adjusted.]

MR MARCH. That's important, don't you think, Mary? [MARY, accustomed to candour, smiles dubiously.] [Brightly] Ah! And cleaning plate? What about that?

FAITH. Of course, if I had the opportunity—

MARY. You haven't—so far?

FAITH. Only tin things.

MR MARCH. [Feeling a certain awkwardness] Well, I daresay we can find some for you. Can you—er—be firm on the telephone?

FAITH. Tell them you're engaged when you're not? Oh! yes.

MR MARCH. Excellent! Let's see, Mary, what else is there?

MARY. Waiting, and house work.

MR MARCH. Exactly.

FAITH. I'm very quick. I—I'd like to come. [She looks down] I don't care for what I'm doing now. It makes you feel your position.

MARY. Aren't they nice to you?

FAITH. Oh! yes—kind; but— [She looks up] it's against my instincts.

MR MARCH. Oh! [Quizzically] You've got a disciple, Mr Bly.

BLY. [Rolling his eyes at his daughter] Ah! but you mustn't 'ave instincts here, you know. You've got a chance, and you must come to stay, and do yourself credit.

FAITH. [Adapting her face] Yes, I know, I'm very lucky.

MR MARCH. [Deprecating thanks and moral precept] That's all right! Only, Mr Bly, I can't absolutely answer for Mrs March. She may think—

MARY. There is Mother; I heard the door.

BLY. [Taking up his pail] I quite understand, sir; I've been a married man myself. It's very queer the way women look at things. I'll take her away now, and come back presently and do these other winders. You can talk it over by yourselves. But if you do see your way, sir, I shan't forget it in an 'urry. To 'ave the responsibility of her—really, it's dreadful.

FAITH's face has grown sullen during this speech, but it clears up in another little soft look at MR MARCH, as she and MR BLY go out.

MR MARCH. Well, Mary, have I done it?

MARY. You have, Dad.

MR MARCH. [Running his hands through his hair] Pathetic little figure! Such infernal inhumanity!

MARY. How are you going to put it to mother?

MR MARCH. Tell her the story, and pitch it strong.

MARY. Mother's not impulsive.

MR MARCH. We must tell her, or she'll think me mad.

MARY. She'll do that, anyway, dear.

MR MARCH. Here she is! Stand by!

He runs his arm through MARY's, and they sit on the fender, at bay.
MRS MARCH enters, Left.

MR MARCH. Well, what luck?

MRS MARCH. None.

MR MARCH. [Unguardedly] Good!

MRS MARCH. What?

MRS MARCH. [Cheerfully] Well, the fact is, Mary and I have caught one for 'you; Mr Bly's daughter—

MRS MARCH. Are you out of your senses? Don't you know that she's the girl who—

MR MARCH. That's it. She wants a lift.

MRS MARCH. Geof!

MR MARCH. Well, don't we want a maid?

MRS MARCH. [Ineffably] Ridiculous!

MR MARCH. We tested her, didn't we, Mary?

MRS MARCH. [Crossing to the bell, and ringing] You'll just send for Mr Bly and get rid of her again.

MR MARCH. Joan, if we comfortable people can't put ourselves a little out of the way to give a helping hand—

MRS MARCH. To girls who smother their babies?

MR MARCH. Joan, I revolt. I won't be a hypocrite and a Pharisee.

MRS MARCH. Well, for goodness sake let me be one.

MARY. [As the door opens]. Here's Cook!

COOK stands—sixty, stout, and comfortable with a crumpled smile.

COOK. Did you ring, ma'am?

MR MARCH. We're in a moral difficulty, Cook, so naturally we come to you.

COOK beams.

MRS MARCH. [Impatiently] Nothing of the sort, Cook; it's a question of common sense.

COOK. Yes, ma'am.

MRS MARCH. That girl, Faith Bly, wants to come here as parlour-maid.
Absurd!

MARCH. You know her story, Cook? I want to give the poor girl a chance.
Mrs March thinks it's taking chances. What do you say?

COCK. Of course, it is a risk, sir; but there! you've got to take 'em to get maids nowadays. If it isn't in the past, it's in the future. I daresay I could learn 'er.

MRS MARCH. It's not her work, Cook, it's her instincts. A girl who smothered a baby that she oughtn't to have had—

MR MARCH. [Remonstrant] If she hadn't had it how could she have smothered it?

COOK. [Soothingly] Perhaps she's repented, ma'am.

MRS MARCH. Of course she's repented. But did you ever know repentance change anybody, Cook?

COOK. [Smiling] Well, generally it's a way of gettin' ready for the next.

MRS MARCH. Exactly.

MR MARCH. If we never get another chance because we repent—

COOK. I always think of Master Johnny, ma'am, and my jam; he used to repent so beautiful, dear little feller—such a conscience! I never could bear to lock it away.

MRS MARCH. Cook, you're wandering. I'm surprised at your encouraging the idea; I really am.

Cook plaits her hands.

MR MARCH. Cook's been in the family longer than I have—haven't you, Cook? [COOK beams] She knows much more about a girl like that than we do.

COOK. We had a girl like her, I remember, in your dear mother's time, Mr Geoffrey.

MR MARCH. How did she turn out?

COOK. Oh! She didn't.

MRS MARCH. There!

MR MARCH. Well, I can't bear behaving like everybody else. Don't you think we might give her a chance, Cook?

COOK. My 'eart says yes, ma'am.

MR MARCH. Ha!

COOK. And my 'ead says no, sir.

MRS MARCH. Yes!

MR MARCH. Strike your balance, Cook.

COOK involuntarily draws her joined hands sharply in upon her amplitude.

Well? . . . I didn't catch the little voice within.

COOK. Ask Master Johnny, sir; he's been in the war.

MR MARCH. [To MARY] Get Johnny.

MARY goes out.

MRS MARCH. What on earth has the war to do with it?

COOK. The things he tells me, ma'am, is too wonderful for words. He's 'ad to do with prisoners and generals, every sort of 'orror.

MR MARCH. Cook's quite right. The war destroyed all our ideals and probably created the baby.

MRS MARCH. It didn't smother it; or condemn the girl.

MR MARCH. [Running his hands through his hair] The more I think of that—! [He turns away.]

MRS MARCH. [Indicating her husband] You see, Cook, that's the mood in which I have to engage a parlour-maid. What am I to do with your master?

COOK. It's an 'ealthy rage, ma'am.

MRS MARCH. I'm tired of being the only sober person in this house.

COOK. [Reproachfully] Oh! ma'am, I never touch a drop.

MRS MARCH. I didn't mean anything of that sort. But they do break out so.

COOK. Not Master Johnny.

MRS MARCH. Johnny! He's the worst of all. His poetry is nothing but one long explosion.

MR MARCH. [Coming from the window] I say We ought to have faith and jump.

MRS MARCH. If we do have Faith, we shall jump.

COOK. [Blankly] Of course, in the Bible they 'ad faith, and just look what it did to them!

MR MARCH. I mean faith in human instincts, human nature, Cook.

COOK. [Scandalised] Oh! no, sir, not human nature; I never let that get the upper hand.

MR MARCH. You talk to Mr Bly. He's a remarkable man.

COOK. I do, sir, every fortnight when he does the kitchen windows.

MR MARCH. Well, doesn't he impress you?

COOK. Ah! When he's got a drop o' stout in 'im—Oh! dear! [She smiles placidly.]

JOHNNY has come in.

MR MARCH. Well, Johnny, has Mary told you?

MRS MARCH. [Looking at his face] Now, my dear boy, don't be hasty and foolish!

JOHNNY. Of course you ought to take her, Mother.

MRS MARCH. [Fixing him] Have you seen her, Johnny?

JOHNNY. She's in the hall, poor little devil, waiting for her sentence.

MRS MARCH. There are plenty of other chances, Johnny. Why on earth should we—?

JOHNNY. Mother, it's just an instance. When something comes along that takes a bit of doing—Give it to the other chap!

MR MARCH. Bravo, Johnny!

MRS MARCH. [Drily] Let me see, which of us will have to put up with her shortcomings—Johnny or I?

MARY. She looks quick, Mother.

MRS MARCH. Girls pick up all sorts of things in prison. We can hardly expect her to be honest. You don't mind that, I suppose?

JOHNNY. It's a chance to make something decent out of her.

MRS MARCH. I can't understand this passion for vicarious heroism, Johnny.

JOHNNY. Vicarious!

MRS MARCH. Well, where do you come in? You'll make poems about the injustice of the Law. Your father will use her in a novel. She'll wear Mary's blouses, and everybody will be happy—except Cook and me.

MR MARCH. Hang it all, Joan, you might be the Great Public itself!

MRS MARCH. I am—get all the kicks and none of the ha'pence.

JOHNNY. We'll all help you.

MRS MARCH. For Heaven's sake—no, Johnny!

MR MARCH. Well, make up your mind!

MRS MARCH. It was made up long ago.

JOHNNY. [Gloomily] The more I see of things the more disgusting they seem. I don't see what we're living for. All right. Chuck the girl out, and let's go rooting along with our noses in the dirt.

MR MARCH. Steady, Johnny!

JOHNNY. Well, Dad, there was one thing anyway we learned out there—
When a chap was in a hole—to pull him out, even at a risk.

MRS MARCH. There are people who—the moment you pull them out—jump in again.

MARY. We can't tell till we've tried, Mother.

COOK. It's wonderful the difference good food'll make, ma'am.

MRS MARCH. Well, you're all against me. Have it your own way, and when you regret it—remember me!

MR MARCH. We will—we will! That's settled, then. Bring her in and tell her. We'll go on to the terrace.

He goes out through the window, followed by JOHNNY.

MARY. [Opening the door] Come in, please.

FAITH enters and stands beside COOK, close to the door. MARY goes out.

MRS MARCH. [Matter of fact in defeat as in victory] You want to come to us, I hear.

FAITH. Yes.

MRS MARCH. And you don't know much?

FAITH. No.

COOK. [Softly] Say ma'am, dearie.

MRS MARCH. Cook is going to do her best for you. Are you going to do yours for us?

FAITH. [With a quick look up] Yes—ma'am.

MRS MARCH. Can you begin at once?

FAITH. Yes.

MRS MARCH. Well, then, Cook will show you where things are kept, and how to lay the table and that. Your wages will be thirty until we see where we are. Every other Sunday, and Thursday afternoon. What about dresses?

FAITH. [Looking at her dress] I've only got this—I had it before, of course, it hasn't been worn.

MRS MARCH. Very neat. But I meant for the house. You've no money, I suppose?

FAITH. Only one pound thirteen, ma'am.

MRS MARCH. We shall have to find you some dresses, then. Cook will take you to-morrow to Needham's. You needn't wear a cap unless you like. Well, I hope you'll get on. I'll leave you with Cook now.

After one look at the girl, who is standing motionless, she goes out.

FAITH. [With a jerk, as if coming out of plaster of Paris] She's never been in prison!

COOK. [Comfortably] Well, my dear, we can't all of us go everywhere, 'owever 'ard we try!

She is standing back to the dresser, and turns to it, opening the right-hand drawer.

COOK. Now, 'ere's the wine. The master likes 'is glass. And 'ere's the spirits in the tantaliser 'tisn't ever kept locked, in case Master Johnny should bring a friend in. Have you noticed Master Johnny? [FAITH nods] Ah! He's a dear boy; and wonderful high-principled since he's been in the war. He'll come to me sometimes and say: "Cook, we're all going to the devil!" They think 'ighly of 'im as a poet. He spoke up for you beautiful.

FAITH. Oh! He spoke up for me?

COOK. Well, of course they had to talk you over.

FAITH. I wonder if they think I've got feelings.

COOK. [Regarding her moody, pretty face] Why! We all have feelin's!

FAITH. Not below three hundred a year.

COOK. [Scandalised] Dear, dear! Where were you educated?

FAITH. I wasn't.

COOK. Tt! Well—it's wonderful what a change there is in girls since my young days [Pulling out a drawer] Here's the napkins. You change the master's every day at least because of his moustache and the others every two days, but always clean ones Sundays. Did you keep Sundays in there?

FAITH. [Smiling] Yes. Longer chapel.

COOK. It'll be a nice change for you, here. They don't go to Church; they're agnosticals. [Patting her shoulder] How old are you?

FAITH. Twenty.

COOK. Think of that—and such a life! Now, dearie, I'm your friend. Let the present bury the past—as the sayin' is. Forget all about yourself, and you'll be a different girl in no time.

FAITH. Do you want to be a different woman?

COOK is taken flat aback by so sudden a revelation of the pharisaism of which she has not been conscious.

COOK. Well! You are sharp! [Opening another dresser drawer] Here's the vinegar! And here's the sweets, and [rather anxiously] you mustn't eat them.

FAITH. I wasn't in for theft.

COOK. [Shocked at such rudimentary exposure of her natural misgivings] No, no! But girls have appetites.

FAITH. They didn't get much chance where I've been.

COOK. Ah! You must tell me all about it. Did you have adventures?

FAITH. There isn't such a thing in a prison.

COOK. You don't say! Why, in the books they're escapin' all the time. But books is books; I've always said so. How were the men?

FAITH. Never saw a man—only a chaplain.

COOK. Dear, dear! They must be quite fresh to you, then! How long was it?

FAITH. Two years.

COOK. And never a day out? What did you do all the time? Did they learn you anything?

FAITH. Weaving. That's why I hate it.

COOK. Tell me about your poor little baby. I'm sure you meant it for the best.

FAITH. [Sardonically] Yes; I was afraid they'd make it a ward in Chancery.

COOK. Oh! dear—what things do come into your head! Why! No one can take a baby from its mother.

FAITH. Except the Law.

COOK. Tt! Tt! Well! Here's the pickled onions. Miss Mary loves 'em! Now then, let me see you lay the cloth.

She takes a tablecloth out, hands it to FAITH, and while the girl

begins to unfold the cloth she crosses to the service shutter.

And here's where we pass the dishes through into the pantry.

The door is opened, and MRS MARCH'S voice says: "Cook—a minute!"

[Preparing to go] Salt cellars one at each corner—four, and the peppers.
[From the door] Now the decanters. Oh! you'll soon get on. [MRS MARCH
"Cook!"] Yes, ma'am.

She goes. FAITH, left alone, stands motionless, biting her pretty lip, her eyes mutinous. Hearing footsteps, she looks up. MR BLY, with his pail and cloths, appears outside.

BLY. [Preparing to work, while FAITH prepares to set the salt cellars] So you've got it! You never know your luck. Up to-day and down to-morrow. I'll 'ave a glass over this to-night. What d'you get?

FAITH. Thirty.

BLY. It's not the market price, still, you're not the market article. Now, put a good heart into it and get to know your job; you'll find Cook full o' philosophy if you treat her right—she can make a dumplin' with anybody. But look 'ere; you confine yourself to the ladies!

FAITH. I don't want your advice, father.

BLY. I know parents are out of date; still, I've put up with a lot on your account, so gimme a bit of me own back.

FAITH. I don't know whether I shall like this. I've been shut up so long. I want to see some life.

BLY. Well, that's natural. But I want you to do well. I suppose you'll be comin' 'ome to fetch your things to-night?

FAITH. Yes.

BLY. I'll have a flower for you. What'd you like—daffydils?

FAITH. No; one with a scent to it.

BLY. I'll ask at Mrs Bean's round the corner.

She'll pick 'em out from what's over. Never 'ad much nose for a flower meself. I often thought you'd like a flower when you was in prison.

FAITH. [A little touched] Did you? Did you really?

BLY. Ah! I suppose I've drunk more glasses over your bein' in there than over anything that ever 'appened to me. Why! I couldn't relish the war for it! And I suppose you 'ad none to relish. Well, it's over. So, put an 'eart into it.

FAITH. I'll try.

BLY. "There's compensation for everything," 'Aigel says. At least, if it wasn't 'Aigel it was one o' the others. I'll move on to the study now. Ah! He's got some winders there lookin' right over the country. And a wonderful lot o' books, if you feel inclined for a read one of these days.

COOK'S Voice. Faith!

FAITH sets down the salt cellar in her hand, puts her tongue out a very little, and goes out into the hall. MR BLY is gathering up his pail and cloths when MR MARCH enters at the window.

MR MARCH. So it's fixed up, Mr Bly.

BLY. [Raising himself] I'd like to shake your 'and, sir. [They shake hands] It's a great weight off my mind.

MR MARCH. It's rather a weight on my wife's, I'm afraid. But we must hope for the best. The country wants rain, but—I doubt if we shall get it with this Government.

BLY. Ah! We want the good old times-when you could depend on the seasons. The further you look

back the more dependable the times get; 'ave you noticed that, sir?

MR MARCH. [Suddenly] Suppose they'd hanged your daughter, Mr Bly. What would you have done?

BLY. Well, to be quite frank, I should 'ave got drunk on it.

MR MARCH. Public opinion's always in advance of the Law. I think your daughter's a most pathetic little figure.

BLY. Her looks are against her. I never found a man that didn't.

MR MARCH. [A little disconcerted] Well, we'll try and give her a good show here.

BLY. [Taking up his pail] I'm greatly obliged; she'll appreciate anything you can do for her. [He moves to the door and pauses there to say] Fact is—her winders wants cleanin', she 'ad a dusty time in there.

MR MARCH. I'm sure she had.

MR BLY passes out, and MR MARCH busies himself in gathering up his writing things preparatory to seeking his study. While he is so engaged FAITH comes in. Glancing at him, she resumes her placing of the decanters, as JOHNNY enters by the window, and comes down to his father by the hearth.

JOHNNY. [Privately] If you haven't begun your morning, Dad, you might just tell me what you think of these verses.

He puts a sheet of notepaper before his father, who takes it and begins to con over the verses thereon, while JOHNNY looks carefully at his nails.

MR MARCH. Er—I—I like the last line awfully, Johnny.

JOHNNY. [Gloomily] What about the other eleven?

MR MARCH. [Tentatively] Well—old man, I—er—think perhaps it'd be stronger if they were out.

JOHNNY. Good God!

He takes back the sheet of paper, clutches his brow, and crosses to the door. As he passes FAITH, she looks up at him with eyes full of expression. JOHNNY catches the look, jibs ever so little, and goes out.

COOK'S VOICE. [Through the door, which is still ajar] Faith!

FAITH puts the decanters on the table, and goes quickly out.

MR MARCH. [Who has seen this little by-play—to himself—in a voice of dismay] Oh! oh! I wonder!

CURTAIN.

ACT II

A fortnight later in the MARCH'S dining-room; a day of violent April showers. Lunch is over and the table littered with, remains—twelve baskets full.

MR MARCH and MARY have lingered. MR MARCH is standing by the hearth where a fire is burning, filling a fountain pen. MARY sits at the table opposite, pecking at a walnut.

MR MARCH. [Examining his fingers] What it is to have an inky present! Suffer with me, Mary!

MARY. "Weep ye no more, sad Fountains!
Why need ye flow so fast?"

MR MARCH. [Pocketing his pen] Coming with me to the British Museum?
I want to have a look at the Assyrian reliefs.

MARY. Dad, have you noticed Johnny?

MR MARCH. I have.

MARY. Then only Mother hasn't.

MR MARCH. I've always found your mother extremely good at seeming not to notice things, Mary.

MARY. Faith! She's got on very fast this fortnight.

MR MARCH. The glad eye, Mary. I got it that first morning.

MARY. You, Dad?

MR MARCH. No, no! Johnny got it, and I got him getting it.

MARY. What are you going to do about it?

MR MARCH. What does one do with a glad eye that belongs to some one else?

MARY. [Laughing] No. But, seriously, Dad, Johnny's not like you and me. Why not speak to Mr Bly?

MR MARCH. Mr Bly's eyes are not glad.

MARY. Dad! Do be serious! Johnny's capable of anything except a sense of humour.

MR MARCH. The girl's past makes it impossible to say anything to her.

MARY. Well, I warn you. Johnny's very queer just now; he's in the "lose the world to save your soul" mood. It really is too bad of that girl. After all, we did what most people wouldn't.

MR MARCH. Come! Get your hat on, Mary, or we shan't make the Tube before the next shower.

MARY. [Going to the door] Something must be done.

MR MARCH. As you say, something—Ah! Mr Bly!

MR BLY, in precisely the same case as a fortnight ago, with his pail and cloths, is coming in.

BLY. Afternoon, sir! Shall I be disturbing you if I do the winders here?

MR MARCH. Not at all.

MR BLY crosses to the windows.

MARY. [Pointing to MR BLY's back] Try!

BLY. Showery, sir.

MR MARCH. Ah!

BLY. Very tryin' for winders. [Resting] My daughter givin' satisfaction, I hope?

MR MARCH. [With difficulty] Er—in her work, I believe, coming on well. But the question is, Mr Bly, do—er—any of us ever really give satisfaction except to ourselves?

BLY. [Taking it as an invitation to his philosophical vein] Ah! that's one as goes to the roots of 'uman nature. There's a lot of disposition in all of us. And what I always say is: One man's disposition is another man's indisposition.

MR MARCH. By George! Just hits the mark.

BLY. [Filling his sponge] Question is: How far are you to give rein to your disposition? When I was in Durban, Natal, I knew a man who had the biggest disposition I ever come across. 'E struck 'is wife, 'e smoked opium, 'e was a liar, 'e gave all the rein 'e could, and yet withal one of the pleasantest men I ever met.

MR MARCH. Perhaps in giving rein he didn't strike you.

BLY. [With a big wipe, following his thought] He said to me once: "Joe," he said, "if I was to hold meself in, I should be a devil." There's where you get it. Policemen, priests, prisoners. Cab'net Ministers, any one who leads an unnatural life, see how it twists 'em. You can't suppress a thing without it swellin' you up in another place.

MR MARCH. And the moral of that is—?

BLY. Follow your instincts. You see—if I'm not keepin' you—now that we ain't got no faith, as we were sayin' the other day, no Ten Commandments in black an' white—we've just got to be 'uman bein's—raisin' Cain, and havin' feelin' hearts. What's the use of all these lofty ideas that you can't live up to? Liberty, Fraternity, Equality, Democracy—see what comes o' fightin' for 'em! 'Ere we are-wipin' out the lot. We thought they was fixed stars; they was only comets—hot air. No; trust 'uman nature, I say, and follow your instincts.

MR MARCH. We were talking of your daughter—I—I—

BLY. There's a case in point. Her instincts was starved goin' on for three years, because, mind you, they kept her hangin' about in prison months before they tried her. I read your article, and I thought to meself after I'd finished: Which would I feel smallest—if I was—the Judge, the Jury, or the 'Ome Secretary? It was a treat, that article! They ought to abolish that in'uman "To be hanged by the neck until she is dead." It's my belief they only keep it because it's poetry; that and the wigs—they're hard up for a bit of beauty in the Courts of Law. Excuse my 'and, sir; I do thank you for that article.

He extends his wiped hand, which MR MARCH shakes with the feeling that he is always shaking Mr. BLY's hand.

MR MARCH. But, apropos of your daughter, Mr Bly. I suppose none of us ever change our natures.

BLY. [Again responding to the appeal that he senses to his philosophical vein] Ah! but 'oo can see what our natures are? Why, I've known people that could see nothin' but theirselves and their own families, unless they was drunk. At my daughter's trial, I see right into the lawyers, judge and all. There she was, hub of the whole thing, and all they could see of her was 'ow far she affected 'em personally—one tryin' to get 'er guilty, the other tryin' to get 'er off, and the judge summin' 'er up cold-blooded.

MR MARCH. But that's what they're paid for, Mr Bly.

BLY. Ah! But which of 'em was thinkin' "'Ere's a little bit o' warm life on its own. 'Ere's a little dancin' creature. What's she feelin', wot's 'er complaint?"—impersonal-like. I like to see a man do a bit of speculatin', with his mind off of 'imself, for once.

MR MARCH. "The man that hath not speculation in his soul."

BLY. That's right, sir. When I see a mangy cat or a dog that's lost, or a fellow-creature down on his luck, I always try to put meself in his place. It's a weakness I've got.

MR MARCH. [Warmly] A deuced good one. Shake—

He checks himself, but MR BLY has wiped his hand and extended it.

While the shake is in progress MARY returns, and, having seen it to a safe conclusion, speaks.

MARY. Coming, Dad?

MR MARCH. Excuse me, Mr Bly, I must away.

He goes towards the door, and BLY dips his sponge.

MARY. [In a low voice] Well?

MR MARCH. Mr Bly is like all the greater men I know—he can't listen.

MARY. But you were shaking—

MR MARCH. Yes; it's a weakness we have—every three minutes.

MARY. [Bubbling] Dad—Silly!

MR MARCH. Very!

As they go out MR BLY pauses in his labours to catch, as it were, a philosophical reflection. He resumes the wiping of a pane, while quietly, behind him, FAITH comes in with a tray. She is dressed now in lilac-coloured linen, without a cap, and looks prettier than ever. She puts the tray down on the sideboard with a clap that attracts her father's attention, and stands contemplating the debris on the table.

BLY. Winders! There they are! Clean, dirty! All sorts—All round yer!
Winders!

FAITH. [With disgust] Food!

BLY. Ah! Food and winders! That's life!

FAITH. Eight times a day four times for them and four times for us.
I hate food!

She puts a chocolate into her mouth.

BLY. 'Ave some philosophy. I might just as well hate me winders.

FAITH. Well!

She begins to clear.

BLY. [Regarding her] Look 'ere, my girl! Don't you forget that there ain't many winders in London out o' which they look as philosophical as these here. Beggars can't be choosers.

FAITH. [Sullenly] Oh! Don't go on at me!

BLY. They spoiled your disposition in that place, I'm afraid.

FAITH. Try it, and see what they do with yours.

BLY. Well, I may come to it yet.

FAITH. You'll get no windows to look out of there; a little bit of a thing with bars to it, and lucky if it's not thick glass. [Standing still and gazing past MR BLY] No sun, no trees, no faces—people don't pass in the sky, not even angels.

BLY. Ah! But you shouldn't brood over it. I knew a man in Valpiraso that 'ad spent 'arf 'is life in prison—a jolly feller; I forget what 'e'd done, somethin' bloody. I want to see you like him. Aren't you happy here?

FAITH. It's right enough, so long as I get out.

BLY. This Mr March—he's like all these novel-writers—thinks 'e knows 'uman nature, but of course 'e don't. Still, I can talk to 'im—got an open mind, and hates the Gover'ment. That's the two great things. Mrs March, so far as I see, 'as got her head screwed on much tighter.

FAITH. She has.

BLY. What's the young man like? He's a long feller.

FAITH. Johnny? [With a shrug and a little smile] Johnny.

BLY. Well, that gives a very good idea of him. They say 'es a poet; does 'e leave 'em about?

FAITH. I've seen one or two.

BLY. What's their tone?

FAITH. All about the condition of the world; and the moon.

BLY. Ah! Depressin'. And the young lady?

FAITH shrugs her shoulders.

Um—'ts what I thought. She 'asn't moved much with the times. She thinks she 'as, but she 'asn't. Well, they seem a pleasant family. Leave you to yourself. 'Ow's Cook?

FAITH. Not much company.

BLY. More body than mind? Still, you get out, don't you?

FAITH. [With a slow smile] Yes. [She gives a sudden little twirl, and puts her hands up to her hair before the mirror] My afternoon to-day. It's fine in the streets, after-being in there.

BLY. Well! Don't follow your instincts too much, that's all! I must get on to the drawin' room now. There's a shower comin'. [Philosophically] It's 'ardly worth while to do these winders. You clean 'em, and they're dirty again in no time. It's like life. And people talk o' progress. What a sooperstition! Of course there ain't progress; it's a world-without-end affair. You've got to make up your mind to it, and not be discouraged. All this depression comes from 'avin' 'igh 'opes. 'Ave low 'opes, and you'll be all right.

He takes up his pail and cloths and moves out through the windows.

FAITH puts another chocolate into her mouth, and taking up a flower, twirls round with it held to her nose, and looks at herself in the glass over the hearth. She is still looking at herself when she sees in the mirror a reflection of JOHNNY, who has come in. Her face grows just a little scared, as if she had caught the eye of a warder peering through the peep-hole of her cell door, then brazens, and slowly sweetens as she turns round to him.

JOHNNY. Sorry! [He has a pipe in his hand and wears a Norfolk jacket]
Fond of flowers?

FAITH. Yes. [She puts back the flower] Ever so!

JOHNNY. Stick to it. Put it in your hair; it'll look jolly. How do you like it here?

FAITH. It's quiet.

JOHNNY. Ha! I wonder if you've got the feeling I have. We've both had hell, you know; I had three years of it, out there, and you've had three years of it here. The feeling that you can't catch up; can't live fast enough to get even.

FAITH nods.

Nothing's big enough; nothing's worth while enough—is it?

FAITH. I don't know. I know I'd like to bite. She draws her lips back.

JOHNNY. Ah! Tell me all about your beastly time; it'll do you good. You and I are different from anybody else in this house. We've lived they've just vegetated. Come on; tell me!

FAITH, who up to now has looked on him as a young male, stares at him for the first time without sex in her eyes.

FAITH. I can't. We didn't talk in there, you know.

JOHNNY. Were you fond of the chap who—?

FAITH. No. Yes. I suppose I was—once.

JOHNNY. He must have been rather a swine.

FAITH. He's dead.

JOHNNY. Sorry! Oh, sorry!

FAITH. I've forgotten all that.

JOHNNY. Beastly things, babies; and absolutely unnecessary in the present state of the world.

FAITH. [With a faint smile] My baby wasn't beastly; but I—I got upset.

JOHNNY. Well, I should think so!

FAITH. My friend in the manicure came and told me about hers when I was lying in the hospital. She couldn't have it with her, so it got neglected and died.

JOHNNY. Um! I believe that's quite common.

FAITH. And she told me about another girl—the Law took her baby from her. And after she was gone, I—got all worked up— [She hesitates, then goes swiftly on] And I looked at mine; it was asleep just

here, quite close. I just put out my arm like that, over its face—quite soft— I didn't hurt it. I didn't really. [She suddenly swallows, and her lips quiver] I didn't feel anything under my arm. And—and a beast of a nurse came on me, and said "You've smothered your baby, you wretched girl!"

I didn't want to kill it—I only wanted to save it from living. And when I looked at it, I went off screaming.

JOHNNY. I nearly screamed when I saved my first German from living. I never felt the same again. They say the human race has got to go on, but I say they've first got to prove that the human race wants to. Would you rather be alive or dead?

FAITH. Alive.

JOHNNY. But would you have in prison?

FAITH. I don't know. You can't tell anything in there. [With sudden vehemence] I wish I had my baby back, though. It was mine; and I—I don't like thinking about it.

JOHNNY. I know. I hate to think about anything I've killed, really. At least, I should—but it's better not to think.

FAITH. I could have killed that judge.

JOHNNY. Did he come the heavy father? That's what I can't stand. When they jaw a chap and hang him afterwards. Or was he one of the joking ones?

FAITH. I've sat in my cell and cried all night—night after night, I have. [With a little laugh] I cried all the softness out of me.

JOHNNY. You never believed they were going to hang you, did you?

FAITH. I didn't care if they did—not then.

JOHNNY. [With a reflective grunt] You had a much worse time than I. You were lonely—

FAITH. Have you been in a prison, ever?

JOHNNY. No, thank God!

FAITH. It's awfully clean.

JOHNNY. You bet.

FAITH. And it's stone cold. It turns your heart.

JOHNNY. Ah! Did you ever see a stalactite?

FAITH. What's that?

JOHNNY. In caves. The water drops like tears, and each drop has some sort of salt, and leaves it behind till there's just a long salt petrified drip hanging from the roof.

FAITH. Ah! [Staring at him] I used to stand behind my door. I'd stand there sometimes I don't know how long. I'd listen and listen—the noises are all hollow in a prison. You'd think you'd get used to being shut up, but I never did.

JOHNNY utters a deep grunt.

It's awful the feeling you get here—so tight and chokey. People who are free don't know what it's like to be shut up. If I'd had a proper window even—When you can see things living, it makes you feel alive.

JOHNNY. [Catching her arm] We'll make you feel alive again.

FAITH stares at him; sex comes back to her eyes. She looks down.

I bet you used to enjoy life, before.

FAITH. [Clasping her hands] Oh! yes, I did. And I love getting out now. I've got a fr— [She checks herself] The streets are beautiful, aren't they? Do you know Orleans Street?

JOHNNY. [Doubtful] No-o. . . . Where?

FAITH. At the corner out of the Regent. That's where we had our shop. I liked the hair-dressing. We had fun. Perhaps I've seen you before. Did you ever come in there?

JOHNNY. No.

FAITH. I'd go back there; only they wouldn't take me—I'm too conspicuous now.

JOHNNY. I expect you're well out of that.

FAITH. [With a sigh] But I did like it. I felt free. We had an hour off in the middle of the day; you could go where you liked; and then, after hours—I love the streets at night—all lighted. Olga—that's one of the other girls—and I used to walk about for hours. That's life! Fancy! I never saw a street for more than two years. Didn't you miss them in the war?

JOHNNY. I missed grass and trees more—the trees! All burnt, and splintered. Gah!

FAITH. Yes, I like trees too; anything beautiful, you know. I think the parks are lovely—but they might let you pick the flowers. But the lights are best, really—they make you feel happy. And music—I love an organ. There was one used to come and play outside the prison—before I was tried. It sounded so far away and lovely. If I could 'ave met the man that played that organ, I'd have kissed him. D'you think he did it on purpose?

JOHNNY. He would have, if he'd been me.

He says it unconsciously, but FAITH is instantly conscious of the implication.

FAITH. He'd rather have had pennies, though. It's all earning; working and earning. I wish I were like the flowers. [She twirls the dower in her hand] Flowers don't work, and they don't get put in prison.

JOHNNY. [Putting his arm round her] Never mind! Cheer up! You're only a kid. You'll have a good time yet.

FAITH leans against him, as if were indifferently, clearly expecting him to kiss her, but he doesn't.

FAITH. When I was a little girl I had a cake covered with sugar. I ate the sugar all off and then I didn't want the cake—not much.

JOHNNY. [Suddenly, removing his arm] Gosh! If I could write a poem that would show everybody what was in the heart of everybody else—!

FAITH. It'd be too long for the papers, wouldn't it?

JOHNNY. It'd be too strong.

FAITH. Besides, you don't know.

Her eyelids go up.

JOHNNY. [Staring at her] I could tell what's in you now.

FAITH. What?

JOHNNY. You feel like a flower that's been picked.

FAITH's smile is enigmatic.

FAITH. [Suddenly] Why do you go on about me so?

JOHNNY. Because you're weak—little and weak. [Breaking out again] Damn it! We went into the war to save the little and weak; at least we said so; and look at us now! The bottom's out of all that. [Bitterly] There isn't a faith or an illusion left. Look here! I want to help you.

FAITH. [Surprisingly] My baby was little and weak.

JOHNNY. You never meant—You didn't do it for your own advantage.

FAITH. It didn't know it was alive. [Suddenly] D'you think I'm pretty?

JOHNNY. As pie.

FAITH. Then you'd better keep away, hadn't you?

JOHNNY. Why?

FAITH. You might want a bite.

JOHNNY. Oh! I can trust myself.

FAITH. [Turning to the window, through which can be seen the darkening of a shower] It's raining. Father says windows never stay clean.

They stand close together, unaware that COOK has thrown up the service shutter, to see why the clearing takes so long. Her astounded head and shoulders pass into view just as FAITH suddenly puts up her face. JOHNNY'S lips hesitate, then move towards her forehead. But her face shifts, and they find themselves upon her lips. Once there, the emphasis cannot help but be considerable. COOK'S mouth falls open.

COOK. Oh!

She closes the shutter, vanishing.

FAITH. What was that?

JOHNNY. Nothing. [Breaking away] Look here! I didn't mean—I oughtn't to have—Please forget it!

FAITH. [With a little smile] Didn't you like it?

JOHNNY. Yes—that's just it. I didn't mean to It won't do.

FAITH. Why not?

JOHNNY. No, no! It's just the opposite of what—No, no!

He goes to the door, wrenches it open and goes out.

FAITH, still with that little half-mocking, half-contented smile, resumes the clearing of the table. She is interrupted by the entrance through the French windows of MR MARCH and MARY, struggling with one small wet umbrella.

MARY. [Feeling his sleeve] Go and change, Dad.

MR MARCH. Women's shoes! We could have made the Tube but for your shoes.

MARY. It was your cold feet, not mine, dear. [Looking at FAITH and nudging him] Now!

She goes towards the door, turns to look at FAITH still clearing the table, and goes out.

MR MARCH. [In front of the hearth] Nasty spring weather, Faith.

FAITH. [Still in the mood of the kiss] Yes, Sir.

MR MARCH. [Sotto voce] "In the spring a young man's fancy." I—I wanted to say something to you in a friendly way.

FAITH regards him as he struggles on. Because I feel very friendly towards you.

FAITH. Yes.

MR MARCH. So you won't take what I say in bad part?

FAITH. No.

MR MARCH. After what you've been through, any man with a sense of chivalry—

FAITH gives a little shrug.

Yes, I know—but we don't all support the Government.

FAITH. I don't know anything about the Government.

MR MARCH. [Side-tracked on to his hobby] Ah I forgot. You saw no newspapers. But you ought to

pick up the threads now. What paper does Cook take?

FAITH. "COSY."

MR MARCH. "Cosy"? I don't seem— What are its politics?

FAITH. It hasn't any—only funny bits, and fashions. It's full of corsets.

MR MARCH. What does Cook want with corsets?

FAITH. She likes to think she looks like that.

MR MARCH. By George! Cook an idealist! Let's see!—er—I was speaking of chivalry. My son, you know—er—my son has got it.

FAITH. Badly?

MR MARCH. [Suddenly alive to the fact that she is playing with him] I started by being sorry for you.

FAITH. Aren't you, any more?

MR MARCH. Look here, my child!

FAITH looks up at him. [Protectingly] We want to do our best for you. Now, don't spoil it by— Well, you know!

FAITH. [Suddenly] Suppose you'd been stuffed away in a hole for years!

MR MARCH. [Side-tracked again] Just what your father said. The more I see of Mr Bly, the more wise I think him.

FAITH. About other people.

MR MARCH. What sort of bringing up did he give you?

FAITH smiles wryly and shrugs her shoulders.

MR MARCH. H'm! Here comes the sun again!

FAITH. [Taking up the flower which is lying on the table] May I have this flower?

MR MARCH. Of Course. You can always take what flowers you like—that is—if—er—

FAITH. If Mrs March isn't about?

MR MARCH. I meant, if it doesn't spoil the look of the table. We must all be artists in our professions, mustn't we?

FAITH. My profession was cutting hair. I would like to cut yours.

MR MARCH'S hands instinctively go up to it.

MR MARCH. You mightn't think it, but I'm talking to you seriously.

FAITH. I was, too.

MR MARCH. [Out of his depth] Well! I got wet; I must go and change.

FAITH follows him with her eyes as he goes out, and resumes the clearing of the table. She has paused and is again smelling at the flower when she hears the door, and quickly resumes her work. It is MRS MARCH, who comes in and goes to the writing table, Left Back, without looking at FAITH. She sits there writing a cheque, while FAITH goes on clearing.

MRS MARCH. [Suddenly, in an unruffled voice] I have made your cheque out for four pounds. It's rather more than the fortnight, and a month's notice. There'll be a cab for you in an hour's time. Can you be ready by then?

FAITH. [Astonished] What for—ma'am?

MRS MARCH. You don't suit.

FAITH. Why?

MRS MARCH. Do you wish for the reason?

FAITH. [Breathless] Yes.

MRS MARCH. Cook saw you just now.

FAITH. [Blankly] Oh! I didn't mean her to.

MRS MARCH. Obviously.

FAITH. I—I—

MRS MARCH. Now go and pack up your things.

FAITH. He asked me to be a friend to him. He said he was lonely here.

MRS MARCH. Don't be ridiculous. Cook saw you kissing him with p—p—

FAITH. [Quickly] Not with pep.

MRS MARCH. I was going to say "passion." Now, go quietly.

FAITH. Where am I to go?

MRS MARCH. You will have four pounds, and you can get another place.

FAITH. How?

MRS MARCH. That's hardly my affair.

FAITH. [Tossing her head] All right!

MRS MARCH. I'll speak to your father, if he isn't gone.

FAITH. Why do you send me away—just for a kiss! What's a kiss?

MRS MARCH. That will do.

FAITH. [Desperately] He wanted to—to save me.

MRS MARCH. You know perfectly well people can only save themselves.

FAITH. I don't care for your son; I've got a young—[She checks herself]
I—I'll leave your son alone, if he leaves me.

MRS MARCH rings the bell on the table.

[Desolately] Well? [She moves towards the door. Suddenly holding out the flower] Mr March gave me that flower; would you like it back?

MRS MARCH. Don't be absurd! If you want more money till you get a place, let me know.

FAITH. I won't trouble you.

She goes out.

MRS MARCH goes to the window and drums her fingers on the pane.

COOK enters.

MRS MARCH. Cook, if Mr Bly's still here, I want to see him. Oh! And it's three now. Have a cab at four o'clock.

COOK. [Almost tearful] Oh, ma'am—anybody but Master Johnny, and I'd 'ave been a deaf an' dummy. Poor girl! She's not responsive, I daresay. Suppose I was to speak to Master Johnny?

MRS MARCH. No, no, Cook! Where's Mr Bly?

COOK. He's done his windows; he's just waiting for his money.

MRS MARCH. Then get him; and take that tray.

COOK. I remember the master kissin' me, when he was a boy. But then he never meant anything; so different from Master Johnny. Master Johnny takes things to 'eart.

MRS MARCH. Just so, Cook.

COOK. There's not an ounce of vice in 'im. It's all his goodness, dear little feller.

MRS MARCH. That's the danger, with a girl like that.

COOK. It's eatin' hearty all of a sudden that's made her poptions. But there, ma'am, try her again. Master Johnny'll be so cut up!

MRS MARCH. No playing with fire, Cook. We were foolish to let her come.

COOK. Oh! dear, he will be angry with me. If you hadn't been in the kitchen and heard me, ma'am, I'd ha' let it pass.

MRS MARCH. That would have been very wrong of you.

COOK. Ah! But I'd do a lot of wrong things for Master Johnny. There's always some one you'll go wrong for!

MRS MARCH. Well, get Mr Bly; and take that tray, there's a good soul.

COOK goes out with the tray; and while waiting, MRS MARCH finishes clearing the table. She has not quite finished when MR BLY enters.

BLY. Your service, ma'am!

MRS MARCH. [With embarrassment] I'm very sorry, Mr Bly, but circumstances over which I have no control—

BLY. [With deprecation] Ah! we all has them. The winders ought to be done once a week now the Spring's on 'em.

MRS MARCH. No, no; it's your daughter—

BLY. [Deeply] Not been given' way to'er instincts, I do trust.

MRS MARCH. Yes. I've just had to say good-bye to her.

BLY. [Very blank] Nothing to do with property, I hope?

MRS MARCH. No, no! Giddiness with my son. It's impossible; she really must learn.

BLY. Oh! but 'oo's to learn 'er? Couldn't you learn your son instead?

MRS MARCH. No. My son is very high-minded.

BLY. [Dubiously] I see. How am I goin' to get over this? Shall I tell you what I think, ma'am?

MRS MARCH. I'm afraid it'll be no good.

BLY. That's it. Character's born, not made. You can clean yer winders and clean 'em, but that don't change the colour of the glass. My father would have given her a good hidin', but I shan't. Why not? Because my glass ain't as thick as his. I see through it; I see my girl's temptations, I see what she is—likes a bit o' life, likes a flower, an' a dance. She's a natural morganatic.

MRS MARCH. A what?

BLY. Nothin'll ever make her regular. Mr March'll understand how I feel. Poor girl! In the mud again. Well, we must keep smilin'. [His face is as long as his arm] The poor 'ave their troubles, there's no doubt. [He turns to go] There's nothin' can save her but money, so as she can do as she likes. Then she wouldn't want to do it.

MRS MARCH. I'm very sorry, but there it is.

BLY. And I thought she was goin' to be a success here. Fact is, you can't see anything till it 'appens. There's winders all round, but you can't see. Follow your instincts—it's the only way.

MRS MARCH. It hasn't helped your daughter.

BLY. I was speakin' philosophic! Well, I'll go 'ome now, and prepare meself for the worst.

MRS MARCH. Has Cook given you your money?

BLY. She 'as.

He goes out gloomily and is nearly overthrown in the doorway by the violent entry of JOHNNY.

JOHNNY. What's this, Mother? I won't have it—it's pre-war.

MRS MARCH. [Indicating MR BLY] Johnny!

JOHNNY waves BLY out of the room and doses the door.

JOHNNY. I won't have her go. She's a pathetic little creature.

MRS MARCH. [Unruffled] She's a minx.

JOHNNY. Mother!

MRS MARCH. Now, Johnny, be sensible. She's a very pretty girl, and this is my house.

JOHNNY. Of course you think the worst. Trust anyone who wasn't in the war for that!

MRS MARCH. I don't think either the better or the worse. Kisses are kisses!

JOHNNY. Mother, you're like the papers—you put in all the vice and leave out all the virtue, and call that human nature. The kiss was an accident that I bitterly regret.

MRS MARCH. Johnny, how can you?

JOHNNY. Dash it! You know what I mean. I regret it with my—my conscience. It shan't occur again.

MRS MARCH. Till next time.

JOHNNY. Mother, you make me despair. You're so matter-of-fact, you never give one credit for a pure ideal.

MRS MARCH. I know where ideals lead.

JOHNNY. Where?

MRS MARCH. Into the soup. And the purer they are, the hotter the soup.

JOHNNY. And you married father!

MRS MARCH. I did.

JOHNNY. Well, that girl is not to be chucked out; won't have her on my chest.

MRS MARCH. That's why she's going, Johnny.

JOHNNY. She is not. Look at me!

MRS MARCH looks at him from across the dining-table, for he has marched up to it, till they are staring at each other across the now cleared rosewood.

MRS MARCH. How are you going to stop her?

JOHNNY. Oh, I'll stop her right enough. If I stuck it out in Hell, I can stick it out in Highgate.

MRS MARCH. Johnny, listen. I've watched this girl; and I don't watch what I want to see—like your father—I watch what is. She's not a hard case—yet; but she will be.

JOHNNY. And why? Because all you matter-of-fact people make up your minds to it. What earthly chance has she had?

MRS MARCH. She's a baggage. There are such things, you know, Johnny.

JOHNNY. She's a little creature who went down in the scrum and has been kicked about ever since.

MRS MARCH. I'll give her money, if you'll keep her at arm's length.

JOHNNY. I call that revolting. What she wants is the human touch.

MRS MARCH. I've not a doubt of it.

JOHNNY rises in disgust.

Johnny, what is the use of wrapping the thing up in catchwords? Human touch! A young man like you never saved a girl like her. It's as fantastic as—as Tolstoi's "Resurrection."

JOHNNY. Tolstoi was the most truthful writer that ever lived.

MRS MARCH. Tolstoi was a Russian—always proving that what isn't, is.

JOHNNY. Russians are charitable, anyway, and see into other people's souls.

MRS MARCH. That's why they're hopeless.

JOHNNY. Well—for cynicism—

MRS MARCH. It's at least as important, Johnny, to see into ourselves as into other people. I've been trying to make your father understand that ever since we married. He'd be such a good writer if he did—he wouldn't write at all.

JOHNNY. Father has imagination.

MRS MARCH. And no business to meddle with practical affairs. You and he always ride in front of the hounds. Do you remember when the war broke out, how angry you were with me because I said we were fighting from a sense of self-preservation? Well, weren't we?

JOHNNY. That's what I'm doing now, anyway.

MRS MARCH. Saving this girl, to save yourself?

JOHNNY. I must have something decent to do sometimes. There isn't an ideal left.

MRS MARCH. If you knew how tired I am of the word, Johnny!

JOHNNY. There are thousands who feel like me—that the bottom's out of everything. It sickens me that anything in the least generous should get sat on by all you people who haven't risked your lives.

MRS MARCH. [With a smile] I risked mine when you were born, Johnny. You were always very difficult.

JOHNNY. That girl's been telling me—I can see the whole thing.

MRS MARCH. The fact that she suffered doesn't alter her nature; or the danger to you and us.

JOHNNY. There is no danger—I told her I didn't mean it.

MRS MARCH. And she smiled? Didn't she?

JOHNNY. I—I don't know.

MRS MARCH. If you were ordinary, Johnny, it would be the girl's look-out. But you're not, and I'm not going to have you in the trap she'll set for you.

JOHNNY. You think she's a designing minx. I tell you she's got no more design in her than a rabbit. She's just at the mercy of anything.

MRS MARCH. That's the trap. She'll play on your feelings, and you'll be caught.

JOHNNY. I'm not a baby.

MRS MARCH. You are—and she'll smother you.

JOHNNY. How beastly women are to each other!

MRS MARCH. We know ourselves, you see. The girl's father realises perfectly what she is.

JOHNNY. Mr Bly is a dodderer. And she's got no mother. I'll bet you've never realised the life girls who get outed lead. I've seen them—I saw them in France. It gives one the horrors.

MRS MARCH. I can imagine it. But no girl gets "outed," as you call it, unless she's predisposed that

way.

JOHNNY. That's all you know of the pressure of life.

MRS MARCH. Excuse me, Johnny. I worked three years among factory girls, and I know how they manage to resist things when they've got stuff in them.

JOHNNY. Yes, I know what you mean by stuff—good hard self-preservative instinct. Why should the wretched girl who hasn't got that be turned down? She wants protection all the more.

MRS MARCH. I've offered to help with money till she gets a place.

JOHNNY. And you know she won't take it. She's got that much stuff in her. This place is her only chance. I appeal to you, Mother—please tell her not to go.

MRS MARCH. I shall not, Johnny.

JOHNNY. [Turning abruptly] Then we know where we are.

MRS MARCH. I know where you'll be before a week's over.

JOHNNY. Where?

MRS MARCH. In her arms.

JOHNNY. [From the door, grimly] If I am, I'll have the right to be!

MRS MARCH. Johnny! [But he is gone.]

MRS MARCH follows to call him back, but is met by MARY.

MARY. So you've tumbled, Mother?

MRS MARCH. I should think I have! Johnny is making an idiot of himself about that girl.

MARY. He's got the best intentions.

MRS MARCH. It's all your father. What can one expect when your father carries on like a lunatic over his paper every morning?

MARY. Father must have opinions of his own.

MRS MARCH. He has only one: Whatever is, is wrong.

MARY. He can't help being intellectual, Mother.

MRS MARCH. If he would only learn that the value of a sentiment is the amount of sacrifice you are prepared to make for it!

MARY. Yes: I read that in "The Times" yesterday. Father's much safer than Johnny. Johnny isn't safe at all; he might make a sacrifice any day. What were they doing?

MRS MARCH. Cook caught them kissing.

MARY. How truly horrible!

As she speaks MR MARCH comes in.

MR MARCH. I met Johnny using the most poetic language. What's happened?

MRS MARCH. He and that girl. Johnny's talking nonsense about wanting to save her. I've told her to pack up.

MR MARCH. Isn't that rather coercive, Joan?

MRS MARCH. Do you approve of Johnny getting entangled with this girl?

MR MARCH. No. I was only saying to Mary—

MRS MARCH. Oh! You were!

MR MARCH. But I can quite see why Johnny—

MRS MARCH. The Government, I suppose!

MR MARCH. Certainly.

MRS MARCH. Well, perhaps you'll get us out of the mess you've got us into.

MR MARCH. Where's the girl?

MRS MARCH. In her room-packing.

MR MARCH. We must devise means—

MRS MARCH smiles.

The first thing is to see into them—and find out exactly—

MRS MARCH. Heavens! Are you going to have them X-rayed? They haven't got chest trouble, Geof.

MR MARCH. They may have heart trouble. It's no good being hasty, Joan.

MRS MARCH. Oh! For a man that can't see an inch into human nature, give me a—psychological novelist!

MR MARCH. [With dignity] Mary, go and see where Johnny is.

MARY. Do you want him here?

MR MARCH. Yes.

MARY. [Dubiously] Well—if I can.

She goes out. A silence, during which the MARCHES look at each other by those turns which characterise exasperated domesticity.

MRS MARCH. If she doesn't go, Johnny must. Are you going to turn him out?

MR MARCH. Of course not. We must reason with him.

MRS MARCH. Reason with young people whose lips were glued together half an hour ago! Why ever did you force me to take this girl?

MR MARCH. [Ruefully] One can't always resist a kindly impulse, Joan. What does Mr Bly say to it?

MRS MARCH. Mr Bly? "Follow your instincts "and then complains of his daughter for following them.

MR MARCH. The man's a philosopher.

MRS MARCH. Before we know where we are, we shall be having Johnny married to that girl.

MR MARCH. Nonsense!

MRS MARCH. Oh, Geof! Whenever you're faced with reality, you say "Nonsense!" You know Johnny's got chivalry on the brain.

MARY comes in.

MARY. He's at the top of the servants' staircase; outside her room. He's sitting in an armchair, with its back to her door.

MR MARCH. Good Lord! Direct action!

MARY. He's got his pipe, a pound of chocolate, three volumes of "Monte Cristo," and his old concertina. He says it's better than the trenches.

MR MARCH. My hat! Johnny's made a joke. This is serious.

MARY. Nobody can get up, and she can't get down. He says he'll stay there till all's blue, and it's no use either of you coming unless mother caves in.

MR MARCH. I wonder if Cook could do anything with him?

MARY. She's tried. He told her to go to hell.

MR MARCH. I Say! And what did Cook—?

MARY. She's gone.

MR MARCH. Tt! tt! This is very awkward.

COOK enters through the door which MARY has left open.

MR MARCH. Ah, Cook! You're back, then? What's to be done?

MRS MARCH. [With a laugh] We must devise means!

COOK. Oh, ma'am, it does remind me so of the tantrums he used to get into, dear little feller! Smiles with recollection.

MRS MARCH. [Sharply] You're not to take him up anything to eat, Cook!

COOK. Oh! But Master Johnny does get so hungry. It'll drive him wild, ma'am. Just a Snack now and then!

MRS MARCH. No, Cook. Mind—that's flat!

COOK. Aren't I to feed Faith, ma'am?

MR MARCH. Gad! It wants it!

MRS MARCH. Johnny must come down to earth.

COOK. Ah! I remember how he used to fall down when he was little—he would go about with his head in the air. But he always picked himself up like a little man.

MARY. Listen!

They all listen. The distant sounds of a concertina being played with fury drift in through the open door.

COOK. Don't it sound 'eavenly!

The concertina utters a long wail.

CURTAIN.

ACT III

The MARCH'S dining-room on the same evening at the end of a perfunctory dinner. MRS MARCH sits at the dining-table with her back to the windows, MARY opposite the hearth, and MR MARCH with his back to it. JOHNNY is not present. Silence and gloom.

MR MARCH. We always seem to be eating.

MRS MARCH. You've eaten nothing.

MR MARCH. [Pouring himself out a liqueur glass of brandy but not drinking it] It's humiliating to think we can't exist without. [Relapses into gloom.]

MRS MARCH. Mary, pass him the walnuts.

MARY. I was thinking of taking them up to Johnny.

MR MARCH. [Looking at his watch] He's been there six hours; even he can't live on faith.

MRS MARCH. If Johnny wants to make a martyr of himself, I can't help it.

MARY. How many days are you going to let him sit up there, Mother?

MR MARCH. [Glancing at MRS MARCH] I never in my life knew anything so ridiculous.

MRS MARCH. Give me a little glass of brandy, Geof.

MR MARCH. Good! That's the first step towards seeing reason.

He pours brandy into a liqueur glass from the decanter which stands between them.

MRS MARCH puts the brandy to her lips and makes a little face, then swallows it down manfully. MARY gets up with the walnuts and goes. Silence. Gloom.

MRS MARCH. Horrid stuff!

MR MARCH. Haven't you begun to see that your policy's hopeless, Joan? Come! Tell the girl she can stay. If we make Johnny feel victorious—we can deal with him. It's just personal pride—the curse of this world. Both you and Johnny are as stubborn as mules.

MRS MARCH. Human nature is stubborn, Geof. That's what you easy—going people never see.

MR MARCH gets up, vexed, and goes to the fireplace.

MR MARCH. [Turning] Well! This goes further than you think. It involves Johnny's affection and respect for you.

MRS MARCH nervously refills the little brandy glass, and again empties it, with a grimacing shudder.

MR MARCH. [Noticing] That's better! You'll begin to see things presently.

MARY re-enters.

MARY. He's been digging himself in. He's put a screen across the head of the stairs, and got Cook's blankets. He's going to sleep there.

MRS MARCH. Did he take the walnuts?

MARY. No; he passed them in to her. He says he's on hunger strike. But he's eaten all the chocolate and smoked himself sick. He's having the time of his life, mother.

MR MARCH. There you are!

MRS MARCH. Wait till this time to-morrow.

MARY. Cook's been up again. He wouldn't let her pass. She'll have to sleep in the spare room.

MR MARCH. I say!

MARY. And he's got the books out of her room.

MRS MARCH. D'you know what they are? "The Scarlet Pimpernel," "The Wide Wide World," and the Bible.

MARY. Johnny likes romance.

She crosses to the fire.

MR MARCH. [In a low voice] Are you going to leave him up there with the girl and that inflammatory literature, all night? Where's your common sense, Joan?

MRS MARCH starts up, presses her hand over her brow, and sits down again. She is stumped.

[With consideration for her defeat] Have another tot! [He pours it out] Let Mary go up with a flag of truce, and ask them both to come down for a thorough discussion of the whole thing, on condition that they can go up again if we don't come to terms.

MRS MARCH. Very well! I'm quite willing to meet him. I hate quarrelling with Johnny.

MR MARCH. Good! I'll go myself. [He goes out.]

MARY. Mother, this isn't a coal strike; don't discuss it for three hours and then at the end ask Johnny and the girl to do precisely what you're asking them to do now.

MRS MARCH. Why should I?

MARY. Because it's so usual. Do fix on half-way at once.

MRS MARCH. There is no half-way.

MARY. Well, for goodness sake think of a plan which will make you both look victorious. That's always done in the end. Why not let her stay, and make Johnny promise only to see her in the presence of a third party?

MRS MARCH. Because she'd see him every day while he was looking for the third party. She'd help him look for it.

MARY. [With a gurgle] Mother, I'd no idea you were so—French.

MRS MARCH. It seems to me you none of you have any idea what I am.

MARY. Well, do remember that there'll be no publicity to make either of you look small. You can have Peace with Honour, whatever you decide. [Listening] There they are! Now, Mother, don't be logical! It's so feminine.

As the door opens, MRS MARCH nervously fortifies herself with the third little glass of brandy. She remains seated. MARY is on her right.

MR MARCH leads into the room and stands next his daughter, then FAITH in hat and coat to the left of the table, and JOHNNY, pale but determined, last. Assembled thus, in a half fan, of which MRS MARCH is the apex, so to speak, they are all extremely embarrassed, and no wonder.

Suddenly MARY gives a little gurgle.

JOHNNY. You'd think it funnier if you'd just come out of prison and were going to be chucked out of your job, on to the world again.

FAITH. I didn't want to come down here. If I'm to go I want to go at once. And if I'm not, it's my evening out, please.

She moves towards the door. JOHNNY takes her by the shoulders.

JOHNNY. Stand still, and leave it to me. [FAITH looks up at him, hypnotized by his determination] Now, mother, I've come down at your request to discuss this; are you ready to keep her? Otherwise up we go again.

MR MARCH. That's not the way to go to work, Johnny. You mustn't ask people to eat their words raw—like that.

JOHNNY. Well, I've had no dinner, but I'm not going to eat my words, I tell you plainly.

MRS MARCH. Very well then; go up again.

MARY. [Muttering] Mother—logic.

MR MARCH. Great Scott! You two haven't the faintest idea of how to conduct a parley. We have—to—er—explore every path to—find a way to peace.

MRS MARCH. [To FAITH] Have you thought of anything to do, if you leave here?

FAITH. Yes.

JOHNNY. What?

FAITH. I shan't say.

JOHNNY. Of course, she'll just chuck herself away.

FAITH. No, I won't. I'll go to a place I know of, where they don't want references.

JOHNNY. Exactly!

MRS MARCH. [To FAITH] I want to ask you a question. Since you came out, is this the first young man who's kissed you?

FAITH has hardly had time to start and manifest what may or may not be indignation when MR MARCH dashes his hands through his hair.

MR MARCH. Joan, really!

JOHNNY. [Grimly] Don't condescend to answer!

MRS MARCH. I thought we'd met to get at the truth.

MARY. But do they ever?

FAITH. I will go out!

JOHNNY. No! [And, as his back is against the door, she can't] I'll see that you're not insulted any more.

MR MARCH. Johnny, I know you have the best intentions, but really the proper people to help the young are the old—like—

FAITH suddenly turns her eyes on him, and he goes on rather hurriedly

—your mother. I'm sure that she and I will be ready to stand by Faith.

FAITH. I don't want charity.

MR MARCH. No, no! But I hope—

MRS MARCH. To devise means.

MR MARCH. [Roused] Of course, if nobody will modify their attitude —Johnny, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, and [To MRS MARCH] so ought you, Joan.

JOHNNY. [Suddenly] I'll modify mine. [To FAITH] Come here—close! [In a low voice to FAITH] Will you give me your word to stay here, if I make them keep you?

FAITH. Why?

JOHNNY. To stay here quietly for the next two years?

FAITH. I don't know.

JOHNNY. I can make them, if you'll promise.

FAITH. You're just in a temper.

JOHNNY. Promise!

During this colloquy the MARCHES have been so profoundly uneasy that MRS MARCH has poured out another glass of brandy.

MR MARCH. Johnny, the terms of the Armistice didn't include this sort of thing. It was to be all open and above-board.

JOHNNY. Well, if you don't keep her, I shall clear out.

At this bombshell MRS MARCH rises.

MARY. Don't joke, Johnny! You'll do yourself an injury.

JOHNNY. And if I go, I go for good.

MR MARCH. Nonsense, Johnny! Don't carry a good thing too far!

JOHNNY. I mean it.

MRS MARCH. What will you live on?

JOHNNY. Not poetry.

MRS MARCH. What, then?

JOHNNY. Emigrate or go into the Police.

MR MARCH. Good Lord! [Going up to his wife—in a low voice] Let her stay till Johnny's in his right mind.

FAITH. I don't want to stay.

JOHNNY. You shall!

MARY. Johnny, don't be a lunatic!

COOK enters, flustered.

COOK. Mr Bly, ma'am, come after his daughter.

MR MARCH. He can have her—he can have her!

COOK. Yes, sir. But, you see, he's—Well, there! He's cheerful.

MR MARCH. Let him come and take his daughter away.

But MR BLY has entered behind him. He has a fixed expression, and speaks with a too perfect accuracy.

BLY. Did your two Cooks tell you I'm here?

MR MARCH. If you want your daughter, you can take her.

JOHNNY. Mr Bly, get out!

BLY. [Ignoring him] I don't want any fuss with your two cooks.
[Catching sight of MRS MARCH] I've prepared myself for this.

MRS MARCH. So we see.

BLY. I 'ad a bit o' trouble, but I kep' on till I see 'Aigel walkin' at me in the loo-lookin' glass. Then I knew I'd got me balance.

They all regard MR BLY in a fascinated manner.

FAITH. Father! You've been drinking.

BLY. [Smiling] What do you think.

MR MARCH. We have a certain sympathy with you, Mr Bly.

BLY. [Gazing at his daughter] I don't want that one. I'll take the other.

MARY. Don't repeat yourself, Mr Bly.

BLY. [With a flash of muddled insight] Well! There's two of everybody; two of my daughter; an' two of the 'Ome Secretary; and two-two of Cook—an' I don't want either. [He waves COOK aside, and grasps at a void alongside FAITH] Come along!

MR MARCH. [Going up to him] Very well, Mr Bly! See her home, carefully.
Good-night!

BLY. Shake hands!

He extends his other hand; MR MARCH grasps it and turns him round towards the door.

MR MARCH. Now, take her away! Cook, go and open the front door for Mr Bly and his daughter.

BLY. Too many Cooks!

MR MARCH. Now then, Mr Bly, take her along!

BLY. [Making no attempt to acquire the real FAITH—to an apparition which he leads with his right hand] You're the one that died when my girl was 'ung. Will you go—first or shall—I?

The apparition does not answer.

MARY. Don't! It's horrible!

FAITH. I did die.

BLY. Prepare yourself. Then you'll see what you never saw before.

He goes out with his apparition, shepherded by MR MARCH.

MRS MARCH drinks off her fourth glass of brandy. A peculiar whistle is heard through the open door, and FAITH starts forward.

JOHNNY. Stand still!

FAITH. I—I must go.

MARY. Johnny—let her!

FAITH. There's a friend waiting for me.

JOHNNY. Let her wait! You're not fit to go out to-night.

MARY. Johnny! Really! You're not the girl's Friendly Society!

JOHNNY. You none of you care a pin's head what becomes of her. Can't you see she's on the edge? The whistle is heard again, but fainter.

FAITH. I'm not in prison now.

JOHNNY. [Taking her by the arm] All right! I'll come with you.

FAITH. [Recoiling] No.

Voices are heard in the hall.

MARY. Who's that with father? Johnny, for goodness' sake don't make us all ridiculous.

MR MARCH'S voice is heard saying: "Your friend in here." He enters, followed by a reluctant young man in a dark suit, with dark hair and a pale square face, enlivened by strange, very living, dark, bull's eyes.

MR MARCH. [To FAITH, who stands shrinking a little] I came on this—er —friend of yours outside; he's been waiting for you some time, he says.

MRS MARCH. [To FAITH] You can go now.

JOHNNY. [Suddenly, to the YOUNG MAN] Who are you?

YOUNG M. Ask another! [To FAITH] Are you ready?

JOHNNY. [Seeing red] No, she's not; and you'll just clear out.

MR MARCH. Johnny!

YOUNG M. What have you got to do with her?

JOHNNY. Quit.

YOUNG M. I'll quit with her, and not before. She's my girl.

JOHNNY. Are you his girl?

FAITH. Yes.

MRS MARCH sits down again, and reaching out her left hand, mechanically draws to her the glass of brandy which her husband had poured out for himself and left undrunk.

JOHNNY. Then why did you—[He is going to say: "Kiss me," but checks himself]—let me think you hadn't any friends? Who is this fellow?

YOUNG M. A little more civility, please.

JOHNNY. You look a blackguard, and I believe you are.

MR MARCH. [With perfunctory authority] I really can't have this sort of thing in my house. Johnny, go upstairs; and you two, please go away.

YOUNG M. [To JOHNNY] We know the sort of chap you are—takin' advantage of workin' girls.

JOHNNY. That's a foul lie. Come into the garden and I'll prove it on your carcass.

YOUNG M. All right!

FAITH. No; he'll hurt you. He's been in the war.

JOHNNY. [To the YOUNG MAN] You haven't, I'll bet.

YOUNG M. I didn't come here to be slanged.

JOHNNY. This poor girl is going to have a fair deal, and you're not going to give it her. I can see that with half an eye.

YOUNG M. You'll see it with no eyes when I've done with you.

JOHNNY. Come on, then.

He goes up to the windows.

MR MARCH. For God's sake, Johnny, stop this vulgar brawl!

FAITH. [Suddenly] I'm not a "poor girl" and I won't be called one. I don't want any soft words. Why can't you let me be? [Pointing to JOHNNY] He talks wild. [JOHNNY clutches the edge of the writing-table] Thinks he can "rescue" me. I don't want to be rescued. I—[All the feeling of years rises to the surface now that the barrier has broken] —I want to be let alone. I've paid for everything I've done—a pound for every shilling's worth.

And all because of one minute when I was half crazy. [Flashing round at MARY] Wait till you've had a baby you oughtn't to have had, and not a penny in your pocket! It's money—money—all money!

YOUNG M. Sst! That'll do!

FAITH. I'll have what I like now, not what you think's good for me.

MR MARCH. God knows we don't want to—

FAITH. You mean very well, Mr March, but you're no good.

MR MARCH. I knew it.

FAITH. You were very kind to me. But you don't see; nobody sees.

YOUNG M. There! That's enough! You're gettin' excited. You come away with me.

FAITH's look at him is like the look of a dog at her master.

JOHNNY. [From the background] I know you're a blackguard—I've seen your sort.

FAITH. [Firing up] Don't call him names! I won't have it. I'll go with whom I choose! [Her eyes suddenly fix themselves on the YOUNG MAN'S face] And I'm going with him!

COOK enters.

MR MARCH. What now, Cook?

COOK. A Mr Barnabas in the hall, sir. From the police.

Everybody starts. MRS MARCH drinks off her fifth little glass of brandy, then sits again.

MR MARCH. From the police?

He goes out, followed by COOK. A moment's suspense.

YOUNG M. Well, I can't wait any longer. I suppose we can go out the back way?

He draws FAITH towards the windows. But JOHNNY stands there, barring the way. JOHNNY. No, you don't.

FAITH. [Scared] Oh! Let me go—let him go!

JOHNNY. You may go. [He takes her arm to pull her to the window] He can't.

FAITH. [Freeing herself] No—no! Not if he doesn't.

JOHNNY has an evident moment of hesitation, and before it is over MR MARCH comes in again, followed by a man in a neat suit of plain clothes.

MR MARCH. I should like you to say that in front of her.

P. C. MAN. Your service, ma'am. Afraid I'm intruding here. Fact is, I've been waiting for a chance to speak to this young woman quietly. It's rather public here, sir; but if you wish, of course, I'll mention it. [He waits for some word from some one; no one speaks, so he goes on almost apologetically] Well, now, you're in a good place here, and you ought to keep it. You don't want fresh trouble, I'm sure.

FAITH. [Scared] What do you want with me?

P. C. MAN. I don't want to frighten you; but we've had word passed that you're associating with the young man there. I observed him to-night again, waiting outside here and whistling.

YOUNG M. What's the matter with whistling?

P. C. MAN. [Eyeing him] I should keep quiet if I was you. As you know, sir [To MR MARCH] there's a law nowadays against soo-tenors.

MR MARCH. Soo—?

JOHNNY. I knew it.

P. C. MAN. [Deprecating] I don't want to use any plain English—with ladies present—

YOUNG M. I don't know you. What are you after? Do you dare—?

P. C. MAN. We cut the darin', 't isn't necessary. We know all about you.

FAITH. It's a lie!

P. C. MAN. There, miss, don't let your feelings—

FAITH. [To the YOUNG MAN] It's a lie, isn't it?

YOUNG M. A blankety lie.

MR MARCH. [To BARNABAS] Have you actual proof?

YOUNG M. Proof? It's his job to get chaps into a mess.

P. C. MAN. [Sharply] None of your lip, now!

At the new tone in his voice FAITH turns and visibly quails, like a dog that has been shown a whip.

MR MARCH. Inexpressibly painful!

YOUNG M. Ah! How would you like to be insulted in front of your girl? If you're a gentleman you'll tell him to leave the house. If he's got a warrant, let him produce it; if he hasn't, let him get out.

P. C. MAN. [To MR MARCH] You'll understand, sir, that my object in speakin' to you to-night was for the good of the girl. Strictly, I've gone a bit out of my way. If my job was to get men into trouble, as he says, I'd only to wait till he's got hold of her. These fellows, you know, are as cunning as lynxes and as impudent as the devil.

YOUNG M. Now, look here, if I get any more of this from you—I—I'll consult a lawyer.

JOHNNY. Fellows like you—

MR MARCH. Johnny!

P. C. MAN. Your son, sir?

YOUNG M. Yes; and wants to be where I am. But my girl knows better; don't you?

He gives FAITH a look which has a certain magnetism.

P. C. MAN. If we could have the Court cleared of ladies, sir, we might speak a little plainer.

MR MARCH. Joan!

But MRS MARCH does not vary her smiling immobility; FAITH draws a little nearer to the YOUNG MAN. MARY turns to the fire.

P. C. MAN. [With half a smile] I keep on forgettin' that women are men nowadays. Well!

YOUNG M. When you've quite done joking, we'll go for our walk.

MR MARCH. [To BARNABAS] I think you'd better tell her anything you know.

P. C. MAN. [Eyeing FAITH and the YOUNG MAN] I'd rather not be more precise, sir, at this stage.

YOUNG M. I should think not! Police spite! [To FAITH] You know what the Law is, once they get a down on you.

P. C. MAN. [To MR MARCH] It's our business to keep an eye on all this sort of thing, sir, with girls who've just come out.

JOHNNY. [Deeply] You've only to look at his face!

YOUNG M. My face is as good as yours.

FAITH lifts her eyes to his.

P. C. MAN. [Taking in that look] Well, there it is! Sorry I wasted my time and yours, Sir!

MR MARCH. [Distracted] My goodness! Now, Faith, consider! This is the turning-point. I've told you we'll stand by you.

FAITH. [Flashing round] Leave me alone! I stick to my friends. Leave me alone, and leave him alone! What is it to you?

P. C. MAN. [With sudden resolution] Now, look here! This man George Blunter was had up three years ago—for livin' on the earnings of a woman called Johnson. He was dismissed with a caution. We got him again last year over a woman called Lee—that time he did—

YOUNG M. Stop it! That's enough of your lip. I won't put up with this —not for any woman in the world. Not I!

FAITH. [With a sway towards him] It's not—!

YOUNG M. I'm off! Bong Swore la Companee! He turns on his heel and walks out unhindered.

P. C. MAN. [Deeply] A bad hat, that; if ever there was one. We'll be having him again before long.

He looks at FAITH. They all look at FAITH. But her face is so strange, so tremulous, that they all turn their eyes away.

FAITH. He—he said—he—!

On the verge of an emotional outbreak, she saves herself by an effort. A painful silence.

P. C. MAN. Well, sir—that's all. Good evening! He turns to the door, touching his forehead to MR MARCH, and goes.

As the door closes, FAITH sinks into a chair, and burying her face in her hands, sobs silently. MRS MARCH sits motionless with a faint smile. JOHNNY stands at the window biting his nails. MARY crosses to FAITH.

MARY. [Softly] Don't. You weren't really fond of him?

FAITH bends her head.

MARY. But how could you? He—

FAITH. I—I couldn't see inside him.

MARY. Yes; but he looked—couldn't you see he looked—?

FAITH. [Suddenly flinging up her head] If you'd been two years without a word, you'd believe anyone that said he liked you.

MARY. Perhaps I should.

FAITH. But I don't want him—he's a liar. I don't like liars.

MARY. I'm awfully sorry.

FAITH. [Looking at her] Yes—you keep off feeling—then you'll be happy!
[Rising] Good-bye!

MARY. Where are you going?

FAITH. To my father.

MARY. With him in that state?

FAITH. He won't hurt me.

MARY. You'd better stay. Mother, she can stay, can't she?

MRS MARCH nods.

FAITH. No!

MARY. Why not? We're all sorry. Do! You'd better.

FAITH. Father'll come over for my things tomorrow.

MARY. What are you going to do?

FAITH. [Proudly] I'll get on.

JOHNNY. [From the window] Stop!

All turn and look at him. He comes down. Will you come to me?

FAITH stares at him. MRS MARCH continues to smile faintly.

MARY. [With a horrified gesture] Johnny!

JOHNNY. Will you? I'll play cricket if you do.

MR MARCH. [Under his breath] Good God!

He stares in suspense at FAITH, whose face is a curious blend of fascination and live feeling.

JOHNNY. Well?

FAITH. [Softly] Don't be silly! I've got no call on you. You don't care for me, and I don't for you. No! You go and put your head in ice. [She turns to the door] Good-bye, Mr March! I'm sorry I've been so much trouble.

MR MARCH. Not at all, not at all!

FAITH. Oh! Yes, I have. There's nothing to be done with a girl like me. She goes out.

JOHNNY. [Taking up the decanter to pour himself out a glass of brandy]
Empty!

COOK. [Who has entered with a tray] Yes, my dearie, I'm sure you are.

JOHNNY. [Staring at his father] A vision, Dad! Windows of Clubs—men sitting there; and that girl going by with rouge on her cheeks—

COOK. Oh! Master Johnny!

JOHNNY. A blue night—the moon over the Park. And she stops and looks at it.—What has she wanted—the beautiful—something better than she's got—something that she'll never get!

COOK. Oh! Master Johnny!

She goes up to JOHNNY and touches his forehead. He comes to himself and hurries to the door, but suddenly MRS MARCH utters a little feathery laugh. She stands up, swaying

slightly. There is something unusual and charming in her appearance, as if formality had dropped from her.

MRS MARCH. [With a sort of delicate slow lack of perfect sobriety] I see—it—all. You—can't—help—unless—you—love!

JOHNNY stops and looks round at her.

MR MARCH. [Moving a little towards her] Joan!

MRS MARCH. She—wants—to—be—loved. It's the way of the world.

MARY. [Turning] Mother!

MRS MARCH. You thought she wanted—to be saved. Silly! She—just—wants—to—be—loved. Quite natural!

MR MARCH. Joan, what's happened to you?

MRS MARCH. [Smiling and nodding] See—people—as—they—are! Then you won't be—disappointed. Don't—have—ideals! Have—vision—just simple —vision!

MR MARCH. Your mother's not well.

MRS MARCH. [Passing her hand over her forehead] It's hot in here!

MR MARCH. Mary!

MARY throws open the French windows.

MRS MARCH. [Delightfully] The room's full of GAS. Open the windows! Open! And let's walk—out—into the air!

She turns and walks delicately out through the opened windows;
JOHNNY and MARY follow her. The moonlight and the air flood in.

COOK. [Coming to the table and taking up the empty decanter] My Holy Ma!

MR MARCH. Is this the Millennium, Cook?

COOK. Oh! Master Geoffrey—there isn't a millehennium. There's too much human nature. We must look things in the face.

MR MARCH. Ah! Neither up—nor down—but straight in the face! Quite a thought, Cook! Quite a thought!

CURTAIN.

THE END.

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